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## The Four Deaths of Ged

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### Abstract

A grim land of the dead holds a central place in Le Guin’s Earthsea series. This underworld, its relationship with the land of the living, and its final transformation, have important psychological meanings: Le Guin demonstrates that to develop a self that is integrated, differentiated, and vibrant, not only does the conscious mind need connection with the unconscious, but the unconscious mind needs connection with the conscious ego as well. Le Guin further demonstrates that these connections between the conscious and unconscious mind must take different forms across the lifespan. The arc of Ged’s story provides the rare opportunity to observe a literary character’s changing relationship to death as he matures and ages. This changing relationship plays out as Ged dies four times: in actuality at the end, and thrice symbolically before that.

### Additional Keywords

Death; Unconscious; Maturation



## THE FOUR DEATHS OF ĆEO

JOHN ROSECRANT

### CONSIDER EARTHSEA'S LAND OF THE DEAD:

A long way they went, over dry lava-flows from the great extinct volcanoes rearing their cones against the unnamed stars, across the spurs of silent hills, through valleys of short black grass, past towns or down their unlit streets between houses through whose windows no face looked. The stars hung in the sky; none set, none rose. There was no change here. No day would come. (Le Guin, "The Word of Unbinding" ["Unbinding"] 931)

The stars above the hill were no stars his eyes had ever seen. [...] They were those stars that do not set, that are not paled by the coming of any day. [...] No wind blew over the dry steep ground. (*A Wizard of Earthsea* [*Wizard*] 5.57<sup>1</sup>)

They came then into the streets of one of the cities that are there, and Arren saw the houses with windows that are never lit, and in certain doorways standing, with quiet faces and empty hands, the dead. [...] All those whom they saw [...] stood still, or moved slowly and with no purpose. [...] They were whole and healed. They were healed of pain and of life. [...] Quiet were their faces, freed from anger and desire, and there was in their shadowed eyes no hope. [...] [H]e saw the mother and child who had died together, and they were in the dark land together; but the child did not run, nor did it cry, and the mother did not hold it or ever look at it. And those who had died for love passed each other in the streets. (*The Farthest Shore* [*Shore*] 12.366-7)

This is a very grim underworld, reminiscent of the Homeric Hades where the dead spend eternity, weak and shadowy. When Odysseus travels to Hades to speak to the shade of slain Achilles and praises him as blessed because of his military prowess, Achilles responds, "Put me on earth again, and I would rather be a serf in the house of some landless man, with little enough for himself to live on, than king of all these dead men that have done with life" (Homer 184).

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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*.

It is no wonder that in Earthsea, Alder says, “the spirit must go to that dark place, and wear a semblance of the body, and endure there—for how long? Forever? In the dust and dusk there, without light, or love, or cheer at all? I cannot bear to think of Lily [his wife] in that place. Why must she be there? Why can she not be—[...] be free?” (*The Other Wind* [Wind] 4.856).

This grim underworld, and its relationship with the land of the living, is a central preoccupation of the Earthsea series from its very beginning and throughout to its very end. (The centrality of death in Earthsea was noted by Bucknall, in a paper written before *Tehanu* came out.) The quote with which I began this paper comes from “The Word of Unbinding,” the first short story about Earthsea, written before Le Guin had put Ged or any of its central characters on paper. The second quote is from *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the third from *The Farthest Shore*. *The Tombs of Atuan* also presents us with a death-related underworld, from a different Earthsea culture. The final transformation of the land of the dead occurs at the conclusion of *The Other Wind*, and the very last Earthsea story, “Firelight,” is about the actual death of Ged himself.

It is curious, and worth trying to understand, why Le Guin gave such a prominent place to such a bleak version of afterlife in the Earthsea books. She wrote about more cheerful, less forbidding versions of death elsewhere, whether that found in Taoism (in her translation of the *Tao te Ching*) or based on ethnology (*Always Coming Home*). Esmonde agrees with Le Guin’s own assessment that because death is difficult to comprehend, *The Farthest Shore*—the most focused on this topic of the first three books—“is a less well built, less sound and complete book than the others” (“Dreams Must Explain Themselves” [“Dreams”] 55). Whether or not this is an accurate critique of the book, it speaks to the puzzling nature of the Earthsea underworld.

In this paper I will explore psychological meanings of this grim land of the dead, of its relationship with the land of the living, and of its final transformation: Le Guin demonstrates that *to develop a self that is integrated, differentiated, and vibrant, not only does the conscious mind need connection with the unconscious, but the unconscious mind needs connection with the conscious ego as well*. This linkage between the conscious ego and the unconscious is consistent with the general orientation toward balance and unification in the Earthsea series (Crow and Erlich, Cummins, Spivack). Le Guin furthermore demonstrates that *these connections between the conscious and unconscious mind must take different forms across the lifespan*. Crow and Erlich, Cummins, and Esmonde all recognized themes of lifespan development prior to publication of the fourth Earthsea book; lifespan development continues as an important theme in the subsequent books.

I do not mean to suggest that Le Guin had these meanings consciously in mind as she wrote; indeed, such conscious direction would be foreign to her professed approach to writing the Earthsea stories: “If [...] a character [is]

worthy of being written about, then he exists. He exists, inside my head to be sure, but in his own right, with his own vitality. All I have to do is look at him. I don't plan him, compose him of bits and pieces, inventory him. I find him." After stating that this attitude is rooted in Taoist philosophy, Le Guin continues, "The Taoist world is orderly, not chaotic, but its order is not one imposed by man or by a personal or humane deity. The true laws [...] are not imposed from above by any authority, but exist in things and are to be found—discovered" ("Dreams" 49) And in the same essay Le Guin states that rather than planning Earthsea, she found it in her subconscious (42).

