

# Redemption of the Divine: The Feminine Spirit in Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle

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*The paper is an investigation of aspects of the archetype of spirit that are represented by a female image. To this end, the Earthsea Cycle by Ursula K. Le Guin is discussed. It is shown that the image of dragons represents a primal and wild aspect of the human spirit. Through an image of a wounded girl-child who embodies the dragon-energy, spirit is reborn from below. The girl mediates between the world of spirit and the material world. Renewed consciousness of the reality of a spiritual realm redeems the materialism and inflated belief in human power of our time.*

During my training as a Jungian analyst at the Jung Institute in Copenhagen, I wrote my final article on the topic of the light and dark aspects of the human spirit symbolized by the contrasting pair of the white and the black magician in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea novels (Gitz-Johansen 2020a). In this article, I briefly commented on the fact that the figure of the magician is a male figure.

Although I recognized that the question of the female aspect of spirit is central to the last two books of the series, I nevertheless refrained from discussing this topic any further. At the time, my intention was not to engage with the question of a female representation of spirit, since it did not feel particularly relevant to me personally. The dreams I had at the time featured male magicians, so I did not feel called upon to include a female image of the human spirit. However, some months after I had finished working on the magician article, I had the following dream, which prodded me to engage with the meaning of a feminine symbolization of spirit:

*I am in a medieval town. I walk through a town gate leading to a long market street. I sneak into a house where a dragon lives. The dragon is sleeping. In the house a young woman, who is perhaps a princess, is held captive by the dragon. I lead her out of the house, but the dragon wakes up and pursues us. It is huge. We run down the street with the dragon after us. We arrive at some old church ruins, which descend as vaulted caverns and corridors into the ground. I help the young woman down into the ruins and we try to flee into them and hide there. However, the dragon pursues us by burrowing through the ruins with its claws. We suddenly enter an underground church in which a female priest is speaking to a large group of people. I get the feeling that she is a kind of superior priest, perhaps a bishop. She is wearing bright gowns inlaid with patterns of gold. Her hair is light brown. The dragon burrows its way into the church. The female priest calmly notices its arrival, and with a few words or perhaps only one word, she completely dispels any threat from the dragon.*

This dream left me very puzzled. What does the dragon symbolize? Who is the female superior priest who with one word can dismiss the threat from the dragon? I felt certain that the image of a female priest points to an aspect of the human spirit that I had not dealt with in the magician article. This assumption is supported by Jung's mention of the figure of the priest alongside the magician as an image of the human spirit. (Jung 1948/1959, CW 9.1, § 398) But what is the difference between a magician and a priest as images of spirit? What is the significance of the priest's gender, since she is clearly female whereas the magicians of my essay were all male? Finally, what is the relationship between the female priest and the dragon since she could so effortlessly eliminate its threat? I felt I needed to return to Le Guin's Earthsea universe to answer these questions, and this time investigate the symbolic meaning of the female spiritual characters rather than the all-male magicians.

## “The feminine”

It is necessary to present a few considerations about how I use the gendered terms “female” and “male”. In order to avoid falling into what Rowland calls “essentialist views of innate femininity or masculinity” (2002, p. 32), I suggest that the terms “female” and “male” are decoupled from actual women and men. Instead, the terms describe certain qualities, which may be embodied by women and men alike. Such use of the terms is congruent with the fact that the content of the terms masculinity and femininity is far from culturally and historically fixed or stable. Baring and Cashford point out that the meaning of the terms has varied vastly across cultures and historic periods:

“The terms ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, ‘female’ and ‘male’ have been given so many different nuances of meaning down the ages and have been the repository of so much unconscious projection that they are now utterly ambiguous until a context is provided. (...) we intend the terms ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ to refer to a way of being or a mode of consciousness available to *both* men and women.” (Baring and Cashford 1991, p. 284)

I suggest that we understand the terms *feminine* and *masculine* not as essentialist understandings of what it means to be a woman and a man, but rather some ways of being and acting, which in certain periods and cultures have been regarded as *masculine* and *feminine*. Both the Earthsea universe and my own dream are products of a Western psyche and cultural consciousness, and as such they reproduce certain gendered ideas of feminine and masculine, which may look different and even reversed in another cultural and historical context.

