

THE UNRAVELING OF A WORLD: DEGENERATION
IN URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *EARTHSEA CYCLE*

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ABSTRACT

In the first *Earthsea* trilogy, Ursula K. Le Guin exposes the process of degeneration, humanity's connection to it, and how restoration counteracts the devastation of degeneration. Throughout the trilogy, degeneration comes in different forms. Each novel focuses primarily on personal and collective degeneration and how through acts of self-sacrifice the protagonists are able to restore themselves and their world to its original state. Unlike a series that promotes reformation, like *The Hunger Games*, where degeneration is combatted with rebellion and revolution, the *Earthsea Cycle* portrays a world in need of restoration rather than reformation in order to correct the consequences of degeneration.

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INTRODUCTION

In her first *Earthsea Trilogy* published from 1968 to 1972, Ursula K. Le Guin presents three plots in which protagonists must solve a problem in order to restore their own well-being and that of their world. As an “immersive” fantasy, a fictional world completely independent of reality, the series cannot rely on a newly arrived outsider to fuel the necessary plots because the solution depends on in-depth knowledge of the world and its history to bring about restoration. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn quotes fantasy specialist John Clute, who states that “in an immersive fantasy, what is storyable is not the discovery of the world (in which we are immersed) but its loss” (61). To generate plot, writers of immersive fantasy must devise obstacles internal to their world for their protagonists to face. The solutions to these obstacles take many forms. For example, in *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins has her heroine lead a rebellion against the oppressive Capitol to reform Panem into a better version of itself.

In contrast to *The Hunger Games*, where the reformation of Panem is the intended solution, *Earthsea* presents a world in need of restoration. As Ged, Tenar, and Arren deal with degeneration, their experiences lead each of them to pursue a path of restoration for themselves and their world. Within the trilogy, the primary obstacles are the degeneration of Earthsea and how individual people influence the cause and progress of the degenerative process. Throughout the *Earthsea Cycle*, Ursula K. Le Guin displays a fantasy world that deals with the complex connections among the nature of magic, the theme of degeneration, and the responsibility humanity has in the cause and progress of degeneration in order to expose the purpose of degeneration, which exposes the need for restoration rather than the reformation of a fantasy world.

DEGENERATION: A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the primary causes of degeneration is Ged's decision to conjure the spirit of Elfarran. In attempting to establish himself as the strongest apprentice wizard on Roke Ged fails to comprehend the consequences of his actions, and Le Guin emphasizes how his selfish decision results in immediate and long term personal and collective consequences of degeneration. For example, as the narrator explains, "To check the ungoverned spell and drive off the shadow from Ged, Nemmerle had spent all his power, and with it his bodily strength was gone. He lay dying" (*WOE* 87). Although Ged is responsible for releasing the shadow, it is the Archmage Nemmerle who pays the ultimate price: his own life. Since the rest of the novel revolves around Ged's journey to repair the destruction he has released upon Earthsea, Le Guin shows how a lust for power demonstrated through a single, individual act can allow for the spread of degeneration throughout Earthsea.

Since Le Guin presents a world completely separate from the real world, *Earthsea* is an excellent example of an immersive fantasy. To better define the term *immersive fantasy*, Mendlesohn states that "The immersive fantasy invites us to share not merely a world, but a set of assumptions. At its best, it presents the fantastic without comment as the norm both for the protagonist and for the reader: we sit on the protagonist's shoulder and while we have access to his eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative" (xx). Although the characteristics of immersive fantasy are not fixed, Mendlesohn outlines the way immersive fantasies are worlds unfamiliar, unexplained, and never questioned by the reader; therefore, *Earthsea* qualifies as an immersive fantasy.

In the immersive fantasy of *Earthsea*, people hold certain views of magic that influence how they interact with each other and their world. Throughout the series, there are two primary views of the purpose or goals of magic that aid in the cause of degeneration: magic as a tool for profit and magic as power. The first view, magic as a tool for profit, reveals itself through Ged's aunt. As the narrator explains, "As her sister's son [Ged] had been nothing to her, but now she looked at him with a new eye" (*WOE* 4). Before Ged shows any signs of magical ability, his aunt sees him as a burden. However, when Ged shows the possibility of performing magic, his aunt desires to control him for her own gain.

Through seeking control over Ged and his magic, his aunt reveals one of the causes of degeneration: the notion that self-gain does no harm to the balance of Earthsea. As the narrator reveals,

Now the witch of Ten Alders was no black sorceress, nor did she ever meddle with the high arts or traffic with Old Powers; but being an ignorant woman among ignorant folk, she often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends. She knew nothing of the Balance and the Pattern which the true wizard knows and serves, and which keep him from using his spells unless real need demands. (*WOE* 7)

Since Le Guin displays this view of magic as acceptable to Ged's aunt and unacceptable to the narrator, the unforeseen harm of magic being used for self-gain can be recognized by the reader long before it is noticed by the characters. In *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre*, John Timmerman says that "in the tradition known as 'high fantasy' the supernatural or magical power provides much of the driving impetus of the story. The story is, if you will, about magic and how it affects man" (73). Although Le Guin does show magic's effects on man, I want to expand Timmerman's claim by emphasizing how the use and view of magic also affects the very existence of the fantasy world.

However, the second view of the purpose of magic, magic as power, is the most damaging of all in *A Wizard of Earthsea*. As the narrator emphasizes, "The tricks of illusion came to [Ged] so easily that it seemed he had been born knowing them and needed only to be reminded. The Master Hand was a gentle and light-hearted old man, who had endless delight in the wit and beauty of the crafts he taught; Ged soon felt no awe of him" (*WOE* 58). From Ged's perspective, real magic should alter the world and provide the magic user with power over the elements of that world. Because Ged views magic as a means of acquiring power, he opens himself and the world to the damaging consequences of degeneration.

Ged's personal degeneration begins with his perspective on magic. By viewing illusionary magic as un-empowering, Ged chooses to omit an aspect of magic that is foundational to understanding its true purpose and his responsibility as a wizard. As Timmerman reveals, "At this stage [Ged] wants power *for himself*, not to understand The Powers for their sake and for others" (86). Like his aunt's, Ged's lust for power blinds him to the fact that magic is rarely an isolated experience. If Ged chooses to use magic for individual gain, he will inevitably be harming other people, animals, or nature. As the Master Hand warns, "You must

not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act” (*WOE* 59). In *Earthsea*, one simple act of magic can result in devastating consequences for the magic user, others, and the world itself. Misuse of magic begins the process of degeneration.

