

## **Rinterpreting the Discernment of Mortality and Immortality in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore***

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the primary notion of the mortality and immortality in respect to life and death in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*. The novel's theme of death can also be seen as a coming-of-age, but on a deeper level, it represents the process of embracing one's own mortality through that voyage into the abyss below ground. The moral and social integration of death is implied in this novel. To connect Le Guin's figurative *The Farthest Shore* with preexisting, theoretical considerations, it is necessary to first analyse the concept of the abyss, which symbolises the encounter with death and the required symbolic voyage. It is paradoxical that childhood will come to an end with the realisation of death, and that a new life truly begins with this realisation. Human life on Earth is becoming unbalanced due to either birth without death or death without birth. Life expectancy is okay, but immortality is not. When it comes to the idea of the dead, it is untrue. Furthermore, humankind's quest to defeat death and attain deathless life is what causes the war. Fantasy is all that is needed to deal with this concept. The reason for this is that throughout the many millennia of human history, there is no proof of immortality. Regardless of their social, political, or spiritual standing, people inevitably die after birth. The novel uses fantasy since it is necessary to go into such a speculative theme.

**Keywords:** Life, Immortality, Death, Journey, Mortality

### **Introducción**

Ursula K. Le Guin is a prominent nineteenth-century American woman novelist. She is a remarkable writer who not only concentrates on a variety of genres but also gives them life, demonstrating her high degree of originality. Gender, sexuality, politics, feminism, and liberation were the main topics of her writing. Her novels are the best examples of explaining the significance of moral principles and science, which are necessary for one's life to be fulfilled. She is a model for the current age because of her superb narrative technique and her outstanding anti-discrimination ideas.

The third novel of Earthsea Trilogy that is *The Farthest Shore* first published in 1972 by Atheneum. The awful predicament that is produced in the Earthsea universe is the subject of the novel. Across Earthsea, including Roke, this evil is wreaking havoc. It is Morred's son, Prince Arren of Enlad, who, at his father's request, came to Roke to meet Archmage to confront the evil. The School of Wizardry is housed in Roke, which is home to one great Archmage and all nine masters. It is their responsibility to instruct the student and preserve global equilibrium. Now that he is the Archmage, Ged wants to consult with all of the Roke masters.

The evil's signs of destruction began in Narveduen and continued to spread. Spells and charms are no longer effective; either people forget them or use them incorrectly. Ged has a responsibility to investigate the situation and provide a solution. He so sets out with Arren, visits every location, and, with the aid of the dragon Orm Embar, discovers the evil. The world is being destroyed by the wizard Cob, who is the cause of all evil since he gives humans life after death, making them eternal. Dragon Orm Embar defends Ged from Cob's attack on him and passes away from the metal that got lodged in his neck, which is meant to kill Ged.

A malignant spiritual sickness of gloom has afflicted Earthsea; magic is failing, boundaries are becoming hazy, and meaning is being lost. We can hear the ancient dragon Kalessin telling Ged, "The sea is running out of water and there is a hole in the world" (154). There is not much light left. The dry land will be our only option. Speaking and dying will cease to exist. There are ominous murmurs and whispers about the will to live forever, and the evil in Earthsea can be linked to a general denial of mortality. Since Ged believes that death is the cost of life, he views the yearning for immortality as a danger to the natural order.

As they depart Roke in Ged's boat Lookfar and head west, Arren and Ged consider the distinctions between youth and old age as well as between magic and kingship. Given that Ged is apprenticed to Ogion, the relationship between Ged and Arren can be somewhat viewed as that of a master and apprentice; the young man is eager, while the elderly man is patient. Arren is eager to assist Ged in identifying the origin of this enigmatic evil, but he discovers that he is prone to temptation and that he can fail, despite his pride in his youth and heritage. During a meeting when Ged tries to join the drug-induced world of Hare, an ex-sorcerer, Arren fails for the first time in his role as guard in Hort Town, Hazia, where many of the residents are hooked to the drug. A small flame hypnotises the young prince as he observes the two men.