## Magic and spirit

In the earlier essay, I followed Jung’s lead by regarding the figure of the magician as an image of the human spirit. More precisely, it is the image of magic, which symbolizes the human spirit,

whereas the figure of the magician symbolizes *a specific relation to or attitude towards spirit*. This distinction allows spirit (magic) to remain an essentially ineffable archetypal energy, whereas the variations of the figure of the magician allow us to discuss different ways of using and relating to spirit.

I have elsewhere given an account of Jung's understanding of the phenomenon of spirit (Gitz-Johansen 2020b), but a few words are needed here about what is meant by the word "spirit". Le Guin's description of magic in the documentary "Worlds of Ursula K Le Guin" (Curry 2018) gives a clue:

"I am a writer, I use words, and by knowing the names of things I do magic. I do make up things that didn't exist before by naming them. I call it Earthsea, and there it is – it exists! So I had this total parallel between wizards and artists to play with."

Elsewhere she states: "Wizardry is artistry. The [Earthsea] trilogy is then, in this sense, the creative experience, the creative process." (Le Guin 1975, p. 11) Spirit is then closely associated with the creative capacity of the human psyche. This understanding of magic is close to how the word "spirit" is used in the title "The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature" (Jung 1966, CW 15). The editorial note at the beginning of this volume states the following about the content of the book: "The source of scientific and artistic creativity in archetypal structures, and particularly in the dynamics of the 'spirit archetype', forms an essential counterpoint to the theme underlying this collection of essays." (Jung 1966, CW 15, p. v) Hence, spirit is an autonomous archetypal energy, which fuels creative thinking and new ideas, whether they take the shape of artistic products, philosophical or religious ideas, or new scientific concepts and paradigms. This is the archetype of spirit, which inspires scientists, artists, philosophers, intellectuals, and theologians alike. Due to the

influence of such inspired individuals or groups, spirit works in the world and participates in the shaping of human life and history.

## The discovery of Earthsea

One may ask why it is relevant to study a work of fantasy fiction, which takes place in an entirely imaginary world. In order to answer this question, it is relevant to turn to Le Guin's process of writing the Earthsea books, which shows a striking similarity with the Jungian method of active imagination. Le Guin explains the following about her inventions of the Earthsea universe: "I didn't plan anything, I found it." When asked where she found it, she replies: "In my subconscious." (Le Guin 1975, p. 6) To Le Guin, Earthsea is not a conscious invention, but it is something she found inside her imagination and simply went on to explore as a writer of fiction: "I did not deliberately invent Earthsea. I did not think 'Hey wow - islands are archetypes and archipelagos are super-archetypes and let's build us an archipelago.' I am not an engineer, but an explorer. I discovered Earthsea." (Le Guin 1975, p. 7) Elsewhere, Le Guin puts further words to the process of discovering Earthsea: "I don't feel so much as if I was making it up. I know I am. But that isn't what it feels like. It feels like being there. And looking around and listening." (Curry 2018) In an interview from 1988, Le Guin explains further how to her writing is closely connected to her unconscious, since her writing draws on the same resources as dreams: "While I'm actually writing a book, I tend not to have very vivid dreams. It is as if the material is going into the writing." (Le Guin 2008, p. 61)

Le Guin's way of writing is less a process of making things up consciously but rather a process of sinking down and looking around inside her imagination. This is very similar to Jung's process of writing the Red Book. As Jung writes: "there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life." (Jung 1963/1983, p. 207) My reason for analyzing Le Guin's fantasy books is that, just as Jung gained psychological insights from his encounter with inner figures, we may learn some psychological truths by studying the

material that Le Guin discovered in her imagination and crafted into stories. In our case, the “truth” we are after is to learn what the female characters that arose from Le Guin’s imagination can teach us about the phenomenon of spirit and our way of relating to it.

## The gendering of Earthsea

The fictional world of Earthsea may be entirely imaginary but since it is a product of a specific psyche, which in turn is embedded in a specific cultural context, some of the cultural consciousness unconsciously spills over from the real world and into the fictional world. In the original Earthsea trilogy, it is the male protagonists who play the active roles in the story, and magic is the domain of magicians, who are all male. The female counterpart to the magicians is the witches, but their magic is described as weak, and not much is said about it in the story. After the publication of the last book in the original trilogy in 1972, Le Guin was made aware by feminist commentators that her fantasy novels reflected the patriarchal values of contemporary society. This made her reflect on how her own unconscious beliefs about gender influenced her writing. Although a woman herself, she realized that she had written the story from a male perspective, with a male hero and protagonist, and even with a denigrating attitude towards women’s place in the world (a comment about magic in Earthsea is: “Weak as a woman’s magic. Wicked as a woman’s magic.”). Le Guin reflects on this in an interview from the time between the first trilogy and the last books:

