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An Examination of Myth and Archetype in the Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin

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An Examination of Myth and Archetype in the Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to apply the principles and methods of one type of criticism, archetypal, to certain science fiction/fantasy writings. The study used these methods to answer the question: How do archetypes function in the Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin? The trilogy comprised A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, and The Farthest Shore.

AN EXAMINATION OF MYTH AND ARCHETYPE
IN THE EARTHSEA TRILOGY BY
URSULA KROEBER LE GUIN

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

This study was an attempt to apply the principles and methods of one type of criticism, archetypal, to certain science fiction/fantasy writings. The study used these methods to answer the question: How do archetypes function in the Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin? The trilogy comprised A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, and The Farthest Shore.

The scope of the study was small. The study was limited to three books written for young adults by one contemporary author. Although the study might serve as a pattern for other, similar papers, the conclusions and results cannot be applied to other books.

A second limitation arose from the problems involved in defining "archetype" and delineating "archetypal criticism." Archetypes, according to Northrop Frye, existed in literature and could be explicated and discussed, but their existence was one of language rather than one of concrete objectivity. This nonsubstantive quality made the subject difficult to deal with.

The area of literary criticism called "archetypal" required explanation and the term "archetype" required definition. Lauriat Lane, Jr. wrote a brief history of archetypal criticism in an article in The Journal of

Aesthetics and Art Criticism.¹ The history dealt primarily with the contributions of Carl Jung and Northrop Frye to the subject. John Celli wrote a similar and much more detailed study of the same subject. In his study, The Uses of the Term "Archetype" in Contemporary Literary Criticism,² Celli devoted a chapter to each of six major theoretical archetypal critics: C. G. Jung, Madu Bodkin, Leslie Fiedler, Joseph Campbell, Philip Wheelwright, and Northrop Frye. Each critic's interpretation of the term "archetype" was detailed. Celli also discussed relationships among the critics and how other, less theoretical, more practical critics approached the subject.

Celli stressed the two poles between which archetypal critics aligned themselves: on the one pole, those following Jung who studied the psychological aspects of archetypes, and on the other pole, those following Frye who studied the functional aspects. Celli explained that ". . . At one extreme is Jung, at the other Frye, and in between are a variety of gradations that gradually shift from a commitment to psychology to a commitment to literature."³ In Jung's view archetypes existed in the

¹Lauriat Lane, Jr., "The Literary Archetype: Some Reconsiderations," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 13 (December, 1954), 226-232.

²John Celli, The Uses of the Term "Archetype" in Contemporary Literary Criticism (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Xerox University Microfilms, 1974).

³Celli, p. 139.

subconscious mind from birth and are then recognized in art forms. Archetypal images derived their power from subconscious recognition. The symbols were meaningful to readers because they reminded them of things hidden in their minds. *fantasy?*

Frye saw the use of archetypal symbols as functional within a piece of literature or other art form. The function of archetypes was to universalize or generalize elements in art. The archetypal images recurred in art and derived their power from recognition within the art forms, rather than from some psychological recognition. Frye believed archetypes originated in pre-literature, that is, myths, rituals, and folktales.

This writer's inclination and commitment was to literature, rather than to psychology. Frye's definitions of archetypes and conceptual framework of literary criticism served as a guide in writing this paper. The Anatomy of Criticism, by Northrop Frye, was used as an aide in the identification and explication of archetypes.⁴ This collection of essays incorporated a number of Frye's essays previously published in journals. In these essays Frye systematically studied various forms of literature, "dissecting them" to use Frye's metaphor. Frye explained

⁴Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

in the introduction that the book was an initial and incomplete attempt at building a conceptual framework in order to study literature in a systematic manner.

Archetypes are symbols recognized universally. An archetype is a recurrent pattern or element in literature. Archetypal symbols arise from the repeated experiences common to all men, such as birth and death. Frye explained that ". . . some symbols are images common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited. Such symbols include those of food and drink, of the quest or journey, of light and darkness, and of sexual fulfillment, which usually takes the form of marriage."⁵

In explaining Frye's examination of archetype within literature, Celli wrote: "It is identified by way of the inductive method just as biological genus would be. It does not exist in the psyche; it does not exist in any transcendental world of ideal forms; it exists only in literature."⁶

⁵Frye, p. 118.

⁶Celli, p. 138.

ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS

*Much of this is
summary - change
(see examples)
omit*

Northrop Frye established four narrative categories of literature. They were: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony and satire.⁷ Frye explained that ". . . conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance, the radical of romance being a sequence of marvelous adventures."⁸ The three books of *Earthsea* were categorized ^{maybe} as romance. ^{after this study,}

Frye further established six phases within each of the four narrative patterns of literature. The six phases or romance "form a cyclical sequence in a romantic hero's life."⁹ The first two phases were the birth and innocent youth of the hero. Frye gave the finding of the child Moses as an example of the first phase.¹⁰ Frye suggested that Adam and Eve in paradise before the Fall represented the second phase.¹¹ The third phase was the quest-romance. Frye gave the story of St. George and the dragon as a representative example of the third phase.¹²

⁷Frye, p. 162.

⁸Frye, p. 192.

⁹Frye, p. 198.

¹⁰Frye, p. 198.

¹¹Frye, p. 200.

¹²Frye, p. 189.

The theme of the fourth phase "is that of the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience."¹³ According to Frye, the fifth phase "deals with a world very similar to that of the second phase except that the mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it."¹⁴ The sixth phase "makes the end of a movement from active to contemplative adventure. A central image of this phase, a favorite of Yeats, is that of the old man in the tower, the lonely hermit absorbed in occult or magical studies."¹⁵

The narrative pattern that Frye called the romantic quest-myth, the third phase of romance, emerged ^{after a first reading} as the narrative pattern of each book of the Earthsea Trilogy. In each a hero went on a very real and very perilous journey, met and defeated a dark power, and returned. The pattern was repeated with variations in each of the books.

Frye identified three essential elements of the romantic quest-myth. These were the quest itself, the conflict between the two main characters, and the dialectical nature of this conflict. He wrote:

¹³Frye, p. 201.

¹⁴Frye, p. 202.

¹⁵Frye, p. 202.

The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages; the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero.¹⁶

*This section
is correct* When the trilogy was closely examined, in each book Ged journeyed to meet some danger. In his journeys he faced the perils of the natural world, e.g., wind and sea, and the perils of man's world, the darkness of evil which sought to overcome the light of goodness. Ged struggled with the force of darkness in each book, overcame this force, and was honored or rewarded in some way for his victory.

The second element, the conflict between two characters, was also clearly evident in the trilogy. Frye wrote: "A quest involving conflict assumes two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antagonist or enemy."¹⁷ Ged was the protagonist. He was a human gifted with the powers of wizardry. The enemies of Ged did not take human form. His enemies were evil unembodied. They were the Dark Powers which represented the darkness in men's souls. These enemies ^{seemed} were suitable in general for the fantasy genre, and in particular for Earthsea.

¹⁶ Frye, p. 187.

¹⁷ Frye, p. 187.

The third element was the dialectical nature of the conflict. Frye explained that ". . . the central form of romance is dialectical: Everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero."¹⁸ This focus upon the hero Ged was very pronounced because the evil enemy had no human embodiment and no redeeming characteristics.

By carefully looking at each of the books, this narrative pattern of the romantic quest-myth was seen to emerge clearly.

¹⁸Frye, p. 187.

THE EARTHSEA TRILOGY

Before discussing the Earthsea Trilogy in depth, some things about the place ^{Earthsea?} require explanation. Le Guin created a world, its people and their myths and languages and customs. The books dealt with insights and truths at the very basis of human existence. Earthsea was a world of many islands surrounded by a vast and uncharted ocean. Magic was a real power in this world and it was a part of daily life. Men, born with the power to work magic, could acquire the necessary knowledge and learn the proper skills and names and become sorcerers and wizards. Ged, the hero of the trilogy, was mageborn.²

Robert Scholes in "The Good Witch of the West," the final essay in his book, Structural Fabulation, wrote that:

What Earthsea represents, through its world of islands and waterways, is the universe as a dynamic, balanced system, not subject to the capricious miracles of any deity, but only to the natural laws of its own working, which include a role for magic and for powers other than human, but only as aspects of the great Balance or Equilibrium, which is the order of this cosmos.¹⁹

Earthsea was a world stripped of the confusions and uncertainties Frye would call "realism."

¹⁹ Robert Scholes, Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 82.

