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The Heroine's Journey in Ursula K. Le Guin's  
*The Tombs of Atuan*

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To my grandparents, the most beautiful stars in the sky, the ones that have guided me this far and have taught me to be who I am today.  
I love you and I miss you.

A mis abuelos, las estrellas más bonitas del cielo, las que me han guiado hasta aquí y me han enseñado a ser quien soy hoy en día.  
Os quiero y os echo de menos.

## ABSTRACT

Until the 1950s, speculative fiction was mostly dominated by male figures. However, with the growth of feminist ideology and the feminist movements, women gained recognition within the field. Ursula K. Le Guin contributed to it with works such as *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), her first novel with a heroine as the main character. With the popularization of stories that centred on the journey of the heroine, it became evident that Joseph Campbell's 'monomyth' had certain shortcomings, which led to the development of alternative patterns for the heroine. Therefore, the main purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the heroine's journey in *The Tombs of Atuan*, and to determine whether it adheres to any pattern derived from myth criticism. The models that are going to be considered are those proposed by Campbell and by two female scholars, Valerie Estelle Frankel and Maureen Murdock. The analysis will lead to a consideration of Le Guin's oeuvre in terms of her evolving representation of the heroine. As will be contended, the increasingly feminist ideology in her novels runs parallel to the gradual acceptance of women writers and feminist thought in society.

**Keywords:** Ursula Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, the heroine's journey, myth criticism, feminist speculative fiction.

## RESUMEN

Hasta la década de los 50, la ficción especulativa estaba, mayoritariamente, representada por hombres. Sin embargo, con la expansión de la ideología feminista y el incremento de los movimientos feministas, las mujeres ganaron reconocimiento en este ámbito. Úrsula K. Le Guin contribuyó a ello con publicaciones como *Las Tumbas de Atúan* (1970), su primera novela con una heroína como personaje principal. Debido a la popularidad de las historias centradas en el viaje de la heroína, fue evidente que el 'monomito' de Joseph Campbell presentaba algunos defectos, lo que llevó al desarrollo de esquemas alternativos para la heroína. De este modo, el objetivo principal de esta tesis es analizar el viaje de la heroína en *Las Tumbas de Atúan* y determinar si se adhiere a algún esquema derivado de la crítica del mito. Los modelos que se van a tener en cuenta son los propuestos por Campbell y dos académicas, Valerie Estelle Frankel y Maureen Murdock. El análisis conducirá a una consideración con respecto a la representación evolutiva de la heroína de Le Guin en su obra. Como se argumentará, la ideología cada vez más feminista de sus novelas es paralela a la aceptación gradual de las escritoras del pensamiento feminista en la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** Úrsula Le Guin, *Las Tumbas de Atúan*, el viaje de la heroína, la crítica del mito, ficción especulativa feminista.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most common features of adventure stories is the predominance of male figures as main characters or heroes. By way of illustration, there are classics such as *Beowulf*, being Beowulf the hero, *the Pilgrim's Progress*, with Christian as the main character, or *The Last of the Mohicans*, where the hero is Natty Bumppo; the same happens with many contemporary works, such as *Harry Potter*, with Harry Potter as the hero, *The Lord of the Rings*, being Frodo Baggins the main character, or *Star Wars*, where the hero is Luke Skywalker.

Despite differences in plot and setting, most of these male heroes tend to develop in similar ways throughout the story arc. This fact led Joseph Campbell, a key myth critic, to develop the theory of the 'monomyth', also called 'the hero's journey' in his monograph *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). This theory states that all the heroes in adventure stories follow the same pattern: they grow up in an ordinary world, they are summoned to an adventure (which they firstly reject but then accept), and then, they face a series of trials that teach the hero a lesson he will share with all the community. This theory achieved great success, becoming the referent for the study and criticism of adventure stories that have male heroes as main characters.

One of the reasons why male heroes have predominated is that writers of adventure stories have almost exclusively been male. In other words, male dominance has long characterized authorship as well. This is particularly evident in the case of speculative genres such as science fiction, which has been written, mainly, by men. Very few women attempted to write, and if they did so, they were eclipsed by men and, consequently, disregarded. Among the female writers who tried to contribute to science fiction, Ursula K. Le Guin is one of the most remarkable. Her career as a novelist began

in 1966 with the publication of *Rocannon's World* and her fame would gradually increase with later works, leaving an enormous mark on the history of science fiction.

Her earliest publications had one thing in common: they dealt with a male hero and were male-oriented. It was not until 1971 that she wrote *The Tombs of Atuan*, her first novel dealing with a female protagonist. Despite being a fantasy story much like those that Campbell studied, in which the plot moves along as the hero goes through a number of stages, Le Guin's story does not follow the pattern described in Campbell's theory. Indeed, with the flourishing of feminist fantasy and speculative fiction, female critics began to develop their own theories about the pattern followed by heroines. This is the case of Maureen Murdock, with her study *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (1990) and Valerie Estelle Frankel, who wrote *From Girl to Goddess: the Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend* in 2010. In these works, Murdock and Frankel present their own alternatives to Campbell's 'hero's journey' pattern by studying adventure plots in which the protagonist is a heroine and putting forward their own 'heroine's quest' schemes.