Although the cause of degeneration is the way people view magic, the progress of degeneration occurs in two ways: through an unrealistic expectation about magic’s purpose or a growing disbelief in the power of magic. Since both of these processes highlight how people understand magic, I argue that Le Guin’s novels are good examples of high fantasy based on the connection between the loss of magic and the degeneration of a social world. As Timmerman emphasizes, “Magic does not belong to all men, but only to special, gifted men. Little is said in high fantasy about the origins of this gift” (82). Despite only a select few having the power to wield magic, Le Guin shows how magic is not only a gift but also a powerful force that plays a crucial role in the progress of degeneration. After the release of his shadow, Ged observes,

It was only the dumb instinctive wisdom of the beast who licks his hurt companion to comfort him, and yet in that wisdom Ged saw something akin to his own power, something that went as deep as wizardry. From that time forth he believed that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things . . . and in later years he strove long to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees. (*WOE* 115)

Throughout the *Earthsea Cycle*, Le Guin establishes magic as a gift to be used in the name of necessity rather than personal empowerment. By comparing wizardry to aspects of nature, Ged learns that magic should be used for the betterment of others and his world. Because of Ged’s newfound understanding, Le Guin reinforces one of the central morals of the series: responsibility for one’s own actions. *Earthsea* is not only a place where magic is used, but also a place where magic and its users have the opportunity to diminish or advance degeneration.

For example, *Earthsea* dragons are both made of magic and have the ability to produce magic. To better explain magic in relation to dragons, Ged says, “We men dream dreams, we work magic, we do good, we do evil. The dragons do not dream. They are dreams. They do not work magic: it is their substance, their being. They do not do; they are” (*TFS* 46). Through Ged’s description of dragons, Le Guin reveals that magic exists regardless of the magical abilities of people or creatures in *Earthsea*. While most people associate magic with a person’s ability to

permanently alter the physical world, Le Guin offers a contrasting perspective on magic and how it connects to the progress of degeneration. In “Genre, Utopia, and Ecological Crisis: World-Multiplication in Le Guin’s Fantasy,” Katherine Buse says,

In order to name something, a wizard must spend time with it and discover its name through intimacy and careful attention. This means that the subject-object relationship suggested by the idea of ‘using something’ is subverted by the logic of Earthsea’s magic. To know the name that allows magic to be performed is to know the ‘being’ of a thing, to have a relationship with it that renders it an end in itself. (268)

In Earthsea, magic exists to allow humanity the ability to maintain balance in the world. However, Le Guin exposes humanity’s frequent failure to successfully maintain balance and highlights human beings’ talent for causing and progressing degeneration both knowingly and unknowingly.

Through Ged, Le Guin exposes the degenerative qualities of an individual who has unrealistic expectations about the purpose of magic. Before Ged journeys to Roke, the narrator writes, “He hungered to learn, to gain power” (*WOE* 23). Prior to releasing his shadow, Ged fails to understand fully the primary purpose of magic. He believes that magic should be used for self-empowerment rather than for the benefit of others. In fact, he often sees others as obstacles to his growing power instead of seeing them as people who should be protected by his power. In “Growing Up in Earthsea,” Sue Jenkins states,

In each [Earthsea novel] there is an imbalance or lack of awareness in the protagonist that reflects or threatens to contribute to an imbalance in the outer world. In each [novel] the protagonist must take positive steps to correct both the outer and inner imbalances[:] by going on a quest, by making a new commitment, by broadening his or her awareness” (23).

Ged’s lust for power over others results in an inner imbalance that unleashes the threat of his shadow upon Earthsea. Ged’s misunderstanding of the purpose of magic propels the degenerative process within both himself and the rest of Earthsea.

Le Guin reveals how this unhealthy lust for power, in association with Ged’s gift for magic, creates the foundation for his unrealistic expectation about magic. While at Roke, Ged often associates magic and power with the ability to abolish fear. For example, as Ged continues his studies on Roke, Le Guin writes, “The more [Ged] learned, the less he would have to fear,

until finally in his full power as a Wizard he needed fear nothing in the world, nothing at all” (WOE 74). Unlike a mature wizard, Ged fails to recognize his responsibility to control the magic he unleashes upon the world. For example, as Timmerman shows, “The wizard knows quite certainly what powers lead to evil and which to good, but his understanding of the power enables him to choose one or the other” (74). At this point, Ged does not fully understand that the outcome of the magic used is the sole responsibility of the user. Instead, he believes that the cost of using magic is always worth the price because he fails to realize the extent of magic’s reach. Ged’s misunderstanding of magic’s use leads to his unrealistic expectation of magic’s purpose.

Although Le Guin often emphasizes the collective consequences of degeneration, Ged’s path to restoration represents a very personal journey. After Ged summons the shadow, he explains to Ogion that “it threatens only me, now. But if it enters into me and possesses me, it will work great evil through me” (WOE 179). Although Ged does not realize yet that the shadow is a representation of his own ability to spread evil in the world, he recognizes that his shadow affects both himself and others. Since Ged’s actions influence the world on a larger scale, the overall purpose of degeneration in Le Guin’s novel is to highlight and inspire the need for restoration. As Buse expresses, “the hero must discover the cause of the degradation of the land and identify his (or her) role in fixing it – this is all at once a diagnosis of the problem with the landscape, a moral for the story, and a discovery of the hero’s role in the world, because they are the same thing” (272). Although Ged’s journey to restoration is his own, readers learn much about the darker side of humanity that lives within every person, whether that person lives in Earthsea or reality. Ged’s journey to defeat the shadow displays a lesson of individual responsibility for inner darkness and inspires the courage to accept internal darkness in hopes of restoring one’s self, others, and the world.

