

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

TIME IN THE SECONDARY WORLD FANTASIES OF
PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP

AUDREY ISABEL TAYLOR

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks to examine time in the secondary world fantasies of Patricia A. McKillip. Very little work has been done previously on McKillip, and none examines such a broad range of her works. Taking a strict definition of secondary world, I investigate McKillip's fantasy books that fit within this parameter to see whether there is a unifying principal behind time, in all its forms, in her work. Although time has been examined in fantasies that are obviously about time, very little has been done in the style of Mark Currie or Paul Riceour, who examine time in books that contain time but do not seem to be about time. I investigate time in terms of an overall chronotope, and argue that this seems to be one of the past. I argue that McKillip's works and other fantasy books like hers have a grammar of the past, and that everything in their works is influenced, to a degree, by this grammar. Thematically organised chapters examine sixteen of McKillip's immersive fantasies. The thesis begins with an investigation of the overall chronotope of McKillip's books and the influence this has on her works. It then examines "active time": time which is used in an active way to undo and heal wrongs of the past. McKillip's use of legends to add depth and age to her stories is explored. Her pastoral works, those with a nostalgic connection with nature, are examined. The sometimes counterpoint of the pastoral, cities, are then investigated and found to be places of influenced by time passing in the form of age and political era. Lastly, several of McKillip's characters are examined to show how time has affected them and affected their interactions with those around them.

Key words: Patricia A. McKillip, time, fantasy, chronotope

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Introduction

This is a study of time in the secondary world fantasies of author Patricia A. McKillip. I will begin with a discussion of why I have chosen to examine McKillip, and her use of time in particular, before moving on to defining recurrent terminology and giving an overview of the contents.

Patricia A. McKillip is an US author who won the first World Fantasy Award in 1973 and continues to write at the time of this thesis (2015). In spite of her critical acclaim and a large fan base, McKillip has not yet received the critical attention her works deserve. McKillip has written nine essays, some of which serve as introduction to her works, and has been interviewed a few times (notably, twice by *Locus* magazine, and once by the *Green Man Review*). No book-length studies of McKillip exist. Rita Haunert has written the sole completed PhD thesis on McKillip, "Mythic Female Heroes in the High Fantasy of Patricia McKillip," though another by Christine Mains is in progress at the University of Calgary. McKillip's work has been discussed briefly in a small number of other PhD theses, such as Stefan Ekman's "Writing Worlds, Reading Landscapes: An Exploration of Settings in Fantasy," which refers to *Ombria in Shadow* as an example of a liminal city where culture and nature are quite separate. Kerry Anne Lievre's "The World Is Changing: Ethics and Genre Development in Three Twentieth-Century High Fantasies" uses only *The Riddle-Master Trilogy* to explore narrative in a

particular kind of Tolkienesque plot. The previous works of Haunert and Mains are the only ones to focus exclusively on McKillip before this thesis. Haunert finished her thesis at Bowling Green State University in 1983, examining McKillip's use of mythic female heroes. At that time McKillip had written five books and *The Riddle-master Trilogy*; Haunert's view of McKillip's works is necessarily limited to these few works and is confined by a French feminist critique. Although several master's dissertations have been written on McKillip, the only one of note is Christine Mains's 2001 look at the female heroes' quests in her works. It, too, is a feminist critique, though in the Anglo-American tradition.

Only a few articles on McKillip have been published, generally in the *Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts* and *Extrapolation*. This scarcity of critical work on McKillip is surprising considering her twenty-five books, short story collections, award recognition, and general acclaim. This thesis attempts to go some way towards rectifying this situation with a comprehensive examination of one large section of McKillip's oeuvre, that is, her secondary world fantasies (sixteen books in total).

This thesis seeks to examine McKillip through the greater lens of time in fantasy literature in order to argue that there is a pervasive slant to time in her works: one of the past. Time in non-genre literature has received close critical attention, and I will apply theories from many of these works, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope (from *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*) and

Mark Currie's *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*. Time in science fiction has also received similar study, and I will be using theories from there as well, with critical works such as Karen Hellekson's *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*. However, time in fantasy literature has received less focused attention and, thus, I intend to argue that certain fantasy literature (such as a selection of McKillip's work) has a grammar of the past, and that this influences every aspect of the work.

This thesis focuses on McKillip's secondary world fantasies. Some of the recurrent terminology included throughout this thesis are the terms *primary* and *secondary world*. The definitions of both are somewhat controversial. I take my definitions loosely from J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" and then modify somewhat with a slightly narrower definition in mind. Tolkien argued in "On Fairy-Stories" that certain stories were created by man as a "sub-creation":

He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter.

Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. (37)

I argue that a “strict” definition of secondary world can be useful. By strict I mean that I do not include any books with links to our Earth. For example, though the *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) series is clearly excluded in my iteration, perhaps more unexpectedly so, too, is Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (1954). This is both because Tolkien named it Middle-earth and because he intimated that it was somewhat of a creation story of how man came to rule on Earth, and because it is a particularly English mythology as Jane Chance argues in *Tolkien’s Art: A Mythology for England* (2). Thus in both cases there are links to the reader’s Earth, and therefore they are both of the primary world. Everything links to our Earth in some way (authors are denizens of the primary world after all) but that is not the link I emphasise. This means that one or two books of McKillip’s that might have been included in this study, such as *Winter Rose* (1996) or *The Bell at Sealy Head* (2008) have been excluded because of (however tenuous) connections to our Earth. A problem sometimes brought up in regards to the terms primary and secondary world is that there are multiple layers to the imagination, and some consider the secondary world to be our dreams or imagination at work. I would therefore like to make it clear that by primary world I mean our planet Earth, our recognisable world, our stories. By secondary world I mean a world completely unattached to our Earth, an invented world that the author has created. In my iteration, stories (sometimes in other definitions considered secondary because of their separation from reality) are part of either primary or secondary worlds

depending on whether they are told from our Earth or from the story world. Thus, a story such as “Cinderella” is a story of the primary world, and stories in the secondary world are part of that secondary world.

Defining fantasy as a genre is notoriously difficult¹, so much so that the battle to find a single definition has inevitably given way to the acceptance of multiple classifications. Therefore, I will not be making an argument about what fantasy is; I will only place McKillip within the fantasy genre by applying Brian Attebery’s “fuzzy set” from *Strategies of Fantasy* along with Farah Mendlesohn’s rhetorical groupings from *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Attebery describes his “fuzzy set”: “Genres may be approached as ‘fuzzy sets,’ meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center” (*Strategies* 12). Thus Attebery’s definition depends on the centre being clearly defined, and books linked to that centre in some way are part of that same genre. If I take Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* as a seminal work of fantasy, McKillip’s books fit easily into the “fuzzy set” of fantasy alongside it. Mendlesohn’s taxonomy delineates the type of fantasy rather than attempting to define it as a whole. She describes four types of fantasy: liminal, portal-quest, immersive and intrusion. I have chosen to focus on McKillip’s immersive books; in Mendlesohn’s argument, “The immersive fantasy is a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world” (*Rhetorics* 59). These

¹Fantasy has numerous definitions, an excellent summary of which can be found on pp. 4-5 of Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James’s *A Short History of Fantasy*.

are books in which the reader is dropped (immersed) into a story, and the world is not discovered (portal and/or quest), nor does the fantastic intrude into our primary world (intrusive). McKillip's immersive books are also, in other terminology, secondary world books: those fantasy books that concern imagined worlds, fully realised. Mendlesohn argues that "we might want to think of the emergence of modern immersive fantasy as a rediscovery of the reality of the fantastic, and with it a set of ways to express that belief" (61). This fantastic reality is important to modern immersive fantasy as well as secondary world fantasy, and is one of the reasons I link them together here. Secondary world fantasies and immersive fantasies are also often the same books in that secondary worlds, fully realised and not attached to our Earth, often require immersion. Although secondary world fantasy and immersive fantasy are not always the same thing (for example, Mary Robinette Kowal's *Glamourist Histories* series (2010–14) which is immersive but not in a secondary world), I argue that McKillip's fantasies are both immersive and secondary world. I take a strict definition of secondary world fantasy, only using those books that I have deemed take place exclusively in a secondary world. The sixteen of her books I include in my examination are: *The Throne of the Erril of Sherril* (1973, hereafter referred to as *Throne*); *The Riddle-master Trilogy*² (*The Riddle-master of Hed* (1976), *Heir of Sea and Fire* (1977), *Harpist in*

² Although the edition of *The Riddle-master Trilogy* that I use is titled *Riddle of Stars*, I have kept with recent editions and scholarship that call the trilogy as a whole *The Riddle-master*

the Wind (1979)); *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (1974 *Forgotten*); *The Cygnet* duology (*The Sorceress and the Cygnet* (1991), *The Cygnet and the Firebird* (1993)); *The Book of Atrix Wolfe* (1995 *Wolfe*); *Song for the Basilisk* (1998 *Basilisk*); *The Tower at Stony Wood* (2000 *Tower*); *Ombria in Shadow* (2002 *Ombria*); *In The Forest of Serre* (2003 *Serre*); *The Changeling Sea* (2003 *Changeling*); *Alphabet of Thorn* (2004 *Alphabet*); *Od Magic* (2005 *Od*); and *The Bards of Bone Plain* (2010 *Bards*).

This array of books, both fantasy and strictly secondary world, enable me to narrow down McKillip's oeuvre to a manageable proportion. Creating these parameters allows me to look at a set of books that is thematically similar but different in how they treat the various aspects of time. For each chapter I have made a subselection of these books which demonstrate an especially clear treatment of the investigated feature. Each chapter has its own critical position, although Bakhtin's chronotope shows a strong influence throughout the text. I will draw upon Bakhtin's chronotope as a way of exploring time in fiction. In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics" he argues, "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84, author's emphasis). The chronotope—time rendered artistically visible—is a useful way of looking at certain immersive fantasies such as McKillip's,

wherein the past and history influence everything from the landscapes to character interaction.

Analysing the narrative context of time as a type of narrative voice can be understood through the lens of Bakhtin's chronotope. Sue Vice offers this definition:

Bakhtin describes the chronotope as the means of measuring how, in a particular genre or age, 'real historical time and space' and 'actual historical persons' are articulated, and also how fictional time, space and character are constructed in relation to one another. (201)

For this thesis the latter half of the definition is most relevant as I am examining non-mimetic fiction.

The aim of this thesis is to study McKillip more closely than has been done previously, but also to begin to examine how time works in a type of fantasy literature. Time is a closely scrutinised subject in literature, so it is remarkable how comparatively little examination of the topic has taken place in the analysis of fantasy literature. Several articles on the subject do exist, but full-length studies tend to focus on books with obvious time themes such as historical fantasies or slipstream books such as Alison Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* (1977). For example, Maria Nikolajeva in *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*, devotes several sections to time in fantasy for children. She even explains how the chronotope might be useful to

fantasy literature, though briefly. She argues that “when we speak of the fantasy chronotope we mean the way the particular author’s ideas of space and time are artistically transformed and woven into a literary text that answers our definition of fantasy” (113). Nikolajeva has thus begun to formulate what I eventually expand upon, but she goes into little more detail; furthermore, there has yet to be a study undertaken that examines time as Paul Ricoeur encourages us to do (that is, as a book that has time but is not singularly about time). There are a number of books that appear to examine time in fantasy literature, such as Verlyn Flieger’s *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Road to Faerie*. However, it examines how Tolkien was a man of his era, rather than looking at time in his works. C. Butler, in *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children’s Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper*, argues of Penelope Lively that “Rather than write historical novels in which children could immerse themselves and thus gain a vivid experience of ‘what it was really like’, Lively chooses to consider the relationship of the past to the present” (5). The same can be said of McKillip. Writing for adults as well as teens (and perhaps younger children), McKillip writes not of an actual past and history, but rather of how the past and history can affect the present, regardless of whether that is a real present.

There have been previous arguments about fantasy’s use of time, often that it is cyclical. Marek Oziewicz’s book *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic*

Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle and Orson Scott Card, for example, focuses on the mythic quality of fantasy, its archetypes and circular expression of time and culture. Maria Nikolajeva maintains a similar argument about time in *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*. She focuses on how the time moves within the narrative, though not necessarily how it infuses the book itself. For instance, she emphasises the “circular” nature of time in children’s fantasies by arguing that “Circular journeys are more common in fantasy for children than linear ones, which is natural; the child characters return to their own safe home” (42). Roderick McGillis’s argument that “fantasy rhetorically enacts the journey of return. When we begin a fantasy, we anticipate a return; we read retrospectively” (7) is a common one, with the motif of a “journey” often applied to those books Mendlesohn termed quest fantasies. I make no attempt at furthering these cases, however, and instead mean to explore how time infuses McKillip’s works, the central concern being how the grammar of the past influences them (as will be explored in Chapter One).

At first glance there is nothing remarkable about McKillip’s use of time. None of her books are focused on time travel like E. Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) does, nor are they manipulating time and narrative in interesting ways such as Diana Wynne Jones’s *Hexwood* (1993). I am not attempting to do as Simon de Bourcier did for Thomas Pynchon and look at narrative time, which de Bourcier defines as “the temporal sequence of the

story or plot, the relation of that sequence to the time of narration and the time of reading, and the narrative and syntactical representation of time” (1), though it is certainly a further aspect of time in fantasy literature that could be examined. However, the way in which time infuses—is found throughout—McKillip’s works in the form of the past is compelling, hence the focus of this thesis.

The following chapters comprise the thesis: Chronotope, Active Time, Legends, Pastoralism, Cities Built of Time, and Character and the Personal Chronotope. The chapters move in order from the broad to the specific, beginning with an investigation of chronotope and ending with an examination of how time influences particular characters. Chronotope will be featured along with other theories to explore how time influences different aspects of McKillip’s books.

The Chronotope chapter, Chapter One, will explore why I have chosen Bakhtin’s theory as a fitting frame from which to examine many of the aspects of time found in McKillip’s works. The chronotope is considered in terms of its semantic significance to the plot as well as how it can be used to group a certain type of fantasy. I argue that the chronotope of a certain type of fantasy is one rooted in the past. I provide a few examples of both primary- and secondary world fantasies before beginning to examine how some of McKillip’s works exemplify this particular chronotope.

The Active Time chapter, Chapter Two, seeks to show how the past can be altered either in memory or in reality to allow healing. It explores how time may be actively used, rather than inertly being allowed to pass. I argue that entropy, repetition and amnesia can all be used in positive ways to allow mental healing in secondary world texts that are close to, but not entirely, alternate histories.

As implied, Chapter Three, the Legends chapter, examines the legends McKillip uses to add a sense of age and depth to her works. McKillip uses legends to help to make the worlds seem as though “If you turn a corner ... you know that there will be more world there” (44) in the words of Mendlesohn and Edward James in their *A Short History of Fantasy*. McKillip’s worlds are deep not only in terms of physical space but also in terms of history, and the past and her legends are instrumental to this.

Chapter Four, Pastoralism, analyses the pastoralism inherent in many of McKillip’s books. As in many fantasies, there is a clear love of and appreciation for nature present in McKillip’s books, and I will examine how this is displayed as pastoralism, an agrarian mode that looks at a (sometimes imagined) past that valued nature and the natural. I will argue that the pastoral, though an inherently nostalgic genre, has positive, forward-looking aspects that can be useful when carefully applied.

Chapter Five: Cities Built of Time scrutinises the cities in several of McKillip’s books. I specifically look at how these cities are “built of time”;

they are old cities, with the past and history marked upon them both physically and sometimes psychologically. I will look at the structures of the cities, but also how the characters in the books move through them in order to examine character traits and motivations.

Characters and the Personal Chronotope, Chapter Six, considers how time affects characters and how they interact with others depending on their own chronology. It examines several characters who have ordinary lifespans as well as those with extended lifespans and the consequences they face—both for themselves and in interactions with others—as a result of their extended years.

A note about editions: I have primarily used the Ace editions. For *The Riddle-master* Trilogy and *Cygnets* duology I have somewhat unusually used editions that combine their respective separate books. I have made use of these not only for convenience but also because I think those titles can be usefully viewed as single narratives. In the case of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy I always treat it as a single narrative (even though it is technically three books: *The Riddle-master of Hed*, *Heir of Sea and Fire*, *Harpist in the Wind*). In the case of the *Cygnets* duology I look at the book both as a single narrative and as individual books (when an individual book is being used I refer to it individually as *Sorceress* (*The Sorceress and the Cygnets*) or *Firebird* (*The Cygnets and the Firebird*)).

Chapter One: Chronotope

Time, how it is presented, framed, and used, influences all of McKillip's works. Mark Currie argues in *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* that, "it is important to see all novels as novels about time, and perhaps, most important in the case of novels for which time does not seem to be what is principally at stake" (4). McKillip and the fantasy genre in general are no exception to Currie's argument; where they sometimes do differ is in the construction of secondary worlds, and thus how this might affect the presentation of time.

The chronotope, as a theory based around notions of time, is consequently a useful beginning from which to examine time and narrative. Neel Bemong and Pieter Borghart argue that "Bakhtin's basic assumption is the idea that narrative texts are not only composed of a sequence of diegetic events and speech acts, but also—and perhaps even primarily—of the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope" (4). Thus Bakhtin, and Bemong and Borghart in turn, argued that along with within-world sound and speech, there is also time and space. The construction of a fictional world is a part of all fiction (even all narratives it could be argued), but it is particularly visible in genres such as fantasy that work to create worlds different from our own. Time within these works will likely be different, too,

either in explicit ways (as with the use of magic to travel in time, for example) or in the way it is used (whether there is clock time, for example), or how it frames the novel with explicit or implicit narrative time.

For Bakhtin the chronotope is crucial. In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics” he offers his definition: “We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84, author’s emphasis). The combination of time and space, Bakhtin argues, is vital to what a novel aims to do and how it aims to do it. The chronotope functions on several different levels, which can be useful in terms of examining time in non-standard ways. In “Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives,” Bemong and Borghart identify the following four levels of significance of chronotopes from his conclusion: “(1) they have narrative, plot-generating significance; (2) they have representational significance; (3) they ‘provide the basis for distinguishing generic types’; and (4) they have semantic significance” (6). The only one of these I will not be examining is the second, representational significance. In this chapter I will look at each of the others, beginning with the argument that chronotopes provide the basis for distinguishing generic types, moving on to how they have narrative significance, and finishing with an exploration of how chronotopes can have semantic significance.

Generic Significance

The levels of the chronotope and time itself are figured differently in every genre. Gary Saul Morson argues that “for Bakhtin genres are neither sets of rules nor accumulations of forms and themes, but are rather ways of seeing the world” (185). For example, Bakhtin argues that in the Greek romance genre, not the whole world but just the rarities are described (“Notes” 89). He also explores how the plot has a particular arc, one that corresponds to a type of time and place:

The first meeting of hero and heroine and the sudden flare-up of their passion for each other is the starting point for plot movement; the end point of plot movement is their successful union in marriage. All action in the novel unfolds between these two points. (89)

Thus, Bakhtin argues, the plot is constrained between these two poles. He also argues that Greek adventure-time “lacks any natural, everyday cyclicality. . . . No matter where one goes in the world of the Greek romance . . . there are absolutely no indications of historical time, no identifying traces of the era” (91). Consequently, the plot and the type of time included are linked. He goes on to argue chronotopes for other genres he has devised. For instance, he argues that the travel novel starts from the familiar—from home—and works outwards. However, though the chronotope is a worthwhile theory, Bakhtin’s

use of it is imprecise and at times quite vague. This is useful in that it allows a range of interpretations, but it also means that I will not be attempting an exact replica of what Bakhtin (perhaps) means when he formulates the chronotope.

If each genre has its own patterns and time, then, as Maria Holmgren Troy argues, “Specific chronotopes are associated with specific plots. In a sense the chronotope indicates which plots are possible in a narrative at a specific historical moment, and thus which genre conventions are put into play” (13). Chronotope, in Troy’s amalgamation, precedes genre. Chronotope is the necessary starting point not just for an examination of time, but for a text’s genre as well.

Bakhtin did not use his chronotope theory on many examples of speculative fiction (gothic fiction is one), but there is a clear argument for doing so. When applied to genre literatures such as science fiction and fantasy it can provide useful insight into a range of effects. Science fiction has a grammar of the future, for example; Tom A. Shippey argues in his introduction to the *The Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories* that “[Science fiction] is overwhelmingly urban, disruptive, *future-oriented*, eager for novelty” (ix). Science fiction looks to the future for its tropes, ideas, and momentum.

Discussing speculative fiction, John Clute argues that “Genre began when the creation of geological time and evolutionary change began to carve

holes in reality, which became suddenly malleable" (*Pardon* 3). Clute argues that geological time (that is, the realisation that the Earth was far older than previously thought) and Darwin's theory of evolution changed how humans perceived a time, and a history, that had seemed unquestionable before. Suddenly something that had seemed certain—the ordered march from past to future—had been disrupted and changed. The world, which within Christendom had a finite age, was suddenly much older than it had appeared. These two facets of human history shifted how people perceived time. Clute argues that when this happened, Western literature changed to encompass this new understanding. The works of Virginia Woolf are full of this new awareness of time, for example in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925):

Through all the ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise—the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love—love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone. (89)

There are several different views of time encoded within this one moment where a beggar woman sings next to a tube station: the knowledge that the Earth is ancient, that the particular spot on which the woman stands is thousands of years old, that the ideas she sings of (namely: love) are ancient. And yet, the reader understands that this woman has not really loved for a million years, just as her lover cannot have been dead for longer than her lifetime; it is that it has seemed that way to her. The infinitesimally small moment in which she has lived her life has seemed millions of years long while actually being quite short and while the land she stands on has actually been present for millennia. Time is presented in all its dimensions, from the huge and ancient to the small and present moment.

Morson argues that viewing genre through the lens of time and space shifts the focus off of topoi and onto the attitude that the work expresses about time. The fantastic, like other genres, thus has its own ways of seeing the world. Mark Currie argues that there can be a “tensed view of time” (*About Time* 15). I would argue that fantasy has a past tense. What those ideas of space and time are is woven into how fantasy as a genre interacts with time, and I argue that this is an idea of times past. This does not mean that a fantasy must be *set* in the past, rather that a sense of past (in themes, creatures, attitudes, landscapes, etc.) is present. This is also separate from the historical novel, which might also have a grammar of the past but is not fantasy both for reasons of the fantastic (magic, dragons, other worlds, etc.)

and because, as Umberto Eco explains in *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, “by furnishing a world in a historical novel: some elements, like the number of steps, can be determined by the author, but others . . . depend on the real world” (27). Fantasy fiction does not have to “depend on the real world” in the same measure as more mimetic fiction.

Fantasy has a grammar of the past and it looks to the past, rather than the future, for answers and inspiration. A grammar, according to *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, “describes the principles or rules governing the form or meaning of words, phrases, clauses and sentences” (Huddleston and Pullum 3). While I use grammar in a looser sense, a grammar of the past tense *suggests* rather than “rules”, for example, this is still a useful definition.

Expanding grammar to describe an entire view of the world is not so large a stretch as it might at first appear.³ Just as grammar indicates the relation of individual words to a sentence, so too can it be expanded to indicate the relation of bigger groups of objects to the world, or, in this case, to the novel. A grammar of the past indicates that there is a particular tense in use. While I do not mean this literally; many fantasies are told in the present, it does mean that the definition of tense is useful: “The general term tense applies to a system where the basic or characteristic meanings of the terms is

³ This is not a new concept of course: Saussure and others have applied it to linguistics, structuralism, etc.

to locate the situation, or part of it, at some point or period of time”
(Huddleston and Pullum, *Grammar* 116). Thus fantasy locates itself in a particular “point of time,” though it offers a variation: that it is a time that *might* have gone by, but did not.

Clute argues that “Fantasy treats the present world as a *mistake* created by the engine of history, a mistake which must be refused through the creation of counterworlds and secret gardens as respite” (*Pardon* 4, author’s emphasis). Spread throughout these counterworlds are references to “lost” forms of government (such as monarchy), “lost” creatures (vampires, werewolves), and perhaps even a lapsed type of morality. In his introduction to *Worlds Enough and Time: Explorations of Time and Space in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Gary Westfahl argues that “One foundation of fantasy appears to be a longing to return to the past, accompanied by the sense that the passing of time has brought humanity only decline and degeneration” (1). This longing, along with other aspects of the past and time’s incarnation, creates those secret gardens and counterworlds of which Clute speaks. Thus McKillip and other authors working in the same tradition of fantasy (such as Guy Gavriel Kay, Susan Cooper, Lloyd Alexander, and others) share a particular chronotope, and it is, as Carl Darryl Malmgren argues, one that “the mood for fantasy fiction ... is *could not have happened*” (8, author’s emphasis). Fantasy is fantastic, but it is a fantastic that resides in the past of the public consciousness. This aspect is not unique to fantasy literature. Prelapsarianism

and postlapsarianism, as found in literature as diverse as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and works of utopian fiction, contain elements of this backwards looking ideology as well. What differentiates fantasy is twofold. The first is the genre distinction that makes fantasy fantastic: that is, the inclusion of the impossible (although texts such as *Paradise Lost* might be considered fantasy). The second is that fantasy is not simply looking back at the past, it is grounded in this past in that it re/creates a new past, one that did not exist.

Before continuing I offer the warning that though I argue fantasy has a grammar of the past, I am aware that this is a simplification of an enormous and loosely bound form of literature. I would not, for example, go so far as to completely agree with Westfahl who argues that "It is a truism to suggest that virtually all fantasies, either explicitly or implicitly, take place in an imagined past and are infused with tropes and props from various ancient and medieval cultures" (1), as I do not find that it *is* a truism with today's fantasy. Working out how all types of fantasy—everything from the urban *The City's Son* (2012) by Tom Pollock to the unusual *Perdido Street Station* (2001) by China Miéville—work within this grammar is outside the remit of this thesis, but further work on this idea would be worthwhile.

I would also like to note that just because I formulate fantasy as a literature of the past does not mean I see it as a regressive, inherently

conservative genre. As Brian Attebery argues in *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*:

Fantasy, if considered at all within the historical narrative, is treated as an eddy in the time stream, a nostalgic swing into an imaginary past. Its kings, countryside, and spirituality are seen as inconsequential archaisms, temporary fads, just as the Tolkien boom of the 1960s was expected to be a temporary phenomenon.

(42)

This aspect of assumed regression will be examined further in Chapter Four, as pastoralism is another form of literature often dismissed as one that remains mired in the past.

A brief look at how other authors of fantasy fit within this chronotope is useful before moving on to McKillip. Monica Furlong's the *Doran* series (*Wise Child, Juniper, Colman* 1987–2004) is a primary world fantasy, but works with a grammar of the past. The books take place in a version of medieval Britain. The introduction to the first book, *Wise Child* (1987), is quite specific about its time and place in the primary world, which is somewhat unusual for a fantasy: "Wise Child and Juniper lived in the seventh century in the Kingdom of Dalriada, now part of Scotland, on the island that we call Mull" (Furlong 8). The books, although full of magical happenings, are treated as authentic past. The "lived" indicates that the reader is to take the book as truth, as full of things that actually happened in the past. The books have a

strong feel of the past, with witches (or “Dorans” as they prefer to be known in the books as opposed to the “vulgar word for it that can mean all kinds of things” (85): witches) and herb lore as some of their principal elements. The distrust ordinary people have for the Dorans is generally the central motivating factor of the books, and this somewhat “old-fashioned” view of those who are different frames the novel.

Mercedes Lackey’s *Heralds of Valdemar* (1987–88) series is a good example of a “typical” secondary world fantasy. The series has a clear grammar of the past in that it recreates the topoi (i.e. commonplaces) of the past in a largely non-mechanised world. It has very few machines, horses are the primary form of transportation, and the types of governance are generally old-fashioned (the primary country of Valdemar, for example, is a monarchy). It also harks back to an age when messengers on horseback provided a vital service, and many of the topoi are medieval in feel, if perhaps not in truth.

Annette Curtis Klause’s *Blood and Chocolate* (1997) also provides a grammar of the past even though it is set in the primary world, is contemporary in time frame, and takes place in the ordinary suburbia of the United States. The book has a grammar of the past in its insistence on a return to the “Old Way” (as the werewolf pack terms their traditions) of doing things; being too modern has brought trouble for the protagonists of the book. The book also concerns werewolves—a supernatural creature with a long history—and contains a topos (or commonplace) that brings with it a “return

to nature” feel. The book is told from the viewpoint of Vivian, a werewolf or “loup-garou” (French for “werewolf” and the preferred name in the pack), whose struggles within her pack occupy much of the plot. Her wish to be accepted by a human world to which she feels superior provides an ongoing tension in the book. As a YA novel, the struggle with identity and the need to fit in is central: “Male or female, they resisted her. Could they see the forest in her eyes, the shadow of her pelt? Were her teeth too sharp? *It’s hard not to be a wolf*” (Klause 15, author’s emphasis). The return-to-nature motif is quite strong in spite of the book’s urban setting. It also argues for a return to values previously held (even if those values are not human in origin).

Plot points and topoi fit the chronotope of these novels with a grammar of the past, but this is of course not the only respect in which these three novels and series function within this paradigm. The language used, the tone, and the characters’ attitudes all combine to create this feeling of the past, this intersection of time and place that creates the chronotope of fantasy.

Before I analyse McKillip’s particular fantasy in terms of a chronotope, we must recognise that Bakhtin’s chronotope is time, but it is also space. Two of the chapters of this thesis focus specifically on types of space found within McKillip’s fiction (Chapter Four and Five respectively), but each chapter is informed by the sense that a particular time is impressed into space. That is, the space of the novels is just as influential as the time, and each affects the

other. While Bakhtin discusses both time and space in relation to the chronotope, this thesis will focus primarily on time.

Stories are told *in* time as well as *about* time, and this necessarily influences the narrative. Bakhtin argues in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics” that chronotopes have plot-generating significance. As Robert Stam explains, “Through the idea of the chronotope, Bakhtin shows how concrete spatiotemporal structures in literature limit narrative possibility, shape characterization, and mould a discursive simulacrum of life and the world” (11). Certain types of plot are possible only within certain types of space time, thus the chronotope influences what kind of stories can be told (“adventure time” in Bakhtin’s terms, tragedies, gothic tales, etc.), and how they are presented. Umberto Eco argues, “The fact is that the characters are obliged to act according to the laws of the world in which they live” (29). Bakhtin argues, and Stam in turn notes, that the chronotope is one of the most vital of these “laws” that affect how a character acts.

Using *Blood and Chocolate* as an example once again, we can see how the chronotope can influence plot. For example, the main character Vivian is a contemporary teenager; one who both glories in her werewolf self but also wants to be “normal”. A completely human boy she finds herself attracted to is dismissed: “He was a human after all: a meat-boy scantily furred, an incomplete creature who had only one form” (Klause 34). Though she is

attracted to him and the normality he represents, her thoughts are derisive.

Many of the conflicts in the book are driven by the contradiction that in attempting to be normal Vivian is fighting against her werewolf heritage and culture, against an old pattern of thoughts and ideas. Vivian reveals herself to a non-werewolf against all tenets of the werewolf-pack codes because she wants to feel normal. In doing so, she endangers the pack and herself because “meat-boy” Aidan cannot deal with her reality.

Fighting against the traditional power structures in the pack also has consequences, in the past and present of the book. The book begins with a fire, and Vivian’s father being killed trying to rescue pack members. They have been burned out of their home because some of the younger male werewolves are out of control and have exposed their true selves to humans. Most of the rest of the book is spent dealing with the consequences of having lost important pack members to the fire, and also having to deal with the continued rebellion of the younger members. The “Old Way” has to be reinstated because being too human has cost them. This description makes *Blood and Chocolate* seem inherently conservative, and perhaps it is in some ways, but it is also important to note that there are good reasons for the strictures of the pack, reasons that move beyond mere tradition. I will not go into the problematic relationship between Vivian and pack leader Gabriel (or the gender politics in general of the book) in depth as it is not relevant to the argument I wish to make. However, Gabriel stalks Vivian for most of the

book, convinced she is his mate whether or not she likes the idea, and “or not” is her attitude through the entire book until the very end. The validation of this behaviour is the validation of conservation gender mores, and this can be troubling. The pack’s return to the “Old Way” is also problematic in that it inherently reinforces a patriarchy as the male wolves are the stronger and chosen as leaders (which also does a disservice to real wolves whose pack structures are more complicated). I would note that a grammar of the past can be both a positive force for change with an eye towards the good of the past as argued in Chapter Four, or a conservative wish to stay in the status quo. *Blood and Chocolate* undoubtedly has a grammar of the past, and if it is regressive rather than progressive, as I argue many of McKillip’s books are, remains irrelevant to my overall argument.

Narrative Significance

As in *Blood and Chocolate*, some of McKillip’s books are shaped by the types of chronotope that they include. The limitation of narrative possibility (that is, what the chronotope “allows” the work to cover) works well within several of McKillip’s books such as *The Riddle-master Trilogy* or *Alphabet*, but nowhere is this more apparent than in *Bards*, where individual characters’ chronotopes shape narrative. *Bards* deals with the characters Nairn and his son Phelan. As a famous bard, Nairn was cursed to immortality in a competition near the beginning of his country’s founding. His son Phelan

writes a research paper on Nairn (whom he knows as Jonah) for his own (unwanted) Bardic mastery. The book is split between chapters of the research paper Phelan writes, time in the novel's present, and time in Nairn's past.

Bakhtin restricted the chronotope to a term for a type of literary phenomenon; however, it can be usefully broadened. A person's place in time is measured through age; it could be argued, therefore, that a person's lifespan is their own personal chronotope. What is important here is to note that a person's chronotope makes a difference to how he or she perceives, is perceived, and behaves. In works of fantasy such as McKillip's, age is further complicated by the addition of supernatural lifespans. The difference between mortals and immortals in McKillip's series and the effect these various lifespans have on characters, which is usually different from what is expected, will be explored further in Chapter Six.

Characters have differing relationships to lifespan, which renders the concept of the chronotope useful when considering situations within the book (characters) as well as outside of it (readers).

In *Bards*, the interaction of different personal chronotopes affects the plot. Most of the characters in *Bards* are perfectly ordinary in that their lifespans match those found in our primary world. This includes Nairn's son, Phelan. The conflict between Nairn's extended lifespan and the other characters' ordinary ones is what drives much of the book's story. Phelan and Nairn are father and son, but their radically different lifespans (and thus

personal chronotopes) mean that they are locked in conflict throughout the book. Their lifespans should be similar. Human beings take their ageing process (at least in part) from their genetics; therefore, the ageing process is largely patterned after one's progenitors. Nairn's curse of immortality throws off their father-son relationship completely.

With his extended chronotope, Nairn has seen countless families live and die, and is consequently haphazard with both his own actions, and his actions towards those he loves. His strange behaviour is legendary, but his son Phelan is the one that takes it personally. At the beginning of the book Phelan asks Nairn, "Tell me what you are. Tell me how I can understand why you are here, sitting in mud and rubble on the river's edge at dawn in this desolate wasteland" (McKillip, *Bards* 3). Phelan's inability to understand and relate to his father means that he does not confide in him at any of the crucial junctures of the book. For example, Nairn surely would have recognised his own story were Phelan to explain his Bardic mastery topic, but he does not. Were Nairn to have had a better relationship with Phelan, he might have been able to share his unease about the Bardic stranger who has appeared. Perhaps then Phelan would have been reluctant to engage in competition with the stranger. Instead, any warnings have the opposite effect of sending Phelan to investigate, and Phelan becomes trapped in the same competition as the one that cursed his father.

Gershon Reiter argues that “unfortunately, nowadays many sons feel like sons of Abraham, sons who feel sacrificed for their father’s personal priorities” (109). This can be a useful way to look at Phelan and Nairn’s relationship as well. Nairn is willing to sacrifice Phelan and forces his own priorities on him; Phelan is made to go to a bardic school, though he hates it. Phelan’s resentment of his father’s driving will is clear, but his father’s motives less so. Because their very different chronotopes are not known (because Nairn must pretend to be an ordinary human in the guise of Jonah), their conflict is extended from that of an ordinary father/son disagreement. Nairn forces the Bardic profession on his son, but cannot explain why. His obsession with archaeology and his constant despair greatly trouble his son and affect their relationship, but it cannot be explained with what Phelan knows of his father. What Phelan thinks of as his father’s peculiarities are quite logical, or at least understandable, in light of Nairn’s extended years and experiences. For example, Nairn searches with archaeology and seemingly random holes for the location of plain on which he was cursed, but cannot articulate that this is what he is doing. Thus they struggle to understand each other, and Nairn’s goals for Phelan often seem unreasonable, causing Phelan to fight back in any way he is able. Phelan feels like Isaac: sacrificed for his father’s goals without knowing or understanding the true goal.

In *Ombria*, too, the plot is driven by a difference in age and, consequently, a difference in personal chronotope. *Ombria* takes place in the

failing city of Ombria where the old prince has just died, his son is a child, and the regent is his power-mad great (perhaps great-great-great) Aunt Domina Pearl. The old prince's mistress, Lydea, and bastard nephew, Ducon Greve, must try to save the young Prince Kyel as well as themselves and the city of Ombria. Complicating matters is Faey, an ancient sorceress who lives beneath the city, and her assistant called variously "the waxling" or Mag. The nemesis of the story, Domina Pearl, is old but she is not as ancient as the mysterious sorceress Faey, and this affects how they deal with one another. As will be explored in Chapter Six, Domina Pearl is Regent and the official, though ruthless, authority of the city-state of Ombria. Faey is the unofficial authority, residing underground, sometimes helping and sometimes hindering Domina Pearl depending on who pays her. Domina Pearl began as human, even if she has found ways of prolonging her life through sorcery. Faey, however, though of unknown origins, seems to have always been immortal. To Faey, nearly everything is business and she does not involve herself in the politics of the city of Ombria in a personal way; who reigns is of no interest to her. For Domina Pearl however, everything is personal. Domina's tenuous hold on the power in Ombria and the overarching pressure of her natural chronotope limits her patience; she makes enemies of people who it would have been easier to persuade because, like a mortal, she is driven by a fear of time running out. Were she to have the patience of

someone with a naturally longer chronotope, like Faey, she probably could have ruled undisturbed for generations more.

There are numerous examples of Domina Pearl's rashness driving the plot forward. She needlessly sends away the young Prince Kyel's beloved nurse for no particular reason other than to have full control of him. He would have been a more biddable child ruler if he had been happy and surrounded by those he loves. Domina Pearl's urgency causes her to misjudge Ducon Greve badly. Had he been left alone he would have come to nothing, but Domina Pearl's constant blackmail and sabotage leave him no choice but to rebel. Ducon Greve acts only after Domina has threatened him; before that he is a fairly feckless character. Domina Pearl also goes after Faey when it would have been more prudent to ignore her (and her helper Mag who, though meddlesome, is not particularly dangerous). Were Domina Pearl to have lain dormant, as Faey does, it is possible she could have raised the prince in a way favourable to herself with no interference from the other characters in the book. None of the principal actors—Lydea, Ducon Greve, the young prince, or even the treacherous tutor Camas Erl—is looking to steal Domina Pearl's authority. She shows her power, and her malevolence, too early and loses the power she has worked so long to secure.

Immortality will be explored further in Chapter Six. For now, I will discuss how an immortal's personal chronotope influences plot. *The Riddle-master* Trilogy follows Morgon, prince of the rural Island of Hed, as he

searches for the meaning of the stars branded on his face since birth (and his attendant destiny, or set future). It also follows Raederle, the woman he wishes to marry, whose own inheritance of immortal shape-shifter blood causes complications.

