

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

**IMAGINING A DIFFERENT WORLD:  
TRANSFORMING AND RE-VISIONING IN CHILDREN'S FANTASY NOVELS**

A Thesis in

Curriculum and Instruction

by

Hsin-Chun Jamie Tsai

© 2004 Hsin-Chun Jamie Tsai

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2004

The thesis of Hsin-Chun Jamie Tsai was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Daniel D. Hade  
Associate Professor of Education  
Thesis Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto  
Assistant Professor of Education

Steven Herb  
Head of Education and Behavioral Sciences Library

Reiko Tachibana  
Associate Professor of Literature

Patrick Shannon  
Professor of Education  
Coordinator of Graduate Programs in Curriculum and Instruction

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the function of fantasy literature and importance of stories. Fantasy was viewed as a means of bridging the visible and the invisible, while narrative as a means of making sense of lives. Reading fantasy through the lens of sociological imagination was considered as a social project which provided readers a way of inquiring social reality. Stepping in and out the separated world in fantasy novels, readers were invited to connect ourselves as subjects and characters with the society as settings in both the created and our own stories. We are offered opportunities to imagine beyond our limitations and discover possibilities for re-reading, re-telling, and re-interpreting our personal narrative. The study examined two novels by Lois Lowry, *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, to reveal how this method of reading helps readers to activate our sociological imagination. It also analyzed two other novels from Earthsea series by Ursula Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*; through reflecting on my life story along with the analysis, it was demonstrated that how we as readers can take a further step to operate our capacity for sociological imagination to re-interpret our personal narrative.

The finding of this study indicates that by experiencing the unfamiliar provided by fantasy literature through the lens of sociological imagination, readers could discover things we did not expect to uncover. This research transformed from a metaphor of journey as a beginning standpoint to one of weaving and composing. As a result, it leads me, as the researcher of this

study, to recommend that this method of reading provides readers, both children and adults, with a good approach to extend our world of wonder. I would also invite educators to show this rich ground of metaphors offered by fantasy novels to guide children to imagine more possibilities for their own personal reality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
<b>Chapter 1</b> Stories in Lives .....	1
Begin from Adventures.....	2
Fantasy as a Critique to Reality .....	4
Statement of the Problem: A Social Project .....	7
Not just Hero Tales .....	8
Creation of Meaning .....	10
Transformation and Revision .....	12
Significance of the Project: Different Voices .....	13
Definition .....	14
Research Questions.....	15
A Brief Example .....	16
Overview of Remaining Chapters.....	17
<b>Chapter 2</b> Fantasy as a Means of Bridging the Visible and the Invisible, Narrative as a Means of Making Sense of Lives .....	20
Power of Imagination: Research on Fantasy Literature .....	22
Taking Fantasy Seriously .....	22
The Rich Ground for Metaphor in the Separated World.....	26
Importance of Stories: Personal Narrative and Imagination .....	32
To Begin the Story: Personal Narrative .....	33
To Communicate: Stories Becoming Meaningful .....	38
Conflict: Who Is the Narrator? .....	43
Shaping Lives and Retelling: Imagination.....	51
<b>Chapter 3</b> Fantasists as Sociologists.....	55
Transformation: Sociological Imagination as Reading Lens.....	56
Cultural Production and Personal Troubles .....	58
Imagining beyond Limits and Transforming .....	64
Reading Fantasy as a Social Project.....	66
Revision: Feminism as Reading Lens .....	71
The Researcher's Voice .....	73
Feminism as a Critique of Sociological Theories .....	74
Revision Personal Narrative in Reading Fantasy .....	77
Turning.....	80
<b>Chapter 4</b> Lens of Sociological Imagination: The Giver and Gathering Blue.....	81

Summary of the Two Novels .....	82
The Giver.....	82
Gathering Blue.....	83
Reading through the Lens of Sociological Imagination .....	85
How and What Knowledge Is Gained? .....	85
What Is to Be Seen?.....	89
What Has Empowered the Social Structure?.....	94
Employing the Sociological Imagination .....	97
Becoming an Amateur Sociologist.....	100
Turning.....	101
<b>Chapter 5</b> Lens of Feminism: The Tombs of Atuan and Tehanu and Revision a Personal Narrative.....	102
Voices in Three Columns .....	103
Coming Out of the Labyrinth: The Tombs of Atuan, the Two Stories .....	105
Part One: The Eaten One .....	105
Part Two: The Light .....	115
Part Three: The True Name.....	132
The Stories Never End .....	151
Transition .....	153
Composing the Heart of the Swan: <i>Tehanu</i> , the Two Stories Continued .....	155
Thread One: Listening to the Silence.....	155
Thread Two: Being Powerless.....	170
Thread Three: Making from the Unmaking .....	205
Turning.....	222
<b>Chapter 6</b> Imagining a Different World: Educational Implication and Conclusion .....	223
Ways of Looking.....	224
Exploring the Two Research Questions.....	224
Connecting Stories with Life .....	226
Transforming Research .....	228
Possibilities: Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman’s Dark Materials.....	230
Conclusion .....	233
From a Journey to a Composition.....	233
Extending Children’s World of Wonder .....	235
Bibliography.....	237

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been quite an experience conducting this project. I have been extremely fortunate in receiving very special and generous support, academically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally from my thesis advisor and all committee members. Dr. Dan Hade, as my advisor, not only introduced me to the world of children's literature, particularly fantasy literature, but also assisted and guided me to shape various views to read and to look. Throughout my doctoral program, he has been an extraordinary listener, whose gentle smiles often create a vast space with immense freedom that encourages my imagination and courage to take a different angle of consideration. To him, I owe a particular debt of gratitude.

I would like to acknowledge with appreciation the energy and spirit the other members of my committee afforded me. In their own distinctive ways, they also provided encouragement, care, support, motivation and intellectual challenge. Dr. Steven Herb, in his mischievous and humorous way, led me to see the important role stories play in human beings' lives. Dr. Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, in her quilt-like way of softness, strength, and intelligence, showed me the wisdom of the feminine side of this field. Dr. Reiko Tachibana's advice often helped me to discover a very different perspective to review my ideas and ways of thinking and expression.

I would also like to thank the friends and colleagues who listened, discussed, shared their knowledge, and read portions or versions of this work with me. Chun-Yuan Yo was an inspiring presence in this work. Her refreshing

reactions as a person not familiar with children's literature helped me to surface the central ideas of this project. Kara Robertson's generosity of spirit and talent as a colleague and my editor aided me to complete the final step of the writing process. I thank her for both her time and skills as an editor, and the enthusiasm and excitement as a friend she has offered. Sara Willoughby-Herb, Mandy Chou, Eunja Yun, Lisa Hopkins, Chen-Ling Hung, and Michelle Lee contributed their support, friendship, hugs, and smiles that meant more to me than they know.

Finally, I want to thank my parents and my grandparents, who have given me a life full of stories and possibilities, and Yao-Chang Ian Chen, whose abiding company sustained me through the difficulties between thoughts and the actual writing. Their unwavering love was the source of inspiration and energy with which this project grew. To them, I dedicate this dissertation.



## Chapter 1

### Stories in Lives

She thought how a girl had sat silent, thinking, in the night, a long time ago and far away, a girl in a windowless room, brought up to know herself only as the one who had been eaten, priestess and servant of the powers of the darkness of the earth. And there had been a woman who would sit up in the peaceful silence of a farmhouse when husband and children slept, to think to be alone an hour. And there was the widow who had carried a burned child here, who sat by the side of the dying, who waited for a man to return. Like all women, any woman, doing what women do. But it was not by the names of the servant or the wife or the widow that Ogion had called her. Nor had Ged, in the darkness of the Tombs. Nor – longer ago, farther away than all – had her mother, the mother she remembered only as the warmth and lion-color of firelight, the mother who had given her her name.

“I am Tenar,” she whispered. (Le Guin, 1991, p. 22)

Stories carry a function of assisting readers to sharpen their grasp of themselves, to obtain experience to solve the puzzles of existence and to reach joy and beauty. We use stories to construct ourselves, to communicate with others, to form our personal histories, to give meaning to our experience, to think with, to interact with society, and to understand others. “We use stories to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives, ... We tell stories to become part of the social world, to know and reaffirm who we are” (Engel, 1995, p. 25). When introduced to new people, we tell stories about ourselves. It is through the stories we tell that we are acquainted, we are learned, and we are known. Stories

allow us to understand a person, help us to make sense of life and of the society, and to understand ourselves. “Stories not only help shape how a person sees [herself], they also may influence how others see that person, which can further affect how [she] sees [herself]” (Engel, 1995, p.193). These stories in lives, stories created by writers, by ourselves, in remembering our past, in continuing our present, and in moving forward to the future, conduct the meaning of who we are. “We are our stories” (Rosen, 1986, p.236).

The crucial questions to ask are: how do we tell our stories? Are we aware that the ways we construct and interpret our personal narrative can, in fact, be cultural and social? And if they are indeed cultural and social, can they be altered and changed?

### **Begin from Adventures**

The hero tale, still the staple of contemporary fantasy, has been essentially a male preserve: in fantasies from *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Peter Pan*, *The Hobbit*, the first three ‘Earthsea’ Books, and countless others...(Hunt, 2001, p. 3).

After graduating from college for a few years, I once had this conversation with my father when my younger brother was ready to leave home for college. Father said to my brother, “After college, if you like it there, don’t rush to come home. Boys should find your ways far from home.” I remembered protesting at the time, “Father!! You said the exactly opposite thing to me when I was about to graduate from college. You kept telling me to come home as soon as possible.

Why?" Father replied, "You are a girl. What do you do at the strange place?" I asked, "Then why did you just tell brother to stay there?" "Well, he's a boy. What does he do at home?"

Boys are to find their ways in the strange land; girls are to find their ways at home. I was very reluctant to learn this concept. Years passed. I found my ways in this foreign land, very far away from home. The way I now look at this dialogue I had with Father is very different from how I used to. I ponder what is embedded in that conversation, and whether there could be a different way to interpret this part of my life story. I also began to wonder: were the conflicts and struggles I encountered with myself in insisting to go on adventures only my own personal trouble? Are there not stories about girls going on adventures to find their ways?

Fantasy literature contains adventure, which has traditionally been privileged to boys. Among the hero tales, there are a few of them telling heroine tales. Around the early seventies, writers such as Ursula Le Guin, along with her woman readers, began to ask "how come all the wise guys on the Isle of the Wise were guys" (Le Guin, 1993, p.11). They could no longer go on pretending to be genderless in the stories they created. And there began their telling of heroine tales. Reading these fantasy stories, I became acquainted with female protagonists who embrace change and struggle, and developed a strong bond with them. They are heroines who find their ways in adventure. I wanted to know what girls do in their adventures and through the critical approaches what could

be revealed and how their stories could be read. Perhaps, after all, adventures do not always have to be boys' privilege.

In the world that fantasy writers create, I experience things that I do not experience in reality. The values I carry and believe in are not necessarily accepted in the worlds created in fantasy literature. A protagonist can be a cripple but still live a worthwhile life (*Gathering Blue*); can be damaged, crippled, ugly and powerless but inherit the most ancient knowledge (*Tehanu*). This genre has provided me with a chance to examine the values and the ideologies I take for granted, and perhaps are taken for granted by society as well. It is my belief that through experiencing the imaginative world, readers are guided to reflect on the social attitudes and tendencies that exist in the society.

### **Fantasy as a Critique to Reality**

Fantasy has been a vehicle used by writers to express their dissatisfaction with society, to comment on human nature, or to bridge the gap between the visible and invisible worlds (Egoff, 1988, p.1).

Fantasies take readers away from reality, help them develop imagination and by doing so provide them a possible alternative way of life (Huck, Hepler, Hickman & Kiefer, 2000). So often we, as human beings constructed by the society and the time of the history we are in, take things for granted. We live in a society, provided with conveniences in many ways, accept values, such as beauty, strength, intelligence and power, without much questioning. We even tell

our stories in certain ways without much awareness of our ways of telling. How have these beliefs and values come to be taken as 'natural' instead of 'cultural and social'? Fantasies offer opportunities to step outside the reality we live in. By reflecting back, we are able to better understand ourselves critically and the struggles we face as human beings. This genre of literature, named by its particular focus on imagination, is not as irrelevant to reality as it is often believed. On the contrary, it provides a different approach to reality and it can be argued that it is just as relevant to reality as its realistic counterpart.

Research has shown that the intention of writers of children's fantasies is to critique the values and certain ideologies that were constructed in the Western culture and English speaking society. In research literature, fantasy novels have been examined through many perspectives. Sarah Gilead (1992), using several books including *The Wizard of Oz*, *In the Night Kitchen*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, claims that fantasy provides a function of healing. Through the protagonists' experiences of being away from home and reality and then returning to reality at the closure, children are given a chance to grow up and to learn about the 'rules' in the reality they will be living, "The protagonists renounce dreamworlds and choose the security and familiarity of home, of reality made more tolerable and indeed subtly altered, by fantasy" (p.88). Similarly, Maria Nikolajeva (2000) provided discussions in her book *From Mythic to Linear* about the "conceptions of what human maturation looks like or should look like" (p.2). She examined how children's novels are related to the protagonists' place in the maturation process. The purpose of fantasy novels is "to conserve the

children – as well as adults – in an innocent, unchanging state, comfortably freed from memories, emotions, affections, responsibilities – and from natural death” (p.169). John Stephens (1992), on the other hand, considers the ideology and subjectivity which lie under the discourses of fiction. “...it is through language that the subject and the world are represented in literature and through language that literature seeks to define the relationships between child and culture” (p.5). Questions such as: “Does the fantasy plot yield knowledge, consolation, or moral significance and thus fit the concept of children’s literature as comforting and educative?...Does the frame, as a ‘safe’ container, enable the fantasy to challenge the norms of reality?” (Gilead, 1992. p.81) are being asked repeatedly but in different ways in the literature. It can perhaps be inferred that the researchers believe that in writing fantasies, authors are talking as seriously as any sociologist about “human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived. For after all,..., it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, and compassion, and hope” (Le Guin, 1989, p.48).

How, then, do fantasy writers talk as sociologists? In social science, the concept of sociological imagination has been explored amply by sociologists since it was first developed by C. Wright Mills. They suggest that with this capacity for imagination, individuals are able to associate their personal reality to larger societal realities. When fantasy writers, by providing a rich land of metaphors and bridging the familiar to the unfamiliar, invite readers to read with “the sociological eye,” whatever we read “becomes a clue to the larger patterns

of society” (Collins, 1998, p.3). Fantasy literature thus becomes a lens with which readers bridge the visible to the invisible.

This study will endeavor to provide a method of understanding the function of fantasy, and hopefully to help readers learn about themselves, their own habits and their own beliefs. It is also a study about stories. We learn ourselves through stories we read and tell. Every time we read a story or tell a story, we learn a small bit about ourselves. Stories told by researchers, novelists, and writers come across the reader’s path, take on their own lives and come to the reader’s. The reading process becomes, not only one of reading novels, but also one of re-reading, telling, re-telling, and re-interpreting the reader’s personal narrative. Reading fantasy literature then becomes a social project.

### **Statement of the Problem: A Social Project**

Although fantasy literature has been widely analyzed through various approaches, more studies to contribute concrete examples of how readers can benefit from reading this type of literature are still needed. Some fantasists and scholars scrutinized the functions of fantasy through various approaches such as reader response (Sanders, 1995). They studied themes like love, doubles and images in selected novels. Others view this genre as journeys toward knowledge, identity, transformation and destiny (Pharr, 2003). The significance of fantasy literature is that it has so much to offer that there can be so many possible ways to read it. Many methods have been adopted to examine this type of literature.

However, there are not yet many studies connecting fantasy literature with sociology, particularly the concept of sociological imagination.

### **Not just Hero Tales**

Traditionally this genre of literature has been associated with hero tales. Critics and scholars tend to focus their studies on the journeys heroes take, quests they are to fulfill and themes they are to learn. This study proposes to take a further step and to connect fantasy literature from its imaginative lands to the reality readers live in. As Le Guin (1989) suggested, fantasists are talking as seriously as any sociologist. The researcher of the current study intends to scrutinize fantasy novels as an amateur sociologist in order to reveal how this genre of literature critiques society, what it critiques, and thus guides its readers to activate and apply their capacity for sociological imagination.

The book does not reproduce me, it re-defines me, pushes at my boundaries, shatters the palings that guard my heart (Jeanette Winterson, 1995, p.26).

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals (C. Wright Mills, 1959, p.5).

Literature of the fantastic has been claimed as 'transcending' reality, 'escaping' the human condition and constructing superior alternate, 'secondary' world (Rosemary Jackson, 1981, p.2).



These three quotes indicate a connection between fantasy and sociology. In the field of sociology, researchers examine the phenomena in the society and through qualitative research they uncover the social construction of class (Macleod, 1995; Heath, 1983), of gender (Finders, 1997), of language and race (Soto, 1997). Sociologists ask questions such as: "What is the structure of this particular society as a whole?" Within the structure, "What is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?" (Mills, 1959 p.6) "What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period?" "What kind of 'human nature' is revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period?" (Mills, p.7) Taking these questions into consideration when reading fantasy literature, the readers are involved in a social project. Authors who create a 'separated reality' often conduct different sets of societal structures and rules. Within the imaginative world, meanings are to be re-defined and human nature is to be revised. In order to comprehend what is being presented to them in the new land, the readers have to be willing to put aside their own sets of values and accept or follow the new ones. While they are doing so, they are also changing their ways of thinking and understanding. Readers are therefore experiencing the created world as well as scrutinizing the real world. This is when the connection between fantasy literature and sociology is revealed: that imagination has the capacity to shift perspectives, and that the readers are taking a different approach to the reality and constructing their own critique. The act of reading also becomes the production of meaning.

Thus, this study considers reading fantasy as a social project and will endeavor to explore the implication of the connections between fantasy literature and sociology – how fantasy literature enables its readers, by stepping into a separated reality, to activate their imagination and discover alternate perspectives.

### **Creation of Meaning**

It is through stories we read and tell that we learn about ourselves and are learned and known by others. In literature, this concept of making sense of our lives through narrative has been widely explored by many theorists from different academic areas. Narayan (1991) in her article *According to Their Feelings* gave a limpid briefing:

That narrative is a means of making sense of one's own and others' experience has been recurrently argued by theologians (Crities, 1971; Goldberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1986); psychologists (J. Bruner, 1986, 1987; Coles, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schafer, 1983); philosophers (MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984); historians (Clifford, 1986; Mink, 1978; White, 1973, 1981); and anthropologists (E. Bruner, 1986; R. Rosaldo, 1989)...Most generally, these theorists agree that the progression of events in narrative captures the dimension of time in lived experience. By arranging the flux and welter of experience around a narrative line, we make sense of our pasts, plan for our futures, and comprehend the lives of others (p.113).

The inspiration gaining from their research brought me to contemplate these questions: What is a personal narrative to a person? Many of us grow up

with stories. Some of them are very sad, with so much sorrow that perhaps every time we retell them, we bring tears either from ourselves or from our audience. What does it take, then, for a person to tell the grief? It occurs to me that perhaps telling a personal narrative is not simply to put the events in the correct sequence but involves more. Over the course of our lives, we continually build our sense of self and try to make sense out of the many events that often time do not make much sense to us. Some of these stories we read or experience develop such profound attachment to us while others fade. How and why do our minds choose certain stories to remember? In the stories we tell about ourselves and our past, we are both the narrator and the character. Are we aware of the ways of our own storytelling? Do we choose certain things to develop our narrative line and leave other things out only because our minds are taught in certain ways and we value only certain things? If the ways of conveying our personal narratives are socially constructed, can we possibly re-shape, retell our narratives or even imagine a different one?

To read fantasy as a social project, taking the reader's subjectivity into account becomes essential. Readers have to go farther than reading for the themes and meanings or taking fantasy as an escapist or a hero's quest fulfillment. They become the meaning producers and metaphor interpreters according to their subjectivities, while finding their voices to form a dialogue with the protagonists and themselves. Through this process, they are imagining the heroines' narrative as well as their own.

## Transformation and Revision

How do people deal with the overwhelming power of social structures they cannot see? How do they live as subjects amid such big and mysterious social forces? And how do they measure the meaning of their lives against the array of social differences they encounter? (Lemert, 1997, p. xiv).

Individuals as characters living in the society as settings are often unaware of the power of social structures they cannot see. The power is usually so overwhelming that when it causes various personal troubles, people actually take them as solely personal. Authority and rules are transformed into morals. Values of work in the field of cultural production are determined by someone or something other than the creator or the producer. What is actually cultural and social becomes natural to people. We are educated in such a way that we see the meaning of our lives as defined by social rules. Therefore, when women are trapped in their difficult situation, they tend to blame themselves. So are children who are labeled as 'bad students' because of their inadequate academic performance.

Sociologists suggest a notion named 'sociological imagination,' which enables individuals to shift from one perspective to another, to connect the personal reality with the larger society, "to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two" (Mills, p. 7), and to start inquiring social things.

We will then find courage to accept what needs to be accepted and then to do the best with the rest. There, we imagine beyond the limits and transform.

The current study proposes to take sociological imagination as a reading lens and to encourage readers of fantasy literature, through the act of imagination, to discover new connections with themselves and between the known and unknown. In the process of inquiry, we become our own narrator and reader. And as the ways we see ourselves and our conditions are changing, the stories are transformed. We are transformed. The vision we have can then be revisioned. I will attempt to also explore the theories of feminism and narrative inquiry in order to provide a concrete example of participating in this social project. From the standpoint of feminism, viewed as a variation of sociological theories, I am proposing to demonstrate how a reader of this genre can take a different lens to look at her own reality and see the possibilities of re-telling and revisioning her personal narrative.

### **Significance of the Project: Different Voices**

We wanted to know what children themselves thought about the world they live in – and, more specifically, how they use texts of all kinds to enter both the ‘possible worlds’ and to deal with their existing worlds. How do they engage with the multitudinous amount of information with which they are bombarded on an average day? How do they select and reject? Do they understand the difference between fantasy and realism? (Daniels, 2000, p.162).

Children's fantasy literature is created and distributed to young readers by adults. It is also read, studied, critiqued and discussed by readers, both children and adults. These unique factors bring in already various voices in this genre and therefore make the realm of interpreting richer, wider and broader. In this project, there are times when multiple voices are presented. They are voices of the researchers, the authors, the readers, the protagonists, as well as mine as a researcher, the author of this thesis, the reader of fantasy literature, and the protagonist of my own story. Each voice represents one dimension of the world and conveys one possibility. As Bruner (1986) encouraged, our central concern shall be to create in the young "an appreciation of the fact that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created not discovered" (p. 149). It is, after all, the essence of this project, that individuals, adults or children, shall learn to discover their subjectivities and, with imagination, to find alternative ways and metaphors to voice their side of interpretation, both the fantastic and the realistic. And in time, we shall see that there is not much distance or difference between the two.

### **Definition**

According to Swinfen's (1984) *In Defense of Fantasy*, fantasy literature, in contrast to realistic literature which refers to stories set in the primary world where authors and readers live in, tend to be divided as animal fantasy, in which animals are given anthropomorphic characters or humans are metamorphosed

into animals, time fantasy, where primary world and other-worlds are in parallel, and pure secondary world fantasy. In this study, the term fantasy and fantasy literature particularly refer to stories that involve a secondary world, a separated world. However, it is also an attempt of this study to challenge the dichotomy between the definitions of fantasy and realistic literature. Through contemplating the research questions, I am playing both roles of a reader and a writer. In exploring the areas in-between the dichotomy of the fantastic and the realistic as well as the roles of readers and writers, it is my intention to consider an alternative way of viewing the type of literature.

### **Research Questions**

In order to make the connection between fantasy literature and sociology and to provide a concrete example of how readers can find alternative approaches to their personal narrative by reading fantasy, the research questions I asked have these two emphases:

1) How can the concept of sociological imagination be applied as a method of reading children's fantasy novels?

2) When we as the narrator tell our own personal narrative, how does fantasy literature, as the stimulus of imagination, guide and allow us to explore the possible ways of re-interpreting and re-shaping our narrative?

To explore the first question, I first examine a number of research studies related to fantasy literature as well as the ideas and implications of sociological

imagination as my theoretical basis. Then I analyze two novels by Lois Lowry, *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, focusing on the two protagonists', Jonas and Kira, interaction with their societies as an example of reading fantasy literature through the lens of sociological imagination. To discuss the second question, I study two novels from the Earthsea series by Ursula Le Guin, paying particular attention to my own interaction with the protagonist, Tenar and her companion Ged. It is intended to be a demonstration on how I as a reader of fantasy literature find my voice to retell my own personal narrative. Because of the strong connection I felt with the two girls who find their ways in adventure, I chose these novels to study. As for Jonas, his struggle, his emotions, his sensitivity, and the choices he has to make form a bond just as strong as the connection between myself and the girl-protagonists. We are characters of our own stories, who find our ways in the bravery of seeing beyond through the power of imagination.

### **A Brief Example**

How is the fantasy literature viewed through the lens of sociological imagination? Anyone familiar with Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* perhaps knows that it is mainly about a child's imagination. When Max was sent to bed without dinner because of his mischief, the child's reluctance and rebellion were illustrated on his face. It was then his imagination taking him out of his room, soothing his anger and finally bringing his smiling face back. For an adult reading this story through the lens of sociological imagination, the perspective can be



shift from educating a child's mischief to whether the society is building up walls and limiting children's capacity of imagination through education. Max's mischief originated in his childlike imagination; yet it leads to punishment. Sociological imagination invites the adult reader to connect this one child with the educational principles of the whole society. For a younger reader who is perhaps being troubled by her own learning experience, sociological imagination can guide this young mind to change her perspective and to understand that it is not the wild imagination that brings punishment but the rule violation.

### **Overview of Remaining Chapters**

In chapter two, I first explore research on the fantasy literature – how this genre throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was first rejected and then taken seriously both because of the power of imagination. In the separated world created by the authors, fantasy novels offer a rich ground for metaphor through which readers are guided to a new understanding of their experience. In the second half of this chapter, I examine research literature on narrative and the importance of stories – through imagination readers connect their personal narrative with the larger society and are invited to re-interpret their past and to discover the possibilities for their present and future.

In Chapter three, the two ideas, transformation and revision will be connected with the notion of sociological imagination introduced by C. W. Mills in 1959 and theories of feminism. And Le Guin has suggested that fantasists often

talk as serious as sociologists, I propose to take sociological imagination as a reading lens to interpret fantasy stories and argue that this lens can guide readers to transform their limited personal reality to endless possibilities. The notion of sociological imagination will be explored in the first half of this chapter, while this method of reading will be applied to discuss Lois Lowry's two novels in chapter four. In the second half of this chapter I examine theories of feminism and studies of feminist fantasy. Feminism contributes to sociological theories as a critique. Feminist theories are grounded in women's lives and feminist fantasy writers, as other fantasists who concern themselves with social conditions, particularly pay attentions to the construction of gender and the ideologies that contribute to its construction. Reading through this lens, connecting with the idea of sociological imagination, I intend to offer an example to demonstrate how reading fantasy novels through the lens of sociological imagination can take readers to meet with their past and revision their personal narrative. A discussion on Ursula Le Guin's two novels along with my personal narrative revision will be presented in chapter five.

Chapter four presents summary and analysis of *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*. In this chapter, fantasy literature is viewed as a tool to activate readers' sociological imagination. I consider the notions of how readers are invited to enter and experience the different in the separated world and by operating their imagination they picture the alternative. When they step back to their own reality, their capacity for imagination turns out to be sociological. The readers then begin

to be able to revision and rethink what has often been believed without questions and to make connections between their personal situations and the larger society.

Chapter five contains two long stories told in three voices. The first one tells a story about a heroine, Tenar, created by Ursula Le Guin in her Earthsea series. The second is a commentary relating my reading of the story. The third voice presents a reflection on my own personal narrative. These three voices are presented in three columns with an attempt to address multiple voices and to imply the metaphor of weaving. It is also my intention to demonstrate an example that through reading the two fantasy novels, *The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*, the reader produces meaning for both the story reading and life reading according to her own subjectivity.

Chapter six provides a brief summary of the discussion on the two research questions. I sum up the connections among the main ideas explored in this study, and contemplate their further implications by considering two popular fantasy series, Harry Potter and His Dark Materials. The chapter concludes with a transition that happened during the process of this study that is viewed as an invitation for educators to trust young people to unchain their imagination.

## Chapter 2

### **Fantasy as a Means of Bridging the Visible and the Invisible, Narrative as a Means of Making Sense of Lives**

The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent' (Jackson, 1981, p.4).

Books are vehicles for transmitting knowledge – what the real world is to us and how we make sense of ourselves. Knowledge is ways of thinking. It is a form of literacy. It is what we believe. It is also how we identify ourselves and how we connect ourselves to the larger society. Knowledge is what people think to be real (Garrison, 1999). One way educators pass on their knowledge is through books. Children acquire knowledge from reading books, from being literate. Yet, for a person like me who has traveled thousands of miles to study in a foreign country, knowledge is not merely another form of literacy but also new ways of thinking and of identifying myself. It is almost like reading a fantasy novel – traveling to a different world. The only possible way of comprehending this new world is through the aid of imagination. Coming from a different culture with a different set of knowledge, values, and assumptions, to make a mutual understanding with this new world possible is through the negotiation of meaning, in which I search for metaphors to make coherent what I have in common with people in this unfamiliar land. It is as if these metaphors have become one of my senses. Through imagination, I find personal metaphors to highlight and make

coherent. An alternative way of viewing life and its meaning can then be discovered. My mind as the many minds of youngsters who read the fantastic is becoming opened.

In children's fantasy novels, a secondary world is created, one that allows us to consider different knowledges. As Winterson (1995) stated, "The book is made of language, living and not inert, for a true writer will create a separate reality and her atoms and her gases are words" (p.44). In this separated reality, our imagination is provoked and extended. Our beliefs and the reality we know are challenged. As Le Guin (1989) noted, we question the fantastic stories about human life "as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived" (p.48). Children's fantasy novels offer glimpses into a different world. They provide opportunities for educators and young learners to engage their imagination. Through the lenses, they reflect back to their own realities and therefore begin to see beyond their realities They then may come to an awareness that their knowledge – what they think they know and the way they process the world in their minds – "is socially constructed and may or may not accurately reflect the reality" (Garrison, 1999, p. 68). And through this awareness, their knowledge becomes power that enables them to have some control over their lives (Shannon, 1999).

In first half of this chapter, I will explore research literature to uncover how this genre has come a long way to be rejected and then gradually accepted and taken seriously both because of the power of imagination. In the separated world created by the writers, fantasy literature provides a rich ground for metaphor

through which readers are given a new understanding of their experience. In the second half of this chapter, I will examine research literature on narrative and the importance of stories – through imagination readers connect their personal narrative with the larger society and are guided to explore the possibilities for their present and future.

### **Power of Imagination: Research on Fantasy Literature**

#### **Taking Fantasy Seriously**

Fantasy literature is either taken seriously (and enthusiastically), or seriously rejected. (Hunt, 2001, p.2).

Fantasy literature is nowadays widely studied and examined from various approaches. However, it was only a few decades ago that this genre was still largely and passionately rejected and condemned. Mark West (2000), inspired by Ursula Le Guin's article *Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?*, conducted a brief study on how fantasy literature had been evaluated and valued throughout the course of 20<sup>th</sup> century. "Beginning in the 1920s," West stated, "some professional educators joined librarians in their campaign against fantasy stories" (p. 35). At the time, educators and librarians took serious responsibilities for the moral development of children and believed that it could only be accomplished to educate children's soul by encouraging children to read realistic novels. West

quoted from Fairchild (1897)'s article *Methods of Children's Library Work as Determined by the Needs of Children*:

These idealistic and realistic stories of life reveal to the children the meaning of their own experiences. And these stories, if true to life, store the child's mind with knowledge of the ways and means of getting its ambitions accomplished (p. 23).

Toward the 1950s, educators continued voicing their prejudice against fantasy literature for children; some even devoted themselves to stopping fantasy stories from being published. As the controversy over this genre subsided and gradually diminished during the 1960s and 1970s, more and more high quality fantasy stories were published. Librarians and educators began to accept fantasy literature as worthwhile and realistic. Nevertheless, the days in the sun for this genre did not last long. During the mid-1980s, the censorship storm came whirling around fantasy literature, mostly from religious activists, who attacked nearly all fantasy tales related to witches, ghosts, or anything about magic. As Swinfen (1984) suggested in his book, *In Defense of Fantasy*, "some critics and academics condemn the whole genre with a passion which seems to have its roots in emotion rather than objective critical standards" (p. 1).

