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Editorial

This issue of *The Journal of Children's Literature Studies* could be described as a celebration of two Fs: Fantasy and Feminism. Both of these categories have often been to the fore in children's literature criticism and, in one way or another, all the papers in this issue have something to say about one or both of them.

Sanna Lehtonen rightly acknowledges the 'coal-tinged realism' in Susan Price's *The Ghost Wife*, but claims that historical authenticity is not the main issue in this challenging novel. Despite its realistic portrayals of the characters and their surroundings, it also draws on the conventions of the Gothic novel, in order to forge a connection between female sexuality and class, particularly focusing on Rebecca, a vampire-like ghost who can control her own materiality and visibility. Lehtonen argues that the novel reveals how discourses concerning respectability, gender, class and sexuality which originated in the nineteenth century and, from a feminist perspective, should have become outdated, remain in circulation in contemporary society.

Also mixing genres between realism and fantasy is the book by Hugh Lofting discussed by Vivienne Savini-Hand, *Doctor Dolittle's Caravan*. While the very idea of a concert given by the birds with whom Dr Dolittle is able to communicate is evidently the stuff of fantasy, this paper reveals how Lofting makes use of factual details concerning the great violinist Paganini in order to reinforce his message about the dangers of nationalism. Lofting's fear of nationalist fervour, generated in his experiences during the First World War, is as political as is Price's concern for the working class. In this book, through Paganini's strictures about the over-facile judgments of the audience, Lofting seems to be condemning the kind of attitude which goes along with a general consensus instead of having the courage of conviction.

Feminism, a strong theme in Price's work but less evident in Lofting's, is seen by Christopher Tuthill as central to the 'Earthsea' fantasy novels of Ursula Le Guin. He traces the development of her ideas from an over-facile acceptance of the masculine bias of her society in the 1960s, to a more explicit commitment to a feminist agenda. While an early work, *The Tombs of Atuan*, merely displays what she would come to see as 'feminist leanings', by revisiting Earthsea in later books she provides a more explicit critique of male-dominated structures, in both Earthsea and in our world.

The two articles in this issue which relate to fairytales both take a feminist stance. Basing their discussion on a close study of five of the most familiar stories, Hilla Haelyon and Moshe Levy display how often within these the female body is depicted as defective, guilty and violated, women being depicted in passive and weak postures, silenced, subjugated and isolated, with a consequent diminishment of identity. The authors conclude on a more positive note with a glance at some more recent tales which reverse this tendency. Marilyn Pemberton's examination of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* also looks at some of the conventions of fairytale, though the feminist angle (implicit in Lizzie's redemptive action in licking the poisonous juices off the body of her sister). However in her article this is secondary to a providing a perspective on the poem as carrying a strong moral message, analogous to that of the many fairytales which reveal the care needed in making wishes, especially those, like Laura's, which are motivated by greed.

Myth has a wider and deeper significance than most fantasy, but it still employs characters and situations that are well away from everyday reality. Anuja Madarn's discussion of child-directed versions of the Indian classic, the *Mahabarata*, suggests that such versions over-simplify its message. While the epic itself deliberately does not leave its readers/listeners with a neat sense of closure, leaving questions in their minds, these attempts to convey its story to young readers tend, she feels, to close the opportunities which should be available for self-initiated discoveries for the child readers.

Perhaps the most fantastic of all today's scenarios, at least as far as the young are concerned, is the 'rags to riches', 'Cinderella' fantasy of celebrity – you too can be famous! Increasingly, celebrities also turn their hands to producing children's books, which may or may not have literary merit, but are certainly likely to propose celebrity values. Focusing on a book written by a reality television star, Paul Venzo suggests that it, like many similar works, endorses celebrity as the most desirable identity category for the children today, so that even difference becomes a commodity to be traded in the quest for fame. 'Queer theory', rather than feminism, is part of the critical framework here, something which reflects the way that fantasy, rather than realism, frequently tends to be the locus for critical discussion.