The shape-shifters fought a long ago battle with the Earth-masters (the only one of whom seemingly still survives is the strongest, called “The High Lord”) and were defeated at great cost, but they have returned in a bid to prevent Morgon from fulfilling his destiny as the High Lord’s all-powerful heir. Morgon’s love Raederle is one character whose chronotope influences the plot; the discovery of her true chronotope is so unsettling to her that it drives her forward into actions she would not have considered otherwise.

Although Raederle from *Riddle-master* comes by her immortality (or presumed immortality) congenitally, she learns of this heritage quite late and spends her formative years with the assumption that she is fully human, with an ordinary human chronotope. This difference between assumed chronotope and actual chronotope changes her life and her actions.

Learning in young adulthood that she has shape-changer blood, and therefore a potential for destructive power and immortality, is a great shock to Raederle and one that renders her, at least temporarily, unstable. For example, because it is an aspect of her shape-changer blood she refuses to change into bird shape even though it would make her and Morgon’s journey much safer and easier. She does not want to use the power that shape-shifter blood gives

her because in doing so she sees herself as less human. Her chronotope, one that she has experienced as fully human until this point, is both extended and changed by her ability to shape-change. Because she refuses to change shape, she and Morgon are nearly trapped by Morgon's enemy the wizard Ohm. Their journey becomes much more dangerous, and the character Deth is injured helping them to escape. As at other points in the books Morgon has been able to avoid detection easily by shape-changing, it can be assumed that this would have been the case here as well. This sudden, petty-seeming refusal to what Morgon sees as a simple request is influenced exclusively by her newfound powers. Awareness of her shape-changer heritage from an ordinary human perspective, and at a relatively young age, has deranged her. Soon after she is told of her shape-changing abilities, another character speaks with her: "So. That sent you into the night. And you think, in the midst of this chaos, that it matters?" And she replies, "It matters! I have inherited a shape-changer's power—I can feel it!" (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 298–99).

To Raederle, her newfound heritage is more upsetting than almost anything else. Several of her decisions in the book are based entirely on her reactions to her newfound heritage (and its attendant unnaturally elongated chronotope) and what it means for her and the people around her. For example, she leaves the safety of the King Danan's household impetuously: "She could not find the stables in the dark, so she walked out of the King's yard, down the mountain road in the thin moonlight to the Ose" (295). She

has left in the dark, without appropriate provisions or even a map because the thought of her shape-changer heritage and its non-human chronotope has unnerved her so much. Although Raederle has been presented as strong-willed (she refuses to marry, for example) she is not presented as foolish until the discovery of her non-human heritage changes her actions.

Raederle and Morgon both fight against their destinies because destiny means that their time is not truly their own. Fantasy does not present destiny in the science-fictional terms of set futures; rather, it is generally considered a good thing, a wonderful circumstance, to have a destiny to “look forward to”. Fate is often presented as a reward, as the end that a hero deserves for following the correct actions. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, charts the following path for the hero: the hero starts in the ordinary world and receives a call to adventure. If the hero accepts the call, he (in Campbell’s iteration it is almost always a male) must face tasks and trials. The hero must survive a severe challenge, often with help earned along the journey. At the end he will perhaps be given a reward of some sort, and this is often the glorious fate that has been promised the hero. This is not always the case; there are exceptions. One is Mercedes Lackey’s *The Mage Winds* Trilogy (1991–93), which follows the Princess Elspeth as she goes out of her way to extract herself from a destiny that has been assigned. Destiny means that choice is limited, and both Lackey and McKillip explore that limitation in their respective works.

Much of the first two books of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy are occupied not with Morgon's destiny but his attempts to escape that destiny. Although McKillip follows the usual hero's destiny charted by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, she does so in a way that makes it clear that having a destiny is not always a positive. Raederle, and especially Morgon, have had immortality of a sort thrust upon them as destiny; they were born assuming they were fully human, with an ordinary human lifespan, and neither happily accepts this change to immortal but tries to change it. The difference between their destinies creates interesting psychological implications.

The extended chronotopes of both Morgon and Raederle are symptoms of their destinies. For Morgon, the realisation that he is being driven towards a destiny set out long before he was born is both frightening and enraging. That the shape-changers are willing to kill him and anyone who is helping him towards his destiny is certainly an important reason for him to be enraged, but it is not all. Those who, like his parents, are innocent of any knowledge of his destiny are still casualties in the war waged to keep him from fulfilling his destiny, and he has been put on a path without his knowledge, much less consent. Neither Raederle nor Morgon have any idea that they have an unusual chronotope, and learning that they do causes changes in their perceptions and actions. Another character notes to Raederle of Morgon, "He is the Star-Bearer. I think he was destined to live," and Raederle answers, "You make that sound more like doom" (McKillip, *Riddle-*

master 259). It is a painful path, and one Morgon is forced back onto, often with terrible consequences, such as when the ship he is on is wrecked. Though he survives, he is wounded and made mute, unable to help himself or even say who he is. At first Morgon tries to escape his destiny (the fixed future set out for him without his knowledge or consent), and its attendant chronotope. However, each time he struggles away from his destiny, he is forced back towards it. Destiny has forced the otherwise level-headed Raederle into imprudent action to escape it, and it does the same to Morgon.

In several ways, K. J. Parker's *Scavenger* Trilogy (*Shadow, Pattern, Memory* 2001–03) is an interesting counterpoint to McKillip's *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, both in the mysteries they provide and how they answer them. In both novels the chronotopes of the characters are unusual. For Parker's main character, time is slippery because Poldarn is a god, though one who does not remember who he is and only experiences snatches of memory in his dreams. As a result, he simultaneously has an extended view on the world as well as an extremely shortened one due to his memory loss. Poldarn is simultaneously McKillip's Deth; as a god he can see patterns and has lived numerous lives; but Parker's Poldarn is also McKillip's Morgon, stumbling through life from one problem to the next, unsure of where he is going or why. As with Raederle and Morgon, there is the conflict created between what Poldarn thinks is his chronotope (an ordinary human one) and what his

actual chronotope is (that of a god). In both McKillip and Parker the characters' convoluted chronotopes enhance the sense of mystery.

Both McKillip and Parker build their plots around these mysteries. For Parker however, the line of narrative is even more convoluted than with McKillip. Morgon, like Poldarn, is fighting off a destiny, and like Poldarn he does not know what that destiny is. Poldarn is like Raederle, rightly afraid of himself; he has tremendous power to harm, even (especially) if he does not mean it. The crucial difference is that Parker foregrounds these convolutions in ways that McKillip does not. What seem like loose ends in the *Scavenger* Trilogy are not; rather, time for Poldarn (and thus the reader) is *kairos*, "poised between beginning and end" (Kermode 46). Every piece ties into every other so that Poldarn has a whole, rational history, even if it can only be seen from the end. Were his history to be a straightforward succession of events, as in other books, it would be *chronos*, in Frank Kermode's iteration. In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: With a New Epilogue*, Kermode argues that "Within this organization that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future: what was *chronos* becomes *kairos*" (46, author's emphasis). Poldarn's inability to remember his past, and Raederle and Morgon of *Riddle-master's* inability to know their true pasts or future destinies, means that their time is *kairos*. Neither trilogy can be an orderly succession of events, even if for Parker and McKillip the mysteries

have different answers and different goals which is in evidence by the way answers are (or are not, in the case of McKillip) provided.

One further way in which the *Scavenger* Trilogy is an interesting counterpoint to McKillip's is the way in which the reader experiences time. Part of the overall chronotope of the novels is the way in which the readers perceive the plot (and thus, time within the novel as well). In Parker's work, Poldarn's amnesia skews his sense of time, and since his viewpoint is the one a reader follows, the reader's sense of time is awry as well. Returning to Kermode, who argues;

The clock's *tick-tock* I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organisation that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize. (45, author's emphasis)

Both Parker and McKillip interrupt this standard sequence of tick-tock and explore what happens in between the order. For example, in *Bards* the way that the reader experiences time influences how the plot unfolds: the several mysteries that underpin the novel are enhanced by the movements back and forth through time as the reader is left to piece together the mysteries that consume the characters. This gives the narrative a fractured feel. David Wittenberg argues that "since all narratives do something like 'travel' through time or construct 'alternate' worlds—one could arguably call narrative itself a

‘time machine’, which is to say, a mechanism for revising the arrangements of stories and histories” (1). McKillip is by no means the only author to destabilise temporal order in a novel, but in the instances explored above it is less for the sake of experimenting with narrative technique and more a consequence of the stories McKillip wishes to tell. The chronotope is plot-generating.

Tanya Huff’s *The Blood Book* series (1991–97) also features interactions between an immortal and a human, which influence the overall plot. The main protagonist, Vicki, is a private investigator with retinitis pigmentosa. She teams up with the vampire bastard son of Henry VIII, Henry Fitzroy, in order to solve a series of supernatural crimes. Vicki is a fiercely independent person, but her deteriorating eyesight means she must depend on Henry far more than she would like. It also means that the power balance between mortal and immortal is further upset. Henry is considerably stronger than her, but Vicki holds her own in interesting ways, fighting Henry’s help in every book. Henry muses in *Blood Trail* (1992) “he’d been trying to figure out if Vicki was infinitely adaptable to circumstances or just so single-minded that anything not leading to her current goal was ignored” (Huff 76). Vicki’s independence combined with Henry’s age-gathered wisdom combines in ways to drive the plot forward as each deals with the other’s different chronotope.

The time Henry has lived means that he has clear advantages over the ordinary Vicki; however, Huff does not allow the power balance to be as unequal as this implies. In her much shorter time span Vicki has acquired knowledge that is itself useful, both with her history degree and her police work. She is described in *Blood Price* (1991): “Vicki had been one of the best, three accelerated promotions and two citations attested to that, and more importantly, her record of solved crimes had been almost the highest in the department” (Huff 40). Huff, like McKillip, is not convinced that infinite age trumps all. However, for Henry immortality is not a curse in the ways that it is for many of McKillip’s characters. Aside from clearly vampiric characteristics he seems more human than many of McKillip’s immortals, perhaps in part because Huff’s work is based in the primary world, while McKillip can stretch the “humanity” of her immortals further in the secondary world (the shape-changing immortals of McKillip’s *Riddle-master* for example). Where Henry does differ is that his “beast” (his primitive, ancient part) is closer to the surface than it is in most of the ordinary humans that surround him. His chronotope is both longer than those of the mortals around him and more primitive in the sense that he has a stronger connection to human’s ancient selves and his own longer past than ordinary people do. One example among many is when, “The players closest to him edged away, recognising the hunter” (Huff, *Price* 312). Henry is closer to the beast, and to humanity’s forebears, than the contemporary humans around him, and this is

treated as an attractive quality. In this way Huff plays with the concept of immortal and non-immortal in a way different to McKillip. There is a clear grammar of the past: even amidst the trappings of twentieth-century Toronto there is still the yearning for the past, as exemplified by Henry's charismatic "beast/hunter" personality, his longing for simpler times, and the various supernatural creatures that he and Vicki encounter.

Semantic Significance

Finally we come to another level of the chronotope, semantic significance; that is, how the chronotope is conveyed through signifiers such as descriptions. Morson argues that "the chronotope gives the literary text the qualities of a world that can be imaginatively inhabited by readers" (212). Allowing the reader to "imaginatively inhabit" the world is of primary importance to fantasy, and thus the chronotope employed is vital to every aspect of secondary world creation. In their essay, Bemong and Borghart argue that the "major chronotopes should be conceived of in constructivist terms as supratextual entities, as impressions, that is, left in the mind of the reader through an aggregate of textual strategies, both of a narratological and thematic nature"(10).

Bakhtin used the example of a gothic castle:

the traces of centuries and generations are arranged in it in visible form as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings,

weapons. . . . And finally legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events. (246)

One can see the semantic significance of the past in Mervyn Peake's fantasy *Titus Groan* (1946), which is full of the past, its buildings crumbling with history. Werner Wolf in "Description as a Transmedial Mode of Representation: General Features and Possibilities of Realization in Painting, Fiction and Music" argues that "the descriptive, as also, for instance, narrative—is a common macro-mode of organizing signs that can occur in everyday life as well as in various other situations, text types and genres" (2). These "impressions" of a chronotope are felt throughout McKillip's works in the sense of the past. Bryan S. Rennie argues that "the nostalgia is not for a chronological past, an actual or historical condition; rather it is for an imaginary ideal which none the less functions as an exemplar" (79), and this works within fantasy. This exemplar of times past is infused throughout the fantasy: the vocabulary used and the mood evoked are impressions left on the reader's mind and help to shape the chronotope.

Descriptions in fantasy are often "signs" pointing to a grammar of the past: the words used as description within a text can be used to identify the tense. Like McKillip's, Peake's descriptions provide not just facts for the book, but atmosphere, as can be discerned in this early passage:

The plaster walls arose on every side into a dusky and apparently ceiling-less gloom, lit only by a high, solitary window. The warm light that found its way through the web-choked glass of this window gave hint of galleries yet further above. . . . From this high window a few rays of sunlight, like copper wires, were strung steeply and diagonally across the hall, each one terminating in its amber pool of dust on the floorboards. (*Titus Groan* 18)

With this description, Peake provides an atmosphere of great age and disuse. Gormenghast castle has its own chronotope, one that is ancient; “web-choked” and “amber pool of dust” are not only descriptive, they intimate a place that has been very still for a long time. Of course, this is the enigmatic Gormenghast, and in the next paragraph figures scurry through the disused hall, but it is part of the narrative that the whole castle seems abandoned. Gormenghast’s atmosphere of age but also gloom (“dusky,” “terminated”) is skilfully evoked. Gormenghast’s chronotope is also distinct because of the use of ritual, such as with the ledgers described in *Titus Groan*:

The left hand pages were headed with the date and in the first of the three books this was followed by a list of the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. The exact times; the garments to be worn for each occasion and the symbolic gestures to be used. Diagrams facing the left hand

page gave particulars of the routes by which his lordship should approach the various scenes of operation. (Peake 49)

The people of Gormenghast are constrained in both space and time by ritual. Time is prescribed in minute detail for the people within the castle. There is little or no connection to the outside world, and as a result the rituals within the ancient castle are the chronotope, not just ways of dividing it.

McKillip uses her descriptions for different purposes than Peake's, but they similarly evoke atmosphere with description, and with that atmosphere comes a sense of tense. Wolf argues for "the descriptive as a mental concept or cognitive frame" (5), and this is one of the useful ways to observe description: as a framing device that highlights the grammar of the overall text and clues the reader in to how the text ought to be read.

In McKillip's fantasies the past is imbued in her landscape, cities, characters, and legends, as I will explore in my other chapters. Stuart Allan argues that chronotope is the ordering of events in a text, but also the other elements of a novel that join together to give a sense of the time and place:

The production of narrative meaning vis-à-vis this ordering of causal events is a complex process of negotiation, one involving a range of questions, regarding, amongst other matters, the means by which the text configures a specific representation of the world ('the world of the text') and how this representation,

in turn, correlates with the world ostensibly 'outside' of the text itself. (126)

A particularly good example of this in McKillip can be found in *Basilisk*. *Basilisk* follows Caladrius, an orphan raised by Bards, who has a mysterious past. Caladrius eventually remembers that he is the oldest child of the Tormalyne family, who in a bloody coup were (almost) all killed by the Pelliors, their rival House in the city of Berylon. Head of the Pellior family is the ruthless Basilisk, whose daughter Luna shows a similar propensity for magic. *Basilisk* is a story about music: the main character is a bard, music is a weapon both literally (a magic pipe features as an assassination tool) and figuratively and features throughout the book. It is also a story about restitution of past wrongs and as such it is perhaps unsurprising that the word "past" is used heavily throughout.

Philippe Hamon argues that "A descriptive system ... sets up *lexical* and *stylistic* expectations" (158, author's emphasis). Expectations are set up in the first few pages of *Basilisk* as the word *past* is used repeatedly, emphasising how important this particular aspect of time is to the story as well as to fantasy as a whole. Past is repeated in a variety of ways and circumstances, often entwined with music: "his voice was dark and taut with past" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 7); "past and terror receded, blocked by sound as tuneless as a wave" (9); "A bard changed the past to song, set it to music, and made it safe" (13). In *Basilisk* music makes the past safe by distancing it from the present reality: "At

Luly, such violence becomes transformed into poetry. Time and the traditional order of words make it unreal. Past. Until the end. When words made themselves real again” (171). Like literature and other forms of art in the primary world, music in *Basilisk* serves as a way to deal with trauma indirectly. This conflation of music and past—past coming back out of poetry and music into reality—is a common theme in McKillip’s works, but in *Basilisk* it is particularly noticeable. Characters are marked by the turmoil they have been through, as are the buildings of the city. The past, and discovering the truth in the history, is vital to moving forward (as explored further in Chapter Two), and this is reflected time and again in the language of the book.

Although McKillip describes time in the ordinary fashion of chronological sequence, she also describes time’s forward movement as a physical process. The main character of *Basilisk*, Caladrius introduces the reader to a sense of time passed:

He recognized it little by little: the change of seasons in a city of stone. Light from the setting sun drew shadows of a different slant along the street. The light itself, warm and limpid, had loosened its burning grip on the city; its fiery brilliance had softened to harvest golds. (196)

McKillip does not explicitly point out that it is autumn and that time has passed for Caladrius in the city, but the reader is made aware with the language she employs; “its fiery brilliance had softened” indicates the suns

waning not just in terms of setting, but in terms of the intensity that marks seasons. Time has passed in a way that has nothing to do with the ticking of clocks, but rather with the physical markers of light and colour.

The same type of marker can be found in some of her other works. For example, in *Serre* a night is described passing without any mention of hours: “The moon only grew cold, distant, gathering its stars about it, wandering away into some darker realm, leaving the forest black around him” (McKillip 60). This rich sentence, detailed with the moon’s personification (“gathering its stars about it,” “wandering”), combines to describe night passing without reference to clocks or “civilised” time. With the character Prince Ronan lost in wilderness and madness, it is appropriate that there is no orderly time mentioned, rather only what he can observe. In her earliest secondary world fantasy, *Throme*, McKillip was less elusive in her nomenclature for time.

Throme is the story of Caerles, sent on an impossible quest to find a legendary book in order to marry Damsen, daughter of the king. Markers of time are frequent, and precise; “the next day,” “three days later,” and “in the morning” are all ordinary expressions of time passing. Perhaps this is to do with the fact that *Throme* is a true fairytale⁴ quest, moving regularly from one adventure to another, or perhaps it is simply that McKillip grew more subtle as she matured in her writing.

⁴ I have chosen to follow the spelling used in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.

Awareness of time passing is executed in a more personal way as well.

Towards the beginning of *Basilisk*, Caladrius:

looked at [Sirina], still playing, and realized in that moment how she had changed, from the slight, freckled girl he had first met. Her harper's hands were pale as sea spume; her long hair gleamed like pearl. She knew things, he thought suddenly. She held secrets, now, in the long, slender lines of her body.

(McKillip 15)

Time has passed in the unexpected awakening of his interest in a fellow bard. It becomes clear that he is growing up, without McKillip having to explicitly say so. These and other descriptors convey the passage of time and the maturation of characters without outright indicators.

Character and the city alike are physically marked by time. The past has lain heavy in the world of the *Basilisk* and this is emphasised in descriptors, such as when a woman is presented to the main character several years after he last saw her: "She had smiled in those days. Now her face had settled into grave and bitter lines, the expression she found least need to change" (136). The past has physically lined her face with sorrow and anger, and her permanent expression shows that she has no anticipation of a better future.

The city too is rich with past, as will be explored further in Chapter Five. However, a brief descriptor now will serve as an example. One of the characters of *Basilisk* describes their surroundings;

stood in a grimy alley between two battered marble mansions. . .
. The mansions had seen better days. Clothes fluttered, drying,
on balconies where once banners had hung. Children wailed
above his head, cats fought, men and women shouted at one
another. The alley stank. (69)

This is a moment that is not made much of in the book, and it is a description not particularly relevant to the plot of the story; however, the fate of the city and its history can be discerned in McKillip's careful word choice in the contrast between "mansions" and "marbled" with "battered" and "grimy." Elegant and costly buildings reduced to laundry-drying lines and squalor speaks of a marked shift in fortunes and a quick one, too, because though the mansions are dirty and no longer banner festooned they are not decrepit. The city's chronotope is embedded in the description of buildings in reduced circumstance.

Chronotope is the specific space time that a work of fiction uses, according to Bakhtin. I have expanded that to include a character's personal timespan. I have also used the chronotope in terms of a grammar; the grammar of a text, like a chronotope, influences everything about it. In Chapter Two I will explore a type of time that focuses on using the past in

addition to some of the many aspects of McKillip's works that involve a grammar of the past.

Chapter Two: Active Time

This chapter will focus on active time, a concept I have formulated with McKillip's works especially in mind, though it could well be used outside of her work. Active time is a splinter concept developed from the term "healing fiction" postulated by Marek Oziwicz. He uses "healing fiction" to describe the act of reading and writing science fiction where the outcome of World War II is different from primary world history. I would like to expand this with the concept of active time, a type of alternate history, but one that does not necessarily have the marked splits characteristic of alternate history proper and which can therefore be used to examine a broader range of texts. Alternate history requires a distinct branching more commonly found in science fiction. For example, in Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953) history is changed when the South wins the American Civil War thanks to a different outcome at the key Battle of Gettysburg. In the main character Hodge Backmaker's first timeline, the South has won. In the end, Hodge is transported to our timeline, where the North won, thus showing that it has been a true branching in time (with two very different outcomes). In active time, what we (or the characters) know as the present is altered, and there is a moment of difference where the story is changed, but it can be done without an obvious difference in the past or perhaps with just an alteration of

memory. This allows for books without typical alternate-history characteristics to be examined in some of the same ways as an alternate history proper.

Oziewicz argues in "'Healing Fiction': Marcin Ciszewski's Major Trilogy as A Compensational Journey from History to HISTORY" that Ciszewski's trilogy is a healing fiction: the books "offer restorative journeys from history 'done' to history 'envisioned'" (46), in other words, the texts allow healing that imagining a different historical narrative might provide. The concept that time heals as consolation (generally for feelings and emotions rather than physical wounds) has been present since at least the fourteenth century when Geoffrey Chaucer used it, as noted in the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Simpson and Speaks). But, rather than the traditional concept of allowing time to heal wounds, in active time the writer and characters distort events and actively use time to promote healing, whether this is in the form of entropy, repetition, or revision.

This chapter will focus on *Bards*, *Ombria*, *Alphabet* and *Tower* as the clearest examples of time re-played or subverted in order to heal characters, although the argument could be made for other books of McKillip's, such as *Basilisk* or perhaps even the *Cygnets* duology. What is key is that all of the McKillip books examined in this chapter have a moment where time is actively used in some way to bring about healing. While Oziewicz focuses on the reader's healing in our primary world, I will shift the focus to the healing

that the characters in the secondary world experience. In this understanding, time must be re-played or subverted in order to create healing. In the work of McKillip this tends to be through a re-working of the past in some way, with an end lesson that accords with the post-structuralist views of Michel Foucault and others that there is no concrete, knowable past.

According to Oziewicz, alternate histories serve as “compensation for traumatic events, escape from history, and ensouling of events for the sake of insight” (“Healing” 47). The third of these functions, “ensouling,” Oziewicz modifies from the psychologist James Hillman’s work in *Healing Fiction: On Freud, Jung, Adler*. Hillman’s “ensouling” is when someone looks at an internal incident from the outside, distances themselves sufficiently, and is thus fully able to grasp the situation. This is perhaps most readily apparent in McKillip’s *Tower*, where the protagonist must re-live his experiences in order to understand them fully and be able to move forward.

Alternative History

Oziewicz uses active time in the form of healing fiction as a way to explore the great number of alternate histories written in Polish. Oziewicz notes that a large portion of alternate histories written in Polish concern the Second World War (“Healing” 46) suggesting that Poles need the healing that a different historical narrative can provide. Broadening from this concept that alternate histories can be healing in the primary world, I try to work out what

a similar form of healing does in the secondary world. Because alternate history is the original catalyst for active time, it is a natural way to begin to formulate and explore active time. Karen Hellekson in *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* posits some slightly different definitions of alternate histories that work well within the broader framework of secondary worlds and fantasy. Hellekson argues that alternative histories are “histories that approach their subject from a nonstandard position” (3). Thus the change of past within a secondary world, and even the change of history (taken here to mean the interpretation of the past) within a secondary world, can be included within Hellekson’s definition of alternate history.

Mark Currie explores this instability, and in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* argues;

In short, poststructuralists moved away from the treatment of narratives (and the language system in general) as buildings, as solid objects in the world, towards the view that narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways. (3)

While Currie is looking specifically at postmodernism, McKillip can be usefully examined in light of this instability of narrative and language, of disrupted hierarchy. All the books I use as examples of active time are slanted in this way. *Tower*, for example, is told from the viewpoint of the powerless: the beaten enemy, the tired knight, a baker. *Ombria* is another example of this

in that characters who do not have all the pieces and are not the powerful ones in the story tell the history. The characters telling the story in *Ombria* are one step removed from power. That is, they are all close to power—but not expected to wield any—and are in traditionally powerless roles: Lydea is an ex-mistress of the dead king; Ducon Greve a bastard of the royal house; and the waxling is the powerful sorceress's apprentice. None of these characters is in a position of power or in a position to know exactly what is happening at all times. *Ombria*, therefore, is told from a “nonstandard position” as in Hellekson's definition.

Although the area of alternate science fictions is well trodden (for example, in Karen Hellekson's *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*, or in William Joseph Collin's “Paths Not Taken: The Development, Structure, and Aesthetics of the Alternate History”) there is a distinct lack of in-depth scholarly discourse on fantastic alternate histories. In the otherwise excellent *Classic and Iconoclastic Alternate History Science Fiction*, the editors Edgar L. Chapman and Carl B. Yoke mention fantasy on several occasions in the introduction, which leads the reader to expect some discussion of alternate-history fantasies. Fantasy however, when mentioned, is done so as a brief aside. As, for example, in their introduction they argue that:

Since the importance of history for our understanding of time is obvious, it is hardly surprising that authors of science fiction—

and to a lesser degree fantasy — often make our conception of history one of their central concerns. (1)

They go on to talk extensively about what this means for science fiction authors, but leave the “lesser degree” fantasy alone. Gene Wolfe’s *There Are Doors* (1988) is given as an example of a “curious” (9) alternate-history fantasy without any exploration of why or how alternative history functions differently within fantasy than within science fiction. Although the focus of the book is obviously science fiction, the way in which fantasy is mentioned and then dropped is indicative of the treatment of alternate-history fantasies: there is some mention of alternate histories in fantasy, but it is usually quite brief.

C. Butler, in *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children’s Literatures of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones and Susan Cooper*, talks about types of alternate history in Diana Wynne Jones’s *Archer’s Goon* (1984) and *The Time of the Ghost* (1981):

[They] feature not only time slips, but characters who live through the same period of time more than once. The difficulties this repetition raises about choice, causation and the role of memory in subjectivity are incorporated into the plot rather than being bracketed as aspects of an unfathomable mystery. (68)

Butler argues that Jones uses alternate history, that she “incorporates” it rather than merely hand-waving her characters back and forth, and that she is concerned with particular effects this might have on her characters. Butler’s focus is slightly different to mine: while memory plays a large part in active time, and choice a smaller role, causation is not a part of its framework (at least within McKillip).

In *Classic and Iconoclastic Alternate History Science Fiction*, Chapman and Yoke note that authors use alternate history differently, that:

Authors have used the alternate history tale to express nostalgia for favored periods in the past; as expression of an emotional compensation with an imagined victory for a cause hopelessly lost; or as the means to project a utopian dream. (4)

Although all three can be seen to an extent in the works of McKillip, active time chiefly concerns that middle use of alternate histories: emotional compensation. However, because active time allows for actual change in the secondary world—instead of simply “imagined” change—it is a more active variant of alternate history than Chapman and Yoke present. Active time specifically looks at the use of alternate histories that allow for the re-enactment of time that is sometimes necessary for healing that is not otherwise possible, as will be explored further with outside works such as *Groundhog Day* (1993), and in McKillip’s *Bards*. Active time is inherently entangled with the past. In order to change something for the future,

something must have been done in the past. C. Butler argues that “Time slips and time travel, both regular devices in fantasy fiction, are clearly designed, at least in part, to satisfy this fundamental longing [for the past]” (63). In some ways all of fantasy is a type of alternate history; however, even if only certain types of fantasy are considered alternate history, the definition usually presented is limited, with the most commonly cited type of alternate history fantasy being those in which our primary world is the same, but with the inclusion of magic or magical creatures (such as in Patricia C. Wrede’s *Mairelon the Magician* (1991) or Gail Carriger’s *Blameless* (2010), which have a primary world like our own but with the inclusion of magic). However, Chapman and Yoke argue that “more often in the fantasy genre, [authors] have also forged fictional histories and pre-histories for the human past” (2). John Clute further claims that fantasies are a type of wish fulfilment for a past as it ought to have been (*Pardon*). Fantasy as a whole can thus be seen as a special type of alternate history. And thus, although most secondary world fantasies are not usually examined in terms of alternate history, it is legitimate to treat them as such here.

Active time is a way of examining alternate histories that involves a much smaller shift than is usual, something that can widen the corpus of possible texts for study. McKillip does not usually use clear alternate histories, but it is still a useful concept for several of her books, especially *Ombria*. *Ombria* is the closest to a “classic” alternate history, though it is not quite an

alternate history, at least not in the multiple-worlds sense that Diana Wynne Jones and others have used it. *Ombria* is an alternate history in which the alteration comes at the end, instead of early in the work. The change that happens is not the plot of the book but its culmination; it is a goal rather than a beginning. While in one sense this is not particularly unusual in fantasy literature ⁵— the worlds in *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* (2004) by Suzanna Clarke, *The Merlin Conspiracy* (2003) by Dianna Wynne Jones, and *Silver on the Tree* (1977) by Susan Cooper all experienced great change at the end—it is not quite what I am talking about here; in *Ombria* this great change creates an alternate future/past.

In *Ombria*, it is sorcery that changes the future/past of the city of Ombria and creates a clear new beginning. The book ends with a similar but altered scene to the one that opens the book: Lydea again tells a fairytale to the young prince, but this time the terror that has followed this moment of calm is gone in the alternate time line. Furthermore, it is fairly clear that this has happened in Ombria before. The structure of the city, explored in depth in Chapter Five, is plainly one of tumultuous change and changeovers: “Houses on the river crumbled in the damp, revealing pale, elegant rooms, massive hearths, delicate paints. Their roofs sometimes rose to support the streets above” (McKillip, *Ombria* 42). Parts of the city that were used are abruptly

⁵ It is sometimes considered a “eucotastrophe” from Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories,” which *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* defines as “the final ‘turn’ of a plot which gives rise to ‘a piercing glimpse of joy....’”

forgotten. What is described is not the ordinary slow rot of a city whose function has changed; rather it is sudden, and unexplained. It is not just that history has changed in *Ombria*; the actual past has changed as well. Time running its course has only brought disaster to the city. Domina Pearl, who ought to have died years (perhaps even centuries) before has lingered on, bringing the city and its trade to a terrified standstill, as I will explore further.

Entropy

There are several ways in which active time manifests itself. The kind of active time that I look at in McKillip generally has a forward momentum. I have included entropy as a kind of active time because it is time that has its own momentum—its own internal energy and force—and continues winding down without outside assistance. Although entropy is usually seen as a deterioration, and therefore an ending, it can be manoeuvred in such a way as to open possibilities. McKillip's use of entropy is redemptive, and her active time opens up possibilities even within entropic story lines. This is not the only type of entropy (or even a common one) in speculative fiction; the classic narrowing down towards death is evidenced as well. Other speculative fiction that has not allowed the entropy to be redemptive include M. John Harrison's *The Course of the Heart* (1992) and *The Last Universe* (2005) by William Sleator. Both these books are entropic, winding down towards death, and, unlike in *Ombria*, there is not a happy ending. *The Course of the Heart*

follows a man who has performed some sort of ceremony before the story begins that has marked him and his two companions. As the protagonist attempts to make a new life for himself, his two companions slowly become ill and perhaps mad. The protagonist never finds an answer for what has happened, or why. The reader is not given a satisfactory answer, and the whole book ends on a note of depression. If entropy can be considered active time, then at first appearance redemption and therefore healing do not have to be a part of active time, as entropy usually ends in death. However, unlike Harrison, McKillip has allowed the energy of entropy to be redirected into a new beginning, thus ensuring that her use of active time is an overall positive, and healing one, as in *Ombria* where entropy has cycled into a new beginning with past wrongs erased.

Almost as deadly as the winding down of entropy is its near opposite: the dead stand still of stasis. Unlike entropy where there is some form of movement (albeit generally towards destruction), in stasis everything is held in check and nothing can grow or renew. An example of stasis can easily be discerned in *Ombria*. The city of Ombria is locked into a stillness that will eventually end in death. Domina Pearl's traumatising of the city could eventually be healed in customary fashion with new leadership, a renewed trading economy, and time to recover if time were passing normally. Yet, Domina Pearl has distorted the path of Ombria by lingering long past when she ought to have died. The stasis of Domina Pearl herself means that the

natural healing process cannot be passively endured but must be actively accelerated. The city is one in stasis; at the coronation of the young prince, “No one trusted in anything but a savage and uncertain future, and the only fidelity pledged with any degree of truth sprang out of terror” (McKillip, *Ombria* 82). Ombria cannot be saved by allowing time to run its natural course. A comparison to one of Ursula K. Le Guin’s Earthsea book’s, *The Farthest Shore* (1972), is useful here.

In *The Farthest Shore* magic has leaked out of the world because a mage (Cob) has tried to live beyond death. In making himself immortal he has undone the foundation of the world of Earthsea, damaging it almost past healing. The wizard Ged argues with him: “A living body suffers pain, Cob; a living body grows old; it dies. Death is the price we pay for our life, and for all life” (Le Guin 189). Cob’s immortality is unnatural, and in gaining it he has almost destroyed the world. So too Domina Pearl who warns Ducon Greve, “I am older than anyone alive in this court. I have been called great-aunt to rulers and their heirs far longer than anyone would care to delve into” (McKillip, *Ombria* 34). Her destruction of the city is nearly complete, and with trade choked off and the entire city terrified of her the future of Ombria is bleak: “[T]here is the matter of the Black Pearl. She has mysterious origins and powers that no one understands; she is unscrupulous, unpredictable, and she has turned Ombria into this.” He reached down, pulled a flourishing thistle out from between the planks.” (39). Domina Pearl has caused the city’s

seeming demise by lingering long past when she ought to have died and stagnating it for her own gain in the process.

Domina Pearl has trapped Ombria in a stasis. Ducon Greve and Lydea force it into entropy to attempt some movement out of her death hold. The options throughout the story continue to narrow until all the main characters face death trying to bring about change. Ombria is a city in entropy at this point as it spirals seemingly without hope towards a certain end. Entropy does not just have to mean death, however. As Peter Freese in *From Apocalypse to Entropy and Beyond: The Second Law of Thermodynamics in Post-War American Fiction* notes philosophers and scientists alike have tried to change the theory of entropy to one where hope is possible (113). A way of doing this is to change the directional possibility of an ultimate ending into a cycle, as Freese argues:

for at the same time at which pessimistic culture critics conjure up the second law as a messenger of the inevitability of ultimate chaos, optimistic students of self-organization under conditions of change refer to it as a harbinger of the spontaneous rise of new order. (293)

Ombria is a classic literary example of this. The city runs down towards what seems an inevitable end; an end that would be inexorable were it not for the magical intervention of Faey. Only the cyclical renewal of the city posits a possibility for a different future. What could be the ultimate end for Ombria

is, actually, a better beginning. Those inside the system (which is all of the characters within the book, including Faey because she is affected along with everyone else by the amnesia) do not see that and expect the end to be just that: an ending. With the old prince dead and Domina Pearl at last free to rule outright, the future of the city and all the characters within it is bleak. Faey's helper Mags notes of Domina Pearl that "Her bones and her shadow and her dank eyes boded nothing but ill for Ombria. Her ways had eaten the heart out of its better days; she was busily turning the city into a parched, crippled, bitter husk" (McKillip, *Ombria* 39). Domina Pearl destroys the city and only a new beginning can entirely save it. The past then can be re-shaped into a new future, albeit with the help of magical intervention and amnesia.

Faey's rescue of Mags precipitates a mostly un-explained transition from old Ombria to new. Even Faey is vague when asked what is happening as the world crumbles and changes around her and her helper: "I'm never sure. But it seems to happen whenever I come up from the underworld" (278). Clearly something of a magical nature is happening: "The floor shrugged and rippled as though the entire palace were trying to uproot itself, walk away from the doomed city" (284). The use of the word "doomed" for the city is significant, as is the fact that it is described as trying to "walk away." In some ways Ombria does walk away from its past to begin a new future. When everything has stopped changing, it is as though Domina Pearl and the crisis Ombria endured never existed. Unlike *Tower*, *Alphabet*, and *Bards* the main

protagonists of *Ombria* do not remember their actual pasts. Every memory of the times before must be erased in order for a future un-poisoned by doubt and fear to be allowed to take place. The desperation that has led to the regeneration of Ombria allows for nothing else; a new beginning without amnesia would not have been possible. Entropy has come to pass, the city has wound down to its death, and the shadow world has come to the rescue of the “real” Ombria:

We came because in your utter despair you found a way to open the door between our worlds. The shadow world is your hope. When you no longer despair, you no longer need us; we fade and you forget. When the sorceress who lives underground is disturbed enough by events to make her way up into the troubled, desperate world above, then she shifts the balance between despair and hope, between light and shadow. (286)

The city’s death is a true one, its entropy has been completed in that it is not the same Ombria that exists at the end of the book. Frees and others have opened up the possibilities of time to allow hope, and *Ombria* is an actual incarnation of this, helped by the transformative power of Faey, who herself only vaguely remembers her role.

Amnesia

Amnesia can be necessary to allow active time. There is no indication that Domina Pearl would have eventually died without intervention, and so the changing of Ombria's past and future, with Domina Pearl wiped from memory, is necessary to allow Ombria a chance at survival. To return to an outside example, in *The Farthest Shore* the danger is both more and less opaque. In *Ombria* everyone knows that it is Domina Pearl who has brought destruction on the city; in *The Farthest Shore* it is a mystery to all but (in the end) Ged and his companion. However, in *The Farthest Shore* what needs to happen to reverse the dying of the world is quite obvious (send Cob to a natural death) to the two people who know of it, while in *Ombria* the solution is much less clear. Because *Ombria* is a type of alternate history, with characters in non-standard positions, they are not powerful, and they do not know exactly what is needed to free the city. Domina Pearl's death is an obvious answer but with an almost impossible resolution. Many previous courtiers and machinators have tried to kill her, but, thanks to her own sorcery and dealings with Faey, none have succeeded, let alone the disordered bunch of characters (Lydea, Ducon Greve, Mags) the narration follows. Domina Pearl cannot be merely deposed because the reign of terror she has created has traumatised the city. Amnesia allows for a complete new beginning, and is one of the ways in which McKillip uses active time. Amnesia is not necessary in *The Farthest Shore* because only Ged and his companion are aware of the true nature of the problem. While the people of

Earthsea have not had an easy time with the foundation of their world shaken, the dying of their world was not traumatising in a permanent sense. Marion Michel Oliner argues that “the subjective experience of trauma relies on memory” (21). With the memory of the past erased, the characters at the end of *Ombria* can move forward into a new and hopeful future.