The majority of contemporary criticism of fantasy literature tends to suggest that the so-called 'realistic' writing is somehow "more profound, more morally committed, more involved with 'real' human concerns" than the fantastic (Swinfen, p. 10). This argument could easily be traced and reflected back to the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when teachers and librarians campaigned against fantasy literature. However, is the line between fantasy and reality truly clear? For people from a tropical country, could the image of children sledding in the snow at the temperature of 25 Fahrenheit be completely fantastic? As Peter Hunt (2001) indicated, the difficulty of separating fantasy from reality “is that ‘fantasy’ is the ultimately relative term: one person’s fantasy is another person’s norm – who would care to draw their own line between fantasy and reality” (p. 10)? The issue could also be clarified from another perspective, “that what is now regarded as the ‘real’ world – that is, the world of empirical experience – was for many centuries regarded as the world of ‘appearances’” (Swinfen, p. 11). In addition, fantasy literature is perhaps just as much as realistic novels about reality, about the human condition. It is “a literature of possibilities. It opens the door to the realm of ‘What If’, challenging readers to see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets” (Pierce, 1996, p. 179). To reveal these possibilities, this genre could be read, studied, examined, and critiqued from numerous approaches and lenses. Some critics study themes of the stories as Bloom (1982) studied the hero and heroine’s quests – that “any true hero or heroine of literary fantasy discovers at last that the only fire they can steal is already and originally their own fire” (p. 10), and Mains (2003) studied the use, misuse and abuse of power – that the characters are used by the author “to mediate a dialogue about the interaction of power and identity...about authority and identity” (p. 59). Others examine the story lines as McCaffery (1982) explored structures of fantasy fiction – that fantasies “open us up to new



constructive possibilities” (p. 31). Still others remain interested in scrutinizing the differentiation and interaction between the realistic and the fantastic as Clayton (1982) examined the discourse between the realistic and the fantastic – that “the real supports the fantasy, the fantasy protects the real” (p. 63). To these fantasists, fantasy literature indeed has so much to offer – the meaning is so complex and the pleasure is so immense – that the point of reading this genre is no longer about drawing a line between the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’ but about tracing the clues to “the limits of a culture” (Jackson, 1981, p. 52), finding “the crossroads, cross-cultural zones, points of interchange on the intricate connective tissue of communications between cultures” (Warner, 2002, p. 17) and above all, following the ‘freedom’ it provides to see the alternatives.

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn’t factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phoney, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom (Le Guin, 1992, p. 40).

Fantasy invites readers to take a different approach to reality and to experiment with new ways of thinking and seeing, new ways of living. It “challenges our assumptions about many important issues: the nature of the universe and man’s place therein; mortality, morality, corporeal limitation, space/time limitation, physical confinement to one sex and one body” (Hume, 1984, p. 164). To do so, readers have to unchain their imagination. It is perhaps

this very freedom of exercising imagination that frightens people, for “imagination is too dangerous to wander unchained” (Hunt, 2001, p. 3). Yet, imagination is all it takes to see beyond, to transform, to revision, and to find the alternative. “By experiencing something clearly and completely different from ourselves, we become acutely aware of who and what we actually are” (Nodelman, 1996, p. 178). It is this power of imagination that brings “an enrichment of life, for even if dragons exist only in otherworld, our lives in the primary world are richer and more beautiful through the imagining of them” (Swinfen, 1984, p. 6). It is this same power that can “cause changes in reality and alter one’s life “(Zipes, 1995, p. 9), and guides human minds to be able to interpret the metaphors that underline the stories fantasists tell – the metaphors that people live by.

### **The Rich Ground for Metaphor in the Separated World**

[Metaphors that are imaginative and creative] are capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience. Thus, they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 139).

When we were little, grow-ups ask us “what do you want to be when you grow up?” The answers were often “I want to be a doctor”; “I want to be a lawyer”; “I want to be an owner of a company”; “I want to be the president”...We all wanted to grow up and become ‘great’ people, and by ‘great’ we meant ‘powerful’, and by ‘powerful’ we meant ‘lots of money – rich’. So we did – we worked hard, studied hard, absorbed all the knowledge available hard – to grow up to be all

sorts of professionals so we could know ways of how to make more money and become more powerful. I have recently started to wonder, why have we hardly ever been asked “what kind of person do you want to be when you grow up?” And perhaps the answers would have been as such: “I want to be a generous person”; “I want to be a kind and gentle person”; “I want to be a patient person”; “I want to be a quiet person”...We live by the metaphors of being heroes and heroines. We read biographies and learn ‘history’ consisted of history of the authority, the powerful – the ‘great’ people. What if we switched these metaphors? Katherine Paterson (2001) was once asked by a friend:

“what if, “she asks, “what if we didn’t use as the basic metaphor of group activity, sports, which are ritualized warfare, but if we used the choir as the standard metaphor for group activities – then we wouldn’t come up with idiocies like ‘My country right or wrong,’ we’d think: ‘A good descant makes the music richer’” (p. 119).

The metaphor of sports implies winning. We are taught to win not to lose, to become heroes, not losers. What if we began to stop thinking about winning, would we see other things than only the finish?

In most traditional views of metaphor, it is “a matter of mere language rather than primarily as a means of structuring our conceptual system and the kinds of everyday activities” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 146). In fact, if reality is human perceptions and conception of the physical world, we perhaps constantly comprehend our life experiences in terms of various metaphors. As Lakoff & Johnson continued in their book, *Metaphors We Live By*:

What is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his social reality and of the way in which that shapes his experience of the physical world. Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us (p.146).

If we understand life in terms of 'LIFE IS A STORY", we are constantly seeking coherences and meaning in our lives (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 175). Anything that does not fit in the coherent whole are left out from the life stories we construct and tell, even if they might be extremely important. However, if we create a new metaphor of 'Life's... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing", then it would perhaps become easier to deal with the changing circumstances of our lives, possible to accept the discontinuity without looking for certain meaning and coherences (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 175). Just as we live in the metaphors of heroes and heroines, princes and princesses, if we could develop a new metaphor to live by, if we would live in the metaphor of songs or particles, then perhaps boys and girls would grow up to be musicians or tree planters instead of soldiers or leaders. By creating a new metaphor, we have the power to create a new reality.

"Fantasy provides a rich ground for metaphor..." (Webb, 1995, p. 155).

The direction of metaphor asks the readers to dig more deeply and to create a meaning that "roughly corresponds to what the writer intended but is richer and more personal" (Webb, p. 155). It is the charm of metaphor that each reader

could create a different meaning, and each personal interpretation adds one more seriousness and greatness to the storytelling. Because the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another, metaphors become a powerful device for writers to approach a different vision of reality. Through the metaphorical, fantasy writers create a separated world. To understand this separated world, readers are asked to activate their imagination, for “any really deep understanding of why we do what we do, feel what we feel, change as we change and even believe what we believe, takes us beyond ourselves” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 222). We search for appropriate personal metaphors from our past, our present activities, experiences we had and senses we have, in order to perceive what is depicted in the separated world. In fact, “metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious” when we wander in the imaginary world (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 239), for “it transforms the strange into the familiar,” and the familiar into the strange (Ozick, 1989, p. 280). The writers therefore have to create their separated world with a firm basis in the readers’ primary world reality as well as a complete inner consistency in the created world so that the readers can be involved and their mind can enter the marvelous world.

The writing of fantasy appears to be closely linked with man’s rational being and perception of the natural world. What may at first sight seem to be a paradox lies in fact at the heart of fantasy: that is, that to create an imaginative and imaginary world it is necessary to observe faithfully the rules of logic and inner consistency which, although they may differ from those operating in our own world,

must nevertheless be as true to themselves as their parallel operations are in the normal world (Swinfen, 1984, p. 3).

Not only must the geography, history and the natural law be self-consistent, so must the cultural background. However, within this constructed framework, the authors of the fantastic have more artistic freedom than those of the realistic novels. Here they are free from the restrictions of the many social conventions, the assumptions and realities of the primary world. In the context of the separated world, the authors depict their views of society or philosophy of life.

With considerable common ground for the readers to recognize some relevance for herself and for her experience and the complete self-consistency within the context, the separated world constructed by skillful writers command complete secondary belief on the part of the reader in her capacity for imaginative sensitivity and freedom. Writers like Tolkein and Ursula Le Guin, create their secondary worlds, Middle Earth and Earthsea, with great success. When the reader's mind enters their separated worlds, inside it, as Swinfen quoted of Tolkien, "what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside." (p. 5). What the writers offer is their own views of society or philosophy of life and their own schemes of morality in the metaphorical form. For the readers who enter the separated worlds, they are not provided with mere escapism "but a method of approaching and evaluating the real world" (Swinfen, p. 230). The freedom provided by the genre of fantasy literature permits the writers to range beyond the limits of the

world reality and depict an experimental, separated world, and the readers to explore beyond an imaginative world and interpret the metaphors with their own past and memory. This quality makes fantasy a serious form of the contemporary literature.

Modern fantasy, far from being the escapist literature which it is sometimes labeled, is a serious form of the modern novel, often characterized by notable literary merit, and concerned both with heightened awareness of the complex nature of primary reality and with the exploration beyond in imaginative and spiritual otherworlds. Through fantasy, man does indeed enter the Perilous Realm, and may find there both the familiar made strange, and the strange made familiar (p. 234).

These great novels transform experience into ideas, transform memory into tales, transform one person's fantasy into another's reality, transform the familiar into strangeness and vice versa. Most of these transformations are presented in metaphors that invite the readers to enter "a place where each heart is meant to rave on in its uniqueness, [where] there is no means for the grief of one heart to implicate the understanding of another heart" (Ozick, 1989, p. 280). As Ozick stated his beautiful and powerful ideas about metaphor in this book *Metaphor & Memory*:

Through metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us, and we it. Through metaphorical concentration, doctors can imagine what it is to be their patients. Those who have no pain can imagine those who suffer. Those at the center can imagine what it is to be outside. The strong can imagine the weak. Illuminated lives can imagine the

dark. Poets in their twilight can imagine the borders of stellar fire.  
We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers (p. 283).

Metaphors presented in the genre of fantasy literature is therefore one of the chief device guiding readers to imagine their past, revision their reality, re-interpret and re-shape their personal narratives.

### **Importance of Stories: Personal Narrative and Imagination**

Human beings are storytellers by nature. In many guises, as folktale, legend, myth, epic, history, motion picture and television program, the story appears in every known human culture. The story is a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information. Storytelling appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others (McAdams, 1993, p. 27).

Many stories have been told orally and in writing across time and space, languages and cultures. Our sense of selves are embedded in the stories we tell, and the language we use in our narrative line is often framed by the cultural code. Through stories, we learn about others and ourselves, past, present and future; we are learned and known; we remember and are remembered. And by re-visioning our stories, we are re-shaped. While the stories are retold, the plot is imagined and the possibilities are discovered. Here I ask: how do stories affect our lives? How do we tell our stories? I will present various stories, some of which are very splendid, and shall begin here with a beautiful quote from Witherell (1991), inspired by David Carr's *Time, Narrative, and History*:



Can my life be regarded as an event that I experience, an experience I have ...or perhaps an action I perform? Is it thus the sort of 'story' in which I am character, story-teller, and audience all at once?" This sense of self is to be taken in the broadest sense, that is, the self that "is concerned not with the right or wrong of particular actions or even rules for action, but with the question of how to live one's life as a whole, and with questions about the nature of individual human existence, character, and personal identity" (p.92).

### **To Begin the Story: Personal Narrative**

*When I was a child – very shy, very self-conscious – I was sometimes taken by my mother to events at which I would be introduced to adults who swooped at me with toothy smiles and unanswerable questions. I had a tendency to look at the ground, scrunch the hem of my dress in my hand, chew on a strand of my own hair, and scuff one shoe against the other during those painful moments.*

*"Look up!" my mother used to tell me. "Hold your shoulders straight! Look people in the eye! Hold out your hand! Say, 'fine, thank you, how are you?'"*

*I tried, but it was excruciating. I wasn't fine at all, holding out my nail-bitten hand for a stranger to shake. I was paralyzed, mute, and hoping for a trap door to open beneath me so that I could disappear with a whoosh into some dark cavern where I could curl up with a book until the grownups stopped their socializing. [...]*

*But I am all grown up now, so I have learned to stand up straight and hold out my hand. Here I am, looking you right in the eye. I would like to introduce you to this book. It has no plot. It is about moments, memories, fragments, falsehoods, and fantasies. It is about things that happened, which caused other things to happen, so that eventually stories emerged. [Lowry, 1998, How Do You Do: An Introduction]*

I met Lois Lowry at the Children's Literature Matters Conference in 2001. She was an elegant speaker with so much unsaid wisdom sparkling in her eyes. When she stood on the stage with both hands folded behind her, telling stories about herself, her son, her past, their past, I felt as if I saw the very shy, very self-conscious child she was describing in her *Looking Back*. It was through her words – they were told in such a dramatic way that I was utterly absorbed in her narrative – I learned about a fascinating writer. Her narrative, describing poignant phases of her past, conveyed her emotions and connected mine. Our life paths crossed at that moment, and some part of me made a little better sense of life by comprehending her narrative line. Like Witherell, C. (1991) quoted from Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings*, Lowry's and my separate journeys converged at the meeting point.

It is our inward journey that leads us through time – forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling. Each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember, remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Our living experience at those meeting points is one of the charged dramatic fields of fiction (p. 83).

That day after her speech, I had a chance to tell her a little bit about myself, my story. I told her how the stories she told in her novels and her *Looking Back* connected and moved me. She gave me an amiable smile and our conversation went on. Stories linked us – Lowry and I, I and you, who is now reading this paper.

Stories we tell express who we are to both ourselves – the storyteller, and the audience – the listener. Through the storytelling, we construct ourselves and identify who we are with our inner selves and others. “Over the course of our lives, we continually build a sense of self through our stories of personal experience. We remember events and occasions and repeat those experiences to ourselves and to others in a story form” (Engel, 1995, p.10). The events in our life, the experience we go through, the journey we take, they are what we are and who we are. Every turn we make along our journey, we make a choice and the plot is created. “To a great extent we are the stories we tell, and our memories of personal experiences are what give us a history and a sense of who we are – past, present, and future.” (Engel, p.14) These stories “not only order experience but order it in ways that are meaningful to us” (Engel, p.32). In every situation we experience, a memory is formed as a story. These stories and memories are woven like a quilt and then pieced together to assemble who and what we are. “Every curve in the river road has a story, and every straight run is the pause before a story. Story, story, story the map-quilt gets made, gets folded for the pocket of the mind ...” (Stafford, 1991, p. 17). When we begin a story, we are making a choice “from an infinity of possibilities” (Rosen, 1986, p.231). The way we tell our personal narrative implies the way we see ourselves, affects how other people see us, and then further influences how we see ourselves. Our feelings and emotions are embedded and expressed in our stories, and connect ourselves with our past, present and future. It is also through these threads we bind ourselves with the world in relation to people around – in time and space,

we locate our place. “Every work of literature has both a situation and a story. The situation is the context or circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say” (Gornick, 2001, p. 13).

What does it take, then, for a person to tell her own story? What is personal narrative to a person? What is being told in a person’s narrative? Gornick stated:

The writing we call personal narrative is written by people who, in essence, are imagining only themselves: in relation to the subject in hand. The connection is an intimate one; in fact, it is critical. Out of the raw material of a writer’s own undisguised being a narrator is fashioned whose existence on the page is integral to the tale being told. This narrator becomes a persona. Its tone of voice, its angle of vision, the rhythm of its sentence, what is selected to observe and what to ignore are chosen to serve the subject; yet at the same time the way the narrator – or the persona – sees things is, to the largest degree, the thing being seen (p.6).

It would seem easy for a person to tell her own story. Isn’t it simply that she puts all the events into the correct sequence and then the story begins? Paragraph upon paragraph, reflections, passions, emotions, dilemmas, wounds, joy and pain – all of these are being told in a personal narrative. When it comes to telling stories, how can this be an easy task, as we often believe?

*When [J. R.] Ackerley died in 1967, at the age of seventy-one, he left behind a remarkable piece of confessional writing he had been working on for the better part of thirty years. It is, ostensibly, a tale of family life. He was the son of Roger Ackerley, a fruit merchant known most of his life as “the banana king.” This father was a large, easygoing, generous man, at once expansive and kindly but indirect in his manner, most indirect. Ackerley himself*

*grew up to become literary and homosexual, absorbed by his own interests and secrets, given to hiding his real life from the family. After his father's death in 1929 Ackerley learned that Roger had lived a double life. All the time the Ackerleys were growing up in middle-class comfort in Richmond, the father was keeping a second family on the other side of London: a mistress and three daughters. The disclosure of this "secret orchard," as the Victorian euphemism had it, astounded Joe Ackerley to such a degree that he became obsessed with probing deeper into the obscurity of his father's beginnings. In time he became convinced that in his youth Roger had also been a male whore and that it was through the love of a wealthy man that had had gained his original stake in life (Gornick, 2001, p.18).*

As said in the story, it took Mr. Ackerley thirty years to tell. The author, Vivian Gornick, who retold this story asked: "why did it take him thirty years to tell it? Why not three?" (p.18) Because it was not simply a person's story; it was J.R. Ackerley's situation – "the story that took thirty years to get itself told" (p.18) A personal narrative to a person is often not simply a story to tell; it is a painful struggle of a person encountering her past self whom she was unable to face, confronting the past experience that she was incapable of comprehending at the time. "Through the poignant grip of story and metaphor we meet ourselves and the other in our mutual quest for goodness and meaning" (Nodding & Witherell, 1991, p.4).

*Ackerley was, he thought, only putting together a puzzle of family life. All I have to do, he said to himself, is get the sequence right and the details correct and everything will fall into place. But nothing fell into place. After a while he thought, I'm not describing a presence, I'm describing an absence. This is the tale of an un-lived relationship. Who was he? Who was I? Why did we keep missing each other? After another while he realized, I always thought my father didn't want to know me. Now I see I didn't want to know*

*him. And then he realized, It's not him I haven't wanted to know, it's myself (Gornick, 2001, p.19).*

Ackerley met himself for the first time when he finally was able to tell his own story. "It is through telling our own stories that we learn who we are and what we need" (Cooper, 1991, p.99). A personal narrative thus brings a person to a knowing, an understanding, and a communication of and with herself.

### **To Communicate: Stories Becoming Meaningful**

Without a story, we perish. Stories define our lives: they teach us what is possible and good, help set our goals and limits, offer us role models and explain mysteries. Without stories – myths and legends, folktales and sacred texts, romances and comedies and tragedies – our lives would be formless (Cooper, 1991, p.97)

What do stories do in life? From the very first day, when our eyes were still tiny and not yet able to see, or perhaps earlier, when we were still small creatures living in the safest environment full of water, we were read to or told stories. Stories about grandmothers, uncles, father's youth, mother's first love, stories like *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Happy Prince*, stories from the foreign lands, and stories passed on from the ancestors, these stories nurture us, sooth us, educate us and comfort us, sometimes bringing laughter, other times tears. "Listening to stories is an ancient form of nurturance" (Cooper, p.104). At night, stories keep the little child company and take her into the dream world. During the day, stories quiet the crying baby and attract attention in her curious

eyes. Stories nourish the child's mind. She not only learns to listen to the stories but also to tell them. The language of storytelling – expressing, describing, conveying – is thus acquired, as Le Guin (1989) suggested, “To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story” (p. 39). Then when the child grows up, she tells the stories she remembers to her acquaintances, her close friends, her children, and so these stories are passed on. It is then how our past is remembered, how our history continued and how relationships are built, and how communication is established.

*How many generations to work a story down to size, to rub away the burrs and sawdust of its making? You have to forget 90% of what happens if you want to tell the story right. So said Wilma, substitute teacher in residence at Wallowa School. She was a teacher by story, story alone. Something about her dress, softened by a lifetime of washings, hung down. Something about the spark her eyes kindled. Something about her hands held up to shape a face that's been long buried about burns in the air:*

*“My uncles, they all had handsome faces, but Earl was the darling – dark hair, chin like a pretty little axe, but he could talk blue. Those eyes. Had to leave West Virginia in a hurry. We never did know why. But he made the best white lightning you ever dreamed. He always kept a Mason jar full in the refrigerator. Liked his cold.*

*“Well, he comes home pretty looped one night, along in the spring, shouting about the cabbage maggots. We hear him slam the car door and shout, ‘Damn you, maggots! I’ll fix you!’*

*“We hear him fumbling around in the hall, stumbling around. I remember I figured he was just trying to make it to his bedroom. But no, I hear the snap of his shotgun action getting loaded.*

*“‘You think just because you’re little, you’re safe!’ That line wakes everybody up. I can hear Mama call out, ‘Earl! I want you calm!’ But then he starts for the back door, and I sit up in bed. It’s just*

*starting to get light. I pull the curtains back when I hear the screen door bang shut and the dogs whimper as they get out of Earl's way.*

*"Your time's come, so stand up all of you and take it!"*

*"Earl! Mama's in the hall, but I can see she's too late. Earl's in the garden and raising the shotgun toward the east. And just as the sun's first rays flicker onto his face, he fires off both barrels level over the garden into the trees out east.*

*"BOOM! BARRROOOOM! He has a wild, satisfied grin on his face, and all of Mama's calling from the back porch can't make it go away.*

*"You know, we never did have trouble with cabbage maggots after that. I know it sounds crazy. It is crazy. Gardening is like that. And Earl's white lightning is too. We took it for a saying in the family, whenever things go so impossible we didn't have any logical thing to do, we'd say, 'Fire two shots toward the rising sun!' And after we said that, and thought about Earl standing there so happy his pants were about to fall down, nothing seemed quite so bad" (Stafford, 1991, p.18).*

Stories record the emotions, feelings, experiences and relationships in our lives. They consist of our memories. When we remember, we remember in the story form. Thus when a story is recalled or retold, it is not just the story itself that is being presented; it is also the memories and the emotions stored in the story that are being uncovered. "It's not just what we remember that shapes our experience and our sense of who we are. It is also how we remember" (Engel, 1995, p.13). What stories do is "more than simply add color to the day. We use stories to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives, to communicate with other people, and to develop relationships with them. We tell stories to become part of the social world, to know and reaffirm who we are" (p.25). Some stories stay with us for our lifetime; others fade. How do our minds



select what to remember, what to forget? How does a story become so meaningful to a person that she holds on to it for as long as she lives? How do we communicate with other people through stories we remember?

Robert Coles (1989), in his book *The Call of Stories*, recorded a number of beautiful stories of his students reading novels. These youngsters knew pain, had problems in their lives and mostly had to 'fight' their ways out of their bad conditions, but they, too, accumulated stories. When they met Dr. Coles, they 'exchanged' stories with him. The question they asked was powerful: "Have you ever read a book that really made a difference to you – a book you couldn't get out of your mind, and you didn't want to [get out of your mind]?" (p. 36). Stories profoundly transformed these young minds. These youth were having rough lives, but stories had "worked their way into everyday reality of their young lives: watching their mothers iron, and thinking of a story; watching a certain heavy-drinking friend, relative, neighbor, and thinking of a story; watching children in church, and themselves in school, and thinking of story" (p.57). The stories they read did not simply pass by. Instead, they had become so meaningful and made such an impression "that lasts 'longer than a few hours'" (p.189).

*"This novel won't let go of me," a college freshman said to me about Invisible Man – and the student was white and from a wealthy, powerful family. Moreover, he was at pains to let me know that he hadn't ever been especially interested in the racial question of the United States and that a reading of the Ellison novel had not at first pushed him in such a direction. What, then, did he make of the novel he has read, to make of his response? In his papers and in his contributions to the class discussions he made clear what Ellison had set in motion – a new awareness of himself*

*as “ignorant” more than “prejudiced.” He kept pointing to the irony that for years he had traveled to every continent, including a brief stop in Antarctica, yet never went near Harlem, less than fifty miles from his parents’ Connecticut home. Such an irony is, of course, not all that singular in American life. But this student did something more with the Ellison novel: he worked himself into it, connected himself to the central character in such a way that some of Ellison’s “invisibility” became for an eminently privileged youth of eighteen a means of self-recognition: “My parents are so damn busy with their lives that they usually want us out of the way, and the longer the better. No wonder they sent me to boarding school when I was only twelve, and no wonder I was off at camp from the age of seven onward. When I was finishing Invisible Man I remembered a time long ago; I must have been six or seven, maybe. My mother and father were talking about my brother and me and our older sister. They’d had their Manhattans; that’s what they always drank. I heard them say they were going on a vacation, and I heard my dad say something that meant he might worry about us, and then I heard my mother say, ‘Out of sight, out of mind.’ She wasn’t a bad person, but she sure loved a good time. I think we were invisible to her – out of her mind a lot of the time. All those maids took her place. It took that novel to get me remembering!”*

*A memory can be sprung loose by an encounter with quite another world. That student had found John Cheever’s stories all too familiar; they gave him an occasion to yawn and think of Manhattans and sailboats and tennis games. [...] Ellison’s novel brought him an insight: he had learned not to notice because he himself had been persistently ignored. With a renewed awareness, he could stop and think of not only about America’s racial problems but his personal ones as well (p.191).*

A story brings out another story. A fictional story touches and connects a life story. A person is bound to another through the storytelling. “All these stories entered one idea together: A story saves life a little at a time by making us see and hear and taste our lives and dreams more deeply. A story does not heroically rescue life at the end but all along the road, continually. I do not make the story; the story makes me;” so said Stafford (1991), “If I can live deeply enough, I will

not feel the need to live this life again. Stories do stick to people like cockleburrs  
(p.28)

### **Conflict: Who Is the Narrator?**

Whether writer or teller, the narrator of a story provides further meaning – and even further text – to the story being told. The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p. 3).

*NARRATOR: Once upon a time – in a far-off kingdom – lived a young maiden – a sad young lad – and a childless baker – with his wife.*

*CINDERELLA: I wish...more than anything...more than life ...more than jewels...The King is giving a Festival. I wish to go to the Festival – and the Ball...*

*JACK: I wish...more than life...more than anything...I wish...I wish my cow would give us some milk.*

*BAKER, WIFE: I wish...more than the moon...more than life...more than riches...I wish we had a child. [Sondheim & Lapine, 1987, Into the Woods, p. 4]*

So the narrator began to tell the stories of Cinderella, Jack, and Baker and his wife. As the story went on, Little Red Ridinghood came to Baker to ask for a loaf of bread for her grandmother; a Witch appeared to tell Baker he had a sister whose name was Rapunzel and if they wished to have a child they must break a curse by finding four things in the woods; Jack's mother sent Jack away to sell their cow; Cinderella went into the woods to implore her mother's spirit for help.

All the characters went into the woods for their own reasons and purposes, and eventually, they came to meet each other. In the woods, they all had their wishes come true and everyone was happy ever after. However, the story did not end. Things began to go wrong after they obtained what they had wished for. The characters were not as happy as they had expected. While the narrator continued the story, he made observation, interpretation, and even examined the characters' moral issues. In the middle of his telling, there came to a conflict between the characters and the narrator.

*NARRATOR: It is interesting to examine the moral issue at question here. The finality of stories such as these dictates – Sorry, I tell the story, I'm not part of it.*

*LITTLE RED RIDINGHOOD: That's right.*

*WITCH: Not one of us.*

*BAKER: Always on the outside.*

*NARRATOR: That's my role. You must understand, there must always be someone on the outside.*

*STEWARD: You're going to be on the inside now.*

*NARRATOR: You're making a big mistake.*

*STEPMOTHER: Nonsense.*

*NARRATOR: You need an objective observer to pass the story along.*

*WITCH: Some of us don't like the way you've been telling it.*

*NARRATOR: If you drag me into this mess, you'll never know how your story ends. You'll be lost!*

*BAKER: Wait! He's the only one who knows the story.*

*NARRATOR: Do you think it will be fun when you have to tell it yourselves? [...] You don't want to live in a world of chaos. There must always be an outside obser – (p.103).*

The characters got rid of their narrator and decided to manage what would happen next on their own. Gradually, they helped each other to end the story and discovered hope by learning from each other's personal stories.

Being the storyteller, the narrator of our personal narrative, how do we tell our own stories? Are we really our own narrator? Or are we only the characters whose stories are being told by some narrator that we call 'self' who is making judgment, observing, and defining meaning for us, a narrator who is so well trained by the committee of Culture, Society, Authority and Power that she is not even aware of the language she has been using? Where did we learn this language of storytelling? How are the language and the ways of telling constructed? Helle (1991) altered Eagleton's notions and stated:

Theoretical discourse has typically been language held by those in power, and it has often structured our reality by pointing to fixed and impartial frames of reference – hallmarks of the exclusive reliance on separate knowing. Once such references become part of a cultural code, they operate unconsciously to constrain rather than to liberate the construction of alternative standpoints (p.63).

Under the didactics of Culture, we learn our personal narrative and the authoritative language. "Authoritative discourse demands 'our unconditional allegiance – permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no creative stylizing variants on it. It is

indissolubly fused with its authority. It is all inertia and calcification” (Rosen, p. 234). Most of the time, we can subtly and properly use the language quite well. We think of ourselves as our own narrators and let this narrator tell the story, believing that she knows how the narrative should be constructed and how our stories should end. Only occasionally when we meet a person who does not follow the ‘natural’ course of telling her personal narrative, and see her constantly struggling, panicking, and feeling lost, do we realize that the culture in which the narrative is told becomes what limits the telling. We then find out that we are as lost as those who do not follow the ‘natural’ path, just as described in this striking and deliberative personal essay by Seymour Krim, quoted in Gornick (2001):

*At 51, believe it or not, or believe it and pity me if you are young and swift, I still don't know truly 'what I want to be.' I've published several serious books. I rate an inch in Who's Who in America. I teach at a so-called respected university. But in that profuse upstairs delicatessen of mine I'm as open to every wild possibility as I was at 13, although even I know that the chances of acting them out diminish with each heartbeat...*

*That's because I come from America, which has to be the classic, ultimate, then-they-broke-the-mold incubator of not knowing who you are until you find out. I have never really found out and I expect what remains of my life to be one long search party for the final me. I don't kid myself that I'm alone in this, hardly, and I don't really think that the great day will ever come when I hold a finished me in my fist and say here you are, congratulations. I'm talking primarily about the expression of that me in the world, the shape it takes, the profile it zings out, the 'work' it does. [...]*

*Our secret is that we still have an epic longing to be more than what we are, to multiply ourselves, to integrate all the identities and action-fantasies we have experienced, above all to keep experimenting with our lives all the way to Forest Lawn ... Let me*

*say it plainly: Our true projects have finally been ourselves*  
(Gornick, 2001, p.53).

When we tell our story, deliver our narrative and interpret our past experience, the language is sometimes so constructed and the interpretation is so fixed that we do not see any space for other possibilities. It is as if the story line has been already determined; the past has already happened, been 'understood,' and meaning has already been comprehended; who we are, what we can become and how we can tell about ourselves are all given. Narrative is a means of making sense of our experience. But "why are we likely to underestimate the number and variety of stories we tell?" (Engel, p.5). Stories and the narrative form seem to be so much a part of our lives that we either don't realize their extent or neglect their numerous constructing forms. In his book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Dr. Sacks (1985) told stories about men who lost their sense of visual in various ways. Dr P., for example, is a man "who has (albeit only in the sphere of the visual) wholly lose the emotional, the concrete, the personal, the 'real' ... and been reduced, as it were, to the abstract and the categorical with consequences of a particularly preposterous kind" (p. 5). How does a person, like Dr P., then, interpret his life? How does he construct and tell his own personal narrative? What language does he use?

