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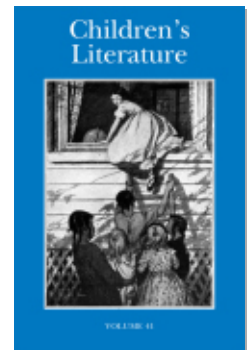
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## From Master to Brother: Shifting the Balance of Authority in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu*

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Children's Literature, Volume 21, 1993 , pp. 43-65 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: 10.1353/chl.0.0516



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*From Master to Brother:  
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In literature as in "real life," women, children, and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallogically. That they are Other is (*vide* Lacan *et al.*) the foundation of language, the Father Tongue. . . .

By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, "Civilized Man" has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf calling him brother—not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child—not Father, but son. He hears only his own words making up the world. He can't hear the animals, they have nothing to say. Children babble, and have to be taught how to climb up into their heads and shut the doors of perception. No use teaching woman at all, they talk all the time, of course, but never say anything. This is the myth of Civilization, embodied in monotheisms which assign soul to Man alone. [Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals* 9–10]

In recent years Ursula K. Le Guin has taken up an explicitly feminist position in a passionately energetic critique of patriarchal culture.<sup>1</sup> But these lines also show her understanding of the structural parallels between patriarchy's marginalization of children and its repression of women (as well as "unruly men" and the other "animal presences" of her *Buffalo Gals* collection). In many ways, the transition from the third and once last book in the Earthsea series,<sup>2</sup> *The Farthest Shore*, to the fourth book, *Tehanu*, marks a similar move 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.<sup>3</sup> This form of language has long been both hidden and neglected in Western culture, and Le Guin represents it thus in the fictive world of Earthsea.

*Children's Literature* 21, ed. Francelia Butler, Christine Doyle Francis, Anne K. Phillips, and Julie K. Pfeiffer (Yale University Press, © 1993 The Children's Literature Foundation, Inc.).

But to think about authority in literary works solely in representational terms may obscure the ways that texts also use rhetorical structures either to legitimate or to undercut their representations of authority. Le Guin explores the problems of legitimacy with particular clarity in *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu*. In structural terms, the new volume creates a fresh transition between the ending (third and fourth) volumes of the series. These new transitional structures provide readers an excellent arena for observing patterns of narrative authority at work.

The Earthsea novels use a sophisticated narrative technique—shifting the point of view from the mimetic to the diegetic level—in order to present their thematic representations of social and cultural patterns of authority.<sup>4</sup> *The Farthest Shore* shows the patriarchal world of “old” Earthsea and suggests how authority can be used and abused within a male-dominated cultural system by focusing readers’ attention on the dynamics of authority between adults and children in the relationship of Ged and Arren. In contrast, *Tehanu* provides a powerful critique of such repressive social patterns in its representations of the passing of the old order and advent of a new, more genuinely human one, particularly in the web of relations that encompass Tenar and those around her. Yet the narrative structures in each novel reinforce the point of these representations—that identical energies and social patterns account for the parallel repressions of children and women. Readers who attend not only to Le Guin’s representations of authority in Earthsea but to the narrative structures of these novels can develop a richer understanding of Le Guin’s analyses of cultural and narrative patterns of authority.

To take my responses as indicative of such a readerly evolution, I begin reading *The Farthest Shore*, the third book, already cherishing its fictive world of island and village folk, its magic, and its simple, elegant assertions of the great Taoist principle of Equilibrium. In this world, the “Old Speech”—the “language of true names”—has the power to transform, reveal, and bind; its authority rests on these powers, as well as on its antiquity and its part in the Making, the founding of the world. As a reader, I am easily caught up in the book’s descriptions of spaces and characters. By following the series, I have become comfortable with its depictions of village life, its stories of travel, the ancient and dangerous wisdom of its dragons, and the quietly mysterious power of its mages.

But as many readers know, *The Farthest Shore* places these won-

ders in desperate doubt: magic is leaving the world, and toward the end of the book, even the Old Speech no longer avails. In a painful testing of the mimetic world's constitution, Earthsea begins to look in the penultimate book of the series much like an outward-facing mirror, a picture of our "real" world—too often a hard and gritty place where motives are seldom simple and magic rarely works.

*The Farthest Shore* puts further stress on its presentation of wonder whenever the storyteller takes on the protagonist's point of view: the narrator's sentences often collapse the diegetic and mimetic levels into one. For example, during the journey through the Southern Reaches when Arren begins to manifest the effects of the Dark Mage's influence, the narrator reports the boy's now cynical view of magic virtually from Arren's perspective, lending the authority of the tale's teller to the faulty viewpoint of the young prince: "There was nothing in magery that gave a man true power over men; nor was it any use against death. The mages lived no longer than ordinary men. All their secret words could not put off for one hour the coming of their death" (99). At such moments, the text invites readers (even those rereading the novel) to accept the view that Earthsea is dying. Yet we resist this invitation by reminding ourselves of the bigger picture—the view from that most diegetic level in which the larger order of the volume in hand becomes apparent (we know how it will end). From this vantage, readers can take in the openings and endings of each book and so understand how these structures, too, convey certain kinds of authority. More important, perhaps, readers may find encouragement because the whole created by the series steadily undercuts the immediate claim, at times so convincing in *The Farthest Shore*, that things are falling apart. In spite of such traumas, that is, we keep rereading the book.

