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## **Conflict Between the Real and Unreal in Ursula K. Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea – A Study**

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### **Abstract:**

Ursula K. Le Guin's first novel in the series of the Earthsea Cycle deals with the evolution of Ged as a great wizard in his career as a novice in his education to become a wizard; he makes a trial and error on many occasions. In his early education period as a wizard, he makes an error pronouncing a spell of creating an unreal being called Shadow. This shadow has no concrete figure, form and identity. Yet it follows Ged and attacks him. Thus, a Conflict between Ged as real and Shadow as unreal develops. Ged, who always runs away from shadow in fear, faces Shadow face to face on the advice of his friend Vetch and discovers that he is not weaker than Shadow. On the last encounter, Ged pronounces the name of 'Ged' as it is the name of Shadow, Shadow merges With Ged. The conflict between Real and Unreal is resolved in the merging of the Unreal with Real. The novelist has employed fantasy of various kinds to convey the Wisdom that unreal does not come exists on its own, but it is a creation of the Real only. The conflict can be resolved in not running away from the unreal but embracing the unreal with real.

**Keywords:** Real, Unreal, Shadow, identity, resolve, Wisdom, fantasy

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### **Introduction**

The American Literature has been created, nursed, and nourished by a number of gifted writers like Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, Edgar Allen Poe, Sylvia Plath, Ezra Pound, E.E.Cummings, W.H.Auden and others in poetry; like Eugene O'Neil, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Thornton Wilder, Edward Albee, Maya Angelou and others in play; like F.

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Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, James Baldwin, Henry James, Sinclair Lewis, Saul Bellow, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others. However, Ursula K. Le Guin has occupied a distinguished place and status among the American novelists for her original and innovative creation of Fantasy and Science Fiction and contributing the same not only to the corpus of American Fantasy Novel but to the body of World Fantasy Novel. She has been admired and celebrated by the readership of children as well as adults. Her novels are a combination of entertainment and education. She accomplishes this blend by using fantasy as the mode/ device and moral/Wisdom as the matter. This paper attempts to trace the conflict between the Real and the Unreal as a matter/ theme in her maiden novel *A Wizard of Earth Sea*, which was first published in 1968 and reprinted in 2016.

**Plot:**

The plot of *A Wizard of Earthsea* revolves around Ged's growth from a humble smith's boy to a renowned wizard. His education and training in Wizardry begins with his aunt and ends with Ogion and Masters of Roke. Duny is his original name. He loses his mother within one year of his birth. His aunt brings him up in his childhood. He spends part of his time with his father as a smith boy and partly as a goatherd. His aunt is a village witch and he learns some rhymes from her. His magic for cloud/mist formation which rescues his people from the attack of enemies spreads as far as to a mage Ogion who visits him in person and names him as Ged. He takes with him. His education begins with him and ends in the School on Roke. In this school, he makes a mistake of casting a spell to bring the dead back but uses a wrong spell which creates a shadow. This shadow as its name follows him and causes attacks also. Although the Archmage advises him that the present place is safe for him, he moves out and finally wins in his dangerous encounter with Shadow.

**Conflict Between the Real and the Unreal:**

Ged life journey from his child as name 'Duny' to the end of resolving the conflict with the Shadow is filled with events, incidents, things and human beings of both real and unreal. Yet this is no serious and grave conflict between the two till he creates Shadow accidentally. In the first instance of magic, there are real and unreal factors. The real factor is concerned with the behaviour of goats before he utters the rhyme and the unreal factor is the behaviour of the goats after he repeats the rhyme. The following serves as an illustration of the real and the unreal:

"Next day herding the longhaired goats on the meadows of High Fall, Duny shouted to them the words he had heard, not knowing their use or meaning or what kind of words they were

Noth hierth malk man

hiolk han merth han!"

He yelled the rhyme aloud, and the goats came to him. They came very quickly, all of them together, not making any sound. They looked at him out of the dark slot in their yellow eyes.

[3]

The real is represented/depicted in the goats grassing in the meadows under the observation of Duny. Everything is normal there. The goats eat the grass in their own and Duny is also relaxed. Suddenly, he remembers his aunt's rhyme and yells not only once but twice aloud. It casts spell on the goats and they become unreal in their behaviour by rushing towards him and surrounding violently. Here there is a conflict between the real and the unreal for which Duny is himself responsible. His aunt arrives there and protects him by cancelling the spell on the goats.

Subsequently, Duny creates a conflict between the real and the unreal by using the words of power learned from his aunt. It happens when the kargs launches attack on Ten Alders. Almost all the people in the village flee the village for their protection. His aunt also escapes with them. But Duny uses a trick called foreweaving and weaves artificial/unreal fog so thick that it covers the entire village with darkness. With this fog/mist, the people of Ten Alders chase the Kargs away from their village. Duny, who has protected his village from the Kargs with the unreal fog/mist, becomes a victim of his own magic. Duny has lost his speech as a consequence of his magic. Even the witch could not revive him. His condition due to the impact of his magic is depicted as follows:

"Duny the bronze-smith's son standing himself bearing no hurt, but speechless and stupid like one stunned. They were well aware of what he had done, and they led him into his father's house and went calling for the witch to come down out of her cave and heal the lad who had saved their lives and their property, all but four who were killed by the Kargs, and the one house that was burnt. No Weapon-hurt had come to the boy, but he would not speak no eat nor sleep; he seemed not to hear what was said to him, not to see those who came to see him. There was none in those parts wizard enough to cure what ailed him. His aunt said, "He has overspent his power," but she had no art to help him" [17].

