

**PUSHING OUT TOWARDS THE LIMITS, AND FINDING THE CENTRE:
The mystical vision in the work of Ursula K. Le Guin**

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Gisela Beate Hoyle

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Declaration

All work in this thesis is the original work of the author, except where specific acknowledgement is made to the work of others

Signed: 

G.B. Hoyle
Department of English
Rhodes University
Grahamstown

January 1992

Abstract

This thesis explores the major novels of science fiction and fantasy writer, Ursula K. Le Guin: it follows her journey from her first imaginary country, Orsinia, through the inner lands of Earthsea and the outer spaces of the Hainish Ekumen to her Yin utopia in a future California and an Earthsea revisited. In each of these worlds she moves towards an experience of an inner, unified truth which is comparable to the ecstatic experience of the religious mystics and that of which T.S Eliot writes in his *Four Quartets*.

Through her reading of the Taoist sages and the discovery of their perception of Life as a constant and ongoing process rather than as a series of isolated events or states, whether mystical or mundane, these worlds and planets become symbols of a way of life instead of static objects. In her medium, narrative, this way is embodied in the *story*: the movement towards that moment of enlightenment, which is revealed as the heart, the life-giving centre of each world. It is the home to which each journey returns. "True voyage is return" (*The Dispossessed*).

Owing to this perception of the immanent (w)holiness of life, of the many, different realities, she moves from a serene Taoist equilibrium to an angry feminist rejection of the masculine, dualist, Western civilisation, in which Man has largely been perceived as a creature apart; apart from nature, a guest on this planet, belonging to *another* world. In her anarchist and feminist utopias she seeks a new spiritual home, a less alienated identity for humankind.

Despite this apparent "development", at the heart of all her books there is that same joy in *this*, mortal life, the search for which she sees as the most essential of all human pursuits. That, ultimately, is both source and subject of Le Guin's work; and each new world explored is a different manifestation of the joyful *Tao*, a celebration of life.

Glossary: Defining the terms

The Centre

The mystical experience of the Centre is a concept central to this thesis. Therefore I place a tentative (as all rational definitions must be) definition of it in a glossary to which the reader can refer throughout the text.

To leave the circumference for the centre is equivalent to moving from the exterior to the interior, from form to contemplation, from multiplicity to unity, from space to spacelessness, from time to timelessness. In all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial "paradise state" and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe.

Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p.40

This is the way in which I have used the word "centre" in the study of Le Guin's work. It is understood in various ways: in the psychological mode it is the Self, in the Jungian sense; in the mystical it is the Burning or Divine Ground where the mortal and the divine may meet; in the symbolic mode it is both the omphalos and the moment in the Rose Garden of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*; and in the mathematical mode the number one is the equivalent of the Centre. The centre in this sense is experienced as a moment of truth by the mystic and often by the artist, despite the fact that the arguments of mages and academics alike are infinite: the truth cannot be *known* or *defined*, but according to Le Guin, T.S. Eliot and other mystical writers it can be *experienced*. It is in this sense of the experience at the Centre that the word "truth" will be used in this thesis.

1. The Psychological Mode

1.1 The Self

This is the collective unconscious, a selfhood which goes beyond the individual, conscious ego. It is the identity of the individual consciousness with other beings and possibly with the divine, the source of all being. In the text of the thesis this Self, the collective unconscious, will be capitalised, while the lower case will be used for the individual, conscious self.

1.2 Archetypes

These are embodiments of various aspects of the unconscious mind, e.g. the anima figure, the hero, the wizard and the king. They are a way of describing an inner truth. Jung says of them:

The archetypes are the numinous, structural elements of the psyche and possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the conscious mind, those contents which are best suited to themselves. The symbols act as transformers, ... It was manifestly not a question of inherited ideas, but of an inborn disposition to produce parallel images, or rather identical psychic structures common to all men.

quoted in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p.XXXV

2. The Mystical Mode

2.1 The Divine Ground

This is what the mystics experience as the divine reality, as God, as the *Tao* or as the state of enlightenment. An experience which cannot be placed in time or space, or defined in rational terms. It is not to be found in the conscious world.

3. The Symbolic Mode

3.1 The omphalos

This is a white stone, which the inhabitants of Delphi called the *omphalos* (navel) and considered to be the centre of the world. It is therefore another symbol of the mystical centre at which the divine and the mortal, the living and the dead or unborn are connected. This image of the centre as a stone becomes part of Le Guin's definition of *home* in *Always Coming Home*.

3.2 World

This is not defined as the outward reality of matter but as a way of being, of living. Such ways of being are symbolised by the different planets of Le Guin's novels. It is an interaction between the individual being and the outward reality, in which these two become one:

So there is the secret. What is esoteric; what is profound, and what is deep is what we will call the *implicit*; what is obvious and in the open is what we will call the *explicit*. And I and my environment and you and your environment are explicitly as different as different could be, but implicitly you go together. And this is discovered by the scientist when he tries to describe what happens exactly (which is the art of science). When he describes exactly what you do, he finds out that you, your behaviour, is not something that can be separated from the behaviour of the world around you. He realizes then that you are something that the whole world is doing. Just as when the sea has waves on it - the sea, the ocean, is *waving* - so each one of us is a *waving* of the whole cosmos.

Alan Watts, *Om: Creative Meditations*, p.19

3.3 Dragon

The dragon is perceived as the symbol of nature par excellence and as such has in the West traditionally been seen as a creature of great evil that must be fought and overcome in order to attain enlightenment. As both a Taoist and a feminist Le Guin turns this symbolism inside out. Her dragons are not creatures of evil, but an embodiment of the wisdom of life, of the *Tao*, which is not moral but simply *is*. In *Tehanu* this nature of the dragons, as embodiments of the very spirit of life, is seen in women as well.

4. Taoism

Le Guin's mystic vision is based largely on Taoism; in fact she says she has been a Taoist since the age of 12 (Barrow and Barrow, 1991, p.22). This vision of the ancient Chinese sages poses a number of problems for the Western reader. A central one is that of translation: many different translations exist of the *Tao Te Ching*, the central book of Taoism, alone, each with a very different, individual interpretation. I have followed Richard Wilhelm's interpretation, if not always his translation, where I have quoted from the *Tao Te Ching* to illustrate a relation to Le Guin's writing. I will try to explain the central words of this philosophy/religion without a dogma: *Tao*, *Te* and *Wu wei*, as well as *yin* and *yang*.

4.1 Tao

The clearest explanation of this word is given by Richard Wilhelm in his Introduction to his translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. I quote here H.G.Ostwald's translation of this into English:

The metaphysics of the *Dao De Jing* is built on a foundation of intuition which cannot be formulated into static or narrowly defined concepts. Lao Zi [in this thesis referred to as Lao Tzu, the more traditional spelling of the name] "painfully" called this DAO. From the outset the correct translation of this word has been the subject of a great deal of controversy. "God", "Way", "Reason", "Word", "Logos" - these are just a few of the translations that have been suggested; while a number of writers have simply introduced the word "Dao" into European languages without translating it. In point of fact, the term matters little since even for Lao Zi himself it was only a sort of algebraic symbol for something ineffable. It was for essentially aesthetic reasons that it seemed desirable to have a German word in a German translation. I have chosen the word "Sinn" [roughly, "meaning"] throughout. . . . This would seem to be the translation that does most justice to the Chinese word DAO in its various meanings. The primary meaning of the Chinese word is "way"; it then broadens out into meaning "direction", "state" (as condition) and from there into "reason", "truth". Used as a verb the word means "to speak". "to say", or, metaphorically, "to lead". . . . The German word "Sinn" also has the original meaning of "way", "direction". In addition, it implies: (1) "the inner man's directedness towards something"; (2) "the inner man as the seat of consciousness, perception, thinking, reflection; (3) "bodily sensation", predominantly used in the plural; (4) "meaning, idea, sense of words, images, actions". Among all these meanings only the one mentioned under (3) should be rejected as inapplicable to DAO; in other respects, though, the concurrence . . . is very comprehensive.

Introduction to *Tao Te Ching*, pp.12-13

In the thesis *Tao* [the more usual spelling] will always be written in italics, to indicate the algebraic nature of the word. Similarly the word *way*, which is Le Guin's translation of *Tao*, will also occur in italics at the appropriate places. For the purpose of this study the word "story" can in many ways be read as related to *Tao*. This will be explained in the body of the text.

4.2 Te

"Nature", "power", "essence", "spirit" and "virtue" are various translation of this word. The Chinese definition is : "What beings receive in order to come about is called De" (ibid.), thus again, Richard Wilhelm's translation seems the most appropriate: Life. *Te* is variously spelled Te or Teh, in quotations I will use the translator's spelling.

4.3 Wu Wei

This is the way of being by which the Taoist sages follow the *Tao*. It involves a spontaneity of action which is however not impulsive but a result of a clear, intuitive understanding of what is appropriate in each situation, without any rational weighing of the outcome or the morality of one's actions. In this way one acts in harmony with the *Tao*. Le Guin translates this as "action in stillness" in her introduction to *Planet of Exile*.

4.4 Yin and Yang

These are the two principles, the energies by which the world is constantly created for the Taoist. When united they become the One, the *Tao*, when differentiated, they create by their coupling the myriad things, the material world. Yin is the female energy, associated with darkness, with passivity, with the unconscious, with cold, with wet, with death and decline; while yang is the male energy, associated with light, action, conscious rationality, dryness, warmth, birth and growth.

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Introduction

In her essay, "A Citizen of Mondath", Ursula K. Le Guin writes about how she came to write fantasy and science fiction:

The limits, and the great spaces of fantasy and science fiction are precisely what my imagination needs. Outer Space, and the Inner Lands, are still, and always will be, my country.

The Language of the Night, p.23

Her writing about Outer Spaces and Inner Lands is both a "pushing out towards the limits" (ibid. p.23) and a "working from the centre of being" (ibid. p.67): for her it is a mystical process, in which the outer cosmos and the inner being of the artist are One. She writes of fantasists that "they dance on the burning ground" of divine being and therefore "the rational mind notoriously cannot see what is happening in fantasy, or why it happens" (*The Language of the Night*, p.106). For it is not a rational process to be explained in rational terms.

If fantasists dance on the burning ground, then their stories are, both for them and for their readers, *journeys* to that burning ground of the goddess, which is the heart. This unity of the inner being of Man and the divine reality is the very heart of the mystic's experience. F. C. Happold explains it thus:

1. This phenomenal world of matter and individual consciousness is only a partial reality and is the manifestation of a Divine Ground in which all partial realities have their being.
2. It is of the nature of man that not only can he have knowledge of this Divine Ground by inference, but also he can realize it by direct intuition, superior to discursive reason, in which the knower is in some way united with the known.
3. The nature of man is not a single but a dual one. He has not one but two selves, the phenomenal *ego*, of which he is chiefly conscious and which he tends to regard as his true self, and a non-phenomenal, eternal self, an inner man, spirit, the spark of divinity within him, which is his true self. It is possible for man, . . . to identify himself with his true self and so with the Divine Ground, which is of the same or like nature.
4. It is the chief end of man's earthly existence to discover and identify himself with his true self. By so doing, he will come to an intuitive knowledge of the Divine Ground and so apprehend truth as it really is, and not as to our limited human perceptions it appears to be.

Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology, p.20

According to Le Guin, the psychologist Jung would agree with this view of the human psyche:

Very roughly, then, Jung saw the ego, what we usually call the self, as only a part of the Self, the part which we are consciously aware of. "The ego revolves around the Self as the earth around

the Sun", he says. The Self is transcendent, much larger than the ego, it is not a private possession, but collective - that is, we share it with all other human beings, and perhaps with all beings. It may indeed be our link with what we call God. Now this sounds mystical, and it is, but it is also exact and practical. . . Human beings all look roughly alike, they also think and feel alike. And they are all part of the universe.

The Language of the Night, p.52

Fantasy, like myth and fairy tale, seeks a way to this Self, this Divine Ground, and the way to it is not clear and rational, but dark, beyond the rational. For this reason Le Guin does not plan her worlds in an orderly and rational manner, she *discovers* them, as she explains in "Dreams must Explain Themselves":

"But I didn't plan anything, I found it. . . in my subconscious." . . .

This attitude towards action, creation, is evidently a basic one, the same root from which the interest in the *I Ching* and Taoist philosophy evident in most of my books arises. 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.

The Language of the Night, p.39

These "laws" of the *Tao*, which are not imposed, but exist in things as they naturally *are*, are the laws by which Le Guin's stories, like fairy stories, operate:

There *is no right way* to act when you're the hero or heroine of a fairy tale. There is no system of conduct, there are no standards of what a nice prince does and what a good little girl doesn't do. I mean, do good little girls usually push old ladies into baking ovens, and get rewarded for it? Not in what we call "real life", they don't. But in dreams and fairy tales they do. And to judge Gretel by the standards of conscious daylight virtue is a complete and ridiculous mistake.

The Language of the Night, p.55

The **appropriate** way, in which princes and little girls act in fairy tales, is not the **right** way as defined by our rational standards of good and bad, for the world of fantasy, of fairy tales, the unconscious world, unfragmented by the phenomenal ego, follows those true, unimposed, laws:

The Way that can be gone
Is not the eternal Way
The name that can be named
Is not the eternal name.

City of Illusions, p.152

These words guide Falk-Ramarren in his search for his true self and his true world. They might also serve as a guide to any reader of the books of Ursula K. Le Guin. They are the opening words of the *Tao Te Ching*, a book of mysterious and sometimes paradoxical verse about the *Tao*, a mystical perception of Reality.

Taoism is a way of seeing beyond the fragmented world of reason, in which humankind is not at home, but an alien. For the Taoist the world is a single ever-changing process, a unity of which all things are a part, and the meaning of each part lies not in itself alone, but in its relation to the whole.

Joseph Needham clearly defines how this differs from traditional western thinking in his *Science and Civilisation in China*:

While European philosophy tended to find reality in *substance*, Chinese philosophy tended to find it in *relation*. . . . Behind the metaphysical idea of "substance". . . lies the logical idea of "identity," and Western philosophers laid down as a basic principle of thought that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time. Chinese philosophers, on the other hand, laid down that a thing is always "becoming" or "de-becoming," all the time on the way to something else.

quoted in Bittner, 1979, p.1

At the root of this Chinese philosophy of eternal becoming lies Taoism, the ancient wisdom of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Lieh Tzu. The *Tao* is that process: the *Way* that all things go. It is the ultimate reality, the source of all being:

The Tao is like an empty bowl,
Which in being used can never be filled up.
Fathomless, it seems to be the origin of all things.
It blunts all sharp edges,
It unties all tangles,
It harmonizes all lights,
It unites the world into one whole.
Hidden in the deeps,
Yet it seems to exist for ever.
I do not know whose child it is;
It seems to be the common ancestor of all, the father of things.

Tao Te Ching, 4

The *Tao* is the course of life: birth, growth, maturity, decay, death, rebirth. It is what makes the acorn an oak tree, the baby an adult. This course is both the source and the meaning of life, of itself. The only way to grasp this is through a mystical, intuitive understanding of the *Tao*. It is a religion/ philosophy without dogma:

Chao-Chou asked, "What is Tao?"
 The Master [Nan-ch'üan] replied, "Your ordinary consciousness is the Tao."
 "How can one return into accord with it?"
 "By intending to accord you immediately deviate."
 "But without intention, how can one know the Tao?"
 "The Tao," said the master, "belongs neither to knowing nor to not knowing. Knowing is false understanding, not knowing is blind ignorance. If you really understand the Tao beyond doubt, it's like the empty sky. Why drag in right or wrong?"

Chuang Tzu, quoted in *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, p.38

The Tao is simply a name for whatever happens, the usual, ordinary course of life. It is nothing "special" and yet it is both source and meaning of all life, the inner holiness of everything that lives. The way to understand, to perceive the Tao, is *wu wei*, which Le Guin translates as "action in stillness" (Introduction to *Planet of Exile*). It is the stillness achieved by the quiet mind, free of the abstract weighing of good and bad and responding spontaneously to the situation, doing the appropriate thing:

Learning consists in daily accumulating;
 The practice of Tao consists in daily diminishing.

Keep on diminishing and diminishing,
 Until you reach the state of Non-Ado.
 No-Ado, and yet nothing is left undone.

Tao Te Ching, 48

Wu wei, translated here as Non-Ado, essentially means the spontaneous flow of the Tao, without willful, conscious human action. Such stillness of mind and spontaneity of action form the power of the Taoist sage to see the world whole:

Attain to utmost Emptiness.
 Cling single-heartedly to interior peace.
 While all things are stirring together,
 I only contemplate the Return.
 For flourishing as they do,
 Each of them will return to its root.
 To return to the root is to find peace.
 To find peace is to fulfill one's destiny.
 To fulfill one's destiny is to be constant.
 To know the Constant is called Insight.

Tao Teh Ching, 16

Alan Watts in his *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, an explanation of Taoism for the western reader, suggests the only possible way he can see of gaining a true understanding of the meaning of the Tao, and, in doing so, describes *wu wei*:

However, a one-sidedly literary and academic approach to the Tao gives nothing of its essence, so that to understand what follows the reader must now, and at each subsequent reading, allow himself to be in a proper state of mind. You are asked - temporarily, of course - to lay aside all your philosophical, religious, and political opinions, and to become almost like an infant, knowing nothing. Nothing, that is, except what you actually hear, see, feel, and smell. Take it that you are not going anywhere but here, and that there never was, is, or will be any other time than now. Simply be aware of what actually *is* without giving it names and without judging it, for you are now feeling out reality itself instead of ideas and opinions *about* it. There is no point in trying to suppress the babble of words and ideas that goes on in most adult brains, so if it won't stop, let it go on as it will, and listen to it as if it were the sound of traffic or the clucking of hens.

Let your ears hear whatever they want to hear; let your eyes see whatever they want to see; let your mind think whatever it wants to think; let your lungs breathe in their own rhythm. Do not expect any special result, for in this wordless and idealess state, where can there be past or future, and where any notion of purpose? Stop, look, and listen . . . and stay there awhile before you go on reading.

Tao: The Watercourse Way, p.36

This is not unlike Le Guin's way of writing, of creating worlds. Bittner explains it thus:

Thus a "world" is the totality of the dialectical interplay of individual self and environment, a *Gestalt* which can be either a conglomeration of alienated fragments or an integrated unity, an identity. This "world" is no ahistorical, static entity, though, for it exists as a "story", and therefore unfolds in time, in an ordered and coherent fashion, structured according to a particular "pattern," a plot, which leads up to and expresses a "vision." ... A "world" is the way things happen, not a thing. It is the path (Tao) that all events take, and as such it includes the way (tao) an individual perceives and acts, whether in violation of it, or in harmony with it.

James Bittner, 1979, p.4

Le Guin speaks of this ordered way in which things happen as something to be discovered, existing in all things, not something imposed by man or gods (*The Language of the Night*, p.39). Her story-telling is a way of discovering who we are, discovering the relation between the individual and the environment. Her particular way of discovering this is through science fiction and fantasy and children's books. In all of these she has turned away from mainstream, rational Western, and specifically American, ways of thinking and writing. She is part of the "lunatic fringe" (*The Language of the Night*, p.35) one of those children who have not been outgrown, who

have survived, who believe in the truth of the imagination. This grown-up child still plays the game of "let's pretend . . . I'm a dragon" (for children, aged 2 to 99) seeking a truth which reason cannot find.

Writing science fiction and fantasy novels creates a "secondary universe," by which reality may be better understood: "Distancing, the pulling back from 'reality' in order to see it better, is perhaps the essential gesture of SF" (*The Language of the Night*, p.13). Her art is a means of probing reality, "of finding the truth and expressing it as clearly and beautifully as possible" (ibid. p.11) and in this she discovered the inner lands and outer spaces of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Her stories provide a "view in", a way of exploring the inner reality and to see the truth of the imagination. That truth, expressed in myths and dreams, is the mystical experience of the Unity of All Being.

Le Guin's Science Fiction and Fantasy stories, then, are metaphors for the human condition; they are new ways of seeing mankind so that in reading them we may understand ourselves and our world better. But most essentially Le Guin is a story teller, telling stories which make order out of chaos. She discusses this human need to make a story of our lives, to make sense of the confusion with which our senses present us: making up stories may be our only way into reality, our only way of seeing true.

Why are we huddled about the campfire? Why do we tell tales, or tales about tales - why do we bear witness, true or false? . . . Is it because we are so organized as to take actions that prevent our dissolution into the surroundings?

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.28

But what if we have no means of access to this truth or reality except through the process of "lying" except through the narrative?

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.40

This is the light in which to perceive Le Guin's own storytelling: as a way of encountering and interacting with reality, both the outer and the inner, "an enlargement of present reality by connecting it to the unverifiable past and the unpredictable future" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.45). For only in this way may we glimpse that reality which we intuitively recognize as truth: a unified and ordered world, the *Tao*. And it is this

recognition which guides Le Guin in her world-making; her inner lands, her outer space and finally her yin utopia are the true home of our being.

Le Guin has sought and still seeks to expand our home territory into the "open Universe".

If science fiction has a major gift to offer literature, I think it is just this: the capacity to face an open universe.. Physically open, psychically open. No doors shut.

What science, from physics and astronomy to history and psychology, has given us is the open universe: a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy but an immensely complex process in time [the *Tao* again]. All the doors stand open, from the prehuman past through the incredible present to the terrible and hopeful future. All connections are possible. All alternatives are thinkable. It is not a comfortable, reassuring place. It's a very large house, a very drafty house. But it's the house we live in.

The Language of the Night, p.180

And so, in reading her stories one finds oneself suddenly at the very centre of being and for an instance the entire universe is one unbroken whole. It is the same experience T.S. Eliot struggled to express through the medium of language: in his *Four Quartets*. This unity of all being is for Le Guin both a profoundly mystical experience and of serious ethical concern, which leads her to explore the possibility of different worlds and societies with beliefs and social systems ordered in a way more in tune with her vision.

That this order is not one imposed but one discovered is the joyous experience of reading Le Guin, which, like the experience of the mystics, who have glimpsed the divine reality, cannot be expressed in words: "The tao that can be named is not the eternal *Tao*."

In many ways this thesis attempts the impossible: to put this experience in words, to make it part of conscious knowledge. It explores the mystic vision that is both source and subject of Le Guin's work. It follows Le Guin's journey from its beginning in Orsinia through the exploration of her Hainish future history and her inner world, Earthsea. From there she returns, via Orsinia, to California, the country of her birth. It is her own journey home, to the Self, and therefore becomes, for the reader, an exploration of her/his inner Self. The only way to do it truthfully, and to see the whole of it, is by pursuing *wu wei*, to read spontaneously, without any preconceived methods or systems of knowledge. Therefore I have used no one literary theory; but have put aside all religious, scientific and political opinions in order to listen to the stories and discover their heart: to find the Burning Ground.

"I would not quarrel with you, my lord," he [Arren] said as coldly as he could. "But this - this is beyond reason!"

"It is beyond all reason. We go where reason will not take us. Will you come, or will you not?"

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.384

PART I: SETTING OUT

Orsinian Tales

The *Orsinian Tales*, published in 1976, but begun much earlier (1951), map out the moral and spiritual concerns of Ursula K. Le Guin's work. This collection of 11 tales is about art and what it does, where it comes from and where it goes. "Orsinia" is a play on Le Guin's first name: Ursula means bear; *orsino* is Italian for bearish. It is her first inner land and therefore bears her name. In naming this country she also names the source of her art - it comes from within.

True to the territory of the imagination, the inner world, its boundaries, and its place on the map are not clearly defined, shifting and changing, moving outwards and then inwards, an interplay of the outer and inner reality. For in naming it for herself Le Guin makes it an imaginary country but it has anchors in the outer world in references to cities, like Paris and Vienna and Versailles, and in the dates placed at the end of each tale. It seems to be somewhere in central Europe, behind the Iron Curtain, but it is also in Cleveland, Ohio (*A Week in the Country*) for it comes from within Le Guin and is not tied to any specific geographic location.

On a sunny morning of 1962 in Cleveland, Ohio, it was raining in Krasnoy and the streets between grey walls were full of men.

Orsinian Tales, p.108

This country, Orsinia, and these tales about it seem remote. The remoteness is, like the mode of science fiction, a deliberate distancing device used to explore the writer's actual world. *The Orsinian Tales* explore the relationships between art and politics and art and ethics; and the distinctions between them here are clearer than they are in any of her later works.

The clearest statement about the meaning of art in the world is to be found in *An die Musik*. Ladislav Gaye is a musician with a "first rate talent", but he is also son to a bedridden mother, husband to an ailing woman, and father to three young children, and to keep them all alive he is a clerk in a factory which produces steel ball-bearings. These conditions make it impossible for him to devote himself to his art entirely, but he is also "not made" (p.134) in such a way as to desert them for his art; nor to stick to small, manageable pieces of

music as Otto Egorin suggests he do. He has to write his mass, however impossible this may seem. Thus his dilemma seems to be a "catch-22" situation. He is caught between the very demanding master, music, and his responsibility to his family. Otto Egorin takes this split between art and the everyday world, and more specifically the political world, even further:

"This is not a good world for music, either. This world, now, in 1938. You're not the only man who wonders, what's the good? Who needs music, who wants it? Who indeed when Europe is crawling with armies like a corpse with maggots, when Russia uses symphonies to glorify the latest boiler-factory in the Urals, when the function of music has all been summed up in Putzi playing the piano to soothe the Leader's nerves."

Orsinian Tales, p138

This is a very bleak view of art, that it is impotent and pointless, used only to add splendour or luxury to the lives of those in power. It has been trivialised in the service of tyrants. From those in power, who will send the world to war, music, Egorin says, cannot save us. It will not put an end to war.

Gaye, back in his everyday world of scolding wife and crying children and the threat of Hitler's advances into eastern Europe, agrees with him; music is useless, but in that moment he rejoices in the fact:

What good is music? None, Gaye thought, and that is the point. To the world and its states and armies and factories and Leaders, music says, "You are irrelevant", and, arrogant and gentle as a god, to the suffering man says only, "Listen." For being saved is not the point. Music saves nothing. Merciful, uncaring, it denies, breaks down all the shelters, the houses men build for themselves, that they may see the sky.

Orsinian Tales, p. 143

This is the "open universe" of Le Guin's art. The walls, the houses that, in protecting, separate the human being from the world, imprison him in himself and isolate him, are momentarily unbuilt by the vision of wholeness and freedom, which art affords us. Gaye's misery, the central paradox of his life, will not be resolved by music or anything else, but music, art, through moments of vision like this, makes all the rest bearable. And it is in fidelity to this mystical vision of Beauty, of Wholeness and Truth, that the point of art lies: "that they may see the sky."

It is a wholeness and beauty perceived only by the inner eye, which is why this moment nearly always comes upon one in darkness, the "blessed darkness" (p.109), as Stefan sees it in *A Week in the Country*. In the

world of light all seems fragmented and the individual is isolated and alienated, but in the darkness lies comfort. This need for darkness, for yin to balance yang is explored in the Handdara of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Gaye hears his Sanctus in the blaring of trumpets on the radio (paradoxically, the music of war, whereas his is the song sung at the central moment of the mass, the moment of transformation) at night and feels he may look up into the "complete, enduring darkness" as if the roof, which separated him from it, had been lifted off the building. Art breaks down the defences people put up (humankind, as T.S.Eliot observed, cannot bear very much reality) leaving them vulnerable, open to the larger world, to its terror and delight.

It is important to Le Guin that we should not feel defeatist about art in this world, because it is art which makes possible this communion with the world and with others. Like love it establishes connections between one human soul and another. And in this bleak world - Orsinia is variously described as either on the point of being destroyed by war or under the yoke of socialism, or oppressed by pagan fears - it is the artist's and art's job to keep faith with the beauty and truth of a whole world, an open universe.

The importance of true communication and of the fragile links between people, which hold the world together, is expressed in the many marriages or planned marriages in the *Orsinian Tales*. The families described in *A Week in the Country* and *Imaginary Countries* are symbols of a world intact:

She still asked about families. She must be very innocent, more elusive and intact even than Kasimir, who placed his reality beyond the touch of any hands or asking of identity.

Orsinian Tales, p.116

The two families are seen in their summer homes, in places a very long way from anywhere else, where a life intact is still possible. If the family is symbolic of wholeness, then marriage is an act of faith in that world and the possibility of creating it through the power of love. In her 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile* Le Guin explains that marriage is a central theme of her work. So, despite the death of Kasimir and the cruelty of the outside world, Stefan and Bruna will marry, because there is "No good letting go, is there?" (p.128). Fidelity to love and the beloved is what keeps the world together, what makes life bearable. This is also the experience of Stefan and Ekata in *Brothers and Sisters*, and of Alitsia and Sanzo in *Conversations at Night*: the only way out of their misery into a better world is together, the way of love and fidelity.