Pat Pinsent

Coal-tinged Realism Meets Female Gothic: Gender, class, and desire in *The Ghost Wife* by Susan Price

Sanna Lehtonen

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Abstract

Since the 1970s there has been a plethora of feminist criticism on representations of gender in children's literature, yet few critics have analysed the intersectional relationship of gender and class. The British fantasist Susan Price explores this relationship in several of her works. By adapting feminist theorisations of gaze and gendered subjectivity, the current paper examines the representations of gender and class in Price's horror novel The Ghost Wife *(1999). This novel is a generic hybrid that combines the conventions of Gothic novel and historical realist fiction, juxtaposing different associations and discourses of class, gender and sexuality. Although in terms of female gaze and sexuality the novel did not seem particularly radical at its time of publication, the connections it derives between female sexuality and class make it more so than at first appears.*

Introduction

A ghostlike female vampire – in her former life a pauper girl – and a cross-dressing collier wench may not be characters that make the top o the list of strong, agent heroines in fiction for young readers. These working-class or underclass characters in the horror novel *The Ghos Wife* (1999) by the British fantasist Susan Price are not particularly cleve or resourceful, nor do they find their identity or become empowered a the closure of the novel. Yet I will argue that they are examples o characters that challenge conventional gendered discourses, particularly in relation to social class. The focus in feminist criticism of children's literature has been on girls as individuals – on their personal identity quest or empowerment – and not on girls as representatives of a socia class. However, ethnographers of girlhood and womanhood, such as Beverley Skeggs (1997: 161) and Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001: 209), maintain that class remains a central factor in the regulation of gendered identities and sexuality in contemporary Britain: gender thus intersects with class and cannot be fully explained without a reference to discourses of social class. As well as feminis literary critics, much writing for children that thematises gender has

'Made to Hold Light': The Women of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books

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Abstract

Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea books can be seen as one of the foremost examples of feminist fantasy. The Tombs of Atuan, Tehanu, *and* The Other Wind *in particular demonstrate the importance of the feminine; despite the fact that male characters are powerful mages and kings in these works, women play equally critical roles. In* The Tombs of Atuan, *Tenar must help the archmage Ged escape the power of the Nameless Ones before whom his power fails.* Tehanu *further shifts Earthsea toward the feminine, as Ged is devoid of power and Tenar acts as protector to him. A close analysis of the Earthsea books shows Le Guin's interest in the balance of the sexes. In essays such as* Earthsea Revisioned, *Le Guin discusses the way she changed her thinking toward the books as her career progressed. Comments from some critics of Leguin's Earthsea books will also be examined.*

Introduction: Le Guin and Feminism

In contrast to other classic works of fantasy, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea novels feature strong female characters that are as important, or more so, than their male counterparts. Discussions of sex and gender are either not seen at all, or at most to a very small degree, in the works of Tolkien or C.S. Lewis, to name just two of Le Guin's predecessors, while Le Guin's work is far richer in terms of gender than much of the work she drew inspiration from. Holly Littlefield notes that Le Guin's early writings came at a time when 'there were few feminist models or precursors for her to draw on' (Littlefield 246). Littlefield also calls attention to this quote from Le Guin:

> Until the mid-seventies I wrote my fiction about heroic adventure, high-tech futures, men in the halls of power, men – men were the central characters, the women were peripheral … I did not know how to write about women – very few of us did – because I thought that what men had written about women was the truth, the true way to write about women (Le Guin, 1990:234).

It is interesting to read the Earthsea books in light of this statement, since clearly there is a shift in the tenor of the Earthsea books as they progress. As Le Guin says, most fantasy she read before she began writing was written by men, and male characters dominated those works. Le Guin has written and talked about her growing feminist awareness over the years and how it affected the later Earthsea books. Especially beginning with *Tehanu* in 1990, there is a revisiting of Earthsea's patriarchal society; we as readers learn that the imbalance of the sexes has had disastrous effects in Earthsea.