Ged has the longest relationship of any character with the land of the dead, both in terms of his presence in the Earthsea stories from beginning to end, and in terms of his individual life. Indeed, the Earthsea series provides the rare opportunity to observe a character's changing relationship to death across his lifespan. This changing relationship plays out as Ged dies four times: in actuality at the end, and thrice symbolically before that.

#### **GED'S FIRST DEATH**

Ged's first symbolic death takes place at the finale of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, when he confronts and merges with the shadowy figure that had been pursuing him:

As they came right together it became utterly black in the white mage-radiance that burned about it, and it heaved itself upright. In silence, man and shadow met face to face, and stopped.

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: "Ged." And the two voices were one voice. (*Wizard* 10.124)

This encounter occurs in a strange locale that is replete with images of death: Ged thought they might have come to

[the] world's end. [...] All sounds of water, wind, wood, sail, were gone, lost in a huge profound silence that might have been unbroken forever. The boat lay motionless. No breath of wind moved. The sea had turned to sand, shadowy, unstirred. Nothing moved in the dark sky or on that dry unreal ground that went on and on into gathering darkness all around the boat as far as eye could see. (*Wizard* 10.121)

Notice how much of this description is the same as Le Guin's description of the land of the dead: silent, motionless, windless, shadowy, dry, and unchanging. And to Ged's companion, Vetch, it appears that Ged has indeed died: "But to

Vetch, watching in terror through the dark twilight from far off over the sand, it seemed that Ged was overcome, for he saw the clear radiance fail and grow dim" (*Wizard* 10.124).

This scene can be understood as the death of Ged's old self, and his rebirth into a more integrated self. "'The wound is healed,' [Ged] said. 'I am whole, I am free'" (10.125). Given that the thing that had been pursuing Ged is regularly described as a shadow, the death and rebirth of Ged's self has often been thought of as depicting the integration of the Jungian Shadow (Crow and Erlich, Cummins, Esmonde, Spivack), an idea that gains credence from Le Guin's avowed appreciation for the Jungian view of the unconscious. The Shadow for Jung is roughly equivalent to the personal (as opposed to the collective) unconscious, and he thought that coming to terms with the Shadow was the first step in the individuation process (Jung, *Archetypes*). Here is Le Guin's own description of the Jungian Shadow, from "The Child and the Shadow," an essay in which she discusses the importance for psychological development of dark elements in fantasy:

The shadow is on the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind. It is Cain, Caliban, Frankenstein's monster, Mr. Hyde. [...] The shadow stands on the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious mind, and we meet it in our dreams, as sister, brother, friend, beast, monster, enemy, guide. It is all we don't want to, can't, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used. ("The Child and the Shadow" ["Child"] 63-64)

All this fits well enough with Ged's double. But it is important to note that Le Guin did not yet know about the Jungian Shadow when she wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea*: "any Freudian critic exploring Earthsea will find only 'Jung's Shadow! (As I found it: having never read a word of Jung when I wrote the book)'" (quoted by Susan Wood in *Language of the Night* 34). And although Le Guin appreciated Jungian thinking, obviously more than she appreciated Freudian, she was leery of its potential for reductionism:

Jungians [...] have generalized such journeys into a set of archetypal events and images. Though these generalities can be useful in criticism, I mistrust them as fatally reductive. "Ah, the Night Sea Voyage!" we cry, feeling that we have understood something important—but we've merely recognized it. Until we are actually on that voyage, we have understood nothing. ("Papa H" 57)

Ged's double was Le Guin's own free creation, and although it works well as a Jungian shadow, we can see other interesting features when we move as she suggests from generalities to specifics.

Most importantly, Ged's double comes from the Land of the Dead—and comes when called by Ged. It first appears when the teen-age Ged, stung by a girl's mockery and desiring to impress her, looks into lore books that his master Ogion had forbidden him:

[W]ith the girl's questions and her mockery always in his mind, he stopped on a page that bore a spell of summoning up the spirits of the dead. As he read it, puzzling out the runes and symbols one by one, a horror came over him. [...] [R]aising his head he saw it was dark in the house. [...] [T]he horror grew in him [...]. [S]omething 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. (*Wizard* 2.21)

Ogion returns in time to dispel the creature and save Ged.

Ged accidentally summons the Shadow a second time, as a student wizard on Roke, in order to triumph over a rival student (Jasper) whom he hates. Ged attempts to demonstrate his supremacy by showing he has enough power to summon the dead.

"Don't be afraid," he said, smiling. "I'll call a woman's spirit. You need not fear a woman. Elfarran I will call, the fair lady of the *Deed of Enlad*." [Elfarran was a mythic heroine.] [...] The words of the enchantment hissed and mumbled on Ged's lips. [...] The shapeless mass of darkness he had lifted split apart. [...] [F]or a moment there moved a form, a human shape: a tall woman looking back over her shoulder. Her face was beautiful, and sorrowful, and full of fear. [...] [Then appeared] a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. [...] [T]hrough that bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face. (*Wizard* 4.44-45)

This time Ged is rescued by the Archmage of Roke, who dies in the process.

