

## **'NOT IN VAIN THE DISTANCE BEACONS': SCIENCE & THE POETIC IMAGE**

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I begin this paper very reluctantly, not because I'm unprepared – I've thought about this topic for a long time – but because what I have to put forward is not an academic argument based on coherent research but some remarks about poetry, specifically about poetic imagery, that derive ultimately from my own attempts to write poetry. I have the feeling that those who know my poetry will say, 'What's he on about? that's not what I detect in his stuff,' while those who don't know it will say, 'Well if that's what he's up to, it doesn't sound worth bothering with.'

But the problem is more than personal. I don't think there has ever been a time when the practice of poetry and the criticism of poetry have been more remote from each other. In the English tradition there are the great poet critics – Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot – and whether you are in their camps or not it's obvious their poetry and their critical writings are mutually reinforcing. But there's nobody like that around these days – Ivor Winters used to do it but he's dead, Donald Davie whom I much admired is also dead. Instead, we have a type of criticism that declares itself the senior partner in the literature business. It draws its authority from 'theory' (or if you like philosophy) rather than from proved poetic competence. Texts are produced so that literary critics can exercise their skills on them, deconstructing the errors of class and race and gender that poets commit but that critics are miraculously free of. I suppose this is inevitable – as Auden says, you can make much more money by talking about poetry than writing it, so it's the law of the market the critics should become the bosses.

There are poets who have adjusted to this. The Irish poet Paul Muldoon seems deliberately to construct poems that will be elusive, teasing the critics rather than giving pleasure to readers (and perhaps the same applies to John Ashbury, out-post-modernising the post-modernists by ensuring every poem is about everything and nothing is ever 'foreclosed'). But where readers fit into this game isn't clear, that is, readers who are not themselves poets. Margot Farrington, a poet from Brooklyn, describes standing in front of an audience and saying 'Will anyone who is a poet stand up? Every single person present did so. 'You are all poets?' They nodded. 'Where are the others?' she shouted, 'Get out! Go Home!' (POETRY WALES: 72).

As for myself, what I've done is to combine writing poetry virtually every week for longer than I care to say with an academic career that has lurched between history, anthropology, ethnography, oral poetry, translation and now biography – all of them disciplines that still use words like evidence, truth, accuracy, facts, reality. These are words – especially the last one reality – I think poets can't afford to do without. But use them at a conference of literary critics, people will smile at each other behind their programmes and wonder 'How did this peasant get invited?' So to remain in touch intellectually, while continuing to write poetry, I virtually abandoned literary criticism for many years, to try to focus on what's out there in the world around me. Given I've spent so much of my life as an ex-patriate, this has always been the more interesting option.

In 1830, Tennyson was present at the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester railway, the first passenger railway with Stephenson's *Rocket* as the star attraction. It wasn't a good occasion. William Huskisson, there as President of the Board of Trade to open the railway, stood in the track and was run over and killed, becoming the first casualty of a private railway company. It wasn't the only thing to go wrong that night. Tennyson devised a couplet that he afterwards included in his poem "Locksley Hall":

Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range,  
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.  
(TENNYSON 1969: 699)

It's not a very distinguished couplet. Tennyson was trying to be the poet of industrial progress when his real talents lay elsewhere. But it wasn't the sentiment that came to disturb him, it was that metaphor about 'grooves of change'. He explains "It was a black night, and there was such a vast crowd round the train at the station

that we could not see the wheels". Hence his error, "I thought that the wheels ran in a grove". He wanted to cancel the couplet, but his friends protested, insisting it wasn't a poem about railways but about social change, and that plenty of things run in 'grooves'. But the bad metaphor rankled. He wanted it to be *right*.

A similar footnote glosses the third stanza of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". This is an extraordinarily complex poem, written as five linked sonnets but rhymed *terza rima*, about as difficult a technical exercise as you could set yourself in English. It's also a poem that moves through what the west wind is doing to earth, air and water, so, of course, fire is coming in the fourth sonnet, with Shelley himself as Prometheus the Fire-Giver (alias Frankenstein?) in the fifth. The difficult part of this programme is the third sonnet, dealing with the effects of autumn and the west wind on water. Does the sea change with the seasons? Shelley writes 'The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear / The sapless foliage of the ocean, know / Thy voice', and he adds a pedantic footnote, viz., "the phenomenon is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea ... sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons". (SHELLEY 1971: 577-578).