In her essay *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin goes further, describing herself as writing 'in an approved female role' and as an 'artificial man' at the time of their publication: 'So long as I behaved myself, obeyed the rules, I was free to enter the heroic realm,' a realm populated almost exclusively by men (1993: 7). She goes on to describe the Western tradition she writes in as 'a great one, a strong one. The beauty of your own tradition is that it carries you … Indeed, it's hard not to let it carry you, for it's older and bigger and wiser than you are' (1993:10). But because that tradition is so focused on men, the first Earthsea novels are also dominated by men; as LeGuin says: 'The fundamental power, magic, belongs to men; only to men; only to men who have no sexual contact with women' (1993:9). This was something she would address in the later Earthsea works, beginning with *Tehanu*.

In this essay, Le Guin also remarks on the nature of the hero-tale, the myth she invoked when she started writing the Earthsea books:

> The myth of man alone, or alone with his God, at the center, on the top, is a very old, very powerful myth. It rules us still. But thanks to the revisioning of gender called feminism, we can see the myth as a myth: a construct, which may be changed, an idea which may be rethought, made more true, more honest. (1993:17)

In revisiting Earthsea after almost twenty years, and then going back to the series again in the early 2000s, Le Guin has done a thorough job of revisioning her most famous creation. By revisiting it after all this time, Le Guin has been able to point out certain problems in the world she created, problems she was not thinking about when she initially wrote the novels. As she further remarks, 'The politics were there all along, the hidden politics of the hero-tale, the spell you don't know you're living under until you cast it off' (1993: 24).

Perhaps Le Guin was not consciously thinking about the patriarchal system of wizards when she published *A Wizard of Earthsea* in 1968, but though she says she 'always considered herself a feminist,' nonetheless she, like many others, 'moved to a higher plane of consciousness about these matters' (Leguin: 1990, 7-8). *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she says, 'is the record of my consciousness, the process of my thinking' (1990:8). It is interesting that she published *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), a novel she later 'revisioned' to critique its patriarchy, just a year before *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), this document of her feminist thinking. Perhaps Le Guin felt freer in this science fiction novel to explore gender than she did in the heroic tale of Ged the wizard, with all its cultural baggage. It is clear that in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she is very concerned with the balance of the sexes, and explores problems that occur when there is an imbalance in them. The seeds of her revisioning of Earthsea can be found in this book. Though Le Guin's feminism is evident in much of her fiction, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* she deals with gender explicitly.[1] It is worth discussing this novel and looking at LeGuin's treatment of gender in it before getting into a discussion of the Earthsea books.

The Left Hand of Darkness is an exploration of gender roles and androgyny in a society that is very different from the world of Earthsea. In this novel, the Gethenians do not consider themselves male or female, but can be either sex during specific time periods, known as kemmer. Le Guin has written about the book in her essay 'Is Gender Necessary?', in which she points to three main differences between Gethenian society and our own: the absence of war, the absence of exploitation, and the absence of sexuality as a continuous social factor (Le Guin, 1990: 11-13). She first wrote this essay in 1976, and returned to it in 1987, when she reworked some of its ideas. In it, she articulates many of the issues that would come to light later in the Earthsea novels. As Le Guin says, Gethen is not a utopia, but the balance of the sexes on the planet has allowed them to avoid war and other problems that plague our own world, and that of Earthsea (1990: 11). Since the Gethenians lack sexuality except during socially approved periods (just one-fifth of every month), males do not try to dominate social and political life, as the wizards do on Earthsea. Physical violence is limited to personal encounters (1990: 11). As Le Guin says: 'Ritual and parade were far more effective agents of order than armies or police. There was no

slavery or servitude. Nobody owned anybody. There were no chattels' (1990: 11). Le Guin further says that she

> was trying to show a balance – and the delicacy of a balance. To me the 'female principle' is, or at least historically has been, basically anarchic. It values order without constraint, rule by custom not by force. It has been the male who enforces order, who constructs power structures, who makes, enforces, and breaks laws. (1990: 11)

The female principle she refers to has stabilised the people of Gethen, because the two genders have been equal. When the balance is disturbed, as it is in the novel, problems begin. One of the nations on Gethen, Le Guin points out, is becoming a nation-state, and is on the verge of the world's first war (1990: 11).