*Dr P. was a musician of distinction, well-known for many years as a singer, and then, at the local School of Music, as a teacher. It was here, in relation to his students, that certain strange problems were first observed. Sometimes a student would present himself,*

*and Dr P. would not recognize him; or specifically, would not recognize his face. The moment the student spoke, he would be recognized by his voice. Such incidents multiplied, causing embarrassment, perplexity, fear- and, sometimes, comedy. For not only did Dr P. increasingly fail to see faces, but he saw faces when there were no faces to see: genially, Magoo-like, when in the street, he might pat the heads of water hydrants and parking meters, taking these to be the heads of children; he would amiably address carved knobs on the furniture, and be astounded when they did not reply. [...]*

*It was obvious within a few seconds of meeting him that there was no trace of dementia in the ordinary sense. He was a man of great cultivation and charm, who talked well and fluently, with imagination and humor. I couldn't think why he had been referred to our clinic [neurology].*

*And yet there was something a bit odd. He faced me as he spoke, was oriented towards me, and yet there was something the matter – it was difficult to formulate. He faced me with his ears, I came to think, but not with his eyes. [...]*

*'What seems to be the matter?' I asked him at length.*

*'Nothing that I know of,' he replied with a smile, but people seem to think there's something wrong with my eyes.'*

*'But you don't recognize any visual problems?'*

*'No, not directly, but I occasionally make mistakes.' [...]*

*It was while examining his reflexes – a trifle abnormal on the left side – that the first bizarre experience occurred. I had taken off his left shoe and scratched the sole of his foot with a key – a frivolous-seeming but essential test of a reflex – and then, excusing myself to screw my ophthalmoscope together, left him to put on the shoe himself. To my surprise, a minute later, he had not done this.*

*'Can I help?' I asked.*

*'Help what? Help whom?'*

*'Help you put on your shoe.'*

*'Ach,' he said, 'I had forgotten the shoe', adding, sotto voce, 'The shoe? The shoe?' He seemed baffled.*



*'Your shoe,' I repeated. 'Perhaps you'd put it on.'*

*He continued to look downwards, though not at the shoe, with an intense but misplaced concentration. Finally his gaze settled on his foot: "That is my shoe, yes?"*

*Did I mis-hear? Did he mis-see?*

*'My eyes,' he explained, and put a hand to his foot. 'This is my shoe, no?'*

*'No, it is not. That is your foot. There is your shoe.'*

*'Ah! I thought that was my foot' (Sacks, 1985, p. 10).*

Dr. Sacks continued Dr P.'s story in the chapter, where he described how Dr P. was unable to recognize a rose until he smelled the flower, unable to identify his own family from their pictures unless there were noticeable characteristics on their faces. How does Dr. P continue his life?

*How does he do anything, I wondered to myself? What happens when he's dressing, goes to the lavatory, has a bath? I followed his wife into the kitchen and asked her how, for instance, he managed to dress himself. 'It's just like the eating,' she explained. 'I put his usual clothes out, in all the usual places, and he dresses without difficulty, singing to himself. He does everything singing to himself. But if he is interrupted and loses the thread, he comes to a complete stop, doesn't know his clothes – or his own body. He sings all the time – eating songs, bathing songs, everything. He can't do anything unless he makes it a song.'*

*While we were talking my attention was caught by the pictures on the walls.*

*'Yes,' Mrs. P said, 'he was a gifted painter as well as a singer. The School exhibited his pictures every year.'*

*I strolled past them curiously – they were in chronological order. All his earlier work was naturalistic and realistic, with vivid mood and atmosphere, but finally detailed and concrete. Then, years*

*later, they became less vivid, less concrete, less realistic and naturalistic.... Finally, in the last paintings, the canvasses became nonsense, or nonsense to me – mere chaotic lines and blotches of paint. I commented on this to Mrs. P.*

*'Ach, you doctors, you're such philistines!' she exclaimed, 'Can you not see artistic development – how he renounced the realism of his earlier years, and advanced into abstract, non-representational art?' (p. 16).*

Dr. Sacks then gave a paragraph of comments that profoundly struck me.

We interpret lives mostly by seeing. Gradually only what can be seen makes sense to us. We construct our personal narratives, tell our own stories and see ourselves through what we 'see.' The invisible thus often becomes the unimaginable. Are the ways we comprehend the world and construct our stories only so concrete and obvious? What happens when one loses the sense of concrete and the visual reality? Is it only catastrophe or is it another possibility?

*And yet, I wondered, was she not partly right? For there is often a struggle, and sometimes, even more interestingly, a collusion between the powers of pathology and creation. Perhaps, in his cubist period, there might have been both artistic and pathological development, colluding to engender an original form; for as he lost the concrete, so he might have gained in the abstract, developing a greater sensitivity to all the structural elements of line, boundary, contour – an almost Picasso-like power to see, and equally depict, those abstract organizations embedded in, and normally lost in, the concrete ... [...]*

*'Well, Dr. Sacks,' he said to me. 'You find me an interesting case, I perceive. Can you tell me what you find wrong, make recommendations?'*

*'I can't tell you what I find wrong,' I replied, 'but I'll say what I find right. You are a wonderful musician, and music is your life. What I would prescribe, in a case such as yours, is a life which*

*consists entirely of music. Music has been the center, now make it the whole, of your life' (p. 17).*

The language Dr P. uses is music. It is through this 'different' language he interprets and tells his personal narrative. And it is through his narrative that Dr. Sacks discovers another possible world. "The question becomes not what is the "right" standpoint for knowing, but how we can come to understand, individually and collectively, the forces that nourish greater inclusiveness, change, and growth over time" (Helle, 1991, p.55). When we envision what is constructed in our minds on the terms of others and revision on ours, finding a different language, a possible world displays.

### **Shaping Lives and Retelling: Imagination**

Imagination plays a central role in the formation of the self, including its narrative structure. It is imagination that enables us to ask the "what if" and "as if" questions that can guide our explorations of human events and actions of the past and our sense of possibilities for the present and future. Karen Hanson, in *The Self Imagined* (1986), develops her notion of self as grounded in imagination and in one's interest in the past, present, and future, including their continuities (Witherell, 1991, p.88).

The stories we tell, stories about ourselves and stories we remember, represent the ways we view or the meaning we interpret of the stories. Each time the same story is told, a possibly changing viewpoint is conveyed along the narrative. As Paul (1998) suggested, "...the story I tell depends very much on

how I look” (p.35). When we tell our personal narrative, we are also telling how we see, read and interpret our past. But can we “imagine the past instead of perceiving it as a kind of received truth?” (Makler, 1991, p. 31). Or can the story be retold from a different perspective? Every time a story is told, a changing viewpoint is also presented. Then how do we make the change happen? How do we “recount the past...reclaim it,” and retell our story? (Makler, p.45).

Cooper (1991) instructed a group of students to learn who they are and what they need through telling their own stories by journal writing. “Students tell their own stories and listened to each other’s stories in ways that were honest, caring, and at times enormously moving” (p.98). This form of narrative allows them to rethink their past, present and future selves. One of the students wrote a farewell letter in which she expresses where this journey had taken her.

*The thought of coming to Journal Class on Saturday – even a warm, sunny Saturday – left me not with dread but with anticipation. Maybe it was the comradery with the group, maybe the sanction to write freely and fully, maybe the chance to listen and cry and laugh with others as they grew through this journey called life. Each of us came to the class from our own little crowded world, and many of us wondered and fought this gut-wrenching process called reflection. Yet the first day so many weeks ago, we each ventured out a little at a time to experiment and trust ... writing, thinking, writing, sharing, searching ... each time we tackled an assignment we felt the challenge – spurred on by our honesty – to dig deep and question values ... it has been a wonderful class and has probably been the thread of self awareness and willingness to discover – the sanctuary of those processes – that held my life in some sense of perspective this spring (p. 98).*

By revisiting our past, we re-interpret our stories, and understand that “Part of who we are is determined by what we imagine” (Engel, p.186). Like these students of Coopers (1991), while we tell our own stories we “simultaneously incorporating our own future, as we reconstruct our past” (p. 98). Therefore who we are to become is not yet settled but “best determined by the stories [we] can *learn* to tell” (Rosen, p.236). Thus, our stories are not what is given, but what can be imagined.

*When the telephone rang at my house in Massachusetts, it was so early that it was still dark and I was still sound asleep. But in Germany, where my son lived with his wife and daughter (whom he called Bean), it was eleven in the morning.*

*Margret, my daughter-in-law, was calling. In the bravest voice that I have ever heard, she told me that Grey’s plane had crashed and he had died. That was the saddest day of my life (Lowry, 1998, p. 167).*

*I imagine, again, being able to talk to my mother. She was fifty-six when her daughter – my sister; Helen – died. I was fifty-eight when I lost Grey.*

*I picture us having coffee together; two middle-aged moms with a look of sadness.*

*“What was it like for you?” I ask her. “How could you bear it?”*

*“It was a piece of my life ripped away,” she replies. “But I still had a family left. So I put one foot in front of the other and went on.”*

*“You looked ahead,” I said, knowing that’s what I would have to do.*

*She nodded. And she smiled. “But I looked back all the time, too,” she explained (Lowry, p. 172).*

How does one find the strength to go through the poignant phases of the past, re-visiting the sadness and wounds, trying to make sense of it and to look for an alternate perspective to retell that part of her life story? I have always found encouragement from these words of Charles Lemert (1997):

Personal courage is among the competencies given us. But it is up to us to exercise it – to face the unacceptable realities that can only be accepted, to imagine the better possibilities, then to live with those we hate no less than with those we love (p.190).

Perhaps not every retelling is coherent and comprehensible, but we can reread our stories “in endlessly changing ways ....The alternate ways of reading may battle one another, marry one another, mock one another....There is something in the telling, ....The story goes nowhere and everywhere” The power of stories is “in the dialectical interaction they establish between the two: ‘the fusion of scandal and miracle” (Bruner, 1986, p.7). And the power of imagination is “to create empathy between one’s self and the lived experience of those in other times and places ... It is a way of acknowledging the common dimensions of shared humanity across the chasm of passed time and the cultural separations ...” (Makler, 1991, p.45). In creating the alternate narrative, we discover that the attraction of stories is the power in the act of disclosing a possible world.

## Chapter 3

### Fantasists as Sociologists

The fantasist, whether he uses the ancient archetypes of myth and legend or the younger ones of science and technology, may be talking as seriously as any sociologist – and a good deal more directly – about human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived” (Le Guin, 1989, p.48).

Sociologists study human life and contemplate various ways of understanding the individuals and the society. They seek to comprehend and to be aware of the connection between individual and social realities. Sociology is “stories people tell about what they have figured out about their experiences in social life. This is the most basic sense in which sociology is always an act of the imagination” (Lemert, 1995, p.14). This imagination, which enables individuals to see and to realize that their own personal issues are in fact public, is what sociologists call sociological imagination (Mills, 1959; Lemert, 1997). Reading sociology, we are reading about a world we are part of and active in, “a world that situates exactly the actualities that we live. We are also, of course, reading in that world and being related to the same world as that in which our reading is going on” (Smith, 1989, p. 43). When reading fantasy literature, readers step into a separated world. During the reading process, with our minds active in the world, we connect ourselves to the reality the authors create. Taking the lens of sociological imagination, we are invited to comprehend the experience we have

in the society and to relate ourselves with the separated world as well as our own actual world. Then we are guided to discover alternate perspectives of viewing our own life.

In this chapter, I will first explore the notion of sociological imagination as introduced by C. W. Mills in 1959. Le Guin has suggested that fantasists often talk as serious as sociologists, and I propose to take sociological imagination as a reading lens to interpret fantasy stories and argue that this lens help guide readers to transform their limited personal reality to endless possibilities. This method of reading will be applied to discuss Lois Lowry's two novels in a later chapter. The second half of this chapter presents an exploration on theories of feminism and studies of feminist fantasy. Feminism contributes to sociological theories as a critique, and feminist fantasy writers, as other fantasists who concern themselves with social conditions, particularly focus their attentions on the ideology of gender. Reading through this lens, connecting with the idea of sociological imagination, I intend to offer an example to demonstrate how reading fantasy novels through the lens of sociological imagination can open the door for readers – by entering that door, I re-encounter my past and revision my personal narrative. A discussion on Ursula Le Guin's two novels along with my personal narrative revision will be presented in a later chapter.

### **Transformation: Sociological Imagination as Reading Lens**

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life



and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within the welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that welter, the framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues (C. Wright Mills, 1959, p.5).

In his book, *Social Things*, sociologist Charles Lemert (1997) discussed the struggle that human beings experience in the society. Women struggled to discover and to try to be who they wished to be. Laborers struggled to convince the society or themselves the value of their existence. To Lemert, there were three powerful questions that all sociologists must try to answer:

How do people deal with the overwhelming power of social structures they cannot see? How do they live as subjects amid such big and mysterious social forces? And how do they measure the meaning of their lives against the array of social differences they encounter (p. xiv)?

Sociologists suggest that individuals need sociological imagination to make the connection between their troubles and the public issues of social structure. The real problem is perhaps not how women find their paths to be who they wish to be, or what laborers can do to express the value of their existence, but why do they need to do so, and the imagination is what helps individuals “to shift from one perspective to another” (Mills, 1959, p. 7), and to inquire cultural production and its relationship with their personal troubles.

## Cultural Production and Personal Troubles

“‘Society’, accordingly, is not anything we can feel, smell, touch, see, or hear – at least not directly” (Lemert, 1995, p. 15).

Individuals live a social life, reared and nurtured by the society in which they live. Within our society, we are given knowledge, made believed certain things, and living lives in certain ways. Within the reality we know, we make meaningful the world which makes us (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This form of knowledge, as Bourdieu (1993) suggested, is cultural capital, where culture is produced, and in which the social agents acquire “an internalized code” (p. 7). Through a long process of inculcation that includes family education from early childhood and institutionalized education, the code is created and learned.

Schooling serves to reinforce, rather than diminish, social differences. The culture it transmits is largely that of the dominant classes, and it tends to perceive and classify as ‘natural’ talent, and thus ‘natural’ superiority, levels of knowledge among students which are in fact largely the result of an informal learning process taking place within the family. The educational system transforms social hierarchies into academic hierarchies and, by extension, into hierarchies of ‘merit’ (Bourdieu, p. 23).

Individuals are then equipped with “a feel for the game, a practical sense” (p. 5) that inclines us to act and react in a certain manner in specific situations, the cultural competence that enables us to identify the “meaning” of any work of art, and a whole system of notions that balances our social relations, legitimizes

certain practices in our lives and therefore makes us members of the society.

Bruner (1986), in his book, *Actual Minds Possible Worlds*, studied the interaction between individuals as characters and the society as the settings in which they operate actions that are permissible and comprehensible according to social rules. He cited from Victor Turner's remark (1982) and suggested that "as we enter more actively into the life of a culture around us,

we come increasingly to play parts defined by the "dramas" of that culture. Indeed, in time the young entrant into the culture comes to define his own intentions and even his own history in terms of the characteristic cultural dramas in which he plays a part – at first family dramas, but later the ones that shape the expanding circle of his activities outside the family (p. 67).

Because the education starts from the very moment we are born, the practical sense we acquired becomes a natural one, almost like a second nature. In the structured field of cultural production, the culture of the dominant classes is transmitted, its values and beliefs are reinforced, and we become naturally able to empathize and appreciate the values and views our culture establishes for us. Most of us are hardly aware of how we relate as individuals to society. Often, we eagerly participate in the routines of our community and happily conform to conventional morality and motives. As proper members of our society, we work hard, get appropriately ambitious, and become successful in a modest way.

Every society holds images of its own nature – in particular, images and slogans that justify its system of power and the ways of the

powerful. ... By justifying the arrangement of power and the ascendancy of the powerful, images and ideas transform power into authority (Mills, 1959, p. 80).

Authority and rules are transformed into common values, morals we deeply hold, virtues we praise. Although we do not always understand the meaning of virtues, we adjust ourselves for them. We obtain instructions “to behave in ways the authorities define as proper and constructive” (Lemert, 1997, p. 42), knowledge and terms to comprehend features of ‘reality’, and defend our norms believing that these norms secure our ways of living and that structures are what make sense of our lives.

Many, if not all, types of human knowledge tend to use the same term to define those features of reality that most abstractly account for their better organized and evidently distinct spheres. With rare exception these are called *structures*. In some psychologies, the brain may be taken as the mass of structures in relation to which mental life is supposed to make sense....Thus, in a sociology, society is the imagined mass of structures without which a great deal of group life would make no sense (Italics original, Lemert, 1995, p. 17).

Thus when personal troubles occur, we as part of the larger society, blame ourselves for our wrong being– the cripples are doomed and the slow learners naturally ought to be eliminated by the standard. As Lemert (1997) remarked:

Adult women, boys and girls, minorities, the unjustly punished, victims of family violence, children of abusers or alcoholics, are all strongly tempted to place the blame for their misery on themselves (p. 12).

Adult women are ready to despise themselves when they do not spend enough time with their children or when they work too late to get up early and make breakfast for their husbands – bad mothers and bad wives, aren't they? Men see themselves as failures when they do not make a certain amount of money or when they are not working at some important job – What use is a man with no money and no power? Children and teenagers quickly accept themselves as incompetent students when their grades indicate an inadequate performance – What good can they do in the society when they grow up if they don't learn anything in school? Boys who are bad at sports grow up with low self-esteem – Who would want to admire a wimp? Girls loathe themselves for being fat and ugly – How is she ever going to get married? And for all of us, it is totally reasonable when others look down at us, scorn us, attack us, laugh at us, refuse to be our friends for us not being a gentle mother, a capable man, a behaved child, a proper individual in general. All of these happen only because we deserve them.

The value of our work and our performance is not determined by ourselves, for it has less to do with how much effort we invest than with who is judging our value and examining our work. Often, 'who' is the true producer of

the value of a work becomes an ambiguous and vague question. As Bourdieu (1993) questioned when considering the value of art or literature,

Who is the true producer of the value of the work – the painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the playwright or the theatre manager? The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work. The art trader is not just the agent who gives the work a commercial value by bringing it into a market; he is not just the representative, the impresario, who 'defends the authors he loves'. He is the person who can proclaim the value of the author he defends and above all 'invests his prestige' in the author's cause, acting as a 'symbolic banker' who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated (which he is liable to forfeit if he backs a 'loser') (p. 76-77).

In the field of cultural production, this structure of who proclaims the value is often invisible – that the creator and her creativity alone do not decide the value of her work is not acknowledged. The artists and writers, therefore, inevitably blame their own immature skills when their work does not sell.

The feeling that one is a worthless person is psychological, but the reality of the causes and effects of the feeling is sociological (Lemert, 1997, p. 19).

Personal troubles remain personal when society and structure are something we do not directly feel, smell, touch, see, or hear. From our standpoint, much that happens to us “seems the result of manipulation, of management, of blind drift” (Mills, p. 170). Those with power often feel no need to make their authority explicit; we ordinary people, as a result, often cannot get clear targets for thought and action when we are in trouble. We consent to our troubles, believing they are happening either because we are not good enough or because of our own bad luck. The question is: how do some people get luckier than others? When choosing a right place of publication, a right publisher, journal, or gallery becomes a vitally important factor for an author’s or an artist’s success; the matter of luck becomes problematic.

The powerful work of class structures is the sneaky work of convincing those who fail that they deserve to fail as much as those who succeed believe they deserve to succeed (Lemert, 1997, p. 144).

Under the force of the invisible structures, the prestige, the authority, and cultural production and reproduction, what does it take for individuals to know that many of their personal problems cannot be solved merely as troubles, “but must be understood in terms of public issues” (Mills, p. 226)?

## Imagining beyond Limits and Transforming

To write a history of the present requires stretching toward the horizon of what cannot be seen with ordinary clarity yet. And to stretch toward and beyond a horizon requires a particular kind of perception where the transparent and the shadowy confront each other. As an ethnographic project, to write the history of the present requires grappling with the form ideological interpellation takes – “we have *already* understood” – and with the difficulty of imagining beyond the limits of what is already *understandable*. To imagine beyond the limits of what is already understandable is our best hope for retaining what ideology critique traditionally offers while transforming its limitations into what, in an older Marxist language, was called utopian possibility (Italics original, Gordon, 1997, p. 195).

Growing up in a society, individuals become increasingly adept at seeing certain sets of events from certain perspectives or stances. These ways of seeing eventually build up walls that limit our vision to other worlds. Gradually, human eyes learn to ‘see’ certain things while at the same time ignoring others. Within these limits, we habitually exclude things that are not already understood, believing the realm of our experiences represents the whole reality and history is as how it says. It is therefore not an easy thing for the rules to be broken and structures to be deconstructed. Sociologist C. W. Mills introduced the notion of sociological imagination in 1959 and the idea has been widely studied, adapted and stretched by scholars in the field of sociology (Morgan, 1998), education (Shannon, 1999), and literature (Gordon, 1997). The sociological imagination marks a capacity “to shift from one perspective to another” (Mills, p. 7), to put the images, facts, experiences, and struggles together to make images relevant and lend meaning to facts. This imagination allows individuals “to range from the



most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two” (Mills, p. 7). Individuals begin to inquire about social things, asking ‘how does one good/bad-luck thing after another happen to a person?’ and ‘how do we become who we become?’ Within the range, in the life of an individual, the making of societies occurs; within this range “the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time” (Mills, p. 226).

Nevertheless, inquiry, as the beginning of making a difference, does not occur without a price. Alternatives are not something human minds easily accept and happily live on with. Questioning current condition, changing perspectives, and taking different stances involves such deep pain, struggle, and confusion that we often would rather choose the familiar and reject the altered. Therefore women who have violent husbands choose to stay in their marriages; workers laboring over time without getting proper pay decide to remain silent. Ordinary people follow rules even if they are bad rules, for we know that it is sometimes even more trouble to make things different. Imagining and living in a world different from the one currently in fashion is not easily achieved. After all, how can we be sure things would be better when they are different? How do we know that it is freedom that lies behind the wall of our limitations? Even if it is, what does freedom guarantee anyway? Our questions expose our reasons for avoiding change, living by strict routines, and sacrificing imagination.

The sociologist, Lemert (1997) encouraged his readers,

No one lives perfectly because no one is given control over all the social things that come down from the structured worlds. The most fundamental lesson of the sociological life is that the individual who intends to live well must begin, not with grand accomplishment, but with the simple acceptance of what comes across the path. Acceptance of the unyielding realities is not necessarily passive self-effacement. It is much more an attitude that gives us a chance to imagine the world as it is and might be, thus to change what we can (Lemert, 1997, p. 188).

All of us need to find our ways to live in the world. To transform, we need grace, for it indeed takes much effort to build the strength needed to bear the burdens inquiry, making changes, and finding freedom impose. Practice is necessary to uncover the alternatives sociological imagination offers us to see, and profound personal courage must be discovered to see beyond the already understood and to imagine better possibilities.

Taking this lens, reading fantasy thus provides more than mere escapism or heroic adventure.

### **Reading Fantasy as a Social Project**

Good fantasy writing is not really a retreat from the difficulties of the world into an imaginative safe haven, even though the wish-fulfillment elements of many fantasy narratives may act with restorative power. Rather the selection of events that run counter to the terms of ordinary human experience must be justified. The inventiveness of fantasy becomes empty if it is merely self-serving, but rich and interesting if it allows identifiable human dilemmas to be explored from new angles. Since fantasy invokes the possibility of living under different terms and conditions, the new world it activates inevitably invites comparison with our own (Whitley, 2000, p. 175).

Gordon (1997) proposed the idea in the study, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, that fictions enable other kinds of sociological information to emerge, and “hoped to draw attention to a whole realm of experiences and social practices that can barely be approached without a method attentive to what is elusive, fantastic, contingent, and often barely there” (p. 26). To Gordon, fiction is getting very close to sociology for “social reality seems made-up and real at the same time” (p. 37). What Gordon suggested could easily be connected to Le Guin’s remark about fantasies that fantasists are talking as seriously as sociologists about human life. Fantasy writers, in their created separated world, offer readers a different approach to reality and reveal issues of invisibility, marginality, and exclusion. By imagining the alternatives, fantasy provides a critique to reality and thus reality and fantasy are linked.

Starting from accepting what comes across the path and the unyielding realities, we are given an opportunity to imagine a world with possibilities and to change what we can. In this context, reading fantasy becomes a social project. The novelists of the fantastic, “whose serious work embodies the most widespread definitions of human reality” (Mills, p. 15), frequently possess sociological imagination, and do much to meet the demand for it. They create a world full of uncertainty, asking us “to pay attention with much more than our ordinary consciousness” (Mellon, 2000, p. 51). Entering the separated world of the fantastic, readers as well as the protagonists have no absolute control over the social things. However, by imagining the world as it is and might be, both the

reader and the character are learning to find a place in the world for themselves. What the stories provide for individuals, is a metaphor, with which they begin practicing examining and imagining the relationships between reality and fantasy, and between themselves as subjects and the society.

Fantasy literature has traditionally dealt with heroes. Critics study aspects of heroes' lives including "power and powerlessness, courage and fear and the force of the passions – love, lust, anger, retribution, revenge" (Bearne, 2000, p. 187). To read fantasy as a social project is to go farther than reading for the themes and the meanings. Readers, both adults and young people, "become producers of their own fantasies in the stories they make for themselves" (Bearne, p. 197). They create meanings according to their subjectivity, for the true meaning of the story is not something one can extract solely from the story itself. Paterson (2001), as a writer and a reader, remarked,

When I write a book I am not setting out to teach virtue, I am trying to tell a story, I am trying to draw my reader into the mystery of human life in this world. I am trying to share my own sense of wonder that although I have not always been in this world and will not continue in it for too many more years, I am here now, sharing in the mystery of the universe, thinking, feeling, tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing, shouting, singing, speaking, laughing, crying, living, and dying (p. 21).

These, too, are what readers do when they read – they are sharing their own sense of wonder, their own dimensions of the world. They are telling their side of the story. And the world is totally connected. "The act of imagination is the

opening of the system so that it shows new connection” (Paterson, p. 232). The matters heroes in stories deal with – to “measure the meaning of their lives against the array of social differences they encounter” (Lemert, 1997, p. xiv), to grow up, and to fulfill the quests under the social structures – are also what readers have to learn to face in their own lives. The fantasy narrative allows its readers to identify human dilemmas and to explore them from new angles. It “invokes the possibility of living under different terms and conditions” (Whitley, 2000, p. 175). Thus coming in and out the doors fantasy literature opened, the readers find new connections, new possibilities, and new meanings every time they go back to these different worlds, both the imaginative and the real.

Adults tell children stories, hoping “to enthrall and transport them into the world of the imagination...to learn about how life should be lived” (Bearne, p. 183). We expect stories for children to instruct and delight. However, as Margaret Meek Spencer (2000) believed, what reading does is more complicated than mere instruction.

Reading transforms readers, adults and children in different and unexpected ways. What readers read not only offers them information about actual events, people and things, but also proposes extensions, alternative views and versions of living. Adults give accounts of how the world is represented in books for children, treating some as ‘real’ and others as ‘imaginary’, yet recent studies show that this is too simple to be helpful (Spencer, 2000, p. 198).

Children know this – they know that “to make reading make sense, they have to become both the teller and the told” (Spencer, p. 200). They look into the world of the imagination with wonder and surprise. There, they confront the realities adults create for them and the idea of being a child adults define for them. With imagination, they might start learning new ways to define themselves and to deal with their existing worlds. As Jackson (1981) indicated, fantasy literature “has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (p. 8). Within the unfamiliar realm, readers experience things they have not yet experienced, practicing the struggle and pain in their minds through imagination. The fantasies teach us about the part of ourselves that we might not have known or understood. Our imagination expresses our “hidden desires, wishes, and fears” (Engel, 1995, p. 186), and what we imagine becomes “one facet of our way of thinking, our view of the world, our way of being” (Engel, p. 186). For readers, whether children or adults, “literature may not be our salvation, but it does help us all ... to recognize the agencies at work within our society, and to reflect on our responsibilities” (Daniels, 2000, p. 171). We become our own narrator and our own reader. As we change the way we see ourselves, past, and present, we can begin to imagine beyond our limitations. The stories are then transformed. We are then transformed.

### Revision: Feminism as Reading Lens

In the fantasy fiction of contemporary women writers, then, certain patriarchal systems prevalent in our time are quietly being questioned, subverted, and revisioned. Far from being cute stories about unicorns written for juveniles, these mature, thought-provoking novels represent an intellectual and imaginative rebellion against the status quo. Through their prevailing metaphor of magic, they seek to transform society through the creative power of the imagination. The quest is a fantasy metaphor, but the transformation is a real goal (Spivack, 1987, p. 15).

Fantasy literature, stories and personal narrative, sociology and imagination: how are these ideas all connected together? When this project began, one of the goals was to understand the girls who find their ways in adventures, which was one thing, among many others, that is often privileged to boys. The heroes fulfill their quests in adventures – to venture from the world of common day into a region of wonder, encounter the fabulous force, win a decisive victory and finally come back from the adventure with power (Campbell, 1968), to become a wizard with white beards that represent wisdom (Le Guin, 1989). What, then, are the heroines trying to accomplish? What is woman's quest? To answer these questions, feminist theory provides a critical approach.

In reviewing literature, many texts have been re-considered and critiqued from the feminist perspective in order to reveal the underlying ideology of gender, such as Paul's (1998) re-reading of several picture books in her *Reading Otherways* and Webb's (2002) reading of *Little Women*. Fantasy literature invites its readers to take one further step. In addition to the rejection of constructed

values, reading fantasies through the feminist lens offers readers opportunities to reflect back on their own context, their own personal reality, and find the possible revision of their own personal narrative.

The critical consciousness of feminism was more than the perception that women were not part of this, it was also a search for a consciousness in myself that had been present (in the anxieties, the tension, the headaches, the feelings of nausea accompanying my work, departmental meetings, trying to write sociology, and so forth) but impotent. It was the learning of how to be a subject in my body, in the actualities of my life, and working from a grounding in experience and an ongoing sensitivity to “where I am.” It was the learning and practice of a subject to whom the alienated practice of a subject in the relations of ruling was no longer tolerable (Smith, 1989, p.37)

Feminist sociologist, D. E. Smith, suggests the crucial view of taking feminism as a standpoint to see, to look, to read and to write. In learning feminism as a personal practice, Smith discovered that she “had to discard a practice of being that had involved [her] in situating [herself] as subject in the objectified discourse and relations and [she then] identif[ied] as the relations of ruling” (p. 36). As a female researcher who intends to take this standpoint to propose an understanding of the life stories of the heroines created in fantasy literature, and to see how their stories are connected to a reader’s personal narrative and introduce her to a shift from one perspective to another, and of how all these ideas could be woven together through imagination, there appears a need to me to present a subjective voice, with which I could express a vision of seeing “the significance of working in two worlds for development an alternative



consciousness of society than that I had practiced” (Smith, p. 36), a need to voice my own personal connections with feminist theory and those heroines I encountered in fantasy literature.

### **The Researcher’s Voice**

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing “the place for the first time” (Richardson, 1997, p. 6).

Growing up as a girl, what is a woman’s quest, was a question I did not encounter. The life of a young girl was simple – I followed what I was told. There was hardly a need to ask questions, for most things seemed to have been decided for me and I only needed to obey. Obedience empowered me. The question was not what my quest was, but: in what way could I better perform what I was being trained to be? The better I performed, the more I would be adored, and I believed the adoration gave me power.

Were things as simple as I recall? I still remember the pain I experienced the first time I was officially assigned to read a serious text about feminism. It was a mixture of feeling confused, resistant, angry, lost, sad, struggling, and many other emotions that I cannot name. It was the very first time in my life I was

forced to look directly at myself and ask, who are you? Then when I entered the fantasy heroines' worlds, their experiences were familiar to me.

Feminism thus becomes an important lens I take to read and write for this project, to meet with the protagonists who bravely and with grace reflect back to their past, encounter their present, and imagine their future. Their journey emboldens me to confront my own past, deliver my own narrative, and revision a possibility to alter the reality I have known. In the world that feminist fantasists create, my quest is to know myself for the first time. And if, as Mills has claimed, personal troubles are in fact public issues, then what I experience here might be as personal to me as it is public to many other readers.

### **Feminism as a Critique of Sociological Theories**

Of course, a sociology for women, for people, seeking a knowledge of how our lives and relations (direct and indirect) are shaped, directs us toward a knowledge community beyond our discipline. Discovering and uncovering how our societies are put together must embrace in its cooperative growing those who have formerly been the objects of our study and must now be, in a new sense, its subjects, its knowers (Smith, 1989, p. 59).

Feminism contributes to sociological theory as “the critique and reevaluation of existing theories” (Wallace, 1989, p. 11). It provides a shift in perspectives, enlarges the horizons of sociological theory and can therefore be viewed as a variety of the notion of sociological imagination. When I first became acquainted with feminism, like many people, I considered it a theory for women,

or more precisely, a theory for angry women who either hate men or want to be like men. It was a long process before I realized that my idea about feminism is a total misunderstanding. Feminism is not just about women, even less about angry women. It is about a promise, a hope.

When I began to resist male domination, to rebel against patriarchal thinking (and to oppose the strongest patriarchal voice in my life – my mother’s voice), I was still a teenager, suicidal, depressed, uncertain about how I would find meaning in my life and a place for myself. I needed feminism to give me a foundation of equality and justice to stand on. Mama has come around to feminist thinking. She sees me and all her daughters (we are six) living better lives because of feminist politics. She sees the promise and hope in feminist movement (hooks, p. x).

As I became more familiar with feminist theory, my exploration became more personal. Feminism allows me to challenge what I have believed about being a woman and, to find a voice within myself.

