

*Reinventing the Past: Gender in
Ursula K. Le Guin's Tehanu
and the Earthsea "Trilogy"*

Perry Nodelman

The publication of an unexpected sequel to a novel or series of novels, always disconcerting, is especially so when it occurs some years after the appearance of the original. What seemed complete for so long turns out not to be, and, inevitably, the events of the new story change the meaning of what went before.¹

So it is with Ursula K. Le Guin's novels about Earthsea. For almost two decades after *The Farthest Shore* appeared in 1972, they were widely known as the Earthsea Trilogy. Then, in 1990, Le Guin published *Tehanu*—a fourth member for the former trilogy, teasingly subtitled "The Last Book of Earthsea." In continuing her story past the now only apparently concluding events of *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin clearly signaled that she had new thoughts about her old conclusions, and that she wanted readers to reconsider their understanding of what they had read earlier.

In "From Master to Brother," Len Hatfield describes how a perceptive reader can read the former trilogy in terms of its new addition. He argues that the difference between *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu* mirrors Le Guin's espousal, in articles and speeches, of the feminist analysis of patriarchal assumptions that emerged in the years between the appearance of the two novels, and "marks a similar movement from a representation of patriarchal structures of authority to a critique and displacement of them by means of a 'mother tongue,' a phrase Le Guin has usefully borrowed and developed from feminist theory" (43).

Hatfield does not see this movement as representing the abandonment or even the revision of old ideas; for him, *Tehanu* merely acknowledges openly what was hidden in the earlier books: "Implicit subversions of patriarchy become explicit" (61). Hatfield appears to have done exactly what I assume Le Guin wished: he has

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reinterpreted the old story in the light of its new ending—and done it persuasively.

Nevertheless, my first response, both to the existence of *Tehanu* and to Hatfield's reading of it, was deep suspicion. I found myself unable to forget the almost 20 years in which there was *no* explicit subversion of patriarchy in the Earthsea books. I found myself wondering if, before *Tehanu*, it would have been possible to notice—or, having noticed, to see as important enough to concentrate on—the implicit subversion the later explicit statement now makes so obvious. Is Le Guin engaged in reinventing the history of her own attitudes? Is Hatfield helping her to blot out the past?

But then I remembered the unsettling transformations that had occurred in my understanding of the Earthsea books long before *Tehanu* existed, as I first read them some years ago. Just as *Tehanu* influenced Hatfield's understanding of the former trilogy, my own reading of the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, had significantly changed my original understanding of the first book, *The Wizard of Earthsea*. It had been clear to me then that Le Guin had wanted me to experience this transformation, to understand *Wizard* first one way and then the other: she had taken advantage of the fact that new events change the meanings of old ones in a particularly pointed and clever way. Furthermore, the way *Tombs of Atuan* changed my reading of *Wizard of Earthsea* related specifically to questions of gender—just as Hatfield suggests the move from *Farthest Shore* to *Tehanu* does.

Apparently, then, *Tehanu* is not so much an attack on history as a continuation of it. It merely repeats what was always true of the Earthsea books: although each book always could—indeed must, for new readers—be read and understood without knowledge of its sequels, the new information provided by the sequels always forced readers into a revised understanding of what went before.

Nevertheless, I still feel a little unease about what Le Guin tries to do in *Tehanu*, and the way in which Hatfield has responded to it. Eighteen years is a long time between books; and in the history of North American ideas about gender, they were busy years. If we allow the revised version of something that seemed complete for so long to blot out our memory of what we earlier thought to be true, we misrepresent both our earlier experience of these books and the two decades of cultural history during which they meant something different.

What follows, then, is an attempt at Earthsea archaeology. I try to remember what Le Guin appears to want me to forget, and what Hatfield seems to have forgotten: what the trilogy meant before it had a fourth book. Nevertheless, my method is akin to Hatfield's, exploring how reading *Tombs* evokes meanings not otherwise perceivable in *Wizard*.

Although I am returning to a long-standing perception that *Tombs* forced me to revise my reading of *Wizard*, I can no longer understand that difference as I once did. New events have changed the meanings of old ones; if I want to make sense of my old perceptions now, I have no choice but to do so in terms of interpretive strategies I have since learned, from a variety of critical theorists—many of them, like Annis Pratt and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, feminists. I offer these readings and rereadings as a prelude to the rereading of all three books implied by *Tehanu* and presented by Hatfield, in the faith that tracing the archaeology of the older ideas submerged under the latest transformation might offer insight, not just into Le Guin's fiction, but also into the shifting history of cultural conceptions of gender, and of feminist responses to them, between 1972 and 1990.

To begin at the beginning: how did I, and other readers, once understand *Wizard of Earthsea*? What might it mean on its own, without consideration of what follows it?

In a talk given in 1975, Le Guin said that “the great fantasies, myths and tales . . . speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious—symbol and archetype” (*Language* 62); in other words, they represent allegories of psychological processes. In a 1973 essay in which Le Guin made it clear that she saw *Wizard* as such a fantasy, she named its specific subject as “coming of age” (*Language* 55). Since then, many readers have echoed her assertion that *Wizard* is an allegory of individuation, some even insisting that the experience of reading it itself offers psychological benefits. According to Jean Murray Walker in 1980, “What is from Ged's point of view the experience of socialization is for the reader an experience of isolation from society which passes him through an artificial, highly patterned action, limited in space and time—a rite of passage” (183). According to Margaret M. Dunn in 1983, “a young reader cannot escape the implications which the story holds for him” (56).

