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## Through a glass darkly, seeking the common ground: The value of Derrida's two interpretations of interpretation for reading literature in religious education

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**Through a Glass Darkly - Seeking the Common Ground:  
the Value of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation"  
for Reading Literature in Religious Education**

By

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of the Requirements for the Award of

**Master of Education**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates and demonstrates the value of using Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" (the Rousseauistic and the Nietzschean) to enrich the reading of literature in Religious Education with reference to Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea. Religious Education has responded in recent decades to developments in pedagogy, theology, and various other disciplines such as psychology and sociology. However, religious educators do not seem to have considered the question of the impact of modern literary theory on Religious Education. Such theories have influenced the way in which literature is read and studied in the English classroom. Such developments should be of interest not only to the English teacher but also to the Religious Education teacher.

The hypothesis underlying this thesis is that the Derridean common ground of the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations will broaden and enhance the reading of literature in Religious Education by facilitating both the search for the centre (search for finite meaning) and the free play of signifiers (pursuit of infinitely deferred and pluralistic meaning).

Generally, Post-Structuralism, with its emphasis on the impossibility of absolute meaning, seems antithetical to Religious Education, with its emphasis on the search for meaning. However, Derrida's common ground of the two interpretative positions suggests a reading of literature that allows for both the Rousseauistic concern with centre and definitive meaning and the Nietzschean concern with free play and provisional meaning. This thesis, then, establishes that the value of 'story' in Religious Education is considerably enriched by the adoption of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" as an approach for reading literature, whether secular or sacred, in Religious Education.

## DECLARATION

"I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material."

Signature.

HELEN ELIZABETH COLLINS

Date.....21/11/97.....

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Cordon Art B.V., Baarn, Holland are gratefully acknowledged for permission (Permissionno. B-97/395) to photocopy several prints by M.C. Escher for use in this thesis.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction to the Study**

#### **Overview**

In Religious Education considerable effort has been made in recent decades towards developing teaching methods that are child-centred and religiously inclusive. Emphasis has been placed both on developing curricula appropriate to the child's experience and on acknowledging the plurality of religious traditions (Moore & Habel, 1982; Rossiter, 1981, for example). Religious Education does not exist in isolation from the rest of the world. Grimmit (1978; 1987) has contributed significantly to the development of Religious Education by acknowledging the relevance of such disciplines as theology, pedagogy, and sociology to Religious Education and by demonstrating how they may be adopted and utilized. However, religious educators do not seem to have considered how modern literary theory may also impact on Religious Education.

The way in which literature is now read and studied in English has been strongly influenced by modern literary theory. For example, Cohan and Shires (1988) discuss the way in which signs can both disrupt and facilitate the passage of meaning while O'Neill (1993) examines how critical reading is encouraged by Cultural Criticism. Modern literary theory can also be of considerable value to religious educators concerning how literature is read and studied.

Modern literary theory is as rich as it is broad, and even various developmental strands can be diverse. While it would indeed be worthwhile to examine the value of other areas of modern literary theory for reading literature in Religious Education this thesis concentrates exclusively on one aspect of the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930- ), whose name is virtually synonymous with Post-Structuralism.

In this thesis the value of using Derrida's "two interpretations of

interpretation” (Derrida, 1978, p. 292), the Rousseauistic and the Nietzschean, to enhance the reading of literature in Religious Education is examined in detail. This is demonstrated by a close textual analysis of Le Guin’s novel A Wizard of Earthsea. The area of study undertaken in this thesis is considered original as it does not seem to have been previously explored. The hypothesis of this thesis is that the Derridean common ground of the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations will broaden and enrich the reading of literature in Religious Education by facilitating both the search for the centre (search for finite meaning) and the free play of signifiers (pursuit of infinitely deferred and pluralistic meaning).

The relevance of this thesis is in its examination of the value of Derrida’s two interpretative positions for reading literature in Religious Education. The Nietzschean interpretation, with its emphasis on the impossibility of absolute meaning, seems to undermine if not obliterate the assurance and certitude facilitated by the Rousseauistic interpretation, with its emphasis on definitive meaning. However, Derrida points to the common ground of these two irreconcilable interpretative positions. The Derridean common ground allows for a reading of literature that accommodates both the Rousseauistic concern with absolute meaning and the Nietzschean concern with provisional meaning.

### **Defining Religious Education**

Definitions of the term ‘Religious Education’ are varied, evolve over time, and are influenced by various issues. Alves (1975) considers that differences in views about Religious Education arise from “different views of the relationship between the individual and the society into which he has been born”, which subsequently influence general opinions regarding education (p. 23). While expressing a similar opinion, Moore and Habel (1982) also emphasize that Religious Education should be multicultural,

comparative, open-ended, critical, and affective (pp. 34-36). Horder (1975) discusses four approaches to defining Religious Education: confessional, anti-dogmatic, implicit, and explicit (pp. 176-178). The confessional approach is concerned with the passing on of a belief system, while the anti-dogmatic approach fosters an objective and dispassionate giving out of information. Horder considers both of these approaches unacceptable because either it is, respectively, exclusive or it disallows consideration of the subjective and emotional nature of belief. Horder suggests a combination of the implicit (the "quest for meaning and purpose") and the explicit (the "quest for understanding of religion and religions") (pp. 177-178). Similarly, Hull (1982) observes that today religious educators, while trying to avoid "the inert imparting of facts", also express a desire "that pupils should learn from religion in ways which will enrich them and deepen their humanity, rather than merely informing them" (p. xv).

Grimmitt (1978) highlights the need for consideration of both the affective and the cognitive in his two-level conceptual framework for teaching Religious Education: the existential approach (use of "the child's feelings, acts and experiences as the basis for developing religious concepts") and the dimensional approach (presentation of "selected religious concepts by way of the six dimensions of religion") (p. 50). Grimmitt (1987), like many religious educators, deplores the indoctrinational approach insisting that what "religious education . . . seeks to further are pupils' capacities to take responsibility for their own beliefs and values - to 'own' them" (pp. 215-216).

Marvel (1982) also emphasizes the need for both the 'implicit' approach (affective) and the 'explicit' approach (cognitive), which he feels is facilitated by the phenomenological method (pp. 73-74). In a similar vein, Wilson (1982) suggests that there must be a combination of the rational and the emotional in Religious Education. In contrast, Robinson

(1982) considers that despite any practical aims in Religious Education its achievements will be small if it does not also enable and facilitate children to experience the religious, while Attfield (1982) is concerned with the teaching of age-appropriate concepts (pp. 81-83). Groome (1980), while writing about Christian Religious Education, does acknowledge the need for inclusivity in Religious Education generally, which he describes as “a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life” (p. 22). Nevertheless, such a definition does not acknowledge the secular nature of society, which is of concern for many religious educators.

Cox (1982) discusses the importance of critical understanding in a pluralistic society, describing the function of Religious Education as being:

to help pupils to understand the nature of our present secular, pluralistic society, to help them to think rationally about the state and place of religion in it, to enable them to choose objectively and on sound criteria between the many conflicting religious statements . . . and to work out for themselves, and to be able cogently to defend, their own religious position or their rejection of the possibility of having one. (p. 56)

Finding similar concerns in his research, Rossiter (1981) notes that various Australian Government reports “recommended broad, open-ended, descriptive and objective courses in religious studies” (p. 11). These reports consider that Religious Education is not to be aligned with any religion or church, is concerned with education in religion and the place of religion in culture, and provides the “opportunity for clarifying meaning in life” (p. 12). Rossiter lists the aims of Religious Education as including learning about “religious aspects of culture, becoming aware of different belief systems in the community, understanding the different dimensions of religion, [and] clarification of the individual’s own beliefs” (p. 12).

While the term ‘Religious Education’ can be variously defined, then, there is, overall, a consensus of opinion on the need for Religious

Education to be defined and practised in ways that are broad and inclusive and to incorporate both the affective (implicit) and the cognitive (explicit) dimensions. Drawing on such writers the following working definition of 'Religious Education' is suggested for the purposes of this thesis:

Religious Education should encompass an exploration of the myriad ways in which meaning and purpose in human existence has been and is sought; such an exploration would emphasize (but not exclusively) an examination of religion (and religions), philosophy, literature (sacred and secular), and culture and would incorporate (but not necessarily concurrently) an overall concern with both the cognitive and affective dimensions.

This thesis is concerned exclusively with the use of literature as one of the many ways in which meaning and purpose is sought. While both secular and sacred texts constitute the literature that is read and studied in Religious Education, this thesis uses as an illustrative example a piece of secular fantasy literature. The use of close textual analysis emphasizes the cognitive but does not exclude the affective. The value of the approach to reading a secular text demonstrated in this thesis could, and should, equally be applied to the reading of sacred texts.

### **Other Studies**

Investigations of published and dissertation material in the area of Religious Education and modern literary theory indicate that no work has been attempted in this potentially exciting nexus of subjects. Critical works on Post-Structuralism, Derrida, and deconstruction are plentiful and include such topics as: an exploration of literary theory, ideology, and institutions (Culler, 1988); a theoretical examination of the nature of change in philosophy, history, and culture (Barker, 1996); discussions about Derrida and deconstruction (Silverman, 1989; Wood, 1992); and, an

investigation of deconstruction, philosophy, and theology (Hart, 1991). Dissertations (Dissertation Abstracts International) include such topics as: a critique of the epistemology of Post-Structuralism (Brodrigg, 1988); the contribution of the work of Derrida to ethics (Conlon, 1994); extensions of Post-Structuralism into contemporary discourses concerning curriculum (Hwu, 1993); a Freudian critique of Derridean Post-Structuralism (Barbour, 1996); and, Post-Structuralism and literature education in grade five schooling (Mesheau, 1991).

Critical works on A Wizard of Earthsea have tended to concentrate on it as literature for young adults. For example, Jenkins (1985) and Cummins (1990) explore the novel as about coming-of-age while Molson (1979) discusses it as ethical fantasy for children and young adults. Dissertations tend to be more varied and include such topics as feminism (Clarke, 1992), coming of age (Stevens, 1990), and moral education (Wayne, 1993).

There seems to be no work, either published criticism or dissertation, produced in the area of Religious Education and Post-Structuralism, or specifically focussing on Religious Education and Derrida's theories, let alone with reference to A Wizard of Earthsea. Notwithstanding the worthwhile studies about Earthsea, the important developments in Religious Education, and the notable work in Post-Structuralism, reading a novel like A Wizard of Earthsea from a background of Derridean theory can be of significant value for Religious Education.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Background to the Study**

#### **Developments in Religious Education**

Religious Education has changed considerably as it has responded to changes in society. In the earlier part of this century, it was little more than indoctrination, either fervently or perfunctorily, and was rightly criticized and challenged. However, considerable effort has been expended over recent decades towards developing teaching methods in Religious Education that are child-centred, religiously inclusive, and abreast of modern pedagogical and theological developments. These developments acknowledge that societal changes are relevant to Religious Education and demonstrate how they may be utilized.

There has been a great deal of research and work produced in the area of Religious Education in England, reflecting the needs of teachers working in a country where the 1944 Education Act made the teaching of Religious Education compulsory in all state schools (Rossiter, 1981, p. 14). In contrast, the situation in Australia varies between States. In Western Australia, for example, Religious Education is provided in State primary schools by visiting clergy and lay persons. In State high schools chaplains provide support for teachers and students. Australian Church schools provide kindergarten to year twelve Religious Education, with ethos dependent on the school's denominational background.

Hull (1975), in his examination of Religious Education syllabuses in England, indicates how they have changed from those in the 1920's and 1930's concerned with a historical study of Christianity to those in the 1950's that emphasized the "centrality of the experience of the child" (p. 101) to those in the late 1960's and 1970's that recognized the necessity for religious inclusivity. He also notes that some syllabuses consider the inclusion of non-religious life stances to be necessary (p. 115). Elliott



(1982) discusses the problems of producing syllabuses acceptable for use in a democratic and pluralistic society, emphasizing that their content "has to be selected for its relevance to problems about religion which arise at the boundaries of belief and unbelief" (p. 132). Gooderham (1982) also discusses the need for Religious Education curricula to be inclusive and open-ended, while Cole (1982) concerns himself with a consideration of the treatment of religion in schools where students come from a variety of faith backgrounds.

Moore and Habel (1982) have produced a valuable Australian contribution in their creation of a typology of religion for use in Religious Education. Another notable Australian work is Rossiter's 1981 empirical study which explores approaches to Religious Education in State and Church schools. Rossiter provides a detailed examination of issues and developments in Religious Education practices. As with developments in England, Religious Education in Australia has moved towards more inclusive and broader considerations of religion and religious issues.

Hull (1982) considers that, like other educational disciplines, Religious Education has been dramatically effected by rapid social change (p. xv). As a result there has been much discussion, even argument, about what 'should' constitute Religious Education. "Sometimes this ferment of new ideas and approaches is described as 'confusion' and religious education is criticized for 'not knowing where it is going'" (p. xv). Such 'confusion', suggests Hull, is actually a sign of vitality and responsibility in the meeting "between the religious and the secular outlooks" (pp. xv-xvi). The need for a balanced, pedagogically sound approach to Religious Education underlies much of the work produced from the 1960's onwards and can be particularly seen in the work of Grimmitt.

Grimmitt (1978; 1987) argues for the recognition of the impact of developments in other disciplines on Religious Education. In his 1978

study he discusses the failure of Religious Education in England to function adequately, and examines twentieth century changes that have impacted on the teaching of Religious Education:

The impetus for change in the teaching of religion . . . stems not simply from our awareness of the failure of traditional 'religious instruction' but also from three aspects of change unique to the mid 20th century. These are: theological change, educational change and social change. Together they have created a force which . . . has led to a remarkable revolution in the field of religious teaching. (p. 5)

In a later book Grimmitt (1987) continues his discussion of the impact of other disciplines on Religious Education, finding it necessary to use advances in other fields "which, until now, have not been a particular feature of the work of religious educators - most notably the sociology of knowledge and philosophical anthropology" (p. 9). Grimmitt draws on the work of Berger and other sociologists in discussing the concept that "human beings construct reality" (p. 25). He observes that humans are seen as shaped by culture and society, knowledge is seen as a social construct, and meaning is seen as constructed through language:

the way in which meanings are assigned to a common 'objective' world is through a common interpretational system . . . . The chief and most powerful way in which these categories and typicalities are organised or given meaning is through language. (pp. 25-26)

Grimmitt's examination of the social construction of reality and its influence on Religious Education indicates how far Religious Education has developed this century: from the confessional/indoctrinational approach that tended to position itself in splendid isolation to approaches that acknowledge, respond to, and utilize developments in other disciplines. The overall result of such developments is that now Religious Education is firmly rooted in advances and developments in other fields.

This thesis very much arises from, and is considered a part of, this developmental direction.

In particular, Grimmitt's discussions were germinal in suggesting a possible direction for this thesis. He argues that Religious Education needs to acknowledge and respond to contemporary theory in other fields. However, while he examines the social construction of reality he does not pursue the notion of meaning constructed through language or the ways in which this may impact on how literature is read in Religious Education. This thesis studies this relationship of language and meaning by exploring a particularly influential aspect of Post-Structuralism, namely Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation". Through its investigation of the value of Derrida's two interpretative positions for reading literature in Religious Education this thesis is very much a part of the continuum of development in Religious Education championed by Grimmitt.

### **Story, Imagination and Fantasy in Religious Education**

Complementary to these developments have been a burgeoning interest in, and development of, the place and role of story, imagination and fantasy in Religious Education. Story is a particularly appropriate literary form and process for use in Religious Education because, as a central and vivifying part of life in all human cultures, it helps to explain, give meaning, nourish, and sustain. "The impulse to story . . . consists in the need to respond to a challenge; and the challenge is one that lies in the simultaneous shapelessness and shapefulness of life" (Blisshen, 1979, p. 31). Story helps make sense of a seemingly chaotic world by giving direction, meaning, and security amidst the chaos. "Stories bind us together; human community depends on them" (Staudenmaier, 1988, p. 314). Stories inform cultures, nations, communities, families, and individuals about themselves and each other and the interrelationships

between them. Through stories people can be “validated as persons” (Bausch, 1991, p. 46). This is why literature, both secular and religious, has so much value for human society.

Moore (1991) discusses how narrative connects people to each other, how sharing stories roots people in a cultural background, and how narrative teaching “gives meaning to abstract concepts” (p. 131). For her, narrative is “a significant mode of human communication, a bearer and critic of culture, and a potentially profound and far-reaching educational method” (pp. 132-133). Moore emphasizes the relationship between education, narrative, and imagination, arguing for the importance of story in life and education, and the value of the narrative method in Religious Education. From a different perspective, Navone (1977) discusses links between theology and story, emphasizing “the narrative quality of religious experience” (p. 9). Story is considered vital to faith and in what he terms “biblical travel stories of God”, Navone explores how “we have a multiplicity of travel stories that disclose *who* God is and who we are” (p. 53). Navone suggests storytelling is involvement in several different, “but interpenetrating, levels of meaning, communicating a fullness of cognitive, effective [sic], and imaginal experience” (p. 11). For Navone “our stories and symbols reflect how we grasp ourselves and our world and how . . . they reflect the quality of our interrelatedness with reality” (p. 34). Similarly, Bausch (1991) suggests that “every story is religious” in his discussion of the relationship between faith and storytelling (p. 46).

Crossan (1988) examines parable as ‘story’ with a subversive nature. He interprets the parables of Jesus as “intended to shatter the structural security of the hearer’s world” (p. 101). The purpose of parables is to change us by challenging and upsetting deeply-held convictions about the way in which the world is ordered (p. 39). Bausch (1991) also examines the “disturbingly paradoxical and challenging” power

of parables (p. 117). Crossan (1988) suggests that parable is “necessary, logically, as the binary opposite of myth: myth proposes, parable disposes” (p. 47). There seems to be a potentially interesting correlation between this binary opposition, in which the opposites require each other, and Derrida’s two interpretative positions, which although oppositional must exist together. For Crossan, the parable shatters the safely constructed vision of life that myth/religion perpetuate, thereby creating the possibility of transcendence. Crossan considers it is not possible to:

get outside language and outside story. But one can sail as close as possible into the wind . . . My suggestion is that the excitement of transcendental experience is found only at the edge of language and the limit of story and that the only way to find that excitement is to test those edges and those limits. And that . . . is what parable is all about. (pp. 29-30)

Cupitt (1991) explores the importance of story in philosophical and religious thought. He feels the somewhat bad reputation that story has of being not ‘true’ has changed because truth is no longer seen as “outside the text, but . . . is inherent in . . . the text” (p. 23). In particular, Cupitt’s discussion of the anti-story is a valuable study of story as ‘not story’. He explores notions of language, reality, and truth from the perspective of Zen and its use of anti-stories or non-stories:

More than any other faith Zen has recognized the absurdity of attempting altogether to escape from language. There is Nothing outside language, there is nothing outside language, there is nothing outside language . . . yet Zen still obstinately follows nearly all other faiths and philosophies in locating salvation outside language in an effable Beyond. It is clever, yet it continues trying to point us beyond the text, even though it perceives that there is nothing to point to and no way of pointing to it. (p. 136)

The concepts in Zen regarding story and language make it virtually an Eastern ‘version’ of the ideas in much Post-Structuralist literary theory.

Concurrent to developments in Religious Education about story has been a growing interest in, and concern with, the place of imagination and fantasy. Imagination has a central place in Religious Education because, as Fischer (1983) argues, it “provides access to the deepest levels of truth and allows us to live in the ‘real’ world” (p. 6). Similarly, Bausch suggests that in story and storytelling can be seen “the power of imagination to proclaim the truth” (1991, p. 47). Le Guin (1979) also points to achieving truth through imagination, maintaining that “it is by such beautiful non-facts [imaginative ‘true’ fantasy] that we . . . may arrive . . . at the truth” (p. 45). She believes that imagination leads to an understanding that fantasy, while not factual, is true. Fischer values imagination in Religious Education because to her it is “essential to Christian faith” (1983, p. 7). She describes imagination as the “inner rainbow”, a bridge connecting the sacred and the secular (p. 7). This concept of ‘bridge’ is similar to Le Guin’s ideas concerning the process of fantasy writing which involves making a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious so that the “readers can make the journey too” (1979, p. 79). Imagination, according to Le Guin, is one of the best ways of making this journey, where reason alone cannot lead.

Le Guin distinguishes between what she calls ‘true’ fantasy and ‘false’ fantasy. For her fantasy is not escapism and she observes that ‘true’ fantasy, like the great myths, speaks “*from the unconscious to the unconscious in the language of the unconscious*” (1979, p. 62). To use Tolkien’s terminology, escapist fantasy tells of the ‘Flight of the Deserter’ instead of the ‘Escape of the Prisoner’ (1964, p. 56). Fischer (1983) points to problems also associated with the use of the word ‘imagination’, which stems from fear that it is illusory and unreal because of the tendency to “associate the imagination with emotion and intuition, and we in the West are schooled to regard these as sources of error and deception” (p. 5). Zuck

(1975) considers that “imagination in the form of the fantasizing process is one of our primary instruments for seeing beyond” (p. 589). He argues for the use of imaginative fantasy in Religious Education because fantasy “can enlarge our sense of what is ‘real’ or of value, and this movement is a necessary part of any response to the religious dimension of experience” (p. 590). Warnock (1976) believes that “the cultivation of imagination . . . should be the chief aim of education” (p. 9). For her imagination “allows us both to express and to understand ideas” (p. 72) and also to create. While her discussion concerns education generally her emphasis is on the place and role of imagination “to go beyond . . . [which] is an absolute necessity” (p. 201).

Harris (1987) celebrates “fantasy as an epistemological power, as a unique form of imagination”, and as the “capacity to enter into inwardness” (p. 8). For her imaginative fantasy encourages the touching of “one’s own human inwardness” (p. 14). Le Guin (1979) expresses similar views in her belief that fantasy “is the language of the inner self” because it allows us to make an inward journey (p. 70). Like Harris, Robinson (1982) also believes imagination to be essential for religious experience, “for feeling after the mystery of life” (p. 87). He is concerned that “imagination is starved by those who wish to protect children from any aspects of reality but the nice” (p. 88). In a similar vein, Le Guin deplores ‘false’ fantasy because it sanitates, trying to fix evil as if it were a problem rather than presenting it as it is: all the pain and suffering that is part of the human condition (1979, p. 69).

In Religious Education concern with the place and role of fantasy and imagination adds considerably to the potential dimensions and value of ‘story’. A variety of ‘story’ can be used and, in particular, the use of fantasy stories allows for consideration of the human situation in a way that is non-threatening to all children in an increasingly pluralistic

society. 'Story' may be variously used to teach about faith, explore issues of responsibility, examine meaning, or question belief. It seems clear, then, that the impact of modern literary theory on how 'story' can be read and studied should be of considerable interest to religious educators.

### Modern Literary Theory

At the turn of the century literary theory was influenced by the emphasis in Humanism on the logocentric. Eagleton (1983) observes, for example, that for Husserl language was "a secondary activity which gives names to meanings" that are already possessed (p. 60). Both Leavis, who devised the literary canon of 'great' literature, and Richards, who isolated the text from its historical context, promoted close reading of the text and this new critical approach held sway well into the 1970's (Barry, 1995, p. 30). The author's intentions were considered irrelevant to the text's 'meaning', as was the reader's subjective feelings. Although this type of critical approach to the literary text rejected the God-like status of the author, the 'essentialist truth' nature of literary theory remained and was vested in the critic. The critic now became a 'grand interpreter', revealing 'the' meaning of the text for the reader. In the work of Hirsch, for example, literary meaning is considered "absolute and immutable" only because "his theory of meaning . . . is pre-linguistic" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 67).

Saussure strongly influenced the development of modern literary theory. In theorizing language as a system of signs he undermined "the notion that 'man' is the centre, source and origin of meaning" (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 6). For Saussure language did not just record or label the world but actually "*constitutes* our world . . . . Meaning is always *attributed* to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language" (Barry, 1995, p. 43). The Humanist idea that language expressed 'existing' meaning was thus severely ruptured by



Saussurean theory. The “hallmark of the ‘linguistic revolution’ . . . is the recognition that meaning is not simply something ‘expressed’ or ‘reflected’ in language: it is actually produced by it” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 60). The effect of new literary approaches “was so powerful as to produce, by the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, a situation which was frequently referred to as a ‘crisis’ . . . in the discipline of English” (Barry, 1995, p. 33). Literary theory would now stem from linguistic theory in which language was seen as pre-existing any order that humans make of the world.

Saussure (1996) was the first to posit the idea that “in language there are only differences” (p. 14). Eagleton (1983) notes that for Saussure meaning can arise only from difference:

Each sign . . . has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the others. ‘Cat’ has meaning not ‘in itself’, but because it is not ‘cap’ or ‘cad’ or ‘bat’. . . . [Meaning is not] immanent in a sign but is . . . the result of difference from other signs. (p. 97)

A sign is comprised of a signifier (sound/image) and a signified (mental concept). In Saussurean linguistics “elements of language acquire meaning not as the result of some connection between words and things, but only as parts of a system of relations” (Selden, 1985, p. 53). Because the relation between the signifier and signified is a matter of convention the sign, and therefore meaning itself, is always arbitrary and relational. Culler (1981) points out that:

In analyzing signification Saussure and his later followers insist that forms and concepts do not exist independently of one another but that the sign consists of the union of a signifier and signified. Moreover - and this is the important point - both signifiers and signifieds are purely relational entities, products of a system of differences. (p. 40)

The legacy of Saussure’s ideas is most clearly seen in Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, but also influenced other modern literary theories.

Structuralists argued “that the structure of language produces ‘reality’” (Selden, 1985, p. 68). There is a rejection of the Humanist “myth that meaning begins and ends in the individual’s ‘experience’” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 113). Language ‘pre-exists’ any order that individuals make of the world. Meaning “isn’t a kind of core or essence inside things: rather, meaning is always outside” (Barry, 1995, p. 39). Understanding arises from knowing what something is not rather than what it is. Structuralists tried to scientifically dissect language like a specimen. Meaning was then determined in relationship (difference) of sign to sign. “Meaning is dependent upon differential relations among elements within a system” (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 22). In Structuralism stability is produced, and play is contained, in the fusing of the signifier to the signified to produce the sign: like two trains on converging tracks that meet at one point - the sign. Thus, Structuralism, “while rejecting the idea of a unified meaning occupying the text, . . . still seeks unity or unification in the literary system as a whole, recourse to which can then ‘explain’ the individual work” (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 23). In practice, then, there is still a ‘right meaning’ in application. This ‘right meaning’ comes from “the operations and oppositions which govern language” (Selden, 1985, p. 68).

Post-Structuralism grew out of Structuralist theories concerning instability of signification. There is considerable disagreement, however, about what constitutes Post-Structuralism and also about its relation to Structuralism. Nevertheless, it is the radical changes in ideas concerning language and meaning, stemming from Saussure and Structuralism, that underpin all Post-Structuralist theories. “Post-structuralists have in various ways prised apart the two halves of the sign” (Selden, 1985, p. 73). In Post-Structuralism, unlike Structuralism, there is no fusion of the signifier and the signified to produce the sign: like two trains on parallel tracks that never meet. “If structuralism divided the sign from the

referent . . . 'post-structuralism' . . . divides the signifier from the signified" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 128). Post-Structuralism, because it views language as considerably less stable than Structuralism does, sits between the signifier and the signified. "The sign is not so much a unit with two sides, as a momentary 'fix' between two moving layers" (Selden, 1985, p. 73).