Ged's third encounter with the shadow is more generously motivated. As the young resident wizard on an island, he tries to save the life of an ill child. In a trance his spirit follows the child's spirit into the land of the dead but is unable to save him. He turns to return to the land of the living. "But across the wall, facing him, there was a shadow. [...] It was shapeless, scarcely to be seen, but it whispered at him, though there were no words in its whispering, and it reached out towards him. And it stood on the side of the living, and he on the

side of the dead" (*Wizard* 5.57) This time Ged is powerful enough to push past the thing, although he lies in a lifeless trance until licked by his loving pet.

From then on, the shadow relentlessly pursues Ged in the land of the living, until Ged escapes and returns to Ogion. Ogion counsels Ged to overcome his terror and face the thing, and in their conversation, Ged recognizes his love for Ogion. Equipped with a new staff that Ogion has crafted, Ged turns to pursue his double.

How are we to understand the origin of Ged's double in the land of the dead? First, the land of the dead, and the underground more generally, are common symbols of the unconscious—thus the term "depth psychology." Jung stated that "the unconscious corresponds to the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors" (*Memories* 191). Referring to dreams occurring during analytic treatment, Freud stated, "If 'the unconscious', as an element in the subject's waking thoughts, has to be represented in a dream, it may be replaced very appropriately by subterranean regions" (*Dreams* 410) And Freud was fond of using archeological metaphors to depict the buried layers of the unconscious (see for example *Civilization*).

The lack of words in the land of the dead is another symbol of the unconscious. Freud (*Unconscious*) taught that a fundamental difference between the unconscious and the conscious was that images in the unconscious are not attached to words—they are "thing-presentations"—whereas a defining feature of images in the conscious mind is that they are attached to words—"word presentations." This is part of why talk therapies derived from Freud and Jung work: they consist of verbalizing that which has been too frightening to verbalize. And we see that all the descriptions of the land of the dead that I quoted on the first page highlight that the dead are silent; in fact, silence permeates the land. Ged's double whispers to him, but the whispers do not contain words.

The Jungian Shadow is part of the unconscious, so it is fitting for Ged's double to emerge from a land of the dead that is also a symbol of the unconscious. But the Jungian unconscious is a lively place, peopled by active archetypal figures like the Anima and Animus, the Trickster, and the Wise Old Man. The Freudian unconscious is less personified but nevertheless is full of energy, as we see in this metaphor: "These wishes in our unconscious, ever on the alert and, so to say, immortal, remind one of the legendary Titans, weighed down since primeval ages by the massive bulk of the mountains which were once hurled upon them by the victorious gods and which are still shaken from time to time by the convulsion of their limbs" (Freud, *Dreams* 553). What are we to make, then, of the grim, static land of the dead in Earthsea as a symbol of the unconscious?

Here a fundamental aspect of Freud's theory of the mind is helpful. Many people are familiar with the concept of "transference" as an experience when someone seems to possess characteristics of someone else very important to us—for example, feeling that our boss or our spouse is like one of our parents. This is an example of transferring the importance of one mental content onto another. Freud believed that the unconscious could only become known to us if, in such a way, it transferred its power onto a conscious thought or feeling, and he illustrated this with an allusion to Hades, which, as noted earlier, much resembles the underworld of *Earthsea*: "[unconscious contents] are only capable of annihilation in the same sense as the ghosts in the underworld of the *Odyssey*—ghosts which awoke to new life as soon as they tasted blood" (*Dreams* 553). The only dead person in *A Wizard of Earthsea* who shows emotion is Elfarran, whose face was "sorrowful, and full of fear" when Ged summoned her—when she had tasted his blood, so to speak. Only after it has moved into the land of the living does Ged's double speak not wordless whispers but a meaningful word—Ged's name—once as it pursues him (*Wizard* 6.75), and again when it merges with Ged.

Fuller implications of Freud's concept of transference were developed by Loewald (*Therapeutic Action*): the unconscious mind and the conscious ego need each other. It is a familiar idea in psychology that the conscious mind needs contact with the unconscious to reach full potential; e.g. Ged needed to integrate his Shadow. But this need also flows in the other direction: without connection to the conscious mind, unconscious concepts are like weak and shadowy ghosts.

Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost-life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow-life. [...] In the daylight of analysis [or of art—JR] the ghosts of the unconscious are laid and led to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life [...]. (*Therapeutic Action* 249)

In this process, the unconscious and conscious mind are both enriched. And this is what we see in Ged's relationship with his double: not only does it complete Ged and give him his subsequent wizardly mission and power, but also Ged raises it from a terrifying, shadowy, wordless existence to conscious effectiveness. We of course normally consider this process from Ged's perspective, but if we take the Shadow's point of view, we see *A Wizard of Earthsea* as the story of how rage and terror, inchoate, unmodulated, and alone, first pursued to destroy and then fled in terror from the possibility of higher organization, until finally by joining with Ged it accepted form and control in order to have meaningful impact.

We will see that what is true of Ged's first death is also true of the others: *Ged's four deaths show the necessary interplay of the unconscious and conscious minds in creating a vibrant self.*

Each death, as we will see, each interplay between unconscious and conscious, is appropriate to Ged's developmental stage. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* his death occurs as he is transforming from an adolescent into a young man. As Erikson taught us, adolescence is the time when identity crises are most common as youngsters gradually establish who they are outside the family of origin, both socially and in the work world. It is Ged's uncertainty as to who he is, who is more powerful, especially in relation to the charismatic Jasper, that leads to his disastrous summoning of Elfarran and the Shadow; even if especially strong in Ged, such concerns about power and peer relationships are common adolescent emotions.