This fidelity is only possible in freedom; it arises out of freedom. This is the freedom of the individual to *choose*: no matter what the laws or morals of society, for to comply is still a choice. "The pursuit of art, . . . is the pursuit of liberty" (*The Language of the Night*, p.126), Le Guin wrote in her introduction to *The Word for World is Forest* and this is once again an inherent part of the joy and terror of both art and life. This idea is explored in *The Fountains*, not in terms of marital love but of love of one's country. For Adam Kereth, having defected, having escaped the constantly watching eyes, has realised his freedom. Now, being free, he can return home drawn by fidelity, not by force, and his freedom is not diminished by this return:

Knowing now that he was both a king and a thief and so was at home anywhere, what turned him to his own land was mere fidelity. For what else should move a man, these days?

Orsinian Tales, p.10

"Mere fidelity" greatly understates this central human relationship. When all else is gone, all that is left behind, that remains, endures, is fidelity. As the reader progresses through *Orsinian Tales*, this fidelity is revealed as more and more important. And it is closely linked to freedom, the freedom to choose: most of the characters choose fidelity in the end, as freedom alone, as an end in itself, seems to be sterile. So Mariya of *The House* returns to her ex-husband, Pier, who knows that the "trick" (p.152) is the same: be it love of place or of people, it is loyalty which is not, after all, dependent on ownership. It was ownership which Mariya had feared in marriage; it is love and loyalty to which she returns. The centrality of love and companionship to a free society is explored again in the Odonian anarchy of *The Dispossessed*, at the heart of which lies the knowledge that "to be whole is to be part" (p.76).

And in *The Lady of Moge*, the freedom George Mogeskar gains for his sister, is based on a betrayal and is accordingly empty. Isabella is denied the choice to live or die, to be herself, by her brother when he in loving concern sends her away before surrendering their castle. The freedom she gains in this way is thus a false freedom, leading nowhere and denying her fidelity to the castle and to herself as its lady. It destroys her faith in life:

And if I had been allowed to die on the walls of Moge, I should have died believing that life held great terror and great joy.

Orsinian Tales, p.166

Freedom without fidelity to oneself and what one believes in is without joy, a dead thing. Fidelity in Le Guin's work is not a hanging on to life at all costs. In *The Lady of Moge*, to allow Isabella death would have been the faithful act, would have asserted the joy and meaning of life. If life is to be truly Life, there must be death, otherwise the two are indistinguishable and life becomes a death-in-life. This is why it pains Andre to see Isabella so many years later. And it is the knowledge that he has betrayed both Isabella and life itself that keeps him from Moge castle.

The refusal to face and accept death is also explored in *The Road East*. Here Maler's mother sees only the sunshine and flowers. As she sees it, life is a lovely gift, in which there is no room for bitterness, no evil. This is to deny life its power to terrify and to delight. True joy stems not from a denial of sorrow, but from its very heart, for joy arises out of hope and hope only entered the world with the evil and pain of Pandora's box. So Maler knows that life seen like this is a lie:

He was her lie, and one must keep hold of a lie, wither around it, hold on. Her world without evil, without hope, her world without revolution depended on him alone.

Orsinian Tales, p.69

To save her world, to give her hope, he must leave her alone, to suffer and feel pain, and he does. True life is mortal, therein lies its beauty, its joy and its terror. One cannot have one without the other. To deny death and its terror is to deny life its joy, and this in itself is a profound kind of evil, which Le Guin will explore in greater detail in the Shing in *City of Illusions* and in Cob of *The Earthsea Trilogy*.

This does not mean that death becomes a thing to be praised or rejoiced in itself. The relationship between life and death is never seen as a simple one of dependence. In *The Barrow*, Count Freyga turns back to a pagan rite according to which the sacrifice of one life to Odne the Silent will ensure the life of his child and his young wife. This bowing to the powers of darkness is a terrifying act and it is not at all clear that the sacrifice was necessary. When he returns from it, his wife's labour is over and the child born is a strong healthy boy. The nurse merely chides the count for being late, as if for being uncaring. And when he gives thanks for

the life of his wife and child, it is not to Odne but to Christ. History records that both he and his son devoted their lives to the defence of the church. The only darkness to which Freyga owes anything is the darkness in his own soul, the murder he committed, his sin. For Odne the Silent, one of the dark forces of earth, is essential in the balance of life between terror and delight. When Freyga worships the dark he tips the balance in his own soul. The danger of worshipping the gods of darkness is explored again in *The Tombs of Atuan* of *The Earthsea Trilogy*.

Ile Forest follows immediately after *The Barrow* and it opens:

"Surely," said the young doctor, "there are unpardonable crimes! Murder cannot go unpunished."

The senior partner shook his head. "There are unpardonable people, perhaps; but crimes . . . they depend . . ."

"On what? To take a human life - that's absolute. Self defence aside of course. The sacredness of human life -"

"Is nothing the law can judge of," the older man said dryly.

Orsinian Tales, p.20

Nothing is simple, there are no absolutes, for life, the whole world, is a web of interrelated beings and events. And murderers turn out to be the people one loves, one's brothers. As in *The Barrow*, the darkness in *Ile Forest* is the darkness in one man's soul, the darkness of murder. Galven Ileskar, who committed the murder, copes with the knowledge by "forgetting". This may seem rather like Maler's mother in *The Road East*, but this forgetting has a very different quality from her denial of her husband's cancer. Ileskar knows that his wife is dead and that he killed her, but he also knows that this knowledge and the thought of it will drive him insane or break him (as it has his manservant, Martin) and so he tells himself, and others, the story that she ran away with the man from Brailava. And in doing so he endures; he can live and love again. Like Count Freyga, he gave in to the darkness in a moment of intense feeling, but he will not succumb to the darkness entirely; he will not serve it. Again it is endurance, fidelity to oneself and to life, which makes life bearable and love possible.

To the existentialists the spontaneous act is all, it is pure existence, no reason, no thinking at all, life unalloyed - a leap into darkness. But to Le Guin life is not merely that, perhaps because, like King Lear, she

knows that that way madness lies. We cannot forever live and act in a meaningless void; it may be an act of faith alone to weave a fabric of meaning over the void, but the joy of life lies in that faith:

There's growth and death, delight and terror, an abyss, the rest we invent.

.....
 Aisnar? What's Aisnar? Mere hearsay." - "That's morbid," Kasimir said, glimpsing again the wall collapsing. - "No, exhilarating," his friend answered. "Takes a lot to hold the world together, when you look at it that way. But it's worthwhile. Building up cities, holding up the roofs by an act of faith. Fidelity."

A Week in the Country, p.109

This is Le Guin's response to the horror of history, to the destruction of World War II that is imminent in Orsinia (1935 is the central date in the *Orsinian Tales*). Not to give in and drown in the darkness and fear, not to be swept along by the forces of history, but to keep faith with oneself, love and beauty and so with hope, in the face of that darkness. That is the responsibility of art. Therein lies joy: in not living out the nightmares of politicians but in listening to the words of the dragons, to the words of the imagination.

FAIRY STORIES DECKED OUT IN SPACE SUITS

Le Guin has described her early novels as "fairy-stories decked out in space suits" (*The Language of the Night*, p.22). This image suggests the playfulness which to Le Guin is such an important element in science fiction and fantasy: she writes of "the potential of SF to play games, to make sense and beauty of our fearfully enlarged world of knowledge and perception" (*The Language of the Night*, p.181). After all that is how children (and those grownups who are not afraid of Dragons) use their games: to understand the world. But it also suggests another very important element in the science fiction of Le Guin, the point at which the game becomes more than simply entertainment, at which it reaches the heart of understanding: the mythical element. Alan Watts links this notion of playing games to the mystical perception of reality and the Self:

Just as a sun or star has many rays, so the whole cosmos expresses itself in each of us with all our different variations. It plays games.

It plays the John Doe game, the Mary Smith game, the beetle game, the butterfly game, the bird game, the pigeon game, the fish game, the star game. These are games that differ from one another in the same way as do backgammon, whist, poker and bridge, or waltz, mazurka and polka. The cosmos dances with infinite variety.

But every single dance it does, that is to say *you*, is what the whole thing is doing. We forget this. We have been brought up in such a way that we are unaware of the connection, unaware that each of us is *the works*, playing it this way for awhile.

Alan Watts, *Om: Creative Meditations*, p.25

This is the playfulness, the profound joking at the heart of Zen and of Taoism. In this spirit Le Guin lightly calls these novels fairy stories, but at the same time they are based on the serious inner truth of Norse mythology. Mythology for Le Guin is both an important source of inspiration and the only way to express the mystical reality of our inner being in a comprehensible and rational way:

True myth may serve for thousands of years as an inexhaustible source of intellectual speculation, religious joy, ethical inquiry and artistic renewal. The real mystery is not destroyed by reason.

The Language of the Night, p.65

The mythic mode of perception is irrational in origin: myths emerge from what Jung calls the collective unconscious, yet they are also rational in that they are stories and stories are a "rationalisation", a logical

connection of images, whether this be by cause-and-effect logic, as in naturalistic fiction and apparently in daily life, or by "magical" logic, the logic of symbols, as in fantasy or dreams. It is in this sense that all stories, from *War and Peace* to *Rumpelstiltskin*, are a way Humankind has devised to explain itself to itself. Thus Le Guin's novels are journeys, journeys of discovery, journeys into the inner self, for the heroes, for Le Guin and for the reader.

Myths are the meeting ground of reason and dream, of the conscious and the unconscious mind, and like them, both fantasy and science fiction seek to build bridges from the unconscious to the conscious mind: fantasy with archetypal figures such as the hero and the dragon while science fiction finds these archetypes in new forms in the world of science and technology. For Le Guin, Science Fiction is "the least rigid, freest, youngest of all literary traditions" (*The Language of the Night*, p.205). And it is in this sense of freedom, of flexibility and of working with the new material of scientific research that she sees the unique contribution of SF to literature: the ability to live in a world in which all futures are possible, in an open universe.

This complete freedom means to Le Guin complete and absolute responsibility on the part of both the reader and the writer. She sees the ethical responsibility of the writer in terms of evoking an intelligent, thoughtful response in the reader (*The Language of the Night*, p.23). And this for her means not writing the pulp, Barf the Barbarian type of science fiction, concerned largely with hardware, rugged heroes and nubile, bird-brained women, into which science fiction so easily slips. It also means avoiding easy "relevance" which does not answer or even approach the real, the human, question but only evokes a gut reaction about certain "issues," e.g. anger against oppression or injustice, without exploring its source, which is fear, the fear of the "other," the alien, a central archetype in science fiction. Le Guin sees this kind of writing as "a sensationalist raising of a real question, followed by a quick evasion of the weight and pain and complexity involved in really, experientially, trying to understand and cope with that question" (*The Language of the Night*, p.180).

This does not mean that Le Guin ignores questions such as racism, sexism and the exploitation of the poor, but it does mean that she does not accept any quick-fix, ready-made answers. She explores different political systems, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and in *The Dispossessed* in particular, both criticising and

praising, but in the end her concerns are moral, aesthetic and spiritual, not merely political. The Ekumen, the co-ordinating body of all the known worlds in her Hainish books, is "not so much a body politic as mystic" (*The Left Hand of Darkness*, p.219). As she says in the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, she is not a political activist but an artist, exploring different ways in which to live, not advocating a particular one. So she uses the ideas of feminism and before those of Marx, Kropotkin, Goodwin and Shelley to find out how she works, how people work, to get at the truth. For artists go into themselves to reach others, to tell them what truth they know.

James Bittner (pp.85ff) has pointed out that Le Guin began her Hainish history, her series of science fiction novels, when Asimov's history of the Galactic empire dominated science fiction. Indeed, her Hainish history follows that basic pattern quite closely, beginning with a League of All Worlds, which is assailed by "an enemy", followed by a period of barbarism. This comes to an end with the founding of the Ekumen, a kind of trading house for exchange between the various cultures. But while working within this structure she criticises its morality, seeking ways other than war and domination of understanding the world and of communicating with others. In *Rocannon's World* Rocannon criticises the early ruthlessness of the League of all Worlds:

Only technology mattered. The two missions to this world in the last century had started pushing one of the species towards a pre-atomic technology before they had even explored all the other continents or contacted all intelligent races. He had called a halt to that, and had finally managed to bring his own Ethnographic Survey here to learn something about the planet; but he did not fool himself. Even his work here would finally have served only as an informational basis for encouraging technological advance of the most likely species or culture. This was how the League of All Worlds prepared to meet its ultimate enemy. A hundred worlds had been trained and armed, a thousand more were being schooled in the uses of steel and wheel and tractor and reactor. But Rocannon, the hilfer, whose job was learning, not teaching, and who had lived on quite a few backward worlds, doubted the wisdom of staking everything on weapons and the uses of machinery.

Rocannon's World, p.34

This is typical of Le Guin's criticism of political systems. The artist, like Rocannon, in Le Guin's view, should be the one who learns, not the one who teaches. She seeks no easy moral or political judgment, deploring those she does make (*The Language of the Night*, pp.126-128), she simply doubts the wisdom of political or intellectual systems, which by admitting only their own view, deny the world its whole truth.

Similarly Lao Tzu doubts the wisdom of those who rush around saying much and organising more, instead of practising *wu wei*, that freedom from desire by which one attains the stillness of mind to act appropriately in each situation.

You govern a kingdom by normal rules;
 You fight a war by exceptional moves;
 But you win the world by letting alone.
 How do I know that this is so?
 By what is within me!

The more taboos and inhibition there are in the world,
 The poorer the people become.
 The sharper the weapons the people possess,
 The greater confusion reigns in the realm.
 The more clever and crafty the men,
 The oftener strange things happen.
 The more articulate the laws and ordinances,
 The more robbers and thieves arise.

Therefore the Sage says:
 I do not make a fuss, and the people transform themselves.
 I love quietude, and the people settle down in their regular grooves.
 I do not engage myself in anything, and the people grow rich.
 I have no desires, and the people return to Simplicity.

Tao Te Ching, 57

For Le Guin's morality, in so far as it has a definite, single basis, is based on Taoism, which acknowledges the complete relativity of ethical systems. This is why Le Guin cannot make any ideological statement - there is always another side to the question. This does not mean that anything goes, it is not licentious: it simply means that right and wrong, like yin and yang, are the two sides of the same thing and that if you keep on doing the "right" thing you may actually end up doing more harm than good.

When the Great Way is lost, we get benevolence and righteousness.

Lao Tse: XVIII

quoted in *The Lathe of Heaven*, p.48

It is a morality not governed by any dogma or rules, but based on the spontaneous reaction to a situation. This spontaneity needs to be clearly differentiated from the spontaneity of Western Romanticism, which is passionate, impulsive and egocentric. Taoist spontaneity follows long years of practising that stillness, in which the soul will reflect the true way of *Tao* and thus act spontaneously in harmony with it. And acting in harmony with the *Tao* quite often means not acting at all, *wu wei*.

In the same way, Le Guin does not plan her stories or characters, her inner lands and outer spaces; she discovers them within herself, she practises *wu wei* ("Dreams must explain Themselves" in *The Language of the Night*, p.37). The laws she discovers are never man-made ones, but those which, like scientific laws, are inherent in the nature of the world. Her world, her way of being and writing, is guided by the *Tao*, which is the way of all things, if they are left to themselves. Thus her stories are journeys (*Tao* means "the way"), usually circular journeys, for the true way of *Tao* is return. Her characters set out on journeys to return home, to come upon themselves. "Home" is that mystical moment of understanding and seeing the world whole, a moment both strange and remembered:

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 Through the unknown, remembered gate
 When the last of earth left to discover
 Is that which was the beginning;

T.S.Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding"

What this journey of self-discovery usually involves, Le Guin explains in her essay "The Child and the Shadow". It involves coming to terms with, and accepting as part of oneself, something which one previously considered alien to one's being, whether it is in fact a "real" alien, or one's own dark side. In this way both the reader and the protagonist discover a world, a way of being, which is whole; not divided, but harmoniously

balanced. A world in which "real" aliens, monsters, dragons and mages live is a world bodied forth by the imagination in order to understand the inner world, the psyche, whose sanity rests on the profound balance between conscious and unconscious, between rationality and dreaming. Herein rests the completeness of Le Guin's novels, on this balancing of two opposites which only together can form a whole. But neither the balance nor the completeness is static; it is a constant movement from one to the other, an ongoing process of creation. As she was to put it later,

"Only what is mortal bears life, Arren. Only in death is there rebirth. The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement - an eternal becoming."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.423

Le Guin does not balance her novels on the razor edge of realism alone. They find their stability on the bridge between reason and dream. Her truth is both the truth of fact (science), coming from the outside, and the truth of the imagination (fiction), coming from the inside. For only together can they portray the whole truth, which is not only the facts, but also their relation to each other, the story one makes of them. Thus two of her novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Rocannon's World*, begin with a statement of the relatedness of myth (imagination) and facts. Like yin and yang they are only complete together; together they may reach the truth.

Like the modern physicists, this science fiction writer uses *Gedankenexperimente* (the imaginative projection of the facts known so far) in writing her stories and thus finding some kind of truth about humans and their life. The discoveries of anthropology or physics make sense only in relation to each other and to their discoverers: as Genly Ai says in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the pearl may be beautiful when worn by one person and dull when worn by another. That Le Guin uses the image of a jewel as both a symbol of truth and as a symbol of the inner being of Man is an indication of where she believes this truth is to be found.

The only way to the truly collective, to the image that is alive and meaningful in all of us, seems to be through the truly personal. Not the impersonality of pure reason; not the impersonality of "the masses"; but the irreducibly personal - the self. To reach others, artist go into the self. Using reason, they deliberately enter the irrational. The further they go into the self, the closer they come to the other.

The Language of the Night, p.66

The Early Hainish Novels

As we have seen, Le Guin celebrates the joy of mortal life in *Orsinian Tales*. In the early Hainish novels she moves towards an exploration of the source of that joy: each of the early novels is a way of working towards a description of an inner experience, a mystical vision of truth. As Le Guin is a Taoist these visions are not so much what is envisaged at the end of the spiritual journey, of the process, as the journey itself. There is no constant light at the end of the way: the truth lies in becoming, in change not in stasis.

The truth is not one thing but lies in the way things (which are stages of the universal process of becoming) relate to one another. This is the process of the three early novels: in learning that truth and beauty lie in relation, from which arises the unity of all Being.

Rocannon's World

The central concern of these early novels, as Le Guin sees it, is the relationship between different worlds and different races. The problem of such a relationship is expressed in the conversation between Ketho and Rocannon, when Semley appears in their museum to fetch her jewel:

"Well," said Rocannon [after consulting his field guide to the various alien life forms], "now at least we know what she is."

"I wish there were some way of knowing who she is," the curator mumbled.

Rocannon's World, p.20

This is a problem Le Guin will explore again and again, the relationship with an alien, with "the other", the unknown creature, whose reality cannot be denied. It becomes almost a recasting of the Taoist yin-yang symbol in which two polarised forces, two opposing entities, form a whole. And the mystery and beauty of reality lie in the relationship between the two. So Rocannon puts a hold on the exploitation of Formalhaut II and sets out on an anthropological mission to the planet. He tries to find out *who* its people are, to understand them and their world.

The reader has just discovered *who* Semley is, in the prologue, *The Necklace*. This tale is based on a story from Norse mythology, the story of the Brisingamen, Freya's necklace, which was made by cave-dwelling dwarves and which Freya buys at a very high price. The tale of the Brisingamen is a tale of seasonal change, the inevitability of winter and death, symbolised by Freya's going underground. The story of the Eye of the Sea,

Semley's necklace, has a more human moral. Semley values riches too highly, confusing her sense of self with the value of the family jewel. Durossa, her sister-in-law points this out to her, "Is Durhal's pride in his wife, or in what she wears?" (p.10). The jewel does, however, become a symbol of the self in later books. But here Semley is concerned with its outward beauty and its material value. In this way, Semley is made responsible for her own tragic fate and the pain of her husband although she does not know the terrible price she will have to pay for her necklace.

Four of the dwarfish Gdemiari take Semley on a journey, one long night long, as they describe it to Semley, to another world, for they have one of the space ships from the League of All Worlds. The other peoples of this planet neither know about these space ships nor do they understand what space travel involves. This is a reflection on the irresponsible way the League has gone about the colonisation of this planet, paying no attention to the cultural setting of its people, simply using the industrial skills of the Gdemiari for its own ends. So Le Guin interweaves a tale from Norse mythology, about the changes of the seasons, with human values, with responsibility and with the relationships between different races and different worlds.

The Prologue of *Rocannon's World* begins with a list of the High-Intelligence Life Forms known to be found on Formalhaut II. They are the Gdemiari, the Fiia and the Liuar, divided into the Angyar and the Olgior. Other species are suspected but not certain. This disembodied, supposedly factual list gives no idea of the reality of this world. That reality Rocannon explores on his journey through Formalhaut II, by stepping into a personal relationship with it and some of its people. It is to the Angyar, Semley's people, that he goes first. There he gets to know and becomes friends with Mogien, Semley's grandchild and heir of Hallan. This friendship is central to his, and the reader's, understanding of this world, as that between Genly Ai and Estraven will be in *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

When all his comrades of the League are killed in an attack by its enemy this alien remains his only companion. The loss of his own kind is the first price Rocannon must pay to learn the truth about Formalhaut II. He learns that he is personally responsible for the fate of this planet, because he has cut it off from further contact with League in order to proceed with his mission, leaving it now at the mercy of the unknown enemy.

Rocannon, Lord Mogien, Raho, Iot and Yahan (three of the Olgior, who are servants to the Angyar) then set out to find and do battle with the enemy. On the way they are joined by Kyo, one of the faerie-like Fiia,

whose village has been destroyed by the enemy. On this journey Rocannon gets to know and befriends one person from each of the known species of aliens. Kyo and he seem to establish a very fragile and precious telepathic link, and Yahan becomes faithful servant and dear friend when he and Rocannon become separated from their companions. Lord Mogien has all along welcomed Rocannon and has accepted the Starlord, the stranger, as equal.

The possibility of friendship with an alien is the central concern of the book. For in recognising the humanity of the alien, his fellowship with himself, this strange world becomes Rocannon's world, his home. This friendship, the discovery of an "other", who is part of himself, is seen as both wonderful and enriching:

Rocannon followed, glancing back after Yahan and ahead at Mogien, wondering at the strange being, his friend,...

Rocannon's World, p.59

It is this capacity for wonder at the other, making Rocannon feel he has "blundered through the corner of a myth", which opens the way for mutual friendship, understanding, loyalty and love. For Rocannon, the Starlord and Wanderer of the Fiia, has become part of the mythology of the people of Formalhaut II and by the same process, the fate of the planet has become inextricably linked with his own. Rocannon feels, after his first battle fought beside Mogien,

... now wholly committed, sealed by his shed blood to this world to which he had come a stranger across the gulfs of night.

Rocannon's World, p.55

In the midst of this new-found wonder and joy, this friendship, lies the pain of the knowledge, beyond reason, that a price must be paid. It is his shed blood which seals him, the stranger, to this planet. This leads up to the final, dearest price Rocannon must pay for the knowledge of the last art, taught him by the mysterious, mythical Ancient One at the mouth of a spring in the mountains. The price will be the life of Mogien, whose mother Haldre had predicted to Rocannon that he (Mogien) would not return from this expedition. It is Rocannon's calling Mogien's name at the moment of Mogien's death which names the price, thereby making it. For until it is paid, the price remains unknown:

A thing, a life, a chance; an eye, a hope, a return: the name need not be Known. But you will cry its name aloud when it is gone. Do you give it freely?
Freely, Ancient One.

Rocannon's World p.107

Mogien has already seen his death at nights, in the mountains, and has challenged it, fiercely, almost joyfully. He goes freely and proudly, like the brave warrior he is, to meet it. Perhaps this is what helps the reader to accept this sacrifice, which is unreasonable and cruel to Rocannon, who is not a warrior and would have back what he lost; and yet it is necessary, as Rocannon knows when he gives it freely: one cannot be whole without pain. The mystic's joyous vision of truth is not based on a denial of pain, but on a profound understanding of it. It is this last art, mind-hearing, so dearly paid for and thus truly his, which enables Rocannon to free this world from the enemy. From Mogien's death springs new life for his world: "Only what is mortal bears life. . . . Only in death is there rebirth" (*The Earthsea Trilogy*, p.423).

This price to be paid, which is often that which is most dear to the one who must pay, is one of the threads which weaves many of Le Guin's books together. In *City of Illusions*, Falk must leave Parth, his dearest love, his teacher of life, in order to find out who he is and what he must do. Like Mogien, it is Parth who knows this is the price before Falk can accept it. She knows that he will not return to her; she will not wait, she will mourn. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Estraven must die before Genly Ai's mission on Gethen can be complete. The keystone of the bridge across the void between the *worlds* must be mortared in blood, else it will not hold.

The clearest sense of this necessary sacrifice comes in the short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas". For despite beginning it with the quotation from William James, who sees the sacrifice only as hideous (seeing it merely in terms of the archetype of a scapegoat; he does not, however, acknowledge that Christ too was not only a willing scapegoat, but in the West a generally and joyously accepted one), Le Guin makes no such easy judgment. She acknowledges the profound need for a balance between joy and pain, which this cruel sacrifice of one person establishes, even as she writes about those who reject the joy (and it is joy, not mere happiness) based on the awful sacrifice, and set out to live differently somewhere. For those who walk away from Omelas are making their own sacrifice too. What in Omelas is borne by one single soul in torment, they each take upon themselves, thus sacrificing the joy which the people in Omelas have. They go out into a non-absolute world, in which both joy and pain will be the lot of every individual.

This is a central concern in Le Guin's work: the sense of the paramount importance of the individual, which draws authority from Jung's definition of the self:

The only way to the truly collective, to the image that is alive and meaningful in all of us seems to be through the truly personal . . . the irreducibly personal - the self.

The Language of the Night, p.66

That is why, when Rocannon says that "In times like this, Mogien, one man's fate is not important", Mogien replies with the simple question, "If it is not, . . . what is?" (p.40). In the *Left Hand of Darkness* the protagonist suffers an even clearer rebuke in the words of Foreth rem ir Osboth:

"However, the mission I am on overrides all personal debts and loyalties."
"If so," said the stranger with fierce certainty, "it is an immoral mission."

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.94

The relationship, which each of Le Guin's protagonists makes, and on which the success of his mission depends, is a personal one. Rocannon meets Mogien, Rolery meets Jakob and Genly Ai meets Estraven. In each case, the friendship or love begins in a recognition of the Self (cf. Glossary) in the other.

. . . [W]e all have the same kind of dragons in our psyche, just as we all have the same kind of heart and lungs in our body. . . . But 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.

The Language of the Night, p.67

The sense of this Self as the deepest root of all our being is the mystery at the heart of the jewel imagery throughout Le Guin's early novels. In this she draws on the oriental mystical teachings on meditation in which the discovery of the pearl of wisdom, held in the hand of the imperial dragon, is symbolic of the attainment of self-knowledge. According to the Taoist sages the truth may only be learnt through exploration of one's inner being - the *Tao* can only be discovered, as a treasure or a precious jewel can, not imposed by any dogma or theory. Thus Lao Tzu:

Without going out of your door,
You can know the ways of the world.
Without peeping through your window,
You can see the way of heaven.
The farther you go,
The less you know.

Thus the sage knows without travelling,
Sees without looking,
And achieves without Ado.

Tao Te Ching, 47

The discovery of the self in *Rocannon's World* becomes a story about returning to the roots, as Le Guin herself returned to her roots in going back to Norse mythology, which she read as a child, for *The Necklace*. Mogien recognises the country on the other side of the mountains as his own domain (p.103). This is the place where he will die and be returned to the earth; it is the country of his ancestors and he has come home to it. The people with whom Rocannon is to stay for the rest of his life and one of whom he will marry, are the first Liuar. The girl he marries, the Lady Ganye, is Semley all over again to Rocannon. She has a face "that he had remembered even as he had seen it for the first time" (p.112). This is that sense of recognition, of coming home, which the mystic has in the moment of enlightenment. Similarly, the Ancient One would seem to be one of the ancestors of the Fiia and the Gdemiar, like the *Tao*, which is yin-yang:

It was like the Clayfolk, dwarfish and pale; like the Fiia, frail and clear-eyed; like both, like neither. The hair was white. The voice was no voice for it sounded within Rocannon's mind while all his ears heard was the faint whistle of the wind; and there were no words.

Rocannon's World, p.106

The Ancient One, whose voice speaks only to the inner being, which is beyond the perception of the physical senses, is an embodiment of that moment of recognition which the mystic experiences and of which Eliot writes in the *Four Quartets*, as he glimpses the world as whole. Even without having glimpsed this vision of an unbroken world, humankind recognises the truth of this experience. For we long for a paradise, a golden age, a home in the experience of *heimweh* for the home of our childhood. Thus in *Orsinian Tales* the world of the family symbolises this world intact, in which the self is not alienated but rooted in its surroundings. The fact that he teaches Rocannon the art of mindspeech and that this will be teachable to all humankind, makes this Ancient One perhaps the ancestor of us all, a symbol of that greater Self in which the many disparate human selves are united. This Jungian Self is, to the mystic, the divine ground in which we all have our being. It is both the ultimate reality and that which permits us knowledge of it. It is the root, the home, of all things.