Le Guin introduces the allure of immortality in a creative way. One was standing there, calling in the great, dry blackness. "Come, tall lord of the shadows," (99) he said. He offered Arren life by holding a tiny flame in his fingers that was no

bigger than a pearl. Arren followed, taking a slow step towards him. Ged is rendered unconscious due to Arren's distraction, and slave traffickers take Arren away. Later, Arren is saved by Ged, but the young prince feels ashamed of himself. Given its drug culture and quest for immortality, it is simple to understand how Hort Town might represent a disconnection from reality.

Arren has a more profound spiritual failure as their quest goes on. They are at sea when their third friend, Sopli, drowns and Ged sustains a nearly mortal wound.

Arren is stranded in a downward spiral of sorrow amid the immensity of the sea, distant from his royal luxuries, and is more worried about surviving. He haphazardly tends to Ged's wound and lets the boat float aimlessly on the broad ocean rather than guiding Look further towards a port. Our untried prince no longer believes in magic; when he gazes at Ged, we can feel his hopelessness and defeat. When Arren looked at him, he saw a man who had lost all his strength, wizardry, youth, and might. Neither had he diverted the spear away from himself, nor had he spared Sopli. He had not saved them; he had put them in danger. Due to this man's negligence, Sopli was now dead, he was dying, and Arren would also die - all for nothing.

The Raft people, a culture that spends their entire lives on rafts floating in the open sea, save Arren and the barely aware Ged during this dark night of the soul. It is instructive that the Raft people represent the truth of the ocean floor as an abyss in their precarious existence of literally existing above water. The abyss is only depths below; this is a precarious, improvised manner of life. Le Guin's suggestion that "the dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss" (121) is not an accident. One could see the Raft people's efforts to heal Ged and Arren as a hallucinatory experience that foreshadows a period of rebirth. The idea that the raft people represent the preparation of that heavenly dwelling, which may be the cause of reincarnation, is alluring. Arren can identify his own shadow and his dread of death during this time of rehabilitation and healing. They depart from the Raft people and resume their westward journey after Ged has fully recovered. When their trip ends in the "dry land" of the dead, things begin to reach a climax. They face the evil that is causing Earthsea's misery and lack of magic right at the border of that gloomy, grey region.

Ged and Arren face the enemy, Cob, a former sorcerer who gave up his humanity in return for corporeal immortality, in front of the stone wall that divides the living from the dead. The portal between life and death has been opened by Cob's dark magic, transforming a living planet into a living world of death where life is devoid of joy and the sun has lost its shine. A dragon has destroyed Cob's physical body, but his spirit ascends the wall and enters the realm of the shadows, where Ged and Arren must follow.

A voyage through a place where stars shine but do not twinkle, where shadows meet but have no voice, and where the only thing to relieve the thirst is dust is depicted darkly by Le Guin. When Ged and Arren arrive at the door separating the living from the dead, the final showdown takes place. This is the main crack that has caused the equilibrium and balance to change - not in a positive way, but negatively. Despite using all the magic he can conjure, Ged uses his superhuman strength to close the door and cure Earthsea of its illness in his advanced age. Returning to the land of the living is a long and difficult voyage; the archmage and prince rely on one another for support, and while the elderly wizard can serve as a guide, his physical might be insufficient to fulfil the demands of the situation.

Though the shadow problem - the denial-of-death dilemma of Earthsea - is shared by our modern civilisation, it is neither unique or personal; rather, it is the shadow of our entire era's culture. This widespread illness turns into a tyranny where the uniqueness of things is gradually lost in a pointless cycle of battling, clinging, and grasping for life's essentials without finding fulfilment in the results. "The same dull round" (105) becomes life. It's intriguing that Ged asks the young prince, "What is it they are missing?" immediately following Arren's assessment. "Joy in life," (87) Arren stated without doubt. Lasseter provides a compelling explanation for why the joy is gone. Through the whispering of the individual shadow, the communal shadow infiltrates. By casting doubt on the worth or viability of personal objectives and disparaging the current task as being less important than the promised prize, it plays into the desire for power and the demands of the individual shadow, enhancing and empowering it. In exchange for future immortality, it requires that we give up "the names."