In Post-Structuralism there are no signifieds, only endless chains of signifiers. Meaning is apt to slip as signifiers enmesh with each other in the matrix of language. Post-Structuralists argue "that the sign is not stable, that there is an indeterminacy or undecidability about meaning and that it is subject to slippage from signifier to signifier" (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 116). In the absence of the signified, Post-Structuralism applauds the play of textual signification and, unlike Structuralism, does not propound a monolithic 'methodology'. It operates from the premise that there are no referential points by which to determine meaning, hence it "tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism" (Selden, 1985, p. 72). Meaning is found not only in difference, as the Structuralists argued, but is also infinitely deferred. Textual meaning:

is always somehow suspended, something deferred or still to come: one signifier relays me to another, and that to another . . . and although the sentence may come to an end the process of language itself does not. (Eagleton, 1983, p. 128)

Post-Structuralists relish in digging beneath the surface of the text as they are concerned with the difference between what a text says and what it purports to say. Selden (1985) observes that they tend to ask questions rather than provide answers, make the text work against itself, and refuse to make it mean something: "We may be irritated by the post-structuralists' failure to arrive at conclusions, but they are only being consistent in their attempts to avoid logocentrism" (p. 102). In a Post-Structuralist world "we can never quite close our fists over meaning,

which arises from the fact that language is a temporal process” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 128). In Post-Structuralism “everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*” (Barthes, 1996a, p. 121). Barthes describes this process as like following a thread in a stocking (p. 122). There is no beginning and no end, only traces of the journeying. Meaning:

is scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers: it cannot be easily nailed down, it is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together. (Eagleton, 1983, p. 128)

For Post-Structuralists the restrictions imposed by language cannot be escaped, hence their emphasis on the decentred (world, self, and text). There are no points of contact between signifiers and signifieds to produce signs, resulting in an absence of stable reference points by which to determine anything with any certainty. With no fixed points from which to view the world it becomes a “gravity-free universe, without upside down or right way up” (Barry, 1995, p. 62). Although Post-Structuralism can seem painfully devastating and rupturing as it undermines logocentrism it can be viewed positively:

Post-structuralism’s iconoclastic nature can be uplifting. One might grieve the passing of textual absolutes and the tradition of critical reading they supported, but there must also be room for the euphoric giddiness produced by Barthesian readings, which illustrate the potential for creativity unleashed by the *playing* of text. (Moon, 1990, p. 20)

One could also add Derridean interpretations to this Post-Structuralist pre-occupation with the giddy play of language within the text. While the early Barthes is associated with Structuralism, the later Barthes, like Derrida, is considered a major exponent of Post-Structuralism. In particular, Derrida’s ideas contributed strongly to the development of Post-Structuralism, which in some instances “has almost

become synonymous with the name of Derrida and the mode of analysis he inaugurates - 'deconstruction'" (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 114). Derrida's emphasis on the "joyous affirmation of the play of the world" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292) celebrates a liberation of the text from logocentrism just as Barthes' death of the author celebrates a liberation of the text from the clutches of the "Author-God" (Barthes, 1996a, p.121). However, Post-Structuralism "is not a homogeneous entity" (Moon, 1990, p. 8) and this makes definition difficult but also facilitates the various, sometimes antithetical, theoretical directions. For example, according to Barthes (1996a) it is in the reader that a text's unity lies: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (p. 122). In contrast, Foucault (1984b) is interested in what the author ideologically represents, warning that "we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance" and watch for what fills these gaps (p. 105).

In addition to Post-Structuralism, some of the many other areas of modern literary theory include Marxism, Feminism, Post-Modernism, and Post-Colonialism. The great expanse of modern literary theory is not contained or static. It continually expands as new ideas are presented, older approaches are re-appraised, or existing theories are fused together or split still further. From the plethora of theories available Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" is considered a particularly valuable approach for reading literature in Religious Education. It has been demonstrated that Religious Education has responded to developments in other fields of human learning and there is no reason why it should not also respond to developments in modern literary theory. This thesis is very much situated in the literary critical arena.

### **Developments in English Education**

The way in which literature is read and studied in English has been

strongly influenced by modern literary theory. Cohan and Shires (1988) discuss narratives and the way they “structure the meanings by which a culture lives” (p. 1). In an examination of Saussurean linguistics they demonstrate that in a discourse a sign can disrupt as well as facilitate the passage of meaning because “the relation of signifier to signified is unstable” (p. 19). Medway and Stibbs (1990) argue that because the text is a signifier it is neither a window on the world nor a reflection of it. They discuss how deconstruction reveals a text’s pretendedness and encourages an “awareness of the textuality of text” (p. 78).

Gilbert (1991) explores narrative as a social practice that needs to be placed in a social/language framework to see its role in regulating social meaning. She observes that stories “take place within a particular *cultural semiotic*” and discusses the way both narratives and narrators are “socially and culturally situated” (p. 38). Burgess (1988) is also concerned with the social framework of language and text and argues for “renewed attention to classroom discourse, guided by a social view of language and development” (p. 167). Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert (1990) are interested in the social construction of reading, emphasizing the way in which texts can operate to conceal their ideologies by covertly positioning readers so that the apparently ‘natural’ organization of material “authorizes particular ideologies” (p. 441).

O’Neill (1990) discusses the promotion of resistant readings, and advocates ‘molesting’ the text to alert students to the constructedness of texts and the cultural values endorsed by them (p. 90). Mellor, O’Neill and Patterson (1990) investigate the need for new types of questions to be asked in order to show that texts are not a slice of life nor a reflection of it. Such questions also reveal the “constructedness’ of a text”, the “plurality of a text’s meaning” (p. 9), and how “language constructs particular versions of reality” (p. 4). Corcoran (1992) examines the Cultural Critical

practice used in English to construct critical readers rather than responsive readers. He considers teaching methods where the teacher sees his/her role as “unravelling the one true meaning” of the text or as “curator of canonic treasures” are problematic (p. 72).

O’Neill (1993) investigates Cultural Criticism, which “derives from post-structuralist literary theory and linguistic theories in which language is regarded as a construct that assigns meaning arbitrarily” (p. 20). Language, texts, and readings are seen as culturally constructed:

Practices which promote the capacity see the text as a construction, rather than as a reflection of reality, allow readers space in which to challenge the bases of the construction, rather than accepting it as given. (p. 24)

O’Neill discusses how different readings privilege or suppress particular ideas or values. “Different ideologies construct different relationships between the writer, the text, and the reader in terms of production and legitimation of meaning” (p. 19). Cultural Criticism asks such questions as: “What are possible readings of the text? How are readings of character constructed?” (p. 20). O’Neill argues that this approach to literature seeks to construct critical readers instead of responsive readers because “responsive readers are prisoners of the text, while critical readers have the option to resist the text and take up alternative, even oppositional, reading positions” (p. 24). Cultural Criticism allows for a multiplicity of meaning. It does not detract from what may be considered the preferred reading but furnishes a variety of readings. Meaning, in either text or society, is not final or absolute. The Cultural Critical practice considers “reading is a learned practice of making meanings” (p. 19) and helps students to understand that society, text, and meaning are constructs and meaning is culturally defined. For O’Neill, personal growth towards wholeness and meaning does not take place in a vacuum but in society:

Texts, rather than being regarded as the repositories of putative meanings or as offering universal statements about the human condition, can be perceived as culturally located artifacts, potential sites for the production of competing or conflicting meanings. (p. 24)

Understanding the interrelationship between the individual and society is vital in any quest for meaning and purpose in life.

The influence of modern literary theory on how English is taught impacts directly on English Education in Western Australia. Since the 1980's there has been an emphasis in English Education on developing critical readers and fostering an understanding that a "text is a *construction*, not a *reflection* of reality that is 'true'" (O'Neill, 1990, p. 93). Intertextuality now forms part of year eleven and twelve literature courses and is an examinable part of the Literature TEE examination. In the Draft Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia (1997) the learning area statement for English states that language "is influenced by the context of its production . . . . [and] influences the context and how it is perceived" (p. 6). In English "students learn . . . that language operates as a social process" (p. 74). While English still necessarily includes functional literacy as one of its main aims, it also includes critical literacy, which involves:

knowledge about language and how it works, . . . . an understanding that language is a dynamic social process, . . . an awareness that the meaning of any form of communication depends on context, purpose and audience . . . . [and an] ability to reflect on and critically analyse one's own use of language and the language of others. (p. 75)

The Draft Curriculum Framework is indicative of the fact that English orientates itself towards developing student understanding and awareness of the constructedness of language, text, readings, and meanings.

As with developments in Religious Education, particularly



Grimmitt's work, developments in English Education concerning treatment of the text and meaning were also seminal in suggesting a possible direction for this thesis. Through an investigation of the value of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" for reading literature in Religious Education, this thesis is very much a part of the continuing development of the impact of modern literary theory on how literature is read. There are compelling reasons why modern literary theory should also be of interest to teachers of Religious Education. A situation where a student has to 'learn' that reading literature in English means utilizing certain approaches to texts but has to employ quite different approaches to texts in Religious Education would be educationally untenable. Moreover, the application of modern literary theory has the potential to considerably enrich the reading of literature in Religious Education rather than undermine it or hijack its pre-eminent concern with the search for meaning and purpose.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology: Derridean Post-Structuralism

Derrida's theoretical output is vast and complex and has significantly impacted on modern literary theory as a whole, though he is primarily linked with Post-Structuralism. Derrida "has been seen as almost synonymous with the post-structuralist enterprise . . . [and] is perhaps best known for inaugurating 'deconstruction'" (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 173). While the methodology utilized in this thesis stems generally from Post-Structuralism, the particular direction taken is that of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). Although Post-Structuralism's concern with the impossibility of final meaning is contrary to Religious Education's concern with the search for definitive meaning Derrida furnishes an approach to reading literature that accommodates both of these oppositional positions. By examining A Wizard of Earthsea using Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" its value as a methodological approach for reading literature in Religious Education is effectively demonstrated. In this thesis the methodology also necessarily incorporates and builds upon recent developments in Religious Education and English Education.

Derrida is often cited as the instigator of Post-Structuralism. Indeed, its "starting point . . . may be taken as his 1966 lecture Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (Barry, 1995, p. 66). This lecture was delivered at a conference at Johns Hopkins University intended to introduce Structuralism to American intellectuals and academics. "In fact, and primarily in the person of Derrida himself, the conference was announcing not the advent of structuralism, but its demise" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 9), and the advent of Post-Structuralism.

For both Derrida and Post-Structuralism in general the world is considered decentred: there is a decentring of world and self and text: "we

cannot know where we are, since all the concepts which previously defined the centre . . . have been 'deconstructed'" (Barry, 1995, p. 62). Barry uses an apt analogy to explain how in this decentred world there is a lack of reference points by which to know anything with certainty:

Without a fixed point of reference against which to measure movement you cannot tell whether or not you are moving at all. You have probably at some time had the experience of sitting in a stationary train with another train between yourself and the far platform. When that train begins to move you may have the sensation that it is *your* train which is moving and only realise this isn't so when the other train has gone and you again see the fixed point of the platform. (p. 61)

Post-Structuralism is concerned with the textual play of signification and the provisional nature of meaning. It is considered by both Derrida and Post-Structuralists that it is not possible to escape the restrictive parameters of language, hence the impossibility of the existence of both the signified and absolute meaning. Post-Structuralists occupy their time and energy "tracing the insistent activity of the signifier as it forms cross-currents of meaning with other signifiers and defies the orderly requirements of the signified" (Selden, 1985, p. 73). In the Post-Structuralist world-view there can be nothing 'outside' language so investment in concepts that rely on a logocentric outlook are rejected. Post-Structuralism and the Derridean position challenge "not only Saussurean structuralism but all discourses which purport to be grounded in values external to their own structures" (Moon, 1990, p. 14).

### **The Derridean Position**

Derrida discusses his two interpretative positions in his prestigious paper Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences:

There are . . . two interpretations of interpretation; of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of

interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, . . . throughout his entire history - has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (Derrida, 1978, p. 292)

One interpretative position Derrida terms the Rousseauistic interpretation, which seeks the centre (searches for the signified), and the other is the Nietzschean interpretation, which affirms free play (free play of endless chains of signifiers). It is crucial to an understanding of Derrida's two interpretative positions to follow his movement from a logocentric world in which the centre of the structure was fixed to a world where this way of thinking was shattered.

Derrida views the *epistémè*, the entire Western tradition of scientific and philosophical thought, as caught up in determining fundamental principles by fixing centres into every structure. The centre functioned "not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure . . . but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play of the structure*" (Derrida, 1978, p. 278). The centre, according to Derrida, permits play of elements within the structure because it orients and organizes the coherence of the system, but the centre also closes off play because it stabilizes the structure: "At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements . . . is forbidden" (Derrida, 1978, p. 279). The centre is both inside and outside the structure: it fixes the structure from the inside but authenticates the meaning of the structure from the outside. The centre "cannot be implicated in the very languages which it attempts to order and anchor: it must be somehow anterior to these discourses" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 131). Because the centre is both foundational to the structure and the source of authority for meaning in that structure it must be beyond the structure. The centre "governs the structure but is itself not subject to structural

analysis (to find the structure of the centre would be to find another centre)” (Selden, 1985, p. 84).

Derrida points to the Western preoccupation with the centre as clearly evident in the drive to find fundamental principles. He views thought systems as metaphysical if they depend on “an unassailable foundation, a first principle or unimpeachable ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings can be constructed” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 132). The centre has historically received different names in the Western concept of structure and “must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center” (Derrida, 1978, p. 279). As each new thought system became established a new centre replaced the old centre but whatever form the centre took it always centred on the human. In the West there are “innumerable terms which operate as centering principles: being, essence, substance, truth, form, beginning, end, purpose, consciousness, man, God, and so on” (Selden, 1985, p. 84). The Derridean concept of centre always represents a fixed point and always points to a presence, which is seen as outside the structure or system. Derrida (1978) argues that the matrix of Western thought, particularly metaphysics, is “the determination of Being as *presence* . . . . [All] names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence” (p. 279).

For Derrida thought systems are logocentric if they rely on a metaphysics of presence which validates the centre, thereby fixing meaning that is beyond questioning. Culler (1983) considers all logocentric concepts “involve a notion of presence” and in oppositional pairs such as:

positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, . . . the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication . . . or a disruption of the first. (p. 93)

The dual function of the centre was to determine meaning and validate it by referring to a presence outside the structure for its authority, thereby placing it beyond debate. Logocentrism yearns for the sign which will furnish meaning to all other signs “- the ‘transcendental signifier’ - and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point (the transcendental signified)” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 131). Fixing linguistic meaning within the structure places it beyond play: it becomes ‘the’ meaning, at least until a new centre replaces the old one. The centre operates to restrict “the text’s potential to mean” (Moon, 1990, p. 16).

Derrida points to an historical ‘event’ (the process of decentring logocentric thought patterns) that ruptured this safe and reassuring way of thinking, after which language was seen as preceding and producing meaning and reality. “Derrida sees in modern times a particular intellectual ‘event’ which constitutes a radical break from past ways of thought” (Barry, 1995, p. 66). Derrida (1978) considers this ‘event’:

was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse . . . that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. (p. 280)

While Derrida (1978) describes the movement away from a logocentric way of thinking and seeing the world as an event or rupture he also considers it symptomatic of an historical era and specifically links it with a number of influential thinkers, including

the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign . . . ; the Freudian critique of . . . consciousness . . . ; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics. (p. 280)

Central to Derridean theory are the distinctions made between a

logocentric world, in which the structure's centre both determined meaning and referred to a presence outside the structure for its authority, and a world where such intellectual frames of reference were severely fragmented. If there is no direct correlation between the signifier and the signified, and if the text "cannot be legitimately grounded in external points of origin, how then can we arrive at final, complete meanings? The simple answer is that we cannot" (Moon, 1990, p. 16). After the 'event' the world was decentred, without fixed reference point or absolute meaning. The centre, which had previously 'operated' the structure like an axis or drive-shaft and 'fixed' it in place like a lynch pin or key stone, was no more. In this new world there are "no absolutes or fixed points, so that the world we live in is 'decentred' or inherently relativistic. Instead of . . . a known centre, all we have is 'free play'" (Barry, 1995, p. 67).

The rupturing of logocentric thought patterns does not indicate that the centre, which used to exist, no longer exists but that logocentrism fostered the illusion that there were such things as centres in the first place. Nevertheless, even rejecting logocentrism it is not possible to completely move beyond the use of centring principles that are reflected in such terms as God, Word, consciousness, and truth. Indeed, "Derrida does not assert the possibility of thinking outside such terms; any attempt to undo a particular concept is to become caught up in the terms which the concept depends on" (Selden, 1985, p. 84). It is not possible to return to a 'before-this-event' position, hence the sadness and anxiety associated with the loss of the centre. The loss of the ideal of logocentrism implies the impossibility of the centre and therefore of meaning itself. After the 'event' Derrida (1978) points to a world where:

it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. (p. 280)

Accepting the world as decentred does not mean that logocentric concepts 'cannot' exist, but that they cannot be 'proved' to exist and should therefore not be invested in. "People desire a centre because it guarantees *being as presence*" (Selden, 1985, p. 84). Nevertheless, for Derrida (1987):

Logocentrism is . . . fundamentally, an idealism. It is the matrix of idealism. Idealism is its most direct representation, the most constantly dominant force. And the dismantling of logocentrism is simultaneously - *a fortiori* - a deconstitution of idealism or spiritualism in all their variants. (p. 51)

Once the transcendental signified is accepted as being absent the reign of play marks a new epoch. Play is "equivalent to an absence, the absence of a founding origin . . . [but functions to] cross, somehow envelop and exceed the question of being" (Haar, 1992, p. 63). Meaning, instead of being absolute as in a logocentric world, becomes disseminated along chains of signifiers. For Derrida and Post-Structuralists "meaning is not something located within a text; rather, it is a thing chased through a text. It is not an ending but a journeying" (Moon, 1990, p. 17). Derrida (1978) describes the methodology of play as "the disruption of presence" (p. 292). The metaphysics of presence demands an escape from play that is achieved by the centre closing off play other than the play of elements that forms the invested and transcendently signified. Bass (cited in Haar, 1992, p. 63) observes that "the concept of *play* . . . announces . . . the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end". In the web of textuality the play of multiple chains of signifiers is never-ending.

It is the contrast between the 'before' and 'after', between the logocentric and decentred worlds, that is reflected in the contrast between the 'restricted' play of the Rousseauistic position and the free play of the Nietzschean position. Although Derrida rejects logocentrism, he does acknowledge that the human desire for meaning, even security of belief, is understandable. On the basis of the certitude afforded by logocentric



thought systems, observes Derrida (1978), “anxiety can be mastered” (p. 279). Nevertheless, Derrida applauds the free play that is only possible at the edge of the linguistic abyss of Post-Structuralism where play “is always play of absence and presence” (1978, p. 292). The interpretative contrast Derrida makes is represented by the binary opposition between Rousseau and Nietzsche. Hart (1991) observes that this dichotomy could just as easily have been between the standard oppositional pairing of Kant and Nietzsche (p. 118) What is important to note is that Derrida is drawing a contrast between grounded (Rousseauistic) and ungrounded (Nietzschean) modes of interpretation that are clearly inverse to each other.

Derrida’s “two interpretations of interpretation” ensures a methodological approach for reading literature in Religious Education that encompasses both the search for the centre (the Rousseauistic interpretation) and the play of signifiers (the Nietzschean interpretation). The Derridean approach fosters a much broader consideration of meaning and the meaning-making process than would be possible with only pursuing either the Rousseauistic or the Nietzschean interpretation. Culler (1981) observes of interpretative entanglements and disagreements that “to understand the ambiguity or openness of literary meaning, one must study the reading process. No other area of literary criticism offers such an interesting and valuable program” (p. 79). By pursuing two different reading processes, or interpretative positions, a valuable and challenging encounter with the text is guaranteed that ensures an accommodation of both the search for absolute meaning and the play of many provisional meanings.

### **The Rousseauistic Interpretation**

This interpretation dreams of finding the centre. In practice its application for reading literature results in a process seeking to centre the

structure of the text. For example, in A Wizard of Earthsea this process can be seen in centring the novel on the concepts of the Jungian shadow or Taoist balance. Derrida terms this position Rousseauistic because of his reading of Rousseau's philosophical stance concerning language and origins. "Rousseau is preeminently the philosopher of origins, one who sought by every possible means to restore language to a natural state of simplicity, innocence and grace" (Norris, 1987, p. 103). Rousseau looked back to an idyllic time of humans living in a 'natural' state of grace, before civilization wrought social evils. "Rousseau wants to think that there is (or once was) a perfect adjustment between man's social and his natural needs" (Norris, p. 107).

Hence, in his Rousseauistic interpretation Derrida (1978) sees this position as one that "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign" (p. 292). In this backward looking stance there is a melancholy longing for the lost centre, for the ideal of logocentrism. Derrida calls such an interpretative position sad because he sees it as seeking certainty that is simply not possible given the constraints of the linguistic world that humans inhabit. Implicit in this backward looking stance towards the lost centre is the belief in the existence of a centre in the first place. The Rousseauistic interpretation is necessarily separated from what it seeks, hence the sad longing for the centre and the nostalgic dreams of deciphering a truth, "the full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). Similar to Derrida's view of the Rousseauistic interpretation as sad and negative is Nietzsche's description of philosophical perspectives that rely on the transcendental. Nietzsche describes as:

'woeful wisdom' any view that rates life inferior to some supposed transcendental state. All such views - that is to say, almost all the great philosophies and religions of the human past - link life's meaning to fulfillment in an imaginary beyond. (Novak, 1996, p. 19)

While Derrida considers the Rousseauistic position sad he is not, however, actually saying that there is no transcendental signified; there may or may not be. What Derrida is saying is that it cannot be proved to exist from within the parameters of Post-Structuralist linguistics. As a process, then, while a Taoist reading of A Wizard of Earthsea may appeal to Taoism as the transcendental signified by which to understand the text's meaning, Taoism itself cannot be proved to exist outside language. The Rousseauistic interpretation represents the logocentric impulse that looks for the centre, or origin, or truth of the structure. Derrida considers:

this Rousseauist mythology of origins and presence still very much at work in the modern sciences of man. And nowhere more so, he argues, than in structuralist thinking about language, society and cultural history. (Norris, 1987, pp. 127-128)

In Religious Education there is a heavy investment in reading literature in a way that affirms foundations and uses the centre to fix a structure and provide definitive meaning. Such an interpretative stance, which is rejected by Derrida and Post-Structuralism, operates on "the idea that texts are validated by something outside themselves, that they serve as pointers for concepts separable from their own structures" (Moon, 1990, p. 15). The methodology involved in reading a text from the Rousseauistic interpretation is a process directed at deciphering 'the' meaning in its search for the transcendental signified. For example, as applied to A Wizard of Earthsea this search for the transcendental signified suggests either a Taoist centre or a Jungian centre. Although Derrida considers the Rousseauistic interpretation sad he does, however, acknowledge the human need for fixing centres in structures in order to give meaning and assurance. The logocentric impulse to centre structures furnishes certitude which helps master anxiety (Derrida, 1978, p. 279).

The Rousseauistic position necessitates an end to any potential

play within the structure. In addition to escaping from play there is also an escape from the order of the sign since it is presence as Being that is desired and not affirmation of infinitely variable signs where, in essence, there is no finite meaning. For Derrida (1978), this interpretation is turned “towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play” (p. 292). Bernasconi (1992) notes that, for Derrida, Rousseau is seen as concerned with conceiving and promoting concepts that bear the metaphysical mark of presence, hence the Derridean description of the Rousseauistic interpretation as concerned with the presence of Being:

Derrida regards Rousseau as always *wanting* to opt for the chain of concepts that bears the mark of presence . . . . Rousseau is thus understood in terms of a contemporary discourse . . . that identifies Western metaphysics with the priority of presence. (p. 144)

The Rousseauistic interpretation relies on a metaphysics of presence which not only validates the centre but also fixes meaning that is beyond questioning. Meaning is thus determined by the centre, which also refers to a presence external to the structure for its authority.

Although human history attests to the drive towards locating a firm foundation that gives reassurance and stability, Derrida considers such positioning idealistic. Norris (1987) observes that “bound up with the Rousseauist mystique of origins and presence . . . [is] the supposed evils of modern ‘civilized’ existence cut off from the primitive state of communal grace” (p. 122). In his philosophy Rousseau looks back to an idyllic state of the ‘noble savage’, now lost to modern society. Hence, Derrida’s description of the Rousseauistic interpretation as negative because it is concerned with the presence of what is absent. Moreover, in seeking that which is now rendered idealistic and absent this

interpretative position “lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile” (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). Derrida does not favour this position because he feels it is sad, negative, and exiled since it is necessarily removed from what it seeks. However, what religious educators would seek to add is that there is ‘hope’ and ‘faith’ that ‘something’ beyond this world does exist even if it cannot be proved to exist; in addition to sadness, exile, and negativity, then, there is faith and within this is affirmation and joy. As a methodological process the value of this interpretation for reading literature in Religious Education, as illustrated in Chapter Four with reference to A Wizard of Earthsea, lies in its pre-eminent concern with the search for definitive meaning and as such it becomes one of the “myriad ways in which meaning . . . is sought” (*supra vide*, p. 11).

Application of the Rousseauistic interpretation undertaken in this thesis involves a process of examining A Wizard of Earthsea for ways in which the text can be centred and definitive meaning sought. In the classroom the teacher would direct the reading process, having previously decided how the text will be read and interpreted. However, in this study several examples of the Rousseauistic interpretation of the novel have been selected to illustrate the type of Rousseauistic interpretation likely to be chosen by the Religious Education teacher and to demonstrate this Derridean interpretative position in operation. Chapter Four contains a study of the novel from the Jungian concept of the shadow and the Taoist concept of balance, which are the most obvious examples of this interpretation that the reader will encounter.

The Rousseauistic interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea is accomplished by closely reading and studying the text as either a story about Ged who finally recognizes and accepts his dark side in his journey towards wholeness or a story about Ged who learns about the importance of balance in his journey towards a holistic and balanced life.

The novel so 'naturally' lends itself to either of these readings that they 'appear' to constitute its 'meaning'. Both examples centre the structure of the text by appealing to an external authority (Jungian psychology or Taoism) to validate the sought-after definitive meaning. In centring the novel in this way any potential play is closed off. The Rousseauistic interpretation of the novel as exemplified in Chapter Four indicates the logocentric impetus to search for absolute meaning.

In this thesis the methodological process of applying the Rousseauistic interpretation is achieved by centring the novel, which limits the focus, confines the possibilities, and restricts the reading process. The examples used in Chapter Four demonstrate how the text can be read and interpreted in a directed, contained, and closed manner. This methodological process would translate into a teaching process that is narrowly focussed and directed. Approaching A Wizard of Earthsea as illustrated in Chapter Four reflects the type of Rousseauistic interpretative approach that could be utilized by the Religious Education teacher in selecting and directing the teaching and interpretation of the novel. This process is a grounded interpretation that closes the novel by centring the text in the search for definitive meaning.

### **The Nietzschean Interpretation**

Derrida sees in Nietzsche a rejection of logocentrism, of absolute truths and meanings. For Nietzsche there "is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing' (Novak, 1996, p. 49). Nietzsche was interested in truth, perception, and language. He considered that "people first decide what they want and then fit the facts to their aim: 'Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them'" (Selden, 1985, p. 98). Nietzschean philosophy points to the error of 'false' causality. Although it is generally believed that causation is understood Nietzsche asks "but whence did we derive our . . . belief we

possessed this knowledge? From the realm of the celebrated 'inner facts', none of which up till now been shown to be factual" (Novak, 1996, p. 63). Nietzsche radically upset the Western pre-occupation with causality and its insistence on providing explanations, reasons, and origins. Culler (1983) outlines Nietzsche's ideas on "the concept of causal structure [as] . . . the product of precise tropological or rhetorical operation" (p. 86). Nietzsche also undermined the Western historical perspective in his concept of 'false' causality. Foucault (1984a) discusses Nietzsche's understanding of history as involving a rejection of cause-and-effect continuity and instead an emphasizing of its responding to "haphazard conflicts" (p. 88) and its "affirmation of knowledge as perspective" (p. 90). Nietzsche (1977) attacked temporal ideas regarding causality, arguing that cause and effect as "a duality probably never occurs" and is not a continuum but "a capricious division and fragmentation" (p. 62).

Nietzsche's renouncement of logocentric thought patterns constituted a powerful and wrenching influence on subsequent thinking. K ung (1980) observes of Nietzsche that he "pierced through to the foundations of human knowledge and questioned them as no one had done before him. No one has equalled him in the acuteness, depth, and radicalness of his thought" (p. 410). It is not surprising, then, that Derrida should call his radical interpretation of interpretation after Nietzsche. This Derridean interpretative position, as with Post-Structuralist thought in general, reflects Nietzsche's "famous remark "There are no facts, only interpretations"" (Barry, 1995, p. 63). Such interpretations are "orchestrated by the will to power" (Novak, 1996, p. 11). In Nietzschean philosophy Derrida found an understanding of the limitations of language:

Every candidate for 'truth' must first be expressed in language, and language, Nietzsche reminds us, is notoriously unable to get at reality. It oversimplifies and distorts, concealing at least as much as it reveals. (Novak, 1996, p. 10).

Nietzsche's concern with the problems and restrictions of language can be seen reflected in the playful approach to language so central to Derrida's Nietzschean interpretative position. Derrida describes this position as not concerned with trying to find centres but rather with the impossibility of meaning contained in the endless chains of signifiers. The Nietzschean position, "which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). There is a rejection of, and movement beyond, anthropocentrism to a position that neither seeks the centre nor centres on the human but exhibits a "joyous affirmation of the play of the world" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). Such play is only possible without the centre. In the concept of play Derrida refers to the ideas of Nietzsche for whom "reason has no foundation other than the play of the non-ground of interpretation" (Hart, 1991, p. 73). Nietzsche denied the existence of truth considering it "the name we give to that which agrees with our instinctual preferences; it is what we call our *interpretation* of the world, especially when we want to foist it on others" (Novak, 1996, p. 11). His rejection of 'truth' attacked the foundations of logocentric thought. Nietzsche "raises the question of truth . . . more radically than anyone before him" (Küng, 1980, p. 383).

