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FEMINISTIC FEATURES IN THE SECONDARY WORLD OF URSULA LE GUIN'S "EARTHSEA"²²

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the importance of the secondary world in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, which evolved significantly over the more than thirty years she spent developing it. In her effort to introduce a new kind of fantasy heroine, Le Guin found it necessary to reshape the structure of her fictional world, focusing particularly on its historical background. She employed two main approaches to constructing this history, seen in *A Description of Earthsea* and *Tales from Earthsea*. The former adopts the tone and format of an official historical record, offering a comprehensive overview of the world's development. *Tales from Earthsea* contrast with personal narratives set against the backdrop of major historical events. *Tales from Earthsea* is a notable feature of its emphasis on women's perspectives, contributing to a more feminized view of history. The article concludes that by reimagining the history of *Earthsea*, Le Guin was able to thoughtfully reconstruct the series' world in a way that aligns with contemporary themes, while still maintaining the overarching philosophical principles of the original saga.

KEY WORDS

Fantasy, Ursula
Le Guin, *Earthsea*,
secondary world,
historical narrative.

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URSULA LE GUINNING “YER DENGIZI” TURKUM ASARIDAGI IKKILAMCHI OLAM FEMINISTIK XUSUSIYATLARI

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ANNOTATSIYA

Maqolada Ursula K. Le Guinning “Yerdengizi” turkumidagi ikkilamchi olam ahamiyatini tadqiq etiladi. Bu olam o'ttiz yildan ortiq vaqt davomida sezilarli darajada rivojlangan. Yangi turdagi fantastik qahramonni yaratish jarayonida Le Guin o'z xayoliy olamining tuzilishini, ayniqsa uning tarixiy asoslarini qayta shakllantirishni zarur deb topdi. U bu tarixni yaratishda ikki asosiy yondashuvdan foydalandi: “Yerdengizi tavsifi” va “Yerdengizi ertaklari”. Birinchisida rasmiy tarixiy yozuv uslubi va shaklini qo'llab, dunyo taraqqiyoti haqida keng qamrovli ma'lumot beradi. “Yerdengizi ertaklari” esa asosiy tarixiy voqealar fonida shaxsiy hikoyalarni taqdim etadi. Bu asarning e'tiborga loyiq jihati ayollar nuqtayi nazariga urg'u berib, tarixni ayollarga xos tarzda yoritishidir. Maqola xulosasida Le Guin Yerdengizi tarixini qayta tasavvur qilish orqali turkum dunyosini zamonaviy mavzularga mos ravishda chuqur o'ylab, qayta yarata olgan, ayni paytda asl dostonning asosiy falsafiy tamoyillarini saqlab qolganligi ochiqqlangan.

KALIT SO'ZLAR

Fentezi, Ursula Le Guin, ikkilamchi olam, tarixiy hikoya.

ФЕМИНИСТСКИЕ ЧЕРТЫ ВТОРИЧНОГО МИРА В ЦИКЛЕ УРСУЛЫ ЛЕ ГУИН “ЗЕМНОМОРЬЕ”

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АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье исследуется значимость вторичного мира в цикле “Земноморье” Урсулы К. Ле Гуин, который претерпел существенную эволюцию на протяжении более чем тридцати лет его развития. Стремясь представить новый тип героини фэнтези, Ле Гуин сочла необходимым перестроить саму структуру своего вымышленного мира, уделяя особое внимание его исторической подоплеке. Она применила два основных подхода к созданию этой истории, что отражено в произведениях “Описание Земноморья” и “Сказания Земноморья.” Первое выдержано в тоне и формате официальной исторической хроники, предоставляя всесторонний обзор развития мира. В противоположность этому, “Сказания Земноморья” представляют собой личные повествования, разворачивающиеся на фоне ключевых исторических событий. Отличительной чертой “Сказаний Земноморья” является акцент на женских перспективах, что способствует более феминизированному взгляду на историю. В статье делается вывод, что, переосмыслив историю Земноморья, Ле Гуин сумела вдумчиво реконструировать мир цикла таким образом, чтобы он соответствовал современным темам, сохраняя при этом основополагающие философские принципы оригинальной саги.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Фэнтези, Урсула
Ле Гуин, Земноморье,
вторичный мир,
историческое
повествование.

INTRODUCTION

In keeping with the tradition that goes back to J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the characteristic features of fantasy literature is the detailed elaboration of the secondary world created by the writer. Its geography (including the use of visualization in the form of maps of the magical world), mythology, history, social organization, and culture are all developed in detail.

