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TRAUMA, PROVERBS, AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN LE GUIN'S *ANNALS OF  
THE WESTERN SHORE*

By  
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To the Graduate Faculty:

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Figure 1. (Page 3) A schematic diagram of Foa and colleagues' integrated cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. Solid rectangles depict external events, and dashed-line rectangles depict representations in memory. From *Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for PTSD* (p. 78), by E. B. Foa and B. O. Rothbaum, 1998, New York: Guilford Press. Copyright 1998 by The Guilford Press.

## **Abstract**

Proverbs, marked by their figurative language, comparative structure, and disconnection from the established topic and pronoun choice of the surrounding text (but, in my usage, not necessarily by their frequency of occurrence), are used as part of Le Guin's narrative strategy in her *Annals of the Western Shore* series to illustrate occasions when a character, usually narrating a moment of trauma from his or her childhood, has developed compassion, gained insight, or extended kindness to the self or another by bridging that trauma with the development of a cognitive strategy through experience and then expressing it in language—the proverb. These proverbs, though seemingly trite out of context, are deeply meaningful when understood as embedded in, and even holding together, the fabric of a character's life and the threads of Le Guin's narrative, and work in tandem with fantastic elements in the story to illustrate its moral and aesthetic vision.

## 1. Introduction

Moral development in Ursula K. Le Guin's later work, especially the *Annals of the Western Shore* series, is marked by proverbs, which are discernable by their distinctive break from ordinary pronoun use, a move to third person narration, figurative language, and rhythm. These proverbs are formally appropriate to mark moral development for several reasons: first, because they move to third person, revealing an invitation to interact with the proverb at a similar remove from the speaker; second, they use figurative language, which George Lakoff has shown to be applicable to many situations; and third, they require an imaginative leap on the part of the reader parallel to the creative leap taken by the speaker of the proverb (in this case, the character speaking or narrating when the proverb arises). They reveal that moral development, being defined by movement toward depth, clarity, and compassion of vision, or what Marek Oziewicz might call spiritual movement, has taken place, and thus they allow the reader to join in the insight. One key feature is that proverbs provide compassionate insight into the source of the dissonance that spawned a new point of view (for example, recognizing "a god I do not know" from *Four Ways to Forgiveness*). Perhaps most clearly in Le Guin's short story "Buffalo Gals," but also in *The Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Lavinia*, and *Annals of the Western Shore*, moral development begins with a lacuna, or a hole. Whether that hole is an absence or a wound, and whether it is caused by a specific circumstance, by conflict within or adherence to a culture or language, or whether yet it is simply discovered within the heart, its discovery/ creation



constitutes a trauma, and thus a new perspective; a new paradigm has the opportunity to form, anchoring the process of moral development.

## **2. About *Annals of the Western Shore***

In my thesis, I'm interested in how characters deal with traumatic events. I'm investigating the *Chronicles of the Western Shore* series, by Ursula K. Le Guin, author of the *Earthsea* cycle and *Catwings*. *The Chronicles of the Western Shore* are more recent books of hers, and open to critical inquiry, as are many others of her more recent pieces (her older works, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the first three books of the *Earthsea* cycle being solidly within the realm of classic and extensively critically investigated fantastic literature). To give a brief biography, Le Guin herself, now in her mid-eighties, started out life as the daughter of anthropologists and so is understandably interested in how cultures and beliefs affect the psyche, and often uses them as an effective backdrop (if not foreground) for her literature. The fantastic elements function not only as effective metaphors but also as doorways to understanding ways of being. Rather than considering science fiction as a popular genre, she considers practitioners of it to be working with a "broader reality." Perhaps, as James Bittner writes, this involves moving "from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious—symbol and archetype" (Bittner, 17). Much of her writing alludes to these methods, including the forward to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, elements of the *Earthsea* sequence, *The Telling*, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, which is Le Guin's rendition of the Daodejing, and many others.

The three *Annals of the Western Shore*, *Gifts*, *Voices*, and *Powers* respectively, the focus of this study, are all subtly fantastic. All three are interested in character development, memory, detail, use of power, and identity. All might well be called

"coming of age" stories, in which an older narrator begins the book talking about his or her younger self, the memories of childhood, pertinent moments of growth, and what makes them who they are today. What makes my job easier is that the older narrator, though often in a round-about way, points out what was important by the way the story is told. I track some of the strategies they use to signal what I have been calling moral development, meaning by that honesty, freedom within the self, clear sightedness, and compassion for others (probably among other things). So far, I have found that moments of tangible moral development are often signaled by use of figurative language, a narrator much older than the focal character, an absence of pronouns connecting the proverb to surrounding sentences, and a structure either involving metaphor or formal definition. These narrative choices signal the way that moral development has happened for each character in response to trauma: sometimes it occurs as a gestalt insight after collecting and percolating through experiences, sometimes it occurs as an intrusion which must either be rejected or accepted. Particularly salient is the compelling way her characters move past internal ruptures that they initially want to reject, which are usually traumatic experiences for the character, like rebellion against a loved one like Orrec, unwanted compassion for an enemy like Memer, or socially unacceptable inclination like Gavir, rather than getting stuck and never changing. All of these characters manage to transcend the pain and weakness in their lives creatively, one through writing and story-telling, the other through epic.

I have found that the character's own commentary about his or her actions is the most fruitful ground for proverbs and the best place to trace the moral

development that precedes them. When a character's outlook and insight are reformed in such a way that balance and compassion are sustained, moral development has taken place. For example, Orrec Caspro, the narrator of *Gifts*, talks often about his relationship with his father, especially in the context of the traditional passing of the knowledge of how to use a gift of the lineage, that is, a gift inherited within a particular family, perhaps genetically. Periodically, Orrec's father, Canoc Caspro, takes him through a series of ritual questions and answers that encompass the gravity and meaning of using the gift, and also outline the procedure. Early on, Orrec tells us of his father "Obeying him was a difficult, intense pleasure. His satisfaction was my reward" (*Gifts*, 18). Though this story is told only once, such remarks make it clear that these words are a consistent part of young Orrec's life, including interspersed phrases like "I hoped he would stop, but that was no longer where these questions stopped" (19), which shows continuity with the past, but also current development of the ritual. With this kind of consistency established, the later rupture is quite clear, and the narrative strategies revealing the thoughts of the young Orrec, and of Narrator Orrec, reveal, at least partially, the kind of movements taking place internally. It reads, "A flint stone and a steel blade may lie side by side for years, quiet as can be, but strike them together and the spark leaps. Rebellion is an instant thing, immediate, a spark, a fire" (105), and the paragraph ends there. There are several elements which distinguish this paragraph from its surrounding context, among them the subject of knives and fire; a shift to figurative language, *a* knife rather than a *particular* knife; a sense of parallelism; the trochees "flint knife" and "steel blade"; the repetition at the end, "a spark, a fire"; an unasked-for

definition, “rebellion is an instant thing” (105); and some difficulty identifying the speaker as young Orrec or Narrator Orrec, perhaps bordering on 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient. In her famous address to women students at Cambridge, Virginia Woolf, with her tongue in her cheek, describes the first duty of a lecturer as “to hand you after an hour’s discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever (“A Room of One’s Own” 1). This is about as close as we are ever going to get.

If asked, Young Orrec might have said that he had no rebellion in him, only sweetly hard-won obedience. However, here something else is revealed, and explained. Young Orrec treasured his obedience, unaware of the sleeping rebellion which shocked young Orrec and his father, however, by time the book is written, Narrator Orrec has likely encountered rebellion many times, both in himself and in others. This proverb marks the break in young Orrec when he acts contrary to who he understands himself to be, causing a fracture in his self-schema, which eventually leads to Narrator Orrec’s mature understanding of his own nature and his thoughts on the nature of rebellion.

### 3. Review of Le Guin's Work and Criticism

Ursula K. Le Guin's literary career has been quite multifaceted; she is most famous in academic communities for *The Left Hand of Darkness* and her Earthsea series, but most famous in elementary schools for her *Catwings* series. In addition to these, she has published numerous novels, poems, and children's books, which receive much less critical attention than her works of science fiction, fantasy, and critical essays. The list so far is impressive enough, but is not quite thorough: historical fiction, short stories, personal essays, performance pieces, writing guides, translations, and screenplays ought to be included. She began publishing in the mid 1960's with *Planet of Exile* and *Rocannon's World*, both science fiction, and continues writing and publishing up to the modern day; her most recent publications are *Finding My Elegy*, a collection of poems, and *The Unreal and the Real: Selected Stories*.

Though she writes mostly in genres that have until recently been on the margins of literary studies, she is considered by many to be one of the major contemporary American writers, and has been the recipient of numerous awards for her speculative fiction and for her contributions to the field of science fiction and fantasy. Her father, Alfred L. Kroeber, was an anthropologist who studied Native American cultures and individuals, and for whom the line between research and friendship was more than blurred. Her mother, Theodora Kroeber, was a respected children's author. Le Guin completed most of a Ph. D. in French Literature, and though she is not intimidated by scholars, prefers to think of herself as a writer rather than an academic.

Critics of her science fiction and fantasy, not to mention Le Guin herself, have pointed out influences from Native American mythology and from ancient writings of the Far East (especially Daodejing and the *I Ching*, the latter of which she considers one of her wise aunties, alongside the Oxford English Dictionary (“Things Not Actually Present” 38)), though she has also commented that she considers herself a western writer (perhaps with a sidelong glance at the map (“I am a Woman Writer; I am a Western Writer: Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin,” 200)). These seemingly incongruous influences have provided Le Guin with plenty of material to track in several different directions, seemingly at once, though her work consistently values (and perhaps encourages) compassion and balance as primary virtues.

Le Guin’s first major works, and perhaps still her most famous, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* came out in 1968 and 1969 respectively; as Donna R. White describes, each started a conversation within criticism that still continues today. Le Guin took part in the conversation and controversy surrounding *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and it has famously had an influence on her later work. Though she initially defended her work in *Left Hand* against feminist critics who found the experiment wanting, she later revised her thoughts on gender, and, though still defends the work, the revision has influenced her more recent writing, especially *Tehanu* and the following *Earthsea* narratives.

Donna R. White’s *Dancing with Dragons*, which chronicles the critical conversations had about and with Le Guin’s work, records how the conversation surrounding Le Guin’s science fiction and fantasy began and developed. Discussion

of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin's first book to attract a great deal of attention, began with Eleanor Cameron's talk "High Fantasy: *A Wizard of Earthsea*" delivered at the New England Round Table of Children's Librarians, and also published in *Horn Book Magazine* (11-12). Further scholarly work appeared on the Earthsea series after the next two books, *Tombs of Atuan* and *The Farthest Shore* were published; critical interest on what was at that time the Earthsea Trilogy blossomed in the 1970's, starting with George Slusser's *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin*, which dealt with the series as a unified whole (rather than a developing one), and focused on the Daodejing as a primary influence and unifying principle. T.A. Shippey's "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy" is the next major work of criticism to come along; it treats the series as a progression which begins by the establishment of the rules of a fictional world and "moves further into gloom and closer to familiar reality" (White, 22), by which he means recent American history. White notes that Shippey's interests in Le Guin's work run towards modern anthropology rather than the influences of Jung or the Daodejing. White notes that "Shippey concludes that the trilogy is a parable about modern life and that the parables are summed up in the gnomic statements of the mages, such as "To light a candle is to cast a shadow," (22) as I discuss earlier.

Though Mike Cadden's specialty is in children's literature, his book *Ursula K. Le Guin: Beyond Genre* includes all of Le Guin's fictional genres, and is interested in "Le Guin's lines of vision—not so much the lines that divide, but those that connect her work" (xii). His work takes the form of a compilation of essays, a couple of them revised from previous printings, and so constitutes a series of critical appreciations



rather than a single argument. Included in those essays are “Le Guin’s Continuum of Anthropomorphism,” “Connecting Characters on the Continuum of Viewpoint,” “Home as Travel Through Time and Place,” “Earthsea: Crossover Series of Multiple Continua,” “*Always Coming Home*: Childhood, Children’s Stories, and the Child Reader,” “Ethics and the Continuum of Hope: Genre and Audience,” and “An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin.”

I have suggested that one of the ways that proverbs are marked is that, though they appear in a particular context, they tend not to contain) internal cues about the surrounding context. Cadden devotes a chapter to Le Guin’s use of narrative strategy, and points out how it illuminates connections between characters, and the ways in which it creates or prevents connections between readers and characters. For example, Cadden points out that neither Dr. Haber, from *Lathe of Heaven*, nor Don Davidson from *The Word for World is Forest*, is a particularly sympathetic character; the former is an egotistical (though well-meaning) dream specialist, the other, as Cadden says, is “almost a caricature of a testosterone-laden military officer” (22). However, when focalizing through these characters, Le Guin uses free indirect discourse to increase audience connection by increasing their proximity to the narrator and thus their authority. Cadden points out how intentional Le Guin is about her narrative strategies. In support of this claim, though Cadden does not mention it, she writes extensively about point of view in her work on writing *Steering the Craft* and in various other essays.