In short, male dominance and the general absence of female writers and protagonists in speculative fiction led to the almost total displacement of women in this field. However, the passing of time and the increasing appearance of stories with heroines as main characters would inspire critics to direct their attention towards the heroine's quest. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to analyse the journey of Le Guin's heroine in *The Tombs of Atuan*. Resorting to the analytical tools provided by myth criticism, and more specifically, to Campbell's, Frankel's and Murdock's theories of the hero/heroine's quest, this study will seek to determine the extent to which Le Guin's protagonist adheres to any of these proposed patterns, and to discuss the reasons why this might be so. In order to achieve those aims, this dissertation will follow the following structure. After the

Introduction, the second chapter reviews the theoretical framework and contextualizes Le Guin and her novel in social and historical terms. Then, there is a detailed analysis of each step the heroine follows considering the patterns proposed by the three scholars mentioned previously. Finally, the Conclusion discusses the main findings regarding Le Guin's adherence or departure from the proposed patterns for her own heroine's quest.

## 2. CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Context

Ursula K. Le Guin was born in 1929. At a very young age, she became attracted to the field of speculative fiction. She wrote short stories for magazines, but it was not until 1966 that she published her first novel, *Rocannon's World*. Two years later, she wrote the first book of the *Earthsea* trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). Although she was a very prolific author, she faced a heavy obstacle. At that time, the field of speculative fiction was quite limited for women. In the introduction she wrote for *the Tombs of Atuan* she acknowledges that, while she was writing the story in 1969, she did not know any female hero in heroic fantasy apart from those in Ariosto and Tasso's works, published in the Renaissance. So, female authorship, as well as female gender, was totally absent from this genre. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen argues that "SF works that focused on female preoccupations and interests, as well as on the impact of new technology and science on women's lives, were soon unkindly labelled as 'diaper fiction' in the 1950s" ("Feminist Dystopia" 1). In spite of that, Le Guin and some of her contemporaries, perhaps inspired by the growing strength of the feminist movement, never gave up and kept on fighting until they succeed in pushing speculative fiction from a male-dominated genre into a more inclusive form. When asked by Jonathan White about her introduction into the feminist movement, Le Guin stated:

My introduction was slow and late. All my early fiction tends to be rather male-centred. A couple of the *Earthsea* books have no women in them at all or only marginal women figures. That's how hero stories worked; they were about men. With the exception of just a few feminists like Joanna Russ, science fiction was pretty much male-dominated up to the 1960s. Women who wrote in that field often used pen names. [...] My first feminist text was *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which I started writing in 1967. [...] I gradually realized that my own fiction was telling me that I could no longer ignore the feminine. (101)



Carl Freedman has argued that the feminist movement of the 1960s contributed to the creation of an extensive system of journals, conferences and women's-studies programs (279). He also adds that thanks to that, the 1970s seemed to be the golden age of women's science fiction (278). Apart from the publications by Le Guin, those years saw the publications of Joanna Russ's best work, *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Octavia Butler's path-breaking novels, *Kindred* (1979) and *Wild Seed* (1980). As Aliaga-Lavrijsen points out, "after the boom of feminist science fiction in the 1970s, women writers have been publishing much more and getting more attention by critics" ("Feminist Perspective" 60). Thus, Le Guin and her contemporaries increasingly became important figures within the field of speculative fiction as they opened a window of opportunities for younger female writers.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

During the 1940s and 1960s (although it lasted until the 1980s) myth criticism became a very popular approach for the analysis of literary works. The popularity of this theory was due to the quick development of modern anthropology since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is worth mentioning the influence for the development of this critical approach of works such as *The Golden Bough* (1890) by James Frazer and *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949) by Mircea Eliade. These confirm the existence of a series of recurrent basic structures in myths and legends from different cultures. Carl Gustav Jung, greatly contributed to the development of the field thanks to works such as *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959), which brought psychoanalytic theory closer to anthropology. Jung put forward the idea that the subconscious—widely studied by Sigmund Freud—is not only individual but collective as well. Something common between the different tendencies that study the relationship between myth and literature is the belief in the utility of psychoanalysis and anthropology for the study of literary

works, paying attention to the symbolic images and subconscious and inherited mythic models that exist in the human mind.

As it has been mentioned previously, Joseph Campbell was one of the most outstanding figures in myth criticism. He was a very prolific author whose diverse works on mythology analysed the universal functions of myth in various human cultures and mythic figures in a wide range of literatures (Segal). He played an important role as he introduced and explained in his best-known work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the notion of the 'monomyth'. It was understood as the pattern the hero followed in almost all the adventure stories to a new, divine world. As Segal explains, "the encounter with the divine occurs in adulthood rather than childhood, involves interaction with gods rather than with parents, and is loving rather than hostile. Understood psychologically, the journey symbolizes the rediscovery of the unconscious, from which an adult has lost contact in the process of growing up" (Segal).

However, it is important to highlight the fact that the pattern suggested by Campbell derived from his analysis from works with male heroes, so the problem came when there was a work with a heroine as the main character. Campbell's 'monomyth' became a quite popular theory, but it had a huge limitation, it did not seem to apply to works with female figures as protagonists. This constraint led to the appearance of female scholars who analysed a large number of stories with heroines as main characters, leading to the development of alternative patterns of the heroine's journey. Particularly useful examples are those of Maureen Murdock and Valerie Estelle Frankel.

