

THE USE OF ARTHURIAN QUEST
MOTIFS IN THE SCIENCE FICTION AND
FANTASY OF URSULA K. LE GUIN: A STUDY OF
THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS AND A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA

by

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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

~~The Use of Arthurian Quest Motifs in the Science Fiction and Fantasy~~

~~of Ursula K. Le Guin: a Study of The Left Hand of Darkness and A Wizard~~

~~of Earthsea.~~

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ABSTRACT

Ursula K. Le Guin has written a number of essays detailing her interests and background in myth and legend but few critics have investigated her work from this point of view. There is, however, a great deal to be learned from such an investigation. It is possible, for example, to elucidate the quests and adventures of her heroes by seeking their source in the Arthurian world. Although it is the direct and more obvious parallels between Le Guin's questers and those of the Arthurian world that first become apparent upon such an investigation, it is through the subtle employment of the questing themes in portraying the growth and development of her heroes that we see the full influence of myth upon her work. When we see Genly arrive in Erhenrang, for instance, and follow his quest across the frontiers of Karhide and Orgoreyn, across the vast Gobrai wasteland and eventually back to Erhenrang where the weak king rules, we immediately see a parallel with Percival's quest. Yet the great circular quest that he follows through his journey is more than a simple configuration. It is also a life cycle through which we follow the quester's inner journey--his development from early naivete to maturity and later through individuation to a hero who is fully aware of his weaknesses as well as his strengths. The complex interrelationships between these inner and outer journeys may well be the reason why Le Guin's fiction stands out in a genre noted more for its action than its human interests.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife whose love and patience gave me strength, and to Mason Harris whose vision and unbounding enthusiasm lit the way.

Thus, I had long suffered in this quest,
 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
 So many times among "The Band"--to
 wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search
 addressed
Their steps--that just to fail as they, seemed
 best,
And all the doubt was now--should I
 be fit?

(Robert Browning, Child Roland to the Dark
Tower Came)

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Chapter 1

Whereas many science fiction writers start with man in order to make him godlike, Le Guin starts with nature in order to reach man. Man's imperfect nature and the necessity of coping with the problems such a nature implies are threads woven throughout her fiction... . Furthermore, most science fiction writers tend to concern themselves with the "outer realm" -- the vast cosmos or the superior technological society--whereas Le Guin is clearly chiefly concerned with the "inner realm", the arena of the psyche. A familiar science fiction scenario portrays an individual who sets out to change the world--to conquer it or shape it--for his own survival or for the survival of the group to which he belongs. Le Guin allows her characters to enter an inner world--often one of pain and mental anguish--to achieve wholeness, an almost mystic union, with the universe. This striving for union, or balance, with the universe--Le Guin's natural world--is not naively romantic. For Le Guin the world is composed of both good and evil, and the solutions to the problems which humans and other beings face must take into account the interdependency of these two forces.¹

Orlander and Greenberg's introductory remarks touch upon the essence of Le Guin's fiction. In worlds where wizards, dragons, aliens and androgynes abound there is always a constant to be found--the author's deep and abiding concern with the human condition. Amidst an assortment of exotic backdrops Le Guin commits herself fully to exploring the beliefs and changing attitudes of her hero. She penetrates and probes the very nature of her subjects and leaves little hidden in her bid to explore the relationships between humans, aliens and the environment in which they live. Hers are not worlds for 'Hobbesian heroes', but for the solitary, simple man--the hero in the making. It is on these worlds that we encounter the heroes struggling against loneliness and alienation and

grappling with new, emerging feelings precipitated by acculturation. We are privileged to follow the course of these heroes as they change and grow, learning through hardship and adventure. Yet in viewing their progress we also become aware of a greater schematic--a mythic framework within which the hero enacts the most ancient of rituals--the quest. Although, as Orlander and Greenberg rightly point out, many of Le Guin's protagonists search within the "inner realm" for understanding, it is initially in the external realm that we begin to see their quests reflect the patterns and motifs that have become so familiar to us. Perhaps the most familiar of these are the grail quests undertaken by Percival, Gawain and Lancelot. That Le Guin herself is aware of the emergence of such patterns in her work is made evident in her essay "Myth and Archetype":

The more original [the] work, the more imperiously recognizable it will be. "Yes, of course!" says the reader, recognizing himself, his dream, his nightmares. The characters, figures, motifs, plots, events of the story may be obvious parallels, even seemingly reproductions, of the material of myth and legend. There will be--openly in fantasy, covertly in naturalism--dragons, heroes, quests, objects of power, voyages at night and under sea, and so forth. In narrative, as in painting, certain familiar patterns will become visible.²

The remarkable parallels between the Arthurian questers and Le Guin's heroes not only serve to deepen our empathetic responses but also to demonstrate the universality of the quest itself. Le Guin, as literary critic and keen anthropologist, is on sure ground when she fuses myth with her own creative energy. The resulting mix produces a complex protagonist who ranges

across future worlds in search of the same ancient answers sought by his Arthurian precursors. To trace her use of the Arthurian quest motifs and her genius in employing them in science fiction is truly a rewarding experience.

When Orlander and Greenberg refer to Le Guin's focus on her heroes' attempt "to achieve wholeness," and a "mystic union with the universe," they touch upon the essence of the Arthurian quest. The grail, long sought after by the knights of the round table, epitomises this mystic element. By attaining the Holy Grail the knight creates a whole from two separate yet composite parts; the spiritual and the secular. It is this kind of harmonious balance, constructed through the union of opposites, that is at the heart of Le Guin's fiction. Her heroes, questing across wastelands, seek not only to attain material goals but to reach an understanding of their worlds and of themselves--an understanding that calls upon the quester to explore the dynamics of nature, all that is dark as well as light, evil as well as good, in an attempt to achieve a final vision of wholeness.

For Le Guin's questers, as well as Arthur's, the road to success is full of peril. There is no easy route, no short cut; each must undergo ordeals that plunge him into danger and sometimes bring him to the very brink of death. Yet each one must continue the journey, mastering first one skill, then another, in order to gain the experience that will eventually help him to fulfil his destiny. The nature of this experience

and the toll the ordeals take on the quester is nowhere better illustrated than in the case of Lancelot.

At first glance Arthur's champion appears to be a knight non pareil, yet we soon discover that he is not able to attain the Holy Grail because of deep-seated feelings of inadequacy. These feelings, generated by the guilt he experiences after his affair with Guinevere, create within him a dichotomy of tensions--the desire to rid himself of sin and behold the grail and his lust for the queen. Thus the quest he vows to follow chronicles the internal struggle as well as the physical journey. Indeed, we are given an intimate look at the opposed forces vying for supremacy within the tortured knight. Simply put, he is on one hand ruled by his adulterous passion while on the other he strives to attain spiritual perfection. These mutually exclusive forces wreak havoc upon him. He can neither contain nor control their power. Instead of striving to understand their relationship to a greater whole he persists in suppressing one in favor of elevating the other. He even goes so far as to renounce his secular side by seeking to live the life of a holy hermit:

And Lancelot ... rode off weeping and sorrowing and begging Our Lord to lead him back into a path which would profit his soul: for he realized he had sinned so grievously in his life and so offended his Maker, that Our Lord's mercy may be truly boundless for him to find forgiveness. So he came at last to this: that however much his former life had pleased him, his present practice [as a hermit] pleased him ten times more.³

Lancelot's failure to sustain the role of the hermit is

readily understandable--he has been ruled by his passions all of his life, he is no saint, indeed, he is never truly shriven. His spiritual goals cannot be achieved through will alone no more than he can give up his secular life. Lancelot's failure lies in his limited vision. He cannot see that he needs both the spiritual and the secular; that one checks the other and that each, though indivisible, forms an integral part of a balanced whole. Ironically, Lancelot is never able to attain the grail, only behold it for a few, brief moments. What we see through his actions is a knight who is partly successful and partly defeated--a knight who is never able to reach his full potential, never able to realize his ambitions because of his immaturity and inability to resolve his internal struggle.

In turning to Percival we see similar obstacles in his path; the sin, the internal struggle and the suffering are all there. Through the works of Chretien and Wolfram von Eschenbach, however, we are afforded a detailed view of the quester and the changes wrought during his journey. At the outset of these works it is clear that the quest, at least in part, is portrayed as a rite-of-passage. Through a series of tests and adventures, each one serving to instruct the young hero, we witness all the changes necessary for him to complete his task. From naive child to knight of the realm the years of questing carefully mould the character that finally enables him to claim his rightful place as a successor to the Fisher King. The journey demands much of Percival. Spiritually he must

overcome temptations, and like Lancelot, expiate the sins he had earlier committed. This effort, often undermined by his knightly ambitions, creates a dichotomy of tensions similar to those evident in the other questers--the desire for chivalric fame and the longing for spiritual solace:

He spent five years thus, at no loss
for strange adventures to pursue,
and dangerous and hard ones too,
which he kept seeking, all the same,
while in pursuit of knightly fame,
and he fought well and held his own... .
The knight, in terror of the sin
he feared he had committed, grasped
the hermit by the foot, and clasped
his hands, and bent down low, and prayed
the hermit for advice and aid
of which he was in urgent need.⁴

The internal conflict, the dynamically opposed ideals, and the educative process of the journey that are fundamental elements of the Arthurian quest provide the template from which Le Guin works to create a greater depth in her characters. Like the knights of the round table, her heroes struggle against the adversity, alienation and ignorance that keep them from their goal. Their quests too are journeys of understanding, each exacting its price from the hero; we see a Lancelot who succumbs to temptation, a Percival who emerges from ignorance to claim his true heritage and a Gawain given to impulsive action rather than to rational thought. The quests lead the heroes on a rich and complex human voyage--a voyage that precipitates irrevocable changes. Like their Arthurian precursors, no quester returns the same from the perilous journey. Each one grows through the adventures that prepare them later to ask the correct questions

or solve a particular problem; each suffers doubt and despair similar to those that tormented their Arthurian counterparts.

To trace the evolution of Le Guin's use of the quest we first need to consider her two early novels, Rocannon's World and City of Illusions. In each of these novels her heroes are patterned after the Arthurian heroes in a direct way. Although neither Rocannon nor Falk/Ramarren have the depth and dimension of Le Guin's later heroes they, nevertheless, closely follow the basic schema of the Percival/Lancelot quests.

From the outset it becomes clear that the heroes' quests follow a design or a formula. First we see each hero leave behind the comforts and securities of homelife and set out, like their Arthurian counterparts, on long and arduous journeys. Travelling through forests and over barren plains, they meet with temptations, dangers, and an assortment of adventures that call upon their reserve of tact and physical strength. As we follow these journeys, moreover, we become increasingly aware of the educative process at work--a process similar in effect to that found in the accounts of Percival and Lancelot. The adventures, the struggles, and the mistakes both Rocannon and Falk make serve to create within them a series of changes. These changes, wrought by the journey, are profound and lasting. Rocannon, for example, who comes to Fomalhaut II as a socio-scientific investigator interested in collecting data and studying the effects of intercultural relations, ends his journey living out his final years in voluntary exile among the Fomalhaut natives.

During the course of his quest he changes from observer to participant, from scientist to soldier, in a continuing odyssey of physical hardship and personal introspection.

In order to illustrate the nature and extent of these changes Le Guin employs a major Arthurian motif--she shows how progress is made by the quester when he turns from his past and awakens to a new future. In Rocannon's case this turning point occurs when he is captured by Zgama--an account worth looking at in detail. After a surprise attack Rocannon is taken by the malevolent chief to a dark, barren hall where he is stripped and cast into a fire. Yet Rocannon does not die. He does not even burn. He is saved instead by a super-material that fits him skin-tight. Thus, what we witness when we see Rocannon in the fire is not a true burning but rather a symbolic purging--a purging that rids him of his past:

As the night and the fire went on and on he thought also of the little Fian Kyo, childlike and uncanny, bound to him in a way he had not tried to understand; he saw Yahan singing of the heroes; and Iot and Raho grumbling and laughing together as they curried the great-winged steeds; and Haldre unclasping the gold chain from her neck. Nothing came to him from all his earlier life, though he lived many years on many worlds, learned much, done much. It was all burned away.⁵

Rocannon stumbles naked from the fire on the third day. Near death he is hardly able to move, scarcely able to breathe. But at this point, Le Guin seems to stop short. By not taking Rocannon's emergence from the flames one step further and developing the idea of a symbolic rebirth, the way she does in The Left Hand of Darkness and The Wizard of Earthsea, she limits

the extent to which she can portray the changes. We may see Rocannon's awakening to new responsibilities and even greater commitment to his goals, for example, but both the cost of losing his past way of life and an account of the price that must be paid for his new beginning are sadly missing.

The situation is similar in City of Illusions. The educative process of the journey is clear from the moment Falk first sets out to find Es Toch. Like Rocannon, he too must undergo changes within himself in order to complete his quest--changes that are also a direct result of the way in which he learns and responds to the adventures he meets with on the way to seeking his goal. When we follow Falk's quest, moreover, we again see Le Guin stripping away her hero's past in order for him to awaken to a new beginning. This time, however, the act is not symbolic. Falk, who is developed from the mind-razed hulk of Ramarren, is an entity unto himself, that is until he is informed by the Shing of his former existence.