Marek Oziwicz’ interest in science fiction and fantasy, and in Le Guin in particular, is demonstrated in his *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy*

*Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeline L'Engle and Orson Scott Card*, in which Oziewicz grapples with the didactic goals of much speculative literature, and attempts to demonstrate the world-forming, myth-building aspects of it. Oziewicz notes the strong ideological convictions often present in fantastic literature and takes seriously the effort to pursue answers to the essential questions of human existence (5-6). In his section on Le Guin, he looks particularly at the Taoist influence in Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle.

In this section, titled "Rediscovering Harmony: Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* Sequence (1964-2001)," Oziewicz suggests that the primary way that the Tao has influenced Le Guin, and the primary way that Le Guin's works offer strong ideological convictions, is that they cast ideas of balance and harmony, rather than singular success, as foundational to human experience. Many critics have attempted to trace direct links between the Tao and Le Guin's work, Oziewicz notes that Le Guin's "kind of lifelong interest must have translated into Le Guin's writing, demonstrating just how it marks its presence is a complicated issue" (120). This influence has implications for how power is ethically used and the way characters are developed in Le Guin's novels. As Oziewicz notices, the Tao as a philosophy prefers and agriculture and low structure to more traditionally Western values often associated with Christianity, which Oziewicz describes as preferring strong hierarchies and mechanization.

#### 4. Critical Approaches to Le Guin's Fiction

Marek Oziewicz, drawing on many theorists, critics, and writers from the fields of children's literature and science/fiction fantasy, advocates for a definition of science fiction and fantasy writing as mythopoeic, which he lays out in terms of characteristics of the literature and of the function of the work. The first is a relatively long list, but includes such characteristics as having a *bildungsroman* type structure with two currents, one "human beings on their own against a hostile, godless world of chance" and the other "human beings as the instrument of a higher power which will see them through to the realization of its objectives." Other elements include ending in some sort of *eucatastrophe*, a human being or at least a being whose psychology is human among the cast of characters; characters who are sympathetic because of their mix of virtues and vices, like greatness and everydayness; a setting in a secondary world with rules different than ours; themes that have to do with "a conceptual interest in human actions transplanted to the world of numinous demands," that is, with the moral quality of a life that "is not lived, mythopoeic fantasists suggest, for the sake of it, but for achieving human fulfillment"; and language that asserts "a basic unity of life," often taking the form of a fictionally ancient language of making, the prime example being Tolkien's invented languages (84-90). Along with this description of elements, Oziewicz argues for a more holistic if somewhat nebulous understanding of mythopoeic literature and the forces within it.

Central to Oziewicz's definition of mythopoeic literature is that each work, perhaps each author, projects an identifiable worldview that has its roots in

spirituality, by which he means an intuitive (but ontologically dense) sense of what ought to be, of what the rightness of the world is. In Oziewicz's words "fantasy is a cognitive strategy innate to human mind, a worldview and a way of conceptualizing our experience of the world which assumes the existence of the supernatural" (19). Because fantastic literature is for Oziewicz rooted in worldview, he advocates a holistic model with which to address it. The worldview in each work is the "felt background" (40) behind interpretive work when the work is dealt with on its own terms (37)<sup>1</sup>. Oziewicz contrasts holistic criticism and reductionist criticism, finding that

the basic division between these two approaches is that for the holistic critic *humans are essentially spiritual beings* and their activities—especially imaginative creations such as those of literature—reflect human spiritual longings as well as the depth of their connection to their spiritual nature. For the reductionist, by contrast, *humans are creative beings* and their activities reflect just that—creativity and inventiveness—but do not point to any extra-sensual reality or a person's spiritual self. By the same token, for the holistic critic human life is a search for meaning defined especially by transcendence, whereas for a reductionist it is a search for meaning defined primarily by our relation to material culture: race, gender, social position, and so on. (33)

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<sup>1</sup> One wonders if Stephen Toulmin's concept of warrants might be useful in addressing felt background in order to describe a worldview.

Oziewicz goes on to say that

One of the major differences between holistic and reductionist critics is that the former acknowledge a mode of knowing things intuitively, complementary to but not less important than scientific cognition. This mode, holists assert, has been neglected by our civilization in most areas of life but can be recovered in and through stories of a special kind. The importance of literature written in this mode is that reading it awakens the mechanisms of the use of this intuitive, or poetic, mode of knowledge. Poetic knowledge and fantasy as a worldview which presupposes the existence of the supernatural overlap in that it is through poetic knowledge that the supernatural is sensed as real though impossible to prove [...] And it is under this assumption about human beings as being able to intuitively, and correctly, grasp reality that holistic critics have been in search of poetic knowledge. (52-53)

Oziewicz' definition of fantastic literature as mythopoeic and his inclusion of spirituality allows for an appreciation and inclusion of what might otherwise be troubling in fantastic literature. For example, some of Lewis's evangelistic tendencies in *The Chronicles of Narnia* which have troubled reductionist critics can be appreciated as a part of the worldview inherent to the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Using Oziewicz' framework, holistic critics can freely discuss the touching and transcendent spiritual aspects of the worldview regardless of the critic's personal convictions or experience with Christianity.

Oziewicz has gone out of his way to be as thorough as possible in his definitions as he lays the groundwork for his theories; his definition of a spiritual element may initially sound foggy, but I think it is helpful in that the concept allows critics to talk about what is insightful about works of science fiction or fantasy even when it is not related to the skill of the author as a writer, as in the case of Lewis' assertions about George MacDonald, or the face-value of the worldview of the work in the eyes of the reader. It does have limitations in that it does not lay the groundwork for how one might discuss the spiritual value of various works, but it does carve space to talk about, if not compare, intuitively grasped ideas related to the nature of human beings (whatever form they may take in fantastic literature).

Oziewicz's definition of spirituality is interesting and offers a tendency towards what I mean by morality, by moral development, but Brene Brown's wholehearted living offers a more specific and more developed definition of what Oziewicz might call spiritual actions would look like outside of fiction, and therefore what drives them within fiction. Oziewicz' theories advance the ways in which we can talk about transcendence and moral development in fantastic literature, and leave intact our confidence in our compassionate moral instincts and our ability to address insights in fantastic literature that advance a particular worldview, or way of being human.

In another approach, Bittner, in his *Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin*, argues that Le Guin's work tends to follow a romantic pattern, beginning with a seemingly whole world where a crisis or difficulty is discovered, resulting in the necessity of a heroic journey. Though Le Guin consistently resists the notion of a

monolithic hero, I agree with Bittner that the journey from destructive discord towards wholeness and balance fits the romantic pattern as described by Northrop Frye; that, whether internal or external, even if anarchistic, even if fragmented, constitutes real spiritual movement in the Oziewiczian sense, and fits with a romantic arc.

As Bittner notes,

Because Le Guin's heroes are responsible for creating the need for the journey and for making the journey themselves, her romances have a strong ethical dimension. (*Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin*, 10)

Bittner also notes, quoting Hume, that

like the ego which must venture into the unconscious and struggle there with "all manner of powers,...all extra-rational and not regulated by reason or logic (132), the romance hero must enter upon enchanted ground and face ordeals more extreme and more terrible than anything he has experienced in this normal world. (10)

The connection of loss with development, with moral progress, has long been discussed by critics as a part of the sense of balance present in Le Guin's work. Even early on, for example in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin brings out the balance inherent in progress. Cadden points out that, along with balance, progress toward a single goal is fraught, and the concept of "center" needs to be addressed carefully, writing "So too in Le Guin's dynamic, dialogic fiction, the center is dynamic,

mediation between sites from a particular perspective" (*Ursula K. Le Guin: Beyond Genre*, 51).

To Cadden's observation, Bittner adds an understanding of dialectic to his criticism of Le Guin's work, and also the German concept of *aufgehoben* (17) which he defines as "three things simultaneously: negate, absorb, and transcend" (16).

Bittner goes on to point out the uniquely placed power of romance as a genre in terms of its dialectic qualities. He suggests that the way to

resolve the contradictions between identity and alienation, in their interrelated individual and social forms, is to resolve them into a synthesis in which the old horizons that had separated one world from another are *transcended* as they are *negated* by means of an *absorption* of one into the other at the moment that what had been forgotten or repressed or alienated or excluded from consciousness is recognized as part of the whole self. This is the telos of the completed romance quest. When Ged and his Shadow say each other's names *at the same time* and embrace each other, the horizons between them are *aufgehoben*. (17)

Bittner points out that the recognizing of the alien in the self, and the acceptance of it as both alien and self, then the synthesis of both into a deeper, broader, and clearer perspective constitutes moral development in Le Guin's work, and completes the hero quest. I find that the bridges between alien and known self are often marked by a proverb or proverb-like statement: somewhat removed from immediate circumstances by the distance of a metaphor, yet with the insightfulness



and intimacy of an anecdote, like Barry Toelken says “as a cultural norm, with all the authority, antiquity, and stability of that category” (*Dynamics of Folklore* 136).

So, as Bittner says

the completed romance quest, then, is pre-eminently a tool for dealienating alienation; it is the mediation by which, in dialectical terminology, we negate the negation. The “natural” and “appropriate” language for this, said Le Guin in a lecture presented at the Library of Congress, is fantasy. (17)

In a fantastic world, leaps of this kind can still be made and are often made in ways we would recognize in our daily lives, with language, or insight; but perhaps just as often these leaps are made with the aid of something a little out of the ordinary, like a magic sword, ancient incantation, sacred stone, or special ability. These elements stand in similar ways to proverbs: their disconnection to initial assumptions about the fictional world, and their broad applicability to that world once known. These elements are often described vividly, even figuratively, and often form metaphors for other themes in the text.

Bittner writes

Unlike realism, romance does not *affirm* or *confirm* the self-sufficiency of the author’s environment by trying to mirror it. Instead, romance *estranges* (and science fiction cognitively estranges) the apparently self-sufficient identity or world by re-presenting its complementary alienation or its complementary other world (21)

So, the fantastic elements of the fictional world fit well with the basic way romance works, in estranging in order to clarify, and with the way proverbs work, commenting from a distance in order to offer wisdom in a way that can be understood and processed by the hearers. Bittner continues

When estrangement is carried through its dialectical synthesis, normal and strange, identity and alienation, are seen as they really are, interrelated and complementary parts of a whole. Literalization of metaphor is a method science fiction uses to do this. We go on quests to alien worlds in order to recover-discover our native world.

(21)

I make the argument that we go on quests not only to recover-discover our native world, but also to recover-discover our native self. Gavir leaves the world in which he grows up as a slave to discover his own freedom, Memer leaves her world of resentment to recover her larger community, and Orrec leaves his attachment to his family's gift of unmaking to discover his own gift of making. All three of these characters comment on their experience from the remove of many years, but also from a distance in terms of discourse by using proverbs.

Orrec's literal and figurative self-blinding is a good example, and the gifts of the lineages are perhaps better examples. The gift of the Caspro lineage, the unmaking, also unties knots, and other gifts, like the dagger, can be used to remove splinters. Gry and Orrec wonder about this paradigm shift in *Gifts* and *Voices*—seeing gifts as beneficial social binders rather than as oppressive technologies.

What's unique about paradigm shifts in Le Guin leading to moral development is that, as Bittner notes with the horizons, the pre-shift way of seeing does not necessarily become discounted. Rather, it becomes part of a new way of seeing, and allows for additional depth perception as a part of each character's moral vision, both as it relates to how the character interacts with his or her world, and in terms of how he or she understands their own identity. As Bittner observes,

No less than the rocks in her landscapes, Le Guin's characters are "in the process of making themselves." Neither reality nor ethics is handed to them on adamantine tablets (though some of them may think they are); whole cultures as well as individuals dissolve and reconstitute themselves as they change and grow. This happens repeatedly in her science fiction. (38)

This is true throughout Le Guin's canon, but it is especially true in Le Guin's *Annals of the Western Shore*. Each of these characters is in flux in the story; in classic *bildungsroman* fashion, they begin as young people, and work through the process of working through issues in themselves and in their culture as they develop toward adulthood.

