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Fantastic Languages: C. S. Lewis and Ursula K. Le Guin

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Abstract

This thesis explores the nature and function of language as it is used in twentieth-century fantastic fiction, as represented by the work of C. S. Lewis and Ursula K. Le Guin. In it I argue that the anti-mimetic impulse behind the language of fantasy makes it a polemical, contentious mode, which situates itself against discourses (religious and scientific) that assume the existence of a reality to which language may be said to correspond in certain clearly understood, conventional ways. Both Lewis and Le Guin suggest, by contrast, that experiential reality is an arbitrary and shifting construct, although each writer has a very different attitude towards the category of the 'real' and the question of how it may best be articulated. Despite the fact that Lewis uses the language of authority and Le Guin the language of liberation, they both interrogate fundamental ethical, social, political and theological evaluative assumptions embedded in language, disrupting the rigidity that conventional usage confers upon words and the concomitant human tendency to submit unquestioningly to cultural conventions. Lewis challenges the modern, secular, materialist understanding of reality, contending that metaphor has the power to undermine post-secular fixed notions and reveal new semantic fields pertaining to what he understands as the 'spiritual'. Le Guin celebrates human and non-human embodied existence, with its possibilities and limitations, refuting any transcendent reality.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One deals with the 'reactionary' school of fantasy represented by Lewis. My contention is that Lewis's Narnian Chronicles dramatise Owen Barfield's theory of the concomitant evolution of human consciousness and language in relation to the phenomenal world. The three chapters in this part demonstrate that in the Narnia books Lewis represents initial forms of mythical, 'participatory' consciousness (as Barfield calls it) – that is, a world in which no linguistic or imaginative distinction is made between the human, animal, material and spiritual dimensions; followed by the loss of participation and the consequent alienation of human beings both from immaterial things and the environment; and concluding with the renewal of participation through a new use of language. Part Two is concerned with Le Guin's sequence of fantasy novels about the imaginary world of Earthsea. Following Darko Suvin, I divide the sequence into two trilogies, which embody two contrasting responses to the conservative fantasy represented by the Narnia books. For me, the difference between these responses can best be understood through a close examination of Le Guin's changing attitude to language in the First and Second Trilogies, which I undertake in four chapters. The first chapter explores Le Guin's

initial collusion with Lewis's patriarchal politics, a collusion signalled by the rigid linguistic conventions and unchanging cultural practices of her imaginary world. The three final chapters deal with the Second Earthsea Trilogy, with particular emphasis on the last two books, since these have so far received little critical attention. In these books she deconstructs the earlier premises of her created world by finding new ways in which to represent the voices that had been excluded or marginalised in her previous trilogy, as well as in the work of her predecessors in fantasy. The thesis as a whole represents an effort to reassess the political implications of linguistic choices, and of attitudes to language, in twentieth-century fantastic fiction.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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INTRODUCTION

'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'
'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean different things.'
'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.'

(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

The thesis is concerned with the relationship between language as it is used in twentieth-century fantastic fiction and the very different kinds of language used in the quasi-literary modes of myth and the Bible. The chief difference between these three modes is that fantastic fiction is concerned to construct through its use of language alternate worlds or sets of events which are manifestly fictional and indeed impossible: they never did and never will take place. Mythic and biblical language, on the other hand, claims to describe things that may have really taken place: the death and resurrection of Christ, for instance, or the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, which commentators for many centuries have assumed to be based on actual historical events. The mode of the fantastic, which includes supernatural events, tales of wonder, and miracles, is deployed by all three narrative traditions; but the assumptions and expectations of readers regarding the nature of the worlds they construct through language, and the relationship of these worlds to the 'real' world of the reader, are very different. I will particularly concern myself with the question of control in language, which is closely related to the role of the author and of authority. Briefly put, myth and scripture can be said to wield a certain cultural and even social authority to which the writers of fantasy never lay claim; and I shall be considering the effects on fantasy of its frequent interaction with these authoritative modes of narrative, and to what extent fantasy writers are able to maintain authorial control over these effects.

Biblical and mythical discourses situate themselves as sacred and true, but with very different attitudes towards authorship. Myths are widely defined as anonymous, quasi-sacred stories with universal significance. The Bible was for many centuries believed to have been authored by God, giving its readers direct access to an objective transcendent reality through the use of language unambiguous in its referents and meanings. However, post-Enlightenment thinking effectively repudiated both mythical and transcendent authority, replacing these with Reason as the sole arbiter of meaning. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, a growing sense of history, from the late

eighteenth to the late nineteenth century led to critical methods of reading the Bible as a collection of historically situated texts, of composite authorship. This thesis takes as its premise the widespread assumption among writers and thinkers that the purportedly truth-bearing language of the Bible and myth has become disabled, or at least enfeebled, in post-Cartesian epistemological structures. I will argue that fantastic fiction is an intervention in the Biblical hermeneutic, responding to the loss or diminution of scriptural authority by constructing what is in effect a set of alternative, non-authoritative scriptures better adapted to the cultural needs of modern readers. In the process, the active engagement of literary fantasy with the language and imagery of scripture and myth - both collusive and polemical – confirms the continuing relevance of these narratives for the contemporary world.

My interest is in two particular schools of fantasy that evolved in the twentieth century, each of which has a different attitude to the language in which it is written and the relationship between that language and the world its readers inhabit. The first seeks to retain the connection between the language of fantasy and the truth-claiming language of myth and the scripture, and this school is represented in my thesis by the Christian fantasist C. S. Lewis. The second school of fantasy seeks to divorce itself from the linguistic traditions of classical myth and the Bible, seeing these as perpetuating certain forms of tyranny in the world – the sorts of social injustice that condemn portions of the population to powerlessness and subjugate one gender to another. This school is represented by the American novelist Ursula K. Le Guin. These two schools of fantasy would seem at first glance to be utterly inimical to one another; but I shall argue that they are in fact much more closely interconnected than their writers would perhaps be willing to acknowledge. My contention is that the 'reactionary' Christian fantasy of writers such as Lewis contains the seeds of a radical questioning of its own conservative stance on language; and that the 'radical' fantasy of confessedly non-religious writers such as Le Guin is engaged in an intensive close dialogue with the linguistic theories of the conservative fantasists who influenced her work. Each school feeds upon and is enriched by the gaps and contradictions in its author's own linguistic theories; and the processes by which this cross-fertilization takes place is my subject in this thesis.

The Linguistic Background

The seventeenth century witnessed a radical disjunction between subject and object, which is imputed to Cartesian philosophy. René Descartes's well-known formulation in the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), 'I think, therefore I am', signalled not only an epistemological but also a linguistic

split with the past, the details of which I shall consider later. In England, Francis Bacon emphasised the inadequacy of language, which he felt was a hurdle to knowledge. His *idola fori* - Idols of the Marketplace - draw attention to the capacity of discourse to mislead its users through the embedded preconceptions and prejudices that could not be eliminated from verbal structures.[1] In his *Novum Organum* (1620), Bacon insists that language as it is currently used is incapable of articulating scientific knowledge systems.[2] The response of the Royal Society was a call for a 'universal' language, whose precision and transparency would make it a viable tool for scientists.[3] Technological and scientific progress was being hindered by linguistic ambiguity, and the way out was to establish an inflexible, unvarying and perspicuous form of discourse, liberating humankind from the joint curses of Babel and of the vicissitudes of history.

Bacon's deep distrust of the verbal double meanings beloved of poets, as expressed in the *Novum Organum*, was shared by many of his contemporaries and persisted well into the twentieth century.[4] As literary scholars interested in linguistics, C. S. Lewis and his friends at Oxford were well aware of contemporary trends that were geared towards producing 'scientific' systems of language and epistemology, somewhat along the lines proposed by the Royal Society in the seventeenth century. Lewis refers in his letters to what he calls the 'Logical Positivist menace',[5] a philosophical movement which dismissed as meaningless any statements that were not empirically verifiable, so that its adherents considered all metaphysical statements, including religious ones, to be effectively null and void. The main proponent of this theory was A. J. Ayer, whose *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) was influenced by the linguistic theories of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, as set out in their books *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) and *Principles of Literary Criticism*

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[1] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 47-48.

[2] The OED defines the 'scientific' method as consisting of 'systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing and modification of hypotheses'.

[3] See, for example, *John Wilkins and 17th-century British Linguistics*, ed. by Joseph L. Subbiondo (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1992); Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought 1*, 2nd. edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997 (1989), pp. 110-125.

[4] See Jonas A. Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: London University of California Press, 1981).

[5] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 462. For a comprehensive overview of logical positivism see Oswald Hanfling, *Logical Positivism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); *Essential Readings in Logical Positivism*, ed. by Oswald Hanfling (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); A. J. Ayer ed., *Logical Positivism* (Glencose III: Free Press; London: Allen and Unwin, 1959).

(1924). Ogden and Richards differentiated between 'emotive' and 'referential' language: the language of poetry was emotive and figurative, with no 'real' referents, while scientific language had actual referents, and was the only veridical language.[6] In response to these theories, systems of language control were proposed in a bid to regulate and constrain the perceived waywardness of twentieth-century language use, from Ogden's Basic English, which proposed an 850-word vocabulary to be used for all practical social and scientific purposes, to the Shavian efforts at spelling reform.[7]

Owen Barfield, a member of the Oxford literary group known as the Inklings and a close friend of the group's co-founder, C. S. Lewis, categorically equates such systems of language control with efforts at thought control, whose implementation would lead to totalitarian stasis. He insists that those thinkers who are 'driven to reduce the specifically human to a mechanical or animal regularity will continue to be increasingly irritated by the nature of the mother tongue and make it their point of attack'. [8] What better way to stifle dissent than to impose a strict control on the range of referents available to language users, placing that control in the hands of the hegemony? The reductionist tendencies in these efforts to make language ultimately into an almost algebraic form, ideally suited to the purposes of indoctrination, would lead eventually, he felt certain, to a 'liquidation of the human spirit'.[9] Barfield, in the Preface to the second edition of *Poetic Diction* (1952), and Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man* (1944), set out the dangers inherent in the strict regulation of language along the principles proposed by Ogden and his colleagues. For both writers, the abolition of meaning from poetic discourse would ultimately lead to the 'abolition of man' himself – the erasure, that is, of everything that makes us human.[10] Barfield asserts that 'Language is the storehouse of imagination',[11] a cache of knowledge capable of being accessed through the imagination and readily available to anyone perceptive enough to recognise its value.

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[6] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923), p. 10. See also I. A. Richards, 'The Two Uses of Language' in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1924), pp. 244-54.

[7] See <http://ogden.basic-english.org>. For Bernard Shaw's spelling reform proposal, see Edward Carney, *A Survey of English Spelling* (Oxon: Routledge, 1994), pp. 483-488. For Barfield's views on these see *Poetic Diction*, pp. 13-14.

[8] Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 4th. edn. (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010 [1928]), pp. 13-14.

[9] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, pp. 13-14.

[10] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, pp. 5-6, 130; C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944), p. 64.

[11] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 13.

As we shall see, Lewis was strongly influenced by Barfield's thinking on language, and much of the first section of this thesis will be taken up with tracing the impact of this influence on Lewis's fantasies for children, the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

Barfield contended that all language was metaphorical, and that so-called abstract words, such as 'verify', 'referential', and so on, could be traced back to their metaphorical origins. In their theoretical and literary works, then, he and Lewis position themselves in direct opposition to the positivists. In contradistinction to this school, Barfield offers an account of human linguistic development which is commensurate with the Christian narrative of history. He proposes that only the submicroscopic world has an objective existence independent of human thought. The phenomenological world, or the 'world as experienced', as he calls it, is constructed by human thought and named by human language. What we perceive, in other words, is structurally inseparable from thought and language. According to Barfield, mind and matter *interpenetrate*: the two aspects of the world are indivisible, even if not indistinguishable. Early human language was semantically unified because the meaning of individual words encompassed both these aspects of the world, the material and the non-material. The modern distinction between self and world, the mind and its material environment, was only introduced as a concept in the seventeenth century, after which language lost its semantic unity, with human experience and the world it encounters being artificially divided into separate regions: soul and body, intellect and matter, 'inner' and 'outer'. Consequently, following the empiricists' privileging of observation over other means of acquiring knowledge, only the outer, or material aspect of human experience was considered to be demonstrably real and permanent and therefore worthy of the scientist's attention. Barfield further proposes that changes in human consciousness constitute changes in the world itself; the physical world changes as language changes. Post-rational language, he insists, is creating a de-spiritualised world which effects a radical sense of alienation between humanity and the environment.

As I have suggested, these ideas of Barfield had a profound effect on Lewis's thinking, and hence on his fantasy; and Lewis's response to these ideas had a profound influence, albeit in large part a negative one, on the fantasy of Ursula Le Guin. But before proceeding to trace these influences, the differences and similarities between myths, scripture and literary fantasy must be considered more extensively.

The Bible, Myth and the Literary Fantastic

Myths are complex cultural constructs. Myths were - and in some communities still are - held to be exemplary stories, providing models for human behaviour, and giving accounts of the creation of the world that articulate some of the dominant values of the cultures in which they circulated.[12] The models they offered could be useful for suppressing deviant behaviour, or for providing a common basis for rituals aimed at asserting communal order. In certain senses, then, they were held to be 'true' stories. As Mircea Eliade points out in *Myth and Reality* (1963), any cosmogonic myth is in a sense self-evidently 'true' because the world exists; the myth of how death originated is 'true' because men are mortal; and so on (6). However, as Eliade makes clear, Greek rationalists such as Xenophanes criticised the anthropomorphism of the Greek pantheon. Eventually, the authority based on *mythos* was surrendered to the authority of the *logos* in around the fifth century B.C.E., and the reasons for this surrender were political and linguistic.[13]

A parallel trajectory, though with radically different causes, can be traced for the claims of biblical truth. As I stated earlier, the post-Enlightenment privileging of Reason went a long way to undermine religious authority. Another trend that gained momentum in the late eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth century was that of Higher Criticism, or historicism. As early as the seventeenth century, Spinoza dismissed the inspirational aspect of the Bible, insisting upon its composite human authorship. But it was in the latter part of the eighteenth century that the fact claims of the Biblical stories were scrutinised, leading eventually to what Hans W. Frei has famously called 'the eclipse of biblical narrative'.[14] According to E. S. Shaffer, 'The Biblical critics in […] the 1790s were engaged in showing that the sacred text belonged to mythology.'[15] This claim is exemplified in the work of German scholars like J. G. Eichhorn - who published a series of articles exploring Genesis and certain parts of the New Testament as Oriental myth; and J. G. Herder - whose claims that the Hebrew poetry of the Bible was the highest expression of man's intellect led to questions of the historical situatedness of the sacred text. In England, scriptural authority had been undermined by Robert Lowth's lectures (1749-50), which considered the Old

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[12] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

[13] See Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 3-43.

[14] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974).

[15] E. S. Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and The Fall of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 7.

Testament as literature.[16] The iconoclastic claims pertaining to the Bible as an appropriation of ancient myths continued into the nineteenth century, when Darwin's evolutionary theories exacerbated the matter by thrusting Man out of his central position in the cosmos, and questioning the very ontological assumptions on which such centrality had been based. By this means, the authority of the *logos* was superseded by the authority of reason or logic, and another narrative which had helped to constitute the collective identity of a community found itself displaced, very much as had happened with mythical narratives in the sixth century before Christ.

It is against this background of religious and cultural change that narrative fantasy evolved into the form it took in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Its counterpart, realistic literature, was claiming at the time to mirror an extra-textual, external reality: realism purported to have a correspondence or fidelity to the non-verbal reality of experiential existence. Fantasy, however, made no such claims; indeed it openly, even flamboyantly, declared its own impossibility. John Clute has given a lucid exposition of its emergence as a major literary form in his seminal *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, co-edited with John Grant. Clute points out what he calls an 'irreversible impulse towards fantasy' in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and distinguishes this new, modern literary mode from the 'taproot texts' from which it took its growth.[17] These 'taproot texts', such as the *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Beowulf*, the *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* – narratives containing elements which are recognisably different in kind from anything encountered in ordinary human experience, though not necessarily impossible in the cultural context in which these works were generated - are a ubiquitous feature in world literature; but the Enlightenment brought about a sea-change in readers' responses to the supernatural. The tidal wave of fantasy generated by the eighteenth-century imagination, which includes Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) and Horace Walpole's gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), differed from the taproot texts because the authors of these texts consciously situated themselves against the Enlightenment privileging of reason over every other form of human discourse. Texts like these helped to generate the mode of fantasy, whose relationship to the reader's world is defined by the manifestly impossible elements it contains. From the first, then, fantasy can be seen as a conscious counter-narrative to the dominant

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[16] For detailed studies of the rise of Historical Criticism and its effects, see Frei, *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative*; Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 9-47; Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and The Fall of Jerusalem.*

[17] *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1977), p. 921.

world view; and the bulk of this thesis will be given over to a consideration of what sort of counter-narrative it offers.

Given the different relationships of each of these 'fantastic' modes to their readers and the world they inhabit, the obvious question to ask concerns the nature of the language used by all these different narrative traditions. How do the discourses of myth, the Bible, and literary fantasy differ, enabling these modes to develop such radically divergent relationships to truth? And how did human understanding of language change, enabling the truth-claims of myth and scripture respectively to be dismissed so summarily by the intelligentsia of fifth-century Greece and nineteenth-century Europe? These are the questions that this thesis will explore, through an examination of the thought and work of the two writers mentioned in my opening paragraphs. But before examining further the relationship between fantasy, scripture, and myth, I should give a brief overview of some recent definitions of literary fantasy, which include the view that the Bible itself is in some sense fantastic.

A Brief Overview of Fantasy and the Fantastic

Mircea Eliade, in his *Two Tales of the Occult* (1970), states that *littérature fantastique* is an 'authentic instrument of knowledge' (viii, xii). Theorists who have engaged with this mode point out various ways in which fantasy can be described as a valid means of knowledge acquisition - something which had been firmly repudiated in post-Cartesian epistemology. The Victorian fantasist George MacDonald offers what is still one of the most comprehensive definitions of the mode: 'The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use; but they may themselves suggest laws of other kinds, and a man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws'.[18] J. R. R. Tolkien agrees with the notion of fantasy's symbiotic relationship with reality, and its paradoxical condition of being derivative of natural laws that it refuses to acknowledge as infrangible — even if a whole new world has to be constructed to violate those laws. But for Tolkien fantasy and reality are not subject to a one-way alliance; even while a sub-creator makes an internally consistent world with its own laws, many of its qualities 'are derived from Reality or are *flowing into it*'.[19] This points to the transformative potential of fantasy. However, Rosemary Jackson questions the notion of 'reality' as

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[18] George MacDonald, 'The Fantastic Imagination' in *A Dish of Orts* (London: Sampson Law, 1893), p. 314.

[19] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories' in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 71. Added emphasis. Hereafter cited as 'OFS'.

a culturally constructed category that suppresses disorder and illegality to establish a comfortable social order. Jackson calls fantasy a 'literature of subversion' in her seminal book on the subject.[20] According to Jackson, fantasy scrutinises the category of the 'real' by positing an 'unreal' against it, threatening to subvert normative socio-cultural rules and conventions which determine our notions of reality.

Jackson extends the structural theory of one of the foremost theorists of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov, who calls fantasy the 'literature of hesitation'. He affirms that readers of and/or characters in certain narratives find themselves hesitating 'between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described', and that the fantastic occupies 'the duration of the uncertainty'.[21] Tolkien, however, would emphatically disagree with Todorov. For Tolkien, fantasy does not depend on hesitation, nor yet on the 'willing suspension of disbelief' espoused by Coleridge, but on Secondary Belief. Tolkien's conception of the 'fantastic' is a 'freedom from the domination of observed "fact"'.[22] Arrogating to himself the power of Humpty Dumpty, he uses the word Fantasy to denote the transference, through what he calls the 'sub-creative art', of images derived from the real world into new shapes imbued with the 'quality of strangeness and wonder' ('OFS', 47). In other words, the governing, rational suppositions of the primary world of the reader are inverted or destabilised in fantasy. As Tolkien makes clear, a consensus concerning reality is necessary if the fantastic is to come into existence. Tolkien's term 'strangeness' can be readily identified with the terms 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarisation', which are central to modern critical thinking. The concept of estrangement originates with Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdung*; Darko Suvin's useful formulation 'cognitive estrangement', generally applied to science fiction but just as relevant to the fantastic, derives from these sources.[23] Tolkien further suggests that the experience of 'imagined wonder' is central to fantasy. Tolkien describes the 'fantastic' as dealing with 'images of things' that are not only 'not actually present', but not to be found in our primary world at all, or 'generally believed not to be found [...] in such small glimpses of it [i.e. the primary world] as are familiar' to most people.[24] And crucially for Tolkien, these

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[20] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981).

[21] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell, 1970).

[22] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 47.

[23] Gary K. Wolfe, *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986).

[24] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 48.

things are created by the 'fantastic device of human language'.[25] Here he uses the term 'fantastic' for human language in general in order to make a strategic point. The fantastic is a means of expressing unreal things; that is, it is free from the dominion of observed, empirical reality, and can therefore be described as the early modern poetic theorists described allegory, as extended metaphor. According to Paul Ricoeur, 'a metaphorical statement proceeds from the violation of semantic rules which determine appropriateness in the application of predicates',[26] so that 'impertinent predicates' displace what is accepted generally as 'pertinent', opening up novel semantic fields. As Barfield observes, the reader absorbs the metaphor, and this enables her to observe what she could not observe before. Creative fantasy, says Tolkien can 'let all the locked things' – that is, everything considered stable and unambiguous – 'fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, [but] free and wild' ('OFS', 59). In other words, the fantastic device of language allows its own mutations, enabling the new to enter existing semantic fields.

Colin Manlove's definition of fantasy also lays stress on the ingredient of wonder, calling fantasy 'a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of [the] supernatural or impossible'.[27] Implicit in Manlove's argument is the idea that the supernatural is evoked by language, for fantasy calls a thing into being by naming it. Many of these features are shared by the Bible. According to Manlove, 'The Bible is not simply the truth: it is a fantastical truth'.[28] By this he means, among other things, that the setting of the biblical Genesis (for instance) is an 'other' world, and that this first book of the scriptures tells the story of humankind's transition from that world to our mundane one. The biblical books of apocalypse, too, such as Daniel and Revelation, deploy dream imagery, prophecy, and fantastical images, including dragons, to convey their message. Even the Gospels, which relate the story of the incarnation and the resurrection, have not been exceeded in the marvels they relate. The human drive to make sense of its experiences propels the seminal narratives of creation, redemption and apocalypse. As in religious or mythical ritual, stories are re-enacted from one generation to the next to keep them alive and meaningful; and as a result, Lewis considered literary re-tellings as in some sense materially participating in what he

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[25] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 59.

[26] Paul Ricouer,'Creativity in Language' in *Philosophy Today*, 17:2 (Summer, 1973), p. 106.

[27] Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 7.

[28] Colin Manlove, 'The Bible in Fantasy' in *Semeia 60: Fantasy and the Bible* (1992), p. 91.

believed to be the one fantastic story that came true, in the sense of acquiring non-verbal substance in the world we inhabit: that of the Bible.

It is hardly surprising, then, if the Bible is a key taproot text for the work of the authors discussed in this thesis – which is just one more proof of its continued power to provoke imaginative response and energise other texts. The centrality of the Christian scriptures to the Western cultural tradition means that for any authors writing in the wake of that tradition the Bible remains the primary text to which they must have recourse when engaging with the doubts raised by post-Darwinian and post-Cartesian epistemologies. The biblical narrative and images can be grotesque, even absurd at times, but they are always challenging and unsettling. These patterns are wrenched from their settings and placed by authors of fantasy in different settings — medieval, romantic, pagan, or contemporary — in their efforts to bring them to bear on the cultural conditions under which they are writing. Whether these authors are trying to extend the biblical narrative or to write a counter-version, it is difficult for them not to engage on one level with biblical language and imagery; and while this may be true of all writers of fiction, it is perhaps particularly so of those who trade in the sorts of impossible events of which certain books of the Bible are so richly composed.

Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) provides a useful taxonomy for fantastic fiction. Her thesis is that the manner in which the fantastic enters any given text has important implications for the way we read the narrative, and offers a crucial insight into the reasons behind the rhetorical choices of the author. A good example is provided by Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. For Mendlesohn, the bulk of these books for children are examples of what she calls 'portal quest' fantasy, whereby a fantastic world is entered through a door or opening in our own; individuals may cross and re-cross the boundary, but magic does not infiltrate the frame world, except temporarily (think of the brief intrusions of Aslan and Jadis in *The Silver Chair* and *The Magician's Nephew*). The fantastic world is interpreted and explained from the point of view of a character from our own world, and the language is descriptive and explanatory, so that the readers are gradually inducted into an understanding of the logic that governs the fantastic universe they have entered. According to Mendlesohn, the reader in portal fantasy is dependent upon the protagonist for describing and decoding the new world they enter; the two movements undergone by reader and protagonist alike are of 'transition' from a mundane world and 'exploration' of a fantastic one. The history of the world in portal quest fantasy – our own world and the other – is presented as fixed and

unarguable.[29] According to Mendlesohn, then, the quest is driven towards a restoration, and not an instauration (make-over) of the world; portal quest fantasy can therefore be seen as a fundamentally reactionary form of fiction.

While Mendlesohn's account of portal-quest fantasy gives a good example of the ideological implications of a certain rhetorical choice made by the fantasy writer in ordering the world he or she creates, and in situating the reader in relation to it, I would suggest that a crucial aspect of this particular form of fantasy is the stress it lays on the moment of liminality. The Latin word *limen* means a threshold, and the crossing of a threshold - especially through a portal between two worlds – can be a disorienting experience, described by the anthropologist Victor Turner as the moment of 'pure potentiality when everything [...] trembles in the balance'.[30] The author and/or narrator relies on the moment of bewilderment – the plunge into a different context - as the central estranging device of the narrative, so that the epistemological indeterminacy of the threshold moment allows the newness of the portal world to be fully experienced. The relationship between this idea and Todorov's moment of hesitation is obvious, and suggests that portal quest fantasy has a potential for radically destabilising its readers' assumptions in a manner not so far removed from Todorov's very particular form of 'fantastic' literature. I shall be arguing that Lewis effectively extends the liminal moment – the crossing of the threshold – throughout his *Narnian Chronicles* by combining different mythical traditions, whose encounters with one another in his text replicates in miniature the first crossing from our world into his secondary creation experienced by the protagonist and reader in tandem. And I shall be suggesting that this repeated experience of liminality has a rather different effect on the reader than the straightforward induction into Christian doctrine intended by Lewis, according to his own accounts of the series.

In Mendlesohn's schema, Le Guin's fantasy sequence set in the imaginary world of Earthsea best fits the criteria for 'immersive' fantasy, which invites the reader into a world whose acceptance of events and situations we understand as 'fantastic' she is asked to share. There is no explanatory narrative; the ironic assumption of realism allows the omniscient narrator an authoritative voice. As Mendlesohn remarks, 'immersive fantasy is both a mirror of mimetic literature and its inner soul'.[31] In other words, it lays bare the strategies used by realism to produce an effect of representing a

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[29] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), pp. 3-18.

[30] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Press, 1982), p. 44.

[31] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. 59.

reality that is 'out there', transparent to language. However, unlike Lewis, Le Guin persistently undermines the authority of the narrator, and her own narrative is presented as one of many possible versions of the events it recounts even as early as her first Earthsea novel.

I will argue that fantasy uses language to build worlds that express, to varying degrees, the belief-systems of the author; but that the rhetorical strategies of the fantasy writer sometimes serve to undermine the logic that is central to these belief-systems. For instance, in his theoretical writings on fantasy Lewis states that the main function of this mode is not to provide excitement, but to create an atmosphere or mood, to induce in the reader a kind of trance akin to a waking dream.[32] When Lewis asks for the 'meddling intellect' to be left aside as these moods are imaginatively absorbed, he seems to be invoking Keats's notion of 'negative capability' - 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.[33] This view of fantasy could be seen as fundamentally inimical to his project of indoctrinating his young readers in Christian theology. Although Lewis's narrator in the *Chronicles of Narnia* gently but firmly coaxes these readers in the right direction, towards the 'correct' or Christian attitude appropriate for each situation he imagines, the moods evoked in his stories can sometimes be resistant to such authoritative mandates, as I shall argue in the first part of this thesis. Le Guin, by contrast, invites a dialogic relationship with her readers. She wants the reader to actively participate in the construction – or deconstruction – of the text. Reading for her is an act of collaboration; her sexual/textual/political ideal is 'Not a rape: a dance'.[34] The second part of my thesis will address the verbal means by which she seeks to establish this collaborative partnership between author and reader.

A comparison of Le Guin's stipulations, or invitations, with the demands of the Bible is illuminating. The biblical text seems to ask much more: in Revelation for example, St. John states: 'And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey'.[35] In this case, the reader of the 'little book' is asked to ingest it, and warned of the different effects it will have on his body. What is the contemporary reader to make of these demands, as compared

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[32] C. S. Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 116-17.

[33] John Keats, *Letters of John Keats to his Family and Friends*, ed. by Sidney Colvin (London: Macmillan, 1925 [1891]), p. 47.

[34] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Matter of Trust' in *The Wave in the Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), p. 231.

[35] *Revelation* 10: 9; see also *Ezekiel* 3: 1-3. All references to the Bible are to the King James Version.

with the invitations to dialogue tendered by Le Guin? It is an interesting coincidence that many authors of fantasy, including both Le Guin and Lewis, compare the use of language to tell stories with the process of weaving a magical spell,[36] with the obvious connotations of control that the metaphor entails. The medium in both cases is words, and it is how they are used, and what they are used for, that gives them their efficacy and power. As Le Guin says, words are events; they make things happen. No story escapes ideology; no spell can be innocent of ideological underpinnings. If this is so, then her fantasy cannot be altogether a dialogue, since it effects certain changes in its reader while remaining largely impervious to any reciprocal transformations that might be effected by the process of reading. We put ourselves under its spell, casting none of our own. Our temporary and unconditional acceptance of its rules, its authority, is a prerequisite for its success.

Le Guin's collaborative fantasy, then, may also function as a potent means of indoctrination, an authoritative textbook; while Lewis's instructive handbooks in the art of being a Christian engage in a dialogue between different mythic and religious traditions that renders them startlingly unpredictable, wayward in a way he might well have been surprised by. Despite the different rhetorical forms they work in, as practitioners of portal quest and immersive fantasy respectively, Lewis and Le Guin share a common commitment to the ambiguous poetic language which Bacon and the Royal Society sought to systematise – that is, to control. And in the end their own lack of systematic control over the language or rhetoric of their fantasies is one of the things that render their work in this medium so endlessly fascinating.

Lewis and Le Guin can also be said to represent two different cultural traditions of fantasy, the British/Irish (Lewis was an Irishman from Belfast) and the American (Le Guin is from California). This may again seem to place them in opposition to one another, but an examination of the two traditions can help to highlight the resemblances as well as the differences between them. I have chosen Lewis as representative of twentieth-century British/Irish fantasy because in his work the fantastic, theological, and mythical discourses interact in particularly subtle and complex ways. Le Guin's work provides many nodes of opposition and resistance to, as well as appropriation or reproduction of, the concerns of the British/Irish tradition. As an American, a fierce ecofeminist (in the later stages of her career), and a woman, she seems an appropriate choice to explore the political implications of language choices and representations in fantasy. Her engagement with the

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[36] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 31; Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory' in *Essay Collection: Faith Christianity and the Church*, ed. by Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 99; Le Guin, 'The Question I Get Asked Most Often' in *The Wave in the Mind*, p. 275.

foundational British/Irish fantasy texts that she perceives as emerging out of patriarchal cultures of dominance is an act of resistance to textual and gendered authority. These intertextual engagements provide provocative inflections aimed at making her readers re-examine their relationship with sacred and secular myths in the contemporary world.

The central concern of these two fantasists is language and its relation to human freedom. Their narratives attempt to show how social control can be effected by controlling and delimiting language. The rhetoric of the master-slave relationship between language and its users, as expressed in the epigraph to this introduction by Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, was an ongoing concern of linguists in the twentieth century. As Barfield pointed out, an immutable language could only lead to establishing systems of uniform thought-patterns, and totalitarian stasis. The powerful discourse and images of the Bible and myth, on the other hand, inspire writers both conservative and radical to engage with them in ways that destabilise the traditions they draw upon, opening up the transformational and revolutionary possibilities within the scriptures and mythologies they reprise. While Lewis tries to align his revisions of these traditions with Christian theology to posit a typological relationship between myth, scripture and story, Le Guin postulates myth as an inherently powerful form that operates at sub-conscious levels to subvert and destabilise normative categories, specially those reinforced by the discourse of institutional religion. In the process both authors make clear that humanity is not embarked upon a one-way cultural journey of linear progress from a crudely 'primitive' state to one of increasing social, intellectual and technological sophistication. For Lewis and Le Guin equally, return and memory are essential for spiritual development, both individual and collective. To resist the rhetoric of linearity is, perhaps paradoxically, to resist the discourse of immutability – the assumption that things change only in certain predetermined ways; and it is as fellow members of this resistance that Lewis and Le Guin find themselves most closely allied as practitioners of literary fantasy.

Part One

The first part of this thesis deals with the creative interaction between the two members of the Inklings discussed above, C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield. Barfield's proposal that early language was 'concrete', in that pre-logical humanity had an experiential connection with the universe which meant that their language was predicated on the unity of material and spiritual existence, led the Inklings to conclude that the language of this early period of human culture reflected certain forms of truth that had since been lost, and was consonant in certain crucial ways with the nature of reality

as they perceived it. In modern times, they held, metaphor could retrieve these lost connections between matter and spirit, the world and the mind, and recover the capacity of language to represent the immaterial.

In Barfield's formulation, metaphor is not merely a literary tool, but has a religious significance – a capacity to reveal aspects of reality that have remained underemphasised, or even unapprehended, until the moment of their utterance, liberating them from their condition of lying dormant under the tyranny of empiricism and positivism generated by the scientific revolution. As such, metaphor is the linguistic tool that can lead to 'revelation', as it mediates the interconnections between God's Word and the human imagination. Lewis (with certain reservations) agrees with Barfield's quasi-religious appreciation of metaphor. For Lewis, the particular potency of fantasy lies in its ability to give concrete, sensory form to what has been revealed by metaphor, generating the radically impossible such as walking, sentient trees, the metamorphosis of humans into dragons, the petrification of living beings, and so on. To achieve this, Lewis draws on disparate narrative traditions in the *Chronicles of Narnia* – scripture, mythologies, fairy and folk tales, the *Arabian Nights* and the *immrama* (Old Irish tales about journeys to the Otherworld) – as a means of making metaphor more intensely present to his readers' senses. He incorporates these traditions in his stories in accordance with a practice he admired in medieval literature, which freely appropriated widely different rhetorical and imaginative traditions in a single text, creating a rich and diverse picture of an integrated universe that was itself only a metaphor for the 'actual' world of the spirit. By this means, Medieval writers implicitly acknowledged that their understanding was limited and that the universe was much more vast and mysterious than could be circumscribed in human understanding at any one point in history. Lewis tries to create something of this effect in his novels. His delight in the reconciliation of disparate philosophies and narrative traditions, all of which have something to contribute to our picture of the way things are, explains the dazzling heterogeneity of his universe. Lewis's aim is explicitly to present a fictional version of Christian apologetics. However, the exhilarating segue of his narrative into carnivalesque disorder repeatedly problematises any systematic reading of the sequence.

I will further examine Lewis's shifting ideological positions vis-à-vis the origins of language and its relationship with physical nature and morality, as revealed in the Narnia series. The series changes as it progresses; but all along his central concern remains to show the development of human consciousness, individual and collective, as mediated by language. In the process he writes a secular Bible, with its own imaginative reworkings of the Christian concepts of creation,

resurrection, Pentecost, redemption and apocalypse. Parallel with this, he stages a return of the pagan gods - choosing the elusive Pan and the raucous Bacchus as the representatives of this return. The encounter between these disparate traditions is what renders the sequence so satisfyingly complex.

Part Two

The second part of my thesis will examine Le Guin's Earthsea series. For her, at least since the 1980s, the project of patriarchal domination – with the white western male at the top of the hierarchy and the rest of the homogenised world arranged in declining order of importance on a grid below – is a constructed image that can be demolished by certain linguistic strategies, which provide counter-moves to the ideological manipulation of language in the service of reason gendered (in the western tradition) white and male. What is fascinating about Le Guin is her acute consciousness from the 1980s that she has herself been complicit with this patriarchal hegemony. In response to this dawning recognition, she re-visioned her own fantasy world of Earthsea after seventeen years, initiating in the process a three-way conversation: between her work and the British/Irish tradition of fantasy, as represented by Lewis and Tolkien; and between her own First and Second Earthsea Trilogies, separated from one another by almost two decades. The language of the First Trilogy tended to reinscribe the binaries it purported to destroy, due to Le Guin's confessed inability to realise that all language choice was politically and ideologically loaded. Even such seemingly innocuous texts as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, she now insists, can become the locus of ferocious power struggles, as embodied in the change of the generic singular pronoun from 'they' to 'he', which unobtrusively encodes a gender hierarchy in language.[37] At the beginning of her career she was inattentive to the ideological implications of such linguistic changes, and barely noticed how these reverberate in thought and action. Her realisation of her unconscious but (for her) culpable complicity with the ideology that promotes patriarchal dominance is first addressed in the inaugural novel of the second Earthsea trilogy, the startling *Tehanu*.

At the same time, there are consistent themes running through both Earthsea trilogies. In her response to the 1975 issue of the journal *Science Fiction Studies* – dedicated to her work, and published after she had finished writing the first trilogy – Le Guin declares that 'The central image/ idea of Taoism is an important thing to be clear about, certainly not because it's a central theme in

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[37] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Preface' in *The Language of the Night* (London and New York: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 1-2.

my work. It's a central theme, period'.[38] I hope to show that even though Le Guin self-confessedly was flying on the 'wings of tradition', by which she means traditional tropes of western literature such as the hero's journey, the cunning of wizards or the wiliness of dragons, and traditional language, with its embedded patriarchal hierarchies, the inherent notion of polarity in Taoism could not be reconciled with this tradition without opening certain very obvious gaps and aporias, even at the very outset of her fantasy sequence. She starts the sequence by exploring her abiding interest in the power of words in the form of names. As later, she is also interested in the concepts of wholeness and balance, which are based in the philosophy of the Tao. As such, her first trilogy is about finding wholeness in the dialectical polarity of darkness and light, male and female, death and life – a quest that continues in the second trilogy, for all its modified political outlook.

Since not much has been written about the Second Trilogy, especially *Tales from Earthsea* and *The Other Wind*, I have chosen to treat it more fully than the first. The three last books of Earthsea present conversations between opposing views and voices, not least of which is the conversation between the two historically situated selves of the author. The central philosophical concept of the first trilogy, that every living being and object in Earthsea has its own unalterable True Name, becomes problematic in the second as Le Guin realises how it conflicts with the teachings of the Tao, which affirms that the world is not made up of finished objects, but exists in a perpetual process of becoming. How are fluid and borderline entities named, if each True name is separate and distinct? Can a world in flux be named with a unique word, a totalising title, an essential identity? As in the second trilogy she unpicks the crudities, so to speak, inherent in the conception of True Speech, she addresses her fall into the phallogocentric discourse of the unambiguous formulation of one referent for one word, and its drive towards absolutist formulations. She moves from de-contextualised power, contained in words, to explore how this power can change when contextualised, in sentences. In the process words become agents rather than fixed entities, as they modify one another in different arrangements and new syntactic structures.

This second part will appraise the way this shift in perspective makes her narrative more consciously preoccupied with the dogmas of doctrinal language. The proselytising narrative of her Christian predecessors drives her to engage more consciously with Biblical themes in the last two books of her second trilogy. As a result, even though her response to theology is overtly hostile and

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[38] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Response to the Le Guin Issue (SFS #7)' in *Science Fiction Studies* 3:1 (March, 1976), pp. 43-46.

she rejects the doctrinal rigidity of organised religion, her views are shaped by theology at a fundamental level.

My conclusion is that authors of fantasy are never quite in control of the language they use to construct their works of art, and that fantasy itself as a genre can be said to encourage this lack of control, surprising its authors as well as its readers by its capacity to articulate positions diametrically opposed to, or profoundly different from, the political and religious positions openly espoused by its authors. The best writers of fantastic fiction may often be aware of and delight in this perversity in the genre they practise – its recalcitrant and uncontrollable nature – and reflect this delight in the constantly shifting language of their successive narratives.

CHAPTER ONE. SYNCRETISM AND PARTICIPATION IN *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*

In the *Chronicles of Narnia* C. S. Lewis appropriates and rewrites many texts, most notably the Bible, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and a number of the medieval texts he mentions in his posthumously published monograph, *The Discarded Image* (1964). His celebrated sequence mingles philosophies (Platonic and Aristotelian), world-views (pagan and Christian), cultures (Northern and middle-eastern), historical periods (medieval and modern), and mythologies (Greek, Pagan, Arabian, Norse and Biblical), with an obvious delight in creating a hybrid intertext. Myth and reality are not presented as discrete, but fused and diffused in a myriad of ways, and the effect of this exuberant fusion is to challenge and unsettle the reader's presuppositions about the relationships between time and place, illusion and reality, fiction and non-fiction, in a number of ways.

Syncretism - which can be described as the interlacing of differing religious or philosophical systems while retaining their heterogeneity, allowing the discrete elements to interact in ways that do not obliterate difference - generates much of the energy of the Narnia stories, although this aspect has been largely ignored by critics, who concern themselves by and large with the Christian message of the sequence. The formal aspect of syncretism allows the fusion of different narrative traditions, enabling the juxtaposition of belief systems through the juxtaposition of stylistic techniques and clusters of metaphors. Much has been made of Lewis's desire, as expressed in his 1956 essay, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said', to 'steal past those watchful dragons' of a reverential atmosphere and the obligatory wish to feel 'religious' in a certain way, so as to convey a religious message without the usual trappings of hushed voices and stained glass associations.[1] But he was also insistent that his stories not be read as crude allegories, having a one-to-one correspondence with some transcendent 'truth'. Moreover, as he himself suggests, a writer 'always has imaginative knowledge of his matter which transcends his conceptual knowledge - something more than he consciously meant will keep creeping in'.[2] This 'something more' emerges repeatedly in the course of the sequence, as the fusion of disparate elements drawn from different mythological semantic fields generates new meaning.

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[1] C. S. Lewis, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said' in *Of This and Other Worlds*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Glasgow: Collins, 1982), p. 73. Hereafter cited as 'SFS'.

[2] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 439.

In his Marion E. Wade lecture of 1977, Owen Barfield stated that Lewis was in love with the imagination, and that for him the most potent product of the imagination was myth.[3] Myth is considered by Lewis to be 'one of the greatest arts',[4] whose meaning lives only in the story, and cannot be stated in conceptual terms without suffering some diminution of its potency. It is 'a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination', as Lewis puts it in *Miracles* (1947),[5] with an intrinsically typological relationship with history. The supreme example of myth that became fact, for Lewis, was the Incarnation. Yet he also avers that the imaginative potency of certain earlier, pagan myths became in effect somewhat depleted by the factual death and resurrection of Christ:

> Just as God, in becoming Man, is 'emptied of His glory', so the truth, when it comes down from the 'heaven' of myth to the 'earth' of history, undergoes a certain humiliation. Hence the New Testament is, and ought to be, more prosaic, in some ways less splendid, than the Old; just as the Old Testament is and ought to be less in many kinds of imaginative beauty than the Pagan mythologies [...] the story of Christ demands from us, and repays, not only a religious and historical but also an imaginative response. (161)

Although Lewis insists that the story of Christ demands and repays imaginative response, he is not sure that the actuality of the story, its condition as fact rather than myth, would be able to sustain and energise the imagination, in its turn. He questions, in an essay called 'Is Theology Poetry?' (1944), the validity of an imaginative response to matters of belief. 'May it not even be that there is something in belief that is hostile to perfect imaginative enjoyment?', he inquires.[6] The human intellect, Lewis avers, is 'incurably abstract', so that experiential reality quickly sinks into mere instances and examples the moment it is subjected to intellectual scrutiny. As Keats says, 'Do not all charms fly/ At the mere touch of cold philosophy?'[7] But Lewis insist that 'In the enjoyment

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[3] Owen Barfield, 'Lewis, Truth and Imagination' in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 1989), p. 98.

[4] C. S. Lewis, 'Preface' to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, ed. by C. S. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), p. 16.

[5] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Collins, 1947).

[6] C. S. Lewis, 'Is Theology Poetry' in *They Asked For A Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p. 152.

[7] John Keats, 'Lamia', Part 2, ll. 229-230 in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems 1820* (Yorkshire: Scolar, 1970), p. 41.

of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction'.[8] Barfield suggests that this doubt of a mutual sustainability between imaginative enjoyment and belief is what made Lewis hesitant to make any clear systematic statements about his views on the relationship between imagination and truth. This apparent paradox in Lewis, which makes Barfield aver that there are 'two Lewises', problematise his avowed intentions of getting past watchful dragons to present a Christian message in the Narnia series. This is especially pertinent because his own eventual acceptance of Christianity was brought about by an understanding of a typological relationship between myth and history, and he attempts to represent that in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. In the process it becomes clear that typological appropriation does not always work unproblematically, as we shall see.

1.1. Typology: Myth, History and Story

As I have already hinted, Lewis understood the relationship between myth and history to be a typological one. A. C. Charity defines typology as the study of the 'quasi-symbolic relations which one event may appear to bear to another - especially, but not exclusively, when these relations are the analogical ones existing between events which are taken to be one another's "prefiguration" and "fulfilment"'.[9] More precisely, for Lewis, the relationship between myth and history was one of the historical 'fulfilment' of ancient mythical 'prefigurations' in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. In his book *The Inklings*, Humphrey Carpenter relates the now famous episode of Lewis's conversion to Christianity as a recognition of this relationship between myth and history.[10] During a conversation in 1931, his friend Tolkien showed Lewis that the beauty that had moved him in pagan myths of dying and resurrected gods, such as Balder or Osiris, and the truth and meaning he discerned in such myths, were equally available in the story of Christ.

Because of this understanding of a dialectical typology between myth and history, and the affective power of myths as conveyors of truth, Lewis conferred a special status on stories - especially on the genre of fairy-tale or fantasy (he often used the terms interchangeably). One of the common threads in the non-fiction of Tolkien and Lewis is their view of mythopoeic stories as 'good-spells', or secular Gospels, a form of narrative that provides analogies – anticipatory or retrospective – for the life of Christ. In his 1938 Andrew Lang lecture, 'On Fairy-Stories', later

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[8] Lewis, 'Myth Became Fact' in *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, p. 140.

[9] A. C. Charity, *Events and their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 1.

[10] Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London: HarperCollins, 1978, 1981), pp. 42-45.

published as an essay in the mini-anthology *Tree and Leaf* (1964),[11] Tolkien states that 'The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels - particularly artistic, beautiful, and moving'.[12] This points to the *eucatastrophic* function of fantasy, which brings a message of hope, and a subversion of the status quo as embodied both in external hegemonic systems and in internalised convictions about the nature of reality.

Myths, for Lewis, were (in theological terms) types (that is foreshadowings or prefigurements) of the antitype, or fulfilment of God's self-revelation in the Bible, a fulfilment which supersedes all the types that foreshadowed it. The supreme antitype, of course, is Christ, whose birth in the New Testament constitutes the substance of which all Old Testament types are shadows, giving retrospective meaning to such incidents as Jonah's liberation from the belly of the whale, which is a type or foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection from death. In a post-Enlightenment intellectual context where rationalism is the only acceptable mode of knowledge, Lewis felt acutely the need to proselytise about the value of the types provided by myth, which embodied what he felt was mythopoeic truth: that is, a form of truth that could only inhere in stories. His project in his fiction was in effect a secular rewriting of the Bible, which aimed to fill the gap created by the post-Enlightenment repudiation of the Bible as a sacred, revealed text.

Language played a central role in the fulfilment of this project, for both Barfield and Lewis perceived language as *the* creative force. Following the Fourth Gospel, which situates the Word at the beginning of Creation, Lewis felt that the creative ability of the poet as maker (in prose or verse) was an extension of the creative power of God, who created man in his image. His acceptance of the basic tenets of Barfield's arguments about the inherently metaphorical nature of language, the creative and epistemological role of the imagination, and the intrinsic interconnectedness of language, myth and human consciousness, energises Lewis's texts in striking ways, as I hope to show.

1.2. Language Control

Barfield and Lewis were intensely interested in the origin and historical development of language(s), and the semantic evolution of words. Barfield's first published work was *History in*

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[11] Tolkien wrote 'On Fairy-Stories' in 1938 for the Andrew Lang Lecture in St Andrews University. This was expanded and published in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (1947). The revised and further expanded edition in its final form was published in *Tree and Leaf* in 1964.

[12] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 72.

English Words (1926), in which he traces the etymologies of several words in an effort to demonstrate, as he puts it, that 'In our language alone, not to speak of its many companions, the past history of humanity is spread out in an imperishable map, just as the history of the mineral earth lies embedded in the layers of its outer crust [...] Language has preserved for us the inner, living history of our soul. It reveals the evolution of consciousness'.[13] In a similar vein, Lewis wrote *Studies in Words* (1960), which he claimed was a compilation from years of notes he used while teaching at Oxford. In it he traces the etymologies of Old English words, in an effort to make people aware of how 'ancient, fragile, and (well used) immensely potent instruments [...] words are'.[14]

Lewis's scholarly work as well as his fictional projects enabled him to acquire a vast fund of knowledge relating to the semantic history of languages, and the changes in world-views this historical trajectory demonstrated. For Barfield and Lewis the universe was a theophany — a self-revelation of God; and language was a creative force, its creativity emanating from the primal Word alluded to in John's Gospel, the *logos* that brought the world into being. In this context, history was a gradual unfolding of God's Word, and the world a book that would continue to be written till it was 'folded up like a scroll' (Isa: 34:4, Rev 6:14). The overarching metanarrative of the Bible can be divided into four elements: creation, fall, redemption and apocalypse.[15] In Barfield's view, expressed in his seminal book *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (1957) the history of language itself replicates this narrative, and can be similarly broken down into four elements: the transition of words from a former unity with what they signify (creation) to a sundering from their referents (fall), followed by the expectation of a reunification of word with meaning (redemption) at some point in the future, which will be brought about by a linguistic renewal (apocalypse). As an admirer of Barfield's work, Lewis understood fairy stories as being inextricably intertwined with the quadripartite structure of the Bible and linguistic history. And in the modern world, newly composed fairy stories could participate in this quadripartite narrative, becoming the site both for its reiteration and explication – that is, introducing the movement from creation and fall to redemption and apocalypse for current generations.

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[13] Owen Barfield, *History in English Words* (Gt. Barrington, MA..: Lindisfarne, 1967), p. 18.

[14] C. S. Lewis, *Study in Words*, 2nd. edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, 1967), p. 6.

[15] See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1971), for details of this Romantic gloss on the Biblical metanarrative.

Lewis's effort to reclaim language was not a nostalgic but an iconoclastic endeavour, an effort to break the prevalent images (idols) of reality and offer a space for new possibilities from within the new and unfamiliar semantic fields that metaphor could reveal - meanings which could often surprise the writer as much as the reader. Therefore, a tension exists in Lewis's work between creating new meanings and reinstating traditional ones; between recuperating mythic symbolism and rejuvenating Christian ones. His stories are at times subversive of their own enterprise, eluding authorial intention through the proliferation of multivocal meanings generated by the metaphors and tropes from heterogeneous traditions they deploy, marking fantasy as a hybrid and deviant genre that escapes generic categorisations. As a consequence, his fantasy is a palimpsest of multiple and even contradictory hermeneutical explorations, rooted in his own understanding of his stories as interventions in the ongoing typological relationship between myths, legends, folklore, and fairy-tales on the one hand, and the Bible on the other.

1.3. Barfield's Influence on Lewis

Lewis and Barfield have both testified to the fact that their ideas and views developed together, each thinker owing a profound debt to the other for the arguments, written and verbal, which helped to form and mature their thoughts on important issues. *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (1928) is dedicated to 'C. S. Lewis: Opposition is true friendship'. Lewis's own first major scholarly work, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), is dedicated to 'Owen Barfield: Wisest and Best of My Unofficial Teachers'. The argument in *The Allegory of Love* takes Barfield's premise for granted, and the reader is referred to Barfield's books for further details. Lewis and Barfield's arguments about the epistemic significance of imagination are recorded in the letters they exchanged mostly between 1925-1927, published as *C. S. Lewis' Great War with Owen Barfield* (1978). Lewis was in agreement with most of the ideas in Barfield's book *Saving the Appearances,* about the nature and development of human consciousness and its relationship with the external world, as is evident from his detailed discussion of it in a letter dated 27 March, 1956, written after reading the text in manuscript.[16] Even by the time Lewis wrote *The Abolition of Man* (1944), he remained convinced of the effects of abstract thought on language[17] and human consciousness. That Lewis was largely in agreement with Barfield, eventually if not initially, is revealed in his letters, essays, books and

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[16] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 724.

[17] Lewis mentions both Goethe and Rudolf Steiner - strong influences on Barfield's work - as examples of a 'regenerate science' that would recognise the intrinsic connectedness between all life forms and organic and inorganic matter on the planet, in *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944), p. 79.

lectures, and needs to be gleaned carefully from scattered sources to form a coherent argument. The *Chronicles of Narnia* embody these ideas more potently and consistently than his other writings, in large part no doubt because of their greater reliance on the imaginative faculty.

Lewis alludes to Barfield's concept of an 'ancient semantic unity'[18] in his letters, the phrase indicating that language was initially concrete and figurative, and gradually evolved into literal and abstract meanings. This proposal needs to be considered in some detail in order to understand why and how it had such a great effect on Lewis's writing.

1.4. Figuration and Metaphor

According to Barfield, primitive humanity discerned what he called 'unified meanings' in the world around them, in that a number of concepts which are now perceived as separate – in particular the modern distinction between the physical and the spiritual – were understood as indistinguishable, with language reflecting this lack of distinction between them. For Barfield the historical trajectory of language is from this initial unity to the diversity we experience today, from 'homogeneity towards dissociation and multiplicity'.[19] This process of diversification can be exemplified by the changing fortunes of the Latin word *spiritus* (Greek *pneuma*), which is now rendered as *either* breath *or* wind *or* spirit. According to Victorian philologists such as Friedrich Max Müller, the earliest meaning of this word was literal and physical, that is wind; later, when people wanted to name the human breath, and the principle of life, they abstracted the analogy with wind, and used the same term to describe all three. But Barfield refutes this as an instance of imposing post-logical thought on pre-logical humanity. Actually, Barfield insists, pre-logical thinking was a different form of thinking altogether from our own, and the phenomena perceived by its practitioners were also different. The word *spiritus*, then, did not mean wind *or* breath *or* spirit separately; neither did it mean all three together. It had an 'old, concrete, undivided meaning'[20], which was its '*own, old peculiar meaning*'.[21] This ancient semantic unity stemmed from a different way of understanding and describing the speaker's relationship to the world she inhabited.

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[18] Carpenter, *The Inklings*, p. 42.

[19] Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 4th, edn. (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010 [1928]), p. 73. See also Northrop Frye, *Words with Power* (San Diego: Harvest, 1990), pp. 72-73.

[20] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 71.

[21] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 73. Original emphasis

Barfield's *Poetic Diction* anticipates his theory of the evolution of consciousness, expressed in more detail in his book *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*. In *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield does no less than insist on what Thomas Kuhn calls a paradigm shift [22] - an overthrow of the 'common-sense' world view to embrace the view of reality revealed by twentieth-century physicists. Imagination, for Barfield as for Lewis, is a creative faculty, and he emphasises its role in the creation of the familiar world as we perceive it, basing his account on the discoveries of what he terms modern physics.

As early as 1911, Ernest Rutherford, the famous physicist, had postulated that the atom consisted of a very small positively charged nucleus orbited by electrons, a discovery that must have helped strengthen Barfield's theory that 'reality', as we experience it in the phenomenal world around us, is created by the human imagination. What is 'really there', the atomic (or sub-atomic) structure of the universe, exclusive of human consciousness, is termed by Barfield 'particles' or the 'unrepresented'. He explicates in detail the difference between this structure of the universe and the phenomena (Greek for 'appearances') that are presented by that structure to human consciousness.[23] The perceptions of our sense-organs are related to these particles, but our 'percepts' or sense-data must remain a fragmented jumble of meaningless sensations without some form of active human participation; another activity is necessary before they can be transformed into the familiar phenomena we experience. This activity Barfield calls 'Figuration', the combination and construction of the particles into recognisable objects. Figuration and naming occur simultaneously - they are in fact the same thing, as Barfield insists: 'speech and nature [phenomena] came into being along with one another'.[24] Therefore, there is a semantic unity between the name and the thing - which, it must be remembered, is not the supersensible 'unrepresented' particles, but the appearance, or representation, constructed by Figuration. Barfield calls these appearances 'collective representations', that is, consensual figurations of things, or the shared experience of reality. Only the 'unrepresented' (that is, the particles) exist independently of collective consciousness and therefore of human language. Barfield insists that 'the mind first creates what it

22 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th edn. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012 [1962]), pp. 10-17.

23 Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry,* 2nd. edn. (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1965, 1988), p. 12. Hereafter cited as *SA*.

24 Barfield, *SA*, p. 123.

perceives as objects'.[25] The 'data' that science claims to deal with are no more than bare percepts, Barfield tells us, and 'The rest is imagination'. [26]

Barfield distinguishes between two modes of metaphor, based on the evolution of human consciousness and language. Early humanity had what he calls a 'participatory' consciousness, incapable of abstract thinking. The 'seemingly fundamental distinction between self and the world'[27] did not exist for primitive humanity, and their thinking was a simultaneous thinking-perceiving, in effect an unselfconscious *participation* in the creation of meaning with what we now call nature. This basic meaning-creation he terms 'Figuration', to distinguish it from the more conscious activity involved in making poetic metaphors, and to stress the 'pictorial form' of these earlier, unitary meanings participated in by human beings. This process of Figuration discerned the intrinsic interrelatedness of human consciousness and the structures of the universe. Barfield states that 'Men do not invent those mysterious relations between separate external objects, and between objects and feelings or ideas, which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought but of any individual thinker'[28] — that is, while primitive humanity perceived these unities as 'direct perceptual experience', modern humanity cannot see 'this one *as* one'.[29] Barfield describes 'participation' as 'the extra-sensory relation between man and the phenomena',[30] that is, as a kind of immaterial connection between the percipient and what he or she perceives. Primitive men were aware of this extra-sensory link, so their participation is termed 'original participation' by Barfield. He explains: 'The essence of original participation is that there stands behind the phenomena *and on the other side of them from me*, a represented which is of the same nature as me'.[31] This 'represented' has been given various names, like mana (life-force), gods, demons, God, or Spirit: whatever the name, the 'represented' was considered to be equally immanent in nature and man; or, to put it another way, the self and the phenomena were felt to be derived from a common source, and linked to that source in a supersensible way. Pre-logical thought was emphatically *not* based on cause and effect relationships: primitive man's mind was not

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[25] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 19.

[26] Ibid., p. 19.

[27] Ibid., p. 206.

[28] Ibid., p. 79.

[29] Ibid., p. 79. Added emphasis.

[30] Barfield, *SA*, p. 40.

[31] Ibid., p. 42.

a tabula rasa, looking at the same phenomena as us and then peopling them with gods, as Max Müller, for example, suggested. Instead it existed in an entirely different environment, made up of humans, animals and gods, all of which are in conversation, and the inanimate objects with which all three of these interacted.

As consciousness evolved, says Barfield, so did 'collective representations'. Humanity became capable of theoretical thinking - which Barfield calls 'alpha-thinking' - and man and nature were polarised. However, this polarity, which was the means to man's self-consciousness, still retained traces of 'original participation', which survived until the end of the Middle Ages and even beyond. It was the scientific revolution[32] that created a complete disjunction between subject and object, so that man and nature became completely disconnected. Barfield calls this the 'Cartesian sword-thrust between matter and spirit',[33] made possible by 'beta-thinking' or reflective thinking, characterised by the ability to think about the nature of thought.

Lewis demonstrates that this dichotomy between subject and object was absent in the Middle Ages, and that 'original participation' prevailed, in his book *The Discarded Image* (1964). He calls man 'a cross-section of being', because every mode of being in the whole universe contributes to him.[34] Man was a microcosm, and the macrocosm – that is, the whole universe – was connected by 'certain sympathies, antipathies, and strivings inherent in matter itself',[35] so that there was a reciprocal participation between man and the universe, an integration which is represented in *The Chronicles of Narnia* – as in early modern poems such as John Davies's *Orchestra* (1596) – through the image of a dance. The language of the Middle Ages too, Lewis agrees, 'continually suggests a sort of continuity between merely physical events and our most spiritual aspirations'.[36]

Poets, Barfield believes, can recuperate these forgotten relationships; and as far as they do, they create 'true metaphors'. An example of true metaphor is the word 'shine', meaning both pure human thinking and the physical light, which exemplifies one of those early unitary meanings that

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[32] The scientific revolution was so named by Alexandre Koire in 1939, to denote the period of fundamental changes in scientific outlook which started at the end of the sixteenth century and continued to the end of the eighteenth. Barfield refers to Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science, 1300–1800* for a comprehensive overview.

[33] Owen Barfield, 'Matter, Imagination and Spirit', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42: 4 (Dec., 1974), p. 626. Rpt. in *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays* (San Rafael, CA..: The Barfield Press, 1977), pp. 163-176.

[34] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 153. Hereafter cited as *TDI*.

[35] Lewis, *TDI*, p. 92.

[36] Ibid., p. 94.

'appear in the world without individualised human effort', as 'immediate realities'.[37] But in the post-Cartesian world an individualised, conscious effort is required to perceive unities or connections between things or concepts that are understood by the rest of the world to be different. True metaphor, then, gives access to the reality now lost, inviting and enabling us to participate in the unity that resides in the structure of existence.

When a 'representation' is not experienced as such, that is, as a 'representation', but is thought to be independent of the human mind (alpha-thinking), it becomes, in Barfield's terms, an 'idol'. The human mind ceases to be aware of its own participation in the creation of the phenomena, and of the 'universal Mind' that is common between man and nature, and becomes incapable of apprehending the spiritual plane that intersects with the material world at many points. With progressive alpha-thinking, the disjunction between subject and object became more and more pronounced. As self-consciousness developed, what was thought to be 'on the other side of the phenomena' gradually came to be considered as existing inside man. As nature is depleted of spirit, the spirit is internalised. Lewis calls this 'that great movement of internalisation, and that consequent aggrandisement of man and desiccation of the outer universe in which the psychological history of the West has so largely consisted' (*TDI*, p. 42). It must be made clear that Barfield considers this a necessary step in the evolution of consciousness, which has to achieve a self-conscious imaginative impulse - that is, the human mind needs to become aware of its creative activity.[38] Beta-thinking - thinking about these 'representations' in relation to our own mind - can, in time, allow a liberation of images (idols) - an endeavour initiated, but not fulfilled by the Romantics.

The second kind of metaphor, termed 'accidental metaphor' by Barfield, is useful for exposition or creating a visual image, which can be 'delightful' and even 'influential in the evolution of language'. It is based on a 'synthesis of ideas rather than on immediate cognition of reality',[39] that is, on an artificial conjoining of already fixed notions or ideas. In other words, true metaphor is an imaginative understanding of the relationships and unities pervading nature and human consciousness; while false metaphor is a hypostatisation of ideas formed by tautological thinking processes.

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[37] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 81; p. 85.

[38] Owen Barfield, 'Preface to the Second Edition', *Poetic Diction*, 4th. edn. (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010 [1928]), p. 19.

