Transformative Voyages: The Boat and the Ship in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* Cycle

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Abstract
In her *Earthsea* cycle, Ursula K. Le Guin explores the finer nuances of itinerant heterotopias and the transitions and transformations they enable. Drawing mostly on Michel Foucault's heterotopia of the boat/ship, but also on Margaret Cohen's chronotope of the ship, this paper distinguishes between these two variations in Le Guin's series. The fragile boats in which the young wizard Ged crosses the world of Earthsea and his own tormented mindscapes, in search of the shadow born of his reckless mishandling of magic, is a metaphor for the self, and the voyage is one of self-discovery and of passing from adolescence to maturity. By contrast, the majestic ship in which King Lebannen and his companions sail to parlay with the dragons represents a microcosm of Earthsea's cultures and a union of previously disparate elements: a coming together which foreshadows the subsequent healing of an ancient rift. Thus, the different uses of the same heterotopic space in the first and last book of the series point to a shift in Le Guin's focus, from the personal to the political, from magic to secular power, and from knowledge of the self to knowledge of the world.

Keywords: *Le Guin, Earthsea, heterotopia, boat, ship*

Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea, itself an *otherworld* of the imagination, encompasses a number of heterotopic spaces which exist both in 'real' space (the labyrinth, the school on Roke) and beyond it (the Dry Land, the other wind). In between, lacking a fixed place due to their peripatetic nature, float the most mysterious of Michel Foucault's heterotopias, the boat, which he associates with imagination and discovery [1], and Margaret Cohen's ship, which, drawing on Casarino (2002: 28) she envisions as a rigidly hierarchical "microcosm of society" (q. in Cohen 2006: 663). In the *Earthsea* cycle, Le Guin makes use of both variations in order to trace individual and collective journeys of exploration, transition, and transformation.

While various journeys take place all through the *Earthsea* cycle, the series is bracketed by two particularly important sets which take place in the first and last novel, respectively. The first novel, *A Wizard of*

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Earthsea, documents the long journey of the young wizard Ged across the watery expanses of his world and across his own haunted mindscapes, in search of a shadow he recklessly released into the world as a result of an ill-thought exhibition of magical prowess. The shadow, of course, is Ged's own unpalatable side, and it is only by accepting and embracing it that he can grow as a human being and as a mage. Ged's most important journeys take place in a number of small boats, capable of accommodating one or, at most, two travellers. The boat, in this case, does not share the characteristics Cohen identifies: it is not a microcosm of a society, but a vehicle for the soul and a metaphor for the self; it has no hierarchy; it is not the locus of an absolute monarchy; it allows no room for social climbing. It does, however, serve as a space for a rite of passage, for its main passenger's coming of age.

By contrast, the last novel, *The Other Wind*, chronicles an important political and magical development in the world of *Earthsea* which marks its own coming of age, in a sense: the necessary destruction of the Dry Land, an abomination created eons ago by human mages in their search for immortality, which imprisoned human souls in a state of undeath, depriving them of the chance to engage in the natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth. This endeavor requires a coming together of *Earthsea*'s humans (from the king in Havnor to the wizards on Roke and the non-magical Kargs), of its dragons, and of those who exist in between the two species. The majestic ship in which King Lebannen and his companions sail to parlay with the dragons represents a microcosm of Earthsea's cultures and an alliance of previously disparate elements which foreshadows the subsequent healing of an ancient rift (and mirrors, on a much larger scale, the healing of Ged's split selves). Thus, the boat and the ship, two facets of the same heterotopia, both mark a shift from one state to another. At the same time, the switch from boat to ship points to a larger shift in Le Guin's focus, from the personal to the political, from magical to secular power, and from knowledge of the self to knowledge of the world.