As a basis for the development of the secondary world, one can distinguish spatial (introduction, description and understanding of new spaces) and temporal (history of the development and change of the described world) aspects, each of which, as well as the spatio-temporal organization of the artistic world of fantasy in general, is the subject of active study.

Let us consider the specifics of the history of the secondary world in the Earthsea cycle by the American writer Ursula Le Guin. This cycle was created over more than three decades. In the first three novels (*A Wizard of Earthsea*, *Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*) Earthsea appears to the reader in a single logic of development. However, the writer makes some changes to the fantasy canon that had been established by that time (the novels were written from 1968 to 1972). Thus, she shifts the emphasis from the external actions of the hero to his internal transformation and makes it central to the work. She introduces elements of Eastern philosophy, creates the image of a school of wizards, and, for the first time in fantasy, makes the main protagonist dark-skinned (Hatfield L., 1993, 43–65).

At the same time, Ursula Le Guin builds a secondary world, “following the unshakable conservatism of traditional fantasy and giving Earthsea the character of a certain frozen social hierarchy - kings, lords, merchants and peasants...” (Le Guin W., 2020, 1071). This picture of the world is characteristic of the first three novels about Earthsea, but returning to the created secondary world in *Tehanu* (*Tehanu: the last book of Earthsea*, 1990), Ursula Le Guin sets herself the goal of creating a story whose true heroine is a woman. This becomes a response to the challenges of the times, and simultaneously a natural stage in the creative path of the writer, who realized she cannot “continue her heroic tale” until she fights “as a woman and as a

creative person – with the angels of feminist consciousness” (Le Guin W., 2020, 1074).

However, this turned out to be a difficult task, requiring a long time, and requiring a rethink of all the principles of constructing a secondary world: “Already at the beginning of 1972, I understood I should write a fourth book about Earthsea, but only sixteen years later did I understand how to write it” (Le Guin W., 2020, 1074). By posing completely new questions to the characters, Ursula Le Guin, however, does not change the already familiar world of Earthsea, but gives a new view, since Tehanu is a story seen through the eyes of the heroine (Le Guin U., 1999). “Tehanu begins where the trilogy ended: in the same hierarchical society where only men rule, but now we perceive this world through the eyes of a woman” (Le Guin W., 2020, 1074).

This change in perspective subjects Earthsea to what Adrienne Rich calls a “complete revision”, but it should be noted that the revision here is not aimed at transforming a secondary world, but at revealing the problematic aspects hidden behind the facade of the traditionally ordered hierarchical society of heroic fantasy. By leading the main characters of the series through a full circle of formation and transformation, to gaining the right to consciously choose their role in life, Ursula Le Guin not only realizes the idea of people’s deep inner freedom, but also faces the need to change Earthsea itself. The more psychologism appears in the images of the main characters, the more emphasis on interpersonal relationships between them increases, the more one feels the resistance of the secondary world, which in Tehanu becomes not only disproportionate, but also openly hostile and dangerous for the heroes.

According to Ursula Le Guin, when she finished her novel Tehanu, she realized its action “happens ‘here and now.’ And, as happens in the real world,... I could not imagine what would happen next” (Le Guin U., 2020, 588).

Indeed, the initial Earthsea trilogy is set in the past, reinforced by regular references to fictional epic tales. At the beginning of the novel *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which tells the story of the development of young Ged, it is said his life “is told in

the epic tale of Ged's Deed and in many heroic songs, but this story of ours is about the times when glory had not yet come to him and songs had not yet been composed about him" (Le Guin U., 2020, 17). Both *The Tombs of Atuan* and *The Far Shore* are heroic stories told from the perspective of a specific individual (Tenar and Arryn/Lebannen), with the result that the grand global feat fades into the background, giving way to a central place in the story of personal development and the problem of choice.

At the same time, the events described are constantly related to the final epic result, and the picture of the world tends to be static-imperative. The hero is free in his choice, but each of his actions has good or bad consequences, and the measure of good and evil is determined through the observance or violation of the original world balance.

The antagonist's action (or the hero's own mistake) causes an imbalance and threatens the existence of the secondary world, and the hero must make a moral choice and take the necessary actions, as a result of which the viability of the secondary world is restored. In *Tehanu*, the action from the past is transferred to the present, the category of time is felt, and the picture of the world acquires probabilistic features (Le Guin W., 2020, 21).