Amnesia is crucial to another of McKillip’s novels as well. *Alphabet* works differently to other books of McKillip’s in that it includes a time-travel narrative that intrudes into a more ordinary, linear narrative. The main character Nepenthe (whose name, tellingly, means “drug of forgetfulness”) is the unknowing daughter and heir of a sorceress and her conqueror-king partner. Nepenthe has been left in the kingdom of Raine as an orphan (in what is to the sorceress and her king “the future”). Translating a book of stories that only she feels drawn to, Nepenthe un-knowingly calls her sorceress mother, Kane, and conqueror father into her adoptive land from a distant land and time.

Movement Through Time

The sorceress Kane has learned to move through time, and in doing so has changed the course of history. She explains it to the king this way:

Every moment . . . is like a wheel with a hundred spokes in it.

We ride always at the hub of the wheel and go forward as it

turns. We ignore the array of other moments constantly turning

around us. We are surrounded by doorways, we never open them. (McKillip, *Alphabet* 253)

This description has interesting parallels with Antonia Barber's *The Ghosts* (1969) and Jones's *The Time of the Ghost*, both of which use the wheel metaphor in a similar fashion⁶. In all three books the wheel metaphor is used to explain how various characters are able to move through time. Because the spokes of a wheel are all connected to a centre, the characters are able to use this centre to connect across to different points in time. This intimates that the past, present, and future are all simply different iterations of the same thing, and that only one's individual position on the "wheel" allows a different perception of what is "now" and what "will be" and what "was." Thus, travelling to different points in time does not have to involve a magic spell; it can instead just require a readjustment of perception.

Kane of *Alphabet* is able to travel through time with just such an understanding and could be read as a "ghost" in the same way the children of Barber's and Jones's books are: as a character who has moved out of her "correct" time but is not dead in the traditional sense of a ghost. Ghost stories epitomise active time because ghosts often need active revisioning of time in order to be placated. Ghosts are frequently presented as the remnants of people who have been wronged and can only be laid to rest when this is

⁶ For a discussion of the wheel metaphor in fantasy literature see Farah Mendlesohn's chapter on "Time Games" in *Diana Wynne Jones: The Fantastic Tradition and Children's Literature*.

righted. This commonly requires the redoing of something that happened in the past. In Barber's book a pair of children has to help a "ghost" (a child travelling forward from her own present) to save her life and that of her brother. The contemporary children have seen the graves of their counterparts; they know that they existed and that they died on a particular date. By helping time's reversal with their empathic understanding of the ghost they allow their own present, as well as the past, to be changed. In the case of *The Ghosts* the past is re-created (the "present" children successfully travel into the past) to allow the guardian Blunden to save the children whom he failed in the first incarnation of their lives. The past in the form of the "ghost" children have to move into their future in order for the past to be healed. The metaphor of time as a wheel is used to explain how time can be shifted to its "proper" path when the "ghost" Sarah explains "it is more like a vast wheel turning and you two and Georgie and I are on different parts of the rim" (Barber 42). In *The Ghosts* the children use a potion to allow themselves to be put through to the spoke of the wheel, where the past can be changed. The basic assumption that the past cannot be changed is one that has to be worked through and finally discarded. As one of the children notes, "But Sara said that our future is the past to people who come after us, and we can change that" (73–74). *The Ghosts* actualises Currie's argument in *About Time: Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time* that the present is the object of future memory (5). It follows that if the present will become a form of

memory (and memory can be changed) then the present is as mutable as the future or past. The “present” of the ghost children is a future memory of the modern children and, because it is so, they are able to change it.

Mircea Eliade’s theories on time and history provide a framework for examining this mutability of time. Eliade’s conception of history in *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* is of time turning into history by a “corrosive action being able to exert itself upon consciousness by revealing the irreversibility of events” (52). Thus to Eliade, the joining of irreversibility and time are a function of man’s perception (history), not a natural occurrence. He argues, “If we pay no attention to it, time does not exist; furthermore, where it becomes perceptible—because of man’s ‘sins’ i.e., when man departs from the archetype and falls into duration—time can be annulled” (85–86). To Eliade time is something flexible that can be changed. McKillip’s uses of active time are also an iteration much more flexible than the traditional view of time as a forward-flying arrow that cannot be reversed or changed (first articulated by Arthur Stanley Eddington). Like *Ombria*, *Alphabet* uses this looser conception of time. In *Alphabet*, the sorceress Kane is able to travel through time and, in doing so, changes the course of history. She brings destruction to future empires and so must change events. In *Ombria* the city and its history restart in times of great stress or danger to the royal house. All that came before is forgotten and life resumes as though it

has always been that way. In both instances time is disrupted and the past can be reshaped.

Although active time is used in *Alphabet* it is also curiously negated for a time in the character of Nepenthe. As a presumed orphan she does not seem particularly bothered by who her parents were or by her past. That it is a rather spectacular past comes as much of a surprise to Nepenthe as to the reader (or presumably that was the reaction McKillip was looking for; whether or not it is successful is a different matter). The classic “reveal” scene, in which the orphan learns she is child to great and powerful parents and will be Queen, is not one of glorious redemption but rather horror. Nepenthe says, “I never knew my father. My mother died when I was barely old enough to crawl. The librarians are the only family I have ever had” (McKillip, *Alphabet* 294) Nepenthe does not *want* to revise her story. This is what she knows, what she is comfortable with. Her parents coming out of the past is unlooked for and unwelcome. Nepenthe says, “And now a three-thousand-year-old marauding emperor and a sorceress who can travel through time say I am their daughter and they want to put your crown on my head” (294–95). Nepenthe is the catalyst for the reverse of the typical fairy story; she convinces the sorceress (her mother) to send the Conqueror (her father) back to his original time and place. In doing so she has actively worked to change the past and, thus, her own future. Part of the confusion with just how much has changed in the past, and therefore the future, is that McKillip chooses to

end the book there, with much of the action unfinished and consequences unexamined. The Conqueror has been sent back in time, to rule over the lands he was meant to hold, and the sorceress stays in the present to get to know her daughter. However, what *is* clear is that time has been changed, not just in the sense of history, but the future path of Raine and its characters as well, as relationships are repaired and the kingdom of Raine has a newly confident Queen to guide it.

As in *Ombria*, amnesia of a sort has been required. Nepenthe has constructed a personal narrative of her origins from what she has forgotten. In order to grow up as a normal person, one ignorant of and, crucially, uninterested in her royal position, Nepenthe must not remember anything of her past. When she does learn of her past, she is too old and too set in her own narrative to wish to change it. Her mother has left her without any mementos and this allows the revisioning of what could have been a very bleak future for Raine.

Repetition

Repetition, like amnesia and especially like entropy, can also be posited as something negative, but McKillip has used repetition in the form of active time to allow characters to move forward. Catherine Silverstone posits repetition solely as a negative in her introduction to *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance*; she cites both flashbacks and nightmares (13) as

examples of repetition in trauma. In McKillip the repetition can take the form of flashbacks, as in *Tower*, and might have a nightmarish quality to them, as in *Bards*, but they are healing and enable the characters to move forward.

Repetition is not produced for its own sake, and the characters are not stuck in the repetition. Once the healing has begun they are able to move forward out of the repetition; thus, the characters move actively out of the repetition that is necessary for healing. An example of this in fantasy fiction is Jones's *Archer's Goon*. Howard, the main protagonist, has had to repeat his life over and over, always with the same egoistic and ruinous ending. It is when he repeats his life, but with a younger sister, that he is able to move out of his destructive pattern of behaviour. Repetition in this case is necessary to find the key to curing Howard's egomania; he needed a sibling. The trope of time-loop is a popular one seen in films such as *Groundhog Day* and books such as Ken Grimwood's *Replay* (1986), both of which feature men re-experiencing loops of time until they are able to find a perfect sequence of events. This repetition is necessary in order for mistakes to be rectified and lessons learned.

McKillip allows her characters out of their repetitive patterns much earlier than either *Replay*, *Groundhog Day*, or even Jones's *Archer's Goon*. Lessons are learned faster in McKillip, and the resolutions do not require perfection as in *Groundhog Day*; only improvement is required to move the story, and the characters, forward. Although eventually the character in

Replay comes to see a life well lived as a goal, he spends several lifetimes simply indulging himself. There is no reason for his repetitions; they simply exist. This is because his repetitions, which begin when he dies at a fairly young age, are based on a sort of mathematical equation. His repetitions have no relation to what he does in his various lives. However, in McKillip's *Bards* repetition is only required once within the text to provide healing. *Bards* contains two stories: that of the cursed-to-immortality former bard Nairn and that of his son Phelan. Chapters alternate between Phelan, who is writing a research paper about Nairn (whom he knows as Jonah), and Nairn's actual story. Nairn was cursed to immortality as punishment for losing a bardic competition; he pushes the unknowing Phelan to become a bard, presumably in a bid to live vicariously what he has lost. Phelan and Nairn have a very troubled relationship (as I explored in Chapter One). What Phelan sees as Nairn's unreasonable peculiarities are made understandable, or at least given a logic, with the knowledge of Nairn's immortality. For example, Nairn is constantly engrossed in digging holes in the ground; this obsession with archaeology seems (to Phelan) pointless, but not when we learn that Nairn is attempting to find his own past in the form of the plain on which he was cursed. In an interview with C. Butler quoted in *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper*, Alan Garner speaks of archaeology as "the physical residue of our interaction with time" (57). Archaeology is one of the

many ways that Nairn attempts to get in touch with his “original” time, but it is also yet another way in which he is distanced from his beloved son.

Immortality is not presented as a gift in *Bards*, and Nairn’s search for its reversal structures much of his life. Though time is a factor in all of the story, active time, in the form of its active use, comes into *Bards* at the end.

The ending of *Bards* can be examined in the frame of Mircea Eliade’s theory of sacred time. If we treat the incident of the curse’s casting and its reversal as sacred time, which, Eliade asserts in *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, “has a wholly different structure and origin” (71), then its repetition can be seen as something that is not fixed. Eliade also argues that “by its very nature sacred time is reversible in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a primordial mythical time made present” (68, author’s emphasis). Thus in *Bards* the time of cursing can be re-enacted and used to heal in a time separate from, but part of, the present. The character Beatrice experiences the shift from ordinary to mythical time: “The world blurred around her, flashing, melting. As the tears finally fell, she heard Jonah’s sudden exclamation. She could see again, but in what world she had no idea” (McKillip, *Bards* 314). There is a sharp division presented here between the ordinary competition and what it becomes. Nairn attempts to keep his son from re-enacting it because “If [he] is who I think he is, you could be in grave danger, that’s the point. He destroyed my music. I won’t let him take you from me as well. That would destroy me all over again” (299). But this repetition is necessary, and

the re-enactment of that moment of time enables it to have a different outcome. The active repetition of time is what allows Nairn to escape his immortality at last. Another character, Kelda, talks to Phelan:

“I didn’t do anything. You did. . . . He’s been trapped in this tower since he tried to kill me with his music. That time, he only brought down that old watchtower. This time he found a better way to deal with me.” (321)

Nairn’s fear for his son’s future has allowed him to undo his own cursed past.

Time on its own has made no difference to Nairn and his plight; it has not healed. All he has had is time, and in the millennia he has been alive he has come no closer to finding the enemy who caused his curse or reversing his immortality. Caught up in the same competition that cursed his father, Phelan thinks: “If his father had any good advice, he thought grimly, he would have given it to himself all those centuries before” (319). If Nairn had had the knowledge to break his curse on his own, he would have done so. The ending of *Bards* involves Phelan taking part in the same competition that cursed his father, but this time there is a difference. This time Nairn steps in to save his son, and in doing so is able to break his curse. Only when Phelan actively uses time by entering the same semi-mythical competition (though by accident) does the curse unravel. Without knowing it (partially because of his difficult relationship with his father as was explored in Chapter One) Phelan enters the same competition that cursed his father to immortality, only this

time Phelan's knowledge and his father's love and maturity enable a different outcome. Phelan, in studying his father's history for a school project, begins to unravel it. In the Introduction to *History Revisited: The Great Battles: Eminent Historians Take on the Great Works of Alternate History*, J. David Markham argues that "For to study history is to travel backward in time, though without benefit of HG Wells's time machine" (1). Phelan's knowledge of his father's history begins the path to reversing the curse that has plagued Nairn. Phelan must re-enact the time of his father's cursing in order to undo it. When they emerge from the enacted sequence Nairn's curse is broken, and they both have a better understanding of each other, allowing them both to move forward.

McKillip also uses a form of repetition in *Tower*, though this time it is a memory that is relived and not an event. *Tower* follows the noble but impoverished knight of Yves, Cyan Dag, on a quest to save his king from what he thinks is marriage to a sorceress (whose double is locked away in a tower, Lady-of-Shallot style). Along the way he encounters Sel the baker (a selkie trapped in a human life), her wild daughter Melanthos, and enemy of Gloinmere; Thayne Ysse, of the subjugated land of Ysse, all of whom get their own chapters throughout the book. In *Tower* time passing has not been enough to heal, and it takes an incident of James Hillman's "ensouling" to heal the characters and lands in the book. Hillman argues, "Successful therapy is thus a collaboration between fictions, a revisioning of the story into

a more intelligent, more imaginative plot, which also means the sense of mythos in all the parts of the story" (18). *Tower* is the opposite of *Ombria* and *Alphabet* in that it is remembering, not forgetting, which is necessary. In *Tower* a re-visioning of the story must take place to heal.

The psychic wounds left by a war in which one country has conquered a smaller one still exist. One of the characters from the conquered country exclaims, "The King wants the first bite we put into our mouths. He wants the pearl in every oyster. He wants us to bend our heads so low he never has to look into our eyes" (McKillip, *Tower* 173). The king has had to fight a country he assumed to be his, and the people of that land have been subjugated to the point of rebellion. Certainly postcolonialism is a relevant comparison here: much work has been done on speculative fiction and postcolonialism, especially science fiction and magic realism. Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* is one example, which largely focuses on the science-fictional depiction of empire and The Other. However, another way in which postcolonialism works with genre fiction is in the form of revision. Postcolonialism is sometimes linked with revisionism, often to negatively describe a country's history being revised for political gains. That is not what I am arguing here (that is a broader argument), but personal revisionism is useful when looking at *Tower*, and I would argue that the revisionism in *Tower* is "evidence-driven revision," the sort that is derived from "new evidence" in Aviezer Tucker's definition (1). Postcolonial theory as a whole

provides a compelling lens from which to view the conflict in *Tower*. Manjari Chatterjee Miller charts the shift in ideology: “Owning colonies had been an unquestionable ‘right’ that over a few decades became an indisputable ‘wrong’” (1). The king of Yves was handed the “colony” of Ysse as an absolute birthright, and the people of Ysse have at long last rebelled against this control. Miller argues that a particular character is often presented by postcolonial nations:

countries that had experienced colonialism burst on the international scene in a new avatar, with leaders who had strong anti-colonial nationalist credentials, contested and often blood-soaked, political boundaries, a desire to create a new international order, and a very strong sense of personal and collective *suffering* under colonial domination. (11, author’s emphasis)

Thayne Ysse, son of the crippled and only nominal king of Ysse, is certainly a postcolonial leader of the type Miller describes. He has battled for Ysse’s autonomy before and is prepared to do so again. He and his people have suffered and he wants all of Yves to know it. The trauma of a war that happened years before has not healed; it has only been covered over. Cathy Caruth makes a wide ranging argument for trauma, that:

trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound

that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (4)

There is misunderstanding on both sides, and years after the battle even the look in a man's eyes marks him as victor or defeated:

He had no shield; the torn emblem on his surcoat was undecipherable; nothing told who he was. But he was not an islander, with hardship and desperation beaten into his eyes. The Knight's eyes were clear, cold, and merciless, trained that way. (McKillip, *Tower* 168)

Even though several years have passed since the actual conflict, tensions and anger run high on both sides, and psychic scars remain as Thayne, one of the Islanders, can attest:

[He] had lost cousins barely old enough to fight, and his remaining uncle; his father had been badly wounded. He recovered his strength, but his wits had wandered away into some misty past where Ferle Ysse ruled the North Islands and there was magic in the world. (26)

The deaths of family members are important, but it is the enduring mental trauma caused by the war and subsequent retribution that Thayne lingers on

most. He wishes for a return to the time when his father was a strong ruler: “He watched his father, hungry for the strong, familiar, unyielding expression that even now faded, became uncertain, fretful” (29). This change in his father—of a strong man to a weak one—is presumably of far more importance, and worthy of more anger, than an honourable death in battle would have been.

In *Tower*, Cyan Dag is sent on a quest supposedly to rescue a woman locked in a tower, but what he actually accomplishes is peace between both nations, and in/among many of the people he meets. A witch in the story notes, “What you need . . . is not always what you are looking for” (99), and this is the key to Cyan Dag’s quest. He is sent on one quest, but in reality his real mission is to help people heal. In a way, *Tower* is an alternate history as understood by Chapman and Yoke: “they frequently attempt to offer a revisionist view of history” (1). Cyan Dag’s remembering is the key to a revisionist view of history within *Tower*. This (positive) revision in turn allows for a peaceful resolution for all. At the end of the book, Thayne is challenged to kill the king (or at least explain whether he knows what he intends to do):

I don’t! What good would that king’s heart do to anything alive?

He’d go to his death with the same arrogance in his eyes, the same oblivion worse than contempt with which he views us even while he demands our hope, our loyalty, our lives. (276)

Thayne is trapped without a good resolution because he recognises that even with a fierce dragon at his disposal he is powerless to change the king's, and thus the country's, attitude towards his own people. The crucial moment of shift occurs when "[The king] looked at Thayne ... seeing him instead of the vague, pinched, impoverished face that every man from the North Islands wore in his eyes" (267). The king must see Thayne and his people *as* people, and Cyan Dag's own attitude is crucial to this transformation. Hillman argues that "Freud's crucial discovery [was] that the stories he was being told were psychological happenings dressed as history and experienced as remembered events" (40). The same is true for the characters of *Tower*. In *Tower* the stories they have been told and tell themselves are of an unfair war: "'You asked for war when you refused to offer fealty to me in Gloinmere when I was crowned. I gave you what you wanted.' 'You nearly destroyed us'" (McKillip, *Tower* 274). Each side blames the other. As in primary world Spain where Dacia Viejo-Rose argues that "The stories that a society tells itself about its past are constantly woven together, and periodically revised, to meet the changing needs of the present" (2), so too in *Tower*. Their grievances are "dressed as history": given the weight of history and the reality of remembered events. Viejo-Rose claims that "By redefining the parameters that demarcate a society, moments of crisis can provoke changes in how the past is valued, and what moments of history are to be highlighted" (3).

The lands in *Tower* are certainly in crisis, and it is this redefining that is necessary to move the countries forward towards a peaceful resolution. When the past as they remember it is shown to be false, then healing can begin. The past they remember is a damaging one, one without hope for future peace, and must be changed in order for a resolution to be reached:

“I didn’t war on children!” Regis [the king] snapped. “And I nearly died myself in that battle.” “You’ve fought a war without weapons since then,” Thayne said bitterly, “against even our children.” “You started the war!” “You drained everything but the breath out of the North Islands to punish us for it!”

(McKillip, *Tower* 277)

Their inability to see the other side, and to forgive each other, has led to grievance years in the nurturing. When the baker Sel threatens the king with magic, the king replies in a bewildered fashion:

“I thought you came here as a favor to one of my knights, to defend Gloinmere.” “That knight,” Thayne Ysse said tautly, “of all your knights, had some pity for the islanders. He left your side while you were wounded, to save my brother’s life.” “How do you know that?” Regis Aurum asked sharply. “He never told me that.” “I know because I nearly killed him myself, battling over this dragon in Skye. But he knew my brother’s name. So I let him live.” (278-9)

Cyan Dag's compassion has saved Thayne Ysse's life, but also more broadly brought empathy to a struggle that badly needs it. At the end, one of the witches who has sent Cyan on his quest explains to Cyan why it had to be him to create a lasting peace:

"We needed you." . . . "We needed you to help Sel, and Thayne Ysse and the North Islands. We wanted all your courage and your gentleness, your determination, your loyalty and your gift for seeing and for doing, as when you heard the young boy crying in the rain, what must be done." (288)

Among more ordinary heroic qualities such as courage and determination are gentleness and empathy, without which there could be no peaceful resolution. The past has not actually changed, simply everyone's perception of it. *The Time of the Ghost* is the same in that the past is *not* changed; a revision is enabled through memory and a shift in viewpoint. Much like in McKillip's *Tower*, the past is not actually changed to allow a new present and future, as one of the sisters in *The Time of the Ghost* argues:

"You can't alter the past. . . . The only thing you can alter is the future. People write stories pretending you can alter the past, but it can't be done. All you can do to the past is remember it wrong or interpret it differently, and that's no good to us."
(Jones 125)

The sister is wrong, however: a shift in memory and circumstance is enough to enable a different interpretation to the benefit of all (or almost all in the case of Jones, whose 'evil' character, Julian, is sacrificed) the characters. Like cognitive behavioural therapy in the primary world, which seeks to "decrease maladaptive behaviors and increase adaptive ones by modifying their antecedents and consequences and by behavioral practices that result in new learning" (Craske 1), this revision of memory in the secondary world enables healing by changing harmful memories and destructive behaviour. Phil Mollon argues in *Freud and False Memory Syndrome* that "Remembering is reconstructive—like telling a story—rather than a process of accessing an accurate record of an event" (6). Changing the story of a memory changes the outcome of the book in both *Tower* and *The Time of the Ghost*.

Memory is mutable, but its distortion does not have to be as radical as that found in *Ombria*, *The Time of the Ghost*, or *The Ghosts*. At the very beginning of *Tower*, it is noted of the main character that "It was the second longest night of Cyan's life" (McKillip 12). This reference to an event the reader does not know about, but which lies in Cyan Dag's past, is small but crucial. The night referred to is one in which Cyan Dag remembers having sat with his wounded king all night after a battle has left them separated from their comrades and injured. In the course of the book, Cyan Dag's memories of the night shifts to re-include his rescue of a young member of the opposing army. Chapman and Yoke argue that alternate history "attempts to portray

the sense of contingency which governs history and to depict the 'indeterminacy' and social construction of meaning and reality, not to mention problematizing 'the entire notion of historical knowledge'" (16). In McKillip's *Tower* these aims are met. Somehow Cyan Dag has blocked this incident, perhaps because the honourable Cyan Dag is and was torn between his loyalty to his king and his honour as a person who feels compelled to help the helpless. The past is not what it seems and history shifts as memory is regained and questioned. So although the events themselves have not actually changed, Cyan Dag living them again, and seeing them again from the inside, is crucial to the reworking of his own history. Cyan Dag's act of compassion is the key, but it had to be re-remembered in order to function.

McKillip places no markers around the re-remembered past; it is actively relived both by reader and Cyan Dag in the thirteenth chapter. The reader goes from one character's thoughts in the "present" of the novel ("He turned his back to the dragon's eye, slumped down on the floor against a pile of gold, and waited" (McKillip, *Tower* 116)) to Cyan Dag reliving the past that he had blocked out. There is no differentiation, no warning that time has shifted. The memory is told in the same style as the rest of the book is. The chapter begins, "On a hillside in the northernmost part of Yves, Cyan knelt within a thick line of vine and bramble and brush growing along a ditch between fields" (117). This switch in character and place is in line with the rest of the book, where chapters alternate between various characters and

their respective timelines. Nothing alerts the reader to a shift in time, and Cyan is presented in the act of being *in* the memory, not as though he is recalling something. Thus the reader is introduced to the memory as a lived event, just as Cyan Dag experiences it. It is not, therefore, a passive memory or a passive use of time; it is active, and it is relived. William Hardesty III in "Toward a Theory of Alternate History: Four Versions of Alternative Nazis" argues that "In sum, an alternate history uses its art—by forcing the reader to seize a non-existent past—to problematize the received truth about the past" (81). Thus *Tower* contains an alternate history within it. Time has to be played with, in the form of remembrance, in order for a peaceful resolution to be reached. Cyan Dag at one point thinks, "*I did nothing ... in memory. There is nothing I can do. I cannot change memory*" (McKillip, *Tower* 124, author's emphasis), and yet he does. History as the characters in the novel understand it at the beginning of the book has left a scar that time alone has not been able to heal. Only active re-visioning allows for healing.

This re-vision of memory provides interesting contrast to *The Time of the Ghost*. The past is revised, not changed, and yet that is enough to create positive change in the present. In *The Time of the Ghost* the change is even greater than in *Tower*. In *The Time of the Ghost* the present of the novel is changed drastically for the better, the character whose life is in danger is assured safety, and another character is killed in her place. The assumption that the past cannot be changed is asserted in *The Time of the Ghost* as well as

in *Tower* and so, too, in *The Ghosts*. Several times the sentiment that “if something was happening a hundred years ago, then it had already happened, and however much you cared nothing could change it” (Barber, *Ghosts* 62) is expressed. And yet, the book has a happy ending, like in *Tower* and *The Time of the Ghost*, in which memory is changed and the past is healed. The difference with *The Ghosts* is that it goes further than the other books. To everyone but the protagonists the past has always involved a fire that killed several people except the children of the house, who were rescued in time. The children who have lived through the shift, however, know that the past has been changed. Characters not knowing that a change has happened equates more with *Ombria* than with *Tower*: in *Ombria* the reader has a privileged position and can see the change from the present of the narrative to the present of the “new” *Ombria* physically taking place. To the characters in the book, *Ombria* has always been as it is in the last scene of the book, just as to the ordinary characters of *The Ghosts* things have always been as they “remember.”

In all of the above examples time is used, and manipulated, to bring about healing. Time is used actively rather than being allowed to pass passively. Hellekson, in *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*, argues that “then the text becomes an alternate history: it has challenged the events in question by changing them” (29). This definition allows for revisions of history within secondary worlds, and thus in fantasy such as McKillip’s.

Chapter Three moves to another way in which McKillip uses time, in this instance with her use of legends. Active time is a way in which the past is changed, legends are used in order to flesh this past out.

Chapter Three: Legend

McKillop's secondary worlds are rich for many reasons, but perhaps one of the most important in relation to time is her use of legend to add age, depth, and texture to her stories. I will be focusing on how McKillop invents her own legends to pair with her invented worlds. McKillop tends to use them in one of three ways: as backdrop to the main story, as will be explored in *Forgotten* and others; as the framework for the story, found in *Alphabet* and *Bards*; and as an exploration of "truth" and how it can change from history into legend.

Legend, a Definition

Myth, legend, and fairytale (or folktale) are often used interchangeably. I seek to differentiate them, not because they are wholly and always separate, but because a useful definition can be reached by pointing out what legend is not. A legend has classically meant a story having to do with heroes that might have once been historical but has been changed into something bigger than reality. This definition of legend is still relevant, but there is a second "modern" meaning as well. Modern legends still concern themselves with heroics, but they are not necessarily based out of our primary time and past. They are, however, something grounded in the past, whether that is of

the primary or secondary world. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* legend is described as “Events or stories which have grown to mythic proportions. Legends are closely associated with folktales, but usually on a heroic scale.... A collection of legends related to a culture’s foundations and Hero figures becomes a mythology” (Ashley 572). In these definitions, myth and legend are quite muddled and a legend can grow into a myth. I would argue that it is the opposite and that a myth, through dilution or exaggeration, becomes a legend in time.

Myth is creation story; it is man explaining how life came to exist. It is also a story of explanation, presenting the unknown as knowable. There is generally a sense of great age about myth. Myths are considered some of the oldest relics of mankind, but legends, too, can be considered “out of the past.” Gary K. Wolfe critiques the term “new mythology”:

An oxymoron, perhaps too often used to characterize science fiction or fantasy’s function or appeal. Such terms possibly arise out of a desire to find cultural significance in a field that has seldom gained the serious attention of the dominant literary culture . . . characterized by some rather vague and unpersuasive claims. (81)

Although I believe the term “new mythology” can occasionally be helpful, as it is with Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, there are certain truths to Wolfe’s argument. What is often problematic about the term “new mythology” is the use of the word *mythology*.

Mythology is a set of stories or parables either explaining the occurrence of natural phenomena or explaining the creation of the world. In a scientific and rational age, this is no longer necessary. I would argue that where many use the term myth what they mean is legend. Two critics who are careful with their use of myth are Brian Attebery and Marek Oziewicz, both of whom have discussed myth and fantasy at sustained length in their books *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* and *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle and Orson Scott Card* respectively. Oziewicz makes an argument for myth in fantasy, that it is:

a holistic, soul-nurturing type of narrative capable of addressing vital psychological, cultural and aesthetic needs which are disregarded by most other forms of contemporary literature. . . . the secondary worlds that mythopoeic fantasy employs are morally charged universes in which human actions are meaningful and may suggest a paradigm for a creative and fulfilling life in the real world. . . . core structural marker of the genre is mythopoesis—a deliberate embedding of the story in the conventions of myth and mythmaking—which allows it to suggest a poetic and intuitive perception of reality. (*One Earth* 8)

Oziewicz is not using myth in the sense of foundational stories, but nor is he looking at it precisely as I do when I discuss legend. As Oziewicz notes, the stories he speaks of as

myth are those embedded in the “conventions of myth and mythmaking.” Which is not, quite, what I am discussing here, as I will go on to show. Attebery defines myth closer to the traditional formulation of it; he argues that “*myth* is used to designate any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief” (2, author’s emphasis). I do not argue completely against the use of the word *myth* in relation to fantasy. What I am arguing is that there is a different something at work in various ways within some of McKillip’s works, something that is connected to the past, like myth, but separate from it and more closely connected to individuals and the epic, and that is legend.

Fairytales are predominantly seen as stories relating to the folk (thus their conflation with “folktale”) or lower classes, and with a generally prescribed plot and type of character⁷. Maria Tatar explains fairytale as a limited form of literature: “The cast of folkloric characters is remarkably limited when compared to that of literature and the plots in which the characters of folktales move unfold in a relatively uniform manner” (xvi). Fairytales serve a purpose in society, but it is not the same function performed by legends. Legends are grand and heroic. They tell of lives writ large by circumstance or fate. Fairytales explain the familiar, and legends the epic.

When authors first began creating entirely separate secondary worlds, a need for new legends became evident as well. Because tales based in secondary worlds are

⁷ As explored by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folk-Tale*.

separated from our primary world, the inclusion of our legends would break the disconnection. Secondary worlds are, by and large, full of heroics; legends give this stature and a familiar sense of form. In his PhD thesis “Writing Worlds, Reading Landscapes: An Exploration of Settings in Fantasy,” Stefan Ekman notes that “Fantasy is a genre where old tales, motifs, and characters are brought to life again, in ways which make them relevant once more to their contemporary readers” (19). Modern legends are a part of secondary world fantasy that serves this purpose.

When Le Guin, McKillip, and others first began to create entirely autonomous secondary worlds in the 1960s and 1970s, they created stories with power outside of themselves. Le Guin and Tolkien are considered mythic storytellers. They are often grouped together, but the basis of their worlds is quite different. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* is completely independent of Earth, and life, in our primary world. Tolkien, however, in *Middle-earth*, created a mythology for Earth; it was still connected to our world, albeit tenuously. Tolkien’s tales are myth because he sought to create a backstory for England, a common history of how man came to power on the Earth. Le Guin and McKillip however, are creating their own separate worlds with their own separate histories. They seek to explain life, but not through any type of real or forged mimesis.

The farther into the rational and scientific age humanity travels, the less need there is for traditional myths, as Attebery argues in *Stories About Stories*:

the difference is not the ability to apply skeptical reason to magical motifs and supernatural beliefs; rather, it is the new awareness of myth as something belonging to others, to the past, to unfallen primitives. The advent of the scholarly study of myth marked the loss of myth. (26)

Myth has changed from its historical antecedents, and I argue that this change has made it something that McKillip is not doing in her fantasies; she is not looking (by and large) *to explain*. While there is a great movement to rewrite and revise fairytales that are close to their traditional forms, there is only a little rewriting of traditional myth. It is often quite distinct from its traditional predecessors, in that the form might be used but the content is quite different. There is no longer the need to explain the same type of things. For example, myth experiences very different treatment in Neil Gaiman's hands in *Anansi Boys* (2005), which uses the Anansi stories of West Africa as a base, compared to Tolkien's use of myth. When there is a rewriting of a classical legend, it is usually one of a few; the Arthurian legend is a popular example. The modern rewriting of legends has generally been seen less often, like myth, but of a type more directly related to its original, like fairytale.

Legend Invention

McKillip uses primary world fairytales, such as the Russian fairytales found in *Serre*, which Helen Pilinovsky, in her article "The Mother of All Witches: Baba Yaga and

Brume in Patricia McKillip's *In the Forests of Serre*," argues are not part of the story but *are* Story. McKillip is also frequently lauded for adding feminist twists to fairytales (as in the article "Changing Self, Changing Other: Patricia McKillip's *The Changeling Sea* as Feminist Fairy Tale" by Ann F. Howey), but fairytales are not what I am focused on here. Although she uses primary world stories in some of her books, such as *Tower* and *Serre* (the Lady of Shalott and Russian fairytales respectively)⁸ McKillip invents her own legends as well. In the following pages I hope to explore her invented legends, everything from the fabulous animals in *Forgotten* to the ageing, but infamous, mages in *Serre*, *Wolfe*, and *Alphabet*.

Attebery argues in *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* that "A perceptive writer of fantasy can take hold of remembered legends and extract the truth that remains in them" (36). McKillip does this to a degree, but using her own legends, her own inventions to "extract the truth." She does this by exploring how legends are formed and what happens to the people who are in the legends, and by inventing her own secondary world legends. Attebery goes on to argue in the same book that fantasy performs a certain function, that is:

Fantasy is not myth, which is generally held to be ancient, anonymous, and traditional, but it is one of the many endeavors we have undertaken

⁸ See Martha Hixon's "'The Lady of Shalott' as Paradigm in Patricia McKillip's *The Tower at Stony Wood*" along with "Patricia A. McKillip *In the Forests of Serre* (Ace Books 2003)" by Robert M. Tilendis.

to continue the process of mythmaking into a literate, individualistic age.

(166)

McKillip's invention and use of legend is another way to continue mythmaking in the modern world, but in a way separate from traditional myth. The wavering line between good and evil, light and dark, is part of what differentiates modern legend from its classical forebears. The wider the world becomes, the more obvious it is that evil is often simply difference or the unknown. The breaking of the world into absolutes is no longer as easy as it seemed in the past, and thus a new kind of legend as well as myth is needed. Ann Swinfen writes in *In Defense of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* that "the modern writer of fantasy cannot start from a widely accepted basis of belief" (2). A modern legend, therefore, does not begin with a familiar historical figure, as perhaps ancient primary world legends did, but rather with the familiar shape of one. A legend by traditional definition is filled with heroic characters, a grand tone, and a sense of historical importance. McKillip's legends, though invented, fill these qualifications. McKillip's stories are filled with heroes, both big and small. The importance of their tasks is never in doubt, even when the motivation is. McKillip's prose style, lyrical and old-fashioned, is one of the most remarked upon features of her writing. Lastly, as discussed in Chapter One, the past is thick in McKillip's works; her works have their own pasts and their own histories. The heroes one is reading about become part of this tradition within the books themselves,

as when Nyx's lifestyle as a swamp witch in *Sorceress* is treated as legendary by other denizens of her kingdom in *Firebird*.

There are several reasons for the invention of her own legends. One is that McKillip is allowed more freedom with her own legends (although she adopts fairytale quite loosely, as evidenced by *Winter Rose*, a non-traditional retelling of the Tam Lin story with McKillip choosing and discarding various parts of the traditional tale). There are no traditions to be satisfied, no endings or characterisations to be upheld or not. For example, when Angela Carter wrote her own version of the legend of Bluebeard in "The Bloody Chamber," she broke expectations by having a mother save her daughter at the end instead of having men do so, and just as deliberately stayed within the framework of the legend by having the corpses of former brides in the secret chamber. By working with an already extant legend, Carter had to make choices about where to adhere to the traditional elements of the story and where to break from them. By creating her own legends McKillip is free to work with them as she sees fit; Carter had to make choices, but McKillip does not. There are few expectations to negotiate. Those expectations that are present are those applied to all legends, which McKillip is able to play with. For example, almost all heroes are young men, which McKillip disrupts in a number of ways by having ageing heroes in *Alphabet* and *Wolfe* or women heroes in *Forgotten* and *Alphabet*. Thus McKillip is able to use the expectations the legend form provides, without being constrained by specific primary world legends.

As well as having fewer preconceived ideas to uphold or disrupt, the invention of legend keeps the secondary world intact. To be sure, her change of the names (Brume for Baba Yaga in *Serre*, for example) helps with this disconnect, but the recognisable primary world fairytale elements are still there. For example, the Baba Yaga story has certain familiar characteristics, giving the reader specific expectations of the story. The mix of primary world fairytale and invented secondary world can also be done clumsily, as Edward James remarks in his essay “Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy”: Tolkien’s exclamation of, “It really won’t do!” (71) probably alluded to Lewis’s “apparently slapdash world-building” (71) with its inclusion of Greek mythology, Father Christmas, and a host of other primary world characters. Without allusion to outside fairytale, myth, and legend, McKillip is able to create the same effects of these forms, but without breaking the secondary world barrier. McKillip is able to create warning stories, learning stories, and at times poetic stories within her worlds just as legends do in the primary world. Tristram Potter Coffin in *The Female Hero in Folklore and Legend* defines the difference between folklore and legend: “there is an atmosphere of belief present when legends are told” (4). It is this sense of belief that is vital to secondary worlds. As Tolkien argued in his seminal essay “On Fairy-Stories,” full belief in the world created by fantasy is essential to its purpose. And, by inventing her own legends, McKillip is able to keep this belief uninterrupted.

Though McKillip never gives an outright definition for what she views as legends, there are small clues presented in the texts. For example, Calyx of *Sorceress* says, "Legend says that during a siege by the Delta armies, the house moved to the northern fields of Withy Hold"; and her sister responds, "Legend. . . . It's a thousand year old tale" (McKillip 147). It is interesting that legend and tale are differentiated; legend is something that could be true while tale is not and is something that has been distorted with time. In the Preface to the second edition of *Deutsche Mythologie* (1844) Jacob Grimm argues, "The fairy-tale flies, the legend walks, knocks at your door; the one can draw freely out of the fullness of poetry, the other has almost the authority of history". Legend then is set apart from tales; it has the weight of history behind it and is therefore seen as something old and changed, but at some point true.

Some of the best examples of McKillip's creation of legend are in *Forgotten*, the story of the sorceress Sybel. At the beginning of the book she lives alone, surrounded by legendary creatures that her father collected and some that she has subsequently caught. Content with searching for more creatures and knowledge, Sybel's life is disrupted by the arrival of a knight, Coren, who brings her a kinswoman's baby to rear. As the boy grows, the outside world begins to invade Sybel's space until she is forced to enter the world of men and politics. In *Forgotten*, the legendary beasts of the title are vital to the story, and each is given a traditionally phrased backstory. Cyrin the Boar, for example, is introduced when the protagonist's father, "caught like a salmon the red-

eyed, white-tusked Boar Cyrin, who could sing ballads like a harpist, and who knew the answers to all riddles save one”(McKillip 4). The lyricism of the lines lends to the atmosphere of legend, as does the syntax. “All riddles save one” is both an elegant phrase and one that adds scope to the description of Cyrin. The natural question, which riddle does he not know the answer to, is brought to mind, but in a deft way. Cyrin is introduced with appropriate aplomb, and even within those few short lines he is given a backstory suitable for a legend.

