Wizards and Their Art in Tolkien and LeGuin

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Preface

This is a scholarly work concerned with shedding some light into a dark corner in which a band of bearded old men have been hiding for years. The last time they came out of hiding, they caused quite an uproar among the superstitious. After all, wearing long flowing robes and living in isolated towers, speaking in strange languages and causing strange happenings is enough to make anyone suspicious. Of course these men who go about cloaked in mystery are wizards. Now that they are making another appearance in the world in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and Ursula K. LeGuin, I wish to dispell some of the mists that surround these men wherever they go. I wish to explain what they are and what they do, and somewhat how they do what they do. This small group of elitists seek to preserve their trade, their art for posterity. And I, wishing to do my own small part to aid their weakening crusade of preservation, have lit this small candle to illuminate this dark corner, only hoping that the howling winds do not extinguish its feeble light too quickly.

What is a Wizard?

At first glance, one might think that this would be a rather simple question to answer, after all it is only four words long. But length of question does not necessarily dictate length of answer. A wizard is a much more complex being than most people think.

First of all, there are the basic types of "magically" endowed persons: conjurors, enchanters, illusionists, magicians, necromancers, prestidigitators, seers, sorcerers, thaumaturges, theugists, warlocks, and witches. These people deal with certain aspects of "magic," dabbling in either one or more specialties (e.g. dealing with demons, studying natural sciences, practicing sleight-of-hand, etc.) which often overlap. these types of practitioners of "magic" are so intimately inter related that one could be a conjuror-magician-necromancer all at once. Most of these specialties can be for either good or evil depending on the purposes and will of the individual prac-However, there are some specialties that by their very definition exclude other specialties, such as a sorcerertheurgist. The sorcerer is one who barters his soul to a demon in order to gain certain powers; the theurgist communicates with good spirits who enable him to work wonders. powers cannot exist in the same person. The demon would not

obey the good man any more than the good spirit would obey the evil man. There are two other combinations that are likewise impossible: the theurgist-warlock and the theurgist-witch. Both warlocks and witches are evil in nature in that the practitioner deals with the Devil himself in the former, and with evil spirits in the latter.

Conjurors, enchanters, illusionists, magicians, necromancers, prestidigitators, seers, and thaumaturges may all be either good or evil. Conjurors bound spirits to their will by making oaths. Enchanters held people spellbound by dazzling the senses or by gaining power over the individual through a spirit. The illusionist dazzled the eyes with miraculous sights and with sleight-of-hand trickery. Speaking with the dead to find out about future events was the art of the necromancer. Sleight-of-hand tricks including juggling was the domain of the prestidigitator. One who had deep insight into spiritual matters or who received divine revelations in the form of visions was called a seer. Workers of marvels which dealt with natural sciences were named thaumaturges. The magician was the jack-of-all-trades in the world of magic for his realm of study encompassed all of the above.

But what is a wizard? A wizard is simply one or more of the above with the addition of one very significant characteristic: profound wisdom. It is this wisdom which separates the wizards from the magicians, one could say. This wisdom can only be obtained through living, through experiencing and learning. One can find magicians of almost any age, but a young wizard of worth is a rare sight.

In his works, Tolkien deals with wizards and labels them as such. LeGuin has three major groups of magic-users: apprentices, sorcerers, and wizards. She also uses the term "mage," which is essentially the same thing as a wizard.

