

Visiting the Ancient Land of the Dead in Le Guin and Riordan

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This [article](#) examines two works of children's fantasy, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005) and Ursula Le Guin's third Earthsea book, *The Farthest Shore* (1973), in which the central theme – [one that dates back to antiquity](#) – is that the hero must travel to the Land of the Dead. The journey to the underworld, known as a 'katabasis', must be accomplished while the hero is alive; it is [his/her](#) return which marks them out as truly heroic. In its essence, the katabasis can be seen as the 'heroic quest par excellence, in that it represents the triumph of the vital principle over the forces of death' (Cook 2009: 26). This [article](#) builds on my work in *Foundation* #118, in which I explored Le Guin's use of an inverted nekuomantic rite in her later Earthsea book *The Other Wind* (2001). In this [current article](#), I will focus on those parts of [Homer's](#) *Odyssey* which describe a katabasis (rather than a nekuomantic rite), [in order](#) to read [similar descriptions in](#) Riordan and Le Guin.

In her introduction to *Reception Studies* (2003), Lorna Hardwick suggests that an analysis of texts which make reference to classical sources can not only yield 'insights into the receiving society' but also 'focus critical attention back towards the ancient source' (Hardwick 2003: 4). Riordan and Le Guin envisage the ancient past differently, and draw on disparate aspects of antiquity. Thus, reading their work through the lens of an ancient text can give us insights into how their own texts function. At the same time, their own readings and interpretations of an ancient text can provide us with different angles on how that text may be perceived and [operates](#).

Riordan's [novel](#) is set in a twenty-first century America which is simultaneously inhabited by Greek gods and mythical monsters. Hades is therefore located in the DoA (Dead on Arrival) Recording Studios at the western edge of California. By contrast, Le Guin's

Earthsea series takes place in a traditional fantasy world, which appears mediaeval in its lack of both technology and large urban communities. Despite the difference in their respective settings, both narratives use the ancient, [and especially Greco-Roman](#), idea of the katabasis to resolve their respective imbalance of power. Riordan [gives Percy](#) a traditional style quest, in which he needs to retrieve Zeus' lightning bolt from Hades and return it to Olympus. In the *The Farthest Shore*, Ged makes a lengthy sea-voyage to a land known only as 'the dry land', the home of the dead, which lies beyond the edge of the westernmost island in Earthsea. [My analysis](#) will show how the journeys, the location of the land of the dead, [and](#) the entrance and exit of the protagonists can be seen to follow aspects of the model of [Odysseus' voyage to the underworld](#) in book 11 [of Homer's epic](#).

Complexities in Odysseus' Narrative

Odysseus' story follows the adventures of many of his mythological predecessors, who also made a similar type of journey. Our oldest full katabasis story is that of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, [recorded](#) over four thousand years ago, in which the eponymous hero travels [to](#) the land of the dead following the death of his companion Enkidu, a journey which has been termed 'the definitive heroic adventure' (Van Nortwick 1996: 28). Within Greek mythology, various heroes also made the journey: Polydeuces went to rescue his dead brother; Orpheus his dead wife; Theseus tried to steal Persephone; and for one of his labours, Herakles had to steal Cerberus from Hades. The aim of Odysseus' journey, by contrast, is closer to that of Gilgamesh's: 'Odysseus retrieves from Hades not a denizen of the underworld, but insight into the forces governing his existence and into his ultimate destiny' (Cook 2009: 26). Odysseus is told by Circe that he must go to Hades in order to learn how he might return home, although he is not actually told this information in any detail. Instead, he learns about how and where he will die. Thus, Odysseus' journey 'brings the hero face to face with

mortality' (Van Nortwick 2009: 57), as what he brings back from Hades is not just knowledge of others' deaths (which have already happened), but knowledge about the manner of his own death. The other thing which Odysseus achieves by his journey is an increase in his heroic stature. Debbie Felton has suggested that the katabasis forms the way in which Greek heroes may learn 'that the best way for a mortal to attain immortality is to achieve a heroic reputation through brave and memorable deeds' (Felton 2007: 94). Thus, Odysseus' katabasis not only forces him to understand his own mortality but also to evaluate how he can enhance what people will say about him after his death. Of course, it is Odysseus who narrates the story of his katabasis, and he is not a narrator to be trusted elsewhere in the epic. But, by telling the story, Odysseus increases his own heroic stature through the narrative, regardless of whether his audience, the Phaeacians, or we (as the text's audience) actually believe his story.