Cob, a great but fallen magician, is held responsible for the loss of names and distinctions as well as the dilution of mage powers in *The Farthest Shore*. This rogue wizard had debased the summoning of the dead, and Ged had once challenged him out of rage and vanity, dragging him to the wall separating the world of the dead from the land of the living. Given that Ged bears a substantial portion of the blame for the man's deeds, George Slusser implies that this fallen magician is, in a sense, once more Ged's shadow. As Cob later informs Ged, "I was in pain, after you, in your pride, thought you had humbled me and taught me a lesson," Ged's attempt to correct Cob backfires since Cob does not learn the desired lesson. "Yes, you did teach me a lesson, but it wasn't the one you intended. I would not accept death; I told myself after seeing it for the first time" (178). Now that he has rewoven the Pelnish Lore, Cob is offering people endless life, which is moving them away from the natural cycle. Even though Earthsea has achieved peace, the kingdom is still split because there is no monarch or central authority. Men and islands are therefore easily taken advantage of by Cob, who would be anti-king, in the absence of a central direction. According to Suzanne Reid's explanation in *Presenting Ursula K. Le Guin*, this anti-king's strange behaviour means: "By opening the possibility of even a shadowy life after death, he is draining from Earthsea the magic, the joy of creation, and the will to live fully and passionately" (44). What is this collective shadow,

both as it is perceived in the novel and in its symbolism of our times? Almost at the end of the novel, *The Farthest Shore*, in the abyss of the dark land of death, Ged questions Cob:

‘What is life, Cob?’

‘Power.’

‘What is love?’

‘Power,’ the blind man repeated heavily, hunching up his shoulders.

‘What is light?’

‘Darkness!’ (179)

Desperation and hopelessness are the collective shadow of our time. Losing hope is worse than losing faith because hope is more substantial and contains “the substance of things looked for,” or one’s own personal reality. Thus, the “essence” of everything, including life, shifts when hope is lost. Therefore, the shadow of the anti-faith era is despair. The concept of social reform constantly “directs” us in our collective culture to pursue the lofty goal of “safety” and control over life in return for the cessation of suffering.

In the first three chapters of *The Farthest Shore*, Arren and Ged are conscious of the fact that their journey necessitates a considerable distance from their hometown, familiar friends, and societal duties. It is significant to remember that Arren’s quest for selfhood is greatly aided by Ged, the only person on the journey who serves as a representation of the human society. Since he cannot have a mature, honest connection with the other until he “turns clear around” and examines the very desires he tries to suppress, Arren’s coming of age is a journey towards both understanding the tie of trust and loyalty with the other and understanding himself.

Arren is instantly stripped of the material pleasures he was born with, and he soon discovers that he can live without them. He now views these conveniences as nothing more than diversions from his mission. Additionally, he is being deprived of the delusion that civil order prevails everywhere, as demonstrated by his tidy and cosy tiny island home. For Arren, Hort Town’s poverty, drug abusers, robbers, dishonest businesspeople, and slave traders are all examples of evil in action. When he is seized and presumed to be sold as a slave, the fact that evil exists in Earthsea becomes his own reality. When he fails to protect Ged from what he believes to be merely robbers, he loses the dual illusion of his own strength or control: he cannot overcome evil or save Ged, nor can good intentions bring about safety.

Failure, frailty, and inaccuracy further impede Arren’s goal. Due to his inability to keep watch while Ged interrogates the drug-induced, insane former sorcerer Hare, Arren is put into a trance and, once Ged is rendered unconscious, is taken prisoner by slave dealers. The little prince is later saved by Ged. Arren’s inability to give sufficient security stems from his inherent frailty, as he falls prey to the shadow’s allure of immortality. Since Arren is no longer acting as the father Ged’s dependent child, Cummins sees Arren’s activity as a step into adulthood because he is pursuing his own desires. It is a step towards the dark side of himself, his capacity for evil - in this case, his yearning for something that goes against nature - that he must acknowledge and face.

The longing for immortality, the very illness that plagues Earthsea, is still present in Arren. According to Cummins, Arren tries to repress this want to avoid mortal existence, but this repression leads to nightmares and dreams that push him in the direction of self-awareness. When Arren feels compelled to suppress his darker side, he has dreams in which he is shackled and covered in cobwebs. Cummins provides an interesting analysis of these dreams. The dreams hint at Arren’s impotence if he keeps denying his own capacity for evil, even as they also portend his experience in the kingdom of death. Even after setting sail from Lorbanerry with Ged and Sopli, the young prince continues to battle his inner devil.

