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Making and Unmaking in Middle-earth and Elsewhere

Abstract

Study of the concepts of making (creation) and unmaking (destruction), the opposing forces of Order and Chaos, in worlds created by Tolkien and Orson Scott Card.

Additional Keywords

Creation and destruction; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Silmarillion; Card, Orson Scott. The Alvin Maker series

Making and Unmaking in Middle-earth and Elsewhere

Edith L. Crowe

ONE of the most common characteristics of fantasy as a genre is a tendency to present its tales in dualistic terms, though not as simply as its detractors would have us believe. Jane Yolen says that fantasy “tells of the world *as it should be*. It holds certain values to be important. It makes issues clear. It is, if you will, a fiction based on great opposites, the clashing of opposing forces, question and answer, yin and yang, the great dance of opposites” (64). Various fantasy authors have portrayed this “clash of opposing forces” in different ways: the Law and Chaos of Michael Moorcock, Susan Cooper’s *Light and Dark*, and other guises of Good and Evil too numerous to mention. The two works considered here—Tolkien’s vast *oeuvre* describing Arda and Orson Scott Card’s *Alvin Maker* series—present this characteristic dichotomy admirably and with satisfying complexity.

Opposing forces in Tolkien’s work have usually been discussed in terms of that great theme of *The Lord of the Rings* (*Lord*), Power and Renunciation. This is partly because *Lord* is Tolkien’s best-known and most often analyzed work, but also because this particular opposition speaks very strongly to our age of world wars and nuclear weapons. In addition, the idea of the renunciation of power is appealing because it is not a common one in the fantasy genre, which is more likely to portray getting and using power rather than giving it up. In his *Alvin Maker* series, Orson Scott Card offers another pair of opposites that resonate particularly well with late twentieth century knowledge and sensibilities: the concept of Making and Unmaking. Although Tolkien’s Secondary World is not usually looked at in these terms, the paradigm of Making and Unmaking applies to Arda as well.

First we need to define the concept as Card has presented it in the first four books of the *Alvin Maker* series. Making/Unmaking is a powerful and archetypal concept, very meaningful to anyone aware of both the scientific and sociological realities of our times. Alvin Miller himself sees this dichotomy as the most basic of oppositions: “Alvin knew all kinds of opposites in the world [. . .] But deeper than all those opposites was making and unmaking. So deep that hardly anybody noticed that it was the most important opposite of all” (*Seventh Son* 129).

One basic characteristic of the Unmaker is its implacable destructiveness, its desire to break everything down. While still a child Alvin has a recurring dream about “The world filling up with an invisible trembling *nothing* that seeped into everything and took it apart” (124). Later on, during his apprentice years, he describes it thus: “That fire from the Sun, that’s what the Unmaker hates most. The life it makes. Put that fire out, that’s what the Unmaker says inside himself. Put all fires out, turn all water into ice, the whole world smooth with ice, the whole sky black and cold like night” (*Prentice Alvin* 131). In addition to a desire to bring about eventual sameness and cold, a third characteristic of the Unmaker is its apparent ability to tear things down faster than anyone, including Alvin, can build them up, at least as Taleswapper explains it. Using the metaphor of a wall, Taleswapper says “brick and flesh and bone alike all break down into the same indistinguishable dust. Then the Unmaker will sneeze, and the dust will be infinitely dispersed so that it can never come together again. The universe will be cold, still, silent, dark, and at last the Unmaker will be at rest” (*Seventh* 131).

A better personification of entropy and the eventual heat-death of the universe would be hard to find, and we should not be too surprised to find it in the work of an author who writes science fiction as well as fantasy. The character of the Unmaker works on several levels. For those who recognize its roots in twentieth-century cosmology and physics, it can be appreciated as a powerful metaphor of a major scientific reality. Card has taken the immoveable and impersonal force of entropy and given it not only a name but a personality and malevolent intent. Entropy is a fairly frightening concept if we let ourselves think about it, but we seldom do because its eventual triumph is too distant to affect us personally. Card pulls it from that far future to affect the everyday lives of well-drawn and very human characters with whom the reader cannot help but identify. An impersonal operation of the laws of thermodynamics becomes the monster that flickers at the edge of sight and works real evil in the world.

