

\* To really emigrate to Otherwhere, you must literally get out of yourself while somehow remaining inside yourself.  
Joanna Russ, 46 Highland Ave., Binghamton, N.Y. 13905

16 May 1975

Dear Tip,

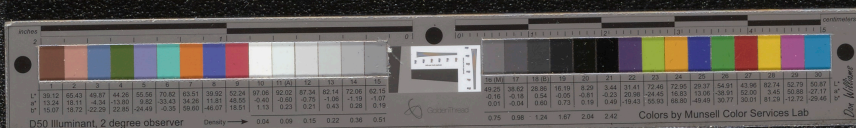
Some afterthoughts.

The trouble with emigration is there is nowhere to go. I spent most of my adolescence and my 20's trying to get there, but it's quite impossible, sort of going clinically mad and when you do that, Otherwhere is NOT the place you get to.\* My favorite Otherwhere was Arkham and vampire films for a while, but the trouble is that nothing can happen there that isn't--in the last analysis--stale and familiar, despite the beautiful scenery. And one only sees the place in flashes because if you cease looking out of the corner of your eye, it's gone. Like The Mysterious East, &c. We are hooked, will-we, nill-we, into here-and-now, and the emigrants can only retrace the old teeny-tiny parish of fantasy, make the old gestures, and say ~~the~~ the old, old words. And that is, basically, what I have against Ursula. AND Tolkien. I read the Lord of the Rings innumerable times, then woke up one morning clear-headed and nauseated, unable to look the books in the face again. As C.S. Lewis said in one of his fits of common sense, all these fantasy books ~~begin~~ better than they end (because there's no action that can match the world). The real heroic epics are not fantasies or escape literature; I've just finished Grettir's Saga--it's entirely another kettle of fish and basically realistic.

So I was driven out, eventually, by boredom more than anything else, and found that the real world is all there is. Of course people are very willing to pay for pain-killers, especially when they dress themselves up as something else, or are mingled with something else. But the disease goes on all the same--worse, even. I just can't bear the stuff any more. So I went back to Shaw and Brecht and re-read the interlude in Man and Superman several times. It is, in the end, such a damned tiny kingdom, despite all the promises of wonders and marvels. You yourself never wrote about it & neither did I, for all my desires to get into it; somehow one must either leave one's brains behind or go into the long-ago-and-far-away business and I just don't believe it. You can't get inside a story, no matter how you try. To do Ursula justice, her last two books are realism, basically. If there's any divinity it's in the here-and-now and in us, but I no longer feel even tolerant of escape. There's a kind of mounting addiction problem with it.

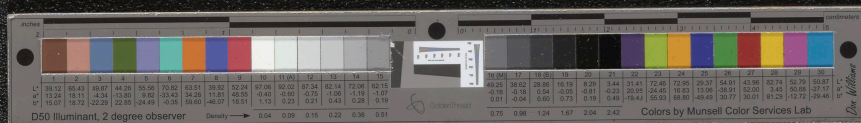
And about the solidarity of pain--ah yes, but who is hurting whom? If A is tromping on B's instep and B is gouging out A's eye, they're both hurting. Yet they're hurting each other. Which is why I keep recurring to money and power, money and power, class and race, over and over again. We can all be hurting dreadfully and still happily engaged in murdering one another, and appeals to our solidarity only mean that the business of why is glossed over. Social analysis and science may not be enough, but it's all there is. All.

And when I see someone who calls herself a feminist totally unable to project an image of female activity and female consciousness, all I can think is that she is so damaged by sexism and so afraid of finding it out that she can only image herself as a man. Certainly she's developing extraordinarily in the last few years as an artist and goodness knows what may come out of it, but I feel very strongly that her fame is not



