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The Making of *Always Coming Home*

Ursula K. Le Guin

Todd Barton

Margaret Chodos-Irvine

George Hersh

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Abstract

Transcript of panel discussion from 1988 Mythopoeic Conference. Author, illustrator, composer, and cartographer/ researcher discuss the genesis of *Always Coming Home*.

Additional Keywords

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*; Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*—Illustrations; Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*—Maps; Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*—Music and musical instruments

The Making of Always Coming Home

A panel at Mythopoeic Conference XIX Berkeley, California, July 31, 1988
 Ursula K. Le Guin, Todd Barton, Margaret Chodos-Irvine, George Hersh, panelists.

Le Guin: This isn't really so much a panel as, probably, a question and answer session, the way we figured, because we really didn't know what you wanted to hear about, but we figured you knew what you wanted to hear about. So if you will just ask us — I'm the writer, and this is George, the geomancer, and that is Margaret, the artist, and that is Todd, the composer. We are all here either to tell you truly or somewhat fictionally about how we did it.

Question: I'm wondering if you had planned from the very beginning to integrate the music and dance, and so on, with the text.

Le Guin: No. It was after I'd worked on it for quite a while, and had written a good deal of the poetry, particularly, or descriptions of the dances. I kept thinking, "I wish I could hear the music. But I don't have the music; I just have the words." Todd was doing the music for a little radio play that I wrote for KSOR in Ashland. That's how we first met. And I liked his music — incidental music for a little radio play. So I sort of pulled my courage together, knowing that Todd is the music director of the Ashland Shakespeare company, and has many many styles under his belt: "Would you like to write the music for a non-existent people?" [Laughter] There was a little pause —

Barton: About a millisecond. [Laughter]

Le Guin: — he processed it, and then he said "Yes." And so then we went on —

Barton: And that turned into about a year and a half —

Le Guin: Yes. You got yourself into deep water right away.

Barton: But from that also came the fact that the poems she first gave me were in English, and I said, "But don't they speak something different?" And then —

Le Guin: There was a long pause. [Laughter]

Barton: And the ricochet is still being heard. And hence the language had to be made up. And I'll never live this one down. So that was another six months, at least.

Le Guin: Just about.

Question: Are you going to do more tapes of the music?

Barton: More tapes of the Kesh? It's something that's definitely been in the back of our minds. That's a possibility. Let's see what happens. Instruments are being built, as you know: we have the *houmbúta* that's sitting here as an ornament today. It's the Great Horn of the Kesh culture. It was finished Monday. I picked it up Monday in Ashland, Oregon, and put it in the car with all the kids and came down.

Question: In the car? It's so large.

Barton: The fellow that made this is also working on the bone reed flute that you see pictures of in the back of the book [Harper ed. p. 445, Bantam ed. p. 475]. And Leigh Ann Hussey and her husband are working on the *tówardou*, the hammered dulcimer. So there's some interest. It would be wonderful, in a few years, when all these instruments have finally been created, to have Kesh music and poetry in the sequel, on the real instruments, instead of made-up ones that I had to create.

Question: If this was made on Monday, how did you record the music on the tape that I got a year and a half ago? [Laughter]

Le Guin: Here comes the fictional part.

Barton: To do the music, I went on sort of archaeological digs in my mind. First I tried to create the musical theory, and found that was eventually a sort of a barrier, a dead end for the moment. And then I realized I needed to find what instruments these people played, and sort of derive the theory and style of performance from the instruments. So I went trying to find instruments, and would take these instruments, very poorly sketched out, and profusely described, since I'm not an artist, to Ursula, and she would tell me whether they were pre-Kesh or post-Kesh or indeed Kesh. After I got those worked out and actually designed them, since I had built instruments before — and they had to be acoustical instruments — I designed them and then Peggy would draw them for me. That was wonderful, because they were just in my head. Given the time frame we had, we couldn't create all these instruments, so all the instruments were created on a single synthesizer. The only acoustical instrument you hear is the hammered dulcimer, which is an Appalachian American style trapezoidal hammered dulcimer. All the other sounds are synthesized, but I took a very long time to try to make them sound acoustical. And indeed, this comes out sounding close to the sound on the tape.

Le Guin: The *houmbúta* is simply in a picture on page 474 of the little book [Bantam ed., Harper ed. p. 444]. It looks exactly like this instrument, which only now exists! The picture was drawn long before.

Chodos-Irvine: It's pretty amazing for me. [Laughter] I'm glad that the drawing looks the same as the instrument.

Le Guin: Peggy is a person who prefers to draw from life, and this was something of a problem sometimes. [Laughter] I would say, "Peggy, you can't!"