McKillip traces the creation of legend in a number of ways. In *Forgotten* the animals are so legendary that they are assumed to be no more than just stories. However, in McKillip legends are brought out of the past and into the present. The legendary creatures in *Forgotten* have been out of recollection so long that even their legends are known by only a few. A woman who marries one of Sybel’s wizard ancestors “was of poor family, with tangled hair and muscled arms, and she saw in Myk’s household things that others saw perhaps once in their lives in a line of old poetry or in a harpist’s tale” (4-5). The creatures of *Forgotten* no longer even have all their attendant legends; instead they are remembered in pieces of story. The animals are presented not only as old, as legends, but ones of beauty, incorporated into poetry and song. When the origin of a legend has been lost, the story itself can become so legendary that it is assumed the origin, or base, is itself fantastic or unreal. This happens to the animals of *Forgotten*, but in other of McKillip’s works as well.

In *Sorceress* for example, the stories told as complete fiction are shown to be alive. *Sorceress* follows a young man, Corleu, on his quest to free his trapped love from the constellation sign that holds her captive. On his journey he meets a sorceress, Nyx, who agrees out of curiosity to help him. Nyx and Corleu discuss the reality of the legends they are encountering:

“It is a banner, a constellation, an ancient war sign. A song. How could you walk into it?” [Nyx asks] “Who am I to know that?” [Corleu] asked her. “The likes of me? How did the Cygnet get into the sky? How did the Gold King’s house get into a song? Maybe it was us put them there. Or maybe they’re the ones whispered to us that they were there. Or something was there, hiding behind Cygnet, behind sun’s face. Something dark and powerful and terrible, that we hung faces on to make them less terrible.” (48)

In this excerpt McKillip explores several reasons for a legend’s founding: that humans invented them, that they influenced humans to “invent” them, or that nature was vast and terrible and given human stories to become more understandable.

In one of her earliest books, McKillip already shows a clear interest in legend and how it evolves. *Throne* is filled with moments of backstory and legend. The book as a whole is an adventure that charts the hero’s progress from legend to legend, only to discover in the end that nothing is quite as it has appeared. The hero, Cnite Carles asks,

“But the Mirk-Well of Morg does not exist. It is a line in a song, a passage of a tale told to children by firelight. How can I go to a place that is not there?” (McKillip, *Throne* 30)

Yet he attempts to go to several places that are lines in songs, or tales, showing that within McKillip’s worlds story can be entered and changed. Meredith Veldman in *Fantasy, The Bomb, and the Greening of Britain* argues that the reality of stories within Tolkien’s invented world was important too:

A central theme in *The Lord of the Rings* is that legend and reality interweave in a seamless web. . . . Tolkien’s characters discover that “the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.” (81)

The same can be applied to *Cygnets*, but also *Alphabet* and other of McKillip’s books in which ancient legends come to life. Legends are not left in the legendary past for McKillip; they are played with, brought to life, and treated with realistic consequences, which I explore in *Alphabet* and others.

In *Sorceress* the exploration of story and, in a way, history, is done from inside the story itself. Corleu discovers this to his horror when he finds himself inside what he had thought of as a children’s rhyme:

It was a smallfolk rhyme, about a dark house falling, falling out of the sky,
and how you must never enter it, for having entered you will never leave.
. . . He lay listening, his skin prickling with horror, because the door was

open, he could have touched the dusty sill with his hand, but he could not move; he had leaped beyond the world into a child's song, into the story behind the song. (McKillip, *Sorceress* 31)

He has become part of a rhyme, something used to entertain children, not just assumed but *known* to be unreal, until he lands in it and must find his way out again. To find his way out he must go from story to story, and only by dealing with and acknowledging them in the present of *Sorceress* can he move on. In *Sorceress* McKillip works to show the "truth" behind song and legend, but in a different way than she has in other books.

Although McKillip does not seem to be arguing with anyone, as Tolkien argued against Friedrich Max Müller and Andrew Lang, I would contend that she has a similar goal to that which Michaela Baltasar argues for: "[Tolkien] arguing that myth is neither allegory nor historical document, but a true secondary world born out of language, to be experienced, not excavated" (19).

McKillip's characters in *Sorceress* are forced to experience the songs and traditions of the past as actual beings, stories that are both story and real. McKillip introduces the concept subtly but quite early on in *Sorceress*. Boys listen to stories Corleu tells: "They were silent a little; the thick, blazing stars had edged closer, it seemed, to listen to Corleu's tales" (McKillip, *Sorceress* 10). Because this is a fantasy, the stars have actually done so. The constellations that will come to life are indeed listening to Corleu and his tales. When Corleu asks why it is his life that has been interrupted,

one of the star signs, the Gold King, replies, "You were always saying our names, stargazing, never thinking who might be listening. Why did you go into my house? You knew what it was" (36). McKillip has created Corleu so that he is somewhat like Coren of *Forgotten*. Someone close to the old legends, the old stories. However, Coren is different from Corleu in that Coren struggles against others' disbelief. Coren argues with his brother Eorth in *Forgotten*: "'A boar told you all that?' 'He talks.' 'Oh, Coren, you have told us ridiculous things, but—' 'It is not ridiculous. It is true. Eorth, you never could see farther than the sword in your hand—'" (McKillip, *Forgotten* 145). Coren has the disbelief of others, but he knows with certainty that the legends he perceives are real. Corleu, however, must struggle against not only the disbelief of others, but also himself. The sorceress Nyx chides him: "For someone who just came face to face with a story, you're far too ready to dismiss them" (McKillip, *Sorceress* 56). In the fantastic, belief is imperative. Corleu has their stories, the knowledge of their meaning, but not quite the belief necessary to deal with them until the very end of the book.

McKillip weaves into this exploration of story the old superstition that fairies and other supernatural creatures need belief to stay alive. In conversation with one of the constellation signs that has trapped him in *Sorceress*, Corleu is told;

"The Gold King is a moldy old shepherd's tale, one of those silly stories that get passed around the world like air, only if they were dreams and

smoke they wouldn't be keeping such as the Gold King alive, would they,
listening to his spoken name?" (McKillip 34)

Therefore, the need works both ways: McKillip has made the constellations dependent on people's belief, but people need the stories as well. It is intimated that the stories attached to the constellations are ancient, and even when they are considered "just" stories they are passed from generation to generation, implying that there is importance in them beyond being stories. Susan Sellers in *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction* makes an argument for the importance of stories:

that stories play a formative part in creating who we are since they
present a medium through which we can organise, communicate and
remember our experiences, proffering ready-made schemata that equips
us to understand and evaluate our lives by connecting what happens to us
to a wider community and other points of view. (vii)

In *Sorceress* and other of her works, McKillip presents legends in ways that makes clear their continued importance, both to their own secondary world and to the primary world. The stories that McKillip has created, surrounding a group of constellations that she has invented, serve as the equivalent of secondary world myth and legend. They are not stories from the primary world, but they serve similar functions as those types of stories do in the primary world. Bruno Bettelheim argues in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* that stories serve as fun, but also as warnings,

and guidance. McKillip, by implanting her own stories, retains the secondary world immersion while allowing the stories to serve the roles they play in the primary world as well.

By creating her own sets of constellations and their attendant stories, McKillip is doing something different from many others who explore the same topic. Diana Wynne Jones's *Dogsboddy* (1975), for example, tells the story of the star Sirius from our primary world constellations. McKillip, however, in using her own constellations, keeps the secondary world intact. Having their own stories and legends in the secondary world intimates that they have their own culture and history. This creates a dense world in a short amount of writing. While it would perhaps have been easier to follow for the reader had McKillip used familiar constellations, the use of her own invented ones means that the reader is in an alien land. Stars, which are familiar to everyone, take on new strangeness when their patterns are different to what we are used to. Thus the reader is thrust fully into a fantastic landscape, one with stories—and a past—all its own.

This belief in story, in legends, is important to other books of McKillip's besides just *Forgotten* and *Sorceress*. In *Alphabet*, remembering legend—piecing together history and the past—is vital to the peaceful resolution of the story. The famed sorcerer Kane and her king have to be reconstructed, rediscovered in history and story before the land of Raine can be prepared for their invasion: "King and mage. Rulers of the entire known

world. No one born who didn't learn their names. And where are they now? Vanished like rain" (McKillip, *Alphabet* 35). This mystery is not just of historical importance in *Alphabet*, it is vital to keeping the world as they know it intact. *Alphabet* and *Bards* are structured differently, but the reconstruction of old stories and legends is just as important to them as to Corleu in *Sorceress*.

All stages of legends are looked at in McKillip. In *Forgotten*, before the book has even ended new legends are being created. To the reader, the lion Gules has become familiar, no longer a creature of legendary status but a lion, almost a pet of the sorceress Sybel. But, the legends that surround him are in continuous remaking, as readers are reminded at the end when they are told, "There was a harpist-warrior who made a song already of the sight of Gules bounding before twenty unarmed warlords across the Slinoon river" (McKillip, *Forgotten* 206). At the end of *Forgotten* the beasts of Eld have been transformed back into the legends they had been, out of the real and back into story.

The same transformation is shown in its beginning taking shape around someone who is far from legendary material. The young queen Tessera in *Alphabet* is described as quite plain, sullen, and a typical teenager in most respects. Her mentor, however, has overheard others speaking of Tessera and muses, "Along with beauty, strength, and wisdom, [Tessera] had acquired magical powers. She would be the last to recognize herself" (McKillip, *Alphabet* 108). The legends are shaping around the "rabitty"-faced

young Queen even before her reign is stable. The power of story has already begun to transform her into what history will remember. In Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* (2001) the Duchess, who is trying to rewrite events in the minds of the populace, claims that "Reality is only weak words, you say. Therefore, words are reality. But how can words become history?" (134). McKillip traces this path of reality to history (and, therefore, to story, poetry, etc.). In *Alphabet*, the old warrior Gavin says, "Heroes die a hero's death. Always. In tales if not in truth" (McKillip 36). With this he notes that the reality of the past is easily changed and turned into something more interesting, or perhaps just more beautiful, than "reality."

This look at the end of legends, rather than their beginning, does not just apply to characters in McKillip's books. In *Bards*, the bardic school that the legendary Declan has founded is described thus: "The school's reputation had spread far and wide, causing bardic schools to spring up everywhere to emulate it. It had become legendary, and as happens with legends, it was relegated mostly to the imagination" (McKillip 243). The school has become legendary, and in doing so it has passed beyond its prosaic purpose into story. The wry sense of humour in the comment also serves to highlight that being a legend is not always a positive. McKillip is not only speaking to the school's fate, but also more broadly to that of the people who inspire the legends. They are treated as just as mythical as the creatures are in *Forgotten*. It is their deeds that are

remembered, but it is their reality that McKillip shows, thus bringing them out of the past and into the present.

The small details that McKillip gives to the animals of legend in *Forgotten* are an example of what Mendlesohn and James argue in *A Short History of Fantasy* made Tolkien so popular: “For many readers the main attraction of *The Lord of the Rings* was precisely the feeling that Middle-earth has depth. If you turn a corner in Middle-earth, you know that there will be more world there” (44). The same can be argued for McKillip: there is more world beyond what has been placed on the page, and it gives her books a depth and feeling of great age they might not have had otherwise. A clear example of the type of detail that Tolkien was famous for can be found in McKillip’s description of the Black Swan of Tirilith: “the great-winged, golden-eyed bird that carried the third daughter of King Merroc on its back away from the stone tower where she was held captive” (*Forgotten* 4). Neither the King Merroc nor his daughter is explored at any point in the book, but this bit of detail gives the Swan’s backstory a richness that it might not have had otherwise. It places both the Swan, and the story, within a specific history. Furthermore, Marek Oziwicz in his *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L’Engle and Orson Scott Card* argues that, “The specificity of time and space is highly important and entails the need to construct a whole history of the secondary reality which is the background for the plot” (88). Invented legends are but one important way that

McKillip is able to construct her secondary worlds with intricacy and detail. The invented legends give the books not only a sense of depth in terms of there being more world hidden away, but also sense of time having passed. Though the history intimated in the Swan's background is not detailed, it is there, and because of this the reader is given a sense that the world of *Forgotten* has a detailed past, even if it is one that is not viewed fully.

Use of Legend

McKillip rarely goes back to lands she has already explored. The kingdoms in *Forgotten* are explored once, but not again. This means that there is an impetus to create backstory—and a feel of history and past—succinctly. In describing the main sorceress Sybel for example, her lover Coren says, “And you are beautiful, ivory and diamond-white, fire-white, with eyes as black as Drede’s heart...blackier...black as the black trees in Mirknon Forest where the king’s son Arn was lost three days and three nights and came out with pure white hair” (McKillip, *Forgotten* 29). The line is beautiful: “ivory” “diamond-white,” and even “fire-white” all create a sense of sumptuousness and beauty in keeping with the lyrical tone; but the description of a lover’s eyes as black as a cruel man’s heart is also atypical, and reflects on their relationship. A description coming from Coren, who knows the legends of the lands of *Forgotten* better than anyone save wizards, is a compliment rather than insult. The insertion of a legend from the

story-world of *Forgotten* works at keeping the mystique of the world intact. An explanation of who Arn was, or where the Mirknon Forest is, are unnecessary. The legend itself can be used as a shortcut to express unusual beauty, as well as the lovers' relationship to each other and the world in which they live. All of this is created with a quick allusion to a legend that is not detailed.

These small moments of legend and depth can be found in other books of McKillip's although not, perhaps, in quite the same way. For example, in *Bards*, "The leaf was flying across the grass toward the great standing stones that circled the crown of the knoll above the river in a dance that had begun before Belden had a name" (McKillip 10). At this point in the book the standing stones have not been explained, and their relationship with the land of Belden too is a mystery; thus this simple description provides the reader with several clues without being explicit. In *Alphabet* the main character Nepenthe says to her lover Bourne that "there is a legend—" and he responds with "There always are. . . . They gather on places of great antiquity like barnacles" (McKillip 74). In recreating these "barnacles" throughout her stories, in moments both large and small, McKillip weaves a tapestry of age and breadth through her stories without overburdening them. McKillip creates small pockets of breadth and age by adhering legends, both explored and unexplored, to various parts of her books. By not always focusing on them she creates a feeling that there is more to the world, and its past, than is visible to the reader.

Throme receives a slightly different treatment in that McKillip does not concentrate on any of the legends themselves. It is filled almost entirely with the short descriptors examined above. In this, the earliest of her secondary world fantasies, the reader is not given drawn-out descriptions of the legends. They simply exist, as is often the case in the primary world, where fairytales, for example, are often a shortcut for meaning. They are given in short form in *Throme*, as in this brief moment: “The seven spears rose, flashing like birds. ‘We are the Seven Watchers of the child Elfwyth of the Erle Merle’” (McKillip 27). The child Elfwyth has been introduced into the story as an ordinary child, so it is therefore a surprise to the reader as well as the main character, the Cnite Caerles, that she has such an obvious importance. Very little else is said of her—we are not told why she must have Watchers, or why she is so important—but this small detail gives breadth to an otherwise quite short novel; there is more world here, with a past all its own, even if it is one the reader does not see. *Throme*, in spite of its short length, still presents the depth and lyricism that is a feature of McKillip’s works.

In several novels, including *Ombria*, legends also serve a narratological function as framing devices. The legend in *Ombria* is presented as something not to be taken seriously. It begins with a tale told to the young prince, of a shadow Ombria: “A city rose behind Ombria, a wondrous confection of shadow that towered even over the palace” (McKillip 40). The language is fanciful, ornate, and sweet, with “confection” and “wondrous,” but the story is also told by a goose puppet to entertain a frightened

young boy. The story is treated as just a story and is presented this way at the beginning and end, but it takes on additional meaning as it winds in the background of *Ombria*. The reader and some of the characters learn of the story's veracity, but only gradually. At the end, Ombria has shifted, the tale has come true, and we once again see the tale being told as just a story by those who have forgotten their previous adventures.

Although the parallel Ombria and its legends can appear superfluous to the main story of the young Prince Kyel fighting to keep his throne, it is this different slant, this peculiar framing device, that allows *Ombria* to be one of McKillip's most challenging, and enjoyed, books. The threads of the tale of the parallel Ombria wind throughout the book, meaning that inconsequential oddities such as a chimney beginning below a plot of sunflowers are important clues to the reality of the tale.

Terry Pratchett, in his novel *Witches Abroad* (1991), has a character who says, "stories are important. People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it's the other way around. Stories exist independently of their players" (118). In *Ombria*, the story that shapes the plot is barely visible to the reader and only to a few select characters. Ombria's past incarnations and parallel shadow self are defining legends, but, as none of the characters (or the reader) are sure of their veracity, they are left as a mysterious backdrop. Lydea tells the tale of Ombria's shadow other to the Prince Kyel at the beginning of the story:

The shadow city of Ombria is as old as Ombria. Some say it is a different city completely, existing side by side with Ombria in a time so close to us that there are places—streets, gates, old houses—where one time fades into the other, one city becomes the other. Others say both cities exist in one time, this moment and you walk through both of them each day.

(McKillip, *Ombria* 4)

Thus, *Ombria* begins with truth presented as fairytale, as false. At the end of *Ombria*, Lydea is again telling a story to the prince. The prince asks if there is a sorceress who lives beneath the city, and Lydea “paused again, glimpsing a barely remembered tale. ‘I think she does. Maybe even her own city beneath Ombria’” (290). The sorceress does exist, and Lydea has even been to her ancient domain beneath Ombria, but it has been forgotten. The reality of Ombria has been forgotten, returned to legend. Legends start and end *Ombria* and in between their truth is explored. In this way legend frames *Ombria* as in *Alphabet* and *Bards*, but to a much subtler degree.

In *Alphabet* and *Bards*, legend and story are used as a framework but in a more obvious way. Both books are structured around a central “legend” that in the end is found to be real. In *Bards*, the chapters alternate between a scholarly paper on the legends surrounding the bard Nairn and the “modern-day” quest of his son for answers. In *Alphabet*, a translator piecing together a legend’s meaning in troubled times is interchanged with the document itself. Both have chapters alternating between the

modern characters and documents that purport to tell the “truth” about the legends they explore. In *Alphabet* a bit of poetry or song is presented along with what happened. For example, “*Axis slew his father, / The good, the just. / The Serpent swallowed his bones, / And the bloody-handed child became king.*” It was actually a tranquil afternoon beside the river” (McKillip 46, author’s emphasis). The king is eaten by a crocodile while playing with his son, and this in turn is woven into the much more ruthless version in poetry.

In *Bards*, the tone of the intermittent “truth” chapters is scholarly. For example, Nairn’s beginnings are given prosaically: “*He is first named in the records of the village of Hartshorn as the son of a farmer in the rugged wilds of the north Belden known then as the marches*” (McKillip, *Bards* 14, author’s emphasis). McKillip does not go as far as some authors (like Jorge Luis Borges or Suzanna Clarke) who construct fake footnotes to add a notion of authenticity, but there is still an attempt at a different type of language use. In both books the tone of the exploration of legend chapters is different than the story chapters; that is, the chapters in the “modern” time, where the reader follows the main characters, contain the typical third-person narrative tone of McKillip’s other works. Both books reveal their subjects as actual people, instead of just legends, who will interact (or already interact in the case of *Bards*) with the modern characters. The introduction of the legendary as real is done quite late in both books, though less so in *Bards*. This is perhaps because the terror of the unknown is what motivates the characters in *Alphabet*, while for the modern characters in *Bards* it is only once they

understand that legends have “come to life” that they become truly frightened. Perhaps because *Bards* was written later than *Alphabet* (and McKillip was more skilled) the link between modern and ancient feels less disruptive. There are more clues in *Bards*, but they are more subtly laid than in *Alphabet*. Because the character Nairn is active within *Bards*, disguised behind the name Jonah, clues to the legend are interwoven throughout the book. *Alphabet* takes shape in retrospect, when the identity of the legends is proven real. However, both books use this legend-come-to-life frame to explore legends and their protagonists.

To further confuse matters are the clues and hints about the legends that are thrown into both books, which can prove to be both true and false. For example, in *Alphabet* both the first ruler and the great sorceress Kane are presented as men in poems, story, and history. Both, however, were women. Characters in *Alphabet* argue about legend:

“Legends change through time. They get tangled up with other legends, names change, events that have nothing whatsoever to do with the legend cling to them and change.” “I know that. But sex is usually constant. Men don’t change into women.” (McKillip 117)

And yet it has happened not once but twice in the world of *Alphabet*, showing the mutability of story and the fallibility of words. Pratchett in *Wyrd Sisters* has a conversation between a Duchess who wishes to change history and the Fool she wants

to do it for her: “‘But can your words change the past?’ ‘More easily, I think. . . . Because the past is what people remember, and memories are words, who knows how a king behaved a thousand years ago? There is only recollection, and stories” (133). McKillip uses this mutability of story in several of her works, and though the politics of what is remembered and what is forgotten is not commented on (no one emphasises that it is *women* of great power who have been changed into men), it is still important to the story. Alexandra Bolintineanu in her essay “‘On the Borders of Old Stories’: Enacting the Past in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*” argues that this mutability was important to Tolkien as well:

It is not an infallible transmutation. Both texts sometimes offer competing versions of past events (one authoritative, the other suspect), showing that the legendary past can be distorted in the telling, from conscious desire or ignorance. (265–66)

In McKillip the transmutation of fact into legend does not often seem to be deliberately distorted, but it is shown happening quite often. However, one instance when it is deliberate is in *Alphabet* when Kane’s own legendary status has been intentionally changed because she needs to remain a mystery. Her status as lover to the king as well as all the basic details about her, her gender, who she is, and where she really came from must be disguised. This is one of the few times where the past is distorted purposefully, and there are clear reasons for doing so within *Alphabet*:

They had not yet become lovers, which is why legend was silent about their early relationship. Until she masked herself, Kane remained simply unseen. Until the cousin vanished, presumed lost in an unremarkable life between the lines of history, the magician, the lover, the Hooded One, could not exist. (McKillip 53)

This deliberate retelling is different than that of distortion when ignorance, or fancy, are involved. For example, when the king is killed by accident, the child Kane who has witnessed it gives a credible account: "But while events were sorted in a haphazard fashion to a coherent conclusion, impressions lingered and turned, long past memory, into myth" (49). A simple, if sad, tale is transformed through time: "He wore a light shirt of metal scales and a gold sheath for his knife in his belt. These things were magnificently transformed later into elaborate armor and a sword that had drunk the blood of thousands" (46–47). Legend has taken the place of fact and has mutated the past into something fanciful. This is perhaps self-referential; much of fantasy is about the ordinary being made fantastic.

Robert H. Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski argue in "The Secondary Worlds of High Fantasy" that "Although of vital importance, verisimilitude is not enough. A secondary world must also create in the reader a feeling of "arresting strangeness", a feeling of awe and wonder" (57). Although McKillip's works themselves inspire both of these concepts, by creating her own legends she includes the transformation of these

moments within her texts as well. This feeling of “awe and wonder” is helped by the transmutation of the truth within story into grander legend. In the example from *Alphabet* above, a man’s accidental death, and what happened with the event, is shown mutating into a moment of blood and glory. Though not purposefully distorted, the tale takes on new shape through poetry and legend, and McKillip traces this change.

In McKillip’s works empirical reality, legend, and story are intertwined. We are reminded of this because of the small moments in which truth and story are questioned. Warren G. Rochelle argues in *Communities of the Heart: the Rhetoric of Myth in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* that “Truth ultimately becomes a question of language, an issue of story” (1). The truth is not always given outright in McKillip’s works; it is often woven into legend. An example can be found even in smaller moments, such as this description of how the mage school in *Alphabet* came to be floating in a wood:

Legend said that as the palace grew more complex through the centuries, the school broke free of it and floated away, searching for some peace and quiet in the wood. Another tale had it hidden away within the wood for safekeeping during a war. Yet another said that the wood was not a wood at all, but the cumulative magic of centuries spun around the school, and that the magic itself could take any shape it chose. (16–17)

Various legends are given, but nothing is presented as certain. This uncertainty, this permutation of fact, infuses McKillip’s works. Even though the mage school is not of

central importance to *Alphabet*, it is still given its own small mystery, and its own stories, in the series of legends. That such a small part of the book should have such an ambiguous (and legendary) history lends the same air of depth and past to *Alphabet* that legends have in other of McKillip's works.

McKillip, in creating books of wavering "truth" such as *Alphabet* and *Bards* (and even, to some extent, *Ombria*), is exploring within fantasy what many post-modernists seek to do. In *Literature of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* Peter Middleton and Tim Woods argue:

Postmodern historical fiction is unconvinced that there is a single unitary truth of the past waiting to be recovered, and is more interested in who has or had the power to compose 'truths' about it, whereas historical realist fiction tends to assume that the literary narrative has a special power to present the past in a language of the present and give direct access to the thoughts, speech and events of that other time without distorting their significance. (21)

McKillip is not writing a "real" historical fiction; however, both *Bards* and *Alphabet* set out to look at this transformation of what "actually" happened into history via songs, poetry, and stories. An example can be found in a small moment from *Alphabet* where the legend that is being transcribed describes a conquered country: "And doom it was for Gilyriad, after three days, or thirty days, or ninety days and ninety nights of

constant battle, depending on which poet wrote of it" (McKillip 212). Though Gilyriad's doom is certain, how it happened, with what force, and for how long is amplified in poetry. Within these fantastic books, McKillip has set up a paradigm where the possibilities of the past and story can be explored by presenting both the events as they happened and their legendary after stories. It is interesting that in *Forgotten*, an earlier work, the legends have been forgotten but the veracity of the legends are not questioned. In later works McKillip complicates this, as the legends are sometimes both forgotten and/or "wrong."

In *Bards*, too, the fragility of story is explored. Like Tolkien, McKillip is layering secondary worlds into a secondary world and seeing what happens. Phelan explains to his class what likely became of the bard Nairn, and notices that a student's mind is wandering: "Lost, it seems, along with Nairn in the mists of poetry" (McKillip, *Bards* 11). Phelan continues with his lecture noting that Nairn has been lost: "Between the lines. He did exist once; that is a matter of documented history. But the exacting demands of storytelling, requiring a sacrifice, transformed him from history into poetry" (11). Phelan does not know that he speaks of his own immortal father when he speaks of Nairn, doubling the mystery. Nairn indeed existed/exists, but, as Phelan notes, he has been lost first in history, then in poetry and song. This transformation, from "actual" history into an artistic representation, is charted throughout the book, with the events as they happened being presented close to the representations of those

actions. In the research paper that is presented in alternate chapters, the author is bewildered by this transformation:

It's here, around the time of Declan's competition, that the boundaries of history begin to blur into the fluid realm of poetry, much as a well-delineated borderline might falter into and become overwhelmed by the marsh it crosses. Where, the historian might ask bewilderedly, did the border go? Nothing but this soggy expanse of uncertain territory in front of us, where we were stringently following the clear and charted path of truth. (160)

Part of the trouble is that as a fantasy, *Bards* includes moments of magic. Declan's competition is one of those moments of magic, and as such a prosaic scholar is not able to follow the "truth" because it is out of his/her experience. Historical truth is a difficult concept. In her article "Bending the Arrow of Time: The Continuing Postmodern Present," Alison Lee argues for a postmodern interpretation, but it works well within *Bards* or other works of fantasy that explore the "truth" of history:

One of the tasks of postmodernism is to examine the discourse of traditional history and to see the other journeys concealed within it, not just the physical journeys of those who are often excluded from historical narrative, but also the ideological journeys of the writers of history, and the taken-for-granted assumptions which remain unquestioned. (219)

McKillip examines both ideological and physical journeys, and though she does so within her works of fantasy, it holds lessons that can be transmuted to the postmodern, of how story changes, and why. The first ruler of Raine being changed from a woman to a man is (we must assume) unintentional, but Kane's disappearance from history is more deliberate: "It was assumed through the centuries, by anyone taking note of her disappearance, that it was brief, and that, during the blink of history's eye, an inadvertent glance away, she was found or chose to return home" (McKillip, *Alphabet* 82). The king's female cousin Kane has disappeared and then has re-appeared as the sorcerer Kane. In order to do that, her own personal past had to be erased to be re-created as a legend to be feared. There are layers of possibility within every interpretation of the past; mistakes can be made both on purpose and without meaning. Those writing the history will have their own skewed views, as will those who read it, and this is sometimes examined in McKillip.

In *Ombria* the legend of Ombria's shadow self is treated as fact—as something that can be searched for and proven—only by the scholar Camas Erl. The reader is also given hints of its truth through the eyes of Ducon Greve, whose unique parentage means he can sometimes see the parallel Ombria, but the majority of the characters (and presumably the townspeople whom the reader only briefly sees) treat it as story, as untrue. The structure of Ombria, a city layered on ruins, is discussed in depth in another chapter, but what is important to note is that these ruins are perhaps further

evidence of the changed Ombria, the story Ombria. Like snakeskin sloughed off, these buildings had their uses and then were left to slide into obscurity when a new incarnation was needed. McKillip's use of this concept is unique to this particular book in her oeuvre. In *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, Peter Stockwell argues that "The way that we divide the world up and name it to ourselves determines what we think the world is, and, even more importantly, how we think that we think at all" (27). How something is named and presented influences how it is thought of. Because the past of Ombria, and alternate Ombria, are thought of as a legend, they are presented this way in *Ombria*. They are offered to the reader (and most of the characters) as something fanciful. Most of the characters in the book treat the current incarnation of Ombria as the only one because to them it is: legend is not real to them. It is the scholar Camas Erl who sees the history behind the story. Although Michaela Baltasar is talking of Tolkien specifically in her essay "J.R.R. Tolkien: A Rediscovery of Myth" it is applicable to McKillip and *Ombria* as well: "It portrays myth, in full function, as a means of experience, a continuous story changed by its progression, shifting according to those who became involved in it" (22). The story that is Ombria is both real and legend, so the telling of the tale and its understanding are similarly mysterious in *Ombria*. The truth cannot be seen through the story, but the story is affected by the characters acting it out in "real" life. Thus, their independent actions are not quite so autonomous as they appear.

The progression from “reality” to story is not something limited to *Alphabet*, *Bards*, and *Ombria*. McKillip also picks up the thread in some of her other books, though in not quite the same manner as those examples. In *Sorceress*, for example, a young Corleu tells stories to his friends: “He told them the tale of the Rider in the Corn many different ways, always feeling his way closer to the truth of it, until one day they all stumbled into understanding” (McKillip 8). Here, instead of the past mutating into legend, the story has illumined the past through continuous, though different, repetitions. McKillip explores how story can illumine truth in *Sorceress*, as well as the more explored reverse.

There has been more of a movement towards “realism” in fantasy, and McKillip applies this to her legendary figures as well. They are presented not just as paragons of youth and vigour, but also past their primes, which is a noteworthy way to begin. Books about legendary figures either show them in their prime, doing tremendous deeds (such as Conan the Barbarian) or show them growing into their legendary status. Rarely explored is what happens after legendary status is achieved. One example is Taran from Lloyd Alexander’s *The Chronicles of Prydain* chronicles (1964–68): five novels show his path to manhood and legendary status, and then the story stops. How Taran deals with fame afterwards is not explored, though this is a typical extension of the story. Legends of Hercules performing his mighty labours and deeds are abundant, as are stories of his famous childhood, but you are not shown him in weakened old age.

McKillip however, takes a different tack. Atrix from *Wolfe* and Unciel of *Serre* are both presented past their prime. *Wolfe* examines the aftermath of a magic-influenced war. The great mage Atrix Wolfe intervenes in a battle that is in stalemate, but in doing so he unleashes a horror into the world that kills many members of both sides of the army. He puts his knowledge into a book and hides it, only for Talis, one of the sons of the king killed at the battle, to find it. *Serre* primarily follows the bewitched Prince Ronan (ensnared in the Forest of Serre by the witch Brume) and the Princess Sidonie and her retinue as she travels from her country Dacia to marry him. But it also contains the ancient mage Unciel, who has fought something very evil and come back to Dacia to recover. Not only are Atrix and Unciel shown as old, but even Unciel's final battle is not given the glory in which it might otherwise be wreathed, as the scribe Euan notes:

He had thought the wizard's last battle would be a tale of terror and courage, feats of unimaginable magic performed with heart-stopping skill and passion, good and evil as clearly defined as midnight and noon, a heroic battle for life and hope against the howling monster. . . . Instead he was trapped in the middle of something grisly, ugly, dreary. (McKillip, *Wolfe* 212)

The reality of a fight to the death is often "grisly, ugly, dreary" and, by having her legendary character allow this truth into the world via diary entries he has transcribed, McKillip is showing this reality. Later Euan discusses the fight with someone else: "It's

a horrible tale. . . .’ ‘Of course it would be. Look at what it did to him. Were you expecting poetry? ‘I suppose I was.’ ‘It will get turned into that soon enough’” (254).

Euan has already distanced himself from the fight by calling it a “tale,” and the person he is talking to notes that it will be distanced further as it is turned into poetry or song. The transformation from ugly fight to beautiful poetry is made visible. In this way McKillip’s legends are explored from a different angle than is usual. Going back to front, the reader is not even necessarily aware of *why* the characters are legendary. There is an aura of past strength and legendary status to both old men; however, the readers are told this, not shown, as is typical. The barest hints are given, such as when Unciel is described in *Serre* as a series of rumours: “He was the son and the grandson and the great-grandson of a long line of powerful sorcerers, and he had become the most powerful of all. . . . Another had him born in a land so old all but its name had been forgotten” (McKillip 16). Another example is when Atrix’s past deeds are used to describe him in *Wolfe*: “The Shadow of the Wolf, the students called the mist. They climbed the mountain to look for the White Wolf, impelled by the legends of him, tales the mages told” (McKillip 21). They are given legendary status, but with the slimmest descriptions. They are not presented as men in their prime in the midst of their great deeds. McKillip seems interested in presenting them as people rather than legends. She does this in other books, though not to the same scale. In *Sorceress* McKillip briefly mentions a legend: “The ancient mage Diu, a descendant of Chrisom’s, was such a

legendary figure it was difficult to conceive of him still alive and swapping spells” (241). The characters in the book, and the reader, are reminded that legends were and are alive in McKillip’s worlds; they have not been allowed to remain in the legendary past but are brought forward into the present.

As well as reconstructing the heroes of past legend, McKillip also explores the fate of living legends in *Wolfe* and *Serre* where characters Atrix Wolfe and Unciel of *Serre* are explored in their twilight years. This is different from the others explored as neither Atrix nor Unciel has a reason to hide his identity (unlike Kane and Nairn), and though powerful wizards, they are not quite fables in the same sense that the animals in *Forgotten* or the constellations come to life in *Sorceress* are. They are both legendary men in terms of power and deeds, and also in how their reputations have overwhelmed them as people. Neither is expected to be frail or fallible. Unciel is described thus: “The wizard, around whom legends swarmed and clung, each more fabulous than the last, seemed worn by the burden of them” (McKillip, *Serre* 16). This first description presents him as a legend, he is not presented as a man but rather as a wizard, with legends swarming. However, he is also shown “worn,” clueing the reader to the fact that this will not be a typical recitation of a legend. He is shown with a weakness and not at the prime of his strength, as will be explored further in Chapter Six.

Both Atrix and Unciel are legendary but, as explored in Chapter Six, they are shown as fallible, too. They are given the status of legends but without the usual

infallibility. Both Unciel and Atrix make mistakes that are hidden almost too late because the other characters in their books see them first as legends and only much later as fallible men. Ironically, because Atrix has been the one to make Pelucir wary of magic, the King of Pelucir tells Atrix in *Wolfe*, "We may be suspicious of sorcery in Pelucir, but you have a name as ancient as gold" (McKillip 128). He is trusted because he is a legend. And yet, it is his sorcery which has caused the near destruction of Pelucir and made them wary of magic to begin with. McKillip explores this implicit trust in their legendary status in both books. Only when both Unciel and Atrix are understood to be human are their errors corrected, and not without help. Both Unciel and Atrix require the aid of younger characters. They are legends, yes, but this legendary status has come at a cost for both of them.

McKillip explores legend to a smaller degree in some of her other books. For example, Vevay of *Alphabet* (who will also be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six) is also old and legendary: "Her blue-gray eyes, hooded with age, had once inspired poetry; her hands had inspired epics. Her deeds had inspired a great many passions; she had managed to survive them all" (McKillip 36). Her description is more romantic than that of Unciel or Atrix, but she is still shown having had tremendous power. Like Atrix and Unciel, Vevay also needs younger insight into the problems in her land, but she is also shown as powerful, though old. The reader is given an intimate look at characters who are often ignored at this stage in their lives.

I have shown that legend, story and “truth” interweave in McKillip’s books in ways that add depth and mystery and bring the past into the present, and into the personal. The past, in the form of these remembrances (which often come to life), is found throughout her books and is one of the main ways in which her books sustain a grammar of the past. The topic of this chapter could have easily been part of many, if not all, of the other chapters. McKillip’s legends infuse her books, the cities are full of history and stories, the characters are legendary, the land itself is full of legend (sometimes literally as is the case in *Serre* and *Alphabet* where aspects of the landscape itself are legendary), and all of these facets combine to give a sense that the past is always present. In Chapter Four, the legendary nature of the land will be explored further through a consideration of pastoralism, a literary form McKillip uses within some of her fantasies that exemplifies the grammar of the past within a paradigm of the natural.

Chapter Four: Pastoralism

Pastoralism, like the chronotope, is based on a conception of a specific time and type of place. Sue Vice argues that “in the more idyllic, pastoral chronotopes, space holds sway over time” (201). Like the type of fantasy I am examining, pastoralism is rooted in the past, but it is also anchored in landscape. It is this sense of the pastoral that I intend to work with, the connection of a nostalgia and sense of the past with landscape. While within traditional pastoral this is usually strictly contained to the agrarian (that is, farm and grazing land), I will extend it to include wildness, as it is this feeling of the past’s embrace of nature, in all its forms, that McKillip uses in her works. I argue McKillip is a pastoral writer in many of her books such as *Serre*, *Forgotten*, and *The Riddle-master* Trilogy. Pastoral is a mode of literature that focuses on nature and a past longing; it is this looser conception that I use rather than the stricter definitions of pastoral as either poetry or strictly about the agrarian. Terry Gifford argues that “beyond the artifice of the specific literary form, there is a broader use of ‘pastoral’ to refer to an area of content” (2), and I continue that tradition here.

Pastoralism

This chapter is a closer inspection of pastoralism, the longing in literature for a Golden Age of rural tranquillity, simplicity and the strength found “inherently” in the “natural.” I will argue that a particular view of the past can affect how characters, cities, and the counterparts of cities can be written. In the passage quoted above, Gifford continues his argument, saying “In this sense pastoral refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban” (2). While Gifford argues that the key to the pastoral is its connection between man and nature (especially the countryside), I would add that a sense of the past is vital to the pastoral. Pastoral has always been a form of literature that looks to the past. That is sometimes taken as a negative, with pastoral assigned a pejorative meaning (as Gifford argues in his chapter on the “Anti-Pastoral Tradition”), but that does not obscure the fact that it is a genre of the past, and one that, if at times idealised, can still help look to the future. This chapter is an argument for the nostalgia intrinsic to many of McKillip’s works, especially the rural nature of her characters and many of her settings. Though her books have varying combinations of cities, countries, and populated or unpopulated landscape, what Vernon Hyde Minor argues applies to McKillip as well as the pastoral as a whole: “The pastoral endures the ages and adapts to countless cultural environments” (64). Pastoral can be used as a variable concept, as I am doing here. The “countless cultural environments” can encompass the agrarian but also more modern preoccupations such as cities, as well as celebrating the power “inherent” in the

“natural.” Thus, although the pastoral is an old concept, it continues to be used in new and compelling ways. Gifford argues that “This is the essential paradox of the pastoral: that a retreat to a place apparently without the anxieties of the town, or the court, or the present, actually delivers insight into the culture from which it originates” (82). The pastoral as seen in McKillip allows for explorations of all types of nature and the past, as well as an interrogation of the dichotomies inherent in the modern view of city versus country. This allows something inherently old-fashioned to provide fresh insight for the present.

