The Impossible Equilibrium:  A Study of Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle
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Introduction

I will discuss the fantasy series the Earthsea cycle by an American writer Ursula Kroeber Le Guin (1929- ). At the present time, the Earthsea cycle consists of six books: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), and *The Other Wind* (2001). These stories are all set in an imaginary world of vast archipelago called Earthsea. Before the publication of *Tehanu*, the three books, published by 1972, used to be called ‘the Earthsea trilogy’. Le Guin confessed in 1973 that she herself considered the stories of Earthsea to be completed as a trilogy. However, after eighteen years since the completion of the trilogy, came the fourth book, which was even followed by the fifth and sixth book eleven years later.

In the Earthsea cycle, Le Guin introduces the concept of Equilibrium in order to rethink how we should treat the dualistic concepts such as light and darkness. She complains that many fantasy works in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5), have adopted the dualistic contrast between light and darkness as the set of opposing elements, as the symbol of the conflict between good and evil. They attribute the goodness to light, and the hero from the region of light goes to defeat the evil which is considered to subsist in darkness. In short, fantasy works have traditionally regarded the relationship between light and darkness as that of the conqueror and the conquered. The good light expels the evil darkness, bringing peace in the world. Le Guin tries to reconstruct such a hierarchical structure of dualism, using the concept of Equilibrium. She sets up the Equilibrium, or the balance, of any dualistic contrast as the ultimate principle in her imaginary world Earthsea.

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Earthsea the evil is not in darkness, but in the mind of those who refuse to accept the Equilibrium of the world. While adopting the traditional framework of the dualism, she attempts to reconstruct it by denying the hierarchy in the dualism and instead establishing the Equilibrium in it. However, it seems inadequate to conclude that her attempt ended up in complete success. The concept of Equilibrium which was established in the first half of the Earthsea cycle actually entailed some contradictions, and to solve them, she had to add three more books to the series.

In Chapter 1 of the thesis, I will focus on Le Guin’s attitude toward the fantasy genre and the SF genre, revealing how she defines those genres. Chapter 2 deals with the analysis of the Earthsea cycle. The main purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate how she attempts to construct the world of Earthsea and what kind of narration she adopts. In this thesis I will concentrate on the analysis of so-called ‘the Earthsea trilogy’, which I will call “the first trilogy”. In the first trilogy, the world of Earthsea is constructed by establishing three kinds of Equilibrium: light and darkness, man and woman, life and death. Three books from Tehanu to The Other Wind, which I will call “the second trilogy”, will be mentioned in relation to the analysis of the first trilogy. Chapter 3 summarizes the analysis of Chapter 2 and considers the relationship between the first trilogy and the second trilogy. I will also show that Le Guin’s understanding of the essential concept of the world-construction, Equilibrium, has gradually changed when she moved on from the first trilogy to the second trilogy: she attempts in the second trilogy to revise and reconstruct the Equilibrium which she has established in the first trilogy.

Chapter 1

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1 I follow Mike Cadden in his categorization of “the first trilogy” and “the second trilogy”. See Mike Cadden, Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults (New York: Routledge, 2005) 79-113.
Le Guin’s Attitude toward Fantasy and SF

1.1. The Problem of the Genre

Ursula Le Guin started her career as a professional writer by publishing *Planet of Exile* (1966). She went on to publish a number of fictions such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), and *The Dispossessed* (1974). These works have been generally regarded as the works that belong to the genre of science fiction, or SF. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, for example, won two famous awards for SF, Nebula Award and Hugo Award. At the same time, she published the first half of the Earthsea cycle in an answer to the request of the publisher for writing the young adult fiction.\(^1\) The trilogy and its three sequels have been regarded as the works that belong to the fantasy genre by the publisher, critics and Le Guin herself. All the works mentioned above were published during the period from 1966 to 1974, and have been celebrated as her masterpieces. Most of the SF stories are set in a huge union of planets called “Hainish world”, whereas the fantasy stories in a vast archipelago called “Earthsea world”.\(^2\)

Other than fictional works, Le Guin has also written a lot of critical essays and reviews. Those works are today published as *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1979), *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (1989), and so on. Such books reveal her strong concern for what the fantasy and the SF genre should be.

On the one hand, she seems to take a negative view of the firm existence of the fantasy and the SF genre. Once the genre is established, she argues, it would promote the differentiation from the so-called “polite literature”, reduce the opportunities of receiving

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\(^1\) Le Guin, *Language* 41.

the proper criticism, and eventually make itself a ghetto where fans and writers of fantasy
and SF acknowledge the value of their works only by themselves.¹ She also declared in a
speech in 1989 that the formation of literary genres, which she calls the “genrification”, is
nothing but a political action in essence, controlled by some authoritative power.²

On the other hand, however, she evidently attempts to find out the definite
characteristics of the fantasy and the SF genre. It indicates that she does not intend to
invalidate the genre itself, nor does she have a complete disregard for the boundaries
between different genres. In the 1989 speech mentioned above, she defined the “genre”
as the concept that must be used in a totally neutral way: the “genre” must be employed for
all the variety of literature, from realism to SF and fantasy, with a totally equal and
unprejudiced standard.³ Le Guin’s intention is not to invalidate the genre, but to validate
it by maintaining its neutral employment. The word “neutral” means the absence of the
value judgment which causes the discrimination between genres. If we consider, for
example, the “polite literature” as good and pure, while fantasy and SF as bad and vulgar,
then the genre will no longer remain as a neutral concept. Instead, the genre will turn out
to be a useful devise for differentiating the good literature from the bad, giving supremacy
to the former. Le Guin regards such a value judgment as an absolutely inadequate action,
or as an unforgivable offence against the ideal neutrality of the genre itself. Thus, it is
significant for her to define the characteristics of the fantasy and the SF genre on the
condition that the genre itself is treated as neutral, that the fantasy and the SF genre
possesses the same value with any other literary genres.

One may well think it unrealistic to believe that the formation of literary genres can

¹ Le Guin, Language 2-3.
² Quoted in Brian Attebery, Strategies of Fantasy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)
it x - x , from Ursula K. Le Guin, “Spike the Canon,” SFRA Newsletter, 169 (July / August 1989)
17-21.
³ Quoted in Attebery, Strategies x , from Le Guin, “Spike the Canon” 17-21.
be done in a completely neutral way, without any kind of value judgment. What is important here is the fact that Le Guin tries to reconstruct the existing system of genre-formation by introducing the concept of neutrality, and in doing so, maintain the boundaries of the fantasy and the SF genre. Such an attitude of her toward the genre is closely related to her way of constructing an imaginary world in her fantasy works: in the Earthsea cycle, she tries to reconstruct the traditional hierarchical structure of the dualism by introducing the concept of Equilibrium, and in doing so, create a world with a clear boundary, or a world of wholeness. However, considering the change of her attitude toward the concept of Equilibrium in the second trilogy, it is probable that she has come to reconsider the possibility or the impossibility of the neutrality in the act of forming genres. As I will discuss later, the Equilibrium in Earthsea reveals its own impossibility by the end of the sixth book. It may be probable, then, that Le Guin has come to find it impossible to assume the neutrally-formed genre of fantasy and SF.