In order to have power over something a wizard needed to know its true name, i.e., its true being. The true names of people, animals, plants, rivers, stones, and so on, were in the Old Speech which was the language of the Making of the world. Dragons were very ancient creatures who lived in Earthsea, mostly in the West Reach, and who still spoke the Old Speech. Sorcerers and wizards learned what words they could of the true names of things. Because knowing the true name of a thing gave power over that thing, men hid their true names from all but their most trusted friends. Ged's use-name, the name most men knew him by, was Sparrowhawk.

In 1972 Ursula Le Guin gave a speech at the second annual Science Fiction Writer's Workshop which was held at the University of Washington. The title of this speech was "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" and in it Le Guin dealt with her ideas about fantasy and the responsibilities of writers of fantasy. She said that fantasy is ". . . a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence."²⁰ Further, "fantasy . . . instead of imitating the perceived confusion and complexity of existence, tries to hint at an order and clarity underlying existence."²¹ In a book of true fantasy

²⁰Ursula K. Le Guin, From Elfland to Poughkeepsie (Portland, Oregon: Pendragon Press, 1973), p. 20.

²¹Le Guin, Elfland, p. 21.

then order would exist and the characters would act out the drama of the story cleanly and without the confusion of realistic existence. Heroes would be good and villains would be evil. Frye wrote that "... the perennially childlike quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time and space."²² The golden age existed in Earthsea.

²²Frye, p. 186.

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA

A Wizard of Earthsea began the story of Duny, a village boy living in Ten Alders village on the island Gont. The Mage of Re Albi, Ogion the Silent, discovered that Duny was mageborn. Ogion gave Duny his true name, Ged, in the ceremony of Passage and took Ged to be his prentice. The ceremony of Passage was a ceremony of rebirth and of ritual passage into manhood.

Ged journeyed to Re Albi with Ogion where he began to learn what the mage would teach him. Ged was proud and willful. In his pride and in his desire to prove himself he loosed a shadow. He attempted a spell of summoning to call a dead spirit to him. Ged had the power to work this spell but not the knowledge to control it. As the spell was worked, he felt a horror growing in him. "Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call him in a whisper; but he could not understand the words."²³ This shadow was Ged's enemy. Ogion entered the room and was able to

²³Ursula K. Le Guin, A Wizard of Earthsea (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 22-23.

dispell the shadow because, as he explained to Ged, "that was but the foreboding of it, the shadow of a shadow."²⁴ The shadow was Ged's enemy and he would either conquer it or be conquered by it.

Frye explained that ". . . A threefold structure is repeated in many features of romance."²⁵ Three times Ged was to meet his shadow before the final confrontation. The first meeting occurred on the island Roke where Ged traveled to study at the School for Wizards. Again Ged's pride was offended and he worked the same spell of summoning, this time to summon the Lady Elfarron from the dead. Because Ged used a spell which was beyond his knowledge he could not control it. A hole in the world opened through which the shadow entered. This time the shadow was in the world and would pursue Ged until one or the other gained control.

Ged was safe while he remained on Roke because it was protected by deep spells of wizardry. He sought to understand what the shadow was so that he could escape it. The Archmage Gensher explained his understanding of it.

It has no name. You have great power inborn in you, and you used that power wrongly, to work a spell over which you had no control, not knowing how that spell affects the balance of light and dark, life and death, good and evil. And you were

²⁴Le Guin, Wizard, p. 127.

²⁵Frye, p. 187.

moved to do this by pride and by hate. Is it any wonder the result was ruin? You summoned a spirit from the dead, but with it came one of the Powers of unlife. Uncalled it came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you; you are connected. It is the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you case.²⁶

Frye stated that ". . . The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life."²⁷ The enemy here was not a man, not the personification of evil and darkness, but darkness itself.

Ged left Roke to take a humble position on Low Torning, a small isle among the Ninety Isles. Ged hoped that his shadow would not find him here. In trying to save a young boy's life Ged journeyed into the Dry Land following the boy's spirit. This was a journey of the spirit only, a journey that only wizards could take and return safely. The Dry Land was the place where the shadows and the names of the dead went. Death is associated with dryness in the same way that life is associated with water. Ged met his shadow as he left the Dry Land. He understood that ". . . at the boundary wall between death and life, it had waited for him these long years. It had found him there at last. It would be on

²⁶ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 66.

