The "Mother Tongue" in a World of Sons

Language and Power in The Earthsea Cycle

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Fantasy, Le Guin, and the World of Earthsea

Fantasy, as a genre of literature, has been struggling to find its place within American literature since Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* was published in 1819. The widely heralded authors Nathanial Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville all used fantastic elements in their fiction in the nineteenth century, but the works in which these elements are included are primarily rooted in established reality. The nineteenth century saw a wide number of minor authors writing mythical works for children, but most of these made little impact on more sophisticated readers. The emergence of *The Wizard of Oz* in 1900, however, brought about an explosion of American imitators attempting to recapture the work's accessibility to children and sophisticated readers alike. Brian Attebery claims that these early twentieth- century imitators failed to rise to the level of *The Wizard of Oz*, being "raw and out of focus or distant and unreal" (135). As this time of ineffectual children's fantasy in America began to move into the mid-nineteenth century, writers of fantasy intended for adults began to emerge. The most notable of these authors are James Thurber and Ray Bradbury. These men successfully integrated fantastic elements into narratives intended for contemporary adults.

Attebery defines fantasy as "[a]ny narrative which includes as a significant part of its make-up some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law" (2). This definition makes significant distinctions between fantasy and science fiction as well as fantasy and works with fantastic elements. Unlike fantasy, science fiction is most often delineated by a speculative setting and plot that could be made possible through

technology within natural law. Whether fantasy includes magic, creatures outside of the realm of possibility, or worlds that could not exist, fantasy violates the natural principles that govern space, time, and matter. Some works of literature include elements that violate the natural law, but they would not be considered works of fantasy because fantastic elements do not provide a significant foundation for the work.

Though authors like Thurber and Bradbury saw success through writing works that would be considered fantasy for adults, the genre of fantasy has continued to suffer under the stigma of being considered children's literature. Contemporary fantasy unintentionally been neglected by critical anthologies and journals that do not specialize in this genre.

However, this genre has lately been receiving more attention from scholars. Though general anthologies of literature rarely include works of fantasy, Norton and other publishers have created critical anthologies devoted solely to science fiction and fantasy. Literary journals that focus only on science fiction and fantasy have also helped to establish fantasy as a serious genre of literature. While most of the critical attention on fantasy has come primarily from specialized critics, mainstream critics such as Harold Bloom have found the genre of fantasy to be a fertile ground for criticism. The growing interest in fantasy within the critical community has validated future discussions of fantastic works.

Contemporary fantasy has found its epicenter in England, but the relatively brief fantasy tradition in the United States has produced one of the premier contemporary writers in the genre. Where the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are the standard for fantasy and science fiction in Britain, Ursula Le Guin's works have established her as

one of the standard-bearers for the genre in America. Harold Bloom calls her "the best contemporary author of literary fantasy" (1), claiming that she "more than Tolkien, has raised fantasy into high literature" (9). Le Guin's sophisticated and beautiful fiction lends credence to Bloom's claim of Le Guin's supremacy over the genre of fantasy.

A great part of the appeal of Le Guin's writing is an understanding of the "other" that was fostered in her during childhood. Ursula Le Guin, née Kroeber, was surrounded by various cultures from a very young age. Her father was Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkley. He was renowned for his study of the Arapaho Indians. Le Guin's mother had a master's degree in psychology from University of California, Berkeley and was also deeply interested in Native American stories, writing *Ishi, Last of His Tribe* four years before her daughter would publish *A Wizard of Earthsea*. As a young girl growing up in Berkley California, Ursula Kroeber saw people of many different races pass through her house as they worked with her father on anthropological projects. This exposure to perspectives outside of traditional Western culture is reflected in Le Guin's later sympathy with oppressed people groups and adherence to Eastern philosophy.

After completing her high school education in Berkley, Le Guin decided to move east to attend Radcliffe College, where she received her B.A. in 1951. From Radcliffe, she moved to Columbia University, where she earned a master's degree in French literature. In 1953, she went to France to continue her studies. While on the ship to France, she met Charles Le Guin whom she married the same year.

Le Guin's first work of fiction was published in 1966 under the title *Racannon's World.* Two years later, the first book of her critically acclaimed The Earthsea Cycle, *A*

Wizard of Earthsea, was published. This work is framed as a coming of age story, but the story's Jungian themes and focus on the Taoist principle of balance led to the book's acceptance by children as well as literary critics (Reid n. pag.).

In 1969, *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published. This work did much to establish Le Guin as a feminist author. The novel is set on the planet Winter, which is populated by a society of androgens. In her essay, "Is Gender Necessary," published in 1976, Le Guin explains that *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a thought experiment about the universal elements shared by men and women that make them human. She claims in the essay that, in writing this experimental novel, she was attempting to exploit the fallacy of gender roles in society (*Dancing* 9, 10). Though this essay was written in response to the negative criticism the novel received for not being a consistently feminist work, critics now viewed her as a feminist writer.

The second of the Earthsea novels, *The Tombs of Atuan*, was also viewed as a feminist work, but like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it received scathing reviews for its ostensibly equivocal stance on patriarchal society. In this work, Le Guin tells of Tenar, a young woman who has been required to live among the ruins of an ancient city to satisfy the gods. Though the novel was abused by critics for its seeming ambiguity about male dominance by feminist critics, the tale seems to be providing a sharp criticism of the imprisonment which a patriarchal society can impose upon women.

Nearly twenty years after the third book of The Earthsea Cycle, Le Guin published the fourth installment to the series, *Tehanu.* Like *The Tombs of Atuan*, *Tehanu* has Tenar as the protagonist. This novel is focused less on adventure and a physical journey than it is on the psychological passage of the scarred young Tehanu. Le Guin

relates in her essay, "Earthsea Revisioned," that she wrote *Tehanu* partly to operate outside of the typically male-centered system of archetypes in Western myth and to replace them with a more universal structure. *Tehanu* reveals Le Guin's shift from passive feminist to one of affirmative action ("Revisioned").

Though Le Guin eventually attempts to write outside of the male-dominated structure of Western myth, she recognizes the rich heritage of both Eastern and Western fiction in the genre that she has chosen. Le Guin places her works in the tradition of fantastic classics such as *Mahabharata*, *Thousand and One Nights*, *Beowulf*, and the works of Kipling and Tolkien (*Wave* 266). Speculative fiction has been making a resurgence in popularity since the mid-nineteenth century, but the primary elements of the genre of fantasy can be seen not only in the stories Le Guin recognizes as precursors to her own fiction, but also in the ancient literature of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Norway. Though the genre of fantasy has drifted in and out of vogue within the literary community, highly canonical works such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Odyssey, Thousand and One Nights, Beowulf,* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* give credence to works containing fantastic elements.

Within this heritage of fantasy, Le Guin has established her own distinct place within the genre. While Le Guin's fiction is almost invariably are set on another planet, her writings are replete with cultural commentary. Le Guin is most notably an advocate for egalitarianism. In her essay, "American SF and The Other," Le Guin notes that much of the science fiction written before her first novel shows antagonistic and condescending spirit towards "the cultural and the racial Other" (*Language* 94). As opposed to these novels, Le Guin pens nuanced literary fiction that recognizes the worth of every self-

aware being. Though she is characterized primarily as feminist in the social realm, Le Guin's works suggest that she would be very much opposed to any sort of segregation, as her fiction is centered on people and aliens whose actions and dispositions resemble a multitude of cultures.

Le Guin's culturally sensitive content is deeply affected by Le Guin's adherence to Taoist philosophy, and in her canon, Le Guin's Taoist perspective is most apparent in The Earthsea Cycle. J.R. Wytenbroek insists that Le Guin does not wield her Taoism in this series like many of her contemporaries were using their Christianity in their own works:

> Le Guin writes from *within* a Taoist consciousness, rather than simply applying an external knowledge of a religion to her writings . . . her Taoist ideas, rather than becoming the subject of her novels, become deeply interwoven with and form a basic element of many of her themes, characters, and even the structures of the plots and novels themselves. (173)

Indeed, Le Guin's Taoist perspective can be seen even in the name of the world she has created. She uses the binary relationship of earth and sea to frame the books in The Earthsea Cycle within the circuitry of binaries. The interconnection of binaries is central to Taoist thought: "Thus Something and Nothing produce each other; The difficult and the easy complement each other; the long and the short offset each other" (*Tzu* 2.5). In this thought, binaries are complements in a constant, delicate balance.

This expression of Taoist principles in Le Guin's writing reveals her discomfort with typical Western mythology. In the first three novels of The Earthsea Cycle, Le Guin

subconsciously challenges the traditional masculine hierarchies found in much of the speculative fiction written before the Cycle, while her stretching of these boundaries becomes a more conscious effort in the last three novels of the series. Her feminist views are well blended with her Taoist depiction of codependent and equal binaries in The Earthsea Cycle, and she clearly opposes the masculine form of communication by lauding the disposition of harmony rather than domination in conversation. Though Le Guin's feminism is implicit throughout the first three novels of The Earthsea Cycle, she received negative criticism for not explicitly challenging patriarchal hierarchies. This criticism, along with her readings on Jungian archetypes, led to Le Guin's conscious reversal of the male-centered archetypes she had been using in the first three novels of the Cycle. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Le Guin has established herself within the genre of speculative fiction by artfully challenging the typically male structure of the genre.

Her works do lend themselves to case studies in structural theories. These theories can provide a common vocabulary for criticism focusing on her use of language and feminism. The structuralist writings of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes are helpful in the discussion of the power of language and myth in The Earthsea Cycle. An understanding of Saussure's initial recognition of the separation between the signifier and the signified in speech is useful in understanding the difference between common speech and the speech of magic in Earthsea.

Scholars on Ursula Le Guin's fantasy and science fiction have discussed the power that language holds in the worlds that she creates, but the seemingly obvious connection between her work and structuralist theories of languages has not been

thoroughly explored by critics. While structuralist theories can be helpful in the exploration of Le Guin's conscious attempt to act outside of patriarchal myth in *Tehanu*, the theories of Jung are more relevant to the analysis of this novel. Structural theories and the theories of Jung both fit into Le Guin's views of balance and integration. Using these theories as context for investigating her literature can help to unearth how she structures her stories in the Cycle.

This examination of language and myth as power in The Earthsea Cycle requires that some consideration be given to the fourth book of the Cycle where Le Guin overtly questions the traditional values applied to language and myth. The primary focus of this thesis will be on the first three novels, because these books show how Le Guin's views on gender can be discerned through her depiction of the power and balance of language rather than through the conscious effort found in *Tehanu* to reverse patriarchal archetypes. However, this reversal cannot be excluded from the discussion. This fourth book of the Cycle reveals an attempt to remove Earthsea from the structure of Western myth that Le Guin deems to be symptomatic of patriarchal dominance. Le Guin's distancing of this novel from Western archetypes necessitates evaluation in this thesis.

Besides The Earthsea Cycle novels, two other primary sources must be mentioned: *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the short story "She Unnames Them." *The Left Hand of Darkness* is one of Le Guin's science fiction novels, but its inclusion is necessary because of its exploration of the elements that are foundational to humanity without respect to gender. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is about a genderless society, and in the examination of Le Guin's views of gender roles, this book is essential in detailing what she views as human traits shared between both genders. The short story "She

Unnames Them" is also central to the subjects of women and language. This story gives a fictional account of Eve before the Fall of Man. She finds words to be too constricting, so she begins to unname things. She views language as a male construction, and she feels free only when she can step outside of this construction.

Le Guin herself provides a wealth of commentary on her own writing that illuminates her views on language, archetypes and feminist issues. Le Guin has written and spoken widely about her fiction and her personal beliefs, but two oral presentations are particularly helpful: her commencement address to the students at Bryn Mawr and her lecture "Earthsea Revisioned." She outlines her theory of the mother tongue in her commencement address. This theory is critical to the understanding of Le Guin's feminism and her view on speech and communication. Likewise, "Earthsea Revisioned" is a necessary explanation of why she is writing the last three books of The Earthsea Cycle and how she is intending to make her feminist views more explicit than in the previous three books.