Barton: The last anecdote on the *houmbita* is that when it was created there was an added bonus for me on Monday. Usually an alphon, which this is sort of a precursor or predecessor of, or the long Tibetan horns, those horns when you play them, the first few notes you would get would be like [Sings]. It'd be an octave, a fifth, a fourth. This, the first four partials are all fourths, which is a very good Kesh thing to be. It's unique, as far as acoustics — I've never heard of an open-end pipe that overblows in fourths.

Le Guin: It's a four-house instrument.

Question: Is that part of its design?

Barton: It has to be part of its design, but I didn't know that was going to happen. It's probably because of the long narrow — it's conical, but it's so long and narrow up here.

Question: What kind of bore does it have?

Barton: It's a gently flaring conical bore. It starts out about three-eighths of an inch, and comes out down here at about three inches. It's nine feet long, so that's a very slow taper. Most other instruments, even a French horn, would have a slightly —

Question: How did you actually manage in terms of building it?

Barton: The fellow who made it is Stephen Bacon, and there's some cards. He makes recorders and shakuhachis and things. If anyone's interested, by the way, definitely come get these [brochures] up here. This one was actually cut in — he found a piece of *madrone* which looked exactly like the picture, and it was seasoned, it was just laying out in the woods in southern Oregon. [Laughter] Because it was seasoned, he wasn't able to slit it, as is called for in the book, to make it into nine slats out of the same piece of wood. Sort of like you'd take an apple core, there'd be something similar to that. Just a spoke shape, and split it into nine slats. But you need to cut it green, and do it at that time and then let it season. Anyway, so he takes this, cuts it in half and bores it out by hand, with gouges, then puts it back together and seals it with beeswax and pitch and walnut oil and seed wax, and then wraps it with hemp.

Question: You mentioned how Todd became involved in the project in the first place. Peggy, George, how did you get involved in this?

Chodos-Irvine: Well, I got a phone call from Todd one night, and he told me how he'd gotten involved with Ursula, and said that she needed someone to get illustrations for this book — she was thinking how to do illustrations for this book also, and would it be o.k. if he sent copies of my work. I had taken a class from him at the University of Oregon in Renaissance music and culture when I was a freshman, and we'd gotten to be friends. I'd gone down to Ashland since I was seven almost every year. So I'd started to send him one out of each edition of prints that I was doing in school then — I was getting a bachelor's in art. So he had this little mini-collection of

everything I'd done. So he asked if it would be o.k. if he xeroxed them and sent them to Ursula. And again, there probably wasn't much of a pause; I said "Yes, sure." Then I called my mother and told her [laughter], and a few other people. Then I heard from Ursula. I think she sent me parts of the manuscript, as the manuscript was at that time, for me to read. That's when it started, and it did go on from there.

Le Guin: You were majoring in art and anthropology?

Chodos-Irvine: Yes, I have a bachelor's in art and anthropology. I didn't know at that time that Ursula's father was Alfred Kroeber. One of my anthropology teachers told me that, because he was a great fan of Ursula's, and was very excited about the whole thing.

Le Guin: You got taken on digs, didn't you, to draw artifacts? You know how archaeologists do —

Chodos-Irvine: I worked in the summer of '82, I think, on digs in southeastern Oregon. At that time, I decided that I was going to start drawing things. I was actually working as one of the field workers, digging, and sifting and sorting things. I started to talk to the supervisor, and started to draw some of the artifacts. There was also a Native American on the dig, who made Indian points; and I said, "I'll pay you, make me some Indian points," because I couldn't really handle the actual artifacts. So he made some of those, and I was working on sketches, and at the end of the year I went back, and went with a friend of mine to the University of Oregon museum of natural history, and someone who was a roommate of a friend of mine said — and I was just there — said, "Oh, you're in the arts and archaeology departments; would you like to do some graphic work for the museum?" And I said, "Sure! Okay", and I started doing volunteer work for them, and started drawing artifacts for them, and that's when I really started doing it. That actually worked very well for me, because when I did get the job doing the book, and I needed to get a deer bone, for example, for the deer bone flute, I went to the head of the collection — and they have a large natural history collection, of birds and animals and all kinds of things — same thing with the flicker, same thing with the bear skull — I said, "Can we take these out for a while and just leave them here, and come and draw them every once in a while?" And they said, "Yes, sure." So a lot of the things that are drawn in there, I was able to draw from actual things, which as Ursula said, I like to do. It worked out very well, so things kind of fell into place nicely.

Le Guin: You know, in that first batch of things that Todd sent me, there was enough of this kind of drawing from actual life — I thought, "Here is somebody who can draw something accurately," which is a lovely talent. But there was also that picture of a lot of little fat naked women under the Ponderosa pines, which were not drawn from life, I don't think.

Chodos-Irvine: No, it was out of my imagination. [Laughter]

Le Guin: Wow.

Chodos-Irvine: I didn't get any women to model for me. [Laughter]

Le Guin: It was a wonderful picture.

