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“Beware Her, the Day She Finds Her Strength!”: Tehanu and the Power of the Marginalized to Affect Social Change in Ursula K. Le Guin’s Earthsea Saga

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Abstract

The present paper aims to study the central role that Ursula K. Le Guin gave to the character of Tehanu in her Earthsea novels of Tehanu and The Other Wind, with the intention of showing how even the most marginalized and liminal individuals of society should be given a chance to prove their worth. For this purpose, we will study the reasons that make Tehanu such a character, focusing especially on her inscription as a female individual, her namelessness, and disability. At the same time, making use of the proposals offered by liminality and disability studies, we will suggest that it is by means of a thorough reflection on her physical condition that this character will end up acquiring a powerful position from which she will be able to affect change in a global scale.

Additional Keywords

Ursula K. Le Guin; Earthsea Saga



“BE AWARE HER, THE DAY SHE FINDS HER
STRENGTH!”: TEHANU AND THE POWER OF
THE MARGINALIZED TO AFFECT
SOCIAL CHANGE IN URSULA K. LE GUIN'S
EARTHSEA SAGA

JON ALKORTA MARTIARTU

ONE OF THE MAIN FEATURES OF URSULA K. LE GUIN'S WRITING has always been her constant—albeit constructive—criticism of our society's ways. To a great extent, this criticism has been focused on how the unprivileged are treated and, too often, vanished by those in power. She was extremely aware of the fact that a western- and male-centred hierarchy ruled the world, a hierarchy to be challenged because of its completely arbitrary nature. Le Guin made reference to this idea in a speech she delivered at Mills College (California) in 1983, when she claimed that “[p]ublic speaking is done in the public tongue, the national or the tribal language; and the language of our tribe is the men's language,” before adding that “maybe we've had enough words of power and talk about the battle of life. *Maybe we need some words of weakness*” (“A Left-Handed Commencement Address” 115, italics are mine). By calling for “words of weakness,” Le Guin was proposing a change in the social paradigm that could be achieved by means of language. If we were able to turn from language that describes the world as a hostile place where every individual must fight for their existence, and turn instead to a language that, through the incorporation of marginal voices and experiences, talks of cooperation and unity, then we might be able to effect a change for the better in society. This proposition that a change in language may engender societal change may be one reason Melanie A. Rawls describes Le Guin as “an author who is internationally known for her explorations of gender politics and her critique of patriarchal social arrangements” (129).

All the above mentioned, among other factors, led Le Guin to wanting “[t]o learn and tell the stories that might otherwise be lost” (“On the Frontier” 29), that is, the stories formed by the perspectives and experiences of people who are left out of society's spotlight. The different novels comprising the *Earthsea* saga can be said to have helped her achieve this aim, at least the stories written from *Tehanu* (1990) onwards, in which Le Guin's social critique is especially evident. The already mentioned *Tehanu*, *The Other Wind* (2001) and the short stories included in *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), reflect Le Guin's inner change in

that she became a much more conscious feminist, leading her to including in her writings "an alternate vision of the female characters" (Rawls 129). In general, in these last novels, Le Guin clearly changes the focus from the coming-of-age and deeds of the hero, to the heroism in the minutiae of the "'ordinary' [people's]" (132) everyday lives. This present article looks at the character of Tehanu with the aim of examining the ways in which this character allows Le Guin to suggest that the voice of the marginalized can be used to produce far-reaching changes in society. This character will be analyzed from two principal and interconnected perspectives: her liminal nature, that is, her existence right "between the meaningful and the unmeaning" ("On the Frontier" 29); and her physical disability, which simultaneously works as a burden and a doorway out of that unmeaningness.

There are three principal factors that we could say make Tehanu a liminal, othered character living "in [that] dark place [...] that our rationalizing culture of success denies, calling it a place of exile, uninhabitable, foreign" ("A Left-Handed Commencement Address" 116). The first factor is her being a female in a clearly patriarchal society such as Earthsea's. The second factor is her namelessness. The third is her physical disability.