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged’s decision to face his shadow is the turning point in the novel. Before Ged begins his pursuit, Ogion says, “If you go ahead, if you keep running, wherever you run you will meet danger and evil, for it drives you, it chooses the way you go. You must choose. You must seek what seeks you. You must hunt the hunter” (WOE 178). Through the wisdom of Ogion, Ged gains the courage to pursue a path toward personal and collective restoration. However, he struggles with the decision to confront his shadow. Since the shadow poses such a great threat to Ged and others, the narrator explains that “there was a greater wish in him to stay here on Gont, and forgoing all wizardry and venture, forgetting all

power and horror, to live in peace like any man on the known, dear ground of his homeland. That was his wish; but his will was other” (*WOE* 183). Ged hesitates to find his shadow, because he does not believe he has the strength to overcome the shadow before it consumes him. If the shadow consumes Ged, it will then become a threat to the rest of Earthsea. Ged’s hesitation thus expose the gravity of the situation.

As Ged interacts with his shadow at the end of the novel, he is willing to sacrifice himself to correct his mistake. As the narrator notes,

Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life’s sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark. (*WOE* 254)

Ged’s restoration and his fight against degeneration are twofold. First, he finds self-restoration through his acceptance of the darkness within himself. Second, his self-restoration prevents the degenerative process from progressing to a state that threatens the rest of Earthsea.

Ged’s acceptance of the evil nature of his shadow, which is the evil within himself, provides an argument for Le Guin’s restoration rather than reformation of her fantasy world and the people who live in it. In “Between Light and Darkness: Earthsea and the Name of Utopia,” Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos states,

[Ged] cannot accept that there could ever be a part of the world (let alone of himself) which he would not eventually conquer, control, and master. His shadow, though, shows him exactly this: that there is another side to everything, a different but complimentary side, which you cannot defeat but only acknowledge. (53-54)

Since Ged does not change his shadow, Le Guin establishes that part of the restorative process is to accept that people are sources of both good and evil. In the moments before Ged confronts his shadow, the narrator states, “He knew now, and the knowledge was hard, that his task had never been to undo what he had done, but to finish what he had begun” (*WOE* 208). To defeat his shadow, Ged does not reform or destroy it. In fact, to restore himself and prevent further harm, Ged accepts his own internal darkness because only through acceptance can Ged gain control over that darkness and prevent it from reaching the rest of the world.

DEGENERATION: THE TOMBS OF ATUAN

In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the theme of restoration takes a different form. In book two of her trilogy, Le Guin focuses on the Kargad lands where the decay of religious tradition and the Lost Ring of Erreth-Akbe are the primary indicators of degeneration. The decay of religious tradition shows itself in two ways: psychologically through the rising numbers of unbelievers and physically through the neglect of the religious temples. In addition to the decline of religious tradition, the Lost Ring emphasizes the growing progress of degeneration occurring on the Archipelago and spreading throughout the rest of Earthsea.

Early in the novel, Le Guin highlights the religious decline of the Kargad people. As Tenar says, “The Godking, and his people, are neglecting the worship of the tombs. No one comes” (*TOA* 28). The unbelief of the people demonstrates the degenerating psychological state of the Kargad lands beginning with the social elite: the Godking. In the Kargad lands, the Godking strives to obtain complete control of his people; but first, he needs to replace traditional religious beliefs with a new form of religion. Now, people worship the Godking instead of the Old Powers.

In order to usurp the religious traditions of Kargad, the Godking must render the worship of the Old Powers obsolete. Through the character of Manan, Le Guin highlights the level of manipulation the High Priestess and the Godking are capable of through their goal of killing Tenar in order to destroy the power associated with her religious position. In his conversation with Tenar, Manan explains,

[Kossil] is the High Priestess of the Godking, and the Godking rules. But she won't kill you in the open. She will do it by stealth, by poison, in the night. . . . There would be no Priestess of the Tombs, and the sacrifices would not be made, and the blood not poured out, and the worship of the Dark Ones could be forgotten, forever. She and [the Godking] would like it to be so. (*TOA* 121)

A key component in the psychological decline of the traditional Kargad religion is the influence of the Godking and his loyal servants upon the rest of the kingdom's population. As Le Guin will later demonstrate in *The Farthest Shore*, the leader of a land holds the power to hinder or encourage degeneration. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Le Guin shows a leader who chooses to promote a kind of degeneration in hopes of achieving greater power for himself.

To illustrate the spread of religious change in Atuan, Le Guin opposes the faith of Tenar to the unfaith of Penthe. As the narrator states,

[Tenar] had not realized how very different people were, how differently they saw life. She felt as if she has looked up and suddenly seen a whole new planet hanging huge and populous right outside the window, an entirely strange world, one in which the gods did not matter. She was scared by the solidity of Penthe's unfaith. (*TOA* 47)

Throughout most of the novel, Tenar represents the traditional religion of the Kargad lands. However, as Tenar grows in her knowledge of the Old Powers and encounters people with different religious beliefs, she realizes that belief in the Old Powers is not the only religious system available for the Kargad people. Although the transition from the Old Powers to the Godking shows elements of degeneration, this transition also emphasizes the cruelty involved in the worship practices of both religious systems.

Further elaborating on the degeneration experienced by the worshippers of the Old Powers, Le Guin emphasizes the disregarded state of the religious temples. As Tenar explains, “[The Godking’s] temple is painted fresh every year, there’s a hundred-weight of gold on the altar, the lamps burn attar of roses! And look at the Hall of the Throne – holes in the roof, and the dome cracking, and the walls full of mice, and owls, and bats” (*TOA* 28). If the people of Atuan had respect for the Nameless Ones and their power, the people would maintain the temples instead of letting them fall to ruin. As Buse highlights, “Landscapes are neither indifferent nor incidental in fantasy, but an indication of the way the narrative is progressing” (272). Because *The Tombs of Atuan* focuses primarily on people who have a growing unbelief in ancient ways, Atuan presents a different perspective on degeneration in Earthsea. Unlike Ged, Tenar does not believe in wizardry, but rather in the power of the Nameless Ones. The narrator explains that while exploring the tombs, “the powers of the dark, the Nameless Ones, would guide [Tenar’s] steps here, just as they would lead astray any other mortal who dared enter the Labyrinth of the Tombs” (*TOA* 52). Although the Nameless Ones do not have a physical form, Tenar believes in their power, and her devotion to them is dependent on her belief in both their existence and power.