In terms of *how* this development works, Bittner writes

It is important to understand that the moment of vision in the romance is the culminating event in a story that unfolds in time. Rather than speaking of romance's dualistic images and polarizing forces we should instead conceive of the romance as a dialectical process. Two boxers squaring off, one wearing white trunks and the

other black, is not dialectical. A dialectical process begins when an initial element (thesis) creates out of its own contradictions an inverted image of itself (antithesis). The conflict and opposition between thesis and antithesis are resolved into a synthesis, a resolution which can be denoted best by the untranslatable German word *aufheben*, which means three things simultaneously: negate, absorb, and transcend. Good and evil, friend and enemy, helper and harmer, idyllic and demotic—these are not eternally separate and conflicting opposites or dualities; rather, they are *compliments*, related parts of a coherent whole. Each exists *only* by virtue of being the inverted or negated counterpart of the other. (Bittner 15, 16)

As with many works of literature, the complexity of the dialectic process must be foregrounded. In *Annals of the Western Shore*, Le Guin's each character narrates his or her own story, but not as straight monologs, one person performing in a vacuum, but as internal reports with many threads: they share with the reader the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of motives, actions, and words as they find their place in the world in which they live. The schemas prior to trauma (thesis) attempt to process experiences outside their purview (antithesis), which creates initial disharmony and disconnection, but which, once the gap is bridged, are synthesized into a morally broader and deeper perspective (synthesis). A prime example of this is Orrec's rebellion. He cannot explain it, and was not aware of it as a part of himself until reacted in rebellion. That act of rebellion, his own action, functions as a thorn in his side and as a harm to his community until he is able to synthesize it as a part

of himself, becoming an author, thus offering back a part of himself to the world, and synthesizing himself as a part of its present and history.

I do not mean to say that Le Guin's characters discover these things about themselves, the thesis, antithesis, or synthesis, apart from the place they live, the people they live with, and the language which they speak. Orrec discovers joy in obedience as a response to his father, and his rebellion the same way: neither exist in the vacuum of Orrec's mind. Gavir's life is profoundly influenced by his origins as a marsh dweller, and by his upbringing as a slave and a scholar, yet he is faced with his own ignorance as the result of trauma and loss. Memer Galva begins life at the crux of two cultures, one can see thesis and antithesis in their attitude to the written word (though neither culture is simple enough to be only a thesis or antithesis), and though she grows up in the midst of both, and quite literally as the product of both, she suppresses one and indulges the other. This is a difficult case; for those of us who are readers, the culture of the iconoclastic Alds might sound purge-worthy. However, Orrec Caspro, with great political acumen, draws out the antithesis hidden within that culture, the widespread respect for recitation. And, along with the leniency of the chief Ald, the process of the muddling of these two cultures and the growth of a city together could begin.

Bakhtin's concept of dual-voiced utterances is also helpful here: anytime a narrator represents dialogue from another character, they do so for a narrative purpose of their own: thus the utterance has two voices, the intention of the original speaker, and the intention of the narrator. To expand the idea, when a character suffers trauma, the disruption of schema and subsequent fragmentation may cause

the narrator to have more than just one intention. This concept offers an opportunity for readers to re-examine narrated stories, and draws attention to utterances that might offer insight into that fragmentation, especially those utterances that might be able to bridge it. Because proverbs are capable of many applications, they sometimes unite fragmented voices within a trauma sufferer: the differing internal voices speak the same thing at the same time in a proverb, even if they do not quite mean the same thing by it. In that way, the fragmentation caused by a traumatic event is transcended: a connection which can bridge the gap between pre-trauma records and post-trauma records is formed. As a result, the sufferer of trauma can now speak coherently from both (or even multiple) perspectives at once; perhaps this phenomenon is one of the things that makes Le Guin's characters so complex. When proverbs are spoken in dialogic voice, the practice incorporates something like the subversive use of proverbs noted by Helen Yitah. Just like the women who use traditional proverbs to question the status quo, the proverbs Le Guin's characters use to bridge the spaces between fragments created by trauma revealing at once the chaos, or liminality, of a mental space and the structure now holding it together.

The injuries sustained by Le Guin's characters, whether physical, communal, or psychological, are troubling not only because of the injuries in and of themselves, but because they reveal a previously invisible internal conflict: manifesting in incomplete or inaccurate self and/or world schema. In order to negotiate the fragmentation created by trauma, these characters, through proverbs, find ways to let conflicting fragments of the self speak at the same time, even if what's being said

is different. Proverbs are uniquely suited to this task, because, as codified nuggets of collected and condensed wisdom, they create the assumption of more than one set of contexts; in other words, they imply at least two sets of circumstances at once. At the very least, the speaker's present situation and the inherited norms of the society, but also the speaker's conscious understanding of his or her circumstances, and the somewhat different and often unconscious inner self, typically comprised of more varied ideas, observations, opinions, and desires than those of which the speaker is aware. For example, young Orrec does not know why he feels rebellious, and does not know what to do about it. The experienced Narrator Orrec has access to collected experience, and so can name the experience, and tell the story of it in a way listeners are likely to understand.

Moral development, the growth of a compassionate imagination, is often central to the plot of Le Guin's novels. It's the seemingly bland fortune-cookie moral that one might pull out at the end of the book, yet not valuable without it. It is hard-earned in the story of the character's life. When a character's vision is expanded, that clarity extends outward to circumstances around him or her, and inward, to failures or triumphs within the character's memory records and psyche. And just as one must break the cookie to get to the fortune, the expanded vision is likely the result of a crack in something that appeared whole: an experience that results in broken schema. The result of some form of trauma, revealing a hollow place where a proverb must be either found or created to bridge the gap, which, if left open, is sometimes an even greater disruption to a character's normal operations, and a cause of later trauma.

## 5. Imagining Moral Development—A Cognitive Psychological Approach

One of the psychological explanations of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is that it is a result of a memory or memories which cannot be integrated with the rest of the system, a person's existing self and world schemas. If the traumatic experience cannot be processed, it remains fragmentary. Thus, whenever some stimulus reminds the sufferer of the traumatic event is encountered and the brain tries to access that memory, the fragmentation may corrupt or even take over sensory information. One of the goals of cognitive therapy is to create pathways through the memory in order to allow the sufferer to make his or her way through the memory successfully when encountering reminders in day-to-day life. It is my opinion that the proverbs in Le Guin's book are evidence of the formation of cognitive pathways through traumatic memory, and of successful reintegration of ruptured schemas. Le Guin captures moral development through short statements that function as points, which, connected, allow the reader to trace the progress of moral development in her characters. These proverbs are marked by a shift to third-person narration, and typically lack a direct connection to the plot and immediate details of the scene in the surrounding text. The character's recognition of the injury from without within, the realization of truth, begins to organize a liminal space, which must be further developed through compassion before the injured character can grow beyond, and thus transcend, the trauma.

In order to illustrate the multidimensional nature of moral development, I offer the following meditation: Imagine a blackboard. A blank blackboard. A *tabula rasa*. Imagine two points drawn. The space between those two points I will call a



liminal space, a doorway between possibilities. Across this space, a line can be drawn between the points. Imagine someone drawing such a line. Now imagine a third point on the black board, a triangle, a fourth, a square, and so-on, infinite points forming a circle. The liminal space is different, more inclusive. Now imagine a point outside the square. To incorporate it, imagine a spiral, like a nautilus shell; a point begins at the center, and the line continues to spiral outward, the points getting farther and farther apart. The liminal space is expanding. Now imagine a point three inches in front of the blackboard, and the line leaps to meet it. Imagine now a cube of slate, with points drawn on the inside. Someone connecting the points must now walk through the stone.

My exercise in imagining moral development captures some of the kind of leaps in dimensionality made by moral development, and I think successfully interrogates some aspects of the plane, the tracing, and the tracer, but is not designed to be used as a model to trace specific moral development pathways. As I did my research, it seemed to me that I needed a map specifically designed to help chart such developments. E. B. Foa and B. O Rothbaum published just such a diagram in their article “Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for PTSD.”

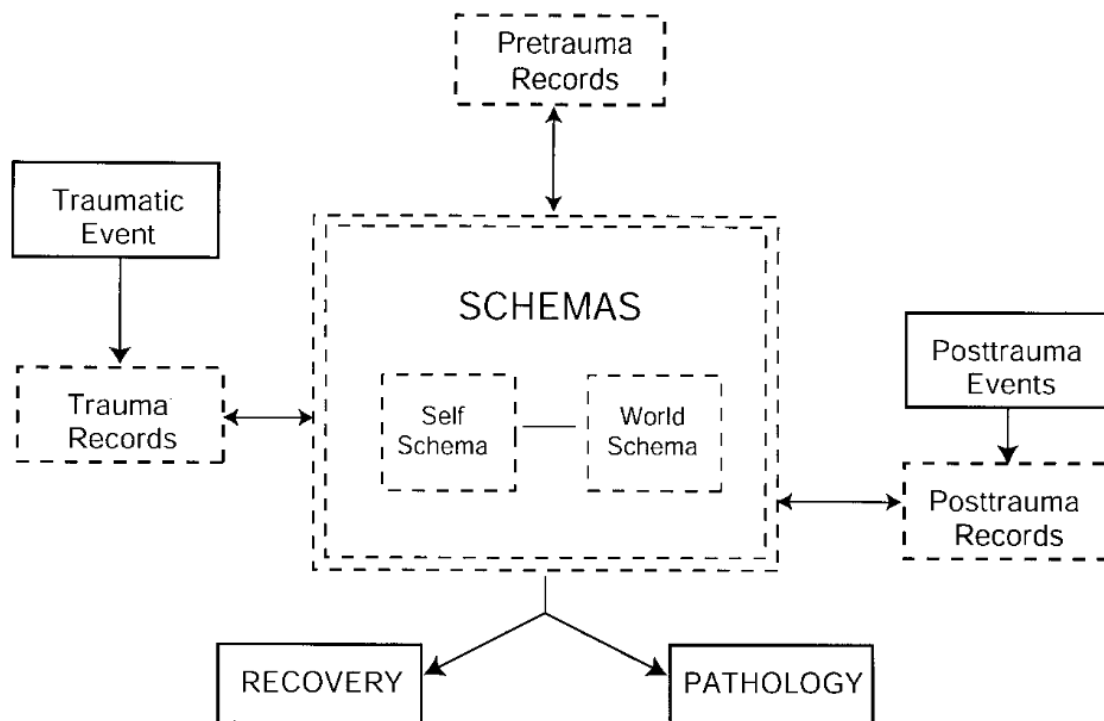


Figure 1. A schematic diagram of Foa and colleagues' integrated cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. Solid rectangles depict external events, and dashed-line rectangles depict representations in memory. From *Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for PTSD* (p. 78), by E. B. Foa and B. O. Rothbaum, 1998, New York: Guilford Press. Copyright 1998 by the Guilford Press.

Models of cognitive processing developed through trauma studies offer a theoretical structure for thinking about how cultural and personal experience is processed, and so allowing us to trace the path of moral development through that process. Though there are several models for describing these frameworks, I find the recent model articulated by E. B. Foa and his colleagues, and represented in the above chart, to combine the best of the schematic and network models.

The schematic models are based on the theory of the cognitive schema (a proverb can represent such a schema as the tip of an iceberg represents an iceberg—it implies a much larger and deeper anchor). Schemas are formed over time as societies and individuals recognize the similarities and regularities of experience. Trauma disrupts these schemas, since they tend to resist quick changes. Therefore, the trauma is difficult to incorporate into them. Network models, on the other hand, are based on the pattern of response to an individual traumatic experience, and subsequent attempts to track the connections within the process (Dagleish, 232-235; 236-240; 244-247 respectively).

In Foa's model, there are three main kinds of mental representation: memory records, the pattern of response to an individual experience; schemas, which are frameworks for processing sensory data; and post-traumatic reactions to the self and others, which stem from the schemas of the individual and involve the formation of new memory records (Dagleish, 244-245). This model accounts for how traumatic events, not to mention other sensory information, is processed so that the subject can, over time, construct a coherent view of the world. It also

accounts for the ways in which disruption of the process of forming schemas, or the disruption of processing information through schemas, can result either in successful integration of information and rebuilding of schemas, or disruption of the working of the schemas structures, temporarily or permanently.

This diagram, though helpful, is lacking in that it can portray movement in only two dimensions, across a flat surface. I find this diagram even more helpful when a three dimensional and richly textured landscape is imagined beneath the diagram. The boxes attempt to faithfully represent, in map form, the landscape beneath them. To advance the metaphor, both the landscapes and their representations can be affected by ongoing events, like weather, earthquakes, and meteor showers. The boxes are what is thought and what is perceived, while landscape represents the events which the map organizes. The more closely the schema reflects what is below it, the fewer disruptions occur, at least under peaceful geological and meteorological conditions. Let's assume it takes some kind of disruption to detect a discrepancy: say, someone looking at the map for a creek and finding it dry, or expecting a pass and finding it blocked. This discrepancy between map and landscape requires a leap of creativity, first to find one's way to the destination, and second to re-write the map more accurately. So, moral development, at least in terms of the ability to see clearly and cheerfully resolve disagreeable circumstances, requires and creates liminal space. When traumatic events occur, I posit that these are like points outside the blackboard, in previously uncharted territory, or like a wrongly-labeled point on the map, in miss-charted territory. A leap is required to extend to that point outside the blackboard in order

to include it within the framework of schema, or to re-assign current markers on the map. In terms of internal workings, this requires an extension of self; an imaginative leap. Perhaps this is why science fiction lends itself so well to that task; leaps are already being made.

