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# INTRODUCTION

## READING POSITIONS

Poetry has a form, the novel has a form; research, the research in which the movement of all research is in play, seems unaware that it does not have a form or, worse still, refuses to question the form that it borrows from tradition ... . But the manner of conveying what is in question in research remains, generally, that of exposition. The scholarly, academic dissertation is the model.

(Blanchot 1993: 3)

Writing of any kind fixes the word outside time, and silences it. The written word is a shadow. Shadows are silent. The reader breathes back life into that unmortality, and maybe noise into that silence.

(Le Guin 1989: 180)

In this thesis I draw out the main features of Le Guin's response to power, as revealed (and often concealed) in her writing. But in saying that, making a statement of intent, the mark of acquiescence to established conventions of academic thesis writing, I inevitably raise more questions than I answer. Which form of power am I dealing with? And which theoretical model of power am I invoking? Above all, why should a study of Le Guin, in an era when comparison and dialogue between voices is valued more than a 'monological'<sup>1</sup> single-author study, shed any light on the complex nature of power in the late twentieth century? This introduction aims to pursue these problems, not, as I shall explain, with a view to resolving them, but rather in order to discover what useful problems they raise in their turn.

My strategy in this thesis is emphatically not to seek single or final interpretations of Le Guin's work. There are several such accounts, some of them by very able critics and scholars; and yet they all leave me feeling that something has been missed. To take only one example, Bucknall neatly sums up Le Guin's writing as follows:

Le Guin is a romantic, and as a romantic she values love, nature, adventure, marvels, dreams, the imagination, and the unconscious. Like the romantics [sic], she is aware of the dark side of things and is attracted by it, even when she prefers the light. She values the individual and his or her struggle for personal liberation.

(1981: 154)

This, of course, is the kind of resumé literary criticism is made of. It slots the writer into a category ('Le Guin is a romantic') and then proceeds to outline unequivocally the main qualities of the category. It finishes by indicating the author's contribution to humanistic values ('She values the individual'). I do not wish to denigrate Bucknall's account, or the kind of criticism she represents. On the contrary, I agree with her findings - as far as they go. I cannot fail to see them, however, as an attempt to get unruly or undecidable aspects of the writing firmly under control of a critical summary that authoritatively delineates the author's most important concerns. I argue, in opposition to Bucknall, that statements of this kind are a surer index of the critic's own theoretical allegiances (in this case, to a Leavissian thematic model of analysis) than they are of what 'exists' in the text/s.

Cummins's summary of Le Guin's work, in the first chapter to her book, revealingly entitled *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*, is less overt in its theoretical affiliations. The chapter opens with a biographical sketch of the writer, then progresses to an overview of her work. It ends with a thematic summary similar to Bucknall's:

... "getting there" is a journey for both artist and reader. The journey may occur within the expansive worlds of Earthsea or the Hainish planets or within the restricted worlds of Orsinia or the American West Coast. An individual journey may become an exploration of the coming-of-age process that lasts a lifetime, or of alienation and connection, or of the difficulties of identifying one's inheritance, or of the nature of utopia. Whatever world, whatever journey, the reader will be immersed in a new "there," which will lead to a better understanding of intelligent beings, the world, and the interaction between the two.

(1990a: 19-20)

As Bucknall does, Cummins offers valid and justifiable insights into Le Guin's work, where the trope of the journey is frequently and productively used. But I would trace its privileged position

as a central feature of the writing (according to Cummins's account) directly to Le Guin's comments on *City of Illusions*:

Most of my stories are excuses for a journey. (We shall henceforth respectfully refer to this as the Quest Theme.) I never did care much about plots, all I want is to go from A to B - or, more often, from A to A - by the most difficult and circuitous route.

(1993b: 142-43)

The Introduction to *City of Illusions* was written in 1978 (1993b: 140). In the twelve years that separate it from Cummins's book, Le Guin could have transcended the *modus operandi* she delineates for herself, especially since she describes her writing as 'pushing out toward the limits - my own, and those of the medium' (1993b: 25). These considerations make it unlikely that the journey has remained her single central trope.

I want to oppose my approach to Le Guin's writing to those of Bucknall and Cummins. I must stress, though, that their search for a single unifying theme in a large body of writing, all written by the same author, is not exceptional. On the contrary, it is replicated in almost all critical discussions of Le Guin's work. One of the best articles I have read is Nudelman's brilliant piece, (dis)ingenuously entitled 'An Approach to the Structure of Le Guin's SF'. The article not only implies that the 'approach' it offers is the most comprehensive of those available; it also states explicitly that all of Le Guin's science fiction to date<sup>2</sup> is a repetition on a single theme:

The movement towards Oneness on the planetary scale is absorption into the League; within the planet, it is the reunification of a fragmented society; on the individual level, it is the striving toward fellow-beings and unification with them.

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 247)

It is possible to cite an almost endless series of examples of this kind of writing on Le Guin. Indeed, the search for themes and general, abstract meanings in literature is a crucial part of the time-honoured tradition of literary criticism. This is especially true of a study such as mine where the salient point of the exposition is, allegedly, what unifies the work of a single author. Nevertheless, I do not think, even after some years of research, that the search for consistent

theme and meaning is the most valuable approach to Le Guin's writing. Possibly this project is never entirely valid; but that question, although implied by my methodology, does not lie directly within the scope of this thesis.

In contradistinction to the will to (single) meaning that is discernible in the Le Guin critics I have cited, Pratt discusses reading strategies in an influential article, 'Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader-Response Criticism' (Arac 1986: 26-54). The goal of Pratt's argument is to achieve a satisfying response to a plurality of interpretations, which she sees as an inevitable part of critical endeavour. She portrays reader-response criticism as a response to

... a problem in formalist theory, namely the fact that readers commonly disagree as to the aesthetic structures and properties of texts, and that this disagreement doesn't feel at all inappropriate even though it puts into question the objectivity in which formalism seeks to validate itself.

(Arac 1986: 26)

Pratt goes on to discuss three forms of reader-response criticism, namely Prince's concept of the narratee, Culler's notion of literary competence and Fish's idea of the interpretive community. She concludes that even an extremely 'democratic' model such as Fish's has the potential to become prescriptive. She describes Fish's views as follows:

Interpretations, in this view, are never intrinsically valid or invalid; all are potentially valid with respect to some set of assumptions. Interpretations get validated by virtue of being assented to, accepted, and ratified by communities that hold the assumptions on which they rest.

(Arac 1986: 47)

This sounds attractively egalitarian, but, as Pratt shows, it is based on an unlikely model in which all the members of an interpretive community will automatically and unproblematically hold all the same assumptions. Pratt ends the article by pointing to the ineradicable tensions between different interpretations, and by calling for a renewed recognition of the inscription of critical procedure in social and power-relations:

... interpretive communities are always part of social structures ... there is always doubt, conflict, disagreement, because interpretations are always there in

multiplicity denying each other the illusion of self-containment and truth, the full confidence of belief that each would like to maintain ... . Knowledge is interested, and interest implies conflict; to advance an interpretation is to insert it into a network of power relations.

(Arac 1986: 52)

I find this conclusion apposite because it accounts for two contradictory impulses in literary criticism: the need for consensus, to persuade others that a particular interpretation is (self-evidently and ahistorically) correct, and the wish for a more egalitarian dispensation in which differing interpretations might be seen as valid contributors to a fruitful dialogue between positions. I believe that all post-formalist critical activity is marked by (at least) these two desires, whether acknowledged or not. My own wish for critical harmony leads me to hope that this thesis will find a place in a body of work on Le Guin where it will constitute a valid addition to existing scholarship; such, indeed, are the requirements for doctoral study. But there is also the need to be right, to displace my critical competitors; and, more challenging still, Pratt's call to situate my endeavours in relation to myself as a socially constituted, and not always internally consistent, individual subject.

The situation is compounded by prevailing currents of thought in philosophical circles. As Flax notes in *Thinking Fragments*, the wish for a coherent explanation for the universe and human life within it has, in the latter part of the twentieth century, been shown to be a chimera:

To many contemporary philosophers it appears that the Enlightenment has failed. The grand ideas that structured, legitimated, and lent coherence to so much of Western science, philosophy, economics, and politics since the eighteenth century no longer appear compelling or even plausible ... . The political and philosophical aspirations and claims typical of Enlightenment thinking appear to have been falsified by that which it was supposed to predict yet cannot account for: the subsequent course of Western history.

(1990: 7)

This is by no means the only account of the failure of Enlightenment ideas;<sup>3</sup> but I find it a very succinct one. In the wake of the unsettling collapse of the possibility of comprehensive explanations, the intellectual (a category that could be extended to include the writer and the critic) is in a highly ambivalent position. Flax describes this as follows:

Western intellectuals cannot be immune from the profound shifts now taking place in contemporary social life. These transformations have deeply disrupted many philosophers' self-understanding and sense of certainty. One of the paradoxical consequences of this breakdown is that the more the fault lines in previously unproblematic ground become apparent, the more frightening it appears to be without ground, the more we want to have some ways of understanding what is happening, and the less satisfactory the existing ways of thinking about experience become.

(1990: 6)

In this passage Flax identifies what I believe is a key feature of intellectual activity in the late twentieth century: the longing for explanations and origins, combined with a sense that these are no longer accessible in a direct or complete way. Flax's preoccupations are very similar to those which have shaped this thesis, as her subtitle, *Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, indicates. My writing about Le Guin is marked by a wish to ask questions about her texts, rather than to provide answers which, in the very moment of writing, reveal themselves as partial and inhabited by undecidable propositions. Blanchot finds questioning an appropriate philosophical activity because, he says, it is more fruitful than answering:

The question, if it is incomplete speech, rests upon incompleteness. It is not incomplete as a question: on the contrary, it is speech that is accomplished by having declared itself incomplete. The question places the full affirmation back into the void, and enriches it with this initial void. Through the question we give ourselves the thing and we give ourselves the void that permits us not to have it yet, or to have it as desire. The question is the desire of thought.

(1993: 12)

In my dissatisfaction with critical summaries and explanations of Le Guin's writing, which inevitably leave out more than they include, I have sought in this thesis to open up areas for questioning. I believe that the intellectual desire articulated by my questions is more interesting than the limited certainties that I could offer. Jung puts the problem of what the thinker does not know, and does not know how to find out, more succinctly than I can:

Interpretations are only for those who don't understand; it is only the things we don't understand that have any meaning. Man woke up in a world he did not understand, and that is why he tries to interpret it.

(1990: 327)

Coincidentally (or, Jung would say, synchronistically) Jung is writing here about myth, the originary narratives that arise from the psyche's unconscious need to understand the world it lives in. Narrative is at the heart of human self-understanding. In Lyotard's famous statement, the fact that grand Enlightenment (meta)narratives have lost their efficacy does not mean that narrative has lost its validity as a way of knowing:

It is not inconceivable that the recourse to narrative is inevitable, at least to the extent that the language game of science desires its statements to be true but does not have the resources to legitimate their truth on its own. If this is the case, it is necessary to admit an irreducible need for history ...

(1987: 28)

Later Lyotard makes his allegiances even more explicit when he states: 'the little narrative [*petit récit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science' (1987: 60).

Le Guin also recognizes the primacy of narrative as a form of meaning-making. In 'The Shobies' Story' (1991b), the spaceship *Shoby* seems to have lost its way while testing a new form of instantaneous travel called 'transilience'. Each member of the ethnically varied crew perceives the ship's location, and the sequence of events, differently. Disorientated and unable to use the ship's controls, they group together to tell their own stories to one another. The narratives do not join to make a seamless whole, but somehow the act of narration returns the *Shoby* to the spaceport where its journey began. This parable illustrates the ineluctable relativity and mediacy of story-telling, but also insists on its almost magical ability to create reality and to forge bonds between narrators.

Le Guin's essay, 'It was a Dark and Stormy Night; Or, Why are we Huddling about the Campfire?' gives some of the theoretical premises for her appreciation of narrative. The essay



tells several stories, some of them about the necessity of story-telling as a means of survival. It concludes:

There may be some truth in that story, that tale, that discourse, that narrative, but there is no reliability in the telling of it ... . In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood. Take the tale in your teeth, then, and bite till the blood runs, hoping it's not poison; and we will all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, in the middle.

(1989: 29-30)

This passage generates an effect that I have encountered several times in Le Guin's writing. On the one hand the essay is on the side of narrative as a means of interpreting and making sense of the world and of surviving in times of great suffering. On the other, the discourse destabilizes narrative's potential for truth, wholesomeness and even linearity. The image of the poisonous snake biting its own tail/tale, repeated in the essay in the circle of listeners around a campfire telling stories, powerfully challenges conventional views of narrative as sequential. And Le Guin goes further, to insist on a vision of human life itself as, if not circular, at least non-progressive. This encapsulates her challenge to Enlightenment notions of progress, evolution and teleology. At its root, the civilization shored up by these ideas is seen to be founded on a form of discourse that is inherently incomprehensible: unreliable narrative, passed from one receiver to another down the centuries, which owes none of its power to philosophically accredited criteria such as truth-claims.

'It was a Dark and Stormy Night' evokes the unsettling, and to me, particularly postmodern sense that meaning is, somehow, in another place than in the discourse. Le Guin does not deny the existence of meaning, any more than do the structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers of the twentieth century. As they do, she simply points to the impossibility of defining meaning, and to the way in which language always says both less and more than is intended or apparent. Culler makes a similar point in his meditation on meaning in *On Deconstruction*:

What we call our experience is scarcely a reliable guide in these matters, but it would seem that in one's experience of interpretation meaning is both the semantic effects one experiences and a property of the text against which one seeks to check one's experience. It may be that what makes the notion of

meaning indispensable is this divided character and divided reference: to what one understands and to what one's understanding captures or fails to capture.

(1983: 132)

Culler goes on to quote Derrida, the philosopher par excellence of the indeterminacy of meaning:

What if, Derrida suggests, "the meaning of meaning (in the most general sense of meaning and not of indication) is infinite implication? the unchecked referral from signifier to signifier? If its force is a certain pure and infinite equivocality, which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest, but engages it within its own economy to go on signifying and to differ/defer?"

(1983: 133)

What this enacts, on the part of both Culler and Derrida, is surely not the denial of meaning with which deconstruction has so often been charged, but a profound engagement with its complexities. I believe that Le Guin's writing has the same divided nature that Culler describes, and that is characterized by a self-reflexive awareness of *différance*: difference and deferral. Meaning is definitely present, but it is different from what is said (and, sometimes, from itself). It resides in a deferred signifying space, like the religion of the Handdarata, which is 'always somewhere else' (1969: 52).

This *différance*-effect is exemplified by the short story 'Schrödinger's Cat' (1982b: 49-57). The title comes from Schrödinger's 'thought-experiment'; and indeed, much of Le Guin's fiction may be seen as thought-experiments, as ways of asking questions and trying out different versions of 'reality' within the 'controlled'<sup>4</sup> world of the text. In describing *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a thought-experiment, Le Guin creates an explicit parallel between her speculative fabulation<sup>5</sup> and Schrödinger:

I was not recommending the Gethenian sexual setup: I was using it. It was a heuristic device, a thought-experiment. Physicists often do thought-experiments. Einstein shoots a light ray through a moving elevator; Schrödinger puts a cat in a box. There is no elevator, no cat, no box. The experiment is performed, the question is asked, in the mind. Einstein's elevator, Schrödinger's cat, my Gethenians, are simply a way of thinking. They are questions, not answers; process, not stasis. One of the essential functions of science fiction, I think, is precisely this kind of question-asking: reversals of a habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination.

(1993b: 158-59)

As Rover in 'Schrödinger's Cat' knows, the point of Schrödinger's experiment is to illustrate the formal undecidability of events in the absence of an observer. The photon gun fired at the cat in the box will either kill the cat or not; but until the observer opens the box, the cat is, in a strict epistemological sense, neither alive nor dead. Le Guin's story, however, takes the experiment one step further, heightening the effect of defamiliarization and *différance*:

"Just exactly what are you trying to prove?" I demanded [of Rover].

"That the cat will be dead, or not dead," he murmured submissively.

"Certainty. All I want is certainty. To know for *sure* that God *does* play dice with the world."

I looked at him for a while with fascinated incredulity. "Whether he does, or doesn't," I said, "do you think he's doing to leave you a note about it in the box?" I went to the box and with a rather dramatic gesture, flung the lid back. Rover staggered up from his knees, gasping, to look. The cat was, of course, not there.

(1982b: 56-57)

Rover fails to see the paradox that what he wants to prove, and be certain of, is uncertainty itself. To make the point that outcomes are unpredictable, and that there are always unforeseen variables, the cat (a wiser animal than either the narrator or the enthusiastic canine experimenter)<sup>6</sup> can only disappear to some unknown location. But there is also a metadiscursive aspect to this surprising ending: it implies that writing itself is imbued with indefiniteness. Schrödinger's account of the experiment would have had to accord with the laws of physics and 'reality'; but in the creative space of speculative fabulation the outcome can be even more unpredictable and more in accord with the principle of undecidability than in the historical experiment.<sup>7</sup>

Undecidability, deferral of meaning, is a recognized aspect of postmodern fiction. Flax explains that a rejection of final solutions is a cornerstone of postmodern thinking:

Truth for postmodernists is also an effect of discourse ... . A discourse as a whole cannot be true or false because truth is always contextual and rule dependent. Instead discourses are local, heterogeneous, and incommensurable. No non-discourse-dependent or transcendental rules exist that could govern all discourses or a choice between them. Truth claims are in principle "undecidable."

(1990: 35-36)

In my opinion, the other, often unarticulated side of these sentiments is their opposite: the need for truth, certainty and answers even if they are always already unstable. Flax questions the will to (make) meaning in her own enterprise:

How is it possible to write? What meanings can writing have when every proposition and theory seems questionable, one's own identity is uncertain, and the status of the intellectual is conceived alternately as hopelessly enmeshed in oppressive knowledge/power relations or utterly irrelevant to the workings of the technical-rational bureaucratic state?

(1990: 5)

Allen, writing from a similar position, questions the relationship between feminism and postmodern discourse: 'How do I, a feminist, locate myself, among which is a philosophical self, when postmodernism has become the dominant discourse of western philosophy in the twentieth century?' (1987: 315). I locate my own discontinuous allegiances to feminism and postmodernism in the same way as Flax and Allen, that is, by resisting the pressure to arrive at a unitary, synthesized approach.

Writing as an academic in a postmodern framework is beleaguered by the stringent questioning of all truth-claims, on the one hand, but also by the requirement of making sense, on the other. At the same time as it embraces the destabilizing of meaning, the institution of the literary-critical academy continues to endorse an expository drive that comes from its own desire for answers. I have found, I believe, that both of these impulses are present in Le Guin's writing and on those grounds I would argue that her work is profoundly postmodern.<sup>8</sup> I see her as recognizing, simultaneously, the need for effective solutions in an increasingly complex society and the impossibility or, at best, the limitations of such solutions.

I am interested in Le Guin's response to her contemporary 'empirical environment',<sup>9</sup> the society of late-capitalist America. In the 1990s America has emerged as the most powerful nation in the world. I suggest that it is also extensively infiltrated and regulated by power. Foucault's apt metaphor for the condition of being pervaded by power is the Panopticon, from

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which all the targets of disciplinary power can be seen and, because they believe themselves visible, regulate their own behaviour even when there is no surveillance:

... one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social "quarantine," to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of "panopticism." Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them, and, above all, making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations ... .

(1984: 206-7)

This kind of statement probably is what Barr has in mind when she paraphrases Foucault as saying that 'power is everywhere and cannot be eliminated' (1992: 10). At the same time it is necessary to recognize that not everybody shares Foucault's view of the pervasiveness of power.

Sarup summarizes some of the objections to a Foucauldian model of society as follows:

Power [in Foucault's opinion] is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is a name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society. All social relations are power relations. But if all social relations are power relations, how do we choose between one society and another?

(1988: 92-93)

In examining Le Guin's engagement with power, I have been strongly influenced by Foucault's analyses. They have directed me to examine power-relations and the means of subverting them in areas which are not often considered to be the domains of power, namely texts in speculative fabulation. I contend that Le Guin's response to America epitomizes a double movement towards and away from coherence that I have identified as characteristic of her writing. The socio-political counterpart to coherence is conservatism, the reinforcement of existing practices and values. My discussion aims to show that Le Guin's writing subverts these phenomena precisely at the moment that it demonstrates most clearly its roots in a humanist, capitalist and highly, albeit ambivalently, imperial society.

As McHale notes, speculative fabulation not usually taken seriously by literary critics because it has a "low art" stigma' (1987: 65). McHale goes on to call science fiction 'a

noncanonical, subliterate genre' (1987: 69) even as he claims that it is 'perhaps *the* ontological genre *par excellence*' (1987: 59). The 'popular' status of speculative fabulation is seen as an indication that it does not engage seriously with complex or profound (social or other) issues because it is supposedly 'escapist' (Talbot, in Filmer 1992: 135). In an interview with Greenland, Le Guin wryly acknowledges that she writes the 'wrong' kind of fiction for her to be taken seriously: "I write all the wrong things: sf, fantasy, kiddylit, regional. How wrong can you be?" Greenland goes on: 'Le Guin is very aware that there is an official culture, and that it disapproves of genre fiction' (1991: 58). I believe that the contrary is true; that, indeed, the social and political relevance of speculative fabulation accounts for much of its popular appeal.<sup>10</sup> As Suvin shows, utopia (and, by extension, dystopia) is a highly political (sub)genre which intersects with fantasy and science fiction (1979: 61). Martens summarizes this aspect succinctly as follows: 'Utopias present the future as we hope it may be; dystopias present the future as we fear it might be' (1993: 66). I would argue further, in line with Davies (1990: 1-7), that not only utopia/dystopia, but a great deal of speculative fabulation directly addresses social concerns (which, following Foucault, can be traced to power relations) in a thoughtful, often meliorist way.<sup>11</sup> Many of these works, like Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), experiment with ways in which the author's empirical environment could be different, and investigate whether these alternatives might be an improvement on the status quo.

In addition to seeing speculative fabulation as a directly political genre, my thesis claims that Le Guin's writing articulates a particularly political perspective. However, this concern is never either simple or simply expressed. In catalogues of 'radical' authors of speculative fabulation, Le Guin's name seldom appears.<sup>12</sup> Deetlefs is one of very few critics to claim unequivocally, 'Le Guin is a political author, committed to feminism, pacifism, and anarchism - in short, an activist' (1994: i). I find this omission both just and surprising - for different reasons. In terms of my founding hypothesis, that Le Guin's writing has clear political overtones, I believe it is a surprising oversight on the part of the authors of such catalogues. But, on the other hand, there is a degree of hesitancy and ambivalence about the political dispensation which keeps Le Guin's work from being unequivocally subversive. To a certain extent it may be read, even, as conservative or as reinforcing the status quo. The double-voiced quality of her response to political issues is evident in a 1991 interview with Greenland: 'Fantasy fiction is always about

power, [Le Guin says] “but in fantasy questions about power are skimmed over in favour of the story, instead of being dug up and investigated” (Greenland 1991: 60-61).<sup>13</sup> An example of this is *A Wizard of Earthsea*, where the apprentice wizard Ged is educated to assume the most powerful position in all Earthsea, that of Archmage of Roke Island. Ged’s education takes the familiar form of the hero-quest, in which the hero (always a man) leaves home, passes through initiation, encounters a temptress, and returns to his natal shores empowered by what he has learned.<sup>14</sup> And yet, most readers are shocked to find that this pro forma hero is black. Le Guin is very clear about the subversive intentions behind this move: ‘I was making him an Outsider, an Other, like a woman, like me’ (1993c: 8). Le Guin’s argument is fluently articulated and persuasive, but, as I argue in my third chapter, Ged remains a man and to that extent conforms to the dominant tradition regarding literary heroes. It is only later, in *Always Coming Home* (1985a), *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (1991a) and *Tehanu* (1992), that Le Guin challenges that particular bastion of fictional hierarchy by choosing women as her main protagonists and portraying them as heroes.