First, then, to consider Tehanu's gender. Although we mentioned above how Le Guin consciously tries to empower her female characters from *Tehanu* on, this re-vision does not mean that she also changed the social hierarchy of her fantasy world. Thus, the society of Earthsea continues to be one ruled by men, who are self-entitled to power—be it political or wizardly—and women, who are relegated to roles considered to be baser, in many cases related to household chores. Even their use of magic is socially constrained to rather more practical issues such as "finding, mending, dowsing, animal healing" ("A Description of Earthsea" 420), far away from those lofty applications for which wizards' 'real' magic is used. The way in which this male-dominance might have affected Tehanu is clearly seen in how power is exercised against her. In her discussion of power relations, Kristina Rolin suggests that power is often applied for the purpose of limiting "the choices available to [an] individual or group," and that they often carry an element of domination (219). At the beginning of *Tehanu*, we learn that persons who are supposedly this character's family have "pushed [her] into the fire while it was burning" (1.641),¹ apparently with the intention of getting rid of her and hiding any evidence of the violent beatings they have given her (1.642). We also learn that in this group of people, comprised of two men and a woman besides Tehanu, the men lived off whatever the woman could obtain (1.641). The power distribution in this group is vertical,

¹ Because there are many editions of the *Earthsea* books, citations will be given in the format *chapter.page*.

in that the men exercise their power—even by means of force—directly upon the female members, in a clearly dominant manner. The actions of these men evidence a desire to restrain the choices and even rights of others, as they try to basically deprive Tehanu of her right to live.

Regarding Tehanu's namelessness, this is an especially important matter in Le Guin's conception of the universe and the role that names play in it. True names are extremely important in Le Guin's fictional world, since, as part of True Speech, every true name conveys the essence of that which is named, even in the case of human beings (Shippey 116). This means that knowing someone's or something's true name provides information about their nature (Le Guin, "Interview" 63), at the same time as it grants power over that person or thing. In line with this conception, Tonia Payne suggests that "Le Guin creates a name, and then creates all the attributes that pertain to that name, thereby creating a character" (68), consequently implying that "a person's true name is linked with his or her true self: to know the one is to know the other, and the self is incomplete [...] without the true name" (97). This incompleteness is the condition of Tehanu at the beginning of the story. After she is rescued and adopted by Tenar, we are told that "if the child had a name, she did not know it or would not say it. [Tenar] called her Therru" (*Tehanu* 2.646). Such a state of namelessness in a world where true names are what give each being's essence means that an individual without a true name is doomed to be incomplete. Such a state implies that Tehanu is a voiceless character, without the ability to act.

We must next address Tehanu's physical condition. Due to the severe burns she suffers, Tehanu is left with a right hand that is "charred to the bone" (*Tehanu* 1.643), and "crippled, withered" (*The Other Wind* 2.109) forever. The fact that her left hand is referred to as her "good hand" (2.108) implies that, after the incident of the fire, Tehanu ends up with a physical disability. For the sake of gaining a deeper insight into the implications of this character's physical state we shall resort to what is known as disability studies, the aim of which is to acknowledge the worth of disabled people and their contributions to their societies, or as Simi Linton puts it, "to weave disabled people back into the fabric of society" (518). Within the ample proposals offered by this methodology, there are two that we shall take into account. On the one hand, we find the idea that disability is a social and cultural issue above all (Thomas; Wendell). In this sense, Ruthie Gomes et al. suggest that "the problems faced by disabled people are the results of social oppression and not of their individual deficits," and therefore, it is society that needs to remove "the social barriers that impede the participation of [these] people in society" and "rehabilitate itself" (2) in order to provide appropriate spaces for such individuals. In addition to this, many researchers have pointed out that disabled women often find themselves in yet worse situations than their male counterparts (Thomas; Wendell; Asch and

Fine). Returning to Tehanu's case, we can also perceive that social habits and cultural beliefs mark her experience of disability. We, as readers, seldom get the impression that Tehanu does not accept her condition and the limitations or difficulties that it could bring along, but there are cases in which it is society itself that marks her as different and prevents her from integrating in it. Dan Goodley writes that "alterity supports the demarcation of lives to be saved and lives to be sacrificed" (81). Regarding Tehanu, we know not whether she had any birth condition that may have made her 'family' want to get rid of her, but what is made very clear through the *Earthsea* saga is that she is a very peculiar and powerful character. So, perhaps, her 'family' was aware of this element of difference in Tehanu and simply did not want to deal with it and chose to do away with her, out of fear, shame or any other reason. What we do learn, however, is that, while still very young, Tehanu is feared by most of the people around her (*Tehanu* 3.661), referred to as a "monster brat," and that some even "[spit] and [make] the sign to avert evil" (2.655) at the sight of her.