What I find most instructive about these comments, from the per-

spective of a different decade, is that both Dunn and Walker refer to readers as “him.” The pre-*Tehanu* Le Guin would not have been upset by this: explaining why she called the genderless characters in her adult science-fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* “he,” Le Guin once said, “I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for ‘he/she.’ ‘He’ is the generic pronoun, damn it, in English” (*Language* 168). It seems that Dunn’s and Walker’s readers are similarly generic: obviously, not all of Le Guin’s actual readers are male, and I doubt that Dunn or Walker would wish to exclude female readers from the benefits they ascribe to the book.

But a male hero like Ged in *Wizard of Earthsea* can represent the psychological situations of female readers only to the degree that his maleness is *not* a focus of attention—only if the specifically male features of the story are ignored as insignificant or seen as symbolic of the generic human condition, beyond consideration of gender. That is how I first read the book.

Indeed, nothing in *Wizard of Earthsea* suggests that Ged’s problems or his way of solving them relate significantly to his masculinity. For readers who understand his story as a model for psychic integration, it is merely accidental that he happens to be a male. Few of the critical analyses of *Wizard* that appeared prior to the publication of *Tehanu* attach much significance to Ged’s gender.²

But for me, Ged’s status as representative of generic adolescence was thrown into question as soon as I read the second book of the series. *The Tombs of Atuan* describes how a second person, Tenar, follows a second, different path toward maturity—a symbolic journey of psychic significance, but one different enough from Ged’s to throw its “generic” status into doubt.

What could account for this variation from an apparently universal psychic pattern? The most obvious difference between Tenar and Ged is that she is female.³ If a story like Tenar’s must be told, then could Ged *not* have been female? Is his story in fact a specifically male one after all? It seems so. I found myself rethinking *Wizard* in terms of the new focus on gender implied by the new information from *Tombs*.

I quickly realized that the most obvious explanation for the differing stories of psychic integration experienced by the male Ged and female Tenar could be found in Jungian psychoanalytic theory. Le Guin reveals her knowledge of Jung when she speaks of “the timeless archetypes of the collective unconscious” (*Language* 69) and

names Ged's adversary in *Wizard* a "shadow." Jung asserts significant differences in the psychological makeup of males and females when he posits the existence of a female principle in males, the anima, and an equivalent male principle in females, the animus. Although the goal of psychic integration for both males and females is an androgynous state achieved by accepting this "other" as part of one's self, what men and women see as other and must integrate are two opposite qualities. That means that female integration operates differently from male integration, and requires its own story with its own cast of characters—a story like *Tombs*.

Just as Jung saw the components of the psyche as an inner cast of characters that need to come into balance with each other, Le Guin describes the characters in her novels as "psychic factors, elements of the complex soul" (*Language* 66). We could certainly understand Tenar's meeting with Ged as the awakening of her animus, and read *Tombs* as an allegory of female coming of age parallel to Ged's story, now clearly revealed as a specifically male one.⁴

At that point, I thought I had figured out why Tenar needed her own story and was quite content not to think of the implications of Ged's story then being exclusively a male one. I suppose I assumed what Le Guin's comments on the use of "he" implied: that the universal human condition was in fact male, and that being female was therefore a variation from the human norm.

In accepting that notion, I neglected to notice other problems—the most obvious being the fact that the next novel, *The Farthest Shore*, is yet another story of an adolescent apparently accomplishing psychic integration, even though Le Guin had already used up the two genders in the two earlier books. In light of the universalist claims of Jungian theory, why would a different male require a different story?

Another sort of Jungian reading might avoid that problem by seeing all three books of the trilogy as a sequential story of one psyche's integration, as represented by Ged. In *Wizard*, he confronts his shadow, those aspects of himself his conscious mind has rejected and must acknowledge; then in *Tombs* he moves down into his unconscious, as represented by the underground tombs of Atuan, and there confronts his anima, Tenar, and integrates it into himself as he places the ring of Erreth Akbe on Tenar's wrist; in *The Farthest Shore*, finally, the anima Arha is replaced by Arren (note the similarity in their names). Arren is a "girlish lad" who seems androgynous.

nous and whose destiny as high king over all might well represent psychic individuation and wholeness.

In retrospect, of course, the mere existence of *Tehanu* denies the possibility of such an interpretation: past wholeness, what further psychic activity could a narrative possibly represent? But even before the existence of *Tehanu* such a reading is problematic. If Tenar most significantly represents Ged's anima, then why do we see the events of *Tombs* from her point of view?

John H. Crow and Richard D. Erlich assert that "narrating the story from the Anima-figure's point of view . . . allows Le Guin to treat the woman as a person with an individuality of her own, rather than making her nothing more than an adjunct of the male, as often happens in myths and stories of this type" (203). But the idea that this could even be possible suggests a confusion inherent in Jung's own writing: according to Demaris Wehr, "He often states specifically that he is going to discuss the anima—an aspect of male psychology—and then launches into a discussion of the psychology of women" (104). Indeed, the rhetoric of *Tombs*, which focuses on Tenar being freed from the false idea of femininity represented by Arha and becoming herself, gives us no choice but to see her as an individual rather than just the nameless expression of the anima she was—as a character, that is, rather than a psychic component. Instead of disguising the pattern, the fact that she is "a person with an individuality of her own" actively conflicts with the possibility that she is merely part of Ged's psyche.

In the light of that, I now understand that the way Le Guin's characters waver between representing psychic entities and representing people prevents any consistent Jungian interpretation of the trilogy; Le Guin's Jungian ideas are more suggestive than exact.

