

## Light Within the Darkness

All is dark for the blind, deaf, and mute young man, lying wounded in the healing-chamber of Roke. The future, which was so full of possibility, is suddenly murky, shrouded by a veil of uncertainty and fear: fear of what he has just released unto the world, of himself, and of his own power (LeGuin 64). This young man is Ged, the protagonist of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, a novel by Ursula LeGuin. In the book, the young wizard unleashes a dark evil into the world, and must embark on a quest to defeat the shadow and to find himself. In the poem "In a Dark Time" by Theodore Roethke, the author tells a similar story, focusing on the dual parts of the narrator's being, and the trials endured to accept and join the two halves. Though the circumstances of the speaker of the poem and Ged are dissimilar at first glance, the two works are both fundamentally based in the concept of a journey marked by trials of temptation, during which the hero discovers his identity and the power within himself to change.

A hero's journey is fraught with trials of temptation, and by conquering these trials the hero learns and grows stronger. In the poem, the speaker tells of the darkness of his soul, stating "Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire" (Roethke ln 19). While his outer self, or his "light," is dark, his desires are more so. In the first stanza, the speaker exhibits a dark ambition for power in his assertion that he is "a lord of nature" (Roethke ln 4). Though, in his arrogance, the narrator becomes "a fallen man," as he fights to dominate his shadow, he states that it allows him to "climb out of [his] fear" and thus defeat the darkness of his temptation (Roethke ln 23). Ged also falls victim to such dark desire at Roke, and tries to bring a spirit back from the dead in order to prove his power to his rival at the school. After Ged is struck down by the darkness, he awakes much

later, and speaks with the Archmage about the shadow. The Archmage reminds Ged that on the night of the evil act, he was “moved to do this by pride and hate,” which are undeniably part of Ged’s nature in the beginning of the story (LeGuin 66). As Ged embarks on his journey away from Roke, he keeps this lesson in mind, and wards off other temptations, such as that presented to him by the lady in the Court of Terrenon. Though she offers him great power, he sees through her trick, denies her, and, thus, evades evil, for “It is very hard for evil to take hold of the unconsenting soul” (LeGuin 119). In this way, Ged shows growth and strength of character, and is moved a step further on his quest for his freedom. In this way, both characters, through their triumphs over the evils of the temptations of their own desires, to know their true identity.

A prominent aspect of the journey is the hero’s search for his true self, or his identity. In the poem, “In a Dark Time”, Roethke’s speaker struggles to find his identity. By asking “Which I is I?” Roethke’s narrator illustrates the conflicting halves of the dual self, and the resulting confusion as to which half is one’s true being (In 21). Ged, too, experiences such a conflict with his own identity. When he finally stops running from the shadow and, instead, chases after it, the shadow takes on his own forms and actions. Later, Ged admits to his friend, Vetch, “All my acts have their echo in it; it is my creature” (LeGuin 160). With these words, he shows that each side of his being, both his shadow and his external self, share the same qualities and are forever bound together, as are the dual characteristics of the speaker of the poem. Both characters must fall, and must meet their darker sides in order to discover their true selves, and to become truly free.

At the end of a journey, a hero is enlightened, transformed, and is then able to return to his community to share the gifts of his experience. Roethke's speaker describes himself after accepting his shadow, as "A fallen man, I climb out of my fear. The mind enters itself.... And one is One, free in the tearing wind" (ln 22-24). In taking the final step of the journey, and embracing his inner darkness, in becoming "One," the narrator of the poem is enlightened, freed from the confines of his fear. In knowing both his external self and his shadow, he becomes whole, and therefore, free. Ged, too, transforms in such a way when he confronts his shadow at last. At the world's end, he meets his shadow for the final time, calls it by his own name, and embraces it, unafraid. Though the shadow engulfs him, Ged's light prevails, and in this way, Ged "made himself whole.... knowing his whole true self [he] cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself" (LeGuin 180). In both the poem and the novel, the protagonists find pure enlightenment and freedom in their transformation, and acceptance of their identity. Thus, each is prepared for anything that the future holds, for in knowing oneself lies the greatest strength of a hero.

When Ged slowly awakens after his first encounter with the shadow, he opens his eyes to clearly see his way in this new dark time. At the beginning of this new journey, his spirit is weakened, but he does not allow this weakness to remove him from the path he discovers with his new-found sight. For Ged, and for all heroes in a dark time, "the eye begins to see" (Roethke ln 1). In this way, these heroes find light within the darkness and are able to take the first step on the journey to freedom.