The Nietzschean interpretation does not celebrate a lost centre but affirms the noncentre: "*This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center*" (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). It does not seek to re-centre the human in another way because such centring is deemed an illusion. Nor is this position interested in re-gaining the lost centre because it does not consider there ever was a centre, it just looked as though there was. Nietzsche challenged the logocentric pursuit of origins: "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of things. It is disparity" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 79). Derrida sees in Nietzsche's rejection



of origins a joyous affirmation of the noncentre. For Derrida (1978), then, the Nietzschean interpretation is positive, an:

*affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. (p. 292)

Such positive affirmation in this interpretative position reflects the Nietzschean “Joyful Wisdom” at the rejection of logocentrism and its investment in transcendental signifieds (Novak, 1996, p. 19). Derrida considers the ‘event’ that disrupted the logocentric world, as seen from the Nietzschean position, as a joyous event because it facilitated free play. In Derridean terms ‘play’ enters a new era once the transcendental signified is accepted as being absent: play is now “the disruption of presence” (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). No security or reassurance is offered in this position; play is risky, but is considered productive and pleasurable. The Nietzschean interpretation “plays without security . . . . In absolute chance, affirmation surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace” (Derrida, 1978, p. 292).

In the Nietzschean position there is no longer a decipherment based on a centre, on an authority that translates the meaning. Rather, the emphasis is on the free play of signifiers. Nietzsche (1977) considered that truth is entirely a matter of one’s perspective and in his time saw a giving way of absolute truth to a position where truth is relative (p. 9). Hence the Derridean description of the Nietzschean interpretation as concerned with deconstructing the text and exposing the free play of endless chains of signifiers. The methodology involved in this interpretation is a process concerned not with deciphering ‘the’ meaning, as in the Rousseauistic interpretation, but with exploring the text’s multiple provisional threads of meaning. Derrida emphasizes the joy to be

had in this affirmative position. "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" (Derrida, 1978, p. 280). For Derrida there is an infinite impossibility of meaning that underpins the ineffability of the deconstructive process of the Nietzschean position: "What deconstruction is not? everything of course! What is deconstruction? nothing of course!" (Wood & Bernasconi, 1988, p. 5).

### Deconstruction.

Deconstruction is a typical Post-Structuralist mode of reading. It seeks to show textual disunity by exposing the "textual 'subconscious'" (Barry, 1995, p. 73). Deconstruction is concerned with reading the text against itself and "is created by repetitions, deviations, disfigurations" (Culler, 1983, p. 228). In practice the Nietzschean deconstructive process fosters an oppositional reading of a text. This "is not a subverting of the text but rather a demonstration that the text is already subverted by its own language" (Moon, 1990, p. 18). Deconstruction, rather than being a body of theories, is a practice, a process, a way of reading, even a 'methodology'. However, Derrida resists calling deconstruction "either a 'method', a 'technique' or a species of 'critique'" (Norris, 1987, p. 18). Nevertheless, in practice deconstruction discloses itself as concerned with revelation; that is, a process directed at revealing the unsaid in the text. Caputo (1989) describes deconstruction as "a parasitic practice":

what it does is to inhabit the discourse of those who have something to say and to make trouble for them. It needles its way into the discourse of others and shows them how much trouble they have brought upon themselves. Deconstruction does not want to deny that something exists, but only to show the difficulty we have getting that said. (pp. 30-31)

While Derrida may shy at defining deconstruction, particularly as a method, in practice his deconstructive work exhibits certain

characteristics that are suggestive of a methodological process. For example, Norris (1987) postulates a definition reflecting Derridean deconstruction which sounds very much like a method:

deconstruction is the vigilant seeking-out of those 'aporias', blindspots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to mean*. (p. 19)

Much of Derrida's work involves close attention to texts which he deconstructs, demonstrating that they are not the holistic and coherent entities they are generally assumed to be. Derrida feels that his "grammatological project . . . must deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to onto-theology, logocentrism, phonologism" (Derrida, 1987, p. 35). The Nietzschean interpretative position can be utilized to deconstruct all texts, as well as point to intertextuality between texts. Culler (1981) points out that although Derrida's works involve a very close engagement with texts they rarely:

involve interpretations as traditionally conceived. There is no deference to the integrity of the text . . . . Derrida . . . concentrates on elements which others find marginal, seeking not to elucidate what a text says but to reveal an uncanny logic that operates in and across texts. (pp. 14-15)

Post-Structuralism maintains that language, rather than being 'solid', is actually liquid - "signs float free of what they designate, meanings are fluid, and subject to constant 'slippage' or 'spillage'" (Barry, 1995, p. 64). This results in marginal slips and spills which collapse the text against its 'intended' meaning. Such slips and spills, or textual gaps, are entrances into the text's sub-conscious. In practice, then, the process of applying the Nietzschean interpretation results in a methodology that concentrates exclusively on exposing textual gaps through which entry to

the underside of any text, such as A Wizard of Earthsea, is facilitated. Eagleton (1983) describes deconstruction as showing how oppositions “are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text’s margins certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them” (p. 133). It should be emphasized that deconstruction is not actually destruction of the text and textual meaning. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that it is the fluid nature of language which actually works against itself. Johnson (Salusinszky, 1987) observes that deconstruction “is not synonymous with *destruction*”:

It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word *analysis*, which etymologically means ‘to undo’ . . . . The deconstruction of a text . . . [proceeds] by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. (pp. 164-165)

It is this unravelling of text that characterizes the deconstructive process, which is sometimes referred to as “textual harassment” (Barry, 1995, p. 72). The Nietzschean interpretative position deconstructs a text, for example A Wizard of Earthsea, by a process of oppositional reading in which the ‘unified’ face of the text is undermined by an unmasking of textual conflicts, paradoxes, contradictions, and inconsistencies. Barry notes that texts which were “previously regarded as unified artistic artifacts are shown to be fragmented, self-divided, and centreless. They always turn out to be representative of . . . ‘monstrous births’” (1995, p. 68). The previously unnoticed ‘chasm’ in the text can then be explored. “Deconstruction can begin when we locate the moment when a text transgresses the laws it appears to set up for itself” (Selden, 1985, p. 87). Deconstruction demonstrates the irreducible plurality of text, which underpins the plurality of textual meaning. This pluralism signals the impossibility of absolute meaning, something that can give rise to what Barry (1995) describes as “terminal anxieties” (p. 64). Moon (1990),

however, tries to emphasize the positive potential of Post-Structuralism, particularly the deconstructive process:

Deconstruction need not be destruction. What post-structuralism does is to remind us that our cultural systems and practices are not the seamless, self-evident entities we take them for: they embody gaps and contradictions; they perpetuate injustices even as they seek justice; their surfaces have been worn sensuously smooth by years of use but their internal contradictions remain. In language and in our cultural systems we paper over these cracks so automatically that we forget they are there. Deconstruction forces us to confront the gaps, contradictions and inequalities in our society; whether or not we then do something about them is up to us. (p. 21)

While no definitive meaning is achieved, as in the Rousseauistic position, the Nietzschean interpretation 'plays' with the text, producing multiple threads of provisional meaning. In this new Nietzschean world facts have no guarantee. Instead there are interpretations which have no "stamp of authority. . . since there is no longer any authoritative centre to which to appeal for validation of our interpretations" (Barry, 1995, p. 67).

The Nietzschean deconstructive process, by pursuing endless chains of textual signifiers, facilitates the exploration of many provisional meanings. Culler (1983) observes that deconstruction is not an end to distinctions but as the "play of meaning is the result of what Derrida calls 'the play of the world', in which the general text always provides further connections, correlations, and contexts" (p. 134). Deconstruction burrows beneath the textual surface, exposing inconsistencies, playing with meaning, and bringing "out what the text excludes by showing what it includes" (Silverman, 1989, p. 4). The deconstruction of A Wizard of Earthsea undertaken in Chapter Five burrows beneath the novel's surface by looking for gaps and inconsistencies facilitated by such words as "source" or "power". This process is not something limited to textual criticism but can be used as a methodological approach for exploring and

analyzing many issues in life. Johnson (Salusinszky, 1987) suggests that every time one is tempted:

to conclude what seems natural, or what seems satisfying, or what seems commonsensically true, you arrest your movement towards that for a moment, and examine what you are putting together . . . [Even] to the point of asking yourself, 'Could the opposite also be true?' (pp. 159-160)

Practising the deconstructive process in everyday life exposes what lies beneath the surface of society, its institutions and practices. It could be said of deconstruction that it is a valuable process, in that it facilitates a unique method of examination, but in itself is of no particular value, in that it reaches no conclusions, resolutions, or solutions. Perhaps the value of Nietzschean deconstruction lies in its being, to return to Derrida, both "everything" and "nothing" (Wood & Bernasconi, 1988, p. 5).

Deconstruction, then, is the Nietzschean interpretation in practice. Derrida's reluctance to describe deconstruction as a methodology is typical of much modern literary theory's aversion to being aligned with any definitive sort of process or methodology, particularly of a prescribed or 'scientific' nature. For example, Post-Structuralism rejects the scientificity of Structuralist methodology. Nevertheless, in execution, deconstruction can be seen as a methodological approach for textual reading. As a process it applies the Nietzschean interpretation to the practice of reading literature, or any 'text'. In application this interpretation, as undertaken in Chapter Five, involves a process of examining A Wizard of Earthsea for textual threads of provisional meaning. In the Religious Education classroom both the teacher and students would individually and corporately expose and pursue these Nietzschean threads. For the purposes of this thesis, however, of the infinite number of threads facilitated by the Nietzschean interpretation this study examines only a sample to illustrate this interpretative

position in operation. The material in Chapter Five, then, is expressive of the deconstructive process as may be practised in the classroom and is not indicative of definitive application.

The process involved in the Nietzschean interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea, unlike the process involved in the Rousseauistic interpretation, is not directed and controlled by the teacher. Rather than the one voice of the teacher determining how the novel is read and studied the many voices of the students and teacher would deconstruct the novel in a plethora of directions, resulting in a playful cacophony of provisional meanings. Instead of a centred classroom it would be, in the process of applying the Nietzschean interpretation, a decentred classroom.

As a methodological process the deconstruction of A Wizard of Earthsea involves pursuing threads of meaning by selecting certain words or phrases through which the text can be examined for gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies. In this way the apparent unity of the novel is thrown into disarray, language is demonstrated to be unstable, and the meaning-making process is explicated. Deconstruction proceeds by a close textual analysis of the novel in which slips and oddities are teased out and examined for a while. In Chapter Five discussions about the contradictory use of the word "light", inconsistencies in the use of the word "shadow", confusion over use of the word "dark", and gaps afforded by the word "cast" facilitate an examination of the unsaid lurking in the sub-conscious of the novel. As a methodological approach deconstruction puts into practice the Nietzschean interpretation's emphasis on decentring, on a playful approach to language, and on a concern with provisional meaning. This process is necessarily always tentative and incomplete as, by definition, it is infinite.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Rousseauistic Interpretation in Practice**

While Derrida's Rousseauistic interpretation can be used as a methodological approach for reading any text, whether it be a newspaper advertisement, a film, a play, or a sacred text, this examination will apply to Le Guin's fantasy novel A Wizard of Earthsea (1993). From a close textual analysis of this novel two of the most obvious Rousseauistic interpretations would be Jungian, in the novel's concern with the concept of the shadow, and Taoist, in the novel's concern with balance. Both these Rousseauistic interpretations seek to centre the structure of the text. The centre both determines meaning (whether the Jungian concept of the shadow or the Taoist concept of balance) and refers to a presence outside the structure for its authority (whether Jungian psychology or Taoism). Such interpretations are extremely attractive to religious educators because they are implicitly concerned with the search for meaning and wholeness, and provide a firm foundation on which to pursue this search. However, from the Derridean perspective such firm foundations are only possible in the Rousseauistic approach because it affirms logocentrism and denies the decentred world of Post-Structuralist theory.

### **Jungian Shadow**

In the Rousseauistic interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea that seeks to centre the structure of the text by referring to Jungian psychology the shadow would be seen as the centre (the truth) around which the fantasy story revolves. The presence of the Jungian concept of the shadow in the novel has been noted by many critics, though Le Guin claims not to have read Jung until after the publication of A Wizard of Earthsea (Bucknall, 1984, p. 49). Nevertheless, having read Jung, Le Guin agrees with him on the necessity to integrate the shadow and is very



much concerned about the dangers of people denying their profound relationship with evil because the shadow “is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared” (Jung, 1991, p. 21).

For both Le Guin and Jung the shadow is the means whereby the individual is able to achieve full potential and wholeness. The guide for this journey “to self knowledge, to adulthood, to the light” is the shadow (Le Guin, 1979, p. 65). For Le Guin the shadow “is the animal within us . . . the dark brother, the shadow soul” (p. 67). Echoing Jung, Le Guin deems the shadow as “not simply evil. It is inferior, primitive, awkward, animallike, childlike; powerful, vital, spontaneous” (p. 64). In addition, Le Guin feels it is her shadow that guides her in the discovery of her fictional characters and worlds (pp. 59-71). Le Guin’s ideas can be seen reflected in Ged, whose shadow ‘guides’ him towards wholeness and balance.

Slusser (1976) discusses the origin of Ged’s shadow as coming “from within himself” (p. 36), while Cummins (1990) notes that Ged’s wholeness comes from recognizing both the good and evil within himself (p. 37). Scholes (1986) observes of Ged that the “shadow was himself, his own capacity for evil . . . . To become whole he had to face it . . . and accept it as part of himself” (p. 39). Shippey (1986) also considers that the shadow is part of Ged, being “equal and opposite to the man who casts it”, and his wholeness comes from accepting it as a necessary part of himself (p. 106). Lasseter (1979) points to Le Guin’s concern with the dual nature of humankind and the balancing of light and dark as the most religious theme in her tales (p. 91), while Molson (1979) also comments on the duality of human nature and the need to accept “oneself as a finite creature made up of good and evil” (p. 135). Bittner (1984) discusses Ged’s shadow as “a helpful though fearful guide and an integral part of Ged’s Self” (p. 11) and Wood (1986) observes that for Ged to control and accept his shadow “he must journey . . . into his own spirit” (p. 207).

In Jungian psychology the shadow refers to those aspects of personality and behaviour that are repressed by the ego. These repressed traits are considered by the ego to be dark, inferior, and unacceptable. "The development of the shadow runs parallel to that of the ego" (Jacobi, 1973, p. 110). As the ego develops throughout childhood and adolescence the shadow also develops. The act of repressing the shadow during childhood is "a necessary protective function that allows ego development to take place" (Cannon, 1985, p. 32). Where a problem with the shadow does arise is when, as an adult, the act of repression is the major defence mechanism in coping with faults and failings of the ego. There are five areas that can be explored in terms of the Jungian concept of the shadow and A Wizard of Earthsea. The shadow in both Jungian psychology and the novel is dark and inferior, is projected onto others, needs to be recognized and assimilated, is frightening, and is unrelenting.

### **(1) The shadow is dark and inferior**

The shadow in Jungian psychology is seen as containing inferior, repressed, primitive, and vital aspects rejected by the ego. Moreno (1974) sees the shadow as "the inferior personality made up of everything that will not fit in with the laws and regulations of conscious life. It is a darkness . . . the hidden, repressed, and guilt-laden personality" (p. 39). Jung describes the shadow as "the face we never show to the world" (Jung, 1959, p. 304) and as containing "dark characteristics [and] inferiorities" (Jung, 1971, p. 145). The shadow contains "unknown or little-known attributes of the ego" and can indicate its existence:

in an impulsive or inadvertent act. Before one has time to think, the evil remark pops out, the plot is hatched, the wrong decision is made, and one is confronted with results that were never intended or consciously wanted. (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1978, pp. 174-175)

The shadow contains “repressed dispositions” and “rejected aspects of the developing ego” which are experienced by the ego as liabilities (Stevens, 1990, p. 43). Nevertheless, the shadow, although a dark aspect of the self, is an essential part of the individual and is not necessarily an evil entity. It is “inferior and unadapted, not wholly bad . . . but it also displays a number of good qualities such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, and creative impulses” (Moreno, 1974, pp. 39-40).

Ged’s shadow consists of his pride, arrogance, temper, and ambition but also the impetus towards union and wholeness. Ged displays considerable arrogance and desire for power in his thirst for knowledge. Both as a new apprentice to Ogion and a student on Roke Ged’s actions indicate that deep within him lurks ambition and greed for power. When first apprenticed to Ogion, Ged thinks this will be his entrance into a world of power, but he is bitterly disappointed:

Ged had thought that as the prentice of a great mage he would enter at once into the mystery and mastery of power. He would understand the language of the beasts and the speech of the leaves of the forest, he thought, and sway the winds with his word, and learn to change himself into any shape he wished. Maybe he and his master would run together as stags, or fly to Re Albi over the mountain on the wings of eagles.

But it was not so at all . . . . They entered no mysterious domain. Nothing happened . . . . [Ged] kept back his resentment and impatience, and tried to be obedient, so that Ogion would consent at last to teach him something. For he hungered to learn, to gain power. (p. 25)

As a student on Roke, Ged is still greedy for power. He asks the Master Hand how to lock changing-spells so that he can perform more than mere tricks of illusion. However, the Master Hand merely:

looked down at the pebble again. ‘A rock is a good thing, too, you know,’ he said, speaking less gravely. ‘If the Isles of Earthsea were all made of diamond, we’d lead a hard life here. Enjoy illusion, lad, and let the rocks be rocks.’ He smiled, but Ged left dissatisfied. (p. 48)

In Ged's relationship to the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi can also be seen his desire for power as well as his pride. He is driven by a need to impress and boast. Ged "had a desire to please her, to win her admiration" (p. 28). He fears that she is mocking him and that she considers him afraid. "That he would not endure. He did not say much, but he resolved that he would prove himself to her" (p. 30). It is this desire to impress and not have his pride hurt that sends him off to look in Ogion's Lore-Book.

Ged's pride is also abundantly evident in his relationship to Jasper. Ged desperately wants to show off his powers to Jasper. "Ged's pride would not be slighted or condescended to. He swore to prove to Jasper . . . how great his power really was - some day" (p. 46). Also in his relationship to Jasper can be discerned his temper. Ged has a dreadful temper that erupts at the slightest feeling of injury: "The younger boys [were] used to seeing his black temper break out at the least hint of slight or insult" (p. 61). His barely stifled rage at Jasper results in him challenging Jasper to a duel in sorcery, something strictly forbidden on Roke (p. 60).

Repeatedly Ged's pride is referred to: Ogion says of Ged, "your power is great. Greater even than your pride, I hope" (p. 32); Ged seeks to "hide his ignorance and save his pride" (p. 46); "bolstering up his [Ged's] pride, he set his strong will on the work they gave him" (pp. 46-47); and, Vetch says to Ged "Pride was ever your mind's master" (p. 146). This pride is indicative of Ged's shadow, of his sin of hubris, as is his ambition and desire for power. Ultimately, this leads to his undoing. After Ged has released his shadow Lord Gensher severely reprimands him:

'And you were moved to do this by pride and hate. Is it any wonder the result was ruin? You summoned a spirit from the dead . . . Uncalled it came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you: you are connected. It is the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast.' (p. 68)

However, Ged's shadow does not only contain negative qualities. It also displays life-saving instincts when as a boy Ged saves his village from attack by the Kargad warriors (pp. 19-22). It is also from the shadow that arises Ged's enormous power. After the loosing of his shadow he is ill, and even after he has recovered his power is weak and clumsy:

The boys he had led and lauded over were all ahead of him now, because of the months that he had lost, and that spring and summer he studied with lads younger than himself. Nor did he shine among them, for the words of any spell, even the simplest illusion-charm, came halting from his tongue, and his hands faltered at their craft. (p. 69)

It is the shadow's instinct of union with Ged that is strong, not the other way around. After being released from Ged the shadow desperately clings to him, but Ged is so terrified he screams (p. 64). The shadow, being rejected, fought back but still "clung to Ged" (p. 64).

## **(2) The shadow is projected onto others**

In Jungian psychology the shadow is projected onto other people of the same sex. "The shadow appears . . . in projections as when we burden our neighbours with the faults we obviously have ourselves" (Moreno, 1974, p. 41). Shadow projection results in the opinion that it is the other person who is lazy, proud, and irresponsible and not oneself. "That is why the 'other fellow is always to blame' as long as we are not aware that the darkness is in ourselves" (Jacobi, 1973, p. 113). If the projection of the shadow continues unchallenged these projections eventually "change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (Jung, 1971, p. 146).

Extreme emotional reaction (hate, jealousy, and the like) indicates that the shadow has been projected. "We can tell that a weakness of our own has been projected onto our neighbours when we notice in ourselves a strong compulsion to correct or criticize their behaviour" (Cannon, 1985, p. 34). It is only possible to deny that the shadow exists by projecting it

onto others. In this way the individual denies any faults or failings but is quick to criticize the other person onto whom has been projected the shadow. Not only do “we *deny* the existence of our shadow and *project* it onto others . . . [but in] this way we deny our own ‘badness’ and project it onto others, whom we hold responsible for it” (Stevens, 1990, p. 44). Even when such projections may be obvious to others, the individual finds it difficult to acknowledge what is happening. Jung (1971) considers:

No matter how obvious it may be to the neutral observer that it is a matter of projections, there is little hope that the subject will perceive this himself. He must be convinced that he throws a very long shadow before he is willing to withdraw his emotionally-toned projections from their object. (p. 146)

In his early relationship with Ogion can be seen an inkling of Ged’s projected shadow. He feels that Ogion’s teaching makes a fool of him and he “did not like to be made a fool of” (p. 26). However, Ged’s respect for Ogion prevents a major projection of his shadow. It is onto Jasper that Ged projects his shadow with great ferocity from their first meeting (pp. 42-43). Ged considers that it is Jasper who is proud, aloof, hateful, and boastful, not himself. Jasper elicits strong reactions from Ged, so much so that even on convivial occasions of mirth among the students “like all Jasper ever said to him, the jest set his teeth on edge” (p. 53). That Ged’s shadow has been projected onto Jasper is clear from his intense hatred and rivalry towards Jasper. Ged is filled with a burning rage and swears:

to himself to outdo his rival, and not in some illusion match but in a test of power. He would prove himself, and humiliate Jasper . . . . Ged did not stop to think why Jasper might hate him. He only knew why he hated Jasper . . . . Jasper stood alone as his rival, who must be put to shame. (p. 49)

While Ged is still a student on Roke he asks the Master Hand how to lock changing-spells so that could “put Jasper to shame at last” (p. 47).

Ged feels Jasper continually makes a fool of him. "Jasper laughed, ill-humouredly, and went on . . . . And Ged followed, sullen and sore-hearted, knowing that he had behaved like a fool, and blaming Jasper for it" (p. 46). Ged's reactions to Jasper are driven by powerful negative emotions. After Jasper has performed an illusion for a visitor, the Lady of O, all present are pleased with his efforts and praise him. All that is except for Ged who "joined his voice to the praises, but not his heart. 'I could have done better,' he said to himself, in bitter envy, and all the joy of the evening was darkened for him after that" (p. 55).

Ged is so totally blinded by his hatred of and rivalry towards Jasper and by his own pride that he is unable to see the situation for what it is or to realize the danger inherent in his behaviour. Ged would not see, or refused to see, that "in this rivalry, which he clung to and fostered as part of his own pride, that there was anything of the danger, the darkness, of which the Master Hand had mildly warned him" (p. 49). All of Ged's behaviour in relation to Jasper is totally out of proportion to the reality of the situation. Vetch's reactions, always moderate and sensible, fail to bring Ged to his senses. When Ged challenges Jasper to a duel Vetch exclaims: "Duels in sorcery are forbidden to us, and well you know it. Let this cease!" (p. 60). But neither Ged nor Jasper listen to him. Vetch tries appealing to Ged's sense, but to no avail: Ged "will you be a man and drop this now - come with me" (p. 61). Although Vetch is able to see Ged's hatred and jealousy for Jasper he is unable to stop the fateful event that will shatter Ged's young life.

### **(3) The shadow needs to be recognized and assimilated**

The first step in Jungian individuation, or the process towards wholeness, is the recognition and assimilation of the shadow. It is imperative "to distinguish ourselves from our shadow by recognizing its reality as part of our nature" (Jacobi, 1973, p. 114). For Jung:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as real and present. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. (Jung, 1971, p. 145)

It is only after recognition of the shadow that “the painful and lengthy work of self-education begins - a work, we might say, that is the psychological equivalent of the labours of Hercules” (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1978, p. 174). Wholeness and completeness of the self cannot be achieved without recognition and assimilation of the shadow. “The goal of the self is wholeness” (Stevens, 1990, p. 41). Since the shadow will not go away, much as the ego would like this scenario, it must be lived with. Moreno observes that the “question is no longer how we can get rid of our shadow, but rather how we can live with our dark side without becoming dark ourselves. Shadow and consciousness have to live together” (1974, p. 45). Wholeness of being can only be achieved by a union of ego and shadow. According to Jung, psychological and spiritual health are not achievable without learning to live with the shadow. An individual can “only be well and sane when the quarrel between him and his shadow . . . [is] dissolved and reconciled” (Van der Post, 1977, p. 219).

The shadow, though not necessarily an opponent, may often be viewed as an enemy and must always be lived with. “Whether the shadow becomes our friend or enemy depends largely upon ourselves . . . . The shadow only becomes hostile when he is ignored or misunderstood” (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1978, p. 182). Without recognition and assimilation of the shadow an individual will not find wholeness. No matter the pain and difficulty experienced in dealing with the shadow the “assimilation of the shadow is a crucial step on the way to individuation” (Stevens, 1990, p. 46).



After Ged has released his shadow he is much humbled and shaken by the experience. Although he would like to “stay. To learn. To undo . . . the evil” (p. 67) this proves to be a vain hope. While completing his training on Roke he dreams of the shadow but does “not know what it was - the thing that came out of the spell and cleaved to me” (p. 68). Ged’s recognition of the shadow is slow, but at Low Torning he senses the shadow “was drawn to him” and acknowledges it as “being his creature” (p. 83). Yet Ged does not know “in what form it could come, having no real form of its own as yet, and how it would come, and when it would come” (p. 83). Ged’s progress toward recognition of his shadow can be seen in his refusal of the temptations offered by both Yevaud (p. 90) and Serret (pp. 112-113) to provide him with his shadow’s name. Ged’s behaviour is far more responsible and he is a much humbler person. It is a very different Ged who admits his weakness and ignorance to the Doorkeeper (p. 74) than the Ged who arrived arrogant and angry years earlier (p. 40). It is also a very different Ged who admits to Ogion that “I have come back to you as I left: a fool” (p. 118) than the Ged who “hungered to learn, to gain power” (p. 26) and wished “for glory” (p. 32).

No one can really tell Ged what to do, though Ogion tells him that “You must seek what seeks you. You must hunt the hunter . . . and seek the very source and that which lies before the source” (p. 120). Ged fully realizes that he cannot keep running from his shadow as it “will surely find me again . . . And all my strength is spent in the running” (p. 121). Ged decides to follow his master’s advice and goes hunting, in search of his shadow and the source. This is the great Jungian turning point in the journey towards wholeness: that of turning around and seeking and trying to recognize one’s shadow. However, to begin with Ged hopes to destroy his shadow, even if it means destroying himself.

Ged recognizes the shadow as his shadow but not that it is an

essential part of his being. He sees it very much as an enemy to be destroyed and is still driven by a terror of his shadow. "He knew only the torment of dread, and the certainty that he must go ahead and do what he had set out to do: hunt down the evil, follow his terror to its source" (p. 136). Out at sea he thinks that when he meets his shadow he can grasp it and "drag it with the weight of his body and the weight of his own death into the darkness of the deep sea" (p. 125). In the middle of the sea, alone, and hoping to destroy his shadow he summons it: "I am here, I Ged the Sparrowhawk, and I summon my shadow" (p. 126). But, finally Ged recognizes that he cannot destroy his shadow. In the East Reach, Ged tries to attack the shadow but finds nothing in his empty hands. But this meeting has a profound effect on Ged and marks a deep recognition of the shadow and his relationship to it:

All terror was gone. All joy was gone. It was a chase no longer. He was neither hunted nor hunter, now. For the third time they had met and touched: he had of his own will turned to the shadow, seeking to hold it with living hands. He had not held it, but he had forged between them a bond, a link that had no breaking-point. There was no need to hunt the thing down . . . . When they had come to the time and place for their last meeting they would meet . . . . 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. (p. 138)

As Ged begins to recognize his shadow it begins to lose its power over him. Ged eventually recognizes his shadow for what it is; he accepts it, joins with it, and becomes whole. His journey to this point has been painful and difficult. Ged's assimilation of his shadow is a slow process that progresses as his recognition of his shadow grows. In the end Ged knows not only the shadow's name but also what he must do:

Ged lifted up the staff high, and the radiance of it brightened intolerably . . . . In that light . . . the thing came towards Ged. It grew together and shrank and blackened, crawling on four short taloned legs upon the sand. But still it came forward,

lifting up to him a blind unformed snout without lips or eyes or ears. As they came right together it became utterly black in the white mage-radiance that burned about it, and it heaved itself upright. In silence man and shadow met face to face, and stopped.

