

Ursula K. Le Guin

Beyond Genre

**Fiction for
Children
and Adults**

MIKE CADDEN

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Ursula K. Le Guin
Beyond Genre

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Contents

Series Editor's Foreword	vii	
Acknowledgments	ix	
Preface	xi	
Chapter 1	Le Guin's Continuum of Anthropomorphism	1
Chapter 2	Connecting Characters on the Continuum of Viewpoint	20
Chapter 3	Home as Travel Through Time and Place	49
Chapter 4	Earthsea: Crossover Series of Multiple Continua	79
Chapter 5	<i>Always Coming Home</i> : Childhood, Children's Stories, and the Child Reader	114
Chapter 6	Ethics and the Continuum of Hope: Genre and Audience	135
Chapter 7	An Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin	147
Endnotes	166	
Bibliography	188	
Index	197	

Series Editor's Foreword

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term "children" to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Owing to the fact that the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. Although the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last 50 years, there have been radical shifts in the scholarship that considers these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

JACK ZIPES

Acknowledgments

Like most young adults, I was a crossover reader—alternately reading Twain, Cormier, pulp fiction, Steinbeck, and young adult sports biographies. My first encounter with Ursula Le Guin was in 1980. I was a 16-year-old high school junior trawling my school library for something to read on my basketball team's trip to play a tournament in Boston. The trip from Oyster Bay, Long Island, to Boston would surely provide some down time during which I could avoid homework and enjoy a new book. It was there, somewhere on I-95, that I became a citizen of Earthsea. I was that young reader Parnassus Press asked Le Guin to target, and she hit her mark—a moving target heading across the Throgs Neck Bridge. Nice shot. Three points.

I didn't know it then, but Le Guin would catch me at various crossover moments—as a high school student looking for fantasy, as an undergraduate student rediscovering Le Guin the science fiction writer, as an instructor looking for something to use in a course on science fiction and fantasy (Is there a better author for such a mistaken combination course?), and as a doctoral student intent on studying children's literature in the field of English. In many ways I think my reading of Le Guin over time mirrored her production by genre, both of us concentrating more on the children's books later in our careers. It has been a joy to cross the bridges again and again.

Chapter 6 is a revision of "Speaking to Both Children and Genre: Le Guin's Ethics of Audience," which first appeared in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. It is reprinted here with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

I also want to thank Kent State University Press for permission to republish some material from "Purposeful Movement Among People and Places: The Sense of Home in Ursula K. Le Guin's Fiction for Children and Adults," which appeared in *Extrapolation*.

Portions of my article, "Speaking Across the Spaces Between Us: Ursula Le Guin's Dialogic Use of Character in Children's and Adult Literature," found in *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* appear in this book. My thanks go to the people at *Paradoxa* for their kind permission.

I am grateful to Missouri Western State College for sabbatical leave and travel funds, which were wonderful gifts vital to the completion of this project.

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Ursula Le Guin proved to be a generous respondent. My thanks to her for granting me interview time and for making notes on essay drafts. Her interaction made the process both more enjoyable and immediately enlightening.

Ultimately, however, this effort is dedicated to LuAnn, Rose, and Lillian—the three brown-eyed ladies on Lovers Lane, St. Jo.

Preface

He had now made unscathed, for the first time, that crossing-over and return which only a wizard can make with open eyes, and which not the greatest mage can make without risk.

Ursula K. Le Guin
A Wizard of Earthsea

The epigraph alludes to the wizard Ged's crossing from the land of the living to the Dry Land, the land of the dead in Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*. It is a perilous crossing, to be sure, and such a crossing in the third book in the Earthsea series will cost Ged his powers. Other wizards in the series lose their lives as a result of that crossing. Wizards cross that wall separating the two worlds with various motives. Some wish power in and over both realms, others cross in a selfless attempt to rescue someone, and then there is Ged, who would seem to cross because it is his destiny, as foretold in Earthsea lore.

