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## Who is There? Subjectivity, Transformation, and the Child's Journey in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan*

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### Abstract

The intricately crafted worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin provoke us into thinking about our own world's constructs, our languages, and our very being. Though *The Tombs of Atuan* sets many puzzles for readers, subjectivity, or what it means to be an individual person, is an overarching theme. The paper demonstrates how *The Tombs'* narrative leads readers through three stages of identification of name to subject: an initial, partial identification (Tenar), a passage to namelessness and near-negation of self (Arha) and finally, the retrieval of the name (Tenar). These three stages, or moments of naming, (and calling) reflect an active, violent and unstable process of subjectivation – a process through which human beings do seem to go, in the passage from childhood to adulthood. The fact that we are beings whose journeys can include radical destruction and transformation is itself crucial. The paper concludes that a certain will to power, friendship and a limited type of self-knowledge or intuition all subsist the stripping away of the name and self in Arha, (and in the passage from childhood to adulthood), and enable a performative and experiential retrieval of identity. As such, it seems that if *The Tombs of Atuan* is to yield any notion of a subject, no set of universally true and immutable conditions can be delineated. Rather, an individual's who is formed and performed in the ethical sphere, meaning that performative and transformative practices and events occurring with, and in relation to, others contribute to the very constitution of self. In this respect, parallels between Tenar's story and women's initiation rites can be drawn. Le Guin's tale may provide symbols and moments by which to understand the profound transformation a child undergoes in adolescence.

### Additional Keywords

*The Tombs of Atuan*; subjectivity; thought experiment; interpellation; calling; names; performativity; ethical self



Who is there? SUBJECTIVITY,  
TRANSFORMATION, AND THE  
CHILD'S JOURNEY IN  
URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *The TOMBS OF ATUAN*

MEGHANN CASSIDY

**B**UTTERFLY METAMORPHOSIS IS RADICAL: a larva does not merely lie within its chrysalis, passively waiting for new appendages to sprout before ultimately emerging. Instead, "a caterpillar first digests itself." Its larva body is liquified into a mushy, runny goo. "But certain groups of cells survive, turning the soup into eyes, wings, antennae and other adult structures" (Jabr). Moreover, this radical, near-complete breakdown of the individual within the cocoon remains hidden from the outside world, occurring instead in an intimate, private, and obscure setting. For those familiar with Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea series, in particular the multi-layered and compelling second volume, the larva's tale of profound transformation may very well strike a chord.

Just as insect metamorphosis seems to captivate human curiosity, so too do the stories of human transformation and growing up that we recount and create. Critics, including Le Guin herself, have argued that the first two tomes of the Earthsea works, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan*, are classic *Bildungsroman* ("Dreams Must Explain Themselves" ["Dreams"] 11; Griffin). Indeed, both Ged and Tenar embark upon dark, profoundly transformative journeys in childhood; not unlike the caterpillar, Tenar is "eaten" and must literally, and violently, emerge from her obscure, cavernous dwelling, before claiming a more stable, meaningful identity (*The Tombs of Atuan* [Tombs] 178). But what, on a mythopoeic level, do the events at *The Tombs of Atuan*, against the backdrop of Earthsea's histories and metaphysics, impart to young and adult readers about themselves and their own experiences of metamorphosis and selfhood?

This paper argues that *The Tombs of Atuan* provides readers with a story of transformation that challenges the notion of a unified, individual, and permanent subject and that powerfully leads readers, young and old, to a more fragmented, relational, and contingent notion of the self. To demonstrate this hypothesis, the first section, "Provoking Thought," deals with *how* Le Guin's fiction engages readers in games of make-believe which, in turn, disrupt and unearth certain nonfictional beliefs that ground our reality. The next section, "The Laws of Earthsea," describes some of the nonfictional, metaphysical

concepts that this make-believe world brings to light. Namely, it underscores a tension at the heart of our everyday concept of the self. *The Tombs of Atuan* specifically appears to experiment with this tension, and its two competing forms of subjectivity. The third section of the paper accordingly describes this tale of "Subjectivation"; its subsections detail the linguistic and narrative elements which engage readers in the conceptual puzzle: *who/what* is Tenar and *who/what* are we? We'll see how the tale draws readers into a hypothetical scenario which strips the subject of many supposedly essential qualities and finally leads readers to a more complex, and yet fractured, understanding of selfhood. In conclusion, the paper identifies the conditions for selfhood that *The Tombs of Atuan's* narrative *does* in fact put forth and draws a parallel with our own experiences of metamorphosis and initiation during adolescence.

In short, an analysis of the effects of Le Guin's "descriptive" fiction, of Earthsea's metaphysics and, finally, of the text's narrative and formal elements will demonstrate how *The Tombs of Atuan* alters our own notion of *who* we are, have been as children, and can become ("Dreams" 11). The journey through childhood and adolescence, as verbalized and ritualized in *The Tombs of Atuan*, shifts our understanding of ourselves from a relatively permanent and essential subjectivity toward a fragmented, yet volitional, highly social, and performative selfhood.

#### PROVOKING THOUGHT

The conceptual shift that is brought about by *The Tombs of Atuan* is, in first place, a result of the thought-provoking nature of Le Guin's work. Though her stories are truly a delight to the senses, they also provoke thought, in both senses of the term 'provoke': they give rise to and induce thinking, and they also might push buttons, and even vex some readers.

This latter connotation of the word 'provoke' is probably related to the first causal sense. That is, Le Guin's stories may push buttons precisely *because* they initiate changes in our thinking. The worlds she creates poke and prod at the very limits of our language, culture and conceptual frameworks, whether we are talking about gender pronouns on Gethen, hidden names and namelessness in Earthsea, or the darkness and violence inherent in the human condition, and thus, in childhood.

To use an expression she herself employed regarding her work, Le Guin sometimes engages her readers in a series of thought experiments. In her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she tells us:

This book is not extrapolative. If you like it you can read it [...] as a thought-experiment. [...] The purpose of a thought-experiment, as the

term was used by Schrödinger and other physicists, is not to predict the future [...]—but to describe reality, the present world. [...]

Certainly. Fiction writers, at least in their bravest moments, do desire the truth; to know it, speak it, serve it. But they go about it in a particular and devious way, which consists in inventing persons, places and events which never did and will never exist or occur and telling about these fictions in detail [...] and then when they are done writing down this pack of lies, they say, There! That's the truth! ("Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*" 156-157)

As Sophie Roux and others have noted, the term 'thought experiment' has become vulgarized over the past fifty years. For Schrödinger and others, "a thought experiment is a hypothetical scenario whose existence may or not be achievable in reality and whose description aims to convince its audience of a particular scientific principle" (Morton 3).

