Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion

Susan M. Bernardo
Graham J. Murphy

Greenwood Press

URSULA K. LE GUIN

Ursula K. Le Guin. Photograph by Marian Wood Kolisch.

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CRITICAL COMPANIONS TO POPULAR CONTEMPORARY WRITERS
Kathleen Gregory Klein, Series Editor

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To Mark Wagner,
an ever-patient, astute reader and feline loyalist.

To my parents,
who taught me to read and pointed me in the
direction of the public library.

To my niece, Elise Leduc,
avid reader, world explorer, and wise soul.

SMB

To Jennifer Pym-Murphy,
for bringing me balance and never wavering in your faith and love.

To my parents and family,
who encourage me to keep moving forward despite the odds.

To my colleagues,
whose advice is never wasted.

GJM

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Series Foreword

The authors who appear in the series Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers are all best-selling writers. They do not simply have one successful novel, but a string of them. Fans, critics, and specialist readers eagerly anticipate their next book. For some, high cash advances and breakthrough sales figures are automatic; movie deals often follow. Some writers become household names, recognized by almost everyone.

But, their novels are read one by one. Each reader chooses to start and, more importantly, to finish a book because of what she or he finds there. The real test of a novel is in the satisfaction its readers experience. This series acknowledges the extraordinary involvement of readers and writers in creating a best-seller.

The authors included in this series were chosen by an Advisory Board composed of high school English teachers and high school and public librarians. They ranked a list of best-selling writers according to their popularity among different groups of readers. For the first series, writers in the top-ranked group who had received no book-length, academic, literary analysis (or none in at least the past ten years) were chosen. Because of this selection method, Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers meets a need that is being addressed nowhere else. The success of these volumes as reported by reviewers, librarians, and teachers led to an expansion of the series mandate to include some writers with wide

critical attention—Toni Morrison, John Irving, and Maya Angelou, for example— to extend the usefulness of the series.

The volumes in the series are written by scholars with particular expertise in analyzing popular fiction. These specialists add an academic focus to the popular success that these writers already enjoy.

The series is designed to appeal to a wide range of readers. The general reading public will find explanations for the appeal of these well-known writers. Fans will find biographical and fictional questions answered. Students will find literary analysis, discussions of fictional genres, carefully organized introductions to new ways of reading the novels, and bibliographies for additional research. Whether browsing through the book for pleasure or using it for an assignment, readers will find that the most recent novels of the authors are included.

Each volume begins with a biographical chapter drawing on published information, autobiographies or memoirs, prior interviews, and, in some cases, interviews given especially for this series. A chapter on literary history and genres describes how the author's work fits into a larger literary context. The following chapters analyze the writer's most important, most popular, and most recent novels in detail. Each chapter focuses on one or more novels. This approach, suggested by the Advisory Board as the most useful to student research, allows for an in-depth analysis of the writer's fiction. Close and careful readings with numerous examples show readers exactly how the novels work. These chapters are organized around three central elements: plot development (how the story line moves forward), character development (what the reader knows of the important figures), and theme (the significant ideas of the novel). Chapters may also include sections on generic conventions (how the novel is similar or different from others in its same category of science fiction, fantasy, thriller, etc.), narrative point of view (who tells the story and how), symbols and literary language, and historical or social context. Each chapter ends with an "alternative reading" of the novel. The volume concludes with a primary and secondary bibliography, including reviews.

The alternative readings are a unique feature of this series. By demonstrating a particular way of reading each novel, they provide a clear example of how a specific perspective can reveal important aspects of the book. In the alternative reading sections, one contemporary literary theory— way of reading, such as feminist criticism, Marxism, new historicism, deconstruction, or Jungian psychological critique—is defined in brief, easily comprehensible language. That definition is then applied to the novel to highlight specific features that might go unnoticed or be

understood differently in a more general reading. Each volume defines two or three specific theories, making them part of the reader's understanding of how diverse meanings may be constructed from a single novel.

Taken collectively, the volumes in the Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers series provide a wide-ranging investigation of the complexities of current best-selling fiction. By treating these novels seriously as both literary works and publishing successes, the series demonstrates the potential of popular literature in contemporary culture.

Kathleen Gregory Klein
Southern Connecticut State University

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1

Biography of Ursula K. Le Guin

If you weren't a writer what would you be?
Dead.
—from M.E. Wood's BellaOnline interview with Ursula K. Le Guin

Ursula K. Le Guin's one-word answer to an interviewer's question indicates her view that she is most essentially a writer. She began writing at five years old and has flourished as a writer throughout her life. Now in her seventies, she shows no signs of slowing down. Her most recent work, *Gifts,* was published in 2005, and she is at work on another novel set in the same place, the Western Shore, to be published in 2006. A new book of poems, *Incredible Good Fortune,* has recently been published in March of 2006. Her short story collection, *Changing Planes* (2003) recently won a Locus Award. Her versatility as a writer of poetry, short stories, novels, and essays and as a translator of various texts (Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching,* Angela Gorodischer's *Kalpa Imperial,* and Gabrielle Mistral's poems) begins to unfold the many facets of what being a writer means for Le Guin. Her intensity, focus, and curiosity all combine to make her the award-winning writer we now know.

At their heart, both science fiction and fantasy are fictions that rely heavily on world-building; in other words, both genres cannot rely on

general references to the setting because their worlds are typically strange and/or alien. A biographical overview of Ursula K. Le Guin's life reveals sources that explain her decision to make her career in world-building genres.

Le Guin was born on October 21, 1929, in Berkeley, California. Her father was Alfred L. Kroeber, a noted anthropologist who made his career exploring the cultural worlds of American Indian ethnology. Of course, anthropology is a science of world-building in its exploration of cultures and their relationship to the global environment. Kroeber was a well-known and influential anthropologist who, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, contributed to "the archaeology of New Mexico, Mexico, and Peru; and to the study of linguistics, folklore, kinship, and social structure. His career nearly coincided with the emergence of academic, professionalized anthropology in the United States and contributed significantly to its development." The article goes on to say that Kroeber "was concerned with culture as a universal human characteristic and believed that a complete understanding of culture must contain explanations not only of specific cultures but also of cultural elements and patternings that transcend specific cultures." Though Le Guin points out that she had only one formal course in anthropology, she recognizes what she calls an "affinity" with her father's ways of thinking (James). In many ways, Le Guin's work is anthropological by providing detailed ethnographic history and genealogical lineages to her alien cultures.

Le Guin's mother, Theodora Kroeber, was equally influential in Le Guin's development. She too was an anthropologist, but Theodora's success came in the form of writing. In particular, Theodora Kroeber authored *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*, a biography of the last Yani Indian, who was found in 1911 hiding in a California slaughterhouse and suffering from dehydration and malnourishment. Ishi was eventually brought to the University of California's Museum of Anthropology and was cared for by Alfred Kroeber. Theodora Kroeber's 1961 biography of Ishi was a best seller and is still in print. As with her father, Le Guin had merely to look to her mother to see world-building in action; in this case, she watched her mother reconstruct the world of Ishi and witnessed the power of narrative in keeping that world alive and conveying it to a broader audience. Under the guidance of her parents, Le Guin was exposed to alternate worlds throughout her entire life. As *Contemporary Authors Online* notes in its entry on Ursula K. Le Guin, her Napa Valley summer house mingled

scientists with writers and California Indians and "[s]he also grew up hearing a variety of Native American tales from her father and reading a great deal of mythology."

In addition to her parents, Le Guin also grew up with three older brothers and, as she says on her Web site, she got "to have fights with the youngest of them" and "tag around after" them. Her teenage years, when she spent summers in the Napa Valley with her parents after her brothers had gone to serve in World War II, helped to shape her soul. She describes herself as "a teenager wandering the hills on my own, no company, 'nothing to do.'" Her decision to turn to science fiction and fantasy can also be attributed, in part, to the influence of her brothers and their interest in the science fiction periodical *Amazing Stories.* Le Guin submitted her first short story to *Amazing Stories* when she was 12. Although it was rejected, it was the first step towards what would eventually be her writing career. In the meantime, Le Guin grew older and attended college, earning an undergraduate degree from Radcliffe College. As *Contemporary Authors Online* indicates, "she decided to follow her father's advice and find a marketable career. She studied Romance languages with the intent of teaching and earned her masters degree from Columbia University." During this period she never stopped writing, and her early tales—the Orsinia books—found their roots during this period. While pursuing her doctorate, Le Guin took a trip to France on the Queen Mary and met Charles Le Guin, whom she married in Paris in 1953. She returned to the United States (Atlanta) with Charles and balanced her writing with part-time work and the task of raising three children. According to Maya Jaggi, writing in the review pages of *The Guardian,* Le Guin says that she was the one who pushed her husband west to Oregon in response to the culture shock of living in the segregated American south (Jaggi).

Le Guin's first professional sale was the short story "April in Paris" for *Fantastic* in September 1962. According to *Contemporary Authors Online,* Le Guin describes her early style as "fairy tales in space suits." Aside from this humorous judgment of her work, it also demonstrates Le Guin's unwillingness to be restricted to rigid genres; as a result, Le Guin has made a career writing beyond literary borders. Since turning to writing full-time in the 1960s she has had novels, novellas, short stories, children's stories, poetry, and literary criticism published in her 40+ year career. She has also edited such texts as *Interfaces: An Anthology of Speculative Fiction* (1980), *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (1993), and *Selected Stories of H. G. Wells* (2004).

Le Guin's most unique work, however, is her translation of *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* published in 1997. Le Guin acknowledges that her upbringing was not particularly religious. Once again, in *Contemporary Authors Online* she says "[t]here was no religious practice of any kind. There was also no feeling that any religion was better than another or worse; they just weren't part of our life. They were something other people did." Nevertheless, Le Guin recalls watching her father read *Tao Te Ching;* as a result, Taoism (Daoism) is a fundamental element that can be found throughout many of her writings. Taoism is a complex mode of understanding the universe and cannot be adequately explained in a biography of this nature. Generally, however, Taoism is a way of conceptualizing the relationships among humans, nature, and the universe. It addresses such philosophical notions as *wu wei* ("nonaction"), detachment and receptiveness to the universe, the elusive nature of human values, the search for a long life, and the strength found in passivity. A key image is the *taijitu,* the yin and yang symbol familiar to many Westerners—a circle evenly divided between black and white with a white circle in the black portion and a black circle in the white portion. This is a diagram of the supreme ultimate and is an embodiment of balance and synchronization. In sum, Taoism is about searching for the "way," a path toward balance and harmony with the natural world and the universe as a whole. In an online interview for *Guardian Unlimited* Le Guin "counts among her affiliations the peace and women's movements ('I take a perverse pleasure in calling myself a feminist'), and Taoism ('profoundly subversive')" (Jaggi). One might argue that the bulk of Le Guin's writings is her own search for the "way," embodied in the travels and travails of her characters and the worlds they encounter.

Le Guin's career has been steady, subversive, and profoundly impressive. Although a complete list of her awards might be exhausting, her honors include (but are not limited to):

2002: Locus Readers Awards: *Tales from Earthsea:* "The Bones of the Earth"
2001: Endeavour Award: *The Telling*
2001: Locus Readers Award: *The Telling;* "The Birthday of the World"
1997: James Tiptree Jr. Award: "Mountain Ways"
1996: Locus Readers Award: *Four Ways to Forgiveness*
1996: Nebula Award: "Solitude"

1995: Theodore Sturgeon Award: "Forgiveness Day"
1992: *Searoad* short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize
1990: Nebula Award: *Tehanu*
1988: Hugo Award: "Buffalo Gals"
1979: Lewis Carroll Shelf Award: *A Wizard of Earthsea*
1976: Jupiter Award: "The Diary of the Rose"
1975: Nebula Award: *The Dispossessed*
1975: Hugo Award: *The Dispossessed*
1973: Locus Award: *The Lathe of Heaven*
1972: Newbery Silver Medal Award: *The Tombs of Atuan*
1969: Hugo Award: *The Left Hand of Darkness*
1969: Nebula Award: *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Finally, in the ultimate recognition from her peers, Le Guin was knighted a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writer's Association in 2003, the second woman to join an illustrious group that includes such figures as Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Clifford Simak, Brian Aldiss, and Lester Del Rey.

A RECENT EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH URSULA K. LE GUIN

In January 2006 Ms. Le Guin generously replied to a series of questions that Susan Bernardo sent her. Here is the text of that set of questions and answers:

SMB: As part of this book my coauthor and I have been asked to include a chapter on your biography. What events, people, or ideas would you highlight as most important to your development as a writer?

UKL: You know, at 26 maybe I would have thought I knew, but at 76—there have been so many events, people, ideas—how do I know? how could I choose? I have been "developing as a writer" ever since I was about five; and I can't think of any element of my life that was irrelevant to that process. Everything goes in. Consider life as a huge compost heap, and art the often quite unexpected plant rose or eggplant or redwood that grows out of that untidy mess …

SMB: *A Wizard of Earthsea* makes me think of a long story of Oscar Wilde's called "The Fisherman and his Soul." Critics

have also compared the Wilde story to Andersen's "The Shadow." These two stories are themselves part of a longer tradition of fiction that uses doubles, but these two are classified as fairy tales. Did either of these stories or other pieces that focus on doubles influence your creation of the gebbeth in *Wizard?*

UKL: (The gebbeth is one form Ged's shadow takes; I wouldn't use the word to refer to the shadow throughout the book.)—I read the Wilde story as a kid, but it didn't stick; read the Andersen story and it did stick. There are many other double and shadow stories. Similarities are interesting, but I don't think a lineage of influence is really very useful in this case. Some writers write about doubles, some about shadows, some don't write about either. Why? Has to do with the writer's mind more than with influences, I think.

SMB: In *The Other Wind* Tenar and Seserakh are the ones who wait for the others who have gone to eliminate the barrier that created the dry land. Are they the ones who wait because they are Kargish and their culture never supported the Hardic wizards' deal that created the dry land in the first place, or because they are adept at waiting and helping those who return or for some other reason?

UKL: Good question. Essentially I think you've answered it: the dry land is simply not part of their reality—they *can't* go there. Or you could say, it never occurs to them to do so.

SMB: You have turned toward poetry recently. What does poetry as a form offer you as a writer that fiction does not?

UKL: I was writing poetry in 1935, and published the first of my six volumes of it in 1974, (another is due out in March), so I don't think "recently" is accurate. I've read and written poetry all my life. It offers me what poetry offers everyone, that narrative prose can't: heightened verbal intensity and brevity, and the formal or regular pattern of sound and rhythm that brings about this intensity.

SMB: You have done translation work recently (I am thinking of *Kalpa Imperial,* for example).

UKL: Again may I say that I've done it for decades, though the early translations (Ovid, Rilke, Supervielle, etc. mostly didn't get published). The Tao Te Ching was the first that did.

SMB: You also indicate that there are often inherent difficulties in translations and understanding other cultures in the stories in *Changing Planes.* What do you think about the way language conveys thought patterns, and how can translation best convey those patterns?

UKL: Sometimes I think all writing—poetry and narrative prose—is translation. As I said in the first note to *Always Coming Home*, "The difficulty of translation from a language that doesn't exist yet is considerable, but there's no need to exaggerate it." The 'language that doesn't exist yet' may be the language, the words, of your poem or story; you are translating them (bringing them across, literally) from nonexistence into existence. The difference between understanding another culture and understanding another person may be a difference of size, not kind. We all speak different languages and have to learn those of other people(s). To learn the art of translation.

SMB: When an interviewer asked you about a typical day of writing you described one, and claimed it would be an ideal day. Part of your description included "pet cat." How would you characterize your link to cats?

UKL: Admiring, affectionate, grateful. The presence of a cat keeps me in touch with the mystery, the unreasonableness, the beauty, the stubborn wildness of the nonhuman world. Dogs are lovely creatures but they are humanised, they have joined our tribe. Cats remain the Other. I need otherness.

SMB: You have said that your fiction is character driven.

UKL: Well, I do hope you don't believe everything I say. I don't! I try to be honest but it is extremely difficult to be both honest and complete. And partial questions tend to get partial answers.

SMB: Tenar's and Tehanu's situations, for example, naturally bring up feminist issues in *Tehanu.* Which characters in particular started your thinking for *The Other Wind?*

UKL: I'd say that the source of that book lay rather in my need to understand what the "dry land" was, why it existed, who the dragons are and what is their relationship to human beings. The last story in *Tales of Earthsea*, "Dragonfly," had left me on the verge of seeing how to find out these things—that is, what story I had to tell.

As for the characters, I was of course largely revisiting people from the other books. Alder was shaped by his destiny. Seserakh was the unexpected gift—I had no plans for her at all, she simply leaped into the book like a lioness, there she was, and I had to deal with her. I enjoyed it immensely.

SMB: You have written in *The Wave in the Mind* about the importance of libraries. What do you think of the extended availability of texts online through library databases as compared to the physical libraries that many of us grew up using?

UKL: Anything that furthers the availability of knowledge is fine. I'm a child of my time like all of us; I like to hold a book in my hands; but that's aesthetic preference. I don't care what form the knowledge comes in so long as it comes, and is free to ALL, as the public library is.

SMB: *Tales from Earthsea* helps readers bridge some gaps and get a longer historical view of the Earthsea cycle. Do you think you will write more of these tales? Are any in progress?

UKL: None in progress. I never predict anything about my own work; but my last fantasy books (*Gifts* and the two that will follow it when the publisher gets around to publishing them) are not set in Earthsea but in the Western Shore, a very different place.

SMB: One poem that I read on your Web site, "In the Third Year of the War" contrasts earlier, more peaceful moments with the ongoing losses of life in the Iraq war. Why is poetry a particularly good way for you to address the human cost of the war?

UKL: Well, you can say things briefly and directly in poetry without getting preachy. Love and pain both tend to seek poetry for their primary expression.

SMB: My coauthor Graham Murphy asked me to invite you to reflect on how much and in what ways your own thinking about Taoism has influenced your science fiction.

UKL: My science fiction? Or my fiction, which comes in several flavors? I am impatient of being confined to science fiction in people's minds. I will reply as if the question referred to my fiction. But then I won't answer it, because I'm a novelist,

not a critic. I may be keenly aware, once a work is written, of some of the elements of my learning, my life, my thinking that shaped it, but my business is to make a work that speaks for itself, not to analyze it afterwards and show how this led to that and what I "meant." As far as the artist is concerned, the work is the meaning. It is the critic who should analyze and explain. Biologists are not asked to dissect themselves, are they?

I hope you won't take this nonreply badly; I love good criticism and appreciate it. I just don't think I can provide both the novel and the Cliffs Notes!

SMB: You have spoken of feminism and writing female characters in your books. You have cited *The Eye of the Heron* as the book that made you stop and rethink how women take part in the story. You also experimented with gender roles a decade earlier in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Were there any times in your life before the experience of writing *The Eye of the Heron* when you had personally come up against limitation based on the fact that you are a woman? As you think back on it, were there limitations that you accepted because they were part of the prevalent thinking of the time? I ask this because women I have known came to their own understandings of feminism through a personal experience that angered them and revealed an attitude or double standard that they had not before been aware of in their own lives.

UKL: Of course I accepted limitations on my freedom of thought and action because such limitations were the cultural norm! (Anybody who thinks they never did so, and that they aren't doing so right now, is either kidding themselves, or living out of a grocery cart under a bridge—which is a different kind of limitation. . . .) There was no Aha! moment and no burst of anger. I just grew up into feminism as feminism itself grew up.

SMB: My students often say that they would not call themselves feminist because the term for them has come to mean anti-male everything. I marvel that the movement of the sixties and seventies that was so pro-woman can seem this way to them. I always think of all the legislation that came out of the

sixties that many people take for granted now (Title IX, Equal Pay, etc). What do you think of the women's movement of the sixties and the seventies?

UKL: I am infinitely grateful to it for enlarging my understanding and my life, and profoundly sad at how it has been misunderstood and diminished by women as well as by men.

SMB: You refer to reading feminist literary criticism around the time you were working on *The Eye of the Heron.* You say in the interview with Jonathan White that you "found some guidance in feminist theory." Which writers of theory were you reading? Which of their ideas were most helpful to you?

UKL: I can't really remember now. Sorry. Mostly it was not social theory, but lit crit (before it went off into academic jargon and posturing). *The Norton Anthology of Women Writers*—I read it from cover to cover including every footnote. The book of revelations!

SMB: Since ideas about human rights would include concern for women as well as men, why does society still need feminists? Or does it?

UKL: Ask any working woman, in any occupation, if "the ground is level." So long as it isn't, feminists are needed. Unless you're really, really sure that women are fully included in "human," "human rights" will only see to getting the ground level for the guys.

SMB: There are cultures that have not embraced the idea of women's equality. Do you think these are cultural differences that the world should respect, or do human rights trump cultural traditions?

UKL: I think one should respect the prejudices of other cultures, as one respects the prejudices of one's elderly relatives; this is an essential matter of politeness, of human courtesy. I think one should hold to one's convictions of what is right and what is wrong, even in a culture hostile to those convictions, and when faced with an actual need to *act,* one should act according to one's own ethics—when and if and as possible. I lived with my husband in the South during segregation, and I *lived* this question (in terms of race, not gender). It does not have any glib, short, simple answers. No trumps!

SMB: You have written poetry, short stories, novels and essays. Have you ever written a stage play or plays? If so, are/were they in print?

UKL: Only screenplays. *King Dog* (Capra Press, a screenplay modified to make it readable) is long out of print; the others are unpublished.

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The Literary Genealogy of Science Fiction and Ursula K. Le Guin

To speak of science fiction as a definable genre is increasingly problematic because in more than one hundred years it has mutated and shifted through definable evolutionary periods: the scientific romances of H.G. Wells; the dime novels and pulp age of Hugo Gernsback and early-twentieth-century Americana; John Campbell and the Golden Age of the 1930s-50s; the British New Wave of the 1960s; feminist offerings of the 1970s; the dominance of cyberpunk in the 1980s; and, more recently, a return to splendor for British science fiction and the ascension of Canadian and Australian science fiction. Of course, the precursors to science fiction—Sumerian legends of Gilgamesh, Roman and Greek mythology, the lunar and solar journeys of Cyrano de Bergerac, or the fantastic journeys in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*—in conjunction with science fiction's kissing-cousins, notably Utopian fiction, Gothic fiction, and even fantasy, make delineating strict borders around texts incredibly difficult and, quite often, a hotbed of discussions. It is for this reason that providing a definition of science fiction (SF) is a slippery slope towards both futility and frustration. As *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* indicates, "[t]here is really no good reason to expect that a workable definition of [SF] will ever be established. None has been, so far" (314).

In spite of the problems regarding defining this mode of writing, Samuel R. Delany provides a useful way of distinguishing science fiction

from other literary genres, an apparatus Le Guin advocates as she extensively quotes his ideas in her introduction to *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (1993). In his 1969 essay "About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words," Delany discusses science fiction through what he calls subjunctivity, arguing every form of writing has a particular relationship to reality. In journalism, for example, the subjunctivity is *this happened.* The journalist reports the events that happened, whether on a local, national, or global scale. Issues of journalistic bias aside, the subjunctivity relates the narrative (that is, the news story) to a real object or a real world.

In realist fiction, the subjunctivity is *this could have happened.* In other words, the story is purely fiction but there is nothing inherently contradictory that could prevent the narrative from actually happening in the real world. Thus, the lawyer fighting in the name of his client's defense while trying to salvage his ruined marriage may be a fictional story but it *could have happened* somewhere in the world the reader lives in and knows about. Most television programming—*Law & Order, ER, M*A*S*H*, *Friends, 24,* and so forth—operates at this level of subjunctivity; it may be unlikely that these events are happening, but not impossible.

In fantasy, however, the subjunctivity is quite the opposite from realist fiction: *This could not have happened.* Fantasy relies on things like magic, weaving spells, and casting curses; thus, *this could not have happened* in the real world. This is not a condemnation of fantasy; rather, it is a positioning. A tale involving hobbits carrying a ring of power and being defended by sorcerers relies on a magical system and fantasy does not need to explain how the sorcerer can fly, how the warlock transforms an alligator into a bloodthirsty creature, or how the witch can stay balanced on the broomstick.

Finally, Delany identifies the subjunctivity of science fiction as *this has not happened.* This subjunctivity is quite different from the other three descriptions because while it acknowledges events in the fiction may not have happened, it doesn't preclude them from happening. The events that have not happened *might happen;* for example, given technological progress we *might* be living on the moon in 200 years. Or, events that have not happened include events *that have not happened yet;* thus, some science fiction tales, notably ones describing ecological devastation, are attempts to warn the reader to prevent the event (like global pollution) from ever happening. Finally, there is the story detailing events that have not happened *but could have happened* had events simply turned out different. This is the avenue of parallel-Earth stories where history is changed in some

way; for example, the Axis ends up winning World War II or Lee Harvey Oswald's bullet misses John F. Kennedy.

SCIENCE FICTION'S GENEALOGY

The history of science fiction is somewhat less onerous than its definition. Its origins can be found in such texts as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1863), or H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). In America, however, science fiction would emerge as an identifiable genre in the twentieth century with the publication of Hugo Gernsback's periodical *Amazing Stories* (1926). This pulp periodical was a venue to highlight this emerging speculative form—known as scientifiction but eventually renamed science fiction—in short story form. Competing periodicals soon followed *Amazing Stories,* including the emergence of *Astounding Stories* (1930) and *Science Wonder Stories* (1930), a periodical edited by Hugo Gernsback after he lost control of *Amazing Stories.*

In 1937, SF made a significant leap in its imaginative repertoire when John Campbell, an author in his own right, took over the editorial reigns of *Astounding Stories* (and re-named it *Astounding Science-Fiction*). At this point, SF entered what has been called "the Golden Age" and, under Campbell's control, *Astounding Science-Fiction* helped launch and/or popularize the careers of some of the key figures and Grand Masters of SF, notably Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, A. E. Van Vogt, Lester Del Rey, Jack Williamson, C. L. Moore, Clifford D. Simak, and Theodore Sturgeon. Under Campbell's tutelage, SF was pushed to become more mature, to explore more controversial ideas, to present at-times unpleasant solutions to the narrative conflicts, and to expand its imaginative thought experiments. As part of that process, Campbell encouraged authors to expand into the soft sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology), a realm resolutely denigrated by Gernsback's insistence on the hard sciences (chemistry, physics, biology) of *Amazing Stories.* Many of the stories published under Campbell's watchful eye were expanded in the 1940s and 1950s into novels; similarly, the ideas he pushed his authors to explore found their way into the SF canon and continue to be used today by the field's contemporary authors.

THE EMERGENCE OF LE GUIN: NOVELS IN CONSIDERATION

While the 1940s and 1950s had a profound impact upon the development of SF, Le Guin's emergence in the 1960s was in the midst of the

next big SF movement: the New Wave. The New Wave represented the re-emergence of a British sensibility in science fiction after its having been eclipsed by American SF. In the early 1960s, amidst a Western countercultural revolution that saw younger generations reject their parents' ideological belief systems and turn to alternate forms of expression—often embodied by the rebellion of rock 'n roll, the rise of hippie communes, political resistance to the war in Vietnam, excessive drug use and experimentation, the advent of the birth control pill, and new explorations of sexuality—science fiction too underwent a metamorphosis. In a 1963 editorial to the *New Worlds* periodical, British author Michael Moorcock lamented what he felt science fiction had lost:

> Let's have a quick look at what a lot of science fiction lacks. Briefly, these are some of the qualities I miss on the whole—passion, subtlety, irony, original characterization, original and good style, a sense of involvement in human affairs, colour, density, depth and, on the whole, real feeling from the writer [… but] adult writers are beginning to write adult stories and that the day of the boy-author writing boys' stories got up to look like grown-ups' stories will soon be over once and for all. (quoted in James 168)

Moorcock later took over the editorial reigns of *New Worlds* in 1964 and implemented a change in science fiction that paralleled his editorial vision. Specifically, he demanded that stories for *New Worlds* be more literary and abandon the tired clichés of space travel, marauding aliens, and cowboys in outer space in favor of adult themes that explored the depths of human experience

American responses to the British New Wave were mixed. While some authors moved to Europe and embraced this new wave of writing, others overreacted and decried the death of science fiction with its move away from hard SF to focus on the subjective sciences of soft SF. It is in this period that Le Guin entered the marketplace, deftly weaving her varying interests into a decades-spanning career. Specifically, her first three novels—*Rocannon's World* (1966), *Planet of Exile* (1966), and *City of Illusions* (1967)—are stories merging the British New Wave sentiment, American genre imagery, and Le Guin's anthropological interests into tales of loss, companionship, isolation, redemption, and love.

In *Rocannon's World,* for example, Rocannon, an ethnographer, finds himself marooned on Fomalhaut II after his ship and crew are destroyed by a space-faring enemy. As a representative of the inter-galactic League

of All Worlds, the "Starlord" Rocannon must solidify ties with the natives of Fomalhaut II, notably Mogien and Yahan, if he is to protect the planet and contact his fellow "Starlords" in outer space. Throughout the narrative, Rocannon makes his way through the alien terrain, encounters a variety of dangers, and undergoes daring adventures that expose him (and the reader) to the diversity of Fomalhaut II and the planet's highly intelligent life forms (hilfs): the Gdemiar, the Fiia, and the Liuar. Peter Nicholls writes that "in finally giving himself to the planet, he [Rocannon] receives in return the gift of 'mindspeech' or telepathy" (703). Cultural contact and the (in)abilities of communication to bridge the divide and connect disparate people become key structuring principles in *Rocannon's World.*

In *Planet of Exile,* these principles are evident in Le Guin's depiction of a long-abandoned human colony on Gamma Draconis III and their tense interactions with the planet's hilfs. As with *Rocannon's World,* an enemy threatens the social stability of the communities; specifically, the Gaal, a marauding seminomadic race of people, are moving southward in preparation for the onslaught of winter. On a planet where one year is equivalent to approximately 600 Earth years, significant preparation to ensure adequate food supplies and shelter is needed before winter arrives. What makes this Gaal movement disturbing, however, is that they have mobilized into one massive force, consisting of tens of thousands, as opposed to their traditionally smaller group movements. This force threatens the Landin, the Earth-human community (aka Alterrans), but also endangers the hilf community located on the Range of Askatevar. Faced with the destructive threat of the Gaal, Jakob Agat Alterra acts as intermediary between the Alterrans and the Tevar and tries to unite the isolated communities to mount a defense, protect their livelihood, and save their lives. What makes the story compelling is as much the external threat of the Gaal as the inner tensions; namely, the Tevar do not trust the Alterrans, who they call the "farborns," and their shaky truce is completely shattered when Agat and Rolery fall in love in what amounts to an illicit relationship. The Tevar respond violently, nearly killing Agat until Umaksuman's intervention saves his life. This focus on internal fighting and the inability to make any decisions frustrate Wold, an elder chief and Rolery's father, who rejects the petty squabbling and feels their gaze should be directed outwards to the impending threat of the Gaal; in spite of Tevar skepticism and disbelief, Wold is proved right when the Gaal eventually attack and the Tevar are decimated, the survivors forced to retreat to Landin. With the threat of the Gaal ever-looming and the start

of the winter season, Tevar and Alterran eventually unite for survival and outlast the Gaal, achieving a balance and profound understanding of one another's communities.

Memory is particularly important in *Planet of Exile,* as the Alterrans have lost the historical thread of their heritage; the passing of one generation to the next has caused a cultural forgetting that forces the Alterrans to rely on incomplete cultural artifacts to piece together their precolonial life. This function of memory is particularly central in Le Guin's third novel, *City of Illusions.* In that text, Falk, the protagonist, is afflicted with amnesia and has been abandoned on a ravaged Earth. Raised by a group of humans who have to re-educate him, Falk struggles to piece together his past to ultimately realize his importance. As part of that process, he forms ties with his benefactors, notably Parth and Ramarren, and must negotiate a rural landscape defined by fragmentation and alienation, key elements found in both *Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile.* As with the enemies Rocannon faces and the omnipresent threat of the Gaal, the great enemy in *City of Illusions* is the Shing, a group whose telepathic abilities is comparable to the mindspeech of *Rocannon's World.* In the end, Peter Nicholls writes that "[t]he amnesiac hero turns out, when his memory is restored, to be a messenger from the planet of the previous book; able to detect mindlying, he will be the agent of destruction for the malign Shing" (703).

The mindlying is one example of many intertextual references among *City of Illusions, Planet of Exile,* and *Rocannon's World.* For example, aside from the personal journey Rocannon undergoes, there is his knowledge that the League is preparing for war with an unknown enemy, an enemy that will be identified in *City of Illusions* as the Shing. Part of Rocannon's role is military in nature; he attempts to persuade Fomalhaut II to join the League and help defend itself from the invading Shing. In that task he makes use of the ansible, an instantaneous communication device, to contact the League. Similarly, the "farborns" of *Planet of Exile* are cut off from the League and its war with the Shing, a war that, as described in *City of Illusions,* eventually forces the League into retreat. Finally, one of the "sorcerous" abilities the Alterrans possess is telepathy, dubbed mindspeech, that was introduced to Rocannon at the end of *Rocannon's World.*

THE HAINISH SEQUENCE

Rocannon's World, Planet of Exile, and *City of Illusions*—collected in the omnibus *Worlds of Exile and Illusion* (1996)—all function as stand-alone

texts. Nevertheless, they are much more effective as part of a sequence that encompasses the bulk of Le Guin's SF oeuvre. The Hainish sequence/cycle (also known as "novels of the Ekumen") is a general history of the Hain, an originary race that has spread their seed across the galaxy and created a variety of offshoot human species with cultural variations and at-times radically different ethnographic histories. The Hainish sequence is spread across several of Le Guin's novels and short stories, including *The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed, The Telling, The Word for World Is Forest, Four Ways to Forgiveness,* "The Day Before the Revolution," "Coming of Age in Karhide," and "A Fisherman of the Inland Sea." In the course of this sequence readers encounter a galaxy-spanning empire that showcases the League of All Worlds, its decline under the invading power of the Shing, and the eventual emergence of the Ekumen. This is Le Guin's SF opus, and what makes this megatext so delightful and challenging is the task of placing the narratives in a historical continuity. Specifically, the publication history of the narratives does not match the chronological history of the Hain. For example, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is quite early in the publishing sequence of Le Guin's works, but it is set quite late in the internal sequence of the Hain once all the texts are taken into account. Her next novel in the sequence, *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972), is set *before* the events of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the events of *Rocannon's World.* Finally, *The Dispossessed* (1974) also pre-dates *Rocannon's World* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* and depicts the development of the ansible, the instantaneous communication device featured in *Rocannon's World.* The complexity and intricate sequencing of her Hainish sequence is perhaps matched only by Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, or the Foundation stories of Isaac Asimov. Overall, one must be attuned to the textual references within the narratives to fully grasp their placement in the sequence, as publication date and Hainish chronology are not in tandem.

While the Hainish sequence has dominated Le Guin's science fiction offerings, not all of her books are part of that genealogy. Two key texts in particular—*The Lathe of Heaven* (1971; discussed in chapter 4) and *Always Coming Home* (1985)—are central to her non-Hainish portfolio. *Always Coming Home* highlights Le Guin's anthropological interests. Drawing on her childhood growing up in the Napa Valley, *Always Coming Home* sees the Napa Valley fictionalized in the Valley of the Na, a landscape that has survived a natural catastrophe that has flooded and sunk coastal cities throughout the United States. The novel then merges a fictional narrative style with an anthropological excavation of the matrilineal Kesh, a near-

future Native American tribe that has a profound historical lineage. The novel is a pastiche of anthropological resources and offers drawings of Kesh instruments and tools, a mythological accounting by Stone Woman Telling, instructional tales for educating the younger generations of Kesh, recipes for authentic Kesh meals, and tales of the Coyote trickster. Rounding out the collection are sketches and maps by Margaret Chodos and a cassette of Kesh music by Todd Barton. While the narrative pacing of *Always Coming Home* can be somewhat plodding at times, the sheer wealth of information and complexity of this thought experiment positions it as both a key narrative in Le Guin's science fiction repertoire and deeply rewarding for the committed reader who patiently works through its intricacies.

As a whole, Le Guin's career has spanned multiple decades, multiple genres, and, with her adept ability at moving from short story to novel and then to novella, multiple formats. The next series of chapters gives a general sense of Le Guin's SF accomplishments by focusing on five novels: *The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed, The Lathe of Heaven, The Eye of the Heron,* and *The Telling.* As a whole, Le Guin's work is an exemplar of science fiction and its ability to destabilize the reader with intricate world-building while simultaneously returning him/her to a (re)consideration of the present moment.

3

The Left Hand of Darkness (1969)

Although Ursula K. Le Guin had several novels published prior to 1969, notably the first three novels of the Hainish sequence (*Rocannon's World, Planet of Exile,* and *City of Illusions*) and *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Left Hand of Darkness* cemented her position as a powerful voice within the SF canon. *The Left Hand of Darkness* won both the Nebula Award (1969) and the Hugo Award (1970) and, with the possible exception of *The Dispossessed* (1974), is the most important piece in Le Guin's SF oeuvre. In addition to its ethnographic exploration of an alien world and its pivotal placement in the Hainish sequence, the text was also published on the cusp of a feminist explosion in SF that dominated the 1970s, wherein Le Guin joined such figures as Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Suzy McKee Charnas, James Tiptree, Jr. (aka Alice Sheldon), and Pamela Sargent at the forefront of the SF literary stage.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The overall plot of *The Left Hand of Darkness* follows a stranger visiting an alien planet. In this case, Genly Ai is an Envoy (aka Mobile) of the Ekumen who is on the planet Gethen, known alternately as Winter, an environmentally harsh world of perpetual snow and ice. Genly is the only Ekumen representative on Gethen because, as he later explains, one

person can be received by an alien culture as an oddity, a vulnerable messenger who poses no threat to the planet's cultures. A group of Ekumen representatives, however, might be seen as an invasion. His initial attempt to invite Gethen to join the Ekumen is directed towards King Argaven XV of Karhide, a figure he has been unable to meet for the past two years in Karhide. As the novel opens, a ceremonial parade is taking place to honor the completion of the Arch of the River Gate in the Karhide capital of Erhenrang, a passage that will mark King Argaven's place in history. The estrangement felt by Genly in the face of this alien culture is repeatedly made evident; in this instance, Genly makes note that the ceremonial music is being played rather badly, and later there is a revelation that all kings of Karhide are mad. These are simply two of the features of Gethen that repeatedly jar Genly in their alienness.