Though the Gethenians are much more technologically advanced than the people of Earthsea, the social problems Le Guin points to in this essay – problems that are all absent on Gethen – are evident in the Earthsea novels. Earthsea has its hierarchy of wizards, one that excludes women, who have been excluded from power for generations. There is exploitation and rape, as we see in *Tehanu*. Like our own world, Earthsea is plagued with imbalance. Men hold all the social and political power, and this has been a disaster for Earthsea, one that Le Guin would revisit in 1990, when she began to write about Earthsea again in *Tehanu*.

Several critics have noted that the Earthsea novels can be read from a feminist perspective. Comoletti and Drout state that in *Tehanu*, Le Guin is 'undertaking a feminist intervention' into Earthsea and that Tehanu 'works as a feminist reaction to the Earthsea trilogy' (Comoletti and Drout, 2001: 113; 124). Though he comes to very different conclusions, Perry Nodelman also notes the shift in *Tehanu*; he goes so far as to ask if Le Guin is 'reinventing the history of her own attitudes' (1995: 180). Though there has been much written on Earthsea and its feminism, the novels can be re-read in light of her most recent additions to the series, *The Other Wind* (2001) and *Tales From Earthsea* (2005) which were written more than three decades after *A Wizard of Earthsea*'s first publication in 1968, and more than a decade after *Tehanu*.

By focusing on three of the six Earthsea books, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *Tehanu*, and *The Other Wind*, we can come to a better understanding of Le Guin's 'revisioning' of Earthsea. Cultural attitudes towards women in Earthsea, women's relationships to men, their abilities with magic, and

their relationships to the environment all powerfully demonstrate this revisioning. It is clear that Le Guin's novels are very complex in terms of gender; they can be considered as among the finest examples of feminist fantasy.

'Weak as Women's Magic'

The phrase 'Weak as women's magic' first appears in the beginning of *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968:5) and subsequently appears again and again in the Earthsea books. The mages are all men, and any woman that shows aptitude for magic is shunned and taught that it is not acceptable to use her talent, no matter how strong it is. As Le Guin herself later observed in *Earthsea Revisioned*, magic in Earthsea is the dominion of men, and women are controlled so that they cannot wield it. Through the course of the books, however, it becomes quite clear that this manipulation of powers and focus on the masculine by the Earthsea mages has disastrous consequences for everyone concerned. Politically, environmentally, spiritually, and sexually, the people of Earthsea suffer for generations because of the imbalance. It is only in *The Other Wind* that the tide finally starts to turn and women's powers become more accepted.

Littlefield's observation that the first books of Earthsea 'reflect the author's early feminist leanings rather than the more developed feminism of her later novels' (1995: 245) is especially true of *The Tombs of Atuan*, which is the coming of age story of a young woman (Sobat, 1996: 24). In *Tombs* we quickly see the kinds of horrors that female characters are subjected to. Tenar, also called The Eaten One, is taken from her family as a young child; her mother gives her child up against her will (1971: 2). Tenar is placed in the care of the eunuch Manan, who protects her and serves as the only male she meets until the wizard Ged.

Tenar is forced to become a princess of unnamed dark powers in a cave, isolated from her family and anyone she knew. She must do the bidding of her captors, conducting endless and pointless rituals to appease these dark gods. Tenar even oversees executions of people who defile the Tombs, and lives as a kind of slave to these powers. Nonetheless, critics such as Gail Sidonie Sobat have pointed out that the Taoist symbolism of the book 'facilitates a feminist reading of the text: a woman shows a man 'the way,' and as a result both are reborn, each delivering the other' (1996: 24).