Finally, this world will be named for Rocannon after his death, making the place, to which he came an alien and a wanderer, truly his home to which he has returned. In this the plot follows the Romance pattern discussed by Bittner (pp.1-27): Rocannon leaves his home, travels to the alien planet on which he finds himself entirely alone, without friends or family (either killed or dead long ago on some other planet, which was once

his home) and finally finds a new home in this strange world. This pattern is at the heart of most of Le Guin's novels.

Most of my stories are excuses for a journey (We shall henceforth respectfully refer to this as the Quest Theme). I never did care much about plots, All I want is to go from A to B - or, more often from A to A - by the most difficult and circuitous route.

The Language of the Night, p.124

The journey to a new home requires the leaving of the old. The old home and the old self are sacrificed, painfully and often unwittingly, but inevitably, for the new. Thus the journey from A to A becomes the cycle of death and rebirth in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and this sense of the necessary sacrifice leads directly into Shevek's idea in *The Dispossessed*, that human brotherhood rests on shared pain and loneliness from which springs compassion and thus love.

This returning to the source is the heart of Le Guin's *Way* of writing. For in her books the journey itself, the return, is the source, is what defines her world: not a static object, but in the experiential sense, a way of being. It is a Taoist world. The *Tao* is both the source and the way of the world. And the way is always the way home, the return to the central mystery. So Rocannon finds the mysterious Ancient One, which is also a discovery of a new Self, and in this sense, a return.

The Tao is to the world what a great river or an ocean is to the streams and brooks.

Tao Teh Ching, 32

All things return to it as their home,

Tao Teh Ching, 34

The movement of the Tao consists in Returning.

Tao Teh Ching, 40

The Taoist holism, the balance between light and dark, between yin and yang, lies at the heart of the cycle of death and rebirth which leads home. For to grow is to be yang, to decay yin. This balance is also expressed in the unity of the Fiia and the Gdemiar. Kyo knows that his people, the Fiia, are only half-people for they have sundered themselves from their counterparts, the Gdemiar. The Fiia are light-loving, graceful, happy people of the valleys while the Gdemiar are cave-dwelling, lumpish in nature and appearance, and saturnine.

There is a kind of sadness in Kyo as he speaks of this split to Rocannon, which points to the mystical truth that wisdom and joy lie in wholeness. This is one of the central tenets of Taoism, and the one which seems most important to Le Guin. This wholeness is attainable in mystical moments of oneness with the universe; and, in rather more human terms, in friendship and love, in acceptance of the other, the alien as both a part of oneself and as a reality in its own right. That is the joy at the heart of Le Guin's novels, the sense "that we can communicate, that alienation isn't the final human condition" (*The Language of the Night*, p.67).

For this reason Le Guin makes Rocannon an anthropologist who is instrumental in changing the ways in which the League goes about discovering new worlds, just as she will change the emphasis of the science in her novels. Science for her will be largely the "soft" sciences of anthropology and psychology (the ones which, ideally, seek to understand, not to dominate), as opposed to aggressive technology. Le Guin is exploring the inner life rather than a separate outward reality. Rocannon's mission on the planet which, significantly, will be named for him, uses technology but does not further it and is certainly not aggressive in any way. It is a learning expedition, as writing stories is for Le Guin, and reading them is for her readers. For war must surely be the ultimate state of alienation and war is definitely not Le Guin's final word on the human condition. Hardware and warfare will play an increasingly smaller role in her Hainish universe as she discovers more and more about it. In her next novel, the relationship between two aliens brings about the unification of two races, putting an end to a silent war of mutual distrust and fear.

Planet of Exile

In the 1978 introduction to *Planet of Exile* Le Guin expresses what she feels to be the central theme of her work:

Yin does not occur without yang, nor yang without yin. Once I was asked what I thought the central, constant theme of my work was, and I said spontaneously, "Marriage."

Planet of Exile, p.xii

This is not only the marriage between man and woman; marriage becomes symbolic of the unity of the polarised energies, yin and yang, in the universe, symbolic of both the true nature of life, which lies in balance and symbolic of the beginning and of the possibility of life which lies in the union of the two:

Tao gave birth to One
One gave birth to Two
Two gave birth to Three
Three gave birth to all the myriad things.

All the myriad things carry the *Yin* on their backs and hold the *Yang* in their embrace,
Deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the two vital Breaths.

Tao Teh Ching, 42

If the true way of the *Tao* is return, then the way from the myriad things leads through harmony to the three, which are yin, yang, and yin-yang, and then finally back to the One. This is the eternal motion of *Tao*: from the primal darkness, from nothingness proceeds the created world which moves in the great circle of life through death back to nothing. The union of yin and yang is both the first moment of creation and the last step towards the inner mystical unity. It symbolises the process that constitutes the world, as well as an understanding of that world. Thus it is that moment of unity between the outer world and the self which is the only complete reality.

In this novel that is what Le Guin seems to be working towards. She sees this not only as the natural state of the world and the self, but also in terms of the moral relations between different beings. In *Rocannon's World* Rocannon learns to accept the aliens as friends and companions, and at the end he marries an alien. Such a relationship, its meaning and the possibilities arising from it, are explored in greater detail in her next novel.

As far as the Hainish history is concerned, *Planet of Exile* fits into the age of barbarism, after the dissolution of the League of All Worlds and before the Ekumen has been established. This creates the mood of the novel, which seems in some ways apocalyptic as for both the Alterrans and the Tevarans an epoch, a culture, is coming to an end. Both peoples are beset with feelings of doom and alienation and fear of each other. This mood is intensified as both prepare for the onset of the terrible long winter and with it, for the coming of the Gaal, the barbaric hordes who migrate south in the winter leaving destruction in their wake. Destruction is necessary before creation is possible; this is the circle of life, the cycle of the seasons.

Thus, on an unknown continent of an unnamed world in the borderlands between land and sea, two peoples live in superstitious fear of each other. Each is convinced that it is the human race and the other some alien creature. One of these, the Tevarans, live as they have always lived, nomadic in summer, in a city in winter, largely ignoring the "Farborns" whom they suspect of witchcraft. Although there was once a marriage between a Tevaran and a farborn, this union remained childless, a dead end, so to speak. The others, the Alterrans, whose name is a play on the words *alia* and *terra*, are both earthlings and aliens. They live embittered and isolated in their city, a last outpost of their civilisation which, for all they know, being cut off from all contact with the rest of the League, is dead already. They despise the primitive Tevarans all the more because they will probably survive while their own race is dying out as more and more of their children are stillborn and fewer and fewer are conceived. Their life is sterile, and their concern for their civilisation is almost elegiac as if it were already dead. There is little joy left as they endure their exile and their life:

The cup in his hand, blue porcelain, was very old, a work of the Fifth Year. The handpress books in cases under the windows were old. Even the glass in the windowframes was old. All their luxuries, all that made them civilised, all that kept them Alterran, was old. In Agat's lifetime and for long before there had been no energy or leisure for subtle and complex affirmations of man's skill and spirit. They did well by now merely to preserve, to endure.

Planet of Exile, pp.31-32

On the one side the Alterrans carefully preserve the remnants of their culture in this barbaric and primitive world and on the other there are the Tevarans with their fear of witchcraft. On both there is hatred.

In the midst of enmity and distrust, then, two people, Rolery of the Tevarans and Jakob Agat of the Alterrans, meet for one brief moment on the shore, between land and water, as the tide comes in. It is dusk and thus the moment is poised between light and dark, between the time when that patch of the world is land and

when it will become sea; it is a moment in flux, symbolic of life which is change, process, not stasis. The sea is here potentially destructive, but it is also the sea in which the beginning of life lies. It is from this brief contact that the possibility of a new world on this planet springs, as Jakob Agat touches Rolery, bespeaks her and so saves her from drowning in the rush of the incoming tide. Therefore the image of the two hands, the light and the dark, reaching out to one another, taking hold of one another, remains the central symbol of the book. It becomes a recasting of the Taoist yin-yang symbol, for Jakob and Rolery are opposites; he is dark to her fairness, he is man to her womanhood and his culture is highly advanced while hers is primitive. It is from their union, in the face of oncoming darkness, of the night and of the approaching winter as well as of the darkness of fear and ignorance of both their people, that hope and new life spring.

Rolery, born out of season (and in this sense an outsider and a portent, a "sign"), brings about the unification of the two peoples on this planet. She does not fit into the pattern of a normal Tevaran family and will bear no Tevaran child. Like the Alterrans she is barren amongst her own people; but together, she and Jakob may bear children. It is through her that the new pattern will be woven, a pattern uniting light and dark, yin and yang. It is she who, without knowing why, spontaneously explores the city of the Farborns and goes out to the shore where Jakob will take her for one of his own. This is a mistake as she is not an Alterran, but as the possibility of telepathic communication between the two "aliens" shows, it is also true; they are both human, they belong together. She is the book's central character not because she acts or does anything much but because she provides a kind of still point around which her brothers and Jakob act and organise and do battle. And so, without doing anything, simply by being what she is, she brings hope, *is* hope:

Across his bleak rush of foreboding he had recalled briefly, irrelevant and yet seeming both an explanation and a sign, the light, lithe frightened figure of the girl Rolery, reaching up her hand to him from the dark, sea-besieged stones.

Planet of Exile, p.33

As Le Guin has pointed out, this is not her weakness, as a woman inevitably in the background, it is the strength of *wu wei*, of action in stillness, which accomplishes more than aggressive, outgoing action, as Wold, her father, knows:

Wold felt sorry for him, as he often did for young men, who have not seen how passion and plan over and over are wasted, how their lives and acts are wasted between desire and fear.

.....

"Alterra, the Gaal will come, and will go. The Winter will come and will not go. What good for a victorious warrior to return to an unfinished house, when the earth turns to ice?"

Planet of Exile, p.24

Although coloured by the grimness of a world facing a 60-year-long winter, this is basically the wisdom of the *Tao*:

Tao never makes any ado
And yet it does everything.
If a ruler can cling to it,
All things will grow of themselves.

Tao Teh Ching, 37

So it is Rolery, always associated with darkness (passivity, yin), always waiting instead of doing, who first discovers that the immune system of the Alterrans is breaking down, making them once again vulnerable to infection. Thus they become, metaphorically, mere mortals once again. This realisation of mortality is for Le Guin always an essential moment in the process of coming of age and thus of coming into one's inheritance as a human being: Life ("Dreams must Explain Themselves" in *Language of the Night*, p.37).

For as Ged says in *The Earthsea Trilogy*, only what is mortal can bear life. Here it is this newfound possibility of mortality which will enable Rolery and Jakob to have children. For the genetic changes which make them vulnerable to this world's diseases, make them also a part of this mortal world and so able to live and breed and die in it, as part of it, aliens no longer. The Alterran civilisation will not die but change and so find new life and a new home:

This was his fort, his city, his world; these were his people. He was no exile here.
"Come," he said to Rolery as the fire sank down to ashes, "come, let's go home."

Planet of Exile, p.140

Thus *Planet of Exile* is a story of marriage, of yin and yang, not only in the love between Rolery and Agat, between "human" and "other", but also in that it expresses the indivisible unity of life and death, and the joy there is in this fragile mortal life, in the complete circle of life, within which alone Life is possible:

Agat stood by Rolery in front of the sinking death-fire, in the high sea-beleaguered fort, and it seemed to him then that the old man's death and the young man's victory were the same thing. Neither grief nor pride had so much truth in them as did joy, the joy that trembled in the cold wind between sky and sea, bright and brief as fire.

Planet of Exile, p.140

Always in Le Guin there is that image of joyous life, between sea and fire, between light and dark, in the face of death, on the sands before the tide comes in.

City of Illusions

City of Illusions is the story of a journey, a physical journey from planet to planet, and one across the American continent during the time of the Enemy in the Hainish future history, and a psychological journey into the mind of Falk-Ramarren, the main character, to find out who he is. In this it becomes, amongst other things, a story about the art of story-telling (Bittner, p.2) and about reading:

We read books to find out who we are.... The story - from Rumpelstiltskin to *War and Peace* - is one of the basic tools invented by the mind of man, for the purpose of gaining understanding.

(*The Language of the Night*, p.25)

Stories are journeys of discovery which lead inwards to the Self, for we judge the truth by what lies in ourselves. And in order to understand this self and his own life man must enter the "blessed darkness" of his soul and try to grasp its meaning in the language of the night, i.e. the language of the imagination, of fantasy, of myth. For, as Joseph Campbell has pointed out in his *Primitive Mythology*:

And why should it be that whenever men have looked for something solid on which to found their lives, they have chosen not the facts in which the world abounds, but the myths of an immemorial imagination. . . ?

(*Primitive Mythology*, p.4)

This is the lesson of the imagination and of belief, that the fullness of our lives depends not on rational thought and knowledge but on the depth and range of our mythology. And Fantasy, as Le Guin uses it, keeps open the paths of the mind to the treasure-house of the unconscious where the myths are held and reworked into ever new, yet familiar dreams and stories.

Thus it is through the "childish narrative" of Orry (children speak naturally in the language of fantasy) that Falk catches the first glimpse of the shining jewel, image of his world and of his self, both of which he has lost:

Falk kept gazing in his mind at the jewel that might be false and might be priceless, the story, the pattern, the glimpse - true vision or not - of the world he had lost.

(*City of Illusions*, p.116)

This unity of being between the soul and the world, expressed in the symbol of the jewel, lies at the heart of Le Guin's science fiction writing. Rocannon of *Rocannon's World* discovers that a world is not merely an object which can be described with a list of scientific facts about its geology, geography and typography. It is also what the mythology and imagination of its people make it. Thus he reads up on the planet Formalhaut II and yet when he meets Semley, feels he has blundered through the corner of a myth. The reader shares this discovery and so Formalhaut II becomes Rocannon's world, the myths and fireside tales of which he becomes a part, and finally also *Rocannon's World*, the book, which is Rocannon's story.

In *City of Illusions* the reader never sees Ramarren's home planet, his world in one sense, but enters the mind of Falk-Ramarren and perceives his soul, which is also his world, *world* as a centre of consciousness. Consciousness is a way of being. World as a way of being, as life founded on the truth of the imagination, the centre of consciousness, is never a static concept for Le Guin but a process, a process of eternal becoming. That process for Le Guin is symbolised in a story, for stories are the way in which we make sense of the outside world. They form the link between it and our minds, thus shaping our consciousness:

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 two extremes. To connect. To connect the idea with value, sensation with intuition, cortex with cerebellum.

(*The Language of the Night*, p.65)

In this unity of way as consciousness and way as journey of discovering a world, lies the *Tao* of Le Guin's Hainish world, for *Tao* is the way the World is and it is the way too the sage must follow in order to understand it.

Man follows the way of the Earth.
The Earth follows the ways of Heaven,
Heaven follows the ways of *Tao*,
Tao follows its own ways.

(*Tao Teh Ching*, 25)

The way of the *Tao* is not the way of learning, it is not an outward journey, but leads inward to the centre of consciousness, what St Paul calls the heart of man. Thus at the core of Le Guin's writing lies not an object, a planet, but the eternal and ineffable mystery of being, which can only be explored as it is embodied in a symbol of a jewel, which is both world and soul. For in itself it cannot be spoken about:

Tao can be talked about, but not the Eternal *Tao*.
Names can be named but not the Eternal Name.

As the origin of heaven and earth, it is nameless:
As "the Mother" of all things, it is nameable.

So, as ever hidden, we should look at its inner essence:
As always manifest, we should look at its outer aspects.

These two flow from the same source, though differently named;
And both are called mysteries.

The Mystery of all mysteries is the door of all essence.

(*Tao Teh Ching*, 1)

The planets, which Le Guin describes, are ways of exploring the different possibilities of life, are various manifestations of the Divine Ground.

The meaning of world for Le Guin lies not so much in description of the object in itself as in relation, both in terms of relating a story and in terms of what this story-telling does; it establishes relationships between events, things and people - between worlds. It is in these relationships that their meaning lies. In them lies the dynamism of the *Tao*, in which everything is related, nothing exists in isolation, absolute unto itself, and things find their meaning relative to other things. In Taoism there are no discrete objects, but states which are constantly in the process of becoming their own opposites, an eternal process of creation and destruction. The world *is* not but constantly *becomes* and herein lies its wholeness: what the western mind perceives as objects, a fragmented world, the Taoist knows to be part of an eternal process.

This sense of the entire cosmos being woven together in the patterns of life emerges from two images in particular in these early novels:

And the world was a network: a deep network, like the interlacing branches in the woods, like inter-running currents in water, silver, gray, black, shot through with green and rose and a yellow like the sun. As one watched the network one saw in it, among it, woven into it and

weaving it, little and great patterns and figures, beasts, trees, grasses, men and women and other creatures, some like farborns and some not; and strange shapes, boxes set on round legs, birds, axes, silver spears, and feathers of fire, faces that were not faces, stones with wings and a tree whose leaves were stars.

(*Planet of Exile*, p.73)

Here is Yggdrasil in the galaxy, the tree of life of which each being is a part, one of the strands in the pattern. Rolery does not *look at* the pattern, she *watches* it - it is alive and changing, growing, not a static image.

The second image of a changing network is that of the patterning frame in *City of Illusions*:

. . . a network of gold and silver wires upon which beads were strung, so pierced that they could slip from wire to wire and, at certain points, from level to level. There were hundreds of beads . . . It was a patterning frame, such as Zove and Buckeye and others of the house possessed. . . the thing was a fortune-teller, a computer, an implement of mystical discipline, a toy.

(*City of Illusions*, p.91)

This is an image of the *Tao*, of life itself, of the universe and of Le Guin's art, science fiction. For it is life in that it is an ever-changing pattern, it is the universe because the beads on it are jewels (amethyst, agate, topaz, turquoise, opal, amber, beryl, crystal, garnet, emerald, diamond) symbolising the different worlds (both planets and souls) out of which life is woven, and it is Le Guin's art because science fiction is a game, a mystical discipline, exploring life. Life, science fiction and the world all merge into One, the unity of all things at the core of the mystical experience.

This complex image appears at the still point at the centre of the book. It is a point of rest on Falk's journey in search of his true name, his true being. It is typical of Le Guin's novels that at the central moment of *City of Illusions* should be an encounter with a person, with a different reality, a different world, by which that of the protagonist is enriched. The mad, splendid Prince of Kansas is a king who, like the sun behind his throne, is a traditional symbol of the self; and it is through the exploration of the self that the world as Self may be known.

Therefore this king, who seems so different from the people of the house from which Falk set out, is yet the one to give him once again a copy of the Old Canon, the *Tao Te Ching*, setting him back on his way. It is this ancient poetry of the Way, the *Tao*, which guides Falk in his search. In the paradoxical way typical of the *Tao*, and thus of the two guides whom Falk encounters on his way, it guides by not guiding, for when the way is lost

the Way will be found. Falk must find his own way; there is no dogma he can follow, there is no law to help him. "He was on his own, and had only one job to do: to try to follow that way through to the end" (*City of Illusions*, p.175).

The one law which dominates this world which Falk is travelling through is no help. It is the law of the Shing, which preaches absolute Reverence for Life. Throughout the novel this law, which on the surface seems good, is uncomfortably surrounded by ambiguities. For the Shing who decreed it should then be benevolent, but they are feared throughout the continent and by such wise men as Zove. The law keeps appearing as empty cliché in the mouths of mindless animals, robbing it of all meaning. This seems very close to the empty appeals of advertising, also to the newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Once Falk arrives in Es Toch, the city of the Shing, he discovers the reason for this. As the city is built above the abyss so the law stems not from true respect for life but from an all-consuming fear of death. It turns out that the Shing, having conquered the League and stationed themselves on Earth, are now a barren people, a dying race, as the Alterrans were in *Planet of Exile*.

Having been the conquerors, the "Lords of Earth", they are now faced with something beyond their own control: death. In fear of this they cling desperately to life, which without its completion, death, becomes an empty husk, meaningless. Their law, do not kill, becomes a farce in the face of their ruthless mindrazing of Falk and the "criminals" in their society. These criminals seem to be revolutionaries, who, like Ramarren, threaten the existence of the Shing and so are silenced, in effect, killed. For if individual life is the story of that individual, the Shing have indeed killed Falk, leaving only his empty shell, the mindless body: "He had been killed and brought back to life. What was death, then, the death he could not remember?" (*City of Illusions*, p.165)

In this denial of the truth that life is not merely defined by a beating heart, a functioning body, lies their mindlie. Their law of respect for life is based on a lie, on the fear of death. This fear they translate into a law and so their power on earth is not a ruling but a blight (p.173). Their Reverence for Life is ultimately a form of death.

The truth is that life is mortal, just as the truth about Falk is that he should have died centuries ago. This is a strange mingling of mortality with immortality: there are no absolutes, no certainties. This is the mindlie of the Shing: their Law tries to make absolute what is relative (this is the wisdom of *The Lady of Moge*,

that true reverence for the life of Isabella would have granted her death. See above, p.12). Life is not life without death. Yet another truth about Falk is that he is Ramarren, who must live another century to tell the truth about Earth to his people.

Thus Falk's search for his true self is not a search for an absolute, unchanging centre of his being. His being lies in the harmony, the implicit unity of two different selves. His integrity, his fidelity to the truth lies in this:

In that same moment of misery he touched for the first time, for a moment only, the balance-pole, the centre, and for a moment was *himself*: then lost again, but with just enough strength to hope for the next moment of harmony.

(*City of Illusions*, p.166)

He is Falk-Ramarren, the wise man and the fool, the twice-born (and twice dead). This realisation of his true being comes to him in a moment of misery, in the abyss, not above it where Es Toch proclaims it is to be found. Like the true name of the *Tao*, the truth about Falk cannot be named, it is a changing, living, mysterious truth. Life cannot be embodied in a law, for that would be to destroy it. Life cannot be dogmatised to make it safe and comprehensible, for it is both terrifying and beautiful, and to deny the one is to deny the other. Therefore *City of Illusions* begins and ends in darkness and in silence.

The inability to name the truth is symbolised in Ramarren's inability to say the true name of the sun of Werel. This is the necessary guard surrounding the holy places in the human mind, the vulnerable, precious heart of Man, symbolised here by the sun, which becomes part of the multiple meanings of "jewel" in Le Guin:

He stopped, caught by a sudden joy. For it is something, no matter what had gone before and what might follow after - it was something to have seen the light, in one lifetime, of two suns. The orange gold of Werel's sun, the white gold of Earth's: he could hold them now side by side as a man might hold two jewels, comparing their beauty for the sake of heightening their praise.

(*City of Illusions*, p.181)

For Falk-Ramarren's truth can only be seen in the light of two suns, his self lies in two names and his love is for two women in two homes. Twice he sacrifices his love to find out who he is, what it means to be human, to find his roots. The truth is never simple.

That is the centre point of these early Hainish novels, that truth is a mystery, which cannot be pinned down by a law which is a lie, nor by "scientific" handbooks on the various worlds. For it lies in the relationship

of one thing, of one person to another, and the relationships, the things and the people are constantly changing, becoming themselves. So the central figure in these early books is a person, or a pair (Rolery and Jakob) trying to find a home, to find out who he is. And home turns out to be a strange, yet recognised place, reached for the first time.

PART II: THE INNER LANDS

The Earthsea Trilogy

In many ways *The Earthsea Trilogy* constitutes the core of Le Guin's writing. Written at the same time as the next novel in the Hainish cycle, which explores the outer spaces, it is the exploration of her inner lands.

The original and instinctive movement of fantasy is, of course, inward. Fantasy is so introverted by nature that often some objective "hook" is necessary to bring it out into the open and turn it into literature. . . . Nowadays it is science that often gives fantasy a hand up from the interior depths, and we have science fiction, a modern, intellectualized, extroverted form of fantasy. Its limitations and strengths are those of extroversion: the power and the intractability of the *object*.

The Language of the Night, p.106

In contrast to this, *The Earthsea Trilogy* is not hooked up out of the unconscious by means of science, it is the dream she has never stopped dreaming (*The Language of the Night*, p.45). And so it is written in and created by the language of the symbolic world of dreams, a magical language. At the heart of this dream, of Earthsea lies Roke, the protected isle of the wise, the school of magic, home of the still point in the storm, at which, as in Eliot's rose garden, the unity of the cosmos is perceived. This "still point" is symbolic of the mystic's momentary perception at the centre of the world of Reality as a seamless whole. It is a glimpse of eternity which cannot be placed either in time or in space.

. . . Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say how long, for that is to place it in time.

Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton", I

Roke, magically protected from danger and the vagaries of the weather, provides the setting for such a moment and such a place. This vision which, in Eliot's *Four Quartets* is symbolised by the moment in the rose garden is, in *The Earthsea Trilogy* symbolised by the immanent grove. This is a grove of sacred trees, whose roots go deeper than any others, down to the very beginning of the world. To the inhabitants of Roke it seems that the immanent grove moves, but the mages know that it is the rest of the world that moves, the trees with their deep roots are still. In this way they are reminiscent of Yggdrasil, the cosmic axis, the centre of the world, symbol of life and Reality. This centre moves in *The Farthest Shore* to the courtyard at the heart of the school.

For Roke is the Isle of the Wise, where the art magic is taught; and the Great House is the school and central place of wizardry; and the central place of the House is that small court far within the walls, where the fountain plays and the trees stand in rain or sun or starlight.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.303

Again this description is, like that of the rose garden in Eliot's *Four Quartets*, an image of the centre. It is the centre of being, of both the cosmos and the individual, which to Le Guin is the source and subject of the artist's creativity. Thus it is the immanent grove where the Master Patterner lives, teaching sorcerers the last art, patterning, making them mages.

Patterning lies at the heart of Earthsea magic: perceiving the relations between things, seeing the whole. In *The Dispossessed*, Shevek will say that to see life whole is to see it as mortal (p.162) and in *Orsinian Tales* coming of age, the awakening of the soul, is seen in terms of an acceptance of death. Similarly, in the *Earthsea Trilogy* Le Guin explores the pattern of life and death, the balance between the two, their inalienable unity. This perception of balance and unity roots the *Earthsea Trilogy* firmly in Le Guin's Taoism, for acceptance of death as part of the pattern of life, as one of life's many transformations, lies at the heart of Chuang Tzu's peace and serenity.

"Ugh! The maker of all things still goes on turning me into this crumpled thing." "Do you hate it?"

"No, why should I hate it? Little by little he'll borrow my left arm to transform it into a cock, and it'll be why I am listening to a cock-crow at dawn. Little by little he'll borrow my right arm to transform it into a crossbow, and it will be why I am waiting for a roasted owl for my dinner. Little by little he'll borrow and transform my buttocks into wheels, my daemon into a horse, and they'll be there for me to ride, I'll never have to harness a team again. Besides, to get life is to be on time and to lose it is to be on course; be content with the time and settled on the course, and sadness and joy cannot find a way in. This is what of old was called "being loosed from the bonds" and whoever cannot loose himself other things bind still tighter."

Chuang Tzu, p.88

In "Dreams must explain Themselves" Le Guin points to another link to Taoism in *The Earthsea Trilogy*. The link lies in the world order which in both Taoism and the Trilogy is "not one imposed by a man or by a personal or humane deity. The true laws - ethical and aesthetic, as surely as scientific - are not imposed from above by any authority, but exist in things, are to be found - discovered." (*The Language of the Night*, p.7)

This sense of an underlying, all-pervasive and yet mysterious pattern informs the entire trilogy. It is most clearly perceived in the kind of magic taught on Roke, which seeks to understand the patterns of nature

rather than to dominate them. The wisdom of the mage lies in this understanding and in his concern not to interfere with these patterns but to align himself with them. For the mage serves the Equilibrium, the delicate balance of darkness and light, of life and death, and his powers serve not to weave patterns but to maintain those that already exist. The young Ged and later Cob seek to weave their own patterns and in doing so actually tear the fabric of the world and the rent is healed only at great cost in life and power.

The patterns are fundamental to the Equilibrium, the balancing of the forces of life and the psychic energies between yin and yang. This is not a static, rigid equilibrium, for the forces of life are ever-changing (change is the basic condition of life, stasis is death) and moving: becoming. As Ged says:

"Only what is mortal bears life, Arren. Only in death is there rebirth. The Balance is not stillness. It is movement - an eternal becoming."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.423

This constant movement creates patterns, not abstract or even transcendent entities but made of the very fabric of life. The *Tao* is not above or beyond, it is within, informing even the tiniest drop of water. Thus the role and behaviour of each creature are essential for the pattern to be woven; each drop of water contributes to the shape of the wave. The pattern is not *something* that exists but something that is constantly being made by life. This is why Taoism is a religion, a philosophy without dogma. The *Tao* is not fixed and therefore it cannot be spoken or explained; its followers have no fixed rule of conduct, no absolute right or wrong. This also is the case for the mages of Earthsea. No act of power is forbidden or taboo, or in itself evil, but always they are aware that the outcome affects the pattern, changes the world and that therefore every act involves great responsibility and should not be performed lightly.