The strict definition of pastoralism according to Philip Carl Salzman in *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* is “the raising of livestock on ‘natural’ pasture unimproved by human intervention” (1). However, even in most of the primary world, Salzman acknowledges that “The very existence of the pasturelands is, in some regions, the result of human action” (2). Thus, even within scientific discourse, pastoralism is the illusion of freedom and non-human intervention. As noted in Chapter One, John Clute in *Pardon this Intrusion: Fantastika in the World Storm* argues that “Fantasy treats the present world as a *mistake* created by the engine of history, a mistake which must be refused through the creation of counterworlds and secret gardens as respite” (4, author’s emphasis). Pastoralism is thus important to much of fantasy in that it provides a mode for this secret garden respite. Fantasy such as McKillip’s is envisioned as though the industrial revolution never happened. It is infused with the

pastoral as a longing for something that ought to have been but does not (and perhaps cannot) exist in the primary world. Gifford argues that “The reader recognises that the country in a pastoral text is an arcadia because the language is idealised. In other words, pastoral is a discourse, a way of using language that constructs a different kind of world from that of realism” (45). Consequently, both fantasy and the pastoral are modes full of longing and, in some respects, nostalgia.

The pastoral is an old and powerful form of literature. Vernon Hyde Minor explains in *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste* that it is “[a] peculiar character of the pastoral—its ability to propel the viewer into the work, to absorb him, and to make him a real part of a fictional space” (71). The pastoral takes a reader’s own longings and immerses him/her in them. This aspect means that the pastoral and fantasy literature blend well. I have chosen to focus on McKillip’s secondary world works because some of her best work is done when she is creating new worlds. There is a fascination with this inherent in her works; very few of her books return to worlds previously explored. This interest in new worlds as well as new characters means that each of her worlds is worked out carefully, with character and landscape interacting in variable and engaging ways. For example, in *Firebird*, the desert that the sorceress Nyx and her cousin Meguet have to contend with shapes and illuminates their characters. However, the first view of Nyx in the first of the *Cygnets* duology, *Sorceress*, is as a swamp witch surrounded by decay and the horror of the characters who must interact

with her: "The trees thinned; water shunted into a slow side channel and from there bled into a wide lagoon" (McKillip 40). The swampy landscape is described with precise, horror-laden language; the water does not flow, rather it bleeds. This is in stark contrast to the cold and nearly lifeless desert found later in the books. The same is true for various other novels of McKillip's. There is the territory that Cyan Dag from *Tower* must contend with, for example: "If a road west took him across a mountain pass as narrow as a blade and so high he felt the cold starlight in his hair, he crossed it" (McKillip 39). Forests, mountains, coastal regions, and even deserts all challenge him in various ways. This variety allows McKillip to explore not just character but also different landscapes. The typical pastoral is likely to be set in gentle farmland, but even farmland is part of nature, and an often idealised nature at that. Gifford argues that there are three types of pastoral: the historical form of shepherds and poetry, a pastoral that celebrates nature and "delight[s] in the natural" (2), and a more environmentally aware, eco-critical pastoral (1-2). McKillip takes some elements of all three of these modes, but nature and the landscape that forms it is a vital part of the pastoral whichever type is used.

Lore Metzger argues in *One Foot in Eden: Modes of Pastoral in Romantic Poetry* that aspects of the pastoral are stylised landscape, independent soul, and Golden Age allusions. McKillip is often praised for her lyrical tone. This lends itself to stylised landscape, in that it is landscape quickly, though beautifully, described. The enchanted

wood from *Wolfe* is described thus: “[he] rode away from them to a silver stream into which Oak, during one of the wood’s arbitrary seasons, had dropped gold leaves to lie like coins at the bottom of the clear water” (McKillip 8). The poetic description, though short, fits the magic of the place, giving it beauty and a character of its own. I would also argue that with the beauty of the description comes a value judgement with “silver stream,” “gold leaves,” and “like coins.” The richness of the landscape is stressed, and that in turn emphasises the value. Jane Darcy in her article “The Representation of Nature in *The Wind and the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*” argues that *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and *The Secret Garden* (1911) “[invest] the natural world with moral significance and with a quasi-religious mysticism” (214), which can be found in the McKillip passage above. Certainly the proper name given to an oak tree, “Oak,” invests the passage with hints of paganism and a sort of mysticism, but the sentence as a whole emphasises the beauty and cleanliness (“clear water”) of the natural world. Another example comes from McKillip’s *The Riddle-master Trilogy*: “They stopped beside a narrow stream under a stand of three oaks. The late sun in the clear, dark-blue sky glanced off the red faces of rocks pushing up in the soil, and turned the hill grass gold” (75). The actual setting is vague and follows long passages of action but no physical description. However, when it is given detail, the landscape is described with the careful beauty displayed in the sentence above. The use of “clear” for the sky and

“gold” for the grass imbues the passage with a sense of cleanliness and wealth, and the sentence as a whole conveys beauty in the careful choice and order of words.

The independent soul can be found in many of McKillip’s pastoral characters; one example is Morgon, from *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, the ruler of the small agricultural island of Hed. Morgon refuses to do as he is expected, and one of his subjects insists “you shouldn’t let your private inclinations interfere with the duty you were born to. . . . It’s not—it’s not the way a land ruler of Hed should want to behave” (McKillip 13). It is important to note that he says “should want” rather than “ought.” It should be in Morgon’s very nature to stay on his lands, but he has an independent, questioning character. This is portrayed as a troublesome yet positive aspect in the book. Morgon should not want to leave his island nation, but he does. Thus, Morgon is a typical pastoral character in that he is a farmer in love with his lands and way of life. Pastoral is often linked to the role of shepherd, which in turn can be used as a metaphor for kingship; thus, Morgon’s dual nature as pastoral farmer and ruler are not in conflict. However, his independent nature causes him to roam away to school, and then roam again to find out his destiny, even when that means leaving his true pastoral life, and kingship, behind.

Lastly, Golden Age allusions permeate McKillip’s non-mechanised worlds. The system of governance found in all her books, such as monarchies, have the tinge of Golden Age. Only one of her books that I am using in this study, *Bards*, has machines

and even then the machines are rarely mentioned. Thus, almost all McKillip's worlds included in this thesis are nostalgic for a Golden Age, non-mechanised time. This includes a fascination with the medieval and, in books such as *Basilisk*, the Renaissance. Meredith Veldman in *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* is speaking of the Romantics, but could be arguing for McKillip's use of a sometimes idealised Middle Ages: "Medievalism, however, was more than mere escapism or nostalgia; the Romantics may have created a utopia or social ideal out of the Middle Ages, but they utilised this social ideal in an effort to renew and recreate their social reality (14). McKillip's use of medieval or Renaissance power structures and lack of mechanisation is not only a way of escaping modern "social reality" but also a way to explore it in contrast with lands that are non-mechanised and the characters that are drawn to the land. Thus, Golden Age attributes in McKillip's works are not only a basic aspect of the pastoral but a way of exploring it as well.

The pastoral, like fantasy, has always had a grammar of the past. Parts of fantasy, particularly that defined as "high fantasy,"⁹ are very much rooted in the past. Veldman has argued that one of the "taproot texts" (a term I have taken from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*) of certain kinds of fantasy are ideas from the Romantics, but so are the pre-Raphaelites who used this same sense of times past. As with the pre-Raphaelites, this is

⁹ From *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* ed. John Clute and John Grant: "Fantasies set in OTHERWORLDS, specifically SECONDARY WORLDS, and which deal with matters affecting the destiny of those worlds" (466, capitals in original).

not a “real” past but rather an ideal of golden ages when machines did not exist: a pre-industrial utopian vision. As examined above, a hallmark of literary pastoralism is a longing for a past Golden Age.

The works of McKillip lack the sense of loss or irony that often accompanies these backward-looking genres, however. Her worlds face destruction in a number of ways, but not in the environmental sense that often accompanies eco-critical writing. Yet, there is a sadness to the works and the characters, even if they lack the typical feeling of loss found in such texts. Perhaps it is the pastoral mode as a whole that infuses her works with a sense of loss, because the landscapes in the books themselves face no encroachment. Part of John Clute’s definition of fantasy literature in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is a moment of thinning, that is “the gradual loss or decay of magic or vitality” (339); but McKillip’s works, though clearly fantasy, do not seem to have this. Individual characters, such as Morgon of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, might mourn the loss of a rural, “simpler” life. However, they do so within a pastoral world that is threatened through misuses of power, not machines or any type of industrialisation. In *Wolfe* for example, the land is scarred by memory, not by actual physical damage. Talis, young scion of a battle-ravaged family, notes that “He and Lares had been at the mages’ school for two years, but the siege that Lares had laid to bitter memory seemed endless” (McKillip 14). Even though they are too young to have been at the battle itself, the memories they hold are “bitter,” and Lares does not simply

bother Talis but lays “siege” as though they still fight. Although both Talis and Lares are quite young, their whole lives have been shaped by the battle between their families, even when the land itself has long ago returned to normal. The landscape where that battle occurred is described by Talis later in the book: “He saw . . . the misty green wood on the hill, the sky colored pearl around it” (39). The land has healed but the characters have not, which is in contrast to other fantasy books, such as K. J. Parker’s *Scavenger Trilogy* and Lloyd Alexander’s *The Chronicles of Prydain* series, in which battles poison the landscape. Although McKillip’s countries or characters might be threatened, the actual landscapes are not. Like many battlefields in the primary world, these landscapes have recovered from man’s ravages and their often bucolic tranquillity provides a contrast to their violent pasts.

The pastoral has been a part of literature almost since literature’s inception as a written form, and its continued appeal is in part because of its amorphous nature. William Barrillas argues in *The Midwestern Pastoral: Place and Landscape in Literature of the American Heartland* that the traditional pastoral had specific characteristics:

Ancient poets, among them the Greek Theocritus and the Roman Virgil, established many of the conventions still associated with pastoral, which first implies the characterization of intelligent and resourceful farmers, shepherds, and other country people, and description of landscapes,

plants, animals, and natural phenomena such as weather and seasonal changes. (12)

Thus a form of literature where the natural is praised over man-made is an old one, and one which even non eco-critical writers such as McKillip utilise today. Blue Calhoun in *The Pastoral Vision of William Morris: The Earthly Paradise* argues that by the eighteenth century the pastoral, though always an important genre, had begun to see its limits (5). And yet, Calhoun goes on to argue for the relevance of pastoral writing in the works of writers past the eighteenth century, those such as the pre-Raphaelite William Morris who “use the pastoral contrast to evaluate the possibilities of life within what Morris calls ‘a more complete civilization’” (9). Just as pre-Raphaelites such as Lord Dunsany, John Ruskin, and the aforementioned William Morris found the pastoral a useful mode from which to critique the modern, so too McKillip. Though at times sentimental, McKillip’s version of the pastoral allows for more “modern” preoccupations, such as cities, as well as an exploration of the power that can be found in the wild.

The pastoral within the fantasy genre has its variants; Ursula Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985) is a good example of how accurate pastoral can be used within fantasy. Le Guin’s book is presented as though archaeologists in the far future are looking back on a culture that is, to our current time, still in the future. *Always Coming Home* endorses a pastoral lifestyle but also shows its difficulties in a more detailed way than McKillip. Nevertheless, it is still a pastoral, and still firmly rooted in a vision of the

past. Pastoralism can use accuracy as well as nostalgia to be powerful and effective.

Always Coming Home begins “The people in this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California” (“A First Note”). What this confusing premise can be reduced to is that *Always Coming Home* is a pastoral book. The focus, though primarily on character, is also on the landscape and how it is used for farming, hunting, weaving, and other forms of sustenance. Thus it is still a pastoral, though it is one looking forward to the pastoral, rather than back. The attention to detail is acute and emphasises the accurate nature of the pastoral in Le Guin when it shows, for example, the realities of a dog getting into livestock or of planting crops. McKillip’s pastoral is not so accurate, or so detailed, but perhaps it could be argued that accuracy is not a mark of pastoralism. However, nostalgia and Golden Age longings intimate a glossing but do not require it, and a certain level of realism can enhance the pastoral and provide it with a concrete attainability that extends its usefulness as a model for life in the primary world, as explored by Gifford in his third variant of the pastoral.

There is a long, particularly American, tradition of pastoralism, and because McKillip is an American author this should be addressed. Thomas Jefferson, a founder of the United States, argued for the farmer-citizen in 1781: “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens” (Padover 68). From the beginning America has been branded with a particular fervour for the pastoral. David E. Nye argues in *American Technological Sublime* that “The North American continent possesses every feature that a

theory of the natural sublime might require, including mountains, deserts, frozen wastes, endless swamps, vast plains, the Great Lakes" (1). Consequently, the variety of terrain in McKillip's works could be traced to her American heritage. The importance of this landscape upon character (as upon people) is a characteristic of the sublime mentioned by Nye, and can be seen where McKillip describes monumental landscapes, whether tall mountains or barren deserts. The United States was seen as virgin territory from the beginning (ignoring previous dwellers) and advertised as a land of bounty. Ashton Nichols notes that "Yellowstone National Park . . . is a naturalistic theme park that relocated thousands of indigenous people . . . to start using this land as self-described 'wilderness' for the benefit of mostly upper-middle class, mostly white, nature lovers" (17). The American "wilderness" was false to begin with. Nevertheless, this American sense of the pastoral, as something wholesome and "natural" (natural meaning un-touched by man), can be perceived in some of McKillip's works. Robert Hughes argues about American landscape painter Thomas Cole that "For [Cole], the image of America as Arcadia served to spiritualize the past in a country without antique monuments" (146). This wilful conflation of past with a particular landscape means that America has a chronotope firmly rooted in the landscape. McKillip's worlds contain this particular chronotope in the form of landscape as Arcadia, as empty paradise. McKillip's worlds are sparsely populated outside of the concentrated cities. There are great tracts of empty lands for the characters to quest across, very rarely coming across

people. In *Serre*, for example, the Princess Sidonie is travelling to her betrothed, and does so for months without interacting with another soul besides her own retinue. There are occasional mentions of farmers in McKillip, for example in *Basilisk*, but even when they are the main characters (as is the case with Morgon from *The Riddle-master Trilogy*) it is not about the reality of being a farmer but about the illusion of being one. An argument between Morgon and another character Lyra demonstrates this after an incident when Morgon has had to physically defend himself: ““You had good aim with that rock”” notes Lyra, and Morgon responds ““That’s a good enough weapon for me. I might kill someone with a spear.”” Lyra’s answer is a puzzled, ““That’s what it’s for.”” And Morgon’s response is ““Think of it from a farmer’s point of view. You don’t uproot cornstalks, do you”” (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 85–86). Lyra is disgusted because Morgon refuses to defend himself, and his arguments about why in turn do not ring true. A farmer would be very familiar with killing of both plants and livestock. Defending his land from predators would be a natural preoccupation, as would using animals for sustenance. For him to disavow killing altogether is a false and nostalgic characterisation, especially with ““You don’t uproot cornstalks,”” as that is exactly what is done once the corn crop has been harvested (Morgon goes on to say that you don’t do so before harvest, but the corn crop is still killed, as the animals on his farm would be).

Leo Marx argues in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* that ““The soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over urbanised landscape is largely a

vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness (6). Fantasy literature allows this “veil of nostalgia” to be embodied. There is no famine, and very little of the hard work involved in food production is mentioned. There are examples in fantasy where this is not the case. *Lord Valentine’s Castle* (1980) by Robert Silverberg is an excellent example. Though a “classic” genre text, there are details of farming, food production, and agriculture in general spread throughout the book. The pastoral, however, has a tradition of skimming the details; it is a literature of nostalgia, not reality, and as such McKillip’s works accord with it. Vernon Hyde Minor notes in *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*, that writer “[Giovanmario Crescimbeni’s] garden was not the wood of Theocritus, Virgil or Sannazaro; rather it was the self-conscious playhouse in which the shepherds rehearsed the lives of the shepherds” (64). Even with the earlier poets such as Virgil listed, the descriptions were not accurate or especially detailed; they were focused on the loss of pastoral as much as its charms (and more so than the realities of rural life).

The pastoral is a sense of time that has been and gone as well as a nostalgic view of the past. This can be separated from works that might more accurately be termed “environmental fiction,” such as the works of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Wendell Berry (all, it must be noted, American men). Their works are considered non-genre or “realistic” literature. Yet there are also aspects of the fantastic

to their works. They all praise the “present” of nature, but there is an aspect of the pastoral or the nostalgic to them as well. Thoreau’s *Walden*, for example, is about the solitude of nature, but Thoreau was visited by friends and close neighbours. This does not lighten the impact of his work, but it does serve to show that even “real” literature is in some sense a work of fiction, constructed to show a particular aspect and not reality in its entire and literal truth. Wendell Berry writes of his own farm in an idealised way:

I stoop between the strands of a barbed-wire fence, and in that movement
I go out of time into timelessness. I come into a wild place. The trees grow
big, their trunks rising clean, free of undergrowth. . . . It is free of the
strivings and dissatisfactions, the partialities and imperfections of places
under the mechanical dominance of men. (24)

This passage is a romantic view of Berry’s farm. Earlier, Berry acknowledged that even that which looks uncultivated has been changed by human hands. Within this passage “free of undergrowth” implies some form of intervention. Though Berry and his contemporaries spoke of their “present,” acts of imagination are just as important in their works as in McKillip’s. This ought to be kept in mind when she is criticised for her lack of realism. What can be portrayed in literature is a reflection of “actual” reality; a second layer of the fantastic does not diminish the work’s import. As Brian Attebery notes in his *Strategies of Fantasy*, “mimesis depends on something akin to fantasy for its

ability to organize and interpret sensory data, because every organizing schema is the product of imagination rather than simple observation" (4). Mimesis requires a type of fantasy, and fantasy in its turn needs aspects of realism, and neither diminishes the other.

Nostalgia

Landscape is a large part of the pastoral, but so is nostalgia. Though removed from the Romantics in time, criticism about some of Romanticism's values can also be usefully applied to McKillip. The pastoral was a strong feature of both the literature and the art of the Romantic movement. Veldman argues that the Romantics "viewed human reason as essentially limited, and they endeavoured in their efforts to connect with nature and the past, to offer an expanded vision of experience and existence" (14). McKillip's books have a strong feel of the Romantic, of a movement which also dealt with a past grammar and which sought to use the past and nature as counterpoint to modern sentiment and mechanisation. Veldman argues for an appreciation of the past by the Romantics:

The Romantics celebrated change but did not embrace the Enlightenment view of human development as a progression from the darkness of superstition and ignorance into the sunshine of rationality. Instead, they

saw in past societies important values that must be restored if the task of reintegration was to succeed. (14)

Although Veldman is speaking about a past Britain, her assertion can be used to explore more modern pastoral sentiments as well. The nostalgic aspect of pastoralism is one rooted in the glorification of the past, of golden ages. At its most positive, pastoral is a plan to move forward using the best of the past. This can be seen in all of McKillip's pre-industrial worlds. The problems of modern, primary world Earth are not to be found in McKillip's works. Without issues such as global warming or pollution, McKillip is able to focus on personal interactions both between characters, and between characters and the natural world. A reconnection with nature, and with the wildness which that allows, is one of the "lessons" that can be found in McKillip's pastoral works.

Nostalgia is often held as a negative, something that prevents people from moving forward. A nostalgic view of the past, however, is not always damaging. Paul Gruchow argues in *Grass Roots: The Universe of Home* that "Nostalgia is the clinical term for homesickness, for the desire to be rooted in a place—to know clearly, that is, what time it is" (7). Nostalgia is a natural part of the pastoral, and both are "rooted" in concepts of time. This nostalgia comes with a sense of loss, but perhaps it is a sense of loss that comes more from the author/reader and his/her knowledge of the primary world outside the text than from McKillip's text itself.

Pastoral can be a way of becoming stuck in the past. Conversely, it also has transformative power. Gayle Greene, in "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," argues that "nostalgia and remembering are in some sense antithetical, since nostalgia is a forgetting, merely regressive, whereas memory may look back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions to enabling fictions" (9). While it is true that nostalgia can contain a notion of being frozen in time, and letting growth stall, I prefer Greene's slant on memory, and think that nostalgia need not be so different from memory in Greene's definition after all. Not being fixed in the past, but rather using it as a way to look forward, is an important part of the growth of several of McKillip's characters. All of *Tower* could be said to be focused on this dynamic. The web of intrigue that is set up to entangle the various characters is done precisely in order to enable them to move forward from their versions of the past, as explored in Chapter Two. At the end of his journey, Cyan Dag realises he has accomplished "nothing," but a witch tells him, "'You rode out of Gloinmere to rescue the woman in the tower. What you truly did, while you searched for me, was to rescue Thayne Ysse and the North Islands from seven years of bitterness and hardship. You rescued Sel from her dark tower'" (McKillip, *Tower* 289). The witch explains further: "'If I had asked you to outface a dragon, catch a selkie in the sea, persuade Thayne Ysse to trust a knight of Gloinmere, face death by water, sword and sorcery, and survive to bring magic into Yves, what would you have said?'" (289). Convinced his quest is something else, Cyan Dag is able to heal the whole

world of *Tower* “by accident,” as explored further in Chapter Two. Thus, even though *Tower* is a book without machines, with medieval power structures, and pastoral all the way through, it still maps a way out of bitterness and power struggles and into hope.

Consequently, the pastoral can be a simple construct rooted in a past that never was as well as a guide forward. Barrillas argues that “While this nostalgic tendency can lend itself to sentimentality and a false idealisation of life in nature, the best pastoral writing acknowledges social complexities and conflicts invented in the individual’s striving for a meaningful life” (12). Working from this definition, the best of McKillip’s pastoral works is *Tower*. Though part of a typical fantastic monarchy, the lands in *Tower* are in conflict. The secondary world equivalent of serfs have been ground down long enough, as a baker, Sel, explains to the king: “It’s not the Lord of Skye you would face. . . . It’s all the folk whose faces you have never seen. Like the folk in the North Islands, they have names, and lives they think important” (McKillip, *Tower* 278). The hardship of rural life is acknowledged and not glossed over. Farmers, shepherds, fishermen, etc., all are given character and not minimised as is so often the case. Raymond Williams in *Country and City in the Modern Novel* argues that Jane Austen is but one example where “This is face to face across an actually crowded countryside, with most of the people in it faded to anonymity or to landscape” (4). McKillip works to people her countryside in the more accurate of her pastoral works. Hardship is acknowledged, even if it can be but briefly. The village in *Tower*, for example, is sketched out, but with sympathy: “Half

the villagers fished. The others raised sheep and goats on the wild land, which grew grass or rocks indiscriminately, but little else" (McKillip 58). This is not a land full of plenty, but rather one where subsistence means toil of one kind or another, and this is acknowledged.

Because nostalgia is often veiled by romantic sentiment, it can be considered a falsehood. The same can be said for the pastoral. However, Brian Attebery argues in *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* that "Coleridge points out that the supernatural, properly treated, can partake of an emotional truth, a fidelity to human experience, that overrides the apparent unreality of the subject matter" (34).

Pastoralism can be accused of the same as the supernatural (or fantasy); it too is a representation of something that does not exist. However, as Attebery (and Coleridge before him) argue, there are still truths to be found. The link between wild, natural settings and power is clear in McKillip. So, too, is a sense of home.

The sense of nostalgia as homesickness is powerful in McKillip's works, not only in the clear longing for rural life that runs through her books, but also within particular characters. Brenden from *Od* and Melanthos's mother Sel, from *Tower*, are not just examples of this nostalgia, they are embodiments of it. Sel is described by her daughter: "She frowned absently, studying the tall, bulky, swaying figure. It was her private belief that her mother had once been a seal, who had swum too close to humans without her sealskin on and had been taken. She was shaped like one, she barked, and she knew

some very strange things" (McKillip, *Tower* 58). This characterisation is blunt. Most of McKillip's turns of phrase are less outright than this, but it does sum up the character quickly and brings her association with the seals to the forefront of the reader's mind. Sel waits to return to her seal form, but so early in the book neither the character herself, nor the reader, is aware of this. Thus the characterisation of her as something natural and non-human is important, but so is the sense of homesickness that her daughter senses from her mother's demeanor. Vijay Agnew in his introduction to *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home* argues that "the individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living 'here' and remembering 'there', between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home" (14). This tension is found in many different characters, and the characterisation with the natural is one way in which McKillip shows the character's affinities and longings.

Brenden from *Od* is different from the sorcerers in other of McKillip's books in that both nature and his longing to return to it lend him power: "Home drew him, the bare, windswept hills, the marshes where he could sit for an entire day watching a bog lily open and never hear a human word. The stark longing fueled his magic" (237). Other characters, such as Nyx from the *Cygnets* duology, are lent power and knowledge by nature, but are not drawn to it in the same homesick way. The need to return to nature is a common sentiment. As Marx notes, it is a "familiar impulse to withdraw

from the city, locus of power and politics, into nature” (22). But McKillip adds layers to this. Not only does Brenden want to withdraw, this very nostalgia gives him power. Thus, something often presented as a negative can be quite powerful.

There is also an ambiguity to be found in the nostalgia McKillip presents. The pastoral is often set in opposition to the city and modernity, but, as Raymond Williams in his *The Country and the City* argues, “It is significant, for example, that the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present” (297). Many of McKillip’s books reside in this imaginary past. Even her cities are not images of the future such as science fiction might see, but rather inspired by the Renaissance or by ideas of medieval cities. Many of her books exist out of time. That is, they are in an imaginary past that is neither true past, possible future, nor actual present.

People and the Landscape

A sense of the pastoral infuses McKillip’s character descriptions. Several of her characters—the baker Sel from *Tower* and Brendan from *Od* are but two examples—are attempting to return to nature in some way. Her descriptions of them echo and amplify this. McKillip often uses phrases to describe her characters in ways that make the association between character and nature plain. McKillip clearly equates the natural with a source of power and learning that are in line with nature-study advocates for whom “the green world was a source of delight, instruction, and nourishment for the

soul" (Armitage 1). One example of many can be found in *Od*. *Od* explores the dichotomy of trained versus natural as it follows the un-(formally)trained but extremely powerful Brenden as he goes to be a gardener at the School of Magic of *Od*. There he meets the wizards Yar (also originally from the countryside) and Valoren (completely a man of court) who attempt to help him and are afraid of him respectively. One point of many where Brenden's affinity with nature is illuminated is when Brenden is described as "standing quietly as a tree in an ancient, weathered grove" (McKillip, *Od* 314). Portrayed are the unmoving age of the tree as well as the sense of age outside of the few physical years Brenden has lived, together with his affinity to nature. His stillness is contrasted with the busy city he has been thrust into, and his wild nature is underscored as well.

Sometimes it is a character's true affinity and spirit that are emphasised by McKillip's lyrical descriptions. What might otherwise be a pathetic fallacy in realistic fiction is often real in fantasy (or at least gives clues to the truth). For example, the prince of *Changeling*, at this point a mysterious stranger, is (though he does not know it) the son of the sea. A vivid passage in *Changeling* comes alive because of its associations with nature (specifically the sea), a hint at his parentage, and the trouble it will soon cause to the watcher:

The dark horseman from the sea gazed up at her, mounted at the foot of the cliff. She caught her breath, chilled, as if the sea itself had crept

noiselessly across the beach to spill into her circle. . . . A wave boomed and broke behind him, flowing across half the beach, seeking, seeking, then dragged back slowly, powerfully, and, caught in the dark gaze of the rider, his eyes all the twilight colors of the sea, Peri felt as if the undertow had caught her. (McKillip 11-12)

What ought to be a simple description of a man on horseback, staring back at a girl, is turned into something rich and strange. He is explicitly linked with the sea “as if the sea itself,” his eyes are described as “the twilight colors of the sea,” and his gaze is given the power of the “undertow.” The sea is also described as “seeking,” and while this could be a simple description of its motion, the fact that powers in the sea are searching for the prince is evidenced without being directly stated. The horseman’s power and his affinity with the sea are emphasised, and even his longing to return to it (and its desire for him to return) is intimated through description.

Nature, as well as being expressed through character descriptions, is also journeyed through. While I have chosen to categorise all the books I am working on as “immersive” from Farah Mendlesohn’s rubric (*Rhetorics* 59), many are also, though not primarily, quest fantasies. A quest fantasy moves across landscape, and the landscape is therefore an inevitable part of the story; landscape plays its own part in quest fantasies and influences character development. *Tower* takes place across a range of landscapes, from forest to sea. *Basilisk*, too, ranges over an imagined world, as do the *Cygnets* books,

in which various characters are challenged by everything from mountains to swamp. The landscapes in these works present challenges, but also mark characters in various ways. Perhaps this is another way in which McKillip's American background is apparent.

Although a variety of landscapes are presented, from forests to desert, the difficulties encountered are more often man-made rather than natural in McKillip. This is slightly unusual. With such variety of landscape it could be assumed that it would be used to foil the characters outright, such as by having characters forced to go under a mountain instead of over it, as is the case in *The Lord of the Rings*. Pratchett parodies the common use of landscape as a (nearly) living foil (which he calls "Psychotropic" landscape) in books such as *Wyrd Sisters*, which begins with an anthropomorphised storm. However, in McKillip, landscape is used in a less direct fashion. For example, in *Tower* the landscape seems to (but does not actually) change depending on who quests through it. Thayne finds by accident something Cyan Dag has been searching months for: "They were not so far as they had looked; he came swiftly to the place where the river began its curve between the two closest hills" (McKillip, *Tower* 81). Thayne easily finds, and rides to, the hills that Cyan Dag must fight to reach. Yes, the landscape shows character through adversity, but more important in McKillip it is a tool of character illumination. As the witch Sidera notes in *Tower*, "What you need . . . is not always what you are looking for" (99). And the same holds true for the landscape in McKillip. It

might not actively entangle the characters, but it does affect them, whether they see it or not.

Though McKillip is not an ecological writer (that is, a writer expressly concerned with matters of ecology), she does show a sympathy for nature, as expressed through the characters in her pastoral. Aldo Leopold argues in his *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* that “wild things . . . had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast” (vii). By this he means that only when humans had leisure did they look to nature. However, McKillip shows a non-mechanised world where there is still time for the natural. In *Od*, caring for other creatures and plants is presented as a clear virtue. The main character Brenden argues, “Well no one ever told me that plants couldn’t speak and that I couldn’t see what they said. It was something I just did” (McKillip, *Od* 68). Without someone to tell him that plants are important and have a (literal, this is a fantasy) voice of their own, he has noticed and acted upon this knowledge to help the plants themselves in addition to the animals and people who need the knowledge he has gained from the plants. Thus an understanding of, and sympathy with, nature is encouraged.

In Chapter Five I explore the duality between wild and tame magic in *Od*. This can be seen in several of McKillip’s works, and not just within her cities. Natural magic, the magic that is found away from civilisation, is praised and shown to be powerful. To learn all they can of magic, Sybel from *Forgotten* and Nyx from the *Cygnets* duology both

leave civilisation. In forests and mountains and swamps they learn their strongest magics. In *Od* two characters converse about the main character Brenden: ““What are you saying? . . . That he’s more powerful than you?’ ‘At that moment he was.’ ‘And he learned this-where?’ ‘From the bog lilies, by the sound of it. Earth. Rain. Seeds’”

(McKillip 311). Brenden’s “natural” way of learning has led him to be superior to those wizards that have been trained in the city, away from nature.

The pull between civilisation and other is a strong set of tensions in many of McKillip’s books. In *Forgotten* the sorceress Sybel has to learn how to interact with men and to decide whether she wants to remain wild and powerful or join in with fellow humans. Nyx, another sorceress, from the *Cygnets* duologies, feels a similar pull between her duty as an heir in the seat of power and the call to power out away from civilisation. Similarly, the peasant girl Melanthos from *Tower* feels the tension between the wild and civilised. She has her own concerns and does not understand why others should be worried about her. Ready to follow the knight Cyan Dag because she is curious, she thinks, “One of the wild horses roaming the plain might be in the mood to let her ride it. She bounded a step after the knight and then a voice wound around her ankle and pulled her motionless” (McKillip, *Tower* 54) The voice is another human, a “civilised” one, calling her back to her responsibilities. This passage not only demonstrates Melanthos’s wild power (she is able to talk with wild animals) but it also demonstrates how her priorities are so different from those of others who are more ordinary in their

humanity. Marx argues that “An inchoate longing for a more ‘natural’ environment enters into the contemptuous attitude that many Americans adopt toward urban life” (5). Because McKillip is an American author it is perhaps normal that this sense of yearning should infuse her works in places. Nyx, Sybil, and Melanthos all feel pulled between duties to loved ones and the power that they can see in natural things, away from people and rules. It is an interesting value judgement. McKillip does not seem to say that in the end wilderness is superior to civilisation. There is a more moderate message: the wilderness is powerful and bewitching, but people need other humans. The wilderness is not presented as clearly superior in and of itself, however, nor is it denigrated. A character in *Basilisk* asks why the bard’s school is out beyond even the province of farmed lands: ““Why this lonely place? What possessed the first bard to build his school here, instead of some civilised place where you don’t have to climb down off the edge of the world to buy an apple?”” and Caladrius answers, ““I suppose because that long ago no one had invented the word ‘civilized’ yet”” (McKillip 46). The phrasing is quite careful here. McKillip has put civilised in inverted commas, as if to question what that means. She is also prefacing it by saying that it is merely a word, and therefore not a true concept. She is neither denying the power of the city, nor presenting civilised as a “real” concept, or even a superior one. Thus, McKillip’s blending of city and country in her books allows for a more open, and positive, look at the pastoral.

Wild and natural magic equates to power in McKillip. This dichotomy is an extension of the pastoral. It is a furtherance of the notion that the natural is superior to the man-made. McKillip is not the only fantasy author to equate these. Tamora Pierce, for example, in her series *The Immortals* (1992–96), features a mage, Daine, whose wild magic is often superior to those who have been trained in more formal types of magic. Daine, like many of McKillip's characters, draws her strength and power from the natural world around her. Both Nyx from the *Cygnets* duology and Sybel from *Forgotten* are the same: they needed to leave civilisation to find their strength. This aspect of the pastoral, "some form of retreat and return" (1), that Gifford argues is crucial is a drawing away from but also coming back to. When civilisation and its power games have overcome Sybel, she returns to the wilderness, where the wise woman Maelga describes what she will find there:

"Come with me tomorrow through the forest; we will gather black mushrooms and herbs that, crushed against the fingers, give a magic smell. You will feel the sun on your hair and the rich earth beneath your feet, and the fresh winds scented with the spice of snow from the hidden places on Eld Mountain. Be patient, as you must always be patient with new pale seeds buried in the dark ground. When you are stronger, you can begin to think again. But now is the time to feel." (McKillip, *Forgotten* 209)

Sybel can find the solace she needs only in nature, which is healing. However, it is also a place to remember—and to learn and overcome—what knowledge she has acquired and the actions she has performed in civilisation. Thus the pastoral is presented as healing, but not as amnesia.

In this sense McKillip has a broader focus than some other feminist writers who have written about healing nature. Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978), for example, draws a strict dichotomy between male/female, evil/good, and city/country. Pratchett parodies this sort of fantasy with the character Magrat from *Wyrds Sisters*: "Magrat believed in Nature's wisdom and elves and the healing power of colours and the cycle of the seasons and a lot of other things Granny Weatherwax didn't have any truck with" (24). This romantic view of nature, as something always healing and meant for woman alone, is complicated in McKillip. The distinctions are not so clear cut, and, as a result, her books are more accepting and more complex. Gail David argues in *Gender and Genre in Literature: Female Heroism in the Pastoral*, that "Female heroism, for example, seems an unlikely attribute of the pastoral, a genre which traditionally presents nature from the perspective of the white male author and according to literary convention, images the rural landscape as a submissive female" (xviii). McKillip's pastoral allows for the female, as well as the male, hero. Sybil, Nyx, Meguet, and others are all the heroes of their books. This does not, however, preclude a male engagement with nature as is presented in the conflation between men and evil in

The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women. McKillip's concept of "land-rule" in *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, for example, means that Morgon is deeply, literally entwined with the land and its welfare. The lands in McKillip also are not presented as something waiting to be conquered. Indeed, in *Od* it is this tendency of seeing the wilderness as something that needs to be controlled and tamed that is presented as a problem.

McKillip's works cannot be considered environmental in the strict sense of the term. They do not include manifestos about the evils of pollution or global warming. However, they are about nature and about the power it can lend to the human spirit when allowed to be wild. Nichols registers his displeasure that too often Thoreau is misquoted as saying "In wilderness is the preservation of the world," when in actuality it is "wildness" that Thoreau says can save the world (3). Thus McKillip's championing of both the urban and the natural, wilderness and civilisation, can be fit alongside one another when it is wildness that is viewed as the positive. Lawrence Buell argues in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* of the "tendency . . . to want to represent the essential America as exurban, green, pastoral, even wild" (32). The United States as untamed wilderness was a blatant fiction, and perhaps McKillip's works lean too much on this ideal; however, there is still a strong sense throughout her books of the wonders of nature and its improving influence on man. Morgon in *Riddle-master* for example, though a "simple" farmer, has outwitted the greatest riddler in his world: "He said great lords of Aum, An and Hel—

the three portions of An—and even riddle-masters from Caithnard had challenged him to a game, but never a farmer from Hed” (McKillip 9). The riddle that has won Morgon a crown from the riddler is one from his homeland. The rest of the world ignores Hed because it is peaceful, and full of sheep and grain. William Barrillas argues that the “Pastoral often entails a contrast between urban and rural life, usually but not exclusively in favor of rurality, to which special virtue is attributed; and a tone of nostalgia” (12). The independent and strong spirit of McKillip’s pastoral characters is clear. Yar and Brenden from *Od* are set up against the “city” (and thus, tame) wizards who have been trained without imagination or hardship in what has become the king’s (and therefore the capital city’s) school. The degree to which the city has been sealed off from wild magic will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but the same can be applied to the people. Country-born Yar has left his wildness—along with his wonder and much of his power—behind in order to be a teacher in the wizard’s school. He tells the story of how he came to be in the school from humble, rural beginnings, and the reactions from his students are telling: “Some looked at him with wonder, as though he must have walked out of a tale instead of an obscure village. . . . Others seemed skeptical, unable to imagine either hunger or a hero who had not been brought up to become one” (McKillip, *Od* 91). Yar is thus presented as almost a creature of fable to the well-cared-for wizarding students of the city. Here McKillip pokes fun at the tendency

to see everything (and everyone) not of the city as backwards and incapable of heroics.

Wendell Berry argues of the focus on the city evident in modern life and literature:

there was the assumption that the life of the metropolis is *the* experience, the *modern* experience, and that the life of the rural towns, the farms, the wilderness places is not only irrelevant to our time, but archaic as well, because unknown or unconsidered by the people who really matter—that is, the urban intellectuals. (7, author's emphasis)

Pastoralism has this aspect—the feeling that it is something to be moved away from—to contend with. People long for the pastoral without considering whether it is something they actually want. However, believing that the pastoral is backwards and non-progressive is just as narrow a view as believing that it is the only solution.

The pastoral characters McKillip writes are not always accurate to true country living, emphasising that this is often a genre of nostalgia and not “truth,” per se.

Morgon from *The Riddle-master* Trilogy refuses to kill because he is a farmer although one of the most necessary actions on a farm with livestock is to cull some of that livestock for food. *The Riddle-master* Trilogy is close to what Williams despairs of: books that idealise the pastoral too much, which, “[deceive] hardly anyone who really [live] and work[s] in the country, but . . . in its way [is] a perfect weekending, rentier form” (*Modern Novel* 11). Characters (and in the primary world, people) from the countryside are often presented as rustic, unsophisticated, and sometimes uninteresting as a result.