Odysseus' tale of how he travelled to Hades and what he did when he got there is complex, and at times, downright contradictory. There has been much scholarly discussion about the inconsistencies in *Odyssey* 11, and therefore about the text's composition. Walter Burkert has observed that 'contradictions are freely tolerated' within the *Odyssey* (1985: 196). However, the main point of contradiction for my purposes is the nature and location of Odysseus' actual encounter with the dead. Bruce Louden has said that *Odyssey* 11 combines distinct and separate genres of myth: the katabasis itself and another tradition, the nekuomantic rite, a cultic ritual of consulting souls of the dead at a dedicated shrine (Louden 2011: 197). Odysseus' encounter with the dead is complex precisely because the poem blends together these two strands, so that, when he arrives on the shore by the grove of Persephone, he does not make a standard heroic *entry* into the underworld, but initially carries out a mystic ritual over a pit containing blood for the shades to drink from so that he may consult them. Michael Clarke has suggested that in the *Odyssey* 'we begin with an account of

conjunction of spirits (nekuomanteion) but end up with a journey through the underworld (katabasis)' (Clarke 1999: 215), though the mixture of the two strands is rather more problematic. For my purposes, I would like to suggest that Odysseus' physical sea voyage to Hades forms the very first part of his katabasis, which is then fulfilled by his later visit within Hades, towards the end of his narrative.

Travelling to the Land of the Dead

The physical journey itself is the first heroic achievement in travelling to the land of the dead. However, the journey Odysseus makes to reach the land of the dead is not described as dangerous or even lengthy. He is instructed to make this visit by the daughter of the sun, Circe, and it is she who also gives him the directions and means to get there. Odysseus tells us that Circe's island Aeaea lies at the easternmost edge of the world, 'the Aeaeon island, where the house and dances of early rising Dawn are, and the rising sun' [νῆσόν τ' Αἰαίην, ὅθι τ' Ἡοῦς ἡριγενείης / οἰκία καὶ χοροὶ εἰσι καὶ ἀντολαὶ Ἥελίοιο] (*Odyssey* 12.3-4). Circe tells Odysseus that he must sail due west from her island until 'in your ship you have crossed past the Ocean' [ἂν δὲ νηὶ δι' Ὠκεανοῖο περήσῃς] (*Odyssey* 10.508), but she emphasises that he will not have to worry about exactly how he is to get there: the winds will automatically send him in the right direction. His subsequent journey is probably one of the easiest journeys he makes in the entire epic (certainly, while he is awake): there are no storms, no monsters, and no distractions on the journey. Circe has sent a 'favourable fair wind' [ἱκμενον οὖρον] (11.7) which hurries them on by filling their sails, and the 'wind and pilot' [ἄνεμός τε κυβερνήτης] (11.10) steers their ship, while they simply sit back and wait. This journey is unusual for Odysseus precisely because it is so easy for him to accomplish, and he has a clear and achievable goal.

Percy's actual journey is rather more complicated by comparison. He needs to travel

across America from east to west coast. However, the most obvious method of modern transport is forbidden to him on account of the impending war between his father Poseidon and Zeus as god of the skies:

‘Oh’, I said. ‘Naturally. So we just get on a plane – ’

‘No!’ Grover shrieked. ‘Percy, what are you thinking? Have you ever been on a plane in your life?’