When Ged arrives at the tombs he is the first man Tenar has had contact with aside from the eunuch. But it is clear that though he is the archmage, his powers are weak where Tenar's are strongest. Le Guin has also noted this in *Earthsea Revisioned*:

> She cannot get free of the tombs without him ... But – a fact some critics ignore –neither can Ged get free without her. They are interdependent. I redefined my hero by making him dependent, not autonomous...I had reimagined the man's role, but not the woman's. I had not yet thought what a female hero might be (1993: 9).

In the labyrinth, Ged's power fails as he tries to open doors and find an escape, and Tenar proves to be his only hope for survival. Only through Tenar's willingness to help him is he able eventually to escape. He is the strongest mage in Earthsea, but will die without Tenar's help. It is also important to note also that Ged is there seeking the ring of Erreth-Akbe, a symbol of peace (Bucknall, 1981: 53). Eventually he does find the ring, but only with the aid of Tenar; through her aid of the archmage in his task she can also be seen as a symbol of balance and peace.

Ged helps Tenar vanquish the dark spirits of the tombs, and after their escape, she expresses her remorse at spending so many years dedicated to these dark powers. Ged responds, 'You were never made for cruelty and darkness; you were made to hold light, as a lamp burning holds and gives its light' (1971: 145). Ged's words can be seen to mean that Tenar is not only capable of life-giving qualities, but also of magic, since magic is often described in Earthsea as an internal power that mages are able to harness with the proper training. Tenar's story is just beginning though, and, as we see in *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*, the capturing of the ring of Erreth Akbe, while an important symbol of balance, does not automatically cause Earthsea to be balanced. There is much work to be done, and the male mages who control Earthsea are firmly entrenched in their ways, unwilling to change things to allow women more freedom.

Earthsea's women are primarily seen as mothers and caregivers, staying at home and tending to domestic affairs while men control the political and spiritual world. The men of Earthsea are actually quite afraid of women who have magic powers, and treat them not only as inferior, but as witches, to be shunned, feared or killed. As Sobat says, 'Although witchery is seen as weak and wicked, a woman's power has deeper roots which extend into the dark and unknowable, presumably the

unconscious' (1996: 31). Witches such as Ivy and Moss in *Tehanu* operate on the fringes of society, helping people desperate for medical attention or suffering from maladies caused by evil wizards or sorcerers. Without the education afforded by the men of Roke and their cloistered school of magic, women have little chance of being as powerful as men, yet they intuitively know how to treat patients and their services are often in high demand. The magical abilities of women would be more fully explored by Le Guin in the later Earthsea books, which reflect a 'more developed feminism' (Littlefield 1995:245). The idea that a woman might be capable of magic, or of something more than the life of a peasant's wife, is revisited and developed by Le Guin, starting with *Tehanu*.

Tehanu

Tehanu is the beginning of Le Guin's 'revisioning' of Earthsea. The maimed girl Therru, and Tenar, are the central characters in the book, and through them Le Guin is able to criticise the male-dominated world of Earthsea convincingly. As Comoletti and Drout write, in *Tehanu* Le Guin 'negotiates not only the genre traditions she inherited from Western culture but also the internal logic and metaphysical structure she inherited from her own first three Earthsea books' (2001: 113). Le Guin keeps the framework of the first three books by revisiting ideas such as women's ability to use magic, the patriarchal system of mages, and the overall treatment of women in Earthsea society.

Clearly the decades between *The Farthest Shore* and *Tehanu* were filled with profound change, and Le Guin wanted to revisit her world in light of them. As she says in *Earthsea Revisioned*, 'In my lifetime as a writer, I have lived through a revolution, a great and ongoing revolution. When the world turns over, you can't go on thinking upside down. What was innocence is now irresponsibility. Visions must be revisioned.' (1993: 12). It was time for Tenar to have a stronger voice. In fantasy fiction, women's voices had grown through the 1970s and 1980s, and science fiction written by women became more varied than ever before. Previously, much of science fiction and fantasy had been dominated by male authors, but times were changing. Octavia Butler (*Kindred*), Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*), and Joanna Russ (*The Female Man*), to name just three women authors, wrote books that dealt with gender in sophisticated ways, the way Le Guin had in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. If in 1968 Le Guin was not completely aware of how male-centred Earthsea was, by 1990 she was clearly ready to visit her world again and intervene.