This readerly ambivalence arises from the ways that narrative texts in general claim authority for themselves, and these tactics for claiming textual authority recur in Le Guin's other children's books. Le Guin frequently provides her readers with mimetic situations that expose problems with adult authority. In *Catwings*, for example, when Susan and Hank find the winged kittens playing in an empty field, the children keep the secret because they are convinced that people (the adults) will fail to understand and preserve these wonders; Hank says, "You know how people are" (38). In a parallel way, in "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight," a child who is the sole survivor of a plane crash finds sustenance and heal-

ing among the mythic animals of the wilderness, particularly the not-so-adult coyote, a trickster-like female character who glories in freedom, instability, and irregularity. Although the child eventually returns to the adult world, she does so only after she has come to perceive the world's great mythic cycles and the spirits of its places and animals from outside the domain and authority of adults. Social structures and traditions in Earthsea likewise emphasize the ways children must negotiate with adult authorities. It is especially easy to see this pattern if we look closely at the structures of authority in Earthsea's adult traditions and institutions for magic.<sup>5</sup>

Much like other fantasies that echo the history of medieval Europe, the Earthsea books represent the adult authority system of magic in hierarchies reminiscent of monarchic governments, guilds, and priestly or scholarly orders. Earthsea's magical system shows authority descending in two ways, from a historical and a supernatural source, and in this it patterns itself after the ancient political and religious systems of Taoism. As a number of scholars have shown, the greatest source of magical power in Earthsea is the Old Speech;<sup>6</sup> both mages and dragons assert power and authority by their use of this ancient language, but their power is itself expressed in hierarchies. Among humans, where authority accrues from the largely historical sources of tradition and discipline, the guildlike order of the magical system is apparent in rankings according to power and knowledge (from "mere" weather workers up the ladder to true mages and the Council of the Wise on Roke Island, where young mages are trained). Echoing its medieval European counterpart, and adapting the principle of noblesse oblige, this power structure brings responsibility to those privileged by it. As Ged often demonstrates in *The Farthest Shore*, the Archmage must both protect and restore those weaker than himself.

The supernatural aspect of authority arises from the magical power that the language of the Making provides, and the richest examples of this power are the dangerously wise dragons, creatures that embody both the historical and supernatural elements of magical power through their inherent antiquity and their use of the Old Speech. These beings bear great authority, an influence only increased by their willingness to attack humans and by an alien mentality that makes their conversation seem both true and untrue to human listeners. Dragons constitute a dangerous potential for Earthsea: they threaten the stability of the magical order of the secondary world, and the mages are their counterbalance.

Authority in Earthsea also derives from achievement and association; early on, Ged speeds his rise in the magical system by becoming a Dragon Lord, a man who can deal on equal terms with these creatures. Indeed, one way to assess mimetic authority in the first three Earthsea books is to distinguish the kinds of mastery that the male characters demonstrate, a distinction pointed up by the contrasting connotations traditionally assigned to “masterly” and “masterful.” The “masterly” Ogion, for example, acts quietly yet effectively in the manner of a master whenever we encounter him. By contrast, we get a full demonstration of the “masterful,” with its suggestions of arrogance and pomposity, when young Ged attempts to demonstrate his magical superiority over Jasper in an adolescent contest in *The Wizard of Earthsea*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is tempting to align these senses of “mastery” with what might be called the adult and child views of authority—so that “masterly,” the quiet one, would be considered the “adult” view, while “masterful,” the arrogant one, would become the child’s view of this quality.

Nevertheless, and despite the temptation, the novels resist our impulse to reduce these complex dynamics to an either-or division: even in the patriarchal sections of the series, a successful Dragon Lord is not simply masterful (and childish) or masterly (and adult). Ged cannot be just masterly in his handling of the great dragons of Earthsea—he must be masterful. His authority rests not only on the quiet, somewhat retiring manner of “masterliness,” which we associate with his mentor, Ogion the Silent, but as much upon the balance of such restraint with the more aggressive, display-oriented manner of the “masterful.” Were he unable to show himself full of mastery, he could not face the dragons—a fact underscored whenever Ged speaks to these wonders. Not only must he cry fiercely to them in the Old Speech because he is, relatively, so small, but he must also demonstrate by his posture that he deserves their respect. As he comments hoarsely after an interview with Orm Embar in *The Farthest Shore*, “It is not easy—talking with dragons” (153).<sup>8</sup> Most of Ged’s dragon visits should remind readers of our images of circus lion-tamers: in both cases, the spectacle is nearly as important as the relationship, and the tamer in these threatening situations adopts the role of the authoritative master but balances this posture with a keen awareness of the animals’ power.

Such a comforting view of balanced mastery in the old Earthsea, however, obscures an important detail: in the first three Earthsea books, the relationships of power are represented as occurring

solely between dominant males and some form of the alien Other (dragons, dark powers, children, or adolescents). In fact, this feature of Le Guin's secondary world is echoed in her more recent comments, in "The Fisherwoman's Daughter," about her earlier strategies for narratives about male heroes:

Even when subverting the conventions, I disguised my subversions from myself. It took me years to realize that I chose to work in such despised, marginal genres as science fiction, fantasy, young adult, precisely because they were excluded from critical, academic, canonical supervision, leaving the artist free; it took ten more years before I had the wits and guts to see and say that the exclusion of these genres from "literature" is unjustified, unjustifiable, and a matter not of quality but of politics. So too in my choice of subjects: until the mid-seventies, I wrote my fiction about heroic adventures, high-tech futures, men in halls of power, men—men were the central characters, the women were peripheral, secondary. [*Dancing at the Edge of the World* 233–34]

So where is the peripheral woman in the first three Earthsea books? To the degree that the dragons represent a wild, powerful Other, they may also suggest a view of woman from the perspective of the patriarchy. The female is the source of inspiration (the muse) but is also often an incomprehensible force of power, seductive and dangerous. The male must approach the Other cautiously, and in Earthsea as elsewhere, he must never look "It" in the eyes. Only the exceptional male can be called a Dragon Lord—a label applied from within the male-dominated, hierarchical system of authority. To be able to communicate with the dangerous Other and survive becomes a sign of "mastery."