The choice they present to him at this point is deceptively simple. They offer either to restore him to his former self by razing his present state of mind, or to let him continue living in the form of Falk. But Le Guin's hero is determined to pursue a third option--his own. He decides to find a way that will allow him to keep and integrate both selves. The decision he makes exemplifies Le Guin's idea that harmony and balance can be maintained through the integration of opposites:

In those first fearful hours, he begged and prayed to be delivered sometimes from one self,

sometimes from the other. Once when he cried out in anguish in his own native tongue, he did not understand the words he had spoken, and this was so terrible that in utter misery he wept; it was Falk who did not understand, but Ramarren who wept.

In that same moment of misery he touched for the first time, for a moment only, the balance-pole, the center, and for a moment was himself: then lost again, but with just enough strength to hope for the next moment of harmony.⁶

After the emergence of Ramarren/Falk from the parahypnotic center and Rocannon from the fire, each continues the quest with renewed hope. The goals they strive for, though still difficult, are made more attainable now as a result of their newly acquired knowledge. By becoming more of a part of the world that is to be named after him, Rocannon, for example, is able to destroy his enemies through the secret knowledge that is given to him by the Ancient One. Ramarren/Falk on the other hand, uses one part of his mind to control the Shing while the other part of him, Falk, is free to think and act. Using the cunning he has learned as Falk and applying the knowledge acquired during his journey he is able to free himself from the Shing and return to Werel. Thus the quests of both heroes end in success. The enemy is defeated and we are left with the satisfaction of having witnessed good triumphing over evil and the knowledge that true heroism is born from the nobler instincts of man.

When we look at the journey of Percival and Lancelot the similarities are striking. The heroes, coming from the outside, enter the chivalric world with a mission to complete. However, like Rocannon and Falk they make tragic errors in judgment and

as a consequence suffer and are forced to wander, as exiles, from one adventure to another. Unable to attain the grail they so eagerly seek without help or guidance, Percival and Lancelot turn to a hermit who acts as a spiritual counsellor. The resolve of both heroes in following the advice of the hermit shows an important change in the direction of the quest and marks a new spiritual beginning.

The emergence of the questers from the wasteland and their arrival at the hermit's home where the changes take place is clearly reflected in the emergence of Rocannon from the fire and his subsequent counselling from the Ancient One, and later in Ramarren's emergence from the parahypnotic center and his counselling by Falk. Lancelot's partial success too is reflected in the final stages of Rocannon and Falk's quest. For both of Le Guin's heroes, though successful, are not completely so. While it is evident that they achieve their immediate goals, they are, nonetheless, left at the end of their quests far from home with a great deal more to accomplish.

These events and the motifs that form the basic pattern of the Arthurian quest are used by Le Guin to provide a structural framework and to create a mythic background for the quests of Rocannon and Falk. Yet she seems to fall short of her critics' expectations in some major areas. Brigg, for example, argues that, "the heroic ideal is not suited to the ethnologist,"⁷ and that Rocannon's driving desire to destroy his enemies is too simple and as a result restricts his potential for growth. A

similar criticism may be made of Falk whose single-minded obsession of ridding the Earth of the Shing also leaves little room for development. In the two novels that follow, Left Hand of Darkness and A Wizard of Earthsea, Le Guin widens her horizon considerably; not only does she create worlds within which her heroes are given greater latitude and scope for development, but by following the pattern of the Arthurian quest more closely she is able to explore the 'human condition' more effectively.

In these novels she traces, like Chretien and Wolfram before her, the psychological growth of her hero and we become increasingly aware of her concern with the interior journey. Because of this the quests of Genly and Ged are not the same simple tales of heroic undertaking as those of Rocannon and Falk. They are much more. Le Guin's delicate balance of ideas and her profound insight into human nature serve to help develop her new heroes more fully. In their journeys we see the internal suffering as well as the exterior hardships, the long and difficult process of individuation as well as the physical actions each adventure demands. For these reasons the quest itself, though more complex, is more complete. The journey the heroes embark upon also takes on new form and meaning. No longer is their progress linear, but circular, like the Arthurian quest. Each step the hero takes moves him further away from his goal and his own beliefs. It is only when he reaches the point of individuation or new understanding that the goal is seen clearly and the return journey made possible.

The great Arthurian design provides more than just structure and mythic background to Left Hand of Darkness and A Wizard of Earthsea, it lends to the works a central theme from which Le Guin explores man's struggle to find harmony within and his unremitting efforts to understand the nature of the world that lies without. It is this design in particular that helps separate the early Hainish novels from the later fiction. As Slusser notes:

These early novels, however skillfully written, remain verbal skeletons, too stylized and bound by the conventions of the space adventure to be truly effective. In The Left Hand of Darkness, Le Guin takes a bold step, for here the Hainish saga is transposed into concrete terms--recognizable societies, with men instead of symbols.⁸

To find the source of these 'concrete terms,' we need look no further than the Arthurian world--a world where heroes who champion the causes of others so often fall victim to human frailties themselves, where the spiritual tempers the secular, and wisdom is won from experience.

Chapter 2

So it was spring in the Year One in Erhenrang, capital city of karhide, and I was in peril of my life, and did not know it.

I was in a parade. I walked just behind the gossiwors and just behind the king. It was raining.

Rainclouds over dark towers, rain falling in deep streets, a dark storm-beaten city of stone, through which one vein of gold winds slowly. First come merchants, potentates, and artisans of the City Erhenrang, rank after rank, magnificently clothed, advancing through the rain as comfortably as fish through sea.¹

This is our first glimpse of Erhenrang, royal city of Karhide and of Genly Ai, envoy of the Ekumen. The incongruous juxtaposition of space traveller and medieval parade that initially precipitates thoughts of fantasy rather than science fiction, is our first introduction to Le Guin's subtle use of Arthurian myth. For it is with Genly's entrance into Erhenrang that we first see the link with Percival. When the early hero enters Carduel [Camelot] he, like Genly, is marked by his differences and despite his desire to belong suffers the same derision as his counterpart.

With further examination a number of other important connections become immediately apparent. Both heroes, we note, arrive from the outside; Percival from "deep in a forest lone and wild",² Genly from far distant Earth. The success of their mission, which involves quests that will take them across vast waste lands, relies upon first gaining the trust and confidence of the king. For each hero this task proves to be more difficult than expected. The problems they face are not easily overcome. As outsiders they are naturally ignorant of

the ways and customs of the royal court and as a result are subjected to scorn and ridicule. Little either hero says is believed at first, and, try as they might to express themselves, their initial attempts at communication are fraught with misunderstanding. In order for Genly and Percival to surmount these difficulties and gain a position of trust and confidence, therefore, they need to show that they are worthy of their claims. For Percival this means proving himself in the field of battle--he must demonstrate to the king that he can fight like the knight he believes himself to be. This he does by avenging the honour of the queen and killing the Red Knight in fair combat. For Genly the process of proving what he claims to be is considerably more difficult than for Percival. He must demonstrate to the king that he is an envoy from the Ekumenical Council despite the fact that this means jeopardising the lives of his crew by bringing them to Gethen.

It is plain to see that these early connections are not just tenuous links. They form instead some of the strongest bonds between Arthurian myth and Le Guin's fiction. Indeed, she moves visibly from using general motifs and constructs to provide a framework as she did in Rocannon's World and City of Illusions to employing a specific myth, that of Percival, from which she not only shapes and patterns her work, but from which she begins to draw a detailed picture of her hero. With this clearly defined source in mind it is evident that a close examination of Percival's quest is in order if we are to shed

light on Genly's complex nature and find meaning in his perilous journey across the Gobrin ice.

One of the first interconnecting motifs that comes to our attention upon further examination is that of the preparation of the hero. It becomes clear after their arrival at the royal court that both Percival and Genly are on the threshold of a great mission; yet equally evident at this early stage is their inability to carry it out. The opening scenes at the court highlight this by laying bare their scant qualifications for the job. Percival, who literally comes blundering into the court, shows little understanding of court etiquette or behavior.

In fact, after the hero knocks off the king's hat while attempting to reign his horse, we wonder if he could ever do any more than simply aspire to be a knight. Yet we soon learn that his clumsiness is not the only deficiency called into question--he is also seen by the courtiers as, 'savage-bred' and foolish:

The young man did not care a chive
for anything the king related,
and in no way commiserated
with his wife, shame, or suffering.
"Make me a knight, my lord the king,"
was what the youth was heard to say,
"I'm eager to be on my way."
The eyes of this young savage-bred
were sparkling within his head.
No people present thought he seemed
intelligent, and yet they deemed
the fine youth someone of account.³

Although Genly is neither as ignorant nor as naive as Percival, he is, nevertheless, lacking in the tact and diplomacy required to communicate effectively with the king. His task, to

convince Argaven that his intentions are honorable and that he wishes for the Gethenian world to become part of the Ekumenical empire, is not an easy one and is doomed to failure from the beginning. Without the knowledge and understanding of the language he is unable to communicate effectively:

Though Argaven might be neither sane nor shrewd, he had had a long practice in the evasions and challenges and rhetorical subtleties used in conversation by those whose main aim in life was the achievement and maintenance of the **shifgrethor** relationship on a high level. Whole areas of that relationship were still blank to me, but I knew something about the competitive, prestige-seeking aspect of it, and about the perpetual conversational duel which can result from it. That I was not duelling with Argaven, but trying to communicate with him, was in itself an incommunicable fact.⁴

The source of Genly's failure lies in his poor understanding of **shifgrethor**--the all-important principle of social authority in the royal city. Without the art of applying it or recognising when it is used in conversation, the many inferences and nuances of the conversation are missed and the unenlightened speaker runs the risk of seriously offending the person with whom he is conversing. We first notice Genly's lack of knowledge in this area when he meets with Estraven. This occurs when Genly is briefed by the prime minister for his audience with the king. The conversation, in which Genly misconstrues everything the prime minister says, demonstrates the lengthy preparation and the many changes necessary before he can realise his goals. **Shifgrethor**, inexperience, and lack of trust, serve to blind him to the machinations that threaten Estraven's position. The one chance Genly has of

success, the one true friend and ally to his cause are denied him because of his naivete:

He spoke as if ashamed of me, not of himself. Clearly there was a significance in his invitation and my acceptance of it which I had missed. But my blunder was in manners, his in morals. All I thought at first was that I had been right all along not to trust Estraven. He was not merely adroit and not merely powerful, he was faithless.⁵

All that Genly sees and suspects is wrong. Estraven is not faithless, he is no turncoat, no traitor, he is loyal to Gethen and stands, in principle, for what the Ekumen represents. Like Percival, however, Genly at the onset of his quest is unable to read all but the most obvious of signs. He is blind to the intrigues of the court and oblivious to the subtle hints his friend gives in the same way as Percival is blind to Kay's jeering and to the advice Arthur offers.

It is clear that both heroes have a great deal to learn if they are to achieve any measure of success in the quest. First, each must learn the rules of the court, next he must familiarize himself with this knowledge in order to become more resourceful. In short, their preparation must include, as its fundamental base, a continuous process of acculturation--a process that calls upon both worlds to provide guidance in the form of a teacher. For Percival the Arthurian world provides help through the teachings and advice of Lord Gornemant of Gohort. Genly, on the other hand, is shown Gethen through the eyes of Lord Estraven.

The work is arduous, the gap between teacher and pupil is

great. In Percival's case this gap is mostly a product of his own youthful ignorance, something that he is eventually able to overcome through the experience he gains on the quest. Initially, however, he needs help in the most elementary areas in order to prepare him for knighthood. This makes Gornemant's task an onerous one, for Percival, despite the fact that he is quick to learn, needs to be instructed in everything from how to dress to deporting himself like a knight:

"My friend, when I brought you inside, you promised me you would obey whatever counsel I might say."

"I'll wear the clothes, for that's the truth.

I shall not fail," replied the youth, "In any way to do your bidding."⁶

Genly is neither as youthful nor as ignorant as his precursor, yet his need of instruction is just as great. His education, taking on a far more subtle and complex form, ranges from coming to terms with *shifgrethor*, to facing his own psychological fears and distrust of alien sexuality:

Thus as I sipped my smoking sour beer I thought that at table Estraven's performance had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? For it was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture: in him, or in my own attitude towards him?⁷

So difficult is it for Genly to overcome his fears that the process of acculturation takes a great deal of time. Yet through the help of his friend and mentor, Genly is able to make steady progress. Early on, their friendship, though stormy and

full of misunderstanding, is bound by a mutual external need--the need that their worlds have for one another. But during the long journey that follows their rocky beginning, the teacher and pupil grow gradually closer in their understanding of each other until, by the end of the quest, it is no longer only the external need that binds them, but a new emergent force--a force that comes from within; a love and respect for each other that transcends even the terror of the Gobrin Ice fields.