So, although Tenar helps Ged in *The Tombs of Atuan*, and is secondary to him, in *Tehanu* we see the world through her eyes, and Le Guin shows us what a middle-aged woman in Earthsea would face. Tenar had chosen to marry rather than learn magic from Ogion, and this choice of a simple life has had consequences (1993: 17). Instead of the heroic tale of a young man and his wizardly powers, we get the story of Tenar and a maimed girl, Therru. Le Guin focuses on small details to show her readers what everyday life is like for women in this world. As we will see, it is not at all easy, and is made very difficult by powerful men. What Le Guin offers is a possible way beyond the male-dominated world that readers have seen throughout the first three books of the cycle.

The young girl Therru is a prime example of the marginalisation of women in Earthsea. When it is found that she has magical talents, she is raped and burned by her own father. Disfigured and near death, she is sheltered by Tenar, who at the old wizard Ogion's request teaches her what she knows of magic. 'They will fear her,' he tells Tenar, speaking of the maimed girl's power (2001: 24). 'They fear her now,' Tenar replies, speaking of the girl's disfigurement (2001: 24). Though she wants to nurture the young girl, Tenar has her doubts as to whether promoting magic use is the right thing, or if it will keep her safe:

> 'Weak as women's magic, wicked as women's magic,' she had heard said a hundred times ... Village witches ... were never trained in the high arts or the principles of magery...no woman was so trained ... there had never been a woman mage. (2001: 39-40).

The impact of this lack of women mages proves devastating to Tenar and Therru, and threatens the entirety of Earthsea by the end of the cycle.

Male mages in Earthsea have for centuries blocked women from using magic, and deal harshly with women who dare to practice it. Aspen, one of the mages of Re Albi, briefly captures Tenar and Ged and humiliates them before nearly murdering them, showing an irrational hatred of them and what they represent. He fears Tenar because she does not conform to his ideas of womanhood; she represents freedom from the oppression of the men of the island. In addition to her dealings with the child who is suspected of using magic, she also lives with a man who is not her husband. It is significant that her lover is not just any man, but the former archmage, a man who was once celibate and the most powerful man in Earthsea. In addition, the mages know there is a power at work on Gont that might point the way to the new archmage, but would never consider

that a woman could hold a position of power: 'Evidently this is to guide us, show us the way, somehow, to our archmage,' the mage Windkey says, speaking of a prophecy (2001: 177). It is beyond their comprehension that the new archmage might actually be a woman, and the mages believe she can only direct them to a man, demonstrating their lack of respect for women.

The mages of Earthsea 'take on the roles...of medieval Christian priests' in a 'centrally managed heirarchy' (Comoletti and Drout, 2001: 114). Also, like priests, they are celibate and during their formative years of training must avoid all contact with women (ibid). Ged was at the head of this priesthood before losing his power. As Le Guin explains in an appendix to *Tales From Earthsea*:

> Witchery was restricted to women. All magic practiced by women was known as 'base craft' even when it included practices otherwise called 'high arts' such as healing, changing, etc ... They were forbidden to enter Roke school ... for more than three centuries, no woman taught or studied at the school on Roke. (2005: 279).