Outside of theory and Le Guin's own nonfiction, there have been many scholarly articles, and a few books, published about her writing and the genre of speculative fiction. Brian Attebery's book, *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature,* is an important work for placing Le Guin within the context of American fantasy. This book traces the genre in American fiction starting with Washington Irving and ending with Le Guin. She is lauded by Attebery in this book, where he argues that Le Guin "has herself written the most challenging and richest American fantasy to date . . . She . . . has absorbed Tolkien, comprehended him, and gone on in her own direction" (162). Attebery views Le Guin's fantasy as the culmination of the genre in America. He observes how her

fiction operates as myth, and praises her for operating within the mythic tradition while challenging the genre of fantasy with her new take on magic and her focus on harmony.

Where Attebery focuses on Le Guin's place within American fantasy, Elizabeth Cummins' book, *Understanding Ursula Le Guin*, delves deeper into the specifics of Le Guin's works and the worlds she creates. Each chapter of the book focuses on a different fictitious world created by Le Guin beginning with the world of Earthsea. This book puts the intricacies of Earthsea in the context of all the other fictional worlds that Le Guin created.

A study of Le Guin's structural view of language and myth, as found in her non-fiction, is helpful in establishing a base for later the study on the power of language and myth in The Earthsea Cycle. The explication of Le Guin's structural views in this first chapter will guide the criticism in later chapters focusing on language and myth by exploring Saussure's sign theory for the purpose of later showing how Le Guin uses the disconnect between the signifier and the signified to inform her depiction of language in The Earthsea Cycle. The theories of Levi-Strauss and Barthes will also be used as a means of further explaining the structural belief that a word has meaning only within its supporting language structure. This will further set the foundation for my discussion on the dichotomy between ordinary speech and the speech that leads to magic in The Cycle. The nature and role of myth as defined by Jung will help form the conclusion of this chapter. This will provide context for my later chapter exploring Le Guin's conscious attempt to challenge patriarchal archetypes in the last three novels of The Earthsea Cycle.

The next chapter will draw from the structural theory defined in the previous chapter to begin an exploration of how the common speech in Le Guin's Earthsea has a

separation of signifier and signified while the language of the Making used in magic has no such separation. Though this separation does not exist in the speech of magic, Earthsea is depicted as a structure itself wherein each thing is defined by its place within the structure or balance of all things in the world. I will be focusing on the names of people and of things to show how the power in the speaking of their common names and their true names differ.

Chapter three explores how Le Guin's structural depiction of Earthsea is consistent with her feminism. Le Guin's use of circuitry within binaries will be analyzed to show how neither binary should be privileged. Some pairs represented in her use of binaries are good/evil, light/darkness, wizard/commoner, and man/woman. Le Guin depicts these binaries as being in a balance with each half of the binary seamlessly informing the other half. This depiction of the equality of binaries is applied to the man/woman binary, showing that man is not greater than woman in Earthsea, but that they are a necessary part of each other.

Ending this chapter will be an examination of how Le Guin's theory of the mother tongue can be applied to the first three books of the Earthsea Cycle to reveal the novels' consistency with her feminism. These novels have been attacked by critics for not expressing her feminism, but using her theory of the mother tongue, her feministic values can be clearly seen.

The final chapter will discuss how critics' attacks on her lack of ostensible feminism and the writings of Carl Jung influenced Le Guin to "revision" Earthsea. In her short essay, "Revisioning Earthsea," written between shortly after the publication of *Tehanu*, Le Guin states that she will be consciously the patriarchal archetypes that she

used in the first three novels of the cycle. This chapter will explore her reasoning behind this change and examine what measure of archetypal upheaval was gained. This chapter will attempt to show how, in removing *Tehanu* from the heroic tradition of Western myth and by focusing on the commonplace events of a middle aged woman, Le Guin not only changes the mythical framework of the novel, but she also moves the Cycle from an epic tradition for children to the tradition of the novel, generally intended for adults.

Le Guin's intricate and beautiful Earthsea Cycle attempts to provide readers of any age, race, creed, or gender with a universal perspective, and to a large extent, it succeeds. The equality of binaries in the world of Earthsea reveals Le Guin's respect of the other along that of the native. Le Guin's gift of a voice to the other in *Tehanu* is an obvious picture of her love for the oppressed, but in her typical deliciously delicate manner, the structure of Earthsea has been exposing this love all along.

Chapter 1

Structuring Reality

Language and Myth in Ursula Le Guin's Non-Fiction

Ursula K. Le Guin is uneasy with most literary theory. In response to an edition of the journal *Science-Fiction Studies*[1] that was devoted to articles on Le Guin's fiction, she reflects, "[These articles] gave me the impression that I have written about nothing but ideas . . . At times ideas alone are discussed, as if the books existed through and for their ideas; and this involves a process of *translation* with which I am a bit uncomfortable" (*Language* 9, 10). She asserts that her novels were not written as intellectual concepts but rather as something more elemental:

> It's as if one should discuss the ideas expressed by St. Paul's Cathedral without ever observing what the walls are built of or how the dome is supported . . . what makes a novel a novel is something non-intellectual . . . something that rises from touch not thought, from sounds, rests, rhythms . . . It involves ideas, of course, and ideas issue from it, the splendid affirmation of the dome rises above the terror and the rubble and the smoke . . . but all the thinking in the world won't hold that dome up. Theory is not enough. There must be stones. (10)

The stones that she refers to here are the basic constituents of her stories. Perhaps the two most salient stones in the foundation of her fiction are language and myth. One certainly must be careful not to sterilize Le Guin's writing, but her own structural criticism of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings Trilogy indicates her knowledge and focus on language theory. Her nonfiction also reveals a marked interest in myth, as she plays off

Carl Jung's theories in developing her own standard for how myth should be used. Though Le Guin may not invite purely theoretical investigations of her fiction, her discussions of language and myth in her nonfiction provide insight into her views of balance and integration, which are so important in her fiction.

Spoken (or written) language is described by Le Guin as "pure sound and rhythm" (*Wave* 73). Here Le Guin separates the language of speech from what that language is attempting to communicate. She views the written language found in literature as a system of pulsations that are given a sense of order based on the pattern of the words or pulses. She compares the rhythm of words to heartbeats, noting the importance of intervals between beats. Rather than privileging the active pulse over the passive interval, Le Guin explains that the two can be reversed, noting that one can "[think] of the pulse as a boundary between intervals" (*Wave* 71). While most of her chapter "Stress-Rhythm in Poetry and Prose" is devoted to the rhythmical stress patterns in the language of various texts, near the end of this chapter she expounds on how her observations of stress can be applied to a repetition of words or phrases:

> Another kind of repetition is a characteristic phrase, a character tag; in *David Copperfield,* for instance, Mr. Micawber's ever-hopeful 'in case anything turns up.' Having a character say the same thing often enough that you come to wait for it can be a mechanically humorous contrivance; but Dickens is not a mechanical writer, and when the Micawbers are on the brink of ruin, the repetition darkens humor into irony, sympathy, and pain. Fiction can take a trivial event or even a single word and repeat it in

> different contexts, changing and deepening its meaning every time, and intensifying the structure of the narrative. (93)

Here, Le Guin proposes that context is essential to understanding how a word or phrase is used in a narrative. The "pulse" that Le Guin names earlier in the chapter can be seen here in Mr. Micawber's phrase, "in case anything turns up." As she contends, the context, or the "interval" between each of these pulses, "deepens" the meaning of the phrase. As the phrase itself is deepened, it in turn "[intensifies] the structure of the narrative" by darkening "humor into irony, sympathy, and pain."

Le Guin's idea of the recurring pulse or event is reminiscent of Roland Barthes' description of how a "unit" works within the structure of a narrative. In his essay, "Structural Analysis of Narratives," Barthes uses the term "unit" to indicate any fragment of language that takes on meaning in a narrative. Barthes describes how this unit comes to mean:

> A unit belonging to a particular level only takes on meaning if it can be integrated in a higher level; a phoneme, though perfectly describable, means nothing in itself: it participates in meaning only when integrated in a word, and the word itself must in turn be integrated in a sentence. (86)

For Barthes, the units of language only come to mean anything through their position within the structure of a text. Like Barthes' "unit," Le Guin's "pulse" must be integrated in the greater structure of a work to mean anything. Le Guin takes this thought to its logical end by proposing that if the same pulse is repeated throughout a text, its meaning will shift and expand as develops further context.

The importance that Le Guin places on repetition and context in narrative reveals a facet of her structural view of language. Like the father of Structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure, Le Guin seems to posit in her investigations of sound and language patterns that "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*" (67). For Saussure, the linguistic sign "is the combination of a concept and a sound pattern" (67). He calls this sound pattern the "*signal*," which refers to "the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by evidence of his senses" (66). The concept to which he refers, he calls the "*signification,"* which is, in essence, the meaning behind the signal. By arguing that the sign is arbitrary, Saussure posits that the connection between the signal and the signification is not inherent, but rather constructed. Like Saussure, Le Guin views words as meaningless on their own. Her assertion that the pulse is given meaning through its context (recall Mr. Micawber's "in case anything turns up") is also resonant with Saussure's theories of language. Saussure proposes that "[t]he content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside it" (114). Saussure's focus on context here is directly reflected in Le Guin as she finds a deepening of meaning as a word is placed within various contexts.

A crucial aspect of context to Le Guin is the concept of binary pairs. The crux of her investigation in her essay, "Rhythmic Pattern in *Lord of the Rings*," is her analysis of binaries in the trilogy. Unlike in "Stress-Rhythm in Poetry and Prose," in this essay Le Guin primarily focuses on core concepts such as darkness/daylight, fear/courage, and paralysis/action rather than on specific words or phrases. She refers to these binary pairs as reversals: "What I call reversal is a pulsation back and forth between polarities of feeling, mood, image, emotion, action—examples of the stress/release pulse that I think is

fundamental to the structure of the book" (*Wave* 101). As Barthes points out, binaries do not explicitly appear in Saussure's theories because they are not strictly linguistic representations. He argues that though language forms opposing or "polarized" terms, true binaries cannot be absolutely delineated linguistically (*Elements* 82). However, structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss agrees with Le Guin's assertion that binary pairs are indeed necessary for coherence within a narrative. In explaining a Western Canadian myth in which a skate captures the South Wind, releasing it only after it promises to blow at certain times of the year, Lévi-Strauss maintains that the skate is an embodied binary because it is large when seen from the top and very narrow when observed from the side. Lévi-Strauss suggests that the skate's binary nature helps us understand the myth:

> An animal which can be used as I would call a binary operator can have, from a logical point of view, a relationship with a problem which is also a binary problem . . . if [the wind] blows one day out of two- 'yes' one day, 'no' the other day, and so one – then a kind of compromise becomes possible between the needs of mankind and the conditions prevailing in the natural world. (22,23)

He argues that modern man's understanding of the binary code of cybernetics "gives us the ability to understand what is in this myth, to which we remained completely blind before the idea of binary operations became familiar to us" (23). Like Le Guin, Lévi-Strauss views binaries as essential to both meaning and understanding.

Le Guin views these binaries in *The Lord of the Rings* as opposing states that give meaning through opposition but also through their inseparability. She asserts that each half of a binary gains meaning through its opposition to the other half, but she qualifies

this: “These reversals are not simple binary flips. The positive causes or grows from the negative state, and the negative from the positive. Each yang contains its yin, each yin contains its yang. (I don’t use the Chinese terms lightly; I believe that fit with Tolkien’s conception of how the world works)” (*Wave* 101). In claiming that each half of the binary pair contains a part of the other half, Le Guin shows that she does not view binaries as completely opposite. Each half needs the other to give it meaning because individual words and concepts, to Le Guin, need different and opposing words and concepts to give them meaning.

Le Guin’s nonfiction works on the subject of fiction reveal that she views myth as being equally important to language in works of fantasy and science fiction. Her essay “Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction” most clearly defines her views on myth. In this essay, Le Guin quickly rejects what she calls the “reductive, scientific” definition of myth which she summarizes: “Myth is an attempt to explain, in rational terms, facts not yet rationally understood” (*Language* 68). To this she replies that “the rational and explanatory is only one function of the myth. Myth is an expression of one of several ways the human being, body/psyche, perceives, understands and relates to the world” (69). Myth, to Le Guin, communicates concepts that cannot fully be put into words. She finds that myth is commonly expressed through symbolism, but not in the common allegorical sense in which people think people often think of symbols: “A symbol is not a sign of something known, but an indicator of something not known and not expressible otherwise than symbolically” (71). Le Guin posits that these symbols used in myth are the best way to communicate complex emotions and impressions.