Chodos-Irvine: That was a thing called "Fat Women in the Woods." [Laughter]

Le Guin: It's a very, very charming picture.

Chodos-Irvine: It got me the job. [Laughter]

Question: George?

Hersh: Oh, do I get to tell? I'd been corresponding with Ursula for a long time, and one of the rules was, don't talk about work in progress. But she made a mistake. She had an interview with somebody from *Mother Jones*, and she talked a little bit about her new book, and one of the things that she did was to let the interviewer see on the wall in her workroom a map that was up there, with overlays. That got into *Mother Jones* [January 1984], and I looked at it, and I sent a letter to Ursula and I said, "Maps?" Because I'm a map nut. And she sent a letter back which said, sort of, "Maps..." And then a mild paper deluge descended on Portland from San Francisco of maps.

Le Guin: There's a Hersh box in my attic. It's a carton like this. [Laughter]

Hersh: When you work for the state there are the earthquake maps, and big maps of the state that show where the hundred-foot contour is — if you want to put a hundred feet of water into the Central Valley where it reaches to — that sort of thing. That was fun. And then we got onto some more things. One of them was that the Kesh don't like to look on things from above — they like perspective views of things in maps. There was that perspective view of the Kesh world as it was at the time of the story, and how to draw it so it looked good. Eventually what we ended up doing, I did a plaster cast of the state, of one of these plastic relief maps: turned it upside down, filled it full of plaster, sawed off Los Angeles, filed down Nevada [laughter], painted the rivers black, and filled the Central Valley up to the hundred-foot contour, and then photographed it from a bunch of different angles with different shadows, and turned the photographs over to Ursula, so that she would have a model for her map. She could pick the one that she liked, and she picked the one that she liked, and drew her map from it.

Le Guin: I'm trying to find it in the book — unfortunately the maps aren't in the table of contents — to show the map that we're talking about. I was going mad — you know, many medieval Japanese maps are drawn not from flat above, not from noon, but from sort of like you were the sun setting at about four o'clock: you're looking across the land and you see the mountains behind it. What's the page? Page 128 in the small book [Bantam ed.]; it's page 123 in the big book [Harper ed.]. That's California as seen — this is west, west is at the bottom of the map. Why does south always have to be at the bottom? These people don't

go to the North Pole. [Laughter] The rivers run west; rivers run downhill, don't they? Almost all women know perfectly well that all the rivers on a map are running down to the bottom of the map. [Laughter]

Hersh: There were some other things, and there's one story I don't think I have dropped on anybody yet. When Ursula and Elinor Armer were doing the first concert over in San Francisco, she invited me and my wife over to hear the concert. This was the first time that we had met, other than letters. I had at this point read Grey Bull's narrative, "The Trouble With the Cotton People", which had been published separately, and which Ursula had sent me. So here's Ursula — I'd never seen her before — here's George, who has just met her — and essentially what I told her was, "How can you possibly have a railroad?" And she looked at me sadly and said, "You know, I've been worried about that." The problem was, that a railroad implies high tech and steel mills and stuff like that: industrialization. She was thinking sort of sadly about cutting the railroad out, and I felt horrible about having said that. So I went back and I got the history of railroads, and fortunately it turns out that early railroads were run on oak rails. There was no problem at all; you could make a wooden railroad, and the Kesh railroad is wooden.

Le Guin: It took George a lot more work than he's making it sound like to save the railroad. [Laughter] By the way, a little footnote to this: there will be a book coming out sometime in the next year or year and a half or so, of photographs of Northern California, black and white photographs. The text will be basically quotations from *Always Coming Home*. I haven't got a title for it yet. [*Way of the Water's Going*, Harper & Row, 1989] Ernest Waugh and Alan Nicholson — two photographers — they sent me pictures, and I won't go into this, but I trust one of the pictures in this book is going to be a picture of a railroad in Northern California, just oak hills and stuff, and a bit of a railroad line. And the rails look as if they were made of wood. It's just a light effect, but we have a photograph now to prove that George was right. [Laughter] [Page 79 of *Way of the Water's Going*]

Question: So you can get there from here.

Hersh: You're already there!

Le Guin: With a little hopping.

Question: Question about the music: what sort of music is this? Did you invent something new as far as theory is concerned? Did you try to go with a theory that fit the culture?