It is the combination of gender, namelessness, and disability that force Tehanu to occupy a peripheral position in society, very much detached from the actional and powerful center. In other words, she becomes a liminal individual, a "go-between" who will be "torn between [and] torn apart" ("The Beast in the Book" 29) due to the diverse realities that she is made to inhabit. Liminal individuals must fight an internal battle in order to make sense of the two disparate realities that they have been allotted: that psychological reality of their own and that of the society that they live in but which they cannot completely relate to. Bjørn Thomassen clearly states that "liminality refers to human experience that cannot be put in boxes" (20). Liminal experiences should not be categorized because, in the end, they are extremely subjective and personal. However, society insists on putting such experiences in boxes that have been conceived and shaped by itself, which ends up causing trouble as these boxes often carry tags such as "abominations" (Thomas 49), while at the same time they "symbolize failure of control and the threat of pain, limitation, dependency, and death" (Wendell 260). In a sense, and following the idea offered by disability studies, we may reasonably say that disabled liminal individuals are not allowed to fully participate in society. Therefore, what is presumably left for these people is "to mask [those] behaviors that would disturb the public and [...] not to exaggerate or call attention to [their] odd forms or the way [their] forms function" (Linton 521). This is exactly the behavior that Tehanu adopts once she starts living with Tenar in Gont. What Tehanu exhibits is an absolutely passive behavior, together with an utter inability to act or change her situation. This is the reason she is described as "blank, unanswering, docile in the way an inanimate thing, a stone, is docile" (*Tehanu* 4.672). In fact, such is her powerlessness and inactivity that it even seems impossible for her to improve

her social status, and her only chance of leading a decent life seems to be to take up work as a weaver, “shy, [...] unmarried, shut away at [her] work” (8.754). This is, at least, what Tenar foresees for her future, hinting at Tehanu’s stagnant position.

One of the reasons behind Tehanu’s inability to come to terms with her reality might well be a lack of knowledge or, on other words, her inexperience concerning her situation. In a sense, she lacks the tools to make sense of and face her reality, leading to her to a state of being being completely inactive and powerless. This relationship between lack of knowledge and powerlessness is highlighted by Miranda Fricker when she claims that “hermeneutical disadvantages render [people] unable to make sense of [their] ongoing mistreatment, and this in turn prevents [them] from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it” (97).

In spite of these severe consequences attributed to occupying a liminal spot, we could also say that liminality simultaneously offers those individuals suffering from it a doorway towards better prospects. Victor Turner describes liminality as “the essentially unstructured (which is at once destructured and prestructured)” (236). This lack of a defined and relatable structure that Turner suggests may imply that it is within these same spots of apparent powerlessness and changelessness that power and change can be obtained. It is as if a position that is outside society grants the individual a chance of developing itself in a way impossible to do so within the limits and structures set by society. This is precisely what Homi K. Bhabha suggests when talking about these issues of liminality regarding a colonial environment. In his words, liminal spaces provide “the terrain to elaborating strategies of selfhood [...] that initiate new signs of identity” (1). In order for this self-work to happen, however, it seems important that the individual has the appropriate mindset. Talking about the spaces created around frontiers, Le Guin suggests that “if there are frontiers between the civilised and the barbaric, between the meaningful and unmeaning, they are not lines on a map nor are they regions of the earth. They are boundaries of the mind alone” (“On the Frontier” 29). What Le Guin’s words may hint at is the idea that those barriers built by society are never really physical, but rather psychological, which posits the requirement of a strong will to face and explore one’s real self. This way, the liminal individual may make use of those spaces “with all the danger and promise of liminality” (28) where they will begin to be actual.

The turning point in Tehanu’s personal trajectory will be the moment when she finally obtains her true name, which, in the universe of Earthsea, means that she is also able to gain a better insight into who she really is and how to interact with the world around her. She receives her name from the dragon called Kalessin, “the giver of names” (*Tehanu* 14.888), who flies to Ged and

Tenar's aid at Tehanu's own request. Here we should note that obtaining her name does not translate into this character becoming an actional person automatically, as there will still be instances in which Tehanu will manifest her inability to fully understand who she really is (*The Other Wind* 4.182). Rather, it means that she sets foot on the right track towards said goal. In other words, "knowledge sets [her] free" ("My Libraries" 22). In a sense, receiving knowledge of her true name helps raise Tehanu's awareness regarding that psychological place that she inhabits, and the potentiality that may lie in it. Thus, the liminal spot that she finds herself in will no longer be a barren place, devoid of practically everything. Instead it will be, as Victor Turner suggests concerning spaces of liminality, rather a "fruitful darkness" (243). Following Le Guin, what Tehanu should do, once she has come to realize that she is "in the dark," is to "remember that darkness is [her] country, where [she lives], where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is. [Her] roots are in the dark [...]. What hope [she has] lies there. [...] Not in the light that blinds, but in the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls" ("A Left-Handed Commencement Address" 117).