due only to her good qualities, but to her limitations as well. She is not only good; she's safe. If you hear the voice of envy in this, it's certainly there. I do envy her immensely. I don't, of course, know the price she's paid. But she seems to me chained to ~~the~~ the past, or rather to a false image of the past in which one is "inside the song" as Tolkien says. This can work in lyric verse but it simply won't do in story-telling. Each of her books seems to me a battleground between accuracy and real details (on the one hand) and on the other a central action which is evasive, romantic, glamorous, and unreal. And a third thing: the pure lyric moments, outside of time, which can sometimes be splendid, but which are completely disjointed from the realities. One of the odd things about her work (and it's very striking) is that there is no comedy in it and no wit. As one who grew up with both and admires both (and Delany is likewise full of wit, if not comedy) I find this symptomatic of a lack of something; comedy is destructive, in a sense, and wit analytical, and without them (however ghastly a form they may take) one's missing half one's brain; there's some refusal to look things in the face or analyze them. It shouldn't be possible to destroy a real creation by one epigram; yet in "Bored of the Rings" (a dreadful book, mostly) I remember Arrow Shirt, son of Arrowroot, with immense pleasure because (alas) it says everything about Aragorn and says it economically. Likewise Velveeta the Evening Star in Lothbrien, one of the more queasy-making episodes of the book. And much of what Ursula writes is especially susceptible to this kind of puncturing. It seems to me that until recently she's been ignoring her own real profession (which is that of mother and housewife) and her own experiences for experiences she'd like to have--as you say, an emigrant--and it's all false, false, false. They work again and again as separate lyric images but they don't move and they don't act. One of the things Dunsany does is to constantly undercut, undercut, undercut, his wit being of the "black" or ghastly sort. And even horror won't work without that sense of reality somehow underneath it--as witness poor HPL who's pure ritual and very silly. And Eddison himself tries (at least) to use Elizabethan wit, if not comedy, although after one reading I found his books absolutely impossible; nothing but the same stuff over and over again. I would prefer the Greyhound Bus Schedule, I really would. Ursula is getting there, but she's still caught up in what is essentially a kind of daydreamy sloppiness--and her readers love her all the more for it, I think. And (which I can't stand) she is praised for creating male characters--as if she ever did anything else! The women are unreal, including Takver the Always Immensely Supportive who is the only woman in discussions otherwise filled up with men. AND Odo herself, who has never done anything political except write the Prison Letters (that part was real, by the way). If I am on the barricades I don't want somebody emigrating to Faeryland when the going gets rough; no matter how many kudos she gets for it.

Mind you, she's very good at it. But unless you can turn a book round and come back to life with the book inside you, I'm not interested in ~~it~~ it. That's why I love Lem so. And a Pole, too, centuries of being conquered and invaded and burnt and God knows what. Ursula's essay "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" is very beautiful and very well done, but unfortunately it is untrue; Faeryland never changes you because it never happens; it is always about to happen or just has happened or would happen if only--and then the book's over. Far from changing anyone, all these Faeryland books do is confirm us all in our worst prejudices and stupidities. When anything can happen, nothing is interesting, and what comes out of fantasy (I take it that before the 18th century there was no such thing, since there was no idea that certain things were untrue) is the magrest, stupidest, most threadbare re-workings of the oldest possible experiences, cheapened by being taken out of the real social context in which they occurred(once), not "archetypes" (whatever those are) but clichés. No matter how lovely the language. It's like trying to read



Poe; Ketterer's version of "the half-shut eye" in Poe seems to mean that if you squinch your eyes up enough you can manage to convince yourself you see what isn't there, or as somebody else said, whatever's too silly to be written as prose can be written in blank verse (or sung). Mary Shelley tries to do it and falls flat on her face (The Last Man, q.v.--my GOD, what a bore!). It can't be done, in fact, and no one has ever succeeded in doing it. At best you have that out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye business, and then Melville comes along and with one sentence steps flat on poor Poe and annihilates him by sheer contrast.

And these people then talk about Jung and archetypes, by which I think they mean an atemporal, apolitical, asocial realm in which things happen automomously all by themselves--a sort of Platonic Realm of Ideas--this is just the "new criticism" of the 1950's driven into rationalizing itself by mythical/anthropological nonsense. If there are any archetypes they are rooted in our material biology, which produces our experience, and until somebody can demonstrate that to me, I politely decline to believe in them, especially when they are applied to things like Supermen in comic books which, far from bearing any kinship to Beowulf (which is a very sophisticated work) are degraded, stupidified, instant-kitsch, and serve very obvious social purposes.

If there were really a place to emigrate to, I'd be there myself, but it just ain't so. That's the trouble. It hit me some time in my late twenties that I was reading the same story over and over and that it was I who supplied all the reality, not the author. And I began to resent it.

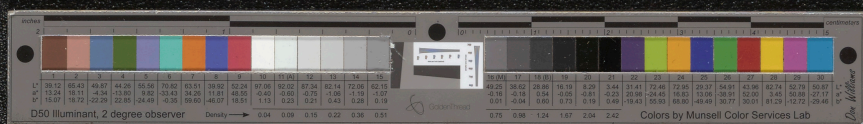
Ursula is popular not because she's bad (she isn't bad) but because she's not good enough. And she has the verbal skill to hide that fact; at least for a while. Daydreams don't satisfy; that's what's wrong with them. Believe me, I'm a ~~xxx~~ veteran. It is better to build bombs on your cellar and blow yourself up, if you must.