Layers of internal dimensionality, a requirement for moral vision, are created by the opening of an internal eye, the leap to a new point, a tear in the fabric of the universe. Reaching these new points of view is often related to meditation on an experience, slowly building out to the point, but sometimes coming all at once, in one realization, or sometimes coming by force, in a traumatic experience.

In the interest of structure, let me lay out what I have observed in terms of the stages of moral development in Le Guin's *Annals of the Western Shore*. First, an eye is opened when characters must see themselves or their world in a new light: moral development begins with truth. The second step has to do with not just the fact of sight, but with how one sees. Acceptance, compassion, and balance are central here. Third, once compassion is in place, another move can be made—trust. In *Powers*, the breaking of trust is the primary cause for trauma, and the keeping of trust with others is the primary sign of maturity, while in *Gifts* and *Voices*, the characters learn to trust their inner voices.

## 6. Proverbs and Folklore

Proverbs and sayings have long been a part of research and scholarship in folklore studies. In *The Study of American Folklore*, Jan Brunvand offers a summary of how various kinds of proverbs and sayings have been defined and addressed by folklorists, and how the field has developed in the modern period. In his initial definition, which draws on previous work on proverbs by Archer Taylor and Alan Dundes, Brunvand begins by offering three criteria for identifying proverbs, then goes on to discuss various kinds of proverbs and proverb-like sayings within that category. The three criteria for proverbs are that it must be a “popular *saying* in a relatively *fixed form* which is, or has been, in *oral circulation*” (74, emphasis original). He lays out several different kinds of proverb, including true proverbs, proverbial phrases, and Wellerisms, but different classifications abound (75-78). The true proverb, as Brunvand defines it, is “always a complete sentence, varies slightly in form, and usually expresses some general truth or wisdom” (75). He uses examples like “haste makes waste” and “live and let live” (75). Proverbial phrases are not complete sentences, and they often express ideas in terms of metaphor, while proverbial comparisons, like “go like blazes,” employ like or as. Wellerisms, another kind of proverb, attribute a generalized bit of wisdom to a usually humorous specific context, Brunvand uses the example “‘It won’t be long now’ as the monkey said when he backed into the electric fan” (77). Aside from these four categories, Brunvand lumps all other kinds of proverbs into a catch-all miscellaneous proverbial sayings category, which he says “seem to be innumerable”(77) but mentions insults, retorts, and wisecracks (or slam sayings),

interrogatives, euphemisms, national and ethnic slurs, and author and title pairings, as prominent groups (77).

As Brunvard begins to discuss how to analyze and research proverbs, he notes the broad variation in their forms and source material, and suggests that they may offer an entry point into a better understanding of the culture in which they originate or in which they are preserved. Proverbs spring from almost every aspect of life: beliefs, observations, prejudices, et cetera, as well as from many kinds of professional or folk knowledge, such as medicine, sailing, weather forecasting, or farming. Yet another source of proverb is the quotation, or rather misquotation, of famous passages in literature, some of which are attributed to folkloric characters like Adam or Hercules. This observation is especially helpful for the proverbs found in Memer's and Gavir's narratives, which are far more often adaptations from scholarly quotation than original expressions based on reflection. Brunvard notes that the quotations are often *misquotations*, unlike those in *Voices* and *Powers*, and that they are almost always unattributed, again unlike the ones found in Le Guin's writing (or so we assume).

Yet another angle of approaching proverbs Brunvard discusses is that of Alan Dundes, which utilizes "folkloristic structure," in which the relationship of the topic to the comment is primary in determining its meaning and usage (83). For example, he uses the example "Boys will be boys" (83) to illustrate an A (topic) = B (comment) structure, while the example "One swallow does not make a summer" (83) illustrates an A  $\neq$  B structure. These structures can be very complex or very simple. This type of structural analysis is similar to Lakoff and Turner's hypothesis,

which sees the proverb as a species of metaphor, and deals with imagistic expressions: “as the twig is bent, so grows the tree” (Bradbury 265). This theory focuses on the chain of reasoning from the first part of the proverb to the second, and the process of applying the derived principle to a new context. These proverbs connect to a series of extended metaphors already present in the mind and are mapped onto given situations using a series of decision trees; especially important in this setting are a comparison to a body of practical knowledge gained through experience or instruction, and a tendency to practice verbal economy (266-7).

The Honeck thesis treats proverbs as “problems that require solutions, rather than poems that require interpretation” (269). Honeck’s formal definition is rather involved, reading

A proverb can be regarded as a discourse deviant, relatively concrete, present (nonpast) tense statement that uses characteristic linguistic markers to arouse cognitive ideals that serve to categorize topics in order to make a pragmatic point about them. (270)

Nancy M. Bradbury helps decode it in the following way: discourse deviant means that it does not follow typical rules, and is marked in some distinct way from the rest of the discourse. Honeck notes that proverbs often contain implicit assumptions about how the world ought to be; this tendency towards an ‘ought’ is what Honeck means by cognitive ideals. Bradbury notes that Honeck’s example, “not every oyster contains a pearl,” draws attention to the discrepancies between what the proverb treats as ideal, pearls galore, and the reality of scarcity. Honeck observes that proverbs can sometimes be “freestanding bits of practical philosophy”



(269), and as such, need not be imagistic. Honeck notes that relevance to context, especially lack thereof, is often the primary marker for proverbs (270). Honeck writes, “the proverb functions as a miniature theory: it is generative, it can be applied to an infinite number of new situations, and, once applied, it transforms the situation” (270).

In Bradbury’s study of how Chaucer uses proverbs in *The Canterbury Tales*, she devises this description of a proverb: “for Chaucer, a proverb seems to have been a saying, of any origin, worth repeating because it serves as a guide to action, deliberation, or understanding” (277). Though rather general, this is similar Roger Abrahams’s comment, quoted by Brunvard: “The strategy of the proverb [...] is to direct by appearing to clarify; this is engineered by simplifying the problem and resorting to traditional folk wisdom” (84). Both of these observations are getting at the practical function of proverbs: a specific use as a guide, a suggestion, or as a way from one idea to another. The proverbs that Le Guin’s characters use draw the reader from one idea to another, making a culturally appropriate way for the character to comment on his/her own experience, and allow the reader an angle on an otherwise indescribable revelation.

In yet another approach to studying proverbs, in *The Dynamics of Folklore*, Barre Toelken discusses an occasion when a Polish proverb arose unexpectedly at a party, and he offers some observations and suggestions regarding how we might understand and interpret proverbs in context. His example frames the discussion well: an enigmatic Polish phrase is uttered by an irate wife at an in-the-way husband, which, translated, means “a husband in the kitchen is like a boil in the

anus" (134). Without knowing the meaning of the phrase in Polish, the husband duly and happily leaves the kitchen, figuring he will find out what it means later.

Toelken's meditation on this event draws out several points which help to frame proverb interpretation. First, "Proverbs usually come forth in response to a situation when one person has to offer culturally appropriate advice to another person (in Europe and America, usually a friend or relative)" (134). Second,

it is always the situation that brings up the context for what advice seems to be needed, and situations in life differ considerably, as we know. We might advise one person here to leap and another person there to hesitate. But since the proverb allows phrasing the advice in a culturally recognized form, it comes out not as our own personal opinion (which might be thought intrusive anyway) but as a cultural norm, with all the authority, antiquity, and stability of that category.

(136)

Third, proverbs are always part of a larger performance of some kind, and the accompanying gestures, volume, and circumstances are all highly relevant. For example, the husband, who did not speak Polish, did not need to know the meaning of the words to understand what the other cues were telling him.

These various definitions of proverbs are all trying to get at something about these utterances which are so familiar, yet so difficult to categorize. They feel familiar, yet have distinctive discourse markers; they are relatively fixed, yet they change constantly; many of them have similar structures, but there are always outliers; most importantly, they provide a cognitive tool for action: a compact bridge

from one idea to another, a little piece of schema that helps thinking beings to navigate as they go about their business. This stabilizing but not centralizing kind of growth goes hand in hand with Le Guin's deep respect for the Tao, and her consistent "anarchy," favoring folk movements, women's movements, inclusive movements, over exclusive, centralized, authoritative masculine ones.

## 7. Becoming-art, Deleuze and Gautari

This notion brings up questions about how these little pieces change over time to build new perspectives, which brings us to becoming-art, a concept originally sparked by Deleuze and Gautari's discussion of trauma in *Anti-Oedipus*, developed as a critical strategy by Tom O'Connor in "Trauma and Becoming-Art in Gregg Araki's *Mysterious Skin* and Asia Argento's *The Heart is Deceitful above All Things*." According to O'Connor, because becoming-art is "a consciousness-transforming, problem solving operation," rather than a "fantasy or illusion" (54). It is useful for "analyzing the significance as well as overcoming the effects of trauma" (54). It is difficult to precisely pin down the parameters of becoming-art in Deleuze, but O'Connor clarifies and applies it as a process in which the fantastic<sup>2</sup> effects of trauma are molded into "productive narratives of becoming" (O'Connor, 54).

According to O'Connor, "Deleuze defines becoming-art as the ability to push the powers of the "false" (or the creative potentials of the imagination) to a "degree which is realized, not in form, but in transformation" (O'Connor, 55-6, quoting Deleuze's book *Cinema 2*, 146), a process that, as O'Connor explains, Deleuze calls transcendental empiricism; a process that "creates ever-new circuits between our actual and virtual possibilities" (56). Becoming-art is "a generative power that allows one to exist within a never-ending process of creative engagement with (and in affirmation of) the world's non-ideal forces" (64). O'Connor suggests that becoming-art ought to render traumatic events rewritable (68).

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<sup>2</sup> Fantastic in the sense that reality is altered.

O'Connor treats Deleuze's concept of becoming-animal as a species of becoming-art, defining it as "not 'regressions, but creative involutions bearing witness to 'an inhumanity immediately experienced in the body as such'" (Deleuze and Gautari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 273; italics original)" (63). These inhumanities experienced within the body, and the necessity of bearing witness to them, sounds very much like trauma, and the need to bear witness fits well creatively with cognitive approaches to assimilating traumatic memories, and to beginning moral development with the recognition of truth. Though Deleuze, and Le Guin, for that matter, are likely to resist a top-down assimilation, the kind of grassroots assimilation that is typical of rhizomatic growth is likely to appeal to both authors; it constructs a complex yet minimally hierarchical whole from what was once fragmentary.

As O'Connor points out, internal connection via creativity need not be fictionalization, but rather a reaching of the imagination, that is, the inner eye, to encompass another point of view; we often call this compassion. This internal compassion is necessary when bridging divergent voices within a self to assimilate trauma, ultimately allowing for inner wholeness despite inner conflict. This maturity is often the result of healing from trauma, whereas failure to grow results in what we call pathology—a persistent enslaving immaturity.

As O'Connor describes Deleuze and Gautarri's main points as he understands them, he writes "Nietzsche and Rank's description of this molecular un/conscious as an artistic or creative will allows one to become "a free and joyous person, [as well as] a carrier of life flows" (*Anti-Oedipus* 331)" (58). A molecular world sounds

something like a healed fragmented memory or self, atoms bound together by insubstantial forces to form new stable compounds, and this un/conscious sounds much like the landscape metaphor I add to Foa's diagram—it has depth, living flows, and organic changes, just as Nietzsche and Rank's description demands.

Becomings generally are the connections within and among rhizomatic structures. Deleuze and Guatarri, and perhaps Le Guin, prefer grass roots, rhizomatic growth patterns to taproot growth patterns. Rhizomes, e.g. most grasses, ginger, and irises, predominantly grow by putting out underground stems (rhizomes) which grow a new plant, rather than via seed. Many rhizomes form a mat of root and rhizome in which individual plants become enmeshed with each other. Rhizomes grow horizontally and, though there is a pattern to their growth, it is constantly diverging and never uniform. Deleuze describes mutual influence of different parts of the world as becomings, for example, when a wasp and an orchid evolve in a symbiotic way, the orchid undergoes a "becoming-wasp" and the wasp undergoes a "becoming-orchid." Thus, a becoming, for Deleuze, is at least the bridging of a gap where form is developed rhizomatically, and mutual life is sustained.