[39] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, pp. 197-98.

Barfield's conception of Figuration and metaphor-making derives ultimately from Coleridge's Primary and Secondary Imagination as expressed in *Biographia Literaria* (1815-17). Barfield's notion of Figuration is analogous to the workings of Coleridge's Primary Imagination, which is 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, [...] a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'.[40] According to Barfield's interpretation of this famous formulation, the primal act of creation is 'God's projection of his own "alterity"',[41] which is a unity as well as a progression, for God remains one even as the Word is uttered and manifest as creation. Initially, humanity perceives everything as participating in the Logos, not as self and other but as a continuum of being. That is, the substance of reality, which in scientific terms is waves or sub-atomic particles, achieves actuality by a double process - the sense-datum is received by the senses; imagination acts on these data to create objects or things. The phenomenon 'only achieves full reality (*actus*) in the moment of being "named" by man'.[42] But in the course of history, says Barfield, the 'Divine Word has been gradually clothing itself with the humanity it first gradually created'[43] - that is, a process of internalisation has been going on through which Logos is now perceived by an individual as within herself. This process, according to Barfield, is mediated by language.

The Secondary Imagination, states Coleridge, is 'an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create' (*BL*, 313). The poet as 'maker' or creator sets this act in motion. Barfield notes that 'When individual man, having achieved self-consciousness, returns to the making of poetry, the secondary imagination is at work on the making [...] of meaning. And as the secondary imagination makes meaning, so the primary imagination makes "things". There is no other thinghood'.[44] The sub-sensible (or supersensible) atomic world is all that exists if human participation is excluded.

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[40] S. T. Coleridge, 'Biographia Literaria', Chapter XIII, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. by H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 313. Hereafter cited as *BL*.

[41] Owen Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* (San Rafael, CA..: The Barfield Press, 1971), p. 147.

[42] Barfield, *SA*, p. 85.

[43] Ibid., p. 127.

[44] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 22.

1.5. Poetic Diction: The Poetic and the Prosaic

For the purposes of my argument it would also be useful to explore the difference between logical or discursive and poetic or metaphorical language, as understood by Barfield. This is important because the Inklings members believed that the structure of the 'real' was expressed in poetic language, and their fiction explores the relationship between the real and the unreal at two levels. At one level, they posit their fantasy as manifestly unreal, creating worlds and inhabitants only within language; on the other, they suggest implicitly that the poetic language they deploy apprehends the underlying structure of an objective reality, and in so doing, changes the 'real' world as well as language itself. In other words, 'fallen' or fragmented language can be redeemed by poetic use, to counter the fall in some sense. In his essay 'Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction' (1945), Barfield tells us that the 'logical use of language presupposes the meanings of the words it employs and presupposes them [to be] constant'.[45] Logical propositions, therefore, cannot create new meaning. On the other hand, simile, metaphor and symbol, which Barfield says are different forms of figurative language, make one thing stand for another. A simile says that *A* is like *B*; a metaphor says that *A* is *B*, suppressing the words 'like' or 'as' to foreground the comparison. In symbolic language, the element of comparison is dropped still further, so that *B* is spoken of without any overt reference to *A*. Since metaphor stands in the middle of this gamut, Barfield uses 'metaphor' for all figurative speech. Metaphor, then, by removing the conventions of predication, reveals unapprehended comparisons and contrasts between apparently heterogeneous things and concepts, thus effectively creating new meaning, as logic cannot.

Barfield notes that modern abstract ideas are derived from old concrete meanings, which contained within them the potential for later significations. The rational human faculty splits up the older, concrete meanings, producing separate meanings which then get crystallised as dictionary definitions. The rational principle in thought is based upon the repetition of the same meanings, rather than the interplay of alternatives. The poetic faculty, or imagination, ruptures these ossified meanings by wrenching a word out of its habitual context and into a new relationship with the words around it, dismantling established notions of fixities in reality and removing the film of familiarity to reveal new ways of seeing. As Barfield puts it, 'The world, like Dionysus, is torn to pieces by pure intellect; but the poet is Zeus; he has swallowed the heart of the world; and he can

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[45] Owen Barfield, 'Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction' in *The Rediscovery of Meaning* (San Rafael, CA: The Barfield Press, 1977), p. 68. This essay was first published in Dorothy Sayers ed. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 1945.

reproduce it as a living body'.[46] In other words, metaphor allows an escape from predisposed views of reality, for example Lewis's re-presentation of trees as Dryads.

Barfield calls these opposing impulses in language the poetic and the prosaic. The poetic is 'the principle of living unity' and it observes the resemblances between things; the prosaic 'marks the differences'.[47] The pivotal role of language in the creation of meaning is dependent upon the polarity of linguistic development: on the one hand language seeks out unities and analogies (poetic) while on the other hand it seeks to particularise more and more, dividing and splitting meaning into exceedingly precise terms (prosaic). Polarity is neither identity nor contradiction, for 'polar contraries [...] exist by virtue of each other as well as at each other's expense'.[48] Within this dynamic interaction, 'the contraries can and do transform into each other, back and forth', and the 'predominate pole never ceases to require its opposite pole to be predominating'.[49]

While not using the Barfieldian term 'evolution of consciousness', Lewis was concerned about the change that had occurred in consciousness from primeval to modern times, and about the concomitant process of 'internalisation', where the process of evolution of consciousness seemed to be at a standstill in the post-war world – or to be degenerating into the sort of consciousness that sees only 'disjointed impression[s] made by the surface of life upon the senses and the surface of the mind', manifesting itself in the withdrawal, detachment and disillusionment of the human spirit, as demonstrated in Modernist poetry (*PD*, 28). In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis states that analytical thinking (Barfield's 'alpha-thinking'), which led to the perception of a dichotomy between self and object, had the further repercussion of inducing man to dominate 'Nature': in this context the word Nature signifying the world of objects about which man does not make any value judgements, and treats in terms of quantity rather than quality. Thus the 'total reaction' of man towards Nature has become fragmented.[50] But, claims Lewis, our analytical power comes at a price, for as soon as 'original participation' stops,

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[46] Barfield,*Poetic Diction*, p.81.

[47] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 80.

[48] Barfield, *Speaker's Meaning* (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 2011), p. 22.

[49] Richard A. Hocks, 'Tradition and Talent in Coleridge and Eliot' in Shirley Sugerman ed. *Evolution of Consciousness: Studies in Polarity* (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 2008), p. 86.

[50] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944), p. 70. Hereafter cited as *AoM*.

> We do not look at trees as Dryads [...] while we cut them into beams: the first man who did
> so may have felt the price keenly, and the bleeding trees in Virgil and Spencer may be far-off
> echoes of that primeval sense of impiety. The stars lost their divinity as astronomy
> developed, and the Dying God has no place in chemical agriculture [...] It is not the greatest
> of modern scientists who feel most sure that the object, stripped of its qualitative properties
> and reduced to mere quantity, is wholly real [...] The great minds know very well that the
> object, so treated, is an artificial abstraction, that something of its reality has been lost.
> (*AoM*, p. 70-71)

The reductionism latent in the thinking of trees, stars and so on as mere objects, as opposed to earlier, participatory thinking, has not had wholly beneficial results, Lewis maintains. Consciousness has evolved to make new 'discoveries' about nature, space and man, but not all these discoveries can be said to add to the knowledge of reality as Lewis perceives it. As is obvious in the above quotation, Lewis believes that earlier consciousness, what Barfield terms 'participatory' consciousness, might have apprehended reality in more meaningful ways than post-scientific man is capable of. Ironically, says Lewis, this process of reduction culminates in man being reduced to an object of analysis - as thought processes are imputed to chemical activity in the physical brain - and the abstraction Man can lead only to nihilism: deprived of values and qualities, as earlier Nature was deprived, Man too becomes an object for manipulation. As long as humans were reducing Nature to 'idols', and imputing to these an existence independent of human perception, they felt able to manipulate Nature, to control it for their own use. But what would be the final step in this process? Lewis deems it quite possible that the final conquest will be of our own species, and that 'as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same'. Our language, argues Lewis, is saturated with the effects of this idol-making, marking the modern age as steeped in prosaic language. The way out of this dilemma, he proposes, is a reassessment of our scientific discoveries, a consciousness that 'the "natural object" produced by analysis and abstraction is not reality'.[51] Rather, a conscious effort to catalyse the poetic impulse in language is required in order to redress the meaninglessness that threatens to pervade individual and communal lives. Barfield maintains that natural objects can still be participated with, although with the evolution of consciousness this participation will be different: it will be conscious, so that

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51 Lewis, *AoM*, p. 71, 74, 79.

the 'representations' figured forth by the imagination can be channelled through a universal moral system, which is the phrase used by Lewis to describe his own idiosyncratic version of the Tao.[52] This new participation has been termed 'Final Participation' by Barfield.

The brutal sway of entrenched notions of what is real and what is unreal is established by language; and ironically, language itself provides the most potent resistance to these conventionally established meanings. Robert W. Funk, who explores the nature of metaphor in his work on parables, cites approvingly Barfield's perception that metaphor creates meaning. The raw material for metaphor is language; the 'something new' that is to be created must draw upon this raw material. As the new enters language, it modifies and mutates language, allowing words to escape from the cages of referential totality into which tradition binds them, so that as Tolkien says, a gem can stand for a flower, or a flame. However, poetic language itself, in evoking in the poets' minds unorthodox or unofficial ways of expression, allows the new meaning to be discerned. Language, as Funk says, invites its own deformation by 'refusing its total complicity'[53] in established forms and meanings. Metaphor resists the tyranny of tradition that has petrified meanings, producing 'idols'; the poet is the 'true creator, the maker of meaning itself'.[54] Lewis demonstrates both the prosaic and the poetical impulse of language in his fiction, with the prosaic actualised as frozen Narnia, the poetic as midnight dances between heterogeneous Narnian creatures. Often, the trope of dance and song is used to show how the poetic can disrupt the prosaic, or even to hold the two up in contrast. For example, in *The Silver Chair* (1953) we are shown the Green Witch's dominion of controlled Earthmen, who expressionlessly repeat a single sentence; and when the kingdom dissolves, the same creatures are shown dancing and singing, floating down to fiery Bism, where gems can be squeezed for juice, and one can enjoy the wit and eloquence of fiery salamanders.

To better understand Lewis's view of poetic language and its relation to reality, I will now briefly discuss Lewis's concept of Transposition.

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[52] Lewis's concept of Tao is not related to the philosophy of Tao as propounded by Lao Tzu, and that informs Le Guin's fiction, as demonstrated in Part Two. Rather, Lewis proposes a universal, syncretic moral system he invents from a collection of moral maxims from Hindu, Medieval, Chinese and other ideological systems.

[53] Robert W. Funk, *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays*, ed. by Bernard Brandon Scott (California: Polebridge Press, 2006), p. 35.

[54] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 101.

1.6. Lewis: Transposition and Imagination

Lewis's sermon 'Transposition', read out at Mansfield College Oxford in 1949, and later published in *They Asked For A Paper* (1962), is extremely important for an understanding of his views on the role of the imagination in the apprehension of meaning. '"Transposition" amounts in my view,' asserts Barfield, 'to a theory of imagination, in which imagination is not mentioned'.[55] According to Lewis, there is a supersensible, transcendent reality – one that cannot be directly apprehended by the senses – which can nevertheless be apprehended through sensible verbal, visual or physical symbols. Using the analogy of emotions and their effects on the sensations, Lewis tries to explain the correlation between spirit (supersensible) and matter (perceived by senses): as emotions are more complex than sensations, the same sensation accompanies a variety of emotions, for example a flutter in the stomach in moments of pleasure as well as anguish. That is because, asserts Lewis, 'If the richer system is to be represented in the poorer at all, this can only be by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning'.[56] The example Lewis gives is an instance when both the simple systems (the five senses) and the complex system (emotions) are known, and we can see why physical limitations make it necessary that we should have the same sensation for a variety of emotions. But, claims Lewis, that is not all. The flutter *is* pleasurable in one instance and unpleasant in another: the sensation *becomes* the emotion it signifies. In other words, the 'higher' or more complex reality can be 'participated' in (Barfield's term) by the 'lower' or simpler one. The signified interpenetrates the sign so that they both become one, making it a sacramental relationship. Lewis calls this process Transposition.

In a sacramental relationship, the signified 'descends bodily [...] and digests, transforms, transubstantiates [the sign]'.[57] A necessary corollary for understanding the process of Transposition might be, then, to know the 'higher' or more complex and subtle medium that is being transposed into the 'lower' or simpler one. When the spiritual world is represented in the symbols of the natural world, only a person who approaches 'from above, or from inside'[58] can discern what is being represented - which is not as impossible as we might at first assume, because the spiritual world, asserts Lewis, is somehow known to man, and is present to him in the longing or desire that formed

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[55] Barfield, 'Lewis, Truth and Imagination', p. 103.

[56] C. S. Lewis, 'Transpositions' in *They Asked For A Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p. 171.

[57] Lewis, 'Transpositions', p. 173.

[58] ibid., p. 75.

such a vital part of Lewis's own imaginative life, and which he termed 'joy'.[59] Herein, as Barfield affirms, is encapsulated Lewis's theory of the relation of imagination to truth, since it makes clear that he sees imagination as the tool of religious faith. A person, alleges Lewis, who approaches the phenomenon of Transposition from the 'lower medium', in other words without imagination, 'sees all the facts but not the meaning'.[60] For Lewis such a state of consciousness - a state in which the bulk of readers find themselves - can only lead to severe reductionism. In simpler terms, imaginative thinking can provide a glimpse of the supersensual reality through the symbols of our natural world; and at times this supersensual reality actually interpenetrates the symbols, creating what Lewis calls a sacramental bond. For Lewis, the spiritual and the material, the mind and the body, have a transpositional relationship - the two planes of existence have multiple interconnections, which he presents as doorways to other realms in the Narnia series, just as the words of his story are doorways through which his readers can pass in order to engage in an imaginative experience.

For Lewis, a clear analogue exists in the relationship between the material and spiritual world and the one that exists between a story and the world beyond it - the readers' world. Reading, for Lewis, could be an act of transposition. The interaction between story and reader has transformational potential. Lewis describes such an experience in personal terms by claiming that his imagination was 'baptised' after reading George MacDonald's novel *Phantastes*.[61] And out of the three instances he relates when he experienced the intense stab of joy which is analogous with a spiritual longing, in two cases the initial stimulus is literary: reading Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin*, and encountering a line from Longfellow's translation of 'Tegner's Drapa'. The relationship is not of two discrete formal entities encountering one another, but one of actually interpenetrating forms of reality. A good example of this is found in the last book of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle* (1956), where the faun Mr Tumnus describes reality as an onion, with the layers getting larger the further in you go. In other words, the spiritual and material worlds are enwrapped like layers of an onion, so that the material world provides a means of entering the spiritual world. Lewis's own reading experience exemplifies this process. He says that while reading *Phantastes,* 'I saw the bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting

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[59] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy* (London: HarperCollins, 1955). Hereafter cited as *SBJ*.

[60] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 180.

[61] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 209.

there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged'.[62] This was for Lewis the seminal instance of transposition.

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, characters who are familiar with stories are much better aligned with the world they find themselves in, and better able to identify archetypal good and bad characters, than the hard-line rationalists. For Lewis, the flat world of Narnia is analogous to the physical book: entry into both these territories is a transformative experience. Not only does the flat world – both Narnia and the book – morph into a vibrant, multi-dimensional series of openings into new realities, but when the adventurer/reader returns to her or his own world, they find themselves equipped with new ways of perception.

The point Lewis tries to make in all his writings is that unknown dimensions of reality exist, and that the refusal to accept at least a potential area of the unknown is the result of obdurate habits of thought, for example those of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; or ideologically driven efforts to control the thoughts of others, like those of the Green Witch in *The Silver Chair*. In *The Allegory of Love* (1936), Lewis suggests that it was the ancient allegorists who first made available to poets three worlds: 'the actual world', 'the world of his own religion' and 'a third world of myth and fantasy' (82). An example of a text that clearly represents an encounter between these three worlds is the Border ballad of Thomas the Rhymer, which Tolkien invokes in 'On Fairy Stories'.[63] Lewis felt himself to be present in three worlds in a slightly different sense: the world of the books he immersed himself in, the 'real' world, and the 'afterworld'. Not only were these three worlds present at all times to him, but they also had a transpositional relationship, which is an interpenetrating connection. Symbolic connections can, as he states in his essay 'Transposition', become substantial - that is, the actual substance of two worlds can merge. As Robert W. Maslen has pointed out, Lewis's stories 'participate in real events that for him are taking place here, now, as he writes and as we read. We ourselves are part of the story they tell, which is a chapter in the "universal story" described in *Miracles'*.[64] And in his Narnia books, Lewis wants his young readers to experience the same sense of existing simultaneously in three different worlds that was such an integral existential fact for him.

The central episode in the third of the *Narnian Chronicles*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* is when Lucy reads a spell from the Magician's Book on the island of the Monopods. Lewis begins

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[62] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 209.

[63] Tolkien, 'OFS', p. 5.

[64] Robert W. Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography of the Future' in *Inklings Jahrbruch 18* (2000), p. 229.

by describing the library as 'lined from floor to ceiling with books' and as 'smelling old and learned and magical'.[65] He then describes the book itself, its paper crisp and smooth with a pleasant smell; the writing beautiful, with 'thick downstrokes and thin upstrokes' and big coloured capital letters at the beginning of each spell, each of which incorporates a picture (169). He invites his readers to feel the lure of the room, and of the physical book. While searching for a spell to make the Monopods visible, Lucy begins to read a story that is intensely beautiful, to the extent that having finished it she tries to return to the first page and read it again, an act with which any inveterate reader, including Lewis himself, would instantly sympathise. However, she discovers that the pages do not turn back, and that she can never read the story again. While reading the story, she had felt she was living it 'as if it were real, and all the pictures were real too' (175). While Lewis clearly wants to posit this as a special story, the sense of 'realness' is something that he found in all good stories. A good story, Lewis contends, 'strengthens our relish for real life'.[66] Having finished reading, Lucy remembers only that the narrative included a cup, a sword, a tree and a green hill. This suggests the Grail legend, and Aslan later tells Lucy that 'I will tell it to you for years and years' (179), as the Grail story has been told over successive generations. The implication that the story will be in some sense *lived* by Lucy, as a religious experience, is something Lewis feels strongly about the best of human narratives. The equation between life and story in the episode of the Magician's book is obvious, as narratives that can only, finally and irrevocably, be experienced once. As he says, for imaginative readers 'the first reading of some literary work is often [...] an experience so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed. They have become what they were not before'.[67] The world of the book enters the world of the reader, and points to another world beyond; a multifocal vision is created, whereby the reader inhabits three worlds at once. This is the effect Lewis wants to achieve in his *Narnian Chronicles*; and the rest of this chapter is dedicated to the question of how he sought to achieve it.

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[65] C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1952]), p. 168. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[66] C. S. Lewis, 'On Stories' in Walter Hooper ed.*, Of This and Other Worlds* (London: Collins, 1982), p. 38.

[67] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 3.

1.7. The Evolution of Consciousness in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the intersecting intertexts of ancient myth, Biblical narrative and Medieval and epic poetry allow Lewis to bring to life Barfield's propositions about the evolution of consciousness and language. As we have seen, this evolution proceeds from the 'first participation' experienced by early humankind, enabling them to understand and articulate the world as composed of an interpenetration of the material and the spiritual, to the loss of participation through the dominance of rationalism, to 'final participation' whereby human beings can recapture by their own linguistic efforts the original experience of the world as composed of both matter and spirit. However, while Lewis lets his readers glimpse in these books what final participation can achieve, he stops short of envisioning a world where it is an established practice. Each novel represents a conflict between what might be called Old Narnia, the land of myth and poetry, and New Narnia, in which reason dominates and the status of myth and poetry has been diminished to that of a childish game. In each novel Lewis shows forms that Final Participation might take, as characters laboriously seek out evidence for the truth of the Old Narnian ways and beings that have been dismissed as fictional. Old Narnia, then, is repeatedly suppressed and excluded in these books, as Lewis presents us with a series of variations on the efforts of the dominant hegemony to assert its power through linguistic suppression and control. The struggle of Lewis's characters to recover Old Narnia corresponds to Lewis's own struggle throughout his life to recuperate the myths and fantastic narratives he loved, and to show that they were relevant in the developing contexts of modernity.

A consideration of the form Lewis chose for his project – the fairy tale – is important for understanding the sorts of expectations he wished to arouse in his readers. In his essay 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' (1952), Lewis recalls how sometime in 1949 he felt that he had to write not only a fairy tale, but a fairy tale addressed to children - or else he would burst.[68] According to Lewis, the constraints imposed on the author by this form left him free, or conversely compelled him, to write what he calls 'mere story', a term he explains in his essay 'On Stories'. Here Lewis defines 'mere story', or Story with a capital S, as a narrative that concerns itself first and foremost with a 'series of imagined events' ('OS', 25), as distinct from style or character development or social comment. But 'mere story' is not just a narrative whose plot is of prime importance; it is a narrative in which whatever is being conveyed by the 'series of events' is itself

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[68] C. S Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' (1952) in Walter Hooper ed., *Of This and Other Worlds*, p. 63. Hereafter cited as 'OTW'.

important. The emphasis on plot derives from Aristotelian criticism, which privileges Mythos over style or character,[69] and for Lewis, this is only possible in those literary forms where 'everything else is there for the sake of the story' ('OS', 25). The pleasure of 'mere story' is not excitement ('the alternate tension and relaxation of suspense and curiosity'), as is the common misconception, but the 'atmosphere' it creates (*SIL*, 115), on which the whole 'quality of the imaginative response' depends. The series of events, or plot, according to Lewis, 'is only really a net whereby to catch something else [...] something other than a process and much more like a state or quality' ('OS', 42-3), a way of being.

The second and related function of Story is to evoke the feeling of longing that Lewis calls *Sehnsucht*: a longing which is its own satisfaction, and which is the manifestation of the knowledge of the spiritual world mentioned earlier. It is the longed-for atonement – 'at-one-ment' – that was experienced in 'original participation' and can now be recovered by writing and reading stories. This longing he calls an *askesis*, a spiritual exercise ('OTW', 65), so that reading itself becomes a participatory act. And since for Lewis mere story – even the dullest – demands active imaginative participation, it trains the reader's imagination towards Final Participation. In other words, by it the human being is made aware of the scope and reach of her own creative potential, and discovers the intrinsic link between language and creativity which is vital for the creative process.

Lewis's significant and lasting contribution to literary criticism is his proposition that 'mere story' can induce the 'felt change of consciousness' that Barfield imputes to poetry, and that is such a vital aspect of the evolution of consciousness. Story, says Lewis, can 'mediate imaginative life to the masses while not being contemptible to the few'.[70] In other words, the 'felt change of consciousness' that is imparted by poetry to the educated elite can be offered by 'mere story' to people who might not be able to appreciate poetry – less educated adults, or children, for example. Repudiating the 'jejune and narrow'[71] literary canon that denigrates certain forms, Lewis proposes that the 'Fantastic or Mythic Mode'[72] requires a certain way of thinking (imaginative) and reading, which can produce an expansion of consciousness. This expansion corresponds with an effect of defamiliarisation, so that the world is seen anew.

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[69] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA.: Focus, 2006).

[70] C. S. Lewis, 'OS', p. 42.

[71] C. S. Lewis, 'On Juvenile Taste' in *Of This and Other Worlds*, p. 77.

[72] C. S. Lewis, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said' in *Of This and Other Worlds*, p. 74.

Lewis explains the process thus. The longing for fairyland aroused in a reader is

a longing for he knows not what. It stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach and, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted. This is a special kind of longing [...] the boy [...] desires and is happy in the very fact of desiring.[73]

In other words, the pleasure provided by story is analogous to the pleasure of poetry, which induces an enlargement of awareness. According to Barfield, the moment of pleasure is simultaneously the moment when consciousness changes from one plane to another. Consequently, human beings can bring to their perception of the world more, because they know more. In Coleridgean terms, 'we receive but what we give,/ and in our life alone does Nature live'.[74] By thus positing fairy tales and fantasy as equally able to induce a change of consciousness, Lewis rescues Story from the murky depths to which it had been consigned by literary prejudice.

The myth of the hundred-year winter in Narnia demonstrates in a short tale what might take many books to explain. As Barfield has shown, human consciousness lost 'original participation', which can also be called the mythical mode of thinking, by gradual increments. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) the loss of 'original participation' is represented not as a gradual change over centuries, but as an abrupt imposition by the Witch, who, by forbidding the participation of the beasts of Narnia with Aslan, accelerates the process which in our own world took many lifetimes: that is, the evolution of consciousness from participatory to idolatry, and its effects. By this means Lewis's critique of the contemporary mode of thinking is rendered more accessible, as I shall demonstrate in the next section.

1.8. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: Original Participation

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950), begins by recuperating the foundational western myth of Adam and Eve. As they enter the land of Narnia, the four Pevensie children from our world find themselves addressed by all the Narnians as Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Lewis makes

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[73] C. S. Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' (1952), *Of Other Worlds*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York and London: Harcourt, 1966), pp. 29-30.

[74] S. T. Coleridge, 'Dejection: An Ode', <http://www.online-literature.com/coleridge/634/>

it clear that they belong to a fallen race, and that no representatives of that race have visited Narnia for many generations. Nevertheless, they are meant to rule the land of Narnian animals, as the beaver explains in the words of an age-old prophecy: 'When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone/ Sits at Cair Paravel in throne/ The evil time will be over and done'.[75] The chronicles, as is well known, were not planned as a sequence of seven books,[76] but Lewis is quite consistent on this aspect of the land called Narnia; every book in the sequence reaffirms a hierarchy that was important for his Christian-humanist vision, echoing the biblical motif of 'man' as the ruler of creation. In addition, the intersecting worlds – Narnia and our own – allow the fictional children in them, and by analogy the readers, to reconfigure their own sense of their present experiential data. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the fallen race of Adam witnesses 'original participation' in Narnia, rather than experiencing it – with the notable exception of Lucy.

By making Lucy, the youngest and the most innocent of the four Pevensie children in the *Lion*, the one to discover Narnia, Lewis is able to posit her as the most imaginatively susceptible - that is, the one most capable of participation in nature, since she is the least 'self-conscious'. By self-consciousness Lewis understood a state of consciousness where the subject-object dichotomy has been rigidified to an extent that nature is viewed as wholly Other – as what Ursula Le Guin calls 'wilderness', fit only to be controlled by human beings.[77] The *Lion* begins with Lucy walking through the back of a wardrobe into a snowbound landscape. The subject-object division has not yet become rigid in the young girl's consciousness; perhaps that is why the 'solid' back of the wardrobe dissolves into 'particles' (Barfield's term for atoms) so that she can walk through them.[78] The older children find a solid enough back when they seek material proof of her experience. Lewis was of the opinion that children, like poets and primitive men, are more likely to make an imaginative rather than an intellectual response to the world they live in,[79] which makes Lucy a good choice as the discoverer of Narnia.

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[75] C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Collins, 2000 [1950]), p. 82. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

[76] A detailed history of the composition and publication dates of the *Chronicles of Narnia* can be found in Paul Ford, *A Companion to Narnia*, rev. edn. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), pp. 15-21.

[77] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Women/Wilderness' in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), pp. 161-164.

[78] For 'particles' see Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, p. 16.

[79] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Collins, 1947), n. 1, p. 218.

The doorway into Narnia further demonstrates Lewis's view of the nature of reality as a potentially infinite process of *becoming*, rather than a collection of finished products. He agrees with Barfield that Mind precedes Matter in the universe. In this, he rejects post-Darwinian materialism, which held that matter slowly attained consciousness, through a process of natural selection, in a single species. In an essay called 'Matter, Imagination and Spirit',[80] Barfield defines 'matter' as a 'form of arrested physical energy' which can be perceived by the senses, and 'spirit' as 'part of the totality which is not perceptible through the senses', which he equates with energy in a non-arrested form. He concludes that matter is the 'occasion of spirit', or the 'present expression of spirit',[81] meaning that spirit (or energy) is realised in images that are perceived as material objects. The Cartesian 'sword-thrust' between 'thinking substance' and 'extended substance' has resulted in the radical alienation of what Barfield states are actually forms of consciousness on a spectrum; that is, mind and matter are like the two poles of a rainbow, rather than two separate substances. Lewis concurs with this view, stating that 'the real relation between mind and body is one of Transposition'.[82] As consciousness evolves, human beings become more able to exert their will in this act of transposition that transmutes spirit/energy into matter, an activity that remains instinctive in 'original participation' – that is, the human will does not mediate the process.

Besides the mind/body continuum, transpositional links exist between different worlds, suggests Lewis. As Professor Kirk declares when the older children confess their misgivings about Lucy's mental health, things do not have to be there all the time for them to be real; furthermore, he stresses, nothing is more likely than that there are other worlds 'all over the place, just round the corner' (*LWW*, 52). The suggestion, which unsettles his readers' spatio-temporal assumptions as much as the children's, is that other worlds, or alternative realities, might be 'there', but can only be perceived by imaginative participation. Here Lewis demonstrates how fantasy can concretise what theory indicates in abstract terms. Metaphor and myth, like the magical door, disrupt ossified notions of reality, letting the 'new' enter language and consciousness. In his essay on Charles Williams, Lewis suggests that stories which enact a 'violation of frontier', that is, where the marvellous impinges upon the mundane or the other way around, can reveal the 'precariousness of our common-sense world' by the juxtaposition of the strange with the ordinary – an observation

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[80] Owen Barfield, 'Matter, Imagination and Spirit' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42: 4 (December, 1974), pp. 621-629.

[81] Barfield, 'Matter, Imagination and Spirit', p. 622, 623, 625.

[82] Lewis, 'Transposition', p. 174.

which applies equally well to the Narnia series.[83] The very title of the first book of Narnia produces what Barfield calls a 'quality of strangeness' that immediately opens up new possibilities; the juxtaposition of *the* lion, *the* witch and *the* wardrobe is intriguing, and the mundane is fractured to reveal a new world of possibility, where something as ordinary as a wardrobe is linked to a fairy-tale character and a wild animal. As Funk says, metaphorical language does not look *at* the phenomenon but 'through it'.[84] In other words, metaphor unsettles or dismantles normative notions of reality, showing that the unfamiliar exists within the familiar, a notion that is actualised in Lewis's 'chinks or chasms'[85] – a wardrobe, a painting, a backdoor – between multiple worlds.

These multiple worlds, moreover, can exist as restrictively categorised discursive fields, like 'myth' and 'reality'. Lewis foregrounds the potential intersections and border-crossings between myth and reality in Lucy's first encounter with Mr Tumnus the faun. When Lucy meets Mr Tumnus carrying parcels and holding an umbrella, she is not in the least surprised, but quite happy to accompany him to tea. On the other hand, the faun is so taken aback that he drops all his parcels, explaining afterwards that he had never before seen a human being and had thought them only 'myths' - for the faun a derogatory term designating something that does not exist. This way of thinking is the result of his having been forced to forsake 'original participation' under the sway of the hundred-year reign of the evil White Witch, which has made the world 'all fact and no meaning'.[86] The meaningless array of facts she has imposed on the Narnians is represented in the coldness and aridity of the land under her rule. Although Mr Tumnus is employed by her as a kidnapper, with instructions to capture any human he happens to meet, he never expected to see one, as is evident from his amazement at encountering Lucy. In the faun's cave Lucy sees books entitled *The Life and Letters of Silenus* and *Nymphs and Their Ways*, lying side by side with books with titles like *Men, Monks and Gamekeepers; A Study in Popular Legend*, or *Is Man a Myth?* The implication of these titles is quite clear: what is conceived as myth in one world might be real in another; or what is conceived as myth (untruth) by one person may well be lived reality for someone else. Lewis explored this possibility in his science fiction, where Ransom travels to the

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[83] C. S. Lewis, 'The Novels of Charles Williams' in *Of This and Other Worlds*, pp. 46-54.

[84] Robert W. Funk, *Funk on Parables* (California: Polebridge, 2006), p. 38.

[85] C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1951]), p. 234. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[86] Lewis, 'Transposition', p. 181.

'unfallen' planet Perelandra to be confronted with the myth of Adam and Eve, and become an active agent in the re-enactment of the ancient story.[87]

In Narnia, this interweaving of myth and reality allows Lewis to show original participation at work. Within a very few pages of the *Lion*, the readers are introduced to a whole host of different mythological and fairy-tale creatures, producing generic, thematic and formal hybridity. As I have pointed out earlier, syncretism is an important element in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and Lewis's exuberant imagination revels in the heterogeneity he creates. In his autobiographical work *Surprised by Joy* (1955) he alludes to his delight in discovering Celtic myths and Greek drama to add to his love of Norse mythology, knowing that the enjoyment of such diverse cultural products 'is a balancing thing, and makes for catholicity'.[88] Barfield once perceptively remarked, after reading a letter by Lewis, that the letter was a pastiche.[89] Pastiche is defined in the OED as 'an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period' or 'consisting of a medley of pieces imitating various sources'. Lewis deploys pastiche as a means of recreating for his readers the excitement generated for him by the distinct 'flavours' of different mythologies. Pastiche in this sense generates syncretism that retains difference, creating a dialogic and dynamic nexus where meaning can emerge in interstitial spaces generated by the juxtaposition of disparate stylistic and semantic elements.

Lewis describes the effect of this multiplicity in his autobiography:

Pan and Dionysus lacked the cold, piercing appeal of Odin and Frey. A new quality entered my imagination: something Mediterranean and volcanic, the orgiastic drum-beat. Orgiastic, but not [...] erotic. It was perhaps unconsciously connected with my growing hatred of the public school orthodoxies and conventions, my desire to break and tear it all.[90]

Even after leaving the public school, the desire to 'break and tear it all' seems to have persisted, and the displacement of gods by the severe winter of the Witch – signifying the frozen

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[87] C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (London: HarperCollins, 1943). See also Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography of the Future'.

[88] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 132.

[89] Owen Barfield, 'Introduction' in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Jocelyn Gibbs (Geoffrey Bles: London, 1965), p. x.

[90] Lewis., *SBJ*, p. 131.

emptiness and blankness of a reality bereft of poetry in his own world – may also stand for Lewis's period of atheism as he describes it in *Surprised by Joy.*

In the process, Lewis's views on archetypes and hieroglyphs as needing no innovation become problematic. Lewis suggests, in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942) and his essay 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' (1952), that some images have become trans-historical symbols or 'Archetypes', forming part of the Collective Unconscious of humanity.[91] When used in a work of art these archetypes are able to elicit richly nuanced responses which would otherwise be almost impossible to produce, for their fertile suggestiveness is the cumulative effect of many centuries. Adding to this Jungian model, Lewis proposes that the near-human forms created by fairy tales - giants, dwarfs and talking animals - act as hieroglyphs, presenting 'types' of characters in a few words and images that might otherwise take a whole novel to invent.[92] Representing these requires no innovation, because 'giants, dragons, paradises, gods, and the like are themselves the expression of certain basic elements in man's spiritual experience'.[93] Nonetheless, Lewis's portrayal of the Dionysian element, for example in the faun Mr. Tumnus in the *Lion*, or the Bacchic revelry in *Prince Caspian*, is an amalgam of tradition and innovation. Even though Lewis does not quite follow his own dictum, he achieves the much more interesting goal of transforming these archetypes so that the older myths can be read in new ways. The initial expectations and patterns of response that the archetypes serve to arouse are at times disconfirmed, for example by Mr. Tumnus; but at times the power of the mythic material overwhelms Lewis's apologetic aims, and proliferates into multiple meanings, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The *Lion* famously began with the isolated mental picture of a faun carrying an umbrella.[94] Fauns and satyrs are hybrid goat-men traditionally associated with Pan, Dionysus and Silenus; Pan and Dionysus (the Roman Bacchus) are among the most syncretistic elements in Graeco-Roman mythology, often conflated with each other. Lewis had read *The Crock of Gold* (1912) by James Stephens 'with great excitement', and states that 'Euripides' picture of Dionysus was closely linked in my mind with the whole mood of Mr Stephens' *Crock of Gold*'.[95] This comparison has

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[91] Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' in *Of This and Other Worlds*, p. 62.

[92] Lewis 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 27.

[93] Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 56. Hereafter cited as *PPL*.

[94] Lewis, 'It All Began With A Picture...' in *Of This and Other Worlds,* pp. 78-79.

[95] Lewis, *SBJ*, pp. 130-31.

interesting implications for Lewis's use of the Dionysian/Pan myth in Narnia. Euripides' *Bacchae* portrays vividly the characteristic frenzy and wildness of the god and his maenads; and Stephens' novel explicitly portrays the naked Pan as the god of desire. The mythical associations of fauns - followers of the god/s Pan and Dionysus - with wine-drinking, merry-making, kidnapping and lasciviousness might make Lewis's choice seem eccentric; and Mr. Tumnus certainly seems to be a 'typical' faun at first. He lures Lucy under false pretences to his house, and plays the reed pipe associated with his famous predecessor, making Lucy want to 'cry and laugh and dance and go to sleep at the same time'.[96] However, when she awakens the faun is contrite, and tells Lucy of the oppressive regime of the Witch, and his own unwilling role in the proposed kidnapping of Lucy. In Lewis's Narnia, Pan and Dionysus have been banished by the Witch who abhors the participation they represent. Their followers, like Mr Tumnus, are forced to work for the Witch or be frozen, becoming abstractions like their inanimate counterparts in the western world.

Mr Tumnus gives a thrilling account of the time when Nature and animals moved in concert together, telling Lucy about:

> the midnight dances and how the Nymphs who lived in the wells and the Dryads who lived in the trees came out to dance with the Fauns; about long hunting parties after the milk white stag who would give you wishes if you caught him; about feasting and treasure seeking with the wild Red Dwarfs in deep mines and caverns far beneath the forest floor; and then about summer when the woods were green and old Silenus on his fat donkey would come to visit them; and sometimes Bacchus himself; and then the streams would run with wine instead of water and the whole forest would give itself up to jollification for weeks on end. (*LWW*, p. 19-20)

Here Lewis's exuberant imagination responds vividly and delightedly to the mythic way of perception. He sets up a contrast from the very first novel between the overwhelming enjoyment of pagan revelry and the bitter, freezing, inflexible rigidity of the dissociated consciousness represented by the Witch, who has divided the forces of Nature against each other ('Even some of the trees are on her side', p. 24), and who detests happiness and participation. When she sees a group of creatures (in typical Lewisian mode comprising a diverse range of mythologies: 'a squirrel and his wife with their children and two satyrs and a dwarf and an old dog-fox', p. 113) enjoying a

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96 Lewis, *LWW*, p. 20.

communal meal beneath the trees, she immediately turns them to stone. Her hundred years' reign has clearly put a stop to any form of participation, and any aberrations are quickly stilled. On their second visit, the four Pevensies discover that Tumnus has been captured and probably turned to stone by the White Witch.

By thus creating a division between Old Narnia, described by Tumnus, and New Narnia under the Witch's sway, Lewis enlarges the theme of the duality of good and evil, expressing it in linguistic terms: the poetic, participating consciousness is pitched against linguistic manipulation - such as the faun's lies to Lucy, or the White Witch's dissimulations to Edmund - and frozen participation. In the *Lion* the four children are Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve: they belong to 'fallen' humanity. As a race, their innocence is lost. It is appropriate, then, that they are pitted against the White Witch, who as the beaver informs them, is descended from Adam's first wife Lilith, who was a Jinn, and on the father's side from the race of giants (*LWW*, p. 82). Lilith, the eponymous character in George MacDonald's celebrated novel, was the first wife of Adam according to Jewish midrashic tradition. Refusing to be considered in any way inferior to Adam, she uttered the ineffable name of God, and flew away to live with devils.[97] In the penultimate novel in the Narnia series, *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), Lewis intensifies the connection between Lilith and the White Witch as embedded in their misuse of the power of language: Jadis, we are told in that story, learns the Deplorable Word and utters it to destroy the whole of Charn and its inhabitants. Again, this allusion to Lilith as the witch's ancestor adds the resonance of myth to Lewis's history, as it were: the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve will confront and subjugate Lilith; Jewish midrashic and Biblical characters are pitted against each other. The readers who know their myths and stories will have a good idea of which side is the 'right side'. And they are also made aware of the continuing relevance of myth in contemporary life, and the radical reduction in available experience that the repudiation of this mode entails.

In several subsequent scenes, Lewis demonstrates the effects of participation and alienation by dramatically juxtaposing contrasting scenes which portray the two forms of consciousness. The first of these paired scenes represents two simultaneous journeys through snow-bound Narnia, the first made by Edmund to the Witch's house, the second by his siblings to a rendezvous at Aslan's How. Edmund's floundering journey in darkness, 'silence and loneliness' (91) demonstrates his alienation from the environment. No Naiads or Dryads help him or keep him company, as he keeps 'tripping over fallen tree-trunks', or 'slipping into deep drifts of snow, and

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97 See, for example, Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith: The First Eve* (Zurich: Daimon Verlag, 2009 [1992]).

skidding on frozen puddles'. Later, he sees the Witch's castle, but as a confirmed rationalist has no stories to draw on that would help him understand the significance of its design: 'It seemed to be all towers; little towers with long pointed spires on them, sharp as needles. They looked like huge dunces' caps or sorcerer's caps' (91-93). The forbidding exterior of the castle, which conflates images of folly and sorcery, might have given pause to a person more versed in narrative tradition. But Edmund not only lacks affinity with Nature because he cannot 'participate': he is also unaware of the archetypal signs and symbols which stories provide, and which might have made up for his detachment from Nature.

Lewis uses the Witch as an hieroglyphic character, part of a symbolic economy that can engender 'a deliberate organisation of attitudes'.[98] Lewis says that 'stock responses' – that is, the ability to recognise certain basic human values, such as the convictions that 'love is sweet, death bitter, virtue lovely' — are not just given, but need to be instilled in the reader through an extensive course of literary training. Edmund's inability to recognise a Witch when he sees one reveals his ignorance of fairy tales, folk tales and myths; his inability to recognise her 'type' confirms his inadequacy as a reader or auditor of imaginative narratives. He lets the Witch lure him and feed him with magical Turkish Delight, so that later in the beavers' house he finds himself unable to enjoy the homely, delicious food — freshly caught and cooked fish, potatoes with rich yellow butter, creamy milk and sticky marmalade roll — but keeps thinking of the Turkish Delight, which was obviously addictive (and, given Lewis's attitude to Middle Eastern culture in the series, unhealthily non-English). While Lucy, the youngest child in the *Lion*, retains traces of 'original participation', the eldest two can get help from stories to make the right choices. For example, as the children are guided through the woods by a friendly robin, Edmund expresses doubts about their guide, and Peter contends: 'They're good birds in all the stories I've ever read. I'm sure a robin wouldn't be on the wrong side' (*LWW*, p. 64). Only Edmund, who on first entering Narnia 'decided that he did not much like the place' (32), is unable to make the right decisions.

An alienated consciousness considers all things to be idols, and 'idols do not participate one another',[99] but are considered 'there' to be used. Edmund's journey through the blizzard is punctuated by thoughts of modernising Narnia with 'decent roads', cars, a private cinema, principal railways and 'laws […] against beavers and dams' (91-92). In *The Magician's Nephew*, Uncle Andrew too immediately begins to think of the commercial potential of the rich, uncultivated land

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[98] Lewis, *PPL*, p. 55.

[99] Barfield, *SA*, p. 98.

he has entered. For Lewis, rapid and irresponsible development and industrialisation evince an inability to recognise the integral link between humankind and the non-human environment. The next step from this position, as Lewis shows in his science fiction, would be cosmic imperialism. The Witch, we learn in the *Nephew*, belongs to another world; her petrification of Narnia and Edmund's plans for its modernisation are based on personal, individualistic greed. The close connection between ecological degradation and the politics of power cannot be ignored, as Lewis demonstrates.

A parallel journey of escape in the snow, by the beavers and the three children, demonstrates what a more participatory experience of nature might be. As Mr and Mrs Beaver leave their house to escape the White Witch, the shining sides of the valley tower up beside the 'dazzling brightness of the frozen river with all its waterfalls of ice' and the 'white masses of the tree-tops and the great glaring of moon and the countless stars' (103). The snowfall helps them escape by hiding their footprints from the enemy. They find a hole to sleep in, 'an old hiding place for beavers in bad times', where they spend the night huddled together for warmth – a perfect model of participation in the sense of collaboration between species. And the morning brings nothing less than a tray with a piping hot teapot, milk jug and all, brought by 'Father Christmas' himself — the archetypal spirit of religious and corporeal festivity.

Another contrast, between the followers of the Lion and the Witch, serves to foreground the antithetical impulse within imagination, which can be both good and evil. The children first see Aslan at the Stone Table surrounded by 'Tree-Women […] and Well-Women (Dryads and Naiads as they used to be called in our world) who had stringed instruments [...] four great centaurs [...] a unicorn, and a bull with the head of a man, and a pelican, and an eagle, and a great Dog' (124-5). To combat Aslan's forces, the Witch assembles her own entourage, so that the same Stone Table which had resonated earlier with the joy of participation is now described thus: 'Ogres with monstrous teeth, and wolves, and bull-headed men; spirits of evil trees and poisonous plants [...] Cruels and Hags and Incubuses, Wraiths, Horrors, Effreets, Spirits, Orknies, Wooses, and Ettins' (148). Since language mediates the transition from participation to self-consciousness, it opens up vast possibilities for the human act of creativity. As Barfield has said, there is no other 'thinghood' but what is created by humanity. But it does not follow that the creative act will only produce good; it is just as likely to create evil, as the witch has done. This is why Lewis insists upon the fallen nature of humanity in the Chronicles, as a warning that even if we realise the power of our imagination, we need to keep our nature as fallen creatures in sight.

The binary fission within the word, created by the split in language between the immaterial and the concrete, was considered analogous to the fall by the Inklings members. In *The Problem of Pain* (1940), Lewis contends that evil was always a natural potential outcome of free will granted to humanity. God has paid us the 'intolerable compliment' of love, 'in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense' (33), by giving us free will, a 'burden of glory' (39) that led to the abuse of the possibilities it opened up. Lewis asserts that we really sinned 'in Adam', as the Church Fathers believed, not simply 'by legal fiction' but in a spiritual sense. The nature of original sin is grounded in the awareness of 'self' as separate from nature. As man became aware of the dichotomy between self and object, the inevitable concomitant was an awareness of the 'otherness' of God. And thus, says Lewis, 'the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre opens' (70). Subsequently, the separate self, aware of its own creative potential, is liable to create both good and evil.

Barfield agrees, saying that 'Freedom and evil are […] very closely connected'.[100] As self-consciousness develops, so does the unconscious – both collective and individual. And even though human beings hypostasise 'representations' and begin to think of them as wholly other, without any link to human consciousness, we continue to participate - only now we are not aware of this. As the twentieth century progresses, writes Barfield, and the nature of reality is exposed by science as consisting of waves and particles, we begin to become aware once more of our own creative potential. Herein lies the danger, according to Barfield, as 'Imagination is not, as some poets have thought, simply synonymous with good. It may be either good or evil [...] in an age when the connection between imagination and figuration is beginning to be dimly realized [...] the good and the evil latent in the working of imagination begin to appear unlimited' (*SA*, 145).

One potential outcome of the choice has been identified by both Lewis and Barfield as the 'abolition of man', a concept that can be illustrated in two scenes from the *Lion*. To elude detection by Aslan's forces, the Witch turns herself into a boulder and her servant Dwarf into a tree-stump, abolishing their humanity to avoid facing the consequences of her actions. In stark contrast, Aslan reanimates all the creatures petrified by the Witch, including Mr Tumnus. Lewis describes in beautiful detail how Aslan breathes on the creatures that have been turned to stone, and how they come alive:

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[100] An Interview with Owen Barfield, by James R. Wetmore, *Re-weaving the Rainbow*, ed. by David Lavery (e-book, page numbers not available).

> For a second after Aslan had breathed upon him the stone lion looked just the same. Then a tiny streak of gold began to run along his white marble back—then it spread—then the colour seemed to lick all over him as the flame licks all over a bit of paper—then, while his hindquarters were still obviously stone the lion shook his mane and all the heavy, stone folds rippled into living hair. (165)

The image that Lewis uses to describe the infusion of life – analogous to the return of humanity, which had been abolished by the Witch – is that of fire consuming paper; an especially apposite image since it echoes the Pentecostal image of a flash of fire, which Lewis uses in his Narnian creation scene in *The Magician's Nephew*, where we are shown how Aslan breathes on some of the newly-created animals to endow them with the gift of speech. Aslan's breath is the Spirit infused into earthly creatures, so that the word 'breath' should be taken here in the older sense of the word *pneuma*, which (as Barfield shows) once meant breath and soul and spirit at the same time, in pre-historic, pre-logical language (*SA*, p. 100). And fire, the archetypal emblem of knowledge, also symbolises the endowment of each creature with the Lion's breath of life, soul, language and knowledge all at once, in an exhilarating return to original participation. The word *pneuma*, with its fusion of the physical and the non-material, encapsulates the way Lewis wanted words to work in his fantasy, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

1.9. Psycho-Physical Parallelism

In his essay 'Bluspels and Flalansferes' (1939), Lewis draws attention to how alienation from nature is a result of analytical thinking and the repudiation of imagination as a mode of knowing.[101] Lewis suggests that the earliest metaphors indicate that 'there is a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself' and that 'all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor', thus bearing out the correlation between language and the 'representations' of reality figured and named through original participation. At that time there was an intrinsic bond between nature and man's thought, so that the earliest metaphors showed the true nature of the universe, as it was apprehended by participation. 'It does follow', Lewis concludes, that if those original metaphors – the familiar equations 'between good and light, or evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others,

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[101] C. S. Lewis 'Bluspels and Flalansferes' in *Rehabilitations,* ed. by Walter Hooper (London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1939). Republished in *Selected Literary Essays*. Hereafter cited as 'BF'.

were from the beginning arbitrary and fanciful - if there is not, in fact, a kind of "psycho-physical parallelism" (or more) in the universe - then all our thinking is nonsensical'.[102]

As early as 1936, when Lewis wrote *The Allegory of Love*, he claimed that 'It is the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms. What is good or happy has always been high like heavens and bright like the sun. Evil and misery were deep and dark from the first. Pain is black in Homer, and goodness is a middle point for Alfred [as] for Aristotle'.[103] In the light of this psycho-physical parallelism – that is, of what he sees as the intrinsic bond between thought and the spaces and forms of nature – Lewis further proposes an inherent correspondence between the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds of sentient beings. He conceives Narnia as an embodiment of this correspondence, its outward physical landscape reflecting the inward spiritual state of its inhabitants, so that the dominance of evil manifests itself as unchanging winter, the return of goodness as the dynamism of spring. Thus the spiritual re -awakening of Edmund, who has succumbed to temptation and betrayed his siblings, and Narnia with them, is concomitant with the coming of spring in Narnia. And the description of the advent of Good, with the coming of Aslan into Narnia, is uncannily similar to Lewis's description of his own spiritual awakening in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* – suggesting that the psycho-physical parallelism of Narnia has its equivalent in the lived experience of Lewis and his readers.

As the snow-clad Narnia awakes at last into new life, we witness a parallel awakening of Edmund's hitherto muffled senses, the necessary prelude to the awakening of his mind and spirit. 'A strange, sweet, rustling, chattering noise' of running water makes the boy's heart leap in anticipation of the end of the long, long winter. First the bough of a tree, then patches of grass become visible, and Edmund finds himself responding to the joy of spring as it emerges from the dead of winter to assert the enchantment of mutability. In a riot of sensuous delight Lewis describes how the 'trees shook off their robes of snow [...] the mist turned from white to gold [...] shafts of delicious sunlight struck down on the forest floor and [...] you could see blue sky [...] a glade of silver birch trees [...] little yellow flowers - celandines'. Then comes the first chirp of a bird, followed by others, till 'the whole wood [is] ringing with birds' music' and filled with delicious scents (*LWW*, 119-20). In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis recounts his spiritual renaissance in strikingly similar terms, coming after a

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[102] Lewis, 'BF', p. 158.

[103] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 44.

long period of aridity during which he never felt the 'inconsolable longing' that he calls *Sehnsucht*. 'This long winter,' he tells us,

> broke up in a single moment […]. Spring is the inevitable image, but this was not gradual like Nature's springs. It was as if the Arctic itself, all the deep layers of secular ice, should change not in a week nor in an hour, but instantly, into a landscape of grass and primroses and orchards in bloom, deafened with bird song and astir with running water. (82)

Narnia, then, is the objective correlative of the inner psyche in a way that clearly demonstrates Lewis's notion of psycho-physical parallelism, the intimate association of the mind with the physical world it inhabits.

However, this concept is rendered problematic by the hierarchical binarism that is embedded in Lewis's Christian theology. It is easy to see how a rigid binarism, such as the insuperable divide between good and evil which Lewis calls in one of his best known books of Christian apologetics *The Great Divorce*, could reduce the dynamism of the relationship between the seen and the unseen, the mental and the physical, which he is concerned to restore. Barfield shared with Lewis the view that the associations between death, sleep and winter, or birth, waking and summer, inhere within ancient myths – such as the myth of Demeter and Persephone, which exemplifies those old, undivided meanings that are 'logically disconnected but poetically connected'.[104] But the imposition of moral categories on these living, polyphonic webs of meaning threatens to displace the inherent unity between their constituent elements, by associating them with human ethical categories as rigid as the categories of analytical logic. Indeed, Lewis's own fiction is often criticised for being excessively dualistic, and it often is so.

At the same time, his imagination is simply too exuberant and irrepressible to allow such neat moral divisions to remain unchallenged within his fiction. Something keeps intruding to disrupt them, as he responds with delight to the polar dynamics of widely disparate narrative traditions. For example, all the Narnia books that follow the *Lion* are in some sense revelations of heavenly secrets - cosmological, meteorological, astronomical and spiritual – and the combination of these different forms of the celestial often resists crude efforts to decode them as straightforward

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[104] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 84.

moral allegory.[105] In addition, Old Narnia is repeatedly juxtaposed with New Narnia in the later books, as in the first, with the former portraying participation, the latter radical disjunction; and in each case the return of Old Narnia is very seldom a simple concept. The second Narnian chronicle, *Prince Caspian* (1951), offers a perfect illustration of Lewis's unconscious resistance in his fiction to the simplistic dualism he sometimes seems to champion in his philosophical and religious writings.

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[105] Michael E. Stone claims that apocalyptic speculation about the secrets of nature and cosmology form an integral part of the revelatory experience, in 'Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature', *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God* (Garden City and New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 414-452.

CHAPTER TWO. *PRINCE CASPIAN*: REVELATION IN NARNIA

Prince Caspian (1951) is sub-titled 'A Return to Narnia', and the concept of return, as it pertains to memory and imagination, is extremely important in the novel. In Barfield's formulation, memory and imagination are vital for the evolution of human consciousness from original to final participation. This evolution signifies for Lewis a deepening relationship with God, personified as Aslan in his sequence. And for both Barfield and Lewis, the fluctuating relationship between past and present, between current experience, memories, and recovery, had been confirmed (ironically enough) by the discoveries of those very analytical scientists who had been responsible for the philosophical 'split' between mind and matter in the seventeenth century.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, physicists such as Arthur Eddington and James Jeans, whose work Lewis knew,[1] had confirmed that the structure of the universe was much less rigid than had previously been assumed. In his 1927 Gifford Lecture at Cambridge, Eddington showed that the universe was composed of fields of forces, electrons and sub-atomic particles; while in his book *The Mysterious Universe* (1931) Jeans compares the motions of electrons and atoms to those of 'dancers in a cotillion'.[2] The concept that the universe consists of waves of sub-atomic particles strengthened Barfield's conception of the universe as an 'unrepresented' field of energy that was 'Figured' as phenomena by the human imagination. As indicated earlier, Lewis accepted most of Barfield's philosophy, and in *Prince Caspian* he explores the role of memory in the development of consciousness from simple figuration to conscious and willed participation.

In *Prince Caspian*, Lewis uses the device of the story within a story to create receding frameworks of spatio-temporal perceptions within which the categories of myth, history and story are explored in the context of their relationship to reality. Within these explorations, Lewis pits the Old, participating Narnia against the New, alienated Narnia, much as he had in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the process Lewis tries to achieve poetically what he had repudiated in his theoretical thinking: that is, a reconciliation of religion with the intensely poetic, almost 'orgiastic' enjoyment provided by myth. In the process, religious and mythical discursive fields disturb and disrupt each other, revealing that neither discourse is as entirely coherent or ordered as its proponents would like to believe. Questions of memory, and assertions of its importance for the

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[1] See, for example, *Mere Christianity* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1955), p. 54; 'Dante's Similes' in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 75; 'Historicism' in *Christian Reflections* (London: Geofrey Bles, 1967), p. 112; *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 228.

[2] James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 136.

evocation of that spiritual longing Lewis calls Joy, are opened up. Lewis's own moments of Joy, as he recounts them, are often triggered by memory; and the return of the Pevensie children to Narnia helps to link memory with longing, which is Joy itself for Lewis.

This longing, for Lewis, inheres in the primal rupture between man and nature, catalysed by the increasingly prosaic tendency in language towards abstraction. Lewis, like Tolkien, wanted to show that abstract language, rather than being factual and referential as the logical positivist school proposed, actually concealed living, participative reality beneath a film of congealed and drab familiarity; and that poetic language alone could reveal the living, oscillating polarity that was a fundamental aspect of reality. According to Northrop Frye, the Greek word for revelation, *apokalupsis*, and the word for truth, *aletheia*, both begin with a negative particle: the metaphorical meaning of both is *un*-covering. Frye asserts that Apocalypse is the 'inner form of everything that is happening now [...] What is symbolised [in the Bible] as the destruction of the order of nature is the destruction of the way of seeing that order'.[3] Lewis would agree with this ahistorical view, not as a repudiation of historical development, but as an acceptance of the ongoing renewal which historical processes can help to bring about. Lewis's concern throughout his work is to unveil what might be concealed behind our common-sense view of the world.[4] Therefore, in the *Chronicles of Narnia* he actualises the three stages of consciousness proposed by Barfield. Old Narnia represents the mode of participating consciousness, now only retained in memory and stories. Miraz's kingdom came about through a displacement of the gods, revealing an alienated consciousness. And the renewal of Narnia is achieved through the return of Aslan – ironically accompanied by a return of the pagan gods whom Christianity displaced.

Since 'original' participation connotes mythical thinking, according to Barfield and Lewis, its absence is correlative with the kind of thinking where myths are considered to be lies, or a demonstration of 'primitive' thinking, and considered irrelevant to the needs of the present. As Barfield argues in *Saving the Appearances*, lack of participation invariably corresponds to a lack of imagination. To refute this kind of agnosticism concerning myth, Lewis begins the second novel by showing that myth and history can and often do interpenetrate. The chronicle begins with the four Pevensie children being pulled into Narnia by the magical horn of Queen Susan, now again a child after having ruled Narnia for many years in the previous book. The children find that they are talked

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[3] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 135-36.

[4] See Stone, 'Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature', pp. 414-452.

about in Narnia as mythical creatures – myth here being used in the sense of untrue stories, with no impact on the present. Although Caspian blows the horn in hope of help, not many of the Narnians believe any help will come, because they have once again lost faith in the myths that came to life so vividly in the *Lion*.

2. 1. Old and New Narnia: The Displacement of the Gods

In order to restore mythical discourse to its cultural function as a vehicle of profound truths that cannot be conveyed in any other way, Lewis dramatises the processes underlying the eradication of myth in *Prince Caspian*. These processes are concretised as a displacement of gods — a result of privileging reason as the only valid vehicle of knowledge, and refuting the epistemic validity of the imagination. The dichotomy between reason and imagination was particularly important for Lewis because he had experienced the rupture in his own psyche, before his conversion. Barfield's insight that there were 'two Lewises'[5] can be better understood in Lewis's own description of his state of mind in the years between 1914 and 1916: 'On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow "rationalism"'.[6] But by the time he writes the *Chronicles*, Lewis clearly realises that imaginative discourse, specially myths and fairy-stories, can convey moral and existential truths in ways that are impossible for rational discourse to convey. In all the Narnia books Lewis draws attention to the function of story-telling in what he and Barfield thought of as the expansion of consciousness. When reading fairy stories, for instance, 'the dim sense of something beyond [the reader's] reach, far from dulling the actual world gives it a new dimension of depth'.[7] The metaphor of depth he uses here has important implications for Barfield's theory of the role of metaphor in the 'revelation' or uncovering of reality alluded to by Frye as the central theme of apocalypse. As Barfield argued, once language has mediated the transition from an undifferentiated matrix of consciousness to individualised self-consciousness, the fundamental antinomies of inner/outer, mind/matter, subject/object emerge, as human beings become capable of analytical thinking. Now the old representations of the world are available *as memory-images* for individuals to manipulate, and Coleridge's famous dictum of *diffusion, dissipation and dissolving*

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[5] Owen Barfield, 'Introduction' in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Jocelyn Gibb (London: Geofrey Bles, 1965), p. xiv.

[6] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 197.

[7] Lewis, 'OTW' in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 29.

comes into play.[8] That is, the reawakening of Old Narnia depends upon the children's and Caspian's capacity of memory and imagination.

Initially, the children who return to Narnia enact Lewis's theory of good reading, for 'Scenes and characters from books provide them with a sort of iconography by which they interpret or sum up their own experience'.[9] A knowledge of stories helps them with practical matters such as where to find food and water.[10] But stories also help them and Caspian to 'see' other phenomena now concealed by the dominant discourse of Reason, as espoused by the tyrant Miraz, under whose reign Old Narnia lies comatose. Stories can actualise something 'that has no sequence in it', which Lewis calls the 'Kappa Element' or the hidden element, by which he means an indescribable state of joy.[11] This is a state of being that is always fleeting in real life, but can be captured, even if only for a few pages, in a book.

In the modern world, fairy tales (as Lewis and Tolkien both affirm) are relegated to the nursery like old furniture; but the longing they evoke can often lead to revelation of forms of truth not available to strictly rational modes of knowledge. The incipient longings for Old Narnia awakened in Caspian's heart by his old Nurse's tales are ripened into intense desire by Doctor Cornelius's endorsement of her seemingly childish claim that the Old Narnians once existed. When the tutor tells young Caspian that there had been very few men in Narnia when the prince's ancestors, the Telmarines, conquered it, the boy is amazed. 'Do you mean,' [Caspian] gasped, 'that there were other things? Do you mean it was like in the stories?' The fascination with the other, and the literal truth that often inheres in story as myth, is once again emphasised when Caspian encounters a being he thought of as mythical – Trumpkin the dwarf – and then has to assert his belief in Aslan against Trumpkin's scepticism. 'I do [believe],' said Caspian, 'and if I hadn't believed in him before, I would now. Back there among the Humans, the people who laughed at Aslan would have laughed at stories about Talking Beasts and Dwarfs [...] Yet there you are'.[12] Most of the New Narnians do not believe in myths, which they equate with lies; and there is a delightful irony in the fact that this scepticism concerning myth is most fiercely articulated by the

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[8] See Chapter One.

[9] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 3.

[10] Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1951]), p. 15, 19. All subsequent references are to this edition. Hereafter cited as *PC*.

[11] Lewis, 'On Stories' in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 18. 'On Stories' was originally read at Merton College as 'The Kappa Element in Fiction' and first published in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (1947).

[12] Lewis, *PC*, p. 81.

old Narnians, who are themselves mythical creatures in our own world as well as in the kingdom of Miraz.