This is not to say that Earthsea's dragons are female, even if their gender is often not specified. Rather, they fulfill the role of symbolic Otherness that patriarchy usually assigns to the female. Women, in fact, are remarkably absent in both *Wizard* and *The Farthest Shore*, whereas in *The Tombs of Atuan* (volume two) Le Guin presents an almost exclusively female community and dragons do not appear. On reflection, then, it is not surprising to find parallels between the women and dragons of Earthsea, provided we recall that women constitute a hidden, neglected Other within the patriarchal order: throughout the first three volumes, women's magic is denigrated by

the mage-hierarchy but remains functional. It is also *subterranean*, dark, groping, and sometimes associated with the dark Powers of the Earth.<sup>9</sup>

In *Tehanu*, for the first time in the series, the text explicitly connects the dragons and patriarchy's hidden Other, first in the old Dragon Woman whom Tenar recalls (144) and most powerfully in the child Tehanu at the novel's end. In this one character, Le Guin unifies patriarchy's external Other (the symbolic Woman) with its internal Other (those characters she had made secondary and peripheral in the first three books).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, all the female characters in *Tehanu* serve the still larger goal of helping to write a new fictive era in which such ancient oppositions as self-other and male-female can merge into a powerful and widely inclusive web of relations.

But patriarchal Earthsea's magical system also highlights its opposite, the potential danger against which it is designed as a ward or boundary. Indeed, both *Wizard* and *The Farthest Shore* pose their moral (and cosmic) dilemmas largely in terms of the hierarchy of this magic system, where a figure of great natural power attempts to use his ability either without proper training (as in Ged's case) or from outside the boundaries of established values (in Cob's). These figures threaten the limits that allow the world to exist—boundaries echoed in the systematic ranking of magicians and the restraint of their powers for good. More simply, this mimetic system of authority restrains chaos, a common-enough goal of adult authority.

Young Ged and, later, Cob question the magical system in ways reminiscent of the challenges children make to adult authority. Both wish to circumvent the slow and limited ways of adults in favor of immediate rewards and fulfillments of desire. Ged's adolescent assault on adult authority in Roke erupts as an attempt to break through the discipline of the system in order to claim what he sees as his proper status. Cob similarly despises limits—in particular, the one imposed by death—and (like Ged), convinced of his power, he pursues and appears to achieve eternal life whatever the cost.

Indeed, the final confrontation between these two mages further maps their conflicts with authority onto the relationships among children and adults. Finally unmasked and powerless in the land of death, Cob reveals his fear at not being able to close or even escape the hole he has made in the world, a breach associated with im-



mortality throughout the novel. In his attempt to master the world and retain his self forever, Cob has created a cosmic imbalance, rejecting the natural cycle of life and death. Reiterating his obsession with his deeds, he moans in a “mixture of despair and vindictiveness, terror and vanity” that he can neither control nor escape his destructive creation (181). Yet, like a father setting to rights the misdeeds of a child, Ged relentlessly but gently brings Cob to realize his errors before sealing the hole and releasing into death this figure who never really grew up (184–85).

The traditional alignments of selfishness, shortsightedness, and impatience with the “childish” and innocence, joyfulness, and vulnerability with the “childlike” seem to fit this resolution well. The similar challenges Ged and Cob make against adult authority arise because of their refusal or inability to understand the necessity of limitation in the great balance of Earthsea: in the secondary world of Earthsea, real power requires limitation; life balances with death. Ged makes the point explicitly in explaining Cob’s confusions to the Dark Mage:

Did you not understand? Did you never understand, you who called up so many shadows from the dead, . . . even . . . Erreth-Akbe, wisest of us all? Did you not understand that he, even he, is but a shadow and a name? His death did not diminish life. Nor did it diminish him. He is there—*there*, not here! Here is nothing, dust and shadows. There, he is the earth and sunlight, the leaves of trees, the eagle’s flight. He is alive. And all who ever died, live; they are reborn and have no end, nor will there ever be an end. All, save you. For you would not have death. You lost death, you lost life, in order to save yourself. [180]

Denying Cob’s attempts to arrest change and create a self-centered immortality, Ged shows that the only eternal life possible in Earthsea is the unending life of the system. In that web of life and death, “A living body suffers pain, . . . a living body grows old; it dies. Death is the price we pay for our life and for all life” (180). In effect, the adolescent Ged and the adult Cob pit their considerable child-talents and, later, their magical skills against that system and lose.

Of course, the differing qualities of these losses demonstrate alternate strategies for resolving conflicts of desire with authority: in refusing to mature, Cob resists and enlarges the reach of his

challenge until he is finally forced to accept his limits in death.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, in “growing up,” Ged submits to and internalizes the structure of authority, transforming lawless into lawful desire and later reaching the pinnacle of the magical system of authority as the Archmage. This adult retains childlike delight in playful art magic and manages some of his greatest accomplishments by following the innocence of children like Prince Arren. Such a pattern suggests an important underlying theme in all of the first three Earthsea books: after coming to awareness, children discover that adult systems of authority exist and must soon negotiate a relationship with them. Maturing, or the “fruitful resolution” of this conflict, leads to wisdom, authority, and a certain freedom; refusing such resolution may provide short-term rewards but ultimately leads to a necessarily destructive imposition of limits.

As a reader thinking about Earthsea, I envisage mostly this secondary world and its characters, the ones who live within the magical hierarchy. But I enrich my perceptions of this representation when I begin to notice the behavior of the storytellers, those detached yet intimate viewers constantly floating behind and sometimes seeming to see through the eyes of each protagonist. In this intermediate zone the diegetic and mimetic levels interact most clearly in establishing the authority of the larger whole of each novel and, larger still, of the series itself.