Although Genly relies upon Estraven almost exclusively to guide and teach him, this cannot be said of Percival and his mentor. Their relationship has neither the complexity nor intimacy of Genly and Estraven's. In truth, there is little time for such a relationship to develop during the few days they spend together. It is, however, interesting to note that the parting advice Lord Gohort gives to Percival after his formalized training serves to form a code which shapes the young knight's whole future:

You must not talk too freely, for
no one can talk too long before
he makes a statement lacking sense,
or which is rude and gives offense.
The man's saying's always been
that 'Too much talking is a sin.'⁸

These words, completing the first stage of Percival's education, have a profound effect on the hero's life. For as long as he journeys on his quest they provide a guiding light for his actions. There is, however an ironic twist in this advice, as there is in Genly's meeting with Estraven: for

Percival to finally succeed he must forget what he learns from Lord Gohort and think for himself; Genly's success, on the other hand, is contingent upon learning what was not said in the conversation and then deciding on a course of action.

The initial time each hero spends with his tutors marks a clear beginning to the quest. Enough is taught to ensure survival during the early stages of the quest but far less than the hero needs in order to become successful. As if to demonstrate this point Le Guin and Chretien both follow the teacher/pupil episodes by affording their heroes the chance opportunity of fulfilling the quest without further instruction or experience. Genly's opportunity comes almost immediately. The day after his stay with Estraven he is given an audience with the king. He has only to deliver a message and convince the king that his intentions are honorable and that he wishes only for the Gethenian world to become part of the Ekumenical empire and his quest would be complete. Genly would gain a world for the Ekumen and at the same time save Karhide from an impending war. But Genly's attempts end in a miserable failure due to his lack of **shifgrethor** and his ignorance of the court intrigue:

"I don't like tricks, Mr. Ai."

"It's not a trick, sir. Some of your own scientists have examined--"

"I'm not a scientist."

"You're a sovereign, my lord. Your peers on the Prime World of the Ekumen wait for a word from you."

He looked at me savagely. In trying to flatter and interest him I had cornered him in a prestige-trap. It was all going wrong. 9

His dark presentment is realized. All does go wrong. Try as he might, Genly cannot establish any meaningful rapport with the king, and by the end of the meeting the position at Karhide is the same with little or nothing accomplished despite his noble intentions.

Upon leaving the king's court Genly stands in the deserted garden and reflects on his meting and subsequent failure. Dejected, he looks around him at the snow in the greying afternoon light and resolves to journey to the Fastness in order to learn more about Karhide. The journey that he is about to embark upon is, like Percival's, the first part of a circular quest that will eventually return him to the king who holds the key to success. With his back turned to the palace Genly resolves to complete his mission. His final words echo a prophetic note shared by Percival: "For two years I had been answering questions, now I would ask some,"¹⁰ he says.

Percival's chance opportunity to complete his quest also comes shortly after he leaves his teacher. He is bent at this point on visiting his motherland. After journeying some miles he comes across a river that blocks his way. Here he halts, there is no bridge, no ford. On the river, however, is a fisherman of whom Percival asks directions. He is told that there is a castle close by where he may spend the night or longer if he so desires. Upon entering the castle he is shown into the main hall and brought before the king. The results of the ensuing conversation are as disastrous for the king and

Percival as for the king and Genly. The lack of communication in both cases is due to naivete; Genly's in thinking that he could achieve his goal without an understanding of Gethen's politics or shiftgrethor, and Percival's in so rigidly adhering to Gohort's advice and not understanding that his present circumstances were exceptional. This latter point is clearly illustrated after Percival witnesses the miracle of the Bleeding Lance and fails to ask concerning its source or purpose:

The knight who came not long ago
beheld this marvel, but preferred
not to enquire why it occurred,
for he recalled the admonition
the lord made part of his tuition,
since he had taken pains to stress
the dangers of loquaciousness.¹¹

Even when Percival sees the Grail he fails to enquire about its nature or purpose:

Again the Grail passed by the bed,
and still the youth remained reserved
about the grail and whom they served.¹²

The remainder of Percival's time with the king is spent in casual conversation over supper after which Percival retires to bed. When he awakens in the morning, however, it is to find that the castle is deserted. He is desolated. He realizes that the grail is lost to him. Solitary and saddened he prepares to leave the castle. At the drawbridge he stops a moment to reflect upon his actions, or rather inactions, during the night before. There, he resolves, like Genly, to seek the information he needs elsewhere, to ask questions rather than follow Gornemant's advice:

The drawbridge lay across the stream.
 He would not wait and formed a scheme
 of searching through the woods as well
 to see if anyone could tell
 about lance, why it was bleeding,
 about the grail, whom they were feeding,
 and where they carried it in state... .
 "Whoever raised the bridge," said he,
 "Where are you? Come and talk to
 Say something to me; come in view.
 There's something I would ask of you,
 some things I wanted to enquire,
 some information I desire."¹³

Upon leaving the king's grounds both heroes set out on a quest that spans seasons and takes them across continents. Yet as we have seen each is ill prepared for the task at hand. Percival who is physically able and has grown in maturity is not spiritually capable of completing the quest, while Genly begins with even greater disadvantages: he is both physically hard pressed to withstand the bitter cold of Gethen and emotionally insecure in his dealings with the Gethenians.

In order to reach his goal, Genly decides to leave Karhide and set out for the Handdara Fastness in Rer. He will learn, he vows, how to ask the right questions. Unlike Percival who realizes his mistake immediately after losing the grail, Genly must journey to the extremities of the country to learn what questions he should ask and how he should ask them. His arrival at the Fastness is timely, the Foretellers are about to gather. Faxe, the weaver, invites him to join them and asks Genly if he would like to make use of their posers. Genly gladly accepts and broaches the subject that is so close to his heart--the importance of what questions to ask; "The more qualified and

limited the question the more exact the answer," he is told. "Vagueness breeds vagueness,"¹⁴ add the Foretellers. Armed with this knowledge he is invited to ask the Foreteller any question he desires. He learns his lesson well. His question is simple and to the point: "Will this world Gethen be a member of the Ekumen of Known Worlds, five years from now?" he asks.

The answer to Genly's question is seminal; not only does it provide Genly with the knowledge that he will ultimately be successful in his quest, it also provides a further example of Le Guin's adept use of the quest motif--the prophecy of fulfilling destiny. This motif, best illustrated by the Seige Perilous in the Quest del Sang Graal, affords the reader a different perspective on the hero. No longer is the quester simply seeking a grail, he is also fulfilling his own destiny. When Galahad enters Arthur's court and takes his place at the round table, we become aware that the conditions are special. After he takes his place in the Seige Perilous we are informed that he is destined to find the grail and in doing so claim his heritage. Galahad himself acknowledges his lineage and the fact that he will soon visit the castle:

The Knight sat down with impunity and said in turn:
 'Sir, you may return now for you have carried out your orders faithfully. Greet all at the blessed castle on my behalf, especially my uncle, King Pelles, and my grandsire, the Rich Fisher King, and tell them from me that I will visit them as soon as I have the means and the occasion.¹⁵

As soon as his lineage is established, it is clear that Galahad

will succeed where others will fail, for the Seige Perilous is kept only for the knight destined to complete such a quest.

In a more oblique way Chretien and Wolfram also show us that Percival's quest contains the element of fulfilling one's destiny. After his miserable failure at the grail castle Percival meets his cousin weeping over the dead body of a knight. She informs him that the castle he stayed at was none other than that of the Fisher King and proceeds to detail the history of the king and his lands. Percival, listening to the account is awestruck. Finally, when his cousin finishes she asks the all-important question:

"Tell me friend, what is your name?"
Not knowing his real name at all,
he guessed his name was Percival
of Wales and said so... ."16

It is a point of revelation. For the first time Percival is aware of himself and his responsibilities. His lineage is established and as a consequence his destiny to be the next guardian of the grail. In Wolfram's account, a further illustration of this motif is seen when Percival is confronted by a sorceress called Cundrie. She arrives on the scene at a propitious moment, when Percival is thinking more about becoming a knight of the Round Table than pursuing the grail. Cundrie then reminds him in no uncertain terms of his duty and of the destiny he is yet to fulfil:

Had you thought of asking them there at Munsalvaesche,
your question would have brought you more than
Tabronit, city of fabled wealth in heathendom, could
give. Feirefiz Angevin, whose manly courage never
failed him--that same courage possessed by him that

was father to you both--won the queen of that country with fierce deeds of arms... . Alas, that it was ever made known by me that Herzel's child has strayed thus from the path of fame!¹⁷

In Le Guin's work the motif occurs, as in Wolfram's, after the hero's initial failure. For Genly the success of his mission and thus his destined role is prophesied by the Haddarata Foretellers. After a long and complicated ceremony Genly is told that Gethen will indeed become a member of the Ekumen within the space of five years. The prophecy reassures Genly and he prepares to set out like Percival, renewed in his determination to continue the quest.

With both heroes now ready to continue their quests and fulfil their destinies, the great journey begins--a journey that fully prepares the hero for the task at hand. Percival, though proficient in arms, is still in need of the spiritual strength his heritage demands. Genly, on the other hand, needs to see as a Gethenian would see, to view the world through Gethenian eyes. Only then can he effect the changes he needs in the court and fulfil the destiny told him by the Handdara Foretellers.

To acquire these elements a great deal of change is needed in the quester. There remains, in each case, a number of prejudices and misconceptions blocking the integration of the new knowledge that is to be learned. In order to rid the hero of these inhibitions and facilitate acquisition of the new knowledge and understanding, the journey now functions, in part, reductively. Just as Percival must arrive at a point of spiritual origin in order to discover true faith, so must Genly

be stripped of his psychological fears of Gethenian sexuality in order that he may arrive at a point where he can understand the true concept of shifgrethor. The second phase of the quest, then, can be seen to educate the hero through a process of unlearning and undoing.

Le Guin wastes no time in introducing this element. Soon after Genly receives the news that Gethen will join the Ekumen he discusses his future with Faxe. As they walk in the garden Faxe tells Genly that, "'Ignorance is the ground of thought,'" and that, "'unproof is the ground of action.'"¹⁸ What makes life possible, adds Faxe is uncertainty, not knowing what comes next. His message is clear; if Genly is to be successful he must rid himself of any preconceptions he has already and start anew. He must open himself up and begin again. In short, Faxe strives to engender a new perception in Genly, to create a tabula Rasa, a visible beginning from which Genly can interact more effectively with the Gethenians.

From this point on, Genly's journey takes on the appearance of a journey back to a beginning rather than a journey forward to an end. As we trace the hero's steps across Orgoreyn we see this curious process of regression subtly expressed in the way he perceives the people and the landscape. What he first sees as solid and tangible he later comes to view as vague and insubstantial:

The great buildings of central Mishnory, government offices, schools, Yomesh temples, were so blurred by rain in the liquid glare of the high streetlights that they looked as if they were

melting. Their corners were vague, their facades streaked, dewed, smeared. There was something fluid, insubstantial, in the heaviness of this city built of monoliths, this monolithic state which called the part and the whole by the same name. And Shugis, my jovial host, a heavy man, a substantial man, he too was somehow, around the corners and edges, a little vague, a little, just a little bit unreal.¹⁹

His view reflects the progress of unlearning and undoing that Faxe earlier set in motion. The process, which becomes so apparent in the way that Genly sees things in Orgoreyn, also manifests itself in his actions. When he later meets with the Commensals he allows himself to be manipulated and used first by one faction then by another. In the end he is duped into surrendering his ansible into their hands and so severs his one link with his mother ship. It is a costly move and a dangerous mistake. Yet Genly, who is handled with such surprising ease by the Orgotians, whom Estraven tells us are "witless" and "simple-minded," has little chance of understanding their darker design. His actions during his meeting with the Commensals both undermine and in part undo much of what he has accomplished up to this point. Now, cut off from his world, he is forced to continue alone, unaided, on a quest whose success depends more and more on the outcome of his struggle to resolve his internal conflicts.

The regressive steps in Genly's journey that help facilitate resolution are fascinating to trace. Unlike the relatively simple steps that Rocannon takes by undergoing a purging of his former life in order to resolve his internal struggle, or those taken by Falk, who simply reaches back to

Ramarren for help, Genly is taken on a harrowing odyssey of physical abuse and mental torture before he is able to continue his quest. The unlearning and undoing that form the base of this journey are shown to us in a powerful admixture of symbolic and literal action--action that takes us step by step through the stages of adulthood, childhood and infancy, to the point of birth itself.

After the meeting with the commensals the regressive journey continues swiftly. At midnight the Sarf agents arrive at Genly's room with a warrant for his arrest. Alone and confused he is incarcerated and given veridical drugs in an effort to extract information about his mission. For Genly this is his last view of Mishnory. As the drugs take effect the insubstantial world about him dissolves into his own internal darkness and he is loaded on a caravan truck and spirited helplessly away towards the farthest reaches of Orgoreyn. Unable to tell the day or direction he is taking, Genly huddles for warmth with his fellow prisoners in an attempt to stay alive during the interminable crossing. The caravan finally halts at Pulefen, the most distant outpost of Orgoreyn, and the prisoners are let out. Naked, weak, and hungry, Genly emerges with the others, crawling on his hands and knees to where the guards stand in the blinding sunlight.