Aloud and clearly breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name, and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: 'Ged'. And the two voices were one.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one. (p. 164)

In naming his shadow with his own name Ged assimilates the shadow into himself, as part of himself, and "made himself whole" (p. 166).

#### **(4) The shadow is frightening**

Dealing with the shadow is a difficult and terrifying process. "Bitter as the cup may be, no one can be spared it" (Jacobi, 1973, p. 114). Jung describes the initial confrontation with the shadow as "an *ethical* problem of the first magnitude" (Jung, 1959, p. 78) and "the first step on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people" (Jung, 1959, p. 304). Recognition of the shadow is strongly resisted by the ego because it has no desire to associate with the shadow. "To own one's shadow is . . . a painful, and potentially terrifying experience" (Stevens, 1990, pp. 43-44). The terror experienced at even glimpsing one's shadow is the reason that many people repress the shadow. Repression is preferable to recognition, simply because the individual often "cannot bring himself to accept all this darkness as a part of himself" (Jacobi, 1973, p. 113). However, "the less conscious a man is of his shadow, the blacker and denser the shadow becomes" (Moreno, 1974, p. 41).

Ged is terrified of his shadow and has great difficulty recognizing it. He also has to overcome his fear and loathing of it and his desire to kill it. Ged first begins to sense his shadow when still an apprentice to Ogion on Gont. He reads from a Lore-Book and finds himself fixed upon reading a

certain spell and is terrified of the darkness he feels closing in on him:

His eyes were fixed, and he could not lift them till he had finished reading all the spell.

Then raising his head he saw it was dark in the house . . . . [The] horror grew in him, seeming to hold him in his chair. He was cold. Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call him in a whisper: but he could not understand the words.

The door was flung wide. A man entered with a white light flaming from him, a great bright figure who spoke aloud, fiercely and suddenly. The darkness and the whispering ceased and were dispelled. (pp. 30-31)

Ged's initial encounter with what Ogion later describes as "but the foreboding of it, the shadow of a shadow" (p. 120) should be enough to alert him to the dangers of his pride and thirst for knowledge. Ged's first partial glimpse and sensing of his shadow was a truly terrifying experience for him, yet he soon forgets this experience. When Ogion reprimands Ged he says to him, "You will never work that spell but in peril of your power and your life" (p. 31). But Ged does not listen to Ogion's warning and it is this spell that he later uses on Roke to raise a spirit from the dead. In defence Ged complains to Ogion that he has been taught nothing. But again, Ged learns nothing because he does not want to recognize his shadow and is driven by a lust for power.

While a student on Roke Ged finds that certain spells make him uneasy for no reason he is able to discern:

There were certain runes on certain pages of the Lore-Book that seemed familiar to him, though he did not remember in what book he had ever seen them before. There were certain phrases that must be said in spells of Summoning that he did not like to say. They made him think, for an instant, of shadows in a dark room, of a shut door and shadows reaching out to him from the corner by the door. Hastily he put such thoughts or memories aside and went on. These moments of fear and darkness, he said to himself, were the shadows

merely of his ignorance. The more he learned, the less he would have to fear, until finally in his full power as wizard he need fear nothing in the world, nothing at all. (pp. 57-58)

Ged does not want to recognize his shadow, so dispels his fear and strange feelings by a foolish and blind certainty that with power comes an absence of fear. However, Ged has to painfully learn that this is not so.

After Ged is sent to Low Torning to protect the village from dragons he meets his shadow again when, in a foolish attempt to save Pechvarry's son from certain death, he crosses into the land of the dead and finds his shadow waiting for him (p. 80). Ged almost loses his life and his dreams are plagued by the shadow. When he wakes from his dreams he is "weak and cold" and terrified (p. 83). In both dreams and thoughts of the shadow "he felt always the same cold dread: sense and power drained out of him, leaving him stupid and astray. He raged at his cowardice, but that did no good. He sought for some protection, but there was none" (p. 83).

In his dreams and waking thoughts he sees the shadow as a shapeless mass of darkness or a creature with no head because he is too terrified to recognize this 'creature' as his shadow, as a part of himself. Ged tries to run away from his shadow and leaves Low Torning. He flees to Roke but finds his path is thwarted by the "high, enwoven, ancient spells" that protect the mage-island (p. 94). He has dreadful feelings of "a foreboding of doom" (p. 94) and felt "the doom . . . [was] lying ahead on every road" (p. 95). Ged continues running but is unable to cope with the shadow's hunting of him. He is exhausted, distraught, terrified, doesn't know what to do, and discovers to his horror that the shadow knows his true name so is able to gain power over him (p. 101). Ged's actions and thoughts are initially driven by his terror of the shadow. Eventually, in his slow process of recognizing and assimilating his shadow Ged discovers that "all terror was gone" (p. 138).

### **(5) The shadow is unrelenting**

Although a person may prefer to avoid meeting the shadow, the shadow is unrelenting in its determination to be acknowledged and accepted. The journey towards wholeness demands such meetings take place. Jung observes that there is a “passionate drive within the shadowy part of oneself that reason may not prevail against it . . . [because] the shadow contains the overwhelming power of irresistible impulse” (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1978, p. 182). How the individual deals with the shadow’s unrelenting impulse will determine, to a large extent, how the shadow behaves. For Jung (1991):

The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form. It cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness. This problem is exceedingly difficult, because it not only challenges the whole man, but reminds him at the same time of his helplessness and ineffectuality. (pp. 20-21)

It is the shadow that contains the instinct towards completeness and wholeness, not the ego. Indeed, it is the shadow that is a collaborator in the interests of the unconscious tendencies and drives of the self.

If an individual continues to repress his/her shadow and refuses to acknowledge its existence the shadow will find other channels in its attempts to ‘live’ as part of the whole personality. The shadow becomes “pathological only when we assume that we do not have it; because then it has us” (Whitmont, 1969, p. 168). The ego has to learn that the shadow cannot be eliminated and has a right to ‘live’. As a continually repressed entity, the shadow “is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of awareness, upsetting the ego and breeding neurosis” (Moreno, 1974, p. 43). Jung attributed neurosis to a refusal to engage with the shadow. The will is not able to sustain repression of the shadow without it becoming “a serious and often unupportable burden” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 112).

Ged's shadow is unrelenting in its pursuit of Ged because it wants union with Ged. When Ged first sees a hint of it in Ogion's cabin it "seemed to reach out towards him . . . and to call to him in a whisper" (p. 31). After Ged has released his shadow on Roke its immediate reaction is to leap onto Ged and cling to him (p. 64). When he tries to save Pechvarry's son his shadow "whispered at him, though there were no words in its whispering, and it reached out towards him" (p. 81). Always the shadow is trying to communicate with Ged and trying to reach out to him, "seeking to draw near to him" (pp. 82-83). Ged admits to Ogion that the shadow's "desire is to meet me face to face" (p. 120). Because Ged cannot bear to look on his shadow it becomes his enemy and though it remained his enemy for a long time it also remained unrelenting in its passionate drive to be united with Ged. The unrecognized shadow wreaks havoc. The shadow grows more hostile as Ged ignores it, flees from it, and fights it. The more Ged fights against the shadow the more the shadow fights against Ged. Ged's shadow demands existence, drawing on Ged's energy for its 'life' and exhibits the Jungian passionate drive towards wholeness of being. It is interesting that when Ged meets his shadow at the wall between life and death "it stood on the side of the living, and he on the side of the dead" (p. 81). This is strongly reflective of the ideas in Jungian psychology that the recognition and assimilation of the shadow is necessary for wholeness of self and that the shadow's unrelenting drive is towards 'life' while repression and avoidance of the shadow by the ego will lead to a type of 'death' or neurosis.

### **Taoist Balance**

A different Rousseauistic interpretation could seek to centre the structure of the text by referring to the Taoist concept of balance. Taoism is an important aspect in Le Guin's work and personal philosophy and she

readily acknowledges the pervasive influence of Taoism in her novels. In an interview (McCaffrey, 1990) Le Guin explains that she has been strongly influenced since childhood by Taoism: "I happened to grow up with Lao Tzu. I read the Tao Te Ching by the time I was thirteen or so, and it just got under my skin" (p. 174). Cogell (1979) observes that "Taoist philosophy is a basic pattern" in Le Guin's works (p. 153). While most critics have noted this aspect, studies with reference to the Earthsea novels have not been detailed. Le Guin considers that Taoism, particularly the Yin-Yang balance of opposites, is not only "a central theme in my work. It's a central theme period" (Bittner, 1984, p. x).

Slusser (1976) observes that Le Guin's exploration of evil in the Earthsea novels is from a background of "Yin and Yang, not a Manichean contention between light as good and darkness as evil" (p. 35). He notes that for Le Guin, who believes strongly in balance and in the dynamics of polarity, Taoism "has always been the strongest single force behind her work" (p. 3). Cummins (1990) looks at the concern in the novels for the interdependency of all things (p. 11) and the centrality of the Equilibrium in Earthsea (p. 25), pointing out that Taoism is "the only religion Le Guin has admitted to" (p. 33). Indeed, Le Guin (1979) considers herself to be "a congenital non-Christian" (p. 55). Bucknall (1981) makes the point that Le Guin's ideas about the relationship of light and dark are Taoist rather than Christian (p. 42). She observes that in Earthsea light and darkness "represent the polarities of life and death, knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and stupidity, the power to act and the impotence of possession" (p. 41). Bittner (1984) notes in passing that the foundation of Le Guin's ethics is Taoist (p. 4).

Taoism, a Chinese religion, is primarily concerned with balance and wholeness in all things and is written about at length in the works of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. The emphasis on balance and relativity is the first



great principle of Taoism, which is also a means of living and a doctrine (Waley, 1958, pp. 50-51). Le Guin (1979) considers the Taoist world to be orderly but its laws “are not imposed from above . . . but exist in things and are to be found - discovered” (p. 49). In Taoism there is a “repeated emphasis on the eternal, the unchanging” (Smart, 1977a, p. 257). There are four aspects of Taoist balance that can be explored in Taoism and A Wizard of Earthsea: the Tao, Yin-Yang, Wu-Wei and Te.

### **(1) The Tao**

The Tao, or the Way, is a manner of living that is balanced in all aspects and is both the path that humans follow and the rhythmic pulse of the universe. Smart (1977a) suggests that the Tao, or true Way, is “unchanging, eternal, for it exists within and beyond the world of constant change. It is nameless, for it is the true breath of the universe, not to be caught and entangled by human concepts, by names” (p. 257). Smith (1991) looks at the Tao as the “way of ultimate reality” (p. 198), while Watts (1975) goes further in his observation that the Tao is the “ultimate reality and energy of the universe, the Ground of Being and Nonbeing” (p. 40). Waley (1958) also considers the Tao to be “the ultimate reality in which all attributes are united” (p. 50). According to Lao Tzu (1963) “Turning back is how the way moves; / Weakness is the means the way employs” (p. 101); in other words, the Tao moves forward by going backwards (p. 102). The Tao is enigmatic and ineffable:

You may look at it and not see it . . . You may listen to it but not hear it . . . You may touch it but not feel it . . . . It runs on and on and cannot be named . . . . We call it the form that never forms, the image that never materializes. When the tao becomes a thing, it . . . eludes. (McNaughton, 1971, p. 11)

There is a recognized difficulty in trying to convey in words what the Tao is. Cooper (1972) suggests that the Tao “cannot be conveyed

either by words or silence" (p. 9). The Tao "is forever nameless" (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 91). It is also important to realize that there is "no analogy between Tao and the Western ideas of God, and of divine or natural law, which can be obeyed or disobeyed" (Watts, 1975, p. 37). The Tao is not a God who controls creation, rather it is an almost a priori balance existing in the universe. Jochim (1986) describes the Tao as a way of looking at the universe as "an organismic whole whose essential structure and energy abide in every constituent part" (p. 8). Cooper (1981) also emphasizes that the Tao is everywhere and in all aspects of life (p. 22).

In Taoism water is considered to be the natural phenomenon most closely resembling the Tao and is often used as a symbol of the Way. "The highest good is like water. Water . . . does not strain. It approaches the tao" (McNaughton, 1971, p. 13). Smith (1991) observes that Taoists:

were struck by the way it [water] would support objects and carry them effortlessly . . . Similarly, one who understands the basic life force knows that it will sustain one if one stops thrashing and flailing and trusts oneself to its support. (p. 209)

A Wizard of Earthsea revolves around balance and unbalance: before Ged releases his shadow there is balance; after he has released his shadow there is unbalance; and, after Ged joins with his shadow there is balance again. In Earthsea the Balance and the Pattern underlie all things and are known and served by true wizards, who do not use spells "unless real need demands" (pp. 16-17). This balance, or Equilibrium, is the very essence of Earthsea and is the way a mage lives. However:

'A mage can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail. The unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost.' (p. 51)

Ogion tries to teach Ged the way of the mage, but he is too full of greed for glory and power to learn anything. Ged tried summoning the spirits of the dead while still an apprentice to Ogion, who then warned him:

'Ged, listen to me now. Have you never thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light? This sorcery is not a game we play for pleasure or praise. Think of this: that every word, every act of our Art is said and is done either for good, or for evil. Before you speak or do you must know the price that is to pay!' (p. 31)

Later, while still a student on Roke, Ged asks the Master Hand how to lock changing spells. However, the mage warns Ged about the dangers of upsetting the balance and using spells unwisely: "The world is in balance, in Equilibrium." (p. 48). Unfortunately, Ged does not learn about balance and the way of the mage and releases his shadow. In so doing he drastically upsets the equilibrium of Earthsea:

The shapeless mass of darkness he had lifted split apart. It sundered, and a pale spindle of light gleamed between his open arms . . . . It widened and spread, a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through the bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous. (p. 63)

Ged is chastised for working a spell "not knowing how that spell affects the balance of light and dark, life and death, good and evil" (p. 68).

Ged finds that being hunted by the shadow and fleeing from it is a nightmare existence. Exhausted and terrified he has little idea about how to act. Ogion, like a Taoist sage, suggests that Ged must turn around:

'At the spring of the River Ar I named you,' the mage said, 'a stream that falls from the mountain to the sea. A man would know the end he goes to, but he cannot know it if he does not turn, and return to his beginning, and hold that beginning in his being. If he would not be a stick whirled and whelmed in the stream, he must be the stream itself, all of it, from its spring

to its sinking in the sea . . . . Now turn clear round, and seek the very source, and that which lies before the source.' (p. 120)

So, Ged turns round and in order to go forward he goes back and seeks the source of himself and the shadow. Much later, when Ged has begun to learn about the Equilibrium and to value it, he realizes, after being saved by his little otak, that all things are related and inter-dependent:

From that time forth he believed that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, whether they have speech or not, and in later years he strove to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees. (p . 82)

## **(2) Yin-Yang**

The Yin-Yang “polarity goes back to very early times” (Smart, 1977b, p. 216) and came to represent the basic and opposite forces in the universe. These opposite forces cannot exist except in a relationship of unity, one that is oppositely holistic. Yin-Yang is a “cosmic symbol of primordial unity and harmony” (Cooper, 1972, p. 27). The Tao is reflected in the Yin-Yang and everything involved in this binary opposition “implies that which is inseparable, unable to maintain itself except in relationship” (Cooper, 1981, p. 14). Yin-Yang polarity should not be confused with ideas of conflicting opposition because it is “an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity” (Watts, 1975, p. 26). In other words, the Yin-Yang duality is not an opposition between good and evil but a union of opposites. The “*yang* is the active, masculine energy, and the *yin* is the passive, feminine one” (Smart, 1977b, p. 216). From these two energies all things arise and have form. “If two forces are working in perfect balance a unity is achieved; anything that is out of harmony is to be regarded as a failure in or disturbance of the balance of the Yin-Yang forces” (Cooper, 1972, p. 39). Lao Tzu (1963) continually refers to the Yin-Yang polarity:

The way that is bright seems dull;  
The way that leads forward seems to lead backwards;  
The way that is even seems rough.  
The highest virtue is like the valley . . .  
The great square has no corners . . .  
The great image has no shape. (p. 102)

Great perfection seems chipped . . .  
Great fullness seems empty . . .  
Great straightness seems bent;  
Great skill seems awkward;  
Great eloquence seems tongue-tied. (p. 106)

The "two great powers at work in the world can be beneficent or hostile according to the conduct of the individual . . . in either maintaining or disturbing the equilibrium" (Cooper, 1972, p. 40). It is only when the Yin-Yang balance is thrown askew that the relationship loses its balanced unity. Through the Yin-Yang balance the Tao operates such that "all opposites are blended, all contrasts harmonized" (Waley, 1958, p. 52). Reflected in Yin-Yang is the idea that the "attainment of maturity, of wholeness, is the acceptance and reconciliation of all opposites, of light and dark, good and evil, life and death" (Cooper, 1972, p. 25).

In Earthsea the Yin-Yang balance can be seen in the concept of the Equilibrium. All things are interrelated and in balance. To alter one thing can be to disturb other things. Ged, as an apprentice to Ogion, cannot understand why his master will not stop the rain so they may be dry:

[Ged] wondered more and more what was the greatness and the magic of this great Mage Ogion. For when it rained Ogion would not even say the spell that every weatherworker knows, to send the storm aside. In a land where sorcerers come thick, like Gont or the Enlades, you may see a raincloud blundering slowly from side to side and place to place as one spell shunts it onto the next, until at last it is buffeted out over the sea where it can rain in peace. But Ogion would let the rain fall where it would . . . Ged crouched among the dripping branches wet and sullen, and wondered what was the good of having power if you were too wise to use it, and wished he had gone as prentice to that old weatherworker of the Vale, where at least he would have slept dry. (pp. 26-27)

While village witches and weatherworkers and wicked sorcerers use their spells with no consideration for the balance, for the Equilibrium of Earthsea, mages live in respect for the balance. Echoing Ogion's words and way of living, the Master Summoner explains to his pupils on Roke the importance of only using spells when necessary and showed them:

why the true wizard uses spells only at need, since to summon up such earthly forces is to change the earth of which we are a part. 'Rain on Roke may be drouth in Osskil,' he said, 'and a calm in the East Reach may be storm and ruin in the West, unless you know what you are about.' (p. 57)

Ged is also warned by the Master Hand about upsetting the Equilibrium:

But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow. (p. 48)

Ged has yet to learn that in doing little or nothing the mage ruins nothing and that all things are interrelated and in balance. Ged moans that when he asks a mage for his secrets "he would always talk, like Ogion, about balance, and danger, and the dark" (p. 48). In working a dangerous spell with no thought as to how it may affect the Equilibrium Ged rents the very fabric of Earthsea temporarily asunder, and "the stuff of the world had been torn apart" (p. 65). Only the power and knowledge of the Archmage, who sacrifices his life, and the Masters can restore balance to Earthsea. But it is only Ged who can restore balance within himself. Ged disturbs the balance of the Equilibrium because he lets his pride and arrogance dominate his behaviour and blind his understanding of balance. He bitterly learns the consequences of his actions. Towards the end of his journey a much humbled and wiser Ged tells Yarrow about the

Equilibrium and the power of the world that is in all things, interrelated and balanced:

'All power is one in source and end, I think. Years and distances, stars and candles, water and wind and wizardry, the craft in a man's hand and the wisdom in a tree's root : they all arise together. My name, and yours, and the true name of the sun, or a spring of water, or an unborn child, all are syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power'. (p. 151)

### **(3) Wu-Wei**

Through Wu-Wei the Tao is expressed as a way of living. Wu-Wei, or non-action, is a Taoist term that relates to how a person is to live in the world and relate to both self and others. Smith (1991) describes Wu-Wei as "creative quietude" (p. 207), while Cooper (1972) translates the term as "actionless activity" (p. 75) and McNaughton (1971) argues for "anti-action" (p. 85). Jochim (1986) suggests that spontaneity "perhaps best captures in a positive value what Lao Tzu meant by nonaction" (p. 132). The least use of energy and absence of force perhaps best describes Wu-Wei (Watts, 1975, p. 82). Wu-Wei is not opposed to action, but purposeful action is to be avoided as this upsets the Yin-Yang balance. "Do that which consists in taking no action; pursue that which is not meddlesome" (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 124). Interference is considered "the worst product of wilful activity" (Jochim, 1986, p. 133). The underlying sense of Wu-Wei is tranquil nonaction by which everything is always effortlessly achieved. "The way never acts yet nothing is left undone" (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 96). Wu-Wei - "never forcing, never under strain - seems quite effortless" (Smith, 1991, p. 209). Wu-Wei encourages harmony through its aversion to activity and avoidance of "rebellion against the fundamental laws of the universe" (Waley, 1958, p. 55).

In the life of the Taoist sage can be seen the lived expression of Wu-

Wei. According to Lao Tzu (1963) the sage does his “utmost to attain emptiness [and to] hold firmly to stillness . . . . Returning to one’s roots is known as stillness” (p. 72). The Taoist sage teaches using no words and extols the virtue “of resorting to no action” (Lao Tzu, p. 104). It “is because the sage never attempts to be great that he succeeds in becoming great” (Lao Tzu, p. 124). It is also because the sage “does nothing [that he] never ruins anything; and, because he does not lay hold of anything, loses nothing” (Lao Tzu, p. 125). Cooper (1972) observes that the Taoist sage displays “quiet acceptance of life in the world as it comes and as it is, waiting for the time and the season” (p. 74).

Water is also an important symbol for Wu-Wei. It symbolizes the sage’s ideal behaviour “because, as it does not compete but rather takes the path of least resistance, it stands for *noninterference*” (Jochim, 1986, p. 133). Water’s adaptability to its environment and its ability to change its environment are indicative of how an individual should follow the Tao:

Infinitely supple, yet incomparably strong - these virtues of water are precisely those of *wu wei* as well . . . . [A person] acts without strain, persuades without argument, is eloquent without flourish, and achieves results without violence, coercion, or pressure . . . . A final characteristic of water that makes it an appropriate analogue to *wu wei* is the clarity it attains through being still. (Smith, 1991, p. 210)

Ogion the Silent is very much the Taoist sage. “He seldom spoke, ate little, slept less” (p. 25) and only used his mage power when necessary. Silence and nonaction are basic to the character of Ogion. Sometimes it seemed to Ged that the:

mage’s long, listening silence would fill the room, and fill Ged’s mind, until sometimes it seemed he had forgotten what words sounded like: and when Ogion spoke at last it was as if he had, just then and for the first time, invented speech. Yet the words he spoke were no great matters but had to do only with simple things, bread and water and weather and sleep. (p. 28)



Ogion taught Ged by saying nothing, something which Ged is unable to understand. "When will my apprenticeship begin, Sir?" asks Ged, who is simply told in reply by Ogion that "It has begun" (p. 25). Instead of the nonaction and silence demonstrated by Ogion, Ged seeks to act. Ged seeks to gain power to do as he wills. He wants 'something' to happen. "Since I have been with you I have done nothing, seen nothing" complains Ged to Ogion (p. 31). Ogion responds, "Now you have seen something . . . By the door, in the darkness" (p. 31). Yet Ged, though horrified by what he saw and felt, still seeks to act. He considers that a wizard should be able "to do what he pleased" (p. 48). Ged has yet to understand that a great mage, such as Ogion or Archmage Nemmerle, is great because he never attempts to be great. Nemmerle seals the rent in the fabric of Earthsea not by visual acts of great power or loudly spoken spells but by standing and whispering: "Nearby a voice was speaking as softly as a tree whispers or a fountain plays . . . . The night was healed. Restored and steady lay the balance of light and dark" (p. 64).

Nor does Ged learn anything of the mage's way from the masters on Roke. He is repeatedly warned by them about the dangers of upsetting the Equilibrium and why a mage rarely uses his power. It is only after he has released his shadow that he begins to understand what the mages had been trying to teach him. The Master Summoner gently tells Ged:

'You thought . . . that a mage is one who can do anything. So I thought, once. So did we all. And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower; until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must* do'. (p. 73)

Slowly Ged begins the painful lessons of being a true mage. It is not about power and glory and action, as he had thought, but about silence and humility and nonaction. Nevertheless, he uses considerable energy first

fleeing from his shadow and then trying to destroy it before realizing that he is neither “hunted nor hunter”, and ‘knows’ that when the time comes for their last meeting “they would meet” without hurried exertion on his part (p. 138). Ged sensed that “southward the shadow had gone. He need cast no finding-charm to know this: he knew it, as certainly as if a fine unreeling cord bound him and it together” (p. 141). Ged comes to learn that there is much wisdom in the natural world and he “strove to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees” (p. 82). A much wiser Ged is able to say to Murre and Yarrow that “for a word to be spoken . . . there must be silence. Before, and after” (p. 152).

Far out at sea, on water that, for a while, is water no more Ged meets his shadow in silence and stillness:

All sounds of water, wind, wood, sail were gone, lost in a huge profound silence that might have been unbroken forever. The boat lay motionless. No breath of wind moved. The sea had tuned to sand, shadowy, unstirred. Nothing moved in the dark sky or on the dry unreal ground that went on . . . into gathering darkness . . . . Ged stood up . . . . [and] strode forward from the boat, but in no direction. There were no directions here, no north or south or east or west, only towards and away. (p. 163)

At last Ged has learnt what it means to be a great mage. He had taken Ogion’s advice to be “the stream itself, all of it, from its spring to its sinking in the sea” (p. 120). Ged had followed his course from Gont to the sea and there, in silence and stillness, he had returned to his ‘source’ and become whole. On water that is not water and in profound silence seems a particularly Taoist locale to find wholeness of being.

#### **(4) Te**

Te, or virtue is “the realization or expression of the Tao in actual living” (Watts, 1975, p. 107). Te is another Taoist concept that also

relates to the living out of the Tao in a harmonious and positive way. "One could say that *te* is a natural virtue, based on inner feelings, as distinct from artificial virtue, based on a following of rules" (Watts, 1975, p. 108). *Te* refers to avoidance in life of any type of excess. Harmful qualities that can lead to an upsetting of the equilibrium include excesses such as hate, pride, envy, greed, and the like and also "greed of possession [and] worship of status and luxury" (Cooper, 1981, p. 38). *Te* emphasizes avoidance of worldly values such as wealth, status, assertiveness, and competition. "People should avoid being strident and aggressive not only toward other people but also toward nature" (Smith, 1991, p. 212).

In living out *Te* there is avoidance of unbalance in emotions and life:

This is why excessive meanness  
Is sure to lead to great expense;  
Too much store  
Is sure to end in immense loss.  
Know contentment  
And you will suffer no disgrace;  
Know when to stop  
And you will meet with no danger. (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 105)

In Taoism sin is seen as "a violation of the harmony of the universe . . . and as such it creates disharmony and, therefore, disquiet in the individual in particular and in society in general" (Cooper, 1972, p. 22). To avoid upsetting and violating the harmony of the universe, in self and others and the natural world, the individual's behaviour should encompass *Te*. Although a central part of Taoist life and philosophy, *Te* often goes unnoticed because it seems so ordinary (Watts, 1975, p. 108). *Te* is to be seen in always following the Tao: "In his every movement a man of great virtue / Follows the way and only the way" (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 78).

*Ged* exhibits an excess of emotions that upsets the balance within himself, and in Earthsea anything that threatens the Equilibrium is

considered unwise and foolish. The true mage serves only the “Balance and the Pattern” (p. 16) and acts out of need not desire. “A wizard’s power . . . . must follow knowledge, and serve need” (p. 48). In this sense, Ged’s sin, stemming from his pride, arrogance, and greed for power, leads to disharmony in himself and in Earthsea. The greed for “mystery and mastery of power” (p. 25), the “wish for glory, the will to act” (p. 32), and the desire “to be powerful enough to do as he pleased” (p. 48) drive Ged’s thoughts and actions with no regard for himself or others. Ged comes to experience considerable disgrace and danger because he does not know contentment and balance in himself nor does he know when to stop his unwise behaviour. The balance between light and dark is disrupted by his reckless actions. Ged seeks glory, status, and power and has to painfully learn the importance of behaving only as a true mage. In the end, he finally achieves maturity and wholeness through his acceptance and reconciliation with his shadow.