Women play only minor roles in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, but are present enough that we can see Ged's relations with women expressing adolescent male fantasies that commonly develop under patriarchal childrearing. When he wants to show Jasper his superior power, he does so by demonstrating that he is strong enough to summon one of the legendarily most beautiful of women. He is interested in her not for herself but as a token of power over his male rival, whom he taunts with, "You need not fear a woman." His first accidental encounter with the Shadow had come about in an effort to overcome feeling humiliated by a woman. And this woman later appears as a seductress who pretends to protect Ged from the Shadow and tries to induce him to release for her an ancient power, then almost kills him when he refuses. Thus, Ged's first romantic/erotic longings for women are dominated by issues of power and control growing out of his fear of women. He is only able to turn and face his Shadow after experiencing the love of his male mentor Ogion, showing that he is still in need of strengthening his masculine identity—whether or not the reader considers the powerful staff that Ogion makes for him to be a phallic symbol.

The patriarchal cultural background that produced this fear is especially apparent in the different esteem in which male wizards and female witches are held. Wizards are powerful and respected, wielders of True Names; witches know at most a few True Names, and their reputation is captured in the sayings "*Weak as woman's magic*" and "*Wicked as woman's magic*" (*Wizard* 1.9). Ged's personal childhood was one that exaggerated the difference between men and women and left women mysterious and threatening; his mother died before he was a year old, and his father beat him regularly, so "there was no one to bring the child up in tenderness" (*Wizard* 1.7) Much later, in *Tehanu*, Tenar asks Ged who brought him up, and he answers, "Nobody much [...]. My mother died when I was a baby. There were some older brothers. I don't remember them.

There was my father the smith. And my mother's sister. She was the witch of Ten Alders" (6.446). When his aunt had begun to teach him magic, her first act was to try to bind him to serve her, but his natural power was too great for him to fall under her control. Thus, well before her feminist turn in *Earthsea* (Le Guin, "Earthsea Revisioned"; Rawls) that began with *Tehanu*, Le Guin already showed a sophisticated understanding of gender politics and the psychology behind it.

When Ged strengthens his adolescent self and moves into young adulthood by merging with his shadow, we understand him to have mastered his issues around power and control, and we see in the subsequent books that this is so, as he uses his enormous power as a wizard with great care to not upset the (Taoist-like) balance in *Earthsea*. But he is still a long way from mutual relations with women. His next deaths help him mature in this area.

### GED'S SECOND DEATH

Ged's second symbolic death, in *The Tombs of Atuan*, almost becomes literal: trapped in the labyrinth beneath the tombs, he nearly dies of thirst and hunger before being rescued by Tenar/Arha. It is not only the nearness of his actual death that leads me to call this his second death; like the Land of the Dead that Ged visited in the previous book, the labyrinth is rife with symbols of death intertwined with symbols of the unconscious. In returning above ground, Ged is rising from the dead.<sup>2</sup>

The intertwined symbolism of death and the unconscious loom right in the title of the book.

These nine stones were the Tombs of Atuan. They had stood there, it was said, since the time of the first men, since *Earthsea* was created. [...] They were older by far than the Godkings of Kargad, older than the Twin Gods, older than light. They were the tombs of those who ruled before the world of men came to be, the ones not named [...]. (Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan* [Tombs] 2.149)

In addition to being identified as tombs, note the references to "older than light" and "ones not named." I discussed above how lack of language is a feature of the unconscious. Lack of light also symbolizes the unconscious, since consciousness is built in part out of using the perceptual system to access external reality (Freud, *Dreams; Ego*). When Arha wants to bring light into the

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<sup>2</sup> Tenar/Arha is the main character of *The Tombs of Atuan*, but I will be discussing her role only as it intersects with Ged's: just as she saves Ged from actual death, he saves her from spiritual and emotional death. The arc of Arha's own story has been ably discussed by Cummins, Esmonde, Matthews, and Spivack.

tombs to help her conscious negotiation of the labyrinth, she learns that “‘Light is forbidden here.’ Kossil’s [an older priestess, Arha’s teacher and controller] whisper was sharp. Even as she said it, Arha knew it must be so. This was the very home of darkness, the inmost center of the night” (*Tombs* 3.160).

Crucially for Ged’s development, the Tombs of Atuan represent a female unconscious—by which I do not mean an unconscious that only females have, but an unconscious that relates to experience of the feminine. A society exclusively of female priestesses and eunuchs takes care of the Tombs and their rituals, and the description of the tombs as being older than the Godkings or the Twin Gods implicates the early mother before the differentiated father becomes important.<sup>3</sup> Spivack points out that the myths of Theseus and the Minotaur, in which Ariadne is the guide, and of Demeter and Persephone, are implicit models for the Tombs of Atuan. Le Guin stated,

The subject of *The Tombs of Atuan* is, if I had to put it in one word, sex. There’s a lot of symbolism in the book, most of which I did not, of course, analyze consciously while writing; the symbols can all be read as sexual. More exactly, you could call it a feminine coming of age. Birth, rebirth, destruction, freedom are the themes. (“Dreams” 55)

Although Le Guin does not say so directly, I infer that in part she means that the underground Tombs represent the vagina and womb; consistent with this, Spivack states, “For any male to enter the secret underground precincts is of course a symbolic rape” (58).