Nevertheless, they are suggestive. For instance, the dark powers worshipped by women in the tombs of Atuan clearly relate to Jungian archetypes of the feminine—they are irrational, passive, silent, and below consciousness, and their place is dark, labyrinthine, womblike. Their worshipper Arha is then the anima as a distorted representation of femininity that must be discredited, to be replaced by the individual person Tenar. Seen in this way, which is hard to avoid in the context of strategies of reading texts for unconscious assumptions about gender that feminist criticism has taught us in the past decade or so, *Tombs* seems to be the story of how Tenar learns to be whole by rejecting femininity as convention-

ally defined. It is easy to see why Le Guin, at a point in the history of feminist thought when a once-powerful ideal of genderless equality for all seems to have lost ground to a celebration of once-marginalized feminine values (such as a “mother tongue”), might wish to reconsider the significance of Tenar’s story through the addition of *Tehanu*, which, in finally telling something of Tenar’s later life, specifically engages and revises the apparent assumptions of *Tombs*.

Because those assumptions seem to be versions of Jung’s archetypes, it would be useful to take a closer look at feminist responses to Jung in the years since the Earthsea trilogy first appeared. Annis Pratt asserts that “although he sees androgyny, involving the transcendence of gender, as a necessary element in human development, his definitions of these gender qualities tend to be rigid to the point of stereotyping” (7). The archetypes are stereotypes; as a result, as Demaris Wehr suggests, women not only “challenge certain dimensions of Jung’s view of the unconscious—dimensions stemming from his androcentrism”; they are actually “claiming that in some ways they stand outside of the psyche that Jung proclaimed as universal” (97). The conclusion is obvious: despite Jung’s claims otherwise, the “generic” psyche he describes is specifically masculine—and can be read as such.

Because commentators now explore Jung’s thought for what its claims about femininity might reveal of his assumptions about the masculinity he disguises under the name of universality, I can now read Le Guin’s Jung-influenced novels in terms of what their claims about femininity, as expressed in Tenar, might reveal about masculinity, as expressed in the earlier and theoretically gender-neutral story of Ged. If Tenar’s story is different from Ged’s *because* she is female, then it invites a rereading of Ged’s story, in particular its differences from Tenar’s, as a description of specifically male experience. In other words: the same climate of change in our ideas about gender that seems to have led Le Guin to produce *Tehanu* as an encouragement to one particular way of rereading the earlier books might also lead to another, quite different rereading, one that focuses on the books’ hidden assumptions about maleness.

That project seems particularly relevant to me when I view *Tombs of Atuan* through the lens of Annis Pratt’s description of how novels about girls by women contain different views of archetypal patterns than novels about boys by men. Pratt believes that “women’s fic-

tion reflects an experience radically different from men's because our drive towards growth as persons is thwarted by our society's prescriptions concerning gender" (6). Traditionally, male maturity represents the freedom to wield power, female maturity a regressive acceptance of dependency and lack of power. Consequently, women's books about girls tend to take a positive view of their heroine's attempted escape from societal demands into a solitary and blissfully uncivilized place, often a "green" world of nature: "About to be conquered by 'human' society, she turns to something 'inhuman'; about to be dwarfed at the moment of the first development of her energies, she feels that the natural universe as a whole is her kingdom" (17). Frequently, this blissful solitude is destroyed by a male intruder, who rapes the girl and forces her back into the more repressive conventional world.

Tombs follows this pattern, but in a strangely distorted way. The solitary place Arha escapes into is a bleak cavern that imprisons her, and the hostile rapist is replaced by an admirable rescuer who makes her aware of her individuality rather than restricting it. Despite the fact that Le Guin is female, this sounds like a male version of a female story, a rejection of the freedom Tenar experiences in the solitary femininity of her Jungian caverns as imprisonment, and a celebration of entrapment by a male into a male-dominated society as freedom.

We can accept such views only if we see the society Ged represents as universally egalitarian rather than male-dominated, only if we see the Nameless Ones as universal evil rather than rejected femininity; even then, it is hard to neglect the opposite possibility, to wonder, as Cordelia Sherman does, if "the subliminal message" is "that women living without men become twisted and purposeless" (26), or to note, as Lois Kuznets does, that the novel "actually depicts the suppression of a female cult" (32). If *Tombs* reveals this much acceptance of a masculinist point of view, then it becomes important to explore the assumptions about masculinity implied by the apparently generic story of *Wizard*. Only after doing that can we see how cleverly Le Guin reinvents the past in making the explicit antipatriarchalism of *Tehanu* seem implicit in the earlier books.

Reading *Wizard* in the light of how *Tombs* varies from it reveals many aspects of *Tombs* that counterpoint *Wizard* in ways suggestive of traditional differences between femininity and masculinity: what

happens to Ged is often directly opposite to what happens to Tenar. Whereas Tenar is passively thrust into darkness against her will, Ged himself aggressively invites the darkness. Tenar remains in her caves and has her fate come to her, yet Ged travels the world and goes to meet his fate. As priestess, furthermore, Tenar has a role to fill that blots out and replaces her self; as wizard, Ged has a job to do that expresses and fulfills himself. Tenar's role separates her from others, and she begins to triumph when she learns to care more about them and their attitudes toward her; Ged's job puts him in competition with others, and he begins to triumph when he learns to care less about them and their attitudes toward him.

