

***THE PROBLEMS OF PROGRESS IN ANGLO-
AMERICAN CANONICAL HIGH-FANTASY 1889-2001:
URSULA K. LE GUIN'S REVISION OF WILLIAM
MORRIS AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S LEGACY***

Jon Alkorta Martiartu

2019-2020

Supervised by Dr. Martin Simonson and Dr. Raúl Montero-Gilete



Universidad del País Vasco Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

THE PROBLEMS OF PROGRESS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN CANONICAL HIGH-FANTASY 1889-2001: URSULA K. LE GUIN'S REVISION OF WILLIAM MORRIS AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S LEGACY

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar la manera en la que la idea del progreso, junto con los problemas que esta puede acarrear, aparece retratada en las obras de literatura fantástica de William Morris, J.R.R. Tolkien y Ursula K. Le Guin. La producción literaria de estos autores nos permitirá determinar si dicho tema ha persistido en la literatura fantástica en distintos tiempos (desde el siglo XIX al siglo XXI) y lugares (Gran Bretaña y Norteamérica), y en el caso de que lo haya hecho, cómo ha sido este proceso. La idea de este enfoque en particular surge del hecho de que, hasta ahora, la crítica literaria producida en torno a estos autores ha pasado por alto temas que resultan muy interesantes. Es por eso que este estudio tratará de cubrir mayormente dos vacíos existentes. Por un lado, el estudio de los contextos históricos de Morris y Tolkien nos brindará la oportunidad de concretar la influencia no literaria que el primero pudo haber ejercido sobre el segundo, apoyándonos en las similitudes que ambos demuestran en sus críticas del progreso y sus consecuencias negativas. También podremos especificar cómo dichas críticas hacia el avance indiscriminado de la humanidad, tan particulares debido a que estaban súmamente determinadas por la experiencia británica, se trasladaron pasado un tiempo a Norteamérica para que, allí, fueran transformadas en relación a las experiencias vitales de una escritora del Oeste norteamericano.

Las obras concretas que se van a analizar a lo largo de este estudio son *The House of the Wolfings* de Morris, *The Silmarillion* y *The Lord of the Rings* de Tolkien, y la saga de *Earthsea* de Le Guin. La razón por la que se han seleccionado estos autores y obras es que dichos autores son considerados canónicos en la literatura fantástica, gracias a su contribución al desarrollo y asentamiento del género. Por su parte, las obras seleccionadas son muy relevantes dentro de las producciones literarias de sus autores. *The House of the Wolfings* de Morris fue su primer relato fantástico significativo, a la que siguieron muchos antes del fallecimiento del autor. En cuanto a Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* es una obra esencial en la historia del género fantástico, mientras que *The Silmarillion* es fundamental para obtener una idea más completa de todo el universo creado por este autor. Por último, *Earthsea* es la principal obra de Le Guin dentro del género fantástico. Además, todas las obras mencionadas tienen en común un componente que las hace especialmente interesantes para este estudio: todas ellas presentan mundos que están a punto de adentrarse en procesos que traerán consigo cambios y alteraciones tanto para sus habitantes, como para los propios mundos.

Las metodologías que se han utilizado para el análisis de los textos seleccionados han sido tres: la ecocrítica, los estudios poscoloniales y el nuevo historicismo. Esta combinación nos permite acercarnos a la dura crítica anti-imperialista transmitida en el material literario que conforma el núcleo del presente estudio, además de recalcar la clara preocupación ecológica manifestada en el mismo. En cuanto a la ecocrítica, este tipo de crítica literaria pretende establecer una conexión entre la obra artística, o la cultura, y el entorno físico, teniendo como gran objetivo que la sociedad humana retome ese íntimo contacto que alguna vez mantuvo con el mundo natural. Por lo que respecta al presente estudio, el punto de vista ecocrítico será de especial utilidad para acercarnos a la obra de Le Guin. Mediante esta metodología, se ha estudiado Earthsea, el mundo en el que discurre la saga, como una sola entidad cuyas distintas partes existen en perpetua cooperación y equilibrio. También se ha recalcado que la naturaleza propuesta por Le Guin no es una naturaleza pasiva, sino que es una entidad que incorpora en sí misma fuerzas destructivas y creativas. Por último, se ha estudiado el grado de alienación que muestra la sociedad humana de Earthsea, condicionado por el uso de un lenguaje que se asemeja mucho a nuestra ciencia actual.

En segundo lugar, los estudios poscoloniales buscan analizar las diversas voces que se alzan en torno al colonialismo e imperialismo, como, por ejemplo, las de los miembros de un imperio, o en oposición a estas, las voces de aquellos que buscan liberarse de semejante yugo. El poscolonialismo servirá para analizar dos elementos de la obra de Le Guin. Primero, nos centraremos en un tipo de colonialismo físico, ya que los humanos se apoderan de las tierras que pertenecen a los dragones, un hecho que tiene graves consecuencias ecológicas. Por otro lado, la obra de Le Guin incluye otro tipo de colonialismo más psicológico. Esto se debe a que ciertos personajes se verán forzados a embarcarse en una búsqueda personal de sus verdaderas identidades.

Por último, se ha hecho uso del nuevo historicismo, una metodología que trata de recalcar la relación e influencia bidireccional que existe entre textos y cultura, concretamente la conexión entre el autor, su obra, y el contexto histórico, político y social en el que esta fue producida. Esto nos ayudará a acercarnos al Reino Unido de los siglos XIX y XX; tiempos especialmente marcados por la actividad y el avance tecnológico e imperialista de dicho país, para rastrear las posibles razones de las diversas preocupaciones que tanto Morris como Tolkien incluyen en sus trabajos. Igualmente, y con el mismo objetivo, escrutaremos el contexto de Le Guin, marcado por, entre otras cosas, la experiencia femenina, las particularidades sociales y geográficas del Oeste americano y la guerra de Vietnam.

El procedimiento a seguir en el estudio de cada autor y sus respectivas obras es el mismo en los tres casos. Los tres análisis comparten un mismo punto de partida, es decir, el estudio detallado del contexto de cada autor, el cual determinará las experiencias vitales de cada uno de ellos y también en gran medida las ideas que, después, se trabajarán en cada obra. Desde este punto común, el análisis de cada obra y autor tomará un camino propio que permitirá estudiarlos de la manera más apropiada. De este modo, el estudio sobre Morris y Tolkien girará hacia sus ideales sobre el arte y la preocupación que mostraron hacia lo que se producía en una industria que poseía, cada vez, una tecnología más avanzada, mientras que, en lo que al contexto de Le Guin se refiere, el foco se pondrá en las diversas corrientes intelectuales con las que mantuvo contacto y el impacto que tuvo sobre ella el nacer y vivir en California. Una vez el contexto de cada autor haya sido analizado, se procederá a escrutar sus textos literarios: en el caso de Morris y Tolkien subrayando su preocupación con la naturaleza y la industria, y en cuanto a Le Guin, haciendo hincapié en su representación de la naturaleza y el desarrollo del individuo en un ambiente potencialmente hostil.

Las diversas metodologías y el procedimiento a seguir presentados anteriormente nos han permitido responder positivamente a la pregunta que nos hacíamos al principio del estudio sobre la posibilidad de que hubiera una continuidad de los temas e ideas que se incluían en la crítica hacia el progreso de estos autores. Además de esto, también hemos podido recalcar la influencia no literaria que tuvo Morris sobre Tolkien, ya que hay aspectos importantes en las que sus ideas y filosofías sobre la vida y la sociedad humana se entrelazan. El desarrollo de estas fue, no obstante, distinto en estos dos autores británicos. En el caso de Morris, y aunque sus propias experiencias a lo largo y ancho de Gran Bretaña contribuyeron de manera significativa, tuvieron especial importancia influencias intelectuales como John Ruskin, los artistas prerrafaelitas y Lord Alfred Tennyson, con quienes compartía ideales sobre la naturaleza, la sociedad y el medievo. Por su parte, Tolkien parece haber sido influido más profundamente por sus experiencias en sitios como Sarehole y Birmingham, además de sus dramáticas vivencias en la primera guerra mundial. En cuanto a las similitudes entre ambos autores, los puntos en los que la crítica de Morris y Tolkien hacia la modernización y el progreso se tocan son dos. En primer lugar, los dos fueron testigos de cómo el entorno natural británico estaba siendo destruido sin miramientos por y para la industria de la época. Además de esto, percibían de igual manera que el arte, y con él la belleza que traía consigo, era atacado por el progreso. Mientras Morris veía cómo las técnicas más artesanas eran descartadas en favor de una tecnología que permitía producir más cantidad en menos tiempo, Tolkien tuvo que sufrir que la guerra obstruyera las vías para su expresión artística personal: primero, en Oxford, cuando no le fue permitido proseguir con sus estudios universitarios, y, segundo, cuando el grupo literario al que pertenecía y por el cual sentía tanto apego, llamado TCBS, murió tras la muerte de dos de sus

miembros en la guerra. Por último, cabe destacar que tanto Morris como Tolkien mostraron preocupación por lo que se producía en la industria de sus épocas, ya que, debido a que esta buscaba solamente ganancias económicas, la calidad de la producción era cada vez más pobre, y rara vez se hacía hincapié en la belleza y utilidad de los bienes producidos. Todo esto creó en ellos un sentimiento de nostalgia por tiempos pasados, especialmente la Edad Media, en los que la vida era más simple y placentera.

De este modo, podemos afirmar que la crítica hacia el progreso, o, por lo menos, hacia la manera en la que se estaba llevando a cabo, es uno de los pilares de las obras de Morris y Tolkien. Asimismo, Le Guin incorpora a su obra la misma preocupación hacia una actividad humana que, a ojos de los tres autores, conlleva demasiadas consecuencias negativas. No obstante, la razón de ser de tal actitud y la manera en la que esta toma forma en las obras de Morris, Tolkien y Le Guin es diferente. Como ya se ha mencionado anteriormente, los autores británicos, debido a una profunda desconexión con sus respectivas épocas, marcadas por un cambio constante, desarrollaron una sensación de nostalgia por la cual mostraban preferencia hacia tiempos pasados. Esto se reflejó en sus obras en mundos que se debatían entre la modernidad y la tradición, no sin fuertes enfrentamientos entre ambas fuerzas. Le Guin, a pesar de ser igual de crítica con su época, no muestra tal nostalgia. En su caso, esto puede deberse a su firme creencia en que el cambio, sea positivo o negativo, es un elemento primordial de la experiencia humana. Por ello, *Earthsea* no relata el enfrentamiento que los textos británicos incluyen, sino que nos muestra el progreso como un proceso necesario e inevitable que moldea constantemente ese universo ficticio.

A pesar de esta diferencia, los tres autores coinciden en que uno de los elementos más perniciosos del avance de sus sociedades contemporáneas era el capitalismo, relacionada por los británicos con la destrucción de la naturaleza y el arte, y con la insostenibilidad ambiental que implica una sociedad humana sobrepoblada y consumista por Le Guin. Al mismo tiempo, los tres creían firmemente que el progreso se caracterizaba por la posibilidad de dominación que ofrecía, por el hecho de que este podía proveer una sociedad con el suficiente poder como para dominar el mundo. Así, todos y cada uno de ellos incluyen en sus obras personajes o civilizaciones relacionados al mal que presentan esta misma ambición, caracterizados por hacer uso de diversos elementos del progreso como la tecnología, la industria o la ciencia. Es interesante ver cómo los tres autores presentan el uso de este tipo de poder con el fin de empoderar a uno mismo como un elemento que contribuye a su distanciamiento del mundo natural.

Como último comentario sobre la ambición de dominar que muestran ciertos personajes en las obras seleccionadas, cabría destacar el objeto hacia el que se dirige dicho deseo dominador. Como elemento principal que los tres autores presentan como dominado nos encontramos con la naturaleza, tanto por medio de la fuerza industrial como en el caso de Morris y Tolkien, como mediante el uso de la magia (un saber similar a nuestra ciencia) en la obra de Le Guin. Aparte del mundo natural, el progreso también es mostrado como el factor que impulsa el dominio y, en ciertos casos, la destrucción de otros dos elementos. En cuanto a los británicos, este es el arte y la expresión artística, por lo que, en sus obras, muestran mundos ficticios en los que la artesanía está bajo acecho de una modernidad industrial. Por lo que se refiere a Le Guin, esta propone que el progreso pueda llegar a dominar la mente del individuo e, incluso, alienarlo de su propio ser. Esta divergencia nos muestra grandes diferencias entre los autores de ambos países. Mientras que Morris y Tolkien, mediante su preocupación con la naturaleza y el arte, articulan la ansiedad que les producía el saber que el mundo tal y como lo conocían estaba llegando a su fin debido al progreso, Le Guin, además de en la destrucción de la naturaleza, hace hincapié en el factor humano, mostrando así una preocupación con aquellas personas que no son aceptadas como plenos miembros de la sociedad. De algún modo, lo que esta autora propone es construir una plataforma mediante la cual aquellos marginados sociales pueden alzar la voz y reclamar una posición de pleno derecho dentro de la sociedad.

Podríamos decir que esta es una de las mayores contribuciones hechas por Le Guin al bagaje que recibió de los autores británicos en cuanto a la crítica del progreso se refiere, pasando de un enfoque un tanto global a uno centrado más en el individuo humano, como se ve en sus personajes que buscan la identidad que les ha sido arrebatada por fuerzas relacionadas con el progreso. Este énfasis en el individuo es un claro resultado de la vida de Le Guin en el oeste americano y su sociedad multicultural, su contacto con las culturas marginadas, su oposición a la guerra de Vietnam, el entorno familiar, marcado por la antropología y la multiculturalidad, en la que fue educada y sus ideales de igualdad entre los sexos. Es todo esto lo que hace que Le Guin trate de proporcionar centralidad a aquellos personajes que, por sus características, no encajarían en la categoría de héroe o personaje principal.

Un punto adicional en el que los autores británicos y estadounidense difieren es en su representación del mal en relación al progreso. En las obras de los primeros, el progreso y cualquier personaje relacionado con el mismo son representaciones del mal, mientras que en *Earthsea* el hecho de que un personaje pertenezca al bien o al mal depende en el uso que este haga de la magia. Una de las razones detrás de este planteamiento es que Morris y Tolkien se reafirmaban en su idea

de que el progreso, en la manera en la que se estaba llevando a cabo, no era propia de una sociedad humana sana y sensata. Al contrario, Le Guin creía que éste era beneficioso para la humanidad siempre y cuando fuera aplicado correctamente, incluso llegando a afirmar que era parte intrínseca de nuestro ser. La segunda razón, relacionada a la recién mencionada, gira en torno a la concepción que estos autores tenían sobre el mal. Para Morris y Tolkien, éste era algo que no residía dentro del ser humano, y si un individuo mostraba rasgos del mal era porque había sido tentado por una fuerza externa. Esto explicaría la categórica división entre el bien y el mal que hacen estos autores en sus obras, aunque es cierto que también presentan personajes que puedan ser más ambiguos en este respecto. Le Guin, en cambio, posiblemente debido a sus creencias taoistas, creía firmemente en que todo ser humano poseía el poder de obrar el bien y el mal. Por último, cabe destacar que estas diferencias en las ideas sobre el bien y el mal afectan de igual modo al tipo de distanciamiento entre el ser humano y la naturaleza que los tres autores proponen en sus obras. Si Morris y Tolkien presentan a sus personajes malvados como aquellos que se alejan más de su entorno natural, en *Earthsea* podemos ver cómo la sociedad humana en su integridad sufre este distanciamiento debido a hechos ocurridos en los mismo comienzos de su existencia. Aunque pueda parecer que este último comentario contradice lo dicho anteriormente sobre Le Guin y su enfoque más individualista, cabe aclarar que dicha condición que afecta al conjunto de la humanidad es el punto de partida para que esta autora pueda, posteriormente, hacer hincapié en el desarrollo y la valía de cada individuo.

La última idea que cabría comentar, y en la que los autores de ambas naciones difieren, es el tipo de mundos ficticios que crean. Los británicos nos presentan mundos que parecen ser casi perfectos y donde sus habitantes viven en perfecta armonía con el mundo natural. Estas situaciones perfectas se verán, después, afectadas y profundamente alteradas por el advenimiento de una fuerza externa malvada que representa al progreso y por la cual acaecerá un profundo cambio. Esto es exactamente lo que vivieron Morris y Tolkien en sus respectivas épocas. No obstante, en *Earthsea*, dicha situación idílica solamente tuvo lugar en los primeros días de existencia de dicho mundo, ya que para cuando las historias que completan la saga tienen lugar, la división entre ser humano y naturaleza es bastante grande.

De este modo, debido a que el punto de partida es diferente, las alteraciones originadas por las fuerzas del progreso tampoco serán iguales. Dicho esto, por ejemplo, es la obra de Tolkien la que presenta un choque más fuerte entre la modernidad y la tradición, por lo que la perturbación de la perfección es más notable. En ella, Tolkien nos habla de la partida de los elfos hacia otras tierras, lo que implica que la belleza en la Tierra Media disminuirá significativamente. Se pueden encontrar grandes similitudes entre este hecho en concreto y la creencia de Tolkien de que el mundo en el que

vivía estaba ya maldito y no tenía remedio debido a las malas costumbres del ser humano. En el caso de *The House of the Wolfings*, este tipo de perturbación no es tan palpable. El relato cuenta cómo los godos son capaces de resistir la fuerza de los romanos, quienes personifican el progreso. No obstante, la duda de si los romanos volverán algún día persiste, por lo que el futuro de estas tribus permanece incierta. En este caso, se podría decir que la supervivencia momentánea de los godos, quienes son una clara expresión de la artesanía, es fiel reflejo de lo que fue una de las grandes ambiciones que Morris tuvo en vida: la supervivencia de métodos de producción antiguos y artesanos. Por lo que respecta a la obra de Le Guin, el mundo de Earthsea no parece sufrir cambios tan grandes, como, por ejemplo, el de Tolkien. Aunque es cierto que la sociedad humana y el mundo mágico cambian a peor al final de la saga, en gran medida debido a la partida de los dragones, la vida de la gente de a pie no parece sufrir graves cambios, como tampoco se ve afectada la relación de aquellos que se mantienen lejos de la magia con el mundo natural. De algún modo, el mundo y la vida continúan casi igual tras un periodo de incertidumbre. Esta concepción de la vida podría estar influenciada por las creencias taoistas de Le Guin, una filosofía que promulga, entre otras cosas, las fuerzas reguladoras del *yang-yin*. Debido a esto, Earthsea no es un mundo que cambia de la noche a la mañana y donde la oscuridad y la luz se encuentran en constante oposición, sino que, después de una época de gran actividad por parte de sus fuerzas más oscuras y destructivas, él mismo logra volver a un estado de equilibrio. Estas tres diferentes ideas sobre una posible perturbación del estado ideal de un mundo son trasladables a la peculiar concepción que cada uno de estos tres autores tenía sobre el pasado y los problemas presentados por el progreso.

Para terminar, hemos podido ver cómo el género fantástico, establecido por Morris y Tolkien y desarrollado posteriormente por Le Guin, ha mostrado una continua preocupación hacia el progreso y el camino tomado por la humanidad a lo largo de distintos siglos, al mismo tiempo que ofrecía alternativas a nuestro comportamiento y futuro como sociedad. Aunque hay puntos en los que los tres autores difieren, hemos podido ver que Le Guin heredó las preocupaciones de sus homólogos británicos sobre el progreso: el impacto negativo que una mala interpretación del mismo puede tener en nuestro ecosistema y el creciente distanciamiento entre ser humano y mundo natural. A estas bases, Le Guin añadió sus propias ideas sobre lo que pudiera ocurrir al individuo al ser sometido por las herramientas de dominación del progreso. Teniendo esto en cuenta, se puede concluir que Le Guin propone una nueva cultura basada en las culturas europea y americanas (nativas y no-nativas) que ayudaría a sus compatriotas y a las nuevas generaciones de norteamericanos a desarrollar un estilo de vida en completa integración y cooperación con el mundo natural; una vida más sencilla en un mundo en constante cambio.

INTRODUCTION	3
1. Methodology	14
2. The British Perspective: Craftsmanship against the Machine in William Morris and J.R.R Tolkien	29
2.1. William Morris	30
2.1.1. Morris’s Victorian Context	31
2.1.2. Industry vs. Craftsmanship in <i>The House of the Wolfings</i>	59
2.1.2.1. The Romans	59
2.1.2.2. The Goths	62
2.1.2.3. The Dwarves	67
2.2. J.R.R. Tolkien	69
2.2.1. Tolkien’s Twentieth Century Context	69
2.2.2. Anti-industrial and Anti-imperialist Discourse in Tolkien’s Writings	84
2.2.2.1. Heavy Industry and Scorn of Nature as Elements of Evil	84
2.2.2.2. Craftsmanship and Love for Nature as Good	90
2.2.2.2.1. Craftsmanship among the Elves	90
2.2.2.2.2. Craftsmanship among Men	101
2.2.2.2.3. Craftsmanship among the Dwarves	105
3. The American Perspective: Ursula K. Le Guin	113
3.1. Le Guin’s Context	113
3.2. Environmental and Anti-imperialist Discourse in Le Guin’s <i>Earthsea</i> Cycle	153
3.2.1. The World of Earthsea: Precedents	154
3.2.2. Life in a Fallen World	164
3.2.2.1. A Natural Universe?	166
3.2.2.2. Nature and the Language of the Making	182
3.2.2.3. Humanity’s Way: Can Colonialism Shape Our Response to Nature?	192
3.2.2.3.1. Cob: Power That Dominates	192
3.2.2.3.2. Ged: Power That Complies	205
3.2.3. Colonialism’s Identity Implications	215
3.2.3.1. Inborn Identity Issues: Tehanu and Irian	221
3.2.3.2. Imposed Identity Issues: Tenar and Ged	235
4. Conclusions	269
Works Cited	280

Introduction

Every real work of art, even the humblest, is inimitable. I am most sure that all the heaped-up knowledge of modern science, all the energy of modern commerce, all the depth and spirituality of modern thought, cannot reproduce so much as the handicraft of an ignorant, superstitious Berkshire peasant of the fourteenth century; nay, of a wandering Kurdish shepherd, or of a skin-and-bone oppressed Indian ryot. This, I say, I am sure of; and to me the certainty is not depressing, but inspiriting, for it bids us remember that the world has been noteworthy for more than one century and one place, a fact which we are pretty much apt to forget... (Morris, "Popular Art" 106)

It is full Maytime by the trees and grass now. But the heavens are full of roar and riot. You cannot even hold a shouting conversation in the garden now, save about 1 a.m. and 7 p.m. —unless the day is too foul to be out. How I wish the 'infernal combustion' engine had never been invented. Or (more difficult still since humanity and engineers in special are both nitwitted and malicious as a rule) that it could have been put to rational uses —if any... (Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 77)

The myth of social progress and evolutionary progress is one I distrust very

deeply. I believe in change. Change does occur and must occur, “always change for the better”. That’s the myth of progress. (Le Guin, “Entretien avec Ursula K. Le Guin” 139)

These quotations belong to the three authors of fantasy literature whose works form the corpus on which the present study is based, namely William Morris, J.R.R. Tolkien and Ursula K. Le Guin. A close reading reveals the central topic common to all three statements: progress. More specifically, the authors make manifest their disagreement with, and critique of, the ways of their own societies and times; of the path that humanity seems to have taken in the name of advancement and apparent improvement.

Progress, according to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, is the “movement to an improved or more developed state, or to a forward position” (dictionary.cambridge.org). Taken on its own, the notion clearly suggests that progress is beneficial to us. For instance, we, as human societies, are always looking for new ways by which to improve our conditions, so that our lives can be as good and as long as possible. Nevertheless, progress has long been considered a potentially risky enterprise for those blinded by its attractive sparkle. As a matter of fact, already in the first half of the previous century, the Irish historian John Bagnell Bury highlighted what he believed to be the main reason progress may become a burden to humanity rather than a companion and helping hand. In his words, it is when it becomes a “controlling idea” (viii), that is, when it becomes our prime and sole objective, that it turns into a dangerous factor. From that moment on, “we [...] come to judge a civilisation good or bad according as it is or is not progressive” (vii). Thus, we could say that, in such cases, the important idea becomes that we are heading somewhere: *where* we are actually heading is, then, unimportant, as long as it is clear that we advance. The strength of the idea of progress is such that it has come to be associated with “ideals of liberty and

democracy” (vii). All this points to the central position that it holds in our conception of human society, and how entire civilisations are driven by it, striving to become as progressive as possible.

Following Bury, this comes with its own share of negative consequences. One such is that it has shaped the relationship between what is today known as “Western civilization”—roughly Europe, North America, and Australia—and the rest of the world. In his review of Robert Nisbet’s *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980), Victor Lebow claims that “to a considerable extent, the turmoil in the world today can be attributed to the efforts of the West to impose its idea of progress upon peoples whose traditions, cultures, and political and economic institutions have developed in accordance with religious, traditional, tribal and other sanctions less devoted to change, or even antagonistic to it” (69). Over the centuries, progress has been imbued with an element of domination or imposition. While Lebow highlights the problems that progress can bring when it assumes an imperialist role, since the onset of the Industrial Revolution (ca. 1760) it has frequently also been connected to advancements in the fields of technology and science.

We could say that it is precisely against such issues—against progress ruling people’s everyday lives and resulting in more problems than solutions—that the three aforementioned authors raised their voices. In a sense, and quoting Bury on his contemporaries, Morris, Tolkien and Le Guin can be inscribed in that group of people who are deeply aware of “a sudden decline or break-up of our Western civilisation, as a result not of cosmic forces but of its own development” (x).

It is in light of this that the present study aims to analyse how progress, and the problems that it can bring, have been portrayed in the works of William Morris, J.R.R. Tolkien and Ursula K. Le Guin. More specifically, we will study Morris’s *The House of the Wolfings* (1889), Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *The Lord of the Rings*

(1954-1955), and Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle (1968-2001). By considering the literary productions of these three authors, we will be able to determine whether this specific topic has persisted in the fantasy genre literature during different times (from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century) and in different places (Great Britain and North America), and, if so, how this has been done. In order to get a clear view of how this issue is portrayed in their works—and why—special focus will be put on the lives and experiences of all three authors, at the same time as the scope will expand with the help of additional methodologies. It should be noted that the main focus of this dissertation is on Le Guin's work, while the sections devoted to the study of Morris's and Tolkien's conceptions of progress, and the manner in which these were implemented in their oeuvre, will be used as the bases or precedents for her production. Le Guin's social and historical context and literary production is therefore more extensively explored than that of her British predecessors.

In order to conduct this study, we will look for support in the diverse literature produced around Morris, Tolkien, and Le Guin that will be useful for us, later on, when turning to the problems presented by progress in their literary works. Hence, it is necessary that we devote some space to presenting the secondary literature that has proved to be appropriate for our aim. Starting with the British writers, we will move on to studies on Le Guin and her work.

The focus of the study of Morris and Tolkien's works will mainly be on the influence that their own life experiences had on their conception of progress, and the fierce positions that they adopted against it, and there are several studies focusing on the lives of these two authors. Regarding Morris, it is imperative that we mention his thoroughly detailed biography written by Fiona MacCarthy under the title *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (1994). In Tolkien's case, several authors have sketched his biography, such as Humphrey Carpenter, both with his authorized biography of Tolkien *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (1977), and in his study of the Inklings—

Tolkien's closest group of friends and colleagues—*The Inklings* (1978). As will be shown later on, the impact of the Great War (1914-1918) on Tolkien was also central to his life and work, and has thus been widely covered by Tolkien researchers and scholars. Worthy of special mention here is John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (2003), a work that offers deep insights into Tolkien's life in the years around the conflict.

The part of the present study that deals with these two authors is also concerned with their conception of art and how they applied it in their literature, which also serves to give us an idea of their thoughts on progress. Regarding Morris, Fiona MacCarthy's biography again turns out to be pivotal to a proper understanding of his conception of art. About the actual literary application of Tolkien's thoughts on art and craftsmanship, it would be convenient to mention two articles that reveal very interesting ideas on these issues: Jessica Seymour's "'As we draw near mountains': Nature and Beauty in the Hearts of Dwarves", where she studies the long-forgotten figure of the Dwarves, and Gabriel Ertsgaard's "'Leaves of Gold There Grew': Lothlórien, Postcolonialism, and Ecology", which analyses the Elves' interaction with their natural environment. An additional study that focuses on Tolkien's vast literary production, addressing, at times, his preoccupation with progress, is Tom Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* (1982), where we find more ideas about Tolkien's conception of art. One last study that we would like to highlight in relation to Tolkien's position against progress is Patrick Curry's "Iron Crown, Iron Cage: Tolkien and Weber in Modernity and Enchantment". In this article, Curry tries to establish similarities in Tolkien's and the German philosopher Max Weber's respective responses to an age submerged in a process of modernization, each in their national contexts.

Moving on now to North America, we should consider the works that deal with Le Guin's literary production. First, we should mention that most of the existing scholarly work on Le Guin's

writings has focused on her science fiction literature. However, there are also studies concerned with her fantasy work. We could begin by commenting on those monographic publications on Le Guin's oeuvre that feature sections devoted to her fantasy literature. *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*, written by Elizabeth Cummings in 1990, examines diverse motifs across Le Guin's oeuvre, the *Earthsea* cycle included. Among others, Cummings adopts the post-colonial approach in order to study the possible strain between the self and the other. Another monograph that tries to unveil the intricate web of topics that forms Le Guin's work is *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom and published in 1986. This contains essays by scholars like Tom Shippey, Robert Scholes, George Slusser, Brian Attebery, Susan Wood and Dena Bain, covering a wide range of issues, such as language, nature and humanity's approach to it, the human individual, and the presence of Taoism in Le Guin's literature.

Among other studies that work on Le Guin's fantasy literature as a critique of progress we should mention George E. Slusser's *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin* (1972), where the influence of Taoism is mentioned among the factors that give shape to said critique; and Marek Oziewicz's *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle and Orson Scott Card*, published in 2008. Although Le Guin is not the only author studied in the latter, Oziewicz makes use of her fantasy production to tackle issues that arise in an ever-changing world like ours, such as science and ecology. Last, we could mention two additional works: Shu Fen Tsai's "Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle: An Ecological Fable of 'Healing Wounds'" studies Le Guin's fantasy literature from an ecocritical perspective, addressing, among other things, the impact of technological advancement on our ecosystem. Second, Deirdre C. Byrne's 1995 PhD dissertation *Selves and Others: The Politics of Difference in the Writings of Ursula Kroeber Le Guin* studies Le Guin's work from a post-colonial point of view, analyzing the tension between the self and the other.

Regarding studies on the relationship between UK and North American fantasy literature, we would like to mention four. First, Brian Attebery's *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* (1980) aims to construct a history of North American fantasy literature, showing its evolution and pointing to the contributions of foreign authors such as Tolkien and Morris. Apart from this, Attebery highlights those works that he believes to be cornerstones of the fantasy genre in the United States, and identifying similarities between them. Additionally, "'High Fantasy' in America: A Study of Lloyd Alexander, Ursula Le Guin, and Susan Cooper" by Lois R. Kuznets also touches on potential points of contact between the two nations in this regard. Another study that compares UK and US fantasy—although not focusing on any of the authors studied in the present dissertation—is Jules Zanger's article "Some Differences between American and British Fantasy Literature". Finally, we should mention *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, published in 1995 and containing different essays that track the evolution of children's literature—which can be considered another name for the fantasy genre—in Britain and America, also introducing the three authors that form the core of this study.

The existing secondary literature—briefly described above—relating to Morris, Tolkien, and Le Guin's portrayal of the problems presented by progress leave a few areas still unexplored. The present study aims to cover two research gaps that appear to remain untouched. Thus, we will study Morris's and Tolkien's historical and intellectual backgrounds in order to highlight the non-literary influence that the former may have had on the latter, given the similarities that we are able to find in their critiques of progress and its various negative consequences. We will also be able to determine how these critiques of humanity's advancement that were founded on the British experience were later translated into the North American one, and there given shape by a female writer according to her own experience. Even though it is true that scholars like Tom Shippey have worked on both sides—in his case Tolkien and Le Guin—this has

almost exclusively been done separately, as if they were unrelated manifestations within the fantasy genre. In contrast to this, our study will try to establish a link and a succession regarding the manner in which progress has been portrayed in the fantasy genre, and in the works of these particular authors, focusing on the impact that a difference of place can have on such conceptions.

As mentioned above, the literary works to be analysed in this dissertation are Morris's *The House of the Wolfings*, Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga. These authors and works were chosen partly because these authors are all canonical within the fantasy genre, playing a central role in its development at a given time. This is the main reason for their inclusion in monographic studies of fantasy literature like *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (2002) by Richard Mathews or *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012), edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. As mentioned above, these are authors whose works has been acknowledged as turning points within the genre. For instance, Morris is considered to be an "author to add substantially to the recipe for what eventually became modern fantasy" (Wolfe 15), while Tolkien is said to have practically influenced every single fantasy work that came after him (James 70). Regarding the impact of Le Guin's work on North American fantasy literature, Brian Attebery states that "the whole tradition of the marvelous in [that] country stands behind the work of Le Guin and other contemporary fantasists" (*The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* 183), in her case thanks to the fact that she "has written the most challenging and richest American fantasy to date" (162).

As for the particular works selected for the present dissertation, they are each in one way or another, representative pieces of the vast literary production of these three writers. Among William Morris's works, *The House of the Wolfings* is "the first of [his] own major fantasies" (*The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* 8), after which many others would follow. Perhaps for this very reason, this

book feature less than others in the secondary literature on Morris. Nonetheless, it exquisitely portrays the battle between tradition and progress by means of the war between the Goths and the Romans. As regards Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, its importance for the whole fantasy genre was already highlighted above, and is the reason for its inclusion in the present study. *The Silmarillion* makes essential clarifying contributions to many issues introduced in Tolkien's magnum opus, which is why it has been included in the works that form the basis for the analysis of his literature. Last, Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga, in its integrity, was chosen as the most representative and extensive example of her work within the fantasy genre. Finally, the above works were chosen because they all present worlds that are about to enter diverse processes from which changes and alterations result, both to the worlds and their inhabitants.

Regarding the structure of the present study, it has been designed to be as helpful as possible when it comes to answering the thesis question, raised above. Briefly explained, what the present dissertation seeks to discern is the way in which preoccupation with the negative consequences of progress has evolved in space and time within the fantasy genre. In light of this, we believe that it is key to take a thorough look at the social and historical background of each author. This is why the study of each author departs from the same starting point, namely a detailed analysis of their historical, social, and—if need be—intellectual contexts. This approach will help determine what the authors' experiences were like in their respective societies, which will serve to unearth certain topics that later appear in their writings. Once this first point has been covered, the analyses will diverge into topics addressing the particular needs that arise in the study of each author. With this in mind, the study of Morris and Tolkien will veer towards their concern with art and the goods produced by means of advanced technology in their times, while with Le Guin, the focus will be on the various intellectual currents that attracted her as a consequence of being a born and bred Californian. Finally, once the background of each author's has been thoroughly

studied and the ideals that they developed about progress as a result of their personal experiences highlighted, we will proceed to scrutinize the selected works. Hence, the study of Morris and Tolkien's context will lead us to approach their work in search of their concern with nature and industry, whereas Le Guin's work will be shown to be more concerned with nature and the individual's development in a potentially hostile environment.

1. Methodology

This dissertation uses a qualitative approach to elucidate articulations of tensions arising from technology, science, and the resulting tenets of domination of nature and human beings. Thus, this study turns to ecocriticism, post-colonial studies, and new historicism so as to reinforce the fierce anti-imperialist critiques of the literary material at the centre of the study, which, at the same time, displays overt ecological concerns. In the following section, we will try to gain some insight into these approaches.

The first is that of ecocriticism. Before starting to speak about ecocritical theory as such, it is also recommendable that we take a look at our position as inhabitants of Earth. Today we live in a world in which the human race seems to have turned blind and insensible to the natural world it inhabits. This indifference, embodied, for instance, in the human exploitation of natural resources, has resulted in a radical transformation of our environment. As Lawrence Buell notes in the introductory chapter to his *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (2001), already in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx realised that “by the mid-1800s second nature (nature as reprocessed by human labor) had effectively dominated first nature worldwide” (3). In a more catastrophic tone, he recalls Bill McKibben’s idea of “‘the end of nature’: a degree of modification so profound that we shall never again encounter a pristine physical environment” (qtd. 3).

In light of this, we could raise the following question: is all this because the human race is incapable of maintaining a gentle coexistence with its environment and habitat? Certainly, this is a question to which some have answered in an affirmative manner, one of them being Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, as Jonathan Bate puts it, claimed that “society is the negation of nature” (32). Jonathan Bate himself, on the other hand, seems to perceive humankind’s relationship towards nature as some sort of irony, stating that “we are

both a part of and apart from nature” (33). Following this idea that humankind simultaneously is and is not within the realm of nature, Karl Kroeber suggests that it is only due to human selfishness that we tend to become estranged from the natural world (70). Thus, after analyzing William Wordsworth’s poem “Home at Grasmere” (ca. 1800), Kroeber concludes that “the conventionally antagonistic ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ may in fact felicitously interanimate” (55). What these ideas communicate is that it is, in a way, true that we live in a state of disconnection from the natural world, which may be a result of the nature of our civilization, as Rousseau suggested, or of our actions, as Bate and Karl Kroeber seem to indicate.

Resulting from this situation, which has been going on for some centuries, it is no wonder that a type of literature arose that tried to put us back in contact with our long-forsaken environment. As Lawrence Buell describes in his work *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), “environmental literature launches itself from the presumption that we do not think about our surroundings, and our relation to them, as much as we ought to” (261). To this, he adds that “the best environmental writers continually recalibrate familiar landscapes [...] in such ways, so as to keep alive the sense of the ‘undiscovered country of the nearby’” (262). Thus, in a way, it seems that what this type of literature would like us to do would be to find joy and beauty in that environment which is so familiar to us and that we have taken it for granted.

After considering the state of humankind’s current relationship with nature and the presentation of a kind of literature whose aim is to put us back in touch with our environment, we can proceed to shift our focus to the main concern of this section: ecocriticism. Many are the critics who have worked on this branch of literary criticism, each trying to shed some light on how the discipline might be defined or what its main aims should be. Ecocriticism, also known as ecological literary criticism, ecopoetics, or green studies, “is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [...]

[which] shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty xviii-xix). This last idea of the human impact on nature and vice versa seems to be important, since it is also shared by other critics, such as Peter Barry (252). Another definition very much in line with Glotfelty’s, is that put forward by Karl Kroeber, when he claims that “ecological literary criticism concentrates on linkages between natural and cultural processes” (1).

As for the aim of this point of view of literary criticism or the actual usage that critics can make of it, we certainly find some interesting ideas. Barry states that this viewpoint can, in fact, be of extreme use nowadays, since it can offer us new insights about problems that concern the whole population of the planet. In his own words, he suggests that since “no wilderness any longer exists on the planet, for every region is affected by global warming, and other ‘anthropocentric’ problems, [...] we surely need to concede [...] that issues of gender, race, and class cannot any longer exhaust the range of concerns that literature and criticism ought to have” (257). Similarly, Karl Kroeber and Jonathan Bate underline the fact that society could substantially benefit from this type of literary criticism. The former indicates that against the belief of “art [being] practically trivial and of no significance to physical, social or ethical problems” (21), through the filter of ecocriticism, literature can actually “contribute to the resolution of practical, social, and ethical difficulties, [...] [endeavouring] to speak not to an elite or a coterie but to as wide an audience as possible” (21). On the other hand, Bate focuses on the need to urge people to think about their position in the world, claiming that “ecopoetics should begin [...] as a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth” (266), and putting emphasis on the idea that “[it] must concern itself with consciousness” (266). In addition to this, Greg Garrard suggests that ecocriticism can be said to have two dimensions. The first, related to Bate’s idea of consciousness, resides in the fact that “ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses to a ‘green’ moral” (3), while the

second consists of “its political agenda” (3). He concludes that, in a way, this literary theory aims at promoting “environmentally orientated developments in philosophy and political theory” (4). In short, we could say that this branch of literary criticism analyses cultural production aimed at finding evidence of human interactions with the natural world, tracing patterns so as to better know how to improve our relationship with our environment. Indeed, this may be the main aim of ecocriticism—to gain enough knowledge at different levels so as to be able to overcome the challenges that we as a race may face in the near future.

Regarding its historical evolution, Barry establishes that “ecocriticism as a concept first arose in the late 1970s” (249). He also comments on the idea that “[it] should have emerged at a time of ecological crisis” (266), hinting, in a way, to what was mentioned above, regarding its awareness-raising function. Going back to Peter Barry, he analyses the different developmental stages that ecocriticism went through in the USA and in the UK, respectively. As for the former, he states that it “takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth-century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness as manifested in America, these being Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)” (249), while the roots of British ecocriticism can be found in “the British Romanticism of the 1790s” (250). Thus—and even though we can see that there are differences between them—it may be said that both the American and British branches of so-called green studies “are clearly linked in their approaches and aims, but differ in emphasis and ancestry” (251). According to Barry, the difference in emphasis resides in American ecocriticism being more “‘celebratory’ in tone” (251), while the “British variant tends to be more ‘minatory’, [...] [seeking] to warn us of environmental threats” (251) of diverse origin. As can be presumed, however, ecocritical studies are not exclusive to the two aforementioned nations. Nowadays, this type of criticism is “dominated by the Association for the Study of Literature and

Environment (ASLE)” (Garrard 4), with branches worldwide. Similarly, literature is no longer the sole subject matter of study, ecocritics busying themselves with other fields as “scientific writing, film, TV, art, architecture and other cultural artefacts such as theme parks, zoos and shopping malls” (5).

The last issue that we may draw attention to are the challenges that this type of literary criticism has to face. On the one hand, ecocriticism is said to be entitled to “[add] a different perspective” (Barry 259) to the way in which any text, canonical or not, naturalistic or not, is read. This new point of view consists in “[switching] critical attention from inner to outer, so that what had seemed mere ‘setting’ is brought in from the critical margins to the critical centre” (259). In other words, “the intuition we have to counter is a long-standing, deeply-ingrained Western cultural tradition of anthropocentric attitudes” (262). On the other hand, Garrard encourages ecocritics to work in favour of overthrowing the belief that “ecological problems are scientific problems rather than objects of cultural analysis” (5). Garrard’s stance is reinforced by means of an idea by John Passmore, constructed around the notion that “‘problems in ecology’ [...] are properly scientific issues, to be resolved by the formulation and testing of hypotheses in ecological experiments, while ‘ecological problems’ are features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society” (qtd. in Garrard 6). Garrard finally remarks that “ecocriticism need not remain parasitic upon the natural sciences, but has a distinctive and constructive contribution to make to the diagnosis and resolution of ecological problems” (13).

This approach will be useful when addressing several issues in Le Guin’s work. First, we will take a look at the Earthsea world as a sole body, all of its parts existing in cooperation and balance with each other. At the same time, we will see how Le Guin’s portrayal of nature is not necessarily one that is benevolent and tame. Rather, Le Guin’s

nature is a balanced entity that incorporates forces of destruction and creation. Another point that will be studied is the degree of alienation from the natural world manifested by Earthsea's human society, enhanced by the Language of the Making. Since this topic relates to science and knowledge, we will finally consider two approaches to power, provided by a couple of Le Guin's characters who simultaneously suggest good and bad attitudes towards nature, and their implications.

The second important approach for our study is related to post-colonialism. In order to be able to reach a point at which we can define what post-colonial studies and post-colonial writing are, it is advisable to attend to the two concepts that could be said to be at the bottom and root of it all: imperialism and colonialism. These terms seem interconnected, since one could be said to be the direct aftermath of the other. As Edward Said claims, "'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said *Culture and Imperialism* 9). Needless to say, the colonized individual finds themselves in a situation of complete oppression and negation of their culture and persona. Indeed, this attitude of the nonexistence of the colonised for the coloniser is apparently of great importance in shaping the minds of those thus subdued. In light of this, Frantz Fanon argues that "because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* 250). In this quote, Fanon is clearly hinting at the psychological dimension of colonialism, which seems at least as important as its 'physical' dimension, namely the possession and exploitation of other lands.

Following this last idea of the psychological dimension of colonialism, it would be interesting to now turn our focus to the

coloniser's tools, which he uses to control and dominate the colonised. Here, we would be talking about the idea of denying the latter their own voice. A very simple, yet most efficient, manner of achieving this were the representations that the metropolis would make of the natives who lived in its colonies. According to Said, this practice was—and still is—very common and widespread, since “all cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them” (Said *Culture and Imperialism* 100). A good example of this conduct is offered by Fanon when he mentions that, for the European colonial powers, the whole of the African continent and its rightful inhabitants were nothing more than a “haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstition and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of Cannibals—in short, the Negro's country” (211). These types of representations not only convey a remodelling of the nature of the subdued culture, but also, a remodelling of the subconscious of the inhabitant of the Western metropolis, creating preconceptions and prejudices that will, presumably, last for a long time.

A direct consequence of this silencing of the native culture is that “it very quickly becomes a culture condemned to secrecy” (Fanon *Wretched* 237). However, it seems that this secrecy had, in a way, the power to work in favour of the colonised culture, helping to create a movement of resistance (Said *Culture and Imperialism* 196) heavily based on cultural identity. The imposing and oppressing conduct carried out by the coloniser culture would lead “some natives [to seek] refuge in indigenous, often oral cultures or ideals of a national culture based on their own experience and language” (Ryan 196). Thus, in a way, holding fast to one's own culture and language, even if it had to be done in a clandestine way, would convey a message of defiance to the oppressor as well as loyalty to one's own roots. Here, the matter of language is of utmost importance for the colonised people, since “language bears worldviews within it, so that to adopt the imperial language was in effect to adopt the point of view of imperialism” (196).

It is within this framework that post-colonial studies emerge, a branch of literary criticism that would be recognised as such in the 1990s (Barry 192). The material taken into consideration in post-colonial research can either consist of “the study of writing by ‘post-colonial’ writers, usually natives of [colonized countries] – [or] the study of the discourse and literature of imperialism” (Ryan 194). Presumably, the objective of the former would be to regain the silenced voice. In addition to this, post-colonial literary criticism works on issues such as “diaspora, hybridity, ambiguity, mimicry, mestizaje, and creolization” (196), thus also showing diversity in the way that it can be conducted. Some scholars will focus on texts that “[justify] or [...] [register] the existence of the empire in the metropole or imperial center” (195), while others concentrate on native discourses that seek to use their own cultures with aspirations of independence (196). Halfway between these positions, there is the approach that “[examines] the cultural fronts where imperial and subaltern cultures meet” (195). At this point, it is worth mentioning the distinction that some scholars make between the term post-colonial and postcolonial. The hyphenated term seems to “appeal to those who see Europe’s expansion under modernity, and the attendant forms of colonialism and imperialism, as ultimately beneficial to the world, even if not wholly exempt from criticism” (D’haen 76). Conversely, getting rid of the hyphen “presupposes a more radical critique of European expansion, and often of modernity itself, to the point of adopting the *Other’s* point of view in a ‘positioned reading’” (76). In this study, however, it is not our aim to align ourselves with either term.

Regarding the development of post-colonial criticism, Barry comments on the idea that the phases through which it went are similar to “the developmental stages of feminist criticism” (197). According to him, the first stage boils down to “postcolonial criticism [taking] as its main subject matter white representations of colonial countries and [criticizing] these for their limitations and their bias”

(197), which is analogous to the earliest point of “feminist criticism when the subject matter would be the representation of women by male novelists” (197). In the second phase, the similarity between these points of view resides in the fact that they both become, in a way, more self-conscious. Thus, “postcolonial criticism involved a turn towards explorations of themselves and their society by postcolonial writers” (197), while “feminist criticism [turned] towards the exploration of female experience and identities in books by women” (198).

Finally, we will look at certain characteristics common to this branch of literary studies. One is that, when speaking of literature, “universalism is rejected by postcolonial criticism” (Barry 193). The reason behind this attitude is that “if we claim that great literature has a timeless and universal significance we thereby demote or disregard cultural, social, regional, and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly ‘universal’, standard” (192). Besides, and this happens to be pivotal, when adopting such universalist stances, a scholar would be perpetuating the “white, Eurocentric norms and practices” (193), while “all others [are] relegated to subsidiary, marginalised roles” (193), which is precisely what post-colonialism tries to overthrow. In this matter of universality, there are, however, other scholars who are not as firm about it as Barry appears to be. For instance, Peter Hitchcock defends the idea that although universality should be confronted “as long as [it] is linked to Eurocentrism [...], postcolonial critics can differentiate between Eurocentrism as an ideology, and universality as a philosophical proposition” (360). Other issues that concern post-colonial critics could be the “awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral ‘Other’” (Barry 194), the use made of language (195), the “hybrid identity” (196) and the synergy between cultures (196). It is also worth mentioning that post-structuralism and deconstructionism are both influential tenets of post-colonial studies (196).

The post-colonial approach enables us to take up two different perspectives in relation to Le Guin's work. First, we will consider a physical colonialism, in which humanity is claiming possession over the lands of the dragons, driving them farther into the west. This acquisition of land will be shown to have grave ecological implications. Le Guin's work also showcases a type of psychological colonialism in which certain characters will set on an internal quest to find who they really are and where they belong.

The third and last critical approach that comprises the methodological framework of this dissertation is new historicism, also known as cultural poetics. A good starting point for more detailed insight into this branch of literary criticism is Sarah Maza's interpretation of Stephen Greenblatt's—founder of new historicism—aims for this methodology. One of these, according to Maza, is “to demonstrate [...] that texts are cultures and cultures are texts” (260). Maza is here underlining the presumed relation between the literary production of the author and the social, political, and historical environment in which it is written, hinting at the mutual influence that each exercise on the other.

Established as a branch of literary criticism after the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's 1980 book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Colebrook 198), new historicism is difficult to define, since not even the scholars who work within this field of criticism seem to give much importance to the issue. Maza, however, makes an attempt, roughly defining “New Historicism [as] a hybrid of ‘art’ and the ‘real’” (261), from which we can infer that its material is constituted by both literary and non-literary texts. In addition, Catherine Gallagher comments on the idea that this critical approach “entails reading literary and nonliterary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts [tracing] the connections among texts, discourses, power, and the constitution of subjectivity” (37).

The different social and intellectual movements and trends that emerged from the 1960s onward proved to be pivotal in shaping Greenblatt's position, eventually leading him to the creation of cultural poetics. Among these, we may point to intellectual tendencies such as post-structuralism and Marxism. Claire Colebrook writes about their influence in her book *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism* (1997), arguing that it is inevitable to establish links between post-structuralism and new historicism, even though this would not mean that the latter is any kind of aftermath of the former (1). Furthermore, she clarifies that Greenblatt opposed the propositions of both post-structuralism and Marxism, mainly due to what he believed to be "the relation between text and history" (25) and his conception of the "cultural domain" (25). The social and political movements that contributed to the formation of cultural poetics were set in the sixties, with its prominent agendas of feminism and the New Left, and this seems to have constituted "the seed years for the new historicist work that [appeared] in the eighties [,] which has maintained New Left assumption about the sources, nature and sites of social conflict and about the issue of representation" (Gallagher 43). It is also worth mentioning the influence of philosopher and cultural critic Michel Foucault, whose "work—his methodology, practice and terminology—has been of significant importance for new historicism" (Colebrook 30). Therefore, influenced by everything mentioned above, Maza comments that "to Greenblatt and others [...], the importance of connecting literary texts to history seemed sufficiently self-evident" (252). With the scenery and the actors of a new critical movement already set, the spark that ended up kindling the fire of new historicism was the belief that since the literary language that was at hand was obsolete and would not serve the purpose of this new point of view, a new one had to be created. Greenblatt himself spoke about this need, when he stated that

literary criticism has a familiar set of terms for the relationship between a work of art and the historical events to

which it refers: we speak of allusion, symbolization, allegorization, representation, and above all mimesis. Each of these terms has a rich history and is virtually indispensable, and yet they all seem curiously inadequate [...]. And their inadequacy extends to aspects not only of contemporary culture but of the culture of the past. We need to develop terms to describe the ways in which material—here official documents, private papers, newspaper clippings, and so forth—is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property. (Greenblatt “Towards a Poetics of Culture” 11)

As can certainly be guessed by what has been said so far, the central object matter of study of new historicism are texts, be them literary or not, since these are the key to creating representations of ourselves or the other, which are, at the same time, crucial when it comes to determining power. At this point, it is of utmost importance for us to determine what this methodology understands as *text*. According to Greenblatt, a text “is the product of a negotiation between a creator or a class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society” (Greenblatt “Poetics” 12). This negotiation that Greenblatt mentions implies that, to a greater or lesser extent, a text, say, a literary work, will always convey ideas in favour or against the discourse of power, social events, or lines of thought. All this happens to be pivotal when it comes to producing representations, which are, as Colebrook claims, not precisely “descriptive” (204), but “*productive* of order” (204). Consequently, this creation of order is considered some type of platform for establishing power, since “texts both produce *and* reveal mechanisms of power” (27). Even though we have emphasised how pivotal texts are for new historicism critics, mainly due to their close connection to power, it must be said that texts are not the only factor studied in this area. Indeed, cultural poetics takes into consideration “anything [...] which is contiguous to the text” (215), namely “aspects

of performance, printing, framing, consumption, institutionalisation, binding [and] reading” (215).

Sarah Maza summarises the aims of new historicism scholars as an effort “to breathe new life into canonical texts by relating them to non-literary texts and social practices of their days” (249). As seen above, this new manner of dealing with texts relies on trying to establish connections between texts and several diverse factors—social, economic, and political—that orbit them. However, the principal innovation of new historicism is that “the question of the meaning of the text, the idea that there is a ‘signified’ [...] ‘behind’ the work, is displaced in favour of an examination of the text’s labour. Instead of seeking richer and more complex hermeneutic depth to the work, new historicist criticism asks how the text functions” (Colebrook 207). It seems that all this is done with one final idea in mind, which is to reveal the possible relationship between text and power via discourses and representations. Literary critics who embrace this point of view investigate “the distinctions which set one performance or representation off as fictional and manipulative and another as natural, theoretical or legitimate [while seeking] to show the ways in which this distinction between the authentic and the derivative itself relies on certain powers of representation” (211). All this being said, the question that we might ask ourselves is, how is all this conducted? The truth is that, recalling Hunter Cadzow’s words, new historicism critics themselves claim that this branch of literary criticism is “a practice, not a theory” (qtd. in Maza 251), meaning that there are no established guidelines for carrying out research in a new historicist mode.

Among the contributions new historicism have made to the field of literary criticism, it is worth quoting Colebrook, when she points out that new historicism has managed to reveal that “realist texts such as those of history, reportage, science and political theory are inextricably involved in the negotiation of literary form and representation” (208), and that this is “concerned with power” (208).

In addition, Maza comments on another achievement of cultural poetics, namely that its critics have been able to point at a new relationship between form and ideology, demonstrating that “literature and ideology [become], in specific historical environments, a powerful and socially functional mode of constructing subjectivity” (44).

Considering Le Guin’s certainly peculiar context—living as a woman in the American West, the Vietnam War, etc.—a new historicist approach grants us the opportunity to try to establish connections between the social, historical, and economical context in which she lived and wrote her oeuvre, and the ideas and anxieties featured in her *Earthsea* cycle. At the same time, this perspective will be of great help when describing the context within which British fantasy literature evolved, since this can be considered the foundation for American fantasy production, and, specifically for our study, for Le Guin’s *Earthsea* saga. Thus, we will specially focus on the technological and imperialist aspects of the times in which William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien lived, to see how the concerns that each developed in these areas would later feature in their literature.

2. The British Perspective: Craftsmanship against the Machine in William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien

Any reader that ventures into the literature of the two magnificent British authors William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien will notice that their literary productions share certain resemblances. One that strikes the reader from the very first moment might be the high and elaborate, sometimes even archaic, language in which their fantasy tales are written. Another similarity is scenery. Most of the time, these are environments that seem to take us back in time, granting us the opportunity to travel to other worlds and societies that live in a much deeper contact with their natural environments than ours, either now or when the stories were written. All in all, to a reader minimally accustomed to the characteristics of the literature of these authors, the idea that there must be some sort of connection between them is always present. Above, we pointed out how Tolkien acknowledged Morris's as having influenced the shape of his Middle-earth, especially the latter's *The House of the Wolfings* (Tolkien *Letters* 303). Indeed, the relation between the two authors was also noticeable to Clive Staples Lewis—a person very close to Tolkien (Tolkien *The Inklings* 32).

There are further similarities in Tolkien and Morris's works, like the way in which they tended to portray their own world in their fiction. Both authors depicted worlds that were undergoing certain changes, giving rise to certain tensions. This is the case, for example, in their portrayals of the drawbacks of progress in the societies of their time. It is the aim of the following chapters to explore and analyse the similarities underpinning the ways in which our two authors opposed technological and industrial progress and everything that came with it, by portraying it in their writings as something evil, as opposed to a world of craftsmen, which they deemed good and desirable.

Before we begin our analysis, we must dedicate some words to the structure of the following sections. We will begin by scrutinising

the authors' respective background and environment, to see what may have determined the anti-progress and anti-industrial attitudes displayed in their lives and work. In Morris's case, this will take the form of a combination of a brief study of the Victorian Age, some family background, and certain intellectual and artistic figures prominent in his time. Regarding Tolkien's background, however, the study will focus exclusively on his life experiences, in which great relevance will be given to his experience in the Great War, and with special focus on the issue of loss resulting from the use of advanced technology. The next point to analyse will be the two authors' conceptions of art. After considering important elements within Morris's anti-progress thoughts, we will consider his concept of Popular Art, as well as looking at what he considered to be proper production and product. This will be followed by an overview of the projects in which Morris put his ideals into practice. As for Tolkien, the focus will centre on his concept of *sub-creation*, and the artistic relationship existing between God and humankind. The last point in the part of each writer will be dedicated to the analyses of their literary works: Morris's *The House of the Wolfings*, and Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The reader will notice that the study of the two authors' respective oeuvres is clearly different in scope, the part devoted to Tolkien being considerably longer. This is due to the fact that the study analyses two of Tolkien's texts, and just one of Morris's.

2.1. William Morris

Although perhaps best known for his designs, Morris was much more than a designer. Indeed, as George Bernard Shaw pointed out, Morris was "one of the most famous men of the nineteenth century, who was not only a successful employer and manufacturer in the business of furnishing and decorating palaces and churches, but an eminent artistic designer, a rediscoverer of lost arts, and one of the greatest of English poets and writers" (qtd. in MacCarthy 506). In the following

chapter we aim to show how his multifaceted character is portrayed in his work as poet and writer.

2.1.1. Morris's Victorian Context

Before looking at Morris's intellectual context, which features certain figures that influenced him deeply, we need to consider the historical period in which he lived. Even though, as we will mention below, Morris never came to terms with much of what was happening around him, the society in which he lived made an impact on him. This society was that of the English Victorian Age (1837-1901).

One of the most important periods in the history of England and the United Kingdom, the Victorian Age was when the country achieved its peak of power in the world. This was both thanks to industrial and colonial might, as well as other factors. However, the industrial and the colonial also had drawbacks for British society at the time. This was a time “marked by a dramatic technological and social change, the globalization of communication, rapid industrialization, turbulent financial markets and the unchecked expansion of cities at the growing expense of the natural world” (Barringer & Rosenfeld 9). Indeed, as Robert Furneaux Jordan comments, it was the technological aspect that characterised this era the most, its influence being noticeable in the way of conducting industry, in society, and in the environment (qtd. in Landow “Five Ages of Technology”, par. 1). The impact of new technologies on factory work was, we could say, quite negative. In this era, industrial work was mainly characterised by two features: overwork, and the physical consequences of overwork. Regarding the former, sources from the time, such as John Fielden, a Lancashire factory owner, claim that the technological advances had triggered the avarice of the masters, making them force the workers to work for yet longer hours (qtd. in Del Col par. 5). Consequently, hard and prolonged labour influenced the physical condition of the workers, especially child-workers, who would work a little less than adults. As Peter Gaskell

wrote, in a still-forming bone structure, the high temperatures and the fact that they had to remain in the same position for long hours caused malformations in the child-workers, noticeable in their spines, pelvis, and legs (qtd. in Del Col par. 3). The implementation of cutting-edge technology in the factories also conditioned the work of the English artisans. Even though craftsmen of the period are said to have been better off than plain factory workers, according to John Burnett mainly thanks to their “degree of skill—a combination of manual dexterity and acquired knowledge” (qtd. in Landow “The Prince of Victorian Manual Workers” par. 2) that gave them control over the whole process of design and production, it must be said that they, too, suffered the consequences of industrialisation. Due to the “‘freedoms’ of the unregulated market and the state’s commitment to *laissez-faire*” (Kirk 45), many of the English guilds suffered from a “profound and ‘unnatural’ deterioration in status, independence and living standards” (46).