Williams looked at literary novels and found that the people of the countryside were often diminished. In *Country and the City in the Modern Novel* he praises George Eliot for her ability to see country folk, but does so with a caveat:

George Eliot reached out as far as the craftsmen and the small tenant farmers, though at the edges, even there, they are not always fully recognised as individuals, as invariably happens with more privileged persons, but are brushed in as a kind of chorus, or are given what some have called a quality of ballad, meaning that they are primarily seen as folk while others are seen as people. (4)

This distinction is blurred in the better of McKillip's works, but in earlier novels she falls foul of Williams's objections. In the beginning of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, Morgon's farmer friends have this aspect of "folk" in Williams's terms. Some of the names, such as that of Narly Stone, or the pig herder, are quite "folk" and so are many of the opening scenes and conversations. One of the farmers, upon hearing that Morgon has a crown, says, "'Your father never had one. Your grandfather never had one. Your—'" (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 5). They are presented as plain and stuck in their ways. This particular line also links with the American influence seen in McKillip's works. To have a crown is to have a symbol of rulership and the pageantry that goes with it. The people of Hed are not used to this sort of pageantry and view it, and other forms of "civilisation," with suspicion.

Living in the country in these books is not the reality, but rather the wished for perfection that someone looking in from the outside—or someone who only desires the pastoral life for a weekend—can envision. As McKillip moved further into her milieu she seems to have become more comfortable and less idealistic about rural life. Indeed, in later works, especially *Tower*, the loneliness and difficulty of the rural lifestyle is more accurately portrayed. This “reality” does not lessen the nostalgic impact of the pastoral, nor does it change the chronotope of these pastoral works (that is, a backwards-looking chronotope) because realistic or not it still examines a lifestyle that predominated in the past. The “country” people in *Tower* are treated individually. It is Sel, a rural baker, who in the end sees the problem that the king and other nobles have not been able to discern. Sel, who might have been a one-dimensional, un-described character in another work, is drawn out by McKillip. In her introduction to *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932), Lynne Truss writes that the main character, Flora, “is a character in a novel who reads the other characters as characters and re-writes them as people” (xvi). Flora lifts the other characters from the traditional roles they have worn themselves into and allows them to become unique people again, rather than just, for example, the dour farmer. Sel, along with the three witches, do the same for McKillip’s rural characters in *Tower*. The characters of the countryside are lifted from their parts in traditional stories and shown to be people with real, and changeable, motivations instead.

Although McKillip's characters are not "threatened" by modernity at all, the feeling is that none would have the attitude of a rural squire from K. M. Peyton's *Flambards* (1967) who declares, "'I would go out and get killed willingly, if I thought all this would never change. The old places . . . and the old way of life. . . . you can keep your progress'" (216). When modernity is displayed in one of McKillip's books, there is no antipathy towards it. Even in one of the few books to not be pastoral, *Bards*, McKillip, and by extension her characters, show no ire towards machinery. McKillip's pastoral is therefore a celebration of the pastoral rather than a condemnation of the modern (and in turn the city). John F. Lynen in *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* argues that "The pastoral poet's real power springs from his ability to keep the two worlds in equilibrium" (12). Lynen here speaks of the worlds of country and town, and McKillip, though not a poet, keeps these two worlds in balance, with neither the superior force.

As Williams argues, country and city are varied but are often simplified into a dichotomy. Country can be wilderness, yet also contain farmers as well as hunters. The city can be a capital, religious base, market or port. Putting them in strict contrast creates a false polemic. As fantasy literature is not striving to be realistic in all things, this is not a problem within the framework of fantasy. It does perpetuate the idea that this polemic exists, however, and that the difference between country and city is vast. Marx notes "The stock literary contrast between the happiness and innocence of a bucolic golden age and the corrupt, self-seeking, and disorderly life of the city (or

court)" (97). McKillip, in spite of undeniably being a pastoral writer, confuses these clear distinctions.

One of the biggest differences between literature of city and country is often that the city character is treated as an individual atom, floating through the city with no contact, no community. The country character is often part of a network, whether that network is family, neighbours, or even the natural world around him or her. In John Crowley's fantasy *Little, Big* (1981), for example, there is a stark difference between the family life presented out in the country, with many people all living together and a variety of convoluted relationships, and the solitary life of their cousin George Mouse, who lives in the city in a mostly solitary flat, interacting with very few others. This is not the case in McKillip's works. Perhaps because she is interested in the power and relations between people, both her city and country characters have networks that surround them. As Christine Mains explores in her essay "The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Power: The Wizards of Patricia A. McKillip," McKillip has a clear fascination with power, and this is often explored through the dynamics between people. McKillip's city characters are shown within networks and communities, somewhat against type. This allows the power dynamics that interest McKillip to best be explored. Examples from McKillip are Brenden from *Od* and Caladrius from *Basilisk*. They are country strangers, but they are enveloped in communities within the cities they come to inhabit. Brenden, though solitary, has the other gardeners of the school, as well as the protection of the

wizard Yar, also a country boy. Caladrius stumbles upon a group of friendly musicians soon after entering the city and is followed by his son. He too has an immediate community. Therefore, neither of these characters, though thrust into the strange environs of the city, is isolated as is typical.

Pastoralism implies simplicity to many, with the city as vice and action, versus the country as straightforwardness and repose. In *Tower*, for example, the rural kingdom of Ysse is contrasted with its more cosmopolitan neighbour, Yves. The character Thayne “thought of Craiche, who went to battle smelling of dung and whom Thayne carried home in his arms” (McKillip, *Tower* 33). The brutality of war (a very young Craiche has been wounded and crippled for life) is contrasted with the innocence (or naiveté) of nature found in Craiche, who still smells of the peaceful farmyard he has left. The same can be found in *Basilisk*. The heir to the city’s ruler, caught behind a wagon after spending time in the provinces, lashes out: “‘I’ve just spent six weeks smelling barns and eating sheep and listening to something that makes my teeth ache’” (McKillip, *Basilisk* 97), and when he spots a hapless Caladrius (the main character), Caladrius is dismissed as, “‘Another mutton eater’” (97). The negative view from the lordling is counterbalanced by Caladrius himself. In the midst of the turmoil in which he is embroiled in the city, Caladrius thinks of the land where he was brought up: “He felt a moment’s helpless longing for the singing of the restless autumn seas, for the simplicity of fire, water, stone” (196). Though he is drawn to the city and its politics,

Caladrius is still affected by what he thinks of as the peace of the countryside. When he and the music teacher Guilia are speaking of love, she says that, “‘The subject makes me provincial,’” and Caladrius replies, “‘Because it goes to the heart of the matter’” (198). The countryside then is presented as not only provincial (and therefore all that goes with it such as “backwards” and out of date) but it is also where the truth can be spoken outright. The provincial is portrayed as both a positive—somewhere where truth is valued and as a negative—provincial is set in contrast to the city. Barrillas notes that, “At the heart of modernist-derived attitudes about pastoral literature is confusion (perhaps at times wilful) between regionalism and provincialism” (16). Provincial implies backwards and uneducated. What Barrillas describes as “regional” is the tendency of pastoral literature to feature concentrated areas, or a certain type of nature or area. Thus, although there are moments in McKillip where the pastoral is a bit too nostalgic—that is, too full of might-have-been rather than the reality of rural life—there is power to be found in this type of literature. It should not be dismissed outright as fancy, as it sometimes is.

I have been taking a broad view of the pastoral, looking at not only representations of farmland but also at what can be deemed to be natural or “wildness” and how these relate to cities. This broader approach is in line with current eco-criticism, which has moved beyond looking at cities as “unnatural” and into giving a more critical view of the dichotomies often presented as truths behind wilderness/city.

Ashton Nichols argues in *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbannatural Roosting* that nature can be found in cities as well as without, that “nature and urban life are not as distinct as human beings have long supposed” (xiii). I use both human interaction with the natural, as well as the dichotomy often presented between the country and the city, to explore pastoralism in McKillip. Like Nichols, I would argue that McKillip does not see the city as antithetical to nature. Nichols argues that “Crucial to the *urbanature* is the idea that human beings are never cut off from wild nature by human culture” (vx, author’s emphasis). In other words, cities are just as much a part of the natural environment as wilderness (which often is not wild at all, as was discussed earlier).

Though McKillip seems not to be fashioning her pastoral landscapes in an overtly political way, this aspect of the pastoral cannot be ignored. Lawrence Buell summarises the problem in Barrillas’s book when he asks “whether pastoral ideology and art ‘ought to be looked at as conservative and hegemonic’ or ‘as a form of dissent from an urbanizing mainstream’” (3). Both are possibilities available within the pastoral. McKillip strives for the latter; her pastoral is sometimes a little naive, but it leaves the possibility for city life open. McKillip argues through her characters for the power of the wild and the natural, but she does not do so at the complete exclusion of the city and the organised. In *Od*, Od’s School of Magic is superior when wild talent is allowed inside, but the school is not abolished in the end. Od wants “Power shaped by wonder and curiosity, even love. Not by fear and laws that shut out rather than inviting

in" (McKillip, *Od* 305). In the end, the school is not even moved out of the city. When the king asks, "'Then why bother with walls? Why books, teachers—,'" Od replies, "'Most are the better for them. A few can do without'" (311). Both the city and the country are allowed in McKillip's version of the pastoral.

This is further conflated by the fact that McKillip blends power and politics into all her works. The countryside is not a refuge from power but is often equally embroiled in struggles in McKillip's works. *Serre*, for example, is entangled in politics and power, and very little of it takes place in a city. Most action takes place within the forest of *Serre* or, at most, in an isolated castle within the forest. Thus, Williams's argument in *The Country and the City* that both country and city encompass more than their stereotypes is entangled in McKillip, Williams argues:

On the actual settlements, which in the real history have been
astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been
generalised. On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life:
of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea
of an achieved centre of learning, communication, life (1)

This is one of the ways that McKillip's pastoral is more powerful than a simple nostalgic exercise.

Chapter Five will examine what is often presented as the pastoral's opposite: cities. Unlike the new, modern metropolis that is often set up in opposition to the

pastoral, however, McKillip's cities are entwined in the past. They are just as much a product of the grammar of the past as the more obvious pastoral, and this shapes them both physically and politically.

Chapter Five: Cities Built of Time

McKillip's cities are built time. They are old, dense, and full of mysteries. This chapter will explore how time interacts with the cities and how this works in the books in which these cities are found. McKillip's cities are built of time with various eras layered on top of one another to create places with complicated histories and modern political machinations. In this chapter I will be discussing the cities of Ombria from *Ombria*, Berylon from *Basilisk*, Caerau from *Bards*, and Kelior from *Od*. Each is an accumulation of history, different eras, and politics; which shapes them into complicated, European-type cities, as I will explain.

McKillip is not always thorough in her descriptions of her cities. A fantasy author who describes cities in more detail than McKillip is K. J. Parker in *Colours in the Steel* (1998), and this example illustrates where McKillip's focus differs from others who have written about cities. In *Colours in the Steel* the city's physicality is expressed in great detail, but less to convey age, as in McKillip's works, and more to show technical details. The fortifications of the city are described minutely because they are important to the plot. The town and its districts are mapped out carefully, such as where the weavers' district is situated in comparison to the dye makers. These details are important for Parker's aims: revealing the customs of a particular city and how the characters fit into the city society as a whole. McKillip uses details to show the passage of time, mystery, and how politics have influenced a space, as

I'll go on to explain; but, because she does not need within her cities to express the same sorts of concepts as Parker does, she has vastly different types of details. This is interesting because Parker's and McKillip's cities are outwardly quite similar: they are dense and surrounded by fortifications, with hinterlands that contrast to the city.

Other authors such as Peake and Miéville have constructed fantastic edifices, but their works are darker and grittier than McKillip's works. McKillip's works contain politics, intrigue, and even death, but they still retain a sense of beauty. In Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, for example, the language is often rude and disgusting on purpose both to give the city a gritty feel and to enhance the feeling of rude desperation many of the characters feel.

Concentrated City

The intersection of time and history with place is particularly potent in enclosed and old sites such as those of the cities found in McKillip's works. Bakhtin's chronotope can be applied in compelling ways here because each novel has its own distinct chronotope within the city. Catharine Edwards argues that "Freud sets up an image of place as time made visible" (28). Each of McKillip's cities is like this, with time a constant and observable presence. *Bards* is an interesting example of chronotope within city because, though it is set in one city, it takes place in multiple times. Each era creates its own chronotope from the interaction of events and time that has passed. *Ombria*, too, works in interesting ways within this framework

because of the multiple versions of the city that coexist. Each version of the city—the shadow city, the turned Ombria, and old Ombria—has its own sense of time passing. Although the shadow city is left in mystery to a large extent, time does seem to move differently there. Ducon's father is the only inhabitant of the mysterious shadow city who is explored at all, and, though more mature than Ducon, he does not seem to have aged as much as he ought to have if his time moved like main Ombria's does. When Ducon draws him, he thinks, "He had drawn himself. He took a closer look, frowning to focus. Not exactly himself. There were faint lines beneath the eyes, beside the mouth, that suggested himself in the future" (McKillip, *Ombria* 117). Presumably the likeness is very close, as Ducon initially mistakes his father for himself, but time also does not seem to have progressed for as long as it might have in the more ordinary Ombria, and the lines are "faint." Time in the city of Berylon of *Basilisk*, too, is different than in the hinterlands (as the countryside of the novel is called): time is more regularly portrayed within the city, and actions proceed in a logical order and take the expected amount of time. In the hinterlands it plays tricks, as when Caladrius feels himself both in the woods he is in as a man, and at the hearth where he hid as a small child: "He felt sound growing in him, but he could not make a sound, not in the wood, not in the hearth" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 78). And, lastly, Kelior has its own chronotopes. Time moves at different speeds within the city, such as in the Twilight Quarter, where activity happens at night, as well as outside of it, where the more ordinary daylight hours are used.

Basilisk, *Od*, *Ombria*, and *Bards* are not the only books of McKillip's that contain cities. They are the only city-centric of her books, however, and this is what makes them unique in her oeuvre. In general her works are geographically sprawling affairs, taking place over large tracts of land. Even when they do not, such as in *Changeling* (which takes place in a village and close surrounds), the setting is largely rural. The cities that McKillip does focus on are varied, but retain similar features. Sometimes they are walled, like Kelior from *Od* or Berylon from *Basilisk*. Sometimes they are ringed by more natural fortifications such as the river in *Bards*. What they all have in common, however, is that they are all old, with layers of past and political eras impacting on the current form of the city.

Nearly all the cities rise from nothing, surrounded by agricultural hinterlands, but with none of the spread of modern, primary world suburbia. This rising from nothing, however, also reflects other aspects of McKillip's work in their placement. In the sense that they rise from nothing, they are typically American; like Chicago, these cities rise above the plains they sit on in stark definition to the surrounding areas. William Cronon argues that "Americans have long tended to see city and country as separate places, more isolated from each other than connected. We carefully partition our natural landscape into urban places, rural places, and wilderness" (xvi). There is very little back and forth in McKillip's works between country and city, and her cities tend to be distinct from surrounding land.

The effect of their rising from nothing also means that the cities are concentrated, cylinders of time and space. This adds to the cities' confusion, as they

are dense with the past and present in close, sometimes indistinguishable, proximity. The books with cities in them are very definitely set *in* the cities. In some of the books, a part of the plot will take place out in the hinterlands, such as *Basilisk* or *Od*, but the parts in the city are placed firmly within the walls and are where the central plot happens. There is no back-and-forth of activity from the hinterlands to the city itself. A great deal happens within the confines of the city, and much of the lives of the characters within it is presented, but external details such as trade are hardly mentioned. The past and history of the city are therefore layered in a dense, and enclosed, space. Although sometimes the city being enclosed is a metaphorical closure (Ombria, for example, certainly feels enclosed though no walls are mentioned), other cities in McKillip's works are literally enclosed.

McKillip's cities are very much part of a European tradition of cities. The cities are built in, and around, their pasts. Older variants confuse and complicate the modern versions of the cities; streets are twisting, labyrinthine affairs. Marilyn Faulkenburg argues that "*The Wings of the Dove*, another novel that pits America against Europe, depicts the European city as a stone colossus, a labyrinth which imprisons and deadens rather than frees or gives life" (7). While my argument does not centre on the deadening effect Faulkenburg sees, I do argue that European cities, and therefore McKillip's, are labyrinthine in contrast to American cities. There is not the ordered regimentation that American cities typically exhibit. This is indicative of civilisations (and therefore cities) that have complicated pasts. They have grown

slowly and organically instead of being planned in one moment in a regimented fashion.

The characters living their lives within the stories have their own personal chronotopes, and these come into contact with each other in complex ways in the cities. The cities' densities encourage particular human interactions. In *Bards*, for example, Nairn's own chronotope of endless life comes into contact with his son's shorter one, and each is given a different perspective of the other because of their close proximity and yet radically different chronotopes, as will be discussed in Chapter Six. The fact that they live in the same city means that they frequent the same areas, are forced (in the case of Nairn) to attend the same social functions, and are thrown together far more often than might otherwise be the case.

The containment of McKillip's cities means that politics, and action, are all concentrated. They are more like the city-states of Greece, the polis, rather than anything modern. As Arthur W.H. Adkins and Peter White note in their introduction to *The Greek Polis*, "Geographically, the polis consisted of a political and religious center and a tract of countryside. The center was usually a fortified town" (1).

McKillip's cities are generally the entire country and if they are not, as seems to be the case in *Od*, they are still self-contained units of governance that have very little to do with the outside world. Thus, the walls also signify a boundary and demarcation of the state/country. Unlike McKillip's quest-type fantasies that range over a wide area of an invented world, her cities tend to be very concentrated like the polis.

Adkins and White note that "the polis was an autonomous community" (1). The

countryside is barely explored in these instances, and McKillip's cities seem to be self-contained and self-governing.

For example, the city of Berylon from *Basilisk*, though poorly described in general, does have the one characteristic of medieval and Renaissance cities that both *Bards* and *Ombria* seem to lack: it has fortified walls. This is a city obsessed with power, and it is pertinent that it is described as a walled city. I would argue that the addition of walls to the city, an unremarkable addition in the primary world, and a little mentioned marker in McKillip's cities, is significant. There seems to be very little real threat from the provinces, and yet it is a fortified town. The ruling families inside of the city are more dangerous to the general populace and themselves than the countryside, and yet it is the countryside that the city is fortified against. The *Basilisk* uses the walls to keep arms out of the city (out of the hands of his enemies), but presumably this was not their original function as it seems a relatively new decree. Even though docks are mentioned, there is no word of trade from other lands. Berylon seems like a tenuous city-state, on its own with no real connection to the surrounding lands, and yet there are walls. There are several possible explanations for this. One is that the citizens have so much to fear from each other; they are paranoid about anyone else and so built fortifications. Or, perhaps the walls were built more to keep the populace in, rather than anyone out. This occurs at the end of *Basilisk* when the population of the city is locked in to keep rebels from escaping. A third possible explanation is that the city of Berylon has walls because, in spite of the great power inside the city, the populace fears the wild and mysterious

magic of the hinterlands. Perhaps they are right to do so; in the end it is this magic that overthrows the Basilisk in his own lair. In each of these scenarios, the walls serve to highlight power, its use and strength.

Several other fantasy authors have also used concentrated cities as McKillip does in some of her novels. John Clute devotes an entry, "Edifice," to this type of fantasy in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*; he claims that "From without, an edifice may seem self-contained and finite; from within, it may well extend beyond lines of vision, both spatially and temporally" (309). Clute's edifice fantasy is more particularly focused on a house/castle than I am (an argument could be made for the castle in *Alphabet* as precisely what Clute is defining), but my argument that cities can be as concentrated as the houses Clute speaks of is not in direct contradiction. China Miéville's *The City and the City* (2009) is an example of a city that exudes this type of "edifice" containment. Very little is heard about the outside world, but the cities themselves are described in depth, with government, law and order, and most trade all self-contained. Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* Trilogy (1946–59) is like this too, though closer to Clute's iteration. In most of the first two novels all action takes place in the monstrous castle Gormenghast. This is only one structure, not technically a city, but it fulfils all the functions of a city for the people that live there (it seems to be market, governance, and living quarters all in one). The governance, and seemingly everything else necessary to the survival of the people it contains, are all within the castle. Gormenghast is the entire world for the young Titus and, in that sense, it is very much its own city-state to him. John Clute and David Langford in

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction describe “the inhabitant of any constricted environment” as “liv[ing] in a pocket universe”; therefore, Gormenghast, which certainly qualifies as “constricted,” is a “pocket universe”. Because Gormenghast is a nearly self-contained world the dealings of the characters are fraught with tension brought on by the constant interactions; in *Titus Groan* “opinions too free to be expressed in an atmosphere where the woof and warp of the dark place and its past were synonymous with the mesh of veins in the bodies of its denizens” (Peake 470) are dangerous. Gormenghast and its inhabitants are as closely concentrated as the denizens of many of McKillip’s cities.

The conflation of past and present in McKillip’s cities means that history is often confused or forgotten entirely, and this is shown in the cities themselves. Christine Mains compares *Ombria* and *Basilisk*, for example, to Renaissance Italy in her article “For Love or For Money: The Concept of Loyalty in the Works of Patricia McKillip”: “Two of McKillip’s fictional worlds, the worlds of *Ombria in Shadow* and *Song for the Basilisk*, evoke the city-states of Renaissance Italy, a time and place characterised by intense violence and inter familial conflict, both within and between the city-states” (219). The choice of Renaissance Italy is interesting both for the reasons Mains cites, but also because Italy is a country rich in history. Italian cities such as Rome and Florence are conflations of past and present. The past and present are constantly in collision, especially in regards to the physical remains left by previous eras. George Nelson remarks on this combination of times in Rome:

You would be walking down a street past a fifteenth-century palazzo and sticking out of the wall of the palazzo would be a ruin of an arch; the palazzo was built around the ruin centuries older than the palazzo. Then because business wasn't good in Rome either, a corner of this palazzo had been remodelled and somebody had put in an ultramodern candy shop. (viii)

Modern and ancient conflate and are built upon in primary world cities, just as in McKillip's fantastic ones.

Mystery

Many of McKillip's books contain mysteries (Morgon's secret destiny in *The Riddle-master*, for example) but those that also centre in cities, like *Bards* and *Ombria*, result in cities that are themselves mysterious. The modern Mexico City invites illuminating parallels with *Bards* and *Ombria*. The ancient Aztec city of Tenochtitlan is still buried beneath the modern incarnation of the city. Things are speculated, some archaeology has been done, but the exact nature of the city and its citizens remains a matter for myth and legend, just as in *Bards* and *Ombria*. As in *Bards*, the modern city began with the remnants of the older city and expanded, so boundaries are no longer clear and eras are mixed together indiscriminately. *Ombria* is a slightly different case in that the past is still living (in the form of Faey) beneath the newer

incarnation of the city. In all the cities however, there are characters more aware of their history than others. In *Invisible Cities* (1972), Italo Calvino writes “Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves” (27). Calvino warns that some people do not wish to know that the city they see as theirs has other forms and other incarnations. Those who do pay attention to this are rare. The past speaks to only a few characters in McKillip’s books, while the general population moves through the cities without awareness of former incarnations. To most of the inhabitants of *Bards*, for example, their city’s past is of little importance. To select characters, such as the Princess Beatrice, it is interesting, yet it is also, to characters such as the immortal Nairn, full of clues and mystery.

The city of Caerau in McKillip’s *Bards* is a plausible city. Its history is similar to that of thousands of primary world cities. An encampment was set up beside a river. Merchants arrived to supply this encampment. Buildings grew to house the town, and at last a castle was built to fortify and rule it. This ordinary past is evidenced by the ruins buried beneath the city and the new ways in which older parts of the city are used. The Princess Beatrice shows an un-Princess-like interest in archaeology:

The smoke-stained walls, their stones dug out of field and river, still spoke, she thought, of a time so long ago that the school on the hill with its broken tower and the tiny village called Caerau was

surrounded by grass and fields and the great standing stones so old
nobody remembered when or how they had come to the plain.

(McKillip, *Bards* 63)

The city's past is a seemingly regular one, but Beatrice's last comment about the standing stones shows that Caerau has its mysteries. The characters like Beatrice who are the most interested in the city's past are the ones most likely to notice and, perhaps, solve its mystery.

Some of McKillip's cities, such as Berylon from *Basilisk*, have their history loudly proclaimed by the state of the city, but Ombria is more of a mystery. Physical clues are available but harder to read than a blatantly burned-out mansion, as is the case in Berylon. The physical past, though more difficult to read in *Ombria*, is just as important as it is in other books, and characters (for example, the court historian and tutor Camas Erl) ignore the clues it provides to their detriment. When Camas Erl seeks to understand Ombria's past he is brought to the sorceress Faey by her helper Mag. Faey presents Camas Erl with a series of historical figures who lead him deeper into the underworld as a means of getting him out of the way. It is curious that he does not seem interested in the fact that there is another city sunk beneath the present one. Calvino writes that "The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the street" (13). Ombria keeps its secrets but, if looked for, they are there to be read. Bewitched or not, the under-city is physical evidence of the story Camas Erl seeks to prove, of Ombria's story. Physical evidence cannot be distorted in the same way that a historian's

treatise can. Camas Erl is described as deep into books several times, but he never seems to notice the history that physically surrounds him. It is this physical presence that gives the best clue to what happens—and what has happened—to Ombria, and it is perhaps why Camas Erl has never fully pieced everything together.

The empty rooms found scattered throughout Ombria are important. Empty rooms can be a sign of great wealth but also of decline.¹⁰ Ombria, unlike Rome, has not, for the most part, re-appropriated the old rooms for new uses. Neil Christie argues in his essay “Lost Glories? Rome at the End of Empire”, that starting in the fourth century, and perhaps even earlier, many cities in Italy were abandoned as populations fell and people moved back out into the countryside (314). Ombria, under Domina Pearl’s rule, is a similarly failing city. The docks are weeded over, and descriptions of the empty rooms tell of mould, sagging, and disuse. The empty rooms all over Ombria are an unremarked upon, but important, sign of the city’s death. They are clues to Ombria’s past, but are ignored by Camas Erl and others. Ombria is complicated by its shadow city and by its own regeneration. Both phenomena have left physical clues on the city, but only some of the characters are aware of these. Ducon is one who is unconsciously drawn to the shadow city. Ducon is constantly sketching doorways and shadows that others ignore. Poisoned, delirious, and dying, he finds his way to Faey’s underworld by stumbling after his father, the prince of Shadow Ombria. Her domain is the only place in Ombria where

¹⁰ In *Cities of Tomorrow* Peter Hall argues in “The City of Dreadful Night” chapter that empty rooms were a sign of wealth in contrast to the late 1800’s and earlier when whole families sometimes lived in one room.

he can be saved and he finds it when “Streets he had known all his life looked suddenly unfamiliar; he could no longer understand language” (McKillip, *Ombria* 121). He cannot even speak, and yet he manages to stumble into the relative safety of Faey’s domain. He is aware of his surroundings even in a poisoned stupor, and, as one of the victors in the end, it is clear that this is an important skill. The physical presence of the city and the physical marks that its past has left are important but often ignored.

When the past is ignored in McKillip it is often dangerous. It is one of the peculiarities of *Ombria* that one of the most overlooked characters is the historian. A city full of the past should only ignore the past at its peril; yet, Camas Erl is ignored by the general populace, fools the bastard Ducon Greve, and has fooled the old prince as well. Camas Erl is a man whose obsession with history nearly precipitates the destruction of Ombria. It is not destroyed but instead turns into a new Ombria; however, none of the characters are sure of this result, least of all him, and yet he is allowed unfettered and unquestioned access to all parts of Ombria, to all its histories. Its potential to slide into a new era is one of the most mysterious, and important, elements of Ombria. Its regeneration is only hinted at in stories, yet the regent Domina Pearl and Camas Erl both hunt for proof of the truth: Domina Pearl for the power it would lend her, Camas Erl for the knowledge. Jerry White speaks of London but it could be said of Ombria that “even new London raised on the rubble of the old, was ever renewing itself” (20). The difference between Ombria and primary world cities that evolve and renew as fires, floods, and mobs destroy them

is that Ombria, as a fantasy city, is allowed to renew itself completely and instantly with what is not named, yet can be understood as, magic.

The sorceress Faey's personal chronotope is explored further in Chapter Six, but it is important to note here that it is a reflection of the city. To her, each era is much like the next; her domain is similarly mixed. All times blend together, and neither she nor the city remembers where she came from, or even what she, or it, must have looked like originally. Her house is a collection of multiple and shifting eras. The underground mansion Faey lives in is an accumulation of the past, and none of it is ordered, or consecutive, as it ought to be. Lydea feels as though "she moved backwards in time, wandering haphazardly through layers of history that changed at random and were never consecutive" (McKillip, *Ombria* 161), but this could be referring to either Faey or Ombria. The full path of Ombria's past is a mystery. Faey's mansion reflects this in that though it is full of history, it is disordered and hidden: "Faey, who had been born in Ombria before it had a past, had sunk gradually underground along with it" (22). Faey and Ombria are simultaneous entities, and each is an accrual of times past.

Time seems to move differently in her underground domain, as shown when Faey traps Lydea into having never-ending tea with her: "Lydea, drinking an endless cup of tea in the sorceress's leafy chamber, realized occasionally, in the buried part of her mind where time still moved, that she was spellbound. Somewhere, hours passed during a single sip; night fell as she replaced her cup in the saucer; the sun rose when she lifted it again" (131). Time has been slowed to the point that when

Lydea “awakens” to her reality there is mould growing in her tea. Faey is dismissive of the time that has passed, because as an immortal such small stretches of time have very little meaning to her, but Lydea is frantic to know how much time has passed in the world above and to let her father know where she is. The contrast of Lydea’s father, wondering where she is and “up to his ears in dirty beer mugs” (133) and Faey, in her underground domain where time has very little meaning, is marked. Like the mostly oblivious citizens of Ombria, Faey is only somewhat conscious of her past. Though she is of ultimate importance to Ombria’s past (and therefore future), her hazy memory of her role in Ombria’s past allows it to continue towards its future without her knowing interference.

Power

McKillip’s cities have multiple layers of different eras, history, and power. The political eras that each city experiences are important to the overall form they take. Primary world cities, too, are influenced in this way, and useful comparisons may be drawn. Rome is an especially pertinent comparison because of the impact of various regimes. During the Roman Empire various emperors built, rebuilt, and destroyed monuments, palaces, and public spaces. In the declining years of the empire, buildings were taken apart for their materials and restructured for new uses. In more recent years, the dictator Mussolini created great changes in the physical structures of the city of Rome. With quick archaeological work, he sought to show

the continuing glory of Italy. He also cleared great sections of the city for triumphal marches and other projects he considered important; as Borden W. Painter Jr. asserts, “sometimes Rome’s buildings and churches would have to fall to the piccione, or pickax, of progress as the regime destroyed the old to create the new and uncover the glories of the imperial past” (3). Thus, by “improving the flow of traffic, preserving and ‘liberating’ ancient monuments, tearing down buildings of little or no historical value, and above all demonstrating the fascist ability to carry out projects that others had only talked about,” a modern city considerably different in shape and with different political purpose than it had had in the past was created (8). Politics are ingrained both in a city’s past, as evidenced in its monuments, and in a city’s present, in what still remains, what is ignored, and what is destroyed. The powerful characters of McKillip’s cities have an impact on their physical space as much as their real-world counterparts do. McKillip’s cities have also been torn down and built over; their political history is written in the physical spaces. Thus, each city has its political past marked out in the concrete spaces of the city. It is only the mundane details of a city, such as how people live, that is overlooked or not deemed important enough to the stories McKillip wishes to tell to be described in detail.

The past of the city’s development is described in more detail than its current form. A map of the cities in McKillip’s works would be virtually impossible because space is not clearly defined in terms of how the cities work as cities. In and of itself this is interesting because fantasy literature is infamous for its inclusion of maps of the invented terrain (see Diana Wynne Jones’s lampooning of the subject in *The*

Tough Guide to Fantasyland (1996), or Stefan Ekman's extensive work on the subject: *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (2013)). City maps are far less common in fantasy literature, but this perhaps points to the lack of interest in structurally defining their cities. In one of her first secondary world fantasies, *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, McKillip has included a map, but none of her subsequent books include one, and *Riddle-master* only has dots for the cities; there are no details. The cities themselves are imprecise; however, the power dynamics, the past and history of a city, and how these influence the physical look of the city are all explored in depth.

The city of Berylon from *Basilisk* is not built as completely as Ombria of *Ombria* or Caerau of *Bards*. McKillip is not as interested in the city as she is in the power that it contains. However, there is still a degree to which the city's structures give clues to the books' themes. It is McKillip's lack of details that is interesting in *Basilisk*. In contrast to Ombria, and Caerau, both of which are described in detailed prose, Berylon is hardly fleshed out at all. Only certain buildings and structures are described in any depth, and which buildings are chosen for this detail is telling. In "Descriptions as a Transmedial Mode of Representation: General Features and Possibilities of Realization in Painting, Fiction and Music," Werner Wolf argues that description is "**implicated in the construction of meaning of the artefact or text** as a whole as well as in guiding various responses to the recipients" (18, author's emphasis). That is, detail can be used to focus the reader's gaze: it can act as a marker, as is the case here. The buildings described in detail are all ones important

to the plot: the music school and the palaces of the ruling Pelliors and the deposed Tormalynes. Other than these key buildings and certain markers (such as pubs important to the conspirators or the bridges leading in and out of the city) very little is explored. Outside of these markers no descriptions are given. The city itself is left as a haze in the reader's mind, and were one to attempt to map it out, certain buildings would be drawn clear and the rest a blank. Where McKillip focuses details is where the action, and the power, are centred. Unlike Kelior and Ombria, which are full of mystery involving the city, the action and mystery of *Basilisk* are centred on the people and a few buildings connected to those characters.

The power dynamic when people live in close proximity to each other seems to interest McKillip more than how the cities work as cities. The power dynamics between characters are worked out in detail, but important things such as markets, food importation, or water sources are not broached. Unlike, for example, Parker's *Colours in the Steel*, where details such as markets are crucial, McKillip's work is more focused on her characters and on the buildings they use or need rather than the actual structure of her cities.

The past is not just story and history; it is also an occupied space in some of McKillip's works, such as *Ombria*: "Faey lived, for those who knew how to find her, within Ombria's past. Parts of the city's past lay within time's reach, beneath the streets in great old limestone tunnels: the hovels and mansions and sunken river that Ombria shrugged off like a forgotten skin, and buried beneath itself through the centuries" (14). Part of Ombria's past is a physical manifestation. There are a number

of primary world cities where the same physical remnants of the past are significant. For example, Jon Coulston and Hazel Dodge argue in their introduction to *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City* that “When the economic tide receded from the 3rd Century, AD onward, the urban fabric remained for future generations to live in, adapt, and continue to marvel at. The skeletons of massive buildings, their original functions often forgotten, remained” (2). Like in Rome, the past in Ombria is something not only found in history lessons but lived in. Unlike in Caerau, where much of the past is buried beyond usability or integrated into the present city, Ombria’s past is distinct from the modern city, even if its “original functions” (like in Rome) have been forgotten.

The people of Caerau, while just as careless of their history as the common people of Ombria, have built around buildings left by the past, which indicates how the history of Caerau is safer to explore and how its past is more regular: “The servants got used to finding the princess anywhere at all: in the laundry room examining water pipes, following the line of an ancient wall into the butler’s pantry” (McKillip, *Bards* 37). New buildings have accumulated around old sections. In Caerau, people live in history in a practical manner: what is not buried deep beyond usability is incorporated. There is no under-city as in Ombria, and this points to the difference in how the cities have developed and who has had control. Caerau has been built in a more ordinary fashion, with older structures buried or incorporated, while in Ombria the city’s turning has meant that sections go unused suddenly, sinking out of use and forgotten without warning.

In the section on mystery I explored how the denizens of Ombria were often ignorant of their city's true past and unclear even on its history. This is not an uncommon trope in genre; for example, in Robert Heinlein's *Universe* (1951, collected in *Orphans of the Sky*) the denizens of a generation starship have completely forgotten their pasts. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* Mendlesohn talks about the "blinkered gaze of the urban inhabitant" in *Perdido Street Station*, *The Etched City* and *Titus Groan* (90). It is this "blinkered gaze" that the citizens of Ombria and Berylon have in common, but in *Basilisk* history is ignored in a more purposeful way. The history that the victorious Pellior House has tried to erase is left to the evidence of buildings in *Basilisk*. Caladrius notes that "he could look down at the griffins still intact on their egg-shaped shields on either side of the front doors. The basilisk had destroyed the House, but had let the stones survive. A gesture for history, Caladrius guessed. A token to the dead" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 115). Presumably, the Basilisk does not see the buildings as a threat, unlike the human children he slaughtered along with their parents. Mark Crinson explains Aldo Rossi's idea that "A city remembers through its buildings" (xiii), so it is interesting that the Basilisk has allowed the building to remain. The obvious presence of the Tormalyne building, but its dangerous place in history, leaves it in a curious space between seeing and unseeing:

Tormalyne Palace lay in the bright, drenching light like the immense, blinded, sun-bleached corpse of some fabled animal. Caladrius tried to pass without looking at it, afraid he might stop in the middle of the jostling crowds and howl like a dog, tear cobbles from the street to

wring sorrow out of stone. It loomed beyond his lowered eyes,
insisting, until he finally looked and was stopped. (McKillip, *Basilisk*
119)

Caladrius's inability to look away regardless of his fear is reminiscent of Miéville's *The City and the City*. It is a very different book to McKillip's, but the purposeful not seeing, the danger inherent in seeing something taboo, is the same. The politics of seeing and unseeing are important to both stories, even if in different ways.

The music building is another building stuck into the seeing/unseeing category. It is significant that it is the one remainder of Tormalyne House that has been allowed to survive intact. It has been allowed to retain its name, its griffin carvings, and its sculptures of the dangerous but brilliant Tormalyne family. Music is what defeats the Basilisk in the end; music is what the story hinges on and is the one thing the Basilisk almost overlooks. Caladrius must "[learn] the history of Tormalyne House through its music" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 179). In Berylon history is so dangerous it can only be navigated through music so, as a consequence, music is made dangerous. And yet, it is the music school that has been allowed to survive intact.

History is ignored by others, sometimes in ironic fashion, as when in *Basilisk* "A basilisk unfurled, black on red, in a silken cascade that did not quite touch the marble griffin crouched beside the door" (195). The basilisk and the griffin are the emblems of the two opposing houses, but the basilisk and griffins are forced into close proximity during the city's festival. History is erased with banners and festivals, but the buildings themselves remain as mute testimony to the city's violent

past. In Berylon there is a “consensus memory,” to use Jenny Barrett’s term (202). The past that the Basilisk has tried to suppress is still evident in physical structures, and so a state in between knowing and yet ignoring the past is evident. Barrett argues that “consensus memory” is “a manufactured and agreed-upon perception” (202). It is a forced “agreed-upon” perception by the despot of Berylon, but it is a manufactured view, or rather un-view of the past to which the citizens of Berylon seem to subscribe.