This is despite the fact that the school was founded by men and women together. On the celibacy of wizards, she says, 'The belief that a wizard must be celibate was unquestioned for so many centuries that it probably came to be a psychological fact' (2005: 279). Here we see similarities to church and state from our own history and the Western tradition that grounded Le Guin's earlier works. In these later books Le Guin demonstrates what this male-dominated system meant for Earthsea. The explanation of wizards as priests resonates deeply in the context of religious hierarchies; women are stilled barred from leadership positions in the Catholic Church and other religions. However, like the school of Roke, the Catholic Church in its earliest days saw women such as Mary in positions of power. The comparisons to this hierarchy are evident through Le Guin's wizards, all of whom are men, and who cling to their power despite any appeals to reason. In the world of *Tehanu*, wizards are careful to ignore female voices, and some want to kill women who can use magic.

Ged, the former mage, is in hiding from the wizards during most of *Tehanu*, since his power as a mage is gone – spent after trying to repair damage done by an evil mage who had ruined the balance between the living and dead. He can no longer perform even the simplest magic, and finds his way back to Tenar after his ordeal. Ged's loss of power is so

wrenching to him that he even says that he doesn't understand why he survived and implies that he wishes he were dead (2001: 103). Tenar and Ged live together as an unmarried couple and are the object of ridicule and targets of attacks by people on Gont, further demonstrating the harsh treatment of women in Earthsea. Tenar, the young girl who saved Ged from his entrapment and death in *The Tombs of Atuan*, now finds herself shielding this once-powerful archmage from the King, as well as mages who want to know his whereabouts.

Tenar's life is the center of *Tehanu*. She acts as a caretaker to both Therru and Ged, and as a widow who has lived alone after raising her two children, Apple and Spark, she is an example of an independent woman. When Spark returns from a sea voyage, he takes over the property and expects his mother to run the house, which she refuses to do; although she is powerless to stop Spark from taking the property, she decides to live on her own rather than become his housekeeper. Though she is able to free herself, it is again clear that the patriarchal system of Earthsea is an obstacle to women, who are not seen as men's equals.

The end of *Tehanu* sees the child Therru transform into someone capable of speaking with Dragons, the oldest and most mysterious of all the creatures in Earthsea. Her name is changed to Tehanu 'by the giver of names,' as Ged says of the dragon (2001: 279). She has saved Tenar and Ged from torture and death at the hands of the evil wizard Aspen by calling Kalessin, a dragon whom Ged calls 'Eldest.' The dragon is pleased that she has done so, saying to her, 'I had sought thee long' (2001: 277). Tehanu asks, 'Shall we go there now, where the others are, on the other wind,' but ultimately she decides to stay with Tenar and Ged, since they cannot accompany her (2001: 277). Tehanu is 'possessed of an enormous power for magery,' and this 'makes a powerful feminist political statement' (Comoletti and Drout, 2001: 128-129). Between Tenar's strength as a single woman who will not conform to Earthsea's expectations of her and Tehanu's magical power, we see that the women of Earthsea are far from powerless.

By the time she had written *Tehanu*, it was clear that Le Guin was re-imagining the structure of Earthsea, and the patriarchal system of the mages. As Littlefield notes, 'The wizards' inability to acknowledge or respect anything feminine is repeatedly shown in *Tehanu*' (1995: 252-253). By the time Le Guin wrote *The Other Wind* in 2001, more than three decades had passed since she published *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and the novel makes it clear that her thoughts on Earthsea are still

evolving. In *Tehanu*, she criticized the social structure of Earthsea, and in *The Other Wind* she continued this.

The Other Wind

In *The Other Wind* there is still no archmage, and no balance in Earthsea. The dragon Kalessin says that 'once we [dragons and humans] were one people,' and that 'long ago we chose. We chose freedom. Men chose the yoke.' (2003: 128). Later in the book the dragon Irian says to the mages:

> You own the earth, you own the sea. But we are fire of sunlight, we fly the wind! You wanted land to own. You wanted things to make and keep. And you have that...but you were not content with your share. You wanted not only your cares, but our freedom. (2003: 194).