Maureen Murdock explores mythology and the heroine's journey in her book *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (1990). She suggests a pattern that derives in part from Campbell's, with a circular structure that moves clockwise. According to Murdock, the main goal of the heroine is the search for identity. In her

analysis, the first step of the pattern is that of separation from the feminine. It is followed by an identification with the masculine and after that, the beginning of the road of trials in which the heroine has to overcome a series of obstacles. Then, she faces an illusory boon of success: “our heroine feels strong within herself, knows her capabilities [...] She has achieved the power, recognition and success in the outer world” (Murdock 71). However, that success is ‘illusory’ because it is followed by the feeling of never being enough, perpetuated by male: “when the unconscious masculine takes over, a woman may feel that no matter what she does or how she does it, it is never enough. She never feels satisfied with completing a task because he always urges her to pursue another” (Murdock 76). In addition to that, there is a step that Murdock calls ‘strong women can say no’ in which the heroine suffers a series of betrayals, for instance, by the father (forcing the daughter to marry) or by God (the heroine being a woman would never be enough for God who has always been portrayed as a man). Once the heroine is successful in the previous phase, there is the initiation and descent to the goddess and an urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine. Finally, there is a healing of the mother/daughter split and a finding of the inner man with heart. To this scheme, Murdock adds a final stage called ‘beyond duality,’ in which the duality between the feminine and the masculine is healed.

Valerie Frankel, a practicing psychotherapist, public speaker, and author, puts forward another very relevant model for the heroine’s quest in her book *From Girl to Goddess: the Heroine’s Journey through Myth and Legend* (2010). In it, she analyses the common pattern the heroine follows in adventure stories. Then, taking Campbell’s pattern for the hero’s quest, she divides the heroine’s journey into several stages, each of them with different characteristics. It has a similar beginning to that of Campbell: there is a heroine who grows in an ordinary world and receives a call to adventure which she refuses. However, there is a mentor and a talisman that lead her to embrace the adventure.

Then, there is a journey through the unconscious in which she faces the first threshold and finds allies and enemies. After that step, the heroine meets the ‘other’. Here, there is a ‘shapechanger as lover,’ a confrontation with the father, abuse and healing, and sacred marriage. And similar to Murdock’s scheme, the next step is that of ‘facing the self,’ with a descent into the darkness, a confrontation with the deadly mother, a process of healing the wounded shadow, a reward, a flight, and a return. Finally, the last stage is that of ‘goddesshood and wholeness,’ characterized by rebirth and the heroine becoming a ‘mistress of both worlds.’

The patterns proposed by these critics should be considered when analysing Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970). This book is the second within the *Earthsea* series<sup>1</sup> and the first one (out of two) with a heroine as the main character: Arha/Tenar. As my analysis will show, some of the steps the heroine follows in the book are the same as those proposed by Campbell, but many of them divert from the pattern established in his ‘monomyth’. That is the reason why the work of two scholars mentioned previously, Maureen Murdock and Valerie Estelle Frankel, might be profitably used to analyse Le Guin’s novel. Their suggestions are going to be taken into consideration when exploring Arha/Tenar’s journey.

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<sup>1</sup> The series is composed of the following novels: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales from Earthsea* (2001) and *The Other Wind* (2001). Nine short stories by Ursula Le Guin are also set in Earthsea.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF URSULA LE GUIN'S *THE TOMBS OF ATUAN***

#### **3.1 Step One: A New Identity**

Campbell's monomyth begins in the Ordinary World, which is the place where the Hero lives as a conventional person before the story begins. This is also the case of Tenar, the protagonist of *The Tombs of Atuan*, who as the Prologue explains, is born to a regular family and then chosen to become the new Priestess of the Tombs. The first and second stages according to Campbell's pattern would be the Call to Adventure and the Refusal, which are also the beginning of the heroine's journey in Frankel's proposal. Murdock, however, proposes an alternative stage, which she calls 'the separation from the feminine'. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the Prologue anticipates a forthcoming separation of the main character from her parents. The prologue, together with the first chapter ('The Eaten One') coincides with Murdock's first stage of the heroine's journey: the separation from the feminine that Tenar goes through as she is taken away from her family

As Murdock states in her book: "the heroine's first task toward individuation is to separate from her (mother)" (29). This kind of introduction is anticipating that the little girl will be separated from her family and, consequently, this implies a separation from the mother, as Murdock puts forward in the book. As the father says, "she isn't ours, she never was since they came here and said she must be the Priestess at the Tombs" (5). When the day comes, she must leave their parents to take the position of Priestess.

Murdock defends that "a daughter may struggle with this separation process her whole life, some making a more dramatic break than others" (29). In this story, the break with the mother is not as dramatic as in other stories, e.g. *A Very Easy Death* by Simone de Beauvoir (it deals with the final days of a mother) or *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (novel dealing a mother who does not understand her daughter). However, the

effects of this separation process can be seen all through the book as the heroine makes references to her previous life before she became Priestess. Moreover, Murdock defends that “the mother/daughter relationship and the separation from the mother is so complex that in most women’s literatures and fairy tales the mother remains absent, dead, or villainous” (33). The absence of the figure of the mother together with the very few references Tenar makes to her throughout the book proves the idea stated by Murdock.

Thus, Tenar has to abandon her family, her life and her customs to start from scratch. This abandonment is also related to that separation from the feminine. In the prologue, we learn that her name is Tenar, but after the ritual process described in Chapter One, she is named ‘the Eaten One’ or ‘Arha’: “I’m not Tenar anymore [...]. The little girl, who had no name anymore but Arha, the Eaten One, lay on her back looking steadily at the dark” (10-11). Incidentally, this is the name that all the previous Priestess were given, as each new Priestess is considered to be a reincarnation of the previous one. Tenar has lost her name but she has lost more than that: she has lost her identity. According to Alba Jimeno Ruiz de Larrinaga “the loss of one’s name would signify the loss of self” (12). Therefore, that loss of name implies the loss of everything that she was before. She is a new girl, with a new identity, a new life, and a new family. As Charlotte Spivack aptly claims, “her individual identity is... sacrificed to her assigned role as priestess of the ancient underworld powers. Her supposed rebirth as a priestess represents her death as an individual” (33).