Now, what does a wizard look like? This is a far easier question to answer than the first one. Anyone would say that a wizard appears as an old man with long hair and a beard, wearing flowing robes and a tall pointed hat, and possibly carrying a staff. This is probably the most traditional view of a wizard's appearance. The robes and staff, along with a few books of lore, are the most common outward signs of a wizard. Tolkien gives each of his wizards a staff, flowing robes, and a color. 1 Their books of lore are scattered over all of Middle-earth, collected in various strong points. Le Guin gives her wizards the same basics plus a couple of 5 books of lore from the school on the isleaf Roke. of the garments is important to both authors because they are able to rank their magic-users according to relative power and, for Tolkien, areas of study. In Ursula LeGuin's trilogy, beginning apprentices are signified by their grey cloaks, while sorcerers have the added badge of a silver clasp at their throats. 2 The Nine Masters of Roke wear grey cloaks and bear staffs of wizardry, while a wizard, upon leaving the school, may wear any color and bear the wizard's staff. The Archmage of Roke is dressed all in white and bears a staff also. Tolkien's works, there are only wizards of various powers, and

for him the color of the robes designates areas of study and rank within the order. 3

Tolkien and LeGuin take two opposite stances with regard to the number of wizards in their works. Professor Tolkien uses an order composed of five wizards called the "Istari." These five were Valinoreans and came to Middle-earth in the traditional appearance of wizards: old men. 4 They originally had pledged themselves to serve "the Secret Fire," which was the Flame of Anor. This represented the sun, which in turn stood for the One Himself, Eru. 5 Of the five in the order, only three are mentioned: Saruman, Gandalf, and Radagast. Saruman the White was the head of the Istari who took great delight in mechanical works, secret devices, etc. to put on magnificent displays of power. 6 Saruman could charm people with his voice alone, and he also possessed a crystal ball. 7 In the terms used to describe what a wizard is, Saruman would be a wizard who specialized in the roles of the thaumaturge, seer, and enchanter. Gandalf the Grey was second in rank in the order. He dealt with the harnessing of fire to his will; his superior wisdom aided his ability to prophesy so much that he did not need to use a crystal ball. Gandalf the Wizard would be a thaumaturge-sage-seer combination. Without knowing anything about the other two members of the Istari, it is almost impossible to determine whether Radagast the Brown is third, fourth, or fifth in rank. Radagast the Brown had the power to change shape and color, and could communicate with animals. He was also a master of herblore and beastlore. 10

The combination of the wizard Radagast is a thaumaturge-sorcerer,

In Earthsea, the world of Ursula LeGuin, wizards and other magic-users abound; almost every island has one. On the isle of Roke, at the school for wizards there is also an order. In her order of wizards, there are nine masters and an archmage who is above those of the order. The archmage is the wisest of the wise and the most learned, a wizard (or mage) in the truest sense of the word. His role is primarily that of the sage-magician. Then come the Nine Masters of Roke, each the greatest in his art: Master Chanter, Master Windkey, Master Herbal, Master Hand, Master Namer, Master Changer, Master Summoner, Master Patterner, and Master Doorkeeper.

The last Master is the first one that a young candidate for the school of wizards meets; he is also the last one that a "finished" wizard sees when he leaves the school. The Master Doorkeeper, when he asks the initiate to tell him his "true" name in order to gain entrance to the school, is giving the new student his first lesson in trusting others. When he says his true name, the "magic" door allows the student to enter. 11 There is no other way to enter. Neither physical force nor magic will avail, for the Master Doorkeeper is the master of his craft. The Master Doorkeeper is a wizard that specializes in enchantment.

After a brief audience with the Archmage, the new student begins his lessons. His first teacher is the Master Chanter who teaches legends, sagas, and lays of wisdom, and tells of the deeds of great heros. 12 He is a wizard-sage. Next, the

student or apprentice goes to the Master Windkey to learn the arts of the wind and weather. Under him apprentices learn the art of handling a boat, sailing both by the world's wind and by command of spell. 13 The Master Windkey is a wizard-theurgis. Going on to the Master Herbal, a wizard-thaumaturge, the apprentice learns the ways and properties of all things that The next master to study under was the Master Hand, a wizard-sorcerer-prestidigitator. His art consisted of tricks that involved sleight-of-hand and juggling, along with some of the lesser arts of changing things. 15 The final step in a student's apprenticeship was to go to the Isolate Tower and study under the Master Namer, a wizard-sage who taught the "true" names of everything. 16 Great magic could not be performed with out knowing the "true" names of things in the True Speech. After returning from the Isolate Tower, the apprentice was made sorcerer and given the silver clasp of his new rank. 17 Here. please note that LeGuin does not use the term "sorcerer" in the traditional sense of one who barters his soul to a demon to gain supernatural powers.