"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. Indeed it can be done. It is the art of the Master Changer, and you will learn it, when you are ready to learn it. But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow..."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.48

This acceptance of the ever-changing nature of life and of the dynamic interplay of its opposing forces involves (for the Westerner) a radical change of morality. The greatest hero is no longer the Paladin, fighting

the forces of evil at all cost, seeking to expunge evil from the world, but the man who knows that "good" and "evil" are human categories for forces often beyond human comprehension; and who is aware that this rigid definition of the spontaneous interplay of the cosmic energies is in itself foolish and dangerous. Light alone will not make a pattern, it needs the shadows to do so (as Genly learns on the ice in *The Left Hand of Darkness*). So instead of adhering to abstract notions of ultimate good and evil, the Taoist sage or Earthsea mage sees evil as the misunderstanding and disrupting of the patterns of life (Wood, 1986, p.208).

Thus woven into the patterns of life is a strong sense of evil, as a threat to these patterns, a threat to life itself. This evil, however, does not always take the expected shape, it does not always arise out of the darkness, as it usually does in the Western collective consciousness. *The Earthsea Trilogy*, as an exploration of art, an experiment in telling the truth, becomes an exploration of the nature of evil. Moral responsibility, in Earthsea, lies not in adherence to a fixed code of conduct but in discovering one's own true nature in order to live as part of the world, part of the pattern, not a disruption of it. "To be part is to be whole. True voyage is return" (*The Dispossessed*, p.76).

For the pattern is not a rigid, once-created entity but is made of the very fabric of life itself. Human beings, all creatures, the very atoms which make up the cosmos, together, create the pattern. Animals naturally do not disturb the balance, because they do only what they must. Humans, with their self-awareness, the knowledge of their power to create, must *learn* to do only that, must learn what humanness, following human nature involves. That is the *Tao*: it is the nature of living things to be what they are. As Ged explains:

"The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the balance of the whole. But we, in so far as we have power over the world and over one another, we must *learn* to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the balance."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.361

The teaching of Roke, Le Guin's exploration of magic, is a venture into the inner lands of the human soul, an exploration of what it means to live as a human being, responsibly. The imagery of Taoism, of the patterns inherent in the world and yet not destined, not rigid, gives her a way of doing this. Story-telling, Le Guin's art, is a way of perceiving the patterns, a way of making sense of an otherwise meaningless reality. And the

meaning she has discovered is intuitively understood in the central symbol of the trilogy, in Ged's explanation of the Long Dance to Arren:

"There is no safety and there is no end. The word must be heard in silence; there must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.410

All that we know, all that the new science, like magic, can teach us is that there is or may be a pattern, but we do not know its meaning or even whether it has a meaning. Perhaps it is left to us to give it meaning. And because it forms a pleasing pattern to contrast meaning with the void, we do so and the pattern is continued. There is both great joy and great terror in this act of faith.

Magic in *Earthsea* is a metaphor for this power of the awakened soul, the power to perceive, to understand and to serve the great pattern of life. The exploration of magic, the kind of power it is and the way in which it is wielded, is also an exploration of art and in particular the poet's art, which, like *Earthsea* magic, also lies in naming. Art is a way of perceiving (and so of shaping) the patterns of life, it makes the connections and that is what meaning is, a connection, a relation, a link. It is a link over the void between the I and the world. *Earthsea* is a world at the limits: the limits of consciousness and the limits of understanding. It is a dance danced above the abyss. It is a dream in words of the mystic's vision of a unified world. It is a perception of meaning that is beyond the grasp of the rational mind.

In *Earthsea*, in the inner world of imaginative wisdom, the meaning and beauty of life lie in the unity of life and death, of light and shadow, in the great and delicate, ever-changing Equilibrium. In each of the three books of *Earthsea* this balance between life and death is threatened and in the process of restoring the balance a human soul is made whole. For in the mystic's experience and understanding of the world, the individual self and the cosmos are one. If one is fragmented, so will the other be and the one is made whole with the other.

... [O]ur job in growing up is to become ourselves. ... What we need to grow up is reality, the wholeness which exceeds human virtue and vice. We need knowledge; we need self-knowledge. We need to see ourselves and the shadows we cast.

The Language of the Night, p.59

A Wizard of Earthsea

This is the story of Ged's coming of age, from birth on Gont, Earthsea's mountain of truth from which great wizards are born, to magehood and manhood. In the process a wizard, the symbol of a soul awakened to life and the world, is born. He begins as a proud, strong-willed boy who sees magic very much in terms of power and strength over others: "for he had no wish to tell the secret to his playmates, liking to know and do what they knew not and could not" (p.15). And again when he chooses to go to Roke rather than stay with Ogion, it is because he yearns for power. Ogion is the Taoist sage of Earthsea, who follows the path of silence and quietude and has renounced public life for that of the hermit, passive and listening to life rather than acting. Although Ged at this point chooses Roke and power, there is already a yearning in him for this way of silence, expressed in his love for Ogion. But his longing for power is stronger.

It is this imbalance in Ged that leads him to his mistakes and the horrifying consequences of his attempt to prove his superior power. His contest with Jasper during the Long Dance takes the form of displaying his power over death. He tries to call up a spirit of the dead and an ancient and venerable spirit at that, the spirit of Elfarran. She was a beautiful queen of the ancient past, consort of one of Earthsea's greatest heroes. Thus Ged's breach is all the more horrifying, for this noble lady is at this stage merely an adolescent misunderstanding of his own feminine side, just as Helen to Faust was a projected Anima figure, not accepted within the wizard himself, and presumed to be rationally controllable. With her peerless spirit, the shadow enters the world of the living, for Ged's act opens a way between the two worlds where there should not have been one.

After his encounter with the shadow on Roke Ged will follow a slower, quieter path to power. Thus Ged moves from a Faustian, egocentric conception of magic as a power with which to overcome the mortality of nature and the darkness of the world, to a magic based on Taoist wisdom which seeks harmony with the forces of nature and is used to help maintain the Equilibrium of the world instead of seeking dominion of either one or the other (Galbreath, 1977, p.262). In such a hard personal schooling in magic this mage learns to use his power only when he must, practising *wu wei*, letting things be and allowing nature to take her course and even matters out (*Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, pp.48-61).

Central to this acting only when he must, is the acceptance of death as an inevitable part of life as opposed to trying to "save" life always and at any cost. Thus Ged is taught on Roke to heal the sick body or mind but to let the dying spirit go (p.80). His pride and his need to prove his power, to the girl on Gont and to Jasper

on Roke, constitute an attempt to overcome death. Repeatedly he tries to summon a spirit from the other side of death and this attempt to cross a border not to be crossed lightly and to gain power over one of the primal forces of the world (death) tears the dreadful rent in the fabric of life. Archmage Nemmerle dies trying to close it.

In these attempts to assert his power over death, Ged loses his shadow; it becomes a separate creature, hounding him until he accepts it as a part of himself and is made whole again. This quest for personal wholeness is one he can only undertake alone; the mages on Roke cannot tell him what this shadow is.

In seeking this wholeness, his true Self, Ged meets several of the powerful forces of life. Through each adventure he moves closer to his own being, the "home" to which his journey takes him. Once he leaves the protection of Roke he is exposed to the shadow; not knowing it and fearing it, he is at its mercy. So the first part of his journey consists in flight. But despite this personal danger, Ged unselfishly serves the people to whom he has been sent as mage. This service, however, becomes a part of his quest, for he cannot but be part of the *Tao*. In trying to save his friend's little son, who is dying of illness, Ged follows the child's soul too far and at the crossing between life and death finds his own shadow again. He flees from it, but completes his service to the people of Low Torning. He goes out to meet the dragon, welcoming this challenge, this danger coming from life, after the faceless danger of the shadow from beyond life.

For the dragon is the symbol par excellence of the natural, the animal world, of generative life. In communicating with this spirit of life itself, Ged comes to understand mortality, the self, which unlike the immortal Self (in the Jungian sense), is defined, a separate entity and therefore bears a name. Knowing, or rather guessing the dragon's name, Ged has power over it. For the self resides in the true name, which is part of the Old Speech by which the world was created, and the self is mutable, mortal. After his meeting with the dragon, in which Ged rejects the dragon's ambiguous offer of help in controlling the shadow, he will not again succumb to the temptation of seeking power over his shadow, although it is offered him by the keepers of the stone, the Terrenon, as its name suggests, one of the dark, primal forces of the earth. Ged recognises that the strange power of the stone, which has its source beyond life itself, would in the hands of a mortal man turn evil. Like the shadow itself, use of this power would be an intrusion of the realm beyond death, beyond life, into life itself. As Ged looks upon the stone he understands that mastery of it would actually mean slavery to it. Like the

shadow it would eat his soul. This master-slave reversal in dealing with life and death is explored in greater depths in the fate of Kossil in *The Tombs of Atuan* and of Cob in *The Farthest Shore*.

Thus after encounters with a child's death, with the dragon, with the dark and dangerous Terrenon, and after the death of the little Otak, Ged's animal friend and helper, he can recognise his own shadow and accept himself as mortal, whole. At one with his shadow, knowing now his selfhood, Ged can live with integrity. For as Estraven says in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, "a man must cast his own shadow" (p.24). Once he has accepted and made peace with his shadow, the balance within him is restored and he is made whole, no longer only yang, reason and light, but also yin, chaos and darkness. He now recognises his nature as a whole, mortal human being.

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

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.164

The Tombs of Atuan

In the second book of the trilogy, the reader sees another coming of age. This time it is that of a young girl, to balance the young boy, Ged.

The subject of *The Tombs of Atuan* is, if I had to put it in one word, sex. There's a lot of symbolism in the book, most of which I did not, of course, analyze consciously while writing; the symbols can all be read as sexual. More exactly, you could call it a feminine coming of age. Birth, rebirth, destruction, freedom are the themes.

The Language of the Night, p.44

The Tombs of Atuan opens with a heart-warming picture of a mother's love for her youngest child, which is already overshadowed by the knowledge that she must lose this child to some mysterious priestesses. An acute sense of cruelty and evil is established immediately, the source of which turns out, once again, to be the human heart, not any power outside it.

For at first it would seem that it is the Nameless Ones, the dark forces that Tenar (now Arha) serves, which are the source of evil. But many ambiguities surround The Place and especially the Tombs and labyrinth beneath them, for although they are by no means friendly places, Tenar feels more at home there than with the

priestess of the Godking, Kossil. In exploring the labyrinth she is exploring "her domain"; in the darkness she is exploring her inner being.

Three religions have established themselves at The Place: the worship of the Nameless Ones, of the Twin God-Brothers and the latest addition, that of the reigning Godking. Since the coming of the later two religions the worship of the Nameless Ones has steadily declined; the only people still observing their rites and festivals are the priestesses. Occasionally the Godking sends a few prisoners as a sacrifice. But these seem to be largely token gestures, and the priestesses have long forgotten the meaning of the words they chant. Finally Tenar is shocked to find disbelief even amongst the priestesses. The gentle Penthe does not believe in the gods she daily worships and hopes that in her next incarnation she will not be a priestess of any kind. Tenar's personal world is shaken by the sureness of this disbelief, for faith in her Nameless Ones is all that gives meaning and content to her boring and empty life. Worse still and more frightening is the discovery of Kossil's unbelief. The guiding principle of Kossil's life is power, temporal power, not awe before the great powers she serves. Faith is something in others which she is quite willing to use to increase her own power over them.

When Ged is not struck dead for bringing light into the labyrinth where all light is forbidden, Tenar herself begins to wonder whether the Nameless Ones are dead, or ever existed. The evil which pervades The Place stems less from the dark and ancient forces themselves than from the place they have been given in the life of the human community. The source of evil, then, is the worship of these dark forces, which gives them a power out of proportion to the other forces of the world. As Ged previously, and Cob later, seek only the light and life without death, so here, in contrast, only death and darkness are worshipped and acknowledged as the single supreme forces on earth. Again it is the creation of an imbalance (by human beings) that constitutes evil and not the natural forces of earthly life, which are indeed terrible, but not morally responsible as humans are. Like the hurricane and the whale they act within the Equilibrium, if left to themselves.

As Shippey puts it (Shippey, 1977, pp.110ff) the guiding morality here is that of Ged, who acknowledges the dark forces and has deep respect and fear for them, but does not let them govern his soul, either in trying to overcome them with an excess of light and life or in surrendering himself to them in abject and perverse worship:

"They do not die. They are dark and undying, and they hate the light: the brief, bright light of our mortality. They are immortal, but they are not gods. They never were. They are not worth the worship of any human soul."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.265

Kossil, although she does not believe in the Gods or in the Nameless Ones, remains their slave still in her worship of power and her need to defeat them which, as was seen in the first book, is directly related to a disproportionate fear of the dark force of death. As Ged later explains to Tenar,

"I think they drove your priestess Kossil mad a long time ago; I think she has prowled these caverns as she prowls the labyrinth of her own self, and now she cannot see the daylight any more. She tells you that the Nameless Ones are dead; only a lost soul, lost to truth, could believe that."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.266

Tenar's growth towards maturity is traced from the little girl, happy in her mother's arms, to the Eaten One with no individual life or personality but that of high priestess to the ancient and terrible forces of the earth, and finally again to Tenar, reborn from the labyrinth to a life of individual hopes, fears and joys. In many ways she is Ged's counterpart: like him she is an apprentice on her way to adulthood and she too is struggling to come to terms with the ambiguous nature of life. She is the yin to Ged's yang in that whereas Ged would not accept his shadow or the shadow side of life, Tenar is all shadow. She is indeed the Eaten One permitted neither life nor personality of her own, set aside from the generative life, usually regarded as the domain of woman. These were taken from her in a grotesque ceremony at the age of six. She has only the faintest memories of her mother, dreams and the love of the eunuch Manan to remind her (not very convincingly) that this is not all there is to life. But it is all she knows and she puts her whole heart and soul into it. However this is not what she, or any human life, was meant for. Death may be the inevitable end of life but that is not its purpose or meaning; life alone is the purpose of life.

She cried for the waste of her years in bondage to a useless evil. She wept in pain, because she was free.

What she had begun to learn was the weight of liberty. Freedom is a heavy load, a great and strange burden for the spirit to undertake. It is not easy. It is not a gift given, but a choice made, and the choice may be a hard one.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.295

Thus it is ultimately the first image of Tenar, of the little girl running through an orchard in spring, which is vindicated. Tenar, as her mother and Ged called her, is reborn as Arha, whom the priestesses made, dies. Her mother does finally triumph over the priestesses as Tenar emerges from the tombs into life. Through her relationship with Ged, the human companionship taken from her when she was taken from her family is restored and she learns to accept the uncertainty and the multiplicity of life. As Arha, the Eaten One of the Nameless Ones, she knew, she tells Ged, the one thing, the darkness, the certainty of death. As Tenar she knows very little of life - there are no certainties. "How do I know that you are what you seem to be?" she asks Ged, who replies "You don't" (p.251). Despite this impossibility of knowing very much about life or each other, Ged and Tenar entrust themselves to it rather than to the certainty of death in the tombs. Their trust for each other, based on absolutely nothing, an act of faith, enables them to escape the anger of the Nameless Ones and they emerge from the darkness of the tombs reborn to life.

J.E. Cirlot, in his *Dictionary of Symbols*, writes that the ancient labyrinths were constructed both to trap demons (an abyss) and to symbolise the complexities of the heavens. These two notions are not contradictory, he writes, because

. . . the terrestrial maze, as a structure or a pattern, is capable of reproducing the celestial, and because both allude to the same basic idea - the loss of the spirit in the process of creation - that is, to the "fall" in the neoplatonic sense - and the consequent need to seek out the way through the "Centre", back to the spirit.

A Dictionary of Symbols, p.175

In addition, he writes that the maze may symbolise

the unconscious and also error and remoteness from the fount of life. Eliade notes that it was, in fact, an initiation into sanctity, immortality and absolute reality and, as such, equivalent to other "trials" such as the fight with the dragon.

A Dictionary of Symbols, p.175

Thus Ged and Tenar find trust in each other and heal the Ring of Erreth Akbe in the very heart of the labyrinth, in its Great Treasury. In the heart of darkness lie hope and new life. Tenar goes there for the first time when she takes Ged there: she never sees it alone. The way out of the death-in-life of The Place for both Ged and Tenar lies, then, through the centre of the labyrinth, the silent, still heart of the dark:

In the Great Treasury of the Tombs of Atuan, time did not pass. No light; no life; no least stir of spider in the dust or worm in the cold earth. Rock, and dark, and time not passing.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.263

As Ged will say to Arren, the dance is danced over the terrible abyss, the void, but despite this - or perhaps because of this - the dance is beautiful and true; it is worth dancing. So Ged and Tenar make whole the ring of Erreth Akbe; delicately, almost unconsciously, they dance the ancient dance of man and woman, of sex, symbolically creating new life. For although their love is not physically consummated, their psychic union nevertheless symbolises a rebirth, new life.

"I will come with you," she said. . . .

When she said that, the man named Ged put his hand over hers that held the broken talisman. She looked up startled, and saw him flushed with life and triumph, smiling.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.274

They unite the two halves of the Ring of Peace, of Plenty, the yin to the yang sword of Erreth Akbe in Havnor, which together symbolise life. They recreate life.

Once again, as in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, polarised forces which seem to be mutually exclusive are balanced and seen to belong together, both necessary to life. Only together can yin and yang be the *Tao*. In the first book the power of making needed the curb of mortality, lest it destroy the delicate fabric of life. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, it is the powers of unmaking that are threatening to take over and thus destroy Arha's soul. In both cases it is not the powers themselves that contend for dominance but the human beings, who have chosen to serve one or the other. For as the labyrinth is a symbol of the unconscious, so these powers, be they the Nameless Ones of the earth or Ged's human power of calling (p.285), symbolise the energies that flow in the unconscious. And human beings must learn that one should not rule the other, but that both together make up life. "To be reborn one must die", Ged tells Tenar (p.273).

The Farthest Shore

In *The Farthest Shore* Ged has come full circle as he once again follows a "shadow" to the farthest reach of the Archipelago. And once again he is at least partially responsible for Cob's destructive behaviour. For it

was Ged's punishment that brought on Cob's overpowering fear of death. It is also not coincidence that Ged punishes Cob for exactly the same pride of power over the dead that first unleashed his own shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. This time the shadow threatens the fabric of Earthsea far more visibly as the very springs of magic run dry throughout the Archipelago.

The attempts of Cob to overcome death, to find unlimited life, actually destroy life; they symbolise a lust for power, which, as we have seen in the fate of Kossil, is ultimately life-denying. Death brings change to individual entities, for in order to grow the old entity must die, making way for the new. Death and rebirth form the constant cycle of life, the *Tao*. By seeking to destroy death, Cob denies change which is the essential condition of life (which is mortal); as a result life loses its meaning and magic, closely related to the meaning men perceive in life, loses its power. The pattern he has woven is a constricting web (thus the significance of his name, Cob), deathless and therefore lifeless. There is no joy in his kingdom: for joy is part of the essence of life:

We're here to enjoy ourselves, which means we are practising the most essentially human of all undertakings, the search for joy. Not the pursuit of pleasure - any hamster can do that - but the search for joy.

The Language of the Night, p.199

So the people who have succumbed to Cob in their own fear of death do not care, it is all the same to them. Neither their life nor their art gives them any pleasure. That is why the springs of magic are running dry. Cob, by denying the terror of life and magic, also destroys the joy, the sheer delight in their beauty. And this delight is defined by the limits of the art, as the delight of life lies in its mortality:

"But how is it that all the wizards of the South - and elsewhere by now - even the chanters of the rafts - all have lost their art, but you keep yours?"

"Because I desire nothing beyond my art," Sparrowhawk said.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.420

And the limits of Sparrowhawk's art, magic, are the limits of a language which is Le Guin's medium, too:

". . . [Y]ou must use its own true name in the Old Speech, which is *essa*. 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.

". . . Thus, that which gives us power to work magic, sets the limits of that power. A mage can control what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not

so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail. The unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost."

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.51

The structure that underlay *A Wizard of Earthsea* was that of the quest for Jung's archetypal shadow, which is within each human being and must be accepted if it is not to turn destructive. The mythic structure of *The Farthest Shore* follows the tale of the Fisher King (Remington, 1980, p.282) whose illness infects his entire country and his subjects, and who must be healed of his illness if the land is not to perish. Therefore, although his evil is as terrible in its lust for power as Sauron's in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, it is in the end seen as an illness; and Cob is finally merely pitiable. Like Cob, the Fisher King of ancient legend cannot die. Although Cob is not sexually wounded like the Fisher King, he does reject generative life, the source of which is sex and the definition mortality. Thus Cob creates a dry kingdom of death whose landscape closely resembles T. S. Eliot's Waste Land.

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit

The Wasteland, V

The country of the innumerable dead was empty. No tree or thorn or blade of grass grew in the stony earth under the unsetting stars. . . .

"I am thirsty," Arren said, and his companion answered, "Here they drink dust."

The Earthsea Trilogy, pp.457-458

Le Guin understands this imagery in the Taoist sense of the need to accept death as the natural balance to birth, an inalienable part of life. As in all her writing, in *The Earthsea Trilogy* Le Guin celebrates this life, here and now, and not any life beyond or after death; and the most striking characteristic of this life is that it is mortal. This mortality is related to time and change and is contrasted to the terrifying changelessness of a life outside these two aspects of mortality. The changelessness of the kingdom of Cob is very similar to the change-

lessness of the world in and around the Tombs of Atuan. Only death is changeless, rigid; life changes, grows and decays, but it is far more beautiful than that dry kingdom of empty immortality.

Ged and Arren must hunt out Cob and heal the breach between life and death that he has made, lest all Earthsea be swallowed up in his dreadful deathless sterility. There is never a doubt that mortal life is truly more beautiful and preferable and must therefore be saved, despite Arren's doubts about Ged and his motives. For Arren, too, dreams the dream of every human self, the dream of immortality, which Cob plays on to gain his power over the other souls. Paradoxically it is both this very desire for immortality, this fear of death, as well as death itself, which define the mortal self:

"The traitor, the self, the self that cries *I want to live, let the world rot so long as I can live!* The little traitor soul in us, in the dark, like the spider in the box. He talks to all of us. But only some understand him. The wizards, the singers, the makers. And the heroes, the ones who seek to be themselves. To be oneself is a rare thing, and a great one. . . ."

"Life without death. Immortality. Every soul desires it, and its health is the strength of its desire. . . ."

The Earthsea Trilogy, pp.422-423

"I know what they think they seek. But I know that they will die, as Soplì did. That I will die, that you will die."

The hard grip still held Arren.

"And I prize that knowledge. It is a great gift. It is the gift of selfhood. For only that is ours that we are willing to lose. That selfhood, our torment and glory, our humanity, does not endure. It changes and it goes, a wave on the sea. Would you have the sea grow still and the tides grow still to save one wave, to save yourself? Would you give up the craft of your hands, the passion of your heart, and the hunger of your mind, to buy safety?"

The Earthsea Trilogy, pp.410-411

This is the painful joy of mortal life, which Eliot describes in *Four Quartets*:

The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth.

Four Quartets, "East Coker", III

Le Guin explores it symbolically in the joy of beholding the dragons' dance:

As *Lookfar* approached the island Arren saw the dragons soaring and circling on the morning wind, and his heart leapt up with them with joy, a joy of fulfillment, that was like pain. All the glory of mortality was in that flight. Their beauty was made up of terrible strength, and utter wildness, and the grace of reason. For these were thinking creatures, with speech, and ancient wisdom: in the patterns of their flight there was a fierce, willed concord.

Arren did not speak, but he thought: I do not care what comes after; I have seen the dragons on the wind of morning.

The Earthsea Trilogy, p.432

The joyous patterns of the dragons' dance are the patterns of the *Tao*, for the dragons themselves are an embodiment of that Reality, the *Tao*. Its "thereness" beyond reason, beyond knowledge and beyond understanding, is also theirs: they are. And in this wholeness (no fragmentation between the reasoning "I" and the world, but pure being, *wu wei*) lies the peril of looking into their eyes: it is the danger of facing the open universe, no doors closed, no safe roof to hide under.

Cob denies this reality as he seeks only power over the world, not life in the world. He disrupts the *Tao* and therefore the dragons lose their speech and their sanity when he comes to Selidor. Ged and Arren will heal this break in the pattern.

Arren who will be king, symbol of the supreme, integrated consciousness, is the human self who is made whole in the process of overcoming Cob. It is Arren who must accept mortality, who learns what pain is. The victory he feels after his climb over the mountains of pain and back into life is a victory over death in which death is not defeated, but integrated, accepted as part of the pattern. The promise of the ring made whole and brought to Havnor, the promise of plentiful life, will be fulfilled through Arren. Symbolically he is the child, the new self, born of Ged and Tenar, the king born of the wizard and the woman made whole.

Arren is also Ged's counterpart, for while the dyer of Lorbanery mistakes Ged for Cob, the "Lord of life", making Ged Cob's adversary, it is Arren, not Ged who will be king once Cob, the anti-king, has been defeated: Arren, who is the youth and activity to balance Ged's age and passivity. When the word (magic) has done, the sword will take over. This is the balance on which Earthsea's peace is based and the full swing of the pendulum is explored later in *Tehanu*. As Roke, which has been fishing the shallows for too long, declines, Havnor, a new and different, a non-magical, power, rises. This is the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. Ged's power dies so that, in getting this now helpless man back to the realm of life, an act of faith like Tenar's in the labyrinth, Arren's power may be born.

As in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, it is magic, power, that caused the breach between life and death, for only wizards are said to be able to cross the border between these two lands and live. Yet, when Ged grasps his

shadow, becoming one with it, he drops his staff. It is not his power, his magic that can make him whole, but only his human soul, his outstretched hand. Here in *The Farthest Shore* magic is spent, used up, in healing the life that magic broke. It is the ordinary, human, new-born self, Arren who must cross the mountains of pain and restore the kingdom.

The whole of the *Earthsea Trilogy* can be read as an exploration of the course of magic. Ged's journey, in the shape of an open spiral (a symbol explored again in *Always Coming Home*), is the course of his life, from sorcerer's apprentice to mage to Dragonlord and finally to archmage. It is the story of both the beginning and the end of magic. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Le Guin set out to explore what a wizard is before he becomes archetypally aged, whitehaired and venerable (*The Language of the Night*, p.42); and the action of the *The Farthest Shore* takes place under the light of Gobardon, the Rune of Ending. The story of Ged is the story of the making and the unmaking of a mage, a way of understanding magic and its source, the human soul.

Magic in the *Earthsea Trilogy* is a metaphor on the one hand for the poet's art and on the other for the power of the awakened, integrated soul, at one with the cosmos (which may in itself be a description of the poet's art as Le Guin sees it).

Insofar as magic is an art, it involves the risk of hubris, the arrogance of the creator spirit, the wish to (re-)create the world in his own image. This is seen in both the young Ged, who believes that the mage may drive back the darkness with his power, and more powerfully in Cob who styles himself the Lord of Life and weaves his own terrible web of death-in-life, contrary to the teachings of Roke. For such mages the language of magic is seen wholly as the creator language and in their mouths it is used to create a world they desire. But as this world is based on their own egotistical desires, the power of their magic actually serves to alienate them from the world over which they thought they had gained power. For when the Old Speech is used to create the desires of the self it loses its link with Reality, being rooted solely in the self of the mage. So under the influence of Cob the words of magic become meaningless, the names lost, the spells powerless, their essential link to reality severed; and for so-called immortality even sorcerers trade in their true names, their true being.

Balancing this danger in the power of magic is the knowledge that this power arises from the soul awakened to the *Tao*, the Oneness of the cosmos, which therefore perceives itself as an inextricable part of the world and not as an agent above or outside it in any way. The true mage seeks only the unselfish service to the

whole he perceives the world to be. He is constantly aware of the Equilibrium, that balance between light and dark, between good and bad, between meaning and chaos, by which alone life is maintained. In this sense the language of magic is perception rather than creation, the Old Speech is a language which goes beyond language, it is not a screen between the speaker and reality but is in itself a *part* of reality. This is also the lesson Rocannon learns in *Rocannon's World*, that naming a thing creates it (as Segoy created Earthsea by naming the things of it and Le Guin by discovering it) but this creation is not so much a making as a perception of meaning in the fabric of the universe; a perception of the patterns of life, a word spoken in silence that it may be heard and have meaning.