I see the multiple nature of Le Guin’s response to political problems and issues as a further, more frequent example of the effect of *différance* that I described earlier as a recurring feature of her work. Le Guin’s writing inscribes a fascinating refusal to make absolute or definite commitments to one meaning or one political position. Instead, there is a shifting, self-questioning plurality of positions. Meaning and (political) value are always already present, but cannot be located where they appear to be; they fade into other references, other significations. In this way the author avoids a too-simple identification with any particular cause. At the same time, she also makes it impossible to give a coherent analysis of her work based on a single premise or theme. I believe that the appropriate model for an examination of the complexity of political resonances in Le Guin’s work is the conversation, rather than the exposition. This choice of interpretive mode has been influenced by a Bakhtinian model of heteroglossia, which I have adapted to suit my own interests. My notion of interpretation as conversation entails alluding to my own situatedness and experience as a reader; it also means that I have juxtaposed interpretations rather than trying to arrive at a single interpretation. All arguments make choices, but as far as possible I have tried to present diverse interpretations as mutual and reciprocal supplements, not rivals in a contest for correctness: I believe that interpretations derive validity,



not by recourse to notions of truth, but through their appositeness for rhetorical purpose and context.

Blanchot, in an intriguing philosophical meditation on the conversational mode, finds it to be a discourse where power does not hold sway, as long as the participants recognize their mutual strangeness:

This means also that this distance [on which the 'relation of the third kind' is based] represents what, from man to man [sic], escapes human power - which is capable of anything. This relation founded by a pure lack in speech is designated there where my power ceases ... .

(1993: 68)

Blanchot's is a truly subversive proposition in a world where relations with Others<sup>15</sup> are so permeated with power and oppression that anything else seems unthinkable and Estraven, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, can confidently state that nationality and patriotism are based on "The fear of the other" (Le Guin 1969: 23). Blanchot's volume, interestingly entitled *The Infinite Conversation*, gives a great deal of attention to relations with people who are utterly different from oneself. He calls these people 'autrui', which the translator glosses as follows: 'Autrui designates other people, neighbor (*prochain*), or fellow man' (Blanchot 1993: 441). *Autrui* escapes/evades western philosophy, which is a system of knowledge designed only to deal with sameness:

... almost all Western philosophies are philosophies of the Same, and when they concern themselves with the Other it is still only with something like another "myself," being at best equal to me and seeking to be recognized by me as a Self (just as I am by him) in a struggle that is sometimes a violent struggle, at other times a violence appeased in discourse ... . *Autrui* is entirely Other; the other is what exceeds me absolutely ... . [T]here is an infinite, and, in a sense, impassable distance between myself and the other, who belongs to the other shore, who has no country in common with me, and who cannot in any way assume equal rank in a same concept or a same whole, cannot be counted together with the individual that I am.

...

The Stranger comes from elsewhere and is always somewhere other than we are ... .

(1993: 52)

I have quoted Blanchot at length, even although I think his insistence on using the male pronoun to refer to *autrui* is a defensive and domesticating linguistic mechanism, because he offers detailed insight into one of the most common themes in speculative fabulation: that of the O/other. Science fiction re/presents the Other as the Alien, the subject of Le Guin's influential essay, 'American SF and the Other'. This 1975 essay expresses the author's interest in feminism, and is ostensibly 'about' the status of women in science fiction. But Le Guin sees women in the context of otherness in general, which she describes as follows:

The question involved here is the question of The Other - the being who is different from yourself. This being can be different from you in its sex; or in its annual income; or in its way of speaking and dressing and doing things; or in the color of its skin, or the number of its legs and heads. In other words, there is the sexual Alien, and the social Alien, and the cultural Alien, and finally the racial Alien.

(1993b: 93)

She goes on to describe the denigration of cultural and racial Aliens in science fiction:

What about the cultural and the racial Other? This is the Alien everybody recognizes as alien, supposed to be the special concern of SF. Well, in the old pulp SF, it's very simple. The only good alien is a dead alien - whether he is an Aldebaranian Mantis-Man or a German dentist. And this tradition still flourishes ...

(1993b: 94)

One might add that even when the Alien is a part of one's own psyche, as in Nayfack's 1956 film *Forbidden Planet* (Halliwell 1991: 395), narrative resolution comes about when the Alien is eliminated. Le Guin's point is that the O/other, the Alien, is always re/presented in terms of power-relations:

If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself - as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation - you may hate it or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. And thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality. You

have, in fact, alienated yourself.

(1993b: 95)

Le Guin's argument here can stand as a description of several of her own novels. *Rocannon's World* (1966a), *Planet of Exile* (1966b), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) all depict encounters between a fairly conventional (representation of a) human and a 'cultural and racial Alien'. In each case, the distance of strangeness is bridged as the relationship progresses and the narrative ends with a recognition that the similarities are more important than the differences. Rocannon, in *Rocannon's World*, comes to value the Angyar or 'hif' Mogien more than anything else, and finally marries an Angyar woman rather than returning to his own civilization. Rolery and Jakob Agat in *Planet of Exile* are depicted as having a more complex relationship, one that is constituted by difference:

She the stranger, the foreigner, of alien blood and mind, did not share his power or his conscience, or his knowledge or his exile. She shared nothing at all with him, but had met him and joined with him wholly and immediately across the gulf of their great difference: as if it were that difference, the alienness between them, that let them meet, and that in joining them together, freed them.

(1966b: 80)

And yet, the formal parallelism of the novel's structure reinforces not the differences but the similarities of the Terrans and Tevarans. Similarly, *The Left Hand of Darkness* depicts the process of educating a conventional man, Genly Ai, to accept that the ambisexual Gethenian Estraven is a genuine human being. And the rebel Shevek in *The Dispossessed*, by disobeying his society's unwritten injunction to forsake anything from Urras, in effect brings about a cultural reconciliation.

Nevertheless, such a synopsis of four carefully written novels can only over-simplify their complexities. I believe that in each of them, Le Guin keeps power-relations, which she aptly perceives wherever difference is inscribed, in the forefront of the text. In each case she deconstructs those power-relations which decree that white skin is better than black; that men are better than women; that heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexual expression; and that western civilization is better than any other kind. The outcome is never a simple reversal of the hierarchical binary opposition. Rather, she shows the interdependence of the

terms in such a way as to emphasize that the opposition itself is false. In this respect, her method is strikingly akin to deconstruction, described by Derrida as follows:

... through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, [to] put into practice a *reversal* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of *intervening* in the field of oppositions it criticizes and which is also a field of non-discursive forces ... .

(Culler 1983: 85-86)

Where Derrida mentions 'non-discursive forces', I read power-relations. In relation to these, Le Guin does indeed use 'a double gesture, a double science, a double writing' in her fiction. For example, at the end of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly Ai prefers the ambisexual Gethenians to his own compatriots (1969: 249). This ending apparently reverses the human/alien opposition so that the alien nature is valorized; but the result of this reversal is that Gethen joins the Ekumen of Known Worlds, a western-style commonwealth much like the United Nations. And so the familiar western, even American, mode of conducting relations with Others is perpetuated.

Not all of Le Guin's novels participate in the domestication of O/otherness in the same way as the four I have just mentioned. There are also works where the O/other is portrayed in ways that recall Blanchot's description of irreducible strangeness. *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) does not admit the possibility of any synthesis of human and Athshean cultures; nor does *Always Coming Home* allow the peaceful Kesh to make an alliance with the warlike Condor, however much Stone Telling might desire it. On closer examination, I find that, for Le Guin, difference takes on a quality of ineradicability wherever coercive power-relations are involved. For example, *City of Illusions* stresses the desolation that follows the Shing's failure to assimilate, culturally or biologically, into the Earth culture they dominate (1967: 215-16). Even in novels where the plot moves toward cross-cultural rapprochement, violence and aggression disqualify the participating groups from dialogue. Thus the violent Faradayian rebels on Fomalhaut II are summarily destroyed in *Rocannon's World*, because their intention to take over the planet cannot be countenanced. Another way of putting this would be to say that where difference manifests itself as violence, it is not a quality to be valued. In this respect Le Guin does not go as far as Blanchot in praising strangeness; but I doubt that even Blanchot would

embrace an Other who was pointing a fire-thrower at him, as Davidson does to the Athsheans in *The Word for World is Forest* (1972).

We may value dialogue across the aporia of alterity, but we must still make choices about ethical issues and, for that matter, about philosophical and epistemological positions. As Blanchot does, Flax finds that the conversational mode best suits her project of commenting on the contributions of feminism, psychoanalysis and postmodernism to contemporary society:

The conversational form of the book [*Thinking Fragments*] represents my attempt to find a postmodern voice, to answer for myself the challenge of finding one way (among many possible ways) to continue theoretical writing *while abandoning the "truth" enunciating or adjudicating modes* feminists and postmodernists so powerfully and appropriately call into question ... . In this spirit I will not attempt to resolve conflicts within or between the theories discussed here, nor will the conversations among them result in any new, grand synthesis.

(1990: 4, my italics)

I, too, wish to abandon the mode of enunciating or adjudicating truth, especially as it seems to me that Le Guin is highly sceptical of grand truth-claims and inscribes semiotic uncertainty in all her texts. At the same time, I agree with Flax that some interpretations 'can provide more or less space for a variety of voices and that they can be criticized for ignoring or repressing certain questions that are germane to their own projects' (1990: 5). Thus, for example, in Chapter Three I have adopted a largely post-Freudian approach to Le Guin's representations of adolescence in works such as *The Earthsea Quartet* (1993a), in contravention of the author's stated preference for Jungian psychology rather than Freudian.<sup>16</sup> Although my use of the term 'others' in my title might evoke expectations of a Lacanian interpretive framework, I have preferred to draw on a wider range of meanings and have not confined myself to a strictly Lacanian reading of Le Guin's work. Psychoanalytic criticism provides a space for me to explore the complex links between Le Guin's writing and the 'real' experience of adolescents: it attempts to address the problematic relationship between 'art' and 'life' that is implied in my thesis. In addition, I argue that certain concepts from a Freudian model of psychological development, such as the family romance<sup>17</sup> and the Oedipus complex,<sup>18</sup> provide useful keys to the politics of gender within the romances<sup>19</sup> Le Guin has created. In so doing, I aim, not to undervalue the significance of Jungian

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concepts such as the shadow<sup>20</sup> and individuation<sup>21</sup> for a reading of the novels, but rather to explore the aspects of the fiction that Jung does not elucidate, namely the psychological foundation of the gender inequality that Le Guin portrays.

Similarly, in Chapter Four, I have drawn on postmodern theorists of history, in particular White's concept of 'metahistory' (White 1978: 52), to help me explore the connections between Le Guin's narratives and the social history of the West. I would not like to claim, however, that Le Guin has been influenced by White, or that she is formally part of a postmodern project of revisioning history. I have concentrated on the metadiscursive level of the fiction, comparing it with more explicitly theoretical models of historiography, in order to investigate the power-relations that underlie each mode of writing. This is not to say, for example, that Selinger's psychoanalytic reading of *The Lathe of Heaven* (Selinger 1988: 75-102) is invalid: on the contrary, I find it erudite and enlightening. But, like a Jungian analysis of *The Earthsea Quartet*, it serves interests that are different from mine.

Earlier, I mentioned *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) and *Always Coming Home* (1985a) as texts which do not envisage the possibility of bridging the distance between cultures. *Always Coming Home* is a striking case of Le Guin's deconstructive strategy, as applied to the relations between women and men. In contrast to Le Guin's 1974 'ambiguous' utopia, *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home* is a utopia for women.<sup>22</sup> Here the author's sympathies for feminism, somewhat latent in her earlier texts,<sup>23</sup> are given free rein. I believe it is important to note that Le Guin regards phallocentrism more as an over-arching philosophy than as a conglomerate of specific injustices perpetrated on individual women. Consequently, she sets about destabilizing its power in philosophical terms, rather than at the level of praxis. The reader's response to this approach will vary depending on her or his views on the Romantic doctrine that social and political change begins in the mind of the individual:<sup>24</sup> I find it very appropriate. The radical feminist theologian, Mary Daly, also adopts the strategy of treating sexism as a system of thinking that must be entirely changed:

... it is necessary that Nags know the prevailing and legitimating ideology of the society spawned by phallic lust - the sadosociety.

The sadosociety is the sum of places/times where the beliefs and practices

of sadomasochism are The Rule ... .

The sadosociety, then, is legitimated by sadospirituality.

(1984: 35)

Both Daly and Le Guin believe that language is a vehicle for the perpetuation of male dominance over women, and that, as a correlative, a dissenting language can bring into existence (even if only in imagination) a society where conditions are more favourable. Le Guin's register is more conventional than Daly's, but in my view her literary/political intentions are no less radical:

The women are speaking. Those who were identified as having nothing to say, as sweet silence or monkey-chatterers, those who were identified with Nature, which listens, as against Man, who speaks - those people are speaking. They speak for themselves and for the other people,<sup>25</sup> the animals, the trees, the rivers, the rocks. And what they say is: We are sacred.

(1989: 162)

What Le Guin is implying, here and in other writings, is that a pervasive and underlying belief-system validates male supremacy over all other forms of life. Cixous and Clément give an evocative list of hierarchical oppositions that demonstrate the existence of this ideology:

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground - where steps are taken, holding- and dumping-ground.

Man

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized ... .

Thought has always worked through opposition.

Speaking/Writing

Parole/Écriture

High/Low

(1986: 63)



What Cixous and Clément's list demonstrates is that the second term, the inferior partner in each opposition, is always already identified with woman, while the privileged first term is always associated with maleness. Le Guin says something strikingly similar, although in different terms, in 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be':

Utopia has been yang.<sup>26</sup> In one way or another, from Plato on, utopia has been the big yang motorcycle trip. Bright, dry, clear, strong, firm, active, aggressive, lineal, progressive, creative, expanding, advancing, and hot.

Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.

...

To attain the constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward. What would a yin utopia be? It would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting, and cold.

(1989: 90)

This extraordinary passage uses simple reversal, the first step in deconstructive analysis (Derrida, in Culler 1983: 85), to produce a startling effect. The lists of qualities cited by Le Guin as characteristic of yang and yin utopias are almost self-deconstructing. The qualities of a yang utopia sound very attractive at first - 'Bright, dry, clear ...' - but go on to evoke, uncomfortably, a nuclear holocaust: 'expanding, advancing, and hot'. Similarly, no one would choose to live in a 'dark, wet, obscure' utopia, but one that is 'peaceful [and] nurturant' is the obvious antidote to the destructiveness of its yang counterpart. And by drawing on the Taoist oppositions, Le Guin does not even have to mention that yang is male and yin is female. She does, however, specify that her utopia is not a separatist community:

Non-European, non-euclidean, non-masculinist: they are all negative definitions, which is all right, but tiresome; and the last is unsatisfactory, as it might be taken to mean that the utopia I'm trying to approach could only be imagined by women - which is possible - or only inhabited by women - which is intolerable.

(1989: 90)

This contrasts strikingly with the community of Hill Women in Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, whose powers derive from their freedom from men and men's society. After some deliberation, the Hill Women decide that as violence comes from men, and violence is intolerable, they are

prepared to kill all the men rather than allow them to destroy the Earth:

*We do not slay him  
But aid him in his dying,  
Show him how to bear himself  
Into his own stilldeath.*

...

*Cut the species human  
From the cord of life,  
That the species human  
May at last let go.*

*With water and blood we can wash away the slayer.  
With water and blood we can wash away the race.*

(1979: 210-11)

Gearhart's solution to gender politics is extremely chilling. It is also the only logical outcome of the separatist position underpinning *The Wanderground*, which holds that women and men are irreconcilably different and men are intrinsically violent.<sup>27</sup>

Rosinsky gives a clear outline of the alternatives for women who have become aware of gender inequalities:

... proponents of this "androgynous vision" claim that nurture, rather than nature, is the dominant influence on women's and men's mental as well as physical development. Thus, the traditional divisions of labor into circumscribed "feminine" and broader "masculine" spheres are artificial constructs which reflect social prejudice rather than actual human capabilities. To feminist proponents of androgyny, women's and men's abilities are potentially equal ... .

In contrast to this re/vision of androgyny, other feminists maintain that there are indeed innate psychological or spiritual differences between the sexes. Their emphasis on "essential" mental differences between woman and men is potentially the mirror image of the androcentric essentialism that has fueled patriarchal stereotypes of women as naturally limited, inferior beings. Instead of perceiving women as inferior, though, proponents of "gynocentric essentialism" view our supposedly distinct traits as superior ones - abilities which furthermore do not preclude women's fulfilling traditionally male roles.

(1984: ix-x)

It is extremely difficult to say where Le Guin stands on the nature/nurture (or

androgyny/essentialism) debate. While this is perhaps appropriate for an author who consistently eschews final or definite solutions in favour of a plurality of context-related positions, it makes the task of the critic rather complex. On the one hand, there are statements such as her comments in 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', and in *Always Coming Home*, where she specifically includes men as citizens of her 'yin' utopia. In *Always Coming Home*, she even shows sensitivity to the possibilities for sexism in a society where women make all the decisions. The adolescent visionary, Flicker, is apprenticed to a woman named Milk and a man called Tarweed. She sympathizes with Tarweed's oppression by a gynocentric system in which women hold all the intellectual power (1985a: 293). Here an essentialist position, the reverse of what our society sanctions, is taken for granted at the same time as it is undermined.

Le Guin seems aware that gynocentric essentialism contains within it the potential for sexism, just as androcentric essentialism does. To this extent she appears to support an androgynous position, and on several occasions she gives explicit, but always already qualified, sanction to it. For example, in the 1976 Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* she writes:

Yes, indeed the people in it are androgynous, but that doesn't mean that I'm predicting that in a millennium or so we will all be androgynous, or announcing that I think we damned well ought to be androgynous. I'm merely observing, in the peculiar, devious and thought-experimental manner proper to science fiction, that if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weathers, we already are.

(1993b: 153)

Here Le Guin carefully tries to separate support for androgyny as a component of human psychology, an epistemological framework, from support for it as a political ideal. I believe, though, that description and prescription are not so easily separable, and that the interpretation Le Guin has chosen also reflects her politics.

In a similar vein, she opposes a radical feminist view of social injustice in the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*:

One soul unjustly imprisoned,<sup>28</sup> am I to ask which sex it is? A child starving, am I to ask which sex it is?

The answer of some radical feminists is yes. Granted the premise that the

root of *all* injustice, exploitation, and blind aggression is sexual injustice, this position is sound. I cannot accept the premise; therefore I cannot act upon it.  
(1993b: 137)

This reads like an unambiguous rejection of the essentialist position; but fourteen years later, in 1992, Le Guin published *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea*. In this novel, the heroes are women (Tenar and Therru); the former Archmage, Ged, has lost the magical powers for which, Moss explains, he traded his sexuality (1993a: 570). The origins and nature of personal power are a focal point of the book. Moss takes an essentialist line, but Tenar is less certain:

"A man gives out, dearie. A woman takes in."

Tenar sat silent but unsatisfied.

"Ours is only a little power, seems like, next to theirs," Moss said. "But it goes down deep. It's all roots. It's like an old blackberry thicket. And a [male] wizard's power's like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it'll blow right down in a storm. Nothing kills a blackberry bramble."

(1993a: 572)

As I note in my discussion of *Tehanu* in Chapter Five, 'Disempowerment', Le Guin's own views on the subject are mediated by the speakers, so that the effect is one of polyphonous dialogue around the topic, rather than a definite, univocal statement.

Later in *Tehanu*, Tenar discusses men's and women's power with Ged. The ex-wizard is as clear as Moss that women and men have access to different kinds of power, but again Tenar is unconvinced:

"The Mages of Roke are men - their power is the power of men, their knowledge is the knowledge of men. Both manhood and magery are built on one rock: power belongs to men. If women had power, what would men be but women who can't bear children? And what would women be but men who can?"

"Hah!" went Tenar ...

(1993a: 664)

In the end, both Ged and Tenar admit that 'we don't even know what a woman's power is' (1993a: 665). But they are both proved wrong when it becomes apparent that Therru, Tenar's

crippled adoptive daughter, is the 'woman on Gont' who is destined to become Archmage of Roke. And so it appears that a woman can hold the power that was previously thought to be men's exclusive preserve. I suspect that under the imaginative conditions of *The Earthsea Trilogy*, it would have been impossible for a woman to assume this kind of power. The change in Le Guin's representation of women's potential is probably due to changing sexual mores in the 1990s, which give women more access to positions and capabilities that were traditionally men's domain. But I do not think current social attitudes completely explain Le Guin's shifting position; in addition, I discern in her writing a greater commitment to an essentialist position than is evident in her earlier works. As I have noted, it is extremely difficult to pin down Le Guin's writing to a single position on almost any issue, especially one as complex as feminism. In an interview with me,<sup>29</sup> she gives a characteristically ambiguous answer to the question of her relationship with feminism:

The debates come and go. I think my essential position remains very much the same, which is that what feminism is about is, you might say, an attempt to be aware of how gender is constructed by society. It's really an attempt to discover what makes a man behave like a man, and so on. And of course, where the construction of gender is manifestly unjust, then it becomes a political movement to rectify it, to try to put a little more justice and reason into it. I think that is my present working definition of feminism. It doesn't put me on any particular side of any particular current debate.

On the one hand, this places her firmly on the side of 'nurture', social conditioning, as the cause of gender differences and inequalities. On the other, it recoils from engaging with 'any particular current debate' and thus leaves all the issues open and the questions unanswered. Frustrating as this is, my thesis argues throughout that the very undecidability of meaning in Le Guin's writing is one of its greatest virtues, and the source of a tantalizing semiotic fecundity.

One of the recurring themes in Le Guin's work, which the previous quotation highlights, is the notion that subjectivity and personal identity are not 'givens' but rather socially (which is to say, politically) constructed. In *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (1991a), Barbara notes the inadequacy of terms for describing personal relationships, ending with the complaint that "We don't have words for what we do ... . Nothing means anything but the proper names" (1991a: 106). Barbara is both right and wrong. She perceives accurately that labels for relationships are

now emptied of their signifying content. But possessing a proper name does not free one from needing to occupy several, often conflicting, 'subject-positions' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 11, 13). Flax describes a postmodern view of identity as irremediably fractured and always already inhabited by conflicting and contradictory discourses:

In fact Man is a social, historical, or linguistic artifact, not a noumenal or transcendental Being.

In [the postmodernists'] view Man is actually "decentered." His attempts to impose a fictive or narrative order or structure on experience or events are constantly preconstituted and undermined by desire, language, the unconscious, and the unintended effects of the violence required to impose such an order. Man is forever caught in the web of fictive meaning, in chains of signification, in which the subject is merely another position in language.

(1990: 32)

Later she criticizes postmodernism, I think justly,<sup>30</sup> for its failure to address gender politics:

First and most obviously, extended discussion of gender relations as essential to and constitutive of contemporary Western culture is absent ... . Within postmodernist discourses there is no attempt to do justice to the specificity of women's experiences or desires as discussed by women ourselves.

(1990: 209-10)

Flax's use of postmodern and feminist discourses to converse with and ultimately qualify each other is similar to Le Guin's feminist response to the undermining of personal identity in the late twentieth century. *Searoad* contains representations of women's psychological space as complex, as inscribed by others' discourses and desires, but as exceeding them nevertheless. In 'Hernes', Jane Shawe meditates on the relationship between her name, her signature<sup>31</sup> and her identity. She writes her name in footprints on the sand, but outruns it all the same:

My footprints on the burning sand, on the cool wet sand, write a line behind me down the beach, running in love, writing my name, Jane running alone, ten toes and two bare soles from Breton Head to Wreck Point and straight out into the sea and back with dripping skirt. You can't catch me!

(1991a: 131)

Jane's proper name is as inadequate as the various subject positions that she occupies to

circumscribe her identity; in any case, what is attractive about writing her name in footprints on the sand is that the waves will wash it away. Identity is never fixed or transcendental, as in Enlightenment thinking (Flax 1990: 32-33). This is particularly true of women, whose identity is intricately bound up with their relationships to men and is consequently strictly prescribed/proscribed by the Law of the Father. In this regard, Le Guin's writing points towards what cannot be defined or described, towards aspects of the self that are not recognizable in terms of established categories such as 'wife' or 'mother'.