While Le Guin's work does explore and even perform hypothetical scenarios, it does not "aim to convince its audience of a particular scientific principle"; and yet it would be a shame to disregard Le Guin's comments about using fiction to reveal and discover truth.

The type of experiment that Le Guin engages us in seems related to something that both Foucault and Deleuze insisted on—the need to render inconspicuous or seemingly normal concepts visible; the need to both suspend and deconstruct their "necessary" and "evident" status (Foucault, *Dits et écrits* 23). Foucault in particular attempts to show that the origins of certain constructs are both arbitrary and linked to cultural and political shifts, in short, to power dynamics. Inspired by Nietzsche, he carried out this mission by using history to unearth "evidences," such as the prison system, and described the events and discursive changes that are at the root of our notions of justice, incarceration and subjectivity (24).

Unlike Foucault, Le Guin does not use historical narrative or deconstruction, but rather playful, "fictional" storytelling to shake the very ground of our thoughts and languages. Nor did she "analyze consciously" *The Tombs'* rich symbolism as she wrote ("Dreams" 11). She does not attempt to extrapolate but to illuminate, render visible those very concepts that constitute our mentalities and cultures but that remain somehow invisible in real-world situations. She spoke time and again of the incapacity of realism to highlight our cultural and linguistic underpinnings and was confident that magical realism, science-fiction, fantasy and other "genre lit" would continue to more accurately speak to our contemporary experiences, questions and worries ("Why Kids Want Fantasy" 380). But how, precisely, do her characters, stories and worlds shed light upon otherwise indiscernible building-blocks of our reality?

When we read fiction and imagine its content, there is a constant back and forth between the object a reader may be imagining and the subject the text is describing, narrating, and contextualizing—there is a “making sense” of things, to borrow a term from Deleuze (Lambert 38). In some ways, we might think of reading (fiction in particular) as a game wherein the reader uses the physical, material supports—scratches on paper, shapes on a screen, the sounds of words—to call up images and ideas that roughly correspond to those put forward by the text.

The images and ideas readers call up are not static entities, but serve as figures, props in a game of make-believe. In his influential work, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Kendall Walton demonstrates that the enjoyment of art, including literary and other forms of fiction, is rooted in the human capacity to participate in and play games of make-believe: “[T]o be fictional is, at bottom, to possess the function of serving as a prop in games of make-believe” (102).

Readers of Le Guin's work *pretend* that subjects such as Duny/Ged, Tenar/Arha, and Earthsea itself are real each time they pick up the books or think about the characters and events. In other words, they use these “image subjects” (Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory* 64), and their names, as props in an on-going game of make-believe. Readers participate in the game and attempt to fill in, color in, and flesh out the ideas and sense objects they call to mind. This game is all the more enticing in that the images, sounds and feelings elicited by the language are incomplete—they need to be filled in and identified by the reader.

Furthermore, the fictional props readers play with are neither wholly separate nor unrelated to our everyday thoughts and experiences. Le Guin in particular very subtly plays with the reader's real-world constructs by introducing fictional ones; she leads the reader to construct images that diverge from our dominate, everyday representations. In some cases, the reader is first drawn into the story and must gradually rework his/her understanding of the subject. For instance, by the time we learn that Duny/Ged has dark skin and that, indeed, nearly all of the figures in *A Wizard of Earthsea* do, many readers may have already begun imagining him as white. If so, they then had to rework imaginings that were still only sketched in, that they had only begun to construct. From the onset, then, these readers are drawn away from the white or supposedly colorless center, and are then led to fill in, and quite literally, color in a fictional subject. This experience, this shift in image consciousness from initial imaginings and a default representation of the story's *who* to a dark-skinned center, is exactly the kind of thought provoking, performative, and transformative experience that Le Guin's work offers. Indeed, when we read Le Guin's work with both Walton and Foucault in mind, that is, as both engaging

us in games of make-believe and provoking thought experiments, the power of her work and worlds becomes all the more palpable.

*The Tombs of Atuan* engages us in a fantastical game of priestesses, God-Kings, and dark forces; but within this whimsical framework, it sets puzzles for readers concerning power, freedom, the oral versus the written tradition, the relationship between names and their referents . . . . Again, these puzzles are not wholly fictional in nature but involve real-world beliefs, concepts, and institutions. One central prop readers of *The Tombs* use in their game-playing experience is Tenar/Arha, whose exceptional political position and journey present a puzzle regarding the limits and characteristics of subjectivity. This riddle is formulated within a larger, metaphysical framework concerning causes, language, and matter that must first be delineated if we are to understand how *The Tombs* powerfully transforms readers' understanding of selfhood.

#### THE LAWS OF EARTHSEA

Magic courses through Earthsea. From a metaphysical perspective, it seems to be an elemental property uniting, and yet lending specificity and essence to, matter; it is at work within every single thing and is strongly connected to language. This connection to language is of the utmost importance for readers, as they themselves engage with the text, experience the power of its names, and think about their own identity.

As Robert Galbreath points out, the magic of Earthsea is not Faustian, striving to dominate nature, but part of a natural world that, in accordance with Taoist philosophy, maintains a certain Equilibrium; it also seems to obey a sort of principle of conservation of energy, to wit, the Taoist principle of inactivity (262). The influence of the philosophy of Lao Tzu on the worlds of Le Guin is fascinating, and well-documented, as are the significant Nordic and Celtic components of her fantasy (Thompson). Yet the magical world-system of Earthsea may evoke another philosophical school for some readers, as it is not wholly dissimilar to the world-system early Stoic philosophers (such as Chrysippus or Zeno) described, particularly concerning the relationship between causes, matter, and the use of language. In the Stoic world-system, *logos* and *pneuma*—that is, divine reason and the breath, along with fire and the other elements to which it gives being—comprise the same immanent and pervasive cause of both natural and human events. Speech is that which serves to express thought (and potentially the divine reason which inspires it), but also denotes the phenomena of our world-system and is itself materially and spiritually constituted by the breath.

Stoic metaphysics insists that sounds and words are material objects (primarily, bits of air shaped by speakers; secondarily, their written representations), whereas significations constitute one of four species of incorporeal: *lekta*, literally 'sayables' [or *pragmata*, 'things [done]' [...]. (Atherton and Blank 314)

The Stoic doctrine of bodies and incorporeals [σώματα and ἀσώματα] is worth mentioning, not because this metaphysics is identical to the fantastical world of Earthsea, but because of this essential link between language, matter, and causal change. In Earthsea in effect, linguistic signs—names—appear to be both corporeal and incorporeal—a physical sound and a signification—and, as such, play a role in the causal relations binding all things.