Tenar must learn to define herself more in terms of others, Ged less; but in both cases, the others are men, which suggests that self-definition is a matter of seeing oneself connected to men if one is female, and separate from other men if one is male. After meeting Ged, Tenar rejects her entire sex: "All these women among whom she had always lived and who made up the human world to her, now appeared to her as both pitiable and boring" (83). After meeting women, Ged rejects them rather than himself. Just as Tenar's story centrally involves Ged, Ged's story centrally involves himself; a woman, Serret, has only a peripheral role in it. Nevertheless, the climax of Ged's story comes when he rejects what the woman Serret offers; the climax of Tenar's story comes when she accepts the truth of what the man Ged offers. And finally, Tenar is saved by Ged, whereas Ged saves himself.

As "the Eaten One," Tenar is absorbed into a darkness exterior to herself, and must be disgorged from it in order to be free; but Ged's darkness comes from within and he must seek and reabsorb it in order to become free. She first accepts and glories in her darkness as she learns the mazes of the Tombs, and must be taught to run from it; he first runs from his darkness and must learn to pursue it. Her goal is separation; his, wholeness. Her absorption into darkness gives her a power which is shown to be illusory, and his disgorging of darkness is a use of his power which signals his lack of power over himself. But both darknesses represent what each must conquer in order to be free, so that she must conquer what strengthens her while he must conquer what weakens him. In other words, she triumphs by giving up power, he by regaining it. Furthermore, her absorption into the darkness diminishes her, and

she becomes more at the end by separating from it and becoming less; his unleashing of his darkness into the world diminishes him; and he becomes more at the end by uniting with it.

Not surprisingly, Tenar's loss of the power of darkness earns her the right to be ordinary, but Ged's integration of that power earns him the right to hold power and wield it. There is a deep irony here: the endings of both *Wizard* and *Tombs* seem to contradict what they most obviously try to persuade us of. *Tombs* contains many statements about the dangers of solitude and separation; but Tenar is saved from solitude and finds herself separate. Saved from the darkness of the caves, she finds the larger and scarier darkness of the sea, and saved from silence, she goes to live with Ogion, "the Silent." Meanwhile, *Wizard* is clearly meant to be about the dangers of pride and wilfulness, but Ged is saved from using his power in order to assert himself and ends up wielding his power in a way that allows him to assert himself in an even more intense way. He has become "a man who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself" (199).

These different fates clearly relate to traditional conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Tenar's enclosed life in the caves is an extreme form of the role she must eventually play as wife and housekeeper, and Ged's releasing of his shadow is an extreme form of the machismo he must express as a male and a hero. In a sense, both first experience and reject extreme and therefore less useful versions of the roles that rightly await them because of their genders; and the roles both Tenar and Ged fill after theoretically learning to balance the extreme are less androgynous than surprisingly traditional feminine and masculine ones.

Throughout *Tombs*, Le Guin makes traditional connections between femininity and receptivity, silence, darkness, touch, and emotion, on the one hand, and between masculinity and authority, speech, light, sight, and reason, on the other. The sign of Tenar's power is a dark uterine cave, of Ged's a phallic staff and a light, and Le Guin's description of his entry into her cave is fraught with sexual overtones: "He had come here into the hollow place that was the heart of the tombs. He had entered in" (59). Later, when she holds him captive, his knife is "useless": "the blade of it was broken short" (71). Eventually, however, he replaces the eunuch Manan as the man in her life, calling her "little one" as Manan did (117), and raising the staff she had brought him and his light to free her

from darkness. When Ged identifies the emasculated Manan as a servant of darkness (120), disregarding his obvious love for Tenar, the implication is that the evil that enmeshes Tenar is a rejection of male power; and Le Guin's language clearly implies that her salvation through her contact with him is an awakening of heterosexual desire.

Men held captive in the caves earlier had suffered a different form of mutilation from Manan's: they had their tongues cut out. Traditionally, the ability to speak, to name and have the name you give accepted, is a pure form of mastery, the strongest evidence of authority—like God's originary speech that simultaneously gives a name to light and produces it, or like Adam's naming of the beasts. Such authority is also, traditionally, male. It is then not unrelated to conceptions of gender that the female order of Atuan considers the reading of words as "one of the black arts" (112), or that Tenar's world is dark and silent except for Ged's words, or that Ged carries light and has the power of naming.

A female priestess takes away Tenar's original name as she begins her apprenticeship, and the male Ged later gives it back to her. Without a name she chants meaningless words, empty signifiers—and is herself an empty signifier, a nameless container, until Ged's voice speaks her name. Similarly, a wizard takes away Ged's original true name and gives him a new one as he begins his apprenticeship; but that new name remains his true name, so that while Tenar's truest self is defined by what she always was, the person under the role, Ged is defined by what he is chosen to become, the job imposed on the person. Not surprisingly, Tenar learns after her escape from namelessness that she cannot call a rabbit to her by naming it, as Ged can; wizardry, Le Guin tells us a number of times, is essentially the art of controlling something by naming it—in Earthsea, an exclusively male profession.

He who names, names what he sees; his gaze defines what is. Tenar first fears Ged's "dark gaze" (80), ordering him not to look at her, and she defends herself from the temptation to look at the visual wonders of the dark cave she has previously known only by touch, and has now seen as revealed by his light, by denying the truth of what the eyes see: "All I know is the dark, the night underground. And that's all there really is. That's all there is to know, in the end" (86). But Tenar gives in to the temptation to trust her eyes when Ged shows her something he considers "worth seeing": her-

self in a beautiful gown, dressed as he imagines her and in a way meant to be conventionally attractive to the male gaze.⁵

Tenar's salvation occurs when she acknowledges the truth of the name Ged gives her and accepts his vision of her, the male-oriented image he imposes over her. Acknowledging his power to name her, she goes to him bearing a light and names him with the name he has told her (104). Her ability to speak his name signifies her moment of salvation; in *Wizard*, his salvation is also signaled by the ability to speak the name of the same person: himself. Both salvations signify acceptance of Ged's values—his words instead of her silence, his light instead of her darkness. Tenar claimed earlier that there is darkness buried under all the light; now she accepts his reverse definition of her as a light buried in darkness, "a lantern swathed and covered, hidden in a dark place" (108). Vision has triumphed over touch, light over darkness, naming over namelessness—male over female. And in the process, both masculinity and femininity have been defined.