It seems odd that romantic poets of all people – the visionaries, the dreamers, the myth-makers – should be so earnest about scientific detail. The man who could devise the cosmic ballet of earth, moon and stars that rounds off *Prometheus Unbound* should surely have been able to take a dose of pathetic fallacy in his stride. It never bothered the surrealists that a horse was green or a clock had wings. Yet I like Shelley the better for this, and I reckon there's much to be said for poets being literal-minded.

It's one of the things I love about the poetry of Camões – not that he deals in pseudo-scientific footnotes, but that he has an engaging habit of treating conventional imagery and conventional mythology in a literal-minded manner that persuades you he's talking intelligently about real people in a real world. Take, e. g., his "Endechas para a Escrava Bárbara". This is a very Petrarchan poem, using conventional Petrarchan images – that the poet has a mistress, that he is slave to his mistress, that his mistress is fair as roses, white as the snow, fashionably blonde, and so on. Camões takes these convention images, and plunges them straight into Portuguese colonial society, where Bárbara is literally his slave, and out of this contrast between poetic convention and harsh reality creates a love poem of the utmost tenderness, the first ever addressed by a European to a black woman.

This slave I own  
Who holds me captive,  
Living for her alone  
Who scorns to live,  
I never saw woven  
In bright bouquets  
One dog rose lovelier  
To my gaze.

The flowers in the field,  
And the stars above  
In their beauty, yield  
To my love.  
Distinct in feature,  
Eyes dark and at rest,  
Tired creature,  
But not of conquest.

Here dwells the sweetness  
By which I live,  
She being mistress  
Of whom she is captive.  
Her hair is raven,  
And the fashion responds,  
Forgetting its given  
Preference for blonde.

Love being Negro  
At so sweet a figure,  
The blanketing snow  
Vows to change colour.  
Gladly obedient  
And naturally clever,  
This may seem expedient,  
But barbarous, never!

Quiet presence  
That silences storms,  
All my disturbance  
Finds peace in her arms.  
This is the vassal  
Who makes me her slave,  
Being the muscle  
That keeps me alive. (WHITE 2003: 150)

Or consider another example from *The Lusíads*. I know *The Lusíads* is a many-sided poem, not to be confined to any single interpretation – a poem in which the word ‘truth’ never appears in the singular, always as the plural ‘verdades’, a poem that ranges from Christ’s appearance at the battle of Ourique to Vasco da Gama sitting on the beach in South Africa using the astrolabe to mark his location, and both in the same plane of reality. But one voice in the poem is of Camões, the literal-minded pragmatist.

In Canto 5, Vasco da Gama is made to boast to the Sultan of Malindi that his pioneer voyage to India puts those of the ancients in the shade:

Did you think, O King, the world contained  
Men who would tackle such a journey?  
Do you imagine that Aeneas and subtle  
Ulysses ever ventured so far?  
Did either of them dare to embark on  
Actual oceans? For all the poetry  
Written about them, did they see a fraction  
Of what I know through strategy and action? (CAMÕES 1997: 115)

He goes on to express his professional scorn for Odysseus for abandoning half his crew on the island of the lotus eaters, and for Aeneas for losing even his helmsman on a calm night, and we’re brought face to face with a practical navigator’s reading of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.

The words are Vasco da Gama’s, of course, but Camões never distances himself from them. But how *can* he argue that the historical diminishes the mythical? The answer is, of course, that he is making his own myth out of subsequent

history. But it seems extraordinary that his method involves such literal-minded deconstructing.

Now a book has come our way that offers persuasive, earthbound interpretations of some of our most ancient myths. It's by an American folklorist called Adrienne Mayor, and it's called *The First Fossil Hunters: Palaeontology in Greek & Roman Times*.