This is a rock; *tolk* in the True Speech [...]. A bit of the stone of which Roke Isle is made, a little bit of the dry land on which men live. It is itself. It is part of the world. [...] To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. and to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. (*A Wizard of Earthsea* 3.48)<sup>1</sup>

The Stoics did not believe in any kind of true lexicon, such as the lists of true names in Earthsea imply. Nevertheless, the concept of a true lexicon that identifies things at their essence and has causal influence on their movements and actions is a compatible variation on the Stoic world-view. Indeed, the concept of a "True Speech" composed of "true names" that are *material parts* of the world only makes sense in a world-system where matter, divine reason, and its linguistic expression are closely and intrinsically linked.<sup>2</sup>

In "The Rule of Names," a school mistress, her charges, and the bumbling Mr. Underhill introduce readers to a cultural practice/norm of Earthsea and a corresponding core metaphysical principle: one must never reveal one's true name; and one must never ask the true name of another, "Because the name is the thing [...] and the truename is the true thing. To speak the name is to control the thing" (937). Furthermore, the ontological identification of name and true essence, i.e., "the truename is the true thing," does not stand alone but is accompanied by a principle of causality, one of the natural laws that govern matter: "to speak the name is to control the thing."

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<sup>1</sup> Because there are so many editions of the *Earthsea* books, citations are given in the format *chapter.page*.

<sup>2</sup> In their relevant article, "How They Do Things With Words," Comoletti and Drout highlight the parallels between a Judeo-Christian language of creation and medieval Latin and Christian priests, on the one hand, and the Old Speech, wizards, and patterning in Earthsea, on the other. However, they make no mention of the Stoic and Roman origins of these Christian institutions (117).



In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the very first descriptions of this world's magic connect names, not only to people, animals, and other phenomena, but more precisely to behaviors or actions and to their causes. Duny/Ged's first teacher of magic, his aunt, proposes to "teach him [...] the *word* that *makes* a snail look out of its shell, or the *name* that *calls* a falcon down from the sky" (1.15, italics added). The next indication of the signification of names comes as young Duny faces the Kargs and, feeling powerless, despairs that he might, "go into the dark land without ever having known his own name, his true name as a man" (1.19).

These two instances make use of the two properties of names that we have already identified. 1) A name is true; that is, an essential property of the bearer, (e.g., "his true name as a man"). 2) Its essence is not separate from the material world, but truly embedded in it, to such an extent that it constitutes a cause or an impulse toward action (e.g., "makes a snail look out of its shell").

These instances also make use of a third principle of names (and efficient, magical causes) that we have not yet identified. This principle is anthropological, and yet neither separate from nor inferior to, the metaphysical or natural spheres. I am speaking of course of the "Passage" wherein children "leave [their] childnames behind and keep only [their] truenames" ("Rule of Names" 937). In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the ceremony of Passage takes place on the youth's thirteenth birthday, whereupon "the witch took from the boy his name Duny, the name his mother had given him as a baby. [...] As he came to the bank Ogion, waiting, reached out his hand and clasping the boy's arm whispered to him his true name: Ged" (1.24).

The naming ceremony, or passage, is no mere superfluous rite, but produces a radical transformation, affecting the very essence of the bearer. For readers playing the make-believe game and engaging with its enigmas, this causal, transformative function appears highly relevant. Specifically, the socio-cultural practice of naming and the corresponding change it effectuates in the physical world inevitably raise the question of personhood—what some have called, following Kant's coinage—subjectivity. In contemporary philosophy, the word is problematic at best—but in our context, in terms of the kinds of thoughts and relations that Le Guin's worlds provoke us into thinking about—we might use it nevertheless, if only to refer to the fact of being a subject: an individual and unified locus of thoughts, of feelings, and potentially of action.

In light of the characteristics of magic and names previously indicated—names are essential parts of the physical world, they can be imminent and efficient causes of behavior and action, and they can themselves be transformed through magical rites and ritual—we might conclude that the name *is* the subject. Indeed, the name appears to "get at" the very essence of the thinking, feeling, acting individual. In this sense, there would seem to be a kind of "'mimological' [...] utopian construction of both sign and subject" (Robinson

385); nevertheless, this utopian, mirror construction of sign and subject is at odds with the fractured selves and the rent existences that give rise to the tales' central conflicts and subsequent resolutions.

In the end, two competing forms of subjectivity appear to be at work within this fictional world. The metaphysics of Earthsea are such that there exists an ontological identification of sign with subject—in short, you *are* your name; your name *is* you. At the same time, the relationship of name to named, of sign to self, is also a dynamic, destructive, and active undertaking, an *event* that takes place in the natural and social world. The apparent duality that piqued our curiosity at the outset—that the butterfly *is* the caterpillar it once was; yet the butterfly is a radically different and new being—also entralls us in Earthsea, as we contemplate names, the subjects to whom they refer, and the profound changes they undergo.

We have seen how language, through its materiality, functions as an efficient cause affecting, transforming the phenomena and events of Earthsea. It is through knowledge of language that mages are able to exercise their power within the natural-magical world-system. The role of the mage is, more specifically, semantic and performative—for language here does not describe, it does things, it enacts.

#### SUBJECTIVATION IN *THE TOMBS OF ATUAN*

This linguistic and cultural performativity may play a crucial role in shifting readers' understanding of subjectivity. In Earthsea, names—and not propositions—and acts of speech—not descriptions—are surely the most powerful constituents of language. But for Judith Butler and others, these claims can *also* be made of our everyday cultures and settings (2). On an empirical level, anthropologists such as Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn have probed into the power of names, and namelessness, in a variety of cultures. We might conclude that names and speech acts bridge the gap between signifier and signified in Earthsea and, at least to some extent, in our own world.

For readers entertaining both fictional beliefs about Earthsea and nonfictional beliefs about selfhood, this apparent conflation is consequential: my name is not (merely) the linguistic marker that refers to me, it *is* me, *who* I am. And yet, though 'Meghann' and my 'self' are mirror-images, this identity is not given *a priori*; or rather, that which is given, in an infant or young child for example, is at first ostensible, a surface-level tautology devoid of significant content. A truly meaningful identity between name and self is instead enacted; subjectivity is performed through speech and undergone in experience. Borrowing loosely from Foucault's lexicon, we might call this process "subjectivation" (*L'Histoire de la Sexualité* II 18).