The mage of Earthsea learns not only to serve the balance of life but to maintain a balance within himself between the two sides of magic; he learns to do only what he must, and in this learns to be essentially himself. The story of Ged's road to magehood then is the story of his becoming himself, the integration of his soul. Ged the apprentice is all conscious mind, eager to assert itself, to be the light driving back the darkness. On his way to magehood he learns that darkness cannot be driven off, that darkness, the shadow he has raised, is beyond the understanding of reason or the power of magic to control. He then becomes a dragonlord, one who can communicate with the dragon, the essential spirit of the natural world. And only once he has done that, has established that link to the mortal world, can he accept the shadow, not as something to be undone (the reverse creator spirit) but as something to be completed, as a part of himself.

And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark.

The Earthsea Trilogy, pp.165-166

But before he becomes archmage, Ged must find and heal the ring of Erreth Akbe, the symbol of the peace and unity of the Archipelago and also the complement, the yin counterpart, to the sword of Erreth Akbe, which, being phallic, is all yang and action. *The Tombs of Atuan* is the story of Tenar's coming of age, her sexual awakening, but it is also the final step on the way of Ged's becoming whole, becoming the archmage. In rescuing Tenar from the labyrinth he is also integrating his own feminine principle, his yin, passive, side. When we next meet Ged, he has been archmage for five years and has remained passively on Roke. When he does act, he

does only what he must. And what he must do is to give up, to sacrifice his power of making. Having perfected and integrated his power, he must now give it up, explore the silence which surrounds the word. "He has done with doing. He goes home," says the Doorkeeper (p.477).

This delicately balanced and ambiguous art, which is a metaphor for Le Guin's own art, is the door to an understanding of this trilogy. Earthsea, as the artist's creation, i.e. an inner world, is a world in which word and reality are truly one. A world of islands and sea, of land and water, a world of balance and integration, suggested in its very name, Earthsea is both a world created by language and a perception of meaning in the *world* as it is.

PART III: THE OUTER SPACES: THE HAINISH EKUMEN

The Left Hand of Darkness

With *The Left Hand of Darkness* Le Guin finally broke away entirely from the all-conquering galactic empire type of Science Fiction. During those intensely creative years in which she wrote *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the three books of Earthsea, she clearly defined her way of writing, of using the medium for what she has to say:

Along in 1976-8 I finally got my pure fantasy vein separated off from my science fiction vein, by writing *A Wizard of Earthsea* and then *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and the separation marked a very large advance in both skill and content. Since then I have gone on writing, as it were, with both the left and the right hands; and it has been a matter of keeping on pushing out towards the limits - my own and those of the medium.

The Language of the Night, p.23

In this fourth novel of the Hainish cycle, Le Guin continues her discovery of the future. Her method of research is intuitive and imaginative, seeking the *Way* in which humans might live in a future. Thus her science is anthropology, discovering different peoples and ways of life rather than new technology. This gives a new turn to her history of the future. In *City of Illusions* the universe was in a state of war, alienation, which was called "the time of the enemy". In *The Left Hand of Darkness* that has come to an end with the creation of the Ekumen, a kind of clearing house for trade and cultural communication between the worlds, rather than a political governing body such as the League of All Worlds had been.

The word *Ekumen* is based on an anthropological term, *oikoumenê*, which means hearth:

But Le Guin's Ekumen, a teleological myth, is a transformation of her father's etiological myth, her science fictional version of the *Oikoumenê* he proposed in 1945. Just as A.L. Kroeber hypothesized that Eurasian cultures are "an historic culture aggregate" with a single origin, Le Guin in "Winter's King" reveals for the first time in her future that Hain is the single origin of the Ekumenical worlds, a fictional-historical culture aggregate.

James Bittner, 1979, p.103

It is with this sense of the unity of mankind that Le Guin creates her Hainish Ekumen, a return to one hearth, one home, a means of making the universe inhabitable. It envisages a world in which the different peoples may live in peace and harmony, recognising their brotherhood.

"The dream of the Ekumen, then, is to restore that truly ancient commonality; to regather all the peoples of all the worlds at one hearth?"

"Winter's King" in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, p.107

And in the process of realising this dream, the Ekumen becomes an instance of Taoist sage-like ruling, a fusion of the political and the mystical, and a way of uniting All Beings into the One, the *Tao*, the mystical unity at the heart of the diverse cosmos.

"Life loves to know itself, out to its furthest limits; to embrace complexity is its delight. Our difference is our beauty. All these worlds and the various forms and ways of the minds and lives and bodies on them - together they would make a splendid harmony."

"Winter's King" in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, p.107

And as one Taoist sage puts it:

Be aligned along a myriad years, in oneness,
wholeness, simplicity.
All the myriad things are as they are,
And as what they are make up totality.

Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters, p.59

This unity of the mystical and the political will also become one of the central tenets of Ursula Le Guin's anarchism, in both *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*. It is essentially a vision of a harmonious world. This vision of harmony is not utopian and certainly not escapist. The harmony is perceived to be only momentarily attainable:

"No harmony endures," said the young king.
"None has ever been achieved," said the Plenipotentiary.
"The pleasure is in trying."

"Winter's King" in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, p.106

"But the Ekumen is not essentially a government at all. It is an attempt to reunify the mystical with the political, and as such it is of course mostly a failure; but its failure has done more good for humanity so far than the successes of its predecessors."

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.119

And the delight in striving for harmony is balanced by a wise sadness at the bottom of which lies the consciousness of the abyss, the depths of isolation and terror within the human heart, which limit the possibility of such a harmony. The beauty of the dance danced above the abyss stems partly from its very precariousness, its fragility.

For among these mild persons, whose chief quality seemed a cool, profound sadness indistinguishable from a warm, profound hilarity - among them, the ex-king of Karhide knew herself a barbarian, unlearned and unwise.

"Winter's King" in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, p.110

Through him [Genly] speaks a shrewd and magnanimous people, a people who have woven into one wisdom profound, old, terrible, and unimaginably various experience of life.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.135

This unimaginably various experience of life may be understood, integrated and shared through the Ekumen. Genly describes its functioning thus:

"Material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life. The enrichment of harmony and the greater glory of God. Curiosity. Adventure. Delight."

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.35

The Ekumen thus operates along the ways of the four modes of being, of which the human mind is capable and which are explored in greater detail in *The Dispossessed*. They are the religious, the scientific, the social/political and the psychological modes (Gillie, 1977, pp.179ff). Each of these represents a way of understanding the world, the way it functions and how the human being fits into it. These four modes together make up Le Guin's artistic mode. So *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a story woven of the many various strands of human perception and being. The story of Genly Ai's friendship with Estraven and his mission on Gethen is interwoven with hearth tales, scientific reports and ancient myths of the Gethenians. So Genly's political mission on Gethen gains meaning through the echoes of his own experience in hearth tales and myths, in the religious experience of the Gethenians.

Each chapter about Genly and Estraven is therefore alternated with a chapter recording a tale or myth or report he heard or read somewhere. And each time the interspersed chapter changes the perceptions of the reader and deepens the understanding of Genly's experience on Gethen (which is also the reader's experience of Gethen). The meaning of the book emerges from the interweaving of the different chapters, all the stories becoming one story. As Genly puts it in his final report:

The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them are false, and it is all one story.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.9

Thus "The Place Inside the Blizzard" foreshadows the shadowless ice-journey of Genly and Estraven towards the end of the book, as they escape from the darkness, the life-in-death of Pulefen farm. On the glacier, whose whiteness permits no shadows and makes vision as impossible as total darkness would, the two aliens are totally isolated. In the tale this centre of the ice is a place of death. It is the place of no shadows where the dead go and in this way functions to warn the reader against the Yomeshta who would deny the need for shadow to see, for darkness to live, as they seek to transcend mortal life. This is the symbolic death from which Genly Ai and Estraven are reborn. It is the death which makes new life, love and brotherhood possible. In this sense, this chapter is a premonition of the central mystical experience in the book, for it explores the terror of death, from which the friendship of the two aliens is born.

"The Nineteenth Day" relates closely to the following chapter ("The Domestication of Hunch") as it illustrates rather grimly the futility of knowing the answers to the wrong questions (p.65). It explains Faxe's central observation that the only thing that makes life possible is permanent and intolerable uncertainty. The one certainty is death, therefore uncertainty is life.

"The Question of Sex", although not exactly a myth, is nevertheless woven into the fabric of the novel along with the other myths. It explains some details to the reader and in this is directly opposed to the way of the myths, trying to explain literally instead of understanding metaphorically. This is once again a reflection on the relationship between science and myths out of which science fiction is woven. For this piece of scientific investigation is woven into the novel at the same level as the myths and hearth tales; both help to illuminate the truth. They are different modes of perceiving the truth: both are true.

"Estraven the Traitor" foreshadows and explains a great deal about Estraven and his fate. It is important that the reader should perceive him as an outsider, an alien amongst his own people. For what constitutes the core of the friendship between him and Genly Ai is that they are so very different, both aliens, in isolation from their own kind. Estraven becomes a traitor to his country and his love for his brother allows him no true kemmering vow: the one he does make he breaks. However, the one that cannot be sworn, his first, his true

love, he never betrays, not even in death. His death can, however, be seen as a betrayal of Genly, whom he leaves behind, for the death (and possibly suicide) of a friend is often experienced as a betrayal by those who must live with it. Estraven's "only way home lies in death" (p.68) and he goes home, while Genly is left to get on with life, alone. It may be that his death provides the blood for the mortar of the keystone in the arch, but like the sacrifice to Odne in "The Barrow" (*Orsinian Tales*) it is not clear that the sacrifice is necessary. For as Odne has been superseded by Christ, so the ancient belief about the need for blood in the construction of arches in Karhide has already been compromised, humanised: they now use animal, not human blood. Yet it is also in his death that he calls Genly by his brother's name, making him truly a brother, creating a personal blood-bond. For naming things creates them as Rocannon learns in *Rocannon's World*.

"On Time and Darkness", ironically named, introduces the Yomesh cult in its own words. It is ironically named, as time and darkness are the two things that Yomesh seeks to avoid or transcend. This mythic chapter balances the historical one set in Otherhord Fastness, the Yomeshta against and with the Handdarata. This will be discussed in detail below.

"An Orgota Creation Myth", coming immediately after the volcanoes on the ice, during Estraven and Genly's ice journey, unites the polarised opposites, on which the meaning of the book is balanced, into one symbol. It leads up to the central mystical experience of the two aliens on the ice. Death and Rebirth, Latency and Kemmer, Solitude and Companionship, Fear and Love, Time and Eternity are all symbolised by the Fire and Ice, from which the world is continuously created. The fire on the ice, be it the volcanic ones or the small domestic hearth fires, is what makes life, companionship and love possible. It is the fire which melts the frozen ice-world and by its light allows shadows to be cast. "Praise then the darkness and creation unfinished" (p.209) is the Handdara prayer which acknowledges this constant process. The chapter symbolically explains the rebirth for the planet Gethen, following the success of this journey, and the rebirth into love and friendship of the two aliens. It illustrates what makes life possible: the shadow, fire, change; and what does not or denies it: pure light, ice, eternity.

The different modes of perceiving and relating to the world, explored in the interspersed chapters, in which the central concerns and symbols gain depth and resonance, are then united in the novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness* itself, which is Le Guin's work of art but it is also Genly's report. This dual value, perceived by the

reader within the same thing, indicates clearly where, ultimately, these different modes of being are united, within the individual, who is capable of all four.

This is acknowledged by the Ekumen in its fusion of the intimately personal and the so-called supra-personal, the political sphere. All human perception and understanding, be it religious, scientific, social or psychological, creates and is created by the inner being of the individual, the Self (in the Jungian sense) which is the mystic point of contact with Reality. That is why, in contacting a new world, the Ekumen sends the first mobile alone, not in force, with a military backup:

Alone I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone I must listen, as well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not we and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical. In a certain sense the Ekumen is not a body politic, but a body mystic.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.219

It is Genly's discovery of a "thou", of a completely different, alien being who is also a friend, that is the central focus of the book. And this discovery is entirely personal, individual and as such involves an understanding of what constitutes the individual. *The Left Hand of Darkness* asks that question, What is it that constitutes the individual human being?

One can send an imaginary, but conventional, indeed rather stuffy, young man from Earth into an imaginary culture which is totally free of sex roles because there is no, absolutely no, physiological sex distinction. 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.

The Language of the Night, p.138

Thus Le Guin explores Gethen and the Gethenians, an androgynous world and an androgynous individual, Estraven. A *world*, in other words, which is not at odds with the *Tao* but allows the dynamics of yin and yang full, spontaneous play.

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

Barbara Brown, 1980, p.228

According to several creation myths, e.g. the Gnostic and the Cabalistic, humankind was initially androgynous, both man and woman in one being, before it was torn in two, never to be united again except in love. But a "remembrance" of wholeness remains, a sense within the human psyche that it is not just one or the other, it is both. The androgyne is an archetype of human wholeness. In this sense, the androgynous Gethenians are symbolic of humans as they at times are, not as they will be or could be or should be at some future time. But at the same time they represent a possibility of living in harmony, without the constant sexual power struggles that beset Terran human relations. This harmony within the individual is reflected within the Gethenian society. For the individual there are no social pressures to act in ways that are considered appropriate for a certain sex, no social stereotyping; the individual is free to be what he/she is. In such a society there is no division between strong and weak sex, neither the female principle (yin) nor the male principle (yang) can become dominant. The balance is maintained.

This is the ideal state according to the Taoist sages, in which to follow the way of the *Tao*, to live without strife and so live wisely.

Know the masculine,
 Keep to the feminine,
 And be the Brook of the World.
 To be the Brook of the World is
 To move constantly in the path of Virtue¹¹
 Without swerving from it,
 And to return again to infancy.

Know the white,
 Keep to the black,
 And be the Pattern of the World
 To be the Pattern of the World is
 To move constantly in the path of Virtue
 Without erring a single step,
 And to return again to the Infinite.

Know the glorious,
 Keep to the lowly,
 And be the Fountain of the World.
 To be the fountain of the World is
 To live the abundant life of Virtue,
 And to return again to Primal Simplicity.

This is what the Gethenians in Karhide have achieved: a balance. Genly Ai's mission on Winter allows him, and the reader, a glimpse of a world in which Yin and Yang are not alienated one from the other, but together form a harmonious balance. For as Genly discovers, under the prestige-seeking and ambition of the politics of Karhide lies the mystical vision of the Handdara. For ambition and a desire for progress and power are traditionally Yang, while the passivity of the Handdarata, expressed in their attitude of *nusuth* (another instance of *wu wei*) and their praise of ignorance, is Yin. Thus the industrial progress on Gethen has been very slow, almost imperceptible. But it has been sure and they are technologically quite advanced without having permitted this to become as disruptive as the unchecked advance of technology has been on Terra. The Gethenians have not become alienated from their surrounding world in a search for power over it; indeed they are highly concerned with the wholeness of their world.

"Well, in the Handdara . . . you know, there's no theory, no dogma. . . . Maybe they are less aware of the gap between men and beasts, being more occupied with the likenesses, the links, the whole of which things are a part."

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.199

Thus the Handdara, the mystical religion which is practised in Karhide, in many ways is the clue to an understanding of the vision of wholeness at the heart of the novel. It balances the politics and the prestige-seeking, the orderly side of Karhide, providing the mystery, the darkness.

But I began to understand Karhide better, after a halfmonth in Otherhord. Under that nation's politics and parades and passions runs an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.56

The Handdara is a religion which, like Taoism, praises Ignorance above all, for the truth cannot be known by accumulated facts and outward knowledge but only by the inner vision of the stilled mind. Thus the Handdarata praise the darkness, as did Stefan in "A Week in the Country" (*Orsinian Tales*). For in the light one sees the fragmented world of disparate things, while in the dark, when outward things are invisible, the inner wholeness can be perceived.

Between Heaven and Earth,
There seems to be a Bellows:
It is empty, and yet it is inexhaustible;

The more it works, the more comes out of it.
 No amount of words can fathom it:
 Better look for it within you.

Tao Teh Ching, 5

Thus the Handdarata work on Ignorance, knowing that the inner truth is not the object of rational knowledge, and their religion (insofar as it is one) weaves together light and dark, what is knowable with what is not, postulating no absolutes but seeking only harmony with the currents of life, which change constantly. It is through this harmony with the forces of life that they are able to do their foretelling, which seems to be an ability arising out of the contact with the collective unconscious, which is not timebound.

The Handdarata have perfected the art of foretelling in order to understand the complete futility of knowing the answers to the wrong questions (p.65). In this again they follow the teaching of the Taoists that the search for certain answers is useless, for the course of life is constantly changing and to live joyously and at peace one must surrender oneself to this constant change.

That hugest of clumps of soil loads me with a body, has me toiling through a life, eases me with old age, rests me with death; therefore that I find it good to live is the very reason why I find it good to die. We store our boat in the ravine, our fishnet in the marsh, and say it's safe there; but at midnight someone stronger carries it away on his back, and the dull ones do not know it. The smaller stored in the bigger has its proper place, but still has room to escape; as for the whole stored within the world, with nowhere else to escape, that is the ultimate identity of an unchanging thing. To have happened only on man's shape is enough to please us; if a shape such as man's through ten thousand transformations never gets nearer to a limit, can the joys we shall have of it ever be counted? Therefore the sage will roam where things cannot escape him and all are present. That he finds it good to die young and good to grow old, good to begin and good to end, is enough for men to take him as their model; and how much more that to which the myriad things are tied, on which we depend to be transformed just once!

A.C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, p.86

Faxe, the weaver at Otherhord fastness, a mountain retreat of the Handdarata, states this rather more starkly:

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

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.66

Although on the one hand this is frightening, as the desperate search for certainty in "The Nineteenth Day" shows, it is also a cause for praise. The only prayer Estraven, who is also one of the Handdarata, ever utters is: "Praise then the darkness and creation unfinished" (p.209).

The balance, the serenity and the wholeness of this way of life in Karhide becomes all the more precious because it is threatened by the political and religious development in Orgoreyn, which is entering Karhide in the form of Tibe.

The Karhidish way of life is based on the darkness and passivity of the Handdara. The political structure, although theoretically a monarchy, is more of a family quarrel than a nation, as Estraven says to Genly (p.13). In this it is an instance of Le Guin's anarchism. The people of Karhide define themselves in terms of the individual hearths to which they belong, rather than in terms of being Karhidiers. Thus Estraven's "treachery" to the king is seen as a less serious offense by Karhidiers than treachery to one's hearth would be.

In Orgoreyn these important personal and local distinctions have become blurred, as the words commensality and commensal, which mean "hearth", are now being used of the centralised governing committee as well. This blurring of individual identities somehow diminishes the people; even their names are shorter than the Karhidish names are. They lack the hearth name, the name of one's home. This dehumanises the people of Orgoreyn as is reflected in the treatment they get at the hands of the Sarf, the inspectors, and other "government agents".

What strikes Genly most about the Orgota city and way of life (after his approval of the luxury) is its insubstantiality, its unreality.

The great buildings of central Mishnory, government offices, schools, Yomesh temples, were so blurred by the rain in the liquid glare of the high streetlights that they looked as if they were melting. Their corners were vague, their façades streaked, dewed, smeared. There was something fluid, insubstantial, in the very heaviness of this city built of monoliths, this monolithic state which called the part and the whole by the same name.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.127

When he is imprisoned for the second time in Orgoreyn, Genly begins to understand the source of this unreality. It lies in the religion of the Orgota, the cult of Yomesh greatly encouraged by the comensals. The Yomeshta will not allow for the necessity of darkness, of shadow, as the Handdarata do, they praise and seek only the light, making it a sinister glare as in the streets of Mishnory. Light alone is death (as in "The Place

within the Blizzard"). They do not accept change but seek to transcend it to completeness and full knowledge (denying that some questions cannot be answered, or that answers may be useless). This is only attainable once one leaves behind the world of change, of the patterns of light and dark. Seeking absolutes, the moment of truth only, not the flux of life in which it is embedded, and codifying them, finding the answers in dogma, they deny life its truth, which is change.

. . . There is, it seems to us,
 At best only a limited value
 In the knowledge derived from experience.
 The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
 For the pattern is new in every moment
 And every moment is a new and shocking
 Valuation of all we have been.

Four Quartets, "East Coker", II

The Yomeshta, in contrast to the Handdarata, work on Knowing; they seek only the light and with it permanence, omniscience, eternity, transcendence as opposed to the Handdara practice of presence - immanence. In its quest for clarity, light and transcendence the Yomesh cult seems very close to the rational western mind, which has sought, in some instances, to rationalise even its religion, Christianity, basing its belief on the light of human reason. The Yomesh cult places a being, a mortal human consciousness, Meshe, in the centre, where darkness should be. The lying arrogance of the commensals, who encourage this religion of knowledge, seems to stem from this.

And yet there may be some truth in what the Yomeshta believe - what but the Self could be in the centre: the human mind is, after all, ego-centric: we perceive ourselves as centres, we are the consciousness from which the world radiates out - we can know no more. Once again there is ambiguity in Le Guin, the Yomeshta are both right and wrong. Their mistake lies in making the self absolute, turning this limitation, this inability to go beyond the self rationally into a cosmic law. They do not distinguish between the self and the Self.

The crime in Orgoreyn is that in setting a single human self in the centre, it becomes impossible for the commensals to acknowledge, and eventually to permit, the self of another. All selves are identified with this "supreme" one, which is spiritually empty. It is a false version of Jung's collective unconscious: what he called the collective consciousness. Herein lies the inability of the Orgota to cast shadows. For when Estraven says

that a man must cast his own shadow, he means that he must live with integrity, with the freedom to be, and in loyalty to himself: the shadow defines the light. And the self is similarly defined. If this self is not acknowledged, this is impossible. So *shifgrethor* is a very important part of social intercourse for Estraven.

Shifgrethor is, amongst other things, a way of telling the truth without telling the whole truth (which is impossible anyway) and without insulting anyone and thus infringing on his dignity. It is a ritualised way of dealing with personal aggression and self assertion. The word *shifgrethor* is derived from an old word meaning "shadow". Estraven says to Genly Ai that a man must cast his own shadow (p.24) and this makes clear the connection between *shifgrethor* and human dignity and integrity. In Karhide this highly personal matter is what gives order and stability to an otherwise anarchic society. Human dignity and integrity and respect for these keep order in Karhide.

In Orgoreyn, on the other hand, the impossibility of knowing and therefore telling the whole truth is not acknowledged and this subtly infringes on the integrity and dignity of the people. *Shifgrethor* is freely waived; each of the commensals claims to be telling the entire truth while consciously lying. Order is cruelly and inhumanly imposed by the centralised governing body. The local, the personal, shades of truth are denied as the local and specific is subsumed in the word commensal and thus allowed no importance of its own. No "other" is permitted *shifgrethor*, it is a matter of the state, which, by generalising and confining (defining) it thus, turns it into an empty ritual which can be freely waived.

Thus the Orgota are shadowless in contrast to Estraven. Their whole country is ill-defined and vague. As Genly says, they cast no shadows because their reality is underground (p.145), it is based on deceit, on a denial of the complexity of truth. The truth like the individual is not one thing, is not simple, it casts a shadow, it has another side; and so, in Karhide, it is treated with circumspection and is granted its mystery. In Orgoreyn it is "nationalised", appropriated by the government, and so becomes a lie, shadowless.

In this light, Ashe's rebuke to Genly about the immorality of a mission which denies the importance of the individual gains its full force.

"However, the mission I am on overrides all personal debts and loyalties."

"If so," said the stranger with fierce certainty, "it is an immoral mission."

In *The Earthsea Trilogy* Ged speaks of the self as "our shame and our glory" (p.410). In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, this ambiguity, the complexity and the wholeness of the individual self, is once again the centre of focus. For the self defines the individual's loneliness. In its limitations lies the isolation of the human soul, and this isolation and the possibility of overcoming it lie at the heart of the winter imagery of this novel.

The planet Gethen is simply called Winter by Genly's people because it is a planet in the middle of an ice age. The story of Gethen is a winter myth (Ketterer, 1986, p.12), because winter bears the association of the seasonal cycle of death and rebirth and this is a story of death and rebirth. The logic of the seasons becomes also the logic of the winter journey. Cold winter is a symbol of isolation and solitude: *The Left Hand of Darkness* begins in complete isolation. Genly Ai feels alone and constantly cold, friendless on this planet. In fact the entire planet is cut off as it has not yet been contacted by any other world in the Ekumen. In this sense, also, it is complete unto itself. So too are its inhabitants (p.199).

Despite their concern with wholeness, with the things that link them to the rest of their world, the Gethenians are isolated, living on a world barely able to support mammalian life - there are no other large mammals to be found on Gethen. And their androgyny makes them complete, but possibly also rather lonely. In this society of self-sufficient individuals, kemmer, the terror and joy of union with another, lasts only a few days of each month. As Ong Tot Opping writes in her report:

Everything gives way before the recurring torment and festivity of passion. This is easy for us to understand. What is very hard for us to understand is that, four-fifths of the time, these people are not sexually motivated at all. Room is made for sex, plenty of room; but a room, as it were, apart.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.84

The isolation of winter is symbolic of the isolation of the individual, of the human being, whether man, woman or androgyne. And isolation is sterile, half-dead by Gethenian standards (p.60). The experience of utter isolation on the glacier is symbolic of death. As the old plants die in winter to be reborn in spring, the old Genly dies on the glacier and a new one emerges on the other side. He emerges with a new self, integrated through love for what he thought was alien to him. Love, the rebirth which springs from the very heart of isolation, makes *The Left Hand of Darkness* a description of Life in a time and on a planet of death (the Gethenian crops must be carefully monitored to ensure survival). Life is always lived in the face of death, the dance danced above the abyss.

Isolation and alienation and the rebirth following upon them are the shuttles which weave the novel together. The planet Winter has been going in its direction for too long (pp.21,40). It is time for this isolation to come to an end and the only one who can see this is Estraven who is proclaimed a traitor and driven into exile, made an outsider, isolated from his brothers and from his country.

Genly Ai, who also is totally isolated and alienated on the planet Winter, is the one who brings in his empty hands, with his innocence, a possibility of rebirth. The *world* is reborn because two aliens isolated from their own kind and from each other by their differences find love in the very heart of winter.

If, as Shevek (*The Dispossessed*) would have it, the final bond of humanity which makes for community is not brotherhood but pain and isolation, then Genly Ai and Estraven are ideally suited to forging that bond between two new and alien worlds. For Genly Ai's name is a cry of pain to which Estraven responds (p.195), and Estraven himself knows that his only way home lies in death. A beginning of brotherhood is forged in the very moment of death, on the glacier and later when Estraven dies calling Genly by his dead brother's name.

Two human beings, aliens to each other, and each at some point to his own kind, overcome their isolation and alienation in love, despite the fact that the differences between them, what alienates them, is specifically their sexuality. Genly, the heterosexual human being, is alienated from half of his own species. He cannot tell Estraven what a woman is (p.200). But he needs this other half of himself to be complete. Estraven, the androgyne, does so only in kemmer, and so may feel more isolated in his own completeness. This wavering between completeness and incompleteness, between self sufficiency and love is a paradox of all human existence which *The Left Hand of Darkness* does not resolve, for that would be to diminish the complexity of the human soul.

What is important here is that all humans are at times complete unto themselves, while at others they very much need a partner or friend. And it is the depth of this need of the other, arising out of the utter isolation of the self, that makes love such a frightening and joyful experience. It is the isolation and desolation of the alien on the glacier, the expanse of ice between one human soul and another, which makes the possibility of friendship and love so joyous. Love, the need for companionship in pain and isolation, is the one bridge across the gulfs that separate humankind, one from the other.

It is at the moment of realisation of the wholeness in Estraven that Genly Ai realises that he loves this alien. In the midst of isolation, he perceives this wholeness and so comes to love the other, permitting him/her

their own reality at last. So love, which bridges the gap between the I and the other, bringing wholeness is at the same time a perception of wholeness.

But it was from the differences between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge, across what divided us.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.211

and:

"Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow."

The Left Hand Of Darkness, p.225

This is what Le Guin has discovered about humanity with her thought experiment. That the duality of Earthling perception and the alienation which stems from it is not the last word on the human condition. On the other side of alienation, then, when sexual and special differences are put aside, Humankind is seen to be an integral part of the universe it lives in. An alien could well turn out to be a brother, a beloved. The other side of alienation is wholeness, is love.

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

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.199

This moment of unity, of vision, the new wisdom and love, has its price, which in itself is an inalienable part of the vision. As Rocannon and Falk-Ramarren, in building bridges and in finding their true self, lose what is most dear to them, so Genly too loses the love he has only just found before his mission is complete. Worse still, he finds himself betraying that love, for he calls down the starship before Estraven's exile is revoked. The prophecy of the opening of the book has come true:

Very-long-ago a keystone was always set in with a mortar of ground bones mixed with blood. Human bones, human blood. Without the bloodbond the arch would fall, you see.