Ursula K. Le Guin, a wizard of sorts herself, made her own crossover by publishing *A Wizard of Earthsea* in 1968. She had, by then, established herself as a writer of science fiction with her first three novels. When Herman Schein of Parnassus Press convinced Le Guin to write something for young adult readers, she made the crossover not only to a different audience, but to the genre of fantasy. Since childhood, Le Guin crossed genres as a reader: "I never read only science fiction, as some kids do. I read everything I could get my hands on, which was limitless."¹ As a writer she continues, through her fiction, poetry, and in her critical commentary, to investigate the legitimacy of categorizing her "thought experiments." She delights in "genre-busting," as she puts it, and is an exception even among crossover writers: Sandra Beckett notes that "the extensive list of dual-audience authors is greatly reduced, however, when limited to those whose works have made it into both the children's literature canon and the canon for adults."² Le Guin has won major awards as a writer for both children (Newbery Honor Book and the National Book Award), young adults (The Margaret Edwards Award and Arbuthnot Lecturer), and adults (Nebula and Hugo awards, a Pushcart prize, the prestigious Harold Vursell Award from the American Academy & Institute of Arts & Letters, and runner-up for both the National Book Award

and the Pulitzer Prize), a situation that Helma van Lierop-Debrauwer claims “breeches traditional boundaries and helps to establish a positive image” for the children’s writer.³ And her reputation as a literary theorist on the genres of fantasy and science fiction would be secure whether she wrote fiction or not. In fact, she won the Pilgrim Award, given by the Science Fiction Research Association for an outstanding body of *critical* work on science fiction.

Le Guin is a writer who has trafficked much among the genres (both of fiction and nonfiction), but she is much more interested in continuity than separation. She is interested in the connection of points, of ideas, rather than in the discrete and autonomous nature of categories nurtured so fondly by those of us in the business of literary exposition. She routinely thumbs her nose at the border guards of genre as she speeds by in a vehicle that is at once spaceship, stroller, family wagon, and dragon. She’s a writer more interested in matters of degree than kind, which is why she rails against the dividing lines critics, bookstores, and libraries impose on the literary world.

Genre crossing is almost as perilous a journey as it comes in the publishing world, since one can’t be certain that one’s readers will follow. Fans might not know that something is being offered by a favorite writer in what amounts to an entirely different section of the library or bookstore—which might as well be in a different world. She has made that crossing, seemingly unscathed, many times now—from science fiction to fantasy to realism, from fiction to poetry, from essays to editor’s introductions, from adult to young adult to children’s literature. And the subtexts that critics identify in her work are present in all of her work, though very infrequently are those connections made because of the real barriers of genre in the production of literary criticism. This is no fault of the critic whose work is in studying specific literary contexts. It is the nature of literary study itself that has resulted in the tendency of Le Guin’s fantasy to be ignored by her science fiction fans and critics, and of her realism, young adult, and children’s stories to be ignored by just about everyone.

This collection of essays pays attention to Le Guin’s lines of vision—not so much the lines that divide, but those that connect her work. I invite the reader to regard less the vertical lines of genre (well, at least until the sixth essay) and consider instead the horizontal lines that intersect and, arguably, blur those verticals. I argue that rather than crossing to avoid critical pursuers, or merely to try out a new type of fiction, Le Guin traces lines of thought and follows lines of vision that simply employ the different metaphors that different genres offer. With the exception noted in the volume’s sixth chapter, these lines don’t mark the movement from one genre to the next as much as they mark the moves from one idea, one type of character, a certain plot, a particular relationship, a specific reader to another; they allow us to see her trying out ideas in subtle variation rather than only in completely different literary contexts.

She isn't so much inviting us to leap across literary chasms as pointing to the next stone in the stream to step on. The last stone might have been science fiction, the one we stand on might be realism, the next children's literature, but the line is one that traces the idea of, say, anthropomorphism, or degrees of character connection, or ways of coming home—and we sometimes have each foot on a different stone. We tend to want to take those strings of stones and make big genre rock piles out of them. Like her characters, Le Guin wants to travel in the company of others, and the regrouping of rocks into piles has potentially isolated her readers from each other and herself. I think there's an invitation in her work to follow her one step at a time along lines of vision. As we see in the latest volume of *Earthsea*, Le Guin will tear down the wall between worlds and reestablish a continuous line of existence. "Something there is," Robert Frost tells us, "that doesn't love a wall." Le Guin's body of work is one such thing.