Though both Barthes and Lévi-Strauss discuss the purpose and function of myth at length in their works, Le Guin's multiple references to Carl Jung's views on myth in her essays make his theories more pertinent to a discussion of Le Guin's own views on myth. In his book, *Communities of the Heart: The Rhetoric of Myth in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin,* Warren G. Rochelle rightly contends that "[i]t is the Jungian [view of myth], primarily, to which Le Guin can be compared" (17). Though, as Barbara Bucknall points out, Le Guin "had never read anything by Jung" until after the Earthsea Cycle was written, Le Guin herself agreed that even though she had not read Jung's works before writing *A Wizard of Earthsea,* the novel reflected his concept of the shadow (49). Upon reading Jung, Le Guin found that she agreed with his assertion that the source of myth is to be found in the collective unconscious. Of mythmaking, Le Guin advances that "of all the great psychologists, Jung best explains this process, by stressing the existence, not of an isolated 'id,' but a 'collective unconscious.' He reminds us that the region of the mind/body that lies beyond the narrow, brightly lit domain of consciousness is very must (sic) the same in all of us" (*Language* 74). For Jung, myth is something common to everyone, as the archetypes which form myth are rooted in something deeper and more universal than individual experience. Jung writes of the collective unconscious:

> There exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. (43)

The secondary route by which Jung indicates people can become conscious of the archetypes of the collective unconscious is through myth, or the symbolism that expresses "something not known and not expressible otherwise than symbolically" (*Language* 71). Though Le Guin would later criticize Jung for focusing primarily on Western mythology and archetypes (*Revisioned* 5), she subscribes to his assertion of a universal, pre-existent nature in humans.

Myth, for Le Guin, serves as a means of integrating the rational with the emotional. In "Myth and Archetype is Science Fiction," she claims that the ethical and skillful mythmaker uses myth in a way that balances reason and emotion:

> The way of art, after all, is neither to cut adrift from the emotions, the senses, the body, etc., and sail off into the void of pure meaning, nor to blind the mind's eye and wallow in irrational, amoral meaninglessness—but to keep open the tenuous, difficult, essential connections between the two extremes. To connect. To connect the idea with value, sensation with intuition, cortex with cerebellum. The true myth is precisely one of these connection. (73)

This need for balance between the mind and emotion follows her belief in the interconnectedness of binaries and is a symptom of her Taoist views of balance that will be discussed in the next chapter. She argues that neither the rational nor the emotional should be privileged over the other. The artist's task is to find the common factor between the two polarities, the black spot of the yin within the white half of the yang.

While she does not believe that new archetypes can be created, as they are exclusively inherent forms in the human mind, Le Guin feels that their universal nature

allows for effective communication. She argues that though we cannot create new archetypes, "This is no loss; rather a gain. It means that we can communicate, that alienation isn't the final human condition, since there is a vast common ground on which we can meet, not only rationally, but aesthetically, intuitively, emotionally" (*Language* 75). The universal nature of the collective unconscious gives humans a starting point, or "common ground" from which they can relate to every other human. Le Guin proposes that only by accessing the depths of the collective unconscious can an author have a truly original work: "Writers who draw not upon the words and thoughts of others but upon their own thoughts and their own deep being will inevitably hit upon common material. The more original the work, the more imperiously *recognizable* it will be" (*Language* 75). Le Guin criticizes fiction that relies on tired representations of cultural tropes. She believes that well written fantasy will come through the author who draws from the archetypes that are already present with him or herself.

The deep nature of Le Guin's fantasy is certainly no accident, as her nonfiction reveals her insight into the constituents of language and myth in literature. She views language as both limited and powerful. The arbitrary nature of the sign creates an uncertainty within language, but the interdependence of signs shows the power of one sign over the other signs within a work. In her literature, Le Guin attempts to infuse original representations of myth into this structure of signs. Her belief that myth should integrate the binaries of emotion and reason has the same Taoist backbone as her structural views of language, and with both of these elemental foundations of meaning, Le Guin constructs her fiction worlds.

Note

1. This is from *Science-Fiction Studies 7* (Nov. 1975).

Chapter 2

Balancing a World

The Power of Language in Earthsea

Ursula Le Guin is a master craftswoman of words. She carefully constructs her delicate, yet powerful prose to effect word pictures that few authors can match. However, in The Earthsea Cycle, and particularly in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin shows the inadequacies of all human language by creating a language that has a perfect connection between the signifying words and their signified meanings. The very fact that this language has many names in The Cycle (the language of making, True Speech, Old Speech, the language of magic) proves the limitations of the language that Le Guin uses and of the common speech spoken by the non-magical people of Earthsea. In it the language of the making presents an ideal picture of speech that is connected to reality and that affects the balance of the world.

The perfect relationship between words and the things they refer to in the language of magic in Earthsea can best be examined by first turning to the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure. He first introduced the important concept of the signifier and the signified. In his seminal work, *Course in General Linguistics,* Saussure submits, "A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern" (66). His distinction between a name and a sound pattern is especially important here, as it replaces the concept of words as names that are inherently attached to an object to sound patterns that evoke a concept rather than a specific thing. He goes further: "*The linguistic sign is arbitrary*" because "there is no internal connexion (sic), for example, between the idea 'sister' and the French sequence of sounds s-ö-r which acts

as its signal" (67). For Saussure sounds and syllables are not static representations of a greater reality, but are arbitrary constructions.

In Earthsea, common language has, over time, come to have the same sort of division as Saussure's signifier and signified. The language of Earthsea is separated by the language of magic and ordinary language, but for both wizards and common men, their language has been degenerating since the first words spoken at creation. Doris Myers makes the important observation that the language of magic in Earthsea was never the native language of men: "The Old Speech is the native tongue of dragons, while man, speaking a language derived from it, is one step further removed from the nature of things and their true names." Myers further explains that the people of Earthsea believe that a perfect speech exists, but since they are not able to find it, they must use their imperfect language in frustration (97). This corruption of language has ended in most inhabitants of Earthsea not being able to speak the language of magic. As Myers suggests, these people feel the frustration of not being able to adequately communicate in their native tongues. Language in Earthsea has degenerated from where the signifier and the signified were one and the same to where the signifier has become the same kind of arbitrary symbol for the signified that Saussure recognizes in the languages on Earth. The frustration that the people of Earthsea feel in not being able to communicate properly is due to the distance between the words that they use and the thing or concept to which they are referring.

Like Earth, Earthsea has different languages and different accents. Common, or non-magical, speech is divided into different accents and languages. In *A Wizard of Earthsea,* Ged meets a man and woman of Kargish descent who cannot understand him

because they do not speak the Hardic language that Ged speaks. Though it is unclear how many languages are spoken in Earthsea, at least two other common languages, Osskili and the language of Enlad, are mentioned. Within the Hardic tongue, regional accents are also recognized. In *Tehanu*, Tenar recalls that her accent must have seemed strange to the people of Gont (37), and likewise noting Ged's "dry Gontish accent" (77). All the languages of Earthsea besides Hardic were not passed down from the language of making and do not possess magical qualities. Hardic, however is the degenerate form of the language of making, and the different accents within Hardic show how this language has been evolving into a less specific and precise tongue.

Though the common people in Earthsea are restricted to language that has little power over reality, the magical connection of the language of wizards to the structure and nature of Earthsea is consistent with the sort of supernatural power ascribed to language in the Christian, Norse, and Native American literature and mythology with which Le Guin was familiar.[2] The power of language in creation and in having power over nature recalls the stories of God's creation and Adam's early responsibilities of naming in the Bible. The book of Genesis recounts God's initial creation of the light through His words, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1.3). Here, the physical universe was established through the creative power of language. Segoy, the creator of Earthsea, is also said to have created Earthsea through language (*Wizard* 19, 47, 115). Though Le Guin was likely not using the Bible as reference for her conception of creation, the likeness between these two stories reveals the inherent power of language when spoken by a perfect being.

This perfect connection between language and the thing it signifies is again represented by God's commissioning of Adam to name the animals of the earth. The Bible reveals Adam's duty of naming: "Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2.19). This is a passage which Le Guin was certainly familiar with, as she wrote a short story entitled "She Unnames Them," about Adam's naming of the animals and fictitiously depicts Eve taking away the animals' names. Though she views Eve's exclusion from the job of naming as an indication of undue power being given to men,[3] central to The Earthsea Cycle is the ability of people to use words that truly represent the things to which they refer.

Though most of the people of Earthsea are restricted to imperfect language, and thus cannot perform magic, the magic of wizards and witches in Earthsea is possible only through knowledge of the language of making. The magical speech of the wizards of Earthsea is reminiscent of the power gained by Odin in Norse mythology when he obtains the sacred runes and powerful songs after hanging in the tree Yggdrasil for nine days. In his work, *The Norse Myths*, Kevin Crossley-Holland recounts the wisdom and power Odin obtains while hanging in Yggdrasil:

> I peered at the worlds below; I seized the runes, shrieking I seized them; then I fell back. From Bolthor's famous son, Bestla's father, I learned nine powerful songs . . . Then I began to thrive, my wisdom grew; I prospered and was fruitful. One word gained me many words; one deed gained me many deeds. (16)

These words and songs give Odin a magical power over eighteen different aspects of nature, including sickness, weather, and the knowledge of the names of the gods and elves (Crossley-Holland 16-17). Though Ursula Le Guin claims Norse mythology as one of the primary mythological bases for her writing,[4] she may not have pulled her conception of magic directly from this tale about Odin. But just as Odin's magic was enabled by ancient words, so the magical language of Earthsea can only be performed by those who know the "language of making," the language from which all other Earthsea languages sprung.

Ged is first able to perform in *A Wizard of Earthsea* at the age of seven by repeating a rhyme that he had heard his aunt use to call her goats. Though this is a very simple spell, the young Ged accidentally creates a very strong circle around the goats, which draws them dangerously close to himself. After seeing this dangerous situation, Ged's aunt easily calls the goats off with a word, but through this incident sees Ged's natural power as a worker of magic and begins to teach him everything she knows about the art of magic.

Ged's aunt teaches him minor charms that can be performed just by knowing the words of the charm, but through his temporary master, Ogion, Ged begins to learn the depths of magical language. As Ged begins to learn the Six Hundred Runes of Hardic, the narrator explains the connection between Hardic speech and the language of magic:

> The Hardic tongue of the Archipelago, though it has no more magic power in it than any other tongue of men, has its roots in the Old Speech, that language in which things are named with their true names: and the way to

> the understanding of this speech starts with the Runes that were written when the islands of the world first were raised up from the sea. (19)

The narrator, here, gives the cycle's first reference to the Old Speech and "true names." These true names were created with the things that they name, so that the two are inseparable from one another. In this way, Le Guin has created a language where the spoken word does not have the distance between the signifier and signified that creates restrictions upon the power of ordinary speech in Earthsea. In the Old Speech, the name is not just connected to the thing itself, but the name is actually a part of what that thing is in the same way as size, color, and shape are a part of a thing.

This inherent connection between a word and the thing it names is important in Le Guin's work for more reason than her conception of language and reality. Le Guin posits that language should not be tied to any authority. In *Language of the Night*, she writes, "The Taoist world is orderly, not chaotic, but its order is not one imposed by 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 and are to be found—discovered" (44). That the words of the true speech do not come from any source but the things the words name is important because if an authority is responsible for the names of things, then language is a product of power. Though this magic language is consistent with the biblical sense of naming done by Adam and God in the perfect connection between words and their signifiers, the idea that the true speech of Earthsea is not connected to any authority does not cohere with the Bible. Le Guin views this sort of biblical authority as domination. Her conception of true speech seems to indicate that she believes truly perfect language would be inherently tied to the signified meaning of the

words because she believes that truth exists outside of what we are able to describe through our imposed language. Though most people on Earthsea are speakers of languages devised by man, she sees that the perfect language would be one that could be discovered, just as truth is discovered rather than invented.

This discoverable True Speech is the native language of dragons. Dragons, as the native speakers of the language of making, have much greater control over nature than wizards can have. Le Guin narrates, "Although the use of the Old Speech binds a man to truth, this is not so with dragons. It is their own language, and they can lie in it, twisting the true words to false ends, catching the unwary hearer in a maze of mirrorwords each of which reflects the truth and none of which leads anywhere" (*Wizard* 90). Because the Old Speech is connected to truth, wizards are unable to tell falsehoods in the true speech. Though dragons cannot lie, their intricate knowledge of True Speech allows them to twist the truth around in a way that can confuse men. Wizards consider dragons very wise, but they do not dare to trust them because of dragon's ability to befuddle men with their trickery.