Therefore, the first step the heroine follows fits more within the scheme suggested by Murdock who proposes a separation from the feminine. Tenar must abandon her mother and her father, as well as her previous life. She loses her name which means the loss of her identity, also understood as a separation from her feminine.

### 3.2 Step Two: Meet Manan

The next step in the hero's journey according to Campbell's model is Meeting with the Mentor, whereby the hero may be given supernatural aid. Frankel, for her part, also talks about the existence of a mentor that makes the heroine embrace the adventure and guides her through the road of trials. As she states "to guide them toward their goals, epic heroes have mentors [...]. The kindly advisor is mostly tutor, brimming with all the wisdom of the world, incredibly powerful, yet gentle and kindly" (Frankel 36). In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the second chapter introduces the character of Manan, an eunuch. He is the one who shares with Arha important information regarding her position as Priestess: "now tell me how I was chosen! And he would tell her again" (13). In addition to that, he acts as an advisor of Arha as well as being the character to whom Arha tells her worries: "not long ago she had been driven to speak of it. She had to talk, she thought, or she would go mad. It was Manan she talked to [...]. To her surprise he had had an answer for her" (26). Thus, it is the character of Manan the one who could be considered as Arha's mentor. He advises and takes care of her and shares all his wisdom with her: "Arha said nothing, but her eyes flashed. Again, Manan had shown her a new way of seeing things. [...] Yet Manan was right" (28).

Arha's connection with Manan also coincides with Murdock's next stage: after the rejection of the feminine, Murdock proposes the identification with the masculine. In her book, she claims that "during the second stage of the heroine's journey a woman wishes to identify with the masculine or to be rescued by the masculine [...]. Our heroine looks for role models who can show her the steps along the way. These male allies may take the form of a father, boyfriend [...]" (49). In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Manan acts as a father, he is the one who visits Arha at night before sleeping and takes care of her, as mentioned previously: "the big, waiting hands came up and drew her to him, held her

gently, smoothed her braided hair. ‘There, there. Little honeycomb, little girl...’ She heard the husky murmur in the deep hollow of his chest, and clung to him” (24). Manan also addresses Arha in a very affectionate way and worries about her, as a father would, “he offers her comfort after she is made nameless, refers to her in kindness and with petnames [...]” (Sobat 29).

Thus, the steps both scholars propose are highly related as both point to Manan. While Frankel, following Campbell, suggests the existence of a mentor that makes the heroine embrace the adventure and guides her through the road of trials, Murdock’s suggestion is related to the identification with the masculine. She defends that the heroine looks for role models that may take the form of a father. In both steps, it is the figure of Manan, the eunuch, the one who best fits within the description.

### **3.3 Step Three: Into the Tombs**

After separating from the feminine and identifying with the masculine (Murdock’s model) or taking that male figure as a mentor (Frankel’s model), the heroine embraces the adventure and faces the first threshold. This step is common to both Frankel and Campbell. However, Murdock gets straight to the point and proposes an immediate facing of a road of trials.

In *The Tombs of Atuan*, the first trial the heroine will have to face is that of officiating the sacrifice of prisoners who have sinned against their lord. However, in order to do that, first, she has to cross the first threshold, which in Le Guin’s novel takes the shape of a literal as well as a metaphorical crossing: Arha has to enter the labyrinth of the tombs, and in so doing she is also symbolically entering the world of the unconscious. As Frankel points out “on her quest, the heroine will cross ‘the crack between worlds’, the entrance to a new geography and a new psychological landscape” (59). She also adds that



“when the heroine poises herself on the edge of the unconscious world, she hesitates. [...] And here is where the heroine grows into her hidden powers” (57). At first, Arha is frightened, as it is the first time she enters the Tombs of Atuan, and she does not know what she is going to find inside: “Arha’s heart jumped; the blood pounded in her throat” (31). Nevertheless, she remembers she is the Priestess, she belongs there and is powerful there, so nothing could happen to her: “this is my place, I belong here, I will not be afraid!” (31).

Therefore, entering the caves and the labyrinth means entering the world of the unconscious. Once Arha is inside the caves, she notices a different atmosphere to that of the outer world: “it was absolutely black. There was no light. The dark seemed to press like wet felt upon the open eyes” (31). The description of the place produces a sense of anxiety to the reader, as it does not seem to be a safe place. However, as Arha follows the path, she seems to become more empowered and confident: “Arha liked this game in the dark, she wanted a greater puzzle to be set her” (33). Frankel in her book speaks of a forest as source of feminine power: “the forest, a feminine symbol, represents the dangerous side of the unconscious, its ability to destroy reason. [...] This forest, dark and mysterious, is a font of feminine power, the deep unconscious made manifest. As the heroine travels it, she explores the deepest recesses of her soul” (59). This forest can be compared to the maze and caves Arha explores. In the beginning, she fears, the atmosphere is dark and mysterious. Nevertheless, as she goes in, she discovers her powers.

In short, this third step of Arha’s journey fits within the schemes proposed by both Campbell and Frankel. They put forward the idea that before facing a road of trials, the hero/heroine should cross the first threshold. In this case, this threshold could be understood as entering the world of the unconscious; that is, exploring the caves and

mazes that lie under the Tombs of Atuan. By contrast, instead of crossing a threshold, Murdock proposes the heroine's immediate facing of a road of trials.

### **3.4 Step Four: The Beginning of the Adventure**

As mentioned previously, Campbell and Frankel propose as fourth step the facing of a road of trials after the hero/heroine has crossed that first threshold, which is also Murdock's third stage. Campbell includes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* a description of the hero's descent to the special world and the facing of a number of tests and enemies: "the most difficult stages of the adventure now begin, when the depths of the underworld with their remarkable manifestations open before him..." (91). Murdock, however, is one step ahead and talks about an illusory boom of success on the part of the heroine after having faced that road of trials.