1.2. The Characteristics of the Fantasy and the SF Genre

A lot of writers and critics have attempted to define the characteristics of the fantasy and the SF genre, which is also the case with Le Guin. Samuel R. Delany, for example, once defined that SF deals with “what has not happened” while reports deals with “what happened”; and fantasy with “what could not have happened” while realism with “what could have happened”.¹

However, it must be noted that these two genres cannot be clearly distinguished from each other. On the basis of Delany’s definition, Elizabeth Cummins points out that fantasy essentially resembles SF in the attempt at the world-construction: both genres

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¹ Quoted in Cummins 6, from Samuel R. Delany, “About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy Five Words,” SF: The Other Side of Realism, ed. Thomas D. Clareson (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971) 141.
similarly try to create “an alternate world”.¹

Brian Attebery compares fantasy and SF from the point of view of narration. In short, both genres derive their characteristics from the unique usage of language and rhetoric. The narration in the works that belong to the SF genre tends to focus on external and material things, emphasizing the causality and order of human acts, social organization, and physical environment. On the other hand, the narration in the works that belong to the fantasy genre tends to focus on internal and psychological things, borrowing various motifs and materials from Celtic legend or Northern European myths. Moreover, although the two genres have several origins in common such as Greek myths, SF gradually separated from fantasy as the scientific rhetoric began to be adopted in the narration. One of the most conspicuous examples of the separation is *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), written by Mary W. Shelley. While she adopts such mythical materials such as the golem and Prometheus, Shelley uses various scientific terms which were scarcely found in fantasy: in her novel, a sacred fire is replaced by electricity, a haunted abbey by a laboratory, and the Devil by a scientist.²

Therefore, the characteristics of the fantasy and the SF genre can be generally defined as the construction of an alternate world, the uniqueness of narration, and the borrowing of traditional materials. Le Guin’s understanding of the two genres has a lot in common with the general definition. Regarding the concept of the world-construction, she mentions the importance of the fantasy and the SF genre as the means of creating new worlds, but at the same time she thinks that the two genres should not be mixed.³ The world-construction in the SF genre is for her a “thought-experiment”: the SF world should

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¹ Cummins 6-8.
² Attebery, *Strategies* 105-11.
³ Le Guin, *Language* 114. She comments on her own work *Rocannon’s World* that her use of impermasuit is a good example “where fantasy and science fiction don’t shade gracefully into one another”.

be closely linked to the real world and should reflect it.¹ Fantasy, in contrast, attempts to construct the world which is rather introverted and subjective: the fantasy world should be regarded as a totally different world, independent of our real world.² Le Guin also shares with Attebery the recognition that SF is extroverted, whereas fantasy is introverted. She remarks that her own home grounds are “Outer Space” and “Inner Lands”, designating SF and fantasy respectively.³

She is also conscious of the uniqueness of narration in those genres. As for the narration of SF, she defines it as the extroverted type of derivation from fantasy, which is essentially introverted, and attributes the uniqueness of narration to the adoption of science as rhetoric.⁴ On the other hand, she asserts that the style is everything in fantasy works.⁵ Fantasy is, for her, nothing but the translation of the world of “the intuitions and perceptions of the unconscious” into the “verbal images and coherent narrative forms”.⁶ One thing to remember, when we try to understand her definition of fantasy, is that she assumes the world of unconscious to be “the collective unconscious”, the concept suggested by C. G. Jung. When “the ego” proceeds deep into his or her own inner side, it will discover what Jung calls “the Self”.⁷ The Self is transcendent and collective, shared by all kinds of being, whereas the ego is personal. The Self is “the archetype of

1 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969) i-vi. In the introduction of the book, Le Guin stresses that this novel is a “thought-experiment”, not an “extrapolation”. She explains that while the “extrapolation” is the imaginary “prediction” of the future, her own work is the “description” of the real world in which we live. She says: “I am describing certain aspects of psychological reality”. Considering the word “psychological”, we could think of her unique categorization of the “thought-experiment” as a reflection of her psychological attitude toward the fantasy and the SF genre: as I will discuss later, she regards fantasy and SF as the genres to describe the collective unconscious by using the language of archetypes and symbols.


7 The ego is sometimes referred to by Jung as the ego complex, the self (with a lowercase s), or the ego consciousness. See Robert H. Hopcke, *A Guided Tour of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999) 79.
wholeness within the collective unconscious\(^1\), in which exists a lot of other “archetypes”, the psychic images shared by all kinds of being. On the basis of such Jungian concepts, Le Guin attributes the uniqueness of narration of fantasy to the use of the unconscious language, the use of symbols and archetypes.\(^2\) She also regards SF, a scientific derivation of fantasy, as the translation from the unconscious to consciousness, pointing out some archetypal images which appeared in SF works.\(^3\)

1.3. Le Guin’s Fantasy as the Narration of Constructing a New World

Bearing Le Guin’s definition of fantasy in mind, I will examine in the following chapters her most celebrated fantasy works the Earthsea cycle, demonstrating how she attempts to construct a new world as well as how she narrates the story. As George E. Slusser points out, critics have not paid so much attention to her fantasy works as to her SF works, possibly because of “the silly publishing classification which designates the books as “children’s literature””\(^4\).

She agrees with the idea of J. R. R. Tolkien, who regards fantasy as the art of creating “a Secondary World”.\(^5\) She then expands the idea in her own way: writing fantasy is the act of creating “a new world”, “a world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation”; and “[t]he only voice that speaks there is the creator’s voice”.\(^6\)

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1 Hopcke 80.
2 Le Guin, Language 51-3.
5 In On Fairy Stories, Tolkien defines “Fantasy” as the art of mankind which is proximate to “Enchantment”, the art of elves. This “Enchantment” is called as the art of creating “a Secondary World”. If a man is enchanted by this art, he cannot help believing that he exists in “a Secondary World” in the literal sense of the word, not that he merely believes in another world different from his own “Primary World”. See J. R. R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001) 52-3.
6 Le Guin, Language 81.
In the Earthsea cycle, she tries to construct a new world Earthsea by using the concept of balanced dualism, which is called the Equilibrium. Especially in the first trilogy, her attempts to establish the Equilibrium take the form of the coming-of-age stories, or Bildungsromans: by narrating the process of reaching maturity of young adult characters such as Ged, Tenar, and Arren, Le Guin tries to show the Equilibrium of the world through the maturity and wholeness of characters.

Chapter 2

The Equilibrium in Earthsea

2.1. General Characteristics of the Earthsea Cycle

Le Guin’s fantasy had already begun to take shape before the first Earthsea story, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, was published. “The Word of Unbinding” and “The Rule of Names”, both published in 1964, were two short stories in which Le Guin first attempted to create her fantasy world. Although the world does not yet have the name Earthsea, the stories develop several concepts such as the archipelago, the land of the dead, and the wizardry, all characteristic in the world of Earthsea.

It is obvious for Le Guin that the setting of her fantasy world is a vast archipelago. The use of capital letters like “the Islands” and “the Archipelago” in two stories implies the significance of the setting. Readers of the Earthsea cycle are given far more detailed descriptions of the Archipelago, and even the map of Earthsea written by the author.

As Le Guin admits, the land of the dead described in “The Word of Unbinding” foreshadows the last scene of *The Farthest Shore*, in which Ged and Arren also make a

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3 Le Guin, *Wind’s* 73.
4 Le Guin, *Wind’s* 83.
journey into the land of the dead. The image of the dead land appears throughout the Earthsea cycle, especially in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Farthest Shore*, and *The Other Wind*. The world of Earthsea is composed of two realms: one for the living, and another for the dead. The two realms are divided by “a low wall of stones”, and on the side of the dead, “the long slope” is descending from the wall “into the dark”. The land of the dead is also called “the dry land”, above which shine the stars “that do not rise, nor set” (455).

The wizardry in Earthsea is fundamentally based on words and names: in short, to work magic is to use true words and names. In “The Rule of Names” a schoolmistress teaches her children two Rules of Names. Then a man called Mr. Underhill appears and illustrates the essential point of the rules: “the name is the thing, [...] and the true name is the true thing. To speak the name is to control the thing.” In Earthsea, those who possess the knowledge of the true names are regarded as wizards or mages, because they can control things by calling their true names. This control over things is the essence of wizardry in Earthsea. Again, the significance of words and names is implied by capital letters like “Word” and “Name” in “The Word of Unbinding”.