Now, knowing some of the True Speech, the young sorcerer studies under a wizard-sorcerer-illusionist, the Master Changer He teaches how to perform true shape-changes on oneself and on others. Training continued with the Master Summoner, This wizard-conjuror taught the sorcerer how to summon energies such as: light, heat, electricity, and powers of weight, form, color, and sound. The last step in the education of the sorcerer was to learn from the Master Patterner in the Immanent

Grove, where spells are not cast. 20 Since no one is quite sure what is taught there, and wizards won't tell, one would think that the patterns of the world are taught there, making the Master Patterner a wizard-thaumaturge.

Upon returning to the school from the Immanent Grove, where the young sorcerer was made a wizard, the young magic-user meets once again the Master Doorkeeper. The old man says to the other, "You won entrance to Roke by saying your name. Now you may win your freedom of it by saying mine." The newly-made wizard must think this impossible! He knows he cannot force the door by physical or magical means. Neither can he force the name from the old master by any means for he is clearly the stronger. He has studied names and how to find out names, but trickery will not help. The answer is too well hidden and guarded. Finally the young man says:

I cannot take your name from you, not being strong enough, and I cannot trick your name from you, not being wise enough. So I am content to stay here, and learn or serve, whatever you will: unless by chance you will answer a question I have.

Ask it. What is your name?²²

The Master Doorkeeper says his name, hears it repeated and opens the door for the last time to the young man. Here the new wizard learns his last lesson on the isle of Roke from the one who taught him his first: trust yourself. The revealing of someone's true name is an action of utter trust because of the power of one's true name. Now the circle is completed and the wizard can go his own way.

Comparisons may be made between the two orders of wizards, especially after Saruman is expelled from his order and Gandalf replaces him as Gandalf the White. LeGuin's Masters each have their trade. Tolkien's wizards cover more than one field of study apiece. Radagast is a combination Master Herbal-Master Changer because he knows the ways of growing things and can change his shape. Gandalf is a more complex combination of the Masters Chanter, Namer, Summoner, and Patterner. He knows much concerning ancient lore and legend; he knows many languages and the words of which they are made up. Gandalf can summon light and fire (with the aid of Narya, the magic ring of fire), and has great wisdom in the ways and patterns of the world. Gandalf the White is also comparable to the Archmage, the wizard-sage, in that both are the heads of their respective orders and the signifying color for both is white.

Each wizard has his own sphere of influence, his own craft and his own duty. For both Tolkien and LeGuin, the leaders of the council of wizards have one primary duty: preserve. Gandalf'the White's realm of preservation includes "all worthy things;" the Archmage Sparrowhawk's duty is to preserve the Balance, the Equilibrium of the world. Both have great power, but it is not to be used to rule others. In a conversation with the prince of Enlad concerning the Archmage and the isle of Roke, the young sorcerer Gamble says that:

He hasn't done much since he was named Archmage. They never do. They just sit on Roke and watch the Equilibrium, I suppose....
Roke guides, but it can't rule. The Balance lies here, but the Power should lie in the king's hands.

If either Sparrowhawk or Gandalf would have taken this power to rule upon himself, he would have been corrupted by the destructive aspects of this ruling power and would have fallen. Saruman submitted to the temptation to rule and fell. Gandalf withstood the temptation of taking the One Ring of power and wielding it, and after his return to the world after his fight with the balrog of Moria, he becomes "Saruman as he should have been." Saruman, as the head of his order, should have been the one to seek the preservation of worthy things. Just as Denethor, son of Ecthelion, is Steward of Gondor, so too must the wisest of wizards be stewards. Gandalf, at the end of his audience with Denethor, says that even though no kingdom is his to rule, he cares for all things of worth, and that he too is a steward. 25