Ged’s growing responsibility for his behaviour is reflected in his refusal to gain the name of the shadow from either Yevaud (pp. 88-90) or Serret (pp. 108-112). As much as he wants to know the shadow’s name he is all too aware of the danger of the temptations offered to him. In addition to refusing knowledge of the shadow’s name, Ged also refuses what could be considerable personal gain. He rejects Yevaud’s offer of jewels and bargains instead for the dragon’s promise “to never come to the Archipelago” (p. 90). He also refuses Serret’s bribe of becoming “a king among men” with her at his side (p. 112). However, Ged is slow to learn the virtue in always serving the balance no matter the particular circumstances. When Ged tries to save Pechvarry’s son he disregards the natural harmony of the Equilibrium (of life and death) resulting in further injury and danger to himself. Ged broke “the first lesson and the last of . . . [healing lore]: Heal the wound and cure the illness, but let the dying spirit

go" (p. 80). In desperation to try and help Pechvarry and his wife by saving their son he "mistrusted his own judgement, and thought perhaps the child might be saved" (p. 80). By the conclusion of the novel, however, Ged has mastered the way of the true mage in both his thoughts and actions, now fully understanding why this way must be followed at all times. Vetch sees the truth in Ged's assertion that "it is done. It is over" (p. 166) and sings from "the *Creation of Éa* which is the oldest song, it is said, 'Only in silence the word, only in dark the light, only in dying life: bright the hawk's flight on the empty sky'" (p. 166).

### **Value of the Rousseauistic Interpretation**

These two examples of the Rousseauistic interpretation are extremely appealing to religious educators because they use the vehicle of the text, in this example a delightful fantasy tale, as a means for teaching about the importance of balance in self and the world or the importance of incorporating into the self the dark side of one's nature. Nevertheless, Derrida would consider such Rousseauistic interpretations sad and exiled because they seek to decipher textual meaning as definitive and to explain the human situation in terms of absolute doctrines. This is achieved by referring to an external authority, Taoism or Jungian psychology, for its meaning. The logocentric impulse in the Rousseauistic interpretation is attractive to religious educators because, in stabilizing the structure of the text, it seemingly affirms foundations, seeks definitive meaning, and provides certitude and principles by which to live, thereby reducing anxiety. For Derrida a text can only be interpreted in this way by closure and cessation of textual play. It can be seen from the two preceding examples how 'natural' the Rousseauistic interpretation seems. The meaning looks obvious, intended. Yet, in Derridean terms this is merely representative of the ideal of logocentrism, of the seeking of the lost

centre, that is not possible in a Post-Structuralist world. However, there is a heavy investment in Religious Education of the Rousseauistic interpretation because its essence is concerned with seeking “meaning and purpose in human existence” (*supra vide*, p. 11).

A Rousseauistic interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea that centres on the Jungian shadow would be favoured by religious educators as helping students to come to terms with the question of evil in themselves. The shadow is Ged’s darker side which he does not recognize as his and which he empowers by his negative, destructive feelings. By uniting with his dark side Ged becomes whole again. Through Ged’s journey the student can come to understand the place of the shadow in life and the folly of ignoring it. Related discussions could also pursue the Jungian notion of the collective shadow, expressions of which can be seen in discrimination, racism, and group prejudice. The greatest danger of not assimilating the individual shadow is the possibility of infection by the collective shadow. “If we could see our shadow . . . we would be immune to any moral or mental infection and insinuation” (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1978, p. 73). At the core of the collective shadow is “the archetype of the enemy, the treacherous stranger, the evil intruder” (Stevens, 1990, p. 45), that are dehumanized into monsters who must be destroyed. Jung’s concern with the personal and collective shadow led him to a consideration of evil, which he saw as “the necessary opposite of good” (Jung, 1991, p. 323). Jung viewed evil to be as real and necessary as good, seeing them as opposites in a relationship of psychological polarity. For Jung the true meaning of Christ “was that every individual should live out fully his own natural and specific self as truly as Christ had lived his . . . and this was only possible if man were reintegrated with the shadow” (Van der Post, 1977, p. 240).

Religious educators would also favour a Rousseauistic

interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea that centres on the Taoist concept of balance as encouraging students to consider the necessity of balance in all things, in both self and in relationship to others and to the world. Through Ged's story the student can come to an understanding of the absolute necessity of balance. In his arrogance and greed for power Ged does not understand that lack of self-discipline and knowledge without true wisdom can threaten the Equilibrium. He does not even recognize that upsetting the balance is wrong. Nor can he see that even with the power to do so he must not. Through Ged students are encouraged to understand why self-discipline and responsibility are necessary prerequisites for deeply appreciating the inter-relatedness of all things in a unified balance and for living as caring people within the complexity of human and cosmic life. The Rousseauistic interpretation that centres on Taoism can be used as a starting point for discussions regarding the differing concepts of good and evil in different religions. Le Guin points out that "not many critics have been willing to notice that the view presented of life and death in Earthsea is not only non-Christian but anti-Christian" (McCaffrey, 1990, p. 168). In Le Guin's emphasis on the polarity of light and dark, good and evil, is seen reflected the Taoist emphasis on universal balance in all things. This is very different to the Christian position in which good is seen as ultimately triumphing over and destroying evil.

Through these Rousseauistic interpretations of A Wizard of Earthsea religious educators can also explore other issues of importance to Religious Education. For example, topics such as responsibility, respect, and friendship can be isolated for study. Ged displays complete disregard for others and acts in an irresponsible way that brings about his own downfall. Yet, he does eventually learn about the importance of self-responsibility and grows to wholeness and maturity. Ged experiences the warmth, love, and trustworthiness of true friendship in Vetch and comes

to both understand and appreciate what it means to be trusted by a friend and how to trust that friend himself. Ged also learns the necessity of caring for, respecting, and valuing all life. In possibly his most vulnerable state Ged is saved from dying by his otak.

The Rousseauistic interpretative position is immensely important in Religious Education because of its overall concern with divulging a specific meaning. There may be more than one meaning, in this study the concepts of balance or the shadow, but each meaning is pedagogically specific, teaching about balance or the shadow, and is considered putative. Such interpretations are inherently valuable in discussions of the journey towards wholeness. In addition, religious educators would cite Le Guin's strongly professed views on Taoism and the Jungian shadow as greatly supportive, if not the *raison d'être*, for pursuing such examples of the Rousseauistic interpretation of her novel. Necessarily, the style and process of teaching using this interpretative position is one directed, however gently and encouragingly, by the teacher. It is a reading of the text controlled and determined by the teacher to provide textual exploration to specific ends.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Nietzschean Interpretation in Practice

Through a close textual analysis of A Wizard of Earthsea using the Nietzschean interpretation it is possible to pursue endless threads of provisional meaning contained within the text. However, the plurality of meaning facilitated by language, and any related slippage, is inherent in the words themselves. Words are not forced to mean certain things:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.' (Carroll, 1974, p. 197)

Humpty Dumpty, while exhibiting a playful approach to language, actually assumes the Rousseauistic interpretative stance since it is not possible in the Nietzschean interpretation to restrict the meaning of words to precisely one thing or to be a master of language. It is most certainly not a case of 'making' words "mean different things" but that from the perspective of the Nietzschean interpretation the 'meanings' of words themselves are apt to slip and slide in all sorts of odd directions and metamorphose into all sorts of strange creatures.

In the Rousseauistic interpretation, of course, words are seen as conveying the intended authorial meaning, which then furnishes definitive textual meaning. The Nietzschean interpretation, however, points to the instability and fluidity of language from which arises the impossibility of meaning. This is not a denial of meaning per se, but is a rejection of absolute meaning (that is, there is an infinite deferral of meaning). In this position, Derrida sees the plurality of provisional meaning at play in the language of the text. Even though the Rousseauistic position may give

rise to more than one meaning in A Wizard of Earthsea such meanings are putative and absolute in themselves, such as the Taoist concept of balance or the Jungian concept of the shadow. In the Nietzschean position there is an impossibility of finite meaning; all that is ever possible is an infinite abundance of provisional meaning. These threads of provisional meaning are not centres that fix the structure of the text, as in the Rousseauistic sense, but actually constitute a multiplicity of aspects drawn from the language of the text through deconstruction.

The Nietzschean position uses textual gaps and contradictions to deconstruct Le Guin's novel to show what lies lurking beneath its surface. In this way language is demonstrated to be not straightforward, and to be actually problematic, in communicating meaning. What appeared to be a unified text conveying a particular absolute meaning, as in the Rousseauistic interpretation, is shown to be a fragmented text that works against itself, giving up a plethora of provisional meanings. While Humpty Dumpty boasts that when he makes "a word do a lot of work . . . I always pay it extra" (Carroll, 1974, p. 197), the Nietzschean interpretation simply utilizes the instability and fluidity of language to carefully trace provisional meanings that the words themselves freely furnish. Rather than the reassurance, certitude, and guidance that can come from the Rousseauistic position, in the Nietzschean position what results can be unsettling, confusing, and disconcerting. Indeed, the familiarity of the logocentric impulse, as represented in the Rousseauistic position, feels so natural that there is often resistance to the Nietzschean position because it seems so threatening and upsetting. The logocentric idea that concepts pre-exist language, which are then conveyed by language, is totally rejected. Language is seen as pre-existing any sense that is made of the world. In the Nietzschean interpretation rather than sadness and fear at what this position undermines there is joy and excitement at the infinite

possibilities of textual play.

As a methodological approach the Nietzschean interpretation is a potentially indefinite process in which the role of the teacher changes from one of directing students to one of facilitating their active and equal participation. Pedagogically, deconstruction places its emphasis on limitless questioning. Johnson (Salusinszky, 1987) suggests that "in order to be truly deconstructive, you would have constantly to move the locus of your questions, not just move onto another text" (p. 158). Derrida also acknowledges this emphasis on questioning that characterizes the Nietzschean interpretation. However, in wanting to emphasize the affirmation facilitated by this position he adds that deconstruction is not totally interrogative but "is affirmative rather than questioning; this affirmation goes *through* some radical questioning, but is not questioning in the final analysis" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 20).

The Nietzschean interpretative position is an affirmation of the free play of endless chains of signifiers. There is no end to the questions and there is no end to the infinite possibilities of interpretation facilitated by incessant textual play. In addition, there is also no 'control' or 'order' or 'system' or external 'imposition', as characterized by the Rousseauistic approach to the text. Rather, it is an infinite, ever-changing, and ever-evolving maze that characterizes the Nietzschean interpretation, where strange questions about "whether pigs have wings" (Carroll, 1974, p. 169) may well be asked. Any utilization of this interpretative position is necessarily incomplete and centrifugal, and can only ever be abysmally partial and fragmented. What can be positively and successfully achieved, however, is the provision of a taste, a delicious inkling, of what constitutes the Nietzschean interpretation in practice. Nevertheless, even these inklings are also necessarily incomplete, representing only a sampling of various aspects that provide no resolution or end-point.

Both concomitant and subsequent to these discussions is the 'organization' (disruption) of material in this chapter. Numbering of threads in the following section is purposely jumbled and non-sequential to emphasize the essence of the Nietzschean interpretation; that is, the multiplicity of play, the fabric like textual structure of innumerable interweaving threads of provisional meaning, the non-privileging of one thread over another, and joyful playfulness. What follows, then, is a limited pulling of textual threads, a sampling of the weft and warp of the text, a farrago of eclectic thoughts arising from textual deconstruction.

### **Threads of Meaning**

Numerous threads of provisional meaning can be pursued through a Nietzschean interpretation of Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea (1993). The deconstructive process explores the chasm in the text by exposing textual contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, by focussing on specific words or phrases the points of textual betrayal can be highlighted and the provisional nature of language and meaning demonstrated.

#### **Thread 25: "light"**

By concentrating on the word 'light' it is possible to demonstrate the confusion that exists in the text concerning the concepts of light and dark. Ged tells Yarrow and Murre that "Light is power" (p. 150), "All power is one in source and end" (p. 151), and "There is no other power" (p. 151). Such statements clearly indicate that light is the only power and is both the source and end of all things. Light, then, is three things: it is unitary, alpha, and omega. Yet, only a few pages later the reader is informed that when Ged joined with his shadow "Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one" (p. 164). This phrase contradicts the previous statements in its description of the relationship between light and dark. If light is the one power from which all things arise and is the only power

how, then, can it meet and join with darkness and become one? It is not possible for A (light) to meet and join with B (dark) and become C (one) if A is already 'one' and both the beginning and the end of everything, including B. Now it appears that light is part of a binary relationship that when fused produces a third element, that which is unitary. In addition, light clearly cannot be alpha and omega because it is not the source, only part of it, and is not the end, only a means to the end.

Moreover, to add to the confusion the reader is informed, almost at the conclusion of the novel, that "only in dark the light" (p. 166). This phrase is one line from a poem also located on the facing page of the novel before commencement of the story proper (p. 12). It is from the *Creation of Éa*, which in Earthsea is considered "the oldest song" (p. 166). Its repetition at the conclusion of the novel and its description as old, given the value attached to the ancient in the Earthsea story, are suggestive of some importance. This phrase seems to indicate that it is only possible for light to exist in darkness or at least that dark is a necessary precondition for light. Without dark it can be deduced that light could not exist or function. Light, then, is conveyed as a separate 'contained' entity within dark, and which requires the dark to be "in". The word "only" stresses the absolute needfulness of light for dark, while the word "in" indicates that light actually exists within the dark. This implies that dark is the originating factor within which light can only be found. This is obviously contradictory to the description of dark and light meeting and joining and becoming one when Ged joins with his shadow, clearly the focal point of the story of Ged's journey towards wholeness. If dark contains light, and light is only possible within dark, then how can dark and light meet and join and become one? It is not possible for A (dark) and B (light) to meet if B (light) is already contained within A (dark). Nor is it possible for A (dark) and B (light) to become C (one) if B (light) is already a

constituent within A (dark) and therefore in a sense already C (one). Conversely, whether dark needs light to exist and function raises some other interesting questions about the relationship of light and dark so bewilderingly referred to in the text.

There is considerable confusion and contradiction regarding the relationship of light and dark in A Wizard of Earthsea. What from the Rousseauistic position seemed straightforward and meaningful is from the Nietzschean position obfuscating. Students can consider how the confusion and contradiction over the word 'light' and 'dark' may be reflected in Western society and culture, and even in sacred texts.

**Thread 7,490: "had sent him to read that spell"**

When Ged meets Serret at the Court of the Terrenon he does not initially realize that he knows her. It is only when they are trying to escape from the wrath of Lord Benderesk that he remembers her:

there was a fierce witch-look to her beauty; and Ged knew her at last - the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi . . . who had mocked him . . . long ago, and had sent him to read that spell which loosed the shadow. (p. 114)

In these few words the entire narrative structure of A Wizard of Earthsea collapses in on itself. Ged is suddenly exonerated of responsibility for releasing his shadow. What, from the Rousseauistic interpretation, is a story about owning one's shadow or the necessity of balance is now, in the Nietzschean interpretation, irretrievably decimated by the admission that the fault lies with a girl who "had sent him to read that spell". This little phrase occurs about half way through the novel and effectively contradicts all that has preceded it and all that follows it. The story, having lost its coherence and direction, no longer makes any sense.

It would be so easy to overlook this phrase in the context of the novel as a whole, but to do so would be to ignore one of those little niggling

details to be found in the margin of the text. Not only does Ged now seem to possess little will of his own but, of all people, it is a little girl who “sent him to read that spell”! This minuscule vestige of the patriarchal order brings with it long-standing Western ideas that women are inherently evil and are always to blame. It is impossible not to see through this tiny textual gap the Eve narrative of blame and guilt. It is all the more surprising that this phrase slipped in at the hands of a female author. Nevertheless, this indicates the insidious influence of cultural belief that can still inform and exert its influence through language when the ideas themselves have long been questioned and rejected as not having a rightful place in the social order. What has been overtly challenged and ‘removed’ in society is demonstrated, by the Nietzschean interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea, to be still in evidence beneath the textual surface, subversively disturbing the veneer of apparent societal consensus and intention. Pursuing such a thread of provisional meaning obviously interweaves with other strands of meaning to do with women and power.

**Thread 343: “that which lies before the source”**

Ged is advised by Ogion that to deal with his shadow he must “turn clear round, and seek the very source, and that which lies before the source” (p. 120). Source means beginning or that from which something originates. How then can there be something behind the origin? From the Rousseauistic interpretation this type of statement ‘sounds’ as though it is very meaningful, but linguistically looks rather nonsensical.

Nevertheless, in pursuing this thread it is possible to follow the analogy begun in the text. That is, Ogion is talking about a stream that rises as a spring in the mountain and runs down to the sea. Spring water, though subterranean, originally collects from rainfall, so perhaps this is “that which lies before the source”. But, rainfall originates from evaporation of ground and sea water. So, is this “that which lies before

the source"? But, that means that the mysterious "that which lies before the source" is actually itself before it becomes itself; that is, it is spring water before it has been evaporated and falls as rain which is then collected as water in the spring. What does such circularity say about the shadow? What is it before it's a shadow and what is it after? Is the shadow Ged, both before and after it becomes a shadow, or is it something else?

Well, after all Nietzschean interpretations are playful and do confound! Such circular discussions reflect linguistic entanglements where meanings seem to loop together into nonsensical infinity. Similar conundrums can also be seen echoed in religious/philosophical issues to do with arché or telos, and what lies before the beginning or after the end, where the problematic nature of language is much in evidence.

#### **Thread 454: "argue"**

Pondering whether his shadow has a name or not Ged observes that "where mages argue, dragons may be wise" (p. 148). This seems such an innocuous little word in a seemingly simple statement, but in considering it carefully in relation to the text as a whole throws the apparent unity of the text into disarray and raises some very interesting and poignant threads of meaning. The impression given to the reader through a surface reading of the novel indicates a very strong cohesive view concerning the Equilibrium as the interrelated balance by which all things in Earthsea exist. The Archmages, the Masters, Ged, and Vetch, representative of the controlling hierarchy in Earthsea, display a general consensus of opinion regarding the Equilibrium. Yet, Ged indicates that mages do argue and Vetch also supports this in his statement, "*Infinite are the arguments of mages*" (p. 148). It must be concluded, then, that there is actually no cohesive view amongst mages. Perhaps the text tries perpetuating the 'party line' but betrays itself, betrays its whole structure and meaning, by several little slips. It is precisely such slips



that deconstruction utilizes to expose the textual 'subconscious'. Indeed, Ged, in a moment of doubt, even wonders whether "there is no true power but the dark"(p. 152). The reader is left to ponder whether Serret, who tried to tell Ged that only darkness can be defeated by darkness (p. 112), may be right and perhaps the wizards have got it all wrong.

**Thread 6,921: "balance"**

The Master Hand explains to Ged that the "world is in balance, in Equilibrium" (p. 48). By focussing on the word 'balance' and its centrality to both the structure of the novel and Earthsea some interesting questions about power and gender are raised. The type of questions asked of texts in Cultural Criticism in the English classroom can be fruitfully applied to texts used in the Religious Education classroom. For example, it is possible to gain different insights into A Wizard of Earthsea by asking such questions as: How is balance maintained in Earthsea? Who pays for the maintenance of this balance? What values, aspects of society, laws, and concepts are marginalized or privileged? and, What roles are available for women? These type of questions encourage the reader to be critical, rather than responsive, and to see the text as something that is constructed, rather than as something that reflects reality (O'Neill, 1993, p. 24). This deconstructive approach to reading the text in an oppositional manner challenges the apparent 'unity' of the text.

Unlike either of the Rousseauistic interpretations that have been discussed the Nietzschean interpretation deconstructs the Equilibrium exposing it to be a balance that maintains the existing hierarchy and which requires the individual to behave in certain ways so as not to disturb this balance. The student is encouraged by such an oppositional reading of A Wizard of Earthsea to consider the place of the individual in relation to the existing power structures. Instead of the existence of a pre-ordained balance that must be understood as necessary for all life and

must not be disturbed, as in the Rousseauistic interpretation, balance from the Nietzschean position could be interpreted as existing only because of the subjugation of the individual and of women generally. If the individual tries to exert independence or individual action that runs counter to the ordained order (as Ged does) the result will be punishment and alienation. In this interpretation the joining of Ged with his shadow is the sad failure of the individual to break the immensely powerful bonds of society that hold him in subjugation.

**Thread 525: "perilous"**

The word *perilous* appears a number of times in the novel. The occurrence of the same word in different contexts is intriguing and draws attention to its use. For example: there are ancient spells "that kept the *perilous* island [of Roke] safe" (p. 94); without Equilibrium the "unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we *perilously* dwell" (p. 51); and, a wizard's power "can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous . . . [and] most *perilous*" (p. 48). It seems odd that mages live on a *perilous* island, possess *perilous* and dangerous powers, serve the Equilibrium, but can potentially upset this balance and cause destruction of the islands on which the folk of Earthsea *perilously* live. Are these things connected? It is suggested in the novel that those who serve the dark powers, such as sorcerers or village witches, do not serve the Equilibrium, yet nor do they seem able to greatly disturb it. It is only the mages, who do serve it, that are considered able to do this. Perhaps, then, it is the mages who are guilty of the greatest threat to Earthsea, not by their serving of the Equilibrium but by their power to shake and rupture it. The *perilous* state of Earthsea seems inextricably linked to those who profess to be its guardians. Pursuing this odd textual thread raises questions to do with the power, responsibility, and betrayal.

In society, the church, or family are those who have the

responsibility to serve and protect, but by virtue of their trusted position can cause immense damage to those in their care, also potentially guilty of the same 'crime' as the mages? Victims of abuse, whether in the family, church, or state, would answer 'yes'. Any position of power, or access to power, necessitates great responsibility, as the mages are well aware of and as Ged bitterly learns. Such power is perilous because those who are subject to it live, by virtue of their subject position, perilously. Such issues, however unpalatable and threatening to society's structures, need to be addressed. Those who assert that 'others' are dangerous because they serve the 'dark' are likely to be potentially far more dangerous themselves. The deconstructive process forces confrontation with the contradictions and inequalities in both the novel and society that can be so easily smoothed over by language and may often go unnoticed. In particular, the Nietzschean position can help the student examine and understand how societal structures use language to maintain authority and control and to 'deal' with 'issues' that threaten its privileged position, and also how that same language betrays what is hidden beneath its surface. Of Derrida's two interpretations it is only the Nietzschean interpretation that can facilitate such a linguistic and textual exposé.

### **Thread 9: "dark"**

A consideration of the use of the word 'dark', or its derivatives, is suggestive of another provisional thread of meaning that betrays apparent textual integrity. This thread of thought obviously crosses and intertwines with threads of thought to do with 'light'. There are some odd statements about 'dark' in the novel than indicate a puzzling use of the word. When Ged first glimpses his shadow, while still an apprentice to Ogion on Gont, it is described as "darker than darkness" (p. 30). What precisely this statement means is difficult to ascertain. The word 'darker' means to darken or make dark, which itself means to make or be without

light or to obscure, while 'darkness' refers to the characteristic of being dark. Strictly speaking it is questionable whether that which is already in the state of being dark can actually be more so.

Balance is continually represented as the essence of Earthsea. For example, after Archmage Nemmerle has returned Earthsea to Equilibrium "restored and steady lay the balance of light and dark" (p. 64). However, there is also evidence of an oppositional conception of light as good and dark as evil. The phrase "never in the service of . . . dark" (p. 166) is suggestive of dark being evil and to be avoided, not merely a balance to light. This establishes an oppositional relationship with light that places dark with evil and light with good. The use of the word 'dark' to describe that which is evil or wicked, and therefore antithetical to light and good, has a long linguistic history in the West: "And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:4, King James Version, KJV). Although Le Guin claims to be Taoist not Christian in her philosophical outlook, the division of light and dark and the view of light as good have heavily influenced the West for many centuries and this cultural background cannot easily be dispensed with.

The influence of this dichotomous division, and its inherent labelling, is perhaps far too pervasive and insidious to avoid. Even in trying to resist a particular attitude the linguistic weight of centuries of Western meaning makes its appearance in the text as niggling details which plague the text and upset authorial intention. It is through such troublesome trifles that deconstruction is able to dig down to the hidden depths of the text and harass it, by disturbing the apparent smoothness of the textual surface. In A Wizard of Earthsea the use of the terms 'light' and 'dark' sometimes suggests a balancing of equal opposites and sometimes the linking of dark with evil and light with good. Students could be encouraged to examine how they use the terms 'light' and 'dark', what

meanings they attach to the use of these words, and whether they use them in a confused and inconsistent manner as evident in Le Guin's novel. Another phrase worth examining is: "danger must surround power as shadow does light" (p. 31). Once again, dark and its characteristics are deemed undesirable, linked to danger while light is deemed, by associated deduction, to be linked with not only good but also power. Such strands of enquiry intersect at various points with other discussions about power.

**Thread 3,254: "not the powers I serve"**

Ogion reprimands Ged for reading a certain spell, explaining to him that the "girl herself is half witch already. It may be the mother who sent the girl to talk to you. It may be she who opened the book to the page you read. The powers she serves are not the powers I serve" (p. 31). In such a statement Ogion indicates a separation between powers in Earthsea. The mages, such as Ogion, serve the Equilibrium whereas those such as Serret serve the "Old Power" (p. 148). The hierarchical order of Earthsea, with the mages on Roke holding both power and prestige, is dependent on the "powers that I [the mages] serve" constituting both the generally accepted and authoritative power. Those like Serret, who do not serve the same power, are necessarily seen as oppositional and therefore threatening, dangerous, and to be avoided.

Roke, a male enclave where only boys are trained to be wizards, is a segregated world of mages and boys that rarely has a female presence:

That night the Lord of O was a guest of the school . . . . [and] with him was his lady, slender and young, bright as new copper, her black hair crowned with opals. It was seldom that any woman sat in the halls of the Great House, and some of the old Masters looked at her sidelong, disapproving. But the young men looked at her with all their eyes. (pp. 53-54)

The implied celibacy and virtual exclusion of women and all things female indicates a very closed existence and world-view. It is perhaps noteworthy

that while both men and women are born with power such as Ged and Serret, it is only boys that need years of training. This may well be another thread of meaning to pursue: female power grows to fruition while male power must be trained. The Nietzschean interpretation exposes that the 'other' must remain 'other' if the extant powers wish to retain their position. This segregated world of the mages feeds their fear and suspicion of women since it is not possible to understand something of which one has no knowledge. That which is not understood tends to be feared, and that which is least understood tends to be most feared. In society, too, it is those not understood that are feared and rejected. Only in recent decades have lesbians and homosexuals become more understood and accepted and therefore less feared and marginalized.

Ged says that "the Old Powers of earth are not for men to use" (p. 111). Strictly analyzing the words of this statement indicates that the Old Powers, which are not for men, may, by inference, actually be for women. The resistance, fear, and rejection that Ged and Ogion display toward this 'other' power seems indicative that it is part of the general fear of, and separation from, women that characterizes the mages' world. That this 'other' power is always referred to as old is suggestive that the powers which women such as Serret and her mother serve predate the powers that the mages serve. In this oppositional positioning of powers served by the mages and those served by, but not exclusively, women is perhaps a linguistic echo of Western history in which very early matriarchal societies were usurped and replaced by patriarchal societies, which have generally held sway until relatively recent times. Students could be encouraged to extend their Nietzschean examination of A Wizard of Earthsea in terms of these divisions of power allegiance to an examination of contemporary society. The advent and growth of women's issues and women's groups this century were a retaliation against the

long-standing Western patriarchal society and an attempt to empower the female position. Within this context what does the recent advent and growth of men's issues and men's groups signify?

**Thread 2,011: "cast"**

On Roke the Master Hand explains to Ged the importance of balance, the Equilibrium, in Earthsea and says to him, "To light a candle is to cast a shadow" (p. 48). A surface reading of this statement seems obvious enough: when a candle is lit it casts a shadow. A Rousseauistic interpretation is likely to 'extract' from this the idea of causation in that all actions and thoughts imply effects, quite possibly imbibing such an interpretative stance with a sense of religiosity. The approach taken in the Nietzschean interpretation, however, is quite disparate in intent, manner, and result. The word 'cast' seems an innocent enough word, but it actually facilitates an entry point into the text that causes all sorts of problems and difficulties, demonstrating very clearly the fluid nature of language. Indeed, the paradoxes and unintended meanings arising from a deconstructive approach to the use of this word amounts to what some (particularly those of a vehemently Rousseauistic interpretative persuasion) may term considerable textual harassment.

From a perusal of several dictionaries the word 'cast' has a considerable variety of meaning. For example, among other meanings, it can mean to throw, mould, twist, direct, hold, secure, overthrow, search, shed, form, and discard. If the text as a whole is considered in the light of even some of these other definitions it begins exhibiting some quite startling and thought-provoking strands of provisional meaning. Cast, as in 'to mould', can have positive as well as negative connotations. It can be a creative process as in the act of moulding in sculpture or cooking where something is poured, placed, or packed into a mould to create a specific form. However, it can also be a destructive process as in the act of forcing

different things or people to conform to a specific design so it appears they have all been 'cast' from the same mould. The School on Roke trains boys to be wizards. This can be seen positively, as in creating mages able to live and work in accordance with the rules of Roke. This is likely to be the favoured Rousseauistic interpretation as it supports the status quo and does not threaten the controlling hierarchy that undertakes the casting of adepts. It can also be seen negatively, as in the enforced destruction of individuality in a process that casts all manner of boys in the same wizard mould. Those who do not make the grade and prove unsatisfactory, such as Jasper, are 'cast' aside, discarded.