This pathetic, childlike figure of Genly is a far cry from the Hainish envoy we were earlier introduced to in Karhide. As a result of the drugs and the terrible caravan crossing he is

reduced now to the point where he is scarcely able to fend for himself. Soon, even his conscious world shrinks to the primitive confines of the commensality where he finds himself surrounded by lifeless figures of fellow inmates who are devoid of feeling and as "sexless as steers."

The day to day existence and monotonous routine of Pulefen which produces the infantilized state in the inmates also pushes Genly further and further towards a point of utter helplessness. Through the use of more veridical drugs, the side effects of which are devastating, he is reduced to a near comatose state by the end of the month. In the last few days he is hardly able to move from his bed or hold a coherent train of thought for any length of time. Our last view of Genly during the final stages of this inexorable journey is dominated by his concerns with life and death. It is as if he senses his own mortality. Then, just before the end, in the dusky quiet of the barracks, he sees everything in a vision of clarity. He talks with his dying companion, Asra, about the nature of myth and the meaning of birth. And Asra, in a moment of poignant lucidity sees him for the child he has become:

"Is it (Hain) a place of reward, then? Or a place of punishment?"

"I don't know, Asra. Which is this world?"

"Neither child. This here is just the world, it's how it is. You get born into it and ... things are as they are ..."

"I wasn't born into it, I came to it. I chose it."

The silence and the shadow hung around us. Away off in the country silence beyond the barracks walls there was one tiny edge of sound, a handsaw keening: nothing else.

"Ah well... Ah well," Asra murmured, and sighed, and rubbed his legs, making a little moaning sound that he was not aware of himself. "We none of us choose," he said.²⁰

This is Genly's last conversation within the hellish confines of Pulefen. The day after Asra's death he is taken for a final time into the inquisitor's cell. There, injected with yet another dose of veridical serum his symbolic journey back into childhood is brought to an end. Slowly as the last light of consciousness fades the drug-induced darkness envelopes all.

For a time the momentum stops as the narration switches to Estraven. From this perspective the view becomes externalized and we next see Genly as an adult would see the child he seeks after its birth:

I saw them [the irmates] in the staring light of the great room they slept in, and all but gave up my hope of acting that first night before I had drawn suspicion on myself. They were all hidden away on longbeds in their bags like babies in wombs, invisible indistinguishable. -All but one, there, too long to hide, a dark face like a skull, eyes shut and sunken, a mat of long, fibrous hair.²¹

Estraven's following actions serve to reinforce the notion of Genly's rebirth. Like a father he swaddles the naked Genly in a blanket and smuggles him out of the ward. Together they slip under the guard's nose, Genly carried by Estraven as they head north over the snow-laden fields. The journey requires almost super-human effort and can only be accomplished when Estraven draws on his dothe strength.

Once clear of the commensality, Estraven sets up camp and watches over Genly and waits for him to recover while he rests

and builds up strength. Finally, the following evening, Genly stirs. At first he babbles unintelligibly, mixing numerous words from far worlds into a nonsensical language. The childlike prattle, however, soon develops into coherent speech. For Genly order has come out of chaos. It is a new beginning; he has been reborn on the world of Gethen, not as an alien but as a Gethenian. From this point on the journey prepares him for the completion of the quest through constructive actions--actions that mark the end of the unlearning and undoing that Faxe engendered. The educative process that follows starts from a foundation of friendship and builds gradually into a deep and meaningful understanding of the Gethenian mind. The road that Genly is to take is, in many ways, even more perilous than the one that has brought him thus far. In order for him to achieve success and overcome the physical dangers that face him he must learn to live and think as a Gethenian, for ahead of him lies the Gobrin ice, a daunting seven-hundred mile polar wasteland that will tax him to the limit of his endurance, mentally as well as physically.

Percival's journey backwards is similar to Genly's in that he too must seek a new beginning--a spiritual rebirth. This time the reductive process is in diametric opposition to Genly's, however. Rather than shedding social prejudices by unlearning and undoing or exorcising an alien conscience, Percival has to correct and atone for the mistakes he committed in his past and so cleanse his soul in preparation for receiving

God. Like others before him who have lacked the spiritual guidance needed to complete the quest, Percival's journey through his past provides the key to self-knowledge--a point from which he can move forward wholly able to fulfill his destiny as a knight, and servant of God.

In the structure of Percival's journey back to this point we can see the template from which Le Guin has so artfully worked. Like Genly, Percival begins his journey after the first failure. He passes backwards through his past by meeting once more with those whom he has sinned against or brought to misery. In Wolfram's account these are, Jeschute, Orilus, Cunneware and Clamide. Each in turn forms a stage of atonement whereby Percival is able to erase the sins and errors he has previously committed. Jeschute, the maiden whom he first met after he left his mother is in dire trouble as a result of their earlier encounter. Wolfram gives us a graphic description of the wretch as she approaches the hero. Clad like a rustic she rides an old nag that can hardly walk. Lamenting her present condition she wastes no time in laying the blame for her plight squarely on the shoulders of Percival whom she scarcely recognizes through her tears:

"I have seen you before, to my sorrow, May God nevertheless give you more happiness and honour than you deserve of me! As a result of that meeting my clothes are poorer now than when you saw them last. If you had not approached me then, my good name would never have been questioned.²²

Upon hearing this Percival immediately sets to righting the wrongs he had committed. He challenges Jeschute's husband to

battle and after defeating him exacts a promise that he will give full pardon to his wife. Percival then attests to her innocence and restores to her the ring he admits having stolen earlier.

Percival's actions are exemplary and set into motion a series of events that lead to restitution and marital harmony. Although the overall view of the episode is morally satisfying the underlying structure clearly delineates the purpose of Percival's journey; the sin of pride has been vanquished. In this confrontation with his past actions Percival experiences shame and humbles himself openly.

Upon leaving Jeschute and Orilus, Percival is suddenly caught in a freak snow storm. For a moment the world stands still as he sees at his feet 'three tears of blood.' Falling into a deep trance Percival is overcome by a longing to see his wife Condwiramur whose colours he sees mirrored in the blood. Once more he is set on course. This time his journey is self-determined. His actions are now a result of contemplation, a higher state of awareness achieved because he is able to see himself more clearly. His past, full of errors and sin, has finally caught up with him. His desertion of Condwiramur, the woman he truly loves, is almost beyond bearing. It is to her that he must return to save her from Keie and right the wrongs caused by his desertion.

The reversal of time continues with his return to Arthur's court where he not only meets with his wife but also with the

others whom he has hurt in his past. Percival is received with honour by Arthur and Guinever who further help expiate his sins by forgiving him his rash killing of king Ither. There is danger in Arthur's warm reception, however, for with it comes the invitation to become a knight of the Round Table. If Percival were to follow this course he would undoubtedly turn from the quest in pursuit of Chivalric fame. At this point Wolfram introduces Cundrie who admonishes Percival in harsh terms telling him that his destiny lies not with 'Arthur and his Retinue' but with his quest for the grail. The supernatural appearance of Cundrie is a reminder that Percival is still in need of spiritual guidance while at the same time as Soceress she effectively halts the time-reversal process and precipitates Percival's forward motion. Before he leaves the court, however, he expiates a final part of the guilt left from previous actions. By marrying Condwiramur he brought unhappiness to Clamide who hoped to marry her himself. But Percival compensates for this action by arranging for Cunneware to marry Clamide!

With a clear conscience, rid of his guilt and sin, Percival is at last ready to leave and continue his journey. Like Genly, he finally arrives at a new beginning. Free now from the errors of his past, he is ready to fulfil his destiny. Before him, as before Genly, lies the perilous journey across the wasteland--the journey that will fill the spiritual void and provide the faith needed to surmount the difficulties

encountered on the quest.

Le Guin's portrayal of the wasteland motif in The Left Hand of Darkness is a striking example of how she is able to go beyond using Arthurian myth simply as a framework for action. Here she employs the motif as a medium through which she effects a detailed study of the changes and growth that takes place within her hero. Rather than portraying the wasteland as a sympathetic reflection of the king's lost virility where the reproductive processes of nature are held in a state of suspension as in Percival, she uses the wasteland as an external reflection of her hero's interior condition. In the mirror she holds up we see Genly more clearly than ever before. The 'whitish-grey void,' where there is 'no sun, no sky, no horizon, no world,' adumbrates his psychological state. This is the Tabula Rasa, the unknown, the unfortold ground that Faxe spoke of. From here Genly tentatively reaches out to explore his limitations. Within the legendary 'place within the blizzard', the place where the ancient tale tells how one brother confronts his dead kemmering and chooses life over death, a new psychology is gradually born in Genly. His actions, innocent yet dangerous, result in a profound sexual awareness. We first see this begin when Genly takes the lead across the 'unshadow' ice. Traversing the treacherous ground he becomes paralyzed with fear after he feels the ice give way beneath his feet:

Every footfall was a surprise, a drop or a jolt. No shadows. An even, white, soundless sphere: we moved along inside a huge frosted-glass ball. There was nothing inside the ball, and nothing was outside it.

But there were cracks in the glass. Probe and step, probe and step... . It became exceedingly difficult to take even one more step.

"What's up Genly?"

I stood there in the middle of nothing. Tears came out and froze my eyelids together. I said, "I'm afraid of falling."²³

This admission of fear reveals a new attitude. Genly no longer calls on "the more competitive elements of my masculine self-respect,"²³ but recognises instead his own suppressed feminine qualities. This becomes the key to understanding the ambivalence of the Gethenian character. By recognising his own emotional androgyny he opens up a channel of communication that was formerly denied him. He sees now that wholeness is not achieved by denying or excluding one part of the self, but by recognising it as an integral part of the whole. Thus as the journey progresses he comes to understand and grows to love his friend and mentor, Estraven. The androgyny that first set them apart now, ironically, becomes the catalyst that draws them together.

Yet, each remains separate because of their differences. When Genly tries to bespeak Estraven, for example, their attempts at joining ends in partial failure. Estraven does not hear Genly but the voice of his dead brother:

"You called me--It was my brother. It was his voice I heard. He's dead. You called me--you called me Therem? I... . This is more terrible than I had thought." He shook his head, as a man will do to shake off nightmare, and then put his face in his hands."²⁵

Although Estraven's later actions may serve to demonstrate

the closeness he feels towards Genly, they also remind us of the pain and pleasure, the love and sorrow, that such intimacy engenders. Thus we witness again the wholeness that comes from the balance of opposites. Indeed, neither Genly nor Estraven can become one through any bond of intimacy, they can only hope to understand each other's differences, to remain separate yet composite parts of the greater balanced whole.

The movement from denying one part of the self to recognising its relation to the whole is nowhere better expressed than in the brief moment when Genly takes up pencil and paper and draws for Estraven the yin-yang symbol as an emblem of himself:

"Do you know that sign?"

He looked at it a long time with a strange look, but he said, "No."

"It's found on Earth, and on Hain-Davenant, and on Chiffewar. It is yin and yang. Light is the left hand of darkness... how did it go? Light, dark, fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on the snow. 26

The coalescing of the black and white curves within the ancient symbol reflects the completeness of the androgyne. This is what Genly has been unable to achieve despite all of his Hainish training. His view has always been singular, his purpose linear. Now, gaining new insights into the nature of the Gethenian world as his friendship with Estraven develops, he begins to question his own values and reassess the purpose of his solitary mission. The quest that has brought him from the confines of the court to the vast Gobrain wastelands leads him to

the realization that he cannot be left untouched by the changes he creates. He can no longer hope for success through selfish or single-minded means; instead, he must reciprocate with the Gethenians--he must become a willing participant of the changes. If he represents the light of knowledge and they the darkness of ignorance, then each must be willing to share with the other in order to communicate effectively--neither one alone is right, or complete, as Genly later sees:

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. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical.²⁷

The sharing must first take place in its most essential form--on a personal level. It has taken a great deal for Genly to realize this, yet his entire journey and all of the adventures en route have steered him towards the revelation. All along it has been, I [the pun on the name Ai can hardly be missed, especially when we consider the egocentric nature of the envoy in Karhide]. With this new awareness, however, the aloof and reserved nature of Genly all but disappears, and instead, we begin to see his capacity for love and understanding. The long arduous quest across the ice has in effect stripped away the external trappings and exposed the internal feelings.

In the cold neutrality of the Gobrin winter Genly and Estraven have lived side by side, each learning about the other's differences until, finally, growing steadily closer

throughout the journey, they become like the composite parts of the ancient yin/yang symbol--separate, yet inextricably linked to the whole. So close do they become in fact that when they finally leave the ice and enter Kurkurast, Genly, upon hearing someone call out, "will you look to my friend?"²⁸ thinks he said it when it was actually Estraven speaking.