Lastly, the Victorian era also saw the throes of fierce colonialism. Originally devised “to facilitate the acquisition of as much foreign territory as possible, both as a source of materials and in order to provide real or potential markets for British manufacturers” (Cody par. 2), which gives an idea of its appeal to the British capitalist class, it inevitably ended up a tool for dominion. Under the rule of Queen Victoria, Britain expanded its colonial power with the acquisition of a “commercial network in the East” (par. 3), with the Queen proclaiming herself “Empress of India” (par. 4), and gaining control over lands in Africa and China. The issue of colonialism is quite important for understanding Morris, since it accesses that facet of him that displays his keen social conscience. As stated above, this new practice rapidly turned into a tool for dominion, which meant that those lands and peoples that were turned into subjects of the British crown suffered a considerable decline in living standards. In the end, colonialism was solely directed at the utter exploitation of the material and human resources of the acquired lands. No wonder, then, that Morris took a fierce stance against British colonial expansion. In his

own words, its promoters were “spreaders of the blessing of shoddy civilization [sic]” (qtd. in Hanson par. 1), and their practice nothing but “slaughter and destruction carried on wholesale” (qtd. in Hanson par. 1).

After this brief look at the social and political context in which Morris lived, it is time to survey the intellectual context that proved to be an exceptional influence on him, helping him shape his ideas on many issues. In this case, there are three outstanding influences that are worth mentioning: John Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Ever since his student years in Oxford, which he described as “the unfolding of medieval thought” (qtd. in MacCarthy 55) within himself, Morris was always much impressed and influenced by Ruskin’s notion of the Gothic, and by the medievalism of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites.

John Ruskin was one of the most peculiar characters of nineteenth century Britain. An extremely influential literature and art critic, Ruskin also gave thought to the ongoing industrialisation of England and the consequences this had on the lives of the working-classes. In this section, we will try to point at certain aspects of Ruskin’s philosophy that could be said to have had a special influence on Morris. These are three: his praise of Gothic art; his ideal of the perfect working-man, and his scorn for the capitalist economy.

In order to understand Ruskin’s admiration of Gothic art, it is important to bear in mind his idealisation of the Middle Ages and his ambition to bring back certain values of the medieval era. According to Ruskin, if we want to find the true “foundation of all art” (“Art and Man in the Middle Ages” 48), we have to go back to the medieval period. There is a very simple reason behind this strong claim, namely that in “medieval art, thought is the first thing, execution the second; in modern art execution is the first thing, and thought the second” (48). This idea of the thinking artist or worker was a key factor for Ruskin, as we will see below. However, before delving deeper into

this, it would be interesting to have a look at his conception of Gothic art and what it meant to him.

Ruskin suggested that the word ‘Gothic’ referred to the type of architecture practiced in the North, although it was always used as a pejorative term, referring to how “buildings [...] exhibited a degree of sternness and rudeness” (*The Nature of Gothic* 155), not to be found in the architecture of the South or East. However—and although it was despised for these features—Ruskin believed that it was the existence of these that made the Gothic art worthy of “our profoundest reverence” (155). There were two other characteristics that Ruskin found to be key in medieval or Gothic art and architecture. First, he found the connection between artist and nature to be crucial. Ruskin held that nature must always be a key influence on artists, and was an entity from which they may draw considerable material. Gothic aesthetics and thought had ‘naturalism’, that is, “the love of natural objects for their own sake” (*NoG* 181), as a central feature. Indeed, we know of the strong affection that Gothic artists had for the shapes found in the flora around them, to the point that, as Ruskin claimed, they “struggled to render all its characters with as much accuracy as was compatible with the laws of [their] design and the nature of [their] material, not unfrequently tempted in [their] enthusiasm to transgress the one and disguise the other” (200). Contrary to the lives of the factory-workers of Ruskin’s time, the deep love of nature that the Gothic artist felt was a sign of their “tranquil and gentle existence” (201).

Second, the emphasis on the imperfection of the artwork was one of the most praiseworthy characteristics of Gothic architecture, according to Ruskin. The idea was that the artist, knowing and admitting their abilities and limitations and not being afraid of them, is capable of producing an imperfect piece of art that will help produce “a stately and unaccusable whole” (*NoG* 160). Going further, Ruskin considered the perfectly executed building to be inferior to one featuring more imperfections (160). Perfection was not desirable,

thought Ruskin, since the existence of great accuracy will, most of the time, mean the use of precise machinery (230). On the whole, Ruskin considered “the demand for perfection ... a sign of the misunderstanding of the ends of art” (170), and there were two main reasons for this. The first of is the idea that the artist’s “mind is always far in advance of his powers of execution” (170), which leads to minor and understandable inaccuracies. The second reason is related to human nature itself, the “state of progress and change” (171) of every human body, since nothing “that lives is ... rigidly perfect” (171). All in all, Ruskin linked the idea of imperfection to the freedom of thought that any worker ought to have in order to bring out the best in them, no matter the failures that this might bring about. This enables them to regain the human condition lost in the repetitive toil of factory-work, which is, in its own sense, a type of slavery (161-162).

The second aspect of Ruskin’s philosophy that it is, for our purposes, important to mention, is also related to his idea of the worker’s freedom of thought. Ruskin’s ideal working man would have the right to think freely and for himself. At the same time, it is important to consider, for a moment, the relevance that the working class had for him. Ruskin believed that both the class itself, and the work they did, were fundamental to society. As regards the former, he claimed that this class consisted of “the holiest, perfectest [sic], purest persons the earth can at present show” (“Poverty” 215), while he considered the latter to be the true mover of society, unlike the “fine work” (222) of the upper classes, which he thought to be utterly useless. Nonetheless, he admits that ‘perfect’ work would be a combination of both of the above-mentioned: the handwork of the working-classes and the exercise of thought of the upper classes (222). In this vein, and in order to improve the situation of the workers, it is essential that they be given the chance to think, which could be granted only if they were employed for fewer hours. This way, the beauty of their handwork would be enhanced, since it is outside of working hours that the worker can let their mind flow. As Ruskin put it, “the highest results of the human intelligence, are conditions, or

achievements, of quite unlaborious,—nay, of recreative,—effort” (“Labor” 191). It is similarly pivotal that the whole process of production be left to the worker—that is, both the processes of thinking and making—since a creation shaped by the imagination of its maker will be far better than that of the worker who merely follows instructions by someone else (*NoG* 169). Thus, we arrive at the primordial task of any worker, and the characteristic that any consumer should look for in any work of art: invention. The fact that there is invention in a work means that the mind of the worker has been at work in it, which is enough to consider a work worthy of praise. Never should the execution of ideas be put before the invention and thought that have gone into them, since every artist will execute their work to the best of their faculties, and this should be enough (167). Giving workers the freedom they need to let their minds work, and thus invent, would be to decide that they are humans rather than tools. It would be dehumanising to demand precision of the worker. Instead, we should always look to “[let] him but begin to imagine, to think, to try to do anything worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once. Out come all his roughness, all his dullness, all his incapability; ... but out comes the whole majesty of him also” (162).

The last piece of Ruskin’s philosophy that could be of use for a deepened understanding of William Morris is his firm anti-capitalism. For Ruskin, the capitalist class is the representative of a disease within society, and he catalogues them as “rogues” (“Riches” 212) or “stupid persons” (212), busy with “money-making, gambling, or champagne-bibbing” (212), while the evil of the capitalist system consists in fierce and unfair competition between the guilds and trades that it promotes (199). He also strikes against one of the pillars of capitalist society, that is, its measureless consumerism. Ruskin implores the upper classes to consume in the right measure, since limitless consumption of goods means treading upon the working-classes, who are the producers of those products. Ruskin adds emphasis also to the

unfairness of there being a producer class while there is another class that is nothing but consumerist and idle (194).

During Ruskin's time, the capitalist class were engaged in an industry that was becoming increasingly oriented towards mass-production. Ruskin felt that this came with two clear drawbacks. First, he assumed that since the amount of produced goods in the factories aimed at quantity, producers never stopped to think of quality, which may result in the product not being useful, which is one of Ruskin's ideals for products (*NoG* 165-166). He saw a clear connection between mass-production and loss in quality and usefulness, and arrived at the conclusion that "the greater part of the labor of the people of England [was] spent unproductively" ("Riches" 213). The second drawback of mass-production was related to what it meant for factory workers. Among other consequences, these production-oriented jobs meant that the workers would get no satisfaction from the jobs they did, which, according to Ruskin, could even threaten social stability. Further, lack of pleasure in the workplace and the way in which work was conducted would mean that the workers would be turned into mere machines, "counted off into a heap of mechanism, numbered with its wheels, and weighed with its hammer strokes" (*NoG* 164). This brings us to the most essential feature of the industry of mass production: machinery. Due to advancements made in previous industrial revolutions, by Ruskin's time, machinery occupied a pivotal place in the factories. Although it may seem a little strange, Ruskin did not completely oppose the use of machines, since it eased the work of many labourers ("Machinery" 243). However, Ruskin would fiercely attack the use of heavy machinery in place of simple machinery. As mentioned above, the use of such technology meant that workers would suffer a degradation into some sort of a simple tool, deprived of their human condition. His opposition to the power of this type of machinery was structured around the praise of everlasting powers that did not have destructive consequences, such as simple manpower, and the power of nature (244).

As we can see, Ruskin's stance was based on a fierce criticism of almost everything that the industrial revolution and colonialism had achieved in Britain by his time, in a fashion very similar to Morris's later on. We will return to the similarity between the stances adopted by the two men in more detail, in an upcoming passage concerning Morris's position against progress and industry.

Moving on, now, to the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, founded in 1848 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Everett Millais, this artistic group would end up being "the most influential and controversial movement in the history of English art" (C. Wood 9). They received their name from "their admiration for the early Italian painters of the period before Raphael" (10), and, like John Ruskin, their impact on the young William Morris is more than noticeable. In this case, we will focus on certain themes that were important to the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as for Morris, as will be shown later on. These themes are the following: the presence of nature, their medievalism, and their social critique.

To start with, it is very important that we point out the influence and tight bond that existed between this group and John Ruskin, perhaps the most respected art critic of the time. A similarly tight bond existed between this group of artists and Morris. An admirer of Pre-Raphaelite paintings from the very beginning, Morris came to develop a personal relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Perhaps the greatest example of cooperation between the Pre-Raphaelites and Morris is the house the latter had constructed for himself when he got married, in the construction and decoration of which many artists close to the brotherhood and Morris worked. Ruskin was present among these young artists from the very beginning, since his writings justified their pictorial ideals, rooting in their minds, among other things, the idea that "a good picture was a picture that conveyed a large number of ideas" (C. Wood 10-12). Apart from this, Ruskin also offered his support to the brotherhood when the group faced public scorn by certain critics. One of these was

Charles Dickens, who catalogued the artistic production of the group as “mean, repulsive and revolting” (qtd. in C. Wood 12). Even though this wave of fierce criticism continued for a while, Ruskin was steadfast in his support of the Pre-Raphaelites, and thanks to his influence as an art critic, the fate of the brotherhood changed completely (C. Wood 21). In a letter that he wrote to the editor of *The Times*, after pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the works of painters like Millais and Hunt, he concluded that, provided that this group was not deterred from painting by the harsh criticism directed towards them, they had the potential to “lay in [...] England the foundations of a school of art nobler than the world [had] seen for 300 years” (“The Pre-Raphaelite Artists”, par. 8).

We will now consider the themes present in Pre-Raphaelite art, as well as in Morris’s, later on. The first concerns the role that nature played in Pre-Raphaelite painting. We may say that there were two branches within the brotherhood, one more focused on “realism and naturalism” (C. Wood 80), placing considerable emphasis on the production of landscape works. Part of this branch consisted of the likes of Hunt, Millais, and Madox Brown. Ruskin encouraged painters to approach nature with an open mind, taking everything that it had to give, since all of it was true and beautiful, and his influence could be noticed in the importance that nature had for some of the Pre-Raphaelites. Thus, these young painters started “[painting] their pictures with complete fidelity to nature, [...] and painting landscape on the spot, out-of-doors” (10).

Regarding the second theme—medievalism—we need to turn to the second branch of Pre-Raphaelite artists. This, unlike the one mentioned above, found its inspiration in “romantic, medieval subjects, far removed from everyday life” (C. Wood 80). This tendency towards the past, and particularly the Middle Ages, was already present in Victorian society, which, in the midst of a turbulent time of change, “turned to the past for solutions to the intractable political, moral and aesthetic problems inherent in the condition of

modernity” (Barringer & Rosenfeld 9). This tendency to look back in time is also reflected in the very name chosen to denote the brotherhood. With this tendency, then, the Pre-Raphaelites sought “medieval simplicity” (Adams 28), dismissing any type of sophistication imposed by the (British) Royal Academy of Arts. This was similar to the simplicity that the Arts and Crafts Movement, of which Morris would be a prominent influence, wanted for its furniture designs (28). Despite this idealisation of the Middle Ages among the brotherhood, Christopher Wood argues that these artists “were modern and medieval at the same time” (12), since theirs was “a blend of romantic idealism, scientific rationalism and morality” (12).

Last, but not least, this group expressed strong social awareness and critique, which may seem a little peculiar in certain cases, since most members of the Pre-Raphaelites were born upper-class. Nonetheless, this facet of the group is more than apparent in their conception of art, perceiving it as a tool with which to throw some light on the social problems of their time, with the aim to try to eradicate them and form a new society (Barringer & Rosenfeld 9). Even though this theme appears in a minority of their artworks, those that exist were extremely significant, being some of the earliest pictures showing the situation of women in Victorian society. Only preceded by the work of Richard Redgrave in 1848, some works by Hunt, Millais, Rossetti, and Madox Brown show a deep concern with the situation of the likes of “exploited women [like] seamstresses, milliners, shop girls [and] unmarried mothers” (C. Wood 12). Hunt even turned to the theme of prostitution in his paintings.

Looking at the concerns, themes, and techniques important to the Pre-Raphaelites, it is clear that a considerable connection holds between them and John Ruskin. The topics of the closeness to nature, the longing for the past—embodied in the idealisation of the Middle Ages—and the awareness of the problems and struggles of society, reveals how the influence that Ruskin exercised on the brotherhood was essential to the forming of its ideals. In what follows, we are

going to explore how these topics are shared not just by Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, but also by Tennyson, and Morris himself.

The last figure we shall turn to concerning William Morris's intellectual context is Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate 1850–1891. Above all, there is one characteristic of his literary production worth highlighting for our present study: his medievalism, which establishes the connection between him and Morris. One of the first contacts that Morris had with Tennyson's work was when, as an Oxford undergraduate, he came across the poem known as "Ballad of Oriana" (1830), which he greatly admired. Apart from this, it is known that, with the aim of "[providing] an alternative reading of the Arthurian cycle" (Boos 20), Morris modified some medieval-themed poems by Tennyson that would later be published in his *The Defense of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) (20). Thus, this early encounter with Tennyson's literary works in which the medieval topic was so palpable encouraged Morris to develop many of his own writings with similar themes (21). Certain similarities thus seem to exist in the works of the two authors. On the one hand, we find that the use of these themes and topics provided a way to convey ideas about politics, sexuality, and social codes of the Victorian Age in a more clandestine manner (19). On the other hand, the apparent aim of Morris's and Tennyson's use of medieval themes seems to lie in the ambition to "[create] a popular association with the Middle Ages of utopian hope for human perfection in an ideal realm" (24). This utopian idea can very well be found in Morris's *The House of the Wolfings*—the novel that we will analyse below. In a sense, this work portrays a society of Goths, in which the life of the individual is conducted in harmony with others and the environment, as opposed to the Romans, who seem to portray many of the evil features of mankind. On the whole, the use of medieval topics was so brilliantly executed in the writings of Morris and Tennyson that certain scholars seem to consider that medievalism reached its peak with their production (Garth 40).

As we have seen, the influence of Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Tennyson was certainly important in the formation of Morris's ideals, especially concerning nature, medievalism, and social awareness. By the time he approached adult life, Morris was one of the best-known manufacturers Britain had ever seen. The range of products produced in his workshops was extremely wide-spanning, as were the crafts and techniques that he rescued and learned on his own. However, he never implemented the philosophy of the great factories in his workplaces, since he did not believe in it. In the following paragraphs, we are going to deal with Morris's own ideals concerning product and production, and take a look at his substantial trials when putting those ideals into practice.

However, we shall first turn to some of the life experiences of this brilliant artist, in order to see, among other things, the importance of his intellectual environment, which we have mapped out above. Morris grew up in Woodford Hall, Greater London. Here, the Morris family produced many of the products they consumed themselves, among other things "home-made wines, wine-jellies and syllabubs, sweet cured hams, filberts from their own nut-walks [and] fine desserts of peaches" (MacCarthy 7). This gives us an idea of the presence of handwork and sustainable production and consumption in Morris's early life. This environment probably helped kindle his interest in "three-dimensional, [...] tactile" (17) crafts, such as embroidery and carving, when he was no more than nine years old. Another crucial element in the daily life of the Morris household was his father's work, which made the family rich, although the young William never appreciated the way in which his father earned the money to support his family. William Morris Senior worked as a London broker, apart from owning important shares in the West Country copper mines, an "abstract and complicated" (23) business that made Morris ashamed of his father. Surely, one of the factors of this embarrassment were the terribly poor working conditions in his father's mines (25). The combination of being unable to understand his father's occupation and the awareness of the consequences of his

mining business may have driven Morris to think of his father as “a capitalist villain” (27). Despite all the hatred that he could feel towards his own father, Morris was conscious that he was not unlike him in the end, since both displayed, for instance, an extremely acute sense for business (28).

Once Morris became a little older and was a student at Oxford, another influential figure gained importance in his life. John Ruskin came to play a central part in Morris’s intellectual development. In her biography of Morris, Fiona MacCarthy writes that his reading of Ruskin’s texts provided some “sort of a revelation” (69) for him, with their ideas in defence of the Middle Ages and against industry. Other ideas that Morris may have derived from Ruskin—and that he would later try to implement in his workshops—were, for instance, his aforementioned respect and admiration for the working classes (168), and the freedom of the artisan not to have perfect execution (182). Yet this praise and admiration seems to have been reciprocal, as Ruskin admired Morris’s immense work and restless dedication, and considered him to be “the ablest man of his time” (qtd. in 649).

Similarly, his time at Oxford boosted his interest in another topic around which much of his work would spin in later years: medievalism. MacCarthy comments on Morris’s awareness of the existence of a movement in the 1840s called ‘Young England’, whose objective was to recover from the Middle Ages anything that they believed could help improve Victorian society (63). Whatever his earlier contact with medievalism may have been, in Oxford, Morris fell in love with it, and he considered this city to be the epitome of medievalism. Apart from its archaic architecture, Oxford granted Morris the unique opportunity to examine authentic medieval manuscripts (61). This his medieval facet was enhanced by his meeting with Edward Burne-Jones, with whom he would come to develop an extremely deep artistic and personal relationship and who was equally fascinated by the Middle Ages. This was how medievalism—which Morris had liked since childhood—became one

of the cornerstones of all his artistic work, writings, carvings, paintings, and even lectures and speeches (*William Morris's Socialist Diary* 31).

It is not possible to look at Morris's early years without mentioning the influence that the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood had on him. In fact, together with Burne-Jones, he became an essential member of the group. Already aware of Pre-Raphaelite art, Morris and Burne-Jones were introduced to the brotherhood by means of one of its co-founders, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. When Rossetti encouraged the two young men to start painting Morris, together with Burne-Jones and Rossetti, became an essential part of the development of the second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism (MacCarthy 115). Even though Morris soon left his painter ambitions behind, for Burne-Jones this proved to be the first pillar in a long and successful career as a painter. Instead of painting, Morris directed his efforts towards poetry and medieval furniture design, both proving successful; on the one hand, Morris became "the first Pre-Raphaelite poet to be published" (146), with his *The Defense of Guenevere and Other Poems*, and on the other, his enthusiasm for painted furniture was luckily shared by his companions Rossetti and Burne-Jones, thanks to which they produced certain works in collaboration (120). On the whole, the core composed by these three exceptional artists made an extraordinary impact on the world of art, attracting young painters to their circles and, above all, leaving no one indifferent (C. Wood 128).

How, then, do these experiences help to shape Morris's broadest conceptions and ideals about the society in which he lived? Here, there are three main topics that we could take into consideration. The first is the idea present in Morris's mind that the times that were gone were better than those he had been destined to live in. This is seen not only in his deep medievalism, but also in the fact that his was a mind in discord with his time, even in a "holy crusade against the age" (MacCarthy 121). Another example of this crusade was his post as the secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings,

founded in 1877, whose aim was to preserve ancient buildings as they were, instead of modernising their appearance (375-377). Morris's longing for the past was a clear consequence of the deep disgust that he felt towards Victorian society. For him, civilisation had fallen into the deepest pit, and had developed into "an organized injustice, a mere instrument for oppression, so much the worse than that which has gone before it, as its pretensions are higher, its slavery subtler, its mastery harder to overthrow, because supported by such a dense mass of commonplace well-being and comfort" ("Civilization" 106). Another key element that contributed to Morris's dislike for the society in which he lived was how, when productivity had been boosted by its new industrial power, consumerism became gradually more important, while commerce was suffering tremendous change due to increasing footholds of capitalist ideas. Morris was a person who delighted in the beauty of the process of creation and the product itself; thus, the sight of wrongly conducted and treated process and product inclined him to dismiss society even further. He was one of those who, as Steven Adams suggests, "did not share [the Queen's] appreciation for the fruits of industry and free international trade, and saw the onslaught of industrialisation as detrimental to the nation" (15). Morris considered the new way of doing commerce as very close to war itself, due to the ruthlessness of the burgeoning competitive ethos; a war in which the contenders would now be nations, firms, and the workers themselves ("How We Live and How We Might Live" 165). Hence, his attitude towards commerce was crystal-clear: he would always support "small traders [...] [, enjoying] their skills and deftness" (MacCarthy 22), against an ever-growing commercial world whose main objective was just the making of profit (Morris "Innate Socialism" 93).

In light of this, if we want to gain better insight into what Morris would have considered a proper manner of production and a final shape of its product, a good starting point would be to have a look at what he thought about the heavy industry of his time.

We have already mentioned Morris's dislike of progress and the fierce commercialism that it brought along. The basis for this commercialism was heavy industry, which was growing increasingly central in his time. Morris, who visited many areas of Britain as part of his various travels, felt miserable whenever he encountered "the sight of smoke cloud hanging over the hideous manufacturing cities" (MacCarthy 517) imposed by a system based on pure exploitation ("Useful Work Versus Useless Toil" 122). Morris realised that the majority of the negative consequences of this system of production affected workers and the natural environment. As for the former, the most striking consequence was, perhaps, their subhuman working- and living-conditions. Morris was especially disgusted by "the 'division of labour': the rigid organization of the factory which keeps the operative virtually chained to a single repetitive task" (MacCarthy 356). He perceived this feature of work as hindering workers from carrying out their labour in accordance with their own aesthetic ideas, and thus, in a way, depriving them of their freedom (356). In addition, there was also the major issue of the work-places, which Morris referred to as mere prisons for the working men (432). Regarding the living spaces of the factory workers and their families, we learn that Morris was seriously concerned about "the squalor of the housing [...] where the poor [workers] huddle beside the factories in houses that [seem] the proper size of dog kennels" (356). It is here that we are able to best perceive the subhuman conditions of the working-classes in his time, with living quarters resembling animal shelters.

As mentioned, the disastrous consequences that heavy industry was having on the environment was another matter that disturbed Morris. Not only was he aware of the high levels of pollution in the heavily industrialised areas of the country, but he was equally concerned with the great problem that this posed for London, where he lived and towards which he had always maintained a love-hate relationship (MacCarthy 23). All in all, the "poisoned air, polluted water [and] squalid industrial waste" (357) that could be easily found wherever there was industry was a shameful sight for a nature lover

like Morris. We must also add his ambivalent attitude towards machinery to his deep dislike for the consequences of heavy industrial activity. In a similar way to his mentor Ruskin, Morris did not consider machinery a primordial source of evil, even acknowledging machines to be useful (351). However, he did feel that we should be very cautious not to grow dependent on machinery, and believed that the main threat resided in “allowing machines to be our masters and not our servants” (“How We Live” 177). Observing the tight bond between the widespread use of machinery and the industry of his time, what Morris really opposed was the surrender of such an immense power to capitalist ends (Shankland par. 1).

The experience of bearing witness to all the industrial consequences mentioned above made a deep impact on the way Morris thought of certain issues important to his conception of ideal work and product. We will next be considering three: his connection with nature, his social awareness, and the importance of what he called Popular Art.

In one of his essays, “The Lesser Arts”, from 1882, Morris expresses an idea that reveals the connection he felt existed between nature and art. In one passage, Morris highlights the pivotal role that nature plays in his conception of the fair—meaning beautiful—product, when he argues that “everything made by man’s hands has a form, which must be beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her” (85). The underlying idea is that if the product of the worker’s or artist’s labour is to be considered fair and worthy, first of all, it should coexist in harmony with nature, never going against it. Most importantly, what Morris seems to be hinting at in these words is the intrinsic beauty of nature itself, the idea that anything that we make will be beautiful if, and only if, it conveys that fairness that is proper to nature. With this in mind, it is no wonder that Morris’s artistic production was always so related to nature, as can be seen in his choice of shapes and motifs for his wallpapers, furniture, and

embroidery. This connection between nature and art in his mind is made even clearer if we consider MacCarthy's words, when she writes that this artist "found in art and nature the sources of resilience" (358). Further, the bond that Morris felt with nature went beyond the artistic, being, we could say, even spiritual. This bond was established already in his earliest years, his birthplace being very near London woodland Epping Forest, and he would delight in the beauty revealed to him in the woods. The long and numerous strolls that he enjoyed in this forest made him one of its fiercest defenders, believing it to be his duty to defend the natural beauty of Epping Forest against the government's plans to tame its wildness, as is made clear in a letter that he sent to the *Daily Chronicle* in 1895 ("The Experts of Epping" 307-308). We can easily imagine that, apart from his concerns for Epping Forest, Morris was equally worried about the plight of the whole of Britain's natural scenery under the rule of Queen Victoria, noting the possible connection between the spreading of industry and the decrease in the amount of natural areas (MacCarthy 143).

Another of Morris's concerns regarding industrial activity and British factories were the social inequalities existing across the nation. Indeed, his social awareness pours out of almost all his non-literary writings, in which he constantly expressed his concerns regarding the "depth of degradation the ordinary English workman [had] been reduced [to]" (*Socialist Diary* 33). Morris's many travels across the British Isles increased his awareness of the existing social injustices, (MacCarthy 336), making it impossible for him to understand the ways of "a social system that forced such a high proportion of the population to endure lives of poverty and squalor" (446). Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that Morris's awareness seems to be double, since apart from his awareness of the dire poverty of the working classes, he was equally conscious of his own luck, being born into a more than well-off family, since he may as well have been born into a working-class household (400). Thus, being aware of his luck and the bad situation of others, he never hesitated when it came to taking a stand in favour of the working-class, praising its essential role

within society, submitting that it is they that “produces all that is produced, and supports both itself and the other classes” (“Useful Work” 120). The combination of all the aforementioned factors would directly lead Morris into one of the last and most agitated stages of his life: socialism. Morris himself described this development as a “gradual and inevitable” (MacCarthy 462) conversion.

Something that he was able to learn from his strong contact with the life and work of the working-classes was the idea that, due to the shape that industry had adopted in an increasingly capitalist society, working men could obtain no “pleasure in [their] daily work” (“The Worker’s Share of Art” 141). This idea would lead Morris to develop the conception that may well be the cornerstone of all his social philosophy—an idea that was articulated around the concept of what he called Popular Art—namely the belief that art was one of the most useful means for bringing about social change. Before delving into the question of what he meant by Popular Art, we need to know what art meant for him. Morris believed that art and society were two terms that were closer to one another than what was generally believed, arguing that a “theory of art [...] depended on a theory of society” (Briggs 14). That is, any current in the history of art would have its ultimate sources in contemporary currents of thought and social circumstances, and vice versa. At this point, it is worth recalling Morris’s own words about what art represented for him:

Art is man’s embodied expression of interest in the life of man; it springs from man’s pleasure in his life; taking all human life together, however much it may be broken by the grief and trouble of individuals; and as it is the expression of pleasure in life generally, in the memory of the deeds of the past, and the hope of those of the future, so it is especially the expression of man’s pleasure in the deeds of the present; in his work. (“Worker’s Share” 140)

If there is one concept that clearly stands out here, it is the idea of the pleasure obtained in everyday labour, which means that art is the greatest means by which to bring about social change. This is because it implies providing the greatest share of society—the working-classes—with what the capitalist system was denying them: the ability to take joy in their work.

For a proper understanding of what Morris meant by Popular Art, the following remarks are essential: arguing that society's widespread belief in a clear division between craftsmen and artists should not exist at all, he took for granted that an "artist was an exalted craftsman" (MacCarthy 605). Going further, he encouraged artists and craftsmen to unite in a single body with the hope of making society a better place to live, stating that such a body would "rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith" (qtd. in 605). This is the real power of art for Morris. On the whole, it is this relationship between art and craftsman that we should bear in mind when talking about Popular Art, since, for Morris, this term has its roots in the decorative arts, a type of art that is at everyone's disposal (Adams 40). Morris considered it crucial that art be popularised, because only then "will [there] be pretty much an end of dull work and its wearing slavery; and no man will any longer have an excuse for talking about the curse of labour, no man will any longer have an excuse for evading the blessing of labour" ("Innate Socialism" 86). In other words, Popular Art is that art that is "done by the ordinary workman while he is about his ordinary work" ("Useful Work" 130). With this concept, Morris was pointing to the idea that a proliferation of the decorative arts would help to enhance the aesthetic intellect of every single person in society, meanwhile serving as the most powerful weapon against the capitalist system of production that made work so frustrating.

Even though the primary objective of Popular Art is the achievement of a situation where the worker, thanks to their awareness of their artistic skill, may take pleasure in their work, it is certainly a

utopian vision belonging to an idealised past. Morris himself claimed that Popular Art did not exist anymore, “having been killed by commercialism” (“Useful Work” 130). Nevertheless, he proposed measures by means of which this objective of Popular Art could be achieved. The essential premise for this to be fulfilled is that “all labour, even the commonest, must be made attractive” (129). In order to do so, the first measure to be taken is that, unlike the mass-productive capitalist industry, all labour of the worker “must be directed towards some obviously useful end” (129). As a second measure, and following on from this, would be a decrease in working hours. Next, it would be equally essential that a variety of duties existed in the working day of the labourer. Morris believed that “[compelling] a man to do day after day the same task [...] means nothing short of turning his life into a prison-torment” (129), this being a feature of the capitalist system. Contrary to this, he suggested that “[a] man might easily learn and practice at least three crafts” (129). At last, he charged against the “misery and squalor” (131) present in every industrialised city, and against the fact that this was taken for granted as the natural outcome of industrial activity. Morris, instead, claimed that an achievement of “pleasant surroundings” (131) is as important in obtaining pleasure in work as the measures mentioned above.

Morris foresaw that improvements to working conditions would lead to benefits for the whole of society. These improvements include the rule that, against the industrial proceedings of his time, everything would be created according to his ideal of the beautiful and useful product (MacCarthy 185). Apart from this, reduction in working hours would immediately translate into the working-classes having more time for their own leisure. Consequently—and we can here see clear similarities with Ruskin—more leisure would mean more time to think about things other than work, which would kindle in the workers a “desire for beauty, for knowledge, for more abundant life” (“Worker’s Share” 143), leading to production of art. We mentioned above how the concept of Popular Art suggests a

popularisation of art, which includes the idea that art may be found in everyday chores. Along these lines, Morris thought that greater awareness of art among the working-classes could trigger an increase in the productivity of the decorative arts, which Morris believed could serve to “raise the quality of everyday life” (Harvey & Press 50). These thoughts show, again, Morris’s deep commitment to society, believing, in this case, that awareness of artistic skill among the working-classes would open up a path that would lead to a better and more egalitarian society.

Along with Morris’s hopes for social change through art, there are hints throughout his writings of what he considered to be the perfect situation for the working-classes, envisaging the characteristics of the new and improved worker. The first element of this new working man was that his work would be a clear source of pleasure, rather than a curse. This is the fundament upon which the other features of this new worker rest. In relation to production, we find, for example, the claim that workers should, while labouring, exercise both their hands and minds (MacCarthy 23), and that the workers themselves should control the means of production (490). Another idea that relates to production is Morris’s demand in favour of a more cooperative system, as opposed to the competitive system of capitalism. This latter point was one of Morris’s major concerns, since he thought that for that most-desired social change to be possible, it was necessary that workers would start to work together and unite against that real enemy that was capital and the masters that controlled it (“How We Live” 167-169).

Another aspect of this social change pertained to the characteristics of the living conditions of the working-classes. A situation such as that mapped out by Morris would grant workers a renewed hope consisting in “hope of rest, hope of product [and] hope of pleasure in the work” (“Useful Work” 118). We have discussed the latter one at length above. Concerning the first, Morris argued that it is “the simplest and most natural” (118), consisting in the prospect of a

nearby future in which the worker would not have to work. As for the second, it is based on the idea that the worker must always be aware of their productive powers, not considering themselves mere machines (118). In addition to this new hope, Morris also dreamed of a different working environment. In his almost utopic vision, he foresaw factories turned into communities surrounded by delightful environments, in which the workers would work, study, and cater for themselves by tilling the land (132). On the whole, the life and work of this improved working-class in their newly devised working-communities would be, for Morris, centres where good work could be carried out, a type of work “not far removed from a blessing, a lightening of life” (117), as opposed to the work imposed by the capitalist system, considered by him as “a mere curse, a burden to life” (117).

Recalling our discussion on the Pre-Raphaelites, we noted the clear chain of thought that connects Ruskin to that group of artists, and highlighted the similarity of their respective philosophies: their connection to nature, medievalism, and social awareness. Now, after having taken a look at Morris’s thought, it is clear that also he felt a strong commitment to these topics. Of course, their mutual influence was emphasised by the existence of a tight bond. Ruskin was a stout defender of the brotherhood, while Morris was a member of it, in addition to being influenced by Ruskin from the very beginning of his university years.

Whenever we study the figure of William Morris, we need to bear in mind the kind of person that he was. He was one of those people who would do anything to see their dreams come true and ambitions fulfilled, even if this damaged their reputation as respectable citizens. Hence, Morris delivered lectures on his utopian society, where the working-classes would be better off than they were in his time, but he also set out on the quest to bring his ambitions into reality, at least in those companies and projects of which he was the owner. In the following paragraphs we will take a look at some

projects where Morris was an essential member, in order to see how he tried to improve the working conditions for his co-workers.

The very first major artistic project that Morris was involved in was the so-called Red House. This was a manor designed by architect Philip Webb for Morris and his wife Jane Burden shortly after they were married. This “Palace of Art” (C. Wood 110) and its shaping embodied two ideals characteristic of Morris: his connection to nature and his idealisation of the Middle Ages. This home was the outcome of an idea that was deeply rooted in Morris, and reminiscent of that historical period: that of the “noble communal hall’ where people work together and enjoy each other’s company” (MacCarthy 163). We know that the interior of the Red House and its furniture were all designed by Morris and his friends, among which we could find artists like Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Regarding the designs, it is worth mentioning “Burne-Jones’s painted glass designs [...] and wall paintings” (Adams 35); the “ceiling [decorated] by Jane and William Morris” (35); Jane’s embroidery, and the Rossetti’s “painted scenes from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* on some items of furniture” (35). The manifestations of Morris’s ideas of nature in the Red House can be found in the way these were integrated in the very building. Indeed, it seems that the whole building had been designed so as to be integrated into its natural environment, rather than the other way around (154). MacCarthy notes that when Morris first arrived at the Red House, the “[climbing] plants [...] were trained up the red brick walls” (164), perhaps giving the impression that the building had been reclaimed by nature itself. This last idea may have resonated with Morris’s vision of the optimal garden, which was “one of the necessities for civilized existence, [...] [being] both *mysterious* and familiar, evocative and homely” (165, my italics).

Another example of Morris’s implementation of his ideas in the world is his first incursion in the business of manufacturing, by the creation of the company originally called Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., later renamed Morris & Co. It featured members from Pre-

Raphaelite circles as well as other artists, and it is said to have been the “best-known decorating business in Victorian Britain” (MacCarthy 166). One of the greatest contributions that Morris made to craftsmanship are the uncountable antique artisan techniques that he managed to recover and apply to the production system of Morris & Co. Among these once lost and later recovered techniques, two examples are “his research into lost techniques of embroidery” (133) and his interest in calligraphy, “using techniques that had lain virtually fallow since the invention and development of printing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (264). Morris’s effort to bring back into use techniques from centuries ago points to that notion that was always so present in his mind, namely that the past had been better than his present time. Morris may have thought that those old techniques were more appropriate than the modern ones since they treated the product better and—most importantly—granted the worker more freedom to exercise their skill compared to what a modern machine could do. However, the production at Morris & Co. did not limit itself to embroidery and printing, covering many different crafts, such as stained-glass production; the colouring of tiles (174); wallpaper production (182); textile dye (326), and weaving (400).

We mentioned above Morris’s deep medievalism and idealisation of the past, and, and it seems indeed that the Morris & Co. designs followed certain “medieval lines” (Barringer & Rosenfeld 16). Some of these may be perceived in one of his workshops, Merton Abbey. Merton Abbey embodied his ideal of a “communistic” (MacCarthy 455) society of workmen, involving “one purse and one table and one workshop, one interest only for workman and foreman, [...] as part of a universal system of communistic life” (455), where, in an “idyllic combination” (434), the workers would not only be busy in their workshops, but they would also till their own land. Thus—thanks to the working community established on these premises—Merton Abbey became a place in which “the skills of the workmen [were] valued” (453) and their working-conditions were more than good. Indeed, Steven Adams comments that these bordered on “idyllic” (47):

[The] accommodation [is] light and spacious and set in the countryside beside the river Wandle. Like the craftsmen of the Middle Ages, Morris's workers were [...] free to interpret and add their own personality to many of the designs. [...] [They] apparently went unhurriedly about their respective crafts, striving, unlike similar industries in Victorian society, for standards of excellence and beauty rather than quantity. (47)

This kind of production aimed at achieving the greatest mastery of each technique so that the final product would be excellent, rather than “profitability” (Harvey & Press 50).

Kelmscott Press was another project, and here the working conditions were quite similar to those at Morris & Co. This was Morris's last enterprise adventure, founded in 1891, five years before his death (MacCarthy 608). The aim of his incursion in the trade of book printing answered, again, to his idealisation of the Middle Ages. He admired medieval typography above anything else, and set out on the quest to create books that, as he wrote, would just be “a pleasure to look upon” (qtd. in 609). Regarding working conditions, Kelmscott Press was arranged in accordance with the communal system (624). After a visit on the premises, the German Count Harry Kessler noted that “only hand-presses [were] used” (qtd. in 622), so as to avoid pollution, and the premises were “kept cleaner” (qtd. in 622) than the norm. Besides, workers were “paid higher than average wages for a forty-six-and-a-half-hour week” (622), and they were granted the time they needed to do their job properly.

However, despite all the work and dedication that Morris and his collaborators put into all of the aforementioned projects, it could be said that he failed in his attempt to reform the arts, and society by means of them. One aspect that made his enterprise a failure was that, due to their laborious and detailed elaboration, the products sold by

Morris & Co.—mainly pieces of furniture—became very expensive, which made them out of reach for the poorer households (MacCarthy 445) to whom this production would ideally have been directed. In order to try to mend this situation, the company set out to try to produce affordable goods “for those of more modest means” (Adams 45), like the Sussex chairs that cost much less than other Morris & Co. products. Nevertheless, we have, again, no proof of this attempt finally serving to extend the work of Morris & Co. to the poorest social strata. Moreover, despite his efforts, public opinion was unappreciative of Morris’s efforts to bring about his ambitions. Indeed, he was more than once criticised for combining the capitalist conditions of a business-owner with his social awareness and involvement in socialism, attacks to which he always responded with a display of great commitment to his social ideals (MacCarthy 479). All in all, there came a time in which Morris realised that his ambitions to reform art and society had failed, perhaps due to an inability to reach out to a majority of society. As he himself wrote to a friend, the reason for the failure was that, since his attitude towards art was shared by very few, “a reform in art which is founded in individualism must perish with the individuals who have set it going” (qtd. in Harvey & Press 51).

The last example that we would like to present on this issue is that of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Fiona MacCarthy argues that its founding, although indirectly, was Morris’s greatest accomplishment, leading up to the “sprawling [...] of visionary craft communities, exploring the philosophy of simple life” (589). His presence within this movement was not, however, limited to the influence of his ideas, but he also took part in it. The relationship between Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement had its ups and downs, however. In its early stages, he felt somewhat reluctant about it, as MacCarthy records, even though after a few years he ended up “aligning himself with the groups and the activities of the Arts and Crafts” (596). His influence can be traced in some of the principles that the movement made its own, such as the universality of art; its social value; the

importance of the environment, and the characteristics of the good product. As for the first of these, the movement believed that the feeling and skill for art resided within each of us, and was always ready to flourish. The very same principle was applied in Morris & Co., where many people without obvious artistic skill were hired to be trained and taught according to the firm's values, which always believed in their artistic potential (MacCarthy 175-176). This quotidian character of art can be found both in Morris's work and the Arts and Crafts movement, as testified in Morris's belief that art resided in the everyday work we do with our hands. Regarding the second shared principle, we find the social commitment they each connected to art. In the case of Morris, we have seen how he strongly believed that art had the power to improve society. Similarly, the Arts and Crafts Movement wanted to put art in the service of society with the aim to "[improve] the lot of producer and consumer" (Adams 125). The third principle concerns the belief in the importance of a properly designed environment both for the worker and the average person. While Morris thought that the decorative arts were an essential part of the education of society, and that a proper working-environment was pivotal for the worker, the Arts and Crafts Movement believed that "a well-designed environment—fashioned with beautiful and well-crafted buildings, furniture, tapestries and ceramics—would serve to improve the fabric of society for both producers and consumers" (9). Last, but not least, we have the shared belief in the constitution of a perfect work. For Morris, the perfect product was something that was beautiful and useful at the same time, while for the Movement it should "be beautiful but also the result of contented labour" (Adams 9). Here we can see that the feature of beauty is present in both product ideals, and although the element of usefulness seems not to be very important to the Movement, they did stress the necessity that the product must be the result of work from which the worker could obtain joy and satisfaction, a key factor in Morris's idealised work. On the whole, and even though it may not have triggered the revolution Morris had envisaged, MacCarthy claims that the Arts and Crafts Movement "has been a revolution in

terms of the challenge to conventional views of work and leisure, the things we choose to make and the ways we use our lives” (590).

2.1.2. Industry vs. Craftsmanship in *The House of the Wolfings*

Now that we have a better grasp of Morris’s anti-progress and anti-industrial attitudes, and the ideas that underpin them, we will turn our focus to his literary production, where we will be able to find these very same attitudes. Morris’s *The House of the Wolfings* tells us about the life of several tribes of Goths who need to fight for their freedom against the arriving Romans, wanting to conquer their land. As in his other romances, it portrays a world where artisans are still the major manufacturers (Boos 23), and—as Morris himself states in the novel—a time in which “the builder builded in loving and delight” (*The House of the Wolfings* 47).

In the analysis that follows, we will scrutinise the opposing Gothic and Roman forces, concerning their respective attitudes towards nature and what they represent as societies and civilisations. Thus, we will be able to perceive how the Romans, although not overtly marked as evil in the novel, represent evil in society and in the human being itself, while the Goths represent a sustainable and primeval way of life. The portrayal of the opposing forces of good and evil is partly done by means of their physical battle, as well as by the type of machinery and technology that each of these civilisations makes use of. In addition to these two societies, we will also mention the peculiar case of the Dwarves.

2.1.2.1. The Romans

Morris never expressly portrays the Romans as evil in this novel. Indeed, they are represented as courageous and stout warriors, respected by the Goths. However, due to their actions, they become representatives of evil in the text. As a civilisation, the Romans seem to represent many features that Morris detested from his own

Victorian time, such as the use of destructive industry, the destruction of nature, and colonialism. They are described as “the folk of the cities” (*HotW* 24) whose “lust is without a limit” (72). Regarding the presence of heavy industry among the Romans, it is true that there is no mention of any mechanical machinery, which was developing fast in Morris’s time. However, certain hints lead us to detect the existence of industry and machinery in this civilisation. First, industry and use of machinery is portrayed as having a stronger presence in Roman cities than in Gothic ones, as when a Goth states that, in her visions, she could see “strange engines that [she] knew not, or the end for which they were” (24). The activity of these engines may be why the houses making up the Roman cityscape are said to be “dim and black as the face of hell” (24), blackened by smoke and pollution.

As a society with what was apparently considerable mechanical power, it is no wonder that Morris depicts the Romans as real threats to the conservation of the natural world. In this sense, there are many names given to the Romans that show their tendency to destroy the environment, such as “fire-raisers” (*HotW* 47); “the curse of the world” (73), and “the foes of the earth” (153). Such names are related to scenes in the book in which we are told about their actual desire for destruction. There are several moments where the Goth tribes are warned about the doom that would fall upon them and their beloved forest, as when the Goths are pushed to war after being warned that the Romans “have no other thought save to win the Mark and waste it” (79), or when one of their leaders foresees what the consequences of a Roman victory would be like for their kindred, expressed in the following lines:

But where shall be the corner wherein ye then shall abide,
And where shall be the woodland where the whelps of the
bears shall hide
When ‘twixt the snowy mountains and the edges of the sea
These men have swept the wild-wood and the fields where
men may be

Of every living sword-blade, and every quivering spear. (178)

These last two quotations make clear that a Roman victory would mean the total destruction of the Gothic habitat—their woodland—as a consequence of which they might have to change their way of living, or even disappear.

The last characteristic of the Romans, which we could relate to the ways of the society in which Morris lived, is their colonialism. When describing certain elements of the Victorian period, above, we mentioned that colonialism was still a very powerful factor that could be noticed in the everyday lives of British citizens. Although originally devised as a means to improve the nation's economy and commerce, it very soon surrendered to the political ambitions of different leaders, ending up in dominion of newly-acquired lands. Concerning the Romans, we know that, historically speaking, their colonial power was enormous, and that they formed one of the greatest empires ever known. Thus, the portrayal of the Romans needed to present an imperialist desire also in this novel. Colonialism and the acquisition and dominion of lands have always resulted in slavery and destruction of the peoples that lived in those lands before the arrival of the colonisers. The very same happens in this novel, since the arrival of the Romans meant not only the destruction of the Goths' natural environment, as we have seen, but also the end of their liberty and lives. A Goth warrior exclaims: “[the Romans] will [...] carry fire and the sword and the chains of thralldom into every House of the Mark” (*HotW* 194). The choice of Roman civilisation as the representation of evil in this text thus seems quite appropriate, establishing, at the same time, a parallel between the Romans and Morris's own Victorian civilisation, since colonialism was a very prominent activity in both societies. Besides, Morris linked his Romans to certain technological advancements that grant them destructive power, in a very similar manner to the great progress in industrial technology that Britain was going through under the rule of Queen Victoria, and which caused such damage, not only to the

natural environment, but to certain strata of society. Morris thus achieves a portrayal of both the Roman Empire and Victorian Britain as evil in their connections with colonialism and destructive technology. Also, this helps him to reaffirm his anti-industrial stance.

Considering, then, the particular characteristics that the Roman civilisation displays in Morris's text, we could presume that the author was hinting at his own Victorian Britain when depicting the Romans: both societies make use of heavy-industry, destructive of nature, and give an important role to colonialism. We have also talked about Morris's dislike for the society in which he lived. The ruthless progress that it brought along discarded many things related to more ancient ways of life. In this book, the Romans bring their own progress to the Mark, and it is this intrinsic destructiveness of progress that makes them evil in Morris's text.

2.1.2.2. The Goths

Opposing the forces of evil embodied by the Romans we find their good counterparts, the Goths. *The House of the Wolfings* presents us with several Gothic tribes that live along a forest called Mirkwood and a river with the same name. Historically belonging, as they did, to the Middle Ages, Morris's Goths are also depicted as leading very simple lives and delighting in tilling the land, raising cattle, and working with their hands: the very same relaxed and simple life that Morris praised as the ideal. The Goths' civilisation shows no signs of destructive industry or ambitions for domination of any kind. Instead, the only sign of productive activity to be found in this society is the handiwork by means of which they design and produce things of real beauty and value.

Over the years, the Goths have established a tight relationship with their natural environment, which is articulated in three ways. The first is their adaptation to their environment and the use of the resources that the forest offers them. At the very beginning of the text, we learn that the habitat by the forest was made by the Goths

themselves by cutting down some areas of the forest and opening a “great clearing in the woodland” (*HotW* 3). In addition, at the time of their arrival at Mirkwood, the tribes

spread from each side of the river, and fought with the wood and its wild things, that they might make to themselves a dwelling place on the face of the earth. So they cut down the trees and burned their stumps that the grass might grow sweet for their kine and sheep and horses; and they diked the river where need was all through the plain, and far up into the wild-wood to bridle the winter floods. (4)

This might well seem the opposite of what we have just said about the tight bond between the Goths and their environment, but it is not. These people appear to have fought against nature just once, only when they needed to provide themselves with a place to live. It may thus be an example of a respectful attitude towards nature, based on the idea that they only take what they need to cater for themselves. Clearing an area for habitation is in no way an overexploitation of the resources provided by the environment. The forest also provides the tribes with much-desired protection. Thanks to the familiarity with the forest that they seem to have gained through the ages, the Goths are certain that it would “be a friend to [them] and a wall, but to [the Romans] a net” (*HotW* 81). Indeed, Mirkwood’s ability to protect seems to be real. Later on, we are told about the Romans’ reluctance to venture into it. We learn that “they knew not what it held; and [...] over them also had fallen a dread of some doom anear; for those habitations amidst of the wild-woods were terrible to them as they were dear to the Goths; and the Gods of their foemen seemed to be lying in wait to fall upon them” (192).

Another sign of the connection between the Goths and nature lies in the Gothic tribal names: the Wolfings, Elkings, Hartings, Bearings, Vallings, Alftings, Beamings, Galtings, Oselings, and Daylings, among others. These names strike us as formed of a particle that establishes a relation with nature, such as wolf, elk, bear, and even

day. This connection is not only appreciable in their names, but also—and more importantly—in their banners. These, which the tribes fly when they go to war, feature the natural symbol that represents their respective houses, among which we can find

the Wolf and the Elk, the Falcon, the Swan, the Boar, the Bear, and the Green-Tree: the Willow-bush, the Gedd, the Water-bank and the Wood-Ousel, the Steer, the Mallard and the Ror-deer [...] the Horse, [...] the Daybreak, and the Dale, and the Mountain, and the Brook, and the Weasel, and the Cloud, and the Hart. (*HotW* 246)

These symbols clearly portray the extremely tight bond between the tribes and their natural surroundings, as John Garth states (219). In a way, then, if we consider that the tribes, as representatives of those elements that they bear in their banners, manage to obtain a victory over the Romans, we may imagine that Morris was here hinting at a situation where the power of nature, embodied in the figure of the Goths, had managed to defeat the power of progress, embodied by the Romans.

Another distinction between these two societies is one already mentioned—the fact that this warring society does not use of any kind of heavy or destructive industry, as the Romans do. Instead, Gothic production is based on mere craftsmanship. Indeed, throughout the novel we learn that they master several crafts. Among these, we should first mention woodcraft, which can mainly be seen in the construction of buildings. A great example of a wooden building is the hall of the Wolfings, or, as it is called in the novel, the Roof. We learn that it was “framed of the goodliest trees of the wild-wood squared with the adze” (*HotW* 6). The fact that the Roof was made exclusively by wood reinforces the aforementioned idea of the tight bond between the Goths and nature. Also, the interior is made out of wood. For instance, we learn of a door, to be used only by men, that features a “manifold carving of knots and dragons that was wrought above [its] lintel” (6). In a similar manner, the pillars that support the hall were

“fashioned of the mightiest trees that might be found, and each one fairly wrought with base and chapiter, and wreaths and knots, and fighting men and dragons” (7). Another example of the high skill with which the Goths were able to work the wood are the wains that they bring with them whenever they set to war. Among these, the wain of the Wolfings stands out from the rest, “drawn by ten black bulls of the mightiest of the herd, deep-dewlapped, high-crested and curly-browed; and their harness was decked with gold, and so was the wain itself, and the woodwork of it painted red with vermillion” (30). The presence, among the Goths, of such beautifully adorned wagons being used for war brings out that essential characteristic that Morris attributed to the good product: that it should be beautiful as well as useful.

The second craft that is present in this society is smithery. The story tells that the Goths “had learned the craft of iron-founding, so that they had no lack of wares of iron and steel, whether they were tools of handicraft or weapons for hunting and for war” (*HotW* 3). It is in the production of weapons and tools for war that we will be able to find the greatest examples of the magnificent skill of the Gothic smiths. Hence, among the outstanding tools that the Gothic warriors carry into battle, we are told, for instance, about the war-horn of the Wolfings, an example of magnificent craft. We learn that it was “carved out of the tusk of a sea-whale of the North and with many devices on it and the Wolf amidst them all; its golden mouth-piece and rim wrought finely with flowers” (12). Another example can be found in the figure of Heriulf, a mighty warrior, and his war garment. A perfectly skilled smith himself, he appears to have produced his own “dark iron helm [...] fashioned above his brow into the similitude of the Wolf’s head with gaping jaws” (67). His fighting weapon is a huge twibill, a double-edged axe, “done both blade and shaft with knots and runes in gold; [...] called [...] the Wolf’s Sister” (68). Another mighty warrior whose war raiment stands out is the principal character of the book, the chieftain of the House of the Wolfings, Thiodolf. Apart from his magic hauberk, which will be discussed later, his shield features

the work of an artisan goldsmith, “thereon the wood-wolf’s image in ruddy gold was done” (41). Similar to the wain of the Wolfings, the war gear of warriors such as Heriulf and Thiodolf, with their sublimely wrought helms, axes, and shields, as well as the war-horn of the Wolfings, points to Morris’s idealisation of the beautiful and useful good, so absent in the mass-production industry of the Victorian era.

Next, we should consider the Goths’ proficiency in the crafts of embroidery and weaving. Regarding the former, we are told about the Wolfing Roof holding “woven cloths pictured with images of ancient tales and the deeds of the Wolfings, and the deeds of the Gods from whence they came” (*HotW* 8). In another example, the cloak on which Thiodolf is laid out after being killed in the final battle against the Romans is “a purple cloak gold-embroidered of the treasure of the Wolfings” (244). Instances of Gothic weaving can be found in the production of items of clothing, as in the case of another very important character of the story, Hall-Sun. This is a young lady that has the power to foresee the future, and she occupies a very prominent position in the society of the Goths. Thus, her raiment is also somewhat special, particularly made for her: a “holy cloth of old, / And the neck-chain wrought for the goddess, and the rings of the hallowed gold” (45), or

a garment of fine white wool, on the breast whereof were wrought in gold two beasts ramping up against a fire-altar whereon a flame flickered; and on the skirts and the hems were other devices, of wolves chasing deer, and men shooting with the bow; and [...] she had a broad girdle of gold and gems about her middle, and on her arms and neck she wore great gold rings wrought delicately. (31)

On a different occasion, Hall-Sun wears “a dark blue cloak from under which gleamed the folds of the fair golden-broidered gown she was want to wear at folk-motes” (*HotW* 197). The name Hall-Sun refers to a lamp that hangs in Wolfing Hall. This was

a wondrous lamp fashioned of glass; yet of no such glass as the folk made then and there, but of a fair and clear green like an emerald, and all done with figures and knots in gold, and strange beasts, and a warrior slaying a dragon, and the sun rising on the earth: [...] it was held as an ancient and holy thing by all the Markmen [the Goths], and the kindred of the Wolf had it in charge to keep a light burning in it night and day for ever; and they appointed a maiden of their own kindred to that office. (*HotW* 8)

That is the reason the maiden receives the name of the lamp, an artefact that is clearly a work of greatly skilled craftsmen. Besides, the lamp seems to carry extreme importance for all the tribes that live in the Mark, to the point that it seems that the future of their Houses lies on the destiny of the lamp. Indeed, when the Romans are getting close to Wolfing Hall and everyone in it needs to be evacuated, the need to save this object arises (*HotW* 168). Later, at the end of the war against the Romans, when the Goths are victorious and they can once again enter the Roof of the Wolfings, the first thing to be done is for Hall-Sun to hang the lamp back in its place, since it is “a token of the salvation of the Wolfings and the welfare of all the kindreds” (239). The importance that the lamp seems to have for the Goths may well be a hint of the love that these people feel for those objects that are the result of their skill and the joy they obtain from their labour. This is a very Morrisian idea, not only the necessity of taking pleasure in the work we do, but also how meaningful and important the things that we create with our own hands really are.

2.1.2.3. The Dwarves

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the case of the Dwarves is a peculiar one. This peculiarity resides in the fact that they are, in a

way, a combination of the Romans and the Goths, since, even though, like the latter, they make use of their own craft and not of heavy industry, they are portrayed as evil. The Dwarves are said to be “no kindly kin of the earth” (*HotW* 27), and the Goths fear them “and their anger and sorrow and mirth” (27).

The House of the Wolfings gives two examples of the Dwarves’ craft. The first is a ring that the war leader of the Goths, Thiodolf, has to wear on his arm and carry into battle. This golden ring is said to be “ancient and daintily wrought, but not very heavy” (*HotW* 82). However, there is another object, and this features the two characteristics attributed to the race of the Dwarves: their remarkable skill and their evil alignment. The object that embodies these features is the hauberk that Thiodolf is made to wear into battle. This “treasure of smith’s work” (82) was originally devised for evil purposes. The story tells that there was once a maiden who, desperate about her lover going to war, ran off into the woods. There, she arrived at the cave of the Dwarf-lord, who was instantly attracted by her beauty and started to think of a plan to retain her. After gaining knowledge of her troubles he offered her the hauberk, thanks to which her lover would return from war alive, in exchange of her spending a night with the Dwarf-lord in his cave. The maiden accepted the deal, magicked the dwarf to fall asleep, and managed to run away with the hauberk. The betrayed Dwarf-lord set a curse on the hauberk, claiming that

whoso weareth the same,
Shall save his life in battle, and have the battle’s shame;
He shall live through wrack and ruin, and ever have the
worse,
And drag adown his kindred, and bear the people’s curse.
(212)

Despite its cursed evil, the hauberk is also a work of delicate craftsmanship, with its clasps “of gold and blue stones” (*HotW* 207). In light of this, there seems to be no apparent reason why the

Dwarves, while still being exceedingly accomplished craftsmen, need to be portrayed as evil creatures. Perhaps the only reason for such a portrayal is that Morris was just following the historical literary depiction of this race as greedy and not completely trustworthy creatures (*The Road to Middle-earth* 70).

2.2. J.R.R. Tolkien

J.R.R. Tolkien is one of the greatest authors of fairy-stories, as he liked to call them, and perhaps best-known for his masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*. However, if we want to gain deeper insight into his work, it is indispensable that we also focus on his *The Silmarillion*. This collection of stories contains, indeed, everything that the reader needs in order to understand the shaping of what we know as Middle-earth, from its cosmogony to some lesser tales, in addition to serving as the background of much that takes place in *The Lord of the Rings*.