²⁷ Frye, p. 187.

his track now, seeking to draw near to him, to take his strength into itself, and suck up his life, and clothe itself in his flesh."²⁸

Ged began to dream of the shadow and realized that he must leave Low Torning to escape. The first of two chances to learn the shadow's name occurred before he left. Ged had to sail to Pendor to confront the dragon Yevaud which threatened the Ninety Isles. The dragon offered to tell Ged the name of his enemy so that he could gain power over it. Ged refused the dragon's offer because to do so would have been to forsake his trust. His duty was to protect the island people from the dragons of Pendor so he had to use his power over Yevaud to secure protection for the Ninety Isles, rather than to secure protection for himself.

Ged next tried to sail to Roke for the protection this place of wizardry would offer him. The ship could not reach Roke because the island was protected from the evil which followed Ged. He sailed instead to Osskil in the North. Here Ged met the shadow for the second time, now in the form of a gebbeth. The shadow took over the body of a man called Skiorh. A gebbeth "is something like a shell or a vapor in the form of a man, an unreal

²⁸Le Guin, Wizard, p. 83.

flesh clothing the shadow which is real."²⁹ Ged escaped, but barely, because the shadow was able to name him, "Ged", and thus hold him to his true form. Ged entered the Court of the Terrenon, an isolated fortress of stones and spells on the moor of Osskil. He was a second time offered an opportunity to discover the name of the shadow. The Lady Serret, the mistress of the fortress, told Ged he was protected by the Stone of Terrnon, the founding stone of the central tower of the place, and that if he touched the stone it would become his servant and do his bidding and answer his questions. Ged resisted because he realized that the Stone was a thing of great evil. Ged told Serret that "It is light that defeats the dark."³⁰ When he realized that he had been led to this place for evil purposes Ged escaped by working a spell of changing. He took the shape of a Pilgrim Falcon and flew to Gont, to Ogion.

On Gont Ged sought Ogion's counsel. Ogion told him: "You must turn around. . . . If you go ahead, if you keep running, wherever you run you will meet danger and evil, for it drives you, it chooses the way you go. You must choose. You must seek what seeks you. You must hunt

²⁹Le Guin, Wizard, p. 107.

³⁰Le Guin, Wizard, p. 119.

the hunter."³¹ Ged made the decision to follow Ogion's advice and hunt the Shadow. He retraced the sea path that brought him to Gont and summoned the shadow in his own name ". . . I am here, I Ged the Sparrowhawk, and I summon my shadow!"³² The shadow appeared in the distance and turned from Ged. Ged began the pursuit.

An incident occurred during the pursuit, whose meaning was not revealed in this book. The Shadow caused Ged to run aground on a tiny rocky sand bar where an old man and an old woman lived in squalor. Before Ged left the island, the old woman showed Ged her treasure:

It was a little child's dress of silk brocade stiff with seed-pearls, stained with salt, yellow with years. On the small bodice the pearls were worked in a shape Ged knew: the double arrow of the God-Brothers of the Kargad Empire, surmounted by a king's crown.³³

She also gave Ged a gift, "a bit of dark metal, a piece of broken jewelry perhaps, the half-circle of a broken ring."³⁴ Ged did not understand the significance of this meeting until the second book of the trilogy. The two old people would not leave the island when Ged made the offer but he thanked them for their kindness by causing their brackish spring to flow forever with sweet and clear water.

³¹ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 128.

³² Le Guin, Wizard, p. 135.

³³ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 142.

³⁴ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 142.

Ged gave the man and woman a gift of life, water, in return for saving his life.

Ged met his Shadow for the third time in a high cliffed dark bay of an island. The shadow appeared behind him in the boat. Ged tried to seize it, but he could not because there was nothing physical to hold. Now Ged saw that ". . . he had forged between them a bond, a link that had no breaking-point. There was no need to hunt the thing down, to track it, nor would its flight avail it. Neither could escape. When they had come to the time and place for their last meeting, they would meet."³⁵

*Indent
quote on
13 lines*

Ged's next meeting was with a friend. Vetch, a fellow student on Roke, had become the wizard on Ismay. After hearing Ged's story, Vetch, whose true-name was Estarriol, insisted upon accompanying Ged. The final journey took them to the Open Sea where there were no lands but also to "the very center of that balance, toward the place where light and darkness meet."³⁶ Here they appeared to run aground on dark sand under a dark sky. Ged walked over the sand to face his shadow for the final confrontation:

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

³⁵ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 148.

³⁶ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 167.

