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EATEN AND FORGOTTEN.
THE DEPICTION OF THE AFTERLIFE
IN URSULA K. LE GUIN'S FANTASY

To die is landing on some distant shore.

John Dryden

To My Beloved Father

ABSTRACT

Ursula K. Le Guin was an American writer, a master of science fiction and fantasy. She was the author of the famous Earthsea trilogy, in which magic remains the pivotal idea. In the novels, Le Guin links immense, yet dangerous, supernatural abilities with the idea of Equilibrium within realms, a principle that governs the universe. The paper is an attempt to elucidate how certain visions of life after death are constellated within Le Guin's fantasy writings. Visibly inspired by Eastern mythologies and religious doctrines, the author does not steer clear from the vision rooted in Western traditions. The ongoing debate is an attempt at clarifying the universal concept of soul and mankind.

KEYWORDS: fantasy literature, American literature, Ursula K. Le Guin, death

STRESZCZENIE

Ursula K. Le Guin była amerykańską pisarką, mistrzynią science fiction i fantasy. Jako autorka słynnej trylogii Earthsea, stworzyła świat rządzony prawami magii. W swym powieściach Le Guin łączy zarówno wszechmocne jak i niebezpieczne zdolności magiczne z ideą równowagi w rzeczywistości, będącej głównym prawem świata przedstawionego. Artykuł jest próbą przedstawienia wizji życia po śmierci w dziełach fantasy Le Guin. Choć zainspirowana wschodnimi mitologiami i doktrynami religijnymi, autorka nie omija tradycyjnej wizji mającej swój początek w kulturze zachodu. Przedstawiona w jej powieściach debata jest próbą wyjaśnienia uniwersalnej koncepcji duszy i ludzkości.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: literatura fantasy, literatura amerykańska, Ursula K. Le Guin, śmierć

The American writer Ursula K. Le Guin, born in 1929, was one of the most acclaimed writers of contemporary fantasy. An author of numerous novels, short stories and poetry collections, she received numerous literary prizes, including the Hugo, Nebula, Jupiter, Locus, and Gandalf awards during her fifty-year literary

career. Researchers claim she was “the only writer to have won both of these prestigious awards twice, having won four Hugos and two Nebulas” (McCaffery and Gregory 27). The list of awards is impressive, starting with the Boston Globe-Horn Book award for *A Wizard of Earthsea* awarded in 1968, and ending with the 2010 Locus Award for *Cheek by Jowl*.

Her debut, the science fiction novel *Rocannon's World*, published in 1966, followed shortly thereafter by the fantasy, *A Wizard of Earthsea* in 1968, brought her international fame and positive criticism. Her recent death on 22 January 2018, at 88, marks a tragic irony in this exploration of death in her most famous pieces.

An atheist herself, Ursula K. Le Guin devotes surprisingly much space to a multifaceted depiction of metaphysical models her *Earthsea* fantasy cycle, particularly its second volume, *The Tombs of Atuan*. Visibly fascinated with the concept of reincarnation, the author makes it the pivotal aspect of religious beliefs of the inhabitants of the realm. It is inextricably linked with the idea of Equilibrium, the inevitable balance that exists in the world, which is modeled on the interconnected forces of yin and yang described in Taoism.

One group of *Earthsea* inhabitants, the representatives of the Kargish Empire, where magic is strictly forbidden, are reincarnated upon death, which involves the transmigration of an immortal soul to a physical form after death. The doctrine acknowledging a life beginning in yet another physical body after death is drawn from Eastern philosophies. Le Guin contrasts this with the visualization of a “dry land”, an intermediate state to which one's consciousness is exiled, which governs the lives of the other group of *Earthsea* citizens.

These two concepts act as the framework for a universal debate on the issue of death. It reaches its peak in *The Other Wind*, the last novel of the cycle, which provides the readers with multiple voices raising their opinions on the problem of mixing the realms of the living and the dead, when the ultimate law of Equilibrium is threatened.

The fascination with the topic of death is conspicuous in the second volume of *Earthsea* cycle, *The Tombs of Atuan*. It is a story of a young girl, a high priestess of the Ancient gods, whose title is Arha: a title literally means “the eaten one” in Kargish language, since she lost her former life and name upon becoming a priestess.