The first trial Arha faces is the one in which she has to decide and officiate the sacrifice of the sinners who rebelled against the lord: "the Priestess of the Tombs knows best what manner of death will please her Masters, and it is hers to choose. There are many ways" (34). As a novice Priestess, the first punishment that comes to her mind is hewing off the men's heads. However, Kossil, one of the Priestess who trained Arha, seems not to agree with that punishment and Arha notices it. Then, the heroine decides to impose another punishment and lets them starve to death: "let them not bring any more food or water then. Let the torch go out" (35). When Murdock talks about the road of trials in her book, she defends that in the inner journey, the heroine will face forces of her own self-doubt, indecisiveness, paralysis, and fear (59). This is what happens to Arha; she imposes the punishments, but she is always looking for the approval of Kossil, she doubts of herself: "is this well, Kossil?", "it is well, mistress" (35).

Frankel, in her book, following Campbell, talks about the existence of allies and enemies throughout this road of trials, “for just as she has small helpers, she has small enemies [...]. When the heroine enters the forest or another realm of the unconscious, she has left the world of the logic and entered that of the spirit, the anima” (65). After having seen the three prisoners and faced her first trial, Arha faints. She feels weak and ashamed, and each night she has nightmares about the three men. These bad dreams could be considered her enemies, making her question her power and strength as does not have the courage to enter the caves again. As Frankel puts it, “in this world, the heroine is weak” (66). Another enemy that will appear in forthcoming chapters is Kossil. Although she seems to be on Tenar’s side as an ally, she happens to be another important enemy. She is ambitious and selfish and he envies Arha’s power and position as superior Priestess: “it would take very great strength to stand up against Kossil’s jealousy of a higher status than her own, her hatred of anything she herself did not control” (52). This envy and hate are the main factors that will turn Kossil into another important enemy of Arha’s.

However, the heroine has allies as well, “both heroes and heroines need the advice of tiny creatures magical amulets of the goddess, or other feminine powers to defeat these twisted voices of the unconscious” (Frankel 66). Apart from Manan, mentioned previously, the character of Thar, the other Priestess who trained Arha, plays a very important role in her life. She is the one who gives Arha information about the labyrinth and the caves that lie under the Tombs:

But when Arha asked her, “What is the way from the iron door that stands open to the Painted Room?”, or, “How does the way run from the Room of Bones to the tunnel by the river?” then Thar would be silent a little, and then recite the strange directions she had learned long before from Arha-that-was [...]. Thar showed Arha the many spy holes that opened into the maze, in every building and temple of the Place, and even under rocks out of doors. The spiderweb of stone-walled tunnels underlay all the Place and even beyond its walls; there were miles of tunnels, down there in the dark. (43-44)

Despite her nightmares and her weakness, she gathers strength and decides to go to the underworld following the instructions Thar had given her. Those enemies seem to be another trial she has to overcome. They try to push her out of the way, but it is her courage and her alliance with Thar that lead her to defeat the voices of the unconscious and explore the caves on her own: “one night in early spring she took a candle lantern and went down with it, unlit, through the Undertomb to the second passage to the left of the passage from the red rock door” (44).

Thus, *The Tombs of Atuan* follows the pattern proposed by Campbell as well as by Frankel and Murdock regarding the facing of a road of trials. Throughout this road, Arha finds enemies she has to defeat, such as her inner voices and dreams, and allies, such as Manan and Thar, that help her keep ongoing and move on to the next stage. Her ability to control her fear and to master the labyrinth of the Tombs corresponds to the stage that Murdock calls “the boon of success.” Facing these tests and enemies thanks to her courage and the help of her allies, while she also learns who she can and cannot trust, Arha completes her initiation into what Campbell calls the Special World and confirms her commitment to the journey.

### **3.5 Step Five: Meet the Soulmate**

At this point in the heroine’s journey, Frankel proposes as the next stage ‘Meeting the Other,’ which is the alternative for the heroine to Campbell’s ‘The Meeting with the Goddess’ (in which the hero is given hope by the goddess, a representative of the feminine ideal) or ‘Woman as Temptress’ (in which the hero faces temptations, often of a pleasurable nature, that may lead him to abandon or stray from his quest). This proves the limitation of Campbell’s model, mentioned in the theoretical framework: Campbell’s ‘monomyth’ could only be applied to stories with male heroes because of steps like these one.

According to Frankel, the Other that the heroine meets might be a shapechanger as a lover. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Arha meets a male figure, Ged,) who will play a key role in the story. While Arha is exploring the caves and labyrinths she notices there is a light where it should be dark: “gray, not black. A dull edge of pallor, just visible, where nothing could be visible, where all must be black” (56). She realizes there is someone in the sacred place. This is the second trial she faces: the capture of this stranger that was disturbing her Gods. She decides to capture him in the caves: “this, suddenly, with all her strength, she dragged downward. Blue sparks leapt out in a falling shower. [...] She put out her hands and felt, only a few inches before her face, the pocked surface of an iron door. [...] She had caught her thief” (58-59). She is afraid and does not know what to do with him. She knows that he should be put to death, but she cannot bring herself to do it, which incidentally brings her to defy Kossil for the first. Finally, she decides to keep him in captivity but alive: “I want the man to live, Manan. He’ll die of the cold, look how he shakes now” (72). Frankel argues that it is the danger that lies behind that attracts the heroine (80).