[...]

‘Okay,’ I said, determined not to look at the storm. ‘So I’ll travel over-land.’ (Riordan 2010: 147)

This prohibition already means that Percy’s journey is much longer than Odysseus’: to travel by train or coach across the continent takes about four days. However, Percy’s journey is further complicated by the interruptions he experiences from the copious number of monsters (and some gods) **which** attempt to delay him or try to kill him and his companions. In this way, Percy’s **quest** comprises of several different transport methods: when he encounters a monster, he is often forced to change his plans. First, he is taken by private hire car to catch a long distance bus from New York. This part of the journey is cut short when he is accosted by **the** Furies, and forced to walk in the woods until he has raised the money for a train from New Jersey to Denver. He is able to **hitch-hike** a lift on the back of an animal transport lorry as far as Las Vegas, after which he has the funds to take a taxi the last leg of the way to Los Angeles.

On his journey, Percy encounters the Furies, Medusa, Echidna with a Chimera, undertakes a side-quest for Ares, and is delayed in the Lotus Casino before he reaches Los Angeles itself, where he is nearly killed by Procrustes. This is an impressive list of monsters, considering even Odysseus only claims to have experienced five monstrous encounters before his monster-free journey to Hades: the Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops, Aeolus, the

Laestrygonians, and finally, Circe. Odysseus' curiosity could be blamed for his meetings with the Cyclops, Circe and the Laestrygonians, and his poor leadership for the disastrous outcome of his meeting with Aeolus. Percy is more concerned about his companions than Odysseus in every encounter, and does not leave them to satisfy the hunger of monsters. He is also explicitly not to blame for the various attacks which he experiences (although he frequently blames himself for not being more observant). However, both characters experience a visit to the land of the Lotus Eaters. Percy, unlike Odysseus, is taken in by the Lotus Casino, and has to become more observant in order to realise what is happening to him. Odysseus, as always, claims not to have been taken in by any such tricks. Percy's adventures form the nature of his journey to Hades, while Odysseus' adventures are part of his overall journey back to his home in Ithaca, and separate from his journey to Hades.

Le Guin's Earthsea is a very different world from Riordan's loud and commercialised America. Earthsea is a non-technological world, which is closer in some respects to the world of the *Odyssey* than Riordan's modernised gods. Le Guin has herself suggested that the image of Earthsea's dry land was influenced by (among others) 'the Greco-Roman idea of Hades' realm' (Le Guin 2004). Like Odysseus, Ged makes his journey by sea – given the nature of the Archipelago's island geography, this is not surprising. His journey is long in both time and space: the voyage takes many months, from early spring to high summer, and his destination is about a thousand miles away. Unlike Percy and Odysseus, Ged does not travel directly to the land of the dead, because at the start of his journey he does not know where he will need to go. Percy and Odysseus are both told by a divine authority that they must travel to the land of the dead, but in Earthsea there are no visible deities governing action or telling human beings what to do. Ged has to make his own choices. He has no means of transport available to him at this point beyond his boat, although he can control it with a magic wind just as Circe could send Odysseus a favourable wind to guide him to Hades. While Odysseus

and Percy begin their journeys in the east of their respective worlds, Ged begins his journey in the centre, not the east, at Roke island and begins by travelling south, first to the island of Wathort. His encounters then take him southwest, and beyond the farthest island on the southwestern edge of Earthsea. At this point he sails north, to the island of Selidor at the far western edge of Earthsea. Ged and his companion Arren have to contend with various trials on the journey, but they are all human, not divine, and only monstrous in the sense that they are indicative of a deep imbalance in the world.