While Genly has been unsuccessful in meeting with King Argaven, he has had several meetings with Therem Harth rem ir Estraven, the prime minister or councillor of Karhide, known locally as the King's Ear, a political figure Genly does not entirely trust. Genly finds it incredibly difficult to read Estraven, unable to interpret the mannerisms, gestures, and words of the councillor as indicative of Karhide's position regarding the issue of joining the Ekumen. Part of this difficulty stems from the most shocking element of Gethen: Its inhabitants are biologically androgynous. With the exception of *kemmer,* a monthly reproductive cycle wherein Gethenians morph into male and female partners for reproductive purposes, male/masculine and female/feminine designations have no place on Gethen, as its inhabitants have no biological sex. As a Terran, however, Genly cannot escape gendered designations, and this is a significant element lying beneath his mistrust of Estraven; his efforts to connect with Gethenians are flawed because he cannot help but see "a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own" (12). This alienation is coupled with Genly's suspicions as to Estraven's motives, a paranoia that is heightened when Estraven informs Genly that s/he will not urge Genly's cause to King Argaven. Estraven is fully aware that the current political state of Karhide is not mature enough in its patriotic sensibility to grapple with exposure to the single-sexed Other that Genly embodies: "No, I don't mean love, when I say patriotism. I mean fear. The fear of the other. And its expressions are political, not poetical: hate, rivalry, aggression. It grows in us, that fear. It grows in us year by year. We've followed our road too far. And you, who come from a world that outgrew nations centuries ago, who hardly know what

I'm talking about, who show us the new road […]. It's because of fear that I refuse to urge your cause with the king, now" (19).

Genly is unable to see that Estraven is not rejecting the Ekumen but rather is saying that Karhide needs more time to become politically acclimatized to what the Ekumen offers. Nevertheless, Estraven is essentially speaking another language, and Genly soon learns the dangerous implications of Estraven's position when the political situation in Karhide becomes more complex. Finally granted a meeting with King Argaven, Genly hears on the radio that Estraven has been branded a traitor and excommunicated from Karhide, under punishment of death should s/he return. Estraven's treason is in pushing Karhide to leave behind its insularity and consider joining the Ekumen to open itself to alien cultures and experiences. Estraven is seen as conspiring to weaken the authority of Karhide and is subsequently condemned. Genly's meeting with King Argaven is equally fruitless, as this royal figure prefers to maintain Karhide's traditional views on Gethen's place in the universe rather than accept the broader implications of a multirace universe filled with single-sex species that Argaven labels perverse and considers abominations. While Genly avoids sharing Estraven's crime and punishment, he comes to realize that Estraven's earlier conversation may have been a premonition, subtle advice from a wise counsel that his mission's success may not reside in Karhide.

In spite of his failure, Genly spends a great deal of time traveling the countryside of Karhide in an attempt to understand this alien locale. On one sojourn he travels to consult with the Foretellers of Handdara, a mystical sect who can apparently see the future. Genly meets Goss, an Indweller (apprentice) of the Handdara, who brings him to Faxe, a Celibate and Weaver whose foretelling seemingly indicates that Gethen will be an Ekumen member within five years. What is more profound on the visit, however, is the revelation that knowing the right answer to the wrong question is pointless; namely, it is not whether Gethen will accept the Ekumen (or vice versa), but rather, will Genly accept the Gethenians and their androgyny? Somewhat bolstered by the foretelling, Genly learns that King Argaven is pregnant and that Argaven's cousin, Pemmer Harge rem ir Tibe, is occupying the throne as Regent and using his power to accelerate a land dispute over the Sinoth Valley with Karhide's chief rival, Orgoreyn. Genly, failing to make contact with Tibe to reinvigorate discussions regarding the Ekumen, fears the conflict will become violent, an aberration on a planet that knows no war. Realizing that Estraven's subtle counsel to look outside Karhide may have been accurate, Genly decides

to travel to Orgoreyn, carrying with him money given to him by Foreth rem ir Osboth (Ashe), a Celibate of the Foreteller's and Estraven's former *kemmering* partner.

During Genly's wandering, the narrative shifts to Estraven's final days in Karhide, starting with his realization that she has been branded a traitor. S/he quickly prepares to depart and writes to Ashe that whatever possessions are left behind can be sold to help with the two children they share. S/he also tells Ashe that no money is to be sent lest Tibe punish anyone supporting Estraven's departure. Fleeing to a border town, s/he steals a rowboat and in so doing is shot with a sonic gun as s/he crosses the border, only to awaken in an Orgoreyn hospital. Estraven hides under the identity of Therem Harth and begins to make a new life in Orgoreyn. Although Estraven works in the fishing industry, s/he is recognized in Mishnory by Commenssal Yegey, a political figure in Orgoreyn who rescues the former King's Ear from the manual labour of this new life, and Harth (aka Estraven) becomes Yegey's secretary.

It is Estraven's support of Genly's mission that prompts Orogoreyn to accept Genly's visit with open arms, and at least initially, Orgoreyn appears to be much more amenable to joining the Ekumen. Genly's reunion with Estraven, however, is ambiguous. Estraven warns Genly not to become a political tool in Orgoreyn; unfortunately, it is too late. When Genly reveals that a spaceship is orbiting Gethen's sun and is awaiting positive confirmation that Gethen will join the Ekumen, the political forces of Orgoreyn want Genly to call the ship down, an act of political power and public embarrassment for Karhide, who had ignored Genly when he was in their midst. Genly, wizened from his experiences in Karhide, begins to doubt the integrity of Orgoreyn's politicians and their interest in the Ekumen.

While Genly is beginning to have political doubts, Estraven has never been fooled and comes to the conclusion that Orgoreyn is becoming like Karhide, with its deceptions, internal politics, and repressively maddening controls. He becomes increasingly concerned that Genly is being duped by Orgoreyn and counsels the Envoy to either radio-contact his ship or use the ansible, a device allowing instantaneous communication across light years, to bring his ship down with reinforcements. Unfortunately, Estraven's warning comes too late, as Genly is arrested, interrogated in Kundershaden Prison, and then shipped by truck to Pulefin Farm, an isolated northwest corner of Orgoreyn. Drugged, underfed, and isolated, Genly's life is effectively over until Estraven saves him from his imprisonment.

Using political contacts and blackmail, Estraven locates Genly and, disguised as a trapper and then a guard, removes Genly from Pulefin Farm and retreats to Gobrin Ice, a sheath that, in a desperate crossing, will return Genly to Karhide.

On the ice, Estraven reveals that the general population of Orgoreyn knew nothing of Genly, his mission, nor of the Ekumen. His arrest was a political necessity when his presence began generating unwelcome public attention. During the dangerous trek on Gobrin Ice, Estraven enters *kemmer,* slowly transforming into a female to complement Genly's maleness. While no sexual union ensues, a deep commitment, even love, emerges between the two figures who spend months traversing the sheath. The relationship, however, is ultimately unconsummated. In a final desperate gambit, Estraven sacrifices everything for his/her planet's future when s/he distracts the border guards to allow Genly to slip back into Karhide. While Genly is successful in contacting his ship, the guards kill Estraven, and Genly is taken into Karhide custody. Although imprisoned, word of Genly's presence and what the Ekumen offers has filtered to the general population, and both governments of Karhide and Orgoreyn are reeling. The arrival of Genly's spaceship cements his authenticity and, as the novel ends, Genly and his shipmates have begun the indoctrination process, preparing for Gethen's ceremonial inclusion in the Ekumen.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

While the Foretellers' vision that Gethen would join the Ekumen within five years proves true, what is more profound is Genly's conversion in the face of Gethenian androgyny, the subject of his character development. Genly Ai is the protagonist of the piece, the key (but not sole) point-of-view character through which Le Guin narrates her tale. As a Terran permanently locked into one biological sex, Genly is unable to fully accept the Gethenians and finds it difficult to avoid gendered assumptions regarding Estraven, Tibe, or any of the other Gethenians he encounters; conversely, the Gethenians look upon Genly as a pervert, a pitied abomination locked into a permanent state of *kemmer.* This cognitive gap heightens the political tension and distrust Genly feels towards Estraven and the Gethenians while also reinforcing at every turn that Genly is an alien Other. His inability to fully comprehend Gethenians also feeds into the political manipulations as he is used by both Karhide and Orgoreyn in their respective bids for political/national clout. The message of joining the larger Ekumen

seems lost on both nations who are unable to grasp (or accept) a universe-wide society made up of equal partners. The exception is Estraven, who recognizes that Gethen must join the Ekumen, willingly or not, if its own internal political strife over the Sinoth Valley is to be resolved without bloodshed and war. Genly represents an end to isolationism and a solution to the growing nationalistic fervor that is infecting both Karhide and Orgoreyn; thus, Estraven is willing to use his political machinations to pull Gethen into the future, even if it means being branded a traitor.

As a result of the cognitive gap, Genly is unaware of Estraven's involvement and ultimate commitment to the future until they are forced to rely upon one another on the Gobrin Ice. The punishing Gobrin Ice is the transitional space for Genly, who must now communicate with Estraven, a person he has not fully trusted and to whom he must now entrust his life. It is here where their differences thaw and melt away as trust develops and the gap between them is bridged. They both begin to see one another without the filtering gaze of androgyny, *kemmer,* the alien, and political machinations occluding their view. While they both grow, it is Genly's transformation that is most profound, the "pervert" coming to an epiphany about the aliens he has been interacting with for the past several years.

Genly's growth on Gobrin Ice is not immediate but is a gradual process. He learns that Estraven's political manipulations were for his own safety; specifically, Tibe, in his ascendancy to power, would have likely eliminated all threats to his power, including murdering Genly. Thus, the obstacles and failures Genly attributed to Estraven's influence were, in fact, defensive measures to save Genly's life and Gethen's future course. As Estraven notes, "I am the only man in all Gethen that has trusted you entirely, and I am the only man in Gethen that you have refused to trust" (198–199). Trust slowly grows in both of them as they swear to become friends or hearth-brothers, dropping the formality of surnames and referring to their first names. At first, however, Genly is not particularly interested in this affectation:

> A friend. What is a friend, in a world where any friend may be a lover at a new phase of the moon? Not I, locked in my virility: no friend to Therem Harth, or any other of his race. Neither man nor woman, neither and both, cyclic, lunar, metamorphosing under the hand's touch, changelings in the human cradle, they were no flesh of mine, no friends; no love between us. (213)

As circumstances dictate, Genly gradually loses his species-phobic distrust of Estraven, realizing that if the code of honor Estraven follows (shifgrethor) could be lowered, he too "could dispense with the more competitive elements of my masculine self-respect" (218).

With the lowering of these defenses, both aliens traverse a similar path, getting to know the alien culture of their hearth-brother, their friend. Genly, in attempting to describe Terran women, realizes that after two years on Gethen, "women are more alien to me than you are. With you I share one sex, anyhow … " (235). The growing reliance Genly has upon Estraven's knowledge of survival on Gobrin Ice breaks down his barriers, bypassing the gap that has marked Genly's isolated experiences on Gethen; in particular, Genly realizes all he can offer Estraven is one gift:

> Mindspeech was the only thing I had to give Estraven, out of all my civilization, my alien reality in which he was so profoundly interested. I could talk and describe endlessly; but that was all I had to give. Indeed it may be the only important thing we have to give to Winter. But I can't say that gratitude was my motive for infringing on the Law of Cultural Embargo. I was not paying my debt to him. Such debts remain owing. Estraven and I had simply arrived at the point where we shared whatever we had that was worth sharing. (247)

The mindspeech proves central to the affection between Estraven and Genly; while on the ice, Estraven enters *kemmer,* becoming female to Genly's male. During this process, Genly is finally able to reconcile the androgyny of Gethenians and recognize that in spite of his reference to Estraven as a male, the former King's Ear is also female, both sexes embodied in one. The mindspeech proves more intimate than intercourse and, in attempting to demonstrate the technique, Genly mentally taps into Estraven's deepest psychological territory to communicate: "'You called me—It was my brother. It was his voice I heard. He's dead. You called me—you called me Therem? I … This is more terrible than I had thought.' He shook his head, as a man will do to shake off nightmare, and then put his face in his hands" (253). The terror Estraven refers to is the sheer vulnerability mindspeech triggers, a realization that those in mindspeech are truly naked to one another, a true intimacy that cannot be matched.

This mindspeech event also subtly reveals quite a bit about Estraven; namely, it speaks to another "traitorous" action Estraven has undertaken, an underlying incest in his/her past. According to the sexual mores of Gethen, kin can choose one another as sexual partners during *kemmer* if

they desire; however, kin cannot "vow *kemmering,*" what is described as essentially a monogamous marriage. Yet, clues are scattered throughout the book that Estraven and his/her dead kin, Arek Harth rem ir Estraven, did vow *kemmering* at some point. When Estraven visited his/her former partner Ashe prior to the exile from Karhide, Estraven notes that no *kemmering* vow was broken by their split because "[t]here was none to break. It was a false vow, a second vow. You know it; you knew it then. The only true vow of faithfulness I ever swore was not spoken, nor could it be spoken, and the man I swore it to is dead and the promise broken, long ago" (75). Then, during mindspeech, Genly is heard speaking in Arek's voice, the source of the vow of *kemmering;* upon Estraven's death at the border, his final words are to call out Arek's name. Finally, the end of the novel finds Genly visiting Estraven's parent, who introduces Genly to Sorve Harth, his/her sons' son.

Genly eventually comes to accept the alien and implicitly realizes that Estraven, from the outset, has always been a rebel to Gethenian social and political custom, from the vow of *kemmering* to the acceptance of the Ekumen. Estraven's entire character has been one motivated by faithfulness and a grander vision than the limitations of such narrow-thinking nations as Karhide or Orgoreyn. This acceptance of Estraven and, on a larger scale, the Gethenians is pronounced when Genly's spaceship finally lands, its small crew disembarks, and Genly is unable to fully relate to his fellow Terrans: "It was strange to hear a woman's voice, after so long […]. Out they came, and met the Karhiders with a beautiful curtsey. But they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them. Their voices sounded strange: too deep, too shrill. They were like a troupe of great, strange animals, of two different species; great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in a rut, in *kemmer* … " (296). Genly has finally been able to bridge the cultural gap, recognizing the alien in his own people as much as the alien in Gethen, and he describes his Terran comrades in the same Gethenian language initially used to describe him. While this may appear to be a devastating alienation for Genly, the novel ends with his status as an intermediary firmly established; he relates tales of space and the Ekumen to Estraven and Arek's child, taking on the role of one who is, truly, an Envoy.

NARRATIVE VOICE

The narrative voice of a text can typically be constructed around the first person or the third person, a choice that has specific consequences

for how the shape of the narrative emerges. In *The Left Hand of Darkness,* the first person narrative voice is absolutely central to the structure of the novel. The bulk of the narrative is the report Genly Ai is sending back to an Ekumen station located on Ollul; thus, most of the novel is Genly's personal accounts of his experiences on Gethen. Yet, Genly is not the sole voice of the text. As previously indicated, Estraven also shares narrative duties as s/he reports on his/her experiences, notably the exile from Karhide and the political machinations s/he encounters in Orgoreyn. Aside from these two figures, however, there are two other narrative voices. The first voice belongs to Ong Tot Oppong, an Investigator for the Ekumen who secretly traveled to Gethen on an anthropologically based investigative mission prior to Genly's arrival. Ong Tot does not appear in the narrative; rather, this voice is transmitted through a series of reports filed with the Ekumen on the social, political, and familial structure of Gethen. Through these reports, Ong Tot Oppong confirms that Gethenians are descendants of the Hain and likely an experiment in gender androgyny. These reports are central to Genly's understanding of the planet and help educate him regarding some Gethenian customs. Through these reports, both Genly and the reader learn about *kemmer,* the length of the sexual cycle, the social system, Gethenian psychology, and other pertinent facts that help flesh out Gethenians as a living, breathing, viable species.

The other narrative voice is embodied in the mythological components of the novel. Any social system is inundated with myths to provide it with historical context and genealogical grounding. The value of myth, however, is also its ability to transcend the specifics of the historical past to have relevance in the contemporary present. Scattered throughout the novel are Gethenian myths and oral narratives that serve as historical grounding and external commentary. For example, chapter two, The Place Inside the Blizzard, is a hearth-tale recorded during the reign of King Argaven VIII. This myth narrates the story of two brothers—Getheren and Hode—who vow *kemmering* to one another. The social response to this vow is for the Lord of Shath to command them to break their vows and never to meet in *kemmer* ever again. Hode commits suicide out of utter despair while Getheren is exiled from Hearth and Domain and, following his curse on the Hearth, ends up wandering the Pering Ice. Getheren barely survives the Pering Ice and hides his true identity for several years under the new identity of Ennoch. During these years, however, Getheren eventually learns that the Shath Domain has been suffering and it is not until he reclaims his name—Getheren—and accepts his whole identity that the Shath Domain prospers once again.

His death heralds a renewed prosperity for his former homeland. This myth is a direct reflection of what will happen to Estraven. Estraven, who has vowed *kemmering* to his own brother and has been exiled from Karhide for his political manoeuvring, cannot hide in Orgoreyn under an assumed name but must accept his true identity. Like Getheren Estraven must survive on an ice sheath—Gobrin Ice, rather than Pering Ice—and his death will also herald a renewed prosperity for his homeland. As with the anthropological reports of Ong Tot Oppong these mythic chapters help solidify Gethenian culture as one with historical and genealogical permanence that stretches from the past into the future, providing the cultural aspects that give life to an alien species.

THEME

The theme Le Guin explores in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is inspired by Taoist beliefs; namely, the need for balance. While it would be misguided to interpret the novel as advocating that the human species should be androgynous, the Gethenians have achieved a balance by virtue of their possessing both male and female qualities. Throughout the novel, Estraven (among others) pities Genly because he is isolated from those around him. According to Gethenians, Genly is stuck in perpetual *kemmer* and he can only access the Self, forever cut off from the Other. The Gethenians, however, have the opportunity to become both Self and Other in *kemmer,* the physical body alternating between male and female. This balance in the universe is best expressed in the Handdara philosophy from which the novel derives its title:

Light is the left hand of darkness
and darkness the right hand of light.
Two are one, life and death, lying
together like lovers in kemmer,
like hands joined together,
like the end and the way. (233–34)

This association to Taoist thinking is made explicit when Genly shows Estraven an Earth symbol that encapsulates the Handdara philosophy: the yin and yang. As Le Guin reveals in her essay "Is Gender Necessary?," "[t]he dualism of value that destroys us, the dualism of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, might give way to what seems to me, from here, a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality

of integration and integrity"(169). Thus, as the ending of the novel indicates, Genly achieves—through Terran mindspeech, Gethen's hearth-brothers, the alienation from his own species, and then his final position as Envoy—a comparable balance when he too is rewarded with the experiences of being both Self and Other.

ALTERNATE READING: FEMINIST THEORY

While the formative years of SF have been dominated by male authors, this does not suggest that female authors and fans have been absent from the genre; quite the contrary. Women's voices have always been part of SF's development. Yet, it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that such women as Joanna Russ, Sally Miller Gearhart, Marge Piercy, James Tiptree, Jr. (aka Alice Sheldon), Pamela Sargent, and Ursula K. Le Guin exploded into the field. The arrival of these voices coincided with the emergence of second-wave feminism in the broader political and cultural spheres. Unlike calls for women's political and social equality that marked first-wave feminism in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, second-wave feminism moved beyond simply seeking equality among women and men to directly challenge gender roles themselves, calling into question the social roles of women and, more broadly, the very definition of what it means to define *woman.* Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is often credited as the launching point of second-wave feminism, a text that challenges assigned gender roles and argues that women's oppression is based on their historical restriction from the marketplace, their relegation to the domestic sphere, and their perceived inferior status. Oppression can only be overcome if gender assumptions are shown to be nothing more than social designations and thus are openly challenged. Given the cultural transformations taking place during this era, SF's tendency to explore alternative worlds made it the ideal medium for feminists who wanted to examine different possibilities through worlds of alternate gender formations, alternate sexualities, and, in the end, alternate lifestyles.

In "Is Gender Necessary?" Le Guin admits to these feminist sentiments during the formative years of the novel, remarking that in 1967 she "began to want to define and understand the meaning of sexuality and the meaning of gender, in my life and in our society" (161). One can easily see this feminist impact in *The Left Hand of Darkness* in the Gethenians and their androgyny, an androgyny that is not deemed "natural" according to Terran standards. Yet, although their history is a product of Hainish

engineering, androgyny is perfectly natural for the Gethenians. This is particularly profound because "natural biology" is often used as the pretext for reinforcing gender roles. For example, since it is considered "natural" for a woman to give birth it is then a small step to argue a woman's role is at home where her "motherly instinct" is best suited for raising the children she bore. Or, because women "naturally" have less muscle mass than men it is a small step to argue women are more vulnerable or weaker than their male counterparts. Or, because women "naturally" have thinner fingers it is a small step to argue that clerical or sewing professions are well-suited to women. In other words, "nature" is often used as a political tool to justify social stratification between men and women. Gender designations become entrenched and taken for granted because they then appear irrefutable because of their grounding in "nature." "It's only natural" or "It's human nature" are typical statements used to foreclose intellectual probing. Emotions, actions, and professions are then gendered because they are "naturally" attributed to one sex over the other.

Yet, human society repeatedly violates "nature" on a daily basis, from vaccinations and medical surgeries to clothing options, birth control, and dental hygiene. And, of course, not all women are alike: some women do not want to be mothers; some women have more muscle mass than men; and, some women don't have slender fingers. "Nature" can be readily challenged and in so doing gender roles can then be destabilized from their authoritative stance. Le Guin takes on this task by rewriting "nature" in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Gethenian reactions to the single-sex Genly and his reactions to the androgynous Gethenians allow her to explore the alienness of gender roles and tear down dualistic thinking that leads to social isolation.

Gethenians do not associate social roles with a biological ability to reproduce and raise children, because *kemmer* allows each Gethenian to potentially have this ability. Thus, Estraven is both father and mother to his/her children, and King Argaven temporarily secedes the throne because "he" is pregnant. Social activities are not foreclosed based on gender roles; rather, social mobility is more pronounced. Since biological sex is temporary, gender roles cannot be assigned. As Ong Tot Oppong's observational records indicate, the absence of gender roles equates to an absence of war, jealousy, hatred, rape, and sexual exploitation: "There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter" (94).

To speak of *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a feminist text, however, is not as self-evident as it may first appear. Unfortunately, *The Left Hand of Darkness* has not gone without criticism. While many have hailed the text as an important feminist text, many have also criticized the novel for its evasions. Specifically, while the text ostensibly depicts an androgynous society, some critics contend that Le Guin has effectively eliminated the female altogether and presented nothing but a male society. This assessment stems, in part, from Le Guin's use of language and, more specifically, the masculinzed language of "he" and "him" when referring to Estraven and other Gethenians. For example, when Estraven is first introduced, Le Guin writes, "He is lord of a Domain and lord of the Kingdom, a mover of great events. His name is Therem Harth rem ir Estraven" (5). Le Guin did anticipate this criticism and, in the field notes provided from Ong Tot Oppong, this gender derivation is addressed: "I must say 'he,' for the same reasons as we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter of the feminine. But the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man, but a manwoman" (94–5). In spite of this defense, Le Guin was forced to repeat herself in "Is Gender Necessary?" reinforcing that "he" is the generic pronoun. Nevertheless, Le Guin admits that the novel is perhaps not as convincing as is needed to depict androgynes as it may leave out too much: "One does not see Estraven as a mother, with his children, in any role which we automatically perceive as 'female': and therefore, we tend to see him as a man. This is a real flaw in the book" (168).

In addition to some of the negative feminist commentary, the novel does nothing to challenge heterosexuality; in other words, "straight" relationships are still advocated as the normal sexual condition. This is clearly evident in *kemmering*, as Gethenians default to male/female binaries and pair up in that fashion; although there are incestuous partnerships, there apparently are no homosexual relations. Le Guin uses "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" to apologize for this omission: "*In any kemmer house homosexual practice would, of course, be possible and acceptable and welcomed—but I never thought to explore this option; and the omission, alas, implies that sexuality is heterosexuality. I regret this very much*" (14; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, in spite of its problems or oversights, *The Left Hand of Darkness* is an important book for both feminism and SF in offering explorations of the Other that challenge the reader to think of gender notions in a new light, because, after all, light is the left hand of darkness, and vice versa.

4

The Lathe of Heaven (1971)

The Lathe of Heaven is one of a handful of science fiction novels that is not set in Le Guin's Hainish universe. Originally published in *Amazing Stories* in March and May of 1971, the novel was released as a paperback in 1973. It is one of her most well-known science fiction novels and appeals to genre and non-genre readers alike. It was nominated for both the Nebula Award (1971) and Hugo Award (1972), won the Locus Award (1973), and has remained in print since its original release. As a sign of its success, it has been adapted into two television movies, one released in 1980 starring Bruce Davison, Kevin Conway, and Margaret Avery, and the other in 2002 starring Lukas Haas, James Caan, and Lisa Bonet.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The plot of the near-future novel *The Lathe of Heaven* is deceptive. On the surface it is nothing more than the struggle of the protagonist, George Orr, to come to terms with his dreams. On a deeper level, however, the narrative addresses the very construction of reality, a point addressed in greater detail below. As part of his mandated treatment (Voluntary Therapeutic Treatment) for using barbiturates and Dexedrine that have been illegally purchased using other citizens' Pharmacy Cards, George is sent to Dr. William Haber to determine why he is using the chemicals to suppress the dreaming state of sleep—the d-state or REM state. At first

Haber treats George as simply another patient, a drug abuse case, but he quickly re-assesses George when it becomes apparent that George's dreams take on special abilities: When George dreams, the world he awakens to has changed. More frightening, however, is George's realization that nobody in the newly awakened world has any recollection of the previous world; rather, they perceive their world as continuous whereas George can remember the "old" world. George reveals an early experience with "effective dreaming" was as a seventeen-year-old boy whose family allowed his mother's sister, the thirty-year-old Aunt Ethel, to stay with them while she was undergoing a divorce and living on Basic Support. Aunt Ethel is attracted to the virginal George and makes him sexually uncomfortable; then, one night he dreams that Ethel dies in a car crash. The next morning Ethel is not in the apartment but has been dead for several weeks following a car crash in Los Angeles. George distinctly remembers Ethel staying with his family; yet he also has an overlapping memory of Ethel having been killed in the Los Angeles car crash. The rest of the family, however, has no recollection of Ethel's stay.

Haber initially doubts the veracity of George's claims and tests his new patient by submitting him to a device of his own creation, the Augmentor, a device designed to augment d-state dreaming. This allows Haber to get his patients into d-state more rapidly, and he can then record their brain waves. Believing hypnosis can cure George of his apparent delusion and allow him to face his dreams, Haber submits George to his first treatment; however, given Haber's proximity to George, he becomes immune to the effective dreaming. This is made clear when Haber instructs George to dream about riding a horse in a wide open field. Upon awaking, George reveals that the photograph of Mount Hood that once hung in Haber's waiting room is now a photograph of Tammany Hall, a racing stallion. Haber claims he does not remember the photograph of Mount Hood and insists it has always been Tammany Hall; yet it is clear that Haber is lying as he does remember the alternate reality and initially struggles with his sanity to resolve his conflicting memories.

The bulk of the narrative concerns George's attempts to reconcile his d-state effective dreaming abilities with Dr. Haber's manipulations of his abilities. Overall, Haber's intention is to use the Augmentor to record George's brainwaves, which would allow him to cure George without losing the power of effective dreaming. Unable to simply stop attending the court-mandated sessions, George is increasingly frustrated with his lack of treatment at the hands of Haber. In fact, Haber starts to manipulate George's effective dreaming to secure himself a larger office with a view, a more

important psychiatric position, and, moving upwards in scale, the resolution of social and political conflicts. In spite of Haber's at-times pseudobenevolent attempts to make the world a better place, the consequences of the effective dreaming weigh heavily on George. For example, in an age of significant overpopulation that puts a strain on the world's food resources, Haber suggests that George dream of a cure to the problem. The result? A plague called the Crash that "reduced human population by five billion in five years, and another billion in the next ten, had shaken the civilizations of the world to their roots and yet left them, in the end, intact. It had not changed anything radically: only quantitatively" (80). In an attempt to halt ongoing wars and physical conflicts, Haber suggests George dream of a peaceful world. The result? Aliens land on the moon, thereby uniting the world with a common enemy and redirecting the global arsenal away from one another's nations to the new lunar threat.

In an attempt to break this cycle of dependency, George visits the attorney Heather Lelache to determine if he has any legal grounds to stop attending the therapy sessions. Although she is initially skeptical, Lelache witnesses one effective dreaming session and literally sees the world transform around her. Following the session, she and George attempt to determine the best course of action; finally, out of desperation, Heather suggests that George dream that Haber is a more benevolent person, someone who is less power-hungry and will cure George rather than exploit him. During the hypnosis, however, Heather recklessly suggests that George also dream that the aliens are off the moon. George subsequently awakens to a world where the aliens have left the moon and are attacking Earth. In spite of the risks of submitting George once again to Haber's control, Haber's Augmentor is the only way to once again "rectify" reality and bring peace to the planet. While the war is successfully halted, the remainder of the novel finds George cycling through several realities—some of which include Heather Lelache as his wife, some that have no Heather whatsoever—and learning that the aliens, the Aldebaranians, have a word for his ability: *iahklu.* Befriending an Aldebaranian merchant, Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe, George is increasingly comforted (albeit still confused) that his ability is not entirely unique to him but can be conceptualized, but not articulated, by the alien race. Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe helps reconcile George to his abilities, symbolized when the alien, in an attempt at communication, gives George a copy of the Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends" that provides George, strangely, with an informal support network, what is called *Er' perrehnne* in the language of the Aldebaranians.

This support network is needed in the end when Haber, using his Augmentor, attempts to replicate George's d-state abilities and inadvertently creates a nightmarish world: "The emptiness of Haber's being, the effective nightmare, radiating outward from the dreaming brain, had undone connections. The continuity which had always held between the worlds or timelines of Orr's dreaming had now been broken. Chaos had entered in" (167). Apparently cured of his own d-state abilities, George simply shuts the Augmentor off, restoring the world but leaving Dr. Haber in a permanent mental fugue that finds the once-esteemed psychiatrist housed in the Federal Asylum for the Insane. For George, redemption is offered in the form of Heather Lelache, a woman he has loved in several timelines who once again enters his life and portends a bright future where dreams of the heart might come true one last time.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

While Heather Lelache has a significant role to play in *The Lathe of Heaven* and there are a host of secondary characters—human and alien alike—the narrative hinges on the interplay of its two chief figures: George Orr and William Haber. As the antagonist of the novel, Haber might appear to be the archetype of the mad scientist. After learning of George's unique abilities, he ends up exploiting George's d-state effective dreaming to literally change the world. Yet, while Haber does benefit from this exploitation and improves his status and reputation, some of his intentions are misguided attempts at bettering the world. What Haber lacks is the moral conscience to see that the ends do not necessarily justify the means. For example, when Haber suggests that George dream of a world where racial strife and conflict are nonexistent, the result is a world where everyone is gray:

> No black people, no white, no yellow, no red. They came from every part of the earth to work at the World Planning Center or to look at it, from Thailand, Argentina, Ghana, China, Ireland, Tasmania, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Honduras, Lichtenstein. But they all wore the same clothes, trousers, tunic, raincape; and underneath the clothes they were all the same color. They were gray. (125–26)

This is a source of delight for Haber, as the differences that have historically sparked interracial conflict have been erased, ensuring that "[n]obody in the entire history of the human race has suffered for the

color of his skin" (126). The HURAD tower—Human Utility: Research and Development—that houses Dr. Haber in one version of reality bears a legend that best epitomizes Haber's philosophy: "THE GREATEST GOOD FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER" (132).

George, on the other hand, is concerned about the ramifications of Haber's manipulations and the implications of literally erasing billions from the stream of existence. Or, while racial strife is eradicated in the gray world it also bears the byproduct of cultural and racial homogeneity. Case in point: Heather Lelache cannot exist in this reality: "Her color, her color of brown, was an essential part of her, not an accident. Her anger, timidity, brashness, gentleness, all were elements of her mixed being, her mixed nature, dark and clear right through, like Baltic amber. She could not exist in the gray people's world. She had not been born" (127). George cannot bear the erasure of people's memories, lives, and even existence that is the burden of his power.

A large part of George's anxieties is likely the result of having already lived through an apocalypse. If the unwanted sexual advances of Aunt Ethel were early triggers of George's abilities, his traumatic experience of having lived through the end of the world is the trigger for the events depicted in *The Lathe of Heaven.* At one point George reveals that April 1998 was when the world ended. He details the history of an overpopulated globe that couldn't sustain itself, a Mafia-controlled black market of food and resources, a constitution rewritten in 1984 that eliminated democracy in favor of a police state, and mass epidemics. The flashpoint, however, is the war of 1993 between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Arab states that has culminated in nuclear weaponry:

> I dreamed about being home. I woke up and I was all right. I was in bed at home. Only it wasn't any home I'd ever had, the other time, the first time. The bad time. Oh God, I wish I didn't remember it. I mostly don't. I can't. I've told myself ever since that it was a dream. That *it* was a dream! But it wasn't. This is. This isn't real. This world isn't even probable. It was the truth. It was what happened. We are all dead, and we spoiled the world before we died. There is nothing left. Nothing but dreams. (105)

In spite of George's postapocalyptic trauma, *The Lathe of Heaven* is about redemption, and George slowly comes to realize that, in spite of his abilities, he is not *apart* from the world but, rather *a part* of the world. As he tries to explain to Haber, "We're in the world, not against it. It doesn't

work to try to stand outside things and run them, that way. It just doesn't work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world *is*, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be" (136). Haber, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite of George's epiphany; he is, in every sense of the word, driven by power: "To be, the will to power must increase with each fulfillment, making the fulfillment only a step to a further one. The vaster the power gained, the vaster the appetite for more. As there was no visible limit to the power Haber wielded through Orr's dreams, so there was no end to his determination to improve the world" (128). George and Haber are "us" and embody our own relationship to the planet. We can either control it and face those consequences or we can see our intimate connections to it. *The Lathe of Heaven* stages this conflict in the antithesis of George and Haber.

SYMBOLISM

The difference in characterization between George and Haber is epitomized in key symbols and/or symbolic moments throughout the narrative. The physical make-up of Haber's office comes to reflect Haber's growing stature as he takes control of George's effective dreaming abilities; thus, as verification of his perceived status, the first significant change Haber initiates is to replace his windowless office with one that has a corner window facing north and east, providing him a view of the Willamette River, the towers of downtown Portland, and, in the distance, Mount Hood. As Haber becomes increasingly powerful, his office's largesse increases exponentially, culminating by novel's end in a half-acre suite subdivided into seven individual rooms and staffed by an autoreceptionist.

Haber's will-to-power is also reflected in his psychiatric methods and the hypnotizing of George:

> Orr shook his head. He looked apprehensive, but he offered no objection. There was an acceptant, passive quality about him that seemed feminine, or even childish. Haber recognized in himself a protective/bullying reaction toward this physically slight and compliant man. To dominate, to patronize him was so easy as to be almost irresistible. (22)

The "bullying" temptation finds its way into the very method by which George is hypnotized, one whose implicit violence and potential fatality is quite explicit:

> As Orr obediently tipped his head back, Haber, close beside him, reached out quickly and quietly and put his left hand behind the man's head, pressing firmly with thumb and one finger behind and below each ear; at the same time with right thumb and finger he pressed hard on the bared throat, just below the soft, blond beard, where the vagus nerve and carotid artery run. He was aware of the fine, sallow skin under his fingers; he felt the first startled movement of protest, then saw the clear eyes closing. He felt a thrill of enjoyment of his own skill, his instant dominance over the patient, even as he was muttering softly and rapidly, "You're going to sleep now; close your eyes, sleep, relax, let your mind go blank; you're going to sleep, you're relaxed, you're going limp; relax, let go—." (23–24)

With his hands at George's throat, Haber literally has George's life in his hands; more telling, however, is the imagery he uses to refer to George's psyche. Throughout the narrative, Haber repeatedly refers to George's dreams as a lock, one that can be opened with the right key, a key Haber apparently possesses given his advanced psychiatric skills, his Augmentor, and the mandated visits George must endure. In many ways, Haber is the jailer who controls when and how the key to George's psyche will be used.

Alternately, George is equally represented by symbolic reference points. Towards the end of the novel, Dr. Haber reveals to George the results of a battery of tests conducted early in their psychiatric treatments, including a personality inventory, an IQ test, and a Rorschach test. Haber expresses a certain degree of amazement that George is so balanced in the test results. His extroversion/introversion score is 49.1, essentially indicating he is balanced between an extrovert personality and an introvert personality; on his dominance/passive scale, he is 48.8, demonstrating a tendency to favor neither dominance nor passivity; finally, his independence/dependence scale is equally balanced. As Haber puts it,

> Both, neither. Either, or. Where there's an opposed pair, a polarity, you're in the middle; where there's a scale, you're at the balance point. You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left. Now, Walters down at the Med School reads the results a bit differently; he says your lack of social achievement is a result of your holistic adjustment, whatever that is, and that what I see as self-cancellation is a peculiar state of poise, of self-harmony. By which you can see that, let's face it, old Walters is a pious fraud, he's never outgrown the mysticism of the seventies; but he means well. (134)

Locked into his perceptual apparatus, Haber dismisses Walters's assessment of George as mysticism, an assessment that proves entirely accurate as the novel continues. Instead, Haber views George's balance as a detriment to identity, even going so far as to call George a moral jellyfish (143).