However, Arha discovers that this man is not a normal one. He has managed to enter the Crypt, a sacred place where only specific individuals survive, but he is alive. Marina Warner referring to stories with a man as shapechanger comments: “this type of story places the male lover, the Beast, in the position of the mysterious, threatening, possibly fatal, unknown, and Beauty, the heroine, as the questor who discovers his true nature” (in Frankel 76). That ‘Beast’ Warner mentions would be the magician, who is presented as a mysterious man (he has survived to the Crypt), threatening (he is disturbing Arha’s Gods), and unknown. Nevertheless, Arha ends up discovering that he is a magician who is trying to steal the talisman hidden in the caves. She discovers his true nature: “he must have come by the red rock door. Only a sorcerer could open it. A sorcerer...” (60).

Despite that, their relationship becomes progressively closer and stronger, to the extent that they become one. Ged makes her realize the powers she has as Priestess and they fight together to get out the Tombs: “she looked from the horror of earthquake to the man beside her [...] ‘You held it back’ she said [...]. ‘You held back the earthquake, the anger of the dark’” (118). As Frankel points out,

this monster is the animus, the submerged male side of the heroine. [...] By integrating the animus into herself, the heroine journeys towards wholeness, adding to her power before she need face the more terrible initiation through death. Sometimes this is fulfilled through animal helpers, dwarves, or other male companions, friends and confidants who teach her needed skills. (76)

Thus, it is the character of Ged that Arha needs to become aware of all of her strength and power, while at the same time Arha is what Ged needs to escape the Crypt and survive. As Frankel puts it, “this is a melding of personalities and traits, the perfect balance of male and female abilities, yin and yang” (77).

For Murdock the next stage in the heroine’s journey is the suffering of a betrayal. As mentioned previously, until now Kossil had been an ally but, from this point onwards, she will be Arha’s enemy. Kossil is jealous of Arha’s superior position. Because of that, Arha has always tried to avoid giving orders to Kossil and has always followed her advice: “the woman called the girl ‘mistress’, and should obey her if commanded. But Arha learned not to command Kossil” (52). Instead, she always tried to please her. As Murdock puts it: “we don’t want to disappoint others; so much of our self-image is invested in making other people happy” (92). However, Arha, for the first time, rebels against Kossil’s authority, which enrages her: “Kossil’s face seemed to withdraw into the black hood, like a desert tortoise’s into its shell, sour and slow and cold” (70). Arha deceives the Priestess into thinking that the magician has died but she keeps him alive, hiding him from her.

The problem comes when Kossil discovers the truth by spying on the heroine: “her eyes found high in the dark arching roof the small square that was the spy hole from the treasury of the Twin God’s Temple. [...] Kossil had been listening” (84-85). In this way, Kossil’s dark side comes to light: “well, what did it matter, what harm could Kossil do? Even as she asked herself the question she knew the answer. Nothing is easier to kill than a caged hawk” (85). So, it is Arha’s duty to protect Ged from Kossil: “this is the only place I know where you can stay alive. Kossil will kill you or make me kill you, Sparrowhawk. But here she cannot reach” (89). Although Arha is the highest Priestess and the one who gives orders, she always did what Kossil wanted in order to please her. The heroine always lived in the shadow of Kossil. Jean Shinoda Bolen argues that “when we are doing something because it is expected of us or to please somebody else or because we are afraid of somebody else, we become further alienated from a sense of living authentically” (in Murdock 92).

Therefore, both steps—the existence of a shapechanger as a lover (Frankel’s suggestion) and the betrayal the heroine suffers on the part of Kossil (Murdock’s suggestion)—can be applied to *The Tombs of Atuan*. On the course of the road of trials, Arha meets the figure of Ged, who will become determinant in the heroine’s journey (this proves Frankel’s idea) and together they will fight against Kossil, who betrays Arha (Murdock’s idea).

### **3.6 Step Six: A New Version of the Self**

The penultimate step that both female scholars suggest is almost the same. Frankel’s proposal is ‘descent into darkness’, while Murdock’s one is ‘descent to goddess’. In this step, Campbell talks about an ‘atonement with the father’, but his suggestion does not fit Arha’s journey in *The Tombs of Atuan*: the father neither appears nor is mentioned.

Murdock quotes in her book Sylvia Brinton Perera's words when she says that by saying no to the patriarchy, heroines begin the descent into the spirit of the goddess (92). Although in the previous step Arha said no to Kossil's authority, this could also be considered the beginning of her descent to the goddess. She is no longer eclipsed by Kossil. Murdock claims that "the descent is characterized as a journey to the underworld, the dark night of the soul, the belly of the whale, the meeting of the dark goddess, or simply as a depression" (95). Thus, the confrontation with Kossil can be considered the meeting of the dark goddess that Murdock talks about. Now, Arha acts on her own, without taking advice from anyone. However, Murdock also argues that "this journey to the underworld is filled with confusion and grief, alienation and disillusion, rage and despair" (95). Arha is a young heroine who has to go ahead alone. She has to confront her enemy without any aid and has to keep Ged alive. In order to do so, she has to make decisions that may lead her to some kind of confusion and despair: "her despair grew so great that it burst her breast open" (91).

Nevertheless, after so much psychic pain and suffering, this break with Kossil makes her gather strength. Murdock argues that the heroine "experiences a loss of identity, a falling away of the perimeters of a known role, and the fear that accompanies loss" (97). Thanks to that break, Arha is reborn into a new heroine, a new self. She retrieves her previous identity: "'I am Tenar', she said, not aloud, and she shook with cold, and terror, and exultation, there under the open, sunwashed sky, 'I have my name back. I am Tenar!'" (92). She feels more powerful and confident, she knows how to face Kossil now: "she felt quite capable of handling Kossil, after breakfast" (92). Thus, it is Arha's break from Kossil what makes her grow as an individual, as a heroine. This allows her to become the woman she was but a wiser and more mature one. This is what is understood by Murdock as the 'descent into goddess'.