Each journey can be judged as heroic but at different levels. Odysseus' journey is straightforward but heroic because it is impossible for Odysseus to reach Hades without divine assistance – not only would he go the wrong way, he surely would not go far enough: he travels to Hades in only one day, leaving at sunrise and arriving at sunset. Percy's survival alone is heroic, considering the number of monsters he has to ward off or kill. Ged does not boast about his journey in the way that Odysseus and Percy do, but the journey itself is much more frightening. He sees people suffering, and sees the despair of people driven mad, although he cannot do anything about it. Ged's journey is heroic not only because he survives it, but also because he is able to navigate his way without any external guidance or assistance.

Location of the Land of the Dead

The land of the dead is situated in the western edge of the world in all three texts. Odysseus leaves Circe's island at sunrise, and sails due west until 'the sun went down, and all the ways were dark' [δύσετό τ' ἡέλιος σκιάωντό τε πᾶσαι ἀγνυαί] (11.12), and his ship 'reaches deep flowing Ocean's boundary' [ἐς πείραθ' ἵκανε βαθυπρόου Ὠκεανοῖο] (11.13) at the very western edge of the world. Here, the Ocean is envisaged as a stream of fresh water encircling the inhabited world, both land and sea, as it is also represented on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18, and its waters 'thus define the borders of the universe' (Marinatos 2001: 395).

Odysseus crosses the river Ocean in order to reach the land Circe described to him. When he reaches the boundary of the river Ocean, he describes that this is the location of the kingdom of the Cimmerians, and they are ‘hidden in mist and cloud’ [ἡέρι καὶ νεφέλῃ κεκαλυμμένοι] (11.15), a place where the sun never rises because the land lies beyond the sun’s path. The next five lines of text emphasise the sun’s absence from this place at all times of the day and night, and how this point beyond the inhabited world lies in perpetual darkness, emphasising the total finality of the sunset described when ‘the sun went down and all the ways were dark’ (11.12). Nanno Marinatos has demonstrated that ‘the sun does not go to Hades according to Archaic cosmology’ (Marinatos 2010: 195), and therefore that the solar day is limited to the inhabited world and not the world beyond. This part of Odysseus’ journey lies outside normal time as well as beyond normal space. Darkness thus becomes endemic to the experience of Hades which Odysseus narrates, and it is representative of the westerly location of the land of the dead. The west is linked to sunset: our term ‘Occident’ comes from the Latin ‘occido’ which means ‘I kill’, but such ideas are also traceable to Egyptian and ancient near eastern sources (Marinatos 2001). However, Odysseus suggests that after he **had** crossed the Ocean, and arrived at the confluence of rivers which ‘Circe had described’ [ὄν φράσε Κίρκη] (11.22), he **had** effectively reached Hades. He does not need to travel downwards to reach Hades, and at no point in his narrative is there any suggestion that he needs to move below the surface of the earth, although when he performs his nekuomantic rite, he calls the spirits of the dead up to him from below.

Percy learns that the Underworld maintains its westerly location. **His** teacher Chiron informs him:

‘The entrance to the Underworld is always in the west. It moves from age to age, just like Olympus. Right now, of course, it’s in America.’

‘Where?’

Chiron looked surprised. 'I thought that would be obvious enough. The entrance to the Underworld is in Los Angeles.' (Riordan 2010: 147)

Within the series of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, America is represented by Percy (who is the first person narrator) as the inhabited world: Percy does not really consider the world beyond or outside it. Therefore, the western edge of the inhabited world within this context is the west coast of the North American continent. However, the entrance to the underworld is, as Chiron says, *in* Los Angeles, not beyond it. After Percy's encounter with Procrustes in Los Angeles, he discovers a flier for DOA Recording Studios, with an address and a map. He comments that it is located 'only a block' (Riordan 2010: 282) away from where they are standing and they simply walk there. Interestingly, therefore, this situates the Underworld *within*, rather than beyond, the edge of the western world. Percy does not have to cross a sea to reach it nor does he have to leave the inhabited world. The Underworld proper, however, turns out to be located *below* Los Angeles, following an alternative tradition, such as that in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the **subterranean** nature of the underworld also accounts for a lack of sunlight.