Feminist sociologists devote themselves to explore the issues of how our lives were shaped and determined from outside us, and declare that “from a particular standpoint, generalizing relations, objectified knowledge, universalized forms, and so forth are always to be made problematic” (Smith, 1989, p. 37). They propose an insider’s sociology. That is, in sociology, “we cannot take existing social conditions, or their explanations, for granted” (Cosser, 1989, p. 202), for social definitions are often “created and legitimated by elite members, who control dominant social institutions..., [and] reflect a masculine perspective of the world” (Chafetz, 1989, p. 138). To respond to the social condition in which

knowledge, truth, and reality are constructed “as if men’s experiences were normative, as if being human meant being male” (Personal Narrative Groups, 1989, p. 3), feminist theory emerges and seeks to consciously explore the reasons why people have particular perspectives or take particular actions, to develop “an analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction” (hooks, 2000, p. 19), and to explain to women and men how our sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it. Feminists do not seek to undermine the existence of others, but to provide a perspective and sense of understanding that has been ignored for too long. As Coser (1989) stated:

Are we feminists making claims of understanding more than anybody else? Are we saying that feminists, or women, at the exclusion of nonfeminists or men, can conceive of some “totality,” whatever that is? Can we ever understand the totality of anything? I would like to be a bit more humble (p. 203).

What they are proposing is a movement – “to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, p. viii). This movement began from a foundation where feminists ground their theories in women’s lives and aimed “to analyze the role and meaning of gender in those lives and in society” (Personal Narrative Groups, 1989, p. 4). The interpretation of women’s lives thus becomes essential for feminist research.

Feminism started with a group of women who resisted male domination and wished to find a place in-between their inner worlds and the outer male-

dominated world. With this theory, we are now offered a lens to reconsider what the male-dominated society has imposed on its members. Through this door, entering the world of fantasy stories that have for a long time been privileged to boys, we are triggered by “quests for subjectivity and self-realization” (Lewis, 1995, p. 26). Fantasy about girls finding their ways in adventure then becomes “more ‘realistic’ than many realist accounts of social reality” (Lewis, 1995, p. 18). It offers us “opportunity to realize most fully the reality of [ourselves]” (Aisenberg, 1994, p. 161). The stories of the heroines and the female reader’s personal narrative become interwoven and there then appears a revision of both.

### **Revision Personal Narrative in Reading Fantasy**

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility (hooks, 2000, p. x).

What can we tell about our own stories? Women’s personal narratives are stories of how we negotiate our exceptional gender status both in our daily lives and over the course of our lifetime. For a long time, we make our own lives and life histories under conditions not of our own choosing. To tell and interpret our stories, taking into account gender roles and gender expectations, is vital because our personal narratives can provide an important entry point “for examining the interaction between the individual and society in the construction

of gender” (Personal Narrative Groups, 1989, p. 5). For a lot of us, it perhaps takes a longer time to tell our stories as our own narrators, viewing ourselves as the heroines than our male counterparts, for traditionally we have constructed our reality as if being human meant being male. We have always been amazed by the hero tales and quests. Of course we were clearly aware that our quests were different from those of the heroes, and a lot of us accepted that, waiting patiently for our heroes to come. But some of us were different. They did not accept the conventional female quests. They dreamed about becoming heroes themselves, slaying dragons. Whether accepting or challenging the tradition, we all built our ideas of exceptional and successful people around the image of a heroic quest, “a journey in which obstacles are overcome” and the goals are “visible on the horizon, onward and upward” (Bateson, 1990, p. 5).

Power is the legitimate aim of other major figures representing the good. The aims of power-seeking are fulfilled in several ways that are positive in context: the dragon is slain, the war is fought and won, the king is restored to the throne. These goals are regarded as good ones. In contrast, in many of the fantasies written by women, the desire for power is denounced as a principle. It is not a matter of the good guys exerting power in order to crush the power-seeking of the bad guys. Instead power seeking as such is rejected. The goal in these quests is to *not* slay the dragon, to *not* take the treasure, to *not* seize the throne, to *not* dominate the Other (Italics original, Spivack, 1987, p.10).

Entering the separated world fantasy writers create, we are presented an entire society whose values could be sustained by those of the feminist. We become protagonists in the places where the current inequities of power between

the sexes might be corrected. “The authors of these novels insist the goal of gender equality must include not only the private, but also the public sphere” (Aisenberg, 1994, p. 163). They commit themselves to reveal the ideology of gender, to create “new vocabulary, new expressions, and new literary images which would give voice and substance within the world of literature to the new consciousness of women” (Frieden, 1989, p. 181). This new vocabulary, new expressions and new literary images give the readers of fantasy literature voices to articulate and to revision their own personal narrative. A dialogue can begin between the heroines and the readers. We share our stories and the sharing provides us significant ways of understanding our worlds and our places in them. To understand our own lives in light of these stories, we become full participants in the culture and are made aware that our own place in the world shapes the meaning we derive from the stories. As the Personal Narrative Group (1989) indicated:

Women’s personal narratives embody and reflect the reality of difference and complexity and stress the centrality of gender to human life and thought. They are, therefore, critical to the elaboration of a more finely nuanced understanding of humanity and to a reconstruction of knowledge that admits the fact and value of difference into its definition (p. 263).

Through the conversations we have with our heroines, through becoming heroines ourselves, we recount efforts to grapple with our conditions in all of the confusion and complexity and begin to value our own subjectivity, our rootedness

in time, place, and personal experience. We could then remember the stories our mothers and grandmothers told us. We could then start knowing the nature of the perspectives and shift ours among them. We could ask questions, re-visit and examine our past, imagine and alter our interpretation. It is in probing the nature of the perspectives revealed in our stories and dialogues that “we can begin to experience the power of feminist revision” (Personal Narrative Group, p. 264).

### **Turning**

In the next chapter, two novels by Lois Lowry will be discussed through the lens of sociological imagination. Looking through the protagonists’ eyes, I intend to demonstrate how this notion adopted from the field of sociology could be taken as a reading method to interpret children’s fantasy stories.



## Chapter 4

### **Lens of Sociological Imagination: The Giver and Gathering Blue**

The boy, Jonas, is beginning to look more deeply into the life that has been very superficial, beginning to see that his own past goes back further than he had ever known and has greater implications than he had ever suspected (Lowry, 1994, p.414).

In this chapter, fantasy literature is viewed as a tool that activates readers' sociological imagination. They experience the other alternative in the created world and their imagination concretizes that alternative. When they return to their own reality, their capacity for imagination turns out to be sociological. The readers are able to revision and rethink what has always been believed without doubts and to make connections between their personal issues with the larger society. They can then become amateur sociologists who learn to activate their sociological imagination by creating parallels between the real and the imagined.

In what follows I will consider how two children's books, *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry, offer opportunities for readers to employ our sociological imaginations. To begin, I will offer a brief summary of each text.

## Summary of the Two Novels

### The Giver

Finally, The Receiver must have one more quality, and it is one which I can only name, but not describe. I do not understand it. You members of the community will not understand it, either. Perhaps Jonas will, because the current Receiver has told us that Jonas already has this quality. He calls it the Capacity to See Beyond (Lowry, 1993, p.63).

*The Giver* tells the story of a young boy, Jonas, who lives in a seemingly ideal society where there are no conflicts, poverty, unemployment, family problems or inequality. Elements that can cause pain do not exist. Feelings and dreams are shared in rituals. Careers are assigned. All the family units contain a father, a mother, a male and a female child. They are not of the same blood, but are arranged to be a unit by the Council of Guardians. Babies are born by a birthmother and are taken care of at the Nurturing Center until they are old enough to be assigned to a family unit. Elders live at the House of the Old until they are old enough to be released to Elsewhere.

As the novel begins, the boy Jonas is ready to be assigned a career, along with his peers who have reached the age of twelve in the community. He shares his feeling of apprehensive with his family. His Father, who is a Nurturer, Mother, who holds a prominent position at the Department of Justice, comforts him by sharing their own experience. Later in the Ceremony, Jonas receives his assignment, which is a very special one. He is assigned to be the new memory carrier and will start his training with 'the Giver', the previous carrier who bears

the memories of history. From then on, Jonas is to gain wisdom through books and memories of the past that the Giver will gradually transfer to him. During the process, Jonas is able to physically experience emotions, such as fear, joy and sadness, senses of hunger and pain, and other elements of life like love and loss that he has never felt before. He first feels the warmth and sunburn from sunshine, the taste of rain, and the coldness of snow. He also discovers his unique ability to see beyond that brings him to become the new memory carrier. In Jonas' past experience, there was never physical pain, emotional conflicts or any thing that causes trouble or suffering. There are never any profound feelings either. Jonas gradually realizes what the society lacks and what people in the community have lost. He also discovers that the releasing of the elders or the weaker infants to Elsewhere was actually euthanization. Jonas suffered from gaining knowledge and understanding. In the end, in order to save a baby who was ready to be released, Jonas chose to leave the community and to search for Elsewhere.

### **Gathering Blue**

The threads began to sing to her. Not a song of words or tones, but a pulsing, a quivering in her hands as if they had life. For the first time, her fingers did not direct the threads, but followed where they led. She was able to close her eyes and simply feel the needle move through the fabric, pulled by the urgent, vibrating threads (Lowry, 2000, p. 45).

*Gathering Blue* tells the story of Kira a young girl, living in a primitive village where men and women take separate and stereotypical responsibilities – men hunt and women are responsible for domestic chores. Inhabitants mercilessly fight for their lives, valuing the strong and discarding the weak. Villagers are governed by the Council of Guardians. They never leave the village except to hunt or to send the dead to the Field of Leaving. Their fear of beasts in the surrounding woods keeps them at home. Many hunters are believed to be killed by the beasts.

As the novel begins, Kira is guarding her mother's dead body alone in the Field of Leaving. Her father died in the woods when she was little. Orphaned and with a crippled leg, she faces a frighteningly uncertain future. When she returns to the village, her neighbors have already burned down the cottage where she and her mother have lived. Kira plans to rebuild, but the hostile neighbors do not want her to stay. They are all summoned by the Council of Guardians. One of the guardians, Jamison, is assigned to be Kira's defender in the trial. He indicates that, despite her physical flaw, Kira has a talent for weaving. Kira is assigned to stay in the building where the Council is located and is employed as a weaver to repair the Singer's robe on which the history of the society is remembered. Each year, there is a Gathering, where the Singer wears the richly embroidered robe and sang the Ruin Song. She is to eventually weave the current and future history of the village on the robe after her repairs are complete.

During her life in the Council building, Kira meets two other young artists, the Carver, Thomas, who is to decorate the Singer's stick, and the an apprentice

Singer, Jo, who is to replace the current Singer one day. Kira gradually discovers that there are no beasts in the woods as it is claimed. Her father was not killed by the beast but by the guardian, Jamison. The parents of the three young artists, the Carver, the Singer and herself, the weaver, were murdered by the guardians, in order to take the three children into the building and to enslave their gifts of creation and creativity. They are well nurtured and fed, but they are captives with no real freedom. At the end of the story, Kira finds out her father is still alive and lives in another village where people help and support one another. He comes to take Kira with him, but Kira decides to stay and completes the mission of creating the future – a potential future, not a future that manipulated and determined by the cunning guardians.

### **Reading through the Lens of Sociological Imagination**

#### **How and What Knowledge Is Gained?**

Knowledge was defined as “the certainty that phenomena are real and they possess specific characteristics” (Garrison, 1999, p. 68).

In both Kira’s village and Jonas’s community, knowledge was not available to certain citizens. Even though Kira had always wished to learn and to be able to read, “it’s not permitted for girls to learn” (p. 88). In the trial where Jamison defended her, she looked at the stack of paper containing information about her and the rules of the village; she wished in her mind that she could read. The

message conveyed at this point of the story suggests the importance of literacy, that being able to read is a way of having power. As in many social studies, literacy is equated with power and control. Being literate does not simply mean being able to read and write.

For individuals this is taken to mean that ways of thinking, cognitive abilities, facility in logic, abstraction and higher order mental operations are all integrally related to the achievement of literacy: the corollary is that 'illiterates' are presumed to lack all of these qualities, to be able to think less abstractly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon the nature of the language they use or the sources of their political oppression (Street, 1995, p. 21).

In other words, the illiterates are controlled more easily. In the later part of the story, Kira was assigned to be the weaver to repair the Singer's Robe, which contained the past and the future of the village woven by different colors of threads. It could be inferred that Kira still gained knowledge, but not through written words. Knowledge came through her fingers. It was the talent of an artist.

"[Your mother] said you had the knowledge in you fingers... More than she did." Kira looked at her hands, folded in her lap.  
"Something happens when I work with the threads. They seem to know things on their own, and my fingers simply follow." Annabella nodded. "That be the knowledge" (Lowry, 2000, p. 83).

Having the talent of weaving, Kira not only earned her life back, but also obtained an access to knowledge. However, the importance of literacy conflicted with the form of knowledge Kira owned. When Kira began to learn to recognize

the various names of the plants that were used to produce hues, because she did not have the actual words in her brain, she experienced difficulties memorizing the names through only the sounds of the words. Without having the exact written words, it was not as easy to make sense of knowledge. While, Kira's friend, Thomas, was writing down the words for her, "she turned her eyes away quickly so that she would not learn it, would not be guilty of something clearly forbidden to her" (p. 89). It was the power of literacy. In Kira's society, the authority that had this power used it to control the ordinary that did not. Kira did not have the power and she was afraid of attaining it.

In Jonas' society, children went to school and were taught proper 'knowledge' what they needed for life and their future jobs. They were educated with 'precise language.' This involves the control of "people's sense of identity and in what they [take] to be the basis of knowledge" (Street, 1995, p.31). Children in Jonas' society, through their proper education, grew up to be adults who accept what is to be given and made believed by their authority. Jonas never realized there were 'other kinds' of books until the day he entered the room where he obtained training from the Giver.

In his own dwelling, there were the necessary reference volumes that each household contained: a dictionary, and the thick community volume which contained descriptions of every office, factory, building, and committee. And the Book of Rules, of course....The books in his own dwelling were the only books that Jonas had ever seen. He had never known that other books existed (Lowry, 1993, p. 74).

The boy started to acquire the knowledge that came from the past – the memories of the whole world. “It is how wisdom comes. And how we shape our future” (p. 78). He experienced running a sled in the snow, sunshine and sunburn, love, joy, physical pain from breaking a leg, mental pain and grief from loss and war. He questioned why other people in the community did not carry the memories but only the Receiver of Memory did, and why there were not hills, snow, actual pain, feelings and emotions in their life. He suffered from learning, yet enjoyed the pleasure as well. To Jonas, it was a fruitful yet lonely journey that he went through to gain knowledge. He was not allowed to share his new experiences and new understanding with his family and his friends. Even if he had been allowed, and he did try secretly, they could not understand.

He was very aware of his own admonition not to discuss his training. But it would have been impossible, anyway. There was no way to describe to his friends what he had experienced there in the Annex room. How could you describe a sled without describing a hill and snow; and how could you describe a hill and snow to someone who had never felt height or wind or that feathery, magical cold (p. 89)?

Jonas gained the new knowledge through experiencing feelings and emotions. The people in his community were educated to ‘function’ properly, but yet not to ‘feel.’

In both Kira’s and Jonas’ societies, literacy played an important role in transmitting knowledge. Literacy education was carefully controlled. The form of knowledge and the way people’s minds worked were standardized. The uniformity allowed “little scope for choice or idiosyncrasy” (Street, 1995, p.63).



Everything in these societies seemed to be equal. The different forms of knowledge, from a talented artist to experiencing feelings, senses and emotions, conflicted with the conventional form of knowledge. In both societies, one protagonist had to rely on a guardian to defend her and was even afraid to reach literacy, and the other was prohibited from sharing his experience and knowledge with any one else. Before they reached the awareness of the new form of their knowledge and what power this knowledge could bring them, both Kira and Jonas were not yet able to challenge the authority. In other words, they had not yet gained the sociological competence, an awareness of what was right or wrong in what was happening in their societies through their own personal experiences (Lemert, 1997). And to the ordinary people in both societies, the powerful authority, by eliminating the differences and building the standards and the rules, had promised them a good dream of future (Shannon, 1999).

### **What Is to Be Seen?**

‘Power,’ as the term is now generally used in social science, has to do with whatever decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live, and about the events which make up the history of their period (Mills, 1959, p.40).

Kira’s mother had taught her how to create a pattern with colored thread. When she grew older, “in one astounding burst of creativity, her ability had gone far beyond her mother’s teaching” (p. 20). After her mother died, she had to learn to dye threads from an old dyer. The old dyer transmitted her knowledge of

colors to Kira. Learning how to dye, Kira then could use the colorful threads to repair the past, the entire history of the people and the horrifying story of the ruin, that were portrayed with complexity on the folds of the robe. Each color seemed to represent an element of nature or the earth – the pale green sea, the knots of red that were used to color blood in the fallen men and the gold sunflowers. The more colors Kira were able to make, the more knowledge she gained. She was also told when she finished repairing that she would be assigned to weave the future on the robe for people in the village. Kira seemed to grasp the power of creativity through the colored threads. However, the more she learned and understood and the closer she approached the essence of the social reality, the more she realized what was beneath the ‘power’ she seemed to obtain. She did not seem to be truly free. Learning was more than simply internalizes knowledge. It was “a way of being in the social world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 24). It was situated socially and culturally.

Thomas nodded. “Yes,” he said to her surprise. “I have a piece of wood that does that same. One I carved long ago, when I was just a tyke...And sometimes I feel it in my fingers still, the knowledge that I had then” (p. 93).

Thomas lost his gift of creativity throughout continuing his assigned work – carving and decorating the stick of the Singer. To, Kira, when she started to work on the Singer’s robe, her fingers ached. “Kira rubbed them and sighed. This was not at all the same as her own threading, the small pieces she had done

throughout her childhood” (p. 96). The production of their craft did not “depend on [their] individual wills and consciousnesses and forces itself upon individuals” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 223). They were arranged in the social institution and founded on social reality.

Gradually, Kira realized even though she and Thomas were provided with comfortable rooms to live in, warm and nice meals, all sorts of wonderful tools for their work, and satisfied finely with most of their requests, they were not free. “She was losing the joy she had once felt when the bright-colored threads took shape in her hands, when the patterns came to her and were her own” (p. 153). Her talent of an artist brought her a different form of knowledge. The responsibility of repairing the Singer’s robe on which the history of the society was woven gave her a chance to study the past. However, there was a difference between the artist’s interest and natural talent, and obligation and the forced responsibility.

Jonas, on the other hand, had the ability to see beyond – he was able to see colors while there were nearly no colors in his community. Most citizens in the community had dark eyes. There were only a few exceptions, and Jonas was one of them. His ability of seeing beyond led him to be selected as the new Receiver of Memory. Jonas did not understand the concept of color until he had a chance to describe certain things to the Giver, such as how an apple or his friend, Fiona’s hair changed in an odd way. The Giver told him he was beginning to see the color red. He realized how beautiful colors were, and questioned why colors disappeared from the society. “The Giver shrugged. ‘Our people made that

choice, the choice to go to Sameness” (p. 95). When Jonas gradually learned the quality of colors from the memories transmitted from the Giver, he was able to see more colors. The more he was able to see beyond, to feel and to experience, the more frustrated he felt for people not having choices. “But now that I can see colors, at least sometimes, I was just thinking: what if we could hold up things that were bright red, or bright yellow, and he could choose? Instead of the Sameness.’ ‘He might make wrong choices” (p.98). People in the village made the choice of not having choices so that they did not have to take the risk of making wrong choices. Jonas felt irrationally angry with his friends and family for being satisfied with their life, which contained no vibrancies. He felt angry with himself as well for he could not change anything. Knowledge did give him a better understanding of life and the power to question his life and to see beyond his own world. Nevertheless, it did not seem to bring him the power to make any difference. Knowledge did not seem to give him the power to really make choices, or more precisely, to really make choices for people he cared about. At the same time, he seemed to pay the price for gaining this power to see beyond. He suffered when he realized that his father’s releasing one of the newborn twins really meant killing the child. He suffered from understanding that people in the community virtually had no feelings. He suffered from knowing about pain, anguish and grief.

He didn’t want the memories, didn’t want the honor, didn’t want the wisdom, didn’t want the pain. He wanted his childhood again, his scraped knees and ball games” (p. 121). “Jonas trudged to the bench beside the storehouse and sat down, over whelmed with

feelings of loss. His childhood, his friendships, his carefree sense of security – all of these things seemed to be slipping away (p. 135).

Kira's talent weaving brought her the access to knowledge. The knowledge of dyeing and the capability of making colored threads empowered her to approach the truth in her society. She realized there was a bigger power around her, and the power was what controlled people's lives. Her power was small and the freedom of artists was limited. Jonas's ability of seeing beyond – seeing colors – led him to be chosen as the Receiver of Memory and therefore brought him the access to knowledge of the past, which comprised wisdom. The knowledge from memories – from being able to see colors and to feel – empowered him to approach the truth in the society. He perceived what had been missing in the community. However, he also realized he did not really have the power to change anything. There was a bigger power that constructed the rules and controlled people's choices. People did not seem to have choices. He did not seem to have choices. As Mills (1959) indicated, power has to do with people making decisions about their lives. Events that are beyond people's decisions do happen. Yet "in so far as such decisions are made (and in so far as they could be but are not) the problem of who is involved in making them (or not making them) is the basic problem of power" (p. 40). What Kira and Jonas had come to realize was the limit of their freedom and choices. They had begun to see something that the ordinary eye did not see. What they saw could gradually become a clue to the larger patterns of the society (Collins, 1998), that the power

of authority had managed to manipulate the consent of people in their societies and to make arrangements for the community without ever being questioned.

### **What Has Empowered the Social Structure?**

Among the means of power that now prevail is the power to manage and to manipulate the consent of men. That we do not know the limits of such power – and that we hope it does have limits – does not remove the fact that much power today is successfully employed without the sanction of the reason or the conscience of the obedient (Mills, 1959, p.41).

The relation between knowledge and power is sophisticated. “Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true” (Hall, 1997, p. 49). The average person’s lack of awareness – what they believe, take for granted, and never question – strengthens the power of those in authority. In *Gathering Blue*, people in the village believed what had been told that there were beasts in the woods. Their fear of the beasts restricted the way they lived and built up the boundary. The authority, like Kira’s defender Jamison, had the power to govern and to even make people ‘disappeared.’ Kira’s father was believed to be killed by the beasts. Her mother’s death was an unexpected illness. If one thing is believed by everyone to be true, it then becomes “‘true’ in terms of its real effect, even if in some absolute sense it has never been conclusively proven” (Hall, p. 49). Parents of Thomas the Carver and Jo, the future Singer, both died abruptly as well. “ ‘But why?’ ‘Because they wanted Kira.’ ‘Why?’ ‘So that they could capture her gift: her skill with the

threads.' 'And Thomas? His parents too? And Jo's?' 'Why?' 'So that all their gifts would be captive'"(p. 210). It was the freedom and the creativity of artists – their capacity of creating the future, that threatened the authority. It was this capacity that had been sacrificed under the power of ordinary people's obedience.

In *The Giver*, people were satisfied with their ordinary life – the sameness and painless life. Because they didn't understand freedom, rules that required strict obedience didn't seem burdensome. The authority, therefore, had the power to control literacy learning – precise language was demanded, standard phrases for apology were used, rituals of sharing feelings and dreams with family members were practiced, feelings toward the opposite sex were controlled by pills, jobs were assigned and announcements were given constantly to ensure that everyone properly followed the rules. Language, emotions, and thoughts were all well and carefully controlled so that people would not experience conflicts or pain. Everything superficially linked to pain was actually connected to power, and was discreetly structured. Only one person, the Receiver of Memory, was allowed to 'know,' for "an important aspect of social power lies in the power to determine word meanings and legitimate communicative norms" (Stephens, 1992, p. 11). The Receiver, as the one carrier of the 'burden' from the past who held the wisdom of history and memory, was the only person to be consulted when meanings could not be decided. People in the village did not question what they had. Neither did they consider the possibility of having choices.

Did they not have choices? Both Kira and Jonas felt despair when they realized how little they could do. However, did they indeed not have the power to

change anything? When ordinary people begin to ask 'why,' there is a chance for the authority to be challenged and the reality to be changed.

Social living is the courage to accept what we cannot change in order to do what can be done about the rest – to face the unacceptable realities that can only be accepted, to imagine the better possibilities (Lemert, 1997, p.191).

In the end, Kira chose to stay in the village.

Kira knew, suddenly and with clarity, what it all meant. It was so simple. The three of them – the new little Singer who would one day take the chained Singer's place; Thomas the Carver, who with his meticulous tools wrote the history of the world; and she herself, the one who colored that history – they were the artists who could create the future (p. 212).

She looked at the small shoots she had just planted, the plant she could make the color blue with; she knew somehow these plants would survive. She knew she must stay. "The blue was gathered in her hand, and she could feel it quiver, as if it had been given breath and was beginning to live" (p. 215). She made her choice.

Jonas, on the other hand, chose to leave his community. His love for the little baby, Gabriel, who was to be released, led him to this choice.

But if he had stayed...His thoughts continued. If he had stayed, he would have starved in other ways. He would have lived a life hungry for feelings, for color, for love. And Gabriel? For Gabriel there would have been no life at all (p. 174).



He made his choice. It might not be a choice that changed the whole community. However, it was a choice that changed both his and the little baby's lives. It was a choice leading to the beginning of the alternative.

### **Employing the Sociological Imagination**

In our lives, we do what we must do, and we do most of what society expects of us. In so doing, we are at the terrible risk of losing our sociological imaginations if we trust too much the instructions and orders of the powerful social institutions. The way out into the wider truths beyond our little world is, as I have said, personal courage (Lemert, 1997, p.50).

Lois Lowry has created a separated world for her readers. When we read the books, we walk out of our own world and into the world where Kira and Jonas live. Through their own sociological imaginations, the two protagonists approached knowledge that helped them to comprehend their society and to look beyond. "They acquire a new way of thinking...[and] experience a transvaluation of values" (Mills, p. 8). As readers, we are offered an opportunity to activate and to practice our sense of imagination by reading their stories. With this imagination, we go through the struggle with them. We experience the feelings of joy and pain as they do. We face the same difficulties when it comes to making decisions. And, perhaps most importantly, we see how they practice their sociological imagination. Their stories re-define us. The boundaries of our mind are pushed and the palings that guard our hearts are shattered (Winterson, 1995). Our own sociological imagination, at the same time, is evoked and engaged. It is an

opportunity that we are provided to 'see beyond' our own boundaries and to look back at what has been taken for granted in our real lives. It is a chance that we are offered to question whether we are too satisfied with the life we live. We are provided an alternative way of viewing our lives. If we are able to imagine what Kira and Jonas experience, we may be able to learn the courage they summoned and to gain the wisdom to understand and to hope as they did. After all, "it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, and compassion, and hope" (Le Guin, 1989, p.48).

The two stories raise the questions of what it is to be taken as knowledge and power and how individuals manage their sociological imagination to be aware of social structure and to understand the realities of individuals in connection with larger social realities. It is the concept of sociological imagination that is practiced by the two protagonists in the two novels. They struggle throughout the process of gaining the knowledge and approaching the essence of the larger reality. They taste joy as well as pain. They feel despair for not being able to make much difference with the new knowledge. They question what has been accepted and believed, and feel frustrated for what has been taken for granted. In the end, they both see beyond the powerful social institutions. They see beyond the limit of their own power, and they make their choices with personal courage and their capacity of sociological imagination. Their awareness and understanding are not to lead them to start a revolution, but to accept what they cannot change and to do what can be done.

In classrooms, fantasy novels like *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* provide opportunities for both educators and students to employ their sociological imaginations. Because the novel has the ability to transport the reader to a different time and space, they may practice identifying the relationship between the individual and society by analyzing the novel, asking questions such as: Is the novel reflective, or a critique of society? What sociological and personal insight has been gained (Cosbey, 1997)? Through the analysis, they may also make personal connections and begin to develop a greater understanding and appreciation for how sociological imagination can relate to their own life experiences (Misra, 2000). They may take the experience they have through reading the novel and examine what is happening in their real daily life. For example, sending students to the library to examine the local news stories can be conducted (O'Flaherty, 1992). Students are offered different lenses by the protagonists' stories and may start to learn to see beyond and to gradually employ their sociological imagination; their ability to connect individual realities with larger social realities is enhanced.

Educators need to be aware of the risk of reducing their pupils' sociological imagination when they expect pupils to trust entirely in their instruction and the orders of social institutions. They also have the responsibility to increase the pupils' capacity for questioning what they are told and for understanding the meaning of their own lives in connection to the larger society. When young learners walk out of the school walls and enter a larger and more powerful social reality with the understanding of how knowledge is gained "not in

the autonomous and isolated freedom of intellectual contemplation, but always in some evident relation to the political realities of the world” (Lemert, 1997, p.90), they may begin to see things in their daily life with a different perspective. There then can be more alternatives in their lives.

### **Becoming an Amateur Sociologist**

The taken-for-granted world is seen as being in some way strange, through the adoption of a new perspective of a willingness to stand up close or move away (Morgan, 1998, p. 652).

When a person like me travels thousands of miles to a foreign land to study, the world I see in this land is not taken for granted by me. It is in some ways strange to me. I am adopting a different perspective and a willingness to change my worldview. And the aid I have to comprehend this new land and to make sense of myself is nothing but my imagination. I am learning to accept that my mind is not as free as I have supposed and the ways of my contemplation are constructed. I begin to learn and see the essence of social structure. The awareness may perhaps start to empower me to have some control over my life. For a child who has not yet grown old enough to travel thousands of miles, fantasy literature provides her with an opportunity to ‘transport’ from her own life (Cosbey, 1997). She is offered a chance to begin to look more deeply into the life that she has been so used to and perhaps taken for granted. She begins to see that her own individual history has greater implications than she had ever suspected. When she is able to evaluate her current circumstance and see

beyond, her imagination is offering her an alternative, a different choice, a revision of her own personal narrative.

### **Turning**

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how becoming an amateur sociologist through reading fantasy literature provides me as a reader with an opportunity to employ my capacity for sociological imagination. Two novels by Ursula Le Guin will be analyzed while at the same time my own personal narrative will be re-encountered.

## Chapter 5

### **Lens of Feminism: The Tombs of Atuan and Tehanu and Revision a Personal Narrative**

Fantasy has always provided a clue to the limits of a culture, by foregrounding problems of categorizing the 'real' and of the situation of the self in relation to that dominant notion of 'reality' (Jackson, 1981, p. 52).

The story of Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan and Tehanu*, at first, was only a fantasy story about a girl who lived in a world the author, Ursula Le Guin, created. However when I read on, Tenar's path encountered my own path and this fantasy story became real. It was perhaps the same path of many girls from my generation. This path that Tenar goes through, the struggle she faces, the choices and decisions she makes, how she questions what she has always believed, every step she takes, all seem so familiar. It was as if I was not reading Tenar's story but my own life story. There is such a strong bond between Tenar and me that I began to see my life through Tenar's eyes. By entering Tenar's world, I revisited the world I lived in. By reading Tenar's story, I re-encountered myself. It was as if through this fantasy story, the unseen comes visible and the certainty releases some space to be questioned.

By reading this Fantasy novel, a female reader is offered a chance to consider what a woman's quest is. To Tenar, the quest is in Earthsea; to the reader, it is in her own world. As Spivack (1987) states, the quest in the fantasy

novel is symbolic. "It is a metaphor of the search for meaning, for identity" (p.4). There are therefore two stories being told simultaneously in this paper – the story of Tenar and the story of the reader. The former provides the latter a lens to look at the self she knew, the path she took and the choices she made. As Le Guin (1989) herself indicates that the theme of the Tombs of Atuan is "a feminine coming of age, birth, rebirth, destruction, freedom" (p.50). Thus, when the reader finishes Tenar's story, there is a good chance she finds a new interpretation of her own life, of who she has been and of the 'unlimited' freedom she can find for herself in the 'limited' space she is given in her own world. And she then can realize that the individual finds fulfillment not by struggling against the world but by seeking her place within it.

Weaving with the theories of feminism, I will now tell you the story of Tenar and also consider how Ursula Le Guin's fantasy story offers opportunities for her reader to re-define a female's personhood.

### **Voices in Three Columns**

The circumstances of women's lives now and in the past provide examples for new ways of thinking about the lives of both men and women. What are the possible transfers of learning when life is a collage of different tasks? How does creativity flourish on distraction? What insights arise from the experience of multiplicity and ambiguity? And at what point does desperate improvisation become significant achievement? (Bateson, 1990, p. 10).