Although Haber intends to insult George with the jellyfish comment, it is unknowingly the most appropriate metaphor and, in fact, is the symbolic linchpin for the novel. The first images the reader encounters in *The Lathe of Heaven*—ones that are repeatedly used in the description of George's dreaming state—are images of water and life. The first three paragraphs of chapter one describe a jellyfish floating in the sea: "Borne, flung, tugged from anywhere to anywhere, for in the deep sea there is no compass but nearer and farther, higher and lower, the jellyfish hangs and sways; pulses move slight and quick within it, as the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moondriven sea" (7). After the opening paragraph, the jellyfish is flung out of the sea and crashes upon the cliffs of rock, "that dry, terrible outerspace of radiance and instability, where there is no support for life" (7). Le Guin explicitly links the jellyfish and George's mind when that section concludes with the following: "What will the creatures made all of seadrift do on the dry sand of daylight; what will the mind do, each morning, waking?" (7). As anyone who has seen a jellyfish on the beach can attest, the mixture of sun and land will kill the jellyfish, separating it from the life-nourishing depths of the sea. Similarly, Le Guin symbolizes George's psyche and spirit with the jellyfish as he has also crashed on the cliffs of rock—Haber's rock of reason—and awakened from the dream state into a world that offers him no respite.

Le Guin's intent is to describe a life-form completely at one with its surrounding environment, a unity that George will acquire as the novel progresses. Much like the jellyfish enveloped in the depths of the ocean, George recognizes a similar envelopment, a connection uniting all life-forms. Thus, "if that's true, then the whole world as it now is should be on my side; because I dreamed a lot of it up, too. Well, after all, it *is* on my side. That is, I'm a part of it. Not separate from it. I walk on the ground and the ground's walked on by me, I breathe the air and change it, I am entirely interconnected with the world" (149–50). This is the essential difference between George and Haber: The former is, like the jellyfish, at one with the surroundings; the latter, with hands at throat, is the rock of reason. Only by returning to the sea—the realm of unity, the space of dreams—can George become whole once again, united with the universe around him.

THEME

As previously noted, *The Lathe of Heaven* is quite separate from the Hainish books that have dominated Le Guin's career; yet, in spite of the differences there is a profound thematic similarity in *The Lathe of Heaven* when compared to her earlier novel *The Left Hand of Darkness.* Recall that the Taoist belief in the need for balance is a dominant element of *The Left Hand of Darkness,* epitomized by the androgyny of the Gethenians and the Handdara philosophy:

Light is the left hand of darkness
and darkness the right hand of light.
Two are one, life and death, lying
together like lovers in kemmer,
like hands joined together,
like the end and the way. (233–34)

While *kemmer* is not a part of *The Lathe of Heaven,* a similar Taoist exploration of duality and balance structures the novel. As the sections on character development and symbolism have made clear, achieving balance with the world may be a difficult task, but it is infinitely superior to the vacuousness of Dr. Haber's world, the void in his life made manifest in his catastrophic attempt at effective dreaming.

This focus on alternative belief systems and the material impact on dreaming is reinforced throughout the novel with epigraphs that open each chapter, all of which are related in their challenges to rigid individualism. Thus, there are statements from H. G. Wells, Lao Tse, and Victor Hugo regarding alternate modes of existence and the nature of Being. Most compelling, however, are epigraphs from Chuang Tse (alternately Zhua-ng Zi and Chuang Tzu), one of the three originators of Taoism, that provide thought experiments into the nature of Being and reality and furnish Le Guin with the novel's title:

> Those whom heaven helps we call the sons of heaven. They do not learn this by learning. They do not work it by working. They do not reason it by using reason. To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood is a high attainment. Those who cannot do it will be destroyed on the lathe of heaven. (30)

In many ways, *The Lathe of Heaven* is a thematic exploration of this statement, as Haber attempts to use psychiatric reason to explore and

understand what cannot be understood: George's psyche and his effective dreaming. And, as Chuang Tse forecasts, Haber is crushed under the lathe, the scaffold, of heaven; George, on the other hand, accepts his profound unity with dreams and the universe, a state of Being outside conventional Western notions of identity and ego and one that achieves a profound balance with the depths of the cosmos.

ALTERNATE READING: INNER SPACE AND ALTERNATE HISTORIES

The New Wave of the 1960s was a particularly central period that influenced Le Guin's emergence into the SF canon. Le Guin acknowledges as much in her introduction to the *Norton Book of Science Fiction:*

> it is fair to say that science fiction changed around 1960, and that the change tended towards an increase in the number of writers and readers, the breadth of subject, the depth of treatment, the sophistication of language and technique, and the political and literary consciousness of the writing. (18)

A particular focus for the New Wave is the notion of inner space. J. G. Ballard first described inner space in his 1962 editorial to the *New Worlds* periodical: "[s]cience fiction should turn its back on space, on interstellar travel, extra-terrestrial life forms, galactic wars and the overlap of these ideas that spreads across the margins of nine-tenths of magazine s-f […]. The biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth" (quoted in James 169–70). As part of that inner journey, the countercultural 1960s milieu saw younger generations break with belief systems of the past to explore new modes of awareness, facilitated by the energy of rock 'n' roll, the changes in sexuality, the emergence of women's liberation movements, and drug experimentalism. In addition, non-Western belief systems and methods of altering consciousness and perception were embraced, including Taoism, Buddhism, the Tarot, and other non-Western perceptual systems.

Inner space and the focus on Taoism are clearly structuring principles for *The Lathe of Heaven.* For example, a chief figure of Taoism is Chuang Tse, and several chapters begin with his epigraphs. Also, the jellyfish imagery that opens the novel is about the perception of reality in its comparison of the waking state, one that is separated from the depths

of the dreamlike sea, to a "terrible outerspace of radiance and instability" (7). While "outer" space notions are certainly evident in *The Lathe of Heaven*—including aliens, lunar colonies, apocalyptic plagues, nuclear weaponry, and interspecies warfare—inner space is the engine driving the novel. The challenges to the psyche, the links between the conscious and unconscious minds, and the reality of dreams are what is of interest in the novel. Throughout *The Lathe of Heaven,* George is repeatedly struggling to make sense of his jumbled mind as his experiences from one continuum to another continuum overlap, his vision of external reality repeatedly in a state of flux. For a time, George is unable to distinguish the difference between the waking mind and the sleeping mind, believing he may in fact be dreaming that he is awake.

Le Guin's New Wave–inspired novel also ties into a common topic, as alternate or parallel dimensions of the sort George encounters are a mainstay of SF. Alternate Earth narratives are both fun and intellectually engaging because they offer a window to different historical timelines that could have taken place. In "The Way It Wasn't: Alternative Histories, Contingent Geographies" Barney Warf explains that history is often viewed in a teleological manner, that is, a manner that assumes historical events are stages in a movement towards an end that has already been determined (18). Typically, "we" look at history as having unfolded in the way it *should* have unfolded as if in some pre-ordained fashion; in other words, historical events *must* have worked out the way they were *supposed* to work out by their having happened. We live in a world where the Axis lost World War II; thus, it must be *right* that they lost since that is the way history unfolded. History had to have moved in its *proper* direction as evidenced in our contemporary reality. As Warf explains, "teleological interpretations draw a sharp line between the potential and the real, the possible and the impossible, the contingent and the necessary, what was and what might have been, between what occurred empirically and what *could* have occurred theoretically" (19). The effect of this teleological idea of history, however, is the evacuation of human agency. If history has happened in the manner it was (pre)ordained to happen then the human ability to change history becomes suspect. Warf comments that space and time are then "external to human action" and become nothing more than "containers that 'hold' society but are not produced by it" (19).

Resistance to teleological views of history are founded on (re)writing human agency into the historical equation; in other words, anti-teleological readings of history enforce the centrality of human actions and the contingency of those actions. People are "always conscious,

acting subjects, capable of 'doing otherwise'" and contingency "in whatever form is a vital antidote to teleological readings that hold history rolls along a single track of possibility" (Warf 29). Alternate history narratives are ideal mediums to explore contingency and human agency by highlighting how "reality" is a by-product of individual actors and actions, some on a grand scale while others on a minute scale. An alternate Earth allows readers to see how history and historical actions are not written in stone nor pre-ordained macrocosmic events; rather, like a jellyfish that floats in the immensity of a fluid universe history and its (re)actions respond to the currents and eddies of human subjects. Le Guin encapsulates this reality-bending model through the figure of George who is buffeted by the current of history and repeatedly shifts from one continuum to the next under the machinations of Dr. Haber, all the while changing the world around him. *The Lathe of Heaven* demonstrates that history—past, present, and future—and reality are contingent on inner space and human actions as the world/reality that is constructed, perceived, and remembered is constantly in a state of change.

From the outset, *The Lathe of Heaven* is interested in exploring alternative modes of Being and positing new realms of experience. The unconscious as the dream realm, a state of Being normally buried by our waking mind and forgotten by the daily trivialities of wakeful living, becomes as real as the conscious world. This is eloquently summarized by Haber when he tells George that "[w]hen you *see* another man's dream as he dreams it recorded in black and white on the electroencephalograph, as I've done ten thousand times, you don't speak of dreams as 'unreal.' They exist; they are events; they leave a mark behind them" (18). In all, the novel raises important questions regarding the perception of reality, the responsibility of those possessing power, and, ultimately, the relationships among (human) beings and the planet.

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The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia (1974)

The second seminal work in Ursula K. Le Guin's science fiction oeuvre and a key text in the Hainish sequence is *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia,* a novel that went on to win the Hugo (1975) and Nebula Awards (1974), as well as the Campbell Memorial Award (1975), the Locus Award (1975), and, most recently, the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award (1995). Although published approximately five years after *The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed* is set earlier than any of the previous novels in the Hainish sequence. Like *The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed* also features an interstellar traveler negotiating cultural values and mores while visiting an alien planet; yet, *The Dispossessed* is significantly more complex than *The Left Hand of Darkness* by virtue of its world-building scope and its overall thought experiment.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The plot of *The Dispossessed* relies on the clash of two cultures—the planets Anarres and Urras—as experienced by one man acting as an intermediary between the two and trying to bridge the gap that has kept them silent to one another for generations. In many ways Urras is as alien to Anarres as Anarres is to Urras and both planets harbor a mistrust for one another. The extent of Anarres's mistrust is made evident in the opening pages of the novel

when Shevek, a physicist and resident of Anarres, is approaching the Port of Anarres in preparation for his spacebound trip to Urras. As an Anarresti physicist, Shevek was able to maintain a modicum of contact with the work of Urrasti physicists; yet, in spite of his upcoming scientific trek to expand his knowledge of physics, he is viewed by many on Anarres as a traitor when he apparently abandons his home planet. This is readily evident when a mob of demonstrators denounce Shevek's trip to Urras and go so far as to throw rocks at the ship in an attempt to physically assault Shevek.

This opening scene draws attention to the walls surrounding the Port and immediately establishes the social dynamic of Anarres and Urras. The bulk of Urras, epitomized by the city of A-Io, is structured along the familiar lines of Western capitalism and individualism; thus, the Urrasti repeatedly position Anarres as a backward locale that is walled away, an isolated moon orbiting the larger planetary body of Urras. The Annaresti, however, have a completely different perspective and believe that their walls have protected them from the social degradations and discriminations of Urras and the wider universe. Anarres's political system (Odoniasm) has eliminated material acquisition; in other words, everyone ideally participates in an equal manner for the good of the overall global community and thinks of the community rather than the individual. Any direct expression of individual possession is frowned upon by Anarresti and is classified as "egoizing." For example, Shevek's father, Palat, is not "my father" or "his father" but "the father." Similarly, children are housed and raised in large dormitories where they can interact with other children and learn about their responsibility to the collective social order. School is equal-access, and Anarresti adults have the option of pursuing any profession; however, this pursuit is tempered against the good of the overall social community. Thus, Anarresti allow the computerized system of the Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) to deploy them in work crews spread across the planet. There is no political system of governance and no democratic system of electing leaders; rather, a series of committees partnered with voluntary service help maintain the wider social operation. Finally, while sexual partnerships are favored, monogamy is not the natural course of action as that involves egoizing; thus, partners agree to contracts of limited duration and, upon completion, can renew the contract or allow it to lapse.

Carrying his Anarresti social and political systems with him to Urras, Shevek repeatedly brushes up against a political system based on material acquisition and individual wealth. Shevek must consequently question not only the politics of Urras but his own ideological baggage.

Nevertheless, Urras is initially quite welcoming to Shevek and he marvels at the wonders this planet has to offer. As his stay continues, however, Shevek becomes increasingly frustrated by the restrictions he finds have been placed on him and his scientific pursuits begin to suffer, as discussed below.

Shevek eventually throws off the condescending passive-aggressive bonds of his hosts to make contact with rebel Urrasti forces inspired by Odoniasm. For these rebel factions, Shevek and Anarres are icons, symbols that Odo's centuries-old ideals can be put into practice. Yet, after a series of violent skirmishes, Shevek retreats to the only safe place on Urras: the Terran embassy to the Council of World Governments. Under Terran protection, Shevek allows his scientific theories to be accessible to all interested parties; in a roundabout manner, Shevek's mission to break down walls is successful as he is willing to share his science with Terrans and Hainish alike, thereby opening Anarres and Urras to a wider universe. The last few pages of the book depict Shevek returning to Anarres with Ketho, a Hainishman, in tow. Ketho wants to engage in the mission of breaking down walls and decides to spend time on Anarres and learn about a culture that has remained alien to the rest of the universe.

Part of Le Guin's success with *The Dispossessed* is her alternating narrative format and the manner in which Shevek interacts with the two worlds. In other words, she does not present the Anarres material first and then proceed to Urras; rather, she alternates between them. In a brilliant fashion, the novel begins in the middle of Shevek's quest and moves forward with the Urras events while using extended flashbacks to establish the Anarres background. Tellingly, this serves a useful function as Shevek's disillusionment with Anarres finds a parallel in his disillusionment with Urras, thereby drawing both worlds together through Shevek's personal experiences.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

As the protagonist of the novel, Shevek is the point-of-view character for each chapter, and through him Le Guin highlights the social construction of both Anarres and Urras. Despite the alien settings of these two planets, however, it is a *human* journey that dominates the novel, one that challenges Shevek's identity and exposes him to an emotional register that fluctuates between hopeful optimism and utter despair. In a manner similar to Genly Ai's maturation in *The Left Hand of Darkness,* Shevek begins as a relatively naive innocent, a figure repeatedly estranged from

the social systems surrounding him before maturing into a character of experience. Overall, Shevek strives for a deeper meaning in the universe and attempts to transform the destiny of both Anarres and Urras; however, he is profoundly affected by the failings of those with smaller visions than his own.

Anarres

Even on his home planet, Shevek seems to be perpetually isolated, bumping up against social expectations. Central to the functioning of Anarres is its citizens' participation in the maintenance of the social community. Anarres is a planet of drought, famine, and dust-ridden climates; as a result, it is centered on communal sharing, support, and responsibility, while notions of individual ownership, or proprietorship, are socially discouraged and counter the dominant belief system. Mandatory labor, mobile workforces, and the balanced distribution of materials and personnel allow Anarres to be a self-sufficient global community, one that frowns upon Urras and only maintains its minimal ties through trade agreements both planets have struck and zealously follow.

Le Guin immediately alienates Shevek; this can be seen in a number of instances from Shevek's childhood. First, Le Guin depicts Shevek's infancy as a troubled period. In one scene he is sitting on a part of floor directly illuminated by a wide beam of sun shining through a window. A larger child sits in the sun and pushes Shevek out of the illuminating rays; Shevek pushes back. While the larger child's proprietary involvement goes unaddressed, Shevek is reprimanded by the matron when he lays claim to the sun, calling it "Mine sun!" This incident is a metaphor for Shevek's life on Anarres; perpetually pushed out of the bright light, he is repeatedly punished for his "egoizing" response to the oppressive, often egoizing, actions of larger bodies.

The second incident occurs when Shevek is an adolescent and discovers his early aptitude for physics. In this scene he runs afoul of the instructor and is accused of egoizing by not participating equally in a Speaking-and-Listening group. Deemed a disruptive influence, Shevek is demoted and told to seek out a less-advanced group. Recognizing Shevek's early aptitude, his father, Palat, uses a small book, embossed with the Circle of Life insignia, to introduce Shevek to mathematics. In a dream later that night, Shevek sees himself approaching a field bordered by a wall, one that closely resembles the Port of Anarres in chapter one. In this case he is unable to get over the wall until he sees how mathematical equations

allow him to see that there is no wall in the shadows. This is the dominant arc of Shevek's development, an insistence on mathematical principles and science to breach the walls within himself, within society, and eventually between Anarres and Urras.

The third incident occurs later in Shevek's adolescence as he is exposed firsthand to an alternative belief system. Since the incarceration of criminals serves no communal purpose on Anarres, Shevek can only read about criminals in such books as *The Life of Odo.* Shevek joins his adolescent friends, notably Tirin and Bedap, in a typically adolescent experiment when one of the boys, Kadagv, volunteers to be imprisoned for an unspecified amount of time. The boys recreate an incarceration that is completely alien on Anarres. After four hours Kadagv is unaffected; he is imprisoned for two more days, at which point, upon his release, he has lost control of his bowels and vomited on himself. The dehumanizing images of imprisonment and their desultory bodily effects haunt Shevek through his adult life as he repeatedly struggles against prison walls, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Tellingly, this experiment on Kadagv is also Shevek's initial exposure to a revolutionary sensibility that will eventually draw him to Urras. Specifically, Tirin expresses doubts regarding the propaganda they receive depicting the barbarism of Urras. Tirin openly questions what it is Anarres has to fear from Urras, going so far as to suggest that an Anarresti visit Urras. While this trip is Tirin's idea, it is Shevek who will successfully complete it.

The final incident has to do with the incompatibility between mandatory labor and Shevek's own intellectual grandeur. While working on a forestation project, Shevek's mind continues to wander to scientific principles and rationales; yet he is unable to follow through on his research as his communal duty precludes him from accessing the laboratories he needs. In the interim, Shevek engages in relatively menial relationships: He gets into a fight with Shevet, a virtual stranger, over their similarities in names; he is rejected by Gimar, a woman who fascinates him; and he ultimately starts a relationship with Beshun, a young man who introduces him to sexual pleasure.

While his acceptance to the Central Institute of Sciences in Abbenay on a physics scholarship is a dream come true, the Institute proves to be a testing ground for the various contradictions of Shevek's life and, on a broader scale, Anarres. In this elite space Shevek is mentored by Sabul, a physicist impressed by Shevek's early work. While Anarres is safely ensconced behind its walls, Sabul exposes Shevek to a broader reality and forces him to learn Iotic to read the Urrasti physicists Atro, To, and

Baisk. As in his childhood dream, Shevek believes that the sciences can break down walls, especially when he finds Anarresti physicists regularly engaging in written dialogue with Urrasti physicists. In addition, Shevek struggles to adapt to notions of privacy and individual ownership, because the secrecy of the Urrasti communications and scientific principles is "a situation so new to him and morally so confusing that he had not yet worked it out" (109). In the end, he seems able to resolve the contradiction of private ownership within a communal system: "But for those who accepted the privilege and obligation of human solidarity, privacy was a value only where it served a function" (111).

This rationalization of his contradictory position may initially prove beneficial to Shevek, but it quickly becomes the main source of his personal angst and the trigger for his eventual disillusionment with Anarres. Specifically, Shevek quickly learns that the ownership of ideas can be a weapon as much as a tool. This comes to the forefront when Shevek is published but then finds a translation of his book, *A Critique of Atro's Infinite Sequence Hypothesis,* credited to both Sabul and Shevek. Sabul claims to have polished the manuscript and rewritten sections for clarity. In Sabul's words, Shevek's ideas form the groundwork for the collaborative text; to Shevek, however, Sabul has appropriated his work to advance his own career. In a telling contradiction, Sabul is egoizing by imposing his individuality upon Shevek's physics. Sabul exploits his protégé's work to bolster his own status and reinforce his prominent place as the PDC's Press Syndicate consultant on physics. Furthermore, Shevek grows increasingly disillusioned when he discovers that the prominence Sabul has garnered as a premier physicist on Anarres is largely due to his translations of Urrasti physicists; in other words, Sabul has been riding the coattails of intellectual superiors for years. Shevek is trapped, however, because he needs Sabul to access the communication routes to Urrasti to enable his ongoing studies and to see his theories published. This entanglement is reinforced later in the novel when Shevek, in an attempt to get his revolutionary thesis published, finds Sabul blocking its publication until Shevek agrees to attach Sabul's name as coauthor. Much like the older boy who pushed the younger Shevek out of the light, only to have Shevek punished for clawing his way back in, the older Shevek must fight to extricate himself from the shadow of Sabul in order to regain his position in the scientific light, a fight that repeatedly has him punished or humiliated.

After a particularly distressing illness, Shevek attempts to reintegrate himself into the communal social sphere. This endeavor proves fruitless,

because beneath the superficial platitudes he is profoundly depressed, crestfallen by the walls that the sciences have failed to overcome. Indeed, like his childhood dream, Shevek is threatened with absolute and total failure:

> Nothing he did was understood. To put it more honestly, nothing he did was meaningful. He was fulfilling no necessary function, personal or social. In fact—it was not an uncommon phenomenon in his field—he had burnt out at twenty. He would achieve nothing further. He had come up against the wall for good. (161)

This is a watershed moment as his life now begins to change. First, he is immediately reacquainted with Bedap, his childhood friend, who stokes Shevek's revolutionary fervor. Bedap offers compelling philosophical arguments that Anarres is a repressive social state because it punishes the individual and uses Odoniasm as a weapon to stifle the mind: "We don't educate for freedom. Education, the most important activity of the social organism, has become rigid, moralistic, authoritarian. Kids learn to parrot Odo's words as if they were *laws*—the ultimate blasphemy!" (168). As tangible evidence, Bedap tells of Tirin, their childhood friend who, after staging an apparently anti-Odonian play, struggled with increasingly hard-labor job postings in remote areas before being institutionalized in a mental asylum. Shevek later bonds with Takver, the woman who eventually becomes the love of his life. One night while looking at the moon, they wonder why the barbaric Urras looks so beautiful in spite of Anarresti propaganda; interestingly, Shevek notes that an all-encompassing view from a distance will make anything look beautiful, but up close the faults and ugliness are easily seen.

The effects of these social relationships remain dormant for several years, until Shevek is reunited with Takver and they reminisce about old friends, including Tirin who, despite the pressures of Anarres, continues to write plays. Shevek, decides he can no longer remain silent:

> We keep our initiative tucked away safe in our mind, like a room where we can come and say, 'I don't have to do anything, I make my own choices, I'm free.' And then we leave the little room in our mind, and go where PDC posts us, and stay till we're reposted […]. [W]e're ashamed to say we've refused a posting. That the social conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it. We don't cooperate—we *obey.* We fear being outcast, being called

> lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. We fear our neighbor's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice. (329/330)

Shevek realizes that his coauthored dissertation was a tactical error; in response, he and Takver set up their own collective, the Syndicate of Initiative, and re-release the original thesis with Sabul's name removed. They also release Tirin's repressed plays and Bedap's *Sketch of Open Education.* Most important, however, the Syndicate establishes its own communication with Urras; while Urrasti are forbidden from visiting Anarres, nothing stops Shevek from accepting (although not without reluctance and trepidation) an invitation to visit Urras.

Urras

Given the hardships of Anarres—drought, famine, dust-ridden climates, computerized job postings, and relocations—Urras initially appears to Shevek as "what a world is supposed to look like" (65). Shevek's reputation precedes him on his trip to Urras, as his accomplishments in physics have garnered him an academic following, including the awarding in absentia of the Seo Oen Award in physics. Shevek is initially ecstatic at finding people of an equal caliber to his own skills and, once established at the Ieu Eun University in A-Io, he is amazed at how easy it is to gain access to the host of scientists, mathematicians, biologists, and other specialists. Shevek's boyish enthusiasm on Urras serves as forceful counterpoint to the academic repression he has felt under Sabul on Anarres.

The curbing of his enthusiasm begins relatively early, however, as he is repeatedly reminded of his alienness. First, Shevek wants to teach and interact with young minds, but Ieu Eun only reluctantly provides him with classes. Second, in typical Anarresti fashion, he does not see the value of giving hierarchical grades and ends up agreeing to do so when faced with pressure from administration and students. Finally, he starts noticing that the Urrasti faces he regularly encounters in social gatherings are the same faces, repeated over and over again. It slowly dawns on Shevek that he is isolated from all but the elite of Urras, bunkered behind a new set of walls that is gradually eating away at his resolve: "He felt himself dry and arid, like a desert plant, in this beautiful oasis. Life on Anarres had sealed him, closed off his soul; the waters of life welled all around him, and yet he could not drink" (129).

As Shevek is exposed to the wide wonders of Urras, Le Guin charts the character's loss of innocence and his growing realization that he has

simply traded one set of walls for another. Shevek bears the brunt of his ongoing disillusionment and views his failings as signs of his own weakness. Figuratively, he is slowly being poisoned by Urras, as his love and enthusiasm for physics crumbles. This personal crisis reaches its epitome with Vea Doem Oiie, a woman he had met at an earlier social function. On an unplanned expedition into the city of Nio Esseia, Shevek locates Vea, who is thrilled to see him and invites him to her party. Over the course of the evening, Shevek unwittingly becomes drunk and begins to espouse on Urrasti's superficiality and materialism and proclaims that the solution to the planet's woes lies in unity with Anarres. Heated debate ensues and Shevek makes what he believes is an astute observation: "Here you see the jewels, there [Anarres] you see the eyes. And in the eyes you see the splendor, the splendor of the human spirit. Because our men and women are free—possessing nothing, they are free. And you the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes—the wall, the wall!" (228–29). Retreating from his drunken oration with Vea, his clumsy attempt at seducing Vea borders on attempted rape before he pathetically ejaculates on her dress and, moments later, vomits and passes out. Interestingly, this scene is reminiscent of Kadagv, his childhood friend whose boyhood experiment with Urrasti incarceration resulted in a similar loss of bodily control and dehumanization.

Shevek's lack of control at the party is highlighted when the true motivation of the Urrasti elite is revealed. They care nothing for Shevek's altruistic goal of uniting the two planets and ushering in an age of participation, cooperation, and unification; rather, they have tolerated Shevek solely for access to his General Temporal Theory, a method by which instantaneous travel across space is achieved, which would free Urras from reliance upon Hainish space propulsion. This tolerance, however, is quickly dwindling. Shevek was prevented from allowing his life to flow on Anarres as he was kept in check by the Odonian social system; on Urras, he is slowly being drained of his life and corrupted by the individualism of Urrasti who care only for economic and technological advantage.

Terran

While Shevek has been slowly undergoing emotional and physical breakdown, Le Guin offers salvation in the form of the Urrasti Odonians and, later, the Terrans. Following the party incident, Shevek gradually realizes that he must throw off the benevolent shackles of his hosts and

make contact with the laboring classes of Urras. With the help of Efor, his Urrasti servant, Shevek is introduced to the hidden side of Urras, the blemishes the upper class want forever hidden. In the background of Shevek's trip to Urras has been a civil conflict in Benbili, a country whose laboring classes are rebelling against a repressive government. Shevek seeks out this laboring class and successfully makes contact with the resistance movement. He emerges from his social isolation to become an accidental figurehead for the Revolution, an icon for the successful implementation of Odonian philosophy on Urras. He holds a rousing speech during a demonstration and proclaims that true Revolution requires its followers to leave behind all personal possessions and desires and come to the future with open empty hands. Although the assembly turns violent following a police crackdown, the events lead Shevek to petition for asylum with the Terrans. Under Terran protection in the embassy, Shevek undergoes his final transformation and recognizes that the future of Anarres and Urras must be made through the intervention of a third party. Anarres and Urras are unwilling to cross the gulf that separates them, but Shevek recognizes that joining the ranks of other Hainish worlds will finally tear down the walls, and it is Shevek's own General Temporal Theory that will affect pan-global change. While his equations will not lead to the instantaneous travel Urras desperately seeks, they will result in the ansible, a technological device allowing near-instantaneous transmission of messages through space. Such communication will tear down the walls of Anarres and Urras and expose the planets to the wider scope of the Hain. In addition, Shevek has come to a re-affirmation of his self-identity: "He was aware of hope deceived and of the promise kept; of failure; and of the sources within his spirit, unsealed at last, of joy. He was a man released from jail, going home to his family" (382). The breakdown of planetary walls parallels Shevek's final maturation, a strengthening of his resolve that, in spite of the challenges ahead, his dream may come to fruition.

THEME

The dominant theme that runs through *The Dispossessed* is the search for balance. That search is epitomized by Shevek, whose personal struggles are emblematic of the struggles affecting his two homeworlds: Anarres, his birth-planet, and Urras, the "mother country" of Anarresti's ancestors. This search for balance is epitomized in the Taoist thought that has run through *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Lathe of Heaven:* the balance of

yin and yang. Shevek believes that the seeds to Anarres's overcoming its walls are to be found on Urras; on Urras, he comes to believe that the seeds of Urras's future are to be found on Anarres. Similarly, such unification would rectify his own imbalance; on Anarres he was an egoist, repeatedly punished for his individuality; on Urras, he despises the social inequality arising from individualism and praises the social equalities on Anarres. The solution to Anarres's and Urras's problems lie in a union of the two planets, the yin with the yang that will bring balance to them both and, within the broader scope of the Hainish sequence, allow them to join with what will eventually become the League of All Worlds and, eventually, the Ekumen.

Interestingly, Le Guin extrapolates even further on the need for balance; specifically, Shevek's reliance on Terrans introduces a broader sensibility than simply the merging of opposites. Shevek's ansible will enable instantaneous communication among planets separated by light years' distance. The ansible will allow both Anarresti and Urrasti to communicate with other species, all of whom share a common ancestry in the Hain. As a metaphor for globalization, Le Guin seems to suggest that balance cannot simply be achieved via the integration of opposites, but rather, an all-inclusiveness that does not recognize nor legitimate social inequalities arising from difference. Just as all Anarresti, Urrasti, and Terrans are descendants of one universal community—the Hain—so too are all of Earth's citizens one people, one global community in need of balance.

ALTERNATE READING: ANARCHISM AND UTOPIA

The subtitle to *The Dispossessed* is *An Ambiguous Utopia,* clearly indicating Le Guin's intentions that the novel be located within the broader field of Utopianism (that is, social dreaming) and Utopian studies. In the 1970s, Utopian studies and Utopian literature experienced a resurgence of attention with the publication of *The Dispossessed* as well as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976), and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978). According to Lyman Tower Sargent in *The Utopia Reader*, utopia, taken from the Greek "ou" ("no") and "topos" ("place"), can be defined as "a non-existent society described in detail and normally located in time and space" (1). Breaking that definition down, Sargent goes on to note that utopia typically appears in fiction as a eutopia or a dystopia. Eutopia, taken from the Greek "eu" ("good") and "topos"

("place"), is a utopia the reader judges to be "considerably better than the society in which the reader lived" (1). The dystopia is defined by Sargent as a utopia that the reader judges to be "considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (2).

The function of utopias—whether as eutopia or dystopia—gives the author a means of providing political commentary about social and/or political systems through a comparison to a fictional environment. In this particular case, Le Guin uses utopian discourse to critique the limitations of Westernized capitalism, embodied by the social stratification, superficialities, and inequalities of Urras, and the political feasibility of anarchism, embodied by Anarres. Popular images of anarchists and anarchy often depict lawlessness, the bedlam of angry countercultural groups lashing out, usually in violent demonstrations, at dominant figures of authority. To speak of a society crumbling into anarchy is to describe its downfall, its streets overrun by disorder and chaos, violent uprisings, and the fearless committing of vandalism, looting, assaults, and even rape and murder. As a political ideology, however, anarchy is quite unlike the chaos and disorder often associated with the term. According to *Britannica Online,* anarchism comes to be about balance, constructing a society without government mediation and systems of control. Typically, anarchists "deny man-made laws, regard property as a means of tyranny, and believe that crime is merely the product of property and authority. But they would argue that their denial of constitutions and governments leads not to 'no justice' but to the real justice inherent in the free development of man's sociality—his natural inclination, when unfettered by laws, to live according to the principles and practice of mutual aid." An anarchist society based on such voluntary associations would create an interwoven network of shared responsibility on social, technological, ecological, educational, and ethical levels, eliminating the need for governmental power and agencies.

The anarchist ideology is embedded in Odoniasm, the system of thought all Anarresti (and to a lesser extent the Odonian subculture on Urras) share. As Le Guin describes Odoniasm, " [t]here was to be no controlling center, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy and the dominance drive of individuals seeking to become captains, bosses, chiefs of state" (95). This system is in direct contrast to the political system of Urras wherein material acquisition and class conflict are par for the course. In addition, the importance of anarchy on Anarres is reinforced given the planets harsh conditions. Computers become the center of Odo's anarchist planet, coordinating

and administering "the division of labor, and the distribution of goods." In addition, the Anarresti are "aware that unavoidable centralization was a lasting threat, to be countered by lasting vigilance" (96). This vigilance helps explain the focus on stamping out egoism because egoizing operates as an early indicator that the subject is centralizing—being an individual—rather than thinking of the broader anarchist community.

The anarchist system Le Guin depicts also gives her an opportunity to touch on issues of gender and sexuality. The feminist undercurrent emerges in key discussions Shevek has with Urrasti citizens, notably Kimhoe, the freighter pilot transporting Shevek to Urras. Kimhoe questions whether the rumors about Anarres women are true; specifically, he wonders if the men of Anarres actually treat women as equals in spite of their "natural" weaknesses in strength and intelligence. Shevek cannot understand the social practicality of dividing labor according to a person's sex: "[I]t seems a very mechanical basis for the division of labor, doesn't it? A person chooses work according to interest, talent, strength—what has the sex to do with that?" (17); Shevek then concludes by wishing he were as tough as a woman. Kimhoe is shocked and bemoans Anarres's losses, including feminine delicacy and masculine self-respect. Kimhoe even expresses incredulity that Shevek could possibly believe that women are equal in mathematics and physics or that Anarresti men are willing to lower themselves to women's level. The equality that is achieved in such a harsh climate as Anarres is juxtaposed against the so-called freedom women have on Urras; specifically, Vea is entirely unconvincing in her attempts to convince Shevek that aside from their love of oil baths, pretty sandals, and belly jewels, women on Urras have significant power because they influence the Urrasti men who have the power.

The anarchy of Anarres, however, is by no means perfect nor perhaps even an ideal anarchist system. After all, as Shevek experiences firsthand, this anarchist system is failing. Sabul's power over Shevek, the remote job assignments given to punish Tirin, and the pervasive global censorship indicate that everyone may be equal on Anarres, but some are more equal than others. Centralization begets more centralization, and in these instances it is abundantly clear that a centralized cabal exists on Anarres. As Tom Moylan makes clear in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination,* "the primary social problem is the danger of centralization of power in an elite group and the reduction of the ideals of the revolution into a dogmatic ideology that itself inhibits further emancipatory activity" (100). Clearly Anarres is falling off the anarchist path:

Shevek repeatedly finds his intellectual will imposed upon by others; Bedap talks about repression on Anarres; and, the Syndicate of Initiative repeatedly meets with resistance from the PDC's Press Syndicate.

It is important to note that the subtitle of the novel calls this utopia an *ambiguous* one; in this fashion Anarres is a complicated social space because it appears lodged somewhere between a utopia and a dystopia. In this case it is better to consider the novel as neither utopian nor dystopian but, rather, an example of a new form of utopian discourse that emerged in the 1970s: the critical utopia. In *The Utopia Reader* Lyman Tower Sargent offers the following definition of the critical utopia: "a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve, and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre." This is distinctly different from the utopia as it highlights society as perpetually in flux rather than static; thus, readers can see the tensions, contradictions, and frictions of utopian societies as they struggle to articulate social dreaming.

Tom Moylan presents an equally effective understanding of the critical utopia in *Demand the Impossible*:

> A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. Furthermore, the novels dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (10-11)

In every way Anarres and its reliance on anarchist philosophy is an example of the critical utopia. First, *The Dispossessed* rejects an anarchist utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. This is embodied by the obstacles Shevek faces and the centralized cabal, headed by Sabul, that keeps him professionally stymied. However, in spite of these problems Shevek still advocates for anarchy while on Urras as he recognizes that the two planets can solve one another's problems. It is important to note that Le Guin ends the novel with Shevek's homecoming, his return to the flawed anarchy of Anarres rather than his outright rejection of it. Second, the novel repeatedly stages the conflict between the originary

world of Urras and the utopian society opposed to it. Through these oppositions the possibilities and pitfalls, the triumphs and tragedies of utopian practice are explored. Finally, in spite of the unification that the ansible will enable there are differences and imperfections within the utopian society of Anarres—as well as the originary society of Urras—that remain to be resolved long after Shevek returns to his home planet. In sum, in spite of anarchy's failings social dreaming is not lost; rather, *The Dispossessed* highlights that social dreaming, when put into practice, is an ongoing endeavor, a process of perpetual movement that, in striving for a better condition in the future, can potentially improve society in the present.

6

The Eye of the Heron (1978)

The Eye of the Heron is not part of Le Guin's Hainish sequence; in spite of its separation from this Hainish megatext, however, one can see many of the thematic issues that have appeared in *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *The Dispossessed* threading their way through *The Eye of the Heron,* notably such concepts as communication, exile, love, communal vision, and the need to bridge cognitive gaps. The novel addresses the very definition of "alien" and, in the process, reveals that one may be able to remove the Earthling from Earth, but removing Earth from the Earthling is much more difficult.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The Eye of the Heron is a story about divisions, community, parallelisms, and the search for new homes and new hope. It is set on Victoria, a planet that houses two small human civilizations. Human colonists on Victoria have only been on the planet for one or two generations; as a result, both Victoria City and Shantih Town have cultural baggage from Earth that must continually be negotiated in this new setting. In the case of the citizens of Victoria City, there is the history—one that is not openly spoken—of their penal background. The citizens of Victoria City are the descendants of criminals who had been expelled from Earth and forced to eke out a new existence on Victoria. These criminal exiles have grown to become the

Bosses of Victoria, ironically becoming the government and legal authority that mirrors those same figures on Earth that had expelled their own ancestors.