Unlike *Ombria* and *Bards*, where the past is ignored or just forgotten, most of the characters in *Basilisk* are ordered to forget the past. Tormalyne Palace, a distinct reminder of the city’s past, is ignored by the denizens for their own safety. The main character Caladrius, dismissed as “the librarian,” “lingered beside the iron fence, studying the ruined palace, the monument to the dead, that those born in Berylon scarcely noticed when they passed” (McKillip, *Basilisk* 189). The clues to history and the past are available for everyone to see, but ignored. The same can be found in primary world cities such as Budapest, where communists changed street names and erected monuments, which then needed to be changed again once the regime ended. Richard S. Esbenshade argues that the blank pedestals where the monuments used to stand and the crossed-out old street names (still found above the new versions) remain as examples of “‘under-erasure’ in the Derridean sense, neither truly there nor fully absent” (72–73). The palace in Berylon, too, is “neither truly there nor fully absent” because it is a huge building, an entire palace, but one that the populace tries their best to ignore. In Berylon it is not safe to remember. This is

another place where parallels with *The City and the City* may be drawn. There, too, it is dangerous to see the wrong things in full view. The mystery of *The City and the City*, as in *Basilisk* (and to an extent *Ombria*), is enhanced by the seeing/ unseeing dichotomy. The main detective of *The City and the City* describes the vehicle used to dump the murdered body: “We both knew that with its make and its Besz number plates, anyone in Ul Qoma who glimpsed it would likely have thought it elsewhere and quickly unseen it, without noticing it past” (Miéville 200). Noticing what is not meant to be seen is more than impolite—it is dangerous. This un-seeing is deliberate and takes an act of will, as the “without noticing” makes clear. The same can be seen in Peake’s *Gormenghast* (1950) where rooms “were there for all to see but no one saw them” (350). The character Steerpike is one of the only ones to see these rooms, and as such is afforded a degree of power that he might not otherwise have had. His devious nature allows him to see—and to use—space that has not just been ignored by others but has almost been willed out of existence; as a result, like the murderer in *The City and the City*, he is able to use this unseeing for his own ends.

Politics

Cities reflect their past and this is often inescapable from their politics. Andrew Ballantyne argues that “Buildings are always symptomatic of larger and smaller forces, operating at different levels of influence, from the personal to the global” (11). Mussolini, for example, cleared great swathes of Rome to make room for triumphal marches, as the Nazis did in Germany. As Painter Jr. asserts, “Fascism

transformed Rome. The city has a fascist imprint that has changed the way we experience the city today” (xv). Similarly, the Nazis, in addition to the communists in the former USSR, had strict building codes that dramatically changed the landscape of the cities they dominated. Paul B. Jaskot notes, “As with the Party Rally Grounds, building in Berlin was used both as a symbol for specific ideological policies as well as means of asserting Party (and specifically Hitler’s) control over an existing administration” (82). Just as various regimes have deep impacts on the physical aspects of primary world cities, so, too, does McKillip draw politics on the cities in her books. Ombria, Kelior, and Berylon all have power structures physically demarcated on their streets and palaces. Berylon of *Basilisk*, for example, experiences a coup, the remnants of which can be found physically marked upon the city in various ways. Some are obvious, such as the burnt-out husk of the Tormalyne family palace, allowed to remain a destroyed shell in full view, but some are more subtle.

Kelior (located within the unexplored kingdom of Numis) from *Od* has areas where politics are manifest. The Twilight Quarter is an area where politics have been physically marked on the city. The entrance is described as “the Twilight Gate, an archway through the thick wall which led to the upside-down world within” (McKillip, *Od* 33). It is a section of the city forbidden to wizarding students, and one that is looked after closely by the guards. Even though the area has been walled off and isolated, it is still presumed too dangerous to ignore entirely. Walling off a part of the city means that the ideas coming in from other lands are carefully contained. Like in Berylon, walls serve to contain the populace and also to keep external

influences (especially those considered dangerous) out. The Twilight Quarter is described as “dangerous, bewitching” (48), and because of this vice as well as ideas are cordoned off physically from the rest of the city. This is not an unusual conceit in genre fiction. Samuel R. Delany’s *Triton* (1976), for example, contains such neighbourhoods: “At founding, each outer Satellite city had set aside a city sector where no law officially held — since, as the Mars sociologist who first advocated it had pointed out, most cities develop, of necessity, such a neighbourhood anyway” (9). The same can be said of primary world cities, such as nineteenth-century London. White notes that “Extremes of deprivation and discomfort and pain provoked extremes of anticipation and enthusiasm and pleasure” (258). The extremes of large numbers of people packed into small spaces can be just as volatile in fantastic cities as in the primary world. London needed outlets for pleasure, just as Kelior does. The power of such extremes can become explosive, just as it did with mobs and rioting in London, and with revolution in Kelior.

In *Od* certain areas have been appropriated for political reasons, and this is reflected in the shape that the city takes. Both the Twilight Quarter and the School of Magic are carefully enclosed because they are places of naturally unruly power. Yar bitterly notes that ““You will be taught how best to use your powers for Numis. You will never leave Numis to go roaming out of curiosity and wonder as Od does. You will be considered too valuable a weapon”” (McKillip, *Od* 21–22). Through the years the wizards have been turned into weapons of the king, and with this process came the merging of the school building with the king’s palace: “The very walls of the

school are owned by the rulers of Numis. Why should they not train wizards to their own advantage?" (32). Somehow the wizards of Numis have become shaped to the king's will, just as their school became the king's. Through the centuries the school—first the subjects and how they were taught, and later the building itself—was overtaken by the kings. As the wizard Yar teaches, "'So, you can see, from the very beginning there was that strong bond between wizard and ruler which strengthened through the centuries until Od's school became, in Cronan's reign, part of the king's palace'" (20). The school that began as a separate entity, eventually merged with the palace, literally and figuratively beneath the king's gaze.

The balance of power that sees the king ruling both kingdom and school is one that seems beneficial to the king yet is detrimental for the wizards. Yar notes, "I didn't realize, as the years passed, how these walls that keep us safe and comfortable have also put such limits on our vision" (28). The wizards have been physically attached to the king's house, walled in, and in the process their powers and vision have been walled in as well. Knowledge is controlled by the king, because "Both rulers and wizards [crave] power; to avoid contention and chaos one must be bound by the other" (48). The kings have decided that power cannot be shared, that it must be leashed, and this vision of power shapes how the city looks: "He couldn't get lost; the king's high towers overshadowed everything" (71). The king's palace is the ultimate building in Kelior, as he is the ultimate power, and both the Twilight Quarter and the School of Magic are in its shadow.

To drive the point home, the most powerful characters in the story are those with “wild” magic who still think outside of what is allowed by the king and try to escape the physical as well as mental confinement of the school. “I had a dream of magic. . . . somehow, within the walls of Od’s school, I lost sight of that dream” (96), laments Yar. Magic is tamed by the king, and the characters who wish to break free of this are treated as dangerous. The king’s own daughter is one such character, and when told she is to be married to a complacent wizard, and thus never free again, “A helpless despair rose in her, that she would never see past the walls the Kings of Numis had placed around magic; she would never know how much more, if anything, there was to know” (57). Her first response is to lament the lack of knowledge. Crucially, she immediately thinks that she “would never see past the walls” that the kings have put around magic. She thinks of walls because they go beyond metaphor in the city of Kelior and into physical reality. Knowledge is corralled with physical as well as metaphorical walls.

The king nearly spells his own doom with the separation of the Twilight Quarter from the city and of the School of Magic from creativity. The king is wrong in his assumptions that the wizards seek power like his and must be kept in check. In *Triton*, Delaney has a character note that the complete anarchic trouble that those in power expected of the “unlicensed sector” (that area like the Twilight Quarter) is naturally contained: “the interface between official law and official lawlessness produced some remarkably stable *unofficial* laws throughout the no-law sector” (9, author’s emphasis). Just as the “unlicensed sector” in *Triton* is less dangerous than

expected, so, too, with the Twilight Quarter and those who simply want knowledge. The characters in the novel who seek to subvert the king's rules do so for their own sake, for their own dream of knowledge. As Yar explains, "Great wizards pursue knowledge and magic, not power. . . . They are not confined by the boundaries of a king's power, nor by any law except the laws of magic, which are exacting and compelling as any king's" (McKillip, *Od* 129). All that those with untamed magic really seek is freedom from walls and strictures, not anarchy. This is reflected in the fact that those rebelling do not enact any physical violence on the city itself (at least not on purpose); it is an intellectual rebellion, not a physical one. The hero of Kelior, Od, was not formally taught, but used wind and water to defeat an impending army only because she did not know she could not. So, too, the wizard Yar, who as a young man on his way to the school saved the palace from destruction by a Beast because he thought to ask it what it wanted and listened. The kings have sought to protect themselves and their kingdom, but instead they have stagnated it. By closing off the Twilight Quarter, which is creativity, fun, and inspiration, and the school, which should be the same but is no longer, the monarchy impedes the progress of its citizens without knowing it. By physically marking off space as dangerous, or regimented, they have cut off the flow of ideas as well. When the gardener Brenden needs to know what a plant is, he is directed to the Twilight Quarter. When the Princess Sulys wants to know if there is more small magic, like that of her mother's family, she tries to go to the Twilight Quarter. The Twilight Quarter has forms of knowledge not available in the rest of the city, which creates problems. As a young

student notes, "But if the wizards in other lands learn different ways of magic that are forbidden here, they could attack the king, and no one could stop them" (128). The kings have created their own destruction with the enclosure of school and Twilight Quarter and thus the stifling of knowledge.

The inherent mystery of *Ombria* gives form to a subtler political shaping than that found in *Od*. The two greatest forces in the city are the powerful women Domina Pearl and Faey. Each has her own domain and her own secrets. That neither of their realms is easily accessible gives clues to their personalities and to the mystery surrounding the two women. Domina Pearl's regime in Ombria imposes her will on the landscape of town in addition to castle. In the city of Ombria her influence is seen in the rotting timber and weed-filled docks. At one point the wharf's disintegration is described: "On the end of a weedy pier, where they could see the waves through rotting wood. . . . The warehouse facing the water was empty; so was the harbor except for a few fishing boats and a black-sailed pirate ship" (McKillip, *Ombria* 58). Hints are dropped throughout of an embargo. An imprudent former merchant toasts to "The Black Pearl and her sea scum that closed the ports of Ombria" (56). Domina Pearl has closed the town's free shipping, and only her black-sailed ships go in or out. Her rule has caused Ombria to decline, which is shown tangibly in the deteriorating state of the city's docks and the empty rooms discussed earlier.

How each section of a city has dealt with its past makes for contrasting but connected areas. *Od*, for instance, has the opposing structures of the School of Magic,

and the Twilight Quarter. Both are blocked-off sections of the city where particular acts are performed by particular types of people. They are both concerned with magic, but one is creativity and the other is regime. They are part of the same city, the same problems and solution, but in superficially different ways. In *Ombria* the shadow city, the underground remnants of past Ombrias, and Ombria's current incarnation are all part of the same physical space, but not completely. At times they intersect, like the crosshatched areas in *The City and the City*, but they also have their own distinct characteristics as well. This adds to the confusion and mystery, especially because the laws of how the worlds work are not fully explained. It is up to the reader to conjecture exactly what differentiates each part from the other because the processes are not fully explored.

Domina Pearl's secret dominance of the city in the past and her blatant dominance of it in the present are both reflected in her physical surroundings. She has two places of power: her secret chamber and her secret library. The "real" library of the castle was purged long before of anything to do with magic or poison. Domina Pearl sees to it that only she has the knowledge, and the space, to rule. Mag stumbles upon the lesser of the two rooms, the library: "She had chanced across the Black Pearl's library. The knowledge she found important, her spells, perhaps her history" (McKillip, *Ombria* 127). Even this already secret room is hidden well, with its "stairs hidden behind a warped, flecked mirror in the back of a room" (126). Domina Pearl's library is hidden behind a mirror, in the back of an empty room, in the secret and disused part of the palace. This triple layer of deception shows her cunning, her

imagination, and her ability to shape the castle to her needs. A room of one's own seems to apply to sorceresses just as much as to women writers. Virginia Woolf's manifesto on what women writers need to succeed (*A Room of One's Own*), part of which is space of their own and the luxury to use time as they want, can apply to all professional women, even sorceresses. The powerful characters in McKillip's cities similarly need space and time, and their secret domains accomplish this by allowing them to hold and wield power from secure bases. Perhaps Domina Pearl is powerful not only because she is ruthless but because she has carved herself this space and time away in which to work.

Secret rooms are important to someone looking for power. Like Domina Pearl in *Ombria*, the prince from *Basilisk* has a secret room to do sorcery, also without a door. Unlike Domina Pearl's sanctuary, however, there is not even a whisper of the Basilisk's room's existence. According to the definition in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* the Prince of Berylon is a true "secret master," someone who is the "guiding will" behind events (Langford, 848). He manipulates events from a secret room: "In Pellior Palace, the Prince of Berylon's dragon-eyed daughter stood beside him in a chamber without a door. The chamber was the heart of the palace, a secret only known to the two of them, for the prince, having discovered it, had eliminated those who helped him furnish it" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 48). This room of power is important both because it helped him to overtake Tormalyne house with poisons and magic, but also because he and his daughter are the only ones who have found it. The uses of the chamber illuminate the power dynamic. It is interesting that the room has not only been used

to deal with outsiders but with family as well: "The chamber, built of massive blocks of white marble behind the walls of other rooms, had been the last refuge of rulers of Pellior House who had exhausted every other method of dealing with troublesome neighbors or relatives" (51). As with *Ombria*, the power struggles in *Basilisk* can be within a family as well as without. This is yet another way the worlds of *Ombria* and *Basilisk* are similar to the primary world's Renaissance Italy, where family feuds had significance in the outside world.

Domina Pearl's secret chamber is reminiscent of the Basilisk's secret chamber in *Basilisk*. Here her secrets are kept and her poisons brewed. It differs from the Basilisk's private space in that it is a space that a few intuitive characters, such as Mag, guess must be there. But, in the end, none of the characters of *Ombria* actually find this secret domain; it has to be shown to them. Ducon exclaims, "'She opened the door for me . . . and I went in. I've been searching everywhere for that door'" (McKillip, *Ombria* 230). It is important that although Ducon suspects Domina Pearl has such a space, she has to show it to him. It is as well concealed as Domina Pearl herself has been, hiding in *Ombria*'s past of and manipulating its future: "It was Domina Pearl's most closely guarded secret, the center of the she-spider's web. That she had permitted Mag to see it, Mag found profoundly disquieting" (268). Domina Pearl's closely guarded sanctuary is within the palace, but seemingly outside it as well since no one has ever been able to find it without her help. Just as she has been able to hide herself from notice and time's ravages, her secret chamber is within the castle, yet separate. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the entry "wainscots" maintains

that “invisible or undetected societies [live] in the interstices of the dominant world”(Clute, “Wainscots” 991). *Ombria* and *Berylon* both contain these “wainscots,” or people (sometimes groups as with the conspirators in *Basilisk*) who work invisibly in secret chambers and hidden rooms to manipulate events to their satisfaction.

Just as the holding of space displays power, the appropriation of space displays power dynamics. Domina Pearl seeks to take over the underground, to commandeer all the spaces of *Ombria*. Faey holds complete control of the underneath *Ombria*, the one place Domina Pearl has taken no notice of until the end of the book, when she notes, “She has grown too free and unpredictable in her underground city. I want her here, under my control” (McKillip, *Ombria* 271). Domina Pearl seeks to control Faey not only by removing Faey from her own domain but also by physically putting Faey into Domina Pearl’s realm of influence.

In *Basilisk* as well there is an appropriation of space. Arioso Pellior does not just want to destroy the Tormalyne family, he takes everything that was associated with it, including “the music school, which Prince Arioso had appropriated, down to its last demisemiquaver, for the good of the city, though he at least allowed it to keep its three-hundred-year old name” (McKillip, *Basilisk* 71). Later in the novel Caladrius notes that in Tormalyne House “He recognized racks for bottles and kegs, though they were empty. Pellior House must have appropriated the wine cellar along with the music” (159). Taking the wine is a small example, but shows the completeness of the ruination of Tormalyne House. The Basilisk torched the house and killed all the

family, but also appropriated the wine and music. It was a complete, and callous, appropriation, one that displays the extent of Pellior's power and ruthlessness.

How characters move through space is an indicator of relationships as well. Caladrius follows Luna through the Palace that should be his by right: "She moved ahead of him through the dark; he saw her easily, moving surely, gracefully across damp, sagging flagstones, through the maze of rooms. He felt the blood pound again behind his eyes. She knew the place where he had been born as if she had claimed it for her own" (295). That she moves so easily through what should be her enemy's palace is interesting, but so, too, is the fact that she dominates the space (even "claims" it) over and above Caladrius with her ease of movement. The blood pounding behind his eyes is a sign of his shock; this is a space that has been forbidden since Luna was a very young child, and yet she moves through it with confidence, "easily," more so than Caladrius whose family and childhood home it was. This creates interesting implications. Perhaps Luna has explored the forbidden space as she has done other secret spaces. Perhaps it is simply a talent. Whatever the answer, and the book is not forthcoming with any, what is clear is that space and how characters move within it is important for more than just travel from point A to point B.

Like in Berylon where the Basilisk's reign has physical implications for the city, so too in Ombria. Faey is complete mistress of the underground city and, to an extent, Ombria's past as well. The disuse of the underground is a reflection of the power Faey holds over the unconscious city. She suffers no one to be underground

without her knowledge, and since the general townsfolk have no curiosity about Ombria's past, the only ones she chases out are the street urchins. Faey does not even allow people to die in peace in the under city: she says to Lydea, "I wish . . . that people wouldn't die down here. I can usually send them back up before they get too far" (McKillip, *Ombria* 133). Thus, the only members of the under city are those Faey has allowed to be there.

The use of space can be both subtle and important and its further exploration in *Basilisk* is provided at the end of the book with a hint in which Luna allows Caladrius to see her come out of the secret room. Her father would have allowed no one to do so, and, at this point, Luna knows that Caladrius is quite dangerous. The opening of a secret door openly displays trust but serves as a warning as well. The fact that Caladrius has already noted the eyehole where a tapestried animal's eye should have been shows his own cunning. The fact that he has noticed a keyhole where no one else has combined with the fact that she allows him to see the secret provides a hint at the balance of power that occurs at the end. Caladrius uses his own nerve and cunning, and Luna allows a balance of power to be restored for the sake of peace. These power struggles are played out silently, all with the simple opening of a door, but they are an important clue.

Luna's ability to get into her father's secret chamber as a small child is a secret test and an example of how space can expand beyond the physical and into the psychological. Here she enters the room for the first time: "[she] had seen an unfamiliar expression on his face when she joined him in his secret place. He looked,

she realized later, as if he had seen her for the first time in their lives; he had finally recognized her as part of him" (52). The Basilisk's relationship with his daughter is important, and it is equally important that they are the two who can enter the chamber and have managed to do so without formal teaching or anyone pointing out that it can even be done. Arioso discovered it by paying attention to lore, but without actual guidance: "According to family history, it had last been used two centuries before. Then it had passed into family lore until Arioso had discovered a need for it, and, in his methodical fashion, discovered it." (51). In the same methodical way, Luna, too, discovers it when she needs her father. They find the space and privacy they require within a busy household and their dominance of this space reflects their dominance over the rest of the family and city.

The past and its few visible remnants the stones speak to Caladrius and Luna, linking them again, both with their special importance to the novel, and their affinity with the past. When Caladrius goes into Tormalyne Palace; "Dark and stone closed around him. . . . he heard the sounds within the register of its silence; the forgotten screams of pain and despair that had seeped into the stones through centuries of Tormalyne history" (158). Both he and Luna hear the past in the stones. If it were not a fantasy, it is entirely possible that it would be a figure of expression. As it is, it can be taken literally: "[Luna] walked curiously through the vast, empty rooms, their walls charred black like chimney stones. Cries followed her, seeped out of the past around her" (274). Both she and Caladrius can hear the past, not just in their own imagination, as we would in the primary world, but in reality. This deep connection

to the past is far more intimate than the usual figurative use of “hearing the past.”

Perhaps this shared affinity is partially why they are the two rulers left at the end of the book. They do not ignore the past; the past—and its pain—speaks to them both and gives them a level of empathy their parents likely lacked.

In the end, the physical manifestations of power must be changed when the regime comes to an end. As in Ombria, the physical effects of tyranny are obvious in Berylon and must be cleaned up after the regime changes. In *Basilisk* at the height of the conflict “The doors of the school were chained shut; guards stood at every corner. Someone had pounded the faces of the stone griffins flanking the doors into dust” (McKillip 266). The griffin is a symbol of the Tormalyne family; the griffins on the school’s steps (and the school’s name) are some of the few reminders of the Tormalyne family, and they have been disfigured purposefully. Though the name cannot be maimed physically, the other symbol of the house is. Berylon must begin the mundane task of picking up after peace: “Around her students and magisters picked up books, mopped mud and spilled water off the floors, repaired battered doors” (313). These are not great acts, but they are important to physically setting the city to rights and to returning it to the state it was in during more peaceful times. It is also important that Luna provides furnishings and other necessities for the destroyed Tormalyne House. They are unlooked-for reparations that point the way to future interaction between the two houses.

Ombria, too, must be repaired. All that Domina Pearl has physically done to stamp her power on Ombria must be undone. Politics are physically imprinted on

the city with a reminder that Ducon Greve, the new Regent, must see that “All the broken piers he had wandered over must be fixed; the troubled, dangerous streets he had roamed at all hours must be made safe” (McKillip, *Ombria* 293). The metaphysical repairs are created with the forgetting that is cast by Ombria’s turning, but the physical damage must be undone as well. The wharves that Domina Pearl allowed to rot need to be fixed, and her secret rooms have crumbled in Ombria’s change. Faey, whose power goes on forgotten, but undiminished, is left undisturbed in her underground domain, with her power intact and her domain untouched by the newest ravage of history.

The nature of McKillip’s cities reflects the general tone of her writing: even though she has placed these tales in mostly self-contained cities, she cannot help but be a pastoral writer, as explored in Chapter Four. McKillip, in the end, is not an urban fantasist. Some of her stories are placed in cities, but she is far more interested in the power dynamics of people than in how the cities function as cities. Her cities are steeped in the past, and they are not particularly “modern,” even when modern inventions such as motors are added, as is evident in *Bards*.

The next chapter will look at the most specific form of the chronotope and how it informs McKillip’s characters. As shown in this chapter, McKillip is interested less in cities, or even landscape, and more in how characters interact with these spaces. This last chapter will examine how characters interact with both the internal and external manifestations of chronotope.

Chapter Six: Character and the Personal Chronotope

Time influences a person's ideology and experiences. Bakhtin wrote of the chronotope as a literary phenomenon, yet because humans live through and are influenced by time they have a chronotope of their own. As Thomas J. Cottle argues, "Because to live is to grow old, time reveals itself partly in the way one experiences one's inner life" (10). Humans' chronotopes are influenced by time not only in how long they have physically lived, but how they perceive the time that has passed or has yet to come. An example from Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) demonstrates this point in a scene in which two older women discuss a girl of eleven: "'she's been doing it a long time she says.' 'That would mean a month or two, at her age'" (29). In a book in which linguistics and accurate expression are vital, these remarks give an example of how time perception changes as we age. To the girl of eleven, a month or two *is* a long time. The older women are able to perceive how long it is in "actual" time because of their longer lifespans and experience. This different perception of time influences McKillip's characters not just within themselves but also in how they interact with each other. Time writes itself on the characters' bodies as well as in their minds. As they age, the time they have lived (that is, their past) influences their present and how they interact with those they know in that present. As Maria Nikolajeva argues in *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*, "The interaction of two chronotopes must

necessarily have an impact on them both" (95), and Nikolajeva's phrasing is clear here: the meeting of two chronotopes has an "impact" in that there is contact of a violent and enduring sort. The interaction of chronotopes is complicated and, by extension, a person's interactions with time are more complicated than might be apparent at first.

Personal Time

A sense of time passing is a deeply personal one. Time, which is assumed to be a stable element, is not, because each person experiences it differently. In "Time Orientation Measurement: A Conceptual Approach," Terrell P. Lasane and Deborah A. O'Donnell outline what many have argued: "The linear understanding and experience of time to which most westerners adhere may in fact be an illusion, at least according to some physicists who readily admit that they do not understand the construct of time" (12). Each person uses a different internal temporal framework to both judge time and act on the information this internal understanding imparts.

John N. Boyd and Philip G. Zimbardo argue that "the abstract, cognitive processes of reconstructing the past and constructing the future function to influence current decision making" (1272). In *McKillip*, this plays out in various ways. For example, the small stretch of time that Phelan from *Bards* has lived is all that he knows, while his immortal father has watched over hundreds of such stretches of time. With their radically different pasts, the same amount of time can be perceived very differently by them both, which means that a certain amount of time can have

passed with Phelan frantic because he has not seen his father, while to Nairn seemingly no time at all has gone by since he last saw his current family. Examining the personal chronotopes of Nairn and Phelan, it becomes clear that Nairn, as the (much) older of the two, ought to be the voice of authority, but it is Phelan that has the more regular sense of time, and is thus imbued with official authority.

Using Paul Ricoeur's notion of "monumental" time, the difference between Nairn and Phelan becomes clear. Ricoeur describes how "the figures of authority and power that form the counterweight to the living times experienced" belong to "'monumental time', of which chronological time is but the audible expression" (106). The extended time that Nairn has experienced means that his inner sense of time does not match the chronological time exemplified by bells or other social ways of marking increments of time. Thus Nairn, who as a father ought to be the figure of authority, is constantly being brought back to his home or social functions by his son Phelan, who represents authority because of his more regular adherence to externally set chronological time.

Time's effects can be seen in the past of cities, or the history of stories, but it also affects how people interact, how they are perceived, and, occasionally, what their roles are meant to be. I will be considering the various characters who are congenitally immortal, immortal from acquired means, or who we (as readers) meet who are ignorant of their immortality. I will analyse how their various chronotopes, congenital and acquired, immortal or not, interact; and I will analyse how time in the form of the past affects individuals and their relations with each other.

It is worth noting that McKillip is not meticulous about her time nomenclature, perhaps because that is not where her focus lies. For example, if it were a science fiction text *The Riddle-master Trilogy* would fail at providing accurate descriptions. It is noteworthy that when the main character of *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, Morgon, loses track, or sense, of time, he thinks of it in terms of hours and minutes, but nowhere else in the book are regular time-measurement devices such as clocks mentioned. When Morgon is lost in a winter storm, for example, “He lost all sense of time, not knowing if moments or hours had passed since he had started walking, not knowing whether it was noon or evening” (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 128). Identifying noon or evening in a general way can be done by ascertaining the position of the sun in the sky, something with which the farmer Morgon would be well acquainted. What hour it is, however, requires a more specific measure, suggesting at least an acquaintance with more formally kept time. Consequently, two different measures of time are conflated. A sense of time can be both personal and cultural. Perhaps Morgon thinks of daylight markers such as “noon” and “evening” because he was a farmer, but he thinks of “hours” because he was schooled in a more formal setting. In the primary world different constructs of time are cultural as well as personal. For example, William T. Brown and James M. Jones discuss how time is perceived in Trinidad:

As a cultural attribute, Any Time is Trinidad Time (ATTT) is not just an attitude about time, it is a value of personal and cultural meaning. That is, *time* has no inherent value; it is not per se an asset. Rather one’s

behavior is almost entirely determined by social relationships, personal intentions, preferences, and motives. (306, authors' emphasis)

Time works very differently for different cultures, and McKillip has perhaps reflected this in how her various characters perceive time.

Immortals

McKillip's apparent lack of interest in being exact means that it can be difficult to tease apart characters' chronotopes. The King Har of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, for example, is not clearly defined as mortal or immortal. He has lived a long time (several hundred years), but that is all that is explained. How various characters are influenced by time can be explored, but the reasons for this influence and their behaviour as a result might not be readily apparent. This confusion is not necessarily purposeful on McKillip's part. Rather, it is sometimes a consequence of the obscurity of the characters involved. The King Har for example, is not central to the story, but it is clear that he is very powerful and long lived, and this gives his character a different perspective within the books. Likely because it is not central to the story, McKillip does not seem interested enough to work out a clear difference between immortal and near-immortal.

The usual definition of immortal describes someone or something not subject to death. It will be used in this way, to denote someone who cannot die, but will be expanded to someone who can be killed but will otherwise live forever. This amplification of the term is not ideal and it is too broad; however, McKillip herself is

not exact within her framework, and the terminology must then be stretched to suit. Lifespan will be defined using Anthony Farrant's definition: "The normal lifespan identifies the length of life for which an individual might reasonably expect to live" (38). This definition is particularly useful in that it uses the broader term "individual" rather than human. It has been argued by Leon R. Kass and others that immortality would cause humans to become unhuman, and, if this view is accepted, Farrant's definition is still relevant, human or not. McKillip's immortals are close to what Carol G. Zaleski calls "Alpha" immortals:

Alpha immortals are set apart and in some respects are inhuman. They seem to lack the defining characteristic that makes *mortal* a synonym for man and an antonym for god. Yet they are not gods, and what they achieve may be more properly called *everlasting longevity* rather than *eternal life*. (116, author's emphasis)

Except perhaps for the High One in McKillip's *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, none of her immortals are gods as such, yet neither are they fully human. Like Gandalf of *The Lord of the Rings*, McKillip's immortals are long lived and wise, but fallible. In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, death is important. As Abraham Cleaver notes in his article "Warrior, Healer, Savior, King: The Complex Nature of J.R.R. Tolkien's Heroes," the ability to die and be resurrected is vital to Gandalf's role within the books. As a deeply religious man Tolkien was necessarily interested in death, but McKillip seems less so, and perhaps this is partially why her immortals are not

worked out in more detail. It is not their deaths that McKillip is interested in; rather, her interest appears to lie in their lives.

The reader's introduction to those I have termed congenital immortals, such as several characters from *Ombria* and *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, is one of both intrigue but also accepted immortality. With Faey from *Ombria*, for example, it is not explored whether she can be killed, as no one tries, nor are her origins explored in any depth. She is simply ancient, so old she cannot remember her own beginning. She is presented from an unquestioned base of power and yet, when examined in depth, her exact origins and even the extent of her immortality are not apparent.

For an example of an author who is clearly interested in the delineation between mortal and immortal, one can look at Tamora Pierce's *The Immortals* series. In that series, especially in the last book, *The Realms of the Gods* (1996), there is a clear difference between immortals (who can live forever, but can also be killed) and the Gods, who cannot be killed. Pierce uses this clear difference to set up conflict between the Immortals, the Gods, and mortals. McKillip does not have this clear boundary, which makes the differences between various characters difficult to work out, and means that the conflicts are not necessarily divided so neatly.

With the long lifespans McKillip has given some of her characters, she is neither taking a realistic look at how long humans are actually capable of living, nor is she looking at the social consequences as a science fiction text might do. Stefanie Giebert in "A Place for the Silver Horde or No Country for Old Men? Age and Aging in Fantasy and Science Fiction" asks, "Being non-mimetic genres, SF/F are not bound

by natural laws, such as the one that says that all lives must age and die at some time. Thus, anything is possible. How do writers use this freedom and what are the recipient's attitudes towards this?" (187). McKillip is interested in the personal consequences of mortality and the consequences for power, and this drives the plot of several of her novels. In reality, longevity of the kind seen in McKillip's books is, if not impossible, improbable. Farrant notes that "any increases in lifespan will be gradual and there is no prospect in the immediate future, if at all, of a significant extension to longevity such that people might live for hundreds of years" (ix). Even if it were possible to live a vastly expanded lifespan, the socio-economic effects are worrying to the scientific community and to society as a whole. Overpopulation and the burden on the younger generations of older relatives who live past their expected lifespans, among other aspects, could be the focus of a science fiction novel—and is the focus in most literature looking at longevity—but not for McKillip.

What, then, is McKillip's interest, and what drives McKillip's immortal characters? Dominance is the obvious answer, at least for the malevolent characters such as the sorceress Domina Pearl of *Ombria* and the shape-changers of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy. But, for other characters such as Deth in *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, Nairn of *Bards*, and Faey of *Ombria*, it is love for an individual rather than of power that drives them forward. Before the events in their respective books, Faey, Nairn, and Deth have all been in a sort of stasis. They have been living their eternal lives in the worlds of mortals with small interferences but without engaging their emotions.

It is being entangled with mortals whom they begin to love that drives their lives forward in any meaningful way.

How the immortals deal with other more ordinary characters can be a clue to their character. Faey and Domina Pearl of *Ombria* are the only two characters in the “real” *Ombria* to have extended lifespans, but they have very different motivations. The other main characters in the story are all fairly young. Even the old prince whose death sets off the events in the novel was clearly mortal, with a seemingly early death. The story is one based around the conflict that comes from immortal (or near immortal) term, interacting with ordinary lifespans. This underlying theme is not one drawn out in any obvious way in the novel, but, when examined closely, it is what pins the various plots and action together. Domina Pearl’s struggle for power and the immortality to wield it is the basic conflict of the book. Her interaction with other characters, both those who are mortal as well as the immortal Faey, was explored in Chapter One, but what is key here is that it is how all the characters experience time that differentiates them and drives conflict.

Conversely, in *Ombria* love for an individual is also important. Domina Pearl and Faey are often compared in that they are both women of power running the city, but the ways in which they differ are crucial. Faey speaks to Lydea of Domina Pearl: “If that woman has my waxling, I’ll make a broth out of her bones” (McKillip, *Ombria* 135); and Lydea replies, “I wish you would. . . . then there would only be one of you” (136). Lydea is sharply rebuked for this remark; Faey does not consider herself at all similar to the other woman, but, as Lydea has noticed, they are both

ancient, powerful women who hold the real power in the city. They are similarly cold, as Lydea notes: “Living down here, safe in magic, you don’t have to care about anything or anyone” (136). They are, in some sense, twins, but Faey’s remark about her waxling is pivotal to the difference between her and Domina Pearl because Faey cares about something beyond herself: “I do care about something. I care about my waxling” (136), says Faey. Faey’s “waxling” is a child left on her steps that she has reared from an infant, and though the name is significant—the girl is meant to have the pliancy and brainlessness of wax—Faey has inadvertently come to love her as an individual. Faey is ancient, as old as the ancient city of Ombria and so old that she does not remember how old she is, so Faey, like other ancient characters of McKillip’s, is largely indifferent to human suffering. But she is not *entirely* indifferent, and this is key. Like Nairn from *Bards* and Deth from *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, Faey comes to love an individual, and it changes her interactions as well as the plot of the book. Her interference in the city of Ombria is caused by her love of an individual. Without the imperilled waxling, presumably Faey would have allowed the city to continue to sink into destitution and despair. Faey’s love is crucial to the reformation of the city.

What then of those with a congenitally short lifespan in the book? There is a desperation to most of the characters that is not present with Faey. Knowledge that your time is already limited—and the threat of having that lifespan cut off even earlier—causes characters such as Lydea and Ducon Greve to fight, yet to do so as prudently as possible against Domina Pearl. Kass asserts that “To know and to feel

that one goes around only once, and that the deadline is not out of sight, is for many people the necessary spur to the pursuit of something worthwhile" (313). This is one of the classic arguments against immortality (or even sustained longevity) in the primary world. The assumption is that without death as a goad, without the limited time this implies, humans would revert to a lazy and "un-worthy" existence. This does not seem to be the case with McKillip's immortals (Faey perhaps is lazy in her own way, but it could also be construed as selfishness) who are generally powerful and active.

The immortals of *The Riddle-master* Trilogy are complicated: the duplicitous nature of their characters entangles identity, immortality, and power, yet one immortal—the High Lord—stands out. The High Lord (sometimes the harper Deth) is an Earth-master. He is of seemingly similar origins to the shape-changers in the story, but his humanity is greater. Like the difference between Faey and her rival Domina Pearl in *Ombria*, in *Riddle-master* love for an individual is crucial. The High Lord laments, "Morgon . . . I wish you had not been someone I loved so" (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 573). The High Lord's love for Morgon is not part of the master narrative that has shaped Morgon's destiny long before he was born, but it is crucial nonetheless in that it gives the High Lord a perspective on humanity (and indeed, some humanity in and of itself). The shape-changers in the Trilogy take many different forms, but they have very little humanity save for their ability to mimic it. This mimicry means that some of their blood has mixed with that of humans, but, as Raederle notes, "'Ylon's blood has been in my family for generations. . . . Now I

know what his father was. One of you. That gives me some kinship with you. But nothing else, nothing of your compassionlessness, your destructiveness''' (291–92). It is key that Raederle says that she knows not who but *what* her ancestor's father was; the inhuman aspect of the immortal shape-changers is emphasised.

However, though the reader is given clues, neither the shape-changers' full origins nor the extent of their powers is disclosed. The shape-changers are presented as immortal and powerful, but because their past is not fleshed out they are not fully defined. They are introduced as clearly dangerous, but the long-ago war they fought in is not explored in depth and neither are they. Thus, it is difficult to know the full extent of their powers or even their exact natures. The wizards of *Riddle-master* also appear to have extended lifespans, although whether they are immortal or not is unclear. It is a fact that many wizards were killed during a long-ago war. At the beginning of the book it is assumed that they have all been killed, and they are treated as legend. As explored in Chapter Three, McKillip frequently uses "legends" that turn out to be real. The few wizards that have survived the war have done so in disguise and for centuries longer than an ordinary human would be expected to live. As such, they are considered congenital immortals, though their importance to the text is less than that of the other characters, thus the scarcity of the analysis of them here. Although all of their origins are slightly hazy, it is clear that they are all congenital, that they were all created with these particular lifespans, and that the most drawn out characters are those (such as the High One) who love an individual.

Like Faey of *Ombria* and the High One of *Riddle-master*, Nairn of *Bards*'s love for an individual, his son Phelan, means that he is forced to deal with events on a personal level. He will sacrifice Phelan to his own goals only so far. Presumably he has coerced Phelan into being a bard in the hopes of having his own curse reversed, but when it comes to the actual moment when Phelan would participate in the same competition that caused his immortality, Nairn refuses to allow it. Nairn is terrified to think his son could be tricked into a similar fate. One of the other characters notes of Nairn that "'He turned his heart inside out to rescue you from his fate'" (McKillip, *Bards* 322). The ending of *Bards* is a somewhat weak one because it transpires that there was no *real* danger to any of the characters. The sacrifice on both their parts turns out to be unnecessary, but it does show the dynamics of the immortal father and mortal son, and what, exactly, Nairn is prepared to do to have his immortality reversed.

On the surface, Domina Pearl and Faey of *Ombria* are quite similar. However, conflict between chronotopes is manifest in the dynamic between them, as explored in Chapter One. They are powerful women, sorceresses, who have shaped the city without the city being aware of it. To them the city of *Ombria* is nothing but a board game. They send their pawns to do their bidding with no real qualms. Both women are inhuman in how they deal with the other characters in the book. One of the main arguments against immortality in the primary world is that it would make humans something other. As Eric Juengst argues, "The first, and most common, alternative medical argument against anti-ageing medicine is that ageing is part of the life cycle

that defines human beings, and that tampering with that cycle could literally be *dehumanizing*" (326-27, author's emphasis). Juengst's use of the word "tampering" (instead of, for example, *changing* or *extending*) along with the tone of the rest of his argument indicate that he sees dehumanisation—and any extension of the life cycle—as undesirable. Thus, immortality can be considered dehumanising, and Faey and Domina Pearl of *Ombria* exemplify this in their lack of human empathy. Faey, for example, casually mentions someone she has been paid to kill: "Faey only waved him away with her leaves. 'Ducon Greve is taken care of,' she said with chilling disinterest" (McKillip, *Ombria* 111). There is a sense of unreality to their actions, and even death is just business.