It is Le Guin's last description of the pair, though, that perhaps best sums up the sense of wholeness they compose when they are together. After the treachery of Thessicher they hide out near the Orgoreyn border while Estraven awaits his chance to escape:

We huddled in the dark hollow under dark trees, in the snow. We lay right together for warmth. Around midday Estravan dozed off for a while, but I was too hungry and too cold for sleep; I lay there beside my friend in a sort stupor, trying to remember the words he had quoted to me once: Two are one, life and death, lying together... . It was a little like being inside the tent up on the Ice, but without shelter, without food, without rest: nothing left but our companionship, and that soon to end.²⁹

As Estraven lies dying in the snow he calls out to Genly with the name of his dead brother Arek. It is as if Genly has become his brother in the last fleeting moments of his life. If this is so, then Genly must accept the responsibilities that come with it. He must carry out Estraven's dream of setting "the keystone in the arch." Thus the blood spilt becomes the blood that cements the arch and, in a greater sense, the blood that seals the breach between Karhide and the Ekumen. That Genly is now ready to carry out his friend's wish is testimony to the many changes that have taken place within him. Just as we

follow Percival's growth from outsider to a position that allows him to restore vitality to the kingdom, so we see in Genly similar changes that lead him from the outside to a position in which he too can help bring renewed hope and vitality to an ailing society.

With this final task Genly's journey comes full circle. Although grief-stricken by his friend's death, he comes to see the truth of his actions; by sacrificing himself, Estraven has ensured the success of the mission. Alone and unencumbered, Genly has a chance to reach Erhenrang unharmed, and once there, considering the political climate, he is virtually assured of Argaven's cooperation.

The motif of the reductive journey, the phase in which the hero undergoes a process of unlearning or undoing, brings both heroes to a point where they can begin anew--Genly after his symbolic re-birth and Percival after his atonement. Whereas Le Guin elects to concentrate on the psychological aspects of this journey, however, Chretien and Wolfram focus their attention on Percival's spiritual condition. The nature of Percival's journey after his atonement is well worth examination, for within it lies a fundamental parallel between both questers--their struggle to reconcile the dynamic forces that are in opposition in their worlds. What we see as the stark duality on Gethen, the opposed forces of light and dark, myth and reality, and the constant tension between alien and indigenous perception, is in many ways an inventive outgrowth of the duality inherent in the

Arthurian world--the omnipresent struggle between the spiritual and the secular. The tension created by these two fundamental forces is pervasive, and Percival, like Genly at the onset of his journey, is faced with the choice of selecting one course or the other in his quest. Yet neither one alone is right. He must learn that a balance between the two opposing forces holds the key to success.

If Percival is to complete his quest and take his rightful place as successor to the Fisher King and become the next guardian of the Holy Grail, then he must strike that balance by encompassing both ideals in such a way that the spiritual and the secular moderate each other. In short, Percival must aspire to become a Holy Knight. This noble position, however, is not easily gained. Percival must first undergo the long, arduous journey across the wasteland before he learns, as Genly does, that a new wholeness can emerge from incorporating, not denying, what is alien or spiritual. Yet this is precisely the trap that Percival falls into. Rather than following a Christian as well as chivalric code, he eschews the first in favor of the fame the second brings.

After leaving Arthur and wandering for five long years he completely forgets about God and never once enters a church. He seeks only knightly deeds and curious adventures:

The story tells us Percival
had lost his memory of all
events that had occurred before
so he remembered God no more.
The months of April and of May
had come five times and gone away;

yes, five entire years had passed
since he had been to chapel last
or prayed to God or to His cross.
He spent five years thus, at no loss
for strange adventures to pursue,
and dangerous and hard ones too,
which he kept seeking, all the same,
while in pursuit of knightly fame,
and fought he well and held his own. 30

These opening lines clearly show the failure in Percival's choice. Wandering in his wasteland, still persisting in demonstrating his prowess for the distant acclaim of the Arthurian court, he finds his ideals leading only to emptiness. Then, a surprise meeting with a group of penitents on Good Friday provides the shock necessary to make him aware of just how narrow his vision of life has become. They have just left an old hermit to whom they have made their confessions and from whom they have received absolution. On hearing this Percival weeps and seeks the holy man in turn. This is the nadir of Percival's existence; he is empty of grace yet full of prowess--the imbalance is glaring. His world, like Genly's before he crosses the ice is a world where goals and actions are defined by distant codes and dictates.

But clearly there is more to life than can be won through prowess. Percival has gained the fame he sought and has proved himself worthy of a seat at the round table, yet he is still no nearer gaining the grail. He has abandoned his spiritual quest in favor of the material rewards that the secular world has to offer. Before he can continue on his journey, however, he has to resolve this disparity by seeking spiritual counsel from the

Holy Hermit.

The Good Friday episode shows us this resolution in detail. When Percival confesses to the hermit that he failed to ask concerning the grail when he was at the castle and that he has since forgotten God, he adds that his name is Percival. The hermit then informs him that his failure was due to the fact that he looked more to adventure than to the needs of his soul. The hermit then goes on to explain the meaning of the grail in the following way:

Now do not let the thought prevail
 that from the grail he [the fisher king]
 takes food like
 a salmon, lamprey, or a pike,
 because from it the king obtains
 one mass wafer, and it sustains
 his life, borne in the grail they bring;
 the grail is such a holy thing.
 He is so very spiritual
 that he's required no food at all
 except the host the grail contained... .31

The grail presented in this light is a purely symbolic vessel providing spiritual not physical sustenance. Thus the key to Percival's resolution is clearly illustrated in his previous misunderstandings; time after time at the grail castle he was confronted with the choice between the spiritual and the material and time after time he neglected to enquire after the spiritual nature of the vessel, choosing instead to concentrate on the eating and drinking--on the material pleasures of the castle. Now, through the words of the hermit he learns the errors of his earlier ways and is moved towards introspection--towards an understanding of the spiritual side of his

own nature. As Emma Jung notes; "Percival's turning toward the Christian hermit may accordingly be understood as a step away from egoistic chivalry, in the direction of a greater spirituality, and thus as a first step towards a fresh approach to that which was seen in the grail castle".³²

This "step towards a fresh approach," is not, I believe, a movement away from the secular to the spiritual, but a conscious attempt to embrace both worlds in an effort to complete his quest. From the balance of these two opposite philosophies Percival gains the wisdom and vision that enables him to ask the long awaited question and so take up his rightful place as ruler and spiritual provider to his people. There is, perhaps, no better illustration of Wolfram's intent in having us see the importance of creating a whole from the union of these opposites than in his description of the grail. After Percival asks the question that heals the wounded king all is restored to its former glory. Percival receives recognition as the next king and we are told:

No other election was made than the man the Gral Inscription had named to be their lord. Parzival was recognized forthwith as King and Sovereign. If I am any judge of wealth, I imagine no one would find a pair of men as rich as Parzival and Feirefiz in any other place.³³

The figure of the Holy Grail inscribed with the name of a secular ruler effectively symbolizes the efficacy of balance in much the same way as Le Guin's Taoist yin/yang emblem. Both objects, brought to our attention at the close of the quest, moreover, not only serve to focus our attention on the

resolution of the opposed forces in a more direct way, but also remind us of their ideological significance--religion and politics. The connection between the grail and the Ekumen becomes clear at this point. Here we see the need of each world expressed in the symbols: the need of the Arthurian world, poised on the brink of civil war, for the spiritual guidance represented by the grail, and the need of Gethen, split by its political differences, for help from the Ekumen in bringing about unification.

Le Guin's holistic vision, however, is not solely confined to a symbolic plane. Throughout the novel she carefully develops the parallel between the tensions and dualities present in her protagonists and those reflected in the world of Gethen and Earth. In this way Genly and Estraven create a microcosm within which Le Guin effectively explores the nature of balance and its relationship to the whole in its most essential form. If the novel were to end at the completion of Genly's quest, therefore, Le Guin's holistic vision would be seriously impaired; while there would be resolution in the macrocosm with the worlds of Gethen and Earth finally coming together and so heralding the start of a new age, there would be no such parallel to be found in the microcosm. For this reason, I believe, Le Guin continues the account of Genly until he reaches the ancestral home of Estraven.

The journey to the ancient Harth is a sentimental one for Genly--one that he hopes will help fill the emptiness that he

has felt since the death of his friend. But his hopes prove false. His long pilgrimage offers no comfort:

I had come on a fool's errand to Estre, hoping for solace. There was no solace; and why should a pilgrimage to the place of my friend's childhood make any difference, fill any absence, soothe any remorse? Nothing could be changed now.³⁴

Indeed, nothing can be changed at this point. Estraven's death has long been accepted by his family--his actions need no further vindication. All that remains for Genly is to hand over the journals his friend kept. As he moves forward to give the journal to Esvans, Sorve steps into the firelight. Immediately, Genly sees the flash of Estraven's spirit in the boy's face. While he recovers from the shock of seeing the child, the boy asks, "'Will you tell us how he died? --Will you tell us about the other worlds out among the stars--the other kinds of men, the other lives?'"³⁵

With these words comes the promise of a new relationship between Earthman and Gethenian--a relationship that finds its parallel in the macrocosmic meeting of the Ekumen and Gethen. The youthfulness, the knowledge that awaits exchange, and the promise of a shared future represented by Estraven's son are all effectively mirrored in the expectations that result from his planet's contact with the Ekumen. Genly, on the other hand, reflects the age, the wisdom, and the willingness to share that comes with the Ekumen. Thus the circle is made complete. Alien meets alien and from their acceptance of each other a new era is created and a new generation waits for the cycle to begin again.

Le Guin ends her work in true Arthurian style. Our last view of Percival is also one of cycles ending and the promise of a new beginning:

The authentic story has now reached you concerning Frimutel's five children--how they acted in good part and how two of them died. The first was Schoysiane, who in God's eyes was perfect in her loyalty. The second was Herzeloyde, who thrust falsity from her. To win eternal gain, Trevrizent had dedicated his sword and chivalric life to God's sweet love. The heart of handsome, noble Anfortas harboured courage and chastity together: as his Order enjoined on him, he rode many jousts fighting not for ladies but the Gral.

Loherangrin grew to be a strong and valiant man in whom fear was never seen... . Then Loherangrin went away. If we are going to do right by this story he was Parzival's son. He travelled over paths and water back to the keeping of the Gral.³⁶

From father to son, from one guardian of the grail to the next, the cycle plays out the great drama of life--a drama that begins with ignorance and ends in the triumph of understanding.

Le Guin's Taoist vision of this wholeness, prescribed through balance, harmony and the circular construction of the quest, is not only consistent with the Percival myth, but is, in many ways, a natural outgrowth of its central theme--the search for self. In the portrayal of this search Le Guin uses the Arthurian template in such a way as to provide the work with a mythic background while at the same time creating the latitude to explore the changes that take place within her hero. The internal struggle, the process of growth and the light of understanding that is gained as a result of these changes forms a common thread that joins the two questers--a thread that transcends time and spans the universe. Whether man is from a

medieval world or from a far flung planet in a distant galaxy, no matter how different his external journey may be, his internal journey, Le Guin tells us, always remains the same.

This constant holds true not only in her world of science fiction but also in her world of fantasy. In A Wizard of Earthsea, for example, we see the familiar pattern of the interior journey set against a backdrop of wizards and dragons. As we follow the young hero through battles, encounters with spirits, and seductive temptations, moreover, we recognized more clearly than ever a kinship with Percival. For here is a hero who suffers through the mistakes and pain of adolescence, who struggles to understand himself and who tries to make sense of his world as he prepares to fulfil his destiny as a ruler of his people.

Chapter 3

For the shadow is the guide. The guide inward and out again; downward and up again; there, as Bilbo the Hobbit said, and back again. The guide of the journey to self-knowledge, to adulthood, to the light... .

It also seems to me that most of the great works of fantasy are about that journey; and that fantasy is the medium best suited to a description of that journey, its perils and rewards.¹

The "journey to self-knowledge, to adulthood, to light," is revealed through the life and adventures of Ged, wizard of Roke, in an epic story that traces him from his beginnings as a goatherd to his future as an archmage. Set in the isles of Earthsea the tale opens with an account of Ged's humble birthplace - an account that adheres closely to the familiar Arthurian myth. Again we meet with a hero who is cared for by a single parent, who lives in isolation not knowing his true name, and who, at an early age, exhibits the talents that will later serve him in fulfilling his quest. Yet we soon learn that the quest itself is uniquely structured. There is no attempt at allegory or at creating a macrocosm to reflect the internal struggles that take place within the hero; rather we see a quest that grows from the mind of the hero into objective reality.

The quest begins simply but effectively. Ged, "a tall quick boy, loud and proud and full of temper,"² learns that knowing the true name of an object gives one power over it. For this he seems to have a natural gift. He is quick to learn and even quicker, it seems to try out his growing talents. But his

gifts are governed by those same passions that are so evident in Percival; pride, ambition, and impatience, and it is to them that he initially succumbs.

The first time we see this darker side of Ged's nature emerge is when he tries to impress the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi by working a changing spell and instead unleashes a dark and shadowy evil that seeks a way through him out into the world:

Then raising his head he saw it was dark in the house. He had been reading without any light, in the darkness. He could not now make out the runes when he looked down at the book. Yet the horror grew in him, seeming to hold him bound in his chair. He was cold. Looking over his shoulder he saw something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call him in a whisper... .³

He is saved from the nameless horror only by the timely arrival of Ogion. The wise mage sees clearly the forces at work within Ged. His words, warning Ged of the danger that awaits, also tells him of the nature of his world--a world dependent upon the harmonious coexistence of opposing forces, "'Have you ever thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light?'" he asks.⁴ Thus, the dynamic tensions set in motion through Ged's act threaten the very fabric of balance and unity on Earthsea. Yet it is only a glimpse of the shadow that we see at this point--only a hint of how profoundly it could effect the nature of things, for Ged's pride and ambition are not yet strong enough to unleash the shadow entirely.