The first three essays deal with questions of character in different ways. The first proposes a continuum of sentience in Le Guin's work—from the alien to the human, from the animal to the dragon, and the points between. She ultimately privileges an examination of difference through a dialogue among different types of being rather than through a synthesis of types, which is often the case in science fiction. The next essay then asks the reader to consider the continuum of connections possible among characters, of how they connect and what the implications are for complete connection at one end and utter isolation on the other. I argue that character viewpoint and focalization strategies are the means by which Le Guin achieves character connection or isolation. The second essay argues that Le Guin's work features dialogue among different points of view rather than presenting monologue. Suzanne Reid comments on reasons that Le Guin should be at home presenting various points of view in so many contexts: "Ursula learned early from her family and their many acquaintances to look beyond the boundaries of a single viewpoint."⁴ In fact, she devotes a section in her book on creative writing, *Steering the Craft*, to polyphony: "one of the marvelous things about that marvelous thing the novel is its many-voicedness, its polyphony. All kinds of people get to think, feel and talk in a novel, and that great psychological variety is a part of the vitality and beauty of the form."⁵

In the third essay, I examine how characters move through time and place. Although the first two essays argue for continua of existence and character connection, respectively, the third examines those characters' movement through time and place with others as a means of finding "home." As there is a line charting sentience and degrees of character connection, there is a line of possibilities for chronotopic movement in the pursuit of home. How do characters move across time and place in her fiction? What are the chronotopic possibilities? There turns out to be a rather long line of subtle gradations irrespective of genre that account for how, or whether, characters find a sense of home.

The fourth and fifth essays examine particular contexts—the alternative world of Earthsea and the future world of *Always Coming Home*, respectively—and examine multiple lines of thought and vision in each of those. Rather than considering one line across many works, as I do in the first three essays, these two essays show how specific works employ multiple continua. In the Earthsea sextet, I look down lines such as the movement from epic to novel, the gradation of age-based genres, the shift in viewpoint and dialogue strategies, the change in protagonist focus, the line of character relation (as discussed in the first two essays), and the chronotopic continuum in the series (as discussed in the third essay). In *Always Coming Home*, similar continua are present regarding genre and character viewpoints and relationships, as well as a continuum of implied readership.

The sixth essay is a reconsideration of Le Guin’s relationship to genre. In this essay I argue that what appear to be separate works by genre (fantasy, science fiction, realism) can be reconsidered as a continuum of hopeful fiction that corresponds to Le Guin’s notion of age-based implied readerships.

Following that last essay is an interview in which I ask Ursula K. Le Guin about these crossings-over by genre and her journeys along lines of thought and vision. Here Le Guin discusses her work as a crossover writer—or writer for multiple audiences—as well as her writing practices and the genesis of some of her work. The interview covers ground not previously considered in her other interviews to date.

These seven chapters attempt to show the ways Le Guin “steers the craft” of fiction—to borrow from the title of her handbook on writing—along the lines of ethics, genre, narration, character, plot, and audience. And in keeping with Le Guin’s practice of observing continua of many kinds all through her fiction, I offer these essays in a line of sorts. So, as the essays progress, the line narrows in scope regarding the number of texts considered but broadens in terms of the number of textual, subtextual, and contextual continua entertained.

