

Summer Project Report

During the course of the Long Vacation, I was fortunate enough to be able to undertake a residential research project as part of the Summer Project Scheme. Over the period of eight weeks, I began to draft an article, which I hope to publish in the *Journal of Narrative Theory*, exploring the idea of 'possible worlds' in literary narratives.

My initial ideas revolved around the idea of a ruined landscape, inspired primarily by Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness*, and the way in which characters' imaginations rendered what one might instinctively see as a space of desolation as something like a fertile developmental environment. In the course of my research, however, I was struck by the common thread of projecting more positive fantasies into ruined spaces, and the alternative reality thus generated by the narrative voice's imaginative presence. Building on Simon Palfrey's explorations of Shakespeare's 'possible worlds', heavily influenced by Leibniz, I advanced the idea that in these acts of fantasy we witness the generation of the self-contained spheres of possible reality Leibniz termed monads.

In broad terms, my essay advances a new theoretical approach to reading the act of fantasising and projection in various texts, ranging from Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* to the works of Wordsworth and Byron. In so doing, I aimed to demonstrate the ways in which their various narrative voices establish a series of competing realities that we as readers unconsciously sift apart in order to navigate the textual world in a linear fashion. By drawing attention to this, I hope to show the productive possibilities of approaching this process more consciously, treating each possible world as an equally valid text in its own right. Ultimately, I begin to demonstrate a less hegemonic way of reading narrative experience, one which treats these realities not as simply ornamental or narratively expedient, but as generative spaces for criticism. By treating the text as a series of interconnected, yet separate spaces, I aim to demonstrate what can be lost by relying solely on approaches such as formalism or historicism, reliant as they are on a tendency to resolve the paradoxes of possibility inherent in literature. Choosing instead to explore these paradoxes on their own merits, I demonstrate what is gained in meeting each possible world on its own terms, as well as the extent to which it appears to diverge with an external objective 'reality' implicitly fashioned by the text.

The piece is now at a late draft stage and should soon be submitted. Reaching this point would not have been possible without the Summer Project Scheme, and I have hugely appreciated access to the support and resources of both the college and wider university. The article notwithstanding, this access has also facilitated the shaping of a broader base of research, both in terms of my FHS studies and future graduate work, including preparation for a BA dissertation and the successful submission of multiple book reviews to the *St Catherine's Academic Review*. As a result, I feel I have been able to strengthen my skills and broaden my range of research interests in preparation for future study.

I have been able to take advantage of the greater experience of too many people to list here, but I am especially grateful to SCR members Dr Daniel Sawyer, Professor Richard McCabe, and Dr Tessa Roynon, without whose advice and guidance the project would not have taken the shape it did. I would wholeheartedly recommend the project scheme to anyone with similar plans for further study, and remain hugely grateful to the college for providing me with this opportunity.