In Le Guin’s fantasy, the lines between good and evil are difficult to navigate. However, Le Guin distinguishes between natural evil occurrences and degeneration that results from evil human motivation. For example, when Tenar is tasked with her first execution, Kossil states,

“The Priestess of the Tombs knows best what manner of death will please her Masters, and it is hers to choose” (*TOA* 37). By placing the decision in the hands of Tenar, Le Guin highlights the extent of humanity’s responsibility for degeneration in Earthsea. If Kossil’s statement is true, Tenar’s first choice of execution should have gone unquestioned. Since Kossil does question Tenar’s choice, Le Guin reveals the cruelty of the Nameless Ones and the evil intentions of Kossil. The death of the prisoners is evidence of Kossil’s capacity for evil, not solely the evil nature of the Nameless Ones.

However, regardless of the nature of the Nameless Ones, there is little question of their power. Although many people no longer believe in them, Le Guin highlights how lust for power provokes the degeneration of faith in the Nameless Ones in Earthsea. For example, as the narrator reveals,

Kossil had no true worship in her heart of the Nameless Ones or of the gods. She held nothing sacred but power. The Emperor of the Kargad lands now held the power, and therefore he was indeed a godking in her eyes, and she would serve him well. But to her the temples were mere show, the Tombstones were rocks, the Tombs of Atuan were dark holes in the ground, terrible but empty. (*TOA* 63)

Through contrasting the faith of Tenar with the unfaith of Kossil, Le Guin further establishes the cruelty of both Kossil and the Nameless Ones. Although the Nameless Ones possess great power, the nature of their power is often determined and wrongly implemented by people with evil intentions. While the Nameless Ones are not a source of good, the evil effects of their power manifest through the decisions of people who have the ability to use that power. Through people like Kossil who are growing in unbelief, Le Guin reveals how degeneration occurs in a fantasy world regardless of the kind of powers being presented. The method of progression may differ, but the presence of degeneration and the role that humanity plays in the cause and progression of degeneration remains painfully clear.

Although some characters seem to be more evil or good than others, Le Guin provides each character the opportunity to choose between good and evil. Before Tenar decides to help Ged escape the tombs, Ged states,

You must make a choice. Either you must leave me, lock the door, go up to your altars and give me to your Masters; then go to the Priestess Kossil and make your peace with her – and that is the end of the story – or, you must unlock the door, and go out of it, with

me. Leave the Tombs, leave Atuan, and come with me oversea. And that is the beginning of the story. You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You cannot be both. (*TOA* 137-38)

Through allowing Tenar to save or destroy Ged's life, Le Guin exposes how Earthsea's ancient powers wholly depend on individual choices. Since these powers provide good or evil actions to be executed, ultimately the nature of those powers is left in the hands of the person using those powers. Therefore, these ancient powers test the morals and values of the characters in Earthsea while providing the perfect atmosphere for exploring the cause and progress of degeneration.

Since Tenar decides to save Ged's life, a clear distinction between good and evil actions emerges based on the outcome of those actions upon the individual and the rest of the world. In "The Princess and the Wizard: The Fantasy Worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin and George MacDonald," Cordelia Sherman highlights,

A journey is an archetype of a child's psychological and moral development, which brings [him/her] in the end to stand in the light or be swallowed by the darkness. Le Guin and MacDonald know that the path to darkness is as torturous and difficult to chart as the path to light; Le Guin and MacDonald know that a child must tread both in the process of choosing between them. (25)

Through comparing the work of Ursula K. Le Guin with George MacDonald, a founding father of children's and young adult fantasy, Sherman emphasizes the influence and significance of psychological and moral development in fantasy literature. Although Le Guin and MacDonald are very different authors, their work deals extensively with the development of morals and how this process affects not only the characters but the existence of the fantasy world. To emphasize the difficulty between choosing to do good or evil, Le Guin shows how these decisions often require some kind of internal and/or external sacrifice. For Tenar, the choice between saving Ged's life and turning him over to Kossil requires both internal and external sacrifices: if she lets Ged live, she will be sacrificing her home but saving the life of an innocent person; if she lets Ged die, she will save her own life, but she will carry around the knowledge of Ged's death, and her hand in it, for the rest of her life. Le Guin shows the complexity of choosing between good and evil, but she also reveals that the choice between good and evil is a never-ending process, not a one-time occurrence. Like the continual process of choosing between good and evil, degeneration is never completely defeated. Degeneration will always have the opportunity to exist because of humanity's role in promoting it.

In *Atuan*, Le Guin highlights the importance of restoration through the concept of the Lost Rune. Soon after meeting Tenar in the tombs, Ged explains,

[The broken amulet of Erreth-Akbe] is what's been called, since then, the Lost Rune. . . . But the broken rune was the one that bound the lands. It was the Bond-Rune, the sign of dominion, the sign of peace. . . . Since it was lost there have been no great kings in Havnor. There have been princes and tyrants, and wars and quarreling among all the lands of Earthsea. (*TOA* 133)

The loss of the whole Ring is presented as responsible for a hitherto undiscussed degeneration of the Archipelago. The solution to peace and future prosperity, however, is not a revolution to produce change, but rather, striving for the restoration of Earthsea in its original form by reconnecting the separated halves of the Lost Ring.

Connecting the thread of degeneration and the need for restoration in the two novels, Ged tells the story of how he unknowingly acquired the first half of the Lost Rune while pursuing his shadow in the first novel. As Ged states,

I didn't know it for what it was, no more than she did. The greatest gift of this age of the world, and it was given by a poor old foolish woman in sealskins to a silly lout who stuffed it into his pocket and said 'Thanks!' and sailed off . . . Well, so I went on, and did what I had to do. . . . But all the time I kept the thing with me, because I felt a gratitude toward that old woman who had given me the only present she had to give. (*TOA* 134)

A key element to Earthsea's restoration is finding the ultimate symbol of peace: the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. By showing how Ged obtains the first half of the Ring, Le Guin emphasizes how restoration is achieved through humanity's ability to sacrifice a part of themselves to heal the damage done by degeneration.