From *Shadow* to *Lookfar*

A Wizard of Earthsea has its origins in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale 'The Shadow,' which Le Guin discusses at length in her 1974 essay 'The Child and the Shadow' (reprinted in the 1992 anthology *The Language of the Night*). To Le Guin, the meaning of the fairy tale is clear: the man in the story is civilized, while the shadow he separates himself from

represents the part he tries to suppress: a dark, animalistic, shameful side; and yet, "the monster is an integral part of man and cannot be denied" (1992: 56). "A man who will not confront and accept his shadow is a lost soul," she concludes (56). Thus, while Andersen's tale ends tragically, with the man refusing to accept his shadow, becoming its servant in a strange reversal of fortunes, and being executed by the princess who signifies pure, cold reason, in Le Guin's novel, the hero who unleashes the shadow upon the world, disrupting its natural order, reluctantly makes a choice to confront it, and his subsequent acceptance of the shadow serves to restore order and harmony. This acceptance, however, comes only at the end of a series of journeys, the most significant of which take place across water.

While Ged's most important travels in this novel take place aboard a nameless boat woven of magic spells and of the sturdy, faithful *Lookfar*, his initial journey to the isle of Roke sees him board a more traditional ship – *Shadow*, whose name references both Ged's first transgression while under the care of the great mage Ogion, and the ones still to come. But first, the episode which leads to Ged's journey on *Shadow* must be examined. While studying with Ogion and experiencing a certain degree of frustration with the mage's slow, measured ways, Ged is taunted by a sorceress' daughter, who questions his maturity and magical abilities [2]. Recklessly, Ged consults Ogion's ancient books of magic and is drawn into deciphering a spell meant to summon the spirits of the dead. As a result, Ged experiences his first brush with both the darkness of other dimensions and the darkness of his own pride and recklessness when he summons "a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness" (Le Guin 2018: 21), a cold, menacing entity which does not belong in this world and whose presence upsets the natural equilibrium. In applying a Jungian interpretation to her own work, Le Guin focuses on ways of accessing the collective unconscious, which she considers to be populated by far more interesting figures and concepts than Freud's "grim trio of Id, Ego, Superego" (1992: 59). "How do you find your own private entrance to the collective unconscious" (59), she wonders, and then settles on an answer: "Jung says that the first step is to turn around and follow your own shadow" (59). She notes that young children do not have a shadow yet, but that the shadow grows as their ego stabilizes, and that, according to Jung, the more unacknowledged the shadow, the darker and denser it grows (59). For now, in his adolescence, Ged is unaware of his shadow, and that which he glimpses as a clump of

darkness is intensely frightening – beast, monster, enemy, not yet recognizable as an emanation of his own developing self and not something he will come to accept and embrace for a long time. While glimpsing, calling, fleeing, chasing, and ultimately embracing the shadow are traumatic events in Ged's young life, it becomes evident that these acts are necessary for his personal and political development as a man and as the greatest Archmage of Roke. Without flirting with the darkness, without confronting it, without making room in himself for it, he is doomed to share the fate of Andersen's character and become a lost soul.

Following this episode, Ged has an important conversation with his master during which it is decided that he will leave Ogion's tutelage and depart for the School on Roke, the centre of formal magic education. Undoubtedly, Ogion, in his wisdom, understands that Ged is not a gentle creature, but that he lives up to his use name – Sparrowhawk, a bird of prey. Accordingly, the shadow he must make peace with is not a gentle, measured one either, but one which can engulf the world in darkness if left unchecked. As a result, Ged chooses to travel to Roke, and arrangements are made for him to board the *Shadow*, "from the Andrades, bound to Hort Town with furs and ivories. A good ship" (22), yet one which lacks a weatherworker and which Ged does not have the knowledge to assist yet. Upon hearing its name, Ogion's face darkens in premonition, yet the voyage which ensues serves as the private entrance into the unconscious which Le Guin alludes to in 'The Child and the Shadow.'