Barton: The question was a little bit more about the musical theory of the Kesh. Yes, I tried to develop a true theory of music in the Kesh culture. If you have a fourth, like C to F, then you add a fifth, you get a ninth. In a 20th century music, if you have a fourth and a fifth, that equals an octave, so what I did was basically out-jog it. The heyiya-if pattern is based on two interlocking spirals, one with a radius of five, one with a radius of four. So I was bouncing

off of that. I originally started, when Ursula asked me to do it, of course I was going “oh wow”, thinking of all my conservatory training, and here I start going beyond Schoenberg and all this stuff [laughter], and of course I’d read a lot of her work, and I went, “Boy, she gets this amazing depth and complexity, but there is an immediacy.” That’s not the case, I would consider, with Schoenberg or Stockhausen. There is indeed depth and complexity, but it’s also — you are confronted with it, whereas with something like *The Left Hand of Darkness* or the Earthsea trilogy, it’s something that is successful now, and takes you right down. So that backed me up a bit, a big blast of humility on the head. I started trying to figure out a way so I could create a theory that wasn’t going to be totally obscure. The theory would then generate a music that was accessible, but had the Kesh symbolism in it. So a lot of their rhythms are alternating fives and fours, or fives and fives. I bounced a lot off of the poetic structure. If you look at the transliterated poetry, it’s alternating lines of fives and fours; or five five four four; or you can break the nine-fold heya, instead of just “heya heya heya, HEYA HEY”, it can be “HEYA heya HEYA heya heya.” So all of a sudden you have these wonderful multiple stresses. So that’s what I’ve been trying to generate in music, that ear effect.

Question: It just seems to me that all these stories prove what I said the first day, that you should stop distinguishing between fantasy and reality, because fantasy is going over very abundantly into reality faster and faster. Your stories are just as good as any fiction.

Le Guin: Well, a story’s a story.

Question: Is there any truth to the rumor that somebody tried to claim it was real anthropology?

Le Guin: Oh, tell them, Todd.

Barton: It’s one of my favorite stories. [Laughter] It took a very long time to get this book published, because Harper and Row didn’t know what to do with the cassette. It took us a year, discussing with lawyers, and also with production people, to finally get it through. We had this manuscript just sitting there, waiting. Once it finally came out, then it was time to copyright the cassette. It was going to be out in October, and I started in March for copyright procedures. Copyright procedures normally take two to three months, max, so I figured I was well ahead of the game. Come May, and no copyright; come August, I made a phonecall, and said, “Hello? Can we get this copyrighted now, please?” Come August, all my papers come back, saying, “I’m sorry, you can’t copyright the music. You filled out the forms incorrectly. Here’s a whole new set of forms; please circle 6A and B.” On line 6, A and B, it says, “You and Ms. Le Guin are just making arrangements of traditional folk tunes.” [Laughter] What we’d sent them, of course, was not only the tape, but the two pages of liner notes, which are half in Kesh, transliterated, and half in English. So I wrote back and said, “Hi guys, [Laughter], I’m glad somebody there can read Kesh, because we’d love

to use them on the next album.” [Laughter] And I tried to explain that the Kesh were thousands of years away from us at the moment, and that indeed this was fictional, created.

Le Guin: They came through very quick, didn’t they?

Barton: Yes, they did. No response, just — [Laughter]

Le Guin: Somebody was blushing at the copyright office.

Barton: Unfortunately, the final straw was that story then appeared in *Life* magazine [April 1986].

Le Guin: We’ll never get another copyright. By the way, just out of the blue, there’s two people I would like to include in spirit on this panel. One is our editor at Harper and Row, Buz Wyeth, who fought this book through. If you know anything about publishers, you might imagine the difficulty of getting a book this size, with a cassette in a box, to talk that through the production and finance departments of a big publisher. Even a friendly, well-disposed big publisher, as Harper and Row has always been to me. Buz was a hero. And the other person was the book designer, whose name I really did want on the title page: Helene Berinsky. She took essentially what Peggy and I gave her, and designed that book: the placement of the pictures and the lines. I think it’s absolutely part of the job that we were all trying to do together. She made the object that I had dreamed of, this beautiful book. She had nothing to do with the cover; that’s the cover department. That was my battle, to get a decent cover on it. But the inside is all Berinsky’s work. So she’s sort of one of us, too. I had much, much, much more input, by the way, on making this book than any author I’ve ever heard of. That was another thing that Buz got for me. I could say, “No, you can’t do that,” or something. That’s really unusual.

Question: Was it you or the people at the cover department who put the words “A Novel” on it?

Le Guin: That was Buz. He said, “People are going to pick this up and look at it and say, ‘Isn’t she an anthropologist?’, and put it back.” [Laughter] So that’s sales, that’s a commercial thing, and I couldn’t change it.

Question: What were the battles that you mentioned about the cover?

Le Guin: They didn’t want Peggy to do the cover. Peggy was very young, and I think they felt she was untrustworthy.

Chodos-Irvine: Marketing strategy.

Le Guin: Yes. They looked at these hundred beautiful pictures, and how could they say, “No, I don’t think she ought to do the cover?” But they did. That’s the cover department. Big publishers have a cover department.