2.2.1. Tolkien's Twentieth Century Context

Tolkien was always very critical of the direction that the society of his time was taking. During his childhood and teens, the boy that was born “between the Golden and Diamond jubilee of Victoria” (*Letters* 393) experienced two historical British periods: the late Victorian era and the Edwardian era, which is considered to start at the beginning of the century and end at the start of the First World War. Regarding Tolkien's affinity with these periods, he may be considered more of an Edwardian, since his conservative values seem to be quite similar to those that were prominent during this British period, hailing such tropes as respectability, civility, dignity, and controlled progress, among others (Simonson 79). Nevertheless, and going back to Tolkien's divergence from his times, we can find very clear examples of this in the post-war period, in which Tolkien produced most of his literary work. As Humphrey Carpenter argues in his work *The Inklings*—the name of the literary group to which Tolkien belonged—

Tolkien could never have been considered anything close to a “modern writer” (157), that is, a writer in convergence with the dominating literary styles and ideals proper of the time. Carpenter points out that the reason for this was the fact that Tolkien barely read any literature produced in his time, his tastes being “buried deep in early literature” (158), similar to those of the other members of Inklings. Yet this idea of Tolkien being “impervious to influence from all things contemporary” (Garth 39) seems also to have been somewhat reciprocal, since “[his] ‘poetry’ [received] little praise” (*Letters* 396), something Tolkien himself assigned to it not being properly understood.

That is why, in this section, unlike in our exploration of Morris, we will not pay much attention to Tolkien’s contemporary Britain, but we will focus instead on his own experiences, from childhood to adult life. In what follows, we will, however, pay some attention to one of the major events in the history of the twentieth century, the Great War, although also this will be approached, through Tolkien’s own perspective, and his experience as a soldier in this war that shook the foundations of Europe for decades to come.

Looking at the early years of Tolkien’s life, two major elements are particularly conspicuous. The first is death, as both of his parents died. The second one, the one with which we are going to deal in this section, is nature. Even in the Middle-earth legendarium that Tolkien would devise later on, nature seems to be a key element. Indeed, the reader of Tolkien’s stories will witness different attitudes towards nature: while nature is sometimes venerated, at others, it is despised and destroyed, as a burden that needs to be got rid of. With this in mind, in this section we are going to look at Tolkien’s biography and show the role that nature played in it.

Tolkien lived in several different places during his lifetime, some of them in the countryside, and others in urban and industrialised areas. such as Birmingham. He developed a particular

love of the English countryside and forests and quite a profound distrust in progress in general and industry in particular. Later on, as his experiences with the world became more varied, he would develop a great disgust with the growth of industrialised areas that, in part, turned his world into a “bad corrupt unnatural world” (*Letters* 64), as he himself put it.

The development of Tolkien’s way of thinking regarding nature and industry may well have its roots in the different environments Tolkien lived in during his early years. This was mainly due to the family being constantly on the move. The ‘exodus’ of the Tolkien family—consisting of Tolkien’s mother, his younger brother, and himself—began in the spring of the year 1895, according to Humphrey Carpenter’s *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, when his mother took John Ronald and Hilary to England to visit her parents in Birmingham. Their father remained and died in Bloemfontein, South Africa, where the family had originally lived. The environment in Birmingham proved to be very beneficial, since it “marked [an] improvement in Ronald’s health” (*J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* 23). After the death of their father, their mother decided to move to the quiet hamlet of Sarehole outside the industrial city of Birmingham, where the two Tolkien boys would be in permanent contact with nature. Sarehole was a place of pivotal importance both for Tolkien and his mythology. It was pivotal in the sense that it triggered his passion for nature and trees. His love for the latter was a very peculiar one. As a child, he was very fond of drawing, and trees seemed to be a recurrent theme in his sketches. However, not only did he like drawing them, but he also liked “to be *with* trees” (30). Carpenter writes that Tolkien used to “climb them, lean against them, [and] even talk to them” (30). The fact that he used to talk to trees may show us how he really believed that these were living creatures inhabiting this world the same way as humans did. Looking at his writings, we see that trees have a prominent place indeed in Middle-earth. Probably the greatest expression of Tolkien’s love for trees can be found in the figure of Treebeard the Ent. Treebeard is a tree that has the faculty of behaving like a human in the sense that he can move freely and

communicate with the other inhabitants of Middle-earth. Carpenter states that this figure is “the ultimate expression of Tolkien’s love and respect for trees” (198).

Going back for a moment to the importance of Sarehole for Tolkien, we have to bear in mind that this influence went beyond the literary terrain. We could even say that the time Tolkien spent in Sarehole helped shape his ideal of a perfect place. A place away from the rumbling of the busy city life and its industrial activity, where life remained in very deep contact with nature and the things that grow and flow, and where the civilised manners of old still prevailed. This influence becomes even more relevant if we consider the “dry dusty barren landscape” (*Biography* 23) of Bloemfontein. We can thus imagine the deep impact that this extreme change of landscape would have had on Tolkien. All these could have been some of the key factors that embodied, as we were saying, Tolkien’s supreme ideal of place, originating in that little hamlet in the Warwickshire countryside. This very same ideal is found in that place of Middle-earth that fed so vastly on Tolkien’s own memories from Sarehole (*Letters* 235), namely the Shire, the major settlement of the Hobbits in Middle-earth, that place “where an ordered, civilized, if simple and rural life is maintained” (158).

In the year 1900, after four years in the quiet and remote Sarehole, the family moved to the industrialised city of Birmingham. As we can imagine, the enormous difference between Sarehole, with its woods, mill, etc., and the factories and fumes of Birmingham had a profound impact on Tolkien. The new scenery surrounding him struck him hard when compared to the natural landscape that he had enjoyed so much in Sarehole. What Tolkien could see from the windows of his new house was, as Carpenter puts it, “a sad contrast to the Warwickshire countryside: trams struggling up the hill, the drab faces of the passers-by, and in the distance the smoking factory and chimneys of Sparkbrook and Small Heath” (*Biography* 33). In light of this, it is little wonder that he felt as if he was “trapped in the city” (40), longing for his past experiences in the countryside, which at the time seemed so far away.

If the germ of Tolkien's anti-industrial attitudes can be traced back to his time in Birmingham, there is another event that could well be considered the one that pushed Tolkien to finally adopt this attitude as one of the major and most determined ideals of his life. This event is the First World War—also known as the Great War—which took place between the years 1914 and 1918, and in which Tolkien found himself entangled. As part of the Lancashire Fusiliers, he fought the infamous battle of the Somme, where he served as a signaller for a few months, before he was taken back to England after being infected by what was known as 'trench fever'¹.

The First World War could be considered the experience that made Tolkien adopt a very firm stance against the admiration of progress dominant in his time, for the sake of which everything that belonged to the old world was being destroyed. Indeed, the Great War is well-known for the enormous effort of developing technology and machinery on behalf of the powers involved in it, especially Great Britain and Germany. Its drawback was that all those advancements were being applied to the machinery of war with tremendous consequences, among which we could mention the invention of tanks, used in the Somme for the first time (Garth 191). Garth goes even further when he claims that "[in] this war of men and machines" (165), the value of machinery was above that of plain soldiers. We can but imagine the impression that this would have made on a person who already felt more than a little reluctance towards advanced technology. Besides, the consequences of the presence of such powerful and unheard-of technology were devastating; destruction was everywhere.

Destruction is always related to the idea of loss, and the Great War also held a great store of this. We could divide the loss produced by the War in three different categories: loss of human lives, loss of intellect, and loss of nature. Obviously, it is the former, the loss of human lives,

¹ For an extensive account of Tolkien's war experience see John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (2003).

that first comes to mind whenever we talk of war. However, it is worth extra emphasis in the case of this particular war, since the magnitude of its casualties was unparalleled by anything that had taken place before. Men were killed in their thousands, as in the case of the battle of Verdun, where “France would pour in its troops and ‘bleed to death’” (Garth 129) in a futile effort to conquer the enemy trenches and move the fronts a little bit further. Carpenter offers a description of the battleground that conveys the desolation and horror produced by war when he describes how “corpses lay in every corner, horribly torn by the shells. Those that still had faces stared with dreadful eyes. Beyond the trenches no-man’s land was littered with bloated and decaying bodies” (*Biography* 91).

Concerning the loss of intellect, we should consider a very peculiar condition of the soldiers taking part in this conflict, as explained by Paul Fussell in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). The condition that we are pointing to is, in this case, “the unparalleled literariness of all ranks who fought in the Great War” (Fussell 156). As for the reason behind this particular condition, Fussell suggests that it owes to a similarly unprecedented situation in Britain at the beginning of the War. It seems that the situation emerged from the convergence of “two ‘liberal’ forces” (157), the first being that “the belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature was still extremely strong” (157). On the other hand, it seems that education—and particularly the chance to study literature—was at last being offered to the poorest classes. Thus, and boosted by the “appeal of popular education and ‘self-improvement’” (157), literariness became deeply rooted in the lower classes. As a result, the passion for literature spread to a great part of society, and it became essential for the sanity of the men on the front, where “quest literature was profoundly popular” (Garth 296) and “[books] such as Morris’s *The Well at the World’s End* and John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* provided a key without which [that] life of tribulation and death seemed incomprehensible” (296). Nevertheless, even though Britain obtained very learned generations from all classes, the arrival of the War destroyed them near-completely. We can thus perceive how the loss of human lives also meant the loss of human

intellect, the loss of generations that were better educated than those who had come before them.

As for the last type of loss, we should now consider the element of nature, that is, how the destructive power of the war affected the environment in which it was being fought. Apart from the already mentioned introduction of tanks, shells and bombings were also part of the everyday life of battle, whose force could easily damage the land. The impact of the war machinery and armament was such that the destruction on the Somme is still visible today. Fussell highlights that “[the] mine craters are too deep to be filled and remain much as they were” (70), and they make “the Somme [...] a peaceful but sullen place, unforgetting and unforgiving” (69). Apart from this, it is also worth considering the intervention of man, who constructed a huge north-to-south frontline by digging up trenches, again changing the surface of the land. In this environment, it is not hard to imagine how desolate and despairing the so-called No-Man’s Land was, after humans had dropped all its power of destruction upon it. Similarly, it is little wonder that the literary reaction of those who came face to face with this crude war often share an element in common: the love of the pastoral. Of course, when facing a land that has been torn up by an unprecedented display of destructive power, it is totally understandable that soldiers should take refuge to the pleasant places abiding in their memory. Fussell suggests that the “[recourse] to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them” (235). Therefore, English soldiers would constantly resort to “ideas of ‘home’ and ‘the summer of 1914’” (235).

So far, we have seen what the usual experience was like for any soldier of the Great War: every day presented the agonising risk of being added to the long list of casualties, combined with the wretched experiences of the trenches and No-Man’s Land. We have mentioned the use of advanced machinery as the major source of all this destruction. However, what about Tolkien’s own personal view of his war

experiences? In the following lines, we are going to deal with the personal contact that Tolkien himself had with the issue of loss.

To gain better insight into Tolkien's share of loss in the War we may keep in mind English philosopher G.E. Moore, "who considered that the most important thing in life was artistic experience and personal relationships" (Simonson 76). This serves as a very good base from which to set out, since it is certainly applicable to Tolkien's own experience. Indeed, the war deprived him of enjoying his personal relationships and the artistic experiences about which Moore was talking. To start with the loss of personal relationships, we know that Tolkien, like any other soldier fighting in the War, suffered the deaths of people very close to him. In his case, the closest people that he lost were two 'comrades' from the literary group to which he belonged since his Birmingham days: the so-called T.C.B.S. ('Tea Club and Barrovian Society'), the core of which was made up by Christopher Wiseman, G.B. Smith, Rob Gilson, and Tolkien himself. G.B. Smith and Rob Gilson both met their deaths in the fields of France. The first to die was Gilson, whose death Tolkien learned of in a letter from G.B. Smith. In response, Tolkien wrote that "[he did] not feel a member of a complete body" (*Biography* 92), claiming that for him "the T.C.B.S. [had] ended" (92). The despair in Tolkien's words suggests the close relation that he maintained with the other three members of the group and the relevance that they each had within it, to the point that, for him, the loss of one meant the loss of the whole group. As for the death of G.B. Smith, Garth suggests that this made an even deeper impact on Tolkien. All in all, we know that the death of these close friends marked him deeply and that the grief remained with him until his own death (Garth 250). However, there was another 'loss', also forced by the War, and this was the separation of Tolkien and his wife Edith. Even though this loss is not related to death at all, it seems that it felt something like dying for the newly married Tolkien when he was called to embark for France and he had to leave Edith behind in England (138).

Regarding artistic expression, we can also appreciate a partial loss of this in Tolkien. As just mentioned, he felt very attached to the literary group to which he belonged, and he felt that the death of one of its members made it impossible for the group to go on. The T.C.B.S. was of utmost importance to Tolkien, who would frequently share his own literary creations with its members in order to receive feedback and critique (*Biography* 83). All the members of this group had their own ideas about literature and what it stood for, and they thought of their group as a society with a supreme aim that was to be fulfilled by means of literary production. Tolkien himself had very great expectations for it, believing that their society “had been granted some spark of fire [...] that was destined to kindle a new light” (*Letters* 10). Thus, the loss of this promising group probably made Tolkien feel as if he was, in a way, losing some kind of outlet that allowed him to transmit his feelings and all the unease that he had deep in his mind and to which he was now giving literary shape.

Another example of Tolkien’s loss relating to literature—his main means of artistic expression—was how the War acted as an obstacle between him and his academic ambitions. As an Oxford University undergraduate taking a degree in English language and literature, Tolkien experienced how, as a result of the war, every academic activity in Oxford was, if not cancelled, very poorly conducted. Tolkien had initially refused to enlist, intending to finish his degree and obtain a mark that would set him on course for an academic career. However, he soon realised that it would be almost impossible for him to continue his studies at Oxford (*Biography* 80). Nevertheless, and contrary to the idea that the war was hindering Tolkien’s literary ventures, it is curious to note that it was during the war, and due to what he saw and experienced in it, that Tolkien lay the foundations for his Middle-earth mythology. This first fundament was called “The Fall of Gondolin”, a story conceived and written while Tolkien was in hospital with trench fever (Garth 38). Here, then, we can perceive the duality to the war, serving both as an obstacle and a spark for Tolkien’s literary production.

In addition to the two types of loss mentioned above, we must not forget about a third, which, we may presume, seriously hurt Tolkien: the destruction of nature. The importance of nature for Tolkien was, as we have seen, crucial, and especially the trees that he familiarised himself with during his years in Sarehole. We can only imagine Tolkien's reaction when, near the French town of Albert, he met with the vision of "scorched, stunted trees" (Garth 163) standing along the road. Again, we face the image of nature being destroyed by the inventions of man.

Keeping in mind the types of loss that Tolkien suffered as a consequence of the war, we can easily understand his attitude towards this, and the next World War that was to come, in which his son Christopher would fight. Tolkien, as many who served on the front, believed that the war was nonsense. In a letter written in 1944 to his son Christopher, who was then fighting with the Royal Air Force, he mentions "[the] utter stupid waste of war" (*Letters* 75), although he admits that it is unavoidable in such "an evil world" (75) as ours. Nevertheless, he remained convinced of the futility of war, as when, in another letter to Christopher, he declares that "wars are always lost" (116). It is possible that the time Tolkien spent on the frontline, and the sight of destructive technological advancements there, influenced his distrust in progress in the same way that his childhood in Sarehole and Birmingham did.

Tolkien's anti-progress attitudes became most explicitly expressed during his adulthood, to which we now turn. We mentioned above that Tolkien never quite went along with the main ideals of his time. Similarly, his correspondence makes it quite clear that he was also trying to keep himself away from technological progress. As we will see, the reason for this reluctance may well be based on Tolkien's extreme sensitivity towards the changes implemented in the world around him.

This attitude of opposing almost everything that had to do with progress was not, of course, exclusive to Tolkien. Indeed, these same

attitudes were pervasive in the whole circle of the Inklings. For example, we know that C.S. Lewis was similarly opposed to modernity. Apparently, he felt quite critical of the direction the world had taken, arguing that “it [was] pretty plain that humanity [had] been making some big mistake” (qtd. in *Inklings* 183). According to him, “[we were] on the wrong road. And if that [was so], we must go back. Going back [was] the quickest way on” (qtd. in 183).

In Tolkien’s case, we have some detailed information about what it was that he especially detested about progress. To start with, we have globalisation. In a world that was gradually becoming smaller due to advancements in telecommunications and means of travel, Tolkien seems to have taken a stand to defend the peculiarities of each land and culture. This anti-globalisation attitude can be traced in the following excerpt from a letter written to his son Christopher in 1943. Here, Tolkien complained that “[the] bigger things get the smaller and duller or flatter the globe gets” (*Letters* 65), while sarcastically suggesting that the global implementation of American imports like “sanitation, morale-pep, feminism, and mass production” (65) would make the inhabitants of the world much happier. However, the greatest reason behind Tolkien’s fierce opposition to globalisation might be the spread of the English language to every corner in the world, making it the Lingua Franca of the world. Tolkien’s stand was crystal clear, writing the following: “If true, damn shame—say I. May the curse of Babel strike all their tongues till they can only say ‘baa baa’. It would mean much the same. I think I shall have to refuse to speak anything but Old Mercian” (65). Another major target of Tolkien’s scorn were the factories and their industrial activity. Due to industry’s potential to pollute the environment, Tolkien showed sympathy for “the growing habit of disgruntled men of dynamiting factories and power-stations” (64). However, factory pollution was not the only reason that Tolkien opposed industrial activity. He seems to have been equally disgusted with the products of mass-production, which had taken off in earnest during his lifetime. As a direct consequence of “an age of ‘improved means to deteriorated ends’” (“On Fairy-Stories” 72), Tolkien

mentions the “ugliness of our works, and [...] their evil” (72). Similarly, it is in light of a world that was becoming increasingly bent on consumption that Tom Shippey suggests that, for Tolkien, “the love of things, especially artificial things, could be seen as the besetting sin of modern civilization” (*Road* 274).

Perhaps it was as a result of all this that the notion that any bygone time had been clearly better than the times in which he himself was living rooted itself so firmly in Tolkien’s mind. A thing that Tolkien admired about earlier ages was, as he himself put it, “the ‘manners’ of life 150 years ago [...] as depicted by Jane [Austen]” (*Letters* 72). He argued that “they made life a lot easier, smoother, and less frictional and dubious” (72). Another aspect of Tolkien’s disgust with industry was the method of production in English factories. His revulsion for consumer-oriented production led him to believe that his was a time where “many men [felt] disgust with man-made things” (“OFS” 73). Similarly, he longed for a time when the natural environment was still unspoiled by human industrial activity. For example, when he returned to Sarehole in 1933, he realised that nearly everything had changed and many of the places where he had played as a child were no longer there. He noted, in his diary, that he envied those “whose precious early scenery [had] not been exposed to such violent and peculiarly hideous change” (*Biography* 130). According to Verlyn Flieger, Tolkien’s idealisation of the past was later present in his use of myths and fairy tales, because “[for him], the beauties and eternalities of myth and Faërie, unreal though they may seem, have outlasted and will outlast the improvements and artifacts of ever-changing technology” (26). We can thus understand his urge to create a whole universe with idyllic and pastoral natural spaces, where chivalric values and behaviour can still be found, and where craftsmanship and artistic expression is preferable to industrial activity.

At this point, it would be interesting to have a look at Tolkien’s own conception of art or, as he liked to call it, *sub-creation*. Tolkien’s

own perception of art is relevant for us to gain a deeper insight into his anti-industrial stance, since he there establishes a clear division between the good and the bad artist: between those who make good use of their creative, or sub-creative, powers and those using them in the wrong way. In what follows, we will also turn to Tolkien's depiction of the bad sub-creator's both essential and despicable use of machinery.

To understand the term *sub-creation*, it is fundamental to first consider Tolkien's deep catholic faith, which gives God the top position in his artistic scheme. It seems that, for Tolkien, art is a sort of gift in itself, indeed an undeserved and divine gift (Segura 213). As Tolkien himself stated in his lecture "On Fairy-Stories" (1939), "fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a maker" ("OFS" 66). What we can perceive in these words is the idea that man's creative ability comes straight from a supreme Creator, namely God. It follows that, in this scheme with a supreme Creator, Tolkien assigns men the role of sub-creators. Keeping in mind that Tolkien expressed his feelings by means of literature, it is no wonder that sub-creation should be a mainly mythopoetic process in which the literary arts serve to imitate human actions (Segura 120). In this context, *mythopoetic* means the art of telling tales (126). The importance that the creation of tales had for Tolkien—to the point of being pivotal in his conception of sub-creation—could be due to the fact that by producing them we can "create a new secondary world in the mind" (*Letters* 87) and, thus, be most closely imitating God, or as Tolkien once called him, "the Writer of the Story" (252).

Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia" is particularly clear in expressing the idea of humanity receiving its creative ability as an heirloom from God. This poem was personally directed at Tolkien's close friend C.S. Lewis, with the objective to make him realise that myths and the art of creating them was something necessary and of

second-nature to man. The following lines from “Mythopoeia” should perfectly illustrate our point:

Disgraced [man] may be, yet is not de-throned,
And keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
Through whom is splintered from a single White
To many hues, and endlessly combined
In living shapes that move from mind to mind. (qtd. in
Flieger 42)

The line about the Light that “is splintered from a single White / To many hues” (qtd. in Flieger 42) presents a very interesting idea, which is also key to understanding that the fact that we are able to create at all is a heritage received directly from God. This is because our “*imaginative inventions* must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of eternal truth” (*Inklings* 43). In other words, the person that is about to create, whose creation we should refer to as *secondary art*, will try to reflect that primary White and portray it in their own creation, if their aim is to achieve the truth necessary for any creation to be “consistent” (*Road* 106).

Another relevant element is the objective of Tolkien’s conception of art. According to Eduardo Segura, this aim was no less than that of perfecting the world (213), because Creation, God’s supreme work, awaits the arrival of sub-creators to help complete it, making its significance fuller with other truths and, thus, obeying God’s bidding to mankind that it should work and finish His task (218). Nevertheless, this creative gift has its own limits, which are also in accordance with its divine origin. This is a limit set upon the artists themselves, whose aim would be that of preventing them from going beyond the simple objective of completing God’s work. Thus, if the artist went beyond those limits, he would most probably fail, and “start making things for [themselves], to be their Lord” (*Letters* 195). In other words, the artist is never supposed to create things with the aim to possess or claim domination over them. However, “the desire

for a living, realized sub-creative art” (“OFS” 64) will always be present in the artist’s mind. Nevertheless, Tolkien adds that “in this world it is for men unsatisfiable, and so imperishable. Uncorrupted, it does not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves” (64).

As mentioned above, regarding the evil conversion of sub-creative desire, we find that, if corrupted, the artist will be ruled by the appetite for power and domination. This way, “the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the creator [...] [which] will lead to the desire for power, for making the will more quickly effective—and so to the Machine (or Magic)” (*Letters* 145). Consequently, this sort of behaviour will lead the artist to fall (145). Here, it is curious to see how, again, the Machine—something related to progress—is connected to evil, in this case to something that aims to submit others to its domination. However, it must be pointed out that the use of the Machine is not always present in the cases of artists turned bad. It seems, rather, that the tendency to make use of the Machine is a most natural—although not compulsory—aspect of the behaviour of the bad artist.

Contrasted to this is the behaviour resulting from good management of artistic desire, which stands in complete opposition to the one mentioned above. As Segura comments, good artists tend to almost forget about their work (235). We mentioned above how God’s bidding to mankind was that of completing his own Creation by means of the sub-creative powers endowed on humans. In light of this, we may think that the artist should surrender their work right at the moment of its completion. Of course, for this to happen it is pivotal for the sub-creator’s work to be made public, since this, as Tolkien himself stated, “is an essential part of the full process” (*Letters* 1126). If the creation is supposed to help complete God’s own Creation, then it ought to reach as many people as possible, “since a solitary art is no art” (122).

2.2.2. Anti-industrial and Anti-imperialist Discourse in Tolkien's Writings

Now that we have gained a broader insight into Tolkien's background, and have a better understanding of the experiences that made him take a stand against progress, it is time to move on to the main section of this chapter. We will here have a look at the manner in which this anti-progress attitude is portrayed in his Middle-earth legendarium, for which purpose we are going to look at the two major books dealing with Middle-earth: *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

First of all, it is important that we talk about the organisation of the peoples of Middle-earth. For this, John Garth offers a very important idea, noting that Tolkien's is "a mythology of the conflict between good and evil" (217). Of course, there are many shapes that this conflict takes in Tolkien's texts, one of them being the battle between those who embrace nature—regarded as good—and those who destroy it—catalogued as evil. Regarding the latter, a couple of shared characteristics of those who look forward to destroying nature are, first, the use of heavy, destructive, and extremely polluting industry, and, secondly, the ambition to gain power and domination. As opposed to this, we find whole races that delight in nature and respect it, which is not to say that it is impossible to find traces of industry among them. Nevertheless, their manner of production consists mostly of craftsmanship, creating only what is necessary and beautiful, and never taking from nature more than what they need. Therefore, in this particular expression of the battle between good and evil, we will be able to perceive the anxiety Tolkien felt as he was witnessing the way in which the destructive and polluting industry was spreading like a disease. No wonder, then, that "Tolkien's myth underlines the almost insuperable efficacy of the machine against mere skill of hand and eye" (Garth 222).

2.2.2.1. Heavy Industry and Scorn of Nature as Elements of Evil

Industry and the quest for power and domination, seem, in Tolkien, more than related; indeed, one may be considered the means to achieving the other. This is because “Tolkien clearly saw a link between this desire for domination and the use of science to create nature-dominating technologies” (Ertsgaard 218).

The figure of Melkor—the primeval enemy in Tolkien’s mythology—shows signs of desiring power and dominion from the very beginning. Once the world had gained its physical dimension, and the Valar were allowed to enter it, we are told that the very first thing that Melkor did was to “[kindle] great fires” (*The Silmarillion* 10) and reclaim that new land for him, making it his own kingdom. The strongholds of Melkor in Middle-earth were two, both of them in the North. The first was called Utumno, and when this had been destroyed by the Valar, Melkor erected another, called Angband. Both places share important connections with iron, which is a material carrying strong connotations with heavy industry. We are told that Melkor encircled Utumno in a chain of mountains called Ered Engrin, or Iron Mountains, while Angband was also known as The Hells of Iron (134). Regarding the existence of proper industrial activity in these places, the former is said to have “pits [...] filled with fires” (48), which may hint at the presence of industry. The industrial activity of the latter is made much more explicit, it being described as centred around “forges” (124) whose “thunder” (124) cause the nearby lands to “tremble” (124), and “subterranean furnaces” (134) out of whose “ash and slag” (134) its encircling mountains were made, “the thunderous towers of Thangorodrim” (134). Indeed, these mountains resemble factory chimneys, since apart from having the shape of towers, “smoke issued from their tops” (134), polluting its environment, keeping, for example, Thangorodrim always covered by a “dark cloud” (225). Melkor’s industrial power also seems to serve his desires for dominion, since he uses it in the wars that he fights against the Valar and the Elves. For example, he employs a “great reek and dark cloud to hide” (111) and protect his land from enemies, as well as sending “vast smokes and vapours” (123) to undermine them.

To these, we should add that when actually fighting a battle, Melkor can make use of “engines” (232) to besiege a citadel or “fires of many poisonous hues” (175) that have the ability to destroy everything that stands in their way, as in the case of the plain of Ard-galen, which “became a burned and desolate waste” (175). This is, then, the vast industrial power that Melkor owns, and which he uses to serve his purpose of dominating anything that he wants.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, we will find more information about Sauron, disciple of Melkor, also known as the Dark Lord, and the main enemy of the free peoples of Middle-earth during the Third Age. His dwelling place is Mordor, the Land of the Shadow, in the East. This is a very arid land, a plateau enclosed within mountain chains like the Ephel Dúath, the Mountains of Shadow, and Ered Lithui, also known as the Ash Mountains. If we focus on the way this land is described by different characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, the idea that we form in our minds is going to be the image of an area where industry has caused severe damage to the landscape. When Frodo and Sam find themselves near the very end of their journey, gazing upon the stretch of land that extends between them and their objective, Mount Doom, we are told that they stand in front of “a wide region of fuming, barren, ash ridden land” (*The Lord of the Rings* 936). Apart from the apparent volcanic activity in the land of Mordor (905; 920), these three characteristics can be attributed to the heavy industry that Sauron has developed there. His forges and machines are mentioned more than once in *The Lord of the Rings*. Mount Doom, also known as Orodruin, seems an immense factory with “furnaces far below its ashen cone” (899), from which can be heard a “rumour and a trouble as of great engines throbbing and labouring” (945). This, added to the fact that the mountain, also called Mountain of Fire, seems to have some sort of “vast oast or chimney capped with a jagged crater” (941), emphasises the idea of Orodruin being something like a great factory.

This vast factory, of course—like the factories of Tolkien’s Birmingham—heavily pollutes the lands around it. Therefore, Mordor

is also a land covered in mist and fog, all proceeding from the forges of Mount Doom. Its chimney is constantly “belching forth a great fume” (*LotR* 920), and if we consider that the origin of this fume is industry, it is no wonder that the air in that land makes breathing “painful and difficult” (940). Of course, the vapours, fumes, and reeks that spread all over Mordor are produced on purpose by Sauron himself, since they are very useful for him to extend his threat across the whole of Middle-earth, in a very similar manner in which Melkor used them for protection and war. This is at least what Beregon, soldier of the citadel of Gondor, tells Pippin when Pippin asks him about the gloomy weather: “this is no weather of the world. This is some device of [Sauron’s] malice; some broil of fume from the Mountain of Fire that he sends to darken hearts and counsel” (808). Further, Sauron’s industry is also polluting the streams that run within his realm. Once Frodo and Sam decide, after some deliberation, that both will drink from a stream that Sam suspects is poisonous, we are told that the water “had an unpleasant taste, at once bitter and oily, or so they would have said at home” (921). We could say that these words convey the idea that the water of the Land of Shadow is not appropriate for drinking, and that the queerness of its taste may be caused by Sauron’s industrial activity.

The third and last evil character that we would like to discuss is Saruman. Saruman is perhaps the clearest case in which a character shows such a clear disrespect and scorn for nature, using it to fulfil his aim of increasing his power. Like Melkor and Sauron, it is in Saruman’s own dwellings that we can perceive the most disastrous consequences of his industrial activity. If we have a look, then, at the place of his abode, Isengard, we realise how much change his foul industry has caused in this place changes. Isengard was originally a fortress erected by the Men of Westerne to the west of Rohan in the ancient days. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we are offered the following account of what Isengard had been like before Saruman, and what it became after:

Once it had been green and filled with avenues, and groves of fruitful trees, watered by streams that flowed from the mountains to a lake. But no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman. The roads were paved with stone-flags, dark and hard; and beside their borders instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some of marble, some of copper and of iron, joined by heavy chains. (*LotR* 554)

The above extract tells us about a place that has been modified—even, in a way, urbanised. It has been made fit for human living with paved roads. However, the changes do not merely reside in Saruman paving the roads that lead to the Tower of Orthanc, but go far beyond that. What Saruman has built in Isengard is a heavily industrialised place, with “pits and forges” (*LotR* 260), whose fires light the whole valley at night. The construction and expansion of this industrial area has been made at the cost of the trees of the wood of Fangorn, which are felled and later “carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc” (474). Of course, as in the Birmingham of Tolkien’s youth, the valley of Isengard is also filled with some sort of “smoke or haze” (481) so typical of industrialised areas. The source of this change is clearly connected with the change that Saruman himself suffers. Originally a wizard belonging to the order of the Maiar, he was sent to Middle-earth by the gods to help the fair folks that inhabited it. However, he becomes greedy and industry is presented to him as a shortcut to increase his power. That is why, from wandering in the woods of Fangorn with Treebeard’s leave, he turns himself into someone who perceives nature as both an obstacle and a vehicle for his ambitions of “becoming a Power” (473). His mind becomes, as Treebeard explains to Merry and Pippin, “a mind of metal and wheels” (473), making clear reference to his interest in industry. The fact that he uses the trees of Fangorn as wood for his forges makes him the enemy of the Ents. Indeed, the Ents refer to him as an “accursed tree-slayer” (979) and as having a heart “as rotten as a black Huorn’s” (586).

From the behaviour of the three characters Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, we can draw two main conclusions in the form of similarities.

The first concerns the type of industrial activity that all three carry out in their strongholds. However, it is only Saruman that we are told actually exploits the natural environment in order to obtain fuel for industry. In his case, as we have seen, he almost completely cuts down the woods of Fangorn, and he would have continued to do so if it was not for the Ents rising up and going to war against him. It seems that Melkor and Sauron, on the other hand, can produce fires and fumes also by means of their own power. However, in all three cases, the lands have been altered due to implementation of heavy industry. The most noticeable alteration resides in the fact that nature has been gotten rid of in these areas. Therefore, we could claim that we find in the figures of Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman the embodiment of “the tyranny of the machine over life and nature” (Garth 222).

Second, all three characters were originally good, even if only briefly. Melkor was one of the Valar, who were given “the greatest gifts of power and knowledge” (*Silmarillion* 4). A step below him were Sauron and Saruman, belonging to the order of the Maiar. We nevertheless witness their fall and consequent destruction, in which the use of the Machine plays a pivotal role. As pointed out above, it was Tolkien’s own idea that the use of the Machine should under every circumstance lead to a fall, and the path there is very straightforward. Tolkien argues that the existence of the Machine is presented to the individual as a shortcut; a “labour-saving machinery” (*Letters* 88) that helps them fulfil their objectives in a much easier way. Awareness of such a powerful tool, kindles the desire within the individual to use it to accomplish their own aims. The combination of such an insatiable desire and the machine that can help serve one’s purposes creates power. However, the possession of power is very risky and something to be handled with much care, since “[power] corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (qtd. in *Road* 154). Finally comes the fall, which, according to Tolkien, “makes our devices not only fail of their desire but turn to new and horrible evil” (*Letters* 88). This seems to indicate that, even though the intentions behind our use of the Machine may be good, their outcome is nothing but fatal. This is exactly the path followed by

the three characters analysed in this section. Although they were all created with no sign of evil in them, it seems that the awareness of their own powers, in addition to an external source of power that they could make use of, made them go astray and turn to the evil side. Thus, the combination of these two elements made them extremely powerful, but the road they ended up following would undoubtedly lead to their fall.

2.2.2.2. Craftsmanship and Love for Nature as Good

This section focuses on the opposite of industry. Instead of heavy industry that destroys the environment and seeks domination, we will now look at another kind of production technique, resulting in the lack of the two major elements that we have just mentioned: the type of productive activity carried out by the ‘good’ races—Elves, Men, and Dwarves—will not serve the purpose of getting rid of nature, nor of dominating either the environment or its inhabitants. Rather, these people will embrace craftsmanship, always aiming to make use of their extraordinary skill in order to give shape to their beautiful and fair creations. However, as we will see, evil walks also among these people.

2.2.2.2.1. Craftsmanship among the Elves

If there is a race dwelling in Middle-earth whose works reveal unsurpassable skill and beauty, it is the Elves. Holders, from the very beginning, of a knowledge and skill received, in great part, from the Valar themselves (*Silmarillion* 49), the Elves are “primarily artists” (*Letters* 192). Here, it is worth noting what Tolkien himself had to say about them. He suggested that Elves and Men were very closely related when it came to appearance, with the difference that the former had “greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties” (*Letters* 176), among other things. Similarly, Tolkien also suggested that the race of the Elves embodies the “beauty and grace of life and artefact” (85), suggesting that the Elves’ principal role is that of the artist. Superior as the Elves are to Men, they also make proper use of their artistic faculties. Tolkien makes special mention of a couple of traits that are interlaced with each other,

suggesting, on the one hand, that the Elves have a primordial duty towards Middle-earth, namely that they are destined to “bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection” (147). This is to say, of course, that whatever the Elves may create with their own hands and craft is supposed to enrich Eru’s major work, Middle-earth. Going back a little, we realise that this duty of the Elves is the same one Tolkien had in mind for the human artist: namely the idea that we must surrender our work of art immediately after it has been finalised, so that it may help complete God’s own design. We could thus argue that, provided that they fulfil this obligation, the Elves would be acting as good artists in Tolkien’s eyes. On the other hand, and directly related to the Elves’ behaviour as good artists, we find their deep love for the natural environment, which deters them from employing their skills in order to use it “as a power-platform” (236). This is a very interesting idea, since it points directly to the fact that the Elves will never be as dominating as Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman. Instead, they simply use their craft and skill as tools to make the world in which they live more fair and beautiful, always drawing inspiration from their love of nature.

After giving a few hints about the Elves’ artistic nature, it is time to have a look at their works as artists, which can be found all over *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In the former, the Elves take joy in different kinds of craftsmanship, among which we find crafts such as stonemasonry, clothing, woodcraft, and the making of weapons for war. Regarding the works the Elves make from stone, we should consider the Elven city of Menegroth. This was the dwelling of the Elven king Thingol, and even though it was dug by the Dwarves of Belegost, the Elvish artisans also had their share in this beautiful creation. About this city, which portrays the connection between Elves and nature, we learn that

the pillars of Menegroth were hewn in the likeness of the beeches of Oromë, stock, bough, and leaf, and they were lit with lanterns of gold. The nightingales sang there as in the gardens of Lórien; and there were fountains of silver, and basins of marble,

and floors of many-coloured stones. Carven figures of beasts and birds there ran upon the walls, or climbed upon the pillars, or peered among the branches entwined with many flowers. (*Silmarillion* 101)

Another important Elven artisan activity is the smith work by means of which they produce excellent weapons and all sort of goods for protecting themselves from the enemy in times of war. One great example of outstanding war-gear is that worn by King Fingolfin during his battle against Melkor, “for his mail was overlaid with silver, and his blue shield was set with crystals; and he drew his sword Ringil, that glittered like ice” (*Silmarillion* 179). Some of the weapons made in the early years of the Elves survive whole ages and reach the hands of inhabitants of Middle-earth in the Third Age, such as Gandalf’s and Frodo’s blades in *The Lord of the Rings*. About them, named Glamdring and Sting, we learn that they had the ability to “[shine] with a cold light, if any Orcs were near at hand” (*LotR* 310). What we can perceive here is that, for the Elves, the objects that are to be used in war should not just be useful, but they should also be beautiful, showing all the craft and skill possessed by the hands that made them. There exist more examples of famous blades produced by exceeding Elvish smiths, and we will return to these a bit later.

So far, we have talked about particular crafts that are quite widespread among the Elves of Middle-earth. Let us now, then, have a look at more particular cases, approaching individual craftsmen and works. Getting started with the former, it must be said that there is one Elvish artisan in Middle-earth who is said to have exceeded the skill of any other craftsman, be it Elvish, Dwarfish or human. This is Fëanor, the great Elvish artisan who, among other creations, is the mind and hands behind such incredible works as the Silmarils or the Palantiri. Regarding this character, it is very interesting to look not only at his creations, but also at his upbringing and skill. First of all, a figure that we should definitely consider is Fëanor’s mother Míriel, from whom we are made to think he received a great part of his skill and who also helped shape his

personality, and who had a “surpassing skill in weaving and needlework; for her hands were more skilled to fineness than any hands even among the Noldor” (*Silmarillion* 63). Thus we see that, from the very beginning, Fëanor would have been in contact with the crafts, in this case practiced by his mother, and he may have inherited some of her talent, because, in fact, he proved to be more skilful than his brothers from the very beginning (60). In addition, we learn that the time when Fëanor was born was one of the most prolific epochs in the young history of Valinor concerning Elvish knowledge and artistic creations. It was, for example, the time when the runes—that is, the “signs for the recording of speech and song, some for graving upon metal or in stone, others for drawing with brush or with pen” (63)—were devised for the first time. Thus, not only Fëanor’s inheritance from his mother, but also the environment in which he was born and then brought up, could have played a crucial part in his becoming “of all the Noldor, then or after, the most subtle in mind and the most skilled in hand” (64).

Consequently, it is little wonder that he was predestined to create the outstanding artefacts that he designed, which were the Silmarils and the Palantíri. The former were the “most renowned of all the works of the Elves” (*Silmarillion* 68). About the creation of these three exceptional jewels we are told that they were devised when Fëanor, “being come to his full might” (68), started thinking of ways to preserve the light of The Two Trees of Valinor, Telperion and Laurelin, forever. However, no one knew what material they were made of, only that it was “[like] the crystal of diamonds [...] and yet was more strong than adamant, so that no violence could mar it or break it within the Kingdom of Arda” (68). It is even said that “the inner fire” (68) that these jewels stored keeps shining, and that, “as [...] living things, they rejoiced in light and received it and gave it back in hues more marvellous than before” (68). It was, then, for their unparalleled beauty that, from the very first moment in which they were made visible to the inhabitants of Valinor, they were very highly praised (68).

However, not everything about the Silmarils was beautiful. Indeed, these jewels kindled a love in Fëanor that later caused the first battle between elves, and their consequent expulsion from the land of the Valar. This was because, as Tom Shippey points out, the Silmarils were “bright, hypnotic, intrinsically valuable, but also the quintessence of the creative powers, provoking both good and evil, the maker’s personality itself” (*Road* 276). In other words, the creation of almost any work of art produces, not just something fair and beautiful, but also brings out either good or evil in its creator. This was so also in the creation of the Silmarils, for if, as in the case of Fëanor, the creative attitude is based on possessiveness and unwillingness to surrender the finished work, evil behaviour will arise. On the contrary, if the artist is ready to let go of their work and to thus contribute to the major Creation, no evil consequences is in store.

In addition, and at least in the case of the Silmarils, it seems that the evil of the artist puts a curse upon the creation. Indeed, whenever the Silmarils reappear in the narration, strife follows. The clearest example of this may be what happened to the Elven king Thingol and his kingdom of Doriath. This king acquired one of the jewels by means of Beren, who took it from the very crown of Melkor. It was also at this time that Thingol received the necklace Nauglamír, made long ago by the Dwarves. Such was his love for both works of art, the greatest examples of the skill of both races, that he thought of attaching the Silmaril to the necklace, and thus “the greatest of the works of Elves and Dwarves were brought together and made one” (*Silmarillion* 279). However, the sight of the Silmaril also kindled a desire in the Dwarves, who reclaimed their right to possession of the Nauglamír, and devised a plan to gain the Silmaril as well. This is how they ended up killing King Thingol, triggering the beginning of the downfall of the Kingdom of Doriath (279-284). It is curious to see how the Silmarils aroused the same feeling in almost everyone who set their eyes on them, namely a desirous need to possess them, which came with disastrous consequences for the individual, as in the case of Thingol, whose “death ‘in the deep places of Menegroth’ [...] becomes an analogue of his descent to greed and

cunning” (*Road* 296), which implies some sort of fall. This seems to be the peril inside any artistic creation: the danger of unleashing its evil powers, which, as in the case of Fëanor’s Silmarils, ended up being destructive.

Fëanor’s second most important creation were the Palantíri or ‘Seeing Stones’, and even though they do not carry a curse similar to that of the Silmarils, these stones are equally dangerous to anyone who ventures to use them. Even though we have no account of their shape or likeness, we know that they passed into the hands of the Men of Númenor, and after its destruction were brought to Middle-earth by the founders of the realm of Gondor, who were, at the same time, exiles of that land. We know that they were used to “see far off, and to converse in thought with one another” (*LotR* 598), so that the vast kingdom of Gondor could be “guarded and united” (598).

Such was the greatness of Fëanor that his creations inevitably, and also unintentionally, helped to define the plight of the whole of Middle-earth, since they ended up triggering the exile of the Elves from the land of Valinor and the discord that arose among them, as in the case of the Silmarils, while also playing an important role in the War of the Ring that took place in the Third Age of the history of Middle-earth, as happened with the Palantíri.

The second Elvish artisan of special importance in Tolkien’s mythology is Eöl, also known as the ‘Dark Elf’—a character portrayed as ostensibly evil. In *The Silmarillion*, we learn that this is a very peculiar elf since, strange as it is for his kin, he develops a very close relationship with the Dwarves that pass nearby his woods, Nan Elmoth. This relationship is fuelled by Eöl’s own knowledge and skill in smith craft, in which, of course, the Dwarves were also very learned. Such was their relationship that he was even granted the opportunity to spend several periods among the Dwarves in their cities of Nogrod and Belegost. The result of all the lore that he gathered among them was one of his greatest creations, the *galvorn*: “a metal as hard as the steel of the Dwarves, but

so malleable that he could make it thin and supple; and yet it remained resistant to all blades and darts” (*Silmarillion* 153). Apart from this newly devised type of steel, Eöl is also responsible for other peculiar creations, such as the two blades that he created, which received the names of Anglachel and Anguirel. These were “made of iron that fell from heaven as a blazing star; it would cleave all earth-delved iron” (239). About the sword Anguirel we are told very little, but Anglachel turns out to be a very special sword, we could even say it was quite an evil one.² It is also worth mentioning that Eöl’s son, Maeglin, who lived among the people of Gondolin, followed his father’s steps as an artisan, as we learn that he loved “smithcraft and mining [...] and thence he got a wealth of forged metal and of steel, so that the arms of the Gondolindrim were made ever stronger and more keen” (160). As will be mentioned below, the works of exceeding craftsmen like Fëanor or Eöl can be very useful when trying to figure out Tolkien’s anti-industrial attitudes, since the singularity of these works of art, made of extremely peculiar materials and by means of unknown procedures, stands in clear opposition to the profit-oriented industry whose product Tolkien detested.

After considering the cases of particular Elvish artisans, it is time to turn our attention to another example of extraordinary skill and craftsmanship. This is the case of the Rings of Power, the artefacts whose creation almost led Middle-earth to its utter destruction in the Third Age. Nevertheless, these rings were devised some time earlier, during the Second Age, to be more precise. Their creation was carried out in the smithies of the Elvish city of Eregion, since this was a land whose smiths were so extremely eager to gain more knowledge, they even had a relationship with the Dwarves of Moria (*LotR* 242). However, it was not the knowledge gained from the Dwarves that allowed the Eregion Elves to create the Rings of Power, but the aid of someone whose help they would regret for a long time. We know that the knowledge and skill that was necessary to accomplish such a piece of craftsmanship was granted to the Elves by Sauron himself, who “was still fair in that early time”

² For information about this sword, read “Of Túrin Turambar” in *The Silmarillion*.

(*Letters* 152), and “guided their labours, and he was aware of all that they did” (*Silmarillion* 344). As can be imagined, the reason that Sauron helped the Elves was not the pleasure he could find in artisanship, but—again—the desire for domination, “to set a bond upon the Elves and to bring them under his vigilance” (344). That was also the reason why, secretly, he forged another ring for himself, the One Ring, which allowed him to “see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore [the lesser rings]” (344). Nevertheless, the Elves happened to be clever enough to realise Sauron’s treachery, and they forsook the Rings, all except three, which ended up in the possession of three Elven Wise. These were “Narya, Nenyà, and Vilya, [...] the Rings of Fire, and of Water, and of Air, set with ruby and adamant and sapphire” (345). These were also the most powerful of the Rings made by the Elves, thanks to their power against the passing of time. At the same time, they were the ones that Sauron wanted to seize the most, even though he never achieved his goal (345). Tolkien mentioned in a letter that the Elves’ devising of the Rings of Power was the moment that they “came their nearest to falling to ‘magic’ and machinery” (*Letters* 152), which leads us to think that, if they had done so, the Elves would have changed their attitudes completely, since, driven by a lust for power and domination, they would apply their powers on the natural world in order to achieve their goals, as Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman did.

In *The Lord of the Rings* we find two additional uses of Elvish craft. These are the two greatest Elvish strongholds in Middle-earth: the woods of Lothlórien and the hidden valley of Imladris, or Rivendell. Between these two, we find less examples of artisanship in the latter than the former. The examples of handwork in Rivendell are related to stonemasonry and the production of garments. For instance, we learn that the room in which Frodo is having rest had an uncommon ceiling, with “dark beams richly carved” (*LotR* 219), signalling the importance that producing beautiful spaces in which they could put their skill to use had for the Elves of Rivendell. Concerning clothing, the greatest example of rich raiment among these elves is to be found in the way in which Arwen, daughter of Elrond, is dressed in the moment when the Hobbits see her in

her father's Hall. Her clothing consisted of a "cap of silver lace netted with small gems" (227) on her head, and a "soft grey raiment [...] [with] no ornament save a girdle of leaves wrought in silver" (227).

The range of crafts practiced in Lothlórien is, on the other hand, clearly wider than that in Rivendell. In the case of the Elves living under the protection of Celeborn and Galadriel, they are experts in the arts of woodcraft, stonemasonry, and weaving. The first is mainly found in their ability to build ships, "some [of which] were brightly painted, and shone with silver and gold and green" (*LotR* 371). Nonetheless, the Elves' shipbuilding ability does not limit itself to the mere painting of their boats, but goes beyond that, as shown in the case of the ship of Celeborn and Galadriel, which the Fellowship initially mistook for a swan. About its shape we read that "[its] beak shone like burnished gold, and its eyes glinted like jet set in yellow stones; its huge white wings were half lifted [...] [being] wrought and carved with elven-skill in the likeness of a bird" (372). Moving on to the next example of craftsmanship, we mentioned the Elves' skill at stone craft. The sole example of stonemasonry that we find among these elves is a pedestal, part of Galadriel's Mirror, which was "carved like a branching tree" (361).

Finally turning to the craft of weaving, the greatest expression of this art is, again, to be found in the clothes they wear. Hence, we find several examples of skilfully produced pieces of garment. For instance, the raiment of the elves of this forest is said to be of a "shadowy-grey" (*LotR* 343), and, thanks to this, "[the elves] could not be seen among the tree-stems, unless they moved suddenly" (343). Similar to these clothes are the cloaks that the companions of the Fellowship are given. Their colour was not easy to define, since "they [had] the hue and beauty of all [the] things under the twilight of Lórien that [the elves loved]" (370), as well as having the characteristic that they could help their wearers "in keeping out of the sight of unfriendly eyes" (370). Besides, they were also extremely useful in the sense that "they [were] light to wear, and warm enough or cool enough at need" (370). Apart from the crafts already mentioned, there is another case of artistry that is worth

considering, whose products are among the gifts that the Elves give to the Fellowship. In the parting of the Fellowship from Lórien, Lady Galadriel gives each of them a special present. To Aragorn she gives two, one of them a sheath for his sword, “overlaid with a tracery of flowers and leaves wrought of silver and gold, and on [which] were set in elven-runes formed of many gems the name of Andúril and the lineage of the sword” (374). The second is a brooch “wrought in the likeness of an eagle with outspread wings” (375) with a gem in it. Boromir receives a golden belt, and Merry and Pippin other “[smaller] silver belts, each with a clasp wrought like a golden flower” (375). Frodo, the Ring-bearer, is given the most powerful present—a crystal phial in which was “caught the light of Eärendil’s star” (376), meant to bring light to the dark places he was destined to travel.

From everything that has been said about Elvish craftsmanship in this section, some ideas are especially worth highlighting. The first is that the Elves are clearly a race that bases their production of goods on the work and skill of their own hands, not by use of any advanced or destructive type of machinery. This is evident in the likes of Fëanor, Eöl, and the Eregion Elves, through whom we are given hints of a whole context and society that embraces craftsmanship as an essential activity by means of which to let loose all their creative and aesthetic urges.

Secondly, we should consider what the creations of these exceptional artisans convey. Among other things, we find the idea that the work of this race has very deep links with nature, to be found, for instance, in the areas where they build their dwelling places. Above, we mentioned the examples of Menegroth and Lórien, which are, interestingly, places that have been constructed in and around nature itself. We know that Menegroth is a hill that was turned into a stronghold with the aid of the Dwarves (*Silmarillion* 101), while in the latter case they constructed their habitations and halls in the trees themselves (*LotR* 354). Apart from this, we have also seen cases in which the Elves give the stone pillars and structures of their habitations shapes that are to be found in living things in nature, like trees, thus making their halls

resemble real forests, as in the cases of Menegroth and Rivendell. Their clothing offers another example of the connection between the productions of the Elves and their surrounding natural environment. Among these, we may mention Arwen's silver girdle, shaped like leaves, the swan-like boat of Lady Galadriel and Celeborn, and the cloaks and gifts given to the Fellowship.

Looking closer at the gifted cloaks, we arrive at yet another feature ever-present in the works of the Elves, namely that they often display both beauty and usefulness. Thus, for example, these cloaks, apart from being beautiful, are also extremely useful, affording excellent camouflage. Similarly, the presents that Lady Galadriel give Aragorn, Boromir, and Merry and Pippin all display this combination of qualities, being common items like sheaths, brooches, and belts, but with exceptional composition, with precious stones, materials, and special shapes. Similarly, Frodo's gifted phial contains the light of something as beautiful as a star, which is basically the light of one of Fëanor's Silmarils (*Letters* 150), as well as proving extremely useful in the times to come. Other examples of this duality can be found in Fingolfin's war-gear, beautifully wrought and protecting him in battle, and in the High-elven swords Glamdring and Sting, which shed a pale light anytime an enemy is close by. All in all, the Elves' creations display their love of nature and are at the same time both beautiful and useful, affording their products the air of unique pieces of craftsmanship. This uniqueness can be found not only in the works of unmatched artisans like Eöl, Fëanor, or the Eregion elves, but, rather, in almost everything that this race creates. Clear evidence of this lies the fact that many of the weapons that the Elves created throughout the ages received their own names, somehow displaying the peculiar that reside in them. We could argue that this uniqueness that results from the activity of a race that delights itself in handiwork is essential to our understanding of Tolkien's anti-industrial stance, since it is the perhaps greatest antithesis to the type of industry that he witnessed in his time. This industry, based on pure production and profitability, implied a lower quality standard, as well as lacking in the uniqueness we can find in artisanal work.

As a final idea, it is interesting to note that Tolkien seems to be telling us that even craftsmanship has its negative or evil side, as testified by the Silmarils and the Rings of Power—creations that bring considerable peril. For example—as mentioned above—in the case of the Rings, Tolkien said that it was in their creation that the Elves came closest to turning to the use of the Machine, that is, to become evil. Thus, we may think that the creation of something that is too powerful and, in a way, beyond the skill and knowledge of the individual, is to be avoided. This reminds us of certain aspects of Romantic philosophy, which fiercely opposed scientific advancement, arguing that certain issues were better kept undercover, suggesting that knowledge that goes beyond a certain limit could drive mankind to its destruction. The idea of limitless obsession, which, in the case of the Romantics is directed towards knowledge, can also be found in Tolkien's conception of art and the good artist, as he believed that artists were always at risk of desiring to claim possession on their creations, which would lead to their downfall. This might even be considered the greatest sin in his literary work, which is perfectly portrayed in the behaviour of, among other characters, Fëanor.

2.2.2.2.2. Craftsmanship among Men

Men, also called the Second People due to their coming into Middle-earth after the Elves, were inferior also in other respects, including in their craft and skill. Even though their creations could never be equal to, and even less surpass, their forerunners, there existed a race of Men—the very first of them—that may be considered to be very close to the Elves. This was the race of the Númenóreans, dwellers of the Isle of Númenor, whose works and deeds are counted among the greatest of Men in Arda. After them came their followers: the Men who would found the Kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor. The last relevant race of Men is that of the Rohirrim, the horse-riders of the land of Rohan. This section will focus on their characteristics, their craft, and works.

The Númenóreans was a race of powerful, wise, and long-living Men, who lived in their own isle to the west off the shores of Middle-earth, and whose love for seafaring brought them to Middle-earth with many gifts of lore to instruct its inhabitants, among which we could mention “the hewing of wood and the shaping of stone” (*Silmarillion* 314). Remnants of their works could be found in Middle-earth long after their time had passed and they disappeared for ever. The greatest of this could possibly be the Tower of Orthanc, in the valley of Isengard, a building that serves—as mentioned above—as Saruman’s dwelling place in the Third Age. This was

a tower of marvellous shape. It was fashioned by the builders of old, who smoothed the Ring of Isengard, and yet it seemed a thing not made by the craft of Men, but riven from the bones of the earth in the ancient torment of the hills. A peak and isle of rock it was, black and gleaming hard: four mighty piers of many-sided stone were welded into one, but near the summit they opened into gaping horns, their pinnacles sharp as the points of spears, keen-edged as knives. Between them was a narrow space, and there upon a floor of polished stone, written with strange signs, a man might stand five hundred feet above the plain. (*LotR* 555)

That was, then, the likeness of this tower, whose building process no one seemed to remember nor be able to decipher. Such was its strength and hardness, that even the wrath and power of the Ents’ attack on Isengard had barely any impact on the shape of the tower (*LotR* 577). Other treasures originating in Númenórean craft include the treasures that the Hobbits find in the Barrow-Downs. Among these, they came across works like “a brooch set with blue stones, many shaded like flax-flowers or the wings of blue butterflies” (145); or daggers, “leaf-shaped, and keen, of marvellous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold” (145), together with their sheaths, “wrought of some strange metal, light and strong, and set with many fiery stones” (145).

As mentioned, the Men of Númenor disappeared. This was due to their excessive greed for longer life-spans, for which they were punished by the gods. Their isle was swallowed by a great wave, and most of the Númenóreans died as a result. However, a remnant of this people managed to escape the destruction and arrived in Middle-earth. Ruled by Elendil and his sons Isildur and Anárion, they founded the Númenórean realms of Arnor and Gondor (*Silmarillion* 349). Very little is known about the former, so we will focus on Gondor, which played a key role in Middle-earth history. Starting with Minas Tirith—the main city of the kingdom of Gondor—and considering its people’s “love for, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive” (*Letters* 281), we could presuppose that this city would be somehow majestic. In fact, it was extraordinary, in the literal sense of the word. Built along the mountain of Mindolluin, in seven levels, each with its own gate, all except the first level were divided in two by the “huge out-thrust bulk” (*LotR* 752) of a rock pier. The uppermost level was the Citadel, “a towering bastion of stone, its edge sharp as a ship-keel” (752), built by the mighty craft of old and taking advantage of the shape of the hill itself. In addition, it is said that the first wall of the city—the main one—was quite similar to the Tower of Orthanc. Built in the first days of the realm, when the Númenor skill that was brought across the sea still remained, it was “hard and dark and smooth, unconquerable by steel or fire, unbreakable except by some convulsion that would rend the very earth on which it stood” (822).

Here, it is quite striking to read Tolkien say that Gondor “has many industries though these are hardly eluded to” (*Letters* 196). This is striking because if Tolkien was referring to heavy industry in relation to the ‘good’ races of Middle-earth, this would be the first sign of a destructive turn. Nonetheless, the trade of guilds in the city of Minas Tirith must have been quite important, and we learn that one of its streets is named “Lampwright’s Street” (*LotR* 771). The products of the artisanship of this city include the clothes and ornaments worn by some of its people. For example, it is worth considering the raiment of the Guards of the Citadel. Their helms, in which “were set the white wings of

sea-birds, [...] gleamed with a flame of silver, for they were indeed wrought of *mithril*” (753).

The last race of Men that we want to consider in this section is that of the people of Rohan, also known as the Rohirrim. Their main city is Edoras, with its golden Hall Meduseld. Again, in a similar manner to other Men and Elves, the Rohirrim also produced their own weapons of war, some of which were great works of craftsmanship. Among these, we could count the sheath of King Théoden’s sword Herugrim, which was “clasped with gold and set with green gems” (*LotR* 519), and the war-horn that Merry receives as a token of his services to the King, “cunningly wrought all of fair silver with a baldric of green; [upon which] wrights had engraven [...] swift horsemen riding in a line that wound about it from the tip to the mouth; [...] set [with] runes of great virtue” (978).