If *The Tombs of Atuan* is indeed a *Bildungsroman*, it also relates a particular instance of subjectivation. Indeed, Tenar's tale is not Ged's "young man's story" (Rawls 130). That "hero spends as little time as possible underground; he longs for the journey upward to the light" (Sobat 25). Tenar, the heroine, on the other hand, not only dwells underground; she revels in the darkness, exploring, seeking, and finding power there. Tenar does embark upon a "child's journey" and ultimately emerges with a new sense of self, but the time spent in the dark is a crucial component of her subjectivation. The darkness also tantalizes readers, has them reveling in the mysteries of what Arha might do, and *who* she might actually be. The reader is thus drawn into a moral and philosophical query; though we may strive to imitate the heroine or identify structural, universal elements of her journey, we are also wonderstruck (*thaumazein*) by them, drawn into contemplating the landscape of power, identity, and friendship that she navigates.

Tenar/Arha is at the center of at least two kinds of imaginings readers engage in whilst enjoying *The Tombs of Atuan*. She is a prop in a make-believe game of underground mazes, magical objects, god-kings, and priestesses; and she also presents a wonderful puzzle about what makes us who we are in the real-world realm of signs, concepts and culture. What happens when self-knowledge, personal memory, and even the use of the first person—the grammatical subject 'I'—are potentially excluded from one's thoughts about oneself? Who are we and who can we be when all of this is stripped away?

*The Tombs* tells a dramatic and violent tale of subjectivation, and in so doing, challenges readers in their very understanding of subjectivity. Specifically, the narrative leads the reader through three stages of identification of name to subject. These three stages, moments of naming as it were, reflect the active, violent, and unstable process of subjectivation mentioned above.

First, the initial interpellation of Tenar and her partial, indistinct identification. Tenar is five years old.

Second, the passage to namelessness, the reader's identification of Arha. This moment is in fact a non-identification, an undoing and stripping down of identity that moves us ever closer to the limits of subjectivity. Arha is roughly speaking between six and twelve years of age.

And third, the retrieval of the name, the mirror-image identification of Tenar. An identity is struck between name and subject, but also between the sign 'Tenar' and its meaning "light in a dark place." The naming process now complete, Tenar can now be fully called out; there is a retrieval of selfhood in the ethical sphere and a sense of coming home. Tenar is twelve to fifteen years old.

### TENAR, YOUNG CHILD: AN INDISTINCT SUBJECT

The incipit of *The Tombs of Atuan* introduces us to the tale's central figure. We begin, "Come home, Tenar! Come home!" (Prologue.175).

From a linguistic standpoint, these opening lines make use of a vocative and constitute a call or address. Specifically, the vocative 'Tenar!' appears to serve two functions here: within the story, the speaker (the mother), employs it in an effort to *activate* the addressee, that is to somehow manage the addressee's behavior (Schaden). But externally, from the reader's perspective, (and perhaps also the mother's), the vocative here also has an *identifying* function, that is, it identifies a unique and physically discernible addressee from a plurality of objects of consciousness.

What kind of referent is being called and sought out by the identifying function? Not an unmoving, inanimate thing but a someone, an actionable *who*—in other words, the referent is a subject insofar as it can potentially respond to the call. In this sense, the call might also be thought of as an interpellation—that is, the incipit articulates a name and identifies, or even constitutes, a subject (Althusser 86).

Nevertheless, although the sign 'Tenar' under which we are to place this someone is articulated from the onset, the subject to whom this sign corresponds remains vague, abstract, incomplete—the identifying function of the vocative falls short, leaves something to be desired.

In fact, the incipit's introduction is indirect; "Come home, Tenar! Come home!" does not actually present someone to the reader. What it does present is a *name*, a sign to which a referent and a sense need to be assigned and filled in.

As we read on, the sketch of the referent is so sparsely drawn that no complete image is brought to consciousness, and only an impartial identification takes place between the Tenar that is called for and a fictional image-subject. We read:

Down the orchard aisles, in the thick, new, wet grass, the little girl ran for the joy of running; hearing the call she did not come at once, but made a long circle before she turned her face towards home. The mother waiting in the doorway of the hut, with the firelight behind her, watched the tiny figure running and bobbing like a bit of thistle-down blown over the darkening grass beneath the trees. (Prologue.175)

The subject being called for is plainly out of our grasp: back turned, in movement, obscured by the interplay of shadow and light, we do not *see* Tenar so much as seek her, glimpsing snippets of hair and movement through her mother's eyes.

Significantly, the subject Tenar is not simply being called out, but activated, beckoned home by a parent. And yet the mother's speech act, just like

the thought act or “intentional mental process” wherein the reader seeks a referent for the name ‘Tenar’, is not immediately satisfied—Tenar runs a long circle before turning towards home (Husserl, *Ideas* “119,” 233).

Of course, this long circle, the delayed activation of the addressee, prefigures the imminent uprooting and *de*-activation of the subject; for ultimately, Tenar will not be “coming home” to her mother. And yet this moment of identifying and activating—of seeking and beckoning the subject—is all the more noteworthy that it elicits the reader’s participation. The call to come home is effectively transferred to the reader, who begins *The Tombs of Atuan* by calling and seeking an elusive, unfixed subject. Playing the mimetic game of make-believe, we adopt the mother’s voice and follow her gaze, seeking to behold Tenar as a parent seeks to hold and behold her own child. Thrown into an intimate, familial, and blurred apprehension of the subject, the reader is enjoined to identify and activate the heroine, not only through the use of vocative-imperative in the initial beckoning, not only through the impartial sketch of the child, but also through a preliminary and concise exposition of the young child’s fate, from both the mother’s and the father’s point of view.

“Why do you let your heart hang on the child?” says father to mother—and we learn that the mother’s calling out is vain, that Tenar will not in fact come home but be taken away to become “The Priestess at the Tombs” (Prologue.175). As the door closes on hearth and home, the care of the child—the hanging heart as it were—is thus transferred over to the reader who takes up the call, seeking the identification and activation of its addressee in the soon-to-be absent mother’s stead: “‘When the time comes,’ the woman said, ‘I will let her go.’” And the father’s “face in the dusk was full of grief, a dull, heavy, angry grief that he would never find the words to say” (Prologue.176).