While wizards are able to learn the True Speech, their knowledge is limited because of the vastness of the language. Wizards are always native speakers of Hardic, and they have to learn the thousands of words of the language of making as a second language. The Master Namer tells Ged of these words:

> Any witch knows a few of these words in the Old Speech, and a mage knows many. But there are many more, and 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. (*Wizard* 47)

Since the words of the making are intimately connected to their signified objects, these words are as numerous as the different parts that make up Earthsea. Though a wizard may know the name for the sea, as the Master Namer tells his pupils, "He who would be Seamaster must know the true name of every drop of water in the sea" (46).

Because of the necessity to know these endless names to have complete control over nature, the wizard is both empowered and limited by his knowledge of names. Before Ged learned his own true name, he learned the power of magical words, using them to call his aunt's goats to his side and eventually to save his town from invaders by summoning up a fog inside of which the invaders killed each other in fear. On the isle of Roke, the mages teach the students the magic of illusion before they introduce them to true magic or the magic of changing. The Master Hand explains to Ged the distinction between illusion and the art of changing:

> The Master took [the pebble] and held it out on his own hand. "This is a rock; *tolk* in the True Speech," he said, looking mildly up at Ged now. "A bit of the stone of which Roke Isle is made, a little bit of the dry land on which men live. It is itself. It is part of the world. By the Illusion-Change you can make it look like a diamond—or a flower or a fly or an eye or as a flame—"The rock flickered from shape to shape as he named them, and returned to rock. "But that is mere seeming. Illusion fools the beholder's senses; it makes him see and hear and feel that the thing is changed. But it does not change the thing. To change this rock into a jewel, you must

> change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done . . . But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. (43-44)

In both illusion and in the magic of Changing, the wizard must know the name of the thing that he or she is seeking to change. But the Master Hand lets Ged know of the dangers of upsetting the balance in the world by changing a thing's name.

Because of the power that a thing's name has over that thing, a wizard in Earthsea must make sure that he keeps his own true name a secret from only those he trusts the most. The sacred and powerful nature of a person's name is ubiquitous throughout cultures, but the Native Americans strikingly ascribe magical quality to names very similar to that described in The Earthsea Cycle. Warren Rochelle reports that for the Native American tribes that Le Guin's parents studied and interacted with, "To know the name of someone was to have power over them" (6). This sort of power is ascribed to names in Earthsea. After Vetch tells Ged his true name on the isle of Roke, Le Guin states, "Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping" (*Wizard* 69). Just like everything else in Earthsea, people have common names and they have true names. This true name is a part of the person, giving magical people or creatures who know that name power over that person.

The people in Earthsea must be careful not to tell their true names to beings that might misuse it. After Vetch tells Ged his true name, the narration reads, "No one knows

a man's true name but himself and his namer . . . If plain men hide their true name from all but a few they love and trust utterly, so much more must wizardly men, being more dangerous, and more endangered. Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping" (69). In *A Wizard of Earthsea,* the shadow chasing Ged knows his name, and uses it to disable Ged's magic. After the shadow, which has taken the form of a soulless body, or gebbeth, speaks Ged's name, he "could work no transformation, but was locked in his true being, and must face the gebbeth thus defenseless" (106-107). The gebbeth's act of restricting Ged to his true form is possible because Ged's name is a part of who he is. By saying this true name, the gebbeth keeps Ged from taking a form that would have a different name. Carl Jung documents the Native American belief that changing one's name can ward off evil: "He is given another name and thereby another soul, and then the demons no longer recognize him" (129). Though one is not able to change his or her true name in Earthsea, the same inextricable connection between the name and the soul is seen, and the people of Earthsea protect their names as they would their physical bodies.

Language has the power to hurt individual people in Earthsea, but more importantly, it has the power to upset the world's balance. The Master Hand is not speaking in hyperbole when he tells Ged that the changing of a sand grain could upset the balance of the world. Ogion gives Ged a similar warning earlier in the novel: "Every word, every act of our Art is said and is done either for good, or for evil. Before you speak or do you must know the price that is to pay" (23). Earthsea is a place of equivalent reactions for every action. Since the wizard generally uses magic to change something in nature, nature will always react to the weighing down of one of her scale's pans by righting the balance with an equal weight in the other pan. Le Guin describes the

duties of the Master Summoner: “It was he who showed them why the true wizard uses such spells 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’” (54). The consequences of magic are not necessarily only seen in the specific place where the magic took place because every island, every part, of Earthsea is provides some weight in the balance that governs the whole world.

Balance must always be taken into account for the wizards in Earthsea because everything, even the hundreds of islands comprising this fictitious world, is intricately connected to every other thing in the world. This balance is not entirely maintained by language, but language certainly has the power to upset this balance. Because the words of True Speech are a part of things that appear in physical reality, these words can change reality. For Le Guin, this language is the ideal, being inherent rather than imposed. The balance of Earthsea is largely dependent upon the way wizards use language, as each of the words that wizards use in magic are a part a greater structure. Though every word is inherent, having meaning outside of any context other than the thing it signifies, each word has the power to change the entire structure of Le Guin’s fictitious world.

Notes

1. While the extent of Le Guin's knowledge of the Bible is not known, she certainly knew the story of Adam and Eve, of whom she wrote a short story entitled, "She Unnames Them." She also wrote the preface to the Oxford edition of Mark Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve*. Her knowledge and love of Norse and Native American mythology is better documented. Barbara J. Bucknall writes that "the Norse myths were especially dear to [Le Guin] and shaped her imagination," and she relates, "Le Guin tells how her father used to narrate Indian legends" (3). In her essay, "Myth and Archetype," Le Guin documents the debt that some of her early works of fantasy owed to Norse mythology (70), and her short story, "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight," obviously borrows from Native American lore with its anthropomorphic animal characters and its concept of the Native American "Koyaanisqatsi," as revealed by Le Guin in *Earthsea Revisioned* (20).

2. In this short story, Eve does not feel that she can express herself with the language, which Adam has helped to form. This sense of frustration with an imposed system of language is consistent with Le Guin's belief that laws "are not imposed from above by any authority, but exist in things and are to be found—discovered" (44). Rather than using Adam's prescribed nomenclature, Eve attempts to speak of things in a way that captures their true essence. "She Unnames Them" is found in Le Guin's book, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*. This short story is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

3. In her essay, "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," Le Guin writes, "Since stories need retelling from generation to generation, why not steal them? I'm certainly not

the one to condemn the practice; parts of my first novel were lifted wholesale from the Norse mythos . . . This sort of pilfering goes on all the time" (70). Though Le Guin does not claim Norse mythology as the source for any of her storytelling in The Earthsea Cycle, she was certainly familiar with this mythology, and it likely permeated her writing more than even she was aware of.

Chapter 3

Open Mouth, Open Ears

Le Guin's "Mother Tongue" in the First Three Earthsea Novels

As a purported feminist, Ursula Le Guin has been criticized for not rethinking patriarchal social structures in her early works, particularly *A Wizard of Earthsea* and the third book in the Earthsea Cycle, *The Farthest Shore* (Rashley 24). Though both novels were critically acclaimed, with *The Farthest Shore* garnering The National Book Award, their supposed blind adherence to patriarchal structures led Le Guin to pen "Earthsea Revisioned," in which she admitted to an underdeveloped feminism when writing the novels ("Revisioned" 9-12). The roots of Le Guin's feminism are evident in *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore*, however. Though both works operate within the paradigm of masculine mythology, Le Guin's admittedly underdeveloped feminism finds its voice in her advocacy of non-dominating speech and perspective.

As a professing feminist,[4] Le Guin was chastised by feminists of the time for not challenging patriarchal social structure in her early books in The Earthsea Cycle (Rashley 24). Even modern critics such as Holly Littlefield see in these works a "failure to criticize patriarchal social structure" (246). In retrospect, Le Guin also felt that she had fallen short as a feminist. Though the second book in the cycle, *The Tombs of Atuan,* has a female protagonist, she is virtually powerless in the novel. Le Guin wrote *Tehanu* in 1990 in an attempt to mend some of the harm she felt she had perpetrated through using traditional patriarchal structures in her earlier books in the series, but she felt that revising the original books was unethical (Rashley 26). She explains her use of only male characters in positions of power in *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore*: "My

father had told us stories from Homer before I could read, and all my life I'd read and love the hero-tales. That was my own tradition, those were my archetypes, that's where I was at home. Or so I thought" (qtd. in Rashley 26). The first and third book of The Earthsea Cycle are written using traditional patriarchal archetypes, but they are not masculine in nature. Littlefield acknowledges of the first three books in The Earthsea Cycle, "Clearly they do not espouse or support the traditional values of patriarchy such as domination, control, and conformity" (247). The books rather reveal the Taoist principles that power should be coupled with humility and a sense of balance. Her feminist standpoint may be more present in spirit than in body, but it certainly affects the work and is compatible with her early novels.

Le Guin's feminist stance is most clearly expressed in her commencement address to the 1986 graduates of Bryn Mawr, an elite women's college. In this address, Le Guin introduces her concept of the mother tongue. She begins by describing her development in feminism as "unlearning":

> I am trying to unlearn these lessons, along with other lessons I was taught by my society, particularly lessons concerning the minds, work, works, and being of women . . . I love my unteachers . . . from Wollstonecraft and Woolf . . . the unmasters, the unconquerors, the unwarriors, women who have at risk and at high cost offered their experience as truth." (*Dancing* 151)

She continues, proclaiming that her unlearning involved recognizing and cultivating the mother tongue.

One of the main things that Le Guin is unlearning is the "father tongue," a communicative disposition in which the speaker talks but does not listen. She defines the father tongue in terms of binaries:

> White man speak with forked tongue; White man speak dichotomy. His language expresses the values of the split word, valuing the positive and devaluing the negative in each redivision: subject/object, self/other, mind/body, dominant/submissive, active/passive, Man/Nature, man/woman, and so on. The father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected or heard. (*Dancing* 149)

This conception of the father tongue places all binaries on a hierarchy, with one of the binaries always being privileged. In Le Guin's examples, all of the privileged binaries are masculine, with the weaker binary being feminine. With the masculine binary being privileged, it assumes a role of dominance over the other binary. She extends this dominance of the masculine binary to the subject of language, proposing that the father tongue not only speaks in terms of hierarchies, but assumes a place of dominance in communication. This dominance is manifested in speaking without listening, as the speaker is privileged over the hearer. The speaker becomes a dispenser of truth, while the listener is expected to be a passive receiver. Le Guin significantly states that this is the manner of the "white man." She later cites how when first encountering Californian Indian chiefs, the white "invaders," who spoke in a dominating, combative manner, "couldn't comprehend, wouldn't admit, an authority without supremacy- a non-dominating authority" ("Commencement"). These pacifistic and harmonious principles

of discourse are strikingly Taoist, and show a strong connection between this philosophy and Le Guin's feminism.

This compatibility has not gone unnoted by critics, with Elizabeth Cummins observing that the binary male and female are not seen in a hierarchy in Taoist thought, but rather as coequal pieces in harmony with each other (34). Barbara Bucknall, in her essay "Androgynes in Outer Space," also finds a connection: "It is fair to say that Taoism leans traditionally to the feminine side and has been, in consequence, in opposition from the start to the philosophy of Confucius, which is more masculine and authoritarian" (61). Whereas Confucianism is a religion that teaches the father tongue, Taoism speaks in the mother tongue. *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore*, often recognized as coming-of-age stories, can also be traced through as personal journeys from the father tongue to the mother tongue.

The consistencies of Taoist and feminist thought lay within the very structures of each philosophy. Le Guin's feminism, as expressed through her view of the mother tongue, is built on the belief that each participator in discourse is equal, sharing equally valid thoughts as individual parts of a greater whole. Le Guin expresses this in various ways in the first and third books of The Earthsea Cycle, perhaps most vividly through her use of binaries. She uses the binary relationship of earth and sea to frame the books in The Earthsea Cycle within the circuitry of binaries. This interconnection of binaries is central to Taoist thought: "Thus Something and Nothing produce each other; The difficult and the easy complement each other; the long and the short offset each other" (Tzu 2.5). In this thought, binaries are not only coequal, but complements in a constant, delicate balance.