What follows is that Tehanu will embark on a stage that, as Turner suggests, is offered by a liminal state, namely that of reflection (241). Tehanu will be able to reflect on her own self, on the reasons and factors that have made her what she is, namely a liminal individual, as well as reflect on the ways in which she can begin to use this realization to kindle her self-growth.

An interesting question can be raised at this point. Could we here say that Tehanu, through a meditation on her disability, is finally able to manifest all of her potential and become the powerful individual that she was meant to be? Certainly, Simi Linton states that "self-explorations—[the disability] turned on itself—" (518) are an essential part of disability studies, highlighting, in a way, this procedure's potential benefits for the disabled individual. In Tehanu's own case, we could argue that her crippled right hand, the one irremediably damaged by the fire, constitutes a symbol of what she is to become. In a passage in *The Other Wind* we read how her hand is described as "the burned [hand], *the claw*" (2.109, italics are mine). The fact that the hand is described as a feature belonging more to an animal than to a human being, establishes a link with the form that Tehanu will adopt in the near future, that of a dragon with a "bright mail, gold, with wings of gold [...]" and [burning] like her name, a great bright star" (5.238). Thus, we may conclude that this character will finally pick up all of those hints that, during the previous years, have been there within herself but that she was unable to make sense of until the right time came. Abilities like that of being able to guess true names—a gift of wizards and dragons (*Tehanu* 14.882; 884)—or the power and "wildness" (12.847) that others could sense about her are now made clear. The clawed hand and the burning body may even be

regarded as predictive warnings of her immense power if ever she becomes aware of her real nature (11.819). This realization brings to mind what Bjørn Thomassen, reviewing Turner's work, calls the "dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (14), that moment when the individual makes sense of all those apparently meaningless life experiences and notions that they have constructed about themselves which cause "the sudden foregrounding of agency" (14).

Another interesting issue about Tehanu's personal development, which also vindicates the viewpoint that inherent worth exists within each of us regardless of physical or psychological impediments, is that Tehanu eventually makes use of her liminal position on her own terms. She does not give in to that social custom that, as even Tenar thinks, means that the only worthy manner to live her life is for her to become a spinster, safe at the margins of society as long as nobody notices her. This ready-made social position does not meet the needs presented by Tehanu's identification process because, as Thomassen claims in relation to the problems faced by liminal subjects, "the answers to the challenges one needs to face are simply not offered by any predefined 'structure'" (18). Merely accepting what society had prepared for her would be, as pointed out above, to meekly surrender to all of the social stigma built around her condition and to accept those ideas that suggest "[d]isabled people are *their* impairment. *They* are broken individuals. *They* lack development. *They* cannot do. *They* do not have the abilities to lead an independent life," and, ultimately, *they* hold on to that "position of monstrous other" (Goodley 80, italics in original). Rather, Tehanu will break free from all stigma and decide to be seen, to make herself be seen. She negotiates her worth, power and identity on her own terms, according to what she believes she is meant to be. As Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine suggest when talking of the empowering processes of disabled female individuals, she "[has demanded] that the world take [her] on [her] terms" (251).

This whole process, triggered once Tehanu obtains an essential piece of knowledge, namely her real name, which leads to her being able to build an identity based upon her condition to which she can completely relate, may also be read as a rite of passage. A general overview of Tehanu's personal story indicates that she has followed the three stages that Arnold van Gennep suggested all rites of passage included: "separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation" (Turner 235). From being cast out from what presumably was her family environment at a very early age, and left empty-handed as a consequence—a typical feature of those going through a rite of passage (237)—Tehanu leaves her peripheral position behind and participates in society, albeit on terms that she has deemed appropriate. In short, she experiences that "key feature of liminality: *transition*" (Thomassen 15, italics in original). A most interesting point about this development is that Tehanu's period of transition

and culmination goes hand-in-hand with the completion of Earthsea’s own process of change. In fact, Tehanu herself is a key participant in the event that will change this fictional universe and its society’s characteristics. As “*transition* [is] the central ‘fact of life’” (Thomassen 12, italics in original), we see how it affects individuals and collectives alike.