By expanding those concepts, Le Guin went on to write three volumes of Earthsea. However, she once thought of the series as finished in the trilogy, and readers had to wait for a long time until the rest of the Earthsea cycle were published. The huge time lag, especially between the third and the fourth volume, brought certain change in Le Guin’s attitude toward the world of Earthsea.

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1 Le Guin, *Wind’s* 71.
2 Le Guin, *The Earthsea Quartet* (London: Penguin Books, 1993) 455. The edition is the collection of four books: *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, and *Tehanu*. All the subsequent references are to this edition and will be found in the text.
3 Le Guin, *Wind’s* 83.
5 The three concepts, the archipelago and the land of the dead and the wizardry, will be examined fully in 2.4.
Many critics have pointed out that the first trilogy is the stories of coming-of-age, or *Bildungsromans*. Each story features a young adult who struggles to attain a new perspective on his or her own self, and thus find out the place where he or she should be.\(^1\)

Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is wounded terribly by the shadow which his own haughty act summons up. He has to go on a journey to find out what the shadow really is, and in doing so, make “himself whole: a man” (166) who knows “his whole true self” (166).

Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan* is deprived of her name in her childhood, and when she reaches her adolescence, she is appointed as the Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan who serves the Nameless Ones. She meets Ged in the underground Labyrinth, the huge dark place where men have not been allowed to enter. At first she tries to kill him, but gradually they come to understand each other. They at last succeed in escaping the Labyrinth and the Tombs of Atuan. Ged tells Tenar that she is “truly reborn” (299).

Arren in *The Farthest Shore* is a young adult who is going to be the Kind in Havnor, the central island of the Archipelago. He visits Ged on Roke island to consult about the recent decline of magic in Earthsea. They decide to set out on a journey to discover what is wrong in the world. They cross over the wall of stones to go to the land of the dead, and there they confront Cob, the wizard who disturbed the balance between life and death. After returning from the dead land, Arren goes home to ascend his throne in Havnor. His journey with Ged is the process of realizing the truth that “[t]o refuse death is to refuse life” (410).

The second trilogy, on the contrary, does not have the characteristic of *Bildungsroman* so explicitly as the first trilogy. In *Tehanu* readers are introduced to a young girl named Therru, whose true name turns out to be Tehanu. Although the climax

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\(^1\) Cadden 98.
of the book may be the last chapter where Therru’s identity is revealed as a dragon’s child, the story focuses mainly on the consciousness of Tenar, now a middle-aged widow. *Tehanu* is the story of Tenar who seeks to determine her own sexuality as a woman, living in the community which is ruled by men. *Tales from Earthsea* also deals with the problem of sexuality. “Dragonfly” is the story of a girl Irian who tries to enter the school on Roke, where only men have traditionally been allowed to enter. Le Guin has to rethink also the balance between life and death, which seemed to be settled by the journey of Ged and Arren. In *The Other Wind* the low wall of stones, which divides the regions of life and death, is finally torn down by the hands of Lebannen, Tehanu, Irian, Tenar and others.

The second trilogy is the revision of the first trilogy, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Le Guin attempts to reconstruct the world of Earthsea which she has already constructed in the first trilogy.

In her essay, Le Guin comments on the themes of the first trilogy: *A Wizard of Earthsea* treats the coming-of-age, *The Tombs of Atuan* treats the sex or the female coming-of-age, and *The Farthest Shore* treats the death.\(^1\) It is crucial that all the themes are developed in the form of dualism. Ged’s coming-of-age is achieved in the moment “[l]ight and darkness” (164) meets, joins and becomes one. He reaches maturity by “naming the shadow of his death with his own name” (166). The theme of sex is treated as the problem of man and woman, and the theme of death as the problem of life and death. Thus Le Guin adopts three kinds of dualism as the essential factors of the construction of Earthsea: light and darkness, man and woman, life and death.

The epigraph of *A Wizard of Earthsea* clearly demonstrates how Le Guin understands the dualism.

\(^1\) Le Guin, *Language* 44-5.
Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk’s flight
on the empty sky.

— The Creation of Éa (12)

“The Creation of Éa” is one of the traditional songs prevalent in Earthsea. While there exist a great number of traditional songs in Earthsea, “The Creation of Éa” is said to be the oldest. The dualistic contrasts such as silence and word, dark and light, dying and life, are all regarded as complementary: the latter in each combination can never exist without the former. In short, the dualism in Earthsea is not of antagonistic kind, but coexistent. Such quality of dualism is called in the text as the Equilibrium. One wizard in A Wizard of Earthsea explains the concept well: “The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard’s power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. […] To light a candle is to cast a shadow…” (48)

The world of Earthsea is “a creative, dynamic balance, Yin and Yang, not a Manichean contention between light as good and darkness as evil”¹. As Elizabeth Cummins says, Manichean understanding of dualism is common with Western thought in which “light and dark are often regarded as symbols of the dualistic, warring powers of good and evil”². Le Guin replaces such hierarchical understanding of dualism with Taoistic one, and thus her Equilibrium is “the idea that opposites are actually complementary”³.

In order to examine the construction of Earthsea, I will make close analyses of three

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¹ Slusser 74.
² Cummins 34.
³ Cummins 33.
kinds of dualism mentioned above: light and darkness, man and woman, life and death. Considering that the wizardry means the use of true names, and that such wizardry is thought to be apt for only men, it is reasonable to regard the contrast between man and woman as that of word and silence. Therefore the epigraph of the first book refers to all the three kinds of dualism. Through the analyses of those dualistic concepts, the movement from the first to the second trilogy will be made clear: the first trilogy undertakes the construction of Earthsea by balancing the unbalanced dualism, whereas the second trilogy undertakes the reconstruction of Earthsea by doubting and destroying the dualism itself.

2.2. The Equilibrium between Light and Darkness in A Wizard of Earthsea

The coming-of-age process of young Ged in A Wizard of Earthsea is demonstrated as a lonesome journey around the Archipelago on a boat named Lookfar, a journey to find out the shadow which he himself let loose. The climax of his journey is the moment when he confronts the shadow at world’s end, the far east of the East Reach, and joins with the shadow, naming it with his own true name “Ged”. Thus “[l]ight and darkness met, and joined, and were one.” (164)

He can achieve his manhood only when he accepts “the shadow of his death” (166) by identifying himself with it. In other words, his journey comes to an end when the Equilibrium between light and darkness is realized. When he is a haughty student of the school on Roke, and has not yet summoned up the shadow, Ged does not understand the Equilibrium of the world. He feels dissatisfied by the speech of a Master exhorting him to comprehend the balance of the world. Ged thinks as follows:

But surely a wizard […] was powerful enough to do what he pleased, and balance the world as seemed best to him, and drive back darkness with his own
light. (48)

The passage clearly shows that Ged is ignorant of the Equilibrium at that time, but it also points to Le Guin’s narrative characteristics in the first trilogy, that is, the use of free indirect discourse.¹ According to Gerald Prince, free indirect discourse is defined as “a type of discourse representing a character’s utterances or thoughts” that “does not involve a tag clause (‘he said that,’ ‘she thought that’) introducing and qualifying the represented utterances and thoughts”.² Using free indirect discourse enables a coming-of-age story to be much more impressive, for it allows readers to sympathize more deeply with the process of the character’s coming to maturity. As Mike Cadden puts it, the narrator “doesn’t give the reader any “mature” view from the outside of the telling”³. Ged’s thoughts are expressed without the narrator’s mature judgments such as “he is good” or “he should not do it”. Thus the narrator of *A Wizard of Earthsea* does not prepare for any maturity, which is already established outside of Ged’s journey. Readers, who may be also young adults like Ged, can follow the character’s maturing process sympathetically, that is, without following any direction from the narrator.