In general, in each book the narrator adopts the limited omniscient perspective, ranging relatively closer or farther from the protagonists and other characters. From a distance, the tale teller reveals the characters’ errors and joins the reader in mocking characters’ foibles. The narrator’s nearness promotes authenticity of feeling, so that we read not only a description of inner attitudes but also an enactment of their effects on the character’s perceptions. The narrator’s varying stance also gives us an anchor for the range of other adult perspectives in the mimetic world, one possible “normal” or “adult” view among many. The varying adult authorities differentiate themselves by their relationship to the child protagonist, from those adults who are supportive and helpful to those who are hostile and dangerous. This pattern of child-adult relationships occurs throughout the series, for example, in the contrast between Duny’s abusive and neglectful father (the village smith) and Ogion, his name-giver and true father in *Wizard*. Readers similarly follow Tenar as she transforms into Arha, and the narrator helps

us assess the subtle differences among her harsh and demanding false mothers in *Tombs*. The design concludes in Arren's evolving relationship with Sparrowhawk in *The Farthest Shore*. In each case, the narrator adopts sufficient distance to show us the variety of adult figures of authority, inviting us to be aware of their strengths and limitations, and encouraging us to assess their role in hindering or helping the young protagonist's development.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the best moments to watch the narrator's moves to reinforce mimetic authority come when the child protagonist is deeply confused, so that readers must try to decide which view (the child's or the adult-narrator's) is authoritative after all. For example, in *The Farthest Shore*, Arren's resentment of Ged's highly un-image-like behavior seems to color everything he sees. Sailing with the older man far from charted waters, the boy increasingly suffers the creeping doubt that spreads under the Dark Mage's influence. But what is intriguing is how the narrator quietly embraces this viewpoint. Speaking of Ged, she begins from outside Arren: "Arren saw now what a fool he had been to entrust himself body and soul to this restless and secretive man" (99). But almost at once the teller slightly shifts her relation with Arren, so that the spoken view seems almost indistinguishable from the boy's. Now Sparrowhawk's problem isn't only his own, but something that troubles the whole world, a general "failure of wizardry . . . among men" (99). Worse, Arren knows more than this old coot about the "real" situation in the world. Adopting a tone of finality, the narrator subtly shifts the claim of authority from a personal observation to one that encompasses all Earthsea: "It was clear now that to those who knew the secrets, there were not many secrets to [the] art magic. . . . Reality was not changed" (99). Here the narrator seems to sit within Arren and speak his confusion, irritation, and resentment. Naturally, this partially reliable narration increases Arren's credibility by making us feel as he does from within. But paradoxically, by placing his disaffection in the foreground, the narrator's collusion with the child's view causes readers to contrast Arren's assessment with the Ged-characters of the previous volumes. As a result of this momentary switch to the diegetic level, the boy's view becomes less credible, so that even as we feel the mimetic authority of his perceptions and responses, we also discount them.

Such back-and-forth movement between these levels accounts for much of the rich ambivalence of the reading experience. It sug-

gests that, when deep in the mimetic moment and “identifying” with Arren, the reader may not be thinking about the larger pattern of things. Thus, when Arren repeatedly questions Ged’s real powers and motives, because of the narrator’s shifting so closely to the prince’s point of view, we see two things at once, listen to two contending claims of authority. On the diegetic level, Arren simply falls more and more under Cob’s spell. Yet on the mimetic level, his questioning happens often and compellingly enough that it seems to rise to a nearly diegetic authority, so that the whole narrative fabric starts to look flimsy—as if all Earthsea (its wonders, magic, dragons, and mages) were nothing but a lovely child’s story, not now credible. As a result, before the end I feel uncomfortably close to Arren who sees “nothing with the clear eyes of despair” (106).

When Ged eventually reseals the doorway between nothing (the external world’s wretchedness) and this fictive (childlike) world of magic and dragons, most readers rejoice. That we do arises from the nearly diegetic authority the narrator has lent to the child’s mimetic viewpoint. Like Arren, we learn from the inside that what he thought was the “adult” view of the world (that of Cob and the various bereft ones we meet along the way) is after all but a child-ish confusion.

This is compelling artistry: Le Guin balances us between thinking Ged *is* fooling himself and thinking he isn’t. When Le Guin’s narrator colludes with the text’s fictive systems of authority, she reinforces our experience of characters’ negotiating their relationships with various adult authorities, a feature of the mimetic level. But these collusions also serve the authorial purpose of teaching by showing instead of by telling. It is through this switching between narrative levels of authority, moreover, that the text creates the situational ironies that in turn encourage readers to identify with one view and not another, helping us to assign an effectively balanced mixture of mimetic and diegetic authority to characters’ perceptions and feelings.

Another compelling example of this narratorial play with the protagonist presents itself in what the series calls the “last book of Earthsea,” *Tehanu*. It is manifest that every central character in the foregoing books undergoes a process of development or growth and that in each book Le Guin enriches the reader’s experience by frequently realigning the relationship between protagonist and narrator. But in *Tehanu* this realignment takes on a considerably

larger range of reference, not least because of the book's claim to be the last in the series.

In addition to this enhanced sense of closure, readers face several other important shifts in the final book. The structures of authority are no longer presented largely in terms of the conflicts of the child and adult views of this social power. In fact, because Tenar, the girl we met in *Tombs of Atuan*, is the protagonist, now an older woman, it might be argued for a moment that this last book is not part of the series in the same way that the earlier tales are: this seems hardly to be a children's story at all.