Although personified, the Unmaker is frequently presented as an almost elemental force of evil and destruction. Few people—Alvin among them—can sense the Unmaker directly, and even to him the Unmaker appears as but a subtle shimmering of air. The Unmaker can work through the physical stuff of the world, however. One of the most interesting and unusual aspects of symbolism in the Alvin Maker series is the association of the element of water with the Unmaker. Water is not only an apparently willing tool in the carrying out of the Unmaker’s destructive designs, but seems to have an inherently negative “personality.”

The world of Alvin Maker is one based on the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, a view of the material universe which in our own world goes all the way back to the philosophers of ancient Greece, particularly Empedocles. Card, however, gives these elemental forces a degree of intention: in the words of Oldpappy, “each wants to have its own way” (25). Earth, air, and fire are given matter-of-fact characteristics that cannot be considered particularly malevolent; earth in particular is described only in positive terms. Water is different: “But water, it tears things down, it falls from the sky and carries off everything it can. [. . .] If the water had its way, the whole world would be smooth, just a big ocean with nothing out of the water’s reach. All dead and smooth” (25). In contrast to the colors of the other elements—yellow fire, red earth, grey air—Peggy the Torch sees water as “deep black emptiness” (23). Card explicitly states that “Water was its [the Unmaker’s] servant, did most of its work, tearing things down” (*Prentice* 100). When the Unmaker appears to Cavil Planter in the form of the Overseer, it tells Cavil that one of its names is Water-bearer (8).

This is a rather original conception. The one thing most essential to life in the universe as we know it is the presence of liquid water. Anyone who lives where it normally does not rain for many months of the year knows that the rainy season is greeted each year with an almost worshipful relief. One of the foundations of many economies is agriculture, and that agriculture is often based on irrigation. When rain does come to otherwise arid lands, however, the destructive power of water can be quite apparent—such as two so-called thirty- or hundred-year floods within a decade or so. Like the other elements, water has both a beneficial and a destructive side. For Makers, however, water seems to be nothing but malevolent. Water tries time and again to kill Alvin—by attempting to drown him, by cracking stones to crush him, by making mud so he will slip. These attempts recur from the very time of Alvin’s birth to his making of the golden plow.

However, once that plow is made, once Alvin becomes a Maker in truth, “The Unmaker couldn’t touch him through water anymore. No, the Unmaker’s tool would be more subtle now. It would be people” (*Alvin Journeyman* 111). Throughout *Seventh Son* and *Red Prophet*, the Unmaker’s attacks on Alvin are primarily physical, just as Alvin’s understanding of Making is in primarily physical terms such as the making or fixing of objects and the healing of bodies. The change in the power of water over Alvin signals a profound change from a primarily physical battle to a primarily psychological and spiritual one. This major shift is presaged by the irony of water being used to actually save Alvin from being taken over by the Unmaker,

when Gertie Smith dumps a bucket of water on him (*Prentice* 118). Water also serves a positive function by washing away all traces of Arthur Stuart's old DNA after Alvin has changed him, in a scene suggestive of baptism by immersion (*Prentice* 291-92).

The Unmaker is a powerful metaphor for more than a basic tenet of physical science, however. The greatest achievement of the Alvin Maker series is its psychological (and to some, spiritual) truth. Entropy in reality is a blind force of nature with no intention to harm or do evil. From the first, however, the Unmaker is portrayed as having such intent, especially toward those it sees as having the power to thwart its designs, i.e. Makers. Unlike most other personifications of evil, such as Morgoth or Sauron, the Unmaker has destructiveness as its end, not merely as the means to something else (such as power over others or acquisition of riches). One would have to be oblivious to contemporary society not to appreciate how well the concept of senseless destruction fits in with what we see so often in the daily news.

Just as the Unmaker is a metaphor for entropy in the physical realm, it also reminds us of that force in the psychological realm that Sigmund Freud called Thanatos, or the death-instinct. The concept is generally defined as "a universal impulse for death, destruction, self-destruction, and aggression. [. . .] Freud pictured human life as a theater of operations in which two ultimate forces, the life instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos) battle for supremacy" (*Longman Dictionary* 203). Another of those great oppositions, the Eros/Thanatos dichotomy is largely a prophet without honor in its own country of psychiatry, at least in the United States and in the specifics of Freud's description. However, the general concept is one of those great archetypal oppositions, and one that speaks with particular force to the later twentieth century. In our era destruction for its own sake seems all too common on large stages and small, from war and holocaust to random acts of violence and destruction on city streets.