On Roke those students who are successfully moulded are admitted to the ranks of mages while those who are not are discarded or cast aside. Such a process does not allow for individual expression of opinion or behaviour that runs contrary to the authorities. In this sense, casting of the individual, as in to 'mould' and 'twist' the student, prevents the casting or 'overthrow' of the controlling mage elite. Ged does prove to be suitably moulded in the end, because he acts and thinks in accordance with the teachings of the mages on Roke. There is little or no scope for individuality in the 'cast' process of producing wizards. Nor is there much scope for women who are either cast as ignorant village witches, like Ged's aunt (pp. 16-17), powerful but evil sorceresses, like Serret (105-113), or domestic, like Yarrow (pp. 149-152). Since boys only are trained on Roke females are never cast in the mould of mages. Does this mean they are less 'cast' than males or simply that their casting options are fewer?

Cast, as in to 'hold' or 'secure', suggests a restrictive confinement that not only prevents individual action but also ties or bonds a person, preventing movement. In this sense, it is possible to view the text as a whole as concerned with restricting the role and options open to individuals by casting them, as in to 'hold', to prevent unwanted



movement within a prescribed structure. There is also the sense of casting them tightly, as in to 'secure', to prevent escape from the social and hierarchical order. It is interesting to note in passing that phonically, the words 'cast' and 'caste' are identical. Caste, in meaning a rigid social system that separates and distinguishes between different classes, echoes the hierarchical, restrictive, and divisional structure of Earthsea that has been explored through the word 'cast'.

Another phrase in which 'cast' is used can be found in the reprimand given to Ged by Archmage Gensher who describes Ged's released shadow as "the shadow you cast" (p. 68). Given previous discussions about the impact and influence of possible meanings of the word 'cast' on the novel as a whole, Ged's shadow could be explored as something moulded or formed by him, as something discarded or rejected by him, or as something held and secured by him. All of these raise many questions about the shadow and the relationship between it and Ged. For example, the idea of the shadow being 'cast' by Ged and thereby stripped of its individuality in the process of moulding shifts the power structure in the novel from a mage/student scenario to a Ged/shadow scenario. The shadow tries both attacking (p. 102) and fleeing (p. 127) from Ged, but to no avail. In addition, it has been so stripped of its personhood that it barely has any form (p. 64) and often takes the form of other people, such as Skiorh (pp. 100-101) or Ged (p. 141).

The shadow initially expresses some autonomous actions but succumbs to Ged's completion of the casting process in which Ged realizes that "his task had never been to undo what he had begun, but to finish what he had begun" (p. 138). In this context the shadow is very much the product of an incomplete casting. In being not completely 'cast' perhaps explains its lack of form, though it certainly possesses an embryonic personality. That the shadow is bonded to Ged is clear from the

description of Ged having “forged between them a bond, a link that had no breaking-point” (p. 138). This binding of the shadow to Ged is very strong and eventually the casting line is pulled in. Who does the pulling, though? Ged or shadow or both? Although Ged is terrified of his creation he eventually overwhelms it and completes the moulding process, casting the shadow to himself securely.

It is very tempting to ask: what if the casting of the shadow had not been completed? How would this have affected the shadow, Ged, Earthsea? Students could pursue these ideas in relation to society. Does society, the family, or church cast individuals to fit the prescribed order? And what of those who are incompletely or not properly cast: are they cast aside like misshapen misfits or discarded as unsuitable? Are such rejects less moulded, confined, restricted, or bound than those who have been successfully cast? What advantages or privileges do the ‘successfully cast’ have in society, the church, the community, the family? Can society function without the casting process, without the socialization of its members? Is it only the ‘successfully cast’ who impact on the world? Are Chuang Tzu, Jesus Christ, and Buddha representative of the successfully cast or the cast aside, the rejected misfits of the world? And what of Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot? The pursuit of provisional threads of meaning and the innumerable questions raised, both to do with the text and life in general, are typical not only of the Nietzschean position’s refusal to arrive at conclusions but also of its incessant asking of even more questions instead. Definitive textual meaning is always infinitely deferred, but provisional meanings are inevitably thought-provoking, if not somewhat disconcerting, and always playful.

The execution of the Nietzschean interpretation of the text through the window of the word ‘cast’ facilitates an extraordinary and stimulating view of the novel from completely different perspectives. An entirely

different approach to the use of the word 'cast' would be to concentrate on the textual selection of a lighted candle casting a shadow, when a lighted candle could equally be said to cast light, not shadow. In pursuing the Nietzschean reading of a text students can be encouraged to explore how words actually work to mean something and how the context in which words are lodged influences how those words are read and meaning attributed. In the Nietzschean interpretative approach an understanding of how language works to communicate ideas and make meaning is facilitated. It also alerts students to how the surface reading of a text remains ignorant of the enormous currents and cross-currents of provisional meanings that lurk hidden beneath the surface. Reading the text in light of these other meanings of the word 'cast' facilitates a broad consideration of textual communication and meaning that fosters a high level of critical textual engagement on the part of the student. In the Nietzschean interpretative position students are challenged and provoked in ways not possible in the Rousseauistic interpretative approach.

**Thread 108: "high, ancient, enwoven spells"**

When thwarted in fleeing from his shadow to Roke, Ged realizes that he could not go there because he is "forbidden by the high, enwoven, ancient spells that kept the perilous island safe" (p. 94). The use of "high", "ancient" and "enwoven" to describe the most powerful and ancient spells in all of Earthsea are indicative of binary opposites. That which is low/common, new/revolutionary, and loose/unravelling/separated is necessarily placed in an oppositional position to the ancient spells that protect Roke. In other words there seems to be a division between the old, aristocratic, traditional, and closed (Roke and all it stands for) and what is low, new, and open (that which is oppositional to Roke).

The thrust of the novel, revolving around Ged and his journey towards becoming "one" (p. 164) and "whole" (p. 166), indicates that

finished, closed, and completed is the ultimate and highest goal to be sought after and achieved. The emphasis is on ordered fusion, a bringing together, that by its very process restricts and prevents other possibilities. By contrast, the oppositional position is lowly/mundane, new/revolutionary, and open/loose. In pursuing such a strand of enquiry the Nietzschean interpretative characteristic of isolating the opposite to that which is stated in the text facilitates an exploration of the 'unsaid' textual discourse. In this way the deconstructive process encourages an examination of what the text actually says and promotes by concentrating not on what it says but on what it does not say. The 'unsaid' in society and its institutions can also be similarly explored by locating oppositions in the textual fabric of society.

**Thread 809: "shadow"**

There is considerable confusion and contradiction over the use of the word 'shadow' in the novel. The shadow is obviously a central motif, but it is so variously described that, when carefully examined, its use raises more questions than answers. Some of the numerous descriptions include: "a shapeless clot of shadow" (p. 30); "something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous" (p. 64); "has no name" (p. 68); "one of the powers of Unlife" (p. 68); "the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast" (p. 68); "it stood on the side of the living" (p. 81); "having no real form of its own as yet" (p. 83); "like a bear with no head" (p. 83); "the gebbeth" (p. 101); "my shadow" (p. 126); and, "crawling on four short taloned legs . . . lifting up to him a blind unformed snout without lips or ears or eyes . . . [or] lips or tongue" (p. 164). Picking up on even several of these, the shadow cannot be a power of 'Unlife', Ged's creature, a 'gebbeth', and a shapeless clot all at the same time.

Certainly, the novel indicates the shadow is able to change shape which suits the narrative process and the apparent authorial intention.

However, the Nietzschean interpretative position is able to probe the text for meanings that the author did not intend, but slipped in unnoticed. For example, in describing the shadow as a power of Unlife, a gebbeth, Ged's creature, and the shadow he casts displays uncertainty about whether it is a separate creature of evil and ill-will or an aspect of Ged that represents his darker side. Within the context of the story the shadow represents some aspect of Ged that is released, proves dangerous, and is united with Ged so he can be whole. However, the inconsistent descriptions of the shadow betray a hesitancy to fully commit to the idea that the shadow is actually a part of Ged, representing his dark side.

From such discrepancies concerning descriptions of the shadow an unease with the shadow, with what it is, and with what it represents can be discerned. If the shadow is supposed to be Ged's darker side that he must unite with in order to achieve wholeness then it would seem reasonable to expect consistency in descriptions of the shadow as actually being Ged's dark side. Many references to the shadow clearly position it as being a part of Ged, related to Ged, connected to Ged, an aspect of his darker side, his creature, the shadow he casts, and so on. However, there are also references to the shadow that equally clearly describe it as a very separate entity, a 'gebbeth', a power of 'Unlife', or a shapeless clot of blackness. These descriptions of the shadow are fewer in number compared with descriptions that indicate a relationship between Ged and the shadow. Nevertheless, their existence provides gaps for a deconstruction of the text that exposes confusion about the shadow.

Textual examination from the Nietzschean interpretative position indicates a speculative consideration of the question of evil which is unresolved. Le Guin professes an anti-Christian life-stance and agreement with Jung's concept of the shadow and the need to assimilate the dark side of one's nature, so foundational to the Rousseauistic

interpretation of the novel that centres on Jungian psychology. However, inconsistencies in descriptions of the shadow as being representative of Ged's dark side indicate that authorial belief did not completely obliterate references to the Western concept of evil as something contrary to good. Echoes of Western ideas concerning evil can be seen in the descriptions of the shadow as a terrifying type of monster or as a power that threatens life, seeking to do evil. From such a deconstructive analysis of the text students are able to examine the way in which language functions both to construct meaning and to undo that meaning, and the way it carries with it centuries of cultural baggage that are not easily discarded.

**Thread 484: "true name"**

In Earthsea names play such a vital role that no one knows a person's "true name but himself and his namer. He may choose at length to tell it to his brother, or his wife . . . . Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping" (p. 70). People are known by their 'use' names, but their 'true' names are secret, given by wizards in a naming ceremony, and are generally not shared with any other person. Knowledge of an individual's 'true' name gives a person power over that individual. Only the shadow has no name until Ged names it with his name. Nevertheless, at sea Ged and Vetch find it difficult to catch any fish because "even when they called out fisherman's charms they caught very little, for the fish of the Open Sea do not know their own names and pay no heed to magic" (p. 166). Serret also makes mention of names, but she refers to "things not named in the Namer's lists" (p. 110).

The shadow is described as coming "from a place where there are no names" (p. 68). That the shadow is considered a threat indicates some sort of correlation between name and danger. Only after Ged has named the shadow "with his own name" (p. 166) does it cease to be a threat. If the Equilibrium were to fail then "in the old silence all voices and all

names would be lost” (p. 51). Why are names so important in Earthsea, particularly ‘true’ names? If fish live in the Open Sea not knowing their true names then why are ‘true’ names so vitally important to most of Earthsea. Clearly knowledge of one’s true name is not necessary for existence. This then leads to questioning about what it is necessary for.

Is the system of true names, for example, tied to the wizard’s power over Earthsea? Or is it that one’s true self is generally kept from others, with people rarely interrelating on anything but a superficial level? Does this situation become problematic for Ged because he separates from part of himself, the part that is kept hidden from others? Is the novel actually talking about the need to keep one’s true self absolutely hidden from most other people? Is it the true self that is actually given a separate name, not known to others, which represents a separate hidden identity? Does the system of ‘true’ names protect individuality or coerce a population into submissive and obedient behaviour? Such questions rather upset the Rousseauistic interpretation that sees the novel as a story about integrating one’s dark side to achieve a balanced, whole personhood. Nevertheless, the incessant questioning of the Nietzschean interpretative position assists students to be radically critical of the text, and also of society, to discover what has been left unsaid amongst the words on the ‘page’. The pedagogic value of the Nietzschean interpretative position is that in affirming free play it directs student attention to the multiplicity of meaning contained in the ever-shifting fluidity of language and to what is hidden beneath the textual surface.

**Thread 277: “change what cannot be changed”**

The Master Namer tells his pupils that even a mage only controls:

‘what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail.’ (p. 51)

Either something can be changed or it cannot. How is it possible to change something that it is not possible to change? There seems to be confusion over what can be changed and what cannot be changed. This is one of the many contradictions in terms that frequent A Wizard of Earthsea. Other examples would include "only in silence the word . . . only in dying life" (p. 12). From the Rousseauistic interpretation such phrases take on a religious sense in which the seemingly impossible or mystical is being communicated. The Nietzschean interpretation, however, examines the words themselves. Why do certain words seem to be so profound and carry such a weight of meaning when the words themselves carry no such profundity? How can words mean more than they mean? In asking such questions the Nietzschean interpretative position directs students towards a critical understanding of the functioning of language, particularly within a cultural and religious framework.

For example, in Christianity phrases such as "But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:31, KJV) or "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt. 10:39) do not make a great deal of sense or furnish any profound meaning if the words alone are carefully studied. Likewise, in Taoism neither do phrases such as "You may look at it and not see it . . . You may listen to it but not hear it . . . You may touch it but not feel it" (McNaughton, 1971, p. 11) make much sense. Indeed, they are not necessarily any less nonsensical or more profoundly meaningful than phrases such as: "The sun was shining on the sea . . . [but it was] / The middle of the night" (Carroll, 1974, p. 167), "Their shoes were clean and neat. . . [but] / They hadn't any feet" (p. 168), or "I only wish *I* had such eyes . . . To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too!" (p. 206).

It is no more possible to adequately explain, understand, or interpret such words as "He that findeth his life shall lose it" or "touch . . .



and not feel” than such words as “The sun was shining . . . [in] the night”. However, what makes the former (Christian and Taoist words) seem profound as words of meaning and the latter (Carroll’s words) amusing as words of nonsense is the religiosity attached to the former, which is lacking in the latter. Religious/philosophical phrases can seem nonsensical when the textual words are closely examined, but as part of a broader context of an ‘on-high’ delivery of ‘definitive meaning’ they assume a status that suggests such words actually convey something of profound importance. They also suggest a certain veneration: that which appears confusing, baffling, or contradictory is actually conveying ‘great’ or ‘ancient’ wisdom that seems obfuscating only because ‘mere mortals’ are unable to fully understand.

Similarly, it seems ‘natural’ to invest certain words in non-religious literature, such as poetry, with ‘meaning’ because of their implied ‘religiosity’ or profundity. Hence, phrases such as “change what cannot be changed” (p. 51) or “only in dying life” (p. 12) do not mean a great deal linguistically but as part of the novel’s contextual framework they ‘appear’ to mean something profound. The transcendent nature of religious thinking and its treatment of sacred texts historically affected approaches to secular texts. Such texts were judged and studied by what they appeared to ‘mean’. That is, there is an approach to secular literature that involves the Rousseauistic search for the transcendent. This impulse is rejected by the Nietzschean interpretation which seeks to expose such logocentric approaches to all texts, disclose the instability of language and meaning, and reveal how meaning is constructed.

Words used in a certain context carry with them not just linguistic meaning but also cultural and religious meaning that elevate those words to mean more than they actually mean. The deconstructive process uses such words to expose the underground meanings of the text. Conversely,

the words themselves can be examined to see how discourses can be made to function through them. For example, the word 'fall' can open up the Christian discourse of the fall of man (humankind), not to mention the Eve discourse. Use of the Nietzschean interpretation encourages students to be critical of what they read, how they read, and how they invest words with meaning. This interpretative position helps students to become critical readers rather than responsive readers, and therefore critical members of society rather than responsive members. In alerting students to how language can be used to communicate certain meanings, that lead people to interpret the text in a specific way and to invest in a specific meaning, fosters literary criticism that is open and challenging.

**Thread 666: "Weak as woman's magic"**

In *Earthsea* the options open to women are strictly limited. A woman may be a common village witch such as Ged's aunt, or an evil sorceress such as Serret, or assume a housewife-type role such as Yarrow. Indeed, Yarrow, is the only female in the novel who is described, while not in glowing positive terms, at least not in a negative way or a way that concentrates on her looks alone: she cooks, spins, keeps house for her older brothers, and is "mistress of" her house (p. 149).

One of the longest descriptions in the novel of a woman concerns Ged's maternal aunt:

There is a saying on Gont, *Weak as woman's magic*, and there is another saying, *Wicked as Woman's magic*. Now the witch of Ten Alders was no black sorceress . . . but being an ignorant woman . . . 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. . . . Much of her lore was mere rubbish and humbug, nor did she know the true spells from the false. She knew many curses, and was better at causing sickness, perhaps, than curing it. ( pp. 16 - 17)

This village witch has limited power, is ignorant, and more troublesome

than evil. Like her male counterpart, the weatherworker, she is seen as no threat by the mages on Roke. In the characters of Lord Benderesk and Serret the evil that both men and women are capable of, from the mage point of view, can be seen. However, the linking of female magic to 'weakness' and 'wickedness' indicates a binary opposition that necessarily places male magic as powerful and good. Individual males, such as Lord Benderesk, may be evil but magic associated with the male population, as a whole, is not described as 'weak' or 'wicked'. This textual gap furnishes a view of the novel's sub-conscious where women's magic has been given a secondary and inferior role to that of the primary place of male magic, and is conceived from the dominant male perspective to be a complication or disruption, or at worst a threat, to their privileged position.

In asking what happens if these positions were to be reversed exposes the dependence of the narrative on the opposition of male and female magic. If women's magic is seen as powerful and good what does this do the text as a whole? To begin with, it means that it is now men's magic that is weak and wicked. This indicates that in order for the male population, and particularly the mages, to maintain their position they must reduce women and their magic to both a lowly and contrary position. In this way the threat that women constitute to the social order is kept in check and under control. So, from the male point of view women either know nothing of the balance like Ged's aunt, ignore it like Serret, or willingly uphold it like Yarrow. Women's magic is considered 'weak' and 'wicked' only because to view it in any other way is a threat to men in general and to the mages in particular.

The narrative structure depends on the sublimation of women to the 'lower' half of the opposition. If, for example, both men's and women's magic were described as powerful and good or weak and wicked this would indicate a very different structure. The Nietzschean practice of seeking

oppositions and then reversing them facilitates not only a radical exploration of the oppositions themselves but also of how they function in the text. The 'weakness' and 'wickedness' of women's magic draws attention to the unsaid in the novel. Students can also explore society and its institutions for examples of oppositional structures, how these operate, and who is privileged or marginalized by them. In this way, the underbelly of the societal 'text' can be exposed and examined. In the Nietzschean interpretation it is always the unsaid in the text that proves to have the most to say and to be the most provocative and challenging. In 'rocking the boat' the Nietzschean position demonstrates to students how and why the boat seemed steady in the first place.

### **Value of the Nietzschean Interpretation**

The Nietzschean position facilitates interpretations that are both challenging and playful, and also infinite. Deconstruction of A Wizard of Earthsea is a mode of reading that can proceed indefinitely. The sample of threads that have been pursued are merely illustrative of the endless tapestry of provisional meaning that is possible from the Nietzschean position. Moreover, such discussions themselves are also potentially indefinite. Any Nietzschean interpretation, therefore, always remains partial and evolving because the very process itself is infinite. It would be in keeping with the Nietzschean position to deconstruct the text of a previous deconstruction, creating even more textual play and provisional meaning. The possibilities of this interpretative position, as illustrated in this chapter, are quite literally limitless, inevitably raising more and more questions and conundrums. The relentless questioning that characterizes the Nietzschean position is where Derrida situates "the pedagogic effect of deconstruction" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 158). Answers and final resolutions are not part of the makeup of the Nietzschean interpretation,

as they are of the Rousseauistic interpretation. This process encourages and challenges critical reflection and response as the reader has to 'discover' threads and then choose which ones to follow.

While it is obvious why the Rousseauistic interpretation, in its concern with finding meaning, is attractive to religious educators it may not be as immediately obvious why the Nietzschean interpretation should also be attractive to religious educators. Pedagogically, this position could be seen as potentially problematic because having students explore the absence of finite meaning in literature, the absence of the transcendental signified, is possibly not helpful to students grappling with growing up and finding meaning in their lives. Nevertheless, this position facilitates a fail-safe mechanism that forestalls religious (or sectarian) chauvinism and messianism. Thus, the situation where a religious educator 'teaches' that a text is only about a particular thing, divulging a particular 'message', is an impossibility in the Nietzschean position. The call for Religious Education to be "practised in ways that are broad and inclusive" (*supra vide*, p. 11) is affirmed and enabled by the Nietzschean interpretation.

Moreover, it is only the Nietzschean interpretative position that helps the reader to understand the constructedness of text and of meaning. In pointing to the instability of language, this Derridean interpretation demonstrates how words are used and how meaning is made. Derrida considers deconstruction to be an important part of education and, indeed, feels that it "must have effects on teaching at all levels. I would say this without hesitation" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 14). Students can be encouraged to relate what they have explored in a deconstruction of A Wizard of Earthsea to society generally, to themselves, to the church, and to other texts (secular and sacred). While the Rousseauistic position is valuable because of its concern with the search for definitive meaning, the Nietzschean position is valuable in its

denial of definitive meaning. The Nietzschean interpretation affords a far greater scope for meaning than does the Rousseauistic interpretation because it enriches the reading of literature in Religious Education by broadening awareness and understanding of texts and life, by demonstrating the constructed nature of language and texts, and by investigating the process of making meaning. Johnson considers that:

The kind of truth that the text was conveying was much more complex and profound than a *simple* determination of meaning could possibly suggest. It seems to me that the most effective teaching that would derive from deconstruction would begin by emphasizing how much more meaningful the text might potentially be, rather than how much less meaningful it could be, by deciding to respect its silences, or respect its forking paths. (Salusinszky, 1987, pp. 162-163)

The teaching style employed in the Nietzschean interpretation could well be described as a democratic journey without end. Although the teacher may have specific aspects he/she wishes the students to explore, the nature of this interpretative position is that original input from the students is as vital and privileged as that of the teacher. If students are to develop into critical readers and come to understand the constructedness of language, text, and meaning their involvement in the deconstructive process is essential. In the Nietzschean position both teacher and students corporately own the journeys of textual exploration, whether the text be a novel, a sacred writing, a social structure, another culture, or a different belief system. In the classroom such corporate ownership would arise from individual, group, and class work.

The possibilities for the reading of literature in the Religious Education classroom from the Nietzschean position are endless, fun, and 'meaningful'. Nor is deconstruction something that can only be applied to texts. Bradbury (1985) considers that deconstruction "offers us not so

much a mode of argument but a mode of self-knowledge” (p. 7). Nietzschean deconstruction is a valuable tool for understanding the world, how it operates, and how humans make meaning and invest in such meaning. Johnson is of the opinion that in emphasizing a certain type of questioning, the relentless and niggling type, deconstruction becomes an invaluable tool for living:

One thing I could say is that the training most people get from the beginning, in school and through all of the cultural pressures on us, is to answer the question: ‘What’s the bottom line?’ What deconstruction does is to teach you to ask: ‘What does the construction of the bottom line leave out? What does it repress? What does it disregard? What does it consider unimportant? What does it put in the margins? . . . . [Deconstruction helps] organize the ‘noise’ that’s being disregarded. (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 164)

As demonstrated in this chapter the Nietzschean interpretation is a creative process, requiring imagination and critical acumen. It requires a letting go of certitude and assurance to float in the uncharted seas of linguistic possibilities. “To grasp the operation of creative imagination . . . one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom” (Derrida, 1978, p. 8). Le Guin (1979) expresses similar sentiments to Derrida, believing that those people who “refuse to listen to dragons are probably doomed . . . . We like to think we live in daylight, but half the world is always dark; and fantasy, like poetry, speaks the language of the night” (p. 11). To twist things out of shape, to look at things from radically different perspectives requires a healthy imagination. Those held tightly by logic and convention will need to be considerably ‘destabilized’ to fully embrace the Nietzschean interpretation.

The value of imagination and fantasy is promoted by many religious educators as a way of “seeing beyond” (Zuck, 1975, p. 589). The ability to break free, to pursue the transcendental, is the same ability

utilized by the Nietzschean position. Crossan's description of the parable as testing the limits of language and the excitement involved in sailing "as close as possible into the wind" (1988, p. 29) are reminiscent of joy and lack of safety in the Nietzschean position. The emphasis on imagination and fantasy in Religious Education provides an excellent foundation upon which to pursue the Nietzschean interpretation, and is a natural extension of their use. The possibility of the 'other' is a pre-requisite both of seeking the transcendental and using the Nietzschean interpretation. Le Guin (1979) observes that some people "are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom" (p. 44). Likewise, it could be observed of some people that they are afraid of the Nietzschean interpretation because they are afraid of the freedom it furnishes, afraid of the freedom to pursue the free play of endless chains of signifiers.

The value of the Nietzschean position is immense. The time has come in the reading of literature in the Religious Education classroom to not only talk about the search for meaning, what Derrida would describe as the Rousseauistic seeking of absolute meaning. The time has also come to talk about the many possibilities, the often extraordinary and startling possibilities, of other sorts of meaning, what Derrida would term the Nietzschean play of provisional meanings:

"The time has come", the Walrus said,  
"To talk of many things:  
Of shoes - and ships - and sealing-wax -  
Of cabbages - and kings -  
And why the sea is boiling hot -  
And whether pigs have wings." (Carroll, 1974, p. 169)

And what does such Nietzschean 'talking' constitute in the final analysis? To return, yet again, to Derrida: "What deconstruction is not? everything of course! What is deconstruction? nothing of course!" (Wood & Bernasconi, 1988, p. 5). Johnson, an eminent practitioner of



deconstruction in the United States of America, very much echoes Derrida's thoughts: "When I give a talk that is asking certain questions, and I'm asked after it 'Was that deconstructive?' I always have to answer 'Yes, and no, and I don't know'" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 173).

Reading a text from the Nietzschean position is a kaleidoscope of possibilities. It is a fun exercise in generating successive threads of meaning, none of which are considered preferred, superior, or the most true. The Nietzschean interpretation does not 'make' words "mean different things" (Carroll, 1974, p. 197) but, in revealing the instability of language, exposes the different meanings already inherent in the words themselves. For Derrida the Nietzschean deconstructive process is ineffable yet it effortlessly facilitates both relentless questioning and joyous affirmation, furnishing an infinite array of provisional meanings and a veritable melangery of never-ending possibilities. The emphasis on questioning forms part of a guiding principle for Derrida: "that we should question, that we shouldn't sleep, [and] that we shouldn't take any concept for granted" (Salusinszky, 1987, p. 17). The Nietzschean interpretation of A Wizard of Earthsea stimulates the creative imagination producing a plethora of textual threads. Reading the novel from this position there are no signifieds, as in the Rousseauistic position, only endless chains of signifiers. Rather than an emphasis on essentialism, so systemic in the Rousseauistic position, there is an emphasis on multiplicity in the Nietzschean position. It may seem problematic to the religious educator that the Nietzschean and Rousseauistic interpretations are so oppositional but Derrida suggests a way forward that is immensely valuable for those involved in teaching Religious Education.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Relevance and Value of the Study

#### The Derridean Common Ground

In the irreconcilable nature of the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations Derrida contrasts grounded and ungrounded modes of interpretation as represented by the polar opposition between Rousseau and Nietzsche. Derrida is pointing to the diametric opposition between decipherment and play, theism and atheism, and logocentrism and deconstruction (Hart, 1991, p. 121). The theories of Rousseau assume a ground or centre or presence, producing a natural theism, whereas the theories of Nietzsche reject any metaphysical concept of true Being or presence or centre, producing atheism and the doctrine of God's death. For Derrida, there is a binary opposition between Rousseau's belief in the transcendent, representing a logocentric outlook, and Nietzsche's radical decentring, representing free play.

Derrida's theories have "often been read as urging us to choose the second interpretation of interpretation" (Culler, 1983, p. 132). However, Derrida (1978) suggests not choice between two alternatives but common ground: he is calling for the act of conceiving "of the common ground" (p. 293). It is this "common ground", this 'co-existence' of opposites, that makes Derrida's interpretations so valuable as an approach for reading literature in Religious Education. Although Derrida prefers the Nietzschean position he claims that there is no question of choosing:

For my part, although these two interpretations must acknowledge and accentuate their differences and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing* . . . because we must try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference. (Derrida, 1978, p. 293)

These two positions, then, are not reducible to other elements from which

a common ground may be found and the differences between them must be noted and highlighted. Nevertheless, although the interpretations “are absolutely irreconcilable”, ‘seeming’ to prohibit each other, Derrida insists on conceiving of the common ground and the “*différance* of this irreducible difference” (p. 293). Indeed, *différance* “disallows our choosing between the Rousseauistic and the Nietzschean theories of interpretation” (Hart, 1991, p. 122). Derrida (1978) emphasizes that even “to live them simultaneously”, to seek the common ground, they remain absolutely irreducible and irreconcilable (p. 293).