I don't know whether you are like me in assuming that dinosaurs were first discovered in the nineteenth century. It's usually said the French geologist Georges Cuvier was the first to recognise in 1806 that fossils were the remains of formerly living creatures, including extinct ones like the dinosaurs. Yet only takes a moment's thought to realise that dinosaur bones have always been coming to the surface. Farmers have been exhuming such bones, and fishermen snagging their nets on them, world wide and down the ages. What conclusions do you draw when you plough up a 15 foot thigh bone?

In England, one conclusion was apparently universal – that the land was formerly populated by giants. You find this folklore from Essex up to Scotland, and probably beyond, I imagine in Portugal too. How else do you explain limb bones the size of tree trunks? It's also intriguing to reflect on what conclusions were drawn from more complete skeletons? Are the legends about dragons, and heroic dragon-killers – from Perseus to St George – based on this kind of evidence? St George has been removed from the Catholic Church's official list of saints on the grounds there is no historical evidence he existed. But the dragons certainly existed (and their bones are still there), perhaps giving rise to the legend.

Adrienne Mayor's book has as cover illustration the so-called "Monster of Troy" from a Greek vase dating from 550BC, now held in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The "Monster of Troy" legend tells of a sea monster that terrorised Troy and had to be pacified by the sacrifice of a virgin, in this case Hesione, daughter of the King of Troy. What the painting on the vase shows is Hesione about to be sacrificed, but rescued by Heracles who is shooting the arrows coming in from the left. I find the portrayal of Hesione very striking – with her profile and abundant hair and that dress with the shoulder strap, she could be a modern Greek woman. But what about the monster? It doesn't look alive – in fact, looks like a skull protruding from a cliff face. Adrienne Mayor's suggestion is that it is a fossilised skull, and that the black space behind it is a cave where the cliff has fallen away. (She goes on to identify it

specifically as an extinct giant giraffe called *Samotherium*, though some palaeontologists are unconvinced). But the hypothesis that it is a fossil is very plausible, and she links it up with other fascinating suggestions.

Greece is a mountainous country, rich in fossils, and most of them are discovered when land is eroded by landslides or earthquakes rather than through ordinary cultivation. What conclusion do you draw if the side of a mountain falls away and you find there are giant bones inside?

In Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells of the fourth age, the age of every kind of crime:

The heights of heaven were no safer than the earth; for the giants, so runs the story, assailed the kingdom of the gods and, piling mountains together, built them up to the stars above. Then the almighty father hurled his thunderbolt, smashed through Olympus, and flung down Pelion from where it had been piled on Ossa. The terrible bodies of the giants lay crushed beneath their own massive structures ... (OVID 1955: 33)

Now, it's no more than a hypothesis, but a fascinating one. Did dinosaur bones give rise to the myth of the Titans and their rebellion?

Or take the skulls of extinct elephants to be found in museums on several of the smaller Greek islands, Samos, for example. Elephants haven't existed there for many thousands of years, but the fossilised skulls remain. Skulls, because it is the habit of elephants, when one of the herd dies, to wait until the bones have been picked clean and then scatter them with their feet far into the forest, so only the skulls remain prominent. An elephant skull is huge, but there is no trace of the trunk which is, of course, soft tissue and quickly rots away. But it leaves a large hole in the centre of the skull, looking like a huge eye. Is this the origin of the myth of the Cyclops, those one-eyed giants to be found on the smaller islands, without law, without agriculture, without society, each living alone in his individual mountain cave (notice the cave, because that's where fossils are found), such as Polyphemus who captures Odysseus and his crew in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*?

In some ways, Adrienne Mayor's most fascinating claim concerns the Griffin, that so-called mythical creature with a huge eagle's beak, a horse's body, four legs with cloven feet, two wings and a tail. Mayor says, boldly, this is the dinosaur *Protoceratops* (no palaeontologist has so far disagreed), and that the griffin represents the earliest attempt to portray from the skeleton what the living creature must have

looked like. Protoceratops had a massive hooked beak, with a normal quadruped's body and a fleshy tail. The bit the Greeks got wrong was giving it wings, but they knew Protoceratop laid eggs because many of the fossils still found in the region have eggs alongside them, so they assumed (very prophetically) that this dinosaur (or Griffin if you prefer) was a bird. And there is one further piece of circumstantial evidence. Many fossilised Protoceratops skeletons have been exhumed from the Gobi Desert. Herodotus, the father of lies, says the mountains surrounding the Gobi Desert are rich in gold, and sure enough there is an ancient Greek myth declaring that Griffins, "a race of four-footed birds, almost as large as wolves and with legs and claws like lions", protect these gold-bearing regions.