On the whole, we can say that, like the Elves, the Men of Middle-earth also make use of their own hands and skill to produce goods or habitations for their use, and are thus quite clearly linked to craftsmanship. In addition, from what we can read in Tolkien’s work, we could conclude that these activities on behalf of Men are, under no circumstances, destructive or harmful to the natural world in which they live. This can be seen, for example, in what we learn about the Númenóreans’ construction of the tower of Orthanc, namely that it seems to have naturally erupted from the earth itself, with no sign or trace of human activity.

On the other hand, the works of Men seem to share some characteristics with those of the Elves. First, we could say that, as happened in the elven strongholds of Menegroth and Lórien, Minas Tirith was also built by adaptation to the natural environment. This great city of Men is said to have been built on and around the shape offered by Mount Mindolluin. This may give a hint of the connection that existing between the people of Gondor and their natural environment, since, instead of getting rid of a feature of the natural scenery to build their habitations,

these people took advantage of what the environment had to offer and adapted it to their needs. Second, it can be said that the dualism of beauty and usefulness in the product is also present in at least some of the works of Men, especially in their war gear. We notice how it features along the works of the three races of Men here mentioned: the treasures of the Númenóreans, whose decorative motifs are derived from shapes found in nature; the raiment of the Guards of the Citadel of Minas Tirith; and a couple of war instruments of the Rohirrim. Nonetheless, and despite their apparent connection to craftsmanship, Tolkien's claims about the presence of industry among the people of Gondor are quite confusing, above all because that characteristic does not appear in any literary piece, but only in the form of a comment written in a letter. Perhaps we could attribute this to the fact that, intrinsically, Men are just kind of a worse version of the Elves, and so it may be possible that Men have begun their descent to the fall, since the use of the Machine is an essential characteristic of this, according to Tolkien himself.

All in all, we could say that, among Men, we have seen fewer examples of artisanship than in the case of the Elves. However, we must remember that one of the major functions of the latter was to let out all their skill and create beautiful things, while Men, coming later, rapidly waned from their Númenor days of might and skill, and never came close enough to regain those creative gifts.

2.2.2.2.3. Craftsmanship among the Dwarves

The last race among which we will be able to find important traces of craftsmanship are the Dwarves. Indeed, their extraordinary skill and ability to create is, we could say, something like second nature to them, since they were devised and given life by the great artisan Vala, Aulë. Aulë may have transmitted a great deal of his knowledge and skill in different crafts. It is also worth noting that, as Shippey points out, Dwarves are historically related to “gold and mining” (*Road* 70), and, indeed, Tolkien's Dwarves also feature that association. In a sense, this ambition for mining is quite related to the idea of the “grudge and greed

[of] Dwarf-hearts” (*Letters* 262): a combination of characteristics that has resulted in their being perceived all-around Middle-earth as purely greedy and distrustful.

Throughout the three ages of the history of Middle-earth, there were several Dwarvish cities where their skill seemed to have been at its peak. These were the cities of Belegost, Nogrod, Moria, and Erebor. From the very beginning, we know that the dwarves of both Nogrod and Belegost showed unparalleled skill to work metal, stone, silver, gold, and especially copper (*Silmarillion* 100). It was perhaps the combination of skill and versatility that helped establish the relationship between them and the Elves. A very tight bond, albeit commercial, was established between the Dwarves of the above cities and King Thingol. As mentioned above, it was the Dwarves who delved a hill in the midst of the forest of Region and hewed the halls of this Elvish king right “in the living stone” (101), which received the name of Menegroth, or the Thousand Caves. Unlike Men, who never reached the craftsmanship standards of the Elves and their works, the Dwarves surpassed them from the very beginning, their skill “in the tempering of steel [...] and in the making of mail of linked rings” (103) being far from the Elves’ reach.

Let us now move on to consider the city originally named Khazad-dûm or Dwarrowdelf—the “[greatest] of all the mansions of the Dwarves” (*Silmarillion* 100)—and later known as Moria. We learn that inside of Moria, the ceiling was supported by means of several “mighty pillars hewn of stone” (*LotR* 315), which, in certain cases, were “carved like bowls of mighty trees whose boughs upheld the roof with a branching tracery of stone” (328). We have already mentioned the Dwarves’ love of mining, and Moria is a very good example of this. Indeed, it was in the mines of Moria that the Dwarvish miners found the material known as *mithril*, or Moria-silver. This was a material that this folk appreciated above anything else from the very moment of its discovery, since “[it] could be beaten like copper, and polished like glass; and [they] could make of it a metal, light and yet harder than tempered steel. Its beauty was like that of common silver, but the beauty of *mithril*

did not tarnish or grow dim” (317). However, this love of mining was one of the causes of the downfall of the kingdom of Moria, since it was due to their greed for mining ever deeper that they woke up one of the greatest servants of the Enemy of old and the reason for their ruin: the Balrog (317). This could be said to be one of the only occasions in which Dwarves’ activities lead to ruin and destruction. All in all, the artisan labour in Moria was constant, from its very early years to its darker days, as can be read in a poem that talks about the years of Moria under the rule of Durin. The exact lines run as follows:

There hammer on the anvil smote,
There chisel clove, and graver wrote;
There forged was blade, and bound was hilt;
The delver mined, the mason built.
There beryl, pearl, and opal pale,
And metal wrought like fishes’ mail,
Buckler and corslet, axe and sword,
And shining spears were laid in hoard. (316)

This stanza signals the range of different crafts practiced in the city of Moria, and the importance that they must have had for the well-being of its inhabitants.

From all the skill and might of hand gathered in the aforementioned cities through all the ages of Middle-earth, the Dwarves produced an object that surpassed all other creations up until that point: the Nauglamír, or Necklace of the Dwarves, whose peculiarity resided in two characteristics. On the one hand was its shape, since it was “a carcanet of gold, and set therein were gems uncounted from Valinor” (*Silmarillion* 130). On the other hand—and this was its most remarkable feature—its power allowed it to “[rest] lightly on its wearer as a strand of flax, and whatsoever neck it clasped it sat always with grace and loveliness” (130). It should not be forgotten, though, that this was the cause of great quarrels between elves and dwarves, as well as that which triggered the ruin of the Kingdom of Doriath.

It is often believed that this race, due to their industrious and mining character, seems bent on destroying their environment. However, this assumption is quite far from reality. Indeed, we could go even further and suggest, as Jessica Seymour does, that “the use of industrial practices is not typical of their race; they use neither big machinery nor mass-production when working their crafts” (41). What is more, it seems that the attitude of the Dwarves is closer to a “celebration of the natural world” (29), so much so that it is impossible for them to engage with it in destructive terms (42). How, then, according to Seymour, do Dwarves engage with their ecosystem? The answer seems to be the Dwarvish conception of “the natural world as a foundation; the stone and earth being the backbone upon which a great fortification can be built” (30). Hence, the way in which this race is going to express its connection with its surroundings will be practical (29). This attitude leaves the Dwarves in an intermediate spot, one that Seymour finds stands “between preservationism and exploitation” (45)³. In other words, we could say that the Dwarves belong between the Elves and the Orcs; somewhere between the crusade against the fading beauty of the former, and the destructive ambition and love of machinery of the latter. The last idea that Seymour offers is about the type of good that results from the manufacture of this race, when she comments that the “Dwarvish ideal of beauty celebrates practicality along with aesthetics” (46), which is an idea that, as we have seen, is very appropriate for our study.

Several ideas may be highlighted from this study of Dwarvish production. The first thing to point out is that this is yet another race that seems not to make use of the power granted by industry and machinery, but employ much more traditional ways of production. The existence of Dwarvish craftsmanship can be seen in such beautiful works as the Nauglamír, or more clearly in the verse quoted above, which consists of a detailed record of the different crafts they practice. Second, we could talk about the apparent relationship between the Dwarves and nature, which is

³ For a literary example of what Seymour is claiming, see *The Lord of the Rings* pp. 547-548.

twofold. On the one hand, we find those works that, like the pillars of Moria, are shaped after natural motifs such as trees or leaves, suggesting that also the Dwarves draw inspiration from their surrounding natural environment. On the other hand, we have the conservationist facet, which Seymour writes about. Her work shows quite clearly that this race rarely engages with nature in a destructive manner, although in the case of Moria the Dwarves' greed generated their own destruction and ruin, which should be born in mind. Instead, they seem to be more than aware of the importance of the natural world, aligning themselves with those who fight to preserve it. Linked to this conservationist facet, there is also the fact that, like the Elves and Men, Dwarves make use of the structures that nature offer to build their habitations, adapting the environment to their needs, rather than destroying it. The last thing to highlight is Seymour's well-argued position that Dwarves put forth all their artistic skill in order to create things at once beautiful and useful.

As a general remark, we have seen that Elves, Men, and Dwarves seem not to have implemented that heavy and destructive industry that we saw in the cases of evil characters like Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman. The only exception would be the supposed existence of industry in Gondor, which Tolkien suggests, but which we find no trace of. All in all, and in different measures, we could say that these three races play the parts of stewards that Tolkien wanted humans to play, containing the "roles of both lord and servant, as gardeners and managers, with the rest of nature having intrinsic value" (qtd. in Ertsgaard 213). The three aforementioned races fulfil this role, since for them nature is both a supplier and a force that can rarely be tamed and has to be respected due to its own beauty and relevance. Perhaps, in Tolkien's mythology, it is among Men that the relationship with nature is weaker or, at least, less talked about. However, we have clearly seen that for Elves and Dwarves, nature is a source of raw-materials and beauty that they feel the urge to preserve, as testified by Lórien and the Glittering Caves.

Finally, it is worth considering that evil sometimes walked among also these good races, which implies that the good is not always all that

good. Tolkien himself pointed out that his mythology was not a mere battle between good and evil, but that it went beyond that, since, for example, “the Elves [were] *not* wholly good or in the right” (*Letters* 197). Elements of evil within the good can be seen in the figures of Fëanor and Eöl, as well as in the Dwarves that kill King Thingol out of pure greed. Even the most honourable men of Númenor turned to evil when, aware of their limitless might and power, they started colonising Middle-earth, claiming dominion over these lands and peoples (*Silmarillion* 319). We may thus claim that, in Tolkien’s mythology, the good should never be taken for granted, since it can turn to evil at any time. This idea of Tolkien’s may well have been formed as a result of his war experiences, since “moral relativism” (Simonson 80) was a widespread idea in the after-war modernist spheres. Even though Tolkien did not seem to follow the modernists, it would not be strange to think that the horrors of war could result in his sharing this modernist idea, since “on the battlefield he had faced an enemy with all the hallmarks of humanity” (Garth 218). We could also link Tolkien’s position on good and evil to his anti-industrial stance. As mentioned above, Tolkien felt that the world in which he lived had gone astray and become corrupted. This may imply that nothing is to be trusted and taken for granted as completely good, since the presence of evil was pervasive and tempting humankind. Anyone who gave themselves up to temptation would inevitably fall, and thus turn to evil. Here, we need to remember, again, that very important feature of falling that Tolkien mentions: the Machine, which—used as a shortcut to gain power—is essential to the conversion from good to evil. This was precisely the case with evil characters such as Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, whose conversion to evil was marked by the adoption of machinery to gain power and dominion over others. Thus, in a mythological world in which the division between good and evil seems to be marked, among other things, between embracing either industry and machinery or craftsmanship, the most obvious sign of a craftsman turning towards evil would be the adoption of machine-power and industry. In the case of those characters belonging to good races that turn to evil—that is, Fëanor, Eöl, and the dwarves of Belegost—all of them craftsmen, we could say that they have but just begun their

conversion. This is a possible reason why they do not yet show tendencies towards the use of machinery. Indeed, unlike Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, not one of our evil craftsmen is said to have gained power, for which the use of the Machine is central.

3. The American Perspective: Ursula K. Le Guin

Considering William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien's crucial contributions to the fantasy genre—indeed we may say they lay its very foundations—it is little wonder that Ursula K. Le Guin also took advantage of their vast literary production. She shared with them an anxiety about progress. And like Tolkien and Morris, this preoccupation was given shape by her own life experiences, although for her this was coloured by what it meant to be a woman living in California in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle features the anxiety about what may happen to a world whose change is spurred on by an almost religious faith in progress. The nature of the change that Le Guin introduces through her literature differs from that of her British predecessors, and she does not portray the fierce opposition between good and evil that Morris and Tolkien present.

In order to delve deeper into the intricate web of topics that Le Guin introduces in her work, we will first take a close look at Le Guin's own life in the American West, which was a decisive factor in the shaping of her mind. Special attention will be paid to the geographical, social, and historical conditions that made California such a unique place at this time. After this, we will analyse her own experience in this peculiar social and geographical environment, which will enable us to highlight the manifold intellectual currents and interests that she would follow and acquire as a consequence of these experiences. All of this will finally be employed to conduct a thorough study of all the individual novels that compose Le Guin's fantasy saga.

3.1. Le Guin's Context

In their study on the figure of wizards in Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga, Laura Comoletti and Michael Drout remark how it is almost impossible for an author not to include certain “cultural constructs and ideological patterns” (129) in their works, even if they are of a kind they “would never espouse” (129). The idea that writers convey such

thoughts even unconsciously may certainly be understood as a consequence of tendencies and beliefs imposed on them by their social and historical contexts. Thus, it would be interesting for us to study the social, historical, and intellectual context in which Le Guin lived and wrote her Earthsea novels—a literary exercise expanding over the span of thirty years, from 1968 to 2001—in order to try to highlight the possible connections between her life and her work.

To this end, we will first look at Le Guin's home state of California, discussing its geographical and historical characteristics so as to later be able to relate Le Guin's Californian experiences to the shaping of her mind. This will provide us with a central footing upon which we may tackle those intellectual influences that made her the person she was, and which were included in her literary production, specifically Taoism, feminism, and an environmental awareness that, at least to some extent, resembled that of Transcendentalism. This study will also allow us to discuss Le Guin's social commitment. Finally, we will address an ever-present feature of the fantasy genre, namely its applicability to today's society and the degree to which it can be defined as a conscious genre, rather than mere escapism.

The extent to which the American West and California can be said to have played a crucial role in the shaping of Le Guin's mind can be clearly seen in the fact that, in an interview, she describes herself as follows: "I am a western writer. I was born in the West and lived most of my life here. I write as a westerner" ("I Am a Woman Writer, I Am a Western Writer" 85). This statement solidly establishes her writings as produced from a specific point of view, apart from all the ideals and beliefs that this may bring with it. In another interview, Le Guin goes yet further, claiming that throughout her life "California has influenced me totally and utterly!" ("Ursula Le Guin" 5). Now that her inscription in this geographical and social environment has been made manifest and clear, we may be inclined to believe that this was an author who included in her literature the responses and feelings caused by the time and place where she had been allotted to live. This is what

she suggested when she stated that “to make a new world you’ve got to start with an old one” (5). This statement hints at the idea that a writer needs some kind of recognisable background to relate to; some solid ground provided by experience, and reflection upon which to build their newly devised worlds and stories.

In the following lines we will try to disclose the geographical and social factors that make California a unique place in the United States, beginning with the former. Geographically located in the far west of the country, California includes untameable wilderness, hostile and barren landscapes, and huge distances (Simonson & Montero-Gilete 29). Apart from this, it is also a place of contrasts. According to Andrew Rolle,

it offers man virtually every physical, climatic, geologic, and vegetational combination: the wettest weather and the driest; poor sandy soil in the south-eastern desert regions and rich loam in the great Central Valley; some of the hottest recorded temperatures on earth and also the coldest; the highest mountain in the United States outside Alaska [...] and the lowest point in the country. (4)

Regarding its climate, California offers similar contrast and diversity (Rawls & Bean 7), since “it is more accurate to speak of California’s ‘climates’ than to refer to one single climate” (Rolle 7). Nevertheless, we should not mistake diversity and contrast for tranquillity, but should bear in mind that, due to its location, “California falls into the highest seismic risk category in the nation: the frequency of earthquakes in the state is 10 times higher than for the world as a whole” (Rawls & Bean 3). This feature, together with the existence of places such like the so-called Death Valley (6), makes us think of California as a place that is equally dangerous and extreme.

Located in what used to be known as the Wild West, we could argue that California has also its own share of wilderness. This land’s

wild characteristics also bring its own benefits or positive aspects, as Tonia Payne suggests: “the concept of ‘wild’ is not without significant negative as well as positive connotations” (12). This duality is reflected in the sublimity of this environment (34), which Le Guin defines as by no means “superficial” (“Review of *Benediction*” 230), largely owing to its “impassively dangerous and beautiful landscape” (“Review of *Ledoyt*” 225). The permanent contact with such landscapes has no doubt shaped the minds of the westerners in a very specific manner, even contributing to founding a national character (Payne 10). The westerner is characterised as seizing every opportunity to learn how to engage with nature in a fierce but, at the same time, sensitive manner in order to overcome its most destructive dimension, while also using this knowledge to build a better society (Simonson & Montero-Gilete 33). The strong attachment to the land of one’s birth and breeding is also present in Le Guin, who regarded the northern Californian Napa Valley as “the central landscape in my life” (“Coming Back from the Silence” 101). In fact, such was the influence of this environment on this writer, that in an interview given in 2010, she acknowledged how “after [she had] written some of the [Earthsea] books, [she] discovered pieces of Earthsea on Earth. One of them [was] Trinidad Bay, on the northern California coast” (“Author Ursula K. Le Guin Shares Thoughts on Book”, par. 5). A final remark regarding California’s natural environment concerns the issue of pollution, which certainly conditioned the public life of its inhabitants from the second half of the twentieth century on. A central concern has been the high levels of ‘smog’ that appeared mainly after World War II in big cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles (Rolle 627). The smog, becoming “a menace to health and a source of costly damage to several crops” (Rawls & Bean 474), led politicians to work out laws to restrict the harmful emissions of specific industries (Rolle 627).

Socially speaking, one of the factors to bear in mind is California’s huge concentration of people. Nowadays it holds the ‘honour’ of being the most populated area in the United States, with almost 40 million people in 2019 (census.gov). Among this huge

number of inhabitants there are, of course, representatives of the diverse ethnic groups that have been making California their home for the last couple of centuries. For instance, in the 1960s, around “8 per cent of California’s people were non-white” (Rolle 678), while during the last decades of the last century, this number saw a considerable increase. According to Rawls and Bean:

more than half the state’s population growth in the 1980s and 1990s was from foreign immigration, primarily from Asia and Latin America. By 1995 one out of four Californians was foreign-born. Much of the remaining growth was due to the high birthrate among those who had recently arrived. Ethnic minorities made up only one-third of the state’s population in 1980, but ten years later they constituted 43 percent. (525)

This affluence of people has had a great impact on California’s history, significantly contributing to the state’s development thanks to the workforce that, since the nineteenth century, has arrived from places like China, Japan, and Europe (Rolle 382). However, regardless of their contribution, the truth is that not every migrant group has been equally well received; even though some have managed to settle down with relative ease, others have found more difficulty (382). Andrew Rolle mentions that the migrants that came from Europe found it easier to get rid of their cultural habits, which, in turn, granted them better chances of achieving a relatively successful life (394). Here, Rolle especially points to the experience of European immigrants in “rural environments” (394), whose “folkways and customs [...] often merged easily with those of their neighbors” (394), apparently propelled by the fact that many of them arrived in the new country in small numbers (394). Opposite to these, we find the Chinese and Japanese, two groups that have been targets of much racial hatred and government pressure. Examples of things that have made integration difficult for them include laws like the “Fifteen Passenger Bill”, which barred Chinese migration during the 1880s (387-388); the segregation of oriental children in Californian schools during the 1900s (390), or

the confinement of Japanese-origin citizens to “internment centers” during WWII (588). The second half of the nineteenth century also saw a continuation of the suffering of Native Americans, in the form of oppression and violence both on behalf of the government and the white settlers. They were not only subjected to the aggression of European colonisers who “instead of accommodating themselves to Indian prerogatives, demanded that the Indian change his way of life to suit them” (399), but this was also the time of the so-called Indian Wars (400), expanding roughly between 1850 and 1880. These, added to other evils brought by Europeans, such as alcohol and diseases (400), resulted in an alarming decline in population, down to 15,500 by the beginning of the twentieth century (408).

By the time Le Guin was entering her thirties, in the 1960s, ethnic trouble was still a latent issue in Californian society, and even though she was herself living in Oregon at this stage, we might think that she was well aware of what was happening in her native state. During this time, the Mexican and African-American struggle for integration entered the public sphere. Regarding the former, many entered California after WWII to work on farms (Rolle 649), and their living and working conditions have been likened to those of the “poorest nineteenth century squatter” (650). Rolle comments that, by the beginning of the 60s, their situation was still firmly set in the margins (673)—as testified by, e.g. school segregation (674). As for African-Americans, the widespread feeling was that they were still victims of a system that put them down by means of “prejudice, segregation, and social deprivation” (676), regardless of their ongoing fight for basic rights.

As a result of this ongoing social injustice and racial tension, people started to rise up and fight for what they thought was right. In this sense, we could say that, between the 1950s and the 1980s, California was a place for vindication. During this time, voices were raised, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area and the University of

California, Berkeley⁴ campus, for the rights of African-Americans and against the Vietnam War (Rolle 679). Le Guin herself took part in demonstrations against the war, which she saw as “a channel of action and expression for my ethical and political opinions” (“Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*” 56). Here, we should bear in mind that this war had not just colonial, but ecological implications, contributing to the destruction of the Vietnamese ecosystem in the long term (Westing 365). Her science fiction novel *The Word for World is Forest* (“Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*” 56) was a result of the contempt she felt for the American intervention in Vietnam. It was also around this time that the Black Panthers Party was officially formed, in response to an ever-growing discontent within the African-American community about the lack of improvement in their situation (Rolle 676). And it was now that minority groups such as homosexuals (401) and hippies (Rolle 681) began to gain national recognition.

Last but not least, 1960s California saw a widespread movement fighting for women’s rights. There appeared to be, in California, an already-established willingness to work towards equality between the genders, being “one of the early states to grant women the vote” (Rawls & Bean 400) already in 1911. Nevertheless, parity was still far from achieved, which could be a reason for the expansion of feminism during the twentieth century, especially from the 60s onwards (Orleck 592). The Californian feminist struggle resulted in an increase in the number of women “elected to public office” (Rawls & Bean 401) in the 70s and 80s, while it was also in this state that “the assembly approved the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] less than a month after Congress had officially proposed it” (403).

As we have seen, California is one of the most diverse states in the USA, regarding both its society and geography. This diversity is

4 For a detailed account of the diverse student movements and revolts that took place in Berkeley during the 1950s and 1960s, see Rawls and Bean (413-17).

usually based on the interaction of opposites. While being home to some of the most radically differing climates and landscapes, it is also here that we find coexistence of diverse ethnic groups that have very little in common, and whose ethnicity frequently determines their social position. Rolle argues that this is what makes up “California’s continuing lack of cohesion” (683), which is also the force that sustains the state (683).

After this brief introduction to California, we can begin to analyse the life that Le Guin led in this time and place. As pointed out above, studying her response to certain characteristics and trends of her society will allow us to track down several important aspects of her thinking and writing, namely her awareness of minorities and displaced social groups; her strong feminist beliefs; the close attachment she felt to the natural world, and the ever-helpful teachings of Taoism. In the end, all these influences seem to have helped Le Guin construct a critique of a society bent on production and profit by raising her voice in favour of both the natural world, which this society considers nothing but a stock of resources, and the social groups that, although contributing to the profits of a capitalist system, do not share in its wealth. As for Taoism, we will see how it speaks against continuous expansion—a motto of progress and capitalism—while advocating an attitude of restriction and moderation.

Alfred and Theodora Kroeber, Ursula Le Guin’s parents, were anthropologists. Alfred was an important voice for Native American Californian tribes, which must have contributed to Le Guin’s awareness of people on the fringes of society. According to Elizabeth Cummins, Le Guin’s parents always strove to “[create] homes for their four children which resonated with ideas of cultural variety” (1). Essential contributors to this diversity were the many visitors who lodged in either of the Kroeber households, be it at their home in Berkeley or in the summer house the family kept in Napa Valley. Among these, we might mention Juan Dolores, a Papago “Indian”, and the Yurok Robert Spott, both of whom would become extremely

close with the Kroeber family, to the point that they were even considered relatives (“Indian Uncles” 10-19); or the scores of “anthropologists [...], graduate students, [and other] Native Americans—speaking German, English, or one of several Indian languages” (Cummins 2).

Le Guin’s father being an anthropologist was key to this influx of people of diverse origin. She recollected that, growing up in contact with anthropology led her to “look more from the point of view of the conquered” (“The Magician”, par. 12), while she also became “interested in other cultures” (“Interview” 54) since she was not “brought up ethnocentric, [...] not [...] culture-bound” (54). Even though anthropology clearly made Le Guin realise that there were other peoples, who lived in ways that were absolutely different from her own, making her aware of and interested in the cultural diversity of the world, she was also aware of the potentially harmful consequences of this science being used in the wrong way. In this sense, she stated that a white individual

writing about a group of people he doesn’t belong to runs two risks. One is of misunderstanding, misrepresentation—getting it wrong. The other is of exploiting, expropriation—*doing* wrong. Writers of a dominant group who assume the right to speak for members of a less powerful one take these risks in complacent ignorance of their existence. Such ignorance, however good the intentions, dooms the result. (“Getting It Right” 143)

Additionally, Le Guin denounced the presence of these ills in the works recording the lives of Native Americans, remarking how “guilt is there in the whole history of Indian-White relations, unavoidable” (“Getting It Right” 144).

The diversity of the population of the city of Berkeley increased during the 1930s and 1940s as refugees, most of them

scholars, arrived from Europe to escape Nazism. Le Guin felt that Berkeley was “an amazing place” (“Ursula Le Guin: She Got There First”, par. 21) during this time. Nonetheless, the openness with which some were received seemed to be nothing but the bright side of a coin that, on the reverse, hid the social injustices that were still lurking in California society. Le Guin herself was aware of the poor and improper treatment that some California citizens received on behalf of the administration, such as the “black kids” (*TGAN and TGOW* 65) arriving “into Berkeley from the South and southern Midwest” (65), facing school segregation.

Le Guin’s exposure to other cultures and her experiences in a Berkeley defined by diversity shaped her mind in such a way as to make her extremely aware of those peoples whom we could catalogue as Other (Payne 149): those who exist at the fringes of society, pushed out to the margins. Consequently, although the society of her time turned a blind eye to such issues, she was of the strong conviction that “the White West [was] not the center” (“A Non-Euclidean View of California” 97), that is, that the prominent position that Western, white civilisation held in the world was one achieved by means of power, and that, in opposition to this, “nobody really [had] the word but everybody’s word [was] worth listening to” (“Ursula Le Guin” 6). This was the mindset that made her stand next to and in favour of those who were marginalised by the system, those “go-betweens, [...] liminal figures, [who are] [...] torn apart” (“The Beast in the Book” 28). For instance, an ethnic group for whom Le Guin always raised her voice were “the many indigenous peoples of Earth who [have] been eradicated or assimilated until their unique cultural ways [are] lost” (Payne 181). One of the forces that she suggested was at work “when a big power wants to deprive a smaller one of its national identity, of its self-consciousness” (“Non-Euclidean View” 82) is the so-called “method of organized forgetting” (Kundera, qtd. in 82). As examples of this behaviour, Le Guin commented on what happened with the Spanish conquest of America and the Roman conquest of Britannia. In both cases, a history was being written, always by the

victorious party, in which the native population would fade away, the new narrative omitting original place names and “what the heathen knows” (83). The conquest of America and the subsequent race for the North American West, although propelled by the Spanish, was an activity in which almost the whole of Western civilisation took part. With this in mind, Le Guin did not hold back when acknowledging the part that her own culture of origin played in the wiping out of native cultures and populations in the American West. In her poem “Places Names”, she recounts a journey from Oregon and eastwards, and illustrates the white man’s dominion as “the thin, sick skin we laid / on this land, / the white skin” (64).

As a consequence of her critical point of view and strong beliefs, Le Guin clearly saw what the greatest problem of American society was, namely that “instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance” (“Is Gender Necessary? Redux” 16). This might be a reason why she believed that slavery was still going strong in the United States, since “the mind of the master and the mind of the slave still [thought] a good many of the thoughts of America” (“A War Without End” 211). As a solution for a society she perceived as based on “[dualisms] of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used” (“Gender Necessary?” 16), she advocated “a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity” (16).

Tonia Payne writes that, as a witness to such a divided society as the North American, Le Guin’s goal was the same one that Henry Thoreau had already striven for a century earlier. She argues that they both fought for a new scenario, where it would be possible “to bring a Native American (and native American) sensibility to European-based American culture, hoping to draw from the strength of Native cultures to formulate a new approach to American life” (52). It is, in a way, an attempt to bring the displaced and marginalised Other to the centre of society, to integrate their values into mainstream culture, from which both parties would surely benefit. Le Guin once described the West as

“the farthest stretch of the extraordinary American experiment in how to be human” (“A Very Good American Novel” 119), and, from what we have been able to see, in her equation minorities must play the same role as majorities. This equation, with which she tried to resolve the above-mentioned experiment, was, of course, a literary one. Consequently, throughout most of her production, she was very cautious about “giving voice to others and letting them speak for themselves” (Payne 58) by “placing the marginalized human (or nonhuman) as the central character” (62). In her own words, she wanted her readers to have “the experience of the ‘other’” (“Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Art of Fiction*”, par. 12) through her literature, “exploring the borderlands” (“On the Frontier” 30), and producing works that aim to be “useful stuff, for those who like to see through eyes other than [their] own” (“Learning to Write Science Fiction from Virginia Woolf” 96).

Concerning feminism, Ursula Le Guin claimed to have thought herself a feminist throughout her life, although she admitted to have been “a more or less unconscious one until 1974” (“Interview” 49). For instance, during the 1960s, when she began writing her *Earthsea* novels, she says, “I considered myself a feminist, I didn’t see how you could be a thinking woman and not be a feminist” (“Gender Necessary?” 7). At this point in her life, it seems as if her feminist awareness was just propelled by her being a woman and having read feminist writers like Virginia Woolf and Emmeline Pankhurst (8). The idea that she still needed some thought and reflection on what it really meant to be a feminist woman can be perceived in the fact that, in the early stages of her career as a science fiction writer, it did not strike her how it was that the genre in which she was writing her first works spoke almost exclusively of men (“An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin about the Hidden Sky”, par. 2). Nevertheless, all this was about to change. It was during this decade, already “a grown woman with kids” (“She Got There First”, par. 30) that she eagerly began reading the feminist theory that was becoming more and more available (“Entretien” 124-125), making her reflect on “what kind of feminist I

could be and why I wanted to be a feminist” (“She Got There First”, par. 30). This raised awareness made her want to defy the masculine conventions of science fiction, “learning how to write as a woman and as a human being of complex and only of partly definable gender” (“Hobo #16: Ursula K. Le Guin”, par. 10). Her personal evolution as a conscious feminist woman would go on through the following decades in which she would make use of her voice as a woman, as when, in the 80s, she “finally learned how to say that [...] I am a woman writer, not an imitation man” (“I Am a Woman Writer” 85). From this moment on, she would start to vindicate women’s roles and place in society, a fight that would go on for her whole life.

Like many others, Le Guin wanted to make use of feminism with the primary objective to challenge an establishment that she knew to be integrally male (“Introducing Myself” 4). Her conviction was that male domination had been achieved and maintained by means of language, more specifically, one she called the “father tongue” (“Bryn Mawr Commencement Address” 149). Apparently, its roots could be tracked down to the very first instances of human speech and culture, when, in a hunter society, the predominant tale would be the one “the mammoth hunters told about bashing, thrusting, raping, killing, about the Hero. The wonderful, poisonous story of Botulism. The killer story” (“The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” 168). As human society evolved and developed into a more complex one, so did its language, although the male perspective was still held onto. For instance, Le Guin was very critical of the use of generic pronouns in the English language, which precisely reflect this issue of masculine authority. Even though she made use of them herself and acknowledged this to be a poor decision on her behalf, she claimed that she deeply

[disliked] [...] the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which [...] exclude women from discourse; and which was an invention of male grammarians, for until the sixteenth century the English generic singular pronoun was

they/them/their [...]. It should be restored to the written language, and let the pedants and pundits squeak and gibber in the streets. (“Gender Necessary?” 15)

This is the key in Le Guin’s feminist discourse on language, namely that, as arbitrarily regulated by men as language is, its most detestable, while also subtle, consequence is that it relegates women to a secondary role, a mere “element of [men’s] experience” (“Bryn Mawr” 155). In her own words: “Using the father tongue, I can speak of the mother tongue only, inevitably, to distance it—to exclude it. It is the other, inferior. It is primitive: inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, trivial, banal. It’s repetitive, the same over and over, like the work called women’s work; earthbound, housebound” (149).

In line with her rejection of the aforementioned male-dominated language, Le Guin equally criticised a specific conduct that she saw in some of her peer feminist women, namely the exclusivity that some women wanted to apply to feminism. Le Guin wrote that some of them “declare that it is ‘virtually impossible for a heterosexual woman to be a feminist’, as if heterosexuality were heterosexism; and that social marginality; such as that of lesbian, childless, Black, or Native American women, ‘appears to be necessary’ to form the feminist” (“The Fisherwoman’s Daughter” 234), consequently making her feel “excluded [and] disappeared” (234). This is exactly the effect that she claimed language to have on women, precisely that their voices are silenced and they are put in the margins, deprived of a central and powerful position. Thus, she would feel it to be her duty to face such a tendency with “my own experience, which [was] that feminism [had] been a life-saving *necessity* to women trapped in the wife/mother ‘role’” (235).

In order to fix a society were “the norm is male” (“Disappearing Grandmothers” 90), Le Guin suggested that a completely new point of view was necessary: that of women who were “more likely to be subversive” (“What Women Know” 83). The

new point of view would stand on top of two pillars: a new language (instead of the father tongue) and a much-needed feminist morality. Regarding the former, Le Guin denounced how “schools and colleges, institutions of the patriarchy, generally teach us to listen to people in power, men or women speaking the father tongue; and so they teach us not to listen to the mother tongue, to what the powerless say, poor men, women, children: not to hear that as a valid discourse” (“Bryn Mawr” 151). However, Le Guin perceived how this masculine story was faltering, as if it were about to collapse, for which she proposed that, even though the father tongue was deeply rooted in society, “we’d better start telling another one” (“Carrier Bag” 168) “the life story” (168), written in the mother tongue, with its own “nature, subject [and] words” (168). As for the new morality, this was utterly necessary to the point that “children’s survival” (“Moral and Ethical Implications of Family Planning” 19) was at stake, since the ethics of our own society has been devised and spread by men and has run its course (19). In contrast, the morality that Le Guin urged us—men and women alike—to embrace was based on the decisions and actions of each individual. For this, it would be pivotal to “get feminine and human morality out from under the yoke of a dead ethic” (20), in order to “begin to get somewhere on the road that leads to survival” (20).

If any society were to embrace Le Guin’s proposals, their reward would be “an end to obedience [and] a beginning of freedom” (“About Feet” 162). Armed with a mother tongue and a feminine morality, that society would be able to “[go] on doing things [their] own way [...]. Not *for* men and the male power hierarchy [...]. Not *against* men, either—that’s still playing by their rules” (“A Left-Handed Commencement Address” 116). That way, men and women would together get rid of the dichotomies imposed on them by a society and a public mind ruled by the father tongue, and by no means “live [their lives] on [Machoman’s] terms” (116). This would lead the way to, for instance, a new kind of solidarity to develop in accordance with feminine values, originating “from the wish and need of mutual

aid, and, often, the search for freedom from oppression” (“A Band of Brothers, a Stream of Sisters” 102), “instead of rising from the rigorous control of aggression in the pursuit of power” (102) as a man-driven one would. The ultimate and prominent goal of Le Guin’s personal take on feminism would be nothing short of “men and women [being] completely and genuinely equal in their social roles, equal legally and economically, equal in freedom, in responsibility, and in self-esteem” (“Gender Necessary?” 16). This, Le Guin held, could only be achieved by a sense of solidarity and cooperation between both sexes (“A Band of Brothers” 104).

These ideas about gender were also entwined in her literary production, which showcases the same evolution that its author went through in her quest to become a fully aware feminist, as studies by critics such as Darko Suvin, Laura Comoletti, and Michael Drout show. The latter two suggest that being aware of the “patriarchal secondary world” (130) devised in the first three books of the *Earthsea* saga, from the 80s onward Le Guin “made a particularly courageous feminist intervention” (130), in accordance with what her feelings and ideals were like at that moment (Suvin 491). A very clear example of her activist feminism in the *Earthsea* books is the way in which she portrays her female characters, particularly in the last two books of the saga. Hence, Le Guin sought to shun the classical patriarchal assumption that constrict women to the role of “baby-makers” (Payne 184), while emphasising the idea of “[women] [...] as not one simple thing [...] but a multiple, complex process of being, with various responsibilities” (“Fisherwoman’s” 231). This multifaceted nature of women will be addressed below, in the form of the character of Tenar, treated in a section on colonialism’s impact on the individual’s identity. According to Comoletti and Drout, Le Guin’s own development, palpable in her literature, hints at a desire to improve the world we live in by means of a “creative willingness to refuse to deny, toss away, or curse one’s cultural inheritance [...] but [at the same time] to intervene and improve on it in the hope that the future can be bettered without ignoring or eliminating the past” (134).

Regarding Le Guin's employment of her feminist principles, we could say that they constitute an important part of her critique of progress. What this author is trying to do is attack a capitalist system established by men for men by means of a presupposed male superiority, leaving a great section of the population aside—mostly women, but also other, marginalised, men. This is clearly conveyed in concepts such as 'mother tongue' and 'feminine morality', which would ideally serve to challenge that fixed and immutable system that has been perpetuated by men for several centuries.

So far, we have focused on Le Guin's response to California society, and we ought now to move on to the influence that the landscape of the West might have had on her. It was pointed out above how the connection between the western inhabitants and their remarkable natural environment is crucial to the Western sense of identity. This was also the case for Le Guin, who felt a deep connection with the Californian environment, regretting, at the same time, any damage that this ecosystem may suffer as a consequence of human activities.

Hence, throughout her life, Le Guin remained a fierce critic of humanity's ways, to the point of admitting to having no idea how people could keep on living in the world in the way they did ("Review of *Suffer the Little Children*" 250). In her writings and in interviews, she made it extremely clear which were the human factors that she believed had led to the destruction of the environment. She took the perhaps strongest contributing force to be the Western economic system, namely capitalism, taking the other destructive factors to be conditioned and propelled by it. In a world that Le Guin admitted was overpopulated, "there [being] too many of [us] for [our] own good" ("Pard and the Time Machine" 95), the dominance of a consumer-driven profit-oriented economic system inevitably leads to a depletion of our natural resources, since it is uninteresting to this system how it

may affect the environment in which we live. Le Guin's words are straightforward on this matter:

Capitalist growth [...] has been growth in the wrong sense. Not only endless but uncontrolled—random. Growth as in tumor. Growth as in cancer. Our economy [...] is sick. As a result of uncontrolled economic (and population) growth, our ecology is sick, and getting sicker every day. We have disturbed the homeostasis of the earth, the ocean, and the atmosphere—not fatally to life on the planet: the bacteria will survive the corporation. But perhaps fatally to ourselves. (“Clinging Desperately to a Metaphor” 113)

Historically, progress is one of the pillars upon which capitalism rests. Regarding this, Le Guin stated that although she did not consider herself a person opposed to it as such (“Interview” 65), she strongly disliked the pernicious “myth of progress, the idea that we *must* progress and that progress is continual economic growth and continual technological complication” (65). It is this idea of progress for the sake of progress, the long-held blind belief in its inherent benefits, that has led “our world society [to have] no center, only increasingly destructive growth, fractal growth” (“An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin” [*Wave Composition*], par. 18).

It would not be controversial to say that our vast advances in technology and science mark two of the most significant fields of human progress. In the case of the former, Le Guin was realistic enough to acknowledge how important technology has been—and remains—for each and every culture that has ever existed on earth (“Dialogue with Ursula Le Guin” 17), but she also displayed icy contempt regarding the way in which it nowadays seems to control our lives, causing “everything [to] become a need and then an obligation and then a mess” (“Chronicles of Earthsea”, par. 47). This untrustworthy relationship between humanity and our technological creations owes, according to Le Guin, to a frequent misuse, since

instead of putting it to the use of ends “that could and should be useful and productive—fuel sources, agriculture, genetic engineering, even medicine” (“Driven by a Different Chauffeur”, par. 27), we have amused ourselves with developing “increasingly exploitative and destructive technologies” (par. 27). In addition, she was rather pessimistic regarding the future of a society that believed “that our exploitive, fast-growing technology is the only possible reality” (“Coming Back from the Silence” 102). This was mainly due to her strong distrust in any advances that technology could make towards

[bringing] us any closer to being a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources [...]; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door. (“Non-Euclidean View” 96)

Le Guin’s take on science was, likewise, a mixture of praise and denunciation. On the one hand, she stated that “science is one of the best things we do” (“Getting Away with Murder”, par. 43), whenever this implied “a dialogic communication with the cosmos” (Payne 358), some sort of conversation between equals that displayed an intense awareness of ethics (359). On the other hand, if the scientific drive is that of possessing the universe (358), trouble may ensue. Le Guin described this change in scientific orientation—from the positive to the negative—in terms of a modification of its guiding question: instead of beginning its formulations with a *how*, which “discovers Relativity” (qtd. in Payne 358), it would formulate them with a *why*, which “[invents] the atomic bomb” (qtd. in 358). It seems that Le Guin is—again—emphasising the idea that the major difference between these types of science is that of ethics, of bearing in mind the consequences that our knowledge of the principles of the universe can bring along. She conveys this potentially destructive aspect of science in an exquisite metaphor, writing that “scientists do cast violets into crucibles and discover the principles of their color and odor”

(“Reciprocity of Prose and Poetry” 111), as if gaining detailed knowledge of the functions of something would exhaust and deprive it of its truest essence, even causing its destruction. Equally risky is another attitude towards science, which can be easily found nowadays, namely the self-importance that some of its sympathisers sometimes showcase. In Le Guin’s own words: “When [...] the scientific discourse announces itself as the voice of reason, it is playing God, and should be spanked and stood in the corner” (“Bryn Mawr” 148). It is interesting to see how the last two features mentioned about inappropriate uses of knowledge are related to transgression of limits. This issue is also very present in Le Guin’s literary work, where we find that it is important that limitations are set, and that the consequences of transgressing them can be terrible. We will highlight this further below.

The bitter but inevitable consequence of the combination of all the factors mentioned above was perfectly clear for Le Guin: humanity’s severe alienation from nature. She traced the origin of this state back to the eighteenth century, when “we’d invented ‘Nature’.

Nature comprises all the other species and all the places where they live and we don’t. Idealised or demonised, Nature is humanity’s Other. We stand outside it and above it” (“Cheek by Jowl” 341). It was, then, by this time that the line between humans and their animal counterparts began to be drawn, when they stopped being “part of [people’s] life, absolutely essential to [their] well-being” (*Conversations on Writing with David Naimon* 111). Consequently, Le Guin suggested that the fact that such a situation has been held onto for the last two centuries has led to us facing “a paradox we need urgently to consider—the unbridgeable gap and the unbreakable bond between human and animal, our impossible alienation from our world” (“Review of *The High Mountains of Portugal*” 253). This reminds us that, although frequently despised and defiled, nature is as much an essential part of us as we are of it, the cooperation and communication of both parties being essential for the existence of each. In light of this, Le Guin commented that animal tales are pivotal

for this issue of the relationship and interdependence between humans and nature, as “the yearning for a Lost Wilderness which runs through so many [of these] tales is a lament for the endless landscapes and creatures and species that we have wasted and destroyed” (“The Beast” 33). One virtue of these tales is that they remind us that another relationship with animals, and ultimately the universe, is possible and desirable, which, if accomplished, would re-establish humanity to a position of being again “a friend and a child of the world, connected to it, nourished by it, belonging to it” (28).

We can only imagine how miserable a person so attached to nature as Le Guin felt when witnessing the ever-increasing distance between the ecosystem and humanity, in addition to the lack of respect the latter showed the former. For Le Guin, the thought of such a separation was unimaginable, since her conception of the universe—following, in a way, the Indians—was that of an “order of things” (“Non-Euclidean View” 82): a unique system to which all living and non-living elements contributed to their own degree. According to Elizabeth Cummins, this same idea of connection is present in Le Guin’s literature in the form of an “interdependency among all existing things” (11), where any action that is carried out, even in the form of speech, can have its consequences in the equilibrium of the cosmos (11). It is also, perhaps, from this notion that she could never believe the idea of nature as an enemy to overcome, which is a widespread belief in our Western civilisation (“Ursula Le Guin” 4). Instead, she considered this to have been devised by the above-mentioned male element pervading our language, and, consequently, our psyche and culture. Writing about Shackleton’s incursion into the Antarctic continent and the explorer’s descriptions of his battles against the elements, she rejected the belief “that Nature is either an enemy, or a woman, to humanity. Nobody has ever thought so but Man; and the thought is, to one not Man, no longer acceptable even as a poetic metaphor” (“Heroes” 173).

All the above factors made Le Guin feel rather pessimistic about humanity's future on earth, writing that, now that we have destroyed our habitat "and are more deeply sold out than ever to profiteering industrialism with its future horizon of a few months, any hope I have that coming generations may have ease and peace in life has become very tenuous" ("In Your Spare Time" 4). In a similarly gloomy mood, she admitted that some hope could still be entertained, but only if we were to reduce our population growth, for which she could only propose three solutions and was not sure which was best. These were "strict family planning to reach zero population growth and then a decline until we get back into ecological balance, or plague and/or famine, or World War III" ("Moral and Ethical Implications" 18). Nevertheless, before having to resort to such extreme measures, it seems that Le Guin would be content enough if her compatriots became aware "of the familial connection between humans and the natural cosmos" (Payne 311). Again, we have the idea of the universe and its elements as one indivisible unit. In addition, in light of our dire situation as a result of blindly "following hi-tech industrial growth-capitalism to the bitter end" ("Hobo#16", par. 11), she repeatedly and strongly urged us to pay heed to "our need, our desperate need as human beings, to begin to live a different life" ("Review of *Flight Behavior*" 242).

The study of environmentalist ideas in Le Guin compels us to focus on one of the most influential environmentally-oriented intellectual movements in the United States of America: Transcendentalism. Although it is difficult to trace Transcendentalism's historical expansion from its beginnings in the East of the US to the West, and to what extent it managed to enter the psyche of western Americans, Lawrence Buell mentions how, "although Transcendentalism's geographical center was the regional metropolis of Boston, its remote tentacles extended throughout the New England diaspora, [...] and across the Appalachians to the 'old northwest', with Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis serving as outposts for different lengths of time" (Introduction to *The American*

Transcendentalists xii). In light of this, we could presume that it would finally arrive in Le Guin's home state of California on its quest to become "the first intellectual movement [...] to achieve a lasting impact on American thought and writing" (xi). Indeed, its influence also reached Le Guin, who acknowledged that, regardless of her lack of deep expertise on Thoreau's work, his ideas pervade much of her production ("Ursula Le Guin" 4). Warren Rochelle is one of the scholars who has established links between Le Guin's literary work and the ideals put forth by members of this movement—Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, among others—(*Communities of the Heart* xi), cataloguing her as their "spiritual descendant" (139). Following the same line of thought, Tonia Payne suggests that Le Guin makes manifest her Transcendentalist influence in how she "can be seen as continuing the project of the American Renaissance" (188)—a period when Transcendentalism played a prominent role—taking up their "project of re-examining the human relationship with and in nature" (189). For this reason, we need to take a closer look at the central tenets of this group of thinkers and writers.

Briefly explained, Transcendentalism was a movement that emphasised the pivotal position that nature holds in relation to human development as such. This is why, according to Lawrence Buell, its writers and thinkers made "nature a major topic" (Introduction to "Why Concord?" 323) in their works. One of its main aims was to show how a specific set of beliefs and values had the power to place the individual in an extremely close relationship with nature, and enable them to draw the benefits that arise from such an intercourse. It may be this centrality of nature in Transcendental thought that attracted Le Guin, and which she uses in her denunciation of progress and a society that looks at the ecosystem as a mere resource for increasing profit. Le Guin would urge her contemporaries to cast aside shallow relationships to the natural world in favour of a tighter bond from which both sides would benefit. Another point of contact between Le Guin and Transcendentalism is the latter's vocal

denunciation of social injustice regarding, e.g., the “Indian” matter, and labour relationships.

The Transcendentalists regarded nature as something that is more elevated than humanity, without boundaries, “limitless [and] divine” (Fuller 65). Indeed, this stance also provides the source for the name they gave their movement. In his 1842 essay “The Transcendentalist”, Emerson wrote that “Nature is transcendental, exists primarily, necessarily, ever works and advances, yet takes no thought for the morrow” (103). The idea of nature as something that is constantly moving refers to another Transcendentalist assumption, namely that of the cosmos, or the universe, functioning as one single unit or system, where each and every one of its elements form an interdependent whole. This notion can be found in the works of such prominent Transcendentalists as Emerson, Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. Norberg describes how it is Fuller’s “incessant, [...] indefatigable motion” (4), and Emerson’s “rule of one art, or a law of one organization, [that] holds true throughout nature [...], [betraying] its source in Universal Spirit” (“Nature” [Norberg] 31). This aspect can similarly be perceived in the following words by Thoreau, beautifully wrought: “The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted” (*Walden* 79).

For the Transcendentalists, humanity is thrust into this great force and thus becomes part of it; part of nature. As Thoreau muses, “Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I partly not leaves and vegetable mould myself?” (*Walden* 129). Being part of this unfathomable entity, our relationship to nature should never be based on aggression or indifference. Instead, it should be one whose main values are those of veneration and cooperation, almost one of stewardship. In light of this, and even though, according to Emerson, nature is to be used by humanity because “it offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful” (“Nature” [Norberg] 29), we should bear in mind that its elevated position makes it impossible for us to control it, since its forces are

beyond our grasp (*Walden* 145). At the same time, Thoreau remarked how inconceivable it would be to think of ourselves as being in a position to claim ownership of the environment, our real and main task towards it being that of relishing our contact with it (195).

The Transcendentalists perceived society as having strayed from the ideal relationship between man and nature. In this sense, they denounced the existence of some sort of clash between the two, which deterred humans from obtaining metaphysical pleasure from intercourse with their environment (*Walden* 37). Rather, this seemed rooted in how, instead of maintaining a proper relationship with the cosmos that would enable them to find happiness by “[learning] from nature the lesson of worship” (“Nature” [Norberg] 41), human society had completely turned its back on it, even adopting an aggressive attitude towards the environment. The first instances of this attitude can, according to Emerson, be found in Christianity, since it “[puts] nature under foot. The first and last lesson of religion is, ‘The things that are seen, are temporal; the things that are unseen, are eternal.’ It puts affront upon nature. [...] The devotee flouts nature” (39). The mistake of religion, then, is that of taking away from nature its transcendental, divine characteristic. If such teachings become part of the popular psyche, it would not be strange to find an increasing aversion to nature in society. During the second half of the nineteenth century, such attitudes were portrayed in the utilitarian mindset dominating most of North America at the time (Fuller 6), with its “prospect, not of unfolding nobler energies, but of more ease, and larger accumulation” (18), that is, of profit. It was thus that people approached nature. This way of thinking, in which everything was done for the sake of progress, would lead to the utter destruction of the environment (“Walking”, par. 15). Thomas Carlyle, prominent in his influence on the founding ideals of the group, saw no end to the “Mechanical Age” (17) in which they lived, and showed contempt for anything that could be obtained by the use of such destructive tools, writing: “We war with rude nature; and, by our resistless engines,

come off always victorious, and loaded with *spoils*” (17, italics are mine).

This new position adopted by society would ultimately make it forget that the survival of any civilisation depends on maintaining close contact with its environment (“Walking”, par. 57), for “in Wildness is the preservation of the World” (par. 46). In contrast, the Transcendentalists clearly saw how humanity was gradually becoming more and more alienated from the natural world, claiming that “Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her” (*Walden* 188). Instead of standing by “this vast, savage, hovering mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; [...] we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man” (“Walking”, par. 73). This, as Margaret Fuller cleverly stated, drives us to a society where “men, for the sake of getting a living, forget to live” (240).

Motivated by this situation of estrangement, the Transcendentalists sought to urge society to reflect on its ways and mend the relationship that they had developed with the natural world. The starting point of such change could only be to remind people of how pivotal nature was for their proper development as human beings, making them realise that “village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness” (*Walden* 295). Setting off from this base, Thoreau implored his contemporaries to enter into communion with nature by observing what it sets before our eyes; to be a “seer” (104). Such observation needs to be followed by a period of reflection on what one has been shown; a time of contemplation that needs to be both individual and personal. This is how we will be able to approach nature’s wonders—on our own, and never merely pondering someone else’s words about their experience with the universe. About the individual who can carry out this kind of reflection, Emerson wrote that “when he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be

wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings" ("The American Scholar" 55). For these proceedings, it is crucial that we approach nature in a gentle manner, never intending to obtain more than what it allows us to see. Regarding this imperative, Fuller claimed that "nature always refuses to be seen by being stared at" (27), to which Thoreau added that "fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense part of Nature themselves, are often in a favorable mood for observing [nature], in the intervals of their pursuits, than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation" (*Walden* 197). This hints at the idea that one does not need to be a person learned in science or philosophy to arrive at the very marrow of the cosmos, but that anyone who considers themselves as belonging to it as part of a relationship between equals can benefit from it. Thoreau encouraged people to always strive towards as simple a life as possible; as simple as nature itself can be (*Walden* 83).

The ideas that may follow from the aforementioned attitude can be taken as a critique of science, always eager to seek the sources of everything that the cosmos contains. What most clearly leads us to assume that there is such an underlying critique in their writings is the Transcendentalist imperative to keep ourselves—and our inquires—within certain limits. In his celebrated essay "Nature", Emerson stated that "we must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy" ([Norberg] 9), to which he added that "if too eagerly hunted, [these] become shows merely" (18), as if their essence could be devalued. Thoreau, on the other hand, emphasised that "we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable" (*Walden* 295). Perhaps, however, the clearest Transcendentalist critique of science may be Margaret Fuller's, when she wrote that "by wild speculation and intemperate curiosity we violate [the Author's] will and incur dangerous, perhaps fatal, consequences" (Fuller 129). The poem that works as an epilogue to

her *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* expresses the need of restriction when it says that “I give you what I can, not what I would” (2).

Last, we should mention that the Transcendentalist approach to nature is of a kind that benefits the individual who follows it. This purely plain and reverential relationship with nature can help the observing individual grow wiser (*Walden* 139) and more aware of the outstanding beauty that nature holds (36), always within certain boundaries, since “the harmony which results from a [great] number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful” (270). From this combination of wisdom and beauty, we could say that, when in contact with the environment, we are allowed to perceive sentiments that “are always elevating” (Fuller 206). Lawrence Buell suggests that in this way the individual will ultimately be brought to a state of happiness (*Walden* 123) and deep self-knowledge (Introduction to *The American Transcendentalists* xiii).

We mentioned above how this movement, which originated in Massachusetts, cared not only about society’s relationship with its environment, but also the injustices taking place in society. In his introduction to *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings* (2006), Lawrence Buell mentions how, from its earliest origins, this movement showed empathy with social groups that did not receive egalitarian and just treatment from the government (xii), such as women (xii), slaves (xvii), and Native Americans, to name but a few. Indeed, the Transcendentalist’s contribution to the battle against these and other issues was crucial, to the point that “had the Transcendentalist movement never taken place, in all of these arenas the course of history would have unfolded differently” (xxviii).

Opposition to abuse and oppression was, according to Emerson, the first duty of any citizen who considered themselves to stand by what was right. He believed that “an immoral law makes it a man’s duty to break it, at every hazard” (“Address to the Citizens of

Concord” 351), and he was indeed among those Transcendentalists who made it their duty to raise their voice for those who could not raise theirs. In his case, he was more than aware that although it was ordinary people who kept a nation going, it was the powerful minority that claimed the vast majority of profits and wealth, “increasing the distance between the rich and the poor”, as Carlyle put it (18). In light of this, Emerson vigorously claimed that every person should be paid according to their contribution to social wealth and well-being, shortly, “to put every man on his merits” (“The Significance of British West Indian Emancipation” 349). Another cause that Emerson ended up embracing was that of the African slaves employed in the large fields of the southern states, which he deemed an utter disgrace to society. His position was that there was “civility of no race [...] whilst another race is damaged” (352). There was no place for such a degradation of humanity in his conception of the United States. Following Emerson, Thoreau also protested against the ways of the government of his country in his influential essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”. He was perfectly aware of how the law forced people to act unjustly, claiming that, in such situations, it was necessary to fight the establishment (12). He addressed his fellow citizens thus: “Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn” (13). One of the major crimes that Thoreau denounced in this essay is that of slavery, which he described as an evil that should be of concern to the whole of the American society, and not only the southern states, where it was most openly practiced. Indeed, he argued that the state of Massachusetts was equally, if not more, reproachable in this regard as was the South (8), stating that “a hundred thousand merchants [in Massachusetts], [...] are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, *cost what it may*” (8). Hence, against the immobility of American society, he urged the people to “rebel and revolutionize” (7). Even if the result of an uprising was imprisonment, Thoreau believed this to already be a victory for the individual, since this was the place for those “freer and

less desponding spirits” (14). He had the absolute conviction that prisons provided a “free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not *with* her but *against* her—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor” (15).

As mentioned, another issue of central importance to the Transcendentalists was the situation of Native Americans, the culture of whom they admired and held in great esteem. As Thoreau puts it, “every circumstance touching the Indian [is] important” (“Thoreau” 426). Fuller was another notable advocate of Native American rights. Well aware that, although “broken and degraded” (251) by the combination of the white man’s violence (234), religion (208) and government (184), Fuller considered the Native Americans the true essence of the West (18) and the “rightful lords” (47) of a land whose “beauty they forbore to destroy” (47), unlike the White settlers. All in all, Fuller seemed unable to understand how, before such injustice, “they can forbear to shoot the white man where he stands” (115), although she realised that “the power of fate is with the white man, and the Indian feels it” (115). In addition, she fought in equal measure for the rights of women, claiming, for instance, that there was no difference whatsoever in the psychological faculties of men and women (Peabody 298).

The capitalist economic system that was becoming the norm in the eastern states of North America and its consequences in society were also a matter of concern for certain members of this group. Among these, we could mention Orestes Brownson, whom Lawrence Buell defines as “the group’s most outspoken social radical” (Introduction to “The Laboring Classes” 193). Brownson was pretty sure that, due to the new relationship “between the operative and his employer, between wealth and labor” (194), “a crisis as to the relation of [both sides] [was] approaching” (194). Somewhat along the same lines as what Emerson himself claimed, he believed that those who contributed most to society were not getting the share “of the fruits of industry” (195) which they were due, and that “men [were] rewarded

in an inverse ratio to the amount of actual service they [performed]” (195). The result of this imbalance was ever-growing poverty among the working classes (195), which would only end if, according to Brownson, “the system [was] destroyed” (199).