At the end of <u>The Farthest Shore</u> in Ursula LeGuin's trilogy there appears a brief account of the Gontish legend of what happened to the Archmage Sparrowhawk after he sealed the breach in the world's wall and thus restored the Balance. The Archmage returned to his home island of Gont, and the young king of all Earthsea came to search for him to bring him as the most honored guest to the coronation of the new king. But Sparrowhawk could not be found because he was wandering alone in the deep forests on the mountain. The young king forbade others to search for Sparrowhawk saying, "He rules a greater kingdom than I do." 26

The young king should have said "guards" instead of "rules" because the Archmage is a guide, he does not set himself up as judge as a king must. The Archmage must preserve the Balance

of the world at all costs. The Archmage Nemmerle spent his life to seal a rip in the fabric of the world caused by a powerful but ungoverned spell of summoning cast by Sparrowhawk in his inexperienced youth. 27 After he became Archmage, Sparrowhawk lost his magery when he sealed a breach in the world's wall and thus preserved the Balance once more. 28 The Master Summoner, in a talk with the young Sparrowhawk, says:

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

A wizard is one who does what he must do to preserve what must be preserved. His knowledge and wisdom are his guides and he acts as a guide or counselor of preservation to kings and others who would have his advice.

The only other common factor between the wizards of Tolkien and those of LeGuin is their obscure endings. The Istari come to Middle-earth from obscure origins and when they are finished they return there, wherever "there" is. 30 Perhaps because wizards are so common in Earthsea, they have no obscure origins and only some of them have obscure endings.

Magic as Art

According to Robley Evans, when one makes images of things, one makes art. It is necessary for this art to belong to both the "real" everyday world and the realm of fantasy. There is a scale that writers use to try to create a balance of the real and the fantastic in their works. If a work is grounded in too much of the real world, then the story's fantasy is diminished possibly to the extreme that fantasy becomes legendary. If there is too little grounding in the real world, then the story does indeed become fantastic, so much so that the fantastic becomes the real and vise versa. So writers use the scales in their attempt to seek out equilibrium in their writings.

"Magic" is the loose term applied to all such related fields as: witchcraft, thaumaturgy, theurgy, sorcery, prestidigitation necromancy, enchantment, conjuration, producing illusions, magic wizardry, and magery. Whatever the field, "magic" has three basic components: spell(or incantation), rite (or gesture), and synechdoche (or material component). The possible combinations of the three components are: spell; spell and rite; spell, rite, and synechdoche; spell and synechdoche; rite and synechdoche; rite. The last two combinations would probably be rare examples and weak in their effect because they lack the power derived from the spoken word.

The spell or incantation is the primary component of magic. Since a spell is made up of words, which give the speaker power over the natural world, anyone comprehending the meaning of the words is able to reveal the reality that they stand for.³² However, sometimes the power of the words is so great that occassionally someone, who lacks the knowledge of the meaning of the words, is able to make the reality come about by simply reciting the words. Young Sparrowhawk read the magic books of the wizard Ogion of Gont and summoned up a shadow of the dead without really knowing what he was reading.³³ Words can endow a man with power over the natural world because they express reality. If one uses words, one has this power. Knowledge enables the wizard to order time and space, and the greater his knowledge and understanding, the greater his power.³⁴ But with this power comes responsibility.