With the shift of the Maker/Unmaker battle to the psychological and spiritual realm, weighty theological issues arise. The role of free will is especially complicated. The Unmaker itself, appearing as the Overseer to Cavil Planter, states "I speak only to those whose desires already turn toward me and my works, the ones who already thirst for the water I bring" (*Prentice* 10). Note the water symbolism again. However, throughout his childhood the Unmaker tries to use Alvin's own father to kill him. Although Alvin Miller Sr. loves his son, he seems unable to resist the concentrated power of the Unmaker, and almost does kill Alvin. Only the constant intervention

of Peggy the Torch, and the fact that Alvin's father finally is convinced to send the boy away from Vigor Church, saves Alvin. Does this suggest that the Unmaker's power can be irresistible, no matter how hard one tries and how little one wants to do an evil deed? How much responsibility does Alvin Sr. bear for his actions?

Other examples of an individual succumbing to the Unmaker are less problematic. The beginning chapter of *Prentice Alvin*, told from the point of view of Cavil Planter, is a masterful demonstration of a man gradually convincing himself that actions he knows to be wrong are right, and finding self-aggrandizing justifications for breaking his marriage vows when the "in sickness and in health" part does not work to his advantage. Presumably, the crack in Cavil's soul that lets the Unmaker drive in a wedge is his acceptance of slavery, and lust provides the sledgehammer. The seven deadly sins are pretty well represented by various people who become the Unmaker's tools. Vilate Franker is pride personified; Amy Sump has a potent mixture of lust, pride and envy; and pride and anger drive the actions of White Murderer Harrison.

Alvin's most unrelenting antagonist, and the Unmaker's greatest tool, may prove to be Alvin's own brother Calvin. Overwhelming envy of Alvin seems to drive Calvin's actions, and the character of Calvin presents some of the most problematic questions on the nature of evil and free will in Card's alternate universe. Late in the last of those books that portray the first phase of Alvin's journey, Peggy tells Alvin he must find his brother and "reclaim" him.¹ Alvin replies:

"What makes you think Calvin wasn't already the enemy of our work before he was born?"

"That's not possible," said Peggy. "Babies are born innocent and pure."

"Or steeped in original sin? Those are the choices? I can't believe you of all people believe either idea, you who put your hands on the womb and see the futures in the baby's heartfire. The child is already himself then, the good and bad, ready to step into the world and make of himself what he wants most to be." (*Journeyman* 363)

I find the implications of this more than a little disturbing. Since Alvin explicitly rejects the doctrine of original sin, we are left with two alternatives. Either Calvin's actions are predestined and free will goes out the window, or Calvin had already decided the course of his life *in utero*, which seems absurd. Since the Alvin Maker series is still a work in progress, one hopes that this apparently problematic idea will be worked out in future volumes.

At this point much has been said of Unmaking but little about Making. One

reason is that Unmaking is defined fairly clearly early on, but the definition of Making changes and evolves as Alvin's own ideas of it grow and mature. In the beginning he thinks of it in terms of "making things go just where he wanted" but also "understanding how things ought to be and helping them get that way" (*Seventh* 63). Later, he sees it in terms of "making things want to be another way, a new shape, so they just naturally flowed that way" (*Prentice* 300). By the time Alvin becomes a true Maker by making a living golden plow, he rejoices "not because he made it, but because he taught it how to make itself" (302). The emphasis has shifted from the maker imposing his will and understanding on the thing made, however benevolently, to guiding, helping—empowering if you will—the thing to make itself. Alvin has now become a teacher, a source of inspiration, a center around whom like minds can gather.

Making is clearly connected to the divine, although exactly how is not yet completely clear. Alvin thinks at one point "that God worked pretty much the way Alvin did—told the rocks of the earth and the fire of the sun and stuff like that, told it all how it was supposed to be and then let it be that way" (242). As Alvin becomes a true Maker, sacrifice and suffering enter in, giving him an increasingly Christ-like aspect. Not only does he enter the fire of the forge to make the golden plow, he begins to view his task in terms of what Charles Williams would call substitution, and what most would view as suggestive of the redemptive love of Jesus: "It's true that sometimes people have to suffer to make something good come to be. But when I have it in my power to save them from suffering it, and bear it myself[. . .] That's part of Making. If I have it in my power then I bear it" (*Journeyman* 298).