My approach in these essays is to consider features of narrative, though a narrative approach is ultimately in the service of arguments about her subtexts of connection and continuity. I think it’s important not only to note the presence of themes or subtexts as they exist in different works in different genres, but to show the narrative strategies that mark the relationship among works outside the context of genre. Her ideas can be considered in an alternative structure.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin informs much of this work because the continuum is a highly dialogic metaphor. Any one point in a line is in conversation with the ones next to it; a line isn’t a random collection of independent points, after all. In order to see a line as a continuous form, we have to recognize the connection of point to point. As the line “fills in,” the importance of any individual point diminishes in service to the creation of that line. And

unless a line has an arrow at one end, or is curved to suggest a movement up or down, it doesn't imply progression or regression. Indeed, Le Guin's thought experiments ask us to consider the continuum as a whole, as a series of relationships that demand consideration, not the ends of lines. As I argue in one of the essays, "home" isn't a point of arrival or departure—an either end of a line—but a movement along a line under certain important conditions. The line is a sum of its points; Le Guin's larger mission is to present a sum of points not to be separated from each other in their consideration. Bakhtin also makes it clear, unlike many narrative theorists, that one cannot tear asunder form and content, text and subtext, in order to determine what is at work in a literary text. For these reasons I cite Bakhtin's ideas throughout these essays.

I've commented on the significance of the title, but let me say something as well about the subtitle of this book. Le Guin once wryly observed, "with the agreed exception of *Alice in Wonderland*, books for children are to be mentioned only dismissively or jocosely by the adult male critic."⁶ An important aspect of this book is the discussion of Le Guin's children's books, or of the child reader, in each of these essays. I hope that this critical adult male will show that Le Guin makes it impossible for us to dismiss or laugh her children's works off of center stage. Donna White, for instance, has discussed in her fine book on Le Guin's treatment by the critics, *Dancing with Dragons*, how Ursula Le Guin's work for children has been ignored in scholarship in some journals that focus on speculative fiction, while her adult work gets short shrift in children's literature journals.⁷ We often disregard what Le Guin has to say across the body of her fiction. The children's book is an important form of fiction to consider, and by illustrating the relationship between them and her works for young adults and adults we both recover her larger body of fiction and further the argument that children's literature, and its study, cannot be dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant. Richard Erlich recently wrote that Le Guin's work is "an interrelated set whose individual members are mutually illuminating and defining."⁸ It is my hope to add to the discussion by highlighting that mutual illumination through a juxtaposition of all of her fiction along various lines. Because this book entertains all of Le Guin's fiction, by genre and by readership of all ages, the audience for this book is potentially quite large.

It is perhaps best to consider the audience for this collection of essays by halves. The first three essays in this collection will be most rewarding to those familiar with Le Guin's work since the purpose of those essays is less to provide close readings of individual texts than to chart phenomena that cross most of her fiction. There are portions of those essays that necessarily allude to works rather than delve into them, especially the short fiction contained in her story-suites *Orsinian Tales*, *Searoad*, and *Four Ways to Forgiveness*. The fourth and fifth essays treat many fewer works and provide

much closer reading as a result; these two—which examine the Earthsea series and *Always Coming Home*, respectively—I believe, are quite accessible to readers less familiar with those stories. The sixth chapter, because it discusses Le Guin’s relationship to genre rather than specific works by the author, should also prove profitable to a general reader interested in the relationship between children’s and adult literature, as well as the reader intimate with Le Guin’s body of work. Through this shift in scope, and therefore a shift in (or reconfiguration of) implied reader, I attempt to make the collection useful for a variety of readers. Indeed, as the book examines continua in Le Guin’s work, there is an invitation to several continua of readers: critics of the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and realism; critics of adult, young adult, and children’s literature; and readers familiar with Le Guin’s work to those unfamiliar with it.

Le Guin is a writer of continua who is coincidentally shelved in rather different places— in libraries, bookstores, classes, and professors’ bookcases. The goal of this project is to help her readers cross from one shelf to another or one bookcase to another—to make those wooden shelves more porous than they already are. The characters in her children’s book *Soloman Leviathan’s Nine Hundred and Thirty-First Trip Around the World* pursue the horizon, not a destination. They know they won’t ever get there, but they marvel at the points of interest along the way. So it is with Le Guin. She’s still traveling and we along with her.

1

Le Guin's Continuum of Anthropomorphism

In no case is a higher third born of the confrontation of opposites.

George Slusser

The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin

Only when the Man listens, and attends, O Best Beloved, and hears, and understands, will the Cat return to the Cat's true silence.