It seems that, thanks to the efforts of Transcendentalists like those mentioned above, and others who stood by them, this movement managed to bring change to society, in part thanks to their “assertion of the inalienable worth of man, and of the immanence of the Divine in the Human” (Dall 550). Transcendentalist writer Caroline W. H. Dall clearly detected the elevating effect this new system of thought could have on the individual. Writing in 1897, she remarked on the movement’s work and the benefits it had brought to society as follows:

Men and women are healthier in their bodies, happier in their domestic and social relations, more ambitious to enlarge their opportunities, more kind and humane in sympathy, as well as more reasonable in expectation, than they would have been if Margaret [Fuller] and Emerson had never lived. Under the influence of transcendental thought and hope, the mind of universal man leaped forward with a bound. (550)

The last two issues that we would like to present in relation to Le Guin’s context diverge from those presented above. The first is her Taoism. Even though religion did not play a crucial role in either Le Guin’s upbringing nor in her posterior self-development, considering herself “a congenital non-Christian” (“Dreams Must Explain Themselves” 11) and “an atheist” (Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* 48), she did follow the set of principles and values promulgated by this oriental philosophy. This was an influence that she had received indirectly from her father, who continually resorted to the *Tao Te Ching* (“An Interview with Ursula Le Guin” 45), the key book of Taoism. She considered Taosim to have conditioned her psyche from a very young age (“Author Ursula K. Le Guin Shares

Thoughts on Book”, par. 9), and introduced its teachings in her literary production, traceable in *Earthsea’s* magic and equilibrium (par. 9). Taoism was historically introduced in the Bay Area—as in the rest of the United States—by Chinese immigrant fluxes that began in the nineteenth century during to the California Gold Rush (“Folk Daoism Comes to the West, par. 1). Several temples were constructed during the second half of said century, and “by the early 1880s, dozens of such temples could be found” (par. 2) in San Francisco and elsewhere. However, government restrictions on Chinese immigration, by means of the above-mentioned 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, contributed to a decline in the number of Taoist temples, and only in big cities like San Francisco and New York did a small number of them remain active (par. 4). It was not until 1965, when the Immigration Act was passed, that, due to “an increase in Chinese immigrants” (Siegler 105), “new Chinese temples were established for the first time since the nineteenth century” (105). We could say that this marked the beginning of a sort of revival of interest in Taoism all across the country: “a revolution in Daoist studies” (105) thanks to “the growing popularity of [its] longevity techniques” (“Folk Daoism”, par. 7) and its contribution to macrobiotics (Siegler 87). Thus, we see how, even though Le Guin mainly came into contact with Taoism by means of her father, the presence of this system of belief in California has been continuous for more than two hundred years, even remaining active during the toughest years of Chinese immigration. Such was the importance of this philosophy in Le Guin’s life that, in 1997, she published a personal—and somewhat free—translation of the book of Tao.

As will be shown below, Taoism firmly opposes any kind of measureless expansion, which is a staple in a capitalist system that believes more to be necessarily better, an attitude that Le Guin considered our society’s greatest mistake. Along these lines, she claimed that moderation in everything we do would contribute to an improvement of humanity’s current and future situation in the world. Further, as expansion implies increasing one’s distance from the

centre, Le Guin's Taoist belief in the necessity of sticking to the roots of our existence, namely nature, no doubt supported her denunciation of the ever-increasing gap between humanity and the natural world in a civilisation bent on progress.

The origin of the *Tao Te Ching* is uncertain, but it is believed to have been written in the pre-Christian centuries, presumably by Lao Tzu. Regardless of its obscure conception, this book has managed to spread Taoist doctrine across the world for centuries. In Jean C. Cooper's words: "It is primarily a cosmic religion, the study of the universe and the place and function of man and all creatures and phenomena in it" (10). This universe of which it speaks is presented as regulated by the Tao, sometimes called "the order of the universe" (Welch 84) or its "underlying unity" (86). This force that governs the cosmos is "the transcendental First Cause, the Primordial Unity, the Ineffable, the timeless, all-pervading principle of the universe, giving rise to it yet undiminished by it; supporting and controlling it; that which preceded the creation of Heaven and Earth" (Cooper 10). Obscure as this may seem, it is interesting to note how Taoism connects Le Guin and the Transcendentalists in this idea of the universe as one system or unity. Indeed, also the Transcendentalists have been connected to this oriental philosophy (Welch 16).

Within this order, life follows a "cyclical pattern of life" (Welch 20), one governed "by cause and effect" (21). Thus, it is all about "reversal, recurrence, [...] and yet the movement is onward" (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* 39). The idea of moving forward should not be mistaken for anything like a blind faith in progress. As Cooper emphasises, Taoism "does not worship at the shrine of progress" (46), since—and quoting R. S. Nettleship—"progress at one point is generally accompanied by regress in some other" (qtd. in 47). Returning to the issue of the underlying cyclical pattern of life, we find illustration of this in Chapter 16 of Le Guin's translation of the *Lao Tzu*:

The ten thousand things arise together;
in their arising is their return.
Now they flower,
and flowering
sink homeward,
returning to the root. (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 22)

About humanity's relationship with the environment and universe, Taoism suggests that the harmony between humans and nature is absolute, since "our inner nature is an extension of the nature of the universe. To follow one is to be in harmony with the other" (Welch 45). This way, the follower of the Tao—or the Way—knows that "there is no mutual opposition in all things. There is no mutual conquest of nature and man" (Cooper 48). It is from this kinship that one can gain the most elevated knowledge of all, namely of "the order of the universe, [with which] you will understand everything in it" (76).

Regarding Taoist symbolism, if there is one symbol that holds a central position, it is that of the *yang-yin*. In this image, "each half contains within it a portion of the other, signifying their complete interdependence and continual intermutability. The figure is static, but each half contains the seed of transformation" (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 85). The relationship between the opposing sections, although full of pressure, is "that of harmony, of the mutual play of creation, not of conflict" (Cooper 27). The *yang-yin* implies that everything in the universe contains these opposing forces. Nature, for instance, displays this ambivalence with "her support and her cruelty as one" (Welch 46). Nonetheless, this interplay of the yang and the yin should not be considered to represent the good and evil side of anything, least of all nature. Le Guin suggests that "'Nature' and its Way [...] are not humane, because they are not human. They are not kind; they are not cruel: those are human attributes" (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 8). That is, since the dichotomies of good and evil have been created by and for humans, calling nature good or evil would be nonsensical. Rather, the

opposite forces of yang and yin should be considered in terms of everything containing contrasting elements, and that at any given time, one or the other could come to light, for better or worse. For instance, in the case of humans, Le Guin sees these two forces as representing “the essential balance between the creative and the destructive within us” (“Review of *Two Years, Eight Months, and Twenty-Eight Nights*” 279).

At the same time, this symbol can also be considered the prevailing balance of the universe. Cooper writes that “to this must man conform if he is to fulfil his potential and play his part in maintaining cosmic harmony” (22). However, such delegations do not always work out very well, and it is usually the case that when the human element enters the arena, calamity follows. Indeed, Taoism suggests that we are the discordant note, and that, although “the animal and plant world conform ‘naturally’, by instinct; only man chooses to maintain or destroy the balance” (22). In Taoist doctrine, the imbalance is usually triggered by an element of excess in human behaviour. According to Le Guin, “for Lao Tzu, ‘moderation in all things’ isn’t just a bit of safe, practical advice. To lose the sense of sacredness is a mortal loss. To injure our world by excess of greed and ingenuity is to endanger our own sacredness” (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 40). Thus, it is imperative that we set limits to these kinds of attitudes, restricting our own ambitions. Examples of this idea are common in Taoism’s holy text, as can be found in Chapter 9:

Brim-fill the bowl,
it’ll spill over.
Keep sharpening the blade,
you’ll soon blunt it. (12)

Or in Chapter 46:

The greatest evil: wanting more.
The worst luck: discontent.

Greed's the curse of life.

To know enough's enough
is enough to know. (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 61)

The most convenient manner in which not to push the limits and restrain our desire for excess is by following the so-called *wu wei*—the concept of non-doing. This “does not mean to avoid all action, but rather all hostile, aggressive action” (Welch 33). This is why, as Welch suggests, Taoism “succeeds by being rather than doing” (21). The benefits of restrained behaviour will lead us to live our lives in the right way, “[obeying] the laws of Nature, of Virtue, and [living] in conformity and harmony with them” (Cooper 25), which is the ultimate goal of Taoism. As Lao Tzu puts it:

So the unwanting soul
sees what's hidden,
and the ever-wanting soul
sees only what it wants. (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 3)

Concluding this study of Le Guin's context, it would be appropriate to include some words about the fantasy genre, to which the *Earthsea* saga belongs. Initially considered to be an escapist literary genre seeking merely to shun reality, heedless of the real problems of the world, imaginative fiction has proven itself to be extremely useful—even more than other better appreciated genres—in exploring and offering alternatives and solutions to the human mind, and to the way in which we interact with each other and the world. Le Guin was acutely aware of the potentiality that springs from the authorial freedom offered by both fantasy and science fiction. As long as a fantasy story maintains an internal logic from which it never attempts to divert, this genre allows the author to work with worlds, social patterns, and forms of life completely different from our own. Lured by this prospect of freedom, it is little wonder that Le Guin set out to construct her brand-new worlds within these literary systems, devising

unique universes that she would be able to shape according to her beliefs and values, which had developed out of her particular influences and life experiences, outlined above. In what follows, we will look at the essential role that the fantasy genre can play when it comes to challenging our preconceptions of life and society. First, it is important to note that, by the second half of the 1960s, when Le Guin began writing her *Earthsea* novels, fantasy had already established itself as an important genre on the US literary scene. A key contributor to this was Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, published in the USA in 1965 by Ace Books without authorisation either by Tolkien or his publisher (*Biography* 232). This first American edition was a massive success, especially among university students (232), leading to the creation of "branches of the Tolkien Society [...] along the West Coast and in New York state" (233), and, finally, to "Tolkien's writings [...] [achieving] respectability in American academic circles" (233). Given Tolkien's importance to the increasing popularity of fantasy literature, we may be forgiven for thinking that Le Guin's first writings in this genre would resemble Tolkien's. For Le Guin, then, there was an already-existing body of fantasy literature that she could rely on, which was as good as non-existent in Morris's and Tolkien's time.

One of the most important features of fantasy literature is the primacy of imagination, which is absolutely necessary when it comes to constructing new worlds. Contrary to popular belief, imagination draws directly on reality, being, as Emerson stated, "the use which the Reason makes of the material world" ("Nature" [Norberg] 35). Similarly, Le Guin wrote that "imagination acknowledges reality, starts from it, and returns to it to enrich it" ("Making Up Stories" 108). In these words, we can see how imagination is, in a sense, a consequence of our reflections upon the world in which we live, that is, reflections on reality. Many thinkers have pondered its benefits to and consequences on the human mind. George MacDonald, the great fairy-story writer, thought of imagination as a formidable force that stirs and puts our minds in motion, as "to inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination. It is aroused by facts,

seeks for higher and yet higher laws in those facts” (2). To this he adds that, if we desire a lively and restless culture, we must nourish the imagination (1). On the other hand, and according to Emerson, Thoreau recognised its contribution to our well-being, “the worth of the Imagination for the uplifting and consolation of human life” (“Thoreau” 427). Also the Romantics—one of the germs from which Transcendentalism was born (Manzari 1796)—praised the imagination. According to Michael Ferber, “Romantics believed that the imagination was the supreme human faculty, superior to reason and understanding, and when it was fully exercised humans achieved a godlike vision and creative power” (54). Apparently, in the eyes of the Romantics, imagination stood “in opposition to the fancy” (54), meaning, as Emerson suggested, that it had its roots in that which is real and tangible. Consequently, “it gives us the power [...] to ‘see into the life of things’” (55), that is, to reflect upon and understand reality. Le Guin followed Thoreau’s line of thought, speaking of imagination’s deep significance for us humans (“National Book Award Acceptance Speech” 3), while attributing yet more qualities to it. She believed that “imagination functions [...] seeking meaning” (“Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*” 275), be it about “each other’s minds and hearts” (“Making Up Stories” 108) or about what it means to be a human being (“The Operating Instructions” 4).

If imagination is one of the pillars of fantasy literature, and if imagination is based on reflection upon the actual world and our lives in it, we may think of fantasy as carrying within itself the essence of reality or, even, of truth. One of the most ardent advocates for fantasy’s close relationship with reality and truth, and of the genre in general, was J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote about this issue in his well-known lecture “On Fairy-Stories”. The world in which these stories are set—what Tolkien called Faërie—has in it everything that makes up our own world, “the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men” (“OFS” 32). With this, Tolkien wishes to imply that a good deal of reality backs up fantasy, with its

“real wills and powers” (35). He takes this relationship still further, suggesting that without truth and references to reality there would be no fairy stories, for “if men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured” (65). MacDonald puts forth this very same idea, believing in the intrinsic truthfulness of this type of tales, since “if it have proportion and harmony it has vitality; and vitality is truth. The beauty may be plainer in it than truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairy tale would give no delight” (316). Le Guin was very much in line with her British counterparts on this issue. In her essay “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” (1974), she wrote:

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom. (35)

Fantasy goes to the very core of what it is to be human, since it gets rid of all the masks and cloaks that society and everyday life may cast on our true nature. It is so real that “nothing, after all, is realer” (“From Elfland to Poughkeepsie” 29).

In addition, MacDonald mentions some sort of subversive dimension is present in the fairy tale, for it should strive to be “mood-engendering [and] thought-provoking” (320), a position that Le Guin also shares. In her words, “upholders and defenders of a status quo, political, social, economic, religious, or literary, may denigrate or diabolise or dismiss imaginative literature, because it is—more than any other kind of writing—subversive *by nature*” (“It Doesn't Have to Be the Way It Is” 83). Thanks to the fact that it challenges our assumptions and norms we will be able to arrive at new

understandings of different aspects of our life in this world (“Ursula K. Le Guin Talks to Michael Cunningham”, par. 13). Thus, it can make us think of new conceptions of freedom and justice (“A War Without End” 220), help us reflect on “human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived” (“National Book” 3), offer new insights on human engagement with the world (Cummins 20), and “deepen [our] understanding of [our] world, and [our] fellow men, and [our] own feelings, and [our] destiny” (“Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” 33). According to Tolkien, one of the most remarkable contributions of fairy stories is that they can bring us into “communion with other living things” (“OFS” 36), for which the issue of *recovery* was an essential part. This comes in handy even in our times, since we still live in an era when society has lost contact with the ecosystem of which it is part, taking the world that surrounds it for granted and fails to pay attention to it. As Tolkien put it:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining —regaining of a clear view [,] [...] ‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them’—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the dab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness. [...] This triteness is really the penalty of ‘appropriation’: the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (67)

From the new perspective granted us by fantasy literature, we will be able to look at things anew, with a different eye, enjoying their beauty and simply rejoicing in them.

Several critics have claimed that Le Guin's fantasy has made a significant impact on its readership. Elizabeth Cummins states that readers "are changed by the journey" (5), challenging their conceptions of "homeland and foreign land" (5) and "self and other, native and alien" (5); Brian Attebery highlights Earthsea's function "as a means of reimagining, of reseeing the world we live in" ("The Beginning Place" 242), and Susan Wood finds remarkable the "clarity and simplicity" (205) with which Le Guin's work is able to transmit truth.

All this hints at the fact that, as many writers of this genre have fiercely argued, fantasy can be an extremely useful tool when it comes to transmitting truth and raising questions about ourselves and the lives we lead in this universe.

3.2. Environmental and Anti-imperialist Discourse in Le Guin's *Earthsea* Cycle

Now that we have gained a deeper insight into that which shaped Le Guin's concern for progress's contribution to humanity's estrangement from its ecosystem and the marginalisation of the individual, we can address the manner in which these are implemented and fashioned in her *Earthsea* novels.

Moving away from the clear clashes between the forces of good and evil of Morris and Tolkien, Le Guin focused on the opposition between appropriate and wrong uses of power and knowledge. According to Peter T. Koper, Le Guin's particular perspective stems from a concern "with science [...] as an attitude towards knowledge" (qtd. in Payne 353). Knowledge is power, and "its misuse as domination" ("On the Frontier" 30), rather than using it to constructive ends, brings trouble to humanity. Le Guin presents us with the consequence of such misuse in the form of a world inhabited by a human race whose bonds with the natural world were already severed from the very beginning. When David Abram claims that, in

our civilisation “non-human nature seems to have withdrawn from both our speaking and our senses” (92), this perfectly suits the condition of Earthsea’s human societies. In a fictional world marred by a greedy use of power, John Crow and Richard Erlich suggest that a central topic of the Earthsea novels is “the unification of man with man, man with himself, and man with nature” (220). This is also the direction that the present analysis will take, and in what follows we will highlight the impact that a wrong conception of, and approach to, progress can have both on nature and on humanity itself.

3.2.1. The world of Earthsea: Precedents

Dragons, having been present since the very beginnings of the Earthsea world, hold a role of considerable importance regarding the shaping and development of this world and its inhabitants. The following section aims to show how Le Guin portrayed the dragons of *Earthsea*⁵, imbuing them with a symbolism that renders them representatives of nature. In addition, we will refer to a key event that these creatures are involved in, which will result in a complete reshaping of humanity’s attitude towards nature.

In order to fully grasp the relevance of the dragons in Le Guin’s saga, it is essential that we look at how they are represented. Warren G. Rochelle argues that, due to the clear connections between Earthsea and “the medieval world of the West” (“The Emersonian Choice” 420), it seems inevitable that the dragons dwelling in this fictional world are also “associated with all four of the ancient medieval elements: earth, fire, water and air” (420). Nevertheless, as readers move through the several novels that comprise this series, an idea about still-greater implications surrounding dragons inevitably

⁵ Although the novels of *The Earthsea Cycle* will be referred to individually, all of them, with the exception of *The Other Wind*, are included in the omnibus edition entitled *Earthsea: the First Four Books* and the collection *Tales From Earthsea*.

arises. In fact, Ursula Le Guin herself claimed that “these are dragons of a new world, America, and the visionary forms of an old woman’s mind” (*Earthsea Revisioned* 22), hinting that the connotations of Earthsea’s dragons go beyond those of the more classical medieval ones⁶. This symbolism is related to the aforementioned elements of nature that Rochelle points out as characterising Le Guin’s dragons, since it could be argued that these are representatives of “Nature, in its raw, untamed beauty” (“The Emersonian Choice” 423). Even Le Guin herself seems to support this claim when she mentions that these creatures principally showcase the idea of “wildness. What is not owned” (*Earthsea Revisioned* 22). It is to this very perception that the present study holds, namely, to the idea that dragons are direct representatives of nature in the world of Earthsea. The implications of this would be that Le Guin is here proposing a paradigmatic change concerning dragons, ridding them of their classical Christian connotations as purely evil and dangerous to humankind, originally linked to the serpent of Eden (Ansgar Kelly 304) and on through the Middle Ages (Hodges 110). Le Guin, by contrast, portrays them as an essential part of nature, placing humanity, instead, as a hazardous and destabilising element, as will be shown below. Hereby, the following lines will be devoted to exploring these issues, drawing evidence from the texts that comprise Le Guin’s saga, in order to make clearer the potential connection between dragons and nature and the consequence of this on the attitude of humans towards their environment.

To start with, we should draw attention to the type of relationship that dragons appear to have with the world in which they live. In *A Description of Earthsea* is written that “songs and stories indicate that dragons existed before any other living creature” (380). It should here be remarked that the oldest representative of their race is called Kalessin, described as “of great age, of years beyond remembering” (*The Farthest Shore* 627). In addition, it is worth

⁶ Taking into account the framework in which this study is developed, namely, the evolution of fantasy literature from Britain to North America, we should call to mind medieval Anglo-Saxon antecedents such as the dragon appearing in *Beowulf*, and the biblical legend of Saint George and the dragon.

pointing to the role that dragons presumably played in Earthsea's creation, hinted at in the following lines: "it may be that Segoy is a name for the Earth itself. Some think all dragons, or certain dragons, or certain people are manifestations of Segoy" (*Description* 391). The identity of Segoy is not made clear, the only thing that we know about it being its role as god-creator of the world of Earthsea. However, it is certainly significant that Kalessin, the head and eldest of the race of dragons, is addressed by Tehanu, a character who is half-human and half-dragon, as Segoy (*Tehanu* 886).

Related to the idea of the paragraph above, the apparent link between the dragons and the so-called Language of the Making is another feature that can be useful to highlight their closeness to nature. About this language, also known as True Speech, we know that it was the language "with which Segoy created the islands of Earthsea at the beginning of time, [and] is presumably an infinite language, as it names all things" (*Description* 383). Thanks to the fact that this language contains the true names of everything—people, animals, the elements, etc.—its users are granted absolute power over that which they name. Interestingly, and for reasons that will be shown below, this is the native tongue of the dragons and only dragons, implying that no human being will ever be "a true speaker of it" (*Tehanu* 856). Indeed, the dragons' bond with this language goes far beyond them being mere users of it, as we learn that "the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being" (856) and that "they do not learn [it]. [...] They are" (856). Such is their knowledge and command of the True Speech, that they can manipulate it to serve their own purposes, so that unlike men, whose "use [...] binds [them] to truth" (*A Wizard of Earthsea* 109), dragons "can lie in it, twisting the true words to false ends, catching the unwary hearer in a maze of mirror-words each of which reflects the truth and none of which leads anywhere" (109).

Contrasted to dragons are humans, who, in order to gain knowledge and mastery of this language, have to learn it. Among them, those who learn the most words are the wizards, who later on

use it to make magic (*Description* 383). Those who gain the deepest knowledge of True Speech are considered Dragonlords, “one whom the dragons will speak with” (*The Tombs of Atuan* 323). Thanks to their knowledge of the Language of the Making, they have great power, and the greatest and last of them is Archmage Sparrowhawk. We learn that Sparrowhawk’s power is far greater than that of his peers, as that he is able to continue casting and keeping his spells even when others’ power has waned considerably (*AWoE* 208-209), and to control even the most destructive forces of nature (*TToA* 346). Having said that, his power is, of course, not limitless (365). We are thus able to detect the close link between this language and nature, the former being a source of life and a gateway to the possession and use of nature’s powers, among other things. The fact that this language constitutes a vital part of the dragons’ being enhances their relationship with nature.

Another interesting feature that hints at a relationship between nature and dragons is the superior position that they occupy in relation to men. Actually, the former regard the latter as somehow irrelevant, as they seldom meddle in their business. About this, for instance, Sparrowhawk mentions that “dragons think [humans] are amusing” (*TToA* 353). Going back to the figure of Kalessin, we find more instances of this hierarchy, as when it is said that, for this dragon men “are like mayflies” (*TFS* 579). One final example of dragons’ superiority to men can be found in a scene described in *The Farthest Shore*, which runs as follows:

Never in the memory of man, scarcely in the memory of legend, had any dragon braved the walls visible and invisible of the well-defended isle. Yet this one did not hesitate, but flew on ponderous wings and heavily over the western shore of Roke, and above the villages and fields, to the green hill that rises over Thwil town. There at last it stooped softly to the earth, and raised its red wings and folded them, and crouched on the summit of Roke Knoll. (631)

In this scene, Kalessin is bringing a seriously hurt Sparrowhawk to the isle of Roke, which is defended by magic against anyone who tries to enter it without the consent of its rulers. However, Kalessin, being beyond wizard—that is, human—power, can enter at will. We can here see how the superiority of dragons over men may be based on their greater power. Indeed, dragons seem to be extremely powerful, and Kalessin is described as a being of “brute strength and size” (*TFS* 628) within whom “life burned in fire” (629).

Next, we may mention the psychological consequences that an encounter with, or the mere presence of, dragons implies for a human being. One of these encounters features Kalessin and Tenar, a woman who becomes a key character in the development of the *Earthsea* saga. The meeting hints at a type of well-being felt by just pronouncing the name of the eldest of dragons: “[Tenar] looked out into the vast levels of air and cloud and said in her mind, once, *Kalessin*. And her mind cleared, as that air was clear” (*Tehanu* 777). The second encounter worth mentioning involves Sparrowhawk, on a voyage to the westernmost isles of Earthsea, also known as the Dragon’s Run, where only dragons live, and “no man living [...] had sailed [...] or seen it, except the Archmage” (*TFS* 577). The witnessing of the flight of dragons on those remote isles must have marked Sparrowhawk deeply, since years later, recalling that moment, he expresses that “though I came to forget or regret all I have ever done, yet I would remember that once I saw the dragons aloft on the wind at sunset above the western isles; and I would be content” (442).

A final remark on the topic of dragons and nature concerns the way in which dragons are portrayed as good or evil, for which purpose the following quotation will be illuminating: “Kalessin said to [the dragons], ‘You let evil turn you into evil. You have been mad. You are sane again, but so long as the winds blow from the east you can never be what you were, free of both good and evil’” (*The Other Wind* 151). Dragons had originally been neither good nor bad, which David

Naimon, in a collection of interviews he conducted with Le Guin called *Ursula K. Le Guin: Conversations on Writing with David Naimon* (2018), attributes to the fact that the world of Earthsea “is not a Manichean world, one where darkness and light are in opposition” (55). Indeed, it was the winds coming from the east, that is, where humans live, that turned them evil. As Warren Rochelle remarks, this happened because “the mages kept the knowledge of the Old Speech that let them manipulate Nature—and in doing so, eventually brought evil to creatures that were neither good nor evil; they just were” (“The Emersonian Choice” 425). Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that during the period in which the stories of the *Earthsea* saga take place, the dragon race displays features of both good and evil, in that some of its individuals will engage with humans in a hostile manner, while others will seek to work together with them.

To conclude, then, which are the features that make Earthsea’s dragons into representatives of nature? First, we have seen that dragons were the first beings to have ever dwelt in this world, and they are repeatedly related to Earthsea’s originating force and figure, Segoy. This reminds us of the role of the forces of nature on our own planet, forming the origins of our dwellings, and the source of all life that has come after. Similarly, we have talked about the dragons’ communion with the Language of the Making, that is, the primary source of creation. Considering the power that it grants its speaker, True Speech may be thought of as a sort of guide to the principles and functioning of the world; a passage through which to gain knowledge and possession of its hidden powers. Its innate relation to dragons increases the symbolism of them as nature. The fact that human beings need to learn this language and the resulting study, magic, and power drawn from it, may indicate our own science (*Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin* 146), always looking at new ways to unfold the secrets of nature and learn more about its ways.

We should also consider the hierarchy determining the relation between dragons and humans, the former being always above the

latter due to their greater power, the same way as nature is above us. No matter how far we may think our control over the ecosystem reaches, nature showcases its hidden power once and again, thus, in a way, resetting the hierarchy and making us aware of its greatness. We also mentioned nature's positive effects upon humans. Even in our world, we constantly resort to nature and the environment in order to seek that internal, psychological welfare. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "one looks at the face of heaven and earth lays all petulance at rest, and soothes us to wiser convictions" ("Nature" [Turpin] 213), as if the sight of and contact with nature could make us forget all about our mundane concerns and make us simply rejoice in what we see.

The last idea that has been pointed out as a connection between dragons and nature is how, until humans arrived and classified dragons according to their own beliefs, they were above the parameters of good and evil. Similarly, we could say that the same thing happens in our relationship with nature. Humans tend to deem nature good if, for instance, the seasons are fair and the crops grow abundant; it is evil, if, on the contrary, natural disasters happen that result in heavy human casualties. We tend to forget that nature stands well above those Manichean classifications: that nature just is. Here, Le Guin portraying her dragons as capable of creating and destroying may refer to nature being, at once a source of life and an extremely destructive power. This idea could certainly be connected to Le Guin's Taoist beliefs, especially the *yang-yin* symbol, as well as to her own experiences in the peculiar nature and landscapes of the American West, as discussed above.

Having explained the features that may lead us to consider the dragons in Earthsea as direct symbols of nature, we now move on to a key event in the history of this world, which shaped it for ever and in which dragons played a crucial role. Before doing so, however, we should briefly explain how the world of Earthsea came into being and who its first inhabitants were. As stated above, the almighty god Segoy spoke the Language of the Making, and thus "raised the islands

of the world from the sea in the beginning of time” (*Tehanu* 650). We learn that the first inhabitants of this newly created world were a race composed of both dragons and humans, who had an innate knowledge of True Speech, the same language spoken by Segoy. However, very soon, this original race very soon branched out into other individual and distinct races, in an event known as the Vedurnan. One of these branches was formed by those individuals who “became more and more in love with flight and wildness, and would have less and less to do with the works of making, or with study and learning, [seeking] only to fly and fly farther and farther, [...] seeking more freedom and more” (650). These are the ones who would gradually become dragons as we imagine them today, and who kept their knowledge of True Speech.

Contrasted to these are those who would ultimately become humans. About them, it is said that they “came to care little for flight, but gathered up treasure, wealth, things made, things learned. They built houses, strongholds to keep their treasures in, so they could pass all they gained to their children, ever seeking more increase and more” (*Tehanu* 650). It should also be noted that humans lost their knowledge of True Speech after a while. In a sense, what we can see in this division is that one of the main differences between these new races of dragons and humans is that, while the former chooses to merely be, the latter choose making and possessing, as testified in this verse:

Men chose the yoke
dragons the wing.
Men to own,
dragons no thing. (*Description* 400)

After this division, the relationship between dragons and humans turned into one of enmity, in which the races attacked each other for survival. This hostility resulted in a geographical separation: while dragons went to live in the western winds of Earthsea, humans—

steadily increasing in number—started to build their cities in the eastern part of the world (*Tehanu* 651). Vedurnan also resulted in the creation of an additional, third, breed, formed of individuals who would remain somewhere in between dragons and humans, acknowledging the existing kinship between the two races, and who “still both human and dragon, still winged, went not east but west, on over the Open Sea, till they came to the other side of the world[, where] they live in peace, great winged beings both wild and wise, with human mind and dragon heart” (651). Thus, certain individuals are still born as both dragon and human, who, in a sense, know of their kinship with the other race, the last of these being a key character in the *Earthsea* cycle, Tehanu.

We may think that all of this could be hinting at a possible alienation between humanity and the natural world. Indeed, we can find certain characteristics of such an estrangement throughout the different human societies of Earthsea. First, we must recall what happened to the race of humans when they became separated from the dragons, namely, that, among other things, they decided to forsake their knowledge of True Speech. This was a language deeply rooted in nature, since it was used in the making of this world. As a result of humans thus neglecting its wisdom, their new languages would also come to reflect such a loss. For instance, Hardic, the predominant language in Earthsea, is said to have its roots in Old Speech, although, now, “it has no more power in it than any other tongue of men” (*AWoE* 27). Such is also the case in the Kargad Lands, where the local language, Kargish, has similarly strayed from this original source language, and we learn that magic is very rare there, knowing that the making of magic needs the Language of the Making.

As a whole—and perhaps as a result of this loss of True Speech—Earthsea’s human society has entered a phase of social and political progress, a consequence of which is further alienation from nature. An example of this is that, by the end of the saga, the dragons have disappeared from the archipelago (*TOW* 246). Similarly,

Sparrowhawk is Earthsea's last ever Archmage—the last individual with a deep knowledge of the Language of the Making—and after him will follow a lineage of kings with no training in the art of magic (*Tehanu* 798). These tendencies are examples of how “the balance changes” (*TOW* 152), indicating that the world is undergoing a paradigm shift. More precise and particular examples of this shift can be found, for instance, on the island of Atuan. In the past, Atuan's inhabitants worshipped the darkest and most destructive powers of the earth—referred to as Nameless Ones—and then, in more recent times, turned their worship to human-like god figures (*TToA* 252). On the isle of Havnor, we find another instance of natural worship being forsaken, as in a place called Aurun, also known as the Lips of Paor. This is “a great crack in the ground, a black gap twenty feet wide or more” (*TOW* 170). What is peculiar about this place is that here, the so-called Old Powers of the earth, “the chthonic or gaeian forces manifest as forces of place” (*Description* 413), akin to the forces worshipped in Atuan. However, with the passing of time, the locals have forgotten the knowledge of the power of this place, and now use it as a place to dispose of their waste, thus defiling it (*TOW* 171). Nevertheless, across the different lands of Earthsea, communities that maintain a tighter connection with nature still exist. We find instances of these in the Kargad Lands, who have continued with a clandestine adoration of the Old Powers; and the Children of the Open Sea, a community living in floating cities composed of several tied rafts who acquire their basic supplies from what the sea has to offer them, such as fish and seaweed (*TFS* 541).

All in all, however, we have seen how the aforementioned change is predominant in Earthsea's human societies, gradually driving them away from nature. An implication of this attitude is a dramatic change in the relationship between humanity and its ecosystem. We could say that, at the beginning of time, humans and nature engaged in a horizontal manner, meaning that theirs was an association between equals, where both stood on the same level. The division and estrangement derived from the Vedurnan then converted

this relationship into a vertical one, where each side struggled for the upper hand, and thus gain power and control over the other. This hostile mindset, particularly of humans claiming their rank above nature, is present in places like Pendor and Havnor. Regarding the former, we are told that the lords of that rich city were “[sending] their sons west dragon hunting. In sport” (*The Finder* 70). As for the latter, some people of that island are said to have engaged with the environment in utterly destructive ways for the sake of obtaining profit from a mineral mined from the earth (47).

We find the last example of this vertical relationship in an event that took place soon after the races of humans and dragons were divided as a consequence of the Vedurnan. This could be said to be the first instance of humanity claiming and achieving ownership over the lands of the dragons—that is, the natural environment—which they perceived to be a “realm [...] not of the body only” (*TOW* 227), but rather a paradisiacal place. As Orm Irian, one belonging to the race in between dragons and humans, expresses it, “you wanted things to make and keep. [...] But you were not content with your share. You wanted not only your cares, but our freedom. You wanted the wind! And by the spells and wizardries of those oath-breakers, you stole half our realm from us, walled it away from life and light, so that you could live there forever” (227). In a sense, we here witness human colonialism in action, the victims, in this case being dragons, and thus, as we have seen, nature. As the following sections of this chapter will show, the aftermath of such an enterprise and attitude towards nature, one implying estrangement and, in some cases, hostility, will be disastrous and manifold for mankind.

3.2.2. Life in a Fallen World

The first idea that we can study in the critique of colonialism and imperialism presented in the *Earthsea* saga, is the way in which these activities might influence humanity’s approach to and relationship with the natural world. Regarding the place that nature occupies in Le

Guin's work, Tonia Payne suggests that, at first glance, this is not a central topic in her stories, indeed "the relationship between humans and nature in her texts is usually subordinate to the story, a story that is 'about' something else entirely. She [...] is telling stories in which the natural world is described as physical setting and in which human relationships with that world are a significant but usually subordinate theme" (37). However, the fact that Le Guin frequently introduces the topic of nature by way of human approaches to it, should not lead us to think that she is thus relegating nature to a peripheral position. Rather, nature is a fundamental pillar on which Le Guin's literature rests, triggering the "awareness of the need to confront human interactions with and ideas about nature" (37). In a similar manner, Scott Russel Sanders writes that Le Guin "[seeks] to understand our life as continuous with the life of nature; [...] [projecting] 'the little human morality play' against the 'wilderness raging around'" (191).

In the previous section we have been able to see how an expansionist/colonialist activity on behalf of humans and their relationship with nature appear to be closely linked. This is discernible in the process of Vedurnan, humanity's appropriation of the land of the dragons, which took place shortly after the creation of Earthsea and whose implication was the ultimate separation of humans and dragons—or, on our reading, nature. This historical event has previously been catalogued as a colonialist act carried out by individuals who, driven by greedy minds, chose to become humans. Interestingly enough for our study, a nation's appropriation of lands has historically involved significant damage to nature. As Jonathan Bate claims, "imperialism has always been accompanied by ecological exploitation" (100) and "environmental degradation" (76), a thought also shared by Greg Garrard (133).

In the following sections we will take a look at the portrayal of nature in Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga, focusing on two main ideas. First, we will dissect the genesis of this fictional world: how it came into being and the conversion that nature suffers. Initially introduced as

humanity's originating force, nature is turned into an entity whose bonds with humanity are extremely damaged—a condition that leads to humankind's alienation from its ecosystem. On the other hand, we will analyse the diverse responses of individuals that follow from facing a world that has been shaped by humanity's greed for domination. Here, the focus will be on the use that two characters, the wizards Cob and Ged, make of the Language of the Making, that powerful tool that allows its speakers to control the forces of nature. The aim is to thus show how Le Guin hints at the appropriate and improper relationships that we may establish with the natural world.

3.2.2.1. A Natural Universe?

In section 3.2.1., which works as an introduction to the study of nature's portrayal in the *Earthsea* saga, we have mainly commented on the figure of dragons and the symbolism Le Guin grants them as representatives of nature, which, at the same time, implies their role as more than potential originators of the fictional world she devised.

Such a crucial part played by dragons may also hint at an additional implication, which will be explored in the following paragraphs. What we would like to suggest is that, by proposing a universe that has been created by a figure—Segoy—showcasing such tight bonds with the forces of nature, Le Guin might be subverting the Judaeo-Christian paradigm of the society in which she was born and raised. What her work proposes, then, is a move from the anthropocentric myth of creation, as is the Judaeo-Christian, to an ecocentric one, as presented in *Earthsea*. Indeed, Le Guin deemed religion to be a foundational part of, among other things, culture and art (“Ursula K. Le Guin: Free Speech, Press Are ‘Liberty in Action’”, par. 9). Making use of her cultural heritage, she thus constructs a critique of it, offering up an alternative to its man-centred world view. As Lev Grossman said of Le Guin, she “is a writer who [...] simply seized the patriarchal-Christian fantasy tradition laid down by Lewis and Tolkien by the scruff of its neck and reimagined it from a feminist,

post-Judaean-Christian point of view” (“An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin” [*Time*], par. 2).

For a person of her strong feminist beliefs and attachment to the natural world, it is no wonder that the Christian tradition is seen as an ideology that, although necessary for the cultural development of Western society, has shaped humanity’s mind in a not fully appropriate way, and for too long (John Loftus, qtd. in Mehta, par. 5). Certainly, man’s historically central role and hegemony in Western civilisation can be traced back to the Christian conception of the genesis of our universe. Robert H. Ayers (155) and Lynn White Junior agree on the biblical origins of this idea of man’s uncontested power. White Junior offers an explanation that is worth quoting at length:

God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image.

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the second century both Tertulian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. (9)

In light of this, our Western civilisation, which has followed Christianity as its spiritual guide for several centuries now, has also developed a social hierarchy in which man sits on top and rules every bit of our world. Le Guin was extremely critical of this, writing that “Civilized Man says: I am Self, I am Master, all the rest is Other—outside, below, underneath, subservient. I own, I use, I explore, I exploit, I control. What I do is what matters. What I want is

what matter is for. I am that I am, and the rest is women and the wilderness, to be used as I see fit” (“Woman/Wilderness” 161). This separation between man on the one hand, and woman and nature on the other, as its subordinates, is rooted in Christianity (Gunn Allen 245; Abram 94) and has incessantly worked its way into the Western psyche. For the purpose of our study, we will focus on how our Christian heritage has moulded the human–nature relationship.

In historical terms, the bond between humanity and the natural world is suggested to have been damaged by Christianity’s arrival, “destroying pagan animism” (White 10), which was the belief that “every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. [...] Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated” (10). Nevertheless, “Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (10). Thus, in opposition to a pre-Christian conception of the world in which humanity was subject to and in need of nature, “the notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very long rung, animals a slightly higher one, and man [...]—especially ‘civilized’ man—a very high one” (Gunn Allen 246) gradually gained prominence, to the point of shaping a “universe [...] primarily on a sense of separation and loss” (244). It is in this environment that human society finally diverts from the path of nature, becoming “a substance isolated from nature” (McDaniel 189) that possesses the divine power to rise above the laws of the natural world (White 10). As a consequence of this division, humanity’s regard for its ecosystem will change drastically, since the latter will no longer hold any power with which to lure humankind (Helfland 48). Hence, the relationship between these two entities becomes one of exploitation and profit, supported by the representatives of Christianity itself, who claim that “nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (White 14). The conception of the ecosystem as a

warehouse that humanity is entitled access to for raw materials and provisions has reached our days, and Henry David Thoreau was one of many who denounced this paradigm change. Writing in the nineteenth century, Thoreau laments how, even though “husbandry was once a sacred art [nowadays] it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely” (*Walden* 155). This profit-oriented mindset seems to be what upsets Thoreau the most, and he claims that “by avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, [...] the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber” (155). Although *Walden* was written almost two centuries ago, there is no denying that these words are still more than applicable to our current world.

Ursula Le Guin seeks to overthrow this long-established idea of a world made for man and his rule, where the whole of creation—including women and nature—are there for his use and profit. Since man’s hegemony is a completely arbitrary construct, Christopher Manes suggests that it can and should be fought. In his words, “‘Man’ is not an inevitability. He came into being at a specific time due to a complex series of intellectual and institutional mutations, among them the sudden centrality of reason. He could just as inexplicably vanish” (26). For this purpose, it is essential that we “challenge the humanistic backdrop that makes ‘Man’ possible, restoring us to the humbler status of *Homo sapiens*: one species among millions of other beautiful, terrible, fascinating—and signifying—forms” (26). In light of this, Le Guin seeks to remove man from the central place granted him by the Judaeo-Christian myth of creation (*The Future of Environmental Criticism* 105), and force him to share a common space with the rest of beings in a universe whose existence depends on the forces of nature.

Although *Earthsea* is, as we are suggesting, a subversion of the Christian anthropocentric myth of creation, it is true that language is

the spark that ignites the flame of life in both Christianity and Earthsea (Commoletti & Drout 116). In the same fashion as the Christian God brought the whole world and its inhabitants into being by command of His voice, so did Segoy animate the fictional world devised by Le Guin in its first stages, where “the beginning was the word” (Spivack 31). There is evidence of this in “The Creation of Éa”, the poem about the origins of Earthsea:

Before bright Éa was, *before Segoy*

bade the islands be,

the wind of dawn blew on the sea [...]

Only in silence the word. (*Description* 390-391, italics are mine)

However, as Tom Shippey points out, this shared feature of the two creation myths should not be taken to diminish Le Guin’s subversive goal. He writes that, although using and considering language’s creative element, Le Guin did so “more seriously and more literally than [...] many other theologians” (“The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words” 117). So much so, that he catalogues her as “a myth-breaker not a myth-maker” (117), her work “existing in defiance of twentieth-century orthodoxies, whether semantic, scientific, or religious” (107). Somewhat in line with Shippey’s comments, Robert Scholes also shares the belief that Le Guin has gone beyond her Christian heritage, mainly due to the fact that her work’s “perspective is broader than the Christian perspective—because finally it takes the world more seriously than the Judaeo-Christian tradition has ever allowed it to be taken” (36). The sincerity that Scholes suggests is a feature of Le Guin’s work can be seen in, among other things, her treatment of death. In her work, death is no longer a taboo, or the obscure issue it is in Christianity, but an essential part of life of any being (Scholes 38), and to have a conception of life without death—and vice versa—would be impossible. In a similar manner to what Jonathan Bate suggests is Wallace Stevens’s aim with his poem “Sunday Morning” (1915-1923), Le Guin is looking “to put aside the

immortal longings of the old religion [...] the ultimate end of which is to conquer space and time, to master weather, to stop the clock which counts us to our death” (115).

In the chapter devoted to the study of Le Guin’s context we talked about how California shaped her mind. We may now talk of how the place of the American West granted Le Guin the opportunity to carry out the subversion of Christian anthropocentrism discussed above. An American himself, Frederick Turner was a defender of the idea that America was, on the whole, naturally suited to create its own mythology. He writes that “We do not need to accept our myth of nature and culture. The state of America is the state of being able to change our myths” (48). Simonson and Montero-Gilete argue that the West, in particular, is a geographical and social space especially appropriate for the creation of new legends that, although rooted in European tradition, are adapted to this new environment (29). Setting off from this premise, they later on embark on a study of the new American hero that emerged in North American literature, for whom it is essential to develop a relationship of interaction and worship with the natural world in which he is thrust (31), where nature, due to the ecological conditions proper to the West, becomes chaotic and violent (32). This hero finally evolves into a figure that, veering away from his European roots, becomes one with the American environment (37) acquiring knowledge from it, due to the intimate relationship developed between the two (38). This shows us how these new stories will develop a character of their own, a rather local one, even though the root from which they have originally stemmed is European, just as Le Guin proposes in her *Earthsea* saga.

What, then, is Le Guin’s newly-devised ecocentric universe like? As an author that “works with an ecology” (Scholes 37), the particularity of her work resides in “its naturalism, its reverence for the balance of life, and its refusal of transcendental values” (“The Earthsea Trilogy” 83). We could say these three characteristics are Earthsea’s founding features: nature’s centrality, the need not to

disturb the natural balance of the cosmos, and the thought that no individual is entitled to transgress nature's limitations. This world view coincides Michel Serres's condition, set in his work *The Natural Contract* (1992), for a more appropriate relationship between humanity and nature. According to Serre, "we must indeed place things at the center and us at the periphery, or better still, things all around and us within them like parasites" (33). In addition, Le Guin's proposal orbits in equal measure around Lawrence Buell's take on environmental ethics, namely "that the interest of the ecosphere must override that of the interest of individual species" (*The Future of Environmental Criticism* 137).

Humanity's role within this specific cosmos does not allow it to claim any ownership of said world, although human individuals are given a certain degree of authority in Earthsea, in that they have the ability and the power to shape and affect the world, although they remain subjects to its everlasting forces. In a sense, this is "an authority without supremacy—a non-dominating authority" ("Bryn Mawr" 148), which Le Guin attributes to the peculiar mindset of the Native American. Indeed, her naturalistic conception of Earthsea could be said to share several similarities with the Native American relation to nature. It is not our purpose here to claim that Le Guin's thoughts on human–nature relationship were directly borrowed from Native American culture, but we would like to suggest that there may exist an affinity between the two. For instance, nature is central to the Native American understanding of the world. As Navajo Scott Momaday states, "from the time the Indian first set foot on this continent [...] he has centered his life in the natural world. He is deeply invested in the earth, committed to it both in his consciousness and his instinct. In him the sense of place is paramount. Only in reference to the earth can he persist in his true identity" (qtd. in Reed 28). Given the essential place that nature occupies in the Native American psyche, it is little wonder that they come to "[assume] that the earth is alive in the same sense that human beings are alive" (Gunn Allen 256), permeated with that "unit of consciousness [that] is the All

Spirit” (257). Additionally, nature showcases religious or spiritual attributes, as “a source of divine revelation” (Reed 29) and as can be seen in its application to totemism (A. Kroeber 837). Native American culture also displays belief in a necessary equilibrium of the cosmos, stemming from a conception of the whole range of beings that inhabit the world as lacking hierarchy. This includes “[acknowledging] the essential harmony of all things and [seeing] all things as being of equal value in the scheme of things, denying [...] opposition, dualism, and isolation” (Gunn Allen 243), together with “[allowing] all animals, vegetables, and minerals [...] the same or even greater privileges than humans” (243).

Nature’s centrality and depiction in *Earthsea* may also bring animism to mind. Animism is “the sense of an all-pervasive spiritual power in nature” (Hughes 7), which leads the individual “to a feeling that one ought not to injure the living things that share the world with mankind, or alter the natural arrangement even of land and sea, because nature is divine” (7). This reminds us of those places in *Earthsea* where the Old Powers of the Earth seem to be still present, and which humans need to approach with respect and reverence, since their anger can be devastating. Places like the Tombs of Atuan, the Immanent Grove, Roke Knoll, and the cave at Aurun are all places that almost seem to have a life of their own. As pointed out above, animism seems to have come to an end with the arrival of Christianity, leading to “the natural world [losing] its numinosity, its sacredness” (21) and the consequent blind exploitation of nature on behalf of human civilisation (22). This adds yet more relevance to Le Guin’s ambition to subvert the Christian paradigm.

One last idea that we would like to mention about *Earthsea*’s complexion is the unity formed by each of its several forces and inhabitants. This shows connotations of what Jonathan Bate refers to as “the relatively new science of ecology, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things. [This model] shows us the wholeness of the living globe, shows us ‘the extreme intricacy and precision of

its interconnected working parts—winds, currents, rocks, plants, animals, weathers, in all their swarming and law-abiding variety” (27-28). Isaiah Berlin’s simile on this issue is worth considering, when he writes that “the world can be conceived organically—like a tree, in which every part lives for every other part, and through every other part” (5), where everything partakes in “the eternal all-containing spirit” (20). In fact, Crow and Erlich refers to Le Guin as “a firm proponent of the oneness of the world” (200), which is to say that Earthsea, “[a] world of land and sea [...] is Le Guin’s concrete image for the idea that all things—organic and inorganic, material and spiritual, object and force—shape and are shaped by each other” (Cummins 10). Scholars addressing the existence of this particular conception of the universe in Le Guin’s work regarding its origins, pointing to diverse points of inspiration ranging from medieval times (Fen Tsai 150), to Emerson’s proposals (*Communities of the Heart* 113). We should also mention the presence of this belief in Native American culture. In this regard, Paula Gunn Allen writes about their widespread conviction that “all of life is living—that is, dynamic and aware, partaking as it does in the life of the All Spirit and contributing as it does to the continuing life of that same Great Mystery” (243). What is interesting for the present study is how Le Guin herself praises the Native American assumption of the human being as part of a supreme apparatus—something that the European colonisers did not embrace. She writes how

what the Whites perceived as a wilderness to be ‘tamed’ was in fact better known to human beings than it has ever been since: known and named. Every hill, every valley, creek, canyon, gulch, gully, draw, point, cliff, bluff, beach, bend, good-sized boulder, and tree of any character had its name, its place in the order of things. An order was perceived, of which the invaders were entirely ignorant. Each of those names named, not a goal, not a place to get to, but a place where one is: a center of the world. (“Non-Euclidean View” 82)

Earthsea may also be said to be very akin to yet another image of the world as one sole unit, namely “the Gaia hypothesis, the idea that the whole earth is a single vast, living, breathing, ecosystem” (Bate 146). Devised by James Lovelock and developed in detail in his book *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979), this theory proposes that “the entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity” (Lovelock 9), where “important environmental properties [...] have to be kept in subtle balance if life is to persist” (16).

Indeed, the need for a persisting balance expressed by Lovelock is paramount for the welfare of Le Guin’s fictional world. In Earthsea, “the principle that sustains being is the Equilibrium” (Crow & Erlich 221), which is similar to Lovelock’s propositions of a “near-infinity of creatures performing essential co-operative tasks” (44) that calls for an “intricate system of check and balances” (46). This Equilibrium implies that every agent in said fictional world fulfils a crucial role, even those forces that seem as opposite as “light and darkness” (*AWoE* 199), and the powers of good and evil (Bucknall 47). This necessary measured cooperation between antagonists appears to be a crucial condition for life in Earthsea, even as it was at its moment of genesis, as told in “The Creation of Éa”:

Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life. (*Description* 391)

The inhabitants of Earthsea are perfectly aware of this arrangement, as can be perceived in Ged’s words: “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” (*TFS* 543). This balance should not, however, be thought of as an immutable being, since “a wizard’s power [...] can shake [it]” (*AWoE* 56). Ged’s advice to Arren—who later becomes Prince Lebannen—is clarifying here: “Do you see, Arren, how an act is not, as young men

think, like a rock that one picks up and throws, and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted the earth is lighter, the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends" (*TFS* 477). Hence, although changeable, the universe will always find a way, by means of lesser or greater adjustments, to keep the Equilibrium, so that "the pattern [holds]" (*The Finder* 97).

This mandatory collaboration between opposite forces relates to the second requisite for Earthsea's proper functioning: the cycle of life, the never-ending process of life and death (Crow & Erlich 201). Regardless of our cultural conception of these as opposites, in Earthsea, death is but a precondition for life, and "to deny death is to turn from life" ("The Earthsea Trilogy" 74). The necessity of death and its regenerative power is also implicit in Lovelock's conception of Gaia, as when he says that "it is so often ignored or deliberately forgotten that the unending death-roll of all creatures, including ourselves, is the essential complement to the unceasing renewal of life" (125). Again, it is Ged—the main character in the *Earthsea* saga—who shows the greatest sensibility for this issue, claiming that "only what is mortal bears life [...]. Only in death is there rebirth. The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement—an eternal becoming" (*TFS* 562). This becoming hints at the idea of death as a contribution to the organic world, fusing with "the earth and sunlight, the leaves of trees, the eagle's flight. [...] And all who ever died, live; they are reborn, and have no end, nor will there be an end" (613). "The Creation of Éa" is also clear on this idea of "[returning] forever to the source" (*Tehanu* 860):

The making from the unmaking,
the ending from the beginning,
who shall know surely?
What we know is the doorway between them
that we enter departing. (*Description* 392)

The above paragraphs have aimed to show how Le Guin's conception of Earthsea drinks from different cultural springs. Setting off from a Christian tradition that she wants to displace, although borrowing from it the centrality of the spoken word in the creation of her universe, she moves towards more ecocentric conceptions of the cosmos, which implies that her work combines both tendencies. We also mentioned how Le Guin and Thoreau seemed to share a similar objective, namely that of being able to offer their compatriots a new cultural standpoint from which to understand their own land. This implied combining the best of European and Native American cultures to produce a hybrid that suited the new world, which is what Simonson and Montero-Gilete suggest happened in the American literature of the West around the nineteenth century. Applying their ideas to Le Guin's work, we could say that Earthsea's myth of creation, and the parameters that it sets, can be thought of as another example of Le Guin's aforementioned goal, since she has been able to create a universe that shares, among other elements, the Native's relationship with the natural world, based on knowledge, sensibility and spirituality, while also making responsible applications of European social institutions (Simonson & Montero-Gilete 33).

The central role of nature in Earthsea gives it enormous and extraordinary powers, some of them, as has been suggested, used in the very creation of said world. Nature is, throughout the different stories that comprise Le Guin's saga, portrayed as an entity of strong character. Before commenting on what kind of conception of nature is featured in these stories, it would be interesting to learn what their author has to say about it. Le Guin states explicitly that she could not conceive of a nature that is "warm, comfortable, and easy" ("Ursula Le Guin" 10), believing this to be a rather "simplistic" ("An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin" [Freedman] 46) view. This is the type of nature that Garrard calls "unsullied purity" (195). On the contrary, she admitted to preferring "things a little dirty and messy. Mixed up. Mucky" ("An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin" [Freedman] 46). Le

Guin thus devised her conception of nature as ambivalent, possessing “light and darkness” (Crow & Erlich 201) within itself. As Ged puts it: “The Earth is beautiful, and bright, and kindly, but that is not all. The Earth is also terrible, and dark, and cruel. The rabbit shrieks dying in the green meadows. The mountains clench their great hands full of hidden fire” (*TToA* 347). This, nonetheless, should not lead us to think of nature as either good or evil. As pointed out above, in the case of the dragons, nature also escapes the grasp of human tags. Instead, nature in Earthsea needs to be regarded as “pre-ethical” (*Description* 412), and, using George Slusser’s words, any attempt to categorise it as evil is nothing less than “a misunderstanding of the dynamics of life” (“The Earthsea Trilogy”⁷⁴).

We find exponents of this ambivalent nature all across Earthsea, although two stand out: the so-called Old Powers and the places where they are manifest, and the dragons. These, in turn, can be divided into two principal categories: those that portray nature’s darkest and most dangerous, even destructive, character, and the ones representing its most pleasant face. As a side comment, it is interesting to see how this dualist view of the natural world may reflect Le Guin’s Taoist beliefs, more precisely the *yang-yin* symbol, which represents the light and dark of every being; as well as the impact that the raw natural scenery of California had on her.

As for the representatives of a darker nature, we have mentioned the dragons and the Old Powers. Since the former have already been studied in detail in the previous section, we shall only focus on the latter. These powers of nature are tremendous (*AWoE* 142), omnipresent (*TOW* 218), and uncontrollable (*The Finder* 116), “bound each to an isle, a certain place, cave or stone or welling spring” (148). Thus, they can be found in places like “Roke Knoll, the Immanent Grove, the Tombs of Atuan, the Terrenon [and] the Lips of Paor” (*Description* 391). While among these spots where the Old Powers are manifest there are some, like the Lips of Paor, that do not clearly fall into either of the opposite categories of Earthsea’s

ambivalent nature, there are others that can definitely be considered to belong to either its darker or brighter side. For instance, the Terrenon and the Tombs of Atuan fall into the dark and destructive category. The former is a stone “made when the world itself was made, and will endure until the end of the world” (*AwoE* 138), in which “an old and terrible spirit was imprisoned” (138). The particular quality of this stone is the knowledge that it can grant to the person that touches it (142). However, it is also said to carry “great evil” (139), perhaps the very same peril inherent in a limitless knowledge, which, as we shall see below, is a central issue in Le Guin’s work. The Tombs of Atuan, on the other hand, are home to the Nameless Ones, which are, to an extent, portrayed as evil spirits. The spirits residing in the Tombs make them a treacherous (*TToA* 276) and “deathly place” (344), although they are simultaneously able to create some of the most beautiful sights humans can behold. These spirits were able to produce a “great vaulted cavern beneath the Tombstones, [...] jewelled with crystals and ornamented with pinnacles and filigrees of white limestone [...]: immense, with glittering roof and walls, sparkling, delicate, intricate, a palace of diamonds, a house of amethyst and crystal, from which the ancient darkness had been driven out by glory” (291). Power, then, although destructive, also has the ability to trigger beauty. Such is the force of the Old Powers that, driven by anger, they tear down the Tombs and the place where they were worshipped—a destruction that they survive (338). Thus, the Terrenon and the Tombs of Atuan—together with the dragons whenever these showcase their most aggressive character—hint at a specific facet of nature, which is its wildest, most dangerous (Garrard 68), even destructive aspect, ready “[to take] [things] away from us” (Serres 36).

In contrast, Earthsea is also home to some very tranquil and beautiful landscapes, even if the Old Powers are present in some of them. Such a place, where humans and the forces of nature live in a rather relaxed relationship is the Isle of Roke, which is “the heart of Earthsea” (*The Finder* 84) and epicentre of magic in said archipelago, due to, among other things, it being the location of the school of

magic. On this isle, there are a couple of spots where nature is most present. The first of them is Roke Knoll, a promontory that “was the first that stood above the sea, when the First Word [of creation] was spoken” (*TFS* 419). If one stands on top of it, its connections with nature are easily felt, “the roots of it [...] deep, deeper than the sea, reaching down even to the old, blind, secret fires at the world’s core” (*AWoE* 74). Another place that displays an extremely tight bond with the natural powers is the Immanent Grove. This enchanted forest is “the heart of peace” (*TOW* 218), and, although unpredictable (*Dragonfly* 339), a place of truth (338) and beauty. According to Ged, the “leaves [there] don’t all turn in autumn, but some at every season, so the foliage is always green with a gold light in it. Even in a dark day those trees seem to hold some sunlight. And in the night, it’s never quite dark under them. There’s a kind of glimmer in the leaves, like moonlight or starlight” (*TOW* 214). However, the crucial element in the Immanent Grove is none of those just mentioned. Its most important characteristic appears to be its centrality to the very life of Earthsea, considered its heart (36). It is the static axis around which the rest of life moves (*TFS* 409), the soil where “the roots of knowledge” (*The Finder* 84) lie deep. It is so essential to Earthsea’s wellbeing and correct functioning that, “if ever the trees should die so shall [wizards’] wisdom die, and in those days the waters will rise and drown the islands of Earthsea which Segoy raised from the deeps in the time before myth, all the lands where men and dragons dwell” (*AWoE* 89).

Regarding areas that stand out not due to their connection with the power of nature, but thanks to their natural beauty and tranquillity, we can count Selidor and Gont. The way these lands are depicted can remind the reader of the landscapes of “Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden” (Kolodny 6). Selidor is an area of Earthsea where dragons can be found in their natural habitat. Its description reads as follows:

The dunes ran inland, low and grassy, for half a mile or so, and then there were lagoons, thick with sedge and saltreeds, and beyond those, low hills lay yellow-brown and empty out of sight. Beautiful and desolate was Selidor. Nowhere on it was there any mark of man, his work or habitation. There were no beasts to be seen, and the reed-filled lakes bore no flocks of gulls or wild geese or any bird. (*TFS* 587)

While Selidor, regardless of its beauty, may even seem slightly awe-inspiring due to its vast sceneries—Gont, and especially the area Re Albi—are the very definition of an idyllic, pastoral landscape (Sawyer 402). In this land, which is Ged's own birthplace, human society and nature have come to develop an exemplary relationship based on rational exploitation and stewardship. Even away from home, Ged's attachment to Gont brings memories of "bright pools in the River Ar; [...] of Ten Alders village under the great slanting forests of the mountain; of the shadows of morning across the dusty village street, the fire leaping under bellows-blast in the smith's melting-pit in a winter afternoon, the witch's dark fragrant hut where the air was heavy with smoke and wreathing spells" (*AWoE* 86). Of course, no pastoral is such without the presence of "shepherds [,] [...] cow- and goatherds" (Garrard 39), which is also an essential economic activity in Gont.