It is apparent that the dualistic contrast between light and darkness is closely associated with that between life and death. The world’s end is described as “dark slopes beneath unmoving stars” (162), and at this point readers can recognize from earlier episodes that the place is the land of the dead.⁴ The shadow is a being from the land of the dead, or the land of darkness. Ged at first feels “the fear of the shadow” (91) or the “formless, hopeless horror” (91) constantly during his journey. At this point he has not

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¹ Cadden 91-6.
³ Cadden 93.
yet reached such recognitions as “it is my creature” (147), but rather he regards it as his opponent, the other being he should defeat and conquer. However, after he recognizes that he should not conquer nor be conquered by the shadow, or that he is “neither hunter nor hunted” (138), all his terror disappears and the shadow begins to take the form of Ged himself, becoming “a presentment […] or an imitation of” (144) Ged.

The motif of deathly, doppelgänger-like shadow mentioned above is not at all the unprecedented invention of Le Guin; the fact is that she succeeds in remodeling the already existing motif so that it functions as a factor of establishing the Equilibrium in Earthsea. Le Guin introduces the motif of deathly, doppelgänger-like shadow already existing in other preceding texts, but at the same time she reconstructs the unbalanced structure of the motif into the balanced structure in order to establish the Equilibrium in her imaginary world. To clarify this point, it will be effective to compare *A Wizard of Earthsea* with some works of Edgar Allan Poe, who also used the image of shadow and doppelgänger.

*Shadow — A Parable* is a short story Poe published in 1835. The narrator Oinos holds a drinking party in a noble hall at night. In the same hall is laid down a dead body of young man named Zoilus, one of the victims of the plague running riot at that time. When Oinos’s singing voices fade away, he suddenly witnesses the shadow:

> And lo! from among those sable draperies where the sounds of the song departed, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow […]. But the shadow was vague, and formless, and indefinite, and was the shadow neither of man nor of God […].

Oinos speaks to the shadow, and its answering voice takes Oinos and the rest of the party totally aghast, for the voice consists of the tones of a multitude of familiar friends that have

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been already dead.

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged experiences the first contact with the shadow when he reads out a spell of summoning the dead.

Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call to him in a whisper: but he could not understand the words. (30)

The shadow described by Poe and that by Le Guin resemble in that they are both formless, and in that they both belong to the region of the dead. In *Shadow*, the shadow looks down on the dead body of Zoilus and speaks in the voices of dead people, probably the voices of the victims of the plague. Moreover it is implied that the narrator Oinos himself will already have gone into “the region of shadows” when the text is read by those who are “still among the living”¹. The shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea* also belongs to the region of the dead. Le Guin and Poe both represent the death by the image of shapeless, dark shadow.

However, there is one remarkable difference in the two shadows. While the shadow of Poe speaks in a clear voice and people can recognize it well, the shadow of Le Guin only whispers to Ged, who fails to understand the words. The whisper is reminiscent of Poe’s “William Wilson” (1839), where the narrator named William Wilson is perplexed by the presence of a man with the same name. The narrator Wilson says that the man has “a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time above a very low whisper”². The man constantly appears in front of the narrator Wilson wherever he goes, and whispers into his ear. In *A Wizard of

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¹ Poe 134.
² Poe 222.
*Earthsea*, Ged happens to encounter the shadow during his attempt at helping a sick child of Pechvarry, and during his travel on Osskil with his shipmate Skiorh. He hears in both occasions the shadow’s whisper in which “there [are] no words” (81), and he realizes that “all his life that whispering [has] been in his ears” (103).

In both stories the mysterious whisperer eventually turns out to be the person whispered to: Ged and Wilson have to confront their doppelgängers. However, their confrontations show a vivid contrast. In “William Wilson”, the narrator Wilson stabs the doppelgänger Wilson, who speaks out as follows:

> You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead — dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist — and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.¹

As for *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the narrator describes Ged, who has just accomplished the union with the shadow, in the following way:

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 (165-6)

Both Le Guin and Poe employ the same images of whispering doppelgängers. However, Le Guin does not repeat Poe’s plot where the protagonist defeats his doppelgänger, bringing about his own destruction. Instead, she lets the protagonist unite with his doppelganger, without either victory or defeat, and attain his wholeness.

Thus the shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is constructed by combining two images in Poe’s works: the formless dark being from the region of the dead, and the whispering doppelgänger. What is remarkable is that Le Guin constructs the Equilibrium by

¹ Poe 232.
introducing well-known patterns of images and reconstructing them. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged attains the Equilibrium between light and dark in his union with the shadow, but this Equilibrium is generated only by denying the unbalanced ending found in other texts such as Poe’s.

2.3. **The Equilibrium between Man and Woman in *The Tombs of Atuan***

Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan* is deprived of her name by the Nameless Ones, and from that moment designated as the Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan. The Tombs consist of a set of nine stones, depicted as follows:

> They had stood there, it was said, since the time of the first men, since Earthsea was created. They had been planted in the darkness when the lands were raised up from the ocean’s depths. [...] They were the tombs of those who rules before the world of men came to be, the ones not named, and she who served them had no name. (187)

The Tombs, and the vast Labyrinth which lies in the underground of the Tombs of Atuan, belong to the ancient darkness that has existed since long before the birth of light. These are the places watched and guarded by the Priestess Arha, who was once called Tenar. The Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan is the “highest of all high priestesses of the Kargad Lands” (194). While most of the Archipelago of Earthsea respect and obey the power of the King in Havnor and the wizards in Roke, the Kargad Lands possess different kind of religious and political system. They worship Twin Gods and Godking, choose the priestesses who govern the place. In other words, the Kargad Lands stay away from the male-oriented powers prevalent in Earthsea, and instead establish unique society in which women hold power. Arha is considered to be the most powerful among the society.

When the Archimage Ged enters into the Labyrinth, therefore, she thinks of him as
totally alien. Ged belongs to the society ruled by the power of single King in Havnor and of wizards in Roke. For Arha, who is ignorant of such a society outside the Kargad Lands, Ged is nothing but “the fool, the foreigner, the unbeliever” (236). The difference between Arha and Ged can be defined in several ways: Arha lives in darkness, has no name, and is a woman, whereas Ged lives in light, has his true name, and is a man. All the three contrasts relate to each other. In the first trilogy, womanhood is closely tied up with darkness and silence, while manhood is associated with light and word. Through the confrontation between Arha and Ged in The Tombs of Atuan, Le Guin tries to establish the Equilibrium of these manifold dualistic concepts, especially focusing on the sexual dualism.

In mentioning the position and the power of Arha as the Priestess of the Tombs, the narrator consciously associates it with “her crossing into womanhood” (194). The Labyrinth under the Tombs is depicted as “the very heart of darkness” (200), the place where “[l]ight is forbidden” (200). At the same time, it is declared that “[n]o man can enter the Dark Places of the Tombs” (202). It is clear from those descriptions that the darkness is closely connected to Arha’s womanhood, and is distinguished from the light and manhood which Ged symbolizes.