Ursula K. Le Guin

Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences

[The dialogic text] is constructed not as a whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects unto itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics

Harold Bloom compliments Le Guin as a writer of "precise, dialectical style."¹ Le Guin does not seem to value dialectic, however. There are many different unreconciled ideas in Le Guin's work. In the Earthsea books alone, Le Guin purportedly draws on Taoism, Jungian psychology, various feminisms, different models of anthropology, "the Hermetic and Neo-Platonic traditions and some elements of Zen,"² Sartre's existentialism, and "Buber's I-Thou relationship and some of Martin Heidegger's ideas on speech and being."³ We would have trouble synthesizing these many systems, to be sure. I don't think Le Guin is asking us to.

Dialogue, while concerned with interdependence, does not insist upon a synthesized or reconciled position but revels in simultaneous, separate, and equally powerful positions in concert with each other. Le Guin engages in "thought experiments" in the parallel lines of different genres regarding the

way worldviews relate to each other. Rather than address the dialogue among formal philosophies like those described above, I want to examine the way Le Guin uses anthropomorphism to show the limits of binary and dialectic. She establishes a continuum that plots points on the line for humans, animals, aliens, and dragons and then examines the spaces between those points. Even when it seems that Le Guin is synthesizing different positions on the continuum of sentience by providing us with characters like the eponymous Tehanu, Myra from “Buffalo Gals” (1987) and Selver in *The Word for Word is Forest* (1972),⁴ she is really showing us how those positions, or characters, on the line are in conversation with each other—any character is a platform for dialogue rather than a determined identity.⁵ There is a line that stretches between the binary of self and other, and Le Guin is interested in the degrees between those end points.

The Human and the Animal

Hailing the other across distance is important in Le Guin’s work. The space between us is the most vital part of a relationship because it is what allows relationship to occur—it signifies the need for relationship and establishes a place for it. Michael Holquist asserts that even “the very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*. This otherness is not merely a dialectical alienation. . . . On the contrary: in dialogism consciousness is otherness” (1990, 18). Synthesis removes the space between and fragmentation proclaims it to be unbridgeable—or it simply ignores the gaps entirely. One cannot create a self or a round literary character by destroying the other, synthesizing it with the self, or eschewing contact with it.⁶ In each of these cases we are left with only part of the story of existence, and a skewed one at that.

Le Guin recognizes the necessary separation of the self and the other, but she tries to get characters as close to the other as possible and mediate a gap that cannot simply be closed. What Le Guin says of people might be said of her characters: “If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself . . . you may hate it or deify it; but in either case, you have denied it spiritual equality and its human reality.”⁷ Le Guin repudiates the ultimate fragmentation of characters as “wholly different,” yet she doesn’t suggest the equally simplistic notion that we’re all really just the same deep down. As she says in the introduction to her collection *Buffalo Gals and other Animal Presences*, “this conversation, this community [of animals] is not a simple harmony. The Peaceable Kingdom, where the lion and lamb lie down, is an endearing vision not of this world. It denies wilderness. And voices cry in the wilderness.”⁸ She argues for difference by degree—real and potentially dangerous differences, but differences that are not insuperable. There are many stops between self and other.

Roger Sale argues that animal characters are “the major source of the power of the best children’s literature.”⁹ The animal character provides the writer of children’s and adult literature with yet another way to approach the question of identity. Ann Swinfen observes that “this urge to leap the gulf which divides men from animals is shared by the writers of all animal tales, . . . whatever may be the other motives behind their work” (14). Margaret Blount claims that all writers who use animals as dramatic material are attempting to cross “the great gulf between human and animal.”¹⁰ In attempting to cross this gulf, the author “may leap, build bridges, or even pretend the gulf isn’t there” (Blount, 17). And authors have provided us with everything from people in fur, as we see in *The Wind and the Willows* and *Angelina Ballerina*, to the animal represented with the consciousness that the author believes is peculiar to its species, such as in *Call of the Wild* and *Black Beauty*.¹¹ William Magee marvels that certain writers for children, especially Elizabeth Sewell, achieve in their writing a “distinctive and credible nonhuman point of view.”¹² Different authors attempt to represent the animal at various distances from the human, and they have different beliefs about how far from the human they can go.¹³