The need for balance is a central theme in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. At the school for wizards on the island of Roke, the Master Hand tells Ged, "The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing, and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world" (44). Even with this warning, which comes from more than one source, Ged disrupts the balance of Roke, and ultimately the world, by evoking a spirit from beyond the grave. This spirit, or shadow, disrupts the balance of the world by introducing death into the realm of the living. Ged's mission throughout the rest of the story is to destroy the shadow and return balance to Earthsea. Using Taoist imagery, Le Guin sets the meeting of Ged and the shadow at the edge of the world where light and darkness converge. At this point, Ged, the living, becomes one with the shadow by giving it his own name. In this way, Ged restores balance to his own life by understanding and accepting the evil in himself in order to become whole. In righting the imbalance between death and life, Ged also restores the balance of the world.

Rather than one binary being privileged over another, both evil and good, death and life, are necessary and equal parts of each other. Elsewhere, Le Guin asserts, "Evil, then, appears in the fairy tale not as something diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol. Neither is greater than the other, nor can human reason and virtue separate one from the other and choose between them" (*Language*). The inseparable nature of binaries is also intricate to Le Guin's later assertion of the mother tongue. Her Bryn Mawr commencement address stresses the separating nature of the father tongue, the way dominant speech distances the binaries of speaker and listener. She finds in the mother tongue the ability to commune and empower each half of a binary.

The demonstration of the symbiotic continuum of binaries in Ged's life is one of the many ways that Le Guin forms him into a very non-traditional hero. While her contemporaries in speculative fiction were almost invariably using masculine characters that forcefully overcome some antagonizing being, Le Guin does not glorify action. According to Taoist philosophy, men should seek a path that does not resist the flow of nature. As Ged first sees in his master Ogion, and then learns himself, often the best course of action is inaction. Ogion first tells Ged, "Manhood is patience," a lesson that Ged will not learn until he has become whole through owning his shadow (17). As Ged ages in *The Farthest Shore*, he explains to the future king of Earthsea, "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" (87). In acting only as Nature dictates, Ged has become the embodiment of Taoist ideals, while being what Littlefield calls a "misfit" protagonist. Littlefield continues, "Although, like most science fiction works, each novel tells the story of an actual physical journey or quest, the real focus of the story is on the character's inner journey, something few science fiction writers have wanted to deal with" (247). With both Ged and Arren, the protagonists in *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore* respectively, developing through introspection, Le Guin steps away from the work of her contemporaries.

Also separating Ged and Arren from the traditional speculative fiction hero are the qualities of humility and service. In *A Wizard of Earthsea,* Ged, born with a great amount of natural talent in magic soon develops pride that matches his skill in breadth and it is this pride that leads him to loose the shadow on the world. When the older

Jasper claims superior skill, Ged feels that he must prove his power. Ged agrees to Jasper's joking whim that he should summon the dead, and as he is poised to do so he feels that "all things were to his order, to command. He stood at the center of the world" (60). Le Guin's wording is not incidental here, as Ged believes himself to be the center of the world in power and perspective. This pride is what nearly kills Ged, and what must ultimately be rehabilitated within him. Ged's pride here is the stance that a speaker assumes when using the father tongue. The speaker views himself, rather than both speaker and listener, as the center of truth. Like Ged, the communicator using the father tongue desires to command rather than commune.

When Ged becomes conscious after days of being comatose, he realizes what he has wrought on the world. The Archmage of Roke had died trying to undo the evil that Ged had done, and the earth was cursed until Ged could find a way to undo his evil deed. When he finally gains the confidence to chase after his shadow, the shadow, Ged's pride has been replaced by fear. He says to Vetch's sister Murre, "The word that was mine to say I said wrong. It is better that I keep still; I will not speak again. Maybe there is no true power but the dark" (165). This overcompensation is righted at the end *A Wizard of Earthsea* when Ged finally has both the humility and the strength to accept the evil in him as part of himself.

Ged finds the proper way to express his power by the end of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Realizing that his power should not be expressed through attempting dominance, Ged has learned a central principle of the *Tao Te Ching*: "The sage embraces the One and is a model for the empire. / He does not show himself, and so is conspicuous; / He does not consider himself right, and so is illustrious; / He does not brag, and so has

merit; / He does not boast, and so endures" (Tzu 22.30). This kind of humility does not take away power; it only manages it by not imposing one's power on others. As an expression of Le Guin's early feminism, this stress on the humility of her hero displays her belief that those who could be privileged because of natural or cultivated power are of no greater importance than others. As each person contains the truth within himself or herself, no one self is elevated above another.

The most vivid picture of humility, love, and service comes in the form of Ged's one true friend, Vetch who is a picture of someone acting almost completely according to the mother tongue. As an older student, Vetch befriends Ged and attempts to be a voice of reason and compassion to the proud and troubled Ged. Though Ged has much greater skill than Vetch, "Le Guin is quick to point out that kindness is a greater skill than magic" (Wytenbroek 178). When Ged is shaken and completely uncertain of himself, Vetch is the one who begins his healing process by telling Ged his true name. As names are vital in using magic, a wizard in Earthsea will only tell the closest of friends and family his true name: "Thus to Ged who had lost faith in himself, Vetch had given that gift only a friend can give, the proof of unshaken, unshakable trust" (Cummins 69). With one word, Vetch renews Ged's faith in himself while strengthening their bond of friendship. The ostensible effect that words have over physical reality in The Earthsea Cycle reveals Le Guin's belief that language and the physical world are intimately connected. This connection that leads words to change physical reality is a direct reversal of Le Guin's mother tongue theory.

Vetch's love for Ged continues long after their time together at the school on Roke, and it is Vetch who eventually travels with Ged to the end of the earth to face the

shadow. Vetch is a model of what Ged will eventually become. In *The Farthest Shore*, Arren watches Ged and the other wizards teaching at Roke and recognizes that "[i]f they sought something, it was not for themselves. Yet they were men of great power" (27). The power contained within these wizards is unlike typical patriarchal power that is always seeking something for the powerful. The wizards' power is focused outwards rather than fulfilling self-interest. This kind of power is obviously lauded in Le Guin's stories, and each of her protagonists in The Earthsea Cycle eventually attain this power, whether it is attended by position in society or not.

In examining The Earthsea Cycle, it is interesting to note that the mother tongue is not solely reserved for females, as the term seems to indicate. Likewise, the father tongue is not restricted to males but is so named because Le Guin believes that males are generally the ones who assume dominating roles in communication. In her Bryn Mawr commencement address, Le Guin argues for a discourse built upon respect:

> When you look at yourself in the mirror, I hope you see yourself. Not one of the myths. Not a failed man – a person who can never succeed because success is basically defined as being male – and not a failed goddess, a person desperately trying to hide herself in the dummy Woman, the image of men's desires and fears . . . Listen, listen, listen! Listen to other women, your sisters, your mothers, your grandmothers – if you don't hear them how will you ever understand what your daughter says to you? And the men who can talk, converse with you, not trying to talk through the dummy Yes-Woman, the men who can accept your experience as valid – when you find such a man love him, honor him! (*Dancing* 158)

The use of the mother tongue is a rejection of a masculine standard. When Le Guin addressed the graduates at Bryn Mawr, she urged them not to compete with masculine conceptions of worth, but to revive their identities through communicating with the mother tongue. She emphasized that men who speak with the mother tongue should be lauded for their positions of acceptance. Thus, the mother tongue is not limited to females, but to anyone who can speak with another person rather than at them.

Her work, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is an obvious place to look for Le Guin's perspective on the father tongue. The novel is what she calls a "thought-experiment" about a genderless society (*Language* 9). In her essay, "Is Gender Necessary?," Le Guin claims of the novel, "I eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human. It would define the area that is shared by men and women alike" (163-164). The androgynous people in the book, the Gethenians, are intended to represent both male and female characteristics, but they naturally speak using the mother tongue with no gender hierarchy. Le Guin recognizes three distinct differences between her speculated Gethenians and actual gendered societies. Her description of these differences gives a further picture of her argument for the mother tongue and against the father tongue.

The first difference she observes is that there is no war on Gethen. She observes that the people have disagreements and quarrels, but that wars among masses of people are absent. She explains this absence:

> To me the "female principle" is, or at least historically has been, basically anarchic. It values order without constraint, rule by custom not by force. It has been the male who enforces order, who constructs power-structures,

> who makes, enforces, and breaks laws. On Gethen, these two principles are in balance: the decentralizing against the centralizing, the flexible against the rigid, the circular against the linear. (165)

As a genderless society, neither the masculine nor the feminine predominates over the other, so though the Gethenians are not completely anarchic in nature, they also do not form dominating factions. Le Guin views war as the ultimate manifestation of a dominant mindset, and the Gethenians, who generally operate under the mother tongue, do not impose themselves in such a way.

The second way in which the Gethenian culture differs from gendered cultures is found in the fact that the Gethenians do not exploit their environment. This difference reveals a different set of feminine values for Le Guin. The Gethenians do make technological advancements but do so in a steady, controlled manner rather than forcing progress for the sake of progress. Le Guin posits, "In this, it seems that what I was after again was a balance: the driving linearity of the "male," the pushing forward to the limit, the logicality that admits no boundary—and the circularity of the "female," the valuing of patience, ripeness, practicality, livableness" (165-166). These "female" values are central to the theory of the mother tongue. The mother tongue is patient, allowing for tangential topic shifts, and it is ripe and alive, bringing forth life between both speaker and listener.

Le Guin proposes that the Gethenian culture differs from gendered cultures lastly in that sexuality is not a constant social factor. The Gethenians, as androgens, can be either male or female in mating, and mating is always a perfunctory practice for them rather than being controlled by lust. This removes both rape and the "alpha male" conception from the Gethenian people (166). The lack of inappropriate sexual contexts

in the Gethenian culture keeps individuals form becoming objects used merely for the other person's benefit or pleasure. This view of sexuality takes the Gethenians a step further away from masculine domination and a step closer to the perspective of one operating within the paradigm of the mother tongue.

In searching for the mother tongue within *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it is important to realize that Le Guin is not proposing the Gethenian culture as a utopia, but is rather giving a picture of what a genderless society might be like. She admits that there would be many problems in such a society, but thinks there would be distinct benefits as well:

> It seems likely that our central problem would not be the one it is now: The problem of exploitation—exploitation of the woman, of the weak, of the earth. Our curse is alienation, the separation of the yang from the 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. (169)

Le Guin's speculated Gethenian culture presents several ideal characteristics, specifically in the balance they demonstrate. As in much of Le Guin's other writing, the hierarchies of binaries are collapsed among the Gethenians. As Le Guin maintains, this collapse leads to "integration and integrity," two characteristics central to communication with the mother tongue.

Like the first three novels in The Earthsea Cycle, *The Left Hand of Darkness* was written before Le Guin's commencement address to the graduates of Bryn Mawr. Though Le Guin had solidified a great deal of her leanings by the time she wrote these novels, she had yet to formulate her theory of the mother tongue. With the novels being written before her development of the theory, the presence of mother tongue can generally be seen more through association with principles of domination and integration. Le Guin's short story, "She Unnames Them," however, is much more explicit in its dealings with the specific topic of language and gender.

Originally published in 1985, one year before Le Guin's Bryn Mawr commencement speech, "She Unnames Them" seems to be a sort of fictional precursor to Le Guin's 1986 commencement address. In her article, "'In the Beginning Was the Word': Voice in Ursula Le Guin's 'She Unnames Them," Kari Skredsvig points out that the reader of the short story "finds deeply embedded concerns about the function(s) of language in our lives, gender determination and conditioning, and the question of authority, particularly in the areas of social roles and linguistics" (65). The story uses the culturally loaded figures of Adam and Eve to question the supremacy over language that men have typically enjoyed.

"She Unnames Them" is not really a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve from the Bible. Like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, this short story is speculative in nature and deals with a thought-experiment. In the story, Eve takes away the names of the animals in the Garden of Eden. As Adam has just recently given the animals the names that Eve removes, she unnames them in conscious defiance of both Adam and God. Eve apparently feels that she must unname the animals to be able to express herself as a

woman, and finds that once the animals do not have names, she feels much closer to them. In a final act of personal liberation, Eve sheds her on name.