As shown in the first and second novels, sacrifice is the key ingredient to defeat degeneration and restore Earthsea. In *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings*, Stefan Ekman states,

Most divisions of our world are social constructs, foisted on the land, and the most basic division is that between the landscape and ourselves. In fantasy, the situation can be, and often is, different: the land can be divided into areas where separate sets of rules of causality and laws of nature apply; dividing lines that we are familiar with can be rethought; and the division between people and their environment can be bridged. (3)

As explained by Ekman, the restoration of a fantasy world occurs through very different methods than seen in reality. In Earthsea specifically, one important ingredient for restoration is re-joining the lost pieces of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe and returning it to the Archipelago to reveal the true king of Earthsea. The Ring of Erreth-Akbe gives hope to Earthsea because it provides the possibility for restoration in the midst of chaotic degeneration. As Thar, a high priestess and believer in the Kargad religious traditions, highlights, “It is very long since Erreth-Akbe and Intathin lived, and yet still the story is known and told, both here and in the West. Most things grow old and perish, as the centuries go on and on. Very few are things that remain precious, or the tales that are still told” (*TOA* 59). The story of the Ring brings together the different lands and people of Earthsea to face a common threat: degeneration. Because of this story transcends boundaries, Ged and Tenar are able to move toward restoring Earthsea to its former glory.

Although the Lost Rune speaks to the need for collective restoration, the development of Tenar’s character speaks to the need for personal restoration. Once Ged and Tenar flee the tombs, the narrator highlights that “what [Tenar had begun to learn was the weight of liberty. Freedom is a heavy load, a great and strange burden for the spirit to undertake. It is not easy. It is not a gift given, but a choice made, and the choice may be a hard one” (*TOA* 172). It is significant that Le Guin allows the possibility for collective restoration to begin or end with the choice of a single individual. Although the Lost Rune seems to be the answer to stopping the degeneration of Earthsea, Le Guin reveals that restoration requires a collaboration of collective and personal acts. Because Tenar holds the power to allow or prevent Ged from restoring the Lost Rune, Le Guin establishes the interdependent nature of collective and personal choices in relation to restoration. Since degeneration is the result of collective and individual choices, the restoration of Earthsea also depends on a collaboration of these choices.

To further emphasize the need for personal restoration because of its connection to collective restoration, Le Guin allows Tenar to be reminded of her original name, the name she lost to the Nameless Ones while she was still a child. When Tenar inquires how she came to be the Priestess of the Tombs, Thar explains, “At the year’s end she is taken to the Hall of the Throne and her name is given back to those who are her masters, the Nameless Ones: for she is the nameless one, the Priestess Ever Reborn” (*TOA* 8). From a young age, Tenar is taught that it is an honor to have her original name taken from her. However, Le Guin never portrays the sacrifice of Tenar’s name as a noble or correct act. In fact, the narrator reveals that “when

[Tenar's] name was taken from her and she became Arha, she slept alone in the Small House, in the bed and in the room that would be her bed and her room for the rest of her life" (*TOA* 12). Le Guin portrays Tenar's life as one of loneliness, isolation, and permanent darkness. Since Tenar's life is not positively described, Le Guin implies that there is a need to restore what has been taken from Tenar.

Through his ability to properly identify an individual's true name, Ged establishes the desire for personal restoration in Tenar's life. When he reveals to Tenar that he knows her true name, Ged says, "You are like a lantern swathed and covered, hidden away in a dark place. Yet the light shines; they could not put out the light. They could not hide you. As I know the light, as I know you, I know your name, Tenar. That is my gift, my power" (*TOA* 130). Because Tenar's self-restoration begins with her regaining the first thing she lost as Priestess, Le Guin establishes the need to re-discover and return to an original state of being. As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos explains:

Just as complexes are clusters of ideas that derive from archetypes and link the individual psyche with the collective unconscious, naming in Earthsea is the bridge between the individual and the world. . . . [I]t is through names that the utterer personalizes the world and fleshes out [an] inner understanding. (52)

Because of her experience with degeneration, Tenar forgets the life she had before being given to the Nameless Ones. Since Tenar's personal restoration is inter-connected with the restoration of the Ring, Le Guin proves that there is a connection between personal and collective restoration. Through the personal restoration of Ged and Tenar, Le Guin emphasizes that the key to restoring Earthsea begins with the restoration of individual people. Because of the inter-connectivity of personal and collective restoration, Le Guin reveals how personal restoration often leads to the beginning of collective restoration. Le Guin's lesson is both simple and profound because the act of restoration is not a natural event, but is rather the result of humanity's conscious choice to make a difference in the world.

DEGENERATION: THE FARTHEST SHORE

In *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin deals primarily with the physical degeneration of Earthsea. It is the novel that clearly shows and focuses on the terrifying degeneration of the world and the responsibility that humanity has in that decline. Across the Archipelago people are experiencing inexplicable and disturbing loss: harvests are poor, flocks fail to thrive, and wizards forget their spells. It is eventually revealed that the root cause of degeneration lies in a spell cast by the renegade wizard Cob, a sinister figure who has induced the people of Earthsea to prefer a promise of eternal but undifferentiated existence to the finite but invaluable experience of mortality. Near the end of the novel, Ged explains,

For we have only what we know we must lose, what we are willing to lose . . . That selfhood which is our torment, and our treasure, and our humanity, does not endure. It changes; it is gone, a wave on the sea. Would you have the sea grow still and the tide cease, to save one wave, to save yourself? Would you give up the craft of your hands, and the passion of your heart, and the light of sunrise and sunset, to buy safety for yourself – safety forever? That is what they seek to do on Wathort and Lorbanery and elsewhere. That is the message that those who know how to hear have heard: by denying life you may deny death and live forever. (*TFS* 155-56)

Through Ged's understanding of humanity's role in degeneration, he is able to highlight humanity's need to accept responsibility for its part in harming the world. Magic is the glue that connects all life in Earthsea and that magic is used for evil in Cob's spell. Le Guin reveals the complex nature of humanity, magic, and degeneration in the novel.