Chodos-Irvine: Which is very separate from — Le Guin: Totally separate from the art department, from the design department. The cover has to do with marketing, more than anything else. So they got this New Jersey artist, and he sent me a sketch. All I could say is — in the foreground

there was this contorted object, which I finally realized was a grapevine. Napa Valley! [Laughter] But in the background, there was some nice red mesas.

Question: Mesas?

Le Guin: It's the West, ain't it? [Laughter] I mean, from New Jersey? I just wrote back and said, "No way. No, no. We have to do something else." "Well, what do you want to do?" I said, "How about a photograph?" "Find us a photograph." You know some of those beautiful postcards that are kicking around of the foggy California hills and stuff? I sent them some. I said, "If you like any of these artists, get in touch with them." And they picked this guy — this was not a postcard photograph, this was some slide he sent — and they said, "Yes, that would make a good, an effective cover." I think it's rather odd that you have a photographic cover on a work of fantasy. It's unusual.

Chodos-Irvine: I can say, it probably would have broken my heart if another artist had gotten to do the cover.

Le Guin: I felt bad too.

Chodos-Irvine: You never showed me that sketch, and I'm glad. [Laughter]

Le Guin: That's one reason I wanted to do a photograph. I just couldn't see wrapping up all Peggy's work in some other artist's drawing. Peggy and I could get back together for *Buffalo Gals* and she *did* get the cover on that one, and she has the cover of the English edition of this. It's the flicker, just on red. No, the wackawack, the bozo bird.

Question: Where was the photograph taken for the cover? Was it somewhere other than the Napa Valley? The reason I'm asking is because of all the wild oats in the picture — there aren't fields of wild oats like that in the valley.

Le Guin: I think it is Contra Costa County, but I'm not quite sure. The photographer was rather reticent about it. He may not remember; he had a lot of slides. Some of them were Tamalpais, some of them were slopes of Mount Diablo, which is country I don't know at all. But I think this was Contra Costa. But it was just right, it was just Northern California unmistakably, and the light is right. As for wild oats, yes, the floor of the valley now, of course, is solid vineyards. But that's okay for then, for the time of the book; there might be a lot of wild oats.

Question: When Thomas Mann wrote his big novel, *Doktor Faustus*, in which he included music and invented an imaginary composer, almost an imaginary culture, he ended up writing a book called *The Making of Doktor Faustus*. Would you consider writing a book including all your friends, all your speculations, and calling it "The Making of *Always Coming Home*"?

Le Guin: It would be too much like *The Making of Star Trek*. [Laughter]

Question: That's because it's California.

Chodos-Irvine: Plus I don't think it's over. You're adding things —

Le Guin: That's true, that's true. We don't want it to be over. We want it to be an ongoing process.

Question: So will there be more work?

Barton: There's more dance. We just did a dance concert.

Le Guin: Yes. Todd couldn't get involved in that, because of his work in Ashland, so for the dance performance in Portland we invented the music on the spot, as it were. But Todd and I have dreamed of certain things: of more tape, of both of us finding time to get together. Of course then there's a little problem of how to distribute and sell it. You don't make a tape and then sit on it. You have to have commercial considerations.

Question: Will there be a collection of the unpublished poetry of the Kesh?

Le Guin: There isn't enough yet. So I don't know; I hope so.

Question: That together with the tape might be a good package.

Le Guin: Yes.

Question: [Unintelligible question, possibly about including more material on the tape.]

Le Guin: Oh, well, that would mean a new edition, probably. These days a book has to be enormously successful in the long term ever to be more than just reprinted. There hardly are any second editions any more. They're just reprints.

Question: [Comment about distribution of tapes from small publishers.]

Le Guin: There are quite a few small firms.

Question: For what it's worth, I grew up in the foothills of Los Angeles, and I felt right at home in this book.

Le Guin: Yes, it's a good California thing.

Question: I'm curious — besides the maps and wooden railroads, what other sorts of consultation in this did George do?

Hersh: It's not consultation, but sticking my nose in until it was removed. [Laughter] I got in on the railroads, I got in on the maps, and the other thing that I did was — I used to be a scientific editor; my wife was much more extensive than I was. When Grey Bull came out as a separate piece, I went through it as though it was a manuscript submitted for editing. I stuck it full of little yellow tags, the way some of my things have come back from editors, and sent it back to Ursula. She was very nice about it. [Laughter] One piece. Most of them were things that she'd already thought about, that it was going to be that way. But there were a couple — the best one, by golly, was in the big book. I was rather proud of that. At one point she had a ceremony in which apple branches are burned, and at another point, a different part of the text, she had the Kesh not having any

use for or interest in apples. That one got ironed out. I was very happy that I'd found that.