The resolution of the conflict is incomplete, and the transfer of the view to the position of the weak reveals the problems of the secondary world, indicating the need to reorganize it on new foundations.

To transform the created world, Ursula Le Guin turns to the development and study of the fictional history of Earthsea. Since every action of every person has certain consequences, which then line up in the line of development of society, to understand what is happening in the secondary world in the conditional "now", correlated with the moment of the reader's reality, it is necessary to construct a historical perspective of the existence of the secondary world. As the writer herself figuratively writes in the preface to *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), "to understand current events,... I had to first study history and spend some time in the Central Archives of the Archipelago" (Le Guin U., 2020, 587).

Ursula Le Guin views the history of society (real and fictional) as a chain of bifurcation points, at each of which the heroes make a decision that sets the direction of further development.

The writer's task is to determine those points when one or another choice at a particular moment in the past determined the further path of development of society, and to establish the causes and consequences of certain events, elections, laws, and regulations. By creating, supplementing, and expanding the history of Earthsea, Ursula Le Guin constructs a chain of events that led to the current results, and explains the emerging contradictions between the original and modern concepts of the world she created through different interpretations of the same event by its different participants, as well as through the description of significant events previously unknown to the reader.

There are two approaches that Ursula Le Guin uses when working with the history of the secondary world. "A Description of Earthsea" (created during the work on the series of stories "Tales from Earthsea" from 1968 to 2001 and published in the edition "The Books of Earthsea" in 2018) corresponds to the style of official history and gives a holistic picture of historical development.

The people of the archipelago, languages and writing, literature, and historical sources are described. A separate section is devoted to the history of the archipelago (including such sections as "Kings of Enlad", "Morred", "Kings of Havnor", "Maharion and Erret-Akbe", "Dark Times", "Brotherhood of the Hand", "School of Wizards", etc.) and the Kargad lands.

Describing the history of Earthsea, the writer completely imitates the style of historical narratives, indicating the exact dates of certain events, as well as providing links to sources. Interestingly, the documents cited as primary sources are positioned as ancient and authentic, but simultaneously not absolutely reliable. For example, referring to the two "earliest historical treatises" ("Enland's Exploit" and "The Tales of the Young King's Exploits"), Ursula Le Guin rather contradictorily calls them historical treatises, a cycle of myths, and a poem. The Feat of Enland, which tells of the times before the reign of Morred, the legendary hero and ruler of Earthsea, the

writer initially mentions it as one of the earliest historical treatises, but later notes that it “by and large is simply a cycle of myths” (Le Guin U., 2020, 988).

The same dual genre characteristic is given to another work – “The Tale of the Exploits of the Young King”, which is spoken of as “a poem or, rather, a historical treatise” (Le Guin U., 2020, 988). The feeling of instability is also enhanced by the fact that some works are given several titles, which are used depending on the place of their occurrence. For example, “The Tale of the Exploits of the Young King” is often called “The Exploit of Morred” (Le Guin U., 2020, 988).

In addition, the historical sources mentioned in the Description of Earthsea are also included in the ritual-mythological cycle of the secondary world, since it is noted that the “Tales of the Deeds of the Young King” “are performed annually during the festival of the winter solstice, when the sun again turns to the south” (Le Guin U., 2020, 988), and the heroic poem “The Feat of Erret-Akbe “is always performed on a June night during the Long Dance” (Le Guin U., 2020, 992). That is, myth, literature, and history operate in the secondary world on equal terms, merging into a single syncretic flow of time, from which it is impossible to isolate and divide the real, the supernatural, and the fictional. Thus, outlining the general outline of Earthsea's history, arranging in a logical sequence the various events that were significant for the development of the secondary world (both new and those mentioned or depicted in previous works of the cycle),

Ursula Le Guin distances herself in every way from the position of an omniscient author and takes on the role of a historian, trying to recreate a complete picture of what happened from various more or less reliable texts (the unreliability of sources and the presence of “blank spots” in the narrative are regularly noted). All this is intended, on the one hand, to create the impression of greater realism, and to emphasize the duality of such a pseudo-historical narrative. The writer constantly reminds us that this narrative is not history itself, but only a story about it, reliable only to a certain extent (to the extent that the narrators of each of the narratives that make it up can be reliable).

The significance of the “Description of Earthsea”, which is a systematic presentation of knowledge about the peoples of the Archipelago and the Reaches, and helps “memory... move more easily up and down the time axis, through years and centuries, as much as possible, without disturbing the order of events and trying to reduce all sorts of contradictions and absurdities to a minimum” (Le Guin U., 2020, 588), Ursula Le Guin herself correlates it with the functions of the first large map of Earthsea, which made it possible to outline the spatial boundaries of the secondary world.