For Le Guin, identity or, as Heidegger would have it, being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962: 149), is not a simple matter. There are resonances here with the position of the critic trying to write an academic examination of Le Guin's work. In writing this thesis, I have had to juggle several identities: as a literary academic with feminist and poststructuralist leanings, as a wife, as a white (middle-class) woman in a newly democratized African country. These (partial) identities have inevitably influenced the choices I have made in my research. I believe, for example, that my choice to examine representations of power in Le Guin is strongly conditioned by my history as a South African citizen. Until recently, to be South African meant being the object<sup>32</sup> of a tyrannical régime that ruthlessly excluded all sectors of society which did not fit into their own agenda. There has been little chance of failing to see power as a 'force that says no' (Foucault 1984: 61) and, even though Foucault goes on to argue for a view of power as productive, as a force that creates and does not simply negate or coerce, South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s provided little evidence for his model. Rather, the years of Nationalist Government (1948-1994) saw power as coercion and exclusion, a force that had visible and destructive effects on individuals and groups, destroying families, societies and languages with equal impunity. Dissenters, such as Steve Biko, died in detention after mysterious accidents involving soap, windows and prison furniture;<sup>33</sup> whole communities were uprooted and relocated to areas that better suited the requirements of the Group Areas Act. In such a repressive climate, the most common wish amongst the marginalized targets of power (the Left, English speakers, women and especially blacks) was for power-relations to be different, for another dispensation to wipe out the injustices of the present one. No-one growing up, as I did, in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, could doubt the reality of power or its effects on human subjects and bodies. In a tyranny, power assumes centre stage, and colours everything one encounters.

A second consequence of growing up in apartheid South Africa is the heartfelt desire for a better, more egalitarian dispensation. The wish for things to be different finds natural expression in speculative fabulation, where authors can explore possibilities for the arrangement of society other than those they have experienced. At the same time, alternatives must take into account the historical and political complexity of the problems they are designed to address. I find that Le Guin's writing steers a careful course, maintaining political responsibility while avoiding a didactic or prescriptive tone. By making undecidability into a structural feature, the discourse admits the partiality of the solutions and analyses it offers, while leaving the door open for further reflections. In my own explorations of power and its workings, I have found Le Guin a helpful and enlightening companion.



## NOTES

1. My use of the term 'monological' derives from Kristeva's (re-)reading of Bakhtin. Kristeva reinterprets Bakhtin's opposition between monological and dialogical discourse, claiming that monological discourse does not give space to dissenting points of view. She writes:

[In] *monological discourse* ... the dialogue inherent in all discourse is smothered in a *prohibition*, a censorship, such that this discourse refuses to turn back upon itself, to enter into dialogue with itself.

(1986: 47)

2. In fairness, as I mention in Chapter One, 'Un/Earthly Powers', Nudelman's search for a 'pattern' is based on only the works available to him at the time: *Rocannon's World*, *Planet of Exile*, *City of Illusions* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 250).

3. See, for example, Sarup (1988: 1-5); Arac (1986: ix); and Lyotard (1987). Wolmark says, in her book on feminism and science fiction, *Aliens and Others*, that the breakdown of Enlightenment theories underpins both the phenomenon of feminist science fiction and her approach to the material (1993: 6-20).

4. In referring to the text as 'controlled', I take full cognizance of the unpredictable and elusive nature of language. In addition, in writing, the referential function is apt to disappear amongst the reflexive mutual reference of signifiers (Culler 1983: 133). I believe, nevertheless, that the author has more control over her texts than over the activities and progress of the world in which she participates.

5. 'Speculative fabulation' is my label for the genre that includes both science fiction and fantasy. I have borrowed the term 'fabulation' from Scholes, who defines it as 'fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the world we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way' (1975a: 29). In using the term, I am aware of the inadequacy of all labels for this kind of writing and have consequently chosen the one I find least problematic.

6. Le Guin's fondness for cats is revealed in pieces such as 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves', where the cat's hunger is at least as important as the literary interview (1993b: 41-42), in 'Neko at Twenty', which commemorates her aged cat (1991b: 7); and in *A Woman's Liberation*, where the narrator's kitten gives her lessons in feminist assertiveness (1995a: 157-60).

7. This eerie effect is repeated in 'Ether Or' (1995b), which is set in an ethereal small American town that moves around America unpredictably. The inhabitants of Ether are unable to say where their town will be on any given morning, and nobody who leaves the town is able to find it again, except Roger Hiddenstone (1995b: 46).

8. While Roberts cites *Always Coming Home* as a postmodern text (1993: 148-55), she does not include any of Le Guin's other works in the category of postmodernist science fiction.

9. Suvin uses this term to differentiate the conditions a science fiction author is actually experiencing from those depicted in the fiction (1979: 8). I find it cumbersome but preferable to the highly problematic 'reality', which it is designed to replace.

10. Davies propounds this view in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict, and War*, when he writes that 'SF is a literary form particularly suited to the analysis of conflict and war' (1990: 2). Barr approaches the matter from a different perspective by exploring the connections between speculative fabulation, feminism and postmodernism in *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (1992).

11. Examples of speculative fabulation's engagement with political concerns are far too numerous for an exhaustive list to be given here. I shall simply cite a few outstanding examples: the parallels between 'The Rebuilding of the Shire' in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and post-second World War Europe (Tolkien 1968: 1035-1058); representations of fascism in Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1945) and Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962); the portrayal of tyranny in Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949); and so on. Several of the episodes of *Star Trek*, where the Prime Directive is not to interfere with indigenous cultures (Reeves-Stevens 1990: 111, 398), may be read as comments on the problems of racism and ethnocentrism which have plagued relations between cultures in the late twentieth century. Finally, any number of titles have been written on the topic of relations between the sexes. See, for example, Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976); Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1975); and Fowler's *Sarah Canary* (1991).

12. See, for example, Easthope's discussion of utopia (Davies 1990: 50-67) and Greenberg's collection of *Social Problems Through Science Fiction* (1975). Wolmark (1993) and Barr (1992) barely mention Le Guin, although Barr does devote a chapter to Le Guin's short story 'Sur' in *Lost in Space* (1993: 154-70).

13. Significantly, Le Guin goes on to identify power-relations in fantasy as the 'subject' of *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* (Greenland 1991: 61).

14. My account of the stages in the myth of the hero is derived from Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968). While I find Campbell's analysis limited because of its masculinist bias, I do not think this affects its applicability here.

15. My use of the terms 'other' and 'Other', although it recalls Lacanian interpretive frameworks, gestures towards a political reading of alterity as a mode of relationship that denies equality. I use 'other' to refer to a relationship of othering on a personal basis, and 'Other' to refer to a group or groups that are constituted as 'different' by a collectivity.

16. In 'The Child and the Shadow', Le Guin describes Jung as 'the psychologist whose ideas on art are the most meaningful to most artists' (1993b: 58). Later in the essay she writes:

Jung saw the psyche as populated with a group of fascinating figures,  
much livelier than Freud's grim trio of Id, Ego, Superego ...  
(1993b: 59)

17. See, for example Gay (1989: 297-300) and Blos (1962: 154).

18. See, for example, Gay (1989: 640-45); Mitchell (1974: 14, 88-91) and Chodorow (1978: 94-95, 159-64).

19. I am using 'romance' in a very different sense from Bittner, whose book, *Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* (1984), contains an extended comparison of the structures of Le Guin's fiction with those of pastoral romance. By contrast, I use the term to refer to the fictional depiction of sexual (and sexualized) relationships.

20. See, for example, Jung (1959: 8-10; 1990: 80); Samuels (1985: 31-32).

21. See, for example, Jung (1990: 147-85).

22. Women do not come off very well in *The Dispossessed*, where all important decisions are made by men and women are either helpmates like Takver, rejecting/castrating mothers like Rulag, or prostitutes like Vea. I owe this insight in great measure to Lefanu (1988: 133).

23. In 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux', Le Guin writes that she was just encountering feminist theory at the time when she wrote *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1993b: 155-56). In the same vein, in her interview with me (reproduced in full in the Appendix to this thesis) she says:

I didn't start reading feminist theory, and begin to understand what the debates were about, until the mid- or late seventies. So I was slow to become a theoretical feminist. I was just saying, "I know what all this is about," and actually I didn't. In the late seventies and early eighties I was catching up on reading the theory, reading feminist criticism, reading books by women, all that.

24. This idea appears frequently in Blake's and Shelley's work; but perhaps it is given clearest expression in Blake's *The First Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Los* (1972: 222-37, 255-60) and in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1951: 54-130).

25. The essay from which this passage is taken, 'Woman/Wilderness', appeared in 1986, the year after *Always Coming Home*. In the novel, too, non-human natural phenomena are referred to as 'people':

The people of the Sky, called Four-House People, Sky People, Rainbow People, include the sun and stars, the oceans, wild animals not hunted as game, all animals, plants, and persons considered as the species rather than as an individual, human beings considered as a tribe, people, or species, all people and beings in dreams, visions, and stories, most kinds of birds, the dead, and the unborn.

(1985a: 44)

26. Le Guin's debt to Taoism, which she invokes here, has been explored by various critics, for example Bain (Bloom 1986: 211-224); Crow and Erlich (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 220-24) and Woodcock (1994).

27. In the years since the publication of *The Wanderground*, Gearhart has revised her position somewhat. Her views are less implacably separatist, as she explained in an unpublished interview with me:

We've got to say we are different and men are violent in order to make our separateness OK. But I can't say any more that men's biology makes them violent. I've become kind of an agnostic about that.

28. This situation is at the core of Le Guin's award-winning story, 'The Ones who Walk away from Omelas', where she describes a society whose happiness is guaranteed by the misery of an imprisoned child. The child 'could be a boy or girl' (1975b: 281) and, indeed, the compassion its misery evokes is not dependent on its sex.

29. The complete text of this unpublished interview is contained in the Appendix to this thesis.

30. That is to say, I find Flax's objections to postmodern theorizing just on their own terms, that is, in terms of the theorists whose work she discusses, who are all men. I would argue, though, that Spivak offers a uniquely postmodern response to the problems of gender relations in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1988), published after Flax's text was completed (Flax 1990: ix).

31. Le Guin's emphasis on the signature here strongly recalls the central place of the signature in Derrida's meditation on iterability in 'Signature Event Context' (1982). I do not know if Le Guin has read Derrida; but certainly she is using the signature to mean something very similar.

32. By 'object' I mean target or victim. This meaning opposes Foucault's account, which claims:

The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects.

(1980: 188)

I am aware that an Althusserian reading would probably see the state as inseparable from the subjects which create it; but this is not the experience of many South African citizens during the years of apartheid. Similarly, I disagree with Foucault's assertion that an individual is (only) 'the product of a relation of power' (1980: 73-74).

33. Essa's play, *Steve Biko: The Inquest*, gives a chilling list of people who died in detention and whose deaths were attributed to 'natural causes' or accidents (1987: 94-98). Likewise, Hope's short story, 'Learning to Fly' satirizes the well-known habit amongst detainees of falling to their deaths from high buildings, usually after extended torture (1991: 446).

## CHAPTER ONE

### UN/EARTHLY POWERS

Us an dem it is us an dem  
 When will dis ting reach a conclusion  
 Us an dem it is us an dem  
 Pick your place before de confusion, it is us or dem.  
 (Zephaniah, in Collier 1992: 2)

What about the cultural and the racial Other? This is the Alien everybody recognizes as alien, supposed to be the special concern of SF. Well, in the old pulp SF, it's very simple. The only good alien is a dead alien - whether he is an Aldebaranian Mantis-Man or a German dentist.  
 (Le Guin 1993b: 94)

Several of Le Guin's writings present narrative as constitutive of human existence.<sup>1</sup> A polemical exposition of this belief is found in 'Some Thoughts on Narrative', where Le Guin writes:

Narrative is a stratagem of mortality. It is a means, a way of living ...  
 To put it another way: Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origin, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story.  
 (1989: 39)

Encouraged by these large claims for narrative, I propose to scrutinize the twin histories of imperialism and colonialism as a story with several versions. This story is one of the most powerful narratives of our time: Said, for example, calls imperialism a founding condition of western society (1993: 4).<sup>2</sup> All versions of the imperial/colonial story include and represent a moment when one culture invades another's territory. This generative, although non-originary, moment gives rise to various narrative developments and diverse reactions. It is, I contend, the episteme which unites speculative fabulation with colonial and post-colonial theory. Accordingly, this chapter juxtaposes Le Guin's speculative fabulation with (post-)colonial discourse, reading both forms of writing as parts of a narrative and discursive conversation based

on the imperial/colonial story.

Much literary theory ignores speculative fabulation<sup>3</sup> because it is, as McHale puts it, considered a low-brow form of literature (1987: 59, 65, 69). Such an omission is, surely, ill-considered with respect to science fiction and the colonial situation. The situation where one cultural group colonizes, invades or lands in another's domain is so familiar as to be a stock-in-trade of the genre.<sup>4</sup> Because science fiction is, as Scholes says, speculative (1975a: 30), it is uniquely positioned to explore features and outcomes of this event. In effect it provides an analogue, by means of what Suvin calls 'cognitive estrangement' (1979: 4), of the colonial relationship which dominates western civilization. The use of a defamiliarized topos encodes opportunities in the text to speculate about what could happen in the colonial situation, in ways that so-called realist fiction cannot.<sup>5</sup> It is, therefore, appropriate to bring the insights of post-colonial theorizing to bear on works of speculative fabulation.

The arguments for reading Le Guin, specifically, in the light of post-colonial theory are even stronger than for reading the genre of speculative fabulation as a whole in this way. As an American author, Le Guin occupies a particularly ambivalent position in relation to imperialism. Some theorists view America as an imperial power, while others see it as an ex-colony of Britain.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because of this ambivalence, Le Guin's writing closely scrutinizes the relationship between imperial powers and the indigenous people they subjugate. Her fiction differs from the novels examined in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), where, as Said demonstrates, colonialism is a hidden theme.

This chapter examines ways in which five of Le Guin's novels - *Rocannon's World* (1966a), *Planet of Exile* (1966b), *City of Illusions* (1967), *The Eye of the Heron* (1978) and *The Word for World is Forest* (1972)<sup>7</sup> - testify to and criticize the subtleties of the imperial project. I begin by analyzing the role of anthropologists in the novels. Anthropologists are, as I shall show, prominent protagonists in the narrative of imperialism and colonialism. Their psyches manifest in microcosm the irremediably riven conscience of the colonizer. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a consideration of relations between colonizers and indigenous peoples.

In my view, Le Guin uses her fictions as 'supra-colonial' allegories, in which many narrative permutations ensuing on the imperial/colonial moment are explored. Like post-colonial theorists, Le Guin offers an extraordinarily wide range of responses to imperialism, without closing the debate by deciding finally possible outcomes. This generates a creative tension between discourses which is the hallmark of these novels.

Like any story, the imperial/colonial narrative has epistemological implications.<sup>8</sup> As Nietzsche has indicated, the will to know is intimately related to the will to power (1977: 224-26). More recently, Foucault has also linked truth and power:

... truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power ... . Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true ... .

(1984: 72-73)

In the colonial story, the anthropologist is the character who gets to know the colonized other. This relationship affects both players. The anthropologist, *de facto* a member of the imperial group, brings the epistemological framework of the colonizer to bear on the indigenous peoples who are the subject of his or her study. The anthropologist's observations are necessarily interpreted through the lens of the values held by the imperial culture. Since ethnocentrism is all but inescapable, anthropological research tends first to presuppose, and then to find, inferiority in Other cultures. The anthropologist's reports serve imperial interests, as colonizing powers can better subjugate cultures about which they possess knowledge. At the same time, though, the anthropologist, as a person of learning and probably humanist values, tends to abandon her or his position of superiority to some extent. This coincides with a growing fascination with the culture under scrutiny, into which he or she can never be assimilated, because of cultural distance and the inequities of the colonial situation. According to Memmi's analysis of the mechanisms of colonialism,<sup>9</sup> colonizing powers make knowledgeable-sounding statements about their Others in order to fend off the threatening apprehension of uncontrollable alterity, and to preserve their interests by controlling the colonized subjects. Looked at in this light, anthropology appears as 'the handmaiden of colonialism', as Lévi-Strauss calls it (Said

1993: 184).

Le Guin's view of anthropology undoubtedly springs from her father, A.L. Kroeber, the eminent anthropologist who 'is chiefly known for his work on the California Indians' (Bucknall 1981: 2). Kroeber writes in the tradition of founding anthropologists, whose concern is to catalogue the distinguishing practices of other cultures from a position of disinterested objectivity. His assumptions can be seen in an extract from the essay 'A Southwestern Personality Type':

The two cultures [Navaho and Walapai] are alike in possessing no town life and few fixed statuses or offices, and in that they have never been construed as favoring the development of a restrained, classic, Apollonian type of personality. Both farmed - the Navaho somewhat more - but depended also on gathering. They differed in that Walapai culture was far less patterned, more slovenly and amorphous, than Navaho. Its ritual ways were of minimum development. There was no wealth: no solid, heavy hogans, no flocks, no woven blankets, no accumulation of silver and turquoise; existence was eked out with few reserves, formerly as today.

(1952: 323)

As this passage reveals, Kroeber's standard is a western, even classical one. What strikes him as significant is the deviation from order that the communities evince. He does not ask about the function and meaning of these features in the life of the Navaho and Walapai, because his concern, as Trinh puts it, is 'the Same and the Other. What is perceived, however, through his language and despite it, is either the Same and the Same, or the Same versus the Other' (1989: 53). Constituting his culture as a self, Kroeber can only see Native American cultures as Others.

This approach to anthropology has been criticized by thinkers such as Fabian and Trinh. Fabian's work, *Time and the Other*, tellingly sub-titled *How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983), argues that anthropological discourse produces the global result of 'denial of coevalness'. He defines his terms as follows:

By that I mean a *persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse ...*. The unusual *coeval*, and especially the noun *coevalness*, express a need to steer between such closely related notions as *synchronous/simultaneous*



and *contemporary* ... . *Coeval* ... covers both ("of same age, duration, or epoch"). Beyond that, it is to connote a common, active, "occupation," or sharing, of time. (1983: 31)

Trinh critiques anthropologists' attitudes to the 'natives' more scathingly:

Terming us the "natives" focuses on *our* innate qualities and our belonging to a particular place by birth; terming them the "natives," on *their* being born inferior and "non-Europeans."

(1989: 52)

These quotations indicate that the anthropological story which Le Guin imbibed from her father was probably based on the superiority of white, western observers, despite Kroeber's attitude of 'friendship and respect' (Bucknall 1981: 3) towards his Native American 'subjects'. The anthropologists in Le Guin's novels are, in turn, written by this attitude together with the need to 'let the subaltern speak'.<sup>10</sup> Le Guin's interest in anthropology emerges in the key roles she gives to anthropologists, as Huntington notes:

The typical Le Guin hero is a visitor to a world other than his<sup>11</sup> own; sometimes he is a professional anthropologist; sometimes the role is forced on him; in all cases he is a creature of divided allegiance. As a student of an alien society, he has responsibilities to his own culture and to the culture he visits; he must sympathize with and participate deeply in both, for it is by the experience and analysis of their differences that he hopes to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature and possibilities of mind and social organization. In his role of scientist, the anthropologist expects cultural division and has been trained to explore it ... .

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 267)

Huntington's response to the imperial/colonial story is evident in this passage. He describes an enlightened anthropologist, engaged in an objective study of indigenous peoples. It goes without saying that the autochthonous population are less advanced than the civilization which the so-called hero represents. Huntington's representation of Le Guin's anthropologists emphasizes the detachment and objectivity afforded to them by their position as researchers. Trinh, as a so-called 'native', offers an oppositional reading of anthropology. She thoroughly deconstructs the image of the noble, dispassionate inquirer, such as that described by Huntington. She insists on the mediation of anthropological findings by the subjectivity of the anthropologist, and the political

implications of anthropology's claims to objectivity:

An analysis of the other-not-me (or of oneself) does not occur without the intervention of the me (or of one's "higher" self), and the division between the observer and the observed. The search for meaning will always arrive at a meaning through I. I, therefore, am bound to acknowledge the irreducibility of the object studied and the impossibility of delivering its presence, reproducing it *as it is* in its truth, reality, and otherness.

(1989: 70)

The representation of Gaveral Rocannon in *Rocannon's World*, and Lyubov in *The Word for World is Forest*, is inscribed by irreducible ambivalence towards anthropology. On the one hand, Le Guin subscribes to a Huntington- and Kroeber-like ideal of anthropological neutrality and objective commitment to a wider good. On the other, she shows the instability of this position and the inevitability of its collapse in the face of material conflict. In analysing these two characters, I read them as symptomatic of a wider split in the author's attitude towards anthropology and imperialism.

Gaveral Rocannon is an 'ethnologist' - a student of foreign societies, like an anthropologist. In a brilliant parody of the titles of anthropological texts,<sup>12</sup> his guide to the life-forms of the planet Fomalhaut II is entitled the *Abridged Handy Pocket Guide to Intelligent Life-Forms* (1966a: 6). Its main, though mostly covert, function is to identify which of these can be made into allies of the League of All Worlds. Le Guin gives the entry on the Gdemiar as follows:

A) Gdemiar (singular Gdem): *Highly intelligent, fully hominoid nocturnal troglodytes, 120-135 cm. in height, light skin, dark head-hair. When contacted these cave-dwellers possessed a rigidly stratified oligarchic urban society modified by partial colonial telepathy, and a technologically orientated Early Steel culture. Technology enhanced to Industrial, Point C, during League Mission of 252-254. In 254 an Automatic Drive ship (to-from New South Georgia) was presented to oligarchs of the Kiriensea Area community. Status C-*

*Prime.*

(1966a: 5-6)

A few pages later, Rocannon explains the enigmatic classification at the end of the entry: 'They're not pretty, but they're Status C Allies ...' (1966a: 20). They possess sufficient technological skills for them to receive aid so that they can develop an industrial economy. This supposed assistance is designed to make them allies in the current war between the League and its unspecified enemy; they will fight on the side of their colonizers. The agenda behind the information in the *Abridged Handy Pocket Guide to Intelligent Life-Forms*, gathered by skilled observers such as Rocannon, underlines the ineluctable connection between knowledge and (imperial) power in a manner reminiscent of Foucault's analyses of the relation between power and scientific discourse. Foucault writes:

... it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification.

(1984: 54-55)

Rocannon, trying to be a dispassionate scholar, wishes vainly that he could keep out of the war and engage with the life-forms on Fomalhaut II purely as a scientist. He wants to detach science from politics. However, as I have mentioned, since the publication of *Rocannon's World*, various theorists have pointed out that no such disentanglement is possible. For example, later in the interview on 'Truth and Power', quoted above, Foucault identifies knowledge as one of the effects of power:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

(1984: 61)<sup>13</sup>

An unwilling colonizer, Rocannon knows that the League's conduct in its relations with the indigenous people of Fomalhaut II is morally questionable and would like to dissociate himself from it. His discourse signals his investment in an ideal of ethnology as politically innocent:

... he did not fool himself. Even his work here would finally have served only as an informational basis for encouraging technological advance in the most likely species or culture. This was how the League of All Worlds prepared to meet its ultimate enemy. A hundred worlds had been trained and armed, a thousand more were being schooled in the uses of steel and wheel and tractor and reactor. But Rocannon the hilfer, whose job was learning, not teaching, and who had lived on quite a few backward worlds, doubted the wisdom of staking everything on weapons and the uses of machines.

(1966a: 34)

Despite this disclaimer, Rocannon's collaboration with the League's imperialistic practices is far-reaching. His idea of 'learning, not teaching' and eschewing the use of weapons is self-deceiving. As even he knows, anything he learns will only serve the interests of a territorial war.