“The Earthsea books as feminist literature are a total, complete bust. From my own archetypes and from my own cultural upbringing I couldn’t go down deep and come up with a woman wizard. Maybe I’ll learn to eventually, but when I wrote those I couldn’t do it. I wish I could have.” (Curry 2018)

Le Guin acknowledges that the first three Earthsea books reproduce the dominant cultural and literary attitudes towards women of their time. Even though she tried, she found herself unable to access an image of a female magician, which could have continued the story and challenged the

prevailing gender stereotypes in the fictional world of Earthsea and her own contemporary society (USA). Because of this inability, Le Guin experienced a 16-year period in which she was unable to continue the Earthsea story although she tried.

### The scorched child

In the documentary “Worlds of Ursula K Le Guin”, Le Guin reflects on how the process that eventually enabled her to begin the work on the fourth book was deep and transformational for her as a person and as a writer:

“It was a radical revision from within of my whole enterprise in writing, and for a while, I thought it was going to kind of silence me. But I think that if I hadn’t gone through with it and learned how to write from my own being as a woman I probably would have stopped writing.”

Le Guin (1993) writes that the event, which enabled her to continue the Earthsea story, was the emergence in her mind of an image of a female child. The girl was pushed into a fire by a group of men and left to die, which left the right side of her face and body horribly scorched by the fire. This girl is called Tehanu, which became the title of the fourth book. Le Guin writes about Tehanu’s role in her writing process: “She was the key to this book. Until I saw [Tehanu], until she chose me, there was no book.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 19) After the appearance of the girl, the story began to unfold through her writing process rather than through any conscious plan: “While I was writing *Tehanu*, I didn’t know where the story was going. I held on, held my breath, closed both eyes, sure I was falling.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 26)

In order to understand the role of the figure of Tehanu in the Earthsea story and in Le Guin’s writing process, Jung’s discussions of the child archetype are relevant. Jung points out that

the image of an abandoned and neglected child is an archetypal image, which brings renewal and redemption into the personal and cultural consciousness. He writes of the child archetype:

“Abandonment, exposure, danger, etc. are all elaborations of the ‘child’s’ insignificant beginnings and of its mysterious and miraculous birth. This statement describes a certain psychic experience of a creative nature, whose object is the emergence of a new and as yet unknown content. In the psychology of the individual there is always, at such moments, an agonizing situation of conflict from which there seems to be no way out – at least for the conscious mind, since as far as this is concerned, *tertium non datur* [no third possibility is given]. But out of this collision of opposites the unconscious psyche always creates a third thing of an irrational nature, which the conscious mind neither expects nor understands.” (Jung 1951/1959, CW 9.1, § 285)

Jung continues by saying that it is characteristic of the child archetype that danger and hardship surround its birth and that the child is exposed to early abandonment: “Nothing in the world welcomes this new birth, although it is the most precious fruit of Mother Nature herself, the most pregnant with the future, signifying a higher stage of self-realization.” (Jung 1951/1959, CW 9.1, § 285) It is as if the truly new thing that is born into the world cannot expect to be welcomed or cherished by the old world and its established consciousness. Tehanu is no exception to this, to which the scorched half of her face and body testifies.

### The sacred as empty

If Tehanu is a redemptive symbol, which situation is she redeeming? My suggestion is that the answer to that question is to be found in the second book of the series, *The Tombs of Atuan*. The main character of this book is Tehanu’s adoptive mother, Tenar, who as a child is identified as the reborn High Priestess of divine powers called The Old Powers of the Earth. She is brought to an



ancient temple site called The Tombs of Atuan. Here she is brought up to serve as the spiritual head of the community of priestesses who live at this site.