Le Guin: This guy is a born editor, which is — some people would take it as an insult, but I mean it as a compliment, because a good editor is a gift of God. There were a lot of things I used you for. George was a resource person to me, as he knows a lot about California, and a lot about ecology and relationships and ethology and things, and I could just ask him questions. And I did, shamelessly. And he would shamelessly answer them! [Laughter]

Question: There were two elements in that book that were throwbacks to our time: the Condor airplane and the computer that the Exchange had. Could you comment on those and why they were there?

Le Guin: The Condors and their war weapons were essentially satirical, I guess you could put it, briefly. They'd heard about this stuff, so they think they have to do it. That's how you get wars. The Exchange is a very complicated thing, which isn't really relevant to this particular panel. Why it is there, and what its function in the book is, and so on, which is not entirely clear to me in a verbalizable sense. Claude Levi-Strauss, the anthropologist, the father of structuralism, has a marvelous essay in one of his anthropology texts. He gets almost into a Levi-Straussian utopia. It's about our civilization going so far towards the information, the computer side as to become, essentially, just that, and thereby to regain the tranquility and centeredness of the village or tribal cultures. I couldn't put it together, I didn't want to go in that direction myself, but I thought I should include Levi-Strauss's vision in my book, as an alternative. After all, my book is a kind of alternative to the way we live, and within that book is another alternative. It's the way the computers have worked it out, which is taking what we do to its complete ethereal ultimate of becoming pure information system. This is related — this will sound silly — but this is a bit like, in early science fiction, people who've gone all to mind, brain cases floating in liquid. We used to have a lot of them in science fiction in the early days. In this sense, it's called the City of Mind because that's all it is: mental. It's the mental taken to its highest point. So it's an extremely radical contrast to the way the Kesh live. I wanted that contrast in there, I wanted that option. It's partly satirical, too. About as Swiftian as I ever got. [Laughter]

Question: [Question about the Kesh seasons.]

Le Guin: I'm a Californian. The four seasons of England and the East Coast and so on, and to some extent of Oregon are foreign to me. I was just writing the seasons I know from childhood. And of course they're not recognized in our language, but here was a language where they could be recognized, as of course they were in California Indian languages. They didn't talk about "spring" and "fall" and "winter" and stuff like that, because it's all different.

Question: I wondered if there's any way to get Kesh music.

Barton: Sheet music? Sure. Fill out this card and send it to

me. [Laughter] Originally I was interested, if people wanted Kesh music; I haven't published it yet, but somewhere I have the manuscripts. I would be interested in putting together a small book of music for some nominal fee. So get your friends to sign cards and send them to me. If I get ten or twenty orders I'll probably do it.

Le Guin: How much of it exists? How much is written down?

Barton: Just about all the music on the cassette, except for things like the heya chant, the long singing.

Le Guin: Which we did last night. In a way.

Barton: The two or three chants, the permutations, are written down, so that piece of music is very short. But it's very long in performance.

Le Guin: People might be interested to have just that little seed of it.

Question: It sounds as if making this book was a lot of fun —

Le Guin: It was for me.

Question: Is it something that all of you would like to be involved with in some way again, should the occasion arise? [Laughter]

Le Guin [to the others]: Would you?

Chodos-Irvine: I'd love to. I didn't know what I was getting into, because I wasn't even thinking about illustrations seriously, although I'd illustrated since I was really young, on my own. I thought I was going to get my Ph.D. in anthropology when I was 25 or something. That got left by the wayside. But it was interesting, because when I first talked to Ursula, she thought she wanted about thirty illustrations. She gave me a list of about what she thought they would be. And I kept getting these other lists, and at some point I counted them up and I said, "Ursula, there are about 75 here so far." And this wasn't even near the end. Also I went down to Napa a couple of times and drew things on the spot, and I started adding things, and picking things out of the book that I wanted to illustrate, so in case anybody's counted, or hasn't counted, there are over a hundred illustrations in the book. It was interesting, because it kept developing, and you get more and more involved, and the next thing you know, it's changing your life. [Laughter] And that continues —

Le Guin: All this time you were going to school and working.

Chodos-Irvine: I was. I did take some time off from school. I felt that I needed to, because it did take a lot of concentration.

Question: There are a few illustrations that include buildings. There's one of the *heyimas*, and one of the houses in Sinshan. Was there a specific design for those as there was for the instruments?

Chodos-Irvine: Yes. Ursula sent me sketches, and we

talked about the way they were structured, quite a bit. I also took photographs of the landscape. I took a lot of photographs of the landscape in the area.

Le Guin: Getting Peggy to draw the five *heyimas* was like pulling hen's teeth. "But they're not *there*," she said. [Laughter]

Chodos-Irvine: I actually built models of these things, and I had them sitting there. The one of the five *heyimas* in the little valley was of all the illustrations the most cut up and pasted together of any of them, because I redrew those little things. I tried to draw them from my head, and I didn't like it. I built the little things, and tried to get them at the right perspective. [Harper ed. p. 174, Bantam ed. p. 184.]