At its deepest level, the Tombs represent the oral/anal relationship of infant with mother. Le Guin’s drawing of “The Labyrinth of the Tombs of Atuan” looks not like a vagina or womb, but very much like the convoluted twisting of the intestines. As the tombs collapse at the end, the entrance/exit is described as a mouth: “From the black mouth among the rocks behind them issued forth a long, long, groaning howl of hatred and lament. [...] Then with a crash that seemed to echo off the sky itself, the raw black lips of the crack closed together [...]” (*Tombs* 10.223). And the act of eating or being eaten is fundamental to the human relationships in the story. The central character is born *Tenar*, but as a young girl she is chosen as the reincarnation of the One

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<sup>3</sup> Nowadays we know that men as well as women can fulfil the role of nurturing parent prior to differentiation, and women as well as men can fulfil the role of more differentiated parent; indeed, the same person can fulfil both roles at different times. However, gender roles in Earthsea are mostly traditional—one very significant exception is Ged in later life, discussed below—and modification of traditional gender roles in parenting remains (unfortunately) rare, so I will continue to use “mother” to refer to the primary nurturing figure.

Priestess of the Tombs, and in a ceremony of investiture she becomes *Arha*, “The Eaten One.” In this way her individuality is killed off as she is digested into the role of the One Priestess. Almost the first official act required of her is to decide how to sacrifice three male prisoners who have been sent by the GodKing from his city and chained in the Tombs. Arha decides that they are to be left to starve, then buried in the Undertomb, where “My Masters will eat the bodies” (*Tombs* 3.162). Eaten herself, she prevents the prisoners from eating so that they may be eaten.

Ged enters the labyrinth in search of the missing half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. Although his wizardly powers enable him to open an outer door, when he penetrates farther an inner door closes behind him that defeats his powers—he is trapped. Arha wants him to die for this violation, but (in a sign of her psychological growth) she is horrified by her memory of the deaths in darkness to which she condemned the three prisoners. She considers instead having him brought to the surface and beheaded. In a tormented compromise, Arha thinks,

She could let a little water for him down one of the spyholes, and then call him to that place. That would keep him alive longer. As long as she pleased, indeed. If she put down water and a little food now and then, he would go on and on, days, months, wandering in the Labyrinth; and she could watch him through the spy holes, and tell him where water was to be found, and sometimes tell him falsely so he would go in vain, but he would always have to go. That would teach him to mock the Nameless Ones, to swagger his foolish manhood in the burial places of the Immortal Dead! (*Tombs* 6.187)

Although Arha thinks of this torture as an attack on Ged’s “foolish manhood,” it actually serves to attack his humanity more generally. In need of affirmation of her eaten, de-individualized status when faced with this male individual in her realm, Arha fantasizes that she will endlessly enact her power over him, while he wanders in the intestinal underground like food that is perpetually but never completely digested.

Arha’s sadism here has affinity with that of the eponymic Marquis de Sade, whose phantasmagoria of explicitly sexual tortures was built upon fantasies of affirming himself by endlessly enacting his power, eliminating his victims’ individuality, and reducing them to pieces and finally to particles and feces.

[T]he denial of disillusionment is effectuated through a magical anal economy that equates all body parts and admits of no loss, differentiation, or diminution of the self. Human physiology is degraded

into a jigsaw puzzle of small parts that are equated with food and feces and become interchangeable. [...]

[quoting de Sade:] And what after all is murder: a small rearrangement of matter, some changes in its disposition, some molecules that are disassembled and plunged back into the cauldron of nature whence they emerge some time later assuming another form on earth; and where is the harm in all that?

[...] This function of affirmation is also served by fantasies of infinite and ultimate revenge. (Bach and Schwartz 469-470).

As Ged starves in the Labyrinth he is perpetually eaten, losing his individuality as Arha had lost hers.

But before Arha can fully eliminate Ged's individuality, it sparks her own that she had forgotten. When he has been weakened by exhaustion and hunger, she enters the Labyrinth to meet with him, and they speak. "'It's pleasant to have light,' he said in the soft but deep voice, which perturbed her. 'What's your name?' she asked, peremptory. [...] 'Well, mostly I'm called Sparrowhawk'" (*Tombs* 6.192). With these references to light, speech, and names, we see the conscious mind returning. During this encounter Arha refuses to reveal her name. Ged is able to ascertain it with his power of naming, however, and later, after they have decided to escape together and she has given him enough food and drink to restore his strength, he tells her, "You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You cannot be both" (*Tombs* 9.217) She chooses Tenar, and they escape from the intestinal unconscious.

In Jungian terms, this raising from the unconscious to consciousness can be described as the needed psychic growth of childhood, developing an individual ego out of the undifferentiated collective unconscious (*Man and his Symbols* [*Symbols*]). The hero's journey often involves escape from devouring creatures that Jung regarded as symbolizing escape from the pull of the undifferentiated unconscious—a familiar example being Jonah and the Whale (Jung, *Symbols*; Campbell).

From another viewpoint, the transformation of Ged's psyche from conscious and individual, to symbolic death in the unconscious, and then back to individuated consciousness, further illustrates Loewald's ideas about the mutual need of the unconscious mind and conscious ego for each other. The risk of too much emphasis on consciousness and separation is aloneness, anxiety, and depression, all of which Ged experienced in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. But too much emphasis on the unconscious also carries risk, that of de-differentiation, merger, and death of individual identity, that Ged barely escapes in *The Tombs of Atuan*. "Reality is lost if the ego is cut off from [human relationships]; reality is lost as well if the boundaries of ego and reality are lost (the threat of the

womb)" (Loewald, *Ego and Reality* 16). Ged shows us the need to move dynamically between these poles and find a livable balanced reality.