As in the rest of the series, in *The Farthest Shore* Le Guin provides a specific degenerative threat that needs to be countered. Because of Cob's immortality spell, restoration comes in two forms: defeating Cob's spell and training Arren, a young Prince of Enlad, to be the new king of Earthsea. Although the novel centers on the destruction caused by Cob's spell, it begins by examining a number of other consequences: loss of magical abilities, excessive drug use, and physical decay of the land. As Arren brings news of the loss of magic in Enlad, Ged converses with the other mages: "Then to you all . . . it seems that there is nothing very wrong; or if there is, it lies in this, that our lands are ungoverned or ill-governed, so that all the arts and high skills of men suffer from neglect" (*TFS* 28-29). Although the others are concerned with the

loss of magic, Ged sees how disinterest has led or will lead to far greater consequences. Wizards are not the only people losing the ability to use magic; everyone is being negatively affected.

Le Guin reveals how the side effects of Cob's spell have a degenerative result on all Earthsea magic. For example, when Ged and Arren arrive at Hort Town, the narrator reports that "there was indeed something wrong about Hort Town, wrong in the very air, so that one might think seriously that it lay under a curse; and yet this was not a presence of any quality, but rather an absence, a weakening of all qualities, like a sickness that soon infected the spirit of any visitor" (*TFS* 63-64). At this point, the degeneration of Earthsea influences every aspect of the world – people, land, sea, animals, and language. The evidence of degeneration is present but unnoticed by the townspeople and unexplainable by Ged and Arren. Helping to explain the 'wrongness' felt in Hort Town, Buse reveals that

While wrongness is simply the first indication, an intrusion of something that does not make sense or should not be, thinning is the way that the world is corroded perversely by the threat. A concept like 'pollution' gains its valence from a similar movement, an extrapolation of uncanny or inexplicable events (wrongness) to an intuition about the state of the world as a whole: poisonous insects or even dying birds, taken individually, are not as pervasive a threat as they seem when amassed as a set of narratives that challenge collectively-held senses of 'normality.' (273)

While Buse generally refers to degeneration in fantasy as a general topic, her observations are relevant in the discussion of Le Guin's work. Although Cob's spell does not directly target the physical existence of Earthsea, the *sickness* that Ged and Arren feel is a result of the spell's ability to extinguish the magical powers of True Speech. Without True Speech, the people drawn to Cob's "eternal life" exchange the real Earthsea for a lesser version that destroys the true Earthsea. As people begin to long for a better world, they decide that the best way to enhance their world is to abandon the real Earthsea; however, Cob's Earthsea can never be experienced in the same way as the true version. The "wrongness" experienced in Hort Town is a by-product of degeneration that foreshadows the greater destruction yet to come.

Although the connection between True Speech and degeneration seems subtle, Le Guin alludes frequently to the consequences of losing True Speech. To clarify the significant power of True Speech, the Master Summoner explains that "No man, no power, can bind the action of wizardry or still the words of power. For they are the very words of the Making, and one who

could silence them could unmake the world” (*TFS* 27). Since the magic that created Earthsea fades with the destruction of True Speech, Le Guin stresses the significance of the magical language and its role in the preservation of Earthsea. To further explain the unique nature of True Speech, in “How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* Books,” Laura Comoletti and Michael Drouot suggest,

The speech acts of wizards . . . are enabled by the Old Speech, presumably because it is a creation language. Unlike real human language, which is arbitrary in nature, the Old Speech of Earthsea is perfect because its vocabulary is able to describe thoughts, actions, things – the world in its complexity – precisely. (119)

True Speech is responsible for the creation of Earthsea, and it has the power to sustain or destroy the world. With only a select group of people being able to use the magic that True Speech gives, the loss of it allows for certain people to hold a dangerous amount of power that enables the progress of degeneration within Earthsea.

To highlight the extent degeneration threatens Earthsea, Le Guin shows multiple locations touched by it. As Ged emphasizes,

This is evil, evil, what passes on this island: this loss of craft and pride, this joylessness, this waste. This is the work of an evil will. But a will not even bent here, not even noticing Akaren or Lorbanery. The track we hunt is a track of wreckage, as if we followed a runaway cart down a mountainside and watched it set off an avalanche. (*TFS* 111)

Although the exact cause of degeneration is undetermined at this point, Ged realizes that the individual responsible for initiating the process of degeneration often fails to anticipate the final outcome of the degenerative process upon others and the world.

In addition to physical degeneration, human degeneration also occurs at an alarming rate. For example, the people of Hort Town have taken up drug use on a wide scale. As Ged reveals, “Hazia. It soothes and numbs, letting the body be free of the mind. And the mind roams free. But when it returns to the body it needs more hazia. . . . And the craving grows and the life is short, for the stuff is poison. First there is a trembling, and later paralysis, and then death” (*TFS* 51). Similar to Hazia, the signs of degeneration often go unnoticed until there is little to be done to stop the course of destruction. The degenerative process begins with the *freeing* of the mind in hopes of gaining a better life experience. However, the people of Earthsea fail to realize that by

using hazia to escape reality they are aiding the cause and progress of degeneration. As people sacrifice the true Earthsea for a shadow version, their bodies begin to degenerate at alarming speeds.

Since Cob's spell is the central cause of Earthsea's degeneration, Le Guin emphasizes the immense responsibility this kind of magic places on the people who are able to use it. As Timmerman shows, "In the *Earthsea Trilogy*, the [Balance] derives from an eternal harmony of powers, also referred to by Le Guin as the Old Powers. These powers contain within them the possibility for good or evil use. It is man who upsets the pattern by his use of the powers. Thus the terrible danger of magic" (82). Although it appears that Cob's spell is initially responsible for the degeneration of Earthsea, the progress and near triumph of degeneration is the result of humanity's lust for power. By emphasizing human desire for power and fear of death, Le Guin shows how selfishness provides the opportunity for magic to be used by humanity in ways that lead to degeneration.

Le Guin shows the progression of degeneration through Arren's misunderstanding of magic's purpose and his growing unbelief in magic's power. As Ged and Arren embark on their journey to save Earthsea, Le Guin slowly reveals the extent of Arren's unrealistic expectation of magic. As Arren contemplates, "There was nothing in magery that gave a man true power over men; nor was it any use against death. The mages lived no longer than ordinary men. All their secret words could not put off for one hour the coming of their deaths" (*TFS* 126). Much like young Ged, Arren begins to doubt the effectiveness of magic when it does not provide growth of power or ensure a longer life. However, Arren's misunderstanding of magic's purpose adds to the degenerative atmosphere within Earthsea because, like many others, he begins to doubt the usefulness and importance of magic. Like Ged, Arren must choose between believing in the true purpose of magic or substituting his own purpose for magic. Although he has the freedom to choose his own understanding of magic's purpose, Arren cannot choose the consequences and responsibilities that accompany his final decision.

