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Special Ursula K. Le Guin Issue

EXTRAPOLATION



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Contributors

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Brian Attebery is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the College of Idaho in Caldwell. His book on American romance and fantasy will be published this fall by Indiana University Press under the probable title *American Tales of the Imagination*. He has also written the Le Guin entry for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

Edgar C. Bailey, Jr. is the Reader's Services Librarian and Assistant Director of the Providence College Library. Prior to that, he was a reference librarian at Eastern Connecticut State College. He also spent five years as a secondary school English teacher, during which time he developed and taught a course in science fiction and fantasy.

Dena C. Bain is presently doing research on William Blake for her doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto. Her article on R. A. Lafferty is pending publication in *Extrapolation*.

Barbara Brown teaches part-time in the English Department of David and Mary Thomson Collegiate, Scarborough, and the Humanities Department of York University, Toronto. She has published several short stories and is currently working on a science-fiction anthology.

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Thomas J. Remington is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa, where he coordinates the graduate program and teaches. He has published articles on science fiction in *Extrapolation*, *Science Fiction Studies*, *The North American Review*, and the *Ursula K. Le Guin* volume of Joseph D. Olander and Martin H. Greenberg's *Writers of the 21st Century Series*. The current article was originally delivered as a paper at the Science Fiction Section of the MLA Conference in Chicago, 1977.

Carl B. Yoke is an Associate Professor of English and Assistant to the Vice President for Regional Campuses at Kent State University. He is also Associate Editor of *Extrapolation*. His science-fiction publications include *A Reader's Guide to Roger Zelazny* for Starmont and *Roger Zelazny and Andre Norton: Proponents of Individualism* for the State Library of Ohio. He is currently working on a *Reader's Guide to C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner* for Starmont.

THE LAUNCHING PAD

■Beginning with the next issue of *Extrapolation*, we will regularly (that should not be interpreted as every issue) review fiction. Granted that this is something of a departure, it seems a necessity because several of the journals which were to be almost exclusively concerned with reviewing current titles have folded and, at least as I write this, there seems to be no new title forthcoming. We will continue to give attention to the reprint series. In that regard, note that Gregg Press has continued its recent publications with another series of Andre Norton titles: *Catseye*, *Ordeal in Otherwhere*, *Star Man's Son*, and *Storm Over Warlock*. All are available at \$9.95 each.

We will give attention to the new titles, but one plan that we intend to follow is to keep you informed of the availability of paperbacks which may be of value to you in your classrooms, as well as your personal collection. For example,

Pocket Books has finally filled a tremendous gap: Gene Wolfe's collection *The Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories and Other Stories* [sic] has just been published. The first volume of his series, *The Book of the New Sun*, has also just been issued in cloth; its title is *The Shadow of the Torturer*. But more of that and others next issue. Those of you who have attended recent MLA, PCA, or SFRA meetings in the Midwest have had a chance to hear him speak about science fiction and his own work. With these new books his stature as one of the finest writers in the field should be generally recognized.

Extrapolation is planning several special issues, both thematic and single-author. We hope, too, to bring some papers and/or special sessions from this year's SFRA Conference to you in future issues, particularly if there is not a *Proceedings* published by the Conference itself. Incidentally, we

understand that copies of the 1978 *Proceedings* of the meeting at Northern Iowa University are still available. At the moment I can tell you nothing about such a volume from last year at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

This year's meeting at Wagner College, Staten Island, will be held from June 18-20. The Pilgrim Award banquet will be held the evening of the 19th. In many respects this is a special meeting; indeed, in a sense SFRA comes full circle with it, for it was in the autumn of 1970 at Queensborough Community College that SFRA met for the first time. This year's meeting seems particularly crucial because elections will take place. If editorial deadlines permit, I will include a brief report (written on the way home) in this issue. Otherwise a full report will be made in the next issue.

Speaking of meetings, I do not think this is too early to alert you to two matters. First, at the MLA meeting in Houston at Christmas, Professor Patrick G. Hogan of the University of Houston and Dr. H. W. Hall of the Library of Texas A&M will discuss library collections and their value to research. At that same meeting in Houston, we have asked that a proposed Executive Committee of a *permanent* MLA Discussion Section of Science Fiction be allowed to meet to plan for a 1981 meeting and present to the appropriate governing committees final plans for a Section to come into existence in 1982.

In that regard, MLA has asked that we collect letters from MLA members who favor the formation of such a group. Professor Charles Elkins of Florida International University, who will be a member of the initial Executive Committee, has turned over to me all letters which he received from members of SFRA after he and Professor David Ketterer of Concordia University, Montreal, called for the formation of such a group through the SFRA *Newsletter*. If you are a member of MLA and through some oversight (I no longer have the complete file of subscribers here at Wooster; Kent State has the list) have not been asked for a letter, will you please write to me so that I can send you one of the standardized forms which MLA seems to want from us? I have been in correspondence with members of the Convention Committee and will see them while I am in New York, but they have assured me that since Committee action cannot be taken until Houston, any letters that I receive in addition to those I now have will be welcome.

One final matter: Professor Douglas Robillard of the University of New Haven has asked me to co-edit a special issue of *Essays in Arts and Sciences* devoted to science fiction. The issue is now essentially complete, and much of it is at the typesetter. By the next issue of *Extrapolation* I can give you all the particulars.

This autumn issue is devoted to a series of studies of Ursula K. Le Guin. I have asked Carl Yoke to do

(continued on page 298)

Precious Metal in White Clay

CARL YOKE

■ In a retrospective view of "The Stars Below," Ursula Le Guin wrote:

you don't go exploring the places underground all that easily. The symbols you thought were simple equivalences, signs, come alive and take on meanings you did not intend and cannot explain. Long after I wrote the story I came on a passage in Jung's *On the Nature of the Psyche*: "We would do well to think of ego-consciousness as being surrounded by a multitude of little luminosities. . . . Introspective intuitions . . . capture the state of the unconscious: The star-strewn heavens, stars reflected in dark waters, nuggets of gold or golden sand scattered in black earth." And he quotes from an alchemist, "Seminare aurum in terram albam foliatam"—the precious metal strewn in the layers of white clay.¹

The quotation from Jung, though perhaps unknown to Le Guin when she began her writing career, explains better than anything else the direction that her writing has taken and hints at that which has always provided a substructure for her work. The many novels and short stories that fill her canon are all so many "stars reflected in dark waters," so many "nuggets of gold scattered in black earth." She has from the beginning struggled to provide her readers with those introspective intuitions that capture our unconscious minds.

Has she succeeded? The critics certainly think so. Eliot Walk of the *Chicago Sun-Times Showcase* wrote, for example: "Ursula Le Guin keeps getting better and better, and she may be SF's brightest development in the last decade." D. G. Hartwell of *Crawdaddy* wrote: "[*The Dispossessed*] is a novel which will be read for a long time to come. It will not be exhausted by our generation, but belongs in the select company of Huxley's *Brave New World*." Robert La Rouché of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* wrote: "Le Guin does not write like a woman. Nor like a man. She writes as a realized person, an integrated personality who understands social and personal

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complexities and balances." Helen Rogan of *Time* wrote: "Le Guin writes with painstaking intelligence. Her characters are complex and haunting, and her writing is remarkable for its sinewy grace." *Kirkus Reviews* called her "One of our finest projectionists of brave and other worlds." And such a noted author as John Updike acknowledged Le Guin's importance when he wrote: "only recently has her reputation, passing through the same cultural space-warp utilized by Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut, entered what is hailed from the other side as 'mainstream fiction.' "

Without question, Le Guin is a writer of the first rank, one who has captured the imagination of reader and critic alike. And she is a science-fiction writer who is read by people who do not consider themselves to be science-fiction fans, who, in fact, scoff at the term "science fiction" and think that fantasy is strictly for juveniles. In this respect, Le Guin has done much to legitimize the genre, and as a result she has achieved "mainstream" stature, just as H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell have.

But what is it about her work that precipitates this reaction, that permits her to gather to her both those who deride the field and the otherwise indifferent? What is it that prompts Updike to comment that her writing has had "a mainstream tact, color, and intelligence" and that "The social sciences inform her fantasies with far more earthy substance than the usual imaginary spaceflight, and her hypothetical futures have a strong flavor of familiar history." Le Guin herself has remarked, as Updike points out, that science fiction need not sacrifice the moral complexity proper to the modern novel.

Updike is, of course, absolutely correct. As Peter Nicholls notes, all of her work displays a strong, yet unpreachy emphasis on the moral responsibility of the individual and its cost.² And her work indeed plays off current and familiar history. *The Word for World is Forest*, for example, recalls the Vietnam War, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and "Winter's King" deal, at least indirectly, with the question of sexual roles, and *The Dispossessed*, with its central metaphor of the wall and its clash of political systems, certainly echoes the present clash between the capitalism of America and the socialism of the Communist bloc countries.

In addition to these characteristics, Le Guin possesses that most important of all skills for a writer—she is able to convince us of the validity of the worlds she creates and the characters who people them. How she creates her illusions is very important, for it is in this ability to appeal that she attracts and holds her readers.

Clues to how she accomplishes this are found in the critical comments cited. They hint at two skills, I feel, which are most important to her writing: her ability to detail the worlds she creates, and more importantly, at least in some respects, her ability to perceive and subsequently project characters who are thoroughly human. The two are not, by the way,

mutually exclusive. As readers, we can empathize with characters who are psychologically credible, no matter how alien their bodies. This is the one connection with reality that all writers must maintain if they are truly to be successful. Indeed, there is a very real question as to whether writers can create any characters who are not psychologically credible to us, for any attempt to do so presupposes a knowledge that none of us has. So, the question becomes one of the degree of psychological credibility, and Le Guin's characters rate extremely high in this area regardless of their degree of alienness.

Two of her works, not dealt with otherwise in this special issue, will illustrate: *The Word for World is Forest* and "The Day Before the Revolution." Both are award winners and rank well with her other work. *The Word for World is Forest* won a Hugo in 1973, and "The Day Before the Revolution," a preamble to *The Dispossessed*, won Nebula and Jupiter Awards.

In its creation of world, *The Word for World is Forest* is well-conceived, fully realized, and brilliantly implemented. It accomplishes its systems of invented geography, past history, government, and even a literature of sorts with such utter subtlety that one is hardly aware of the scope of its conceptualization. In typical Le Guin fashion, a central metaphor dominates the story. In this case it is the forest, and all of the systems invented for the world of New Tahiti are not only organically related to it but also derivative of it. In fact, the forest almost attains the same level of sentience as that of the forest in Le Guin's short story "Vaster Than Empires But More Slow." Notice, for example, the pervasiveness of the forest she has created for her novel:

The roots of the cooper willow, thick and ridged, were moss-green down by the running water, which like the wind moved slowly with many soft eddies and seeming pauses, held back by rocks, roots, hanging and fallen leaves. No way was clear, no light unbroken in the forest. Into the wind, water, sunlight, starlight there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex. Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots; they did not go straight, but yielded to every obstacle, devious as nerves.³

Even the natives are derivative of the forest, and thus enrich and complicate the metaphor. Called Athsheans in the native tongue and crechies by the human colonists, they are similar to apes. Though they vary in height and color, all seem to be furred, to have muzzles, and to engage in howling, whistling, bellowing, and cuffing when involved in one of their singing contests. Evolved from the seeding by the "Hains," they are more advanced than Earth apes. They have both an oral and written language, including an "old tongue" used primarily by the male dreamers. They live in matriarchal societies, conduct trade and maintain com-

munications with other clans of Athsheans, and have perfected their singing to a high form of art. Though capable intellectually of technology, they have chosen instead to live in as close harmony as possible with the forest. Their houses are underground warrens made of twigs and branches, and they take great care to maintain the planet's ecological systems.

But the metaphor is built and enriched in other ways. The language of the Athsheans is full of forest imagery. Clans are referred to as "Trees," for example, and Selver, whose name vaguely suggests sylvan, fears being cut off from his roots when he cannot dream, fears "that he had gone too far into the dead land of action ever to find his way back to the springs of reality" (TWWF, p. 38). Also, the Athsheans talk about the humans being insane because they are "driven by the gods within, whom they will not set free, but try to uproot and deny" (TWWF, p. 45). The language of Le Guin's descriptive passages, full of root, leaf, and tree imagery, builds the impact of the forest metaphor and complicates its meanings. She says, for instance, "A girl came quickly, a young huntress, the color of pale birch leaves" (TWWF, p. 40). Even the color of the creechies immediately involved in the action is green. Not only does the color suggest the forest, but it also implies the intimate connection that exists between the natives and their forest. There is even a direct reference to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." This citation provides a direct link to Le Guin's superb short story, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," and its sentient forest. And there are other parallels between the two stories. In both, a bridge is built between human and alien by surrender to otherness, and in both, "alienation is imaged as violence, madness, and ravening egoism."⁴

The metaphor is expanded and complicated in the relationship between the Athsheans and dreaming. They distinguish between dream-time and world-time, but though the brain patterns of their dreams are like those of humans, they are more complex, are higher in quality, and display more control. The Athsheans speak of dream-time as real time. It is not until Selver, the creechie antagonist, makes Lyubov understand that the word for "dream" in Athshean is the same as "root" that the research specialist truly understands the nature of the natives and, in turn, their relationship to the forest. The implication surely is that not only is dreaming derivative of the forest but so are the creechies, who fear being cut off from their dreams and their roots. This fear is reinforced by their habit of touching one another as a form of communication. It is no accident that when Selver learns to kill, he is unable to dream, for indeed he has been alienated and driven along the path to insanity, at least as defined from the creechie point of view. Moreover, it shows why the Athsheans are concerned about the cutting of the trees and how closely they live with nature. To log the trees is, in truth, to destroy part of themselves.

The interconnections between dreaming, the forest, and the people

themselves complicate the central metaphor of the story, but they also tie everything neatly together. It is no surprise to Lyubov later when he learns that the word for world is "Athshe," or "forest," for: "So earth, terra, tellus meant both the soil and the planet, two meanings and one. But to the Athsheans soil, ground, earth was not that to which the dead return and by which the living live: the substance of their world was not earth, but forest. Terran man was clay, red dust. Athshean man was branch and root" (TWFF, p. 89).

The relationship is borne out even in the descriptive passages. Notice, for example, how the female Athshe in the following sentence resembles a tree after a rain or heavy dewing: "The little crone, her green fur all dusted and besilvered with raindrops, sighed with relief when he [Lyubov] said goodbye" (TWFF, p. 97).

Vital to establishing the dominance of the forest metaphor is Le Guin's ability to infuse the entire novel with references, suggestions, and imagery that recall, at least if not consciously, subliminally, the forest. This she does superbly. Packing the writing with detail, she is even able to have the human dialogue and descriptions project the forest metaphor because the conflict between the two cultures forces the humans to be immersed in the world of their adversaries.

Besides her superior ability to construct a world in detail and to make all its parts organic to the theme of the story, Le Guin is also a keen observer of human psychology, and she is very adept at projecting a character incisively. Though her work abounds with well-conceived and brilliantly implemented characters, two examples will illustrate: Captain Don Davidson from *The Word for World is Forest* and Laia Odo from "The Day Before the Revolution."

A "macho" type, Davidson is the epitome of the military mind. In fact, if his actions were not so carefully motivated and his role so important to the story, he would be a caricature. But because he becomes a symbol to the Athsheans and because he is so perfectly representative of a kind of thinking current in contemporary culture, he achieves a startling and significant dimension.

In his own mind, Davidson is above all else a military man. He is straight-backed, tall, handsome, with a face that is lean and rugged. He is chauvinistic, in both the original and new senses of that word, extremely self-confident, tough, and "cool" under fire. He possesses excellent self-control, exudes virility; he is a soldier, a fighter. He remarks at one point that "the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man" (TWFF, p. 81). He is a man of action, who, when he believes that his superior officers have gone "spla" (have cracked under the strain), takes command himself and leads raids to kill the creechies against specific orders to cooperate with them. Though he has an

eidetic memory and considers himself to have more imagination than most men, he is extremely near-sighted, rigid, and insensitive. He considers the creechies to be dumb, lazy, treacherous, and lacking the physical sensitivity of humans. They are less than human to him, things to be exploited. He thinks nothing, in fact, of raping Selver's wife, and feels neither grief nor remorse when she subsequently dies from his act. Quite logically, his prejudice even extends to fellow humans. He has little respect for the Navy, "a lot of fancy sunhoppers who left the dirty, muddy, on-planet work to the Army" (TWWF, p. 15), and he believes that "Some men, especially the asiatic forms and the hindi types, are born traitors" (TWWF, p. 78). He also believes that Raj Lyubov, the research specialist, is jealous of his virility because Davidson considers him to be an intellectual and therefore effeminate.

Yet Davidson feels that he is the perfect man for the job he was assigned. He is a "world-tamer" by his own admission, and making New Tahiti into a new Eden, into Earth as it used to be, not the "desert of cement" that it is (TWWF, p. 7), is the task set before him. His ego-centeredness is so severe that he believes that New Tahiti exists for the sole purpose of serving men. He even chooses to believe that the planet was seeded by a colony of Earth settlers from Atlantis, who later died off, rather than the Hainish, whom he views suspiciously because they claim to have started everything, and he can recognize no race superior to his own.

Despite his shortcomings, however, Davidson achieves a status with the Athsheans that he does not understand. Ironically, they (Selver in particular) come to view him as a god. The word for god in their language is the same as for translator, and a translator for the creechies is one who, like Selver, bridges the gap between dream-time and world-time. A translator changes things, and both Davidson and Selver do just that. The world will never be the same because of them. "We're both gods, you and I," says Selver. "You're an insane one, and I'm not sure whether I'm sane or not. But we are gods. . . . We bring each other such gifts as gods bring. You gave me a gift, the killing of one's kind, murder. Now, as well as I can, I give you my people's gift, which is not killing" (TWWF, p. 160).

Davidson, typical of other humans, is considered insane because he cannot control his dreams, because there is a wish in him to kill things, because he is cut off from his roots, and most importantly, because like Lyubov, he considers "world-time" to be the only reality, rather than seeing "world-time" and "dream-time" as different aspects of one reality.

It is this Taoist perspective that permits Selver and the other Athsheans to learn from Davidson and for him symbolically to become yet another part of the forest, thus expanding and complicating the dominant metaphor of the story. Davidson represents the dark side of the forest, the irrational, the dead. Insanity is recognized by the Athsheans as simply

another aspect of reality. It is this perspective which permits them to view both Davidson and Selver, who also wonders if he is insane, not only as gods but also as derivative of a part of the forest which they have little knowledge of. Coro Mena, a Lord Dreamer of the Whitethorn clan, sums up this relationship nicely when he remarks of Selver, "He is a god. . . . We may have dreamed of Selver these last few years, but we shall no longer; he has left the dream-time. In the forest, through the forest he comes, where leaves fall, where trees fall, a god that knows death, a god that kills and is not himself reborn" (TWWF, p. 35). These remarks apply equally well to Davidson, who presents to them a totally foreign point of view, one representing death and insanity. They even believe that he has come from a world (Earth) which is, ironically, a forest with no trees (TWWF, pp. 44-45).

It is a rationalization that the Athshean mind can comprehend easily, for their own forest encompasses not only beauty and life but ugliness and death as well. In fact, the two processes are inextricably connected, part of one reality. This unity is clearly illustrated in the following passage: "The ground was not dry and solid but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long, elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across" (TWWF, p. 25). Though the Athsheans live in harmony with the forest, even they do not completely understand it. Coro Mena sums up their view when he says, "The world is always new . . . however old its roots" (TWWF, p. 33). For the Athsheans, complete understanding of the forest would be complete understanding of God. It is both the reconciler of opposites and their generator. Black and white, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, yin and yang, all are part of this over-consciousness, the Tao. So too is Davidson and what he represents.

How Davidson ends up is both appropriate and ironic. Selver exiles him to Dump Island, a place whose ecology has been completely destroyed by the loggers, a place with no trees, no forest. Cut off from his roots, Davidson will remain isolated, alienated, and alone. Eventually, he will probably go mad, thus fulfilling the Athshean perception of him.

In Laia Odo, of "The Day Before the Revolution," Le Guin has created a brilliant character sketch of a proud, strong woman hobbled by old age. The portraiture is focused by the contrast between the impending revolution—a goal she has propounded for more than fifty years—and her imminent death, the only thing that can supersede the revolution in importance for her.

In Le Guin's description of Laia are the obvious physical effects of aging: gray hair, wrinkled skin, hunched posture, creaking bones, and failing vision. In addition, Laia has had a stroke, leaving her right side weakened,

and causing her to drool on herself when she eats. The brilliance of the sketch comes not from these physical characteristics however, but from Le Guin's description of the psychological effects of aging.

Laia displays the symptoms of advancing senility. She focuses on details that would be insignificant to most other people. For example, throughout the story, she is preoccupied with her toes:

The toes, compressed by a lifetime of cheap shoes, were almost square where they touched each other, and bulged out above in corns; the nails were discolored and shapeless. Between the knob-like anklebones ran fine, dry wrinkles. The brief little plain at the base of the toes had kept its delicacy, but the skin was the color of mud, and knotted veins crossed the instep. Disgusting. Sad, depressing. Mean. Pitiful. She tried on all the words, and they all fit, like hideous little hats. Hideous: yes, that one too. To look at oneself and find it hideous, what a job! (WTQ, p. 233)

This preoccupation is part of a general appraisal of her body and that, in turn, is part of her sudden awareness of advanced age. Moreover, it is all part of the "looking back" syndrome. For her, the details often trigger a chain of memories. For example, as she shuffles into one of the bathrooms in the house where she lives, she sees a young girl, Mairo, washing her hair in the lavatory. Laia admires the girl's beautiful hair briefly, but almost instantly the event propels Laia into the past, when she had been taunted for being a "longhair," had had her hair pulled by policemen or young toughs and shaved off by a grinning soldier as she was incarcerated at a new prison (WTQ, p. 235).

Like the old, she returns in circular fashion to certain details. In a brilliant passage, Le Guin mirrors this tendency in the writing itself:

"Oh, oh my dear," Laia said out loud, and she sank down on to the bed again because she could not stand up under the remembrance of those first weeks in the Fort, in the cell, those first weeks of the nine years in the Fort in Drio, in the cell, those first weeks after they told her that Asieo had been killed in the fighting in Capitol Square and had been buried with the Fourteen Hundred in the lime-ditches behind Oring Gate. In the cell. Her hands fell into the old position in her lap, the left clenched and locked inside the grip of the right, the right thumb working back and forth a little pressing and rubbing on the knuckle of the left first finger. Hours, days, nights. She had thought of them all, each one of the Fourteen Hundred, how they lay, how the quicklime worked on the flesh, how the bones touched in the burning dark. Who touched him? How did the slender bones of the hand lie now? Hours, years. (WTQ, p. 234)

And she is forgetful. After waking from a dream involving a significant meeting with Asieo, she forgets what he said to her on that occasion. When asked about some letters that she was to write, she momentarily forgets what they are about, and she forgets to shut the door when she changes her shirt. Moreover, she is easily distracted. When her secretary, Nio, finally

gets her to sit down to compose the letters, she has to let him finish them, for she suddenly finds the exercise irritating and not as important as it had been in the past.

She has also grown emotional, even sentimental, though she has always spoken out against sentimentality. Wallowing in self-pity, she suddenly pulls a folder containing a work by Asieo from her desk and fondles it. Then, overcome with remembering him, she kisses his handwritten name on the front. Shortly thereafter, she goes down the hall to the bathroom to re-do the knot in her hair and encounters Amai, who does it for her. While the young girl is re-tying her hair, Laia reflects on how Amai symbolizes what the revolution is really about, and overcome with emotion because of the daughter that she never had, she weeps.

Despite her efforts to fight against the effects of aging, she cannot mitigate the changes it has brought in her point of view. She keeps the "old ways." For example, she wears a dressing gown down to breakfast, whereas the young people in the house dress immodestly, and she refers to Taviri Asieo as "husband," rather than as "partner," the accepted revolutionary term for a mate. And, in a retrospective examination of the material she wrote in prison, material which became the Bible of the revolutionary effort, she denies the bravery of her efforts and the meaning attached to some of her work. She had no choice but to go on, she says to herself, and she meant only that if you wanted to come home you had to keep going when she wrote, "True journey is return," an oft-quoted and inspirational phrase of the revolutionaries. Finally, age has dampened her ability to be enthusiastic. Experience has taught her to be wary of enthusiasms, so when she hears news about the city of Thu that causes her to believe that the revolution might actually be starting, she simply feels out of the center of things. Her many disappointments have made her weary of the revolution.

A woman who has always looked ahead, whose life has been immersed in the efforts of the revolution, and whose perceptions have always been directed outward, Laia's sudden awareness of old age and impending death is not illogical. Prompted by her introspection, she engages in a search for meaning and self, and is subsequently driven to return to the streets of the city. There she sees the squalor, the slums, the misery, and "Laia shuffled through the foul, noisy street, and all the ugly weakness of her old age was at home" (WTQ, p. 244). It was the exploitation of the poor and the hopeless that had triggered her participation in the revolutionary effort in the first place.

In the return to the squalid streets, Laia also finds an answer to the question of self:

"Who am I?" Laia muttered to her invisible audience, and they knew the answer and told it to her with one voice. She was the little girl with the scabby knees, sitting on the doorstep staring down through the dirty golden haze of River

Street in the heat of the late summer, the six-year old, the sixteen-year old, the fierce, cross, dream-ridden girl, untouched, untouchable. She was herself. Indeed she had been the tireless worker and thinker, but a blood clot in a vein had taken that woman away from her. Indeed she had been the lover, the swimmer in the midst of life, but Taviri, dying, had taken that woman away with him. There was nothing left, really, but the foundation. She had come home; she had never left home. "True voyage is return." Dust and mud and a doorstep in the slums. And beyond, at the far end of the street, the field full of tall dry weeds blowing in the wind as night came. (WTQ, p. 245)

Le Guin ends the story with: "On ahead, on there, the dry white flowers nodded and whispered in the open fields of evening. Seventy-two years and she had never had time to learn what they were called" (WTQ, p. 246). The dry white flowers symbolize Laia, of course, and link nicely with the tall dry weeds in the paragraph explaining her answer to the question of self. Like the weeds and the flowers, opposites are equally part of being, and so too is Laia's death part of her life. Satisfied with her answer, she faces her death as she faced her life—strongly, proudly, looking ahead.

Le Guin's portraiture of old age is not only perceptive and sensitive, it is poignant and haunting. The concept is fully thought out and brilliantly implemented. The rush of detail incorporated into the story makes it impossible for any reader to remain unsympathetic to Laia and to deny the image of his own aging.

In *The Word for World is Forest* and "The Day Before the Revolution," Le Guin has exceeded a writer's responsibility to produce merely a story; she has produced art, at least as Susan Langer has defined it: "What a work of art sets forth—the course of sentience, feeling, emotion, and the *elan vital* itself—has no counterpart in any vocabulary. . . . But what it conveys is really just one nameless passage of 'felt life,' knowable through its incarnation in the art symbol even if the beholder has never felt it in his own flesh."⁵ James Jarrett has added: "Great works of art should be thought of not only as evoking familiar emotional responses, but as *extending* too, our emotional lives."⁶ By penetrating so deeply into human psychology and reproducing her findings in detail, in worlds which permit the working out of complex emotional reactions, Le Guin has been able to communicate with her readers in terms of emotional experience and has brought to science fiction that which it has until recently lacked—truly identifiable and fully empathetic characters.

That a probing of mind is her goal is no secret, for she has stated quite openly that it is:

Unless physical action reflects psychic action, unless the deeds express the person, I get very bored with adventure stories; often it seems that the more action there is, the less happens. Obviously my interest is in what goes on inside. Inner-space and all that. We all have forests in our minds. Forests unexplored, unending. Each of us gets lost in the forest, every night, alone. (WTQ, p. 149)

No doubt it is her exploration of the forests of mind, inner-space, that prompted Peter Nicholls' observation that Le Guin's later novels offer no absolute resolutions and that the answers seem to come less easily.⁷ The constant probing of self is bound to produce changes, to complicate character, and to produce more detail, those stylistic qualities which, I feel, make her writing so outstanding. She is cognizant of the changes in her work and welcomes them: "The progress of my style has been away from open romanticism, slowly and steadily. . . . It has been a progress. I am still a romantic, no doubt about that, and glad of it, but the candor and simplicity of 'Semley's Necklace' have gradually become something harder, stronger, more complex" (WTQ, p. 1).

The eventual result will probably be, as Nicholls predicts, that her future work will place greater value on the individual and less on the harmony of the whole.⁸ This is, I believe, inevitable. The course of her future writing has been charted. She will continue to bring us those luminosities which light our paths through the darkness of our subconscious minds; she will mine that precious metal that lies strewn in the white clay layers of inner-space, and she will do it with such consummate skill that we will proclaim her to be an alchemist.

Though this special issue on Ursula Le Guin came about more by accident than by design, I hope it is no less of a tribute to either her writing skill or her rank among science-fiction authors. The truth is that the sheer bulk of excellent articles written about her work forced such an issue. Though it is not comprehensive, the issue falls into two broad categories: a general section and a section on the Earthsea novels.

In her article, Dena Bain discusses the *Tao Te Ching* as the universal base for the behavior of the societies and individual characters in many of Le Guin's novels. Rosemarie Arbur offers an interpretation for "Song" (one of Le Guin's serious poems) that she believes establishes Le Guin as a feminist in a singular way. In her article on *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Barbara Brown explores the archetypal background for androgyny and thus proposes yet another possible reading for this already well-criticized novel. Tom Moylan discusses "critical utopias," those which shift from simple negation to negation with alternatives in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Samuel Delany's *Triton*.