Unlike the City ancestors, the citizens of Shantih Town are political exiles from Earth who have been punished for their connection to the Long March. As one of the Shantih Town citizens describes it, the Long March was a peace movement on Earth that had attracted thousands upon thousands of followers. Opposed to the ongoing War with the Republic, this group began its peaceful protest in the City of Moskova (Russia) and proceeded to march across the European continent, drawing supporters from India, Africa, Europe, and other countries, all with the promise of leaving the City Lisboa for the Free Land of Montral in Canamerica. Upon arriving in Montral, however, they were arrested because of their unwieldy numbers and their foreign political sensibility. Those opposed to the Long March denounced the peace movement because they were concerned "their own people were leaving them and joining the Peace, and this could not be allowed, because they must all fight the Long War with the Republic […]" (147). Two thousand marchers, including the Mehta, Adelson, Kaminskaya, Wicewska, and Shults families, were expelled from Earth and sent to Victoria to join the convicts who had been expelled decades beforehand.

In many ways the exiled Long Marchers ended up trading one repressive system for another, as life on Victoria is controlled by the Bosses in the City. Although the City professes to be built upon legal authority and stability, it is an unjust social system that rigidly enforces a social class division, evident in City dwellers' tendency to patronize the citizens of Shantih Town by calling it Shanty Town. Early in the novel, a political delegation from the Town informs the City Councillors of its intention to have Towners migrate and expand into new territory north of the settlement; yet, before legitimate discussions can take place on the method by which this expansion can best serve both Town and City communities, the Towner leaders, including Vera Adelson, are arrested and jailed. Later, in its own attempt at political and geographical expansionism, the City Councillors initiate a mandatory labor draft and shepherd able-bodied Towner males to clear a forested area south of the City for future development. This labor draft is enforced by guards carrying guns and other weaponry and only adds to the growing resentment between Shantih Town and Victoria City. However, the labor draft is poorly organized and insufficiently manned; as a result, it falls apart as the Towners eventually decide to leave in the night and return to

Shantih Town, embarrassing the City Councillors and highlighting the City's military inadequacies.

The focus of the story, however, is on representatives from each of the communities and their internal growth as they mature and eventually occupy the same territory. The key figure of Shantih Town is Lev, a member of the Shults family and a direct descendant of one of the Long March leaders. Lev is one of the explorers searching for new land in the north. He is of a younger generation, one that recognizes that ongoing debates, discussions, and treaties with the City Councillors will not improve the living conditions in Shantih Town; rather, Lev (and others) recognizes the necessity of expanding beyond the current limitations of both Town and City. In that expansion, however, Lev and the majority of the Shantih Towners acknowledge the need to maintain a strong sense of community, a sensibility that involves *inclusion* of the City dwellers in the human expansion on Victoria rather than their alienation.

The second focus is on Luz Marina Falco Cooper, the daughter of Boss Falco, who is an important figure within the City political enclave. Luz's rebelliousness is immediately identified in her feelings of entrapment within the City and the Falco estate (Casa Falco) which serves as a symbolic link to her family's own penal background. One source of resentment for Luz is the expectation that her social role will be to marry and continue the Falco genealogy. Her two potential suitors—Herman Marquez and Herman Macmilan—are men that she despises.

Tellingly, Luz is given another option—one that will eventually lead her to freedom—through the figure of Vera Adelson. When Vera and the other Towner representatives are arrested following their "disruption" and "civil disobedience" at the Council chambers, Vera is housed at the Casa Falco estate because the City jail cannot accommodate a woman amidst the male prisoners. This "imprisonment" allows Luz to communicate with Vera as she tries to understand the political pacification that dominates Shantih Town. For example, when Luz later offers to help Vera escape and return to Shantih Town, Vera refuses, citing her promise to the City Councillors to await their final decision on the Town's proposal to expand North. Vera's refusal to defy her promise in spite of the unjust imprisonment confuses Luz. The longer Luz talks to Vera, however, the more she begins to appreciate the Shantih Towners and their different lifestyle.

This appreciation eventually becomes loyalty when she overhears her father talking with Herman Macmilan. As Luz explains to Vera, Falco's and Macmilan's plans involve establishing a secret military force and

pushing the Towners to instigate a violent clash with police forces, thereby giving the City the justification needed to resume the failed labor draft:

> They're planning a raid on the Town. They're going to take Lev and all the other leaders prisoner, and then try to make your people get angry and fight, so they can beat them up and send a lot of them to work on the new farms as punishment. They already sent some of them down there, but they all ran away, or the guards ran away—I didn't hear that part clearly. So now Macmilan is going with his "little army" and my father tells him to force the people to fight back, then they'll betray their ideas and then he can use them as he likes. (93)

Vera's effect on Luz's formerly limited view of the beliefs and values of Shantih Town is profound, as Luz decides to betray her father and the City he represents by sneaking to Shantih Town and warning them of the impending action. Although initially doubted by those in the Town who do not trust City dwellers, Luz is eventually believed and decides to stay with the Towners as an act of political defiance and Town solidarity.

Luz's defection only serves to strain the already fragile relationship she has with her father, but it is successful in delaying the planned City attack, at least temporarily. Boss Falco, in a private meeting with Lev, Luz, and other Towner representatives, attempts to instigate a prisoner trade: Luz for Vera. However, Boss Falco is unable to understand that his daughter has voluntarily chosen to remain with the Towners rather than return to the comfortable cell of Casa Falco. In addition, Falco claims he cannot stop the Council's plans, but only delay them. Whether this is true or not becomes irrelevant; Lev insists that Luz not give up her freedom of choice as part of political negotiations between City and Town. Lev insists that they are separate issues, and ultimately it is Luz's decision as to whether she will return to Boss Falco, a decision firmly in the negative.

This meeting mirrors a later meeting between Macmilan's "little army" and the thousands of Towners who refuse to be exploited by the City demands for forced labor. The Towners demand that the hostages, Vera included, be returned to Shantih Town lest "all cooperation in work, all trade, all furnishing of food, wood, cloth, ores, and products will cease" (132). Boss Falco once again broaches the topic of a prisoner trade; however, unlike the previous meeting, this one turns fatally violent when Herman Macmilan turns his gun on Lev and shoots him in the chest, killing him. What follows is a violent uprising and the tumultuous chaos of bodies as seventeen Towners are killed in the melee; more significant,

however, is the betrayal of Town philosophy, as the nonviolent Towners are responsible for the deaths of eight City dwellers in the clash.

This confrontation has a dramatic effect upon both Town and City. First, Lev, the de facto leader of the Town in Vera's absence, has been killed and the gap uneasily filled by Andre. Andre, however, is a mere shadow of Lev and lacks the same charismatic sense of leadership and forward thinking as Lev. Second, Luz learns that her father has killed Herman Macmilan. Fearing for his daughter's safety during the confrontation and angered that action had been taken without his direct orders, Boss Falco used his gun and clubbed Mamilan in the head, killing him instantly. Consequently, Falco has been jailed as a traitor to the City, his ancestral penal roots coming back to roost. Finally, an uneasy truce has apparently been achieved between Town and City. But in a conversation with Luz, Andre betrays uncertainty and doubt regarding the stability and endurance of the current political climate.

Perhaps because Luz has straddled both Town and City life she has a more realistic viewpoint than others; consequently, she does not trust the City's upholding of the current contract. As a result, she embraces Lev's dream of expanding beyond the Town and settling other areas of a planet that beckons with new frontiers and possibilities. Luz argues that the Long March is not over but merely transported from Earth to Victoria and, in the final pages of the text, she and 62 other Towners embark on a trek to new country, a new foundation for the creation of a new community that will not be based on exploitation. The 63 neo-colonists are only a first wave of explorers and settlers, a number small enough not to attract the attention of the City Councillors nor negatively disrupt the relationship that currently exists between Shantih Town and Victoria City. By the end of the novel, this first group of colonists has mirrored the first group of travelers that opened the novel and, together, have settled into a new communal space. As the novel ends, Luz and the settlers engage in a primal act of ownership, calling their new community Heron, or Heron Pool, naming it after the indigenous "birds" of Victoria.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

There are a variety of inter-related conflicts that Le Guin stages in *The Eye of the Heron*. First and foremost is the conflict between the Town and the City. Victoria City is a community based on privilege and the exploitation of the working class in Shantih Town. This rigid social exploitation of Towners by the City is keeping the Towners perpetually locked in a

near-poverty level existence. It becomes quite clear, however, that the City relies upon the Towners to a much greater extent than the Towners rely on the City and it is only the peaceful political ideology of the Towners that prevents them from staging an uprising.

As with all of Le Guin's novels, however, the focus is on the effects the complex setting and plot machinations have on its citizens, notably Lev (Towner) and Luz (City). It is in their interactions with their environment and eventually one another that the heart of the novel resides. As one of the younger members of Shantih Town, Lev is first introduced in *The Eye of the Heron* on the expedition to find more suitable land for Town colonizing. He is introduced with an indigenous creature with chameleon-like abilities perched in his hand—a wotsit. As Le Guin describes it, there is no sense of ownership or conquest in this scene: "A small creature crouched in the warm, shallow cup of his palms. He was not holding it; it had decided or consented to be there" (1). This consent is a fundamental aspect of Lev's character—and that of the Towners in general—as is his exploration of new, more fertile ground upon which to build a community. Consent, as opposed to imposition, is the goal of Shantih Town.

Lev embodies the outward gaze of a younger generation that cannot remain enmeshed in the social stratification of the two human colonies on Victoria. He sees new lands and new possibilities, evident in his presence on the exploration party, and he gently rubs up against the older traditions of negotiations with the City councillors. This is immediately evident in the first meeting of the Towners and City representatives, headed by Boss Falco. When the Towner delegation broaches the topic of expanding northward they are informed that their maps and reports are valuable assets but further discussions pertaining to migration will have to be studied by the Council. Vera cordially replies that she thanks Boss Falco for his invitation; however, Falco makes it immediately clear he is not offering an invitation but an expectation that the maps and reports will be forwarded to Council within three days. It is Lev, the younger Towner, who allows the cordiality of the meeting to slip: "'We thank Councillor Falco,' Lev said, 'and decline his invitation'" (11–12). In spite of its subtlety, this is an act of open defiance against the City authority and serves to spark some controversy within the Towner community that is symbolic of generational conflict: "On the porch, two groups formed: the explorers and other men and women, mostly young, around Vera [and Lev], and a larger group around a fair, blue-eyed man named Elia. Down among the crowd this pattern was repeated, until it began to look like a ringtree forest: small circles, mostly young, and larger circles, mostly older" (12).

With Vera's imprisonment in Casa Falco, Lev takes on a leadership role and matures from a young upstart to a conscientious representative of the Towners and their pacifist philosophy. When Lev and other Towners are removed from their communities under the pretence of the labor draft, they recognize the importance of clearing the Southern Valley and its long-term benefits in easing the overcrowding of both City and Town. Yet when the workers are repeatedly treated as slaves, Lev organizes a nonviolent protest: He leads the Towners to abandon the labor draft under the cover of night, and, en masse, they return to Shantih Town. This is seen as a victory as "[t]hey had won their battle without violence. No deaths; one injury. The 'slaves' freed without making a threat or striking a blow; the Bosses running back to their Bosses to report failure, and perhaps to wonder why they had failed, and to begin to understand, to see the truth" (89).

The manner by which the Towners resist the City is through their position as the People of the Peace—Lev and the Towners are pacifists. Pacifism is antithetical to warfare and violence; in other words, pacifists believe that "the waging of war by a state and the participation in war by an individual are absolutely wrong, under any circumstances" (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*). It is for this reason that they do not engage in any physical retaliation when Towners are being forcibly drafted into labor camps or economically oppressed by the unfair business dealings of the City. In fact, the People of the Peace find strength in the historical lineage of pacifism (including the father of nonviolent protest, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi [1869–1948], referenced at least twice in the novel). In chapter eight, Lev outlines for Luz the four basic steps to pacifist handling of disputes:

1. Negotiation and arbitration: an attempt to reason and negotiate with City councillors to resolve the dispute;
2. Noncooperation: the Towners reject the City's orders and refuse to follow their demands until negotiation and/or arbitration can take places;
3. Issuing of an ultimatum: the City is provided with a constructive solution to the current dispute and warned that noncompliance will result in repercussions;
4. Civil disobedience: the Towners refuse to follow any laws or orders issued by the City and establish an independent governing authority to determine the Towner course. (108–09)

Boss Falco recognizes Lev's growing importance as a pacifist leader, and part of his plan to break Towner spirit is to capture all the Town leaders

(Lev Shults included) in a plan that fails following Luz's "defection" to Shantih Town. In spite of Lev's eventual death, however, it seems somehow fitting that he should die a martyr to the cause of peace, sacrificing himself for his community in the ultimate sign of maturity. In spite of his tragic fate, Lev's death is not in vain, as his cause is taken up by the other protagonist of the novel: Luz Marina Falco Cooper.

Luz's transformation from a sheltered child to a mature young woman is much more dramatic and is embedded in her personal feelings of imprisonment and betrayal. For Luz, Casa Falco and the social expectation that she is to marry a respectable suitor are untenable: "She would be a wife. She would be a daughter-in-law. She would wear her hair in a bun, and scold the servants, and listen to the men carousing in the hall after supper, and have babies […]. Luz made a face and spat. She spat on the tiled floor of her room, and let the spittle lie" (24). The possibility of marrying either Herman Marquez or Herman Macmilan demonstrates the social restrictions Luz is facing; namely, one Herman is just like the other. Both options are equally frustrating. As *The Eye of the Heron* continues, Luz's initial resistance to her father emerges as a resistance to the lies and deceit of the City; but it is not until Vera's arrival destabilizes the social dynamic of Casa Falco that Luz acquires a political direction. In her discussions with Vera, Luz begins to integrate the complex and confusing feelings she is having regarding the relationship between Town and City. Luz cannot accept that her father is attempting to instigate violent conflict and returns betrayal for betrayal by joining the Towners. No longer content to simply spit on her bedroom floor, Luz makes a leap into adulthood when she chooses her politics and stands beside the Towners in direct opposition to her father and the City. It is this scene that heralds Luz's rebirth and emergence as a commendable proxy to Lev's Towner vision of establishing a new community separate from the oppressive boots of the City. *The Eye of the Heron* begins with one three-lettered *L* (Lev) balancing a wotsit in his hand while exploring the countryside for a new home; the novel concludes with the other three-lettered *L* (Luz) balancing a wotsit in her hand while exploring the countryside for a new home. Lev may have died, but his spirit lives on in Luz.

In spite of the military power the City possesses, the pacifist politics of the Towners prove successful as a negotiated settlement of the dispute is arrived at (albeit perhaps only temporarily) and, more important, the Towners achieve a goal that had been articulated to the City Council at the beginning of the novel: the establishment of a new community. The decision to name it Heron or Heron Pool is also symbolic of the centrality Luz comes to take on in Shantih Town and, more important, the new

community. When Luz first arrived to Shantih Town Lev insisted the Town was where she belonged as she was "never like the other City girls, you didn't fit, you didn't belong. You belong here. The truth matters to you" (106). What Lev came to realize, however, was that Luz "was different, alien to him. Like the gray heron of the Meeting Pool, there was a silence in her, a silence that drew him, drew him aside toward a new center" (110). Although Lev does not live to see that new center, it is one based on a new sense of community embodied by the establishing of Heron Pool at the end of the novel, a new circle of community that surrounds Luz and symbolizes wholeness, strength, and balance.

THEME

As with her other novels, Le Guin's *The Eye of the Heron* is about achieving a sense of balance; yet this novel takes this thematic exploration into new terrain by focusing on the importance of home and the circle of life. It opens with the exploration of the planet Victoria in hopes of establishing a new settlement. By the end of the novel, Luz and the other explorers have moved into the future, scouted the terrain, and begun the process of establishing the settlement. Of course, the future in this novel remains open to speculation, as these explorers face hard work; but the desire to build a new world, figuratively if not literally, addresses the need to build a new home and community. In spite of the solidity of Shantih Town, its citizens were never truly free to chart their own destiny, one that needn't be separate from the destiny of the City. In Heron Pool, however, these settlers are not bound by the binary restrictions of "Town" nor "City," and *The Eye of Heron* dramatizes the need for a truly stable and equitable community to define "home." In sum, if the old adage that "home is where the heart is" is true, then *The Eye of the Heron* presents Heron Pool as a new heart for the planet Victoria.

ALTERNATE READING: COLONIAL LANGUAGE

The Eye of the Heron can also be read as exploring the tensions surrounding colonial sensibilities and the imposition of language. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica Online,* colonialism refers to a "political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world" and "[b]y discovery, conquest, and settlement, these nations expanded and colonized throughout the world, spreading European institutions and culture." There are

multiple manifestations of the colonial project (for example, military, economic, education) but language is particularly central to the process, and this is clearly staged in *The Eye of the Heron.* According to the editors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures,* language "becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (7). In other words, language provides the means of communication *and* the means of ordering the world in such a way that it can be communicated from one person to the other. This is evident in an early conversation Luz has with her father. The history of the City and its citizens is given a revisionist gloss by Boss Falco when he responds to his daughter's questions about their lineage. When Luz reveals to her father that she has been told by the Towners of their convict past, a past that mirrors Australia's convict colonial history, Boss Falco revises the language of history and spins their checkered past into a more heroic story:

> [Y]ou let them tell you that Luis Firmin Falco, my great-grandfather, the founder of our House, was a thief, a jailbird. What do they know about it! I know, and I can tell you, what our ancestors were. They were men. Men too strong for Earth. The Government on Earth sent them here because they were afraid of them. The best, the bravest, the strongest—all the thousands of little weak people on Earth were afraid of them, and trapped them, and sent them off in the one-way space ships, so that they could do as they liked with Earth, you see. (22)

In Falco's version of history, the margin (the planet Victoria) writes against the center (Earth) and redefines "convicts" as "real men" and "criminal imprisonment" as "betrayal" and "entrapment." In many ways Boss Falco dramatizes a colonization of thought—knowledge and representation of history—that can be achieved when language is carefully deployed, regulated, and used to control reality.

The use of language to order reality, however, is not infallible nor entirely successful. This is particularly evident in the repeated symbolic function of the heron:

> The Victorian heron was not a heron; it was not even a bird. To describe their new world the exiles had had only words from their old world. The creatures that lived by the pools, one pair to a pool, were stilt-legged, pale-gray fish eaters: so

> they were herons. The first generation had known that they were not really herons, that they were not birds, nor reptiles, nor mammals. The following generations did not know what they were not, but did, in a way, know what they were. They were herons. (47)

In this example, the "heron" occupies an ambivalent position because it is, by definition, not a heron; however, "heron" (as defined on Earth) is the only reference point the inhabitants of Victoria can use to form a mentally coherent picture of this strange creature. In other words, language is used to colonize the landscape—the indigenous bird is folded into language that has been imported from the Imperial center of Earth and then applied to Victoria—so that its settlers can have stable reference points to the environment. Objects that cannot be encapsulated in language remain alien, and on a fundamental level the alien, the unknown, initiates anxiety. Even if the heron is not really an Earth heron, it allows the settlers to grasp this creature on a conceptual level and replace its alien-ness with familiarity. Similarly, Shantih Town or Shanty Town and Victoria City—the former a common name for any city slum on Earth; the latter a reference to Queen Victoria (1819–1901), who reigned during the peak of European colonialism—provide a familiar conceptual space and a way of creating stability for two communities wedged into a narrow strip of land on an alien planet.

Of course, the problem with this naming process is the inability to fully encapsulate the object in the imposition of language. For example, in spite of the heron's name, it still retains some of its alien-ness that no amount of linguistic imposition can fully erase. In other words, this creature is still able to retain some of its alien-ness as neither bird, nor reptile, nor mammal. The imposition of language is only partially successful; there is still a conceptual gap between the word "heron" and the living object it signifies. It is for this reason that *The Eye of the Heron* ends by depicting this gap between the indigenous creatures and the Heron Pool settlers: "Elegant, long-legged, silent, the herons went about their own business of food, gathering on the other side of the wide, dark pool; sometimes they paused in the shallows to gaze at the people with clear, quiet colorless eyes. Sometimes, on still cold evenings before snow, they danced" (179). Similarly, Luz is seen holding an insect, a wotsit, in her hands; yet, the name of this insect—"wotsit" = "what's it?"—highlights the incompleteness of language as this fragile creature also remains indissolubly alien. In the end, the novel dramatizes the need to impose

language upon the landscape and the (perhaps inevitable) manner by which even alien terrain that has been made familiar remains, to one extent, alien on some level.

The Eye of the Heron is another masterpiece by Le Guin that blends pacifist politics with the colonial deployment of language all the while embodying these issues in the maturation and interpersonal bonds that emerge in its two protagonists: Luz Falco and Lev Shults. The novel operates on a variety of registers, and explains why it appeals to both the adult and youth markets simultaneously.

7

The Telling (2000)

With the release of *The Telling* in 2000, Ursula K. Le Guin finally returned to the Hainish sequence after a lengthy absence. Although she had visited the Hainish universe in shorter pieces (for example *Four Ways to Forgiveness* [1995]) *The Telling* was her first novel-length exploration of yet another facet of the Ekumen since *The Dispossessed*. Unlike either *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *The Dispossessed*, however, *The Telling* is more succinct in its world-building scope. This is not to suggest that Le Guin has lost her narrative storytelling abilities. *The Telling* is almost poetic in its use of sparse descriptions and evocative language that capture the "human" spirit of its characters. It is once again a thoughtful exploration from a Grand Master of science fiction.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

As with *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, *The Telling* features a stranger to an alien world struggling to come to grips with the surrounding discontinuities and politics. What is of interest, however, is the conflict taking place between the advanced settlement of the central authority in the (Dovza) City and the resistance happening on the margins in towns such as Okzat-Ozkat, a pattern central to the structure of *The Eye of the Heron.* In this case, *The Telling* follows Sutty, an Observer for the Ekumen, who is stationed on the planet Aka. What makes Aka so

interesting is its position as a mirror to Terra (aka Earth), Sutty's home planet. In a series of flashbacks, Le Guin depicts the Terra of Sutty's childhood as a planet struggling with Unism, a religious fundamentalism so strident that *all* forms of knowledge—other religions, literature, mathematics, sciences, even music—were actively destroyed in a series of purges. One of the earliest scenes is during the Time of Cleansing, when a squadron of planes from the Host of God bombs the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and reduces it to rubble. After all, "[o]nly one Word, only one Book. All other words, all other books were darkness, error. They were dirt. *Let the Lord shine out!* cried the pilots in their white uniforms and mirror-masks, back at the church at Colorado Base, facelessly facing the cameras and the singing, swaying crowds in ecstasy. *Wipe away the filth and let the Lord shine out!*" (4–5). On the other hand, Aka has gone to the opposite fundamentalist extreme and is advocating an age of Pure Science that bans alternate forms of knowledge and creative expression. In moving from Terra to Aka, Sutty has simply traded one fundamentalist regime for another. She has slipped through the looking glass to land on a planet that is quite similar to Terra.

This similarity is particularly problematic for Sutty, as her role as an Observer for the Ekumenical Envoy Tong Ov is repeatedly challenged by her inability to maintain objectivity; instead, she continually judges Aka and then chastises herself for making preliminary judgments. In fact, her inability to remain objective has Sutty believing that she has failed her first assignment and will be returned to Terra. To her surprise, however, Tong Ov wants her to embark on an officially sanctioned excursion to leave Dovza City and make contact with one of the many rural villages, Okzat-Ozkat. For Tong Ov, this is a significant event, as all previous requests to move beyond the walls of Dovza City have been denied by Aka's ruling party, the Corporation. This is an opportunity to explore Aka's pre-Corporation history, a history that has been gradually expunged from the official records. In addition, Tong Ov has a theory that Terran colonists may have made contact with Aka at some point in the past. While one manned expedition, authorized by the Ekumen, is on record, there is no record of a second expedition; yet the peculiarities of Aka's language and the relative youth of the Corporation suggest to Tong Ov that there may be closer ties to Terra than anyone knows.

Although Sutty feels she is not the right person to go to Okzat-Ozkat, Tong Ov informs her that the other two Observers—Ki Ala and Garru—are not up to the task; rather, Ov needs someone who has an ambiguous

relationship with both religion and *any* form of fundamentalism. Sutty's task is to survey this mountainous village, because if any remnants of the pre-Corporation culture of Aka have survived they are likely to be located in remote areas. Tong Ov concludes by warning Sutty that she may be isolated on her trip and/or the Corporation may be watching her, so she must take confidence in her ability and be very careful.

Sutty reluctantly embarks on her trip and heads to Okzat-Ozkat on the Ehera River Ferry Eight. Sutty has no real relationships in Dovza City; everyone fulfills their various roles and slots, mimes the appropriate speech, and discusses the appropriate topics of conversation. On the ferry, however, the situation is quite different—the further from Dovza City she goes the more conversant the passengers become. She is thrilled at the change and is increasingly hopeful that some aspect of pre-Corporation Aka culture may have survived. After several days aboard, she has a short conversation with the only other traveler who embarked from Dovza City, a Monitor from the Sociocultural Bureau, a Corporate agency that includes the Central Ministry of Poetry and Art and the World Ministry of Information. During their sometimes-stiff conversations, Sutty marvels at the natural wonders of rural Aka. The Monitor, on the other hand, reveals that he despises the countryside and compares it to a desert.

After a week-long journey to Okzat-Ozkat, Sutty quickly finds shelter and begins making associations with the local citizens. Two such individuals are Iziezi and her 15-year-old nephew, Akidan, who rent Sutty a room. This association immediately begins Sutty's transformation. In the producer-consumer culture of Dovza City, meaningless pleasantries (for example, greetings, leave-taking, thanks, welcoming) are forbidden as they serve no use-value; yet Sutty thanks Iziezi for her hospitality. Then Akidan refers to Sutty as *yoz*, a word denoting "fellow person" that has been banned by the Corporation for 50 years, as consumer economies don't have "fellow" persons but only negotiating parties. The next morning, Sutty tries to use her ZIL (an identification chip) to pay for a two-week stay, but Iziezi uses nonelectronic bookkeeping to record her visit, essentially allowing any guest to stay off the Corporation's economic radar.

Locally, Sutty notices that signs and buildings have faded print that is in neither of the planet's two official languages. Stepping into an apothecary, she begins to translate a portion out loud that references trees, roots, and leaves. At this point Sotyu Ang, the Fertiliser, warns her not to speak the old language aloud. He gives her some moisturizer to soften the "bark" of her skin and then very quietly bids her adieu with a portion

of the language she had been translating. A short time later, Iziezi invites Sutty to join her in her Corporation-sponsored exercise routine. When she joins them, it is more akin to yoga meditation than the high-impact exercises authorized by the Corporation. Moments later, the lights snap sharply on and people begin jumping and shouting, a ruse to fool the Corporate officials who have intruded on the exercise routine.

Sutty eventually tells Iziezi that she wishes to read books about the old culture; however, she insists she be put in touch with someone who does not have family members depending on them, in case of negative repercussions to Sutty's investigations. After receiving a reply from Tong Ov authorizing her line of research, Sutty inquires openly about the old culture; furthermore, the Monitor, who has been carefully watching Sutty, is ordered to halt his surveillance of Sutty and her actions. With such freedoms, Sutty learns more about Aka's history and assembles coherent pictures from the fragments scattered around Okzat-Ozkat. Sutty learns a great detail from Sotyu Ang, a representative of a neo-naturalist philosophy that encapsulates the notion of Man and Nature being One. She learns about the *umyazu,* a banned word essentially denoting a temple or monastery that served the purpose of education. During the rise of the Corporation, these places were bombed and destroyed, except for Golden Mountain, which was appropriated as the Corporate Site for the worship of the God of Reason. Finally, Sutty learns that the *maz* engage in the Telling, the transmission of stories that do not follow rules of orders. Although she attempts to find the definitive text of the Great System, Sutty fails to do so, as there is no central text but "dozens of upanishads, a million sutras" (102).

Unsuccessful in finding an authoritative text, she then shifts to studying the *maz* themselves (highly educated people who engage in telling stories to the *yaz*) and listens to their stories. The *maz* are always sexual couples—both homosexual and heterosexual—who pledge eternal devotion to one another, even after one partner has died. The *maz* are devoted to the Telling and live in poverty. They find meaning in life in the telling of the stories. Over the following weeks Sutty continues attending maz Odiedin Manma's clandestine exercise classes. At one such class, a man tries to help her do a step she doesn't understand and he accidentally levitates off the ground. Later, Sutty's mind begins to rationalize the event and she imagines there must have been a black box he was stepping on that she couldn't see. Nevertheless, Sutty struggles with her rational mind and the distinct memory that the man *was* levitating. Sutty eventually exhausts the knowledge available in Okzat-Ozkat, which is symbolized

by her discovery that maz Sotyu Ang's store has been closed down and painted over and the remnants of the language irrecoverably lost. At this point, maz Elyed tells Sutty that she should really go to Mount Silong: Okzat-Ozkat contains only fragments of the old culture, but Mount Silong has one of the biggest *umyazu*, with books, artifacts, and records of the old culture.

The path to Mount Silong is long and treacherous and discourages anyone from following. With maz Odiedin Manma and Akidan as guides and companions, Sutty embarks on the lengthy pilgrimage. One morning nearly 10 days after they began their trek, Sutty believes she can hear the sound of an engine or helicopter; while she cannot see anything, her instincts prove accurate, as she is being followed. While continuing their trek, the pursuing helicopter crashes, killing everyone aboard save the Monitor, whose pursuit of Sutty into the mountains has not been authorized by the Corporation. Badly injured, the Monitor is attached to a sling and brought to Silong.

In the complex cave-and-tunnel system of Silong is a vast array of books, a living history of Aka that has been methodically abolished and erased by the Corporation. Sutty does her best to record whole texts in her recorder, a clearly impossible task given the breadth of materials. More important, she begins a series of conversations with Yara, the Monitor, and discovers that the two of them have much in common. Yara firmly believes that the religious Telling can only result in a step backwards for Aka, a move to an old conservatism and a return to the dark ages that are antithetical to the notions of progress affiliated with the Ekumen. His position slowly shifts, however, upon hearing of Sutty's Terra. Brought up to believe in the inherent superiority of the Ekumen, Yara learns of Earth, a planet that has slid towards its own repressive barbarity, its later climb out of fundamentalism by the actions of the Terran Envoy Dalzul, and the Holy Wars accompanying such change. Yara comes to realize the Ekumen is not perfect but is equally as flawed as any human organization.

By novel's end both Sutty and Yara come to realize that the Monitor is in an impossible position because he cannot be returned to the Corporation lest he reveal the location of the repository on Mount Silong. The newly transformed Yara apparently understands this as well; rather than live as a prisoner on Mount Silong or be forced to reveal Silong's location to the Corporation, he opts to throw himself off a cliff in a manner mirroring an ancient Telling, to be discussed below.

Yara was also responsible for enlightening Sutty on a secret of Aka's past, a secret that validates Tong Ov's theory of an unrecorded second

visit from Terra. Some time after the first Ekumen ship left Aka, a ship of Terran Unists offering technology in exchange for religious conversion had arrived. While Aka benefited from the technology, its citizens refused the terms of payment—spiritual conversion—and imprisoned, possibly even killed, the Unist missionaries. This is a particularly important moment as it explains the distrust the Corporation has towards the Ekumen; namely, they are still waiting to be told the price they need to pay for their use of Terran technologies and the missionaries' deaths. Upon Sutty's long return back to Dovza City, she develops a plan to free the Telling from the censure of the Corporation. Sutty convinces Tong Ov that the Telling—its books, its culture, its people—is the price to be paid by the Corporation for all the information and technology the Ekumen has provided to Aka. As a result, there is a decriminalization of the *maz* and the Telling and, as the story ends, Sutty is involved in the negotiations that will presumably change Aka for the better.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Le Guin's indebtedness to Taoism is particularly prevalent in the character development of Sutty, the protagonist of the novel. As with Shevek (*The Dispossessed*) and Genly Ai (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), Sutty is displaced from her surroundings on Aka and is in desperate need of achieving a sense of balance in her life. Having fled the religious fundamentalism of Terra, Sutty has landed on Aka, a planet ruled by the Corporation's secular fundamentalism. As she remarks, "[s]ecular terrorists or holy terrorists, what difference?" (58). In addition, Sutty is besieged by self-doubt and anxiety, repeatedly chastising herself for her social gaffs and allowing her personal feelings to influence her interactions on Aka. For example, in the beginning of the novel, as Sutty is walking to her meeting with Tong Ov, she begins to mentally complain about the overwhelming slogans on Aka, the songs, the hype, the traffic jams, and the food (akagest). She suddenly cuts herself off: "Judgmentalism. Wrong to let frustration cloud her thinking and perceptions. Wrong to admit prejudice. Look, listen, notice: observe. That was her job. This wasn't her world" (9). These self-recriminations repeatedly plague Sutty until her transformation in both Okzat-Ozkat and then Mount Silong.

Sutty's task on Aka proves quite challenging, as she is haunted by the religious fundamentalism of Terra and the price it has exacted; specifically, Sutty still grieves over the death of Pao, a woman Sutty met on Terra on Freedom Day. Pao became the love of Sutty's life and they made

future plans to join the Ekumen together. They dreamed of a brighter future exploring the cosmos and loving one another on alien planets. During the Christmas holidays, however, Pao is killed during a Holy War raid initiated by the Purifiers of Earth. Still working through her grief at the loss of Pao, Sutty's memories repeatedly intrude while on Aka: "She thought: Pao should be here. By me. She would have been here. We would have been happy" (37). This loss of love leaves Sutty isolated, enmeshed in her grief, her self-critique, and the complicated mix of familiarity and alienness of Aka.

This loss of Sutty's lover, however, has much more profound effects, as it is the very symbol of Sutty's imbalance. In Sandra J. Lindow's analysis of the novel, she remarks that "[i]n Chinese 'Pao' is the same as 'Tao.' Pao means 'something of value' or 'a little gift' but more importantly it refers to the Tao Te Ching […] Sutty is a character who has lost the loving centre of her life, Pao and Tao" (71–2). If Taoism is about achieving balance, Sutty is clearly unbalanced in a variety of manners; thus, the personal arc of the narrative is Sutty's Taoist search for balance in her life. This balance only comes about through her exposure to the Telling, the religious center of Aka that has been repressed and decimated by the secularism of the Corporation's capitalist ideology. Like the Handdara of *The Left Hand of Darkness,* the Akan religion (or Telling) is based on achieving balance, a "[p]rimal division of being into material and spiritual only as two-as-one, or one in two aspects. No hierarchy of Nature and Supernatural. No binary Dark/Light, Evil/Good, or Body/Soul. No afterlife, no rebirth, no immortal disembodied or reincarnated soul. No heavens, no hells. The Akan system is a spiritual discipline with spiritual goals, but they're exactly the same goals it seeks for bodily and ethical well-being" (95).

Once Sutty is removed from Dovza City, she begins to experience an awakening that strengthens both her mind and her spirit. She slowly stops chastising herself for her apparent lack of objectivity and, through the Telling and texts of Silong, gradually matures from a timid, self-critical girl to a powerful woman who negotiates the future direction of Aka. This growth and confidence is perhaps best seen in Sutty's interactions with Yara. Initially, Yara is assigned to monitor Sutty, and he appears as a politically dangerous character. Sutty maintains a distance from this direct representation of the Corporation while in Okzat-Ozkat. In Silong, however, Sutty is able to spend time with Yara, and he is gradually fleshed out as a real character. Sutty begins to understand his world. He reveals he has also been traumatized. As a result of growing amid the complications of *maz* grandparents, corrupt *maz* parents, and the apparent

progressiveness of the Ekumen, Yara firmly believes in a future based on technological progress and not the apparently anachronistic beliefs of myths and superstitions:

> Your people came here and they brought a new world with them. A promise of our own world made greater, made better. They wanted to give us that. But the people who wanted to accept that world were stopped, prevented, by the old ways. The old ways of doing everything. The maz mumbling forever about things that happened ten thousand years ago, claiming they knew everything about everything, refusing to learn anything new, keeping people poor, holding us back. They were wrong. They were selfish. Usurers of knowledge. They had to be pushed aside to make way for the future. And if they kept standing in the way, they had to be punished. We had to show people that they were wrong. My grandparents were wrong. They were enemies of the state. They would not admit it. They refused to change. (215)

In many ways, Sutty and Yara are parallel streams in their shared experiences and awakenings.

As Raffaella Baccolini notes, in order for Sutty to understand Aka, "she must come to terms with her own history and with her painful memories, particularly the death of her lover Pao at the hand of Terran religious fundamentalists. In her search to recover and preserve an endangered history, she discovers that she needs to do her own telling" (123). In her Telling, Sutty must reacquire Pao, both emotionally and spiritually, and the doubled nature of her name becomes evident. Sutty reveals to Yara that her name was taken from the mythological story of Sati, the Hindu god and Shiva's wife. Questioning her uncle about the significance of her name, Sutty learned that Shiva and Sati are not two distinct beings but are complementary aspects of one being: "Sati is Shiva, and Shiva is Sati. You are the lover and the griever. You are the anger. You are the dance" (212). For too long Sutty has been living an incomplete life, one half of a dualistic whole, the angry one unable to dance, the griever unable to love. Once in Okzat-Ozkat and then in Silong, however, Sutty realizes "[s]he had come to Aka to learn how to sing this world's tune, to dance its dance; and at last, she thought, away from the city's endless noise, she was beginning to hear the music and to learn how to move to it" (91). Similarly, she learns to love on the journey to Mount Silong and engages in a relationship with Kieri, the first sexual contact she has had since the death of Pao.