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.12

The bridge is built, it is mortared in blood, it will hold. The central mystical experience of unity, life, joy and love is inseparable from alienation, from isolation and from death. The wholeness lies in the process: life springs from death and death follows life: a shadow on snow, the end and the way. And so Estraven's child asks:

"Will you tell us how he died? - Will you tell us about the other worlds out among the stars - the other kinds of men, the other lives?"

The Left Hand of Darkness, p.253

The Dispossessed

Modern scientists are discovering the parallels between the explorations of science and the experiences and teaching of the Eastern mystics. This began in the field of modern physics with the discovery of quantum mechanics and the relativity theory, but is now emerging in other scientific disciplines such as biology and psychology. At the heart of these discoveries and experiences is the unity of the mystic or the scientist with the cosmos:

I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. Being a physicist, I knew that the sand, rocks, water and air around me were made of vibrating atoms, and that these consisted of particles which interacted with one another by creating and destroying other particles. I knew also that the Earth's atmosphere was continually bombarded by showers of "cosmic rays", particles of high energy undergoing multiple collisions as they penetrated the air. All this was familiar to me from my research in high-energy physics, but until that moment I had only experienced it through graphs, diagrams and mathematical theories. As I sat on the beach my former experiences came to life; I "saw" cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I "saw" the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I "heard" its sound, and at that moment I *knew* that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers, worshipped by the Hindus.

Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p.11

This is the universe experienced by the scientists of the late twentieth century and this is then also the "open universe" of Le Guin's science fiction, in which the walls which separate "I" from "the other", the walls within the Western mind, which isolate and alienate humankind from the universe it inhabits, are unbuilt. This is the experience of Ladislav Geyger in "An die Musik" as he hears his Sanctus. *The Dispossessed* explores the implications of this scientific-mystical experience, in which the scientific observer and his experiment are one, for the moral and political world:

He [Shevek] would like to write a paper showing the relationship of Odo's ideas to the ideas of temporal physics, and particularly the influence of Causative Reversibility on her handling of the problem of ends and means.

The Dispossessed, p.45

One of the worlds on which *The Dispossessed* is set is Anarres, inhabited by an anarchist colony from the home world, Urras. The anarchy of the Anarresti is based, in part, on the political theories of Kropotkin. It is a society based on the Taoist principle of *hsiang sheng* ("Mutual arising"):

The principle is that if everything is allowed to go its own way the harmony of the universe will be established, since every process in the world can "do its own thing" only in relation to all others. The political analogy is Kropotkin's anarchism - the theory that if people are left alone to do as they please, to follow their nature and discover what truly pleases them, a social order will emerge of itself. Individuality is inseparable from community. In other words, the order of nature is not a forced order; it is not the result of laws and commandments which beings are compelled to obey by external violence, for in the Taoist view there really is no obdurately external world. My inside arises mutually with my outside, and though the two may differ they cannot be separated.

Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, p.43

Thus the central principle of Anarresti anarchism is the mystical experience of "to be whole is to be part" (p.76), the words on Odo's tombstone. Odo was the originator of this anarchism. Her name, like *Tao*, means "the way" (in Greek) and as the *Tao* is the unifying process of the diverse cosmos, so Odo's circle of life, her anarchism, unites and harmonises all the different modes of being of the human mind: the social, religious, scientific and the psychological. The children of Anarres are all taught all of them, each is seen as an integral part of the functioning of the individual and of society. Thus Shevek's discovery is at once scientific, spiritual, moral and political for the circle of life contains all these modes of being. And it is with this expression of the profoundly holistic vision at the heart of all her writing, that Le Guin completes the Hainish cycle. The vision is at once of an individual, Shevek, and of a society, the Anarresti: of a world.

In completing the Hainish cycle with *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin returns to its roots and those of the Ekumen. The Odonian anarchism seems very close to the workings of the Ekumen: the marriage of politics and mysticism is essential to both. Shevek's gift, his unified field theory (which Einstein sought in vain), and the spirit in which he gives it to all the known worlds make the Ekumen possible. Le Guin's exploration of the beginnings of the Ekumen lead her to explore anarchism more extensively than she did before. Thus Odonianism is also in many ways the anarchy of Karhide explained, rationalised, made conscious. And as this anarchy is brought up out of the unconscious realm, the feminine principles related to it surface too, making *The Dispossessed* not only the root of the Hainish cycle but also the beginning of Le Guin's feminist writing of the Eighties. It is, then, a turning point, both an end and a way. The wisdom of *The Dispossessed* is that of Torner's Lay in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, that wholeness and truth lie in both the moment of enlightenment and in the journey, the process of which it is a part.

What we call the beginning is often the end
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.
 The end is where we start from.

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding", V

Therefore this final novel of Le Guin's outer spaces can be explored in two ways, as the root of the Hainish Ekumen and as the beginning of the feminist exploration of the world; and the two ways are one. *The Dispossessed* "closes the circle" (*Planet of Exile*, p.10) of the Hainish Cycle but it also opens the door to the yin utopia of *Always Coming Home*; it is a doorkeeper, a hinge, making the circle also a spiral.

In one way, then, *The Dispossessed* and "The Day before the Revolution", a short story set on Urras, complete the Hainish cycle. And the novel in itself forms a circle, the Odonian circle of life, the route of the *Tao*. "True voyage is return", Shevek says to Ketho (p.319), and he himself lands on Urras, his alien home world "with a strange look of grief and recognition on his face" (p.25). The voyage out is incomplete without the return and may in itself constitute a kind of return:

He would most likely not have embarked on that years-long enterprise had he not had profound assurance that return was possible, even though he himself might not return; that indeed the very nature of the voyage, like a circumnavigation of the globe, implied return.

.....

You can go home again, the General Temporal Theory asserts, so long as you understand that home is a place you have never been.

The Dispossessed, p.52

The circle is closed and whole, but does not shut out as walls do. As the route of the voyage it becomes the dominant symbol of the novel, appearing again and again as the Odonian Circle of Life and confirmed by the structure of the book. For *The Dispossessed* begins and ends with Shevek's journey home, to Urras; and within the structure of the novel he sets out as he returns. The alternating time-levels of the book record Shevek's life on Anarres up to his decision to leave for Urras and his life on Urras up to his return to Anarres. The circle is formed by the interweaving of the two cycles of events in Shevek's life, one on Urras and one on Anarres. The events on Urras, on one level of the perception of time, follow after those on Anarres, but within the book, the narrative moves from one planet to the other, alternating the chapters between Anarres and Urras, making the two sequences of events simultaneous. As Shevek tries to explain his temporal physics, he also explains a good deal about *The Dispossessed*:

"Well, we think that time 'passes', flows past us; but what if it is we who move forward, from past to future, always discovering the new? It would be a little like reading a book, you see. The book is all there, all at once, between its covers. But if you want to read the story and understand it, you must begin with the first page, and go forward, always in order. So the universe would be a very great book, and we would be very small readers."

The Dispossessed, p.187

That is what Shevek goes to Urras to do: to work out a unified theory of temporal physics and to present it to Mankind in such a way that no one nation or planet may gain power over another. For he is the integrated individual, whose individual being is One with that of the world. He is a part of the social organism of Man: "to be part is to be whole". His work involves Einstein's relativity theory, the political theories of Odo (based on Shelley, Kropotkin, Goodman), and the mystical experience of reality. At a certain point, then, all truth becomes one truth, and at that point the arrow and the circle of time are one. This unity of all modes of experience forms the core of the novel. As Shevek says:

"And so, when the mystic makes the reconnection of his reason and his unconscious, he sees all becoming as one being, and understands the eternal return."

The Dispossessed, p.187

One way of describing this understanding is found in Shevek's explanation somewhat later:

"There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises."

The Dispossessed, p.188

Thus Shevek, the scientist, in perceiving the answer for his unified field theory, experiences a moment of mystical illumination:

The wall was down. The vision was both clear and whole. What he saw was simple: simpler than anything else. It was simplicity: and contained in it all complexity, all promise. It was revelation. It was the way clear, the way home, the light.

The Dispossessed, p.233

This is what Le Guin had set out to do from the very first books of her Hainish history: the unity of myth and science, the discovery of the *world*, the unity of the individual and the cosmos. The journey outward,

to the other worlds, is also return to the true Self. Thus Le Guin sees the artist as one who works from the centre of her being, from the divine ground within, on which all beings meet, in which all beings are one:

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 much the same in all of us. This does not imply a devaluing of consciousness or of reason. The achievement of individual consciousness, which Jung calls "differentiation", is to him a great achievement, civilization's highest achievement, the hope of our future. But the tree grows only from deep roots.

The Language of the Night, p.66

Therefore Le Guin's world is balanced not on reason alone but on the relationship between reason and dream. She explores this balance in *The Word for World is Forest*, in the "little green men", the Athsheans, who live in the forest, under the trees, in the play of shadow and light of the leaves. Their dreams, like those of the Senoi of Malaysia, are "meaningful, active and creative. Adults deliberately go into their dreams to solve problems of interpersonal and intercultural conflict" (Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*, in *The Language of the Night*, p.128). That is the *Tao*, the dynamic interplay of the conscious (yang) and the unconscious (yin) mind, by which the *world* is created. It is the circle of life: Life followed by death, which brings rebirth, isolation from which stems human brotherhood. In *The Dispossessed* it finally finds its clearest expression, as on all levels the novel works toward that experience of a unified reality at the centre of the space-time continuum and of the individual.

There are several events which make the two cycles, one on Anarres and the other on Urras, on one level worlds apart, on another the same circle. It is also ironic that, while for the Anarresti Urras is a completely different, an alien, world and vice versa, for the other worlds in the Ekumen, they are the Cetian world, belonging together, the planet and its moon, inhabited by one people. Shevek's journey both ways is a journey home, at the heart of each lies an experience of cosmic wholeness. The dream Shevek has as child of the wall and the primal number marks the same experience of the wholeness of the cosmos as his final breakthrough in his unified theory of temporal physics (quoted above).

He dreamed he was on a road through a bare land. Far ahead across the road he saw a line. As he approached it across the plain he saw that it was a wall. It went from horizon to horizon across the barren land. It was dense, dark, and very high. The road ran up to it and was stopped.

He must go on, and he could not go on. The wall stopped him. A painful, angry fear rose up in him. He had to go on or he could never come home again. But the wall stood there. There was no way.

.....
 A stone lay there. it was dark like the wall, but on it or inside it, there was a number; a 5 he thought at first, then took it for a 1, then understood what it was - the primal number, that was both unity and plurality. "That is the cornerstone," said a voice of dear familiarity, and Shevek was pierced through with joy. There was no wall in the shadows, and he knew he had come back, that he was home.

The Dispossessed, p.35

Again, on both worlds he is with a man, a brother who has worked in a common cause, in his last hours. He lives through the death of this man, unable to help in any way but to be there, sharing and not sharing the pain, the fear, the isolation. Out of this experience rises Shevek's certainty on Urras that his theory must be a gift, a sharing with all Mankind, as did his sense, on Anarres, of the meaning of human brotherhood.

"Then I saw ... you see ... I saw that you can't do anything for anybody. We can't save each other. Or ourselves."

"What have you left, then? Isolation and despair! You're denying brotherhood, Shevek!" the tall girl cried.

"No - no, I'm not. I'm trying to say what I think brotherhood really is. It begins - it begins in shared pain."

The Dispossessed, p.58

The pain and the isolation caused by their four-year separation is part of the strength of his relationship with Takver. For as Takver knows, Shevek has and will always come to her from a very, very long way off: this is the ice separating Estraven and Genly in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It is this distance between them, the distance that isolates each individual from his or her fellows, on which love is based. It is the shifting ground on which Shevek and Takver base their love, as did Genly Ai and Therem Estraven, Stefan and Bruna, Rocannon and Mogien. This is the act of faith, which holds the world together.

As he started down the air grumbled a little and he felt a strangeness: no jolt, no tremor, but a displacement, a conviction that things were wrong. He completed the step he had been making, and the ground was there to meet his foot. He went on; the road stayed lying down. He had been in no danger, but he had never known himself so close to death. Death was in him, under him; the earth itself was uncertain, unreliable. The enduring, the reliable, is a promise made by the human mind.

The Dispossessed, pp.259-260

This is the fidelity which is so important to Shevek and which he feels his mother betrayed. It is the impossible fidelity, the betrayal by Genly of Estraven and by Estraven of Genly Ai, which is at the same time an acknowledgement of brotherhood. It makes the world we live in, the world of myth, the world of the artist, who lies in order to tell the truth (*The Language of the Night*, p.131).

It forms the circle made by the clasping of hands, the circle of friends around the fire, the circle the snake forms to get somewhere, to live, by which it may also die (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.24); it is the circle of mortality, of life: "To be whole is to be part". Individual wholeness is only possible within the circle of life, Man within the universe, not without, above, not alienated but part of the movement of *Tao*, in Odonian terms as part of the social organism. That is the heart of Le Guin's fusion of political being with the mystical teaching of Lao Tzu. Both Odonians and Taoists see change as the most central condition of life and unity/community as its highest good. Odo quotes Lao Tzu when she says that true voyage is return, which is the route of the *Tao*.

The Dispossessed is a manifestation of the circle of life not only in that it is the story, sequential and simultaneous, of the Odonian, Shevek's discovery of the unity of all being, but also in that the worlds it contains form another, larger, concentric circle. Once again Le Guin does not begin this cycle at the beginning (does a circle have a beginning or an end, after all?) but at the end, with Anarres, although this only becomes clear at the end of the novel. Shevek says to Ketho:

"I said to Keng, the Ambassador, that I had nothing to give in return for what her people and yours have done for me; well, maybe I can give you something in return. An idea, a promise, a risk...."

The Dispossessed, p.318

And Keng says to Shevek, completing the circle:

"You are like somebody from our own past, the old idealists, the visionaries of freedom; and yet I don't understand you, as if you were trying to tell me of future things; and yet, as you say, you are here, now!..."

The Dispossessed, p.289

Hain, Terra, Urras and Anarres form the circle of life, the history of mankind, from birth on Hain through the present on Urras, to death on Terra and rebirth on the dead planet of Anarres, a progression and a

circle. A story of time and life passing yet all present at once in the book, *The Dispossessed*. The name of the book, then, could refer to any of these four worlds, for they have all lost something.

The Anarresti have lost their home planet, the abundance of life on it, the joy, the splendour of its magnificent abundance, which is not adequately described by the slogan "excess is excrement":

The extravagance, the sheer quantity of the storm exhilarated him. He reveled in its excess. It was too white, too cold, silent, and indifferent to be called excremental by the sincerest Odonian; to see it as other than innocent magnificence would be pettiness of soul.

The Dispossessed, p.165

In losing the horrors of life on Urras, they have also lost its beauty. The Anarresti have also dispossessed themselves of their own past, their roots, denying their history. By hating Urras and all it stands for, they alienate themselves from their roots, their shadowside, and resort to violence when it comes too close in the plans of the Syndicate of Initiative, because, being ignorant of it, they can only fear it. Thus the anarchistic society of Anarres is becoming sterile because it is filled with hatred and fear and in the wake of these come hypocrisy (Sabul) and the need for power over what it fears (Tirin and the Syndicate of Initiative). It is becoming bureaucratic, mechanistic, like Orgoreyn which is the beginning of the end of freedom.

If the Anarresti are dispossessed of their past, the Urrasti have lost their future; they in their turn fear the anarchy of Odo and again meet it with violence and suppression. The clashes between the classes on Urras make brotherhood impossible for its people. Alienation rules on Urras between the classes and between the sexes. Thus they have nothing with which to face the void, the isolation; they simply cover it up, pretend it is not there. Their splendour is empty, fancy wrappings which cover but do not hide the emptiness:

"It is a box - Urras is a box, a package, with all the beautiful wrappings of blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities. And you open the box, and what is inside it? A black cellar full of dust, and a dead man. A man whose hand was shot off because he held it out to others. I have been in hell at last."

The Dispossessed, p.286

Their world is in pieces, its inhabitants separated from each other by the boxes within which everything is kept. The Urrasti have lost human brotherhood and that unity of all being which Shevek expresses when he calls the otter *ammarr*, brother.

The Terrans destroyed life on their planet, and so have lost hope. They have killed their planet and eke out a terrible existence on a desert world, a life in death:

"My world, my Earth is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and gobbled and fought until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt. We destroyed ourselves. But we destroyed the world first."

The Dispossessed, p.287

The beauty of the people which makes life on Anarres tolerable, the love and solidarity, are all lost to the Terrans, whose world is both an inner wasteland and an outer desert. Symbolically it is the wasteland which must be crossed before new life becomes possible.

The Hainish finally seem to have lost so much that it is one of them who is able to take the step, to accept the hope, the future which Anarres, the desert moon, offers. "To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one, maybe you have to be lost" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.48). Having been inside the abyss, they can now build the bridge over it.

"They are a very strange people, the Hainish; older than any of us; infinitely generous. They are altruists. They are moved by a guilt we don't even understand, despite all our crimes. They are moved in all they do by the past, their endless past."

The Dispossessed, p.288

Shevek's gift will make the ansible, and thereby the Ekumen, the bridge from world to world across the void, possible. The Ekumen will be based on that same balance between the part and the whole on which the social organism of Odo, the wisdom of the Taoist sages and the theory of unified temporal physics, are based.

*To be whole is to be part;
true voyage is return.*

The Dispossessed, p.76

It is probably quite true that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet.

Werner Heisenberg, quoted in Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, p.10

Life is bearing fruit: at that point, where Eastern mysticism, science and political anarchy meet, the Ekumen, the hope bestowed by Anarres, is born. Mankind is returning, coming home, where it has never been before. It

is being born again from the darkness naked, like a new-born baby, the beggarman, the fool with empty hands. That is the wisdom of the fool, who through the ages has been the embodiment of all that is irrational: our roots are in the dark, that is the source of life.

This image, "with empty hands", which described Rocannon, Falk-Ramarren and Genly Ai as well as Shevek, suggests at once a hand outstretched, a greeting, and a meditative pose, the emptiness reached by the Taoist sage in which he is at one with the ways of the universe. It is thus both a beginning and a goal, and as such a fitting completion of the Hainish cycle.

That is the one way of *The Dispossessed*, but if one opens the door in the other direction, another way is perceived, the other half of the double spiral. This novel looks back on the Hainish cycle, finding its roots, the birth of the Ekumen. But it also looks ahead to the intense political questioning in the feminism of *Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences*, *Always Coming Home* and *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, the exploration of Coyote country, a new Utopia - the exploration of womanhood.

Le Guin has been greatly criticised by feminist critics for "turning her back on opportunities SF offers for political experimentation" (Lefanu, 1988, p.137). But she is not making statements, she is not experimenting, she is exploring, not a political activist but an artist. As in *The Left Hand of Darkness* she explored a society lacking sexual discrimination, she here explores a society guided by the feminine principles: anarchy and nutritiveness. For Odo, although much in her theories is taken from male political theorists, is a woman. "The Day before the Revolution" describes Odo no longer as the revolutionary but simply as an old woman, Laia, remembering her childhood and mourning her dead love. The old woman who becomes again the little girl and therefore knows that true voyage is return, is like the speaker in Le Guin's "Song":

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

A woman gets and is begotten on:
Have and receive is feminine for live.
I knew it, I knew it even then:
what, after all did I have to give?

A flowing cup, a horn of plenty
fulfilled with more than she can hold:
but the milk and honey will be emptied,
emptied out as she grows old.

More inward than sex or even womb,
 inmost in woman is the girl intact,
 the dirty little virgin who sits and dreams
 and has nothing to do with fact.

The old woman, Laia-Odo, thus provides a bridge from Hain to the feminist world of Le Guin's later writing. Like the poem "Song", she is one realisation of womanhood. She is the space crone, truly representative of "that inmost mind and heart which we, working on mere guess and hope, proclaim to be humane." She is the "person who has experienced, accepted, and acted the entire human condition - the essential quality of which is Change" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.6).

In *The Dispossessed*, womanhood, the different modes of female experience, is explored in several younger female characters. The first is Rulag, Shevek's mother, who in many ways is the yang side of the woman, strong and unyielding. She is a working woman with little gentle motherliness about her; nonetheless she does yearn for it when she meets Shevek 18 years after she had left him as a child to pursue her career. This is not unusual, to some extent even encouraged in Odonian society, and Shevek's sense of her betrayal seems to stem more from his sense of his father's loss of her as a loving partner. It was a personal, individual, betrayal not to be judged in terms of failing to fulfill her social role as mother. She is at the yang end of the yin-yang spectrum found within every individual, as explored in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In Jungian terms, she lives largely in her conscious mind, not the unconscious.

Takver, Shevek's partner, is at the other end of the spectrum. She is the first exploration of the joyous yin-world of Le Guin's later work, for she lives in the consciousness of the sacredness of life. She deals in her work with the one area on Anarres where life is abundant, the sea:

The three oceans of Anarres were as full of animal life as the land was empty of it. The seas had not been connected for several million years, so their life-forms had followed insular courses of evolution. Their variety was bewildering. It had never occurred to Shevek that life could proliferate so wildly, so exuberantly, that indeed exuberance was perhaps the essential quality of life.

The Dispossessed, p.158

She is the mother, associated with darkness, with the animals (the abundant animal and plant life on Urras is the one thing Shevek wishes to share with her on that world), she is yin. But like Rulag, she is not so simple as

that. She, too, leaves Shevek for a while because her work is needed elsewhere, and her wit, her often practical advice to Shevek, her understanding of her society give a sense of a more complex character. She perceives her instincts as a mother rationally as well as unconsciously acting on them; and in childbearing and birth portrays the complex mixture of their joy and weariness. She is certainly no "household Angel".

Finally, Vea, "the woman in the table" (p.180), the temptress, the "body profiteer" (p.180), is also not as simple as she appears at first glance. Although clearly a product of her chauvinistic society, she is also more than that, and provides some acute insight into her society:

"Life is a fight, and the strongest wins. All civilisation does is hide the blood and cover up hate with pretty words!"

The Dispossessed, p.185

Although not accurate as a profound understanding of civilisation as such, it does describe Urras very well. It reveals the sadness in the yearning tenderness she feels at Shevek's brotherly treatment of her. For it is a yearning for the love of Estraven and Genly Ai, which goes beyond the alienation of the sex war on both Terra and Urras.

Beneath the stereotypes, which they do to some extent represent, Rulag, Takver and Vea do nevertheless, collectively and individually, provide a searching picture of what it means to be a woman in Cetian society. Their failings are both personal and a criticism of their respective societies.

For the Utopia Le Guin depicts on Anarres is in no way faultless. The very beginning of the book suggests the problem of Anarres: fear. The wall is one which shuts both in and out, which alienates and so impinges on freedom. The wall around the Port of Anarres is the same frightening wall as the one in Shevek's dream, the one he will go to Abbenay to unbuild. Nor is Anarres entirely without the exploitative, propertarian and chauvinist alienation of Urras. For the secretive, power-seeking behaviour of Sabul is clearly profiteering and some Odonians still do not entirely accept women as equal, seeing them as natural "propertarians" (p.50).

Still, this is not nearly as pernicious as the Urrasti view of women, especially amongst the so-called educated men.

"Can't do maths; no head for abstract thought; don't belong. You know how it is, what women call thinking is done with the uterus! Of course there's always a few exceptions. God-awful brainy women with vaginal atrophy."

The Dispossessed, p.67

This sounds provokingly familiar to Le Guin's twentieth century Terran readers and so is no doubt "realistic" political criticism, but the circle of life, the act of faith, the fidelity of Shevek and Takver, the solidarity of the Odonians is no less real. Alienation and chauvinism may be real but they are not the only reality. On the other side is true human community. Shevek's Odonian perception of science, of religion, of sex, of Mankind in fact, is actually far more convincing, more real than that of Dearri, Oiie and Pae. His honesty and generosity, his concern for his brothers, be they fellow Odonians or an otter, remain convincing, despite the shortcomings of the Odonian utopia. For he truly seeks wholeness, not only in his moment of inspiration and discovery, but in his daily life as an Odonian, as a part of the whole, in a world in which science and religion are simply different modes of perception, not two entirely alienated schools of thought, and men and women work together to make the world inhabitable.

And so from his gift the Ekumen will be born, the body political and mystical, the search for knowledge and delight, for harmony in life. And from Anarres, from the consciously, rationally created, and maintained social organism, Le Guin moves back home to Earth, to a California of the future and yet of the past, into Sinshan in the Na valley in which the animals and even the rocks are a part of the true "*communitas*" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.88*).

The women are speaking. Those who were identified as sweet silence or monkey-chatterers, those who were identified with Nature, which listens, as against Man, who speaks - those people are speaking. They speak for themselves and for the other people, the animals, the trees, the rivers, the rocks. And what they say is: We are sacred.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.162

PART IV: THE YIN UTOPIA

Always Coming Home

This is not only the title of one of Le Guin's most recent novels, it also describes the process of her entire writing. Like Shevek, like Ged and like Falk-Ramarren, Le Guin has come Home. Having been a "Science-Fiction" writer, a writer of children's books, a modern fantasy writer, a writer of Utopias, she is now simply a woman, writing. Writing from within her own country, which for too long has been seen as "the other", the wilderness, avoided in fear and contempt.

Nature as not including humanity, Nature as what is not human, that Nature is a construct made by man, not a real thing; just as most of what Man says and knows about women is mere myth and construct. Where I live as woman is to men wilderness. But to me it is home.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.162

What exactly it is she means by writing from within this country is vividly explained in her essay, "The Fisherwoman's Daughter" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, pp.212-241). It involves a moral responsibility to write and talk about the "woman" side of life, to write from within that network of responsibilities (to her children, her home, to her art, to the world at large) which comprises the woman's world. This resolves Ladislav Gaye's dilemma in "An die Musik" (*Orsinian Tales*) of the split between his life and his art. Le Guin quotes Käthe Kollwitz on this interplay of a woman's life and her art:

I am gradually approaching that period in my life when my work comes first. When both the boys were away for Easter, I hardly did anything but work. Worked, slept, ate and went for short walks. But above all I worked.

And yet I wonder whether the "blessing" isn't missing from such work. No longer diverted by other emotions, I work the way a cow grazes.

Perhaps in reality I accomplish a little more. The hands work and work, and the head imagines it's producing God knows what, and yet, formerly, when my working time was so wretchedly limited, I was more productive, because I was more sensual; I lived as a human being must live, passionately interested in everything. . . . Potency, potency is diminishing.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.226

In other words it is a writing from within the community as opposed to from within the poet's lonely tower, which is why so much of her work is now done in collaboration with others, not least her audience. As she says of her essay, "The Fisherwoman's Daughter":

What pleases me most about the piece, after so much work on it, is that I can look on it at last as a collaboration. The responses from the various audiences I read it to, both questions in the lecture hall and letters afterwards, guided and clarified my thinking and saved me from many

follies and omissions. The present re-collaboration and editing has given me back the whole thing - not shapely and elegant, but a big crazy quilt. And that was my working title for it when I first began gathering material: "Crazy Quilt." That name hints at collaboration, which is what I saw myself as doing as I pieced together the works and words of so many other writers - ancestors, strangers, friends.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.212

It is also writing in the mother tongue, that irrational language, verging on song, verging on silence, rooted in the darkness of mother earth, which is our home.

It is primitive: inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, trivial, banal. It's repetitive, the same over and over, like the work called women's work; earthbound, housebound. It's vulgar, the vulgar tongue, common, speech, colloquial, low, ordinary, plebeian, like the work ordinary people do, the lives common people live. The mother tongue, spoken or written, expects an answer. It is conversation, a word the root of which means "turning together." The mother tongue is a language not as mere communication but as relation, relationship. It connects. It goes two ways, many ways, an exchange, a network. Its power is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but in uniting. It is written, but not by scribes and secretaries for posterity; it flies from the mouth on the breath that is our life and is gone, like the outbreath, utterly gone and yet returning, repeated, the breath the same again always, everywhere, and we all know it by heart. John have you got your umbrella I think it's going to rain. Will you come play with me? If I told you once I told you a hundred times. Things just aren't the same without Mother, I will now sign your affectionate brother James. Oh what am I going to do? So there's his arthritis poor thing and no work. I love you. I hate you. I hate liver. Joan dear did you feed the sheep, don't just stand around mooning. Tell me what they said, tell me what you did. Oh how my feet do hurt. My heart is breaking. touch me here, touch me again. Once bit twice shy. You look like what the cat dragged in. What a beautiful night. Good morning, hello, goodbye, have a nice day, thanks. God damn you to hell you lying cheat. Pass the soy sauce please. Oh shit. Is it grandma's own sweet pretty dear? What am I going to tell her? There there don't cry. Go to sleep now, go to sleep. . . .

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.150

It is a language following the *Tao*, spontaneous, always returning. Le Guin has become a feminist writer and though this may at first appear to be a disconcerting change from Taoism, it is in fact, not so much a change as a development, a renaming. So Le Guin points out that the poem "She Who" by Judy Grahn follows the instructions for Taoist breathing: "the sounds *hu, shi*, . . . blowing and breathing with open mouth . . . evoking harmony" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.186).