A closer investigation of *Wizard*, in the light of this new information from *Tombs*, reveals that the same thing has already happened there. Although the bulk of *Wizard* has nothing to do with Ged's involvements with women, they play a surprisingly important part.

As soon as Ged first discovers his power as a wizard, his aunt (a witch) tries "not only to gain control of his speech and silence, but to bind him at the same time to her service in the craft of sorcery" (15). The aunt's action clearly parallels Tenar's first response to Ged when she finds him in her caves, and is equally doomed, for Ged's male power of speech is stronger than the female power of binding. Le Guin reports two Gontish sayings which make clear that this is a specifically female attempt to control male power: "weak as woman's magic" and "wicked as woman's magic" (15).

This is merely the first of a number of key points in Ged's maturation which involve his dealings with women, and his growing understanding of the dangers both of the female power that might bind him, and of the danger of being bound by his own desire for women and what that desire represents. He first evokes the shadow that later haunts him in response to a young woman, the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi, because he had "a desire to please her, to win her admiration" (31); this desire causes him to forget what his master Ogion reminds him, that the young woman is "half a witch already," and that "the powers she serves are not the powers I serve" (35). Ged's wish to please the young woman by showing off

his strength is a recognizable expression of machismo that binds him to the dark powers. Ged apparently needs to learn that the desire women awaken in men makes men dangerously vulnerable, and that like women's magic it wickedly encourages weakness.

The weakness is a misuse of strength in the name of vanity, to win admiration. Ged exhibits the same weakness in the central episode of the book as he looses the shadow he then must flee. This time it seems to have nothing to do with female power, for it is a male he is trying to impress, the apprentice wizard Jasper. Even so, the act centrally involves Ged's machismo, his need to prove himself more powerful and more manly than Jasper, and so, it also centrally involves a woman. The spirit Ged chooses to awake from the dead is that of the ancient queen Elferran.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of "male homosocial desire" suggests a possible interpretation of Elferran's part in Ged's action here. Sedgwick claims that the major force driving heterosexual men has traditionally been their desire for approbation from or mastery over other males, and that men's dealings with women have most significance as the medium by which men develop their bonds and establish their hierarchies of power with each other. Lévi-Strauss calls this "the male traffic in women"—in Sedgwick's words, "the use of women by men as exchangeable objects, as counters of value, for the primary purpose of cementing relationships with other men" (123). Seen in these terms, Ged's desire to prove himself more powerful than Jasper is a readily understandable expression of homosocial desire, and it makes good sense that he should choose to express it by showing his power over a woman.

As Sedgwick suggests, many novels depict the transfer of power between men "over the dead, discredited, or disempowered body of a woman" (137). Elferran's body is all three; in an aside some pages later we learn that it was the great king Morred's love for Elferran that led to his country's ruin.⁶

But Sedgwick sees this sort of transfer of power as a culturally approved action, and *Le Guin* shows us that Ged is clearly wrong to try to wield his power in this way. His attempt to prove his mastery over another man by mastering a woman's spirit looses the shadow that then haunts him. If the male homosocial desire to better other men defines masculinity, then *Le Guin* seems to be demanding that Ged achieve his power (and the ability to better other men) only by denying that form of masculinity.

That possibility becomes more certain in his next encounter with

a woman. Serret, the woman who first aroused his desire to be admired, now tries to involve him in a traditional triangle of the sort Sedgwick describes as a representation of homosocial desire: she offers him herself as a way of proving himself more powerful than her own husband and all other men: "You will be mightier than all men, a king among men. You will rule, and I will rule with you" (134). Ged rejects this possibility, apparently because he feels no desire for Serret; he has already learned in his dealings with Jasper to separate his power from the machismo that involves valuing females as goods traded to establish male authority.

Nevertheless, Ged's power is still clearly identified with maleness; he rejects Serret's offer because it would require him to give himself over to the Stone of Terrenon, an object connected to the same "Old Powers" that rule in the Tombs of Atuan and therefore, a female force, dark, ancient, before and below light and speech. In opposing this female force with his own ability to name and to give light both here and in *Tombs*, Ged defines his power as male. In this way, Le Guin preserves and passes on conventional ideas about how both females and femaleness weaken male power.

According to Sedgwick, male homosociality operates by expressing its desire for power over other males through heterosexual lust, and therefore has developed over the past few centuries in our culture a vested interest in marginalizing and anathematizing homosexual lust as a defiance of the established hierarchy. Homophobia is then a necessary corollary of homosociality, as is the secret fear of successfully homosocial men that in their focus on other men they might themselves be homosexual. Considering the degree to which Le Guin's vision of Ged evokes so many of our cultural assumptions about maleness, it seems worthwhile to consider the possibility that this sort of homophobic panic might also be present.

Once more, the possibility emerges only if we refuse to ignore the implications of the specific vehicles Le Guin uses in her metaphors for psychic components—if we explore the degree to which the specific characters and actions that are meant to stand for abstract qualities might be seeping their own meanings into those abstract qualities. From that point of view, Ged's shadow, a distorted image of himself as other that is evoked in his desire to master another man, can be seen as a representation of homophobic fear. The shadow as Le Guin describes it looks something like him, pursues him, wants to hold him and enter into him (121)—and in two

key scenes he most fears its presence behind him, first just prior to his entry into Serret's castle as it tries to "catch hold of him from behind" (122), and later as he pursues it and looks over his shoulder to see it standing behind him (164).