With his move to Roke these dark passions are given full

vent. This time it is not simply a girl he wishes to show off to but a fellow student whom he wants to humiliate in front of his peers. The emotions seem to boil within Ged as he confronts Jasper on the issue of wizardry. He swears to outdo his rival, to best him totally in a test of power. Blinded by hate and envy, Ged is unable to see the danger in which he places himself. Even the voice of Vetch, the voice of reason, falls upon deaf ears. Later that day it is almost as if Ged is led to Roke Knoll by these dark forces that find a surreptitious route through to his burgeoning malevolence. Indeed the hold these forces have on Ged is almost demonic in nature:

Now that they stood on Roke Knoll, hate and rage were gone, replaced by utter certainty. He need envy no one. He know his power, this night, on this dark enchanted ground, was greater than it had ever been, filling him till he trembled with the sense of strength barely kept in check. He knew now that Jasper was far beneath him, had been sent perhaps only to bring him here tonight, no rival but a mere servant of Ged's destiny.⁵

In this darkly euphoric state he stretches out his arms and, recalling the spell of summoning in Ogion's book, invokes the spirit of Elfarran from the land of the dead. It is an act spawned from evil motives. The dark mass that he holds in his hands splits apart and for a moment Elfarran appears in a spindle of light. Out of the "terrible brightness," however, springs a "clot of black shadow."⁶ This perverted birth, symbolizing Ged's failure to mature, looses the evil out into the world. So the quest begins. From this point on the shadow-beast and Ged engage in a pursuit/flight ritual, the

former, at first, gradually growing in strength and definition as the latter shrinks from the nameless horror he has freed and then, the reverse, as Ged gains the strength needed to confront his adversary.

The quest becomes a search for unity, a balance between good and evil. What Ged has released he must learn to accept as part of himself. He must, like Percival before him, atone for the errors he has committed in his youth and effect a reconciliation between the opposing forces within himself. In short, he must arrive at a point where he is able to unify the vying powers of good and evil in order to create a harmonious whole. For Ged to arrive at the point where he is able to confront the shadow and name it for himself and thereby re-establish the equilibrium, he must undergo a process of change and growth. The pattern is a familiar one. What we see once again is the journey functioning as the source of the education needed to precipitate the changes. Although Le Guin sets the quest in motion without a great deal of elaboration or historical background, she develops the journey motif in meticulous detail. The Arthurian structure is in evidence from the beginning. In Ged's long and arduous journey we see the initial naivete and lack of communication, the misunderstandings and the eventual struggle across the waste land that we witness in The Percival. Yet through Ged and the fantasy world of Earthsea, Le Guin develops the journey motif in order to examine her hero more fully.

Preparation for the journey is made early. After Ged releases the shadow he is badly wounded and forced to convalesce for a short period. Protected by the ancient magic of the island he recovers and decides during his stay in the Isolate Tower that he must leave the shores of Roke and seek the identity of the shadow. Before he leaves, however, he is put to an important test. He is challenged at the door to discover the doorkeeper's name. After pondering the use of power and then trickery to solve the problem, Ged finally decides to rely on directness:

"Master," said Ged, "I cannot take your name from you, not being strong enough, and I cannot trick your name from you, not being wise enough. So I am content to stay here, and learn or serve, whatever you will: unless by chance you will answer a question I have."

"Ask it."

"What is your name?"⁷

By owning up to his ignorance he acknowledges his own limitations. It is an important beginning for one about to embark on a quest where success can only be gained through a willingness to learn and have faith in oneself.

Alone and unprotected, Ged leaves the safety of Roke and sails to the poor island of Low Torning where he hopes to find a position in which he can remain anonymous. With a desire now "turned as much against fame and display as once it had been set on them,"⁸ he performs simple tasks for the fisher folk. This humble beginning to the quest is part of a familiar motif. We see it originate with Percival when he lives in the forest, with Lancelot donning the hermit's robes and with Genly as he travels

with the poor Karhiders to the Fastness. For each hero it serves a similar purpose. It provides a foundation from which to build, a source where the basic human qualities of honesty, simplicity and compassion originate--the very qualities the quester needs and, indeed, calls upon, throughout the quest.

During his stay on Low Torning Ged learns from the poor folk that it is only through simplicity and directness that wisdom is gained--something he was unable to do with Ogion:

From that time forth he believed that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, whether they have speech or not, and in later years he strove long to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees.⁹

Yet the shadow still haunts him. Even when he acts in true faith and kindness the dark force seems to gather. Ged is learning, gaining wisdom during his stay on the island but he is by no means wise enough to deal with the shadow at this point.

We are clearly shown this when Ged tries to save the life of Pechvarry's dying child. Although his motives are laudable, he was earlier taught to let dying spirits go. So once again we see Ged committing a rash act that exceeds his powers and again puts him in contact with the spirit world. When he enters the land of the dead this time there is no Archmage to save him. All he has to draw upon is himself. By summoning up all of his strength he is only just able to escape the "formless evil thing."¹⁰ His strength, however, comes not from being more experienced than before, but because his act was done in the service of compassion rather than envy or hate.

Low Torning and its lessons in humility, simplicity and honesty stand the young hero in good stead. Before he departs and continues his quest, however, there is one more important lesson to be learned. Ged must show that he can resist temptation and not be swayed away from his duty. The temptation that Ged is faced with comes in the form of an old dragon. The Dragon of Pendor which has spawned nine youngsters is laired in the ruined towers of the Sealords and threatens to fly east towards the village of Low Torning. In order to prevent this and the catastrophe that would ensue, Ged sets out alone to face the ancient enemy. He is armed with only one thing--the name of the dragon. It is a surprise that catches the dragon completely off guard. What the dragon has in store for Ged is even more devastating, however. He holds the key, he hisses, that will free him from the relentless pursuit of the shadow.

"Where is men's greed gone? Men loved bright stones in the old days in the North... I know what it is you want, wizard. I, too, can offer you safety, for I know what alone can save you. There is a horror that follows you. I will tell you its name."¹¹

The temptation is overwhelming, but Ged resists, knowing that by accepting the dragon's offer of help he would be dooming the people of Low Torning:

Ged's heart leaped in him, and he clutched his staff, standing as still as the dragon stood. He fought for a moment with sudden, startling hope.

It was not his own life he bargained for. One mastery, and only one, could he hold over the dragon. He set hope aside and did what he must do.¹²

The growth in Ged's character is well illustrated by his decision. His actions after journeying to Pendor are markedly

different from those he exhibited on Roke. Gone is the envy and arrogance, the self-centered motivation and the obduracy; instead his actions are now tempered by his new found compassion and altruism. Ged's concerns, moreover, no longer lie with becoming a great mage but with the plight of the weak and suffering.

This move towards the humanizing of Ged is interestingly paralleled by a similar evolution in the nature of the shadow. The formless black lump that first springs at Ged when he frees it through envy and hate while on Roke, is a perverse reflection of himself. Its mindless actions are like those of the young wizard. Indeed, in its manifestation it has no head, no center of thought or control--it operates like Ged, through blind desire.

As Ged's actions become humanized and he develops a stronger belief in the plight of others, his counterpart also grows in strength and definition. When the shadow appears in his trance at Low Torning it is still shapeless, but we see that, "it whispered at him though there were no words in its whispering, and it reached out towards him."¹³ Its actions at this point are no longer mindless. Its evolution, like Ged's, is slow but sure and despite the fact that it has no words to whisper, it is, nevertheless, trying to communicate, to reach out and make contact.

As Ged continues to change so does the shadow. When he next sees it, it has in fact taken a complete form. It has

evolved into a gebbeth--a spirit in someone else's body. In this guise it is even more capable of fulfilling its dark ambitions. As Ged flees across the cold, snowy moorlands with the gebbeth at his heels he hears the whispering again but this time there is something else. The shadow calls his name. Its power to communicate is yet another step in its evolution, another step that parodies Ged's development. Indeed, it is as if the courage and strength that Ged exhibited in the face of danger at Pendor have been inversely apportioned to the shadow.

The quest for unity is clearly dependent upon a balance between these two counterparts--as each grows in definition and resolve each becomes more complete. The shadow becomes more evil as Ged grows more humane. The longer they remain apart the more distinctly opposite they become. Yet they are like the yin and the yang--composites of a greater whole. Independently they are enemies in eternal conflict, together they serve to modify each other and form an harmonious whole.

The process that is needed to fuse these two composites together is the same one that Percival and Lancelot go through--individuation. Each of the earlier heroes at first struggled like Ged to try to overcome the evil within and without. It was not until they had recognized the evil and had come to terms with it that they were able to gain access to the grail. For Percival the insidious evil in the form of hubris and desire for fame almost cost him the grail; for Lancelot the evil in the guise of adulterous passion for Guinever did indeed

lose him his opportunity. Where Percival was able to achieve individuation by integrating his baser desires with the more noble spiritual aspirations, Lancelot failed. His weakness in allowing his adulterous passion to supercede his spiritual growth kept the two forces in a state of constant flux. For Lancelot there was never any unity, any rest, only a continual imbalance in his life:

Then Sir Lancelot went to the cross and found his helm, his sword, and his horse taken away. And then he called himself a very wretch, and most unhappy of all knights; and there he said: My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonour. For when I sought wordly adventures for wordly desires, I ever enchieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfit in no quarrel, were it right or wrong. And now I take upon me the adventure of holy things and now I see and understand that mine old sin hindereth me and shameth me, so that I had no power to stir nor speak when the holy blood appeared afore me. So thus he sorrowed till it was day, and heard the fowls sing: then somewhat he was comforted.¹⁴

An examination of the hero's internal struggle in this light points towards a further theme common to both the Arthurian quester and the young wizard of Earthsea--the temptation of the hero. Le Guin's artful use of this theme deserves a closer look. Rather than tempt her hero with worldly riches or rewards that will bring personal renown, she creates a temptation almost impossible to resist; she offers life and freedom as an alternative to a slow and terrifying death. When Percival is tempted by Arthur to become a knight of the realm, his choice to give up fame for the hardships he must endure in order to continue with his quest, meets with our applause. It is, after

all, one of his first positive moves towards responsibility. We see through this, and further temptations, a true growth in his character. He chooses correctly in each case, refusing to be persuaded away from his goal, turning down the offers of Blanche-flor's riches, Arthur's titles and the amorous advances of a variety of women.

Unlike his predecessor, however, Ged is not afforded a variety of temptations to choose from. For him the offer is always the same--the name of the shadow and freedom from its rapacious pursuit. As a result of such a temptation Ged's choice is far more difficult, his is a matter of life or death not merely riches or fame. In this way Le Guin creates a deeper sense of change and meaning in Ged than was possible in Percival or Lancelot. Faced, for example, with the choice of either learning the name of his enemy from the Dragon of Pendor or keeping his promise to the Fisher Folk, Ged shows us the true depth of his sincerity by electing to continue to live under the threat of death rather than reneging on his promise to the people of Low Torning. By doing this he proves beyond any doubt that he is sincere in his loyalty, unswerving in his civic duty.

This is, in effect, the first major test of Ged's character since that fateful night on Roke Knoll. The second test--a test that proves Ged's honesty and steadfastness of character--comes with his visit to the Court of the Terrenon in Osskil. The events leading up to the temptation of the Terrenon Stone are worth examining as they give us further insight into the nature

and power of the awesome shadow.

After running away from the gebbeth on the moors, Ged faints and is carried into the Court of the Terrenon. There he meets the lady of the castle, Serret, the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi, who as a child first tempted him to deal in forbidden magic. The attraction between the two is still there and the same confusion that once arose in Ged in the hills of Re Albi surfaces again. While inside the castle Ged is a virtual prisoner. He is held as if by some magical force. As the days pass, the attraction between Ged and Serret becomes stronger and in the evenings, under the watchful and suspicious eye of Benderesk, her husband, the two grow ever closer. This setting, so strangely reminiscent of that in Gawain and the Green Knight, is perfect for the temptations that are to follow.

Serret uses both her guile and looks to tempt Ged into touching the Terrenon Stone. Power beyond imagining will be his, she says, if only he will lay his hand on the stone and speak to it. He can rule with her at his side and "be mightier than all men, a king among men," she adds. Her attempts, however, are in vain. Ged remains implacable. Even when she whispers that the stone knows all births and deaths and can give him the name of the accursed shadow, he resists--despite his shaken will, he still does not falter. He reasons that he cannot fight darkness with darkness:

Ged's eyes cleared, and his mind. He looked down at Serret. 'It is light that defeats the dark,' he said stammering,--'light.'