In this kingdom the Old Narnians are thought of as in 'rebellion' against the New (rather as Lewis's native Irishmen were considered rebels by their English overlords). Caspian's mention of Old Narnia angers Miraz, who dismisses his talk of Aslan, Dryads, Naiads, fauns and Dwarfs as 'nonsense' and 'fairy-tales'.[13] By contrast, Dr Cornelius tells him that after silencing all the creatures the king and his men are now 'trying to cover up even the memory of them', a claim borne out by Miraz's earlier injunction to Caspian not to talk or even think about Old Narnia.[14] As with the White Witch, the suppression of imagination goes hand in hand with the quest for power. Caspian discovers that Narnia is an unhappy country because taxes are high, laws are stern and the ruler cruel. But Cornelius does not ask Caspian to deal with these political and economic problems directly; instead he asks him to find 'a way of awakening the trees once more', and the tutor's wistful, somewhat ineffectual longing for participation recalls the nostalgia of Mr. Tumnus. 'Sometimes at night, in the woods, I thought I had caught a glimpse of Fauns and Satyrs dancing a long way off',[15] the old man says. It is, then, an old Nurse and an elderly scholar-dwarf who preserve stories and incite rebellion against tyranny by awakening the imagination of the young. The latter might remind us of the scholar hobbits in Tolkien, who take it upon themselves to preserve as much of Middle-earth myth and history as possible. Both Lewis and Tolkien identify the marginalised as scholars and preservers of stories and myths, as against the dominant powers which dismiss these as outdated and unnecessary.

2. 1. 1. Marginalised Images: The Longaevi

Indeed, most of Old Narnia consists of marginalised figures; marginalised not only in Miraz's country, but in a mid-twentieth-century literary world that privileged realism and denigrated fantasy. In order to make his stories enact the evolution of consciousness from participatory to non-participatory, Lewis creates a world inhabited not only by spirits of nature and gods, but by numerous wild, mysterious and ambiguous mythical creatures. As we have seen, Narnia abounds in creatures from different mythologies, giving the chronicles a distinct, syncretic flavour: if one particular quality that Lewis held to be a distinctive feature of fantasy literature were to be

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[13] *PC*, pp. 51-52.

[14] *PC*, p. 61; p. 53.

[15] *PC*, p. 63.

designated for the *Chronicles of Narnia*, it would be that of syncretism, which permits a joyful intermingling, ecstatic interpenetrating and carnivalesque dialogue between a plethora of mythologies.

In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis explains that for medieval thinkers mankind itself was marginal, and the earth merely an infinitesimal point on the vast circumference of the universe. Teeming and diverse forms of life, including fauns, gods, nymphs, Dryads and Naiads, surrounded the world of mortals, and Lewis terms these creatures the *Longaevi*, following the philosopher Martianus Capella.[16] They live in an ambiguous region between air and Earth, and their importance to Christian theology is questionable; and yet, states Lewis, 'their unimportance is their importance' (*TDI*, 21). This somewhat ambiguous statement underscores Lewis's intensely romantic imagination, which revels in the elusive, the indistinct, the multivalent. The 'Medieval Model' tends at times to become 'too ordered', in that everything is assimilated so well into it, all the oddities and contradictions so thoroughly incorporated that there is no room for vagueness, no ambiguity, no blurred boundaries, which for Lewis is an aesthetic fault. Lewis's romantic imagination responds to the element of the 'new' that only the unfathomable or the mutable can sustain, as is evident in his own stories.

The de-spiritualised, post-Enlightenment world provokes in Lewis a yearning for the principle of 'plenitude'[17] that prevailed in the Middle-Ages, when every corner of the universe was felt to be inhabited by some representation of the cosmic mind. Lewis calls this a 'realising imagination' (206), which is made possible by belief in 'a world of built-in significance' (204). 'Realising' here is meant in the sense of *making real*, or creating the phenomena around us. This is the reason for the inclusion of the *Longaevi* in the Narnia Chronicles, and provides an answer to Tolkien's critique of this inclusiveness as generating anomalies and inconsistencies in the sequence. 'They are marginal, fugitive creatures,' Lewis writes. 'They are perhaps the only creatures to whom the Model does not assign, as it were, an official status. Herein lies their imaginative value. They soften the classic severity of the huge design. They intrude a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty into a universe that is in danger of being a little too self-explanatory, too luminous' (122). The hint of something unexplained and indeterminate is an important element in

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[16] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 122. Hereafter cited as *TDI*.

[17] Lewis, *TDI*, p. 134.

romantic thought because individual imagination is of prime importance; and regimented and disciplined reason could hamper and mutilate imagination, for Lewis as for Keats.

These creatures add imaginative depth and resonance to the radical intertextuality of the *Chronicles*, for they can be both good and evil. Like the Native American tricksters Coyote and Raven, these are in-between figures,[18] and no one can be entirely sure of their intentions. The reader has already encountered the figure of Mr Tumnus, the faun, in *The Lion*. Fauns are one of the Longaevi enumerated in the medieval catalogues that Lewis cites in *The Discarded Image*. More striking examples of the ambiguity inherent in the *Longaevi* can be found in *Prince Caspian*, where we see dwarfs, satyrs and giants capable of being equally good and bad, so that anyone's belonging to any particular species cannot be a guarantee of their moral grounding. While the most obvious examples are the dwarfs Nikabrik and Trumpkin, there are others, like Giant Wimbleweather, the great 'twenty tons of living, earth-shaking oxymoron',[19] who tries his best to be of help to Caspian's army but usually fails miserably. The stupid, quarrelsome giants in *The Silver Chair* are another example, as are the giants who live at the castle to which the Green Witch sends Jill and Eustace, who, despite the giantesses' becoming quite fond of the children, plan to cook and eat them. Even the Earthmen in *The Silver Chair* are enigmatic figures, ominously silent at first, queer, even bizarre to look at, with inscrutable expressions and monotonous utterances, thousands of them following a strictly regimented routine; but at the end of the book they suddenly burst into an uncontrolled celebration, mystifying the reader when their furtiveness becomes a frolic, and they dance and jump their way into the deep land of Bism. The dwarves in *The Last Battle* prove to be the cause of a major turn for the worse for Prince Tirian, when they refuse to join forces with him; but one of them, Poggin, stays steadfast till the end.

However, in *Prince Caspian*, the longaevi have been silenced, so that they recede into nothingness, as Miraz insists that they be ousted even from memory — much as the elusive mythical aspects were erased from Christianity by institutionalised forms of worship. The return of the four Pevensies to Narnia allows Lewis to 'reveal' Narnia at several levels, and illustrate the cognitive validity and the vital power of myth, as discussed below.

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[18] See, for example, Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998).

[19] Lewis, 'On Stories', p. 31.

2. 2. The Uses of Myth

In the *Lion*, the four Pevensies grow to adulthood in Narnia before being transported back to childhood in their own world. In the process they are initiated into the mythical, participatory world-view that Aslan re-established in Narnia after destroying the idol-infested kingdom of the White Witch. However, their return to Narnia involves a series of 'disconfirmations'[20] of expectations, both for the characters and the readers, which challenges the understanding of the workings of Narnia they acquired previously. As Stephen Prickett observes, 'Disconfirmation or failure [is] a condition of growth',[21] from childhood to maturity or from one plane of consciousness to another. The children return to a completely different spatio-temporal framework than the one they left a year ago, according to their reckoning. They are required to make a series of adjustments before they are fit for a new sort of participation, that is on a higher plane of consciousness, in Narnia. Two of the crucial new perspectives they acquire are these: that myths and stories are not synonymous with untruth, as most of the Narnians seem to think; and that having recourse to the past can make things new.

In his 'Preface' to *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (1946), Lewis talks about myth as being potentially profoundly disturbing, not only at the psychical but at the sensory level, as it 'arouses in us *sensations* we have never had before [...] as though we had *broken out of our normal mode of consciousness* [...] It gets under our skin, hits us at levels deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are re-opened'.[22] This is similar to Tolkien's conception that the fantastic as a mode breaks through the chains of convention, breaks 'free and wild'. In this context Lewis, like Tolkien, is keen to suggest that the nature of story as self-consciously fictional does not equate stories with lies. Not only do stories provide an existential iconography, but they can interpenetrate reality in a variety of complex ways. One of these ways has been pointed to by Lewis in his essay 'Transpositions', where he lays stress on the sacramental correspondences between lower (sensual), and higher (spiritual) reality. In other words, by arousing new *sensations*, myths could enhance our consciousness, so that the non-arrested energy identified

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[20] Stephen Prickett uses the term disconfirmation to denote the encounter with the radically new, that is a turning point in consciousness. See Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 7-12.

[21] Prickett, *Words and the Word* , p. 173.

[22] C. S. Lewis, 'Preface', *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, ed. by C. S. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), pp. 16-17. Emphasis added.

by Barfield as the spirit could be transformed into arrested energy (matter) in more meaningful ways.

2. 3. Revelation in Narnia

The process of transposition is illustrated in *Prince Caspian*, where an imaginative effort is required to be able to see Aslan. At one point, Lucy finds herself lying awake and feels 'that the whole forest was coming awake like herself', which evokes in her 'a great longing for the old days when trees could talk in Narnia'.[23] As we have seen, memory is an integral part of longing or *Sehnsucht* for Lewis; and in this episode he confirms that Lucy is intensely aware of her own creative ability to participate in nature, since she vividly remembers doing so. The girl feels an irresistible urge to arouse the forest to full wakefulness, and experiences startling flashbacks of Talking Trees: 'She knew exactly how each of these trees would talk if only she could wake them, and what sort of human form it would put on', from a slender, long-haired birch to a hearty old oak, or that smooth and stately 'lady of the wood', the beech. But after her impassioned, unintended attempt at a summons ('Oh, Trees, Trees, Trees [...] wake, wake, wake. Don't you remember it? Don't you remember *me*? Dryads, and Hamadryads, come out, come to me') the rustling of the trees, which was 'almost like words', dies away. 'Yet Lucy had the feeling [...] that she had just missed something: as if she had spoken to the trees a split second too soon or a split second too late, or used all the right words except one, or *put in one word that was just wrong*'.[24] That one word, Lewis implies, was *me*, signifying Lucy's self-consciousness, which has developed to the point where the emphasis lies heavily on the subject. To emerge from the original undifferentiated state of being a polarity between subject and object is necessary, for as Barfield says, 'The experience of oneself over against that which is not oneself is the *sine qua non* of human consciousness'.[25] But in what might seem like a paradox, but is actually based upon the inherent polarity at the heart of Being, the essence of final participation, says Barfield, is to *overcome* the duality between subject and object.[26] This means not a re-fusion, but the realisation of a dynamic interaction between self and other in what Buber calls an I-Thou relationship - a concept I shall be exploring in Chapter Three.

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[23] Lewis, *PC*, p. 128.

[24] Lewis, *PC*, pp. 129-131. Emphasis added.

[25] Owen Barfield, 'Either: Or' in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, p. 53.

[26] Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age* (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 1966), p. 39.

According to Lewis, while the doctrine of Creation in one sense empties nature of divinity, in another, paradoxical sense, the same doctrine makes nature 'an index, a symbol, a manifestation of the Divine'.[27] This is analogous to Barfield's notion of the similarity between 'collective representations' of the original participation and symbols of the Final Participation, in that both apprehend the phenomenal world as standing for something else, or as a manifestation of the Cosmic Mind. Lucy's experience on the second night in the woods is a dramatisation of this, as she is woken to see the trees moving about in a complicated dance. The dance is Lewis's favourite metaphor to show the harmony within the cosmos which he considers so important, and which is maintained in a delicate, precarious balance through the hierarchal structure of the universe. But Lucy is not yet capable of fully participating, so she looks at trees alternating between becoming people and trees, in a surrealistic scene of immense beauty. Here 'original participation' is actually enacted in Lucy's consciousness, and she tries to join in by recapturing the residual memory images embedded in her mind and recreate them in an act of 'final participation'. This journey, from awareness of participation, to the internalisation of nature, and on to *willed* participation, is made clear for us when Lewis explains that '[s]he wanted to get beyond [the trees] to something else; it was from beyond them that the dear voice had called' (152). As I explained in the introduction, the presence of this 'something else' is what Barfield sees as the essence of original participation: 'there stands behind the phenomena, *and on the other side of them from me*, a represented which is of the same nature as me'.[28] Lucy's two encounters with the trees, the first when the intrusive self occludes communion, and the second when she joins the dance, reveal the process of the growth of her mind and spirit.

The purpose of the children's return to Narnia is not a restoration of original participation, but a shattering of the idols produced by Miraz and his followers, giving the children an opportunity to undergo a re-creation as conscious living entities – in Barfield's terms, to undergo Final Participation. For Lewis's Christian friends such as Austin Farrer, the 'rejection of idolatry meant not the destruction but the liberation of images'.[29] The disconfirmations about time and place, the importance of memory as a means of knowledge, and the intrinsic interconnection between myth and reality, are experiences that prepare the children for willed participation, permitting their

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[27] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), pp. 80-82.

[28] Barfield, *SA*, p. 42. Original emphasis.

[29] Austin Farrer, *A Re-birth of Images* (Glasgow: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 14.

language and thought to 'reshape and modify' one another and their creative potential to be unleashed.[30]

The imagery of seeing pervades *Prince Caspian*. In the post-participation world, it is clear that nature can no longer offer 'collective representations'. Instead the individual has to create her own world, investing this by an act of will with the quality of participation. No one can at first see Aslan except Lucy; and she is later rebuked for not having followed her vision of him at once, alone if this became necessary because her siblings would not follow her. This is the huge change that needs to be accepted in the transition from unindividuated to individual consciousness. Like Tolkien's Niggle, each individual has her or his own creative potential to realise.[31] In this second book of Narnia, Aslan can only be seen with an effort of the imagination underpinned by faith; now it is not the grand, golden roaring presence but the 'still small voice' that reveals divinity.[32] The Pevensies are baffled by this change: Lucy tells the lion that 'I thought you'd come roaring in and frighten all the enemies away - like last time',[33] and the other children cannot understand why Aslan should be invisible to them, and visible only to Lucy. In a challenge to the 'logical positivists' – who declared that any empirically non-verifiable statement is meaningless – Lewis makes the older children repeatedly assert that they cannot 'see' anything, and in the process demonstrates the extent to which they have become reacclimatised, since the end of the first novel, to the dominant philosophy of the mid-twentieth century.

In *Prince Caspian*, Lewis dramatises the link between imagination and seeing in order to illustrate that initial perceptions are not always enough, and that there may be more aspects of reality available to enhance figuration, and to unveil what is as yet unperceived. Once language is riven, and words become polysemous, interpretation of word and image becomes necessary.[34] Hermes, the trickster god, becomes active. As we have seen, Barfield claims that as imagination becomes capable of enhancing figuration, through consciously conceived metaphor, 'hitherto unperceived parts of the whole field of phenomena necessarily become perceptible'.[35] Polysemy - the ability of a word to mean more than one thing - comprises the 'potential [for] creativity

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[30] Prickett, *Words and the Word*, p. 88.

[31] Tolkien, 'Leaf by Niggle' in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 93- 118.

[32] 1 Kings 19: 8-12.

[33] Lewis, *PC*, p. 156.

[34] See Paul Ricoeur, 'Creativity in Language' in *Philosophy Today*, 17:2 (Summer, 1973), pp. 97-111.

[35] Barfield, *SA*, p. 138.

contained in the word'.[36] Metaphor, which expresses the connections and unities perceived by the imagination, is an intervention in the known semantic fields which fractures the known to reveal the unknown, the new, so that the creative potential of words can be exploited. The unexpressed or unrepresented is always in a dialectical process of becoming through language and the human mind. As Professor Kirk points out in the *Lion*, things do not have to be there all the time; they can come into being, cease to be and be reinvented in a subtly different form. Chronological snobbery and rigid demarcation of time as severed into 'past' and 'present', need to be reconsidered if we are adequately to understand how language shapes the world. As we have seen, it is only when Lucy is able to overcome her subjective focus, and realise the cosmic mind (Aslan) that animates both human and non-human nature, that she is able to dance with the re-awakened trees. Subsequently, the other children become capable of conscious individual participation and can 'see' Aslan. And eventually, the Old Narnians themselves see myths become facts when the children they had thought belonged to old stories materialise in from of them to help Caspian. The point that Lewis tries to make, through the professor and elsewhere, is that the poetic and the prosaic impulses in language work simultaneously. The idol-making consciousness will repeatedly reassert itself as the prosaic becomes predominant; and the disruptive poetic will emerge from the margins, from the mouths of children and in the shape of longaevi, to destabilise the ordered coherence created by the prosaic. Stories persist on the borders of things, and tricksters lurk in corners, peripheries and fringes, ready to unsettle established meanings and interpretations with unsettling spontaneity.

One such trickster is Pan/ Bacchus/Dionysus, a syncretic amalgam of revelry, music, dance and eroticism. Lewis's contemporary D. H. Lawrence recalled the old notion, recapitulated by Milton, that Christianity signalled the disappearance of Pan: 'At the beginning of the Christian era, voices were heard [...] wailing: "Pan is dead! Great Pan is dead!" The father of fauns and nymphs, satyrs and dryads and naiads was dead [...] Humanity hardly noticed'.[37] Barfield agrees, saying that 'in particular, the whole Dionysian element [...] did not survive the impact of Christianity'.[38] However, as Lawrence writes, 'Down the long lanes and overgrown ridings of history we catch odd glimpses of a lurking rustic god with a goat's white lightening in his eyes [..] Pan keeps on getting

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[36] Ricoeur, 'Creativity in Language', p. 97.

[37] D. H. Lawrence, 'Pan in America' in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Edward McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 22-23.

[38] Barfield, *SA*, p. 99.

reborn, in all kinds of strange shapes'.[39] Barfield explains that this is because 'Pan [...] has not only not retired from business; he has only gone indoors; he has hardly shut the door before we hear him moving about inside'.[40] In other words, the disappearance of gods corresponded to the movement of internalisation in the development of consciousness. And Lewis, for one, is keen to have Pan and Dionysus back in action. He wants to show that the joyful aspect of Christianity is not averse to the pagan lens - at least in his fiction, despite his repeated insistences that they do not go together.

2. 4. Renewal: The return of the gods

Aslan tells Lucy when he meets her in the forest in *Prince Caspian*, 'And now all Narnia will be renewed' (157). And so it is, but in a most surprising way: Lewis stages a return of the pagan gods, both to Narnia and to his young reader's imagination. The implication is that myth works in mysterious ways on the imagination, and conveys profound truth in a unique manner. Certainly, any conception of the *Chronicles* as a simplistic Christian allegory is dispelled in this episode. In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis states that pagan gods were made available to the Romantic imagination by the ancient allegorists; they 'died' in allegory, and only thus could they be resurrected, 'disinfected of belief [...] for gods, like other creatures, must die to live'.[41] The concept of dying to live was central to Lewis's thought, encompassing as it did the whole history of mankind as well as that of the individual soul. All old myths had died in the Enlightenment before being resurrected in Romanticism, and each individual soul re-enacted this drama of dying to one's old self to be re-born as someone new. Romantics such as Shelley recalled Prometheus, and Keats remembered Adonis. Surprisingly, Lewis re-awakens Bacchus, with all the physical, even sybaritic associations of pleasure he brings with him, in a bid to foreground for his readers the importance of the senses.

The scene of the renewal of Narnia, which begins with the re-awakened trees 'rushing towards' Aslan, has a distinct quality of *flow*. The imagery of movement in the form of dance, metamorphosis, and release from bondage, characterises the scene, recalling the sudden rushing, flowing onset of spring in the *Lion*. This Ovidian imagery of transformation is different from Lewis's treatment of life in his theological writings as a step by step series of mutually exclusive

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[39] Lawrence, 'Pan in America', pp. 22-23.

[40] Barfield, *SA*, p. 134.

[41] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 82.

choices.[42] In the process of the dance of the gods, patterns form and mutate; sequences spill into each other: vines are entwined in everyone's hair and trail on the ground; schoolboys metamorphose into pigs; a stick changes into a flowering branch, the man hitting a boy with the stick becoming a tree; Miss Prizzle's classroom transforms into a leafy glade; and the sense of a surging, swirling fluidity permeates these events, showing the poetic impulse of language in action.

The exuberant dance of the pagan gods signals the unfettering of the imagination which has been shackled by reason, and its release from the bonds of positivism. Re-enacting the progress from Enlightenment to Romanticism in narrative form, Lewis also sets free those forces of Nature that had receded or vanished due to the 'great movement of internalisation and [the] consequent aggrandisement of man and desiccation of the outer universe'.[43] This slow process of internalisation of forces had resulted in the valorisation of the subjective as against the objective — what primitive man had regarded as 'collective representations' had been made into objects to be manipulated for human satisfaction. As Lewis writes, humans felt that they were separate from nature, and the linking threads of influences that had joined humans and nature from prehistoric to medieval times, placing man as the microcosm in the macrocosm, were broken. But, as Lewis affirmed, the gods could be resurrected in full consciousness of their aesthetic value, and imaginatively apprehended in Final Participation. A conscious control of the primary imagination, voluntarily applied to perception, could reveal new areas of reality that could once again apprehend the unities within creation. The poetic language which captures this scene is radically unlike the fragmented language of modernism, which expresses the disjointed impressions made by a life preoccupied by surfaces, inducing a withdrawal and detachment of one thing and person from another as the old narratives dissipate.

In this episode, 'the romp', Lewis shows how liberating imagination can be, and that belief in a transcendent truth need not be stultifying and solemn but joyful and happy. In Narnia the gods revel with Aslan, following him in the joyous mission of liberating Narnia from Telmarine rule. Bacchus, with his wild pretty face, is accompanied by Silenus on his ass and a host of wild girls - the Maenads. Fauns and nymphs follow them. The rich imagery of sensuous delight in Lewis's description of the dance of joy, with vines bursting with a luxuriance of grapes and an abundance of enjoyment, pleasure and plenitude, is a deliberate evocation of the Dionysian celebration of life.

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[42] See Owen Barfield, 'Reflections on The Great Divorce' in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 1989), pp. 82-89.

[43] Lewis, *TDI*, p. 42.

The 'divine revellers', as Lewis calls them, disrupt order, the central symbol of this disruption being the smashing of the Bridge of Beruna. Aslan asks Bacchus to deliver the river-god from his chains, and the god proceeds to wrap the stones in ivy, 'splitting, breaking, separating them'(215). The language reminds us of Lewis's wish to 'tear it all up', which he associates with Bacchic revelry in his memoirs mentioned earlier.[44] The bridge can be said to symbolise a turning away from nature, a hankering for 'dry' safe life as opposed to immersion, which involves an abandonment of safety and comfort for the risk of saturation, a process that brings about a sacramental bond with nature which was an integral part of Lewis's imagination. As Bacchus shoots out vines that demolish the bridge, Lewis recounts how with 'splashing, screaming, and laughter the revellers waded or swam or danced across the ford' (215); and in contrast, the Telmarines made a great fuss: 'for they all hated and feared running water just as much as they hated and feared woods and animals' (226). Here Lewis evokes not only the sacramental significance of water, symbolising death and re-birth, but also the fading of 'original participation', and demonstrates how what he has called transposition is an important corollary of participation. The Old Narnians and the children participate and therefore are baptised as they cross the unfettered river. Bacchus himself can now cure a dying woman (Caspian's Nurse) with 'the richest wine, red as redcurrant jelly, smooth as oil, strong as beef, warming as tea, cool as dew' (220). Thus the old gods, 'disinfected of belief', become a source of pleasure, of joy, and of healing that pertains to the senses as well as the intellect, for what is needed is not a withdrawal from sensory contact but a 'transformation and redemption' of the senses by applying them to new purposes.[45]

We can find some illumination as to how Lewis hoped to achieve this if we consider the romantic thrust of his imagination. Lewis felt that myths and archetypes reflected certain fundamental features of man's basic spiritual experience. As noted earlier, one aspect of this experience that Lewis had not found in the northern myths was evoked by the Dionysian mythology, specially as he read it in Euripides' *Bacchae* and Stephens' *The Crock of Gold*. This was the darker, wilder and the more sensual element, absent in the the severe coldness of Teutonic myth. The romp in *Prince Caspian* has strong echoes of the final scene in Stephens' *The Crock of Gold*, a book whose powerful effect on Lewis is evident by the fact that he repeatedly extols it in his letters

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[44] Lewis, *SBJ*, p. 131.

[45] Barfield, *SA*, p. 148

from as early as 1916 to as late as 1957.[46] Lewis's great admiration for the mixture of strange exultation and mysticism of Stephens' darkly evocative book resonates in the romp scene. In Stephens' novel, the god Angus Og and his human bride Caitilin are accompanied by the Irish 'fairy host' - the Shee - leprechauns, the sea people, and countless other beings, including the Mother goddess, Dana, in a dance of freedom at the end of the novel. They dance, 'released from the hard bondage of self-hood', moving with the 'unity of one being'.[47] For as the author says, they revel in being part of the 'mighty organism' made of the units of 'God and Man and Nature'(136). In other words, the spiritual and the material form one organism, reminding us of Lewis's notion of transposition. This is similar to the effect associated with Bacchus/Dionysus, known as the god of fusion. Euripides' play presents Dionysus as the god of dissolution of polarities — the rational and the irrational, order and chaos, or the polis and the wild natural realm — and of an order established by virtue of these polarities. The god himself occupies an ambiguous space between an adolescent and a man, a god and a beast, so that many basic antinomies are confused in his persona. The god's association with anarchy and chaos is dramatised in the *Bacchae*, where his Maenads - literal meaning 'mad women' - tear apart the ruler who tries to imprison Dionysus. By evoking the god associated with the destruction of boundaries, both literal and figurative, Lewis dramatises the dissolution of strictly prosaic, dualistic language into more poetic, figurative meanings.

 The pagan gods remain powerful, eliciting the kind of excited delight that Lewis himself confessed was aroused in him by pagan stories, not the narratives of Christianity.[48] It is especially significant that Lewis needed to re-call the pagan gods for this purpose in the light of his remarks in *The Allegory of Love*, where he quite emphatically states:

> No religion, so long as it is believed, can have that kind of beauty which we find in the gods of Titian, of Botticelli, or of our own romantic poets. To this day you cannot make poetry of *that* sort out of the Christian heaven and hell [...] for poetry to spread its wings fully, there must be, besides the believed religion, a marvellous that knows itself as myth.[49]

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[46] See, for example, Lewis, *Collected Letters* vol. 1, pp. 196, 281-2, 293, 330, 395, 598, 859, 936, 958; vol. 2, p. 753; vol. 3, p. 881

[47] James Stephens, *The Crock of Gold* (Milton Keynes: Lightning, 1912), p. 139.

[48] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 12.

[49] Lewis, The *Allegory of Love*, p. 83. Original emphasis.

Only thus, maintains Lewis, could 'that other divinity [...] come to light in the imagination' (83). Imaginative, or poetic striving for truth cannot soar to the utmost heights without a marvellous, a mythic impetus that is capable of breaking all known and unknown bounds. Only then can the 'new' be envisioned. As already indicated, Barfield felt this to be a reason why Lewis refrained form making theoretical statements about the role of imagination as a vehicle of truth: he felt an element of dissonance between imagination and belief, and preferred to enact the truth of imagination in his stories. In this context, Barfield proposes that there were two Lewises: the imaginative and the rational. Many of his friends agreed that Lewis lived this polarity, but many argued that it was the source of his power as an imaginative writer of fiction.

Austin Farrer, a close friend of both Lewis and Tolkien, was an Anglican priest who served in Oxford as chaplain and fellow of both St Edmund's Hall and Trinity College before becoming Warden of Keble College. While acknowledging that 'the imaginative and the rationalistic held [...] a curious balance in [Lewis's] mind', he refuses to see this as either a split or an integration. Rather, he argues, 'this feeling intellect, this intellectual imagination' resulted in a creative dialectic, producing his most powerful works.[50] As an instance of this dialectic, the unfettered gods somehow escape doctrinal cohesiveness and generate multiple meanings. Dionysus and Pan, the Mediterranean gods associated with mystery and eroticism, might seem a strange choice for a writer who sought to represent the resurgence of Christianity in an unbelieving world. But as noted before, Lewis found the strongly evocative flavour of these myths an aid to the imagination as the creative faculty.

This hints at the possibility that Lewis's work will hold a stronger appeal to non-Christians than to his intended readership of believers and potential believers. In fact, I would suggest that the potency of his fantastic writing might actually be *diminished* by a recognition that it has a 'palpable design on us', in Keats's words. Many readers have found this to be so; but only an extended study of reactions to the novels by Christians and non-Christians, or by readers who recognise Lewis's doctrinal designs in his fiction and those who do not, will be able to answer these questions. Meanwhile, it is worth noting only how many of the best fantasy writers since Lewis have been avowed atheists; and that some of these, such as Philip Pullman and Ursula Le Guin, have been notable for their radical resistance to the Christianity Lewis champions, using his own tools of fantasy against it.

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[50] Austin Farrer, 'In HIs Image' in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, ed. by James T. Como (San Diego: Harvest, 1992, 1979), p. 242.

CHAPTER THREE. APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGES IN *THE LAST BATTLE*

Lewis's *The Last Battle* is concerned, as the name makes clear, with endings; and in Christian tradition the 'Four Last Things' of all are Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. As has been suggested earlier, Lewis concurs with Barfield's theory of the evolution of collective human consciousness as it develops from original participation towards non-participatory self-consciousness and then final participation. For Barfield, human imagination is creative: human beings create the world through language in an imaginative activity he calls Figuration. Primitive Figuration was unconscious, and as original participation is lost, subjectivity emerges and the phenomenal world recedes into the background, becoming objectified. The third step of human development, Barfield proposes, is not a restoration of original participation but a *self-conscious* imaginative act that will re-create the now objectified world as a lived, dialectical reality. But two factors make Lewis stop short from wholly agreeing when it comes to this third stage of this evolution proposed by Barfield, final participation. These factors are Lewis's Platonism – the belief that this world is a copy of Forms or Ideas that exist in another world, which is the 'real' world; and his misgivings about positing final redemption as taking place in the context of this world, which is an integral part of Barfield's notion of final participation. Consequently, in the *Battle* Lewis vividly demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human elements as reciprocally and organically creative of each other (final participation), but only after Narnia comes to an end. This section will discuss Lewis's concept of Apocalypse, which is a complete destruction of 'this world' and the entry into another world where final participation is possible.

The book begins on a dark note, but Lewis's imaginative rendering of the 'real' Narnia that emerges at the end of the book is as sensual and dynamic as anything he wrote. *The Last Battle* is syncretic, like the rest of the *Narnian Chronicles*: biblical themes, motifs and images get interwoven with fragments of classical and Norse myths, underpinned by Miltonic and Dantean structures, and Lewis's dialogic narrative produces meaning through the interplay of the different, even conflicting ideologies represented by these narratives. Above all, the real Narnia of the conclusion is a delightfully inclusive land, in which these many myths cohere to create an exciting, endless vista through which all races and species are shown running, penetrating deeper and deeper into the new reality. In this scene more than in any he had written before, Lewis shows how poets and artists can 'reveal' aspects of the world that have remained unapprehended when only sense-perception is taken as 'rock-bottom reality', to the exclusion of imaginative perception.

To narrate the eschatology or 'end times' of Narnia was essential for Lewis if he was to bring his fantastic vision to a satisfactory conclusion. For Lewis, with his passionate disavowal of Darwinian progressivist post-war ideals, the notion of achieving any sort of perfection through mere human effort was unacceptable. As Robert Maslen points out, he roundly rejected the materialistic literary iconography developed by science fiction writers like H. G. Wells and scientists like J. B. S. Haldane (described by Lewis as 'scientific humanists'), wishing to replace it with an iconography of his own which is based on a biblical model of history.[51] This biblical model, according to M. H. Abrams, consists of a 'single and sharply defined plot' with a beginning, a crisis, and a coming end, which will replace the old world with a new heaven and new earth.[52] This model retained its cogency and affective power for Lewis, as Maslen demonstrates; and in his science fiction Lewis challenged the scientific humanists' efforts by producing his own version of the Bible in the tradition of Dante and Milton.[53] He continued this project in the Narnia series. If Haldane's essay 'The Last Judgement' (1927) offers an eschatological vision that the scientist feels is more relevant to the twentieth century than religious apocalyptic myths, Lewis seeks to demonstrate that the Christian apocalyptic vision is relevant for all times and all worlds. The *Narnian Chronicles*, but especially the last two books, are conscious attempts to present an alternative bible, a living book that interpenetrates the world of his readers by encouraging them to participate wholly and finally (in Barfield's terms) with his imagined world, Narnia.

3.1. Apocalyptic Eschatology in *The Last Battle*

Clearly situated within the tradition of apocalyptic eschatology, *The Last Battle* has many of the characteristics identified by theologians as typical of this category. It includes, for example, a persecuted people (Narnian Animals), an otherworldly journey (Jill and Eustace, and Tirian in a dream), a seer who mediates God's plan (Roonwit), and of course the description of the end of the world, with both a personal afterlife and a transformation of the material cosmos into something

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[51] Robert W. Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography of the Future' in *Inklings Jahrbuch* 18 (2000), pp. 222-249.

[52] M. H. Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Theme and Variations' in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 343-44.

[53] Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography', p. 226.

new and perfect.[54]   In order to link his work from the beginning with the Christian apocalypse, Lewis wanted to make it clear that his fictional universe was soon to end. The *Battle* therefore begins with the words 'In the last days of Narnia'[55], and in chapter two, Tirian is described as 'the last of the Kings of Narnia', phrases clearly devised to shock the young reader who has been following the Narnia series devotedly up to this moment.[56] The human protagonists of the story from Lewis's own time and place, Jill and Eustace, articulate this sense of shock. Finding themselves transported back to Narnia to help the last king in his final confrontation with Narnia's enemies, Jill expresses a wish that she could return instead to those 'good, ordinary times' when Narnia existed in peace and prosperity: 'And then,' she continues, 'I hope they'll go on forever and ever and ever. *Our* world is going to have an end some day. Perhaps this one won't. Oh Jewel - wouldn't it be lovely if Narnia just went on and on'.[57] But Jewel, the unicorn, quickly puts a stop to these musings - which echo, as Lewis knew very well, the wishes of his young readers. Lewis's project, by the time he writes this book, is to demonstrate that Aslan's country is the only 'real' place to desire – to substitute it, so to speak, for the imaginary country he has invented for the entertainment and instruction of children. So Jewel answers Jill by making it clear that 'all worlds draw to an end, except Aslan's own country',[58] thus putting a stop to futile wishes for the perpetuation of any world or species - the kinds of wishes expressed by the scientific humanists of the early twentieth century, who hoped for an indefinite extension of human life into future ages through technological and political progress.

Besides these statements by the narrator and characters, there are certain predictions and signs from the beginning of the novel that foreshadow the end of Narnia, although these are invariably misunderstood or misinterpreted. Chief among these, as we shall see, is the loss of meaning from language, another concept Lewis drew from Barfield.

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[54] For a detailed discussion of the relevant terminology, considering 'apocalypse' as a literary genre, 'apocalyptic eschatology' as a religious perspective, and 'apocalypticism' as a form of social ideology, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 27-34; John J. Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre', *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semiea 14* (1979), p. 3; and Bernard McGinn, 'Early Apocalypticism: the ongoing debate', in C. A. Partrides and Joseph Wittreich (eds.), *Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 2-5.

[55] C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1956]) p. 1. All subsequent references are to this edition. Hereafter cited as *TLB*.

[56] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 15.

[57] Lewis, *TLB*, p.110-111.

[58] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 111.

3.2. Apocalypse as Semiotic and Semantic Confusion

Lewis demonstrates the concurrent loss of meaning and moral values in his imagined world through the changing use of language in *The Last Battle*. As Barfield emphasised, 'The full meanings of words are flashing iridescent shapes like flames – ever-flickering vestiges of the slowly evolving consciousness beneath them'.[59] In fact, what he contends is that language is the tool for an archaeology of evolving consciousness - with its correlative, evolving phenomena. In other words, the Logos (which means both Spirit and Word), which was once equally present in human beings and nature, and in which both participated, is slowly narrowing itself into the human mind, as the microcosm emerges from the macrocosm.[60] As human consciousness evolves, subjectivity emerges and collective human consciousness transforms into individual centres of consciousness. As subject and object bifurcate, language loses its original, concrete meanings and words split into abstract meanings. It is the role of language, says Barfield, to mediate transition from the 'unindividualized dreaming spirit [...] to the individualized human spirit'.[61] Therefore logical positivism, which seeks to abolish referentiality in language except as pertaining to scientific subjects, is in effect abolishing nature as well as humanity. Thinking is participation, Barfield insists, and as language and consciousness evolve, so the phenomena they address undergo a corresponding evolution. Nature is in a constant state of becoming; the world we see is the world we create through language. Mere sense-data are meaningless until the imagination unifies them into concrete, meaningful wholes. However, whereas primitive humanity was aware of their connectedness with nature (participatory consciousness), post-scientific humanity is unaware (non-participatory consciousness).

This is represented by Lewis in the *Battle* by setting up a contrast between the Calormene invaders of Narnia on the one hand (whose invasion has been assisted by the collaboration of Shift, an ambitious ape); and the Narnian Talking Animals on the other, along with Tirian, their king. The abyss that yawns between the Calormenes' use of certain words and the way these same words are used by the Narnians offers a succinct demonstration of the evolution that is taking place among the Calormenes and their allies from what Barfield terms 'participatory' to 'non-participatory' consciousness.

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[59] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 67.

[60] Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age* (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 1966), pp. 84-85.

[61] Barfield, 'Preface to the Second Edition', *Poetic Diction,* p. 13.

Like Tolkien, Lewis believes that naming is an act of imaginative creation, exemplified in the prototypical biblical injunction to Adam - repeated by Aslan to the cabby in *The Magician's Nephew* - to name all creatures according to their nature. Lewis's names for his characters, then, are always carefully chosen, so that the treacherous ape (for instance) is called Shift, an indication not only of his 'shifty', devious nature but also of the shifting and blurring of linguistic boundaries by which he engages in his quest for power. Shift alters and adjusts meaning according to his desire of the moment; mostly the gluttonous desire for food that confirms his commitment to the seventh deadly sin. The ape plays with words to confound and perplex the donkey, Puzzle, whose name also summarises his identity. As the *Battle* begins, the reader quickly becomes aware of Shift's manipulative use of language, as he succeeds in making Puzzle do all the hard work, setting up a master-servant relationship between them that Shift misrepresents to Puzzle as a friendship between equals. Shift's linguistic misappropriations reach a sinister climax when he sees a lion skin in Cauldron Pool. He insists that the skin has been 'sent' with the express purpose of being used to construct a false image of Aslan – though he never explains who has sent it. The different reactions of ape and donkey to the lion skin are illuminating. Shift regards it as a mere object to be used for his own ends, whereas Puzzle understands its significance as the outer shell of that most potent of Narnian symbols, a lion, and associates it at once with the greatest of lions, Aslan. As a result the donkey wishes to give it a proper burial as a token of respect. This confirms Puzzle's recognition that the skin may stand for something other than itself: a spiritual relationship, for instance, or a metonymic representation. Shift, on the other hand, sees it as nothing more than a material asset that can be deployed to fool the animals of Narnia. Shift's semantic distortions are underpinned by a materialistic view of the world, regarding all non-human phenomena, animals, trees and so on, as 'things' to be used. Concomitantly he sees himself as distinct from the other talking animals – as a human being – while dismissing his fellow sentient creatures as suitable material to be enslaved. The issue here is one of definitions: Shift considers humanity to consist in cunning, not recognising that his fellow Narnians manifest their intelligence quite differently from him, by using words in their right senses, by respecting the signs that indicate the values they respect, and by serving their fellow creatures rather than themselves. None of these forms of behaviour qualifies as 'cunning' in Shift's book, and this shift in his understanding of what it is to be human – or rather sentient, a word Lewis translates in his science fiction novels by the invented term 'hnau' – is perhaps the most significant in the novel.

In the light of Barfield's conception of language as creative, and as coeval with the evolution of human consciousness, this new development (or 'shift') in Narnian language usage holds important implications. As we have seen, Barfield shows that as language becomes more abstract in sync with the development of human self-consciousness, the natural phenomena in which humans initially participated increasingly become mere objects to be used. The corruption of Shift illustrates this perfectly. Shift is helped in his perverse designs by the Calormenes, who are also driven by material greed, and whose corruption Lewis had already demonstrated in *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), where they are portrayed as a predominantly materialistic people. Lewis's racism is evident in his portrayal of the Calormenes, which is clearly modelled on Near-Eastern religio-social life as Lewis perceived it. Yet his exuberantly imaginative portrayal represents many beautiful and appealing aspects of the eastern land: above all, the Calormenes delight in using language elegantly, which is at its best when they are telling stories. These positive aspects of Calormene culture, largely drawn from Lewis's love for the *Arabian Nights*, succeed in making *The Horse and His Boy* delightful reading despite its racist attitudes. In the main, however, the Calormenes represent the singular vision that condones and even celebrates the hedonistic life-styles of the rich, itself predicated on the necessity of enslaving a segment of the population.[62] Indeed, part of the pleasure of *The Horse and his Boy* lies in the frequently amusing disjunction between the ornate locutions of Calormenes of all classes and the selfishness of their behaviour. The *Horse's* portrayal of Southern culture as fundamentally corrupt, in contrast to the generous and unselfish Northern culture of Narnia, is reprised in the *Battle*, where the Calormenes exhibit the 'idol-making', materialistic mentality Lewis abhors, and which he warns against in *The Abolition of Man*.[63]

When phenomena (the Greek word for appearances) are treated as 'bodies already formed', as valueless and inert objects, they become 'idols', explains Barfield. In *The Last Battle* the Calormenes are represented first and foremost as the followers of a monstrous demon-god called Tash, who has usurped the place of a deity in their imagination. Where the true God is loving, Tash encourages cruelty in his followers; where the true God, being beautiful himself, delights in beauty, peace and affection, Tash delights in ugliness, war and hatred. Tash, then, stands for the appalling semantic shift that takes place when the term 'god' is applied to something or someone who does not meet the criteria for godhood. And the substitution of another set of meanings for the true

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[62] For example, the supreme indifference of Aravis to how her maid, whom she drugged before escaping, would be whipped; an attitude that evinces the typically English understatement, 'that's unfair' from Shasta, who turns out be a Northern prince. C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, p. 53.

[63] Lewis, *AoM*, pp. 69-70.

meaning of this term brings with it a range of other substitutions, whereby words become utterly detached from their proper significations as if by a perverse act of magic. Indeed, this book makes clearer than any of the earlier Narnia novels that magic inheres in the ordinary words of everyday speech. The reassignment of meanings by Shift and the Calormenes enables them to cast as potent 'spells' as any sorcerer, actually transforming reality by describing it in inverted terms. As the novel unfolds it becomes clear that the Calormenes (and Shift) do not *see* the same phenomena as other sentient beings do, because their consciousness of the world has been profoundly affected by their use of language. They inhabit a world of 'idols', in which the objectified Other is a lifeless substance to be operated upon by the subject.

The semiotic confusion generated by the ape produces an increasingly ominous atmosphere in Narnia. Reading or interpreting 'signs' is an important element in mythico-religious discourse, and the magnitude of Shift's transgression in suggesting that Puzzle dress up as Aslan is made clear when a small earthquake throws them both on their faces.[64] But this sign, too, is contested; Puzzle and Shift interpret it in directly contradictory ways, with Shift's cunning inevitably permitting him to impose his own interpretation on his gullible companion. While the donkey reads the earthquake as a sign of Aslan's wrath at their hubristic plans, Shift claims to read it as a sign of approval from above – though the reader may well suspect that he really thinks it a noise devoid of significance altogether. It's clear, too, that the reader is expected to interpret the sign of the earthquake as Puzzle does, and to be disturbed by Shift's willingness to change the meaning of a divine gesture so well embedded in different mythological traditions. The association of earthquakes with divine wrath, or with imminent disaster, is by no means confined to a Christian context (where it occurs, for instance, in the earthquake that accompanies Christ's death in the Synoptic Gospels). The end of times in the Norse tradition is preceded by earthquakes, while Zeus brings the civilisation of Atlantis to an end with an earthquake in Plato's *Timaeus*.[65] Shift's rebranding of an earthquake as a sign of approval, then, violates the logic of a syncretic web of myths, and drives home the bankruptcy of his view of sign systems in general. It is hardly surprising, then, that as he rises to the ascendancy after the Calormene invasion of Narnia his wilful divorce of words from meanings spreads, so that the many other signs of the end of the world that follow the earthquake are either ignored or misinterpreted. Even the last of the Narnian kings cannot interpret them with any

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[64] This resonates with the Biblical theme of revelation, as St. Paul and St. John both fall to the ground in the moment of revelation.

[65] 'Ragnarok.' Encyclopaedia Mythica from Encyclopaedia Mythica Online.< http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/ragnarok.html > [Accessed 30 July, 2013].

precision - a sign of his diminishing ability to participate, in Barfield's terms, and an inability that leads him to misjudge the mayhem being perpetrated by the Calormenes, especially among words.

The first explicit verbal warning in the book of something terribly amiss comes in the form of a prophecy by the centaur Roonwit, whose name confirms his skill in reading 'runes' or signs. The centaur's prophecy is also a generically apocalyptic element signalling that Lewis was conscious of his book as an intervention in biblical hermeneutics, in which the conduit of revelation is often a non-human 'seer' who unfolds God's design for his people to a human.[66] The Centaur's talk of star-signs and their meanings recalls an astronomical sign in an earlier book of Narnia, the constellation shown to Caspian by his tutor in *Prince Caspian*. That sign had been auspicious, presaging good fortune for Narnia; but the stars bode ill for Narnia in Tirian's reign, as Roonwit explains. 'Never in all my days,' the centaur declares, 'have I seen such terrible things written in the skies [...] I know by my art that there have not been such disastrous conjunctions of the planets for five hundred years [...] some great evil hangs over Narnia'. He warns Tirian not to believe that Aslan is in Narnia, for 'The stars never lie, but Men and Beasts do' (18-19). Unfortunately, Tirian fails to comprehend fully the warning read in the stars by Roonwit, because he is well on the way to losing his awareness of a participating cosmos - a concept which Caspian in the earlier books, set in the Narnian equivalent of the earthly Middle Ages, understood very well. Evidently Narnia is undergoing something equivalent to entropy, of which the disconnection between the spoken word and the comprehension of its recipients is a major symptom.

Another recognised sign of apocalypse is a persecuted people,[67] which is most drastically exemplified in Narnia by the murder of the Dryads, the spirits of the Talking Trees. The notion that trees can talk is always deeply disturbing to invaders of Narnia. The Telmarines of *Prince Caspian* find it terrifying, and the Calormenes are eager to put paid to the practice for good, thus reinforcing their conviction that only the controlled human speech authorised by their rulers can be permitted in their territories. We might remember, from this point of view, that there were no Talking Beasts in the Calormene of *The Horse and His Boy*, and that Bree had been forced to conceal his own articulacy for years for fear of reprisal. The first sign of the Dryads' fate occurs just after the centaur has uttered his prophecy. Roonwit's conversation with Tirian is interrupted by the sound of

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[66] See, for example, Bernard McGinn, 'Early Apocalypticism: The Ongoing Debate' in eds. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich, *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 4.

[67] Paul D. Hanson, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 27-34.

lamentation as a Dryad runs up with the dreadful news that the 'holy trees' of Lantern Waste are being felled: 'Great trees are falling, falling, falling' (20). This episode derives its force from the fact that Lantern Waste was the very first place Lewis's readers saw in Narnia: Lucy entered it from the Wardrobe in the first book of the series, and we witnessed the planting of the lantern in the story of Narnia's creation told in the penultimate book, *The Magician's Nephew*. In other words, the phrase 'Lantern Waste' has come to stand synecdochally for Narnia itself, and its destruction testifies to the Calormenes' hostility to the whole imaginative construct we have come to think of as Narnia. An attack on that particular locale is an attack on Narnia as a whole, and an attack on Narnia is an attack on the imagination, which deploys words to make impossible things happen, to conjure up wonders out of nothing. The reader's relationship with Lantern Waste, built up over years, means that they feel the assault on it more deeply than they could have done if the phrase had been casually introduced into this book without its attendant echoes.

The pain of witnessing the demolition of an imaginary world in whose creation one has participated – something Lewis could assume about every reader who had followed his series so far – is brilliantly dramatised in this episode. With graphic immediacy Lewis shows us what a participating consciousness would see if a sentient tree were to be felled, the horror of which is first articulated in the king's unbelieving exclamation at the notion of Talking Trees being 'murdered'. Instead of simply hearing his horror, the reader is forced to witness its cause:

> 'A-a-a-h,' gasped the Dryad […] shuddering time after time as if under repeated blows. Then all at once she fell sideways as suddenly as if both her feet had been cut from under her. For a second they saw her lying on the grass and then she vanished. They knew what had happened. Her tree, miles away, had been cut down (21).

This horrific scene demonstrates the state of consciousness of the Calormene invaders (non-participating) as against the Narnians (participating). Evidently the Calormenes share the state of mind against which Lewis protested so strongly in *The Abolition of Man*, where he describes the 'bleeding trees' in Virgil and Spenser as 'far-off echoes of that primeval sense of impiety', which Lewis feels sure was elicited by the desecration of nature even as late as the Medieval period.[68] The same impiety is enacted in the felling of the talking trees, which are inhabited by divine or semi-divine beings; the atrocity demonstrates how, in Lewis's words, non-human phenomena can be

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[68] Lewis, *AoM*, p. 70.

'stripped of [their] qualitative properties and reduced to mere quantity' in the mind of the materialist.[69] Lewis's allusion to the bleeding trees in *The Divine Comedy* makes this a complex, resonant image, as Dante's guide, Virgil, mentions his own poem (*Aeneid* 3, 22-48) as an analogue to the bleeding trees in the eighth circle of Hell (*Inferno*, Canto 13, 31-45), thus identifying the topos as a theme running through the major epics. In this scene, Dante casually pulls off the branch of a tree and is shocked when it starts to bleed. A voice from inside the tree then tells the poet that it is in fact a human who committed suicide and has therefore been arborified. Virgil's own bleeding tree is also a human being, Polydorus, who has been murdered for his gold and metamorphosed into vegetation. As Barfield has noted, participation continued into medieval times, and the poets' symbolism of bleeding trees in Dante's poem reveals their awareness of the close connections between humanity and the environment, an awareness shared by Spenser (who introduces bleeding trees into *The Faerie Queene*) and of course Lewis, who idolised all three poets. These intertextual associations point to the epistemic significance of imaginative apprehension, in contrast to abstract, deductive reasoning – the reasoning that underpins the marketplace, at least according to the market's rhetoric.

The impact of reductive use of language is evident as the king and Jewel advance towards the woods in anger. They encounter a water-rat who is sailing on a raft made of 'Half a dozen splendid tree-trunks, all newly cut and newly lopped of their branches', and the rat tells them he is off to sell the 'logs' to the Calormenes. Readers who have just witnessed the terrible death of the Dryad will feel the acute irony of referring to the trees as a certain quantity of material to be sold. There could be no better illustration of the slow conversion of a consciousness that embraces the cosmos as a macrocosm and man as a microcosm within it, to a consciousness that has bifurcated all words into binary fissions, proposing 'I' as living subject and 'It' as dead object (in Martin Buber's terms, which I discuss later). And there's a further irony here: the water-rat is quite oblivious to the fact that he himself will soon be subject to the same process, since in Calormene – and of course in the world of the reader – water rats do not speak, and so cannot distinguish between the log and the living tree.

The desecration of nature is the sign of an advanced degree of non-participatory consciousness. Embodied in the empiricist philosophy of thinkers such as Francis Bacon (ironically

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[69] Lewis, *AoM*, p. 70.

the chief theorist of the various 'idols' that impede clear thinking)[70] was a desire to control the non-human environment, to use it, in a phrase Lewis quotes from Bacon in the *Abolition*, not as a mistress to be pleased but as a spouse to be fruitful.[71] The conflation of women and nature as the symbolic Other to be dominated is present in Bacon's formulation, and has provoked fierce resistance from contemporary ecofeminist movements; Le Guin's polemical response to this double marginalisation is discussed in the next part of the thesis. The same attitude to the environment sponsored the rapid escalation of inter-war techno-industrial development against which both Tolkien and Lewis spoke so strongly in their novels. Tolkien especially loved trees, as his creation of Treebeard the Ent testifies. In a parallel scene to the Dryad one, when Merry and Pippin tell Treebeard of trees being felled to feed the fires of Orthanc, the Ent angrily replies that most of the trees are his friends, 'creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost forever now'.[72] Le Guin shares this love with Tolkien: in the Earthsea series, all knowledge inheres within the roots of the Immanent Grove and can be discerned from the pattern of its leaves. She anticipates this connection between vegetation and wisdom in a note to her short story, 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow' (1975), which begins with the words 'Trees again' and goes on to affirm that 'We all have forests in our minds. Forests unexplored, unending'.[73] As ecological and environmental degradation becomes a vital concern at the turn of the millennium, Tolkien and Lewis's views have come more and more to occupy the mainstream of the political debate. As we shall see in the next chapter, Le Guin represents the end of human life in the later Earthsea novels as a reunion with a matrix that includes both the organic and the non-organic worlds, from whose fusion, as Barfield argued with Lewis's concurrence, all consciousness emerges.

The image of the dying tree in *The Last Battle*, then, derives its energy from an associative nexus of symbols and intertexts which extends from the biblical myth of the Fall, with its tree of knowledge and tree of life, to the reconstruction of the Fall in Milton's *Paradise Lost* - and beyond to Le Guin. The myth of the Fall offers a concrete representation of Barfield's theory of the loss of original participation and the subsequent awareness of self and other as irreconcilably separate. It is therefore an excellent example of the concomitant rational and imaginative apprehension offered by

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[70] See Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[71] Lewis, *AoM*, pp. 77-78.

[72] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), p. 617.

[73] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow' in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, vol. 2 (London: Granada, 1978 [1975]), p. 25.

myth - that is, the cognitive and imaginative validity of myth - and helps to explain Lewis's introduction of a falling tree as an emblem of Narnia's approaching fall.

Lewis frequently shows the difficulty of reconciling these two modes of thought – that is, the rational and the imaginative – without the help of a fund of stories capable of nourishing both the faculties. In Barfield's terms, the rational is the prosaic and the imaginative is the poetic impulse in language, and 'it is only by means of this prosaic spirit that the separate perceptual groups ("phenomena"), which metaphor is to combine or relate, could ever have *become* separate'.[74] Similarly, as Barfield goes on to contend, human consciousness only came into being by the prosaic principle, 'For the rational principle […] is above all that which produces self-consciousness'.[75] In the *Battle*, Tirian feels unable for a while to reconcile his vivid imaginative life with his reason; a dilemma that Lewis himself contended with for many years. Only in his mythopoeic writing, in fact – in *Narnia* and *Till We Have Faces* - did he discover a satisfactory means of bringing them into harmony.[76] In the *Battle*, Tirian's reasoning is often at fault; he acts rashly and makes mistakes, as when he kills two unarmed Calormene soldiers in passionate rage at their beating a Talking Horse. At the same time, it is his imaginative participation that draws him towards the idealised Narnia of Aslan's country. When Tirian is confronted with ever more concrete evidence that Aslan is wholly different from the divine being he thought he knew – that the lion is a tyrant, as constructed by Shift, rather than the benefactor he has heard about in stories – the young king still refuses to be bound by the tyranny of 'reason', and persists in believing in the Aslan he has always dreamed of, much as the young Caspian persisted in believing the stories of ostensibly mythical Old Narnians in *Prince Caspian*. In other words, the integrative faculty of the imagination is needed to restore conceptually what has been lost in perception during the evolution of consciousness. While the rational principle 'shuts off the human ego from the living meaning in the outer world'[77] and encloses it into fragmented pieces of self-hood, poetic language can reintegrate the fragments to discover new semantic fields. The fact that both Tirian and Caspian turn out to be justified in their beliefs – that their imaginative convictions prove substantial – argues for a different use of reason than the Gradgrindian variety espoused by Narnia's enemies.

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[74] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, pp. 139-140. Original emphasis.

[75] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 140.

[76] See, for example, Lewis's undated poem 'Reason' in C. S. Lewis, *Poems*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York and London: Harcourt, 1964), p. 81.

[77] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 140.

After killing the two Calormene soldiers, Tirian and Jewel stop in mid-flight to consider their actions. Musing on the happenings of the past few hours, Tirian is forced to think that Aslan might indeed be back in Narnia; as he reminds Jewel, the rat taking logs downriver to be sold in Calormene, as well as the enslaved Talking Horse, had asserted that these things were being done on Aslan's orders. Tirian's decision to hand himself over to the enemy is based not only on his shame at having attacked two unarmed men; also, and more importantly, he and Jewel feel desolate at the prospect of an Aslan who would endorse such cruelty as the murder of Talking Trees and the enslavement of Talking Animals. But Tirian insists that he would rather die than live with the 'horrible fear' that Aslan 'has come and is not like the Aslan we have believed in and longed for'. He uses a striking simile to describe such a state of affairs: 'It is as if the sun rose one day and were a black sun' (32). This formulation recalls the Green Witch's distortions of language in *The Silver Chair* (1953), when she tries to dissuade Eustace and Jill from belief in the world above the ground by insisting that the lamp in her subterranean apartment – which Prince Rilian has used as analogous to the sun – is the only real source of light, while the sun is 'but a tale, a children's story'.[78] The parallel with this episode may well be deliberate on Lewis's part, reminding his readers of another parable about the truths that fantastic stories can convey. The Narnians' imaginative knowledge of Aslan in *The Last Battle* – based wholly on stories, since the lion has not visited Narnia in their lifetimes – also makes Jewel compare the fear of finding a different Aslan to the feeling you would get 'if you drank water and it were *dry* water'.[79] A black sun and dry water are particularly poignant images of un-life, since light and water are basic necessities or conditions for the subsistence of living beings. More importantly, they are logical impossibilities; the sun *is* light, no light on earth would exist without it, and water cannot be divorced from the property of wetness (except perhaps in dreams). Language loses all meaning if these properties are removed from the things that are their source and origin; and by the same token, as Jewel says, 'if Aslan is not Aslan, what life is left for me?' (32). Putting these words in the mouth of a unicorn is a supremely witty act on Lewis's part; a non-existent animal insists on the necessity of a non-existent lion to his own continued existence, and the reader is constrained by the story's logic to accept the unicorn's reasoning. Here logic and the sentient being's capacity to imagine something better than they have in front of them are inextricably entwined, setting up a powerful alternative to the materialist reasoning of Aslan's detractors.

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[78] Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1953]), p. 198.

[79] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 32. Original emphasis.

In Shift's case, this reasoning is shown in a far more menacing light than the magic spells of the Witches, which presented the chief threat in the earlier Narnia novels. Instead of using magic, like the White Witch or the Green one, Shift and his Calormene helpers distort the meanings of words like 'freedom' and 'slavery' in a manner reminiscent of George Orwell's Newspeak or Doublethink in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). When Tirian and Jewel hand themselves over to the Calormenes they are taken up to the hill where Shift daily collects all Narnians to hear his propagandistic addresses, and nightly collects them to catch a glimpse of the false Aslan – Puzzle dressed in the lion's skin – by the light of a bonfire. The setting up of false prophets is yet another sign of biblical apocalypse, as in Matthew 7:15-22;[80] and the ape's falsity is apparent in his confused speech, as he repeatedly slips into saying 'I want' rather than 'Aslan wants' when he issues his orders. But his linguistic corruption goes much deeper than this. Shift is also guilty of distorting the basic meanings of words through the deployment of what George Steiner calls 'ideological language', a form of discourse which takes advantage of polysemy to achieve its ends: that is, of 'the capacity of the same word to mean different things, such difference ranging from nuance to antithesis'.[81] The ape uses this ideologically inflected language as he warns the animals:

> Everyone who can work is going to be made to work in the future. Aslan has it all settled with the King of Calormen [...] All you Horses and Bulls and Donkeys are to be sent down to Calormen to work for your living - pulling and carrying the way horses and such like do in other countries. And all you digging animals like Moles and Rabbits and Dwarfs are going down to work in the Tisroc's mines (37-38).

The animals' dismayed and unbelieving complaints that Aslan has sold them into slavery are dismissed by the ape as irrational irrelevancies, since they will not technically be slaves: 'You'll be paid,' he tells them; 'That is to say, your pay will be paid into Aslan's treasury and he will use it for everybody's good' (38). This is an excellent example of Orwellian Doublethink, reflecting how slavery and paid work, ostensibly wholly different, are in many forms of governance essentially the same. Steiner's 'ideological language' splinters meaning to such an extent that any word can be used to mean anything that suits the hegemonic discourse. The result of this verbal splintering is

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[80] False prophets are warned against repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments. For example, Deut. 18: 20-22, Jer. !4: 14-16; Matt. 24: 11-12, 24:24, Mark 13:22.

[81] George Steiner, *After Babel*, 3rd. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1975]), p. 35.

that the ideology invoked by the ape could be identified equally with Soviet communism, which claims to distribute wages fairly while privileging a power elite, and capitalism, which makes wage slaves of its workers. These apparently opposite ideological positions are united in their use of language to sustain the hegemony.

Politically motivated speech is full of euphemism and generalisations. Shift's utilitarian slogan, that things are being done for 'everybody's good', actually refers to the advantage of the few; and his list of things to be established for everybody's good is almost comically horrific: 'roads and big cities and schools and offices and whips and muzzles and saddles and cages and kennels and prisons' (38). In this sentence Lewis's satire is again given its point by his use of beast fable; the more 'progressive' elements of a city, such as schools and offices, are mixed in with the apparatus of state control, such as prisons, and both are evocatively intermingled with human mechanisms for controlling animals: whips, muzzles, saddles, cages, kennels. The slippage between human and animal references offers a neat demonstration of the way loss of participation with our environment leads inexorably to loss of participation with one another; deride animals and trees and you deride the people who depend on them. And when the Animals complain that they do not want to be subjected to these tools of oppression – that they want to be free – the ape at once questions their capacity for reason, reinforcing their non-sentient status in comparison with himself: 'What do you know about freedom? You think freedom means doing what you like. Well, you're wrong. That isn't true freedom. True freedom means doing what I tell you'.[82] Here Lewis makes it clear that the ape himself is irrational, since he can think only in subjective terms; his world is solipsistic. In the ossified subject-object binary, all value is based on subjective desire - so that 'you-want' and 'I-want' rhetoric becomes the ultimate category of meaning. Lewis himself, by contrast, believes in objective value, holding that certain phenomena 'demand certain reactions' based on an intrinsic value that inheres within them.[83] But the ape is incapable of apprehending this. The depletion of the awareness of the nexus between human consciousness and nature, and the so-called conquest of nature by humanity, are here exposed as power gained by a few men over the rest of creation, human as well as non-human. The implication is that technological and social progress, with the concomitant 'fatal serialism' (*AoM*, 80) that makes post-war and post-industrial humanity believe they are on a path of continual improvement, needs to be reconsidered before all consideration is rendered impossible by the loss of meaning.

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[82] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 39.

[83] Lewis, *AoM*, p. 75.

The distortions of language encouraged by the invaders expose not only their ecopolitical but also their religious perversity. The nadir of linguistic malfunction is reached when Shift declares Aslan and Tash to be one and the same: 'Tash is only another name for Aslan,' he insists, and 'Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know Who' (40). Now names, for Lewis, are not merely empty signifiers – arbitrary sounds to denote the signified, which have no intrinsic link with the signifier. As we already know from the intensely physical effect that Aslan's name had on the four Pevensie children when they first heard it in the *Lion*, names are of immense importance for Lewis – another link between Lewis and Plato, who discussed the identity of names and things in his dialogue *Cratylus*. Barfield's theory of consciousness posits naming as coterminous with the formation of 'things' at the creation, so that in the primal Adamic language the name and the thing were essentially the same; and the concept that the Word is both creative and also generative of 'sub-creation' helped to shape the literary imagination of the Inklings. For Lewis, then, the distortion of Aslan's name to Tashlan would have been the ultimate transgression, as it warps and disfigures the primal Narnian Word. In *The Magician's Nephew* Aslan was presented as the creator of Narnia, just as Christ is the creator in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and it was his breath that conferred consciousness and language ('Think, Speak, Know') on certain Animals. Speech, then, in association with Aslan, is a thing of power, and to defuse the significance of Aslan's own name is to undermine the premise on which Narnia was constructed. Worse, it binds the lion in an unholy alliance with the devilish Tash, whose name yokes the clash of teeth or cymbals with the word that denotes nonsense in Edwardian English: Tosh.