The scene of Eve's giving Adam back the name that he gave her is replete with distinctions between the mother tongue and the father tongue. Eve addresses Adam to return her name: "You and your father lent me this—gave it to me, actually. It's been really useful, but it doesn't exactly seem to fit very well lately. But thanks very much! It's really been very useful" (4). These hesitant lines by Eve are in part affected by her position in the gender hierarchy. She borders on being contrite in returning her name because it was given to her in the first place. Her position of humility is a manifestation of the mother tongue. Her words show an awareness of an audience, Adam, and she does not privilege herself as the speaker over him as the listener. Her words here are not cut and dry, and express more than her central point. Rather than speaking the least amount of words to get her point across, she is bountiful in her expression. She is repetitive and rhythmic, giving the feeling of liveliness.

Adam, in contrast speaks from the perspective of the father tongue. He replies to Eve, "Put it down over there, O.K.?" (4). His answer is desperately short and succinct. Unlike Eve, whose words are repetitive and full of life, Adam speaks only to communicate his central point and does not expand beyond that. His reply is an imperative commanding Eve to put "*it* down over *there*" (emphasis added). He uses the ambiguous references "it" and "there" as if he knows what he is referring to but does not deem it necessary to make his signified meaning explicit. However, he obviously does not know what "it" is referring to, because his reaction would likely have been much different if he realized Eve was giving her name back. His inattention to his audience,

Eve, reveals that he privileges himself as speaker over her as listener. He speaks in the father tongue, which is shown to no longer be an effective way of communicating in light of Eve's unnaming.

As Eve prepares to leave Adam, she tells him, "Well, goodbye, dear. I hope the garden keys turn up." Adam replies "without looking around, 'O.K., fine, dear. When's dinner?'" The narrator Eve, who has by this point understood that communication with Adam is ineffectual, answers:

> "I'm not sure . . . I'm going now. With the—" I hesitated, and finally said, "With them, you know," and went on out. In fact, I had only just then realized how hard it would have been to explain myself. I could not chatter away as I used to do, taking it all for granted. My words must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining. (5)

Eve cannot communicate effectively with Adam now because she is no longer speaking using the father tongue, which is structured by hierarchies. She understands that her new words must be tentative at first because she is expressing things in a new way.

But this new way of speaking is necessary for Eve to understand her world. Earlier in the story Eve expresses the freedom she feels after unnaming the animals:

> None were left now to unnamed, and yet how close I felt to them when I saw one of them swim or fly or trot or crawl across my way or over my skin, or stalk me in the night, or go along beside me for a while in the day. They seemed far closer than when their names had stood between myself

> and them like a clear barrier: so close that my fear of them and their fear of me became one same fear. And the attraction that many of us felt, the desire to feel or rub or caress one another's scales or skin or feathers or fur, taste one another's blood or flesh, keep one another warm; that attraction was now all one with the fear, and the hunter could not be told from the hunted, nor the eater from the food. (3)

Eve could not see the true nature of life until she removed the names of the animals, and eventually herself. With Adam's names removed, she can clearly see that the hierarchies among typical binaries were constructed by the father tongue. These binaries are actually formed by two coequal parts that are connected by fear. She does not explain what the fear is, but apparently fear is the response to understanding things as they truly are. Eve's manner of expression then is intrinsically tied to her perception of reality.

Besides being necessary for self-expression and understanding of the external world, Eve's new way of speaking is more abundant and specific. Rather than saying that the path she is walking is between the trees with sun shining through them, she says, "Between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining" (5). This specificity in description takes language a step closer to the signified with its ample depiction of the scene. Merely calling the trees "trees" would have gotten the basic point of what Eve was seeing across, but by calling them the "dark-branched, tall dancers," Eve gives a more accurate description that seems to be aware of a listener. In giving such a vivid description, Eve seems to understand the trees better and is aware of her audience, providing enough information for the listener to also come to a better understanding of the trees.

The mother tongue in "She Unnames Them" is not only represented by Eve's disavowal of the father tongue, but also in the form of the short story. In defining this formal representation of the mother tongue in "She Unnames Them," it is helpful to compare the structure of the work to the story, "Marionettes Inc.," by Ray Bradbury. Like Le Guin, Bradbury is a titan figure in speculative fiction. His works are generally science fiction and often explore dystopian ideas. In many places Le Guin expresses her desire to remove her fiction from the masculine tradition of science fiction under which category much of Bradbury's work would be placed. Though "Marionettes Inc." could certainly be considered masculine science fiction, Bradbury is more like Le Guin in spirit than many men in the genre, as he intends his literature to have more than action and a surface level meaning. However, he still writes from a distinctly masculine perspective, and just as Le Guin's use of the mother tongue can be seen in her works, the father tongue is evident in his form as well as content.

One major difference between the two works can be seen in the storyline clauses versus orientation clauses.[4] Roughly the first half of "She Unnames Them" is all orientation clauses. This first half is told by an omniscient narrator; whereas the second half of the story is told by Eve. The first half gives a lengthy list of the garden creatures, explaining each of their reactions to being unnamed. This listing of animals and responses could be removed and the story would still make sense, but these orientation clauses are present for more than just providing a logical background for the action. These clauses show a certain generosity towards the reader. They do more than tell a story. They invite the reader to step into the mind of the author through the effusion of detail.

Le Guin's vast amount of orientation contrasts strikingly against Bradbury's simple and direct storytelling. There are no large blocks of orientation clauses in "Marionettes Inc." Most of the orientation clauses are not strung together, but are rather single sentences among storyline sentences. The story begins, "They walked slowly down the street at about ten in the evening, talking calmly. They were both about thirty-five, both eminently sober" (1). Unlike Le Guin's specific detail about the animals and events surrounding the unnaming, Bradbury gives a very brief description of two nameless men. These men are the two main characters in the short story making the opening orientation clauses somewhat necessary for direct context to the storyline. After this orientation, the two men begin dialoguing, and this dialogue carries most of the action throughout the rest of the story. "Marionettes Inc." has no excess, no description that is not immediately pertinent to the storyline.

Many words in the story are elided, leaving only words completely necessary for understanding. The first exchange between the main characters, Smith and Braling, goes, "'But why so early?' said Smith. 'Because,' said Braling" (1). Though some information can be inferred from these two lines, they are nearly incomprehensible without further reading. This conversation between two men is typical of the father tongue. Each man is attempting to communicate with the other by saying as little as possible to get a point across. Where Le Guin's work is abundant in description, Bradbury leaves much for the reader to interpret himself. Bradbury's story is certainly compelling, as he is a masterful fiction writer, but he writes within the tradition of the father tongue, presenting his story in a linear, rigid way that makes little provision for circularity and excess.

The linguistic division between Bradbury's work and Le Guin's is not complete and unquestionable. Like most literature, their works are too complicated to place Bradbury's work only in the tradition of the father tongue, and likewise with Le Guin's work and the mother tongue. General statements about each work can be stated without a minor detail derailing the premise. One intriguing similarity between the works is the lines, "I don't mean to sound ungrateful," (3) from "Marionettes Inc.," and "It is hard to give back a gift without sounding peevish or ungrateful," from "She Unnames Them" (4). Both of these lines indicate that the speaker acknowledges that there is someone outside of himself or herself that they should be grateful to. However, even these lines show the linear description that Bradbury uses and the circular locution in Le Guin's work.

Le Guin's adherence to the mother tongue is evident in all of her works, from her novels, to her short fiction, to her nonfiction work. Her charge to the Bryn Mawr graduates to embrace their natural way of communicating as females is merely an explicit call for the feminine voice embraced in her earlier works. Though her early novels did not generally express the specific issue of gender and linguistics, the disposition encouraged by her protagonists is the perspective Le Guin challenges those who feel stifled by the father tongue to take. Le Guin's adherence to Taoist precepts, especially the philosophy of the yin yang, inform her perspective of the coequality of binaries, and thus the equality of women and men. With the understanding that neither binary is privileged, Le Guin's mother tongue is seen not to be a merely the way that women communicate, but the way that men and women should both communicate. Le Guin's distinction between genders arises from the fact that males typically assume dominating roles in communication whereas women tend towards integration. As Kristine Anderson

writes of the mother tongue, “The purpose of its language is to enable people, both men and women, to talk to each other. Rather, Le Guin shows us how language is so entangled with society and personality that it is impossible to say which shapes which” (10). As with Eve, language can help to understand reality better, just as reality shapes language. Though certain hierarchies are integral to the universe and society, the values shaping the mother tongue, integration, abundance, humility, integrity, and liveliness, would seem to help balance any society centered on the perversion of power or dominance.

Notes

1. In the essay "Is Gender Necessary? Redux," Le Guin states of when she was writing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, "I considered myself a feminist" (7). This essay, along with its amended portions, attempts to defend the feminist expression in *The Left Hand of Darkness* as well as recognize the shortcomings of the novel as an attempt at creating a genderless world. Her essay "Earthsea Revisioned" further reveals her attempts at "affirmative action" as a feminist writer (12).

2. The storyline clauses will be differentiated from the orientation clauses using Robert E. Longacre's definitions of these clause types found in *The Grammar of Discourse*. Longacre refers to storyline clauses as ones that fall on the "eventline" (21). These clauses express specific actions, and are typically marked by simple past tense verbs in narratives like "She Unnames Them" and "Marionettes Inc." Longacre defines orientation clauses as those "which are descriptive and equative" (23). Orientation clauses are constituted by anything that is not a storyline clause. Typically these clauses have progressive or linking verbs. For further information on these clause types, see Chapter 1 in Longacre's *The Grammar of Discourse*.

Chapter 4

The Aging of Earthsea

The Shift to the Adult Novel in *Tehanu*

In "The Questions I Get Asked Most Often," Ursula Le Guin gives her outlook on good storytelling: "For a fiction writer, a storyteller, the world is full of stories, and when a story is there, it's there, and you just reach up and pick it. Then you have to be able to let it tell itself" (262). In the first three books of her Earthsea Cycle, Le Guin does seem to have this sort of transparency as a storyteller, but in the fourth book of the series, *Tehanu*, the lens through which this organic story is filtered seems to be tinted fairly heavily by Le Guin's political agenda. As supported in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Le Guin does express her feminism implicitly through the Taoist principle of balance and through her depictions of language and power in the first three Earthsea novels. But in the fourth installment into the Cycle, Le Guin quite evidently has taken up the tasks of subversion and "affirmative action" (*Revisioned* 12). *Tehanu*, like the first three novels of the series, is successful in critiquing patriarchal social structures, but in her "revisioning" of Earthsea, Le Guin changes the nature of the Cycle from organically deep epics for children with this complex and deep, though often thinly veiled, novel for adults.

In *Earthsea Revisioned*, written several years after *Tehanu* was published, Le Guin reveals that she wrote *Tehanu* as a sort of amendment to her earlier Earthsea novels. She deems this amendment necessary because, in retrospect, she thought that the first three books of the Earthsea Cycle operated within patriarchal structures without overtly questioning them. She claims that, for the first three Earthsea books, she wrote within the tradition where "[w]omen are seen in relation to heroes: as mother, wife, seducer,

beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden" (5). In the first few paragraphs of *Tehanu* Le Guin is still using the idea of women's identity being in relation to men, but she is very deliberate in how she portrays this. The novel begins:

> After farmer Flint of the Middle Valley died, his widow stayed on at the farmhouse. Her son had gone to sea and her daughter had married a merchant of Valmouth, so she lived alone at Oak Farm. People said she had been some kind of great person in the foreign land she came from, and indeed the mage Ogion used to stop by Oak Farm to see her; but that didn't count for much, since Ogion visited all sorts of nobodies. She had a foreign name, but Flint had called her Goha . . . So now she was Flint's widow, Goha, mistress of a flock of sheep. (1)

In these first few paragraphs, Tenar is never mentioned by her true name, but by the relative titles of widow, mother, foreigner, nobody, and finally "Goha," the name given her by her late husband. By omitting Tenar's true name, Le Guin hints that the world in which Tenar lives views her not as an autonomous person, but as a filler of roles.