In the Earthsea novels, Edgar Bailey traces the archetype of the Shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Robert Galbreath discusses the nature of magic as philosophically related to Taoism. Brian Attebery examines myth in the trilogy and, in particular, compares the mythic pattern of the novels to that of Theodore Roethke's poem, "In a Dark Time." Thomas Remington treats the relationship between seasonal change and the events of the novels. And Colin Manlove discusses the conservatism of fantasy in Earthsea in terms of balance, moderation, and the celebration of things as they are.

Notes

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 179. All subsequent references will be to this edition and coded WTQ.
2. *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, ed. Peter Nicholls (Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin Books, 1979), p. 347.
3. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1976), p. 25. All subsequent references will be to this edition and coded TWWF.
4. Nicholls, p. 347.
5. Cited in *The Quest for Beauty* by James L. Jarrett (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p. 131.
6. Jarrett, p. 131.
7. Nicholls, p. 347.
8. Nicholls, p. 347.

The *Tao Te Ching* as Background to the Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin

DENA C. BAIN

■ The intuitive approach that comes before thought is the only fruitful one with regard to the Chinese sages, and an explicative paper on the basic precepts of the *Tao Te Ching*¹ will reveal nothing about Tao and a great deal about the writer. The Chinese sages taught through poetic paradox, not through the rational dualism of analysis and synthesis, and the importance of Ursula Le Guin's contribution to science fiction lies in her ability to use a distinctly Western art form to communicate the essence that is Tao. In many of her novels, Tao is the universal base upon which societies and individual characters act. The fact that Tao exists not in rational systems but in life and the imaginative construct of life that we call art makes the critic's task of revealing the methods and materials of Le Guin's imaginative integration a very difficult one. Nonetheless, I hope to avoid the traps inherent in the process of analysis as much as possible in giving some definition to the Taoist mythos that permeates the three novels—*City of Illusions*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *The Dispossessed*²—which I think best communicate it.

Unlike Western religious thought, which sees the universe as real and God as a person, Eastern tradition sees the universe as illusory and God as an impersonal force. In both Eastern and Western mysticism, however, the mystical experience is nothing less than direct intuition of Ultimate Reality—a supreme being in the West, a supreme state in the East. In Taoism—and in using this term, I am always referring to the philosophy, not the later organized church—the supreme state is Tao, and its most common representation is as the line joining/dividing the yin and yang

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principles in the circle of life. Tao is the essence, the ultimate unity of the universe. It is the perfect balance point that encompasses all and nothing. In the *Tao Te Ching*, Tao is real, although no more real than the universe it governs; yet it is very definitely the governing force of the universe: the Mother, the One, Being, the Way. Tao “gave birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to Ten Thousand” (TWIP, p. 195). Not-being, or the Something Else, the Self-So, the Nameless, stands outside time, ready, as Holmes Welch suggests,³ to produce new universes ruled by Tao, and maintaining the Tao that rules this one. Nonetheless, it and Tao are aspects of one another. It is in this sense that Tao encompasses all and nothing, or as Lao Tzu says: “For truly Being and Not-being grow out of one another” (TWIP, p. 143). I would like to quote at greater length from Chapter II of the *Tao Te Ching* as translated by Arthur Waley, as it not only contains several important concepts, but also leads into a discussion of the underlying conflict of *City of Illusions*:

It is because every one under Heaven
recognizes beauty
as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists.
And equally if every one recognized virtue as
virtue, this
would merely create fresh conceptions of
wickedness,
For truly Being and Not-being grow out of one
another;
Difficult and easy complete one another.
Long and short test one another;
High and low determine one another.
Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.
Front and back give sequence to one another.
Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity,
Carries on wordless teaching . . . (p. 143).

If we had no preconceptions of beauty, nothing would appear ugly; one thing is made high only at the expense of making something else low, and so on. Similarly, in human affairs every challenge provokes a response, and when anyone tries to act upon humans the ultimate result is the opposite of what he is aiming at. Thus, the Sage, faced with a statement of action that is one side of a duality, must not support that side either directly or indirectly by taking the other side and thereby reinforcing the duality. Lao Tzu believes that challenges are to be ignored and that to cope with them by responding is the greatest of mistakes. According to his teaching, no one can achieve his aims by actions that create the rhythmic oscillation between opposites so common in human affairs. How, therefore, is the Sage to achieve his aims? The answer is *wu wei*—actionless activity. The Sage’s lack

of response to aggression is his wordless teaching. His passivity negates argument and teaches the aggressor to break the circle of cause and effect, and shows him that "To yield is to be preserved whole" (TWIP, p. 171), like Shevek, the physicist protagonist of *The Dispossessed*, whose "gentleness was uncompromising; because he would not compete for dominance, he was indomitable" (TD, p. 94). This actionless activity can succeed because it is the exemplar of the Taoist ideal of *tz'u*—love in the sense of compassion—coupled with humility. This attitude sets up a state of attraction rather than compulsion. Actionless activity is an attitude rather than an act, a state of being rather than doing, and this is the basis of its attraction. The Sage "becomes the model for the world"; his complete relativism absorbs aggression. He "approves of the good man and also of the bad man: thus the bad becomes good" (TWIP, p. 202). First, then, the Sage never tries to do good, since a concept of good implies a concept of evil, and supporting the concept of evil only makes it stronger and more difficult to combat. Secondly, the cycle of cause and effect is so strong, so pervasive in human affairs that good done to one person may well be evil done to another; and third, by the Sage's wordless teaching, his compassion and humility, and his complete relativity in which good and evil are subjective, he can consider any man's criteria as valid as his own, "believing the truthful man and also believing the liar . . . thus all become truthful" (TWIP, p. 202).

The question of truth is the central issue of *City of Illusions*, and the question is focused around Mindspeech, which is called the Last Art. The word "art" is used in the sense of a Zen or Ch'an art. Zen, or Ch'an, is descended psychologically if not doctrinally from early Taoism, and like it became the "conductor," as Waley says,⁴ for the same force engendered by actionless activity and developed in what Lao Tzu calls the Uncarved Block, or true nature. In man's true nature, in the compassion and humility of the Uncarved Block, there is neither good nor evil, beauty nor ugliness, truth nor lie: only Tao. Mindspeech draws upon this true nature—it is impossible to dissimulate in Mindspeech because there is no gap between "thought" and bespeaking, as there is between thought and speech. Zove, who is one of the several characters in Le Guin's work closely resembling Lao Tau's Sage, teaches, like Lao Tzu, by paradox. It is he who points out to the protagonist Falk the paradox of Mindspeech, which is that "In truth manhood lies" (CI, p. 17). Whatever the bespeaker believes to be true will impact with all the conviction of belief, though it may be completely erroneous.

It seems, however, that the Shing introduce a new element, the mindlie. In Le Guin's cosmogony, the Shing are the Enemy, the alien race that broke the power of the old League, twelve hundred years before the action of *City of Illusions*, in a pyrrhic victory that left them isolated on Earth, rulers of a

place that is forever alien to them. If true nature is an extension of the order of the universe, and if to be in harmony with the one is to be in harmony with the other, imagine the shock felt at the time of the War by the League members, practitioners of the Last Art, when this people arrived whose inner nature seemed to contain the capacity to distinguish between the truth or falsehood of their beliefs and to choose falsehood. The operative word is "choice." If the Shing believed what they bespoke, they would not be evil, merely consistent. Their introduction of dualism into the Uncarved Block gave them an advantage over the League that could not be fought.

This is what the Forest People believe, and it is the story that they teach to Falk, the protagonist, whose mind at the beginning of the book, like the reader's, is a blank slate to be written upon; it is not necessarily the truth.

Falk is actually Ramarren, leader of the first spaceship to travel from the planet Werel to Earth since the destruction of the League. All but one of his shipmates, a child, were destroyed by the Shing, and he himself was mind-razed and turned out to die. Rescued by Zove's Forest People, Falk must eventually leave those whom he now loves to find and complete the destiny that was interrupted. In his search for the truth, Falk is actually hunting for clarity, for an end to the ambiguity of the lives and words of the Shing. This ambiguity is indeed overwhelming: Falk is thrown into intimacy with Estrel, the first Shing he meets. Yet she is always "a gray shape in grayness" to him; she "kept nothing from him and yet her secrecy remained untouched" (CI, p. 93). The attitude of the Shing to life and death, shown by their Law against killing which Falk calls a lie, is a reflection of the vagueness that shades everything about them. They are not capable of definitive action; even their murder is not complete. They will wipe an enemy's mind completely clean, obliterating personality, knowledge, and experience, but they consider themselves innocent of killing because they leave the body untouched. Yet there is beauty in the illusory nature of their reality, though Falk will not accept it, preferring his own illusion about reality. When Falk awakes in the Shing palace for the first time, he is in a room where:

There was no furniture. Walls, floor and ceiling were all of the same translucent stuff, which appeared soft and undulant like many thicknesses of pale green veiling, but was tough and slick to the touch. Queer carvings and crimpings and ridges forming ornate patterns all over the floor were, to the exploring hand, nonexistent; they were eye-deceiving paintings, or lay beneath a smooth transparent surface. The angles where walls met were thrown out of true by optical-illusion devices of crosshatching and pseudo-parallels used as decoration; to pull the corners into right angles took an effort of will, which was perhaps an effort of self-deception, since they might, after all, not be right angles. But none of this teasing subtlety of decoration so disoriented Falk as the fact that the entire room was translucent. . . . A blot of shadow somewhere in the green depths suddenly rose and grew less, greener, dimmer, fading into the maze

of vagueness. Visiblity without discrimination, solitude without privacy. It was extraordinarily beautiful, this masked shimmer of lights and shapes through inchoate planes of green, and extraordinarily disturbing. (CI, pp. 116-17)

Of course, it is disturbing to Falk, for whom the city of the Shing is not, as it is for Estrel, a place among places, and though a voice from the mirror in the room in which he wakes tells him to "Wait a moment more, Falk. Illusions are not always lies. You seek truth" (CI, p. 118), he cannot endure or admit the truth offered him in the hallucinogenic dream-play. Lord Kradgy presents Falk with the same paradox about truth that the Sage Zove had:

I am a Shing. All Shing are liars. Am I, then, a Shing lying to you, in which case of course I am not a Shing, but a non-Shing, lying? Or is it a lie that all Shing lie? But I am a Shing, truly; and truly I lie. Terrans and other animals have been known to tell lies also; lizards change color, bugs mimic sticks and flounders lie by lying still, looking pebbly or sandy depending on the bottom which underlies them. (CI, p. 120)

Falk ought to have gone alone, as Zove, the Bee-Keeper, the Prince of Kansas, the Listener in the forest all had told him. By trusting that Estrel had his good at heart, he opened the possibility for her to do him ill. Yet had she done him ill by bringing him to the Shing? He is so clouded by emotion and attached to his preconceptions that he believes this to be the truth, merely because it seems that the Shing are trying to do him ill, and merely because the Shing are alien and enormously remote, bringing with them the "hues, the mood, the complexity of a lost world, a planet of perfumes and illusions, of swamps and transformations . . ." (CI, p. 150).

The Shing succeed in giving Ramarren back his identity, in hopes that they can find out from him the location of Werel in order to destroy it. They do not know, however, that Ramarren has succeeded in retaining his Falk identity as well and, because he has the two sets of information, is aware of their plans. Like all seekers, however, Falk-Ramarren must go through a transformation before being able to complete his mission. He has to learn that Estrel speaks truth when she says: "There is no Enemy, and I work for him." There is no Enemy, only another way to the truth. The transformation takes place just before the climactic scene in which Falk-Ramarren overcomes the Shing Ken Kenyek, and regains his ship. It is made possible because Falk leaves all conscious, rational thought to Ramarren and sinks into a state similar to the trance state he had earlier put himself into to save his identity as Falk. He attains the Tao, the Way, the state of actionless activity, by emptying himself of all conjecture and all thought. Thus, while Ramarren tries with all his trained intelligence to find a way to escape the Shing, the thought, based on his Kelshak upbringing, crosses his mind that:

there is in the long run no disharmony, only misunderstanding, no chance or mischance but only the ignorant eye. So Ramarren thought, and the second soul within him, Falk, took no issue with this view, but spent no time trying to think it all out, either. For Falk had seen the dull and bright stones slip across the wires of the patterning frame, and had lived with men in their fallen estate, kings in exile on their own domain the Earth, and to him it seemed that no man could make his fate or control the game, but only wait for the bright jewel luck to slip by on the wire of time. Harmony exists, but there is no understanding it; the Way cannot be gone. So while Ramarren racked his mind, Falk lay low and waited. And when the chance came he caught it. (CI, pp. 207–08)

Falk-Ramarren comes to the realization that illusion, the world of the Shing, has its own truth, its own reality, and should, therefore, also be heard by the Werelians. The hatred Falk had always felt for the Shing is replaced by compassion and pity for the profound, irremediable lack of understanding that is the essence of their lying. They could not get in touch with men, and had used that as a weapon, the “mindlie.” Yet after twelve centuries of trying to rule these men “whose minds made no sense to them and whose flesh was to them forever sterile,” they are left “Alone, isolated, deafmutes ruling deafmutes in a world of delusions. *Oh desolation . . .*” (CI, p. 216). Thus, in the compassion that leads to true understanding, Falk-Ramarren says that: “There’s always more than one way towards the truth” (CI, p. 217), and takes Ken Kenyek with them to tell his story as well.

As the ship left Earth, the dawn coming over the Eastern ocean “shone in a golden crescent for a moment against the dust of stars, like a jewel on a great patterning frame. Then frame and pattern shattered, the barrier was passed, and the little ship broke free of time and took them out across the darkness” (CI, p. 217). These images of light and darkness, which begin and end the book, figure very strongly not only in Lao Tzu but in all Chinese thought as the two halves of the yin-yang symbol. The terms literally mean the “sunny side” and “dark side” of a hill. Yin is the light, male, active, Being principle, and yang is darkness, the female, quiescent, Not-being. Being and Not-being are aspects of the same thing; together they are Tao and cannot be separated.

Though the images of darkness and light pervade all of Le Guin’s work, they are most important in the novel that uses the concept as its title: *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The title is taken from a Lay of the planet Gethen:

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. (LHD, p. 222)

According to a prehistoric Orgota creation myth, there was in the

beginning nothing but the ice and the sun. When the nations of men were born to the giant Edondurath, however, each child had a piece of darkness that followed him. When Edondurath asked his kemmering why this was so, he was answered: "Because they were born in the house of flesh, therefore death follows at their heels. They are in the middle of time. In the beginning there was the sun and the ice, and there was no shadow. In the end when we are done, the sun will devour itself and shadow will eat light, and there will be nothing left but the ice and the darkness" (LHD, p. 226). Man lives in light, therefore, but must carry a piece of darkness with him in order to be man. At one point in their journey across the ice, Genly Ai and Estraven must travel for days through complete whiteness, through an "even, white, soundless sphere" (LHD, p. 250), where there are no shadows, no darkness. Genly Ai draws the yin-yang symbol and shows it to his companion, who has never seen it before. "It is yin and yang," Ai explains, "*Light is the left hand of darkness . . .* how did it go? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow" (LHD, p. 252).

The Handdara, the spiritual discipline that has shaped the country of Karhide, is its shadow. Behind the politics and parades and passions of this nation of mad kings and feuds "runs an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara" (LHD, p. 61).⁵ As Lao Tzu says, "He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female / Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven / . . . He who knows the white, yet cleaves to the black / Becomes the standard by which all things are tested . . ." (TWIP, p. 178). The Handdarata cleave to the black. Though they will, if necessary, leave their Fastnesses to take up public life, living in the brightness of the society of men, and, as they say, taking back their shadows, they devote themselves to unlearning, to the ignorance which is the beginning of wisdom. "Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day," but the practice of Tao, Lao Tzu says, "consists in subtracting day by day, / Subtracting and yet again subtracting / Till one has reached inactivity. / But by this very inactivity / Everything can be activated" (TWIP, p. 201). The Handdarata practice the same sort of return to a state of Void or Quietness that Lao Tzu teaches. The approach to trance is never by external stimulation or action of any sort, but always by quiet and inaction. When Genly Ai first meets Faxe the Weaver, he and another are standing like statues in the full sunlight of a wide green meadow. Ai says that "They were practicing the Handdara discipline of Presence, which is a kind of trance—the Handdarata, given to negatives, call it an untrance— involving self-loss (self-augmentation?) through extreme sensual receptiveness and awareness" (LHD, p. 59).

It is this discipline of Presence that enables Faxe the Weaver to be one of the Foretellers. As the Weaver of the group, he stands at the center, at the

balance point and point of transference, and eventually becomes the focus of the energies developed by the conflict between the Pervert and kemmerer, and augmented by the time distortion of the Zanies, who are in opposition to the Presence of the Celibates, with their total apprehension of immediate reality. He controls the empathic and paraverbal forces at work among the others, and at the moment of the Answer, there is "in the center of all darkness Faxe: the Weaver: a woman, a woman dressed in light" (LHD, p. 67). Though it would seem that the Handdarata, who do not want answers and who avoid them, are paradoxically the Answerers, yet their reason for answering questions is in keeping with their philosophy of unlearning. They have perfected Foretelling, Faxe says, "To exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question" (LHD, p. 71). In other words, there is no such thing as a right question. Like the king who might ask who would serve him best as prime minister, without understanding what "serving him best" may mean; like the Lord Berosty who asked "on what day shall I die?" and thereby caused his own death to occur on the day named by the Foretellers, any Asker who phrases his question in hopes of receiving a particular answer defeats the purpose of asking by his expectations. Indeed, the very process of asking questions, of adding to one's store of knowledge rather than subtracting from it, is never fruitful, as Ai, whose mission is no less difficult for the affirmative answer his question receives, learns. Faxe explains why:

"The unknown," said Faxe's soft voice in the forest, "the unforetold, the unproven, that is what life is based on. Ignorance is the ground of action. If it were proven that there is no God there would be no religion. No Handdara, no Yomesh, no hearthgods, nothing. But also if it were proven that there is a God, there would be no religion. . . . Tell me, Genry, what is known? What is sure, predictable, inevitable—the one certain thing you know concerning your future, and mine?"

"That we shall die."

"Yes. There's really only one question that can be answered, Genry, and we already know the answer. . . . The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next." (LHD, p. 72)

The Yomeshta, who seek light where the Handdarata praise darkness and Creation unfinished, are a variation of the basic philosophy that lies behind the Handdara and therefore all of Gethen. Their belief, however, is that the Weaver Meshe, at the moment of answering the Question of the Lord of Shorth, became trapped, like a filament in a vacuum, in the burning light of timelessness created by the Zanies. In that instant, Meshe stood in the Center of Time, seeing past, present and future as one whole:

Meshe is the Center of Time. That moment of his life when he saw all things clearly came when he had lived on earth thirty years, and after it he lived on earth

again thirty years, so that the Seeing befell in the center of his life. And all the ages up until the seeing were as long as the ages will be after the Seeing, which befell in the Center of Time. And in the Center there is no time past and no time to come. In all time past it is. In all time to come it is. It has not been nor yet will it be. It is. It is all. (LHD, p. 155)

At the Center of Time there is no darkness, only light:

Meshe saw all the sky as if it were all one sun. Above the earth and under the earth all the sphere of sky was bright as the sun's surface, and there was no darkness. . . . Darkness is only in the mortal eye, that thinks it sees, but sees not. In the Sight of Meshe there is no darkness.

Therefore those that call upon the darkness* (*The Handdarata) are made fools of and spat out from the mouth of Meshe, for they name what is not, calling it Source and End. . . . There is neither darkness nor death, for all things are, in the light of the Moment, and their end and their beginning are one. (LHD, p. 157)

Though the Handdarata seek the Not-being aspect of Tao, while the Yomeshta deny the connection between the Being and Not-being aspects, the Handdarata answer their charges, typically, by saying *nusuth*, it does not matter. It does not matter because their philosophy contains the same concept of an eternal present, though they have no dogma like the Yomeshta. In practicing their discipline of Presence, in seeking to leave untrodden the snows of ignorance, they become like Faxé, who looks at Genly Ai "out of a tradition thirteen thousand years old: a way of thought and way of life so old, so well established, so integral and coherent as to give a human being the unself-consciousness, the authority, the completeness of a wild animal, a great strange creature who looks straight at you out of his eternal present" (LHD, p. 72).

Gethenian society as a whole exists at the center of time—it is always the Year One, and dates future and past change accordingly each year. The people are much more concerned with presence than with progress, as Genly Ai remarks in a comparison of Gethenians with Terrans. Perhaps the ability to foretell is, as Genly Ai suspects, really the power of "seeing (if only for a flash) *everything at once*: seeing whole" (LHD, p. 194). This same pattern of viewing time as an eternal present is also a theme of *City of Illusions*. The patterning frame used by Zove and his sister Buckeye, and by the Prince of Kansas, is "a fortune-teller, a computer, an implement of mystical discipline, a toy" (CI, p. 101). Patterning frames serve the same function as the foretelling trance, except that they incorporate representations of the physical world (the Ten Thousand Creatures created by Tao). The energies that build up between the frame and the empathic Listener are finally released into a shifting of the patterns as, in the instant of attaining Tao—the Center of Time—past, future and present are coexistent and all three can be read in the patterns of the "jewels of life and death." Thus, the

Prince of Kansas plays on his frame, and sees the pattern of Opalstone's (Falk's) life in its entirety. He sees that Opalstone should have died a century ago among the stars from which he came, and he sees him shooting off from time's frame back to the stars, as indeed he does in the concluding passage of the novel.

The nature of time is central to *The Dispossessed*, and again the concept of presence is important, both in Shevek's temporal theories and in his own life. For Shevek, past and future together equal the present, so that we always live at the center of time. For example, Shevek comes to this realization during the time of his great happiness with Takver:

It was now clear to Shevek, and he would have thought it folly to think otherwise, that his wretched years in this city had all been part of his present great happiness, because they had led up to it, prepared him for it. Everything that had happened to him was part of what was happening to him now. Takver saw no such obscure concatenation of effect/cause/effect, but then she was not a temporal physicist. She saw time naively as a road laid out. You walked ahead, and you got somewhere. If you were lucky, you got somewhere worth getting to.

But when Shevek took her metaphor and recast it in his terms, explaining that, unless the past and future were made part of the present by memory and intention, there was, in human terms, no road, nowhere to go. . . . (TD, p. 148)

Time, according to Shevek's Simultaneity Theory, is a function of the conscious mind. He explains to the businessman Dearri that babies have no time; they cannot distance themselves from the past and understand how it relates to the present, or plan the future on the basis of its relation to the present. The unconscious mind of the adult, that is, the Uncarved Block, is like that still. He says: "In a dream there is no time, and succession is all changed about, and cause and effect are all mixed together. In myth and legend there is no time. What past is it the tale means when it says 'Once upon a time'? And so, when the mystic makes the reconnection of his reason and his unconscious, he sees all becoming as one being, and understands the eternal return" (TD, p. 179). This brings us again to the *Tao Te Ching*: "In Tao the only motion is returning; / The only useful quality, weakness. / For though Heaven and Earth and the Ten Thousand Creatures were produced by Being, / Being was produced by Not-being" (TWIP, p. 192). Having made the connection between time and the conscious and not-time and the unconscious, backed by the shy man's quotation from Tebores ("The unconscious mind is coextensive with the universe"), Shevek goes on to discuss Sequence in terms of the conscious mind's linear time, and Simultaneity in terms of cycles:

One cycle, one orbit around the sun, is a year, isn't it? And two orbits, two years, and so on. One can count the orbits endlessly—an observer can. Indeed such a system is how we count time. It constitutes the time-teller, the *clock*. But within

the systems, the cycle, where is time? Where is beginning or end? Infinite repetition is an atemporal process. . . . The little timelessnesses added together make up time. . . . So then time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises. (TD, p. 180)

Shevek's temporal theory, then, is to be a general field theory that will unite the two concepts and use the simultaneous aspect of time in the same conscious way that we use linear time. The result will be the ansible, a field in which a communication can exist in two places within the circle of time.

One of the underlying assumptions behind the philosophy of Anarresti society is that the whole is comprised of two inseparable opposites. As it says on Odo's Tombstone: "To be whole is to be part; / true voyage is return" (TD, p. 68). Shevek also, "would always be one for whom the return was as important as the voyage out. To go was not enough, only half enough." Yet the source of the problem between Urras and Anarres, who are surprised to find that the Hainish and Terrans call them jointly the Cetians, is that the voyage out was made two hundred years earlier by the Odonians, but the return has never been effected. Instead, a wall was built, a wall which, depending on one's point of view, encloses Anarres, or encloses the rest of the universe. Shevek's job is to unbuild walls with his empty hands, to unite the centrality of Anarresti functional anarchism with the spendor of the Urrasti; the past of Urras with the future that is Anarres. Where Falk has many teachers to help him along his way, and Genly Ai has two Sages of the Handdara, Estraven and Faxte the Weaver, Shevek has only himself. We see his development against the backgrounds of both sides of the conflict into a "perfected man" (TWIP, p. 177) who teaches the imperfect with a wordless teaching: by example, by love, humility, compassion, and by a mysterious but natural power of his personality. Like Falk and Genly Ai, the solution to Shevek's problem becomes clear to him only when his situation is so reduced that action on his part is no longer possible. Caught up in the politics of Urras; seemingly more distant than he has ever been from joining the two elements; seemingly involved in an action that can only strengthen the wall, Shevek is caught at a point of such total reduction that luck takes over and he is whisked to the best place for him to be in order to complete his mission, the neutral Terran embassy. Not surprisingly, his general field theory of time becomes clear to him at the same time of low ebb in the fortunes of his mission. Sitting in his luxurious cell at the University, Shevek realizes first of all that he had to come to Urras to write his theory of time, to his enemies, who could give him something he could not get from his friends and brothers: knowledge of the foreign, of the alien, of the other side of the circle. He begins to see also that

the flaw in his approach to his physics has been the same—he has been too narrow:

He had been groping and grasping after certainty, as if it were something he could possess. He had been demanding a security, a guarantee, which is not granted, and which, if granted, would become a prison. By simply assuming the validity of real coexistence he was left free to use the lovely geometries of relativity; and then it would be possible to go ahead. The next step was perfectly clear. . . . How could he have stared at reality for ten years and not seen it? There would be no trouble at all in going on. Indeed he had already gone on. He was there. He saw all that was to come in this first, seemingly casual glimpse of the method, given him by his understanding of a failure in the distant past. The wall was down. The vision was both clear and whole. What he saw was simple, simpler than anything else. It was simplicity: and contained in it all complexity, all promise. It was revelation. It was the way clear, the way home, the light. (TD, p. 225)

Once he sees his way clear before him, it is his obligation and desire to share that clarity with everyone, like the Sage who must always return to live in the world and teach. When he stands in Capitol Square surrounded by a vast crowd, the crowd becomes a single great creature that listens to the speakers, “not hearing and understanding in the sense in which the individual rational mind perceives and understands, but rather . . . as a thought perceives and understands the self” (TD, p. 241). When Shevek speaks, he is speaking the mind, the being, the language of the self gathered in the Square, out of the center of his own being. He tells the crowd that in order to become full, they must be empty, like the Anarresti who have nothing but their freedom and therefore have everything that the Urrasti lack. The Anarresti are the future because they do not cling to the past:

It is our suffering that brings us together. It is not love. Love does not obey the mind, and turns to hate when forced. The bond that binds us is beyond choice. We are brothers. We are brothers in what we share. In pain, which each of us must suffer alone, in hunger, in poverty, in hope, we know our brotherhood. We know it, because we have had to learn it. We know that there is no help for us but from one another, that no hand will save us if we do not reach out our hand. And the hand that you reach out is empty, as mine is. You have nothing. You possess nothing. You own nothing. You are free. All you have is what you are, and what you give.

I am here because you see in me the promise, the promise that we made two hundred years ago in this city—the promise kept. We have kept it, on Anarres. We have nothing but our freedom. We have nothing to give you but your own freedom. (TD, p. 241)

Shevek holds in his empty hands the tool that will destroy not only the wall between Anarres and Urras, but the wall of space that divides all the known worlds, and he gives it to all freely. His theory means nothing to him. “Weigh it in the balance with the freedom of one single human spirit,” he

says to Ambassador Keng, "and which will weigh heavier? Can you tell? I cannot" (TD, p. 282). And so, having given all he had to give, he returns to Anarres, his hands empty, as they had always been.

There is, then, a basic mythos underlying each of the novels based on the Quietist philosophy of Lao Tzu's Taoism: the concepts of wholeness, of presence, of reconciling forces which appear totally opposed, but which, in the moment of complete reduction and return to the Uncarved Block, are invariably revealed to be necessary complements. Thus, Falk-Ramarren attains to the compassion which enables him to understand the illusory reality of the Shing, instead of despising its falseness in his false search for an impossible truth, and open the doors that have remained closed for twelve hundred years; thus Genly Ai, reduced to possessing nothing but his shadow on snow, is able to effect the unification of the darkness and light principles on Gethen and open the door to contact with the Ekumen; and finally, Shevek unbuilds the wall that stands between Anarres and Urras, and changes the lives of all the billions of people in the Nine Known Worlds with the "simple matter" he holds in his empty hands.

Le Guin is a deliberate, conscientious writer who not only creates fully developed cultures in each of her novels, but who has woven them together into an entire cosmogony, giving, in the course of all her novels and stories, a history of the spread of civilization from Hain-Davenant to the Ekumen of eighty worlds, of which Terra is a part. She weaves social and political commentary into her cultural presentation, as in the conflicts between Karhide and Orgoreyn in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, or Anarres and Urras in *The Dispossessed*, always set within the larger scale of humanity as an integral part of the balance of the cosmos. Finally, her style mirrors the balance of her themes. Her writing moves gently but inexorably. To use another analogy from Lao Tzu, it is like a deep pool of water, seemingly inactive, but actually teeming with life. She, too, like the Sage, influences by actionless activity. The value of her work lies in the combination of all these elements, and others, into a complete overview of what it means to be human, no matter on what world, in what cultural subdivision, humans find themselves.