The image of religion and worship presented in this book is not positive, to say the least. Of the graves, which is one of most holy places of the site, we learn: “It was a dreary place. Even in the heat of noon in the desert summer there was a coldness about it.” (2018, p. 149) Slaves are regularly brought to the site to be sacrificed to the Old Powers of the Earth. Another of the most central and holy places is the throne; here, The Empty Throne stands as the earthly seat of the powers. It is significant that the throne of the old powers is called The Empty Throne; the entire religious site with its temples and sacred places seems meaningless and empty. The godly powers are referred to as The Nameless Ones, which further signifies the meaninglessness of the worship. The site lies in the middle of a desert and Le Guin writes: “The Place was guarded and defended by emptiness, by solitude.” (2018, p. 172) The all-female community at the enclosed and isolated sacred site is ridden with jealousy, petty power struggles, and, for those in a low position in the strict hierarchy, fear of punishment for minor transgressions. The relationship between Tenar and an older priestess, Kossil, who is formally her inferior, is full of jealousy and struggles over status and domination. At some point Tenar realizes that the older priestess Kossil does not really view the site as truly sacred but is only concerned with the power that her position gives her. It is not that The Old Powers of the Earth are not real, they are very real, but as the magician Ged tells Tenar as he rescues her from her life as a priestess: “They are immortal, but they are not gods. They never were. They are not worth worship of any human soul. (...) They have nothing to give. They have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy.” (2018, p. 211) Tenar realizes the emptiness of her life as a priestess when she has transgressed against the Powers and calls out to them for forgiveness and mercy: “There was no answer. There had never been an answer.” (2018, p. 221) Later, well away from The Tombs of Atuan, Tenar cries about the years she has wasted on

meaningless service to the Old Powers: “She put her head down in her arms and cried, and her cheeks were salt and wet. She cried for the waste of her years in bondage to a useless evil.” (2018, p. 234)

In the world of Earthsea, the Eastern part (in which the Tombs of Atuan lie) is ruled by the Kargs, a highly religious people, whereas the West is ruled by a combination of a high king and the magicians at the magical college on the island of Roke. The East is highly religious, but religion has deteriorated to its most negative aspects, such as a vehicle for personal power and wealth. The Kargish priests first proclaimed themselves priest-kings and later god-kings. Thus, the men in power have put themselves in the place of the gods: “The High Priests made themselves into the Priest-Kings, and then (...) the Priest-Kings made the empire and began to call themselves Godkings.” (2018, p. 238)

The West, on the other hand, is atheist, and they do not venerate any gods. The Kargs call it “the godless West”. The priestess Kossil says of the magicians of the West: “They have no gods. They work magic, and think they are gods themselves.” (2018, p. 174) Thus, in both the East and the West people have exalted themselves to a position that used to belong to the divine powers. The divine powers themselves have been forgotten and repressed. It is in this situation that Tehanu emerges as a redeeming symbol.

### A new priestess

As mentioned, Le Guin felt unable to continue the story after the first trilogy. She tells about how the figure of Tehanu enabled her to carry the story onwards from the first trilogy: “I couldn’t see the story till I could look through her eye. But which one, the seeing or the blind?” (Le Guin 1993, p. 19) A key to understanding the meaning of the figure of Tehanu is to understand what she “sees” with her burned away right eye. Tenar, the child’s adoptive mother, muses about this question but without finding an answer: “At that moment Tenar first asked herself how [Tehanu] saw her - saw

the world - and knew she did not know: that she could not know what one saw with an eye that had been burned away.” (2018, p. 465) Le Guin also ponders this question: “What can the blind eye teach the seeing eye?” (Le Guin 1993, p. 21) And she provides an answer: “[Tehanu], blinded, sees with the eye of the spirit as well as the eye of the flesh. (...) For a long time we’ve been seeing with only one eye. We’ve blinded the woman’s eye, said it doesn’t see anything worth seeing.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 25) This remark gives us the clue to the nature of Tehanu. She is a person who through her missing eye can see through the “eye of the spirit”, and can therefore connect with the “other world” through what Le Guin calls a “double vision” (Le Guin 1993, p. 20). This “other world” is clearly not a physical world, but rather a spiritual reality, which exists parallel to the physical reality.

In this respect, Tehanu has similarities with the tarot card called The High Priestess, which is the third card of the major arcana. K. F. Jensen writes of the symbol of The High Priestess in the tarot deck: “She is the passive medium between the earthly and the spiritual realm. (...) She inspires dreams and visions, and she is the source of intuitive wisdom. Through her the divine can manifest here on Earth.” (Jensen 1983, p. 87, my translation) In her treatise on tarot, Rachel Pollack writes of the card’s symbolism: “The High Priestess herself represents a deeper, more subtle aspect of the female; that of the dark, the mysterious and the hidden.” (Pollack 2007, p. 37) The High Priestess sits between two pillars, a white one and a black one, representing her place between the conscious and unconscious mind. She is a guardian and medium of mystical insight and of intuitive perception by means of her receptivity towards another world than the external world of the senses. According to Pollack, The High Priestess stands in contrast to the figure of the magician (the second card of the major arcana) whose attitude to spiritual energies is to attempt to control them and use them to his own purposes. In contrast to the active, use-oriented and extroverted attitude of the magician, The High Priestess adopts a more passive and receptive attitude, which guides her

attention inwards to the spiritual world rather than towards goals in the outer world. She mediates between these two realities by receiving messages from “the other world” and delivering them to the material world, which is the function of an oracle, a seer and a medium.