In Le Guin, traumatic situations offer points of reference for compelling counter-readings of individuals and cultures; in this way, they offer a new eye. Through what O'Connor describes as becoming-art, in which the traumatic experience and pre-trauma records are revised, traumatized characters have the opportunity to extend in a rhizomatic growth pattern, rather than in a top-down structure, to include the trauma. This kind of grassroots growth has multiple

dimensions: up and down, out, around, under, though. These are the kinds of movements necessary to reach from a point on a blackboard to a point three inches in front of it. This inclusion of new points of perspective allow experiential depth perception, or parallax ability, while still allowing older points of perspective to remain relevant. Multiple perspectives allow for multidimensional depth perception. Once complete, this kind of growth can allow for compassionate interaction with one's self and others. This dense, enmeshed, grassroots understanding is respected as developed morality, and the active use of the liberated support and stability it offers, in Le Guin, and it is often through traumatic circumstances that this quality is achieved.

Trauma is, by nature, fragmentary and difficult to incorporate. Rather than trying to impose a more comforting narrative over trauma, or allowing it to wreak havoc with existing schemas, connecting fragments caused by trauma via rhizomatic connections allows the trauma and the existing schema to speak for themselves, and still allow for continued developing life rather than soul-destroying chaos. Allowing her characters to use existing and new knowledge to frame a parable to enmesh internal fragments forms the basis of moral development.

## **8. Fantastic Elements, Cognitive Psychology, Moral Development, and Proverbs in *Annals of the Western Shore***

The *Annals of the Western Shore*, *Gifts*, *Voices*, and *Powers*, are sparkling stories very much in the vein of Le Guin's other work. Not as obviously fantastic as *A Wizard of Earthsea* or *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and more closely resembling *Tehanu*, they focus primarily on daily experience, but still have magic hiding in elements like memory, reading, and intention. The known geographical world is only the western shore of a continent, with cold steppes and moors in the north, a desert to the east, and warm, Mediterranean lands on the coast. Though legends say the first people came from across the desert, what is known is primarily local: house, city, and neighboring cities. Though there are variations in accent, the nations and cities speak the same language, one based on an ancient language called Aritan.

These three stories also have similarities in terms of how they are told. All three are written by an older version of the focal character. For example, *Gifts* is focalized through a young Orrec Caspro, but throughout the narrative there are interjections from an older Orrec, who knows what comes next, and is at least several years removed from the latest scene in the novel, which is when he decides to leave the Uplands for Derris Water. Likewise, in *Voices*, a 26- or so year old Memer Galva narrates the shape her early life, the advent of Gry Barre and Orrec Caspro, the Ansul revolution, and finally Memer's decision to go with Gry and Orrec to Urdile when they are ready to leave. Likewise, *Powers* begins with an older Gavir narrating his earliest memories, as a slave with his sister, and of his visions of the



future, through his growing up and the story of how he came to run away from his masters, through several countries and tribes, until he finally comes to bring himself and a child to Gry, Orrec, and Memer in Urdile. Unlike the other two, Gavir's narrative ends when he decides to stay.

All three of these narratives fit Bittner's explanation of romance, and of *bildungsroman*: each is a coming of age story in which the focal character must come to terms with a part of his or her identity, experience, and place in the world. To draw on Oziwicz' work, the way these three characters work through difficult elements in their lives has spiritual meaning, it is intuitively sensed by the reader as good and true, and it has resounding implications in the fictional and fantastic world within the novel. Though these characters work through many complex issues, to summarize briefly: Orrec must choose the gift he has rather than the gift that is expected of him; the gift of his mother's rather than his father's lineage. To do this, he has to give up the life he has known on the steppes, and his inherited responsibilities to protect his clan. For a while, he accepts artificial blindness to create the illusion that he possesses the gift of his lineage, and to fulfill the expectations of his father and clan.

Memer Galva is born as a child of rape and as the heir of a great house. She grows up with a deep hatred of the oppressor, and a fierce loyalty to her mother's house, gods, and traditions. She makes two vows as a child: to hate and drive out the Alds, and never to tell anyone about the books hidden in the oracle room. In order to enter her own destiny, she must break both vows, accepting her Ald half, welcoming the formerly oppressive Alds as part of her democratic city and

government, and choosing to love more people than just those who suffered oppression with her.

Gavir begins life as a captured slave in an aristocratic house very much like one might find in ancient Rome. His family was from the marsh people, but he does not remember that time. He begins his journey with an educated slave-mindset, but moves through the loss of his sister and escape from his owners, the fracturing and healing of his memory, through the village where his mother was born, and after many travels, to become a free man to study in Urdile with Memer, Orrec, and Gry, bringing a child he rescued from abuse with him.

These three books also share the centrality of creative language. In *Gifts*, Orrec loves his mother's stories, and even though he lives in a culture where only he, his mother, and his best friend Gry know how to read, he is eventually set free by reading the stories she wrote down for him, and recognizing his gift of telling and creating stories in retelling them to Gry. Memer begins life writing before knowing what writing is. She draws the word 'open' in a certain place, and a door opens to the Oracle room. Under the Alds, the written word is forbidden, and the only safe place for books in the city of Ansul is in the Oracle room in the house of Galva. When Orrec Caspro is invited to tell stories by an unusually liberal Ald leader, and with the blessing of Lero, god of Ansul, it sparks a (mostly) peaceful revolution, a re-awakening of the Oracle in the house of Galva, and cements Memer's calling as an Oracle reader and scholar. Gavir's lot in life is to be trained as a tutor-slave, so he is taught to memorize the epics, history, philosophy, and poetry of the City States, and of the House of Arca in particular. Once his sister is murdered by Torm and Hoby,

one of the nobles of the house of Arca and his bodyguard respectively, both of whom grew up with Sallo and Gavir, and his trust betrayed, he walks out of his life as a slave and into the wilderness—losing his memory. He is restored to himself slowly by reciting the epics he memorized as a slave, though at first he hardly remembers where they come from. In all three of these stories, individual calling is bound up with narrative and poetry, and self-actualization with the art of words.

The fantastic element in each of these three books also bears discussion. In the Uplands, where *Gifts* takes place, each family has a ‘gift’, passed down by blood. The gift can be strong or weak, and is kept in the family by careful marriages. The Caspro gift functions through a gesture, pointing with the left hand, and a word, though it might be a nonsense word, and it might be different every time. The Caspro family has the gift of Unmaking, which undoes the bones and organs of living things, but also unties knots. Gry, Orrec’s best friend and future wife is from the Barre clan, which has the gift of the Call, which allows her to speak to and perhaps control animals. Traditionally, the highest form of that gift is to call to the hunt, but Gry refuses to call an animal to its death. Neighboring families have the gift of the knife, or the gift of slow wasting. These gifts keep the families separated and afraid of one another. Each guards their power closely, though the land is so harsh that the heads of families hardly eat better than the serfs. In *Voices*, the house of Galva is known as the Oracle house. There is a spring at the very back of a dark hallway in the Oracle room, where, legend has it, the first people to cross the desert read the words ‘here stay,’ and they stayed. Since then, the post of reader of the Oracle has been passed down in the Galva line, and Memer inherits that post. The Oracle bears

some resemblance to the Old Powers of the Earth from the *Earthsea* sequence: it seems to inhabit a particular place, is dark and frightening though not evil, but seems more benevolent in action and more interested in humanity than did its *Earthsea* counterpart. Memer also speaks for the Oracle, though she is not always comfortable doing so. Initially, she is uncomfortable being used, but comes to speak confidently with both her own voice and the Oracle voice at once. The gods of Ansul also form a fantastic element in *Voices*. The ritual worship, touching of lintels, daily offerings at little shrines, are reminiscent of Ancient Rome, or perhaps some Buddhist practices. These gods have representation in everyday things: leaves, meal, balanced stones, deafness, but also have animal forms, like horses, or cats. The day Gry and Orrec arrive is, according to Memer, a day of Lero, where everything is balanced just right, whereas the day before the revolution is a day of Ennu, a day of preparation in waiting. The souls of ancestors also form part of the pantheon, and it can be argued that both Memer's mother and father make appearances in dreams. Though the gods never speak directly, their patterns in *Voices* come across as more than just coincidence.

In *Powers*, the main fantastic element comes through what Gavir calls his 'memory'; it's just that sometimes he remembers things that haven't happened yet, like snow in Etra, or a dark room, or coming up a flight of stairs. So, as time goes on, he has several memories, the memory of his first and subsequent rememberings, the actual event, and the memory of both after that. His people, the marsh people, often have this gift in childhood, and a few have it in adult hood, but most lose it. Gifted women are not acknowledged culturally; however, Gavir's grandmother has the gift,

and continues to use it despite the cultural taboo. Gavir's gift provides interesting vignettes throughout the narration of his early life, and a sense of completion when he encounters one in the chaos his life becomes when he loses all of his memories. I think an argument can be made for a second fantastic element, and it is the curse that pursues him. Gavir grows up with a fellow slave, Hoby, who is a slave, but also a son of the Father of the house. It is Hoby and Torm who kill his sister, Sallo. After Gavir escapes, and word that he is still alive makes its way back to Etra, Hoby pursues Gavir in order to kill him, or bring him back to slavery. In order to escape, he must cross two bodies of water, a method consistent with breaking the power of the so called witches of the Uplands.

These fantastic elements, though far less central than some of Le Guin's early work, still contribute to the dynamics and meaning of these novels in important ways. One could say that they take a backseat to the day-in-and-day-out running of households, finding, growing, or cooking of food, and other daily tasks, which are represented very much as we know them, or might have known them in our history. These are of primary importance in these books, and are as full of interest, detail, energy, and thought as are the fantastic elements.

In her review of the series, Jo Walton notes that *Powers* was, in some ways, an atypical book to win the Nebula award partially because it is the third in the series, and makes an argument for it as the capstone to the other two, because

In Gavir's experience of life as a slave we get to re-examine Orrec and Memer's experiences as heirs to their domains and question what

they do not question—but we get to do it at our own speed and in the context of wanting to know what happens next.

She points out that Orrec and Memer are both heirs to their houses, while Gavir's experience as a slave rounds out perspective. In contrast, Gavir is the only one of the three to have an unmixed lineage. Both of his birth parents were from the same village in the southern swamps, while Memer is half Ald half Ansulian, and Orrec is half Uplander and half Bendraman. (Tor.com)

The first sentence of *Gifts*, though not a proverb, references the saying “born with a silver spoon in his/her mouth,” and also forms a paradox, which is typical of proverbs and words of wisdom. It reads, “He was lost when he came to us, and I fear the silver spoons he stole from us didn’t save him when he ran away and went up into the high domains. Yet in the end the lost man, the runaway man was our guide” (1). This first sentence, beginning right in the middle, without the reader having knowledge of who is speaking, or who took the silver spoons, or to what group “our” refers. The narrator of *Gifts*, Orrec Caspro, has the gift of making stories, of talking, of creative language, and he consistently shows his fondness for figurative language and paradoxes as he narrates his own story. Like the other two in the series, this book is written as if it might be a memoir, in first person, but long after the events took place. This runaway man who is their guide has only this brief part in the book; it begins with his conversation with a sixteen year old Orrec and Gry, but the narrative quickly moves backward in time to when Orrec is around three years old, and their conversation with Emmon doesn’t resume until some 230 pages later. All three of the novels in this series share the tendency to begin in the middle, then

move backward and forward in time, with some comments from the narrator at the farthest forward. For example, the adult Orrec, at some unknown point in time, writes, “It was in April that we left, and I will leave our story there, on the south road down through the hills,” signaling an even later time of writing than the last scene. Gérard Genette would call this a form of prolepsis and consider its contribution to the work in terms of the complexity and infiniteness of the novel, but it also functions to connect scenes thematically rather than temporally, and contributes to the rhythm of the narrative, moving back and forth like a shuttle in a loom.

Timing aside, Emmon was Orrec’s and Gry’s guide because he gives them a good book, and tells them how they could make it in the lowlands, with Gry training horses, and Orrec telling stories, weather blind or sighted. Narrator Orrec frames Emmon’s departure with a proverb: “If you take in a thief, you expect to lose something. You don’t know what you may gain” (248), bringing together two seemingly contradictory qualities in Emmon as a giver and a taker. The proverb also reveals a moment of balance—something is lost; something gained. And Orrec did gain a great deal: an audience, a book, some helpful tips, the seeds of a dream. And, like Emmon, one might say Orrec’s literature was stolen: albeit gained through stolen glances rather than light fingers. I imagine this proverb might arise from Orrec’s discovery of the supposed dishonorable side of life providing great insight, for example a thief who stole money can also provide great guidance, and the son of the lineage who is unable to protect his own house with his gift is nonetheless able to succor many strangers with his gift of poetry. In a way, one might say that Emmon’s gift of the *Transformations* and his instructions for living in the Lowlands

was like what Gry calls “the gift’s gift” (274); he used his gift of thievery, yet left something to foster connection in loss.