Notes

1. All quotations from the *Tao Te Ching* are from the translation by Arthur Waley in *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the "Tao Te Ching" and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), and are coded TWIP.
2. All quotations from the novels of Ursula K. Le Guin are from the following editions: *City of Illusions* (New York: Ace Books, 1967); *The Dispossessed* (New York: Avon Books, 1974); and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969). They are coded: CI, TD, and LHD respectively.
3. Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 56.
4. Waley, p. 59.

5. Interestingly, the present-day Orgota try to deny the existence of darkness. To both Estraven and Ai, Orgoreyn is a shadowless place, and thus lacks the form and substantiality of life in Karhide. It seems to Genly Ai that the people he meets lack some quality, some dimension of being: "It was," he thought, "as if they did not cast shadows" (LHD, p. 142). They are over-balanced toward the sunny side of the hill, and are learning the aggressiveness and forcefulness of action that could lead them, for the first time in the history of the planet, to an actual state of war. Clearly, their attitude is regarded as a potentially disastrous diversion from the beliefs contained in their own creation myths and a perversion of the Yomeshta cult which is now the official state doctrine.

Suggested Reading

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Le Guin's "Song" of Inmost Feminism

ROSEMARIE ARBUR

■ Ursula K. Le Guin, whose public reputation is based neither on her poetry nor her feminism (although she has published a volume of poems and, at a science-fiction conference in 1974, said "remember that about 53% of the Brotherhood of Man is the Sisterhood of Women"), has written a poem that can only be called a celebration and definition of the deepest sort of feminism.¹ The poem, "Song," begins with "O when I was a dirty little virgin," progresses through the roles and the realities of womanhood, and in its fourth and last stanza asserts that "inmost in woman is the girl intact."

The poem is noteworthy for two reasons: first, it establishes Le Guin as a feminist, criticisms that her works of fiction make use of masculine narrators and protagonists notwithstanding and, second, its diction, lyric movement, and use of imagery generate a theme that is deeply and essentially feminist. The kind of feminism that the poem celebrates (and, in a very real sense, creates) is a singular one, not the sort that bandies slogans in a timely though artificial way, but it is not what some feminists call "the personal solution." As a lyric utterance, the poem *is* personal; yet, because the persona who "sings" it could be Everywoman and because the response it evokes is at least 53 percent universal, "Song" is a work of literature that deserves a place in the list of Poems to Be Memorized and Made One's Own.

O when I was a dirty little virgin
I'd sit and pick my scabby knees
and dream about some man of thirty
and doing nothing did what I pleased.

A woman gets and is begotten on:
have and receive is feminine for live.

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I knew it, I knew it even then:
what, after all, did I have to give?
A flowing cup, a horn of plenty
fulfilled with more than she can hold:
but the milk and honey will be emptied,
emptied out, as she grows old.
More inward than sex or even womb,
inmost in woman is the girl intact,
the dirty little virgin who sits and dreams
and has nothing to do with fact.

"Song" is not a dirge, not a verbal artifact born of some aching nostalgia for innocence past, not a subtle and ambiguous and ironic commentary on the status of woman; no, it is a song, an exultation put into words that seem to spring from a deep-founded knowledge and experience of joy. As a song, it celebrates what is basic—most inward—about the experience of a woman who has reached maturity, who has reflected on her female and feminine experiences, and who must then sing of the joy arising from the consciousness of those experiences.

The poem has much that is Freudian in it, or at least much that is Freudian can be gotten out of it. There is the "dirty little virgin" at the very beginning. It is safe to assume that such a "dirty little virgin" was, in the poem's past, a female human being on the verge of puberty but still in that almost asexual stage of latency. Then there is the girl's habitual action: to "sit and pick [her] scabby knees / and dream about some man of thirty," some man, that is, roughly the age of the little girl's father. Quite Freudian, this dreaming, and significantly so: the stages of infantile sexuality and the first Oedipal conflict are past, but the second such conflict (to be resolved during puberty, when the girl realizes that she cannot have her father and so focuses her desires on those adolescents who are most like the father, who are, like the father, male) is foreshadowed by the object of her dream.

Obviously, the persona singing this poem has resolved that second conflict, for she reveals the knowledge of a woman in the remaining three stanzas of the poem. Of particular interest are the kinds of knowledge embodied in the second and third stanzas. Each stanza is made of two lines of experiential "knowing" followed by two lines of "knowing" that is less intuitive, more rational, and, as they appear to complete the utterances of the first two lines, basically logical in nature. At first, one might think that the experiential/intuitive lines are theses followed by rational and logical antitheses, from which the concluding stanza, logically enough, would be the general synthesis or conclusion. But this neat, logical arrangement is not a fair description of the dynamics embodied by the poem.

The second stanza has for its first half a fairly accurate description of the female/feminine role, as "is feminine for live" clearly illustrates. The third

and fourth lines of the stanza are more reflective, more intellectual, than the first two: the "after all" suggests the persona's having considered the experiences put in words by the first two lines and seems to be a rather logical summation. The final words, "to give," seem the inevitable conclusion about what the female/feminine sex role is.

The third stanza, in its first two lines, answers the question posed by the fourth line of the preceding stanza, but answers it not in terms of role but of experience. The words denoting a superabundance dominate the first half of the third stanza, and answer in a celebrative way the question that arose from role-consideration, answer it in words that denote happy experience of womanhood, not merely satisfaction with some role well-played. One word in these lines draws particular attention to itself; the persona does not say "horn of plenty / one filled" (a filled horn), but instead intensifies her experience of womanhood by using the word "fulfilled." This word may be an ambiguity that is functional: it can mean full-filled or filled completely, and it can also mean satisfied beyond one's expectations, made wholer than whole. Here, I think, is a celebration of that which only a woman can experience; she is a whole person, yet one who, by giving birth and giving life (metaphorical as well as actual), can be both self and other: mother and child still dependent on mother for life (*in utero*) and for nourishment (during lactation). This reading adds to "more than she can hold" a literal biological meaning, for when she can no longer physically contain her child, the woman's biological destiny—to give birth—is "fulfilled."

But the second half of the third stanza seems, like the second half of the preceding one, a carefully reasoned-out complement to the celebration of experience of womanhood. Perhaps because this stanza has to do with actuality, not role, its final two lines are the more pessimistic. In the second stanza, which considers the female/feminine role, a well-put question is all that is necessary to balance the experiential with the rational. In the third stanza, however, the intense experience of womanhood, if it is to be balanced by something rational, requires an equally intense negation: "will be emptied, / emptied out, as she grows old." The repetition of "emptied" takes care of the "fulfilled" and, as if to counter the birth-giving that is implied earlier, "grows old" can lead to nothing but death.

Were the basic dynamics of the poem essentially dialectic, with an experience-thesis generating an intellectual/rational-antithesis, the final stanza could not logically follow the second and third as any sort of synthesis, for it does not unite the apparent polarities of the middle stanzas in any way that can be called logical. Yet the last stanza is clearly a conclusion: it does not split, like the second and third, into experiential and rational halves. Neither, however, is it merely a return to the same "dirty little virgin" of the first stanza of the poem, for the persona speaks from experience of "sex" and "womb" in a way that the initially presented "little

virgin" could not even understand. Nor, were one to look upon the final stanza as a statement about geriatric "second childhood," can the distinctly celebrative—even if whimsical—tone of the conclusion be overlooked.

Familiarity with the thematic content of Le Guin's fiction provides a hint at what the final stanza does, but careful reading of the poem itself makes such familiarity unnecessary. The last stanza, by asserting that "inmost in woman is the girl intact," makes the essence of womanhood almost asexual (as the indication of latency makes the girl as she first appears). One cannot deny—nor would one want to—the femaleness of both woman and girl, but neither can one ignore the fact that it is the humanity, not the gender, that is the primary attribute of the persona who sings this "Song." What at first could be taken for theses and antitheses of a dialectical structure are, by the celebrative and joyous conclusion, revealed as aspects of a whole continuum. For woman, Le Guin says in her poem, the experiential and the rational are not separate entities to be united as a synthetic and new "being." On the contrary, the experience of role and of self and the intellectualizations about both are left as intact attributes: they may seem to oppose one another, but the opposition is more like the opposition of the right and left hands, of the cognitive brain and the viscera. They do not act at cross-purposes but together function as the whole person. Womanhood is not achieved by lopping off this or that attribute of the female human being evolving as she lives; it is achieved by the mature and conscious acceptance of all that the woman is.

What the poem "Song" does, then, is to imitate verbally the processes of growth toward mature womanhood. At first there is the girl who "doing nothing did what [she] pleased" because her youth was not yet ready for the responsibilities of maturity. Then there is the next stage of growth or socialization: the older girl or young woman takes on the roles of woman as society defines them and, as a sensitive being, questions her selfhood as contained by these roles. Then, at maturity, the woman experiences her womanhood and, knowing that she has grown and still grows, considers the approach of senescence. But finally, in the maturity that is wisdom, the woman realizes that she has been all the time one self and her realization is a liberating one. No longer defined by anything that is not "inmost" in her, the woman can, with the freedom of the girl made responsible by wisdom, choose to have "nothing to do with [externally defined and defining] fact." To know herself more deeply "than sex or even womb" can let her know is to have more than sufficient cause for a "Song."

Note

1. *Wild Angels* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1975), p. 21. A written version of Le Guin's *ad hoc* speech as a member of a panel on Women in Science Fiction, delivered at a conference in Bellingham, Washington, appears as "American SF and the Other," *Science-Fiction Studies*, No. 7 (November, 1975), pp. 208–10.

The Left Hand of Darkness: Androgyny, Future, Present, and Past

BARBARA BROWN

■ Much of the impact of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) results from the fact that the novel is an exploration of the concept of the dichotomous/androgynous one on three time levels: future, present, and past. First and most obviously, it is future directed, presenting a possible androgynous world on the planet Winter. Second, it is rooted in the present. As Le Guin affirms in her introduction to the Ace edition, the purpose of her science fiction is descriptive, not predictive: "I'm merely observing, in the peculiar, devious, and thought-experimental manner proper to science fiction, that if you look at us at certain odd times of the day . . . we already are [androgynous]."¹ Third, *The Left Hand of Darkness* is directed to the past. In her exploration of androgyny, Le Guin examines a subject whose origins are buried deep in our mythic past.

The term androgyny, itself, reflects the past, present, and future orientation of the novel. Increasingly, we hear the word used in the present by writers like Carolyn Heilbrun in *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*² and June Singer in *Androgyny*.³ They, and other sociologists, use the term to describe a present theory of human sexuality that will provide a viable future pattern for psychological and cultural evolution if we can synthesize the ancient, past knowledge of our androgynous beginnings with our contemporary experiences.

The very origins of the word, lying in our past, in ancient Greece suggest a beginning definition. Androgyny is a combination of *andro* meaning male and *gyn* meaning female. It suggests by its form a blending in which human characteristics of males and females are not rigidly assigned. One might simply assert then that the androgyne is the dichotomous one, incorporating male and female psychological duality in one physical entity.

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There are, though, more complex ideas currently associated with the word. Androgyny is an affirmation that humanity should reject all forms of sexual polarization, emerge from the prison of gender into a world in which individual behavior can and is freely chosen.

We need a word of caution here. Androgyny is not a prescription for blandness, for homogeneity, for the submerging of differences. Human experience will always be paradoxical, containing opposite energies and qualities. According to Jungians, the life system works as a result of the dynamics of the interaction of the opposites.⁴ We must have this tension. In androgyny, however, the source of the dynamics is not the opposition of male and female but rather the alternating thrust and withdrawal of the masculine and feminine principles within each individual psyche.⁵

In practical terms, then, the theory of androgyny affirms that we should develop a mature sexuality in which an open system of all possible behavior is accepted, the temperament of the individual and the surrounding circumstances being the determining factors, rather than gender. In some aspects androgyny involves the reacquisition of what Freud defines as the polymorphously perverse body of the child.⁶ In this situation the individual considers every area, not just the genital, as potentially erogenous. He or she develops beyond gender limitation.

The preceding interpretation of androgyny in the present is certainly part of what concerns Le Guin. However, her presentation of the androgynous beings in *The Left Hand of Darkness* also encompasses the original archetypes. These archetypes express the underlying human conviction that man had once experienced a unity that is now denied by the basic division into male and female. Any review of the creation myths reveals an astounding number of androgynous situations. June Singer in her excellent study of the subject includes a detailed analysis of these creation stories. Some of the more obvious examples are briefly referred to here. Consider that the Bible includes two versions of creation. In Genesis I, it is an androgynous God who creates both man and woman in his image. In the second version in Genesis, it is the hermaphroditic Adam who produces Eve from his side. The patriarchal Jewish society emphasized this latter version.⁷

Both the early Gnostic writings and Kabbalistic literature present pictures of the androgynous origins of man. Traditional pictures of Adam Kadmon, the first man, according to Kabbalists, show the genitals combining male and female organs. Eventually, as this complicated myth develops, primal man is torn apart and the male and female become opposites.

There is also an androgynous version of creation in Plato's *Symposium*: "[The] original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and a union of the two, having a name corresponding to

this double nature, which once had a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach."⁸ As this creation story unfolds the gods are attacked by this unified creature. The punishment for its defiance is division into the two parts of man, male and female. Each part then continues to desire the other half, trying to gain completion.

Similarly, this concept of the paradoxical, split yet unified, male and female principle is found in Chinese mythology. This traditional belief is embodied in the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* dated sometime between 2000 to 1300 B.C. Here the supreme ultimate generates the primary forms, the Yin and the Yang. All nature then consists of a perpetual interplay between this primordial pair. They are Yang and Yin, heat and cold, fire and water, active and passive, masculine and feminine.

While Le Guin works out of this mythic/religious background, she also continues "the hidden river of androgyny"⁹ in literature so well discussed in Carolyn Heilbrun's book *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. One might interpret the triumph of Orestes and Athena in the *Oresteia* as the union of the male and female dualities. Later, the deification of the Virgin Mary in the medieval period balances the principle of the deified masculine in God. There are androgynous women throughout Shakespeare. They choose to defy social conditioning and assert masculine temperaments: the ambitious Lady MacBeth, the sexually determined Desdemona, the lustful Goneril and Regan. Moll Flanders in Defoe's eighteenth-century novel is an androgynous figure in her defiance of the traditionally passive role assigned to women of the time as is Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* and Nora in *A Doll's House*. Consider *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. Here Woolf makes explicit the androgyny she so favors in the concluding chapters of *A Room of One's Own*. For a real life account of androgyny read Jan Morris' *Conundrum*. This androgynous passage in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* confirms how a conviction of the androgynous potential for man appears in unexpected places. When Siddhartha dreams of meeting his friend Govinda:

He dreamt that Govinda stood before him, in the yellow robe of the ascetic. Govinda looked sad and asked him, "Why did you leave me?" Thereupon he embraced Govinda, put his arm round him, and as he drew him to his breast and kissed him, he was Govinda no longer, but a woman and out of the woman's gown emerged a full breast and Siddhartha lay there and drank . . . it tasted of woman and man, of sun and forest, of animal and flower. . . .¹⁰

According to the perceptions of many writers, we are, indeed, male and female. This recognition of androgyny as our ideal is buried in our mythology, in our literature, in our subconscious, and in our cells. Ursula Le Guin draws upon this past tradition of the mythic and literary

androgynous and her recognition of the androgynous behavior in our present society when she writes her future-based novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Le Guin is aware how difficult her readers will find acceptance of the androgynous principle. To make explicit the need for such a non-Western interpretation of experience, she first establishes the movement from duality to unity on all levels of Genly Ai's experience, then depicts his increasing sensitivity to the peripheral ambiguities of truth that contradict the central facts.

We begin with duality into unity in terms of imagery, setting, characters, action, and philosophy. Traditionally, the right side has been associated with light representing knowledge, rationality, and the male principle; the left with darkness, ignorance, and the female principle. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* the initial description of the setting immediately establishes this light/dark, left/right polarity. The novel opens with "Rain clouds over dark towers . . . a dark storm-beaten city" (p. 2). Yet there is one vein of slowly winding gold. This is the parade. Genly, the protagonist, sees these as contrasts, separate facets of the scene. They are, though, part of one unified vision of the world of Winter.

The wider universe is depicted in terms of light and dark. The mad Argaven, King of Karhide, mentions that the stars are bright and blinding, providing a traditional account of the universe. Continuing the description, he expands it, insisting on the surrounding void, the terror and the darkness that counterpoint the rational light of the interplanetary alliance of the Ekumen that Genly symbolizes. The glacier, the heart of Winter, is so bright on the Gobrin Ice it almost blinds Genly and his travelling companion, Estraven, the proscribed first minister of Karhide. Yet it is dark and terrible when they are caught between Drumner and Dremegale, the volcanos, spewing out black smoke and ash.

The action in the novel is often described in terms of dualities. At Arikostor Fastness, Genly specifically mentions the thin strips of light that creep across the circle. They are the counterpoints of the slats of dimness. The weaver, Faxe, a man, is seen as a woman dressed in light in the center of darkness. The foretellers are a part of a bright spider web, light against dark.

Toward the conclusion of his journey, both Genly and the reader perceive the merging pattern of dualities on these levels of setting and action. Light and dark, left and right, and, by implication, male and female become whole. Estraven quotes Tormer's Lay to Genly:

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. (p. 233)

Genly and Estraven yearn for the dark of the shadow when they are in the antarctic void of the white darkness. Without shadow, without dark, there is a surfeit of light. They cannot see ahead to avoid the threatening changes in the terrain. In total understanding, Genly draws for Estraven the Yang and the Yin, the light and the dark. "Both and one," he says; "A shadow on snow" (p. 267). Both are necessary. Ultimately, Genly recognizes their crossing of the ice is both success and failure: union with the Ekumen, death for Estraven. Both are necessary.

But light and dark, left and right are not the only polarities that are unified as preparatory patterns for the central sexual unification. There is political duality in the opposed states of Orgoreyn and Karhide. Karhide has a slow steady pace of change. In many ways it is disunited. While it speaks to the people's sense of humanity, fostering a sense of strong individualism and family loyalty based on the conception of the hearths, like many democracies it harbors within it the possibility of the rise of fascism and a susceptibility to demagogues.

Orgoreyn is more socialist. Burdened down by the rivalries of its Commensalities, the extensiveness of its bureaucracies, the pettiness of its inspectors, it nonetheless is ordered and unified. It conveys a sense of progress. Still, it terrifies Genly with its failure to respect the rights of the individual. These political polarities exist not only between the two states but also within each, since the individual systems are at the same time both rational and irrational.

Genly, disgusted with this ambiguity, embraces Karhide, then rejects it; accepts Orgota, then flees from it. He seeks a consistent rational pattern. There is none. This is precisely Le Guin's thesis. Ambiguous duality must exist if unification is to occur.

This state of political polarity is unified by the agency of the Ekumen. Not a kingdom but a co-ordinator, it serves as a clearinghouse for trade and knowledge for the eighty-three nations within its scope. Mystical in nature, the Ekumen works slowly, seeking consensus. Estraven immediately recognizes that the Ekumen is a greater weaver than the Handdara. It has woven all aliens into one fabric that reflects both the unity and diversity of the civilized world.

This pattern of unifying dualities is clearly related to the central concern of androgyny. Without an awareness of the possibility of unifying opposites on the imaginative, physical, and political levels, we would not be as willing to alter the present sexual dichotomy we experience. According to Ursula Le Guin, at times we already perceive the androgynous possibilities within us. She suggests we are, nonetheless, unable to explore fully this unified duality. One reason for this limitation is the restrictive way

the western mind interprets human experience. (A similar view is promulgated by Taoism and Zen.) This linear approach, characterizing western thought, focuses on scientifically provable facts. As a result it is narrow and exclusive. It fails to incorporate our peripheral senses which, through intuition and mystical awareness, also contribute to knowledge.¹¹ Through the action in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin suggests that by utilizing this peripheral vision we, like Genly, can learn to accept life with all its ambiguities, its paradoxes, its flow, its unknowable qualities, with all its androgyny.

At the beginning of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly is limited by the western mode of thought. As a scientist observing a subject, there is a tacit assumption of superiority on his part. He admits early in the first chapter that he judges the Gethenians as aliens. His detached manner leads him mistakenly to assert that the rivalry between Tibe, the traitorous cousin of the King, and Estraven is irrelevant to his cause. He dislikes Estraven because he is obscure, not an easy subject for scientific research. Notably, Genly's poor judgment of Winter's cultures results from his desire to gather the facts and proceed to logical conclusions. He is skeptical of anything that cannot be labeled and categorized.

Only by abandoning his devious scientific approach can Genly achieve the unification of the warring philosophical and sexual elements within him. First, however, there are many ambiguities he must accept. One of these is Shifgrethor, an ambiguous conveying of information and intent. Not lying, it is a viable mode of behavior, conveying one aspect of truth. The wheel of experience, as Estraven insists, is not factually knowable. It turns independent of human control. On the Gobrin Ice, Genly must accept this ambiguity. No one can predict his success or failure on the glacier. As well, Genly eventually perceives that opposites are not exclusive, not contradictory. Estraven is both patriot and traitor. Genly is both patriot and traitor. Loyal to his mission, he brings Winter into the Ekumen; yet he betrays Estraven by permitting the landing of the starship before forcing Argaven to recall Therem's condemnation. Life is not linear as Genly first believes. Since it is process, the Gethenian system of measuring time is not alien but rather a logical emphasis of the individual's perception as the center of meaningful experience.

Finally, Genly accepts the ambiguous flow of events that makes it an impossibility to contain truth in language. In discussing Therem's behavior with Argaven, he says, "As I spoke I did not know if what I said was true. True in part; an aspect of truth" (p. 293). Often it is the west that affirms that there is one truth that can be logically explicated. It is the east that perceives that truth is flowing and ebbing, inexplicably diffuse, androgynous.

Ironically, this recognition of the many facets of truth is revealed in the

beginning of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Here the enlightened Genly, now looking back with wisdom on his experiences on Winter, declares that truth is a matter of the imagination (eastern) but one can write a report on events (western) containing facts (western). However, those facts, since they are neither solid nor coherent, will glow or dull according to the speaker (eastern).

The unification of all these dualities, the acceptance of these ambiguities, prepares both Genly and the reader to accept the central thematic unity of the sexual hermaphroditism of the Gethenians. In his response to the aliens, Genly reveals what Le Guin assumes the reader's feelings might be to these dichotomous characters. Estraven is first described as "the person on my left" (p. 4). Appropriately he is involved in feminine intrigue; however, he is wearing green, gold, and silver. These are colors not usually associated with both the right (the masculine) and with the left (the feminine). By page 122 Estraven is on Genly's right, all male now, but defying the traditional symbolism of right and left, he is a dark, shadowy figure. Associated with both light and dark, with left and right in a deliberately reversed symbolic order, Estraven is also an ambiguous figure. Neither Genly Ai nor the reader can interpret such a character according to traditional concepts. This world of Winter denies the established polarities of the light and dark, left and right, male and female.

Initially, the mobile responds to this confusion on the basis of his cultural conditioning. While he is repelled by the sexual duality of the Karhiders, he can neither overtly reveal his feelings to his hosts nor covertly admit his distaste to himself. His language, his responses, though, record his uneasiness. Genly first describes Estraven in these revealing terms declaring he was "Annoyed by [his] sense of effeminate intrigue" (p. 8). Later he calls Estraven a strange alien. He is oblivious to the fact that Estraven is the Karhider who has most attempted to befriend him. In a patronizing manner, Genly mentions that his landlady seems male on first meeting but also has "fat buttocks that wagged as he walked and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying ignoble, kindly nature. . . . He was so feminine" (p. 48). In commenting on the lack of war on Gethen, Genly observes, "They lacked, it seemed, the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals, in that respect; or like women. They did not behave like men or ants" (p. 49). Finally, in describing Therem in their later relationship, he affirms, "There was in his attitude something feminine, a refusal of the abstract, the ideal, a submissiveness to the given which displeased me" (p. 212).

At the beginning of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly divides these unified creatures into polarities. He perceives the Gethenians in single bodies responding as both male and female. This merging of the stereotyped roles and responses first shocks and then revolts him.

The completion of his mission, however, brings him to full understanding of the nature of all dualities. They are extremes on a continuum, separated but nonetheless joined, unified. Duality can be unity. Genly must accept this fact and find ease in it. For him the crossing on the ice is a journey to self and universal knowledge. Genly begins by sharing supplies with Estraven; moves to encompassing him with mindspeak; concludes by totally accepting Estraven's nature and, by extension, the androgyny of his own. Toward the conclusion of their journey, Genly admits,

What I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality. He had been quite right to say that he, the only person on Gethen who trusted me, was the only Gethenian I distrusted. For he was the only one who had entirely accepted me as a human being; who had liked me personally and given me entire personal loyalty, and who therefore had demanded of me an equal degree of recognition, of acceptance. I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man. (p. 248)

By later drawing the symbol of the Yang and the Yin, light and dark, masculine and feminine, Genly makes visible his emotional and intellectual acceptance of Estraven: the two in the one.

Le Guin, however, does not conclude with Genly's recognition of the androgynous possibility. Her ending suggests that this state of unified duality is a preferable, superior state of existence. In the final chapter, Genly no longer relates to his own species nor they to him. He is alien to the Terran arrivals. Uneasy in his new perceptions, Genly calls the representatives of the Ekumen "a troupe of great, strange animals of two different species, great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in rut, in kemmer. . ." (p. 296). He is happy to return to the company of the young Gethenian physician who is described in these terms: ". . . and his face, a young serious face, not a man's face and not a woman's, a human face, these were a relief to me, familiar, right" (p. 296).

In *The Left Hand of Darkness* Ursula Le Guin suggests we too should accept as right, as familiar, the archetypal androgyny within us. Transcending male, transcending female, we can become fully human.

Notes

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace, 1976), Introduction. All subsequent quotations in the text are to this edition.
2. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward A Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
3. June Singer, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Doubleday, 1976).
4. C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 205.

5. Singer, *Androgyny*, p. 48.
6. Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 592.
7. Singer, *Androgyny*, p. 93. For a discussion at length of the Genesis creation myth and others, see Singer, Chs. 5–8.
8. Singer, p. 118. For a further discussion of androgyny in Plato's *Symposium*, see Singer, pp. 117–24.
9. For a discussion in detail of androgyny in literature, see Heilbrun, "Part One, The Hidden River of Androgyny," *Toward A Recognition of Androgyny*, pp. 1–46.
10. Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 48.
11. Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 8.

Beyond Negation: The Critical Utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany

TOM MOYLAN

Hence all critical points in the transition of a society from one stage to another are characterized by books of social expectation, dream landscapes of a better world, in short, social utopias . . . in all these utopias, these social voyages to Cytheria, there comes to expression the expectant tendency that permeates all human history.

Ernst Bloch¹

I.

■ Science fiction in the 1970s was the source of a renewal of utopian writing. This new utopian narrative used and transcended both the optimistic utopia of the late nineteenth century (for example, Bellamy, Morris) and the pessimistic dystopia of this century (for example, Huxley, Orwell). Rooted in the historical reality of postwar capitalism and producing images of the repressive present as well as of the resistance to that repression in the postwar social-political movements, these new utopias possess a duality both in content and form which allows consideration of the repressive reality as well as the utopian dream. Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976), and others share in this common narrative approach to the extent that one can refer to these works by the generic term "critical utopia."

The critical utopias, then, suggest a new direction in science fiction as well as a possible shift in the imaginative direction of United States culture:

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a shift from simple negation to a negation with alternatives. These narratives feature utopian societies related to and in conflict with nonutopian, parent societies: reflecting a relationship similar to Ernst Bloch's concept of "concrete utopias" which have existed in history against the not yet changed world (for example, the Paris Commune, the October Revolution, May-June 1968 in Paris).² Although these works are in the tradition of the utopian mode—which has ranged from the medieval millenium of radical precapitalist Christianity (as in Joachim of Fiore and Thomas Müntzer) to the rationalist bourgeois utopia (from Thomas More on) to the socialist utopia (from Fourier on)—they do not imitate that form; rather, the critical utopias of the 1970s have transformed (*aufgehoben*) the traditional utopia in the triple sense of that term: that is, they have negated, preserved, and transformed it.

Although lesser known utopias written between the time of Wells and Le Guin must be considered at another time, one can consider why in the 1970s a new utopian narrative developed. The contradictions in postwar capitalist existence as well as the many forms of resistance and alternatives to it have stimulated moves beyond the cynicism and fear—not to mention anti-communism—that inhibited the artistic and social imagination after World War II. To be sure, in addition to the positive developments in science and technology—that is, the control and conquest of some major diseases; electronic technology and cybernetics; the possibility of ecologically efficient food supplies, energy sources, and living conditions—the social, economic, and political activity of the 1960s produced limited successes and raised expectations and awareness to a point where the historical hope that Bloch speaks of has been sufficiently revived in the literary world to stimulate new utopian writing. Certainly the revolutions of the Third World; the civil rights, student, anti-war, welfare rights, sexual liberation, radical ecology, and workers-democracy union-reform movements; and the utopian experiments of alternative institutions and urban and rural communes are historical factors that have set the scene for these new utopias. Furthermore, the reflective period of the early 1970s was marked by a renewed concern for theory and history as well as the development of an opposition/radical culture. And despite the apparent silence and media disinterest, the social movements continue—that is, workers and sexual liberation struggles, radical ecology and alternative technology, and Third World revolutionary activity within and without the United States.