Derrida applauds the free play that is facilitated by the Nietzschean interpretation but also acknowledges that “even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself” (Derrida, 1978, p. 279). The common ground of the irreducible Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations furnishes a pluralistic approach that is multifaceted, challenging, and stimulating. Derrida’s two interpretations look toward a common ground that accommodates both: one that satisfies the need for centres and one that challenges and encourages play. In Chapter Four, the Rousseauistic emphasis on the centre was explored through the Jungian concept of the shadow in which Ged’s story is seen as a journey to wholeness culminating in the assimilation of his shadow when they “met, and joined, and were one” (Le Guin, 1993, p. 164). Alternatively, in Chapter Five the Nietzschean emphasis on free play was explored with reference to a number of provisional meanings such as “had sent him to read that spell” (p. 114) in which the apparent unity of the novel collapses when Ged blames a girl for releasing his shadow. The Derridean common ground does not require choice between these two interpretative processes but facilitates both: centres, such as the Jungian concept of the shadow, and play, such as the textual gap “had sent him to read that spell”.

The neologism *différance* was coined by Derrida to indicate that meaning is found in difference and is infinitely deferred. "To spell *différance* with an *a* instead of an *e* is of course to press against the limits of a logocentric language" (Culler, 1981, p. 41). In French the 'a' can be discerned only in the written word, not in the spoken word. Derrida intends "that *différance* should function not as a concept . . . but as one set of marks in a signifying chain which exceeds and disturbs the classical economy of language and representation" (Norris, 1987, p. 15). While Derrida accepts the Saussurean emphasis on difference he rejects Saussure's fusion of signified and signifier:

*Différance* . . . designates both a "passive" difference already in place as the condition of signification and an act of differing which produces differences. An analogous English term is *spacing*, which designates both an arrangement and an act of distribution or arranging. (Culler, 1983, p. 97)

There is an endless chain of signifiers never fused to signifieds. Meaning is permanently and infinitely deferred. In this space between the signified and the signifier there is endless play. For Derrida (1987) *différance* is "the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other" (p. 27).

With respect to the two interpretations, Derrida is suggesting that the common ground is one of *différance*. It is in *différance* (comprising both difference and deferral) that the two interpretations of interpretation, which "must acknowledge and accentuate their differences and define their irreducibility", can co-exist (Derrida, 1978, p. 293). Caputo (1989) comments that the role of *différance* is to:

establish the conditions within which discourse functions. It founds (and un-founds, undermines) languages, vocabularies, showing how they are both possible and impossible, that is, incapable of a closure which would give them self-sufficiency and a feeling of success in nailing things down. (p. 28)

It is Derrida's "common ground" of *différance* that furnishes such positive implications for reading literature in Religious Education. Meaning is found not only in difference but is also infinitely deferred. For Derrida (1991) in "a language, in the system of language, there are only differences" (p. 64) which "are 'produced' - deferred - by *différance*" (p. 66). The particular value of Derrida's theoretical position is that it seeks a common ground that acknowledges anxiety at the loss of the logocentric but joyously affirms free play. Choice is not permitted between these dichotomous interpretations and the Derridean common ground facilitates a reading of literature that allows for both interpretations (seeking the centre and playing with signifiers). The intertwining of difference and deferral is all encompassing. Within the Nietzschean position is the implicit presence of its opposite, the Rousseauistic position, and vice versa. Deconstruction, the Nietzschean position, affords marginal readings and endless threads of provisional meaning; while the Rousseauistic position affords the search for, and examination of, the centre, of many possible centres. In this way, it is possible to read A Wizard of Earthsea from both the Rousseauistic interpretation concerned with a centre of Taoist balance, as explored in Chapter Four, and the Nietzschean interpretation concerned with chains of signifiers to do with "light", as explored in Chapter Five.

### **Value of the Derridean Approach**

It may be argued that Post-Structuralism (particularly Nietzschean deconstruction) with its emphasis on the impossibility of final meaning is contrapositive to Religious Education with its emphasis on the search for definitive meaning. Barry (1995) observes that linguistic "anxiety . . . is a keynote of the post-structuralist outlook" (p. 65) that unfortunately tends to result in what could be described as "terminal

anxieties about the possibility of achieving *any* knowledge through language” (p. 64). The impossibility of definitive meaning may produce anxiety, as seen in the wake left by Hartman, the American deconstructionist, “who plunged into deconstruction with gay abandon and left . . . a recklessly scattered trail of fragmentary texts” (Selden, 1985, p. 94). Nevertheless Post-Structuralism generally, and deconstruction in particular, can produce anxiety due to the lack of stable reference points. The universe is one of “radical uncertainty, since we can have no access to any fixed landmark which is beyond linguistic processing, and hence we have no standard by which to measure anything” (Barry, 1995, p. 61). In addition, the impossibility of absolute meaning and the incessant asking of questions that produce no answers but only more questions means that it can no longer be asked of a text “‘What does it mean?’ without simultaneously asking, ‘What are the conditions by which it means? What does its meaning mean?’” (Moon, 1990, p. 14).

The influence of modern literary theory becomes potentially dubious if it furnishes no ‘useful meaning’ in the real world of suffering and pain, joy and happiness. Eagleton humorously observes of one strand of Post-Modernism, which could equally apply to Post-Structuralism, that living in a world that has moved beyond logocentrism is to:

live dangerously, decentredly, without ends or grounds or origins, letting rip the odd snarl of sardonic laughter and dancing ecstatically on the brink of the abyss. It is hard to know what this would mean in practice - how exactly one would live ‘decentredly’ in Chipping Norton, and whether dancing on the brink of the abyss is compatible with, say, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles or returning one’s library books on time. (1996, p. 64)

The unsettling effects of any modern literary theory and its relation to a person’s lived experience of life are serious issues that impact directly

on the theory's value and relevance to human life. Such considerations are vitally important to Religious Education with its emphasis on "the myriad ways in which meaning and purpose in human existence has been and is sought" (*supra vide*, p. 11). However, in Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" is a positive yet challenging theoretical stance for reading literature in Religious Education that both reassures and unsettles at the same time. Reading A Wizard of Earthsea from Derrida's two interpretative positions both reassures, as in the concept of Taoist balance seen reflected in the "Equilibrium" (illustrated in Chapter Four), and unsettles, as in threads of meaning to do with "argue" (illustrated in Chapter Five).

The Derridean common ground facilitates an approach that not only advocates playfulness, characteristic of the Nietzschean interpretation, but also recognizes anxiety associated with the loss of the centre. Derrida acknowledges the human need for fixing centres into structures in order to explain, provide "reassuring certitude", and overcome anxiety (Derrida, 1978, p. 279). The value of the Derridean approach is that it emphasizes the common ground of both interpretative positions, and not the selection of one to the exclusion of the other. To choose only one interpretation is not only to severely limit the potential of any interpretative process but also to misunderstand Derrida's two interpretative positions. Choosing to read the Le Guin novel, for example, from either a Rousseauistic interpretation concerned with Taoist 'balance' or a Nietzschean interpretation concerned with threads of meaning about 'balance' not only drastically confines and restricts the interpretative possibilities but totally misconstrues the Derridean common ground.

In practice, it is the Rousseauistic position that dominates reading practices in Religious Education because of the emphasis on the search for meaning. In Chapter Four the two examples of this interpretation

(Jungian and Taoist) likely to be adopted by religious educators in reading A Wizard of Earthsea, because of their concern with providing definitive explanations and meaning, were discussed. Developments in Religious Education mean that now, on the whole, the meaning extracted from a text is no longer championed as the 'Truth'. Instead there are a variety of truths or centres or origins that can be found in the text; but there is still, in Derridean terms, a centre. For example, in A Wizard of Earthsea it is possible to examine it as pointing to Taoist philosophy or Jungian psychology. This approach to reading literature still seeks to understand the structure by giving it a centre, and bringing to an end play and the order of the sign (at least temporarily until the next truth is sought). Such reading practices, while valuable as a means of exploring meaning, do not do away with or move beyond seeking the centre.

There is also value to be gained in the Nietzschean position, which affirms the noncentre. Marginal readings are encouraged and in pursuing multiple threads of meaning it is demonstrated how meaning is both constructed and invested in. In Chapter Five, exploring the use of the words 'dark' and 'light' in the novel revealed the instability of language in communicating meaning and indicated how certain meanings are constructed and invested in to the exclusion of others. Taken singularly, the Nietzschean position prohibits the value to be gained by seeking the centre, by pursuing Taoist or Jungian concepts; and the Rousseauistic position prohibits the value to be gained by pursuing endless threads of provisional meaning about 'dark' or 'light'. However, taken together, as Derrida insists, the common ground of the irreducible Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations furnishes multiple interpretations that are rich, nourishing, thought-provoking, and meaningful. There is both centre and play, both reassurance and challenge, both the Jungian concept of the shadow (as discussed in Chapter Four) and threads of provisional



meaning such as “dark” (as explored in Chapter Five).

The place of story in Religious Education is well-established, and the emphasis on fantasy and imagination as tools of transcendence have been passionately pursued by a number of writers and educators. These fruitful approaches in Religious Education to the role of story, imagination, and fantasy can be greatly enhanced by Derridean theory. Imagination and fantasy, by their very nature, challenge and transcend the mundane and cognitive world. The scope for endlessly creative, open, stimulating, questioning, and even dangerous play afforded by the Nietzschean interpretation immensely enriches the already potent force of imagination and fantasy to speak of mystery, ‘meaning’, and enigma. Exploration of Nietzschean threads to do with “cast”, for example, enable a reading of A Wizard of Earthsea that is both creative and stimulating as well as challenging, even frightening.

Derrida considers that centring a structure belongs to a logocentric view of the world. There is obviously a human need for centres, and even Derrida accepts that structures cannot exist without centres, which no doubt explains the extraordinary place of story in all cultures. Stories help make sense of this seemingly chaotic world by demonstrating the shapefulness within the shapelessness. This is why literature, both religious and secular, has so much value for human society. And this is why Derrida’s two “interpretations of interpretation” are so important for the reading of literature in Religious Education: they provide a way to read literature that allows for the shapefulness to form out of the shapelessness and then dissolve back into it, infinitely. The Derridean approach facilitates a reading of literature that not only seeks absolute meaning by centring the structure, such as on the Jungian concept of the shadow in Ged’s journey towards wholeness, but that also deconstructs the structure by playing with threads of provisional meaning, such as

“source” that undermine the surface unity of the text. In practice, then, learning about the human situation and concern with the search for meaning (the foundational position of Religious Education) are greatly enhanced and extended by pursuing the Derridean common ground that incorporates both the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations - one that satisfies the need for centres, by centring the novel on the Taoist concept of balance, and one that questions and encourages play, by playing with words such as ‘perilous’.

As a methodological approach for reading literature in Religious Education the Derridean common ground facilitates a rich, rewarding, fun, serious, finite, and infinite search for meaning. As illustrated in this thesis, it will be possible to read A Wizard of Earthsea, or any text, finding centres and following threads without having to choose between one interpretative position or the other, between one that is closed and one that is not. Hence, for example, in A Wizard of Earthsea the Rousseauistic interpretation allows for exploration of different centres, such as Taoism or Jungian psychology, while the Nietzschean interpretation facilitates free play in the text in its pursuit of various threads of meaning, no one of which is seen as dominant or preferred over another. The inclusivity of the Derridean common ground, incorporating both Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations, allows for both centres and play. Therein, lies the value of Derrida’s ideas for reading literature in Religious Education. The reading practices in Religious Education that commonly only pursue the Rousseauistic interpretation can be significantly broadened by the addition of the Nietzschean interpretation. Derrida advocates the common ground of these two irreconcilable interpretations, one that accommodates both the Nietzschean impossibility of transcendent meaning and the Rousseauistic search for absolute meaning. As a methodological process

for reading literature in Religious Education the Derridean common ground supports the concerns of religious educators like Grimmitt (1978; 1987), Horder (1975) and Hull (1982), as discussed in Chapters One and Two, that Religious Education be broad, open, and inclusive.

### **Application to Other Texts**

From an initial study of A Wizard of Earthsea students could be encouraged to explore the intertextuality of some of the issues raised by examining other texts, sacred or secular, that deal with the idea of the shadow or dark side of human nature. The surface reading of such stories as Andersen's The Shadow, Stevenson's The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, and the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel suggests they are concerned with the perpetual duality of human nature. For example, a Rousseauistic interpretation of The Shadow could read it as a cruel story about a man who loses his shadow, finds the roles reversed as the shadow becomes the man and the man becomes the shadow, and in the end dies as the shadow completely becomes the 'man'. Le Guin (1979) describes Andersen's fairytale as a story that "says that a man who will not confront and accept his shadow is a lost soul" (p. 62). Unlike A Wizard of Earthsea, however, in this tale there is no union with the shadow. Rather, the shadow triumphs, marrying the princess, and the man is executed. Examining how texts explore similar issues can lead to a broader discussion of issues than is possible from study of a text in isolation. The variety of ways of dealing with the 'shadow' in different stories (positive union, death) provides considerable scope for discussing how humankind deals with its dual nature and the uneasy co-existence of good and evil.

However, as with A Wizard of Earthsea, it is possible to interpret these stories from a Nietzschean position. In deconstructing the texts to

see what is hidden beneath the surface the textual subconscious can be explored for provisional meanings. For example, in The Shadow the use of the word 'clever' provides a Nietzschean gap by which to dig beneath the textual surface: the man considers that the shadow "ought to be clever enough" (Andersen, n.d., p. 372) to carry out the man's request to separate from his body; and, the princess describes the shadow, who has now become the man, as "a clever man" and the man as "a clever shadow" (p. 380). Such descriptions present an interesting corollary to descriptions of both Ged and his shadow. In both stories the shadow is clever and cunning, but one leads to union and one leads to death of the man. Likewise, in Stevenson's The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde there can be found gaps and silences by which to pursue Nietzschean deconstruction. The phrase "Cain's heresy" (Stevenson, 1984, p. 645) is suggestive of an entrance into the subterranean depths of the novel to play with the intertextuality of the Cain and Abel discourse.

Use of the Derridean common ground does not always have to result in reading stories that deal with similar issues, although parallels furnish useful discussion points and will often present themselves as a matter of course. Wells' enigmatic tale The Door in the Wall follows the story of a man filled with regret for not entering the door in the wall "that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know" (Wells, 1974, pp. 159-160). Worldly concerns and demands prevent him from entering this special world, which he had glimpsed as a child. A Nietzschean interpretation that concentrates on the words "door" and "wall" facilitates a playful deconstruction of the text that raises questions about life, destiny, responsibility, freedom, and choice. A Rousseauistic interpretation could explore the Christian notion of worldly duty and success and the presence of 'mystery' in life that speaks of another world beyond this world.

The parables and stories of Jesus provide material that can either be examined from both Derridean interpretative positions or as, Crossan (1988) suggests, there can be an exploration of parable as the antithesis to myth and religion. Parable destabilizes, fragments, upsets, and threatens much as the Nietzschean interpretative position does, while religion and myth stabilizes, unifies, reassures, and supports much as the Rousseauistic interpretation does. Derrida's ideas concerning the co-existence of two irreconcilable interpretative positions are similar to Crossan's ideas about 'story' in which parable and religion/myth are "binary or polar opposites" (p. 40). Crossan interprets the stories of Jesus as parables "which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world" (p. 100). He argues that some of the stories of Jesus, originally intended as parables, were transformed by the early Church "into moral examples or exemplary stories and/or historical allegories" (p. 101). There is much scope for applying the Derridean interpretative approach and Crossan's ideas to a textual analysis of the Biblical stories and parables of Jesus. Myth and the Rousseauistic interpretation tend to be on a grand scale, provide overarching meaning, and are universalistic. Parable and the Nietzschean interpretation might be described as iconoclastic and subversive, localized and particular, and individually interpretative.

The approaches to reading literature suggested in this thesis can be modified for use with younger students. Indeed, children often have less resistance to looking at something in a new way than older adolescents/adults, because they are less 'schooled' in convention. For example, with children the folk tale of St. George and the dragon could be read from the two Derridean interpretative positions. Exploring it as a tale about St. George who rescues the princess and kills the evil dragon would constitute the Rousseauistic interpretation. Such a reading is centred on the Christian ideas of good and evil. Approaching the text from

the Nietzschean interpretation alerts children to the fun that can be had in playing with the other stories 'behind' the story. Questions could be asked and scenarios presented that suggest alternative ways of viewing the story, of finding hidden stories behind the traditional version of the tale: What happens if St. George is scared of dragons? Suppose the dragon had turned himself into a princess and turned the princess into a dragon so the dragon-as-princess would get to live in a castle with St. George.

In this way, such a folktale can be used as a way of leaning about the Christian idea of good triumphing over evil and also about how stories and meanings are constructed. Issues such as how good and bad are represented in stories, what it means to be good or bad, what it means to be male or female, and what it means to be different can be discussed at a basic level. Beginning with the tale of St. George, children could also explore Eastern tales about dragons which tend to be depicted, unlike those in Western tales, as good. While the methodology remains essentially the same the material and approaches can be age-modified.

### **General Application in Religious Education**

The value of Derrida's two interpretative positions in Religious Education is not restricted as a methodology to only reading literature. The utilization of literary critical theory in the field of religious studies is well established. Culler (1988) observes that the critiquing of religion is:

the proudest heritage of comparative literary studies, and certainly one region in which literary criticism has helped transform Western culture. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, one might say without greatly oversimplifying, Protestants took the Bible to be the word of God; by the beginning of the twentieth century, this belief was untenable in intellectual circles. What had been responsible for this change was scholars' and critics' insistence that techniques of textual and critical analysis which had been developed for classical literature be applied to Biblical writings. (p. 79)

The impact of modern literary theory on theology is part of this continuum of textual criticism. It behoves religious educators to also encompass modern literary theory in the critical study of literature. Religion has had a pervasive influence on all cultures so the “role religion plays in the discourse of . . . culture makes it imperative that it not escape serious intellectual challenge” (Culler, 1988, p. 82).

Application of Derrida’s “two interpretations of interpretation” to exploring general religious and life issues is concomitant with current theological trends. There are many theological issues pertinent to Religious Education which may benefit from the application of the Derridean common ground as a methodological approach. For example, there have been developments in the area of Christology, in the concern for Christology ‘from below’ as opposed to Christology ‘from above’, and in the area of Mariology, with the contrast between the virgin/holy discourse and the Eve/sinful discourse.

O’Collins (1977) observes that Christology ‘from above’ is no longer entirely tenable in the changed climate of twentieth century liberal scholarship, and almost “all contemporary thinking about Jesus Christ begins not ‘from above’ but ‘from below’” (p. 13). Christology ‘from below’ is a more acceptable expression of the person and work of Jesus Christ in contemporary society. O’Collins suggests that Christology ‘from below’:

may follow K ung’s lead and study the experience, ideologies and faiths of human beings in the late twentieth century before going on to consider what the gospels indicate about the earthly existence of Jesus . . . [or] may simply go straight into the humanity of Jesus. (1977, pp. 13-14)

The inherent value of Christology ‘from below’ is that it focusses on Jesus in relation to the human condition. Nolan (1976) notes that it was in Jesus’ acceptance of people, particularly the poor and sinners, that he

became the very human face of God because in treating them as friends he “had taken away their shame, humiliation and guilt . . . . They were now acceptable to God. Their sinfulness, ignorance and uncleanness had been overlooked” (p. 39). Christology ‘from above’ stresses creeds and dogma whereas Christology ‘from below’ stresses the stories about Jesus in the synoptic gospels. O’Collins (1977) observes that both Christologies have their difficulties, however, “most contemporary theologians prefer to attempt a Christology ‘from below’ and practise Augustine’s principle, “Through the man Christ you move to the God Christ”” (pp. 17-18).

Bausch (1984) uses the term ‘high Christology’ to refer to Christology associated with the divinity of Jesus. For Bausch, high Christology, or Christology ‘from above’, is concerned with “the Jesus who walks on water, performs miracles, speaks long Johannine sentences. This is the imperial Pancrator [sic]” (p. 21). Emphasizing the divinity of Jesus creates a separation between the divine and the human. Nolan (1976) stresses the bringing together of the human and divine Jesus:

We cannot deduce anything about Jesus from what we think we know about God; we must now deduce everything about God from what we do know about Jesus . . . . To say . . . that Jesus is divine does not change our understanding of Jesus; it changes our understanding of divinity. (p. 137)

The tensions between Christology ‘from above’ and Christology ‘from below’ can be usefully approached using Derrida’s interpretative positions. Just as the Derridean common ground allows for the human need for the transcendent and the plurality of infinitely deferred meaning so Christology from above and below, when taken together, acknowledges both the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

The figure of Mary is central to Christianity, particularly to Roman Catholicism, but her influence extends far beyond the Church:



Whether we regard the Virgin Mary as the most sublime and beautiful image in man's struggle towards the good and the pure, or the most pitiable production of ignorance and superstition, she represents a central theme in the history of western attitudes to women. She is one of the few female figures to have attained the status of myth - a myth that for nearly two thousand years has coursed through our culture. (Warner, 1990, p. xxv)

An examination of Mary in the Matthean and Lukan birth narratives from the Rousseauistic interpretative position presents an understanding of Mary as the 'mother of God', which can then be further explored through developments in Church ideology and literature. Whereas, a Nietzschean interpretation could deconstruct the Marian mythology from the starting point of the 'Virgin Mother', unleashing a deconstructive process that could lead to an examination of the place of women in the Church and the roles available to them. A particularly important aspect of any study of Mary is the dichotomy between evil/sexuality and holiness/virginity. Warner (1990) observes that "it is almost impossible to overestimate the effect that the characteristic Christian association of sex and sin and death has had on the attitudes of our civilization" (p. 50).

Alternatively, beginning with an examination of the position of women from the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations in A Wizard of Earthsea an exploration could then be extended to the historical place of women in the Church. The point in the text where Ged recognizes Serret as the girl "who had mocked him . . . and had sent him to read that spell which loosed the shadow" (Le Guin, 1993, p. 114) becomes in a Rousseauistic analysis an example of the 'unacceptable' female (as opposed to the 'acceptable' female in the person of Yarrow) and from the Nietzschean position an entry point into the Eve narrative. The binary relationship between Eve and Mary, the second Eve, provides much material for discussions about good and evil, men and women. Adams,

quoted by Warner (1990), indicates that the “study of Our Lady . . . leads directly back to Eve, and lays bare the whole subject of sex” (p. 49).

Although these examples are from the Christian faith there is no reason why the Derridean approach to reading literature and examining issues should not also be used in relation to other faith systems. For example, Cupitt (1991) discusses ‘story anti-story’ in relation to Zen Buddhism, in which he sees there being a search for the unknowable and ineffable even though this search is acknowledged as impossible given the constraints of the linguistic world we inhabit:

Zen itself recognizes . . . the paradox of trying to use language to speak of or gesture towards an un-thing outside language . . . . Like other Eastern religions it dreams of escape. The escape from textuality . . . is enlightenment. There is no way ‘out’ of a chain of written signs like this one . . . . Each sign relates only the others that come before and after it. (p. 134)

Cupitt's study suggests that approaching Zen Buddhism from the Derridean perspective would be a fruitful and fascinating encounter. Cupitt notes that for any religion the belief in transcendence or God was a belief “in the possibility of mastering language from a standpoint outside it. Hence the traditional emphasis on silence, stillness, concentration and the control of one's thoughts” (p. 142).

Like Zen, aspects of Taoism seem particularly suited to the Derridean common ground. While Taoism as a religion expresses a logocentric concern with the centre it also emphasizes ‘unknowing’ as a way of ‘knowing’, and in its “philosophy, language, knowledge, and being are at odds with one another” (Pon, 1996, p. 331). The Tao is both a goal and a way of living, and cannot adequately be expressed in either language or silence. In particular, the stories of Chuang-Tzu embrace “a much more personal and individualistic form of mysticism than that of” Lao Tzu (Hinnells, 1984, p. 90). His work exhibits anarchic characteristics that

are suggestive of the Nietzschean interpretative position. Pon (1996) explores these stories “as a radical suspension of . . . human-centered reality or consciousness” (p. 333). She suggests that Chuang-Tzu combines an uncertainty about language and reality and “plays with the conventions of language and subverts its purposes and functions” (p. 332). In Chuang-Tzu’s concern with the limitations of language that creates distance from the Tao can be seen the tension between the Derridean common ground of the two irreconcilable interpretations (play of language and seeking the Taoist centre). Pon sees language for Chuang-Tzu as being “both inherently limiting and inexhaustible” (p. 331).

Religious Education can utilize many avenues for exploring religion and religious issues and, in addition to literature, could include theatre, music, fine art, and film. The value of the Derridean approach can be utilized to study film, particularly documentaries where the unspoken text can be explored to great profit. The Derridean common ground can also be applied to visual arts in an examination of the way in which artists play with the foreground/focus (positive space) and background (negative space). In much of Escher’s work, for example, neither the foreground nor the background can exist without the other, and indeed, trying to decide which is which is impossible (*infra vide*, p. 154). In sculpture the very act of making casts is an intriguing entry point for discussions raised in A Wizard of Earthsea about cast, space, shadow, balance, and so on. Students could actually work in clay, producing their own moulds for casting. The process of creation requires playing with positive and negative, cast and space, shadow and balance. In printmaking, too, there is a positive and negative reversal in the construction of printing blocks from which to take prints. Humans see in ‘relationship’; in art, as in language, meaning is found in difference and, in being variously ‘constructed’, meaning is also infinitely deferred. There are many

possibilities in the visual arts for exploring the issues raised by reading literature in Religious Education from the Derridean common ground. Sometimes, 'hands-on' can explicate understanding in ways that are not possible from purely mental gymnastics.

### **New Horizons: An "unnameable . . . infant"**

Derrida describes trying to conceive of the common ground of the two irreconcilable interpretations as a:

*conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance towards the operation of childbearing - but also with a glance toward those who . . . turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so . . . only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. (Derrida, 1978, p. 293)

Such a description could equally apply to the 'birth' of the conjoining of Derridean theory (or any modern literary theory) and Religious Education. This 'common ground' can be viewed positively or negatively. Some may find it terrifying and look on it as a monstrosity. Others, even though perhaps averting their eyes, may recognize it as a formless 'infant' having as yet no 'category', but which is, nevertheless, proclaiming its arrival. In this sense (in the Derridean sense of the common ground, of pushing against boundaries, and of conceiving of that which is in the process of becoming) this thesis is very much an "as yet unnamable . . . infant".

Looking into the abyss, peering at the "as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself", trying to conceive of the common ground of the Derridean interpretations, and also of Religious Education and Derridean theory, is a difficult task. It is rather like looking at Escher prints in which, for example, a step-ladder is to be seen both outside and inside the building at the same time (*infra vide*, p. 155). In a sense it is impossible to

fully 'perceive' both versions at the same time - perception must be switched between the two possibilities. Nevertheless, when perceiving one version, awareness of the alternative possibility remains. It seems that in much of Escher's work that undermines perspective can be seen a visual version of Derrida's two interpretative positions in application and also of the nexus of Religious Education and Derridean theory. Although Escher manipulates his images they nevertheless hold together as some sort of decentred yet centred 'unnamable creation' that is proclaiming its right to exist. The common ground in these images is the 'union' of two irreconcilable perspectives. As with these images so also with the two interpretative positions and with Religious Education and Derridean theory. There is a switching back and forth of 'mental perception' from one perspective/interpretation/area to the other and from this interplay and exertion arises the common ground.

Derrida, in his "two interpretations of interpretation" suggests a way of 'simultaneously' reading literature in all its difference, in both the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean positions, by pinpointing "the *différance* of this irreducible difference" (1978, p. 293). This is, indeed, to be found dancing on the edge of the abyss. But it is a dance that is both Rousseauistic and Nietzschean, both decipherment and free play, both centred and noncentred, both reassuring and frightening, both grounded and ungrounded, both closed and not closed. In other words, it is to be as fully human as possible with all the contradictions. The Derridean common ground provides a rich, rewarding and challenging way of peering "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV) to catch a glimpse both of reassuring certitude and of labyrinthine meanderings. The value inherent in the Derridean common ground is that it facilitates a movement away from a limited position of restrictive reading practices to a position that fosters a much wider potential for meaning.

Drawing together what at first seems antithetical areas (Religious Education and modern literary theory) is a potentially hazardous endeavour. There are no signposts or landmarks to assist with navigation. Such a journey is both terrifying and exhilarating. The teaching process is also potentially hazardous. Using the Derridean common ground as a methodology for reading literature, or for approaching religious and life issues, results in a classroom that is partly decentred. While lessons using the Rousseauistic interpretation are likely to be centred on teacher-directed study, lessons using the Nietzschean interpretation would require redevelopment and a different mind-set for both teacher and students. The teacher would assume a decentred role that facilitates student exploration and students would assume a very active role. Many changes are likely: teaching roles and strategies altered, programming and preparation re-formatted, assignments and assessment revised, lessons remodelled, and new types of questions generated. In practice, this may involve much greater class time devoted to individual work, an increased use of paired and group work, and 'round-table' discussions by the class as a whole. The teacher may initially suggest 'possible threads' to demonstrate the deconstructive process, particularly if students are not familiar with this methodology, but equally the students would be both encouraged and expected to produce their own deconstructions. Teaching may seem uncertain using the Nietzschean position, but only because teachers are accustomed to directing, controlling, and determining.