The little that Le Guin tells us about Ged's relationship with his actual mother helps us understand how he could find this process conflictual: as noted above, his mother died when he was a baby, so "there was no one to bring the child up in tenderness" (*Wizard* 1.7). Early maternal loss can lead to feelings of deprivation and despair, as well as longings for merger to try to experience the missing closeness. This wound in Ged is healed, and Tenar/Arha's as well, when this man and woman recognize their mutual needs to escape from deathlike unconsciousness.

This is Ged's first affectionate relationship with a woman, and in Eriksonian terms it comes at the expected time in the life cycle: in *A Wizard of Earthsea* he resolved the crisis of identity vs. role diffusion, and now he resolves the crisis between intimacy and isolation. Many years later, as they are about to consummate their relationship in *Tehanu*, Tenar hints that she always loved Ged, saying, "I have been patient with you for twenty-five years" (12.522), and in "Earthsea Revisited" Le Guin writes that indeed "Tenar always loved Ged, and knew it [...]" (986). But at the time that they rescued each other romance was not yet possible for Ged, because wizards are committed to celibacy to maintain their power. The completion of the quote in the previous sentence is, "[Tenar] can't figure out why she now, for the first time, desires him" (986), and the witch Moss (conceptualized as more central and powerful than witches had been before Le Guin's feminist turn) explains that it is because of Ged's celibacy; we are to understand that his asexuality had stifled any sexual desire on Tenar's part.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is through his encounter with the feminine in *The Tombs of Atuan*, both in his own unconscious and in his mutual affection with Tenar, that Ged is able to mature by shedding his isolated self.

### GED'S THIRD DEATH

Ged dies symbolically a third time in *The Farthest Shore*. A wizard named Cob has sought immortality, and in doing so creates a door between the land of the living and the land of the dead. But rather than creating a rich and vibrant immortality, this rift deadens not only Cob but the entire world. Cob can move back and forth between the lands, but is more like a dead person than a living, and in the land of the living magic ceases to work, balance and order are lost, and a gray joylessness is spreading.

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<sup>4</sup> There is also the matter of their ages: at the time of their first meeting Tenar is only about fifteen, and although Ged is a young man and his age is not made explicit, it is clear that he is significantly older than she. We do not know much about Earthsea marriage customs, but to modern readers a romance at those ages would have felt uncomfortable.

Ged, Archmage and most powerful of wizards, pursues Cob into the land of the dead. He brings with him a companion, seventeen-year-old Arren. They enter the underworld where in the presence of Cob they find the opening between lands, and Ged begins to weave the spell to close it. Cob assaults and begins strangling Ged before he finishes, but Arren cleaves Cob's spine with his sword. "But there is no good in killing a dead man, and Cob was dead, years dead" (*Shore* 12.375). Yet freed from Cob's assault, Ged is able to finish his spell and close the door between the worlds. He frees Cob from his torment to become one of the bland ghosts of the dead—the only possible afterlife. To escape the land of the dead, Ged and Arren must cross to the other side and climb a pass in the Mountains of Pain; Ged knows the way but is too weak to walk it, and Arren carries him the final steps. So they survive, but in casting such a mighty spell Ged has expended all his power. "As Archmage he is dead" ("Earthsea Revised" 987).

In *Tehanu* we learn what Ged has gained to compensate for this loss. He finds his way back to the house of his old master Ogion, who has died in the meanwhile. Tenar lives there now, having studied for a while with Ogion before becoming a farmer's wife and then being widowed. Ged in his bitterness wants solitude, and spends a year high in the mountains as a goatherd, the job of his youth. After achieving some acceptance of his new condition, he returns to Tenar. "They embraced, and their embrace became close. They held each other so fiercely, so dearly, that they stopped knowing anything but each other. [...] They lay that night on the hearthstones, and there she taught Ged the mystery that the wisest man could not teach him" (*Tehanu* 12.522). Ged is finally able to add sexual intimacy to the emotional intimacy that he reached in *The Tombs of Atuan*.

Cadden described a formal genre shift between the first three books and the last three: Throughout *The Farthest Shore* the tone is largely heroic (Crow and Erlich) or epic, but beginning with *Tehanu* the tone is largely novelistic: "From this point onward we are to understand that the overriding authority of this collection is not the epic storyteller around the campfire but the historian who is researching the stories in the library. [...] The novels not only become less epic in their telling, but more self-conscious about the hero tale as a genre" (Cadden 89). This shift in tone supports the content change wherein Ged's powers and enchantments are no longer those of a mighty wizard but those of an ordinary man.

In "Earthsea Revised," Le Guin responded to critics who had said that as part of her feminist turn she had made all male characters "weak or wicked" (985):

[A]s for Ged, well, he has indeed lost his job. That's something we punish men for very cruelly. And when your job is being a hero, to lose it means you must indeed be weak and wicked. [...] Ged's virtues are no longer the traditional male heroic ones: power as domination over others, unassailable strength, and the generosity of the rich. Traditional masculinists don't want heroism revised and unrewarded. They don't want to find it among housewives and elderly goatherds. And they really don't want their hero fooling around with grown women. (986)

To this I would add that Ged's transformation represents another step in his integration of consciousness with the unconscious. The power of wizards resides in their knowledge of the true names in the Old Language, so Ged's death as Archmage means that he has lost this magical control of language, which I identified above as a defining feature of consciousness. Ged's underworld journey in *The Farthest Shore* represents him moving closer to his unconscious and surrendering the arcane knowledge that had been alienating him from it.