Now, where is my argument taking me? I must draw back from being excessively 'literal-mined', as I've put it. Adrienne Mayor's contention is that the Greeks knew fossils were the remains of living creatures, thousands of years before the 19C, and that the Greeks knew that species were mutable, and that species could die out. They didn't express this scientifically, they expressed it as myth, but there is a sense in which the myth and the science are on the same side. What the Greeks lacked was any means of dating fossils, which a later science would supply. Obviously, I'm not trying to pretend Polyphemus was a historical figure. But I like the idea that Homer was rooted in reality, working from the evidence, improvising on known facts.

I should add that I accept, of course, with no reservation whatsoever, there is a kind of poetry that is the very opposite of the poetry I'm describing. It's ludic, it's inventive, it's concerned with the sheer fun of language, and Ovid is its first master. Ovid said of his *Amores* that they weren't about anything real, they were all made up – and though there is an element of special pleading about this (he was being exiled by Emperor Augustus for causing a scandal), it's obvious his most famous poem is an extended game with words. In *Metamorphoses*, nothing is real or fixed, everything is on the verge of becoming something else. It's a poem about the endless flexibility of metaphor, and it's Ovid, far more than Homer, who's left his mark on English Literature. From Chaucer through Shakespeare down to – well, to whom? Ezra Pound? Sylvia Plath? Ted Hughes? – there are poets for whom metaphorical brilliance is the very essence of their art. Meanwhile, even Homer got drawn into it. Despite Homer's absolute eminence in the English educational system, or at least in the public school system, when the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann discovered and began excavating the historical city of Troy from 1870, (and decorated his wife with Helen

of Troy's jewels), the Homeric scholars were offended. What? The Trojan War actually happened? Homer didn't make it all up? It seemed like an assault on their heroic poet's imagination that he was dealing with a historical event.

I can think of four ways of trying to see patterns in what I'm talking about. One way might be to continue reflecting on the contrasting literary traditions deriving from Homer, on the one hand, and Ovid on the other. A second, closely related approach, would be to develop the contrast, first established by the Homeric scholar Milman Parry in 1936 between the Oral and the Literate, when he remarks "literature falls into two great parts not so much because there are two kinds of culture but because there are two kinds of form: *the one part of literature is oral, the other written*" (PARRY 1971: 377). It is quite true there is a sense in which oral literature has immediacy and topicality that are direct consequences of the performers having their audience before them (with oral literature, you can't abolish the audience, and you can't talk about the death of the author: both are indispensable and without both there's no performance). But the trouble with the orality/literacy debate is that was taken in such racist directions by Marshall McLuhan. Writing, he claimed "had a crucial role in staying the return to the African within us" (MCLUHAN 1962: 45) and it became so caught up with the mathematical idiocies – the word is not too strong – of oral formulaic theory that it's difficult to revive.

A third way would be to tap once again into the centuries old debate about the mutual claims of Art and Nature. The appeal to nature is already present in Dryden's 1668 "Essay on Dramatic Poesy", the first essay in English criticism, and it continues through all the critics I listed earlier (with the possible exception of Eliot). But it took an odd twist in the twentieth century, in a manner that is still with us. On the one hand, there is an absolute requirement that poets should conceal their art – that the whole effort of art should be to create the illusion of naturalness and spontaneity. As Yeats wrote,

A line will take us hours maybe,  
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought.  
Our stitching and unstitching has been nought. (YEATS 1989: 132)

On the other hand, the focus of contemporary criticism is entirely on the Art side of the equation – on deconstructing metaphor and metonym, on discourse analysis, on reception theory, and so on. Post-modernism has virtually abolished Nature, and by insisting everything is a text, so a poem about, say, a wedding, is a text

about a text, the main interest being the intertextuality of the discourse, you end up with no point of reference – no test of whether the poem's right or not, and hardly matters whether the poet's got his eye on the object (which is where it firmly belongs). It's worth adding that in a world in which, it's claimed, one species of plant or animal or insect is becoming extinct every nine minutes, so that four species have disappeared while I've been talking, it seems extraordinary we should be content with a critical paradigm that denies there is anything out there to be disappearing.