She begins to accept the world around her and allow herself to accept Pao's death, her own ambivalence regarding religious expression, her importance to Aka, and the strength of her own character.

THEME

As in the other novels, the Taoist search for balance is the key theme of *The Telling*. Although set in a far-future time and location, Sutty's struggles are personal ones shared by all who have doubted their abilities, grieved over the loss of a loved one, or found themselves stymied by a dominant religious/political ideology. This has always been Le Guin's strength; her thought experiments are closely tied to the real-world experiences of her characters. Aside from such personal struggles, however, is Le Guin's exploration of cultural diversity and cultural genocide. In an online interview with Nick Gevers, Le Guin identifies the inspiration for the novel:

> Actually, it was not Tibetan Buddhism, but what happened to the practice and teaching of Taoism under Mao that was the initial impetus of the book. I was shocked to find that a 2500-year-old body of thought, belief, ritual, and art could be, had been, essentially destroyed within ten years, and shocked to find I hadn't known it, though it happened during my adult lifetime. The atrocity, and my long ignorance of it, haunted me. I had to write about it, in my own sidelong fashion.

In many respects, her novel is the Telling of Taoism and her own attempts to record and solidify memory amidst the shadow of forgetfulness (Lindow 73).

ALTERNATE READING: CRITICAL DYSTOPIA

In addition to *The Telling*'s novel-length return to the Hain and her exploration of Taoism through Sutty's character development, Le Guin's text also represents a return to utopia, which, as discussed in the exploration of *The Dispossessed,* is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (Sargent 1). In *The Telling,* however, Le Guin steps through the looking glass to explore the utopia from the opposite end; in other words, while *The Dispossessed* is a representative example of the critical utopia, *The Telling* is a representation of the critical dystopia. The critical dystopia is a subset of utopian discourse that emerged towards the end of the twentieth century. As Raffaella Baccolini

and Tom Moylan describe it in "Dystopias and History," their introduction to *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, the classic dystopia—for example George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*—typically positions hope *outside* the narrative pages. In other words, hope resides in the reader who hopefully recognizes the dystopian text as a warning to prevent the narrative future from becoming an articulated reality. Social dreaming—the utopian impulse—is thus used as a means of social prevention. The critical dystopia, however, writes hope into the narrative itself; in other words, the "ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition" for subjects to resist the dominant hegemony of the social order (Baccolini and Moylan 7). This often takes the form of utopian enclaves that operate as sites of resistance and within which social dreaming takes place.

Enclaves of resistance can be found throughout *The Telling.* First there are the *maz* and the physical spaces of the *umyazu.* As living records of the Telling, the *maz* are embodiments of alternate forms of knowledge, living archives of a past that Sutty learns is alive. Furthermore, the *umyazu,* notably Mount Silong, is the physical repository of a past the Corporation has been unable to wholeheartedly erase from the historical record. Mount Silong is the physical enclave that mirrors the living archive of the *maz.* Of course, the weight of hope in this critical dystopia resides with Sutty, as she is the character who negotiates a future for the practitioners of the Telling.

These utopian embodiments are in direct contrast to the two dystopias of the text: Terra and Aka. Sutty's home planet is darkened by the religious fundamentalism and zealousness that has authorized only one path of life. Two early images set the tone of Terra. First, Sutty's aunt, a proud woman in her home village, is wasting her life away in Vancouver. She has slowly retreated from life and has cocooned herself away from the harsh reality of Terra. Second, the squadron of planes from the Host of God flies to Washington, D.C., and bombs the Library to destroy any historical record that would challenge the Unists. This is mirrored in the Corporation's suppression of the Telling on Aka. Both groups are eradicating an archive of belief, faith, and understanding. This archival destruction is a fundamental maneuver in destroying memory and thereby controlling the present. This allows the ruling power(s) to dictate the flow of history and to authorize knowledge. Thus, the warfare taking place on Terra and Aka are as much physical assaults as psychic assaults

because the destruction of memory erodes the cultural, spiritual, and communal anchors of social identity.

Sutty's experiences on Terra leave her unsure of herself when living on Aka, a planet undergoing its own fundamentalist warfare on memory. Unlike Terra, the fundamentalism on Aka is one of secularism, as scientific principles have eroded and repressed any spiritual belief system. As Raffaella Baccolini writes, "with its focus on mercantilism and religious fundamentalism, the novel establishes that there is no single truth on Aka and that the dangers of fundamentalism are when one idea is allowed to become the only idea" (124). Due to the limitations brought about by space travel, Sutty's escape from Terra's religious fundamentalism is, ironically, to a planet embroiled in its own secularized fundamentalism: Sutty has simply traded one dystopia for another.

The stories that encompass the Telling and the growing library of Silong resist the dystopian darkness because of the persistence of memory: "[h]istory, memory, and the telling of tales are subversive elements in that they promote hope and the potential for change. In living their culture, the people of the Telling challenge the hegemonic discourse of the Corporation and create for themselves a way to attain freedom" (Baccolini 126). Sutty's relationship to the Telling and the texts of Silong is a good representation of Taoism's *wu wei*, action through inaction; namely, accomplishment takes place through minimal action, and the art of studying the nature and patterns of life have an effect in the least disruptive manner. Throughout much of Sutty's experiences in Okzat-Ozkat and Silong, she (in)actively goes with the flow of those around her, gradually becoming attuned to the Telling and its function on Aka. Thus, her attempt to record the texts of Silong has no tangible effect on the physical texts themselves but allows some of them to be archived and preserved. Consequently, the memory of the Telling is not washed away by the machinations of the Corporation.

Yara also comes to embody hope and memory in spite of his suicide. While appearing as finality, his suicide is both an acknowledgment and a validation of the Telling. He would rather die than return to the secular fundamentalism of his old life under the Corporation's rule. In addition, his choice of suicide is itself a Telling. It mirrors the Telling of Penan and Teran, Silong warriors and ancient enemies of the barbarians Rangma. While Teran is killed in battle Penan leads his people to safety only to saddle "the south wind, the sea wind, and [ride] it up into the mountains, where he leapt from the wind and died" (165). Penan's body is returned to nature in the cyclical pattern but he (and Teran) achieves immortality

in the Telling. So too does Yara join the circularity of life by allowing himself to be picked up and returned to the wind and, in spite of his death, he, like Penan, continues to live through the Telling, his life transformed into a means rather than a destination. As Sutty sits with the Executives of the Corporation at the conclusion of the novel to negotiate Aka's place in the Ekumen and the ongoing survival of the Telling, "it was Yara's face that she held in her mind as the bargaining began. His life, that was what underwrote her bargaining" (248). Therefore, this critical dystopia offers a positive direction for both Aka and Sutty, a direction that, as per the features of the critical dystopia, remains ambiguous but full of hope.

8

Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books and Fantasy

Fantasy is a term that we apply to a genre, use to describe or refer to that which is not real, or link to the private imaginings of people who wish their lives were different. Searching for the term "fantasy" in most library databases yields a stunning array of results. Many critics write about fantasy as an element or key to film and texts, but few stop to define the term. It is as though everyone assumes that readers know what fantasy is, but a thoughtful examination of the word reveals that we do not always take into account the fullness and interesting complexity it includes.

We will narrow our focus to the genre of fantasy in order to explore the place of Le Guin's Earthsea within the genre. The genre can date back at least as far as Homer's *Odyssey* (c. 700 B.C. in Greece) in Western literature. Some of the broadest characteristics of fantasy are that (1) it presents the reader with a realm or world that is not real, but has so much detail within it that it becomes meaningful for the reader; (2) it allows readers to look at the human condition and believe that individual action can help shape the course of large events, and (3) it most often takes the form of narrative. Even Homer's epic poem is narratively, or story driven, for instance. Fantasy involves the use of reality without the burden of realism. To say that fantasy is a reaction to the limits of realist fiction covers only part of the relationship between the two. Realism purports to deliver to readers

a world that we know, that we recognize, that we think is real or reflects reality. Realist fiction, however, does not do this. Strict realism would follow a character through the most mundane tasks of life, not highlight the important ones or decide which ones are important. In short, strictly realist fiction would entail the reader looking constantly in the mirror. In essence, realism is only in part constricted by the real, so fantasy is not exactly diametrically opposed to realism. Since fantasy involves an engagement with the human situation, it must link to something that is real or recognizable. The challenges that all human beings face become great society- and life-changing obstacles in fantasy, but the underlying idea that change requires strength and labor remain part of heroic fantasy. The heroic figure in fantasy, as a talented or extraordinary human being, goes through experiences that lead to growth in most cases. That figure encounters obstacles, often in the forms of magical or mythical creatures or forces that have great power.

Though fantasy novels get shelved alongside science fiction in many bookstores, the genres have differences from each other worth noting. Science fiction looks forward, and the forces that become key parts of science fiction narratives involve technologies and science. Fantasy in its twentieth- and twenty-first-century forms most often looks backward and involves pre-industrial or even medieval-seeming societies. This backwardness of setting, however, does not mean that fantasy offers no comment on the current world. Fantasy can and does include themes and concerns that link to the world and time in which the author writes.

The other genre that gets linked to fantasy is fairy tales. They both include magical elements, but traditional literary fairy tales offer resolutions that are comforting and predictable, while fantasy conclusions vary widely. Western literary fairy tales also have their roots in folklore, a source that some fantasy narratives draw on as well; however, fairy tales ask less suspension of disbelief from the reader. For instance, the settings in many fairy tales are recognizable, as are the language and the characters. When reading fantasy we suspend our disbelief, which means that we are willing to grant the rules that the fictional world establishes within its narrative borders. Fairy tale does not make this demand of the reader in the same way. According to Maria Nikolajeva "Among others, Vladimir Propp maintains that the addressee of fairy tale knows that the story is not true" (153). The reader of fairy tales recognizes the world of fairy tales as the trappings of the regular world with improbable figures (witches, for example) walking in it, while fantasy creates new worlds with geographies, languages, and customs of their own. Many fantasy

works, including Le Guin's Earthsea novels, come with maps of the worlds they invite a reader to enter. They also often include histories of a time prior to the lives and actions of the characters in the fantasy. J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion,* for example, acts as a prehistory and cultural background to the *The Lord of the Rings.* Le Guin's *Tales from Earthsea* is another good example of a volume that includes stories and information that help the reader fill in some gaps about the world the writer has created. All of these apparatuses around the central texts provide the reader with a sense of the otherness of the fantasy world on the one hand, and a sense that that world is knowable and has structure on the other. In "Plausibility Revisited" Le Guin writes "The 'secondary creation,' as Tolkien called it, must be entire and self-consistent. Imaginative authority and inner coherence are fantasy's chief means of obtaining its end, which is the reader's willing participation in an undisguised invention. Fantasy is shamelessly fictive."

Critics marginalize fantasy both by connecting it to other unfairly marginalized genres like science fiction and fairy tale, and by claiming that the genre is nothing more than escapist fiction. This charge rests on a deep misunderstanding of the transaction between readers and texts. Many readers who pick up mainstream or realist fiction do so to engage in thinking about some reality or life that differs from their own, thus one could say that realist fiction is also escapist. The charge of escapism is most often part of an elitist sense of a hierarchy of genres and assumes, furthermore, that readers of fantasy are somehow less qualified or intelligent than readers of mainstream fiction. The idea behind the use of the word is that people want to be other and thus reject their lives through some form of frantic make-believe. Well-written fiction generally challenges readers to use their intellects and imaginations, to step beyond themselves. Fantasy novels, when they are well-written, as Le Guin's Earthsea books and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* are, involve readers in the same challenge. According to Clyde Northrup in "The Qualities of a Tolkenian Fairy-Story," Tolkien had a particularly helpful two-part view of the idea of escape (he avoids the word "escapism" because of its negative connotations): "first, we can remove ourselves from the pain, suffering, sorrow, and injustice of the ordinary or Primary world" and "Second, this kind of escape allows us to momentarily remove the limits of reality, by flying with the birds or speaking with animals and trees, or by experiencing immortality and, for a moment, escaping death" (829). One of the keys to Tolkien's thought on the matter is the idea of the temporary nature of escape. A reader can fully engage in the illusion for only

a moment. Escaping the misery of the world acts as a respite from rather than a rejection of the primary world. In this sense, as Northrup points out, fantasy has a therapeutic function. Northrup goes on to claim that the success of the art of fantasy relies on maintaining "the interconnectedness of ordinary and wondrous worlds" (830). This does not mean that the real enters the fantasy in a direct way, but it does indicate that the recognition of the secondary or fantasy world works for readers, because a connection between the two worlds exists at the level of the understanding of human experience and human character.

MODERN FANTASY

The roots of modern fantasy begin in earnest in the middle of the nineteenth century. Writers such as Lewis Carroll (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*), William Morris (an array of stories), and George MacDonald (*Phantastes* and *Lilith*) in England created other worlds that include adventure and magic. These writers departed from the work of their peers who rewrote well-known fairy tales to fit their Victorian culture. Instead of returning to already-formed narratives, they created new ones that draw on the elements of magic and strange worlds and sometimes have doubtful outcomes. Carroll's Alice books, for example, were heralded as the triumph of nonsense over the customary didacticism of works of fiction that Victorian children and their parents were accustomed to reading. Later readers of Carroll's works, for example, have seen in them everything from social criticism to feminism, thus emphasizing that works of fantasy can be serious without being sermons.

The Victorians also brought their sense of nostalgia to works of fantasy. Though the nineteenth century was a time of great progress and invention, those changes were happening at a pace that inspired a longing for a simpler, less hectic time, thus the Victorian love of the medieval in art and architecture. Richard Altick in *Victorian People and Ideas* states that a new building in Victorian England was designed to look old from the moment it was erected (101). This fondness for the medieval and ancient worlds in part explains the tendency of fantasy works to be set in pre-industrial societies.

By the time C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), E. R. Eddison (1882–1945), and J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) wrote their fantasy series, the genre was established, but still evolving. In Lewis's Narnia Chronicles, a series of seven books published between 1950–1956, Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*

(1926) and the subsequent three-book cycle (*Mistress of Mistresses,* 1935; *A Fish Dinner at Memison,* 1941; and *The Mezentian Gate,* published posthumously in 1958), and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* beginning with *The Hobbit* in 1937 and ending with the trilogy (*The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers,* and *The Return of the King*) published in 1954–55, the model of heroic fantasy becomes clear. In each of the three cases the fantasy involves the quest and cannot be completed in one discrete story; thus the structure of a series of books that sequentially unravel events and the establishment of heroic figures' key roles in shaping and responding to changes and challenges of their worlds.

LE GUIN AND FANTASY

For Le Guin, Tolkien is a major precursor. By contrast, she has said that she disliked C. S. Lewis's fantasy series because it is too much a type of preaching in its use of religious allegory. In "Plausibility in Fantasy" Le Guin says

> I believe that as soon as wishful thinking or a conscious political or didactic purpose intrude on that credence, they deform it and the story loses plausibility. Wishful thinking gives us the feeble kind of fantasy where everything is easy, and you never have to feed or water or look after the horse you rode all day. An ideological purpose produces a sermon, or satire (which is not fantasy, and has very different standards of plausibility, since it is a mirror held up to actual life).

Maya Jaggi quotes Le Guin as saying that she perceived Lewis's books as "'simply Christian apologia, full of hatred and contempt for people who didn't agree. The division into good and evil was different from Tolkien, where evil beings are only a metaphor for the evil in our lives; he never casts people into the outer darkness as Lewis enjoyed doing" (Jaggi). In the same article Jaggi tells us that Le Guin "traces a fantasy lineage from *Frankenstein* to Philip K. Dick, embracing Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Jose Saramago and Gabriel Garcia Marquez" and many other writers such as Dickens, Hardy, and Woolf. Clearly Le Guin's notion of fantasy is broad, as it includes works some might call science fiction (*Frankenstein* and the works of Dick), magical realism (the novels and stories of Borges and Garcia Marquez), historical fantasy (Saramago), fantasy, magical realism, and folklore (depending on which works of Calvino), multiplot novels (Dickens), stream of consciousness fiction (Woolf), and psychological

realism (Hardy). Le Guin also acknowledges the importance of Tolkien, whose ability to create a world she finds impressive.

The type of fantasy referred to as heroic relies on what Warren Rochelle calls the "monomyth." He describes monomyth as including "the hero; the different stages of the quest (separation, initiation, and trial); and the journey and return" (34). Rochelle sees these concepts through the combined lenses of the ideas of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. Both Campbell and Jung think about and describe archetypes in their writings. According to Campbell "'there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people" (quoted in Rochelle 35). From the idea that the heroic figure is actually universal Rochelle proceeds to claim "that heroes are not only mythic figures, but also part of the human psyche, and that the human psyche has a certain commonality and is communal in nature" (quoted in Rochelle 35). This notion of communal knowledge is in essence the same as Carl Jung's idea of "the collective unconscious" (see chapter 9 on *A Wizard of Earthsea* for more about Jung). The most important link that Rochelle's study makes for us is that he shows, by quoting from her essay called "The Child and the Shadow" in *The Language of the Night,* that Le Guin "also believes in the collective unconscious, where 'we all meet … [in] the source of true community; of felt religion, of art, grace, spontaneity, and love'" (35). Rochelle rightly goes on to say that Le Guin's fantasy works both use the framework of the monomyth or heroic fantasy and act to subvert the expectations heroic fantasy creates. He cites the fourth book of Earthsea, *Tehanu,* as a subversive text because it redirects the reader's attention away from the expected quest narrative toward what he refers to as "women's work" (55). He adds that the novel, rather than completely dismissing heroic fantasy, redefines it to include women and the work that they do as vital to society's well-being.

One could say that the first three novels of Earthsea, *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan,* and *The Farthest Shore* all appear familiar to the reader of fantasy, but I would argue that even in these earlier books Le Guin provides challenges to the white Anglo-Saxon world of fantasy. By creating characters of color at the outset of the trilogy and including the development of a young woman as a major character in the second book, she begins to expand the horizons of the genre. Le Guin recasts fantasy as truly broadly imaginative. She thinks outside the attractive, powerful, influential idea of the white, male heroic figure whose quest links him most often to others like himself either in sex or stature. She also crosses social class lines early on in *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

In Le Guin's hands the fantasy genre has capacious borders and acts as a genre of multiplying possibilities rather than as a derivative sword-and-sorcerer backdrop (what she calls "commodified fantasy" in the foreword to *Tales from Earthsea*). The importance of language and its power to help wizards control their environment, for instance, appears to be an old notion; however, in the Earthsea books languages go on to open doors to other cultures and ways of seeing. This is especially true of the most recent Earthsea novel, *The Other Wind,* where Kargs, dragons, and Hardic people all have to find ways to communicate with each other. Language in Earthsea goes beyond being the stuff from which the powerful conjure magic and spells to being a truly vital information tool that links cultures and provides history.

The recent popularity of the genre in film renditions of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles,* the Sci-Fi Channel's version of the first two books of Earthsea, and Rowling's Harry Potter series all point to the notion that other-world characters and settings appeal to modern viewers and readers. From 2001 through the present there has not been a year when one, and sometimes multiple, films of fantasy novels have not been available in American movie theaters. Director Peter Jackson's first installment of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring,* appeared in 2001, as did Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.* In 2002 *The Two Towers* and the second Potter film, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* debuted. The next year the final film of the Tolkien series, *The Return of the King,* opened in December. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* was in theaters in 2004, and 2005 featured both the fourth Potter film, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire,* and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* an adaptation of Lewis's first book of Narnia, directed by Andrew Adamson. The Sci-Fi Channel's oddly mangled version of Earthsea appeared in 2004 on the small screen (for further references to this adaptation see the chapter on *The Tombs of Atuan*). Clearly the appetite for fantasy is alive and well not only because fantasy novels make for stunningly interesting visual moments, but also because there is real attraction to the characters in these books who live and struggle in worlds that present them with challenges that define good and evil and explore the nature and dangers of power.

All of the writers whose works have been translated to film question the influence of power on people who would be leaders, on those who would follow them, and on the worlds they inhabit. No matter what individual monsters, magics, or puzzles these works highlight, they all ask readers to reimagine their worlds, reexamine their ideas, and work toward understanding the roles they play in society.

9

A Wizard of Earthsea (1968)

THE EARTHSEA CYCLE

There are six books in Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea series. Many critics see the first three books, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968*), The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), and *The Farthest Shore* (1972), as a discrete trilogy (see Margaret Mahy's article "Two Trilogies and a Mystery"). Approximately 20 years after her creation of this trilogy, Le Guin added *Tehanu* (1990) to the series and followed that book with a collection of stories called *Tales from Earthsea* (2001). The most recent novel of Earthsea is *The Other Wind,* published in 2001.

The first book in the earlier trilogy introduces the reader to Ged, a boy who later becomes a powerful wizard. *The Tombs of Atuan* focuses on a female protagonist, Arha (or Tenar), whose path links with Ged's, and *The Farthest Shore* aligns Ged with the young man who will eventually become King Lebannen, the king of a large part of Earthsea. In all three of these books Ged works to solve a problem or heal an imbalance in the world.

With *Tehanu* Le Guin's focus stays with the problem of seeking balance, but the troubles in the later books involve women and cultures beyond the central one of Ged's experience (Hardic culture) far more. *Tales from Earthsea* gives texture and history to the world Le Guin created by offering both legends and tales that help create a bridge between *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind.* Ged becomes less of a central character in the later books of Earthsea.

ABOUT EARTHSEA

Earthsea is a fantasy world that Ursula Le Guin began to create in 1964 with two short stories called "The Word of Unbinding" and "The Rule of Names." Both of these stories now appear in a 1975 collection of Le Guin's stories called *The Wind's Twelve Quarters,* which is subtitled "Seventeen stories of fantastic adventure." In "The Word of Unbinding" Le Guin creates Festin, a wizard well attuned to nature who is both wise and powerful. When he is imprisoned by an evil mage, named Voll, his attempts to escape through transforming himself (into a mist, a ring, a bird, and a fish) all fail. His final escape takes the form of willing his own death so that he can go on to call on the spirit of the enemy and keep him from doing further harm to other wizards and nature. Both the ideas of the links to nature, in this case especially trees, and Festin's willingness to sacrifice himself come up again in the Earthsea novels, especially for Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. *The Land of the Dead,* where Festin will finally meet and pursue Voll also plays a key role in the later Earthsea novels.

"The Rule of Names" introduces another key idea for Earthsea: that to know the true name of someone confers power over that person. A seemingly bumbling, round, middle-aged wizard the people of Sattins Island refer to as Mr. Underhill (because he lives under a hill), turns out to be a powerful dragon in disguise. An attractive man the local people call Blackbeard comes to Sattins and claims to be the heir to the treasure of Pendor, which he thinks a thief stole after the dragons were killed and driven from their hoards there. Though Blackbeard seeks a thief, he finds the dragon Yevaud, whose name he knows, in the form of Mr. Underhill. The two of them battle and take various shapes during the fight, and the dragon prevails. The dragon goes on to meet Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* when he gets his first wizard assignment. The story also introduces the reader to the power of dragons and the dangers they pose, for we learn that they eat maidens and that knowing a dragon's name is not necessarily enough to give a person mastery over it.

The first novel focusing on Earthsea is Le Guin's 1968 *A Wizard of Earthsea,* which introduces the reader to Ged, who begins his career as a wizard when he is a youth growing up on rural Gont island. His common, or use-name, Sparrowhawk, is the one most people use when speaking to him. As the reader learns in "The Rule of Names" one should never lightly use the true name of another, and very few people should ever be trusted with the knowledge of one's true name. Sparrowhawk is a boy

when he first realizes that he has some power to do wizardry. In the trilogy Ged goes on to become a powerful wizard and encounters various challenges as he develops.

The world of Earthsea is preindustrial and contains various cultures and geographic areas within a large archipelago. In the Hardic area there are rural people, townspeople, and wizards. The Hardic people view the Kargish people as barbarians, while the Kargs see the Hardic as evil sorcerers. The two groups look different from each other as well: Hardic people are dark-skinned, while Kargs are white. The Kargish areas are in the eastern lands of Earthsea, while dragons are in the west of Earthsea. The people who speak Hardic and have a capital on Havnor Island, at a place called Great Port, a sophisticated city of great culture, are geographically between the dragons and the Kargish empire. The island of Gont, where Ged grows up, is in the Hardic part of Earthsea.

The wizards of the Hardic areas are trained at a school on the island of Roke. There are nine mages and an archmage who acts as the leader of these powerful and knowledgeable wizards. The students learn from these masters. This island also contains Roke Knoll, the true center of Earthsea. There are local healers and witches in many areas, but these people are not learned like the Roke wizards, and many wizards look down on these local people as inferior. Only men in Earthsea can be wizards, though some local healers are women.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The structure of the plot of *A Wizard of Earthsea* focuses on the development of Ged. Essentially the novel is a bildungsroman that follows the central character through experiences that help him evolve and mature. The novel has four stories/sections within it: Ged's childhood and recognition of his power and his apprenticeship under Ogion, which all take place on Gont; his learning at Roke, which leads to his disastrous misuse of magic; his journeying to try to escape the consequences of his act; and his later journey to resolve the problem his unleashing of the gebbeth has created. In each of these sections Ged faces challenges that appear to come from others outside of him.

When Ged is on Gont he is a youth who is impatient for the full realization of the power that he discovers is in him. His time of learning from Ogion, a great wizard in his own right, is marked by Ged reaching beyond the knowledge he has in order to use his power. A prime example of his impatient misuse of power is his giving in to the temptation of a girl

who is the daughter of a great lord on Gont (the Lord of Re Albi). When she dares him to do a spell of transformation, Ged's pride drives him to use a book of Ogion's that he has no permission to consult. Instead of feeling more powerful as a result of using the book, Ged finds that the book begins to use him, and he is saved only by Ogion's coming into the room and restoring order.

On Roke Ged appears to fare better at first. The novel tells us that he is an apt pupil. Trouble begins again when another student challenges his power. This student is Jasper, a boy from a well-to-do family, who taunts Ged. The two finally have a wizard's duel at Roke Knoll, where Ged calls forth a spirit from the dead. Again a great wizard saves him—this time it is the Archmage of Roke, Nemmerle. As a result of saving Ged, the Archmage dies. Even though he is saved, Ged is physically scarred, and even more importantly, has released an evil thing called a gebbeth into the world when he called forth the dead spirit. Clearly the consequences of Ged's pride-driven mistakes increase in magnitude with this experience.

In journeying away from Roke after he heals and finally graduates from wizard school, Ged is a humbled and fearful person. In his post as a wizard to the people of Low Torning in the far west of Earthsea, Ged hopes to be out of the reach of the gebbeth, but finds that he cannot escape it. In the midst of this terrible realization Le Guin also shows us that Ged still has real power and even growing wisdom when he manages to banish the dragons of that area by striking a deal with the chief of the dragons. His travels in this part of the book lead him to again get the help of an older wizard. Ogion assists Ged as he helps transform him back into a human from the bird form he had assumed in order to flee evil. Significantly Ged also takes the advice that Ogion gives him and decides to chase the gebbeth rather than fear it and let it pursue him.

The final journey Ged takes leads him far east in Earthsea to a land called Iffish. In his pursuit of the gebbeth he encounters a good friend from his Roke days. His friend Vetch is a wizard in his own right and insists on going with Ged as he follows the creature. From stories the local people tell it is apparent that the gebbeth has been taking the form of Ged and doing evil in the area. The pattern of Ged needing help thus continues in this part of the novel. It is clear that without Vetch's help Ged would not have survived the ordeal of facing the gebbeth and seeing it as part of himself. Through Vetch we learn that "Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a

man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself" (180–81).

THEMES

The idea of the quest is central to the novel. Journeys here are both geographical and internal for Ged. Movement from one point to the other is basic to the quest, but so is the idea of achieving a goal or prize. The quest in Le Guin's novel changes from being aimed at the growth of Ged's power to involving a quest for the containment of evil, which in turn becomes the recognition that the self was what he was seeking all along. Le Guin recasts the idea of the quest ultimately away from action and toward knowledge. Le Guin herself has said that her fiction is far more character based than plot driven.

The theme of the balance between power and responsibility is at the core of Ged's development and the way Earthsea actually works. The wizard-Masters of Roke make the point about the need for balance in the world in their teaching. The novel provides an example of what happens when power is an end in itself when the barbarians of Earthsea, the Kargs, invade and lay waste to parts of Earthsea. Theirs is a physical power that they use without restraint. Later in the book, when Ged is at the court of the Terrenon (the name of a powerful stone housed in the lower part of the castle), he recognizes the terrible temptation of power that the stone represents. He sees that the stone would use and corrupt anyone who links to it in pursuit of wizardly power. Ged faces another temptation to use power in a way that would ultimately harm him when he speaks with the dragon Yevaud in trying to serve the people of Low Torning. The dragon offers him the knowledge of the gebbeth's name, which would give Ged mastery over the creature, but Ged sees that his first duty is to serve the people who have been harassed by dragons, and he instead makes a deal with Yevaud to guarantee that the dragon will cease to harm the local people. He takes his pledge to help them seriously enough to avoid even the seductive offer of a smooth-talking ancient dragon. Whether the power is physical or magical, Le Guin makes the reader see that individuals are ultimately responsible for their uses of it.

The novel also explores the relationship between social classes. Common people like Ged's friend on Low Torning, Pechvarry, have a steady sense of the world and how to live in it. Pechvarry accepts others and befriends Ged. Some wizards, Jasper for instance, think more of their powers and of themselves and lose a sense of the skill of living in

the world and among people. Truly great wizards, like Ogion, manage to have both power and a broad grasp on life that connects him to others and the world. There is also Ged's aunt, who begins to teach him some spells when he is a boy, and who is not a particularly admirable person. For example, she has no desire to assist Ged beyond the basic needs she provides after his mother's death until she notes that he has some ability to use spells. A reader cannot say that wizards are upper-class snobs and that all the lower-class people of Earthsea are somehow more virtuous, but it does appear that the acquisition of power leads some wizards to a false sense of superiority.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Through the various journeys that Ged takes and the mistakes he makes, he learns and matures. The characters around him are stable, so the reader focuses on the shifts in Ged's perspective in the novel. Ged begins the book as a child, and at its end he is about 18 years old. The teenage years are for him an extraordinarily strenuous time, as he struggles with the sense of his own power and how he will fit in in the world. Essentially, Ged thinks he is a loner. He thinks this at first because he believes in his own power and wants to use it unimpeded by larger concerns. Later he sees himself as isolated because he is trying to keep the gebbeth from doing more evil in the world and wants to lead it away from people. The fortunate surprise for Ged is that though he does bear individual responsibility for his actions, others can help him with advice and companionship. He learns hard lessons after the shadow attacks him on Roke Knoll. He even learns of the danger of compassion when he tries to keep the son of Pechvarry (a friend of Ged's when he serves as wizard to the people of Low Torning after he graduates from the school at Roke) from dying. As he follows the boy to try to bring him back from the land of the dead, Ged's way back to life is blocked by the gebbeth. He almost loses himself in trying to save someone he cannot actually help. His motive is good, but his assessment of the situation is flawed. Ged needs to balance his care for others against the proper use of his wizard power.

ALTERNATE READINGS

Two Jungian Readings of *A Wizard of Earthsea*

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) was a Swiss psychologist and philosopher who was Sigmund Freud's closest associate. Jung broke with Freud

in 1912. Jung's career includes arrays of ideas that address our understanding of the psyche. One of his most famous concepts involves what he calls the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious refers to ideas that all of us know but that we cannot trace back to a particular moment of knowledge acquisition. We recognize archetypes or patterns that our ancestors also recognized. It is as though knowledge of these patterns predates our entry into any personal experience.

Jung also identifies the conflict in the individual psyche between the conscious and the unconscious. The two are not discrete, since they interact with each other. Jung speaks of both the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche and the need for smooth interaction between the two. The conscious and the unconscious can contain opposite elements, but Jung makes clear that all that is in the unconscious was at one time part of the conscious. All of us are always negotiating between the conscious elements of our psyches and the unconscious ones. This interplay naturally creates tension.

According to Jung the role of the therapist or analyst is key to assisting a person in negotiating the tension between the conscious and unconscious. The therapist assists the person in getting to transcendence or enacting the transcendent function. Transcendence occurs when the person sees the cause of the conflict s/he has been experiencing and manages to bring the disparate elements from the unconscious and conscious together without destroying the part that came from the unconscious mind.

Repression, or the denial of the conflict and the irritating elements in the conflict, is an unhealthy and potentially destructive way to deal with the trouble of the tension between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. For Jung, repression is a type of self-denial. Without the help of the analyst a person can become stuck in self-denial.

Some of Jung's ideas about the human psyche (mind/personality) can help with an understanding of Ged's predicament in *A Wizard of Earthsea.* Jung speaks of the moment when "tension increases as a result of too great one-sidedness" which cause the oppositional element in the unconscious to "break through into consciousness" (Jung 71). This is the moment that Ged calls forth the shadow that becomes the gebbeth. Ged has been driven by pride and immaturity to take on Jasper's challenge to call one of the dead. He calls forth what at first appears to be the fulfillment of his desire to triumph over Jasper when the Lady Elfarren's spirit appears, but also releases what we later understand to be a part of himself in the form of the gebbeth. We know this at the end of the novel when the

gebbeth's name is Ged. This Ged-gebbeth is the physical manifestation of what Jung would call the "counter-position in the unconscious" (71). Ged's one-sidedness, his direction, takes a detour after the release of the gebbeth. He seeks a quiet life, far removed from people because he fears that the gebbeth in seeking him will hurt others. Ged's direction for his life goes from being driven and focused on his own acquisition of power to beginning to see that he needs a broader view.

But self-denial is not the answer to his issue either. Ged's introverted reaction to his situation does not help him. When he tries to handle the problem on his own he is almost overcome by the gebbeth in the form of Skiorh, a sailor who was apparently trying to assist him. Skiorh/gebbeth also leads Ged toward the court of the Terrenon, a place where a gray stranger had advised him to go to get better weaponry with which to fight the gebbeth than just the wizard's staff he was carrying. In fleeing the court of the Terrenon and the temptation to power Ged comes close to losing himself because he takes the form of a bird and flies a long way as the creature. He tries here to deny himself to save himself, which would be a truly destructive move, according to Jung.

Ogion's intervention and advice help Ged to regain human form physically and go on to reintegrate his psyche as he follows and rejoins the Ged-gebbeth. When Ged joins with the gebbeth he takes into himself a part of himself: "Ged spoke the shadow's name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: 'Ged.' And the two voices were one voice. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one" (Le Guin *Wizard* 179). For Jung, Ged's joining with the feared gebbeth would be a picture of the transcendent function. When a person starts to understand what has caused the conflict and the breaking out of the oppositional force from the unconscious mind, then reintegrates them without destroying the part that came from the unconscious, then the person experiences this transcendent function. Jung says "It is called 'transcendent' because it makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible, without the loss of the unconscious" (73).

It is important to note that Jung believes that a person cannot get to this stage of understanding without the help of the therapist or analyst. In Le Guin's book, both Ogion and Vetch as they assist Ged in understanding and facing the gebbeth occupy the position of the analyst. On the other hand, the Archmage Nemmerle in trying to vanquish the gebbeth stands as a symbol for repression. The Archmage's own death is an emblem of what happens when we try to ignore or destroy the unconscious.

In addition to his ideas about the individual psyche Jung thought that there was something called the collective unconscious in which all of us participate. He says of the collective unconscious that "what is stirred in us is that faraway background, those memorial patterns of the human mind, which we have not acquired but have inherited from the dim ages of the past" (149–150) and "The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual" (158). It is ideas from the collective unconscious that allow us to see such things as broad archetypes or motifs. When we see Ged as a hero on a quest of discovery in the broadest terms and begin to see his entire experience in *A Wizard of Earthsea* as a story of the development of a heroic figure, we are recognizing patterns that are part of our inherited ideas. We did not make them up, nor can we trace them back to any particular moment of human narrative invention, but we are certain of these ideas and their truth in shaping the way we see Ged's quest. Ged's journey becomes a metaphor for his psychological development and his evolution into a powerful hero who can slay and speak to dragons.

Michel Foucault, Power, and Ged

Clearly, Ged seeks to wield power in *A Wizard of Earthsea;* however, his knowledge of what exactly power is comes through a process of failure, challenge, and tenacity. Initially Ged thinks that having and using power makes him an exceptional person who can impress others, such as the girl who tempts him on Gont, and exert control over his own destiny. The lessons that Ogion tries to teach him through silence and patience are wasted on him. To an extent Ged is correct: He is a person of some power or a young man with a real gift. What he does not see is that he cannot guarantee that he will be at the center of or in control of even his most blithe exertions of power or spell-making. The idea that power circulates in the world, that he is not a center like a spoke in a wheel from which he can cause things to happen, is not amenable to him at first.

A French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926–1984), who wrote about an array of topics from the history of sexuality to social institutions, wrote an essay called "The Subject and Power," in which he focuses on the place of the subject, or individual, in society. He states in that essay: "Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that

which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)" (781). Ged's struggle is mostly against himself in the novel, though he perceives his struggle as a struggle for independence from authority and limitation. It is out of his resistance to potential limits that Ged tries to grasp power. Power, though, is also dangerous, because all power is power over someone or something. Power for Foucault is an integral part of society: "In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible—and in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (791). It is the idea of power as part of a network that eludes Ged at the start of the novel. He sees power as incredibly attractive to his sense of self. As Foucault pointed out in an interview:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. ("Truth and Power"119)

Ged sees himself as an individual who should be able to act simply because he wishes to. He does not see connections between his actions and a widening circle of events. As a student at Roke he learns about the nature of power through the idea of the balance of things in the world, but clearly the lessons have been an intellectual exercise that he has not appropriated in a deep way into his sense of himself and how his power and self function in the world. Ged meets the idea of the balance with impatience when the Master Hand explains it to him, showing Ged that the illusion that a common rock is a diamond is far different from a true transformation of the stone. "But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in balance," says the Master Hand. Ged thinks "But surely a wizard, one who had gone past these tricks of childish illusion to the true arts of Summoning and Change, was powerful enough to do what he pleased, and balance the world as it seemed best to him,

and drive back the darkness with his own light" (Le Guin *Wizard* 44). It is one thing for the masters to talk with Ged about connections and quite another for Ged to get past his own flawed idea of individual power. Ged uses false logic when he mistakes himself for a powerful force that can control the world.