In this latter instance, Ged has pursued what he fears into a "dark cleft . . . dark trap under the roots of the silent mountain, and he was in the trap" (163–64) as the shadow comes up behind him and attempts once more to enter him. The place might well be seen as a representation of his own body and what he fears for it; he is both trapped in it and about to be defiled through his entrapment in it. It counterpoints the Tombs of Atuan, a place that seems to represent parts of the female body and their ability to entrap and, sometimes quite literally, castrate males.

Although the public story of Ged's involvement with women is his learning how his own interest in them can weaken him, the subtext implied by these dealings with the shadow is how his knowledge of the dangers of women evokes a fear of his own homosexuality that then must be resolved. Ged's first fearful attempt to beat off the shadow with the staff which symbolizes his manly power unmans him, as the staff burns up; he then flees from the shadow's literally homosexual attempts to enter him from behind into the protective space of the woman Serret's castle, where he must once more reject the possibility of heterosexual desire. The result is the scene in the cleft, where Ged prevents what sounds like a homosexual rape by inviting it—in essence, dissipating the homosexual implications by acknowledging and defying his homosexual fears.

Freed of those fears, he can take a male companion, his friend Vetch, on his final voyage to confront the shadow. Vetch is the antithesis of Jasper—a male Ged can bond with without the pressure of the machismo of homosociality, which might explain why Ged pursues his relationship with Vetch only *after* the scene in the cleft. Vetch is black, like Ged's shadow; but it is a blackness now divested of danger, an unthreatening version of a threatening image.⁷

If taken literally, Ged's final meeting with his shadow also suggests a concern with homosexuality; he unites with it only after it transforms itself in turn into all of the important men in Ged's life except Vetch—all the males with whom he experienced homosocial desire. It then advances toward him as a phallic "blind unformed snout" that "heaved itself upright" (197), and finally Ged drops his own phallic staff, embraces the shadow, and invites it in.

But as it turns out, this is Ged's union with himself, not with another who looks like him. The combined sameness/otherness of homosexual desire has dissolved; the other is separated out as Vetch, who merely observes the union rather than taking part in it. In other words, Ged achieves integration only after he rids himself of all desire and all fear of desire, heterosexual or homosexual. The male shadow Ged fears turns out to share his name—and therefore to share the name of the male power Tenar feared. But while her acceptance of it ties her to him, his acceptance of it separates him from all ties. Cut off from desire, he becomes totally self-enclosed, and ironically in possession of great social power.

Paradoxically, the power Ged achieves as wizard and namer is a male power that he can achieve only by ridding himself of the sexual desires that would cause him to wield it specifically as a male; a wizard must be a man, but a man who feels no male desire. If male power transcends male desire, then gender is divorced from sexuality; indeed, Ged's story replicates the conditions of grammar Le Guin postulated in her discussion of the generic human as "he." It is only when the fact of Ged's gender ceases to be an acknowledged operative factor that he can most express a power theoretically generic and universal but in fact unavailable to females.

Similarly, despite the sexual implications of Ged's staff and Tenar's cave, their relationship is meant to be purely symbolic—not a sexual union but a desirably sexless integration of the idea of maleness and the idea of femaleness. But Ged and Tenar are real people as well as representations of ideas, and so their gender and their sexuality transcend the symbolic and become real issues that reveal the gender bias in the ideas they represent.

The third book of the trilogy tells a different story about a different kind of male; Arren's destiny is to become king over all of Earthsea. Like Ged and Tenar, Arren is a psychic factor as well as a character, and his story adds to Le Guin's exploration of gender and causes readers to reinvent their previous understanding of both Tenar and Ged.

Arren's story counterpoints Ged's enough to seem almost directly opposite to it. The forces Le Guin represents by shadow and darkness are aspects of the self that have been rejected and buried in the unconscious; but whereas Ged buried and then confronted his aggressive cockiness, Arren appears to have buried and has to confront his unaggressive wish to ignore his responsibility. Whereas

Ged confronts his shadow by wielding the phallic sign of his power, his staff, Arren resists wearing the sword which is the phallic sign of his power, and for a time carries a small knife instead—a rejection of the male power he has been fated to wield. When Ged enters most fully into the thrall of his shadow, he experiences egotistic vanity and replaces concern for others with self-concern, but when Arren is most fully in the thrall of his shadow, he experiences only numbness, and replaces concern for others with a perception of total meaninglessness that justifies the absence of concern: “At the depths of the dream . . . there was nothing—a gap, a void. There were no depths” (109).

I suggested earlier that Ged’s and Tenar’s experiences of darkness both represent extreme versions of their fated roles, and the same is true of Arren. Paradoxically, his wish to do nothing is a wilful rejection of his fate, which he must will himself to accept even though doing so means giving up his will. In this way, his story reverses Tenar’s: as Arha, she had a role she must step away from before she can become a self, but Arren has a wilful self he must shed before he can take on his fated role as king.

Furthermore, that role itself represents a form of lack of wilfulness. The sword which symbolizes it “never had been drawn, nor ever could be drawn, except in the service of life” (3). Throughout the book, Le Guin insists that what Arren must learn is, as Ged says, to “do nothing because it is righteous or praiseworthy or noble to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you must do and which you cannot do in any other way” (67). If Ged’s story represents the aggressiveness of male power and its need to define its proper use, then Arren’s story represents the ordering nature of male power and its need to define its proper use.