Here we see a condemnation of the greed of wizards that has caused not only the imbalance between the sexes on Earthsea, but for the entire world. Rogue wizards, trying to cheat death, have caused the souls of the dead to become trapped in a netherworld, threatening the balance of Earthsea. Kalessin also says that 'Men in envy of us long ago stole half our realm...and made walls of spells to keep us out of it' (2003: 128). Only by striking a balance between the feminine and masculine can Earthsea be saved. The dragons are able to convince the all-male council of mages that they must repair the damage that has been done to the boundary of life and death (2003: 195). Without the help of Tehanu, the mages would not be able to make such a repair.

Tehanu is one of the few people born 'in every generation of men,' who 'is a dragon but in human form' (2003: 128). Once again, we see her centrality to the Earthsea cycle; maimed by her father, feared and hated in the patriarchal world of Earthsea, she is the only one with the power to redeem it in the end. It is also interesting that through all of this, Ged, the archmage and hero of the first three books, remains in the background, unable to wield magic. The wizards know that their time might be ending. The wizard Gamble says, 'What I fear ... is this: that when the dragons go, our mastery will go with them. Our art. Our magic.' (2003:199). Though the wizards are not enthusiastic about giving up their power, they can see that they must allow the balance of Earthsea – between male and female, and also between living and dead – to be restored, even if it means they are diminished. So there is a hopeful beginning even after centuries of oppression and imbalance.

Conclusion

Although the first books of the Earthsea cycle are coming of age stories, it is clear that as the novels progressed and as Le Guin revisited the world, her thoughts evolved and were influenced by feminism. *The Tombs of Atuan* is the story of a young girl's coming of age and shows 'feminist leanings' that Le Guin would later explore more fully (Littlefield, 1995: 245). The later novels, especially *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind* show the importance of the balance of the sexes, and represent a 'courageous feminist intervention' into the earlier books (Comoletti and Drout, 2001: 130). There are clear parallels to our world when one considers the role of women in the Earthsea books and the patriarchal mage structure. By revisiting Earthsea decades after she wrote the original novels, Le Guin criticised the male-dominated structure from a different perspective, and created an entirely new way of looking at Earthsea.

Outside of the world of Earthsea, Le Guin continues to explore ideas of gender. (Indeed, she may not be finished with Earthsea; in 1990 *Tehanu* was subtitled 'The Last Book of Earthsea', but she has come back to it, and perhaps readers will see more of this world in the years to come.) Le Guin's most recent novel, *Lavinia*, returns to some of the ideas in the later Earthsea books. This novel is the story of the *Aeneid* told from the point of view of Lavinia, the daughter of the King of Latium and the wife of Aeneas, who is mentioned only in passing in the *Aeneid*. *Lavinia* is a powerful and ambitious work, and a bold reimagining of this male-dominated tale. Though the book is historical fiction, Le Guin adapts the story to a woman's point of view. Though at first Lavinia seems powerless and is told she must marry her cousin, the arrogant and brash Turnus, she instead chooses Aeneas for her husband, and grows to love him deeply. Telling this familiar, classical tale through the eyes of Lavinia is a brilliant stroke, and one that allows the reader to reimagine the founding of Rome as a woman might have seen it. There are some echoes in the novel to Earthsea as well. Lavinia, like Tenar, decides to marry, and her choice has serious consequences, though they are not just personal, but political. Like Tenar, Lavinia's destiny is at the whim of powerful men, but she resists their force to make her own choice. Lavinia's refusal of Turnus and choice of Aeneas is important to her people, since Aeneas goes on to found Rome, and without her, her people might have been destroyed. Here again, as in Earthsea, we see the importance of the balance of the sexes. In retelling this story, Le Guin is again undertaking a kind of intervention into a male-centred past, this time into an ancient story originally told by a man.

Le Guin's fiction, like her ideas on gender and on Earthsea, evidently continues to evolve as time goes on.

Note

1. Le Guin wrote about gender in other fiction as well, including *The Dispossessed* (1974), though less explicitly than in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which gender is the main focus of the work. Mario Klarer has written that *The Dispossessed* 'predates the very core of much current feminist thought and practice' (Klarer, 1992:108).

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