Within the science-fiction subculture, the time also seems to have been ripe. Since the narrative experiments of the so-called New Wave authors in the 1960s, the science-fiction text has been opened to forms beyond simple adventure narrative. To some extent, an expanded and more sophisticated readership informed by both the historical situation and the tradition

within science fiction was ready for more complex works. Also, the adolescent-male domination of theme, form, authorship, and editorship was challenged by the entry of more women and some racial minority writers and by the consideration of heretofore taboo topics. In fact, the most aesthetically interesting and socially significant contemporary science fiction is being produced by women and non-white writers, as well as by a few alienated and critical white males. Writing of the function of such so-called "periphery groups," Gérard Klein notes that "participants in the dominant culture have only the choice between conveying or trying to destroy the values of that culture; only on the social and cultural peripheries are artists able to create different, original values, values opposed to those of the dominant culture."³

Slowly then, and especially from these social and cultural peripheries, imaginative works are being produced which not only negate postwar capitalist existence but also offer alternatives. As one of the developments in this diffuse opposition culture, the critical utopia is both an artifact of contemporary capitalism and an artistic action against it. Ursula Le Guin and Samuel Delany have been on the crest of this social and aesthetic wave. In the following pages the alternative societies and narrative structures of *The Dispossessed* and *Triton* will be discussed as representative critical utopias.

II.

Actual utopia is an apparent contradiction in terms . . . it signified that utopian possibilities are established in the concreteness and openness of the material of history; indeed, of the material of nature itself. This is the objective-real possibility which surrounds existing actuality with tremendous latency, and affords the potency of human hope its link with the potentiality within the world.⁴

Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* identifies itself as an ambiguous utopia.⁵ As a totally conceived alternative, not simply a one-dimensional speculation, a utopia is in full operation on the first page of the text, in this case the utopian society of Anarres.⁶ But also on page one, Le Guin's alteration of the utopian narrative is evident in the wall that separates Anarres—physically, economically, ideologically—from its parent planet, Urras. Thus, the society of Anarres is not presented in "utopian" isolation but rather in conflict with its place of origin: the good place is seen by the reader in the context of its relationship with the bad place. With such a presentation, that is, with Anarres as a concrete utopia over against the world of Urras, it is not surprising that *The Dispossessed* is ambiguous—and more compelling, readable, and provocative than earlier utopias because of that ambiguity.

Utopian society on Anarres is "nonauthoritarian communist" with a

decentralized economy and social system located on a dry, cold, windy moon: 160 years old, Anarresti society was developed by a million followers of the revolutionary Odo, a woman whose writings form the theoretical basis for the movement and the society, who, like Moses, died before setting foot on Anarres. Odo's theory is a variety of anarchism: the principle of individual freedom and initiative is its essence, and the economy, social organization, and social consciousness rise from this idealist base.

The decentralized, syndicalist economy of Anarres—labor intensive on a moon with little water, few trees, and no animals—is by necessity oriented around the basic survival needs of the people. As a neo-colony of Urras, the mineral wealth that Anarres does possess—mercury, copper, bauxite, uranium, tin, gold—is traded to the World Government of Urras for fossil fuels, machine parts, and high-technology, electrical components for the central computer. Beyond this trade, all other needs are filled by the labor of the Anarresti: thus, large-scale communal agriculture and mining are the basic industries, with small factories and craftworks producing necessary manufactured goods and a few personal luxury items. Mass transportation—ships, trucks, trains, dirigibles—is the only mode of powered transport. And due to both the ecological sense of Odo's theory and the lack of native fossil fuels, the only energy sources employed are solar, wind, and earth-temperature differential power. By choice and by necessity, the society preserves an urban-rural balance and maintains, as well as it can, a high technological level. Odonian anarchism was the product of a high civilization, a complex culture, a stable economy, and a high technology. The society that developed out of it held to an ideal of "complex organicism": "the special resources of each region were interchanged continually with those of others, in an intricate balance . . . which is the characteristic of life, of natural and social ecology" (*TD*, pp. 77–78).

Work, both physical and mental, is not alienated labor but rather an organic necessity for every Anarresti. Every person works according to his or her ability and receives according to need. There is no money or other exchange system; goods are produced and used as needed; commodities are neither bought nor sold. The typical work day is between five and seven hours, longer during periods of famine or harvest. Every tenth day, each Anarresti does public maintenance work: repairs or garbage detail, for example. Everyone, including intellectual and administrative workers, must do some physical work for the community.

Production and distribution, then, is administered from the principle city, Abbenay, by the PDC (Production Distribution Committee), and work needs and desires are coordinated at the Div Lab (Division of Labor) computer complex. An Anarresti is free to choose his or her work or to

change jobs according to the analysis of needs computed at Div Lab. In this centralized administration, however, lies one of the counter-revolutionary dangers facing Anarres; for at such a center privilege, prerogative, and decision-making accrues to a few within the administrative bureaucracy that remains and, in effect, rules throughout the changes of representation. Organizationally, the counterpoint to centralization is the syndicate or local work group—"vehicles of both social action and sociability" (*TD*, p. 87)—which are further organized into work-based federatives (miners, teachers, transportation workers, and so forth). During the Odonian Revolution, of course, the syndicate was the form of organization and of praxis that carried out the revolutionary struggle. After settlement, the syndicate was retained as the primary decision-making body and work group; in this way, the Anarresti hoped to maintain Odo's principle of permanent revolution by continually involving all people in the political and economic direction of the society and therefore not alienating the majority under a governmental/managerial bureaucracy. Decision-making, then, flows up from the syndicate to the Central Council and back down: all decisions are approved by the syndicates before Council-recommended action is taken.

As Le Guin presents the superstructure of Anarresti society—its moral, legal, cultural systems—she ties them to the economy; but, given her idealist approach, she bases the social conscience and social system much more on the *concept* of individual initiative and freedom than on the economic-material system. Early in the book, she establishes that Anarres is not a collective society but a community of individuals: "Members of a community, not elements of a collectivity, they were not moved by mass feeling; there were as many emotions as there were people" (*TD*, p. 3). On this individualist base she builds a social vision of libertarian communism. The liberty of the individual is joined in dialectical tension with the needs of the society: a nonantagonistic contradiction that provides Anarres with its fundamental human energy. With the "myth of the state" out of the way, the "real mutuality and reciprocity of society and individual become clear. Sacrifice may be demanded of the individual, but never compromise" (*TD*, p. 267).

With this dialectical relation between the individual and society, then, Le Guin weaves the tapestry of her utopia. There is no separate, private housing. Long dormitory buildings provide private rooms for individuals or couples, as well as temporary sexual partners. Meals are taken together in cafeterias. There are centers for the distribution of goods that are used and then returned when no longer needed. Few material possessions are permanent, for "excess is excrement" (*TD*, p. 80). But though the society is communal and life is harsh, the mental and physical needs of each individual are provided for. Children are nurtured by their parents until

they are weaned, usually around age two. Then, since both parents usually work and twenty-four hour child care is available, the children live in their own dormitories and visit parents on both a regular and spontaneous basis. Education, universally available, is given in a nonauthoritarian manner with both intellectual and manual skills developed in each person: individuals choose their course of study after considering both personal interest and social need. And the arts are practiced by everyone and integrated into the everyday life of the people: the popular forms are poetry, storytelling, dance, song, pottery, weaving, and sculpture. Musical concerts and theater are the highest arts and attract large audiences whenever performed.

Behavior on Anarres is regulated by the social conscience: "the opinion of others is the most powerful social force" (*TD*, p. 90). There are no laws, courts, or police. Since class, sex, race, and economic differences are nonexistent in this communist society, the motivation for most crime is absent. And since "forbidden" is a nonorganic word, an Anarresti is free to live as he or she pleases, given the natural limitations of the moon. Furthermore, with no weaponry, there is little physical violence. But the Anarresti tolerate anger and physical fights, if fair, as a legitimate way of settling personal disputes even though the process of criticism/self-criticism is the primary means of regulating behavior and negotiating differences. Those few who do not fit in or drop out peacefully are estranged from the community and left to fend for themselves; for extreme cases of madness or violence there is the asylum.

One aspect of Le Guin's social vision that is interesting to the contemporary reader is her presentation of the sexual question, for Le Guin has made Anarres a nonsexist utopia. There is no sexual division of labor: the Defense "foreman" on page two is a woman, and women are in leadership positions in all sectors of the society. Sexual activity is unfettered from childhood on and is nonexploitative: "In Pravic it made no sense for a man to say he had 'had' a woman" (*TD*, p. 42). No law, no limit, no penalty, no punishment, no disapproval applies to any sexual practice except rape. Marriage and prostitution are illegal on Anarres, although "partnership" is a voluntary form of monogamous pairing, for any reason and length of time: "So long as it worked, it worked, and if it didn't work, it stopped being. It was not an institution but a function. It had no sanction but that of a private conscience" (*TD*, p. 197). Essentially, then, Le Guin's society incorporates many of the positions of contemporary feminism. But in her emphasis upon partnership and more so in her de-emphasis of homosexual relations—in spite of her approval of all sexual options—she maintains a bias in favor of monogamy and heterosexuality.⁷

Le Guin's vision of Anarres is a totally conceived social construct well within the traditional utopian mode. But *The Dispossessed* is indeed an

ambiguous utopia. All is not well with Anarres: the historical conflict with Urras and the struggle on Anarres against the regressive tendencies of over-centralization, bureaucracy, and loss of revelatory initiative represent a more problematic vision than that presented in nineteenth-century utopian texts. The complexity of *The Dispossessed* that preserves, negates, and transforms the utopian mode arises not only out of this content but also out of Le Guin's narrative strategy of revealing both the dystopian elements within the utopia and the problems inherent in the conflict *between* the concrete utopia of Anarres and the world of Urras. Le Guin carries out this strategy by means of alternating chapters. The two sets of chapters constitute a simultaneous double plot featuring the same protagonist. (By developing two plots in simultaneous rather than one plot in sequential fashion, Le Guin reiterates in textual form the content of Shevek's contribution to Anarresti physics.) In *The Dispossessed*, then, Le Guin constructs a narrative that goes beyond dystopian and utopian exposition.

In the Urras chapters, the focus of the societal vision is on the home world, which resembles contemporary Earth in its problems. The plot follows Shevek's effort to unbuild walls and to seek new discoveries in physics, to find a scientific community with which he can work, and ultimately to restore an attitude of openness in Anarresti society. He seeks, encounters problems, is aided by helpers, achieves his goal, and is transformed—a typical quest pattern. However, it is not only Shevek that is transformed at the end, but history as well. For by the end of the text Shevek's political speech to the people of A-Io as a representative citizen of an actual utopian society has catalyzed a new revolution arising out of the objectively oppressive situation, and his breakthrough in temporal physics has made the ansible communicator possible, thus facilitating instantaneous communication between distant planetary systems. In these chapters, then, the reader does not encounter utopian narrative but rather the narrative of speculation and criticism common to science fiction: that is, aspects of present-day society are extrapolated, and the resulting social vision provides a critical perspective on the present historical situation. Here the focus is on the oppression of lower classes, objectification of women, conspicuous consumption of fetishized commodities, manipulation by a rich and comfortable elite class with the help of a secret service, and the destructiveness of worldwide power struggles.

With the Anarres chapters—presented as flashback—Le Guin shifts to the utopian mode. In these chapters, the plot turns on the protagonist's life from birth to the time of his decision, in his thirties, to go to Urras. The familiar pattern of the novel of development emerges as Shevek "grows up," learns about his world, and takes his place in it. However, contrary to the typical *Bildungsroman*, Shevek does not simply adjust to his world;

rather, both he and his world undergo radical change. As in the end of the Urras sequence, Shevek on Anarres also has a double impact: politically, he helps organize the Syndicate of Initiative which will revive Anarres' revolutionary paraxis; and scientifically, he makes his first breakthrough in sequence physics.

By means of the device of alternating chapters, Le Guin combines the science-fiction mode, the quest plot, and images of Urras as contemporary society with the utopian mode, the development plot, and the alternative images of Anarres. Hence, she taps the richness of two genres—science fiction and the bourgeois novel—to renovate a third, the utopia. To be sure, her utopian vision is realistic as it is presented both with its external opposition and its internal problems and ambiguities. But *The Dispossessed* as a critical utopia does not negate or transform the utopian mode as much as it preserves and revitalizes it. What is most compelling in this work is the idea, the concept, of a nonauthoritarian communist utopia. But the text too easily becomes subordinated to the ideas alone. Characters tend to become one dimensional representatives of ideas or social-psychological tendencies: Shevek, the preserver of revolutionary ideals; Takver, the emancipated woman; Vea, the unemancipated, reified woman; Bedap, the sensitive and critical homosexual; Sabul, the opportunistic academic; and so on. And, especially in the Anarres chapters, the plot and human interest falls prey to the presentation of utopian concepts. Although she moves beyond the dryness of the nineteenth-century utopian expositions, Le Guin still is caught by some of the aesthetic weaknesses of that form—particularly, the subordination of character and plot to the ideas—as well as by her own idealist perspective. However, in the last analysis, *The Dispossessed* is a significant work in itself as part of a new tendency in utopian/science fiction narrative.

III.

The dynamic of [contemporary industrial societies'] productivity deprives "utopia" of its traditional unreal content; what is denounced as "utopian" is no longer that which has "no place" and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies.⁸

If Le Guin's is a utopia of the intellect, Samuel Delany's *Triton* is a utopia of the streets. Whereas in Le Guin's the utopian dream and the antagonisms are sharply presented—as the desert air on Anarres bestowed a hardness of edge and clarity on life—in Delany's work the gap between utopian and nonutopian is less evident, the borders less defined. Whereas in Le Guin the differences and conflicts are in the foreground, in Delany the similarities and mediations between utopian Triton and oppressive worlds

are emphasized. Whereas the substance of Le Guin's vision is intellectual, the substance of Delany's is emotional. In *Triton*, national, international, and galactic politics give way to the politics of everyday life.

Published after Le Guin's "ambiguous utopia," *Triton* is subtitled an "ambiguous heterotopia." In "Appendix B," Delany refers to Michel Foucault's *Order of Things* to make the distinction between utopia and heterotopia. Utopia affords consolation, but the heterotopia is disturbing and challenging. The heterotopia breaks up, deconstructs, speech and myth in order to open our perception of reality to perspectives and dimensions beyond the common, the apparent, the lyrical.⁹ In the text of *Triton* the utopian societies of the Outer Satellites—small, enclosed city-states on moons from Jupiter to Pluto—stand opposed to older societies of the Worlds—Earth, Luna, Mars. But as he suggests with the reference to Foucault, Delany is not so interested in utopian consolation or obvious conflicts as he is in the disturbing, disordered—indeed, ambiguous and uncertain—image of a utopian society emerging slowly out of the old Worlds. *Triton* does not express utopia directly as in the traditional works or negatively as in the dystopia; rather it expresses the utopia in its interconnections with the social system from which it developed and with which it is still in conflict. Overall, *Triton* does not provide a simple utopian vision or a new myth; the text, though beautiful in places, is not lyrical but jarring. To be sure, aspects of history and of nature have been mastered in Delany's utopian society; certain progressive tendencies have been asserted; and the social context is fully developed. That is, a linear sense of history is evident, but every last detail has not "been tried out and rationally organized" (Foucault). Just as the narrative ends with the adventure of the protagonist, Bron, unresolved and open-ended, the adventure of Triton society itself is equally open and unresolved.

Whereas Le Guin's third-person, omniscient narration allows a clear exposition of the Anarres utopia, Delany's narrative is presented from the point of view of his confused and unlikeable protagonist, Bron Helstrom. A relative newcomer to Triton from Mars and confused about his own identity and wants, Bron is hardly the person to relate a systematic picture of the utopian moon. Nevertheless, careful reading reveals that Delany has, indeed, developed a rather complete conception of the utopian society of Triton and the other Outer Satellites.

Triton—settled for seventy-five years—is a moon of Neptune and a member, with domestic home rule, of the Outer Satellite Federation. The city of Triton, Tethys, is by necessity an enclosed artificial environment. Nature, therefore, is entirely controlled; and with a fully automated, cybernetic technology, human control over material existence is complete. Triton's economy is a post-scarcity, post-industrial social-welfare system. What the exact source of surplus wealth is on Triton is not specified,

although mining of rare materials is referred to. The picture of work, therefore, is mystified: since production is entirely automated, work—when available—is generally in systems design, repair, service, or politics and the arts, but the specific tasks and processes are rarely described.

Whatever their work situation, the citizens of Triton enjoy a guaranteed level of maintenance—in food, shelter, clothing, health care, child care, and transportation. Because of the high technology automation, unemployment holds at around eight percent of the workforce—somewhat low considering the level of automation Delany suggests. To ensure equality, unemployment rotates among the workforce—which includes children—with the result that one fourth of the population is on welfare at all times. If a person is without “labor credit,” living expenses are simply transferred by the computer to the state account. With a total credit economy, and the assumption that everyone has the *right* to a good life, there is no bookkeeping expense or welfare bureaucracy. The system is not costly and not degrading or alienating; it is, instead, a service. And because of the rotation of unemployment, no permanent lower class exists: “Practically *everyone* spends *some* time on it [welfare]. And hardly anyone more than a few years. Our people on welfare live in the same co-ops as everyone else, not separate economic ghettos” (*TR*, p. 179). Above this level of a healthy basic maintenance, those who choose to work a full twenty-hour week are eligible for a hierarchy of credit-slot ratings which provide a middle class living standard, including, for example, luxury suburban living for the typical small family commune of twenty.

Another mystification or gap in Delany’s picture concerns the ruling class and structure of Triton. To be sure, a centralized federation government owns and directs most sectors, while a few sectors, such as the postal service, are left to “private cooperatives.” And both federation and local governments are elected by universal suffrage—the age of majority is around puberty (varying from age eleven on Triton to fourteen on some Jupiter moons). An overwhelming variety of political parties exists—thirty to thirty-seven on Triton—and each party “wins,” representing the citizens who voted for that particular party: “They all serve office simultaneously. And you get the various benefits of the platform your party has been running on” (*TR*, p. 221). Governing boards, not individuals, are the norm (as opposed to individual presidents on Mars and Earth). Armies no longer exist, but a war is fought between the Satellites and Worlds over the question of economic hegemony. However, throughout these situations, who the governors are and where they fit in society is not explained.

Some of these gaps may be due to Delany, but the reader needs to remember that the picture of Triton which emerges is filtered through a confused ex-prostitute from Mars in his late thirties: a man alienated and dangling who cares little for economy and politics, a man like many middle

management types in contemporary society. Bron's perceptions and, clearly, Delany's own concerns are, however, much more centered on everyday life; consequently, the superstructural elements of *Triton* are more fully elaborated.

Given the location, economy, and technology of *Triton*, its citizens live a very urban existence. Streets, underpasses, overpasses, and tunnels abound in the crowded urban setting. Like Delany's own Manhattan, the dense urban environment allows one to walk almost anywhere or to take fast mass transit. Most of the people live cooperatively—but as individuals—in dormitories organized by sexual preference (straight male, gay male, non-specific male, straight female, gay female, nonspecific female, mixed sex, and family) or communally in smaller family units. The average room and its high technology artifacts provide a range of communications devices—microfiche, television with seventy-six public channels and three private ones, and other personal comforts in a compact, well-designed space. Meals are taken at the workplace or at the co-op cafeterias; and the city seems to have a wide variety of entertainment places and a range of “single bars” for all taste. Goods are usually obtained, bought or rented, from local distribution centers and most are disposable and recyclable. Education and health care are available to all; medical and mental health clinics, including those for sex therapy and sex change, are readily available and free. Clothing is another aspect of the subjectively free life on *Triton*; the enclosed, controlled environment and the sexual freedom of the society eliminate protection from the elements and sexual taboos as reasons for clothing: hence, what one wears—from total nudity to complete cover-up including masks—becomes an extension of a person's varying moods and interests. In fact, Delany's examination of the social psychology of fashion is one of the more intriguing aspects of the text.

Children on *Triton* are cared for by their “parents” in a variety of ways: a father and son live in Bron's dorm; Bron's boss, Audri, lives in an urban commune with several women and their children; and Audri's boss, Phillip, lives in a suburban “extended family” commune of twenty straight and gay women and men, with some of the men undergoing temporary sex changes to bear children, or nurse them. Finally, since children are full “adults” by puberty, they are free to live alone or in children's communes and can afford to do so given the guaranteed income and available work.

The arts on *Triton* are abundant and endowed by the government and the university. Video is available in both public channels and private, special interest ones. The ice opera is a popular cultural form that is a combination of science fiction and television sitcoms and dramas. And, of course, in the microtheater and epics of *The Spike*, the dramatist with whom Bron Helstrom becomes romantically involved, the reader sees one

aspect of avant-garde art—an aspect that traces its origins back to the Happenings and street theater of the 1960s.

In the libertarian society that flows from the economy and technology of Triton, minimal laws exist. Not as idealistic as Le Guin, Delany creates a utopia with a system of courts and law enforcement. For example, police, “e-girls” of mixed sex, patrol and maintain order; although trained in martial arts, they function as non-oppressive service workers. Punishment, however, is not discussed by Delany. Furthermore, every Satellite city maintains an unlicensed sector—an extrapolation on areas such as Boston’s Combat Zone which “fulfilled a complex range of functions in the cities’ psychological, political, and economic ecology. . . . The interface between official law and official lawlessness produced some remarkably stable unofficial laws” (*TR*, p. 9). There are also “those who chose to walk there only occasionally, when they felt their identity threatened by the redundant formality of the orderly, licensed world” (*TR*, p. 10). Throughout his societal vision, but especially in his treatment of the unlicensed sectors, Delany approaches utopia from the underside, from urban streets rather than university towers, and treats the apparently negative elements as possible dysfunctions or, at times, creative aberrations in the society rather than as dystopian negations of it. Thus, daily existence in this libertarian-socialist society is organized according to the nonrepressive pleasure principle—made possible by the advanced technology and post-scarcity economy. Full subjective freedom is guaranteed to each citizen; and, more effectively than Le Guin, Delany makes clear his understanding of the relationship between economy/technology and subjective freedom. In a key passage too long to quote here, Delany notes that given such an advanced technology, the social responsibility of the government to its citizens includes the commitment “to try and make the subjective reality of each of its citizens as politically inviolable as possible” (*TR*, pp. 268–69).

A free society—all options are open. And a nonsexist society. Even more than in *The Dispossessed*, the sexual question in *Triton* is important, in fact central, to the narrative. Total personal emancipation and equality with no sexual division of labor is the rule. Complete freedom from puberty on, full psychological and physical sex-change and reproduction technology, and the banishment of all taboos allow for a variety of guilt-free sexual activity. The society’s sexual tendencies are eighty percent bisexual and twenty percent homosexual; and if a person is sexually unhappy, unsatisfied, or bored, he or she can change the situation by having their sexual desires refixed or their sexuality changed to any degree desired (*TR*, p. 90). Furthermore, custom has established a code for “sexualizationships,” including a hand signal that expresses interest and invites coupling without

awkwardness or confinement (*TR*, p. 77). Gone from society on Triton are the factors of internal, hereditary, or moralistic repression of guilt; arrived is a society with the economic/technological/ideological freedom to adjust the environment for maximum human fulfillment.

Such is the content of Delany's utopia. Like Le Guin, he opposes utopia and home world. Also, like Le Guin, he takes care to reveal the dystopian and dysfunctional aspects of the utopian society itself. The evils of government bureaucracy and overcentralization are suggested, but *Triton*, more than *The Dispossessed*, addresses the question of personal existence in utopia.

Delany, however, organizes his narrative differently. There is no chapter by chapter opposition of societies, plot organization, or generic strategy; instead, the entire narrative draws together these elements in a single line of development, effectively highlighting the ambiguity and struggle inherent in any "actual utopia." Furthermore, the protagonist is not a model scientist-revolutionary nor a spokesperson for utopia as is Le Guin's Shevek; rather, Bron Helstrom is a misfit in utopia, an unregenerate male chauvinist, a "logical sadist male" seeking a "logical masochist female" in an egalitarian and emancipated society (*TR*, pp. 253–54). He is an antihero, an unreliable protagonist rather than a revolutionary spokesperson. The thin plot based on Bron Helstrom is not one of quest or development but rather a more contemporary one involving an antihero, a dangling man, facing an identity crisis. This plot, then, provides a "spine" around which the multiple images of decadent worlds and utopian moons, science-fiction critiques and dystopian descriptions are clustered and controlled as the "spine" of a film narrative controls the visual and aural elements gathered around it. Film and the modern psychological novel, then, are proper analogs for the organization of *Triton*.

Like *The Dispossessed*, *Triton* preserves the utopian narrative and gives it new life. But more than Le Guin's work, Delany's heterotopia negates and transforms the generic utopia—producing a form which has its roots in the utopia, the science-fiction narrative, and the psychological novel. But it is a form which emphasizes the total image of a complex alternate society (utopian but with all its historical ambiguities and problems) more centrally than previous narratives have. The elements of the text organized in a discrete mode—plot, character, setting—become secondary to the increments that emerge from page one to the end and that are organized as a whole image or vision. In the dominance of this iconic mode over the more traditional and discrete mode, Delany has created a narrative that is closer perhaps to painting or poetry than to realistic narrative or science-fiction adventure.¹⁰ The negation of the traditional utopia—rather than the simple reversal or opposition that leads to dystopia—and the transformation of utopian narrative by means of the complex blending of utopian and

critical modes; the emphasis on iconic presentation of a social vision; and the refusal to idealize, console, or present neat "utopian" conflicts, result in the qualitatively different form of the heterotopia.

As one examines *Triton* further, the underlying structure of the text becomes clear: the narrative moves in a spiral from Bron's presence as a man in the Plaza of Light to her presence as a woman on the same plaza four paramonths later. Further analysis reveals that, as mentioned above, the plot and character become secondary to the continuous image of the alternate society of Triton: a "continuous present," a totality. To be sure, causal progression/history is not abandoned. The text does spiral, not circle. But the repetition—"everything in a science-fiction novel should be mentioned at least twice (in two different contexts)" (*TR*, pp. 333, 341)—the jarring simultaneity, the ambiguity of the minimal plot, leave this text atypically open. Furthermore, *Triton* is self-reflexive in its analyses of science fiction, heterotopia, and metafiction. Not only has Delany opened the science-fiction text to new possibilities—one of which is this heterotopia—but with *Triton*, he has also taken it to the level of self-conscious and self-reflexive art.

Delany's heterotopia, then, in its tightly woven text and its refusal to isolate ideas from everyday life, is not as top-heavy with abstract ideas as is *The Dispossessed*. Rather than universities and barren fields, Delany prefers urban streets where the interface between ideas and material being is more immediate and more complex. Le Guin *asserts* utopian ideas in a stimulating and well-executed way; Delany, however, makes the *experience* of utopian life available to the reader in style and structure as well as in content. Where the opposition between content and form still applies in *The Dispossessed*, in *Triton* the text becomes a whole in which "content is the illusion myriad stylistic factors created when viewed at a certain distance."¹¹ With Delany the reader knows that *Triton* is a literary artifact and knowing that can perhaps see the link between the artifact and the historical situations from which it came. So although the utopian ideas may be clearer in Le Guin's work, the relationship between utopian vision and everyday life may ultimately be more evident, more accessible, in Delany's.

IV.

The truth value of imagination relates not only to the past but also to the future; the forms of freedom and happiness which it invokes claim to deliver the historical reality. In its refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle, in its refusal to forget what can be, lies the critical function of phantasy.¹²

Le Guin's *Dispossessed* and Delany's *Triton* are representative of the critical utopian narratives published in the 1970s. Others—such as Marge

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*—vary as much as Le Guin's and Delany's in narrative style and utopian content; they range from those closer to a more traditional utopian form, such as Callenbach's, to those which are highly experimental, such as Russ's. But all of these works have in common their critical utopian strategy of dealing with the home world as well as the utopian and dystopian elements of the alternative society. They also have in common an opposition to the present state of advanced capitalist society: each of these works negates that present and offers emancipating visions of a better existence. As works of radical imagination, the critical utopias are part of the opposition consciousness that has been developing since the end of World War II.

In the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, as postwar technological capitalism gradually extended its irrational domination over more and more aspects of each person's life, an opposition movement in critical theory, social action, and art also developed. The critical utopias are an aspect of that opposition. Herbert Marcuse's work is another aspect, and his discussion of the revolutionary role of imagination and fantasy is both historically and methodologically useful in understanding the critical utopia.

Marcuse's analysis of imagination and its expression in art challenges the established reality principle of society—that is, performance—by arguing its historical limits. Given the increasing potential for a reduction of the labor process along with the attainment of a post-scarcity economy in Western industrial societies, Marcuse holds that the historical possibility of expressing the hitherto repressed instinctual development must be taken as a serious alternative, if not a necessity in the progress of civilization. In a renewed, nonrepressive civilization the new, historically determined, reality principle would be the pleasure principle.

The mental forces opposed to the current reality (performance) principle are located chiefly in the unconscious. Fantasy (imagination), however, is the exception, located as it is in consciousness and able to operate with a high degree of freedom from the reality principle—although contained within the realm of art. Fantasy links the unconscious with the conscious, dream with reality, and preserves the “tabooed images of freedom.” As Marcuse puts it, fantasy “has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own—namely, the surmounting of antagonistic human reality.”¹³ Of course, it is in the interest of the dominant culture to deny the utopian visions of fantasy any connection with a possible future for humankind and to relegate those visions to the status of sublimated desires of an unrealizable Golden Age. But with the material and intellectual wherewithal in contemporary civilization to allow a greater gratification of needs, the “quantum of instinctual energy still to be diverted into necessary labor . . . would be so small that a large area of repressive constraints

and modifications, no longer sustained by external forces, would collapse."¹⁴ Thus, the pleasure principle would no longer be subordinate; thus the "utopian claims of imagination . . . [would become] saturated with historical reality."¹⁵ And so the struggle against repression and for freedom—"to live without anxiety" as Adorno said—draws on these utopian propositions as part of a revolutionary praxis. For utopian images are created out of the human desires and material possibilities inherent in the forces of society—in the latent tendencies of the historical situation, in what is unfinished and not yet.