This crucial event happens at the climax of *The Other Wind*, and is the culmination of the initial problem that sets the entire story in motion. This problem-engendering initial event occurs during the long ago time when the first wizards, in the early days of Earthsea, seize a part of the domain that belongs to the dragons, an event that was later known as the Vedurnan. In this portion of the dragons’ domain, it was thought, humans would achieve immortality. However, the annexation of this land causes an alteration of the human cycle of life, so that humans of the Archipelago would never be able to fully die and return again to the source. They would be instead be suspended in a state of undeath. This issue would later be made worse by the powerful wizard Cob, as told in *The Farthest Shore*, who tries to bridge the gap that exists between the worlds of the dead and the living with the aim of cheating on nature’s rules and obtaining eternal life. Although Ged and Lebannen seem to correct the grave mistake made by this wizard, in *The Other Wind* we learn that this is not so. The damage inflicted on the world by the Vedurnan and Cob still remains. In fact, the whole world seems to be trapped in a spiral that leads only towards the destruction of the whole universe, as the dead attempt to break free from the land where they are held against nature’s laws. The only manner in which the problem may be solved is if the living tear down the wall constructed by those first wizards. For such an enterprise, King Lebannen will be aided by, among others, Tehanu and Tenar. After some struggle, the party succeeds in opening a gap in the wall, through which the dead are able to escape the dreadful place where they had been confined. It is at this precise moment that Tehanu transforms into the mighty dragon that she had within her, becoming what she has always been meant to be. At the same time, this event will bring about social and structural changes to Earthsea, leading to the beginning of a new in the archipelago.

According to Bjørn Thomassen, Arnold van Gennep, in his study of liminality and the experience of the individual in such a situation, “insisted that individuals make choices that affect social situations in *any* kind of society” (11, italics in original). Of course, concerning the present study, it is not Tehanu alone who produces this change, although she is an essential part of it. We can, however, plausibly claim that this change is effected, to a large extent, because of Tehanu’s successful process of individuation, and because she finally achieves a position of her own from which to act. Thus, even though the destruction of the wall and the repair of the world is a group effort, the truth is

that without each of the individuals and, in this case Tehanu, the outcome may not have been achievable. Besides, we can even say that Tehanu's process of individuation, which ends up giving her such a crucial role in Earthsea's future, has been propelled because she has been able to develop her own power, figure out what this word means for her, and how she can use it. As we said earlier, Tehanu does not resign herself to settling into those positions that society had already prepared for people like her, places and roles that offer no prospect of change at all. For her, it was a matter of choosing between transition and power on the one hand, or immobility and frailty on the other. Fortunately for both herself and her world, she chooses the former. Here, we may recall some words about power uttered by Le Guin herself. She suggests that "[m]ost people have to generate their own power" ("The Second Report of the Shipwrecked Foreigner to the Kadanh of Derb" 131), and that each of us should shape power in accordance with our experiences and beliefs. As she put it, "the word 'power' has become a form empty of content, which has meaning only as the individual fills it, pours the molten bronze of a life and self into that empty mold" (133-4). This declaration mirrors Tehanu's own experience. Le Guin additionally declares that such a word should never be filled only with ideas of individualism (134). Although we have pointed out that the power that Tehanu generates serves to help her achieve individuation, to, in a sense, stand out of the crowd, we should also point out here that she does not exercise that power with individualist aims. Instead, what Tehanu is able to achieve with the use of her power is a collective change, in that, thanks to the addition of her personal effort to a collective enterprise, it is the whole of Earthsea that is changed.

The already mentioned stage of transition in which Earthsea is enmeshed could also be considered a liminal period for the archipelago. In the light of Victor Turner's theory on the issue, "liminality [would refer] to any 'betwixt and between' situation or object" (Thomassen 16), as he extends its applications to "[s]ingle moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs" (16). In fact, we frequently find mention of changes occurring in the Earthsea universe in the narratives of *Tehanu* and *The Other Wind*: references to society changing, sometimes presumably for the worse (*Tehanu* 1.641); to a new time that may come after the last Archmage's, that is Ged's, loss of power and resignation (2.655); to the potential implications of the presence of a King but the lack of an Archmage (10.798); or the various warnings of the wise that the pattern of the world, its balance or paradigm, is changing (*The Other Wind* 1.39, 4.152; *Tehanu* 2.663). Thus, the prospect of a deep transition in the ways of Earthsea has long been vaticinated, but not to have manifested until a group of individuals set themselves to achieve this transition, very much resembling those "'axial moments' or 'axial renaissances'" (Jaspers, qtd. in Thomassen 19),

that are marked by the fact that "individuals rise to the test and new leadership figures arise" (20).