Le Guin: We kind of got off on animals and plants, because a lot of people who don't know California flora needed to see them. We had decided not to have people, because we didn't want to trap people's imagination in any one human type, you see — but I realized we'd had hardly any buildings, and that we had what looked like an extremely primitive, almost Stone Age, culture here, when these people actually have a highly refined technology. And so another one I sort of locked Peggy into was the barn, which my brother uses as a winery. It's the small winery at Sinshan. I said to Peggy, "draw that — that's lovely" — it's the frontpiece to the book. [Both eds. p. 6] It's a lovely little winery, and the press and the barrels show the technology. It's at least as advanced as ours in this respect. Remember I had to sort of argue with you about that one?

Chodos-Irvine: I guess so.

Le Guin: And I loved it.

Chodos-Irvine: I sat there and drew it.

Le Guin: You sat there and drew it. It's one of my favorite pictures in the book.

Question: I was interested in the stylized drawings, the spiral eyes. Did you have to go against your temperament? Did the style evolve?

Chodos-Irvine: Not my temperament. I had to go against my education a little bit, because I had been educated in anthropology, and here I was dealing with a culture that — After having been trained to look at it in an anthropological way, you tend to compare, when you study a culture. In the back of your mind you're comparing it to other cultures that you've studied that are similar or different. So I had to erase my mind of that as much as I could, because it would have been very easy for me to pull out of the back of my mind things that I was familiar with, that I'd seen before, and I didn't want to do that.

Le Guin: That's very interesting, Peggy. I think we all had to do that. Todd had to shake a lot of music styles out of his head, and I had years of battle trying to think Keshly and not to think the way that was natural and easy for me. It was awfully easy to slip over into Native American

imitations, for both Peggy and me. Not so much for Todd.

Barton: It was there too.

Le Guin: Native American literature was an enormous — "influence" isn't quite the right word — it was something for me to fall back upon, to *feed* on when I wrote this book, to get strength from. They did it their way, and that sort of allows me to do it my way. Partly because it's an oral literature. I would give Peggy descriptions of things, and they would sound like something from the Southwest, from the pueblos. Or, living in the Northwest it's awfully easy to drop in the Northwest culture, the styles.

Chodos-Irvine: I think that's right.

Le Guin: We both had to consciously fight that.

Chodos-Irvine: Just one more thing. To me the hardest part, but the most rewarding, was to get to the art of the people. Because I knew I was drawing the flora and the fauna, and the flora is all Northern Californian flora. The fauna — there's only one invented animal, the *himpf*, which was wonderfully enjoyable to invent. Then the artifacts, which were all invented, but with Ursula's help and a lot of feedback, and her ideas. But then to get to the art of the people, which was what I really wanted to do most of all, and was the hardest thing, and took me a while. I would send Ursula sketches, and she'd send them back, and say, "No, not quite," so I'd send her more things, and she'd say, "No, they didn't do that." So I'd try and try. I think the first time I felt like I was getting close was the two quail, which is in the book. Then I felt like I was getting on the right track, and she did say that was getting there. So that was the hardest part, but the most rewarding.

Barton: I had a similar experience. A lot of the stuff I wrote at first was pretty academic. My background is as a musicologist. Besides being a performer I did a master's degree in Renaissance and medieval music, and translated Latin treatises. So I was coming with all this similar approach, I mean approaching this as a musicological challenge and problem and yahoo. And taking all of that approach and projecting it somewhere else. The first many months I would send stuff, and finally Ursula just said, "You're thinking too much!" And I went, "Yes, you're right, okay" It took sort of beating my head against the wall to finally let go of it all, and start to become part of the Kesh. In fact, it wasn't until the last day of the recording session of the music that a similar thing happened. We agreed we're going to do this many songs, we're going to have some vocal ones and some instrumental ones, and this is the cut-off point, and then a couple weeks later I get this: "Todd, here's 'Lahela', it's a lullaby, we've got to do it!" "Okay, fine." So I do the "Lahela" —

Le Guin: I was getting better and better at Kesh poetry. In Kesh, you see. At the same time.

Barton: So just before the recording sessions, I said, "Fine, but this is the last one." Because I have to hire the musicians, and we have to figure out the time, and all those

mundane things, and the studio, and yah-de-yah. Then I get the "Willow" song, which comes way late in the game, I think it was a week or two —

Le Guin: I think I brought it with me to Ashland. [Laughter]

Barton: It was something that close. I had it just before you came to Ashland. I had it scheduled — we do these songs today, and the next ones — and the last day of the recording week, I woke up, and the recording downbeat was 9 o'clock, and I got up, and was on the way out the door at 8, and I looked, and went, "Oh, first thing is the 'Willow' song. Oops." I hadn't written it. [Laughter] I hadn't even thought about it. It was just sitting there on the piano. And so I sat down and said, "Well, if I can do it in the next fifteen, twenty minutes I'll do it, because I can still make the 9 o'clock." So I sat down and just did it, and it came out. So we went in there, and of course I had it all written out, and there was a xerox machine, and I sneakily handed it to my assistant and said, "Go make a bunch of copies," so we come up and it's time for the "Willow" song, and it's right there, and we do it, and Ursula teaches everybody how to speak Kesh, and sing it. Afterwards, on the way back to town, I go, "I have a confession to make. I just did this today, but it felt really right." It was actually the first — it came out so fast, I had to totally cross-circuit any of my automatic responses. She mentioned too that that's the way the poem came to her too.