With the father’s final shrug, the reader takes up, and in her own game of make-believe may mime, this distance, this separation of mother and child. And yet, though the distance is sustained, the reader can do what the parents cannot. Henceforth, we accompany this child/individual from afar, impotently observing the destruction of self on the journey toward liberation and selfhood.

#### **ARHA CHILD: FROM INDISTINCT SUBJECT TO THE LIMITS OF SELFHOOD**

At age six, the young girl readers whom had thus far referred to as ‘Tenar’ passes from the airy, sunlit outdoors to darker, more somber spaces, enclosed by walls and stone. She kneels before a throne that is filled with emptiness and shadows, where light/white figures collide with dark/black ones; her name, and her being are thus “given over” to the shadows, the Nameless Ones (6.266). This passage to darkness is in many ways symbolic; that is, the sacrifice does not extend to a physical death. And yet, the rite sacrifices more than mere surface-level phenomena.

In discussing the metaphysics of Earthsea, we briefly enumerated three characteristics of names: they are incorporeal, that is, they signify or represent; but they are also bodies, corporeal entities which can undergo change, through cultural practices, magical speech acts, specifically. When Tenar's name is taken away, when she is "eaten" and given over to her "Masters," something also happens to her very substance, to the essential and defining spark that, in the history of Western thought, once characterized a "single individual of a single type" (Dennet 270), but what?

The "passage to darkness," and Arha's subsequent lifestyle and experience, compromise at least three qualities that readers steeped in Occidental culture and languages tend to predicate of a subject. Specifically, the capacity to self-refer, to gain self-knowledge and to be a singular and unified subject of memory and future actions (and intentions) are seriously limited in a number of ways. The limitations of subjectivity brought about by the passage might be explored under the simpler subheadings: name/pronouns; memory; will.

#### NAME/PRONOUNS

The stripping away of the name, firstly, is not merely ceremonial, but has effective and durable effects on the subject and her capacity to self-refer. The very evening of her passage to namelessness Arha states, "I am not Tenar anymore" (1.180). As alluded to above, Strawson famously identifies personhood as "the concept of a type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics are applicable [to a single individual of that single type]" (qtd. in Dennett 290). Furthermore, this single individual of that single type is generally referred to through the use of a proper name—the understanding of which may "[consist] in knowing a descriptive condition [...] which something [the individual] must satisfy to be the bearer of the name" (Textor 105). Yet in Arha, the relation to self and to name that develops throughout early childhood is ruptured, abrogated through the rites and power dynamics of the Tombs. She quite literally is no longer Tenar, for she no longer bears the name; she is *only* Arha.

And yet the negation of the name 'Tenar' is only part of the story; for though 'Arha' appears to be an empty referent—meaning merely "that which has been eaten"—it nevertheless functions as a name, albeit under special, exceptional conditions. Specifically, the bearer is no longer one unique, corporally, and spiritually present, person but a complex singular collective, a historical subject—the one and same Priestess born and reborn over the centuries. As such, it is not merely the name 'Tenar' that is eaten but *she*, the self-referring 'I' that had been present and that is now being replaced by an *other* 'I', called Arha or the One Priestess. These new names indicate a form of

subjectivity that exceeds the body and temporality of the little girl of age six. This form of subjectivity would appear *not* to meet certain conditions of personhood that were indicated above; namely, a “single individual of a single type” to whom we ascribe states of consciousness *and* corporeal characteristics, a knowable, describable or identifiable “bearer” of the name. In the passage to namelessness and the assimilation of the One Priestess’ identity, we are, if not outside subjectivity and personhood, at the very limit of the concepts.

As such, these challenges to the individual ‘I’ and to the ‘self’ in self-consciousness play out in the linguistic obstacles Arha and others must navigate. Speakers (and therefore, readers) are effectively constrained by English grammar when referring to past princesses (the Arhas-that-were) who are temporally and corporally distinct from an individual lifetime and body (the Arha-that-is) and yet constitute one and the same subject (the One Priestess).

Repeatedly, the narrator, Manan, Kossil, Thar, and Arha herself employ the pronouns ‘she,’ ‘you,’ ‘I,’ or ‘me,’ not to refer to the individual person, but to this historical, transcendent subject—Arha’s self as something that exists outside a present body and time. Thar explains to Arha: “I know where the Great Treasure is. You told me the way, fifteen years ago, before you died, so that I would remember and tell you when you returned” (4.214).

Conversely, Arha and others avoid personal pronouns when they refer to Tenar’s experience and existence. “*The child,*” “*it,*” “*the mother,*” are not part of Arha’s *personal* story and experience—though the girl craves knowledge of them: “Tell me how I was chosen!” she demand, not once but twice (2.182-3). And Manan encourages it:

“They brought the child back here, for it was indeed the Priestess of the Tombs reborn, and here it belonged. And who was the child, eh, little one?”

“Me,” said Arha, looking off into the distance as if to see something she could not see, something gone out of sight. (2.184)

What is this something “gone of sight”? What is Arha-that-is looking for? One might argue that she is seeking her *self*—the ‘me’ so long ago devoured. During this exchange, she is probing memory, her own and Manan’s, for her *particular* appearance in the story, for any content relating exclusively to her individual existence:

Once she asked, “What did the . . . the mother do, when they came to take the child away?”

But Manan didn’t know [...]. And she could not remember. (2.185)

## MEMORY

Along with the suppression of name and the modification of linguistic self-referencing, the passage paves the way for an equally pervasive and repeated erasure of memory which is repeatedly enacted and performed throughout the child's six years at the Tombs. The near-total elimination of memory is extensive, finally encroaching on Arha's self-awareness and self-knowledge. For "As she grew older, she lost all remembrance of her mother *without knowing that she lost it*" (2.182).

At twelve years of age our protagonist is not only unable to reconstitute her personal story, but having been "given over" at so young an age has little *awareness* of the extreme difference of her existence, even when compared to the other girls and women of the Place. Arha's questionings towards self-awareness and self-knowledge constantly come up against this collective identity—things she "has done" or "seen" before this life.

Nearly all memory of hearth and home, of mother and name is eroded over time, and the subject is not even aware of the erosion: who she is, and who she "always has been," Arha, the eaten one, would seem to be all she knows, all she has of self-knowledge.

And just like the name is not only taken away, but replaced by an inadequate substitute, the loss of personal memory and self-knowledge is compensated for by historical and cultural memories and knowledge: the repetition of stories, rites, and dances, a deeply entrenched oral tradition through which knowledge is transmitted.