I am getting so that when I hear the word "Jung" I wince. It is always anti-reality, whenever I've met it. Nothing is simply a repetition of what's gone before--and if it were, who needs talent? Or verbal skill? Or imagination? It's all there already.

Now Ursula is obviously torn between realism and something else, with realism winning. But anyone who can say that we've had enough confessional literature (we've had very little) and we must start finding alternatives is a God damned fool. There are three thousand years of art and not a mother/daughter portrait in the lot--are we to pretend that none of this has ever happened? I think Ursula's nervous about the whole business and afraid to unleash the demons. Being a part-time demon myself, that particular thing doesn't make me nervous. For example, the dumping on Kate Millett's book, Flying, which is partly because it's "pornographic" (?) and mostly because it is not an attractive book, filled with guilt, and yet for goodness' sake, it's not a novel. But real lives are too trivial and dirty and icky for Litrachoor. Better we should all go up into the sky and become characters in legend and reconcile everybody with everybody and go tell it to the welfare mothers.

I'm beginning to understand some of Brecht's more vicious sallies against Byooty. Which was the form escapism took in his day, I guess.

Of course I don't say any of this in public, but I feel it as passionately as I can feel anything. There is nothing like reality. In fact,



there's nothing else but reality. This ~~isn't~~ often dreadful, but still it's so. I am very glad I had three years writing plays because in plays the falseness shows instantly--you simply can't ~~x~~ pull that Boromir son of Whatsit stuff on the stage and not fall on your face within two lines.

I don't think it's any accident that the archetype of the Hero is suddenly being rediscovered all over the place. This archetype business is the ~~apix~~ religion of a middle class that has no real religion; believe me, I've seen it in Academia over and over and over again and it makes me sick.

I suppose at bottom I have gotten very wary of pain--there are so many people who are in pain, and so many who use it to entrap and hurt others and so many who cling to privilege in spite of it. Tolkien may have been an emigrant but he was also a Pillar of Empire, my dear, and one of those English who think everybody who isn't Anglo-Saxon is a wog and ought to be kept down at least and (possibly) destroyed. And that map! England and the Kaiser all over again. So what do ~~ya~~ we find in the realm of Faery? Racism, nationalism, patrioteering, sexism, add as ~~may~~ many as you choose. It is so infinitely seductive and it never delivers a Single Damned Thing.

Which is why I am beginning to loathe emigrants, far from sympathizing with them. It may be a very refined form of heroin, but that's all it is. I don't see how anybody with 1/10 of a brain can find Lindsay's ~~x~~ ARCTURUS, for example, even readable, except as a directed daydream, and directed daydreams only confirm the worst in us; they must be based on the least common denominator. In fact, I wrote a paper about the whole thing, which I am sending you with this (!!!!!!!). It hit me all at once & is my first scholarly paper, very sloppy.

Naturally this is For Your Eyes Only (Isn't that the title of a James Bond story?). I ought not to belabor Ursula with it. She is, apparently, a delightful, intelligent, and thoroughly charming person, and in another couple of books ~~x~~ may astound us ~~x~~ all, if we can only keep off her neck. (Translation: I ought to keep off her neck.) But on this subject I am intransigent; suddenly Jungians and folklorists of an archetypal cast of mind are sprouting from the woodwork.

(typo) *Urhtypal.*

Really, really, really, the world isn't divided into Victims and Victimizers. Yes, there are some cruddy people who do step on faces with their boots, but then I have stepped on faces, too (not many, I guess) and often come down in Righteous Wrath on some poor, bleating student who was being snotty to me, and so on and so on. So if the hurt got together, who'd be left outside except some sociopaths?

*(or something like);*

Anyway, you must steel your heart and become a Marxist; then you will understand why things are as they are, or at the very least, you will start thinking in terms of power and privilege and money, which are so bloody important.

Hope I didn't send you the paper ~~x~~ before. Probably. Don't send it back, anyhow; I have too many.

I'M not writing, so it doesn't bother me, letters I mean. Maybe you are. You don't have to answer. (I mean, no requirement at this end.)

*Ursula doesn't write Day-Dream lit.  
But there are patches + the tendency  
is there.*

*Love,  
Joanna*