‘At the death of the One Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, the ceremonies of burial and purification are completed within one month by the moon's calendar. After this certain of the Priestesses and Wardens of the place of the Tombs go forth across the desert, among the towns and villages of Atuan, seeking and asking. They seek the child-girl who was born on the night of the Priestess' death. When they find such a child, they wait and they watch. The child must be sound of body and of mind, and as it grows it must not suffer from rickets nor the smallpox nor any deformity, nor become blind. If it reaches the age of five years unblemished, then it is known that the body of the child is indeed the new body of the Priestess who died. And the child is made known to the Godking in Awabath, and brought here to her Temple and instructed for a year. And at the year's end she is taken to the Hall of the Throne and her name is given back to these who are her Masters, the Nameless Ones: for she is the nameless one, the Priestess Ever Reborn (Le Guin 1985b: 182–3).

The young girl is devoid of free will, turned into a vessel of the undefined spirits, being trained in performing mundane tasks of little merit.

She is the protector of the realm of the dead, whose name remains unknown. As the issue of naming is associated with familiarizing, acknowledging and encapsulating one's history, the revelation of a deity's name and its frequent use is of foremost importance in their recognition. The only title the gods of Atuan bear, the Nameless Ones, suggests detachment and complete lack of interest, but it may also suggest the primeval origin of the deities, whose names may have been lost in time.

Without the proper designation, one cannot achieve revelation. In the major monotheistic religions, divine beings are addressed in various ways: in Islam, Allah is said to have 99 names, for example: *Al-Khaliq* (The Creator)¹ or titles: *Ash-Shahid* (The Witness)², *Al-Alim* (The Knowing)³, each praising different aspect of his benevolence. In Judaism, the utmost important name of god occurs as the acronym *YHWH* (Tetragrammaton⁴), but since its pronunciation is forbidden to common believers except the highest priest, subsequent forms *El*, *Eloah*, *Elohai*, *Elohim*, *El Shaddai*, and *Tzevaot* are found. The most popular title by which god is addressed, *Adonai*, means "my lord"⁵ and is used in performing rituals. The tetragrammaton is non-existent in any Greek version of New Testament, the sacred text of Christianity, at all. The word that occurs there is *kyrios* ("lord") or *abba* ("father" in Aramaic). God is usually referred to with the use of family denominations.

The depiction of the deities' realm in the story remains obscure. Their interest in the affairs of humans remains almost non-existent until Arha is prepared to abandon her mundane responsibilities and solitary emotional coldness.

According to the religion of the Kargad Empire, Arha is the incarnation of the highest priestess, and so she needs to devote her previous life and name to serving her masters at the age of six.⁶ Atuan and the rest of the Kargish empire, and especially the tombs lying underground, are obviously connected with cold. The Great Treasury is the centre of that cold, devoid of fresh air. The difference between the inhabitants of Earthsea and those of the Kargish empire, apart from skin

¹ "That is Allah, your Lord; there is no deity except Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He is Disposer of all things" (The Quran 2006 6:102).

² "But Allah bears witness to that which He has revealed to you. He has sent it down with His knowledge, and the angels bear witness [as well]. And sufficient is Allah as Witness" (The Quran 2006 4:166).

³ "Indeed, as-Safa and al-Marwah are among the symbols of Allah. So whoever makes Hajj to the House or performs 'umrah - there is no blame upon him for walking between them. And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, Allah is appreciative and Knowing" (The Quran 2006 2:158).

⁴ In Greek: "(the word of) four letters" (Online Etymology Dictionary).

⁵ "Old Testament word for 'God'" (Online Etymology Dictionary).

⁶ It took six years for Siddhārtha Gautama (Buddha) to find his way to enlightenment (*anuttara samjāk sambodhi*). For this period of time, he led the life of a tramp, travelling, feasting and learning from his contemporary masters until he formed his own ideology.

colour and language, is the fact that the former learn, teach, and perform magic, whereas the latter invented a religion. Bucknall writes that “Unlike the Kargs, who reincarnate, wizards are believed at death to change temporarily into ghosts and then to disappear altogether” (Bucknall 1981: 49–50). Reincarnation, meaning rebirth, is linked with *samsāra*, the concept of repetition, the continuous cyclic change in one’s existence, present in Indian religious doctrines⁷, which is believed to continue “until liberation from rebirth is reached through *moksha* (release, salvation)” (Whaling 2006: 17). Not only does Le Guin draw the concept from Hinduism, but she also incorporates the lexical items. The priestess’ name *Arha* bears a very close resemblance to *artha*, one of the four main aims in life, “working and earning money” (Whaling 2006: 24). Together with *kama* “sensual being”, *dharma* “living morally” and *moksha* (trying to abandon *samsara*, the circle of rebirths), *artha* may also denominate the fourth main stage of life (Whaling 2006: 24).