The hero's quest is a journey toward a visible goal, linear, onward and upward. But not a heroine's.

Feminists have grounded their theories on women's lives, in which "we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations" (Bateson, p. 3). The life stories of women are like our arts in the kitchen, where we often have to "find the odds and ends that could be combined at the last minute to make a meal for unexpected guests" (Bateson, p. 3), for hungry children coming back from school, and for tired husbands working late nights. Women create improvised meals, "riskier, but rich with the possibility of delicious surprise" (Bateson, p.4); but most of the time, it is only because their circumstances make them learn to follow strategies not for victory but for survival. Our journey, in contrast to the traditional hero's, is not linear. We go "forward or back, seldom in straight line, most often spiraling. Each of us is moving, changing, ...As we discover, we remember, remembering, we discover" (Witherell, 1991, p. 83).

Perhaps, if we begin to see these lives of multiple commitments and multiple beginnings as an emerging pattern, we can start to envision life "not as 'a path' but 'a web, where [we] can choose different paths at any particular time, so it's not like there is just one way" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 148). So can the heroes who are built around the image of a quest, a journey. We will then hear the voices not heard before. There is in fact more than one voice of the authority. It is a symphony harmonically and beautifully composed of multiple voices.

Therefore, I present here the multiple voices in three columns.



### **Coming Out of the Labyrinth: The Tombs of Atuan, the Two Stories**

Two stories will be told simultaneously in this section. One is *The Tombs of Atuan* telling a story about a young priestess named Tenar; the other is the reader's story of reading this novel – my story, probably also a story many girls of my generation would tell. There will be three voices telling these two stories, presented in three columns. In the very left column is a voice retelling Tenar's story; in the middle it is a commentary voicing the reader's thoughts from feminist perspective; in the right column I reflect on bits of my own life story that are connected to Tenar's.

#### **Part One: The Eaten One**

**Little girls,  
before they  
reach puberty  
can be  
courageous,  
competent, and  
irreverent; they  
can be  
nurturing,  
compassionate  
, and  
introspective.  
They're not yet  
constrained by  
gender-role  
expectations  
(Allen, 1999,  
p.5).**

The girl was born as  
 a curious and energetic  
 little one. Her life seems so  
 full of possibilities. Her  
 name is my name, Hsin-  
 Chun, or perhaps any  
 girl's – any girl who has to  
 go through the darkness of  
 searching her own path  
 over the path she is  
 assigned to.

*"I am not  
 Tenar any  
 more," the  
 [girl]  
 said, ...*

*"I know. I  
 know. Now  
 you're the  
 little Eaten  
 One...."*

*She said  
 nothing.*

*[...]*

*The little  
 girl, who  
 had no  
 name any*

**The girl has no name  
 now. She is no longer the  
 self that her mother gave  
 birth to. The name contains  
 the self that she was born  
 to be and holds the power  
 that she has over herself.  
 But now it is "eaten" – all  
 eaten by the enormous  
 unseen power of the**

I went to  
 preschool at an early  
 age. Both Mom and  
 Dad worked to  
 support our family,  
 so Mom had to take  
 me to school at  
 seven o'clock in the  
 morning. I was a  
 pretty good student,

*more but  
Arha, the  
Eaten One,  
lay on her  
back  
looking  
steadily at  
the dark  
(The  
Tombs of  
Atuan:  
p.10).*

**Nameless Ones – the old  
power that has been there  
for the longest time. It is  
this ancient power – the  
society that assigns her  
role. She is only to fulfill the  
expectations. And she says  
nothing. There is not much  
she can say. The young girl,  
like Arha, said nothing but  
accepted, for there was not  
a language that represented  
our sense of self (Gilligan,  
1982).**

tiny but shrewd,  
docile. Not that I  
remembered this,  
but all the certificates  
of merits still well  
kept in our closets  
today seemed to  
indicate that. They  
taught me well, I  
suppose.

*Tenar was taken  
away from her mother to  
a desert land at the age  
of five, to be trained to  
become the Highest  
Priestess, a servant of  
the Dark – the Nameless*

**The training of  
making us – me and most  
girls in my generation – to  
become what we are  
assigned to be is tedious  
but for many years in our  
youth we listen and learn.**

*One. "You are Arha. There is nothing left. It was all eaten" (p.24). She lost her memories about her mother, the place where she was born, and the girl named Tenar. She was now the Eaten One, learning everything she needed to become the One Priestess. During the years before she was fifteen, her training was guided by two elder priestesses, Kossil and Thar. Then at the age of fifteen, she made her crossing into womanhood and took on the full powers as the One priestess of the*

**We keep ourselves in silence and wait to be coming of age, hoping that maturity will soon lead us to our power. Our youth is consumed in waiting (Simone De Beauvoir, 1952). Oh~ yes! So we have believed! Someday the training will lead us to our power. But what power have we got? When we finally cross into our womanhood, we only find that we are entering a complete dark domain. The closer we get to our 'power,' the less powerful we feel. "Her individual identity is thus sacrificed to her assigned role" (Spivack, 1987, p.13). It is then we**

*Tombs of Atuan. It was*      **lose contact with ourselves**  
*time she entered the*      **(Gilligan, 1982).**  
*tomb.*

*It was  
 absolutely  
 black.  
 There was  
 no light.  
 The dark  
 seemed to  
 press like  
 wet felt  
 upon the  
 open eyes.  
 [...]*

*“Did you  
 bring a  
 light?” She  
 whispered,  
 as one  
 does in the  
 dark.*

*“I brought  
 no light,”  
 Kossil  
 replied,  
 behind her  
 (p.34).*

*“I shall  
 come here  
 with a  
 torch,” Arha  
 said,  
 guiding  
 herself*

**In the darkness, we**      Most of the  
**don’t see, neither the path**      youth at my  
**nor ourselves. Seeing is not**      generation studied

*along the wall of the cavern by the touch of her fingers, [...]*

*“Light is forbidden here.” Kossil’s whisper was sharp. Even as she said it, Arha knew it must be so. This was the very home of darkness, the inmost center of the night (p.35).*

*In the darkness she learned her way “all by feel, by groping, in the blindness of the underearth and the silence inside the ground. ... Touch was one’s whole guidance;*

**allowed. My girl friends and I, like Arha, we learn our way by feeling and touching. It is as if things that are about our notion of self or our powers are not to be discussed and there is no need or space to question what it is that we are learning but only to accept. The enslavement “to the dark forces of the unconscious, is in fact reflected in the lives of all adolescent females who bear the burden of past tradition and feel compelled to accept a traditionally imposed identity” (Spivack, 1987, p.62).**

through our adolescence. They gave girls cooking, sewing and nursing sorts of classes. I didn’t think of much about who I was. Looking back now, I didn’t think I knew much of me. Most of the time I was worried. I worried about so many things: Did I do it right? Did I pass the exam? Did I not show respect to the teachers? Did I dishonor mom and dad? I daydreamed a lot, too. Even

*one could not see the way, but held it in one's hands" (p.36).*

though I did get by most of the things they taught us, I never thought I was good at any of them. I dreamed that some day I could just gain the power and become so powerful that I never had to worry about anything.

*Arha's first visit of the Undertomb was to sacrifice two prisoners. After she commended them to be starved to death, the elder priestess, Kossil guided her way out. "You must remember [the turnings]. Next time I will not come*

**So we learn to accept our assigned future – the role we shall play and the life we shall live. But we can't stop ourselves from wondering: Is there something else for my life? What would it be like if there were other options? The thought is terrifying!**

*with you. This is not my place. You must come alone” (p.40). When they came out, Arha fainted at Kossil’s, the elder priestess, feet.*

*“You’ll learn,”  
Kossil said,  
still  
breathing  
heavily,  
standing  
motionless.  
“You’ll  
learn”  
(p.41).*

**How could we question our masters – our teachers, our elders, the books, the knowledge...etc.? These traditions have always been followed – learning to be good girls, getting ready to be gentle mothers, patient listeners, thoughtful rearer and supporters. “The dominant positions are embedded in the sets of meanings which define what is ‘ordinary’” (Jones, 1993, p. 161); how dare we question sayings like “There is always a woman *behind* a successful man.” that has been eulogized for thousands of years? How can we possibly “both enter and stay outside of, be**



educated in and then  
change, what has for  
centuries been a man's  
world" (Gilligan, 1993, p.  
147)? Even if there were  
alternatives, would we  
desire to take them (Jones,  
1993)? Would we dare?

*There were other  
young girls to be trained  
as priestess in the land.  
Arha was to be the  
Highest Priestess, who  
should befriend with no  
one. But she was close  
to one of the young  
priestess named,  
Penthe. Arha once asked  
Penthe:*

*"Would you  
rather not  
have been*

**In our youth, we live  
mostly around women,  
young and old. The female  
elders educate us to accept  
our confinement and  
present to us that our role  
is 'natural' and 'God-given'  
(Boler, 1999). Most of our  
time, we are in solitude,  
wandering in the darkness  
and familiarizing what is not  
to be seen, every inch of the  
walls and the cavern, every**

During the six  
years of high school,  
I was in a world of  
primarily young  
females. Most of us  
were quiet, shy and  
obedient, but there  
were always a few of  
us, bright and  
brilliant, so clear of  
what they wanted for  
themselves. I was  
one of the quiet

a  
priestess?"

*"Would I  
rather! Of  
course! I'd  
rather  
marry a  
pig-herd  
and live in  
a ditch. I'd  
rather  
anything  
than stay  
buried alive  
here all my  
born days  
with a  
mess of  
women in a  
perishing  
old desert  
where  
nobody  
ever  
comes!"  
(p.45) [...]*

*[Arha] felt  
that she  
had never  
seen  
Penthe  
before,  
never  
looked at  
her and  
seen her,  
round and  
full of life  
and juice  
as one of  
her golden  
apples,  
beautiful to*

**inch of our world. Never  
have we seen with our eyes  
what our world looks like  
but only know how it feels  
to our hands -- never have  
we seen what and who we  
are. The unchanging land  
and the blackness lead us  
to believe what we are told.  
We are the females behind  
the men, aren't we? But  
when a few of us – the vivid  
and inquisitive ones get  
together, we know there is  
always some sense of  
curiosity inside us. It is as if  
we have known all along  
that there could be  
something more behind this  
darkness.**

ones. Often times, I  
looked at those  
shining girls,  
secretly, admiring,  
even adoring them.  
Their energy was so  
dazzling, inspiring  
and contagious, only  
that I wished I were  
as courageous as  
they...

*see. [...]  
 She had  
 not realized  
 how very  
 different  
 people  
 were, how  
 differently  
 they saw  
 life. She felt  
 as if she  
 had looked  
 up and  
 suddenly  
 seen a  
 whole new  
 planet  
 hanging  
 huge and  
 populous  
 right  
 outside the  
 window, an  
 entirely  
 strange  
 world, one  
 in which  
 the gods  
 did not  
 matter  
 (p.46).*

## Part Two: The Light

*Arha went in to her  
 silent Undertomb, the*

**How do we define our  
 power and domain? Isn't it**

I used to ask  
 my male and

*place where she now knew so well. There was no wind, no season in the darkness. It was close, it was still, it was safe. And yet there in the utter blackness, where nothing could be visible, she saw this man holding a staff with light burning at the end of the wood. There she saw what she had never seen.*

*To have seen the Undertomb confused her; she was bewildered. She had known it only as a region defined by hearing, by hand's touch, by drifts of cool air in the*

**through what we were told and what we do not see but feel? All these years, we have been told to be afraid – to be afraid of our own dark domain, to be afraid ourselves.**

**Women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront oneself – the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in the mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be” (Radicalesbians , 1997, p.156).**

female friends: if they got to choose, would they rather be the sex they were not? Almost all the female answered they would rather to be male, but none of the males wanted to change their sex.

Over the years, I never really liked myself. I had always believed that it was the first male in my life who thought I was beautiful changed my idea about myself. I looked back now from

*dark; a vastness; a mystery, never to be seen. She had seen it, and the mystery had given place, not to horror, but to beauty, a mystery deeper even than that of the dark (p.67). [...]*

*“Forgive me that I have seen your darkness broken,” [Arha] said, [...] Yet even as she prayed, in her mind’s eye she saw the quivering radiance of the lighted cavern, life in the place of death; and instead of terror at the sacrilege and rage against the thief, she thought only*

Tenar’s eyes; it seemed to make better sense. Perhaps, like a lot of my girl friends, we were confused with finding our inner selves with looking for ‘the man’ – our prince charming – who would save us.

**But now that we have seen it, it is nothing like what we have thought and imagined. The dark domain is beautiful! It is so very beautiful that we cannot see what of terror. However, the beauty is confusing. Why have our masters kept us in a dark domain, filled us with fear, yet in fact the domain itself is so very beautiful? Why? “He confirms his image of us – of what we have to be in order to be acceptable by him – but not our real selves; he confirms our womanhood – as he defines it, in relations to him – but cannot confirm our personhood, our own**

*how strange  
it was, how  
strange... (p  
. 69).*

**selves as absolutes”  
(Radicalesbians, p. 156). So  
all these years, we have  
believed that our knowledge  
and passion are dark and  
bound to make trouble in the  
world we are entering  
(Gilligan, 1993).**

**Never have we seen  
our domain until this  
intruder coming in with the  
light – a powerful male.  
Powerful? Why do we think  
he is powerful? Why are we  
afraid of him? He is now at  
the domain of our power; yet  
we fear to face him. We fear  
for his power and for the  
arts he uses. The mind is so  
constructed. The elders  
have taught us that the  
males are wizards. They**

seek and hold powers. So  
 this notion of women  
 looking up to men becomes  
 so normal that almost no  
 one notice (Paul, 1999).

*The truth  
 was that  
 she was  
 afraid to  
 face him.  
 She was  
 afraid of his  
 power, the  
 arts he had  
 used to  
 enter the  
 Undertomb,  
 the sorcery  
 that kept  
 that light  
 burning.  
 And yet,  
 was that so  
 much to be  
 feared? The  
 powers that  
 ruled in the  
 dark places  
 were on her  
 side, not his  
 (p.79).*

[...]

*A rush of  
 hatred for  
 him rose up  
 in her,*

Tenar's power, the  
 female power, is at the dark  
 side and the male intruder's  
 power brings the light. We,  
 females, are the servants of  
 the dark power and he, the  
 male, is the master of his  
 own art. "He is the Subject,  
 he is the Absolute" (Simon  
 De Beauvoir, 1997, p. 13),  
 and we are the Other. Facing  
 the male in our own domain,  
 we do not feel powerful and  
 this feeling angers us. "How  
 did all this begin? ... why  
 should man have won from

*choking her  
throat for an  
instant.  
Why did he  
sit there so  
defenseless  
and so  
strong?  
Why could  
she not  
defeat him?  
(p.96).*

**the start? ... How is it that  
this world has always  
belonged to the  
men...”(Simon De Beauvoir,  
1997, p. 17)? The anger  
involves self-awareness. We  
seem to have forgotten what  
we have forgotten (Gilligan,  
1993). Through the  
intruder’s light, we are now  
able to see and it is as if a  
journey of discovering  
ourselves begins. We see  
something we are never  
aware of – it is no longer  
something to be afraid of but  
something to be curious  
about.**

*Never had  
the rites  
and duties  
of the day  
seemed so  
many, or so  
petty, or so*

**For the first time we  
look at what we have known  
for years from a different**



*long. The little girls with their pale faces and furtive ways, the restless novices, the priestesses whose looks were stern and cool but whose lives were all a secret brangle of jealousies and miseries and small ambitions and wasted passions – all these women, among whom she had always lived and who made up the human world to her, now appeared to her as both pitiable and boring (p.93).*

**angle. All these women in our life, in this female, unchanging, silent desert land, ‘ruling’ our domain, have we ever really had any power? Where did the stern look come from and where did our passion go? Day after day, going through the same rites and duties, how have we come this far? What is it that we want for ourselves? Why have we never thought of what we want? Thought of other choices? Thought of questioning or rebelling? “Women have had to learn to live with ideological contradictions” (Boler, 1999, p. 43). We have lived as servants, guided by the**

perceptions of other's needs. We see no ways of exercising control without risking an assertion that seems morally dangerous (Gilligan, 1982).

From this moment we begin to see, we want to see more. In the darkness, we never saw ourselves, and it is through a man we see it. But what is he showing us? Through this male's eyes, what do we see?

*“Show me something you think worth seeing. Anything!” [said Arha]. [...] The heavy black she has worn for years was gone; her dress was of*

He sees us with a beautiful gown. Oh~~ his arrogance!! He claims it is our inner selves he is showing us. And what is he showing us? A beautiful gown! How can this be our

*turquoise-colored silk, bright and soft as the evening sky. [...] She looked at the magician, speechless.*

*“Do you like it?”*

*“Where –“*

*“It’s like a gown I saw a princess wear once, at the Feast of Sunreturn in the New Palace in Havnor, “ he said, looking at it with satisfaction. “You told me to show you something worth seeing. I show you yourself” (p. 98).*

*“Make it – make it go away.”*

*“You gave me your*

**‘selves?’ We are “looked at but not seen” (Gilligan, 1993, p.145). “Power lies with the one who looks” (Hesford, 1999, p.46), so he defines us. And we define ourselves through him. “By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture’s definition of ourselves” (Radicalesbians, 1997, p.156).**

**But NO! Why is it that we have to relate to men? If we are male-identifies, we cannot realize our autonomy (Radicalesbians, 1997). The beautiful gown does not represent our inner selves. It is not through the man we see it; we have to discover**

*cloak,” he  
said as if in  
reproach.  
“Can I give  
you  
nothing?”  
(p. 98).*

**our own selves.**

<p><i>Arha should kill any intruders of the Undertomb and sacrifice them to serve her masters. Her trainer, Kossil, had instructed her there could be no interaction with invaders but only death as punishment. When Arha encountered Ged, the male intruder with light, out of curiosity, she brought him bread and water to spare him from death and began to learn about life. She suspected</i></p>	<p><b>So we rebel. We disobey the rules. And we treat our arrogant male intruder with generosity – we spare his life and bring him food and water. Then he calls us by our true name – the name we have forgotten for years. But it is not through him we find our true selves. It is through our act of rebellion – <i>our will</i> – we have found our inner selves back. “This, I thought, is Power! Not to be strong of limb, hard of heart, ferocious and daring; but kind,</b></p>	<p>All along, I thought it was the man who made me see my beauty and changed my life. I thought it was their power I wanted – to control, to demand and to be rational.  I see it now. It was never the man but the choices I made – it had always been. Hsin-Chun is my name, and I remember it now.</p>
--	--	---

*Kossil's distrust and was* **compassionate and soft"**  
*afraid this elder priestess* **(Warner, 1995, p.42).**  
*would press her to kill,*  
*she therefore took him to*  
*the very center of the*  
*Undertomb – the Great*  
*Treasure of the Tombs.*  
*There she asked him to*  
*trust her.*

*"You must  
believe me."*

*"I will do as  
you say," he  
said gently.*

*"I will bring  
food and  
water when  
I can....I  
must get  
Kossil off  
the track.  
But I will  
come. I  
promise...."*

*He raised  
his face to  
her. His  
expression  
was  
strange.*

Girls of my  
generation who  
read and travel like  
me, or who rear  
children and care  
for their families  
and who work hard  
for their  
professionals back  
at my home island,  
these were all the  
choices we made.

*“Take care, Tenar,” he said (p. 105).*

*“I am Tenar,” she said, not aloud, and she shook with cold, and terror, and exultation, there under the open, sun-washed sky. “I have my name back. I am Tenar!” (p. 108).*

**Re-encountering our true selves, we confront the conflict with ourselves. Who am I? We ask over and over but cannot find the answer. The awareness brings such confusion and the paradox places such painful battle in us around issues of voice and authorization, unsure of the accuracy of our own perceptions. Who we are we no longer know. “Girls must learn the traditions frame and structure the world they are entering, and they also must hold to their own ways of hearing and seeing” (Gilligan, 1993, p.165). If we**

recognize what we know, we will be in conflict with prevailing authorities. If we do not recognize what we know, we will be in trouble with ourselves. It's a double life we are living from now on (Gilligan, 1993).

*Who am I?  
She asked  
herself and  
got no  
answer  
(p.111). [...]*

*"I am not  
Tenar. I am  
not Arha.  
The gods  
are dead,  
the gods  
are dead"  
(p.116).*

Sometimes we cry with despair as if some lost children who no longer know our way. Our new awareness is so very painful. To the extent we have perceived ourselves as having no choice and we are used to this perception, so we correspondingly excuse ourselves from the responsibility that decision entails (Gilligan, 1982). On

**this path of decisions and responsibilities, we have no guidance. We are on our own.**

*“I didn’t know where to go. I thought I would be safe here, I thought my Masters would protect me and defend me. But they don’t, they are gone, they are dead...”*  
[said Tenar].

*“It was for them you wept – for their death? But they are here, Tenar, here!!... This is a most terrible place. One man alone has no hope, here. I was dying of thirst when you*

**In separating the voice of the self from the voices of others, the woman asks if it is possible to be responsible to herself as well as to others and thus to reconcile the disparity between hurt and care. The exercise of such responsibility requires a new kind of judgment, whose first demand is for honesty. To be responsible for oneself, it is first necessary to acknowledge what one is doing. (Gilligan, 1982, p.83).**



*gave me  
water, yet it  
was not the  
water alone  
that saved  
me. It was  
the strength  
of the  
hands that  
gave it”  
(p.117).*

**Becoming aware of  
our own resilience and  
rebellion brought us new  
power and strength. We  
realize that the ‘powerful’  
male needs us to save him!  
Indeed we are still perplexed  
and afraid, but we are willing  
to take the challenge. The  
male becomes our partner  
with whom we begin a new  
journey.**

*“Did you  
truly think  
[the  
Nameless  
Ones’  
dead? You  
know better  
in your  
heart. They  
do not  
die....They  
are  
immortal,  
but they are  
not gods.  
They never  
were. They  
are not  
worth the*

**The different vibration  
of life grows inside  
ourselves, the kind that we  
have never known before. It  
is the energy of our will. We  
are no longer servants but  
the master. Recognizing the  
possible legitimacy of  
different paths, we rely more**

*worship of  
any human  
soul” [said  
Ged]. [...]*  
“What have  
they ever  
given you,  
Tenar?”

“Nothing,”  
she  
whispered.

“They have  
nothing to  
give. They  
have no  
power of  
making. All  
their power  
is to darken  
and  
destroy....  
They should  
not be  
denied nor  
forgotten,  
but neither  
should they  
be  
worshiped.  
The Earth is  
beautiful  
and bright,  
and kindly,  
but that is  
not all. The  
earth is also  
terrible, and  
dark, and  
cruel....[The  
Nameless  
Ones] exist.  
But they are  
not your

**on our own interpretations.**

**“Thus the process of taking  
control, of coming to a more  
defined sense of what I  
wanted to do and what  
options are available and  
what kinds of paths make  
sense” takes on new  
meaning (Gilligan, 1982,  
p.146).**

*Masters.  
They never  
were. You  
are free,  
Tenar. You  
were taught  
to be a  
slave, but  
you have  
broken free”  
(p.118).*

*She  
listened,  
though her  
expression  
did not  
change. He  
said no  
more. They  
were silent;  
but it was  
not the  
silent that  
had been in  
that room  
before she  
entered.  
There was  
the  
breathing of  
two of them  
now, and  
the  
movement  
of life in  
their veins,  
and the  
burning of  
the candle  
in its lantern  
of tin, a tiny,  
lively sound*

(p.119).

### Part Three: The True Name

*“In my  
lands we  
keep our  
true  
names  
hidden all  
our lives  
long, from  
all but  
those  
whom we  
trust  
utterly; for  
there is  
great  
power,  
and great  
peril, in a  
name”  
[said Ged]  
(p.119).*

**We have now our true  
name. “To know the name of  
[...] a character is to know  
[...] the person” (Le Guin,  
1989, p.46). There is great  
power in our true name – it  
is our true self.**

*She felt a  
weight, a  
pressure  
on her  
mind, that  
seemed to  
darken  
and  
confuse all  
thought  
and  
feeling.  
[...] The*

**We look back to the  
trail we came along – the  
silence and the obedience.  
Thinking of our rebellion  
against our masters, we fear.  
Are we ready to step out this**

*utter  
silence  
outside the  
room  
seemed  
terrible.  
Why was  
that? She  
had never  
feared the  
silence of  
the  
underearth  
before. But  
never  
before had  
she  
disobeyed  
the  
Nameless  
Ones,  
never had  
she set  
herself  
against  
them (p.  
120).*

*“Tell me  
this,  
Tenar.  
How were  
you  
chosen to  
be the  
Priestess  
of the  
Tombs?”*

*“When the  
first  
Priestess  
dies they*

**entrapment and act on our  
own perceptions and thus  
our willingness to take  
responsibility for what we  
do? “Some women are  
better positioned and  
equipped than others, but all  
struggle to create their  
sense of self, their own  
subjectivities in response to  
these discourses”  
(Cherland, 1994, p.21).**

**We trace back and  
wonder: how have we come  
to devoutly accept what has  
always been believed? How  
have the expectations been  
constructed and  
perpetuated? It is as if the**

*go looking  
all through  
Atuan for a  
girl-baby  
born on  
the night  
the  
Priestess  
died. And  
they  
always  
find one.  
Because it  
is the  
Priestess  
reborn.  
When the  
child is five  
they bring  
it here to  
the Place.  
And when  
it is six it is  
given to  
the Dark  
Ones and  
its soul is  
eaten by  
them. And  
so it  
belongs to  
them, and  
has  
belonged  
to them  
since the  
beginning  
days. And  
it has no  
name.”*

*“Do you  
believe  
that?”*

**story of the female has  
started from the very  
beginning and it has always  
been the way it is. Never  
once does anyone question  
it. Never once does anyone  
think of changing it. “The  
culture is defining for its  
members that which is to be  
taken for granted as factual,  
in alienable and proved”**

**(Richardson, 1988, p.4).**

**Women’s role is “*naturalized*  
through common sense”**

**(Boler, 1999, p.35).**

*"I have  
always  
believed it"  
(p. 125).*

And now with this new path lying in front, we see our own hesitation: Should we rebel or should we not? What does it take to set ourselves against what we have always believed? "How does it happen that, while some people succumb to false consciousness [– to think falsely their troubles result from their own failures], others are able to trust their own deeper sociological competence [– to come to an awareness of the bigger social things by beginning with what is right or wrong in what is going on]" (Lemert, 1997, p. 22)?

Mother told the relatives and friends that I was going abroad again for the doctoral degree. She came home, upset. "They all said what good is a girl to study that much. You should just get married."

How would it ever be easy to choose a path of rebellion? I remembered my uneasiness and apprehension on the plane to the U.S....

*"I don't know what to do. I am afraid."*

*He answered softly. "You must make a choice. Either you must leave me, lock the door, go up to your altars and give me to your Masters ... – 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 that is the beginning of the story. You must be Arha, or you must be Tenar. You*

**Who am I? Who are we? What should we do? Which self should we be? "In our lives, we do what we must do, and we do most of what society expects of us....The way out into the wider truths beyond our little worlds is, ..., personal courage. But personal courage is never simply given to us" (Lemert, 1997, p. 50). We struggle and struggle. The choice is so very difficult to make. And the struggle is so very hard to go through. The thought of taking against what we have believed all our life scares us so and we feel so lost! How could we ever**

Here in this country, I use a different name – Jamie. And so begins the struggle and confusion between my two names – Hsin-Chun and Jamie, the former from my parents, the latter myself.



*cannot be both” (p. 126).*

**defeat such enormous power of the Dark Ones? “Those who do, do it by courageously opening their hearts, and eyes, to the realities before them – by feeling their weariness, then seeing the world for what it is, then slowly beginning to act differently” (Lemert, p. 23).**

*“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.” [...] “To be reborn one must die, Tenar. It is not so hard as it looks from the other side”*

**I am trying to unlearn these lessons, along with other lessons I was taught by my society, particularly lessons concerning the minds, work, works, and being of women (Le Guin, 1989, p. 151).**

**Slowly and painfully, we are transforming**

(p.126).

**ourselves. We unlearn what we have learned. We ‘nurture our own voices, our own individualities’ (Richardson, 1997, p.2). Standing back from our life, we see ourselves more objectively, more as an object, yet also more subjectively, more personally. We are now ‘both product and producer, object and subject’ (Richardson, p.2).**

*“They would not let us get out. Ever.”*

*“Perhaps not. Yet it’s worth trying. You have knowledge, and I have skill, and between us we have....”*

**The man who intrudes gives us encouragement too, for he needs us. We are now partners. Together, we can make a whole. Together, he finds his power back and we find our new path. “Men and women are closer to each**

*He  
paused.*

*“We have  
the Ring of  
Erreth-  
Akbe” (p.  
126).*

*“Yes, that.  
But I  
thought  
also of  
another  
thing  
between  
us. Call it  
trust. That  
is one of  
its names.  
It is a very  
great  
thing.  
Though  
each of us  
alone is  
weak,  
having that  
we are  
strong,  
stronger  
than the  
powers of  
the dark.”  
[...]  
“Listen,  
Tenar!” he  
said. “I  
came here  
a thief, an  
enemy,  
armed  
against  
you; and  
you*

**other than either is to  
anything else” (Rubin, 1997,  
p.40). So with trust, the man  
reveals his true self to us  
and at the same time we  
make our choice. The new  
path begins.**

*showed  
me mercy,  
and  
trusted  
me. And I  
have  
trusted  
you from  
the first  
time I saw  
your face,  
for one  
moment in  
the cave  
beneath  
the  
Tombs,  
beautiful in  
darkness.  
You have  
proved  
your trust  
in me. I  
have  
made no  
return. I  
will give  
you what I  
have to  
give. My  
true name  
is Ged.  
And this is  
yours to  
keep.” He  
had risen,  
and he  
held out to  
her a  
semi-circle  
of pierced  
and  
carven  
silver. “Let  
the ring be*

*rejoined,”  
he said  
(p.127).*

*She went  
out of the  
Treasury  
of the  
Tombs  
with the  
ring of  
Erreth-  
Akbe on  
her arm,  
and the  
man  
follower  
her  
(p.129).*

*As she  
stumbled  
forward  
she cried  
out in her  
mind,  
which was  
as dark, as  
shaken as  
the  
subterrane  
an vault,  
“Forgive  
me. O my  
Maters, O  
unnamed  
ones, most  
ancient  
ones,  
forgive  
me,  
forgive*

**The new path begins,  
but who says it is an easy  
path? Every step we take is  
painful and difficult. At every  
corner we turn, we doubt  
whether we have made a  
mistake by taking this  
different trail. Have I made a  
right choice? – Inside  
ourselves, we are crying and  
screaming loudly. “Between**

*me!”*

*There was  
no answer.  
There had  
never  
been an  
answer  
(p.134).*

**the desire to assert  
[ourselves] and the desire  
for self-effacement, [we are]  
torn and divided” (Simone  
De Beauvoir, 1952, p. 695).  
“To be justified by a god is  
easier than to justify  
[ourselves] by [our] own  
efforts” (Simone De  
Beauvoir, p.696). In the  
darkness, we stumble  
forward.**

*It was very  
strange.  
Living,  
being in  
the world,  
was a  
much  
greater  
and  
stranger  
thing than  
she had  
ever  
dreamed  
(p.140).  
[...] There  
was a joy  
in her that  
no thought*

**When we finally come  
out to the new world, a place  
we have never known  
existing, joy grows in us. We  
feel new and reborn. The  
past is now being put behind  
and things are so new to us.  
What we knew about  
ourselves is all so very**

*nor dread  
could  
darken,  
that same  
sure joy  
that had  
risen in  
her,  
waking in  
the golden  
light  
(p.142).*

*“What are  
you going  
to do ...?”  
[Ged]  
said, ...  
“You are –  
more than  
I had  
realized –  
truly  
reborn.”  
She  
nodded,  
smiling a  
little. She  
felt  
newborn  
(p.146).*

**different now. This delight of  
discovering our selves is  
intense and irresistible.**

**But what is this new  
woman in man’s eyes? What  
do people see in us?**

**We come out from the  
very old and long darkness,**

taking against what has  
 been assigned for century as  
 what a woman should do.  
 We have chosen a non-  
 traditional trail. But where is  
 this path leading us? Is it  
 only going to take us to  
 another set of expectation?  
 There is new confusion and  
 fear now rising after our  
 taste of joy.