As we come to learn more about Tenar, one very striking thing quickly becomes apparent: she is the central character, and she is old. In *Tehanu* the Tenar from *The Tombs of Atuan* has aged into a middle-aged woman, and her place at the center of the story is striking in comparison to the first three Earthsea books, which had young adults as the protagonist. In his essay, "Reinventing the Past: Gender in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Tehanu* and the Earthsea 'Trilogy,'" Perry Nodelman asserts that *Tehanu* does not operate as a standard book for middle-readers:

> *Tehanu* most clearly asserts itself as a revisionist act by the fact that it is

> not the kind of story one expects in a novel supposedly for young adults. Although it does tell how a child grows into knowledge and power, that is not the central issue . . . the story centers on the awakening of [Tenar's] consciousness of the evil in the world. (198)

By the end of the first few paragraphs in *Tehanu*, it is clear that whatever revisioning Le Guin has done of Earthsea, a striking change to the nature of this novel is most quickly apparent. Unlike the first three coming-of-age stories in the Earthsea Cycle, *Tehanu* is more of a coming-to-awareness novel for the older Tenar.

While young adults can learn from the wisdom of Tenar and can certainly sympathize with the burned Therru, *Tehanu* does not operate as a book for middle readers. The first three novels of the Cycle are somewhat rooted in the epic in the nature of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Mikhail Bakhtin defines "epic" as "the national heroic past: it is the world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders and families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (13). Like *The Hobbit*, the first three books of the Cycle focus on heroes, even if unlikely ones, and on their deeds that shaped the history of their respective culture. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged, of whom Ogion foresees could become the "one who will be greatest of the wizards of Gont" (*Wizard* 36), must rid the world of the evil shadow that killed the current archmage and unbalanced the world. In *Tombs*, Ged comes to the island of Atuan to recover the second half of the broken ring of Erreth-Akbe, which has the power to restore a king to the throne in Earthsea, and ends up rescuing Tenar from the island along with recovering the ring. *The Farthest Shore* tells the story of the voyage of Ged, now Archmage of Earthsea, and Arren, the prince of Enlad to seek out and destroy the thing that is

weakening wizards' magic and throwing the world into imbalance. Like *The Hobbit*, these first three books operate as fantasy epics because they tell of Earthsea's heroes in their heroic exploits. Even *Tombs* is epic in nature, though much of the story is set in one location amidst seemingly unimportant events because it tells the story of Tenar and Ged's recovery of the ring that will allow a king to once again rule over Earthsea.

Like the first three books of the Earthsea Cycle, *Tehanu* involves heroes of the history of Earthsea, but in contrast, this novel does not focus on their heroic deeds. Rather, *Tehanu* focuses on the small, the intimate, the feminine.[4] Cadden asserts that with *Tehanu*, the Cycle shifts from its epic form to that of a novel in the sense that it has turned from a mythological base to a more historically focused narrative (86). Le Guin manages this shift by writing much more about day-to-day life in Earthsea than in her previous Earthsea books. In her article, "Witches, Wives and Dragons: The Evolution of the Women in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea — an Overview," Melanie A. Rawls explains, "Having written male-centered heroic fantasy, Le Guin examines what the 'ordinary' people of Earthsea are doing even as they live through extraordinary times" (132). In *Tehanu*, Arren, who is now called Lebannen, has ascended to the throne in an enormously important event in Earthsea's history. But the major characters in this novel, Tenar, Ged, and Therru, are not actively involved in this new, historical, event.

Rather than focusing on heroic situations, Le Guin centers *Tehanu* around the experiences of Tenar as she takes in and cares for little Therru, who has been raped, badly burned, and left for dead by the vagrants who had previously been her guardians. Though once a heroine in Earthsea, Tenar is now living in obscurity on the isle of Gont, where she, along with the witch Moss and the farm hand Heather, tend the house and land

left behind by Ogion. Most of the action in the story is about the daily life of tending to chores and interacting with strangers. At the climax of the story, Ged and Tenar are carried up to a cliff to be cast into the sea by the evil wizard Aspen until the dragon Kalessin eventually saves them. Though this event involves characters central to the history of Earthsea, the import is much more local than the climaxes of the first three novels. The dragon Kalessin, who is one in the same with Segoy who raised the islands of Earthsea from the sea, saves the two greatest heroes of their generation, but in this situation, Tenar and Ged's salvation does not have implications beyond their personal group of family, friends, and acquaintances. Where Ged and Tenar's escape from Atuan in the second book of the series meant the possibility of a king in Earthsea, their escape from near death in *Tehanu* had little implication beyond the fact that their lives were not lost. Of course this affected Tenar's family and the people close to both of them, but this event is no more significant than most other events in Earthsea.

Though the dearth of action and heroics in *Tehanu* make this book less a children's book than the first three in the Cycle, Le Guin's shift of focus to day-to-day events is very intentional. She purposes with this novel to reverse the focus on heroic deeds typical to mythological fantasy because she considers heroic myth far too masculine. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, she states of Tenar,

> Her definition of action, decision, and power is not heroic in the masculine sense. Her acts and choice do not involve ascendance, domination, power over others, and seem not to involve great consequences. They are 'private' acts and choices, made in terms of immediate, actual relationships. (13)

As the central character in *Tehanu*, Tenar operates as a sort of antihero who lacks most of the qualities of the archetypical hero figure. She has thrown off the masculine sort of power: "As a young woman she had been taught a powerful knowledge by a powerful man and had laid it aside, turned away from it, not touched it. As a woman she had chosen and had the powers of a woman" (*Tehanu* 76). The ostensible power that Tenar had possessed as a younger woman, "The power that a woman was born to, the authority allotted her by the arrangements of mankind" (*Tehanu* 37), now seems to be gone. She no longer has the physical beauty of her youth, her assistance and supervision as a wife and a mother are no longer needed as her husband has died and both of her children are grown, and she is largely ignored by others.

Despite Tenar's seeming deficiencies, she does have a quiet power throughout the novel. The most obvious expression is in her healing and restorative nature. Though she is not able to heal Therru's wounds, Tenar does manage to restore some of the spirit to the broken and helpless girl. Unlike the men on Gont, save Ogion, who cannot overlook the wrong done to Therru by her former guardians, Tenar recognizes Therru's personal worth and beauty. Tenar very slowly, but persistently, chips away at the proverbial stone which she recognizes Therru has been sealed in (*Tehanu* 39) to bring out life in the little girl. Therru displays a keen interest in dragons and fire from early on in the story, and Tenar recognizes this interest and helps to further it, intentionally or otherwise, throughout the story. The first place in the story where anything like a laugh is heard from Therru takes place when Tenar produces sparks by brushing her hair. Tenar asks Therru why she is fascinated with Tenar's hair brushing, to which Therru replies, "'The fire flying out,' the child said, with fear or exultation. 'All over the sky!'" (124).

Throughout the novel, Tenar attempts to draw Therru out of her shell of pain, and sometimes this happens intentionally, but here Tenar evokes a sign of emotion unintentionally through an act of habit. Tenar is merely brushing her hair, but this daily activity has the power to bring out the most evident expression of feeling that Therru has exhibited since her adoption by Tenar.

Tenar does not just dismiss this response to her hair brushing as a child's silly fascination; it leads her to wonder about Therru's perception of the world:

> At that moment Tenar first asked herself how Therru saw her—saw the world—and knew she did not know: that she could not know what one saw with an eye that had been burned away. And Ogion's words, *They will fear her*, returned to her; but she felt no fear of the child. Instead, she brushed her hair again, vigorously, so the sparks would fly, and once again she heard the little husky laugh of delight. (125)

Unlike the men of Gont, Tenar recognizes the emotion and insight of Therru. While Ged says, "In the child I see only—the wrong done. The evil" (107), Tenar sees beyond Therru's scars and is not afraid. Without trying she evokes laughter and fascination in the young child, and after this Tenar consciously continues brushing her hair to make the girl laugh. Tenar's restorative powers operate both involuntarily and voluntarily here and throughout the novel to bring about Therru's emotional healing.

Tenar works a similar sort of healing on the now powerless Archmage of Earthsea, Ged. Ged is brought to Gont by Kalessin after entering the land of the dead and defeating the wizard Cob who was attempting to gain eternal life. In successfully

thwarting Cob, Ged lost his power as a wizard. Now that Ged is back on Gont, Tenar laments his feeling of utter loss now that he has lost his magic:

> That was all he cared about. He had never cared or thought about her, only about power—her power, his power, how he could use it, how he could make more power of it. Putting the broken Ring together, making the Rune, putting a king on the throne. And when his power was gone, still it was all he could think about: that it was gone, lost, leaving him only himself, his shame, his emptiness. (203)

Ged may well fell that he has lost everything that gives him significance, but Tenar does not value the things that Ged has lost. While Ged is obsessed with power and great deeds, Tenar values "'private' acts and choices, made in terms of immediate, actual relationships" (*Revisioned* 13). She believes that Ged's need for power is selfish and is an exclusionary path to loneliness while the "private" things that she values lead to wholeness in her interpersonal relationships.

Tenar is first able to effect some restoration within Ged through their sexual relationship. Their first sexual encounter teaches "Ged the mystery that the wisest man could not teach him" (*Tehanu* 236). Ged has been struggling for the masculine sense of power through domination throughout his life, but this intimacy with Tenar eventually allows him to find wholeness. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin tells of the typical aversion of intimacy with a female by male heroic figures: "The establishment of manhood in heroic terms involves the absolute devaluation of women. The woman's touch, in any sense, threatens that heroic masculinity" (11). Ged does seem ambivalent and a little frightened after his and Tenar's initial sexual encounter, but Tenar comforts

him: “Oh, Ged, don’t fear me! You were a man when I first saw you! It’s not a weapon or a woman can make a man, or magery either, or any power, anything but himself” (237). While Ged seems, at least in part, to fear that his intimacy with Tenar has lessened his masculinity, Tenar assures him that his masculinity lies beyond what he can physically control.

It is not the actual act of sex that restores Ged but his ability to trust himself and others. Tenar says to Ged, “Real power, real freedom, would lie in trust, not force” (247). His personal wholeness and freedom paradoxically come through his attachment to Tenar and Therru. After he returns to Gont and before he has sex with Tenar, he acts like a lost man, preferring to be alone in his misery. His intimacy with Tenar acts as a catalyst for him to let go of his need for power and to allow himself to know and truly be known by those he loves.

A similar sort of healing takes place in *A Wizard of Earthsea* when Vetch tells his true name to Ged. This gift of Vetch’s true name is incredibly meaningful to Ged as Vetch offers Ged his trust even after Ged unleashed the shadow in Earthsea that unbalanced the world: “Thus to Ged who had lost faith in himself, Vetch had given that gift only a friend can give, the proof of unshaken, unshakable trust” (69). This sign of trust by Vetch helps to partially restore Ged’s confidence in himself and helps him remember his true place in the world: “He knew once more, at last, after this long, bitter, wasted time, who he was and where he was” (70). Like his intimacy with Tenar, Ged’s confidence here is restored through the trust of another.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this sort of power that focuses on wholeness and trust, as exhibited by Vetch here, is seen throughout the first three novels of the Earthsea

Cycle. The Ged who is broken in an almost childlike despondency after losing his power of magic in *Tehanu* does not seem consistent with the Ged depicted in the first three books of the Cycle. Certainly in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged as a youth is obsessed with his own personal power. It is in his pride that he unleashed the destructive shadow on Earthsea. But it is only through his friendship with Vetch and his learning to use his power only when necessary that he is able to bring balance back to the world. Ged has already once recovered from a great loss of power before Kalessin brings him to Gont in *Tehanu*. After releasing the shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea,* Ged is left scarred and without any confidence, yet he seems to learn through this tragedy that he should not seek after power, but rather after wholeness. Indeed, like Ogion, Ged has learned to use his power only when necessary, as exemplified in *The Farthest Shore.* In this book, Arren realizes that Ged has not performed any superfluous magic: "The second night out it rained, the rough cold rain of March, but he said no spell to keep it off them. On the next night . . . Arren thought about this, and reflected that in the short time he had known him, the Archmage had done no magic at all" (44). Like Ogion in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged has learned only to use his powers of magic when absolutely necessary. Likewise, he willingly sacrifices his wizardry to save the magic in the world. This sort of man who had come through a terrible tragedy created by his undue use of magical power and who was so spare with his use of magic afterwards does not seem to align with the surly man who is utterly broken by his loss of magic in *Tehanu*.