Only with Arren's help was Ged able to survive his encounter with the unconscious, but Ged also served as a father-figure to Arren, saving him and bringing him to maturity. In this he was fulfilling the next Eriksonian developmental stage, choosing generativity over stagnation. When Ged and Arren first meet, Arren is seventeen, and a wizard student estimates that Ged is "quite old now [...] forty or fifty" (*Shore* 2.260). In their first conversation Ged recognizes Arren's potential, saying "Before your ancestors were mages [...] they were kings" (1.254). Arren offers his service to Ged: "For Arren had fallen in love. [...] So the first step out of childhood is made all at once, without looking before or behind, without caution, and nothing held in reserve" (1.255). In their travels before reaching the land of the dead, Ged saves Arren several times. Shortly before entering the land of the dead, Ged watches the sleeping Arren and like a proud father thinks, "I have found none to follow in my way [...] None but thee. And thou must go thy way, not mine. Yet will thy kingship be, in part, my own. For I knew thee first. I knew thee first! They will praise me more for that in after-days than for anything I did of magery . . ." (10.356). And in taking Arren across the land of the dead, Ged fulfills a prophecy that shows Arren to be the rightful king: "*He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day*" (*Shore* 2.261, italics in original).

Shortly before they first make love, Ged says to Tenar, "This last month I had the mountain pretty much to myself. [...] It was fine, up there.' 'Lonely,' she said. He nodded, half smiling. 'You have always been alone.' 'Yes, I have.' She said nothing. He looked at her. 'I'd like to work here,' he said" (*Tehanu* 12.522). In moving closer to his unconscious, in embracing the role of

father with Arren and then the role of husband with Tenar, Ged has been able to move out of his isolation.

This does not mean that Ged is bereft of all aspects of traditional masculinity—a few days previous to moving in with Tenar he had driven off thugs intending to rape her, stabbing one of them with a pitchfork. But he has added to his masculinity, so that at the end of *The Other Wind*, when Tenar returns from participating in world-changing events and says “tell me what you did while I was gone,” Ged replies, “Kept the house” (*Wind* 5.891).

### **FREING THE DEAD**

Ged moves off center stage in the Earthsea books after *The Farthest Shore*. Here I summarize only those aspects of the complex ensuing story that clarify the meanings of Ged’s deaths. It is eventually revealed that humans and dragons were originally one kind, and that still on occasion a dragon is born that is also human, or a human is born who is also dragon. Both dragons and humans originally spoke the Old Language, which is the Language of Making. Then in ancient days men gave up that language in order to have the power of making and doing with their own hands, whereas dragons kept the Old Language and chose the utter freedom of flying on “the other wind,” not of this world. But humans violated this covenant and learned to capture the Old Language in runes, giving them the magic of wizards. Wishing to emulate the dragons’ freedom and be spared death, humans used these powers to claim part of the dragons’ realm to live in after dying, but walled it off from the dragons lest they be wrathful about the theft of their land. But thus walled off, that land became the horrible, dry, and windless region in which the dead spend their meaningless time. When Cob (and Thorion, another character) violated the wall, “‘their spells disturbed that place’ the Summoner said, brooding. ‘*So the dragons began to remember the ancient wrong . . . And so the souls of the dead come reaching now across the wall, yearning back to life*’” (*Wind* 5.880; italics added). Here we see the unconscious striving for consciousness.

To understand what it means that the dragons begin to remember the ancient wrong, we must first understand what these dragons are. Crow and Erlich identified that they resemble Jung’s concept of unconscious spirit, as indicated by Ged’s response when queried by Arren about the nature of dragons: “Who am I, to judge the acts of dragons? . . . They are wiser than men are. It is with them as with dreams, Arren. We men dream dreams, we work magic, we do good, we do evil. The dragons do not dream. They are dreams” (Crow and Erlich, 208, quoting *Shore* 3.275). Although Freud believed dreams to be created by a compromise between the unconscious and ego defenses, we know that Le Guin was much more oriented to thinking like Jung, who believed dreams to be undisguised manifestations of the unconscious.

The unconscious nature of dragons is explicated further in "Earthsea Revisited," where Le Guin explains,

Dragons are archetypes, yes; mind forms, a way of knowing. [...] In the first three books, I think the dragons were, above all, wildness. What is *not owned*. [...] The dragon Kalessin in the last book is wildness seen not only as dangerous beauty but as dangerous anger. [...] [T]he dragon is subversion, revolution, change—a going beyond the old order in which men were taught to own and dominate, and women were taught to collude with them: the order of oppression. It is the wildness of the spirit and of the earth, uprising against misrule. And it rejects gender. (989-990)

Le Guin begins by saying that dragons are archetypes; archetypes of course are found in the unconscious. Running through her description of her dragons from the first book to the last is "wildness," another feature of the unconscious. And in their subversion not only of the patriarchal order but of gender in its entirety, dragons represent bisexuality. Freud identified all people as unconsciously bisexual (*Three Essays*), a concept that Jung developed in his own way with his ideas of the archetypes of the Anima in men's unconscious, the Animus in women's. Although dragons still speak the Old Speech, and throughout this paper I have been identifying speech as an aspect of consciousness, it is important to note that when dragons held onto this speech at the time of differentiating from humans it was specifically because they rejected the ego activities of making and doing, preferring to fly freely on the other wind. In response to Tenar's question about dragon speech, Ged replies (similarly to his previously quoted response to Arren about dreams), "[M]y guess would be that the dragon and the speech of the dragon are one. One being. [...] They do not learn," he said. "They are" (*Tehanu* 12.526). Just as dragons are dreams, dragons are speech. As such, dragon speech is not a conscious, learned ego function, but part of inborn nature. Dragon and speech are conceived as one thing according to the dreamlike unconscious mechanism of condensation. It is as though dragons are so much denizens of the unconscious that they have absorbed language into their unconsciousness.