I would be remiss if I didn’t talk about Gry. She’s as much of a main character as Orrec, often, like her personality, manifesting her strength in absence, in listening, than by her presence. Yet, nonetheless she’s at the heart of the story; she makes decisions and manifests talents no less marvelous than Orrec’s, and in *Voices*, Gry, rather than Orrec, is Memer’s initial focus: Gry is the one who first meets Memer in the streets of Ansul, she’s the one who invites Memer to come when Orrec recites for the Alds, and also the one who suggests that she come to study with them in Urdile. We never hear from her as the narrator; nonetheless her quiet strength suffuses scenes when she is present. She has the gift of sensing and calling animals, and in some ways, communicating with them, yet she refuses to use that gift in the way that her culture and family value it most: to call wild animals to be killed by hunting lords. She has the wisdom of common sense, and tends to cut through even the densest confusion whether with a vernacular or an academic register; her default register is a practical one, referencing every-day kitchen, farm, and household work, but during the first dinner in the house of Galva, she draws on an academic register to cut through some kinds of posturing. She does, however, suffer her own losses, which we learn about in *Voices* and *Powers*. She and Orrec have lost a child, named after Orrec’s mother Melle, early on in their marriage, and are never able to have children after that. She first takes in Memer Galva as a student, and as more than a student, and later Gavir, the narrator of *Powers*, and Melle, an abused slave child Orrec rescues from a dilapidated village. Gry doesn’t see her gift as being one of



language; in fact, when women are first pregnant she can communicate with the fetus, but not after they gain more brain development. However, it certainly is one of communication, and connection. Her moral development may not be manifest in proverbs within the narrative, but I think it's apparent that she chooses vulnerability as Brene Brown defines it: she allows people into her wounds, and loves them there. Like Memer. Like Melle. Like Orrec.

I have made the argument that moral development often arises out of a discovery of an internal disorder, something the discoverer does not like about him or herself, and does not wish to discover. Orrec's discovery has to do with rebellion and anger, particularly against his father, Canoc Caspro. I have already used the first proper proverb in *Gifts* as an example, but the first clear proverb that is not a quotation or a saying to appear in *Gifts* is "A flint stone and a steel blade may lie side by side for years, quiet as can be, but strike them together and the spark leaps. Rebellion is an instant thing, immediate, a spark, a fire" (105). This is not a saying I've ever heard, but it might as well be one. Any surprise waiting to happen, any gestalt, might well be described by Orrec's example of the flint stone, steel blade, and the spark. However, he also gives us an interpretation, the way that he came to personal knowledge of the immediacy of a reaction and his own anger in the face of "a very deep habit, a lifelong, unbroken custom" of obedience to his father (105). Like the Polish proverb from Toelken's story, narrator Orrec's introduction of this story with the proverb of his own coining helps us to understand what is going on in a very raw situation that might otherwise repel a reader. In terms of Bakhtin's dual-voiced utterance, it allows narrator Orrec to speak from his own voice of experience

as well as his young self's inexpressible emotion to be telegraphed to the reader, both with different perspectives. From the young Orrec's perspective, we have confusion and heat, from the narrator Orrec, we have understanding and wonder. In terms of Foa's model, Orrec has given us many pre-trauma records in terms of his early memories, though because they're memories none of them are untainted by the trauma of his own rebellion, or the other traumatic experiences of his life. In this case, it is his self-schema that is affected when the spark leaps. The young Orrec is thrown into chaos, but the narrator Orrec has reorganized his schema sufficiently to be able to include this event, and remember it and tell it wholeheartedly. For a while, this rebellion and his inability to display the gift of his lineage led to what Foa and his colleagues might call pathology, a self-enforced blindness, fear, and rage. However, his desire to remember his mother's stories, his love for language, and his joy in reading eventually allow him to use techniques like becoming-art to transcend his own shortcomings, the impotence of his gift, the loss of his mother, the loss of his father (who was unable to incorporate the trauma and guilt of Melle's death even before he died) and accept the loss of his community in all but memory, when he chooses to use his gift of creative language in a public forum in the lowlands, and chooses to leave the Uplands with Gry. All of this might not be directly held within the proverb "A flint stone and a steel blade may lie side by side for years, quiet as can be, but strike them together and the spark leaps" (105), but the rest of the story and the context of the speaking of the proverb show that this personal discovery, realization, and recognition must have been made. The growth that occurred between the traumatic event of Orrec's first rebellion and his ability to integrate the

trauma in a compassionate way, then communicate it creatively reveals moral development, and the readers sense intuitively that spiritual progress, in Oziewicz' sense of the word, has been made (121).

In fact, the way that gifts work, having common and benign uses but being driven to terrible ones, is a good metaphor for trauma, and for twisted growth through shame. The pre-trauma record would be the normal use of the gift. The traumatic experience comes through the misuse of a gift to cause harm, whether accidentally or intentionally. Pathology takes the form of the gift intentionally and repeatedly used to harm, and to garner power: the state of affairs in the Uplands. Some use their gift primarily to protect their people, like Canoc Caspro and Ternoc Rodd, but some, like Ogge Drumm, use it intentionally and repeatedly to gain wealth, power, and the fear of others. This practice enforces pathological schema of both self and world, that the self is an instrument of disconnective power to be wielded to enforce boundaries as dictated by ego, and the world revolves around maintaining the pathological uses of power, that the lineages exist to ensure the continued existence of the gift, rather than the gift to serve and to help those in need of help. When Orrec and Gry leave, they are rejecting this system, and choosing to engage in an unknown but, to them, already full and chaotic world of the Lowlands. In this place, using the gifts they have chosen, they must make a life for themselves, organizing what is for them a liminal space, and becoming part of a larger ecosystem of people, trade, languages, and cultures.

One way the gifts function in a healthy way is the cultural norm of the "gift's gift," a gift given from the user of the gift to the injured party whenever damage is

done. Canoc explains it to Orrec by saying “but if power is shown, a gift must be offered. That is important” and young Orrec rephrases less formally “It’s important, if you show your power, to offer a gift too” (25). This sense is similar to one of the Gethenian cultural proverbs from *The Left Hand of Darkness*, that building a bridge requires blood for the mortar (5), but instead, this one is reversed. When destruction occurs, an olive branch must be offered by the destroyer. This sense of balancing destruction and creation, loss and gain, holds true throughout Le Guin’s oeuvre, and has been often remarked upon by readers and critics. This sense holds true throughout the *Annals of the Western Shore*: a place must be made for new growth by trauma, and, like becoming-art, the new creativity is different than, but in some ways greater than, the trauma that gave it space.

In *Voices*, a great tension for Memer Galva, the narrator, is the occupation of her beloved city of Ansul, known for the great learning of its democratic citizens and university, by the iconoclastic Alds, who despise the written word, and drown books and anyone who owns or reads them. Her struggle with the Alds and with written words is not only in her city, but also in her body. Her mother, a respected daughter of the house of Galva, was raped by an Ald soldier during the initial raid, so Memer has the curly light-colored hair of an Ald and pale skin, rather than the dark slick hair and darker skin of the people of Ansul. She wears her dual heritage on her sleeve, though she firmly chooses her Galva heritage, and is a scholar by choice and by calling. The house of Galva is known as the Oracle House, and in the house of Galva, the Oracle is more often read than spoken.

In *Gifts*, the fantastic element was centered on the powers of a particular lineage, and in *Voices* it is similar. But Memer's gift, rather than something she chooses to use, is instead the gift of being used, spoken through, or directed by, an Oracle. The Oracle of the House of Galva is described in a way similar to the Old Powers of the Earth from the *Earthsea* Cycle, but less disinterested, and without the false worship that accompany them in *Earthsea*. The Oracle speaks in proverb-like utterances. They are proverb-like in that they seem to have little direct context, or perhaps many contexts, and many applications. For example, Memer is told the story of when the Oracle was asked "How should we defend ourselves from Sundraman?" (Sundraman being a neighboring nation, and the ruling power in Ansul until the Alds invaded), the Oracle answered "To keep bees from apple blossoms" (181). This message requires interpretation, and the counselors of the city do not understand how to apply this saying to their defensive strategy. However, the Oracle Reader at the time, Dano Galva, suggested that it ought to be read "to keep bees from apple blossoms is to have trees that bear no fruit" (182), a neat proverb, meaning that the city of Ansul ought not resist the nation of Sundraman, which "excellent neighbors, interfering with [Ansul] very little, but greatly enriching [it] with trade" (181). So, it ended up meaning something like "to defend ourselves from Sundraman is to keep bees from apple blossoms, and thus have trees that bear no fruit."

As I have mentioned, the gift of Memer's lineage is to be spoken through, or read through as the case may be, by the Oracle, as Memer is at the climax of *Voices*, but more frequently to read or read and interpret the Oracle's words written in the

Oracle books, or above the Oracle spring. One of the interesting things about the Oracle's moment speaking through Memer is that she herself is not quite sure of what happens. Sulter Galva miraculously walks tall to confront Iddor, the son of the Gand Iorath, who rules the Ald army stationed in Ansul, with a children's book, which, of course, he cannot read. Iddor, a cruel and ultraconservative Ald, is trying to pull off a coup, and comes to the house of Galva to complete his victory. She describes her experience this way:

And then there was a ringing in my ears. I cannot truly say what it was that I heard, nor can anyone who was there that morning, but it seemed to me that a voice cried out, a loud, strange voice that rang out all around us, over the forecourt where the fountain leapt, and rang echoing off the walls of Galvamand. Some way it was the book itself that cried out, and I think it was. Some say that it was I, that it was my voice. I know I read no words in that book—I could not see its pages. I don't know whose voice it was that cried out. I don't know that it was not mine. The words I heard were, *Let them set free!* But others heard other words. And some heard only the crashing of water of the fountain in the great silence of the crowd. What Iddor heard I don't know. (245-246)

Through the rest of the book, the words "Let them set free" and the words from the earlier oracle, "broken mend broken," come up again and again. They are remembered, re-applied, and re-interpreted throughout the process of the city Ansul and people of Ansul, as well as the Alds, arguably, regain their freedom.

The words “broken mend broken” come into this story as the result of a direct inquiry to the Oracle about how to be free of the Alds. Sulter Galva takes Memer deep into the Oracle room, to the spring at the very back, down a long and naturally occurring cave, to ask the wisdom of the oracle. If ever there was a metaphor for the dark side of knowledge, the description of that cave would be it. Sulter Galva asks the question this way:

Bless us and be blessed, spirits of the sacred place [...] We are Sulter Galva of your people and Memer Galva of your people. We come in trust, honoring the sacred, following truth as we are shown it. We come in ignorance, honoring knowledge, asking to know. We come into darkness for light and into silence for words and into fear for blessing. Spirits of this place who made my people welcome, I ask an answer to my question. Will a rebellion, now, against the Alds who hold our city, fail or prevail? (174)

Though this question is ultimately unanswered, the ritual prelude has many similarities to proverbs. Its use of imagery and paradox, like coming into darkness for light and silence for words, and even into fear for blessing, though that last is more abstract, use images applicable to many contexts to allude to reading and knowledge. The cultural formula also has the smell of a proverb about it, similar to the quotations throughout *Voices*. Rather than seeing the answer of the oracle in the mist above the spring, as the first Galvas read “Here Stay” (168), the Oracle more typically manifests by words appearing or changing in the Oracle books, where the words of the Oracle in times past have been written down, and where the words still

change often. Early in *Voices*, Memer describes hearing these books groan, and even seeing blood dripping out of some of the pages (29-30). Upon returning to the library, Sulter takes down the Oracle book for which Memer looks, and lets it fall open. He does not see anything written, but Memer reads the words “Broken mend broken” (177), and feels that what speaks was “not my voice at all but a deep, hollow, echoing sound swelling out all round my head” (177), a jarring experience, and though she turns to run, she can only go slowly, “like walking in a dream” (177). Regardless of the prelude or erudition of Sulter’s question, the Oracle is apparently asking the question as it appeared in Memer’s mind: “How can we be free of the Alds?” (179). In many ways, the description of how this oracle works parallels a scene of foretelling in *Left Hand of Darkness*, in which the answer is less important than the combination of the question, the asker, the witness(es), and even the darkness surrounding the reading event. It seems that there is a balance between the light of knowing and the darkness through which one must receive an answer. In *Wizard of Earthsea*, Ogion tells Ged “To light a candle is to cast a shadow” (22), and here it appears that to embrace shadow is to light a candle.