For as the *Tao*, the source of all life, is both being and non-being, so the goddess, the great mother, is both manifest and ineffable. She is the mother of all things when she is active, creative; when she is inactive, closed, withdrawn she is beyond all things (Mookerjee, *Kali: The Feminine Principle*, 1988). Her movement

from being to non-being creates the countless universes. Woman is a different name for the *Tao*. That is the wisdom of Joy Harjo of the Creek people:

Oh woman
remember who you are
woman
it is the whole earth

quoted in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.152

The women are speaking, says Le Guin, says Susan Griffin, and what they are saying is:

We say look how the water flows from this place and returns as rainfall, everything returns, we say, and one thing follows another, there are limits, we say, on what can be done and everything moves. We are all part of this motion, we say, and the way of the river is sacred, and this grove of trees is sacred, and we ourselves, we tell you, are sacred.

quoted in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.162

That is the watercourse way, the way of the *Tao*. The women have listened to Lao Tzu:

All-under-Heaven have a common Beginning.
This beginning is the Mother of the world.
Having known the Mother, we may proceed to know her children.
Having known the children,
We should go back and hold on to the Mother.

Tao Teh Ching, 52

Western man has not; and that is his illness. Fritjof Capra puts it thus:

Our culture has consistently favoured *yang*, or masculine, values and attitudes, and has neglected their complementary *yin*, or feminine, counterparts. We have favoured self-assertion over integration, analysis over synthesis, rational knowledge over intuitive wisdom, science over religion, competition over cooperation, expansion over conservation, and so on. This one-sided development has now reached a highly alarming stage; a crisis of social, ecological, moral and spiritual dimensions.

The Tao of Physics, p.15

Le Guin agrees:

Utopia has been *yang*. In one way or another, from Plato on, utopia has been the *yang* motorcycle trip. Bright, dry, clear, strong, firm, aggressive, active, lineal, progressive, creative, expanding, advancing and hot . . . To attain a constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go *yinward*. What would a *yin* utopia be? It would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting, and cold.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.90

Thus Le Guin no longer writes of a balanced Taoist world such as Gethen for this unified vision of the ancient Eastern sages does not hold true of the world as Western man has made it which is the world she is writing in and for. This world is dominated by Yang, by progress and reason and light to the exclusion of everything else. So it has become a world out of kilter, a sick world gone too far in its own direction, threatening now to destroy itself.

As Le Guin sees it, the Western world and its religious thinkers have largely sought means to overcome life. It has characteristically explained Man as not belonging to this earth, thus splitting the human psyche forever into I and the other. It has sought to dominate and subdue nature both outside and within Man, and has fruitlessly and destructively pursued transcendence and escape from life. It has looked down upon the earth and all things and people connected with it as primitive and backward and in this has often despised life itself, which is not always positive or rationally comprehensible.

Machoman is afraid of our terms, which are not all rational, positive, competitive, etc.. And so he has taught us to despise and deny them. In our society, women have lived, and have been despised for living, the whole side of life that includes and takes responsibility for helplessness, weakness, and illness, for the irrational and the irreparable, for all the obscure, passive, uncontrolled, animal, unclean - the valley of the shadow, the deep, the depths of life.

Dancing at the Edge of the world, pp.116-117

So from the beginning she has turned away from Western, i.e. dualistic, ways of seeing and writing about the world, building her world on the way of the *Tao*. The yin-yang symbolism of this profoundly wise way of life, which Le Guin explored in the androgyny of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, provided her with the diagnosis for the Western world, as well as an idea of what it needs to be healed. Having been yang for too long, we need to return to our mother, the earth; we need to return to the feminine within us, to darkness and non-reason and stillness.

And when you fail, and are defeated, and in pain, and in the dark, then I hope you will remember that darkness is your country, where you live, where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is. Our roots are in the dark; the earth is our country.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.117

In this way Le Guin becomes part of that "tremendous evolutionary movement that seems to illustrate the ancient Chinese saying that 'the yang, having reached its climax, retreats in favour of the yin' (*The Tao of*

Physics, p.15). In keeping with this, and in search of a holistic approach, uniting her life and art, she now seeks a different, a yin approach to her art. For as yang has dominated world history, so also it has dominated art.

So the hero has decreed through his mouthpieces the lawgivers, first, that the proper shape of the narrative is that of the arrow or spear, starting here and going straight there and THOK! hitting its mark (which drops dead); second, that the central concern of narrative, including the novel, is conflict; and third, that the story isn't any good if he isn't in it.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.169

And this hero is now threatening to destroy the art of story-telling, too. So at last the axes no longer grind in Le Guin's work, for the need to teach or preach has become one with the need to find a new aesthetic, a new form for literature.

It sometimes seems that the story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one's finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p. 168

Le Guin sets out to tell this story, the story without a hero, which is about life, not the triumph over life. She does this in several ways. Firstly by writing consciously as a woman; she uses the "carrier-bag" theory of fiction as opposed to the "THOK" theory of fiction.

So, when I came to write science-fiction novels, I came lugging this great heavy sack of stuff, my carrier bag full of wimps and klutzes, and tiny grains of things smaller than a mustard seed, and intricately woven nets which when laboriously unknotted are seen to contain one blue pebble, an imperturbably functioning chronometer telling the time on another world, and a mouse's skull; full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions; full of space ships that get stuck, missions that fail, and people who don't understand.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.169

For if the man's world is strength, success and conflict, the woman's world is weakness, failure and community. Secondly, the search for a true *communitas*, a home on this earth, living among its creatures, led Le Guin to those cultures which do live in harmony with the natural world. This was for her another homecoming - to the Indian tales her father told her as a child. So, having travelled with the trickster-mage in Earthsea and the beggarman on Annares, Le Guin finally made Coyote, the trickster, the fool, the klutz, a central image in her

work.

Having set out in *Orsinian Tales* from a personal, mid-European country, travelled through her inner lands and outer spaces, Earthsea and the Hainish Ekumen, Le Guin has now arrived in Coyote country. It is a country inhabited by talking animals, children, women and a few men, a community of people who all speak to each other and tell each other stories in this irrational language which Le Guin calls the mother tongue. Having been an exile, a wanderer, with Estraven, with Shevek, she has now come home, has found an inhabitable world. This is her yin utopia, the world Coyote made.

Coyote is the trickster deity of the Californian Indians. He is both the adversary of Wonomi (in this capacity, he is a parallel to Satan and the archetype of the bad twin god), the creator god, and creator in his own right. In some tales he created Mankind, in others it is merely he who made them mortal. Wonomi created the world perfectly flat and smooth, Coyote put in all the kinks, the mountains, the irregularities. Coyote is a mischief-maker, along the lines of Reynard the Fox, he is lecherous and cruel yet he remains a hero, for it is he who stole fire for the people and taught them the arts of weaving and pottery.

In Western mythology, the trickster (the stealer of fire) has been largely invisible, banned in fact to the underground world (Loki, Prometheus) by the gods of law and order (Wotan and Zeus). In Western culture he is largely a figure of contempt and Jung can say of him, "the trickster is a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals" (quoted in Joseph Campbell's *Primitive Mythology*, p.274).

In so-called "primitive" cultures, however, the trickster is seen in heroic terms as the giver of life and the teacher of mankind. He remains a symbol of life triumphant in a hostile universe, in which he so often comes short, is mocked by society yet is always bouncing back, surviving, grinning, indefatigable, always somehow coming out on top. In Le Guin's words: "Sounds like Coyote to me. Falls into things, traps, abysses, and then clambers out somehow, grinning stupidly" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.98)

This symbol of disorder and confusion, the trickster, can, however, be perceived in a more profound light:

The trickster speaks - and embodies - a vivid and subtle religious language, through which he links animality and ritual transformation, shapes culture by means of sex and laughter, ties cosmic process to personal history, empowers divination to change boundaries into horizons, and reveals the passages to the sacred in daily life.

Robert Pelner: *The Trickster in West Africa, A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, p.3

The trickster is associated with ordinary life, becoming emblematic of ordinary, unheroic people, simply getting on with daily living. This is surely how Le Guin's Coyote works, who in a stumbling, lecherous and foolish way is somehow a symbol of the holiness of life - *reveals the passages to the sacred embedded in daily life*. For as in Blake's poetry there is in *Always Coming Home* and *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* a sense of the holiness of all life :

They speak for themselves and for the other people, the animals, the trees, the rivers, the rocks.
And what they say is: We are sacred.

Dancing at the edge of the World, p. 162

Le Guin's art then is a celebration of life, ordinary, mortal life and this involves respect and love for the earth in which life (including human life) must be rooted to be complete. For life must end to be complete.

Our roots are in the dark; the earth is our country. Why did we look up for blessing - instead of around, and down? What hope we have lies there. Not in the sky full of orbiting spy-eyes and weaponry, but in the earth we have looked down upon. Not from above but from below. Not in the light that blinds, but in the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls.

Dancing at the edge of the World, p.117

For Coyote is not creator of paradise, but of this mortal earth; like Eve, he led man out of immortality, out of paradise into a world beset by death and disease and yet somehow beautiful. Both the trickster and Eve are closely associated with the natural world (as opposed to the transcendent), with darkness and with irrationality, with yin not yang, with the unconscious rather than the conscious mind. Then there is also the tale of the time when Coyote turned himself into a girl and became pregnant: the trickster is one form of the androgyne (Joseph Campbell, 1976). So in *Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences* Coyote is a woman, is Eve, leading humankind, the child, Gal, into the wilderness:

"Hey, Coyote, we are coming!
You called us, you sang us,
Coyote, we are coming!"
Then Coyote said, "There's no use arguing with these people. I fed them dirt and stones and now they belong here."

Always Coming Home, p.164

It is the Coyote that Stone Telling meets on her first walk on the mountain, symbolic of the search for the self, for an identity. Coyote lets her into her house, the wilderness, the untamed, disorderly world. It is Coyote who leads the people into the abyss, the meaningless void, which Rocannon, Falk-Ramarren and Genly Ai crossed to find a home, and out onto the other side:

I have no idea who we will be or what it may be like on the other side, though I believe there are people there. They have always lived there. It's home. . . . See how beautiful it is!

This is the New World! we will cry, bewildered but delighted. We have discovered the New World!

Oh, no, Coyote will say. No, this is the old world. The one I made.

You made it for us! we will cry amazed and grateful.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that, says Coyote.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.99

Coyote, the trickster, the fool, the joker, made an inhabitable world, the ever-changing, living home the exile has longed for. In some ways this image of Coyote is embodied in the figure of Pandora in *Always Coming Home*. For Pandora, curious like Eve, opened the can of worms, opened the box of horrors, of disease and death, but she also found hope at the bottom. Pandora becomes an alter ego for the author, Le Guin herself. In the book she is an anthropologist, researching the way of life in the Na Valley. But she is also the artist, the woman writing in and of this terribly mortal world, sister to Adolf Hitler and Anne Frank (p.147) taking responsibility for the irreparably ruined world, turning yinward, seeking hope:

Bits, chunks, fragments. Shards. Pieces of the Valley, lifesize. Not at a distance, but in the hand, to be felt and heard. Not intellectual, but mental. Not spiritual, but heavy. A piece of madrone wood, a piece of obsidian. A piece of blue clay. Even if the bowl is broken (and the bowl is broken), from the clay and the making and the firing and the pattern, even if the pattern is incomplete (and the pattern is incomplete), let the mind draw its energy. Let the heart complete the pattern.

Always Coming Home, p.53

Joseph Campbell in his *Primitive Mythology* describes Coyote as not so much a deity as a super shaman. The shamans moved between the divine world and that of the mortals, they were the messengers from one to the other and they were healers. Both of these roles they fulfilled by means of singing - through art. Shamanlike Le Guin sees her art also as a means of healing the world. As in the Na valley the doctors hold a "singing in" for sick people, Le Guin is trying to sing her society back to health, to life and hope. She is trying to tell the life story.

In a truly Le Guinean reversal this healing process, this offering of kindness and love, begins in destruction and anger:

I am often very angry, as a woman. But my feminist anger is only an element in, a part of, the rage and fear that possess me when I face what we are all doing to each other, to the earth, and to the hope of liberty and life.

.....

To build, one must tear down the old. The generation that has to do the tearing down has all the pain of destruction and little of the joy of creation. The courage that accepts that task and all the ingratitude and obloquy that go with it is beyond praise.

Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, 1978

Thus Le Guin writes in *Always Coming Home* that this description of a future is not a Utopia but simply an up-yours to "civilized" man:

This is a mere dream dreamed in a bad time, an Up Yours to the people who ride snowmobiles, make nuclear weapons, and run prison camps by a middle-aged housewife, a critique of civilization possible only to the civilized, an affirmation pretending to be a rejection, a glass of milk for the soul ulcered by acid rain, a piece of pacifist jeanjacquerie, and a cannibal dance among the savages in the ungodly garden of the farthest West.

Always Coming Home, p.316

It is a rebellion, a joke, but a joke with the indestructible sacredness of life at its heart. Its laughter is not blasphemous, but an "old joy returned" (*Buffalo Gals*, p.14), the laughter in the eyes of the dragon and the joy of their dance.

The similarity between a spiritual insight and the understanding of a joke must be well known to enlightened men and women, since they almost invariably show a great sense of humour.

The Tao of Physics, p.45

Even if it is, as often in *Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences* and *Always Coming Home*, a desperate, angry humour; angry at the things "civilised" mankind is doing to the world, its wisdom remains. It is the wisdom of Coyote, of King Lear's fool who sees the evil and watches the king go mad. What can they do but play tricks and sing? Thus the fool is both butt and creator.

Where Coyote had pulled things apart, the rainbows came to bridge the gaps. Across these bridges the Four-House people came walking. They came shining and walking into the earth world, and there was coyote standing with her tail down and her head down, shivering, and looking around. There was a lot of music going on now, loud, too much of it, everything shaking and trembling and rumbling, earthquake everywhere, where Coyote had pulled loose and left gaps and darkness. "Hey! Coyote!" the people of the Four Houses said, standing on the

rainbows, looking down, calling down. But Coyote didn't know how to answer. She didn't know how to talk. In the earth world nobody had spoken. There was no speaking, only music. So Coyote sang the coyote music. She put her head up into the air towards the people and howled. The people on the rainbow laughed at her.

Always Coming Home, p.167

So, having turned in fear, laughter and anger from the Cities of Man, Le Guin comes, like Gal and North Owl, into Coyote's house, the house of the wilderness, which is also the home of woman:

But the experience of women as women, their experience unshared with men, that experience is the wilderness or the wilderness that is utterly other - that is in fact, to Man, unnatural. That is what civilization has left out, what culture excludes, what the Dominants call animal, bestial, primitive, undeveloped, unauthentic - what has not been spoken, and when spoken, has not been heard - what we are just beginning to find words for, our words not their words: the experience of women. . . . [T]hat wild country, the being of women.

Dancing At the Edge of the World, p.163

In *Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences* she is very much unnamings, destroying the old way of writing to make way for the new. The anger is there in the crude language, in the fear and animosity between the species, in the men who shoot the mountain lion in Aunt May's garden. The split between the ego, yang, and the other, yin, remains unbridgeable, and Gal must return to "her" people, must leave Coyote's house, for she will grow up and cannot remain of it. And Eve must leave Adam, must unname the animals, must find a new way of life, alone. In this collection of stories and poems, then, Le Guin makes her choice, looks at "civilisation" from the other side, the inside, and turns her back on it.

In *Always Coming Home*, she goes beyond this, beyond criticism to an archaeology of the future. The Na valley is situated in a California of the future, apparently post-holocaust, but the people of it have in many ways turned to America's past, pre-conquistadores, to find a way to live. Technology is there, is used with care, mindfully, but is not a dominant factor of civilisation or culture.

The Kesh, the people of *Always Coming Home*, are modelled partly on the Indians of Central California, a "primitive", passive, yin culture, which predates the light of western civilisation. They had found a way to live at peace with surrounding nature rather than at odds with it. They lived and worked toward survival, maintaining life, rather than toward progress (the changes of which might be dangerous) and the expansion of civilisation. For centuries their culture remained unchanged, they stayed at home, concerned with homely things. It is in this light too that they saw their arts. Art for Le Guin becomes an everyday activity.

Most Kesh poetry was occasional - the highest form according to Goethe - and much of it was made by what we call amateurs, people doing poetry as a common skill, the way people do sewing or cooking, as an ordinary and essential part of being alive. . . . [T]he poem not as fancy pastry but as bread; the poem not as masterpiece but as life-work.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.187

Always Coming Home itself is just such an everyday art work. It is an unheroic story of an unheroic people; it is perhaps a send-up of the romantic dream of a log cabin in the woods, but it also takes that dream seriously, for it does express the soul's yearning for a home which the city of man cannot provide. It is a dream of paradise, but of a paradise whose essential nature lies in its mortality, in its being inside time, rather than outside it, inside life, rather than beyond it. It is through this ecological concern, this awareness of the danger Mankind poses to the world-organism by its number and power, that the realism of the book is brought home to the reader. Pandora writes: "You may have noticed that the real difference between us and the valley, the big difference, is quite a small thing really. There are not too many of them" (p.147).

The nature of this paradise is made clear by Stone Telling's story of her journey, in search of an identity, out of the valley to a people who, like the Yomeshta, see eternity, transcendence, as the basis of Man's spiritual identity. But she finds that her identity, both spiritual and physical, does in fact lie within the valley, in the earth from which she was born and nourished.

Always Coming Home is thus once again a story of a coming of age as well as a coming home. North Owl's father is not a man of the valley but a no-house man. This is what the Kesh call the Condor, a warrior race which is conquering their part of the world. No-house people do not live in the valley; and the name is apt for the Condor do not see themselves as being a part of this earth, but as being an image of a transcendent deity passing through it. North Owl, as a half-breed, is therefore in many ways alienated from her valley family and turns to her father and his way of life for an understanding of herself. She leaves the valley with him and lives for several years in one of the Condor cities. She learns there that the Condor regard all women, foreigners and animals as *purutik*, unclean, dirt-people and set themselves apart from these as images of the One, the creator of the world, but in no way a part of it. This is one of Le Guin's depictions of alienation, of the isolated ego of modern Western civilised Man, un-at-home in the mortal world.

In Orsinia, as in Earthsea, coming of age was seen in terms of an understanding and acceptance of one's own mortality. *Always Coming Home* is an allegorised version of this theme. For the Condor symbolise the

extreme yang elements of Western civilisation, the search for transcendence, the alienation from the natural world and the yearning for eternal life, which in its extreme form leads to contempt for mortal life. The Kesh, on the other hand, are at one with the natural world, not alienated from it, perceiving and mindful of the sacredness of all things in the world, the rivers, the rocks, the animals and birds. The meaning of life for them is defined by their relationship with the world, not by a transcendent deity. Death is an integral, accepted, though terrible part of life, not something to be transcended. Dying for the Kesh is a ceremony of which the entire family is a part, accompanying the dying one into the four houses with the *Going Westward* Songs, and then returning to the houses of earth with great difficulty. The lodge at which these songs are taught is called the Lodge of Rejoining, expressing the wholeness and completion death brings: the return to the *prima materia*, the dance of the atoms. The crossing either way is hard, but it is there, connecting the living and the dead.

Finally the names of the people who died during the year are "thrown on the fire" in a communal mourning ceremony at the World Dance. This is danced in mid Spring, a time of renewed life, and celebrates human participation in the continual creation of the world. This festival and the others are in many ways a realisation of Eliot's vision of such a dance:

. . . Round and round the fire
 Leaping through flames, or joined in circles,
 Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
 Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
 Mirth of those long since under earth
 Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of the coupling of man and woman
 And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Four Quartets, "East Coker" I

This day of mourning precedes the marriage day within the days of the World Dance, following the cycle of the seasons. Altogether the World Dance is a great festival of unity, of life and death, that unity of being which Le Guin's art celebrates, the dance danced over the abyss:

"All you have to do to see life whole is to see it as mortal. I'll die, you'll die; how could we love each other otherwise? The sun's going to burn out, what else keeps it shining?"

The Dispossessed, p.162

This unified experience of life permeates the entire life of the valley. And in the book, *Always Coming Home*, this unity is expressed in Stone Telling's story of home-coming, also a kind of rejoining, which provides a "carrier bag" (cf. p.92 above) for all the other, shorter stories, the poems, the dramas, the bits of information about the valley. And yet her story is only one of the things Pandora found in the valley and translated. Apparently chaotic, the various pieces do nevertheless form a coherent picture of life in the valley. The relationship between the different elements of the book is not simple, just as the relationships within the life in the valley are not simple: the valley and its way of life are held within the minds of the people, yet the valley itself holds the people within it.

This complex relationship is perhaps best explained by the symbol of the house. This symbol has gained resonance in the process of Le Guin's writing. In "An die Musik" (*Orsinian Tales*) the house was seen as a negative symbol, as something humankind builds to separate itself from the world, to shut the world out. In the Hainish books, the Ekumen as the "Household of Man" was a way of re-uniting all the human races. Here, in *Always Coming Home*, it is now seen as a home made from the world itself, a living entity: "A big room, that holds animals, birds, fish bugs, trees, rocks, clouds, wind, thunder. A living room" (p.148).

The valley is such a living house, containing several smaller houses. The house is a central way of seeing life for the Kesh. The entire society is defined by the various houses its people live in. There are nine of these, four houses of the sky and five houses of earth (cf. chart on opposite page).

As in a Babushka doll, the house metaphor works on different levels, one within the other. On one level it may mean an actual house, e.g. High Porch House, or it may mean a complex net of biological relationships by which the rules of incest are defined, e.g. Obsidian. The houses also create specific relationships between humans and animal and plants, e.g. the quail is of the Blue Clay house, and Stone Telling, who is also a Blue Clay person, names her daughter Little Quail. High Porch House, then, is a Blue Clay house, which is a house of the earth. The society of the Valley brings to life the ideals of the Ekumen, of the Odonian social organism, of diversity and complexity within unity. Therefore each plant, rock, all the people, including the human people (the Kesh do not have separate words for human and animal, they are all seen as people), live in one of these houses at all times, whether alive or dead or unborn, whether "actual" or "imagined".

These divisions seem very rigid at first, but although the lodges and arts are organised by a specific house, anyone, from any house, can belong to them. And the festivals are danced by everyone who wants to. The chart was drawn up for the foolish, ignorant, reader; to the valley people that is an inappropriate way of expressing their way of life. Rigid definition and categorisation of the world make an untrue picture of it. Thus they would find it foolish to insist on only one creation of the earth:

How could it begin once only? That doesn't seem sensible. Things must have ended and begun again, so that it can go on, the way people live and die, all the people, the stars also.

Always Coming Home, p.160

The same story may be told in different ways; they would all be true, as Genly Ai found in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The division between "objective" and "subjective" reality does not exist in the valley, although one can, of course, live too much on the inside, and start making the world up; this is not healthy. But the connections between these divisions seem more important than the divisions themselves. This is why valley people speak to "objects", to rocks, to pools of water: communication, the connection between the I and the other, symbolised by these objects, is real.

The central connection, the sacred hinge, is the connection between the houses of the earth and the houses of the sky, although this at first seems to be the most important division, defining the different modes of being and perceiving, e.g. real or imaginative, as well as the two ways of speaking. The language of the Kesh is divided into two modes, the Sky mode, used in all discourse concerning its people (unborn, dead, thought, imagined, dreamed, in the wilderness), in past and future tense, in the subjunctive, conditional and optative moods, in the negative, in abstract or general statements and in all formal literature, written or oral; and the Earth mode, used in ordinary everyday conversation. But these uses, though very clear and exact on one level, also shade into each other. They are not rigid, as shown on the chart on p.501 of the novel (reproduced opposite).

The towns in the valley are also built on this basically binary division, in tune with the immanent holiness of place. They form a double spiral, one arm containing the houses and barns, lodges and orchards etc., the other the heyimas, the sacred houses of each of the five earth houses. But the sacred centre of the town is the hinge, the place where the two arms connect, which is always some form of water, as holy symbol of life.

This spiral, both division and connection, unity in diversity, is the central symbol in the valley. The towns are built in its shape; when walking in the tracks of the mountain lion, i.e. when going in search of the sacred Self, the soul, one walks the heyiya-if, which is the spiral; it decorates musical instruments, houses, clothes, books, any artifacts at all, and forms the shape of the stage, therefore the basis of meaning in drama.

The spiral is also the shape in which most dances are danced. Dance in the valley also means festival (cf. the chart quoted above); in this way the dances can be seen as heyiya-ifs (a symbolic representation of the holy or sacred) of the cosmic dance, emblems at once of unity and of the constant movement and change on the space-time continuum: complexity, diversity, life in unity. Several of them are also seen as reversal-times: at the moon dance the usual sexual roles are reversed and the usual associations of sex are also reversed; at the World Dance, the houses of earth dance the sky while the houses of the sky dance the earth, in a reversal signifying wholeness. The various clowns appearing at the dances are also reversals of the usual way in which the people of the valley see themselves. The clowns speak in reversal words, meaningless words. Stone Telling feels that the Condor live a reversed life, that their religion can only be spoken of in reversal words. The reversals are then seen as negative, even, in the white clowns of the Sun Dance, as frightening. At the time of the Condor influence in the valley, the time of the warrior and lamb lodges, there are then also too many white clowns - the society is threatening to go overboard, out of kilter, the harmony of valley life is disturbed. Nevertheless these reversals are accepted as a necessary and respected part of society: when Kills, Stone Telling's father, speaks of Willow as "his", it is a blood clown who points out his mistake, thus using a reversal to express the values of valley people:

People had come to listen because of the noise he had made shouting at first, and some of them thought it was funny to explain such things to a grown man. Strength, a speaker of the Blood Lodge, scoffed at him. When he said, "But she belongs to me - the child belongs to me," she began to do the Blood Clown turkey-gobble around him, shouting, "The hammer menstruates to me! They pleat the courage to her!" and a string of reversal-words like that.

.

I was glad Strength had jeered at him, and wanted to jeer at him too, for being so stupid.

Always Coming Home, p.40

The reversals are a kind of shadow, like Ged's shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which must be accepted, become integrated into the society so that it may be a harmonious whole, not constantly threatened by its own dark side. This is why the terrifying white clowns appear at the Sun Dance, a festival of rejoicing, of life

returning, centering therefore in many ways on the children. The Dances are a way of expressing the wholeness, the harmony of life in the valley, expressed also by their central symbol, the heyiya-if, the double spiral. The word for it is based on the word heyiya, which Le Guin defines thus in the dictionary at the back of the book:

heyiya sacred, holy or important thing, place, time, or event; connection; spiral, gyre, or helix; hinge; center; change, To be sacred, holy, significant; to connect; to move in a spiral, to gyre, to be or to be at the center; to change; to become. Praise; to praise.

Always Coming Home, p.515

This definition of the word central to life in the valley, meaning both change and praise reminds one of the "prayer" of the Handdara in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, "Praise then the darkness and creation unfinished" (p.209).

The double, open spiral has replaced the circle, the circle of life in *The Dispossessed*, at the centre of Le Guin's work. The circle, being closed, is now seen as a locking-in of power, of life, of being. Accordingly yin and yang instead of fitting snugly into each other within a circle have moved, still connected at the hinge, but open now. The emphasis has shifted from the balance between the two to the relationship between them. Connection, relationship changes things. Things and beings are changed through relationship to others:

Tao gave birth to One,
One gave birth to Two,
Two gave birth to Three,
Three gave birth to all the myriad things.

Tao Teh Ching, 42

Richard Wilhelm explains this as follows:

Wherever the One - as decision, as limit, or line, or in some other way - is posited, all that is other, i.e. not One, is simultaneously given. By the coming forth of the One the Two is created; by Two joining One the Three comes about. These three then form a different and greater entity which already contains the manifold.

Tao Te Ching, p.73

Change, relationship, the dynamic interplay of yin and yang, is at the centre, is the source of life. The Kesh awareness of the cosmos is like that of the ancient Eastern mystics or the modern physicist: it is a space-time continuum, not a cosmos made of separate entities or objects. The relationship between yin and yang is

also no longer seen as one of balance, which tends too easily towards stasis (something Le Guin was constantly at pains to avoid in her previous work) but more actively as "reversal".

Acceptance of life as a dynamic process, then, is at the heart of the Na valley way of life, as well as of *Always Coming Home*. As the people move through the various changes of life, they have different names and wear different clothes; the language changes, depending on what one is talking about; the changes of the year, of the seasons, are celebrated in the various dances. In the book, the mode in which it is written is constantly changing, from narrative, to poetic, to dramatic, to factual, to tabular. The point of view is constantly changing too, from that of Stone Telling, in the first person, to that of the various other tales, usually in the third person, to that of Pandora, also in the first person, to an anonymous narrator in the third person whose presence is keenly felt in the factual pieces. The book moves from the narrative pieces of Stone Telling to bits and pieces of Valley literature to the stream-of-consciousness of the Pandora sections and finally to "the back of the book section" in a seemingly chaotic way. Nevertheless the pieces do come together, forming a meaningful whole, a narrative, poetic spiral and a back-of-the-book spiral; all fictional and all true, hinging perhaps on Pandora, who opened this box, perhaps on the reader, who in reading the book makes the connections, sees the whole.