I am not sure whether the word “passive” is most appropriate to describe the attitude of The High Priestess. The word connotes an inert and lethargic attitude, which is not a suitable description. She may be outwardly passive but I imagine that she is inwardly active, although it may be a different kind of activity than what we expect from an extroverted attitude. She opens herself up to communication from “the other side”. She notices things moving towards her consciousness from “the other side”. She attunes herself to “the other world”. She actively allows something to come forward and speak through her. She is inwardly aware and attentive. She realizes whatever is emerging through her. She enters into altered states of consciousness or trances, in order to set the conscious mind aside and let something else come forward. Thus, perhaps we only describe her attitude as passive because we have few words to describe the inwardly active attitude of The High Priestess.

What is the significance of the redeeming symbol being a female priestess rather than a male priest? In the Tarot, the male counterpart to The High Priestess is The Hierophant. In a different time and culture, the symbolism of male and female religious figures may be different or reversed. As it is, The Hierophant symbolizes religion in the form of established traditions, institutions, orthodoxy, dogma, and doctrines. Like all the cards of the major arcana, this card has both negative and positive aspects. It may support life or it may stifle life, as in the case of the Tombs of Atuan. The fact that Tehanu is a priestess and not a priest shows that spiritual renewal is a rediscovery of a living spirit, which is not a human invention or under human control, and which is not identical to religious traditions and institutions. The living spirit can be called “the archetypes”, “the divine”, “the great spirit”, “The Holy Ghost”, or simply “the divine”, and its rightful place can

be called “Heaven”, “the autonomous psyche”, “the spirit world” or “the other world”. Whichever names we use, the image of The High Priestess tells of an attitude that recognizes spirit as something real and alive, and that communicates with spirit and venerates it as something of importance.

Towards the end of the fourth book, *Tehanu*, we learn that the burned girl is not an ordinary person. She does in fact belong to those extremely rare individuals who are born with a twin nature; she is half human and half dragon. This phenomenon of dragon-people is connected to the very origin of humans and dragons. In the last book of the series, *The Other Wind*, we learn that in a distant mythical time dragons and human were one, but at some point in time, the original dragon-humans divided into two species. One of the species (humans) chose the land and the sea and the ability to build houses and gather possessions. The other species (dragons) chose the air and fire and to remain entirely free without possessions weighing them down and tying them to the ground. In order to understand more about the figure of Tehanu, we must understand more about what the dragons represent symbolically.

### Dragons: The living spirit

Le Guin has written about the connection between the girl and the dragons: “The child who is our care, the child we have betrayed, is our guide. She leads us to the dragon. She is the dragon.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 26) What does this mean? What do the dragons symbolize?

Le Guin admits that she does not actually fully understand the dragons: “The dragons of Earthsea remain mysterious to me.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 22) However, she does write the following about the nature of the dragons of Earthsea: “A wild spirit, dangerous, winged, which escapes and destroys the artificial order of oppression. The dragon is the familiar also, our own imagining, a speaking spirit, wise, winged, which imagines a new order of freedom.” (Le Guin 1993, p. 25-26) To Le Guin, the dragons are a symbol of the wildness inside us, which is the impulses from the

parts of us that is not civilized, tamed, and made conscious. They are impulses from outside of our conscious ego and since Le Guin connects them with destruction of any “artificial order of oppression”, we cannot easily bring them under conscious control.