One difficulty in determining where a Maker fits in the divine scheme of things is the fact that Card's fantasy world is an alternate version of our own rather than an independent Secondary World such as Arda. The religious history of this alternate is not too different from our own world, since Christianity in various forms—Puritan, Roman Catholic, basic Protestant—is the faith of most of the White protagonists. Clearly Jesus was a Maker (*Prentice* 240) but probably not the only one before Alvin.² Was Jesus a special case, both Maker and God? Can one be a God and not be a Maker? Presumably one can be a Maker without being a God, since Alvin seems to be the first but not the second—but is he more than human? Since much remains to be told of Alvin's story, that remains to be seen.

No such ambiguity exists in Arda. At least in its "final" form—to the extent that anything Tolkien wrote can be said to be final—there is a clear demarcation

between Eru and everyone else. Eru is clearly at the top of the hierarchy of Makers, the only being with access to the Flame Imperishable and therefore the only one capable of true creation *ex nihilo*. Eru makes this clear when he says: “And, thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its utmost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite” (*Silmarillion* 17). The Ainur/Valar are secondary Makers, Makers within limits. The music of the Ainur has a great deal to do with the specifics of Arda’s design, but the theme is still Eru’s. Without the action of Eru, Arda would have remained merely a vision and not a living reality: “Therefore I say: *Eä!* Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be; and those of you that will may go down into it” (*Silmarillion* 20).

Melkor is the first and greatest of the Unmakers of Arda. The root of his evil is, like Calvin Smith’s, a mixture of pride and envy. He sought the Imperishable Flame, “for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own”—but that power is reserved to Eru only. The discord that Melkor introduces into the music of creation is a result of his doomed attempt to be a Maker of the same kind as Eru, and his excessive pride, “for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself” (16). As I indicated before, a major difference between Card’s Unmaker and the Unmaker-like behavior of various beings in Arda is intention. For Card’s Unmaker, destruction for its own sake is the point; in Arda it is, theoretically at least, a means to an end. But often an outside observer might be hard put to tell the difference. When the Valar entered Arda to begin their own demiurgic Making,

they built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo or corrupt it. (22)

There is another creature in Arda, however, who comes even closer to Card’s conception of near-elemental destructive force: Ungoliant. “The Eldar,” we are told, “knew not whence she came; but some have said that in ages long before she descended from the darkness that lies about Arda,” and she “took shape as a spider of monstrous form, weaving her black webs in a cleft of the mountains. There she sucked up all light that she could find, and spun it forth again in dark nets of strangling gloom, until no light more could come to her abode; and she was famished” (73).

If Card's Unmaker is a metaphor for entropy, it is tempting to see Ungoliant, with her repeatedly emphasized characteristic as a devourer of light, as an ambulatory black hole. However, the conception of Ungoliant goes back to the earliest versions of Tolkien's subcreation, dated approximately 1915—a year before German astronomer Karl Schwarzschild developed the concept of black holes. In that early version she was a personification of

the primeval spirit Mórú whom even the Valar know not whence or when she came [. . .] more like she has always been[. . . .] It was because of her labours that so little of that overflowing light of the Two Trees flowed ever into the world, for she sucked light greedily, and it fed her, but she brought forth only that darkness that is a denial of all light. (*Book of Lost Tales* 152)

Christopher Tolkien adds in his commentary that “The original idea of ‘the primeval spirit Mórú’ (p. 151) is made explicit in an entry in the early word-list of the Gnomish language, where the name *Muru* is defined as ‘a name of the Primeval Night’” (160). In the earliest version of “The Tale of the Sun and Moon” the Valar avoid sending them into the South because Ungoliant is there. As Christopher Tolkien says, “This seems to give Ungoliant a great importance and also a vast area subject to her power of absorbing light” (200).

Of all inhabitants of Arda, Ungoliant is closest to an elemental creature of destruction. Just as the Unmaker is driven to break down the universe into cold, dark sameness, Ungoliant is driven by her maddening hunger for light to devour it, and in its place produce an overwhelming darkness “that was more than loss of light. In that hour was made a Darkness that seemed not lack but a thing with being of its own” (*Silmarillion* 76). Even her elemental destruction is tempered here, however, by the suggestion of darkness as presence rather than absence.