'Self-knowledge' is not in this case knowledge about individual desires, needs, and moral judgments, nor is it tied up in a personal story; Arha knows *who she is* insofar as she knows the rites, rituals, tasks of the Tombs. And her quest to more fully know this form of *self* has her assimilating the turnings and layout of the Undertomb and Labyrinth themselves, and appropriating the physical space as *hers*.

## THE WILL TO POWER

This notion of appropriation brings us to a final characteristic of subjectivity that is challenged during the time of namelessness, and yet is perhaps not as radically altered as personal memory and self-knowledge are. A subject, or person, is not merely a "type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics are applicable," but is often deemed capable of action within the sphere of human relations, activity and institutions. In the history of philosophy, this facet of human existence, this capacity to *do* or to *act* has, *in the subject*, been invariably correlated to a faculty of *will*, of decision-making or of spontaneity that Strawson's general definition seems to elide.



At twelve years of age, the protagonist has little in the way of a name, personal memory, and self-knowledge—for these “characteristics” of modern subjectivity are, in Arha, greatly absorbed by historical memory, cultural practices, and even geographical knowledge. This is certainly true for any ethical judgments that the young Arha has to make; the knowledge upon which she seems to draw in ethical matters is largely informed by the “sterile,” “hollow,” and “lonely” cultural knowledge she has accumulated as Arha (Sobat 26). Yet it is precisely within this ethical sphere, that is, *through* her interactions with others, that an individual will, power, and difference begin to break through.

Attempts to thwart or subjugate the individual will by those in power (and the structures they represent) are patent as this moment of namelessness draws to a close. The most obvious example is when a twelve-year-old Arha experiments with the power and authority of her identity as Priestess—at the expense of her friend Penthe—and gets caught in the act.<sup>3</sup> Thar states:

“It is better that you do only what is needful for you to do. You are Arha.”

For a moment the girl raised her eyes to Thar’s face, then to Kossil’s, and there was a depth of hate or rage in her look that was terrible to see. But the thin priestess showed no concern; rather she confirmed, leaning forward a little, almost whispering, “*You are Arha*. There is nothing left. It was all eaten.”

“It was all eaten,” the girl repeated, as she had repeated daily, all the days of her life since she was six. (2.192)

Significantly, the consequences of Arha’s act and use of the will—Penthe’s punishment and the repeated subjugation of any individual will to *Arha*—are lived out in the ethical sphere. Anger, guilt, and confusion are not devoured but experienced, making a lasting impression on the young adolescent, a point we shall return to presently.

At fifteen, at the “height of her powers,” the protagonist attempts another utilization of Arha’s power when she is finally taken to the place beneath the Stones. On the way, she exults in the discovery of *her* “domain,” *her* “place” (3.200); she exults in her power and even gives Kossil the Priestess a direct order. But when she crosses the Undertomb—the very place of death—and must dole out a cruel death to three unknown, mute prisoners, the use of

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<sup>3</sup> Arha obliges Penthe to stay and cause mischief with her, asserting that Arha cannot be punished and thus expecting no consequence to her acts. Arha is not whipped, but must stay and silently watch Penthe being whipped for what Arha forced her to do.

the young woman's will in the ethical sphere is yet again subjugated to power relations of which she is not even fully aware. Here again, however, the emotional consequences of Arha's ethical judgments—the prisoners' murder and her own entrapment—are deeply felt by the young woman, are not "eaten" but provoke intense distress, thus fomenting a stronger "will to power" on her part.

Interestingly, this moment concludes with another use of the vocative—another identification in the dark and an effort to activate an addressee. Even though she is the One Priestess reborn, in the place where only she can go, Arha is trapped and cannot find the way out on her own:

"Mistress, the door will not open from inside. There is no way out. There is no return."

Arha crouched against the rock. She said nothing.

"Arha!"

"I am here!"

"Come!"

She came, crawling on hands and knees along the passage, like a dog, to Kossil's skirts. (3.204)

This use of the vocative is again an interpellation—one might even understand 'interpellation' in the strict ideological sense that Althusser describes. Doubly subjugated, both to Kossil's perverse pleasure and to the place of death, that is, to the ideologies of the God-King and the Nameless ones, the young woman is again constituted as "eaten one," her knowledge, discourse and decision-making fully informed by these ideological spheres. Nevertheless, despite this and other repeated instances of somatic and linguistic subjugation, neither the assimilation of the young priestess's identity, nor the suppression of personal history, is absolute. In Arha, the eaten one, a lingering modicum of memory and individuality seems to survive the period of namelessness and to await activation—perhaps not unlike the sparse cellular memories retained during some Lepidoptera species' metamorphosis (Blackiston, Casey and Weiss).

#### TENAR, YOUNG ADULT: COMING HOME AND ANSWERING THE CALL

During the time of darkness and namelessness, repeated linguistic and cultural practices are aimed at suppressing the name, personal memory, and knowledge. These reiterated instances bring about a negation of individual identity, replacing the idea of self that was sketchily formed in young childhood with the collective, yet empty and subjugated, idea of 'Arha.'

Whilst the narrative whittles name, personal memory, and self-knowledge down to a bare minimum, it simultaneously brings other aspects associated with personhood into play. These aspects do not lie dormant *in* Arha, but, between twelve and fifteen years of age in particular, are active contributors to the formation of a new identity and the retrieval of a sense of self. Namely, the defiant will, a desire for friendship and recognition, and a certain type of self-awareness all resist the stripping away of name and self in Arha (perhaps because they do not originate *in* Arha), and enable a performative retrieval of self, a transformation.

### *THE WILL FOR SELF*

As we have seen, attempts to subjugate the individual will in Arha were generally successful in the short term. Arha does the bidding of the God-King, in disposing of his prisoners, just as she is subject to the norms of the Place, when she must watch Penthe being punished. In these respects, Arha is “ideologically” constituted. At the same time, however, an individual will to power, a personal desire to appropriate power for her own self, defies these attempts at subjugation. As previously mentioned, she begins to exult in her “domain” and the power of her position, attempting to find a place and identity within the Nameless Ones’ framework, as the One Priestess. Here, first-person pronouns surge: “my place” (3.200), “my domain” (3.194, 197), “I am the Priestess” “I am Arha.” Ultimately, her attempts to achieve full power as the One Priestess are countered by the overriding power structures and conflicts at the Tombs—between the masculine power of a Godking and the feminine, destructive, Nameless Ones for example (Littlefield 248; Barrow and Barrow 34). And yet readers might see the desire to fully *be* the One Priestess as part of a deeper determination that is not effectively quashed. The restive, defiant will of the young woman is not only not snuffed out by the power structures of the Tombs, it may even be fueled by the attempts to quell rebellious action. Readers might recognize the everyday trope of teenage rebellion as Arha asserts herself and sneaks around the Tombs. Additionally, the negative emotional consequences—guilt, loneliness—of these instances of punishment and subjugation seem to propel the Arha-that-is into adopting a form of action that controverts the power structures from which the punishment emanates.