Utilization of the Derridean approach means that in practice some lessons, those using the Rousseauistic interpretation, may resemble 'normal' teacher-centred teaching but other lessons, those using the Nietzschean interpretation, will be decentred journeys undertaken by teacher and students. In teaching terms, the Derridean common ground combines the irreconcilability and irreducibility of centred and decentred

teaching. Fantasy stories like A Wizard of Earthsea are well-suited to initial student contact with any modern literary theory. By its very nature fantasy is 'removed' from reality and is therefore a safe vehicle by which to begin studies of the constructs of text, society, and belief.

The studies of A Wizard of Earthsea undertaken in Chapters Four and Five furnish data clearly indicating that reading the novel from the Derridean common ground reveals it to be reflective of the tensions, complexities, and contradictions of life. Indeed, from the Derridean perspective it is no longer a novel that neatly 'explains' life/issues. Rather, in highlighting the ambiguities and struggles of life, it has the potential to alter how students engage with and respond to the text and life. In this thesis the interpretation of material in Chapters Four and Five suggests considerable scope for the religious educator in pursuing how "meaning and purpose in human existence . . . is sought" (*supra vide*, p. 11).

The value and relevance of this thesis lies in extending the boundaries of the influence of other disciplines on Religious Education, as already achieved by Grimmitt (1978; 1987), to new horizons. This thesis demonstrates the enormous value to be gained by using Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" as a methodological process for reading literature in Religious Education, which can also be used for exploring general religious issues. Use of the Derridean common ground provides an approach in Religious Education underpinning the consensus view in contemporary approaches in Religious Education that emphasizes the necessity of inclusivity, plurality, and openness and the rejection of closed and exclusive positions (*supra vide*, pp. 8-11 & pp. 13-16).

However, in true Nietzschean style, the 'end' of this journey is not an end, but merely a point in a journey. This thesis, an "unnameable . . . infant", implies new horizons of infinite journeying. Some of these are hinted at in Appendix B.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Further research could embody a number of different directions. Indeed, the plurality of potential future developments in this exciting nexus of modern literary theory and Religious Education seems to be, given that this thesis appears to be the only study undertaken in this area, very much in its infancy. A combination of additional theoretical study and empirical research is considered necessary.

One possible area for further research could involve the application of the methodology used in this thesis to the other three Earthsea novels. Given that A Wizard of Earthsea, the first novel, was first published in 1968 and Tehanu, the fourth and last novel, was first published in 1990 means that the four novels were written over a twenty-two year period. A comparative examination of the four novels in terms of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretations" could prove an interesting study. For example, the strong hint in Tehanu of the new Archmage being a woman and the lack of closure at the end of the novel indicates the possibility of exploring altogether different Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations than have been explored in A Wizard of Earthsea.

One of the initial directions of further research could involve the creation of a curriculum package based on the conceptual framework outlined in this thesis. This could then be utilized in the Religious Education classroom as part of an empirical study to test the validity of the hypothesis theoretically examined and demonstrated in this thesis. The curriculum package would need to be carefully constructed so as to provide a balanced reading of the text from both the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations. Consideration would also need to be given to possible student resistance to radically different reading practices and to



critical rather than responsive reading.

While the discussions in this thesis are indicative of use in upper secondary highschool, the methodological approach can be adapted for use in both lower secondary and upper primary. Curricula could be produced and empirical studies undertaken across a variety of age-groups. The creation of a comprehensive framework, such as devised by Grimmit (1978), for use across both upper primary and secondary years is recommended as another aim of further research and work.

Further research could at some stage also involve examination of the value of other literary theoretical approaches, such as those discussed in Appendix B, for reading literature in Religious Education. This is likely to be an enormous undertaking as modern literary theory constitutes a vast, pluralistic, and ever expanding discipline.

### **Conclusion**

Words, spoken or written, are liable to greater misunderstanding, according to Post-Structuralists, than is ever admitted. Yet, people seem so 'normalized' by this type of experience that it becomes 'natural' and therefore 'invisible'. Meaning is considered obvious: yet disagreement, upset, even war, attest to the monotonous regularity of human miscomprehension and misconstruction. Embedded in this appalling linguistic mire is the special status attached to meaning and truth. Not only is meaning often considered obvious and natural, but it is then privileged as 'Truth'. These troublesome issues are no more evident than in 'stories' (whether individual stories or stories that developed into potent religions, myths, and philosophies), and can be particularly scrutinized in literature. Derrida's concern with the logocentric impulse in Western thought pinpoints a problematic tendency of giving centres to structures in order to furnish definitive meaning, to ultimately explain. Although the

Derridean position rejects such logocentric attitudes to meaning and truth the Derridean common ground of the two interpretative positions facilitates both the search for the centre and the free play of signifiers. Moreover, this common ground forestalls and alleviates problems associated with both the messianic certainty of absolute meaning and truth in text and life (the Rousseauistic interpretation at its worst) and despair and anxiety associated with the hopelessness of ever achieving absolute meaning in text or life (the Nietzschean interpretation at its worst). As one aspect of modern literary theory Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" facilitates a valuable approach for reading literature and to life in general.

The legacy of modern literary theory can be seen surreptitiously influencing our lives. Today many people are able to recognize the 'constructed' nature of advertisements and that the 'truth' contained in them are constructions of reality in order to sell particular products. In the English class students analyze the texts of literature, film, television, and the media to develop an understanding of how language and images are used to communicate certain meanings, how such messages (and therefore the meanings contained within those messages) are constructed, and what social or cultural discourses are operating that marginalize or privilege certain groups or individuals. In Religious Education, too, modern literary theory should be making its presence felt.

Religious Education does not exist in splendid isolation. It has responded to developments in theology, pedagogy, psychology, and sociology, to name but a few disciplines. Religious educators have emphasized not only the importance of acknowledging developments in other areas of human learning, and how these may impact on and influence Religious Education, but have expressed the necessity of responding to such changes. However, religious educators do not seem to

have explored the potential of developments in modern literary theory to also impact on Religious Education.

Modern literary theory has developed a plethora of approaches to language, society, and literature, and in particular, such theories have vast implications for how literature is read and studied. English Education has responded to such literary critical developments by devising new methods of reading, studying, and teaching literature. Such changes emphasize the creation of critical readers and the development of awareness for, and understanding of, the constructed nature of text, society, and meaning. There is no reason why modern literary theory should not also be examined for its impact on reading literature in Religious Education. The already central and valuable place of 'story' in Religious Education, and the associated richness of fantasy and imagination, can be considerably expanded by acknowledging and responding to developments in modern literary theory and their propitious implications for the reading of literature. Modern literary theory has the potential to facilitate pluralistic avenues for exploring meaning, which collectively provide a multifaceted, potent, and beneficent methodological tool and process for reading and studying literature in Religious Education and for examining religious and life issues. The Derridean approach to reading literature facilitates an excellent way in Religious Education to appreciate how "meaning and purpose . . . is sought", which though concentrating on the "cognitive" dimension does not preclude the "affective" dimension (*supra vide*, p. 11). The use of Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" for reading and studying A Wizard of Earthsea has effectively demonstrated its value as a methodological approach for reading literature in Religious Education.

The contribution of this thesis is its examination of the valuable impact of Derridean theory on reading literature in Religious Education. It

would seem this area of study has not previously been undertaken. Post-Structuralism's emphasis on the impossibility of absolute meaning seems antithetical to Religious Education's emphasis on the search for final meaning. However, Derrida's common ground of the two irreconcilable interpretative positions suggests a reading of literature that allows for both the Rousseauistic concern with centre and definitive meaning and the Nietzschean concern with free play and provisional meaning.

The hypothesis of this thesis that "the Derridean common ground of the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations will broaden and enhance the reading of literature in Religious Education by facilitating both the search for the centre (search for finite meaning) and the free play of signifiers (pursuit of infinitely deferred and pluralistic meaning)" (*supra vide*, p. 8) has been exemplified by a close textual analysis of A Wizard of Earthsea. It has also been briefly explored that such an approach to reading literature in Religious Education may equally apply to sacred and religious texts as well as to theological and religious issues.

Looking into the linguistic abyss of Post-Structuralism and searching for absolute meaning and provisional meaning, trying to conceive of the Derridean common ground that encompasses both the Rousseauistic search for the signified and the Nietzschean free play of signifiers, is rather like looking "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV). As an act of faith, which in no way undermines the reading of literature from a Derridean perspective or the value therein, one could add "but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

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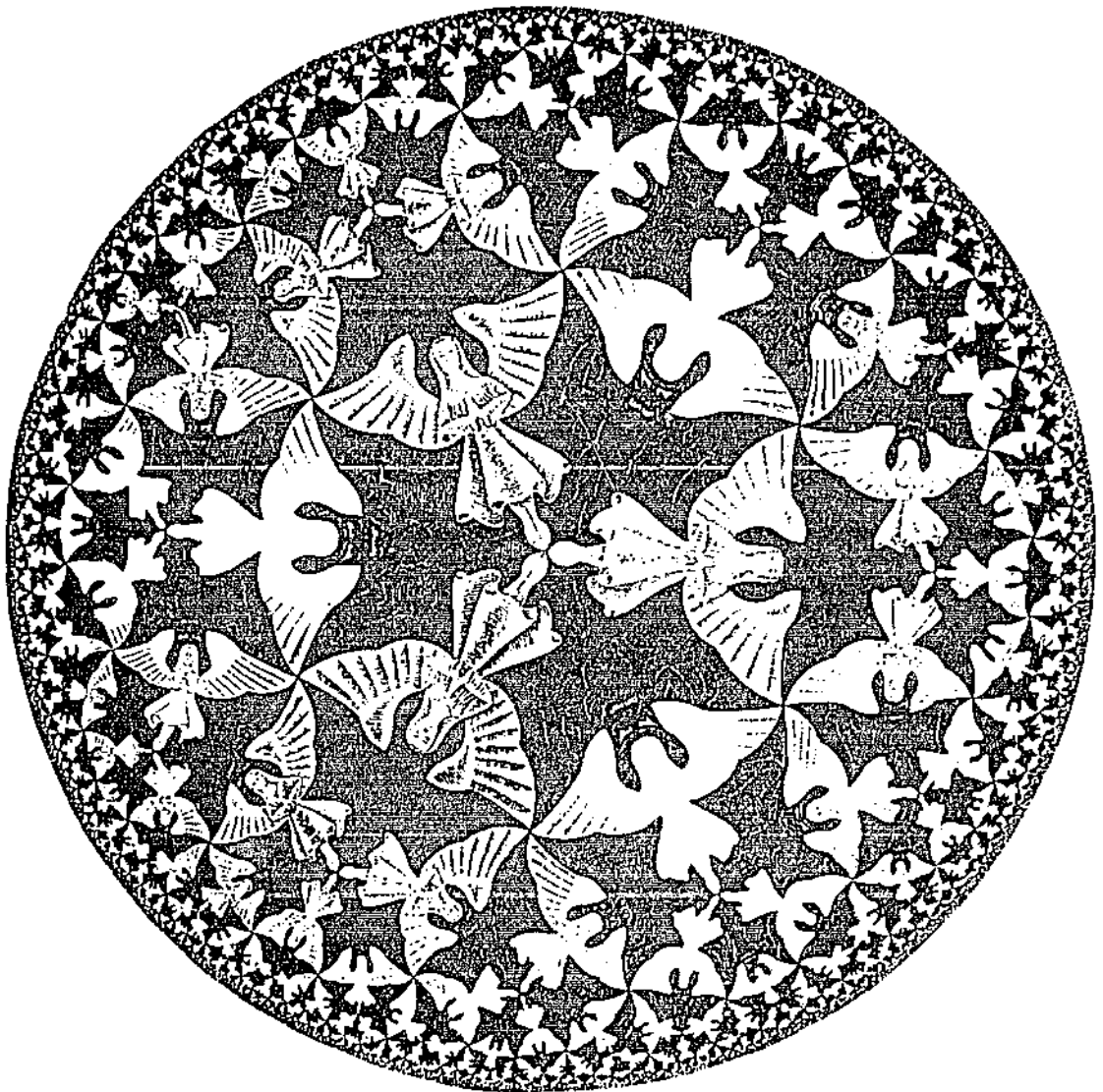
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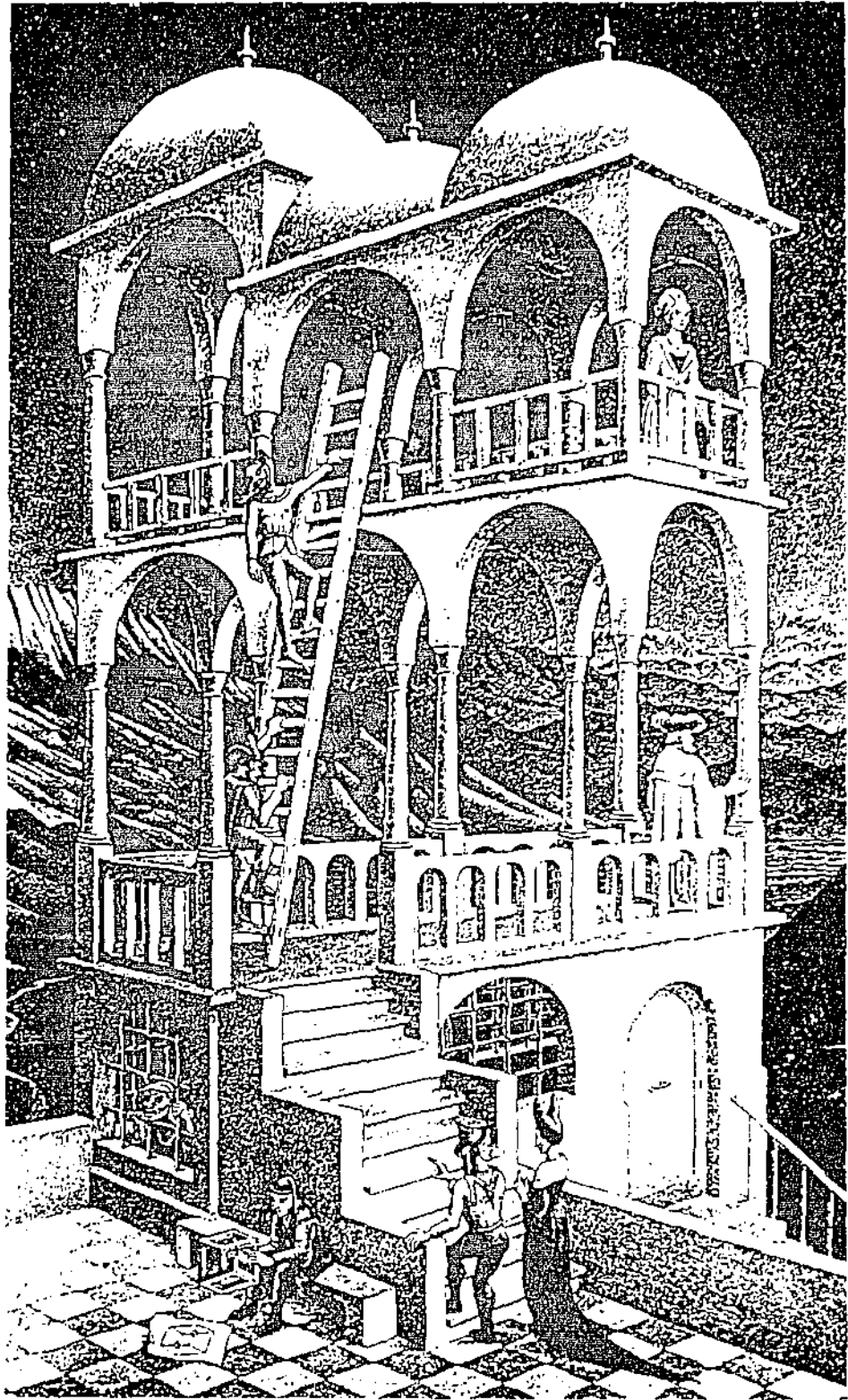
**APPENDIX A**



**M.C. Escher's "Circle Limit IV (Heaven and Hell)"**

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**(Bool, Ernst, Kist, Locher & Wierda, 1992, p. 322)**



**M.C. Escher's "Belvedere"**

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**(Bool, Ernst, Kist, Locher & Wierda, 1992, p. 318)**

## APPENDIX B

### Value of Other Modern Literary Theoretical Approaches

While Derrida's "two interpretations of interpretation" is a valuable methodological process for reading literature in Religious Education it would be anathema and contrary to the ethos of modern literary theory generally and Post-Structuralism in particular, let alone Derridean theory, to suggest that there are not also other equally valuable literary theoretical approaches. Barthes (1996b, p. 195) uses a Biblical quotation to describe textual plurality, which could equally describe theoretical plurality: "My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5: 9, KJV).

The plurality of literary theoretical approaches facilitates a variety of ways of exploring text and meaning. It would be a logocentric attitude indeed to champion one particular approach as somehow 'the' valuable modern literary theoretical approach for reading literature in Religious Education. Barthes (1996b) observes of textual plurality that the "plural of demoniacal texture which opposes text to work can bring with it fundamental changes in reading, and precisely in areas where monologism appears to be the Law" (p. 195). Likewise, the "plural of demoniacal" literary approaches which oppose pluralistic reading practices to logocentric reading practices can also bring with it fundamental changes to reading practices that result in a broader and richer consideration of the quest for meaning. In this way, monologism gives way to pluralism in the practice of reading literature in Religious Education.

There is an enormous range of different theoretical positions in modern literary theory. All these positions have, in their own way, the potential to enhance and enrich how literature is read in Religious Education, thereby contributing, also in their own way, to the "exploration of the myriad ways in which meaning and purpose in human existence has been and is sought" (*supra vide*, p. 11). Nevertheless, it was

considered that an examination in depth was preferable to a cursory overview, hence the necessity of making a single choice from the plethora of possibilities. As a result, this thesis examines only one small aspect of modern literary theory. Even Derrida's theory is expansive and close attention to his ideas regarding 'supplement' (words always supplement or substitute reality) or 'phonocentrism' (the privileging of speech over writing) would be profitable studies in themselves. In particular, given the value assigned to the spoken word in A Wizard of Earthsea the Derridean concept of phonocentrism would furnish a fascinating approach to the novel. It needs to be emphasized that rather than Derrida's two interpretative positions this thesis could have focused on the value for reading literature in Religious Education of any number of other modern literary theoretical approaches, including other aspects of Derridean theory.

For example, an examination of Baudrillard's ideas concerning the culture of 'hyperreality' and 'the loss of the real', which he sees as arising from a loss of distinction between 'real' and 'imagined' brought about by the pervasive influence of film, television, and advertising (Barry, 1995, p. 87), would have been particularly interesting. For a feminist approach a study of Cixous' ideas concerning the masculine economy of profit and the feminine economy of gift (Cixous, 1996) would have been worthwhile. Or a more general approach combining various theoretical ideas, as evidenced in Cultural Criticism used in English Education, could have been explored. Indeed, there are many strikingly interesting and challenging modern literary theories to choose from, all of which could variously and positively impact on how literature is read and studied in Religious Education. As a taste of the value to be found in the multiplicity of modern literary theory for reading literature in Religious Education a brief overview of some of the ideas of Foucault, Althusser, and Bakhtin in relation to A Wizard of



Earthsea will illustrate the imperative of not privileging, by an act of isolation, one theorist over other theorists.

### Foucault

Foucault represents another tangent of Post-Structuralist thought whose ideas, unlike Derrida, focus on the relationship of discourse and power, and history and ideology. "Like other post-structuralists Foucault regards discourse as a central human activity, but . . . is interested in the historical dimension of discursive *change*" (Selden, 1985, p. 98). Foucault points to the observation that discourses are always involved with power. A 'Hitler' or the Irish Republican Army or the Australian Government exercise real power through discourse that has real effects on many people's lives. Also sometimes called New Historicism, Foucault's ideas are concerned with personal freedom and state control.

Foucault's "pervasive image of the State is that of 'panoptic' (meaning all-seeing) surveillance . . . [maintained] not by physical force and intimidation, but by the power of its 'discursive practices'" (Barry, 1995, p. 176). The panopticon was designed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century as a prison which allowed for hitherto unprecedented surveillance of prisoners and isolation of the prisoners from each other. It was a circular prison that "consisted of tiered ranks of cells which could all be surveyed by a single warder positioned at the centre of the circle" (Barry, 1995, p. 176). Whereas Derrida is interested in textual discourse and interpretation, Foucault is interested in the political structures that limit the freedom of the individual and maintain the power of the state. "The Panopticon . . . must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men" (Foucault, 1992, p. 87). An analysis of this Foucauldian concept as it impacts on how A Wizard of Earthsea is read and meaning achieved

raises some thought-provoking issues.

For example, the hierarchical structure of Earthsea could be seen as reflecting Foucault's panopticon. The wizards, who themselves have a rigid hierarchical structure, represent the centre of the panopticon and from their privileged position they control and monitor all of Earthsea. Their power of control is maintained by what Foucault terms "discursive practices" (Barry, 1995, p. 176). For the wizards, particularly the Archmage and Masters, their discourse comprises a special and privileged knowledge of spoken and written words that exercise enormous power. No other inhabitants of Earthsea have access to such power except the dragons or those who dally with the Dark Powers. Such characters, like Yevaud, Serret, or Lord Benderesk, are represented in the novel as threats to the balance and order of Earthsea. The dragons are feared by the wizards and mages because not only do they possess awesome power but they operate totally outside the power structures on Roke. Such 'outsiders' to the Earthsea-panopticon threaten it because they undermine the discursive power of those who control it.

It is interesting to observe that the wizards have considerably reduced powers of observation and surveillance over those who exist outside their discursive realm. In addition, it might be argued that only those outside the panopticon exercise individual freedom. Those who live under the control of the wizards in the panoptic state of Earthsea may be seen as existing only in accordance with the power structures of the wizards and as actually experiencing little freedom because anything that threatens the structure of Earthsea is considered subversive and is not accepted. In this sense, they are isolated from each other in their lack of knowing anything other than the status quo.

In Earthsea there is very much a sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Those 'outside' include marauding pirates, witches, dragons, and the like

(those who exist in a contrary fashion to the dictates of the Earthsea-panopticon and are hence considered dangerous or evil). While those 'inside' include a variety of lords, wizards, farmers, merchants, seafarers, and so on (those who exist in a compliant way to the State control exerted by the mages). Ged's journey takes him from inside the panopticon to outside it and then back again. His shadow is very much representative of the 'outsiders' who often exercise power over aspects of Earthsea or those in it, but ultimately succumb to the enforced structure of the mages. Indeed, the shadow could be seen as championing the New Historicist concerns with the "liberal ideals of personal freedom and accepting and celebrating all forms of difference and 'deviance'" (Barry, 1995, p. 175). Reading the novel from such a Foucauldian perspective facilitates a different aspect to the examination of the human quest for meaning and purpose than is afforded by the Derridean position.

### Althusser

Althusser considers that "it is through ideology that individuals are constituted as 'subjects' - (*mis*)recognizing themselves as free and autonomous beings with unique subjectivities" (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p. 52). His theories concern ideology and the interpellation of the individual as subject (who thereafter becomes a subject who is also 'subject to'). Althusser postulates that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser, 1996, p. 58). Althusser asserts that ideology:

'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals . . . , or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects . . . by that very precise operation I have called interpellation or hailing. (Althusser, 1996, p. 58)

For Althusser, interpellation describes the situation were it appears that

choice is possible but in fact it is not. Interpellation or hailing is “the way the individual is encouraged to see herself or himself as an entity free and independent of social forces” (Barry, 1995, p. 165).

These theories may prove very useful as a methodological approach for reading literature in Religious Education because they are concerned with the place of the individual in society and how the individual is both situated in and subject to that society by ideology. For example, in A Wizard of Earthsea the existence of true names which are not generally shared with anyone else makes for some interesting discussions in light of Althusser’s concept of interpellation. In Earthsea no one has power over an individual without knowledge of that person’s true name. The shadow has power over Ged only because it does know his true name and can therefore transform Ged from individual into a subject that is subject to the shadow’s will.

### Bakhtin

Bakhtin’s theories are particularly interesting because he lived in Stalinist Russia and was unaware of post-Saussurean developments in the West. For Bakhtin language “was a field of ideological contention” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 117). In contrast to Derrida, Bakhtin is not interested in abstract linguistics “but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 232). For him words are not only linguistic signs but also socio-political signs that attribute value. At any “moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects, . . . but also . . . into languages that are socio-ideological languages” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 232). Bakhtin suggests there are two opposing forces simultaneously operating in language, the centripetal and the centrifugal. He does not historically situate a Derridean-type eruption in the life of language but points to historical literary developments in which these

forces can be examined. For example, Bakhtin sees in the epic the functioning of the centripetal force and in the 'novelizing' novel the functioning of the centrifugal force. Bakhtin considers that the 'unitary language' (the single 'official' language) operates in the midst of heteroglossia (the many 'other' languages). The unitary language "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical process of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 231). The heteroglossia, containing centrifugal forces, operates in an "uninterrupted process of decentralization and disunification" (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 233).

Bakhtin, working in a socio-political framework, is concerned with the interaction of opposing forces within language in relation to the social, historical, and ideological. "As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing . . . [language] lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 77). Meaning, in both literature and life, is determined by the relationship between 'self' and 'other'. While meaning for Derrida is concerned with provisional meaning in the Nietzschean position or the search for absolute meaning in the Rousseauistic position, Bakhtin is concerned with meaning as inextricably bound up with addressivity. Bakhtin situates meaning in the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. "The word . . . is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 76).

A great deal of information about character identity in A Wizard of Earthsea comes from character interplay. For example, much is learnt about Ged from his relationship to other characters, such as Jasper, Vetch, or Ogion, as well as from his relationship to his shadow. The tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces can also be seen in addressivity. Whether characters function centripetally or centrifugally,

however, is dependent on which characters are in dialogic relationship. Ged initially functions as a centrifugal force against the centripetal force of the School of Roke. However, after he has released his shadow, it is now the shadow that functions as the centrifugal force and Ged who functions as the centripetal force. Meaning is only achieved in the dialogue between the addresser and the addressee and not, as with Derrida, in textual linguistic structure. Bakhtin emphasizes the social and historical contexts in which such dialogues take place. For Bakhtin (1994) all utterances take “meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment” (p. 76).

Although both Derrida (in the Nietzschean position) and Bakhtin view meaning as something that is not fixed and as being infinitely potential and open rather than finitely completed and closed, it is Bakhtin alone who suggests that meaning is shared: that is, meaning belongs to everyone. “The word in language is half someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 77). For Bakhtin the locus of meaning is in the dialogue between the speaker and the recipient rather than, as with Derrida, in the signifier. The conflicting tensions between the centripetal and centrifugal forces can be seen in the tensions between the heteroglossia and the unitary language. Every word, and therefore meaning, “participates in the ‘unitary language’. . . and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 233). In Bakhtin’s theory the novelist re-works the heteroglossia so that a plethora of languages can be discerned from within the novel’s dialogues. His emphasis on the dialogic discourse encompasses concerns with addressivity and meaning and the underlying dialogic nature of existence.

In A Wizard of Earthsea the dialogic discourse can be examined in the different languages evident in the novel. Traces of the unitary language (the centripetal forces) can be discerned in references to

the maintenance of the Equilibrium by the Master Hand (Le Guin, 1993, p. 48) while the heteroglossia (the centrifugal forces) can be seen in references to the usurping of the Equilibrium by Serret (p. 112). Bakhtin's interest in language as a socio-ideological phenomenon inevitably furnishes an approach to reading literature that is less concerned with linguistics and semiotics than is Derrida's approach.

Both Derrida and Bakhtin express considerable interest in language and meaning. Derrida, in his two types of interpretation, advocates a simultaneous reading of literature in all its difference: one that, from the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean positions, seeks centres and follows threads. Bakhtin suggests a socio-ideological approach to literature that encompasses an understanding that meaning is shared and is inextricably tied up in the dialogic relationship of the addresser and the addressee. Both Derrida and Bakhtin are concerned with the common ground of diametrically opposed but simultaneously lived positions: for Derrida the common ground of the Rousseauistic and Nietzschean interpretations and for Bakhtin a common ground of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Moreover, the implications of their respective theories, each fostering a direction and emphasis lacking in the other, provide complementary positions from which to read literature in Religious Education that are rich and multifaceted, providing a variety of ways for studying meaning, society, and the individual.