As he spoke he saw, as plainly as if his words

were the light that showed him, how indeed he had been drawn here, lured here, how they had used his fear to lead him. They had saved him from the shadow, indeed, for they did not want him to be possessed by the shadow until he had become a slave of the Stone. Once his will was captured by the power of the Stone, then they would let the shadow into the walls, for a gebbeth was a better slave than a man. If he had once touched the Stone, or spoken to it, he would have been utterly lost.¹⁵

The temptation for him to draw upon the dark forces in order to defeat the shadow is stronger perhaps than any temptation before. But in his resistance to it he reasons falsely--it is not light that defeats the dark, it is the acceptance of the two forces as equally important parts of a whole that is the answer. It is joining not vanquishing that holds the key to his quest.

With the knowledge that the shadow is growing ever more powerful and his own strength waning with each passing day, Ged flees from Osskil. Transforming himself into a Pilgrim Falcon, he flies across the seas and through the winter winds to Re Albi and the home of Ogion. The decision Ged makes to go back is seminal. Like Percival and Genly before him, we see his circular journey in detail. "The true voyage is return,"¹⁶ Le Guin writes in The Dispossessed. Never was this more applicable than in the case of the questing heroes. Just as Percival and Genly fail and are forced to begin again, so is Ged. He has set out to undo the wrong he has committed and has failed. Yet he too has learned through the adventures of his journey. He has shown that by overcoming the temptations he is now ready for the new beginning--the symbolic rebirth that his predecessors went

through.

The structure and imagery Le Guin uses to show this 'rebirth' is similar to that used in The Left Hand of Darkness. Ged has undergone a journey that has stripped him of his original perceptions of the world. Unlike Genly, however, he is not stripped of alien misunderstandings and misconceptions, but of the dark and evil nature that dictated his earlier actions. Yet the reducing element found at this point in the journey functions in the same way in both cases. When we follow the pattern we see each hero exhausted and almost at the point of death before the 'rebirth' takes place. The process, long and arduous up to this time, culminates quickly when the quester reaches his nadir. Then each falls into a long sleep after which they awaken to find themselves being cared for by their mentors. The curious father/son relationship that evolves between Ged and Ogion when he awakes takes the sibling dependency that Genly has upon Estraven one step further. Ironically, of all the childhood imagery that Le Guin artfully constructs to give import to the 'rebirth', it is Ogion's words that gives the event its true significance:

Ged, still weary, listened, and as he grew sleepy he thought himself a child in the witch's hut in Ten Alders village, on a snowy night in the firelit dark, the air heavy with herb-scent and smoke, and his mind all adrift on dreams as he listened to the long soft singing of spells and deeds of heroes who fought against dark powers and won, or lost, on distant islands long ago.

"There," said Ogion, and handed the finished staff to him. "The Archmage gave you yew-wood, a good choice, and I kept to it. I meant the shaft for a longbow, but it's better this way. Good night, my

son." 17

After his recovery Ged decides to strike out on his own. As he prepares to leave Re Albi, this time to seek his shadow rather than flee from it, we see again how Le Guin's uses the motif of fulfilling his destiny. Like Genly, Ged receives the knowledge that he can triumph in his quest from a mystical source, but he does not have the certainty that his counterpart has; instead, he learns only obliquely from the mage that he will find success the next time he tries:

'At the spring of the River Ar I named you,' the mage said, 'a stream that falls from the mountain to the sea. A man would know the end he goes to, but he cannot know it if he does not turn, and return to his beginning, and hold that beginning in his being. If he would not be a stick whirled and whelmed in stream, he must be the stream itself, all of it, from its spring to its sinking in the sea. You returned to Gont, you returned to me, Ged. Now turn clear round, and seek the very source, and that which lies before the source. There lies your hope of strength.'" 18

Frightened that he will fail because he has done so twice already, Ged is still hesitant to become the hunter. But Ogion's prophetic words convince him. The "third time is charm," he says. What we see in the conversation is of course the key to the quest. What Ogion has described is the process of individuation that Ged must undergo in order to become the great wizard who will save Earthsea.

Ogion's words of wisdom not only express the concern of a loving guardian, but also shed light on his role as spiritual counsellor. Acting in the same capacity as the hermit in the Arthurian quest, Ogion ensures that the hero is spiritually

prepared for the quest. At first glance the encounter between Percival and Trevrizent, and Ogion and Ged, seems fortuitous, but on closer inspection their timing is critical. Each provides the hero with the impetus to continue and fills him with confidence to complete his quest at a critical juncture--the time when both are lacking in faith and are literally incapable of continuing. When Percival eventually meets the hermit Trevrizent at the end of his long years of wandering, he is without hope or belief in himself. He is, moreover, aware that in his present state he is only part of a whole, that his being is divided and, like Ged, that he is unable to find peace or contentment:

"Only now," said Parzival, "do I realize how long I have been wandering with no sense of direction and unsustained by any happy feelings. Happiness for me is but a dream: I bear a heavy pack of grief. And I will tell you more. All this time I was never seen to enter any church or minister where God's praise was sung. All I sought was battle... . If only God's power would succour me, what an anchor my happiness would be, which now sinks into sorrow's silt! If my manly heart is wounded--can it be whole when Sorrow sets her thorny crown on glory won by deeds of arms from formidable foes?"¹⁹

It is the hermit who heals the breach and who provides the hero with renewed faith and hope. Only through the wisdom and learning of Trevrizent is Percival given the knowledge that will enable him to complete the quest and ultimately establish a balance between the vying internal forces that have tormented him for so long.

Without Ogion Ged too is directionless. He suffers in much the same way as Percival--he is without hope or belief in

himself when he arrives in Re Albi. After his brief sojourn with the hermit wizard, however, he is also given new faith and hope and provided with knowledge that will help him to complete the quest. The timely advice that Ogion gives is profound, for he not only provides Ged with the key that will end his internal struggle but which will also restore the balance within.

Ged's silence demanded truth, and Ogion said at last, "You must turn around."

"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 the hunter... . A man would know the end he goes to, but he cannot know it if he does not turn, and return to his beginning, and hold that beginning in his being.20

With the advice of Ogion to guide him, Ged sets out the following day. He sails from the shores of Re Albi in the winter dark in pursuit of the shadow. Using Ogion's mage staff as a mast he sails out towards Osskil where he plans to confront his enemy. Ged's actions are now methodical. There are no signs of the emotions that formally dictated events. Instead, we see a new determination, a new resolve in the young wizard. Even the fear that had dogged him before is gone now. Alone on the chilling sea he stands up and goads the shadow into action by tempting it with the knowledge of his own name:

Nothing was ahead when he looked ahead. He stood up, chilled, weary of this gazing and peering into empty muck. "Come then," he muttered, "come on, what do you wait for, Shadow?" There was no answer, no darker motion among the dark mists and waves. Yet he knew more and more surely now that the thing was not far off, seeking blindly down his cold trail. And all at once he shouted out aloud, 'I am here, I Ged the

Sparrowhawk, and I summon my shadow!' 21

The bait works. Out of the driving drizzle the shadow appears. It has changed once again. Its definition is more complete, and although it casts no shadow of its own it bears "a likeness to a man." Because it is half blind Ged sees it before it sees him and in that brief moment Ged recognizes it "above all beings, above all shadows." 22

The striking parallel between the ethical growth of Ged and the human growth of the shadow continues to reflect the deepest concerns of their author--the importance of balance. In becoming more distinct, both beings also become more readily identifiable as opposite but equally powerful entities. Slowly but surely they begin to gravitate towards rather than away from each other. Ged stops fleeing and follows, the shadow on the other hand stops chasing and begins to lead, but both journey towards the same goal--a neutral point where they can meet on equal terms.

When Ged doubles his small craft back to follow the shadow after his encounter he runs into a thick mist. Unable to steer safely he says a charm of clearing and for a moment glimpses the shadow once more just as the boat veers wildly and crashes upon shoal rocks. Again Ged is pitched onto an island more dead than alive and again he is rescued and nursed back to health. At first reading the episode that covers the time Ged spends shipwrecked upon the tiny island seems almost superfluous. It does not advance the action and serves no visible purpose other

than to provide an interesting interlude. Yet in the greater scheme of the history of Earthsea and of Ged's later adventures it is of vital importance. Here, when we encounter what we believe to be a harmless old couple living out their last days on the remote beach, we are in fact seeing a royal family in exile--a family who have in their possession the ancient ring of Erreth-Akbe:

Ged put the broken ring into his tunic-pocket with almost the same care, for his heart was full of pity. He guessed now that these two might be children of some royal house of the Kargad Empire; a tyrant or usurper who feared to shed kingly blood had sent them to be cast away, to live or die, on an uncharted islet far from Karego-At... . But the truth of this guess he did not learn until, years later, the quest of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe led him to the Kargad lands, and to the Tombs of Atuan.²³

Although seemingly incidental, the sub-plot is rich in mythic themes. All of the fundamental elements of the Arthurian quest are here. In a wasteland we see the weak figure of ancient royal lineage who is unable to leave the confines of his domain. This figure, like the Fisher King, is also the keeper and guardian of a mysterious talisman that is later to become the focal point of a quest. Through this episode, Le Guin sets in motion a second cycle of events--a cycle that ends in resolving the ancient conflicts between the Hardic and Kargad races. Thus, by introducing the fractured ring of Erreth-Akbe at this point, Le Guin effectively symbolizes the state of disunity and imbalance present in Ged's personal quest while at the same time showing what the consequences of such an imbalance can mean when seen on a national scale.

Ged's immediate problem, however, is still how to find his shadow and resolve his internal struggle. After setting a charm to help the old couple, Ged takes his leave and heads out towards Karego-At. With darkness closing in he finds himself far out among the East Reach Islands. Guiding his boat with helm and charms in an attempt to avoid the shallow rocks and roots, he suddenly becomes aware of another presence. He turns. There behind him, within arms reach, stands the shadow. Ged, knowing that wizardry won't serve him, "said no word but attacked."²⁴ For an instant, icy cold air fills him and he is blinded. When he comes to, the shadow is gone. With grim determination he sets sail once again and follows the shadow down the dark sea-way in a vain attempt to overtake it:

All terror was gone. All joy was gone. It was a chase no longer. He was neither hunted nor hunter, now. For the third time they had met and touched; he had of his own will turned to the shadow, seeking to hold it with living hands. He had not held it, but he had forged between them a bond, 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.

But until that time, and elsewhere than that place, there would never be any rest or peace for Ged, day or night, on earth or sea. He knew now, and the knowledge was hard, that his task had never been to undo what he had done, but to finish what he had begun.²⁵

The movement towards balance is evident. Ged is neither 'hunter or hunted' anymore but the one who reaches out to forge a bond. His attempt to hold the shadow in his 'living hands' not only demonstrates his willingness to accept his own dark side but bears out Ogion's earlier prophesy that the "third time

is charm,"²⁶ for now Ged knows with utter certainty that he will meet the shadow again for the last time. The knowledge this conviction brings takes him even closer to completing his quest. He knows now, "that his task had never been to undo what he had done, but to finish what he had begun".²⁷ This is the final lesson to be learned. All the time during the long journey the educative process has been aimed at humanizing Ged--ridding him of his baser qualities and inculcating nobler aspirations in order to effect maturation. Yet up to this third meeting, he has lacked true reasoning power. We have witnessed time and again the lucky intervention of wizards to save him, chance to help him, or fortuitous timing to keep him from the clutches of gebberth or shadow. But now he reasons rather than acts impulsively. His attempt to undo what he had done was a childish response to cover up his mistake before anyone else found out. To finish what he had begun shows a mature, determined response to accept responsibility for his actions and find a suitable solution to the problem. It is a different Ged that we see after this. Almost coldly rational, he determines the course of actions that will bring him face to face with the shadow for the last time.

The longest night of the year is over and with it the nightmare. Ged leaves East Reach and sails, "out from between the dark cliffs, and on the sea was broad, bright morning, with a fair wind blowing from the north."²⁸ It is a new year of lengthening light, a new day of dawning. Though hope is not yet

evident in Ged it is manifest in the brightening world about him. After sailing from Vemish to Iffish, Ged decides to spend a day in Ismay before continuing on his quest. It is the town where Vetch is wizard. Here, in a street lit by lanterns, he overhears a couple talking and turns to see his old friend. Vetch's odd behaviour on recognizing Ged is a shock to the weary quester:

"Three days ago, in the street in Quor, the village up there in the hills, I saw you. That is, I saw a presentment of you or an imitation of you, or may be simply a man who looks like you. He was ahead of me, going out of town, and he turned a bend in the road even as I saw him. I called and got no answer, I followed and found no one; nor any tracks; but the ground was frozen. It was a queer thing, and now seeing you come up out of the shadows like that I thought I was tricked again. I am sorry, Ged." He spoke Ged's true name softly, so that the girl who stood waiting a little way behind him would not hear it.²⁹

The presentment that Vetch sees is, of course, the shadow. Its changes have continued to parallel those of Ged. From its dark and shapeless appearance at birth, to the final stages of its maturation--the human form--it has acquired greater and greater definition. Now, at the end of its metamorphosis, it stands on equal terms with Ged; one has become the dark mirror image of the other. Just as Ged's quest has tempered his selfish actions and thoughtless deeds, so has the inverse quest of the shadow slowly humanised its form. This symbiotic relationship, constantly in a state of flux and imbalance finally gells into two distinct forms--forms that stand balanced, yet apart, whole yet separate. The tension between

them grows almost palpable after their meeting at East Reach. The knowledge that Ged gains from the encounter, moreover, serves only to lend power to the bond that binds them. He realizes that the shadow is not only part of him but also that it draws its strength from his own weakness:

"Perhaps it is only from my weakness that it draws the strength to speak... . It is bound to me now as I am to it. It cannot get so far free of me as to seize any other man and empty him of will and being, as it did Skiorh. It can possess me. If I ever weaken again, and try to escape from it, to break the bond, it will possess me. And yet, when I held it with all the strength I had, it became mere vapour, and escaped from me... . and so it will again, and yet it cannot really escape, for I can always find it. I am bound to the foul cruel thing, and will be forever, unless I can learn the word that masters it: its name." 30

You cannot defeat or escape that to which you are irrevocably bound. There is no place to hide, no place to run. To show weakness to the shadow is to give it strength. The only hope for the young hero lies in learning more about its nature--learning, in fact, its name, where its true essence is held. To do this Ged must abandon all thoughts of peace and safety. In confronting the shadow for the last time, however, he places himself in mortal danger, for he must reveal himself in order to name his enemy.