So here we reach the meaning of dragons "remembering the ancient wrong": in accord with Loewald's idea that the unconscious needs connection with the conscious ego to be meaningfully active, the dragons have been too unconscious. They have been far in the west, ignoring Earthsea. It is only when Cob and Thorion violate the wall that the dragons are consciously alerted to the need to rectify the world.

As for the souls of the dead, the violation of the wall acted like drops of blood on the ghosts of Hades. Alder, whom I quoted at the beginning wishing

that his dead wife could go free, helps make his wish and the wish of the dead come true:

Alder could scarcely move the great stone his hands were on, but the Summoner was beside him, stooping with his shoulder against it, and said, "Now!" Together they pushed it till it overbalanced and dropped down with that same heavy, final thump on the far side of the wall.

Others were there now with him and Tehanu, wrenching at the stones, casting them down beside the wall. [...] There was a vast, soft cry among the shadows on the other side, like the sound of the sea on a hollow shore. [...] Most came forward afoot. They were not pressing, not crying out now, but walking with unhurried certainty towards the fallen places in the wall: great multitudes of men and women, who as they came to the broken wall did not hesitate but stepped across it and were gone: a wisp of dust, a breath that shone an instant in the ever-brightening light.

Alder [...] watched the dead go free. At last he saw her among them. [...] "Lily," he said. She saw him and smiled and held out her hand to him. He took her hand, and they crossed together into the sunlight. (*Tehanu* 5.885-6)

The dead regained desire, and emotion, enabling them to escape their perpetual unconsciousness and truly die by returning to the earth, in accord with Le Guin's understanding of Taoism (Le Guin, *Tao Te Ching*). Humans have transcended the narcissistic, ego-driven fantasy of eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

#### **GED'S FOURTH— AND ACTUAL— DEATH**

The very last tale of Earthsea is the short story "Firelight," and in it Le Guin grants Ged a generous death. He is an old man with chest pain, and in Erikson's last developmental stage he has found his way to integrity rather than despair. But integrity means not complete peace but the ability to accept what comes with equanimity. Ged fades in and out of consciousness, remembering his exploits, regretting his loss of power, but appreciating what came out of that loss: the ability to appreciate women and to love. He remembers the land of the dead and fears it in his future, while at the same time believing that he and Arren and the dragons had truly harrowed it so that it is no more. Tenar is with him, bringing him food and helping him stay warm. By never directly writing that Ged is dying, Le Guin poignantly evokes the shared understanding of the old, loving couple. "He sat up and she pushed the pillow behind him and set the

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<sup>5</sup> This is not an observation about theological beliefs in our actual world, but about the nature of Earthsea.

bowl on his lap. It smelled good, and yet he did not want it. 'Ah, I don't know, I'm just not hungry,' he said. They both knew. She did not coax him" ("Firelight" 974).

And as Ged finally drifts away, consciousness and unconsciousness meet one last time:

It was bright morning. He was in *Lookfar* [his boat in all his journeys]. [...] Last night there had been no reason to summon the magewind; the world's wind was easy and steady from the east. [...] [Then he] saw the dragon come. [...] [A]nd as it passed, in its hissing, ringing voice, in the true speech, it cried to him, *There is nothing to fear*.

He looked straight into the long golden eye and laughed. He called back to the dragon as it flew on to the east, "Oh, but there is, there is." [...] The black mountains were there. But he had no fear in this bright moment, welcoming what would come, impatient to meet it. He spoke the joyous wind into the sail. Foam whitened along *Lookfar's* sides as the boat ran west, far out past all the islands. He would go on, this time, until he sailed into the other wind. If there were other shores he would come to them. Or if sea and shore were all the same at last, then the dragon spoke the truth, and there was nothing to fear. ("Firelight" 975-976)

The dragon, emissary of the unconscious, tells Ged in his last moments of consciousness that there is nothing to fear. Ged is not quite sure this is true, but he is ready now to experience whatever happens and join the dragons in the Other Wind of unconsciousness. And because of the fullness of his life that included three previous deep meetings between consciousness and the unconscious, Ged sails on this final journey in joy.

## CONCLUSION

Widely known to be a great writer and a thoughtful feminist, Le Guin should also be recognized as a subtle intuitive psychologist. In her depiction of the arc of Ged's life, she demonstrates that to develop a self that is integrated, differentiated, and vibrant, not only does the conscious mind need connection with the unconscious, but the unconscious mind needs connection with the conscious ego as well. Each of Ged's four encounters with death symbolizes a meeting between his consciousness and unconscious, leading to increasing integration between these parts of his mind. Le Guin further demonstrates that these connections between the conscious and unconscious mind must take different forms across the lifespan by showing Ged's first encounter with death leading to stabilization of his adolescent identity, his second encounter leading to increased acceptance of intimacy and the feminine, his third encounter enabling him to more profoundly replace isolation with intimacy, and his fourth

encounter being a joyful acceptance of actual death since he has lived his life with integrity. Le Guin did not consciously and intentionally set out to depict this process; rather, we know from her description of her creativity that her understanding of Ged's development grew out of the meeting between her own consciousness and unconscious.

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