Useful anthropomorphism should go beyond a random use of animals as people. Many contemporary children’s picture books depict characters as animals with no apparent purpose except the obvious belief that the implied audience likes animals. The nature of the animal often isn’t part of the rationale for the choice (the fox and hen as natural enemies, for instance), nor is the animal supposed to have some metaphoric value (foxes are crafty). At best animal characters often merely serve as costumes for characters almost childlike themselves; at worst they are part of a strategy to erase race, class, and gender from what might otherwise be stories depicted in realistic settings. Ducks and cats paint houses together and spiders have tea parties for insects. In her fiction works, Le Guin’s animal choices are always purposeful. In her *Solomon Leviathan* (1983) a giraffe and boa constrictor take to the waves in a rowboat. While this might seem like a set of odd character choices, it’s important to note that the absurdity of the relationship matches the absurdity of their quest to find the horizon. In other words, the characters are purposefully absurd.

Nor should anthropomorphism be a thoughtless mixture of animal and human, or what Le Guin describes as “just tacking a few tentacles or queer mating habits on to a standard Anglo-Saxon cardboard man and calling it a Pxzquilchian Native.”¹⁴ Such pasting of parts or swapping of heads Barbie/G.I. Joe-fashion serves not to put the animal and human (or different kinds of animals) in relation with each other but to point out the failure of synthesis. Le Guin plays with this failure on purpose when she creates her woefully designed Milts in *The Adventure of Cobbler’s Rune* (1982). The characters are meant, as an odd mixture of creatures, to seem both ridiculous

and monstrous. Purposeful mixture of animal and person can be done, and must be since we are limited in our ability to imagine what is truly other. C. S. Lewis challenges us “to imagine a new primary colour, a third sex, a fourth dimension, or even a monster which does not consist of bits of existing animals stuck together. Nothing happens.”¹⁵ Le Guin, for her part, thinks of the animal as something neither to equate with nor divorce from humanity. Rather, she asks us to consider it along with the child and the woman as points increasingly distant from “man,” neither in opposition to him nor in search of blending into him. It is her opportunity to get us to play with how the vertical line of status intersects the horizontal line of sentience. “So long as ‘man’ ‘rules,’ animals will make rude remarks about him” (1990c, 12).¹⁶ Le Guin asks us to move from the vertical to horizontal line as we consider difference; she encourages us to rethink status by using anthropomorphism as the metaphor of difference.

Of Synthesis and Connection Denied

In a few of her stories reproduced in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (1987) Le Guin plays with the problems of animal-human relationships and the related difficulty of adult-child, man-woman relationships. These are stories about betrayal across gender, age, and species. Two of the tales deal with transformation and two with separation. “The Wife’s Story” and “Horse Camp” each show us a transformation: the former is about the transformation from wolf to man and the latter is about the transformation from girl to horse. In “The Wife’s Story” we are told of a mysterious problem that a She-wolf’s husband is having. He acts strangely, and their children don’t seem to recognize him: “Make it go away!” shouts the youngest in her father’s face.¹⁷ It turns out that the husband changes into a man “in the dark of the moon” and is caught in the transformation at the story’s end (68). According to his wife, he had “turned into the hateful one” and his destruction by the pack is necessary if regrettable (70). The wife waits to see if he will resume his wolf form at the end or perhaps come back to life in his wolf form with the death of the human, but the human corpse remains. The two forms die together. From H. G. Wells to Le Guin, it is clear that trying to synthesize man and animal and erase difference is not the answer. The man-wolf ends up betraying himself and his family; the pack and his wife betray him; all betray the children. There is no way to combine, erase, or ignore difference without betrayal and destruction.

In “Horse Camp” the transformation is subtle and gradual, and more figurative than literal. Norah, off to horse camp with her friends and older sister, identifies more and more with the horses. By the last third of the story Norah begins to see herself as a horse, identifying with the horses that run free, feel beautiful, and are disciplined by Meredy the handler.