Rocannon's collusion in the domination of Fomalhaut II is a concrete instance of the collaboration between the will to know and a Nietzschean will to power. Le Guin uses Rocannon to interrogate the political deployment of anthropological knowledge. Rocannon shrewdly realizes that anthropological reports are written for the consumption of the colonizer. Here it is interesting to trace links between Rocannon's adventures and the sub-genre of science fiction that might be termed 'saving the planet'.<sup>14</sup> This sub-genre is governed by the narrative trope of a (male) hero from Earth unwittingly becoming involved in the affairs of an extra-terrestrial society and, in the process, saving the entire planet from destruction. I see this formula, and the fictions it generates, as an extreme justification for imperialism in terms of the supposed good of the colonized, along the lines of 'civilizing the barbarians'.<sup>15</sup>

Like any anthropologist, Rocannon identifies with his home culture. The League provides him with a job and native 'subjects' (read 'objects', after Fabian (1983)) to study. He attempts to compromise between its interests and his duty towards the indigenous population by placing Fomalhaut II under Interdict until he can make a '*more adequate study of its intelligent species*' (1966a: 27). But when the Faradayan rebels kill all members of his expedition, Rocannon's Interdict is directly responsible for their not being able to summon help from the

League. It is even possible that the Faradayans have made their base on the planet because it has been isolated under Interdict. In any case, Rocannon's doubts about 'weapons and the uses of machines' (1966a: 34) last only until the League and the population of Fomalhaut II are threatened. The goal of his (heroic)<sup>16</sup> journey across the continent is to enable the League to destroy all the Faradayans, together with their weapons (1966a: 46, 106-107). This decision highlights the superficiality of his commitment to an ethics of anthropological neutrality. In violent conflict, imperial interests take over from disinterested learning.

Raj Lyubov, in *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), is probably the most fully realized anthropologist in Le Guin's fiction.<sup>17</sup> Like Rocannon, Lyubov wants to believe that anthropology is value-free:

Character and training disposed him [Lyubov] not to interfere in other men's business. His job was to find out what they did, and his inclination was to let them go on doing it. He preferred to be enlightened, rather than to enlighten; to seek facts rather than the Truth.

(1972: 107)

When Mogien dies in *Rocannon's World* as a direct result of Rocannon's commitment to the League's imperialist aspirations, the ethnologist is left in no doubt that 'find[ing] out what they did' is a form of interfering in their affairs. Similarly, the narrator in *The Word for World is Forest* deconstructs Lyubov's aspirations to scientific neutrality immediately after he gives his allegiance to 'Truth' in the passage just quoted:

But even the most unmissionary soul, unless he pretend he has no emotions, is sometimes faced with a choice between commission and omission. "What are they doing?" abruptly becomes, "What are we doing?" and then, "What must I do?"

(1972: 107)

In this passage, Le Guin carefully manipulates pronouns, as Zephaniah does in the poem from which the epitaph for this chapter is taken. In a relationship of violent agonism, the opposition of Us and Them is revealed in all its immutability, and the individual is forced to assume

responsibility.

The tragedy of Lyubov's divided loyalties is that he is the last to realize the dangerous ambivalence of his position. The other colonizers see him as a sellout because he crosses cultural borders to make friends with an Athshean, and even to care for the wounded 'creechie' (Le Guin 1972: 2) in his own home. Nevertheless, he perceives his knowledge about Athshean culture primarily as a research breakthrough. He studies along thoroughly western imperial/anthropological principles:

[Lyubov] had wired countless electrodes onto countless furry green skulls, and failed to make any sense at all out of the familiar patterns, the spindles and jags, the alphas and deltas and thetas, that appeared on the graph. It was Selver who had made him understand, at last, the Athshean significance of the word "dream," which was also the word for "root," and so hand him the key of the kingdom of the forest people. It was with Selver as EEG subject that he had first seen with comprehension the extraordinary impulse-patterns of a brain entering a dream-state neither sleeping nor awake ...

(1972: 100-101)

In this passage Selver is constructed, far from possessing his own (other) subjectivity, as the 'subject'/object of Lyubov's research. The defamiliarized appearance of the furry green Athsheans places them somewhere between biological and anthropological subjects in a way which is only possible within speculative fabulation. Their curious para-human status enables the author to probe the investigation of Other culture in a discourse that is free of the need for political correctness. As with Rocannon's reports on the indigenous population of Fomalhaut II, Lyubov's findings about Selver and his kind are written for the consumption of other colonists. Ironically, Lyubov's most important conclusion is that Athsheans are 'incapable of killing men, his kind or their kind' (Le Guin 1972: 52). Like Rocannon's reports, Lyubov's research serves imperialism, not disinterested scientific knowledge: Lyubov's findings supposedly guarantee that the colonized will not resist. Le Guin makes a trenchant point here about the complicity between epistemology, national systems of signification and imperial power.

Responses to the imperial/colonial story in post-colonial theory, broadly speaking, take

two forms. One stresses the hostile separation between the colonizers and the colonized; the other foregrounds the rapprochement and cultural hybridization that takes place as a result of their interaction. Memmi's book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), for example, is dominated by the first kind of approach, as is Le Guin's novel *City of Illusions*. By contrast, Bhabha's essay on 'DissemiNation' (1990: 291-321), like *Planet of Exile*, mostly exemplifies the second view.<sup>18</sup> Two points need to be made about using such a schema. First, there are many discourses articulating each response. More importantly, it is only a schema, not a rigid taxonomy. Neither of the two views I have described informs any text exclusively. In many cases, especially in Le Guin's 'heteroglossic'<sup>19</sup> novels, they co-exist and intersect with one another at several points. Nevertheless, they do inscribe two distinct approaches to the imperial/colonial story, and I believe it is useful to read Le Guin's fiction, which explores developments in that story, in the light of theoretical responses.

With the exception of *City of Illusions* and *The Eye of the Heron*, all of the fictions I am examining here narrate how the colonizers and the colonized learn to interact. This even-handed approach may be one of the reasons for Le Guin being called a 'dialectical' writer (Bucknall 1981: 102, for example). Such a perspective is open to charges of historical inauthenticity, especially where violence is involved. Would the Viet Cong, for example, have wanted to build cross-cultural bridges between themselves and the American forces? Nevertheless, I shall show that, on closer reading, the co-operation between colonized and colonizing peoples in Le Guin's fiction functions as a superficial cover for deeper hostilities and resistance, which undermines the effectiveness of cultural mixing.

*Rocannon's World* articulates a profound and largely 'unconscious'<sup>20</sup> ambivalence towards the imperial/colonial story. In some respects, the novel supports conventional-style colonialism; in others, it can be seen to criticize it. Rocannon is dimly aware that his involvement with Fomalhaut II poses a moral dilemma, for him if not directly for the people whose lives he is disrupting:

"If the Clayfolk still have that ship, Rokanan, and if the ship goes to the City, you could go, and rejoin your people."

The Starlord looked at him a minute. "I suppose I could," he said ... then

Rocannon spoke with passion: "I left your people open to this. I brought my own people into it and they're dead. I'm not going to run off eight years into the future and find out what happened next!"

(1966a: 32)

This can be read as an early instance of the familiar Le Guin theme of responsibility for the consequences of one's actions;<sup>21</sup> but I believe it is also a warning to imperial powers that expansion has a cost. To some extent, Le Guin endorses Rocannon's superiority by giving him a privileged (that is, western, logocentric) grasp of the state of affairs. But she also depicts his limited vision in that, even while admitting culpability, he does so without acknowledging the deeper inadequacy of his paradigm for relations with high-intelligence life-forms on the worlds he visits.

The indigenous people are presented entirely through Rocannon's eyes, that is, through the lenses of imperial epistemology. Five alien species inhabit the planet: Liuar, Gdemiar, Fiia, the Winged Ones and the Kiemhrir. There is no doubt that Western Man, in the person of Rocannon, is at the top of the social and evolutionary ladder on Fomalhaut II. The Liuar are the only life-forms on the planet to notice the material consequences of colonialism and to be allowed to speak about it, even indirectly. Rocannon certainly does not consider that they might resent imperial rule. Le Guin gives a single, brief account of the embarrassment they feel at the foreign presence:

Hope came hard to the Angyar of Hallan and all the Western Lands, since the Starlords had appeared with their houses that leaped about on pillars of fire and their awful weapons that could level hills. They had interfered with all the old ways and wars, and though the sums were small there was terrible shame to the Angyar in having to pay a tax to them, a tribute for the Starlords' war that was to be fought with some strange enemy ...

(1966a: 7)

This comment is the only mention of the views of the colonized regarding their situation. Semley is an exception, insofar as she is an Angya who speaks for her own interests and against those of the colonizers: but her voice is removed from the main narrative and confined to the Prologue.<sup>22</sup> It is revealing that what she chooses to speak about is the rightful ownership of so-called ethnic items, a recurrent colonial theme.



*Rocannon's World* revises the imperial/colonial story when Rocannon crosses the intercultural divide to become assimilated into the culture of the colonized. This is an extrapolation upon anthropologists' fondness for the cultures they study; but it is an important departure for a colonizer. Among the Angyar whom Rocannon has befriended, he behaves with respect and courtesy, as though he were an Angya himself. He even marries an Angyar woman once his quest has been completed, bearing out Le Guin's assertion that in heroic narratives 'the hero may get a pro-forma bride as final reward' (1993c: 11).

In *Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin extends the plot of the imperial/colonial story by imagining that the protagonists adopt inter-cultural co-operation. Nudelman, while not writing explicitly from a post-colonial perspective, points to some post-colonial implications of Le Guin's approach:

Le Guin's heroes have the mission of attaching a lower-level culture to a higher (finally - to a universal) one. Culture is here interpreted as a unity retaining variety (i.e. the resistance to absorption shown by all unique life-forms), as a structural unity - in contrast to Nature as an unstructured monotony.<sup>23</sup>

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 248)

In terms of the novels he discusses, Nudelman's comments are entirely appropriate. They capture exactly the tone of condescending good intentions used by emissaries of western civilization, which are represented in Le Guin's fiction by the League of All Worlds (or, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the Ekumen of Known Worlds). Pro-imperialists concede that it is possible, and often necessary, for colonizers to work with the colonized; but co-operation of equals is prevented by the inequity at the core of the relationship. In *Rocannon's World*, the colonized Angyar supply everything necessary for Rocannon's southward journey, but the colonizer receives all the credit when the planet is named after him (1966a: 122). This is a familiar episode in the story of imperial domination and exploitation: indigenous peoples supply their overlords with labour and materials, only to have these deployed in the interests of imperialism.

*Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile* both assume, ahistorically, that the interests of the colonizer and the colonized are identical. In *Rocannon's World*, both parties wish to eliminate the threat of the murderous Faradayan rebels, so there is no conflict apart from a few references to the dissatisfaction of the indigenous people. In this fortuitous coincidence of interests, the Angyar are happy to embrace Rocannon because he is the saviour of their planet; and Rocannon is happily married to a woman who looks like Semley, the Angyar who attracted him first. On one level, this 'resolution' is not a resolution at all because it simply sidesteps the issue of Rocannon's position in the colonial system. On another, it depicts an accelerated version of the process of cultural hybridization as a utopian ending to the imperial/colonial story.

*Planet of Exile* apparently 'corrects' *Rocannon's World* by giving a voice to the colonized in the portrayal of Rolery and Wold. The novel subverts the ideology of imperialism by deconstructing the most powerful signifier of difference between the colonizer and the colonized: race. Drawing on the resources of speculative fabulation, Le Guin subverts the stereotypical imperial/colonial story by depicting the indigenous people as white-skinned, while the colonizing Terrans are dark. This reverses the historical connection between white skin and colonial power, and dislodges notions of innate (racial) superiority which have so often been invoked as a justification for colonialism. Le Guin makes a habit of reversing the value-judgements associated with skin colour, which are explained in detail by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1970). In *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993c), she explains her intentions:

... I colored all the good guys [in *The Earthsea Trilogy*] brown or black. Only the villains were white. I saw myself as luring white readers to identify with the hero, to get inside his skin and only then find it was a dark skin. I meant this as a strike against racial bigotry. I think now that my subversion went further than I knew, for by making my hero dark-skinned *I was setting him outside the whole European heroic tradition, in which heroes are not only male but white*. I was making him an Outsider, an Other, like a woman, like me.

(1993c: 8, my italics)

Ostensibly, this extraordinary passage concerns the tradition of heroic literature. But I believe that Le Guin's subversion of 'the whole European heroic tradition' derives from a post-colonial perspective, in which her political awareness has been shaped partly by the distance between American culture and metropolitan England, and also by her marginal status as a woman.

Racial difference as a constructed effect of language, rather than an immutable state of affairs, is exemplified and destabilized in the passage where Rolery and Agat declare their love:

... she broke out, staring straight at him as she had at [the stormbringer], "I hate you, *you're not a man*, I hate you!"

...

"I still hear it. I feel your voice." She put her hands over her ears.

"I know ... I'm sorry. I didn't know you were *a hilf - a Tevaran*, when I called you. It's against the law. And anyhow it shouldn't have worked ..." <sup>24</sup>

"What's a *hif*?"

"*What we call you.*"

"What do you call yourselves?"

"*Men.*"

(1966b: 43, my italics)

Colonizers typically label the Other group to reinforce the distance on which their superiority is based. But, as the novel shows, such name-calling is meaningless because Jakob and Rolery will enter into the most intimate of human relationships, negating the racial/cultural gulf between their societies to assert that, after all, they are fundamentally akin.

The indigenous Tevarans resemble societies described by classical anthropology as 'primitive', while the Terran way of life is presented as unmistakably superior. Kroeber describes 'primitive' culture in an essay on 'The Societies of Primitive Man':

Political organization, on the contrary [as opposed to kinship relationships], is something which primitives have in general not achieved to any notable degree ... . By complement, high civilizations have throughout history regularly been accompanied by considerable measures of political organization. To what the difference is due is not clear. Weakness of technological and therefore of economic controls among primitives may be suspected as an important factor.

(1952: 224-25)

From a perspective that perceives the West as the repository of 'high civilizations', the Tevarans' culture can only appear inferior.

Le Guin describes Rolery as 'the central mover of the events of the book, the *one who chooses*' (1993b: 136). I question this interpretation, since she is coerced by the time of her birth

into a position where remaining with her tribe is equivalent to acquiescing in barrenness and subservience. But if she lacks choice, she is strongly aware of being colonized. In Spivak's terms, she is a 'subaltern who speaks', even though the colonizers may not be willing to hear her. She expresses resistance, resentment and dissent towards the Terrans; she insists upon her own culture by refusing to be circumscribed by theirs. For example, when Seiko Esmit boasts of the Terrans' noble restraint in not interfering with indigenous culture, Rolery rejects the rhetoric of 'pro-imperialist apology' (Said 1993: 78):

"In the Canons of the League, which we study as children, it is written: *No Religion or Congruence shall be disseminated, no technique or theory shall be taught, no cultural set or pattern shall be exported, nor shall paraverbal speech be used with any non-Communicant high-intelligence lifeform, or any Colonial Planet, until it be judged by the Area Council with the consent of the Plenum that such a planet be ready for Control or for Membership ...* . It means, you see, that we were to live exactly as you live. In so far as we do not, we have broken our own Law."

"It did us no harm," Rolery said. "And you not much good."

(1966b: 68)

By refusing to move closer to the centre of imperial control, Rolery insists on the Tevarans' liminality and on what Bhabha calls 'cultural difference':

The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the signifying *singularity* of the "other" that resists totalization - the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-to does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.

(1990: 312)

The Tevarans do not engage in full-blown rebellion, as the Athsheans do in *The Word for World is Forest*. Nevertheless, their position is much closer to a refusal to be subjugated than the unquestioning acquiescence in the imperial/colonial story displayed by the Angyar in *Rocannon's World*.

The Terrans in *Planet of Exile*, like Rocannon, are gentle colonizers, who do not exploit or maltreat the indigenous population in any overt way. Nevertheless, their insistence that they

are foreign, and their concomitant wish to preserve their lifestyle unchanged, are typical of colonizers.<sup>25</sup> In an even-handed way, Le Guin carefully shows that the colonial situation is detrimental to them; their traditional ways are being eroded, and their birth-rate is not high enough. All the same, they have laid aside the will to power only because their declining birthrate cannot support expansionism:

... very gradually, but always there were fewer children born. They retrenched, they drew together. *Old dreams of domination* were forgotten utterly ... They taught their children the old knowledge and the old ways, but nothing new. They lived always a little more humbly, coming to value the simple over the elaborate, calm over strife, courage over success.

(1966b: 32, my italics)

Their stubborn clinging to the ways of a 'home' most of them have never seen prevents them from seeing that, against their will, they have been assimilated biologically by the colony and therefore have, unconsciously, made it their home. The separation between themselves and the colonized, which they insist upon so desperately, proves to be a chimera.

In *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin resolves the conflict between the colonizing and colonized groups by means of rapprochement and hybridity. The affinity between the Terrans and Tevarans is staged at a level deeper than culture, but one which functions as an analogue for culture: physiology. The colonizers believe that their metabolism is incompatible with the local biology. Wattock explains to Rolery:

"... the difference is on a lower level, and is very small - one molecule in the hereditary chain ... . It causes no major divergence from the Common Hominid type in you hilfs; so the first colonists wrote, and they knew. But it means that we can't interbreed with you; or digest local organic food without help; or react to your viruses ... ."

(1966b: 115)

Wattock's mistake is that he has ruled out biological adaptation. Clinging to the *logos* of the first colonists' written reports, he is unable to see the evidence of Terran physiology changing to meet local conditions. The Terrans' physiological adaptation gives the lie, in biological terms, to any concept of detachment on the part of the observer, such as Rocannon and Lyubov try to cherish. It also, significantly, reverses the conventions of the twentieth-century imperial story, where

autochthonous peoples have often been coerced into adopting the cultures of the imperial powers.

The Terrans' altered biology draws on the resources of speculative fabulation to contradict the manicheism of colonial relations. At the level I call 'supra-colonial', it implies an outcome of assimilation and co-operation in achieving shared ends. This outcome is the opposite of JanMohamed's view of the parties involved in the colonial situation as incommensurable antagonists (JanMohamed 1983: 4). It has more in common with Bhabha's view of cultural hybridity as

... the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life; it is an instance of iteration, in minority discourse, of the time of the arbitrary sign - 'the minus in the origin' - through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization.  
(1990: 314)

Le Guin suggests in *Planet of Exile* that the sharing of cultural meanings is not only possible, but necessary if both groups are to survive the onslaught of a sixty-year winter and rampaging enemies. Reassuringly, it turns out that this desirable outcome is guaranteed by the exigencies of biology.

The 'rage for balance' (Slusser 1976: 14) of Le Guin's narrative in *Planet of Exile* suggests that, as in *City of Illusions*, 'There's always more than one way towards the truth' (1967: 217), because everyone has a valid tale to tell. Further, the marriage between Jakob Agat and Rolery irons out the differences between the cultures to produce a single discourse, a single reality common to the Terrans and the Tevarans. The text implies that both groups are 'really' or essentially human. The binary oppositions inherent in the imperial/colonial story are a distortion of the truth. In my view, the symmetry of the novel testifies to Le Guin's hesitation between the two sides of the colonial conflict, and a wish to retain an illusion of objectivity without committing her energies to either. Nevertheless, in Conrad's famous words:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.<sup>26</sup>

(1902: 31-32)

Imperialism necessarily entails bloodshed and violence, and in most cases invokes the anger of the colonized. I read the absence of anger on the part of the Tevarans towards the Terrans in *Planet of Exile*, as a silence in the text which colludes with colonial fictions of kindness and co-operation with indigenous populations. The novel writes an assimilationist outcome to the imperial/colonial story that envisages a conflict-free, but ahistorical utopia.

*City of Illusions* confirms a reading of the colonial story as an eternal antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized. It presents an absolutely closed, manichean system in which the colonizers are bad and the colonized are good. JanMohamed's reading of colonialism, and the cultural forms it produces, stresses its manichean elements in terms that clearly apply to Le Guin's novel:

In fact, the colonial mentality is dominated by a manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object.

(1983: 4)

In a similar vein, Memmi writes:

The colonialist stresses those things which keep him separate, rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community. In those differences, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjects ... . The colonialist removes the factor [of difference] from history, time, and therefore possible evolution. What is actually a sociological point becomes labeled as being biological or, preferably, metaphysical. It is attached to the colonized's basic nature. Immediately the colonial relationship between colonized and colonizer, founded on the essential outlook of the two protagonists, becomes a definitive category. It is what it is because they are what they are, and neither one nor the other will ever change.

(1965: 137-38)

*City of Illusions* articulates a different, more censorious attitude to the imperial narrative from the tolerance of *Rocannon's World* and even the dialogic format of *Planet of Exile*. The separation of colonizers and colonized in this novel is probably an imaginative intensification

of historical antagonism. *City of Illusions* speculates creatively about a society where no rapprochement between the colonizers and the colonized is possible; the only conceivable change is a reversal of power.

*City of Illusions* articulates a paradoxical attitude towards the Shing, which, I believe, encapsulates the internal contradictions of Le Guin's response to imperialism. The reader is encouraged to suspect and despise them, but also to sympathize with the 'desolation' (1967: 216) of their failure to communicate with the indigenous people. Their complex portrayal reflects all the ills of imperial rule and, for that reason, I shall examine these so-called unsuccessful villains<sup>27</sup> at some length, in order to tease out some of the implications of Le Guin's re/presentation of imperial corruption and iniquity.

To some extent, *City of Illusions* perpetuates the old colonizer/colonized relation of centre/margin. The indigenous people are almost entirely marginalized in the text. The tale is told first from Falk's viewpoint, then Ramarren's, then Falk-Ramarren's; and his alienness is emphasized throughout, so that there is no local view of the situation. The humans who do appear in the text - Zove, the Thurro-dowist All-Alonio and the Prince of Texas - are isolated and eccentric, unable to forge communal links with each other despite the alternative epistemology they share. This bears out the long-established imperial trend of silencing the colonized Other. When the humans do speak, they all agree on pejorative and distancing names for their hated masters: they are called, with palpable irony on Le Guin's part, the Lords (1967: 81), the Enemy (1967: 19) and Liars (1967: 165). But their lack of communication and community prevents them from organizing effective resistance against the Shing.

In an echo of apartheid demography, the colonizing Shing live apart from the colonized Earth people. They live in the city of Es Toch, known as 'the Place of the Lie' (1967: 63), while the humans live in close contact with the natural world in rural settings. The disparity in their environments evokes the recurring theme of place in the imperial/colonial story, which I shall discuss in more detail in relation to *The Eye of the Heron*. Most of the scenes in Es Toch take place indoors, and Le Guin underscores the un-natural, *unheimlich*, quality of life among the Shing by limiting the descriptions of natural phenomena in Es Toch to a single garden. From the



outset, Falk sees the Shing architecture as Other:

The City of the Lords of Earth was built on the two rims of a canyon, a tremendous cleft through the mountains, narrow, fantastic, its black walls striped with green plunging terrifically down half a mile to the silver tinsel strip of a river in the shadowy depths. On the very edges of the facing cliffs the towers of the city jutted up, hardly based on earth at all, linked across the chasm by delicate bridgespans.

(1967: 113)

This concretization of the mysterious valley of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* combines detail with a 'supra-colonial' allegory to found the Shing lifestyle on a (moral) abyss. The interiors of their buildings are described in even more defamiliarizing terms:

Walls floor and ceiling were all of the same translucent stuff, which appeared soft and undulant like many thicknesses of pale green veiling, but was tough and slick to the touch. Queer carvings and crimpings and ridges forming ornate patterns all over the floor were, to the exploring hand, non-existent; they were eye-deceiving paintings, or lay beneath a smooth transparent surface. The angles where walls met were thrown out of true by optical-illusion devices of crosshatching and pseudo-parallels used as decoration; to pull the corners into right angles took an effort of will, which was perhaps an effort of self-deception ... . It was extraordinarily beautiful, this masked shimmer of lights and shapes through inchoate planes of green, and extraordinarily disturbing.

(1967: 116-17)

Jackson regards these liberties with conventional physics and architecture as hallmarks of fantasy, referring to them as 'the soluble walls of Ursula Le Guin's *City of Illusions*' (1981: 46). She offers a psychoanalytic reading, which construes the room as an example of fantasy's concern with

... limits, with limiting categories, and with their projected dissolution. It subverts dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold as "reality" a coherent, single-viewed entity, that narrow vision which Bakhtin termed "monological".