At first glance, this portrayal of an evil foreign deity, a sower of deadly nonsense among the conquered peoples, goes against the grain of the joyous syncretism which informed the *Narnian Chronicles* from the beginning. The heterogeneity exhibited in the wild romp of renewal in *Prince Caspian* would seem to be undercut in the portrayal of the Calormene god as wholly evil, in line with the insular prejudice Lewis showed in his representation of 'Southern' culture in *The Horse and his Boy*. But an important counter to this apparent resistance to heterogeneity is the Calormene soldier, Emeth. Emeth believes wholeheartedly in the goodness of Tash, and learns at the end of the book that he has been a faithful servant of Aslan all along. His understanding of divine goodness has always been impeccable; he has simply articulated it through a different combination of letters and sounds. This could of course be said to problematise the conception of naming as presented in the Narnia series. The strong, visceral response of the Pevensie children to Aslan's name in the *Lion* implies that even for post-participation humans one word at least could have a direct link to what it

signified; so that Emeth's application of the same meaning to a different name in *The Last Battle* is an intriguing incongruity. At the same time, it confirms Lewis's personal hope that the best immaterial things – such as God himself – need not become inaccessible to humankind even after the linguistic deterioration to which the *Battle* bears witness. And it offers, too, a rationale for the cultural heterogeneity we have already noted in his earlier works. Lewis's erstwhile secretary Walter Hooper points out that the salvation of the 'virtuous infidel' was an important issue for Lewis throughout his life, as a result of his passionate love for non-Christian arts and cultures.[84] In a letter dated 1954, the year after he finished writing *The Last Battle*, Lewis cites approvingly Dante's inclusion of Rhipeus, a Trojan hero, and the Roman Emperor Trajan, in his depiction of heaven (*Paradiso* XX), describing it as a sign of 'uncovenanted mercies'.[85] It was important, then, for Lewis's delight in imaginative syncretism that Emeth should have been allowed entry into his version of the heavenly city.

The radical disjunction between name and meaning which leads even the virtuous Calormene, Emeth, mistakenly to assign Aslan's qualities to Tash, is again illustrated by a secret conversation that takes place between Ginger, the cunning cat who allies himself with Shift, and the Calormene captain, Rishda Tarkaan. On the night when Shift first asserts that Tash and Aslan are the same, the cat asks Rishda to clarify what he meant by his own statement, in front of all the Talking Animals, that Aslan meant neither less nor more than Tash. Did he mean, asks the cat, that Aslan meant no *more* than Tash – in other words, that there was in fact 'no such person as either' (98)? The Tarkaan's answer is that 'All who are *enlightened* know that'. Subsequently, the Calormenes and their Narnian collaborators plan to include in their plan to depose the Narnian king some of the 'more *enlightened* Narnians [who] care neither for Tash nor Aslan but have only an eye to their own profit'.[86] This highlights the mode of consciousness that disconnects language from any creative principle – that of the Enlightenment humanists, in fact, who believed that progress was predicated solely upon reason. Lewis believed that such 'enlightened' reasoning was in the majority of cases not so much an exercise of remorseless logic as the specific application of logical or quasi-logical techniques to the pursuit of personal advantage. In addition, of course, he wished to demonstrate that the reality available to the senses is not the only reality to which sentient beings have access. Myth has often been proven to be true in Narnia; the four Pevensies, held to be

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[84] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 135, n. 9.

[85] C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 478.

[86] Lewis, *TLB,* p 98. Emphasis added.

mythical creatures in *Prince Caspian*, actually materialise when Susan's Horn is blown; the Old Narnians, thought to be myths by Caspian, help him regain his kingdom; examples abound. So Tash, who had been summoned by the non-believer Rishda, actually appears in Narnia, reinforcing the notion that language constructs reality – or that unpleasant realities can attach themselves to language used rashly and loosely, as when Marlowe's Faustus summons Mephistopheles *per accidens*, as a consequence of uttering blasphemy, not because of the specific words he uses.

Nevertheless, the link between language and consciousness proposed by Barfield, which formed the central principle of Narnia since its inception, remains as integral to this apocalyptic narrative as it was to the creation story told in *The Magician's Nephew* (1955). When Aslan breathes consciousness into the Animals in the *Nephew*, he warns the newly conscious beasts to take care not to behave like the dumb ones, since by doing so they may cease to be sentient: 'For out of them you were taken and into them you can return'.[87] The sentence is clearly a structural and semantic echo of the biblical 'Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return' (Genesis 3:19). Lewis attributes semantic as well as moral and aesthetic qualities of language to divine fiat. In the *Nephew*, Aslan tells the animals he has chosen to make sentient that 'jokes as well as justice come in with speech' (141). One of the reasons Lewis lays stress on this is because of the concern with the origin and nature of language, which was at its height in the mid-nineteenth century, but continued into the twentieth. Max Müller was one of the most important thinkers to promulgate the view that language constituted the main distinction between, animals and humans. In his characteristically dramatic prose, Max Müller warns in an 1875 article: 'Let us take continual care [...] lest by abusing the gift of speech or doing violence to the voice of conscience we soil the two wings of our soul, and fall back through our own fault, to the dreaded level of the Gorilla'.[88] Laughter, too, was identified by Aristotle as the gift that separates humanity from the beasts; and while the creation scene in *The Magician's Nephew* is full of laughter, there is little cause for hilarity in the final book of Narnia. Humanity has come closer to bestiality in this book than at any other point in the sequence; and the profound discomfort that this proximity could evoke is evident throughout the narrative.

In an essay ominously titled 'The Funeral of a Great Myth', Lewis deconstructs the myth of linear progress by insisting that progressive improvement of the species is not the rule in evolution,

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[87] Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1955]), p. 141.

[88] Friedrich Max Müller, 'My Reply to Mr. Darwin' in *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 4 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), pp. 471-72.

and that for every case of progress there are ten of degeneration.[89] In the *Narnian Chronicles*, the most potent symptom of degeneration is loss of speech. Readers of *The Last Battle* have already been subjected to the horrifying moment in *Prince Caspian* when the four Pevensies were attacked by a bear and a shaken Susan could not shoot it for fear it might be a Talking Bear gone wild. The possibility of regression to a pre-linguistic state makes Lucy wonder if human beings too might undergo such a regression, going wild and losing language as they lose touch with one another and their communal past. In the *Nephew*, Aslan tells the Talking Animals: 'I give to you for ever this land of Narnia [...] The Dumb Beasts I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them, but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts' (141). His warning is borne out in the *Battle* in the fate of the sly cat Ginger, one of those who conflate the names of Aslan and Tash while denying the reality of either. His denigration of language as non-referential makes his punishment unsettlingly appropriate: he is reduced to a state of yowling, shrieking inarticulacy in the midst of his efforts to hoodwink his fellow Narnians.[90] Lewis's equation of degeneration with loss of language finds an interesting variant in Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* ((1973), as we shall see in section two. The dragons of Le Guin's Earthsea are born with a knowledge of the Language of the Making, which is a creative language - that is, it creates what it names. In the *Farthest*, a wizard called Cob uses black magic to conquer death, and the unnatural spectacle of the un-dead wizard evokes such deep fear in the dragons that the wizard gains power over them and denudes them of speech. Both Lewis and Le Guin raise fundamental questions of the relationship between language and cognitive capabilities, verifying Barfield's and Tolkien's dictum that language and thinking are coeval. Le Guin's dragons, and the cat, Ginger, become *wild* after loss of language.

The episode in the *Battle* also lends urgency to Lewis's view that the current perception of language, as a system in which signifier and signified have been arbitrarily conjoined and imposed upon reality by convention, must be rectified. The ultimate alternative to such a rectification, it seems, would be incoherence, a condition from which not even the self-appointed arbiters of human speech and culture could remain exempt.

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[89] C. S. Lewis, 'The Funeral of a Great Myth' in *Christian Reflections* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), p. 85.

[90] For a comparison of the high and low view of language as propounded by (Lewis's) contemporary philologists, see Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, Ohio and London: The Kent State University Press, 1994).

3.3 The City of God in Narnia

To portray the radically 'other' world, the location of the Platonic ideal which for Lewis is the place the human spirit longs for but cannot attain in the world we inhabit, is a daunting task, but one that Lewis took on almost pugilistically again and again in the course of his career. In *The Last Battle* he manages to portray the radical alterity of the heavenly city by setting up a stark contrast between this world and the next; a contrast expressed through the polarities of light and darkness, whose basic metaphysical opposition plays a crucial role in twentieth-century fantasy. For Lewis, this is a primal binary fissure apprehended by human beings as equivalent to the opposition of good to evil, and represents an apparent departure from his philosophical affiliation with Barfield, who identified crude binarism as a sign of non-participation. The works of Tolkien and Lewis present the tension between the two poles formally and structurally in their fantasy, although for Tolkien the relationship is a complex one. The equation between light and good and darkness and evil, which is deemed to be universally 'true' by Lewis ('Bluspels and Flalansferes'), is ironically inverted by his principal modern antagonist, Philip Pullman, who follows Milton (and indeed modern physics) in imputing initial creation to 'dark materials'. Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, meanwhile, develops from a traditional identification of darkness with evil to an acknowledgment that darkness and light are mutually complementary, necessary to one another in generating the tension that preserves the wholeness and balance of the universe. For Lewis, however, certain polarities have always existed in stark and irreconcilable antagonism. He articulates this view most fully in *The Great Divorce* (1946), his response to Blake's visionary tract, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93); and he works it out in richly visual terms in the final book of Narnia.

The Last Battle is full of darkness and shadows, with many of the scenes being set at night. On giving himself up to the Calormenes, Tirian is tied to a tree at night and fed by small animals. Later Jewel is rescued under cover of darkness; and the episode with the Dwarfs, where the king exposes Puzzle only to find that the sceptical Dwarfs refuse to believe a thing he says, is set at night, as if to invoke the darkness of ignorance. So too is the final battle referred to in the novel's title. In the meantime there are numerous references to the psychological gloom that pervades Narnia, and these both embody the oppressive regime under which the free Narnians suffer and associate the book with apocalypse as a genre, since darkness is one of the genre's constituent features.

One of the ways in which Lewis portrays the persecution of the Narnians is through references to sound, or rather the lack of it, the aural equivalent of darkness. The Animals sit in

'dead silence' as they are told about the new rules and regulations imposed by their Calormene conquerors (36, 37), with 'worried and bewildered' expressions (34); or they wail and howl in disbelief (50), echoing the wailing lament of the Dryad as she dies, and filling the silence with inarticulate noise. As the children and Tirian walk through the woods to rescue Jewel, the woods are described as 'far too quiet. On an ordinary Narnian night there ought to have been noises - an occasional cheery "Goodnight" from a Hedgehog, the cry of an Owl overhead, perhaps a flute in the distance to tell of Fauns dancing, or some throbbing, hammering noises from Dwarfs underground. All that was silenced: gloom and fear reigned over Narnia' (74-75). The prepositional references - 'overhead', 'in the distance', 'underground' - help to portray an all-encompassing participatory consciousness, which includes all forms of life, now annihilated. Silence is a key method of representing the loss of participation in the *Lion*, too, where the White Witch imposes a reign of winter that effectively silences all the natural sounds of streams, leaves, birds or animals. In the underground realm of the *Chair*, there are no sounds of birds or streams, and the normally garrulous Earthmen go about their business in eerie muteness. The silence that pervades Narnia in the *Battle* echoes these earlier apocalyptic narratives, and points the way to the final silence witnessed in *The Magician's Nephew* by Diggory and Polly on their visit to the post-apocalyptic landscape of Charn.

The climactic moment of darkness in the novel comes when the king's party - sitting in front of a square, dark tower, with its few slit windows and heavy door - witness the approach of an appalling figure: the monstrous god Tash. It is preceded by a deathly stench, as the sun goes behind the clouds and the world grows cold. The figure offers a stark contrast to Aslan. Its deathly gray inverts the luminous gold of the Lion; it has the head of a bird of prey, with a 'cruel, curved beak'; its four arms are held high above its head 'as if it wanted to snatch all Narnia in its grip', in a reversal of Aslan's words when he created Narnia: 'I give to you forever this land of Narnia [...] and I give you myself'.[91] The fact that Tash 'floated on the grass instead of walking, and the grass seemed to wither beneath it' is a clear reversal of the soft, steady pacing of the Lion in the creation scene, when the gentle, rippling song he sang created grass that 'spread out from [him] like a pool' and 'ran up the sides of the little hills like a wave'.[92] While an allegorical correspondence does not

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[91] Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 141.

[92] Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 125.

seem appropriate, Aslan confirms later that 'we [Aslan and Tash] are opposites' (205), so that Tash is Anti-Aslan, even though it does not lead the battle against his forces.[93]

The reason for Tash's absence from this final conflict, it would seem, is Lewis's refusal to set up an anti-god because of the putative equivalence such a portrayal might suggest between the powers of good and evil. As he indicates in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, evil is essentially ridiculous rather than terrible,[94] and Lewis portrays this aspect of it in the ape, Shift. Even the most appalling aspects of evil are given a speciousness in *The Last Battle*, an absence of weight and force, by their association with showmanship. The ape Shift is of course the ultimate showman; and it is he who sets up the stage, quite literally, for the final conflict in the book. The stage on which he displays the false Aslan – Puzzle dressed in the lion's skin – is shrouded in the same darkness that attended the sighting of the vulture-like Tash; only the flickering, misleading light of the bonfire relieves the gloom. As Rishda, the ape and Ginger walk towards the animals, Rishda tells the cat to 'play thy part well' like a professional actor. The narrator then tells the reader that the whole scene 'was rather like a theatre. The crowd of Narnians were like people in the seats; the little grassy place in front of the stable [...] was like the stage' (125-26). While this analogy points up the deception being perpetrated on the innocent Narnians, it also foreshadows the revelation of the 'real Narnia', so that the Narnia we are reading about will soon be shown as just a stage, on which each life has been lived like an actor playing a part. The stable, which is described as 'the scenery at the back of the stage' (126), will soon be transformed into a portal leading to reality, as the actors and the audience, the whole of Narnia, and Lewis's readers, undergo the revelatory experience which Lewis, the creator of Narnia, has in store for them. As the fire sinks lower, its light becomes 'less and of a darker red', reminding the readers of the redness of the dying sun of Charn, just before that world ended. But the Narnians who have kept faith with Aslan quickly emerge from the twilight world of the theatre. As soon as Tirian enters the stable, he finds himself 'in strong light' (164), and the surreal atmosphere created by the flickering interplay of flame and shadow gives way to the solid reality of sunshine, green grass and bright fruit.

This move from the unreal to the real, from the artificial to the natural, has much to tell us about Lewis's attitude to his fiction. Lewis repeatedly draws attention in his work to the importance of stories not simply as a mimetic reflection of the real world, but as something more: a means to

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[93] Peter J. Schakel, rightly, points out that Tash should not be interpreted as an allegorical figure for the Anti-Christ, as Tash does not 'lead the opposition to Aslan, or participate as leader of the evil forces in the final battle', in 'My True Country' *Reading with the Heart* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdman, 1979), p. 146, n. 7.

[94] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 95-60.

access truth. The mirror analogy used by the narrator in *The Last Battle* when trying to describe what the new Narnia was like suggests the kind of access Lewis had in mind:[95]

> You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking-glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking-glass. And the sea in the mirror or the valley in the mirror were in a sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different - deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know. (216-17)

The sentence construction here is such that it seems to lead the reader deeper and deeper into the experience of looking and desiring, with the repetitive 'And's' and the colons that usher the reader into the next stage of the visual encounter. Art, as Lewis says, can 'add to [life]';[96] and he is referring specifically to the 'fantastic or mythic mode' available to the modern reader in fairy stories. The mirror has often been used in fantasy not as a mere device of reflection, but as a portal into new worlds - most famously in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*; or in MacDonald's *Lilith*; and the analogy as used here by Lewis deliberately points out how fantasy, by inviting the reader to discover new perspectives on the familiar, has a potentially transformative effect on our consciousness. When a reader returns from the story, the real world can be viewed afresh with the benefit of this new knowledge; in other words, final participation as defined by Barfield becomes possible through the training that imagination receives.

The narrator reinforces the impression of looking afresh given by the mirror analogy by observing that in the new Narnia 'every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more'.[97] As Lewis says in his essay quoted earlier, when a reader sees ordinary woods after reading about enchanted woods, the latter acquire a greater depth, in the sense of a wider range of associations, a consciousness of extended possibilities for what such a wood might contain, what it

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[95] For the history of ideas about art as mimesis and poesis, see C. S. Lewis, *History of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

[96] C. S. Lewis, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories...' in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 38.

[97] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 213.

might portend.[98] This process of defamiliarisation or estrangement, one of the key strategies of the fantastic, re-enchants the woods, endowing them with a symbolic or representative power they did not previously possess – if you like, making them part of a new narrative, a new fictive language. When Tirian meets the protagonist of *The Magician's Nephew* shortly after entering the new Narnia, Digory explains that this is the 'real Narnia', while the one they have left – the one that resembles a tawdry stage - 'was only a shadow or a copy', with a set beginning and an end.[99] As Barfield points out, Lewis was emphatic in his belief in transcendence, which finds expression in the Narnia series as the Platonic Form (real Narnia) as well as the Christian vision of the divine creator.

3.4. The End of Narnia

If the end of Narnia is the beginning of Final Participation, a vital component of this mode of consciousness is memory. Barfield explains that as self-consciousness develops in humankind, the subject and object bifurcate; and this rift can operate in two ways. It can become, on the one hand, an irreconcilable opposition, propelling human beings towards a reckless destruction of nature as the threatening 'other'. This is apparent in the techno-scientific post World War II developmental projects driven by the 'knowledge as power' ethic, which, in the effort to reduce everything into controllable, predictable, mechanistic units, will eventually result in the abolition of man – or so Lewis and Barfield claim.[100] On the other hand, however, as human beings became aware of their creative potential, which was unconscious in the participatory phase, the 'representations' that were created through original participation, but had since become 'idols', were retained as memory-images in the consciousness; and now these memories can be 'recollected' to re-create the world. The 'idols' which these representations became when we began to think of them as 'dead' and wholly other, can be reanimated. They can be liberated from the petrifaction they have suffered in the post-scientific world and live once again.

For Lewis, memory was an important aspect of the religious experience, and this link between spirituality and recollection is enacted in *The Silver Chair*. Here Aslan tells Jill three signs that she must remember; he insists that she repeat them until they have been memorised, and Jill's failure to do so almost costs her, Eustace and Puddleglum their lives. The last sign, Aslan's own name, is only remembered in the green Witch's underground realm when the enchanted prince

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[98] Lewis, 'On Stories'.

[99] Lewis, *TLB*, p. 211.

[100] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*; Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.

regains his senses for an hour and begs them to save him in the name of Aslan. The prince has earlier warned them not to untie him in this one hour of the day, because the Witch has told him he becomes a raving lunatic during this period. But Jill's fourth commandment was to help anyone who asked them for aid in the name of Aslan, and the children decide to obey that injunction, even at the risk of setting loose a lunatic. As soon as Aslan's instructions are remembered and obeyed the Green Witch's illusory kingdom disintegrates, and Rilian and the earthmen are freed from the terrible spell of forgetfulness laid upon them.

An erasure of memory, in fact, makes the erstwhile prince 'nothing', as Puddleglum rightly observes. When the children talk of Narnia, Rilian evinces surprise, and even his own name is forgotten. Similarly, Lewis makes memory crucial to a person's identity in *The Magician's Nephew*. When Polly and Diggory arrive at the Wood between the Worlds, they become vague and forgetful. Sensibly, they decide to leave as soon as possible, before they merge with the undifferentiated collective consciousness that the wood represents.

To eradicate memory, in fact, is analogous to an effacement of identity, whether individual or collective. In this context, what has been termed the 'problem of Susan' deserves to be recontextualised. In the *Battle*, when the Calormene soldier Emeth encounters King Peter in the 'real' Narnia, he asks him about the elder of his two sisters. The curt reply is that she 'is no longer a friend of Narnia'. But it is Eustace who adds the vital information – that Susan has no memory of Narnia as a real place. When the others talk about Narnia, she says: 'What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children' (169). This is the crux of the matter. As Aslan makes clear to Lucy at the end of the *Dawn Treader*, the children have been called into Narnia so that 'by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there'; for as he tells her, 'you must begin to come close to your own world now' (271). The implication is that the juxtaposition of the two worlds, which represent two modes of consciousness, the participatory (Narnia) and the non-participatory (post-war England), serves the purpose of defamiliarisation. Having experienced the 'revelation' of Aslan in Narnia, the children will be better equipped to comprehend parallel instances of revelation in their own world. Narnia is an initiatory experience for the children who enter it, a preparation for their own world, where they must continue to live. At another level, the child reader's experiences of revelation in Narnia defamiliarise the world of the reader, enabling them to see it, as Tolkien explains, 'freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity - from possessiveness'.[101] Tolkien's notion of possessiveness is

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[101] Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *Tree and Leaf*, p. 58.

similar to Barfield's conception of idolatry. The process entails a loss of primal participation - the resultant radical estrangement generates the subject-object dichotomy. As objectified nature is denuded of spiritual or 'inner' meaning, the phenomenal world becomes a collection of 'idols' which become 'possessions' to be (ab)used. This process is an essential step for the evolution of thinking beings towards the stage of final participation. But memory plays a vital role in this final step, for if the images or idols are to be resuscitated, they must be available in the mode of memory. Only then can a 'rebirth if images'[102] be possible.

Memory, however, can be lost in the desert of suspicion - or what the critic Paul Ricoeur calls 'the desert of criticism'.[103] Ricoeur has identified three 'Masters of Suspicion' - Marx, Freud and Nietzsche - who have most debunked established images of religion. In particular, Nietzsche's formulation that God is dead means that the old images of God as father no longer apply, explains Ricoeur, so that new forms of belief are necessary, new narratives to motivate our actions. Lewis was well aware of such iconoclastic attitudes had seeped into the collective consciousness of the post-secular west. When the children go back to their own world, they are clearly expected to translate their Narnian experience into terms appropriate for the materialistic post-war world they are growing up in. In Ricoeur's words, a hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary in order to achieve a belief based on 'the full responsibility of autonomous thought'.[104] The children who visit Narnia, in other words, are required to make the transition from relatively unselfconscious childhood to a fully responsible adulthood. Their belief in Aslan and Narnia, then, needs to pass through the suspicion of their own critical thought-processes before being recuperated as belief. A 're-creation of language'[105] is necessary, for the rational and discursive logic of post-scientific language can only explain already existing meaning - it cannot create new meaning. Ricoeur wants to posit a form of belief situated beyond either fear of punishment or desire for protection - 'accusation and consolation' are his terms.[106] But as Lewis was well aware, not everyone could make this transition.

In the *Battle*, we are told that Susan chooses to dismiss Narnia as a set of fairy stories and therefore false - an attitude that Lewis has repeatedly exposed as flawed. But Susan is stuck in the

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[102] Austin Farrer, *A Re-Birth of Images*, p. 14.

[103] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 349.

[104] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 350.

[105] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 349.

[106] Paul Ricoeur, 'Religion, Atheism, Faith', in *The Conflict of Interpretations,* ed. by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 441.

sceptical, rationalistic mode which Lewis warns against in his essay 'Fern-Seeds and Elephants'.[107] Here Lewis expresses his belief that agnosticism seems inevitable when, for example, earlier ideas and images presented by religion seem inadequate to modern understanding. In this situation, however, iconoclasm, and not nihilism, is the answer, according to Lewis. Susan does not want to talk or share stories about Narnia. It becomes for her just a game they used to play as children. Clearly, for Susan Aslan (God) is dead. Retrospectively, her deliberate refusal to 'see' Aslan in the earlier novel, *Prince Caspian*, can be read as a foreshadowing of her desire for a comfort-zone that refuses adventures and physical or spiritual hardship. That might be interpreted as an incipient tendency towards the spiritual stasis induced by growing self-consciousness, which for Barfield is a danger faced by contemporary society, stuck as it is at the stage where subjectivity has emerged from a world that has withdrawn into valueless objectivity. It must be remembered, however, that Lewis chose fairy-tale as a form because he wanted to avoid character development or scrutiny, and wanted to present unfolding events as patterns that might present certain forms of truth in concrete terms; he therefore does not elaborate on Susan's psychology.

In any case, Lewis deliberately shows that no amount of proof can be enough if one gets stuck in the 'desert of suspicion'. This is analogous, in Barfield's evolution of consciousness, to the stage where human beings become self-conscious and cease to think of representations as being created by their own participation. Denuded of the last vestiges of participation, at this point phenomena become 'mechanomorphic' objects, which Barfield also terms 'idols'.[108] Ricoeur echoes Barfield when he says, 'An idol must die so a symbol of being may begin to speak'.[109] Ricoeur's conception of idols is strikingly similar to Barfield's, as Ricoeur uses the term to mean formerly vital images that have now become ossified - that is 'gods' who are now dead. Imagination, suggests Barfield, allows human beings to apprehend the 'outward form as the image or symbol of an inner meaning'.[110] The evolution of consciousness is necessary for conscious and autonomous participation, but the choice of how to create their world lies with each individual. As pointed out earlier, the 'evolution of consciousness' – on both individual and species level – brings

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[107] This was originally read at Westcott House, Cambridge, in 1959, titled 'Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism' and first published in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1967). Most recently published in *Essay Collection*, pp. 242-254.

[108] Barfield, *SA*, p. 52.

[109] Paul Ricoeur, 'Religion, Atheism, Faith', in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 467.

[110] Owen Barfield, 'The Rediscovery of Meaning' in *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays* (San Rafael, CA.: The Barfield Press, 1977), p. 20.

dangers with it: including the danger of never recovering participation at all, which is the case with Susan.

3.5. The Blindness of the Dwarfs

Another illustration of how an inability to participate can lead to solipsistic blindness is provided by the Dwarfs in *The Last Battle*. The dwarfs are deployed by Lewis to make several points about the metaphysical structure of his world(s). Led by Griffle, they put up a good fight against the Calormenes, which ends soon, however, as they are heavily outnumbered. Eleven of them (out of the original thirty) are taken prisoners, and 'flung or kicked' into the stable by the Calormene soldiers as an offering to Tash. In the scene that follows, Lewis presents his version - or inversion - of the Dantean Ante-Hell from the *Purgatorio*. When Dante enters the gates of Hell, Virgil tells him that the tormented cries he hears are those of the souls who refused to make a clear moral choice; they exist in the space which is neither heaven nor hell. These 'neutrals' are joined by the angels who chose neither God nor Lucifer. In Narnia, since the space inhabited by the Dwarfs borders on Lewis's Augustinian city of God, the 'real' Narnia, it might be better to call it Ante-Heaven; however, the Dwarfs clearly parallel the souls and the angels who did not choose to side either with good or evil. Their slogan is 'The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs', and during the battle they first kill the horses who come to help the king and his party, then shoot arrows at the Calormenes. As Griffle remarks, 'We don't want Darkies any more than we want Monkeys - or Lions - or Kings' (158). Earlier - after Tirian's rescue, and Jill's discovery that the donkey, Puzzle, has been dressed up in a lion's skin and shown to the animals as Aslan - the sight of marching dwarfs had cheered up the little group of resistance fighters gathered round Tirian. But Tirian's hope of getting the 'honest Dwarfs' on their side is rudely shaken. Rather than rejoicing at the exposure of the false Aslan, as Tirian had expected them to, the Dwarfs decry the king as well as the ape. And even after Tirian and Eustace have killed the Calormene guards, setting the Dwarfs free, the 'honest' Dwarfs refuse to believe anything they are told by their rescuers, casting doubt on Tirian's and the children's identity as well as refusing to believe in the existence of Aslan.

The Dwarfs, like Milton's Satan, have their own private hell within them, which consists in a willing commitment of themselves to perpetual imprisonment. It is the prison of dark chaos, produced when language has been denuded of all meaning. The essential aspect of 'final participation', as Barfield describes, is the realisation by human beings of the part played in the construction of the world by their own creative activity. In original participation, collective

humanity created the phenomenal world by unifying the meaningless jumble of sense-perception into 'things'; and later, as consciousness becomes individualised, each human being can consciously control their imaginative activity. Imagination, Barfield reminds us, can be both good and evil. But the Dwarfs have eliminated meaning from their language by refusing all value-systems. Their refusal to believe in either good or evil effectively debars them from their creative capability, leaving them in the utter darkness of meaninglessness. The tautologous slogan, 'The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs' means nothing, since in the closed, dark hole they perceive the world to be, they fight even with each other. Tirian and the seven kings and queens of Narnia, who can see that the Dwarfs are sitting on a sunny hillside, with fruit tress and flowers growing all around them, cannot persuade the Dwarfs to escape from their self-imposed confinement.

Clearly, the Dwarfs are stuck in the desert of suspicion, like Susan. The 'real' Narnia is the scene for final participation, but the dwarfs cannot enter it, since they are mired within their solipsism. This scene is reminiscent of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where the evil characters (Sebastian and Antonio) are unable to see the beauty of the island which is obvious to the good ones (Gonzalo). Digory points out to Tirian that 'the [stable's] inside is bigger than its outside' (177), and all the others find, as the story draws to its close, that the place where they find themselves – the new Narnia - is getting steadily larger. Their delight in this expansion of their horizons serves to accentuate the irony of the Dwarfs' refusal to participate in the experience.

3.6. New Narnia

The Dantean structure of the new Narnia is emphasised from the moment they enter the stable through these repeated references to the expanding space in which Tirian and the children find themselves. Lucy, for instance, quickly realises on entering it that the stable is unexpectedly spacious; and Lewis makes sure that the symbolic meaning of this expansion is clear by the remark that Lucy adds about a stable in 'our world' having had something bigger in it than the world itself (177). Aslan tells them to go 'further up and further in', and as they all set off running, the inside seems to get bigger and bigger till they reach the Edenic garden. Here they meet all their old friends: Reepicheep the mouse, Tumnus the faun, Trufflehunter the Badger and more. The arrival of the four Pevensies, Caspian, Tumnus and the rest constitutes another sort of expansion, whereby *The Last Battle* is no longer a single novel but a sort of portmanteau containing all the Narnian adventures. Lucy's old friend Tumnus explains the expansion by using the analogy of travelling

through the layers of an onion, 'except that as you continue to go in and in, each circle is larger than the last' (225).

The exhilarating run that takes them all 'further up and further in' is a reprise of the quasi-pagan romp that Lewis stages at the end of *Prince Caspian* - which in retrospect seems to have been proleptic, signalling the eternal mode of participation in the 'real' Narnia. But the pagan gods, Silenus and Bacchus, who formed such an integral part of that romp, are absent. For Lewis, pagan myths were 'lies breathed through silver', that is, stories that nourish the imagination but have no truth value.[111] Later, however, Lewis came to the conclusion, with Tolkien, that these stories were prefigurations of the 'real' story of Christ and the Incarnation.[112] The typological relationship that the pagan myths had with the Christian story was presumably no longer required in the real city of final participation, which accounts for the absence of the gods from the Romp in the *Battle*.

This final romp is also a dramatic enactment of final participation. Everyone runs without getting out of breath; they all swim up a waterfall; they climb with ease up the steep, forbidden hill to the Edenic garden where the tree of gold and silver grows – Digory's tree of Life from *The Magician's Nephew*. Here is no alienation; the human and non-human are in a state of correspondence which allows the subject and object, self and other, to blend without diffusion. In other words, the natural environment is no longer resistant to the human body, as it was in the mutually fallen state of man and nature on earth. Nature and the body are in a state of equipoise, as their ability to swim *up* a waterfall illustrates. The interpenetration of mind and matter is complete, and the transposition that could only be experienced rarely now becomes a mode of being.

This final section of *The Last Battle* has been widely influential on other fantasy writers; part of its influence has been to stimulate them to write *against* it. In the next chapter we shall see how Ursula Le Guin responds to the notion of a transcendent world-order that is somehow more 'real' than the world we live in. The celebrated children's author, Philip Pullman has responded with equal energy to the hierarchal structure, especially in his own fantasy sequence *His Dark Materials*. Both Pullman and Le Guin use the paradigmatic trope of a journey to the Land of the Dead in strikingly similar ways, as a means of repudiating the concept of an individual afterlife. Pullman specifically responds to the notion of a 'higher' reality as expressed in the Lewisian structure of circles of reality - each more real the further in and further up you go, as in Dante's conception of

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[111] See Tolkien, 'OFS' in *Tree and Leaf*, p. 82.

[112] See Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London: HarperCollins, 1978, 1981), pp. 42-45. Carpenter recounts the event of Lewis's conversion in 1931.

heaven. In its place he offers a model of unlimited parallel worlds, but with no higher reality to aspire to, as the Satan-avatar in his novel prepares for a war with heaven in a bid to establish a heavenly *republic*, as against a heavenly kingdom.[113]

Pullman also takes issue with the exclusivity of Lewis's paradise. Pullman's trenchant critique of the absence of Susan from real Narnia imputes her banishment to Lewis's misogyny, interpreted from the unfortunate remark made by Jill about Susan being interested in 'nothing but lipsticks and nylons'.[114] Pullman ignores the fact that it is Jill, a character in Narnia, and not the narrator or the implied author who makes this comment. He also uses the notion of portals into another world to reject what he (wrongly) thinks is Lewis's privileging of the spiritual to the exclusion of the physical. Pullman's own trilogy ends with a moral imperative to close all chinks or chasms between worlds, to enable their inhabitants to address the socio-political problems of their own cultures instead of meddling, like imaginative colonists, with others.

Lewis leaves his reader in the paradigmatic fairy-tale state of 'happily ever after', which is not available till after death. Although the two worlds, the real and the transient Narnia, are obviously placed in a hierarchical relationship, the real Narnia is described in sensory, even sensual terms. It is not a denigration of the physical world we live in, or the one we've been imagining in the other Narnian chronicles, but an intensification of both – a refusal, one might even say, to let them go at the point of death. As Barfield points out apropos of the heaven described in *The Great Divorce*, Lewis uses the notion of solidity to describe what is usually taken to be a spiritual - and therefore non-solid - realm.[115] Language regains its lost concreteness when the narrator of the *Battle* uses a literary gloss to describe the city as a place in 'a story you have never heard', and declares that 'every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more' (213).

This world, Lewis proposes – whether it be the 'this world' we inhabit or the Narnian 'this world' – is a preparation for the real world, a kind of training ground or schoolroom. In proposing this he differs from Tolkien, who ends his epic narrative with a rejuvenation of Middle Earth which is quite literally embedded in the soil of the Shire – a rejuvenation that involves planting trees and

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[113] See Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, 1997, 2000). See also Philip Pullman, 'The Republic of Heaven' in *Horn Book Magazine* 57: 7 (November/December, 2001), pp. 655-667.

[114] See, for example, Susan Roberts' Interview with Philip Pullman, 'A Dark Agenda' (November, 2002) <http://www.surefish.co.uk/culture/features/pullman_interview.htm>. See also Philip Pullman, 'The Darkside of Narnia', *The Guardian* (October 1, 1998) <http://www.crlamppost.org/darkside.htm> [Accessed 30 January, 2013].

[115] Owen Barfield, 'Some Reflections on *The Great Divorce* of C. S. Lewis' in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, pp. 82-89.

giving birth to healthy children. Even though his heroes, Bilbo and Frodo, sail away from the Grey Havens to another life, Sam and the other hobbits are concerned with recreating *this* world, not another; and even if the Golden Age of the Shire that is ushered in by their determination and hard work is alluded to with regret as something long past, it remains a peculiarly earthly model of ideal living. Although Lewis, too, demonstrates renewal and rejuvenation in a delightfully earthy dance in *Prince Caspian*, he also wants to give each individual soul the hope of continuing this dance beyond the confines of this world and time. So in his final book about Narnia he leaves his readers with 'Chapter One of the Great Story', which he suggests will finally achieve the synthesis between narrative and theme, so that the tension between successive events and a joyful state that all stories aspire towards will finally be resolved. By moving beyond the material world while (in a sense) taking it with him, albeit in transmuted form, Lewis leaves his reader with the sense of having taken part in a new beginning, not a conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR. BALANCE AND IMBALANCE IN THE FIRST EARTHSEA TRILOGY

This chapter will discuss the first three novels of Ursula K Le Guin's Earthsea series, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1972), and *The Farthest Shore* (1973), showing how these develop, continue and above all subvert the rich tradition of literary fantasy writing as it had been practised up to that point, in particular by the European school of fantasy writers represented by Lewis and Tolkien. The First Earthsea Trilogy (as Darko Suvin calls it)[1] represents a radically divided, unjust and hierarchal society, for which the Archipelago - sundered bits of land that form small pockets of mutually hostile races and cultures - provides a potent metaphor. The world Le Guin inhabits and the world she creates seem to be divided into irreconcilable fragments - Barfield's 'islanded consciousness' (*SA*, 89) in physical form. Her imagined collection of islands, with its diversity of disparate cultures and peoples, forms the perfect setting to ask questions about how different cultures interact, in terms of their myths, religions, languages, ethnicities and socio-political customs. The fragmentation of humankind finds an objective correlative in the Archipelago, which symbolises the complete disjunctions artificially produced between people based on perceptions of colour, class, gender or culture, generating extremes of animosity and biased judgements. Le Guin seeks to create a dialogue that exists in the gaps between the fragments: with the *sea* – as opposed to the islands, the *earth* part of Earthsea – providing a metaphor for these gaps.

In Earthsea, power belongs to men; women are either excluded from the narratives of male heroic deeds, or characterised in them as wicked, weak or worthless. I will argue, however, that there is in the First Trilogy an implicit interrogation both of these apparently established socio-political norms and of every binary that privileges certain terms at the expense of others. This interrogation becomes explicit in the revolution that occurs in the first book of the Second Trilogy, *Tehanu* (1990), where Le Guin challenges and overthrows the hierarchal polarities, transforming not only the subject-positions of the socio-politically marginalised groups, such as women and children, but also destabilising the logocentric masculinist positions which occupy the dominant centre of her invented social structure. This chapter will argue that the First Trilogy foreshadows the imaginative and political revolution that takes place in the Second Trilogy, and that this prefiguration of

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[1] Darko Suvin proposes that *Tehanu, Tales from Earthsea*, and *The Other Wind* form what he calls a Second Earthsea Trilogy which continues but strongly modifies the first one, which comprises *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan* and *The Farthest Shore*. See 'On U. K. Le Guin's "Second Earthsea Trilogy" and Its Cognitions: A Commentary', *Extrapolation*, 47: 3 (2006), p. 488-504.

revolution appears as what might be called an unconscious symptom of the text of the first three books, so that only a careful reading reveals the undertow of anarchic, oppositional energy running through it.

4.1. Language as True Speech in Earthsea

Le Guin's first two Earthsea stories, 'The Word of Unbinding' (January 1964) and 'The Rule of Names' (April 1964), as their titles suggest, laid the framework of language as intrinsically connected to the physical world. In the second tale, Yevaud the dragon, disguised as a wizard called Mr. Underhill, explains that 'the name is the thing [...] and the truename is the true thing. To speak the name is to control the thing'.[2] While the concept of a language where the subject-object dichotomy has not yet occurred, and where the bond between word and object is intrinsic rather than contingent, is ancient and pre-biblical, this concept was reprised by seventeenth-century philosophers under the term 'Adamic language'. It was widely believed that 'languages [...] in spite of their multiplicity and seeming chaos, contain[ed] elements of the original perfect language created by Adam when he named the animals in his prelapsarian state'.[3] As noted in Part One of this thesis, this concept is deployed by Barfield to suggest the notion of semantic unity in primitive language, indicating that ancient words denoted not only the material or manifest, but also the spiritual or hidden aspects of things, and that using discourse in this way enabled primitive humanity actually to create physical phenomena. Barfield attempts to focus on the scientific, rather than the magical or mythical aspect of this idea, by pointing out that the substance of the physical world is a field force of waves and sub-molecular particles, so that human consciousness and language can be said to create the things we see. Both Tolkien and Lewis used this idea to underline the creative aspect of language in their fantasy. One of Le Guin's inspirations for her own take on this concept, then, is obviously Tolkien, who is acknowledged in the name Underhill, used by Frodo to avoid detection when he leaves the Shire.[4]

Another, and perhaps more important source of inspiration for Le Guin was her father, the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber. In fact, Le Guin had the opportunity to experience difference in culture, race, religion and language as a young child through the work of both her parents. The

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[2] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Rule of Names', in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters,* vol. 1 (London: Granada, 1975), p. 85.

[3] Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 25.

[4] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring: The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1954, 1955, 1966]), p. 200.

concept of the power of names was derived from the Native American culture that Kroeber studied; while Kroeber's wife Theodora wrote a celebrated account of the life of Ishi, the 'last' of the Californian Indians who lived through his final years at a San Francisco Museum under Kroeber's care.[5] The subject of this book 'has haunted the writings of her daughter' throughout her career,[6] according to Robert Maslen, who has traced the influence of this unique encounter between two cultures through some of the early writings of Le Guin. Maslen points out that Ishi never divulged his name, because telling one's name was a serious matter for his people, and that the name by which he was known simply means 'man' in the Yahi language.[7] Le Guin developed her fascination with the power of words in part from her immersion in this man's history, along with her understanding of linguistic and cultural relativity.

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin extends the conception of True Speech to embrace its role in the creation of her imagined world. Segoy, we are told, raised the lands from the sea by using True Speech;[8] and the True Names given to all dwellers in the Archipelago form part of this original language. They are also kept secret, because knowledge of a person's True Name can give the possessor power over that person. Revealing one's name to someone else, then, is a major act of trust, and moments when this take place afford some of the most emotionally intense episodes in the First Trilogy.

In the school for wizards on the island of Roke, where True Speech is taught, the students are told that changing the name of a thing can transform the thing itself, which can have radical and unforeseen effects. As the Master Hand explains to Ged, to alter even a small scrap of the world is to change the world – which is why he himself specialises only in illusory transformations. He insists that 'you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act'.[9] For magic acts by proximity as well as directly, changing the 'names and natures of things surrounding the transformed thing' (57) in ways few wizards have the power to predict.

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[5] Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962).

[6] Robert Maslen, '"Towards an Archaeology of the Present": Theodora Kroeber and Ursula K. Le Guin' in *Foundation* 67 (Summer 1996), p. 63.

[7] Maslen, p. 63.

[8] Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea: The Earthsea Quartet* (London: Penguin, 1992*)*, p. 5. See also pp.109, 267,304, 365. All subsequent references are to this edition. Hereafter cited as *WE*.

[9] Le Guin, *WE*, p. 48.

Le Guin seems to present this notion in an unproblematic way in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The only hint that she might realise the difficulties involved in this kind of transformative language comes when the Master Namer, one of the rare people who reveals his true name (the wonderfully convoluted 'Kurremkarmerruk'), explains to Ged that controlling the sea as a whole is impossible, because every small islet, sea, bay and strait connected with the ocean has a name of its own, and that 'a mage can control only what is near him' (51). This seems to acknowledge the difficulty of naming fluid, constantly changing things. As the Namer points out, 'no thing can have two names', so there is 'no end to that language' (51), True Speech. This limits the power of mages over the earth, for no one can know the name of everything, and the language here posited would seem to be of infinite complexity, since it would seem to include no metaphors, and perhaps few elements shared between different words.

Nevertheless, Le Guin fails in the First Trilogy to address the question of how she relates the concept of the True Name, with its rigid demarcation of the essence of a thing or person, with the fluid philosophical system of the Tao that underpins her imaginative vision. *A Wizard* begins with the Creation Song of Éa (and the name Éa is another Tolkienian borrowing);[10] and this song makes clear at once to what extent Le Guin's Earthsea is undergirded by the Tao, and the particular problems this undergirding generates in the narrative.

4.2. Tao in the Creation of Éa

The most widely known aspect of the Tao is the yin-yang symbol, a circle divided into black and white sections by an undulating line. In each half is placed a dot of the opposite colour, called the t'ai chi symbol. In this image, oppositions exist in a dialectical relationship, which can best be understood with the help of Barfield's concept of polarity. Barfield affirms that opposites do not simply co-exist as opposites, but 'exist by virtue of each other, *as well as* at each other's expense'.[11] That is, there is a perpetual process of the one turning into the other, signified in the symbol by the undulating line.

The Creation of Éa is a song that opens not only *A Wizard of Earthsea* but also the first book of the second trilogy, *Tehanu*, where it stands on the title page; it's clear, therefore, that Le Guin wants us to see it as in some sense central to her imagined world. The crux of the song is the

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[10] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Ainulindale' in *The Silmarillion*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1999 [1977]). Iluvatar says 'Eä! Let these things Be!' (p. 9) to create the world.

[11] Owen Barfield, *Speaker's Meaning* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2011), p. 22. Original emphasis.

importance of maintaining Equilibrium, that delicate, precarious balance between opposites that is a crucial condition for the world's existence:

> Only in silence the word,
>
> only in dark the light
>
> only in dying life:
>
> bright the hawk's flight
>
> on the empty sky

In a fine discussion of these lines, Darko Suvin argues that Le Guin has here shown silence, darkness and death to be 'parental, engendering, motherly' forces, while the terms 'word-light-life' are 'filial, younger, fresher'. The relationship between the parental and the filial terms is such that the latter can 'never be fully and properly perceived and understood without the co-presence of the parental quality'.[12] The three couples of silence-word, dark-light and dying-life are, observes Suvin, 'intimately participating in each other', with the first term in each pair having primacy and the second term showing a progression. Does the Creation song of Éa privilege the word, he wonders, as it is privileged in biblical discourse, or is Le Guin's vision more symmetrical, maintaining a balance between word and silence? Suvin argues that the song posits a hierarchy, sustained formally by its construction, whereby 'life subsumes cognition which in turn subsumes writing' (490), meaning that words and knowledge are the enabling conditions of life. This does not in any way undermine the importance of silence or the dark, but it does associate human life with words, and with light, which is a metaphor for knowledge.

While Suvin is right about the importance of the co-existence of opposites in the song, the 'parental' quality that he assigns to silence or darkness is in some doubt, at least in the First Trilogy, since Ged tells us in *The Tombs of Atuan* that the powers of darkness hate creativity. Speaking of the Nameless powers that rule the Undertombs, he tells Tenar: 'They are dark and undying, and they hate the light: the brief, bright light of our mortality'.[13] However, darkness, silence and death are certainly given primacy in *chronological* terms, for as Tenar observes at the end of the book, looking at the vast darkness of sea and sky as she and Ged sail towards Havnor: 'It [darkness] had

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[12] Darko Suvin, 'On U. K. Le Guin's "Second Earthsea Trilogy" and Its Cognitions: A Commentary', *Extrapolation*, 47: 3, (2006).

[13] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan: Earthsea Quartet*, p. 265.

been before light, and would be after. It had been before life, and would be after. It went on beyond evil' (296). Or, as Ged tells Yarrow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, 'For a word to be spoken [...] there must be silence. Before and after' (152). Life, like a word, is transient, 'a wave on the sea',[14] and the knowledge of one's own mortality, insists Le Guin, is synonymous with the knowledge of selfhood. Light is a power, and 'time is light' (150), Ged tells Yarrow, implying that light, like life, is temporary. Despite - or perhaps because of - this temporariness, life and light are both creative. Both are associated with language. The impermanence of life is the joy of life, maintains Le Guin, since it enables change, and an acceptance of death is therefore absolutely necessary for rebirth.

Another important concept of the Tao is *wei wu wei*, which in her 1998 translation of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* Le Guin translates as 'Doing not-doing' or 'Action by inaction'.[15] In Earthsea this is exemplified by the mage Ogion. Ogion does not interfere with nature; he is not interested in the *use* of things or people, but in their being - their nature. He tells Ged to learn the 'being' of every flower or herb before learning its true name. The mountains, the river, Ged, Ogion - *are*, explains the old mage: they have no use. They are all part of the Equilibrium, the Balance of the universe, a tiny yet essential part of the intricate, delicate, precarious Balance that holds the world together. As we shall see, it takes Ged a long time to learn this lesson in the first book of the First Trilogy; the young Tenar of the second has no opportunity to learn it, since she exists in a stultifying dull routine of ritual till her escape; and in the third book Ged tries to teach it to Arren, but the prince, too, struggles with the concept. Le Guin makes no secret of the alienness of the concept of Balance to her protagonists, and in doing so she acknowledges its alienness to her Western readers, perhaps even to herself.

While she based her books on the Tao, Le Guin's language in the First Trilogy was self-confessedly based on the male-oriented language sanctioned by the institutionalised Western hegemony under which she lived. In her 1992 lecture at Keble College, Oxford, titled 'Children, Women, Men and Dragons' and later published as 'Earthsea Revisioned' (1993), Le Guin confirms that she wrote the first trilogy on the traditional pattern of heroic fantasy. She was using the 'winged words' of tradition, following the pattern set by her European predecessors like Lord Dunsany, Tolkien and Lewis. But by the 1990s, Le Guin had come to see her younger self as having been an unconscious member of an anti-patriarchal counter-order. When she began her career as a writer of

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[14] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Farthest Shore: Earthsea Quarte*t, p. 410. Hereafter cites as *TFS*.

[15] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching: A Book about The Way and the Power of The Way* (Boston & London, Shambhala, 1998), p. 6.

genre fiction, she observes, heroes of fantasy and science fiction were always male, and female authors were performing an approved and traditional task in their role as storytellers.[16] Yet Le Guin argues rightly that the rules did not wholly bind her: 'I was writing partly by the rules, as an artificial man, and partly against the rules, as an inadvertent revolutionary'.[17] Subversion, she insists, can be unconscious, and this certainly seems obvious in her first novel, the *Wizard*, where the hero is dark-skinned and the villainous invaders from Kargad are white – a situation Le Guin makes little of in the novel, but which has been recognised as marking a sea-change in twentieth-century fantasy. However, the subversive tendencies do not effect the fundamental premises of language and its uses in Earthsea. Le Guin's notion of True Speech, despite stemming from ideas about Adamic language - or perhaps because of this - establishes rigid, hierarchical binary systems in Earthsea. This language is the purview of male wizards; women are not allowed to learn it. True Speech, moreover, remains a means of controlling nature, as wizards can change anything into another by naming it.

Even so, another way in which *A Wizard of Earthsea* accomplishes what may well be an unconscious revolution is in its attitude to women; or rather in its exposure of a patriarchal attitude against which the Second Trilogy would launch a full-scale rebellion. Ged's early life as shown in *A Wizard* – his crucial showdown with the aristocratic Jasper which creates the Shadow, and his long journey first to escape and then to find the Shadow he has created – are profoundly shaped by his experiences with women. Several times, the motivators for Ged's actions are women, as we shall see; not only are his first words of power learnt from his aunt, but time and again an encounter with a woman changes the trajectory of his journey, both physically and metaphorically. And this tendency continues in the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*. Here Ged is led to the titular Tombs by an artefact given him by a woman in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and escapes from them only with the help of Tenar, the young Priestess of the Nameless Ones whose deadening presence fills the subterranean labyrinth at the centre of the novel. As Le Guin points out, 'gender expectations are reflected/created by linguistic usage', and despite Tenar's courage she remains, for readers and critics, a 'heroine' - a word with vastly different implications and values than the term hero. Nevertheless, largely concerned with creation and balance as they are, these first two books yet seem to be straining against an order that oppresses the text, discovering a hidden counter-order, as it were, which seeks to liberate itself from the dominant patriarchy that controls Earthsea.

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[16] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned* (Cambridge: Labute, 1993), p. 6

[17] Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned* , p. 7.

In *The Farthest Shore,* while Balance remains a dominant thematic concern, Le Guin more specifically addresses the connection of language with creativity and life. As noted above, Suvin understands this link as encoded in the creation song. Ironically - for this is Le Guin's most consciously polemical stance in the First Trilogy against the Judeo-Christian world-view - the subversive drive seems diminished. An eschatological tone pervades *The Farthest Shore*: the end of time seems near, and evil has apparently triumphed over the Archipelago. But Ged emerges as a kind of Christ/Redeemer, whose sacrifice of his magic power saves the world from the urge to achieve immortality with which it has been infected by the devilish enchanter Cob. Order seems to be restored, and 'a new earth' established, with Arren/Lebannen as the Archipelago's king and Ged as its acknowledged saviour. The reinstated order is patriarchal, and women have no part to play in restoring or sustaining it. It emerges from this discussion that the first trilogy is more revolutionary than its author or readers have given it credit for, but that its revolutionary tendencies are not permitted to unleash a revolution.

4.3. *A Wizard of Earthsea*: **Forgotten Stories**

It would be a careless reading of the First Trilogy that missed the revolutionary undercurrent, strangely powerful by reason of its nature *as* an undercurrent, hidden below the surface, so that the structure of the books reflect their content. In the seemingly traditional narratives of the Earthsea Trilogy there are many fissures and fault lines, through which the undertow of the anarchic energy makes itself felt.

A Wizard begins as a typical fairy-tale, arousing in the reader expectations of a foreclosed narrative structure, where the hero will win out in the end and be rewarded (usually) with wealth and marriage. The narrator tells us that Ged is the 'special' seventh brother whose six older brothers are 'ordinary', leaving home to pursue farming or sailing. His mother dies soon after his birth, while his father is a 'grim, unspeaking man', quick with 'blows and whippings' (13). The young boy's use-name is Duny, but the narrator, on the first page, reveals his true name - Ged - and invokes his later identity as an Archmage and dragonlord, about whom songs have been made, thus indicating that like all fairy-tale heroes, Duny will eventually prove his extraordinary qualities to the world that once scorned him. The pattern of response aroused in the readers by this initial presentation of the hero is in consonance with the monomyth of Joseph Campbell's 'Hero With A Thousand Faces', producing an expectation of a hero who will fight terrible enemies and defeat them, reinstating the

normative power-structure of his land and culture. But Le Guin seeks to rewrite the hero myth, and in the process reveals the silenced voices in the interstices of the structures of ideology.

In rewriting the hero myth, Le Guin evokes many old and forgotten stories, drawing them into the narrative of the hero - or narrating the ways in which the hero is invariably drawn into them - to indicate the silenced voices and suppressed stories implicated in every hero's journey. The silenced voices to which Le Guin's text draws attention are mostly those of women. This might seem surprising, considering that critics - including Le Guin herself - have pointed out the absence of women in the First Trilogy, claiming that even Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan* depends on Ged to be rescued. However, I will argue that the pervasive marginalisation of women in Earthsea is shown as an absence, an aporia in the text and in Ged's life that threatens always to disrupt the narrative. Le Guin uses textual lacunae - untold stories, suppressed viewpoints, lost identities - as a strategic tool to explore these silences.

The quest in the first two books of Earthsea, *Wizard* and *Tombs*, has definite echoes of Tolkienian fantasy - the quest-journey, the Ring as a symbol of power, the absence of a king who would bring peace and prosperity to the imagined lands of the narrative, a friend who accompanies the hero on his final trek to confront his doppelgänger. Ged's quest is a psychological journey to find his own Shadow. Like Tolkien, Le Guin's inversion of the hero's quest from a grand exploit of daring and adventure aimed at vanquishing the Other - an alien, a monster, an enemy - to a lonely journey to the borders of the world and the self, is quite clearly a rejection of the usual categories of the hero-tale genre. In this it follows the trajectory of the Christ myth, since there too the great enemy to be overcome is an internal one; as recounted in Matthew and Luke, Jesus is tempted thrice by the devil during his forty-day sojourn in the desert.

Although heroic adventures occur in the narrative, they are confined to a minor role. For example, Ged's encounter with the dragon of Pendor, who terrorised the islanders of the Western Archipelago, is described in racy, exciting prose, but the incident is short, and quickly over, almost a parenthesis in the narrative. Contrary to genre conventions, it is neither the main adventure nor the motive of Ged's quest; indeed, he deliberately refrains from giving this episode, performed as a public duty, a place in his private narrative, by refusing the dragon's offer to disclose the Shadow's name. Ged's quest is something different altogether, as we are reminded when he is returning victorious after having guessed the dragon's name and so gained power over it: 'As soon as Pendor had sunk under the sea-rim behind him, Ged looking eastward felt the fear of the shadow come into his heart again; and it was hard to turn from the bright danger of the dragon to that formless,

hopeless horror' (91). A 'shadowquest' (147) as opposed to a hero-quest provides the focus of this book, the shadowquest becoming an alternative tale to the typical tale of the hero with a thousand faces. It is a shadowquest because Ged is, till the last encounter, blind to the other's identity; that is, Ged does not realise that the Shadow is part of himself. He does not know what he follows. Archmage Gensher tells him it has no name; but his first master, Ogion, says that all things have a name: and as we have seen, the dragon of Pendor offers to disclose it to him. With these bits of contradictory information, the wizard begins his journey in an unusual state of perplexity - not to gain anything, as in hero-quests; nor even to destroy something, as in Tolkien's famous inversion of the hero quest in *The Lord of the Rings*. Ged journeys to encounter what he calls 'my creature' without any previous knowledge. And women, who are also a mystery to him, play a pivotal role in his journey.

The role of women is supplemented by the role of other absences: silence, darkness, powerlessness and the concomitant desire to seize what power is available. In Earthsea, words are the source of power, as the young boy Duny learns. They make things happen; they change the world. When he inadvertently repeats a few words he has heard his aunt use to call a goat, he is astounded and terrified at the effect they have on the herd he is looking after. This first glimpse of the power of words is an irresistible means of access to the power he lacks and for which he hungers; a hunger triggered by the lack of a loving mother, and exacerbated by the absence of any other loving influence from Duny's life. His feelings of powerlessness are aggravated by a father who regularly beats him. So rather than sharing with his playmates, he seeks to 'know and do what they knew not and could not' (15), revealing the desire to assert himself on others he has learned from these two adults. Everything in Earthsea, he learns, has its 'true name', and when his aunt teaches him certain 'words of power' – the true names of birds and animals - he 'hungered to know more such names', for the 'power it gave him over bird and beast' was a pleasure that 'stayed with him all his life'.[18] The witch tells him of the 'glory and the riches and the great power over men that a sorcerer could gain', and these are his first motives for learning the True Speech of creation.

4.3. Ged's Journey: Silence and Darkness

In recounting Ged's journey into adulthood, Le Guin emphasises the role of the categories denigrated as valueless in Earthsea. Ironically for Ged, who hungers for words of power, the mage who offers him apprenticeship is Ogion, known as 'the Silent' (23). Ged gets impatient within a few

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[18] Le Guin, *WE*, pp. 16-17.

days, as Ogion walks sturdily and silently on the long trek to his home at Re Albi, sleeping in the rain if it was wet, and making no attempt to teach Ged 'the language of the beasts and the speech of the leaves' - all that the boy had been expecting to be taught, so that he could 'sway the wind with his word' and change his shape into whatever he desired (25). Even when they are at Re Albi, 'the mage's long listening silence would fill the room, and fill Ged's mind, until sometimes it seemed he had forgotten what words sounded like: and when Ogion spoke at last it was as if he had just then and for the first time, invented speech'.[19] This echoes the insight Tolkien's Frodo gets when he first enters the woods of Lothlórien, and feels that he has newly invented the names of the colours he sees there. The point is that as Tolkien insists, language itself can become trite when used without thought, and consequently the world it names become drab and familiar. Le Guin, like Tolkien, points to the power of ordinary words; but Ged spurns the learning of anything that has no use.

When Ged's impatience for power leads him to the Roke school of wizardry, his expectations are again overthrown. When he cannot enter the open door, despite stepping over the threshold twice, he immediately thinks of working a spell; however, his carefully woven magic - his aunt's prize spell - has no effect. When nothing happens, he is forced to ask the Doorkeeper for help, who mildly tells him, 'Say your name', and allows him entry. A very similar incident in *The Lord of the Rings* also points to the error of undiluted belief in the power of words as magical spells. When the nine companions comprising the Fellowship reach Moria, the words on the hidden entrance are 'Speak Friend and Enter'. Gandalf assumes that this means a magical spell has to be spoken, and spends many hours thinking and trying out different spells. In the end, he suddenly realises that the words literally mean speak 'Friend' and enter - only the ordinary word friend is required to make the doors of Moria appear.

However, Ged equates language with power, and power with the absence of the fear he experienced in his abused childhood: 'The more he learned, the less he would have to fear, until finally in his full power as Wizard he need fear nothing in the world, nothing at all' (58). As a result, he meets the Master Hand's explanation of the Equilibrium of the world with impatience, telling himself: 'surely a wizard [...] was powerful enough to do as he pleased, and balance the world as seemed best to him, and drive back darkness with his own light' (48). He thinks of himself as 'a word spoken by the sunlight' (41). It is ironic, then, that he is ineluctably drawn to darkness and shadow - principles that in the First Trilogy are identified with the female. By this means Le Guin

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[19] Le Guin, *WE,* p. 28.

implies that his inordinate desire for power stems from a radical lack in the boy's life: the lack of a mother.

4.4. Ged's Journey: Women

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, women are largely absent from the narrative, and the ones we meet are trapped in the roles decided for them by the dominant hegemony: roles whose origin is mystified and which now manifests itself in popular sayings that carry the sanction of years and frequent repetition, such as 'Weak as woman's magic' and 'Wicked as woman's magic' (16). No one challenges the wisdom of these gnomic utterances, although who first said them, who disseminated them and through what well-hidden channels of communication, is lost in prehistory. These sayings bear potent witness to years of suppressing and trivialising women and of limiting their sphere of action; the 'wise' on Roke are all men.

The lack of a mother means that young Duny has few interactions with women, and this has an important impact on his personality, since it triggers a distrust of people that prevents him from forming easy friendships. The woman he spends most time with, his aunt the witch, is manipulative and conniving, trying to use his gift for her own ends. Her disempowered status in the patriarchal system, where despite having the power of magic she has to play a subsidiary role, is obvious. Interestingly, we never learn her name, and many years later, as a middle-aged man in *Tehanu*, Ged fails to recall it. His aunt tries to exert control over the boy by spell-binding him into a 'female' role of silence and servitude: 'she had tried not only to gain control of his speech and silence, but to bind him at the same time in to her service' (16). But Duny finds an intense pleasure in what his aunt gives him, 'the power […] over bird and beast, and the knowledge of these' (17). In fact, he learns from this disempowered woman how to take pleasure in his own powers, since she also takes pleasure in the powers she has, and tries to use them for gain, deprived as she is of any other outlet for her talents.

His second close encounter with a woman occurs when he is about thirteen, after he has been given his true name (Ged) and lived for a while as Ogion's apprentice. When he meets the daughter of the old lord of Re Albi on a herb-picking expedition, he find himself unable to resist her wiles. The girl challenges him to work a spell well beyond his current capabilities, that of summoning a spirit of the dead; and his acceptance of this challenge is significant, for it indicates his desire to 'win her admiration' – to impress a woman. This is something all traditional heroes seek to achieve in order to gain a bride, but the protagonist of Le Guin's fantasy is no traditional hero. His desire to

prove his worth to the girl instead leads him to disaster. He begins reading a summoning spell from Ogion's lore-books, and releases 'a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness' that spreads all over the house as he feels himself impelled by some unknown force to finish reading (30). It is only Ogion's timely entry that dispels the shadow. The girl's influence, then, exposes something sinister in the magical powers that differentiate Earthsea from our own world; and this sinister something at the heart of power is what Le Guin is concerned to address throughout the rest of her sequence.