In the same line with Murdock, Frankel suggests in her book a ‘descent into darkness’. She explains this step by talking about the Inanna’s myth. It is about two characters, the heroine who brings light and the other who shadows the previous one: “the shadow loathes the heroine, who has all the youth, beauty, and advantages of the upper world. Thus her rejection (that of the character who brings shadow) of this lighter self” (121). As mentioned previously, it is Kossil the character that envies Arha because of her power and higher position, and because she eclipses her. As Frankel claims, “heroines descend into the darkness, seeking to reintegrate” (122). The heroine rebels against Kossil by descending into the Tombs one last time to meet Ged, and she will be reborn into a new woman, a wiser and more mature one who is now free from the constraints of her previous life: “you are free, Tenar. You were taught to be a slave, but you have broken free” (103), Ged tells her. As this quotation shows, Arha is no longer Arha, ‘the Eaten One’; she has recovered the previous identity she had given up at the beginning. Frankel also adds that “the underworld claims one of Inanna’s beloveds, and she must choose: faithful servant, adored child, handsome lover. [...] Without it, the heroine can never leave the underworld” (125). Following this statement, Tenar decides to abandon the underworld with Ged. They have fought together to survive and escape the caves. In so doing, they become one.

Therefore, this stage in Arha/Tenar’s journey coincides with those proposed by both scholars, which are in turn similar to one another. Whereas Frankel proposes a ‘descent into darkness’, Murdock suggests a ‘descent to goddess’. Despite having different names, in both of models the same thing happens: the heroine confronts Kossil, frees herself from her chains and is reborn into a new self, a wiser and more mature one, which comes with the recovery of the identity that had been taken away from her.

### 3.7 Step Seven: Wholeness of the Individual

The final step is similar in both Frankel's and Murdock's models, although they name them differently. Frankel's step is called 'Goddesshood and Wholeness' and Murdock's one entails a reconnection with the feminine. Conversely, the step proposed by Campbell consists of the hero's mastery of two worlds, followed by his 'Freedom to Live'. The former one does not quite fit *The Tombs of Atuan*, but the freedom that Campbell proposes is the one Tenar will achieve when she goes to live in Ged's village (which is mentioned at the very end of the novel, as Tenar and Ged are sailing towards that place).<sup>2</sup>

While explaining this stage in her model, Frankel talks about the rebirth of the heroine. It is after that rebirth that the heroine achieves 'Goddesshood and Wholeness'. She argues that "to achieve the greatest success, the heroine becomes a "goddess" herself" (162). But, in order to achieve that success, Arha had to face some previous obstacles. She has an important decision to make that will determine her future. Either she abandons Ged and lets him die in the underworld or she leaves the Tombs and starts from scratch with him:

You must make a choice. Either you must leave me, lock the door, go up to your altars and give me to your Masters; then go to the Priestess Kossil and make your peace with her – and that is the end of the story – or, you must unlock the door, and go out of it, with me. Leave the Tombs, leave Atuan, and come with me oversea. And that is the beginning of the story. You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You cannot be both. (108)

She has to choose between her rebirth into a new self, powerful and wise (the new Tenar), or the self that is eclipsed by Kossil (Arha):

"If I leave the service of the Dark Ones, they will kill me. If I leave this place I will die"

"You will not die. Arha will die"

"I cannot..."

"To be reborn ones must die, Tenar. It is not so hard as it looks from the other side." (108)

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Tenar's new life is the main topic in another book from the *Earthsea* series, *Tehanu*, as we will see presently.

Frankel argues that “this is the true meaning of descent and death: losing the old self in place of the new. [...] this period offers us the chance to reinvent ourselves in our new form” (163). It is not the overcoming of the obstacles what turns the heroine into a goddess, but the fact that after overcoming them, she becomes a new self. She also defends that “heroines descend into the underworld, returning in triumph and wisdom. [...] [The heroine] risk[s] herself completely on her quest, dying in order to be reborn more powerfully” (164). Tenar descends to the underworld, to the Tombs, decides to abandon her old self by confronting her enemies and fears, and becomes the initial but improved version of her self. In addition to that, she manages to get out of the caves with Ged and leave all that world that has enslaved her.

Similarly to Frankel, Murdock also talks about the renewal of the self as a way to reconnect with the feminine. After separating from the feminine when the heroine was ‘eaten’ by the Gods and losing her identity (Tenar turned into Arha, ‘the eaten one’), she achieves a reconnection with it. Murdock argues that “a woman who has made the descent has experienced the devouring, destroyer aspect of the feminine, who is in the service of the death and renewal of the self” (129). As mentioned previously, Arha goes to the underworld and faces many obstacles, such as defeating Kossil or making a life-changing decision that will determine her future. However, after overcoming these obstacles, which Campbell calls ‘the Ordeal’, Arha becomes a new self with more experience.