The priestess, still in her adolescence, needs a spur to act against the inactive forces that rule her world. The girl meets the wizard Ged, the protagonist of *A Wizard of Earthsea* (the first volume of the cycle), in the labyrinth where he comes in search of a ring which may help restore peace in the kingdom. She takes the intruder to the ‘heart’ of the sacred place, to the Great Treasury. It is there that Ged addresses her using her real magical name, Tenar. This is the key moment in the novel. By saying her name aloud, Ged sets the girl free. She is no longer Arha, she regains her name. That stage of her existence is finished, she is reborn to lead a different life; thus the *samsara* continues. To know somebody’s name means to have power over that person, but the stranger makes Arha realize her own name. The name that was taken from her the moment she became a priestess. Bucknall states that in the Kargad Empire, where no magic is used, “there is no need to conceal one’s name” with the High Priestess as an exception (Bucknall 1981: 50). With her true name returned to her, Tenar dreams of her long-forgotten mother and thus “she realizes the connection between her mother’s love and Ged’s” (Bucknall 1981: 55). She seems to regain the knowledge of her previous life, or her previous incarnation, living with her parents. This is the moment of enlightenment, even literally since *Tenar* means “lantern” in Hardic language of Earthsea. The intrusion does not trigger any consequences: only the theft of both the magical ring and the priestess, her thoughts and soul, spurs the deities to act for the first time in the story; however, the couple is not punished, being able to escape the collapse of the labyrinth.

There is no clear depiction of the gods of death in the story, yet their presence is acknowledged not only by the girl’s belief, but also by the final act of destruction. In this sense, the Nameless Ones resemble the god of the Old Testament, who is omniscient and omnipresent, yet cruel and inclining to punish his followers for

⁷ Faiths or religions that can trace their roots to the Indian subcontinent: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism.

even petty crimes. It has been observed that: “hiding his [god’s] face is described as resulting in a separation between God and man”, and this may also apply to the relationship between the Kargish deities and their worshippers (Balentine 1983: 68). Their protection can be retained only on condition of strict adherence to a multitude of severe laws, which include torturing prisoners and slaying dissenters.

The motif of death reappears in *The Other Wind*, published in 2003, two years after *Tales of the Earthsea*, a direct continuation of *Tehanu* and *Tales from Earthsea*. It tells the later story of Tenar and another female character of crucial importance to the whole cycle, Tehanu, a half-human, half-dragon representative of an ancient race of winged people, created by a mythical being or deity, called Segoy. Le Guin points out that there is a difference in the style of the original *Earthsea* trilogy and the books that followed, *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*. The first three books were targeted at young readers and the narration seems old fashioned (Le Guin 2002: 26). The action of the novel takes place fifteen years after *Tehanu*.

This is the story of Alder, a simple sorcerer who has had difficulty sleeping since his wife died. He has been seeking help from the wizard Ged, now living in Re Albi with Tenar and Tehanu. There is great danger lurking in the future, and the king of *Earthsea*, together with Ged, the former Archmage and a group of his most trusted companions, with quite a few women among them, Without any clear solution to their problems, they must cooperate to succeed.

Alder tells Ged the story of his great love for his wife, Lily⁸, who possessed a magical gift similar to his own. For a year and a half, they lived happily, but she died in pregnancy, not able to give birth in due time. Alder says: “But it was late, and then very late. The midwives tried to bring on the birth with herbs and spells, but it was as if the child would not let her bear it. It would not be separated from her, It would not be born. And it was not born. It took her with it” (Le Guin 2003: 15). The young wizard blames the child for Lily’s death.

The majority of world religions, if not all, glorify pregnancy and motherhood, and pregnant women have been represented in art since prehistoric times; one such example being the Venus of Willendorf⁹. The Bible regards motherhood as the crucial task of a woman, and the bond between a mother and a child is the strongest:

Similarly, older women should be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to drink, teaching what is good, so that they may train younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good homemakers, under the control of their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited (New American Bible, 2002, Titus 2:4).