*“...and  
 they’ll love  
 you the  
 more  
 because  
 you are so  
 young.  
 And  
 because  
 you are  
 beautiful.  
 You’ll have  
 a hundred  
 dresses  
 like that  
 one I  
 showed  
 you by  
 illusion,  
 but real  
 ones.*

The man denies our  
 past. His arrogance! He  
 thinks we have known  
 nothing. He thinks what we  
 want from this new path is  
 praise and gratitude and  
 love. He thinks we want what  
 they have. But we don’t want  
 what men have. “I am glad to  
 let them do their work and



*You'll  
meet with  
praise,  
and  
gratitude,  
and love.  
You who  
have  
known  
nothing  
but  
solitude  
and envy  
and the  
dark"  
[said Ged]  
(p.147).*

**talk their talk. But I do not  
want and will not have them  
saying or thinking or telling  
us that theirs is the only fit  
work or speech for human  
beings" (Le Guin, 1989,  
p.159).**

**When joy subsides,  
thoughts and questions  
once again rise in our  
minds. – Is it now going to  
be all bright, sooth and  
beautiful, this new trail? Is  
our life going to be easy and  
free from now on? Are we  
really free? Does freedom  
really come easily just like  
this? If this is truly freedom,  
why does it feel so heavy? If  
this new path is really  
'better' than the old one, why  
do we feel nothing delighted**

**but only dread?**

**When you look  
at yourself in  
the mirror, I  
hope you see  
yourself. Not  
one of the  
myths. Not a  
failed man – a  
person who can  
never succeed  
because  
success is  
basically  
defined as  
being male –  
and not a failed  
goddess, a  
person  
desperately  
trying to hide  
herself in the  
dummy Woman,  
the image of  
men's desires  
and fears. I  
hope you look  
away from  
those myths  
and into your  
own eyes and  
see your own  
strength. You're  
going to need it.  
I hope you don't  
try to take your  
strength from  
men, or from a  
man.  
Secondhand  
experience  
breaks down a**

**block from the  
car lots. I hope  
you'll take and  
make your own  
soul; that you'll  
feel your life for  
yourself pain by  
pain and joy by  
joy (Le Guin,  
1989, p.158).**

*There was  
a dread in  
her now  
that grew  
and grew.  
All that lay  
ahead of  
her was  
unknown.  
She knew  
nothing  
but the  
desert and  
the  
Tombs.  
What good  
was that?  
She knew  
the  
turnings of  
a ruined  
maze, she  
knew the  
dances  
danced  
before a  
fallen altar.  
She knew  
nothing of  
forests, or  
cities, or  
the hearts*

**Freedom and burden  
are now both in our heart  
and on our shoulder at the  
same time. We weep in pain.  
The old master is gone; yet  
the new direction looks so  
unsure. Yes, we've made a  
choice, the first choice we  
have ever made on our own  
will in our life. But! But!  
What if it was a wrong  
choice?**

**Parts of me are  
pinned  
to earth, parts  
of me  
undermine**

Perhaps there  
doesn't have to be  
either Hsin-Chun or  
Jamie. They are both  
*me*. Tenar has come  
a long way out of the  
darkness. So have I.  
"Grace is never  
cheap,' and freedom  
is not easy. But it is  
all right. It is all  
right....

*of men  
(p.150).*

**song, parts**

**of me spread on  
the water,**

**parts of me  
form a rainbow**

**bridge, parts of  
me follow**

**the sandfish,  
parts of me**

**are a woman  
who judges (Le  
Guin, 1989, p.  
159).**

*“Now,” he  
said, “now  
we’re  
away, now  
we’re  
clear,  
we’re  
clean  
gone,  
Tenar. Do  
you feel  
it?”*

*She did  
feel it. A  
dark hand  
had let go  
its lifelong  
hold upon  
her heart.  
But she  
did not feel  
joy, as she  
had in the  
mountains.*

**Isn’t making choices**

**supposed to represent a**

**person’s free will? Isn’t it**

**supposed to assure that we**

**have the power? Then why**

**does it not feel glorious and**

**powerful but only struggling,**

**uncertain and so very**

**painful? “Grace is never**

**cheap” (Lemert, 1997, p.**

**191). It is now up to us to**

**exercise our personal**

*She put her head down in her arms and cried, and her cheeks were salt and wet. She cried for the waste of her years in bondage to a useless evil. She wept in pain, because she was free (p.157).*

**courage – “to face the unacceptable realities that can only be accepted, to imagine the better possibilities, then to live with those we hate no less than with those we love” (Lemert, p.190).**

*What she had begun to learn was the weight of liberty. Freedom is a heavy load, a great and strange burden for the spirit to undertake. It is not easy. It is not a gift given, but*

**We look at what is now spreading in front of us – no limit, no walls, no rules and no roof, the vast space where we can ‘be ourselves.’ The old power can no longer master us, but we know that it will never be completely gone. There is no**

*a choice  
made, and  
the choice  
may be a  
hard one.  
The road  
goes  
upward  
towards  
the light,  
but the  
laden  
traveler  
may never  
reach the  
end of it.  
[...] Atuan  
was out of  
sight  
behind  
them. Her  
heart was  
very  
heavy.  
The sun  
beat in her  
eyes like a  
hammer of  
gold  
(p.157).*

*In the boat  
moved by  
magic over  
the great  
deep, the  
girl lay  
looking up  
into the  
dark. All  
her life she  
had looked  
into the*

**turning back now. And we've  
come to understand that  
“light and dark are of equal  
value ...each of which  
requires the other” (Spivack,  
1987, p. 13).**

**We have come to  
understand that freedom is  
never easy, and life contains  
both the painful and the  
joyful sides. “In traditional  
societies, the transitions in**

*dark; but  
this was a  
vaster  
darkness,  
this night  
on the  
ocean.  
There was  
no end to  
it. There  
was no  
roof. It  
went on  
out  
beyond  
the stars.  
No earthly  
Powers  
moved it. It  
has been  
before  
light, and  
would be  
after. It  
has been  
before life,  
and would  
be after  
(p.158).*

**the life cycle come more  
easily, ... In our society,  
these transitions are more  
painful” (Bateson, 1990,  
p.214). We will now never  
look for easy solution. We  
will take our own  
responsibility to our  
freedom, our life, our  
choices and our will. We will  
taste bitterness, experience  
pain and live with our  
struggle, but blissfully we  
will hold on this true name of  
ours we have found once  
again and never let go.**

### **The Stories Never End**

Only the imagination can get us out of the bind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesizing or pretending or discovering a way that reason can then follow into the infinity of options, a clue through the labyrinths of choice, a golden string, the story, leading us to the freedom that is properly human, the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality (Le Guin, 1989, p.45).

Tenar and I became acquainted with each other in her world, Earthsea. She told me her life story in the book Ursula Le Guin created for her, *The Tombs of Atuan*, and I began to tell my own story along with hers. For months, my story was unable to continue because of a deep struggle. It was a painful journey we took. Every step she took to leave Atuan was painful for her. Every step I took to find the re-defining sense of self hurt me hard. My mind was so constructed. I could not eliminate the strong association between men and power. I could not convince myself a woman does not need a man to see her own beauty and to define her sense of self. The construction was in fact invisible and the deconstruction was painfully difficult. I was not even aware how frequent the word 'powerful' was used to describe the male intruder in my first draft. This 16-year-old character, Tenar, brought me to confront my own confusion, my own struggle, and my own path. For a while, I did lose faith in my new sense of self. By reading this fantasy story and going through what the heroine goes through with her, however, I was able to imagine the possibilities for myself. I was able to locate a new place within my own world. "To face the unacceptable realities that can only be accepted, and to imagine the better possibilities, then to live with those we hate no less than with those we love" (Lemert, 1997, p. 190) – this, is the competence and the courage that Tenar has guided me to learn.



## Transition

I couldn't continue my hero-tale until I had, as woman and artist, wrestled with the angels of the feminist consciousness. It took me a long time to get their blessing. From 1972 on I knew there should be a fourth book of Earthsea, but it was sixteen years before I could write it (Le Guin, 1993, p. 12).

By the early seventies when Le Guin finished the Earthsea trilogy, traditional definitions and values of masculinity and femininity were in question. She was aware of the change. Sixteen years. Le Guin was a different person. So were Tenar and Ged.

While I was writing *Tehanu*, I didn't know where the story was going. I held on, held my breath, closed both eyes, sure I was falling. But wings upheld me, and when I dared look I saw a new world, or maybe only gulfs of sunlit air (Le Guin, 1993, p. 26).

I read both the *Tomb of Atuan* and *Tehanu* around two years ago and began the re-reading and analysis of the two books shortly after that. The analysis on *Tehanu* was not finished and it was now a whole year when I once again picked up what I had left. A year is not such a big gap as sixteen years, but it is a difference. As Le Guin took a flight to revision her Earthsea and wrote *Tehanu*, I read what I wrote a year ago for *Tehanu*, listened to the voice there, and heard another. I am no longer the young girl who went through the long journey with young Tenar, who made the first choice for her life and came out of the darkness, who struggled to learn her true being by holding onto her true

name, and who experienced the pain leaving the familiar behind to face the strange. In this revisioned Earthsea, Tenar had grown to be a middle-aged woman, who had tasted life, and now looked at her world and her own life with a changing vision. Through her eyes I studied her world, her life and her revision; then I reflected back to my world and my life, and I see a different woman looking back at me. Tenar's path and my path once again came across. I see myself now as a 32 year old woman, not quite middle-aged, but no longer young, who seeks in life not answers but understanding. The metaphor I now take for life is not a heroic quest, but a quilt being continually composed. I am looking at a woman's life as "an improvisatory art" (Bateson, 1990, p. 3), in which the woman, with imagination, sews up her life quilt, pieces by pieces, connecting men and children and other women.

I begin to find, in life, often times the more I say, the less I could explain. Yet what plain words can not express, metaphors can. Therefore in this continued story, I am proposing to say less, hoping to express more.

So, together with Le Guin and Tenar and her one-eye-blind child, Tehanu, we flew.

If some of the wild freedom of that flight is in the book, that's enough; that's how I wanted, as an old woman, to leave my beloved islands of Earthsea. I didn't want to leave Ged and Tenar and their dragon-child safe. I wanted to leave them free (Le Guin, 1993, p. 26).

Our stories continued. Or perhaps I should say, they are now being retold.

### **Composing the Heart of the Swan: *Tehanu*, the Two Stories Continued**

Three threads are woven to compose this section. Through the first thread women's silence is unfolded in contrast to men's power. The second thread connects silence to a powerless man. And with the third thread an altered vision concerning the binary image of power and powerlessness is sewn up.

In order to fulfill the intention of saying less to express more, the commentary presented in the middle column will be speaking in verse. The right column still provides reflection on my own life story and the retelling of Tenar's story remains in the left column. Instead of being woven into the commentary, feminist theories are arranged at the beginning of each of the three parts to avoid intrusion on the verses.

#### **Thread One: Listening to the Silence**

The Hebrew word for widow has as its root the word *alem*, "unable to speak,"...Thus the widow was the "silent one" (Erickson, 1993, p. 108).

Tenar and I, as many women, have come through a long journey of pain and struggle to make choices on our own and to rebel the old power. Our ability to make choices for ourselves is "no small matter when [our] structural inability to make choices allows men to make choices for [us]" (Erickson, p. 124). But our stories did not end there. In Tenar's story, she was now a middle aged widow; in mine, I am now a 33 year-old woman. We are both no longer very young.

Coming out of the world of mostly women, we arrived to the land of men. Some things remain similar; in the men's world, women surrender to a meaning system articulated by men. Still, we are defined, as we were before. "The field of the present is just another name for the field of struggle" (Bourdieu, 1993. p. 107).

However, other things have changed,

For those who live in the darkness already and have lived there all their lives, these issues and visions are less frightening and less dramatic. However, they are no less powerful...(Erickson, p. 140).

We are now viewing our task differently. It is now for us to hear what our silence is speaking. We do not wait for men to give us voices. We speak to ourselves. And we speak to our children. The men do not hear us, but we hear ourselves.

The oppressed with voices tell stories about their resistance and pass along strategies for survival. They write their own poetry and maintain literary societies. They do not need to be helped into speech by those people, past or present, who have been admitted to the masculine world and who therefore cannot hear the speech of the oppressed (Erickson, p. 197).

In men's eyes, "emotions are assigned as women's dirty work, and then used against her as an accusation of her inferior irrationality" (Boler, 1999, p. 43), but we have realized that

all decision-making is subjective and emotional, that the rational thinkers among the Europeans struggled to rationalize their own emotional attitudes and re-name their beliefs in vain. It is ultimately better to face the feelings we have and struggle to grow from them to a better place than to deny the heart and make heartless decisions (Maracle, 1996, p. xi).

In the dark, we see not with our eyes, but with our ears. It is where silence speaks. Here, we know emotions matter. So do anger, agony, and sentimentality. We hope the children listen to us; we hope they learn that “the power to be silent awakens dormant forces of listening and understanding” (Mellon, 2000, p. 23).

Silence is not always powerless.

**Tenar and I**

**Our stories continue**

**We have made**

**Our first choice for life**

**Leaving the world**

**that was familiar**

**The old power**

**that mastered us**

**To be in the new land**

**Where we are**

**foreigners**

**Where we are called**

**by different names**

**Not our true names**

*Tenar became*

*Goha – so had her farmer  
husband called her.*

*Twenty-five years had  
passed and she was now a  
widow and mother of two  
grown children, living on  
the farm alone, with the  
solitude she had once  
been used to in her youth.*

*A bad thing*

*happened in the village – a  
little girl was raped and  
burned badly by her  
parents. Goha tried to save  
her and then took her in as  
her adopted daughter. She  
named the girl Therru – the  
flaming of fire.*

<i>Ogion, the Mage of</i>	<b>To live in men's world</b>
<i>Re Albi, sent a messenger</i>	<b>We 'learn'</b>
<i>for Goha. He would have</i>	<b>Terms defined by men</b>
<i>reached her by simply</i>	<b>Becoming</b>
<i>saying her true name in his</i>	<b>Wives and mothers,</b>
<i>own voice, but he was sick.</i>	<b>Playing</b>
<i>Goha set off immediately</i>	<b>Our women's roles</b>
<i>with her little deformed</i>	<b>Saving</b>
<i>child. To make the way</i>	<b>Our sounds and</b>
<i>easier for the child, she</i>	<b>stories</b>
<i>told her stories – stories</i>	<b>For our children's</b>
<i>about Ogion, the wizard,</i>	<b>future</b>
<i>and a dragon.</i>	<b>To change</b>

*"...in the beginning, dragon and human were all one. They were all one people, one race, winged, and speaking the True Language."*

*"They were beautiful, and strong, and wise, and*

*free.”*

*“But in time  
nothing can  
be without  
becoming. So  
among the  
dragon-  
people some  
became more  
and more in  
love with  
flight and  
wildness...*

*“Others of the  
dragon-  
people came  
to care little  
for flight, but  
gathered up  
treasure,  
wealth, things  
made, things  
learned...*

*“...there are  
those among  
us who know  
they once  
were  
dragons, and  
among the  
dragons there  
are some  
who know  
their kinship  
with us. And  
these say  
that when the  
one people  
were  
becoming  
two, some of  
them, still*



*both human  
and  
dragon,...,  
great winged  
beings both  
wild and  
wise, with  
human mind  
and dragon  
heart.”  
(Tehanu, p.  
12-13).*

*That was the story told in  
the Song of the Woman of  
Kemay, who was both  
human and dragon, and  
whom Ogion came to  
meet. Ogion said to her,*

*‘When I first  
saw you I  
saw your true  
being. This  
woman who  
sits across  
the hearth  
from me is no  
more than the  
dress she  
wears.’*

*“But she  
shook her  
head and  
laughed, and*

*all she would  
say was, 'If  
only it were  
that simple!'  
(p. 14).*

<i>At Ogion's house,</i>	<b>The child listens</b>
<i>she thought of these years</i>	<b>To the stories we tell.</b>
<i>being Arha, the Eaten One</i>	<b>We didn't think</b>
<i>at the Tombs, and Goha,</i>	<b>She was listening</b>
<i>the farmer's wife, all these</i>	<b>carefully.</b>
<i>years, so full of silence.</i>	<b>Only she does.</b>

*Like all  
women, any  
woman,  
doing what  
women do.  
But it was not  
the names of  
the servant or  
the wife or  
the widow  
that Ogion  
had called  
her. Nor had  
Ged, in the  
darkness of  
the Tombs.  
Nor – longer  
ago, farther  
away than  
all – had her  
mother, the  
mother she  
remembered*

**We thought to  
ourselves,  
"What is our true  
being?  
Can it be seen?"  
In the bright world  
Where power belongs  
Only to men  
And meanings are  
defined  
Only by them,  
We are the silent.**

*only as the  
warmth and  
lion – color of  
firelight, the  
mother who  
had given her  
name.*

*“I am Tenar,”  
she  
whispered.  
[Tehanu, p.  
22]*

**It is almost as if  
we still live in the  
dark.  
Haven’t we come out  
Of the darkness  
Of the Old Power?  
Never  
Have we been  
ourselves  
In the darkness,  
We whisper  
our own name  
To remember  
who we are**

*The great old mage,  
Ogion, died, with Tenar at  
his side. The wizards came  
to bury him.*

*Both men  
looked at her.  
The young  
man, seeing  
a middle-*

**The emotions we  
speak are  
Not heard.  
We scream with anger  
In our minds,  
Our agony,  
our sentiments.**

I have always  
been a very emotional  
person who thinks more  
with intuition and feelings  
than with reason and  
rationality. For this, I  
have had to learn some

*aged village woman, simply turned away. The man from Gont Port stared a moment and said, "Who are you?"*

*"I'm called Flin'ts widow, Goha," she said. "Who I am is your business to know, I think. But not mine to say." [...]*

*"Take care, woman, how you speak to men of power!" [said the wizard] (p. 28).*

*Before he died, Ogion told Tenar his true name, but the wizards didn't expect her to know the great old mage's true name.*

**In men's world,  
We are not paid  
attention to.  
Why should they?  
They are powerful,  
And we are only  
women.**

hard lessons. "Try to be more rational; don't let emotions get in your way." Elders and friends often tell me so. It is as if feelings and emotions do not matter. Only the things that I should be pursuing matter, the life goals.

After all, who would want to write emotional stories in history? There have always been only successful stories.

*To her  
consternation  
she saw from  
their  
expression  
that in fact  
they had not  
heard the  
name,  
Ogion's true  
name; they  
had not paid  
attention to  
her.*

*"Oh!" she  
said. "This is  
a bad time –  
a time where  
even such a  
name can go  
unheard, can  
fall like a  
stone! Is  
listening not  
power?  
Listen, then:  
his name was  
Aihal. ...He  
was a silent  
man. Now  
he's very  
silent. Maybe  
there will be  
no songs,  
only silence. I  
don't know.  
I'm very tired.  
I've lost my  
father and  
dear friend"  
(p.29).*

*Ogion had asked Tenar to stay and waited. It was the same house Ged had brought her in twenty-five years ago. The neighbor, Aunt Moss, a witch, was friendly to her with certain false respect at the time. Tenar was then viewed as uncommon, as privileged – a female foreign ward of the great mage.*

**We could be powerful, Couldn't we? If we learn The men's knowledge the men's language. But don't we look awkward? We learn as if we weren't Female. In the men's world, we are foreigners Both to men and to women.**

It was not an unusual thing to hear male students from engineering or science departments at college make fun of their female classmates. "We never see them as girls. Look at them! Don't they look just like men?" They used to tell me that. I was never angry about my male friends' remarks at the time.

*Men had given her power,, men had shared their power with her. Women looked at her from outside, sometimes rivalrous, often with a trace of ridicule.*

*She had felt herself the*

Thinking back now, why did these words never upset me? Did I not agree with them? Those girls who took 'men's fields' as their interest were foreigners both to their

*one left  
outside, shut  
out. She had  
fled from the  
Powers of the  
desert tombs,  
and then she  
had left the  
Powers of  
learning and  
skill offered  
her by her  
guardian,  
Ogion. She  
had turned  
her back on  
all that, gone  
to the other  
side, the  
other room,  
where the  
women lived,  
to be one of  
them. (p.34)*

male classmates and to  
me. It was as if their  
major had made them  
less of a woman, of a  
person, less human...

*Weak as  
woman's  
magic,  
wicked as  
woman's  
magic,...  
Village  
witches,  
though they  
might know  
many spells  
and charms  
and some of  
the great  
songs, were  
never trained  
in the High  
Arts or the*

**So we fled, once  
again,  
Away from Power.  
We choose to live  
Where the women live.  
We choose to live  
Among women.**

*principles of  
magery. No  
woman was  
so trained.  
Wizardry was  
a man's work,  
a man's skill;  
magic was  
made by  
men. There  
had never  
been a  
woman  
mage. [...]*

*Most  
[witches]  
were  
midwives and  
healers...*

*"I follow my  
heart," one of  
these women  
had said to  
Tenar when  
she was  
Ogion's ward  
and pupil.  
"Lord Ogion  
is a great  
mage. He  
does you  
great honor  
teaching you.  
But look and  
see, child, if  
all he's taught  
you isn't  
finally to  
follow your  
heart" (p. 36-  
37).*



**We choose the** A friend once told  
**Woman's art.** me a friend of his who  
**The men's work is** went right into marriage  
**High Arts.** after she got her doctoral  
**Ours is low,** degree. I remembered  
**Weak and wicked.** responding scornfully,  
**They see themselves** "then what is the point of  
**As makers** her getting a Ph.D? She  
**And us as healers.** could have become a  
**And it is our 'honor'** housewife when she got  
**To learn theirs.** out of high school." Oh~  
**Still, we follow our** I am saying it as if that  
**hearts.** scorn no longer exists in  
me or in anybody else.

*"Ogion taught  
me. As if I  
weren't a girl.  
As if I'd been  
his prentice,  
like  
Sparrowhawk  
. He taught  
me the  
Language of  
the Making,  
Moss. What I  
asked him,  
he told me."*

*"There wasn't  
no other like*

**We don't want the** Would I be  
**men's art.** receiving the same  
**In the men's world,** reaction if I were to  
**We are the silent.** become a housewife  
**But to live as women,** right after I am called Dr.  
**We listen to our** for the first time?  
**Silence.** No respect to  
woman's work, this is

*him,” [said  
Moss]*

*“It was I who  
wouldn’t be  
taught. I left  
him. What did  
I want with  
his books?  
What good  
were they to  
me? I wanted  
to live, I  
wanted a  
man, I  
wanted my  
children, I  
wanted my  
life.” (p.56)*

how much we want  
men’s art. This is how  
silent we women are in  
the world of men.

## **Thread Two: Being Powerless**

“Wizards are usually elderly or ageless Gandalfs, quite rightly and archetypically. But what were they before they had white beards? How did they learn what is obviously an erudite and dangerous art?” (Le Guin, 1979, p.51)

Ged, as many men, had learned his art with a goal to be powerful. The male in our lives have been taught, with the idea of patriarchal masculinity, that “their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others.” (hooks, 2000, p. 70). They seek power. That is what they know about how to be men. Like women, men know well the male-female binary is “an idea with material force through which males are allocated positions in which

they can act as if they are powerful” (Davies, 2003, p.114). As the feminist observed,

They thus become powerful both through developing a subjectivity which is organized around power and through the discursive practices which establish male power as real and legitimate (Davies, p. 114).

Having long been obsessed with power, they have forgotten how to be themselves. The qualities needed to sustain power, as Davies (2003) quoted from Connell (1987), do not “settle the everyday reality of men’s lives, for most men can’t or won’t live according to the ideal pattern” (p. 129). When they lose their powers, fail the test of strength, “or cannot ‘submit’ to the practices of the men’s society, or ‘is not received into the cult’, [they are] thereafter [women] and not given ‘men’s privileges’” (Erickson, p. 87). When too old or too weak to serve the men’s society, the men go back to live with their women. Losing their very existence, they can then no longer recognize themselves. They are anguished and lost.

As middle-aged women, this male power in our eyes now is not power, but domination. To Tenar and many other women, “it is simply violence” (Erickson, 1993, p. 42), for we have different notions of power. Erickson cited from Hartsock (1983) and suggested that women find power to be:

(1) the glue that holds community together; (2) the means by which community is constituted; and (3) the means by which immortality is obtained and death overcome (p. 42).

We do not consider power to be the ability to command; however, in men's world, we find ourselves wordless to express our fear toward and our anger for what violence the conventional male power can do.

"The power of women is power within" (Erickson, p. 131), but we do not recognize this female power. The majority of us feel ambivalent toward power, for it "remains fundamentally contradictory to the idea and the idealization of the idea of being female" (Davies, p. 75). Often times we perceive mothering as the only powerful position to which we can legitimately make any claims while constituting ourselves as female. Yet at the same time, we rebel against this role through which we try to "vicariously live through [our] children" (hooks, 2000, p. 102). We do not want to become domineering mothers capable of meting out unjust punishment. As women, we are defined as not men. We come to distrust our own power that rises from our deepest, intuitive, and non-rational knowledge.

It is a power "from within," not a "power over" paradigm. This power is threatened by patriarchy, which utilizes "power over" and rationalizes violence against women as sexually inferior beings (Erickson, p. 124).

Under the patriarchal system, both the lost man who can no longer recognize himself and the wordless woman who is seen as a threat to the legitimate authority are powerless.

<p><i>Ged came back on a dragon's back, badly wounded. He lost all his power as a mage. He was no longer a mage. Aunty Moss recognized that, but Tenar didn't.</i></p>	<p><b>The males in our lives</b></p> <p><b>See themselves</b></p> <p><b>Find power</b></p> <p><b>We see them</b></p> <p><b>As power</b></p> <p><b>Men are power</b></p> <p><b>What is a man who has</b></p> <p><b>No power</b></p> <p><b>or loses his?</b></p> <p><b>We wonder.</b></p> <p><b>Looking at ourselves,</b></p> <p><b>What are we?</b></p>	<p>While I was studying hard in a foreign land seeking my sense of self, my male friend from college once told me over the phone, with a tone of deep sadness, depression, and desperation, how he had to try harder to find a way of getting a promotion so that he wouldn't feel like a failure.</p>
<p><i>"A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in its shell." She held up her long, bent, wet fingers as if holding a walnut. "It's hard and strong, that shell, and it's all full of him. Full of grand man-meat, manself. And that's all. That's all there is. It's</i></p>		

*all him and  
nothing else,  
inside.”*

[...]

*“Then it’s all  
his power,  
inside. His  
power’s  
himself, see.  
That’s how it  
is with him.  
And that’s  
all. When his  
power goes,  
he’s gone.  
Empty.” She  
cracked the  
unseen  
walnut and  
tossed the  
shells away.  
“Nothing.”  
(p.56)*

*“And a  
woman,  
then?”*

*“Oh, well,  
dearie, a  
woman’s a  
different  
thing  
entirely.  
Who knows  
where a  
woman  
begins and  
ends. Listen,  
mistress, I  
have roots, I*

**A woman of power**

**A woman’s power**

**What is that?**

**Do we know?**

**Never have we gotten**

**To define**

**Have we?**

**Our power roots**

*have roots  
 deeper than  
 this island.  
 Deeper than  
 the sea,  
 older than  
 the raising of  
 the islands. I  
 go back into  
 the dark.”*  
*Moss’s eyes  
 shone with a  
 weird  
 brightness in  
 their red  
 rims and her  
 voice sang  
 like an  
 instrument.  
 “I go back  
 into the dark!  
 Before the  
 moon I was.  
 No one  
 knows, on  
 one knows,  
 no one can  
 say what I  
 am, what a  
 woman is, a  
 woman of  
 power, a  
 woman’s  
 power,  
 deeper than  
 the roots of  
 trees,  
 deeper than  
 the roots of  
 islands,  
 older than  
 the Making,  
 older than  
 the moon.  
 Who dares*

**In the dark;**

**So said the elders.**

**In the dark,**

**Our eyes shine.**

**With brightness**

**Wildness**

**Deepness**

**Our voices**

**Sing.**

ask  
 questions of  
 the dark?  
 Who'll ask  
 the dark its  
 name?" [...]

"I will,"  
 [Tenar] said.  
 [...]

"I lived long  
 enough in  
 the dark,"  
 she said (p.  
 57).

Once the  
 Archmage, the most  
 powerful wizard of  
 Earthsea, Ged was no  
 longer a mage, no longer  
 a man of power. He woke  
 up from the wound, didn't  
 know what to do with  
 himself. Strength returned  
 to him but not ease.

**The man who**  
**Loses his power**  
**Does not know**  
**Himself.**  
**He looks down;**  
**What does he**  
**Have now?**  
**What about us?**  
**What power**  
**Have we ever had?**

For years Father  
 thought he was a failure  
 as a man. There would  
 be desolation in his voice  
 whenever he talked  
 about his school-principal  
 friend from college or his  
 company-owner brother,  
 and it anguished me so  
 to hear his sadness.

He was  
 looking  
 down at the  
 table, sullen,



*enduring,  
like a farmer  
after a hard  
day in the  
fields faced  
with some  
domestic  
squall. [...]*

*“Give me  
time...I have  
that, now”  
[said Ged]  
(p. 65).*

*And what  
power had  
she now?  
What had  
she ever  
had? As a  
girl, a  
priestess,  
she had  
been a  
vessel: the  
power of the  
dark places  
had run  
through her,  
used her, left  
her empty,  
untouched.  
As a young  
woman she  
had been  
taught a  
powerful  
knowledge  
by a  
powerful  
man and  
had laid it*

**What do we want for**

**Our lives?**

**What are we allowed**

**To have,**

**To decide?**

**Husband**

**Children**

**Family...**

**We turn down the**

**Men’s knowledge**

**Choose a life**

**For ourselves.**

**Men recognize**

**Themselves**

I think of the  
males in my life,  
grandfather, father,  
uncles, cousins and  
friends. They have  
devoted themselves to  
seek power. Success is  
how they define  
themselves. They have  
to be some kind of ‘boss’  
who has power over  
certain people before  
they consider themselves  
‘men.’

*aside, turned away from it, not touched it. As a woman she had chosen and had the powers of a woman, in their time, and the time was past; her wiving and mothering were done. There was nothing in her, no power, for anybody to recognize (p. 67).*

*But a dragon had spoken to her. "I am Kalessin," it had said, and she had answered, "I am Tenar."*

*"What was a dragonlord?" she had asked Ged in the dark place, the Labyrinth, trying to*

**By power**

**Us in being**

**Wives and mothers.**

**The woman's power is**

**Recognized by the**

**Men of power.**

**And we think**

**We have made our**

**choices!**

**Could things ever be**

**Different?**

**Women**

**would no longer need**

**To seek men**

**To admit**

**Our powers.**

**Men**

And I think of the females in my life, grandmother, mother, cousins and friends. I would ask mom what I was like when I was little. Mom would tell me stories from her childhood and youth. And my new-mother cousins and friends tell me about their babies. Success has never seemed to be an issue among us.

