

**The Dragon's Map:  
Guiding and rousing the poet**

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## i. Abstract

This thesis inhabits territory between the work of the literary critic and the reflective creative writer. Employing a meditative and creatively recursive method of analysis, it considers how poets often write from within the confines of a provocative playlet, and see the world from the sanctuary of their memories of their childhood home, focused by an inner eye. Borrowing judiciously from Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, the thesis calls this way of composing creative work 'visiting her dragons'. As a result of such 'visits', a poet's work incorporates the slow, building, climaxing, revelation of drama in an alternative world whose laws of motion escape her full control.

The thesis also defends the claim that significant (valuable, novel or fitting) poetic lines germinate in ordered subjective scenes, generally 'inhabited' by that author. Original poems spring from a writer occupying an imagined scene's space and structure, though are hardly deducible from it. The poet becomes a character in her own daydream scenario, one which grows circuitously from her mesmerising mythos of home and provides the feeling, image, and thought that lets her 'find the words' rather than making them up out of nowhere—or merely rehashing what she<sup>1</sup> has read. In it she can 'rewrite history' if she wishes. This process becomes specific to a given work, and tends to point beyond the quotidian and the charted. A new, singular scene makes a space in the mind for both imaginative and critical thought. Further, such scenes are communicable to readers, however imperfectly, because they connect in various ways to readers' own experiences of and understandings of home. This is important not least because it emphasises how centrally connected poetry is to human experience in the world, and to sensory modes of apprehension.

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<sup>1</sup> In this work I reverse the ancient practice of using the pronouns 'he' for the poet and 'she' for the reader—rather than employing 'he' throughout, the clumsy 'he or she', 'he/she', s/he', etc.

This thesis also pursues questions such as how imaginal scenes grow from the writer's sense of place and origin ('home'); how they join with other influences; how they are disciplined into a work; and how they are transferred in verbal form to a reader. Images are central, as the poet may be alienated or distanced from the 'real' world and yet, because of that 'exile', able to see it in some perspective while still empathising with it and its inhabitants. The poet is thus impelled to set out her impressions imaginatively and the act of writing is an 'emergent' or unpredictable product of a special sort of daydream. The writer's 'history' of daydreaming, with its developing scenes, is at first 'naïve' but must become 'lucid': a mental state she is acutely aware of; a daydream she feels she must revisit and structure or discipline (though flexibly) in order to go on writing. That demands a great deal of conceptual criticality and, conversely, of motivating passion and empathy—a 'critical empathy' (or critical immersion). She must feel and construct at the same time. And whenever we start a new project, we start from what we feel we really know: the concept of 'home' mentioned above. Without home, we have nowhere to begin, no anchor. With it we may make positive change, even revolution.

The discussion of these issues is supported by an interpretation of English-language poetry and (to a lesser degree) examples of poetic prose / prose poetry, taken mostly from c.1920-2000. Each of these works amply illustrates that an imaginal scene partaking of home was important for the writer's *poesis*. It also includes a consideration of the origins of the author's own poetry, as a kind of case study providing evidence for the thesis's conclusions. The thesis as a whole is part literary criticism and literary theory—and, more generally, an attempt to arrive at an illuminating view of that fascinating conundrum, literary creativity.

## ii. Certificate of Authorship

Except where clearly acknowledged in footnotes, quotations and the bibliography, I certify that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted today entitled ‘The Dragon’s Map: Guiding and rousing the poet’.

I further certify that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. The material in the thesis has not been the basis of an award of any other degree or diploma except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The thesis complies with University requirements for a thesis as set out in the *Examination of Higher Degree by Research Theses Policy*.



Candidate’s Signature

1 November 2018



Primary Supervisor’s Signature

31 October 2018

### **iii. Acknowledgments**

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All errors are my own.

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