Her womanhood is interwoven not only with the darkness but also with the namelessness and silence. As I have mentioned above, there are solid connections between true names and true things in Earthsea. The wizardry means the availability of true names that belong to “the Old Speech, that language in which things are named with their true names” (27). However, the knowledge of true names is rigorously limited to particular people. As a Master on Roke insists, the true magic of Earthsea “is worked only by those beings who speak the Hardic tongue” (50), which has its origin in the Old Speech. In addition, women are excluded from the use of true wizardry. Traditionally,
women are not allowed to enter the school on Roke, though the tradition is questioned in “Dragonfly” in *Tales from Earthsea*. All they can learn about the wizardry are only trivial matters such as causing illness, curing it, making up a love-potion or some other “rubbish and humbug” (17). Such women are called witches, who know “nothing of the Balance and the Pattern which the true wizard knows and serves” (16). There are even sayings on Gont like “Weak as woman’s magic” (16) or “Wicked as woman’s magic” (16). People in the Kargad Lands show strong disbelief in the wizardry prevalent in other regions of Earthsea. They deny or fear the power of true names, and their fear must be the reason why they worship the Nameless Ones and deprive the true name of the Priestess of the Tombs.

Moreover, the very darkness which Arha serves takes on the quality of silence. The world of Earthsea was created by “Segoy who spoke the First Word, raising up the isles from the deep sea” (304), but it is obvious that the darkness had existed long before the moment of the world-creation, according to the fact that the Tombs had already been there on the moment the world was created. The darkness, where Tombs were planted, is by far “older than light” (187), older than the First Word, and therefore it is the domain of silence. The association between darkness and silence is also repeated in *A Wizard of Earthsea*: in the darkness of world’s end Ged feels the “old silence” (164). *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan* both represent the darkness as something characteristically without directions. In the underground Labyrinth in *The Tombs of Atuan* no one can get anywhere because “there [are] no centre” (231) and “[n]o direction [is] right” (231). This is just as “[t]here [are] no directions” (163) in the darkness of world’s end in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The darkness without directions produces a sharp contrast with the region of light, the place where Ged lives seeing “the light of the sun” (249), because there are clear directions in the light region. The map of Earthsea adopts
the cardinal points of North, South, East, West, while excluding the Kargad Lands from the categorization. The lack of direction in darkness enforces the typical silence in darkness, for the directions are defined by words such as North, South, East, and West, on the map of Earthsea.

The womanhood, the darkness, and the silence are the three concepts that symbolize each other throughout the first trilogy of the Earthsea cycle. Similarly, the other three concepts, the manhood, the light, and the word, symbolize each other. In addition, there is another kind of dualism that is tied up with dualistic concepts listed above, that is, the dualistic contrast between water and stone. I will discuss this point in 2.4.

In short, all kinds of dualism found in Earthsea relate to each other and form the dual system of symbols. On the one hand is the group including the womanhood, the darkness, the silence, the stone, and the death. On the other hand is the group including the manhood, the light, the word, the water, and the life. One factor symbolizes all the rest of factors in each group. It follows that the attempt to realize the Equilibrium between man and woman, which is the theme of *The Tombs of Atuan*, can be seen as the attempt to realize the Equilibrium between all the other kinds of dualism listed above.

Arha and Ged escape from the Labyrinth, climb the mountains, and sail to Havnor. The Tombs of Atuan collapse and break down, leaving the Nameless Ones buried in its ruins. Ged tells Arha in the following way: “You were never made for cruelty and darkness; you were made to hold light” (299). By bringing Arha out of the darkness and nameless region, Ged seems to achieve her freedom. She has been forced to serve the evil by the society which denies true names and the region of light, putting an exclusively high value on the power of the darkness. Ged has to save her from the Tombs because such a society goes against the Equilibrium of the world. He insists that the Nameless Ones “should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshipped” (266),
just as he himself does not deny nor worship his shadow of death but simply accept its presence.

Ged’s remark reveals a significant way of understanding the Equilibrium of the world. He firmly believes in the existence of the boundary which engenders and regulates the dualism. In other words, he takes it for granted that the boundary should be maintained between the dualistic elements such as light and darkness, man and woman, life and death. The most vivid example of the boundary is the low wall of stones which separates the living from the dead. Even though he goes on a journey for joining with the shadow and becoming one in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged does not intend to realize the union between the regions of light and darkness in *The Tombs of Atuan*. He is satisfied only with the knowledge of the darkness, and lets the darkness remain separated from the region of light. He remarks that “[the Nameless Ones] cannot leave this place; they are this place; and it should be left to them” (266), and affirms that the once-Priestess should belong to the light side of the world as Tenar, not to the darkness side as Arha. The dissolution of light and darkness accomplished in *A Wizard of Earthsea* does not take place in *The Tombs of Atuan*: Le Guin attains the Equilibrium between man and woman not by removing the boundary of the two and making them one, but by placing the two equally on one side of dualistic concepts, that is, the man’s side. Strictly speaking, the union between light and darkness in *A Wizard of Earthsea* cannot be regarded as the complete dissolution of the boundary between them, because the union is treated after all as the living Ged’s accomplishment of wholeness, not as that of the dead shadow. His home still remains in the light side of the world. His acceptance of the shadow is nothing but the process of initiation he has to go through to live as a matured man in the light side of the world. In this sense, Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is still a resident of the region of light, which is separated from the region of darkness by the solid, unquestioned boundary.
It seems inadequate to consider that the Equilibrium is realized by the escape of Ged and Tenar into the light side of the world. As I have mentioned above, the light side of Earthsea is ruled and governed exclusively by men: the male King in Havnor rules the world, and only men can gain the knowledge and availability of true names and wizardry. Women do not have the opportunity either to know true names or master them. They can at best use some trivial magic without understanding what the wizardry really is, and such women are derogatively called “witches”, the user of “weak” magic. In short, as long as we look at Earthsea as the world of wizardry, women are totally “silenced or marginalized”.¹

Elizabeth Cummins points out the difference between Tenar’s coming-of-age process and that of Ged and Arren: “[Tenar] has had to rebel against and break free of the society that nurtured her; Ged and Arren mature so as to fit into their home societies.”² It is notable that Tenar’s escaping the home society, the Kargad Lands, inevitably leads up to her participating into the “foreign” society. The narrator describes Tenar in Havnor at the end of the book as if she were “a child coming home” (300), but this cannot be her “home” in the same sense that her mother uses the word at the beginning of the book: “Come home, Tenar! Come home!” (175) The narrator seems to be ignorant of the unbalanced sexuality in the light side of Earthsea, and therefore unable to predict the rip current Tenar is going to experience later in Tehanu, in which she doubts and resists the womanhood that the male-oriented society expects her to take.³

### 2.4. The Equilibrium between Life and Death in The Farthest Shore

² Cummins 47-8.
³ In her essay *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin regrets that she wrote the first trilogy “as a male”, and regarded the male as “normal, dominant, active” while the female as “other, subject, passive”. See Ursula K. Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned* (Cambridge: Green Bay Publications, 1993) 22.
The third book of the first trilogy, *The Farthest Shore*, opens with the description of the Court of the Roke School:

In the Court of the Fountain the sun of March shone through young leaves of ash and elm, and water leapt and fell through shadow and clear light. About that roofless court stood four high walls of stone. (303)

At first sight, readers may notice the clear contrast between light and shadow, created by the sunlight and tree leaves, but there is another important contrast: the contrast between water and stone.

Readers of the preceding two books may well recognize at this point a similarity between the two contrasts: they both symbolize the dualism between life and death. As for the contrast between light and darkness, *A Wizard of Earthsea* vividly shows the symbolic association with the contrast between life and death, as I discussed in 2.2. As for the contrast between water and stone, readers have already been given some hints in two books: the wall of stones which forms the boundary between the regions of life and death; the dark Labyrinth of the Tombs of Atuan constructed of stones; and the geographical contrast between sea and land. As Brian Attebery says, “the symbolic association” of water and stone “is not at all obvious” at the point of the beginning part of *The Farthest Shore*. However, the dryness of the land of dead is especially conspicuous in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Moreover, in *The Tombs of Atuan* Ged almost dies of thirst in the Labyrinth which is constructed of stones, under the nine stones of the Tombs. It is clear that the lack of water means death in Earthsea.