Earthsea's dry land is expressly located at the western edge of the Archipelago. In Le Guin's later Earthsea books, it is located further west than west (Le Guin 2003: 227), but in *The Farthest Shore* Ged is told by the dragon Orm Embar to go to the island of Selidor, and this is the physical place at which he enters the dry land. Ged approaches Selidor by boat, a journey that has taken him further than the known world as he encounters the Children of the Open Sea: 'We have left places behind us. We have sailed off the maps' (Le Guin 1979: 408). However, as he approaches Selidor 'the way ahead' grows 'dark' (439). The island itself is barren and empty: 'beautiful and desolate' (443). On Selidor itself, as **Ged and Arren** come closer to entering the dry land, we are told:

Though it was full summer the wind blew chill, coming from the west, from the endless landless reaches of the open sea. A mist veiled the sky, and no stars shone above the hills on which no hearth-fire or window-light had ever gleamed. (446)

The imagery echoes the last stages of Odysseus' voyage, when 'the sun went down and all the ways were dark' (*Odyssey* 11.12). It also evokes the landscape of the Cimmerians 'covered in mist and cloud' (11.15), where the sun never shines. As Ged follows the dragon onto the western edge of Selidor, moments before he enters the dry land, 'the sun failed and dimmed, though it stood high on a clear sky. A darkness came over the beach' (Le Guin 1979: 452). The dry land, like Hades, is linked to darkness. Ged and his companion do not experience sunlight again until they emerge from the dry land onto Selidor, and the fog clears letting in the view of 'sunlight on the open sea' (472). As Marinatos has observed, Odysseus and his companions leave sunlight on their way to Hades, and only see it again when they return to Circe's island the next morning, therefore 'Odysseus seems to have moved beyond the realm of the sun's orbit when he sails across the ocean to Hades' (Marinatos 2010: 196). This is perhaps indicative of the way in which the dry land, too, is located beyond the normal world, as it is beyond the sun's path. In addition, the dry land is physically beyond the mappable world. Although Ged goes to Selidor to enter the dry land, Orm Embar has expressly told him the location of the wizard he is looking for: 'You will find him on Selidor, but not on Selidor' (Le Guin 1979: 438). The dry land is not itself located on Selidor, although Selidor provides a suitable gateway to enter it. It is beyond, just as the Halls of Hades are beyond the Ocean's stream.

Entering the Land of the Dead

When Odysseus beaches his ship on the far side of the River Ocean, and walks to the place

Circe has described, he carries out the various rituals he was instructed to. This action brings him into contact with the dead who simply appear around him:

They gathered *up* out of Erebus, the souls of the dead who had died.

[αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο

ψυχαὶ ὑπὲρ Ἑρέβου νεκρῶν κατατεθνηώτων] (*Odyssey* 11.25-6)

This first part of his narrative forms the nekuomantic rite: he has come to the right place and does **not** need to enter a particular location; instead, the dead come *up* and gather around him. Those parts of **Odysseus'** narrative which comprise his actual katabasis later on is part of a continuous narration, so there is no point at which he specifically passes through a gateway or entrance.

Percy, however, makes a much more formalised entrance into the underworld. **When** he walks up to the building, he **stands** 'in the shadows of Valencia Boulevard, looking up at gold letters etched in black marble: DOA RECORDING STUDIOS' (Riordan 2010: 283): this is a physical place which he can walk into without any rituals. When he enters the building, he finds himself already in a part of the underworld itself, surrounded by the dead:

The carpet and walls were steel grey [...] The furniture was black leather, and every seat was taken. There were people sitting on couches, people standing up, people staring out the windows or waiting for the elevator. Nobody moved, or talked, or did much of anything. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see them all just fine, but if I focused on any one of them in particular, they started looking [...] transparent. I could see right through their bodies.