The critical utopias of Le Guin, Delany, and the others are, therefore, a part of this opposition imagination, this negative/transcendant force. Ursula Le Guin's feminist-ecological-anarchist perspective—which one finds in most of her works—is at the center of her critique of the life-denying culture of Urras. But also Le Guin's ability to get outside of one culture and into another—which one also finds in her other works—enables her to turn her critique on its head and posit the utopian alternative of Anarres. And her existence at this point in history, and at this point in the developing genre of utopian writing, leads her to give the entire work the subtitle "ambiguous." Ambiguous because she sees the conflicts between and the contradictions within; ambiguous because reality is ambiguous. Samuel Delany's critique—based more within the heart of the serpent, within the urban centers of capitalism—is less clear in its political and social concepts, although clear enough to be recognized as libertarian and socialist, not elitist or repressive. Delany's use of the techniques of experimental fiction allows him to develop a complex narrative which suits the ambiguous and problematic questions he raises: what about the misfits in utopia; what about each of our struggles against sexism; what is it that will make each of us personally happy; what will we do with our freedom? As in his other works, Delany zeroes in on the personal and sexual, the deepest levels of the politics of everyday life.

If Le Guin is concerned with superego, Delany is concerned with the libidinal. Where Le Guin emphasizes the economic and social, Delany emphasizes the sexual and personal. Where Le Guin deals with representative types, Delany focuses on the radically different individual—often an artist or criminal. Both attempt to work with the social totality; both see that totality as fundamentally political. A deeper probe into the personal and sexual, and more consideration of the historical and material forces in society, would have enriched *The Dispossessed*; a treatment of the revolutionary mechanism by which Triton was formed as well as an examination of how these utopian individuals function as a collective would have greatly clarified Delany's ideas and questions. Since that did not happen, the two works taken together—one by a white woman from Oregon, the other by a black man from New York City—complement each

other and constitute an encompassing picture of the opposition vision within United States culture in the 1970s.

In this culture of almost total domination of the imagination by the mechanism of postwar technological capitalism, the critical utopias of Le Guin, Delany, and the others—although inevitably limited by that domination—help to enliven, subvert, and hopefully to emancipate the repressed and manipulated imaginations and lives of all of us. The critical presentations of the status quo countered by the visions of what-could-be turn out to be rational statements in an irrational society, for these utopias—in touch with both external material and internal unconscious repression—are based in the experience of life in this dominated society. The images that come from the resistance to this domination in turn feed back into more resistance as those images are received by more readers. For if there is a movement of art toward life, it needs to be based on the premise that literature is not just “a mere reflective, contemplative, and mirroring element” but rather “a material, practical, transforming element of reality.”¹⁶

Notes

1. Bloch, *On Karl Marx* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 136.
2. Bloch, p. 172 ff.
3. “Discontent in American Science Fiction,” *Science-Fiction Studies*, 4, No. 1 (March, 1977), 13.
4. Bloch, p. 172.
5. Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Avon Books, 1974). Subsequent references appear in parentheses in the text and are coded TD.
6. The most definitive work to date on the generic structure and operation of science fiction and its subgenre utopia has been done by Darko Suvin. See: “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” *College English* 34, No. 3 (December, 1972), 372–83; and “Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, a Proposal, and a Plea,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (Fall, 1972), 121–45. In the latter article, Suvin descriptively defines a utopia as: “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on an estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.” Suvin’s essays are collected in *Metamorphosis* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).
7. See Delany’s discussion of *The Dispossessed* in his “To Read *The Dispossessed*,” in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (Elizabethtown, N.Y.: The Dragon Press, 1977), pp. 239–309.
8. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay On Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 3–4.
9. Samuel R. Delany, *Triton* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 345. Subsequent references appear in parentheses in the text and are coded TR.
10. For a fuller discussion of the discrete and iconic modes of textual organization see J. M. Lotman, “The Discrete Text and the Iconic Text: Some Remarks on the Structure of Narrative,” *New Literary History*, 6, No. 2 (Winter, 1975), 333–38; and my unpublished essay, “SF and the Iconic Text: Toward a Structural Analysis of the SF Narrative,” forthcoming in *Social Text*. See also Delany’s discussion of “inward discourse,”

- and "discourse of the world," in his *The American Shore* (Elizabethtown, N.Y.: The Dragon Press, 1977); see especially lexia 8, pp. 57–58.
11. Samuel R. Delany, "About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy-Five Words," in *The Other Side of Realism*, ed. Thomas D. Clareson (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1971), pp. 130–46, esp. pp. 132–34.
 12. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 149.
 13. Marcuse, *Eros*, p. 143.
 14. Marcuse, *Eros*, pp. 153–54.
 15. Marcuse, *Eros*, p. 157.
 16. Dieter Richter, "History and Dialectics in the Materialistic Theory of Literature," *New German Critique*, 6 (Fall, 1975), 38.

Shadows in Earthsea: Le Guin's Use of a Jungian Archetype

EDGAR C. BAILEY, JR.

■ Although the adult science fiction of Ursula Le Guin has been subjected to critical scrutiny as intense and wide ranging as that accorded any contemporary science-fiction writer, her writings for young people have been oddly ignored. Whether because, as children's literature, they are not deemed worthy of serious examination or because critics have not been able successfully to assimilate them into the Le Guin canon, the three works comprising the so-called Earthsea trilogy have been little noted in the major critical journals devoted to science fiction and fantasy. In his introduction to the special issue of *Science-Fiction Studies* devoted to Le Guin, editor Darko Suvin notes the lack of any articles on the trilogy, lamenting that "we couldn't find anybody to integrate the *Earthsea* trilogy with Le Guin's SF. This and a number of other aspects of Le Guin, a constantly evolving writer, remain to be elucidated."¹

Le Guin herself has commented on the failure of critics to deal with these works, which she calls "my best books, as art."² She suggests that they are more difficult to deal with analytically than her adult fiction because "The ideas . . . are more totally incarnated . . . less often stated as problems and more often expressed in terms of feeling, sensation, and intuition."³ Incarnated or not, however, ideas are no less important to Le Guin in her juvenile works than in her adult books. Because she is a highly self-aware writer, it is probably not surprising that the most sensitive examination so far of the Earthsea trilogy has been her own. It appears in an essay entitled "The Child and the Shadow," originally delivered at a Library of Congress symposium. Interestingly, in it she never once mentions her own works, focusing instead on such masters of fantasy as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis and leaving the reader to apply her theories to her own writings.

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As the title suggests, Le Guin's subject is the role of shadow symbolism in fantasy; most of her analysis is based on the psychological concept of the shadow formulated by Carl Jung. After noting the difficulty of strictly defining any Jungian term without doing violence to its subtle complexity, she devotes much of the essay to an attempt to explain what Jung means by the shadow. Although simplified and adapted somewhat to her own purposes, the definition is generally accurate: "It is all we don't want to, can't, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used."⁴ A student of Jung and popularizer of his theories, Frieda Fordham, defines the term similarly: "... it is all those uncivilized desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality, all that we are ashamed of, all that we do not want to know about ourselves."⁵ Marie-Louise von Franz, while also noting the complexity of the concept, suggests it might initially be understood as "the dark, unlivd and repressed sides of the ego complex."⁶

Jung's contribution to psychological understanding lay not, of course, solely in the recognition that man has a shadow. Rather, as Le Guin notes, Jung stressed the importance of each person recognizing and accepting his own shadow. Refusal to recognize it, Jung asserts, can never drive it away; in fact, the more it is repressed the more it affects behavior in ways we can neither understand nor control. Too far repressed, it becomes "a menace, an intolerable load, a threat within the soul."⁷

It is not simply the dangers of repression which make refusal to accept the shadow hazardous; he who does not acknowledge his dark side can never be psychologically whole. The shadow may be evil in the sense that it is primitive, uncivilized, passionate; but it is also powerful and from it tremendous creative energies can be drawn. As Jung says, "A dim premonition tells us that we cannot be whole without this negative side."⁸ He adds that "the repressed content must be made conscious so as to produce a tension of opposites, without which no forward movement is possible."⁹

Recognition and acceptance of the shadow, beneficial as it may be, is no easy task. Most people desperately resist, often unaware they are doing so, any pressure to acknowledge their dark side, fearing that once control is loosed even slightly the blind forces of instinct will overwhelm them. "No one," Jung claims, "can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort."¹⁰ The process should not, moreover, be "twisted into an intellectual activity, for it has more the meaning of a suffering and a passion."¹¹

One way we avoid recognizing the shadow, even when it threatens to force itself upon us, is through projection; that is, we attribute to others those very traits which we seek to deny in ourselves. Thus the negative effects of our own repressed instincts can be blamed upon the action of

others who would do us harm. Withdrawal of such projections is the most difficult part of bringing the shadow into consciousness, yet it is essential because a projected world is "illusory . . . the replica of one's unknown face."¹²

As Le Guin points out, Jung was primarily interested in studying the confrontation with the shadow which occurs in middle age. For Le Guin, however, the most significant confrontation often comes during adolescence, at a time when the shadow may appear suddenly, seemingly even blacker than it really is. In order not to be overwhelmed by this previously unsuspected part of the psyche, a young person must face and accept it "warts and fangs and pimples and claws and all. . . ."¹³ It is Le Guin's contention that this confrontation, involving the same "moral effort" and possessing "the meaning of a suffering and passion," is the basic theme of most great fantasies. It is usually symbolically presented as a journey in which, paradoxically, the dreaded shadow, whose existence cannot at first even be admitted, actually serves as a guide into the depths of the psyche. The journey, if survived, brings psychological wholeness and maturity. Although she uses Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as her primary example, it is quite clear that Le Guin intended the first volume of her own trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, as a portrayal of the same hazardous but necessary journey to maturity.

In this work, Le Guin creates Earthsea, a fully realized "secondary world" consisting of a vast archipelago of a few very large islands and many small ones stretching across 2,000 miles of ocean. For the inhabitants, Earthsea is the whole world; no one has ever traversed the empty reaches beyond the outermost islands to seek out other lands. Complete with its own mythology to explain its origins, this world is one of preindustrial simplicity where most people make a living farming, fishing, or trading. Although society is somewhat fragmented by ocean barriers between islands and there is no ruler nor common governing system, a free and regular commerce holds the society loosely together. Vividly realized though it is, Earthsea is an ordinary world, unusual only in that the laws of Nature permit the practice of a limited but still potent magic by specially trained sorcerers and mages.

Into this world Le Guin introduces the young boy Ged, destined to become the greatest mage of all. *A Wizard of Earthsea* describes his confrontation with the shadow which he must recognize and assimilate. Reinforcing this main theme, shadows of all types crop up throughout the story. Even as a child, unaware of his latent powers, Ged manages to confound an invading band of marauders by conjuring up a thick mist in which they lose their way and plunge to their deaths over a cliff. At his baptismal ceremony, during which he must wade an icy stream, "clouds crossed the sun's face and great shadows slid and mingled over the waters of the pool about him."

It is while he is studying with the wizard Ogion, to whom he is apprenticed, that he has his first brush with the real shadow whose existence he is not yet able to accept or understand. He allows himself to be taunted into seeking knowledge he is not yet prepared to handle, delving into Ogion's Lore Books in search of a spell of summoning. As he reads, the empty room darkens, and he becomes aware of something crouching in a corner of the room "a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness" (p. 34). It seems to call him in a whisper which he hears but cannot understand. Almost immediately, Ogion enters the room and dispels the darkness with a blaze of light from his staff.

Ged is initially frightened by the episode; but, caught up in the excitement of developing new powers, he soon puts it out of mind. Quickly becoming impatient with the slow, methodical pace of Ogion's instruction, he decides to pursue the study of wizardry in earnest at the great School on Roke Island. The ship upon which he sails is named *Shadow*, a fact which, we are told, causes Ogion's face to darken when he learns it. Ged makes the trip safely, however, and presents himself, full of enthusiasm and pride, at the gate of the School. As he enters, he seems to discern a shadow following him in, although the light is at his back. Ignoring these omens, he plunges into the life of the school and begins eagerly absorbing the vast body of lore he must acquire to earn his wizard's staff. He pays little heed, however, to the advice offered him by his teachers. Acknowledging their greater power and skill, he nevertheless refuses to grant them superior wisdom. Unimpressed with working mere illusions, he asks one mage how to physically change one object into another. The Master assures him it is possible but warns that such an action, involving as it does a change in the very fabric of creation, is not lightly taken. "To light a candle," he warns Ged, "is to cast a shadow" (p. 57). Here is Le Guin's first explicit statement of the Jungian theory which forms the thematic basis of the book. To be born, to be human, to act, she is saying, is to do evil—or at least to be capable of it. Ged refuses to accept the warning; that is, he refuses to recognize his shadow, pridefully insisting that a wizard has the power to "drive back darkness with his own light" (p. 57).

Although Ged proves an apt pupil, quickly outstripping his peers, there is one student he is unable to dominate. Jasper, who is assigned as Ged's guide immediately upon his arrival, quickly irritates Ged with what seems an air of insolent superiority. Although Ged is quick to assume that Jasper is trying to put him down, Le Guin develops the relationship between the two with subtle ambiguity, leaving the reader uncertain whether the offense taken by Ged is fully justified: "Jasper had a way of smiling faintly as he spoke which made Ged look for a jeer hidden in his words" (p. 50). Although Jasper does apparently taunt Ged, Le Guin maintains point of view so scrupulously here that the reader is never allowed a glimpse into

Jasper's mind or an objective statement of his motives. Ultimately, however, she makes it clear that most of the insolent pride Ged ascribes to Jasper is, in the Jungian sense, a projection of the overwhelming arrogance which Ged, in spite of warnings from Ogion and the mages, fails to recognize in himself: "Ged did not stop to think why Jasper might hate him. He only knew why he hated Jasper. . . . He did not see, or would not see, that in his rivalry, which he clung to and fostered as part of his own pride, there was anything of the danger, the darkness . . . " (p. 58).

Ged's unacknowledged pride finally drives him to an open confrontation, a test of power, with Jasper. Over the strong objections of the other students, using the lore stolen from Ogion, he succeeds in calling up a spirit from the dead. With it comes a monster, a "clot of shadow," which attacks him, leaving facial scars to be borne the rest of his life. This initial confrontation with his shadow, all the blacker for having not been accepted, nearly destroys Ged; only the power of the mighty Archmage Nemmerle saves him that night.

Although Ged recovers from the encounter, he is a changed person. The haughty pride is gone but so is the eager acuity which had kept him always ahead of his peers. The shadow has been driven into the depths of the psyche, rather than being recognized; and, as Jung warned, it has taken with it power, intelligence, and creativity. Ged forgets and must relearn much of the lore of wizardry. While doing so, he delves into some of the ancient books, seeking to learn the nature of the creature which nearly cost him his life. He discovers little, and even the mages can offer only guesses. They are sure the monster is still loose in the world, however, and believe it will continue to pursue Ged as soon as he leaves the sanctuary of Roke Island. Ged does unearth one chilling tale of a man who was completely devoured, from the inside, by a similar creature. The clue suggests nothing to Ged, but the reader familiar with Jung will spot it readily.

Ged finally wins his wizard's staff and agrees to go to the assistance of the inhabitants of a sparsely populated Eastern island threatened by dragons. He stays only a short time, however, before becoming convinced that he must flee from the shadow. He feels obligated, before leaving, to dispel the threat of the dragon and therefore journeys to its lair on the island of Selidor. Armed with a knowledge of the beast's true name, he extracts from it a promise never again to approach inhabited lands. He is nearly turned aside from his mission, however, when the dragon offers to tell him the name of his shadow, thus, so Ged believes, giving him power over it. In what is perhaps the first truly unselfish act of his life, and one of the few not motivated by pride, Ged refuses the dragon's offer, insisting he has come to save others, not himself. He is beginning, perhaps, to realize, at least subconsciously, that the creature pursuing him is not one over which he can expect to have complete control. Ironically, his victory over the dragon brings him the fame which he had earlier sought but now cares nothing for.

Following his encounter with the dragon, Ged flees aimlessly toward the northern islands. Having no idea where his shadow is, he cannot tell when he is running away from it. Finally, on the frozen island of Oskil, he meets it again, this time in the form of a shipmate who offers to guide him to lodging for the night. Interestingly, the shadow here serves literally the function Le Guin ascribes to it symbolically—that of guide. Ged is not yet ready to follow the whole way, however; when the man, suddenly no longer human, turns on him, Ged runs. The beast pursues, unable quite to catch him but never falling far behind. As they run the shadow whispers continuously to him, and Ged realizes that “all his life that whispering has been in his ears, just under the threshold of hearing” (p. 125). He now realizes that his shadow, which he first heard in Ogion’s cabin, has been with him always; he does not as yet recognize it.

Ged escapes his pursuer by stumbling exhausted into a castle where he is warmly received and royally treated by the lady of the house, a mysterious figure who discomfits Ged despite her apparent concern for his welfare. The woman, Serret, shows him a large stone buried deep in the foundation of the castle and promises it will give him unlimited power, “power over his own destiny: strength to crush an enemy, mortal or of the other world, a wizardry that could humble the Archmage himself” (p. 135). Again, without knowing why, but following his instincts, Ged repudiates this tempting possibility. Unconsciously at least, he has sensed that the creature haunting him is not one he can ever “crush” no matter with what supernatural assistance.

He escapes the castle in the form of a hawk and flies, again purely on instinct, back to his own island and to his old master, Ogion. With great difficulty Ogion returns Ged, whose power is exhausted, to his human form. He warns Ged against taking such extreme measures again, saying, “The shadow seeks to destroy your true being. It nearly did so, driving you into hawk’s being” (p. 146). Le Guin here uses an appropriate wild creature (Ged’s nickname is Sparrowhawk) to symbolize the true nature of the shadow and to suggest the potential effect of allowing it to gain control over the man.

It is Ogion who offers Ged the advice which even the masters of Roke had not been wise enough to suggest. He puzzles over the dark monster’s unaccountable ability to uncover Ged’s true name. He finally suggests that his protégé must “Turn around and confront the shadow”; for, “If you go ahead, if you keep running, wherever you run you will meet danger and evil, for it drives you, it chooses the way you go” (p. 146). In other words, the creature has already gained too much control over Ged simply by forcing him to flee, filled with blind fear, from its relentless pursuit. Here, from the mouth of Ogion, is Le Guin’s most explicit statement of the controlling theme of the book.

Ged is naturally skeptical of what seems a suicidal course of action; but,

having exhausted all other possibilities—and himself—he agrees to try. There is some relief in the possibility of at least bringing the horror to an end one way or another. He therefore becomes the hunter and finds that, just as the shadow had seemed able to trail him effortlessly, so now can he readily find the shadow.

After one brief encounter in which the creature leads him to shipwreck on an island and nearly destroys him, he finally gets close enough actually to grapple with it. It slips away; but, as a result of this encounter, he begins finally to realize what he is dealing with: "He was neither hunted nor hunter now . . . he had of his own free will turned to the shadow, seeking to hold it with living hands. He had not held it, but he had forged between them a bond. . . ." He realizes that "his task had never been to undo what he had done but to finish what he had begun" (p. 168). The task, that is, is to complete the "journey" into his own soul which will culminate in the recognition and acceptance of what he has so far been able only to fear.

Ged's final confrontation with the shadow—the climax of the book—occurs in the company of another wizard, Vetch, who had been Ged's only friend at Roke and who now agrees to accompany him on his quest. The episode is so important that Le Guin apparently wanted an external observer to provide the reader an objective description of the incredible events symbolizing Ged's unexpected victory. The encounter takes place in the open sea at a spot where, to Vetch's astonishment, the boat literally runs aground, the water abruptly disappearing to be replaced by a vast empty expanse of sand. The meeting—not, as had been expected, a battle—is described by Le Guin in explicitly Jungian terms:

. . . aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, 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.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of the shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one. (p. 201)

Vetch, watching this merging, and thinking his friend lost, leaps from the grounded boat and rushes to assist him. Almost immediately the sand turns back to water and both friends are left floundering in the sea. When they have struggled back to the boat, Ged announces, "It is over. . . . I am healed" (p. 202). Finally, and perhaps a bit too obviously, Le Guin summarizes her message so that even her younger readers will not miss it: "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 other power than himself . . ." (p. 203).

Lifted out of context as they are here, these quotations may seem rather too bald explanations of symbolic events perfectly capable of expressing

their own significance. In fact, it is certainly here, if anywhere, that Le Guin lapses into didacticism; the ideas are not, as she claimed in her comments on the book, "totally incarnated." It is also true, however, that the climactic scene of the book is so dramatically and vividly realized that even such explicitly obvious glosses are by no means as obtrusive as they may seem out of context. In fact, considering how consistently Le Guin kept her symbolic message in mind as she wrote, it is surely a tribute to her skill that one cannot help but read the book first as a captivating adventure story. This dual accomplishment places her work very nearly in that category of "great fantasy" which she describes so insightfully and praises so highly in the essay which furnishes the key to understanding her efforts.

Notes

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2. Ursula Le Guin, "Letter to the Editor," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 3 (1976), 45.
3. Le Guin, "Letter," p. 45.
4. Ursula Le Guin, "The Child and the Shadow," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 32 (1975), 143.
5. Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 50.
6. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* (New York: Spring, 1973), p. 5.
7. Le Guin, "The Child and the Shadow," p. 143.
8. C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, Vol. VII: *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), p. 30.
9. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. VII, pp. 53-54.
10. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. IX, pt. 1: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 8.
11. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. VIII: *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, p. 208.
12. Jung, Vol. VIII, p. 9.
13. Le Guin, "The Child and the Shadow," p. 144.
14. Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Berkeley, Ca.: Parnassus Press, 1968), p. 25. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

Taoist Magic in the Earthsea Trilogy

ROBERT GALBREATH

■ The holistic nature of Earthsea magery is apparent to all readers of Ursula K. Le Guin's trilogy.¹ Like traditional magic, Earthsea magery combines, as both Robert Scholes and T. A. Shippey have suggested, elements of science, religion, and art to form a metadiscipline.² Earthsea magery functions within a framework of wholeness and balance, the Equilibrium of cause and effect, good and evil. It draws on the one power which underlies and unites "years and distances, stars and candles, water and wind and wizardry, the craft in a man's hand and the wisdom in a tree's roots"³ The resolutions of *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore* in particular emphasize the themes of integration, wholeness, and equilibrium as Ged, the protagonist of the trilogy, undergoes the ordeals that mark his rites of passage from sorcerer's apprentice to archmage and beyond. Yet there is a further holistic aspect of Ged's magery in these two works which requires comment. In the culminating encounters of Ged with the Shadow, his nemesis in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and with Cob, the powerful Lord of the Two Lands who nearly destroys the Equilibrium in *The Farthest Shore*, magery dramatically and ironically exemplifies the paradox of a nonmanipulative magic, itself a metaphor of the open acceptance of reality which characterizes Le Guin's approach to wholeness.⁴ Ged's magery is the opposite of coercive, Faustian magic which, defying all limits, strives for domination over nature; it is, in effect, an antimagic or "Taoist" magic.

In calling Ged's magery "Taoist," I do not wish to imply that Le Guin has based it on the actual practices of Taoist magicians and alchemists. Her own affinity to Taoism, amply documented by Douglas Barbour, James Bittner, and others, is both profound and admittedly "unconsistent."⁵ It is largely an affinity to the philosophical Taoism associated with Lao Tzu and

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Chuang Tzu, not the syncretistic religious Taoism with its extensive pantheon, revealed texts, long-life practices, and magical-religious rites. The clearest point of difference—one that is fundamental to Le Guin's work—is the contrast between acceptance of death by the philosophical Taoist as the necessary complement of life and the persistent quest of the religious Taoist for physical immortality through magic, alchemy, hygiene, and the search for the islands of the Immortals.⁶ Ged's magery comes to embody, as he matures, the principles of philosophical rather than magico-religious Taoism. But the young Ged's excesses and especially Cob's transgressions reflect the opposite attitude: willfulness, regardless of consequences; the desire for power and fame; and the need to overcome death by controlling the dead and gaining immortality. This latter type of magic is indebted conceptually to both Taoist immortality-magic and Faustian manipulative magic of the Renaissance.⁷

Ged's ordeals with the Shadow and Cob parallel one another. They mark the initiation and culmination of Ged's greatness as a mage, youth and age, beginning and end, alpha and omega (*ahm* and *ohb* in the Old Speech). Each ordeal requires a journey, an encounter with death, and a naming, and in each case the Equilibrium is upset. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* the process focuses on self-recognition and individual completion; in *The Farthest Shore* it takes the form of making the other whole. Ged's task with the Shadow is not to undo what he has done, but to finish what he has begun (*WE*, Ch. 8, p. 148). The culminating chapter of *A Wizard of Earthsea* is entitled "The Open Sea," a traditional image of life, unlimited potential, and the unconscious mind. In *The Farthest Shore* the resolution occurs in the chapter called "The Dry Land," a place of shadows, dust, and gloom, recalling imagery extending from descriptions of the Mesopotamian underworld ("the land of no return," "the house of dust") to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Here Ged's task is to undo what Cob has done, to restore the balance of life and death by sealing the doorway between the two lands and liberating Cob from nonlife into death.

Although it signifies Ged's death, the Shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is also the visible manifestation of Ged's extraordinary gifts as a mage and his equally great youthful folly (he is only fifteen when he unwittingly calls forth the Shadow). Its very presence requires "a ripping open of the fabric of the world" (*WE*, Ch. 4, p. 61). Its power is equivalent to that which summoned it. Through Ged it can work great evil on others. For Ged the ordeal with the Shadow is the foundation on which he will rise to become the greatest mage in Earthsea. The ordeal also clearly reveals the nature of Le Guin's Taoist magery as acceptance and recognition rather than manipulation and coercion. The final encounter with the Shadow cannot be properly understood as a conflict in which the participants attempt to subjugate one another. It constitutes instead an act of recognition. When

Ged at last names the Shadow "Ged" and is simultaneously named by it, the shock of self-recognition fuses the two into one: "Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one" (*WE*, Ch. 10, p. 179). Ged accepts, and is completed by, his mortality, his fear, his shadow side. Despite his early confidence that he can master the Shadow by learning its name (*WE*, Ch. 5, p. 90), he does not "defeat" or "subdue" the Shadow by naming it—the Shadow, after all, has known his name all along (*WE*, Ch. 9, p. 160)—any more than life can "defeat" death, as Cob's fate illustrates. Life and death, light and darkness, consciousness and unconsciousness, self and shadow: the polarities are integrated, complementing one another in the familiar yang/yin design of Taoism and the *coincidentia oppositorum* of alchemy. The resulting whole is neither the old Ged, nor the old Ged plus the Shadow, but a new Ged, reborn from the initiatory encounter with death and fear, a totality greater than the mere sum of its parts.

The nature of Ged's future greatness as archmage, based on the integration, not subjugation, of his powers, is suggested by the *Lao Tzu*:

The ten thousand things come into being,
And I have watched them return.
No matter how luxuriantly they flourish
Each must go back to the root from which it came.
This returning to the root is called quietness;
It is the fulfilment of one's destiny.
That each must fulfil [*sic*] his destiny is the eternal pattern.
To know the eternal pattern is to be illumined.
He who knows it not will be blasted and withered by misfortune.
He who knows the eternal pattern is all-encompassing;
He who is all-encompassing is completely impartial.
Being impartial, he is kingly;
Being kingly he is like Heaven;
Being like Heaven, he is at one with *Tao*.
Being at one with *Tao* he is, like it, imperishable;
Though his body may disappear into the ocean of existence,
He is beyond all harm.⁸

Certainly Ged has recognized his destiny and the eternal pattern (the Equilibrium). By accepting his shadow as part of himself and part of the pattern (death), he transcends finitude. He becomes whole and, by analogy, one with the Equilibrium, the equivalent of invulnerability and infinitude: "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, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark" (*WE*, Ch. 10, pp. 180–81).

Ged's integrative transformation is cognitive in nature, based on the recognition of reality as it is, rather than on the use of force to shape it into conformity with his wishes. As archmage he continues to act in the same spirit. "My lord," he advises Arren, "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 must do and which you cannot do in any other way" (*FS*, Ch. 4, p. 67).⁹ Ged refuses to manipulate others: "Who am I—though I have the power to do it—to punish and reward, playing with men's destinies?" (*FS*, Ch. 4, p. 67). He refuses to exercise power for its own sake or even to act in conformity with common values. To act from motives that are less than all-encompassing, hence not in keeping with the general pattern of the Equilibrium, is to succumb to willfulness, whether one's own or the equally limited desires of others. The result will be divisiveness, conflict, domination, a disruption of the Equilibrium. This is surely the case with Cob. Defying the limits, Cob breaks down the barrier between life and death, and becomes Lord of the Two Lands. But his drive for power and immortality, born out of fear, exposes his inner weakness. He has overcome death, but he is not alive; he has forgotten his true name and dwells among shadows; he equates life and love solely with power (*FS*, Ch. 12, pp. 179–80).