The incident at Re Albi foreshadows two later incidents in Ged's early career as related in the *Wizard*. When he arrives at the School for Wizards to complete his training Ged again attempts to summon the spirit of the dead in an act of jealous rivalry with a fellow apprentice, Jasper. On their very first meeting, Jasper's obvious class difference, evident in his refined speech and rich confidence, makes Ged insecure. But the rivalry reaches its climax as a result of sexual rather than class jealousy, when Jasper demonstrates his magic skills to a woman at a festival, the Lady of O, 'slender and young, bright as new copper, her black hair crowned with opals' (53). In response, Ged chooses to demonstrate his own superior powers to Jasper and his peers by summoning a long-dead legendary woman, the Princess Elfarran, and he does so by recalling the spell he was provoked into reading by the girl at Re Albi. It is notable that he calls up Elfarran rather than her lover, the hero Erreth-Akbe. Clearly, since his competitive spirit found impetus in Jasper's conquest of the lady of O, Ged wants to have an even lovelier woman at his beck and call. His intense desire for a woman he can call 'his own' by summoning her at will is clear evidence of how much the lack of female influence matters to him, how intensely he desires a woman who can admire him, as the Lady of O admires his rival.

All the women above have been silenced at the level of the narrative. They either do not speak or their utterance is controlled entirely by the narrator's voice, which describes their feelings and motives for us at second hand. The aunt is given just a couple of sentences of direct speech; otherwise, she is described as 'an ignorant woman' who 'often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends' (16). The girl, although she does speak, is never the focus: the incidents of her meeting with Ged are all narrated from the boy's point of view, and we are told too that her will may not be her own; Ogion suggests to Ged that it was her enchantress 'mother who sent the girl to talk to you' (35). Elfarran is known only as Erreth-Akbe's lover; there is no Deed or lay to celebrate her accomplishments.

Ged meets the unnamed girl from Re Albi a second time after he has raised the Shadow, left Roke and defeated the dragon of Pendor. Her name, we now learn, is Serret, Lady of the Keep, and she lives in a stone tower to which he is driven as he runs from the darkness he has raised. As he crosses the threshold into the Tower, he enters a long-forgotten story: the tale of the Stone of Terrenon. The house with the tower resembles a medieval castle, and the lady is clearly the victim of an unwelcome arranged marriage of the kind common in medieval Europe. Echoes of fairy-tale princesses imprisoned by ogres resound in the background as Ged is immediately drawn to the lady by pity for her situation, with a husband 'thrice her age, bone-white, bone-thin', looking at his young wife with a 'hard, covetous glance'. To Ged she seems like 'a white deer caged, like a white bird wing-clipped, like a silver ring on an old man's finger'.[20] Her being 'white' attracts the dark Ged, who is still at the stage where he idealises women, mentally casting them in stereotyped 'feminine' roles as goddesses or victims whom he can worship or save; significantly, she reminds him especially of the Lady of O, who had initially triggered his jealousy of Jasper – and the resulting release of the Shadow. Although Serret speaks and acts in the novel, she is essentially powerless. Her point of view is never given; even as she speaks, either the narrator or Ged are the focus, trying to judge her motivations. This is symptomatic of women's repression as vocal subjects in a society where the male viewpoint is privileged. Women's experience is mostly portrayed through men's perception of it, and one of the central perceptions in the western tradition is of woman as temptress, responsible for Man's fall.

So, while her narrative role is crucial, Serret lacks agency. When, using her beauty as a lure, the lady seeks to entrap Ged spiritually, making him a servant of the stone of Terrenon, Ged is able to resist the temptation by relying on his reason and imagination. Clearly, the temptation he once experienced at Re Albi is here repeated, but Ged's reactions are now completely different. Whereas the young girl's challenge to summon up dead spirits drove the teenage Ged to take up Ogion's lore books and hunt through them for the dangerous spell, Serret's challenge of him to touch the stone of Terrenon, her taunt that he is afraid, is met with a simple 'Yes' (109). He has learned the real dangers of magic, and to recognise that there are some things more important than proving his manhood.

Soon afterwards, as the Shadow tricks him into shipwreck on a desert islet, Ged plunges into another long-forgotten story: the tale of a kidnapped young prince and princess of the Kargad Empire, left to die there years before by a usurper king. In this incident, Le Guin confirms the

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[20] Le Guin, *WE*, pp. 106-08.

importance of stories, forgotten or half-remembered, that still have a crucial bearing on the shaping of the self or of the world, such as the stories of the dragon of Pendor and of Elfarran, which interact in complex ways with Ged's journey through life. Ged enters the forlorn old woman's story by reconstructing it from the clues she gives him, and by a physical gift she offers him he becomes a continuation of that reconstructed narrative. Ironically, the old woman who cannot communicate with Ged at all, because they speak different languages - in fact, she hardly knows any language - is the first woman who actually establishes a dialogic relationship with him. While his aunt and Serret had never allowed their self-interest to wane, the old, nameless woman is able to have a communion based on Buber's 'I-Thou' relationship, creating a space between herself and Ged where both can embrace the totality of the other. [21] Dispossessed of her inheritance and displaced from her home, she clings to the two things she has always known, the only things that belong to her: a little dress and a broken ring. She does have agency, however - perhaps because of her isolated position, on the unchartered sandbar, where she is not 'subjected' to a suitable role in the controlling patriarchal systems. She decides to share her belongings with this first human being she has met, apart from her brother, since she was marooned. And perhaps her lost childhood helps Ged reconcile himself with his own neglect in his early years.

Her story, on the verge of being forgotten, becomes immortal, the backdrop to the lay which the narrator keeps mentioning, *The Deed of Ged.* Her act makes Ged realise the importance of a dialogic relationship, and in return for her kindness he sets a charm on the spring of salty water on the islet so that it becomes sweet and clear, and the islet acquires a name: Springwater Isle. These two results of the encounter testify to the strength of I-Thou relationships as wellsprings of life at the cosmic, social and individual level, for through this encounter the islet becomes a resting place for sailors and is 'mapped' onto the world. The old man and woman have no names - their names and identity have been taken (as Ged guesses) with violence. Ged's act which results in the island being named at least partly restores them to a connection with Earthsea by indirectly giving their location, at least, a name: making them part of the story of the world, as it were.

Ged's new ability to have dialogic relationships with women becomes apparent soon after this adventure when he meets Vetch's sister, Yarrow, at Iffish. The peace and goodwill he enjoys at Vetch's house for the first time in his life owes a great deal to the cheerful presence of this young girl. After the harsh, bitterly lonely journey he has experienced, Vetch's home is a welcome respite for him and the reader, an indication that the male and female principle are mutually requisite for

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[21] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronal Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959).

wholeness and balance; that a lone male hero, despite all his efforts, cannot restore balance to a disturbed world, be it the microcosmic self or the macrocosmic universe. Vetch's first words after he recognises Ged are: 'Come on, come home with us, we're going home, it's time to get out of this dark' (144). The emphasis on the word home, and on its meaning as a place of communion, are significant because they provide a stark contrast to Ged's lonely, hermetic condition till then. In fact, 'home' is a concept that occurs throughout Le Guin's work as a way of describing the ideal community – most notably, perhaps, in the title of her Californian Utopia of the 1980s, *Always Coming Home*. Homelessness stands for stasis, in Le Guin's universe, and coming home is always for her a process of development and discovery.

In Vetch's home, Ged is introduced to another aspect of women, their connection with wildness, which is symbolised by Yarrow's pet, a tiny dragon. Seeing the little 'winged and taloned' dragon on her wrist, Ged good-naturedly teases the girl about her bravery in tackling the mythical 'monster', hoping, perhaps, to invoke the story of his own encounter with the dragon of Pendor. Unexpectedly, however, his mention of the creature - a harekki - reminds the girl instead of Ged's otak, the story of whose saving of Ged's life she had heard from her brother. That communication between humans and animals is possible emerges clearly from this speech. Even if such communication is silent, it still plays a vital role in the communal life on which humans depend. After trying to save the life of a little boy by following him into the Land of the Dead, Ged was plunged into a coma, and the otak saved him from death with its simple language of touch and warmth. In the process it showed him that he needed community, something the lonely adolescent had been in danger of forgetting after his neglectful childhood.

Le Guin shares the concern of feminism with the devaluing of women's experiences in a culture where they have been 'othered'. The inscrutable relationship between humans and dragons that the little harekki evokes remains an impenetrable enigma, even as the author re-visions Earthsea: 'In the first three books [...] the dragons were, above all wildness. What is not owned', Le Guin explains in her account of returning to Earthsea in *Tehanu*. 'A dragonlord wasn't a man who tamed dragons; nobody tamed dragons. He was simply [...] a man dragons would take notice of'. [22] In this first inkling of a relationship between dragons and women, the little dragon on Yarrow's wrist stands for an element of wildness in the domestic context, foreshadowing the later encounter between Ged, Tenar and the dragon-girl Tehanu.

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[22] Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned*, p. 22.

The instantaneous bond that springs up between Ged and Yarrow, who runs a household where everything was 'well-founded, peaceful and assured' (145), makes Ged realise, consciously, what he has missed all his life - a comfortable home and the loving presence of a woman. While this may be perceived as a limiting role for women – and Le Guin acknowledges as much in *Tehanu* - the author makes the keeping of a home vitally important. Ged likes to talk to Yarrow and listen to her; to tell her things and learn from her. He listens to her earnest questions very seriously, and when she exhibits self-doubt at her inability to understand some of his quasi-mystical explanations of the Equilibrium, Ged is quick to reassure her, blaming her incomprehension on himself and the lack of time to speak clearly. But she is self-assured enough about certain things, which pertain mostly to the essential needs of life traditionally seen to by women. Seemingly unimportant, these aspects of life are absolutely necessary for survival. When Ged teases her by stealing a cake out of the batch she is making for his journey, she tells him, prophetically, that he will regret this theft when each morsel of sustenance becomes precious on the open sea. Easy camaraderie, comfortable conversation and homely luxury become associated with Yarrow even more than with Vetch; but so too does life itself, the material needs of the body.

However, many of these women do not have access to language - that is, they are silenced in the dominant discourse of men in Earthsea. Their stories remain untold, half-told or told from male perspectives. Some of the remain nameless, for example the princess on the island, or Ged's aunt. Le Guin's acute awareness of the importance of stories, and the act of story-telling, illustrates her awareness of how language shapes reality.

4.5. Why Stories Get Told - or Not

Interestingly, Ged's great struggle with the Shadow is lost to song or story in Earthsea. At the end of *Wizard* the narrator's note tells us that Estarriol/Vetch's promise to conserve Ged's quest in song, if fulfilled, has since been lost. Instead three different versions of the final incident in the quest, when Ged's boat was grounded on a mysterious shore that in the middle of the open sea, have been 'carried like driftwood from isle to isle' (168), none of them mentioning Ged or his Shadow. Since only Vetch witnessed this incident, it seems fair to assume that he did make an effort to preserve the story, though the narrator tells us he failed. The *Deed Of Ged* tells of his sailing the Dragon's Run; of the restoration of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe; of his becoming Archmage - but not of his encounter with his malevolent double. The implication is clear - stories are mediated and reformulated, sifted to get rid of any mention of evil as 'self'.

This raises interesting questions about how and why, and most importantly by whom, stories get remembered and told; and about who listens and remembers. Dominant ideologies privilege the male hero's physical struggle with wild, untameable outer forces - forces that can be coded as Other; but stories of inner struggle repressed. For a tale of inner struggle of necessity accepts the possibility that evil resides within the self, so that the 'Other-as-evil' becomes a problematic category. Fredric Jameson shows how the hegemony prefers to make evil synonymous with 'whatever is radically different from me'.[23] Ged's story turns this adage on its head, and so got consigned to oblivion.

Still, the story has been told - we have read it - by a narrator who knows the true names of both Sparrowhawk and Vetch. Le Guin's first Earthsea book, then, bears testimony to the fact that subversive tales do indeed survive somehow, in the interstices of power, silently awaiting their time to be released from silence.

The next section will explore Le Guin's last book in the first trilogy, which once again has two endings, leaving the readers to decide which, if either, is the true one.

4.6. Loss of Language in *The Farthest Shore*

In *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin explores the relationship of language to the polarities of life and death, and to human creativity and sterility. The link between language and creativity is a major concern (as we have seen) in the fantasy of C. S. Lewis and Tolkien. For Tolkien, human creativity is also closely linked to the fear of death, since he sees this fear as an effect of the possessiveness generated in human beings by the gift of creativity - not only as artists, but as imaginative creators of the world.[24] Le Guin too sees creativity as linked with death, but for her it is the Judeo-Christian promise of eternal life – a fiction, as she sees it, though not creative in its effects – that generates a terror of mortality, as it sows the seed of desire for perpetual existence. This desire to escape death in turn generates a scorn for life in all its richness, and encourages the urge to hoard whatever one possesses – beauty, objects, talents – in a condition of stasis which is finally deathly. If language is integral to creativity, as a constantly changing dynamic force, then both can be drained away by the fear of dying, which yearns for changelessness. In her Taoist vision, death should be embraced as an end to the existential 'self', and all desire for an 'afterlife' should be foresworn.

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[23] Fredric Jameson, 'Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre' *New Literary History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1975), p. 140.

[24] See Tolkien, 'OFS' in *Tree and Leaf*.

Le Guin, then, wishes to supplant the biblical narrative of the end times and write an alternative version. As we have seen, fantasy writers seem particularly concerned with writing their own bibles; and while Lewis seeks to do so in order to prepare his youthful readers for an encounter with the real thing, Le Guin's concern is to replace it with something healthier. She has often expressed her hostility to organised religion, especially the Judeo-Christian vision, branding herself 'an unconsistent Taoist and a consistent unChristian'.[25] In her Guest of Honour Speech at the 19th Annual Mythopoeic Conference, titled 'Legends for a New Land' (1988),[26] Le Guin talks about the 'Judeo-Christian tradition that informs our world-view', whereby the 'the City of God is not founded on this earth', but instead 'the world will [...] be rolled up as a scroll, a play that has been acted, a story that has been told. The world has no value except as a sort of waiting room'.[27] Against this, Le Guin sets the mythical view of the native American peoples: 'You're here; it's here', she insists ('Legends', 8). In *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin presents this contrast as a theme, showing how the peoples of Earthsea get sucked into the lure of eternal life, only to find dust and shadow in the promised land. In the process she presents her readers with her most direct challenge to the fantastic vision of C. S. Lewis.

In this book, a wizard called Cob makes a breach between the land of the living and the dead, in a bid to gain immortality. Cob is a pastiche of the Christ figure, but the precise obverse of Ged as Christ. Cob claims to offer eternal life but in fact offers death, for nothing that lives can be eternal. Ged, by contrast, offers life by offering death, since for him death is the condition of life – everything that lives, dies. Cob's offer drains the world of language and creativity; on accepting it people continue to exist, but without imagination, without energy. The absence of imagination is demonstrated through their loss of artistry, innovation and initiative. Le Guin equates the wizard with the artist - most particularly with a writer, as their tools are held in common: words. But when Cob's influence begins to spread, wizards' spells no longer work. The most visibly distressing sign of the end of the world is that wizards have lost the knowledge of True Speech, and thus the potency of their spells along with their connection with the language that shaped the world. Prince Arren, who comes to Roke to seek advice, tells Ged that even his father, the king of Enlad, feels that the words of True Speech had lost their meaning. But other forms of artistry are also lost.

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[25] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Ketterer on *The Left Hand of Darkness*' in *Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (July, 1975), p. 139.

[26] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Legends for a New Land' in *Mythlore*, 56 (Winter, 1988), pp. 4-10.

[27] Le Guin, 'Legends', p. 8.

As Ged and Arren make the long sea-voyage towards the Dry Land, to seek Cob and restore the balance he has upset, they witness many forms of loss of creativity, and loss of meaning from language. One example is the silkweavers of Lorbanery, formerly the makers of the best silk on Earthsea, who now sit idle, their looms silent and dusty. The old men of Lobanery lament that 'There's no more proper singing' (374). An old witch tells Ged that she has lost her power, because 'There is a hole in the world and the light is running out of it. And the words go with the light' (377). Another disturbing manifestation is that the raft people, celebrating the Long Dance, forget the words of the Creation of Éa, which as we have seen is the foundational song of Le Guin's invented world. But the nadir of horror for Ged is when the dragon Orm Embar comes to him for help, and following it to the Dragon's Run, Ged and Arren witness the terrible spectacle of the dragons who cannot speak. As Ged has explained to Arren, the dragon and its speech are one: 'they do not work magic: it is their substance, their being'.[28] The dragons' loss of speech clearly presages the end of the world, because their substance is True Speech, the language of creation.

4.7. Words and Worlds

A common recognition that words are creative means that there is an important dialogic relationship between the Bible and Le Guin's fantasy. The biblical concept of the Word as the creative force is familiar from the first words of St John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. In this formulation the Word is represented as creative and divine; and the creative aspect of language is also of vital importance in Earthsea. Significantly, while it is often repeated in the first two novels that Segoy raised the lands from the sea using True Speech, the concept of the First Word uttered by Segoy to raise the lands from the ocean[29] is only introduced in *The Farthest Shore*. This might seem to be an unimportant distinction, but it indicates Le Guin's consciousness of her fiction as what has been called an unBible.[30] Presumably as a direct result of the link between words and the primal act of creation, language as True Speech is very important in Le Guin's imagined world. Language makes things happen, it acts upon Earthsea. Only the dragons, we learn in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, know True Speech without having to learn it. True names are the truth of everything, animate or inanimate, human or non-

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[28] Le Guin, *TFS*, p. 335.

[29] Le Guin, *TFS*, pp. 304, 365. See also *Earthsea Quartet*, pp. 50, 109, 267.

[30] Richard D. Erlich, '*Always Coming Home*: Ethnography, unBible, and Utopian satire' in *Paradoxa*, 21 (2008), pp.137-165.

human. In *A Wizard*, Ged tells Yarrow that all power stems from one source, and all names and all things 'are syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power' (151). This anchors being in the world in language. Words create and continue existence in all its modes, according to Ged's explanation. How, then, is the 'great word' that is the source of all life and language in Earthsea, different from the Word in the Fourth Gospel?

It is interesting to note how many fantasy writers share an understanding of this link between language and reality. Since these writers create their invented worlds with words, it would seem that they invest these worlds and the words that make them conjointly with the 'truth' as they perceive it. The Bible is, in fact, the text that makes the strongest claim to articulate 'truth' in western literature. Coleridge, in his *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, describes the Scriptures as if they were really possessed of this intention: 'I take up this work with the purpose to read it for the first time as I should read any other work, as far at least as I can or dare. […] in the Bible there is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together; […] the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being'.[31] Coleridge's words imply that the biblical text is active and energetic, seeking out its helplessly receptive readers like a heat-seeking missile. According to Erich Auerbach, 'The Bible's claim to truth is […] tyrannical - it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality - it insists that it is the only real world'.[32] But *The Farthest Shore* encourages us to consider whether there is a difference between remodelling the actual world to our own ends and creating a world that suits us in our fictions. The crucial distinction, of course, is that fantasy does not impose itself on the world; it merely professes to present alternative worlds, other ways of being. This, however, makes Lewis's blatant desire to proselytise through his fiction problematic, because his fantasy is intended to remodel his readers and the world they live in, much as the Bible does as it is read by the Christian churches. Lewis's desire to bring his young readers to the Bible through his fiction, with its assumption that both sets of texts are therefore invested with the authority of truth-bearing documents, can be contrasted with Le Guin's attitude to the way myths and symbols function, and to the responsibility as opposed to the authority of the author. She affirms that myth or symbol is primarily and ultimately a 'supra-rational given, a datum, which it is not my job to disguise

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[31] S. T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Letter 2 (London: Adams & Charles Black, 1956).

[32] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 14-15.

cleverly, but to express vividly and to communicate. I am not a priest. I am a witness'.[33] The implication is that these are complex structures whose meaning cannot be analysed; and also that no one meaning can be assigned to them – that they are open-ended, available for different interpretations.

Nevertheless, Le Guin shares Lewis's belief that myth and reality do not necessarily form mutually exclusive 'true' and 'false' worlds. This is demonstrated, for example, in Ged and Arren's encounter with the Raft Folk, who save them after Ged is wounded by a spear as they try to land on a hostile island. Arren is unable to help Ged, for he is overwhelmed by inertia resulting from a feeling of meaninglessness that is a hallmark of the world after Cob. When Ged regains consciousness, he tells Arren that even though he had heard of the strange Raft Folk, he thought they were merely 'a fancy without substance. Yet we were rescued by that fancy, and our lives saved by a myth' (408). In other words, Le Guin shares Lewis's apprehension of myth as a powerful source of restoration meaning and truth in an increasingly alienated world, by an appeal to the imagination.

As indicated earlier, Le Guin roots her imaginative vision in the here and now, repudiating any perception of this world as temporary, and therefore of less value than some eternal transcendent universe; and she proposes instead a dialogic relationship between peoples and communities, which she initiates in *The Farthest Shore*, but which becomes much more heteroglot in the Second Trilogy. In the *Farthest*, Ged and Arren's journey allows her to show an Earthsea essentially alienated because of Cob, and by presenting the readers with visions of diverse communities robbed of their creative impulse, she demonstrates what a loss of interest in the here and now entails. And in the process she shows us what is at stake, for her, in reading and writing about imaginary worlds.

4.8. Dialogic Integration

Martin Buber, whose book *I and Thou* (1958) is strongly influenced by his study of the Tao, expounds in it what he calls an 'I-Thou'[34] relationship, a form of dialogue where the connection between self and other is not based on a hierarchical subject-object division. Instead, it springs from

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[33] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Ketterer on *The Left Hand of Darkness*' in *Science Fiction Studies*, 2: 2 (July, 1975), p. 138.

[34] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans., Ronald Gregor Smith (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). Buber wrote *Speeches and Allegories of Chuang-Tzu*, including an 'Afterword', 'The Teaching of the Tao', published in 1910, thirteen years before publishing his book *I and Thou* (1923). Buber's work in the latter book shows strong elements of the Tao philosophy, explaining why Le Guin finds it useful.

a mutual acceptance of the other's uniqueness, so that each speaker is accepted as different. 'Dialogue,' Buber tells us, 'is not merely the interchange of words - genuine dialogue can take place in silence [...]. It is, rather, the response of one's whole being to the otherness of the other'.[35] Le Guin mentions the 'I-Thou' relationship in her science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, written in 1969, one year after *A Wizard of Earthsea*. In it Genly Ai, the emissary from Earth to the planet Gethen, tells the Gethenian Estraven:

> Alone, I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou.[36]

Despite these words, for much of the book Genly cannot accept the ambisexuality of the Gethenians, and views Estraven as strange, alien, an Other. He mistrusts Estraven because he cannot accept him in his wholeness, but views him as an object of his own preconceptions. His consciousness is so steeped in these preconceived notions about the Other that it takes their long, arduous journey together through the snow-covered mountains for him to finally see and accept the alterity of Estraven.

In Earthsea, Le Guin shows the personal and political implications of an I-Thou relationship by deploying the geographical setting of the novel sequence as a metaphor for the difficulties involved in building relationships. The Archipelago is a powerful configuration for the study of 'difference', with the sea representing the distance between two individual consciousnesses that both inhibits conversation and is vital for an I-Thou relationship. The ocean is in constant flux, unlike the earth, which is fixed, and this fluidity and movement underlies Le Guin's vision of relationships between individuals and communities. The metaphor is analogous to Lewis's vision of fixed and moving lands in *Perelandra*, although the dialectic between fixity and dynamism is used differently by the two authors. While Lewis uses the stability of the fixed land as a metaphor for the ultimate goal for humans, once they have learned to distinguish between good and evil, Le Guin suggests that oceanic variation and fluctuation are necessary for the understanding of the Other and the self - in fact, that all understanding is rooted in this shifting, changing space where conversations between two poles can take place.

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[35] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith, Introduction by Maurice Friedman (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 25.

[36] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (London: Gollancz, 1969), p. 259.

To take the metaphor further, in *The Farthest Shore* Le Guin shows how the closing of these oceanic gaps between people, which symbolise what Buber calls the space 'in-between', shuts down communication and unleashes chaos. The state of anomie and collapse in the Archipelago, caused by the wizard Cob in his quest for immortality, has disrupted the structure of the world and destabilised the balance between its cultures. There is no commerce between the different islands, as the silk-makers of Lorbanery lament. The sea is infested with pirates, who plunder and loot, making mutual dealings between the islands impossible. With the sea rendered impassable, the bridges between 'I' and 'Thou' cannot be built, and discord and isolation become the rule of the day.

This is offset by the close companionship that Le Guin shows between Ged and Arren. As they embark on their dangerous journey across Earthsea, dialogue takes place between them, developing into a homosocial bond which is fairly radical for its period: an emotional and indeed physical attachment between men of different ages and classes, and concentrating on this at the expense of her earlier and later concentration on gender. The mutual trust between the two men allows Ged to complete the task he has set out to accomplish, and to survive it too, as Arren carries him back from the Land of the Dead to the country of the living. Their relationship is, in fact, a variation on the acceptance of the Other shown in Genli and Estraven's - or even Frodo and Sam's - relationship.

Another unusual dialogic relationship arises from their encounter with the Raft Folk, who are radically different from anyone else Ged or Arren have met. Indeed, as indicated earlier, Ged confesses that he had thought the stories about them to be mere legends. When Arren tells one of the people Ged's use-name, Sparrowhawk, the complete inability of the man to attach any meaning to the word (there are no such birds on the open ocean where the Raft Folk live) demonstrates to Arren their radical alterity. Here again Le Guin demonstrates that the otherness of the Other need not be a hindrance to communication; Arren swims among the Raft Folk like one of themselves, and sings the Creation Song of Éa for them when they begin to forget it under the influence of Cob's magic.

The dialogues between Ged, Arren and the Raft Folk stand in direct contrast to the isolationism of Cob, whose selfishness effectively robs him of the power to engage in conversation. When Ged finally tracks him down to the land of the dead, the Dry Land – an unchanging dust-filled desert where the stars are fixed and the departed inhabitants of Earthsea have forgotten all that made them human – it seems wholly fitting that he should have taken refuge in the place of silence,

where communication is impossible. The Dry Land is the precise obverse of the fluctuating ocean; it is fixed, and its very fixety renders dialogue redundant – why should the dead speak when nothing happens to them, and there is nothing to speak about? Here it transpires that Cob has forgotten his own name, which is emblematic of the fact that his spell of immortality has effectively taken him out of the continuous verbal exchange which is what life consists of. As Ged points out to his disembodied shade, even in the Land of the Dead 'All […] bear their true name' (462) and can be summoned by it, as he himself had demonstrated when he summoned Elfarran. Cob, on the other hand, who wished to appropriate for himself only one aspect of the dead's existence – their apparent continuation as themselves – has forfeited this last vestige of his identity. You cannot remain yourself if you live for ever, because the self is a thing of change, and change entails mortality. Having recognised this about Cob, it is not too difficult to bring his narrative to an end; though it proves far more onerous for Ged to close the gap he has opened between the Dry Land, the unchanging country, and the fluctuating, living world Le Guin calls Earthsea.

Ged's encounter with Cob in the Dry Land raises more questions than it answers. One question is: why does Earthsea even *need* a land of the dead, given its apparent irrelevance to the world of the living? The Dry Land seems to have more in common with Christian or classical tradition than with the Taoism to which Le Guin declares herself committed, albeit 'inconsistently'. And what sort of balance is restored at the end of the novel? Arren, we learn, is to be King of Earthsea, and for many readers the notion of monarchic rule is incompatible with any notion of balance in the sense of an equitable society. Moreover, both the *Wizard* and *The Tombs of Atuan* had shown Le Guin's readers that there is no balance in her fictional world between men and women. The end of the novel brings an end to the threat of Cob; but power relations in her world remain profoundly unequal. As for Ged, the readers are left in doubt as to where he goes. The narrator explains how the *Deed of Ged* relates that after attending Lebannen's crowning, Ged sailed off in *Lookfar*, and was never heard of again. The people of Gont, however, insist that Ged went off into the forests of the mountains, to wander there in solitude.

The problem of gender, and of political, social and indeed economic imbalance seems to have nagged at Le Guin's unconscious for almost two decades. After a lapse of seventeen years she finally addressed it in *Tehanu*.

CHAPTER FIVE. *TEHANU*: REVISIONS AND REVELATIONS

This chapter will look at the first book in Le Guin's Second Trilogy, *Tehanu* (1990). Written seventeen years after *The Farthest Shore*, this novel radically revises her earlier trilogy, with the apocalyptic subtitle 'The Last Book of Earthsea' seeming to link it to the final book in the Narnia sequence. Then after another eleven years, Le Guin again went back to Earthsea to reveal further unknown aspects of her invented world in two more books. In the process, she exploited the gaps left in her own earlier texts to adroitly shift the meanings of some of the premises on which her world is based, resulting in some remarkable changes in the tenor of her narrative. One of the ways she does this is by re-examining the language, metaphors, and symbols she had been using, and radically inverting the implicitly patriarchal assumptions they seem to sustain.

The same revisionist impulse is seen in Lewis, for example in the way he reuses his earlier image of a lit lantern from the *Lion* in *The Magician's Nephew*, weaving a whole story around it to explain its presence in Narnia. This skilful deployment of earlier elements in new stories is one of the main pleasures to be experienced as the Narnia and Earthsea sequences develop; Tolkien's well-planned books show no examples of such impromptu invention.[1] The process of reinvention is aesthetically gratifying as well as exciting, because of the element of the unexpected in the clever overturning of an earlier formulation, or in the innovative use of it to give an important philosophical insight, while bringing off the paradoxical trick of making the series feel coherent even as the later reinventions radically revise some of its premises.

In *Tehanu*, Le Guin no longer writes in the style of Tolkienian high fantasy, with its high register, and light scattering of archaisms in grammar and diction. As she begins to consciously reassess her earlier work from a feminist point of view, her language becomes simpler and more colloquial - indeed, more jarringly modern. Concurrently and perhaps paradoxically, her engagement with the scriptures becomes more overt as well as more polemical. While existing systems cannot be destabilised using the same language and codes that sustain those systems, Le Guin seems to recognise the radical potential for dissidence that retellings offer; so her narrative becomes more self-consciously intertextual, as she recognises the ongoing relevance of biblical themes to contemporary struggles. Ancient folklore, literary fairy tales and the Bible are inter-texts

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[1] One reason for this, of course, is that Tolkien did not write a series. His larger legendarium shows plenty of revision, overturning of premises and of multiple versions of the same stories.

and pre-texts, and conversations between these allow Le Guin to explore and expand the archetypes she has established in the First Trilogy.

By archetypes I mean here the original form (of images, symbols or narrative patterns) – as far as we can access this – of a series of variations in any given narrative.[2] In particular, the Second Trilogy sees the archetypes of the witch and the dragon, common features in folk and fairy tales, enriched in ways that demonstrate their continuing presence in literary and socio-political discourses as symbols deployed for the suppression and othering of women. Inevitably, Le Guin also dedicates her narratives to exploding stereotypes - interpretations of archetypal symbols that attempt to fix singular meanings on the complex, variable archetypes[3] - such as the notions of old woman as abusive witch, abused child as dehumanised 'monster', or dragon as fiend. Her re-visioning of these familiar concepts endows the archetypes with emancipatory meanings, pointing the way towards a radical transformation of a world order embedded in hierarchal binary oppositions, such as man/woman, self/other, ruler/subject. In accord with this transformative re-visioning, an apocalyptic tone pervades the first novel in the trilogy, *Tehanu*, as predicted by the novel's subtitle.

The claim that Le Guin rewrites the apocalypse myth might seem counter-intuitive given her self-description as 'a consistent unChristian';[4] but as we shall see, apocalyptic literature is essentially a literature of resistance, written at times when the socio-political status quo needs to be radically changed. The Greek root of the word *Apocalypsis*, which means 'uncovering', resonates with the connotations of the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, which also means unveiling.[5] Certain aspects of the Book of Revelation have been specially potent in the formation of western ways of thinking, among other things (according to M. H. Abrams) about 'the nature of history'.[6] Christian historians have tended to assume that the world has a definite beginning (creation), a catastrophe (fall), a crisis (the death and resurrection of Christ), and an end (the second coming of Christ and obliteration of evil). This assumption, says Abrams, has pervaded plotting and character delineation in western literature, which are shaped by the 'historical design' and 'theological ideas' inherited

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[2] Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 3.

[3] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[4] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Science Fiction Studies* 2: 2 (July 1975), p. 139.

[5] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

[6] M. H. Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Theme and Variations' in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions* (Dover: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 343.

from the Bible. While the western peoples 'continue to live in a pervasively biblical culture' (342), the twentieth century has seen an increasing tendency to transpose the 'theological model into secular terms, in a process of which the author himself [sic] has remained largely unaware'.[7]

As Laurence Coupe explains, apocalyptic narrative is always written as a response to the current historical epoch, and has a 'strategic function': that of enabling an oppressed minority to purge itself of fear 'by attending to a language that creatively turns the world upside down'.[8] Le Guin felt compelled to mobilise this inversion in the world she had created after the feminist revolution of the 60s and 70s, when feminist theorists began to pay attention to how language had played a vital role in historical constructions of gender.[9] Le Guin felt a strong need to re-view the world she had created and decided that 'when the world turns over, you can't go on thinking upside down'.[10] *Tehanu* is her first attempt at understanding how language governed by male hegemonic systems needs to be re-written as a language which can represent the occluded eye's vision.

In *Tehanu*, this is mainly the vision of a raped and abused six year old girl called Therru, one of whose eyes has been burnt away. In telling her story, Le Guin attempts to recreate Earthsea in ways that allow the reader to hope that despite the violent violation of her body, the child's selfhood may be recuperated. Her recuperation requires an apocalypse, a term that 'signifies a vision in which the old world is replaced by a new and better world'.[11] In the process, the Archipelago is 'revealed' to contain elements that can usher in radical change, as well as destroy the old world where abuse of the weak is prevalent. Unlike the popular conception of apocalypse as all-out destruction, without a creative element, the Biblical apocalyptic narratives[12] presage a transformation based on cataclysmic events that destroy a world that has become too oppressive to be borne, but they also represent the ushering-in of a new order. M. H. Abrams, discussing the influence of Biblical apocalyptic narrative on the Western imagination, says that while fundamentalist interpretations might still envisage the new order as 'a supramundane existence' - à

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[7] Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Themes and Variations', pp. 343-44.

[8] Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 79.

[9] Le Guin mentions, for example, seminal feminist texts such as Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* ; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; and Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, in her 1987 rewriting of her original essay entitled 'Is Gender Necessary' (1976), 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), pp. 7-16.

[10] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned*, pp. 6-11.

[11] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 41.

[12] The canonic apocalyptic narratives are Ezekiel, Zachariah, Daniel, Mark 13, Matthew 24, the second epistle of Peter and the Book of Revelation of St John.

la Lewis - post-Reformation exegesis has shown 'an increasing tendency to assimilate the prophecy of eternal felicity to the enduring state of the world' we already inhabit.[13] As we shall see, Le Guin's interpretation of 'eternal felicity' is underpinned by her Taoist leanings, so that she rejects any concept of polarised time that sets the quotidian against eternity, and repudiates the polarised categories of good and evil. This allows her to jettison the notion of final judgement, a staple motif of biblical apocalyptic narrative. Instead she chooses to anchor change in the here and now,[14] offering no grand narrative of redemption, no final Judgement Day, and no idealised totalitarian order. The Second Trilogy addresses issues that have vital contemporary relevance: child abuse, women's oppression, ageism, race and class hierarchies, rabid misogyny and so on; and by introducing these issues into an already-extant Earthsea, the new sequence renders it necessary to rethink the invented world from top to bottom; to rethink, but not to erase it. The process begins with the novel *Tehanu*.

5.1. Double Vision in *Tehanu*

Tehanu begins with Tenar, now a middle-aged farmer's widow called Goha, coming to the rescue of a child who has been raped, beaten unconscious and left to burn alive in a campfire. The text makes it clear that the world is in a state of turmoil, so that violence and lawlessness are rampant. As Tenar's friend Lark tells her, 'You know how it is now [...] If I were you, I'd lock my door these days';[15] and the sorcerer Beech, who helps the women tend to the child's injuries, confirms her view that this atrocity is symptomatic of a wider malaise: 'I think a time in which such things as this occur must be a time of ruining, the end of an age [...] It can't go on so' (495). Thus early on, the text indicates one of its themes as that of imminent destruction, the approaching collapse of a way of life that has become brutally oppressive. Later, even Ged reinforces this impression, describing the current epoch as 'an age of ruin, an ending time' (547). Chronologically, *Tehanu* is set during Cob's ascendance and immediately after his death.

As we have seen, a similar bleakness, a draining of goodness, affect and creativity, pervaded *The Farthest Shore*, in which the approaching apocalypse seems to have more in common with the

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[13] Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Theme and Variations', p. 345.

[14] For Le Guin's conception of the 'here and now' as rooted in her own land, California, and her effort to make the transition from speaking an inherited classical/English/European language to developing an American vocabulary that spoke of her 'own land', see Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Legends of a New Land', *Mythlore* 56, no. 2, (Winter, 1988), pp. 4-10.

[15] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tehanu: Earthsea Quartet* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 484. All subsequent references are to this edition.

Judeo-Christian tradition. In that novel the ravaged balance of Earthsea is restored by a Christ-figure, Ged, who dies and is resurrected in the process. Ged's successful struggle to close the breach between the world of the living and that of the dead results in the loss of his magic power, used up in his effort to re-engage humankind with the environment from which they have become increasingly detached as a result of Cob's influence. The book ends with Ged on the back of the dragon Kalessin, flying off into the unknown like Christ ascending. In the Earthsea chronology, the end of *The Farthest Shore* and the beginning of *Tehanu* coincide, so that the reader might hope that the time of ruining may soon end. But as the critic Darko Suvin points out, since in the *Farthest Shore* Ged had merely 're-established a disturbed balance, his function was conservative', whereas when Le Guin re-visioned Earthsea at the end of the 1980s, she realised that the balance itself was suspect.[16] As noted earlier, asymmetrical power distribution in Earthsea is grounded in gender hierarchies, and this is most apparent at Roke, the school of wizards, where no women are allowed. For this reason Le Guin decided that more than a single heroic act on the part of a man would be needed to restore any kind of balance between the sexes.

Inevitably, therefore, the apocalypse initiated in *Tehanu* is completely different from those of the preceding books in the sequence. The impending transformation is prophesied by Ogion; as he is dying, the old mage looks towards the west as if watching 'some act or deed, in that far, clear, golden space of light' and whispers, exultantly and joyfully: 'All changed! Changed, Tenar' (502). This is a central moment in the series as a whole, the hinge on which Le Guin's change of vision is placed. Ogion says this when Ged defeats Cob in *The Farthest Shore*; but Ogion's rapturous claim also looks forward to the change in gender (im)balance and the emergence of multiple identities as a result of the oneness of human and dragon that unfolds in Tehanu. The central change, we learn, is to the concepts of the hero and the heroic. By presenting Tenar/Goha as the 'saviour' of a young girl, Le Guin shows us that female heroism may go unsung, and its consequences may be complex and obscure, but that it matters just as much as – or rather more than – the 'quest, contest, and conquest' of male heroism.[17] As Suvin claims, 'The world can perhaps be saved from one acute danger by a feat of heroism, [...] but the pervasive system of cruel power and privilege [can] be righted [...] only by protracted and complex collaboration for life between women, men, and

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[16] Suvin, 'On U. K. Le Guin's "Second Earthsea Trilogy"', p. 490-91.

[17] Le Guin, *ER*, p. 13.

[18] Suvin, 'On U. K. Le Guin's "Second EarthseaTrilogy"', p. 492.

dragons (and animals and plants)'.[18] And it is the art of collaboration that women have mastered, as men like Ged have not – or at least, not to the same degree.

Moreover, Goha/Tenar's act of redemption does not involve death and rebirth. In 1992, two years after writing *Tehanu*, Le Guin explored her thoughts on women and dragons in *Earthsea Revisioned*. Referring to Tenar, Le Guin states that she is 'not pure'(*ER*, 18), and that therefore the paradigmatic sacrifice - death and resurrection - is inappropriate to her. In stating this, Le Guin is interrogating the traditional mythic motif of death and resurrection that has been associated with male gods, ranging from Osiris, Adonis, and Odin to the Christian Redeemer, Jesus. These narratives seem to imply that only virgins can hope to accomplish such an act of redemption - virgin men, preferably. Tenar is neither male nor a virgin; she gives up her virgin status as Priestess, then as ward of Ogion, in order to marry and bear children. As such, says Le Guin, she 'is whole, but not single [...] She has borne, she has given birth to, her children and her new selves. She is not reborn, but rebearing' (*ER*, 18). Le Guin uses the image of a mother to reveal the difference between sacrificial male gods, who die and are reborn usually as a deity who achieves a higher spiritual status, and the rebearing saviour, Tenar. Le Guin's apocalyptic vision is based on a strong rejection of the concept of immortality, so the image of an immortal saviour does not find a place in her narrative. Not dying to be reborn, Tenar gives birth instead to 'new selves': first the White Lady, healer of the Ring of Bonding; then Goha, wife of Flint and mother of Spark and Apple; then Tenar again, foster-mother to Therru. And in *Tehanu*, as I will demonstrate, she 'rebears' again - a transubstantiated 'self' as dragon/woman, to whom Kalessin the Eldest tells its true name, creating a symbiotic bond. Tenar's saving act is private, not consecrated in public songs and legends; yet in the long run, it is the generative force that changes Earthsea irrevocably in all its socio-political aspects, as Ged's private, unrecorded struggle with his Shadow did not.

This change is exemplified in a significant incident that foreshadows the future course of Earthsea's history. As Goha walks with the child, whom she has named Therru, on a visit to the sick mage Ogion, she cuts sticks for herself and the girl to help them along on the lengthy journey to Ogion's cottage. Immediately afterwards, they encounter a group of shady characters, one of them Handy, a young man who had lived with Therru's traveller parents and participated in her rape and mutilation. As they walk towards these men, who have arranged themselves in a menacing position, Goha speaks loudly: '"Out of my way!" she said, raising her alder stick as if it were a wizard's staff', and the men, nonplussed into 'mistaking effrontery for witchery'(496), let them pass

unharmed. The noun used to describe Goha's action – 'effrontery' – draws attention to the power and authority accorded to wizards by the staff, phallic symbols of male supremacy, in contrast to which Goha needs insubordination and trickery, for her 'stick' is 'powerless'. However, as the narrator remarks, 'perhaps there was a power in Goha, or in the child' (496), and the men make signs of averting evil once the two are out of sight. What is the nature of this power that is feared by men who seek to subjugate women? Goha's fierce need to protect the child in her care overcomes her own natural fear of the hooligans; the men are left fearing what they perceive as 'other', as indeed Goha's love and care for Therru are alien emotions for them. Is this the magic we have come to expect from the fantastic setting of Earthsea? Or is it a more familiar kind of magic, the kind we have encountered from time to time in our own world, which takes advantage of the fear spawned by half-suppressed guilt and is paradoxically perceived by Handy as strange? The new stress in this book on the second kind of power is what marks its effect on Le Guin's fictional world as revolutionary.

5.2. Dragons of a New World

Appropriately, in *Tehanu* - which announces a transformation of the existing, oppressive world order - the guiding vision is not that of a powerful adult, or even a powerless adolescent boy as in *A Wizard*, but that of the most disenfranchised human of all: an abused female child. Childhood epitomises helplessness, and since Le Guin claims that gendering is the fundamental cause of oppression,[19] a female child is the most disenfranchised person in society. The child, says Le Guin, talking about her inspiration for *Tehanu*, 'irreparably wronged, whose human inheritance has been taken from her - so many children in our world, all over our world now - that child is our guide' (*ER*, 25).

Faced with the dilemma of how to represent the unrepresentable suffering of this focal figure, Le Guin finds an aesthetic conduit in fantasy literature, which is one of the most potent forms of resistance literature. In it, archetypes can be inscribed with new meanings to allow the force of hope to enter hegemonic discourses by challenging the allegedly stable and universal meaning of ancient symbols, loosing them from the stable moorings of antiquity, and generating new meanings by means of this act of vandalism. The archetype of the dragon, in particular, becomes a potent sign of subversion in Earthsea. And it achieves this change in status by its association with the abused child Therru. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin declares that 'The mythopoeticists [sic] err, I think,

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[19] Le Guin, *ER*, p. 24.

in using the archetype as a rigid, filled mold. If we see it only as a vital potentiality, it becomes a guide into mystery. Fullness is a fine thing, but emptiness is the secret of it, as Lao Tzu said' (22). This challenges C. S. Lewis's conception of hieroglyphs, discussed in Chapter One, where he says that witches, dragons and so on are easily interpretable signs, and that even though they can be used innovatively within the narrative, their meaning should not be changed. Lewis himself had shown the flaw in this argument in the *Lion* by changing the archetype of the faun, and thus demonstrating that writers might not always be in conscious control of their material, as I have often pointed out.

As Le Guin explains in her talk at Oxford, 'There's no way to repair or undo what was done to the child, and so there must be *a way to go on from there*. It can't be a plain and easy way. It involves a leap. It involves flying'.[20] Le Guin suggests that the way forward is not through reacting to cruelty with cruelty, which would generate a spiral of violence without end. Moving beyond either retribution or despair – a movement embodied metaphorically in the dragon's capacity for flight - identifies 'a ground of flexible resistance, a space opened for change'.[21] The renovation of the world is brought about by people 'othered' as monsters, the focal trope for which is the dragon.

Dragons have traditionally been represented as the archetypal 'monster' in Western literature, from the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* to the legend of St. George, the *Volsungsaga*, numerous fairytales, and the biblical Book of Revelation, where a dragon doubles as Satan. Even twentieth-century fantasy continues to present the dragon as a monstrous hoarder of gold (think of Smaug in *The Hobbit*). The dragons in Le Guin's First Trilogy mostly conform to this image.

The dragon Yevaud, for instance, *in A Wizard of Earthsea*, is a hoarder of gold and treasure, like Smaug, sitting on 'his' hoard (in this novel the male pronoun is used unproblematically) for centuries after plundering Pendor. Ged is able to vanquish Yevaud by saying his true name, which he guesses from his knowledge of old lore. As we have seen, Yevaud was first introduced in the short story 'The Rule of Names' (1964), where he went about as the village wizard, Mr Underhill. Mr Underhill is 'a little fat man of fifty who waddled along with his toes turned in, breathing steam and smiling'; as Yevaud, he is a huge, black-winged, steely-clawed, 'monstrous creature'.[22] The true name of a person or thing gives anyone mastery over that person, as evinced in the story, where the stranger who comes to fight Mr Underhill has learnt his true name, Yevaud, and utters it while the 'wizard' is in the shape of a dragon, thinking to bring him back to what the stranger thinks is his

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[20] Le Guin, *ER*, p. 23. Original emphasis.

[21] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A War Without End', *The Wave in the Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), p. 216.

[22] Le Guin, 'The Rule of Names', in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, vol. 1, p. 82, p. 92.

true form - a man. But Yevaud is really a dragon, who then devours the stranger. It is worth noting that already in this early Earthsea story the powers of the principal characters are reversed: the humble middle-aged wizard beats his more presentable opponent; the dragon beats the hero; and the laws of story-telling are inverted in the process, presenting the reader with an alternative 'truth' to set alongside the established truths of romance and fairy tale. From the beginning Le Guin is inclined to play with the conventions surrounding dragons, even as she invokes them.

The discourse of control and mastery continues to be dominant in relation to true names in the First Trilogy, and dragons again provide the strongest illustration of this discourse. In the *Wizard*, we are told that the true names of all things exist only in the True Speech, which is the Language of the Making: the god figure Segoy used this language to create Éa. True Speech is the dragon's native speech, so familiar to them that they can even lie in it (as nobody else can); but it has to be learnt by wizards in hours of painstaking study. This account of the Old Speech is followed consistently throughout the Earthsea sequence, but the way it is used - by dragons and women, at least – undergoes a major metamorphosis in *Tehanu*, as does the gender of dragons, and these changes in the attitude to its originary language are the catalysts for what amounts to a revolutionary change in the socio-political milieu of Earthsea itself.

Le Guin had begun to rethink the gendering of dragons as early *as The Farthest Shore*, and to remould the archetype of the monster accordingly. In *The Farthest Shore*, Ged tells Arren that the dragon Kalessin is the 'eldest' being because no one knows how old 'he' is. The Archmage then corrects himself - and thereby reveals the ideological embeddedness of using the masculine pronoun for transcendent beings, like God, angels and so on. 'I say "he"', Ged muses, 'but I do not even know that' (436). Later, when Arren and the half-dead Ged encounter Kalessin on the shores of Selidor, having crossed over the Mountain of Pain from the land of the dead, the narrator states: 'Whether Kalessin was male or female, there was no telling; what Kalessin thought there was no knowing' (474). This de-gendering leads to a radically new image of dragons in *Tehanu,* enabling Le Guin to present them as embodiments of the equilibrium symbolised in the Tao as the black and white circle of yin and yang.

According to Le Guin, the dragons in *Tehanu* - and in *Tales from Earthsea* and *The Other Wind*, published a decade later - are 'dragons of a new world, America'[23] and in creating them she extends the archetypal dragon-as-monster of European literature to include new emancipatory

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[23] Le Guin, *ER*, p. 22.

meanings. America had been 'the Western site of the millennium'[24] - the millennium in biblical

discourse being the thousand-year reign of Christ after vanquishing the Dragon/Satan - since its

discovery in the sixteenth century by Europeans, for whom it was a land of millenarian hope, fertile

soil for the plantation of a better future. For Le Guin, this hope depends on the achievement of

equilibrium, which is not a static state but a dynamic process of creative interaction between

opposites. So when Le Guin claims that the 'deepest foundation of the order of oppression is

gendering', she is identifying creative interaction between the sexes as the chief prerequisite for

equilibrium.[25] Le Guin points out that even though Therru will grow up to be 'fully sexed', the rape

has three effects: she has been 'ungendered', her 'virtue' destroyed and her beauty marred: in short,

'She has nothing left of the girl *men want girls to be*'.[26] Le Guin makes her meaning explicit. The

categories of an ideal woman *that men would want* - beauty, gender, virtue - have first been

constructed by a male-dominated system; and then the self-conferred power that these very

categories help to sustain is used to produce new categories of 'destroyed' beauty, or virtue. Any

intervention by the debarred, in this closed system, seems almost impossible. Le Guin, as she re-

visions her created world, poses to herself a question similar to the one posed by the feminist poet

Audre Lorde (1984),[27] who questioned the feasibility of trying to destroy the master's house with

the master's tools: that is, how far can the foreclosed systems of oppression produced by

patriarchally established linguistic constructs be unsettled using the same language?

Archetypes, as Le Guin well knows, can function as powerful, embedded linguistic structures

that control thought-processes at an unconscious level. As the dragons evolve a new symbolic

potential in the second trilogy, Le Guin uses it to reject all three male constructs: the dragon as

gender-less, monstrous and dangerous. Because in the Second Earthsea Trilogy – as in the final

book of the first – a 'dragon defies gender entirely' (*ER*, 24), the new American dragon becomes

'our own imagining, a speaking spirit, wise, winged, which imagines a new order of freedom' (*ER*,

25-26). Clearly, this new order of freedom as against oppression must be grounded in a defiance of

the gender categories that lock women into certain codes of behaviour best suited to particular roles

in society. In the Apocalypse of John, the Whore and the dragon are used as embodiments of evil,

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[24] Douglas Robinson, *American Apocalypses* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) p. xi.

[25] Le Guin, *ER,* p. 24.

[26] Le Guin, *ER*, p. 24. Added emphasis.

[27] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 112.

and Le Guin wants her readers to re-think these associations: dragon as ugly other, 'whore' as promiscuous woman, and both as 'wicked'. Most of the evil in Earthsea is effected by men hungry for power, like the God King, Cob, or Aspen, to name a few. To be sure, there are women who help men sustain their particular brand of evil, like the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi, or Kossil, or Therru's mother; but these are mostly trapped into complicity, which makes them as much victims of evil as perpetrators of it. And in *Tehanu* Le Guin refashions the archetypes of witch and dragon in ways that fully expose this victimisation of women by domineering men.

Using the archetype of the dragon to envision a space that cannot be violated, a selfhood free as wind and fire, Le Guin shows that 'a wrong that cannot be repaired must be transcended'.[28] Tenar, whose affinity with the dragon Kalessin develops in the course of the novel, helps Therru move beyond the trauma of her rape and mutilation, by creating a space that is beyond or anterior to the space allowed to women by the male-dominated Earthsea society: a space of freedom from the symbolic realm of normative categories. In the process, Tenar herself is transformed, becoming a hybrid creature whose affinity with the dragons manifests itself in many ways.

This hybridity is thematically embedded in *Tehanu* as a little-known myth of Earthsea, which tells of the primal unity between dragons and humans. This story is not commonly known to the inhabitants, which is surprising, as it seems to be integral to an understanding of the early history of Éa. Tenar was told the story of the primal unity between dragons and humans by Ogion when she studied with him as a young apprentice after escaping the Tombs; Ogion heard it from an old fisherwoman in Kemay, a small town; and Tenar in turn relates it to Therru as they walk up to see the ailing mage. Dragons and humans, the story says, were once a single species: at the 'beginning of time [...] they were all one people, one race, winged and speaking the True language. They were beautiful and strong and wise and free' (491-92). However as time went by some of them became 'more in love with flight and wildness', and less with study and learning, while others grew less interested in flight and instead 'gathered up treasure, wealth, things made, things learned' (492). Eventually, the latter sailed away to the east to protect their possessions from the 'wild ones', and thus the single species became two peoples. Yet a few in each group remembered the ancient kinship, and some exist still as both dragon and human, 'both wild and wise, with human mind and dragon heart' (493). Ogion encountered one such person, the Woman of Kemay, who tried to explain to him the mutual co-existence of dragon and human that made up her being. Her song of explanation was as follows:

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[28] Le Guin, *Tehanu*, p. 580.

> Farther west than west
>
> beyond the land
>
> my people are dancing
>
> on the other wind

And the song, of course, furnishes the fifth Earthsea novel with its title.

In *Tehanu*, the dragon is an emblem of freedom from the desire to own - an inversion of the archetype of the dragon as hoarder of treasure; and this becomes extremely important in the context of the abused child. Therru lives in a culture where even children are sometimes considered to be the property of their parents, to be dealt with as the parents wish – a right of ownership that has been horribly abused by her father. In *Tehanu*, then, the traditional dragon as replicated in the early Earthsea books is rebranded as an anomaly, a perversion. Dragons like Yevaud, who are avaricious for material possessions, would seem to have alienated themselves from their people, renouncing the wind and air for the perverse pleasures of guarding treasure on land. For Tenar, women have long been forcibly alienated from their true natures by becoming tied down in similar ways. The value-laden epithets applied to women – virtue, respectability, reputation and so on – are nothing but devices to restrict their freedom, to conceal their potential from themselves. In a conversation with the Witch Moss, Tenar compares dragons who estrange themselves from their people to women who guard their reputation and 'virtue'. The word 'virtue', Le Guin tells us elsewhere, derives from *vir*, meaning man, connoting that a woman's worth is only the level at which a man values her.[29] The dragon's dance 'beyond the land', on the 'other wind' involves a refutation of ownership, a forswearing of possessions with a concomitant refusal to use others because you 'own' them - children, animals, plants, the earth, your partner. Tenar tries to restore this type of freedom to Therru, whose 'virtue' has been brutally assaulted, so that she is no longer able to fill a role 'doing what a woman should do': that is, as Tenar bitterly points out, to 'bed, breed, bake, cook, clean, spin, sew, serve', all crafts that girls must learn in order to become good wives and mothers. The myth of the primal oneness of humans and dragons reveals that every creature always has (or should have) an opportunity to choose whether to be bound by material possessions, or to cultivate instead physical, intellectual and emotional dispossession. Despite the egregious crime committed against Therru which made her 'other', she should be able to 'dance on the other wind', rejecting

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[29] Ursula K. Le Guin, *ER*, p. 12.

the categories that are too narrow to assimilate her. As we shall see, Tenar helps her to embark on the path towards this destiny by destroying those categories in a blaze of anger, as unjust and arbitrary classifications. As Le Guin remarks in *Earthsea Revisioned*, dragons are not only 'dangerous beauty' but also 'dangerous anger' (*ER*, 23), a promise of retribution for past wrongs.

The story of the ontological dragon/human hybrid has been suppressed, it would seem, by the purveyors of knowledge, the self-appointed male guardians of Earthsea's culture, in a move analogous to the destruction of Native American cultures by the European invaders (and we are invited to make this analogy by Le Guin's hint that she drew the myth of this hybrid from a similar Navaho legend).[30] The successful suppression of parts of history reveals how all knowledge is mediated by discourse, which in turn is shaped by patriarchal notions of what constitutes 'right' and 'wrong' information. The fact that even Ogion, the wise mage, did not initially know the story is significant. The men in charge of disseminating knowledge – which in the largely oral culture of Earthsea is often enshrined in songs and lays – obviously deemed it 'wise' to suppress this primeval portion of Earthsea's history, and thus ossify the human/dragon binary as unbridgeable. This echoes the desperate attempts made by the religious authorities in the nineteenth century to suppress Darwin's propositions about the evolution of species, which included the scandalous proposition that human beings were descended from apes.

But evolution is vitally important for Le Guin, for as Tenar tells Therru: 'in time, nothing can be without becoming'.[31] As we have seen, the equilibrium so important in Earthsea is a dynamic interplay of oppositions, akin to Blake's 'Contraries', rather than a static state of achieved stability.[32] Ged tells Arren: 'The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement - an eternal becoming' (*TFS*, 423). However, liminal or transitive spaces that allow border-crossings and transitions are anathema to dominant discourse, because the elision of classifications possible in these in-between states can disrupt the rigid binary distinctions that reinforce the hegemony. Metamorphoses, observes Marina Warner, constitute 'the principle of organic vitality as the pulse in the body of art. This concept [...] runs counter to notions of unique, individual integrity of identity in the Judeo-Christian tradition'.[33] Metamorphosis is made possible by the process of blurring the borders of identity, for example through the multiple identities acquired by Tenar as her role shifts

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[30] Le Guin, 'Legends', p. 6.

[31] Le Guin, *Tehanu*, p. 492.

[32] William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[33] Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.

from priestess to wife, or widow to lover. In addition, metamorphic discourse is inclusive and embraces continuity rather than compartmentalisation, for it rejects what Le Guin calls the 'Judeo-Christian exclusive focus on one species, the exclusion from sacredness of everything but the human'.[34] Le Guin is particularly interested in processes of transition, as enacted in a flexible personal identity or in the apocalyptic transformations of older perspectives and world orders. As she states, a delight in exploring thresholds, 'with all the danger and promise of liminality', has shaped her writing.[35] In *Tehanu* dragons and women of all ages are shown to possess this liminal status, as do the witch/women Ivy and Moss, the child/monster Therru, and the widow/priestess/witch Tenar.

In *Tehanu*, dragons also become mediators between spirit and body, the intangible and the corporeal, the past and the present. Their thoughts and culture remain largely unknown in the Second Trilogy, despite their prominence in that sequence. And that is one of the reasons for their association with the feminine by Le Guin, who even after having written *Tehanu* admitted that 'The dragons of Earthsea remain mysterious to me' (*ER*, 22). One of Le Guin's greatest influences, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, 'feminized mysteries,' she tells us, 'in a different way from anybody else. These are not "feminine mysteries," but he makes mystery itself a woman', and the most mystical passages in his book, the *Tao*, are 'the most feminine'.[36] Ged's description of dragons in *The Farthest Shore* begins by listing their familiar fairy-tale qualities, but ends by verging on the mystical: 'The dragons are avaricious, insatiable, treacherous; without pity, without remorse. But are they evil? Who am I to judge the acts of dragons? […] They are wiser than men are. It is with them as with dreams [...] We men dream dreams [...] The dragons do not dream. They are dreams. They do not work magic: it is their substance, their being. They do not do: they are' (*TFS*, 335). In *Tehanu*, Tenar discovers that she too is a mystery – to herself as well as to the men of Earthsea – and that she therefore resembles the dragons, despite or perhaps because of her embeddedness in the humdrum businesses of running a household and protecting Therru. And the sign of her connection with the dragons is their mutual knowledge of True Speech, which needs further attention.

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[34] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Thinking about Cordwainer Smith' in *The Wave in the Mind*, p. 66.

[35] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'On the Frontier' in *The Wave in the Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), pp. 28-30

[36] 'The Feminine and the Tao: an Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin' by Brenda Peterson, http://www.embraecthemoon.com/perspectives/leguin.htm. Accessed 28 April 2013.

5.3. Language and Power

As we have seen, language – as in the True Speech, and in True names – serves mainly as a tool of power in the First Trilogy, exploited by wizards and dragons to control their environment and interlocutors. Women are not taught True Speech, picking up only a few words haphazardly here and there. Although most wizards are supremely conscious of the need to maintain cosmic equilibrium, there are always some who seek power for its own sake and exploit their ability to change the cosmic order accordingly, among them the hot-headed young Ged, or the depraved Cob. True names are fiercely guarded, lest they be used as weapons of control, and are rarely given as gifts in the earlier books: the only instance of gifted names in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, for instance, is offered by Ged's friend Vetch, who tells the young wizard his own true name and that of his sister Yarrow. Mostly, finding a person's name is a skill learned in the School for Wizards on Roke. Ged guesses many true names thanks to the scholarship he acquired there, among them the name of Yevaud, which enables him to defeat the dragon. In *Tombs* he calls Arha by her name, Tenar, and when asked how he knew it, replies that 'Knowing names is my job. My art. [...] there is great power and great peril in a name [...] all wizardry […] hangs still upon the knowledge [...] of that true and ancient language of the Making'.[37] The crucial distinction between a 'gift' and a 'power' is a matter of attitude, and Le Guin has gone on to explore this distinction in her recent fantasy sequence *Annals of the Western Shore*.

The difference between discovering a name by 'art' or 'power' and the bestowal of a name as gift becomes clear in *Tehanu* in the profound connection that evolves between Kalessin and Tenar. The first evidence of this connection is when Kalessin comes to Gont, bearing the emaciated Ged on its back, and encounters Tenar on a cliff top. Tenar is able to look Kalessin in the eye, even though she had always been told 'that men must not look into a dragon's eye' (156); but then 'she's not a man, is she?' observes Le Guin wryly in *Earthsea Revisioned* (22). Shortly afterwards the dragon addresses Tenar directly, giving her the gift if its own true name: '*Thesse* Kalessin' to which Tenar responds '*Thesse* Tenar'. The subliminal link between Tenar and the dragons, embedded in their shared knowledge of True Speech and confirmed by the free exchange of secret knowledge, becomes pivotal in the final apocalyptic scene of deliverance in the novel.

Tenar acknowledges what seems to be a pre-discursive knowledge of the True or Old Speech when she explains to Ged how 'the words of the Old Speech, they were as easy and as hard in my mouth as in [Ogion's]. That was like learning the language I spoke before I was born. But the rest -

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[37] Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan, Earthsea Quartet*, p. 267.

the lore, the runes of power, the spells, the rules, the raising of the forces - that was all dead to me. Somebody else's language' (560). This prefigures Ged's explanation of dragons and their understanding of True Speech to Tenar: 'the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being' (663). As Tenar explains to Moss and Therru how Ged arrived on Gont, the dragon's name, Kalessin, involuntarily forms itself with her 'lips and tongue' and 'mouth and breath', revealing the complex bond that the name has created between them. Since, as Ged says, the dragon and its speech are one, Kalessin has gifted her its 'being', its dragonhood, along with the gift of its name, and Tenar's intense consciousness of the physical processes involved in pronouncing that name suggests she is taking dragonhood into her body, making it a familiar part of herself. This is a radically new form of power: it strengthens relationships and forges bonds, in stark contrast to the use of names in the first trilogy, where the emphasis was on how knowledge of the True Speech gave one person power over another, who always remained 'other' despite the words that passed between them. And the strengthening bond between Tenar and Kalessin is revealed in three dreams that visit Tenar after their first encounter.