It is not long before these ominous signs come to fruition. Ged thrives at the School on Roke, but although older and more knowledgeable, he is still consumed by his pride and thirst for power. His second encounter with the darkness within and without is an unmistakable reconstruction and amplification of the first, each omen carefully magnified to signal his progression along the shadowy path into the unconscious. Taunted and challenged by his rival, the young mage Jasper, Ged once again attempts to summon the dead – specifically, the legendary queen Elfarran. As he casts the spell, a small gate opens between the worlds (the gate to the unconscious), mirroring the split in the clouds during his journey to Roke: "a pale spindle of light," which becomes "a ripping open of the fabric of the world" (Le Guin 2018: 45). For a moment, the image of a beautiful, stately woman glimmers within the light, only to give way to a nightmare: "through that bright

misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face" (45). The shadow is likened to "a black beast" which "had no head or face, only the four taloned paws with which it gripped and tore" (45). The repetition of the word 'clot' here is clearly meant to recall the earlier episode, implying that this shadow is the fully actualized version of the barely glimpsed one in Ogion's hut. The shadow, with its monstrous, animal form has no face because it has no need for one: its face is Ged's, but at this stage in his journey, he is unable to recognize it as such. However, the fact that it lacks both face and head indicates that its nature is antithetical to reason – it is pure, unfiltered instinct, the bestial part which the human mind is loath to recognize and claim as its own. This vital episode marks the beginning of a new series of journeys, which take Ged further and further out into the world and yet deeper and deeper into himself.

If Ged's first journey on a ship subverts some of the conventions established by Cohen, his next one reveals the dark side of the heterotopia invoked by Heyner. The nameless Oskill "longship of sixty oars, gaunt as a snake" (Le Guin 2018: 72) which he boards on his way to the Court of Terrenon is partially manned by bondsmen and Ged finds no fellowship among the crew. Antagonized by one of the free men, Skiorh, Ged has a strange vision: "a change in his face, a slurring and shifting of the features, as if for a moment something had changed him, used him, looking out through his eyes sidelong at Ged" (73). What Ged witnesses is both the possession of the man by the shadow and a glimpse of his own psyche attempting to manifest itself. Yet although Ged "told himself that what he had seen was his own fear, his own dread reflected in the other's eyes" (73), there is still no spark of recognition. This episode, however, indicates a progression in the way Ged sees the shadow, its contours gradually shifting from animal to human, even though he is still unable to understand its true nature. The clues regarding the shadow's identity continue to accumulate, as Skiorh, the *gebbeth* (possessed man), walks in Ged's dreams, sharing his mindscape, and after arriving at Eastern Osskil, hunts him relentlessly, once again faceless and knowing Ged's true name. Arguably, this ship journey is a perversion of the rite of passage, as instead of offering a clear path towards growth, it takes Ged into the darkest parts of his mind, into the epicenter of terror where he experiences his shadow not as an amorphous beast, but as monster and enemy.

Following another horrific episode at the Court of Terrenon, Ged escapes in the form of a hawk. While shapeshifting into bird forms is one of Ged's distinct magical powers, the choice of form is not coincidental, although here its function is an inversion of the traditional one: birds are psychopomp creatures, yet Ged's hawk form takes him away from death, irrationality, and the menace of his uncontrolled shadow, which has grown increasingly powerful. Rather, it takes him back to Ogion, in whose presence Ged arrives at a crucial realization: that he must confront the shadow in order to prevent it from devouring him and using his powers to engulf the entire world in darkness. "Master, I go hunting" (91) he writes in his note to Ogion, indicating that he has accepted his quest. Thus begins the second and final stage of Ged's journey into himself, and the vessels which take him across both seascape and mindscape are boats (a necessary shift, since there are places in the mind one can only reach alone): first an illusionary, nameless boat woven mostly of spells, and then a true boat, which allows him to complete his journey and return to the world a whole man.

The first boat, a precarious, warped thing bought with a few spells does not have a name, which emphasizes its tenuous anchoring in reality. It is described as

> in truth no boat but a thing more than half charm and sorcery, and the rest of it mere planks and driftwood which, if he left slack the shaping spells and the binding-spell upon them, would soon enough lapse and scatter and go drifting off as flotsam on the waves (100).