Although the Valar do not have the power of creation *ex nihilo*, within the limits that Eru has set for them their power is great. It is they who actually “construct” Arda, and both in this construction and in the original music of the Ainur they have a great deal of freedom to embellish that creation with their own conceptions. Although the Luciferian Melkor is the most powerful of the Valar, “to [Aulë] Ilúvatar had given skill and knowledge scarce less than to Melkor; but the delight and pride of Aulë is in the deed of making, and in the thing made, and neither in possession nor in his own mastery” (19). The desire for mastery, especially over others, is a flaw that Melkor shares with Calvin, a flaw that poisons their considerable gifts and makes them Unmakers rather than Makers. Aulë and Alvin, despite their great

powers of Making, retain a humility about their gifts. They are also willing, even eager, to share that gift with others and teach them to be Makers themselves. As Alvin teaches the people of Vigor Church, Aulë teaches the Eldar. Tolkien makes the difference between Aulë and Melkor explicit:

Melkor was jealous of him, for Aulë was most like himself in thought and in powers. [. . .] Both, also, desired to make things of their own that should be new and unthought of by others. [. . .] But Aulë remained faithful to Eru and submitted all that he did to his will, and he did not envy the works of others, but sought and gave counsel. Whereas Melkor spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery at the thought of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could. (27)

Melkor, like Calvin, had the potential to be a great Maker. But pride, envy, and hate drive both of them to become servants of the Unmaker. Eventually, Melkor loses what power of Making he has as a Vala, and can only corrupt what already exists. Just as Alvin says: “the Unmaker can’t make nothing. Can’t. He just takes what’s already there and twists and bends and breaks it” (*Journeyman* 291). So Melkor comes to share a basic characteristic of the Unmaker.³

Great power of Making is often perilous in Arda, even for those of better character than Melkor. After all, Aulë does make the dwarves, and the fact that he does it in secret indicates that he suspects Eru would not approve, even though Aulë’s motives are at heart generous ones. Sauron begins as a Maia associated with Aulë, and in at least one version of the “Annals of Aman” he is described as “a great craftsman in the household of Aulë” (*Morgoth’s Ring* 52). Also, Fëanor is Aulë’s greatest pupil among the Eldar. The power of Making is a great power but a concomitantly great temptation. Alvin’s episodes with the roaches in his sisters’ bedroom and the digging of the well show that he is not immune to this temptation either.

What saves the Makers—Aulë, Alvin, and other Valar, Maiar, and Eldar—seems to be a view of their powers as a gift to be used for a greater purpose, not for their own satisfaction or aggrandizement. The Valar make Arda not for themselves but as a habitation for the Children of Ilúvatar, whom they had no part in making. Alvin uses his great power neither to enrich himself nor to make his life easier, and, indeed, he makes a vow never to use it for himself. Just as the Valar have a divine mission to create Arda for Elves and Men, Alvin knows that his purpose in life is to build the Crystal City for others to inhabit. Although Making might be an activity satisfying in itself, these Makers never lose sight of the fact that their Making is not

an end but a means to the fulfillment of a greater purpose outside themselves.

Although Fëanor starts out in this frame of mind, pride, greed, and anger destroy him. In the beginning the gems he creates are freely given away for the beautification of Arda. With the Silmarils, however, Fëanor begins to value the thing made more than the greater purpose. The story of Fëanor and the downfall of the Noldor illustrates that in Arda, also, Unmaking can be done to people as well as material things. By poisoning the minds of Fëanor and other Elves against the Valar, Melkor shows that he is adept at psychological and spiritual Unmaking as well.

Although Fëanor's pride and hot-headedness must bear a great share of the blame, the actions of the Noldor might have been different without the machinations of Melkor. Fëanor's failings, and that of other Elves, provide that crack into which the Unmaker drives his wedge, and Melkor takes full advantage of it. Melkor is by this time practiced at deceit, since he first enters Arda on the pretext of fixing what he has marred, and feigns repentance and the turning over of a new leaf after being released from his first confinement by the Valar. Now he turns his talents to the Elves, turning them against the Valar and encouraging them to leave Valinor. Before we turn to Unmaking of the less material sort, we must mention Melkor's great deed of physical Unmaking, the destruction of the Two Trees (with Ungoliant as his accomplice) and the murder of Finwë—the first murder in Arda.

Sauron learned his master's lessons well, and uses his own power of psychological and spiritual Unmaking to bring about a great destruction, the very downfall of Númenor. Pride and envy seem to be the cardinal sins of Arda, since they are the major reasons for the fall of the Númenoreans from grace. When Ar-Pharazôn first brings Sauron to Númenor, Sauron "was astounded, but his heart within was filled the more with envy and hate." Worming his way into the counsel of the King, "he bade men think that in the world, in the east and even in the west, there lay yet many seas and many lands for their winning." He thus leads them to break the Ban of the Valar, resulting in the sinking of Númenor (*Silmarillion* 271).