Le Guin: By then we had gotten into thinking Kesh. It takes a while. I was awfully hard on these people. Having been through it myself, I knew what you had to go through to get there. But I did have to keep saying, "No, that's not right." A big power trip, which none of us was too happy with.

Barton: For the "Willow" song, we used a *darbagatush*, which is the hand-beater. It's pictured in the book, in the very back, I believe. [Harper ed. p. 449, Bantam ed. p. 479.] It's a bunch of eucalyptus curls, which you can —

Le Guin: You just tie them together and hit them against your hand.

Barton: We had made some up in the Napa Valley when we were going up there to do our research, and I had brought one back to Oregon. It started out this long, and we were doing the "Willow" song, we did about ten takes on that. We were down actually to take number nine, and as you hit the *darbagatush* it breaks, and things fly off, and the little booth I was in was just littered [laughter], two inches deep in eucalyptus bark, and it was down to here, and I'm looking at the two singers, and I'm going, "We have one take left! [Laughter] Get it right, because once this goes we can't — we're in Oregon, there's no eucalyptus." They did it.

Le Guin: I think that's a good last story. Thank you all.

[The Editor would like to thank the 1988 Conference Chairman, David Bratman, for transcribing this panel discussion.]

Arthurian Warnings *continued from page 37*
with the cycles of the natural world; and to show that the Matter of Britain could express a vision which was theologically and linguistically subversive, and radically humanistic. ☞

Notes

- "Guinevere," 476, in Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn. (Harlow: Longman, 1987), 3542. Quotations from the *Idylls* will be taken from this edition, and will be identified by the title of the individual idyll and the line-number. On Arthur's sexual ethos, see "Guinevere," 464-90.
- "Merlin and Vivien," 162.
- I do not mean to imply that Tennyson is a Christian in an orthodox sense; his Christianity is complex and highly individual. But the desperate necessity for a stable center, for a "King within us," as Tennyson put it (*qv.* in *Poems*, 2:261), is clearly a major theme in the *Idylls*.
- For the text of "The Defence of Guenevere," see *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, ed. Margaret A. Louie (New York: Garland, 1981), pp. 45-53. This poem should be compared with Morris' "King Arthur's Tomb" (pp.54-64), a psychological study of Guenevere's remorse and repudiation of Lancelot. In the latter text, Guenevere, "uncertain as sunshine / In March" (298-9), eloquently rejects her "twisting" lover (212); the poem, however, neither endorses nor condemns her repentance, but presents it as an interesting psychological process which does neither of the lovers any visible good.
- Quoted in Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), p. 184.
- For example, in our own day, see Gerhard Joseph, *Tennysonian Love* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), pp. 170-3; Kerry McCauley, *Tennyson and Swinburne as Romantic Naturalists* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 99-108. For the Victorian age, see Swinburne's sarcastic comments in "Tennyson and Musset," in *Complete Works*, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and T. J. Wise (London: Heinemann, 1926), 4:231-2.
- William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 3, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. edn. (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1982), p. 34.
- Richard Hovey, *The Marriage of Guenevere* (1891; rpt. New York: Duffield, 1909), pp. 71, 101, 153.
- Talesin: A Masque* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1899), pp. 51-2.
- The Birth of Galahad* (1898; rpt. New York: Duffield, 1909), p. 10.
- Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 2:812.
- The Tragedy of Pardon / Diane* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1911), pp. 63-4, 69-70, 125.
- "Tristram and Isult," III.135-6, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 2nd edn., ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979), p. 234.
- "Swinburne and Tennyson's Tristram," *Victorian Poetry* 19 (1981): 185-9.
- Quoted in David Staines, *Tennyson's Camelot: The Idylls of the King and its Medieval Sources* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1982), p. 161.
- The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), 1:156. All further quotations from Swinburne will be drawn from this edition.
- John Morley, rev. *Poems and Ballads, First Series, Saturday Review*, 22 (4 August 1866): 145-7.
- Starting on his own Arthurian epic in 1869, Swinburne made no secret of his plans to "lick the Morte of Albert." *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959-62), 2:73.
- See Chapter 6 of my book *Swinburne and his Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1990).