On the whole, we can see how Le Guin devised an Earthsea that seemed to feature ideas put forth by several different philosophers and anthropologists. For instance, this fictional universe was originally a place where nature is at the centre and "behaves as a subject" (Serres 36), creating and shaping that world. As has also been shown, humanity, belonging to the original dragon-human race that inhabited the archipelago, was meant to live on peaceful and responsible terms with nature, of which it was part. Thus, and drawing, to an extent, from diverse native cultures, Le Guin depicted a type of humanity that spoke nature's language (Abram 87), meant to live according to the "rhythm learned from nature" (T. Kroeber &

Heizer 92) and unfold a “sensitive, responsible environmental ethic” (Reed 26). However, putting theory into practice is not always easy, and if the responsibility of carrying that out falls into humanity’s hands, it can certainly be even more difficult. Humankind’s response to such a duty was the event of the Vedurnan, driven by a desire for dominance, using violence if need be. Its consequences, although originally related to other issues, can be found in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno: “the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects” (21), namely dragons, and, consequently, nature itself. This alienation from the natural roots is what leads to the foundation of human society in Earthsea, which can reflect what has historically been considered a “move from the state of nature to that of civility [that can be] likened to the fall of man” (Bate 16). From here, humanity will come to regard the natural world that it inhabits “not as a potential ‘home’ in which to dwell” (McDaniel 197), but “as an ‘other’ to be manipulated and transcended” (197). Ultimately, the only worth given to nature will be that “of its instrumental value to human ends, rather than [...] its intrinsic value, that is, its value in and for itself” (201). This turn in the human attitude to nature can be clearly perceived in Earthsea in the evolution of two issues, both of them studied above: the change in religious paradigm, from worship of nature to worship of the human; and humanity’s loss of, and consequent need to, learn the Language of the Making, the language nature speaks in Earthsea. This new scenario brings about the steady degradation of human knowledge and society, for “ecocide and genocide go hand in hand” (Bate 64).

3.2.2.2. Nature and the Language of the Making

The deterioration of human–nature relationships in Earthsea—due to colonialist ambitions and the consequent alienation between the two—is portrayed with precision via different uses of magic in Earthsea. Before turning to the particular cases of Cob and Ged—examples of bad and good approaches to magic and knowledge, respectively—it is

worth lingering, for a while, on the two factors that make wizardry possible in *Earthsea*: nature, and the Language of the Making.

The magic performed by the wizards and its sources form a kind of chain in which each link is connected to the one that comes before. We have previously shown how magic is directly connected to True Speech, and the magic power that each individual can achieve is also linked to, among other things, their knowledge of this original language. At the same time, the Language of the Making is deeply rooted in nature, as it is its own language, the very source of its existence. Highlighting the tight bond between nature and language, David Abram comments on how “the complexity of human language is related to the complexity of the earthly ecology—not to any complexity of our species considered apart from that matrix” (86). Abram also quotes fellow phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, who referred to language as “the very voice of the trees, the waves, and the forests” (86). In the same way that nature is infinite, there seems to be “no end to that language” (*AWoE* 60) in *Earthsea*. According to Tom Shippey, the way that names are afforded such importance in Le Guin’s work is yet another sign of her ecocentric view: “In her imagined world, the devotion to the word rather than the thing is bound up with an attitude of respect for all parts of creation” (“The Magic Art” 104). In making use of a language that is so rooted in nature, then, “the weaving of spells is itself interwoven with the earth and the water, the winds, the fall of light, of the place where it is cast” (*TFS* 483). In addition, what type of magic can be performed seems to depend on the local natural conditions of the place where the individual is performing it (*AWoE* 189).

The main reason that this language is so pivotal for wizardry, or “naming magic” (“Entretien” 144) as Le Guin calls it, is the peculiarity of the names that form it, that is, that they are conveyors of the being (“The Magic Art” 116) and the essence of that which they name (“Interview” 63). At the same time, the person that utters the name gains knowledge about the named entity, as “to know the true

name is to know the thing” (“Dreams Must Explain Themselves” 9). The Language of the Making contains not only the true names of every object or phenomenon in the natural world, but also those given to humans when they come of age. This is perhaps the most important rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, since the individual will receive their true name, which will be different from the use-name that they have had until then (*AWoE* 21). Of course, this implies that the true being of humans is equally conveyed in their received true names. One scene is particularly clarifying on this issue. Having escaped the Tombs of Atuan, Ged and Tenar arrive in a city in the Kargish Lands. Not wanting the city guard to recognise him, Ged uses a spell that completely changes his appearance. Although this initially startles Tenar, when she utters the name Ged, the spell loses power and fades away from her perception and she is able to recognise the apparent stranger next to her (*TToA* 379). Again, we see how, in this case, someone’s true name can lead us to know their essence, which, as Martin Heidegger has it, is historically that which is “considered to be what the thing is” (Heidegger 4).

Knowledge and power are two factors that appear to be frequently entwined (“Non-Euclidean View” 97), here exemplified by magic and True Speech. David Abram explains, in general terms, this relationship between language and power—or, in the case of Earthsea, magic—and how the latter can be obtained from knowledge of the former, writing that “to assemble the letters that make up the name of a thing, in the correct order, was precisely to effect a magic, to establish a new kind of influence over that entity, to summon it forth! To spell, to correctly arrange the letters to form a name or a phrase, seemed thus at the same time to cast a spell, to exert a new and lasting power over the things spelled” (133). Indeed, one of the most negative aspects of wizardry is the fact that, due to its deep knowledge of the natural world granted by the study of the Language of the Making, humans develop a false notion that they are elevated to a position in which they can claim mastery on anything (“Coming Back From the Silence” 96), even nature itself, to the point of being able to “[hold] it

on a fine, thin leash, tightening it on [its] throat (*AWoE* 112). The idea of language as a means to control our surroundings is not a new one (Payne 56-57; 120), and the issue of humanity's use of language to control and dominate nature has already been tackled in several studies on Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle, from Tonya Payne's remark that "who owns the names owns the things" (115) to Deirdre C. Byrne suggesting how Le Guin "shows naming as a linguistic imposition, aimed at domesticating and controlling the Otherness of natural phenomena" (62). This power, granted to human society by the very language of creation, can ultimately lead to the modification of the natural world ("Telling Is Listening" 199). From here, it follows that, since "names [...] validate, even perhaps confer existence" (Payne 55), giving something a new name translates into reshaping its being (*AWoE* 67).

As mentioned above, after the Vedurnan, humans gave up their knowledge of the Language of the Making in favour of the mastery of other crafts, and this meant that humans were eventually forced to learn that language again. This has been interpreted as quite a clear sign of human society's estrangement from nature. We would here like to suggest that the very event of True Speech being given that linguistic status in human society further enhances their alienation from the natural world. Philosophers have historically aimed to portray humanity as "*uniquely* unique; that our noble gifts set us definitively apart from, and above, the rest of the animate world" (Abram 77), and some have considered human language the differential factor setting us apart, while others look at it as the ultimate "symptom of humankind's apartness from other species and our consequent power to destabilize ecosystems" (Bate 149). Jonathan White's take on language is clarifying here: "we become so enamored of our language and its ability to describe the world that we create a false and irresponsible separation. We use language as a device for distancing. Somebody who is genuinely living in their ecosystem wouldn't have a word for it" (qtd. in Payne 335). This is precisely the issue with humanity in *Earthsea*, it no longer forming an intrinsic part

of their being, they need to reconfigure that arcane, natural knowledge in the shape of the Language of the Making.

Prior to the division between dragons and humans, this knowledge was inherent to all the inhabitants of Earthsea. As something that was innate to that primeval race, there was no urge to objectify it into an extant body. However, the human need and ambition to recover that lost knowledge made it necessary to shape it into a language as we know it today, for the survival and learning of which writing becomes essential (*Description* 384), with its endless lists of names compiled by the Master Namer and learned by anyone who aspires to become a wizard. This issue of the written word is in itself a crucial element in the division that language creates between human society and their ecosystem. Contrary to oral cultures, whose “gestures and signs were seen as the least mediated form of communication, and therefore closest to nature, and their absence of syntax and abstraction seemed to guarantee an immediacy and honesty” (Murray 17), the creation of “the Greek ‘alphabet’, [led to] [...] the progressive abstraction of linguistic meaning from the enveloping life-world” (Abram 102). This development enabled language to “[become] a ponderable presence in its own right” (107) and to bring humanity under its alluring spell. The illusion’s deceit would consist of the idea that “the written letters bring not wisdom but only ‘the conceit of wisdom’, making men seem to know much when in fact they know little” (113), at the same time as it triggered a “more detached, abstract mode of thinking” (109). We are thus able to see how, although originally rooted in nature itself, we have, in a way, perverted this knowledge in that its use has been deprived of its essential and original connection with the living world. As Greg Garrard comments, “communications technologies, capable of infinite replication and wide dissemination of information, *have initiated a world of simulation, that now functions to supplant the real world*” (190, italics are mine).

Regarding the alienating effect of language, we should consider the implications of humanity's use of True Speech in Earthsea. In the previous chapter, we mentioned how Le Guin herself categorised wizardry as something close to science, due to its inquisitive purpose (Fen Tsai 149) and the fact that it "is developed with such precise and quasi-rigorous detail" (Freedman xvi). Many Le Guin scholars highlight and support this comparison, including Byrne (137) and Scholes (37), while others, although not categorising it as such, describe Le Guin's take on wizardry in terms that remind us of science. For instance, Shippey writes about wizardry's "intellectual" ("The Magic Art" 101) and "moral boundaries" (101) and Comoletti and Drout speak of True Speech's "ability to both describe the world perfectly and to change it" (120). If science can be considered to serve the purpose of a tool or the technological basis for some greater plan, such as obtaining knowledge on how something works and then make use of it; a "revealing" (12), to use Martin Heidegger's terminology, then its connotations become quite dark. Within the Romantic paradigm, the analytic scientific perspective was considered something akin to bringing death to the observed object (Berlin 114). In more scholarly terms, the deep knowledge of the ecosystem that science has given Man "[has] enabled him to modify and change the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments" (Sir Humphry Davy, qtd. in Bate 50).

All in all, what is clear is that, depending on the way it is used, wizardry combined with its most valuable tool, contain elements that can make it look like a means of domination, which can ultimately contribute to humanity losing contact with the ecosystem that it inhabits. Given the relationship that has just been established between magic and science, the following words by Payne can help us clarify this issue: "Clearly science itself is not alienating. The sense that science has the only answer and that the scientist must remain separate from what is being observed leads to alienation; science that maintains

the connection with the human and the cosmos is not only valuable but as true and as metaphoric, Le Guin suggests, as fiction” (357). As will be shown below, this is the factor that determines Ged and Cob’s behaviour as wizards as either good or bad.

To anyone who considers making use of the power granted by wizardry, there are certain guidelines, or rules, to which one must adhere. The most important idea for wizards to bear in mind is that “their power was not theirs, but lent to them” (*Description* 412), which, at the same time, entails the notion that, as “a power greater than [their] own” (*TFS* 479), the greatest knowledge is “to know how to let it do” (*Dragonfly* 285), that is, not to meddle with its ways. The importance of being intensely aware of these factors resides in the fact that this power conveys “the wholeness of knowledge” (*The Finder* 71), which refers to its dualistic nature. This dualism necessarily conditions the way in which the individual should approach power, since it can serve either creative or destructive purposes, as conveyed in the following words, from *Dragonfly*: “‘If a word can heal, a word can wound,’ the witch said. ‘If a hand can kill, a hand can cure. It’s a poor cart that goes only one direction” (298). This duality that is present within power, entailed in the idea that “danger must surround power as shadow does light” (*AWoE* 33), means that, if perverted by “fear or greed” (*The Finder* 14), “it [can] work great evil” (*AWoE* 154). The paradox of knowledge and the power drawn from it lies in the fact that, although essentially good, they can turn into pure evil if used in the wrong way.

Of course, the factor capable of corrupting power and directing it to evil is none other but our human selves. In the history of Earthsea, evil has been “a web [...] men [have woven]” (*TFS* 411). This pessimistic view of humanity is traceable in the principal character in Le Guin’s short story *The Finder*, Otter. He laments that “there’s an evil in us, in humankind. [...] And everything we do finally serves evil, because that’s what we are. Greed and cruelty. I look at the world, at the forests and the mountain here, the sky, and it’s

all right, as it should be. But we aren't. People aren't. We're wrong. We do wrong. No animal does wrong. How could they? But we can, and we do. And we never stop" (64). In Taoism, we find the idea that every being and force in the universe contain the ability to create and destroy; it is what makes them what they are. In light of this, we should not blame the whole of humanity for every evil that has been done. Rather, we could say that it depends on the individual and their personal take on it (9), as well as other complementary factors, like the presence of temptation (*On the High Marsh* 267), greed (*The Finder* 43), and ignorance (101). It is this type of individual's "shoddy work that costs to mend" (*TOW* 46). John Crow and Richard Erlich neatly summarise this idea when they write that "evil comes with knowledge, with consciousness, and the birth of consciousness brings the knowledge of good and evil and the power to do each. Evil is the alliance of conscious knowledge with greed for life inherent in the unconscious" (214). Those who venture to tread this path risk tipping over into a humanly inherent ambition to dominate. As Le Guin suggests, "when [the power of those individuals] claims a privileged relationship to reality, it becomes dangerous and potentially destructive" ("Bryn Mawr" 149). However, as conscious individuals, a characteristic that is, at the same time, "our gift and our curse [all] we can do is be conscientious about it—do it rightly, not wrongly" ("Coming Back From Silence" 98).

Thus, apart from being conscious of what may be triggered by our individual approaches to power, we may also comment on other factors in the Earthsea world that may help us establish a wholesome relationship with power. Among these are characteristics like a lucid mind (*AWoE* 22) and a kind heart (53). We may also mention the central idea that we need to stick to the root of power, which is where it maintains its purest and uncorrupted form. We have suggested how Earthsea's wizards draw their power from a language that stems from nature itself. Jonathan Bate's words may serve to clarify this thought, when he writes of our necessity "to live [...] with thoughtfulness and with attentiveness, an attunement to both words and the world, and so

to acknowledge that, although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world” (23).

There are two more elements, central to *Earthsea*, that every wizard needs to take into account when making use of their power, namely the need to use power responsibly (Payne 122), and to be aware of the limitations that it demands (Fen Tsai 149). Regarding the former, Crow and Erlich comment on the importance of universal considerations. They suggest that, given the effect that individual actions can have on the cosmos, “the decision to act should follow only after [the] consequences have been consciously examined and weighed against considerations of self” (208). In other words, universal welfare should always prevail over personal ambition. In fact, it is on such decisions that “our freedom” (209) depends.

On the other hand, one of the teachings Ged learns from the Master Summoner is restraint: “You thought, as a boy, that a mage is one who can do anything. So I thought, once. So did we all. And the truth is that as a man’s real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower: until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must* do” (*AWoE* 89). Regarding our own world, Serres suggests that if power and the knowledge from where it comes are to be kept within boundaries, it is fundamental that they be based on reason (46). The same necessity applies in *Earthsea*. Here we again find the idea of the need to stay close to the root; the centre. If we expand our knowledge in a limitless way, we run the risk of disenchanting nature. This is precisely what Mark Twain advises us against in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883): “Now when I had mastered the language of this water and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something, too. I had lost something which could never be restored to me while I lived. All the grace, the beauty, the poetry had gone out of the majestic river!” (qtd. in Sanders 189). In Le Guin’s fictional world, mage apprentices are taught that “that which

gives [them] power to work magic, sets the limits of that power” (*AWoE* 60), and that, as a consequence, what matters most is to “do what is needed. And no more” (*TFS* 557). The necessity of responsible handling of limited power is also an idea the Transcendentalists promoted, with their critique of our ever-expanding knowledge, and is espoused by Taoism, as Fen Tsai (150) and Bucknall (42) have suggested. Several examples can be found in the sacred book of the Tao, as in chapter 32:

To order, to govern,
is to begin naming;
when names proliferate
it's time to stop.
If you know when to stop
you're in no danger. (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 43)

On the whole, the appropriate approach to power that Le Guin \ proposes in her *Earthsea* novels can be summarised in the natural contract outlined by Michel Serres. He speaks in favour of a relationship

of symbiosis and reciprocity in which our relationship to things would set aside mastery and possession in favor of admiring attention, reciprocity, contemplation, and respect; where knowledge would no longer imply property, nor action mastery [...]. An armistice contract in the objective war, a contract of symbiosis, for a symbiont recognizes the host's rights, whereas a parasite—which is what we are now—condemns to death the one he pillages and inhabits, not realizing that in the long run he's condemning himself to death too. (38)

In the end, since our advancement as a society grants us knowledge and power that, at times, can be difficult to even believe to be true, “it

is we who have the power to determine whether the earth will sing or be silent” (Bate 282).

3.2.2.3. Humanity’s Way: Can Colonialism Shape Our Response to Nature?

After a meticulous study of the source of the wizards’ power, we will now move our focus to the uses that said power can be put to. The relationship that the individual establishes with their ecology can be a decisive factor in the appropriate or inadequate employment of magic, as portrayed in the two characters that will be studied below.

3.2.2.3.1. Cob: Power That Dominates

In what is likely the clearest example of a completely wrong use of power, we will now turn to the character Cob—a powerful wizard featured in *The Farthest Shore*, the third book of the *Earthsea* series. After a brief introduction to his persona, we will try to throw some light on the reasons behind his transgressive behaviour, as well as the consequences it brings.

Under the influence of an unfathomable power, the wizard Cob was allured by the most dangerous uses of magic, such as the art of summoning. Making light use of this perilous art, he was challenged and punished by a young Ged, who, unfortunately, only managed to deter him from for a brief period of time (*TFS* 487-489). In the same way as Serres’s proposed fallen humanity, Cob is fashioned as a wizard who has lost all “faculties of conscience, reason, and judgement” (94); has been led to avarice by wisdom (*TFS* 440) and caught up “in the struggle between the human desire to know nature, [...] and the concomitant desire to master [it]” (Payne 3). This insatiable desire to know the secrets of life, “to know what comes next, [to have] it all mapped out” (“Non-Euclidean View” 97) clashes with Taoist and Transcendentalist teachings about the limits of wisdom. Lao Tzu advocated in favour of a measured and restrained

use of power, while warning against behaviour that did not heed this advice, with claims such as “The more ingenious the skillful [sic] are, / the more monstrous their inventions” (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 74). It is precisely this that happens to Cob, who pays the price for the temerity of trying to outwit the laws of nature, a road that leads to nothing but annihilation. Jean Cooper’s edition of the holy book of Tao conveys an illuminating view on this issue, when she writes how man “descends below the animal when he sets out to exploit nature. Once he has become divorced from nature and has lost the sense of communion with all things, the Oneness, he starts on the downward path which leads to destruction, not only of nature but of his own spiritual life, for the two are intimately associated; as he kills nature, so he kills himself” (66). What we can extract from these words is that, in Taoism there may exist a relationship between the idea of humanity’s alienation from nature and that of limitless knowledge and power, and this is reflected in Earthsea.

Cob’s loss of contact with the natural world can be said to be based on personal choice—a decision that becomes a desire to master its forces, as can be seen in the control that he exercises over several dragons (*TFS* 582). In order to subdue nature, Cob will employ all of his power in a quest that, applying Scott R. Sanders’s own critique of humanity, could be catalogued as “reason’s wholesale assault upon nature” (190). At the same time, this resembles humanity’s “Faustian [...] arrogant, shocking, and suicidal disregard of [its] roots in the earth” (Fromm 39). His infraction resides in the search for immortality, “eternal life” (*TFS* 518), in response to “the self that cries *I want to live, let the world rot so long as I can live!*” (560). Thus, he sets out to open a “wound” (429) through which one can travel between the realms of the living and the dead, a “dry, dark springhead, the mouth of dust, the place where a dead soul, crawling into earth and darkness, was born again dead” (617).

An interesting point of view from which to study the reasons that might have driven Cob to act the way he did is to interpret him as

a herald of the Enlightenment.⁷ Fashioned on the necessity of “liberating human beings from fear” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1); that fear of the unknown born from an irrational civilisation, the Enlightenment has been “understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought” (1). Figuratively speaking, the individuals that comprised this movement sought to cast some light on those issues that had until then been hidden under the darkness of unreason and superstition. It is precisely this that Cob is after—the unveiling of one of the better-kept secrets of nature: the origin of life. Thus, in his quest for immortality, he must cast some light on the “deep [...] springs of being, deeper than life, than death” (*TFS* 596). As pointed out above, this implies that he ultimately endeavours to bring nature and its forces under control, so as to make use of them. This idea of dominance is also conveyed by the presumptions of the Enlightenment, from the moment it postulated the superiority of the man of reason, especially of European origin (Conrad 1005; Sardar xvi). From this lofty position, the rest of the world and its irrational and uncivilized inhabitants become, in a sense, the Other; mere objects at the European subject’s hand. This is how Serres explains this Enlightenment belief: “Mastery and possession: these are the master words launched by Descartes at the dawn of the scientific and technological age, when our Western reason went off to conquer the universe. We dominate and appropriate it [...]. Our fundamental relationship with objects comes down to war and property” (32). At the same time, Serres mentions this predisposition to take possession of everything to have its origin in “the *libido dominandi* [which] is a

⁷Among the many characteristics of the Enlightenment, there are three that could be catalogued as foundational. First, we find the pivotal role granted to reason, on which “the way to truth lay” (Duignan, par. 4). Second, we could mention Locke’s theory of the “social contract”, which implies a change in Man from a natural state that guarantees the equality of every human being (Maltz & Maltz 47), to the creation of societies where men “[surrender] their freedom in exchange for the security of law and order” (46). Last, we have the central position that the social men of reason adopt and which “[installs] them as masters” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1). This dominant attitude, as the present chapter will show, covers individuals and nature alike. Regarding Le Guin’s oeuvre, we will focus on this latter feature of the Enlightenment, since it is this that is most clearly present.

never ending will to dominate, [...] the incontestable mistress of universal history” (58).

With this in mind, we could say that Enlightenment spreads its domination across two major entities: on the one hand human cultures and civilisations that, from an Enlightenment point of view, are uncivilised and barbaric, and on the other, the natural world. As for the former, it is not clear at what point Enlightenment thinkers began to directly support and proclaim imperialist and colonialist ideas (Conrad 1006), though it is possible to establish a not-necessarily-direct cause-effect relationship between the two. Edward Said comments on how, in Enlightenment circles across Europe, it was common to find voices on the issues of “the rights of native peoples and European abuses” (*Culture and Imperialism* 240) and in “opposition to slavery and colonialism” (240). However, others, including Horkheimer and Adorno, perceive a clear connection between reason and domination, claiming that “Enlightenment is totalitarian” (4), since “imperialism [is] reason in its most terrible form” (70). Along these lines, Sebastian Conrad mentions the need to understand expansionist consequences of the Enlightenment as “tied to conditions of globality: as a specific way of incorporating the world in the context of expansion of European trade relations, the annexation of military and commercial bases and colonies, and the cartographic mapping of the globe” (1010). This idea of universalism is also one from which postcolonialist scholars approach the Enlightenment. Due to the expansionist ambition that it gave birth to, they see the age of reason “not as emancipation but as deprivation” (1006). This may, at the same time, have happened due to the fact that “it was only a small step [...] between positing universal standards and deciding to intervene and to implement those standards, also by force, under the auspices of a paternalistic civilizing mission” (1006). In addition, the Enlightenment drove non-European nations to embrace Western ways and join the global economic system (1016). One, historically widely used, ideological tool for the justification of imperialism is to degrade those whom one wants to master, which is where racism comes into play. Enlightenment thinkers were also

guilty of engaging in discourse that positioned the master against ethnic and cultural minorities, as Voltaire did with the Jews and people of African origin (Poliakov 56), the latter being “constructed not as a real person with real history but an image” (Sardar xiv). Other thinkers expressed a predisposition to conduct experiments with colonised people (Poliakov 58), or directly condemned the deterioration of the Western White race from continuous mixing with other, ‘inferior’, races (59).

In a sense, we could say that Cob, too, seeks to dominate others as a way to increase his power. We learn how he lures people with an offer of eternal life, in exchange for them surrendering their names and power to him (*TFS* 519). However, this promise is untrustworthy, since the immortality they are granted is nothing like that which they were told they would get, and they are instead turned into Cob’s puppets, made to come “at his summoning. [...] At his word they may return. At his bidding they may walk upon the hills of life, though they cannot stir a blade of grass” (594).

Enlightenment anthropocentrism implied that, once man’s irrational beliefs were cast away, he was entitled to command the natural world and make use of it as he wished (Bate 77). Lynn White comments that “what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them” (9). Given the tyrannical elements of the Enlightenment paradigm (Horkheimer & Adorno 6), it is little wonder that it focuses on that “form of knowledge which [...] most effectively assists the subject in mastering nature” (65). Historically, it is from this moment on that it starts to make sense to address the ecosystem as a mere object, “the forest [becoming] a place neither of mystery nor sanctuary but rather something to be managed” (Bate 168), attributable to “the utilitarian judgement, the profit motive” (140) that dominates the Enlightenment mindset. David Abram summarises nature’s transition from agent to commodity, and its relation to colonialism: “Descartes’s radical separation of the immaterial human mind from the wholly mechanical

world of nature [...] [provided] a splendid rationalization for the vivisection experiments that soon began to proliferate, as well as for the steady plundering and despoilment of nonhuman nature in the New World and the other European colonies” (78). This idea of nature as a clockwork mechanism, “Nature Methodiz’d” as Alexander Pope put it (qtd. in Berlin 32), takes shape in the instrumentalisation of nature, which responds to the human ambition to know about its functioning and then use that knowledge “to dominate wholly both it and human beings” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2).

This is precisely how Cob perceives nature: a store from which he can draw all the power he wants. Cob employs this power onto humans and nature alike, while he seeks to inflict change on the latter by attempting to achieve immortality. The use he makes of the power acquired from his knowledge of the Language of the Making presents different connotations. One is the fact that Cob perceives nature as an enemy that needs to be defeated lest it devours you, or, in his case, condemns him to inevitable death. This type of human attitude, according to Chaia Heller, derives from an excess of avarice, since “if we are not conscious of our own greed, then we will see nature as a greedy force from which we must continually steal in order to survive” (231). Driven that blind faith in his condition of superior agent, the knowledgeable man does not hesitate “to interfere with the natural order of things” (Lovelock 107) and, consequently, neglects nature’s intrinsic perfection (Berlin 33), trying instead to impose his own, which, in Cob’s mind, is the promise of eternal life. On the other hand, this character turns around the relationship that True Speech holds with nature, as he manages to “bind the action of wizardry, [and] still the words of power” (*TFS* 424). Rather than a body of knowledge that exists in unison with the universe, True Speech now becomes an instrument aimed at perverting the very being from which it was fashioned, and, consequently, it almost “[unmakes] the world” (424). This attitude of Cob’s is related to the Enlightenment mindset, as observed by Jonathan Bate when he writes, “the ecological form of the dialectic of Enlightenment is this: Enlightenment’s instrumentalization

of nature frees mankind from the tyranny of nature (disease, famine), but its disenchantment from [sic] nature licenses the destruction of nature and hence of mankind. ‘Men have always had to choose between their subjection to nature or the subjection of nature to the Self’” (78).

Again, this does nothing but increase the distance between Cob and the cosmos he was meant to live in cooperation with. Nonetheless, it is the inevitable aftermath of pretending to live a deathless life, the fact that “in the moment of [...] transcendence, humankind seeks to become not so much ‘the paragon of animals’ as a Being beyond the animal” (Bate 181). The weakening of the human–nature bond is yet another consequence of Enlightenment’s division between man—the sole subject-agent—and the rest of the universe as object (Garrard 68). One of the potential reasons behind this is that, in his use of the Language of the Making, Cob turns his back on its source, that is, nature. That language that loses touch with “the whole of the sensuous world that provides [its] deep structure” (Abram 85) is one that “has forgotten its expressive depths” (85), which ultimately leads to its speaking community withdrawing from active contemplation of and gentle engagement with the world it inhabits (85). Comoletti and Drout highlight a similar concern with language in *Earthsea*, suggesting that “the self-referential structure” (124) of Cob’s take on language, which goes against “that relation between signifier and signified [as] not arbitrary but grounded in a firm physical reality” (124), reflects “the falling, decaying world of *The Farthest Shore*” (124). We could also mention the idea that alienation is an inevitable side effect of knowledge, as James Lovelock proposed, attributing to Descartes’s legacy the idea that “the conventional wisdom of a closed urban society becomes isolated from the natural world” (135). In *The Other Wind*, Le Guin shows how those societies that shun more complex knowledge are better able to remain in touch with the earth to which they are attached (233).

Everything that has been said makes it clear what Cob's major transgression is. His mistake resides in bringing the cycle of life to a stop by trying to achieve a state of immortality. Of course, "to refuse death is to refuse life" (*TFS* 544), which is the reason why his transgression will put Earthsea's much-needed Equilibrium at risk. In his commitment to achieve immortality, Cob is betraying Emerson's principle of nature's "serene order [being] inviolable to [humans]" ("Nature" [Norberg] 43), as well as disrupting humanity's respectful relationship with its ecosystem. Here, Cob simply goes against what Edward Thomas deemed proper human behaviour towards nature, namely that "mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. They leave to the sun and the moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons their blessing and their inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest" (qtd. in Bate 275).

Cob is addressed as "the Unmaker" (*TFS* 591) in clear reference to his destruction of the main principle of life, which is that there should also be death. What leads him to act in this way is his belief that "[he is] a man, better than nature, above nature" (611), and that consequently he has no need to adhere to the rules that nature imposes on every other being. We might say that this is the attempt of one who, not adhering to the most basic principles of life, blindly strives to elude death and consequently loses both (*TFS* 613).

Although we have presented Cob as a man of the Enlightenment, his actions go against its principal banner of reason and rationality, indeed his domain lies "beyond all reason" (*TFS* 509). Cob's unreason stems from his foul use of the Language of the Making, which evokes the link between language and human alienation presented above. In this case we will consider an idea proposed by Le Guin, where she warns of arbitrary uses of language. According to her, it is the "words separated from experience for use as weapons [...] [that] make the wound, the split between subject and object, exposing and exploiting the object but disguising and defending the subject" ("Bryn Mawr" 151). Cob's use of True Speech

—the way he uses its words—is completely detached from the natural world form which they originate, which simultaneously allows him to direct his power against that source. He is thus able to open a wound between the worlds of the living and the dead in order to draw profit from it, which is unending life. As Le Guin indicates, Cob believes that his infraction should by no means turn back and punish him, as he is reassured by his power. However, what we later learn is that no one is free from actions that make the balance of the world tremble in such a way as Cob’s temerity does. This is because, according to William Howarth, in the same way as in science, this character’s quest for a deathless life would present “solutions that only generate new problems” (79). What Cob learns is that he is fatally locked into what he has done and that his powers will not suffice for him to escape this impasse. These are his words when Ged offers him help:

No one can ever set me free. I opened the door between the worlds and cannot shut it. No one can shut it. It will never be shut again. It draws, it draws me. I must come back to it. I must go through it, and come back here, into the dust and cold and silence. It sucks at me and sucks at me. I cannot leave it. I cannot close it. It will suck all the light out of the world in the end. All the rivers will be like the Dry River. There is no power anywhere that can close the door I opened.
(*TFS* 615)

Here, Cob clearly comes to the realisation that no one can defy the ultimate power of nature, and that if human wills and actions are taken too far, there is a risk that “greed [will put] out the sun” (*TOW* 227).

George Slusser mentions how Cob’s actions, in the same way that they destroy his own self, have serious consequences for the whole of Earthsea (“The Earthsea Trilogy” 80). Thus, all across the archipelago his wrong is felt as if there was “some evil at work” (*TFS* 403), as if “the springs of wizardry [had] run dry” (404). This situation of unbalance was already felt by the wise of Roke before it began to

take form. For instance, we read that the Master Changer looks through a stone and has a vision of the islands of Earthsea disappearing, and how “each time [...] more islands are gone, and the sea where they were is empty and unbroken, even as it was before the making” (566). Similarly, the Master Summoner tells of how he saw “the streams run dry, and the lips of the springs of water draw back. And underneath all was black and dry” (569), which is a signal of “the Unmaking” (569). At the same time as they are running out of magic powers, there is a general forgetting of the lore that allowed the inhabitants of Earthsea to keep in touch with their ecosystem, such as songs (*TFS* 551). We could say that all these signals hint at a deep change in the universe, almost a kind of apocalypse, as if “the unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where [people] perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost” (*AWoE* 60). After this, the world, as known thus far, would cease to exist. The Summoner clearly sees that the ongoing change is leading them “towards death” (569), while Ged expresses it in a yet darker tone. He feels the danger behind “[the] blight upon the lands. The arts of man forgotten. The singer tongueless. The eye blind. And then? A false king ruling. Ruling forever. And over the same subjects forever. No births; no new lives. No children” (561).

Michel Serres expresses the shadow of humanity and the universe’s potential destruction brought about Cob’s ambition to master life, commenting that “through our mastery, we have become so much and so little masters of the Earth, that it once again threatens to master us in turn” (33). The implication of this statement, together with what has been related about Cob’s transgression of the natural limits, sets the focus on the importance of individual actions, a deeply rooted belief in, for instance, several Native American cultures (Gunn Allen 260; Silko 267). Recalling the image of Earthsea as a body of interwoven elements conveys the idea that “the more closely the planet is interconnected, the less room any of its inhabitants has for manoeuvre” (Garrard 205). In other words, the fact that Cob pulls

several strings in his quest for immortality disturbs the whole tapestry represented by Earthsea.

Fortunately for the human inhabitants of the archipelago, Earthsea is restored to a state in which the balance appears to again rule undisturbed. It is interesting to see that, in order for this to happen, nature itself intervenes. This can be seen in a scene in *The Farthest Shore*, when Ged and Arren arrive in Selidor in their quest for stopping Cob. Once they confront him, Cob makes use of his power to immobilise Ged and Arren, which is the precise moment when the dragon Orm Embar arrives flying. We read how “vast and fiery, the great body of the dragon came in one writhing leap, and plunged down full force upon [Cob], so that [his] charmed steel blade entered into the dragon’s mailed breast to its full length: but the man was born down under his weight and crushed and burned” (601). Even though Cob remains alive, Orm Embar’s sacrifice is enough to free Ged and Arren from the wizard’s spell and they are thus able to follow him through a portal and “down into the dark” (602), where they finally overcome Cob and heal the wound that he opened. The fact that a dragon—a representative of nature—sacrifices its life so that the whole of the universe can keep on living hints quite clearly at the imperative need to uphold the cycle of life. The wheel that Cob managed to bring to a stop is thus again put in motion by means of death. In other words, nature sacrifices one of its parts so that the whole can keep on living. Additionally, Orm Embar’s behaviour also hints at the effect that individual actions can exert on a greater scale, in his case—as opposed to Cob—for the better.

Nonetheless, and going back to the issue of the apocalypse mentioned above, we could say that the catastrophe proposed by Le Guin imitates what Garrard calls “a blank apocalypse: an eschaton without a utopia to follow” (101). In *The Other Wind*, the novel that came after *The Farthest Shore*, we learn that Cob’s transgression has still not been healed several years later, which implies that Ged’s efforts and complete waste of power were insufficient (167).

In order to explain how Cob's mistake could not be wholly righted through the efforts of Ged and nature, we need to go back, for a moment, to the time of the Vedurnan. Above, we pointed to the way that the newly formed human race claimed possession over a section of the land of the dragons, which we suggested could be based on imperialist desire. In addition, said activity fatally affected the human life cycle. The area colonised by humans would later be referred to as the Dry Land, "the boundary from death into life" (*TFS* 624). In order to learn more about its vital implications, the following excerpt is worth quoting in full length:

The [ancient humans] saw that the dragon's realm was [...] outside of time, it may be... and envying that freedom, they followed the dragon's way into the west beyond the west. [...] A timeless realm, where the self might be forever. But not in the body, as the dragons were. Only in spirit could men be there... So they made a wall which no living body could cross, neither man nor dragon. For they feared the anger of the dragons. And their arts of naming laid a great net of spells upon all the western lands, so that when the people of the islands die, they would come to the west beyond the west and live there in the spirit forever.

But as the wall was built and the spell laid, the wind ceased to blow, within the wall. The sea withdrew. The springs ceased to run. The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night. Those that died came to a dark land, a dry land. (*TOW* 227)

The direct aftermath of this process was that humans altered their own cycle of life, so that, from that moment on, life could never again be renewed by death. Every dead human would depart from the lands of the living and, due to the cycle being stopped, would be forced to stay in the dreadful Dry Land forever. In this way, it seems as though humans changed the paradigm of death from an organic process that

effects a return to the soil from which it has been born, to a particular state of the spirit, which remains isolated and helpless. This new situation contributes, again, to human society's alienation from its ecosystem, since we learn that it is only humans that ever-set foot on Dry Land. Meanwhile, the rest of the inhabitants of Earthsea continue to return to the source, "to rejoin the greater being of the world" (*TOW* 145).

Regardless of the dire peril implied by crossing the wall built by the first humans (*TOW* 29), which established the division between the realms of the dead and the living, Cob tries to manipulate said wall for his own benefit. Again, what he is after is to "break down that wall" (228) in order to achieve the "bodiless, immortal self" (228). Thus, it seems that Cob's manipulation of the wall, adding to humanity's primal temerity, last long after his other wrongs have been mended.

Horkheimer and Adorno offer their thoughts—set in a different context—on these attitudes present in certain human beings, and the inability of the dead to fulfil their life cycles. They claim that "any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion" (9). This idea is directly applicable to humanity's situation in Le Guin's saga. As we have just seen, many tried to escape nature's imposition of a limited lifetime by going against nature's laws; trying to cheat them. However, since they are consequently disqualified from being one with the earth, the only thing that they managed to achieve was to grant their dead a life of unrest, that is, a worse type of death. This disturbed balance between life and death is the angular piece in *The Other Wind*, which is made clear when certain characters become aware that it is the dead themselves that are unsuccessfully trying to tear down that wall that barred them from rest (20-21), yearning for "death. To be one with the earth again. To re-join it" (228).

At the end of this novel, the wall is at last destroyed by the unified power of dragons and humans, setting free the dead in the Dry Land, “walking with unhurried certainty towards the fallen places in the wall: great multitudes of men and women, who as they came to the broken wall did not hesitate but stepped across it and were gone: a wisp of dust, a breath that shone an instant in the ever-brightening light” (*TOW* 239). However, we should remember that the world of Earthsea, although an organism that strives to keep itself in balance, is affected by the deeds of its inhabitants, and that many of these affects last forever. Thus, although still within the Equilibrium, Earthsea is constantly reshaped and changed. Even the fact that dead humans are at last allowed to be free does not imply that the breach that was made at the very beginning of their civilization has been overcome. Instead, we can presume that humans still turn into their spirit forms when they die, unlike the rest of the inhabitants of the archipelago, who are allowed to unite with the source of life—nature. As the Master Doorkeeper suggests: “I think maybe the division that was begun, and then betrayed, will be completed at last [...]. The dragons will go free, and leave us here to the choice we made” (233).

3.2.2.3.2. Ged: Power that Complies

Directly in opposition to Cob we find Ged. Although we will be able to see how his approach to magic powers was initially not the most appropriate, he evolves to display a much more correct use of his force. We will first have a look at the events that lead to this change, as well as discuss its implications. We shall also focus on the source of his power and how it differs from that of others. On the whole, we aim to show how Ged’s good use of magic is born from a tight relationship with nature.

Ged, who in his later days would become a Dragonlord and Archmage, showcases an enormous power from a very early age. At the age of twelve he succeeds in expelling a group of warriors that were trying to raid his village. He accomplishes this by means of his

innate power to make magic, by invoking a mist that confuses and leads the invaders astray, thus saving the whole island. The deed does not go unnoticed, but reaches the ears of Ogion, an extremely wise wizard that lives on the island in Re Albi, and who encourages Ged to become his apprentice. However, Ged's first contact with the world of wizardry does not go down well. Already from his days as Ogion's apprentice, he "hungered to learn, to gain power" (*AWoE* 26). The mistake that lies in this attitude towards knowledge and power resides in the fact that such behaviour makes it extremely difficult for the individual to stick to the limits set by his craft, as Cob's case clearly shows.

Indeed, Ged initially also sets foot down this path. For instance, when still in Gont under Ogion's supervision, he starts meddling with dangerous spells. Reading through some books that Ogion had purposefully not yet shown him, he unintentionally begins to cast a spell. Suddenly, "a horror grew in him, seeming to hold him bound in his chair. He was cold. Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call to him in a whisper; but he could not understand the words" (*AWoE* 32). Although Ogion's power frees him from this presence, its memory remains in his mind, like when, entering the school of wizardry in Roke, he thinks that "a shadow followed him in at his heels" (45). We may think that, thanks to such experiences, Ged will begin to behave reasonably, but this is not the case. Lured by the potential power that he could gather with the knowledge acquired at school, and coupled with an innate ability to learn, Ged's student time in Roke is characterised by two tendencies: pride and hatred. In order to prove himself better than his peers, his sole aim is to gather all the knowledge that he can (54). Thus, when he finds a match to his power in fellow student Jasper, he "swore to himself to outdo his rival, and not in some mere illusion-match but in a test of power. He would prove himself, and humiliate Jasper. He would not let the fellow stand there looking down at him, graceful,

disdainful, hateful” (57). This is the beginning of a feud between Ged and Jasper (72), which will lead Ged to the greatest transgression of his life.

As a way to find out who of the two is the most powerful wizard, Jasper dares Ged to “summon up a spirit from the dead” (*AWoE* 74), which he accepts. Ged is to show his power on Roke Knoll—a place said to store enormous power. The scene is portrayed in such a way as to give the reader the feeling that Ged is standing above nature itself, having all its powers under his command. It reads as follows: “Under his feet he felt the hillroots going down and down into the dark, and over his head he saw the dry, far fires of the stars. Between, all things were to his order, to command. He stood at the centre of the world” (75). This may remind us of Cob taking the very same stand, in which he would also think of himself as the master of nature, rather than subjected to its powers, and thus entitled to make use of its force according to his own will. Due to the summoning going completely wrong, Ged creates “a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through the bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged’s face” (76). Almost a shapeless being (77), it “was not flesh, not alive, not spirit, unnamed, having no being but what he himself had given it—a terrible power outside the laws of the sunlit world” (103). This being that Ged has set free is a threat to the Equilibrium of Earthsea (82), which is one of the reasons it becomes “his task [...] to finish what he [has] begun” (177). The other, and main, reason is that, as he will later learn, the shadow is part of his own being, so that “it is bound to him” (190). They are two sides of the same being. This is why the only way to finish with the threat of his shadow is for Ged to become one with it, which happens when both speak their true names, that is, ‘Ged’: “Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow’s name, and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: ‘Ged’. And the two voices were one in voice” (213). This

is the process by means of which Ged becomes “whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life’s sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark” (216). This balance of one’s abilities to make both good and evil is certainly present in the Taoist doctrine, more specifically conveyed by the symbol of the *yang-yin*, which hints at the presence, cooperation, and balance of the opposite forces that exist in every being. Apart from being key to Ged’s freedom as a complete human being, his balancing also contributes to keeping the universe in balance (Scholes 39), which, in turn, is a sign that, again, every “human being [is] a part of the Balance and to know that every human action will have impact, positive or negative, on other parts of the whole” (Fen Tsai 158) is essential.

It is all these experiences and the basic, vital learnings that lead Ged to learn how to approach his power in order to make good use of it. In a sense, we see that he is following Ralph Waldo Emerson’s belief that “life’s continuum of experience [...] becomes [...] the basis of knowledge” (*Communities of the Heart* 112). Hence, in the following years until he wastes his power and forsakes the world of wizardry, Ged’s use of his craft is marked by prudence, resorting to it only when it is most needed, to the point of, in Arren’s words, being “miserly about employing his arts” (*TFS* 517). Having seen its potential consequences, Ged has clearly overcome any desire to claim his power over nature, and he would rather have it go its own way and for him to play by its rules. Quoting Michel Serres, he follows these ideas “because, unregulated, exceeding its purpose, counterproductive, pure mastery [turns] back on itself” (34).

During his time as Archmage, Ged was forced to fight Cob and the consequences of his transgression, as shown above. In order to close the rent opened by Cob, Ged sacrifices all of his power (*TFS* 619-620), effectively ending his days as a mage (630). It is also worth noting how, after mending Cob’s wrong, Ged shows no resentment

towards the fact that he has lost that which made him what he was, and he feels “not the least bitterness or regret” (626). Instead, he accepts that he did what was needed to preserve life. In a way, it is as if he blindly and remorselessly accepts adherence to the laws and rules imposed by nature, even if this implies personal sacrifice and damage.

For reasons that we will turn to in the next chapter, Ged does not seek to go back to Roke as Archmage once his power is spent. Even though the Masters of the School ask him to do so, he feels he is not in the condition to remain in the world of wizardry. In other words, Ged chooses a simpler life of contemplation, or being, over the life of a wizard, which is based on doing. We learn that Ged has always been aware of the inconveniences, the risks, that the wizard lifestyle involves. Talking to Arren, he tells him the following:

Try to choose carefully, Arren, when the great choices must be made. When I was young I had to choose between the life of being and the life of doing. And I leapt at the latter like a trout to a fly. But each deed you do, each act, binds you to itself and to its consequences, and makes you act again and yet again. Then very seldom do you come upon a space, a time like this, between act and act, when you may stop and simply be. Or wonder who, after all, you are. (*TFS* 439)

One of the things that we could say influence Ged to make such a decision is that, after so many years spent in the turmoil of a life of action, he needs to find who he really is. We will return to this theme in more detail in the following chapter, when we study colonialism’s influence on the individual’s psyche. Another reason for Ged to set off in search of a life of being could be the attachment to nature he has felt throughout his life. Having seen that a mind like Cob’s, that strives for only for action, can be driven to exert both self- and world-destruction, Ged desires to return to the centre—to nature itself—so that he can be one with it again. This may happen due to the fact that he approaches nature, following Christopher Manes’s description, as

“alive and articulate” (Manes 15), in opposition to Cob, who regards it as a mere reserve of power. It could also be the case that Ged no longer agrees with the usage that wizardry makes of the Language of the Making; a type of knowledge that resembles science in the sense that it seeks to discern the laws and processes of nature in order to take advantage of them. In his study of Romanticism, Isaiah Berlin mentions how “the only persons who have ever made sense of reality are those who understand that to try to circumscribe things, to try to nail them down, to try to describe them, no matter how scrupulously, is a vain task” (140). Ged, in refusing a world of wizardry that seeks nothing but profit from the natural world, has gone through this very experience, and he is now able to discern the real relationship that should exist between humanity and nature, which is one of communion.

Tonya Payne and Isaiah Berlin both affirm this idea of freedom achieved by acknowledging one’s need to live in communion with the natural world, in Ged’s case being “part of the pattern” (*The Finder* 72). In her study of Le Guin’s work, Payne talks about the fact that “it is in the unadorned fact of human ‘being’ in the cosmos that value is found, in the human awareness of being part of something greater” (317). Again on the topic of Romanticism, Berlin comments that it is “by identifying yourself with it, by creating with it, by throwing yourself into this great process, indeed by discovering in yourself those very creative forces that you discover outside, by identifying on the one hand spirit, on the other hand matter, by seeing the whole thing as a vast self-organising and self-creative process [that] [one] will at last be free” (139).

Last, we could mention that this rejection of continuous action in favour of a more contemplative attitude has similarities with the teachings of the *Tao Te Ching* (Bucknall 62). According to Dena Bain, Ged arrives at a “state of Void or Quietness” (218) in which he “sees all becoming as one being” (221)—his persona but a mere element of the vast cosmos—by means of practising the *wu wei*. Ged is aware of

the fact that each and every action carried out by every individual impact on the whole, so that “no one can achieve his aims by actions that create rhythmic oscillation between opposites” (213), which is precisely what his role of Archmage implied—being constantly caught in the battle between good and evil that served only to perpetuate the opposing sides. This is where this teaching of the Tao is called for, which can be described as “actionless activity” (213), that is, briefly explained, “an attitude rather than an act, state of being rather than doing” (213).

A second factor that shows us Ged’s tight bond with the earth is the origin of his wizardry. All across Earthsea, there are variants of the art magic, many of them rooted in specific lands, such as the wizardry of Paln and the wizardry in Roke. Nonetheless, there is a yet more important division within magic, one that seems to even determine the type of wizard that the individual will become. This is the division between the power of wizards and the power of witches, which is to say the male and female variants. Of course, Le Guin’s choice of words—the fact that she names her male magicians wizards and her female magicians witches—has its implications. While the male wizards are meant to embody wisdom, female witches apparently retain “the negative image of an ignorant woman who practices simple magic of herbal healing or even harmful black magic in the countryside” (Fen Tsai 147). As we will be able to see below, the connection with herbal practices and the countryside is key in the portrayal of witches. Within the *Earthsea* universe, women’s practice of magic was regarded a “base craft” (*Description* 419), and since they were not allowed to learn words of True Speech, they spread and taught their knowledge only among themselves (419-420). All this contributed to the bad reputation of their craft, even though it encompassed a very large range of diverse practices, such as “the care of pregnant beasts and women, birthing, teaching the songs and rites, the fertility and order of field and garden, the building and care of the house and its furniture, [or] the mining of ores and metals” (5). This list makes clear that witches are attributed a close relationship with

nature in Le Guin's work. According to Jonathan Bate, it is a common cultural practice to link women with "nature, with instinct and biology" (35). Contrasted to this we find the historical-cultural portrayal of men, and consequently of wizards, in *Earthsea*, as a figure linked "with rationality and transcendence of nature" (35).

The reasonable wizards of *Earthsea* are, thanks to their exclusive study of the Language of the Making, also possessors of what, in their eyes, makes up true knowledge—the only one worthy of their consideration. As Horkheimer and Adorno point out, scientific knowledge—which, as we have seen—resembles that of wizards, is prone to "establish man as the master of nature" (1). This self-attributed elevated position has led wizards to adopt high self-regard and unlimited ambition, which has consequently turned them into a discordant note within Le Guin's universe. In fact, it is their greed that triggers the war in *Earthsea*, and war, in turn, is "a displaced male-generalized activity, something that men do and women don't" ("Ursula K. Le Guin's Life and Works: An Interview" 68). Since the dawn of the magical arts, wizards have frequently used their power when driven by pride and self-interest, their actions bringing disastrous social and ecological consequences (*The Finder* 4-5). Even those characters who act wrongly, many times seeking to make evil, are all male, like Cob, Thorion, a wizard called Gelluk, and, to a lesser degree, Ged himself. All in all, it is very clear how "it was men's ambitions [...] that had perverted all the arts to ends of gain" (86).

Meanwhile, *Earthsea's* witches coexist with their ecosystem, which some would argue is also the case with women in the real world, who are marked by "the humility of dwelling" (Bate 150). Thus, instead of placing themselves on the top of a hierarchy, like wizards do, witches make it very clear that, for them, the earth comes first (*The Finder* 116). In light of this, the connection between the natural world and women and their art is made very explicit, since, in addition to what has been said above, we also learn that their power was drawn from the raw force of the Old Powers (*Description* 411).

This bond is highlighted by several Le Guin scholars, such as Warren Rochelle and Holly Littlefield. While Rochelle links women to dragons, even suggesting that they are the same being (“The Emersonian Choice” 422), Littlefield suggests that “a woman’s knowledge [...] is deeper and more connected to things outside her body” (255), to which she adds the example of Tenar. Here Littlefield focuses on Tenar’s use of the Language of the Making, emphasising that it is presumably thanks to her condition as a woman that this language is second nature to her, men having more difficulty acquiring it (256). She concludes that Tenar cannot “force it into a language of control and domination” (256), since her relationship with nature is not hierarchical. To this we should include what Le Guin says about women. In her words, the most valuable contribution that women have made, and continue to make, to humanity is that of teaching “how to be human” (“What Women Know” 81), which may also explain the greater care for the earth that women usually display (*Writing for an Endangered World* 240). It could be the case that statements like those shown above lead people to think of Le Guin as a person who positions women above men, showcasing, in a way, some kind of reverse sexism. Although it is not the aim of the present study to identify Le Guin’s feminist beliefs, we think that the positions outlined above answer not to a sexually biased mindset, but rather—as will be shown below—to concrete spiritual beliefs.

It is for all the above-mentioned reasons that women’s power, although marginalised by a characteristically male hierarchy, appears to be stronger than that of men, being effective even when the power of wizards seems to be diminishing (*Dragonfly* 302). Here we may recall the words of Moss, a witch who lives close to Ged and Tenar in Gont. According to her, “[women’s] is only a little power, seems like, next to [men’s] [...]. But it goes down deep. It’s all roots. It’s like an old blackberry thicket. And a wizard’s power’s like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it’ll blow right down in a storm. Nothing kills a blackberry bramble” (*Tehanu* 747).

Ged, although a man, is an heir to precisely this approach to magic, which proposes “immersion rather than a confrontation” (Garrard 84) with nature. This is because he is the last link in a chain of wizards whose first steps into the world of wizardry have been taken within the feminine branch (Crow & Erlich 202), as Ged’s mentor Ogion was, in his own time, mentored by Heleth, himself apprentice to a witch called Ard (*The Bones of the Earth* 225-226). Hence, although having made mistakes in his youth, Ged has exactly that main feature characteristic of witch magic, namely being one with the source; with nature. Ogion is highly aware of his power’s connection with nature, as well as of the fact that “his wizardry grew out of it” (207), and that, consequently, it should abide by nature’s rules. It is presumably due to this feature that we read of the school of wizardry in Roke needing more Gontish wizards, since they acknowledge that they are missing something (210). This could explain why, some time later, wizards such as Cob or Thorion would come out of this school.

Since Ged is fashioned as a recipient of a female tradition, we could say that he is challenging the so-called “Myth of Man the Hunter” (Gruen 62), a picture of the male human that stems from the idea that it was “the act of killing [...] [that] established the superiority of man over animal” (62). Shu fen Tsai, commenting on the work of Sara Lefanu, writes that “in the Earthsea trilogy the ones with true power and wisdom are all men; women are either ignorant country women or petty witches playing low and black arts” (163). If to this we add the fact that, in the *Earthsea* saga, women are tightly linked to the natural world, which, in cultural terms, is a “particular patriarchal notion” (Gruen 77), it may seem that Le Guin did not hold her fellow women in particularly high regard. Nonetheless, we would like to argue that this is not the case. If women are portrayed as part of a patriarchal structure it is because the society of Earthsea is ruled by men, just like ours, which does not imply that Le Guin considered women to be inferior to men. Indeed, by what has been said in the paragraphs above, and in the section dealing with her context, we

could state that her stance is entirely the opposite. Although witches are described as possessors of a lesser art, Le Guin presents women's power as the true one, and the few wizards who are in possession of it are portrayed as good and given considerable presence in her plots, like Ged and Ogion. In addition, the idea that women are closer to the natural world may, in Le Guin, be imbued with Taoism, which regards women as possessors of the “yin, the soft, the dark, the weak, earth, water, the Mother, the Valley” (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* 119).

As a last idea, we would like to mention that Ged, in light of Serres's theory, can be interpreted as the perfect 'sage' of nature. This is, at least, what we can glimpse from his actions. For instance, being familiar with what unmeasured greed can bring, Ged advocates for “the demand for prudence” (93) to be present in wizards' use of their power. More importantly, as we have just seen—and will be shown below—he is

well-versed in the natural sciences of the inanimate and the living [...], traveler in nature and society; lover of rivers, sands, winds, seas, and mountains; walker over the whole earth; [...] humanist and scientist, [...], green and seasoned, audacious and prudent; further removed from power than any possible legislator, [...] great, perhaps, but of the common people; [...] knowing and valuing ignorance as much as the sciences, old-wives' tales more than concepts, [...] [and] finally, above all, burning with love for the Earth and humanity. (94)

3.2.3. Colonialism's Identity Implications

The following pages will focus on the potential identity issues that colonialism may have resulted in for several *Earthsea* characters, treating this issue as a second consequence of progress. A postcolonial approach will be used, for two reasons. On the one hand, we could argue that the psychological suffering of the analysed characters is

due, to a greater or lesser extent, to colonialist or expansionist activity. On the other hand, postcolonialist thinker Homi K. Bhabha's postulates regarding the colonial subject's identity production and its consequences are very useful, although his theories will not be the only ones applied. Certainly, the postcolonial approach seems to be appropriate for a study of Le Guin's work, highlighted by Deirdre C. Byrne when she states, "the arguments for reading Le Guin, specifically, in the light of [this] theory are even stronger than for reading the genre of speculative fiction as a whole in this way" (35). The reason that she gives for this is that "as an American author, Le Guin occupies a particularly ambivalent position in relation to imperialism. Some theorists view America as an imperial power, while others see it as an ex-colony of Britain. Perhaps because of this ambivalence, Le Guin's writing closely scrutinises the relationship between imperial powers and the [...] people they subjugate" (35). Further, the inclusion of the figure of the *Other*, a central concept in the study that follows, "resonates throughout Le Guin's work" (S. Wood 194), shaped as "the powerless, the disempowered—women, children, [or] a wizard who has spent his gift and must live as an 'ordinary' man" ("Chronicles of Earthsea"⁸, par. 32).

A central issue in Bhabha's theory is the idea that "the experience of colonialism is the problem of living in the 'midst of the incomprehensible'" (*Location of Culture* 213). In such a baffling environment personal experiences become an expression of "the very nature of humanity [...] [emerging], not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning" (42). That is, the colonial subject comes to develop certain doubts about their true self, questioning their own being. To this, we should add what David Huddart proposed when reviewing Bhabha's work, namely that "identities are mere productions" (70). Within the colonial structure, one overexploited tool that shapes identities is the discourse of the group in power, which "fixes identity and denies it any chance of

⁸ This makes reference to an interview, entitled "Chronicles of Earthsea", published in *The Guardian* on 9 Feb. 2004.

change” (41). Bhabha’s colonised subject is not, however, portrayed as absolutely deprived of power but as possessing “*active agency*” (2). This active agency grants the colonised a dais from which to speak up and make their own voice heard in a context that continually tries to mute them, or, as Byrne suggests Le Guin does in her fiction, allows for “the empowerment of a group whose position under colonialism denies them any power at all” (70). Bhabha holds that, as an ultimate consequence of the clash between two wills or powers—the coloniser and the colonised—the colonial subject suffers from an “ambivalence of psychic identification” (Foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks* xxv), a state in which they cannot be sure of their own identity, but sense more than one self within themselves. This idea, which Bhabha defines as *hybridity*—that “kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth” (*LoC* 3)—is central to his work. Interestingly for our purposes, Byrne points to precisely *hybridity* as “useful to read Le Guin’s fiction” (44), together with some other “responses to the imperial/colonial story in post-colonial theory” (43). This section of the critical body of the present dissertation will, in what follows, tackle the presence of precisely this issue of non-fixed identities in certain characters in Le Guin’s work. We will also study how, due to this state of indeterminacy, Le Guin’s characters undergo a “psychological journey through pain and fear to integration” (Esmonde 34), that is, a journey to come to accept their true identities.

For this purpose, the present passage will be divided into two parts, each dealing with two characters. The criteria for the division is the origin of the identity issues that the respective characters manifest, as well as the conditions that give rise to said problems. Thus, the first part will deal with Tehanu and Irian whose identity-doubts are inborn, originating in the moment of their birth, while the root of these will be linked to the aforementioned historical event of Vedurnan. This, we recall, was propelled by humanity’s desire to possess, and had direct colonial consequences. The second part will deal with the characters Ged and Tenar. The source of their non-fixed nature is linked to the fact that certain identities and roles were imposed upon them, with a

consequent problematic. Unlike Tehanu and Irian, we will not link Ged and Tenar's issues to the Vedurnan, but rather to other colonialist or pseudo-colonialist activities.