Its sail too is "woven of magic and air" (100), its mast a mage staff, and Ged concludes that "[h]e would have gone easier and swifter as falcon or dolphin" (101) but decides to follow Ogion's warning to avoid shapeshifting (presumably because taking on a different form takes him further away from himself). The fragility of the boat underscores the fact that Ged's journey is becoming increasingly detached from the physical reality of the world, but also that his path is fraught with danger and deception. There is also the implication that true knowledge of the self cannot be accomplished via tricks and illusion and that his relentless pursuit of magical power, at the expense of wisdom and humanity, has placed him in a dangerous position. Indeed, his wizardry would not "serve him now, but only his own flesh, his life itself, against the unliving" (102). The reference to flesh is not necessarily one to literal corporeality, since both the landscape and the conflict are representations

of Ged's own mind. Rather, flesh and life are reminders of the wholeness of a balanced human being and likely indicate a disavowal of the idea that the wisdom of sages must necessarily be accompanied by the mortification of the flesh. In order to become fully actualized, Ged's mind and body, his humanity and his wizardry, must reach a state of equilibrium – the ideal state, according to Earthsea's philosophical system.

The illusionary nature of the boat is also mirrored in the form of the shadow itself, which is now manifesting in less substantial forms – "nothing – darkness, air," "like black smoke on the wind," "formless" (102). This is an interesting evolution, for even though the shadow's presence still inspires terrible dread, its form is no longer beastly or monstruous, and its increased immateriality suggests that it is a creature of the mind rather than an actual demonic entity. Here, it must be noted that even though the shadow appears "unliving," the fact that it is part of Ged's psyche, and, in a way, his doppelganger, makes it no less living or real than the young mage himself. This is substantiated by the fact that touching it produces physical sensations – a dreadful cold, blindness, breathlessness, accompanied by another important realization:

> All terror was gone. All joy was gone. It was a chase no longer. He was neither hunted nor hunter, now. […] He had not held it, but he had forged between them a bond, a link that had no breaking-point (102).

This understanding of their unbreakable connection is what leads Ged to eventually accept and embrace his other self.

The last boat, which takes Ged to the final confrontation with the shadow, is far more substantial than the first: "a boat built not of spells and sea-wrack but of sound wood well pegged and caulked, with a stout mast and sail of her own," "sturdy and well-made" (104). The real mast and sail, unlike the mage staff and sail woven out of spells, indicate a certain grounding which is consistent with Ged's realization that his body and his mind must be in harmony with each other. Significantly, he obtains the boat from an old man who seeks not to deceive or take advantage of him, but who offers it to him freely. As thanks, he heals the man's cataracts, restoring his sight. An additional symbolic exchange takes place here: the old man suggests that the boat, previously named *Sanderling* (a small sandpiper, perhaps a cryptic reference to Ged's older and weaker self), be renamed *Lookfar* and that a pair of eyes be painted

on its prow. The implication is clear: the gift of sight is repaid with one of insight.

Another one of *Lookfar*'s qualities is that it "was built to carry two or three men, and the old man who owned her said that he and his brothers had been through high seas and foul weather with her and she had ridden all gallantly" (104). Although the boat as a heterotopia is designed to facilitate solitary journeys, lacking the ship's social structures, *Lookfar* accommodates a critical element of human balance: companionship. On his final journey, Ged is accompanied by his former school mate, Estarriol, who takes on the role of guide and anchor. Estarriol's use name is Vetch, the name of a plant cultivated for forage and soil improvement. It is uncertain whether Le Guin was aware of the existence of such an obscure word and intentionally chose it. However, in another pleasant coincidence (or not), the role of the plant mirrors Vetch's stability and constancy in Ged's life; after all, he is the one who anchors Ged during his confrontation with the shadow and who retrieves him from the waters once the illusionary land vanishes. At the same time, Estarriol suggests the words 'star'/ 'astre'/'estrela'/'estrella,' 'starry,' and, according to Robinson, 'aureole' (2011: 134); also, 'oriole,' yet another kind of bird, with an interesting etymology: Lat. 'aureoulus,' Medieval Lat. 'oriolus,' French 'oriol,' English 'oriole.' If we parse his name as 'est astre' or 'est aureole,' the implication is that he functions as a guiding star. Without his reassuring presence, it is possible that Ged may have lost his way inside his own mind or found himself unable to fully return to the physical world.