All in all, we should here notice that change and transition seem to be two factors that are completely ingrained in the universe of Earthsea, being at work from the very earliest days of its life, as when Ged tells Tenar that "the [Creation of Earthsea—this universe's foundational poem] tells us that we have all returned and return forever to the source, and that the source is ceaseless" (*Tehanu* 12.860). The poem itself tells us of that apparent continuous change or movement forward, where decay and death are necessary if we want to open the door to renovation and, basically, life. Examples of such ideals are lines such as the following:

Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
.....
The making from the unmaking,
the ending from the beginning,
who shall know surely? ("A Description of Earthsea" 391-392)

This idea of change being of utterly necessary for both humanity and the universe to continue existing is one that is fiercely defended by Le Guin, as when she said "I believe in change. Change does occur and must occur" ("Entretien avec Ursula K. Le Guin" 140). For this author, what mattered most was that periods of change and transition—individual and collective alike—exist continually, and it matters not whether the outcome of change is positive or negative. Change, all by itself, is what counts, so that we are never stagnant.

Hence, the destruction of the wall in the land of the dead by Tehanu and her companions will bring about certain changes. Melanie A. Rawls, in her essay "Witches, Wives and Dragons: The Evolution of the Women in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea—An Overview" highlights the most important ones. First of all, we should mention the fact that in the novels studied for this paper, the people who until now had been left behind and in the margins of society, away from positions of power and action, have been brought right to the center; among these are women (Rawls 139). In this regard, Rawls especially puts the emphasis on the role that female characters play in sparking "the change that is sweeping Earthsea" (139), which we could say kindles the hope for a future time in Earthsea when power will be finally distributed in a more rational and egalitarian way. This development of the female characters that Le Guin proposes in the last instalments of her fantasy saga clearly hints at that change of mentality that was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, where we talked of how Le Guin developed a more conscious feminism during the second half

of her life. Besides the inclusion, from now on, of new actors that thus far have been denied the chance of acting, we get the impression that Earthsea's social structure is also about to be upended. There are two examples of this. On the one hand, we should mention the royal wedding, which sees King Lebannen and Princess Sesarahk tie the knot. As Rawls rightly suggests, this event is a clear indication of social and cultural reconciliation (145). The marriage of the "dark-skinned, male Lebannen of the Archipelago to light-skinned, female Sesarahk of the Kargad Lands" (145) will help restore peace and communication between two societies that have been fighting each other for a long time and, hopefully, this new bond will form the basis for a renewed Earthsea society more inclined towards cooperation between those who are different. On the other hand, there is the issue of who will rule Earthsea. That there is a king to unify all of the islands and peoples is clear, but, since Ged's resignation as Archmage, that position of power and authority has been vacant. The only known information about the next archmage is riddles alluding to a woman who, presumably, lives on Gont. As the position of Archmage, part of the male world of magic and wizardry, has exclusively been offered to men, this answer to the question of who will be the next archmage is, to say the least, a curious prediction. However, this answer makes perfect sense under the winds of change that are blowing in Earthsea.

[T]hat answer makes sense if the world is being re-invented and if rule and power are no longer the chief goals of thinking creatures. Under the developing new world order, women, dragons and the dead choose freedom over power. They do not want to rule; they do not want to be singular, heroic or at the top. They only wish to go their own way, in relationship with others, but not oppressing or being oppressed by others. (Rawls 145)

The last lines of the above quote from Rawls reflect exactly what we have tried to show has happened to Tehanu, namely that she has been able to negotiate her own worth, voice, and power without making use of other positions and roles that conveniently at hand. Consequently she successfully finds a place from which she can act and affect the world. Tehanu's case, however, is only one instance of the several previously marginal characters that, by the end of the Earthsea saga, have become central. She is just one of those "meek [who] have inherited Earthsea, [...] [speaking] and [acting] from their own values and perspective" (Rawls 148).

As a final remark, we would like to suggest that the change of paradigm on behalf of the othered that has here been shown here is an attempt by Le Guin to claim that an alternative approach to power is both possible, and, most importantly, advisable. Le Guin has presented a take on power that leaves

behind that vertical approach, wherein a few sit on top of many; she speaks in favor of another approach to power that, by adopting a horizontal position, makes sure that power is distributed equally to every single member of society, which goes without saying should necessarily be comprised of every single individual. Addressing, once again, her audience of Mills College, Le Guin made her point on this issue very clear with the following words: "I hope you live without the need to dominate, and without the need to be dominated. I hope you are never victims, but I hope you have no power over other people" ("A Left-Handed Commencement Address" 117).

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