In the first, which occurs on the night of the meeting, Tenar flies dragon-like in 'a vast windy space hazy with red and gold', calls out Kalessin's name, and is answered from the 'gulfs of light' (522). This recalls her dream of becoming a bird of fire when she was a priestess at the Tombs, oppressed by the malevolent vigilance of the older priestess Kossil. Tenar had dreamt of 'great bedraggled birds', one of whom had golden hair like her mother's; and of being entombed with her arms and legs tied in grave clothes. In that dream her despair eventually 'grew so great that it burst her breast open and like a bird of fire shattered the stone and broke out into the light of day' (*TA*, 257). Images of entrapment are often used in literature to represent the plight of women; and as early as the *Tombs*, Le Guin is already envisioning freedom in terms of fire, wind and flight. Similarly in *Tehanu*, in the subliminal spaces of her dreams, Tenar feels a connection with Kalessin, and wakes up to feel 'a spark; like the bodily certainty of a conception; a change, a new thing. What it was she would not ask [...] You did not ask a true name. It was given you, or not' (524). So when the dragon gave Tenar the gift of its true name, and received hers in return, a connection was forged between them based on trust rather than power. This is a 'bodily certainty', indicating that not only has Tenar become the agent of a fundamental change prophesied by Ogion – its prospective mother, so to speak – but that she herself is experiencing a creative metamorphosis. She is effectively 're-bearing' the alienated Other as an integral part of self, by 'seeing' and speaking to it. For as Moss says, 'to see' is another way of saying 'to know'; it is a recognition that the other exists - an 'I-

Thou' relationship'. And not being seen, not being known, is a condition thoroughly familiar to the middle-aged women who take centre stage in Le Guin's novel.

The bond with Kalessin is only one of several intrinsic bonds built up in the book between Tenar and various others. This is made clear in one of the most important conversations in all of the Earthsea books, between Tenar and Moss, as they split reeds to weave baskets. The splitting is women's work – traditionally men in Earthsea do not weave baskets, nor split reeds to furnish material for them. Yet weaving of many kinds is an integral part of pre-mechanical societies, and the shared activity allows Tenar and Moss to relate to each other, creating fellowship as they thread their way through different topics of mutual interest. As they talk, Tenar asks Moss how men of power are recognised in childhood, and what the difference is between wizards and witches. Moss compares men to hard nuts, with the shell 'Full of grand man-meat [...] And that's all [...] its all him and nothing else, inside [...] His power is himself [...] When his power goes, he's gone [...] Nothing' (528). Ironically, Ged uses the same word to describe his own condition as a powerless ex-Archmage: his victory over Cob in *The Farthest Shore*, he laments, has left him 'nothing at all' (547). He knows no definition of himself that does not involve the exercise of power. Women are completely different, says Moss. Their roots go 'deeper than this island. Deeper than the sea, older than the raising of the lands. I go back into the dark [...] No one knows [...] what a woman is, a woman of power, a woman's power' (528). But Tenar is unconvinced. Darkness may be the primal state, as Moss claims, but can darkness ever be known without the knowledge of light? Can roots be known without trees? Nothing can be known without knowing its opposite, Tenar insists. She goes on to assert: 'It seems to me we make up most of the differences, and then complain about 'em' (572). She tells Moss how her upbringing in the segregated Place of the Tombs made it impossible for her to know women because she did not know men. Similarly, men who live only among men, such as soldiers, sailors or wizards, cannot really know men. Insularity can only produce one-dimensional perspectives. Knowledge is a matter of weaving together different materials, as the women are doing during this conversation.

Although Tenar here effectively demonstrates that Moss is a gender essentialist in her stark separation of men and women, Le Guin herself seems to vacillate in *Tehanu* between gender essentialism and a denial of gender-based difference. As Audre Lord has said, 'The failure [...] to recognise difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower'.[38] Since her vision is Taoist, Le

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[38] Audre Lord, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', *Sister Outsider*, p. 112

Guin thinks in binaries, which exist in a creative, constantly changing dialectical relationship, imaged in the yin-yang circle, with its a dot of the opposite colour in each of its dark and light sides. Her stance therefore resides between the two extremes. While she demonstrates how women and dragons – both of whom have been 'othered' – can collaborate to define a space of liberation for themselves, Le Guin refuses to accept gender as fixed. Since identities are in a state of constant creation, gender is a fluid category.

Tenar's conversation with Moss gives her the insight that the categories of evil and good are not related to the physical manifestations of darkness or light. As Tenar realises the similarity between what was done to Manan, the eunuch who served her in her capacity as priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and the abuse of Therru, the grim reality hits home: evil can and does occur both in darkness and in light, in places consecrated to the service of indifferent gods and in sunlit meadows by the river. This enables Tenar to understand that evil subsists in human agency, and not in places or natural forces, the dark or the light, the desert or the meadow. This may remind us of Lewis's discussion of 'psycho-physical parallelism', in which he claims that all language is metaphorical, and that 'if those original [metaphorical] equations, between good and light, or evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others, were from the beginning arbitrary and fanciful […] then all our thinking is nonsensical'.[39] Le Guin's rejection of the ancient equations of dark with evil and light with goodness invites her readers to deconstruct the ideological subtexts inscribed in seemingly innocuous figures of speech. In *Tehanu*, she applies Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' by challenging her own earlier associations of the Dark Powers with evil. In this novel the primal powers, elemental forces like the Nameless Ones in *The Tombs of Atuan*, are anterior to moral and ethical categories. It is men and women who use children because of their powerlessness: who geld boys in Kargad to use as slaves in the Place; who rape and abuse young girls in Middle Valley to satisfy their lust. She dreams again that night, the night of the basket-weaving, of 'flying in the light above the sea', and she hears a voice calling her name this time, Tenar, and she answers without knowing whose name she calls.

In the next few days, Tenar continues to ponder the difference between men's and women's power, and comes to the conclusion that it is not the power itself but the attitudes of men and women that differ. As a woman 'she had been a vessel' for the power of men, and so had been accorded a temporary power as wife and mother within a patriarchal culture; a power that passed away with her youth, being inscribed in the gender roles framed by society. Yet in her the feeling

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[39] C. S. Lewis, 'Bluspels and Flalansferes' in *Rehabilitations and other Essays*, p.158.

grows stronger that something 'is coming to be born - has been set free. I know in my sleep and in my first waking, something is changed'(538). In the labyrinth Ged had told her a dragonlord was a man dragons would talk to, and she wonders: 'Was that the new thing, the folded knowledge, the light seed, that she felt in herself' (538) – that is, the knowledge that a dragon had talked to her, had told her its name? The image of a seed is used to suggest that Tenar's growing knowledge and its concomitant power will not be used only on an individual level, but for the community, to serve humanity at large.

One important aspect of sociolinguistic constructions of gender, of course, is sexuality, and Le Guin explores how far gender differences are embedded in biology, and to what extent they are produced as ideological agendas. Moss explains to Tenar that wizards take a vow of celibacy, and place a binding spell on themselves that makes them unable to think of their sexuality. At this point Tenar realises with a shock why she has never touched or kissed Ged. While the first three books did not state this explicitly, and in fact the myths and legends of ancient Earthsea heroes included mages who were married and had children (the great mage Morred, for example, was married to Elfarran), in *Tehanu* Le Guin is more conscious of the ideology that pervaded her earlier books without her knowing it: that is, of the tradition of the hero tale as exemplified in classics like the *Iliad* which had framed her thinking and writing.

In *Tehanu*, Le Guin uses the word celibacy for the first time to describe the wizard's state, thus foregrounding the comparison with Christian priests. Tenar remembers that the Priestesses at the Tombs also made a vow of lifelong virginity, which is one of the reasons for the cruel castration of boys: to enable them to act as servants in the Place where no man could enter, but where the physical strength of men was needed for certain work.[40] Laura Comoletti and Michael Drout point out that the similarity between celibate priests and wizards resides in their capacity to effect physical transformations: 'the wizards and priests alike are able to perform speech-acts by which they can change not only social reality but the physical world as well. Using words, a wizard can transform a pebble into a diamond or a person into a bird; using words, a priest can transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ'.[41] In the absence of a king the wizards rule Earthsea, and their position seems analogous to 'the reign of an unmarried ruling caste over a largely married

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[40] This practice finds a parallel in the castration of boys to be part of the Church choir, which women were not allowed to be part of. Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality*, trans. by Peter Heinegg (USA: Penguin, 1990), pp. 134-35.

[41] Laura B. Comoletti, Michael D. C. Drout, 'How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books' in *Children's Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Keyser and Julie Pfeiffer (Yale University Press, 2001), p.114.

mass of people'[42] – that is, the rule of the Church over the world through a hierarchy of priests, bishops and Pope from the twelfth century onwards, when the celibacy rule became established.[43] The equation of celibacy with power is deeply rooted in the western psyche, stemming from the equation of sex with sin and sin with lack of control, and positing sexual desire as a result of the Fall. Since Eve is the paradigmatic tempter, Adam the 'namer' can hope to regain some of his original innocence, and the power of naming, by abstaining from sex, the 'desire' awakened in him by the temptation of Eve. In this way male continence has been imposed as a necessary condition for the preservation of the sacredness of the Word.

But Le Guin believes that the Word, and words, cannot be preserved and possessed by a few 'chosen' people, as Kalessin's gift of its true name demonstrates; and she believes too that the liberation of words from the domains of power can have a radical impact on the culture where it takes place. Tenar's third dream in the book is of flying in 'vast gulfs of wind and light, but the light was smoky, red and orange-red and amber, as if the air itself was fire. In this element she was and was not; flying on the wind and being the wind [...] the force that went free; and no voice called her' (573-74). This dream symbolises a spiritual metamorphosis that Tenar is to undergo, not entering, but *becoming* the hybrid element fire-air. The intense colours of this vision differ from the rose-pink of the earlier dream which welcomed the dawn of a new day, in that the red-orange signifies the risen sun of a new day, bright and at its zenith, indicating the birth of a 'new world'. Under these conditions Tenar needs no name, and is freed from the power relations that names entail. She accesses the new world by flying, a gift that has been bestowed on her, imaginatively at least, by Kalessin's verbal gift. The transformation or transubstantiation of Tenar began with and is rooted in a word, the true name of the Eldest, which liberates Tenar's imagination, reminding us of Le Guin's contention that 'Words are events, they do things, change things. They transform'.[44] But the transformation of Tenar also opens divergent *visual* perspectives, as this third dream demonstrates; and these divergent perspectives are designed to encourage readers to look at Earthsea afresh – to see with new vision the implications of the earlier narratives. As for Tenar, new ways of seeing as well as speaking are required if the reader is to follow the narrative into its new phase.

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[42] Ranke-Heinemann, p. 6.

[43] For a detailed account of the rule of celibacy as a compulsory requirement for priests, see Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality*, pp. 99-124.

[44] Le Guin, 'Telling Is Listening' *The Wave in the Mind*, p. 199.

5.4. The Double Vision of Tenar

The gaining of what Le Guin calls a 'double vision' by Tenar is prefigured in her ability to look Kalessin in the eye. A dragon's eyes are placed such that a human can see only one of them at a time, giving them what is described as a 'sidelong look' (476). Meanwhile, the dragon's eyes see in two different, opposite directions, creating a sort of double vision. From the human perspective, each human sees and is seen by just one eye; but from the draconian perspective, both eyes see, but in different ways. It takes Tenar a little while to understand how this draconian perspective works.

The 'double vision' of Goha/Tenar is symbolised by the fan she sees in the house of Fan the weaver. It is his most treasured possession (as his name suggests). A gift from a sea pirate, the fan has pictures on both sides; one side showing men and women painted against the background of Havnor City; the other dragons in flight among clouds and mountains. When held up against the light, the two sides become one, so that the 'men and women were winged, and the dragons looked with human eyes'(576). As Tenar gazes at the scintillating double vision, Fan asks, 'Do you see?'. 'I see,' replies Tenar, and indeed by now she does possess the 'third eye', the ability to recognise the true value of the 'other' which does not reside in the appearance, but in the moral and ethical qualities of a person.

This is possible because Goha/Tenar has acquired the unusual gift of knowing that the other exists and might have a valid point of view. Le Guin does not suggest that it is possible to wholly understand the other, or to 'see' through someone else's eyes, thus escaping the totalising tendency in feminism which purports to speak for the disempowered and marginalised while not really 'belonging' to either group.[45] The space of radical difference cannot be accessed, demonstrates Le Guin, except in a limited way. Therru belongs to that space, for she has been dehumanised, ungendered, made other by rape. But Tenar's vision, like that of the dragons, is multi-perspectival, and she builds, with her love, a 'bridge of spider web' (625) across the void that separates her from her charge, despite her awareness that the gap will remain. This is the implication of her name on Gont, Goha, which means spider; like Fan she is a weaver, though with threads spun from her own substance, and the weaver's fan enables her to understand what her weaving entails.

Among other things, it entails the deployment of a different form of knowledge than the kind preserved by priests and wizards. It is a knowledge associated with the domestic; and

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[45] See, for example, Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271-313.

domestic knowledge and the knowledge of dragons had been linked together implicitly in Le Guin's mind since she wrote the first Earthsea book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*. At the end of this first book a young girl, Yarrow, wore a little dragon as a living bracelet. In the fourth book of Earthsea, we learn that Tenar like Yarrow chose to occupy the domestic sphere after she left Atuan, rather than the world of publicly acknowledged power offered her by learning magic from Ogion. As a priestess she had known that she had no real authority: 'Men had given her power, men had shared their power with her' while women had 'looked at her from outside'. Ogion had offered to teach her the runes and names of mastery, but Tenar had refused to enter that space of complicity with patriarchy, for if she entered it she would be consolidating the same power structures she had escaped in her flight from Atuan. Rejecting that fate on Gont, she renounced the meagre and illusory share in men's power that learning magic would have given her. So 'she had left the powers of learning and skill [...] had turned her back on all that, gone to the other side, the other room, where the women lived, to be one of them' – that is, to be Goha.[46] Ironically, the dragon/people who had flown west, to the 'other' side of the Archipelago, had also rejected learning in favour of freedom; so her decision brings her closer to them long before she has cause to think about this proximity.

When she refuses to learn the True Speech from the educated male elite empowered to teach it, Tenar simultaneously rejects the freight of connotations, implications and preconceptions built into this learned discourse by its location in an exclusive system of education. Taught in a carefully policed, enclosed and privileged male space, this language would have transferred the assumptions and prejudices that underpin this system to the learner. Tenar chooses instead to form her own perceptions and make her own judgements as a woman, based on women's experiences. As Le Guin has remarked of Tenar, 'Her insignificance is her wildness' (*ER*, 23), and this enables her to 'connect with a different world, a free world, where things can be changed' (*ER*, 23). Rather than learning from a mage, Tenar dreams magic (True Names). In her dreams she forges a connection with Kalessin by calling her name and being answered. And this double-vision is imbricated with the changing conceptions of language in Earthsea, as we shall see.

5.5. The Double Vision of Therru

Le Guin suggests in *Tehanu* that marginalised and excluded identities contain elements that cannot or will not be integrated into mainstream culture. For example, what sort of identity does an abused child have in any given society? Where will Therru - whose name, as Tenar explains to Ogion,

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[46] Le Guin, *Tehanu*, p. 509.

means 'burning, the flaming of fire' (500), or perhaps 'inflammatory' – where will she fit, in a culture governed by rules all of which tend to exclude her? She seems to fit nowhere.

As Judith Butler tells us, gender plays a constitutive role in the integration of a 'subject' into the realm of the symbolic[47], the linguistic structure that sustains the patriarchal laws.   She has no access to language, because language is steeped in androcentric rhetoric, the rhetoric that made it possible to abuse her. Therru has no voice in public affairs, and this metaphorical voicelessness is symbolised in the harsh rasping sound she makes when she wants to speak, because her 'voice is burned away' (540). At the same time, there is a definite affinity between her burnt, husky voice and the stentorian voice of the dragon. The narrator tells us, 'The child's voice was like a metal brush drawn across metal, like dry leaves, like the hiss of fire burning' (654); while the dragon has a 'huge voice like a broom of metal dragged across a gong' and an 'immense furnace-blast of laughter' (688). The similarities are obvious. The burned child may have been 'dehumanised', as Le Guin puts it (*ER*, 19), but Therru's indeterminate status can generate a form of power that destabilises standard, static power constructions, as her name seems to promise. In the world of power politics, whose dominant residents seek to establish monolithic identities for themselves and others, indeterminacy or insignificance can be a tool of subversion, as Le Guin shows us, or as Tolkien's hobbits have demonstrated.

As Ged mourns the loss of his magic, feeling that he is left with 'nothing', he reacts with bitterness to Tenar's assurance that time will heal his loss. 'Like the child?' he asks, and demands to know why Tenar saved the little girl despite 'knowing that she cannot be healed. Knowing what her life must be' (547). The former Archmage's resentment indicates that despite the psychic wholeness he gained by accepting his Shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, he afterwards wholly embraced the socially sanctioned role of the foremost wizard. His identity as Archmage engulfed his whole being, undermining his hard-earned psychic wholeness, rather as if the Shadow had succeeded in taking possession of him. Losing his role as Archmage means that his place in Archipelagic society is no longer culturally intelligible; he is unable to comprehend who he is, and is afraid to face the people among whom he had previously moved with confidence. Ged has in fact been gendered into the identity of 'male hero' and feels dispossessed without that label. To assimilate monolithic, culturally determined identities, in other words, can have severely

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[47] Judith Butler explains: ' According to Lacan, the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed "the symbolic", and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. This law creates the possibility of meaningful language and, hence, meaningful experience', in 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva', *Hypatia*, Vol. 3. No. 3, 'French Feminist Philosophy' (Winter, 1989), pp. 104-188.

debilitating effects on one's conception of one's identity, as Ged's complete breakdown after the loss of his magic power exemplifies. The difference between Ged's view of Therru and Tenar's - though Ged later regrets his words - does not reveal gender essentialism on the part of the author, but reflects the profound effects of gender construction which lead to entrenched and abiding attitudes in both sexes.

Interestingly, Ged, a goatherd from Gont and thus marginalised at Roke, found a stable psychic identity by accepting his Shadow, and that, with his exceptional magical gift, gave him a stable social identity as Archmage of Roke. Therru, by contrast, is denied the possibility of either assimilation or protection. Her marks, like Ged's scarred face, are a sign of this lack, but tell a much more appalling story of utter helplessness before mental and physical violence, as against Ged's tale of an internal struggle born from lack of love. The difference between Ged's scars and Therru's is inscribed in the difference of sex. Though motherless and physically and mentally abused, Ged finds his guide because he is a 'gifted' male and can be trained to become a wizard. Therru's gifts, by contrast – her knowledge of True Speech and her affinity with dragons – remain unrecognised or feared, as Ogion predicted, and she can be scarred much more deeply and permanently than a boy. The development of Ged's gift, which is identified early by his witch aunt and the mage Ogion, then developed at Roke, is a sign that he is male in a male dominated culture. Therru is never offered the chance to develop her gifts as a girl. When Ogion instructs Tenar to 'teach her' he has the sagacity to add, 'not Roke', for at Roke 'they will fear her' – and this fear among intellectual males of the other-as-woman is enacted in Le Guin's later novella 'Dragonfly'. Ogion's 'they', though, refers not only to intellectuals but to the men of Middle Valley, Gont and Earthsea. Most of these men see women as marginal, and think that the preservation of the margins' integrity will help to consolidate 'normal' male dominated space. A female child with gifts threatens to breach these margins, much more if the child is marked out by physical scars which divorce her for ever from the patriarchal conventions of female beauty. For this reason, Therru's scars do not protect her, since her abusers are always seeking to finish off what they began.

Ged's words about Therru haunt Tenar, as she thinks of the 'averted faces' Therru will encounter throughout her life, 'the signs against evil, the horror and curiosity, the sickly pity and the prying threat' (549). Victimisation has no end, in other words, since the victims of brutality are so often held responsible for the horrifying crimes committed against them. Even Tenar at times shares this sense of unending victimhood, as she compares her own past with that of Therru. She had been enslaved to dark powers, both worldly and unworldly, had become 'their servant, their food, theirs

to use for their needs and games'; and as such she begins to think that perhaps she has been permanently tainted. As she tries to visualise a future for her protégée, Tenar/Goha realises that the girl will never have 'a man's arms. Never anyone to hold her' (549). The only other choice open to a woman who cannot marry is to become a 'respectable' wage earner, and Tenar imagines Therru as a weaver, making a 'decent living' at an 'honourable' if 'dull' trade (578), though she balks at the idea of Therru having to hide herself in an enclosed space like a weaver's cottage, unsociable and silent. But outside of such a space there seems no way for her to live, let alone to develop a full personality, to become part of a community.

Stung by Ged's accusations, Tenar succumbs briefly to a horror of despair. Although she refuses to condone the pervasive sense of wretchedness and repulsion with which other people regard the young girl, she cannot disabuse herself of the notion that 'harm draws harm to it' (549), and she watches with caution everyone who comes in contact with Therru. For example, she at first feels some discomfort when Moss, the old village witch, befriends her charge, mistaking Moss's kindness as a perverse attraction, and thinking Moss may have been drawn to Therru 'not only by kindness but by Therru's hurt, by the harm that had been done her: by violence, by fire' (512). These are indications of the pernicious effects of embedded ideological bias, that infiltrates even the most neutral consciousness, or even the consciousness of people who have themselves been victimised, like Tenar. When Ged questions what Therru's life will be in the future, he bases his doubts on the gendered roles accepted by society, and this is a well-founded fear, as the attitudes of most people demonstrate.

Therru is shunned and ostracised by the men of Earthsea society. The sheep seller Townsend who bears Ogion's message looks at her and quickly looks away (487); the ruffians who waylay Tenar and Therru on their way to Ogion's house make signs for averting evil; the king's men who visit Ogion's cottage looking for the erstwhile Archmage, Ged, are full of courtesy and good manners, but are quick to look away from the child (562). It is hardly surprising, then, that Tenar even questions the gaze of the kind young soon-to-be-king, Arren, as he takes her and Therru to Tenar/Goha's village, Middle Valley. As Arren looks at the girl Tenar finds his expression unreadable, and wonders if he is wearing a 'civil mask for revulsion, shock' (607). The old Middle Valley farmhand, Tiff, makes surreptitious signs of averting evil behind the child's back, even as he apparently fawns over her diligence as a 'farm-lass'. 'Like most people' the narrator tells us, 'Tiff believed that you are what happens to you. The rich and strong must have virtue; one to whom evil has been done must be bad, and may be rightly punished' (630). Some people are more vocal in

their hostility, Tenar's son being one. On first seeing Therru, Spark is openly repulsed, and asks his mother, 'What did she do, to look like that?' (674). For him Therru's half-effaced face and burnt 'claw' are merely signs of abnormality, imputed to some inward wickedness. In this way Le Guin shows misogyny and hostility towards women creating stereotypes that stick irrevocably, so that nothing short of an apocalypse - a radical obliteration of the old order – will bring this situation to an end.

Tenar has dreamed of this liberation, embodied in the gulfs of light and air through which she flies in her dreams, so she refuses to let Therru be confined. Therru was not 'wrong', as men seem to label her with their leering or disgusted gaze, but 'wronged, wronged beyond all repair […] Not lost, not lost, not lost' (549). Tenar repeats these words to herself in a passionate denial of injustice and cruelty, on the part of the world as much as of men. And other words give her comfort too. Gazing at the white summer star called Tehanu in Atuan, she asks Ged what it is called in the Archipelago, and learns it is the 'Heart of the Swan', or 'Arrow' in Ged's native village. The arrow is a weapon, the heart a private inward space, the swan an acknowledged symbol of grace and beauty – so the name Tehanu signifies the beauty and power of what lies within. The name of the star, Tehanu, as well as the dragon's name, Kalessin, comfort Tenar's disturbed state of mind, although there is no association of the name of the star with Therru at this stage.

However, Therru's affinity with dragons is hinted at throughout the text. When the word Kalessin forms itself involuntarily in Tenar's mouth, 'A wave of warmth, heat, seemed to flow from the child' (520). The fire that damaged her seems to have entered her, moulding her destiny. She gains, Le Guin shows, a double vision, similar to but more intense than Tenar's double-vision: the girl's blind eye sees what cannot be seen with ordinary sight. One day, Therru sees static flying out of Tenar's brushed hair, and delightedly whispers 'The fire flying out all over the sky'(574). At this point Tenar wonders how Therru saw the world and knew that she 'could not know what one saw with an eye that had been burned away' (574). At the same time, we have gained a hint that it is well worth seeing; though we must look elsewhere in Le Guin's work for further clarification.

Three years before publishing *Tehanu*, Le Guin explored occluded sight as the vision of a female child in her prize-winning novella, 'Buffalo Gals'(1987).[48] A little girl, Myra, falls out of a crashing aeroplane and loses one eye. She is rescued and adopted by the native American trickster god Coyote, and given a pine pitch eye by some of the animals, which Coyote licks to make it

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[48] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (Santa Barbara: Plume, 1987), pp. 17-54. Hereafter cited as 'BG'.

'work'.[49] The wooden eye permits Myra a double vision: she sees the animals around her as people, and when she is taken near a town her original eye shows her an ordinary place with streets and houses, but the 'wild eye' sees a blankness, and then a horrifying vision of time going by 'too fast, too hard, not flowing but pounding, pounding, pounding' ('BG', 46). The wild eye, explains Le Guin in *Earthsea Revisioned*, enables her to see what ordinary people cannot; Le Guin calls this vision *Koyaanisqatsi*, a Hopi word meaning 'life out of balance'.[50] In Therru's case, since Earthsea is set in a pre-capitalist world, the life is out of joint due to the blind use of power which has dehumanised the child. Therru, whose eye was destroyed by male power, 'sees with the eye of the spirit as well as the eye of the flesh' (*ER*, 25), showing that she has gained a different level of perception, not based only on rational, empirical categories. The symbol of the transgendered dragon seems appropriate for the child who has 'nothing left of the girl men want girls to be' (*ER*, 24), but is still hounded by those men, who feel the destruction of her body amounts to the ruin of her soul and makes her a legitimate target of power play.

As Le Guin explores different forms of power, it becomes clear that the human desire to own – the desire for which people separated themselves from the dragons – has led to all forms of perversion. When Handy follows Tenar and scares the child, forcing her back into the autistic state that afflicted her after her trauma, Tenar wonders what kind of satisfaction this might have given him: taking away what Tenar had worked for so many months to restore to the child, the freedom of childhood? 'Is power that - an emptiness?' Tenar wonders (609). Later, when Tenar talks to Ged about the loss of his power, she again refers to an emptiness, a potential, recalling Ogion's account of how even before Ged got his power through learning, before he got his true name perhaps, there had been a bit of hawk in him: 'he was what we cannot name. And so are we all' (551). And Tenar tells Ged that even though he has lost his power, there remains something in him from that previous state: 'room for the power' (660) as she puts it. This is based on the Taoist principle of 'emptiness', rendered beautifully by Le Guin in her translation of the *Tao*:

> Thirty spokes
>
> meet in the hub.

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[49] For Coyote's identity, see Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World* (Edinburgh, Canongate, 1998).

[50] Koyaanisqatsi(1982) is a film directed by Godfrey Reggio. It has no dialogue, only music, and uses the techniques of time-lapse and slow motion to juxtapose scenes from nature and the city to reveal how human beings have become so embroiled in the accelerated technological urban life that they do not see what is happening around them. www.koyaanisqatsi.org

> Where the wheel isn't
>
> is where it's useful.
>
> Hollowed out,
>
> Clay makes a pot.
>
> Where the pot's not
>
> is where it's useful.[51]

The hollowness that allows something else to exist, like the hub of a wheel, for example, is a necessary existential space. Le Guin calls this chapter 'The uses of not', and this concept has also been translated as 'that empty innermost'.[52] Handy's lust for power is just that - nothing; but Ged's emptiness is room for otherness. The concept of 'emptiness', meaning a space or 'room' in one's being, becomes important in the context of the apocalypse that Le Guin envisages, embodied in the process of naming, as we shall see.

5.6. Language and Apocalypse

In *Tehanu*, the use and implications of True Speech and the process of naming is re-visioned, undergirding the vaster apocalypse that is prophesied by Ogion. Le Guin problematises the concept of True Speech, with its unambiguous single referent for each word, as creative speech. As Tenar thinks of Ogion's injunction to her regarding Therru - 'Teach her [...] Teach her all' (500) – she tries to teach the child True Speech, but something seems to stop her. Ironically, the one word she does teach Therru, *tolk* (stone), indicates an object that is flung at her and Tehanu by the village boys. Incidentally, *tolk* is the first and only word of True Speech Tenar learns from Ged in *Tombs* (287); and in *A Wizard*, when Ged asks the Master Hand to teach him how to change things, the Master tells him that a tolk (stone) could be changed into a diamond by changing its True Name, but that would upset the Equilibrium of the universe. But in *Tehanu* Le Guin suggests that human beings need a different sort of language, a more pliable and dynamic language. Tenar decides to teach the girl songs and stories, such as the Creation of Éa. Stories are not bound within hard and fast boundaries, like True Names. Stories use words that are generative of new meaning. Like Lewis, Le Guin suggests that certain truths can be told only through stories. Borrowing Barfield's terminology,

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[51] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way*, trans. U. K. Le Guin (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1998), Chapter 11, p. 14.

[52] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te King*, trans. by Isabella Mears. First Start Publishing eBook edition (October 2012).

once the older, concrete meanings split up, new formations of similarities, unities, fission and diffusion can be created; and for Le Guin this is a wholly positive development.

For Le Guin, narrative is a 'life stratagem', and 'the primary, survival-effective uses of language involve stating alternatives and hypotheses [and] warnings, suppositions, propositions, invitations, ambiguities, analogies, hints, lists, anxieties, hearsay, old wives' tales',[53] so that language is not, in its primary usage, a statement of fact, to others or to ourselves. Citing George Steiner, she says that statements about 'what does not exist and may never exist are central to the use of language';[54] and she compares this function to the weaving of a spider's web. Like a spider, a maker of stories traverses unknown space 'between here and there, between then and now, between now and sometime, a continual weaving and restructuring of the remembered and the perceived and the imagined'.[55] Tenar's name Goha, which means a white spider, takes on a special significance as she is presented as a story-teller and a story-maker, in *Tehanu* and the subsequent books. Interestingly, Le Guin used the same image in *The Farthest Shore* for Cob, whose name also means spider, and points to Le Guin's acceptance, like Lewis and Barfield, that the imagination is not exclusively good, and can and does generate evil. Cob's weaving of stories led to many people, for example Sopli, to desire immortality. Sopli is driven mad as his fear of death increases, and at one point, as he ostensibly guides ged and Arren to Cob, Arren shares this fear of death with him. However, in *Tehanu* and later in *The Other Wind* (as we shall see) Le Guin emphasises that the web as a pattern that can be configured and changed in complex ways. The web image, with spaces in-between, is similar to the map of the Archipelago, with blank spaces full of potential between the islands. The web is an objective correlative for individual, personal relationships: as always, Le Guin demonstrates that the personal and the political have an integral bearing on each other. The gaps in-between the woven web allow for different configurations of the patterns woven, so that no model ever becomes a rigid structure that cannot be reconfigured. In *Tales from Earthsea*, Le Guin states that the name Segoy is derived from Old Hardic meaning 'make' or shape, and also 'creative force, breath, poetry' (*Tales*, 276). In fact, it can be compared to the primary words of semantic unity described by Barfield, which retain the unity of the spiritual and material, the creative force as language and breath. In 1991, Le Guin wrote a poem in which writing and weaving were compared.

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[53] Ursula K Le Guin, 'Some Thoughts on Narrative' in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), pp. 42-44.

[54] Qtd. in Le Guin, 'Some Thoughts on Narrative', p. 43.

[55] ibid., p. 44.

The images she uses in it for a teller/writer of stories fits Tenar very well: 'I see her walking/ on a path through a pathless forest,/ or a maze, a labyrinth./ As she walks she spins,/ and the fine thread falls behind her/ following her way,/ telling/ where she is going,/ where she has gone./ Telling the story./ The line, the thread of voice,/ the sentences saying the way'.[56] In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Tenar wove webs of stories to keep Ged safe for a while; and Ariadne-like, guided him out of the labyrinth. In *Tehanu* she tells and re-tells myths and old tales - for example, the tale of Andaur and Avad (592), the ontological myth of dragons and humans (489), or lays and ballads of Éa - and in the process leads the whole of Earthsea out of the maze in which it had been trapped.

In *Tehanu*, the trap in which Earthsea is held captive is linguistic. What Le Guin calls double-vision begins to reveal a different world, which needs a different way of using language or thinking about language; when two opposing perspectives are visible, for example in the dragon's vision, knowledge lies in both rather than either. True Speech designates an unequivocal signifier-signified relationship. If the name of a thing is changed, the thing changes wholly, changes its very nature; and this stands in sharp contrast to the slow transformation, like a seed sown and slowly growing, which the knowledge of Kalessin's name brings about in Tenar. But in True Speech things do not morph into other things; rather, change is a radical disjunction, a shedding of one identity to assume another, as Ged tells Tenar she must do in the *Tombs*. For Ged, she must decide whether she is Tenar or Arha, and the choice is what will decide whether she remains entrapped in the life of the priestess or is free to walk the Archipelago as she wishes. But in the event, she proves she can be both, carrying her identity as Arha with her to Ged's own island of Gont.

However, the rigidity that True Speech seems to imply for men disappears when it comes to dragons, native speakers of the Old Tongue. Interestingly, dragons can lie in True Speech, while mages cannot. This implies that it is not the language but the way it is used that produces its rigidity. The mages, who spend many years learning the True Names of things, cannot imagine that the thing might have another name, so it does not. Dragons, by contrast, live under no such constraint, and their imagination is unbounded.

In the First Trilogy the dragons were represented as devious, never answering a question directly, always speaking in riddles. Yevaud, for instance, uses language cleverly to gain an advantage over young Ged, who is forced to respond in kind, using his ingenuity and knowledge to find a word that will give him an advantage over Yevaud: the dragon's true name. This links

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[56] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Writer on, and at, Her Work' in Janet Sternberg ed., *The Writer On Her Work* (New York, London: Norton, 1991). Qtd. in Holly Littlefield "Unlearning Patriarchy: Ursula Le Guin's Feminist Consciousness in *The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*' in *Extrapolation*, 36.3 (Fall, 1995), p. 244.

dragons to Tolkien's Smaug and his predecessors - the devil-dragon, for instance, about whom the Bible says: 'the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world'.[57] Even Orm Embar, who comes to Ged for help when Cob is destroying the world by opening a gap between the lands of the living and the dead, speaks inscrutably. As Ged says, 'It is hard for a dragon to speak plainly. They do not have plain minds' (*TFS*, 438). But retrospectively, this so-called inscrutability of dragon speech can be seen as representing a misogynistic, androcentric view - reflected in the logocentric understanding of language which views women's speech, like the dragons', as either tortuous or wily. The impression of crafty cunning in the speech of dragons is exacerbated by their humorous facial expression: a dragon's mouth curls up at the corners, seeming to smile all the time, and the eye of the dragon is described in *The Farthest Shore* as full of 'profound and mild hilarity' and 'ancient laughter' (474-75). This amused gaze is mentioned again in *Tehanu*, when Kalessin meets Tenar and lets out 'a great "Hah!" of orange flame' (520). In the shifting focus achieved through the prismatic alterations and adjustments of perceptions and assumptions, made concomitantly by Le Guin and the reader in *Tehanu*, the sheer inscrutability of dragons along with their physical characteristics are offered as an explanation for men's view that they are wily and guileful - as are women - and therefore to be feared. The more pernicious and enduring effects of this unfold as the story progresses, in the attitudes of the Roke Masters searching for a new Archmage, and later of the wizard Aspen.

In *Tehanu*, the Balance that the wizards and Masters of Roke had so diligently tried to maintain is revealed to be absent. The change prophesied by Ogion is reinforced by the Patterner at Roke. After Ged was carried off by the dragon Kalessin, Aren tells Tenar, the masters of Roke met to choose a new Archmage, as tradition required. Arren was to take the place of the ninth member, as the Summoner, Thorion, was absent in the realm of the dead. However, as Arren explains, the 'learned' and 'knowledgeable' Masters of Roke were unable to come to a decision: 'they use their differences, as I had seen before, to make their decision strong' (611), but this time they were 'all difference and no decision' (611). The only thing the Patterner said was, 'A woman on Gont' (612), leaving the others utterly baffled. The mystification is grounded in the protracted process of subordinating women by narrowing their sphere of existence to that of wives and mothers, or othering them as witches and monsters if they did not conform to the prescribed roles. There has never been a place for a woman in the schemes of the wise, and the result is that the Patterner's

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[57] Revelation 12: 9.

simple phrase becomes a riddle, a verbal trick, rather as Bilbo Baggins's simple question 'What have I got in my pocket?' becomes a riddle in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

The masters are left thoroughly disconcerted by the Patterner's words, and Tenar's tentative suggestion that 'things were already altering . . . and that a change, a great change, has been taking place, has taken place?' (614, original ellipses) is met by 'deafness' from the Master Windkey, who is utterly incapable of understanding the wild suggestion she puts forward, that a woman might actually be needed on Roke. And even though the king is 'silent, listening' (615) as she speaks, and was 'not deaf' (616), he seems to be trying to 'understand a foreign language' (616). This echoes Ged's assertion in *The Farthest Shore* that dragons cannot speak plainly. Re-evaluating this claim in *Tehanu*, Le Guin shows that perhaps it is an incapacity in men, who are incompetent to understand an-other's speech, that leads to claims of complexity or confusion in dragons' - and women's – utterances.

For Le Guin, the important aspect of the difference between men and women's language is not that they use different words - although that may be implied – but that language is constructed and appropriated by male hegemonic mechanisms in a way that forces women either to use it as men do, and so collude with those systems of oppression; or to reject it and speak an alternative dialect, which for men is tantamount to riddling or silence. A few scattered examples of both kinds of women speakers can be found in the First Trilogy: Kossil, or the sorceress of Osskil, are participants in the patriarchal language, while Arha, Penthe, Yarrow, or the stranded princess reject or are excluded from it, with the result that they are marginal to affairs of state, or in the case of the princess, utterly speechless and therefore redundant. But it is in *Tehanu* that Le Guin asks herself for the first time: what language is available to the excluded?

Moss and Tenar engage in 'gossip' (as Penthe gossiped in the *Tombs*); the word is associated particularly with women, and has derogatory connotations.[58] In the process Moss mumbles and hedges, expressing herself in gnomic sayings and proverbs. As the narrator states, most of her 'obscurity and cant [...] was mere ineptness with words and ideas. Nobody had ever taught her to think consecutively. Nobody had ever listened to what she said. All that was expected, all that was wanted of her was muddle, mystery, mumbling. She was a witchwoman. She had nothing to do with clear meaning' (526). Evidently, logocentric discourse is male territory; women are not supposed to be logical or coherent, since no one really listens to women. As a witch, mysterious utterance is

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valuable for her trade, so the tendency becomes exacerbated in Moss. This is an instance of 'doing gender' rather than just being.

But gossip can be a powerful social instrument, according to Marina Warner, who shows how 'Gossip was perceived to be a leading element in women's folly', and more to the point, 'in the sex's propensity to foment riot' (33). [59] Informal talk and indiscreet exchanges can become catalysts for social processes of change, as Tenar learns through her chats with Moss, which increase her understanding of how gender and power hierarchies work. The 'domestic webs of information' (Warner, 34) shared among women are a source of fear for the wielders of authority; and Tenar, in her identity as Goha the spider, is weaving these webs as she interacts with Moss, Ivy, Lark, and later even Ged. Participating in gossip sets her up as a member of an alternative council, so to speak, which rivals the Tolkien-esque council of the wise on Roke; and unlike that council the procedures of their web of gossip can be said to extend themselves all over Earthsea.

One main reason why the Masters reject Tenar's suggestion that change has occurred is their inability to practise the garrulous flexibility of women's discourse as embodied in gossip: its preparedness to hop promiscuously from subject to subject without becoming trapped in logical tramlines, so to speak. The fixed identities into which men have locked themselves compartmentalise people into gendered roles that they are forced to play throughout their lives. Roke's belief in its own infallibility has led to a warped and bigoted attitude, an incapacity to understand that options other than the current organisational patterns might exist. The derogation of women's magic is tantamount to a derogation of their language, since magic is performed through words. The exclusion from the language of the elite results in women's debarment from political and intellectual agency. That women are barred from Roke has become an immutable rule. The Masters at Roke are therefore caught in stasis, refusing to acknowledge that the world exists in a constant state of flux, a basic tenet of the Tao. Just as the earlier patriarchal order had suppressed the myth of evolution which revealed the process of change that separated humans from dragons, so the present patriarchal order refuses the evolutionary process that might elevate the current status of women.

This misogyny is embodied on Gont in the wizard of Re Albi, Aspen. Hungry for power, this young man is engaged in an atrocious act of exploitation of the weak on behalf of his powerful master, the aged Lord of Re Albi: he is slowly transferring life out of the Lord's grandson into the

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[59] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 33.

old man's body. (Strikingly, we learn that this atrocity has been exposed not by official sources – the vampiric lord's control of the region ensures these are kept under control – but through village gossip.) When Goha/Tenar goes up to Re Albi to make inquiries about Handy - who had badly scared Therru by coming to Ogion's house to look for her - Aspen's hatred at once erupts in a lava-like stream of vitriol. He already bears a grudge against Tenar because of the earlier revelation that the dying Ogion had told her his true name, and because she had also prevented the old wizard's burial in the grounds of Re Albi castle. As Tenar guesses, Aspen's attitude is the result of deep-rooted misogyny, so that 'To be a woman was her fault. Nothing could worsen or amend it' (588). Ironically, Ogion's true name, Aihal – meaning the Silent - had gone unheard when Tenar first told it to Aspen and the wizard from Gont port, because the wizards had been conditioned not to listen to women, whose speech was derogated as trivial. Besides the irony of the name 'Silent' having been effectively silenced, this is doubly ironic because Aihal had privileged the faculty of listening all his life, yet suffers what in Earthsea amounts to the profanation of a true name: his name after death is not heard, merely because he told it to a woman. In stark contrast to these androcentric attitudes, Ogion trusted Tenar with his name, as did Kalessin.

But Aspen wants to silence Tenar, silence all women, because he fears them, as the vituperative invective he hurls upon her proves: 'a woman's tongue,' he claims, is 'worse than any thief [...] casting calumny and lies, the dragonseed every witch sows behind her' (586). Aspen's use of the word 'dragonseed' to accuse Tenar of lying is significant, for the word echoes Tenar's feeling, that a seed of change had been sown within her, felt by her as a bodily conception, after the dragon Kalessin told her its name. The True Name helps Tenar 'conceive' the truth about Therru, who is labelled 'monster' by the men of Earthsea, and so bring her up as her daughter - the 'seed' she shares with Kalessin, who also calls Therru 'my child'. The stark contrast that Le Guin sets up between the way Aspen and Tenar use the word 'dragonseed' - Aspen as a description of women's words as lies, that proliferate and spread discontent and fear; Tenar as the words of a dragon that infiltrate her very being, making her capable of helping Therru find a space where she can live as a free individual - shows how language is polysemous, so that the same word can mean different things for different people. As George Steiner explains, 'such difference, ranging from nuance to antithesis, characterises the language of ideology'.[60] One of the most potent means by which such ideologically loaded language can be used to cement power hierarchies is interpellation – the

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[60] George Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 35.

labelling of others - as Aspen interpellates Tenar 'witch' and Therru 'foul imp', seeking to lock them up in these categories.[61]

In order to do this, Aspen steals to Re-Albi in the night to put a spell on Tenar; but some intuitive warning allows her to wake up and turn his spell back on him. As she realises, the language she learned as the One Priestess has its own uses, one of them being the ability to curse or turn a curse (593). Aspen, however, is tenacious in his will to take away Tenar's words. He casts a spell of silence on Tenar, and in the process re-enacts the terrible scene in *The Farthest Shore* where Orm Embar was struck dumb by Cob, arching his back and clawing the air in the agony of inarticulacy. In that book, Ged lamented that the 'Children of Segoy' had been driven to 'the dumb terror of the beasts' (*TFS*, 435); and this prefigures Aspen's arrest of Tenar's ability to think by taking away her language. Aspen's spell confuses Tenar's mind, so that when village children throw stones at her she thinks it is because she has dared to speak, to say the word Tolk, the true name of stone. To punish her for daring to speak, Aspen violates Tenar's speech, so that while trying to tell the half-wit Heather to look after Ogion's goats her words come out as abuse, shocking the girl. Nevertheless, Le Guin shows how a fluid and multiple identity escapes confining borders by demonstrating that Tenar finds she can still think in Kargish, which enables her to make a plan of escape. She takes a short cut to Gont Port, knowing (in Kargish) that Aspen would lie in wait for her on the main path. This is effective, for she soon begins to think in Hardic, and later picks up a stone to utter its true name; and at this point the 'dragon seed' sown in her being, the name of the dragon, forms itself in her mind, clearing it of all confusion. Evidently, her instinctive thinking - Le Guin calls it 'animal sense' - guides her well, because she meets Arren at Gont Port, and the young king takes her to Middle Valley in his ship. Tenar's identity as a woman shows her the way to evade Aspen's attempts to enslave her, through a succession of evasive manoeuvres based in her very different understanding of words and silence.

In this episode, Le Guin enables Tenar to undergo what Blake calls the development of a human being from the 'Perfect Unity' in Eden – the Primal Man incorporating all polarities – to a very different kind of unity or self-assurance. For Blake, the 'fall into Division and […] Resurrection to unity'[62] is a progress from innocence to 'organised innocence', a process which is re-enacted by Tenar as she slowly learns to integrate all the 'selves' that have become part of her

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[61] For 'interpellation' see Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York etc.: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 1502-503.

[62] William Blake, *The Four Zoas*, 4: 4-5 (1796-1807).

personality, discovering a new integrity or wholeness in the process. This integration involves an incorporation of the different languages she knows in her various roles - for example, Arha can use language to curse, Goha can use Hardic to tell stories, and Tenar has an innate ability to talk to dragons, as we shall see later. In the same way we are invited to imagine the severed and splintered islands of the Archipelago learning to create new byways and undercurrents from one to another, generating a dynamic interconnection without a collapse of difference.

Tenar's various 'identities' continue to harmonise themselves throughout the novel. Just as Arha helps Goha in this episode by turning the curse of Aspen, Goha initiates Arha into the mysteries of sex and motherhood, and Tenar finds love with the man she saw and loved at first sight, Ged. As noted above, this is radically different from the paradigmatic dying-to-be-reborn development of classical myth. Tenar does not become a different, transcendent being as she changes her identities; rather, as Le Guin has pointed out, she re-bears, retaining the symbiotic relationship between all her selves. In the person of Tenar we witness an embodiment of the Taoist - and Blakean - concept of the interaction of oppositions: Arha is a virgin priestess, adept at worship and sacrifice, knowing how to curse and retract curses; Tenar, a 'white princess', the person who wears the ring of bonding after the mythical princess Elfarran, and who presages the new dawn in Earthsea with the advent of a king; Goha, a farmer's wife and mother of two children.

This is why, as in her farm in Middle Valley Tenar continues to teach Therru songs and stories, her words - called dragonseed by Aspen - teach Therru that the little girl's selfhood is intact, despite the severe mutilation she has had to undergo in body, mind and spirit. This helps Therru to turn aside the labels of imp, monster and victim - given her by those who have the power to abuse her and label her within the narrow category of the abused - and to enter a realm of freedom, of dragonhood,[63] redefining our notions of dragonhood, monster and victim in the process. Tenar teaches Therru the second verse of the song 'The Creation of Éa' one winter evening:

> The making from the unmaking,
> The ending from the beginning,
> Who shall know surely?
> What we know is the doorway between them

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[63] Brian Attebery makes the point that literary fantasy is able to present Therru's 'unviolated selfhood' through the metaphor of the dragon, enabling the readers to re-view her as a free individual rather than as a 'victim', defined always by her abusers. Brian Attebery, 'The Politics (If Any) of Fantasy' in *Modes of the Fantastic*, ed. by Robert A. Latham and Robert A. Collins (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 1-13.

that we enter departing.

Among all beings ever returning,

the eldest, the Doorkeeper, Segoy . . . [64]

The song questions the limits of human knowledge: our propensity to create beginnings and endings may be natural, but these verses emphasise between-ness. The only surety of human knowledge, they tell us, lies in the discourse of thresholds, passages from one place to another, doorways between the beginning and the end. The sixth line can be connected to the one before it, which embeds all beings in the oxymoronic process of entering as they depart through the doorway; or it can mean that out of all creatures, only Segoy the Doorkeeper - creator of Éa - is the one who always returns. The doorway is the creative space between an individual's multiple identities, as well as the negotiating space between rival beliefs and discourses. Whatever ends or beginnings humankind has envisaged for itself, humanity exists, as Frank Kermode points out, in media res, in the space between tick and tock.[65] This song gains its fullest resonance in the final apocalyptic vision of the Earthsea sequence: *The Other Wind*.

5.7. Apocalypse in *Tehanu*

In the novel *Tehanu*, however, the angst that pervades Éa persists, and is enacted in the climactic humiliation of Ged and Tenar, the healers of the Rune of Bonding. At the end of the book Aspen captures Ged and Tenar in another spell, forcing the woman to crawl on all fours - a gesture that concretises his desire to silence women by literally forcing her mouth into the dust, disabling her utterance. At this point the hope of change that runs through the text as a strong undercurrent ready to change the tide at any moment seems to be annihilated.

Desire for change is important in apocalyptic discourse. As stated earlier, Le Guin is averse to Judeo-Christian narratives of judgement day which place all hope in a transcendent realm of plenitude. But the discourse of hope, as dramatised in biblical apocalypse, is pervasive in Western thinking, and the lure of a sudden dramatic deliverance, which Tolkien calls eucatastrophe, is an important feature of fantasy. The apocalypse in *Tehanu* re-visions and rewrites the biblical version. According to Abrams, biblical history is 'right-angled: the key events are abrupt'; and the Second

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[64] Le Guin, *The Earthsea Quartet*, p. 654.

[65] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Coming is the 'absolute turning point in the plot'.[66] The apocalypse in *Tehanu* too constitutes an abrupt, right-angled change in circumstances, an absolute turning point in the plot. The difference is that it heralds a transformation that is firmly rooted in the heaven and earth we became familiar with in the First Trilogy. In contrast to Lewis in *The Last Battle*, Le Guin challenges herself in this book to change the world she created rather than construct a new one.

In *Tehanu*, Kalessin, the Eldest, collaborates with Tenar and Therru to defeat Aspen. The dragon has already played the role of saviour in the Earthsea sequence, carrying Ged and Arren to safety from the shores of Selidor in *The Farthest Shore*, and transporting Ged to Gont in the book's last action. The dragon's 'second coming' in *Tehanu* saves not only Ged and Tenar but the whole of Earthsea from what is virtually a repetition of Cob's near-destruction of the world.

This time it is the wizard Aspen who is bent upon repudiating death and finding life eternal. Aspen confesses to this design when he captures Ged and Tenar in his spell. Mocking the former Archmage for having lost his magic, Aspen taunts him: 'you thought you were safe [...] my master, our master destroyed. You thought you'd had your will, and destroyed the promise of eternal life [...] My master defeated you. Now do you know it? You did not conquer him. His power lives!' (682). Aspen's 'my master, our master' clearly means Cob, and Cob is his master in the sense of his teacher as well as his owner, the possessor of his mind. Aspen's experiments with the old lord of Re Albi and his grandson are obviously a step towards Cob's ultimate ambition, the acquisition of immortality. When Tenar suddenly realises that Aspen was not a young man, as she had thought at first, but 'withered' with age and driven by some artificial energy, she realises too that he has been indulging in some occult magic to arrest ageing, of the kind Medea practises in classical myth. In *The Farthest Shore* Ged called Cob the 'Anti-King',[67] a clear echo of the biblical Anti-Christ, and Aspen seems set to be another such.

However, new ways of perception open doorways into new worlds, as Le Guin goes on to show us. Tenar's and Therru's gaining of double vision proves to be a doorway into a radically alternative 'reality', helping them to escape the oppressive regime into which Aspen seeks to bind them. As Tenar and Ged are held captive, Therru 'look[s] into the west with the other eye, and call[s] with the other voice the name she had heard in her mother's dream' (685). This is the name Kalessin, whom Tenar called in her dreams while flying in gulfs of air and light. Even as Aspen is

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[66] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 36.

[67] Le Guin, *TFS*, p. 422.

about to throw Ged and Tenar over the cliffs where Tenar first met Kalessin, the dragon enters 'from the doorway of the sky' and destroys the old order embodied in Aspen and his cronies.

The advent of a new order to replace the old one is signalled by the naming of the burnt child by Kalessin. The dragon calls her 'Tehanu', the name of the star Tenar had seen as an emblem of hope at a time when she had felt particularly alone and particularly doubtful of her decision to save Therru. Tehanu, besides being a burnt and abused child - as male hegemony would describe her - is much more, Le Guin insists; she is not just a flaming fire, as the burnt child Therru, but also a star of hope, as the dragon-girl Tehanu. And the hope she represents lies in her knowledge of names. She is born, like a dragon, with an innate familiarity with True Speech, and uses it to summon the dragon. After calling to Kalessin, she goes to see how her peach seedling is faring (it has died); and she then goes to Moss, and heals her from the atrocious illness Aspen has inflicted on her by saying the witch's true name. Kalessin calls Tehanu 'my child', as Tenar did earlier; and that these are true words is confirmed by the fact that she describes Tenar as her mother when she remembers her dream, a dream of being one with Kalessin. The apocalypse that Ogion had prophesied is brought about by language, by Tehanu's unerring knowledge of the proper word to use for each person in the community that forms around her. If both Tenar and Kalessin are Tehanu's parents, the meanings of the terms 'parent' and 'mother' have been reassigned, as happens when we invent a strong new metaphor. This process enables new and non-conformist aspects of reality to be revealed through language. Le Guin's narrative is a perfect demonstration of this process, as she creates new metaphors for envisioning change even in the most terrible or oppressive circumstances.

CHAPTER SIX. UNAUTHORISING THE BIBLE IN *TALES FROM EARTHSEA*

In *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), a collection of five tales garnered from the 'archives' and oral traditions of Earthsea, Le Guin explores the production and maintenance of historical records, demonstrating that emerging socio-cultural assumptions are often projected on to history to produce notions of normalcy based on androcentric paradigms; and that within these androcentric models, women's leadership and contribution is made invisible. This is achieved mainly by using generically masculine language, which functions to suppress women's role in historical discourse. By identifying and deconstructing such linguistic symptoms in her own earlier novels, Le Guin's two most recent Earthsea books formally and structurally enact her thematic concerns. Her short story 'The Finder', in particular, engages once again with biblical apocalypse and prophecy, to scrutinise how foundational patriarchal texts construct power hierarchies.

Tales from Earthsea begins with a Foreword by Le Guin that explains how at the end of *Tehanu*, the story had 'arrived at what I felt to be *now*'. However, she remarks, 'Now moves [...] *now* isn't *then*'. Almost a decade later, Le Guin writes in her new collection what happened after *Tehanu* (the conventional 'then' that moves a story forward); and also addresses what had happened before Ged and Tenar's stories began, 'back *then*' in the history of Earthsea. According to Le Guin, history, whether of the real or the fictional world, can only be accessed through narrative: 'Even if we are present at some historic event, do we comprehend it - can we even remember it - until we can tell it as a story?' she inquires.[1] History and story, for Le Guin, are imbricated, since 'memory [...] is a form of imagination'.[2] Believing that no event can become meaningful unless it is 'storied', Le Guin explores the archival history of Earthsea through imaginative narrative in the *Tales*.

As Le Guin opens up the past of the world she created, she dis-covers how narrative constructs reality, illuminating not only the constructedness of her own fictional world but the constructedness of *all* worlds, including our own, and thus interrogating the categories of 'real' and 'imaginary'. Historical discourse, suggests Le Guin, does not give us transparent access to an external 'reality' that exists independently of it, but constructs our notions of reality; and this construction is mostly controlled by dominant groups that suppress and silence the voices of the disempowered. As she notes in one of her essays, 'history is written by the superior class', who

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[1] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Foreword', *Tales From Earthsea* (London: Orion, 2001), p. xii.

[2] Le Guin, 'Foreword', p. xii.

portray the present state of affairs as 'natural, necessary and unchangeable'.[3] However, there are subtexts and marginal discourses that exist as the underside of the ideological myths presented in history, and these can always subvert and disrupt the dominant accounts. The implied author of the *Tales* confesses to having written a 'description' to 'keep contradictions and discrepancies at a minimum',[4] which implies that any history is not an Ur-story - there are always variations and inconsistencies within and between the different versions. Le Guin has already demonstrated how myths and legends and songs - the main source of historical knowledge in the oral Earthsea society - are culture-specific, so that many variations of the same story exist: for example, the story of Ged's encounter with his Shadow is told differently on different islands of the Archipelago; or the story of Erreth-Akbe, who is the greatest of heroes for the people of the Inner Isles but a cowardly villain on Atuan; or the two versions of Ged's destiny at the end of *The Farthest Shore*. In *Tales* Le Guin demonstrates that such variations cannot be eliminated from written records either, and that there will always be different versions, sometimes even conflicting accounts, in the historical record. In this context, the Second Trilogy abounds in intertextual allusions to and images of the biblical apocalypse narratives, which are mined for their subversive content, symptomatic of the resistance to the Roman Empire in which they were composed, while at the same time being exposed for their complicity with hegemonic patriarchal discourse. This contradictory tendency of myth – whether ancient or scriptural - to be both reactionary and subversive at the same time, finds rich soil in the two contradictory accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2; and in the Book of Revelation, which can be read as resistance literature, but also as a text that inscribes women in polarised roles as whore or virgin. As different versions of stories struggle to be heard in Le Guin's increasingly complex narrative, she foregrounds the need to reject any accounts that claim to articulate *a priori* truths.

Refusing, therefore, to present an 'authorised version', Le Guin challenges the very notion of authority and author, by stating that while writing *Tales* she found that 'What I thought was going to happen isn't what's happening, people aren't who - or what - I thought they were, and I lose my way on islands I thought I knew by heart'. She further undermines the writer's authority by warning readers that 'authors and wizards are not always to be trusted'.[5] Thus Le Guin avoids positing one version, even that of the author, as the 'correct' one, and presents instead a variety of versions of

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[3] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A War Without End' in *A Wave in the Mind*, p. 213.

[4] Le Guin, 'Foreword', p. xiii.

[5] Ibid., p. xv.

constructed reality. By doing this, she implicates the reader in the creative process, by offering her multiple subject-positions to choose from, and allowing a plurality of voices to speak in a text that is dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense. Her successive responses to Earthsea thus become the most potent and paradoxical form of resistance, because they display an evident delight in the stories - her own, her predecessors' – she is concerned to subvert. The perpetual struggle of fusion and diffusion, inclusion and exclusion becomes the locus of creative power, making the text a self-reflexive palimpsest of multiplying stories.

The first story in *Tales*, 'The Finder', tells of a fundamentally different Roke school for magic than the one we encountered in the first Earthsea book, *A Wizard*. 'The Finder' confronts the reader with a radical instance of the 'epistemic violence'[6] that can be inflicted on notions of what is seen as 'normal' and 'acceptable' in a given culture by a process of what Milan Kundera calls 'organised forgetting'.[7] Roke school, it emerges, was founded by members of an organisation called Women of the Hand, originally formed by a league of male and female mages which was mostly run by women. The first Patterner - arguably the most important calling for a 'master' at Roke - was a woman called Ember. Women and men built the school building together, and taught both men and women, young and old. The rowan tree in the central courtyard was planted by a woman. The beginnings of discord between men and women are recorded in the story, and there are clear indications that gender difference might result in harmful divisions and insurgent elements. What is clear, though, is that the school we have seen in Ged's time is a far cry from the shared enterprise aimed at disseminating knowledge delineated here.

The second story, 'Bones of the Earth', relates how important a knowledge of the Old Powers was in stopping the famous earthquake which made Ogion one of the most renowned and respected wizards in Earthsea. One of the ways in which male gendered 'inclusive' language works to create assumptions is exposed in this story, in which Ogion and his teacher together stop an earthquake. Heleth tells his pupil that he will have to work arcane magic, connected to the old powers of the earth. He goes on to tell Ogion that his teacher, Ard, from whom he learned the requisite spell, never disclosed how she had learnt it. By this means Le Guin's readers, like Ogion himself, are jarred out of any complacent understanding they felt themselves to possess of Earthsea history. In

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[6] A term introduced by Gayatri Spivak,to show how representations by dominant groups can stifle the voice of the repressed, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass..: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 266.

[7] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans., Michael Henry Heim (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 234-35. Qtd. in Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California As A Cold Place To Be' (1982) in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), p. 82.

the *Wizard*, the narrator tells us that Ogion got his lore books from 'his own master Heleth Farseer, and Heleth from his master the Mage of Perregal'.[8] The embedded assumption is that the Mage was male, an example of how male gendered language works. Le Guin shows how some of the most pervasive cultural representations are the result of generic androcentric language, which renders women's roles invisible by its grammatical universality.

The last story, 'Dragonfly', brings Earthsea's history up to date in that it relates events contiguous with *Tehanu*. The apocalyptic ending of *Tehanu* left a lot unanswered. The change prophesied by Ogion was initiated, certainly, but the overall premises and socio-cultural structures of the archipelago remained intact. In 'Dragonfly', the rhetoric of imminent change takes on a more urgent tone, leading to the tense, strained atmosphere of *The Other Wind*, where Earthsea seems to be on the verge of being destroyed either by the dragons or the dead.

Le Guin's 'historical' account is an ideological critique, which focuses on the political, ethical, and linguistic dimensions of her earlier Earthsea books. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, written two years after *Tehanu*, Le Guin recognised her growing political awareness: 'now that I know that even in Fairyland there is no escape from politics, I look back and see that I was writing [in the First Trilogy] partly by the rules, as an artificial man, and partly against the rules, as an inadvertent revolutionary' (7). In *Tehanu*, by contrast, Le Guin's project was consciously subversive, and as she continues this enterprise in the *Tales*, she taps the 'political unconscious' of the earlier Earthsea novels, and invites her readers to do the same. According to Fredric Jameson's Marxist definition, the repressed in history and narrative is based on class struggle, and the function of the term 'political unconscious' is to help us in 'detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative' that has never been heard, with the single fundamental theme of class struggle.[9] For Le Guin, however, the fundamental force of oppression is gender inequity, and her exploration of Earthsea history - in the form of her tales from Earthsea - cuts through her earlier novels to reveal the politicised gender constructions and roles that informed her first three novels as accepted norms and suppositions. I will concentrate on 'The Finder', which tells the history of the foundation of Roke School on Earthsea, to examine ways in which Le Guin engages with different models of reality are created by using different forms of language.

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[8] Le Guin, *WE*, p. 30.

[9] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. For Jameson, all historic conflicts form 'a single great collective story', including the economic struggles of primitive societies, religious conflicts about the nature of the Trinity, colonising struggles of Empire building, and governmental and media conflicts of nation-states.