But this is precisely how Le Guin makes the point that patriarchal adult males ignore or repress children in virtually the same ways they do women. Mimetically speaking, *Tehanu* still explores the lack of authority experienced by figures on the "edges" of power, but this time it is not only children but also women and powerless men who provide the text's sharp critique of existing types of authority. In this regard, the last book of Earthsea evokes the spirit of Le Guin's commencement address at Bryn Mawr College in 1986. Challenging the graduates to deny the oppressions of "our schools and colleges, institutions of the patriarchy," Le Guin observes that such training teaches us all "not to listen to the mother tongue, to what the powerless say, poor men, women, children: not to hear that as valid discourse" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World* 151). *Tehanu* demonstrates how the mimetic world of Earthsea has also taught such inattention and silencing, not only to the perverse, such as the revolting child- and woman-abuser Handy and the misogynistic dark mage Aspen, but even to the respectable men of power. This last becomes clearest when we see the various male characters respond to Tenar's attempts to point the way to the new archmage.

*Tehanu* opens just after Cob's defeat, with Earthsea suffering a crisis of authority provoked by Ged's disappearance. His later re-appearance turns out to be precisely opposite of what we might have hoped: as the postscript of *The Farthest Shore* foretells, Ged is a man returned powerless, less Dragon-Lord than Dragon-Baggage. Ged's inability to resume control at the center of patriarchal power on Roke creates a vacuum at the top of the hierarchy: though a king has been placed on the long vacant throne, there is now no one to take up the symmetrically male position of power as leader of the mages. Worse, the normal processes for discovering a successor archmage have produced little more than an ambiguously mysterious clue, so far as the Council of the Wise can understand:

the Master Namer's trance vision allows him to say only "a woman on Gont" (142). The Master Windkey delivers this news, yet in spite of his sensitivity and genuine commitment to goodness and knowledge, the mage cannot even grasp Tenar's suggestion that the new figure of power might actually be a woman, as he demonstrates by observing, "'A woman'—not much to go on! Evidently this woman is to guide us, show us the way, somehow, to our archmage" (144). Tenar remembers the old fisherwoman's claim that she had once lived with dragons themselves, that most transcendently authoritative group in Earthsea. But she cannot tell the Windkey this truth, largely because he simply cannot hear it. Even though she likes him, she knows he will not hear her marginal mother language: "His deafness silenced her. She could not even tell him he was deaf" (144).

Indeed, readers encounter here one of the mimetic world's most radical shifts in key, as Tenar tries to break through the mage's patriarchal deafness in order to suggest a completely other form of magic in Earthsea. After he has agreed that the Roke masters will be many years at work to restore the old magical order, Tenar tries to make her point: "I wonder if there might be more to be done than repairing and healing. . . . Could it be that one such as Cob could have such power because things were already altering . . . that a change, a great change, has been taking place, has taken place?" (144). Again the mage mistakes her concern for fear about her own safety, but Tenar argues that the great change in Earthsea may well have created the conditions for the arrival of the new king, Lebennen, a young man who has escaped the institutional deafness of his elders and who listens carefully to her. It is to Lebennen, finally, that she can present her suspicion: "Couldn't it be that there's a woman on Gont, I don't know who, . . . but it could be that there is, or will be, or may be, a woman, and that they seek—that they need—her. Is it impossible?" (146). Even with Lebennen, Tenar must speak tentatively, proceeding by questions and self-qualifications rather than by strong assertions. The narrator observes dryly that Lebennen "listened. He was not deaf. But he frowned, intent, as if trying to understand a foreign language" (146). Though still learning this "foreign language," the young man we saw growing up in *The Farthest Shore* as Arren continues to grow as the new king Lebennen. In this he offers hope that some of the powerful males in Earthsea may change.

Although formerly one of the most powerful males, Ged has

saved the world but returned as one of those “powerless men” to whom the great (males) do not listen. Ged’s only hope of recovery comes from retreating to simple life as a goatherd. Lacking the power of magic, the exhausted Sparrowhawk must relearn how to live in the world—including how to cope with fear, pain, and violence but also love, sexual desire, and family life. Just as Ged taught Tenar to pursue her identity and name in *Tombs*, so she now teaches Sparrowhawk the ways of the ordinary world. In this, she quietly enacts her own matriarchal tongue, demonstrating a fresh way to authorize and legitimize behavior by connecting it to the average lives of the human community.

Le Guin here parallels Tenar’s newly emerging authority with Carol Gilligan’s recent work on the psychological and ethical development of women.<sup>13</sup> In discussing how women artists have often worked in the very midst of their family lives, Le Guin paraphrases Gilligan’s theory of a male “ethics of rights,” which contrasts sharply with a female “ethics of responsibility”: “A man finds it (relatively) easy to assert his ‘right’ to be free of relationships and dependents . . . while women are not granted and do not grant one another any such right, preferring to live as part of an intense and complex network in which freedom is arrived at, if at all, mutually” (“Fisherwoman’s Daughter” 231n). This captures effectively the emphasis in an ethics of responsibility upon the web of relationships in a social community: Tenar brings the “fallen” Ged back into the lives of her people, introduces him to the web, as it were. This system of ethics tends not to produce heroes, the hierarchically elevated mages or lords, but instead to promote the connections among “ordinary” people.

The ending of *Tehanu* demonstrates the correctness of Tenar’s uncertain and “ordinary” magic—first in the glorious return of the great dragon, which happily ends the reign of Aspen’s misogynistic reign of hatred and brutality, replete with enslavement, violence, torture, and threatened death—both for Tenar and the powerless Ged. But more important, this ending also seems to “repay” Therru, the abused girl, for her suffering, because she is revealed to be the Tehanu, or summer star, a dragon-child. She is the “long looked-for” of the Segoy, in the earlier books identified as the one who had founded the world and here called Kalessin, the eldest dragon; she embodies the reunion of human and dragons that promises a return to the golden age of Earthsea. All this comes

through the child-victim, a physical embodiment of the excluded speakers who have been largely silenced in the patriarchal order of Earthsea.