While Arren does not get pulled into Cob's spell, he allows his fears, doubts, and incomplete understanding of magic to result in his conclusion that Earthsea magic and the wizards who use it are frauds. At the height of Arren's fearful state, the narrator explains that "Always [Ged's] answers were grudging, hard to understand. There, thought Arren, lay the very heart of wizardry: to hint at mighty meanings while saying nothing at all, and to make doing

nothing at all seem the very crown of wisdom” (*TFS* 127). In Arren’s ignorance of Magic’s rightful purpose, he begins to doubt both the usefulness and reality of magic’s power. Through Arren’s thoughts about magic, Le Guin highlights a common belief that magic should always be used to solve life’s problems. In *The Farthest Shore*, the problem that people want magic to solve is death and morality, which leads to Cob creating the immortality spell that promotes the degeneration of Earthsea.

Through forcing Arren to choose between using magic for self-gain or the betterment of others and the world, Le Guin reinforces the thread that connects the importance of magic, human responsibility, and the degeneration of Earthsea. Since lust for power and selfish desires are responsible for the degeneration of Earthsea, Ged explains, “Insofar as we have power over the world and over one another, we must learn to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the Balance. Having intelligence, we must not act without responsibility” (*TFS* 85). Ged reveals how magic is needed to protect Earthsea in its original form, and if one should make a change it should be for the benefit of the original form of the world and not for individual gain. In reference to *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Jenkins explains:

Le Guin shows deep compassion for the suffering of Ged, but makes it clear that he brings it on himself by his refusal to cultivate these qualities of awareness and responsiveness [to the well-being of others]. She evidently feels that youth cannot be allowed to go on being an excuse for the willful abuse of power in a way that brings harm to the young individual himself and threatens harm to the rest of society. (24-25)

Throughout the series, Le Guin expresses how the goal of Ged, Tenar, and Arren is to restore their world through learning to place the well-being of others above their own self-interest and using the original magic that created the world to maintain it. I stress that Le Guin provides a world in which the protagonists’ desire to restore their world, not reform it.

If humanity, magic, and degeneration are bound together, before restoration can occur humanity must accept its role in the destruction of the world and recognize its role in its restoration. As Buce explains, “In times of ecological crisis, the world is thinned not only because of the destruction of the environment but because of the destruction of a sense that human beings have a place in it. Le Guin suggests that yearning for ‘another world,’ one which is ‘reconstructed’ or ‘rationalized,’ is giving everything for nothing” (277). Although it is not a crime to imagine a better world, Le Guin’s novels encourage people to consider restoring their

world rather than abandoning it for something better. Her message implies that people should acknowledge the negative aspects of their world and contemplate ways to return it to a better condition.

Interestingly, Le Guin chooses to use a non-magic user to be the savior and eventual protector of Earthsea. Although it is common for the fantasy protagonist to discover his/her unknown magical abilities at the end of the novel when the world needs him/her most, in *The Farthest Shore*, the narrator highlights that Arren

had hoped – from the very beginning he had hoped – that the reason the Archmage had chosen him and him alone for this voyage was that he had some inborn power, descended from his ancestor Morred, which would in the ultimate need and in the blackest hour be revealed: and so he would save himself and his lord and all the world from the enemy . . .

There was no magery in him. There never would be. (*TFS* 176-77)

Through Arren, Le Guin emphasizes how the solution to degeneration is not an individual's ability to perform magic; instead, the solution to degeneration is an individual's ability to place the needs of others and the world above his own.

Rather than focusing on how to reform Earthsea, Le Guin decides to focus on how to restore Earthsea. In response to Arren's negative observations regarding the degeneration of Earthsea, Ged says,

This is your kingdom, the kingdom of life. This is your immortality. Look at the hills, the mortal hills. They do not endure forever. The hills with the living grass on them, and the streams of water running. . . . In all the world, in all the worlds, in all the immensity of time, there is no other like each of those streams, rising cold out of the earth where no eyes see it, running through the sunlight and the darkness to the sea. Deep are the springs of being, deeper than life, than death. (*TFS* 211)

Instead of choosing to lose hope in regaining the original Earthsea, Ged strongly advocates for its restoration by drawing attention to the aspects of Earthsea that are too precious to lose. While Arren sees a land beyond the point of restoration, Ged sees a land worth protecting. In fact, the moral qualities woven throughout the *Earthsea Cycle* strengthen the idea of restoration because to restore is often more difficult than to reform. Therefore, Le Guin challenges readers to consider saving rather than changing their world, because the world is worth saving; people do

not need a better world, they need to learn to appreciate their world for what it truly is: an incredible gift.

Since Ged views Earthsea as a world to be treasured and protected regardless of its degenerative state, Arren begins to see the world through Ged's eyes. After Ged highlights the importance of Earthsea's moral code, the narrator explains,

Arren saw the world now with [Ged's] eyes and saw the living splendor that was revealed about them in the silent, desolate land, as if by a power of enchantment surpassing any other, in every blade of the windbowed grass, every shadow, every stone. So when one stands in a cherished place for the last time before a voyage without return, he sees it all whole, and real, and dear, as he has never seen it before and never will see it again. (*TFS* 212)

Although Ged's understanding of the world helps Arren reconsider letting the original Earthsea vanish, Le Guin allows Arren to reveal that imperfections do not justify the desire people have to reach a better or perfect version of Earthsea. In fact, much like the nature of humanity, Earthsea's imperfections create an environment in which people get to experience both the good and bad parts of life. In reality, people often need to see both good and bad in order to appreciate what they have. Arren's newfound appreciation for the imperfect state of Earthsea suggests that people need to protect their world regardless of its flaws, because there is no guarantee that the next world will be better. In fact, most often, the world sought after is a world that never existed at all.