The representation of Ged's view of power in *Tehanu* reflects Le Guin's negative depiction of males throughout the novel. While in the first three books of the Cycle not all men were depicted as trustworthy characters, the mages of Roke were generally cast

in a positive light. In *Tehanu*, both the mages and their right to preside as the ruling body in Earthsea are questioned. Besides Ged and his excessive need for power, the Master Windkey of Roke is described as a man who speaks without hearing, especially when speaking with a woman. When talking to the Master Windkey, Tenar "could feel the mage's controlled impatience with her . . . His deafness silenced her. She could not even tell him that he was deaf" (178). Later, after Tenar says Kalessin's name, "He heard the dragon's name. But it did not make him hear her. How could he, who had never listened to a woman since his mother sang him his last cradle song, hear her?" (179-80). The Master Windkey operates under Le Guin's definition of the father tongue as one who uses language to dominate rather than to communicate. Adding to his unwillingness to truly listen to others is his belief that women are not valuable sources of knowledge and truth. He cannot truly hear Tenar because he is trapped within his own preconceptions of truth and authority.

Le Guin further criticizes common masculine prejudices through the characters of Handy and Aspen. Both of these men are wholly evil and view women as subhuman. Handy is one of Therru's previous guardians likely responsible for her being so badly burned. In several places in the novel he tries to get Tenar to give him the child, and his purposes are obviously impure. As his name suggests, Handy is only interested in Therru to fulfill his perverse sexual desires. After Handy touches Therru's arm by the new king Lebannen's ship, Tenar notices that Handy's touch has left a mark: "On her small, thin arm Tenar saw a mark—four fingers, red, like a brand, as from a bruising grip. But Handy had not gripped her, he had only touched her . . . What word meant anything, against deaf violence?" (168). Handy's "deaf violence" is one that wants only to take

without any thought for who he is taking from. Though his offence is much greater than that of the Master Windkey, both of them are described as "deaf" to women because both men do not care about the thoughts, desires, or fears of women. Handy leaves a visible mark on young Therru that represents the mental and emotional pain that his selfish actions have wrought on her.

Like Handy, Aspen, the wizard of Re Albi, is an oppressor of women, but his oppression is more deliberate than Handy's and is manifested through his unbending hatred towards Tenar and Therru. Early in the story, Tenar gains Aspen's contempt by being the only one with Ogion when he dies. After Tenar tells of Ogion's final wishes, "[Aspen], seeing a middle-aged village woman, simply turned away" (31). Aspen need only see that Tenar is a middle-aged woman to dismiss her. Later, Aspen says of his meeting with Tenar at Ogion's burial, "You defied me once, across the body of the old wizard, and I forbore to punish you then, for his sake and in the presence of others. But no you've come too far, and I warn you, woman!" (142). He then proceeds to start to put a curse on her, until several sailors walk by and interrupt his spell. Afterward, Tenar reflects that "[t]o be a woman was her fault. Nothing could worsen or amend it, in his eyes; no punishment was enough" (143). Le Guin depicts Aspen as being firmly guided by the father tongue. Like the Master Windkey, he speaks without listening, and especially without listening to women, and his motivation is "contempt, rivalry, anger" (*Tehanu* 32). Aspen's conception of power is in direct conflict with the inclusive, trusting sort of power that Le Guin views as ideal.

While most of the male characters in *Tehanu* are weak or evil, Lebannen seems to be a picture of Le Guin's ideal man. Lebannen is the true name of Arren who helps Ged

to thwart Cob in *The Farthest Shore*. In the beginning of his journey with Ged in the third book, Arren is a dutiful, but slightly cocky, young prince. However, in *Tehanu*, Arren, now Lebannen, has grown out of his arrogance, and he has become a more than suitable king for Earthsea. Though she listens to Lark's effusions that Lebannen's rule has made it possible that "an honest man could sleep safe at night, and what went wrong the king was setting right" with a discerning ear (198), Tenar does believe that Lebannen is a good man. When she is talking to him, she notes, "He listened. He was not deaf" (181). Lebannen respects Tenar and truly listens to her. He stands out from most men in the novel in this way, and when she and Therru are on the ship after Therru had been touched by Handy, Lebannen is the only man that Tenar will allow to carry Therru to the bunk house. Nodelman asserts that Lebannen is an androgynous figure in the novel (199). While he may not be physically androgynous, Lebannen, like Vetch in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, operates under the mother tongue, seeking trust and harmony rather than favoring masculinity or femininity.

King Lebannen's genderlessness is a sign of Le Guin's intentional displacement of masculine figures from positions of authority in Earthsea. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin makes clear that she is attempting to use the troubling depictions of masculinity exhibited by Handy and Aspen to reveal that masculine domination is a construction of oppression built upon a faulty foundation:

> The deepest foundation of the order of oppression is gendering, which names the male normal, dominant, active, and the female other, subjective passive. To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths

> of race, have to be exploded and discarded. My fiction does that by these troubling and ugly embodiments. (24)

Though there is a male on the throne in Earthsea, Le Guin does not imbue him with the same masculine values as the Master Windkey who is part of the masculine hegemony that has presided over the world of wizards and has had great influence among non-magical people. Lebannen represents a new order of power and respect in Earthsea. His strength comes not through dominance but through his willingness to listen to the wisdom of both men and women.

Le Guin's overhaul of patriarchal social structures in *Tehanu* does not end with King Lebannen. The Master Windkey tells Tenar that during a meeting between the nine mages of Roke to decide who would be the next Archmage, the Master Patterner had a vision, during which he said merely: "*A woman on Gont*" (176). Though the Master Patterner thinks that this woman must be someone who can point the mages to who should be the next archmage, Tenar runs the question of why "there can't be she-archmages" over and over with Ged, never quite satisfied with the circular answers that he gives her (244-252).

There is the implication in the novel that Therru is the woman on Gont that the mages are looking for. Tenar recognizes an untamed power in Therru early in the novel, but it is not until the end that the extent of her power is revealed. Before Aspen leads Tenar and Ged to the cliff over the sea in order to kill them both, Therru calls the dragon Kalessin to rescue them. After the dragon saves them by burning Aspen and his cohort, Kalessin and Therru have a conversation about whether she should go with him or stay with Tenar and Ged. The fact that she is talking to the dragon is remarkable because

even among wizards trained in the Language of Making, there are few who can speak with dragons. Throughout the novel, however, Therru has a great interest in dragons and fire, and she is inextricably tied to fire by the burn scar that covers half her face and makes one hand nearly unusable. Her natural interest in dragons stems from the fact that she, like the woman in a story told to her by Tenar, is half dragon. As Kalessin leaves the cliff, he says to Tenar and Ged, "I give you my child, as you will give me yours" (278), implying that Therru will stay with them until she is ready to join Kalessin "on the other wind" (277).

Therru's half-dragon nature is depicted as a perfect balance of the understandable and the mysterious. Nodelman proposes that "as Arren presumably unified male and female in an androgyny that transcended sexuality, Tehanu unifies human and dragon in a condition that transcends the need for the reasoned control of male authority" (199). Therru, whose true name at the end of the novel is revealed to be Tehanu, represents a power and freedom that comes outside of human construction, which has largely been controlled by the males of Earthsea. She is twice removed from the privileged ideal in Earthsea, being a woman, and being one whose physical beauty has been marred. But in the end of the story she is revealed to have a closer connection to Earthsea's most powerful creatures, dragons, and she will one day have the power and freedom of flying with them in a place away from human constructions, on "the other wind." The dragon represents a new order to Le Guin:

> [Tenar] can look the dragon in the eye – because she chose freedom over power. Her insignificance is her wildness . . . So the dragon is subversion, revolution, change – a going beyond the old order in which men were

> taught to own and dominate and women were taught to collude with them: the order of oppression. It is the wildness of the spirit and of the earth, uprising against misrule. And it rejects gender. (*Revisioned* 23-24)

Just as Kalessin is genderless, Therru's dual nature represents a changing of the order of Earthsea away from the oppression of masculine dominance. Like Ged's need to accept both good and evil as part of himself to find wholeness, the convergence of binaries in Lebannen and Therru represent a balancing of power that will bring wholeness to Earthsea.

Much of what is written in *Tehanu* is completely consistent with Le Guin's depiction of Earthsea in the first three books in the Cycle. In *Earthsea Revisioned,* Le Guin acknowledges that her feminism is somewhat evident in her first three books: "I think now my subversion went further than I knew, for by making my hero dark-skinned I was setting him outside the whole European heroic tradition, in which heroes are not only male but white. I was making him an Outsider, an Other, like a woman, like me" (8). Beyond Ged's outsider status in the first three books in the Cycle, Le Guin glorifies characters who live under her conception of the mother tongue and contends that wholeness and balance can only be gained when both parts of a binary are treated as equal.

The differences between *Tehanu* and the first three novels are a more popular topic among critics than the similarities. Rawls explains their interest: "As has been noted by a number of critics, in this book all that was written before is undermined and changed, re-visited and revised" (131). Nodelman concurs: "I see *Tehanu*, not as an explicit statement of formerly implicit themes, but rather, as a profound criticism and

reversal of what went before" (198). Though some of Le Guin's values have shifted, most notably in her upheaval of the patriarchal power structure of Earthsea, the most striking change effected by *Tehanu* is in the nature of the work itself. The first three books of the Cycle all, to some degree, document the daily lives of the primary characters, especially in *The Tombs of Atuan*. But the focus of these books is on the heroic deeds that, through their connection with myth, will resonate with the young readers for whom the Cycle is written. *Tehanu* operates largely outside of any sort of mythic tradition. Rather than attempting to connect with traditional Western archetypes, Le Guin seeks to exploit the shortcomings of those archetypes. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, she questions Jung's archetypes: "We might be aware that the archetypes he identified are mindforms of the Western European psyche as perceived by a man" (6). In moving away from these accepted archetypes, Le Guin creates a complex criticism of patriarchy, but she does so in a way that will, more than likely, not strike enough familiarity with younger audiences to hold their interest or effect their comprehension.

In her revisioning of Earthsea, Le Guin teeters dangerously close to making politics rather than her story the subject of *Tehanu*. Le Guin recognizes and defends her politicalization of Earthsea: "Oh, they say, what a shame, Le Guin has politicized her delightful fantasy world, Earthsea will never be the same. I'll say it won't. The politics were there all along, the hidden politics of the hero-tale, the spell you don't know you're living under till you cast it off" (*Revisioned* 24). She is quite right in claiming that the politics have always been a part of Earthsea, but in placing such an overt focus on politics in the novel, she shifts her focus away from describing Earthsea to casting a shadow of authorial intrusion on the world that she has created. She acknowledges, in *Earthsea*

Revisioned, that she is no longer content to merely describe Earthsea: "Authority is male. It is a fact. My fantasy dutifully reported fact. But is that all a fantasy does – report facts?" (11). This is an interesting question, and not one that can be adequately addressed in this thesis, but *Tehanu* does introduce the question of the nature of the fantasy found in the Earthsea Cycle. By returning to the Cycle with the purpose to undermine what she had written before, Le Guin makes *Tehanu* as much her personal political platform as her story. This is not to say that the story is not beautiful, and the novel offers great wealth to any adult, but the focus of the novel towards the political is a direct shift away from the form of the previous three novels.

Though Ursula Le Guin's feminism developed beyond the years in which she wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan,* and *The Farthest Shore,* these books work a subtle but strong subversion of the patriarchal values of the father tongue. They promote a slow tongue, a ready ear, and a respect for the Other. In these books, Le Guin uses the power of the speech of magic to depict the wholeness and balance that can only be maintained through a suppression of that power until it is absolutely necessary to use it. The same power of trust that restores Ged to wholeness in *Tehanu* brings him emotional healing in *A Wizard of Earthsea. Tehanu* is a well conceived and masterfully written novel, but it strays far enough from the form of the first three novels that it seems like an angle attempting to become part of the circle formed by the other three.

Note

1. Le Guin herself equates "private" acts, or those of seemingly little importance to the feminine. She claims that in *Tehanu*, Tenar realizes a proper sense of power: "Her definition of action, decision, and power is not heroic in the masculine sense. Her acts and choices do not involve ascendance, domination, power over others, and seem not to involve great consequences. The are 'private' acts and choices, made in terms of immediate, actual relationships" ("Revisioned" 13).

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