That is the mystical experience, seeing the unity, making the reconnection between the self and the cosmos. In *Always Coming Home*, there is no one, central, such experience, for the way of the Handdara has become the way of all. There is no single, central, mystical moment, because all moments are holy, are one, connect past with future, form the present, the eternal moment.

In her essay, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to be" in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Le Guin speaks of the centre of the world and where it is:

An order was perceived, of which the invaders were entirely ignorant. Each of those names named, not a goal, not a place to get to, but a place where one is: a center of the world. There were centers of the world all over California. One of them is a bluff on the Klamath River. Its name was Katimin. The bluff is still there, but it has no name, and the center of the world is not there. The six directions can meet only in lived time, in the place people call home, the seventh direction, the centre.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.82

The omphalos is not one stone only, nor is it one place; it is many and one at once, not only in space but in time too; it is wherever home is. Thus North Owl becomes Woman Coming Home and finally Stone Telling,

a rolling stone that has come home, stays in one place and is a center of the world, an omphalos. The stone as the solid, still centre of the moving earth is symbolic of the reality of *things* as opposed to ideas or thoughts. The moment in the rose garden, the perception of the unity of all being, is an **experience**, not an idea:

But all the same, what makes a novel a novel is something non-intellectual, though not simple; something visceral, not cerebral . . . :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.

The Language of the Night, p.8

Here, in *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin is concerned to let the stones, the things, do the telling. She does not unite them into a single coherent narrative but simply presents the things: Stone Telling's story, poems, other stories and bits of information from the valley to the reader, who makes the story complete for herself, connects the words on the page, things in themselves, in the imagination to let the valley live. As the Kesh do not have a religion but have found a working metaphor (that of the houses, of the double spiral), so *Always Coming Home* is in itself a working metaphor, a heyiya-if, a stone, which is related to another being in the process of reading, and so becomes meaningful, a connection. Connection is the role of fantasy for Le Guin:

The way of art, after all, is . . . 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 connections.

The Language of the Night, p.65

This book, then, this Utopia, this joke, is a sacred hinge between the reader and Le Guin's meaning, between the reader and a future, the reader and home.

The only way I can think to find them, the only archaeology that might be practical, is as follows: You take your child or grandchild, or borrow a baby, not a year old yet, and go down into the wild oats in the field below the barn. Stand under the oak on the last slope of the hill, facing the creek. Stand quietly. Perhaps the baby will see something, or hear a voice, or speak to somebody there, somebody from home.

Always Coming Home, p.5

Return to the Dream: Tehanu

Twenty years after she completed *The Earthsea Trilogy*, Le Guin returns to her inner world, Earthsea. But in *Tehanu* she looks at this world from a very different perspective. It is a return to her dream, her inner world, but home is always a place where one has never been. So Le Guin is no longer writing about the world of mages and hero-kings, of archetypes alone. Lebannen, Prince of Enlad and King to be, is a noble lord but he is also Tenar's "dear boy" who has a lot to learn. And Ged, who in *The Farthest Shore* left Roke to go to Gont with the wise and sad laughter of the dragons in his eye, is in *Tehanu* reduced to a man bitter and broken by the loss of his magical powers. It is an entirely, and to some extent, pathetically, human view of the characters of Earthsea.

Le Guin has said that she is using feminism as a tool to find out who and what she and her art are and mean (1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*). In this last book of Earthsea she is using this tool, feminism, to unpick the allegories and archetypes so often employed in so-called heroic Fantasy Fiction (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.103). The world of symbol and archetype has suddenly become all too human. Therefore Ged is no longer a symbol of the awakened soul, of the human heart at one with the universe, a lord of Elfland; he is simply a man, struggling to begin life anew, after magic. He needs a woman, Tenar, to do this. Similarly kind, generous and wise Aunty Moss is a village witch who, despite warts and a hooked nose over toothless gums, simply cannot be seen as an archetypally evil figure. She takes the child Therru into the forest with her, but only to show her the wonders of nature, not to bake and eat her. The evil in this world that was done to Therru was done to her by men. She was abused, raped, then beaten unconscious and left for dead in a campfire by her father and her uncle. It was done to her as a "punishment" (p.168) for the evil she, as a daughter of Eve, is supposed to represent. It is not the witch who is evil, but the men, the father and uncle of the child. Once again evil in Le Guin does not come from outside, from a terrifying embodiment of the goddess, of nature, the witch, but comes from the human heart itself.

Le Guin is no longer writing in the heroic archetypal mode, for these archetypes have become twisted by the rational mind. She is exploring the fear in the hearts of alienated men, which drove the true archetypes back into the dark, leaving only empty, powerless stereotypes, like the generally accepted idea of a witch. Therefore the language and the mode which she uses, change: she speaks no longer in the high, dignified speech of Elfland:

The Lords of Elfland are true lords, the only true lords, the kind that do not exist on this earth: . . . In life we expect lapses. In naturalistic fiction, too, we expect lapses, and laugh at an "overheroic" hero. But in fantasy, which, instead of imitating the perceived confusion and complexity of existence, tries to hint at an order and a clarity underlying existence - in fantasy we need not compromise.

The Language of the Night, p.74

In *Tehanu*, Le Guin does not hint at an underlying order, she is doing what Eve in *She Unnames Them* did. She has left the "civilised" world, Flint's house of stone in which one lives in fear of all that is outside, untamed and disorderly:

"What could you do but lock the doors? But it's like we're all our lives locking the doors. It's the house we live in."
They looked around at the stone walls, the stone floors, the stone chimney, the sunny window of the kitchen of Oak Farm, Farmer Flint's house.

Tehanu, p.180

As Tenar leaves this stone house to her son and goes to live in Ogion's house, so Le Guin is seeking a language and a way of living within the world as it is, not orderly, not rational, but confused and complex beyond our understanding, beyond any order we can perceive rationally. And the language in which Le Guin now writes reflects this uncertain world, full of darkness and pain.

My words now 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 darkbranched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining.

Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences, p.196

This is what makes the very language of *Tehanu* so very different from that of the other Earthsea books. It is an experimental language, a language seeking its own meaning, a language without certainty. It is a woman's language, irrational, like that expected of Aunty Moss as the village witch.

She was pleased with having found the words to say what she wanted. A good deal of her obscurity and cant, Tenar had begun to realize, was mere ineptness with words and ideas. Nobody had ever taught her to think consecutively. Nobody had ever listened to what she said. All that was expected of her was muddle, mystery, mumbling. She was a witch woman. She had nothing to do with clear meaning.

Tehanu, p.55

Earthsea has become an uncertain world, lawless and filled with fear. As the wizard Beech says:

"I think a time in which such things as this occur must be a time of ruining, the end of an age. How many hundred years since there was a king in Havnor? It can't go on so. We must turn again to the centre or be lost, island against island, man against man, father against child. . . ."

Tehanu, p.24

This confusion is reflected in the languages of Earthsea. What happened to magic, to the Old Speech and the power of true names, during the "reign" of Cob is still having its effects as spells go wrong or are forgotten. Therefore the mages of Roke cannot agree on a new archmage, they have nothing to say; and when the patterner does say something it is not in a language comprehensible to anyone there - he speaks in Kargish, Tenar's mother tongue. This is the language mothers speak to their babies, or priestesses to the ancient dark, a language of uncertain meaning, having nothing to do with reason or order. So, although it is Hardic that is supposed to be rooted in the Old, the True Speech, in *Tehanu* it is the words of Kargish that speak true: Therru's true name, Tehanu, is a Kargish word; when Aspen casts a curse on Tenar, she thinks in Kargish to escape from it, using the wisdom of Arha of the Kargish tombs, who understood "how to curse, and how to live in the dark, and how to be silent" (p.123).

This is a reversal of the way in which the languages Hardic and Kargish were seen in the other books of Earthsea. Le Guin is looking at the reverse side of Earthsea, the woman side, rather than the all-masculine side of mages and adventurers. Yet this woman's world in itself is not seen as a better world or the mother tongue as a better language. If anything it is a more frightening world to live in - it and its language offer no certainty, no safety. If men like Aspen and even the kindly Beech and the Master Windkey have defined women as inferior creatures, incapable of true magic or even of rational thought, Tenar and Ged come no closer to a true understanding of what people are about in their curiously meaningless conversation:

"Both manhood and magery are built on one rock; power belongs to men. If women had power, what would men be but women who can't bear children? And what would women be but men who can?"

Tehanu, p.193

It makes no more sense to define men in terms of women than it did to define women in terms of men. It is certainly meaningless to define them in terms of relative power - that was Cob's mistake, to whom power was all. This groping, in words, towards an answer to the question "Why do we do what we do?" remains just that,

an uncertainty. All the answers are incomplete, tell only some of the truth, are not enough. For those who believe, however harmlessly, that they know the answer are not seeing the whole. Beech's certainty seems a little foolish, and Auntie Moss's, although witty and with a certain wisdom to it, is nevertheless not wholly true.

"I don't know, my dearie. I've thought on it. Often I've thought on it. The best I can say it is like this. A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in its shell." She held up her long bent wet fingers as if holding a walnut. "It's hard and strong, that shell, and it's all full of him. Full of grand man-meat, man-self. And that's all. That's all there is. It's all him and nothing else, inside." . . .
 "Then it's all his power, inside. His power's himself, see. That's how it is with him. And that's all. When his power goes, he's gone. Empty." She cracked the unseen walnut and tossed the shells away. "Nothing."

Tehanu, p.57

This is clearly not true of Ged, the mage without his power, in whom Lark still perceives, despite this, a grandeur and a stature which is somewhat larger than life. In terms of sexual experience he may be a boy of fifteen, but the wisdom of the mage is not lost to the man. And emptiness in itself may be power, the capacity to be, possibility.

"So I imagined that, to have power, one must first have room for that power. An emptiness to fill. And the greater the emptiness the more power can fill it. But if the power never was got, or was taken away, or was given away - still that would be there."

Tehanu, p.189

Lao Tzu puts it another way:

Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub;
 It is on the hole in the centre that the use of the cart hinges.
 We make a vessel from a lump of clay;
 It is the empty space within the vessel that makes it useful.
 We make doors and windows for a room;
 But it is these empty spaces that make the room livable.
 Thus, while the tangible has advantages,
 It is the intangible that makes it useful.

Tao Teh Ching, 11

What was true in the world of the Hainish Ekumen, in Orsinia and also between Tenar and Ged in the labyrinth, remains true of people here. We cannot *know* the true inner being, this "emptiness", the soul of another. Love and trust are acts of faith, leaps across the void.

"Who are we? What is it to be a man? Before he had his name, before he had knowledge, before he had power, the hawk was in him, and the man, and the mage, and more - he was what we cannot name. And so are we all."

Tehanu, p.80

Ged and Tenar *know* no more about each other now that they are lovers than they did in Atuan, and yet their love, and Therru's love for both of them, remains real and triumphs over the hatred of Aspen. As Ashthera in Le Guin's screenplay, *King Dog*, knows, love, the faithfulness to one another in which no safety lies, is all that in the end makes life worth living, meaningful. It is the one thing he cannot give up.

ROMOND'S VOICE: . . . Conscience must be intelligent. The guide of right action is just proportion. You know that. Measure the difference between what you have to lose and what you can win. It is an abyss!

ASHTHERA'S VOICE: In that difference is God, in that abyss is joy. My dear friend Romond, you've sailed across the ocean of the stars and never got out of sight of land. You never will, till you learn not to hedge your bets. But anyway, there's no use my staying here. There's no freedom for people like me. I'm no good for anything but life.

King Dog, p.124

So he returns to his primitive and mortal world in fidelity to his old friend, Batash. Similarly Tenar does find what she seeks, a place where one can live, yet it is not a place a very long way from anywhere else.

"Like Therru," she said after a long pause. "What's a child for? What's it there for? To be used. To be raped, to be gelded - Listen, Moss. When I lived in the dark places, that was what they did there. And when I came here, I thought I'd come out into the light. I learned the true words. And I had my man, I bore my children, I lived well. In the broad daylight. And in the broad daylight they did that - to the child. In the meadows by the river. The river that rises from the spring where Ogion named my daughter. In the sunlight. I am trying to find out where I can live, Moss."

Tehanu, p.59

It is right there, on Gont in sight of the mansion of Re Albi, within the ruined world. It is a world peopled by a widow, a witch, a halfwit, a cripple and a mage who has lost his power. A world of outsiders, of aliens, outcasts of society, people who have been hurt. This world is one in which what happened to Therru is done to children, even in daylight, and men like Aspen look upon it and approve. Therru is a symbol of this world, a child raped, used and abused, then beaten and left for dead. Her wounds, her scars are terrible, both physical and spiritual, and they will never be healed. This is what Tenar comes to accept: Therru will never be whole again, but Tenar takes her home and heals what is to be healed. She, the woman takes responsibility for the irreparable, the

weak and the helpless (cf p.92 above). She and Ged see Therru as beautiful, they perceive her beauty despite her ruined little body, but Tenar feels that this is not enough.

When Tenar was alone, folding up the scraps of red material, tears came stinging into her eyes. She felt rebuked. She had done right to make the dress, and she had spoken the truth to the child. But it was not enough, the right and the truth. There was a gap, a void, a gulf, on beyond the right and the truth. Love, her love for Therru and Therru's for her, made a bridge across that gap, a bridge of spider web, but love did not fill or close it. Nothing did that. And the child knew it better than she.

Tehanu, p.155

It is not enough, but there is nothing else to do, yet there is always the next thing to do (p.47). There are always dishes to be washed and food to be cooked, that is the woman's life. Life carries on, and like Marlowe in Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, Tenar keeps a hold on her sanity, her faith in life, by doing her duty, by attending to the small daily tasks that need to be done. Thus after their terrible night in the house of the lord of Re Albi, Tenar thinks of the beans that must be planted (p.219). Like Genly, like Rocannon and Falk-Ramarren, when all seems lost she does her duty, unselfishly. She chooses to live within the ruined world, to keep faith with it, to see its beauty and its terror and to love it, to make it her home. *Tehanu* ends with her words, "I think we can live there" (p.219).

The new ruler in Earthsea will be Arren, the young king who has learnt what pain is, not the mages on the protected isle of Roke. And the prophecy of the Master Patterner, "A woman on Gont" (p.141) places the future of magic in Tehanu's hands, a child who up to the age of six knew nothing but pain and fear and darkness. In her, in this hurt, frightened child, lies the hope of rebirth, of renewal, Aihal's "All changed", which Ged repeats when he looks at Therru and which echo the words of Yeats, written like *Tehanu* in a deeply troubled time, "Are changed, changed utterly: a terrible beauty is born" ("Easter 1916").

Ged watched her go. "All changed," he said. "All . . . Sometimes I think, Tenar - I wonder if Lebannen's kingship is only a beginning. A doorway. . . And he the doorkeeper. Not to pass through."

Tehanu, p.195

Therru-Tehanu is the central, pivotal character in the book. The possibility, the new hope she represents is at the same time the central mystical experience in *Tehanu*. In *The Tombs of Atuan* Ged said to Tenar that a Dragonlord is one to whom the dragons would rather speak than eat him, yet even he, even Erreth

Akbe himself, would not look into the eyes of a dragon. It is perilous for men to do that. Tenar ignores this taboo and looks into the eyes of Kalessin when the dragon brings Ged to her on Gont. She opens the way for peril - and finds joy. After her meeting with Kalessin, she dreams again of flying, of freedom, in the gulfs of light and there is great joy in her dream.

She slept. She dreamed that a voice called her, "Tenar! Tenar!" and that she replied, crying like a seabird, flying in the light above the sea; but she did not know what name she called.

Tehanu, p.61

And in her anger and fierceness, at the hurt done to Therru, she seems to be a dragon (p.111). Herein lies Le Guin's new archetype: in the unity of being of the dragon and the woman. In *Stone Telling of Always Coming Home*, woman became a stone come home, at the centre of the world, an omphalos. In exploring this image of an omphalos, Le Guin wrote a poem about Mount St. Helens:

O mountain there is no other
where you stand the centre
is . . .
O stone among the stars
the children on the moon
saw you
and came home
Earth, hearth, hill, altar,
heart's home, the stone
is at the centre

Mount St. Helens, an omphalos, a centre, is also a volcano, erupting, spitting fire, part of the landscape, changing it: as dragons do, and women.

I know that many men and even women are afraid and angry when women do speak, because in this barbaric society, when women speak truly they speak subversively - they can't help it: if you're underneath, if you're kept down, you break out, you subvert. We are volcanoes. When we women offer our experience as our truth, all the maps change. There are new mountains.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, pp.159-160

This change of the landscape which the volcanoes bring about by erupting is the "all changed", the promise of Therru's arrival: Therru, the burned girl, child of the dragon, child of fire, Tehanu. Tenar's delight in her unburned, perfect feet and the knowledge that, like the dragons, Therru comes from further west than west, is mirrored in the promise of the poem by Linda Hogan of the Chickasaw people, called "The Women Speaking."

Daughters, the women are speaking.
 They arrive
 over the wise distances
 on perfect feet.
 Daughters, I love you.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.160

On Terra it is volcanoes and women at the centre, erupting, bringing change, in Earthsea, it is women and dragons. This dream of unity between dragons and women, the unity of all being in the *Tao*, is first realised in the story of the woman of Kemay. She is a woman-dragon, symbol of a unity of being which goes beyond all ability to shape-change. It is a mystical experience of the Oneness of living beings. This story fascinates Therru and she is constantly singing that woman's song, for it is also her own song:

*Farther west than west
 Beyond the land
 my people are dancing
 on the other wind.*

Tehanu, p.22

This child, terribly scarred by fire, her very voice burned away by it, is in fact the dragon's child, a creature of fire. Thus Therru is always hot to touch, her voice sounds like the hiss of a dragon's voice and, although she has been burned, fire delights and fascinates her.

"The fire flying out," the child said, with fear or exultation. "All over the sky!"

"It's just the sparks from my hair," Tenar said, a little taken aback. Therru was smiling, and she did not know if she had ever seen the child smile before. Therru reached out both her hands, the whole one and the burned, as if to touch and follow the flight of something around Tenar's loose, floating hair. "The fires, all flying out," she repeated, and laughed.

Tehanu, p.103

"They will fear her," Ogion says of her (p.29) and so they do. Even Tenar cannot fathom her, cannot tame the wildness in her. For she is wild, she is free, as the dragons are wild and free. And so when Ged and Tenar walk into Aspen's trap, Therru-Tehanu walks free and in that moment of independence, and yet of great need, she finds her dragonself and in her dragon voice she calls Kalessin, the Eldest, Segoy.

Kalessin is the dragon who brings Ged and Lebannen back to Roke and Gont. Now Kalessin, the eldest of the dragons, turns out to be the Eldest of all Earthsea, as Ged and Tenar learn his true name, Segoy. Segoy is the creator of Earthsea, the one whose song raised all the islands from the sea.

Therru-Tehanu calls the dragon in the Dragon Tongue, the Old Speech, which is her mother tongue. She has always been able to speak it; therefore neither Tenar nor Ged felt it was right to teach it to her. What Ged, Lebannen and Tenar sensed vaguely - that it is not a language to be learnt but one remembered - is realised in Tehanu. All Tenar can teach her is how to be a human, a woman. Humans must learn to be what they are, but dragons simply, mysteriously are, they do not learn (as Ged says on p.191). They are what they are: they are the *Tao*.

Man follows the ways of the earth.
The Earth follows the ways of Heaven,
heaven follows the ways of Tao,
Tao follows its own ways.

Tao Teh Ching, 25

That is the answer to Tenar's and Lark's repeated question, "Why do we do what we do?": because we are what we are. We are both cruel and loving, full of both joy and sadness. That is the wisdom that laughs in the eyes of the dragon. Thus Tehanu, the ruined little human, is at the same time a child of the ancient, enduring power which has been since the beginning of time. Kalessin-Segoy, the one who raised up all Earthsea, is also the Doorkeeper (p.183) - a link, the one who knows the names of all who enter Earthsea. Knowing the names, Segoy understands the true being of the world, perceives the pattern, and in perceiving it, weaves it. The Doorkeeper is the dance danced over the terrible abyss, the spider web over the gap. For the spider weaving its web is also a symbol of the Centre at which the fabric of the world is perceived to be woven into a unity. Thus Tenar's name in her village is Goha, after a little white spider, because she spins well. In this she becomes an image of Le Guin herself, spinning her tale; the author who, like Segoy, knows the names and weaves the pattern: a dragon-woman.

If Lebannen and Segoy are the doorkeepers who herald in the new age, it is Tehanu who will pass through the door they have opened. She is living with the pain which Lebannen has begun to understand. She has been burned. Tenar faced the peril in the dragon's eyes, which is the peril of seeing whole (Mankind, as T. S. Eliot has said, cannot stand very much reality) but Tehanu's night of terror and pain in the gypsies' camp fire has led her into the very heart of that danger - it is the danger of life in the open universe, the possibility of pain and death - and out onto the other side. Tehanu will enter the changed world, she will go farther west than west, to where the dragons dance at the edge of the world, renewing the world:

But still there is a mystery. . . . To make a new world you start with an old one certainly. To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one. Maybe you have to be lost. The dance of renewal, the dance that made the world, was always danced here at the edge of things, on the brink, on the foggy coast.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.48

Tehanu, like the dragons and Tenar's dream, is a symbol of a new beginning. She is a gift from Segoy, the creator, to begin a new way of life for Earthsea. It is a new freedom in the open universe, in the gulfs of light of Tenar's dream. These gulfs of light in which the dragons fly symbolise that same joy which Ladislav Gaye ("An die Musik", *Orsinian Tales*) glimpsed in the midst of the darkness:

In the thick blaring of the trombones, thick as sweet cough-syrup, Gaye heard for a moment the deep clear thunder of his Sanctus like thunder between the stars, over the edge of the universe - one moment of it, as if the roof of the building had been taken off and he looked up into the complete, enduring darkness, for one moment only.

Orsinian Tales, p.141

The promise of this momentary glimpse of a unified world comes true in *Tehanu*. That is its magic. Magic, the power which lies in the true speech, is in *Tehanu* not the power to weave spells, which is taught on Roke, the artist's power. That power seems to have become meaningless and powerless in the face of such a dreadfully ruined world. The wisdom of the mages of Roke is dismissed as "prating" (p.40) and indeed many sorcerers, those who gather at the mansion of Re Albi, no longer act on that wisdom. In *The Farthest Shore*, in Cob, as here in Aspen, the power of magic is in fact contributing to the ruin of the world. The vision of an unbroken world must go further than art as "High" Art: "certain special products made by specially gifted people living in specially privileged garrets, studios, and ivory towers" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p.154). Magery in *Tehanu* is a power that comes from a great deal deeper than that, the power to live, despite the terrible flaws of life, in freedom, joyfully and with love. The power to be, the power of dragons, in whom meaning and life, word and being are truly one.

The fan of the weaver in Re Albi is an artistic representation of this power which lies in the unity of being of dragons and humans. A unity between the wild, fierce, winged ones and the learned, two-legged, naked ones, a people who are both wild and free, terrible, wise and beautiful, who follow the great Way, the *Tao*.

"Hold it up to the light," said old Fan.

She did so, and saw the two sides, the two paintings, made one by the light flowing through the silk, so that the clouds and peaks were the towers of the city, and the men and women were winged, and the dragons looked with human eyes.

Tehanu, p.106

Therru-Tehanu is the very heart of this power. She is Kalessin-Segoy's gift to Tenar and Ged, a pledge that, wounded and scarred beyond healing, life is still a thing of great beauty and joy.

If the first three books of *Earthsea* were about the art, magic, as a metaphor for the poet's art, *Tehanu* leaves art behind and explores the very spirit of life itself. But again, this is not so much a change as a development, a renaming:

And so on; you see how I want to revalue the word "art" so that when I come back as I do now to talking about words it is in the context of the great arts of living, of the woman carrying the basket of bread, bearing gifts, goods. Art not as some ejaculative act of the ego but as a way, a skillful and powerful way of being in the world. I come back to words because words are my way of being in the world, but meaning by language as art a matter infinitely larger than the so-called High forms.

Dancing at the Edge of the World, pp.154-155

That is Tenar's choice, not magic, the high art of sorcerers and mages, not power, but children, a family, life. And in the midst of this she dreams of dragons. When magic, reason, understanding, turn evil, or fail; when humanity fails, we turn to the dragons. It is not reasonable, it is not safe, we cannot know whether they will speak or kill; but that is the risk we take. "We go where reason will not take us" (*The Farthest Shore*, p.385). To save the world, we act in faith, joyfully as Stefan did in "A Week in the Country" (*Orsinian Tales*) we listen to the language of the dragons.

Conclusion: Closing the circle

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*

I think art remains centrally important in any age, the best or the worst, because it doesn't lie. The hope it offers is not a false hope. And I think the novel is an important art, because it talks about what we live by, other than bread. And I think science fiction is - well, no, not important, yet still worth talking about, because it is a promise of continued life for the imagination, a good tool, an enlargement of consciousness, a possible glimpse, against a vast dark background, of the very frail, very heroic figure of Mrs. Brown.

The Language of the Night, p.102

This conclusion to her essay, "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown" offers a glimpse of what lies at the heart of Le Guin's writing: "an enlargement of consciousness" and "a glimpse of Mrs. Brown". Both these are ways of describing the centre, the divine ground, from which Reality may be perceived. For the mystical experience of finding oneself at the centre of the world, on the divine ground, is certainly an enlargement of consciousness beyond the self to encompass the cosmos in its entirety. And the place where this divine ground is to be found is within the individual, within the unheroic figure of Mrs. Brown.

In all her worlds, be it Orsinia, the Hainish Ekumen, Earthsea or the Na Valley, Le Guin seeks that Centre, the omphalos. For the Centre is within the individual in whose vision the world is made whole. It is that centre of being from which the artist works. It is her inner being which grants her a vision of the world as whole, beyond the fragmentation of alienation; a world with the walls unbuilt. The door opens into the open universe.

Le Guin, the author, is the doorkeeper, who knows the names (so is the reader, who learns them), who opens the door to the dark world, the inner world, which is the divine ground. In this sense the doorkeeper is the sacred hinge, the heyiya, the connection between reason and what is beyond reason. And that connection lies within the individual mind, the artist's, the protagonist's and the reader's. And the work of art is the door itself, the act of faith by which we perceive the dance danced over the abyss and know ourselves to be the dancers.

The ego simply vanishes; but the self becomes all. Literally, precisely all. The dream is the dreamer; the dancer is the dance.

The Language of the Night, p.105

That is the real mystery, the one that doesn't go away, at the heart of all things: the *Tao*, the way in which all things are One. For the dance is danced by the dragons on the morning winds, and we are dragons, dragons are the *Tao*. In this lies the meaning of Le Guin's art: those who have seen the dragons' dance know what joy is.

It is the delight of Ged in his art, the joy of Ladislav Gaye looking up into the enduring darkness, the exhilaration of Stefan who keeps the roof up over his head by an act of faith, the joy of Genly Ai who has found love, the joy of Tenar flying in the gulfs of light; it is the joy of coming home, of becoming oneself. In this vision of unity, of being at home in the world, lie peace and joy, the laughter without which there would be no *Tao*.

The man of *Tao* lives in the *Tao*, like a fish in water. If we try to teach the fish that water is physically compounded of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, the fish will laugh its head off.

Al Chung-liang Huang, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, p.xiii

This joy lies at the centre of Le Guin's writing, a celebration of life itself. It stems from a perception of the wholeness of life, a perception of the dragon in Therru-Tehanu, her inner truth. It does not deny the pain and fear of the world or put an end to it, for that would be to deny its complexity. Le Guin's art follows the *Way* of the world, from the light into the dark, from the dark into the light, in search of joy, that most essential of human activities (*The Language of the Night*, p.199). For true joy stems from the very heart of sadness, from an understanding of both the suffering and the beauty of the world. It is a joy in which what seemed sundered is perceived to be whole:

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum.
Deine Zauber binden wieder,
Was die Mode streng geteilt,
Alle menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Schiller: "An die Freude"

Oh Joy, beautiful spark divine

Daughter of Elysium
fire-drunk, we enter,
Celestial, your sanctuary.
your charm binds again,
What fashion had sundered,
All men will be brothers
Where your gentle wing reigns.

Schiller: "Ode to Joy", trans. auct.

At the heart of Le Guin's mystical vision lies this celebratory joy in life, the sadness and the laughter in the ancient, glittering, gay eyes of Segoy.

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