Evans states that it is of utmost importance that words must be used with extreme caution, lest someone be injured by the immense power of words. 35 And since the basis of all magic is the word, then magic must also be used with the same care lest the Equilibrium of the world be upset. Much of this is contained in this speech by the Master Hand as he warns an apprentice about the danger of magical power:

The Master Hand looked at the jewel that glittered on Ged's palm, bright as the prize of a dragon's hoard. The old Master murmured one word, 'Tolk,' and there lay the pebble, no jewel but a rough grey bit of rock. The Master took it and held it out on his own hand. 'This is a rock; "Tolk" in the True Speech,' he said, looking mildly up at Ged now. 'A bit of the stone of which Roke Isle is made, a little bit

of the dry land on which men live. It is it-It is part of the world. By the Illusion-Change you can make it look like a diamond-- or a flower or a fly or an eye or a flame -- The rock flickered from shape to shape as he named them, and returned to rock. But that is mere seeming. Illusion fools the beholder's senses; it makes him see and hear and feel that the thing is changed. But it does not change the thing. To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done. Indeed it can be done. It is the art of the Master Changer, and you will learn it, when you are ready to learn it. But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve meed. To light a candle is to cast a shadow !-

This passage indicates another aspect of the power of words, that of the "true" name. Besides giving power over Nature, words also give power over man. In both Tolkien and LeGuin men bear secret or true names given to them by spirits or by parents. When one knows a person's true name, he gains power over that individual because a man's power is also contained in his name. Aragorn bore the names of Strider, Longshanks, and Wingfoot, among others for common use. Bandalf used the names of Mithrandir, Tharkun, and Icanus, but his true name was Olorin. It is certain that the secretive race of Dwarves followed this practice, each having a "use" name for dealing with outsiders and a "true" name for use among dwarves. In Earthsea, everyone has a "use" name and at a certain age they are given their "true" name. Sparrowhawk was called Duny when he was a child,

but his true name was Ged. When Ged (Sparrowhawk) released a shadow into the world and the Archmage Nemmerle died to save him, Ged lost faith in himself. His friend Vetch, now a wizard, came to Ged the night before he left Roke and gave to Ged his name: Estarriol. That night Ged pondered:

If plain men hide their true name from all but a few they love and trust utterly, so much more must wizardly men, being more dangerous, and more endangered. Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping. Thus to Ged who had lost faith in himself, Vetch had given that gift only a friend canquive, the proof of unshaken, unshakable trust.

This goes back to the method of entering and exiting the school on Roke, and shows the deep significance of the trust required for the new student to exchange names with the Master Doorkeeper

The second major component of magic is the rite. The rite encompasses more than the physical movements of the magic-user; it includes the way the words are spoken. Rhythm, volume, tone, and pitch are very important aspects of spell-casting. These, coupled with gestures, have a direct influence on the success of the spell, its duration, and the time it takes to begin its effects. Ged's summoning of the spirit of Elfarran, a thousand years dead, is a perfect example of this. According to Evans the words are not the only components that confer power. The ritual in speaking words also confers power. This is why magic can occur from combinations of components such as: rite and synechdoche, and rite alone. The rite also confers power, but not as much as the spoken word. Mr. Evans also points out that"the ordering of words is an art." Gandalf, before the

the west gate of Moria, casts spells of opening but was unsuccessful. He tried the spells again by changing the word order, changing the volume of his voice, and changing the speed at which he spoke. He even tried other languages, but the doors refused to open. 46

The third component of magic is the synechdoche or material component. It is "part of a thing which stands for the whole," such as fingernail clippings, a lock of hair, a few drops of blood, etc. 47 A synechdoche alone cannot produce magic; it is useless unless it is acted upon by word or gesture or both. When it is acted upon, the synechdoche acts like a cheap catalyst which hastens the reaction but is often used up in the reaction. Ged used a blade of grass to make a staff with which to defend himself. 48

Both Tolkien and LeGuin adhere to the principle of magic that states that power can change with time and place. The Ringwraiths of Mordor have increased power when they are closer to their home base of operations. Darkness also magnifies their power. 49 As Ged stood upon the summit of Roke Knoll, whose roots went downward beyond imagination, he knew that his power was strongest here at the center of the world. 50 Ged's power was so strong that he defeated an evil power on its own ground later in his life. 51