At the end of the story, however, she sees her older sister Sal, now also a horse, “walking lightfoot and easy, fresh, just starting up to the high passes of the mountain. On her back a young man sat erect, his fine, fair head turned a little aside, to the forest. One hand was on his thigh, the other on the reins, guiding her.”¹⁸ Adolescent Sal is heading into the dark forest of sexuality in horse form—reined in and reigned over by the erect young man. “No, no, no, no!” Norah calls, feeling betrayed in some ineffable way by change, her sister, the boy, and her own future (147). The horse and woman are analogous here as two who are subject to handling by man. It is a comparison made to show us what awaits the beautiful, the free, the strong girls in a world where the axis of power is vertical, where she and the horse are both ridden.

Two other stories that deal with animals and betrayal feature different thought experiments. Rather than having the gaps erased, as in “The Wife’s Story,” they are made unbridgeable. This is the betrayal. In “The White Donkey” young Sita encounters a unicorn as she takes her goats to a field to graze. The unicorn can be approached, we know from folklore tradition, only by a virgin. Sita finds the “donkey” beautiful and, after a little hesitation on the unicorn’s part, establishes a relationship of trust and appreciation. Sita doesn’t know that the animal is a unicorn; to her it is a singularly beautiful white donkey with a curious horn on its forehead. As it is with “Horse Camp,” this story is about the girl-horse bond that Le Guin recognizes as both typical and instructive regarding empathy; it illustrates the dramatic irony of these innocent girls reaching out to the other in a man’s culture.

Sita’s uncle arranges her marriage and she has to say goodbye to her white donkey, for as a married woman she will move to her new husband’s home, and her brother will take over the goats. She has been “sold” for “one bullock and one hundred rupees cash.”¹⁹ She cries when she says, “‘Goodbye, white donkey.’ The white donkey looked at her sidelong, and slowly, not looking back, moved away from her and walked into the darkness under the trees” (142). Her uncle, who sends her off to a man at whom she wouldn’t look earlier, betrays the relationship and mediation between the girl and the mythical beast. Separation is forced and the gap is made impassable.

In “May’s Lion” there is another case of man cutting off the mediation between woman and beast, though betrayal might be seen in multiple ways. In Aunt May’s account given by her niece, the story’s narrator, we learn that a mountain lion has come out of the woods and rests beneath the fig tree in the yard. The cat is sick, May determines. She doesn’t know what to do. She is concerned that she has to milk her old cow Rosie and that time is running out for her to make a decision. After consulting with Miss Macy on the telephone and being made to worry about rabies, May calls the sheriff. Two car-

loads of men respond and May concludes, “I guess there was nothing else they knew how to do. So they shot it.”²⁰ The vertical relationship is chosen—shoot the wild thing. They don’t know any other way.

Betrayal is complicated, as complicated as the relationships that exist in the story: “I didn’t want him shot. But I didn’t know what to do for him. And I did need to get to Rosie” (183). The men betray May by shooting the lion, a sick lion that May gives water to and wishes no harm. May betrays the lion by turning it in. Rosie the cow, whose attention is made a priority because she is a part of the system, betrays the lion with her need. The cow betrays May by forcing her to make a decision. May betrays herself by deciding not to go on to Rosie in spite of the lion in the yard. Nobody escapes blame in this tale.

But the narrator offers us an alternative. After she relates May’s story to us there is a gap in the text—a gap as significant as that between animal, woman, and man in the story. Across that gap the narrator offers another way. The narrator wants to tell the story again as fiction, “yet without taking it from [May]; rather to give it back to her, if I can do so” (183). In this version the woman in May’s position decides to walk by the mountain lion in order to milk the cow. Later the mountain lion dies beneath the fig tree. The cow is milked, the lion dies on its own terms, and there is no betrayal: “It’s still your story, Aunt May; it was your lion. He came to you. He brought his death to you, a gift; but the men with guns won’t take gifts, they think they own death already. And so they took from you the honor he did you, and you felt that loss. I wanted to restore it” (188). Le Guin speculates that “perhaps it is only when the otherness, the difference, the space between us is perceived as holy ground, as the sacred place, that we can ‘come into animal presence’” (1990c, 13).