6.1. The Finder

'The Finder' begins with the narrator citing the first page of the *Book of the Dark*, which is a 'compilation of self-contradictory histories, partial biographies, and garbled legends' that provides a record of Earthsea history form the time of Morred to the 'dark ages'. The title of this non-existent book connotes the political chaos and unrest that reigned in Earthsea after the murder of the last of its kings and the breaking of his Ring. From this moment the 'will of the wealthy' prevailed. Wizards and soldiers were hired to seize land and property; slavery became common, and extreme poverty drove people to lawlessness and piracy; the divide between oppressors (the rich ruling class) and oppressed (the rest of the people) was vast. As the narrator notes, the ruling class wanted 'praise, not history', and book-burning was one of the strategies employed by the oppressors to prevent the disempowered from learning about the inner workings of dominant systems of power. Of the few extant written records, the *Book of the Dark* is the best account, says the narrator, but some information can be found written in the margins of lore books, which were given to wizards in the pay of the warlords. The implication is that these random records - stories of 'a plague, a famine, a raid, a change of masters' preserved in margins and endpapers - have a certain authority by the very virtue of being marginal, as they are recorded not to convince or teach or serve some important public function, but to express what would be read by few, and what would make no difference in the larger political and social sphere, yet was considered by the writers important enough to be written down despite these disadvantages. The marginal records reveal instances of economic, social and gendered oppression, providing a different perspective to the main account in the *Book*.[10] In addition, 'songs, old lays and ballads from small islands and from the quiet uplands of Havnor' tell further tales of despotism, suppression of freedom, brutality and injustice. The story told in 'The Finder' - of the founding of the Roke School - is constructed from all these sources: the surviving remnants of the *Book*, the marginal notes, and the songs, lays and ballads.

Although the socio-political conditions revealed in the first page of the *Book* have definite echoes of the conditions that led to the apocalyptic ending of *Tehanu* - petty warfare, unjust distribution of power, gender inequality, economic chaos and moral degradation - 'The Finder' is not eschatological, even though the apocalyptic theme, as a yearning towards change, is woven through it. In 'The Finder' Le Guin traces beginnings - the beginning of the Roke school, the

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[10] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Finder' in *Tales From Earthsea* (London: Orion, 2001), p. 2. Hereafter cited as 'TF'.

foundation of the art of magic as an organised institutional knowledge - and shows how beginnings and endings are inextricably linked, as becomes clear in the story 'Dragonfly' and the novel *The Other Wind*. *The Tales* is an 'archaeology of the future' of Earthsea, the five tales being strands that form a pattern in *The Other Wind*, an alternative 'history' of Earthsea revealing the latent elements of subversion that lead to the radical interrogation of the status quo in the final novel of the Earthsea series.

As Le Guin states very often in her writings, 'returning' (to the past, to the place where we began) is important if we are to understand the present and cherish hope for the future. Her repeated injunction is to 'Turn and return',[11] because the past is as important as the future, or perhaps more so - literary fantasy being one of the most potent forms to foreground this fact, demonstrating that re-viewing and retrieving the past is a subversive enterprise, rather than a reactionary one as its critics have so often contended. One of the techniques deployed by both Tolkien and Lewis for this subversive retrieval, as I pointed out in the Introduction, is defamiliarisation (*ostranenie*) — Victor Shklovsky's conception of how literature represents objects and situations afresh, devoid of their familiar associations, rendering them pristine again for readers who may have become immured in habituated modes of thought and action. Similarly, Le Guin uses what Tolkien calls the 'fantastic device of language' to re-engage her readers with contemporary problems that have become so familiar that they are being ignored. For example, Le Guin's identification of Equilibrium as a central aspect of Earthsea's culture can be read as drawing attention to the analogous loss of balance which is being experienced in our world on account of environmental degradation, with its attendant symptoms such as global warming. As the narrator in 'The Finder' tells us, in the dark ages wizards used their spells recklessly in a bid for power, and this resulted in famines, plagues and the drying up of springs, and the birth of 'sickly and monstrous' offspring in animals and humans. The wizards' actions are equivalent to human irresponsibility in the exploitation of natural resources and pollution caused by industrial waste. As Le Guin says, the post-Enlightenment 'Euclidean' vision, based on either/or binary codes, posits reason as the prime force of human progress - a one-way journey that human beings are supposed to have embarked upon after the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. But Le Guin's advice is to pause, and forswear this drive to relentless progress that comes only 'at the cost of the destruction of all other species and their inorganic matrix of earth, water, and air' (*Dancing*, 96).

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[11] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View', p. 85.

The binary mentality that has become part of our make-up, Le Guin points out, has to be re-visioned; our one-dimensional perspective needs to change.

In a fundamental sense, the return advised by Le Guin is a revaluation of language, which in the Earthsea series — and our world — is central to human notions of reality. Le Guin traces the parallels between the suppression and exploitation of women and the earth by the dominant male ideological systems, and exposes the role of language in this double oppression. In 'dis-covering' the archives of Earthsea, Le Guin shows how different metaphors structure different realities - gendered notions of what really exists. This is the central theme of 'The Finder', which depicts the contrast between Gelluk's domain of power, with its paralysed puppet king, Losen, the slaves at Samory, and hired wizards seething with rebellion; and the community at Roke, existing in harmony and peace, but radically isolated from the rest of the world. The story is structured in three sections, and by juxtaposing the power formations at Samory and Roke, Le Guin explores the way metaphors and imagery establish binaries that promote hierarchical social formations.

In a talk in 1986, published as 'Woman/Wilderness', Le Guin's polemical stance is that 'Civilised Man' makes 'all the rest' - women, animals, trees, the earth - into the Other. He, the male white adult, is 'I' and 'the rest is women and the wilderness'; and while the 'I' is linguistically centred, the feminised Other has been silenced, edged out of the dominant discourse to exist as the mute outsider.[12] Le Guin addresses this schism, and seeks to re-vision this parallel between nature and women rather than deny it. As Le Guin became more conscious of the ecofeminist movement that interrogates the equating of the feminine with nature, and recognised the degradation of nature as a way of denigrating the female (and vice versa), she reworked her conception of the Old Powers of the earth, demonstrating that the human, the non-human and the environment are interlinked, so that the 'othering' of nature by man is leading to an ecological catastrophe that humans would do well to recognise. Le Guin's decentring of 'Man' involves giving voice to all that has been silenced. Historically, she tells us, men mastered nature by going into the wilderness and hunting, and their exploits became legends. Once he had dominated that wilderness, women's sphere was made wild too, with the aim of subjecting it to a similar domination. In response to her increasing focus on this story, as we shall see, Le Guin's conception of the Old Powers becomes more explicitly associated with the feminine principle, and with knowledge. And in the process, as in *Tehanu*, she sets about rewriting the Christian scriptures in a manner that would have taken C. S. Lewis by surprise.

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[12] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Woman/Wilderness' in *Dancing*, pp. 161-164.

6.2. Sacramentalism in Samory

As I have noted before, the claim for Le Guin's engagement with scriptural texts seems counterintuitive, since she has called herself a 'congenital non-Christian'.[13] However, her conception of True Speech as acting upon the world and changing it has too many parallels with the biblical concept of the creative word for her not to explore the ramifications of these similarities. One of these similarities is the way language constructs notions of purity, associated with the male and the sky, as against the impure earth, which is gendered female. She questions the concept of 'purity' throughout her work. In *Tehanu*, she examined the question of male 'purity' preserved by avoiding sexual contact - another concept that finds a parallel in the medieval priestly tradition.[14] In *Tales from Earthsea* she turns her attention to one of the manifestations of this quest for purity in sacrificial rituals, represented in many religions as a pathway to some sort of eternal disembodied existence.

At Samory, to which young Otter has been sent as a 'finder' - he has the magical gift for finding things - the earth is mined for cinnabar, the ore of water metal, commonly known as mercury. Here the wizard Gelluk works for the pirate Losen and allows this thug to think of himself as king, while using him to consolidate his own power. With Losen's help Gelluk secures for himself countless slaves and economic resources to mine the ore for his peculiar purposes. The wizard's rhetoric is saturated in religious imagery, which demonstrates the role of organised religions in setting up gendered notions of the world. When he meets the slave boy Otter for the first time, Gelluk reveals to him his 'magical' secret. Gelluk calls the refined metal the King, or the Allking, while the ore in the mines is the 'vile' Red Mother, refined, as Gelluk explains, in the long stone tower where huge fires tended by naked slaves burn constantly, in room above room, until the purified mercury is gathered in the topmost room. The fumes from the metal poison the slaves, so that they die within a year or two. But according to Gelluk, the running sores on their bodies make them 'pure', so that after being 'burned clean' these slaves, both male and female, can eventually 'fly up, fly up into the Courts of the King' (23). The physical movement from impurity to purity is upwards, form earth to sky.

This salvation rhetoric of 'evil souls' becoming pure by contact with the male 'seed, the fructifier', till they reach the sublime heights of eternity, soon takes on sacramental tones. When the

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[13] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, ed. by Susan Wood (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 55.

[14] Comoletti and Drout, 'How They Do Things With Words'.

slave in the top tower room gives Gelluk the few drops of quicksilver, the wizard croons over the metal, calling it 'the baby lord'. Telling Otter that in True Speech the metal is called Turres, which means 'Semen' (21), Gelluk proceeds to eat the metal, and his ensuing speech is a strange combination of the sacred and the profane:

> Now the King is in my body [...] he enters into my veins and arteries [...] My blood runs silver. I see things unknown to other men [...] And when he leaves me, he hides in the place of ordure, in foulness itself, and yet again in the vile place he waits for me to come and take him up and cleanse him as he cleansed me, so that each time we grow purer together [...] And more than that, more than that, the king enters into my seed. He is my semen. I am Turres and he is me (25).

In this pastiche of sacramental discourse reverberate perverse echoes of the seed of change Tenar felt within her when Kalessin told her its name. In the process Le Guin shows how for the wizard, the name of the metal he thinks all-powerful acts to buttress his own self-importance, in contrast to the transubstantiation undergone by Tenar after learning the dragon's name. Tenar's transformation gave her the capacity to embrace her own multiple identity as Tenar and Arha and Goha, reconciling all the selves within her, while confirming her ability to enable the burnt child, Therru, to see herself as more than just a victim of abuse. Gelluk's talk, hinting at what he thinks of as a bodily transubstantiation, is a travesty of this process. His identification of the metal as 'semen' alludes to the male desire for perpetuation through their (male) children - I am Turres and he is me is an allusion to the distorted desire for immortality that some fathers consider is the main purpose of their sons, as Le Guin mentions in her short story 'The Bones of the Earth' (147-8). The mercury Gelluk eats becomes for him a source of knowledge that cancels out all other sources, all arts and crafts, so that in his totalitarian discourse 'one true element', quicksilver, controls all other elements - since it can destroy them all, including gold – just as the 'one true knowledge' it stands for subsumes all others, so that its consumption makes him the 'one true king' (30).

Through this totalitarian rhetoric with its religious overtones, Le Guin shows how Gelluk structures a hierarchical binary opposition between male and female principles that subsumes other, non-human categories such as earth and sky, light and dark, life and death. It is clear that he associates the female with the earth, since as well as dubbing cinnabar the vile Red Mother, he calls the lode containing the ore 'the true womb', which holds the 'moonseed', mercury. In this way,

presenting the earth as a female body reluctant to 'yield', he makes the denigration of women and nature seem to be biological imperatives rather than linguistically constructed, arbitrary structures. He asks Otter: 'Did you know that the Moon is the Earth's father? Yes, yes; and he lay with her, as is the father's right. He quickened her base clay with the true seed. But she will not give birth to the King. She is strong in her fear and wilful in her vileness. She holds him back and hides him deep, fearing to give birth to her master. That is why, to give him birth, she must be burned alive' (33). He is not only denigrating the earth, but also 'hysterisizing' women's bodies, reducing them to a kind of walking womb.[15] And Otter — who can glimpse his thoughts because the wizard has intruded himself into the boy's mind, forging a connection that works both ways — sees visions of burning bodies in his head, which 'screamed as green wood screams in fire', because the wizard has decided that purified metal must be further purified in a fire made of living human bodies, eliciting 'Purity from foulness: bliss from pain' (31). The analogy underlines the ecocide that human beings are so blithely driven towards by the irresponsible spread of pollution and the destruction of the earth, and Gelluk's linking of the earth with the female foregrounds the historically rooted domination of both women and nature by irresponsible men.

In this story, Le Guin reinvents her earlier representation of wizards as possessing the power to change the nature of a thing through their mastery of True Speech. Here this mastery connects them to the Christian priest's ability to change bread and wine into the body of Christ in the Eucharist, as Comoletti and Drout have pointed out.[16] Gelluk's references to mercury as the 'baby lord' and the transformation he declares is happening to him clearly echo the sacramental language of the Mass. But Gelluk, despite being a powerful wizard, does not know the true name of cinnabar, with the clear implication that his radical estrangement from the earth has alienated him from the true names of ores and metals. Otter knows by his gift that the only word of True Speech used by Gelluk - Turres - does mean semen; but it is not the True Name of quicksilver. The fact that Gelluk knows or at least utters only a single word of True Speech, the word for semen, demonstrates that for him his maleness is a means of control and subjugation, just as the mercury he collects is a means to make him King. The bodily images he invokes of sacramental change and fusion with the metal are all false, since he is ignorant of the metal's true nature as embodied in its name. The wizard's megalomania is an extreme form of the desire for power that stems from male pride in being the bearers of the 'seed' of progeny - radically opposed to what Le Guin terms the female act

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[15] See Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 109-127.

[16] Comoletti and Drout, 'How They Do Things With Words'.

of 'rebearing'. In contrast to the feminised earth, Gelluk constructs hierarchical male relationships to suit himself: he asks Otter to call him Father, telling him that the 'wise child loves his father and obeys him, and the father rewards him as he deserves' (34). The allusion to the male-centred relationships that structure Judeo-Christian religious discourse reveals how organised religion has promoted language that pushes women to the margins, while privileging the discourse of reward and punishment that Le Guin repudiates in each of her apocalyptic visions. But Gelluk's rhetoric cannot conceal from Otter the fact that his words are empty. Clearly, he knows nothing of any 'true power' residing in the earth. And his textual knowledge, which is a source of power since it enables him to read the books of magic that are written in the True Speech — another connection to esoteric priestly knowledge in Judeo-Christian discourse — is corrupt, since he interprets and reinterprets the lore of the Book of Way to suit his own delusions of grandeur.

It is Anieb, the half-naked female slave in the top room whom Otter takes at first for a young boy, who reveals to him the true name of the metal she works. Speaking through Otter so that 'his lips parted, his tongue moved' to utter her words, she helps him to speak the word for mercury, 'Ayezur'. This incident recalls the one in *Tehanu* where Kalessin's name formed itself in Tenar's mouth; and this echo in 'The Finder' helps to link the ore with dragons. As the narrator puts it, 'Mining and refining were indeed great crafts with their own mysteries and masteries', and it is easy to see the link between the mystery of the power of the earth and the mysterious beings that live in the West. Although Anieb has been degendered, her breasts empty, her body emaciated, yet she knows the true name of the element she works with, for she is connected to the earth in a way that Gelluk can never be. Anieb's power was born with her. Her mother and aunt, to whom Otter later delivers Anieb's dead body, tell him that she had the gift as a child, and that 'She knew the old powers [...] the powers of the earth' (44). That is why she is able to tell Otter the true name of quicksilver; while Gelluk, who does not know it, is manipulated by Anieb (through Otter) to say his own name and thus plunge to his death within the earth he so despised. As Otter takes Anieb away from the Tower after Gelluk's death, the spittle falling from her sore lips onto her chin and breasts remind the boy of the gushing spring that burst out of the ground that Gelluk had ruptured in order to enter the 'womb' of the earth. The association in Otter's mind signals the slave girl's intrinsic connection with the earth, and with water, the source of all life — a connection that gains resonance in the third section of the story.

6.3. The impurity of Roke

Since the readers have become familiar with Roke School in the First Trilogy, the story of its foundation comes as a surprise, as it overturns all the notions about it they have so far taken for granted. The school's foundation is based on a totally different value-system from the one we encountered in the First Trilogy, thus confirming that the power structures operative at Roke are contingent and temporary, not timeless and immutable. The contrast between Roke 'then and now' vividly demonstrates how social systems and relations, by appearing to be constant, can become invisible and therefore unchallengeable.

When Otter finally comes to Roke — seven years after having restored Anieb's dead body to her family — he flies there in the form of a tern, landing on the round green hill he first dreamed of in his prison cell at Samory, on the night when Anieb came to him as a visitation. This hill is Roke Knoll, and Otter soon discovers that the hill and the Grove are the foundations and centres of all power in Earthsea. On Roke, Otter finds a community at peace: no one in need of food and shelter, all living frugally but contentedly. Yet it soon becomes clear that this seeming utopia is just that - a 'no place'. Otter is told the history of Roke by the two sisters Veil and Ember, who seem to be the decision-makers at Roke. The organisation known as Women of the Hand — 'though there were men among us', as Ember points out — had gathered on Roke a century before Losen's time, to form a secret 'league of mages' (61) which hoped to become strong enough to revolt against the oppressive regime of rich landowners and the powerful wizards in their pay. Women had been leaders in this league, and travelled in disguise around the Ninety Isles, 'weaving a wide, fine net of resistance' which still leaves traces, 'strands and knots', such as the wise women who were Anieb's mother and aunt.[17] Ember explains to Otter how the league of mages at Roke was betrayed by one of their own number, who let down the island's powerful spells of defence and allowed the lords of Wathort to enter the island. The invaders plundered and pillaged, killing children and the old and taking young men and women into slavery. As a consequence of this betrayal, these people, now mostly women, had sequestered themselves from the rest of Earthsea, building even more powerful spells to secure the island, which was also protected from invasion by seas and storms. Ironically, however, as Ember confesses, their security was also their prison. They could not leave the island, or allow anyone else to enter it.

The way to protect their knowledge and power chosen by the women of Roke is not the way Le Guin endorses. At Roke, women are afraid of men, and this lack of trust produces separatist

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[17] Le Guin, 'TF', p. 61.

attitudes embedded in the fear of the other. Veil tells Otter that on Roke they did not trust men; a man betrayed them, men attacked them, and as a result 'We do not deal with their governments' (60). But this lack of trust makes Roke a dead end, which exerts no influence on the rest of Earthsea. Otter's passionate outburst when he first hears about the secret organisation at Anieb's home becomes extremely relevant in this context: 'Will the slaves go free?' he asks, 'Will beggars eat? Will justice be done?' and the answer to these questions must be negative, as long as Roke maintains its isolationist policy. At the same time, Otter is conscious that the mutual trust between him and Anieb had been capable of destroying even a wizard as powerful as Gelluk. Their victory illustrates Le Guin's belief in the power of resistance even at the margins, when it occurs in unexpected spaces ignored by the dominant groups. Anieb's understanding of the Old Powers allowed her and Otter to trick Gelluk where they could not subjugate him by force. Crucially, however, neither could have performed this act individually; it was their mutual effort, symbolically a dialectical fusion of yin and yang, that made it possible for them to defeat the apparently invincible wizard. Remembering this, Otter questions the compartmentalisation that the women at Roke consider a means of safety. For Le Guin, this is not an answer. Integration and wholeness is achieved by sharing the common bonds of earthly existence, even if that involves huge risks and means a lowering of defences, dismantling the borders of utopia. Le Guin insists that the 'no-place' has to become a part of the world to become 'eu-topia', the place of good living.

The cosmos, in other words, is a complex web of connections with everything held in delicate balance; and this in turn revokes the concept of 'purity' that has formed part of the masculine rhetoric of mages since before the foundations of Roke School were laid. In 'The Finder' Ember tells Otter how some of the men — 'And they *are* men' (81) — want to separate themselves from women and remain celibate, so they can be 'pure'. These men, Ember says, 'put men where we put the world' — the androcentric formation automatically repealing belief in the ultimate unity of all true power, and the egalitarian conditions of existence that this implies. For these men, she points out, 'Old Powers are abominable' and women are linked with the Old Powers (81). The narrator has already told us of warring wizards whose reckless use of magic 'in duels and combats of sorcery' (3) resulted in famines and droughts. The wizards ascribed these effects to female witchery, and so brought women's magic into disrepute. The Roke School was set up by Otter and Ember to gather like-minded people who could be trained to form an alliance against the powerful; but the institution quickly breaks down into gender factions.

In the First Trilogy, as we saw, the celibacy of wizards was an accepted, 'invisible' assumption, but in *Tehanu* Le Guin questioned the motives behind that celibacy, and made clear that witches do not share it. 'The Finder' demonstrates that celibacy for wizards is already a question, though not an established rule, in Otter's time, even before the Roke School was founded. Significantly, Otter suppresses his feelings of attraction towards Ember because he has been told by his master Highdrake that 'to make love is to unmake power' (64). When Otter asks her if making love depletes power, she tells him that all powers at root are one. The concepts of purity or purification, as upheld by Gellek, are exposed in all their absurdity by her insistence that power – and Le Guin includes cosmic forces, chemical elements, human consciousness, language and sexuality under the umbrella term 'power' — is one at source.

6.4. Revelations

Since (as we have seen) the biblical Book of Revelation is a foundational text of Western utopias, images and symbols from the book can become powerful tools of Le Guin's iconoclastic endeavour to defamiliarise embedded presuppositions in ways that allow for different perspectives. In 'The Finder' Biblical imagery is deliberately inverted, as Ember's sister Veil declares that the strength of Roke should be hidden and hoarded as a 'young dragon hoards up its fire'. After all, she adds, 'one day the dragon will come into its strength. If it takes a thousand years . . .' (67, 68). The allusion to the biblical dragon (Satan) who is chained for a thousand years can hardly be missed:

> And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed for a season' (Apoc. 20: 1-3)

In the course of the thousand years of Satan's imprisonment, the 'souls' of people who sacrificed themselves for the word of God will have 'lived and reigned with Christ' (Apoc. 20: 4). But the identification of Veil's dragon with Satan points up a problem with this attitude, since Satan's segregation from the world – the hoarding up of his powers, so to speak – works to very different ends than the ones Roke should serve. Otter answers Veil by saying that outside Roke 'there are common people who slave and starve and die in misery. Must they do so for a thousand years with

no hope?' (68). Le Guin here questions Christian millennialism once again by drawing attention to the implicit binarism involved in the millenarian perspective, which divides the world into insiders and outsiders, the saved and the damned. Her concern is with all marginal peoples, not merely those who place their trust in the promises of biblical eschatology. And Otter's question is pertinent for utopian/millennial discourse in general when he asks Veil: 'if all but us are slaves, what's our freedom worth?' (68). The people 'outside' the island suffer and wait, and while this lasts, Le Guin questions how any people can be happy in security when this is gained at the cost of a xenophobic segregation that gives no thought to anyone beyond the home community. Through her ironic inversions of biblical imagery, she encourages readers to rethink the category of the outsider in its etiological and ontological contexts.

In this story Le Guin undermines the designations of good and evil in the 'authorised' version of western history, uncovering the androcentric subtext of the narrative of Revelation. in doing so, she problematises the dualistic gender discourse of biblical interpretations. Dragon and women have been symbolically associated in *Tehanu*. And despite the ontological oneness of dragons and human as told in the myth of the woman of Kemay, all hybrid dragon-humans in Earthsea are women. Thus Le Guin is able to interrogate the monster/dragon/woman paradigm of Revelation that inheres in the presentation of both dragon and Whore as monsters. Le Guin re-presents the dragon as victim rather than victimiser, friend rather than fiend. Each instance of an ideological struggle is a specific articulation which is concrete and contingent, while universalising tendencies 'veil' the struggle as a battle between good and evil – hence the resonance of Veil's name. By infusing archetypal symbols with radically new connotations, Le Guin draws attention to the plural nature of historical discourse, pointing out the fact that there are always 'other' versions of his-story that need to be considered. Labels encourage stereotyping which forms webs of connotations that become fixed as the only forms of truth. As the biblical scholar Austin Farrer claims in his study of John's Apocalypse, images and symbols are not discrete components that can be accepted or rejected individually; rather, they 'form a 'complex web of interrelated significances'[18] that buttress and support each node and connection in the web, so that traditional myths of a culture, with all the associative images and symbols they carry, become an intrinsic part of that culture's consciousness.

In this context, Le Guin's consistent association of women and dragons is a startling image-association, at first, since dragons have been traditionally monsters and hoarders - but as Le Guin says, these are dragons of a new world. The solution offered by the author to the problem of

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[18] Austin Farrer, *A Re-birth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse*, p. 14.

resisting an oppressive regime is especially courageous. Le Guin rejects not only separatism, but also the concept of utopia as 'no-place', a segregated area. Security at the cost of ghettoising a certain group - in this case the women of Roke - is useless, creating boundaries that imprison the ones it claims to protect. Underlying Le Guin's interrogation of such exclusive, select groups is a critique of the paradigmatic 'chosen' people in the biblical Apocalypse, the 144,000 of the 'saved'. Le Guin puts in doubt the validity of a 'new heaven and new earth' that exclude so many others, identified in Revelation as 'the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood' (Apoc. 22:15). Le Guin's fantasy, however, celebrates the *diversity* of life on earth, which contains intrinsic links forming patterns and configurations that sustain the balance of the universe. Pertinently, the 'chosen' in the biblical text are described as those who are 'not defiled with women; for they are virgins' (Apoc. 14: 4). The androcentric, paradigmatic purity legitimised by Scripture is here imputed only to men, who have kept themselves from defilement by keeping away from the opposite sex; the obvious implication is that the chosen are only men, and that this phallocentric discourse provides the impetus behind the celibacy practised by Christian priests.

The answer for Le Guin does not lie in setting up oppositional structures. Veil insists that the Roke community is safe only so long as they are a group of women, as men only consider other men to be important - a group of women would not bother men. But grouping based on gender produces an internalised spiritual anomie, with nothing for 'the young dragon [to] feed on' (68). The implications of the name Veil have already been mentioned, but it is also significant in an apocalyptic context, since apocalypse means 'unveiling', though in a paradoxical sense, as Tina Pippin observes: '"Apocalypse" is the re-veiling of women - the silencing and marginalizing of women. It is also the revealing of women in that it constructs their sexual natures in good or evil terms [...] And this apocalypse of women is the destruction of women as women, through rape or pornography or stereotyping'.[19] The wall of spells protecting Roke prevent any unveiling, any interchange of ideas with the outside world, as happened with the utopian anarchic society in Le Guin's great novel *The Dispossessed* (1974). And the consequence of this 'hoarding' is degeneration. In 'The Finder', Veil is the one who keeps pointing out the dangers involved in any lowering of their guard, any concession to the possibility of being 'dis-covered'. She insists on keeping their stronghold at Roke - consolidating a segregated group - because 'This is the center

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[19] Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, KY.: John Knox Press, 1992), p. 47.

[...] We must keep to the center' (68), refusing to 'reveal' their knowledge for fear of the other. Le Guin, however, interrogates the very concept of the centre, pointing out the dangers inherent in centring any one place, culture, people or species and pronouncing all others peripheral; and she reinforces this interrogation by explaining the origins of Roke island, where the school is based.

Ember tells Otter that Roke was the second land, after Éa, that Segoy raised from the sea. The green hill that embodies its power, Roke Knoll, is 'founded deeper than all islands'; and the Immanent Grove, made up of the 'oldest trees in the world' whose roots are the roots of all knowledge', was the 'source and center of magic' (59). But this is no conventional centre as this would be understood in human geometry. The two most important aspects of the Grove are that it never remains in one place on the island, and that no one knows its extent. When Otter asks Ember how far the forest goes, she says, 'As far as the mind goes' (62). These two aspects of Earthsea's 'centre' demonstrate Le Guin's rejection of Eurocentric paradigms that posit a single centre - 'the White West' - and all else as the marginalised other. Instead she posits a multiplicity of centres, from which all peoples can make their own negotiations and define their own relationships with each other and the universe. This conception is very similar to Lewis's vision of the universe as the Great Dance in *Perelandra* ((1943), where Ransom sees a vision of 'intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light',[20] and each cord seems to become the centre of a design as he looks at it. In a similar vein, Le Guin states, 'The center of the world is a bluff on the Klamath River, a rock in Mecca, a hole in the ground in Greece, nowhere, its circumference everywhere' (*Dancing*, 98). The conversation between communities and cultures, then, should be heteroglossic, involving a plurality of voices and value-systems measuring themselves against each other rather than always being focused on a single dominant authority. The Grove is *axiologically* central, but no particular part of Earthsea, including Roke, can claim to be the site whose value systems the rest of the world should consider as normative.

However, the tacit acknowledgement in 'The Finder' that while a fundamental asymmetry exists at the very centre(s) of knowledge emancipatory hope might be uncertain, indicates that Le Guin's vision of a harmonious integrated society is not based on simplistic attitudes. A stable but diverse and open community is hard to maintain. Once other people are brought to Roke from islands near and far, dissent and discontent follow. The first point of contention, interestingly, concerns the segregation of men and women. Ember tells Otter that the men and the women could not agree on the 'Way', with some men even insisting that the word 'Rule' should be used instead

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[20] C. S. Lewis, Perelandra (London: HarperCollins, 1943), p. 277.

of 'Way' (and 'Rule' again has Christian overtones, invoking the governing principles of religious foundations such as the Rule of St Benedict). Since readers are already familiar with the term 'rule of Roke' from the previous books, it is clear who eventually wins this dispute. The Way, on the other hand, is associated with the Tao, which devotes many chapters to defining it, for example as 'the mother of all things'.[21] 'How the Way does things', the Tao explains in Le Guin's translation, 'is hard to grasp, elusive [...] obscure/ yet there is spirit in it [...] There is certainty in it'.[22] In a note on her translation, Le Guin explains the 'something' that underlies this concept ('Not knowing its real name,/ we only call it the Way') as an 'unshaped, undifferentiated lump, chaos, before the Word, before Form, before Change'.[23] The echo of Le Guin's description of the Shadow in the first book of Earthsea is unmistakable here ('a shapeless clot of shadow', *WE*, 30). Clearly, the implication is that from the Way emerge the fundamental polarities essential for life.

The Shadow is one of the Old Powers of the earth that crop up throughout the first trilogy, and in *Tales* and *The Other Wind* Le Guin extends and modifies her earlier presentation of dark powers as mostly evil. Even though they are not presented as unambiguously evil in the first trilogy - Ged embraces his Shadow to become whole - the Stone at Terrenon is evil; and Ged tells Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan* that the Nameless Powers 'hate the [...] brief light of our mortality' (*TA*, 265). But in 'The Finder' the Old Powers are closer to Suvin's comments on the Creation Song of Éa, that darkness and silence are presented it it as 'parental, engendering, or motherly'.[24] This change is the subject of the next section.

6.5. Old Powers Renewed

In true Le Guinian style, the narrator in 'The Finder' presents a second version of the story of the foundation of Roke School to rival the tale of Otter and Ember; a version that unveils the beginnings of the association between women and the Old Powers of the earth, even as it seeks to denigrate it. In this alternative story, 'They say that Roke used to be ruled by a woman called the Dark Woman, who was in league with the Old Powers of the earth. They say she lived in a cave under Roke Knoll, never coming into the daylight, but weaving vast spells over land and sea that

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[21] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching: A Book about The Way and the Power of The Way* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1998), chapter 25, p. 34. Hereafter cited as *Tao*.

[22] Le Guin, *Tao*, chapter 21, p. 30.

[23] Le Guin, *Tao*, chapter 25, p. 34.

[24] Suvin, 'On U. K. Le Guin's "Second Earthsea Trilogy" and its Cognitions', p. 490.

compelled men to her evil will' (70). The narrator points out that the Old Powers were revered in the time of Medra (Otter's true name) and Elehal (Ember's true name), but that 'That changed with the years' (70). Both versions of Roke's founding, however, can be challenged, and the narrator points this up at the beginning of the story, where she announces it as 'a tale of the Founding of Roke' – by implication, one of many – and challenges its detractors to tell a better one: 'if the masters of Roke say it didn't happen so, let them tell us how it happened otherwise. For a cloud hangs over the time when Roke first became the Isle of the Wise, and it may be that the wise men put it there' (5). While the narrator remains anonymous, her attitude towards the Masters and their occlusion of women from Roke's past suggests that she is a woman; and it also situates her at a time when Roke has become a male preserve. The narrator's use of 'us' implicates the reader in the narrative constructing the history of Roke School, allowing us both to make a choice between the two versions of the story and to choose our own reading of each version. The very fact that 'we' – all of us – are invited to judge the origins of Roke urges the reader to side with those who wish their ideal societies to be inclusive.

The process described by the narrator of the changing role of the Old Powers, from being revered to being associated with an evil Dark Woman, finds many parallels in history. Genevieve Lloyd tells us that at the onset of philosophical thought in Greece, 'femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason left behind - the dark powers of the earth goddess, immersion in unknown forces associated with mysterious female powers'.[25] In other words, Reason was gendered male and associated with daylight, while the irrational or mysterious was gendered female and connected with darkness and earth. In a similar vein, echoes of the biblical Revelation[26] in 'The Finder' function effectively to draw attention to the discrepancy between the discourses of the dominant and the disempowered. There is no rigid system of correspondences with biblical symbolism in the story, but Le Guin's narrative draws on some biblical archetypes that have seeped into western consciousness as representations of good and evil - dragon, scarlet woman, the 'chosen' group, the perfect city - to jar the readers' minds out of embedded normative suppositions created by such 'authorised' associations. The story of the Dark Woman in her cave, for instance, echoes the embodiment of women as evil in religious discourse, most vividly embodied in the 'Whore' of Babylon, and is clearly a later intervention by patriarchal hegemony designed to justify

[25] Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993 [1984]), p. 2.

[26] The Book of Revelation contains many elements from the Old Testament apocalyptic texts, specially Daniel and Isaiah.

the exclusion of women from the Roke School. Can other symbols and signs be thus ideologically motivated? That is the implicit query in the text. According to Fredric Jameson, 'master narratives' - by which he means allegorical and typological readings of texts that encode their meanings in terms of the hegemonic discourse of a particular historic period - 'have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them'.[27] The fabricated story of the Dark Woman is a demonstration of how elements of factual happenings are twisted and deformed to suit the controlling authority.

The narrator in 'The Finder' points out that a mage *did* open and enter a cave, as the Masters claim, but that the mage was Medra (Otter), and the cave was not at Roke Knoll: she tells us the details in her account of how Otter and Anieb defeated Gelluk. The mutation of the event exemplifies how hegemonic (mis)appropriations work. The narrative voice points out the deployment of different sources - 'authorised' versions like the *Book of the Dark*, with marginal notes and oral tales - to make the 'airy quilt' of the story; and draws attention to the discrepancies and conflicting accounts of events within these sources.[28] The interwoven biblical images and motifs operate to point out how similar processes have been at work in our world to crystallise assumptions that reinforce the version of events preferred by the status quo. By implication, readers are invited to reinterpret foundational cultural texts that have acquired the status of unquestionable conduits of the 'Truth'.

In 'The Finder', however, Le Guin does not simply deny the symbolic link between women, darkness and the earth that has been exploited by misogynistic tradition; instead she seeks to tease out its implications. In doing so she exposes how the devalued and excluded entities in this symbolic cluster are necessary to maintain the world's balance. After Gelluk's death, his place is assumed by an equally deadly and malevolent wizard called Early, who chases Medra/Otter from his home on Havnor (Medra in the form of an otter, Early as an eagle) in an attempt to erase him from the earth and effectively expunge his name from history, blotting out all memory of Gelluk's death. In the course of his flight from Early, Medra finds himself in a stream on the same hillside where he and Anieb had tricked Gelluk into falling into a crevice he himself had opened. Medra remembers the incident, and although his hands are powerless (he has used up all his strength to put

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[27] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 19.

[28] Biblical scholars have pointed out that the Bible itself is a collection of generically, historically, and aesthetically heterogeneous material, originally preserved as individual scrolls, including 'history, prophecy, law, devotional verse, proverbs and even love poetry and fiction' in the OT, and 'letters from named individuals' in the NT. See David Jasper and Stephen Prickett eds., *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 3. See also C. S. Lewis, 'The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version' in *They Asked For A Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), pp. 26-50.

a binding spell on his pursuer), he bends to the earth and implores it: 'Mother, open to me' (93). The earth opens up at once and he jumps in, and as he does so he notices that it is not the grand red palace with silver runes of Gelluk's imagination: 'It was […] only dirt, rock, water' (96). That no words of True Speech are needed for this act of magic, and that the earth is not as Gelluk imagined it, separates the incident from the discourse of patriarchal power and identifies a rival, maternal power at work in Earthsea.

This maternal power stands at the centre of 'The Finder' and 'The Bones of the Earth'. In *Tehanu*, Moss told Tenar that a woman's power 'goes down deep. It's all roots. Its like an old blackberry thicket', while a man's is 'like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it'll blow right down in a storm' (572). Tenar remains sceptical, rejecting the essentialist tendency in the old woman's words. She thinks that linking women with the earth, roots and darkness, and men with the sky, heights and light, has helped to establish hierarchies, denigrating both women and the earth as belonging to the 'lower' rungs on the scale of cultural values. But Le Guin's narrator in 'The Finder' seems more willing to see the association as a form of empowerment. Hidden underground, lamed and half-dead, Medra calls on Anieb to guide him even though he knows she is dead. 'He saw darkness,' the narrator tells us, 'heard silence' (96), and the oxymora identify darkness and silence as real presences, as in the Creation Song of Éa ('Only in silence the word / Only in darkness, light'). Since Anieb's death Medra often dreams of her, feeling her presence so vividly at times that he fears 'she might summon him' to the Land of the Dead (84). This is because their collaborative effort to destroy Gelluk imparted to Anieb and Medra a double-vision of the kind we learned about in *Tehanu*: Medra 'saw through her eyes' (33) how to free himself from the tangle of spells that bound him, how to allow her voice to speak through him. Anieb again helps Medra as he flees from Early, guiding him out of the underground cavern to safety. The parallel between Arha/ Tenar leading Ged out of the labyrinth in *The Tombs of Atuan* and Anieb guiding Medra out of the subterranean tunnels identifies the link between women and earth as a sign of power rather than of weakness; and this potency is further reinforced by the clear echoes here of the myths of Ariadne and Persephone. Women, it is implied, have retained ways of knowing rejected and undervalued by men, and this knowledge remains embedded in certain myths. The recognition that knowledge cannot be limited or restrained - how far does the forest go? As far as the mind goes - if we embrace the unconscious as well as the conscious, imagination as well as reason, becomes apparent in this analogous and mutually sustainable relationship between humans and nature.

In the context of the comparison between men's and women's ways of knowing, the interrogation of the knowledge of True Speech that Le Guin begins in *Tehanu* is expanded in the *Tales* to include the *use* of True Speech, and to the scrutiny of how True Names function in identity formation. At Roke, Medra joins the eight Masters, asking to be called the Doorkeeper. He explains that before letting anyone in he would ask them their name, and that at the end of their studies he would let them go if they told him his. This undermines the concept of the secrecy of names held so dear by the wizards; as we saw in the first book, Ged was reluctant to tell his name to the then Doorkeeper. Instead it implies that names are for sharing, and that communities cannot be constructed around the obsessive protection of privacy and individualism. In stark contrast to Ged, and indeed all people of the Ninety Isles, Tenar bears her true name openly.

Elsewhere, Le Guin suggests that a name does not wholly inscribe a person, who is always more than a name. There is a hint of this in Ogion's remarks about Ged, when he says to Tenar that before Ged had his name or knowledge or power 'the hawk was in him, and the man, and the mage, and more - he was what we cannot name. And so are we all'.[29] This is analogous to the 'room for power', or 'emptiness' (*Tehanu*, 660) that Tenar proposes is present in some people, and that signals something more than their name can express. In Taoist terms, this is the empty hub that allows the wheel to function, or the empty space that allows the pot to hold things.[30] In drawing attention to it, Le Guin undermines the supremacy of the circumscribed and coded discourse of True Speech. In the second trilogy, she privileges the words of ordinary speech – Hardic or Kargish – which *are* creative, but not limited to single meanings.

By suggesting that there is some space in every human being which a name does not inscribe, Le Guin does not lessen the importance of the name, but enlarges human potential, as well as the potential of each word to have more than one meaning. In the First Trilogy, what was held to be a universal principle, the fear of being overpowered by someone else's knowledge of your true name, worked only in one instance, that of Yevaud. Orm Embar and Kalessin do not hide their names; and nobody's name is secret in the Land of the Dead. Yevaud is one of the few dragons who, despite being free, chooses ownership: and fear comes with ownership, Le Guin suggests.

In another short story, 'Dragonfly', the girl whose use-name is Dragonfly asks the witch in her village to name her. When the witch whispers her True Name, Irian, the girl is furious, for Irian is the name of her abusive father. As she grows up she realises that there is something different in

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[29] *Tehanu*, p. 551.

[30] *Tao*, chapter 11, p. 14; also chapter 37, p. 48.

her, and after trying to get into Roke School to study, where she is met with fierce resistance, she finally goes to Roke Knoll and transforms into a dragon, Orm Irian. The point is that in this case, her use-name seems to be better suited to her than her 'true' one. As she tells the wizards, 'I am not only Irian', reinforcing Ogion's insight that everyone is more than what they are called.

In this context, the function that Medra chooses for himself, that of doorkeeper, reminds us of the last line of the second verse of the Creation of Éa, which refers to 'the eldest, the Doorkeeper, Segoy'. The liminal space signified by the doorway is an example of the space of indeterminacy; and the imagined creator of Earthsea is evidently not a monolithic, authoritarian deity, but Janus-faced, double-visioned, like a dragon. It is significant that Medra, a passionate champion of freedom, is the first Doorkeeper, a title that becomes important as Le Guin re-examines the creation myth of Earthsea in *The Other Wind*.

CHAPTER SEVEN. THE OTHER APOCALYPSE IN *THE OTHER WIND*

The Other Wind is a book about death. If, as I have argued, Le Guin's Earthsea series is made up of two distinct trilogies, the second of which rewrites the first, *The Other Wind* helps to point up the structural and thematic parallels between the two trilogies, both of which end in a vision of apocalyptic eschatology for Earthsea, a calamitous confrontation with the concept of humankind's mortality. *The Other Wind* concludes and completes the second trilogy just as *The Farthest Shore* completes the first; but it radically overturns the premise of the earlier novel.

In *The Other Wind*, the border between the two worlds which had been ruptured by the wizard Cob is breached for a second time, and the opening that Ged gave up his power to close needs to be reopened. However, there is a radical difference between these two openings or breaches. The second opening is not intended to enable a single living man to avoid his end; this time, the dead themselves want the border between the worlds to be finally demolished. Clearly, a new way of seeing the world is struggling to assert itself. Here Le Guin, who has been preparing to renew her imaginary land of Earthsea since she wrote *Tehanu*, enlists all the species in her imaginary world – human, dragon, animal, even trees – in a concerted act of renewal. The clear implication is that Revelation - the unveiling of the radically new that lies hidden behind ossified systems of thought and language - requires a demolition of hierarchies and categories, a recognition that rigid binaries need to be dismantled in order for the new to emerge. Le Guin appropriates the unique design of biblical history as a discourse that allows for radical innovation, implicitly adopting as the keystone of her philosophy the famous phrase from Revelation 21:5, 'Behold, I make all things new', as against the Greco-Roman cyclical understanding of history. While her apocalyptic eschatology in *The Other Wind* topples the ideological systems of Earthsea, she manages to incorporate the old ethical and aesthetic structure of her world into her new vision to create a subtle and satisfying narrative structure.

The *apocalypsis* - an unveiling or uncovering - in *The Other Wind* involves the discovery of the latent, unconscious energies both in the scriptural apocalyptic texts and in Le Guin's own earlier Earthsea stories. As Le Guin herself has pointed out, [1] *The Farthest Shore* too is concerned with death; but the terrible vision it presents of the land of the dead seems to be horribly out of alignment with the celebration of life and death as inextricably intertwined that underpins her Taoist

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[1] Le Guin, 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves'(1973) in *The Language of the Night*, p. 55.

philosophy as manifest in Earthsea. Similarly, the radical re-visioning in *Tehanu*, which recuperates the silenced female voices of this imaginary world, still leaves its wider socio-political systems largely unchanged. In *Tehanu*, Le Guin transforms a long-established archetype - the dragon as 'monster' - represented in foundational Western texts such as *Beowulf*, the legends of King Arthur, numerous folk and fairy-tales, and her own earlier stories – and substitutes for it the myth of the dragon as creator. In it Kalessin is revealed as Segoy, creator of Earthsea - a radical destabilising of the anthropomorphic image that underpins scriptural representations of God.[2] Yet the dragon's role as *deux ex machina* in *Tehanu* re-establishes the saviour-as-God motif that is such a central aspect of the biblical narrative.

In *The Other Wind*, the relentless drive towards change that starts in *Tehanu* takes on a new energy because there is no longer any single figure who represents power in the narrative. Ged, the Christ-substitute who saved the world in *The Farthest Shore*, plays no part in the cosmic shifts that are occurring. And though Kalessin comes in at the end, it comes not as a saviour but as a border-crossing Trickster god, an airborne Coyote. The apocalypse, or revelation, is rooted in this novel in a bunch of trees, the Immanent Grove; and the name of this wood signals the mode of this particular apocalypse as immanent (this worldly) rather than transcendent (otherworldly). The human or quasi-human leaders of the revolution are ordinary, unimportant people: a sorcerer, a dead witch and a disfigured rape victim. It is through the de-centring of Earthsea, so to speak – the unsettling of our assumptions about it that the prominence of these unexpected elements brings about – that the apocalypse is exposed as an unveiling of the new hidden beneath the sedimentary layers of the contemptibly familiar and the oppressively entrenched.

The hierarchical binaries that Le Guin seeks to demolish in this novel are created by and embedded in linguistic structures. Le Guin calls this the 'father tongue'. Speaking at Bryn Mawr in 1986, a few years before writing *Tehanu*, Le Guin described the 'father tongue' as the 'language of power', the 'forked tongue' that creates hierarchical binaries which establish a subject/object dichotomy, 'exposing and exploiting the object but disguising and defending the subject'.[3] This division subsumes subsequent re-divisions into its structure, so that certain fundamental terms are privileged over others: man over woman, self over other, mind over body, life over death, human over animal, consciousness over the unconscious, and so on. The monologic discourse of the 'father

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[2] *Tehanu*, p. 688.

[3] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address' (1986) in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, pp. 149-151

tongue' is contrasted with the dialogic 'mother-tongue', which makes connections and creates networks of communication, involving in its exchanges the 'whole intellect' - by which Le Guin means both reason and imagination. *Tehanu* represents her first effort to write in something akin to this mother tongue, exemplified especially in the conversations between Tenar and Moss, and the discussions near the end of the novel between Ged and Tenar. In these conversations, Le Guin explores the difference between male and female power and language from the different subject-positions of an old witch, a man who has lost his power but discovered love, and the multiple perspective that Arha/Goha/Tenar provides through the diversity of her experiences.

Yet apart from these few characters, the dominant language remains the forked father tongue, as spoken by the wizardly men of Roke; the Roke wizard Onyx, for example, whose every utterance is impaled on a binary fission that enunciates a certain term while its opposite seethes in silence underneath. The most striking example is his interpretation of the prophecy 'A Woman on Gont', which for him cannot imply anything but a woman who will *guide* the Wise to the man who is to be the next Archmage. *The Other Wind*, by contrast, is thematically, structurally and formally expressed in the mother-tongue throughout. The repetitive structures: for example the myth of the separation of the human and dragon species, which is told many times and from multiple perspectives; the dialogic themes; and the complex, beautifully orchestrated plot which shows human and non-human life as intertwined, are all examples of the mother-tongue deployed as narrative. Also, Le Guin repeatedly deconstructs asymmetrical divisions as she foregrounds not only other forms of knowledge than the ones privileged by the patriarchal order, but other *ways* of knowing, which emerge from the mother tongue. In this novel, the disempowered in each binary division, the dark underside of each hierarchy that seethed beneath privileged discourse in the earlier novels, finds a collective voice.

One of the asymmetrical divisions that has become a particularly potent tool in the oppression and denigration of women and nature (and as we have seen, the two are often conflated) is that of body and soul. The reification of concepts like 'soul' and 'spirit', with the concomitant denigration of the body, which is predominantly sponsored by institutionalised religious discourse, has led to an unfortunate alienation of men and women from their complete selves, which is also the result of grounding hope in a hypostasised 'eternal' existence of the soul in another realm. One of the most terrible consequences of this notion is the careless and irresponsible attitude it encourages towards what for Le Guin is the only realm of human existence - the earth and all that is in it - as hope for a better future is transferred to another existence.

In order to subvert such conceptual paradigms, in *The Other Wind* Le Guin initiates conversations - a word whose root means 'turning together'[4] - between the fissured dichotomies familiar to her readers so as to reveal that the universe exists as a continuum of interacting polarities rather than as rigid bifurcations. These conversations - for example between the living Alder and his dead wife Lily, or between dragons and the mages of Roke - are made possible by the potential disintegration of all established systems, a danger that confronts Earthsea at this juncture in its history. Several signs point towards this disintegration. One sign is the dreams that the sorcerer Alder is having, in which the souls of the dead clamour to get out of the land to which they have been confined. Another is that the dragons, after many years of peace, have begun to attack human communities. Events unfold in such a way that Roke wizards, witches and sorcerers, a Pelnish wizard, the king and his councillors, Tenar and Tehanu, the Kargish people, dragons, and animals, all need to intervene if Earthsea is to be saved. This allows Le Guin to launch a series of dialogues between the seemingly incompatible metaphysical oppositions, created through language, that have formed the infrastructure of Earthsea society: the conscious and the unconscious, human beings and the non-human, and the living and the dead.

The Immanent Grove at Roke is at the epicentre of this dialogue. As Le Guin showed us in 'The Finder', the forest and the human mind are parallel structures; when Medra asked Ember how far the forest goes, the answer was 'as far as the mind goes'. Moreover, the roots of trees are the 'roots of all knowledge'. The paths in the forest are always different, and the extent of it is indeterminable, because, as Ged tells Tenar, all the forests in Earthsea are in some sense part of the Grove. All this indicates Le Guin's growing consciousness of the interconnectedness of the human and non-human elements in the cosmos. At the turn of the millennium, in 2001, as she reconfigures the conception of death in her created world, Le Guin's Earthsea narrative becomes more overtly conscious of the ecocritical[5] and ecofeminist[6] movements that had gained momentum in the last

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[4] Le Guin, 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address', p. 149.

[5] Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis. See Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 2005).

[6] Ecofeminism is 'a movement which resists both the domination of nature by humanity and the domination of women by men, exploring the connection between the two processes'. 'Glossary', *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. by Laurence Coupe (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 302.

decades of the twentieth century.[7] Within these traditions the semantic and structural parallels between the human mind and the forest are illuminating in several ways. The roots of trees delve deep into the earth, embracing dirt and darkness; at the same time, they grow towards light, and their leaves form patterns in an interplay of light and shadow. This is a beautiful symbolic representation of the human psyche, which has its dark aspects - as symbolised in Ged's Shadow - as well as its correlation with light as a life-sustaining force and as a symbol of knowledge. Since the trees of the Grove are described by the author as 'the oldest living children of the earth',[8] human beings can learn from and be guided by their wisdom - in other words, Le Guin suggests that the anthropocentric view of Man as the highest intelligent form needs to be reconsidered. At the same time, through this representation of the analogous and mutually sustaining relationship between humans and nature Le Guin shows us the illimitable capacity for knowledge of which the human mind is capable if we embrace the unconscious as well as the conscious, imagination as well as reason as valid epistemic categories. For Le Guin this capacity can be activated by using the dialogic, repetitive, powerless 'mother-tongue', in which the rigid subject-object boundaries are wittily and inexorably broken down.

7.1. Walls, Veils, Doorways and Dreams

As we have seen, the prophet of change in Earthsea is a socially marginal figure: the sorcerer Alder, whose humble origins might remind us of the humble beginnings of many biblical prophets, most notably John of Patmos, whose vision of the end of the world came to him despite his low social status as a fisherman's son. In Earthsea, too, the prophets we have encountered so far have always eschewed the limelight, turning to powerless people for guidance and instruction. Ogion, for instance, who first prophesied change in Earthsea, was famous for having refused to take part in the institutionalised power system at Roke. Instead, as we learned in 'Bones of the Earth', he left Roke to choose his own teacher, Heleth of Gont. Heleth, too, had had unconventional training: he was taught by a woman, Ard, who initiated him into the secrets of the earth, thus enabling him to stop the great earthquake with Ogion's help. Thus, before *The Other Wind* Le Guin has linked the unsettling talent of prophecy with an unorthodox and non-conformist background.

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[7] By general consensus, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) heralds the advent of modern environmentalism. See Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012).

[8] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Other Wind* (London: Orion, 2001), p. 223. Hereafter cited as *TOW*.

Alder's marriage to a witch further confirms his low status in the eyes of Le Guin's readers, who have learned by now that women's magic is regarded as 'weak and wicked' by the men of Earthsea – not to mention that women are supposed to have a weakening effect on the powers of male magic-workers. By representing the prophets of change as disempowered people, Le Guin underlines the revolutionary nature of prophetic eschatology, which signals hope for the radically disenfranchised, even as it makes it easier for dominant groups to ignore or refute their predictions.

If Alder is socially marginal, his dreams are beyond the pale, violating the basic rules of magic as we have understood them so far in the Earthsea sequence. For one thing, he should not be able to have them. When he tells the Master Summoner on Roke about his visions of his wife after her death, Thorion accuses him of having committed a deliberate transgression against the rules of wizardry triggered by his desperate desire to see her: he has gone to the 'wall', a boundary that can only be reached and crossed by the most powerful of wizards, and then only at direst need. The fact that Alder can reach the wall despite his lowly status in the magic hierarchy raises fundamental questions for the readers not just about the nature and function of that wall, but perhaps of other walls too – such as the arbitrary structures that divide one magic-worker from another, or that separate the two halves of a binary.

Other apparently fundamental laws of Earthsea are also breached in these visions. When Alder tells Ged how he met his witch-wife Lily at the wall, it is not the fact of Alder's access to the boundary between death and life that horrifies the former Archmage but something Lily's ghost says to her husband. As she begs Alder to 'set me free' (18) – a plea that is later repeated by a whole 'crowd of shadowy people on the other side' (21) – Lily addresses him by his true name, Hara, as a token of their intimacy; but she refuses to acknowledge her own true name, Mevre, when he speaks it. 'That's not my name, Hara,' she tells him, 'that's not my name any more' (18). This shocks Ged profoundly, educated as he is in the belief that true names hold the essence of a soul, and are binding to a person living or dead. And it is this linguistic detail that leads him to his conviction of the dreams' significance. Recalling Ogion's prophecy to Tenar, where the dying mage exultantly whispered the words 'All changed', Ged confirms that Alder's going to the wall, even in dream, signifies a change in the very laws of the universe, a change in the unbreachable laws of life and death. As Ged writes in a letter to Lebannen that he sends to Havnor with Alder, 'He [Alder] will tell you of [...] change where no thing changes', and concludes that 'Now the wall itself maybe is to fall' (62-63). What the falling of the wall might signify is a mystery at this point. If there is no separation between the living and the dead, where will the souls of the dead go? Or is death itself to

be vanquished, as in the verse from Corinthians, 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:26)? The truth is veiled from Alder and Ged at this point, as if it is being spoken to them in an unknown language. And we learn in due course that this veiling is itself part of the puzzle they are struggling to decipher.

If the wall is an important and complex symbol in *The Other Wind* so too is the veil, whose centrality to the novel should remind us again of the meaning of the Greek word Apocalypse, *uncovering*. In describing Alder's dreams, Le Guin follows the practice of commentators on the biblical apocalypse – as she did in 'The Finder' – in her frequent use of the metaphor of the 'veil', in this case to articulate the ephemeral nature of supposedly rigid distinctions between waking and dreaming. The oneiric realm and the 'real' world are never far from each other in Alder's mind. He tells Ged how the ghosts of the dead are always present to him even when he is awake: they are 'in him, with him, around him, veiled' at all times (25), and the noises of the wind and the sea contain echoes of the voices of the departed. On the ship to Havnor, where Ged sends Alder to take council with his friends Lebannen, Tenar and Tehanu, Alder keeps a close hold of the kitten Ged has procured for him, whose touch keeps him from dreaming of the wall and the dead; but though the visionary does not dream, he senses the presence of ghostly voices 'just through the veil of sleep in darkness' (58). When he reaches the king's palace at Havnor, Alder thinks that 'the walls of the room might melt away and the evening sky and the floating mountain crown vanish like a curtain brushed aside' to leave him standing once again beside the wall (64). The recurrent image of the veil or curtain is used to show the proximity between the worlds of dreaming and waking, the conscious and unconscious mind. In an interview given in 1982, Le Guin argues that the western tendency to rationalise has produced a rigid dichotomy between 'waking-time' and dream-time', and that the former is considered to be the only 'real time' for all practical purposes. This distinction has the effect of limiting access to what Le Guin considers to be vitally important epistemological avenues, represented in the Earthsea sequence by the chthonic realm of the Dark Powers, which are associated with women and nature and excluded from mainstream knowledge-structures because of the dangers they are supposed to contain. This self-imposed restriction is a fundamental concern of twentieth century fantasists, as is amply demonstrated in the work of the authors in this study.

The role of the artist, argues Le Guin, is that of an interpreter between these two modes of consciousness: waking and dreaming, consciousness and the unconscious.[9] The artist, then, is for

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[9] Carl Freedman, ed., *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin* (Jackson: University Press of Missisippi, 2008), p. 20.

her analogous to the Trickster figure of Greek tradition, who is also the god of interpretation –
Hermes – and like him habitually crosses borders to divulge the meaning of the gods'
pronouncements to mortal listeners. A similar Trickster figure is Coyote, to whom Le Guin often
alludes in her non-fiction work as the creator/destroyer who introduces death and sex to the newly
created world in North American mythologies.[10] As Lewis Hyde has demonstrated, Coyote - like
Hermes - is associated with boundaries, thresholds and ambiguous spaces. This makes him/her
particularly apposite as a metaphor for the artist/creator/interpreter of fantastic fiction, such as the
writers in this study, both of whom affirm the role of the unconscious as operating alongside
conscious artistry in the creative process. Lewis's friend Tolkien goes so far as to call *The Lord of
the Rings* a 'monster' that he has engendered more or less against his own volition;[11] and in his
letters he repeats several times his feeling of having *reported* rather than created certain aspects of
his narrative, for example the ents.[12] Lewis, too, as we have seen, recognises that unconscious
forces are operative in the production of a text, so that writers are not always aware of how they
arrived at their representations or textual figurations. This problematises the authority of both text
and writer, and situates the text as an ambiguous space between reader and writer, both of whom
find themselves in the position of needing to negotiate its meanings from a position of partial
ignorance. Tolkien and Lewis shy away from describing their writerly role as that of a godlike
creator - Tolkien by deploying the term *sub-creation* for human creativity, which positions him in
subordination to God; and Lewis by escaping into allegory to convey his Christian message, which
effectively turns his work into a gloss on the authoritative narratives of the Bible. Both Tolkien and
Lewis, then, present themselves as somewhat ambiguous servants of the ultimate Christian
authority - ambiguous because unconscious forces repeatedly undermine the authority of the verbal
resources and tropes they deploy, as I have demonstrated in my work on Lewis in the previous
section. Le Guin in her later work, by contrast, presents her fantasy as resolutely *anti*-authoritarian.
Coyote is messy, irregular and destructive, and her work increasingly takes on his characteristics.
While Tolkien and Lewis, following Medieval principles, deploy music as a representation of the
cosmic harmony that underpins their work – above all in the creation myths of *The Silmarillion* and
The Magician's Nephew – Le Guin prefers Coyote's chaos, which precedes creation and can follow

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[10] Le Guin, 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves', p. 43.

[11] Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 124, p. 136.

[12] Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 163, pp. 211-12.

it. She describes Coyote thus: 'Just when your ideas begin to get all nicely arranged and squared off, she messes them up [...] Obviously, we need a trickster, a creator who made the world all wrong. We need the idea of a God who makes mistakes, gets into trouble, and who is identified with a scruffy little animal'.[13] The paradoxical role of the Trickster as creator-destroyer has its counterpart in the central movement of *The Other Wind*, which is one of dynamic polarity: the Mender, Alder, is asked to break (the wall); what was built needs to be unbuilt. In *The Farthest Shore*, Ged tells Arren that 'a mage is a trickster' (420). By the 1980s, Le Guin's identification of the artist/wizard with the Trickster is well established.[14] In her Foreword to *Tales from Earthsea*, she tells her readers that 'authors and wizards are not always to be trusted: nobody can explain a dragon'.[15] We see this insight operative in her texts as she not only interrogates the creation myth of her narrative, but also foregrounds the constructedness of her imaginary world.

This is made possible by Le Guin's exploration of the role of dreams as doorways or veils that give access to the unconscious, making it possible to 'de-alienate' our consciousness, as Darko Suvin puts it, from the radical estrangement produced by binary fissures.[16] Ged tells Alder that the love he shared with his witch-wife Lily has made possible the violation of the seemingly unbridgeable boundary between life and death. In *The Farthest Shore*, this boundary was shown to be necessary and permanent; life was transient and therefore joyous, and its difference from death confirmed its transience. In *The Other Wind*, by contrast, the division is revealed to be in a state of transition towards a world where life and death are both joyous; and the engine of this transition to a new state is dreams. In *The Other Wind* dreams take on a significance seen earlier in Le Guin's novel *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), in which the protagonist, the mild and biddable George Orr, has the power to change reality with his unconscious visions. Likewise Alder, whose modest magical gifts are not important enough to earn him a place among the 'higher' arts practised at Roke, becomes the means of changing human destiny through his dreams. Like Orr, Alder has no control over his visions. And like Orr's, his visions have the power to change the world.

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[13] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Coming Back from the Silence' in Jonathan White ed., *Walking on the Water* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1994), pp. 119-20.

[14] For examples of Coyote in Le Guin's work, see *Always Coming Come* (London: Grafton, 1985).

[15] Le Guin, 'Foreword', *Tales from Earthsea*, p. xv.

[16] Darko Suvin suggests that a quest for 'de-alienation' informs all of Le Guin's work. See Darko Suvin, 'Parables of De-Alienation: Le Guin's Widdershins Dance', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, The Science Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin (Nov., 1975), pp. 265-274

One way in which the real world and the dream world begin to impinge on each other is that Alder's dreams begin to affect other people, drawing those around him to make the journey to the wall with him, or to dream of life after death. On the night Alder arrives in Havnor, Tenar dreams of a room full of bird-winged people, some with the heads of vultures or hawks. On waking, she remembers that these are the souls of the 'damned' as painted in a room in the labyrinth at Atuan. Dreams provide a doorway to the unconscious, which is a space where rigid binaries blur and dissolve, so that oppositions slip into each other, meaning wavers and hesitates, and uncertainty gives rise to new configurations and implications. Because of Alder's dreams, the whole of Earthsea is forced to review its ontological and teleological myths, by pooling the mythological resources of the discrete units formed by the various islands of the Archipelago and the Eastern Reaches and the Kargad Lands. As the carefully built, systematically controlled world moves inexorably towards disintegration, the Roke wizards, the king, and the people of Earthsea are forced to pay attention to forms of knowledge that they cannot control, such as vision, prophecy, and the myths and stories to which these experiences are so closely allied.

7.2. Prophecy in Earthsea

Prophecy, dream and rapture are some of the forms that biblical revelations take, and Le Guin accepts these as valid modes of gaining insight and knowledge. As John Collins points out, Biblical apocalypses invariably involve 'otherworldly journeys' and 'eschatological prophecy', both ultimately deriving from Hellenic and post-Hellenic texts such as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and a range of other oracular writings.[17] In the Earthsea series, dreams and prophecy have consistently played an important role. In *The Farthest Shore*, we are told of an ancient prophecy by the last of the kings of Earthsea, Maharion, who said: 'He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day' (316). This prophecy is fulfilled through Ged and Arren's journey through the land of the dead. Similarly, there is the prophecy in *Tehanu*, ostensibly about the new Archmage, which states simply 'A woman on Gont'. And in the short story 'Dragonfly', which constructs a bridge between the Earthsea novels by telling of events that occur midway between the ending of *Tehanu* and the beginning of *The Other Wind*, Azver the Patterner tells the girl named Irian about this prophecy, and so helps to bring it about.