Lookfar takes Ged and Estarriol far beyond the lands of man, on a journey fraught with fear and uncertainty. It is important to note that while Estarriol accompanies Ged up to the site of the final confrontation, offering solace during a long and arduous journey, he remains in the boat once the critical moment comes – both because he must serve as Ged's anchor to the world and because Ged must ultimately face his shadow on his own. Thus, Ged walks alone unto the illusionary shore which appears over the sea, a liminal area between the real and the imaginary, between the world and his own mind.

As noted above, the shadow appears to Ged in various forms: as beast, as anthropomorphous monster, and as black smoke, but always as an enemy. On the shore, it first cycles through the appearances of men it had touched before – Jasper, Peshvarry, Skiorh, all illusions because all of them served more or less as vessels and therefore are not indicative of

its true form. The shadow, as alien/other as it may appear to Ged, is not a representation of another being. This rapid cycle is followed by a fiendish, monstrous form:

> it opened enormous thin wings, and it writhed, and swelled, and shrank again. Ged saw in it […] a pair of clouded, staring eyes, and then suddenly a fearful face he did not know, man or monster, with writhing lips and eyes that were like pits going back into black emptiness (123-24).

The wings are a clear reference to iconic representations of demons, although such creatures are not part of Earthsea's mythology and folklore. Its eyes, both clouded and empty, suggest a lack of insight, of clarity and reason, abandoned in favour of ravenous hunger, of uncontrolled emotion and instinct, of an unbridled desire to engulf and destroy. Accordingly, the shadow takes a more recognizably animal form: "[i]t drew together and shrank and blackened, crawling on four short taloned legs upon the sand. But still it came forward, lifting up to him a blind unformed snout without lips or ears or eyes" (124). Its facelessness and mutability are a mark of its aberrant nature, reflecting the fact that it cannot be named and fit into one of the existing structures of the world.

And yet, in a world shaped by dualist thought, as is the case with Earthsea, reason and light cannot exist without instinct and darkness. Instead of prevailing over the shadow with the aid of his bright magic, Ged allows the burning light of his staff to meet the darkness of the shadow:

> Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: 'Ged.' And the two voices were one voice. Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one (124).

By naming the shadow, he gives it form and sense, even if this comes at a personal cost: the acceptance of the fact that darkness is an intrinsic part of himself which he cannot cast away or outrun. Likewise, the shadow names him as an equal, rather than prey and antagonist, and sacrifices its wild nature for the sake of peaceful coexistence. As Ged becomes whole again, the tear in the fabric of the world is mended and the Equilibrium

is restored: "It is done. It is over" (125), he tells Estarriol after being pulled back into the physical reality of the sea: "The wound is healed […] I am whole, I am free" (125). And with him, the entire world becomes whole, because Earthsea's Pattern is woven from harmoniously co-existing opposites. As its oldest song says, "Only in silence the word, only in dark the light, only in dying life: bright the hawk's flight on the empty sky." As Darko Suvin notes, the poem encapsulates the Taoist duality of the world of Earthsea. However, he also argues for 'an order of preference in each verse which one suspects may harbour a hierarchy' (489). This interpretation contradicts Le Guin's own disavowal of a hierarchical universe and relies on an understanding of 'in' as 'from,' which the text does not justify (i.e. 'from silence the word'). On the contrary, the preposition 'in' serves to highlight the contrast between the elements of each pair and to imply that absence enhances presence. The word is heard thanks to the silence surrounding it; light shines in the darkness; life burns between pre- and post-existence.