The place where they meet and the conditions under which they travel further serve to illustrate the extent of Le Guin's artistry. She creates a sense of balance not only in the power and status of her protagonists but also in the world about them:

They went now a way in which all events were perilous, and no acts were meaningless. On the course on which they were embarked, the saying of the least spell

might change chance and move the balance of power and of doom: for they went now towards the very centre of that balance, towards the place where light and darkness meet. Those who travel thus say no word carelessly.³¹

The further that Ged sails south of Soders, the further removed he becomes from man. His journey to the Outer Reaches where myths are born is, in effect, a journey back to beginnings. He is drawn as if by some elemental force to seek the wellspring of life. Here, beyond Lastland where the sea and earth meet for the final time before all charts end, Ged silently journeys toward his own nascency. The bleak and sombre journey provides a wasteland where the hero, while enduring physical hardships, reflects on his past life. It is more than internal reflection that Ged undergoes on his final journey, however; it is the process of individuation. "To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return."³² The Odonian maxim is never more applicable than at this point. All of Ged's adventuring and journeying since he unleashed the shadow has been to this end. He can never go forward without returning for that lost part of himself. There can be no further growth or advancement without the integration of his shadow. To progress, Le Guin tells us, one must first explore the self in order to face the horrors and darkness within the heart and accept their presence as a natural, integral part of the whole that is the person. For Ged, who is carefully guided through his journey to explore these internal dimensions, the time for integration is close at hand. He is prepared, at last, to meet the shadow and take it

back into himself where it belongs.

The setting for the meeting between Ged and the shadow resonates with symbolic import:

In Ged's eyes there was a dark vision that overlapped and veiled the grey sea and the grey sky, and darkness grew, and the veil thickened. None of this was visible to Vetch, except when he looked at his friend's face; then he too saw the darkness for a moment. They went on, and on. And it was as if, though one wind drove them in one boat, Vetch went east over the world's sea, while Ged went alone into a realm where there was no east or west, no rising or setting of the sun, or of the stars.³³

The cold obscurity and indistinct surroundings reflect the bleak interior landscape of Ged. Without the shadow his learning and humanitarianism are held in static abeyance--he is, to all intents, devoid of the passionate energy the shadow represents. He is part of the whole, as is the shadow; and the two, the light and dark, near yet not joined, eclipse all their surroundings in a grey haze of neutrality. In order for one to accept the other they must face each other with total openness. Thus from the faint, outermost edge of light the shadow approaches, sloughing off the shapes of those people who had engendered Ged's fear and hatred:

At first it was shapeless, but as it drew nearer it took on the look of a man. An old man it seemed, grey and grim, coming towards Ged; but even as Ged saw his father the smith in that figure, he saw that it was not an old man but a young one. It was Jasper: Jasper's insolent handsome young face, and silver-clasped grey cloak, and stiff stride. Hateful was the look he fixed on Ged across the dark intervening air. Ged did not stop, but slowed his pace, and as he went forward he raised his staff up a little higher. It brightened, and in its light the look of Jasper fell from the figure that approached, and it became Pechvarry. But Pechvarry's face was all

bloated and pallid like the face of a drowned man, and he reached out his hand strangely as if beckoning. Still Ged did not stop, but went forward, though there were only a few yards left between them now. The thing that faced him changed utterly, spreading out to either side as if it opened enormous thin wings, and it writhed, and swelled, and shrank again. Ged saw in it for an instant Skiorh's white face, and then 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.³⁴

Stripping off first one guise then another, the shadow gradually reverts back to its original form. Blind and crawling, it moves towards Ged in a perverse gesture of sibling dependency. In the white light of Ged's staff all greyness is dispelled and with stark delineation we see the blackened shape rise on taloned legs to meet his enemy face to face. The daguerreotype scene, frozen by the mage radiance, is shattered when in the same instant both utter the word, 'Ged'. Dropping his staff the weary quester reaches out his hands and takes hold of his shadow, "of the black self that reached out to him."³⁵ At the same moment that the light and dark meet they join and become one. Vetch, waiting in the boat, sees what has happened:

And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark.³⁶

At last it is over. He has faced and finally taken within himself the darkness that is his hate, his pride, his fear, and above all his inhumanity. No longer is the shadow a separate

entity but through individuation it has become an integral part of a greater whole. Balance, both within and without is restored. By absorbing his shadow he re-establishes the harmony of Earthsea. The worlds of light and darkness, of the dead and the living once more find their correct place in the great equilibrium. The quest cycle is complete and Ged, like Genly and Percival, finds that he has travelled vast distances only to discover that his quest begins and ends in the same place.

CONCLUSION

The circular configuration of the journey is first discussed by Le Guin in her introduction to City of Illusions and provides a good focus for a summary of her work:

Most of my stories are excuses for a journey. (We shall henceforth respectfully refer to this as a Quest Theme.) I never did care much about plots, all I want is to go from A to B--or, more often, from A to A--by the most difficult and circuitous route.¹

Looking back at Rocannon we can trace her first, almost uneasy use of the configuration as she hints at a cyclical nature of events through oblique references to Rocannon's marriage and the legacy of Semely's necklace, the introduction of the ansible to show the convolution of time, and the wisdom of the Ancient One whose power to change the future is rooted in the past. In the case of Falk/Ramarren the cycle, though still superficial, is used in a somewhat more direct manner as the hero himself undergoes a transformation from one being to another and back again.

In Left Hand of Darkness, however, we see for the first time a more disciplined use of the cyclical theme. Here Le Guin patterns her novel directly after the Percival myth. The parallels are worth review. First, the hero arrives from the outside--Percival from the forest, Genly from a space ship. Next, he enters a royal city ill-prepared for the task at hand but, despite the help of a mentor, fails in his initial attempt at completing the quest. Then the hero embarks upon the great

circular quest that takes him across vast tracts of land back to where he originally began--Percival to Munsalvaesche, Genly to Erhenrang. Near the end of this journey the quester crosses a wasteland that is used by the author to reflect his protagonist's internal state. Here we see a clear depiction of Percival's spiritual void and Genly's psychological disorientation. Once the wasteland is crossed the hero then goes on to complete his quest with relative ease. It is interesting to note that at the end of the quest our final view is of new circles beginning. This is shown by the introduction of the hero's children--Percival's son Loherangrin, whom we see setting out on a quest of his own, and Sorve, Estraven's child who asks Genly to teach him about other worlds as he once taught his father.

Le Guin employs the same myth in A Wizard of Earthsea but here she uses it more as a template for exploring her hero's inner journey than as a means for revealing action and adventure. The following introductory note to "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," in the Wind's Twelve Quarters, shows just how important Le Guin considers this aspect of her work to be:

Unless physical action reflects psychic action, unless the deeds express the person, I get very bored with adventure stories; often it seems that the more action there is, the less happens. Obviously my interest is in what goes on inside. Inner space and all that.²

We see no better example of the extent to which Le Guin's concerns with this 'inner space' are shown than in the case of

Ged. The same process of growth, maturation and individuation that we see at work in Percival as he seeks the grail, we also see detailed in Ged as he searches for the shadow. A brief review of these parallels is worthwhile. The hero, looked after by a single parent, shows early signs of extraordinary talents that later help in the quest--Percival possesses strength and agility beyond his years, Ged has the ability to learn quickly. After leaving home the hero receives training and instruction from an old wise teacher--Percival from Gurnemanz, Ged from Ogion. The training, however, is wasted on the youthful hero. Eager to depart in search of greater adventure, he soon embarks on a journey that ends in disaster--Percival travels to Munsalvaesche where he neglects to ask the question that would put an end to the King's suffering, Ged journeys to Roke where he unleashes the shadow.

After leaving the scene of the mistake the hero then continues on an odyssey of adventure that forms part of the great quest cycle. The first leg of this journey serves to prepare the hero for the psychological changes that lie ahead. During this time he learns to accept responsibility for the mistake he has made by atoning for the error and so begins the transition from naive youth to mature young adult. Percival atones for his mistake by righting the wrongs he committed in his past. Ged atones for his mistake by leaving Roke and accepting a position as a 'plain sorcerer' in the poor isle of Low Torning.

When the hero has gone through the period of atonement he is then ready to continue on the second half of the circular journey. At this point, however, the quester needs prompting. It is almost as if he has come to rest midway in the quest. Percival's prompting comes from the Sorceress Cundrie who tells him not to stay at Arthur's court but to find the grail and fulfil his destiny. Ged is urged on by the wizard Ogion who tells him not to hide but to go on and find the shadow.

The movement forward, towards completing the quest, takes the hero on a journey that leads to the wasteland--in Percival's case the wasteland is literally that, a desert. For Ged, however, the wasteland is in the form of a vast grey ocean that goes on "till world's edge."³ The final stage of the quester's psychological development, his individuation with that part of himself that he has hitherto denied or lost, ends with the wasteland crossing. For Percival, the individuation takes place when he recognizes and accepts God into his soul, for Ged, the individuation takes place with his recognition of the shadow and his acceptance of it as part of himself. After the wasteland Percival goes on to Munsalvaesche to find the grail, but Ged brings the quest cycle to an abrupt end in the middle of the wasteland.

Le Guin's departure from the Percival myth in the final stage of her hero's journey is worth comment. Since her intention is to explore "what goes on inside," it is clear that we must look to Ged's psychological development for a completion

of the circular journey. If we see the darkness Ged unleashes at Roke as part of himself, then the later individuation can indeed be viewed as a completion of this journey; for Ged first externalizes the shadow, then flees from it, pursues it, and finally brings it back within himself. To have him return to Roke to do this would only shift the focus away from the 'inner journey' back to the outer journey and so detract from the work.

This final view leaves us with one of the clearest examples of why Le Guin's later fiction is so much more complete than the earlier "Hainish novels." In these later works she uses the quest motifs not simply to pattern events as in Rocannon's World and City of Illusions, but to explore the very nature of her hero, to explain his actions and to show that time and space can be used as a medium for revealing the soul as well as spinning the tale.

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- ²³ Le Guin, Left Hand of Darkness, pp. 265-266.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 218.

- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 253.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 267.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 259.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 272.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 293.
- ³⁰ Chretien, Percival, lines 6217-6231.
- ³¹ Ibid., lines 6420-6429.
- ³² The Grail Legend, Emma Jung and Marie-Louise Von Franz, trans. Andrea Dykes, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), p. 225.
- ³³ Wolfram, Parzival, p. 395.
- ³⁴ Le Guin, Left Hand of Darkness, p. 300.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 301.
- ³⁶ Wolfram, Parzival, pp. 409-410.

Chapter 3

- ¹Le Guin, Language of the Night, p. 55.
- ²Ursula K. Le Guin, A Wizard of Earthsea, (Reading: Puffin Books, 1981), p. 12.
- ³Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 35.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 74 .
- ⁶Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 92.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 97.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 95.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 106.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Ibid, p. 95.
- ¹⁴Malory, The Romance of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table (London: Macmillan Publishers), p. 333.
- ¹⁵Le Guin, Wizard of Earthsea, p. 135.
- ¹⁶Ursula Le Guin, The Dispossessed, (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 68.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 145.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 144.
- ¹⁹Wolfram, Parzival, pp. 235-236.
- ²⁰Le Guin, Wizard of Earthsea, p. 144.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 151.
- ²²Ibid., p. 152.
- ²³Ibid., p. 159.

²⁴Ibid., p. 164.

²⁵Ibid., p. 165.

²⁶Ibid., p. 144.

²⁷Ibid., p. 165.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 173.

³⁰Ibid., p. 178.

³¹Ibid., p. 185.

³²Le Guin, The Dispossessed, p. 68.

³³Le Guin, Wizard of Earthsea, p. 194.

³⁴Ibid., p. 197.

³⁵Ibid., p. 198.

³⁶Ibid., p. 199.

Conclusion

¹Le Guin, Language of the Night, p. 137.

²Ursula K. Le Guin, The Wind's Twelve Quarters (New York: Bantam publishers 1976), p. 166.

³Le Guin, Wizard of Earthsea, p. 191.

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