(1981: 48)

I find Jackson's analysis pertinent, but only to the psychological aspect of *City of Illusions*, not to its political dimensions. The blurring of walls, boundaries and limits in Es Toch has several

resonances for the nature of the Shing. It is a spatial version of the hybridity the Shing wish to (but cannot) effect between themselves and the colonized. It signals a form of surveillance,<sup>28</sup> since nobody can truly have privacy when the walls are translucent. Further, I see Shing décor as a concrete example, in science-fiction terms, of their mendacity: it comes as no surprise to find that a people who deal habitually in falsehood furnish their homes with optical illusions.

Another form of surveillance, this time of people's minds, is provided by telepathy, which is the central trope for the misuse of imperial power in *City of Illusions*. As Watson has painstakingly shown, several of Le Guin's novels are linked by an increasing preoccupation with paranormal phenomena and abilities (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 223-25). Watson does not regard Le Guin's interest in the paranormal very charitably:

The particular danger inherent in SF treatment of the paranormal ... is that this can too easily become a quasi-mystical escape route from real problems: ethical, psychological, epistemological, and practical. A seductive nonsense supervenes.

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 224-25)

I argue, by contrast, that the theme of telepathy in Le Guin's first three published novels can be read in the light of post-colonial concerns. It unites the freedom of speculative writing with strongly political meanings. In *City of Illusions*, the cruelty and injustice perpetrated by misuses of telepathic power are at the crux of the novel. The narrator explains that telepathy, as immediate communication, also carries a promise of veracity:

The great virtue of that most intense and perfect form of communication had become its peril for men.<sup>29</sup>

Mindspeech between two intelligences could be incoherent or insane, and could of course involve error, misbelief; but it could not be misused. Between thought and spoken word is a gap where intention can enter, the symbol be twisted aside, and the lie come to be. Between thought and sent-thought is no gap; they are one act. There is no room for the lie.

(1967: 23-24)

The central puzzle of *City of Illusions* is first whether, then how the Shing have mastered the skill of lying telepathically. The mechanisms whereby the Shing perpetuate their Lie/lies are familiar ploys used by imperial forces to make their domination acceptable to the autochthonous

population. They manipulate the mechanisms of ideology in the interests of power. The essence of the Lie is the Shing motto of 'Reverence for Life', inscribed on one of the city pillars. 'Reverence for Life' is almost certainly a reference to Schweitzer's famous dictum. The Shing have clearly distorted Schweitzer's ethic, formulated in *Civilization and Ethics* as follows:

The basic principle of the moral [of Reverence for Life] which is a necessity of thought means, however, not only an ordering and deepening, but also a widening of the current views of good and evil. A man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives.

(1955: 243)

This is a far cry from the cruel 'mindhandling' practices - razing people's minds or plugging them into psychocomputers which programme their actions - that the Shing use to ensure control over the humans. Like contemporary imperial powers, the Shing perpetrate falsehoods about their own 'innate' qualities and those of the colonized, in order to bolster an illegitimate position. Le Guin's use of telepathy exploits the resources of science fiction to imagine a colonizing power in absolute control of technology and media and, therefore, of disseminating imperial ideology.<sup>30</sup>

Falk realizes, as Freud does in *Totem and Taboo* (1950), that what the society most desires is also most strongly proscribed. The Shing have simplified their motto of 'Reverence for Life' into a law against killing because they need institutional methods of suppressing their desire to kill:

Laws are made against the impulse a people most fears in itself. *Do not kill* was the Shing's vaunted single Law. All else was permitted: which meant, perhaps, there was little else they really wanted to do .... Fearing their own profound attraction towards death, they preached Reverence for Life, fooling themselves at last with their own lie.

(1967: 169)

This recalls, and may have been influenced by,<sup>31</sup> Freud's work on the death drive.<sup>32</sup>

The Shing maintain and justify their position by re-narrating the history of the League and Earth's position within it. They become enmeshed in layers of duplicity: Abundibot 'admits' that the Shing told a lie, but what he claims to be a lie is in fact the truth. Abundibot narrates:

"We of Es Toch tell a little myth, which says that in the beginning the Creator told a great lie. For there was nothing at all, but the Creator spoke, saying, It exists. And behold, in order that the lie of God might be God's truth, the universe at once began to exist ... .

"If human peace depended on a lie, there were those willing to maintain the lie. Since men insisted that the Enemy had come and ruled the Earth, we called ourselves the Enemy, and ruled."

(1967: 143)

If, as Bhabha suggests, a nation is 'a system of cultural signification' (1990: 1), then this self-(re)configuring history is crucially important for the Shing. As the title of Bhabha's essay on 'DissemiNation' implies (1990: 291), national power depends on disseminating the narrative of nationhood and making it credible to subjugated people. In the process, those in power construct themselves as a group. The ideological tactic of representing oneself as a 'kindly' colonizer, which Abundibot employs in his speech, is so common as to be a stereotype of eighteenth-century imperialism, which proceeded under the banner of 'improving the natives' by bringing them Christianity and western education.<sup>33</sup>

The real history, as Falk-Ramarren comes to understand, is completely different from the one propagated by the Shing:

... perhaps the essence of their lying was a profound, irremediable lack of understanding. They could not get into touch with men ... . Twelve centuries of lying, ever since they had first come here, exiles or pirates or empire-builders from some distant star, determined to rule over these races whose minds made no sense to them and whose flesh was to them forever sterile. Alone, isolated, deafmutes ruling deafmutes in a world of delusions. *Oh desolation ... .*

(1967: 215-16)

The Shing lifestyle is an extreme example of the 'will to survive', to be the only person left alive

and therefore to have supreme power, which Canetti describes in *Crowds and Power* (1960: 227). Le Guin's writing about the agonistic relationship between the Shing and their colonial subjects participates in a parallel reading of the imperial/colonial story to Memmi's description of the colonizer's relationship with the colonized (Memmi 1965: 120, 137-38):

When there is no relationship, where hands do not touch,<sup>34</sup> emotion atrophies in void and intelligence goes sterile and obsessed. Between men the only link left is that of owner to slave, or murderer to victim.

(1967: 169)

This condemnation has the tenor of a magisterial sentence from an author who consistently values community and co-operation.

Although *City of Illusions* adheres to an overall framework of agonistic colonial relations which admit of no rapprochement, traces of Le Guin's ethic of sharing and joining with the Other are discernible. Her values are indirectly evoked by the presentation of the Shing as fatally flawed because they are incapable of integration with the autochthonous people. This is even biologically true, so that, unlike the Terrans in *Planet of Exile*, they cannot breed with the native people (1967: 195, 216), and remain, in all respects, alien. In a conflictual reading of the imperial/colonial story, the Shing's wish to integrate is a mask for the need to assimilate the Other and so neutralize the threat posed by a dangerous alterity. This is one instance of a political double-bind in Le Guin's fiction, which I read as an index of indecision about imperialism. When co-operation with the colonizers is beneficial to the colonized, as in *Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile*, communion between the two groups is fostered. But the Shing in *City of Illusions* have nothing to contribute to Earth people, so their isolation continues. There can be no marriage, either personal or intercultural, with the people of the Lie.<sup>35</sup> To this extent the novels articulate the view that, as long as the colonizers are benevolent, intercultural exchange is desirable.

The colonized people of Earth are oppressed and deceived at every turn by the Shing. Their only way out is through rebellion and the forcible assertion of their right to self-determination. Said sees the process of decolonization in exactly these terms:

... decolonization is a very complex battle over the course of different political destinies; different histories and geographies, and it is replete with works of the imagination, scholarship and counter-scholarship. The struggle took the form of strikes, marches, violent attack, retribution and counter-retribution.

(1993: 264-65)

*City of Illusions*, however, does not explore this solution. For some unspecified reason, the humans are unable to attack and overthrow the Shing, even although they have superior numbers (1967: 54-55). It seems likely, given the technological and psychological skills possessed by Zove and his family, that several such families working together would be able to damage the Shing régime. Instead of depicting active resistance and rebellion, Le Guin offers the unlikely solution of an outside rescue from the imperial tyrants. Perhaps this outcome to imperial/colonial relations was suggested by the author's perception of American habit of intervening in the destinies of other nations, such as Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> A single adult Werelian, Agad Ramarren, can threaten the hegemony of the Shing as nations and tribes of autochthonous Earth people cannot. His extraordinary power is due, as is usual in a colonial conflict, to technological advantage. Werel houses even more advanced mental skills than the Shing possess, and Werelians can tell when the aliens are mindlying (1967: 191). In a brilliant resistance move, Falk-Ramarren co-opts the oppressors' plans and escapes their dominion. He is headed for Werel, where he will warn his people of the danger posed by the Shing, and whence he can mount a rescue mission to Earth (1967: 197). As a (cognitive) conclusion to the (cognitive) puzzle of the identity of the Shing, the outcome is entirely suitable. But in twentieth-century colonialism, it has not benefited the colonized very much to wait for help from kindly strangers.

*The Eye of the Heron*<sup>37</sup> gives a different narrative outcome to the generative moment in the imperial/colonial story, where one culture occupies another's territory. As in *Planet of Exile* and *City of Illusions*, the narrative is shown to be ineluctably mediated by the political consciousness of its narrator. The antagonists - the 'Bosses' of the City and the People of the Peace in Shantih/Shanty Town - tell different versions of the same tale. According to the Town people, the planet Victoria is a penal colony where Earth criminals were sent (1978: 23-25). This version is borne out by the medical text Luz reads, which specifies that the book has been 'DONATED BY THE WORLD RED CROSS FOR THE USE OF THE PENAL COLONY ON VICTORIA' (1978:

18). The City people, however, tell another story about their ancestors' expulsion from Earth:

They were men. Men too strong for Earth. The Government on Earth sent them here because they were afraid of them. The best, the bravest, the strongest - all the thousands of little weak people on Earth were afraid of them, and trapped them, and sent them off in the one-way ships, so that they could do as they liked with Earth.

(1978: 24-25)

Here Le Guin uses a common science fiction trope, the notion of excess population from Earth settling on an uninhabited planet, as an analogue for both the use of Australia as a British penal colony in the last century and the pioneer narratives of early American writers. Most importantly, the situation where two groups with widely differing political orientations have been despatched to a world that is empty of other known intelligent life<sup>38</sup> allows her to explore the development of what I call internalized colonialism. This turn of events, where hostilities develop between two colonizing groups, recalls O'Dowd's description of Ireland as a site of long-standing British imperialism in his Introduction to the 1990 edition of Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965: 29-66). On Victoria, the City people want to use the Town people as colonized people are customarily used - as units of labour (1978: 89) for their own profit. They share this motive, and the use of language to distance themselves from the O/others, whom they construct as inferior, with imperial powers in western history, and this justifies my referring to them as colonizers.

Imperialism functions liminally in *The Eye of the Heron*, for both the 'Bosses' and the 'People of the Peace' are colonizers in a foreign world, where they intend to use the indigenous resources for their own purposes. By creating a world with drastically reduced flora and fauna, where none of the life-forms is definitely sentient, Le Guin is using the technique of 'world-reduction' which Jameson identifies as constitutive of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* (Bloom 1986: 57-70). I agree with Jameson when he cautiously assigns a utopian political agenda to world-reduction (Bloom 1986: 68). In the same vein, I suggest that, in *The Eye of the Heron*, the planet's reduced ecology serves a political purpose. It highlights the conflict between humans over political difference, while accentuating the planet's utopian hospitality to human settlers. In this way, *The Eye of the Heron* participates in the same

deconstruction of utopia as *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), by showing the destructive effects of political conflict and inequality on utopian communities.

*The Eye of the Heron*, more strikingly than any of the other novels, enacts the difficulty for colonizers in coming to terms linguistically with an unfamiliar environment. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain the recurring intersection of language and place in post-colonial<sup>39</sup> literature as follows:

It is therefore arguable that, even before the development of a conscious de-colonizing stance, the experience of a new place, identifiably different in its physical characteristics, constrains, for instance, the new settlers to demand a language which will allow them to express their sense of 'Otherness'. Landscape, flora and fauna, seasons, climatic conditions are formally distinguished from the place of origin as home/colony, Europe/New World, Europe/Antipodes, metropolitan/provincial, and so on ...

(1989: 11)

In Le Guin's novel, however, the Shantih/Shanty-Town people in *The Eye of the Heron* borrow words from the language of their home planet to refer to alien flora and fauna. They recognize that the indigenous life is irreducibly alien to their experience. Even the 'herons' of the novel's title are not really herons at all:

The Victorian heron was not a heron; it was not even a bird. To describe their new world the exiles had had only words from their old world. The creatures that lived by the pools, one pair to a pool, were stilt-legged, pale-gray fish eaters; so they were herons.

(1978: 52)

This passage exemplifies the mystifications inherent in colonizers' linguistic strategies for coming to terms with frighteningly strange places. Le Guin's insistence that the creatures are not herons, and that the name is a lie, is echoed by Luz's desire to create new names for phenomena on Victoria:

This is our world .... It ought to have its own name. "Victoria," that's stupid, it's an Earth word. We ought to give it its own name.

(1978: 123)



In my view, Le Guin's text provides a more authentic representation of the lexical component of colonialism than is offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. As in 'She Unnames Them' (1985c), she shows naming as a linguistic imposition, aimed at domesticating and controlling the Otherness of natural phenomena. *The Eye of the Heron* uses names as a reminder that both the City people and the Town people are colonizing the Victorian flora and fauna, and that imperialism, as Said shows, is buttressed by language (1993: 270). As in anthropological texts, language in imperial/colonial discourse sets up relations of similitude and difference which reinforce politically unequal relations. The recognition of alterity, such as the Town people show towards the indigenous fauna and flora, is a first step towards redressing the inequalities of colonialism.

The role of names in perpetuating the ideology of imperialism is further reinforced by the distancing names which the City people and the Town people use for one another. Town-dwellers refer to their compatriots in the City as 'Bosses' (1978: 8, 11, 13), a name that mimics the City people's self-construction. The Bosses, in turn, mispronounce the Town people's name for their home, Shantih, so that it becomes 'Shanty' (1978: 14, 21) and the People of the Peace become, when viewed through the lens of imperialism, denizens of disorder. Le Guin's manipulation of homonyms here makes the important point that, as in *Planet of Exile*, each group has its own narrative.

*The Eye of the Heron*, unlike *Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile*, does not recount the road to rapprochement as a resolution of conflict. Instead, it exploits the technique of world-reduction to explore another alternative: geographical distancing. First, though, Le Guin shows, pessimistically, that political difference can be resistant to re/solution, especially when augmented by a disparity in imperial power. The resulting impasse, where the City people prove to be intractable in the face of the Town people's peaceful demands, echoes the situation in *The Word for World is Forest*, where the colonizing humans refuse to halt their exploitative practices.<sup>40</sup> Both of these novels espouse a reading of colonialism as giving rise to oppositional relationships that has much in common with Memmi's, JanMohamed's and Fanon's views. Once the lines of conflict have been drawn, violence could ensue, as in the earlier novel, but instead a pioneering group of Town people set out to find a new place to live, where the 'Bosses' will

not be able to harrass them. Fortunately, the planet turns out to be consistently hospitable to the colonizers and they establish a settlement called 'Heron', whose name registers their awareness that they are foreign and that the indigenous life-forms deserve respect. This is an attractive re/solution within the parameters of the novel, but I suggest that it is possible only within speculative fabulation. In the narratives of western imperialism, dissatisfied colonizers have often left their original colony in search of a more hospitable environment. The paradigmatic example in South African history is the Great Trek from the Cape colony to the Transvaal,<sup>41</sup> and there are several instances of this behaviour in the great westerly move across America.<sup>42</sup> In an 'unreduced' world, most flights from one location in the colony to another do not provide a satisfactory re/solution to the imperial/colonial story.

*The Word for World is Forest* presents a situation that more closely resembles 'real' imperialism than any of the other three novels. Human beings from Earth have made a colony of the planet called World 41 and re-named it New Tahiti, in keeping with the colonial practice of using familiar names from the home country to designate phenomena that are foreign and therefore cannot be named using the colonizers' language.<sup>43</sup> Their aim, like that of imperial powers throughout History, is economic exploitation of the local resources: the trees and the autochthonous people. In a familiar scenario in speculative fabulation, over-exploitation has devastated Earth's ecology, and organic commodities have to be acquired from other planets.<sup>44</sup> Le Guin's contempt for pillaging an independent world for capitalistic greed is evident in the arch-colonialist Davidson's rationalization for imperialism:

... men were here now to end the darkness, and turn the tree-jumble into clean sawn planks, more prized on Earth than gold. Literally, because gold could be got from seawater and from under the Antarctic ice, but wood could not; wood came only from trees. And it was a really necessary luxury on Earth. So the alien forests became wood. Two hundred men with robosaws and haulers had already cut eight mile-wide Strips on Smith Land, in three months.<sup>45</sup>

(1972: 7)

The Earth men (there are no women on New Tahiti, because the men have not yet made it into a home fit for them; the few women who appear are there for the sexual release of the colonizers) see the Athsheans simply as labour for their tree-felling industry. This is typical of imperial thinking, for which all other groups exist solely for its own benefit. Memmi explains

the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as one of inexorable exploitation:

[The colonizer] finds himself on one side of a scale, the other side of which bears the colonized man. If his living standards are high, it is because those of the colonized are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labor and servants, it is because the colonized can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the colony; ... the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized are choked.

(1965: 74)

To the colonists on World 41, represented by the insane Davidson, Athsheans all look the same unless they are physically scarred (1972: 19);<sup>46</sup> they are all stupid (1972: 3); and they are all lazy. Davidson and the work foreman, Oknanawi, sum up their 'intrinsic' nature:

"The thing is, Ok, the creechies are lazy, they're dumb, they're treacherous, and they don't feel pain. You've got to be tough with 'em, and stay tough with 'em."

"They aren't worth the trouble, Captain. Damn sulky little green bastards, they won't fight, won't work, won't nothing. Except give me the pip."

(1972: 11)

Interestingly, Oknanawi's unspecified discomfort is probably the repressed awareness of his moral impoverishment in expecting the Athsheans to work vigorously at destroying their homes. Given early twentieth-century views of colonized people as simply units of labour, his position is historically accurate. From a different historical context, it is striking that none of the colonizers has thought to ask the Athsheans whether they want to work in logging camps.

Davidson never swerves from his conviction that the Athsheans are the inferior side of a set of binary oppositions: Earth/New Tahiti; humanity/inhumanity; civilization/primitive society; intelligence/stupidity; emotion/indifference; work ethic/laziness; strategy/unplanned spontaneity. These views serve two separate functions. First, they justify his cruel exploitation of the indigenous people. Since Athsheans are not people but an inferior form of (possibly animal) life, he feels able to use them for any chore he chooses: boiling water, making breakfast, cutting down the forest, and so on. This includes sexual gratification, in pursuit of which he is happy to rape any of the Athshean women who please him. These faceless encounters mean nothing to him, but he projects the lack of feeling he cannot admit onto his hapless partners:

"Look, you've laid some of the females, you know how they don't seem to feel anything, no pleasure, no pain, they just lay there like mattresses no matter what you do. They're all like that. Probably they've got more primitive nerves than humans do. Like fish."

(1972: 10)

Fanon articulates a rather different view of sexual intercourse across the racial barrier in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1970). For him, sex is a means to what the black man really wants: whiteness (1970: 46). Le Guin's depiction of the imposition of the colonizer's desire on the Athshean re-narrates the sexual dimensions of imperialism in a way that highlights its invading, oppressively masculine qualities. In *The Word for World is Forest*, the colonizer has a monopoly on all initiative, including sexual potency. Davidson constructs himself both as a phallus and as Phallus, exerting (sexual) power over women as well as men, penetrating into a virgin land and deflowering it. The aptness of my imagery here is borne out by the ugly equation in Davidson's mind of killing the 'creechies' and raping one of the women who have been brought to the colony for the enjoyment of the men:

Just take up a hopper over one of the deforested areas and catch a mess of creechies there, with their damned bows and arrows, and start dropping firejelly cans and watch them run around and burn. It would be all right. It made his belly churn a little to imagine it, just like when he thought about making a woman, or whenever he remembered about when that Sam creechie had attacked him and he had smashed in his whole face with four blows one right after the other ...

The fact is, the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man.

(1972: 81)

Merchant draws attention to attitudes like Davidson's in *The Death of Nature*:

"By art and the hand of man," nature can then be "forced out of her natural state and squeezed and molded." In this way, "human knowledge and human power meet as one."

Here, in bold sexual imagery, is the key feature of the modern experimental method - constraint of nature in the laboratory, dissection by hand and mind, and the penetration of hidden secrets - language still used today in praising a scientist's "hard facts," "penetrating mind," or the "thrust of his argument."

(1980: 171)

Le Guin's critique of the self-justifying male appetite for power and violence, coupled with cruelty towards natural phenomena in the portrait of Davidson, is, I believe, unequalled anywhere in her work.<sup>47</sup>

Davidson's racism, while degrading the colonized peoples to non-human status, also inflates his status in his own eyes. Not content with asserting his superiority over the Athsheans, he wants to be superior to his fellow humans as well. His sense of excellence is based on those qualities that, in his view, make him a worthy colonizer: rationality, planning and memory. The self-congratulating phrase, 'just happened to be the way he was made' (1972: 4, 79, 81), is repeated so often that it becomes a nauseating refrain exemplifying Memmi's comment that a 'colonialist', or 'colonizer who accepts', will take refuge in immutable racial nature to justify imperial injustice (1965: 137). It also has an ironic ring, heard against Davidson's utter lack of awareness of the illegitimacy of his position. Like Stalin, and possibly like the American generals in the Vietnam war, which catalysed the writing of the novel,<sup>48</sup> he recognizes no limits in enforcing his power over his colonial subjects. The repeated attacks on innocent Athsheans, for the (quasi-sexual) pleasure of destroying those who have dared to defy him, testify to the inevitable violence that colonizing powers must resort to in order to maintain their rule.<sup>49</sup> For example, he rationalizes destroying the Athshean village closest to the logging camp at New Java as a means to forge a bond with his subordinates:

He could have done it singlehanded, but it was better this way. You got the sense of comradeship, a real bond among men. They just walked into the place in broad open daylight, and coated all the creechies caught above-ground with firejelly and burned them, then poured kerosene over the warren-roofs and roasted the rest. Those that tried to get out got jellied; that was the artistic part, waiting at the rat-holes for the little rats to come out, letting them think they'd made it, and then just frying them from the feet up so they made torches.

(1972: 85)

This description has obvious parallels with the fire-weapons used in the Vietnam war, and also with the burning of Jews' corpses in the Nazi concentration camps.

Some readers have censured the portrayal of Davidson as too one-sidedly evil. I argue, however, that Le Guin's characteristic relativism intervenes to prevent Davidson from being

portrayed too simply: indeed, she writes that he is, 'though not uncomplex, pure; he is purely evil' (1993b: 147). As the most 'colonial' of the colonists, Davidson acquires a kind of glory in his single-mindedness. At the end of the novel, Selver salutes him as a god, albeit an insane one (1972: 160), and sends him to barren Dump Island to 'follow [his] madness through to its proper end' (1972: 161). The Magistrate's frustrated cry to Colonel Joll in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, "'the crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves ... . Not on others'" (1980: 146), is echoed in Selver's refusal to kill Davidson: "'I can't kill you, Davidson. You're a god. You must do it yourself'" (1972: 161-62). As at the end of *City of Illusions*, when the Shing Ken Kenyek returns to Werel with Ramarren and Orry to 'tell Werel his tale about Earth' (1967: 217), so in this novel Davidson and Selver both remain alive as testimony to the fact that there is more than one version of the colonial story. I maintain, however, that Le Guin is not neutral. In both works, she has thoroughly discredited the colonizers, so that the tale of the subjugated people carries the weight of credibility.