Incidentally, this is one of the few examples in Arda of water as a destructive power, and even here it is a tool of Eru himself. The symbolism of water in Arda is almost unfailingly positive. The Ainur praised water above all other elements: "And it is said by the Eldar that in water there lives yet the echo of the Music of the Ainur more than in any substance else that is in this Earth" (19).

Many other examples of non-physical Unmaking are seen in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although the actual origin of the Ringwraiths lies earlier, we encounter them

most fully here, and they provide an interesting example of an essentially spiritual Unmaking that has consequences on the physical plane. Succumbing to the temptation of the Nine Rings (corrupted as they are with the power of Sauron) has Unmade their very bodies. Gollum/Sméagol is an example of a similar process at an earlier stage. Bilbo and Frodo have also felt the beginnings of that process of dissolution by their exposure to the One Ring.

Gríma Wormtongue's influence is an example of almost purely psychological Unmaking, although Théoden's reference to "leechcraft" suggests the presence of some extra insurance of a more tangible sort. Just as in the First Age Morgoth's lies drove wedges between Elf and Valar and Elf and Man, Gríma attempts to turn Théoden against his natural allies. Gríma's lies and insinuations come close to Unmaking Théoden as a physical being, turning him into a weak and suspicious old man. Only the timely intervention of Gandalf and Aragorn saves the King of the Rohirrim from eventual mental and physical dissolution. Gríma's master Saruman is highly skilled at the sort of manipulation of the truth to suit his own ends that Calvin Smith (the original spin doctor) teaches to White Murderer Harrison. The Voice of Saruman speaks with a similarly forked tongue.

Denethor is perhaps the purest case of psychological Unmaking, since in this case all the damage is done by Sauron at a distance. Unlike the more fortunate Théoden, intervention in Denethor's case comes too late—or Denethor's arrogance is too great to accept it. Through the palantír Sauron deceives Denethor into believing there is no hope of victory, and through his great pride Denethor falls into despair. He not only attempts to murder Faramir but Unmakes himself—both physically and spiritually. In Card's world, mere contemplation of suicide is always of the Unmaker (*Journeyman* 273), so presumably even more the deed. Neither is it permitted in Arda; Gandalf tells Denethor, "Authority is not given to you, Steward of Gondor, to order the hour of your death" (*Return of the King* 129). In Tolkien's Roman Catholic belief, despair is the greatest of sins because it denies the possibility of grace. Suicide is a mortal sin that guarantees damnation.

Many other examples could be found in Arda that would reward analysis along Card's axis of Making and Unmaking. One in particular is the complexity introduced into the concept of Making/Unmaking by Alvin's experience with the Reds and his understanding of their different and purer relationship with the magic of this alternate world. Much of the building and Making of the Whites, even Alvin's, kills the greensong and therefore seems inherently flawed and tainted, not unlike Arda Marred, and the Men of Middle-earth who bear the taint of an early Fall to

Melkor. The retreat of the Reds across the Mizippy is more than a little reminiscent of the Elves leaving Middle-earth and sailing into the West, and as poignant. This issue, and the thorny problem of the grey area between Making and Unmaking—the omelette and egg problem—would reward further study, especially in reference to Tolkien’s and Card’s attitudes toward nature versus technology.

Looking at Arda in terms of the “great opposites” of Making and Unmaking (as Card defines them) can be rewarding and illuminating. There are significant differences that should not be glossed over, however. Card has created a variation on our Primary World; Tolkien a separate Secondary World (with a largely offstage suggestion that it represents a lost past of our Primary World). As a corollary to this, the scientific underpinnings of the Primary World are more visible in Card’s creation, but do not on the face of it appear to be an issue in Arda.⁴ We must also remember that the Alvin Maker series is a work in progress. Throughout the five volumes published so far, Alvin’s understanding of significant issues, such as the nature of Making and Unmaking, the Crystal City, and his eventual destiny, have changed and evolved—and therefore the reader’s as well. It is likely that they will continue to do so. It might seem unfair to compare a finished work with a work in progress, but frankly it is difficult to think of anything Tolkien wrote as finished. One doubts that mere death has stopped him from revising.