The second direction of work on Earthsea is realized in the “Tales from Earthsea”, a collection of disparate stories about the fates of characters who lived in the described world in different eras. The Seeker tells the story of the Dark Times (which took place approximately 300 years before the events of the first four novels), and in particular the story of the creation of the school of wizards on the island of Roke. “The Bones of the Earth” tells about the early years of the magician Ogion, Ged’s teacher. “The Dark Rose and the Diamond” is a love story that, according to Ursula Le Guin, could have “happened on the islands of Earthsea at any moment during the last two or three centuries... for love knows no bounds in time or space” (Le Guin U., 2020, 588). “On the High Marshes” covers Ged’s six years as Archmage, while “The Dragonfly” takes place several years after “Tehanu” and introduces characters and ideas that are key to the future development of the world. Ursula Le Guin says that “the only way a writer can explore the history of a non-existent state is to try to tell about some specific event and see what comes of it” (Le Guin U., 2020, 588). The writer shifts attention to individual destinies, finds bifurcation points at which characters made one or another choice that influenced the further development of the entire secondary world, and examines the motives and circumstances of this choice. As a result, the story of history is filled with additional details and appears as a holistic flow of life, which allows greater diversity and plasticity in the world of Earthsea, as well as finding different options for its further development. A common feature of all the stories included in Tales from Earthsea is the presence of main characters who embody various female roles in the

described world. Ursula Le Guin notes that traditionally, female role models are of no interest to history, either in the real or fictional world, and women do not tend to be the protagonists of traditional fantasy, which is hierarchical.

Listing such ordinary women's chores as cooking, sewing clothes, maintaining order in the house, caring for the dying and observing funeral rites, the writer emphasizes that they are considered by society as "by no means the most important problems of life and death," and therefore "it is unlikely that women's affairs are destined to become part of history or even a simple narrative." "What women do is invisible" (Le Guin W., 2020, 1077).

In the note "Brotherhood and Sisterhood" from the collection "Time Busy Living," Ursula Le Guin notes that most social institutions, such as the Government, the Clergy, the Army, the University, and Corporations, have a hierarchical structure and are based on the principles of male solidarity.

When women enter these institutions, they are forced to act according to male rules and are absorbed into the hierarchical system. They begin to "serve male goals and strengthen male values" (Le Guin W., 2020, 136), while women's ways of activity, interaction with the world and each other remain pushed to the periphery of society and confined within the framework of family and home.

The goal of *Tales from Earthsea* is to artistically understand women's roles in the historical process and define the place of women in the fantasy world.

Ursula Le Guin demonstrates that in more ancient times, women possessed magical abilities on an equal basis with men, openly and successfully using them. Over time, female magic began to be pushed to the periphery of magical art, and misogyny even began to spread among wizards.

Some of the heroines of *Tales from Earthsea* go beyond the norms of society they describe and assert their right to traditionally male roles, such as a wizard (for example, Irian from the story "The Dragonfly").

Other heroines do not have supernatural powers, for example, Gift (Emer) from the story "On the Upper Marshes" fulfills the traditional role of a housewife all her life,

but the strength of her nature and a soft, creative, feminine approach help the wizard Iriotkh overcome a deep crisis and be reborn for a new life.

CONCLUSION

The heroines do not perform spectacular and large-scale feats, but it turns out that fateful events in Earthsea are caused by the actions of women. The great future wizard Medra is saved by a woman named Anieb, and the teacher of the magician Dalse, who stopped the earthquake, turns out to be the sorceress Ard. One of the main results of *Tales from Earthsea* is the assertion of the importance of the female role for the general history of the secondary world, and the right to include female history in the general historical narrative.

Thus, the writer uses two approaches to developing the history of the secondary world and implements them in “A Description of Earthsea”, written in the style of historical narrative, and “Tales from Earthsea”, telling stories of private lives in the context of large-scale historical events.

Furthermore, the short story “Description of Earthsea” serves as the foundation for Ursula Le Guin's subsequent work, specifically in “Tales from Earthsea”, where she constructs a new and significant narrative that focuses on the theme of feminization. When examining the progression of the history of the secondary world, it is evident that Ursula Le Guin has skillfully and logically reconstructed the “modern” world of Earthsea on fresh and innovative foundations, all while maintaining the fundamental philosophical concepts of the cycle.

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