The dragons of Earthsea have similarities with Freud’s concept of the *id*, which the ego is tasked with bringing under control (often by means of repression). Freud writes of the relationship between the ego and the id: “The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions.” (Freud 1923/2021, p. 24) However, even when successfully repressed, the unconscious impulses of the id tend to guide our lives, which leads Freud to remark: “we are ‘lived’ by unknown and uncontrollable forces.” (Freud 1923/2021, p. 22)

However, whereas Freud’s idea of the id is chaotic and lacking sanity, the dragons of Earthsea are intelligent creatures with a mind of their own. At some point in the Earthsea story, a merchant calls the dragons “mindless beasts”, but the magician Onyx corrects him: “Mindless? They speak the Language of the Making, in the knowledge of which our art and power lies.” (2018, p. 828) Le Guin also states that, although they are wild and untamed beings, dragons are far from mindless and purely destructive. Their nature is in fact closer to speech and creation than that of any other beings:

“The dragons are beautiful, and also mortal, as tigers are. Long-lived, but not indestructible. Terrible, but not monstrous. Fierce, fiery, careless of human life, sometimes careless of their own lives. Destructive when angry, very much to be feared, and untameably wild. Mysterious, as all great wild creatures are mysterious. But not incomprehensible. Speech is natural to them, inborn: they don’t have to learn it, as we do. Their language, the only one they will speak, is the tongue that wizards

must learn, the tongue that works magic, the True Speech, the language of the Making.” (2018, p. 388)

This description of the dragons as the wild source of all creation is close to Jung’s portrayal of the archetype of spirit, which he often describes as ambiguous, since it is both life-giving as the source of all creativity and inspiration, and a ruthless and potentially destructive force (Gitz-Johansen 2020b). The eruption of spirit may cause wars and exhaust its human vehicles (Jung 1989), but it is also the source of creativity and renewal of the collective consciousness.

### The dragon-girl

Tehanu, being both human and dragon, embodies the spiritual energy of the dragons. She appears as a shy, silent, and softly spoken figure, and the scorched half of her face is often hidden behind her hair. The fact her hair covers part of her face like a veil gives Tehanu a likeness to the Egyptian goddess Isis, who is sometimes depicted with a veil covering her face. Pollack mentions that the tarot card The High Priestess is sometimes referred to as “Veiled Isis” (Pollack 2007, p. 36), which supports a view of Tehanu as an image of The High Priestess.

In *Women’s Mysteries* Esther Harding writes the following about the symbolic meaning of the veil of Isis: “The robe or veil of Isis is the ever-changing form of nature, whose beauty and tragedy veil the spirit from our eyes.” (Harding 1955/1982, p. 181) The veil of Isis is symbolic of the spiritual mysteries that are hidden behind the veil of the material world. Harding points out that the veil hides another world, which is the world of spirit. According to Harding, a part of the spiritual mystery connected with Isis is that access to the spiritual realm is not through the rational mind. It is not by means of reasoning, speculation, and concentrated mental effort that the mysteries are revealed. For Isis, the realm of the spirit is contacted and brought forth through the

body: “The real, the eternal is a different kind of reality, which is, however, ‘bodied forth’ (...) in the interplay of this world’s forces.” (Harding 1955/1982, p. 182) This aspect of the mysteries of the veiled Isis (the embodiment of spirit) is reflected in the figure of Tehanu, whose spiritual (dragon) nature is not connected to intellectual learning and the faculties of the mind but rather to her body. Her dragon nature is generally invisible but it is felt through the strong heat that emanates from her body: “A wave of warmth, heat, seemed to flow from the child, as if she were in fever.” (2018, p. 425-426) When a young magician, Alder, meets her as a young adult, her touch is as hot as a fever: “He touched his hand to hers, palm to palm. Hers was hot, fever hot.” (2018, p. 800) The heat of Tehanu’s body is connected with her dragon nature. It signifies that her power is not taught from books or by instruction from learned magicians; it is a part of her being and it suffuses her body like a burning heat.

This embodied aspect of the spirit is a mystery even to the magicians. Tenar asks Ged, the former Archmage of Roke: “Magic means the skills, the arts of wizards, of mages?” He answers: “What else would it mean?” Tenar answers with the question: “Is that all it could ever mean?” (2018, p. 454) The answer to Tenar’s question, which Ged does not provide, is to be found in the figure of Tehanu: an embodied aspect of spirit, which is hidden behind a veil, and poorly understood by those who mainly value the creative and intellectual aspects of spirit. As Tenar remarks: “We don’t even know what a woman’s power is.” (2018, p. 528)

## The other realm

Throughout the last two books of the series, Tehanu is a quiet person who keeps in the background of the big events. The moment when her true purpose is revealed is at a time when the dragons have come from their faraway islands and are attacking human settlements, setting roofs on fire and burning crops. The humans are unable to defend themselves against dragons. Only the greatest of the magicians would be able to defeat a dragon, and it is mentioned that only one such magician is



presently living. The High King rides out to meet the attacking dragons and it is Tehanu who is able to parley with the dragons. At this moment, she functions as a medium as she mediates between the two races.