⁸ In Rome lily used to be a symbol of hope. In Christian tradition the flower symbolizes purity, innocence, virginity. It is said to have risen from the tears of Eve after she was expelled from Eden. Lily is considered to be plant of the virgin Mary and Joseph (Kopaliński 1985: 599).

⁹ Which stands in opposition to the cult of virginity, present for example in Greek ancient tradition of sibyls, Roman vestals, or acllas of the Inca Empire.

Lily's death, her inability to give birth, stands in opposition to the traditional role of a woman. Not only is the task unfinished, but two lives end much too early. The period of anxiously waiting for a baby is halted by the premature death of both. Alder says that after Lily's death he felt devastated, blaming the child and not being able to feel any connection with the unborn. After two months, he started having terrifying dreams in which he was standing on a hill: "Along the top of the hill and running down the slope was a wall, low, like a boundary wall between sheep pastures. She was standing across the wall from me, below it. It was darker there" (Le Guin 2003: 15). He continues, saying that he often hears his wife speaking to him. Once he kissed her and touched her hands; however, this is strictly forbidden, since touching the dead, even in dreams, can make it difficult to return to reality. The two worlds are separated with the aid of a visual object: a wall.

Just like in other fantasy stories, like *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin, walls mark clear distinction between the common real and uncanny elements. In the Earthsea series, it is said to be the land of the dead, *the dry land*, where the soul goes after death. In this sense, *dry* may on the one hand suggest emptiness, and hence an unwelcoming destination, but on the other, may also imply a safe haven, a place where sailors wish to rest after a long voyage.

After some time Alder had yet another dream:

It was nine days¹⁰ after the first dream. I was in that same place, but high up on the hill. I saw the wall below me across the slope. And I ran down the hill, calling out her name, sure of seeing her. There was somebody there. But when I came close, I saw it wasn't Lily. It was a man, and he was stooping at the wall, as if he was repairing it. I said to him, 'Where is she, where is Lily?' He didn't answer or look up. I saw what he was doing. He wasn't working to mend the wall but to unbuild it, prying with his fingers at a great stone. The stone never moved and he said, 'Help me, Hara!' Then I saw that it was my teacher, Gannet, who named me. He has been dead these five years (Le Guin 2003: 17).

Alder reveals to Ged that since he had his first dream about the wall between the realm of the living and the dead, he has not been able to rest. Every night he finds himself near the wall, constantly asked by the dead to touch them and help them destroy the only obstacle on their way to the living. To find rescue, Alder decided to go to the Roke school of magic to beg the masters to help him; however, the masters were reluctant, since they still remembered how one of them, Thorion, stayed too long in "the dry land" as they called it: Although he later returned to life, he had been changed, as if the excursion, though possible for those skilled in

¹⁰ Nine used to be considered a mystical number, frequently appearing in world mythology: there were nine Muses in Greek and nine days god Odin spent on Yggdrasil tree to possess wisdom in the Norse (Kopaliński 1985: 237). It is the highest single-digit number, often ruling the world presented: in Norse mythology, the universe was divided into nine worlds, Dante's *Divine Comedy* also gives an account of nine circles of hell, there are also nine lands that form Westeros in *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin.

magic, seemed morally wrong. The dry land is the area of the sacred where the dead should stay at peace, where they could not be tormented by the presence of a person they had formerly known. This plane is not similar to that of the Christian idea of heaven: On the contrary, it seems to be modeled on the Hebrew *sheol*, a place where all humans are transported after their physical death, regardless of their deeds.

Ged suggests that Alder should keep a kitten or another innocent small creature that would protect him from entering the dry land during sleep. Surprisingly, holding the animal during sleep, the sorcerer is able to rest and not see dead people. Unfortunately, this does not solve the greater problem of the two realms overlapping, it only helps a single man not to lose his senses. The presence of an animal makes it impossible for Alder to visit the dry land, which may suggest that the way to the wall is accessible to humans only. The overlapping realms of the living and the dead are a sign of the broken balance, the non-existent Equilibrium: Even though the dry land is and should be visited only after death, and no connection should be possible with the deceased, the wizards of Earthsea had crossed the wall several times in search of greater power. The division between the sacred and the profane seems invalid since the men of power are able to visit the land at will, without any difficulties.

There is an overarching debate between the characters, who cannot really understand what happens to a person after death. Most believe “The suffering of the meaninglessness of life and the fear of death cause despair and act as an impetus to create wish-fulfilling illusions (Piven 2004: 59). Having thought about it and talked to Tenar, Tehanu concludes that after death, only humans, and not all of them, can enter the dry land. Tenar says:

‘The Kargish people are like the animals.’