Ged, too, knows from personal experience the dangerous hubris of power that he warns against. We are told of four occasions when the young Ged uses his power to summon the dead or to enter their realm. The consequences are invariably grim. On the first and least threatening occasion, young Ged, goaded by a girl's teasing, awkwardly summons a modest but still dangerous shadow (a literal foreshadowing of the greater horror to come) from which he is saved by Ogion's timely arrival (*WE*, Ch. 2, pp. 22–23). On Roke his anger at Jasper propels him blindly into attempting to summon the shade of Elfarran; instead he unleashes the Shadow, the shadow of his arrogance, ignorance, and immaturity (*WE*, Ch. 4, pp. 59–62, 66). On his first mission as a young mage, he allows sentiment to cloud his judgment when he unsuccessfully attempts to save the dying child Ioeth by pursuing its spirit, "with no thought for his own safety," into the land of the dead, although he well knows the primary lesson of the healer's art is "heal the wound and cure the illness, but let the dying spirit go." He nearly dies himself, and manages only to reveal his presence to the waiting Shadow (*WE*, Ch. 5, pp. 79–82). In *The Farthest Shore* Ged confesses that once in anger he had forced Cob to descend into the nether region as a punishment for having summoned the spirit of Archmage Nemmerle, Ged's savior and former teacher, to do his bidding. Cob's humiliation and fear are subsequently metamorphosed into his determination to conquer death, thereby in time setting Ged his greatest challenge as archmage (*FS*, Ch. 5, pp. 74–76, Ch. 12, p. 178). On each of the four occasions, a reciprocity of cause and effect is apparent. Ged suffers

consequences that are equivalent to the strength of his emotions and willfulness. In time, of course, he learns his lesson. His errors and excesses originate in ignorance and immaturity, not in the desire to do evil. Cob's transgressions, however, are deliberate.¹⁰

As archmage Ged is, in contrast to Cob, a "Taoist" magician. In *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, Le Guin connects Earthsea with Taoism. The orderliness of the Taoist world, she explains, is "not one imposed by a man or by a personal or humane deity. The true laws—ethical and aesthetic, as surely as scientific—are not imposed from above by any authority, but exist in things, are to be found—discovered."¹¹ To her examples should be added the laws of magic, for Ged's wizardry follows the same pattern. It draws on power, not to manipulate and control, but to restore and heal. It recognizes the necessary complementarity of life and death. Ged does not impose his will on nature; he recognizes order (the Equilibrium or the eternal pattern), and acts with it because he must. In this sense, the way of the individual and the way of reality are one and the same. As Barbour first pointed out, the Equilibrium is the Tao, the "way" or "path."¹²

Ged's action conforms to Joseph Needham's interpretation of *wu wei*, the Taoist precept that is often rendered as "non-action" or "inactivity." Needham, however, believes that it means "refraining from activity contrary to nature," as not " 'forcing' things, in the interests of private gain, without regard to their intrinsic principles, and relying on the authority of others."¹³ More recently, Le Guin has described *wu wei* as "activity through stillness,"¹⁴ but Needham's formulation fits Ged more exactly. Neither the individual Shadow nor death itself can be "forced," as the young Ged and the elder Cob learn. They can only be recognized as complements of self and life, part of the eternal pattern of yang and yin. "Our curse," Le Guin has written,

is alienation, the separation of Yang from Yin. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. The 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.¹⁵

This is the lesson of Ged's magery, which from the modern or alienated viewpoint is the antithesis of the exploitative attitudes manifested by Western (but by no means unknown elsewhere) magic, science, and technology. The practice of magery requires a person of exceptional will because paradoxically willfulness must be set aside: its power does not force, its knowledge does not impose, its practitioner does not choose. It is *wu wei*, openness toward the orderliness of things as they are, not as we might wish them to be through the power-fantasies of conventional magic.

Notes

1. This paper is a substantially revised section of a longer paper on Le Guin's use of the occult which was originally presented at the SFRA Annual Meeting, Evanston, Illinois, on June 18, 1977. In its present form, the paper was presented at the SF Field Seminar, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, on February 10, 1979. I wish to express my gratitude to James W. Bittner for his generous sharing of insights and items of information.
2. Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 86–87; T. A. Shippey, "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy," *Mosaic*, 10 (Winter 1977), 147–48.
3. Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea (WE)* (1968; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1975), Ch. 9, p. 164; concerning the Equilibrium, see Ch. 2, p. 23 and Ch. 3, p. 44. Further references to this work and to *The Farthest Shore (FS)* (1972; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1975) appear in the text, with both chapter and page numbers given to facilitate reference to other editions. For *FS*, I have assigned chapter numbers to the thirteen titled sections of the text.
4. This is not to deny other possible meanings of magery. Le Guin equates magery with artistry and sees the trilogy in part as an allegory of the creative process. See *Dreams Must Explain Themselves* (New York: Algol Press, 1975), pp. 10–11; now rpt. in Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction (LN)*, ed. Susan Wood (New York: Putnam's, 1979), p. 53. But Le Guin also typically employs occult phenomena and practices (mindspeech, foretelling, supernormal empathy, effective dreaming, magery) as ironic metaphors for openness and the open universe. See Robert Galbreath, "Holism, Openness, and the Other: Le Guin's Use of the Occult," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 7 (March, 1980), 36–48. On her conception of the open universe, see Ursula K. Le Guin, "Escape Routes," *Galaxy*, 35 (December, 1974), 44 (rpt. *LN*, p. 206), and "Surveying the Battlefield," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1 (Fall 1973), 88–90.
5. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Ketterer on *The Left Hand of Darkness*," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 2 (July, 1975), 139, describes herself as "an inconsistent Taoist and a consistent unChristian." On her Taoism, see Douglas Barbour, "Wholeness and Balance in the Hainish Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1 (Spring 1974), 164–73; "The Lathe of Heaven: Taoist Dream," *Algol* No. 21 (November, 1973), pp. 22–24; and "On Ursula Le Guin's 'A Wizard of Earthsea,'" *Riverside Quarterly*, 6 (April, 1974), 119–23; James W. Bittner, "Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin," Diss. University of Wisconsin 1979, esp. Ch. 5, "Le Guin's Taoism, the Romance, and Utopia," and Appendix, "A Bibliographical Orientation to Taoism"; and Elizabeth Cummins Cogell, "Taoist Configurations: *The Dispossessed*," in *Ursula K. Le Guin: Voyager to Inner Lands and to Outer Space*, ed. Joe De Bolt (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979), pp. 153–79, 207–10.
6. The distinction between philosophical and religious Taoism and the point about accepting death versus seeking immortality are stated most forcefully by Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 88–95, 163. The relationship of Taoist views of nature and change, politics, magic, and immortality to the development of science is explored in detail by Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (5 vols. in 8 parts to date; Cambridge: CUP, 1954—), II (1956), 33–164. This relationship and even the distinction between philosophical and religious Taoism has been questioned recently by another leading Sinologist, N. Sivin, in "On the Word 'Taoist' as a Source of Perplexity. With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China," *History of Religions*, 17 (February–May, 1978), 303–30, esp. 312–13, 316–23. Le Guin recommends Welch and Needham to her critics in "A Response to the Le Guin Issue," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 3 (March, 1976), 45.

7. In view of the similar exploitative attitude toward nature held by the Renaissance magus and the early natural scientist (a similarity which Francis Bacon recognized), and the use of the Faustian label by Spengler to describe Western civilization, it can be surmised that Ged's magery implicitly criticizes Western attitudes generally. On the Faustian tradition in Western magic, the older works of E. M. Butler, *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge: CUP, 1949) and *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: CUP, 1948) are still useful. On Renaissance magic generally, see D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (1958; rpt. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975); Marie Boas, *The Scientific Renaissance 1450-1630* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Ch. 6; and Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1972), Ch. 3 (a digest of source materials).
8. *Lao Tzu*, Ch. 16, as translated in H. G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung* (1953; rpt. New York: Mentor Books, n.d.), p. 88.
9. Cf. the Master Summoner's advice to young Ged: "You thought, as a boy, that a mage is one who can do anything. So I thought, once. So did we all. And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower: until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must* do" (*WE*, Ch. 4, p. 71).
10. Cf. Shippey, pp. 152-53; Barbour, "On Ursula Le Guin's 'A Wizard of Earthsea,'" pp. 119-21. Both authors clearly see the theme of ethics and power, but Taoism lies outside Shippey's purview. I cannot agree with Barbour's contention that Ged's actions concerning the dragon of Pendor and the child Ioeth strengthen him for the final encounter with the Shadow because they are actions for others rather than for himself. To the contrary, the dragon episode indicates that Ged still thinks he can master the Shadow by learning its name, although he resists the temptation to learn it from Yevaud; while in the case of Ioeth his rashness has near-fatal consequences for himself and further documents his inability to weigh actions in the balance of the Equilibrium.
11. Le Guin, *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, p. 7 (rpt. *LN*, p. 49).
12. Barbour, "On Ursula Le Guin's 'A Wizard of Earthsea,'" p. 120.
13. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, II, 68, 71.
14. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Introduction to the 1978 Edition," *Planet of Exile* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. ix (rpt. *LN*, p. 141). I am indebted to James W. Bittner for calling this reference to my attention.
15. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Is Gender Necessary?" in *Aurora: Beyond Equality*, ed. Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson (Greenwich, Ct.: Fawcett, 1976), pp. 138-39 (rpt. *LN*, p. 169).

On a Far Shore: The Myth of Earthsea

BRIAN ATTEBERY

■ Most recent works of fantasy have traced and retraced the patterns of familiar, mostly Celtic, myth and legend. Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy is distinctive in having no Grail, no Arthur, no knights in armor, no fairy folk. Its wizards, without beards or pointed hats, remind one alternatively of medieval clerics and tribal shamans. Its dragons are closer to the wise beasts of Chinese lore than to the greedy horrors of Northern Europe. The magical machinery of the Earthsea saga draws upon sources from all over the world, and it is bound together into a plot according to the dictates of Le Guin's thematic material. Thus, as the first book in the trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, deals with individual identity, its magic is chiefly that of names and naming. The second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, concerns the complementary nature of good and evil, so its magic is of light and darkness and a broken ring. The third book, *The Farthest Shore*, is perhaps the most complex, making use of the traditional magical voyage of discovery to explore the relationships of life and death and of despair and illumination.

The Farthest Shore begins with a troubled world: messengers from all Earthsea come to the wizard isle of Roke with tales of dying animals, failing crops, traditions lost, and spells gone awry. One of the messengers is young Arren, Prince of Enlad. Arren sets out with the wizard Ged, Archmage of Roke, to find the source of trouble. Sailing alone in the small boat *Lookfar*, they discover increasing disorder on the islands to the south and west: slavery on Wathort, madness on Lorbanery, savagery on Obehol. On the island of the dragons, in the farthest West, they at last encounter the sorcerer who is pulling the world apart. He has undone the balance of life and death with a powerful spell. Ged and Arren must follow him into the

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land of death, a waterless, twilight country of silent figures where only wizards can come and go at will. They find him at the gaping hole he has opened in the dark world. Arren attacks the sorcerer—although the sorcerer cannot be wounded—so that Ged can try with all his strength to end the spell. Having succeeded, they struggle back to the shores of the land of the living, where Arren will rule as king of all Earthsea.

The plot Le Guin has selected for this final volume beautifully rounds out the ideas presented in the first two volumes—identity, responsibility, balance—and provides a fit setting for the resonant imagery with which she brings those ideas to life. But the story unfolds with such deceptive smoothness that the underlying structure, the play of symbol and archetype, may pass unnoticed. Because there is no Welsh or Irish legend to give us the story unadorned, some other key is needed, some witching stick to point out the stream of meaning running beneath the surface of event and episode. Theodore Roethke's poem "In a Dark Time," from his "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical,"¹ shares the pattern of *The Farthest Shore* but presents it starkly, with the elements stripped to the bone. By reading the two works together, one can more clearly trace the significant patterns that give meaning to both. In this paper I will move from the poem to the story, finding for every state of mind in the poet an analogous point of action for the heroes of the book. I hope to show that a fantasy can, in its own way, demonstrate the kind of rich redoubling of meaning that we expect from visionary poets like Roethke.

Roethke's poem begins, "In a dark time." In his own essay on the poem, he expands this phrase into "the dark night of the soul."² His territory is interior: the poet's own soul at its most solitary moment. The darkness is multiply suggestive: of depression, of death, and of the expectant darkness of the womb. By coupling a physical description with the idea of time, he gives the reader a whole setting in four words and also indicates the mental state of the narrator. The darkness that opens Le Guin's book is exterior, a whole world shadowed by social and physical ills: "there was a sickness among them, and their autumn harvest had been poor, and still they seemed careless. . . . They were like sick men, like a man who has been told he must die within the year, and tells himself it is not true, and he will live forever."³ As the simile indicates, the origin of the darkness is in the minds of men. It is Roethke's dark night of the soul manifesting itself in the world of nature. The evil, as we discover, springs from the fears and desires of men, because of which they have overthrown the world's equilibrium. On another level, the world itself may be read as a symbol of the individual; and the heroes' journey, the antagonist's spell, and the final confrontation may be read as ways of expressing the soul's self-searching, self-betraying, and ultimate victory. It is at this level that the book corresponds most closely to the poem: they similarly describe the soul's braving of its own

darkness. Wizard and poet are both heroic souls, explorers: "People without power are only half-alive. They don't count. They don't know what they dream; they're afraid of the dark. But the others, the lords of men, aren't afraid to go into the dark" (TFS, p. 60). Roethke leads the reader into his poem with a few potent words. Le Guin devotes much of her book to setting, offering physical details and cultural descriptions that carry the reader across the threshold into her world.

For both authors entering into the darkness is the first step towards self-discovery. As Roethke says, "In a dark time the eye begins to see." The poet can simply state such a paradox, while the storyteller must illustrate it by action. The beginning of vision in Le Guin's tale is when Ged and Arren set out in the *Lookfar* to find the source of the darkness. Ged comments before they begin: "We must look to the deep springs, I think. We have enjoyed the sunlight too long . . . accomplishing small things, fishing the shallows. Tonight we must question the depths" (TFS, p. 15). The novelist does not announce her themes outright, as the poet does, but approaches them through her characters, their words, and their actions. Later in the book Ged quotes an adage that corresponds closely to Roethke's opening statement: "To see a candle's light, one must take it into a dark place" (TFS, p. 157). Yet, though the two sentences look much alike, one is the direct voice of the poet (or his poetic persona), while the other is doubly indirect, a fictional character speaking the proverb of an imaginary society. Story and poem use opposite means to accomplish similar ends.

Another paradox appears in the next line of Roethke's poem: "I meet my shadow in the deepening shade." Roethke elaborates in his essay: "I meet my shadow, my double, my other, usually tied to me, my reminder that I am going to die, in the 'deepening shade'—and surely 'shade' suggests Hades, if not hell" (OIDT, p. 50). In using the words "shadow" and "shade" to bear such weight of meaning, Roethke is aided, as he indicates, by their traditional metaphorical extensions. He lets the reader make the associations necessary to resolve the paradox and give it meaning. Le Guin, using the same words, takes them back first to their root meaning and then builds anew the metaphorical bridge. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged meets a literal shadow, a physical darkness created by his own powers; by naming it with his own name, he absorbs and defeats it. In the "deepening shade" of *The Farthest Shore*, he meets another, greater shadow. This one is not his own creation, but a power equal and opposed to his own. The dark sorcerer even resembles Ged; a woman mistakes Ged for the other: " 'You are the Great Man,' she whispered. 'You are the King of the Shadows, the Lord of the Dark Place—' " (TFS, p. 95). The dark power of this shadow counterpart of Ged's is exactly, as Roethke says, his "reminder that I am going to die," the threat of personal dissolution. Having met the shadow of his own pride, Ged understands the nature of this greater shade. He explains to

Arren that the shadow lies “in our minds, lad. In our minds. The traitor, the self; the self that cries *I want to live; let the world burn so long as I can live*. The little traitor soul in us, in the dark, like the worm in the apple” (TFS, p. 153). The Dark Lord’s promise of immortality calls to each individual’s pride, his shadow.

The next lines of Roethke’s poem introduce another aspect of the poet’s fragmented self: “I hear my echo in the echoing wood—/ A lord of nature weeping to a tree.” This “lord of nature” is not a separate character, as he is in *The Farthest Shore*, but merely an echo among echoes. The title, Roethke says, is “self-mockery” (OIDT, p. 50). The same mocking image, of a would-be lord weeping for his own death, is used in Le Guin’s story to illustrate the character of the King of Shadows, who was once a failed wizard named Cob. Ged recalls that Cob, unlike other wizards, was afraid to cross the mysterious wall of stones into the realm of death. Ged, desiring to turn Cob’s fear into understanding, forced him across: “I made him go with me into the Dry Land, though he fought me with all his will and changed his shape and wept aloud when nothing else would do” (TFS, p. 85). But Cob, unable to accept his sight of the Dry Land, went on to discover the spell for circumventing death. He became the Lord of Shadows and opened a breach between the two worlds of life and death. This act gave him enormous power in both realms, but it lost him his name, the selfhood he meant to preserve. Ged, knowing his history, can see him as a pitiful figure, a “lord of nature weeping to a tree.”

Opposed to the shadow-self in Roethke’s poem is the real self, the I-self. Roethke points out in the next lines that this “I” is not a selfish lord of nature, but a part of the natural world: “I live between the heron and the wren,/ Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.” Roethke explains these lines thus: “I would gather the beasts, I would call upon their powers in my spiritual ascent or assault” (OIDT, p. 51). The more the poet can submit himself to nature, the better he can quell his inner rebellion. The words of Roethke’s poem are a chant to call the natural strength of animal and bird to his aid. What the poet does rhetorically the wizard can do literally. Ged can change at will to animal form: “The farmer, away off on the hillside under the bright sky, had stopped to watch. Once last autumn he had watched the Archmage take a wild bird on his wrist, and then in the next moment had seen no man, but two hawks mounting on the wind” (TFS, p. 13). Ged’s familiar or “use” name is Sparrowhawk, and he can call birds and even dragons down from the sky. Whereas the Shadow Lord rules by fear, Ged draws his power from kinship and understanding.

Roethke’s next lines shift his focus from the combatants within himself to the effect of the conflict on the whole personality: “What’s madness but nobility of soul / At odds with circumstance?” Such exploration into the inner mysteries can bring on madness, but some madness is needed to lead

to the deepest discoveries. In *The Farthest Shore* there is a madman, a former wizard and a dyer of silk who has lost his skill in following the Lord of Shadows. The narrative form seems to necessitate turning each aspect of the soul into a separate character, who can thus participate in the action and interact with the other characters. Le Guin's skill shows in her individuation of these characters: each has a history, a personality, and a role to play. The mad ex-wizard's personality is indicated when he puns on his own condition: " 'I was the dyer,' he said, 'but now I can't dye.' Then he looked askance at Sparrowhawk and grinned . . . " (TFS, p. 100). The role he plays is that of guide, a role for which his madness suits him. As Ged says, "we go where reason will not take us" (TFS, p. 105). The *Lookfar* sails on under his direction toward the edge of the world.

At this point in the poem, the imagery becomes suddenly violent: "The day's on fire! / I know the purity of pure despair, / My shadow pinned against a sweating wall." Roethke explains how these images fit into the action of the poem: " 'The day's on fire!' means, I suppose, the mind is on fire: this is the ultimate burning of revelation. In that condition the purity of despair is realized in all its finality, but in the place of suffering, it is the other, the shadow which is 'pinned against a sweating wall.' The true self still maintains its choice, its mobility" (OIDT, p. 51). In *The Farthest Shore* we have already seen the Shadow pinned against a wall when Ged pulls him across into the land of death. Ged remembers how Cob "crouched down, on the side of the living, and tried to withstand my will, and could not. He clung to the stones with his hands and cursed and screamed. I have never seen a fear like that; it sickened me with its own sickness" (TFS, p. 85). Cob's fear is infectious: although Ged and Arren, the "true self," remain free to search for their enemy, the closer they come the stronger becomes the influence of that fear until Arren is almost overcome. "Now Sopli was dead, and he dying, and Arren would die. Through this man's fault; and in vain, for nothing. So Arren looked at him with the clear eyes of despair and saw nothing" (TFS, p. 122). As Arren fights the battle between true self and shadow self, he nearly loses his power of choice and action. Despair makes him like Cob, unmoving and unseeing. Roethke sets up self and other, despair and mobility, vision and shadow as verbal opposites that strive together within the lines of his poem. Le Guin takes the same antithetical pairs and weaves them into her story line, so that self and other, as we have seen, become separate figures; despair and choice become part of Arren's character development; and vision and shadow become, among other things, a boat called *Lookfar* and an eyeless Lord of Darkness. Instead of purely verbal tension, there is narrative conflict.

Roethke's poem continues to build in intensity with an image of his "place of suffering": "That place among the rocks—is it a cave, / Or winding path? The edge is what I have." The tension in these lines is augmented

by their interrogative form: the poet begins to lose even the certainty of paradox. He knows he is in a place of power, but does not know what power it is. Roethke says: "The cave and the winding path are older than history. And the edge—the terrible abyss—equally old" (OIDT, p. 51). He is coming to the edge, the crisis, but cannot tell if he is at a dead end or the beginning of the winding way to understanding. This edge is vital to the experience that both Roethke and Le Guin are portraying. The poet realizes that the abyss is what he has; even if it is death or pain or underlying nothingness, it must be accepted as his own lot. Ged says the same thing: "There is no safety, and there is no end. The word must be heard in silence; there must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss" (TFS, p. 136). Ged and Arren find the abyss when they follow Cob into the land of death, which is, like Roethke's place of suffering, a wasteland of bare rock: "The country of the innumerable dead was empty. No tree or thorn or blade of grass grew in the stony earth under the unsetting stars" (TFS, p. 198). At the heart of this land is a dry riverbed that leads to "a kind of basin of rocks five or six feet wide, what might have been a pool if ever water ran there; and above it a tumbled cliff of rock and slag. In that cliff there was a black hole, the source of the Dry River" (TFS, p. 207). The hole is linked in imagery and import to the Shadow: "Before him the dry spring, the door, yawned open. It was wide and hollow, but whether deep or shallow there was no telling. There was nothing in it for the light to fall on, for the eye to see. It was void. Through it was neither light nor dark, neither life nor death. It was a way that led nowhere" (TFS, p. 207). Le Guin uses an effective fantasy technique here, establishing an object by physical description and then, by means of hinged words like "yawned," which provides both a concrete image and the symbolic weight of skulls and tombs, adding to that object a magical, metaphysical significance. Roethke does almost the same thing, but unlike a fantasist, he does not convince us that object and meaning exist on the same plane. Roethke's wasteland symbolizes death, but Le Guin's is something more concrete than a symbol. Within the story's frame the dry land is death, all that death is in Earthsea. Her cave is symbolically and literally a wound in the world. Her winding path leads over mountains that are the Mountains of Pain. In Roethke such images are poetic devices; in Le Guin they are the machinery of magic.

The transformation from poetic to magical device can be reversed. Roethke's next set of images is surely drawn from traditional fantasy: "A steady storm of correspondences! / A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon, / And in broad day the midnight come again." Such analogies are effective either as poetic images describing the workings of the mind or as magical runes and spells. Here is the way Le Guin utilizes the idea of night invading day: "It seemed to Arren that the sun failed and dimmed, though

it stood high on a clear sky. A darkness came over the beach, as though one looked through smoked glass; directly before Ged it grew very dark, and it was hard to see what was there. It was as if nothing was there, nothing the light could fall on, a formlessness. Out of it came a man, suddenly" (TFS, p. 191). The darkness serves as an introduction to the apparition of the Lord of Darkness. It is part of his magic, one of the ways in which his inner darkness affects the outer reality.

Roethke's next lines summarize the action to this point: "A man goes far to find out what he is— / Death of the self in a long, tearless night, / All natural shapes blazing unnatural light." These lines summarize equally well the action of *The Farthest Shore*. Ged and Arren have come far indeed, to the land of death where all is "long, tearless night": "He saw the mother and child who had died together, and they were in the dark land together; but the child did not run, nor did it cry, and the mother did not hold it or ever look at it. And those who had died for love passed each other in the streets" (TFS, p. 196). The only way beyond this dry death is a "death of the self"; as Ged counsels, "Listen to me, Arren. You will die. You will not live forever. Nor will any man nor anything. Nothing is immortal. But only to us is it given to know that we must die. And that is the great gift: the gift of selfhood. For we have only what we know we must lose, what we are willing to lose. . . . That selfhood which is our torment, and our treasure, and our humanity, does not endure. It changes; it is gone, a wave on the sea" (TFS, p. 137). By accepting one's own death, one is free of its terror, the shadow loses its power. Roethke says that "the natural self dies in the blaze of the supernatural" (OIDT, p. 52). In the blaze of magic power, Arren finds out what he is: a man, a king, a mature, complete identity. He will be ready to fulfill the ancient prophecy of the last king of Earthsea: "He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of day" (TFS, p. 20).

The next three lines of Roethke's poem describe the agony of the actual moment of choice: "Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire. / My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly, / Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?" Is the poet—is Arren—the king-to-be or is he a coward, a traitor, a dying insect? Roethke asks in his essay, "Am I this many-eyed, mad, filthy thing or am I human?" (OIDT, p. 52). To Roethke, this section of the poem represents "the moment of supreme disgust" (OIDT, p. 52) that immediately precedes the revelation. A similar moment in the story is when Arren is struggling against the invulnerable enemy while Ged strives to close the gaping black hole. This too is a moment of sickening violence: "So horrible to see was this recovery from a death-blow, this inability to die, more horrible than any dying, that a rage of loathing swelled up in Arren, a berserk fury, and swinging up the sword he struck again with it, a full, terrible, downward blow" (TFS, p. 208). When the Shadow Lord is

revealed as a loathsome, subhuman thing, Arren is freed by his disgust to strike a blow against him. He now knows "which I is I." He has chosen eventual death, perhaps even immediate death, over the false life of the shadow. Cob, though he cannot be killed, is not really alive. As Ged tells him: "You exist: without name, without form. You cannot see the light of day; you cannot see the dark. You sold the green earth and the sun and stars to save yourself. But you have no self. All that which you sold, that is yourself. You have given up everything for nothing" (TFS, pp. 204-05). The identity that Ged and Arren have found is their own mortality. They have chosen the transient, the unique, the joy and the pain that come along with the "green earth and the sun and stars."

The inner battle is over, and Roethke's poet emerges victorious: "A fallen man, I climb out of my fear. / The mind enters itself, and God the mind, / And one is One, free in the tearing wind." The resolution of the story is slower and more solemn. After the enemy is defeated, Ged and Arren are still in the land of death; they have come too far to return by the wall of stones. Ged is exhausted by the effort of healing the world's wound. He is victorious, but a "fallen man." It is Arren who, with his new maturity, must lead the way back to life across the looming mountains. Over jagged rocks and cinders they must "climb out of their fear." When they reach the "far shores of day," Arren comes into his kingdom, as the poet enters his mind. Both now possess a sense of oneness with the restored world. The poet has gained from his quest a sense of the presence of God, but Arren's is a bleaker prize: "He almost tossed it away. Then he felt the edges of it with his hand, rough and searing, and felt the weight of it, and knew it for what it was, a bit of rock from the Mountains of Pain. It had caught in his pocket as he climbed or when he crawled to the edge of the pass with Ged. He held it in his hand, the unchanging thing, the stone of pain. He closed his hand on it and held it. And he smiled then, a smile both somber and joyous, knowing, for the first time in his life, alone, unpraised, and at the end of the world, victory" (TFS, p. 216). The form of fantasy seems to encourage symbols to develop and multiply themselves, so that the Dry Land leads to the burning mountains and the mountains to the stone of pain, which is Arren's victory. The stone tears at Arren, like Roethke's "tearing wind," but it also reminds him of his new-won freedom. Where there is pain there is life. He has offered himself as a sacrifice, and in reward has been given the wind and rain of a renewed and renewing earth. Both poem and story stress the return to physical sensation, to something outside the self that can give comfort and support. Roethke, reading his poem, comments: "I feel there is a hope in the ambiguity of 'tearing'—that the ambient air itself, that powers man once deemed merely 'natural,' or is unaware of, are capable of pity; that some other form or aspect of God will endure with man again, will save him from himself" (OIDT, p. 53). Magic and mysticism both

assume some order, meaning, and sympathy in the universe. The light that is brought from the darkness is an awareness of this order and of one's place in it.

Though *The Farthest Shore* is not, that I am aware of, modeled on a particular traditional narrative, it does adapt the broader mythological pattern of quest and discovery to illuminate certain philosophical and emotional problems. In Le Guin's hands, fantasy becomes a technique for bringing together the great polarities of vision and darkness, selfishness and sacrifice, life and death into paradoxes, which can then be reconciled within a system which is, like poetry, extrarational but orderly. Human dilemmas that defy reason lend themselves to the metaphor of magic. Le Guin has stated that "an improbable and unmanageable world is going to produce an improbable and hypothetical art. At this point realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence."⁴ Fantasy's improbabilities are given direction by the logic of symbolism, which dictates that a journey must end in truth, that the self is made of many parts, that a wise man is a wizard and a strong man a king. By the rules of this logic, certain symbols call forth other symbols with which they ally themselves or clash—light with dark, hero with villain, and so on. Such clash and resultant resolution characterize myth, and a fantasy that effectively develops a symbolic syllogism has a force approaching that of myth.

Myths seem to retain their power whether expressed in ritual, in scripture, or in popular narrative. The mythlike pattern of *The Farthest Shore* is equally moving in Roethke's poem, where it is stated nearly as starkly as words can state it, or in Le Guin's book, where it is overlaid with setting, characterization, plot, and subplot. Roethke's verbal play—his ellipsis, allusion, and paradox—challenges readers to find in their own experiences pieces to complete the puzzle. Le Guin lays out the picture complete and calls upon readers to discover its design. Though the methods differ, fantasy shares with poetry—and both share with myth—a freedom to mean, to invert and juxtapose and interpret by the laws of symbol and archetype the great eternal questions.

Notes

1. *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 239.
2. Theodore Roethke, "On 'In a Dark Time,'" in *The Contemporary Poet as Artist and Critic*, ed. Anthony Ostroff (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), p. 50. All other citations are from this volume, hereafter OI DT.
3. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Farthest Shore* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 6. All other citations are from this volume, hereafter TFS.
4. "In Defense of Fantasy," *The Horn Book Magazine*, 49 (1973), 239.