New Immortals

The natural expectation for a human is that time will work upon their body, and they will die. Thus, the expectation of a limited lifespan, and the reality of an elongated one, can cause conflict. The Earth-masters and Faey were created with extended lifespans, which means that the contrast between them and those who are either made immortal (through sorcery or fate) or who are not immortal at all is marked. The inhuman aspect to immortality has special relevance for those characters such as Morgon and Raederle from *Riddle-master* who are born with the assumption that they are fully human. Farrant asserts that "The three features of birth, relationships and death are some of the fundamental facts about human beings that are common throughout all cultures and on which different cultural responses

and social institutions . . . are based" (19). When one of these expected markers is removed, the consequences for a sense of self can be alarming. If the argument that immortality makes one unhuman is treated as true, Raederle and Morgon's struggles against their fates become even clearer. Having the three phases of human life interrupted means that the character becomes something other than human, which has consequences for them physically (in the form of their longevity) as well as mentally. Immortality is not a human attribute. Raederle is terrified of her heritage because the shape-changers are patently unhuman. The idea that she could lose herself in their power is frightening not just because she would become something other than human but also because she is tempted by this power: "She reached out to it tentatively, curiously. Then she realized that, in reaching towards it, she was turning away from her own name—the familiar heritage in An that had defined her from her birth—towards a heritage that held no peace, a name that no one knew" (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 293). Having been born with the basic assumption that she is human, the prospect of being Other is not just frightening but identity-shattering for Raederle. She is curious about her heritage but also knows that this curiosity is dangerous. She understands that in exploring the shape-shifter power she would become something other than Raederle, and other than human. Unimagined longevity is not only unlooked for by Raederle, but unwanted as well. The shape-changers do not have the same value judgments or needs as humans, even if they occasionally take their form, and this is frightening.

It is a strange continuance of the fact that Morgon's presumed immortality is not explored, that the effect this might have on Raederle is not explored either. Perhaps she, too, will be immortal because of her shape-changer heritage. The only other member of her family to have had strong shape-changer influence killed himself, driven mad by the different needs of his human reality and shape-changer blood. There is no clue as to whether Raederle will also be immortal or at least long-lived. This is left as an unknown in the Trilogy's (somewhat) happy ending¹¹. What is clear is that they were both born with the anticipation of human lifespans, and both have had that expectation disrupted. The consequences of this for the plot are that the focus remains on how Raederle and Morgon deal with the onset of their destinies rather than with the continuing process of living day-to-day once their destinies are fulfilled.

Nairn from *Bards* can be compared to Faey from *Ombria* and Deth from *Riddle-master* in that his love for an individual (in his case his son) motivates him. However, his similarity to Domina Pearl from *Ombria*, and Morgon and Raederle from *Riddle-master* in that he comes by his immortality later in life is also important. Immortality is not constructed as a positive in McKillip's books, something which is borne out by the experiences of most of her immortal characters. Zaleski argues that "To be given everlasting longevity without being remade for eternal life is to live under a curse" (116). Although Zaleski does not go into detail about what she means, it is a

¹¹ For a detailed examination of this, see Christine Mains "Having it All: The Female Hero's Quest for Love and Power in Patricia McKillip's *The Riddle-Master Trilogy*."

statement that can be applied to McKillip's Nairn from *Bards*, and perhaps Raederle and Morgon from *The Riddle-master Trilogy* as well. Her argument intimates that there is something inherent about people (or characters) that means they are programmed to expect a certain amount of time alive, and then death. When this is disrupted, is stretched without the accompanying knowledge that immortality requires, it is anything but a positive. Nairn has had immortality cursed upon him after losing a contest. He has spent the eons since the contest trying to find the plain on which he was cursed and watching his families live and die. Like *Ombria* and *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, *Bards* contains a mystery, and as such clues have to be pieced together to understand the chronotopes of the various characters, especially Nairn's. The mystery of the book is therefore enhanced by his mysterious past.

Like Domina Pearl of *Ombria*, other characters are made unstable when immortality, or near-immortality, is thrust upon them. Domina Pearl has chosen immortality as a route to power. While her lack of patience is crucial to her downfall, she, at least, has had a choice in the matter. For Nairn of *Bards*, and Raederle and Morgon of *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, the prospect of immortality is not something they have chosen or were born facing. All three are born as seemingly ordinary humans, and this makes a difference to how they deal with their longevity. Nairn from *Bards* has immortality thrust upon him as a curse, interesting in and of itself, as immortality is generally seen as a positive. People have looked for immortality as something to be desired. Farrant in his *Longevity and the Good Life* argues that "*The Epic of Gilgamesh* may be the earliest tale of a search for a means to prolong life while

the idea of a 'fountain of youth' is an old, culturally diverse and widespread myth" (vii). The search for the philosopher's stone is a quest for immortality, one many people in primary and secondary worlds have undertaken. However, for Nairn it is a cursed existence: the endless years stretch on interminably in a crazed search for the plain where he lost a contest in the hopes of having his immortality reversed.

Ordinary Age

Other books also have characters who are influenced by time, even if not so spectacularly as the immortal characters. *Alphabet* is not just a book with time extant in the form of time travel, it is also a book that explores personal age. The past and experiences of the adolescent queen Tessera and her mentor are so different that time has made them strange. Tessera's forming magical powers only confuses things further. Like Morgon of *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, explored below, Tessera's chronotope in *Alphabet* is confused by her natural affinity with nature and her ability to shape change: "Peace, layered in rings of wood rippling out from the word, was one of the dreams; she breathed it in, or swallowed it. Now she lumbered like a tree, heavy with time, her thoughts too slow for words, her outward body a small, unwieldy thing crusted with bark" (McKillip 199). As someone able to change shape at will, her human concept of time is necessarily skewed. When her older mentor, the sorceress Vevay, is frantically looking for Tessera only to find her staring out at the sea, Vevay's expectation for Tessera, of an ordinary mortal's sense of time (that is, a non-magical adult's sense of time), is disjointed. Tessera's father was evidently non-

magical, as is her mother. There is no expectation of power or of a different mind-set, and this complicates their differences. Vevay says, “I didn’t remember. . . . What power is like when you’re that young. If no one names it for you, how can you possibly know what it is? She had no way of telling me” (231). Thus, power and age conflate to provide even more misunderstandings than might ordinarily be expected. Alison Waller argues that “Adolescence is always ‘other’ to the more mature stage of adulthood” (1). In the case of Vevay and Tessera, this “othering” is exacerbated by the presence of magic.

Waller argues that adolescence is “other” from the viewpoint of the adult, but the reverse can be true as well. The disjunction between different life stages is felt on both sides. Vevay in *Alphabet* cannot understand the Queen, but neither can the Queen understand her. Tessera thinks, “Perhaps I must grow old and gray, Tessera thought, and learn to use a sword and even grow a mustache, and Vevay will finally grow fond of me” (129). Her adolescent mode of thought is focused on the physical, and the mental stage that Vevay is experiencing is too distant and alien for Tessera to even be able to fathom attributes in common. Tessera does not wish for wisdom or even actual old age to be able to understand Vevay; she sees the divide as something mostly physical, as something that a “gray” “mustache” might fix. Age and their vastly different pasts has made them both Other from each other’s viewpoint. The final resolution in the book is only possible once Vevay is able to remember some of her youth, and Tessera matures and is able to put into words the power she uses instinctively. The passage of time is crucial to their ability to work with one another.

They need time in order to understand each other and this understanding can only be reached when their very different chronotopes and experiences are reconciled.

Like Tessera, Morgon of *Riddle-master's* chronotope comes into conflict with those around him. Even without involving his destiny, and Deth/The High One's influence, Morgon's own lifespan is complicated. As a farmer his personal lifespan is linked with the seasons. Because *The Riddle-master* Trilogy follows a cyclical path of the turning seasons rather than the passing of minutes, hours, and years, it is not in conflict with the general structure of the narrative of the book. However, his ability to shape-change affects his chronotope dramatically. First, there is the difference between his usual human chronotope and the animal or plant he has become. As a vesta (a reindeer-type mammal) Morgon runs through King Har's domain with no awareness of how much time has passed for humans. He is constantly being lost in time in other ways; at one point the shape-changer Yrth puts a spell on Morgon, and he loses two days staring into darkness. As a tree "He dwindled back into his own shape on a rainy, blustery autumn day. He stood in the cold winds, blinking rain out of his eyes, trying to remember a long, wordless passage of time" (McKillip, *Riddle-master* 497). The passage of time is marked with a season, autumn, but Morgon has no other indication of how much time has passed other than a vague feeling that it has been a long time. All the time he is a tree, others have been searching for him, but their frantic day-to-day movements mean nothing to him because he has hibernated as a tree and has passed, in some ways, beyond the human concept of time. These journeys in and out of non-human time can give him the indifference to

others that the immortals have; the moments when Morgon is outside the human conception of time are also the moments when he is not human.

In *The Riddle-master Trilogy*, Morgon's chronotope sometimes brings him into conflict with other characters in the books. Once he begins the process of being the High One's heir, even if unknowingly, the difference between how he perceives time and how others do brings conflict. Morgon, who has slept after living out Har's memories, questions Raederle: "'How long-how long did I sleep?'" "'Har said over two thousand years.'" "'Is it day or night?'" "'It's noon. You've slept nearly two days'" (536). In this passage various kinds of time are mentioned. In his and Har's minds and experience Morgon has lived thousands of years. In "real" time, the time that the other characters have experienced, it has been two days. He holds both the recognition of these two very different chronotopes, as well as the here-and-now time of noon, in his head without much apparent difficulty. It is important to note also that Raederle knows without clarification which question he is asking at which time. Her own sense of time expands with his so that she can be a true help at times such as these.¹²

The lands of *The Riddle-master Trilogy* are ones steeped in time, with the various chronotopes occasionally coming into conflict. Not only does Raederle have to deal with the truth of her own lifespan (one that has been hidden from her), she must also deal with the consequences of others' chronotopes, and thus their own

¹² For a further exploration of Raederle and Morgon's relationship, see Christine Mains's Master's Thesis "The Quest of the Female Hero in the Works of Patricia A. McKillip."

sense of personal past. Raederle finds this out to her frustration when dealing with a ghost set on revenge:

She wanted to scream at him suddenly that she had nothing to do with his feuds or his death, that he had been dead for centuries and his vengeance was a matter insignificant in the turmoil of events beyond An. But his brain was alive only in the past, and the long centuries must have seemed to him the passing of a single night over Hel. (345)

Though she is frustrated, Raederle is able to deal with the ghost when others have not. She is capable of doing so because she makes an effort to understand his past, unlike others who have missed the importance of this understanding. Her chronotope has come into contact with his; her understanding of his chronotope allows her to understand him, perceive what he desires, and bargain with it. This enables her to deal with him when others have failed. Thus, her understanding of various chronotopes is useful not only with Morgon, but with others as well.

Time as history but also process and viewpoint is applied to people living as well as dead. Phelan of *Bards*'s understanding of his father is complicated by the fact that the man he knows as his father, the peculiar Jonah, and the man known in legends as Nairn the Deathless are the same. At the very end of *Bards*, when he knows his father as both Nairn and Jonah, there comes a moment when "Phelan gazed at him wordlessly, seeing again that strange double vision of his father: Nairn the Deathless, the Unforgiven, imposed over the father he had grown up with, history pleated endlessly across a moment in time" (McKillip, *Bards* 299). This vision

of his father as both ordinary father and extra-ordinary man out of a tale is possible only with the peculiarities of time. Nairn's experiences, stretched over untold years, give him a completely different perspective—one he is unable to share with his son, and this tension drives the entire book (as explored in Chapter One).

Age affects how people deal with one another and what they are able, or expected, to accomplish. Internal chronotopes matter as well, however. Unlike *Bards* and *The Riddle-master* Trilogy, the *Cygnets* duology is not about how characters' actual lifespans (that is, the time they have actually lived) come into conflict, but rather how their perceived chronotopes do. Nyx and Meguet have superficially similar lifespans; they are both human, though Nyx is a sorceress and Meguet is not. They are both approximately of the same chronological age (though this is never made explicit in the books). However, how they deal with each other, and with others, is markedly different because of their internal chronotopes, and thus their sense of past.

Like several other of McKillip's characters, such as Morgon of *Riddle-master* and Nairn of *Bards*, Nyx of the *Cygnets* duology has a complicated relationship with those around her because of her perceptions of time. What is interesting, however, is that Nyx, though a sorceress, is mortal. Nyx is already an enigma to her family as well as strangers, but her casual relationship with time baffles others even further. She has gone to study with the witches who specialise in time and is quite comfortable dealing with it, travelling through it, and twisting it to her own ends. To her, the spells that open the past and look into the future are much like any of the

other spells she has dealt with; she thinks, “time. . . . What is it? A word” (McKillip, *Firebird* 258, author’s emphasis). To her time is a word, a concept like any other.

When she is caught in the Luxour desert in *Firebird*, Nyx wonders whether “the whole of the Luxour were on the verge of turning itself into a dragon. In the next moment, it would become; but this moment, in terms of its own time, had begun before Ro Holding had a name, and might last until its name was forgotten”

(McKillip 343). It is a small moment, not even spoken aloud to her companion, but it shows how Nyx’s mind does not deal with time in the typical fashion. She is able to comprehend the Luxour’s vast lifespan and subsequent transformations without any trouble. What to most people would cause a serious problem of comprehension is to her instinctive. In this way she unnerves other characters who are not so esoteric.

Meguet of the *Cygnets* duology also does not have an unusual external chronotope (she is not chronologically older than the other characters, including Nyx) but her special gift means that she has the experience of a millennium to make her seem so. Meguet has the “voice” of legions of former protectors in her head to act as an instinct to guide her. She explains in *Firebird* that “in a place as old as Ro House, and among such old families, more than faces and names are handed down. Memories . . . echoes of the past” (128). These “echoes of the past” give her a wisdom beyond her years, and as her actions are guided by this, so is her relationship to the other characters in the book. Ricoeur speaks of *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Magic Mountain* (1927), and *In Search of Lost Time* (1913), but his argument that, “each of these works explores, in its own way, uncharted modes of discordant concordance, which no

longer affect just the narrative composition but also the lived experience of the characters in the narrative" (101) works equally well for Meguet and the *Cygnets* duology. Meguet's internal sense of time, her internal sense of self even, is certainly "discordant" to those around her and very much affects her lived experience. This contrast of an ordinary lifespan with extraordinary information causes Meguet to seem both old beyond her years and slightly out of control. Her actions are not entirely her own, and sometimes what she is perceiving comes into conflict with what "her" instincts are telling her to do. It also means that her destiny is finely controlled. She remarks, "'I was born rooted to the past in this house'" (McKillip, *Sorceress* 146). Her past and future are both entwined with the house, she has never had an option but to be of service to the house, and she will never have other choices in future. Her extended lifespan in the form of her ancestor's guidance means the past is entwined with her future, and her chronotope is one both firmly entrenched in Ro Holding but also spread across decades because of her internal, ancient knowledge. Thus she has her own personal and actual past, but also the experiences of those attached to the house and family before her.

Extra understanding in fantasy literature is not entirely unusual, but Meguet's experience of her voices does mean that her chronotope is markedly different to those around her because her "inner time," in Ricoeur's terms, is so unusual. In Pratchett's Tiffany Aching novels, such as *Wintersmith* (2006), the protagonist has the remnant of an old scholar in her head who translates Latin for her. Though this gives Tiffany a bit of extra knowledge it does not create the same difference with supposed

chronotope and actual chronotope that Meguet experiences, because Tiffany's extra knowledge is limited to a fairly small area of expertise. Meguet's voices impact her every move and, thus, the whole of her chronotope.

The contrast between how time affects them as individuals means that Nyx and Meguet have a convoluted relationship. Nyx is impetuous and her familiarity with the *outré* means that she is often careless with her power, allowing curiosity to reign. At one point in *Firebird* she muses, "Better sorry than safe" (McKillip 256), which seems to be her motto for most of the books. Meguet is carefully controlled, guided by her ancient wisdom to think carefully and to take Nyx's safety far more seriously than her own. As in *Bards*, this conflict drives much of the plot, especially in *Firebird* with Nyx jumping into trouble out of curiosity, such as when she confronts a sorcerer impulsively rather than waiting to see what he wants or to gather reinforcement. Much of *Firebird* is based on Nyx's impetuosity. A sorcerer comes looking for an object he thinks is held at Ro Holding (to which Nyx is the heir); he has not expected any resistance so is surprised at Nyx's power and Meguet's seemingly non-magical resistance to his spells. Nyx's curiosity eventually results in Meguet being transported back to the sorcerer's country, and Nyx must follow. Nyx then becomes entangled in the problems of the sorcerer's country and this results in Meguet having to follow and try to protect her out of a timeless sense of duty. In *Sorceress* they argue, with Nyx attempting to understand Meguet's power by forcing her to use it and Meguet trying to make Nyx understand:

“Nyx, I can’t—” “You can move. If you choose. Find the way.” “How can you do this to me, how can you—” “Don’t panic. Find the power. Use the source.” “It is not—I cannot—it is not mine to use!” “It is yours. Take it. Have the courage to take. To use.” “You don’t understand—You think you know so much, you understand nothing.”

(184)

In the end, they both must learn to negotiate their different chronotopes in order to help each other. Nyx has to learn to put her country’s (and even her own) safety before her curiosity and to be more wary of the vagaries of time. Meguet must learn to negotiate with her ancient wisdom, to allow her own thoughts and experiences to have input as well.

Age

Humans comprehend time to an extent, but we also move through it, that is, we age. McKillip realistically portrays the old, and it is one of the ways in which she checks those who should have tremendous power. Their age means that they have accumulated great wisdom, yes, but they are not spry Merlins to jump around after young boys as in *The Sword in the Stone*, the Disney movie (1963), or carry girls at speed down hillsides as Great Uncle Merry (as the Merlin figure is called) does in Susan Cooper’s *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965). They are old men and women who feel their pasts, they are tired of the world and its consequences, and they feel the weight of what they have done in their weary bones. Their existence at all, however, argues

strongly for McKillip's predisposition towards inclusion. Betty Friedan argues in *The Fountain of Age* that, "the *non-existence* of images that [are] not 'young' [is] dismaying" (36, author's emphasis). McKillip provides a variety of older characters in many of her works; this range of ages adds to the richness of her worlds and provides a variety of perspectives and character motivations.

The sorceress Vevay of *Alphabet*, for example, is presented with limitations. At Vevay's age patterns become routine, and when the Queen does not conform to expected patterns of behaviour and thought Vevay feels too old to deal with her effectively. Having lived a long time often means that experiences begin to fall into patterns. Vevay is ancient, with an extended past to give her great wisdom, but her age makes it so that she is tired and also overlooks some important details. She explains to her consort: "'I don't' Vevay said bleakly. 'I don't understand her at all.' 'What were you like at that age?' 'How should I know? I barely remember the last century'" (McKillip, *Alphabet* 42). In *Alphabet*, the moody starts of a teenager are so distant from Vevay's current place in time and reality that she is unable to cope. As Phillida Salmon argues, "Revelations that time has worked changes in us can also arise out of relations with others" (12). Vevay has perhaps not recognised her great age until this point because a person's sense of age generally feels "natural" and is thus unquestioned. It is only when Vevay needs to understand the much younger Tessera that she feels her own age for what it is: quite advanced. Time has put so much distance between Vevay's own adolescence and the Queen's that she is unable to remember enough to effectively help, or even understand, the young Queen.

However, Vevay's presence at all is a strong argument for McKillip's feminism; as Baba Copper argues, "one of the primary definitions of patriarchy is the absence of old women of power" (15). Vevay might be realistically portrayed in her old age, but she is unquestionably present and undeniably powerful, both in terms of magic and political might as the monarch's chief mentor. In a tweet on November 21st, 2014, the author Kate Elliott wrote, "When I see a lack of older women characters I see girls being told they have no future to grow into even if they are the kickass heroine now." McKillip has gone some way in addressing this problem, for heroes as well as heroines, with a range of characters who live in different places in time.

Characters, including Atrix Wolfe of *Wolfe*, are also given limitations by the realistic portrayal of age. A character such as Atrix, a mage of almost limitless power, needs some check in order to provide interest and conflict to the story; as Terry Eagleton argues, "If magic could resolve all human problems, there would be no narrative" (170), and age is McKillip's choice to ensure conflict. Atrix is an extraordinarily powerful mage, but he is also old and tired. His great deeds are in the past, and he has to be dragged unwillingly back into the world of the active. Atrix has retired into wolf shape: "The mage was old, and lingered, every year, longer and longer in the mountains among the wolves. That year, he had forgotten it was winter and that he was human" (McKillip, *Wolfe* 2). Time has become meaningless to him as he loses his sense of humanness and of self, testament both to his great powers and to his advanced age; he is powerful enough to literally live as a wolf, but old enough to forget that he naturally takes a different form. Unciel from

Serre is a character whose age is similarly a hindrance. He is immensely powerful, but also old. Euan the scribe's first impression of Unciel is telling: "The wizard, around whom legends swarmed and clung, each more fabulous than the last, seemed worn by the burden of them" (McKillip, *Serre* 16). Unciel might be a legendary wizard with all the attendant power, but he is old and "worn," and the last battle he fought has weakened him considerably. Ordinarily, a great and wise wizard would be the focus of the action, battling the realm's foes, but, forced to lean on a younger wizard and helper, Unciel cannot do what is necessary to save the kingdom. He is powerful but also old and tired, able to see what needs doing but unable to do it. Thus McKillip manoeuvres what might be a classic fantasy story into a different iteration.

Time works on everyone, and it is not just the main characters that McKillip treats realistically. Even minor characters such as Vevay's consort from *Alphabet* are not exempt from the strictures of time: "Gavin, sighing over his stiff joints, rode among her guards, to ease Vevay's mind" (106). Gavin's lightly sketched background is one of power, he had "commanded armies" (36), and been a favoured counsellor of the old king. In his prime he could have been any number of brave young sword-wielding fantasy men, but McKillip treats him differently. He is respected at court, but his joints are stiff and he is tired. Old wounds scar him, and, most important, he is not the centre of the story in this case. Nor is the "shrewd and vigorous King" (38) whose death precipitates the action of *Alphabet*. Instead, the teenage protagonists and their struggles with their still-forming identities are the focus of the story. I am

not making an argument for *Alphabet* as a young-adult book though it, and other of McKillip's books, certainly could be; rather, I am arguing that McKillip treats all of her characters and their ages with a complexity that fights cliché, allowing both the old and young a chance to be central to story.

Moments of age-related realism can be found in many of McKillip's books, and these small gestures can be just as important to character as they can be to the pastoral, for example, in demonstrating the effects of time (in this case on the body). A person's past affects his or her physical state, and McKillip adds these realistic touches to several of her characters. For example, in *Wolfe*, Atrix has given another elderly mage shocking news: "He laid a hand over his heart. . . . [Atrix] knelt at Hendrix's feet, took his other hand, felt the shocked blood pounding through Hendrix, and the pain pushing against his heart" (McKillip 68). McKillip does not write that the news is unwelcome, or that it is singularly shocking; instead she allows the realities of age to demonstrate this for the reader. These small moments can also be used for humour, as when "Atrix . . . took his own shape, trembling with exhaustion. His own shape refused to do anything for a while but lie on the oak leaves" (127). The realities of his great age allow for this slightly humorous moment, as does Unciel's great frailty in *Serre*: "In the garden he could see Unciel digging so slowly to unearth the roots of weeds that they probably expired naturally before he got them out of the ground" (McKillip 24). Both these small moments of humour are only possible through the realistic portrayals of old age. McKillip normalises ageing. Neither old man is treated as comedic in and of himself, but humour is created by

their circumstances. They are treated with realism but also with sympathy, and the effects of their strenuous pasts are not glossed over.

McKillip's older characters are realistic, but they are not weighted with the bias often seen in primary world life. McKillip's Vevay might not be able to understand Tessera until the end, but, she is an unusual creation. Baba Copper maintains that "Months, sometimes even years, go by without my seeing a woman I can identify with—one who signals resistance to the role fulfillment expected of my age/sex bracket. Nor do I find them in TV or advertisements or the movies. Even more disturbing is the absence of my image in books" (7). Vevay is wise, powerful, and has no children. She is none of the stereotypes Copper argues against: "The mythical prototypes of the Wicked Old Witch with unnatural powers, the old Bad Mother with neurotic power needs, and the Little Old Lady, ludicrously powerless" (14). Vevay has an important role to play that goes beyond definitions of her either as a woman, or as old, and although her age creates limitations it does not do so in an unrealistic or dismissive manner. Vevay is feared and respected throughout the book.

The limitations of age are expressed upon the young as well as the old in McKillip, and just as the old can be burdened by their pasts, the young are sometimes disadvantaged by their lack of experience. The young Queen of *Alphabet* is not a precocious and poised young woman, prepared to rule a kingdom from the moment it is suddenly passed to her. She is naïve, restless, saddened, and a teenager. Moody and vacant by turns, Tessera frustrates her mentor with her inability to

understand the obstacles that she faces. Her mentor, the mage Vevay, muses:

“[Tessera] had learned everything obediently, but with a distinct lack of interest, her mind occupied by other matters. What matters these were eluded Vevay completely” (McKillip, *Alphabet* 38). To Tessera the danger outside is vague, and her interests are more self-focused. This causes conflict with the ancient mage Vevay, who is supposed to be her counsellor but is so far from the Queen in age and experience that they are unable to understand, or effectively deal, with one another.

Time works on the body and mind in a variety of ways, and McKillip sympathetically portrays characters with a range of ages. Talis of *Wolfe* is a prince whose age is given as 20, but who acts as though he is in his mid-to-late adolescence and is sympathetically portrayed. While McKillip was compared to the Romantics in Chapter Four, her portrayal of adolescence is one way in which she differs. As John Neubauer argues in *The Fin de Siècle Culture of Adolescence*, the Romantics portrayed the child as innocence in contrast to the corrupt adult (77), but this does not leave room for those who are between these two stages. Talis is one of McKillip’s many characters who fills this gap, and does so sympathetically. This means that he is able to act in spite of his not-yet-fully formed powers and lack of wisdom. Lack of wisdom is not something inherent to Talis’s character, or to any of the adolescents in McKillip’s books. They are not created as inferior adults. McKillip works against what Christine Overall argues is “the unthinking assumption that adulthood is the apex of life, for which childhood is the preparation and from which old age is merely the decline and downward deterioration” (297). McKillip’s characters are more

nuanced than that. Talis's "callings were complex and surprising" (McKillip, *Wolfe* 146). Talis's power is strong, unexpected, and he comes into his own, yet he is not presented as a miniature adult with all the wisdom that entails. For example, in classic teenage fashion, he is slightly petty with the faery queen he encounters and falls in love with her. His brother sees the danger he is in, but Talis insists that it is not like that: "'It really wasn't like that at all. It was like nothing I have ever known'" (90), a typically adolescent response. On the other hand, McKillip balances this naïvety with an awareness of the complexity of the world. When speaking of the battle that killed his father, Talis muses: "No . . . it wouldn't have been. Anything that simple" (111). He comprehends more than the black and white understanding often expected of adolescence. McKillip is sympathetic in her portrayal of both Talis and Tessera. They are balanced in adolescence, where age and identity become interwoven and important.

Alternatively, the great wizard Atrix's mind is as active as ever, but the extended time that his body has lived limits him: "He rose again, compelled by mysteries, though he wondered how long his weary human shape could bear the confusion and strain of them" (148). This, along with the formed pattern of Atrix's thoughts, means that the action is often left to Talis. When the faery queen needs Atrix, it is Talis she ensnares and sends to get him because Atrix has been unable to make his own way. Like Vevay, Atrix's advanced age means his thoughts have been corralled into patterns, making it difficult to see what he does not expect or understand. However, McKillip does not present clear-cut dichotomies. Just as Talis

is able to mature, Atrix is eventually able to make it into the faery kingdom by widening his view. His advanced age does not entirely prevent him from reaching the faery kingdom. It simply means it takes him longer to change how he has seen the world. Vevay, too, needs the younger Tessera, though in a slightly different way: “‘I was remembering,’ [Vevay] said. ‘Things that I had forgotten long ago...You reminded me that that they are still there, buried away underneath the years’” (McKillip, *Alphabet* 205). Vevay needs Tessera’s youth and fresh understanding, just as Tessera needs Vevay’s aged experience.

Heroes are an important part of most fantasy works, and McKillip’s books are no different in this. Where hers do diverge from many books is their portrayal of heroes in various life stages, especially the middle-aged hero. McKillip’s middle-aged characters are (generally) men who have fought well in the past and wish to be left alone with the small tasks allotted them in the present. When they are sent off to perform new feats they are wary. As in Barbara Hambly’s book *Dragonsbane* (1985), some of McKillip’s heroes are ageing and it takes far more encouragement to set them off on adventures because they know that adventures are dirty, painful, and perhaps life-ending experiences. They are not things to be eagerly anticipated and embarked upon without thought or care.

In a considerable amount of sword and sorcery-type fantasy, heroes are men (or men-like women) who seem to exist in the prime of youth, perpetually strong. McKillip largely ignores this tendency. One of the ways she disrupts this typical fantasy trope is with characters who are accurate to their chronological ages. If they

are old and wise, they feel their age in their bones. If middle-aged, they see no reason to go haring off on adventure for the sake of it. And if young, they are aware of only what would be logical for someone their age and experience to know, without being dismissed entirely.

McKillip does have conventional young heroes, but they are generally impetuous and not the main characters. Riven of Kardeth from *Wolfe* is an example. His refusal to back down from an unwinnable fight begins the slaughter that will haunt both his land and those he tried to conquer. He is only given a few lines at the beginning that show him to be the brash young man he is, and that is all the reader sees of him. Salmon argues, "In our society, the politics of age render some life phases more rewarding, more powerful, more prestigious than others" (20). McKillip has done what she can to reverse this by focusing on characters who are not within these privileged categories.

Another of the potential "heroes" that McKillip renders realistic is Gyre from *Serre*. Unciel's choice of the younger wizard Gyre to take his battle-worn place is not itself without complications. The princess describes Gyre: "As far as Sidonie could tell, he viewed the world with a great deal of curiosity and no fear whatsoever" (McKillip, *Serre* 44). Gyre, although powerful, is young and lacks Unciel's wisdom and knowledge of self. In this way the plot is driven forward; Unciel's wisdom cannot be used to its best advantage because of his advanced age and frailty, and Gyre causes problems in spite of his youth, energy, and power because of his un-

acknowledged inexperience and brash naivety. Gyre is not allowed to be the hero of the story in spite of his otherwise typical heroic attributes (youth, health, power).

An example of an ageing hero in McKillip is Cyan Dag from *Tower*. He is someone who has fought well in the past, has behaved as a knight should, but is a reluctant hero. As an older man, just the thought of glory is not enough to motivate him. In this quote, in which Harold Bloom explains his favourite version of Falstaff from William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, we see a similar character: "Richardson's Falstaff was neither an adorable roisterer nor a kind of counter-courtier, eager for possibilities of power. Rather, he was a veteran warrior who had seen through warfare, discarded its honor and glory as pernicious illusions" (2). McKillip's middle-aged characters are under no illusions, and this gives them a particular sort of power.

Simply because a character is middle-aged however, does not mean that they have experienced time in the same way, or that they are the same, or that McKillip's treatment of them is similar. Other middle-aged characters are Yar from *Od*, Sel the baker from *Tower*, and Caldarius from *Baslilisk*. A consequence of all of their years is that they have complicated pasts which entangle with their present perceptions of time in sometimes unseen ways. Sel, for example, is presented as a fairly ordinary woman. A widow and a village baker, she has daughters that worry about her, and she sometimes drinks too much ale. As I discussed in Chapter Four, what takes slightly longer to become clear is that she is also a selkie, a woman who was a seal and can return to that form; though she is not named as such within the story, it is

fairly clear that the idea has been taken from that folkloric tradition. Her past as a seal, presented as a vague time before she fell in love with her husband, was one where time did not matter. Most of the way through the book she remembers that she used to do small bits of magic for her children: “Things she had learned from her own father, and remembered in bits and pieces, when she left that world for the other” (McKillip, *Tower* 202). The two worlds, human and seal, are distinct, and so are the times associated with them. Her past is presented as blurred, at times forgotten entirely: “Once, when she was much younger, Sel had left Joed’s side at night and gone to the rocks to take a sealskin. She could not remember why she wanted it, only that it drew her, beyond reason” (128). The world she has come from is “beyond reason,” beyond her now human conceptions. At times she does not even seem to remember her seal self, perhaps because the existence was so different to what she has as a human now. At one point she watches seals swimming and remembers her human youth: “But that young woman seemed no more a part of her now than what swam so freely in the waves with their curious eyes” (131). Like the shape-shifters Morgon and Tessera explored above, Sel’s sense of time is sometimes skewed by her non-human shape, and it impacts her in human form even years after she has last been a seal. Her daughter Melanthos notes, “She’s fey. Now she just turns flour into bread and sells it. I used to think she was as old as the stones on the cliff” (59). Melanthos’s partner responds bewilderedly: “She’s your mother. . . . she was as old as you are, once,” and Melanthos’s answer is, “So were the stones” (59). Both Melanthos’s preternatural understanding of what is likely her mother’s

extended chronotope and her mother's mysterious past identity combined with pragmatic present are explored. Sometimes Sel's sense of time is skewed in a more ordinary, human fashion: "Once her small daughters had swum with the seals. She had watched their curly heads above the water, one dark, one light, their paddling hands and small white feet flashing through foam. "Mother?" she heard, and blinked at a tall young woman with long copper hair and eyes as lucent as the summer sea" (89). Like for many fully human mothers, her children have grown up too quickly and reminiscence blurs with reality. These glimpses of a mother's memory and love remind the reader (as it does Sel) that she is human now, with a human sense of time gone past.

A mysterious past also changes Caladrius's actions in *Basilisk*. He is a grown man with a (at least nearly) grown son of his own when he finally remembers his full heritage. Once he remembers, he wants to kill the man who slaughtered his family. His personal act of vengeance, however, is complicated immensely by his son and the life he has lived as an almost different person until that point. His memories of the act that killed his family are curiously distorted, as though from a dream. They are even described in a dream-like fashion at the beginning of the book: "Within the charred, silent husk of Tormalyne Palace, ash opened eyes deep in a vast fireplace" (McKillip, *Basilisk* 3). He does not open his eyes; rather "ash" does. He is disassociated from the event almost immediately and it becomes dream-like, or illusory. Partially it is because he is a very young child when it occurs, and partially it is because the horror must be disguised in order to allow him to move on. His

early childhood, the act of vengeance that kills his family, and the rest of the life he leads until he remembers are as separate as Sel's seal life are to her human existence. Like Nepenthe of *Alphabet*, Caladrius must remain ignorant of his past in order to have an ordinary up-bringing, one not tainted by his earliest memories. Because he has lived an ordinary life, however, his wish for revenge is greatly complicated. His act of vengeance is to him a necessary one, but his son's unexpected presence disrupts his ability to fully commit to a vengeance that is likely to be suicide. Thus, Caladrius's memories serve an opposing purpose to Nepenthe's discussed in Chapter Two. Like Nepenthe, his name is significant (it is "the bird whose song means death" (McKillip, *Alphabet* 4)) and gives clues to the purpose that has been ordained in him, and, like Nepenthe, it is the forgetting of his past that allows him to be the person he is in the "present" of the book. Unlike Nepenthe, however, Caladrius, once reminded, has no choice (or feels that he has no choice) but to act upon the information that he has remembered. Personal chronotope is convoluted for Caladrius, like many of McKillip's other characters, but it is not convoluted because he has actually lived an unusual lifespan. Caladrius is an ordinary middle-aged man but, like Nyx and Meguet of the *Cygnets* duology, he has a different chronotope than could be assumed from his ordinary lifespan. Unlike Nyx and Meguet, however, it is not one caused or enhanced by magic.

McKillip's characters do not have to be extraordinary to make a difference within their books or within our perceptions of life stages. Yar of *Od* has a past filled with hardship but also wonder that colours his present actions. As a middle-aged

man trusted by his employers and comfortable in his personal habits, Yar should be the pinnacle of status quo. However, his past flavours how he deals with the present. Yar's creativity was explored in Chapter Five in relation to the city of Kelior where he resides, but what is important here is that he has *not* forgotten his past, his beginnings, and that enables him to be an actant for change rather than the middle-aged static product that he might otherwise have been.

Characters, like people, are presented as living through time. McKillip explores the implications of this in a variety of sometimes unexpected ways, with a variety of lifespans both natural and magical in nature. A character's personal chronotope—that time they have lived and can expect to live—influences how they see themselves, how they are able to act, and how they interact.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to closely examine Patricia A. McKillip's secondary world fantasies. I have sought to show that there is a unifying principal behind these works: a chronotope of the past. Using Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, Mark Currie's and Paul Riceour's theories of time, and other critics' ideas specific to each chapter, I have tried to reveal how time infuses all of McKillip's works.

I began with an examination of the chronotope, but each chapter was informed by an overall feel that each section was adding to the collective sense of a chronotope of the past. What I wanted to achieve was an understanding that a particular set of McKillip's texts, though very different, can all be grouped together when examined through the lens of the chronotope. Although each chapter was broken up thematically, each book is a nexus of the various themes, all brought together and entangled so that a sense of the past is inherent in each.

Each of these chapters interlocked in (sometimes surprising) ways, and, as a result, a number of examples could have been used in multiple chapters. Certain books, especially *Changeling*, did not receive the concentrated attention that could have been paid to them, in favour of other works that I felt fit more closely with what I wished to examine. Every book of McKillip's could be scrutinised for traces of

this chronotope of the past, perhaps especially those books such as *Winter Rose* that I chose to exclude from my definition of secondary world.

Although grouped loosely as secondary world fantasies, the books I have used in this thesis could be differentiated just as often as compared. Few of them return to lands or characters previously explored. However, they all have a unifying principal. I argue that a certain type of fantasy—that exemplified by Patricia McKillip’s secondary world fantasies—does have a unifying chronotope, and that this is one of times past. The overarching chronotope of the past affects McKillip’s works in every way, from how characters interact, to the settings, and the stories told therein.

Engaging with this work has led me to consider how other novels—especially fantasy novels—might fit in with a grammar of the past. While I briefly touched on other books throughout the thesis, such as Antonia Barber’s *The Ghosts*, I did not go into detail about how these books could work within a grammar of the past. A number of books that I would confidently argue do fit in include Rhiannon Lassiter’s *Ghost of a Chance* (2011), the story of a girl who feels as though “the world outside the House felt surprisingly difficult to navigate, as if she had grown up *in* the past, rather than simply surrounded by it” (10, author’s emphasis), *The Silver Wolf* (1999) by Alice Borchardt, and Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* (2002). Each of these combines tropes of the past (in the case of *The Silver Wolf* it also takes place *in* the past) with modern preoccupations to create fantasies that are firmly rooted in a grammar of the past.

There is also room to do work on a chronotope for young-adult fiction (which often overlaps with fantasy literature), and perhaps to examine whether this differs from fantasy that is more specifically aimed at adults.

How further works fit within this remit could prove useful in constructing new ways of examining literature of the fantastic. In future this might also prove a simple way of delineating science fiction from fantasy, although this is a secondary usage and not the original intention. If this division were considered useful, the future-versus-past orientation could be examined to enable just such a division. For example, there are books such as *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* (2004) by Michael Swanwick or much of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonrider's of Pern* (1967-2011) series, like *Dragonflight*, that have been claimed for both science fiction and fantasy, and this past/future orientation might provide a further way to divide them (for example, by arguing that both have a grammar of the past and therefore are primarily works of fantasy in spite of scientific accoutrements). Understanding the chronotope that underlies a work can be an important first step to understanding the works themselves.

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