At a key point, Ged tells Arren, “that is the power, not to take, but to accept” (138). To learn this is a triple-barreled form of acceptance; Arren must, first, accept his fate, second, accept a fate that inherently demands the acceptance of an ideal of control and restraint, and third (perhaps most significant), accept Ged’s word. For Arren, to be in darkness is to mistrust Ged; throughout the book, the central question for Arren is whether or not he will accept Ged’s word.

Furthermore, Ged’s word is still connected with Ged’s gaze. In one of the book’s key scenes, Arren responds to a look of “great wordless, grieving love” he sees in Ged’s eyes as Ged looks at him:

"Arren saw that, and seeing it saw him for the first time whole, as he was" (165). Having seen Ged as Ged sees himself, he then accepts Ged's vision of everything, including himself: "Arren saw the world now with his companion's eyes" (165).

According to Pratt, "In the Bildungsroman proper, with its expectation that the hero is learning to be adult, there is [for girls] the hidden agenda of gender norms, where 'adult' means learning to be dependent, submissive, or 'nonadult'" (16)—just as Arren becomes in relation both to Ged and to his fated role as king. Paradoxically, Arren can become the ultimately powerful and inevitably male king over all only by learning to act as females have traditionally learned to act.

In fact, Arren, the "girlish lad" (80), is in the same situation as the female Tenar, and his emotions at the beginning of *Shore* directly mirror Tenar's at the end of *Tombs*. Upon seeing Ged and experiencing "the gaze of those dark eyes" (6), he immediately "had fallen in love" (7). In fact, all his thoughts are about Ged, and so this book reads like a continuation of the one before it, but with the female point of view disconcertingly become that of a male. Like Tenar, Arren resists what Ged stands for, at moments when he finds himself in darkness, and like Tenar he triumphs when he looks at Ged looking at him and accepts Ged's vision of himself and the world.

Le Guin further reinforces the femininity of the role Arren plays by placing him in situations traditionally occupied in fiction by females. Enslaved by a cruel villain, he is like a typical damsel in distress, helpless to do anything himself about his "bonds" (61) until he is saved by Ged, whose "grip" on his arm replaces the chains (62) and pulls him to safety. As with many heroines of romance, the issue is not his being bound, but who is doing the binding. Furthermore, when Arren tries to use his sword aggressively, he is "silly . . . whereas going into a trance at the wrong moment had been wonderfully clever" (64). Like Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and many other female protagonists of fairy tales, he triumphs most when he is most passive. In the novel's climactic scene, it is Ged who fights, while Arren mainly watches. This scene parallels the one in which Vetch watched Ged confront his enemy, but now the great hero is in the role of the watcher rather than the doer.

This new definition of male power as "female" passivity in relation to a greater male power might logically raise the issue of male fear of homosexuality. But there is certainly no evidence of any fear

in the forthright references to Arren as a “girlish lad,” in the scenes in which Le Guin refers to Ged observing Arren’s naked “golden and supple” body “with impartial tenderness” (69), in the imagery of romance used to describe Arren’s love for Ged. Arren achieves a homosocial bonding with Ged without any question of or fear of sexuality. The main reason probably relates to Jungian concepts of individuation: if Arren represents what the psyche becomes after it integrates the anima, then presumably it has transcended the sexual fears that earlier haunted Ged. It has achieved a higher and more spiritual plane of existence, a plane where the focus is on philosophical discussion rather than on physical urges. In fact, Arren is always what Ged becomes at the end of *Wizard*—not so much the adolescent he is purported to be as a mature and therefore, apparently, sexless being. The “girlish lad” is less androgynous than passionless.

Furthermore, it is probably no accident that Arren’s title in the old tongue, “Agni Lebannan” (152), contains something so much like *agnus*, the Latin word for lamb. Like Christ, Arren is lamblike in his lack of sinful thoughts and his innocence. He is the child Ged sends before him into the dark (122), as Christ is the child God sends into the dark world to announce his salvation. If Ged as wielder of light and speaker of words parallels God the father, then Arren, who becomes king of the world through resisting aggressive action and following God’s word, is Christ—and presumably like Christ, his kingly power is signaled specifically by the fact that he is inhabitant of a male body but blind to its sexual impulses.

Nevertheless, this story of psychic individuation, like the story of God and Christ, carries its larger truths within the metaphor of a loving relationship between two males. In hiding or ignoring the sexual possibilities of such a relationship, both stories achieve the ultimate goal of homosociality: a deep and deeply significant love between two males without any homosexual overtones. So Le Guin’s story once more replicates ideas of masculinity key to our cultural definitions of ourselves: in both Jungianism and Christianity, the most intense and most important relationships for males are with other males and decidedly without homosexual content. In this way, male power declares its universality and its universal sway by denying the specific significance of its gender.

I am not suggesting that Le Guin herself intended to affirm such ideas, or even to present an analysis of maleness in relation to male

sexuality—merely that the supposedly generic archetypes she tries to describe are inevitably located in assumptions about gender differences that are less universal than cultural and local; in the first three Earthsea books, she was merely taking for granted what her culture believed, and expressing it in metaphors her culture commonly used. Because of the ways in which the vehicles for those metaphors secretly but inevitably obtrude their presence into the meanings they stand for, she reveals more about herself and her culture's attitudes toward gender than she might care to.

And that, I believe, is exactly the significance *Tehanu* takes on when viewed as the sort of addendum which requires reinterpretation of what precedes it. If, for a moment, I reject Le Guin's invitation to forget what I have already understood about the earlier books and just described, I see *Tehanu*, not as an explicit statement of formerly implicit themes, but rather, as a profound criticism and reversal of what went before.