These moves all require great leaps on Memer’s part. She has long been afraid of the Oracle books, and must move past her initial fear, one might even say traumatic introduction to them, to bear her mantle as the heir to the house of Galva, which she has loved and chosen all her life. A second difficulty lies in wait for Memer, and that is the sense of another voice speaking through her. At first, she rejects this voice, saying, “I closed my mouth, I snapped my teeth shut on the thing that spoke through me, used me” (17). But eventually she makes peace with this



new voice, this new and unpredictable perspective inside her, with a proverb. When she asks about the history and value of the Oracle, Sulter explains the Oracle of the bees and apple blossoms, and also offers this proverb, “The nail’s hit once, the hammer a thousand times” (182), offering meaning for the pain and alienation often associated with such Oracular knowledge. Initially, Memer wishes for clarity, a yes-or-no answer, but upon reflection, comes to a different conclusion “The oracle was not giving orders but just the opposite: inviting thought. Asking us to bring thought to mystery. The result might not be very satisfactory, but it was probably the best we could do” (183). This musing of Memer’s is not too different from a description of the nature of proverbs in themselves. They offer few direct applications to a given situation, but each offers at least one way, and usually more, of thinking about a given situation or context. The value of each is in the perspective(s) it offers, and, as with the Polish proverb, the culturally appropriate invitation to grapple and express, offer advice, or opinion, in short, to discuss. In many ways, this makes sense of Le Guin’s off-hand suggestion that her works contain at best “fortune-cookie morals” (from her article “A Response to the Le Guin Issue (SFS #7)), that is, without a context, and abstracted from the physicality of language, short, fluffy, bland and inoffensive platitudes served as novelties; with all the weight and beauty of language, with the complexities and rhythms of narrative, they are proverbs that invite discussion, that offer an expanded perspective, something more like a Celtic labyrinth than like a shortcut. And similarly, this kind of utterance is much more like the I Ching as she describes it in “Things Not Actually Present” (included in *The Wave in the Mind*), which is made up of sayings that offer a perspective, a way of re-

visioning details, that can offer new avenues of thought, even if they seem non-sensical by themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Many more of the proverbs and near-proverbs in *Voices* are quotations of fictional texts from the books in the library in the house of Galva. For example, when describing Memer's mother hiding in the Oracle room and thus surviving the first invasion, only to die two years later during the siege, the Waylord Sulter Galva, Memer's teacher and relative, says, "Hard is the mercy of the gods" (26). Though this quotation does not have the figurative language typical of a proverb, it has many of the other characteristics. It might be argued that the first word, 'hard,' contributes some figurative qualities since it is used in the sense of difficult and in the sense of impenetrable and unyielding; a hard problem and a hard rock. It also applies well in many different situations, allowing a sense of gratitude as well as an admission of pain, and even potentially of ingratitude, depending on how the quotation would be applied, and is used in both ways by Sulter Galva. He acknowledges his gratitude for Memer's and Decalo's survival through Decalo's knowledge of the Oracle room, but also Memer's suffering at the loss of Decalo not long after, and of the city at the hands of the Alds. In true proverb fashion, Memer responds with another quotation, "True sacrifice is true heart's praise" (26), which also lacks the figurative language element, but conforms in much the same way as the former. Interestingly, both quotations are eight syllables long. This quotation offers another interpretation of events; rather than acknowledging the good and bad of a situation, and of the gods, it re-writes the circumstances, especially the painful

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<sup>3</sup> Paracitic, in Eco's sense of the word?

parts, as “true heart’s praise,” meaningful, and of great value. *Voices* is full of dueling quotations like this, between Memer and Sulter Galva, but also often involving Orrec Caspro from *Gifts*, who comes to Ansul as a visiting orator, using his memory rather than his books to tell stories: both his own, and those of the various peoples of the Western Shore.

Trading quotations is quite common to the dialogue of *Voices*, and though the trading is not as common in *Powers*, quotation is perhaps even more important there. For Gavir, a slave brought up to be a teacher, dramatic recitation rather than reading or composing is the central form of the art of words in his life.

*Powers* is easily the longest, and, perhaps, the most complex of the three books in the series. While *Gifts* and *Voices* take place all in the same region, if not the same buildings and places, the scene in *Powers* changes dramatically every chapter or two, from the house of Arca, to the farm in the hills, to the city of Etra under siege, to the shrine where historic documents are kept, to the slave graveyard, to Cuga’s cave, to the Forest Brother’s camp, to the Heart of the Forrest, to the Southern Swamps, and the city of Mesun in Urdile, not to mention all the roads, rivers, creeks, and forests in between. Though it may sound like a cliché, in each place, Gavir learns something new about the world, and about himself. He meets a completely new cast of characters in each place as well. Connections to the people of former places are rare, and important when they do occur. Similarly, what is known and not known in *Gifts* and *Voices* is more straightforward (though of course, not completely so). To oversimplify, Orrec moves from trying to use his gift, to being frustrated that he can’t, to thinking that he can’t control it and thus blinding

himself, to reading and finding that he doesn't destroy, to rejecting his former assertion that he can't control his gift. There is only one point of ambiguity, whether he does or does not have the gift of unmaking. Memer's story is similar. She perhaps has two points of ambiguity, and one is over very quickly. She starts out hating the Alds with all her anger, only to come to realize that they have to live together. She also starts out fearing the Oracle books, and distancing herself from them and her calling as an Oracle reader, but later accepts and wills that change. Gavir starts out not understanding his lineage, not understanding his gift, and being entirely blind about women and women's issues, but knowing all the history, poetry, and morality of the state in which he lives by heart, to willfully forgetting everything but his name when his trust is betrayed. He spends many chapters totally ignorant about himself and his past. Once he does remember, he spends even more time learning an entirely new culture and way of life in the Southern Swamps, and then passes in and out of consciousness as he undergoes training as a seer, not to mention the ambiguity present each time he has a "memory" of the future.

Gavir's aforementioned initial blindness to women's issues and slow recognition of them is one of the main themes of *Powers*. The mistreatment and death of his sister Sallo is forecast in their friend Sotur's fear, but Gavir misses it completely. He is shocked at the lack of response of the noble family members, even the Mother, who looks the other way and tries to pay Gavir for his suffering. While he lives in societies without women, in Cuga's cave and with the Forest Brothers, he can continue in his forgetfulness, but once he comes to live in the Heart of the Forest in Barna's house and to talk with Diero, Irad, and Melle, he has to come face to face

with his memories, and with the ways in which Sallo and the other women in Arcamand were left unprotected by the patriarchal culture, and how the same was happening to the women in Barna's camp despite the assertion that everyone in the Heart of the Forest was free. Gavir struggles with similar issues among his own people, the Siddoy of the Southern Swamp. The men and the women live in different halves of the same village. The women do a great deal more work, like farming and cooking, while much is made of the men's hunting and fishing, activities which provide less food. The men are not permitted to use furniture or to tell stories, while the women are not permitted to undergo initiation in professions or to talk about their foretelling gifts. Gavir leaves the swamps dissatisfied with this arrangement as well. However, it is because he had come to recognize the difficult place women occupy that he was able to save little Melle from crude sex-trafficking when he returns to Barna's destroyed camp.

Neither Memer Galva nor Orrec Caspro tells us to whom their narratives are addressed, but Gavir does. He writes

—But as I write this story now, for you, my dear wife, and anybody else who may want to read it, I find myself thinking the way I thought back then, twenty years ago, as a boy, as a slave. My memory brings me the past as if it were present, here, now, and I forget that there are things to explain, not only to you but maybe also to myself. Writing about our life in the House of Arcamand in the City State of Etra, I fall back into it and see it as I saw it then, from inside and from below, with nothing to compare it to, and as if it were the only way things

could possibly be. Children see the world that way. So do most slaves.

Freedom is largely a matter of seeing that there are alternatives.

(*Powers* 31)

This last sentence, “Freedom is largely a matter of seeing that there are alternatives,” has the flavor of a proverb. Though it does not use figurative language, it does not contain pronoun references to former sentences, and it is a general statement applicable to many situations. Appropriate to Gavir’s calling as a scholar and historian, this proverb takes the form of a definition, and is in the tradition of the second of Le Guin’s wise aunts from the essay “Things Not Actually Present.” He continues on from there to describe the power structure of Etra, and ends with the observations, “The quality and virtue of a slave is invisibility. The powerless need to be invisible even to themselves” (32). These observations also have the flavor of proverb, for the same reasons. These sound more like moral sayings, like those from Trudec’s *Moralities*, a fictional text from Gavir’s classroom, than like the colorful proverbs from Lakoff and Turner’s definition. Nonetheless, they seem to fit within the phenomenon I have described: applicable sayings of a kind that could pass into broader use, distilled from experience, used to offer culturally appropriate wisdom, and with the some of the rhythms, images, and themes common to true proverbs. The word *freedom* is defined over and over again in *Proverbs*, usually in an incomplete way, but it is one of the central concerns.

These proverbs arise out of Gavir’s experience of being blind to his own powerlessness, and to the powerlessness of others around him, when their vulnerabilities were different than his own. It also comes from his realization that

alternatives are possible, and the ways in which he became invisible, even to himself, in order to survive and thrive as a slave. Several of Le Guin's other works have dealt with what she calls the "slave-mind," including the novellas that make up *Four Ways to Forgiveness*, but Gavir's experience with it strikes me as the least explicit, but most balanced. The House of Arca treated its slaves well, but even its loyalty to its slaves broke down when Torm, the younger son of the heads of household, kills a very young slave boy. The death is passed off as an accident, and swept under the rug. On the flip side, Torm struggles to leave slaves in their place, and not treat them as fellow boys at playtime. He hides toy swords, shields, and helmets so that he and the other boys his age can play soldiers. The defensive gear is permitted, but no slave is allowed to have even toy weapons, or to drill as soldiers. When a slave is injured as the result of an accident while playing with the swords, the Father of the house finds out, and Torm faces a great deal of shame.

Another way the slave/master system breaks down is with the half-brothers born on the same day, Torm and Hoby. In Etra, whenever a gift-girl gets pregnant and has a child, the child and mother are separated. Usually, the infant is sold into another household, but in Hoby's case, the Father of the House chose to sell the mother instead. It is well known that Hoby's father is the Father, and the brothers get along desperately well despite the difference in class. This alliance disrupts the system, and allows for both to wield power in ways usually circumscribed.

Similarly, Barna's ideal community, with freedom and justice for all, breaks down when it comes to women. He wants men to have the freedom to be with any women who wants to be with them, but more than that he wants the freedom to

choose any women he wants for himself, with no strings attached. He does not allow women with children to remain in his house, which is the lap of luxury. Gavir describes the women of the Heart of the Forest this way:

In fact there weren't many women in the Heart of the Forest, and every one of them was jealously guarded by a man or group of men. Those you saw in the streets and gardens seemed all to be pregnant or dragging a gaggle of infants with them, or else they were mere bowed backs sweeping, spinning, digging, milking, like old women slaves anywhere. There were more young women in Barna's house than anywhere else, the prettiest girls in town, and the merriest. They dressed in fine clothes the raiders brought in. If they could sing or dance or play the lyre, that was welcome, but they weren't expected to do any work. They were, Barna said, to be all a woman should be—free, and beautiful, and kind. (272)

This system breaks down too, clearly it has for the women of the town, but it does for Barna when he falls head over heels for a beautiful young girl brought into his house by raiders, who picked Irad and her sister Melle up in a field. The girl is not ready for Barna's intensity, but cannot refuse him because of the power imbalance. When she innocently hides from Barna in Gavir's room, Barna becomes enraged, and reveals a fault in the system: Barna himself is unencumbered, but the other men and women are expected to do as he wishes in respect to one another. This is a well-known open secret to the men closest to Barna, but marks the end of Gavir's time in the Heart of the Forest.



One of the remarkable women in this story is Diero, a former-slave who escaped with Barna to create the Heart of the Forest, and who had been his consort, but remains his friend. Though they do not get to spend as much time on stage as Gry, talking about women's issues in *Powers* without Diero, Sotur, or Gegemer might be something like talking about *Gifts* without mentioning Gry. Diero is middle-aged, gentle, quiet, and smart. She is able to questions and absence in the place of confrontation to maintain balance as best she can. She still falls under the limitations of the system in which she lives, but uses those limitations to help others, especially Barna, to stay true to themselves when they might not have otherwise. When Barna is wild for Irad, but Irad is traumatized and unwilling, she diffuses the situation by asking Barna "Is she a slave?" and invites Irad and Melle to live in her rooms to protect them (303). When she recognizes Melle's quick mind, she finds a way to ask Gavir to educate her without putting anyone in an awkward position. When Gavir finally begins to remember his past, she talks with him and helps him recognize complicity, even his own (286).