These revisions in the mimetic structures of authority in Earthsea signal a powerful expression of diegetic feminist concern. But the newly explicit feminist ideology is, again, effectively underscored by Le Guin's manipulation of the narrator's stance and relation with the protagonist. Throughout *Tehanu*, the narrator has moved in to focus on events through Tenar's viewpoint, giving readers an interior perspective on her fears, anxieties, anger, and hope. As in *Tombs*, Ged is observed only from the outside, which has the effect, in the "new world" of *Tehanu*, of empowering the female (once ignored) viewpoint. Because the female perspective has become central, the narrator can legitimize the evocative but non-linear thinking of Auntie Moss, the old witch woman: "Nobody had ever taught her to think consecutively. Nobody had ever listened to what she said. All that was expected, all that was wanted of her was muddle, mystery, mumbling. She was a witchwoman. She had nothing to do with clear meaning" (50). From the newly centralized women's view readers also gain a terrifying clear perception of the effects of Aspen's misogynistic hatred during his final assault on Tenar and Ged.

What happens in *Tehanu* is finally more than simple narratorial collusion with the book's main themes. Because of Le Guin's adroit movement forth and back across the text's mimetic-diegetic boundaries, readers can experience the book's expression of the mother tongue even in the order of the plot. In this insistence on our awareness of these interpenetrating domains of narrative, she echoes the textual moves of *Always Coming Home*, in which the mother tongue has deconstructed traditional narrative order far more radically than in *Tehanu*. There the text has become fragmented, delinearized, and restructured in a "messy" way that forces readers to rethink the very process of learning the outlines of a secondary world in the first place—and all this in concert with the text's repeated self-reflexive allusions to its fictionality.

In contrast, *Tehanu* largely retains the traditional order of a folk narrative: beginning, middle, and end appear in their expected places, and plot sequence is nicely linear. Only at the level of the relation between this "last" and the three earlier books of Earthsea is the reader invited to see the intervention of the mother tongue



for what it is: a re-vision and restructuring of both the mimetic and diegetic orders of authority in the series, precisely by means of the travail and magical victory promised in the burned girl who is revealed as the harbinger of a new world.

Language is the key to this transformation, and as we have seen, Le Guin leads us to the alternative world through Earthsea's most authoritative creatures. The dragons, guesses Ged, have a unique relationship with the Old Speech of power and authority. As he tells Therru, "Dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being. . . . They do not learn, . . . They are" (196). To conceive the dragons in this way is to see them as being free from a number of patriarchal dilemmas—especially the binary oppositions of the subject/object and the mind/body. In effect, Le Guin argues that men's use of the Old Speech in the art magic of the old Earthsea did not reach far enough in its understanding. The mother tongue functions as a counterpoint to the traditional human (male) usage of the Language of the Making, a critical heuristic, which points toward a domain of experience and knowledge hitherto ignored. Aunty Moss summarizes the difference between Father and mother tongue earlier in the novel when thinking about the differences in Earthsea between men and women. When Tenar asks, "What's wrong with men?" the old woman suggests that men are bound up inside their bodies in ways women are not: "A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in its shell, and it's full of him. Full of grand man-meat, manself. And that's all. That's all there is. It's all him and nothing else, inside" (51–52). By contrast, a woman has none of these boundaries, nor their incipient oppositions: "Who knows where a woman begins and ends?" asks Aunty Moss. For once clearly asserting her alternative and womanly form of authority in Earthsea, the old woman goes on: "I have roots, I have roots deeper than this island. Deeper than the sea, older than the raising of the lands. I go back into the dark. . . . Before the moon I was. No one knows, . . . no one can say what I am, what a woman is, a woman of power, a woman's power, deeper than the roots of islands . . . older than the Making" (52). These are strong and expansive assertions of authority, yet they parallel the ways the mimetic world has previously authorized the dragons themselves—women are empowered through their association with the language and time of the world's creation, an association that suggests their power to do and to endure quite beyond the limits of the patriarchal order that

has dominated Earthsea until now.<sup>14</sup> By linking the Language of the Making with the values associated with the mother tongue, Le Guin has revised the Old Speech from its previous role as a tool of the patriarchal order to a language of Being and Naming which focuses upon the ancestral and hitherto hidden realm of the female Other. The mother tongue works here much as it does in the Bryn Mawr Commencement Address as a parallel critical language pointing toward a world and a language that include the experiences and perceptions of males and females.<sup>15</sup>

Near its ending, the text further reinforces such a vision by a carefully calculated and dramatic shift in the narrator's point of view: for the first time in the book, we see events through Therru's perspective. The nearly silent and once dreadfully scarred child has had time to heal and discover something resembling family life with Ged and Tenar. Yet now she has the magical and, importantly, entirely untrained capacity to use the language of true names and to see through Aspen's binding/blinding spells, which hold her mother and father; she even knows the evil mage's true name: "The one called Aspen, whose name was Erisen, and whom she saw as a forked and writhing darkness" (219). With these abilities, she calls the eldest dragon and releases Aunty Moss from more of Aspen's death-dealing. As a result, readers quickly see that this is not exclusively a child: she speaks to the old witch woman "in the voice she had for these people" (220), and upon Kalessin's arrival she speaks with the Eldest in the Language of the Making (223). Tehanu-Therru becomes the future of magic in Earthsea, and the narrative diegetically reinforces this eruption of the marvelous by shifting between this "child's" viewpoint and that of the "ordinary" adults. To this degree, the last book of Earthsea becomes a beginning and, in keeping with Le Guin's pragmatic-romantic view of the child, embodies that beginning in a return to ordinary life and death at Ogion's rural retreat with the death of the peach tree that Tenar and the child have been growing throughout the narrative. This new family decides to stay in Ogion's old house, simply, as Tenar tells herself, because "I think we can live there" (225).