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.³⁷

Ged and Vetch returned to Ismay where they were greeted joyously by Yarrow, Vetch's young sister.

Clearly, the narrative pattern of the romantic quest-myth formed the basis for A Wizard of Earthsea. The three elements identified by Frye were the quest, the conflict between the two main characters, and the dialectical nature of this conflict. Regarding the quest, the three stages delineated by Frye were visible. Ged first went on a perilous journey during which he confronted his enemy three times. He also met other dangers in the form of wind, dragons, and manifestations of the darkness represented by the shadow. A crucial struggle occurred in which Ged emerged the victor. The struggle did not end in death for either but in the resolution of Ged's character. Robert Scholes explained:

The shadow was himself, his own capacity for evil, summoned up by his own power. To become whole, he had to face it, name it with his own name, and accept it as a part of himself. Thus, by restoring the balance in himself, he helped to restore the balance of his world.³⁸

³⁷ Le Guin, Wizard, p. 179.

³⁸ Scholes, p. 86.

In this restoration lay Ged's exaltation.

Ged gained his true name during the ceremony of Passage in the River Ar, but only after he faced the shadow of himself was he able to claim that name and his power completely. This acceptance of himself was Ged's final and complete passage into manhood.

The second and third elements of the quest-myth, the conflict between two main characters and the nature of this conflict was manifested throughout the book. The protagonist, Ged, represented the tendencies of man toward good. The antagonist, Ged's shadow, represented the tendencies of man toward evil. Ged was the objectification of good and the shadow was the objectification of evil. Because this is fantasy, the differences between the main characters are clear and not confused as they might be in realistic fiction.

THE TOMBS OF ATUAN

Ged's second quest, in The Tombs of Atuan, was by choice. On the isle Selidor, the dragon Orm-Embar explained to Ged the meaning of the bit of metal the woman on the sand bar had given him. It was half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe. There were nine runes imprinted on the ring. Its breakage and separation caused one rune, the Bond-Rune, the sign to peace, to be lost to Earthsea. The loss of this rune caused strife among the island nations. Orm-Embar also told Ged how he could find and restore the other half of the ring; by journeying to the Tombs of Atuan.

The Place of the Tombs was in the desert on the island Atuan in the Kargad Empire. It was a dead, dry place inhabited by a female priesthood, eunuch wardens, and guard soldiers. Here a young woman, Arha, the Eaten One, The First Priestess, was the servant of the Nameless Ones, the powers of darkness. Ged explained to Arha about the tombs:

"In the Archipelago--the Inner Lands--there are places which belong to the Old Powers of the Earth, like this one. But none so great as this one. Nowhere else have they a temple, and a priestess, and such worship as

*Student
quote*

they receive here."³⁹

The enemy was associated with darkness, sterility, and confusion. The Hall of the Throne was in decay and inhabited by owls, bats, and mice. Beneath the Hall and the Tombs was the Undertomb and the Labyrinth, known only to Arha and her eunuch. Few ventured into the desert around the Place of the Tombs. The virgin priestesses, the eunuchs, and the guards lived in dry isolation.

In Arha's fifteenth year, three prisoners were brought to the underground Room of Chains. Arha had to choose a method of death for these men. She caused them to be left chained without light, food, or water until they died. They died as Arha lived, in darkness and isolation.

Arha discovered Ged searching for something (the other half of the ring) and closed him into the Labyrinth beneath the Place of the Tombs. She was torn between letting him die under the ground for the sacrilege he had committed by entering the sacred place of the Nameless Ones and letting him live so that she could talk to him. As she chose to talk to him, a friendship grew. Ged was able to get the half-ring from the room of the Great Treasury. He also gave Arha back her name, Tenar. The two escaped as

³⁹Ursula Le Guin, The Tombs of Atuan (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 79.

an earthquake destroyed the Tombs. Ged explained that
 ". . . It was the Tombs that devoured themselves."⁴⁰

As stated previously, the quest of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe was by choice whereas Ged was forced to pursue his shadow in A Wizard of Earthsea. In The Tombs of Atuan Ged was older and in the fullness of his mage power. He chose the quest in an attempt to restore order to the kingdoms and empires of Earthsea by restoring the ring and the rune. Ged explained the Nameless Ones to Tenar:

They have nothing to give. They have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy. They cannot leave this place; they are this place; and it should be left to them. They should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshipped. The earth is beautiful, and bright, and kindly, but that is not all. The Earth is also terrible, and dark, and cruel. The rabbit shrieks dying in the green meadow. The mountains clench their great hands full of hidden fire. There are sharks in the sea, and there is cruelty in men's eyes. And where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds; there places are made in the world where darkness gathers, places given over wholly to the Ones whom we call Nameless, the ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the Light, the powers of the dark, of ruin, or madness.⁴¹

These are the same powers Ged met during his first quest. He told Tenar: "I told you that I had met with the Dark Powers before, in other places of the earth."⁴²

⁴⁰ Le Guin, Tombs, p. 127.