Soturvaso is wellborn, but without parents or wealth. She is a cousin living with the Arca family. Sotur is caught with the worst of limitations from both sides. She has status, but without wealth or power to back it up. She is separated from the camaraderie of the slaves, and, like the slave-women, vulnerable to the wrath or lust of wellborn men. She understands clearly the danger she faces, and after the siege she starves herself to make sure she is not seen. She secretly attends Sallo's burial. She understands better than the others the world of the farm slaves, and knows to ask Comy to sing when they sleep under the stars on top of the hill. Though she is

not able to do as much as Diero or Gegemer, when Gavir comes to remember his past, he sees much of what he missed the first time around in Sotur's actions.

Gegemer Aytano Sidoy is Gavir's aunt. She has a strong gift, even more than Gavir's. Among her own people, they call her an Ambamer, one who walks with Ennu-Amba, the black marsh-lion. She is a proud woman, and initially, she and Gavir are unable to understand one another. Once she rescues him from his abusive seer training, they are able to accept one another, but still she is unwilling to break with her culture by telling women's stories to a man. Nonetheless, she challenges the male seers and seer-interpreters of her people by maintaining her gift openly, and by calling out their effacement and substance abuse. She makes sure Gavir follows his destiny by telling him what she sees about him in her visions, and by hurrying him out of the village once he has recovered from his failed seer training.

Gavir eventually becomes better at recognizing and accepting the difficulties involved with the slave-mind, especially the vulnerable position in which it places women. At the end of his journey, when he comes to the University of Mesun and is seeking the great poet Orrec Caspro, who is one of the professors at that University, he catches himself often still using the slave-mind. For example, when he and Melle first come to the city of Mesun, he writes "I thought of her beautiful sister, and wondered if Melle too would be beautiful. I found myself thinking, 'let her be spared that!' But surely that was a slave's thought. I must learn to think with a free mind" (479) and he fails to recognize Melle's refusal to talk to men until they had earned her trust (494).

As in *Voices*, quotations form a large number of the proverbs in this book, and many of them are repeated several times. Caspro's hymn to liberty is particularly important. It reads, "*As in the dark of winter night / The eyes seek dawn, / As in the bonds of bitter cold / the heart craves sun, / So blinded and so bound, the soul / Cries out to thee: / Be our light, our fire, our life, / Liberty!*" (155).

As I have mentioned, Jo Walton makes an argument that *Powers* works as a capstone for the series, and though I am still hoping for another Annal, the themes involved in Gavir's journey do seem to tie up the themes of the series rather nicely. Gavir's loss of memory is similar to Orrec's self-blinding, and Gavir's ignorance of his own slave-mind and to women's issues around him parallels Memer's ignorance of Aldish issues, though for Gavir it is much closer to home.

Gavir's experience fits almost too well within the structure suggested by Foa and his colleagues. Gavir's pretrauma records include his slave-mind, a view of the world that allows him to thrive within an abusive societal structure, these create schemas which he sees "from inside and from below" (31), schemas for the world and for himself given to him from outside and above. His world tells him he is kindly treated because he has food and clothes, and his world is not entirely wrong about that. It tells him that the wellborn are special, godlike, owed absolute obedience, and that the great Mother and Father are incapable of real wrongdoing. It told him that for male slaves, "desire was forbidden. Chaste adoration was allowed" (128), and taught him (look up), and also that (his power is in silence—choice when beaten by Hoby). It also taught him that in a world of slaves and masters, "there was trust on both sides. There had to be" (15).

Gavir's traumatic experience came when his sister Sallo was killed by Torm and Hoby. Sallo's death was traumatic for Gavir not only because it removed his sister, who was perhaps the main pillar of his life, from his world, but also because it should not have happened according to the overt rules of his society. Torm had no right to take Sallo; she had been given to someone else. Nonetheless, neither Gavir nor the Mother had much recourse because of Torm's social status as a nobleman and a man. The other pillars Gavir's life was built on, trust of the wellborn of his house, and the stories that formed the foundation for that trust, were also broken. No justice was to be had. Gavir was simply paid for his sister's death. Looking in from outside, it seems to me that the Mother was trying to be as kind as she was able, but it was woefully insufficient, and patronizing in the worst kind of way. Gavir suffered a traumatic break: his experience simply could not be processed within the schema he had. Rather than suffer through his now shredded understanding of the world, he half-chooses forgetfulness. He simply walks out of himself and his life, starting over completely with no records whatsoever. I think Foa would consider this a form of pathology.

Gavir slowly rebuilds his self-schemas and world-schemas as he recovers his health with Cuga, lives rough with the Forest Brothers, and is filled by Barna's constant philosophizing. Throughout these last two, he begins to remember—not his own experiences, not his own joys or suffering—but the epics he memorized in the schoolroom. Through these words, and the reactions of others, the investment of Diero, Chamry Bern, and others, he slowly comes to accept his pain and his memories.

At first he can do nothing but grieve, and he grieves not only for his loss, but his own complicity in the willful blindness of his society that left women like Sallo open to rape and murder without recourse. It is this understanding that lets him see Melle's situation when he comes back through Barna's ruined camp, and allows him, with the proverb-like utterance "what I have I keep" (437), true not only of Melle but now of his memories, his suffering, his lineage, and his learning, to rescue her from the fate of Sallo (or worse). Because he has been invisible even to himself, and been in a position of blundering ignorance in terms of his own vulnerabilities and the vulnerabilities of others, he is now quick to recognize these in Melle and have compassion enough to bring her with him on an impossible journey across miles and miles of country, and two rivers, and finally to a home with Orrec and Gry, who had lost a daughter named Melle many years ago.

The end of *Powers* also tells us many things the reader of *Gifts* might have wondered about how Orrec and Gry's life turned out. Orrec really does become a famous poet and storyteller, even a professor at the great University of Mesun. We discovered in *Voices* that they lost a daughter, a lacuna in their lives partially filled by Memer, and here in *Powers* widened and filled again by this new Melle, deeply wounded herself, but, like them, deeply connected to the stories she learned with Diero and Gavir, and quite literally saved through that connection.

Narrator Gavir's proverb-like assertions at the beginning of *Powers* reveal his successful, but ongoing, bridging of the gaps in his self and world schemas due to his upbringing as a slave. When Narrator Gavir writes, "freedom is largely a matter of seeing that there are alternatives" (*Powers*, 31), he has given the example of seeing

the world from inside and below, like a child or a slave would: without being able to see how things are situated, or why they are the way they are. Then he offers his definition of freedom, long-earned through many alternative cities, cultures, and even mental states. It seems likely that it was this failure to see alternatives that kept him from seeing the difference between his own position as a male slave and Sallo's position as a gift-girl, and his acceptance of his sorrow and suffering that allowed him to see the strange ways the women he encountered lacked alternatives within their purview. Though Gavir's utterance ostensibly takes the form of a definition, it does fit within a folkloric structure as Brunvard represents it, following the A (freedom) = B (seeing alternatives) structure, as well as being discourse deviant following Honeck's definition. To use Foa's terms, Gavir's self and world schemas were affected by his upbringing as a slave. His sister's death caused both sets of schemas to rupture, manifesting in pathology: total memory loss. Gavir slowly recovers access to his pre-trauma memory records through narrative; reciting epics and poetry for story-hungry listeners, and eventually re-building more stable schema as he re-enters society, and lives among different kinds of people. This rebuilding does not happen all at once, but slowly, in a grass-roots kind of way. Like O'Connor describes, his piecemeal assimilation of the cultures in which he lives, and the grassroots growth intertwined with the various cultures, allows him to develop a broad perspective, increasing the number of angles from which he can see, as he becomes a member of each society he visits, until he arrives at the end of his forseeings to study as a scholar with Orrec Caspro, who is now really is losing his eyesight as he ages. This sentence, "freedom is largely a matter of seeing that there

are alternatives,” has a strange ring for Gavir, because, of course, he has the gift of foresight. As much as he might be able to see alternatives, he has oftentimes already seen the reality of his future. Bakhtin is useful here: one voice I hear in this proverb is the voice of many fiction writers, that things might be otherwise, each alternative having great range for potential thought experiment (Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 2). Another says that, whether or not they could actually be different, understanding them with insight and compassion matters deeply, and is what really makes us either free or enslaved.

In *Gifts*, writing is a kind of sight, a gift in itself and a re-creation rather than an unmaking. Gry and Orrec wonder whether the gifts were originally constructive, but have been used and trained differently, and now function as obsessive technologies (as Le Guin says in her acceptance speech at the National Book Awards on November 20, 2014). On the other hand, stories read, remembered, and invented are what Caspro uses to reform and re-vision himself, making a harmonious whole that becomes an integral part of the broader society in which he lives, as we see in *Voices* and *Powers*. His poetry frees him to serve his gift and sets others, like Memer and Gavir, on the path to doing the same.

In *Voices*, writing represents at least two kinds of freedom. The first is the freedom of study: to learn, to discover what has been learned before, and to be comfortable by one’s self with books. The second is the political freedom to do something taboo to a neighboring culture: to live side by side with those who abhor an attribute or practice of their fellow men. This can be a dangerous practice, and both cultures are changed by the acceptance of each other. This practice requires

moral development. Caution and bravery in equal measure, and the compassion to accept hurt without flinching, and to see situations from an other's point of view. In *Voices*, writing the word "open" in a certain place can open a secret door, and, to be obvious about things, that fantastic element serves as a metaphor for what writing, and story as a form of it, do for Memer. As narrator Memer says, "writing and speaking are different ways of doing the same thing" (14).

In *Powers*, epic narratives are the spice of life. They spark joy and engagement in everyone from the noble son of the high household to the escaped slave dying of consumption in the lonely forest. They are what ties Gavir to his past, and to his future. Similar to *Voices*, there is a freedom in experiencing stories that is true both for the slave and the free, for men and women, regardless of a given character's ability to recognize his or her blind spots, and similar to *Powers*, it is through much loved and remembered stories that disabling resistance is overcome, and moral development is achieved.

Creative expression, and especially language, is central to transcending trauma in all three books. In all three, the narrators, reflecting on their experience, offer a cognitive strategy to their readers: a way, to be taken or left, that each character crossed an internal great divide, and an indication of the moral development necessary to make such a leap. As with any of Le Guin's work, these proverbs resist didacticism, but rather move towards compassion and balance, offering an avenue to insight, but resisting cut-and-dried moralizing. These insights find an appropriate form in proverbs and proverb-like language, with "all the authority, antiquity, and stability of that category" (Toelken, 136) as well as



flexibility, and applicability to many circumstances. They, like narrative itself, offer the reader a journey, though exactly what it means, who can tell.

## 9. Conclusion

This thesis first began with a series of midnight text messages with my sister. She had just read “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” one of Le Guin’s better known short stories, and I had been slowly absorbing bits and pieces of Le Guin’s work since going to her reading of *Lavinia* several years earlier at Powell’s Books in Portland. For my sister, the essay had come up in an ethics class, and we discussed the actions of those who stayed and those who left, and whether or not the abuse of and suffering of a child really made the depth or perfection of Omelas any more believable. What is so memorable to me about that conversation is the way we were able to imagine what the actions of the various groups meant. Were the ones who walked away acting out of moral outrage? Were they right to refuse to live in a society with those terms? What happens to those that leave? We wondered also whether the story might function as a model for the internal self, and whether there were aspects of self that people locked away and repressed, and what a healthy response might look like. Later on, my reading of this story was made more complex by Le Guin’s discussion of it in *Language of the Night*, when she talks about her own experience with abortion.

What struck me about this conversation was the ways in which this text imagined the community in Omelas, allowed readers to imagine themselves in the individuals there, the young men and women, the adults, the abused children, and those who walk away, revealing not only moral multidimensionality within the story, but also allowing for moral development on the part of the reader as he or she meanders through the story’s sound, construction, landscape, and details. Though

“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” might be the most frequently used by teachers, and it might be particularly overt about moral questions and conflicting perspectives, but such questions and themes are present in Le Guin’s fiction generally. The ways in which Le Guin’s work gently interrogates human experience generally, and moral experience as a part of that, has continued to develop, and those who read and enjoy the work will find themselves benefiting from the journey.

In conclusion, Le Guin’s careful use of narrative framing gives access to hints of Orrec, Memer, Gavir and other character’s moral development, allowing the reader to track with varying levels of maturity throughout the book. These proverbs, though they can appear trite or flippant out of context, are deeply meaningful when embedded in and supported by narrative and language, the living and breathing fabric of story. They contribute to the moral depth and beauty of Le Guin’s work, and creatively mark moral development. They function much like a prism, not changing the nature of what passes through, but reorganizing it: revealing something not exactly new, nonetheless comprehensible in a new way. But now, having bridged many gaps myself, I can say with the Oracle in *Voices*, “*Let them set free!*” (246).

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