The thematic parallels between the dragons' unity of being and the hitherto hidden power of woman blend mimetically and diegetically in the book's ending and in the transformation of little burned Therru into the dragon-child, Tehanu. To human perception in Earthsea so far, dragons have been wild, fearsome, wonderful—

dangerously Other. Yet just as they need not learn the Language of the Making, so Tehanu demonstrates at the novel's climax a similarly immediate oneness of mind and language.

Tehanu's Otherness has been prepared throughout the book in references to the human-dragon relationship. This first occurs in the story that the old dragon-woman of Kemay sang to Ogion of the golden age when dragon and human were one species (9–13). Tenar's retelling of this to the still largely silent Therru prepares readers for her later discovery of the hitherto hidden side of weaver Fan's painted fan, which depicts great humans on one side and dragons grouped similarly on the reverse. When held to the light, however, the two representations meld, revealing that "the men and women were winged, and the dragons looked with human eyes" (105).

Thus, though to most of the characters Therru-Tehanu is an unlooked-for wonder, to readers she appears as the culmination of this series of hints and foreshadowings. Like the dragons, she sees the truth and acts as needed, unshackled by the habits of perception and language that constrain most of the adults in her world, shackles that provide Aspen a means of controlling Tenar, Auntie Moss, and Ged near the novel's end. Tehanu's liberation of all these adults, like her untutored calling of the eldest dragon, signals the reinstatement of women's language. For attentive readers, this becomes mother tongue speaking through a powerful melding of the mimetic and diegetic domains.

The Earthsea novels allow us to watch Le Guin rethink the ways adult males marginalize children and women, and these fictive reflections parallel sharply her nonfiction reactions to the same thing that is sometimes done to children's literature by a so-called adult viewpoint. As she put it in 1986, "We kiddilitters remain outsiders."<sup>16</sup> It is precisely this move to *silence* the child's or other peripheral voices speaking the "irrelevant" detail that provides such "adults" with the ability to do and to act decisively, but sometimes also insensitively or even wrongly. As Le Guin suggested about the Earthsea series in a recent interview, "Power is the central theme of all the books; what is power and who has it?" (Loer).

As a result of Le Guin's shift from implicit to explicit feminist critique of patriarchy between *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu*, the series offers a rebalancing of both its mimetic and diegetic patterns

of authority. In the old Earthsea trilogy readers encounter representations (in Ged and Arren) of a hierarchical, male-dominated power structure that presents as its ideal the master, a man who enacts an authoritative mix of knowledge and power. This figure embodies the best aspects of male mastery, including a holistic adult view that succeeds because of its openness to and appropriations of childlike desires and motives and its retention of child delight but equally because of its (often compelled) rejection of the limitations of the Father Language.

In the new Earthsea that emerges from the advent of the star-child Tehanu, these implicit subversions of patriarchy become explicit as we watch Tenar move from unspoken and half-realized internal criticisms of the male order into the light of day and full expressions of the mother tongue. Here, the force of Le Guin's narrative technique also comes sharply into focus, as readers find themselves enacting narrative patterns of inclusion and connection rather than exclusion and hierarchy. In this both the representations and their structures move from an ethics of rights to an ethics of responsibility. Finally, in Earthsea, the marginalized speak, and men can become brothers (not masters) by learning to listen to and participate in the "ordinary" community with their mothers and sisters.

#### Notes

1. In recent years, Le Guin has signaled a change from what might be called an implicit to an explicit form of feminist discourse in many of her writings. That she feels this change to have been necessary and deep-delving appears, for example, in her reflections on being a "housewife-artist" in "The Fisherwoman's Daughter": "I was free—born free, lived free. And for years that personal freedom allowed me to ignore the degree to which my writing was controlled and constrained by judgments and assumptions which I thought were my own, but which were the internalized ideology of a male supremacist society" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, 233–34). Le Guin has discussed her self-redefinition as a feminist writer in interviews with Greenland, Neal, and (in relation to *Always Coming Home*) in a panel discussion at the Nineteenth Mythopoeic Conference in 1988, transcribed by David Bratman. Ann Whelton has also briefly discussed *Tehanu* and feminism.

2. The Earthsea series began with *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) and *The Tomb of Atuan* (1971). The first chronicles the development and early maturity of Ged, or Sparrowhawk, from his boyhood on Gont through his formal education and "mastery" of art magic. *Tombs of Atuan* focuses primarily upon Tenar's early life as Arha, the servant of dark powers; Ged eventually rescues Tenar and takes her with him to Earthsea.

3. See Garner, Kahane, and Sprengnether; Le Guin, "Bryn Mawr Commencement Address" and "Fisherwoman's Daughter," 149, 151–53, and 224n, respectively,

in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*; and Le Guin, "Introduction," *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*.

4. Genette divides a narrative's inner and outer domains into the mimetic and diegetic levels of textual authority; this differentiation helps refine our awareness of the many ways narratives make claims for authority in terms of their fictive as opposed to their "real world" referents. That is, mimetic authority is represented in the fictional world, while diegetic authority refers to the world encompassing the fictive one, starting with the operations of the narrator but moving quickly out to such matters as the text's style and organization, its relations with other texts, and finally its place in the "real" world. Mimetic authority is fictive; diegetic connects to us "out here" (see Genette 128–37). Dividing a text's claims to authority into mimetic and diegetic levels helps account for the reader's responses to the shifting codes of authority in each book and helps us understand the Earthsea series better as a whole.

5. These qualities, in turn, help create the books' diegetic authority—the legitimacy of the mimetic realm as a whole (the credibility of the "secondary world," in Tolkien's terms), by reinforcing our sense of the books' larger coherence and consistency. This holistic consistency is often cited as a means for evaluating the quality of fantasy fiction in general; see Tolkien or Rabkin for examples.