Murdock states that the sacred task of the feminine is “finding out about *being* instead of *doing*. [...] *Being* requires accepting oneself, staying within oneself and not *doing* to prove oneself” (131). Thus, according to Murdock, the heroine completes the task when she is reborn into a new and better version of herself, which in the case of *The Tombs of Atuan* happens when Arha becomes Tenar again, and not when she overcomes

all the obstacles. Murdock also adds that, for the heroine, “the heroic quest is not about power over, about conquest and domination; it is a quest to bring balance into our lives through the marriage of both feminine and masculine aspects of our nature” (132). All through the heroine’s journey, there is tension between both, the masculine and the feminine (when the heroine separates from the feminine, she identifies with the masculine). However, at the end of the story, both the feminine, Tenar, and the masculine, Ged, unite, fight together and triumph: “‘Yet it’s worth trying. You have knowledge, and I have skill, and between us we have...’ He paused” (108). It is this triumph that creates a balance between both elements and that makes the heroine accomplish her journey.

Therefore, both steps, Frankel’s ‘Goddesshood and Wholeness’ and Murdock’s ‘reconnection with the feminine’ can be applied to the final stage of Le Guin’s story. Tenar reaches both stages when she leaves behind her role as enslaved Priestess and defeats Kossil before running away from the Tombs with Ged. She achieves ‘Goddesshood and Wholeness’ when she retrieves her initial identity when she is Tenar again. The recovery of the name means the reconnection with the feminine she lost when she became the ‘eaten one’. This recovery is possible thanks to the aid of Ged, who, together with Tenar’s power, helps her to overcome all these obstacles. The union of the feminine with the masculine, as Frankel also suggests, is what allows both characters to triumph and escape the caves alive.

## 4. CONCLUSION

After having analysed more in-depth the stages the heroine goes through in the novel, it can be concluded that these do not fully follow any of the schemes proposed by each of the three authors discussed. Instead, the pattern Tenar/Arha/Tenar follows is a mixture of the three. As mentioned previously, *The Tombs of Atuan* was Le Guin's first novel with a heroine as protagonist. What is more, she wrote it at a time when speculative fiction was mostly dominated by men. As a consequence of that male predominance, the pattern heroes followed was a fixed and common one, the 'monomyth' developed by Campbell. However, heroines did not have any established and common pattern. Therefore, writing a story with a female character as the protagonist was a kind of experiment.

As novels with female protagonists started to become popular, a number of female scholars started to study and come up with models for the heroine's journey, often departing from Campbell's model. Le Guin's heroine, Tenar, follows some of those steps in order to challenge the traditional pattern, but she also still sticks to some of those proposed by Campbell. Thus, although Le Guin was trying to innovate by creating a female protagonist, she did not detach completely from tradition. Therefore, the heroine is halfway between the hero's journey (proposed by Campbell) and the models proposed by Frankel and Murdock for the heroine's journey.

In addition to that in-betweenness, the heroine of *The Tombs of Atuan* can also be seen as an infantilized one, as she is always resorting to and looking for the approval of Ged. As seen in the detailed analysis, Ged and Tenar depend on and help each other, but when they leave the world of the tombs, the heroine wants Ged to stay with her and gets upset when she learns that he will not do so. As Alice Flood explains, "Le Guin's first three books about Earthsea centre on the male wizard Ged, with women 'either marginal or essentially dependent on men,' according to the author herself." Le Guin wanted to

innovate by writing about a heroine, but she was still relying on the traditional stereotype of women as dependent or subordinated to men.

However, she gradually realized that and recognized the following: “I had to rethink my entire approach to writing fiction. [...] it was important to think about privilege and power and domination, in terms of gender, which was something science fiction and fantasy had not done” (in Flood). As a second chance, she decided to keep on writing about Tenar’s story, but this time from a more feminist perspective. It was in 1990 that she published *Tehanu*, the fourth book of the *Earthsea* collection. This novel focuses on Tenar’s life in Gont and focuses on topics such as marriage, widowhood, motherhood, adoption, or violence, which makes it more concerned with feminist demands as well as with the conventions feminist speculative fiction. According to Holly Littlefield, *Tehanu* is totally different from the other three novels as by writing it, Le Guin reflects women’s experience in the world of those three novels and criticizes it (251). The end of this novel emphasizes the power of women and gathers Le Guin’s feminist ideology. It is thanks to Tenar’s adoptive daughter, Therru, that Ged and Tenar manage to overcome the obstacles and survive. In the last part of the book, Therru is presented as a dragon in human form, interpreted as a symbol of female power.

This way, Le Guin has shown an ever-growing and deepening feminist ideology by writing about Tenar’s life in *The Tombs of Atuan* (her first book with a female character as protagonist although subordinated to a man) and, later on, in *Tehanu* (including topics related to femininity and portraying women as powerful). This increasingly feminist thought in Le Guin’s novels runs parallel to the gradual acceptance of women writers and feminist thought in society.

Fortunately, growing acceptance of feminist ideas and female authorship is taking place in the field of speculative fiction as well. Women writers have gone from being

seen as strange creatures (in Le Guin's early days) to be totally accepted and widely celebrated. Nowadays, they talk about a wide range of topics, including traditionally considered 'male' topics, without being censored. It has been thanks to all these works that have criticised patriarchy and issues related to male supremacy that society has realized what lied behind it and has changed the ideology they had regarding women. As Aliaga-Lavrijsen argues, "in the last decades there has been a pluralisation of ideologies in the genre of SF, and we can come across a number of feminist approaches to topics that had so far been considered to be classically male. [...] By examining patriarchal and colonial societies, these works can aid readers in moving towards change" (1-2).

Actually, due to this evolution in society, many important female writers of science fiction have emerged, from the pioneers like Joanna Russ and Octavia Butler to contemporary writers such as Jane Yolen and N. K. Jemisin. These writers, among many more, have been constantly writing novels and stories up to the point that they have developed a more authentic speculative fiction with its own style which is getting more and more audience and popularity. Thanks to the work of writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin, the journey of the heroine has a brighter future than ever.

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