A Time to Live and a Time to Die: Cyclical Renewal in the Earthsea Trilogy

THOMAS J. REMINGTON

■In a generally perceptive essay, "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy," T. A. Shippey says of "the archipelago-world of the trilogy" that "we never find out where or when it is,"¹ and thus echoes the view of George Edgar Slusser that Le Guin's "fantasy setting . . . bears no resemblance whatever to our contemporary world."² In a broad sense, of course, Shippey and Slusser are correct; Earthsea is an imaginary construct, and in building it Le Guin omitted map coordinates or historical dates. In this regard, Earthsea is like the dragons that inhabit it who, Le Guin tells us, "do not submit to the . . . requirements of history, being myths, and neither timebinding nor timebound."³ Nevertheless, since Le Guin is a science-fiction writer (among other things) it seems worth noting that the archipelago of Earthsea is, in fact, terrestrial. It is a land with a single moon, a yearly seasonal change, and—though the matter is not emphasized—a calendar recognizably our own. The months of March, April, and May are all actually mentioned in the trilogy, and the vernal equinox occurs in March.⁴

In fact, the seasonal cycle is carefully worked into the fabric of the Earthsea trilogy, and an awareness of its presence illuminates our reading of the work. The most significant dates of the seasonal cycle are frequently mentioned in the trilogy under the terminology given them by the people of the archipelago. The day of "Sunreturn" marks the winter solstice, "the shortest day of the year" (WE, p. 143), while the Night of the Long Dance is the night of the summer solstice (FS, p. 117). Joined to these two dates are the "Moon's Night" celebrated on the night of the full moon closest to the

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summer solstice (see WE, p. 54) and "Fallows," the night of the first new moon after Sunreturn (WE, p. 169). The equinox is called simply that—even in the minds of the characters in the work (e.g., FS, p. 118). Each major event of the trilogy is given a seasonal context through its relation to one or another of these celebrations.

For example, although Ged first experiments with the "spell of summoning up the spirits of the dead" (WE, p. 22) in spring (WE, p. 19), the night on which the Shadow is actually loosed is the first after that of the Long Dance, the first of the nights measuring the sun's decline toward winter; moreover, the same night is the second of the waning moon. When Ged next is attacked by the Shadow, "the days were shortening into winter" (WE, p. 97). But when Ged takes the initiative of hunting the Shadow and places it on the defensive, the confrontation takes place the day after Sunreturn, "the first day of the new year," which "brightened all the sea" after "the longest night of the year" (WE, p. 145). The final and climactic meeting between Ged and the Shadow occurs three days after the dark night of Fallows, with the sun and moon both beginning to wax.

Thus, in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the dark force of the Shadow does not find its greatest strength in the darkest parts of the year, at Fallows, but rather in the period when the sun is declining from greatness and the moon is waning. In opposition to the Shadow, Ged, who knows "It is the light that defeats the dark" (WE, p. 119), successfully confronts the Shadow as the sun begins its return to greatness, the days begin to grow longer, and the moon starts to wax.

The pattern is similar, though perhaps less obvious, in *The Tombs of Atuan*. At the time that Ged is trapped helplessly in the labyrinth, we are told that "the year was rounding again towards winter" (TA, p. 53). However, in the Tombs themselves there are no seasons: "Here, winter or summer, there was no cold, no heat: always the same even chill, a little damp, changeless. Up above, the great frozen winds of winter whipped thin snow over the desert. Here there was no wind, no season; it was close, it was still, it was safe" (TA, p. 57). The changelessness inside the Tombs is, in fact, the changelessness of death, a signal of the Dark Powers that rule there: "In the Great Treasury of the Tombs of Atuan, time did not pass. No light; no life; no least stir of spider in the dust or worm in the cold earth. Rock, and dark, and time not passing" (TA, p. 103). The deathly lack of change in the Tombs is extended by the Dark Powers to those areas outside of the Tombs under their control, where "the days went by, the years went by, all alike" (TA, p. 13). When Tenar was consecrated as the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, "All spoke to her with elaborate deference. But nothing had changed. Nothing happened. Once the ceremonies of her consecration were over, the days went on as they had always gone" (TA, p. 24).

Because our point of view in *Tombs* is restricted to that of Tenar, who has no knowledge beyond the Place of the Tombs, the significance of the passing seasons is impressed on us less in this book than in *Wizard*. Nevertheless, at least indirectly, the passing of dominance from the Dark Powers (with which the Shadow of the first book was allied—see TA, p. 81) to Ged is signaled as taking place approximately at the Feast of Sunreturn. On the night on which Ged returns Tenar's name to her, three nights before the two of them leave the Tombs together, Tenar asks Ged to give her some demonstration of his power. He responds by altering the appearance of her heavy black skirts to that of a dress "of turquoise-colored silk, bright and soft as the evening sky . . . embroidered with thin silver threads and seed pearls and tiny crumbs of crystal, so that it glittered softly, like rain in April" (TA, p. 88). Ged says of the dress that "It's like a gown I saw a princess wear once, at the Feast of Sunreturn in the New Palace in Havnor" (TA, p. 88).

Of course we have no way of knowing whether Ged's conjuring of Tenar's dress actually occurs at the Feast of Sunreturn, but the book makes that conclusion seem likely. We know that the season "was rounding again towards winter" when Ged was first trapped in the Tombs, and we know that it is winter after he and Tenar escape, for he tells her that it will be winter when she first sees the island of his birth as they pass it on their way to Havnor (TA, p. 130). Thus, the Feast of Sunreturn clearly intervenes between the time when Ged is first trapped by the Dark Powers of the Tombs and the time of his escape—when the Place of the Tombs collapses in an earthquake. *Tombs*, then, repeats the pattern of *Wizard*. In both there is an incursion into the world of the living from the dark land of death. In *Wizard* the incursion is in the form of the Shadow which is released when Ged improperly attempts to conjure the spirit of the dead Elfarran; in *Tombs*, the incursion is the power exercised by the Nameless Ones in their receiving worship from the living:

They have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy. . . . They should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshipped. . . . And where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds; there places are made in the world where darkness gathers, places given over wholly to the Ones whom we call Nameless, the ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the light, the powers of the dark, of ruin, of madness. (TA, p. 107)

The parallelism of two plots in which the representative of light and life withstands that of darkness and death at the time of the sun's return after the winter solstice recalls Sir James Frazer's . . . synthesis in *The Golden Bough* of the myths of the vegetation cycle, the wasteland, and the dying king. Shippey briefly points to the significance of wasteland myth to the Earthsea trilogy, adding that "the regenerative aspect of that myth, as Miss

Jessie Weston restated it, was 'the freeing of the waters,' the clearing of the dry springs" (MAEW, p. 154).

For Shippey, though, the "freeing of the waters" seems to be indicated primarily in a return from land to the sea (MAEW, p. 154). The validity of Shippey's view can be seen in Ged's desire to meet the Shadow on the sea, not "on dry land." "Out of the sea there rise storms and monsters, but no evil powers: evil is of the earth. And there is no sea, no running of river or spring, in the dark land. . . . Death is the dry place" (WE, p. 133).

But the motifs of "freed waters" and "wasteland" seem to go considerably further in *Wizard and Tombs*. In *Wizard*, for example, Ged spends the three days before Sunreturn on a tiny island, "a mere sand bar," where he arrived "parched with thirst" (WE, p. 140). An old man and woman, exiled Kargad royalty, "lived there alone in the utter desolation of the empty sea" (WE, p. 141). With Ged they share fish and mussels—and brackish water from the island's only well. Before he leaves the island, Ged "set a charm on that salty unreliable spring. The water rose up . . . as sweet and clear as any mountain spring" (WE, p. 143); ever after the island is known as Springwater Isle.

Similarly, in *Tombs*, the Place of the Tombs is in a desert (TA, pp. 11–12) where the wells run low in summer (TA, p. 14). Those trapped in the Tombs die of thirst (TA, p. 70), and Ged's life is saved when Tenar offers him a drink (TA, p. 106). When Tenar and Ged escape the Tombs, the cold and dryness of the winter desert are emphasized (TA, pp. 125–30) until they reach "the western mountains which had walled in Tenar's life till then" (TA, p. 130). They come to a grove of trees where a bird sings: "Under the trees ran a stream, narrow but powerful, shouting, muscular over its rocks and falls, too hasty to freeze. Tenar was almost afraid of it. She was used to the desert where things are silent and move slowly: sluggish rivers, shadows of clouds, vultures circling" (TA, p. 130).

Significantly tied in with the "freeing of the waters" is the quest for the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. Ged is given half of the ring—a lost talisman of a great hero from the past whom Ged calls "the best and bravest of us all" (FS, p. 168)—while on the barren island in *Wizard*, but fails to recognize it for what it is. Later, having learned the value of the token he so casually accepted, Ged seeks the remaining half of the ring, which is known to be hidden in the Tombs. The ring is made whole by Ged in the Tombs, and the strength it gives helps him and Tenar to make their escape from the Dark Powers. Like the Grail which is the healing symbol that Weston connects with the wasteland mythology in medieval romances, the Ring of Erreth-Akbe is "the sign of peace, the lost treasure" (TA, p. 131). The great symbol of the ring, with the clearly female significance of its shape, is worn on the wrist of Tenar when she and Ged leave the Kargad lands. Though Tenar wishes to find peace and silence on Ged's homeland of Gont, it is presumed by both her and Ged that she must first journey to the jeweled city of

Havnor, a city of towers. "On the highest of all the towers the Sword of Erreth-Akbe is set, like a pinnacle, skyward. When the sun rises on Havnor it flashes first on that blade and makes it bright, and when it sets the Sword is golden still above the evening, for a while" (TA, p. 85).

The association of the ring worn by a maiden with the upthrust sword set at the city's highest point seems to parallel the significance that Weston places on the symbols of the grail and the lance:

But Lance and Cup (or Vase) were in truth connected together in a symbolic relation long ages before the institution of Christianity, or the birth of Celtic tradition. They are sex symbols of immemorial antiquity and world-wide diffusion, the Lance, or Spear, representing the Male, the Cup, or Vase, the Female, reproductive energy.⁵

Moreover, on the sea voyages of return that mark the conclusions of both *Wizard* and *Tombs*, Ged shares water with his companion (Vetch in *Wizard* and Tenar in *Tombs*), and fish (WE, p. 181; TA, p. 141). The association of Ged with fish, and with the sharing of fish in moments of success, may be significant. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Ged" as a fish, a pike. Further, Ged's great opponent in *The Farthest Shore* is named "Cob," which has as one of its meanings the name of a fish in the OED.⁶

But in using the wasteland-grail-Fisher King pattern, Le Guin is not guilty of the crime of which she accuses some nameless lesser writers who "do not realize that a symbol is not a sign of something known, but an indicator of something not known and not expressible otherwise than symbolically. They mistake symbol (living meaning) for allegory (dead equivalence). So they use mythology in an arrogant fashion, rationalising it, condescending to it."⁷ There is nothing arrogant or condescending in Le Guin's use of myth and symbol in the Earthsea trilogy; on the contrary, the structure of the myth is essential to the story. In the first two volumes, the pattern of the myth is carefully established to serve as a framework against which we can view the diametric inversion of the pattern in the concluding volume.

Shippey suggests that *Wizard* "may be considered as an alternative, one might say a parody or anti-myth if the words did not sound inappropriately aggressive" (MAEW, p. 154). Clearly, I disagree with Shippey's view of *Wizard* and have argued that its development is parallel to and consistent with the mythology that underlies it, and that the case is similar in *Tombs*.

In both *Wizard* and *Tombs*, the balance of things is threatened by an unwarranted incursion of the forces of death into the land of the living. In confronting his own Shadow and in freeing Tenar from her service to the Dark Powers, Ged succeeds in restoring proper balance between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and prevents the forces of darkness from taking an improper place among the living. Moreover, when at the

end of *Tombs* the Ring and Sword of Errath-Akbe are joined in the winter city of Havnor, surely we are meant to see the completion of a quest in which the symbols of life are triumphant in the world of the living.

But the completion of the quest at the end of the second volume warns us to anticipate a reversal of some sort in the third. The opening of *The Farthest Shore* occurs in March, and takes place in the Court of the Fountain where "the fountain talked to itself all serene and never ceasing in the sunlight of early spring" (FS, p. 9). To the Court of the Fountain comes Arren—whose name means "sword" (FS, p. 30)—with news that, beginning with the previous winter and continuing on to the Festival of the Lambs (FS, pp. 3–4), the ways of magic are being forgotten. Ged comments on the surprising nature of the news that "the springs of wizardry have run dry" (FS, p. 6) at a time when all—ordinarily—would seem so well with the world: "We have enjoyed the sunlight too long, basking in that peace which the healing of the Ring brought, accomplishing small things, fishing the shallows" (FS, pp. 11–12). Later, the aging Ged, who is now the *archmage*, speaks of the disorder in terms that recall his Fisher King significance: "I feel as if we who sit here talking, were all wounded mortally, and while we talk and talk our blood runs softly from our veins. . . ." (FS, p. 22, ellipsis in original).

The cause of the springs of wizardry running dry, we subsequently learn, is the inverse of the dangers that threatened in *Wizard* and in *Tombs*. In those, the world of death had intruded into the world of the living; in *Shore*, the world of the living is wrongfully intruding into the dark world. In the archipelago of Earthsea, death is not an evil in itself; it is a part of the balance. It is only death's *intrusion* into life that is wrong, that upsets the equilibrium. In the Earthsea trilogy, as Shippey perceptively notes, "the darkness has rights too" (MAEW, p. 153). The rights of darkness, comparatively unimportant in the mythological pattern of the first two books which follow so closely the framework described by Frazer, are central to *Shore*.

In *Wizard*, Ged faces the shadow four times. He is unsuccessful the first three times, and each of those confrontations takes place between the summer solstice—the Night of the Long Dance—and the winter solstice—the Feast of Sunreturn. Only the fourth meeting, which takes place *after* the winter solstice, results happily. Similarly, in *Tombs*, the restoration of equilibrium and the confining of the Dark Powers to their own realm take place in the season of winter—apparently following the solstice.

But the dangers in *Shore* are associated with the time of lengthening days after Sunreturn, the time of triumph in the previous two books. Ged's earlier journeys, which sought to rectify the intrusions of the Dark Powers, took place under the gathering darkness of autumn, but Ged and Arren set out to stop the attempt of Cob to master the kingdom of death on the day of the vernal equinox, as the days grow longer. Moreover, the successful

outcome of their efforts takes place immediately after the summer solstice, the Feast of the Long Dance.⁸ The task of Ged and Arren is accomplished as the days begin to grow shorter, as the imbalance of life and light over death and darkness is brought back into equilibrium.

The Fisher King myth and the vegetation ritual associated with it show primarily the triumph of life over death, and that myth informs the first two volumes of the Earthsea trilogy, but Le Guin's view insists that death and darkness have their place in the scheme of things. Thus, the seasonal pattern of the first two volumes is inverted in *Shore*, for the balance that must be restored in the latter book is that which gives death its proper place—not worshiped, but not usurped.

As *Shore* develops, we find that Cob, in attempting to achieve immortality, has found "the way back from death" (FS, p. 178). He is able to say, "Alone of all men in all time I am Lord of the Two Lands. . . . All must come to me, the living and the dead, I who died and live!" (FS, p. 179).

But Cob's triumph is a grotesque parody of the triumph of life suggested in the wasteland myths. The immortality that Cob seeks is as changeless and terrifying in its way as is the dark world of the Tombs of Atuan. As Le Guin, through Ged, is at pains to note, "Nothing is immortal. . . . That selfhood which is our torment, and our treasure, and our humanity, does not endure. It changes; it is gone, a wave on the sea. Would you have the sea grow still and the tides cease, to save one wave, to save yourself?" (FS, p. 122). More precisely, Ged asks, "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?" (FS, p. 136).

The horror of Cob's struggle to achieve personal immortality, to become changeless and forever himself, is that it paradoxically "dries up the springs" of the living world. The stasis he seeks to place over the world at large is no more than "death without rebirth." True life must change; it "rises out of death" as "death rises out of life" (FS, p. 136). The only true immortality can be found, not in the arid changelessness sought by Cob, but in the incessant fluctuation of the waters of being. "In all the world, in all the worlds, in all the immensity of time, there is no other like each of those streams, rising cold out of the earth where no eye sees it, running through the sunlight and the darkness to the sea. Deep are the springs of being, deeper than life, than death. . . ." (FS, p. 165, ellipsis in original).

Thus, at the book's climax, when Ged and Arren successfully confront Cob, "the Anti-King" (FS, p. 135), they meet him in death's kingdom, "The Dry Place," where he has sought to extend his living control. The references to dryness completely dominate the prose of the section. "The Dry Land" (FS, p. 171) is fed by the "Dry River" (FS, p. 176). The opening Cob has forced between the dead and living worlds "will suck all the light out of the world in the end. All the rivers will be like the Dry River" (FS, p. 181).

To restore the balance at the end of *Shore* requires, not the healing and vivification of Cob, the King of the Dry Land, but rather his death. In the Dry Land, death should properly hold sway, but through Cob's influence, life has intruded on death. When Ged closes the portal between the two worlds, Cob, whose eyes had been mere blind sockets (FS, p. 177), "looked about him . . . with seeing eyes" (FS, p. 185) and "Crossed / With direct eyes to death's other Kingdom."⁹

Both in *Wizard* and in *Tombs*, the withstanding of the Dark Powers was in some way signified by the bringing of water into a dry and barren place. In *Wizard*, Ged made sweet the salty spring of the barren isle where he recovered the first half of the Ring of Errath-Akbe; in *Tombs*, Tenar brings water to save Ged's life. But in *Shore*, the Dry Land truly and necessarily belongs to death, and no water appears in it. When the entrance is shut, "across the unchanging, barren sky a long roll of thunder ran and died away" (FS, p. 184) but no rain falls. The Taoistic paradox so clearly seen by Le Guin is that death must be allowed its kingdom to rule, or there can be no life: "The word must be heard in silence; there must be darkness to see the stars" (FS, p. 121).

Ged and Arren then return from the Dry Land where "they drink dust" (FS, p. 175). As they leave, the changelessness of death is stressed in the prose: "There was no sound. No wind blew. . . . And nothing moved in all the length and breadth of those black mountains except the two mortal souls" (FS, p. 186). At last Arren must carry Ged back to the kingdom of life where "all who ever died, live; they are reborn and have no end, nor will there ever be an end"; they become "the earth and sunlight, the leaves of trees, the eagle's flight" (FS, p. 180). It is only after leaving the Dry Land of death's domain and returning to the mutable and changing world of mortal life that Arren comes to a mountain stream. "There he dropped down and drank, with his face in the water and his hands in the water, sucking up the water into his mouth and into his spirit" (FS, p. 189).

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged confronts the Shadow of the dark side of his own nature and, giving the Shadow his own name, makes himself whole. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the broken halves of the Ring of Errath-Akbe are restored to wholeness. But in *The Farthest Shore*, the circle of life is made complete as the dark forces of death are recognized as the necessary and natural balancing forces to which those of light and life are the left hand.

Notes

1. *Mosaic*, 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1977), 149. All subsequent references are in the text, hereafter MAEW.
2. *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin* (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 1976), p. 32.

3. Author's Introduction to "The Word of Unbinding" and "The Rule of Names" in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 65.
4. April is mentioned in *Tombs of Atuan* (hereafter TA), p. 47; March and May are referred to in *The Farthest Shore* (hereafter FS) on pages 1 and 118, respectively. The equinox is mentioned in FS, p. 32, and seems specifically set in March. Additionally, in "The Rule of Names," set in the archipelago, the opening scene is in an apparently cold December. See *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, p. 73. References in the text to TA, FS, and *A Wizard of Earthsea* (hereafter WE) are to the 1975 Bantam Books' (New York) editions.
5. *From Ritual to Romance* (1919; rpt. Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p. 75.
6. Shippey notes that "Cob" is the Old English word for spider, and ties this fact in with the spider imagery which runs throughout the trilogy. Shippey's interpretation of the spider imagery may be overly simple in that it sees such imagery as signifying only evil. Shippey ignores passages in which spiders are viewed favorably. For example, in *Tombs*, when Ged and Tenar make their escape from the tombs, they are said to be "like two tiny spiders on a great wall" (TA, p. 123). Elsewhere, the absence of cobwebs or of spiders is offered as symbolic of the changeless evil in the Treasure Room of the Tombs (TA, p. 93). The significance which Shippey attaches to Cob's name, of course, does not necessarily contradict that which I attach to it. [Both Shippey's essay and my own were written prior to the publication in late 1979 of Le Guin's *Leese Webster* (New York: Athenaeum). The fact that this children's book has a pleasant, artistic, and "well-balanced" spider as a title character may make Shippey's suggestion regarding Cob's name somewhat less likely; minimally, *Leese Webster* demonstrates that Le Guin does not regularly treat spiders as symbolic of evil or of "imbalance." (Bracketed note added in 1980.)]
7. "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," *Parabola*, 1, No. 4 (Fall, 1976), 44.
8. Shippey erroneously assigns the episode on the rafts immediately before Ged and Arren journey to the Dragons' Run to the time of winter, referring to "the ritual dance of Sun Return" (MAEW, p. 159). Clearly, Shippey misreads; see FS, pp. 117, 126-27. The misreading may partially account for Shippey's failure to note the manifest distinction between FS on the one hand and WE and TA on the other.
9. T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), p. 56.

Conservatism in the Fantasy of Le Guin

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■ Fantasy is a profoundly conservative genre. It usually portrays the preservation of a status quo, looks to the past to sustain the nature and values of the present, and delights in the nature of created things.¹ The Earthsea trilogy of Ursula K. Le Guin—*A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1972) and *The Farthest Shore* (1973)²—offers a striking individual instance of this. This conservatism expresses itself in three modes: balance, moderation, and the celebration of things as they are.

Balance is at the heart of the fantastic world of Earthsea. When the apprentice mage,³ Ged, who is to be the hero of the trilogy, is at the school for wizards on the island of Roke, the Master Hand tells him, “‘You must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard’s power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need’ ” (*WE*, p. 54; see also *FS*, pp. 43, 74–75). It is this balance which (in *A Wizard of Earthsea*) Ged upsets when, in arrogant contest with another apprentice mage, Jasper, he summons up a spirit of the dead. In doing so he looses into the world a hideous black shadow which almost rends him to death (*WE*, p. 71); it takes all the power of the Archmage, Nemmerle of Roke, to save Ged, to banish the shadow from Roke, and to close up the hole that has been made between the realms of life and death. The rest of the book describes Ged’s attempt to restore the balance he has destroyed; and when he finally catches up with the shadow, he does so after voyaging “towards the very centre of that balance, towards the place where light and darkness meet,” and also to where land and sea merge in a unity out of time (*WE*, pp. 174–75, 184–86). In *The Farthest*

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Shore the magician, Cob, refuses to die, refuses that which is the balance of life (*FS*, pp. 188–89), and in doing so upsets the balance of the whole world and all but drains the life from it.

This balance is no static thing; it is part of the mobile fabric of life. In *The Farthest Shore* Ged tells his companion, Prince Arren, “‘Only what is mortal bears life, Arren. Only in death is there rebirth. The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement—an eternal becoming’” (*FS*, p. 145). The balance has to do with a dialectically conceived world, where everything works by contraries. “‘To light a candle is to cast a shadow,’” says the Master Hand (*WE*, p. 54). Only by accepting death can one continue to live: in the dead Ged tells Cob of King Erreth-Akbe, “‘Here is nothing, dust and shadows. There, he is the earth and sunlight, the leaves of trees, the eagle’s flight. He is alive. And all who ever died, live; they are reborn, and have no end, nor will there ever be an end’” (*FS*, p. 189). As the epigraph from “*The Creation of Éa*” in *A Wizard of Earthsea* puts it, “Only in silence the word, / only in dark the light, / only in dying life: / bright the hawk’s flight / on the empty sky” (see also *WE*, pp. 28, 179, 189). The very nature of the fantastic world, Earthsea, depicts a dialectical relation of earth and sea. The archipelago is not quite a “land,” since it is in fragments on an ocean. Yet, it is united in legend and history, and as the huddle of the known world about such a center as Roke, which sends out wizards to all parts of the world to preserve it from harm, it demonstrates the dialectic of unity in multiplicity in that its peoples though often insular and ignorant are yet part of the larger, if often warring, group.

This “dialectical balance” can be seen in the form of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which is artistically the most satisfying book of the trilogy. Although Ged and the theme of the shadow are the central concern, there are many other topics not directly connected with it. Such are the account of Ged’s early life and education on Gont and Roke (*WE*, pp. 13–61); his career as mage of Low Torning and his vain attempt to save the sick child of the fisherman, Pechvarry, from the lands of the dead (pp. 88–93); his departure from Low Torning to save the island from the dragons of Pendor to the west, and the success of his venture (pp. 94–102); the plot of the Lord Benderesk and the Lady Serret on Osskil to persuade him to loose the evil power of the stone called the Terrenon (pp. 118–32); and his encounter with the exiled king and queen on the mid-ocean shoal (pp. 145–52). But for his having loosed the shadow Ged says he would have explored much more of the diversity of Earthsea (p. 176). Unity is thus played against by multiplicity; and yet, the multiplicity has in it the seeds of unity. For Ged’s education gives him both power and temptation (*WE*, pp. 31–35); the attempt to save the dying child is another, if more charitable, kind of the presumption that led him to try to call up a spirit of the dead; his battle with the dragons and his resistance of the old dragon Yevau’s blandishments

demonstrate his courage and purity of heart; his behavior in rejecting the stone of the Terrenon further shows his learned refusal to try to use evil for his own ends—an attempt which would have led to his doom (*WE*, p. 128)—and his meeting with the old king and queen gives him one half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe that is to be central to *The Tombs of Atuan*. In short, what is portrayed in all save the last of these episodes is a moral development which helps make comprehensible Ged's change after the Terrenon adventure from being hunted by the shadow to doing the hunting himself. And that switch, from "Hunted" to "Hunting" (the titles of different chapters) is another instance of the formal balance of the book. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 cover his attempts to flee the shadow, and the last three cover his pursuit of it; and each section is of almost identical length. Again, in the "Hunted" section Ged is in a sense directionless, going anywhere in the hope of escaping the shadow; but, "Hunting," he has an increasing sense of where to trace the shadow: and in the end there is a trans-temporal fusion of these opposites when Ged travels across an empty sea with a fixed direction in mind and meets the shadow on a featureless sandbank, where "He strode forward, away from the boat, but in no direction. There were no directions here, no north or south or east or west, only towards and away" (*WE*, p. 186).

The formal structure of the Earthsea books also expresses the theme of balance. Where in the first and third books Ged is journeying over Earthsea, in *The Tombs of Atuan* he remains in one place throughout, the labyrinth of the dark powers on the island of Atuan in the Kargad lands on the north-east of Earthsea. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* his journeying ends in a traverse of the East Reach, and in *The Farthest Shore* of the West Reach. Much is made of the number nine. There are nine lore masters on Roke,⁴ nine months from the time that Ged leaves Roke after bringing his shadow into the world until he finally defeats it, nine chapters describing his development as a mage from the point of his apprenticeship to Ogion in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and nine great runes on the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. The course Ged follows in the first book, from Gont, via Roke, Low Torning, Pendor, Osskil, Gont, the shoal on which he finds the strange old couple, and Iffish, to the rendezvous with his shadow on the mid-ocean sand beyond the last land of the East Reach, traces out a figure nine over the map of Earthsea; and the significant places he stops at also total nine. In *The Farthest Shore* the form of Ged's journey is that of a nine upside-down and reversed—a figure six, starting at Roke, moving southeast to Hort Town, southwest to Lorbanery, Obehol, Wellogy and the floating town of the raft-people, then north up the West Reach to the Dragons' Run and Selidor: and here again there are nine places visited. The great constellation under the star Gobardon which dominates the sky of the West Reach and is in the shape of the Rune of Ending, Agnen, is in the shape of a figure nine and has

nine stars. In this way two journeys of the first and last books are balanced: one winds up, as it were, while the other winds down. The number nine is traditionally associated with the completion or "winding-up" of a spell (compare *Macbeth* I.iii.35–37: "Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to make up nine. / Peace! The charm's wound up"). In this case it is associated with the making of a maker of spells, a true mage, in terms both of education on Roke and of the spiritual journey of Ged thereafter. Under the aegis of the reversed nine in *The Farthest Shore*, however, Ged's magical power is steadily unwound until at the end he leaves Roke as a mere man.

There is also a degree of formal balance at a thematic level. In the first book the concern is with a personal evil and a personal solution to it: Ged has loosed the dark shadow of his own arrogance (*WE*, p. 76), one which turns out in the end to have his own name; and the story describes how he learns the courage to face and hunt down this shadow and thereby overcome his own evil nature. In *The Tombs of Atuan* the emphasis is both individual and social. Throughout, the young priestess Arha (meaning "The Eaten One") acquires that growth of the self that will enable her to break free from her custodianship of the dark labyrinth which in one way symbolizes the enclosed individual. But here that growth is stimulated and brought to fruition by an outside agency in the form of Ged, who has symbolically penetrated the tunnels of the labyrinth in search of the other half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe (and the uniting of the two halves of the ring represents the marriage of Arha's will with Ged's); and similarly Ged himself could not have escaped from the labyrinth without the help of Arha. In *The Farthest Shore* the moral conflict of the first book has become wholly external, being between the heroic Ged (helped by Arren) and the depraved Cob, and the issue is now social and universal, for Cob is destroying the whole world.

At both the artistic and thematic levels, the second book can be seen as a pivot or midpoint between the other two books. It seems fitting therefore that where the first and third books are centrifugal in character, involving long pursuits, with their object the banishing of beings out of the world, *The Tombs of Atuan* involves Ged's quest for a center, the center of the labyrinth, and the joining together of the long-divorced halves of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. At the end of the book Arha is "reborn" into the world (*TA*, p. 144; see also p. 127).