Recognizing her as one of their own, one of the attacking dragons tells Tehanu the reason for the dragons' anger. The original homeland of the dragons is in a realm to which humans can only go in spirit. We learn that the individual spirit of a human being passes through this land when they die. Only magicians are able to travel to this land before they die, but as one magician points out, they cannot go to this land in their body: "It is a spirit journey." (2018, p. 766) This other realm is the realm of spirit. It is a world that exists parallel to but separate from our material world. This realm is what is alluded to by the title of the last Earthsea book: *The Other Wind*. As Jung frequently points out, spirit is often symbolized by wind and breath (Gitz-Johansen 2020b).

What enrages the dragons is that originally this realm belonged to them whereas the world of material reality belonged to the humans. However, through the magical powers of the magicians, humans succeeded in building a wall in "the other realm", to prevent their individual spirits from passing on when they died. This wall has created a kind of eternal spiritual afterlife, which, although devoid of any real life, is keeping the disembodied spirit of humans from truly dying and passing on. By this act of magic, the human magicians have drained "the other realm" of life, so that it is now an endless dry wasteland, and the wall is barring the dragons from inhabiting their rightful realm.

An analogy between the human invasion of "the other realm" and the draining of its life and meaning is found in our present Western civilization, where science, technology, and the rational intellect have displaced the belief in the reality of another realm than the material:

“Over centuries, consciousness has been conquering the realm of spirit, which was originally unconscious, and at least partially has reduced its impulses to acts of conscious will. All the supernatural phenomena, good as well as evil, which earlier ages would attribute to the power of spirits, have now apparently been reduced to something reasonable and rational.” (Skogemann 2004, p. 145, my translation)

The proposition that we rightfully inhabit not one world but two worlds is the truth that is born and embodied in the figure of Tehanu. With her is born the ancient mystery, which Harding connects with the goddess of Isis: The realization that “human beings, because they are both animal and spiritual in their nature, belong not to one but two worlds.” (Harding 1955/1982, p. 182) In the material world, Tehanu is a deformed and hidden figure, but it is in the realm of spirit that her true nature is revealed towards the end of the Earthsea Cycle. She is the third of the dragons, who soars towards the sky of “the other realm” as the magicians’ wall is finally breached: “The third had bright mail, gold, with wings of gold. That one flew the highest and did not stoop down to them. (...) all at once the highest rays of the rising sun struck Tehanu and she burned like her name, a great bright star.” (2018, p. 886) In this passage, we finally see the splendor of the true nature of the scorched child as it unfolds in a spiritual realm of existence, which is finally liberated.

### Conclusion: Spirit here on Earth

What can we conclude from this exposition? First, I would like to mention that while working with the archetypal images of dragons, magicians, kings, and priestesses I found it a constant temptation to be carried away into a dramatic and grand (archetypal) language. I found it a challenge to bring the discussions “down to earth” and engage with more mundane issues. Perhaps this reveals something about the nature of spirit, as it tempts us to soar into lofty words and grand prose and away from the tedious concerns that belong to everyday life. Moore (2003), in his discussion of the dragon as a widespread image of creative energies from the Self, points out that the effect of these

energies is often inflation and grandiosity. The word *spirit* is in the root of the word *inspiration*, which literally means “to be breathed into”, so it is hard to avoid being inflated (“blown into”) when one deals with spirit. In his biography, Jung also mentions that “high-flown language”, “high rhetoric”, and “even bombast” are characteristic of the archetypes (Jung 1963/1983, p. 202), which is the Jungian way of describing the contents of the spiritual realm (AUTHOR 2020b, p. 658-659).