Her voice was dry and let no feeling be heard. ‘They die to be reborn.’

‘That is superstition,’ Onyx said. ‘Forgive me, Lady Tenar, but you yourself –’ He paused. ‘I no longer believe,’ Tenar said, ‘that I am or was, as they told me, Arha forever reborn, a single soul reincarnated endlessly and so immortal. I do believe that when I die I will, like any mortal being, rejoin the greater being of the world. Like the grass, the trees, the animals. Men are only animals that speak, sir, as you said this morning.’ (Le Guin 2003: 122).

Tenar abandons her previous beliefs, the idea that saw her become Arha, an incarnation of the unnamed priestess. In the string of lives, she could no longer be free from the sins of her previous appearances, without the ability to make her own choices and decisions. She resigns from the immortality of the soul, *samsara*, the never-ending circle of life after life, to die and travel to the dry land afterwards.

The debate touches on the concept of soul and life-after-death, described in the Old Testament as *nephesh*, which has been translated as *soul*. However, its initial uses refer to the presence of all creatures, animals included: “Then God said, ‘Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds

fly beneath the dome of the sky.' And so it happened", which associates *nephesh* with beasts living in the water (The New American Bible, Genesis 1:20); or "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds.' And so it happened", in which the Hebrew word *nephesh* is used as a denomination of every being on earth that was created by god. (The New American Bible, Genesis 1:24).

Tenar, claiming that just like "the grass, the trees, the animals", she will become part of some greater cause and plan, acknowledges the possibility of the afterlife for all the creatures of the world depicted (Le Guin 2003: 122). Interestingly, no distinction is made between material and spiritual elements in her words, nor those of the Old Testament: They are regarded as being interconnected, as if neither could occur independently: "Both Old and New Testament hold that a man is a thing of flesh and bone," and *nephesh* cannot be taken as a part of a living creature (Swinburne 1997: 311). Moreover, in the Book of Numbers, there is a passage in which the word *nephesh* appears to describe a dead person: "As long as he is dedicated to the LORD, he shall not enter where a dead person is" (The New American Bible, Numbers 6:6).

'But we can speak the Language of the Making,' the wizard protested. 'By learning the words by which Segoy made the world, the very speech of life, we teach our souls to conquer death.'

'That place where nothing is but dust and shadows¹¹, is that your conquest?' Her voice was not dry now, and her eyes flashed.

Onyx stood indignant but wordless. The king intervened. 'Lord Sparrowhawk asked a second question,' he said. '*Can a dragon cross the wall of stones?*' He looked at Tehanu.

'It's answered in the first answer,' she said, 'if dragons are only animals that speak, and animals don't go there. Has a mage ever seen a dragon there? Or you, my lord?' She looked first at Onyx, then at Lebannen. Onyx pondered only a moment before he said, 'No.'

The king looked amazed. 'How is it I never thought of that?' he said. 'No, we saw none. I think there are no dragons there' (Le Guin 2003: 122).

The dichotomy of body and soul, and a later understanding of the two, appear in the writings of Plato, who claimed the latter to be immortal, existing before it was entrapped within a particular body. The main aim of the soul is to free itself from the material grave (the body) and return to the land of ideas, where it belongs. The soul (psyche) has neither a beginning nor end and is able to exist without a body.

Similarly to Plato, Aristotle acknowledged the existence of body and soul, yet he believed in the interdependence of the two. He saw the body as matter, and the soul as a form of a particular entity. Aristotle distinguished three kinds of souls: plant

¹¹ Again, strong resemblance to *sheol*. See: "The word for this vast collective sepulcher, Sheol, literally means the 'grave.' Unlike *qever*, which also denotes the grave, Sheol took on a wide variety of meanings. It sometimes indicated a specific place with definable physical attributes; sometimes it represented the innards of the earth; and sometimes it simply served as a synonym for death" (Bernstein 1993: 140).

(growth, birth and feeding on), animal (sensory cognition) and human (reasoning and intuition). The philosopher rejected the concepts of immortality of the soul, which would be subject to destruction with the disintegration of material element.