6. Le Guin's language of true names has been widely discussed; see, for example, Bittner, Bucknall, Crow and Erlich, Crowe, Esmonde, Gunew, Selinger, and Spivack.

7. See Fowler, who argues for just this kind of distinction. But in spite of these nuances of usage, *masterful* does underscore the power and even, to some degree, the bravado of the male master—that confidence which allows the bearer to out-face opposition of all sorts, even the most awe-inspiring kind. It is important to note as well that these *masterful* types are almost exclusively male in Le Guin's Earthsea books.

8. Note the other dragon conversations in *Wizard* and *The Farthest Shore*. The sense of exhaustion he experiences before the grand and the magical finds an interesting echo in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* whenever Ransom must talk with the planetary angels: both instances argue for human humility in the face of greater age, knowledge, wisdom, power, and authority—in effect, serving as a restatement of the Romantic theory of the sublime and its peculiar power to overwhelm the human observer.

9. A full development of this line of argument should also prove a fruitful way to approach *The Tombs of Atuan*, in which the dark Earth powers of the womblike death religion are served by a women's community. In Earthsea generally Le Guin represents such powers as ancient and inimical to "man" (witness the Stone that threatens to turn Ged into a Gibbeth in *Wizard*, as well as the ongoing danger these powers pose to him in his journeys in the labyrinth of *Tombs*). Because of this, Ged's rescuing Tenar from Atuan must be seen as a liberation from an evil oppression at the hands of a male "master."

At the same time, the women's community at Atuan is very much in the service of a larger male-directed exploitation of these ancient magical forces (as develops in the political struggle between Kossil, the priestess of the Godking, "the Man Immortal," and Arha, the "Eaten One" of the Nameless powers). In effect, a more balanced male master frees her from the oppressions of women serving less balanced ones.

The relations of light with dark forces associated with the Earth in *Tombs* repeats a pattern established in *Wizard* with the evil Terrenon Stone, owned by Bendersk, who claims to be Lord of the Terrenon even as he serves it. In both cases, these dark Earthly powers, although linked with women (Serret in *Wizard*, and the women's community in *Tombs*), principally serve the purposes of the male hierarchy, lending

an ironic cast to the wisdom of the Roke Mages that “the Old Powers of the earth are not for men to use. They were never given into our hands, and in our hands they will work only ruin” (*Wizard*, 118). See Craig and Diana Barrow for an important parallel discussion of *Tombs* and *The Farthest Shore* (as well as *Tehanu* in a brief note, p. 41, n. 1), feminism, and anthropology.

10. A parallel description of women as patriarchy’s hidden Other turns up earlier in *The Dispossessed*, when Shevek ponders the misogyny of Urrasti male scientists and suggests that deep within and unconsciously “they contained . . . a woman, a repressed, silenced, bestialized woman, a fury in a cage. He had no right to tease them. They knew no relation but possession. They were possessed” (60).

11. Cob amounts to the second alter-ego or shadow self (the first being his own raw desire for power, which Ged unleashed in *Wizard*), another vision of what Ged might have become had he not resolved his conflict with the adult system more fruitfully.

12. Consider Selinger’s assessment of Duny’s aunt, who first provides Duny the seeds of his future magical identity (26–28). The initiatory or developmental aspects of the first three books in the series have also generated much critical comment: see especially Crowe, Esmonde, and Selinger.

13. See, for example, Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* and “Woman’s Place in a Man’s Life,” as well as Le Guin’s “Fisherwoman’s Daughter” and the “Bryn Mawr Commencement Address.”

14. Aunty Moss’s description of the reach of a woman’s mind is a mythicized evocation of the fundamental differences between men and women, and it parallels recent feminist psychology’s rethinking of women’s development, particularly in the area of ego-boundaries. As Chodorow argues, from their earliest relationships, girls develop differently from boys: “Mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves. Correspondingly, girls tend to remain part of the dyadic primary mother-child relationship itself. This means that a girl continues to experience herself as involved in issues of merging and separation, and in an attachment characterized by primary identification and the fusion of identification and object choice.” Mothers tend to regard their boy children in a contrasting way, as a “male opposite,” so that “boys are more likely to have been pushed out of the preoedipal relationship and to have had to curtail their primary love and sense of empathic tie with their mother.” This has the result of a “more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of ego boundaries” among boys and men (*Reproduction of Mothering*, 166, 167). These views provide effective support for Silverman’s arguments in *The Subject of Semiotics* that theories of the psychological (and social) “subject” have been radically revised in the twentieth century, with increased emphasis placed on cultural mediation (especially in the processes of development) and less acceptance given to arguments based on spiritual or even biological (as Chodorow has it, “anatomical”) foundations (see, for example, Silverman, chaps. 4, 5).

15. Le Guin argues in the Bryn Mawr Commencement Address that the mother tongue must erupt, volcano-like, to correct and coexist with the legitimate functions of the Father tongue. But her challenge to the graduating women in her audience is to have a clear understanding of the limitations of the male perspective: “I don’t want what men have. I’m glad to let them do their work and talk their talk. But I do not want and will not have them saying or thinking or telling us that theirs is the only fit work or speech for human beings. Let them not take our words, our words, from us. If they can, they will, let them work with us and talk with us. We can all talk mother tongue, we can all talk father tongue, and together we can try to hear and speak that language which may be our truest way of being in the world, we who speak for a world which has no words but ours” (159).

16. In her review of Molly Gloss's *Outside the Gates* (New York: Atheneum, 1986) (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, 297). But also see, for example, Le Guin's comments on "kiddilit" and the responses to children's literature by certain publishers and critics in such essays as "Dreams Must Explain Themselves" (in *The Language of the Night*), the Introduction to *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, and "The Fisherwoman's Daughter" (*Dancing at the Edge of the World*).

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