What of the language of magic? Is there a special language that alone permits magic to function? For the wizards of Earthsea there is. The only language that acts as a conductor of magic is the True Speech, the Speech of the Making, the tongue

of dragons. This Old Speech forces a man to tell the truth; he cannot lie while speaking it.⁵² However, in Middle-earth, any language will conduct magic. Gandalf says that he "once knew every spell in all the tongues of Elves or Men or Orcs, that was ever used for such a purpose," when he confronts the closed west gate of Moria.⁵³

But no matter what type of spell is cast, regardless of its components or the language in which it is cast, the magic-user must be standing in one place completely undisturbed in order to cast a spell successfully. In all of the examples of magic in both trilogies, this is an underlying principle of magic: no movement, with the exception of the gestures of the ritual The magic-user must maintain his concentration on component. what he is doing, or he might lose control over the spell. he is interrupted during the casting of the spell, it is broken. If he is doing more than one thing, the wizard is unable to have a clear mind to concentrate on the matter at hand. episode at the west gate of Moria shows that while he is being plagued by hobbit interruptions, Gandalf cannot search his memory for the spell. When he finally has the spell, he stands before the gate performing the ritual gestures with his hand and his staff. 54 Later, when Gandalf the White encounters Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli on the edge of Fangorn Forest, he turns his back to them and they are released from the spell. 55 In LeGuin's A Wizard of Earthsea, the wizard Ged (Sparrowhawk) acts as the interrupter:

But I am the Lord of the Stone, I, and this I

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do to the disloyal wife: Ekavroe ai oelwantar-It was a spell of Changing, and Benderesk's long
hands were raised to shape the cowering woman
into some hideous thing, swine or dog or driveling hag. Ged stepped forward and struck the
lord's hands down with his own, saying as he did so only one short word. And though he had
no staff, and stood on alien ground and evided
ground, the domain of a dark power, yet his will
prevailed.

A word must be said about magic spells, and what they do. Spells differ in length, being a word, a phrase, or a complete rhyming incantation. The longer the spell, the longer the duration and greater the power of the spell. Although magic may seem to be boundless, there are some very real boundaries that cannot be broken. The greatest limiting factor of magic is <u>time</u>. Words convey power, but only so many words may be said during any given segment of time. In other words, only so much power can be gained per unit of time. So if a wizard wanted to be greedy for power, it would cost him dearly in time.

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So if some Mage-Seamaster were mad enough to try to lay a spell of storm or calm over all the ocean, his spell must say not only that word <u>inien</u>, but the name of every stretch and bit and part of the sea through all the Archipelago and all the Outer Reaches and beyond to where names cease. Thus, that which gives us the power to work magic, sets the limits of that power. A mage can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. 57

There are spells that will cover just about anything that can be thought of, such as: creating light, holding a person in one spot, mending a material item, opening doors, summoning spirits and demons, controlling the weather, and changing a person's shape. Somewhere there is a book of lore or a scroll

that has the information that one wants. All that one has to do is find it and study it.

Magic is an art. It is something that must be studied, and as the practitioner's experience with the subject increases, the less chance there is of a miscasting of the spell. Like many other professions, the practice of magic requires some inborn skill of the magician. With all of the complicated variables that go into the working of magic, it may seem like more of a science than an art. But science too is an art. The slow, deep chanting of the spell coupled with the intricate weaving of arms in magnificent gestures, at the same time, make the working of magic seem almost ballet-like. Indeed it truly is an art.

Remembering Ursula LeGuin's notion that the greater a wizard becomes, the more he does what he must do, I would like to end with the words of the Master Doorkeeper that he spoke when the Archmage Sparrowhawk (Ged) left Roke Isle for Gont, after expending his wizardry to save his world: "He has done with doing. He goes home." ⁵⁸

Footnotes

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 - 34 Evans, pp. 44-45.
 - ³⁵ibid., pp. 30-31.
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⁵²ibid., pp. 89-90.

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⁴¹ LeGuin, A Wizard of Earthsea, pp. 14-15.

⁴² ibid., p. 69.

⁴³ ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁴⁴ Evans, p. 130.

⁴⁵ loc. cit.

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