⁴¹ Le Guin, Tombs, pp. 106-107.

⁴² Le Guin, Tombs, p. 81.

Vetch was Ged's companion in his youth, now the companion in his maturity was the woman, Tenar. She was instrumental in the successful completion of this quest. Ged explained this to her. He said:

One man alone has no hope, here. I was dying of thirst when you gave me water, yet it was not the water alone that saved me. It was the strength of the hands that gave it.⁴³

And later:

Call it trust . . . That is one of its names. It is a very great thing. Though each of us alone is weak, having that we are strong, stronger than the Powers of the Dark.⁴⁴

Following their escape from the Place of the Tombs, Ged and Tenar sailed to Havnor to return the ring to the people of Earthsea. They would receive praise and honor for this. Tenar planned to live on Gont near Ogion the Silent. Ged carefully explained to Tenar why he could not stay with her:

Tenar, I go where I am sent. I follow my calling. It has not yet let me stay in any land for long. Do you see that? I do what I must do. Where I go, I must go alone.⁴⁵

The narrative pattern of the romantic quest-myth is again evident. Ged's journey was beneath the Place of the Tombs, underground in the Labyrinth. His life depended upon Arha who led him through the maze at her whim and

⁴³ Le Guin, Tombs, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Le Guin, Tombs, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Le Guin, Tombs, p. 135.

fancy. With her trust and help, Ged was able to confront the Nameless Ones, the powers of darkness in the world of Earthsea, and to triumph over them. The crucial struggle took place as Ged and Tenar attempted successfully to escape from them beneath the earth. Ged held back the earthquake until they reached the surface. The Place of the Tombs was destroyed by the earthquake. Ged and Tenar, when they reached Havnor, were greeted and honored for the return of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe.

Ged was again the hero of the second book of the trilogy. He was a mature hero in the fullness of his mage-power. The antagonist was the destructive powers of the world of Earthsea.

THE FARTHEST SHORE

The third quest, in The Farthest Shore, began with the arrival of a princely messenger from Enlad. Ged was now both Dragonlord and Archmage. He had lived on Roke Island five years. Arren, son of the Prince of Enlad and heir of the Principality of Morred, had been sent by his father to seek the counsel of the Wise concerning "some evil at work in our part of the world."⁴⁶ News had come from the northwest and southwest that ". . . The springs of wizardry have run dry."⁴⁷ Wizards were forgetting the spells and the true names.

The Council of the Wise, made up of the nine Masters of Roke, met but came to no sure conclusions. The Master Patterner said that: "There is fear at the roots."⁴⁸ A young sorcerer told Arren that he thought the problem with the world was that there was no king on the throne of Havnor. He explained to Arren: "Roke guides, but can't rule. The Balance lies here, but the Power should lie in

⁴⁶Ursula Le Guin, The Farthest Shore (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 5.

⁴⁷Le Guin, Shore, p. 6.

⁴⁸Le Guin, Shore, p. 11.

the king's hands."⁴⁹ The sorcerer repeated the prophecy of Maharion to Arren: "He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day."⁵⁰ Ged's opinion was that:

There is a weakening of power. There is a want of resolution. There is a dimming of the sun. I feel, my lords--I feel as if we who sit here talking, were all wounded mortally, and while we talk and talk our blood runs softly from our veins . . .⁵¹

He made the decision to leave Roke and sought the source of the trouble. Ged asked Arren to accompany him and Arren agreed to this.

The two companions set sail on their quest. They landed on three islands prior to discovering the location of the evil: Hort Town on Wathort, Lorbanery, and Obehol. In Hort Town Ged found a wizard named Hare who had lost his power. Ged tried to find out as much as he could from Hare but learned little because Hare was addicted to hazia. Ged told Arren what Hare had told him:

He says that he hasn't lost it but given it--traded it. For what? Life for life, he said. Power for power.⁵²

Arren and Ged observed that there was no order in Hort Town. The city seemed to have no law and no prosperity.