It is within this context that Arha undertakes a series of risky decisions and life-threatening acts that ultimately “save” the young mage who wanders into “her” domain (Littlefield 248). Indeed, the actions our heroine takes to extricate Ged from the labyrinthine trap should, at least partially, be seen, not as the result of some moral compunction that has somehow survived the violent negation of self, but rather as an exercise of her own will to power, a step toward reclamation and reformation of self. In effect, this series of life-threatening

choices—leading Ged to the labyrinth, giving him water, satisfying her curiosity about him, and finally not killing him—culminates in a clear, distinct choice regarding her own subjectivity—a choice that is actually given in speech and subsequently performed: “You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You cannot be both” (*Tombs* 9.272).

#### FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION

A second, related element concerns the individual's lived experiences, specifically her relations to others in the form of friendship. Despite the power relations that seek to isolate Arha, others *do* enter into her experience and act as friends. Manan in particular encourages her relationship to self, providing elements of her own personal story, comforting her as she grieves her loss of name, memory and freedom. He rarely calls her Arha. Instead, she is “little one” and “honey comb”—the sense of this latter sobriquet is evidently suggestive of the meaning of ‘Tenar’ that is finally disclosed by Ged. Even though Manan cannot “fill the gap[s]” in the young woman's personal story and identity, his “petnames,” fidelity, and stories do introduce other possibilities of selfhood to Arha (Sobat 29). He also provides an essential *other* perspective on their world. “Again Manan had showed her a new way of seeing things” (*Tombs* 3.197). Penthe's friendship is equally significant as it provides a conduit for Arha to experience the ethical sphere—not just in the consequences engendered by Arha's attempt to dominate her, but in her radical otherness. Penthe's blatant faithlessness and Epicureanism provide a striking contrast to Arha's ascetic rigor and show her an *other*, albeit limited and dominated, form of life.

The friendship of both Penthe and Manan is thus instrumental in showing other possibilities of selfhood to Arha; but ultimately these relationships remain governed by the power relations and norms of the *Tombs*. Manan, for instance, is incapable of comprehending Arha's movements toward self at the story's close, and endangers her life as a result. Similarly, Penthe is immediately struck down when she naively sees Arha as an equal, as a free-thinking yet subjugated being like herself (*Tombs* 4.209). As such, Ged's arrival and the trust that builds between the two is the single most influential encounter with Other of the young woman's life. Ged's radical otherness—he is a “stranger” (5.225)—leads nevertheless to a liberating experience of mutual recognition, to borrow an oft-borrowed concept from Hegel's discussion “On Lordship and Bondage” i.e., the Master/Slave dialectic (104-119). Yet it makes sense to apply the concept of mutual recognition to *The Tombs'* puzzle about subjectivity: for Arha ends up seeing the intruder, not as he would be construed by the *Tombs'* discourse and ideology, but as a full, free person; conversely, Ged sees Arha as a person in her own right; he does not relegate “who” she is to her political function, religious name, or dark, morally ambiguous, past.

Ged sees our protagonist's true self and knows her truename, perhaps not simply because he has a gift for names, but because he is neither slave nor master in this domain. He apprehends Tenar/Arha from outside of the linguistic, cultural, and ideological groundwork of the Kargad lands. Free from that particular discourse, he is the only character capable of apprehending her as another free self-consciousness. This outside perspective seems key to understanding how, precisely, "Ged serves as a catalyst for Tenar's escape" (Littlefield 248). Indeed, although Manan has an inkling of the meaning of 'Tenar,' the power dynamics and discursive structures of the Tombs make true, mutual recognition impossible. Here again, the mutual recognition that conditions subjectivity is performed or actualized in speech (when Ged reveals his truename in a spirit of reciprocity); and it is enacted through the joining of the two halves of the ring of Erreth-Akbe, one half of which was in Ged's possession and the other in the treasury of the Tombs.

Mutual recognition, or friendship, along with a defiant will, plays a fundamental role in *The Tombs'* plot, contributing to Arha's escape and the beginning of a new journey. Within the puzzle Le Guin sets readers concerning subjectivity, these two factors are noteworthy in that they catalyze the individual's retrieval of selfhood and her transformation. The fact that these conditions for subjectivity are not "intrinsic" but develop within the ethical and political sphere—in human relations and plurality—is highly relevant.

#### SELF-AWARENESS

A third condition, or quality, of subjectivity has not yet been fully examined, and yet, in a sense we have been discussing it all along. That is, isn't subjectivity first and foremost a kind of feeling or awareness of one's self as a unique and irreducible entity—a 'me' who experiences the world both passively and actively? At the core of a given subject, shouldn't we find the inimitable *who* of the story, and with it, a property, quality, or feeling that excludes all other phenomena? Surely, Tenar/Arha, just like the rest of us, has a basic sense of who she is . . . .

At first glance, this third notion of a unique property at the core of the subject appears to hold great weight in the narrative, for the name 'Tenar' and its corresponding meaning "a light in a dark place," are a central theme. And yet, as we mentioned at the outset, the meaning of the name encompasses a paradox that lies at the very heart of *The Tombs'* puzzle about subjectivity. On the one hand, when we consider that Tenar's name precedes her experience as Arha, that the meaning of the name in fact foreshadows the events that play out in the years to come, the narrative appears to portray subjectivity as an inherent, unique, and foundational phenomenon, existing independently of events, power structures, and the ethical realm. On the other hand, the very fact that the

name 'Tenar' and its meaning can be so drastically stripped away—the fact that, had one choice or happening gone differently, this unique meaning would never be disclosed—points to the illusory nature of any such unique, describable property. The fact that Arha searches blindly for selfhood, and embarks upon a dangerous quest to find it, demonstrates just how contingent and uncertain is the idea of self that is given in early childhood. In a word, a name is “empty” until events, choices, and others come together and fill it in.