Ged's struggle with the idea of power is not just about his ego, though that element is prominent when he accepts Jasper's challenge. Rather, his ego gets in the way of his reaching a better, fuller understanding of the nature of power itself. He cannot step back from situations and see the power struggles that are the backdrop for his own need for power. He lacks, in other words, the ability to analyze his situation. He thinks that if he acquires enough wizardly knowledge he would "fear nothing in the world, nothing at all" (54).

10

The Tombs of Atuan (1970)

Readers coming to the second book of Earthsea, *The Tombs of Atuan,* first published in 1970, expecting to hear of the further exploits of Ged (from the first book in the series, *A Wizard of Earthsea*) are initially disappointed. This novel focuses on a person and place that the reader did not meet in *A Wizard of Earthsea.* The novel introduces a girl who lives in the Kargish Empire, an area in the far eastern part of Earthsea that has its own geography and culture that are distinct from the Hardic civilization from which Ged hails. As with Ged in *Wizard,* the girl of this novel begins as a child and matures through her teen years. She is chosen to be at the center of a group of priestesses and will be known as the Eaten One, or Arha. For much of the novel she has no other name but the title Arha. Her identity as an individual virtually disappears when she goes to serve the powers of the place, referred to as the Nameless Ones. It is Ged who gives her back her name: Tenar.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The structure of *The Tombs of Atuan* revolves around explanations of what sort of life Arha leads in her place at the Tombs. Much of the first part of the novel describes her learning the ways of the priestesses and her duties as the chosen one ("They did not play any games. There was no time for games. They learned the sacred songs and the sacred dances, the

histories of the Kargad Lands, and the mysteries of whichever of the gods they were dedicated to" [13]). The next section handles the disturbance in the ways of the guardians of the Tombs when Ged arrives there and is caught and imprisoned. The latter part of the book focuses on Ged and Tenar's escape from the Tombs and their arrival in Havnor. Thus the flow of the plot goes from a setting in the stable, exclusive world of the Tombs where the Nameless Ones are worshipped and served, to the introduction of the possibility of change and other ways of seeing the world and oneself.

Ged's trip to the Tombs is driven by his search for the other half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* one of the stranded heirs to the Karg Empire that he meets on a sandbar had given him half of the legendary ring. It is purported that when the ring is whole again there will be peace and a king in Havnor (the Hardic capital or political center of Ged's home civilization). When he crosses paths with Arha and is arrested it is because he is looking for the other half of the ring in the Undertomb area. Arha, as she does over all prisoners, has the power to have Ged killed or let him live. The fact that she lets him live attests to her fundamental curiosity about this stranger she has encountered. Her visits to Ged when he is a prisoner allow the two of them to start to know each other.

THEMES

The idea of the power of deep belief and the implications of faith are threads that weave their way through the entire novel. From the opening chapter, which briefly delineates how Arha was chosen and how her family must give her up so she can serve at the Tombs, to her meeting Ged, there is tension between the knowledge of the power of faith and the powers of the Nameless Ones and the human impulse to question boundaries and wonder about the wider world. Ged helps Arha question the idea that these old powers, which are real and definitely present in the Tombs and especially in the labyrinth area of the Undertombs, are deserving of worship. He acts as a catalyst to her ability to understand a growing loss of faith in the teachings of her young life. Knowledge of the world and openness to new knowledge become essential to living and growing, while unquestioned, archaic faith recedes into the background for Arha/Tenar.

Faith and identity are linked in the novel. Arha's sense of herself initially rests completely in her role as the chosen one. She has only vague

memories of her life before she came to the Tombs. Through Arha's development Le Guin makes clear the idea that one needs to have a focus or purpose in order to have a sense of self. It is not enough then for Arha to question her beliefs—she needs to have a set of ideas to put in place of the ones that are fading for her.

The novel also highlights a dilemma that focuses on personal loyalty for Arha. A eunuch servant, Manan, who had always been kind and loyal to her, is killed when she and Ged make their escape from the Tombs. She later blames herself for the fall off a ledge that killed him. Her sense of guilt shows that she is developing as a person, but it also shows that development has an emotional/psychological cost. Her guilt indicates that she is developing a sense of responsibility for both her actions and even the farther off, delayed, or a few times removed consequences of those actions.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Just as *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a bildungsroman that shows us the development of Ged, so *The Tombs of Atuan* shows us the evolution of Arha/Tenar. Her development, rather than being played out through repeated journeys or quests, unfolds as she learns more about the Nameless Ones and the layout of the Undertombs and labyrinth area. The labyrinth becomes a symbol of the subtle turnings of her thoughts and the development of her ideas, since she is the one who knows the ways and turnings of the Undertombs better than anyone else. Charlotte Spivack thinks "the tombs represented for Arha an undifferentiated unconsciousness, deep, demanding, and dumb" (quoted in Senior 107). Ged also sees the labyrinth as a symbol of the High Priestess Kossil's demented thinking and warns Tenar that she may be headed toward the madness he thinks that model and Kossil represent should she remain a servant of the old powers.

She also learns from realizing how the others who serve in the tombs act and think. In particular, Thar and Kossil, both adult women, teach her about the lore of the faith and the physical layout of the place and influence her. Of the two women, Kossil is the one who has ambition and aligns herself with the service of the God king (the political leader of the Kargs), rather than serving only the powers of the Tomb. Arha understands that as the chosen one she has the sole power or right to the most complete knowledge of the Tombs. While this great knowledge confers a sense of privilege, as does the way she is treated as superior to the others who serve, it also constitutes a way of isolating her from others. Of the two High Priestesses, it is Thar who teaches her most about the Nameless Ones. The novel makes

clear that this teaching works to further isolate Arha: "This took her away from the others for an hour or more daily" (13). She cannot share her power or knowledge; she cannot have friends in the normal sense of the word. Her link is to the disembodied but powerful Nameless Ones who inhabit the labyrinth. She is also bound by the rituals and rules of the place. In essence, tradition has power over her through its unchanging form in rituals.

Her encounter with Ged plays into a process of questioning that Arha has been experiencing. Even before she speaks at length with Ged about her doubts, she has heard Kossil defy the powers of the Nameless Ones and thinks that the gods are dead because they have not punished Kossil. From Ged she understands more clearly the reality that there are other people, races, and places in the world and that she need not limit herself to the restricted life of the servants of the tombs. She also understands that because she has gone against her culture and her role in keeping Ged alive, Kossil would have the right to have her executed. So Arha/Tenar has multiple reasons for wanting to escape from the place that has been her home: an increasing loss of faith, the possibilities that a new land can offer her, and her fear of the consequences for her violations of the rules that Kossil has both the will and the power to set in motion. Elizabeth Cummins, in her article "The Land-Lady's Homebirth: Revisiting Ursula K. Le Guin's Worlds," says of Tenar that "she cannot become a wizard or a king. But Tenar is more of a revolutionary than either Ged or Arren [from *The Farthest Shore*]. Whereas Ged and Arren mature so as to assume socially-approved roles, she has had to rebel against the society which nurtured her" (156).

Ged also helps to clarify for Tenar that she herself is a powerful person. He perceives her power and tells her of it when she brings him food and water. She needs to see herself as he can help her see herself, not only as she has been defined by the role she plays in the Tombs. He understands her potential and guides her toward seeing that she actually has choices available to her.

ALTERNATE READINGS

Cultural Perspectives on *The Tombs of Atuan*

An anthropological or cultural perspective demands that the practitioner have as open a mind as possible. Though it is impossible to see another culture through totally unbiased eyes, the approach demands at least a self-awareness of one's own central or deeply held ideas. One way to attempt a deeper understanding of another culture is to try to

live in that culture, to become a person who is in some way part of the culture. The student of culture needs to recognize the elements within the culture that are most significant—rituals, faiths, and legends, for example—without making value judgments about them. Culture itself is a process that unfolds rather than a stable product to examine; however, a work of fiction as it shows the reader this cultural process is stable. It is readers who shift their perspectives about a text. There are two levels on which to apply ideas about culture to a text: One is to look within the text for the ways it examines cultures and people and the other is to view the text within its own time and place as an object of culture itself (how does this book reflect on the culture into which it came as a published work?) (Tyson *Critical Theory Today* 292).

In working with *The Tombs of Atuan* I will use both approaches. In using the first type of cultural approach, seeing the novel as the purveyor of information about a place and its people, the reader sees that Le Guin creates the culture of the Tombs within the larger culture of the Kargish people and puts great emphasis on the power of symbol and ritual. Many critics have pointed out Le Guin's knowledge of anthropology—her father was a prominent anthropologist and her own work in fiction and essays shows sensitivity to cultural differences. One of the hallmarks of Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan* is her subtle view of the part of Kargish culture Tenar grows up in at the Tombs.

For example, the opening pages of the novel highlight the importance of belief in traditions when the priestesses identify Tenar as the one who will replace the recently defunct Arha (chosen/eaten one) at the Tombs. Le Guin also implies that there are tensions within any system of ritual that demands sacrifices from individuals and families. In this case the demand for a new chosen one comes up against the love of Tenar's mother for her as she tries to fool the emissaries from the tombs into thinking that Tenar is imperfect and has a childhood disease that mars her with a rash. That the priestesses see through the trick that Tenar's mother tries to play on them is less important here than the idea that a mother will do all she can, within the cultural limitations she labors under, to keep her child. Le Guin thus posits that there are universal impulses that sometimes conquer individual cultural imperatives and traditions and also illustrates that the power of collective culture often wins in any contest between the two. Tenar's father reluctantly but angrily accepts the decree that she will be taken from them: "His face in the dusk was full of grief, a dull, heavy, angry grief that he would never find the words to say" (2). These are people who are victims of the demands of the culture they live in, rather than joyful participants

in that culture. Though our cultures help form our identities then, there is here a natural struggle between the broader context of life and the needs of the individual.

The narrator reports the perspectives of Tenar's parents without making a judgment on their position, but also manages to invoke the reader's sympathy for their situation, since all of us have been part of a family or group and many of us have been parents. Le Guin thus makes the link between what readers bring to the novel and the new culture she introduces to readers.

The ritual execution of the girl when she is dedicated to the service of the powers of the Tombs plays out the emptying of individual identity. This ceremony is narrated in as straightforward a way as possible. It is a ritual of death/life. Tenar is reborn as Arha the Eaten One, and the old name and identity disappear. She also later seeks to control death when she has her servant, Manan, dig a grave and place a dirt-filled coffin in it to try to trick Kossil into thinking that Ged is buried there. This pattern of facing death and moving toward rebirth is one that appears in many literary works and many cultures. Le Guin fits her cultural exploration of the religion of the Tombs into a larger structure while making it particular to the place and events of the novel. In classical Western literature, for example, Homer's Odysseus and Virgil's Aeneas both go to the land of the dead and return to the land of the living. It is this ability to return from death that marks these figures as heroic and extraordinary. Each of them goes on to do great deeds after their visits to the dead, but neither of them faces the loss of their former identities except via the possibility of complete physical annihilation through death itself.

Though the Kargs do not believe in magic and see the Hardic people as evil sorcerers, since they endorse the power of wizards, there is a mystical element to the area of the Tombs. Though ritual surrounds and in part explains the belief in the old powers, there is one area of standing stones that only Arha goes to. No one knows much about these stones except that "These nine stones were the Tombs of Atuan. They had stood there, it was said, since the time of the first men, since Earthsea was created" (15). Age does not offer legend or meaning, however, since there are no stories or legends associated with these stones.

It is clear that the Kargish rituals and beliefs are quite different from the ideas about meaning and identity that the reader learns about in the first Earthsea novel. Names, for instance, that are so essential to living in the world as an individual are not an issue at the Tombs. Comoletti and Drout in an article published in 2001 point out "Words seem to have no

true meaning or purpose even for the priestesses, who chant tunes made up of babble.... The religion of the Kargs, then, is one of meaningless words and ritual; no one in the Kargad Lands keeps his or her given name a secret because names appear to have no power there" (121).

By the end of the novel, when Tenar and Ged have left Atuan, Le Guin offers a way to bring the two cultures and representatives of those cultures together in the form of combining narratives. Tenar tells Ged the tale of how the two heirs to the Kargish throne were abandoned on an island. Ged then puts her story together with his encounter with the stranded people on the sandbar. Le Guin offers a new wholeness in the form of the joining of the two halves of the ring of Erreth-Akbe and through the cultural exchange that Ged and Tenar participate in. Narrative itself transcends the particular beliefs of either culture as that narrative links the pasts of both places to a future that the newly joined ring portends. Walter Senior focuses on the idea of exchange and its centrality to Le Guin's Earthsea novels in an article called "Cultural Anthropology and Rituals of Exchange in Ursula K. Le Guin's 'Earthsea.'" He sees the importance of the ring as a completion of a cycle of gift-giving: "He then presents her [Tenar] with the other half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, just as the old woman gave him his half [of the ring], giving what she had to give" (108). He also sees the novel expressing a critique of Kargish beliefs, since the "nameless powers of the place [Atuan] return nothing for all their endless demands" (107) rather than participate in what he sees as a cycle of gifts and exchange. Clearly, Senior sees Le Guin embedding a critique of Kargish culture in the novel when he contextualizes it as part of the Earthsea series with his emphasis on the importance of exchange.

In another way Ged and Tenar participate in exchange. Each is the other's guide at various points. Tenar guides Ged out of the labyrinth and Ged guides her to Havnor. Tenar's initial decision to leave her culture and her emptied beliefs behind forges a new structure in her exchange with Ged. This is a new model for the novel, since Tenar as Arha was not in situations and relationships where this type of mutuality was possible. Her experience at the Tombs relied on hierarchies of power. Ged also passes on to Tenar the link to Ogion that was so important to him, as the two of them agree that she will go to Ogion after the ring has been delivered to Havnor. This arrangement comes out of Tenar's sense that she does not fit in in the new culture she is coming to, as well as her newly found sense of guilt for the deaths she caused while she was the chosen one. Despite Tenar's sense of awkwardness Le Guin ends the novel with an almost startling reassurance for the reader: "Gravely she walked beside

him [Ged] up the white streets of Havnor, holding his hand, like a child coming home" (146). This final sentence harks back to the home Tenar lost as a child who was taken from her parents to serve the Nameless Ones and refers the reader to her new, important link to Ged.

The second cultural approach involves placing the novel in the historical context surrounding its time/place of publication. This requires the reader to turn to the decade of 1960s. In the United States this decade was a time of civil rights activism and legislation and growing opposition to the war in Vietnam. At first glance Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan* appears to have little or no connection to these events; however, when we think of the situation Arha is in as she serves at the tombs we can draw a broad parallel between her early, more contented life there and the relative prosperity and comfort of many people in the early parts of the decade. Her growing sense of unease and her loss of faith loosely suggest the unease of people who rose up to insist on equal rights for all people and to protest the war. Though the novel is not primarily feminist, at the time of its publication it enters a culture with a growing women's movement. The fact that Le Guin chooses to have a girl/woman as her protagonist in this second novel of Earthsea is itself a recognition of the importance of women to any attempt at reconstituting the world in a peaceful and whole way. In the contexts of the war and women's movement then it is important to note that the rune of the ring of Erreth-Akbe is called the rune of peace. The stable period that the ring is supposed to usher in fits with a longing for resolution of difficult issues.

In the context of the civil rights movement that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects people against discrimination on the grounds of sex, color, religion, national origin, or race, the reader of *The Tombs of Atuan* does well to remember that Ged not only does not fit in with the beliefs of the priestesses at the tombs, but also is far darker skinned than they are. Le Guin describes Ged as a red-brown person in contrast to the Kargs, who are light skinned. In response to a 2004 Sci Fi Channel miniseries adaptation of her first two Earthsea books, where all the main characters but Ogion are depicted as white, Le Guin emphasizes the importance of Ged's dark skin. Even the title of her essay "A Whitewashed Earthsea: How the Sci Fi Channel Wrecked My Books," clearly focuses on her concern about the channel's misrepresentations of race in her Earthsea books.

> My color scheme was conscious and deliberate from the start. I didn't see why everybody in science fiction had to be a honky

> named Bob or Joe or Bill. I didn't see why everybody in heroic fantasy had to be white (and why all the leading women had 'violet eyes'). It didn't even make sense. Whites are a minority on Earth now—why wouldn't they still be either a minority, or just swallowed up in the larger colored gene pool, in the future? (*Slate.com* December 2004)

In a piece called "Frankenstein's Earthsea" she wrote for *Locus: The Magazine of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Field* that appeared in January of 2005 Le Guin makes the point again in response to the idea that since it's just fantasy or just a movie the color of the actors does not really matter:

> It does matter. It matters a whole lot. I live in a racially bigoted country. From the start I saw my Earthsea as a deliberate refusal to go along with the prejudice that sees white as the norm, and the fantasy tradition that accepts the prejudice. If you're white, ask a colored reader of fantasy whether it matters. Ask them how often they found themselves in fantasy books or movies when they were growing up, and how they felt about it. (*Locus Online*)

Her sense of outrage at the white-focused interpretation she says derives not from any grief at how those in charge of the production mangled the first two books of Earthsea, but that she is "sorry for people who tuned in to the show thinking they were going to see something by me, or about Earthsea" (*Locus Online*). Ursula K. Le Guin's deliberate focus on the issue of race in comments that come approximately 35 years after the publications of the first two Earthsea novels indicates how important the issue was to her then and how important she thinks the issue still is in contemporary American society.

Clearly, *The Tombs of Atuan,* in highlighting cultural differences, reflects heightened sensitivity to issues of rights that were so central to the decade leading up to its publication and that are still key to an understanding of the context of American culture in the twenty-first century.

11

The Farthest Shore (1972)

When *The Farthest Shore* was first published in 1972, it completed Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy. Some critics have compared the Earthsea trilogy to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* Both are clearly works of fantasy that create and sustain a sense of a new, viable world and embroil their characters in vital purposes. Both include a ring of great power and the reestablishment of order through reinstating a kingship. Le Guin's books, however, place far more emphasis on the importance of self-discovery than Tolkien's novels do.

In this novel Ged is the Archmage of Roke and clearly has grown older since the close of the second book of Earthsea, *The Tombs of Atuan.* At the inception of *The Farthest Shore* he and the other masters of Roke begin to hear tales of distress, disorder, and the impotence of magic in various reaches of their civilization. The symptoms of trouble are all well described; however, no one knows the root cause of these problems. The quest Ged undertakes in this book does not see him heading for a particular object (the ring of Erreth-Akbe in *Atuan* for example, or the encounter with the gebbeth in *Wizard*). The journey he makes is a journey toward no particular direction or a defined foe, and he takes a young man, Arren, Prince of Enlad, with him. It is a journey of discovery, investigation, and danger. In 1979 Le Guin said of *The Farthest Shore,* "The book is still the most imperfect of the three, but it is the one I like best. It is the end of the

trilogy, but it is the dream I have not stopped dreaming" ("Dreams must Explain Themselves" 51).

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

As in the first two books of Earthsea the plot revolves around a quest and involves the development of a young person. In this case the youth is Arren, a Prince of Enlad (the region in Earthsea north of Havnor), who is the heir of Morred and thus descended from kings. The plot falls into a three-part structure: Initially the wise meet to ponder the reports they are hearing from Arren and others and can themselves come to no conclusion about what to do; secondly, Ged goes on a quest to discover both the problem and its solution and takes Arren with him on the journey; and finally Ged, Arren, and dragons unite to heal the breach in the world. The conclusion reveals that Arren, whose true name is Lebannen, is king of Earthsea.

Within the questing part of the book there are subjourneys to various places in Earthsea that lead the travelers to meet both people apparently gone mad from the lack of magic and wholeness in the world and those who still maintain their sense of humanity. For example, at Hort Town they meet with crime and chaos; at Lorbanery the people have let things go. Their houses need painting and they have neglected the island's main trade good when they neglect the worms that produce silk. Ged and Arren meet a woman of power at Lorbanery, but she has lost her way. Even though Ged tries to help her by renaming her, it does no good. Her son, Sopli, has gone mad as well. Only the raft people, the Children of the Open Sea, whom Ged and Arren encounter as their boat drifts, at least temporarily seem to retain their equilibrium. In particular, the raft people are truly hospitable to Arren and Ged when they need help. When Ged and Arren leave the raft people and follow Orm Embar, a dragon who comes to get their help, they find that the cause of the imbalance in the world is the act of an evil wizard named Cob who has opened a breach in the world in order to grant himself immortality.

THEMES

As in the first two books of Earthsea the idea of the need for balance in the world is key to understanding Ged's actions. The individual needs to be able to see the larger problem in order to understand how to address

it, so personal perspective must pair with openness to new ideas and the wisdom of experience. The novel makes it clear that the masters of Roke see Ged as the most powerful among them. Ged takes his role as warder of Roke seriously, so when he decides to leave to pursue the cause of the problems in the world, he does so simply because, as he says "I must go" (24).

The importance of loyalty and friendship come to the reader's attention in *The Farthest Shore* early in the novel when Arren swears his fealty to Ged. Ged emphasizes the seriousness of Arren's offered gift. It is also clear that Arren is fierce in his attachment to Ged. He thinks "I would rather sweep *his* room than be a prince in Enlad" (8). The events of the journey test the bond between Ged and Arren. At one point after Ged is injured Arren shrinks from him and fails to do anything to help him—instead, Arren just lets the boat drift. The link between them, however, does not ultimately suffer because of what Arren characterizes as his failing Ged. They enter the land of the dead, the Dry Land, together to heal the breach in the world, and Arren sees to it that they both exit that place though it means carrying Ged over the Mountains of Pain.

Honoring the past and lineage while making a way for the future is also extremely important in the novel. Ged reminds Arren of the importance of his family heritage when they talk in the early chapters of the novel. Arren's family history prepares a destiny for him that he will take up at the end of the novel. His link to Morred is key, though Morred lived over two thousand years prior and there has been little need for heroic deeds in present-day Enlad. The sword Arren carries hearks back to his ancestors: "The sword of Serriadh [Morred's son] had never been laid away or hoarded up, but worn; yet was unworn by the centuries, unweakened, because it had been forged with a great power of enchantment.... He had not used the sword, not had his father, nor his grandfather. There had been peace in Enlad for a long time" (30).

When Ged counsels Arren to take his lineage seriously it is not a matter of emphasizing class or social standing. Ged does not care about social class for its own sake. Indeed he encourages Arren to repeat what the boy refers to as "old wives tales," saying "old women are worth listening to" (5). He reminds Arren "you are the son of Morred and Serriadh," and when Arren protests, saying, "But I am not Morred. I am only myself," Ged makes the point that "to deny the past is to deny the future" (28). Ged's statement that the past and future are part of each other exhibits the idea of continuity of identity and story.

The need for help in bringing about healing appears as a main idea in the novel, as it does in the first two books of Earthsea. Arren and Ged

need each other on the quest, but they also need the assistance of dragons. The idea that all beings feel the disorder Cob causes in the world and thus all must band together to correct the wrong is essential in this novel. The ill in the world has spread over most of Earthsea, and dragons are not immune. For example, Orm Embar loses the ability to speak because of the breach Cob created. Given the link between dragons and the language of the making (the Old or True speech), which is to dragons everyday speech, this curse of silence is astonishing. The appearance of dragons in this text also reminds the reader that Ged is special in his ability to talk with dragons and in their willingness to speak to him. Orm Embar saves Ged's life by flying between him and Cob, and the dragon, Kalessin, brings Ged and Arren back to Roke.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Arren develops into the one who will be king of Earthsea. He fulfills a two-part prophecy when he goes with Ged, and when he enters the land of the dead with the Archmage. Except for the existence of the prophecy, Ged's choice of Arren as the one to accompany him on the quest makes little sense. The prophecy states that the rejoining of the two halves of the ring of Erreth-Akbe, which happened in book two, *The Tombs of Atuan*, would lead to the reestablishment of a king in Havnor, but more particularly, all at Roke have learned how to know the righful king: "*He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day*" (17). The other masters, including Thorion, the master Summoner, question whether it is fair to bring such a young man on this trip. It is clear that they see Arren as still under the aegis of his father, rather than as a potential king who will reign from Havnor. Arren clearly becomes the long awaited king of Earthsea when he and Ged arrive back at Roke on Kalessin's back. The dragon and Ged both make certain that all know that Lebannen is the rightful leader. "I have brought the young king to his kingdom," Kalessin says (195) and the narrator adds, "In the sight of them all, Ged knelt to him [Lebannen], down on both knees, and bowed his grey head" (196).

To get to the point of taking up the kingship, Arren goes through experiences that help him know himself, both his weaknesses and strengths. He goes from being captive on a slave ship to being impotent to help Ged, to being essential in making certain that he and Ged return from the Dry Land. He shows himself and the reader his capacity for openness and self-criticism in a painful conversation he has with Ged about his [Arren's] fear of death and failure to assist the Archmage.

ALTERNATE READING

Taoism, Le Guin, and *The Farthest Shore*

In this novel, far more than in the first two, the idea of the need for balance and the need to restore equilibrium is balanced itself by the notion that events will happen with or without the active pushing of wizards or others. The notion of a balance that depends as often on inaction as on measured action is a central idea of Taoism. It is important to distinguish between Taoism as a religious belief and practice that includes a hereditary priesthood, and Taoism as a philosophy that stresses simplicity, meditation, and links to nature and the natural world. For Le Guin Taoist philosophy is what matters. In Taoist philosophy there is the Way. Broadly speaking "the Tao is a way or path to living as optimally as possible in accordance with the nature of things.... Simplicity, non-contrivance, and non-action are derived from how nature functions" (The Hermitary). Le Guin herself has done a translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, which is her rendering of the text of Lao Tzu. As Jane Slaughter writes "Le Guin knows no Chinese. She worked by using an 1898 translation that showed the original Chinese characters, with a transliteration and translation of each. She compared what different translators had made of the original, enlisted the aid of a scholar of ancient Chinese, J. P. Seaton of the University of North Carolina, and composed her own version" (Slaughter "A Poet's Way").

In *The Farthest Shore* Ged decides to take action to heal the world's troubles, but the action of the journey often leads to forms of inaction such as observation and listening. The learning that Ged and Arren do on the journey drives the narrative. When they go to Hort Town, for example, their first stop on the journey, Ged seeks information from a former wizard named Hare. The evening appointment with Hare turns out to be a trap that ends in Arren being captured and sold as a galley slave. Though Ged later rescues him, the idea that Arren, the future king, should suffer such abuse shows the reader that Ged, for all his power as Archmage, has no supreme power over events. Ged must and does make his way along with the flow of things around him. Ged takes the role of outsider or observer in order to avoid being enmeshed in the evil itself. When Arren and Ged stay with the raft people Arren admits feeling that he has failed Ged—"When for once you needed me. You were hurt and needed my help. I did nothing. The boat drifted, and I let her drift. You were in pain, and I did nothing for you," and Arren adds, "I was afraid of you. I was afraid of death" (120). Ged handles the young man's despair by

reminding him that life and death are part of each other, so denying death has its corollary in denying life, and he reveals to Arren that his fear is a tool in their quest: "It is your fear, your pain, I follow. You have thought me harsh to you, Arren; you never knew how harsh. I use your love as a man burns a candle, burns it away, to light his steps. And we must go on. We must go on. We must go all the way" (122). Ged admits that he is using Arren to help show him the path toward the trouble.

Ged purposely shuts out the "noise" of the ill working in the world so that he can better see it. Ged's stance is almost a meditative one—he waits and follows in order to be on hand when he's called to act. He does not initiate the action or the ill the way he did in *Wizard.* He has grown in wisdom since then and understands that his need to be gone from Roke and doing, as the other masters see it, is not actually about doing. Ged tells Arren that action is an easier course than nonaction. He adds, "But if there were a king over us all again and he sought counsel of a mage … and I were that mage, I would say to him: My lord, do nothing because it is righteous or praiseworthy or noble to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you cannot do in any other way" (67). His quest involves his following a dragon's guidance—a dragon who loses the power of speech, but can show—to the place where Cob breached the world. Ged follows the way—the Taoist way that needs inaction far more than action and must work with the flow of nature and the natural world. At the close of the novel Ged is in a situation of emptiness and the Master Doorkeeper says he's done with doing (196). Rather than seeing Ged's situation at this point as a terrible ending for a once-powerful mage, if we think along Taoist lines Ged has actually reached a point of apotheosis. Not doing is not a form of empty inaction, rather it is a necessary stance in the circumstances and flow of the world. Non-doing for Taoists goes beyond negativity: "It is non-doing in the sense of doing nothing when there is nothing positive that can be done; acting, in other words, only when the time is ripe and the occasion demands it" (Billington 92). In Taoism "action is enhanced by quiescence, and passivity enriched by activity" (92).

The return to the origin, also a key idea in Taoist thought, plays out in Ged's asking Kalessin to bring him back to Gont, rather than leaving him at Roke. The particular return here echoes the larger idea of return to the origin of all in the Tao. Both the terrible visit to the Dry Land and the return to his home on Gont are special recurrences for Ged. They are not simply repetitions. In each case Ged's return is part of forward motion. Le Guin puts it well in a footnote in her translation of the *Tao*

Te Ching in commenting on chapter 28 of Lao Tzu's work: "The riverbed in which power runs leads back, the patterns of power lead back, the valley where power is contained leads back—to the forever new, endless, straightforward way. Reversal, recurrence, are the movement, and yet the movement is onward" (*Tao Te Ching* 38). We see that the course Ged takes in *The Farthest Shore* aligns with Taoist ideas. The apparent wandering that he and Arren do allows them to be available for action when it is most needed. Ged's separating himself from events and taking the stance of observer or even of user of Arren's fear also become more meaningful when we understand the importance of emptiness and non-doing.

Cob's emptiness stands in contrast to the emptiness and inaction of Ged. Cob has no sense of anything but his desire for immortality. He chooses to sever life from death, rather than seeing them as essential to each other. Ged speaks of all the dead being reborn in the living, nature-filled world while Cob lingers without his true name in a Dry Land that brings only annihilation. Cob has only scorn for nature. He tells Ged "Let all stupid nature go its stupid course, but I am a man, better than nature, above nature" (178). In another footnote to one of the chapters of the *Tao Te Ching* Le Guin states: "To believe that one's beliefs are permanent truths which encompass reality is a sad arrogance. To let go of that belief is to find safety" (*Tao Te Ching* 5). Cob's megalomania is a clear example of this "sad arrogance." In grasping for immortality he not only denies the link between life and death, but also unleashes a negative force that controls him. His own delusions trap him.

In denying the link between death and life, Cob sets himself against the very important Taioist idea of the yin and the yang. Billington points out that "the names yin and yang have a prosaic origin, being respectively the northern and southern faces of a mountain—the slope facing away from the sun, therefore mainly in the shade, and the slope facing the sun, therefore mainly lit up … both aspects are necessary if the picture is to be complete" (118–119). He adds that it is through the yin and yang that "the completeness of the Tao is made manifest" (120). Ged's language when he speaks to Arren about Arren's self-perceived fear of death echoes the language of Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching*. Ged says:

> There are two, Arren, two that make one: the world and the shadow, the light and the dark. The two poles of the Balance. Life rises out of death, death rises out of life; in being opposite they yearn to each other, they give birth to each other and are forever reborn. And with them all is reborn, the flower of the apple tree,

> the light of the stars. In life is death. In death is rebirth. What then is life without death? Life unchanging, everlasting, eternal?—What is it but death—death without rebirth? (136)

Cob, for all his boasting about the power he has gained to disrupt the world and make himself immortal, is blind. The state he has won torments him and is not worth having, but he cannot escape it. Ged recognizes in Cob a lack of self and a vast emptiness: "You have given everything for nothing. And so now you seek to draw the world to you, all that light and life you lost, to fill up your nothingness. But it cannot be filled. Not all the songs of earth, not all the stars of heaven could fill your emptiness" (180). Ged's analysis of the situation joins his experience with the current predicament, for he, too, had unwisely opened a breach in the world in *A Wizard of Earthsea.*

He also has played a role in bringing Cob to this point, though he did so unintentionally. He relates the story of Cob to Arren well before they encounter the haunted man in the Dry Land. Cob had enraged Ged by summoning spirits of the dead from the Dry Land as a form of entertainment for anyone who would pay. Ged stopped this practice and compelled Cob to go to the Dry Land, saying, "You compel the dead to come to your house: will you come with me to theirs?" (75). He dragged Cob against his will to the Dry Land to show him what he had been meddling with, but this trip clearly inspired a deep fear of death in Cob that helped drive him to come up with a way to become immortal. The trouble in Cob's case is that the spell that he wove that made him immortal also killed him, so he has achieved endless death rather than eternal life. Ged cannot save him in *The Farthest Shore;* he can offer him real death, but Cob still greedily desires immortal life.

Excessive desire appears in Taoism as truly damaging. In Chapter 29 of the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu writes (Le Guin's rendering), in part:

Those who think to win the world
by doing something to it,
I see them come to grief.
For the world is a sacred object.
Nothing is to be done to it.
To do anything is to damage it.
To seize it is to lose it.
  and
So the wise soul keeps away
from the extremes, excess, extravagance.

Le Guin's gloss on this chapter takes up the direness of Lao Tzu's warning: "For Lao Tzu, 'moderation in all things' isn't just a bit of safe, practical advice. To lose the sense of sacredness of the world is a mortal loss. To injure the world by excess of greed and ingenuity is to endanger our own sacredness" (*Tao Te Ching* 40). Le Guin's word here, "ingenuity," describes well what Cob did in modifying the already powerful and dangerous knowledge he found in Pelnish lore (from the island of Paln in the west of Earthsea) to create the spell that wounded the earth and killed him.

The Children of the Open Sea appear to be immune to the terrible influences of the breach, in part because they represent the opposite of agitated doing, getting, and excessive desire. They float along the sea and follow the great sea creatures in a nomadic, migratory pattern. Their way of life is simple and their diet is minimalist—drawn from the sea and made up of fish products and seaweed. They almost do not help Ged and Arren when they are adrift in Ged's boat, *Lookfar,* except that the chief among them thinks they should aid the wanderers. This intervention, however, does not mean that the people of the rafts are embarking on a new, more-involved attitude toward the world. They avoid land, only visiting it once a year to get provisions and mend their vessels. Even when Ged tells him of the terrible evil in the world, the chief of the raft folk says: "What has it to do with us? We have nothing to do with other men, their islands and their ways, their makings and unmakings. We live on the sea and our lives are the sea's. We do not hope to save them; we do not seek to lose them. Madness does not come here" (123).

Their noninvolvement acts as buffer between them and harm until the days of the Long Dance come and they celebrate this ritual of the turning seasons. In acknowledging and celebrating the Dance they show that they and nature are linked to the rest of the world of Earthsea. As the singer of the sea people chants the song, he stops, saying that he can sing no more because he has forgotten the words and cannot bring them back (128). Ged instructs Arren to sing, and he does, filling the void of the silence. That Arren can take up the song helps the reader understand that he is now in a position to have gotten past the worst of the affects of Cob's evil deed on him. Arren's song also acts as a gift to the people who have helped him and Ged.

Arren thinks that his and Ged's time with the Children of the Open Sea is not at all linked to the rest of the journeying the two of them have been doing (119), but the truth is that rest and restoration are as much a part of what Arren and Ged are engaged in as are the actual travel and information gathering they do. It is while they are with the raft dwellers that

Orm Embar, a mighty dragon to whom Ged owes a favor, finds them and leads them toward Cob. Their physical position on the open ocean makes it easier for Orm Embar to locate them.

In the end the journey of the Archmage and the Prince comes back around to an idea the Master Chanter articulated early in the book: What's wrong with Earthsea is not just about magic or its abuse, but emanates from an empty center at Havnor where there should be a king, but where there has been none for at least eight hundred years. The Chanter says, "Roke is not the center of the world. That tower is, on which the sword of Erreth-Akbe is set, and in which stands the throne of Serriadh.... Let there be a king upon the throne, and we will have peace" (22). Returning to the past to ensure a better future in Earthsea. Returning to the ancestral origins of the throne and bringing together the power of a mage and a king (Lebannen is himself, as was Morred, a natural mage), complete the picture that the Chanter sketches. The renewed center of Earthsea perfectly counterbalances the newly healed breach that Ged supplies.

Ged's return to Gont in the context of the fulfillment represented at the end of the book is most naturally itself a fulfillment. Even beyond the Taoist idea of return, the novel leaves open the fate of Ged after the crowning of the new king in Havnor. Ged becomes a mysterious figure who did or did not come to the coronation ceremony, depending on who tells the tale. He becomes one who wanders off in his boat *Lookfar,* or a man who wanders in the forests or mountains. The important element within the narrative uncertainty Le Guin provides at the end of *The Farthest Shore* is that Ged is now even more than ever linked to legend and thus to the heroes of Earthsea. Ged remains a part of the flow of song in Earthsea, and his tale captures Le Guin again—after she had written this novel, the "last" book of Earthsea.

12

Tehanu (1990)

Almost 20 years after the publication of *The Farthest Shore* Le Guin wrote *Tehanu* (1990). The book cover for the Bantam paperback version of the novel includes the phrase "the last book of Earthsea," though we now know that two other books followed *Tehanu.* Part of the tale picks up where *The Farthest Shore* left off—with Ged on the back of the dragon, Kalessin, landing on Gont. The novel initially focuses not so much on Ged as it does on Tenar, the girl who had helped Ged get the other half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe in the second book of Earthsea, *The Tombs of Atuan.* The large arm-ring, symbolizes the start of a new, peaceful time for Earthsea. Though the prospect of a king on the throne in Havnor makes everyone think society will experience peace and order, it is not yet so on Gont at the start of the novel.