Tehanu most clearly asserts itself as a revisionist act by the fact that it is not the kind of story one expects in a novel supposedly for young adults. Although it does tell how a child grows into knowledge of her power, that is not the central issue. The protagonist is Tenar as a middle-aged woman, someone more like Le Guin herself than like her intended audience, and the story centers on the awakening of her consciousness of the evil in the world, specifically the evil done to women by men.

The shadow Tenar confronts here is clearly exterior to herself: machismo as sheer brute force directed against women by men whose self-esteem depends on their ability to mistreat those weaker than themselves—Tenar herself and the gypsy child she saves from a horrible death by burning. Tenar comes to understand that this sort of violence is merely an extreme form of the power her culture has traditionally invested in males. It turns out to be a good thing that Ged loses his wizardly power of controlling through naming, and that he must learn to be happy as a goatherd with no worldly authority at all.

Ged comes to represent a new kind of maleness divested of its traditional authority; he happily takes a hand in washing the dishes, whereas Tenar's son reveals a retrogressive machismo in his refusal to do so. Not incidentally, Ged must also rediscover his sexuality, and we hear how he finally in middle age loses his virginity to Tenar, paradoxically free to express his biological maleness now

that he has been divested of his male power. Earlier, he represented a separation of power from sexuality that allowed male authority by denying the significance of its maleness; now he represents a separation of sexuality from machismo that redefines maleness by separating it from the need for authority.

Furthermore, the power Ged has lost is in the process of being superseded by a new form of power, one that finds expression in the female child Tehanu, who intuitively knows the language of dragons. As Arren presumably unified male and female in an androgyny that transcended sexuality, Tehanu unifies human and dragon in a condition that transcends the need for the reasoned control of male authority—for the dragon parallels all those dark unconscious forces that Le Guin earlier both identified with women and rejected as evil.

Seen in this way, then, *Tehanu* suggests that Le Guin has reversed her earlier position on male and female qualities: just as she had earlier accepted the identification of traditionally female qualities as an evil that must be transcended, she now seems to be doing the same thing with traditionally masculine qualities. By showing how much supposedly universal archetypes can change in a decade and a half, *Tehanu* reveals the transitory nature of all the supposedly eternal assumptions human beings make about gender and sexuality. By creating the conditions that allow readers like Hatfield to read what came before in the light of an addendum, so that the now-current assumptions seem to pre-date their coming into existence so firmly as to seem omnipresent and universal, *Tehanu* reveals the continual process by which all of us constantly reinvent the past.

Notes

1. The existence of new information inevitably changes our understanding of old information: even during our reading of one novel on its own, an apparently insignificant reference to, say, a broken stair in the first chapter comes in retrospect to seem far more meaningful, after the hero trips on it and dies in chapter fifteen. Furthermore, as Frank Kermode suggests in *Sense of an Ending*, it is exactly our knowledge that events conclude in a certain way that allows us to understand their significance: interpreting fiction is a matter of keeping the end in mind as we reconsider what led up to it and defined it as a conclusion.

2. Indeed, gender rarely appears as an issue even in discussions of the trilogy as a whole. Bittner, Slusser, Walker, Dooley, Dunn, and Bailey discuss individuation without reference to gender. Galbreath so far ignores the issue of femininity that he doesn't even mention *Tombs*, and Attebury also focuses his discussion on the first and last books. While Remington mentions sex symbolism, he doesn't explore its

implications, and both Manlove and Patterson see significant differences in Ged's story in *Wizard* and Tenar's in *Tombs* but deny they relate to gender. Esmonde and Sherman do begin to relate the differences to questions of gender but then deny the conclusions their own insights imply, and Crow and Erlich solve the problem by seeing Tenar in Jungian terms, as Ged's anima. For these and most critics, furthermore, it is also incidental that Ged lives in a world where the sailors, fishers, and farmers are all male, where the powerful wizards are all male, where it is never questioned that the king whose rule will eventually bring peace will be male, and where women do the cooking and cleaning and are silly superstitious witches rather than powerful wise wizards. In such a vision of the universal human psyche, the patriarchal male authority we know to exist in a transitory social world is meant to represent universal psychic power, and readers are expected to understand that psychic power has no inherent connection to maleness.

3. It is instructive that *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin's novel about a planet whose citizens are inherently genderless, appeared in 1969, sandwiched between the male story of *Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) and the female one of *Tombs of Atuan* (1971)—and at just that moment in North American cultural history when the contemporary feminist movement began to gather strength.

4. Indeed, a number of critics suggest that the three books present parallel tales of coming of age.

5. It may not be accidental that in *Wizard*, Ged's shadow emerges as he evokes the image of another woman in a beautiful gown, or that the old woman who gives him half the ring he eventually places on Tenar's wrist defines herself for him by showing him the elaborate child's dress she wore as an infant princess.

6. Sedgwick is talking specifically about transfer of power from the aristocracy to the middle class, and it is interesting that Ged's discomfort with Jasper relates significantly to his perception that Jasper as an aristocrat looks down on him. The dispute between Ged and Jasper over the body of a dead woman is counterpointed in *Tombs* in the dispute between Kossil and Tenar over the body of a discredited, disempowered, and almost dead man, Ged; but in this case, the man wins.

7. Vetch's household is a safe place in every way. In it, Ged finds not only Vetch but also the one sexually unthreatening female of the book, Vetch's young sister, and Vetch's brother, whom he sees as a less threatening version of himself, someone his own age who has none of his power.

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