From *Farflyer* to *Dolphin*

Despite its seemingly epic nature and its close connection with Earthsea's foundational philosophies, Ged's journey is a deeply personal one – a coming of age story woven along the waterways of the world and the complicated landscapes of his own mind. Although the following two novels in the series focus on other characters (Tenar, the priestess of the Old Gods, and Prince Arren, the future king in Havnor), they also document Ged's personal arc – from reckless apprentice consumed by an unquenchable thirst for power, to accomplished mage, and to the greatest Archmage in the history of Earthsea, one who was willing to sacrifice the same magic he had once craved in order to once again restore balance in the world. However, since this final act of mending involves not only sealing the anomalous opening between the world of the living and the world of the dead, but also the restoration of Earthsea's political order by allowing a king to take his place in Havnor, it signals a subtle shift from the magical to the secular and from the personal to the political. This shift becomes fully fleshed out in the final novel of the series, *The Other Wind*. Unsurprisingly, as this last novel chronicles Earthsea's own journey from a world seemingly in balance, but in reality, riven by a number of conflicts (man versus dragon, Havnor versus the Kargish Islands, magic versus secularism, life versus undeath), it is traversed by a number of journeys. Since the emphasis here is not on personal rites of passage as in

the first book, but on societal changes, these journeys take place by ship, which provides an opportunity to observe social and political dynamics at play.

The first portents of a looming crisis are experienced by the mage Alder, an insignificant spellweaver whose specialty is mending broken things. He is visited, in his dreams, by his dead wife, Lily, now a denizen of the Dry Land. Lily's touch, from across the low, yet impassable wall, persists upon his waking, signaling a dangerous intrusion into the world of the living. In other dreams, Alder witnesses the dead attempt to unmake the wall and hears his name called, which frightens him. As he embarks on a journey to seek help, he finds himself aboard several ships. *Farflyer*, the ship which takes him to Gont, has an auspicious name and "[s]ails long and white as swan's wings" (Le Guin 2001: 1). And yet, aboard this ship, the sailors sense the darkness he is carrying inside: they make signs meant to avert curses and dark magic and keep their distance from him. As he leaves the ship, one of the sailors "made a gesture behind his back, thumb and first and last finger of the left hand, all pointed at him: *May you never come back*!" (1). As a mender, Alder is a kind man and not one prone to destruction, so this ritual ostracization and scapegoating is jarring, especially on board a ship described as beautiful and graceful, and associated with birds and the air rather than brutality and exploitation, like some of the ships encountered in the first novel. Thus, this unusual social dynamic points to a certain wrongness in the fabric of reality, before we even learn of Alder's dreams and unwelcome brushes with the dead.

Alder's next journey, to Havnor, takes place on the *Pretty Rose*, a ship whose name indirectly reminds us of his wife, also named after a flower. On this ship, Alder benefits from the protection of an unexpected companion, a small kitten whom the sailors perceive as good luck. Although Alder continues to be haunted by his dreams, the kitten, who is already a competent mouser, buys him enough good will to avoid ostracization. During the struggles ahead, the kitten will also act as his anchor the world, keeping nightmares at bay and preventing him from getting lost in the Dry Land. Thanks to its presence, Alder is able to leave the ship without having inspired fear or resentment. While it is possible that Le Guin, an avowed cat lover, may have introduced the kitten as a light-hearted note in an otherwise somber novel, its presence is strongly reminiscent of young Ged's otak companion – a small creature who offered him solace during his early flight from the shadow and who

sacrificed its life to protect Ged's own. There are no particular similarities between Ged, a remarkably powerful young wizard fleeing from the horror he unleashed upon the world, and Alder, a grown man of modest powers who has already suffered greatly and is wisely seeking help to solve a problem which far exceeds his magic abilities and station in the world. There is, however, a similarity in the state of the world, once again threatened by an anomaly (although, in the last novel's case, the anomaly is much greater, systemic, and historical).