As Sopli’s own worries of death and his longing for immortality only serve to mirror Arren’s innermost emotions, Sopli’s presence exacerbates Arren’s repression and terror. Sopli’s hints, along with his own uncertainties and anxieties, cause Arren to become infected. As a result, the young prince is on the verge of losing his mind when he starts to think that Ged is sending them all to their deaths. Arren no longer believes in his mentor. An essential deprivation of illusion and false images is this betrayal of his purest and deepest love. Even the most cherished perceptions of what is worthwhile, genuine, and reliable are destroyed during this dark night of the soul.

Arren’s physical and mental state is so overpowering that it is easy to comprehend and even feel sorry for him. There is barely any magic left, Sopli has drowned, Ged appears to be dying, and Arren is just seventeen years old, thus he is not yet prepared to handle such physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Arren now accepts and endures; he starts to break free from his dark shadow’s grip and can act despite his dejection. Ged teaches him how to weed out the hints that could fester and turn into crippling facts. In the Long Dance, we encounter a revitalised Arren who comes to the rescue when the Raft people’s singers pause in the middle of their song and the chanter confesses, “I do not know the words.” I’m not a singer. I can’t remember the music” (128). The people of the water are now affected by Earthsea’s cancer.

Ged urges Arren to continue the song, and the young prince does so admirably, singing the creation song - the earliest song about the birth of green fields, the balancing of light and dark, and the one who spoke the first words. It is significant to note that Arren is not currently being trained in any wizardry; rather, his strength appears to stem from his ancestry and the inalienable rights of monarchs. Therefore, his ability to walk and conquer the route designated for the test of kings is directly related to his realisation of selfhood. Arren is the mortal who is without the support of magic and must rely only on his own skills.

The dragon Orm Embar calls Arren and Ged away from the Raft people and sets sail for Selidor, implying in his dragon language that the enemy will be discovered there.

Arren and Ged's relationship have now reached a new level of maturity; the young prince now submits to Ged's knowledge and experience, while Ged now sees Arren as the future ruler of Havnor. As we listen to Ged gaze at the sleeping Arren, it appears that Arren's fate has already been decided. The direction changes as Arren and Ged get closer to Selidor; Arren is now in the lead while Ged is in the rear. Arren guides Ged to Cob, who brings them to the hole in the globe in the arid region of the dead. Arren orders, "Let it be shut!" with a firmness of authority, and Ged responds, "It will be shut" (183). By shutting the door, Ged rids Earthsea of its evil. However, Ged loses all his magical abilities because of this act of closure.

Arren's final run-in with his dark shadow's terror is symbolised by his experience in the land of the dead. He is not threatened by his genuine encounters with the shells of once-living beings who have now lost their sense of reason and emotion. Since he has accepted death, his dread vanishes, and his confrontation can thus be interpreted as an embracing of his shadow. Selfhood ripens for Arren. Ged has transitioned to a new spiritual realm as the novel ends. However, one final major act - the responsibility of a king - remains, one that requires willpower, physical stamina, and perseverance rather than magic or spiritual strength. To get to the distant coast of day, Arren and the fading Ged must now traverse the mountains of suffering.

With just his instinct to guide him, Arren does carry the half-dead Ged across the mountain stones. The former wizard and prince both make it safely to the opposite side of Selidor. Arren's acceptance of pain and mortality as aspects of the personal, societal, and cosmic existence he has come to comprehend is symbolised by his journey across the mountains of pain. Even now, though, Arren is unaware that the world has been restored. Then, in his pocket, he discovers a little, black stone that he believes must have been from the mountain of pain. His being is triggered by this accidental discovery: And he grinned then, a melancholy yet joyful smile, understanding for the first time in his life that he was alone, unappreciated, and, at the end of the world, victorious. Arren and Ged are flown to Roke from Selidor by Kalessin, the ancient dragon and the parent of Orm Embar. It is a welcome home worthy of our warriors. The dragon says, "I have brought the young king to his kingdom, and the old man to his home," (195) to those who comprehended, as Arren descends. Through his experience with death and how it is viewed as an abyss offering the final confrontation that can lead the spirit towards creativity, regeneration, and redemption, Ged's second cycle of selfhood is examined in *The Farthest Shore*. Arren's relationship with Ged and his destined kingship both serve as an examination of his quest for selfhood.

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