The novel deals with various types of trouble that are happening on Gont: gangs of thuggish thieves roaming the land, pirates in control of most commerce, and wizards and aristocrats who use their power in corrupt and damaging ways. During the course of the story Le Guin explores the role of witches, as well, and highlights the differences between the sexes. The quest in this novel does not entail a physical journey, but does lead the reader to see that some of the most important journeys are the ones that occur within the souls and minds of people.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The novel begins with a chapter called "A Bad Thing," which sets the tone for the book. There are no quests to heal a general mischief that emanates from a far-off place or the Dry Land as there were in the first three books of Earthsea. The plot is structured around a series of events that take place in various locales on Gont. The characters move mostly from the area in which Tenar begins, Oak Farm and the Middle Valley region of the island, to the area where Ogion lives near Re Albi. As Warren Rochelle says in *Communities of the Heart,* "These small, private journeys, whether in the light or the dark, stand in sharp contrast to the great adventurous journeys in the first three Earthsea novels" (54–55).

The bad thing at the beginning is the injured, burned child, whom Tenar calls Therru, Kargish for "burning, the flaming of fire," (Le Guin *Tehanu* 23), and Ogion's death follows a couple of chapters later. The first trip to Ogion's house that Tenar and Therru make comes about because Ogion is dying and has sent for Tenar. So misfortune, both in the form of the attack on Therru and the death of a great mage, sets the plot going.

Roughly speaking, the narrative has four sections concerning primarily Therru and Tenar and defined largely by place: the discovery of the abused child at the beginning near Oak Farm; the time at Ogion's house; Tenar and Therru fleeing from that house and returning to Valmouth and Oak Farm; Tenar and Therru returning with Ged to Ogion's cottage. Ged enters the narrative on the back of the dragon Kalessin, at the Overfell near the dead mage's house near Re Albi, but ends up going off to work as a goatherd to escape the entreaties of emissaries from Havnor who want to request that he crown the new king. Only when Tenar and Therru return to Oak Farm do they come back together with Ged.

At Re Albi, though she does not at first realize it, Tenar has a powerful enemy in Aspen, the wizard to the Lord of Re Albi. Aspen clearly despises Tenar and tries to work her evil by setting a curse on her, which has most power when she is in the vicinity of Re Albi. It is clear that he and other wizards who have become used to the way their power has held sway in Earthsea are hostile to the advent of a king. They, like the pirates of Gont, have achieved a privileged place at the top of a hierarchical society. Change is, consequently, a threat to them.

THEMES

The importance of the role of Therru, the burned and abused child, is in part that her situation exposes the prejudices of the various local societies

and people of Gont. There are those who wonder what *she* had done to be in her current state (Spark, Tenar's son, thinks this way)—clearly a case of blaming the victim—and those who avoid looking at her in order to avoid acknowledging that the society they live in could contain people who would do such harm to a child, and those who avoid looking in order not to stare at her deformity. They thus create a sense of Therru as an invisible person. Le Guin's deliberate focus on these reactions to the child forces readers to examine their own treatment and assessment of those who are injured, handicapped, or just look different from them. Aside from Therru there is the character Aunty Moss, a local witch near Re Albi, who is disheveled and smelly but has great compassion and wisdom. She understands, for example, that Ged is no longer a mage long before Tenar truly knows it. She also becomes a victim of the evil Aspen, who puts a curse on her that causes her flesh to rot and grow back so that she will suffer, but not die. In Aspen's view of the universe she is an expendable person, and he uses Moss to lure Tenar back to Re Albi so he can hurt her as well. Tenar, as a Karg, is also different from most of the people she lives among. They are dark, reddish-skinned people, while she is white skinned. The opening of the novel mentions that when Tenar married Flint there was some doubt about his taking a Kargish "witch" for a wife. The people around Oak Farm learned to accept her over time, but many retained their broad prejudice.

A related idea in the novel surrounds the question of the nature of power itself. Who has power, and why? Are those in power representative of some majority of society or do they have their own agendas apart from what might work towards a notion of the broader good? Power in many instances that are negative takes the form of power over others and thus links to the ideas of superiority and prejudices. Clearly there are mages and wizards who have power to do good or ill, but there are other powers in the world that Le Guin shows us. For instance, the people who hurt Therru had power over her and had responsibility for her that they abused. The people of the towns of Gont also have the power to create a better order for society, but lack the will to do anything. Until they hear that there is a king at Havnor who will back them, they do not appoint honest bailiffs who can handle the issues of crime and corruption. In the improved society of Gont at the end of the novel, power for good links with the idea that citizens share responsibility for the workings of the world they live in. Ged and Tenar ask at various junctures when they act to defend themselves and others, "Why do we do what we do?" The question in the text is rhetorical, because readers know that they act because they must, because they care.

The novel redefines relationships both private and political to emphasize interdependence. Isolation, even on Gont, which is hardly the most sophisticated of places in the archipelago of Earthsea, is simply not possible. What happens elsewhere eventually spreads through society. Characters such as Handy and Hake, two of the band who abused Therru, are local examples of the spread of evil doing. The positive influence of King Lebannen's decree about replacing dishonest bailiffs with trustworthy ones and restoring order also acts as an example.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Unlike the first three books of Earthsea, *Tehanu* does not give us a primary person who undergoes development. Only one of the three main characters who does evolve, furthermore, is a young person: Therru (later called Tehanu). The other two people who undergo personal change are already adult and are entering on new phases of their lives. Tenar, who has been a farm wife on Gont for many years, raising two children in that time, is newly a widow at the start of the novel, and Ged, whose powers and adventures were entwined with extraordinary quests in the first three novels, arrives on Gont an emptied person who has no more mage power in him.

Therru has to learn to live with and trust people after she had been brutally hurt by those who were her guardians. She was beaten, raped, and almost killed when one of the gang she was born into pushed her into the fire. Her injuries scar the right side of her face and leave her with a deformed, club-like hand on that side. It is clear when Lark finds her that Therru had been abandoned and essentially left for dead. Lark fetches Goha (Tenar's name on Gont), and the witch Ivy tries to help, but there is really nothing anyone can do except see if the child (who is about six years old) will live. When she does live, Tenar takes Therru to live with her at Oak Farm. Tenar treats Therru as her daughter and does all she can for her, but Ogion tells Tenar with his dying breath to teach Therru, "not Roke" and "teach her all." This guidance sets Tenar to thinking what she can do for Therru, what profession or life the girl will have when she grows to be a woman. The girl Therru needs Tenar's help in order to function in the world, but the girl who is a dragon has her own wisdom that appears to need no help. It becomes clear late in the novel, when Ged and Tenar are in trouble and Therru calls on Kalessin, that she knows the Language of the Making without anyone having taught her, for instance. Her dragon self does not actually need development, but it does take a

while for Therru and those around her to recognize that she is essentially a hybrid being. Since all were dragons at the beginning and some split off and inhabited the land and became humans, there have been a few born from time to time who share in both dragon and humankind. Therru is thus one of these extraordinary beings.

Tenar thinks about her own new life that started when the life of being wife and mother ended in her husband's death and the adulthood of her children. Tenar reflects that she has spent much of her life around tombstones, since she lives not far from where her husband, Flint, is buried, and her early life was spent serving the Nameless Ones as a priestess in the labyrinth at Atuan. Her plan is to run the farm, since she knows she is a good manager and businesswoman, but Ogion's need for her delays that idea. After her return to the farm, her plans change again. As a result of the later return of her son, Spark, to claim the farm as his inheritance, she, Ged, and Therru go back to Ogion's house. Ged and Tenar are in a sense Ogion's heirs, since they are his former students. Tenar is clearly looking for a situation where she can be her own mistress and not have to play the subservient role. It is Spark's traditional, sexist attitude towards his mother that helps her decide to leave the farm. In the course of these location changes, she realizes that she and Ged could have a future together, and their relationship develops with her as the leader in intimate matters. As far as sex goes, Ged is, as Aunty Moss, the witch at Re Albi, says, a boy of fifteen.

Ged's development involves not only sexual initiation, but also a time of healing when he is away from people, herding goats. He discovers that he was in deep mourning for his former Archmage, wizard, self and has not stopped to think about the person he now is or could become. The facts that he is able to make a living and that he can be of real assistance to Tenar go a long way toward helping him revise his views of himself and how he fits into the world. A key event in Ged's development occurs on the night the men who had a role in hurting Therru come to Oak Farm seeking to finish the job. He hears where they are going as he steps off the road to avoid them, then follows them and ends up stabbing one of them in the stomach with a pitchfork. Ged finds through this event that there are more ways to act and help than just the use of spells and magic. Tenar helps him see this:

> "Think how easy it would have been," he said, looking into the coals again, "when I was a wizard. I could have set a binding spell on them, up there on the road, before they knew it.

> I could have marched them right down to Valmouth like a flock of sheep. Or last night, here, think of the fireworks I could have set off! They'd never have known what hit them." "They still don't," she said. (203)

In this same episode Tenar had flung open the door brandishing a knife in order to challenge the would-be assailants. She discovers that she cannot wait passively for an attack, though she had tried to lock windows and doors to keep them out: "It was more than she could bear. The frozen terror that had bound her broke, and in rage she ran into the kitchen that was all red light in her eyes, grabbed up the long, sharp butcher knife from the block, flung back the door-bolt, and stood in the doorway" (188). Here we see Tenar taking charge of the situation. Ged mirrors her as he engages the thugs outside the opened door. The situation forces both characters to act and in acting begin to see themselves and their context differently.

ALTERNATE READING

Feminism and *Tehanu*

In discussing feminism and *Tehanu* it is important to see that there are three issues involved. One way that feminism intersects with the novel involves Le Guin's own statements about the evolution of her thinking on the subject. Another important element in seeing the way feminism helps us understand the novel involves the historical context of American feminism. The third focuses on interpreting the novel using some key feminist concepts. The three areas are obviously related, but seeing them as distinct will help to clarify some important ideas.

Le Guin has said that she realized that she was writing from a male position, and this realization helped her see other ways to view her writing and the world. In the first chapter of *The Wave in the Mind*, a book of essays and criticism, she states, "I am a man, and I want you to believe and accept this as a fact, just as I did for many years" (3). She wrote these words in the early 1990s. Though by this time Le Guin had certainly encountered feminist thinking, this line from what she calls a performance piece begins to describe the situation of many women. The claim of maleness reveals that the world sees men as full people, so it's best to be a man. She says "Women are a very recent invention" (3). In an interview with Jonathan White in 1995 for *Whole Earth Review,* Le Guin calls her introduction to the feminist movement "slow and late" and adds, "All my early fiction tends to be rather male-centered. A couple of the Earthsea

books have no women in them at all or only marginal woman figures. That's how hero stories worked; they were about men." She says in the same interview that she "realized that my own fiction was telling me that I could no longer ignore the feminine" (White). As late as 1988 Bernard Selinger wrote in his book *Le Guin and Identity in Contemporary Fiction* that "many feminist readers of Le Guin will continue to oppose her unless she creates more female protagonists" (155).

What Le Guin refers to as being a man some feminists would call being a patriarchal woman. A patriarchal woman is someone who sees the world through accepted norms that men have shaped. This woman may or may not be aware of her acceptance of male-centered ideas. Le Guin is obviously keenly aware of her earlier part in upholding male notions, but she has certainly gotten well past that time in her career. She cites writing *The Eye of the Heron* in 1977 as a point where her fiction helped steer her toward writing the experience of women as well as men. In that book the hero dies about midway through the novel. She says, "I blundered around awhile and then found some guidance in feminist theory. I got excited when I discovered feminist literary criticism was something I could read and actually enjoy" (White).

Le Guin sees women's and men's experiences as different. She also thinks that "A lot of women still deny that their experience is different than a man's. They do this because it's scary to realize you don't have words to describe your own experience" (White). The idea that women lack a language to fully describe their experiences comes from the corollary idea that language is male centered. In English, for example, sets of opposites like masculine and feminine actually assume the superiority of the masculine. Another example helps us see how slanted language can be: A woman who has many sexual partners is called a "slut," while a man who has many female partners is labeled a "stud" (Tyson 90). It has taken time for women to use language in ways that mesh well with their lives. The 1980s, according to Le Guin, saw what she calls "the incredible upsurge of woman writers and poets" (White). It is the role of writers to assist in creating or using language that can capture and articulate women's experiences. "One of the functions of art is to give people the words to know their own experience" she says (White).

When Le Guin says she came to feminist ideas late she is speaking of the chronology of her life and in broad historical terms. The feminist movement in America can date to the nineteenth century with figures such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who worked to get women the vote. Le Guin's "lateness" refers to her not having gone

past these early feminist figures (she includes an early twentieth-century British writer, Virginia Woolf, among them) until she started reading more recent feminists in the seventies. The images many people have of feminism in the United States center around major political activists like Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, who made up part of the cohort of feminists of the 1960s and founded NOW (National Organization for Women) and *Ms.* magazine, respectively. These leaders of the women's movement were most concerned with getting equal rights and standing for women. Friedan especially pointed out that women felt pressured by their society to fill domestic roles and were not encouraged or even invited to think about having careers. In 1973 the landmark case *Roe vs. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States, was prompted by a Texas woman having been denied the right to have an abortion. The 1960s saw the passage of legislation that most Americans take for granted in the twenty-first century: the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which says that women must be paid the same wage as men for doing the same job; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination in hiring based on sex (as well as other categories—race, color, or national origin); Title IX of the Education Amendments passed in 1972, which forbids schools that receive federal funds from discriminating against women in matters of admissions, sports, or other educational programs; and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1975, which prohibits banks or other commercial institutions from discriminating based on sex or whether a woman is married, single, or divorced. In 1972 Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but since it has not been ratified by enough states to become part of the Constitution, it has expired. Critics of the amendment pointed out that the ERA would have required that women be drafted into the armed services as well as men (see *World Book*).

Some people see feminism as anti-man, and there are undoubtedly some feminist women who might be in that category; however, feminism is much broader than one attitude and stems from a central idea that thinking that women are somehow inferior to men or should have their opportunities limited just because they are women is wrong. What feminists in general want is for women to have opportunities to make their own choices in life rather than have roles chosen for them by society's traditional norms. American feminism in the two decades of the sixties and seventies was issue based and politically active. Though the word "feminist" has become unpopular recently, there are still people, both men and women, who work to ensure that women's rights are upheld.

Looking at the dates of all these activities and pieces of legislation, readers of Le Guin's Earthsea novels can see that the first three books appear to include very little consciousness of the women's movement. Le Guin's citing 1977 and her science fiction novel *The Eye of the Heron* as part of her turning point about feminist issues in her fiction then helps us see what she means by late. She was certainly familiar with the early waves of women's rights activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and she had experimented with gender in her science fiction novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1967), but she had not at that point written major female characters. For her, feminism has both political scope and significance for her fiction. The overt feminism of *Tehanu* comes well after female characters appear in more important roles in Le Guin's other writings.

Some critics of the novel complained that the book is more of a treatise on grappling with stereotypes than a work of fiction, but it is essential to realize that many of Le Guin's Earthsea books are character focused, and the issues the characters face are integral parts of the fabric of the narrative. In *Tehanu* Tenar especially confronts the victimization of women and girls, the terrible power of traditional views of the proper spheres of men and women, and the realization that she must actively resist those two evils. The novel also shows us men who are capable of thinking and acting beyond the stereotypes about sex and gender that function in Earthsea. Ogion, Lebannen, and Ged are all examples.

Part of the problem in Earthsea that leads to the denigration of women is the importance of hierarchies of power that are based both on class and sex. For example, ranks in society from top to bottom (referring only to men) are as follows: king, mages and wizards, aristocrats, merchants, farmers, and workers. Women do not fit in here except as the daughters or spouses of the various men in society. Witches truly do not fit into the hierarchy of power. Even Tenar realizes after getting to know Aunty Moss at Re Albi that she should have treated Ivy, the witch back at Oak Farm, much better than she did.

The attitudes that people have toward women manifest themselves in small but significant ways. For example, when Townsend, a sheep-buyer, comes to look over the stock at Oak Farm, he speaks to Spark instead of to Tenar, though he had earlier spoken to her. It is clear that though she has had far more to do with the running of the place than Spark has—he has been away at sea for years—Townsend talked to Tenar only because there was not a master at the farm to deal with initially. Any woman would be a poor substitute for dealing with another man. Townsend also brings news

that Moss is critically ill and needs Tenar's help. The narrator points out that he delivers the message "with a kind of smirk that might be intended for sympathy" (234). The idea that Townsend might take pleasure in the news that Moss is desperately ill, besides being particularly cruel, reflects a notion that women, especially witches, don't count. What men do is not part of the purview of women, and vice versa. When Tenar tells Spark that she, Ged, and Therru will be going to stay at Ogion's old house, he says "Just go off like that?" to which his mother replies "So you went; so you came" (235). Clearly Spark thinks in terms of a double standard: What is acceptable behavior for him is not acceptable for his mother, a woman. In the matter of a small household chore, picking up and cleaning dishes after a meal, we see the double standard again. Spark refuses to help with the task because "That's women's work" (232). Spark, in his defense, has not actually known another way of thinking, and until his mother tries to get him to share in the housework apparently no one has challenged his ideas. So, far from being a particularly egregious example of sexism, Spark represents the norm of the society in which he lives. He assumes as well that if a man does something wicked, the evil emanates not from his lack of morality, but somehow from the female. He asks Tenar about Therru saying, "What did she do, to look like that?" (231). Though Spark importantly represents the broadly ignorant view of the sexes that relegates men and women to different tasks, goals, and roles—something the Victorians called "separate spheres"—he enters the narrative late. Tenar's thinking about her own future and roles has been evolving well before her son's return to Gont.

At first it appears that Tenar's life will center around the needs of others rather than focusing on herself, thus linking to stereotypes of women's roles, but her path and choices are not that simple. She does care about what happens to Therru; she wants to be with Ogion when he is dying and asks for her, and her waiting at his house turns out to be just what is called for because her presence means that she can help Ged. In addition to all her care for others, though, Tenar grows in power. For example, her brief interaction with Kalessin shows the reader that she, too, is a dragonlord, for a dragon spoke with her. She fearlessly looks the dragon in the eye as well, something that even great wizards fear to do. She realizes the importance of the connection to Kalessin: "So she was a woman dragons would talk to. Was that the new thing, the folded knowledge, the light seed, that she felt in herself, waking beneath the small window that looked west?" (68). In addition, we learn from this episode that dragons do not share in the prejudices and limitations of human society.

Tenar's conversations with Moss also help the reader to see her thought about the roles of women and men. Moss does her best to describe what she sees as the differences between men and women: "'A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in a shell.' She held up her long, bent, wet fingers as if holding a walnut. 'It's hard and strong, that shell, and it's all full of him. Full of grand man-meat, manself. And that's all. That's all there is. It's all him and nothing else inside'" (56). Moss claims that a woman is "a different thing entirely. Who knows where a woman begins and ends?" (57). What Moss says to Tenar in this conversation could lead a reader to believe that she is making a biological essentialist argument. In other words, her description would say that the differences between men and women are fundamental and that they determine what each sex is likely to desire and do in life. Aunty Moss may be making the first part of the essentialist claim, but she does not make the second. In fact in the same conversation the talk turns to Ogion. Tenar points out that Ogion taught her "As if I weren't a girl. As if I'd been his prentice, like Sparrowhawk. He taught me the Language of the Making, Moss. What I asked him, he told me" (55). Both women admire Ogion, and Moss points out that he was different from other mages and men of power. The fact that a person as wise and good as Ogion did not treat Tenar differently from Ged just because she was a girl indicates that there are people in Earthsea who transcend sexism and traditional views. Moss herself, even though she brings the notion of difference to the discussion, clearly does not think that men are by nature or class superior. She celebrates her own "womanness": "'Listen, mistress, I have roots, I have roots deeper than this island. Deeper than the sea, older than the raising of the lands. I go back into the dark.' Moss's eyes shone with a weird brightness in their red rims and her voice sang like an instrument" (57). She accepts her own mystery, though she does see herself as a witch and thus in a category apart from most people.

Moss is one of an array of women in the novel who make up important parts of the societies in which Tenar moves. Back at Oak Farm it is Lark who helps bring Tenar and Therru together. The only other person who comes to aid her at first is the witch, Ivy. Later the sorcerer, Beech from Valmouth, who is a well-meaning, good man, also comes to try to help, but he is not someone who is generally at hand. Tenar also has a good relationship with her daughter, Apple. Of course, her life back in Atuan was lived in the midst of women. She reminds the reader when she tells Moss "I grew up among women. Only women" (58). *Tehanu* does not advocate societies of women as a way for women to deal with the sexism

of some men, but the novel does show the reader the importance of the support women can provide for women.

It is a woman/dragon who tells the tale of the split between dragons and people to Ogion, then Ogion passes that story on to Tenar, who tells it to Therru when they are walking to Re Albi. That Ogion is part of the transmission of the story speaks well of him again. He was willing to listen to what the Woman of Kemay had to say to him about the origins of humans and dragonkind. Just as that story makes clear that the two species were not always separate, so do the characters in *Tehanu* begin to unravel the limiting ideas that divide the sexes. Furthermore, the Woman of Kemay amazed Ogion when he first saw her. Tenar tells Therru

> Then Ogion stepped back, and he held up his oak staff, and put up his hand, too, like this, as if trying to protect himself from the heat of a fire, and in his amazement and fear said her true name aloud—"Dragon!" In that first moment, he told me, it was no woman he saw at all in the doorway, but a blaze and glory of fire, and a glitter of gold scales and talons, and the great eyes of a dragon. (11)

Ogion becomes an exemplar even after his death because he knew how to listen, see, and appreciate difference. It is telling that the Lord of Re Albi hired his own wizard rather than go to Ogion for assistance. Ogion as an independent thinker would hardly have fit in with that Lord's plan to become immortal. Just as Ogion saw the power in the Woman of Kemay, so he sees that Therru is different and will need different teaching and will evoke fear.

Part of the fear with which people react to Therru derives from her dragon nature. People fear a being that they do not understand, cannot recognize, and thus see as other or alien. Though dragons may not be immortal, they, unlike people, are the oldest creatures in Earthsea. When Therru talks with Kalessin she refers to him as Segoy. Segoy is the name of the dragon who created Earthsea, so her reference links him with the far past and links her to him and his knowledge. Therru, who is a young, scarred girl, is also part of one of the oldest species in the world, and this reflects Aunty Moss's statements about being deep and old. It is Therru who helps Moss when Aspen has cursed her flesh, for Therru knows Moss's true name as a dragon who lives with the Language of the Making would know it. Therru acts as an emblem for all that is wrong in society,

since her injuries remind everyone of the terrible evil that was done to her, but her scars and deformities also act as indicators of her great strength. She managed to sustain awful damage and live not only as a shy, withdrawn young girl, but as the heroine of the novel who saves those who are her supposed elders.

The question of what future or profession Therru will have occupies Tenar's mind before the revelation of Therru's dragon-self occurs. She asks counsel from all who might be able to advise her: Beech, Ivy, Ged, and Ogion. Beech thinks that Therru might make a good witch, and so Tenar asks Ivy if she would take her on as apprentice. Ivy's reply shows Tenar part of what she has not yet seen about Therru: "What power she is, I don't know, I don't say. But it's beyond my teaching, I know that—or Beech's, or any witch or wizard I ever knew! I'll give you my advice, mistress, free and feeless. It's this: Beware. Beware her the day she finds her strength! That's all" (181). While Tenar sees Therru as a hurt child who needs kindness and attention, Ivy sees the power in the girl and fears it. Either Tenar does not see it or Tenar, being powerful herself, does not see what is in Therru as difference. Tenar's reaction to Ivy's words is anger: "Nobody would help her, she thought. She knew the job was beyond her, they didn't have to tell her that—but none of them would help her. Ogion had died, and old Moss ranted, and Ivy warned, and Beech kept clear, and Ged—the one who might really have helped—Ged ran away" (181–82). Part of what troubles Tenar about how to help Therru stems from the restrictions society places on women and the even more intense limitations that await a scarred girl like Therru. In a sense she is trying to find a way for Therru to fit into a society that does not accept her. Whether that lack of acceptance stems from recognition of Therru's power or from sexism, the end result is that Therru will be relegated to the role of outsider. A woman of power is by definition an outsider in Earthsea, so even witches would fit in better than Therru would because most of them have learned the male-created idea that women's magic is weak and not to be considered among the real forces in Earthsea.

A woman of power, if she exists, is essentially invisible to those who discount women in general. A glaring example of this blindness occurs when wizards come to honor Ogion after his death and Tenar tries to tell them his true name, the name that he chose to tell her as he was dying. They simply do not hear her when she tells them the name and his wish to be buried near a particular tree. Her anger at their rudeness focuses more on the grave dishonor their attitudes do to Ogion, rather than on herself: "'Oh!' she said. 'This is a bad time—a time when even such a name can

go unheard, can fall like a stone! Is listening not power? Listen, then: his name was Aihal'" (29). When they look at Tenar, the wizard of Re Albi, Aspen, and one from Gont Port see a middle-aged farm wife, and thus it is normal for them to ignore what she says as automatically unimportant. Their sexism becomes both ironic and cruel, since they stand right by the body of a kind, good, and generous wizard when they insult Tenar. In this same scene Moss has come to prepare Ogion's body for burial. It is custom in Earthsea for women to take care of such matters and to show deference to wizards, as Moss does: "Moss did not look at them with her bloodshot eyes, but ducked and bowed and drew back, gathering up her poor charms and witcheries" (27). The homemade charm that she had placed in Ogion's hand, the wizard of Re Albi "flicked … away with the tip of his staff" (27). Though Moss's subservient attitude appears to indicate that she has bought into the notions about the roles of the sexes, she comes to Tenar's defense, letting the haughty wizards know that Ogion had sent for Tenar. "Nobody else but her" she says, reminding the pair of men that Ogion had not so honored either of them. Clearly, Tenar is not the only one who sees a need for those in power to change their perspectives.

The deep corruption of those who hold wealth and rank has no greater example than the Lord of Re Albi and his loyalists. The gossip around Re Albi has it that the old Lord needs Aspen's wizard power to prolong his life by siphoning the energy and youth from his own grandson. The narrative after reporting this hideous idea also states, "It was a matter of 'Let be' again. The doings of the powerful were not to be judged by the powerless. And there was the dim, blind loyalty, the rootedness in place: the old man was *their* lord, Lord of Re Albi" (132). The fact that only men are allowed to serve at the mansion house indicates that the Lord of Re Albi shares Aspen's hatred of women. According to the narrator, Aspen's hatred of Tenar is based on her sex: "To be a woman was her fault. Nothing could worsen or amend it, in his eyes; no punishment was enough. He had looked at what had been done to Therru, and approved" (129). Clearly, the contrast between Tenar's, Lark's, and Moss's care for the abused Therru and the Re Albi wizard's willingness to harm a child leaves no room for moral ambiguity. Aspen's sense of his own superiority also means that he scorns those lower than him in rank, even if they are men. When Tenar tries to tell him that his Lord may have hired an evil-doer, Handy, as a farm worker, the wizard replies "I know nothing about these people" (126). Aspen seeks to use his power to retain his own sense of superiority and can obviously only do so through attacking those who might have power or reputations that rival his own. He is not happy to

hear one of the nobles from Havnor referring to Tenar's part in bringing the Ring of Erreth-Akbe to the capital. Aspen sees her as a witch, a trouble maker, and one who has defied him when he and the other wizard came to the Overfell after Ogion's death.

To attack Tenar, Aspen must first disable her abilities to think and speak so that he can physically assault her and watch her die. He also attacks Ged, but allows him to speak. Aspen says "All I can do to witches and monsters is cleanse the world of them, but to you, who used at one time to be a man, I can talk; you are capable of rational speech, at least" (240). He goes on to make clear that he resents Ged because Ged destroyed his master, Cob (see chapter 11 on *The Farthest Shore*), and because Ged was Archmage and thus in a position of superiority to Aspen when he was a student at Roke. He delights in forcing Ged to repeat, "I'm not a mage." What is even more disturbing about Aspen's megalomania and cruelty is that other men of power share it. He claims that he has gathered them from Roke and even Havnor. Thus Aspen acts a representative of a set of men who do not want a king to realign power in a way that means more equity. What he fears is the idea that there might be a female archmage. He refers to Lebannen as a "meddling king" who "with his mincing lords and stupid wizards, [is] looking for a woman! A woman to rule us!" (241). Men fear that another having power will diminish their own power, and thus fair-minded men like Ged and Lebannen are threats to them. Aspen and his crowd do not realize that Tenar is right when she says that there are all kinds of power in the world (128), but this dispersed idea of power cannot attract selfish, cruel, and insecure individuals.

Tenar's idea of multiple kinds of power aligns with feminist thought that emphasizes multiplicity and circulation of thought. Sharing power and recognizing the gifts and abilities of others in this line of thinking does not weaken the individual, but strengthens society. Because he hates women, Aspen cannot see the generosity of power they represent. At the point when Aspen is about to command Tenar, on whom his curse is working, to throw herself off the cliff, Tenar "pointed to the sky" and "She laughed aloud" (247). Beyond the fact that Aspen mistakes her gesture as pointing out an approaching albatross when it is Kalessin who approaches, Tenar's laugh is truly significant. According to French feminist theoretician Hélène Cixous, a laugh is a gesture both of defiance and wholeness. She refers to Medusa from mythology, a woman with snakes for hair, whose very look, that story tells us, would kill a person. Medusa is the ultimate vilified witch figure for Cixous, who takes the myth and turns it around. She denies the idea that Medusa is evil simply because

men have decided she is: "You have only to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 885). Just as Aspen categorizes Tenar as a witch, so mythology casts Medusa as evil. Tenar is not afraid to question categories, nor is she afraid of the dragon's approach. Her response is to laugh and cry out the dragon's name "Kalessin!" It is she who understands the situation and pulls Ged down onto the rock face as Kalessin's powerful breath annihilates their captors.

Just as the Medusa is hybrid, so are Therru and Tenar. Therru we know is the child of the dragon, and Therru sees Tenar as a red dragon (Le Guin *Tehanu* 121). The affinity between the two "human" women and the dragon highlights both their otherness and their potential power. Those who fear to lose their own share of influence fear such women, but those who are secure in themselves embrace and listen to them. When Tenar and Therru make their way to the King's ship, *Dolphin*, earlier in the novel, Lebannen listens carefully to what Tenar has to say and is kind to Therru. His touch also heals Therru of the mark that Handy made on her arm when he tried to take her from Tenar at the wharf. When the king discusses with Tenar the phrase "a woman on Gont" that the council of the wise heard from one of its members, the Patterner, and she suggests that perhaps the broader changes in the world might mean that there will be a king instead of an archmage, the Master Windkey holds out for wizardly prerogative saying "Roke and the Art Magic will endure. Our treasure is well guarded" (160). He does not truly hear her. As the narrator says, "How could he, who had never listened to a woman since his mother sang him his last cradle song, hear her?" Because of his obtuseness, Tenar waits to speak to Lebannen alone about her straightforward interpretation of the Patterner's words: that the next archmage might indeed be a woman. Whether this would ever happen is less the point in the novel than the idea that people should begin to imagine more capaciously and to credit women with being potential contributors to the good of the world, rather than as invisible entities who do housework. Lebannen is able to hear Tenar's idea and says "under his breath, 'It may be'" (162). The world of *Tehanu* creates the groundwork for women's progress in Earthsea by challenging the ideas and hatreds that have so long hemmed them in. Each of the first three Earthsea novels brings change, but the fourth brings that change to the domestic, political, and wizardly aspects of the world all at once.

13

"The Finder" from *Tales from Earthsea* (2001)

Tales from Earthsea, published in the same year as *The Other Wind,* contains an array of stories that provide more information about Earthsea, its people, and the institutions and mores of society. The last story, "Dragonfly," acts as a bridge between *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind,* while the first story, "The Finder," provides an account of the founding of the wizard school on Roke and thus acts as a prehistory to the first book of Earthsea, *A Wizard of Earthsea.* The intervening stories in the volume, "Darkrose and Diamond," "The Bones of the Earth," and the "On the High Marsh," all focus on talented wizards who choose to use their gifts in various ways. Ogion is a major figure in "The Bones of the Earth," and Ged, as Archmage, plays a role in helping the reader understand an odd, wandering, and potentially dangerous wizard in "On the High Marsh."

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

Though a story, "The Finder," (at 112 pages) is the longest of the pieces in *Tales from Earthsea* and could be termed a novella. "The Finder" introduces the reader to a young man called Otter who has a gift for finding lost or desired objects. He lives at Havnor in a time when there is no legitimate king and people live in fear of a pirate named Losen who despotically enforces his interests and enslaves workers who row his ships, work in mines, or serve him as wizards. Though he pays some

skilled laborers, he forbids them to work for anyone else. Le Guin divides the tale into a preface that helps situate the story ("In the Dark Time"), and three subtitled parts that are all names the narrator calls the finder at different points in his career: "Otter," "Tern," and "Medra." The parts act as stories that involve Otter but also involve female characters of great importance: Anieb and Ember (whose true name is Elehal).

The first part—"Otter"—tells the story of how Otter's gift becomes a liability to him. His father, especially, forbids his son to make use of the gift of working spells and insists that he do his work through the use of his hands. The young man realizes that he enjoys the art of shipbuilding, but finds that he cannot keep himself from placing a spell on a ship that will be part of Losen's fleet. His deep hatred of slavery inspires him to work a spell that will cause the ship not to sail true to course once she is out to sea. It is this stand against the institution of oppression and enslavement that reveals Otter to one of Losen's hired sorcerers, called Hound. Hound can tell that the ship has come with a spell and Losen orders him to find the one who cast it. Thus Otter becomes part of the enslaved workforce.

Gelluk, a wizard who is maddened by his addictive intake of quicksilver (mercury), runs a mining operation that seeks cinnabar ore from which the mercury is created. He uses Otter to find more veins of the ore, but Otter's focus in his own oppressed situation is far less on the "finding" he must do and far more on an enslaved worker whose name is Anieb. Her task of smelting the ore to create vapors that condense into quicksilver has wrecked her physically, but her will and her talent of guiding are still strong. Anieb and Otter together manage to defeat Gelluk as she mentally guides Otter's speech as he walks with Gelluk. Anieb continues to guide Otter when they escape after the earth closes over the mad wizard. She knows she is dying and tells him where to bring her and he carries her dead body back to her people, who are part of a group called the Women of the Hand.

Each time readers think Otter has arrived at a place or situation that fits him, he goes on from that place to seek more knowledge about his gift and to try to alleviate the misery he sees in the pirate-run societies of Earthsea. Though the Women of the Hand are also gifted and accept him and his gift, they also share with him information about a place where a society that openly accepts the gifted still exists. They have no map, but Otter's own finding ability helps him seek the place.

He finds an island called Roke where he arrives as a tern, thus the name of that part of the story. To his surprise he transforms back into his

human shape without having made an effort because he has landed at Roke Knoll, a place where all must be in their true forms. Here Otter finds that there are both women and men who are wizards who work together. Their society has managed to survive in the hostile world of Earthsea because they have protected the island with spells and because everyone thinks that there are just witches on the island. No one credits the magic that women do. As people in Earthsea say, "weak as women's magic."

In his time on Roke, Ember, who has a deep connection to the Immanent Grove, teaches him. As they get to know each other they begin to fall in love. They are emblematic of what it is to be a couple, yet maintain separate points of view and identities. Neither is dominant in their relationship, and they disagree on issues, but their love, as Le Guin says of their days and nights together, was "joy to them" (69). Ember later becomes the Master Patterner, while Otter continues to travel and find.

Otter, whom the people of Roke call "Tern," because he gave that name when he met them, goes on missions to find other wizards and witches who could benefit from the teaching of the more experienced group on Roke, thus he journeys and "finds" throughout his career. On one of these trips Tern (whose true name is Medra) actually stops at Havnor to see his family, and terrible events ensue. "Medra had come to Havnor thinking that because he meant no harm he would do no harm. He had done irreparable harm. Men and women and children had died because he was there. They had died in torment, burned alive" (97). His visit triggers Losen's current wizard, Early, to seek out Medra and kill those who do not cooperate with that search.

Eventually Medra returns to Roke and becomes the Doorkeeper of the school that the gathered wizards and witches build there, which explains why the gate to the garden at the school is still known in the time that Ged comes there in *A Wizard of Earthsea* as Medra's gate.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Clearly Medra grows in knowledge of his gift in "The Finder." He finds objects, but he also finds places and ways to flourish, and in a real sense finds himself through his connections to others. He also shows the reader that even an adult still has much to learn when he makes the disastrous decision to visit Havnor. His boyhood hatred of slavery shapes itself into a need to do as much to help talented youth as he can, though he disagrees with others at Roke that they should

remain separate, insulated from the miseries around them. This deep moral conviction makes him ready to take the ongoing risk of traveling Earthsea looking for the magically inclined who will benefit from the society of witches and wizards at Roke. Though he tries to take the precaution of never going to the same place without letting years pass, Medra becomes known. People call him "The Child Taker … a dreaded sorcerer who carried children to his island in the icy north and there sucked their blood" (83). Medra's growth links directly to the creation of stories that become legends.

The link he forges with Anieb helps him not only to escape Gelluk and the mining operation, but also to see that the power of the gifted can be joined to create more possibilities. Their bond prefigures the cooperation of men and women at Roke. Throughout his life Medra learns from both women and men. From his father and uncle he learns shipbuilding. As a boy he begins to learn about the craft of magic from the midwife who had assisted at his birth, and later he finds help and instruction among the Women of the Hand and subsequently with Highdrake, a mage, with whom he studies for three years before he eventually goes to Roke.