*deny his  
power, trying  
to make him  
admit hers;  
and he had  
answered  
with the  
plain  
honesty that  
forever  
disarmed  
her, "A man  
dragons will  
talk to."*

*So she was  
a woman  
dragons  
would talk  
to. Was that  
the new  
thing, the  
folded  
knowledge,  
the light  
seed, that  
she felt in  
herself,  
waking  
beneath the  
small  
window that  
looked west  
(p. 68)?*

**would no longer need**

**To seek**

**To become**

**Power themselves.**

*Tenar told Ged that* **Then perhaps**

*Ogion said 'all changed'* **In our children,**

*when he died, and she felt* **We could see**

*something lift her grief for* **Wholeness.**

*Ogion's death, something  
had been set free. Ged  
said yes, that an evil  
ended and there was now  
a king of Earthsea. While  
they were talking, the little  
child, Therru, came. She  
looked at Ged.*

*She seldom  
looked at  
people, and  
very seldom  
at men, for  
longer than  
a glance; but  
she was  
gazing at  
him steadily,  
her head  
cocked like a  
sparrow.  
Was a hero  
being born  
(p. 72)?*

*At night, Tenar  
sang Therru to sleep.  
When the child was fast  
asleep, she slipped her*

*from her lap to the bed.*

*Then, after a  
glance round  
to be sure  
she was  
alone, with  
an almost  
guilty  
quickness,  
yet with the  
ceremony of  
enjoyment,  
of great  
pleasure,  
she laid her  
narrow, light-  
skinned  
hand along  
the side of  
the child's  
face where  
eye and  
cheek had  
been eaten  
away by fire,  
leaving  
slabbed,  
bald scar.  
Under her  
touch all that  
was gone.  
The flesh  
was whole, a  
child's  
round, soft,  
sleeping  
face. It was  
as if her  
touch  
restored the  
truth (p. 74).*

<p><i>The king's men</i></p> <p><i>finally came for the</i></p> <p><i>Archmage of Earthsea.</i></p> <p><i>Tenar told Ged this news.</i></p> <p><i>He stopped.</i>  <i>He made a</i>  <i>movement,</i>  <i>quickly</i>  <i>controlled,</i>  <i>but it had</i>  <i>been the</i>  <i>beginning of</i>  <i>a turn to run,</i>  <i>to break and</i>  <i>run like a</i>  <i>mouse from</i>  <i>a hawk.</i></p> <p><i>"Ged!" she</i>  <i>said. "What</i>  <i>is it?"</i></p> <p><i>"I can't," he</i>  <i>said. "I can't</i>  <i>face them."</i></p> <p><i>"Who?"</i></p> <p><i>"Men from</i>  <i>him. From</i>  <i>the king."</i>  <i>[...]</i></p> <p><i>"What is it</i>  <i>you're afraid</i>  <i>of?" she</i>  <i>asked, not</i>  <i>impatiently,</i></p>	<p><b>He cannot even</b></p> <p><b>Stand straight</b></p> <p><b>To face what is coming</b></p> <p><b>For him</b></p> <p><b>The man who</b></p> <p><b>Loses</b></p> <p><b>His power has</b></p> <p><b>Nothing left in him.</b></p> <p><b>Empty.</b></p> <p><b>So he runs,</b></p> <p><b>From what he was</b></p> <p><b>From what he is not</b></p> <p><b>From himself.</b></p> <p><b>To women,</b></p> <p><b>We simply do not</b></p> <p><b>Understand.</b></p> <p><b>How could he lose</b></p> <p><b>His power</b></p> <p><b>After all these years,</b></p> <p><b>When it has been the</b></p> <p><b>Only thing</b></p>
--	---

*but with  
some  
rational  
authority.*

*He put his  
hands  
across his  
face, rubbing  
his temples  
and  
forehead,  
looking  
down. "I  
was – "he  
said. "I'm  
not – "*

*It was all he  
could say (p.  
90-91).*

*"No," he  
said. "None  
of that.  
Nothing of  
that." [...]*

*How can it  
be, how can  
you say  
that – as if  
you'd  
forgotten all  
you know, all  
you learned  
from Ogion,  
and at Roke,  
and in your  
traveling!  
You can't  
have  
forgotten the*

**He ever seeks?**

**Power to us is only**

**Given**

**Shared**

**By those who define it.**

**What is it like to be**

**Once powerful?**

**We don't really know.**

**Pieces by pieces,**

**Here and there,**

**We take whatever**

I think of all these

years when Dad was

absent to our life, busy

with his career, how

mom had managed to

always be there for all of

us. Never once had she

delayed to return her

students' assignments;

never once had one in

*words, the names, the acts of your art. You learned, you earned your power! (p. 92).*

[...]

*The desolation of his voice chilled her.*

*She was silent, trying to remember what it was like to have been powerful, to be the Eaten One, the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and then to lose that, throw it away, become only Tenar, only herself. She thought about how it was to have been a woman in the prime of life, with children and a man, then*

**Comes upon.**

**Powerless,**

**We are simply**

**Ourselves.**

the family left home in the morning without a lunch box; never once had Dad run out of clean ironed shirts. Being a full-time math teacher, a full-time mother, and a full-time wife, Mom never seemed to have time to worry about what power she had.



*to lose all  
 that,  
 becoming  
 old and a  
 widow,  
 powerless.  
 But even so  
 she did not  
 feel she  
 understood  
 his shame,  
 his agony,  
 his  
 humiliation.  
 Perhaps  
 only a man  
 could feel  
 so. A woman  
 got used to  
 shame (p.  
 93-94).*

<i>Ged told Tenar he</i>	<b>Redefine hero?</b>
<i>was disappointed and</i>	<b>Can men see this?</b>
<i>angry when he learned</i>	<b>Women could have</b>
<i>that she left Ogion and his</i>	<b>Learned</b>
<i>teaching to find herself a</i>	<b>Their language and</b>
<i>farmer and married him.</i>	<b>Their knowledge.</b>
<i>He had wanted Tenar to</i>	<b>But we want a</b>
<i>be able to use the power</i>	<b>Different one</b>
<i>and the knowledge Ogion</i>	<b>To speak</b>
<i>tried to teach her.</i>	<b>Ourselves.</b>

**Can they hear us?**

*“Magic  
means the  
skills, the  
arts of  
wizards, of  
mages?”  
[said Tenar].*

*“What else  
would it  
mean?” [said  
Ged].*

*“Is that all it  
could ever  
mean?”*

*“When  
Ogion taught  
me, ..., the  
words of the  
Old Speech,  
they were as  
easy and as  
hard in my  
mouth as in  
his.... But ...  
the lore, the  
runes of  
power, the  
spells...all  
dead to me.  
Somebody  
else’s  
language. I  
used to  
think, I could  
be dressed  
up as a  
warrior, with  
a lance and  
a sword and  
a plume and*

*all, but it  
wouldn't fit,  
would it?  
What would I  
do with the  
sword?  
Would it  
make me a  
hero? I'd be  
myself in  
clothes that  
didn't fit, is  
all, hardly  
able to walk"  
(p. 94-95).*

*Tenar sent Ged  
from Ogion's little cottage  
on the mountain to her  
own farm to herd sheep,  
so that he could get away  
from the King's men.*

*[She] had  
begun to see  
what their  
attempt to  
do him  
honor would  
do to him –  
denying him  
his grief for  
what he had  
lost, forcing  
him to act  
the part of*

**Could men be  
Freed  
From their names?  
Before they had their  
Knowledge,  
Powers,  
Names,  
What were they?**

It took Dad years  
to finally accept his own  
way of success – how he  
has always been honest  
and generous to his  
family, how he has  
always devoted the best  
of himself to whatever he  
does, and how he cares  
so much about his only  
daughter that he'd do  
such a thing against the  
male tradition to tell me,

*what he was  
no longer (p.  
102).*

with shyness and a little  
hesitation in his voice,  
how much he misses me  
when I call home.

I was only glad!

*Aunty Moss came  
to the cottage after Ged  
left. Tenar told her she  
could not understand why  
Ged felt such shame.*

*"It's a queer  
thing for an  
old man to  
be a boy of  
fifteen, no  
doubt!"  
[Moss said]  
(p. 106).*

*Tenar then for the  
first time realized why she  
never felt desire for Ged.*

*"They witch  
'emselves..."  
[said Moss].*

**Power is like a  
Spell.  
We are all  
Under the spell  
Both men and women.  
When men seek it,  
Make themselves  
The power itself, and  
Make their names,  
The spell becomes  
A part of them.  
When all of us  
Become used to it,  
Nobody  
Thinks any more.**

[...]

*“But why,  
but why –  
why did I  
never think –  
“*

*The witch  
laughed  
aloud.  
“Because  
that’s the  
power of  
‘em, dearie.  
You don’t  
think! You  
can’t! And  
nor do they,  
once they’ve  
set their  
spell. How  
could they?  
Given their  
power? It  
wouldn’t do,  
would it, it  
wouldn’t do.  
You don’t  
get without  
you give as  
much. That’s  
truly for all,  
surely. So  
they know  
that, the  
witch men,  
the men of  
power, they  
know that  
better than  
any....” (p.  
107).*

*“When you  
had a man,  
Moss, did  
you have to  
give up your  
power?”*

*“Not a bit of  
it,” the witch  
said,  
complacent.*

*“But you  
said you  
don’t get  
unless you  
give. Is it  
different,  
then, for  
men and for  
women?”*

*“What isn’t,  
dearie?”*

*“I don’t  
know,”  
Tenar said.  
“It seems to  
me we make  
up most of  
the  
differences,  
and then  
complain  
about ‘em. I  
don’t see  
why the Art  
Magic, why  
power,  
should be  
different for  
a man witch*

**Difference!**

**Difference!**

**Between men’s power**

**and women’s,**

**We keep asking**

**What it is.**

**Can there ever be**

**An answer?**

**Does there have to be**

**An answer?**

**In our children’s eyes,**

**What do they see?**

*and a  
woman  
witch.  
Unless the  
power itself  
is different.  
Or the art.”*

*“A man  
gives out,  
dearie. A  
woman  
takes in.”*

*Tenar sat  
silent but  
unsatisfied.*

*“Ours is only  
a little  
power,  
seems like,  
next to  
theirs,” Moss  
said. “But it  
goes down  
deep. It’s all  
roots. It’s  
like an old  
blackberry  
thicket. And  
a wizard’s  
power’s like  
a fir tree,  
maybe,  
great and tall  
and grand,  
but it’ll blow  
right down in  
a storm.  
Nothing kills  
blackberry  
bramble.”  
(p. 110).*

*In the  
morning  
[Tenar] sat  
on the  
doorstep  
brushing out  
her hair....*

*Therru came  
to stand  
behind her,  
watching.  
Tenar turned  
and saw her  
so intent she  
was almost  
trembling.*

*"What is it,  
birdlet?"*

*"The fire  
flying out,"  
the child  
said, with  
fear or  
exultation.  
"All over the  
sky!"*

*"It's just the  
sparks from  
my hair,"  
Tenar said,  
a little taken  
aback.  
Therru was  
smiling, and  
she did not  
know if she  
had ever  
seen the  
child smile*

**Is the world**

**Binary**

**In children's eyes?**

**Perhaps it isn't so**

**Before they are**

**Taught to see it**

**In the binary way.**



*before.  
Therru  
reached out  
both her  
hands, the  
whole one  
and the  
burned, as if  
to touch and  
follow the  
flight of  
something  
around  
Tenar's  
loose,  
floating hair.  
"The fires, all  
flying out,"  
she  
repeated,  
and she  
laughed.*

*At that  
moment,  
Tenar first  
asked  
herself how  
Therru saw  
her – saw  
the world –  
and knew  
she did not  
know: that  
she could  
not know  
what one  
saw with an  
eye that had  
been burned  
away (p.  
111-112).*

*Tenar came down to the village to visit an old weaver friend. He was glad to have a visitor and show her his family treasure, a very large painted fan.*

*'Hold it up to the light.'*

*She did so, and saw the two sides, the two paintings, made one by the light flowing through the silk, so that the clouds and peaks were the towers of the city, and the men and women were winged, and the dragons looked with human eyes (p. 115).*

*Walking home, Tenar thought of*

**The world is shown as  
A whole.  
But we do not see the  
Possibilities.  
So we make life plans  
For our children,  
Thinking  
To protect them,  
Fearing  
For them.**

**It was as if**

*Therru  
sitting at that  
loom. It  
would be a  
decent  
living. The  
bulk of the  
work was  
dull, always  
the same  
over, but  
weaving was  
an  
honorable  
trade and in  
some hands  
a noble art.  
And people  
expected  
weavers to  
be a bit shy,  
often to be  
unmarried,  
shut away at  
their work as  
they were,  
yet they  
were  
respected.  
And working  
indoors at a  
loom, Therru  
would not  
have to  
show her  
face. But the  
claw hand?  
Could that  
hand throw  
the shuttle,  
warp the  
loom?*

*And was she  
to hide all*

**there could be no more**

**Other possibilities.**

**Our eyes can see**

**But our minds don't.**

*her life (p.  
116).*

<i>Tenar got back to</i>	<b>The men of power</b>
<i>the cottage and Therru</i>	<b>Insist</b>
<i>was nowhere to be found.</i>	<b>their control</b>
<i>When she finally found the</i>	<b>Over us.</b>
<i>child, the little frightened</i>	<b>We do not</b>
<i>one told her the man who</i>	<b>Understand.</b>
<i>hurt her came so she hid.</i>	<b>Yet being</b>
<i>Rage drove Tenar to go</i>	<b>Powerless, we find</b>
<i>and look for the man,</i>	<b>No words to</b>
<i>whom she did not find, but</i>	<b>Defy.</b>
<i>instead she ran into the</i>	
<i>wizard who she met once</i>	
<i>when Ogion died.</i>	

*“...Did you  
think I did  
not know  
you for a  
witch? I saw  
that foul imp  
that clings to  
you, do you  
think I did  
not know  
how it was  
begotten,*

*and for what  
purposes?  
The man did  
well who  
tried to  
destroy that  
creature, but  
the job  
should be  
completed.  
You defied  
me once,  
across the  
boy of the  
old wizard,  
and I forbore  
to punish  
you then, for  
his sake and  
in the  
presence of  
others. But  
now you've  
come too  
far, and I  
warn you,  
woman! ... if  
you cross  
my will or  
dare so  
much as  
speak to me  
again, I will  
have you  
driven from  
Re Albi ....  
Have you  
understood  
me?"*

*"No," Tenar  
said. "I have  
never  
understood  
men like*

you" (p.  
127).

*Tenar came back  
to ask Moss about the  
wizard and the witch told  
her the evil deeds he had  
done. Tenar wondered  
why people in the village  
hardly ever talked about it.*

*Moss  
shrugged....  
The doings  
of the  
powerful  
were not to  
be judged by  
the  
powerless  
(p. 132).*

**So we teach our**

**Children.**

*Tenar promised  
Therru that the man was  
never to touch her again  
and from then on she took*

**We teach them what**

**Women know.**

**Yet what we know is**

**Not the wisdom that is**

I used to love  
watching Grandma  
arrange things in her  
kitchen. It was an

*the child with her*

*wherever she went.*

*Meanwhile, the child was learning the chores in the house.*

*“But I should be teaching her,” Tenar thought, distressed. “Teach her all, Ogion said, and what am I teaching her? Cooking and spinning?” Then another part of her mind said in Goha’s voice, “And are those not true arts, needful and noble? Is wisdom all words?” (p. 133).*

*The wizard came to the cottage while Tenar*

**Defined.**

**We do not know**

**Our own wisdom.**

**We talk to our past,**

**The young girl who**

impoverished time when resources were not easily available or affordable. Grandma would carefully collect jars or anything handy and neatly recycle them or magically find a new use for them.

Grandma’s wisdom was perhaps never anything valuable to be appreciated by men during her life, but to me now, it was the kind that books could never teach.

<i>and Therru were away</i>	<b>came through the</b>
<i>and put a spell. Tenar</i>	<b>Darkness,</b>
<i>came back and found that</i>	<b>Who knew pain,</b>
<i>her mind was becoming</i>	<b>Struggle,</b>
<i>confused, slow, and</i>	<b>Obedience and</b>
<i>unable to decide. She</i>	<b>Silence.</b>
<i>could not think in the</i>	<b>In our mother tongue,</b>
<i>language of this land, but</i>	<b>we ask from her for</b>
<i>could in her own</i>	<b>Wisdom.</b>
<i>language.</i>	

*It was as if  
she had to  
ask the girl  
Arha, who  
she had  
been long  
ago, to come  
out of the  
darkness  
and think for  
her...Arha  
had not  
known a  
great deal of  
what Tenar  
and Goha  
knew, but  
she had  
known how  
to curse, and  
how to live in  
the dark,  
and how to*



*be silent (p.  
136).*

<i>They left Ogion's</i>	<b>What do words mean?</b>
<i>cottage, and as they got</i>	<b>In the world</b>
<i>farther and farther, words</i>	<b>Where we are not</b>
<i>began coming back to her.</i>	<b>Heard,</b>
<i>Getting into the village,</i>	<b>How do we</b>
<i>they ran into the man who</i>	<b>Put ourselves into</b>
<i>hurt Therru. Tenar</i>	<b>Words?</b>
<i>grabbed the child and ran;</i>	
<i>to the harbor, luckily, the</i>	
<i>king's ship was there. She</i>	
<i>asked the sailor to let</i>	
<i>them aboard, but before</i>	
<i>they could get on the ship,</i>	
<i>the man touched Therru's</i>	
<i>arm. There, a mark left.</i>	

*The promise  
had been  
broken. Her  
word meant  
nothing.  
What word  
meant  
anything*

*against deaf  
violence (p.  
150).*

<p><i>The king offered to take them to Tenar's farm. On his ship, she met the wizards of Roke, where Ged learned his magery and became the Archmage.</i></p>	<p><b>In the world of Power We do not Fear the powerful. We are no longer the Young girl Who wanted to be a Man. What frightens us now are not men But what power Can do.</b></p>
<p><i>We are so polite, she thought, all Ladies and Lords and Masters, all bows and compliments . She glanced at the young king. He was looking at her, smiling but reserved.</i></p> <p><i>She felt as she had felt in Havnor as a girl: a barbarian, uncouth</i></p>	

*among their  
smooth-  
nesses. But  
because she  
was not a  
girl now, she  
was not  
awed, but  
only  
wondered  
how men  
ordered their  
world into  
this dance of  
masks, and  
how easily a  
woman  
might learn  
to dance it  
(p. 152).*

*“In these  
past years,”  
Tenar said,  
hesitant,  
“there have  
been many  
troubles,  
many  
miseries.... I  
have heard  
men and  
women of  
power speak  
of the  
waning, or  
the  
changing, of  
their power.”*

*“That one  
whom the  
archmage*

**Then we talk about**

**Changes.**

**But are the men**

**Hearing us?**

*and my lord  
defeated ...c  
aused untold  
harm and  
ruin. We  
shall be  
repairing our  
art, healing  
our wizards  
and our  
wizardry...,"  
the mage  
said,  
decisively.*

*"I wonder if  
there might  
be more to  
be done  
than  
repairing  
and healing,"  
she said, "...  
could it be  
that... things  
were already  
altering...  
and that a  
change, a  
great  
change, has  
been taking  
place, has  
taken  
place?" (p.  
160).*

### **Thread Three: Making from the Unmaking**

I cannot be simply male or female, except in a limited reproductive sense, since I am both, my experience of one or the other depending on the way I am thinking, or the subject position that I take up or that is made available to me through the various discourses in which I participate. Ultimately I can be both or neither (Davies, 2003, p. 140).

Ged came back with a understanding of himself and began a conversation with Tenar that many men and women nowadays are also starting. "Those very 'masculine' forms and ways of knowing form a large part of the symbolism and structure that allow [men and women] to subvert and go beyond them" (Davies, p. 139), that inspire us to say what we are and are not. We want to re-consider "what has it meant for women that they devote their lives as daughters, wives, or mothers to the production and maintenance of men who direct the institution of science?" (Harding, 1991, p. 27); what are the new ways of thinking about the lives of both men and women, and "what are the possible transfers of learning when life is a collage of different tasks?" (Bateson, 1990, p. 10). We want to create a new language for men and women and our children, because using "the sacred/profane, masculine/feminine, male/female, black/white, heterosexual/homosexual linguistic frame is to speak the language of patriarchy" (Erickson, 1993, p. 196). The language for our children should be adequate for them to imagine and to express the possible idea that "if there were more than one sex, if there were as many sexes as there are people" (Erickson, p. 196).

To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality (hooks, 200, p. 110).

In this novel, Le Guin has provided us with a vision. The man, a powerless mage, is freed from power and the fame of his name; the woman, a widow, is freed from marriage and her conventional role of wife and mother. And the child, a deformed girl, she has not beauty, but wholeness.

Creating social spaces and locations, and imagining possibilities beyond, so the making from the unmaking begins.

*Tenar came home to find* **If only**  
*Ged was not in the farm but* **We could leave all**  
*went herding goats up in the* **the Matters of power**  
*mountains. She was relieved to* **Behind.**  
*know him safe but disappointed*  
*for his not being there.*

*But it was  
 enough, she told  
 herself, simply to  
 be home – and  
 maybe better that  
 he was not here,  
 that none of all  
 that was here, all  
 the griefs and  
 dreams and  
 wizardries and*

*terrors of Re Albi  
left behind, for  
good (p. 171).*

*She made Therru a red  
dress and said “you look  
beautiful!” to the child when she  
first tried it on.*

*Therru turned her  
face away.*

*“You are  
beautiful,” Tenar  
said in a different  
tone. “Listen to  
me, Therru. Come  
here. You have  
scars, ugly scars,  
because an ugly,  
evil thing was  
done to you.  
People see the  
scars. But they  
see you, too, and  
you aren’t the  
scars. You aren’t  
ugly. You aren’t  
evil. You are  
Therru, and  
beautiful. You are  
Therru who can  
work, and walk,  
and run, and  
dance, beautifully,  
in a red dress.”*

*The child listened,*

**We tell children**

**“the truth,”**

**As if it is not also**

**Defined.**

**Only when they**

**Respond to us with**

**Silence**

**do we realize**

**They know better.**

People often  
ask me with copies of  
some books, “Is this a  
book for children? Is  
there not too much  
graphic violence or  
cruelty in the book? Is  
there not too much  
‘truth’?” I never really  
know how to answer  
this question.

*the soft, unhurt  
side of her face  
as expressionless  
as the rigid, scar-  
masked side.*

[...]

*When Tenar was  
alone, ..., tears  
came stinging into  
her eyes. She felt  
rebuked. She had  
done right to  
make the dress,  
and she had  
spoken the truth  
to the child. But it  
was not enough,  
the right and the  
truth. There was a  
gap, a void, a  
gulf, on beyond  
the right and the  
truth. Love, her  
love for Therru  
and Therru's for  
her, made a  
bridge across that  
gap, a bridge of  
spider web, but  
love did not fill or  
close it. Nothing  
did that. And the  
child knew it  
better than she (p.  
172-173).*

*Winter came. At bedtime*      **Protect them,**      Mom and Dad  
*Tenar heard an echo of a*      **Protect our children!**      still try every way to



*sound at the back of the house,  
then the voice that would bring  
her frozen terror. It was the  
men who had hurt Therru.*

*There was some action,  
then where was silence. Ged  
had come. He hurt one of them  
and the rest ran.*

*Therru got up  
about sunrise,  
and they  
breakfasted as  
usual; clearing up,  
the girl asked,  
“What  
happened?” She  
lifted a corner of  
wet linen from the  
soaking-tub in the  
pantry. The water  
in the tub was  
veined and  
clouded with  
brownish red.*

*“Oh, my period  
came on early,”  
Tenar said,  
startled at the lie  
as she spoke it.*

*Tenar wanted Therru to*

**That’s all we could  
think of.  
So we lie.  
We think  
they didn’t know  
We are lying.  
But they do.**

protect my brother  
and me, hoping they  
can reduce the  
chances of failure,  
and decrease the fear,  
pain and struggle of  
life. Sometimes I  
wonder: how much  
can adults really  
protect their children?  
How much can we  
conceal from them?  
I told Mom, the  
fear, pain and struggle  
are still there, never  
have been decreased  
or eliminated in any  
way. What makes the  
difference is,  
whenever we turn  
back with wounds and  
tears, you and Dad

*stay in the orchard but the girl  
said nothing as she slipped out.*

are always there.

*Tenar knew that  
as she had lied to  
her for the first  
time, Therru for  
the first time was  
going to disobey  
her(p. 199).*

<i>Therru had begun to</i>	<b>The wildness in</b>
<i>learn the stories about creation</i>	<b>Children,</b>
<i>from Ogion's great Lore-book.</i>	<b>The wildness in</b>
<i>Tenar taught her the song of</i>	<b>Women.</b>
<i>Making. Her voice couldn't sing,</i>	<b>The obedience in</b>
<i>so they cited. When Ged came</i>	<b>Children,</b>
<i>back, the child told him what</i>	<b>The obedience in</b>
<i>she had learned, "her face,</i>	<b>Women.</b>
<i>scarred and whole, seeing and</i>	<b>Are we not</b>
<i>blind..."(p. 208).</i>	<b>Rearing them</b>
	<b>To become us?</b>

*The making from  
the unmaking,*

*The ending from  
the beginning,*

*Who shall know*

*surely?*

*What we know is  
the doorway  
between them  
that we enter  
departing.*

*Among all beings  
ever returning, the  
eldest, the  
Doorkeeper,  
Segoy...(p. 207-  
208).*

*By the bedtime when  
Tenar was to tuck her in, she  
did not want to be sung to sleep  
but said she could say the  
Making in the dark. Tenar went  
back to kitchen to sit with Ged.*

*"How she's  
changing!" she  
said. "I can't keep  
up with her. I'm  
old to be bringing  
up a child. And  
she...She obeys  
me, but only  
because she  
wants to."*

*"It's the only  
justification for  
obedience," Ged*

observed.

*“But when she does take it into her head to disobey me, what can I do? There’s a wildness in her. Sometimes she’s my Therru, sometimes she’s something else, out of reach...”*(p.209).

*Tenar invited Ged to stay and work in the farm.*

*“I’d like to work here,” he said.*

[...]

*They lay that night on the hearthstones and there she taught Ged the mystery that the wisest man could not teach him (p. 211).*

*“Now you’re a man indeed,” she said. “Stuck another man full of holes, first, and lain with a woman, second. That’s the proper*

**Indeed**

**The men of power**

**Define the world.**

**They also**

**Define themselves**

**by Power.**

**In that,**

**They forgot**

**Who they were.**

**Just like us.**

I look at the men and women around me, thinking, men are not allowed to fail, achieving certain success in their career as much as women are not allowed to fail in motherhood.

Perhaps, I began to wonder, even with as much privilege as the

*order, I suppose.”*

*“Hush,” he  
murmured, ...  
“Don’t.”*

*“I will, Ged. Poor  
man! There’s no  
mercy in me, only  
justice. I wasn’t  
trained to mercy.  
Love is the only  
grace I have. Oh,  
Ged, don’t fear  
me! You were a  
man when I first  
saw you! It’s not a  
weapon or a  
woman can make  
a man, or magery  
either, or any  
power, anything  
but himself” (p.  
212).*

patriarchal system

allows them, inside,

these males are just

as human as I am, as

lost, as confused, as

powerless.

*On the winterbound  
farm, time went along sweet  
and easy for Tenar and Ged.  
They talked often. Once they  
talked about what had brought  
Ged to come in time and  
stopped the men from hurting  
Tenar and Therru.*

**It was a long time**

**before we could**

**Look back.**

**To the young girl,**

**Who had made**

**The choice and**

**Gone through the**

**Struggling path.**

**We see it now.**

*“But what I want to know is this. Is there something besides what you call power – that comes before it maybe? Or something that power is just one way of using?....”  
[...]*

*“Potentiality?” he said, and shook his head. “What is able to be...to become.”*

*“...You didn’t make it happen. You didn’t cause it. It wasn’t because of your ‘power.’ It happened to you....” [...]*

*He pondered again, and finally asked her, “Is this a wisdom taught you when you were Priestess of the Tombs?”*

*“No.” ... “Arha was taught that to be powerful she must sacrifice. Sacrifice herself and others. A bargain: give, and so get. And I cannot say that that’s untrue. But my soul can’t*

*live in that narrow  
place – this for  
that, tooth for  
tooth, death for  
life... There is a  
freedom beyond  
that....”(p. 216).*

*One day Tenar told Ged  
how she had once tried to  
teach Therru the Language of  
Making but had stopped  
because the word died in her  
mouth.*

*“I thought perhaps  
it was because I’d  
never truly  
spoken that  
language, never  
used it in magery.  
I thought perhaps  
she should learn it  
from a true  
speaker of it.”*

*“No man is that.”*

*“No woman is half  
that.”*

*“I meant that only  
the dragons  
speak it as their  
native tongue.”*

**It was not  
The man’s power  
We were seeking.  
It is the freedom,  
With which we do  
not have to  
“Learn to be.”  
With which we can  
simply  
“Be.”**

I don’t want to  
be a man any more. It  
doesn’t matter  
whether I become a  
professional or a  
housewife. I am me  
and that’s what I want  
to be, finding a space  
for myself.

*"Do they learn it?"*

*"...the dragon and  
the speech of the  
dragon are one.  
One being."*

*[...]*

*"The do not  
learn," he said.  
"They are." (p.  
218).*

<i>Then she told Ged that</i>	<b>So we begin to</b>
<i>on the king's ship, the wizard of</i>	<b>Understand.</b>
<i>Roke had said that they were</i>	<b>Perhaps our quest is</b>
<i>looking for "a woman on Gont"</i>	<b>Never to</b>
<i>and she wondered whether that</i>	<b>Seek power.</b>
<i>woman would be the next</i>	<b>Woman of power is</b>
<i>Archmage.</i>	<b>Not less woman.</b>
	<b>Woman in house is</b>
	<b>Not less powerful.</b>
	<b>We are woman.</b>
	<b>We are</b>
	<b>Simply</b>
	<b>Woman.</b>

*"A woman on  
Gont' can't  
become  
archmage. No  
woman can be  
archmage. She'd  
unmake what she  
became in  
becoming it. The  
Mages of Roke  
are men – their  
power is the  
power of men,*



*their knowledge is  
the knowledge of  
men. Both  
manhood and  
magery are built  
on one rock:  
power belongs to  
men. If women  
had power, what  
would men be but  
women who can't  
bear children?  
And what would  
women be but  
men who can?"*  
[Ged said.] [...]

*"Haven't there  
been queens?  
Weren't they  
women of  
power?"*

*"A queen's only a  
she-king," said  
Ged.*

*She snorted.*

*"I mean, men give  
her power. They  
let her use their  
power. But it isn't  
hers, is it? It isn't  
because she's a  
woman that she's  
powerful, but  
despite it." [...]*

*"What is a  
woman's power,  
then?" she asked.*

*"I don't think we  
know."*

*“When has a woman power because she’s a woman? With her children, I suppose. For a while...”*

*“In her house, maybe.” [...]*

*“But the doors are shut,” she said, “the doors are locked.”*

*“Because you are valuable.”*

*“Oh, yes. We’re precious. So long as we’re powerless...” (p. 219-220).*

<i>And they talked on about</i>	<b>And then we see a</b>
<i>power – that women seemed to</i>	<b>Possible revision.</b>
<i>fear their own strength and</i>	<b>Maybe</b>
<i>themselves, and that how</i>	<b>It does not have to</b>
<i>young the king was to be the</i>	<b>be One way</b>
<i>one who would have the power</i>	<b>Or the other.</b>
<i>to make changes.</i>	<b>Seeing and blind,</b>
	<b>Scarred and whole,</b>
<i>“...Young as I was when I ... “ [Ged said] “Or you,</i>	<b>Perhaps the power</b>

*Tenar, in that dark  
place ... what's  
youth or age? I  
don't know....I  
thought about that  
when I was up  
with the goats on  
the mountain,...I  
learned goat  
wisdom....What is  
this grief of mine  
for? What man  
am I mourning?  
Ged the  
archmage?...What  
have I done that I  
should be  
ashamed?"*

[...]

*"You seemed, in  
your power, as  
free as man can  
be. But at what  
cost? What made  
you free? And I ...  
I was made,  
molded like clay,  
by the will of the  
women serving  
the Old Powers,  
or serving the  
men who made all  
services and ways  
and places, I no  
longer know  
which. Then I  
went free, with  
you, for a  
moment, and with  
Ogion. But It was  
no my freedom.  
Only it gave me  
choice; and I*

**And the powerless  
Have had to  
continue,  
Only because we are  
Afraid,  
We  
Both  
men and women.**

*chose. I chose to  
mold myself like  
clay to the use of  
a farm and a  
farmer and our  
children. I made  
myself a vessel. I  
know its shape.  
But not the clay.  
Life danced me. I  
know the dances.  
But I don't know  
who the dancer  
is."*

*"And she," Ged  
said after a long  
silence, "if she  
should ever  
dance – "*

*"They will fear  
her," Tenar  
whispered  
(p.224).*

<i>Winter passed. The work on the farm got very heavy when Tenar's son came back to become the master. Soon after that, a message was sent from Aunty Moss to say that she was badly sick. The three of them therefore decided to go back to</i>	<b>And in our children, We see more Possibilities. Having gone from Remembering our True names, But forgetting our Beings,</b>	Many of my friends are becoming parents. I often wonder when congratulating them: Will they be teaching their children differently? Will their
--	--	---

*Ogion's cottage and visited Moss, and leave the farm to Tenar's son. When they came closer to Re Albi, Tenar felt her mind would not hold to any thought. They came to the fork of the road and Tenar did not choose the way to the cottage. Instead, she, along with Ged, went on the road to where the wizard was waiting.*

*Therru did not follow the two adults. She went on to find the cliff where the dragon had once brought back Ged. She called out the name that she had heard in Tenar's dream. It was the dragon's name.*

*When the wizard brought Tenar, who was under his spell, and Ged, to the cliff and was to push them down, the dragon*

**To now seeing  
things All over,  
From the beginning,  
With a different  
Vision,  
We are now  
Revisioning.  
We do not have to  
be Heroes.  
We do not have to  
be The power.  
For now we have  
Known,  
The task is never to  
Be complete.  
There are always  
New things to be  
Learned,  
New pieces to be  
Woven in.**

babies, who are not  
yet born, not yet  
assigned a gender,  
not yet sexist, grow to  
be genderless?