Before starting our analysis of the characters mentioned above, we need to dedicate some lines to further explain Bhabha's terminology concerning identity-creation and -development under colonial circumstances. The subject of his study—the figure around whom his work is articulated—is referred to as the *Other*; that individual who “loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse” (*LoC* 31). In other words, this is a person who, as a victim of colonial power, has been rendered voiceless and powerless, consequently becoming an identity-lacking inhabitant of marginal spaces (62). The *Other* shares certain similarities with the definition and attributes that other theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Spivak, grant the *subaltern*. While the former, whom Bhabha quotes in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994), defines it as not simply an oppressed group “but lacking autonomy, subjected to the influence or hegemony of another social group, not possessing one's own hegemonic position” (qtd. in 59), the latter reminds us of this figure's lack of “voice-consciousness” (Spivak 80). Bhabha, Gramsci, and Spivak are all concerned with the powerlessness, subjugation, and voicelessness of the individual. One last interesting idea concerning this issue, brought forth by Spivak and also present in Le Guin's female characters, is the suggestion that the situation of the female *subaltern* is even worse than that of her male counterparts (83).

Another key term in Bhabha's theory is the place inhabited by the *Other*, which, as mentioned above, is always marginal. Bhabha refers to this as *liminal* space, located “on the borderlines of cultures, [...] in-between cultures” (Huddart 7), which, at the same time provides “the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood [...] that initiate new signs of identity” (*LoC* 1). An important feature that we can find in the figure of the individual inhabiting this type of space is,

according to Bhabha, “their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects” (151). In this context, the former refers to all the inherited and learned cultural and identity values, “constituted by historical sedimentation” (153). The latter refers to the individual’s response to this heirloom; “the signifying process of cultural identification” (153), ultimately leading up to a “loss of identity” (153). Regarding the application of these ideas on Le Guin’s work, the fact that she “creates primary identification with the other” (Payne 25), as a consequence of “placing the marginalized human (or nonhuman) as the central character” (62) and “giving [them] voice [...] and letting them speak for themselves” (58), indicates that we may certainly be on the right track. Holly Littlefield remarks, along the same lines, that Le Guin “has frequently explored themes of liminality, marginalization, and displacement. Her characters are often misfits, caught in between two worlds” (245).

Next, we should focus on the procedures that allow the coloniser to effect change in the colonised individual’s personality. For the sake of clarifying the terms that will be presented, let us think of the colonial system as a role-playing game. The first step by which the individual enters the game is acceptance of the rules, which have already been set by someone else. This step is akin to what Bhabha refers to as *iteration*. Huddart defines iteration as “the necessary repeatability of any mark, idea, or statement if it is to be meaningful. A mark that could occur only once would be meaningless [...]. Iteration—repeatability or iterability—is one of the processes from which meaning derives” (16). This may refer to a situation in which the dominating group has circulated and repeated an idea over and over again until it has been assumed and interiorised by the colonised subject and thus achieves the status of irrevocable truth or fact. Once we can say that the individual has agreed to the terms and conditions of the colonial ‘game’, they are granted the chance to play it. However, they will not themselves choose their role, which will rather be imposed upon them. This is what Bhabha has categorised as *mimicry*, that is, “the colonized adopting and adapting to the

colonizer's culture" (57). By means of this mechanism, the coloniser seeks to achieve a situation in which the colonised subject develops an identity, assumes a role, the cultural and behavioural values of whom are predetermined by the coloniser. In Bhabha's words, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost, but not quite*" (LoC 86). What this implies is that the group in power will, by means of this mechanism, try to reshape the colonised so that they become as much like them as possible. Of course, the potential similarity between them will entail its share of risk for the coloniser, since *mimicry* can be a two-edged sword. While it serves the purpose of creating that 'recognisable Other' suggested by Bhabha, the truth is that it, at the same time, "implicitly offers an opening for agency" (Huddart 76), giving the colonial subject the chance to confront the colonialist power (58). This happens due to the fact that the subjugated group will, by means of this imitation, be able to see how similar they are to the group in power, fulfilling Bhabha's claim that "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (LoC 86) and that it discloses "the ambivalence of colonial discourse [and] disrupts its authority" (88). As a consequence of this ongoing process of imitation and similarity, the coloniser ultimately feels unsettled (Kumar 119), as if their position of power was under siege. There will, however, always remain an ultimate gap between both groups—frequently racial—so that the colonial hierarchy remains at the top, meaning that the colonised will never be allowed to enter the power strata and be acknowledged as an equal. Another consequence of this process of imitation can be found in the figure of the colonised, in the fact that, due to a convergence of different identities within them—the one proper to them and the one imposed—the idea of the "colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (LoC 86) appears. This refers to this individual's lack of a fixed, fully defined identity.

The eventual consequence of the process by which the colonial subjects find themselves between different realities and are forced to play roles imposed upon them is what Bhabha means by *hybridity*.

Very briefly explained, this concept hints at “an original mixed-ness of every identity” (Huddart 6), which arises out of the constant touch present between cultures (6). Hence, the subject displaying this feature is said to inhabit “the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (*LoC* 13), reminding us of those *liminal* spaces introduced above. In the most extreme cases of *hybridity*, Bhabha suggests that the individual would not belong to either of these realities, being “neither the one thing nor the other” (33), having instead a ruptured or dual presence (52). We can here draw yet another connection between Bhabha’s *Other* and the figure of the *subaltern*. Indeed, Spivak claims that, similar to this dual presence mentioned above, “the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous” (79).

One last issue worth mentioning is Freud’s concept of the *uncanny*, which Bhabha also applies to his theory. Freud’s *uncanny* meant to capture “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220), drawing on the work of German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who said that the *uncanny* “is the name for everything that ought to have remained [...] secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in 224). Freud also seems to establish a link between the *uncanny* and the concept of the *double*, which is said to be “a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted—a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ [becomes] a thing of terror” (236). The reason that this image of the double produces a feeling of uncanniness in the individual seems, then, to be due to the fact that this figure recalls a stage in which the identity of the self was yet not fully developed and defined (236). Bhabha makes of Freud’s postulates, employing the term *uncanny* when referring to the idea of home, defining this as “a territory of both disorientation and relocation” (qtd. in Huddart 86).

3.2.3.1. Inborn Identity Issues: Tehanu and Irian

Recalling the origins of Earthsea, we have commented on the fact that, at the very beginning, there was just one race, to which both dragons and humans belonged as one single kin. Later on, this breed split into two and gradually evolved into the separate races of dragons and men. However, we are told how “in every generation of men, one or two are born who are dragons also. And in every generation of [dragons], longer than the quick lives of men, [one] is born who is also human” (*TOW* 152). This is precisely the case with Tehanu and Irian who, although born among and as humans, possess their own share of the dragon species, thus belonging to that in-between race that is half-human and half-dragon. In light of this, we can say that the identity issues displayed by these two characters have their roots in the very moment of their birth, since they are born with two different identities in them: the human and the dragon. This situation reminds us of what Tonya L. Payne, in her study of Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, a novel external to the *Earthsea* saga, says regarding “how central social identity is to individuals, and how difficult social alienation is to accommodate and overcome” (154). This could be applied to Tehanu and Irian’s condition as aliens in the societies in which they are born, and the distress caused by it. Their suffering can, to some extent, also be related to colonialist or expansionist activity. The fashioning of this in-between race occurs as a consequence of the Vedurnan, explained in a previous section, and which was, at the same time, the direct consequence of a desire and a choice to possess, present in those who would later on become humans. Interestingly, its implications are those of humans wishing to expand their territories and gain control of the lands of the dragons, which brought along, among other things, the fatal and long-lasting enmity between these two races.

We will now discuss the personal stories of Tehanu and Irian. Regarding the former, we are given the story of a child who was brutally abused by her family, to the point when she was thrown into the fire and left to die there. However, Tehanu was saved, healed, and adopted by Tenar, a key character in Le Guin’s work. Due to the scars from the fire and her innate shyness, Tehanu does not have an easy

life, her social intercourse being extremely limited. Interestingly, we are told that she is “the last to make the choice” (*TOW* 152) between becoming a dragon or remaining in a human body. The fact that she is the last individual born to this race implies that said race gradually decreases in number, becoming less relevant and more marginal. Irian, on the other hand, is a girl who is heir to the domain of Iria, in the Island of Way. Fed up with the drunken and violent ways of her father, and motivated by a desire to find her true self, Irian sets off on a journey to the island of Roke, seeking to be accepted as a student of its school of wizardry, where no woman has ever been allowed.

To begin our analysis of these characters, we could start by talking of the type of figure that each represents. As stated above, according to Bhabha, the image of the *Other* features characteristics of domination, together with a lack of power and personal voice. This is also the case with Tehanu and Irian, who, we can thus say, belong to this category of the *Other*. For example, one key issue depriving these characters of their power and agency is the problems they have with their true names. As we will recall, true names are extremely important in Le Guin’s fictional world, since, as part of True Speech, every true name conveys the essence of that which they name, even in the case of human beings (“The Magic Art” 116). This means that knowing someone’s or something’s true name provides information about their nature (“Interview” 63), at the same time as it grants unlimited power over that person or thing. As for Tehanu and Irian, we learn that, as young girls, neither possesses a name that fits their being. In the case of Tehanu, this is due to the fact that, when Tenar finds her, we are told that “if the child had a name, she did not know it or would not say it. [Tenar] called her Therru” (*Tehanu* 646).

Concerning Irian, we learn that when she came of age and was given what supposedly would be her true name—Irian—she knew deep within her that that was not her name. This feeling was also shared by the witch who named her, who had the premonition that, at least, that was not all of it, “as if [she had] left something unfinished”

(*Dragonfly* 287). Payne's work on Le Guin's creation and use of proper names is very useful for the study of these characters, finding that "Le Guin creates a name, and then creates all the attributes that pertain to that name, thereby creating a character" (68), consequently implying that "a person's true name is linked with his or her true self: to know the one is to know the other, and the self is incomplete, [...] without the true name" (97). We can here draw a parallel between what was just suggested about the implications of true names and the idea of the self-concept, defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the "idea of the self constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others" (lexico.com). According to Hazel Markus and Elissa Wurf, "the self-concept does not just reflect ongoing behavior but instead mediates and regulates this behavior" (299). This implies that it is not our actions that shape our identity, but the idea that we hold of ourselves defines our conduct, as it is the name that grants its holder the attributes that will compose their identity in Earthsea. Going back to Le Guin, then, this whole situation, together with the implications of names in her work, leads us to think of Tehanu and Irian as individuals who have been deprived of their true essence, their true being, or—following Markus and Wurf—of a defined self-concept. In light of this, we may also conclude that this lack of a fixed identity can be translated into voicelessness, since a subject who has no being has no chance to be in a position from which to speak.

Here, it is also interesting to mention Tehanu's powerlessness, particularly conspicuous in the beginning of her life. Thus, we learn about her passive behaviour, her inability to act or change her situation, as when she is described as "blank, unanswering, docile in the way an inanimate thing, a stone, is docile" (*Tehanu* 672). Indeed, she seems such an utterly powerless being that it might appear impossible for her to improve her social status, and her only chance of leading a decent life seems to be to take up work as a weaver, "shy, [...] unmarried, shut away at my work" (754). This is, at least, what Tenar foresees for her future, hinting at Tehanu's stagnant position.

Compared with Tehanu's inability to act, Irian shows a little more agency. She is willing to do anything to know her true self, to the point of following a wizard to the isle of Roke, where she hoped the wise would be able to tell her more about herself. The truth is that, although she may appear to be more powerful than Tehanu, she embarks on the journey to Roke persuaded and deceived by this wizard who only sought to possess her. However, it is precisely this agency and desire that ultimately allows her to achieve her true identity, since "action [...] has the power to create [a] being. It is, in fact, the only way to create it" (Crow & Erlich 209). One last feature that these characters share is their inscription as *liminal* identities. This is due to the fact that they inhabit precisely that space that exists in-between two major cultures and races: dragons and humans. They are thus placed right in the middle of the ongoing conflict between these breeds. Of course, this liminality is not only 'spatial', but also—and more importantly—psychological, since their belonging to two cultures will also affect and condition their attempts to find a fixed identity. After everything that has been said about Tehanu and Irian lacking power, a voice of their own, and their different degrees of agency, we may conclude that these characters embody that set of characteristics typical of the *Other*, who simultaneously inhabits that space that emerges in-between different realities.

To continue along Bhabha's proposals regarding identity construction, we might argue that Tehanu and Irian can also be thought of in terms of having hybrid identities. As indicated above, their hybrid condition has its roots in the fact that, although they were born as humans, they contain within them traces of the dragon race, ready to be kindled. Indeed, we read that the people who interact with and relate to them see beyond their feminine appearance, and are able to perceive their dragon side. For instance, it is clear that Tehanu harbours considerable power inside of her, as she is able to guess the true names of people (*Tehanu* 882; 884), something only the most knowledgeable and powerful can do, such as wizards or

dragons—which she will ultimately end up becoming. It is precisely this power emanating from her, belonging to her dragon nature, that others can perceive. In this respect, Tenar mentions that “there’s a wildness in her. Sometimes she’s my [Tehanu], sometimes she’s something else, out of reach” (847). In a similar fashion, a witch called Ivy—an acquaintance of Tenar and Tehanu—is frightened by Tehanu’s power, and says that “when [Tehanu] looks at my with that one eye seeing and one eye blind [she] doesn’t know what [Tehanu] sees” (819), at the same time as she advises Tenar to “beware her, the day she finds her strength!” (819).

Much the same can be concluded from Irian’s experience. Her hidden might is also perceivable by those who come across her, saying “afterwards that if they looked straight at her she seemed only a tall woman standing there, but if they looked aside what they saw in the corner of their eye was a vast shimmer of smoky gold that dwarfed [everyone]” (*TOW* 150). Above was mentioned how Irian was deceived by a wizard with whom she sailed to the isle of Roke. This wizard, regardless of his power, “felt short; [...] small” (*Dragonfly* 293), the first time he encountered her, and as they progressively became closer companions, he forwent his desire to possess her, rather feeling the very opposite. About this, we are told that, to his astonishment, “his dreams of her were never of her yielding to him, but of himself yielding to a fierce, destroying sweetness, sinking into an annihilating embrace, dreams in which she was something beyond comprehension and he was nothing at all” (306).

This combination of the two different identities coexisting within Tehanu and Irian will lead each to embark on a personal quest to find their true beings. For the sake of a clearer understanding of what comes next, we will begin with the example of Irian, since, chronologically speaking, her personal story predates Tehanu’s.

As mentioned above, Irian travelled to the isle of Roke so that the wise there could teach her who she really was. However, the strict

rule of the wizardry school prohibited women from entering it, restricting magic instruction to men only. Even though Irian is prevented from entering this place of wisdom, certain Masters, that is, the rulers of the school, become intrigued by her. Among these, we find the Master Patterner who lives in the Immanent Grove, and who invites Irian to spend some time with him in his home. It is there that, when the Patterner and Irian are talking of her potentiality, Irian first becomes aware of her power. We read the following:

“I brought you to the Grove because the leaves of the trees spoke your name to me before you ever came here. *Irian*, they said, *Irian*. Why you came I don’t know, but not by chance.”

[...]

“Maybe I came to destroy Roke.”

His pale eyes blazed then. “Try!”

A long shudder ran through her as she stood facing him. She felt herself larger than he was, enormously larger. She could reach out one finger and destroy him. He stood there in his small, brave, brief humanity, his mortality, defenseless. She drew a long, long breath. She stepped back from him.

(*Dragonfly* 361)

What we can deduct from this excerpt is that, when confronted and incited to use her power, Irian feels herself superior to the Patterner, signalling the strength of her dragon origins, resting within her, waiting to be put into motion. We could say that it is from that moment on that she begins to grasp her true capacity, to the point of challenging the Master Summoner—the one most opposed most to her entering the school of Roke—to a duel. Thanks to this heightened awareness, Irian suggests meeting the Summoner on Roke Knoll, a central place on the isle of Roke, known for its extreme connection with the powers of nature. The intense relationship between dragons and nature resounds in Irian’s words when she claims that “my place is on [Roke Knoll]. Where things are what they are” (*Dragonfly* 370).

Interestingly enough, it is in this precise place that Irian turns into a dragon in order to defeat the Summoner, becoming a creature with “great gold-mailed flanks, the spiked, coiling tails, the talons, the breath that was bright fire” (375).

However, the fact that she has finally come to full awareness of her power and the dragon half of her being does not directly translate into her knowing her true, fixed identity, since her doubts have not been fully dispelled. Irian herself acknowledges that the one named Irian is not her only identity (*Dragonfly* 373), and that it is compelling for her to fly “beyond the West [...]” (374), “to those who will give my name. In fire, not water. My people” (374)—the dragons. It is not until some years later that Irian returns with a whole, known identity, introducing herself with the following words: “I was Irian, of the Domain of Old Iria on Way. I am Orm Irian now. Kalessin, the Eldest, calls me daughter” (*TOW* 151).

Concerning Tehanu’s quest for a recognisable identity, she appears to have fully embarked on such a voyage when she first comes across Irian. It is, however, some years prior to said moment that she first faces the paradox of belonging to two different races. Finding Ged and Tenar in great peril, Tehanu calls Kalessin to save them. Afterwards, Kalessin asks Tehanu whether she feels ready to leave them behind and fly to where the dragons live, to which Tehanu answers that she would rather stay with her protectors for a while (*Tehanu* 886-887). The knowledge she gains from this experience is twofold. On the one hand, she learns of the double nature of her being and the inevitable choice that this implies, which she must face sooner or later. On the other hand, she obtains her true name, that of Tehanu, given to her by Kalessin, “the giver of names” (888). All in all, what she, as well as those around her have found is that, as Tenar says, “she has been Tehanu since the beginning. She has always been Tehanu” (888). However, as with Irian, this first encounter with and realisation of her true, mixed nature does not serve Tehanu to obtain a defined

identity and come to terms with it, meaning that her personal quest still goes on.

Some years later, she plays a key role in the mediation between the races of humans and dragons. In the cases where she meets representatives of dragons, she is addressed by these as “daughter of the Eldest” (*TOW* 110) or “Kalessin’s daughter” (111), thus acknowledging her dragon nature. Even Tenar concedes that this is not the Tehanu she once knew, but that rather, due to the knowledge of her dual identity, “she has changed [and] she’ll never come home” (133). However, as we have just seen, the acknowledgement of those around her does not translate into Tehanu obtaining full awareness of who she is and how she must interact with the world around her. Indeed, she manifests this identity confusion that she must bear, the awareness of “[her] alienation, from others, from [her] own society, even from [herself]” (Payne 218), when she tells Tenar “I don’t know who I am, mother” (*TOW* 182). The underlying reason is that she is conscious of the fact that she is not yet what Irian is (182), namely someone who understands the meaning of her inscription in that race between humans and dragons, and the behaviour and power implied in having such a nature. The precise moment in which Tehanu—following the inevitable plight imposed on her by her nature—turns into a dragon and flies west to meet and live with her true people occurs while she is helping humans restore the balance of the world. During the scene in which we learn how the stone wall that prevented the cycle of life from going on is torn down by, among others, Tehanu, we read of her conversion into a dragon after calling Kalessin’s name:

She was gazing upward, westward.

She had no eye for earth. She reached up her arms. Fire ran along her hands, her arms, into her hair, into her face and body, flamed up into great wings above her head, and lifted her into the air, a creature all fire, blazing, beautiful.

She cried out aloud, a clear, wordless cry. She flew high, headlong, fast, up into the sky where the light was growing and a white wind had erased the unmeaning stars.

[...]

Three came wheeling towards [King Lebannen] [...]. Two he knew, Orm Irian and Kalessin. The third had bright mail, gold, with wings of gold. That one flew highest and did not stoop down to them. Orm Irian played about her in the air and they flew together, one chasing the other higher and higher, till all at once the highest rays of the rising sun struck Tehanu and she burned like her name, a great bright star. (238)

Thus, in this fragment, we witness how Tehanu's quest finally comes to an end, as she turns into a dragon and flies westward with Kalessin and Orm Irian, after, we could say, having finally been able to understand her true identity and embrace the essence conveyed by her true name.

We have so far been able to see how these two characters' respective journeys lead them through similar steps. Both begin their way in a state of ignorance regarding their true natures, bringing to mind Bhabha's conception of ruptured identities, and this is followed by a stage in which, even though more aware of their dual being, they are still unable to show any insight into how to deal with it and embrace it. Finally, they both reach a scenario in which they showcase full awareness of their respective identities, to which the knowledge of their true names naturally helps.

At this stage of our analysis, we reach a point where Bhabha's proposals around identity construction may not help us delve deeper into the inner battles and doubts that these characters go through. Hence, we could certainly widen our scope and turn to other interesting suggestions regarding identity, to complement Bhabha's theory of *hybridity*. A suitable approach may be found in so-called bicultural identities, comprising "immigrants, refugees, sojourners,

indigenous people, *ethnic minorities*, *those in inter-ethnic relationships*, and *mixed-ethnic individuals*” (Nguyen, Huynh & Benet-Martínez 17, italics are mine). Certainly, Tehanu and Irian could fall into categories that involve features of ethnic belonging, since, in the *Earthsea* universe, theirs is a minor race as compared to that of the humans or the dragons, finding themselves right in-between these major races. Going a little bit further, we could argue that Tehanu and Irian’s cases are similar to those of “second-generation children of immigrants or refugees and mixed-ethnic individuals who learn their two cultures simultaneously” (22). Our two characters showcase this element of their own nature that makes it more difficult for them to find the appropriate manner in which to interact with the world that surrounds them. The fact that two cultures are rooted within them from the moment they are born makes them doubt which would be most convenient to follow, given their social circumstances. Perhaps the greatest difference that we find between Bhabha’s concept of hybrid identity and the idea of the bicultural subject is captured in the quote above, namely, that the latter acquires both cultures at the same time, while the former seems to acquire a separate one over a period of time. This is also the case with Tehanu and Irian, as their identity issues are of birth origin and not as a problem originating in a new identity being imposed on them later on, as the issue of *hybridity* seems to suggest.

A certainly interesting element of bicultural identity has its origin in the fact that these subjects are frequently located between different realities or cultures, as a consequence of which, “[they] might find themselves above but also right in-between the lines of conflict” (Blazejewski 112). Therefore, biculturals own the necessary tools to mediate in potential conflicts, as Blazejewski suggests, “a bicultural’s privileged access to further cultural knowledge traditions might be [...] an asset facilitating translation and mediation between cultural groups” (123). In Tehanu and Irian’s case, their dual natures leads them to assume pivotal roles in the tension between humans and dragons, stemming from certain dragons attacking human settlements.

In this state of affairs, then, both characters will work as mediators between dragons and humans in order to help both parties reach an agreement and call a truce that would end the hostilities. Examples of such behaviour can be found, for instance, when the fellowship assorted by King Lebannen—including Tenar and Tehanu—come across a dragon on the island of Havnor. To everyone’s astonishment, and despite their fear of the winged creature, it is the little girl Tehanu who steps forward and approaches the dragon, who “sank a little in the air, lowered its head, and touched her hand with its lean, flared, scaled snout [...]; like a king bowing to a queen” (*TOW* 109). The scene reads as follows:

Tehanu spoke, the dragon spoke, both briefly, in their cymbal-shiver voices. Another exchange, a pause; the dragon spoke at length. [...] One more exchange of words. A wisp of smoke from the dragon’s nostrils; a stiff, imperious gesture of the woman’s crippled, withered hand. She spoke clearly two words.

“Bring her” [...].

The dragon beat its wings hard, lowered its long head, and hissed, spoke again, then sprang up into the air, high over Tehanu, turned, wheeled once, and set off like an arrow to the west. (109)

Irian, in turn, mediates on behalf of Kalessin, Eldest of Dragons, in order to prevent any fatal harm to fall upon either group. These are her words to King Lebannen’s party:

The dragon who came before [...] and spoke to Tehanu is my brother Ammaud. [The other dragons] seek to drive you into the east, but Ammaud, like me, enacts the will of Kalessin, seeking to free my people from the yoke you wear. If he and I and the children of Kalessin can prevent harm to your people and ours, we will do so. But dragons have no king, and obey no one, and will fly where they will. For a while they will do

as my brother and I ask in Kalessin's name. But not for long.
(*TOW* 153)

We find, in these sequences, how Tehanu and Irian, thanks to their cultural connections with opposing groups, are able to talk with one party on behalf of the other, so as to find a permanent solution to the long-lasting troubles between dragons and humans, and let each race go its own way.

However, and despite this potentially positive ability that bicultural subjects may exercise thanks to their mixed nature, the bicultural individual will also experience some negative effects of their dual cultural belonging. We saw, above, that Bhabha claims the hybrid subject is in possession of a kind of fragmented self, and does not know which of their inner identities to follow or embrace. The situation of a bicultural individual certainly seems to be similar, since "many biculturals perceive the juggling of their multiple identities as strenuous" (Blazejewski 126). This possible frustration, derived from continuous and simultaneous dealings with several selves seems to have its roots in what is known as "identity intrusion, that is overlap between multiple competing identities as perceived by the individual" (126), which, at the same time, produces in the subject an "intra-psychic conflict" (126). As for the presence of such feelings in the characters under scrutiny here, we have seen evidence of both Tehanu and Irian, partially aware of their nature, experiencing how stressful it is for an individual to perceive several identities within one self. Due to a lack of self-knowledge, these characters lack the necessary intelligence to decide which identity to follow and embrace. Ultimately, they both enter a stage in which they have no idea of who they truly are.

As a last remark, the theories around bicultural identity seem to grant these subjects the ability to be the seeds from which new cultural expressions may flower, it certainly being possible for "a third culture [to be] created via combination of dominant and ethnic

cultures” (Nguyen, Huynh & Benet-Martinez 22). If we translate this to the cases of Tehanu and Irian, it is clear that the mixed-ness of dragon and human characteristics within them does not result in a new cultural identity. We may indeed be more correct to say that they belong to an ‘alternative’ or third culture. Theirs is the first race to people the world of Earthsea, one that is, at the time these stories take place, diminished in number and which has, as a result, been marginalised in favour of the other races that emerged from it, namely dragons and humans. Although the order of the factors might have changed, we can safely claim that these two characters do belong to what could be labelled an alternative culture.

Indeed, if we linger briefly on this concept of a third culture, we can draw several strong parallels between the life experiences of individuals belonging to this group, and Tehanu and Irian’s. A third culture is one that stands “between cultures” (Pollock & Van Reken, qtd. in Walters 6) and whose possessors live “on the edge of [them]” (15). Since identity in an individual is crucial as it “is our sense of who we are and guides our interests and life choices” (3), those who live in-between cultures are not given “the opportunity to complete the critical task of personal or cultural identity development” (2). This impossibility of developing a defined identity that can help them get along in the world ends up in feelings of isolation (8) and lack of belonging (10), even affecting their ability to socialise (2). Consequently, “the chaotic nature of their lives” (13) will translate into their being “blinded by confusion and unable to construct a unified identity. They become trapped by their marginality and struggle with shifting between the cultures, which may lead to a sense of alienation—feeling so different from others, that they feel no one can relate to them” (15). The fact that they stand on this sort of shifting sands also implies that they are denied a stance from which to voice their feelings and thoughts (48). Ultimately, this individual asks themselves the critical questions of “who am I really? Where do I fit? What is my place in this world?” (3), a clear sign of their indefiniteness. This is precisely the experience of these two characters.

3.2.3.2. Imposed Identity Issues: Tenar and Ged

We now move our focus towards the figures of Tenar and Ged. Unlike what was shown in the previous section, these two characters' identity problems are unrelated to birth characteristics. Instead, what we can perceive in the cases of Tenar and Ged is that their suffering has its source in the fact that certain identities or roles have been imposed on them. Their situation shares strong similarities with what Frantz Fanon denounces in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), when he states that, as a black man, he has been "overdetermined from without" (87), and that "it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, waiting for me" (102). This brings to mind Edward Said's claims that the Orient is a Western construct, and that the "Orient is not the Orient as it is, but as it has been Orientalized" (*Orientalism* 104). Applying this to Tenar and Ged, we can perceive certain similarities in that they are also put into specific situations in which they have to embrace a meaning or identity that is given to them. For Tenar, it is that of Arha, Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and for Ged it is that of the Archmage of Earthsea. This translates into their being forced to forsake their true selves, with its consequent problems.

The troublesome relationship between the identity issues of the individual and the experiences of being put into categories created and defined by others, is present yet again in Fanon's work. When examining the subjugation of the people of Madagascar by Western colonisers, he expresses that:

If he is a Malagasy, it is because the white man has come, and if at a certain stage he has been led to ask himself whether he is indeed a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged. I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all

individuality [...]. Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human. (*BS, WM* 73)

All these processes will inevitably lead to a necessary quest for self 'rediscovery'. As will be shown below, Tenar and Ged make their personal journeys together, finding their mutual help to be of utmost importance until they reach the place and moment where they both begin a reconciliation with their former, true identities, with that which they were supposed to be.

Much like in the previous section, what follows will apply different postcolonial viewpoints to the experiences of our two characters. This is because Tenar and Ged's experiences are shaped by factors that can be related to imperialism and expansionism. In Tenar's case, religion imposes upon her the aforementioned role of priestess, while, in the case of the Ged, his new role will be indirectly connected to the idea of progress. As mentioned above, each can be said to be fundamental factors of any imperialist ambition, as when Bhabha declares religion, in this case Christianity, to carry "the standard of empire" (*LoC* 92), and "ideologies of progress" (195), that is, "evolutionism, utilitarianism, evangelism [to be] the technologies of colonial and imperialist governance" (195).

We will begin by analysing the identity issues portrayed in the character of Tenar, and we will then move on to do the same with Ged. After these individual studies, we will look at both characters together in order to point out certain shared experiences that are essential in the construction of their respective identities.

Tenar is a girl who, at a very early age, is taken from her home in a little village on the isle of Atuan to the so-called Place of the Tombs of Atuan, an isolated area that is home to a series of temples dedicated to different gods and faiths. In this place, she is instructed to become Arha, the eternal Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, the leader

of a faith dedicated to the Old Powers of the Earth. By the word 'instructed', we mean that she undergoes a process referred to as "the corruption of life at its source" ("The Earthsea Trilogy" 78), by means of which she is gradually made to forget her true self—Tenar—as she embraces the new identity that is set upon her, hinting at "her death as an individual" (Spivack 33). In other words, Tenar enters a state of complete ignorance about her own personal story, forgetting her family, birthplace, even her own name. As John Crow and Richard Erlich put it, Tenar "gives up personal identity in the service of a social order" (205). This seems key in the creation of a hierarchy of power in colonial environments, where ignorance of the subdued group translates into power for the dominating group (Alatas 26). Indeed, Tenar's ignorance is crucial to her ability her to assume her new role as Priestess of the Old Powers.

In order to define or categorise Tenar in the context of identity shaping, Bhabha's conception of the *Other* as voiceless and powerless may again be extremely useful. This is precisely what happens to Tenar, as illustrated by the ceremony at the end of which she becomes Arha. The conductors of the rite utter the following words uttered: "O let the Nameless Ones [the Old Powers] behold the girl given to them, *who is verily the one born ever nameless*. Let them accept her life and the years of her life until her death, which is also theirs. Let them find her acceptable. *Let her be eaten!*" (*TToA* 229, italics are mine). Two ideas can be deduced from this excerpt. On the one hand, her identity—her true being—has been eaten, that is, taken away from her, which is a necessary condition for becoming Arha, who is ever reborn. On the other hand, we also learn that "her name was taken from her" (237). Now, if we recall the implications of proper, or true, names in Le Guin's work, we could say that this process strengthens the idea of Tenar being deprived of her identity, since her true essence departs together with her name.

Tenar consequently enters a process during which she forgets almost every memory ever possessed of her old self and accept her

new situation as completely natural, as seen in the following words: “As she grew older she lost all remembrance of her mother, without knowing she had lost it. She belonged here, at the Place of the Tombs; she had always belonged here” (*TToA* 233). She even seems to partake in a kind of intentional refusal of her past, asking herself “what was the good in remembering? It was gone, all gone. She had come where she must come. In all the world she knew only one place: the Place of the Tombs of Atuan” (237). The direct aftermath of said process is the complete neglect and oblivion of her true self, where she becomes “[a] little girl, who had no name any more but *Arha*, the Eaten One” (232), and claims that she is “not Tenar any more” (232). In a sense, the feeling we get is that of Tenar becoming some sort of white canvas on which her instructors will be able to draw a whole new identity without opposition. We might also argue that her lack of identity can be translated into a lack of a proper voice, as seen in the cases of Tehanu and Irian, which implies that Tenar will “use language inauthentically with ‘a voice not her own’” (Byrne 151).

Our study of the features of otherness in Tenar cannot end without mentioning the curious connection that seems to exist between her identity blankness and the landscape that she inhabits. The area where the Place of the Tombs has been erected is described as a “barren land” (*TToA* 243) that, “from horizon to horizon, was a dull, tawny, desert colour” (243). Similarly, the caves underneath the Place, which the Old Powers are said to inhabit, and whose “darkness is emptiness” (“The Earthsea Trilogy” 79), seem to be governed by “silence” (*TToA* 259) and “the lifeless smell of the huge hollowness” (360). Hence, the references to this place as an empty, desolate, and silent area remind us of Tenar’s own being after her instruction to become *Arha*; becoming a mere body devoid of identity, of essence—an empty shell—a condition that denies her a voice of her own. In this sense, Margaret P. Esmonde suggests that, apart from the outer landscape, the internal arrangement and atmosphere of the Place itself also impacts on her blank identity. In her words, “the dead and frozen weeds of the Tombs, the black-robed priestesses, and the cold

decaying buildings surrounded by stone walls and endless desert convey the spiritual and psychological aridity of those in the service of the [Old Powers]” (21).

The next concept that we should be looking at regarding Bhabha’s theory would be the place that this *Other* seems to inhabit, which he refers to in terms of *liminal* space. Bhabha suggests that liminality is that which exists right in the place where cultures come into contact with each other. Tenar’s *liminal* space takes place within herself, since hers is more of a psychological zone than a physical area. Since her liminality is constituted by her own experience—by the clash of her cultural baggage and the new culture that she is forced to accept and assimilate—she is its originator. As we know, the child Tenar was taken from her hometown and put in the Place of the Tombs, a place with a whole new cultural reality. It is from this clash between the original cultural values of that small village in Atuan and the ones imposed upon her in the Tombs that her internal *liminal* space takes shape. Tenar thus inhabits a space in between two different realities, which leads to problems when it comes to her knowing which reality she actually lives in, as will be dealt with below.

After what has been said in the previous lines, we will inevitably think that all this hints at a clear lack of true identity in Tenar’s figure, a trace that, we could conclude, makes her a suitable candidate for the category of the *Other*. This is because an individual without a fixed identity—someone who has been deprived of it—may be said to lack a voice of their own, consequently losing the chance to take a stance and secure a position of power for themselves. This difficulty of the *Other* to claim a central space in a cultural reality will lead to them being left aside and inhabit the peripheral spaces that skirt the edges of any culture.

Now that we have defined the subject of our study, we may turn to the task of unearthing the forces, or processes, that enable the creation of a whole new identity for said subject. As we have seen

above, the process that Bhabha calls *iteration* can be thought of as acceptance of the established rules in a role-playing game. If we wish to find evidence of this in Tenar's experience in the Tombs of Atuan, we could point to her assuming as an almost unchallengeable truth an idea transmitted "in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority" (*LoC* 35), namely that she has never been Tenar, but that she is and has always been Arha, the priestess who has been truly reborn over and over again. Her own words are clarificatory here, when she claims that

I [have served the Dark Ones]. Very long! I am the First Priestess, the Reborn. I have served my masters for a thousand years and a thousand years before that. I am their servant and their voice and their hands. And I am their vengeance on those who defile the Tombs and look upon what is not to be seen! (*TToA* 318)

Similarly, during the process of acquiring the knowledge required by being the One Priestess, she assumes this to have been learned long ago, remembering "all that was told her" (277) by her instructors. The same holds for the chores that her new position demands of her, like the obligation to descend to the caves underneath, a dreadful place, which she carries out by battling fear through thinking that "she [had] done this many times before" (262). We can here perceive how Tenar has indeed incorporated the idea that she has always been Arha, while simultaneously accepting everything that this new role demands as something she has been doing for centuries.

Bhabha suggests that, once the colonised subject has accepted the idea, they will acquire their new identity by means of a mechanism he calls *mimicry*. This is the idea that the colonised will perform an imitation of the figure set before them by the group in power, conveying a set of values deemed appropriate by this group. Of course, the figure Tenar will be reshaped in accordance with is that of

Arha, whose sole obligation is to “please [the Nameless Ones]; [and] nobody else” (*TToA* 245). It is curious to see how Tenar seems to take this role-playing to its extreme. We can find quite an unequivocal example of this in a scene set in Tenar’s chambers. We are told that Tenar comes across a “time-ruined coffer of cedar wood” (288), which she would stare at for hours. The chest apparently contains engravings of a king of old, together with that of “the One Priestess, breathing in the drug-fumes from the trays of bronze and prophesying or advising the king [...]; the face of the priestess was too small to have clear features, yet Arha would imagine that the face was her own face” (288). The fact that she believes a featureless figure is a portrait of herself clearly shows the extent to which Tenar has assumed the role of Arha.

This process of *mimicry* has its consequences, which, as shown earlier, might be said to be twofold. On the one hand, we might look at the above-mentioned issue of unsettledness that can be found in the figure of the coloniser—in Tenar’s story, the coloniser is embodied in the character of Kossil. The High Priestess of the Godking, Kossil holds a position of power in the Place of the Tombs. Since she, together with another priestess called Thar, is in charge of Tenar’s instruction as Arha, we may think of her as the coloniser and Tenar as the colonised; the former trying to reform the latter. However, Tenar’s extreme *mimicry* of Arha results in her gaining enormous power—a power sufficient to call her deities to action against anyone who tries to defy them or her (*TToA* 338). Tenar’s rise in power is, then, a threat to Kossil’s status and her ambition to achieve total power over each and every one of the faiths practised in the Place of the Tombs. This is precisely where her feeling of unsettledness comes from, in her coming to believe that Tenar could actually, if she wished to, “vanish” (339) her. We should now turn to the colonial subject, in order to trace the second aftermath of this process. We would expect to find a sort of fragmented—or, as Bhabha would have it, ‘partial’—identity in the colonised individual. As for Tenar, this fragmentation stems from the clash between the two cultural realities coexisting within her being:

the one she was born with and made to forget, and the one imposed on her. This situation seems to lead to her never completely believing all she is told about being Arha ever reborn, even if her actions and words indicate otherwise. However, there are occasions on which Tenar makes manifest her doubtfulness concerning these matters, as when we read that “yet, it was always strange when Thar said: ‘You told me before you died...’” (*TToA* 278).

Tenar’s scepticism can be seen as the turning point in her personal story and development, marking the beginning of a second phase in her life. It is during this second phase that Tenar slowly begins to realise her hybrid identity, which will come to have direct consequences on her behaviour. The factor that initiates this second phase is Ged, or—more precisely—Tenar coming across him in Atuan. Ged is on a crucial mission to restore balance and peace in the archipelago, for which it is necessary that he gets hold of half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe, since, while Ged is in possession of one half of it, rumour has it that the other was put away in the Tombs of Atuan, or, rather, in the caves underneath them. However, due to the existing tension between kingdoms, not everyone is happy about the idea of a reunification of this ring, which is why this mission is carried out in utmost secrecy. However, Tenar, in one of her routine visits to this subterranean place—now her domain as the One Priestess—finds him wandering around trying to find the treasury, for which she imprisons him in the caves. It is sacrilege for anyone who is not the One Priestess to even dare to set foot in these places, which is more than a justifiable reason for Tenar to order Ged’s execution, at least, if she were to act as Arha. However, this situation triggers Tenar’s hybridity and doubts regarding her identity as Arha to come to the surface, pushing her in the opposite direction.

This new situation causes her to gradually reject some of the behaviours and ways of acting that comprises the role of the Priestess of the Tombs. Crow and Erlich comment that “until Ged awakens her into consciousness, [Tenar] shows no sense of possessing the freedom

to choose her acts on the basis of a personal identity unrestricted by assigned roles. Perhaps more important, she shows no sense of being free not to act” (210). After her encounter with Ged, however, she shows strong determination about what she does and does not want to do. In this sense, Tenar’s greatest challenge to the figure of Arha is that, instead of punishing Ged for his insolence and insult to her gods, she seeks to help him escape from the dreadful place where he is kept prisoner.

Tenar’s rebellious stance shares similarities Bhabha’s thought that the colonial individual’s inscription as both a “pedagogical object and a performative subject” (*LoC* 151). Indeed, Tenar makes a transition from the former to the latter—a movement that brings her to reject the cultural knowledge that has been put on her—linked to the priestess role—due to it being impossible for her to obtain any meaningful significance from that cultural baggage when relating it to her new reality. Bhabha claims that the refusal to follow the imposed pattern—in Tenar’s case, that of Arha—“produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’” (185). Hence, after this revolution takes place within her, Tenar’s mind is clearly set on helping Ged escape from the grave peril he is in. In the beginning, her attitude—even though she is lending Ged a hand—is that she is merely playing with her prisoner, as if she had the power to keep him alive until the moment she decides that he has lived long enough. This is what we learn, for instance, when Tenar first communicates with the wizard Ged, indicating to him that he can arrive into a gallery where “she could let a little water for him down one of the spy holes [...]. That would keep him alive longer. As long as she pleased, indeed. If she put down a little water and food now and then, he would go on and on, days, months, wandering in the Labyrinth [...]. That would teach him to mock the Nameless Ones, to swagger his foolish manhood in the burial places of the Immortal Dead!” (*TToA* 306). However, she then guides him to the chamber where the great treasures are hoarded, among them the missing half of Erreth-Akbe’s ring, thus helping Ged

get closer to achieving his goal (308-309). As the days wear on, we learn that Tenar grows increasingly aware of her duty towards her prisoner, since providing for him helps her sleep “long and sound” (314).

We thus, in a sense, witness how an unconscious assistance, hidden behind a veil of mockery and vengeance, ends up becoming a completely conscious and necessary activity for Tenar. Indeed, the influence that the figure of Ged has had on her is such that she is tempted to take yet another step against her gods, that of kindling light in the caverns, which is something that is absolutely prohibited, in order to be able “to see once more, just for a moment, the time-carven stone, the lovely glitter of the walls” (*TToA* 319), a sacrilege Ged was performing the first time she met him. Thus, Tenar’s actions after coming across Ged clearly show that she, at least progressively, has more initiative than prior to their meeting, and is consequently portrayed in accordance with what Crow and Erlich calls “woman as a person with an individuality of her own” (203).

After this, the crucial moment when Tenar learns about her hybrid identity and consequently begins to have even stronger doubts about her true self is when Ged, thanks to his immense knowledge, manages to give her back her long-forgotten name, Tenar (*TToA* 334). At this point, it is interesting to recall that, for several years, her instructors had suppressed this name, which conveys an essence, to the point where it no longer even constituted a faint memory. Nevertheless, when Ged brings back this name, the whole world that had been constructed around the figure of Arha trembles, and almost collapses. Following Payne, we could think of this event in terms of “a consciousness-raising experience” (169) that “a person who has been othered” (169) needs to live “in order for [an] individual revolution to come” (169). It is arguably Tenar’s true name that propels this subversive incident, since it is of utmost importance that, in order to set off on the journey towards freedom, “the [individuals] [...] gain control of [...] their names” (118).

Somehow, this memory of old is a force that baffles and unsettles the reality that Tenar inhabits at the moment, since she “finds her true self only when Ged gives her back her name [...] [allowing] her to know her essential, uneaten self” (Comoletti & Drout 122). Such a re-encounter will have a direct effect on her psyche, in the form of something similar to Freud’s sense of the *uncanny*—that unsettling feeling caused by a distant, suppressed memory being brought back to the present. We can perceive precisely this sense in the sequence where Tenar utters her name for the first time in several years: “‘I am Tenar’ she said, not aloud, and she shook with cold, and terror, and exultation, there, under the open, sun-washed sky. ‘I have my name back. I am Tenar!’” (*TToA* 336). In her words we can see how, even though she ends up embracing this identity of old that she has been given back, her first reaction is the fear that arises when faced with an unsettling memory, in an unease running down her spine. Tenar had faced similar episodes before, as when, after a conversation with a young girl called Penthe in the service of the Godkin, we are told how

there was something underneath Penthe’s words with which [Tenar] didn’t agree, something wholly new to her, frightening to her. She had not realized how very different people were, how differently they saw life. She felt as if she had looked up and suddenly seen a whole new planet hanging huge and populous right outside the window, an entirely strange world, one in which the gods did not matter. She was scared by the solidity of Penthe’s unfaith. Scared, she struck out. (270)

The feeling that we get is that for someone like Tenar, a person who has been secluded for years to the point at which all her memories are linked to that enclosed place, the idea of a world outside those four walls; a world she might have once inhabited, is so strange and uncomfortable that she immediately shuns it. Here, it is interesting to

look at the relationship Freud establishes between the *uncanny* and the figure of the double: a being, identical to us, which we may well have once possessed but subsequently rejected. In Tenar's case, this frightening double corresponds to the little girl she once was, who lived in a little village in Atuan. This could possibly be one of the reasons Arha seems to experience an *uncanny* feeling when Penthe reminds her of that world beyond the walls of the Place.

Going back to the effect that receiving her true name has on Tenar, we mentioned above how this raises her awareness of her hybrid identity, which consists of the self she was made to forget as well as the new one that was given to her. A clear example of this awareness can be found in the way that, in a visit to Ged, Tenar introduces herself, saying "It's I, Arha—Tenar" (*TToA* 344). This shows us the in-betweenness that she now inhabits and the severe difficulty that she showcases when choosing which identity to hold onto and which to let go of, similar to "the problematic identification of a [...] people" (*LoC* 160) that Bhabha relates to a "syntax of forgetting—or being obliged to forget" (160).

As for Ged, it seems that he was conscious of this mixed-ness in Tenar from the very moment that he met her, telling her that "you are like a lantern swathed and covered, hidden away in a dark place. Yet the light shines; they could not put out the light. They could not hide you" (*TToA* 349). His words imply that, even though she has been reshaped and made to forget her identity for the last years, this true essence has still remained inside of her, shining through that veil called Arha that she has been forced to wear.

In the beginning of this chapter, we pointed to Bhabha's suggestion that individuals who feature severe *hybridity* would enter a phase of indeterminacy, due to which they would not be able to identify with either of the realities that co-exist within them. This is precisely what happens to Tenar, whose doubts about which of her identities to hold onto ends up in her declaring that she is actually

neither, saying “I am not Tenar. I am not Arha” (*TToA* 344). This situation resembles Fanon’s own experience of coming to terms with being black in a predominantly white world, being a participant of said indeterminacy and claiming that “not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned” (*BS, WM* 106). Thus, Tenar embarks on an “inner journey to find her true identity” (Littlefield 248), a quest in which Ged will prove an essential companion, making her understand that “I must be Arha, or I must be Tenar. I cannot be both” (*TToA* 356), implying that “to be reborn one must die” (356). However, and regardless of Ged’s aid, Tenar shows continuous difficulty embracing her true identity and once and for all refusing that of Arha, struggling “to find individuation” (Byrne 152). This can be seen in her reluctance to escape from the Tombs of Atuan for fear of possible reprimands from her masters, despite having already made up her mind to forsake their faith (*TToA* 365-367).

Regardless of these doubts that persist for some time (*TToA* 385-387), what is certain is that Tenar has turned into someone else, feeling, in a way, “newborn” (376), as if “a dark hand had let go of its lifelong hold upon her heart” (388). However, being reborn does not directly translate into Tenar acquiring a new fixed identity. Rather, her indeterminacy, that in-betweenness that she features as not truly belonging to any of the realities that she inhabits, still endures. Even as she sails away from Atuan towards Havnor, where a potential new life lies ahead of her, we find proof of this a state of mind in Tenar. The ex-Priestess’s feelings are made clear when she claims “I do not wish to go to the Inner Lands, to Havnor. I do not belong there, in the great cities among foreign men. I do not belong to any land. I betrayed my own people. I have no people” (391). This sequence gives us insight into her situation, one that even seems to prevent her from settling in a new land and acquiring that new identity that she wants to develop.

Before we begin to study Tenar’s level of agency, we may first reflect on the similarity between Tenar’s situation and what Fanon

says about the power of the black individual. Fanon states that “when the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth” (*BS, WM* 119). Applying this idea to Tenar’s personal story, we could say that the roles of the inactive black individual and the worth-giving white man can be attributed to Tenar and Ged, respectively. This is because, as we saw above, Ged brings Tenar’s world and identity as Arha to collapse, at the same time as he becomes the only person that can grant her significance of any kind, since she has become utterly powerless and helpless. Hence, we could argue that Tenar’s level of agency is generally rather non-existent, even though it shows minimal ups and downs. Hence, it is the male characters around her that grant her a new role or identity. The first such instance is when, having left Atuan, Ged decides that Tenar is to stay in Havnor and begin a new life there, to which Tenar simply nodded, “accepting, silent” (*TTtoA* 382). Other examples of Tenar being handed roles and identities by other people can be found in another phase in her life, during which Ged is far away, fulfilling his duties as Archmage. We are told how, during this time, Tenar settles down on the island of Gont—Ged’s birthplace—and there she begins a new life as the wife of a farmer called Flint, and serves as apprentice to Ged’s former teacher Ogion. Here, she does not go by the name Tenar, since her husband gives her a new name: Goha, a name that refers to “a little white web-spinning spider” (*Tehanu* 639), which “fitted her well enough, she being white-skinned and small and a good spinner of goat’s-wool and sheep fleece. So now she was Flint’s widow, Goha” (639). So, Tenar receives yet another name and role, which—like in her previous role of Arha—comes with a new behavioural code.

Later on, and reflecting on the course of her life, Tenar herself is able to realise how other people put her in positions that may have granted her a certain power: as Arha the Priestess of the Tombs, and

later as the apprentice to Ogion. However, she also acknowledges that, in a sense, she has never been brave enough to embrace these potentially powerful spots. Rather, what she has done is to turn “her back on all that, gone to the other side, the other room, where the women lived, to be one of them. A wife, a farmer’s wife, a mother, a householder, undertaking the power that a woman was born to, the authority allotted her by the arrangements of mankind” (*Tehanu* 671). In other words, we perceive how she has exchanged these positions of power to ones that, in a world ruled by men, are deemed more suitable for her own gender, most of them restricted to the care of the household.

All in all, what is clear is that it was always other people—usually belonging to the opposite sex—who put her in positions that convey specific roles, constantly being “overdetermined from without” (*BS, WM* 87). This is particularly clear in Ogion’s words when he tells her that, in opposition to “a dozen things, in the front of her mind” (*Tehanu* 864), there was “never one thing, for you” (864), as if she would never spare a thought for reflecting on her life and self.

The result of Tenar’s powerlessness is her continuous self-doubt; her inability to finally hold onto an identity of her own. This leads to her being unable to satisfactorily settle on Gont, which, in turn, forces her to keep “trying to find out where I can live” (*Tehanu* 697). The end to her suffering finally begins when, after Ogion’s death, she goes to live in his little house in the Re Albi area. Ged is also living there when she moves in, and even though at the beginning she moves in merely to look “after Ogion’s goats and onions” (714), she gradually comes to realise that this place feels like home to her. This feeling ends up granting her the courage required to finally exercise her agency, making the decision to stay in Re Albi, since “down in Middle Valley she would only be Goha again” (768). This can thus be said to be the precise moment that she starts to embrace

her true self, and be what Tenar was supposed to be, as will be argued below.

Even though, from this moment on, Tenar is able to gradually develop her true identity, we should not be led to think that this spells the end of her hybrid identity. In fact, we are able to see how each and every one of her roles and identities throughout the course of her life serve to compose her own identity, pointing to the importance of “acquired experience” (Payne 97), as well as “what one chooses to make of that experience” (97). In light of this, Tenar is able to perceive how, inside of her, there are still remnants of her life as a little girl in Atuan; as Arha, the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan; and as Goha, the wife and widow of a farmer on the isle of Gont (*Tehanu* 659). The fact that everything that she has been during her lifetime contributes to the development of her identity, even those roles once rejected, or almost forgotten, are somehow within her, since “self and other are locked together” (Huddart 44). Byrne would argue that this could be an example of how “the forces of non-being are necessary for identity, just as are the forces of being” (150) regarding how those roles that she no longer assumes still play a crucial part in making her that which she currently is. Additionally, and returning to the idea of the self-concept, we learn how this also comprises “the individual’s here-and-now experience” (Markus & Wurf 302) together with reference “to past and future experiences” (302). To capture this succinctly, we may turn to Tenar’s own words, expressing how she thinks of herself as “always at least two things, and usually more” (*Tehanu* 663)—a clear acknowledgement of her *hybridity*.

Having looked at Tenar’s character, we will now move on to analyse the potential implications of Ged’s identity issues. His is the story of a young boy on the island of Gont, who, “with the few other children of the village [...] herded goats on the steep meadows above the river-springs” (*AWoE* 8). However, as explained above, Ged shows himself to be not just a regular youth, and when, thanks to his power, he saves his town and land from the threat of Kargish invaders he is

given the position of pupil of the mage Ogion. After some time under Ogion's wing, Ged feels the need to learn even more—things that his instructor cannot teach him—which is why he pleads with Ogion to let him travel to the Isle of Roke, where the school of wizardry is situated. Here, Ged gains extensive knowledge on several matters, which, after some years and adventures, ultimately leads him to become Archmage of Earthsea—a title denoting the one with the greatest power of all in the archipelago.

The first issue to tackle in the analysis of this character, who has been classified an “alien” (“The Earthsea Trilogy” 74), is how he, like all the characters we have analysed so far, belongs to the group we refer to as the *Other*. However, Ged's case deviates a little from the path marked by Tehanu, Irian, and Tenar. Ged's incursion into otherness begins in Roke, during his process of becoming a wizard, and is boosted by his time as Archmage. A particular characteristic of Ged's is that he, having grown up in the modest culture of goatherds, always shows a preference for, and envy of, those enjoying a simple life, unlike the life he has been appointed to lead as Archmage of Earthsea. For instance, we read how, in one of his travels around the archipelago, he comes across a very poor community, “such [...] as he had known as a boy in the Northward Vale of Gont, though poorer even than those. With them he was at home, as he would never be in the courts of the wealthy” (*AWoE* 180). Ged's otherness, then, answers to the fact that, due to his receiving a high position that he had never sought, his free will is, in a sense, given up on, since he will not be able to return to that simple and desired life of the plain people he experienced in Gont and Re Albi. This forces him to forsake—to partially silence—that part of his identity that so deeply admires such lifestyles. However, as already mentioned, Ged's otherness does not completely equal that featured in the other characters we have studied. This owes to the fact that, even though he has been deprived of his free will, thus rendering him powerless in that regard, his position as Archmage grants him high status and great influence upon the different lands and peoples of the archipelago. We could thus argue

that Ged's ambiguous degrees of powerlessness differentiates him from Tehanu, Irian, and Tenar: while the latter are moved to the periphery of their social systems, the former remains at the very centre of society. Here, it is interesting to recall Spivak's words on the yet-worse situation of the feminine *subaltern*.

Now, regarding what kind of liminality is to be found in Ged's situation, the same factors that inscribe him as the *Other* are in play here, too, namely the strong attachment that he feels to the plain and simple life in touch with nature, and the new elevated position that he holds in a wizardly world apparently oriented towards progress. In consequence of the clash of these two realities, Ged is forced to inhabit a space of indeterminacy in-between them. This indeterminacy is made clear by Ged's inability to embrace the values the Archmage position brings with it, which leads him to constantly think of his homeland, Gont, with nostalgia and desire, although a return to it always seems a distant and almost unachievable dream. Such episodes of remembrance of his dear homeland are frequent, and he craves "to walk on the mountain, the Mountain of Gont, in the forests, in the autumn when the leaves are bright" (*TFS* 585), or sing "a lilting drone of nonsense words, such as a boy might sing as he herded goats through the long, long afternoons of summer, in the high hills of Gont, alone" (480). All in all, it is made clear that Ged's only ambition is to ultimately be able to return to the precious landscape of Re Albi and lead a life of mere contemplation, making it clear to Lebannen—his companion in his last adventure and later the crowned King of Earthsea—that "if I could ever go back there, not even you could follow me" (559).

Bhabha's concept of *iteration* leads to a mechanism—used by the coloniser—referred to as *mimicry*, by means of which the colonial subject plays the role imposed upon them by the group in power. We could certainly say that during his time as Archmage, Ged does assume and accept this new role that he has been given. However, Ged does not experience the extreme *iteration* and *mimicry* that Tenar did,

which leads to an almost complete state of negation of the self, since Ged often remembers and longs for his homeland and the pleasant, simple life that he once enjoyed there. We return to this issue in what follows.

We can, however, find that Ged's behaviour manifests another idea of Bhabha's, namely that of the colonised subject's agency, granted to them by this process of imitation. Indeed, the degree of Ged's agency is so high that it marks a turning point in his life, putting an end to his Archmage phase, and opens the door to a new stage. We could thus say that Ged becomes 'actional'—using Fanon's term—as the sense of taking a stance; of protesting against the direction that the world of wizardry has taken. As mentioned above, here we could again think of the Language of the Making, whose knowledge gives wizards their power, as a type of science (Bucknall 39), granting its speaker wisdom of the ways of nature, as well as power over them. Ged rebels precisely against this new approach to the use of this knowledge/science, which could certainly be catalogued as progress, as it implies straying from nature and using said wisdom for the sake of personal benefit—for crossing the limits set by nature itself. It should here be remembered how the Archmage's last adventure implied defeating a powerful wizard named Cob, who, due to his great power, had been able to stop the cycle of life, achieving what seemed like eternal life. In light of this, the only thing that Ged can do, after restoring the world's balance, is to give up his power and resign his membership of a powerful collective that does not seem to make the right kind of use of its primary tool. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ged forsakes the mage life, based on active use of his knowledge—on doing—in favour of a life of simple contemplation, that is, of being. The life Ged embraces is precisely the simple and contemplative life promulgated by Taoism and the Transcendentalists.

The process of *mimicry* is suggested to lead to the *hybridity* of the colonial subject—a characteristic that can also be found in Ged's character. The identities that mingle within him are those of the

goatherd and mage, which consequently fragment his self. In his case, we could argue that, unlike what we were able to see with Tenar, he is always aware of this condition, as can be deduced by his insistent remembering memories of his homeland once he has become a mage. Even other people, such as his mentor Ogion, are able to perceive this innate mixed-ness in Ged, as testified by the following words: “They called him Sparrowhawk in his village because the wild hawks would come to him, at his word. [...] Before he had his name, before he had knowledge, before he had power, the hawk was in him, and the man, and the mage, and more” (*Tehanu* 722). This diversity within Ged is also a feature of the conception of self-introduced above, as this is also “a multidimensional, multifaceted dynamic structure” (Markus & Wurf 301).

We mentioned above how Ged’s agency opens a new stage in his life, one that, after stepping down from his position as Archmage and rejecting his magic power, takes him to Gont, to Re Albi, where his identity issues are at first enhanced. This is due to the fact that, even though he now finds himself in that desired place, he comes to realise how impossible it is for him to embrace that modest identity that he had once been made to leave aside. At the same time, he is unable to recover the power he once possessed and rejected, despite all his trials (*Tehanu* 721); his wizardry, his ability to perform magic is “gone. It’s over. Done” (717). Thus, and in line with what Bhabha claims about individuals with extreme cases of *hybridity*, Ged inhabits a position of belonging to neither of the cultural realities that he has been linked to during his lifetime. To Tenar, Ged’s impossibility of sticking to either of the identities he harbours within himself makes him look like “a shadow man, no good to anyone, a dead man forced to be alive” (772). It is from this position that Ged begins the long and arduous process of finding his true self and of coming to terms with what he really is, which, as pointed out above, will be done together with Tenar, since they live together in Gont shortly after the wizard’s arrival. As Tenar also undergoes the same process, we will address this

in more detail below, in the section devoted to the characters' shared experiences.