The trilogy is also informed with the ethic of accepting⁵ or of keeping things as they are, or of allowing them to express their true being—that is, so long as they are good. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged eventually succeeds in taking to himself the shadow he has admitted into the world and in doing so makes himself whole (*WE*, pp. 187, 189); in *The Tombs of Atuan* he recovers the lost half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe and gives Arha the life she should have; and in *The Farthest Shore* he gives Cob the death he is

wrongly resisting, closes the breach made between life and death, and restores being and vitality to Earthsea. The duty of all men, as of mages, is to preserve the Balance. Ged tells Arren,

"Do you see, Arren, how an act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws; and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted the earth is lighter, the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends. The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the balance of the whole. But we, insofar as we have power over the world and over one another, we must *learn* to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility." (FS, pp. 74-75)

By contrast, in the Le Guin canon, there is a much greater emphasis on altering the status quo. In *Planet of Exile* (1966) the last remnants of mankind are dying out on the distant planet they have made their home for six hundred years, and they are able to survive only when they are forced into alliance and ultimate intermarriage with the humanoid *hilfs* of that planet because of the assaults of an army of ravaging Gaal from the north. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), the ambassador Genly Ai eventually succeeds in bringing the backward planet Winter into the galactic federation of the Ekumen. In *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), a man changes the world every time he dreams; normality is never fully restored. In *The Dispossessed* (1976) the scientist Shevek discovers an aspect of time which will revolutionize interstellar transport; and in his own way he initiates a revolution in his planet's society by his very absence from it. The very fact that all three of Le Guin's fantasies are set in one place, Earthsea, where each of her novels creates a different world (and in *The Lathe of Heaven* our own is being fundamentally altered from chapter to chapter), is an index to the conservatism at the heart of the former.

Keeping things as they are means keeping them essentially as they always have been; the past is central. Yet the idiom in which this is done varies, for each age alters the factors in the Balance, or sees different threats to it, or recovers more of the past than was previously known; it is, as it were, a case of tradition and the individual talent. The power of the mage is founded on his knowledge of the names of things in the Old Speech, the speech of Segoy when he created Earthsea, for those are the true names of things and have runic power over the creatures and objects they describe. Ged tells Arha,

"Knowing names is my job. My art. To weave the magic of a thing, you see, one must find its true name out. In my lands we keep our true names hidden all our lives long, from all but those whom we trust utterly; for there is great power, and

great peril, in a name. Once, at the beginning of time, when Segoy raised the isles of Earthsea from the ocean deeps, all things bore their own true names. And all doing of magic, all wizardry, hangs still upon the knowledge—the relearning, the remembering—of that true and ancient language of the Making. There are spells to learn, of course, ways to use the words; and one must know the consequences too. But what a wizard spends his life at is finding out the names of things, and finding out how to find out the names of things.” (TA, pp. 119–20)

The task of the magician is therefore one of recovery.⁶ But the past also exists in the present in the form of the dragons, who still speak in the Old Speech, in the lays and legends and sense of history that are part of the fabric of Earthsea society, and even at the level of the primordial memory—when Arren hears the Old Speech used by the dragon Orm Embar, “he felt always that he was on the point of understanding, almost understanding: as if it were a language he had forgotten, not one he had never known” (FS, pp. 160–61). Yet, while the past and the sense of it are at the heart of life in Earthsea, each generation may produce a new hero; the great figures of legend, Elessar, the Grey Mage of Paln, Erreth-Akbe, are not greater than the mage Ged who is a legend living in the present of which we read.

Most fantasy looks to the past for its values, and not least in the matter of literary indebtedness. The Earthsea trilogy owes much to literary tradition, and quite demonstratively. The concept of Earthsea, with the mapped journey, the nine wizard masters, the great Ring of Erreth-Akbe, the shadow, the sense of the past and of precedent, the frequent reference to lay and legend, the emphasis on language and on magic as a craft look back to Tolkien. The idea of the islands recalls C. S. Lewis’ *Perelandra* (1943) or *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* (1952), or perhaps Book 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, or *The Odyssey*. The theme of the evil shadow is also central in George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895); in *Phantastes* the shadow is similarly released by an act of arrogant disobedience, and in *Lilith* there is also a theme concerning one’s true name. The bestial, taloned form that the shadow first takes as it clings to Ged’s face and tears his flesh is highly reminiscent of the appearance and behavior of some of the horrible creatures in M. R. James’s stories, particularly those in “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas,” “The Tractate Middoth,” and “Mr. Humphreys and his Inheritance.”⁷ The land of the dead, with its lightless towns and silence recalls Dante and more directly James Thomson’s poem *The City of Dreadful Night*. Ged’s voyages in frail boats in *A Wizard of Earthsea* strongly suggest the legendary voyage of St. Brendan, and the society and beliefs described in *The Tombs of Atuan* almost certainly look back to C. S. Lewis’ *Till We Have Faces* (1956). Thus, just as Earthsea is profoundly traditional in character, so too are the books about it. Yet, out of this indebtedness to the past Ursula Le Guin has created a work which is uniquely hers.

The workings of magic in the Earthsea trilogy also express the conservative ethic of the fantasy. The accent is on magic not changing the nature of the world, except in cases of real need; as we have seen, the job of the mage is to preserve the Balance. The arts of Changing and Summoning, whereby a wizard may transform himself or call other beings to him, are to be handled with peculiar care. It is his prideful summoning of Ellassar from the dead that causes Ged all his pain and fear in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. It is possible to change things for a short time and still be able to retract the deed, as Ged turns himself briefly into a dragon at Pendor to destroy the offspring of Yevau (*WE*, p. 97) or into a hawk to escape the servants of the dark powers of the Terrenon on Osskil (*WE*, pp. 131–33); but any longer would have risked permanent transformation. One may use magic to right an imbalance, as Ged slays the young dragons of Pendor or closes the breach Cob has made between the worlds; or to heal the imbalance caused by disease, as he heals the people of the village in the West Hand (*WE*, pp. 158–59); or to show appreciation as he does to the village-woman in *The Tombs of Atuan* for her hospitality by healing the infected udders of her goats (*TA*, pp. 147–48); but it is arrogant and dangerous to attempt to do more. The Master Summoner on Roke teaches his pupils to use spells over wind and sea “only at need, since to summon up such earthly forces is to change the earth of which they are a part. ‘Rain on Roke may be drought in Osskil,’ he said, ‘and a calm in the East Reach may be storm and ruin in the West, unless you know what you are about’ ” (*WE*, pp. 63–64). When in *The Farthest Shore* Arren asks Ged why he does not work marvels with his magic he is told, “ ‘The first lesson on Roke, and the last, is *Do what is needful*. And no more!’ ” (*FS*, p. 142). We recall Ged’s own impatience at the refusal of his early tutor Ogion to do miracles (*WE*, pp. 27–30).

Certain limits are inherent in the working of magic. Many of the true names of things in the Old Speech have been lost: Kurremkarmerruk, the Master Namer of Roke, tells Ged, “ ‘some have been lost over the ages, and some have been hidden, and some are known only to dragons and to the Old Powers of Earth, and some are known to no living creature; and no man could learn them all. For there is no end to that language’ ” (*WE*, p. 57). And as he goes on to say, magic can only work locally, because the nature of Earthsea is such that generalizations are impossible:

“The sea’s name is *inien*, well and good. But what we call the Inmost Sea has its own name also in the Old Speech. Since no thing can have two true names, *inien* can mean only ‘all the sea except the Inmost Sea.’ And of course it does not mean even that, for there are seas and bays and straits beyond counting that bear names of their own. So if some Mage-Seamaster were mad enough to try to lay a spell of storm or calm over all the ocean, his spell must say not only that word *inien*, but the name of every stretch and bit and part of the sea through all the Archipelago and all the Outer Reaches and beyond to where names cease. Thus, that which gives us power to work magic, sets the limits of that power. A mage

can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail. The unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost.” (*WE*, p. 57)

(The last sentence is reminiscent of Ulysses’ speech on degree in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, I. iii, and indeed of the whole Renaissance emphasis on nature and universal order.) And, as Ged tells Arren, magic can be local in another sense: “ ‘Do you know the old saying, *Rules change in the Reaches*? Seamen use it, but it is a wizard’s saying, and it means that wizardry itself depends on place. A true spell on Roke may be mere words on Iffish’ ” (*FS*, p. 80). A further limit on magic is that it can be exhausted or confined. The Archmage Nemmerle loses all his power—and his life—in his actions after Ged has let the shadow into the world. By naming Ged with his true name, the shadow removes for the time his power of wizardry (*WE*, pp. 115–16). Cob drains the powers of mages from the world, and it takes the final exhaustion of Ged’s powers to remove the damage he has done. Ged has to defy fatigue and resist sleep in order to keep together the magically synthesized boat of flotsam and jetsam in which he pursues the shadow (*WE*, pp. 153–56); his fellow-mage Vetch wonders at Ged’s powers in sustaining the magic wind that blows them both in their boat over the sea, where he “felt his own power all weakened and astray” (*WE*, p. 184).

Magic is seen as part of, rather than opposed to, nature and “normality.” A mage is born with his talent, just as another may be a born scholar or warrior. But as with all talents it has to be educated; the young mage is put to school to learn the lore of his craft. Thus we find Ged learning the skills of the Master Changer, the Master Namer, the Master Chanter, the Master Herbal, the Master Windkey, the Master Hand, the Master Summoner, the Master Patternner, and the Master Doorkeeper, just as one might learn French or geometry or history, or do games (compare on games *WE*, pp. 52–53). Primarily what the mage-scholar is bent on discovering is the inmost character of the things of nature (there is little technology in Earthsea)—the names of creatures, objects, forces, plants, and places; their order; how to call them up; how to perform illusory and actual changes with them; the secrets of plants and animals; how to direct such forces as wind and tide; and above all how to respect and preserve the immanent metaphysical balance of nature. Indeed, knowledge of the essence of nature contained in the true names of things in the Old Speech is the most powerful key to magic. To do magic aright, the mage must be in sympathy with nature. Ged comes to believe “that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, and in later years he strove long to

learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees" (*WE*, p. 92). Thus magic becomes bound up with the created world, "the weaving of spells is itself interwoven with the earth and the water, the winds, the fall of light, of the place where it is cast" (*FS*, p. 80; see also pp. 41–42).

And, further to portray the magic as moderate, it is emphasized that some of the most difficult things in the world are done not only by magic but out of one's own nature. It is not only magic that enables Ged to defeat his shadow, but courage, integrity, and insight; and his defeat of Cob also asks a deep love of the world and heroic self-sacrifice. We learn, too, of Ged's friend Vetch that though he was a skilled mage, "a greater, unlearned skill he possessed, which was the art of kindness" (*WE*, p. 52). Similarly, when Ged has to try to enter the school of Roke and cannot step over the threshold, he finds that no magic will help him, but only the simple act of asking the Doorkeeper for help (*WE*, pp. 44, 83–84). Frequently the wizard has to depend on the help of ordinary men, as Ged needs Arha to escape from the Tombs of Atuan (*TA*, pp. 127, 128, 131) and could not have found Cob without the assistance of Arren (*FS*, pp. 102, 131, 147–48).

The Earthsea trilogy is in large part panegyric, a celebration of things as they are. Centrally, of course, this is done through the theme of the Balance, but there are other modes. *The Farthest Shore* is specifically about the loss of identity caused by Cob in the world, and its recovery when he is given, in his death, the true self he has so long refused. During Cob's refusal all meaning and distinctiveness has been largely drained out of Earthsea. The witch on Lorbanery who has lost her power tells Ged and Arren, "I lost all the things I knew, all the words and names. . . . There is a hole in the world and the light is running out of it. And the words go with the light" (*FS*, p. 92; see also p. 163). As mages all over the world forget their powers and lose their knowledge of the Old Speech, so eventually do some of the great wizards on Roke itself, the Summoner, the Changer and the Chanter (*FS*, pp. 148–54). The singer at the Long Dance of the raft-people forgets the words of his song; the dragons can no longer speak (*FS*, pp. 136–37, 157–58, 176). The lustre has gone from the famous blue dyes of Lorbanery (p. 88), and as for the men themselves, Arren observes, "They complain about bad times, but they don't know when the bad times began; they say the work's shoddy, but they don't improve it; they don't even know the difference between an artisan and a spell-worker, between handcraft and the art magic. It's as if they had no lines and distinctions and colours clear in their heads. Everything's the same to them, everything's grey" (p. 95). When Ged asks him what he thinks they are missing, Arren replies, "Joy in life." But Arren himself comes to feel similarly, as he loses all faith in Ged and magery (pp. 107–08), and as he emptily reflects while he is with the raft-people,

He knew now why this tranquil life in sea and sunlight on the rafts seemed to him like an after-life or a dream, unreal. It was because he knew in his heart that reality was empty: without life, or warmth, or colour, or sound: without meaning. There were no heights or depths. All this lovely play of form and light and colour on the sea and in the eyes of men, was no more than that: a playing of illusions on the shallow void. (pp. 129–30)

But when at last he is free of the darkness caused by Cob and sees the dragons “soaring and circling on the morning wind” above the islands of the Dragons’ Run,

his heart leapt up with them with a joy, a joy of fulfilment, that was like pain. All the glory of mortality was in that flight. Their beauty was made up of terrible strength, and utter wildness, and the grace of reason. For these were thinking creatures, with speech, and ancient wisdom: in the patterns of their flight there was a fierce, willed concord. (pp. 155–56)

And on Selidor, which seems to him at first a dead land, he is brought by Ged to “‘Look at the hills . . . with the living grass on them, and the streams of water running,’ ” and to feel with him that “In all the world, in all the worlds, in all the immensity of time, there is no other like each of those streams, rising cold out of the earth where no eye sees it, running through the sunlight and the darkness to the sea. Deep are the springs of being, deeper than life, than death . . . ” (p. 174; see also pp. 174–75).

In all three books of the Earthsea trilogy, evil is a nonentity, a shadow, not substance. The evil powers in *The Tombs of Atuan* are the Nameless Ones; Cob’s evil reduces people to shadows of themselves and eventually brings them into the land of shadows. Magic is centrally concerned with the identities of “things as they are” in that it depends on knowing their true names, which are the names of their original making. Throughout the trilogy we are made to feel a simple delight in the natures of things—a delight which is certainly “thematic” but springs from the author herself⁸ and her own pleasure in creation, or making, as Tolkien put it: in a sense she is analogous to her own Segoy and the creative joy he had in making Earthsea. So great is Le Guin’s power of realization of all the different places visited in *A Wizard of Earthsea* that she can make the sketchiest details conjure up a whole. When Ged leaves Low gtnrning after saving it from the threat of the dragons of Pendor,

He went in a rowing-boat with a couple of young fishermen of Low Torning, who wanted the honour of being his boatmen. Always as they rowed on among the craft that crowd the eastern channels of the Ninety Isles, under the windows and balconies of houses that leant out over the water, past the wharves of Nesh, the rainy pastures of Dromgan, the malodorous oil-sheds of Geath, word of his deed had gone ahead of him. (*WE*, p. 104)

Each island has its character: even the bleak shoal where the old royal

couple live receives an unforgettable thumbnail portrait (*WE*, p. 149). The result is that we feel that in the less than two hundred pages of this book we have covered an enormous canvas of highly individualized people and places, far more than (arguably) we sense in all the eleven hundred of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. And all this comes from the thoroughness with which the author has seen things, the unsentimental realism with which she has presented them,⁹ the metaphoric mode whereby she has so mingled the fantastic and the real that they give life to one another,¹⁰ the originality of her descriptions and the re-creative force of her style (for example, *WE*, p. 29 and pp. 22–23, 37), and running through it all a lonely impulse of delight in all that is and is made.

Notes

1. See also my *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 7–8.
2. References are to the Gollancz (London) editions, published respectively in 1971, 1972 and 1973, and in one omnibus volume in 1977, and cited hereafter in the text as *WE*, *TA* and *FS*.
3. On the use of the word “mage,” rather than “magician,” in the trilogy, see T. A. Shippey, “The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy,” *Mosaic*, 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1977), 147–50.
4. And his mage-tutor, Ogion, tells Ged that “ ‘Mastery is nine times patience’ ” (*WE*, p. 28).
5. On acceptance see also *FS*, pp. 36, 130, 147.
6. Compare J. R. R. Tolkien on “Recovery” as an essential feature of fantasy, in his *Tree and Leaf* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 51–53.
7. Particularly reminiscent is that in the last: see *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: Edward Arnold, 1942), pp. 355–56.
8. See also her “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown,” in Peter Nicholls, ed., *Science Fiction at Large* (London: Gollancz, 1976).
9. Compare Shippey, pp. 154–56, 157–58.
10. See, for example, *WE*, pp. 52–53 (magical and “natural” boat-handling), pp. 55–56 (magical hide-and-seek), pp. 58–60 and 88 (on the pet otak and its hunting of mice in the grass). Typical is the compound of “A mage's name is better hidden than a herring in the sea, better guarded than a dragon's den” (p. 83).

The Launching Pad

(continued from page 204)

an overview of the issue since he has worked closely with it.

The winner of the 1980 Pilgrim Award is Peter Nicholls, whose long career with *Foundation*, both as the first administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation and editor of the journal of the organization, has been highlighted by his general editorship of *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, available from Doubleday. President Joe DeBolt gave the award, and Professor Michael McClintock of the University of Montana, chairman of this year's award committee, correctly spoke of the *Encyclopedia* as the finest and most complete recent reference volume available to scholars in the field.

Professor Douglas Robillard of the English Department at the University of New Haven has announced that the special issue of *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, which he and I co-edited, will go to the printer sometime in August. Subscribers to *Extrapolation* may receive a *free* copy (the journal is distributed free of charge, primarily to libraries) by writing to Professor Robillard at the University in West Haven, CT 06516. It should prove a very provocative issue. My thanks to Professor Robillard for asking me to help him.

Have a good fall, and if you have an idea for an article (or wish to reply to something in one already published), don't just think about it, write it.

TDC

BOOKS

Le Guin's Latest Novel: A New Beginning Place?

The Beginning Place, by Ursula K. Le Guin. Harper & Row, 1980. \$8.95

Reviewers of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* agree that she has captured the love story of Hugh Rogers and Irene Pannis, two isolated young people caught by the uncertainties and barrenness of modern America. One such critic, John Updike in the *New Yorker*, has hailed Le Guin's arrival into the mainstream of American fiction, praising her portrayal of "the littered suburban sprawl outside an unnamed city." Edward Gallagher refers to that environment as the "American Everycity." As far as they go, no one can disagree with these judgments.

Although Updike does mention in passing the "moral and psychological complexity" of her story, the danger of emphasizing the contemporary setting—where the gate to the twilight land of Tembreabrezi lies in the "woods on the far side of the waste fields"—lies in reducing *The Beginning Place* to social and psychological realism which merely records the frustrations of youthful frustration into a painful adult world. Certainly that element is present, but it is only half the coin. The second danger is to oversimplify Tembreabrezi into some kind of never-never land in which Hugh and Irene try to escape the outside world and all too simply fall in love. Gallagher places it "just off the edge of the paved world . . . [where you] don't see it unless you are seeking love." The *Time* critic boldly asserts that it is Adam and Eve all over again, tempered with the certain knowledge that "there is always a snake in the grass." Updike, as might be expected, attaches the land to the "vaguely medieval world" of Malory, Tennyson, William Morris, and most recently Tolkien before suggesting that it is "full of subtle and just touches" if read as "a metaphor of sexuality emerging

from masturbatory solitude into the perilous challenge and exchange of heterosexual love."

What these readings seem to ignore is that Ms. Le Guin has chosen her details so effectively that both the suburban and twilight worlds ("reality" and fantasy) fuse together into a single complex symbolism which not only explores the nature of love but the fear and inadequacies that surround it everywhere. For example, Hugh is the victim of his sexually frustrated mother who has moved them to thirteen houses in five states during the seven years since her husband walked out on them. Except for a growing interest in the occult which seems an inadequate substitute, she dominates Hugh's life, insisting especially that he be home at night, as though she is afraid of whatever the dark contains. As a checker in Sam's Thrift E Market, Hugh judges the customers whom he meets there: "They were stuck. They got nowhere." He makes much the same appraisal of his mother when he momentarily sees "her, like the armchair, as simply inadequate, trying hard to do a job she wasn't up to" Thus one night he flees, passing for the first time through the gate into Tembreabrezi.

One is not surprised to find Irene's world more sordid than that which the latent tensions between Hugh and his mother hint at. Her mother has married a second time to a man—Victor—who treats sexuality as though it were like blowing the nose or emptying the bowels—the "material ["the fertile cells"] has to be cleared out regularly or they make poison. . . ." He has tried to molest Irene. She has left home, though communicating with her mother, and lives with a young unmarried couple whose sexual affair is breaking up. She vows that she will never fall in love.

For years Irene has been able to enter Tembreabrezi, knows the people who inhabit its Mountain Town, speaks their language, and is called "child" because she does not share their concerns. Childlike she may be, but she knows that the village is no longer visited, that the roads to it are closed, and that its inhabitants fear some unnamed thing in the mountains to the North. When she becomes aware that Hugh has entered the land, she tries to drive him away, but to no avail, for the land has some special meaning for him—he calls it home—and, indeed, he is the champion for whom its inhabitants wait. She will act their interpreter in speaking with him, but she rejects him, saying that he is a stranger who does not belong there.

Not only does her attitude complicate reading *The Beginning Place* as an idyllic love story, but also when Hugh does fall in love, it is with Allia, simpering daughter of Lord Horn, who is the leading citizen of the Town—more important even than the Master, to whom Irene is attracted, though he becomes terrified when he tries to leave the place with her on the road to the North. Of Allia, Hugh declares: ". . . she had come to him, and his eyes had cleared to see her. Seeing her he saw the world, for the first time. . . ."

At this point the narrative assumes the structure of a knightly quest.

Hugh is given a sword, Allia wants to go with him, but the Master will not allow it. Irene goes with him. Rather than any heroic quality, however, exhaustion and uncertainty accompany them to the "High Step" in the mountain. Irene becomes the leader. That night the fear embodies itself, first in the hideous sounds and then the sight of a "white, wrinkled" dragon. They flee into the forest, where he weeps and she comforts him. Next day she calls the dragon from its cave, and Hugh kills it, although he is injured.

If those passages dealing with the tangled suburbs of the city are angry or bitter in Le Guin's precise and striking imagery and detail, then this portion of the narrative seems like a travesty—a parody of the heroic quest and romantic love. As though to emphasize this tone, after the death of the dragon, the two make love, and Le Guin assures the reader that they "came to climax together." Both also acknowledge the dragon as one parent (Irene calls it "her") and the "King" as the other.

But this act resolves nothing. Rather than return to the Town, they seek the gate to the outside world. At one point they admit that they are lost. Once through the gate, when an automobile stops to help, Irene reflects, "That it might yet be, that it might always be what she feared. . .": certainly the innuendo suggests that she still fears rape. Yet she takes Hugh by the hand and leads him into the "new" world.

The end comes too quickly. Hugh's injuries are cured, and Irene finds them an apartment—Hugh's mother had his suitcase waiting—and explains that the people from whom they will rent "are really nice. They aren't married either." Again, she has taken the apartment for herself; she offers it to Hugh; he is surprised but agrees. After an exploration of the parameters of love and fear, such an ending seems hasty, almost facetious, albeit up-to-date. One could cite other small details throughout the narrative which are not always satisfactory. Such minor flaws do no major damage to Le Guin's basic theme—the search for a basis for meaningful love. Her achievement lies in the success of her attempt to fuse realism and fantasy into a single complex symbolism exploring the breadth of the theme. She has, so to speak, used both sides of the coin to reveal and dramatize the fear and loneliness which steal the chance for love. Indeed, with this novel Ursula K. Le Guin may well have found a beginning place for an ever more mature act of fiction.

T. D. C.

Valuable New Bibliographic Studies

Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors: A Bibliography of First Printings of Their Fiction and Selected Nonfiction, by L. W. Currey, G. K. Hall, 1979. \$50.00.

Aiming his work at both scholars and collectors, Currey has produced what is to date the finest and most complete description, both hardcover

and paperback, of the major English-language contributors to science fiction and fantasy. He includes a most helpful listing of pseudonyms. In his introduction he states as his purposes (1) "to present for each subject author a complete record of all fiction and selected nonfiction published in book, pamphlet, or broadside format through 31 December 1977; and (2) to present descriptions which will enable the reader to identify both first printings and any other significant printings or editions." This he does with admirable thoroughness. The single disappointment to one interested in the early history of the related fields is that, quite understandably, he has had to restrict his inclusion of early writers to such major figures as Edgar Rice Burroughs, George Allan England, Homer Eon Flint, George Chetwynd, Griffith-Jones (George Griffith), Austin Hall, William Hope Hodgson, Montague Rhodes James, Fred T. Jane, and Garrett P. Serviss. Such a limitation, while obviously necessary, may have a tendency to set up a canon among those early writers and certainly distorts one's appreciation of how widespread both science fiction and fantasy were as early as the turn of the century. One says this on the basis of the exclusion of such writers as Rider Haggard, Jack London, Arthur B. Reeve, and Stewart Edward White, for example.

Perhaps those exclusions simply point up the need for someone to undertake a similar volume for the earlier period. In like manner, one cannot tell from the entries how many of the works were originally published (serialized) in magazines. Granted that such citation is outside the stated purposes of the book, its exclusion underscores how much work bibliographers have yet to do for two reasons: as early as the first decades of the century, many of the science-fiction and fantasy works did appear in magazine form (and thereby gained a larger audience) and, secondly, in the conversion from magazine to book form, perhaps especially in recent years, a comparison of texts would lead to some interesting insights about both the individual authors and the field in general. To emphasize these points may result in part from personal interest. In no way is it meant to detract from the high quality of Currey's work, which is a bibliographic cornerstone for any scholar, collector, or library.

In addition to the novels and short story collections by the subject authors, Currey has included other related titles: "(1) edited books of fiction; (2) translated books of fiction; (3) associational fiction (books by others based on the subject author's fictional work); (4) nonfiction relating to science fiction and fantasy, autobiography, interviews, letters, and journals (other nonfiction, poetry, and verse plays are excluded); and (5) biographical, bibliographical, and critical works concerning the subject author." The nonfiction which his title refers to includes works "dealing with the fantasy genre only." All of these categories list only books or pamphlets. No articles published in periodicals are included. Once again

the exclusion is understandable, especially in view of other general or single-author works available. The end date for those critical materials included is "through June 1979."

He is quite correct when he concludes that his "compilation has no bibliographical antecedents in the science fiction and fantasy genres, or for that matter, within the entire field of modern popular fiction." He covers 215 authors thoroughly, and he has provided not only an invaluable single volume but a guide for future work in the field. Nor should one overlook the fact that he gives David G. Hartwell special credit for "editorial assistance."

Clifford D. Simak: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography, by Muriel R. Becker. G. K. Hall, 1980. \$18.00.

Theodore Sturgeon: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography, by Lahna F. Diskin, G. K. Hall, 1980. \$16.00.

Andre Norton: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography, by Roger C. Schlobin. G. K. Hall, 1980. \$12.00.

These are the first three titles in the series "Masters of Science Fiction and Fantasy" published by G. K. Hall and edited by Lloyd Currey. All three compilers should be commended for their thoroughness; they have provided models which, if followed by subsequent individuals dealing with other writers, should produce the most distinguished single-author bibliographical series available to scholars. Essentially the formats are the same; each is divided into four basic units. First, of course, comes the science fiction itself, listed chronologically by year and month; helpful here are both the listings of stories in each of the author's own anthologies and the listing of subsequent reprints of individual titles in other collections. The second portion of each book is devoted to "Miscellaneous Media." In the case of Simak, this includes, primarily, his early magazine fiction and his later adaptations of stories for NBC radio. In the case of Sturgeon, the majority of works are television adaptations, although both he and Simak adapted their works for the NBC Radio series, *X Minus One*. Andre Norton's poetry—one collection from 1943 and three from 1976—is listed. "Part C" of each book is devoted to the nonfiction of the author. Although the final standard section, "Part D," varies somewhat in each volume, it is devoted to the critical, bibliographic, and biographical studies of the authors, as well as reviews of their works. Significantly, this is the one section in which each item is annotated. The authors have been eminently objective in those annotations, thereby giving them greater value. Although Muriel Becker includes a special appendix in which she explains

Books

(validly) why certain reviews have been excluded, and although Schlobin acknowledges that his fourth section includes only "Selected Reviews," one feels safe in asserting that the majority of the entries in "Part D" of the three volumes involve reviews of individual works (this is an impression, not a precise count). If this impression is true of three such significant authors, then the need for more extensive study of all individual authors is underscored. The fact that "Part D" is the only one annotated also points up a further need in science-fiction scholarship—namely, a motif index such as that done by Stith Thompson in folklore. Until such a project is undertaken and completed—perhaps by SFRA—study in the field is going to remain fragmented and, unfortunately, duplicated as individuals go to the same works time and again. (The situation has an analogy in the stories chosen for anthologizing. The same ones appear over and over again, to the neglect and eventual disappearance of others that are equally fine in themselves and perhaps more important historically.) Perhaps the most satisfactory aide now available is Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder*, currently being revised for a second edition. Certainly the problem will not be solved by having individuals simply annotating the stories in a given magazine and publishing the results separately.

But such matters are not directly pertinent to the three volumes at hand. Both the Simak and Sturgeon volumes contain brief chronologies of the authors' lives, while Professor Becker has also included what seems to be the edited version of a two-part interview with Simak which is very helpful. All of the introductions are sound, and each volume has indexes to the works of the author as well as to the critical articles. As stated earlier, these three volumes start what should be an invaluable series.

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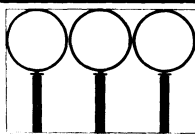
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