Finally, although many beings in Arda have acted like tools of the Unmaker, none quite match that entity’s degree of implacable, unreasoning, elemental impulse to destroy. If Taleswapper’s view of the Unmaker is accurate, he suggests that the Unmaker is beyond good and evil, God and Satan: “Even the devil himself can’t afford to break everything down, can he, or he’d cease to be, just like everything else. The most evil creatures don’t desire the destruction of everything—they only desire to exploit it for themselves” (*Seventh* 128). Melkor, at least at first, is indeed exploiting destruction for motives of his own—marring Arda out of pride and envy; foiling his fellow Valar out of the same motives; bringing about the downfall of the Noldor because he blames the imminent arrival of the Elves for the Valar’s attacks on him.

Melkor evolved in Tolkien’s mind as well, and in a direction closer to the Unmaker. In his own “Notes on motives in the Silmarillion,” Tolkien says of Melkor (as Morgoth) when “confronted by the existence of other inhabitants of Arda [. . .] he was enraged by the mere fact of their existence. [. . .] His sole ultimate object was their destruction” (*Morgoth’s Ring* 395). And furthermore, “Melkor could do nothing with Arda, which was not from his own mind and was interwoven with

the work and thoughts of others: even left alone he could only have gone raging on till all was levelled again into a formless chaos” (396). Tolkien certainly comes close to the idea of the Unmaker here, but never quite reaches it, because he continues: “And yet even so he would have been defeated, because it would still have ‘existed’, independent of his own mind, and a world in potential” (396). There is something in Tolkien that prevents him from taking the final step and conceiving a being whose purpose was utter negation, that was beyond good and evil, God and Satan. Perhaps a faith that saw despair as the greatest sin prevented him. That Card is able to do so may be simply a result of greater attention to a modern scientific worldview, and a desire to merge that with religion and magic. On the other hand, it may say something we may not like to hear about the culture that helped form Card, or at least influenced him. His strong Mormon beliefs may provide a degree of insulation from its most potent negative effects. In fact, like Tolkien, embedded in much of his work is a reaction to, and a refutation of, mainstream secular culture. Nonetheless, this is a culture that Card shares, to some extent, with most of us—and it is a world different from the one that shaped Tolkien.

One might be expected to wonder to what extent these parallels between Card’s world and Tolkien’s show direct influence of the latter upon the former, and to what extent they are simply two skilled mythopoeic authors finding literary metaphors for some basic concerns of our century and our species. That is not a question I intend to ask here, let alone attempt an answer. In closing, however, I quote part of a little song that Alvin makes up to while away those long hours in the Hatrack River jail:

Alone with my imagining
I dreamt the darkest dream,
Of tiny men, a spider’s sting,
And in a land of smoke and steam
An evil golden ring.

As Alvin says, “Just a spare dream and I happened to snag on it during my sleep” (*Journeyman* 263).

Notes

¹*Heartfire*, the fifth book in the series (New York: Tor, 1998), seems a very transitional book, and confirms my contention that *Alvin Journeyman* marked the end of the first phase of Alvin’s journey. *Heartfire* has nothing to add to the subject of this paper, but adds even more complexity and ambiguity to the character of Calvin.

²In *Prentice Alvin* (72) the statement is made that “there hadn’t been a Maker in the world in a thousand years or more, or so folks said,” and since Jesus’s time was over 1800 years before Alvin’s, there was presumably at least one more A. D.—unless “folks” are wrong.

³At least in the “final” version as published in *The Silmarillion*. In one of the versions of the “Annals of Aman” Melkor “wrought” the Balrogs but in a different version of the same work he only “multiplied” them. See Christopher Tolkien’s commentary in *Morgoth’s Ring* 79; also 159 where he comments upon a version of the LQ1 ms. which has Morgoth making Orcs, Balrogs, and other monsters.

⁴However, Tolkien was not unaware of the scientific realities of the twentieth century. This issue of lack of Arda’s congruence with Primary World cosmology came to disturb him as time went on. (For example, in his notes to “Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth,” dated 1959 by Christopher Tolkien, he proposes revisions of his mythology to reconcile it with Primary World conceptions of the Universe.) His mythology as originally conceived owed little to such realities, with its flat-earth cosmology, plants without sun, and charming and fanciful origins of Sun and Moon. Interestingly, in these notes he also states that “[t]he Elves expected the End of Arda to be catastrophic” (i.e., not entropic). That view was modified later, incorporating the concept of “fading” so prominent in *Lord*. See *Morgoth’s Ring* 338-39 and 342.

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