⁴⁹Le Guin, Shore, p. 17.

⁵⁰Le Guin, Shore, p. 17.

⁵¹Le Guin, Shore, p. 23.

⁵²Le Guin, Shore, p. 49.

Ged learned a third important thing from the incidents in Hort Town. He followed Hare on a journey of the spirit. Arren went on the journey also but he led Ged rather than followed him. Ged said, "I thought I had a follower, but I followed you."⁵³

The second island visited was Lorbanery, the island which in the past produced rich and beautiful silks. Ged told the inhabitants that he was a trader looking for emmelstone while he listened to their discussions of the lost art of making fine silk. He talked to Akaren, a woman of the family of dyers, and to her son, Sopli. Both Akaren and Sopli had gone mad. Akaren told Ged and Arren:

. . . my power: it kept me from life. So I lost it. I lost all the things I knew, all the words and names. . . . There is a hole in the world, and the light is running out of it. And the words go with the light. . . . My son sits staring all day in the dark, looking for the hole in the world.⁵⁴

Sopli told them:

I found the hole in the darkness. The King was standing there. He watches it; he rules it. He had a little flame, a little candle in his hand. He blew on it and it went out. Then he blew on it again and it burned!⁵⁵

Sopli told Ged and Arren that the King was somewhere in the west and that he wished to sail with them. Ged permitted him to do so.

⁵³ Le Guin, Shore, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Le Guin, Shore, p. 84.

⁵⁵ Le Guin, Shore, p. 89.

The three were unable to land at Obehol because the inhabitants attacked their boat. Sopli jumped overboard and drowned. Ged was injured badly by a spear and Arren had to turn the boat out of the bay. Lookfar drifted aimlessly until discovered and rescued.

Ged learned more of the evil on the journey from Lorbanery to Obehol. Arren began to dream terrible dreams. He saw the vision of Sopli. He dreamed of death and began to fear it in the same way Sopli feared it. Arren began to mistrust Ged.

He remembered his dreams: the moor, the pit, the cliffs, the dim light. That was death; that was the horror of death. It was from death he must escape, must find the way. And on the doorsill stood the figure crowned with shadow, holding out a little light no larger than a pearl, the glimmer of immortal life.⁵⁶

It was immortal life that Sopli was seeking. He and Arren became allied against Ged. Sopli told Arren, "I want to know I can come back. I want to be there. On the side of life. I want to live, to be safe. I hate--I hate this water. . . ." ⁵⁷ Water was used here as a symbol for life. Sopli hated life because he hated death. Without death there was no life. Ironically, water became Sopli's death.

Ged and Arren were saved by the Children of the Sea, a group of people who lived on large rafts and only

⁵⁶ Le Guin, Shore, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Le Guin, Shore, p. 101.

came to land once a year. The lives of the raft people were seen in sharp contrast to the aimless and wasteful lives of the people of Hort Town and on Lorbanary. The Children of the Sea followed the great grey whales according to the seasons of the year. They lived in total harmony with the environment, accepting both life and death. Here Ged's wound healed and Arren's strength and trust were restored.

Two events finally disturbed the tranquility and peace on the sea and forced Ged and Arren to resume the quest. During the Long Dance celebrating midsummer's eve, the summer solstice, the singers suddenly forgot the words to the chants. The darkness affecting Earthsea had reached even these remote people. Ged told Arren to sing some song so that the Long Dance could be finished. He did so and just as he finished, the dragon Orm Embar flew near seeking Ged. Ged told Arren what Orm Embar came for as the two set out following the path of the dragon:

He said, "In the west there is another Dragonlord; he works destruction on us, and his power is greater than ours." I said, "Even than thine, Orm Embar?" and he said, "Even than mine. I need thee: follow in haste."⁵⁸

Arren and Ged sailed through the Dragons' Run to Selidor. In the Dragons' Run, a stretch of parallel islands, they discovered that the dragons had lost the power of speech

⁵⁸ Le Guin, Shore, p. 132.

and had been driven mad. Ged and Arren reached the westernmost tip of Selidor. Here Ged summoned the Unmaker, the man who was once called Cob of Havnor: "Now do I summon you and here, my enemy, before my eyes and in the flesh, and bind you by the word that will not be spoken till time's end, to come!"⁵⁹ Cob arrived and tried to attack and kill Arren and Ged but Orm Embar dropped on him crushing and burning him. Orm Embar died but Cob crawled into the Dry Land.