So, the pattern I prefer to emphasise is what I see as the continuing partnership between Literature and Science that I was celebrating earlier when talking about Homer working from 'the evidence'.

I don't know what Doutora Filipa Reis had in mind when she chose this theme for this new series of seminars. But I presume it had something to do with the general perception that literature and science are somehow different, with different aims and objectives and methods –perhaps even that they are mutually opposed in the ways of looking at the world. This has certainly been true of English culture since the end of the eighteenth century. Pope was able to praise Isaac Newton ("Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night / God said *Let Newton be*, and all was *light*" (POPE 1963: 808). But by the time we get to the Romantics, science along with rationalism and mathematics, has become the enemy. "May God us keep", wrote Blake, "From single vision and Newton's sleep" (BLAKE 1988: 27). Keats thought Newton's optics had destroyed forever the beauty of the rainbow, and at Benjamin Haydon's famous dinner in 1818 when Keats met Wordsworth, they drank a toast "Confusion to Mathematics". It's very puzzling this, because Wordsworth was an excellent Mathematician. Two years later, in *Lamia*, Keats elaborated on the idea:

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things. (KEATS 1953: 137)

This distinction hardened in the mid-nineteenth century, as the battle between religion and science hotted up. Then came Matthew Arnold's forecast that as religion declined, poetry would take its place as the means of providing joy and consolation in a world dominated by the bleaker and more dangerous forms of science.

But I don't think poets can afford to concede nature to scientists and insist on the benefits of art as a different way of knowing. I want to explore an example that came up from the paper Jeffrey Childs presented last June on the American poet Mark Strand. Jeffrey was tracing Mark Strand's use of the image of the 'eye', with reference back to passages from Milton and from Coleridge's "Dejection Ode". After the seminar, I commented that one can't talk about the "Dejection Ode" without also considering Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", in which he answers the questions Coleridge raises. It's the most marvellous example of dialogue between great poets in the whole of English Literature, and it's complicated – beginning with a stanza of Coleridge's in a poem called "The Mad Monk", and taken up by Wordsworth in the first four paragraphs of the "Immortality Ode" that end with the question "Where is it fled, the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?". Coleridge replies with the first version of the "Dejection Ode", a long verse letter arguing, effectively, that Imagination is instinctual ('what Nature gave me at my birth') and that he has ruined his own by 'abstruse research' (which, in the English manner, I take to mean his German philosophising). The solution (which cannot be right) is to abandon thought ('hence viper thoughts') and let the instinctual take over ('listen to the wind'). Wordsworth then writes the remaining sections of the "Immortality Ode", firmly repudiating what Coleridge says as certainly not applicable to him (Wordsworth took himself seriously as a philosophical poet).

He does it through, among much else, developing the eye image – the power of the soul, formed by experience, to *see* what the child couldn't, supplemented by language which the child didn't have. By 1807, Wordsworth is saying that the mind formed by natural associations and reinforced by language is capable of 'seeing' what was instinctual but beyond expression to the child. Therefore, experience with its 'inward eye' is a blessing too, and the power of the mature poet to survey history is Wordsworth's answer to Coleridge's answer to the question Wordsworth first addressed to him. (Coleridge then criticises Wordsworth's first draft, leading to some excisions (including one of the Eye images) and revises the "Dejection Ode", finally addressing it – after 'Asra', and 'Edward' to the Lady, meaning Sara Hutchinson). It is a fascinating dialogue, with (I think) Wordsworth getting the better of the argument, though I'm not sure Jeffrey agrees.