It is sobering and grounding to realize that the central image of the last two books is that of a scarred and abandoned child. The wounded girl mirrors the fact that many of the main characters of the Earthsea Cycle carry relational trauma, which the story mentions but never dwells on. Ged, the Archmage, lost his mother during birth. Alder, the magician-protagonist in the last book, lost his father as a child. The other dragon-woman, Irian (whom I have not discussed here), lost her mother during birth, and her father neglected her (*Dragonfly*). Tenar, the reincarnated High Priestess and later Ged’s wife, was taken from her family when she was five years old. These characters have all experienced early wounds to the self, and we do not hear anything about these wounds being tended to or cared for. These early traumatic experiences are mirrored in another tale of magicians, which is the Harry Potter series. Harry lost his parents during infancy, and was raised by unloving stepparents. Harry’s magical arch-nemesis, Lord Voldemort, was raised in an orphanage after his father left the family before his birth and his mother died shortly after. Dumbledore, Harry’s mentor and headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, lost his father who died in prison when he was young, and his mother and sister were later killed. It seems there is a connection between magic and trauma. In psychological terms, this indicates how the influx of the creative and inspiring energies of spirit can create inflating feelings of grandiosity, which protects us from being in touch with the pain, humiliation, and vulnerability of our wounds to the self. In Kohut’s (1977) terms, the influx of spirit gives rise to an overestimation of the self, which can compensate for feelings of inferiority that originate from narcissistic wounds such as lack

of parental empathy, admiration, and mirroring. Perhaps the magicians became magicians for that very reason: to feel lifted away from feelings of abandonment, vulnerability, and inferiority.

What sets Tehanu apart is that although she is the most severely wounded of all the main characters, she is the only one who experiences a great deal of parental love and care. She is the only one whose wounds are being tended to. After being pushed into the fire and left to die, she is brought to Tenar who immediately makes the decision to take the girl in as her own. Especially through the fourth book of the series, *Tehanu*, we hear about Tenar's unceasing love and care for and protection of Tehanu. We learn that Tehanu has the potential of becoming dangerous and feared, but as it turns out, she is the one who saves the people of Earthsea from the onslaught of the dragons. I suggest that the fact that she turns out to act as a savior rather than an adversary is due to the amount of love and care she receives, first from Tenar and later from Ged, who becomes her adoptive father.

While working with this material I felt that the antidote to an inflated approach and to getting carried away by lofty and archetypal language was to pay attention to my own narcissistic wounds (my inner child). As soon as I paid attention to whatever feelings of abandonment, vulnerability, and inferiority were masked by inflating ideas and sentiments, the "psychic balloon" of inflation tended to collapse. This theme of "coming down to Earth from high above" is also the topic of a second dream, which came during my work on this paper:

*I am at a service in a large church, which is full of people. My intention is to approach the service discreetly and remain an anonymous spectator from the back rows of the church. However, the female priest spots and recognizes me and indicates that I should come closer and participate in some way, which I am unwilling to do. The service begins after a break. I find myself lying in a low and narrow room with*

*glass panels facing the interior of the church. This little room is high up below the ceiling of the church. I see many people walking towards the entrance of the church, which surprises me.*

My initial interpretation of my position in the small room high above the church floor and the service below is as an image of being too much “up in my head” in relation to the spiritual life unfolding below. My interpretation was that I am overemphasizing the mental and intellectual aspects of spirit. I still think this interpretation is valid. The images of dragons and the fiery energy of Tehanu’s body point to a more embodied and passionate aspect of spirit. However, I also think that the image of me in a room high up in the church and shielded from the participants by windows of glass suggests the inflation discussed above. In his discussions of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, Jung describes spirit as a geyser (Jung 1989, p. 1066), which shoots steam and hot water up in the air. Thus, under the influence of spirit it is easy to be “shot upwards” and away from both vulnerability and community with others.

The dream shows another approach to spirit, which is represented by the female priest and the church. Here, the spiritual energy does not belong to a person, but belongs to God, the gods, the spirits, or the archetypes, depending on one’s cosmology. The priestess does not possess or control spirit in the manner of magicians. She acts as a medium between spirit and people. This means that when the priestess rather than the magician symbolizes spiritual life, the relation to spirit is not a question of being inspired to great creative works. Instead, it is a matter of participating in a spiritual community of people, with spirit being present in *sermons, songs, hymns, images, myths, and rituals*. The purpose of these symbolic forms is to act as meaningful containers for people’s struggles, fears, sorrows, aspirations, and longings. I believe that this is the power of the female priest of the first dream, who dispelled the threat from the furious dragon. She mediates between spirit and people. She gives form to spirit through words and rituals. The service that she holds does

not use the energy of spirit to shoot us upwards and away from our narcissistic injuries, but brings containment to our fears and vulnerabilities. In this situation, the living spirit calms down and works to sustain life in the ordinary world.

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