Ged and Arren pursued Cob through the Dry Land and met him in the dry bed of a river below the Mountains of Pain. Ged and Cob argued in this place of death. Ged told him that:

. . . all who ever died, live; they are reborn and have no end, nor will there ever be an end. All, save you. For you would not have death. You lost death, you lost life, in order to save yourself. Yourself! Your immortal self! What is it? Who are you?⁶⁰

Ged succeeded in reaching the door, the dry spring at the mouth of the dry river and used all his power to close it. He then released Cob who remained in the Dry Land as shadow and name. Arren helped Ged over the Mountains of Pain to return to the living. The dragon Kalessin allowed Ged and Arren to mount and flew Arren to Roke and Ged to Gont. Arren thus fulfilled the prophecy

⁵⁹Le Guin, Shore, p. 168.

⁶⁰Le Guin, Shore, pp. 179-180.

and reigned on the throne in Havnor. Ged lived out his life in peace on Gont.

Ged's third and final quest was successful, but not without cost. The three stages of the quest were present. Ged and Arren went on a perilous journey in search of the cause of confusion in Earthsea. Various adventures attended their journey. In the final struggle with the foe, Ged was able to overcome him. Cob of Havnor finally and truly died in the struggle. Ged lost his wizardry. After their victory, Ged and Arren were carried to Roke where Arren was honored as the fulfiller of the prophecy of Maharion.

Ged's foe in the third book was Cob, a wizard who had overcome death but who had, as a consequence, lost life. Ged's victory over Cob restored order and balance to Earthsea.

SUMMARY

Northrop Frye established a framework for archetypal criticism in Anatomy of Criticism. The framework consisted of four narrative patterns: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony and satire. Within each of these patterns, Frye further recognized six distinct phases. A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, and The Farthest Shore best fit the narrative pattern Frye called the quest-romance, the third phase of the broader category, romance.

The three elements of the quest-romance were present in each of the three books. The elements were the quest, the conflict between two main characters, and the dialectical nature of this conflict.

The quests of Ged consisted of the three stages of the completed quest delineated by Frye. He called these stages ". . . the agon or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and the anagnorisis or discovery, the recognition of the hero."⁶¹

In each book of the Trilogy Ged emerged as the protagonist or hero. The Power of Darkness was the antagonist in each. Frye, in discussing characterization in romance wrote that:

⁶¹Frye, p. 187.

The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure, which means that subtlety and complexity are not much favored.⁶²

This dialectical nature was carried to the extreme in the trilogy when Ged's foe was never a man, but rather the objectification of part of the dark and destructive forces present in Earthsea.

In Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy, the structure of the narrative was archetypal. A similar narrative pattern was repeated in the three books. The major difference among the three patterns was in the manifestation of Ged's enemy. In A Wizard of Earthsea, Ged, a young man, confronted his own dark side. Ged, in the fullness of his mage-power, restored the Rune of Peace in The Tombs of Atuan. He defeated the Power of Darkness by meeting it in it's stronghold and thereby restoring peace to all Earthsea. Finally, an aging Ged confronted his own death in The Farthest Shore. He viewed death as the other side of life. Without death, there could be no life.

⁶²Frye, p. 195.

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APPENDIX
PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF URSULA K. LE GUIN

Titles and original copyright dates of some of the books published by Ursula Le Guin:

The Earthsea Trilogy (written for young adults):

<u>A Wizard of Earthsea</u>	1968
<u>The Tombs of Atuan</u>	1971
<u>The Farthest Shore</u>	1972

Novels written for adults:

<u>Planet of Exile</u>	1966
<u>Rocannon's World</u>	1966
<u>City of Illusions</u>	1967
<u>The Left Hand of Darkness</u>	1969
<u>The Lathe of Heaven</u>	1973
<u>The Dispossessed</u>	1974

Other books:

<u>From Elfland to Poughkeepsie</u> (a speech)	1973
<u>Wild Angels</u> (a collection of poems)	1975
<u>The Wind's Twelve Quarters</u> (a collection of short stories)	1975