A character who at first the reader links with all that is evil, greedy, and power hungry in the world of Earthsea, Hound (the one who had captured Otter in the first place), turns out to be someone who has a capacity for fairness and has some respect for the craft of magic. When Medra tries to escape Havnor by turning into an otter and then literally going underground only to come up near a tree on that island, Hound finds him and helps him. Though Hound clearly knows where Medra is he does not tell the wizard, Early, who seeks to destroy Medra. He goes beyond this act of kindness and helps Medra get back to his mother's house and brings him reports of the fate of Early's expedition to Roke in pursuit of him. Early never returns to Havnor, and the narrative makes clear that when he alights on Roke he loses his magic.

Characters in "The Finder" are more complex than the reader's first impressions of them: The dying slave Anieb is a woman of power; the pirate King Losen has less power than we think as we see that Early runs him; Hound works for the mad Gelluk, but feels a link to Otter because both of them are men of craft; and even Gelluk, whose evil doing causes the miserable deaths of so many in service to the mines, is clearly a megalomaniac whose mind has been ruined by mercury poisoning. There are no absolute categories in this tale, but there is a deep understanding of human limitations and flaws.

THEMES

A major theme in "The Finder" is the need for people with talents to develop and learn to use those talents. Developing skills in magic parallels personal development. Both types of growth occur within a context of oppression and abuse in "The Finder"; however, the mistreatment acts as a catalyst for strengthening rather than preventing the augmentation of the power of the individuals it affects. Without the terrible enslavement he endures, Medra would not have met Anieb or gone on to learn from the Women of the Hand.

In conjunction with the awakening of talent in individuals comes the idea that the sexes can work together. Gender equity acts as a focal point at more than one juncture of the story. For example, those who lay the foundation for the school on Roke meet with opposition to their idea that girls and boys should get equal training, and that both men and women should teach. The more generous point of view prevails at the school's beginning. Ember explains to Medra that those who want a separation between the sexes are not willing to compromise: "To them, the Old Powers are abominable. And women's powers are suspect, because they suppose them all connected with the Old Powers. . . . And so they hold that a true wizard must be a man. And celibate" (85). By the story's end the narrative makes clear that the separatists have not yet won, for the narrator refers to "the teachers of Roke" as "the men and women who were masters of their craft" (111). By the time Ged arrives at Roke in *A Wizard of Earthsea* the idea of male supremacy has become the norm.

The idea that to live in society involves struggle and the balancing of needs and desires with consequences also runs through the story. Whether Medra is at Havnor building ships with his father and uncle or aligned with the Women of the Hand on Roke, there is a larger society and order of power and weakness that operates in the world. It becomes clear that individuals cannot oppress others without some level of general fear and thus consent, but understanding this dynamic does not always prevent rash action or make taking helpful action any easier. Medra's principled stance against slavery, which he learns from his early teachers, leads him to be found out and abused by the servants of the pirate Losen, for example. Though his entanglement in their web of abuse does lead to positive results for his growth, as was mentioned earlier, his family goes through a terrible time not knowing what has happened to him.

ALTERNATE READINGS

Ecocriticism and "The Finder"

Most ecocritics agree that the interest in ecology that created the possibility of ecocriticism began with the publication of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, in 1962 (Sessions "Preface"). Ecocriticism emphasizes the interplay between people and the natural world and often includes indictments of the way human beings misuse, ignore, or destroy nature and animals. Ecocriticism also goes beyond pointing out that humans harm the natural environment. Humans are part of the world and as such need to see our own action as integrated into the places we inhabit. In other words, humans, civilization, and culture are all part of the broad ecology of the planet. This interconnectedness, though essential, often either does not occur to people or we choose to ignore it. Ecocritics seek to bring this relationship to our attention and play out the array of interactions across the links between all elements of the world. One of the most extreme ecocritical schools, called Deep Ecology, sees people as the species that is ruining the planet and advocates decreasing human population in an effort to decrease negative impacts on the environment. Recently, another branch of ecocriticism called ecofeminism claims that women have a more intimate bond with and understanding of the earth (see Easterlin "Loving Ourselves Best of All").

Le Guin's writing often contains a deep understanding of the links between people and their surroundings. For example, Armbruster in "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism" points out the link between humans, animals, and environment in Le Guin's 1987 story. From the opening section of "The Finder" the reader hears of terrible events such as plagues, famines, and droughts that occur as a result of human power used carelessly. Wizards are especially at fault: "And things went wrong more often than right, with wizards warring, using poisons and curses recklessly to gain immediate advantage without thought for what followed after. They brought drought and storm, blights and fires and sickness across the land" (Le Guin 4). It is in this chaos that Otter's life plays out.

Otter, who, besides having the skill of finding also has the ability to transform himself into animals, clearly has a strong link to the world around him. In the course of the story he becomes an otter and a tern when danger threatens him. Through these transformations and experiences of underground places Otter becomes linked to three of the

major elements: water, air, and earth. When he becomes a tern he assumes a form that has even more obvious links to nature than he thinks he does, since in this shape he touches down on Roke Knoll. This is a place that reaches into the depths of Earthsea and the Old Powers of the earth. If he had not taken the bird form when he was on a ship off Roke he would probably have perished with the rest of the people when the ship was hit by a mage wind.

Even when Otter is enslaved and brought to serve Gelluk's mad need for quicksilver, the boy feels no dread of the mines. He feels "a sense of shelter in it. He was half sorry to go back up into the burning day" (19). Otter feels protective in his relationship to the earth, as he refuses to reveal where the mother lode of cinnabar is. The narrative reports that he says to himself "I will not work in the service of evil!" (20). In the figure of Gelluk and his insanity the tie between those who enslave people and those who abuse the earth becomes clear. Those who lust after power become so demented through creating evil that they pay with the twisting of their essential selves. A truly emblematic event occurs when Gelluk goes into the opened earth thinking that Otter has found a giant hoard of ore, only to have the joined force of Anieb and Otter cause him to fall and close the earth over him. The earth absorbs the evildoer and helps those who have true respect for themselves and others. After entombing the mad wizard the earth still bears a scar: "A reddish seam remained, a scar through the dirt and gravel and uprooted grass" (40).

When Gelluk speaks of his visions of the way to attain his goal of huge amounts of mercury he says that the female earth must be "burned alive." As Otter sees the images in the older man's mind he shows us that the suffering the wizard envisions includes both people and nature: "Otter glimpsed the images in his mind: great fires blazing, burning sticks with hands and feet, burning lumps that screamed as green wood screams in the fire" (35). Le Guin uses personification here to emphasize the idea that all are living beings: earth, wood, and people. Gelluk couples sexism with his disregard for the earth. He refers to the earth that holds the ore as the "vile Red Mother" who refuses to give birth to the offspring of the King Moon (25).

Both Anieb and Medra call upon the earth as "mother" when they beg her to engulf the wizard, thus they reaffirm their intimate tie to the earth. Even a simple onion helps the reader see how entwined Otter is with his need for the earth when Gelluk's spells bind him: "The sharp earthy taste of the onion was good, and he ate it all" (27). In sharp opposition

to Gelluk's sexism Otter and Anieb join to such a degree that there are moments when Otter does not know where he ends and Anieb begins. When he and Anieb escape from their enslavement her goal is to see the mountain before she dies. This impulse is both a need to see her homeland and a need to reconnect with the earth. She links them in her dying words to him: "'The women,' she whispered, 'the hand. Ask them. In the village. I did see the Mountain'" (43).

In nature Anieb lives beyond death. It is she who helps Medra find a way through the underground path he takes as he flees Early on Havnor. The depth of the place he is in challenges Medra both physically and psychically and teaches him about the vastness of the world. "This was the kingdom of the roots of the trees. How far does the forest go? As far as forests go. As long as the lives, as deep as the roots of the trees. As long as leaves cast shadows" (105). It is Anieb who guides him through the mystery of the underground. Though he cannot see he goes forward "until he saw Anieb before him" (105). In her capacity as guide to Medra after her physical death she is described as having hair, which she had lost through the terrible poisoning she endured in the smelting tower. Joining to journey together through and with nature Medra and Anieb represent the deep interconnectedness of the world.

Marxism and "The Finder"

Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. This short work appeared in a year that saw waves of unrest in many nations in Europe. Marx published the first part of *Capital*, which is a multivolume work, in 1867. Marx wrote many other books and essays, as did Engels, but the *Manifesto* and *Capital* are the most well known of their works. In these works Marx and Engels explain the way society works to the detriment of the average person, and why this situation developed. The idea that people are part of economic systems and must struggle to create a society that allows people to live decently comes from the Marxist notion that economic interests drive those who have power over the means of production. These people cannot include others in their prosperity because it is the subservient workers who create that wealth in the first place. Without a system that allows for haves and have-nots the wealthy could not live the luxurious lives they expect to enjoy. Such a structure that disempowers the majority of people also leads to seeing the less powerful, or proletariat, as commodities themselves. The work they do also helps to alienate them further, since most of that

work, at Marx's time in the nineteenth century, happens in factories and effectively removes the craftsman or skilled laborer from the picture. When the worker can feel no pride in her/his work, that work comes to seem alien to her/him. Work goes from being a potentially ennobling or meaning-enhancing activity to a meaningless repetition of labor that fails to enrich the worker or improve her/his conditions. In "Results of the Immediate Process of Production" Marx says: "the owners of the conditions of production treat living labour-power as a *thing,* just as value had appeared to be the attribute of a thing and the *economic definition* of the thing as a *commodity* appeared to be an aspect of its thinghood, just as the social form conferred on labour in the shape of money presented itself as the *characteristics of a thing*" (Marx *Readings from Karl Marx* 77). The idea that "living labour-power" or workers become things for those who own wealth and the means of production helps us to see some of what is happening in "The Finder."

It is clear when Losen desires that Hound capture Otter and make him work for the benefit of the pirate economy that he sees Otter as a tool rather than as a person with complex needs and talents. To Losen Otter is his craft and nothing more. The young man may as well have been a hammer or a screwdriver from this point of view. Otter has only what Marx would call use value to those who enslave him. Gelluk, though he does not see Otter as merely a tool, does see him in limited ways. Otter can please him in learning from him and finding the ore. Le Guin points out that "In the young dowser he recognised a power, untaught and inept, which he could use" ("The Finder" 32).

The wizard's attitude toward the slaves who work at the smelting of the ore shows us that they are nothing more than commodities that he has no qualms about using up in his pursuit of mercury. He sees a slave as an ingredient in the manufacturing process: "From the spittle of a dying slave is made the silver Seed of Power" (25). Gelluk sees the slaves as "wearisome with their weakness and trickery and their ugly, sick bodies" (33). The reader learns that the "roasters," or those who work at the smelting as Anieb does in the story, typically live for only a couple of years.

Even the women who work in the mines, though they are not subject to the poisoning that kills the smelters, evoke only a lack of respect from the men who work as guards in the area. These men see picking up a shovel and digging in a mine as work that is both literally and figuratively beneath them (18). This idea, though based only on superstition that a man working in a mine would be in for bad luck, has the power of custom

and creates divisions among the workers. The foremen, such as a man named Licky, would never combine their interests with those of women laborers, and thus all the workers are at a disadvantage in relationship to those who are their masters.

The community on Roke at first appears to be a happy exception to the general rule of dehumanization in the story, but the forces of traditional views begin to indicate that equitable treatment among the "crafty" people there will not last. They have walled out the broad misery of the piratical societies of Earthsea, but they have also walled themselves in with some of their prejudices. When Otter arrives there and he thinks that finally he can be free, Veil, a woman of power, reminds him that there is no freedom on Roke, only a different kind of imprisonment: "You came through the walls of our prison. Seeking freedom, you say. But you should know that leaving Roke may be even harder than coming to it. Prison within prison, and some of it we have built ourselves" (62). There is still more hope on Roke of a better form of society that does not oppress by its very structure. The women who form a league on Roke were once part of a wider resistance that in Marxist terms might have helped shape a revolution; however, the strands of spells that had linked the Women of the Hand still exist, but are not connected. "Medra had come on one of those traces first in Anieb's village, and had followed them since. But they had not led him here" (64). Since trouble had come to Roke, the links were severed and the isolation of the place strengthened.

Though he finds some peace on Roke, Otter has trouble forgetting the enslaved, who still suffer. His family does well economically under Losen primarily because they go along with the structure of power that the pirate has set up. His father thinks that all is well since his business does well. This perspective of buying into the way things are acts as false consciousness, since Otter's father has a skewed perspective of the societal structures that keep him working only for one master. False consciousness causes people to act against their own better interests, because they are lulled into complacency by the current system. People cannot see the failures and horrors of the system they live under or how these failures hurt them. Otter's father does not share his qualms about constructing ships that will have slaves rowing them. The only thing his father fears is becoming a slave himself, but this idea is ludicrous since he is already a wage-slave for Losen's empire.

Marxist ideas help the reader see that the larger economic system that controls people's lives in Earthsea is what would need to change in order to make people truly free. The seeds of that resistance exist in the Women

of the Hand and in the subversive men who join them, but the process, as we know from Le Guin's Earthsea books, is indeed a slow and troubled one. "The Finder" takes place three hundred years before the time of Ged and Tenar and the first three books of Earthsea. Though there are less-powerful pirates, they still roam the waters in *Tehanu.* Instead of a Marxist revolution, Earthsea sees a king on the throne in Havnor by the end of *The Farthest Shore* and struggles with sexism in "Dragonfly," and the king, Lebannen, has the mystery of dragon incursions to solve in *The Other Wind.*

14

"Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind* (1997 and 2001)

Though at its publication *Tehanu* was labeled the last book of Earthsea, Le Guin went on to write two more Earthsea books. *Tales from Earthsea* is a collection of stories published in 2001 that helps the student of Earthsea understand more about that world, its history, and some interesting characters. The story within that collection that concerns us here, "Dragonfly," acts as a bridge between *Tehanu* (1990) and *The Other Wind* (2001). There are currently six books of Earthsea that critics sometimes speak of as making up two trilogies: The earlier trilogy contains *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan,* and *The Farthest Shore,* and the more recent trilogy goes from *Tehanu* to *Tales from Earthsea* and then to *The Other Wind.* Rather than calling *The Other Wind* the last book of Earthsea, the jacket of the hardcover first edition reads "A New Earthsea Novel."

"Dragonfly," which first appeared as a separate story in *Legends* in 1997, introduces the reader to a young woman of that name who goes on to discover her dragon self both psychologically and physically. Her name changes from "Dragonfly" to Irian. As Orm Irian she becomes a key person in *The Other Wind.* The story also illustrates political division among the masters of Roke and challenges the idea that even one of those masters can have power over life and death. Understanding the trouble that occurs at Roke in the story makes it easier for the reader to grapple with the array of issues *The Other Wind* presents.

All of the six Earthsea books deal with death, the land of the dead, or the Dry Land, as it is called, but "Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind* finally address the trouble with the idea of separating life from death. The idea is not new, since Ged speaks of this topic to Arren/Lebannen in *The Farthest Shore,* but the final destruction of the artificial separation between the land of the living and the created land of the dead is indeed new. Warren Rochelle's statement about "Dragonfly" applies to both the story and *The Other Wind:* "Le Guin has more than broken things loose; rather she has broken them apart and rearranged them" (60).

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The plot in "Dragonfly" centers around the development of the title character. The story sketches out her early years on the island of Way and her later journey to Roke with the failed wizard, Ivory. Her journey is very much the search for herself, but has real implications for the masters of Roke. The wisdom, traditions, and knowledge of these same men meet with a further challenge in *The Other Wind.*

The novel's plot initially centers around seeking an explanation and a "cure" for a sorcerer, Alder, whose art is mending and healing. Alder's haunted dreams bring him to the barrier wall between the land of the living and the land of the dead, and he seeks help first from a wizard on Éa, then at Roke, where they send him to Ged on Gont. Ged sends him to Havnor knowing that the king needs to hear Alder's story. No individual wise person can truly work with Alder's problem or with the incursions of dragons on human territory, so councils and gatherings occur in the latter pages of the text.

The journeys of Alder continue when he accompanies a varied group the King assembles to go to the Immanent Grove on Roke. Alder's wanderings and the solutions to the troubles in Earthsea—dragon incursions into human-populated areas and strained political maneuverings with the Kargad empire—all come to a conclusion as a result of a journey into the Dry Land that Alder leads.

THEMES

"Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind* introduce the idea of the redefinition of power. In the story it at first appears that Ivory's plan to fool Dragonfly into accompanying him to Roke, where he thinks he will use her to play a nasty joke on the mages there, is working. However, she makes it clear

as they travel there on a ship that she is using him to get to Roke. She tells this to the Masters when she enters the school: "'I used him to help me get here and to tell me what to say to the Doorkeeper,' Irian said. 'I'm not here to fool anybody, but to learn what I need to know'" (244).

The Other Wind especially illustrates various types of power and magic. The kitten that Alder receives from Aunty Moss back on Gont, for instance, has the natural power to help Alder sleep peacefully. Though Ged's mage power is gone, he has the power of his wisdom and knowledge that lead him to help Alder and send important questions to the council on Havnor that help them work on their worrisome dragon problem. As part of that council, the wizard Seppel from Paln brings different, older magical knowledge. Lebannen himself has power in the forms of wisdom, compassion, and leadership. Advice that Tenar gives the king and offers to the Kargish princess, Seserakh, has power because it helps bring about a real result when Lebannen takes the Kargish princess as his queen. The idea of power in the novel is that it circulates and only works for the overall good when the talents and wisdom of the gathered advisors come together to offer ideas and solutions.

Dreams play an essential role in the book and link to finding ways to address the issues the world faces. The problems that face Lebannen's realm come in the forms of dragons attacking human livelihood as well as in working out a diplomatic relationship with the new, more secular Kargish king. The dreams that Alder has appear to have little to do with all this at first, but the dreams indirectly help everyone understand what the dragons are angry about. Other characters in the novel also dream in ways that show the reader differing views of the problem of the Dry Land. Dreams in *The Other Wind* are not just gateways to an individual in the Freudian sense, but are part of a collective malaise and part of a collective response to trouble and change.

The novel also shows the reader the terrible consequences of human action on the environment. Both the cave of Aurun on Havnor, which the Pelnish wizard, Seppel, sees as a tragic defilement of a sacred place, and the barrenness of the Dry Land force us to acknowledge the evil that ignorance and arrogance create. Seppel describes Aurun as "a sacred place, full of power" and says that he grieves for the harm people's negligence has done to the place (Le Guin *The Other Wind* 170). The narrative says that the filth that mires the cave came from a tanning operation, which is an enterprise that uses various dyes and chemicals to process leather. The whole process begins then with part of an animal. What people do in this process is take something natural and modify it, not caring that the process itself does

harm to the earth. For all the environmental insult the earth at Aurun has suffered, the deep power that is in the earth still exists, and Seppel agrees to use his knowledge of that power in an attempt to help Alder.

The Dry Land suffers from environmental degradation as well. It appears in most of the Earthsea books, but supports no life. It lacks grass, water, even a breeze, and the stars there are motionless. In *The Other Wind* Ged sends Alder to Havnor bearing a couple of riddle-like questions for Tehanu, one of which helps her and the others see that no animals ever go to the Dry Land. Discovering that they don't go there when they die, but Hardic humans do, is a key part of understanding why the restless dead haunt Alder and beg him to set them free. No one would choose to inhabit a wasteland and exist like a zombie, but that is the state of the dead spirits in the Dry Land. Separation from other people and separation from the natural world create an extraordinarily cruel form of alienation.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

In the novel, when the reader encounters Orm Irian she is fully her dragon self and comes to speak with humans only because Tehanu requests it. She began as a country girl from Way in "Dragonfly," but has none of that awkwardness in her dragon form. The novel shows the reader how wonderfully fitting her dragon form is for her.

The presence of Tehanu at Lebannen's court at Havnor happens because the king sent for her and Tenar. Tehanu often appears withdrawn and shy, but when she speaks she adds materially to the deliberations of the council. Her independence and personal power grow immensely when she accompanies the King and a delegation to an area dragons are attacking. Her ability to speak to a dragon and request that Orm Irian come to speak with Lebannen and the councillors is essential to everyone understanding why the dragons insist on launching attacks in the first place. Her speaking with the dragon deeply impresses Onyx, the wizard from Roke. Her transformation into a dragon at the end of the book is remarkable, given where she began in *Tehanu.* As Sandra Lindow says in her article "Becoming Dragon: The Transcendence of the Damaged Child in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin," "For an abuse victim to become a dragon is to transcend victimization and in so doing become an agent for social change, a being powerful enough to stop the victimization of others" (Lindow 35).

In *The Other Wind,* in addition to Alder's quest for peace, the reader sees the growth and talent of King Lebannen. As a man and a diplomat he shows his goodness, but also uncharacteristically shows irritation

when the new secular Kargish monarch sends him a gift in the form of that king's daughter, Seserakh. The marriage of a king brings together the public need for continuity and heirs for the good of the kingdom and the private choice of the man who is the monarch. Lebannen, though comfortable in his role as king, has great difficulty taking a step toward marriage and understandably hates being forced to face it.

ALTERNATE READING

Gender Studies and Cultural Understanding in "Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind*

The idea that gender is different from sex as a designation is important to understanding gender studies. While sex exists as a biological fact, gender derives from social norms and ideas about the roles of the sexes. The area of literary criticism called gender studies explores the dynamics behind gender roles, gender identity, and gender inequities. Though gender studies clearly links to feminism, its scope becomes broader than feminism's focus, since critics who think about gender issues do not limit their discussions to women, but include both men and women in their considerations of how gender affects individuals and society.

For example, in the 1950s in the United States the norm was for women to stay at home with the children and for men to go out into the workplace to support their families. Though most of us know of this traditional arrangement, we do not often think about the implications of it. If a man must support his family then he takes on great responsibility and experiences pressure from the expectations this role places on him. In staying at home with the children a woman focuses her energies on them and may feel separated from the world her husband experiences every day outside the home. Lois Tyson, in her book *Critical Theory Today,* cites "Cinderella" as a story that provides examples of the potential harm that gender roles can do. She points out that the tale not only portrays the woman as passively waiting for a male rescuer, but also presents "a destructive role for men because it promotes the belief that men must be unflagging superproviders without emotional needs" (87). The idea of men and women as somehow locked into roles either in families or in the world of work and careers creates problems for everyone. Instead of pursuing lives that would fulfill them individually, many people fall into predetermined patterns and only much later (if ever) discover what really drives them and might help them live more useful and fulfilled lives. Though there is inherently nothing wrong with a man or woman choosing to live in a

way that is traditional, doing so without any thought or self-awareness can lead to unhappiness.

Both "Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind* challenge gender-role assumptions. In the story, Dragonfly wants very much to go to Roke and study the art magic that the masters teach, but knows that society and tradition limit these teachings to boys and men. She understands that there is something different about her that she needs to discover. The way her father treats her includes abuse and denigration. The way Ivory treats her assumes that she is an ignorant girl whom he can easily seduce. Ivory fails to be a complete wizard (he does not carry a staff), not because he can't learn, but because he has learned and scorns some of that knowledge of Roke and because he has learned traditional ideas about women and men despite his supposedly rebellious attitude toward the Masters of Roke.

Ivory's wizard role either does not suit him, or he is just generally incompetent and lazy. For example, he misses all the signs that the youngest daughter of Birch, his employer, is becoming desperately ill. Her mother hopes the wizard will see: "Her mother shot an anguished, yearning glance at the wizard. Surely he would hear that cough, this time?" (219). He never does pay attention to young Rose's illness, and the narrator makes clear that the teenager is doomed, saying that Rose "was busy crowding a lifetime of keen observation into the fourteen years that were all she was going to have for it" (219). It is Rose who describes Dragonfly as "tall, and beautiful as a flowering tree" (219). What Ivory sees when he meets Dragonfly, the narrator implies, is different: "She was very tall, very sweaty, with big hands and feet and mouth and nose and eyes, and a head of wild dusty hair" (220). Rose notices more than Ivory does, but both descriptions show the reader aspects of Dragonfly. Rose is ready to see the beauty in the young woman, while Ivory needs beauty to accost him. For Ivory Dragonfly's beauty appears "large" and "fierce," and she intrigues him.

All his attempts at seducing Dragonfly fail. A portent of the failure of male seduction occurs when Dragonfly first encounters Ivory. The wizard leads his horse to stand and take abuse from the snarling, biting dog pack that belongs to Dragonfly's father because he wants to try to see her. When she comes upon him and the horse, her chief concern is for the latter: "'There, there' she said. 'The brave girl, the brave heart.' The mare put her head down and shivered all over with relief. 'What did you keep her standing there in the middle of the dogs for?'" (220). Clearly, she barely sees him except to criticize his judgment. His attempt to cast a

seduction spell on her, furthermore, goes awry. Instead of submission and passion, the spell causes her to feel irritated and impatient. She actually "struck him away with a blow to the head that left him dizzy" (231). Ivory, because of his past dealing with girls (he had a girl in his bed at the school on Roke, which is the major reason he was sent away), has a limited view of them. He sees them as objects to be used in defiance of rules and as objects of sexual pleasure. He plays the role of a feminist or forward-thinking man in some of the anti-Roke, critical comments he makes, but he clearly does not aim to be of real assistance to Dragonfly.

The local witch on Way, Rose, knows that Dragonfly is different from the people around her, but has trouble naming her. She gives her her true name, Irian, but acknowledges that this is only part of her name. Irian's anger over this name comes from her need to reject all that her father stands for—grasping at title and land and abusing her as he has done. He holds onto the idea that he is master of Old Iria, though he has lost lawsuits in "trying to prove his right to the whole domain as it had been a hundred years ago" (210).

Rose knows that Irian somehow does not fit the standard naming situation and is open to the idea that there are things she does not understand. As a witch Rose is automatically less bound by the idea of stable categories. Witches exist outside the common categories of society in Earthsea. For instance, witches do not marry, though a witch may take a lover, as Moss tells Tenar in *Tehanu.* Significantly, Rose's eyes often seem to be looking in different directions, implying that her vision has fewer limits than the norm. "Sometimes Dragonfly thought the cast was in Rose's left eye, sometimes it seemed to be in her right, but always one eye looked straight and the other watched something just out of sight, around the corner, elsewhere" (213). She offers Dragonfly trust and affection, furthermore, and helps her become a mature, named person in defiance of the prohibitions of Dragonfly's father.

When she announces the name Irian, though, the girl in anger says that Rose is "only a witch," thus, though briefly, buying into the idea that witches are lesser beings because they are women. Dragonfly assumes prior to this outburst that "Mages can do more than that [naming]," but Rose corrects her saying "Nobody can do more than that" (213). The story makes clear that men are not the only ones who subscribe to the prejudices that see witches as lower beings. In *The Other Wind* Ged asks Alder, who is a mender, whether he would object to going to a witch's house, implying that there are many who would object. Alder's reply "Never in the world, my lord" (47) comes along with a reminder that his wife, Lily,

also a mender, was a witch. The mender couple challenges Moss's earlier idea about witches not marrying. Roles are clearly changing in Earthsea during the 15 years Ged tells us have passed since the events of *Tehanu.* Ged and Alder's progressive view that sees a witch as a person worth consulting and Dragonfly's subsequent apology to Rose show the reader that norms are not truth, but those norms do lead people to form habits of thought that often need modification.

Dragonfly's presence at Roke highlights the gendered ideas of some of the Masters there. The mages split over her right to be at Roke in the first place, as they split over whether Thorion, the Summoner, should become Archmage. The Doorkeeper, Namer, Herbal, and Patterner support her presence at the school and do not want Thorion to become Archmage, while the Masters Windkey, Chanter, Changer, Hand, and Summoner all oppose her. One of the Masters, the Chanter, explains that opposition. The Chanter declares that women learn from witches and sorcerers, and cannot learn from wizards. He says this situation derives from what he calls "true laws" ("Dragonfly" 248).

He articulately outlines the nonreason of tradition: In essence, he says that the world must exclude women from the knowledge of mages because it has always been that way. Since he and others see people's tasks and teaching as gendered, they must continue to operate that way. His statement also upholds the authority of the wisdom of the experienced and older person over the desires of youth. In the universe as he describes it, no changes would ever occur.

In addition to forcing the archaic positions of the Masters into open conversation, Irian's presence acts as a catalyst for the split among the Masters over whether Thorion should be Archmage. Tellingly, Azver the Patterner thinks, "We are ruled by the dead" (271). His thought resonates in multiple directions: If they are to be ruled by Thorion they will be ruled by a dead man (he is literally dead, having summoned himself back to life inappropriately); if they are to be ruled by old ideas about men and women, they will be ruled by the norms of the past, and looking forward to *The Other Wind,* the dead haunt the living and finally get their attention in a way that forces the living to act. Gender issues in Earthsea are entangled with politics, power, and the possibilities for a different future.

When the Windkey comes to the grove to challenge Irian's presence there, he needs a group of followers with him. They represent a male majority who see a woman's presence as a threat and an insult to their ways. Significantly, the mages who support Irian surround her, but she steps out of that set of guards to respond to being called a witch and to

issue a challenge of her own. She orders the Master Windkey to "Tell the dead man [Thorion] I will meet him there [at Rokeknoll]" (275). Irian also makes the mages face the central idea that they are hoarders of knowledge. What can she know if those who have knowledge refuse to teach her or even consider her a full person? The idea of a woman's place that the Master Windkey brings up when he says "Learn your place" acts as part of the refusal to see her (275). If she were in "her place" he certainly would not have to deal with her because she would not be at Roke at all. Her request for knowledge about herself unhinges the notion of power the Windkey and the other Thorion-supporting mages share. They cannot tell who she is because she is beyond their abilities of recognition. Rather than admit their own shortcomings they become defiant and lean on the traditions of excluding women from the school. The true teachers among them know she challenges their knowledge, but are not upset by that idea. The Namer, for instance, invites Irian to come to him after she leaves the Immanent Grove. The Patterner, Azver, does his best to allow her space and peace, understanding that there is little more that he can do. "He had given her a little warmth when she was cold. He had nothing else to give her. Where she must go she would go" (271).

When Irian goes on to destroy the Summoner on Roke Knoll she does so because he tries to cast a spell of binding on her using her name. He follows the failed attempt with a lunge at her and then "She towered above him impossibly, fire breaking forth between them, a flare of red flame in the dusk air, a gleam of red-gold scales, of vast wings—then that was gone, and there was nothing but the woman standing on the hill path and the tall man bowing down before her, bowing slowly down to earth, and lying on it" (278). By the time the Master Herbal gets to them all that is left of Thorion the Summoner is "a huddle of clothes and dry bones and a broken staff" (278). She acts in reaction to Thorion's attack, of course, but the fact that he does not know fully who she is also contributes to his demise. She tells him that Irian is not all of her name. Rather than try to help Irian work on the problem of self-discovery, or accept her as a seeker of knowledge, Thorion has been intent on driving her away from Roke. He also has denied his own death when he summoned himself back to life. She names him correctly when she calls him "the dead man." This moment of challenge aids her in recognizing that her quest for self and a true name must occur among the dragons, not at Roke. She naturally speaks the Language of the Making during this encounter, just as Tehanu had at the end of that novel.

Irian's presence at Roke undermines the idea that Roke needs a defense against women or dragons. Exclusivity has made for limited points of view. When he let her in, the Doorkeeper perceived that she needed to be at Roke at that time, and he understands some of the implications of her destruction of Thorion. He says in answer to the Patterner's question of what they should do now, "I think we should go to our house, and open its doors" (279). His statement refers to opening the doors to air the place out after the stasis and blindness the school has subscribed to, and it also refers potentially to allowing anyone who comes to the school for good reason to enter there and learn. The open doors as a metaphor for the openness of minds gestures toward what is most stimulating about learning anything—the idea that there is more to learn and the anticipated pleasure of that pursuit.

Both "Dragonfly" and *The Other Wind* differ from the feminist message of *Tehanu* because they go the further step of beginning the recognition of gender possibilities. *Tehanu* blatantly exposes the problem of sexism and creates the conditions for the forward movement of the story and the later novel. The council of advisers that Lebannen brings together in *The Other Wind,* for example, includes women (Tenar and Tehanu), a Pelnish wizard (Seppel), a ship master (Tosla), a sorcerer (Alder), and one Roke representative (Onyx). He values the advice of those whom society might suspect or ignore. The wizards on Paln, for instance, practice an art magic that most see as dark and dangerous. Even Alder avoids looking much at Seppel initially. Alder, as a lowly sorcerer, finds himself amazed to be asked to join the group when he comes to Havnor, and Lebannen expressly sent for both women. The normal categories of class, sex, and race do not act as determinative for Lebannen. He recognizes the need to get beyond the limitations that society might still have because he needs to rule, and to rule he needs knowledge that cannot come from only one source.

Despite Lebannen's openness and wisdom, he has trouble accepting the Kargish princess who has been sent to him. It is Tenar who insists that he bring Seserakh on the journey to Roke as a Kargish representative. Many characters act as bridges across categories in the novel. Tenar is one example as she negotiates between the king and Seserakh. Tehanu also bridges the language and apparent species gap between people and dragons when she sends the request through a male dragon named Ammaud that Orm Irian should come to talk with the king's larger council at Havnor. Alder acts as a bridge between the current understanding of the Dry Land and the living people who need to hear the

dead. Importantly, narrative itself creates a nexus of knowledge when the Pelnish wizard, the Kargish princess, the Woman of Kemay (via Tenar, who heard the story from Ogion) Lebannen, Orm Irian, and the Roke mage all share versions of a story that explains the initial relationship between dragons and people and the pact people made to split the land called a Vedurnan/verw nadan.

All the versions of the story tell of the split among dragons. Some went west to remain fully dragon, while others went east to become human. Where the story takes on significantly different perspectives concerns the people in the middle—the Hardic people of Earthsea. From the Kargish point of view those in the middle violated the original agreement when they retained knowledge of the Old Speech and created the area known as the Dry Land. Seserakh tells Tenar that the Hardic people (the accursed sorcerers, she calls them), chose a different path. In exchange for the power to do sorcery, the Hardic people forfeited the ability to die and be reborn. Seserakh calls the choice they made "the Vedurnan," and adds "Only their bodies die. The rest of them stays in a dark place and never gets reborn. And they look like birds. But they can't fly" (*The Other Wind* 125). When Tenar thinks back to Ogion telling her the story of the Woman of Kemay she understands that Seserakh's tale is a version of that narrative.

Orm Irian's tale emphasizes the wrong that people did to the agreement when they, as she quotes some of the dragons as saying "long ago stole half our realm beyond the west from us and made walls of spells to keep us out of it" (152). These irate dragons speak of the Hardic lands and people whose areas they now attack in an attempt to regain their land. The King hears Orm Irian and understands another part of what angers the dragons. They "want to know that our wizards' meddling with the… laws of life and death will not endanger them." Her reply is inclusive "Endanger all of us" (156). Without the piecing together of the versions of the story the King and his delegation made up of dragons, Kargs and Hardic peoples would not have been able to act to dismantle the wall that created the Dry Land.

The group Lebannen leads is purposely inclusive, but they meet with opposition on Roke. Cultural and gender acceptance have not made their way to that bastion of tradition and knowledge. The new Summoner, Brand, initially refuses to see the need for help and intervention from any authorities beyond wizardry and the king. Tellingly, Tehanu, Orm Irian, and Tenar speak up in opposition to Brand when all gather in the Immanent Grove. The dragon/women remind him that the Language

of the Making is their language, and Tenar forcefully says "You are not immortal, *We* are! We die to rejoin the undying world. It was you who forswore immortality" (222–223). The novel joins the voices of women, those the mages have traditionally labeled outsiders, and different cultures to try to make the mages see that their knowledge is not enough. Clarification comes to the old story when the wizards add the pieces they have. The Namer, the Summoner, Seppel, and Onyx all mingle their threads of the narrative with Irian's and Azver's, who, though he is the Patterner is also a Karg. The Patterner sums it up as though he hears it in its entirety from the leaves of the Grove itself:

> The ancients saw that the dragons' realm was not of the body only. That they could fly … outside of time, it may be … And envying that freedom, they followed the dragons' way into the west beyond the west. There they claimed part of that realm as their own. A timeless realm, where the self might be forever. But not in the body, as the dragons were. Only in spirit could men be there … So they made a wall which no living body could cross, neither man nor dragons. And their arts of naming laid a great net of spells upon all the western lands, so that when the people of the islands die, they would come to the west beyond the west and live there in the spirit forever.
>
> But as the wall was built and the spell laid, the wind ceased to blow, within the wall. The sea withdrew. The springs ceased to run. The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night. Those that died came to a dark land, a dry land. (227–28)

The Patterner's account combines the dragons' complaint that their land was stolen, the Kargish idea that the middle or Hardic people do not die and are sorcerers, and the Hardic belief in spells and naming. Those who have the greatest adjustment in perspective coming are the Hardic people, especially the wizards who, until recent dragon incursions and horrifying dreams, had thought that their way was right and a way of power.

It is Alder who sees what they must do. As menders, he and his dead wife, Lily, act as an overarching metaphor for the underlying quest of the peoples in the text. What was broken or divided needs to heal, needs to be mended. All the people cannot return to being dragons, but they can dismantle the wall and spells that created the Dry Land. In seeking eternal life, they gave up immortality and substituted a weird death. The

lack of memory of the earlier events that the legends and folklore of each area include becomes their key. Mending then also means linking with the larger past through attention to the voices of women, men, and dragons. Both gender differences and cultural differences as metaphoric walls start to tumble as the group goes to that wall to unmake it.

In the unmaking there is great freedom and rejoining as well as loss. Tenar grieves for the loss of Tehanu, who goes off to fly on the other wind, though she celebrates Tehanu's wholeness. Tenar cries over the death of Alder, as well—though he has gone to join his wife, Lily, Tenar feels his loss. The Patterner, who clearly loves Irian, knows that she too flies on the other wind, though he hopes to see her again in the Grove. Lebannen does finally marry Seserakh, and Tenar returns home to Ged. The close of the novel reassures the reader that though there may be loss, there is hope and there is the comfort of home that is far less about place than it is about people, people who love and accept each other because of, rather than despite, their differences.

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