In keeping with the character line-up of the imperial/colonial story, Le Guin has created a people who appear convincingly despicable from the perspective of the colonizer, but, seen in their own terms, take on not only reason, but dignity. What the colonizers see as laziness is actually a combination of passive resistance<sup>50</sup> and the Athsheans' inability to adjust their sleep-cycles to a diurnal rhythm (1972: 99). To a certain extent this novel supports the view (which Memmi, JanMohamed and Fanon share) that there is an insurmountable gap between the natures of the colonizer and the colonized. Once again, as in *City of Illusions*, the text reverses the story of western imperialism: here, the indigenous people are intrinsically superior. Le Guin underscores the Otherness of the Athshean mind by linking it carefully to the forest:

No way was clear, no light unbroken, in the forest. Into wind, water, sunlight, starlight, there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex. Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots; they did not go straight, but yielded to every obstacle, devious as nerves ... . The view was never long, unless looking up through the branches you caught sight of the stars ... . Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty.<sup>51</sup>

(1972: 25-26)

Watson, in an essay on the image of the forest in Le Guin's fiction, prefaces his remarks on

Athshean psychology as follows:

*The political facet aside, WWF is a vivid presentation of the dynamics of a sane society which lives in harmony with its natural environment because its members are themselves in psychological equilibrium.*

(Bloom 1986: 48, my italics)

I agree entirely with Watson's connection between the forest and the Athshean way of thinking. However, it is my intention, not to put 'the political facet aside', but to draw it out and to give expression to what imperial forces have denied: the value of colonized cultures. I believe that the detailed description of an intimate link between the Athsheans and their environment serves a political purpose, and that by making the equation Athshean = natural, Le Guin is also making the converse statement human = unnatural.<sup>52</sup> She aligns herself with the Athshean cause by exposing the flaws of the human colonizers.

Le Guin emphasizes the positive, feminine aspect of Athshean society. The Athsheans are as passive as their world to the raping intrusion of men like Davidson, who are exposed as manifesting 'disregard of the environment, racial and sexual chauvinism, xenophobia, paranoia and megalomania' (Deetlefs 1994: 20). Their society reverses the usual gender roles, where men are seen as rational, active doers and women as intuitive, passive and emotional. Practical decisions are made by Headwomen, while attaining insight is the prerogative of the Old Men, who have learned to harness emotion and dream:

In all the Forty Lands, women ran the cities and towns, and almost every town had a Men's Lodge. Within the Lodges the Dreamers spoke an old tongue, and this varied little from land to land ... . As most writing was in this Lodge-tongue, when headwomen sent fleet girls carrying messages, the letters went from Lodge to Lodge, and so were interpreted by the Dreamers to the Old Women, as were other documents, rumors, problems, myths, and dreams. But it was always the Old Women's choice whether to believe or not.

(1972: 36-37)

The feminine qualities of Athshean individual and group psychology, which create a harmonious community, deconstruct the humans' pathological masculinity. As Cranny-Francis puts it, 'In *The Word for World is Forest* Ursula LeGuin [sic] also [like Tiptree] writes about Terran colonizers, but she makes an even more direct connection between colonialist ideology and

sexism' (1990: 58).

In *The Word for World is Forest*, as in *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin reverses the norms of colonial representation. In the earlier novel she accomplishes this by making the colonizers black; in *The Word for World is Forest* the colonizers appear in an estranged<sup>53</sup> light, so that their least attractive characteristics are most noticeable and the reader realizes with a shock that they are human. This contrasts sharply with the official versions of imperialism, which portray the colonizers as white and intrinsically superior to the colonized.<sup>54</sup>

A potent aspect of *The Word for World is Forest* is its deconstruction of the idea of cross-cultural co-operation which is found in *Rocannon's World* and *Planet of Exile*. Lyubov, who tries to befriend the colonized, is in the morally and emotionally wretched position of the 'colonizer who refuses', who becomes, from his people's perspective, 'nothing but a traitor' (Memmi 1965: 85, 87). Memmi explains that colonizers are written by the imperial/colonial story, rather than (as they might wish) writing their own narrative:

Colonial relations do not stem from individual good will or actions; they exist before his [the individual's] arrival or his birth, and whether he accepts or rejects them matters little. It is they, on the contrary which, like any institution, determine *a priori* his place and that of the colonized, and, in the final analysis, their true relationship.

(1965: 104-105)

He forecasts, gloomily, that such a person is doomed because, in a rebellion, 'the colonized would probably not make any exception for him' (1965: 104). This is exactly what happens to Lyubov, who is killed, despite Selver's attempt to warn him, by the Athsheans' indiscriminate need for freedom from colonial oppression.

In the interaction of Athsheans and humans, Le Guin demonstrates that the imperial/colonial narrative inexorably gives rise to agonistic relations. These, in turn, find expression in the language used by the colonizers and colonized to refer to, and distance themselves from, each other. The colonizers refer to the Athsheans as 'creechies' (1972: 9), and in turn are referred to, more generously, as 'giants' (1972: 28) or 'yumens' (1972: 29). Le Guin



makes a point about the cultural foundation for standards of beauty when the Old Woman of Berre imagines a human baby:

"Ugly they are, do you think even their children are hairless?"

"That we shall never know, I hope."

"Ugh, think of nursing a child that wasn't furry. Like trying to suckle a fish."

(1972: 136)

This is humorous, in the same way as the inhabitants of a zoo commenting on their human visitors (an interchange which can only take place in speculative fabulation). Later, though, when the headwoman refers to humans as 'great naked spiders', Selver, whose vision, like Jakob Agat's, goes beyond racial or cultural barriers, insists that the difference is superficial: "'They are men, men, like us, men,'" (1972: 137). His tolerance of Otherness contrasts sharply with the humans' rationalization for genocide on the basis that the Athsheans are animals.

*The Word for World is Forest* acknowledges the complexity of the colonial situation by positing an opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, as Memmi does, and then investigating the effects of hybridization. The outcome is not rapprochement, as Bhabha might have it, but rather the expulsion of the imperial group. Here Le Guin gives a tragic ending to the imperial/colonial narrative. The Athsheans pay for liberation with the loss of their innocence when they learn to kill. Selver demonstrates the negative effects of exposure to Other cultures; in learning and teaching murder, he alienates himself from his own community when he becomes a 'god' or translator (1972: 97, 106). If translation is the vehicle for cultural hybridity, *The Word for World is Forest* implies, rather pessimistically, that it is not always a move towards more humane values.

It may be argued that *The Word for World is Forest* offers a more (historically) plausible solution to colonial oppression than the other four novels I have examined. *The Word for World is Forest* recounts the road to violence and rebellion travelled by a people who were originally labelled 'intraspecies nonaggressive, that meant sitting ducks' (1972: 19). Le Guin depicts, in effect, the empowerment of a group whose position under colonialism denies them any power

at all. As Said notes, self-empowerment is part of the process of 'decolonizing cultural resistance':

One ... is the insistence on the right to see the community's history whole, coherently, integrally. Restore the imprisoned nation to itself ...

Second is the idea that resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history. It is particularly important to see how much this alternative reconception is based on breaking down the barriers between cultures.

(1993: 259-60)

It is Selver's task to 'restore' the Athsheans 'to themselves', to a world without fear of the cruel colonizers who kill them and force them to labour in the destruction of their homes. Said's urbane, detached approach to the effects of imperialism prevents him from giving much attention to the anger of the colonized. Le Guin, on the other hand, reflects post-colonial anger even in her 1977 Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*:

... 1968 was a bitter year for those who opposed the [Vietnam] war. The lies and hypocrisies redoubled; so did the killing. Moreover, it was becoming clear that the ethic which approved the defoliation of forests and grainlands and the murder of non-combatants in the name of "peace" was only a corollary of the ethic which permits the despoliation of natural resources for private profit or the GNP, and the murder of the creatures of the Earth in the name of "man."

(1993b: 146)

The same anger fuels the outcome of the narrative, where the Athsheans, who have never known killing, are driven by the viciousness of colonial oppression to exterminate almost all the colonizers. Nevertheless, in Selver's insistence that the 'yumens' share a common humanity with the Athsheans, there are traces of what Said calls 'a more integrative view of human community and human liberation' (1993: 261).

Said claims that the novel is the cultural form best suited to give expression to the practice and situations associated with colonialism on the part of great western powers. On the basis of these two premises, and because the link between fiction and the domination of certain

nations by others has been insufficiently explored, he proposes a new kind of reading and literary criticism:

To regard imperial concerns as constitutively significant to the culture of the modern West is, I have suggested, to consider that culture from the perspective provided by anti-imperialist resistance as well as pro-imperialist apology ... . We must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling's Indian characters) in such works.

(1993: 78)

I find Said's project of creating a 'colonial' reading of works whose political content has hitherto been neglected, entirely salutary and well-argued. Nevertheless, his attachment to the literary canon appears incongruous in a critic who is so consistently subversive of received norms of reading.<sup>55</sup> In this chapter, I have suggested that, contrary to what Said might (be expected to) expect, not only the 'great canonical works' but also the novels of Le Guin, a largely neglected<sup>56</sup> writer of speculative fabulation, lend themselves to a reading that aims to 'draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented'. Indeed, in some cases, her writing goes beyond re/presentation of the marginalized, and gives support to their emerging nationalistic aspirations via a critique of the colonizers. In this way her fiction participates in what Harlow has usefully called 'resistance literature' (1986: xvi).<sup>57</sup>

I believe that the five novels I have examined in this chapter not only re/present the imperial/colonial story. They also offer re/solutions and narrative developments for the problems it poses. The texts concur in presenting conflict as an ineluctable correlative of imperialism. The overtness of the conflict, and the forms of re/solution offered, differ from novel to novel, and sometimes from situation to situation. At times acquiescence is proposed; at times assimilation and hybridity are seen as inevitable; and finally resistance and liberation are embraced. Le Guin's fictions never portray the imperial/colonial situation as simple or one-sided. There is always resistance intermingled with the acquiescence of the colonized, be it economic (in *Rocannon's World*), cultural (in *Planet of Exile*), underground (in *City of Illusions* and *The Eye of the Heron*), passive (in *The Eye of the Heron*) or militant (in *The Word for World is Forest*).

Le Guin's novels explore the alternatives within, and for, the imperial/colonial narrative in texts which draw on the possibilities of speculative fabulation to mimic the complexity of the colonial situation itself.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, 'It was a Dark and Stormy Night; Or, Why are We Huddling About the Campfire?' (1989: 21-30); 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1989: 165-170); 'Conflict' (1989: 190-91); and 'The Shobies' Story' (1991c).
2. By 'Western' Said means, predominantly, Anglo-American, although he also refers in *Culture and Imperialism* to the colonizing behaviour of other European nations such as France (1993: 8-9).
3. My use of the term 'speculative fabulation' is explained in the Introduction to this thesis.
4. See, for example, Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* (1951), Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1977), Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and, in a defamiliarized context, May's *The Many-Colored Land* (1985). The television series *Star Trek* and its successors *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* derive most of their narrative interest from situations where cultures collide, often when the American explorers arrive on the home worlds of extra-terrestrials.
5. Coetzee uses a similar device, by omitting temporal and geographical specificities from his novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), in order to probe the discursive and ideological foundations of imperialism.
6. Said, for example, sees American intervention in the 1990-91 Gulf War as an example of imperial practice (1993: 359). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, by contrast, write of America as culturally dominated by the British metropolis (1989: 2).
7. Slusser refers to *Rocannon's World*, *Planet of Exile* and *City of Illusions* as a group of 'early' novels by Le Guin. He goes on to argue that their complexity and the sophistication of the issues they address precludes their being labelled 'apprentice' works (1976: 5, 11). Similarly, Bucknall uses the phrase 'the early science-fiction novels of Ursula K. Le Guin' to designate the same works (1981: 15).
8. McHale writes, for example, that 'the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological' (1987: 9).
9. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965: 137-38).
10. This phrase has been borrowed from Spivak's famous essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988). Spivak concludes that 'The subaltern cannot speak' (1988: 308), and to this extent takes a different position from both Le Guin and Said, who view indigenous cultures' access to writing and culture as a crucial step in decolonization.
11. The use of the masculine pronoun is clearly outdated in the light of Le Guin's shift towards a more feminist emphasis in her fiction, especially in *Always Coming Home* (1985a), *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (1991a) and *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* (1992). Nevertheless, to some extent Huntington, writing before 1976, was justified in using 'he' to refer to the main protagonists in Le Guin's fiction, who were, with the exception of Rolery in *Planet*

of *Exile*, all male.

12. Trinh also parodies the learned volumes produced by specialists on 'native' ways:

You know it, don't you, who have directly or indirectly written accounts of *The Nature of the Non-Western World*, *How Natives Think*, and *The "Soul" of the Primitive*. Of *The Savage Mind* and *The Sexual Life of Savages*. Of *Primitive Mentality* and *The Making of Religion*.

(1989: 53)

13. Similar views have been articulated by Feyerabend, Roszak and Kuhn, *inter alia*. See Feyerabend's *Against Method* (1975); Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (1972); and Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn, for example, argues that the position of the scientist in the ongoing conflict between scientific paradigms has a determining influence on the scientific findings (1962: 68-69).

14. Flash Gordon is one of the best-known protagonists of this sub-genre in its popular form. More recently, Adams' novels *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* and *Life, the Universe and Everything* (1986) may be seen as spoofs on this narrative formula.

15. This phrase is drawn from De Kock's work on English in South Africa, "*Civilising Barbarians*": *Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (1993).

16. Here echoes of Norse mythology (Le Guin 1993b: 132) coalesce with the role of planet-saver to ensure Rocannon's heroic status.

17. Genly Ai, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), also gathers information about foreign cultures, but the narrative emphasizes his diplomatic role more strongly than his interest in anthropology.

18. Parry's influential article, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', like my schema, is based on the recognition that post-colonial theories give different accounts of the imperial/colonial story. For example, she opposes Spivak's and Bhabha's emphasis on discourse to JanMohamed's and Fanon's militant and agonistic reading of the colonial situation, as I do:

Those who have been or are still engaged in colonial struggles against contemporary forms of imperialism [such as Fanon] could well read the theorizing of discourse analysts [such as Bhabha and Spivak] with considerable disbelief at the construction this puts on the situation they are fighting against and the contest in which they are engaged. This is not a charge against the difficulty of the analyses but an observation that these *alternative narratives of colonialism* obscure the 'murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists' (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 30) and discount or write out the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records.

(1987: 43, my italics)

19. I have borrowed this term from Bakhtin, who uses it in *The Dialogic Imagination* to allude to the capacity of the novel to articulate several different voices. As he puts it:

These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization - this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.

(1981: 263)

The metaphor of voice is appropriate for the post-colonial project, which often seeks to give expression or 'voice' to what has been silenced by colonialism.

20. In using this term, I am self-consciously invoking Freud and psychoanalysis to suggest that Le Guin may have suppressed her knowledge of colonialism and its attendant evils. Here I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Jameson's 'political unconscious' (1982).

21. For example, the Equilibrium in *The Earthsea Trilogy* may be seen as a generalization of this principle. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the Master Hand explains to Ged:

The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow ...

(1993a: 48)

22. The Prologue, entitled 'The Necklace', is a revised version of one of Le Guin's first published stories, 'The Dowry of the Angyar' (1964), collected under the title 'Semley's Necklace' in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (1975b: 1-24).

23. Nudelman's analysis does not hold for Le Guin's later works (such as *Always Coming Home*), which depart significantly from the pattern of cross-cultural integration; but it is perhaps unfair to expect him to have foreseen, before 1976, the direction her fiction would take.

24. Le Guin's use of ellipses is erratic. On several occasions she uses an ellipsis without a full stop to indicate 'trailing off' in a characters' words or thoughts. This may appear ungrammatical. Nevertheless, throughout this thesis I have quoted Le Guin's punctuation exactly. In addition, I signal my own omission of words from a sentence by means of an ellipsis, and where the omission includes a sentence break, I add a full stop.

25. In a portrait that strikingly recalls the Terrans in *Planet of Exile*, Memmi writes of colonizers:

In organizing their daily habits in the colonial community, they imported and imposed the way of life of their own country, where they regularly spend their vacations, from which they draw their administrative, political and cultural

inspiration, and on which their eyes are constantly fixed.

(1965: 71)

26. Said uses this quotation extensively in *Culture and Imperialism*, where it forms the epitaph to the volume (1993: vii). It offers, for him, both a history of imperialism and an example of the way in which imperialism has been represented in fiction.

27. In her 1978 Introduction to *City of Illusions*, Le Guin writes:

This book has villain trouble. It's not the only one, in SF or out of it.

...

Real villains are rare; and they never, I believe, occur in flocks. Herds of Bad Guys are the death of a novel. Whether they're labeled politically, racially, sexually, by creed, species, or whatever, they just don't work. The Shing are the least convincing lot of people I ever wrote.

(1993b: 141)

28. I am using 'surveillance' here in the Foucauldian sense of the mechanisms whereby power is maintained over a population. Foucault draws on Bentham's idea of the 'panopticon' as an architectural means of surveillance, but he goes on to say that 'the procedures of power that are at work in modern societies are much more numerous, diverse and rich' (1980: 148).

29. In the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin writes that 'Taoism got to me earlier than modern feminism did' (1993b: 136). This is the only reason I can find for her adherence to the stereotypes of 'a dominant Hero and a passive Little Woman' (1993b: 136) in these early writings, where the women characters notably lack substance.

30. Her outcry against thought-control also protests the misuse of socialization in the nuclear family and at school. The coercive aspects of schooling are identified and criticized by, *inter alia*, Goodman (1961), Neill (1962) and Illich (1974). In his utopian essay on 'The Free University of New York', Berke writes that education is a form of ideological control: 'The conventional school or university, being solely organized to control/manipulate the lives of its students and prevent scholarship ...' (Berke 1969: 215). Similarly, the coercive nature of the nuclear family has been discussed by Marcuse (1964); Freud (1930: 39), and Laing in *The Politics of the Family* (1971).

31. It is difficult to say definitely what Le Guin's attitude to Freud is. In 'The Child and the Shadow' (1974), she dismisses Freud in a way that articulates familiarity with his theories (1993b: 59). In my view, it would be ill-advised to assume that she is unaware of Freudian psychology and metapsychology.

32. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud writes of the death instinct:

... the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and ... it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization.

(1930: 59)



33. For example, Achebe has shown with great force, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), that the pretext of 'improving' the quality of life among the indigenous inhabitants of colonized countries is a self-justifying lie which hides a rapacious appetite for land and profit.

34. Remington has given an extensive discussion of the significance of touch in Le Guin's early fiction, in his essay 'The Other Side of Suffering: Touch as Theme and Metaphor in Le Guin's Science Fiction Novels' (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 153-77).

35. Interestingly, this term is also used by M. Scott Peck in his psychological study of human evil, *The People of the Lie* (1983).

36. As Le Guin's Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest* states, she was actively involved in protesting against the Vietnam War at the time when *City of Illusions* was written (1993b: 146).

37. I discuss *The Eye of the Heron* again in Chapter Three on 'Sex/Identity', so my examination of it in this chapter is correspondingly brief.

38. Le Guin carefully does not rule out the possibility of sentience in the creatures she describes, such as the wotsits and farfallies. Her description of marine life on Victoria mimics terrestrial conditions in noting that the sea contains many mysterious life-forms:

There were big creatures in the sea; "whales" came into Songe Bay and were caught for food every summer; out at sea beasts huger than the whales had been seen, enormous, like writhing islands. The whales were not whales, but what the monsters were or not, nobody knew.

(1978: 53)

39. In their definition, 'post-colonial literature' does not necessarily mean literature produced in countries where the colonizing power has withdrawn. On the contrary, they define it as follows:

We use the term 'post-colonial' ... to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.

(1989: 2)

40. The use of passive resistance in *The Eye of the Heron* also recalls Slonczewski's novel of passive resistance, *A Door into Ocean* (1986). In an unpublished interview with me, Slonczewski says that she was inspired by Le Guin's science fiction to try writing in a speculative vein herself. Indeed, *A Door into Ocean* also rewrites the imperial/colonial narrative when the Valans invade Shora for military exploitation.

41. This nineteenth-century journey is recounted in several historical texts. See, for example, Cloete (1900) and Meintjes (1973). Meintjes refers to the Great Trek as 'the greatest adventure story in South African history' (1973: ix).

42. Le Guin describes this tendency in her introduction to *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*: 'Most Americans feel easy going west' (1994a: 10).

43. 'New South Georgia', the nearest planet to Fomalhaut II in *Rocannon's World*, is another example of this ridiculous practice. Le Guin's choice of names suggests that she sees America as a (neo-)imperial, rather than a colonized, country.

44. Le Guin uses the same idea as a warning against ecological devastation in *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Always Coming Home* (1985a). It has also been used, for example, by Slonczewski in *The Wall Around Eden* (1991) and Charnas in *Walk to the End of the World* (1974).

45. In the violent deforestation of New Tahiti, I read an outcry against the destruction of the Amazon and other forests by a tree-loving author, who writes in the Preface to 'The Word of Unbinding':

*I think I am definitely the most arboreal science fiction writer. It's all right for the rest of you who climbed down, and developed opposable thumbs, and erect posture, and all that. There's a few of us still up here swinging.*

(1975b: 71)

46. The colonizer's difficulty in telling apart individuals who have an unfamiliar body shape and facial configuration is well known (Memmi 1965: 139) and helps to promote a vision of the colonized as an anonymous 'They' to whom any unfavourable qualities can be attributed.

47. In saying this, I oppose Deetlefs's view that '[*The Left Hand of Darkness*] is not Le Guin's best work' (1994: 20) and align myself with the position of the World Science Fiction Convention and Science Fiction Writers of America, who honoured the text with a Hugo and a Nebula Award (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 248).

48. In the 1977 Introduction to *The Word for World is Forest*, Le Guin refers to her involvement in anti-Vietnam protests as follows:

All through the sixties, in my home city in the States, I had been helping organize and participating in nonviolent demonstrations, first against atomic bomb testing, then against the pursuance of the war in Vietnam ...

...

American involvement in Vietnam is now past; the immediately intolerable pressures have shifted to other areas ...

(1993b: 146-47)

49. In South Africa, the atrocities perpetrated against helpless black people in the name of 'State security' during the six-year State of Emergency bear out the need for violent enforcement of an untenable imperial rule.

50. Le Guin explores passive resistance and its consequences more fully in *The Eye of the Heron* (1978), where the people who live in Shantih/Shanty Town practise 'noncooperation' and

finally 'civil disobedience' to achieve their ends (1978: 121-22).

51. The link between the forest and the Athshean mind is more fully explored in two critical essays: Alterman's 'Ursula K. Le Guin: Damsel with a Dulcimer' (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 64-76) and Watson's 'The Forest as Metaphor for Mind: *The Word for World is Forest* and "Vaster than Empires and More Slow"' (Bloom 1986: 47-55).

52. Many contemporary New Age scientists regard the human as unnatural. See, for example, Capra (1982: 1); Berman (1988: 1); and Ferguson (1986: 446).

53. I use this term advisedly, evoking Suvin's belief that estrangement is one of the distinguishing characteristics of science fiction (Suvin 1979: 7).

54. For example, all the novels Said examines in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) subscribe to a hierarchy where members of the imperial group are seen as intrinsically superior.

55. As in, for example, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975) and *Orientalism* (1978).

56. When I refer to Le Guin's writing as 'largely neglected', I am articulating the position of the literary-academic establishment. Within the 'ghetto' of readers, writers and critics of speculative fabulation, Le Guin is revered and her work is much discussed in critical works and in journals such as *Science-Fiction Studies*, which devoted an entire issue to her in 1976 (Le Guin 1993b: 31).

57. Harlow describes the subversive potential of 'resistance literature' as follows:

This literature, like the resistance and national liberation movements which it reflects and in which it can be said to participate, not only demands recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production, but as such also presents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and the practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the West.  
(1986: xvi)

## CHAPTER TWO

### POLITIFICTION

All fiction is metaphor. Science fiction is metaphor. What sets it apart from older forms of fiction seems to be its use of new metaphors, drawn from certain great dominants of our contemporary life ... . Space travel is one of these metaphors; so is an alternative society, an alternative biology; the future is another. The future, in fiction, is a metaphor.

(Le Guin 1993b: 154)

This chapter examines Le Guin's famous novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974),<sup>1</sup> in the context of political and social dissent which characterized the 1960s in America.<sup>2</sup> Many critics have read the novels in a decontextualized way.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, I intend to juxtapose essays by thinkers and social critics from the 1960s with the strategies used in the novels. My project is similar to Florence's investigation into the links between speculative fabulation and the empirical environment. Florence writes:

What, then of the closer relation to the mimetic in feminist SF that I'm suggesting? I'm not, of course, saying that SF is closer to realism or naturalism than to fantasy. The point is to move towards reconstructing the basis of these classifications. Thus though what may be called 'realist' elements are appropriated, they are used to different ends.