Further revealing the significance of Arren and his choices, Le Guin uses the ominous teaching style of Ged to expose the importance of Arren choosing between a life of selfishness or selflessness. According to Sherman,

Ged teaches Arren responsibility by refusing to pass judgment on his actions. When Arren reasonably expects praise for asking the right question or blame for falling asleep on guard duty, Ged simply refuses to comment. . . . For Le Guin, calling an action good or evil is something an adult must learn to do for himself, by judging that action's consequences and its place in the grand pattern of life. (24)

Since Arren will one day be a great ruler, Ged understands the significance of Arren's ability to judge for himself which actions will benefit or harm himself, others, and Earthsea. More importantly, Ged shows that magic does not help people distinguish between right and wrong. In

fact, magic often provides the opportunity for people to give power to the selfish, dark parts of themselves that aid degeneration and prevent restoration.

Although much of Arren's training is directed by Ged, the primary reason for his candidacy is his lineage. When he first meets Ged, Arren says, "It is true I come of the lineage of Morred, if any tracing of lineage so old be true. . . . But I fear that you mistake me for something more than I am" (*TFS* 34). By providing Arren's connection to the original monarchy of Earthsea, Le Guin foreshadows the significance of Arren's family line and his ability to bring renewal to the world. While Arren voices his doubts, Ged states: "I did not mistake you for a wizard or a warrior or any finished thing. What you are I do not know. . . . What you will be, no one knows" (*TFS* 34-35). Because Arren comes from the original line of rulers, he has a biological claim to the throne. *The Farthest Shore* explores how Arren becomes more than the rightful heir of Earthsea. Instead, it shows how Arren becomes both heir and saviour of Earthsea by restoring it to its original state.

My point that Le Guin calls for restoration is confirmed as plausible by the consequences of Cob's decision to trade mortality for immortality. In a heartbreaking conversation with Cob, Ged states,

You sold the green earth and the sun and stars to save yourself. But you have no self. All that which you sold, that is yourself. You have given everything for nothing. And so now you seek to draw the world to you, all that light and life you lost, to fill up your nothingness. But it cannot be filled. Not all the songs of the earth, not all the stars of heaven, could fill your emptiness. (*TFS* 231)

Through his desire to defeat death, Cob loses a life worth living. Instead, he is left with a life void of happiness, beauty, and love. In his attempt to fill his lonely life, he calls out to the people of Earthsea in hopes of building a more fulfilled life as an immortal being, inviting them also to sacrifice mortality for immortality.

To combat degeneration in *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin emphasizes the cause of Cob's spell. Throughout the novel, Cob fails to realize that his personal endeavor allows for the possible degeneration of Earthsea. In "Jungian Patterns in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*," Raymond Thompson explains that "The traits of the shadow appear in Cob, whose preoccupation with self would destroy the entire world; this selfishness manifests itself most strikingly in the qualities of vanity, despair, and fear of death" (190). Like Ged, Cob allows his

desire for power over death to taint his use of magic. Similar to Ged's shadow, Cob's immortality spell emerges from a lust for power that produces individual and collective degeneration. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Lord Gensher states that Ged was "moved to [unleash the shadow] by pride and by hate. Is it any wonder the result was ruin?" (*WOE* 91). In other words, human selfishness plays a role in tarnishing magic and allowing it to foster degeneration.

Cob's spell allows for the further progression of degeneration by permitting people to make a choice: mortality or immortality. Since Cob's spell allows for the freedom to choose, Le Guin reveals that every individual is responsible for degeneration. As Thompson explains, "Orm Embar has shown the way: to conquer the crippling shadow of selfishness one must be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life" (192). In saving Ged and Arren, Orm Embar's sacrifice provides Ged the opportunity to later sacrifice his own magic to destroy Cob's spell and restore Earthsea. As Arren and Ged leave Selidor, Arren notices that the Archmage nearly forgets his yew staff. When Arren attempts to return the staff, Ged says, "Leave it. I spent all wizardry at that dry spring, Lebannen. I am no mage now" (*TFS* 247). To counter Cob's sacrifice to make immortality possible, Ged sacrifices wizardry to correct what Cob almost destroyed. Since individual people are responsible for the degeneration of Earthsea, Le Guin offers a solution to combat degeneration: the willingness to sacrifice one's life.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the *Earthsea Cycle*, Ursula K. Le Guin displays a fantasy world that deals with the complex connections among the nature of magic, the theme of degeneration, and the responsibility humanity has to accept an imperfect world and hinder degeneration wherever it appears. In each novel, Le Guin highlights numerous lessons such as the consequences of selfishness, responsibility for one's actions, and the high cost of restoration. However, the most important lesson Le Guin teaches is that restoration is never the easy choice. Before Arren makes his journey across Earthsea, Ged states, "I offer you, instead of a safe trip to Enlad, an unsafe voyage to an unknown end. You need not come. The choice is yours. But I offer you the choice" (*TFS* 35). Le Guin shows that restoration of Earthsea is going to be a dangerous, unpredictable, and difficult journey. Therefore, it is essential that whoever embarks on that journey has the choice to accept or deny the challenge. To each protagonist – Ged, Tenar, and Arren – Le Guin offers the choice to restore their themselves and their world.

In analyzing the *Earthsea Cycle*, I posit that Le Guin offers a difficult solution to a complex problem. For example, Thompson reveals,

Each [Earthsea] book moves progressively closer to the experience of death . . . The deepening levels of the descent are necessitated by the widening awareness of the shadow's range: Ged must deal first with his own personal shadow, then with the shadow of another individual, and finally the collective shadow of all mankind. (194)

If people associate the shadow with the cause, progress, and purpose of degeneration, they will begin to understand that the cause and the solution to degeneration are one and the same: humanity. For Earthsea, the solution calls for humanity to restore what it has destroyed, to fix what it has broken. As the narrator highlights, "A wizard's power of Changing and Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need" (*WOE* 59). In each novel, the fate of Earthsea rests not in the power the protagonists have to reform their world, but in the choice they have to restore it. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged learns that restoring the world involves self-restoration. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Tenar learns how self-restoration provides the courage to restore others. In *The Farthest Shore*, Arren learns that both people and the world are worth the personal cost of restoration. Throughout the *Earthsea Cycle*, Le Guin outlines the cause, progress, and purpose of degeneration by highlighting individual and collective forms of restoration.

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