Throughout these initial journeys, Alder's role is that of a messenger, and as his message is received by Earthsea's king, wizards, and dragons, he fades into the background, allowing others to take center stage. However, his sea voyages serve to create an atmosphere of unease and set the stage for a crisis which will require all the powers of Earthsea to put aside their previous differences and come together to undo a great evil. It is important to emphasize the fact that, in keeping with Le Guin's distaste for war, there is no orgiastic final battle because there is no physical evil to combat. Rather, the novel traces an entire society's journey towards a greater understanding of its multigenerational conflicts. This coming together, which takes place in the aftermath of both humorous and aggravating squabbles, naturally occurs on board a symbolically significant ship – King Lebannen's *Dolphin*, a vessel which serves as a microcosm of Earthsea's entire society, which presents an interesting (albeit not unusual) hierarchy, and which provides everyone present with an opportunity to complete their final rites of passage at the same time as their world undergoes its own.

As usual, the ship's name is meaningful, illuminating both some of the social dynamics on board the ship and its ultimate mission. According to Cirlot, "the dolphin by itself is an allegory of salvation" and "a friend of man," as well as a figure associated with the anchor, which Cirlot argues is another symbol of salvation (2002: 85). As discussed above, metaphorical anchors appear repeatedly in the *Earthsea* novels, usually in the form of human or animal companions. The dolphin, in this case, represents the entire community present on board the ship and foreshadows the fact that during the destruction of the wall surrounding the Dry Land, which takes place in a non-corporeal heterotopia accessible only through magic or dreams, various members of this community act as anchors for each other, ensuring that those who entered the world of undeath can return to their physical bodies. The *Dolphin* and its temporary denizens represent the salvation (and anchor) of Earthsea,

which would be devoured by the Dry Land without their intervention. Furthermore, Ferber notes that a Homeric hymn associates the dolphin, one of Apollo's forms, with the oracle at Delphi, and posits that both words might be related to 'delphys,' which means 'womb' (1999: [3]). Assuming the correctness of this etymology (or otherwise a pleasant coincidence), the *Dolphin* indeed functions as a womb in which Earthsea's harmony is born of opposite elements. He also cites Ovid's *Fasti* 2.79, in which the poet refers to the dolphin as a "go-between in love's intrigues" (n.p.), which also applies to the ship. It is here that King Lebannen and his Kargish bride, Princess Sesserakh, begin to finally understand each other, their political engagement, previously fraught with frustration and strife, finally morphing into a love story which will put an end to the ancient rift between Havnor and the Kargish Isles. In addition, Ferber points out that for Yeats, the dolphin functions as an "escort of dead souls," but also as "the body or fleshly vehicle of the soul, which may be purged and reincarnated in the sea" (n.p.). Given that the final destination of the *Dolphin* is Roke, from where the mages and dragons will enter the Dry Land together, its psychopomp function is appropriate, even though those entering the realm of undeath are not dead themselves. The soul the ship carries is that of Earthsea itself, represented here by its king, its mages, its ambassadors (Tenar, who can translate the princess' Kargish language, and Tehanu, who can speak to dragons), and, flying alongside it, its dragons (represented by Irian, who can access both her human and dragon forms). In all fairness, it is difficult to know whether Le Guin was aware of all these associations, but she was remarkably well-read, and her choice of names is always meaningful and intentional, so ignoring them would certainly impoverish our understanding of the novel.

Dolphin's social organization undermines the convention which casts a ship as its captain's realm. The ship is run by Shipmaster Tosla and his crew, and Tosla is depicted in rather romantic manner, as "dressed in velvet and airy linens, with jewels on his belt and at his throat and a great ruby stud in his earlobe" (Le Guin 2001: 91) and having a "keen and hard" face (91). Tosla, however, is not the ultimate authority on board, as the king is present on the ship and his powers exceed those of a shipmaster. In addition, the *Dolphin* is not Tosla's regular domain; his own ship, *The Tern* (which has a variety of meanings as well: sea swallow; a set of three; three winning numbers drawn together in a lottery and the prize won by drawing them; a three-masted schooner) is

the one which visits Dragon's Run and confirms that the dragons, who had been existing in a state of uneasy truce with humankind, had turned against the latter.