At this point in our discussion, another text came into play, namely Bishop William Paley's *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, first published in 1802, just in time for Wordsworth's and Coleridge's

great debate. Paley was a naturalist and a wonderful one, and his book was a key text in the nineteenth century in the debate about religion and science. Charles Darwin later said that of all the books he read as a student at Cambridge, Paley's *Evidences* was the one that left its mark. Paley's argument is a simple one. Examining the wonder and complexity of the natural world, how could it have come into existence without a Creator? What's interesting about this, in the present context, is that Paley's prime example is the human eye. He describes it in great detail, drawing of course on Newton's optics, in all its parts and how they combine in functioning, and asks, How could such a complicated organ BE without a God to devise it? (Richard Dawkins, one of the most prominent Darwinists in Britain today, says that if you were an atheist in the early nineteenth century, you were either a hypocrite or blind to argument, because, until Darwin, there was no other explanation of the human eye.)

But you see where this takes us? For Wordsworth and Coleridge, talking about perception and the imagination, the very organ of perception – the eye – was itself proof of the existence of God. When the eye saw Nature, the very act of seeing had a transcendental dimension. Newton's Optics was not the enemy. Keats was wrong, and there was no need for poetry to veer off into an aesthetic confrontation with mathematics.

Now, this is an out of date argument – Darwin saw to that, and I'm no Creationist. But just as science changes, so do the opportunities for poetry, and I see no reason why they can't remain on speaking terms. Here I want to refer to one last book that came to my rescue when I was on the re-bond from publishing my translation of *The Lusíads* in late 1997. The book is by Philip Fisher, and it's called *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*.

Something that disturbed me after *The Lusíads* appeared, especially whenever I went back to re-reading the original, was the feeling that in turning it into English I had simplified and secularised the text. This was probably inevitable – modern English is so direct and secular a language. But the word that bothered me most was the last word of the first stanza of Canto 1:

E entre gente remota edificaram

Novo Reino, que tanto sublimaram. (CAMÓES 1947: 1)

'Sublimaram' – 'made themselves sublime'. The sublime is the very essence of the Epic, and the word brought home to me very forcibly that I was attempting to render 'the sublime' in English. My version goes:

Among far distant peoples to proclaim  
A new age, and win undying fame. (CAMÕES 1997: 3)

No 'sublime', you note, just an insistence on the historical importance of this voyage. I did find a place for the word in the concluding couplet of stanza 5 where Camões concludes his introduction.

Give me a poem worthy of the exploits  
Of those heroes so inspired by Mars  
To propagate their deeds through space and time  
If poetry can rise to the sublime. (CAMÕES 1997: 4)

You'll see it occurs in the context of a doubt about whether the poetry I'm writing is capable of 'sublimity'. But the question remained in my mind: had I turned a sublime epic into an easily read verse novel?

Fisher is very critical of the idea of the sublime – or rather, critical of the idea that you can have the sublime without religion. The sublime, he claims, secularised religious feelings of the infinite and of the relative insignificance of human powers, allowing the modern intellectual to hold on to covert religious feelings under an aesthetic guise. For post-Romantic art, the sublime has been far more a matter of critical theory than of artistic practice, being peddled by reactionary critics who refuse to give up the transcendental illusions of religion. In its place, Fisher proposes wonder, as the essential emotion of aesthetic experience. He quotes Socrates that "Wonder is the beginning of philosophy", and Descartes that wonder is the first of the passions, "a sudden surprise of the soul". Most important of all, wonder is not diminished by understanding. Fisher doesn't accept Keats' argument that Newton has destroyed the mythical power of the rainbow. It is the role of art, science and criticism to restore to our minds that wonder that sparks all thought.

As you see, it's a very ambitious argument (and, in fact, a dauntingly erudite book). When I read these words I found in them a retrospective validation of what I had less consciously been trying to do. I don't believe that Vasco da Gama's voyage was divinely ordained, or that European colonialism was part of God's design for human history. But in opting for the secular rather than the religious, the scientific rather than the mythical, the geographical rather than the imperial, I was opting for wonder rather than sublimity, and the wonder of the *Lusíads* is everywhere. In my introduction to the poem, I make a comparison I stand by – between Tethys in

Canto 10 exhibiting to the Portuguese the dimensions and wealth of the planet mankind inhabits, and the Apollo 8 spacecraft showing us the first pictures of earth taken from space.

So Tennyson was right to worry about his bad metaphor. He should have looked more closely, and I'm glad it nagged him over several decades that he'd got it wrong.

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