(1990: 70)

Florence does not claim that science fiction is realistic; she claims that it is related to mimesis, and that it modifies the criterion for classifying texts as 'realistic'. Nor do I claim that Le Guin's fictions are transparent versions of dominant understandings of self and society in the 1960s. Rather, I propose that the two discourses are related in their shared scepticism towards established culture. They may be read side by side in a way that qualifies and relativizes received views of non-fiction and speculative fabulation, or, to put it another way, of 'reality' and 'art'.

Goodman writes that the 1960s were dominated by a perspective which saw American culture, not as 'the family of the family' (Estés 1992: 68), that is, as a larger self. Rather, it had taken on alien characteristics: 'America is the unknown country; it does not cohere; no one yet knows what it is' (1970: vi). This estranged outlook among left-wing thinkers was partly a response to the devastation wrought by the Vietnam War,<sup>4</sup> including the American government's conscripting nearly an entire generation and sending them to almost certain death in Indo-China. The cultural movement that followed was wider in scope than its inceptors could have imagined. Capra, whose work in scientific metatheory Le Guin admires (1989: 89), describes the period as follows:

In the sixties we questioned society. We lived according to different values, we had different rituals and different lifestyles.

...

The era of the sixties, which had the most decisive impact on my view of the world, was dominated by an expansion of consciousness in two directions. One was toward a new kind of spirituality akin to the mystical traditions of the East, an expansion of consciousness toward experiences that psychologists began to call transpersonal. The other was an expansion of social consciousness, triggered by a radical questioning of authority.

(1988: 13-14)

In 1969 Joseph Berke, an ardent opponent of State education and advocate of a 'Free University' system in New York, published 'The Creation of an Alternative Society' (1969: 13-34). The title of Berke's essay strongly evokes speculative fabulation's most commonly used device. Following his lead, I argue that Le Guin's speculative novels also articulate a wish for a world 'nearer to the Heart's Desire' (Fitzgerald 1970: 693). Berke explores the broad base of the trend towards an 'expansion of social consciousness'. According to him, the goal of social critique is nothing less than the replacement of the old order by a new one:

The destruction/DESTRUCTURING of America has begun. At this moment many cracks in the monolith are evident. Their presence has been announced by the spontaneous development of **MICRO-REVOLUTIONARY** groups throughout the West - 'COUNTER' INSTITUTIONS whose existence subverts the social-economic-political roles prescribed by advanced bourgeois society for itself. These will lead to the creation of an **ALTERNATIVE** and **COUNTER CULTURE**.

(1969: 14)

Among the social evils which Berke sees as the products of a repressive and insane social order are violence and the misuse of money. He writes:

The relations of people(s) toward one another are characterized by the uninterrupted and highly organized application of violence and destruction.

...

The prime function of wealth is its use as an anaesthetic against the circumstances of living.

(1969: 14)

These ills are so widespread that nothing but total social and ideological revolution will cure them:

We can only conclude that the WEST - its structure - has to be dismantled piece by piece, not only in the United States, but wherever Western hegemony exists.

...

This work has already begun ... . It is rooted in innumerable projects of social erosion and practical self-survival which are decentralized, heterogeneous, self-supporting and non-participatory in the parent system. It is exemplified by the tens of thousands who have 'dropped out' and begun to engage in spontaneous social experiment: the commune and community, collective living and working

...

(1969: 17)

In a climate where many people perceived their own society as Other, there was a need to imagine alternative social arrangements. It is not surprising, then, that *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, which explore such alternatives, gained great popularity. Power and difference play central roles in these fictions, possibly because the author found herself differing from the style of government in her own culture. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, difference is figured as a complex system of discursive and political articulations between familiarity and unfamiliarity, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, self and other.

As I shall show, the novels address contemporary conditions and ideas in America in a way that intertwines political conservatism and revolutionary radicalism. The impulse to refashion society coexists and intersects with a drive to preserve certain conditions unchanged. Their re/presentations of ideology thus resemble Althusser's discussion of the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis:

... the “dominant” ideas, in this case, were playing their “dominating” role to perfection, ruling unrecognized over the very minds that were trying to fight them.

(1984: 143)

The ambiguous response to dominant ideas that I have identified in Le Guin’s fictions is also a feature of political dissent in the 1960s. Goodman puts his finger on this quality in his introduction to *The Movement Toward a New America: The Beginnings of a New Revolution*.

On the one hand there is the revolutionary impulse:

I see the people of the Movement as New Americans, who recognize that the old America is destroying itself, and that in its paroxysms of fear, greed and hate it may destroy the whole earth. They see the necessity, then, to make a new culture: “Forming a new society within the shell of the old” ...

(1970: viii)

On the other, there is a wish to retain some aspects of the discarded culture:

Yet something remains: remnants of a religious tradition, some feeling for brotherhood and equality, resourcefulness, expansiveness, generosity, and a stubborn determination not to be ruled. Usable pieces of the technology ... . Black culture. Street culture. A language that William Carlos Williams called the American idiom - full of energy, still a language of experiment, of discovery.

(1970: viii)

The coexistence of revolutionary and conservative elements in Le Guin’s fiction may be illustrated by an examination of the modes of government that she imagines. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, there is a constitutional monarchy in Karhide, where the subunits of social organization are Hearths and Domains. These loose groupings conform to Berke’s description of nexuses of revolution as ‘decentralized, heterogeneous, self-supporting and [to a large extent because their members are sceptical towards the insane monarch] non-participatory in the parent system’. The bureaucracy of Orgoreyn, on the other hand, is held up to criticism as an example of centralized government where no one dare risk being caught without papers. What Berke refers to as ‘commune and community, collective living and working’ is embodied by the Ekumen of Known Worlds, an association of worlds for the exchange of ideas. This ideal is even more faithfully executed in the Syndics of the anarchist society on Anarres in *The Dispossessed*,

where the members do not own property and thus exemplify the benefits of living without individual ownership. Le Guin's critique of a capitalist society where '[t]he prime function of wealth is its use as an anaesthetic against the circumstances of living' (Berke 1969: 14) is strengthened by the depiction of Anarres's twin world, Urras. The members of the free enterprise society of Urras live in mutual isolation because of the envy and insecurity which arise from private property. Both novels experiment with systems of government in ways that typify the 'expansion of social consciousness' identified by Capra as an important trend in the thought of the 1960s.

Suin identifies two possible literary mechanisms for responding to prevailing states of affairs in science fiction: extrapolation and analogy (1979: 27-30). Extrapolation imagines and embodies changes which might take place in the future and lends itself to the creation of utopias and dystopias: it portrays the world as it might become. Analogy is based on similarity with the world as it is and hence reflects empirical data. Both of these methods lend themselves to socio-political critique. The societies depicted in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* offer four versions of social structure, by which institutional power is wielded through the channels of government. A fifth is implied in the references to the Ekumen. Of these five arrangements, three can be seen as defamiliarized re-presentations, that is, analogues of Earth societies: capitalist Urras in *The Dispossessed*, the parliamentary monarchy of Karhide and the bureaucracy of Orgoreyn in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The Hearth arrangements, of 'two hundred to eight hundred people', which are 'communal, independent, and somewhat introverted' (Le Guin 1993b: 161-62) are peripheral considerations since they are never encountered directly. While employing defamiliarization in creating extra-terrestrial environments, Le Guin has paradoxically shown a preference for the science-fiction strategy of analogy by depicting societies which are strikingly familiar. The sense of known parameters, to some extent, defuses the subversive qualities of the novels.

Power in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is vested in three institutional mechanisms: the government of Karhide, the government of Orgoreyn, and the religious-cum-ideological power of the mystical Handdarata and Yomeshta cults. Karhide, described as '*not a nation but a family quarrel*' (1969: 13), is nominally governed by King Argaven XV. Genly Ai, Envoy from the



Ekumen of Known Worlds to the planet Gethen, sees Argaven as an incompetent ruler:

Argaven was not sane; the sinister incoherence of his<sup>5</sup> mind darkened the mood of his capital; he fed on fear. All the good of his reign had been done by his ministers and the kyorremy.

(1969: 90)

Argaven is respected, pandered to and obeyed; but the knowledge of his congenital insanity and the Karhiders' cynical obedience to his whims convey the potential to subvert an unquestioning patriotism. In its place is a critical loyalty to the country or nation. Estraven, one-time Prime Minister of Karhide, expresses his allegiance in terms that deny the claims of conventional patriotism altogether:

How does one hate a country, or love one? Tibe talks about it; I lack the trick of it. I know people, I know towns, farms, hills and rivers and rocks, I know how the sun at sunset in autumn falls on the side of a certain ploughland in the hills; but what is the sense of giving a boundary to all that, of giving it a name and ceasing to love where the name ceases to apply? What is love of one's country; is it hate of one's uncountryside? Then it's not a good thing. Is it simply self-love? That's a good thing, but one mustn't make a virtue of it, or a profession ... . Insofar as I love life, I love the hills of the Domain of Estre, but that sort of love does not have a boundary-line of hate.

(1969: 181)

Depending on the reader's perspective, Estraven's speech can be seen as either pedantic or profound. His abstractions give a generalized application to his comments which is consonant with Genly Ai's description of him as serving 'Mankind'. Ai's next words, though, are: 'As I spoke I did not know if what I said was true. True in part; an aspect of the truth' (1969: 246). This remark qualifies, relativizes and problematizes the notion of a universal collectivity, a version of the Brotherhood of Man. The relation between the individual and a wider society in Karhide is more nuanced than that of the part to the whole. Citizens are estranged from their own government by Argaven's ominous instability and by the elusive and shifting locus of power.

Argaven is the king but not the ruler of Karhide; the country has no ruler, but rather vests authority in a decentralized system of Hearths collected into Domains. This leads Keulen, whose

political affinities are close to anarchism, to see Karhide as the expression of a utopian impulse (1991: 93): that is, as an improvement on the author's empirical environment. The Karhidish social structures can be seen as utopian because they give preference to the sexual imperative - a Hearth is designed so that any of its members can find a sexual partner when one is needed - rather than to economic or ideological considerations. Le Guin may accordingly be seen to valorize sexual desire as more authentic than other drives. Beck also prefers sex to money as a communal organizing principle in his essay 'Money, Sex, Theatre':

Money is an abstraction, it doesn't need to be there. We can live without it. Sex is something else. Sex is not abstract. It has a very strong grip. It governs us because it is right here in our bodies ... . If we were able to hold on to sex and were gratified by sex and the physical pleasures of sex, and we were free in our sexual joy, we would not have to hold on to things like money in order to give our bodies a sense of security, or a sense of order, or a sense of perpetuation. We'd have that in another area - of course in a sexual area much more physical, much more real, much more practical and much more necessary.

(Berke 1969: 98)

In the same reformist spirit, there is hardly any mention of money in Karhide, while there is a great deal of sex.

Responsibility for decision-making passes easily from King Argaven to the Prime Minister, whose office is dependent on Argaven's whim. The king's capriciousness is borne out by the fact that there are three Prime Ministers in the course of the novel's action, which lasts twelve months, or less than a Gethenian year. Position is gained by skill in *shifgrethor*, the intrinsically ambiguous prestige-relationship that governs Gethenian social hierarchy. Genly Ai attempts to define *shifgrethor* at the beginning of his mission, from a perspective still strongly determined by terrestrial mores. Predictably, his definition foregrounds his own confusion:

No doubt this was all a matter of *shifgrethor* - prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship, the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority in Karhide and all civilizations of Gethen. And if it was I would not understand it.

(1969: 19)

Le Guin, by contrast, defines *shifgrethor* in 'Is Gender Necessary?' as a reversal of the conventional understanding of prestige:

Rivalries between hearths, as between individuals, are channeled into a socially approved form of aggression called *shifgrethor*, a conflict without physical violence, involving one-upmanship, the saving and losing of face - conflict ritualized, stylized, controlled ... . There might be a king and a parliament, but authority was not enforced so much by might as by the use of *shifgrethor* and intrigue, and was accepted as custom, without appeal to patriarchal ideals of divine right, patriotic duty, etc.

(1993b: 162)

*Shifgrethor* is based on maintaining the pretence, while interacting, that one is dealing with an equal. Success in *shifgrethor* involves sustaining, not one's own status, as in many interactions in western society, but that of the other person.<sup>6</sup> It is an alternative mode of dealing with what Blanchot refers to as the irreducible distance and difference between oneself and anOther (1993: 52). As befits an ambiguous relationship, *shifgrethor* is perfused with contradictions. Both Genly Ai and Estraven draw attention to its basis in pretence when they refer to 'playing *shifgrethor*' (1969: 93, 134). It is a means for creating distance, rather than intimacy, between dialogic partners. *Shifgrethor* must be 'waived' before one can speak openly (1969: 78, 133). Estraven tells Ai that the term comes from an old word for shadow (1969: 210) and it is associated with obscurity and darkness rather than the honesty and light that Ai seeks from his Gethenian hosts. It is a means of signifying through *différance*, foregrounding the trace of what is not said, rather than appealing to a so-called natural isomorphic mapping of signifier onto signified.

The depiction of a polyvalent form of communication, where meaning is frequently located elsewhere than in discourse, is one instance of the recurring quality in Le Guin's writing, which I have referred to in the Introduction to this thesis as a *différance*-effect. On a political level, *shifgrethor* is probably rooted in the author's founding assumptions about Gethen, expressed in 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux':

*At the very inception of the whole book, I was interested in writing a novel about people in a society that had never had a war. That came first. The androgyny came second. (Cause and effect? Effect and cause?)*

(1993b: 164)

The absence of war on a world where the climate resembles that of Greenland (which has never

gone to war)<sup>7</sup> is linked to the text's relativist approach to the issue of patriotism. Ideas of war and patriotism were also highlighted and problematized by America's involvement in the Vietnam War. American soldiers were conscripted in the name of their country's glory; but, as years wore on and victory was no closer, disillusionment set in and members of the younger generation began to question whether the futile deaths in Indo-China were serving the greater glory of the United States or its expansionist greed.<sup>8</sup> Le Guin was certainly one of thousands of Americans to feel outrage at the use of young people as needless cannon fodder, and her commitment to pacifism<sup>9</sup> must have contributed to the imaginative creation of a world without war. Similarly, the flagrant misuse of citizens' patriotism by the government of the United States may have shaped Estraven's denial of his own patriotism. In order to maintain an analogy with terrestrial society, though, Gethen could not be portrayed as devoid of discord. The system of shifgrethor offers a channel to deflect aggression into harmony, while retaining the potential for social disruption. It articulates a relationship where otherness is not denied, but, rather, inscribed in the structure of language.

While Karhide is a representation of a familiar form of government, namely constitutional monarchy, Orgoreyn can be seen as a concretization of THEM, as THEY are identified by Mills in *The Power Elite* (1956). THEY - the name given by Berke to the repugnant and repressive forces of established society - maintain power by an almost invisible network of bureaucratic surveillance that has obvious affinities with Foucault's 'Panopticon', a circular prison with a central tower from which an observer can see the actions of all the inmates (1977: 135-169). Its counterpart in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is 'commensal', which is, at least on the surface, less sinister than the Panopticon. Genly Ai describes Orgoreyn as follows:

I can't properly define that Orgota word here translated as "commensal", "commensality". Its root is a word meaning "to eat together". Its usage includes all national/governmental institutions of Orgoreyn, from the State as a whole through its thirty-three component substates or Districts to the sub-substates, townships, communal farms, mines, factories, and so on, that compose these. As an adjective it is applied to all the above; in the form "the Commensals" it usually means the thirty-three Heads of Districts, who form the governing body, executive and legislative, of the great Commensality of Orgoreyn, but it may also mean the citizens, the people themselves. In this curious lack of distinction between the general and specific applications of the word, in the use of it for both the whole and the part, the state and the individual, in this imprecision is its

precisest meaning.

(1969: 97)

Ai's observation is accurate, as befits a trained cultural investigator (1969: 42, 209), but his interpretation is of Orgoreyn as a nation based on co-operation and not on punitive surveillance is, typically, oversimplified. The union of the interests of State and individual may mean either, as in a communist ideal, that the collective self has completely subsumed the concerns of its members; or it may mean that individual deviation from the behaviour prescribed by the State is not tolerated. Orgoreyn's Commensals subscribe to both these readings, but the latter is the one they practise. There is an echo of the use of understatement to ameliorate social evils (practised by repressive régimes such as the Nationalist government in South Africa) in the name 'communal farm' for institutions where all supposedly share in the profits, but which are actually used for punishing criminals. The drugs administered to ensure docility, by reducing the sex drive and producing co-operation, are a stark reminder that the ideal of uniting individual and collective good is open to corruption.

It is also possible to see in the authoritarian, conformist bureaucracy of Orgoreyn an echo of the American national phobia of Russia and especially the tendency to use distancing labels to represent it in discourse.<sup>10</sup> The universal application of the term 'commensal' recalls the stereotypical 'comrade'; there is a secret police, called the Sarf; and the names Yegey, Shusgis and Obsle all have a Russian flavour when compared with the more alien Karhidish names, such as Tibe and Estraven. Le Guin's depiction of the repressive Orgota society may indirectly express contemporary perceptions of the U.S.S.R. as a communist state where ideals of collective good had been distorted to produce a tyranny of surveillance.

Political values on Gethen are legitimated by religion, which, as in contemporary society, uses concepts of ultimate reality and especially myths of origin to reinforce ideological power. Vivello describes this process as follows:

It has long been recognized that the ways in which a people order their social relationships are reflected in their concept of the supernatural and in their religious beliefs. This correspondence has led many observers to conclude that religious beliefs provide a legitimizing ideology which validates social

organization and therefore helps to regulate social behaviour.

(1978: 193)

In addition, religion provides a form of epistemology that guarantees its adherents ideological superiority, while the conjunction of knowledge and power gives it a privileged position among social practices. The two religious systems on Gethen, the Handdarata and Yomeshta, can be thought of in terms of the binary opposition between light and darkness, which many critics have identified as pervasive in the text.<sup>11</sup> The Handdarata are associated with the less valued pole, darkness, while light is constitutive of the Yomeshta world-view. 'Light' and 'darkness' here connote clarity and obscurity, reason and irrationality, or understanding and incomprehension - with the *caveat* that too much light can produce blindness, as when light shines on snow and the eye cannot differentiate objects. Genly Ai, conditioned by a western post-Enlightenment desire for rationality, is frustrated by the Handdarata habit of valuing a lack of 'light' or answers. Nor can he understand the metaphoric negation at the heart of the cult:

The Handdara is a religion without institution, without priests, without hierarchy, without vows, without creed; I am still unable to say whether it has a God or not. It is elusive. It is always somewhere else.

...

They were practising the Handdara discipline of Presence, which is a kind of trance - the Handdarata, given to negatives, call it an untrance - involving self-loss (self-augmentation?) through extreme sensual receptiveness and awareness.

(1969: 52, 54)

Faxe the Weaver, though, sees no contradiction as he draws on qualities that Western positivism consistently deprecates, such as unreason, to explain the practice of Foretelling or prophecy to Genly Ai:

"You don't see yet, Genry [Karhiders cannot pronounce 'I'], why we perfected and practice Foretelling?"

"No -"

"To exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question."

...

"The unknown," said Faxe's soft voice in the forest, "the unforetold, the unproven, that is what life is based on. Ignorance is the ground of thought. Unproof is the ground of action ... . The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next."

(1969: 65-66)

Handdarata practices are fuelled by irrationality: *dothe*-strength, generated by hysteria, gives adepts more than their usual physical capacity, and the accuracy of Foretelling arises from

... the perversion and frustration of sex, out of an insanity that distorts time, and out of an appalling discipline of total concentration and apprehension of immediate reality ... .

(1969: 61)

In his article, 'The Art of Social-Science Fiction', Theall describes Foretelling as an act with social meaning, with a political impact on the future of the community. He claims that

[t]he Foretellers really teach that change cannot be brought about through the reading of prophecies or predictions; that uncertainty is the essence of the social fabric.

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 289)

At the other end of the interpretive spectrum, Selinger sees Faxe the Weaver, at the centre of the Foretelling circle, as an artist-figure, parallel to Genly Ai, Estraven and Le Guin (1988: 57). Foretelling can also be read in the light of deconstruction, as an undoing of the conceptual distance between polarities such as reason and unreason. It produces meaning in a way that holographically reproduces the epistemologies underpinning the novel itself. The surplus of meaning inherent in paradoxical and oxymoronic concepts, such as the study of ignorance, allows the Handdarata epistemological pre-eminence in *Karhide* precisely because it gives access to meaning-making discourses other than 'objective' or 'scientific' language. It could also be argued that the representation of Handdarata prophecy forms part of a feminist critique of knowledge. In an essay on 'Critiques of Modern Science', Fee describes such an approach as

... one in which no rigid boundary separates the subject of knowledge (the knower) and the natural object of that knowledge; where the subject/object split is not used to legitimize the domination of nature; where ... the scientist is not seen as an impersonal authority standing outside and above nature and human concerns, but simply a person whose thoughts and feelings, logical capacities, *and intuitions* are all relevant and involved in the process of discovery.

(Bleier 1986: 47, my italics)

Adherents of the Yomesh religion base their creed on knowledge by the light of awareness and, in the process, abolish duality along with H/history:<sup>12</sup>

The life of every man is in the Centre of Time, for all were seen in the Seeing of Meshe, and are in his Eye. We are the pupils of his Eye. Our doing is his Seeing; our being his Knowing.

(1969: 140-41)

The Handdara and Yomesh epistemologies appear incompatible, even mutually exclusive. Nevertheless Genly Ai, the foreigner, is able to unite the polarities when he uses Yomesh imagery to understand Handdara Foretelling:

... the gift is perhaps not strictly or simply one of foretelling, but is rather the power of seeing (if only for a flash) *everything at once*; seeing whole.

(1969: 175)

As with many other polarities, which are so common in Le Guin's work that they have earned her writing the description of 'dialectical' structure,<sup>13</sup> the author privileges the pole which has acquired negative connotations. The pole associated with Handdara/darkness/irrationality is opposed to the concepts of Yomesh/light/reason, but when the poles are compared, it is the Handdara who are valorized in Genly Ai's assessment of Foretelling as central to Gethenian cultural practice.

In *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974), Le Guin again uses the device of polarities, but creates a dialogue between them in the actions of Shevek, the scientist. *The Dispossessed* uses opposition as a self-deconstructing structural and topographical principle. In this novel, the strategies of Othering are destabilized and shown to be founded on the non-absolute factor of cultural provenance. The two worlds which provide the topos/topoi for the novel, Urras and Anarres, revolve around each other. Each planet is the other's moon, as the artist Tirin recognizes:

"I never thought before," said Tirin unruffled, "of the fact that there are people sitting on a hill, up there, on Urras, looking at Anarres, at us, and saying, 'Look, there's the Moon.' Our earth is their Moon; our Moon is their Earth."

"Where, then, is Truth?" declaimed Bedap, and yawned.

"In the hill one happens to be sitting on."



(1974: 41)

Tirin's vision of relativity recalls Genly Ai's most characteristic statement, 'Truth is a matter of the imagination' (1969: 9).<sup>14</sup> This insight is also echoed in Ginsberg's assertion of the validity of individual experience:

I mean you've got to make up your own mind; just because everybody else is screaming the same thing, it doesn't mean that you have to join in or be lost in the universe.

(Berke 1969: 176)

On a political level, Tirin's statement refers to the dependence of Urras and Anarres on each other for self-definition. This is true not only spatially but also historically: Anarres is a society of anarchists who have been execrated on Urras and finally exiled from it. The two planets sustain each other economically; Anarres needs Urrasti materials and Urras uses Anarresti products (1974: 82), even though they maintain a pretence of ideological and economic distance coupled with mutual superiority. Socialization on Anarres reinforces the ideology by requiring children to 'detest Urras, hate Urras, fear Urras' (1974: 43). These blatantly political demands for differentiation and distance are underpinned by both planets' need to assert that they are mutually exclusive social systems.