The contrast between the sea and the land is the expansion of the contrast between the water and the stone, or moistness and dryness. During the hunting of the shadow, Ged feels “a terror of meeting the thing again on dry land. Out of the sea there rise storms and

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1 Attebery, *Tradition* 178.
monsters, but no evil powers: evil is of earth” (125). He clearly connects the deathly quality of the shadow to the earth, not to the sea. In addition, in The Farthest Shore the eldest dragon Kalessin speaks of the unbalance of life and death by using the image of the sea and the land: “There is a hole in the world and the sea is running out of it. The light is running out. We will be left in the dry land.” (439) Kalessin also connects the death with the image of stones by talking about “villagers killing a baby on an altar stone” (439), and “a sorcerer killed by his townsfolk throwing stones at him” (439). After all, the name of the world “Earthsea” shows the importance of the dualistic contrast between the earth and the sea.

It is notable that Le Guin repeats the patterns used by preceding writers when she associates the image of the dry land with death. Mike Cadden says the dry land of Earthsea is “so reminiscent of the ancient Greeks’ Hades”\(^1\), the place where people go after death, depicted in Homer’s Odyssey. Brian Attebery associates Le Guin’s image of dry land with that of T. S. Eliot: her image “is reminiscent of the waste land” depicted in his poem of that name, but “even more of his “The Hollow Men” published in 1925, in which the dead land is called as the “cactus land” and the place where “the stone images” are raised.”\(^2\) Le Guin comments that her image of dry land may come from Rainer Maria Rilke, in his Duino Elegies (1923).\(^3\)

As for her conspicuous contrast between sea and land, there is another writer who used the same contrast in his works: Herman Melville. Attebery associates Earthsea with Mardi, an archipelago appeared in Melville’s Mardi (1849), emphasizing that both are “[worlds] in fragments”.\(^4\) He goes on to say that “[a] world of islands must be

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\(^1\) Cadden 81.
\(^2\) Attebery, Tradition 170-1.
\(^3\) Attebery, Tradition 198.
\(^4\) Attebery, Tradition 167.
fundamentally different from a world of solid land” in that each community is “isolated”.¹
The setting of archipelagic world must be the result of writer’s strong consciousness of the
contrast between the sea and the land. Communities on the isolated islands have to be
conscious of the marine region when they try to communicate with each other, while
communities on the “solid land” do not have to. Melville’s *Moby-Dick, or the Whale*
(1851) also shows concerns for the contrast between the sea and the land, and for an
archipelagic world. The narrator regards the world as “s ship on its passage out”², and the
very ship, the Pequod, vividly assumes the archipelagic quality:

They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, *Isolatoes* too, I call such, not
acknowledging the common continent of men, but each *Isolato* living on a
separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set
these *Isolatoes* were!³

The identities of the sailors on the Pequod are not uniform but are different from each other,
exactly as the islands in Earthsea are, every one of which “is different from the others”
(247). Such an archipelagic setting of the world reflects the writer’s strong concern for
the contrast and for the very otherness the contrast spotlights.

It may be interesting to compare Le Guin with Melville, for both writers show strong
interests in dualistic contrasts such as the sea and the land, life and death, and light and
darkness. The narrator of *Moby-Dick* expresses his interest in the dualistic contrast in the
following way: “truly to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for
there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast.”⁴ He then
contrasts “light” with “darkness”, preferring the latter to the former because it is “the

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¹ Atttebery, *Tradition* 168.
³ Melville 121.
⁴ Melville 53.
proper element of our essences”¹ according to him. He also considers the “matter of Life and Death”, and seems to appreciate the latter saying: “Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance.”²

We can again see the different attitudes of the two writers toward the dualistic contrasts, as we have seen in Le Guin and Poe. While Melville tends to regard that the dark side of the contrast possesses some kind of essential quality, Le Guin presumes that the Equilibrium of dark and light is essential. Le Guin’s world-construction again takes place by establishing the balance in the existing motifs which have been used in an unbalanced way in other texts. Ged at first thinks that “evil is of earth” (125) just as the narrator of Moby-Dick thinks that “in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God”³. However, Ged cannot meet and join with the shadow until he realizes that the evil is not the shadow nor the dry land itself, but his “refusal to grant these things their rightful place in the balance of nature”⁴.

Similarly, Le Guin adopts the Christian motif of world-creation by balancing the unbalance. Earthsea was created by Segoy, who spoke the First Word and raised the islands from the deep sea. His world-creation apparently parallels that of God in the Bible. Both texts, the Bible and the Earthsea cycle, employ the dualistic contrast between light and darkness, but the attitudes toward the dualism differ. While Christian God makes the world by bringing Light into existence, Segoy creates the world by making the balance between sea and land, which means symbolically the balance between life and death, between light and darkness. Christian God admits the superiority of Light over Darkness, which means that the unbalance between Light and Darkness is the essence of his world-creation. Segoy denies any superiority of each element, and therefore the

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¹ Melville 54.
² Melville 37.
³ Melville 107.
⁴ Slusser 77.
balance between light and darkness is the core of his world-creation. Here again we can see Le Guin's remodeling of the existing motif by balancing the unbalance in it: she seems to repeat the Christian concept of world-creation, but she makes her new world by rewriting the biblical Un-Equilibrium between light and darkness into the Equilibrium.

The dry land of the dead in Earthsea shows a curious trait. Ged and Arren meet a man named Hare, who explains that “names don’t matter” (349) in the dark land because they are cut off from “the reality” (349). He declares that “[a] name isn’t real, the real, the real forever.” (349) In Hort Town in Havnor, a drug called Hazia prevails among people, and this drug has the same effect with the death: the separation of the name from its reality. Arren witnesses a woman using Hazia, and thinks of her peculiar gesture as “a spell without meaning” (338). In the living world of Earthsea, wizards can perform a magic because “the name is the thing”, or in other words, the name means the reality. This connection between the name and the reality is essential in the Old Speech and wizardry, while in the dry land of death the connection is cancelled. Even in the light side of Earthsea, wizards cannot perform a magic if they are far from Roke, approaching the dry land. Ged experiences it during his journey to the far east, and later tells Arren as follows: “I doubt whether any word that can be spoken would bear, everywhere and forever, its weight of meaning and its power” (365). It follows that they must set up some defensive measures against the power of disconnecting the name from the reality, for the purpose of maintaining their wizardry.

Therefore, the wizardry in Earthsea can only maintain its power by distinguishing the two regions: the living side of the world where the name means the reality without fail, and the dead side of the world where the name is cut off from the reality. Wizards cherish and supervise the Equilibrium between life and death in order to secure the essence of their power, that is, the absolute connection between the name and the reality. In short,
wizards necessitate the boundary between life and death lest their power is nullified.

It is a man named Cob who disturbed the balance between life and death, desiring his own eternal life. Ged and Arren have to cross over the wall of stones to shut up the hole into which the sea, light, and life are running out. Hunted down by Ged and Arren, Cob bursts out:

You sought [the Way of Immortality]. All of you. You sought it and could not find it, and so made wise words about acceptance and balance and the equilibrium of life and death. But they were words – lies to cover your failure – to cover your fear of death! (460)

Maybe the wizards have not sought the Way of Immortality of themselves, as Ged protests Cob. However, it may be that they have instead sought the Way of Immortality of wizardry itself. Cob is true in one point that the establishment and maintenance of the Equilibrium has been done for the sake of wizards and their own magical power. In *The Other Wind*, the latest book of the Earthsea cycle, Ged and other characters break down by their own hands the wall of stones which has separated life from death. They realize that they “built a false wall”, and therefore it “must be unbuilt”.\(^1\) Ged’s belief that “[opening] the door between the worlds” (423) is wrong, after all, turns out to be wrong at the last scene of the Earthsea cycle.