Although Duny is saved on the fifth day by a passer-by wizard who is bestowed with the power of healing all, the conflict/ encounter between the real and the unreal is evident here. The kargs attack Ten Adler. There is a normal or real combat, but Duny creates an unreal mist which, though protects the Ten Alder, affects Duny himself. The conflict is his creation.

The wizard Ogion is impressed by Duny's weaving the mist and protecting his people through that mist. He takes him with him to teach the art of magic and takes him to his home at Re Albi. He undergoes his formal basic magic education here. He attempts to learn spell of Summoning through a book which owned by Ogion; Changing Spells: Self-transformation and others. When he is about to be misled by a girl from Osskil, Ogion the Mage corrects him and reminds him of the danger of using the spell unnecessarily. It is here he has wrongly used the spell of calling the spirit and created a Shadow. Ged is real, and Shadow is unreal. Shadow begins not only to follow him but also creates a threat to his life. The conflict between the real and the unreal as the major theme is introduced here.

From the Ogion's home, Ged moves and arrives at the school of Wizards on Roke. He stays here for his further education in magic/wizardry but undergoes humiliation from his fellow pupil, Jasper. In a

challenge with him, he happens to create an unreal figure, which affects him consequently. How he summons a woman through the spell of summoning is portrayed as follows:

"Again, he cried the name "Elfarran"!

And the third time, "Elfaran!"

The shapeless mass of darkness he had lifted split apart. It sundered, a pale spindle of light gleamed between his opened arms, a faint oval reaching from the ground up to the height of his raised hands. In the oval of light for a moment there moved a form, a human shape: a tall woman looking back over her shoulder. Her face was beautiful and sorrowful and full of fear."  
[64]

This woman figure dissolves and becomes a lump of shadow. It clings to Ged and begins to attack him badly. It looks like a black beast in the size of a small child. Yet it has no head or face. It becomes small and big simultaneously. The figure has four taloned paws, and it grips and tears at Ged with those four paws. Subsequently, Ged is bound and made unmovable. He lays sprawled on his back with his arms flung out. His face is blackened with blood, and there are great black stains on his shirt. This figure is nothing but the shadow he has mistakenly created. He is subjected to such attacks because of the conflict between him-the real and the shadow-the unreal. He loses speech and remains bedridden for long. He is attended by the Archmage Nemmerle, Master Summoner, Master Changer, Master Herbal. Then Ged is saved. In his explanation to Lord Gensher, the creation of the shadow is revealed:

"In dreams, lord." After a while, Ged went on, speaking with pain and shame, "Lord Gensher, I do not know what it was- the thing that came out of the spell and cleaved to me" [91]

Lord Gensher points out Ged's blunder. He also reminds him of the danger from the shadow to him. There is a lapse on the part of Ged in realising the balance between light and dark, life and death; good and evil. He has committed this blunder out of his pride and hate which is bound to result in ruin.

Ged is also reminded that the shadow is the shadow of his arrogance, ignorance created by him. Thus, the shadow has no name. Ged begins to move from place to place in order to escape from the shadow. On one occasion, in his meeting Ogion for counsel he admits again that he does not know the name of shadow. He also presents the confused state of his mind because the Archmage Gensher has said that the evil forces that are loosed are nameless, but the Dragon of Pendor has come forward to tell the name of the shadow. Even the Stone of Serret has indicated that Ged will be told whatever he needs, including the name of shadow. Ogion advises him not to run from place to place and to stay there as it is a safe place for him. But Ged leaves from there. He goes to Re Albi. In the sea here, he is followed by the shadow. He then moves to the West Hand. He meets his friend Vetch here and stays in his house for a few days. His sister looks after him with a fine sense of hospitality. Her name is Yarrow. With Vetch, he sails towards the east and reaches the dead-end called the last land. The shadow and Ged encounter here. The shadow appears shapeless at first. Then, it takes the look of a man rather than an old man. Then it looks like his father, Jasper Pechvarry. When Ged speaks the shadow's name, Ged

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and shadow; the real and the unreal become one. The shadow merges with Ged. Ged regains his lost strength.

**Conclusion:**

The conflict between good and evil, the real and the unreal, is part and parcel of human life. In general, this conflict is man-made. It means that the human beings who happen to create the evil and unreal from the good and the real respectively other accidentally or consciously. This conflict has been a recurrent motif in the literature from the time immemorial across the world. The literature of Europe, America, Africa, Asia, and Australia is a testimony to this aspect. Ursula K Le Guin's novels dwell upon the theme of balance. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, she deals with the balance of the real and the unreal after showing the conflict between them. Literature is the universal medium of highlighting and resolving conflicts. Ged is a real human being. In his anticipation and pride, he happens to create a shadow from/of his own self. While Ged is real, the shadow is unreal. A conflict is bound to arise between the two opposites. Using fantasy of the spell of naming the conflict between the real and the unreal is resolved.

**References:**

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