Neither synthesis nor separation is satisfying, and the notion of having to make a choice between the two is unacceptable. In two other tales Le Guin experiments with trying to allow characters to have insight into both the human and the animal while being both and neither simultaneously.

Human and Animal Eyes in *Tehanu* and “Buffalo Gals”

Myra from “Buffalo Gals, Won’t You Come Out Tonight” (1987) and Tehanu and Tenar from *Tehanu* (1990), the fourth book in the Earthsea series, are involved in character bridging.²¹ What can we make of the relationship between animals and people in these texts? How are the animal others, as well as our human selves, constructed in the narratives, and by whom? While Margaret Chang asserts that “Buffalo Gals” and *Tehanu* are connected in terms of their “integration of wildness into the whole of human experience,”²² I would say that the “integration” of the one trait into the other bears critical investigation. Is the animal, alien, and human melded in the same

character? Are these different parts actually integrated and reconciled? Or is there, rather, a dialogue going on about wildness among and within characters along the continuum of animal sentience?

Animality is extensive in *Tehanu*, despite the fact that relatively few animals are found in the novel other than some sheep and a few goats. Animality is a tool used for understanding relationships, nonetheless. Roger Sale points out that “if the [narrative] handling [of animal characters] becomes fixed or settled too soon, a kind of paralyzed storytelling can result” (252), a paralysis not unlike the allegorical limitations of fable. This limiting condition, this animal stasis, is not found in either *Tehanu* or “Buffalo Gals.” We see various and shifting “animal presences” in the character of Tehanu.²³ She who is other, Tehanu, is seen to have animal qualities by Tenar, Tehanu’s foster mother, and the external narrator. Tehanu is given various animal contexts that provide multiple ways to think of who she is, which range from the domestic animal to the feral child or the dragon itself. No gap between two selves is definitively filled, only temporarily bridged or loosely woven in several places. Identity remains slippery.

In *Tehanu*, the narrator focalizes through Tenar, observing Tehanu as “a little ruined butterfly” (8), “docile animal” (35), a “mousing cat” (32), one with a “crab’s claw” (37), as a “bird” (72), and as a “little animal” (179, 199).²⁴ A relatively detached narrator, in this case, gives us Tenar’s impression that Tehanu “vanish[ed] in the evening light beyond the dark doorframe, flying like a bird, a dragon, a child, free” (*Tehanu*, 103). Tehanu is like all of these things at once and yet she is not any one of them. Tenar calls Tehanu her “birdlet” (*Tehanu*, 52–53, 111) and her “little bird, flame” (*Tehanu*, 119). Interestingly, a young Tenar/Arha has a dream in *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), the second book in the Earthsea series, in which “her despair grew so great . . . like a bird of fire,”²⁵ first giving us that image in relation to herself. Tenar links the images in ways that invite us to think not of a bird-flame, a phoenix rising from the ashes of an old world order, or even of a dragon, but as both bird and flame unblended, unreconciled in form or purpose despite the promise of a new Earthsea that will be revealed in *The Other Wind* (2001), the sixth and currently last book in the series.²⁶

It is Tenar’s vision of Tehanu that helps Tehanu redefine herself as someone more than the burn scars she bears on her face and body (*Tehanu*, 172). In the book, Tenar gives “the nameless child” (*Tehanu*, 8) the portentous Kargish name “Tehanu,” which means “burning, the flaming of fire” (9). Tenar, the namer, herself is multiple: “All her former selves are alive in her: the child Tenar, the girl-priestess Arha, who still thinks in Kargish, and Goha the farmwife, mother of two children. Tenar is whole, but not single.”²⁷ Tenar does not name from a position of singularity, as do the wizards, but names as a dialogue of selves, which explains the multiple ways she sees and names Tehanu.²⁸