As for Arren, he reaches maturity by closing the life-draining hole with Ged: he succeeds in “[making] the world whole once more”. Ged teaches Arren: “I know that there is only one power worth having. And that is the power, not to take, but to accept.” (424) Arren can accept his mortality during his journey to mend the hole opened by the mind of refusing death.

All the three young adults in the first trilogy, Ged and Tenar and Arren, reach

maturity by accepting the existence of the other side of the world, darkness and man and death. It is notable that their coming-of-ages all synchronize with the movement of the world toward union, the shift from the divided into the united. Ged and his companion Vetch have to sail on the sea toward the far east to reach the dry land of the dead, and there they experience a mysterious union between sea and land: they suddenly find that the sea water has turned into sand without their noticing it, as if “an enchantment of illusion” (162). Tenar escapes the Tombs of Atuan by accepting Ged and his request to restore the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, the ring which has on its surface “the Bond-Rune, the sign of dominion, the sign of peace” (269). Without the Rune, the king cannot rule the world well. Tenar herself mends the broken halves of the Ring to make it “whole” (273) as if to promise the recovery of peace in the world.

It follows, then, that the coming-of-age process of characters in the first trilogy can be regarded as the symbol of the establishment of the Equilibrium in Earthsea. Such a symbolic correspondence between characters and the world owes its success to the narrator’s way of constructing the world, that is, the narrator’s dependence on the concept of the Equilibrium. The concept of “Equilibrium” makes sense only when there is the concept of “Un-Equilibrium”. In other words, the narrator cannot construct any kind of “Equilibrium” in Earthsea without presuming “Un-Equilibrium”: the existence of Equilibrium is guaranteed by the very difference it has from the Un-Equilibrium. The two concepts, Equilibrium and Un-Equilibrium, always emerge simultaneously.

Introducing the concept of Equilibrium, therefore, enables the narrator to produce the dynamism from the Un-Equilibrium to the Equilibrium, from the broken to the whole. If the narrator defines the coming-of-age process as the movement from one-sided to

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1 The word “Un-Equilibrium” is the original usage in this thesis. Neither Le Guin nor other critics uses it. The word signifies the condition in which the conflict of dualistic concepts is not balanced yet.
wholeness, he can easily equate it with the dynamism of the world. Owing to the concept of Equilibrium, the narrator can equate the immature character with the unbalanced world, because both similarly have to strive for the wholeness.

Chapter 3

The Un-Equilibrium in Earthsea

The world of Earthsea is constructed on the basis of the concept of Equilibrium, but actually, the world cannot exist without the Un-Equilibrium behind the Equilibrium. When the narrator desires to establish the Equilibrium, the necessity for the Un-Equilibrium inevitably arises, because the Equilibrium can exist only in relation to the Un-Equilibrium. Thus, readers may add another unwritten line to the epigraph of *A Wizard of Earthsea*: only in the Un-Equilibrium the Equilibrium.

The wizardry in Earthsea owes its existence to the essential connection between the name and the thing in the Old Speech, the language of wizardry. All the three stories in the first trilogy concern how they recover the Equilibrium of the world in parallel with the coming-of-age of young adult characters. Their efforts to accomplish the Equilibrium are also the efforts to secure the wizardry in Earthsea, for they can possess the true name on the condition that the Equilibrium guarantees the exact distinction between the light place where the true name means the true thing, and the dark place where the true name means nothing and makes no sense. The trueness of the light place is guaranteed only by the dark place where the trueness cannot exist.

Characters in the first trilogy, therefore, take it for granted that there is some boundary between dualistic elements. However, the second trilogy poses a doubt on, and even resentment at, the existence of a boundary which engenders and regulates the dualism. Characters in the second trilogy feel more or less incredulous of the absolute powers of
wizards and the King, that powers which try to maintain the Equilibrium and the validity of
the true word. At last, in *The Other Wind*, the low wall of stones which, dividing life and
death, symbolizes the boundaries between all the other kinds of dualism, is totally broken
down by the hands of many characters: Lebannen, Tehanu, Tenar, Ged and so on. The
second trilogy concludes with the destruction of the boundary between the dualistic
concepts.

In the first trilogy, the Earthsea people are rather blind to the unbalance and
repressiveness of the power which tries to maintain the Equilibrium. The world-creation
of Segoy took the form of making the balance between the sea and the land, by raising the
lands from the deep sea. To maintain the balance, however, requires some kind of
authoritative power. Gamble, a guide of the school on Roke, knows it well, and says:
“The Balance lies here, but the Power should lie in the king’s hands.” (317) People in the
first trilogy show no incredulity of the notion that there should be the absolute power or
centrality in such islands as Roke and Havnor. They need the power to maintain the order
of the world, the power to distinguish the language of true names from the other “not-true”
languages.

There is obviously a hierarchical order among the languages in Earthsea: the
distinction between the “true” and the “not-true”. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* the narrator
explains the languages of Earthsea in this way:

The Hardic tongue of the Archipelago, though it has no more magic power in it
than any other tongue of men, has its roots in the Old Speech, that language in
which things are named with their true names (27)

The passage above shows that there are two types of languages in Earthsea: the language
of “true” names, namely the Old Speech, and the language of “not-true” names, like Hardic.
Other languages of “not-true” names are listed in *Tales from Earthsea*, such as Osskili,
Kargish and many dialects. Of course, as I have said, the trueness of the Old Speech is guaranteed only by the difference it has from other languages like Hardic that are composed of not-true names.

In the first trilogy, the true wizardry is rigidly restricted to men. That is because the restricting power tries to apply the man-woman dualism to the true-untrue dualism. In doing so, they expect that the strict distinction of the former dualism will rub off on the latter. The Equilibrium in Earthsea, therefore, is nothing but the state of the world desirable only for male wizards.

However, it seems that Le Guin, the constructor of the world of Earthsea, gradually understood such quality of the Equilibrium during the long years from the first trilogy to the publication of the sixth book. *The Other Wind* describes the site of the reconstruction of the world. Lebannen, Tehanu, Tenar and others decide to tear down the wall of stones, allowing the region of death mingle with the region of life. Their action well repeats Segoy’s deed of creating Earthsea, in that both let the deathly, dark, and earthy element into the live, light and marine element. It dawns on them that the Equilibrium in their world has long been creating the Un-Equilibrium: the fact that the Equilibrium itself is one-sidedly desired and needed by people in the light side of the world, especially by male wizards. In consequence, they succeeds in reconstructing the world, which was constructed by setting up the Equilibrium, by breaking it down.

To create the Equilibrium is to create the Un-Equilibrium, just as “[t]o light a candle is to cast a shadow” (48). It is natural, then, that there is always some Un-Equilibrium in Earthsea founded on the Equilibrium. In the first trilogy, they try to dissolve the Un-Equilibrium by bringing it back to the Equilibrium, but that will inevitably promise another kind of Un-Equilibrium. In the second trilogy, then, they attempt to dissolve the

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Un-Equilibrium by destroying the boundary which engenders the very concept of Equilibrium, and thus nullifying the dualism between the Equilibrium and the Un-Equilibrium. As a result, the world of Earthsea is truly saved from any kind of “Un-Equilibrium” at the end of the second trilogy: neither “the Un-Equilibrium” nor “the Equilibrium” can exist as they do in the first trilogy.