This paradox is evident in two conflicting interpretations of how the signifier 'Tenar' operates during the time of namelessness, that is, during her time as Arha: either it is insignificant (Barrow and Barrow 34) or “true” and present, but “cannot be named [...] or receive the social speech acts of others” (Comoletti and Drouot 123). These conflicting interpretations are both right, and yet both fall short. For the narrative itself tends to show that 'Arha' is a signifier in its own right, and as such receives many social speech acts—a ritualized passage into a collective subjectivity, acts of subjugation and dominance by Kossil for instance. Though 'Tenar' and its meaning are “true” in Arha-that-is, the name does not meaningfully and continuously refer to the individual, nor describe *who* the subject is. Despite Le Guin's carefully placed hints at the very beginning of the novel, neither the reader nor the protagonist knows 'Tenar's' signification until the quest for self is well under way; its true meaning cannot be accessed until the story's close. In fact, the revelation of the name actually does something in the story: it opens up previously closed-off possibilities of action and selfhood for Arha/Tenar. As a result, this revelation, and the reciprocal revelation of Ged's name, are speech acts that call out and constitute the subject. In other words, these acts transform the “eaten one” into “a light in a dark place.”

Insofar as the revelation of the name and its corresponding meaning occur in speech, insofar as this meaning is actually enacted in the series of events that constitute the story, the essence of the subject—its 'who'—though univocal, is not given *a priori*, nor is it intrinsic to the subject. Rather, the self's essence is intrinsic to the *story*. Indeed, the retrieval of meaning is not located *within* the subject; it is revealed in relationships, forged in events, and performed in speech. It is the result of an individual will, mutual recognition, and the series of events; but it is not their *condition*.

As the tale comes to a close, the action-packed sequence of events leads to a dynamic and active retrieval of selfhood: a re-identification of the young woman Arha/Tenar—the meaning of Tenar now unearthed as it were, through her actions and choices. The reader can finally “see” her clearly, is able to grasp the thought of her and fix this thought in her mind. In effect, the story ends with a third instance of hailing, that yet again attempts to activate the addressee with the imperative “Come!”

He leapt up onto the pier, holding his hand out to her. "Come!" he said smiling, and she rose, and came. Gravely she walked beside him up the white streets of Havnor, holding his hand, like a child coming home. (12.300)

Unlike the incipit's "Come home," the attempt to activate and identify the addressee is fully successful here. Interestingly, no vocative, no proper name is invoked this time—the gesture of holding a hand out and smiling at the individual replaces the vocative in this final moment of naming and calling. But the absence of name seems significant. The retrieval of selfhood, the transformation, is complete, and the identification of name to subject so clear and evident that it suffices. Tenar knows who she is; and we as readers have finally satisfied the initial call for the subject, as well as the desire, transferred at the story's start, to bring her home.

#### CONCLUSION

Who is Tenar/Arha? She is a fictional subject, a prop in a game of make-believe, but she is also the central constituent of a thought experiment. Subjectivity is seriously challenged in Arha, where "subject" refers to a nameable nexus of memory, knowledge, and intention residing in a unique and unified body. Nevertheless, Arha/Tenar retrieves her selfhood at the story's close. Consequently, if *The Tombs of Atuan* is to yield any notion of a subject, no set of universally true and immutable conditions can be delineated. Rather, subjectivity is constituted and performed in experience, in what we have called the ethical sphere. What, then, should we conclude concerning the time *not being* Tenar? Is it nothing more than a variable in a thought experiment, or, in Tenar's own words, simply a "waste" (*Tombs* 12.298)?

At the outset, we noted that language in Earthsea should not primarily be seen as descriptive. This metaphysics is key to understanding how the time as Arha violently excludes elements of subjectivity, but is not a "waste." Retaining the third, anthropological principle of names and causes, one might suggest that Tenar/Arha in fact experiences two passages in which the respective suppression and revelation of the name effectively cause change and transformation. The social or "ethical" self that is constituted at the story's end is the result of a second passage—the revelation of Tenar and Ged's names, the joining of the ring halves, and the tremendous ascent from out of the earth and the shadows. For Le Guin, these moments or "passages" are, symbolically, "sex," that is, "[b]irth, rebirth, destruction, freedom" ("*Dreams*" 11). In this respect, Tenar/Arha is thus a girl turning into a woman, a child turning into an adult, initiated, as it were, through sex.

Anthropologically speaking, women's initiation rites often center on sexual maturity: in some cultures underscoring the "destruction" with bodily mutilation, in others focusing on a young woman's fulfillment in her new creative capacity, that is, "freedom" (Lincoln 97). In addition, these initiation rites often involve three stages, or passages, from one state of being to another. The community as a whole participates in the "enclosure, metamorphosis [...] and emergence" (101) of the initiand, not to change her status in the social hierarchy, but to *transform* her into something "more creative, more alive, more ontologically real" (104).

This is of course highly suggestive of our analysis of the moments of naming in *The Tombs of Atuan*. It revealed that an idea of self *is* present in the young child, Tenar, though it is incomplete and dreamlike, given in immediacy, but without definition. In Arha, this self is "destroyed," or at least severely limited and subjugated to the conflicting power relations and discourses of the Tombs. But this very destruction also creates a space for Tenar, the young adult, to become actualized. Indeed, it is only after the destruction of the child self that a fully defined idea of self comes into being—it is born through interactions with others, in speech and in shared action. Amidst the rubble of namelessness and darkness, the ethical self triumphs. Tenar/Arha thus accomplishes this journey from undefined selfhood, to destruction and, finally, to re-creation. She is the triumphant transformation of self in the social sphere, an example of subjectivation.

For young readers whose journey through childhood is incomplete, and for parents or siblings observing the process, the radical, destructive loss of the child self in adolescence is a source of anxiety. Could Tenar/Arha's tale help to assuage this anxiety by providing us with symbols for the physical and ontological transformation that occurs in adolescence? If Tenar/Arha is an initiand, and her story both an initiation rite *and* an instance of subjectivation, can these fictional props help us through our own experiences of transformation? In this final respect, Le Guin's allegory may have real myth-making potential. In a world where local rites, symbols, and meaning seem to be slipping away, fantastical literature can communicate the social value and purpose of the journey from a fledgling idea of self, to its destruction and its rebirth in the social sphere.

The *Tombs of Atuan* seems to intimate that *who* a child is, is not predetermined at the start; nor is it solely dependent on individual intentions, choices and acts. *Who* we are is forged out of things we cannot control—culture and power conflicts, the people who come into our lives—*and* our choices and deeds. The adult we end up with at the end of adolescence is *not* the child that once was, though some elements subsist transformation. Finally, destruction



and loss of self are necessary moments on the path to becoming a full, active, and creative self.

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