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[17] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroads, 1984), p. 26.

As Azver relates the incident to her, he recalls how he himself spoke the prophecy with 'the other breath', signifying that he was in a state of trance. This confirms that the prophecy was a visionary revelation, and illuminates Le Guin's conviction that unusual dimensions of reality might be accessible to individuals who learn and respect the pattern of life – the delicate, dynamic web of balances that holds Earthsea itself in equilibrium, and which is epitomised by the Grove where Azver lived. This access, Le Guin suggests in her narrative, can provoke the person who gains it into exploring 'other' ways of speaking, which fall outside the usual processes of self-expression valued by Roke wizards such as Onyx. Onyx, who accompanies Alder and the king on their journey to Roke, chooses each word in his speech with care, certain not only of the power of words but of his own power over words - and over most of the people he uses words to address. This controlled and controlling language is aligned with the father-tongue, which makes gaps and spaces between self and other, producing an alienated consciousness. Each word of True Speech can change the reality of the Other, the wizards are aware: stones can be transformed into butterflies, and vice versa. The involuntary language of prophecy, on the other hand, is an 'undifferentiated engagement'[18] between self and other, which eschews control, speaking in dreams and visions from within a cosmic consciousness, as in Azver's prophecy or the cries of the dead in his dreams.

In *The Other Wind* Le Guin could be said to deploy the Biblical principle of prophetic eschatology, which the Biblical critic Paul D. Hanson describes as the Jewish prophets' witnessing of the 'divine plan' for Israel. This plan is supposed to be fulfilled within the context of this world through human instrumentality,[19] and it has significant implications for the final Earthsea novel. Hanson distinguishes between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology: the latter tradition is postulated as a development of the former, and situates salvation in the context of divine intervention as the advent of a new heaven and earth. One of the reasons for this development, Hanson argues, was a growing schism between the visionary and hierocratic factions - the former following prophets and seers, the latter systems of priestly and ecclesiastic government - in the third to second century B.C. A similar discord can be seen between the Roke Masters in the story 'Dragonfly', where the 'visionary' faction, led by the Patterner, feels that the coming change that

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[18] Le Guin, 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address', p. 152.

[19] Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) p. 11. Hanson distinguishes between prophetic eschatology as translating into 'real politics and human instrumentality' and unfolding in 'real history; while 'apocalyptic eschatology', which develops out of the former tradition, envisions divine intervention establishing a radical new heaven and new earth. See also Mara E. Donaldson, 'Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology in Ursula Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu*', in *Semeia* 60, pp. 111-122.

the Patterner discerns in the pattern of the leaves involves the girl Irian; while Thorion the Master Summoner leads the other faction – which resembles the medieval priesthood in its dogmatic adherence to hegemonically established rules - in a rigid rejection of any possible change in the Rule of the Roke, which prohibits women from entering the school. In the crisis-ridden time faced by Earthsea in the final novel, Le Guin reaffirms the prophetic strain, which situates the radical change within history through human instrumentality, rather than the apocalyptic perspective which proposes the necessity for the annihilation of the world before a new world can take its place.

These traditions are deployed by Le Guin to reveal the artificiality and constructedness of normative values and conditions that are accepted as given, mainly due to knowledge systematisation and codification by dominant powers. As Rosemary Ruether points out, some of these traditions can be appropriated to unlock their liberating potential. Prophecy, Ruether insists, is a subversive mode, as the prophet's critique of the establishment signals the dire need for a change in the status quo.[20] The visionary faction in Earthsea includes Ogion, who makes his prophecy to Tenar, who is a woman and therefore beneath the notice of most wizards. But on Gont, Ged reaffirms Ogion's prophecy as he tells Alder 'it is changing. It is all changing' (41). The tone and the tense used in this sentence points to Le Guin's Taoist philosophy, which proposes that change is the only constant condition of life. Even though change in any form is shunned by established systems, Ged's repetition of Ogion's prophecy stresses the instability and flux of all things. Change, as silent subversion, active dissent or violent revolt, cannot be stopped. And this change is made most manifest in the physical and psychic border-crossings that begin to destabilise established Earthsea systems.

7.3. Border Crossings

Many different kinds of border crossing occur at the crucial juncture in Earthsea history at which *The Other Wind* is set. Le Guin's project of reviving Earthsea history by visiting the 'Archives' in the *Tales* is supplemented in *The Other Wind* by the creation of networks between peoples of Earthsea, which revive oral tales and myths from disparate geographical loci in Earthsea. In the process of recovering these stories, the people of Earthsea rediscover (or dis-cover) hidden aspects of their mutual history. The first of these border-crossings is made by the Kargish princess, Seserakh, sent with the peace emissaries of the new king of the Kargad Empire, who has

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[20] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM, 1983 [1996]).

vanquished the priestly theocracy of the Godking. Seserakh is to wear the Ring of Peace, reads the Kargish king's message, as a sign of peace between the east and west. She represents the linguistic and cultural barriers between the peoples of east and west that seem unbridgeable at first. She has spent her life in Hur-at-Hur, the easternmost island of the Archipelago, which is widely considered the most backward of the Kargad lands. She cannot speak Hardic, the language of the western people. As a woman, she has no say in the matter of her marriage. As such, she is excluded from language altogether.

These socio-cultural barriers are represented by another sort of barrier or border, the veil. The princess is covered from head to toe in red veils; she wears a flat-brimmed hat, so that, says the narrative voice - writing from the point of view of King Lebannen and his courtiers - she 'appeared to be a red column or pillar, cylindrical, featureless, motionless, silent' (69). In her subsequent appearances in the novel, Seserakh is variously described, by the narrator and different people in Havnor, as 'a brick chimney', 'hidden in [a] red sack', 'a tent pole', and an 'immobile cylinder of red and gold' (72, 74, 75, 162). Questions of interpretation surround her: 'what was under the stiff red veils? Who lived inside that unrevealing tent?' (72). The narrator even uses the pronoun 'it' to describe Seserakh climbing the gangplank of her ship when it docks at Havnor (179). These examples of gendered objectification demonstrate what Edward Said describes as the totalising tendencies of the west to ascribe monolithic, essential identities to the 'orient', which can then be inscribed as backward and barbarian, in need of being civilised by the progressive west. Le Guin attempts to jar the codified discursive fields of the west and the orient by the fact that Seserakh is white.

The veil has long been an iconic synecdoche serving to represent women as repressed and their 'repressors' as backward; and this tendency is apparent in Lebannen's attitude as he tells Tenar that daughters are regarded by the Kargads as nothing but 'goods' for a 'barbarian king': 'You know that! You were born there!' (74). The inscription of women's bodies as justification for essentialist critiques, political violence and strategies of control is demonstrated in the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation; and women's bodies continue to be so inscribed as these agendas continue into the twenty-first century. Although Le Guin keeps the narrative voice neutral with reference to the dehumanising descriptions of the princess, it is made clear that Seserakh must unveil in order to communicate with the king, making him 'like her' (as Tenar ambiguously advises the Kargish woman). Lebannen's violent reaction of dislike and resentment shows that deeply embedded prejudice - gender hierarchy being the most vicious and enduring of prejudgements, as Le Guin

often points out - can be almost impossible to erase, and can generate situations that spiral out of control despite the best efforts of some people. Lebannen is caught in such a no-win situation. He claims to dislike Seserakh because she represents to him the degradation of women, a degradation he despises – though of course his despising of her degrades her in his eyes. And he resents her because he is as much obliged to marry her as she is to marry him. There is a fascinating weight of cultural obligations on both.

Meanwhile, the persistent attacks by the dragons are another incursion into western borders that need to be encountered. To deal with this, the king has requested the presence at Havnor of Tehanu, who as a child called Kalessin to destroy the sadistic wizard of Re-Albi. This time, Tehanu's call to the dragons is answered by Irian, the girl whom the Roke wizards refused to let enter the school in the story 'Dragonfly'. In that story Irian, whose use-name was Dragonfly, transformed into a dragon, destroying Thorion the Summoner even as he attempted to destroy her. Now Irian is met again with bigotry and bias from the people of Havnor, as she returns as Orm Irian, to parley with the peoples of Earthsea whose lands are being destroyed by dragons.

But the Archipelageans must learn to be less insular, and allow more weight to other versions of history, if Earthsea is to be regenerated. Seserakh and Irian both reveal crucial aspects of Earthsea history as they tell their own versions of ontological myths, recognisable variants of the story told by the Woman of Kemay to Ogion, about the common origin of humans and dragons. This story, in its diverse renderings, is pivotal for the future history of Earthsea, as we shall see.

The princess proves to be invaluable in opening the eyes of the people of the Archipelago to aspects of their past they have chosen to forget. Seserakh is able to provide information, in the form of mythic stories from her island, Hur-at-Hur, that reminds the peoples of western Earthsea of the pact between dragons and humans when they first divided into two distinct species. According to the princess, in the 'first time' dragons, humans and animals too were all one species. As they separated they made a 'Vedurnan', a kind of pact, to which (according to Sesarakh) the western people subscribed, whereby they agreed never to die or be reborn in exchange for the ability to do sorcery. Dragons and the Kargish people die to be reborn, as one kind of being or another; and neither race practises magic. But the 'accursed-sorcerers' do not die; only their bodies die and 'the rest of them stays in a dark place and never gets reborn. And they look like birds. But they can't fly',[21] Seserakh explains.

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[21] Le Guin, *TOW*, pp. 124-25.

Tenar, as we saw in *Tehanu*, has acquired double-vision and the language of the dragons; that is, she no longer views the world in terms of binary oppositions, or believes in either/or choices. As a result, she is the first to make the connection between Seserakh's story and the myth of the Woman of Kemay. Tenar is reminded of a dream she had a few nights before her meeting with Seserakh - a dream even worse than her earlier dream of a foul-smelling room full of bird-people who cannot fly. In her later dream, one of these flightless bird-humans is Ged, who has a 'vulture's head' and long black wings (115). As Tenar comes to the conclusion that this fate is not very different from the fate of the lost souls who inhabit the dark, dry land of death as Ged has described it, Tenar recoils from Ged's helpless image in anger and revulsion. Shocked by this barbaric vision of Archipelagic culture, she is able to convince Lebannen of the importance of the myth of the ontological dragon/human hybridity, and by this means help him to become less intolerant of Kargish ways. Here dreams once again play a major part in the narrative. They help to steer world politics, acting as catalysts for Tenar's intervention in the apparently irreconcilable differences between the east and west represented by Seserakh and Lebannen.

Orm Irian's alternative version of the myth of original oneness between humans and dragons emphasises the basis of the original separation in the choice either to *own* or to *disavow ownership* and be free. In the form of a woman, Irian repeats what Kalessin the Eldest told the dragons - reminding them of the primal choice made by the dragon/human hybrid, when dragons chose freedom (the west) and humans chose ownership (the east). Kalessin addressed the dragons after Cob's destruction, reminding them that they had let evil turn them into evil - when Cob took away their speech, they killed each other and themselves. The dragons' answer, Irian says, was that 'Men in their envy of us long ago stole half our realm beyond the west from us and made walls of spells to keep us out of it'(152). According to Kalessin, men wanted both ownership *and* freedom, and sought to gain the latter by appropriating the dragons' territory. In revenge, explains Irian, the dragons set about raiding the lands of men. Kalessin, however, told the dragons that as a sign of their original oneness, in every generation of humans there are one or two who are born dragons; and among dragons there is one in every generation who is also human. Kalessin also told them that two hybrid individuals exist at this time - obviously meaning Irian and Tehanu - and that these are 'the messengers, the bringers of choice' (151-52). The implication is that the choice to be human or dragon has remained in some sense open, and is represented by the hybrid beings that occur in every age.

The 'yoke of good and evil', that is, the enslavement to the ethical categories of good and evil, as Irian's narrative makes clear, belongs to humans. The balance is changing, Kalessin explains, and the last to make a choice between being dragon and human will be Tehanu, and after that no way west will remain - 'Only the forest will be, as it is always, at the center' (152). The implications of this for dialogism and hybridity are clearly devastating. This ominous warning, of changing balance and an irrevocable bar between east and west, increases the sense of an ending of things as they are in Earthsea. As Tehanu points out, the forest at the centre means the Immanent Grove, the place where the Patterner made the prophecy 'Hama Gondun', now accepted by most people to mean Tehanu.

These competing or complementary oral narratives help to unsettle the hegemonic versions of history formerly taken for truth in Earthsea. Oral narratives/myths are dialogic because they wander from place to place, gaining multiple socio-cultural perspectives as they are told and re-told; their wayward, fickle nature gives these stories their transformative power. The mages of Roke, by contrast, have become hidebound by reason of their pride in the knowledge of true names that confers on them the ability to control all other beings. But their insularity and stratified knowledge-systems prove inadequate for the crisis confronting Earthsea. As Bakhtin puts it:

> The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.[22]

The 'official monologism' in Earthsea has belonged since its Dark Years to the wizards, who ousted women from this authorised discourse, as detailed in 'The Finder' and 'A Description of Earthsea' at the end of the *Tales*. To renegotiate and reconfigure the denigration of women and Old Powers - both made Other - stories need to be retrieved, reviewed, retold. As Diane Purkiss and Clare Brant have pointed out,[23] re-telling can be an effective strategy to challenge paradigmatic narratives,

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[22] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 110.

[23] Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss eds., *Women,Texts and Histories 1575-1760* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

opening up the elisions due to which diversity has become homogenised, and male supremacy hailed as natural rather than socially determined. For Le Guin, fiction has a transformational role - stories can change our attitudes and lay bare the prejudice in our assumptions.

7.4. Webs of Alliance

The presiding metaphors of the archipelago and the web in Earthsea - both negative in the first trilogy and positive in the second - become pivotal in *The Other Wind*, by being set against the images of walls and veils. The implication that collaboration rather than isolation is necessary if the world is to go on is central to Le Guin's vision. Lebannen, as the prophesied king, realises that a concerted effort is required to save Earthsea from destruction by 'the dragons and the dreams' (221). He recognises the acute need for new forms of conversational exchange between the peoples of Earthsea. As Mike Cadden reminds us, the cooperative participation of Anieb and Medra in 'The Finder' becomes a model for forging identity through 'the stranger, the other', leading to a 'creative collaboration with equality'.[24] The ability to forge identity through the other, to see oneself as another, was acquired by Tenar in her dreams, as recounted earlier. This is why Tenar is able to help Lebannen create the webs of alliance necessary to face the double threat.

As the ship called the Dolphin carries representatives of different cultures and species towards Roke, the vessel (named after another hybrid creature, a sea-dwelling mammal) itself becomes a site of hybridity and heterogeneity, and of the interpenetration of dreams and the waking world. On the last night before the ship arrives at Roke, dreams seem to be engulfing wakefulness: the Masters on Roke dream that a vessel is sailing towards them with a cargo, they variously dream, of 'black rocks', 'burning fire' or 'dreams' (209). The people on the Dolphin certainly bring with them dreams, some of which include the black rocks of the mountain of Pain in the land of the dead. The significance of some of these dreams seems clear to the reader at this point, while others are ambiguous, creating uncertainty and raising a good many questions, for the readers as well as the dreamers, who remember their dreams next morning.

Even though the dreams, of necessity, offer no clear cut logical meanings that can be decoded, the point is that the diverse group of people on the Dolphin are having dreams with identical images and motifs. Irian dreams that her flight is checked by cords of lightning that dash her onto black mountains. As Irian has made clear earlier, dragons do not die to go to the bleak land,

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24 Mike Cadden, *Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre*, p. 105.

so the cord that checks her flight and the lightning that dashes her onto the mountains signal a loss of her freedom and immortality, a sign of the end of the world. Onyx, too, dreams of cords that tie him, but these cords spread over land and sea, dragging the ship towards 'blind sands' of death. The Pelnish wizard Seppel dreams of Lily, Alder's dead wife, holding a black rock in her hand, at first pleading with Seppel to send her husband to her, then raising the rock as if to strike him. Seppel has used the lore of Paln to help Alder stop dreaming. For this, the wizards took the Mender to the Lips of Poar, one of the few known places where the Dark Powers of the earth are strong, and with their help, Alder's dreams drained away from him, as did his power of mending. Clearly, Lily is aware of this, an awareness that emphasises the interwoven texture of the dreams of the living, and their conversations with the dead.

The manifest interconnectedness of dragons, Dark Powers, death and dreams becomes increasingly apparent as the story progresses. Both Seserakh and Tenar dream of transgression. The princess walks in her dream on the forbidden 'dragon's way' in her home town; Tenar dreams of climbing the forbidden steps of the Throne of the Nameless Ones. The significance of these transgressions is not entirely clear at this point, but dragons and Dark Powers occupy a space forbidden to humans, as the dreams of the two women seem to suggest. Lebannen dreams of people starving, and an unhappy child calling to him; and of a green hill, which is obviously Roke Knoll, the centre of all powers in Earthsea. Tehanu, who has been prophesied as the saviour by the Patterner, dreams of crawling through a dark, narrow underground tunnel; significantly, 'the glimmering roots of trees' give her handholds so she can pull herself forward, signalling the immense importance of the Grove and its 'glimmering' roots for Earthsea's destiny. As the dreams go on, an unknown terror overwhelms all the peoples of Earthsea, as their world seems on the verge of unravelling, and history as they know it draws towards an end. The Patterner dreams that he looks up at the sky, and instead of the shifting patterns made by the dance of stars twinkling and leaves stirring in the wind, he sees the small, unmoving stars of the Land of the Dead. Watching them, 'He knew there would be no sunrise';[25] time is coming to an end, or as the Revelations says, 'there should be time no longer' (Rev. 10: 6).

The people who disembark from the Dolphin meet the Masters of Roke in the Grove. As Lebannen declares, the passengers are drawn from 'three peoples: the Kargish, the Hardic, and the People of the West' (222). Within each of these groups there are widely divergent and even

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[25] Le Guin, *TOW*, pp. 205-209.

conflicting views; for example, among the Hardic people there are the mages of Roke, a mage of Paln, a sorcerer and a king; among the people of the east, a princess who was earlier a pauper, a priestess turned farmer's widow, mother, and now wife to the ex-Archmage, and the Kargish warrior Azver, now the Patterner of Roke. The dragons, Irian and Tehanu, are both hybrids. As they negotiate ways of handling the looming danger from 'dragons and dreams' that Lebannen makes clear is drawing towards 'some event, some end' (221), their wills clash. The Roke wizards claim that only they can save Earthsea from the impending doom. The insularity displayed by Roke wizards in this council has been foreshadowed by the way men and women at Lebannen's court have discussed the onslaught of dragons, describing the dragons as 'mindless beasts' which can be overcome by force (140-141). As these peoples argue and debate, various world-views are defamiliarised for the readers, who are able to situate themselves between different subject-positions, diverse religious persuasions and gender situations, a kind of cognitive estrangement that may result in a rethinking and re-evaluation of their presuppositions.

The myth of the creation and separation of dragons and humans is rendered once again in the Grove, gaining resonance and meaning as all the versions are put together, interpreted and reinterpreted, to reveal their significance - an example of the mother-tongue in action. As the Kargish Master Patterner Azver takes up the story, he points out that the 'villagers at Gont and Hur-at-Hur remember what wise men of Roke and the priests at Karego forget' (225), underlining the importance of knowledge that is retained in margins and borders, in forgotten myths and stories. It is significant that the knowledge of the wizards, their spells and incantations are useless at this juncture. Only the exchange of stories brings any understanding of their situation. Azver describes the initial agreement to separate, with humans going east and the dragons west; the humans agreeing to give up True Speech while retaining craft of hand and ownership of land; the dragons disavowing ownership but keeping the True Speech and their wings. Then Le Guin once again appropriates Biblical language, as Azver tells of the breaking of the 'covenant' with the dragons. The 'Dark Folk' of the Archipelago broke the 'covenant', according to myth; they 'caught' the language of the Making, which they had agreed to give up as part of the bargain, in their craft, by which is meant the craft of writing.

The Patterner explains that the Rune Makers - whose actions clearly echo those of the early Church Fathers – invented runes, the earliest form of writing, to preserve True Speech, the language of the Making. By capturing speech in script, it could be said that they conquered it and rendered it unchanging, giving an 'authorised' version of events that could not be contradicted. As Carl E.

Braaten explains, in the patristic era the early Christians' hope of imminent apocalypse was repeatedly disconfirmed, so that individual death became for the first time a more pressing concern than the cosmic 'last things'. 'Fear of one's personal eschaton in death,' Braaten goes on, 'provided the occasion for the church to take control of the eternal destiny of each individual', enabling the newly 'organised church' to demand obedience as a condition for salvation.[26] This situation is clearly paralleled in the story of the Rune Masters, the first and oldest mages, whose awareness that the dragons, in choosing freedom from possession, had gained (or retained) a realm where they could continue to exist forever, an eternity 'outside of time' (227), led them to annexe this space/ time by building a wall where humans too could live forever - with the radical difference that they would exist in a disembodied state. They also ensured, with their spells, that no living body, either dragon or human, could cross this wall. The Patterner explains that as the wall was built, 'the wind ceased to blow, within the wall. The sea withdrew [...] The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night' (228). The metaphor of the wind here is very important, as the wind is a widespread and ancient signal of change. Their knowledge of True Speech made it possible for the Old Mages to 'save' the soul of a person by bestowing on her a true name, which the Namer says is the truth of the self. However, Le Guin proposes that this 'essence' pertains only to part of the individual - the shadowy ghost that continues to exist in the changeless realm annexed by the mages. In giving humans a 'True Name', the mages of Earthsea violate the body/soul bond, since the true name makes the disembodied soul exist in endless isolation. This radical alienation from all contact with material life is contrasted to the 'end' experienced by the Kargs, the animals and dragons. Tenar insist that it is the dragons and the Kargs who are immortal, because they die to rejoin the 'undying world' (223).

The Pelnish wizard Seppel - who comes from the same island as Cob, associated with a dark alternative magic - gives a description of the land where the 'immortal souls' of the dead would go, as taught in Pelnish lore, which includes a set of stories and myth associated particularly with matters of death. This is 'a great land of rivers and mountains and beautiful cities, where there is no suffering or pain, and where the self endures, unchanged, unchanging, forever'.[27] The link with Cob here is obvious. The echoes of the city of God, as described in Revelation 21 - measuring 144 cubits, a perfect square, with walls of jasper, gates of pearl and 'a pure river of water of life, clear as

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[26] Carl E. Braaten, ' The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting' in Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King eds., *Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 280.

[27] Le Guin, *TOW*, p. 226.

crystal' running through it - are clear enough. But this perfect, perfectly symmetrical city is clearly not attractive to Le Guin, for whom constant change is the necessary principle of life; hence no doubt her placing of this account in the mouth of Cob's counterpart, a wizard conversant with the Pelnish lore. The city is the epitome of what Le Guin calls the rational utopia, the not-place which is detached from the conditions under which its inventors live: 'not here, not now [...] It is pure structure, without content; pure model; goal'.[28] This Euclidean utopia, she suggests, is like a labelled diagram, mapped to posit one centre - in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the city of Jerusalem, in the European tradition, the 'West'. But the unmapped utopia, the one Coyote built, has multiple centres and its circumference is 'everywhere' (*Dancing*, 98). This has clear echoes of Le Guin's Immanent Grove, which Le Guin posits as the centre whose roots are everywhere and which is always changing place. The souls of the Earthsea dead, by contrast, exist not in a land of rivers and beauty, as described by Seppel, but in the lifeless desert already witnessed by readers of *The Farthest Shore*.

This land is a wasteland, Ged tells Alder, whose stars are little, mean, and unmoving. Ged's voice is dry and low as he describes it: 'No moon, no sun. Roads and cities [...] Nothing grows [...] Dark cities'. And as he describes the land's inhabitants, echoes of Eliot's 'Wasteland' (1922) and Lewis's *The Great Divorce* (1946) become stronger: 'The multitudes of the dead stand in the streets, or walk on the roads to no end. They don't speak. They don't touch [...] No bond' (*TOW*, 39). The ability to touch, in fact, is what saves Alder from the terror of his recurring dreams, where the dead implore him to set them free. At Roke, when the Master Herbal kept his hand on Alder, the human touch kept him from dreaming of the wall; Ged does the same for Alder at Gont. But as Ged sits with his hand on Alder, he suddenly finds himself near the wall, looking down at the dead grass, and waking up he remembers the 'black dust, black rock' and the 'Dead Stream beds where no water ever ran. No living thing. [...] Only the dead, with their empty eyes and silent faces' (44). This is a very different land from the land of milk and honey of the Pelnish myth - or of Christian tradition.

The fate of the dead that we see in the land on the other side of the wall is a radical interrogation of the desirability of such an end, either as conquest of death or fulfilment of life. As Le Guin insists, 'the view presented of life and death in Earthsea is not only non-Christian but anti-

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28 Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Place To Be', *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 81.

Christian',[29] which makes it clear that her polemical stance is a conscious rewriting of biblical apocalypse. The implicit suggestion is that with all its ugliness and beauty, its goodness and cruelty, the earth is our home, to be protected and celebrated. The glazed gaze of the dead, devoid of emotion or feeling, is an ironic comment upon the desire of immortality by Gelluk, the mad wizard in 'The Finder', or Cob in *The Farthest Shore* . In contemporary terms, this translates into the reified human machines produced by capitalism, whom 'death had undone',[30] designated as 'hollow men' by Eliot, the living who exist as 'Shape without form, shade without colour',[31] and who need what Tolkien calls 'Recovery' - the ability to see the world 'freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity - from possessiveness'.[32] The world in which we live, suggests Le Guin, is much more aligned with our human needs than the illusory prospect of a future disembodied existence.

At the Council, some of the Roke wizards speak in the father-tongue, which makes statements but does not want answers. As the Summoner speaks, 'each word heavy and separate' (222), he insists that only Roke wizards can find a solution for the current crisis. He emphasises that the dragons and humans are now separate, whatever their origin may have been, which means that dragons cannot aid them; and that the Kargs have foresworn immortality by forgetting True Speech, so they cannot be involved in the current debate. He wants separation and division, reflected in the way he uses his words as discrete entities. Each word has a fixed meaning, and does not commerce with its neighbour lest it be tainted or transformed. His use of the word 'us' is exclusive, meaning the people of the Inner Lands; eastern peoples and dragons are excluded from its compass. This is analogous to how contemporary institutional hegemony operates, as Le Guin points out: in western literary discourse, 'us' means straight white Christian men.[33]

On the one hand, then, the Summoner refuses to accept the link between human and dragon, while on the other he dismisses the Kargs because they have forgotten True Speech, the dragons' language. The Summoner's speech exemplifies the frigid discursive practices that refuse to accept any outside influences. The elitist book-knowledge of Roke is producing stasis, leading to entropy.

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[29] McCaffery and Gregory, 'An Interview with Ursula Le Guin', p. 44.

[30] T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922) Bartleby.com, 2011. www.bartleby.com/201/1.html63. Accessed 29/07/2011.

[31] T. S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', *Complete Plays and Poems* by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 81.

[32] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 87-88.

[33] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Unquestioned Assumptions' in *The Wave in the Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), pp. 240-243.

The world that is on the verge of destruction is in fact the one seen through the single-vision created by the father tongue. In this, Le Guin's conclusions about language are very similar to Barfield's. Prosaic language, which produces lexically fixed meanings, cannot add anything to the sum of knowledge, because it can create no new meaning. Only poetic language, such as metaphor and symbol, allows itself to be distended, creating space for new configurations. At Roke, only the Patterner has some knowledge of what is happening - he can see the patterns in the leaves and in words, as if they were metaphors; and he is in the Summoner's eyes a stranger, a barbarian.

One of the meaning-patterns that undergoes a change in the novel is the meaning of immortality, as Tenar claims that animals, dragons and Kargs are truly immortal because they live in the knowledge that they will die to return 'in a woman's womb or the tiny egg of a minnow or a windborne seed of grass, coming back to be, forgetful of the old life, fresh for the new' (87-88).[34] This meaning-shift is an example of how embedded belief needs to be stirred, like a still pool of water, to allow its stagnant silence voice and movement, to allow its submerged stillness to erupt into new patterns.

The core of their dispute is the function of language, which has been used and abused in various ways by the people of the Archipelago – most prominently by the wizards of Roke, descendants of the First Mages. As we have seen, it emerges from the discussion that the wizards broke covenant and 'caught' the language in their books in order to use it, to wield its power over things and people. While the dragons speak the language to communicate, the wizards speak it to get control, which makes them so fearful of its power that they hardly dare talk in it.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, fantasy writers make worlds with words; a very different way of wielding power than that of the wizards. Creating a world necessitates the representation of dialogue in many tongues and from many perspectives: heteroglossia. And in her constructions and deconstructions of her world, Le Guin is especially concerned to show through her language the many different ways of being in it.

7.5. Weaving Worlds with Words

We have noted many times that language as True Speech is an intrinsic aspect of Earthsea metaphysics, since the act of naming is integral to the art magic. In *The Other Wind*, Le Guin's imagined linguistic framework is modified to encompass the expanded vision of her later novels,

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[34] This conception of death as rejoining the earth is in fact very close to the Biblical notion of 'dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' in Gen. 3: 19.

without impairing the inner logic of their ethical and aesthetic structure. The Language of Making (True Speech) as well as ordinary language (common speech) play a vital role in the apocalyptic eschatology of *The Other Wind*. The apocalyptic narrative has seeped into the American consciousness since the early seventeenth century, when the Puritan fathers hoped to witness a historical manifestation of the promised millennium. It's hardly surprising, then, if American fantasy writers, like European ones – since they are creators – feel compelled to write their own versions of the Bible.[35]

Le Guin's version is polemical: she writes an 'unBible', designed to liberate her readers from the entrammelling effect of this particular Religion of the Book. The evocative power of apocalyptic symbols in Daniel and Revelation renders these books especially effective as tools of subversion. A number of critics have recognised the counter-myths that Le Guin writes in an effort to present an alternative to the prevailing western worldview largely informed by Judeo-Christian principles. Mara E. Donaldson, for example, writes a cogently argued article about Le Guin's deployment of biblical prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology as 'subversive literature' to show the 'role it plays in sustaining or criticising the radical impropriety of injustice or evil in a good world'.[36] However, as I will argue below, one of the key notions Le Guin rejects in her vision of end-times for humans is that of a biblical 'good world'; the world, she demonstrates, is anterior to the human categories of good and evil. As Ged tells Tenar in the *Tombs of Atuan*: 'The Earth is beautiful, and bright and kindly [...] The Earth is also terrible, and dark and cruel' (266). The knowledge and choice to do good and evil lies only with humans - an insight that is foreshadowed in *The Farthest Shore*. When Arren asks Ged what or who might have caused the loss of creativity in Earthsea, Ged answers that 'There is only one creature who can do [evil]' - human beings. The desire for 'power over life - endless wealth, unassailable safety, immortality' (*TFS*, 333), according to Ged, leads human beings to do evil. In *The Other Wind*, Le Guin extends this perception by suggesting that the knowledge of good and evil is embedded in language, and the apocalyptic eschatology in the novel is aligned with this insight.

In *The Other Wind*, the knowledge of good and evil is linked with the giving up of True Speech by humans. It is repeatedly stressed that the dragons, who use that primal speech, are beyond these human ethical categories, as are animals without speech. The wizards agree that the

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35 See Robert Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography of the Future'.

36 Mara E. Donaldson, 'Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology in Ursula Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu*', p. 112.

primal choice of separation included the knowledge of good and evil. In an important speech at the beginning of the *Wind*, worth quoting at length because it adumbrates many of the apocalyptic and linguistic strands that are woven together in a beautiful, dynamic pattern at the end of the novel, Ged deliberates upon the link between the various species in Earthsea - animals, humans and dragons. Remembering how his otak had licked him back to life after he had followed a little boy too far across the wall between life and death, Ged wonders at the strong bond that exists between animals and humans. Animals, Ged says, can certainly communicate at need, 'but they can't tell stories, and they can't tell lies. While we can'. But the dragons, continues Ged, know 'True Speech, the language of the making, in which there are no lies, in which to tell the story is to make it be! Yet we call the dragons animals'(52-53). Interestingly, in the *Wizard* we were told that the dragons *can* lie in Old Speech, even though humans cannot, and the way Le Guin incorporates this information into her revised narrative is discussed below. Ged goes on to point out that 'animals do neither good nor evil. They do as they must do. We may call what they do harmful or useful, but good and evil belong to us, who chose to choose what we do. The dragons are [...] beneath our morality [...] Or beyond it' (52-53).

It is perhaps because human beings, as Ged puts it, 'chose to choose', that ordinary speech serves them better than True Speech. True Speech, in which an intrinsic inviolate bond exists between the signifier and the signified, was relinquished in the 'covenant' made when the dragon-human hybrid splits into two discrete beings. The result is a human language where the signifier and signified exist only in an arbitrary relationship – where the sign is fractured. Le Guin uses the concept of True Speech to contrast and compare polysemic language - in Earthsea, 'ordinary languages' such as Hardic and Kargish - in which the meanings of a word can be fiercely disparate, and True Speech, where the word and the thing are one. Ordinary language is mutable, and can produce heterogeneous meanings. This is analogous to Barfield's conception of the poetic and prosaic impulses in language. As noted in section one, the poetic is the vital principle - it can enhance, transform or mutate meaning; while the prosaic id the death principle, concerned with fixing and ossifying meaning. As Le Guin says in an interview, 'Language is for saying what might be, what we want to be, or what we wish wasn't. Language is for saying what isn't.[37] In other words, language allows human beings to imagine new ways of being. This is consonant with

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Northrop Frye's view of the human imagination, 'that it is always a form of "lying," that is, of turning away from the descriptive use of language and the correspondence form of truth'.[38]

As Ged's remarks make clear, using 'ordinary' speech, humans can both lie and tell stories; Le Guin seems to be conflating the two processes. The Pelnish wizard Seppel confirms that ordinary language, 'if it allowed lies and errors, also permitted uncertainty and retraction'(186). Words have no rigid referent, and therefore meaning can be mutated, changed, travestied and questioned. A world where border crossings, slippage and blurring is the preferred mode of existence, a world whose ossified gender, race, and class distinctions need radical redefining and reconfiguring, would need a language which could tell stories - new stories and revisionary stories, to achieve authentic freedom. This has obviously important implications for the faculty of imagination - something that human beings might have developed after the historic rupture, it would seem, for perceiving the world in the context of True Speech requires no imagination, since the semantic bond between each signifier and signified is intact and inviolate. The poet D. J. Enright encapsulates this succinctly in *Paradise Illustrated,* in the scene where Adam views the richly sensual beauty of Paradise:

'It's unimaginable!' sighed Adam.
'You're not obliged to imagine it,'
Snapped the landlord. 'Yet.'[39]

The necessary fluidity between signifier and signified required to imagine alternatives is only possible in the 'fallen' language, as Barfield makes clear; and even defamiliarisation, which Shklovsky says is a device of poetic language, is impossible in the perfect, pristine accord of True Speech. This is beautifully expressed in the short story 'She Unnames Them' by Le Guin, which relates how Eve unnames all the creatures which Adam, with his 'father's' permission, had named. The result is radically emancipatory: Eve gives back her own name too, and as she walks away uncertain, hesitant, she realises that 'my words now must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall

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[38] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 46.

[39] D. J. Enright, *Paradise Illustrated* (London: Chatto & Windus,1978), p. 11.

dancers motionless against the winter shining'.[40] Taking away the names of the trees turns them into dancers, and restores a fluidity that names had deprived them of.

The liberatory potential of not having true names that bind is important for humans, demonstrates Le Guin; humans have dreams, and want to fulfil them, unlike the dragons, who *are* dreams, and exist within a harmonious body/spirit unity that continues on the 'other wind'. Unlike the bond(ed) named life where no true contact is possible between them, animals and the (female) human in 'She Unnames Them' are able to experience sensual touch as an integration – an act of communication, a form of language – that negates the subject/object dichotomy. As the story's protagonist puts it:

> They seemed far closer than when their names had stood between myself and them like a clear barrier: so close that my fear of them and their fear of me became one same fear. And the attraction that many of us felt, the desire to feel or rub or caress one another's scales or skin or feathers or fur, taste one another's blood or flesh, keep one another warm - that attraction was now all one with the fear, and the hunter could not be told from the hunted, nor the eater from the food. (195-96)

The implication is that God's asking Adam to name the 'others' was the paradigmatic alienating experience, expressed by Enright in a parodic reworking of the Cartesian formula: 'I think of words, therefore I am'.[41] This correlates with the mage Gelluk's renaming of the metal, mercury, as Turres (semen) - an act that epitomises phallogocentric attitudes that have seeped into the minds of wizards since the establishment of Roke School. Masculine power ejaculates itself as the 'word' only men should speak, the true speech only men are supposed to know. That is why Lily, Alder's wife, refuses the bond of her true name in the land of the dead. She refuses to be bound in the unlife of soul-existence, where lovers, mothers, children and friends do not recognise each other. While the old Mages used True Speech as a device to 'save' the soul forever, the dead souls want to relinquish the burden of individual identity and rejoin the earth, water, sky, their constituent elements.

For Le Guin, isolation generated by androcentric paradigms results in the radical alienation which we can witness in the form of environmental degradation and species extinction. In her 1988

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[40] Le Guin, 'She Unnames Them' in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, p. 196.

[41] D. J. Enright, *Paradise Illustrated,* p. 11.

Introduction to her story collection *Buffalo Gals*, Le Guin asks her readers to remember that the 'continuity of existence, neither benevolent nor cruel itself, is fundamental to whatever morality may be built upon it' (11) - a notion that gains urgency in the Earthsea series. Ged tells Arren in *The Farthest Shore*, 'The woods and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the balance of the whole' (361). Ged's words are echoed by Otter in 'The Finder', when he talks to Anieb's mother and aunt in despair, almost, of the human condition. 'I think there's an evil in us, in humankind.' He tells them. 'Trust denies it. Leaps across it. Leaps the chasm. But it's there [...] I look at the world, at the forests and the mountains here, the sky, and it's all right, as it should be [...] No animal does wrong. How could they? But we can and we do' (TF, 45). Human beings however, have to *learn* to act within this harmony, because they have power over all these things and over each other.

Le Guin's notion of the 'continuity of existence' is emphasised several times in the Earthsea series. For example, in *A Wizard*, Ged tells Yarrow that all power stems from one source, and all names and all things 'are syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power'(151). Similarly, in the short story 'Bones of the Earth', the wizard Heleth is described thus: 'He stood still and felt the dust and rock of the cliff-top path under his feet, and the cliffs under that, and the roots of the islands in the dark under that. in the dark under the waters all islands touched and were one' (*TfE*, 146). This concept is very similar to Barfield's notion of an antecedent unity that precedes all existence, and which has disintegrated and become fragmented in the process of the evolution of consciousness from participatory to alienated. Both Le Guin and Barfield believe that imaginative participation is absolutely necessary to regain the lost wholeness, for, as Barfield insists, imaginations demands unity because 'it is itself a unity'.[42] The fragmentation is exemplified in the Archipelago in which Ged and Otter live. The Archipelago is a collection of heterogeneous loci that are nevertheless interconnected, home to peoples vastly disparate in their religious, cultural and social attitudes, yet conjoined in their existential link to the lands and waters that are at root one, even as they (land and water) fragment into places and spaces that provide and encourage different forms of socio-cultural constructs. As the Earthsea series unfolds, this Archipelago becomes an increasingly complex paradigmatic symbol of Le Guin's

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[42] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 17.

vision of a humanity that is able to subsist in a biodiverse, sustainable sphere – and of the dangers that threaten such mutual cohabitation. The symbol retains the essential space 'between' that Buber says is vital for a dialogic, 'I-Thou' relationship, in which the 'otherness of the other' [43] is retained as each person responds to the other with his or her whole being. Le Guin comes to a conclusion similar to Buber's: 'it is only when the otherness, the difference, the space between us (in which both cruelty and love occur) is perceived as holy ground, as the sacred place' [44] that true communion occurs. The 'sea' component in the portmanteau Earthsea stands for this 'space between', and it's on the sea that Ged has his self-defining encounter with his own other, the Shadow, in the first of the Earthsea novels.

The Other Wind is a self-reflexive narrative that draws attention to stories as transformative. Telling and retelling stories enables innovation and transformation, not least in the way human beings make meaning of their life and its surroundings, including other living beings and natural environment. The fundamental efficacy of retelling stories as a way of re imagining history has been demonstrated in the *Tales* as the history of Earthsea is re-told from marginal perspectives; and is demonstrated in Le Guin's own revisions as she overturns some of her basic percepts without damaging the structural or thematic framework of her stories. Story-telling is possible only in ordinary language - 'fallen' language. In other words, when human beings decided to give up True Speech, in which the name and the thing are one, they opened up for themselves avenues of linguistic exploration for what *could be*, instead of what *is*. In this sense, fallen language is creative, allowing humanity to imagine alternative ways of being. As the Roke wizards agree, the ability of making and shaping is their mastery, greed, weakness, fear, art, magic - but most of all, joy. Within this framework, Le Guin re-visions the creation of Éa by dismantling several of the notions that seemed to be an integral part of the earthsea metaphysics, as we shall see below.

7.6. Breaking and Mending

In certain ways, Le Guin seems to accept the soul/body dichotomy; for instance, she gives Otter/Medra an out-of-body experience, where the astral human looks at the physical body from outside, in 'The Finder'. But she rejects the dichotomy as a signal or foretoken of eternal life. On the contrary, she represents the survival of the soul without the physical body as bleak, colourless,

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[43] Maurice Friedman, 'Introduction' to Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans., Ronald Gregor-Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 2004 [1947, 1961, 1965, 1993]), e-book, p. 19, 25.

[44] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Introduction' *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, p. 13.

and disaffected, an unlife on a 'darkling plain'[45] without joy, love or light. Gradually, as the Earthsea sequence progresses, it becomes intolerable that the characters we have come to know in it – such as Ogion or the Archmage Nemerle – should be subjected to such an inhumane destiny. 'The Finder' is the first of the stories to suggest that there might be an alternative, as Anieb succeeded in communicating with Otter from beyond the grave. And *The Other Wind* enacts the destruction of the Land of the Dead, dismantled by the combined powers of the council on Roke.

The scene where the ghosts of the dead segue into elemental forms bears a striking similarity to the scene in Philip Pullman's celebrated novel *The Amber Spyglass* in which the protagonists, Lyra and Will, release the spirits of the dead to rejoin the world. As Alder, Tehanu, Irian, the king and the mages break the wall, 'a white wind [...] erased the meaningless stars' of the dead world; and the 'great multitudes of men and women'[46] step across the broken barrier, becoming 'a wisp of dust, a breath that shone an instant' and disappeared.

By this means the ghosts in both books escape from a mental prison erected through centuries of discourse steeped in transcendental imagery: eschatological narratives from Plato's *Timaeus* to Virgil's *Aeneid*; from the Jewish Sheol to the Christian Heaven, which conceive a separate existence for the soul after the death of the body. Western minds remain locked into this discourse; but Le Guin rejects the privileging of the soul, and spurns those visions of an afterlife in which punishments and rewards are meted out by an immortal judge. In her eschatological myth, by contrast, the dead are freed from the land where they exist in a dreadful limbo, an act that also symbolically frees her readers from the mental incarceration that privileges an imagined transcendental realm of eternal existence over the physical world they inhabit.

As Kalessin says, after the wall is dismantled and the dead rejoin the earth, 'Aissadan verw nadannan' - which the Patterner translates as 'What was built is broken. What was broken is made whole' (240). Tehanu, too, becomes whole as she transforms into a blazing golden dragon, burning like her name, a 'great bright star' flying into the sky from which the unmoving stars have been wiped away. The image of the dragons, Irian and Tehanu, wheeling in 'vast gyres' up and up, symbolises the freedom Tehanu has achieved - or chosen, for as Kalessin made clear, the choice was hers. The dragon's flight in ascending gyres images higher, more profound planes of consciousness, learnt through pain, love and loyalty. Tehanu, it must be remembered, chose to stay

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[45] Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach'.

[46] Le Guin, *TOW*, pp. 238-39.

with her foster parents, Ged and Tenar, as a child; and in doing so she showed even more courageous than the young Ged, embracing her shadow - her mutilated, abused self – in order to affirm the loving community she had found on Gont. Later, Alder was chosen by the dead to seek her out as the prophesied Woman on Gont who will save Earthsea - an act foreshadowed by her saving of Ged and Tenar, who rejoined the Ring of Peace for Éa. In this narrative Le Guin imbibes the radically subversive potential of fairy-tale metamorphoses to posit a space for the abused child, unrepresentable in language, since no vocabulary is vast enough to sustain a meaningful space for her, except the language of symbolism; a space at the limits of the imaginary that not only represents the child but provides utopian hope for her. And this also offers hope for all humanity, for no concept of humanity is comprehensible where the dehumanised, abused child cannot find an identity, a way to survive. As the earth is mended by the breaking of the wall, and Tehanu achieves wholeness by becoming a dragon, we see several other forms of achieved wholeness in Earthsea.

7.7. Joinings: Lebannen and Seserakh

Just as *The Other* Wind enacts the conjoining of the realms of the living and the dead, so the marriage of Lebannen and Seserakh represents a joining of two earthly realms, the east and the west. Quite early in her career, in 1978, Le Guin stated that the central, constant theme of her work had been 'marriage'.[47] This statement has been interpreted by James Bittner as a metaphor for her commitment to the yin-yang complementarity.[48] In *The Other Wind*, the marriage is both literal and metaphorical - an integration of opposites prefigured by the making whole of the broken Ring, which signalled peace amongst the disparate peoples of Earthsea, and was a sign of the metaphoric integration of east and west through Ged and Tenar's collaborative effort.

Le Guin has repeatedly created scenarios where encounters between different cultures are presented, though most of these are in her science fiction. Many such encounters are represented from the point of view of an anthropologist, since Le Guin has learned from her anthropologist parents the acute difficulty of representing an alien culture. In the Second Earthsea Trilogy, Le Guin has tackled the still more difficult task of recording the experience of an abused child. To do so the narrator approaches Tehanu from Tenar's viewpoint, who confesses like an honest anthropologist

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[47] Le Guin, 'Introduction to *Planet of Exile*' in *The Language of the Night*, p.121.

[48] According to Bittner, the term marriage is inclusive, referring to 'any complementary, correlative, or interdependent relationship between what we may perceive as opposites or dualisms but which are in reality aspects of a whole, or moments in a continuous process. James W. Bittner, *Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984, 1979), pp. x-xi

that she does not wholly understand her charge because she does not know what a one-eyed child sees. The space of ambiguity with respect to Tehanu's feelings was necessary if Le Guin's narrative was to achieve any measure of authenticity.

Another character difficult to represent is Seserakh, who symbolises a wholly other culture. Just as Tenar builds a spider's web bridge of love for Tehanu that allows the little girl to learn to interact with other human beings, it is Tenar who helps to close the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two cultures represented by Lebannen and Seserakh. The princess's appearance, veiled from head to toe, and the fact that she cannot speak or understand Hardic, intensifies the reader's sense of her alienation. As Maslen has pointed out, Le Guin often conveys 'isolation primarily in linguistic terms';[49] and Seserakh's isolation in these terms is almost complete, ignorant as she is of the language of the place to which she has been sent as the future bride of King Lebannen. She is terrified that she will be sacrificed to dragons by the 'sorcerers', or that Lebannen will steal her soul once he has married her. Nevertheless, she shows great dignity and courage in the face of these terrors. As Lebannen states, she has been used as a bargaining tool, but she 'faces' up to her predicament - symbolised by her removal of the veil – and proceeds to reveal some crucial information in the form of the ancient myths of her land.

It would seem that the west can only perceive the veil in two ways: as an irresistible allure (exemplified in the sailors' curious glances on the way to Roke), hiding mysterious sexuality/ beauty; or as an impassable barrier, shutting out all forms of communication. In both cases the veil needs to be removed, for it provokes fear, curiosity and resentment. It is interesting to note that Seserakh is the one who has to make the necessary linguistic and socio-cultural 'translations' and adjustments in order to be accepted as the new queen. Seserakh is the one who has to *make* the king like her. She is the one who has to learn Hardic. The king makes no attempt to learn her language or her ways. The fact that she is beautiful and manages to attract the king reinscribes the woman's body as the site of her role-construction by society. At the same time, Seserakh ensures, by her willingness to enter into conversation with Lebannen and his people, that she gains a voice, and her voice forms an integral part of the narrative that enables the wall that encloses the Land of the Dead to be broken down.

Entering into conversation is harder for Tehanu, since she has no community who share her experiences and can therefore understand her language. Earlier in the book, when Heather (Moss's

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[49] R. W. Maslen, 'Towards an Iconography of the Future', p. 64.

companion) suggests that Tehanu might be the next queen, Ged's face hardens into immobility, as he realises the impossibility of such an outcome. Tall, beautiful princesses – even foreign ones – can marry the king, but 'poor', abused and disfigured girls can only rely on their imagination - if indeed the dragon's flight can be interpreted as such - for freedom from social constraints and constructedness as Other, and for the ability to speak. For Tehanu does find a voice in her parting speech to Tenar; and when she does she speaks sheer poetry, which lifts her out of the sphere of human limitations into a spiritual potential expressed in the mother-tongue of community, of conversation, of turning together:

> when I die, [she says,] I can breathe back the breath that made me live. I can give back to the world all that I didn't do. All that I might have been and couldn't be. All the choices I didn't make. All the things I lost and spent and wasted. I can give them back to the world. To the lives that haven't been lived yet. That will be my gift back to the world that gave me the life I did live, the love I loved, the breath I breathed. (231)

This speech sums up Le Guin's vision of the world as a cosmic web of connections, and of human life as a part of the dance of an ongoing renewal. It identifies all the people of Earthsea as one, erasing the barriers, veils and perceived disfigurements that come between them. Tehanu's words of hope represent Le Guin's most apocalyptic moment, speaking as they do for the ghosts who have been released from the Dry Land; and it seems appropriate that these words should have been uttered by a girl whose voice has been irreparably damaged by the atrocity inflicted on her, but who still holds precious the life, love and breath she has been given.

7.8. Creation

The theme of connectedness reverberates in the patterns of relationships that develop throughout the novel, as well as in the structural principles that inform it. In the process of envisioning an apocalypse, Le Guin rewrites the creation myth of Éa. Creation and eschatology are inextricably linked, and death is renewal rather than an end, Le Guin demonstrates, basing her premise on mythical modes of thought. For example, in Navaho myths the world is conceived so that 'the real and the spiritual, or the secular and the sacred, are the samething [sic]; a seamless, centred sphere, a wholeness. . . . When you dance the World Renewal Dance, that is actually and exactly what you are doing: you are renewing the world, you are dancing the dance that the world dances. You're

here; it's here'.[50] This is not a 'simple' world-view, and it is especially difficult to understand for the western consciousness steeped in 'a culture with a very powerful system of beliefs and views based on the idea that the world was made by somebody else, from outside'.[51] The apocalypse of *Tehanu* is such a dance, the dance of renewal of this world, and rejection of another.

The idea of creation by a transcendent deity is implicit in Le Guin's own earlier Earthsea narratives, but in *Tehanu* she re-visions the creator as the dragon Kalessin. In changing her conception of the dragon so radically, the narrator of Earthsea functions effectively as the artist-as-trickster, repeatedly disorienting her reader's expectations and assumptions. In *The Other Wind*, Kalessin too is presented as a border-crossing figure; its children, Irian and Tehanu, are messengers, also traditionally boundary-straddling, shape-shifting figures like Hermes, who is the messenger of gods to humans. Kalessin is genderless, but not sexless, as it has sons and daughters; perhaps it is androgynous, like the Gethenians in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, another boundary-straddling characteristic. In his illuminating study of the trickster figure, Lewis Hyde demonstrates that trickster figures such as Coyote, Hermes and Mercury are the 'lords of in-between', the 'spirit of the doorway'.[52] This ties in with Le Guin's concept of Segoy as a threshold figure, presented in the second verse of the Creation song of Ea discussed above, the last line of which refers to 'the eldest, the Doorkeeper, Segoy'.

The threshold with which Segoy is here associated is the site of ambiguity, a space of 'heightened uncertainty' (Hyde, 6), and this concept of uncertainty – of wavering or looking two ways – is vital for Le Guin, who promotes what she calls, following Victor Turner, *communitas* in opposition to structure.[53] The former is flexible, while the latter is rigid: as Turner puts it, '*communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality [literally, threshold-ness]; at the edge of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority'.[54] In *The Other Wind*, *communitas* breaks in through 'inferior' or hybrid figures such as Alder and Tehanu, who become the means of saving Earthsea from what is in effect an invasion by the dead.

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[50] Le Guin 'Legends for a New Land', p. 7.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, p. 6.

[53] Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View', p. 88.

[54] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969), p. 128. Qtd. in Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 88.

It might be argued that Kalessin's speech to the dragons - recounted by Irian at the council - talks of an end to hybridity and boundary-crossing, saying that after Tehanu there will be 'no choosing [...] no way west' (152). But as Hyde reminds us, in some cases trickster 'creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight'. In this way, continues Hyde, the boundary is where the trickster is always found, 'sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it'.[55] So while it is true that Kalessin seems to be creating a boundary, the dragon's attitude as it descends on the broken wall, through which the ghosts of the dead are rejoining the vaster cosmos, is ambiguous. When Azver asks Kalessin if Irian would ever follow the way back through the forest - an ambiguously worded question, leaving the readers in doubt as to whether he means that Irian's chosen dragon-hood will make her the Master Patterner, or whether he is asking if she will ever come back to him in human form - the dragon's 'long, fathomless eye', which has been described as full of ancient laughter, looks at the wizard, effectively leaving everyone in doubt about how rigidly its restrictions on two-way traffic between humankind and dragons will apply (241). Certainly, as Tenar later tells Ged at Gont, Azver believed that Irian would come back to him from the 'other' wind. So Le Guin retains the trademark trickster features of humour and uncertainty in Kalessin, and in her novel.

This raises the question of the seeming contradiction in Le Guin's narrative, alluded to earlier, concerning the function of True Speech for dragons. Ged says that there are no lies in True Speech, as mentioned above. But in the *Wizard*, the narrator informs us that 'Although the use of Old Speech binds a man to truth, this is not so with dragons. It is their own language, and they can lie in it, twisting the true words to false ends [...] in a maze of mirror-words each of which reflects truth and none of which leads anywhere' (87-88). In confirming Kalessin's ability to generate ambiguity even when using True Speech, Le Guin destabilises the true/false dichotomy, which forms an essential aspect of value-systems produced in religious frameworks that posit a single, unambiguous, authorised version of Truth. Le Guin's project of demystifying such absolute categories involves a reappraisal of True Speech. In the wizards' conception, words in True Speech seem to be, to appropriate Barfield's terms, 'solid chunks with definite boundaries and limits' that disallow mutability; in contrast, ordinary words are constantly shifting their meanings: 'flashing, iridescent shapes like flames'.[56] In contemporary linguistic terms, this can point to the difference

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[55] Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, pp. 7-8.

[56] Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 67.

between nouns as fixed entities, constituting the monolithic subject which can stand alone, seemingly independent in its closed circle of self-sufficient, autarkic meaning; and grammar, which engenders meanings through relationships, and interactions between different parts of speech.

The Tao proposes that everything is in a state of constant flux, and Le Guin endorses this, stressing that anything which does not change dies. This problematises the concept of a True Name, for if nothing remains constant, what particular stage of development or change in a thing or a person does a name encompass? In Le Guin's vision of a dynamically interconnected world, names should be the recognition of a temporary function, soon to transform, for example a seed that grows into roots and trunks and branches. She does not deny the importance of names in the Second Trilogy, accepting her earlier recognition that words have power, and that names do signify the 'essence' of the named.[57] But language can also work, she tells us, as a device for producing distance, which can operate as alienation as well as a space for negotiation. Names can go wrong, as she explains in a 1994 interview, when they are used as tools of division, to screen off the world, rather than as a means of communing with the otherness of the other.[58] This is precisely how the wizards of Earthsea are deploying True Names - as instruments of distantiation, secret knowledge rarely imparted for fear of the other.

This aspect of Names can make them devices for socio-cultural imprisonment. If the word as name is valorised over other words that indicate forms of commonality between people or things, the name delimits the identity of the thing named. For example, as Ogion says, Ged is not just an Archmage - he is a human being, with elements of the sparrowhawk in him. The name Ged circumscribes him as the greatest wizard in Earthsea - it excludes the man, the bird, the boy, the potential lover. In fact, the implicit suggestion is that there might be areas within the human and non-human world that resist being named, pinned down or labelled. Perhaps that is why the trees of the Grove are called just trees, for names of places and things can be just as delimiting as names of people. Another example that illuminates the True name as lacking the referential totality generally imputed to it in Earthsea can be found in the short story 'Dragonfly', which relates the naming of the girl whose use-name is Dragonfly. When the village witch reveals her True Name to be Irian, the girl is furious, for Irian is the name of her emotionally (and perhaps sexually) abusive father, whom she hates. However, she is not just Irian, as she declares in her moment of transformation

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[57] Le Guin, 'Coming Back from Silence', p. 106-109.

[58] Ibid., p. 107.

from girl to dragon on Roke Knoll - she becomes Orm Irian, the daughter of Kalessin. Another way in which names can constrain personal or collective narrative is by assigning authority to one version of the story, the version presented by the author. As Farah Mendlesohn has shown, authors can deny the possibility of polysemic discourse by presenting an authoritative version of events using various rhetorical techniques.[59] One of the ways of presenting a hermetic world is by using maps, which name and identify all the places that the reader will be visiting or hearing about, leaving no room for any readerly altercation with the universe she is exploring. An interesting variant of this mapping is found in Le Guin's *Tales from Earthsea*, which has two maps at the beginning. The first map of Earthsea is named, and the maker's name is written in a corner. The second map is an 'eighth century' one, with the same shapes and notable landmarks on the island, but unnamed. The writer cedes historical authority by refusing to posit her narrative as the beginning of a world she has named, unlike Lewis and Tolkien, whose framing narrative of creation and (for Lewis) apocalypse foreclose any disputation with their world and its meaning. By disclaiming any absolute or objective truth to the history she is narrating, Le Guin opens up her text for argumentative interaction with the reader.

A name that exists in isolation becomes like a stone, a *tolk* thrown at Tenar because she (a woman) has dared to refer to its authoritative verbal identity. This is exemplified in the Old Mages' effort to give a person's eternal life by having them retain their True Name after death. The disembodied souls of the dead are pure subject, without predicates to give them meaning through relational categories. As Ged tells Cob, these are nothing but 'a shadow and a name' (462). In contrast Tenar has multiple names, as she transforms her roles and her self. While Ged, in the *Tombs*, tells her she can be either Arha or Tenar, Le Guin shows in *Tehanu* that she can in fact be both, and more. Multiple names as functions of changing identity are a device used to compelling effect by Tolkien, in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where many characters have several names which operate at many levels. To give just one example, Gandalf is Olórin in Valinor, Mithrandir (Grey Pilgrim) for the Elves, Tharkûn (Staff-man) for the Dwarves, the White Rider after his resurrection from the abyss, Stormcrow and Láthspell (Ill-news) when Theóden and Wormtongue accuse him of bringing trouble,[60] and many more. These names are identifications of

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[59] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, pp. 13-15.

[60] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* and *The Two Towers*.

his changing roles, so that the act of *naming* generates and identifies metamorphic possibilities, both human and linguistic.

As we have seen, Le Guin conflates lying and story-telling, not to the denigration or elevation of one or the other, but to draw attention to the human ability to participate in what the Wizards call 'the joy of making, shaping'. By 'making' they mean both the crafts of the hand, such as weaving, building and so on, and art, such as inventing stories, singing songs, dancing, and so on, which together form an integral part of Earthsea culture. Stories can wrench the solitary noun from its fixed single-meaning universe and place it in context, there to wrestle with other words in an effort to transform, contradict or modify each other, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, being left wounded, and finding himself transformed from Jacob to Israel. Stories and myths have famously been called 'lies breathed through silver';[61] and it is clear that Le Guin valorises those forms of truth that can only be conveyed in imagined stories, in concrete and experiential rather than abstract and conceptual terms. There is purposeful ambiguity in the dragon's use of language, embodied in an anecdote told by the Roke wizard, Onyx. When Alder asks Onyx if dragons can lie, the Roke wizard replies that the legendary wizard Ath once asked the great dragon Orm the same question; to which the dragon replied 'No', before reducing the wizard to ashes. This is a story told, presumably, by Orm (the only witness of the event), and like all stories, remains poised on the brink between fiction and truth. To sum up, dragons retain ambivalence and uncertainty in True Speech, but humans bind themselves into single meanings if they deploy this language; the wall that fixes them forever behind a single Word, then, needs to be dismantled. To dismantle one needs to return to the beginnings of things, which is one of the central functions of fantasy. By returning, we may escape from a world constructed by hierarchical binaries: and this is not a reactionary nor a conservative retroactive move, Le Guin insists, but an act of subversion (*Dancing*, 85). The inward or backward journey of fantasy is driven by desire for change, and necessitates a tectonic shift of semantic zones, changing the roots of words that have settled into comfortably conformist meanings. That is why Le Guin goes further back in Earthsea's history the further forward she goes with the Earthsea sequence. Lewis's retroactive movements in the Narnia sequence look distinctly limited and timid by comparison.

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[61] See J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Mythopoeia' in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 85.

CONCLUSION

Literary fantasy is fugitive literature: it flees from the laws of the 'real' world to create a world with its own laws. The word 'fugitive' is Tolkien's,[1] and it suggests dissatisfaction with the way things are, a desire for change. Fantasy decides to flee because the process of creation becomes atrophied in the real world as laws, which cannot be changed. By presenting a world that is manifestly constructed, and by its insistence on reader participation in sustaining the conventions of this constructed world, fantasy points to the constructedness of all worlds; to the intrinsic connectedness of creativity with human consciousness and language; and to the possibility that the laws of the real world are liable to constant mutation.

Fantasists attempt to renew language itself. The process of estrangement on which fantasy is predicated is most satisfyingly applied to the instrument of creation, language. That creation is a process is the reason for the fugitive impulse of fantasy, which does not want to play with what Coleridge calls 'dead counters' - which is how words often operate when used in scientific or analytical discourse. The way to quicken these dead counters is to wrench them from their context in the real world, and place them in new fields that allow room for humorous, ironic, absurd or marvellous play. By blatantly proclaiming its impossibility, fantasy permits estrangement to operate at the linguistic level: words are defamiliarised, through creating new metaphors and symbols in a new world. The linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt describes language as an 'infinite use of a finite means'. This infinite use is made possible by metaphor, which is a 'semantic innovation, an emergence of meaning'.[2] The discursive strategy of metaphorical language can operate in a fantastic world by concretising the emergent meaning.

The impulse to rewrite validates the possibility that lies at the heart of language. Tolkien has said that 'fairy-tales never end' - an insight germane to the issue of the understanding of the creative aspect of language and its centrality to building worlds, primary as well as secondary, our own as well as imagined ones. Fantasy plays a pivotal role in the evolution of consciousness and language. The intertextual interactions of fairy-stories with myth and scripture testify to the importance of a historical imagination. The radically different worlds created by fantasy are a testimony to the infinite uses of a finite means.

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[1] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 153.

[2] See Paul Ricoeur, 'Creativity in Language' in *Philosophy Today*, 17: 2 (Summer, 1973), p. 97.

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