(Riordan 2010: 284)

In Percy's description, these dead are in limbo, in a waiting room, before their entry into the underworld proper. This is much more structured and organised than Odysseus' swarms of shades. In the nekuomantic part of Odysseus' narrative, the shades swarm around him in a

chaotic fashion, and there is no distinction between the newly dead and not yet buried (such as his friend Elpenor, who died the morning they left Circe's island) and those shades who died years beforehand, like his mother and the seer Teiresias. In the later, more firmly katabatic part of Odysseus' narrative (particularly lines 568-627), there seems to be limited organisation among the dead. He sees Minos, Tantalus and Sisyphus who are all depicted in the scenery typically associated with their afterlives, but he does not indicate that he has moved around Hades. After speaking to Herakles, whose appearance he describes in detail, Odysseus tells us that the hero 'again went into the house of Hades' [ὁ μὲν αὖτις ἔβη δόμον Ἅϊδος εἴσω], but in contrast 'I waited on the spot just there' [ἐγὼν αὐτοῦ μένον ἔμπεδον] (11.627-8), hoping to see more heroes. This implies that, even during his katabasis, Odysseus' experience of Hades is chaotic and lacking structure: the dead he sees are restless shades who move about freely.

The world of Percy Jackson is explicitly based on Greek, rather than Roman, mythology. However, the organisation of the Underworld is much more organised and landscaped than Odysseus' Hades. Riordan's underworld is divided into different stages: the ferry crossing of the River Styx, the Plains of Judgement, Elysium and Tartarus, and thus it ironically resembles Virgil's more complex underworld geography in the *Aeneid*, even to the extent of incorporating (fictitious) contemporary characters within the mythical world. The most Homeric part of Riordan's underworld is the so-called 'Fields of Asphodel'. This refers to the place which Achilles wanders off to after his meeting with Odysseus:

and the soul of the swift-footed son of Aeacus drifted through the asphodel
meadow in long strides

[ψυχὴ δὲ ποδώκεος Αἰακίδαο

φοῖτα μακρὰ βιβῶσα κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα] (*Odyssey* 11.538-9).

In Riordan's underworld, it is the location where the majority of the dead remain, because

they did not wish to be judged. They exist in a large formless crowd, and they do not move or act: 'a field [...] packed with people [...] there is no noise, no light [...] Whispering masses of people are just milling around in the shadows, waiting for a concert that will never start' (Riordan 2010: 300). This is reminiscent of Achilles' attitude to death: he complains that being king of all the dead is less rewarding than being a living hired farmhand. Riordan has merged a range of traditions to form Percy's experience of the underworld, and Percy sees landmarks which we would think of as typical of the underworld, such as Charon the ferryman, [although they do](#) not appear in Homer [but are](#) later additions [to the myth](#).

Ged's entry to the land of the dead is more mystical than Percy's, although it still contains a recognisable threshold, unlike Odysseus'. Ged waits on the shore of Selidor, and his transition into the land of the dead is otherworldly: 'a darkness gathered into them, that same shapeless darkness that swelled and dimmed the sunlight. [...] It was like an archway or a gate, though dim and without outline; and through it was neither pale sand nor ocean, but a long slope of darkness going down into the dark [...] they went forward into the dry land' (Le Guin 1979: 453-4). Ged seems to go through the threshold, but it also appears to come to him, as the darkness shifts and gathers towards him. Thus, although he makes the step into the dry land, he also seems to call it towards him. The darkness resembles Hades: both locations are beyond the path of the sun. As a result, the dry land itself is bare, and [Arren](#) notices that 'he could make out nothing distinctly, except that he and his companion stood on the slope of a hill, and before them was a low wall of stones, no higher than a man's knee' (455). This landscape is formless and dark, but the wall of stones marks its boundary point (as we learn in *The Other Wind*), which Ged and [Arren](#) must cross to enter the dry land properly. This wall of stones acts as an additional boundary, beyond the sea. It is perhaps equivalent to Odysseus' confluence of rivers, where he is instructed to dig his trench to consult with the dead. While Odysseus thus only stands at the edge of Hades, and waits for

the shades to come to him, Ged and Lebannen cross into the dry land, over the wall of stones, and enter it properly.