**Conclusion**

In the first trilogy, Le Guin attempts to establish the concept of Equilibrium and to construct a new world based on the concept. The dualistic world view she employs in her narration is not at all original, but the conventional framework that has been used in many other texts over and over again. What is original in her narration is the remodeling of the unbalanced structure of the conventional framework of dualism. She attempts to construct “a world where no voice has ever spoken before” by such remodeling. She intends to create her unique world by introducing the concept of Equilibrium into the traditional dualism in which the one represses the other. Her imaginary world is original not in the sense that she constructs it all by herself from scratch, but in the sense that she reconstructs the structure of the already existing framework. As I discussed in Chapter 2, readers find some motifs already existing in other preceding texts such as the works of Poe, Melville, and the Bible. She creates a new world by reconstructing the unbalanced structure of the dualism found in the motifs, by balancing the unbalance.

The concept of Equilibrium cannot exist without the concept of Un-Equilibrium. By introducing the concept of Equilibrium into the narration, the narrator obtains the dynamism from the Un-Equilibrium to the Equilibrium. The condition of the balanced world is regarded in the story as the world of wholeness: in the first trilogy, the wholeness signifies the condition that the two elements of the dualism are united. The dynamism
from the Un-Equilibrium to the Equilibrium is, in other words, the dynamism from the
divided to the united. When the narrator assumes the process of maturing of a young
character as the same dynamism from the broken to the whole, he or she can identify the
two processes in the story, that is, the maturing of a young character and the recovering of
Equilibrium of the world. Both characters and the world are expected to move from the
divided, unbalanced condition to the united, balanced condition, from the broken to the
whole. That is why the maturing character and the world on the way to the Equilibrium
symbolize each other in the first trilogy. Such a symbolic relationship between a
character and the world makes the first trilogy the “fantasy” works in the same sense as the
author defines it herself: her definition is that to write a fantasy work is to narrate about a
subjective, inner world, and the world of Earthsea can be seen just as such a world for Ged,
Tenar, and Arren, reflecting and symbolizing their inner maturing. Therefore it was a
success for Le Guin that she devised the concept of Equilibrium for the purpose of
producing the fantasy work which accords with her own definition of fantasy.

However, she has to add the second trilogy to the Earthsea cycle eighteen years after,
because she has to deal with the problem that the very concept of Equilibrium she
established in the first trilogy possesses a quality of Un-Equilibrium at its root.

She notices that her Equilibrium is actually the impossible Equilibrium: the
Equilibrium can be generated only by the unbalanced procedure. In order to maintain the
Equilibrium, one must keep on controlling the world not to fall into the Un-Equilibrium.
One can accomplish the Equilibrium only when he or she represses the Un-Equilibrium,
and the very act of repression is done one-sidedly by the light side of the world, by the
region of wizardry. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, wizards have to maintain the boundary
of dualism, because their wizardry cannot exist without the definite dualism. The
wizardry attributes its power to the presence of true names, and the validity of the true
names depends completely on the presence of the dualism. Their act of maintaining the Equilibrium is, after all, nothing but the act of maintaining the solid boundary of dualism. As a result, the Equilibrium in the first trilogy is impossible in two senses: firstly, the Equilibrium is needed and desired one-sidedly by those who belong to the region of light, life, and male-oriented wizardry; secondly, the very concept of Equilibrium is generated only by the unbalanced procedure in which the Equilibrium represses the Un-Equilibrium.

Bearing the impossibility of the Equilibrium in the first trilogy in mind, Le Guin concludes the second trilogy by the nullification of the dualism, that is, the cancellation of the boundary of dualism, which is suggested in the story as the scene of breaking down the stone wall between the regions of life and death. What is important here is that the second trilogy succeeds in dissolving the impossibility of the Equilibrium in two senses mentioned above. Firstly, the unbalance of the one-sided desiring of the Equilibrium by the light region is dissolved in that both regions, life and death, desire the breaking down of the stone wall: Lebannen, Tenar, or Ged decide to tear down the wall in sympathy with the dead people like Lily who desire it to disappear. Secondly, the unbalance of the repression of the Equilibrium over the Un-Equilibrium is dissolved in that there is no longer the dualistic contrast between the Equilibrium and the Un-Equilibrium now that the boundary of dualism itself is cancelled.

The nullification of the concept of Equilibrium also implies that the second trilogy ceases to be the “fantasy” work in the same sense with the first trilogy. Le Guin succeeds in creating the inner world which directly reflects the personal maturing of a character by introducing the concept of Equilibrium. Nevertheless, she does not abandon the narration of constructing a new world in the second trilogy. She rather tries to maintain the “wholeness” of the world of Earthsea in the process of dissolving the impossible Equilibrium. The wholeness of the world she seems to assume in the second trilogy is, of
course, different from that of the first trilogy. The second trilogy should be read as the redefinition of the wholeness, not the denial, for the breaking down of the wall in *The Other Wind* takes place as the act of characters who achieved their own wholeness such as Lebannen, Tenar, and Ged. Le Guin chooses the characters who possess the first-trilogy wholeness, not those who have nothing to do with it, as the destroyer of the stone wall. The destruction of the wall thus involves reconsiderations as to what the “wholeness” should really be by those who have already embodied wholeness in the first trilogy. Le Guin reconstructs the wholeness in the second trilogy in its conclusion.

It seems that her belief in the possibility of the narration of fantasy has not changed. She still believes in the possibility of constructing a new world that is whole. The fact that she began to write a new fantasy series, the first of which is *Gifts* (2004) and the second *Voices* (2006), well suggests her belief that one can construct a world of wholeness in narrating a story. She continues to hold such belief through perpetual reconsiderations, criticisms, and reconstructions of the concept of wholeness. For her contemporary writers, especially those who form the literary trend of so-called postmodernism, it might seem quite old-fashioned or even ignorant to assume any kind of definite wholeness in the world of the story. In the 60’s and 70’s, when Le Guin started telling her story of Earthsea, other American writers were oriented more or less toward the revelation of essential fictitiousness of literature, employing various experimental techniques in their literary works. The 60’s, in particular, is the period that produced many experimental, fantastic works, full of techniques such as parody, black humor, or surrealistic writing. Among the writers who represent the trend of postmodernism are John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Thomas Pynchon.1 Such writers attempted to make their worlds of the story fragmentary.

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and highlighted the metafictional qualities of their worlds. In spite of that trend, Le Guin did not reject the literary belief that one can construct through narrations a world which possesses some kind of wholeness. The Earthsea cycle is the most conspicuous example of her practice of the belief.

The wholeness of the world she presents by introducing the concept of Equilibrium in the first trilogy, however, results in exposing the self-contradiction. Confronted with the problem of her own narration, she does not choose to abandon the wholeness altogether: she instead proceeds to reconsider, criticize, and reconstruct the wholeness she once assumed. Such an attitude of her toward the literary composition is well compared to her attitude toward the fantasy genre itself. As I have stated in Chapter 1, she emphasizes the necessity to aim at the more adequate formation of literary genres, including fantasy and SF, by introducing the concept of neutrality, which means that she attempts to maintain the fantasy genre as a general.

Le Guin’s strong belief in the wholeness of the world of the story as well as in the wholeness of the fantasy genre, can be persuasive to readers just because she has never quit the severe self-criticism of her own works. Her literary attitude of criticizing and maintaining the literary wholeness should be valuable because it offers us a standpoint on which we can grope for alternative ways for the postmodernists’ fragmentation of narratives, or a standpoint on which we can examine the possibilities of genre and literature.
Works Cited


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