I suppose my  
hope is centered  
around the moments  
when they respond to  
my question "do you  
want a boy or a girl?"  
with 'It doesn't matter.  
We will love –" Should  
I say him or her?  
Perhaps we will need  
a new language to  
envision our new  
possibilities.

*came, and they were saved.*

*“Tehanu,” the  
dragon said.*

*The child turned  
to look at it.*

*[...]*

*“Tehanu,” said  
Tenar. “Her name  
is Tehanu.”*

*“She has been  
given it by the  
giver of names.”*

*“She has been  
Tehanu since the  
beginning.  
Always, she has  
been Tehanu” (p.  
250).*

## **Turning**

Coming out of re-telling these two stories, how do I conclude this study? In the last chapter, I will reflect back on my research questions, re-encounter the challenges, shifts of perspectives, transformation and revision that have been experienced during the process of accomplishing this project, and reveal what could be concluded from the study.

## Chapter 6

### Imagining a Different World: Educational Implication and Conclusion

For it is in the unconscious that social structures and 'norms' are reproduced and sustained within us, and only by redirecting attention to this area can we begin to perceive the ways in which the relations between society and the individual are fixed (Jackson, 1981, p.6).

The two questions asked in this study are:

- 1) How can the concept of sociological imagination be applied as a method of reading children's fantasy novels?
- 2) When we as the narrator tell our own personal narrative, how does fantasy literature, as the stimulus of imagination, guide and allow us to explore the possible ways of re-shaping our narrative?

In the process of contemplating these two questions, this study transformed to be something the researcher had not originally expected. It has expanded from a vague idea of connecting fantasy literature with sociology to become a concrete project. Things that I had not planned or intended to uncover were discovered. The metaphors we live by, the subjectivity one stands when reading and understanding, the many possible ways one can reflect back on her past and present and thereafter connect to her future, and even the courage to take an unconventional method to articulate all appeared as one surprise after another. I have come to realize that one has to be willing to put down her own

sets of values and beliefs and to accept that there can be as many different sets of values and different perceptions to look at things as people before one can possibly begin to get closer to and to comprehend the new, unfamiliar world that is so full of possibilities and alternatives. In this sense, fantasy literature becomes something a lot more than escapism or tales about hero quest fulfillment. The imagination has taken me farther than I could have imagined. Reading this genre involves challenging our ideologies, shifting our perspectives, approaching our own reality from different angles, questioning how much we thought we knew, and learning the many dimensions of our life and society. It has then become a social project in which “the story I tell depends very much on how I look” (Paul, 1998, p. 35).

## **Ways of Looking**

### **Exploring the Two Research Questions**

Through studying two novels by Lois Lowry, *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, the first question was addressed. The idea of sociological imagination, adopted from sociology, was explained as people's capacity of associating their personal reality with the larger society. It enables individuals to see and to realize that often their personal issues are in fact public. By operating this notion, they shift their perspectives from one to another. In the two novels, both protagonists were given access to certain knowledge which at first was shocking and did not make



much sense to them. It was beyond the reality where things, rules, beliefs and values, were constructed and reproduced in such a way that people take them as natural instead of cultural. The only way to understand their personal conditions in the societies they live was through the aid of imagination. Their experience was then connected to the idea of sociological imagination – that by activating this capacity, the two young persons found the courage to cope with the unacceptable reality that could only be accepted and then could further begin to imagine possibilities with the rest. It was argued that through reading these novels and experiencing what the protagonists experienced in their separated world, the readers were invited to employ their own sociological imagination. Burner (1989) cited from Robert Woodworth that “there is no seeing without looking, no hearing without listening, and both looking and listening are shaped by expectancy, stance, and intention” (p. 110). The readers’ minds are bridging their visible reality with the invisible reality when they read. They interpret the experiences with their own sets of values and metaphors and at the same time negotiate with what are provided in the separated world. Doing so, they are shifting their perspectives; the stories are transformed to their own reality; the readers are then transformed.

To explore the second question, *The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*, both by Ursula Le Guin, were analyzed and presented in an unconventional way. The intention was to sound out multiple voices with a hope to articulate the connections among fantasy literature, imagination and personal narrative re-interpreting and re-telling – that with imagination, one has freedom to enter a

created world, to understand it, to become acquainted with the characters and thereby to realize that meanings can be twisted, values can be re-set, past can be re-interpreted, and personal narrative can be re-shaped. Forming a bond with the protagonist, the reader is invited to reflect on her own personal reality, taking different stances to see and to look, and envision alternatives and revision. Shifting from one perspective to another, the reader is once again operating her capacity for sociological imagination to re-consider issues such as binary gender stereotype, pre-determined roles, one's social locations and traditional definitions of life quests. The changing of perspectives is not an easy process that involves much pain and struggle; however, in the end, all that is involved will be appreciated and turned to be courage for one to go on.

The three columns, which appeared as one of the surprises during the process of conducting this project, spread out as a quilt to me, on which I traced back to my past, forming a dialogue with the young Taiwanese girl, the novelistic priestess, and the many feminists who had come a long way, trying to understand the term 'gender.' I felt as if I had transformed myself to be the artist Kira, who had gathered the color blue and with the blue thread began to weave a new understanding for the past and future.

### **Connecting Stories with Life**

To imagine beyond the limits of what is already understandable is our best hope for retaining what ideology critique traditionally offers while transforming its limitations into what ... was called ... possibility (Gordon, 1997, p. 195).

Stories in fantasy literature traditionally tend to be considered as irrelevant to the reality and thus were rejected by many educators for a period of time. Recent researchers and scholars begin to take this genre more seriously as they re-consider it as a vehicle writers use to express their dissatisfaction to the reality. They explain that “the writing of fantasy appears to be closely linked with man's rational being and perception of the natural world” (Swinfen, 1984, p. 3) and therefore argue that fantasy literature is in fact as close and relevant to the reality as its realistic counterpart. This type of literature provides a rich ground of metaphors in which readers create meanings according to their own subjectivities.

From this perspective, the four fantasy novels were studied. Between chapter 4 and chapter 5, the idea is to show the process how readers begin from inquiring the separated world to connecting the imaginative with the real. Even though the main purpose of chapter 4 is to demonstrate reading through the lens of sociological imagination, if readers take a further step and reflect back to their own life experiences, as the example set in chapter 5 using the researcher's own life story, there will be a wide space for them to continue the analysis presented in chapter 4. It was the researcher's attempt to show that the imagination we employ during our reading does not only help us envision what is depicted in the separated world. When the idea is associated with the notion of identifying personal conditions in relation to the larger society and thereafter becoming aware of the social re-production, it also takes us to shift our perspectives as subjects being part of our world and to re-vision the world where our personal

narrative is conducted. The scholar Gornick (2001) has said, “the writing we call personal narrative is written by people who, in essence, are imagining only themselves: in relation to the subject in hand” (p.6).

In addition, to those fans of *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, Jonas and Kira are perhaps as real as Tenar to me. We enter their worlds, see through their eyes and experience their pain and struggle. We develop a strong bond with the characters and would express our feelings for them as if we know them as real people. The boundary between the imaginative and the realistic world turns vague. We are then directed to what scholars claim – that what is called the fantastic is really not very different from what is called the realistic. To imagine beyond the present and our limitations, we see possibilities.

### **Transforming Research**

As readers reflect back from novels to our life experiences, reading stories becomes also a process of reading one’s own life. What stories do is more than simply add color to our day. We use them “to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives, to communicate with other people, and to develop relationships with them” (Engel, 1995, p.25). We tell them to family and friends. At some occasions, these stories are entertainment; at other times, they become encouragement and help us “to become part of the social world, to know and reaffirm who we are” (Engel, p.25). In this sense, our subjectivity turns to be an important factor when the research is dealing with stories, because we are the

researcher, the storyteller, the narrator, and the meaning producer, all at the same time. It is how we and our stories are created. The stories make us “see and hear and taste our lives and dreams more deeply” (Stafford, 1991, p. 28).

With the various roles to play and the many dimensions to confront at the same time, I found that the traditional linear way of presenting research seems to become inadequate. Knowing this, I was still at first very hesitant about speaking in an unconventional form. However, while feminists are devoting themselves to continue creating “new vocabulary, new expressions, and new literary images which would give voice and substance within the world of literature to the new consciousness of women” (Frieden, 1989, p. 181), a researcher, taking feminism as the looking lens, shall have the courage to accept that what has been proved could be changed and that what is defined can be re-defined. It was not my intention to challenge the traditional research format, but only to transform, in celebrating voices.

It is, however, an invitation to the scholars in the contemporary children’s literature to consider closing the distance between the researcher and the criticism. When sociologist Smith (1989) began to learn feminism “not as a discourse, but as personal practice, [she] discovered that [she] had to discard a practice of being that had involved [her] in situating [her]self as subject in the objectified discourses and relations that [she] now identify as the relations of ruling” (p.36). From there, she saw “the significance of working in two worlds for development an alternative consciousness of society than that [she] had practiced” (p. 36). This study, therefore, invites researchers to take our

subjectivities into account, for doing so we could be led to an alternative way of critiquing literature.

### **Possibilities: Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman's Dark Materials**

We shouldn't live as if [the Kingdom of Heaven] mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place... We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard, all of us, in all our different worlds, and then we'll build ... The Republic of Heaven," said Lyra (Wood, 2001, p. 256, quoted from *The Amber Spyglass* by Pullman, 2000).

While I was writing this project, the third book companioned to *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* was released. It immediately attracted attentions from fans of the two previous novels; and soon after it was released, there have appeared various reviews from readers on websites such as Amazon.com. What are young people reading today? In the past few years, popularity of fantasy literature for children has seemed to arise and among the many recent released books were "the rise and rise of Harry Potter" (Tucker, 1999, p. 221), and the complex series, *His Dark Materials*. These novels are not only read by a wide range of age groups with keen interests but also discussed and critiqued broadly by scholars through various approaches (Lenz, 2003; Bird, 2001; Zipes, 2001, Gounaud, 1999). They therefore serve as a good vehicle to stimulate and mobilize the sociological imagination.

Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling (1998 - ) tell stories about a boy who does not discover his special magic power until the age of 11. From then on, he attends Hogwart's school of witchcraft and wizardry and begins his tales of learning to be a wizard and encountering with the evil. *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman begins with *The Golden Compass* in the trilogy depicting a rich vision of the world where the heroine Lyra sets out to search her friend, uncovers the secrets of a mysterious element called Dust, enters alternate worlds and gradually learns the meaning of living as a human being.

To read these fantasy novels as a social project involving the employment of sociological imagination is not only to read for the themes or ideas in each book, such as death in the Amber Spyglass (Lenz, 2003), or the magic power in Harry Potter series (Tucker, 1999), but also to pay attention to how Harry, Lyra and even Matty in *The Messenger*, as protagonists in their stories, interact with the world they live in, locate their spaces in their societies, and by connecting their personal experiences with the larger realities reveal possibilities. For example, Harry's academic performance is not particularly outstanding; however, he is often rewarded for his courage and bravery of confronting the evil. In his own eyes, does he view himself as a hero? When Harry first enters the wizard's world, in contrast to often being unnoticed in the muggle's world, referring to people who do not have magic power, he discovers that people in this world consider him as a legend. Whenever they recognize him, they look at him with awe. How does he measure the meaning of this change in his life? Through the events he goes through, he gradually finds out stories about his parents. By

connecting himself with the past, how does he come to identify himself and locates his space in his world? Lyra, on the other hand, is a daughter of two important people who are deeply involved with Dust. However, she does not realize this fact until later and has always had much closer relationships with other people around her than with her parents. How then does she identify herself as a part of her social condition? On her way to look for her friend, she develops an affectionate friendship with a polar bear and learns about the bear spirit. How does the girl, by associating with the bear spirit, come to learn more about herself? The story of Lyra is full of complexity, how does she, as a girl soon to turn to her puberty, come to define the meaning of her own life?

Looking beyond to see the unseen with the heroes and heroines, and imagining their created worlds, visions of readers, children, young adults and adults, are to be broadened. We are invited to ponder our own conditions, reconsider again and again what we have taken for granted, and find more and more possible ways to look at our own realities. All of us grow and change as time passes; therefore every time we go back to re-read a story, or discuss it with someone, we discover some things that were not noticed before and then one more door is open for us. There are always more dimensions to be seen, more alternative to be found, and more possibilities to be imagined.



## Conclusion

### From a Journey to a Composition

We know the world in different ways, from different stances and each of the ways in which we know it produces different structures or representations, or indeed, “realities.” As we grow to adulthood (at least in Western culture), we become increasingly adept at seeing the same set of events from *multiple* perspectives or stances and at entertaining the results as, so to speak, alternative possible worlds (Bruner, 1989, *Italics original*, p. 109).

Beginning from adventure was where this project started out – the intention was to scrutinize what girls do to find their ways in adventure. It was a metaphor of journey. I had taken in the hero’s quest as a heroine’s and believed that when girls set out for adventures, they would do the same as the heroes – overcome the obstacles, reach the goal and come back with a trophy. Nevertheless, as another surprise appears during the process, this study ends up with a metaphor of weaving and composing. The transition happened when I realized that what has traditionally been considered as a heroic quest, a model of success might “leave out many extremely important experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 175). In order to fulfill the quest, the journey metaphor requests heroes and heroines “to resist the transitory contentment of attractive way stations and side roads” (Bateson, 1990, p. 5). The visible goal on the horizon is all that is seen and matters. Therefore, when adults teach children to grow up, as Bateson continued, we tell them to focus, to aim their goals, to make “the right decisions early enough to get on tract” (p. 5). Accompanying with these

pieces of advice, we give children stories and biography of great, exceptional, and powerful people to read. What has been implied in our education to children is that being extraordinary, successful, and powerful shall be the way of living they set themselves to obtain. And before they could understand what these mean, we define all the terms for them already.

In doing the research, reading stories and studies told by scholars and storytellers, listening to their voices, and reflecting back to my own life experiences, I found what is hard is not learning the knowledge and the skills to become heroes or the similar roles heroines dream to play. What is really difficult is the part of 'leaving out'. The heroes have to leave out the parts in them that would fail them to fulfill their quests. So do the heroines. The society, in order to maintain the social reproduction, teaches children the values of authority, and how to become successful and powerful. Gradually they begin to believe this is all what life contains. They know life to be making great names and big careers, setting a clear goal after another, but they can not conceive life as "a collage of different tasks" (Bateson, p. 10), or as a quilt that is filled with multiplicity, ambiguity, alternatives and possibilities. Therefore when they do not reach the target and win the trophy, they blame themselves for all their personal troubles and failures.

This transition of turning from a journey metaphor to a composing and a weaving metaphor leads the study to conclude that reading fantasy as a social project through the lens of sociological imagination to the educators is to show

children the rich ground of metaphors provided by this genre and to guide them to extend their world of wonder.

### **Extending Children's World of Wonder**

Our lives are full of surprises, for none of us has followed a specific ambition toward a specific goal. Instead, we have learned from interruptions and improvised from the materials that came to hand, reshaping and reinterpreting. As a result, all of us have lived with high levels of ambiguity (Bateson, p. 237).

Entering the field of children's literature, questions such as these are often encountered: "Do children read in this way? Does critiquing take away the pleasure of reading from children? Will these books harm the young minds?" Educators, parents, adults in general, seem to worry a lot for children. Bruner's (1989) story about her teacher from his childhood provides a great inspiration.

I recall a teacher, her name was Miss Orcutt, who made the statement in class, "It is a very puzzling thing not that water turns to ice at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, but that it should change from a liquid into a solid." She then went on to give us an intuitive account of Brownian movement and of molecules, expressing a sense of wonder that matched, indeed bettered, the sense of wonder I felt at that age (around ten) about everything I turned my mind to, including at the far reach such matters as light from extinguished stars still traveling toward us though their sources had been snuffed out. In effect, she was inviting me to extend *my* world of wonder to encompass *hers*. She was not just *informing* me. She was, rather, negotiating the world of wonder and possibility. Molecules, solids, liquids, movement were not facts; they were to be used in pondering and imagining (Italics original, p. 126).

While educators are concerned about our many concerns, I often wonder whether there are other ways of looking at the issues that trouble us. As Bruner encouraged, we can “open wide a topic of locution to speculation and negotiation. To the extent that the materials of education are chosen for their amenableness to imaginative transformation and are presented in a light to invite negotiation and speculation, to that extent education becomes a part of what I earlier called ‘culture making’” (p. 127). While we invite our young ones to explore the separated worlds, instead of fearing for them, we guide them to look at the puzzling matters as doors and maps leading them to extend their worlds, as threads for them to weave richer and more colorful quilts, and as training and practices to gain capacities for them to ponder and imagine the many more possibilities. With imagination, we trust the young minds to find “the courage to accept what we can not change in order to do what can be done about the rest” (Lemert, 1997, p. 191).

## Bibliography

- Aisenberg, N. (1994). Ordinary heroines: Transforming the male myth. New York: Continuum.
- Allen, M. (1999). What are little girls made of?: A guide to female role models in children's books. New York: Facts On File, Inc.
- Attebery, B. (1992). Strategies of fantasy. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Bateson, M.C. (1990). Composing a life. New York: A Plume Book.
- Bearne, E. & Watson, V. (Eds.). (2000). Where texts and children meet. New York: Routledge.
- Bearne, E. (2000). Myth, legend, culture and morality. In E. Bearne & V. Watson (Eds.), Where texts and children meet (pp. 183-197). New York: Routledge.
- Bird, A. (2001). "Without contraries is no progression": Dust is an all-inclusive, multifunctional metaphor in Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials". Children's Literature in Education 32(2), 111-123.
- Bloom, H. (1982). Clinamen: Towards a theory of fantasy McCaffery, L (1982). Form, formula and fantasy: Generative structures in contemporary fiction. In G. E. Slusser, E. S. Rabikin & R. Scholes (Eds.), Bridges to fantasy: Essays from the Eaton conference on science fiction and fantasy literature (pp. 1-20). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Boler, M. (1999). Feeling power: Emotions and education. New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. (1992). An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bressler, C. E. (1999). Literary criticism: An introduction to theory and practice. (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bruner, U. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell, J. (1968). The hero with a thousand faces. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chafetz J. S. (1989). Gender equality: Toward a theory of change. In R. A. Wallace (Ed.), Feminism and sociological theory: Four key issues in sociological theory, (pp. 135 – 160). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Cherland, M. R. (1994). Private practices: Girls reading fiction and constructing identity. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Clayton, (1982). On Realistic and fantastic discourse. In G. E. Slusser, E. S. Rabikin & R. Scholes (Eds.), Bridges to fantasy: Essays from the Eaton conference on science fiction and fantasy literature (pp. 59-77). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Coles, R. (1989). The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Collins, R. (1998). The sociological eye and its blinders. Contemporary Sociology, 27 (1), 2-7.

Connell, b., Radican, N. & Martin, P. (1987). The changing faces of masculinity. Sydney: Macquarie University (unpublished paper).

Cooper, J. E. (1991). Telling our own stories: The reading and writing of journals or diaries. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 96-112). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Cosbey, J. (1997). Using contemporary fiction to teach family issues. Teaching Sociology, 25 (3), 227-233.

Coser, R. L. (1989). Reflections on feminist theory. In R. A. Wallace (Ed.), Feminism and sociological theory: Four key issues in sociological theory, (pp. 200 – 207). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Daniels, J. (2000). Harming young minds: Moral dilemmas and cultural concerns. In E. Bearne & V. Watson (Eds.), Where texts and children meet (pp. 161-171). New York: Routledge.

Davies, B. (2003). Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender. Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Egoff, S. A. (1988). Worlds within: Children's fantasy from the middle ages to today. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.

Engel, S. (1995). The stories children tell: Making sense of the narratives of childhood. New York: W. H. Freeman & Co.

Erickson, V. L. (1993). Where silence speaks: Feminism, social theory, and religion. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Fairchild, E. M. (1897). Methods of children's library work as determined by the needs of children. Library Journal, 22, 19-27.

Finders, M. J. (1997). Just girls: Hidden literacies and life in junior high. New York, NY: Teacher College Press.

Forster, E. M. (1974). Aspects of the novel. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Frieden, S. (1989). Transformative subjectivity in the writings of Christa Wolf. In Personal Narratives Group (Eds.), Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives (pp. 172-188). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Garrison, C. E. (1999). Sociology without knowledge: The atrophy of a concept. The American Sociologist, 30 (3), 67-80.

Gilead, S. (1992). Magic abjured: Closure in children's fantasy fiction. In P. Hunt (Ed.), Literature for children: contemporary criticism pp. 80-109. New York: Routledge.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C. (1993). Joining the resistance: Psychology, politics, girls and women. In L. Weiss & M. Fine (Eds.), Beyond silenced voices: Class, race and gender in United States schools. Albany: SUNY Press.

Gilligan, C. (1997). Woman's place in man's life cycle. In Linda Nicholson (ed.) The second wave: A reader in feminist theory. New York: Routledge.



Gordon, A. F. (1997). Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gornick, V. (2001). The situation and the story: The art of personal narrative. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gounaud, K. J. (1999). Family friendly libraries book report: Should "Harry Potter" go to public school? [http:// www.flibraries.org/HPRNo3.htm](http://www.flibraries.org/HPRNo3.htm)

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices (pp. 13-74). London: The Open University.

Harding, S. (1991). Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Helle, A. P. (1991). Reading women's autobiographies: A map of reconstructed knowing. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 48-66). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Hesford, W. S. (1999). Framing identities: Autobiography and the politics of pedagogy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hollindale, P. (1992). Ideology and the children's book. In P. Hunt (Ed.), Literature for children: contemporary criticism pp. 80-109. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2000). Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics. Cambridge: South End Press.

Huck, C. S., Hepler, S., Hickman, J. & Kiefer, B. Z. (2000). Children's literature: In the elementary school. (7th ed.). New York : McGraw Hill College.

Hume, K. (1984). Fantasy and mimesis: Responses to reality in western literature. New York: Methuen.

Hunt, P. (1992). Literature for children: Contemporary criticism. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hunt, P. (2001). Introduction: Fantasy and alternative worlds. In P. Hunt & M. Lenz (Eds.), Alternative worlds in fantasy fiction (pp. 1-41). London: Continuum.

Jackson, R. (1981). Fantasy: The literature of subversion. New York: Routledge

Jones, A. (1993). Becoming a 'girl': post-structuralist suggestions for educational research. Gender and Education 5, 2, 157-166.

Krips V. (1995). Finding one's place in the fantastic: Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising*. In J. Sanders (Ed.), Functions of the fantastic: Selected essays from the thirteenth international conference on the fantastic in the arts (pp. 169-175). Westport: Greenwood Press.

Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980/2003). Metaphors we live by. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Le Guin, U. K. (1970). The tombs of Atuan. New York: Atheneum Books.

Le Guin, U. K. (1979). The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction. New York: Perigee Books.

Le Guin, U. K. (1989). Dancing at the edge of the world: Thoughts on words, women, places. New York: Grove Press.

Le Guin, U. K. (1989). The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction. London: The Women's Press.

Le Guin, U. K. (1992). The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: HarperCollins.

Le Guin, U. K. (1991). Tehanu: The last book of Earthsea. New York: Bantam Books.

Le Guin, U. K. (1993). Earthsea revisoned. Cambridge: Children's Literature New England in association with Green Bay Publications.

Lemert, C. (1995). Sociology: After the crisis. New York: Westview Press.

Lemert, C. (1997). Social things: An introduction to the sociological life. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Lenz, M. (2003). Story as a bridge to transformation: The way beyond death in Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*. Children's Literature in Education, 34(1), 47-55.

Lewis, A. (1995). Subverting patriarchy: Feminism and fantasy in the works of Irmtraud Morgner. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Lowry, L. (1993). The Giver. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

Lowry, L. (1994). Newbery Medal acceptance. The Horn Book Magazine, LXX (4), 414-22.

Lowry, L. (1998). Looking back: A book of memories. New York: Walter Lorraine Books.

Lowry, L. (2000). Gathering blue. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

MacLeod, J. (1995). Ain't no making it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood. Boulder: Westview Press.

Makler, A. (1991). Imagining history: "A good story and a well-formed argument." In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 29-47). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Mains, C. (2003). The use, misuse, and abuse of power: The wizards of Patricia, A. McKillip. In M. Pharr (Ed.), Fantasy odysseys: Selected essays from the twenty-second international conference on the fantastic in the arts (pp. 59-64). Westport: Praeger.

Maracle, L. (1996). I am women: Native perspective on sociology and feminism. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers.

McAdames, D. P. (1993). The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self. New York: The Guilford Press.

McCaffery, L (1982). Form, formula and fantasy: Generative structures in contemporary fiction. In G. E. Slusser, E. S. Rabikin & R. Scholes (Eds.), Bridges to fantasy: Essays from the Eaton conference on science fiction and fantasy literature (pp. 21-37). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Mellon, N. (2000). Storytelling with children. Gloucestershire, UK: Hawthorn Press.

Mills, C. W. (1959). The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

Misra, J. (2000). Integrating “the real world” into introducing to sociology: Making sociological concepts real. Teaching Sociology, 28 (4), 346-363.

Molson, F. J. (1982). Ethical fantasy for children. In R. C. Schlobin (Ed.) The aesthetics of fantasy literature and art (pp. 82-104). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Morgan, D. (1998). Sociological imaginings and imagining sociology: Bodies, auto/biographies and other mysteries. Sociology, 32 (4), 647-663.

Narayan, K. (1991). “According to their feelings”: Teaching and healing with stories. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 113-135). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Nikolajeva, M. (2000). From mythic to linear: Time in children's literature. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Pres.

Noddings, N. & Witherell, C. (1991). Prologue: An invitation to our readers. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 1-12). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Nodelman, P. (1996). Some presumptuous generalizations about fantasy. In S. Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, L. F. Ashley & W. Sutton (Eds.), Only connect: readings on children's literature (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Flaherty, K. M. (1992). Introducing students to the concept of sociological imagination: A written assignment. Teaching Sociology, 20 (4), 326-328.

Ozick, C. (1989). Metaphor & Memory: Essays. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Paterson, K. (2001). The invisible child: On reading and writing books for children. New York: Dutton Children's Books.

Paul, L. (1998). Reading otherways. Portland, Maine: Galendar Islands Publishers.

Personal Narratives Group (Eds.). (1989). Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Personal Narrative Groups (1989). Origins. In Personal Narratives Group (Eds.), Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives (pp. 3-15). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Personal Narrative Group (1989). Truths. In Personal Narratives Group (Eds.), Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives (pp. 261-264). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Pharr, M. (2003). Fantastic odysseys: Selected essays from the twenty-second international conference on the fantastic in the arts. Westport: Praeger

Pharr, M. (2003). Introduction. In M. Pharr (Ed.), Fantasy odysseys: Selected essays from the twenty-second international conference on the fantastic in the arts (pp. xiii-xviii). Westport: Praeger.

Pierce, T. (1996). Fantasy: Why kids read it, why kids need it. In S. Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, L. F. Ashley & W. Sutton (Eds.), Only connect: readings on children's literature (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Propp, V. (1975). Morphology of the Folk Tale (trans. L. Scott), Austin: University of Texas Press.

Pullman, P. (1995). The golden compass. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Pullman, P. (1997). The subtle knife. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Pullman, P. (2000). The amber spyglass. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Radicalesbians (1997). The woman identified woman. In Linda Nicholson (ed.) The second wave: A reader in Feminist Theory. New York: Routledge.

Richardson, L. (1988). The dynamics of sex and gender: A sociological perspective. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Richardson, L. (1997). Fields of play: Constructing an academic life. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Rosen, H. (1986). The importance of story. Language Arts, 63 (3), 226-237.

Rowling, J.K. (1997). Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Rowling, J.K. (1999). Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Rubin, G. (1997) The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "political Economy" of Sex In Linda Nicholson (ed.) The second wave: A reader in Feminist Theory. New York: Routledge.

Sacks, O. (1985). The man who mistook his wife for a hat: And other clinical tales. New York: Summit Books.

Sanders, J. (1995). Functions of the fantastic: Selected essays from the thirteenth international conference on the fantastic in the arts. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Sendak, M. (1963). Where the wild things are. New York: HarperCollins Publishers

Shannon, P. (1999). Sociological imagination, stories, learning to be literature. Theory and Research in Social Education, 27 (3), 396-407.

Shippey, T. (1995). Introduction. In The Oxford book of fantasy stories. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simon De Beauvoir (1997) "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*. In Linda Nicholson (ed.) The second wave: A reader in Feminist Theory. New York: Routledge.

Simon, De Beauvoir (1952). The second sex. New York: Vintage Books.

Smith, D. E. (1989). Sociological theory: Methods of writing patriarchy. In R. A. Wallace (Ed.), Feminism and sociological theory: Four key issues in sociological theory, (pp. 34 – 64). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Sondheim, S. & Lapine, J. (1987). Into the woods. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Soto, L. D. (1997). Language, culture, and power: Bilingual families and the struggle for quality education. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.



Spencer, M. M. (2000). Afterword: Transitional transformations. In E. Bearne & V. Watson (Eds.), Where texts and children meet (pp. 198-211). New York: Routledge.

Spivack, C (1987). Merlin's daughters: Contemporary women writers of fantasy. New York: Greenwood Press.

Stafford, K. R. (1991). The story that saved life. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 15-28). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Stephens, J. (1992). Language and ideology in children's fiction. New York: Longman Group UK Limited.

Street, B. V. (1995). Social Literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.

Swinfen, A. (1984). In defence of fantasy: A study of the genre in English and American literature since 1945. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tucker, N. (1999). The rise and rise of Harry Potter. Children's Literature in Education, 30(4), 221-234.

Turner, V. (1982). From ritual to theatre. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

Wallace, R. (1989). Feminism and sociological theory: Four key issues in sociological theory. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Warner, M. (1995). Six myths of our time : Little angels, little monsters, beautiful beasts, and more. New York : Vintage Books.

Warner, M. (2002). Fantastic metamorphoses, other worlds : Ways of telling the self. New York : Oxford University Press.

Webb, J. (2002). Closing the garret door: A feminist reading of Little Women. In D. C. Thacker & J. Webb (Eds.), Introducing children's literature: From romanticism to postmodernism (pp. 33-38). New York: Routledge.

Webb, S. J. (1995). Culture as spiritual metaphor in Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*. In J. Sanders (Ed.), Functions of the fantastic: Selected essays from the thirteenth international conference on the fantastic in the arts (pp. 155-160). Westport: Greenwood Press.

West, M. I. (2000). Fantasy literature for children: Past, present, and future tensions. Journal of Children's Literature, 26(2), 35-39.

Westfahl, G. (2000). Science fiction, children's literature, and popular culture: Coming of age in fantasyland. Westport: Greenwood.

Whitley, D. (2000). Fantasy narratives and grow up. In E. Bearne & V. Watson (Eds.), Where texts and children meet (pp. 172-182). New York: Routledge.

Winterson, J. (1995). Art objects: Essays on ecstasy and effrontery. New York: Vintage International.

Witherell, C. (1991). The self in narrative: A journey into paradox. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 83-95). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Wood, N. (2001). Paradise lost and found: Obedience, disobedience, and storytelling in C. S. Lewis and Philip Pullman. Children's Literature in Education, 32(4), 237-259.

Zipes, J. (1983). Fairy tales and the art of subversion: The classical genre for children and the process of civilization. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Zipes, J. (1995). Recent trends in the contemporary American fairy tale. In J. Sanders (Ed.), Functions of the fantastic: Selected essays from the thirteenth international conference on the fantastic in the arts (pp. 1-17). Westport: Greenwood Press.

Zipes, J. (2001). Sticks and stones: The troublesome success of children literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter. New York: Routledge.

## VITA

### Hsin-Chun Jamie Tsai

#### Education

B.A. 1995 Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan, Department of English,  
Major: English Literature

M.A. 1999 Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, Department of  
Linguistics, Major: TESOL

Ph.D. 2004 The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, Department of  
Curriculum and Instruction, Major: Language and Literacy Education

#### Professional Experience

08/2003 – 05/2004 Research Assistant at Pennsylvania Center for the Book

08/2001 – 05/2003 Teaching Assistant in the Department of Curriculum and  
Instruction

05/2002 – 08/2002 Graduate Lecturer in the Department of Curriculum and  
Instruction

09/2000 – 05/2002 Instructor in Chinese School, State College, PA

07/1999 – 07/2000 Instructor in Shu-Jen Language Institute, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

#### Professional Papers, Publications, and Research

Hsin-Chun Jamie Tsai "Short Review of Grammar Links 2: A Theme-Based  
Course for Reference and Practice." *TESOL Journal*, Summer, 2000

#### Professional Organization Memberships

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages): 1998-

CHLA (Children's Literature Association): 2001-

IAFA (International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts): 2003-