Leaving the Land of the Dead

Ged and Arren's journey continues through the dry land. They cross several boundary markers, past the liminal 'wall of stones' (455), through 'the shadows of a shadow city' (456), in a bleak landscape, across a 'dry river' (459), until finally, by climbing the Mountains of Pain, they return to the shore of Selidor. This landscape is mapped out and organised, rather than Odysseus' more formless empty space. The dry land is as barren as Odysseus' Hades, but Ged's journey is more difficult because he must cross it, rather than simply visit it. Once he has reached the dry river he cannot turn back, but must take the only way out, which is through the Mountains of Pain:

They were in the valley directly under the Mountains of Pain. There were rocks underfoot, and boulders about them, [...] as if this narrow valley might be the dry bed of a river of water that had once run here, or the course of a river of fire long since cold, from the volcanoes that reared their black, unmerciful peaks above. (459)

This dry river is symbolic of the dry land as a whole but it also evokes the chthonic river of flaming fire, Pyriphlegethon. Odysseus does not describe this river directly but he narrates Circe's description of it as a boundary point to locate the place in which he should carry out his nekuomantic rite: 'There, into Acheron, flow both Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, which is a branch of the Stygian waters' [ἔνθα μὲν εἰς Ἀχέροντα Πυριφλεγέθων τε ῥέουσι / Κώκυτός θ', ὃς δὴ Στυγὸς ὕδατος ἐστὶν ἀπορρώξ] (*Odyssey* 10.513-4). The dry river is a symbol of the land's sterility: even in Hades there is no suggestion that most of the rivers flow with anything other than water.

When Odysseus first summons up the dead in the pit at the edge of Hades, the dead come up uncontrollably in crowds, and it frightens him: ‘The many shades drifted around the pit in all directions with a clamorous shriek: pale fear seized **me.**’ [οἱ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος / θεσπεσίη ἰαχῇ: ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦραι] (*Odyssey* 11.42-3) The shades drift around and make a terrible noise, perhaps eager to get to the blood which Odysseus has prepared, so he has to defend himself (and the blood) with his sword. Riordan’s dead souls in the Fields of Asphodel resemble Odysseus’ drifting shades to the extent that they ‘will come up to you and speak, but their voices sound like chatter, like bats twittering’ (Riordan 2010: 301). Their noise, however, is not frightening to Percy and his companions. Percy reports that he finds them sad and he feels pity for them **although**, considering Percy’s frequent encounters with bloodthirsty monsters, anything which does not make an attempt against his life holds less fear. Ged and **Arren** also feel no fear of the dead in the dry land, because the dead do nothing, to them or to each other: ‘All those who he saw [...] stood still, or moved slowly and with no purpose’ (Le Guin 1979: 456).

The shades in all three texts drift but **cannot** harm the living. Yet while Percy, Ged and their companions feel pity for the crowds of unidentified dead, Odysseus is terrified. A second sighting of the crowds of the dead causes him ‘pale fear’ again. This makes Odysseus’ final exit from Hades appear not particularly heroic, although it is perhaps Ged and **Arren** who have the hardest task, stopping up the leak in the dry land which has led to the unbalancing of the world. Unlike Percy and Odysseus, they have no divinities looking out for them, guiding them out of the land of the dead. Ged needs to use his powers to change the landscape of the land of the dead, and in so doing, he loses his magery. In reshaping the landscape of the land of the dead, Ged has to use up his powers, and leave them behind in the dry land. He returns to Earthsea as an ordinary human being **whilst his** companion is crowned king. **Le Guin, therefore**, does not conform to the traditional homeward journey of the heroic

quest since *Ged* loses, rather than gains, an essential part of his character.

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