In her speech about the afterlife, Tenar contradicts herself, first claiming men to be the only animals that speak, but later describing dragons the same way. However, this may stem from the fact that in that cosmology, when the mythical Segoy¹² created the universe, there appeared one race of winged people: the primeval species from which both humans and dragons come. The question of dragons being able to travel to the land of the dead while living, or go there after the physical end of their lives, is thus associated with the question of soul distribution.

Dragons, who are the guardians of the Equilibrium, no longer trust men who do not keep the balance between life and death by repeatedly crossing the boundary separating them. To restore the balance in Earthsea and make peace between humans and dragons, the wizards must go to the Immanent Grove on Roke island, a safe haven where they can find enlightenment. The question whether dragons could enter the dry land resembles that often asked in Christianity: whether animals are allowed to go to heaven.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who followed the Aristotelian dichotomy of form (the soul) and matter (the body), claimed that the human soul is immortal as a pure form. He placed it above the animalistic soul, which cannot enjoy eternal life after the decay of the physical body. He stressed the existence of a close connection between body and soul, hence the immortal soul is not the whole of a person, but only a part, and as such, is intended for the resurrection of the body. Referring to Aristotle, Aquinas expressed his belief in the resurrection and eternal life. Only a human soul has the element of “natural desire”¹³ of immortality, and as such, the soul represents the attitude of man towards God. For St. Thomas, death means the separation of the soul from the body.

The dragons in Le Guin’s universe are not animals, even though some of the characters describe them as such. To draw parallels with the infamous Descartes idea of “beast machine”, i.e. automata that can neither talk nor think in a rational way, one may easily draw the following conclusion: “This for Descartes indicates the crucial difference between animals and man—they do not think. Animals do not *penser* or *cogitare*; they are not endowed with a mind (*mens, esprit*); they lack reason (*raison*); they do not have a rational soul (*âme raisonnable*)” (Cottingham 1998: 228). The Language of the Making is the mother tongue of dragons, which is also used by Earthsea wizards to cast complicated spells. Following the logic of Descartes, being able to not only communicate in the Language but also the only species able to lie in it, dragons may be easily grouped as humans. This is

¹² The world was created with words by a mythical creature, whose origin is uncertain. However, some hints suggest that Segoy is still alive and present in the form of a dragon.

¹³ In Latin: *desiderium naturale*.

further supported by their demonstrations of rational thinking and *mental substance* (*consciousness*), crucial for Descartes.

In the stories, a clear division between animalistic and human is visible, despite the common origin of humans and dragons: "This is her tale, then: long ago, the humans and the dragons were one kind, speaking one language. But they sought different things, and so they agreed to part- to go different ways. That agreement was called Vedurnan" (Le Guin 2003: 192). However, the acceptance of dragons as self-aware and rational thinking beings makes them equal to humans:

The human beings went east, the dragons west. The humans gave up their knowledge of the Language of the Making, and in exchange received all skill and craft of hand, and ownership of all that hands can make. The dragons let go all such things. But they kept the Old Speech.'

'And their wings,' said Irian (Le Guin 2003: 192).

This philosophical dispute in Le Guin's works demonstrates the author's immense interest in animal studies and Ecology, but also Theology and morality. It is hardly surprising that she makes the dragons, most powerful creatures of Earthsea, who are denied the place in the dry land by some, the guardians of the upmost Taoist rule of balance and the rescuers of the peace in Earthsea. Despite the wizards' arrogant remarks, classifying dragons as animals, the protectors of Earthsea never enter the dry land due to their power and undefined lifespan, not lack of souls: "They don't live as we do. They move between the worlds. So says Orm Irian¹⁴. From the world's wind to the other wind" (Le Guin 2003: 192). This ability to escape death may be yet again connected with the circle of incarnations, *samsara*, which had been the starting point in the discussion of death in Le Guin's stories. The ending of the final novel of the Earthsea cycle, in which the half-human, half-dragon female character, Tehanu, turns into a perfect combination of these two creatures, is an allusion to Chinese philosophy, in which dragons are considered to be benevolent spirits, and an embodiment of the idea of *yin* and *yang*: "'My lady, I saw Tehanu. She flies golden on the other wind.' (...) She struggled and then said, speaking roughly and almost inaudibly, 'Whole?'" (Le Guin 2003: 207). The dual nature of the winged race is the guarantee of the peace in Earthsea and prevents the boundary between the real of the living and the one of the dead from being shattered.

¹⁴ One of the female characters: half-human, half-dragon.

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