To complicate matters, King Lebannen has a reverential attitude towards Tenar, Ged, Tehanu, and Irian, recognizing their superior experience or magical abilities. In addition, a touch of gallantry sees the ladies installed in the king's own cabin, while the men share the captain's smaller cabin, which hints at a different type of hierarchy. Overall, however, the general atmosphere is rather egalitarian, with racial, gender, and social differences erased by the need to focus on the problem at hand.

The two most significant political tensions which have been dividing Earthsea for thousands of years are those between Havnor and the Kargish Islands and humans and dragons. The two sets are divided not only by historical events, but also by deep cultural and philosophical differences. There are ancient grudges at play, pride, and a lack of true understanding. For this reason, the presence of the two women who act as ambassadors is significant in that it demonstrates a desire to heal old wounds despite countless difficulties. Although some diplomatic missions are carried out ahead of the final mission, such as Tehanu's journey to Mount Orm to parlay with the dragons, it is in the belly of the *Dolphin*, on the way to Roke, that some of the healing begins.

As mentioned before, the final act is not one of confrontation, but of liberation. Humans and dragons together destroy the storied low stone wall which surrounds the Dry Land, freeing the souls imprisoned in an eternal state of undeath. The novel finally reveals the origin of this unnatural space, which was created as a result of human greed and selfishness by encircling a portion of the dragons' mysterious 'other wind,' an infinite chronotope which exists outside of physical/linear timespace. Rather than allowing humans to experience immortality, the Dry Land froze their souls in undeath, preventing them from participating in the natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth. The result is a mending of the world, similar to the one experienced by Ged at the end of the first book, yet much greater. "What was divided is divided" (240), the dragon Kalessin says, and the Master Patterner of Roke (also an ambassador figure, given the fact that he is the only Kargish mage in the world) responds: "What was built is broken. What was broken is made whole" (240). These sentences, which paradoxically appear to be speaking of further division and destruction, in fact refer to the

restoration of natural order: the dissolution of the Dry Land, the breaking of the stone wall, and the healing of the world. As the world reaches equilibrium, so do individual characters: Lebannen and Sesserakh, finally in harmony with each other, prepare to begin their reign together; Ged and Tenar retire from public life; Tehanu is finally liberated from her broken human form and joins the dragons on the other wind; Alder passes on, joining his wife into the newly found sunlight. Their choices reflect the entire spectrum of the cycle: life at its apex, life in its twilight, death, eternity, and the promise of rebirth.

Although both individual and collective journeys end on solid earth, the final states of harmony reached at the end of the first and sixth books could not have been attained without the dynamic quality of the placeless place: the boat or ship, depending on circumstances, which allows both souls and entire societies to transition to a new reality. Le Guin's treatment of this heterotopic space and its variations is nuanced and detailed, drawing on a multitude of mythological references and symbolism, and exploring both its dark implications of conquest and nightmare, and its exultant ones of discovery and mending through knowledge and self-knowledge.

Notes

[1] Palladino and Miller (2015: 1-3) note that while the concept of heterotopia has inspired genuine fascination due to its endless possibilities, leading other scholars, such as Johnson (2013), to greatly expand Foucault's list of heterotopias, it has also led to a certain frustration with its ambiguities, which Foucault did not sufficiently explore. For example, while Foucault associates the boat with both economic development and imagination, discovery and adventure, Heyner (2008: 320) correctly points out that it has also served as an instrument of conquest, oppression, and slavery.

[2] The fact that the young woman whom Ogion brands "half a witch already" (Le Guin 2018: 21) creates the conditions for Ged's first magical transgression is consistent with the position of magically-endowed women in the hierarchy of Earthsea's society at the beginning of the series. While Ged learns his first spells from his aunt, her place in this world is made clear: "There is a saying on Gont, Weak as woman's magic, and there is another saying, Wicked as woman's magic "(9). Ged's aunt, a witch untutored in the formal arts of magic, falls in the first category. Others, including the young 'half witch,' prove to be far more perilous, obscuring the fact that Ged is consumed by pride in his own powers and fascinated with what is theoretically possible, yet dangerously unconcerned with the ethics and consequences of his own actions.

[3] Unpaginated digital edition.

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