Before tackling said issue, then, we shall focus on some other aspects that have their source in Ged's troubled identity. On the one hand, we should mention the fact that, similar to Tenar, Ged's identity will always be composed of different selves, meaning that his hybrid nature will last for the rest of his life. This is so because, even though he has shunned his magic powers, they seem to never completely let go of him. Hints of this can be found in that, even despite him leaving Roke and the world of magic behind, the Wise of Roke are able to perceive remnants of Ged's power to still be present in him. They share the impression that, although he is not to be found anywhere, "the archmage wasn't dead—was alive, [...] and yet no mage—and still a dragonlord" (*Tehanu* 794). Dragonlords are, as suggested above, individuals of immense knowledge and power, and Ged is apparently still considered to be one of them, indicating that he is still in possession a certain amount of power. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that Ged remains an extremely simple individual, who is always striving for a plain life. This mixed-ness in his person is also perceived by his neighbours in Gont, where Ged finds work as a goatherd for a while. We read how Lark, a woman living next to Tenar's farm

did not see [Ged] through the words herdsman, hired hand, widow's man, but looked at him himself, she saw a good deal that puzzled her. His dignity and simplicity were not greater than that of other men she had known, but were a little different in quality; there was a size to him, she thought, not height or girth, certainly, but soul and mind. [...]

But the word 'archmage' was too great and grand a word to bring from far-off pomps and palaces and fit to the dark-eyed, grey-haired man at Oak Farm, and she never did that. (851)

We could also talk of the *uncanny* as a feature of Ged's process of acquiring a defined identity, for instance in his feelings of fear when thinking of Roke and of his past as wizard and Archmage, which he is trying to leave behind. When King Lebannen looks for him to ask his help to restore the balance of the world yet again, Ged prefers to remain hidden in Gont. What he is most afraid of is that the King will ask him "to be what I was" (*Tehanu* 731), which, just thinking of it, made clear "the desolation of his voice" (731).

Before bringing our individual study of Ged to an end, we will now turn to a complementary point of view that may also help us understand this character's troublesome identity, namely the perspective of looking upon Ged as a migrant. Homi Bhabha suggests "the migrant's experience" (Huddart 79) to be marked by three main characteristics: "First, this is a *half-life*, like the partial presence of colonial identity; second, it *repeats* a life lived in the country of origin, but this repetition is not identical, introducing difference and transformation; further, this difference-in-repetition is a way of *reviving* that past life, of keeping it alive in the present" (79). All three characteristics listed above can be found in the character of Ged. To start with, we have argued Ged's is a fragmented, or partial, identity as a result of the clash of the goatherd and the wizard inside him. Next, his experience as a wizard in Roke can be interpreted as an altered repetition of his young days in Gont. While in Gont Ged was a young boy powerful enough to perform some magic, in Roke he becomes a fully skilled mage, the alteration residing in his polishing his art. Last, the suggested revision of the past can be found in his nostalgia for his bygone days as a goatherd in the mountains, when life was much simpler.

In addition to the ideas put forth by Bhabha, still more similarities can be found between the prototypical experience of a migrant and Ged. A historically frequent movement of people has been that of "rural-urban migration" (Castles & Miller 20), which is also reflected in Ged's own voyage, when he changes the bucolic and

rustic isle of Gont for Roke—the epicentre of the society of Earthsea, together with the island of Havnor where the Kings reside. The apparent reason for this movement tends to be an already existing relationship between the places of origin and destination, explained by so-called “‘push-pull’ theories” (22). What these seem to suggest is that “the causes of migration [...] lie in a combination of ‘push factors’, impelling people to leave the areas of origin, and ‘pull factors’, attracting them to certain receiving countries” (22). In Ged’s case, Ogion is unable to satisfy his urge to keep learning, and this is what ultimately leads Ged to ask his teacher to allow him to enter the Roke school of wizardry—the only place that could satisfy his appetite for knowledge. These two ideas, together with Bhabha’s definition of what it could mean to be a migrant, can lead us to think of Ged as a rural–urban migrant.

Delving a little deeper into this issue, we may ask what, precisely, defines this particular character’s migration experience. During Ged’s tenure in Roke, there comes a moment in which, discouraged by the world of magic, his resolution is to leave all of it aside and go back to his homeland with the hope to resume his previous life there, presenting us with a pattern of returning, which is central in Le Guin’s work (Spivak 26; White, qtd. in Cummins 56). Here, Ged performs what is known as a ‘circular migration’—a movement where “migrants come to a receiving area for a few months or years, and then return to their homelands” (Castles & Miller 67). In light of this, a couple of things may be suggested as factors that lead the migrant individual to return to their place of origin. One could be that “migration breaks the systematic patterns in which people live their lives” (Hendriks 343), which, regarding Ged, could be related to his being taken away from the rural landscape and life of Gont, where herding goats in the mountains was a central activity. Together with this, issues such as “difficulties of integration” (Bartram 160) or “social factors such as discrimination and isolation” (160) seem to play a crucial role for people establishing themselves in a new country. Certainly, Ged’s inability to accept his role as Archmage, due

to his strife for a more simple life and his constant remembrance of his homeland, refers to his inability to fully integrate in Roke, while the fact that solitude has always been a trademark of his (*Tehanu* 848) may hint at the element of confinement that Bartram mentioned above.

We can now address one of the principal reasons that any individual migrates: the quest for a better life; for happiness. Economic improvement seems to be commonly perceived as one of the main factors for achieving such a state of well-being (Bartram 156). Applying this to Ged's story, we would be inclined to think that his becoming Archmage of Earthsea would boost his happiness, since the higher status in society implied by this position would be equalled to a migrant improving their economic situation, by means of which one can also climb the social ladder. Apparently, however, this is far from the case. Rather, as David Bartram suggests while reviewing several studies on the issue, "the status-signalling function of income appears to mean that economic growth [...] cannot lead to increases in *average* levels of happiness" (158). This idea is also enhanced by Martijn Hendriks, when he suggests that "non-pecuniary factors are the ones that lastingly affect happiness" (344). In Roke, Ged experiences precisely this inability to obtain any type of pleasure or bliss from the high rank that he occupies, which leads him to renounce his title of Archmage, hinting at a descent "from the heights of upper-class power" (Suvin 492). Economic issues aside, happiness is a truly complicated term to measure. Hendriks proposes "two sources of information [...] to assess one's happiness: (1) how well one feels most of the time, and (2) to what extent one perceives oneself as obtaining what one wishes from life" (345). With this in mind, we could state that it is utterly impossible for Ged to achieve a state of happiness during his time in Roke, since his constant thoughts of Gont, and his previous life there, as well as his joy in the simplicity of others, make it clear that he will never find his source of bliss on the Island of the Wise.

As a final remark, Ged's above-mentioned inscription as a migrant could be considered a complementary factor to his *hybridity*. Above, we suggested that his hybrid nature turns him into someone that belongs to neither of the realities that he inhabits, unable to fully identify with either. Ged's circular migration also implies that, while living far from his roots, he is also unable to fully integrate at his destination. This highlights that state of indeterminacy that can also be found in the hybrid individual's lack of belonging.

In a joint analysis of Tenar and Ged, the first issue to be addressed is that of the *uncanny*. As suggested by Bhabha, this concept can be applied to the notion of home, as he mentions that this "is a territory of both disorientation and relocation" (qtd. in Huddart 86). Applied to the present characters, we can see how Bhabha's proposal exactly reflects the experiences that they undergo in relation to their homelands. Thus, while Atuan is a place of confusion for Tenar, since her memories of this her homeland are either already forgotten, or not completely positive, as those formed in her role as Arha; for Ged, the isle of Gont and, more specifically, the mountainous area of Re Albi, are places where he is able to find his true identity.

Re Albi certainly plays a pivotal role not only in allowing Ged to find and accept his identity, but also in granting Tenar the same opportunity. This happens thanks to its pastoral nature, and we will next proceed to point out the psychological benefits that this type of place has been said to offer, while applying said proposals to Tenar's and Ged's experiences in, first Gont and then Re Albi. Thus, the upcoming paragraphs will not focus on the natural features that may make these two areas pastoral, but we will rather be looking at "nature as a location [...] of human predicaments" (Garrard 39), that is, at its influence and role in Tenar's and Ged's respective quests for a fixed identity. This is the main reason that the present study does not completely agree with Andy Sawyer and his claim that "many of Le Guin's literary approaches can be considered as echoing pastoral

structure rather than content” (406). Instead, we suggest that the *Earthsea* saga not only presents a pastoral setting and characters, but it also tries to study how an individual can personally benefit from a cathartic experience in such a place.

Among the three types of pastoral that Terry Gifford identifies, we will follow that which he says refers to “any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban” (2), which is certainly similar to what Leo Marx points out when he suggests that “a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence ‘closer to nature’ [...] is the psychic root of all pastoralism” (6). In addition, we should not forget another important feature of this tradition, that after which it is named, namely the role that shepherds, “cow- and goatherds” (Garrard 39) play in it.

The isle of Gont is portrayed precisely as a place with extensive natural scenery that apparently still escapes the grasp of most modern civilisations, as exemplified by Havnor or Roke, and in whose tranquil everyday life herding plays an important part. The pastoral features that make Gont the one and only place that Ged knows he has to go to (*TFS* 632) once he has given up his power, could be two. On the one hand, we could speak of the idea that the pastoral seems to work as a type of shelter from progress, or even as a “possibility of confronting it” (Garrard 44). As pointed out above, this is precisely one of the reasons why Ged decides to forsake the wizardry world, that is, due to certain individuals beginning to use their power ways that he knows to be inappropriate due to its consequences on the natural world. Hence, we may also highlight a recurrent theme of the pastoral in Ged’s character, namely the feeling of “profound, long-standing discontent” (Marx 9) with civilisation, produced by progress itself. All this shows the wizard that his only possible destination is the pastoral Gont, “a place apart, secluded from the world—a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture” (116); away from potential “power struggles” (116) present in such an epicentre of society as Roke.

On the other hand, we find the issue of nostalgia for “a better past” (Garrard 41) to be another, equally present, staple of this tradition, and it is indeed also present in Ged’s character in the shape of his continuous remembrance of his homeland. In a sense, it seems as if this feeling of longing for another time and place could be triggered by the idea that returning to that land is a return to safety. About this, Garrard comments that “at the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human society” (63), which is pretty much what Gont seems to offer Ged: a place of rest from the world’s turmoil. In addition to pastoral Gont as a refuge, its geographical nature, as an island, also seems to give its inhabitants an “opportunity for redemption and newness” (Grove 33), a chance for Ged to find who he really is meant to be, once and for all, to “go back” (*Tehanu* 730), presumably to his old ways, as he himself puts it.

As a last remark, Gonts sheltering attributes also helps Ged in his ambition to lead a life of mere contemplation, as opposed to a life based on ‘doing’, which he led in Roke, giving him the chance for “unlearning and quietness, and returning to [a] primitive state” (Tsai 153). This is yet another idea that can help us think of this island as devised and constructed according to the pastoral tradition, since “the renunciation of worldly striving in favor of a simpler, more contemplative life always had been the core of the pastoral ethos” (Marx 239). These characteristics that we have attributed to Gont and Re Albi as places of rest and personal reconciliation are in line with what Shu Fen Tsai points out about Le Guin’s *Earthsea* saga, when she argues that it gradually advances towards the “completion of an ecological vision of ‘healing the wounds’ of modern humans’ isolation from their whole self” (171).

Having highlighted the pastoral characteristics of Gont, as well as what this land can offer Ged in terms of helping him find his true identity, we can move on to study Ged’s own experience there. We

learn how contact with Gont's unspoilt natural scenery—which, at the same time, allows him to revisit the dear places of his childhood—have an immediate impact on him, allowing him to begin to get closer to his old life. For instance, we read that “he had begun to visit Ogion's grave, spending hours in that quiet place under the beech tree, and as he got more strength he took to wandering on up the forest paths that Ogion had loved” (*Tehanu* 712). This reconciliation with his past ultimately leads him to realise that the next step in his quest to find himself has to inevitably take him “up on the mountain” (729). It is, then, on the mountainous pastures of Gont that Ged achieves contact with his past, and again adopts his long-forsaken identity of goatherd (809). Nevertheless, reclaiming this identity—simultaneously cherished and repressed for so long—still cannot provide Ged with a fixed identity. Rather, his resurfacing *hybridity* initially deprives him of the feeling of belonging somewhere, sensing instead that “I have nowhere to go” (848). Reflecting, however, on the time he recently spent herding goats up in the mountain, Ged realises how he has, in fact, benefited from this experience, telling Tenar that “it was a good thing for me [...]. It was the time I needed” (848).

As a result of this activity, Ged seems to definitively set his feet on the right track, which will lead to him being able to achieve a fixed identity. Indeed, he acknowledges that there have been some changes in him, and he claims that “I have died and been reborn, [...] under the sun, more than once” (*Tehanu* 860). This could hint at the time in which he rejected his power and identity as wizard, which could certainly be perceived as a death of his person, at least of one part of it. Consequently, his time in Gont feels to Ged somewhat like a rebirth, thanks to which a new identity is gained and a new life begun. Taking a deeper look, we could determine that Ged's rebirth comes as a consequence of the acceptance of and reconciliation with the two identities that comprise his true self, or, in other words, by “[acknowledging] the wisdom of ‘integrating’ and ‘balancing’ the opposite forces in [...] life and [accepting] things as they are” (Tsai 153). We have already seen how quickly Ged adopts the role of the

goatherd and takes to the mountains, which is the first step in his recovery. The second crucial step is the acknowledgement of his other half, that is, his wizard identity. This step consists in grieving this late role, in the form of “Hawk the goatherd sick with grief and shame for him” (*Tehanu* 861), mourning him while he “looked after the goats, also” (861). We could thus argue that Ged accepts that role he has been trying to escape from, consequently bringing together his two identities and merging them into one.

Ultimately, the acquisition of this bidimensional identity also helps him to look at his past as a wizard in Roke from a new angle that conveys acceptance, as if he were “wholly outside it, free of it” (*Tehanu* 859). Thanks to this, then, we could say that the *uncanny* feeling produced by those memories will return no more, Ged being relevantly healed. It is interesting to see, here, how the *uncanny* plays a role in Ged’s reflection on, and acceptance of, his true self, just as Bhabha suggest that “the uncanny [...] opens a space for us to reconsider how we have come to be who we are” (Huddart 83).

While Ged seems to have finally gotten to know his real identity, Tenar appears not to be in that position yet. Although, as mentioned above, she knows herself to be composed of several identities acquired over the years, she has not been able to reach a point in which she can fully identify with what she sees and feels. Her words to Ged are clarifying in this regard:

I was made, moulded like clay, by the will of the women serving the Old Powers [...]. Then I went free, with you, for a moment, and with Ogion. But it was not *my* freedom. Only it gave me a choice: and I chose. I chose to mould myself like clay to the use of a farm and a farmer and our children. I made myself a vessel. I know its shape. But not the clay. Life danced me. I know the dances. But I don’t know who the dancer is. (*Tehanu* 861)

We could thus conclude that the difference between the two characters is that, while Ged has been allowed to exercise his freedom, reflect on his life, and choose the path he wants to follow, Tenar has been denied all this. As highlighted above this could also be related to the difference in agency displayed in the two characters, Ged's being far greater than Tenar's.

This is precisely the moment when Ged and Tenar, already living together for some time, make the decision that will finally allow both of them to find their true selves and begin a life of happiness. This decision involves Ged, Tenar, and Tehanu moving to Re Albi, more precisely to Ogion's little house. All three characters have, at some stage in their lives, spent time in this place, and it holds a special place in their hearts. Indeed, it is a place where, for instance, Tenar "yearned to go" (*Tehanu* 873). Re Albi, then, albeit a remote part of the isle of Gont, also has its share of pastoral characteristics. Similar to any typical landscape in this tradition, this mountainous area affords the feeling of home to the individual that inhabits it (Bate, qtd. in Garrard 47), or, as Marx puts it, it could be a locus of "unimproved nature [which] is the location of all that we desire" (76). Furthermore, this place can also be taken as an "idealization of 'innocent' society in the 'natural' state and of 'primitive' man" (Furst 34).

Here, a complementary and certainly interesting approach to Re Albi would be that of studying its potential inscription as what is known as 'middle-landscape'. This idea works on those places that are to be found "somewhere 'between', yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (Marx 23). In other words, we are speaking of a place where a simple human society has been established in an area where the natural environment is not conceived as a threat. This type of landscape also implies that the society that inhabits it is industrious and works the land, representing "a mediation between art and nature" (71), art here being the daily work carried out in that society. All of the above-mentioned features of the pastoral tradition can be seen in Re Albi's construction as a

place that, although far from the epicentres of society, and located in a remote natural scenery, still enjoys the benefits of both, with its simple farming and herding community and a pleasant ecosystem from which to make profit. In short, a most desirable place to live for those who, as the characters studied in these pages, are weary of life's strain.

Concerning the idea of a potential reconciliation between mankind's work and nature in pastoral places like Re Albi, we may still linger a while on the issue of labour. Greg Garrard, speaking about the evolution of the pastoral tradition in America, points to the existence of an idea of "a working rather than an aesthetic relationship with the land" (54). This is precisely the way in which Tenar and Ged psychologically benefit from their experiences in Re Albi, where work is central. Indeed, one reason that they move to this place are the available work prospects there. Interestingly, these jobs are related to working the land. Thus, while they "could buy a herd of goats" (*Tehanu* 889) for Ged "to take them up the mountain" (889), Tenar is able to "replant Ogion's garden" (890), whose prospect already made her think "of the rows of beans and the scent of the bean flowers" (890). The implications that working the land seem to carry in this tradition are exactly what these two characters are looking for, that is, some sort of renewal brought about by the acquisition of their true identities; of coming to terms with what they are. In light of this, Marx comments how "landscape means regeneration to the farmer [...] [representing] the possibility of a secular, egalitarian, naturalistic 'resurrection'" (111), while Payne, in a similar manner, states how "Nature in Le Guin's stories has an [...] impact on the human beings who encounter it and brings [them] freedom" (203).

All in all, the idea of rebirth seems to be at the very core of the pastoral tradition, precisely as an "underlying narrative structure in which the protagonist leaves civilisation for an encounter with non-human nature, [...] [experiencing] epiphany and renewal" (Garrard 54). Tenar and Ged experience a type of rebirth in that, thanks to retiring to an area where contact with nature is the norm, they can

restart their lives from scratch and, thus live them the way they want to. Despite there being differences in what they have achieved, they can be said to have found their own places, somewhere they can call their home. For instance, we learn how, after a time away from Gont, Tenar starts feeling “homesick” (*TOW* 86), her only desire being “to be back in Gont, with Ged, in their house” (86).

It is true that it is difficult to determine whether, by the end of the *Earthsea* saga, Tenar has been able to find her true self, especially if we consider, e.g. her words about not knowing who was in charge of determining her fate. Nonetheless, we can conclude that, for the first time in her life, Tenar has been able to decide for herself where and with whom she wants to live, which could be seen as the beginning of the end of her quest for knowing who she is. Margaret Esmonde writes, concerning Tenar’s flight from the Tombs of Atuan, and it is equally applicable to this situation, that “the psychological journey through the labyrinth of her own mind, filled with darkness and guilt, has ended in freedom and light” (27).

Regarding Ged, we can state with certainty that Gont, and especially Re Albi, are the places that make him happy. This can be appreciated in a scene where, sitting next to Tenar outside their little house, Ged “looked at her and smiled, the broad, sweet smile that she thought, perhaps wrongly, perhaps rightly, nobody but her had ever seen on his face” (*TOW* 244). This smile may evoke that of an individual with a fully satisfied mind, since, unlike Tenar, Ged seems to have come to terms with himself, accepting the different bits that make up his identity. For Ged, the influence of Re Albi as a ‘middle-landscape’ has helped him solve his identity troubles. Akin to the harmony between art and the environment suggested by this type of place, it is also in Re Albi that Ged, thanks to being in contact with nature by means of herding goats in the mountains, has been able to accept his art, his past as a wizard, and consequently found his true identity. We may thus conclude that both characters have “come to radical new understandings of themselves and the world in which they

live” (Littlefield 253), by means of a defined identity like Ged’s, and one that is on its way to being defined, like Tenar’s. This situation arose due to what Lillian Heldreth has named “a mythos for image-correction” (qtd. in Payne 360), that is, “a way of living in the world that adjusts the map by which one negotiates reality to reflect the experiences encountered” (360).

4. Conclusions

The present study began with the idea to analyse the way the issue of progress is portrayed in three works/sagas of British and North American mainstream fantasy literature. The aim was to see if there was continuity in terms of elements incorporated in the respective critiques of progress as a pernicious activity and mindset of and for humanity, or if Ursula K. Le Guin's writings presented divergences and new perspectives, since she wrote in a very different social and historical setting as compared to William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien. In other words, focusing on the portrayal of progress in these works, the question this dissertation has aimed to answer is which elements in the British fantasy tradition established by Morris and Tolkien has been incorporated by Le Guin in her own writings, and which are new contributions that, due to the Western American context in which Le Guin wrote, she has made to the genre?

Our analysis of Morris and Tolkien's social, historical, and intellectual contexts have shown that their critiques have several shared characteristics. Although their respective attacks on progress—and consequently on an increasingly capitalist and consumerist society—were similar, it is interesting to see that they both arrived at the same stance by treading different paths. We can deduce say that Morris was more deeply influenced by his close connection with intellectual figures such as John Ruskin, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and members of the Pre-Raphaelites, with whom he shared ideals concerning nature, society, and the Middle Ages, than by his own life experiences, although the contribution of the latter was also considerable. In Tolkien's case, due to a lack of acknowledged intellectual influences, we have found that his vital experiences living in Sarehole, Birmingham, as well as partaking in the Great War, directed his mind against the times and society in which he was living.

Based on these experiences, Morris and Tolkien were made highly aware of the fact that the British natural scenery was being

utterly destroyed under the banner of modernisation and improvement, especially in areas where industry was growing. On the other hand, they also perceived that art—and with it the beauty that it brought to humanity—was under attack from the same enemy. While Morris mourned all the ancient crafts that were being discarded due to being considered obsolete in favour of modern technology—a situation that he tried to amend by bringing back several crafts and successfully putting them into practice in his various enterprises—Tolkien experienced his tight bond with artistic expression and study interrupted by the Great War in two ways: while the war denied him the chance to pursue an academic career in Oxford, at least until peace arrived, it also deprived him of the perhaps greatest artistic outlet that he had at the time, namely the T.C.B.S. Concerning the issue of art and beauty, these two authors shared a preoccupation with the quality of what was being produced by the industry of their time, since, aware of the fact that it was clearly becoming profit-oriented, they saw how the standards of products were poor and no longer either useful or beautiful. All these conditions would kindle within them a nostalgia for the past; a burning desire to go back in time to periods like the Middle Ages, when life was easier and, above all, more pleasant.

The principal inquiry of this dissertation—the problems brought by progress—is thus a thematic cornerstone in Morris's and Tolkien's literature and, as we have seen, is also an element around which Le Guin builds her literary saga. We can thus say that she, in a sense, inherits the British preoccupation with, and reluctance towards, the idea of progress, a human activity that, in the eyes of these authors, had only negative social, cultural, and environmental consequences due to the way that it was being perpetuated. As a starting point, we could talk about the way that these three authors present this issue and the potential reason behind it. From what we have been able to gather, Morris and Tolkien felt a strong attachment to and idealised the times that were already gone, since they believed that life in the past was, in general, fairer for human beings, which, we could say, stems from their disconnection with their respective

eras—the Victorian and the post-Edwardian, respectively. The former was characterised by heavy advancement in industrial and colonial power, and the latter marked by the Great War's interruption of life. The two authors perceived a deep change in society during their eras, in the sense that humanity's relationship with nature and the British lifestyle and manners were being radically upset. This led to them developing a nostalgia for the past that was later translated into writings that speak of a clash between the forces of tradition and progress, implying that there was no place for both; that it was either one or the other. Regarding Le Guin—although she was as critical of the world in which she lived as Morris and Tolkien were of theirs—she seems not to give voice to such a strong feeling of nostalgia for a better past. This could certainly be related to her belief that change is, as shown in one of the quotations that opened the introduction, an inseparable and necessary feature of human life. Therefore, her *Earthsea* saga does not present the confrontation present in our British writers, but in her work, progress is rather presented as an ongoing, even organic and inevitable, process that continually shapes her fictional world.

The aforementioned difference aside, these three authors did agree that one of the most pernicious elements of their societies, linked to humanity's advancement, was that of capitalism. While the British authors denounced the destruction that the new means of mass production brought to the natural world and the arts, Le Guin warned against the danger of an overpopulated and consumerist human society, especially in relation to the sustainability of our ecosystem. All three portray progress as an element characterised by the possibility of domination; the idea that it can provide our society with a power great enough to master the entire world. Small wonder, then, that all of the works studied in this thesis present us with characters and civilisations that feature the imperialist desire. In light of this, it is interesting to see how progress, be it in the form of industrial advancement or science, is used by Tolkien and Le Guin as a potential tool to gain power and, hence, spread one's dominion over others.

This is what Tolkien referred to as the Machine, originator of the Fall and used in his work by evil characters like Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman—turned evil by their ambition to dominate—and similarly portrayed in Cob’s use of magic in Le Guin’s work. Regarding Morris, the idea of a tool by which to increase one’s power is not perhaps as clear as with the former authors, but the Romans are portrayed as a both imperialist and industrially advanced society, from which we can conclude that they do make use of their technology in order to claim possession over the lands of others. It is also important to mention that all three authors portray the use of a given power to empower one’s self and to dominate the world and its inhabitants, as an element that contributes to these evil characters’ alienation from nature.

As a last comment on the ambition to dominate as presented by some of the characters produced by these authors, we can detect another deviation between the two traditions in the elements towards which domination is directed. As highlighted above, our British authors present nature and the traditional crafts to suffer domination and, often, destruction by means of industrial force. In Le Guin’s work, this is often presented as the result of a wrong take on magic in Earthsea, as it has the ability to both control and deeply alter the natural world. In her case, we could say that this preoccupation with nature’s destruction is related not only to her tight bond with the ecosystem of the West, and the potential influence of Transcendentalist ideas in her conception of human–nature relationships, but also with certain activities of her USA as a nation, such as the ecological consequences of its role in the Vietnam War. An additional key element in her work is the effect progress has on the individual’s psyche, portrayed as repressing the individual and ultimately alienating them from their true essence. Therefore, while our three writers share a concern for natural destruction, the differing elements—art and the individual, respectively—reveal deep divergences between Le Guin and her British predecessors. This is because, while Morris and Tolkien portrayed the anxiety created by the end of the world as they had known and idealised it; a world in

which industry puts an end to beauty, Le Guin focuses on the human factor. Apart from the alienation between humanity and nature, her main preoccupation concerns what will happen with those individuals that are not embraced, and that are even cast out by a society whose pace seems to be far too quick for them to keep up with. In a way, what she is trying to do is to construct a platform on which society's outcasts are given a voice of their own and are, thus, acknowledged as full members of society, a characteristic that, although theoretically inherent to every human being, is denied them.

We could say that this is one of Le Guin's greatest contributions to what she inherited from her British counterparts in terms of a critique of progress. From Morris's and Tolkien's more global scales, she turned to the human individual, as exquisitely conveyed in the stories of characters who are desperately seeking lost identities, taken away from them by forces that are, in one way or another, related to progress. This constant emphasis on the marginalised individual is the direct result of Le Guin's Western American context and the response that she gave to it. Here, we should first of all mention the impact that her Californian society had on her. As seen above, this was a society that had from its conception been determined by strong multicultural strands, with the presence of Native Americans and the gradual arrival of Europeans, Asians, African-Americans, and Mexicans who arrived in the Golden State in search of a better life. Of course, not all of them achieved centrality in this society, and many remained in the margins. Le Guin was highly aware of their situation, as can be seen in her participation in marches for social equality and against the Vietnam War, abundant in 1960s San Francisco and Berkeley. Further, Le Guin's familial environment was determined by ethnic variety, as her anthropologist parents constantly had guests of various origins, developing tight relationships with some, such as Le Guin's 'Indian' uncles. Le Guin was conscious of the double-sided quality of anthropology. She knew that, although if used with respect it was essential to giving voice to those minorities that lacked a voice of their own, it had historically been conducted as

a tool contributing to their marginalisation. Last, we have seen that her concern for cast-out members of society was also influenced by her strong desire for equality between the sexes. Over the years, she became more aware of the importance of a new feminist perspective for a more egalitarian and just society, a testimony that she would later convey in both her literary and non-literary work. All of the above serves to clarify why Le Guin tries to grant centrality to characters who, due to their peculiar conditions, would not otherwise fit in the category of hero, or main character.

Another very interesting issue on which the British and North American writers of our study differ is the way in which they approach evil in relation to progress. In the works of Morris and Tolkien, progress and any character linked with it belongs to the category of evil characters, while in the *Earthsea* saga, their being good or evil depends on the use that a character is able to make of magic. There are two interconnected reasons behind these contrasting approaches. One is the way in which these three writers approach progress, or, to be more precise, industry and science. Morris and Tolkien categorically claimed that these, at least in the way that they were being used, were by no means activities proper to a sane and civilised society, since they did not consider these a natural part of humanity. In contrast, as mentioned above, progress for Le Guin is, if conducted correctly, undoubtedly beneficial for human society, and she also wrote about the inherent benefits of science. She considered these matters to be inseparable from our own being, claiming them to be elements that had made us what we are today. Thus, Morris and Tolkien both considered that which was not intrinsic to man to be evil, while Le Guin believed progress and science to be part of us and that each individual practitioner determines whether it falls into the category of good or of evil.

The second reason for such specific approaches to evil and progress, related to the one just mentioned, is the different manner in which these writers conceived of the idea of evil. In Morris and

Tolkien, although the latter frequently criticised the fallen and wicked world in which he lived, we are given the impression that, for them, evil was something that categorically belongs outside of Man, who can only be engaged in evil activity when lured by an external force. This explains the division between the forces of good and the forces of evil in their works. Although they created races and individual characters that display rather ambivalent alignments, such as Morris's dwarves and Tolkien's Fëanor, the division between good and evil remains clearly marked in their works. This is not the case with Earthsea. Presumably based on her Taoist beliefs, Le Guin conveyed the idea that every being has within them the potential to make both good and evil; to construct and to destroy. This may be the reason why, while for our British authors evil and progress are tightly connected as elements not proper to humanity, this is not necessarily the case for Le Guin, where it depends, again, on each person's own free will whether to use their power for good or evil. As a last remark, these could also be the reasons behind the portrayals of human alienation from nature in these works. Morris and Tolkien clearly conveyed the idea that it is the evil characters who, due to their greed to dominate, separate themselves from the natural world. However, in the case of Earthsea, we have seen how, on a greater or lesser scale, due to factors such as the Vedurnan and the Language of the Making, the whole of humanity suffers from this alienation and not only those that would later on tread the path of evil, although their alienation is enhanced by their actions. Although this last idea of a common condition for the whole of humanity may seem to contradict what was suggested before about Le Guin focusing on the individual rather than on a global idea of 'Man', these are not incompatible positions. This dissertation has hopefully shown that Le Guin takes her departure in a condition that makes all humans equal—their inherent alienation from nature—in order to emphasise the development and importance of each individual being.

The last idea that we would like to comment on is the type of worlds constructed by these writers. In Morris's story of the Goths and

Tolkien's Middle-earth legendarium, we could say that the universes that we come across are originally, if not perfect, very close to perfection. What they portray is a world where some idealised civilisations—Goths, Elves, Dwarves, Men, etc.—live in harmony with their ecosystems. This stability is later fatally challenged by a threat that comes from abroad—Romans, Melkor, Sauron, Saruman—usually portrayed under the banner of progress, which implies that ruthless change is about to come. This is precisely what these two British authors experienced, each in their own time and society. Diverting from such a vision of a fallen paradise, Le Guin, in turn, constructed a universe that knew an idyllic situation where humans and nature were one only at the very beginning and for a very short span of time. In fact, by the time the Earthsea stories take place, it is clear that humanity has already opened a gap between itself and its ecosystem, for reasons detailed above.

Setting off from such different points, the disruption that each writer portrays cannot be the same. For instance, in Tolkien's literature the consequences of the clash between progress and tradition are deeply felt. The clearest example is that, although the forces of evil are finally defeated, there comes a time when the Elves—who are the greatest example of a purely immersive approach to nature—while also being stewards of its beauty, have nothing that binds them to Middle-earth and so they sail away. Tolkien was clearly suggesting, here, that the world will never be the same, as its most exemplary civilisation does not dwell there anymore, but has departed, taking with it a great share of the world's beauty. This might be due to Tolkien's already mentioned belief that the world in which he lived had no remedy, that it was already fallen and wicked, due to the pernicious ways of humanity. In Morris's *The House of the Wolfings*, the disruption is not as clear as in Tolkien's work. Here, we are told that, in the end, the Goths drive out the Romans from their lands, hinting at the idea that the Goths may be able to carry on with their lifestyle in almost the same way as they had for centuries. Nevertheless, the doubt remains whether the Romans will come back

one day and destroy the Goths, that is, we are left with the impression that the future of this civilisation is still uncertain, and that their end looms over them. If, in Tolkien's case, the catastrophic connotations of his Middle-earth were due to what he thought of our world, we could say that the momentary survival of the Goths and their lifestyle could also be related to Morris's primary aim in life: Morris, as his Goths, struggled throughout his life to keep older, almost-forgotten means of production alive.

Le Guin's Earthsea, regardless of the damage inflicted on it by human society, is a world that does not seem to change as much as, say, Tolkien's does after the advent of progress. It is true that we are given hints about the world of wizardry and human society changing for the worse at the end of the saga, after the dragons depart forever. Nevertheless, life does not seem to change as much for the common people. Nor does the detrimental change to magic—an important tool by means of which humans keep in contact with nature—seem to affect the connection that people without any relation to the world of wizardry had with their environment, as testified by the cases of Ged and Tenar, and their healing processes and lives in Re Albi. In a way, it is as if, after a period of fear and uncertainty, life carries on almost as before. We would like to suggest that this conception of life, where not even a wrong take on progress can shake people's existence too profoundly, is influenced by Taoism and its balancing forces of the *yang-yin*. The same happens with life in Earthsea. This is not a world that is going to change from day to night, where dark and light are in an endless opposition. Rather, Earthsea is a body that keeps a constant balance, so that after a period when its darkest or most destructive forces have been prominent, the world itself will manage to return to a state of equilibrium by its own force. As we have seen, these different approaches to a potential disruption of the universe can be linked to how the three writers portray the problems of progress and the conception that each has about the past.

To finalise this study, we have seen that the fantasy genre, as established by Morris and Tolkien, and developed by Le Guin in a different time and place, has continually expressed concern about the issue of progress and the direction that humanity has taken during different eras, while also giving other alternatives to our behaviour and destiny as a society. Although it is true that the authors tackle this issue from different angles, there are also certain points at which all three agree. In a way, Le Guin inherited part of Tolkien's and Morris's critiques of progress, which is the negative impact that a wrong approach can have on our ecosystem, and the potential alienation of humanity from the natural world. Building on this foundational idea, Le Guin added to it an anxiety of her own, which is the devastating impact that the diverse tools of progress can have on the individual who, at a given time, comes to be dominated by someone else. Following this idea, we find ourselves in the position to validate Tonya Payne's words, when she suggests that Le Guin was the person who took up Thoreau's torch in order to continue the latter's project of creating a new culture that, by taking the best of European and American (Native and non-Native alike) cultures, would guide the new generations of North Americans towards a life of complete integration in, and cooperation with, their environment. By taking bits and pieces from the British fantasy literature and adding to these other pieces, fashioned by her own experience as an American, Le Guin sought to create a legendarium that would help her compatriots lead simpler lives at their fullest in an ever-changing world.

Works cited

- Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Vintage Books, 1996.
- Adams, Steven. *The Arts & Crafts Movement*. Grange Books, 1996.
- Alatas, Syed Hussein. *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1977.
- Ansgar Kelly, Henry. "The Metamorphoses of the Eden Serpent During the Middle Ages and Renaissance." *Viator*, vol. 2, 1 Jan. 1971, pp. 301-28.
- Attebery, Brian. "The Beginning Place: Le Guin's Metafantasy." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 235-242.
- . *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. Bloomington, 1980.
- Ayers, Robert H. "Christian Realism and Environmental Ethics." *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, edited by Eugene C. Hargrove, University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 154-171.
- Bain, Dena C. "The Tao Te Ching." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 211-224.
- Barringer, Tim, and Jason Rosenfeld. "Victorian Avant-garde." *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-garde*, Edited by Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld & Alison Smith, Tate Publishing, 2012, pp 9-17.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press, 2009.
- Bartram, David. "Happiness and 'Economic Migration': A Comparison of Eastern European Migrants and Stayers." *Migration Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, pp. 156-75.
- Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. Picador, 2001.
- Beowulf. An Anglo-Saxon Epic Poem*. Translated from the Heyne-Socin text by Lesslie Hall, D.C. Heath & Co., 1897.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*, edited by Henry Hardy, Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Bernardo, Susan, and Graham Murphy. *Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood, 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

---. Foreword to the 1986 edition. *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon, Pluto Press, 2008, pp. xxi-xxxvii.

Blazejewski, Susanne. "Betwixt or Beyond the Lines of Conflict? Biculturalism as Situated Identity in Multinational Corporations." *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp.111-35.

Boos, Florence S. "Medievalism in Alfred Tennyson and William Morris." *Victorians Institute Journal*, vol. 7, 1978, pp. 19-24.

Briggs, Asa. Introduction. *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 13-20.

Brooke, Johanna H. "Building Middle-earth: an Exploration into the uses of Architecture in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien." *Journal of Tolkien Research*, vol. 4, 2017, pp. 1-18.

Brownson, Orestes. "The Laboring Classes." *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, pp. 193-200.

Bucknall, Barbara J. *Ursula K. Le Guin*. Ungar, 1981.

Buell, Lawrence. Introduction. *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006.

---. Introduction to "The Laboring Classes", by Orestes Brownson. *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, p. 193.

---. Introduction to "Why Concord? ("Musketaquid")", by Ralph Waldo Emerson. *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, p. 323.

---. Introduction. *Writing For an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, by Lawrence Buell, Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 1-29.

---. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

---. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Bury, John Bagnell. *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*. MacMillan & Co., 1920.

Byrne, Deirdre C. *Selves and Others: The Politics of Difference in the Writings of Ursula Kroeber Le Guin*. 1995. University of South Africa, PhD dissertation.

Carlyle, Thomas. "The Age of Machinery." *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, pp. 16-19.

Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings*. Allen & Unwin, 1982.

---. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*. Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 4th ed., The Guilford Press, 2009.

Cody, David. "The British Empire." *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/Empire.html>. Accessed 3 July 2017.

Colebrook, Claire. *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism*. Manchester University Press, 1997.

Comoletti, Laura B. and Michael D.C. Drout. "How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books." *Children's Literature*, vol. 29, 2001, pp. 113-141.

Conrad, Sebastian. "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique." *American Historical Review*, Oct. 2012, pp. 999-1027.

Cooper, Jean C. *Taoism: The Way of the Mystic*. Aquarian Press, 1972.

Crow, John H., and Richard D. Erlich. "Words of Binding: Patterns of Integration in the Earthsea Trilogy." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Joseph D. Olander & Martin H. Greenberg, Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979, pp. 200-224.

Cummins, Elizabeth. *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*. University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

Curry, Patrick. "Iron Crown, Iron Cage: Tolkien and Weber on Modernity and Enchantment." *Myth and Magic: Art According to the Inklings*, edited by Eduardo Segura and Thomas Honegger, Walking Tree Books, 2008, pp. 99-108.

D'haen, Theo. "Introduction. What the Postcolonial Means to Us: European Literature(s) and Postcolonialism." *European Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2005, pp. 73-78.

Dall, Caroline Wells Healy. "Transcendentalism as Feminist Heresy." *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, pp. 546-553.

Del Col, Laura. "The Life of the Industrial Worker in Nineteenth-Century England." *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/work/burnett8.html>. Accessed 3 July 3 2017.

Duignan, Brian. "Enlightenment." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 29 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>. Accessed 26 June 2019.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Address to the Citizens of Concord (on the Fugitive Slave Law)." *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. 348-365.

---. "Nature." *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. 7-49.

---. "Nature." *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Edna H. L. Turpin, Charles E. Merrill Co., 1907, pp. 193-216.

---. "The American Scholar." *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. 50-66.

---. "The Significance of British West Indian Emancipation." *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, pp. 347-354.

---. "The Transcendentalist." *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. 98-112.

---. "Thoreau." *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. 415-41.

Ertsgaard, Gabriel. "'Leaves of Gold There Grew': Lothlórien, Postcolonialism and Ecology." *Representations of Nature in Middle-earth*, edited by Martin Simonson, Walking Tree Publishers, 2015, pp. 207-229.

Esmonde, Margaret P. "The Master Pattern: The Psychological Journey in the Earthsea Trilogy." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Joseph D. Olander & Martin H. Greenberg, Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979, pp. 15-35.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1963.

---. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press, 2008.

- Ferber, Michael. *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Kent State University Press, 2002.
- “Folk Daoism Comes to the West.” *The Pluralism Project*, <http://pluralism.org/religions/daoism/the-daoist-tradition/folk-daoism-comes-to-the-west/>. Accessed 30 August 2019.
- Freedman, Carl. Introduction. *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. ix-xxii.
- Freud, Sigmund. “The ‘Uncanny’.” *The Standard Collection of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, edited by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, pp. 217-256.
- Fromm, Harold. “From Transcendence to Obsolence: A Route Map.” *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 30-39.
- Fuller, Margaret. *Summer on the Lakes in 1843*. Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844.
- Furst, Lilian R. *Romanticism*. Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Gallagher, Catherine. “Marxism and New Historicism.” *The New Historicism*, edited by H. Aram Veenser, Routledge, 2013, pp. 37-49.
- Garth, John. *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012.
- Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. Routledge, 1999.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. Introduction. *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. xv-xxxvii.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- . “Towards a Poetics of Culture.” *The New Historicism*, edited by H. Aram Veenser, Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-14.

Grove, Richard H. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Gruen, Lori. "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 60-90.

Gunn Allen, Paula. "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 241-263.

Hanson, Ingrid. "William Morris on General Gordon." *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/morris/hanson2.html>. Accessed 17 August 2017.

Harvey, Charles E. and Jon Press. "William Morris and the Marketing of Art." *Business History*, October 1986, pp. 36-54.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt, Garland Publishing, 1977.

Helfland, Jonathan. "The Earth Is the Lord's: Judaism and Environmental Ethics." *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, edited by Eugene C. Hargrove, University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 38-52.

Heller, Chaia. "For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 219-242.

Hendriks, Martijn. "The Happiness of International Migrants." *Migration Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2015, pp. 343-369.

Hitchcock, Peter. Review of *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, by Vivek Chibber. *The Comparatist*, October 2015, pp. 355-64.

Hodges, Kenneth. "Reformed Dragons: *Bevis of Hampton*, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2012, pp. 110-131.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 2002.

Howarth, William. "Some Principles of Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 69-91.

Huddart, David. *Homi K. Bhabha*. Oxford, Routledge, 2006.

- Hughes, Donald. "Pan: Environmental Ethics in Classical Polytheism." *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, edited by Eugene C. Hargrove, University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 7-24.
- Hunt, Peter, editor. *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- James, Edward. "Tolkien, Lewis, and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 62-78.
- Kirk, Neville. *Capitalism, Custom and Protest, 1750-1850*. Scolar Press, 1994.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor As Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Kroeber, Alfred. *Handbook of the Indians of California*. Dover Publications, 1976.
- Kroeber, Karl. *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Kroeber, Theodora, and Robert Fleming Heizer. *Almost Ancestors: The First Californians*. Sierra Club, 1968.
- Kumar, Sanjiv. "Bhabha's notion of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' in V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*." *Researcher World*, Oct. 2011, pp. 118-122.
- Kuznets, Lois R. "'High Fantasy' in America: A Study of Lloyd Alexander, Ursula LeGuin, and Susan Cooper." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 9, 1985, pp. 19-35.
- Landow, George P. "Five Ages of Technology." *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/work/burnett8.html>. Accessed 3 July 2017.
- . "The Prince of Victorian Manual Workers: The Skilled Craftsman." *The Victorian Web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/work/burnett8.html>. Accessed 7 July 2017.
- Lebow, Victor. Review of *History of the Idea of Progress*, by Robert Nisbet. *Challenge*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1980, pp. 69-72.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "A band of Brothers, a Stream of Sisters." *No Time to Spare*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Mariner Books, 2019, pp. 101-104.

---. "About Feet." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 160-162.

---. "A Description of Earthsea." *Tales From Earthsea*, Graphia, 2012, 377-423.

---. "A Left-Handed Commencement Address." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 115-117.

---. "An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin about *The Hidden Sky*." *Prospect Theater*, 11 Feb. 2010, <https://prospecttheater.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/an-interview-with-ursula-k-leguin-about-the-hidden-sky/>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

---. "An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 26-46.

---. "An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin." *Time*, 11 May 2009, <http://techland.time.com/2009/05/11/an-interview-with-ursula-k-le-guin/>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

---. "An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin." *Wave Composition*, 8 Nov. 2013, <http://www.wavecomposition.com/article/issue-7/>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

---. "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 80-100.

---. "Author Ursula K. Le Guin Shares Thoughts on Book." *MLive*, 28 Feb. 2010, https://www.mlive.com/news/jackson/2010/02/author_ursula_k_le_guin_shares.html. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

---. "A Very Good American Novel: H.L. Davis's *Honey in the Horn*." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 116-119.

---. "A War Without End." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 211-220.

---. "A Wizard of Earthsea." *Earthsea: The First Four Books*, Puffin Books, 2016, 7-218.

- . "Bryn Mawr Commencement Address." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 147-160.
- . "Cheek by Jowl: Animals in Children's Literature." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 339-379.
- . "Chronicles of Earthsea." *The Guardian*, 9 Feb. 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/feb/09/sciencefictionfantasyandhorror.ursulaklequin>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2018.
- . "Clinging Desperately to a Metaphor." *No Time to Spare*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Mariner Books, 2019, pp. 111-114.
- . "Coming Back from the Silence." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 92-101.
- . "Dialogue with Ursula Le Guin." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 12-25.
- . "Disappearing Grandmothers." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 88-95.
- . "Dragonfly." *Tales From Earthsea*, Graphia, 2012, 278-375.
- . "Dreams Must Explain Themselves." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 4-12.
- . "Driven by a Different Chauffeur: An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin." *SF Site*, Nov./Dec. 2001, <https://www.sfsite.com/03a/ul123.htm>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . *Earthsea Revisioned*, Green Bay Publications, 1993.
- . "Entretien avec Ursula K. Le Guin." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 124-162.
- . "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 18-29.
- . "Getting Away with Murder: The Millions Interviews Ursula K. Le Guin." *The Millions*, 31 Jan. 2013, <https://themillions.com/2013/01/getting-away-with-murder-the-millions-interviews-ursula-k-le-guin.html>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

- . "Getting It Right: Charles L. McNichols's *Crazy Weather*." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 143-148.
- . "Heroes." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 171-175.
- . "Hobo#16: Ursula K. Le Guin." *Hobo*, 30 May 2014, <http://hobomagazine.tumblr.com/post/87283851761/hobo-16-ursula-k-leguin>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . "I Am a Woman Writer, I Am a Western Writer: An Interview with Ursula Le Guin." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 77-91.
- . "Indian Uncles." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 10-19.
- . "Interview." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 47-66.
- . "Introducing Myself." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 3-7.
- . "Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 46-49.
- . "Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 54-58.
- . "In Your Spare Time." *No Time to Spare*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Mariner Books, 2019, pp. 3-7.
- . "Is Gender Necessary? Redux." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 7-16.
- . "It Doesn't Have to Be the Way It Is." *No Time to Spare*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Mariner Books, 2019, pp. 80-87.
- . "Learning to Write Science Fiction from Virginia Woolf." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 95-96.
- . "Making Up Stories." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 107-112.
- . "Moral and Ethical Implications of Family Planning." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 17-20.

- . "National Book Award Acceptance Speech." *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, p. 3.
- . "On the Frontier." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 28-30.
- . "On the High Marsh." *Tales From Earthsea*, Graphia, 2012, pp. 231-277.
- . "Pard and the Time Machine." *No Time to Spare*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Mariner Books, 2019, pp. 95-98.
- . "Places Names." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 51-74.
- . "Reciprocity of Prose and Poetry." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 104-114.
- . Review of *Benediction*, by Kent Haruf. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 230-232.
- . Review of *Flight Behavior*, by Barbara Kingsolver. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 239-242.
- . Review of *Ledoyt*, by Carol Emshwiller. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 222-226.
- . Review of *Suffer the Little Children*, by Donna Leon. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 249-250.
- . Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by Salman Rushdie. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 272-275.
- . Review of *The High Mountains of Portugal*, by Yann Martel. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 251-253.
- . Review of *Two Years, Eight Months, and Twenty-Eight Nights*, by Salman Rushdie. *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 276-280.
- . "Tehanu." *Earthsea: The First Four Books*, Puffin Books, 2016, 635-890.

- . "Telling Is Listening." *The Wave in the Mind*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambhala, 2004, pp. 185-205.
- . "The Beast in the Book." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 26-34.
- . "The Bones of the Earth." *Tales From Earthsea*, Graphia, 2012, pp. 202-230.
- . "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 165-170.
- . "The Farthest Shore." *Earthsea: The First Four Books*, Puffin Books, 2016, pp. 395-634.
- . "The Finder." *Tales From Earthsea*, Graphia, 2012, pp. 1-152.
- . "The Fisherwoman's Daughter." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 212-237.
- . "The Magician." *The Guardian*, 17 Dec. 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/dec/17/booksforchildrenandteenagers.shopping>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . "The Operating Instructions." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 3-6.
- . *The Other Wind*, Orion, 2012.
- . "The Tombs of Atuan". *Earthsea: The First Four Books*, Puffin Books, 2016, 219-394.
- . *Ursula K. Le Guin: Conversations on Writing with David Naimon*, by David Naimon, Tin House Books, 2018.
- . "Ursula K. Le Guin: Free Speech, Press Are 'Liberty in Action'." *Street Roots*, 29 Sept. 2017, <https://news.streetroots.org/2017/09/29/ursula-k-le-guin-free-speech-press-are-liberty-action>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . "Ursula K. Le Guin talks to Michael Cunningham about genres, gender, and broadening fiction." *Electric Literature*, 1 Apr. 2016, <https://electricliterature.com/ursula-k-le-guin-talks-to-michael-cunningham-about-genres-gender-and-broadening-fiction/>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . "Ursula K. Le Guin, the Art of Fiction." *The Paris Review*, 2013, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6253/ursula-k-le-guin-the-art-of-fiction-no-221-ursula-k-le-guin>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.

- . "Ursula K. Le Guin's Life and Works: An Interview." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 67-76.
- . "Ursula Le Guin." *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Carl Freedman, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 3-11.
- . "Ursula Le Guin: She Got There First." *The Boston Globe*, 22 Nov. 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2014/11/22/ursula-guin-she-got-there-first/aQURr2fiFuKjxf1Fv6zW3O/story.html> . Accessed 10 Sept. 2018.
- . "What Women Know." *Words are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books 2000-2016*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Small Beer Press, 2016, pp. 81-87.
- . "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Gollancz, 2018, pp. 30-35.
- . "Woman/Wilderness." *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 161-164.
- Littlefield, Holly. "Unlearning Patriarchy: Ursula Le Guin's Feminist Consciousness in 'The Tombs of Atuan and Tehanu.'" *Extrapolation*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1995, pp. 244-258.
- Lovelock, James. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. Oxford University Press, 1979.
- MacCarthy, Fiona. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. Faber and Faber, 1995.
- MacDonald, George. *A Dish of Orts*. Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 1895.
- Maltz, Harold, and Miriam Maltz. *The Enlightenment*. Greenhaven Press, 2005.
- Manes, Christopher. "Nature and Silence." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 15-29.
- Manzari, Alireza. "Contextual American Transcendentalism." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 2, no. 9, 2012, pp. 1792-1801.
- Markus, Hazel and Elissa Wurf. "The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective." *Annual Review of Psychology*, no. 38, 1987, pp. 299-337.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. Routledge, 2002.

Maza, Sarah. "Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism, and Cultural History, or, What We Talk About When We Talk About Interdisciplinarity." *Modern Intellectual History*, Aug. 2004, pp. 249-65.

McDaniel, Jay. "Christianity and the Need for New Vision." *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, edited by Eugene C. Hargrove, University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 188-212.

Mehta, Hemant. "Is Christianity Beneficial or Harmful to Society?" *Patheos*, 21 Oct. 2014, <https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2014/10/21/is-christianity-beneficial-or-harmful-to-society/>. Accessed 26 June 2019.

Morris, William. "Civilization." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 105-106.

---. "How We Live and How We Might Live." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 158-179.

---. "Innate Socialism." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 84-105.

---. "Popular Art." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 106-107.

---. "The Experts of Epping." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 307-308.

---. *The House of the Wolfings*. Project Gutenberg, 2005.

---. "The Worker's Share of Art." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 140-143.

---. "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil." *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986, 117-136.

---. *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986.

---. *William Morris's Socialist Diary*. Edited by Florence Boos, The Journeyman Press, 1985.

Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. Indiana University Press, 1991.

Nguyen, Angela-MinhTu D., Huynh, Que-Lam & Benet-Martínez, Verónica. "Bicultural Identities in a Diverse World." *Diversity in Mind and in Action*, edited by J.L. Chin, vol. 1, Praeger, 2009, pp. 17-31.

Norberg, Peter. Introduction. *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Peter Norberg, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, pp. xiii-xxxiii.

Olander, Joseph D., and Martin Harry Greenberg. *Ursula K. Le Guin*. Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979.

Orleck, Annelise. "Feminism Rewritten: Reclaiming the Activism of Working-Class Women." Review of *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*, by Dorothy Sue Cobble. *Reviews in American History*, Dec 2004, pp. 591-601.

Oziewicz, Marek. *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle, and Orson Scott Card*. McFarland and Co., 2008.

Payne, Tonia L. 'A Heart That Watches and Receives': *Ursula Le Guin and the American Nature-Writing Tradition*. 1999. The City University of New York, PhD dissertation.

Peabody, Elizabeth. "A Margaret Fuller Conversation on Gender." *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell, The Modern Library, 2006, pp. 297-300.

Poliakov, Léon. "Racism from the Enlightenment to the Age of Imperialism." *Racism and Colonialism: Essays on Ideology and Social Structure*, edited by Robert Ross, Springer, 2011, pp. 55-64.

"Progress." *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/progress>. Accessed 19 July 2019.

"QuickFacts-California." *United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/geo/chart/ca/PST045218>. Accessed 2 April 2019.

Rawls, James J., and Walton Bean. *California: An Interpretive History*. McGraw-Hill, 1998.

Reed, Gerard. "A Native American Environmental Ethic: A Homily on Black Elk." *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, edited by Eugene C. Hargrove, University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 25-37.

Rochelle, Warren G. *Communities of the Heart. The Rhetoric of Myth in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin*, Liverpool University Press, 2001.

---. "The Emersonian Choice: Connections Between Dragons and Humans in Le Guin's *Earthsea* Cycle." *Extrapolation*, Winter 2006, pp. 417-426.

Rolle, Andrew F. *California: A History*. Crowell, 1969.

Rosenthal, Ty. *The Arts and Crafts Movement and J.R.R. Tolkien: Middle-Earth's Imagery and Philosophy of Craft*, August 11-15, 2005, Birmingham, The Tolkien Society, 2008.

Ruskin, John. "Art and Man in the Middle Ages." *Art and Life: A Ruskin Anthology*, edited by Sloane Wm. Kennedy, John B. Alden, 1886, pp. 46-50.

---. "Labor." *Art and Life: A Ruskin Anthology*, edited by Sloane Wm. Kennedy, John B. Alden, 1886, pp. 191-194.

---. "Poverty." *Art and Life: A Ruskin Anthology*, edited by Sloane Wm. Kennedy, John B. Alden, 1886, pp. 214-225.

---. "Riches." *Art and Life: A Ruskin Anthology*, edited by Sloane Wm. Kennedy, John B. Alden, 1886, pp. 194-214.

---. "The Nature of Gothic." *The Stones of Venice*. Vol. 2, Smith, Elder and Co., 1867, pp. 151-231.

---. "The Pre-Raphaelite Artists". *The Times*, 26 May, 1851: 8.

Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1994.

---. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.

Sanders, Scott R. "Speaking a Word for Nature." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 182-195.

Sardar, Ziauddin. Foreword to the 2008 edition. *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon, Pluto Press, 2008, pp. vi-xx.

Sawyer, Andy. "Ursula Le Guin and the Pastoral Mode." *Extrapolation*, Winter 2006, pp. 396-416.

Scholes, Robert. "The Good Witch of the West." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 35-46.

Segura Fernández, Eduardo. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Mitopoeia y Mitología. Reflexiones Bajo la Luz Refractada*, edited by Martin Simonson, Portal Editions, 2008.

“Self-concept.” Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/self-concept>. Accessed 19 July 2019.

Serres, Michel. *The Natural Contract*. Translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Seymour, Jessica. “‘As we draw near mountains’: Nature and Beauty in the Hearts of Dwarves.” *Representations of Nature in Middle-earth*, edited by Martin Simonson, Walking Tree Publishers, 2015, pp. 29-47.

Shankland, Graeme. “William Morris Designer.” *William Morris: News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by Asa Briggs, Penguin Books, 1986.

Shippey, Tom. “The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: The Earthsea Trilogy.” *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 99-117.

---. *The Road to Middle-earth*. Harper Collins, 2005.

Siegler, Elijah. *The Dao of America: The History and Practice of American Daoism*. 2003. University of California Santa Barbara, PhD dissertation.

Silko, Leslie M. “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination.” *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 264-275.

Simonson, Martin, and Raúl Montero-Gilete. *El western fantástico de Stephen King: Hibridación y desencantamiento de la tradición literaria europea en El Pistolero*. Peter Lang, 2017.

Simonson, Martin. *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition*. Walking Tree Publishers, 2008.

Slusser, George E. “The Earthsea Trilogy.” *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 71-83.

—. *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin*. Wildside Press, 1976.

Spivack, Charlotte. *Ursula K. Le Guin*. Twayne Publishers, 1984.

Spivak, Gayatri. “Can the subaltern speak?” *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 66-111.

Suvin, Darko. “On U.K. Le Guin’s ‘Second Earthsea Trilogy’ and Its Cognitions: A Commentary.” *Extrapolation*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2006, pp. 488-504.

Thoreau, Henry David. *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, edited by José Menéndez, Elegant Books. *Ibiblio*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Thoreau/Civil%20Disobedience.pdf>

- . *Walden*. Penguin Books, 2016.
- . "Walking." *The Atlantic*, June 1862, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/06/walking/304674/>. Accessed 26 March 2019.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories." *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Harper Collins, 2014, pp. 27-84.
- . *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, George Allen & Unwin, 1981.
- . *The Lord of the Rings*. Harper Collins, 2004.
- . *The Silmarillion*, edited by Harper Collins, 1999.
- Turner, Frederick. "Cultivating the American Garden." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 40-51.
- Tsai, Shu Fen. "Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle: An Ecological Fable of 'Healing Wounds.'" *Concentric: Studies in English Literature and Linguistics*, Jan. 2003, pp. 143-174.
- Walters, Kate A. *A Story to Tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing Up as Third Culture Kids*. 2006. Trinity Western University, PhD dissertation.
- Welch, Holmes. *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*. Beacon Press, 1966.
- Westing, Arthur H. "The Environmental Aftermath of Warfare in Viet Nam." *Natural Resources Journal*, Spring 1983, pp 365-389.
- White, Lynn Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 3-14.
- Wolfe, Gary K. "Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 7-20.
- Wood, Christopher. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.
- Wood, Susan. "Discovering Worlds: The Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 183-209.
- Zanger, Jules. "Some Differences Between American and British Fantasy Literature." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 18, 1989, pp. 93-99.