By contrast with this ideology of difference, *The Dispossessed* sets out to validate Tirin's perspective by proving that Anarres and Urras are not only contiguous but mutually dependent. As a polis, Anarres can only make sense of itself if it knows it is not-Urras and embeds this self-definition in the very structures of education. On Urras, the ideology of separateness and Otherness is more subtly embodied. There the anarchist society is simply ignored because it was written out of the global History when all Odonians were exiled to another planet. Mutual isolation has created a relation which is the inverse of colonialism. Instead of the two societies refusing contact because of excessive closeness as the result of one society's intrusion into the other (as in colonialism,<sup>15</sup> which I examine in more detail in Chapter One), they deny communication on the grounds that they are physically and even cosmologically separate. *The Dispossessed* shows that in the relationship between Anarres and Urras, as in the

imperial/colonial story, the effect of strenuously asserting difference is to enhance and reaffirm the mutual dependence that constitutes the relation. Estraven highlights this deconstructivist point when he says, 'To oppose something is to maintain it' (1969: 132).

To arrive at an understanding of Le Guin's 'ambiguous utopia', the reader may follow Suvin's etymology of utopia as both 'ou-topia' (no-place) and 'eu-topia' (good place). This reading generates a definition of utopia as a discursive form:

Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.

(Suvin 1979: 49)

Arising from a well-known wish for a better society, utopia is created by improving upon existing social conditions in the areas that, in the author's view, are most lacking. The differences in socio-political arrangement between the utopia and the author's community then generate a critique of the latter. Insofar as Le Guin presents Urras as a version of capitalist society on contemporary Earth (America, for example), Anarres may be seen as its antidote. The juxtaposition of a world in need of improvement and its corrective may underpin Somay's reading of *The Dispossessed* as an 'open-ended utopia' (1984: 25), which presents a

... tension between the narrative actuality of the utopian locus and the potentiality of the utopian horizon that completely transforms the static, closed structure of doctrinaire utopian fiction, whether classical or contemporary.

(1984: 33)

The relation of dependence between utopia and its parent society, which sustains the force of social critique, is more explicit in *The Dispossessed* than in most other utopian fabulations. The Anarresti are descendants of exiles from Urras, who were sent as migrant labour to a mining planet because of their adherence to Odonian anarchism. In addition, the link is structurally inscribed in the narrative since the setting of chapters alternates between the two planets.

Interplanetary gravity, History, ideology and narrative collaborate in powerfully yoking Urras and Anarres together. Indeed, although the two planets are portrayed through Shevek's perspective, Le Guin's narrative structure creates the eerie sub-textual impression that it is the planets (and the societies they house) which speak, rather than the protagonist.

Various critics have seen Anarres and Urras as analogies to terrestrial systems of government. Suvin, for example, articulately analyses the names of the two planets to support his view that they have a corresponding referent in the empirical environment:

[Anarres's] name testifies to its being not only the country of An-Archy (non-domination) and the negated (*an*) or reinvented (*ana*) Urras, but also ... the Country Without Things (*res*) ...

(Mullen and Suvin 1976: 297)

In the exaggerated portrayal of communal interest on Anarres as opposed to capitalist self-interest on Urras, I read an echo of the contemporary view of America and the U.S.S.R. as mutual enemies, which could not co-exist since the survival of each required the destruction of the other. It is certainly possible to read Urras as an indictment of materialistic America and Anarres as a revisionist (re-)interpretation of the scapegoated Soviet Union. Another interpretation, focusing on the analogic dimensions of the text, would see both societies as reflections of the author's empirical environment. In this reading, Urras could be seen as a caricature of the consumer society, with its faults and injustices - excessive competition, possessiveness and mutual isolation - foregrounded. Anarres would appear as the imaginative expression of a utopian wish to improve that society, since practically all its virtues are, precisely, the remedies for Urrasti social ills.

*The Dispossessed* represents power as based on economic considerations. Mills's classic sociological text, *The Power Elite* (1956), underscores the crucial role played by wealth in creating the power networks in America which held sway as Le Guin was writing *The Dispossessed*:

Political institutions in the United States have never formed a centralized and autonomous domain of power; they have been enlarged and centralized only reluctantly in slow response to the public consequence of the corporate economy.

(1956: 272)

Writing of American society after World War 2, Mills continues:

In so far as the structural clue to the power elite today lies in the economic order, that clue is the fact that the economy is at once a permanent-war economy and a private-corporation economy.

(1956: 275-76)

Berke makes a similar point somewhat more colloquially, more than a decade later, partly out of outrage at the Vietnam War:

The United States exists solely to create, develop, feed, encourage and participate in war, anywhere in the world, all over the world.

(1969: 16)

These terms distinctly recall the Urrasti style of economic governance. The state of A-Io on Urras gains impetus and ideological unification from the fact that the nation is reported to be constantly at war with the state of Thu for the control of the smaller, proletarian country of Benbili (1974: 229), which is depicted in terms that recall 'Third World'<sup>16</sup> nations on Earth. This sanitized war, conducted at a safe distance from the citizens of A-Io and their possible opinions, furnishes a justification for restricting physical movement by imposing a curfew. In keeping with their penchant for deception, the government and media of A-Io make headlines of the war with Thu but do not even acknowledge the silent class war between bourgeois and proletarian elements of their own society. This conflict is reported only in the underground press or by word of mouth. The refusal to grant official recognition to the burgeoning labour movement and its call for strike action recalls the antagonism between government and trade unions in America during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>17</sup>

In keeping with Le Guin's insistence on the relativity of relationships with political/cultural Others, *The Dispossessed* offers several perspectives on Urrasti society. The most consistently voiced is that of Shevek, who sees Urras with the eyes of an anarchist visitor, to whom capitalism and even free enterprise are necessarily anathema.<sup>18</sup> Shevek speaks for the

Anarresti point of view when he consistently refers to the Urrasti as 'propertarians' (1974: 43, 83, 96, 137, 161, 175) and 'profiteers' (1974: 96, 139, 180, 189). These two aspects of the money economy are most striking to him because, with the vision of a stranger, he sees most clearly what he does not know: the double hegemony of property and profit. Shevek's analysis of Urrasti society takes a Marxist turn when property and profit - the means and the outcome of production - extend beyond quantifiable economic dimensions to take on a psychological aspect. The juxtaposition of these labels with the Anarresti pejorative verb, 'egoize', captures the alienation from oneself as well as others that is inherent in capitalism. All these notions are metaphorically evoked by the image of the wall that Shevek uses to denounce Urrasti society:

"And you the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes - the wall, the wall!"

(1974: 192-93)

Shevek's uncharitable view of free enterprise on Urras is counterbalanced by the perspective of Keng, the Terran ambassador. In their conversation Shevek expresses contempt of Urras, but Keng bestows praise:

"... There is no way to act rightly, with a clear heart, on Urras. There is nothing you can do that profit does not enter in, and fear of loss, and the wish for power. You cannot say good morning without knowing which of you is 'superior' to the other, and trying to prove it."

...

"... To me, and to all my fellow-Terrans who have seen the planet, Urras is the kindest, most various, most beautiful of all the inhabited worlds ... . I know it's full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of good, of beauty, vitality, achievement. It is what a world should be! It is *alive* - tremendously alive - alive, despite all its evils, with hope."

(1974: 286-87)

As in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, where Genly Ai insists that truth is relative to the individual (1969: 9), truth is here a matter of cultural perspective. Keng's truth about Urras is its superior beauty and prosperity when compared with her home-world, an Earth devastated by nuclear holocaust and the over-exploitation of natural resources. But to the Anarresti, 'hell ... means

Urras' (1974: 197) because they come from a planet and a society which, to them, represents utopia. The portrayal of Anarres and Urras bears out Mannheim's point that utopian conceptions are dependent on the observer's context:

What in a given case appears as utopian, and what as ideological, is dependent, essentially, on the stage and degree of reality to which one applies this standard.

...

It could be shown ... that the successive forms of utopia, in their beginnings are intimately bound up with given historical stages of development, and in each of these with particular social strata.

(Mannheim 1936: 176, 185)

Anarres is an unusual utopia in that it does not offer an increase in material well-being over its parent society (whether that is identified as Urras, Earth or America in the early 1970s).<sup>19</sup> Instead, the planet is arid and, like Victoria in *The Eye of the Heron* (1978), barren of almost all life-forms except aquatic ones. Plants and humans are imported; there are no indigenous mammals. Dryness is the most pervasive condition and is exacerbated by the drought that afflicts the inhabitants in the course of the novel. In this respect *The Dispossessed* matches Jameson's description of Le Guin's technique in creating alternative societies as 'world-reduction' (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 251).<sup>20</sup> The implications of locating utopia in the desert are wide-ranging. On the one hand, Le Guin may be suggesting, by a process of negation,<sup>21</sup> that water is more important than money for well-being. On the other, there is a strong implication in the text that suffering is a more effective basis for community than wealth. In a germinal conversation with his classmates, the intelligentsia of Anarres, Shevek articulates the same conclusion:

"Suffering is the condition on which we live. And when it comes you know it. You know it as the truth. Of course it's right to cure diseases, to prevent hunger and injustice, as the social organism does. But no society can change the nature of existence. We can't prevent suffering. This pain and that pain, yes, but not Pain. A society can only relieve social suffering - unnecessary suffering. The rest remains ... . I'm trying to say what I think brotherhood really is. It begins - it begins in shared pain."

(1974: 57-58)

In *The Dispossessed*, as in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, exigencies of climate determine the mode of social organization. The inclement weather always already qualifies the characteristically

utopian mood of optimism with regard to social improvement. Existence in Le Guin's utopia cannot be seen unequivocally as better than terrestrial life.

In yet another sense, Anarres is poorer than Urras: there is no money at all. Goods are taken as required from any one of a number of depositories. But since natural resources are scarce, there are not many goods. The representation of Anarres as topographically uniform, 'reduced' to a condition where dryness is the all-pervasive condition, can be read in terms of Jackson's account of the topography of fantasy as dominated by a lack of distinction in its 'white, grey or shady blanknesses' (1981: 42). If one accepts Jackson's view of the unconscious as the supreme locale of undifferentiation, Le Guin's reduction in the topographical differentiation and diversity of her presented worlds can be read as a valorization of the unconscious. The arid expanses of the Dust of the Southwest on Anarres embody this quality. So do the ice landscapes of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which, paradoxically, highlight separateness even as they blur distinctions: 'Cold isolates', writes Jameson (Bloom 1986: 60).

The eutopian aspect of Anarres lies in the Odonian anarchism that structures its social organization. Anarchism, construed as belief in a society without formal government, is founded on an optimistic view of humanity as capable of self-motivation by means of pleasure in work and the value of mutual aid. The difference between Anarresti anarchism and Urrasti capitalism is located in the revolutionary texts entitled *The Analogy*, *The Social Organism* and *The Letters*, authored by Odo, the fictional Urrasti social theorist. Odo's works, which are mentioned, but not quoted, in *The Dispossessed*, lay the foundation for the creation of an anarchist society. Le Guin describes the parameters and theoretical forebears of Odonian anarchism in her 1974 preface to the short story 'The Day Before the Revolution':

Odonianism is anarchism. Not the bomb-in-the-pocket stuff, which is terrorism, whatever name it tries to dignify itself with; not the social-Darwinist economic "libertarianism" of the far right; but anarchism, as ... expounded by Shelley and Kropotkin, Goldman and Goodman. Anarchism's principal target is the authoritarian State (capitalist or socialist); its principal moral practical theme is cooperation (solidarity, mutual aid). It is the most idealistic, and to me the most interesting, of all political theories.

(1975b: 285)

Describing the genesis of *The Dispossessed* in the essay 'Science Fiction and Mrs Brown', Le Guin cites the same presiding theorists as sources of inspiration for her anarchist novel:

All right. All right, what's your name. What is your name, by the way? Shevek, he told me promptly. All right, Shevek. So who are you? His answer was less certain this time. I think, he said, that I am a citizen of Utopia.

Very well. That sounded reasonable. There was something so decent about him, he was so intelligent and yet so disarmingly naïve, that he might well come from a better place than this. But where? The better place; no place. What did I know about Utopia? Scraps of More, fragments of Wells, Hudson, Morris. Nothing. It took me years of reading and pondering and muddling, and much assistance from Engels, Marx, Godwin, Goldman, Goodman, and above all Shelley and Kropotkin, before I could begin to see where he came from ... .

(1993b: 108)

Le Guin's comments draw together several issues that are pertinent to a political reading of *The Dispossessed*. 'The Day Before the Revolution' is a story about Odo, not Odonianism, and it highlights the disparity between the living woman and the theory she created. The tendency for Odo to become a reified system of thought, for discourse to become logocentrism, is articulated in the repressive aspects of Anarres. It seems that even a society without government cannot dispense with power, located in a source extrinsic to the individual. In this case, it is group consensus:

The social conscience, the opinion of others, was the most powerful moral force motivating the behaviour of most Anarresti ... .

(1974: 98-99)

This is strikingly incongruous in a society where individual conscience is upheld as the ultimate arbiter of morality and decision. This contradiction is only one of the sources of internal tension threatening Anarresti social organization and making it, like middle-class American (WASP) culture in the 1960s, dangerously alienating for its own citizens. Another is inscribed in the community's relation to its founder. Odo's texts, *The Analogy*, *The Social Organism* and *The Letters*, are founded on an understanding of society as organic. But they have become the nominal source of legitimation for a rigid system of thought, through the reifying power of discourse and the stultifying effect of socially sanctioned custom. Bedap notes that these forces



are slowly poisoning Anarres:

... he [Sabul] has power over you [Shevek]. Where does he get it from? Not from vested authority, there isn't any ... . He gets it from the innate cowardice of the human mind. Public opinion! That's the power structure he's part of, and knows how to use. The unadmitted, inadmissible government that rules the Odonian society by stifling the individual mind.

(1974: 142)

Bedap's diagnosis can be taken at face value: as a Shelleyan anatomy of internalized tyranny,<sup>22</sup> or as Le Guin would have it, 'The Stalin in the Soul' (1993b: 213-24). This reading would see it as part of the analysis of the ills of Anarresti society. Other instances are Bedap's many discourses on the same subject, as well as the censorship of Shevek and his family by the PDC, including calling his daughter Sadik a traitor and using peer pressure to evict her from the communal sleeping place. Another possible interpretation is to see the repressive aspects of Anarres as a veiled critique of the U.S.S.R., where strictly enforced Stalinist policies had generated a régime where only a narrowly delimited range of views were accepted. This line of interpretation would draw on the decentralized system of 'Syndics' which, like the Russian soviets, run the administrative functions of Anarres and were designed as nexuses to facilitate procedures. In any case, the trope of a disappointed idealism as the motor force for society permeates *The Dispossessed*. Conservatively-minded individuals, who have assumed the majority in the PDC, can be trusted to choose the most conservative values and therefore to entrench existing, unspoken but nevertheless supremely powerful codes of behaviour. These people acquire status by virtue of the normalizing and equalizing effects of majority opinion and are able, if necessary, to quell Otherness manifested as deviance and to destroy all the support mechanisms of a transgressor, such as Shevek.

By the end of the 1960s there was a growing disillusionment with communist social systems, fuelled by outrage at Stalin's excesses and the Vietnam War. Le Guin's Anarres shows the cracks in a society which was founded on noble ideals, but has degenerated into a new system of censorship and State repression. It would appeal to readers who had espoused an ideal of mutual aid and communal property, but had lost faith in the efficacy of systems of thought or economy to bring about a better dispensation. The anarchist society it portrays represents a

superficially radical departure from prevailing conditions. But, as I shall show, encoded in Le Guin's radicalism is the opposite impulse towards a conservative reading of social potential and capabilities.

In terms of the politics of representation, it is possible to construct a continuum of fictional depictions of society. The status quo in America (complete with capitalism, ethnocentricity and an humanistic democracy) during the 1960s would form a normative 'middle ground' of representation. More 'realistic' portrayals would be located closer to the conservative end of the spectrum, while those which diverge from a realistic *modus operandi* would constitute the opposite, radical pole. The twin worlds of Anarres and Urras can similarly be placed on this spectrum. Urras, largely represented by A-Io, the only nation to be described in any detail, may be seen as having a relatively conservative relation to the empirical environment of American society in the 1960s. Anarres belongs to the radical end of the scale, not only because the anarchist principles enshrined in its creation belong to political positions traditionally located on the 'left', but also because the social structure it embodies differs widely from that of twentieth-century America.

It is remarkable, then, that two such divergent, even hostile societies both honour the same individual - Shevek, the novel's central protagonist. Such unexpected consensus about criteria for excellence bespeaks shared values. I suggest that the ground in common can be identified with Le Guin's own values as they are embodied in the creation of Shevek and the twin worlds of which he is a citizen. Shevek's provenance is different from the prevalent form of socialization in western civilization, namely the nuclear family. He is named by a computer, raised in a collective child-rearing enterprise, and taught from his earliest days not to 'egoize' (1974: 29-32). The central contradiction in his portrayal resides in the fact that, despite the process of socialization which is designed to mould him into a co-operative member of a society based on Kropotkinian mutual aid,<sup>23</sup> Shevek chooses to make a career in temporal physics. His unification of Simultaneity and Sequency theories of time have been eruditely explored by Bittner (Rabkin, Olander and Greenberg 1983: 244-70) and Philmus (Garnett and Ellis 1990: 125-50). Philmus's description of self-reflexivity in Le Guin's portrayal of Shevek's research is particularly pertinent for my reading of her fabulation as double-voiced:

... LeGuin [sic] has constructed a text which we cannot properly construe so long as we hold to the alternative of Sequency or Presence. Any reading that sides with the one against the other must falsify the narrative in respect either to the real continuity of Shevek's life or to its real disruption ... . [The text's] meaning is not compound or dichotomous, but complex: not only does it assert the reality of permanence and change, it recognises them as aspects of one another.

(Garnett and Ellis 1990: 144)

Nevertheless, Shevek's career choice bespeaks a preference for isolation and against mutual co-operation since few, if any, of his Anarresti compatriots are able to understand his field, let alone his theoretical approach to it. His characterization is closer to the dominant model of liberal-humanist individualism<sup>24</sup> than to a deconstruction of that convention, as one might expect from his alternative, defamiliarized background.

Shevek's career signals a preference for individual endeavour over collective enterprise; he deviates from the norm of working together that is sanctioned by '[t]he social conscience, the opinion of others' (1974: 98). In Anarresti terms, Shevek is an 'egoizer' pursuing his interests at the expense of those of the community. In Urrasti terms, which are those of the symbolic code,<sup>25</sup> he is an individualist. Jose perceptively stresses the novel's complicity in conventions of male heroism:

The story remains that of a lone individual succeeding against the odds ... the narrative is dominated by Shevek, a man imbued with euclidean reason and a European bias towards the promise of technology and science. Clearly, in terms of both its discourse and utopian vision, *The Dispossessed* is very much in the euclidean, European, and masculine mould.

(1991: 189: 90)

The novel makes it painfully clear that, on both Anarres and Urras, to be different, to choose the path of Otherhood rather than following the dictates of the social 'self', is a crime. Shevek is punished for it repeatedly, and even forced to leave his home planet because he is thought a traitor to the ideals of Odonianism. On Urras, his 'revolutionary' anarchist politics arouse the ire of the capitalist authorities, and when he is apprehended in the act of inciting proletarian

rebellion, his life is threatened and he has to flee to the Terran embassy for shelter.

Although both Anarresti and Urrasti society valorize the opinion and interests of the majority, Shevek is portrayed as free of culpability for his transgressions against social norms. He is even rewarded for it by the approbation of the narrator throughout the novel. For example, when he returns to Anarres after being evicted from Urras, he is depicted in terms that emphasize humanistic values such as dignity, joy, belonging to a family unit and the ability to inspire admiration:

“I’m ready. I have nothing to pack.” Shevek laughed, a laugh of clear, unmingled happiness. The other man looked at him gravely, as if he was not sure what happiness was, and yet recognized, or perhaps remembered, it from afar. He stood beside Shevek as if there was something he wanted to ask him ... . “It will be early morning at Anarres Port,” he said at last, and took his leave, to get his things and meet Shevek at the launch-port.

Alone, Shevek turned back to the observation port, and saw the blinding curve of sunrise over the Temae, just coming into sight.

“I will lie down to sleep on Anarres, tonight,” he thought. “I will lie down beside Takver. I wish I’d brought the picture, the baby sheep, to give Pilun.”

But he had not brought anything. His hands were empty, as they had always been.

(1974: 319)

This passage evocatively conflates the values of individualistic alienation from others (in Shevek’s distance from the Hainishman Ketho) with those of identification with a collective self, both in Shevek’s attachment to his family and in his ‘empty hands’, which connect him to the Anarresti value of non-propertarianism. In the end, at the novel’s conclusion and in its ultimate choices, *The Dispossessed* echoes the Anarresti model of human existence, privileging the identification with his anarchist brothers that leads Shevek to fulfil the Odonian maxim that specifies: ‘true voyage is return’ (1974: 76).

Odo’s distrust and denigration of ‘marriage and copulation’, which she categorizes as ‘the main Urrasti sexual institutions’ (1974: 23),<sup>26</sup> lead the Anarresti to adopt an alternative form of social organization, namely mutual aid. As Shevek notes, Odo’s condemnation is contradictory because she herself was ‘married’. *The Dispossessed* perpetuates these contradictions where

sexual relations are concerned. On the one hand, the novel advocates increased sexual freedom and demystifies prevailing 'romantic' myths about sex by reducing it to factual 'copulation'. On the other, Anarresti society provides for 'partnership', conceptualized as a life-long sharing which includes sexual fidelity (Le Guin 1974: 48). Shevek's partner is Takver, of whom Lefanu has eloquently written: 'Oh dear, Takver' (1988: 133). Takver's subservient role in her partnership with Shevek exemplifies an inequality that can only be called sexist, despite Heldreth's claim that 'Le Guin presents Shevek's partnership with Takvr as one between equals who love each other' (Palumbo 1986: 218). In other circumstances, though, it might also describe Charles Le Guin's relation to the author of *The Dispossessed*:

Takver, like any man or woman who undertakes companionship of the creator spirit, did not always have an easy time of it ... . The usage the creator spirit gives its vessels is rough, it wears them out, discards them, gets a new model. For Takver there were no replacements, and when she saw how hard Shevek was used she protested.

(1974: 160)

Shevek's bond with Takver is established in terms that similarly essentialize sexual relationships:

"Is it what you need, then?"

"Yes. The bond. The chance."

"Now - for life?"

"Now and for life."

Life, said the stream of quick water down on the rocks in the cold dark.

(1974: 155)

The symbolic, ritualistic and even - in the final sentence - animistic register of this interchange recalls the marriage ceremony. Indeed, Takver and Shevek behave strikingly like a conventional married couple, especially in the self-sacrificing support role assigned to Takver. Shevek's research into temporal physics is prioritized, while Takver's work with fish genetics, which is arguably more important as a possible source of food which is not depleted by drought, is mentioned but not given any prominence. Instead, Takver is depicted in stereotypically 'feminine' roles: childbearing, child-minding, and at home in the room she shares with Shevek. She rearranges her work schedule to accommodate the hours when Shevek is most productive; and while his academic struggles and discoveries are faithfully recorded, Takver's labour during their four years' separation are simply glossed over as the narrative devotes more attention to her

having raised Sadik. The marital division of labour is incongruous with the Anarresti norm of equality between men and women in terms of their contribution and responsibility to the larger socius. Overtly, the alternative society in *The Dispossessed* espouses a sexual revolution similar to that propounded by Beck in the essay, 'Money, Sex, Theatre', where the author valorizes sex above money or legality as a motive for communal arrangements (Berke 1969: 98). Beck's views would appeal to readers who, like Le Guin herself, had experienced a loosening of sexual mores in the 1960s. But the re/presentation of sex and gender roles in *The Dispossessed* partakes of the same ambivalence towards revolution and conservatism that I have identified as constitutive of Le Guin's works of socio-political critique. On the one hand, the novel espouses a radical, egalitarian dispensation for both men and women. On the other, it upholds older values and forms of social organization, such as the family and the concomitant inequality of men's and women's labour. I believe that these features serve the text's privileging of a single, heroic male individual, the temporal physicist Shevek.

The same duality is also at work in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Since feminist critics have debated the status of the novel for over two decades, my discussion of it will focus mainly on gender issues, which, I believe, exemplify the text's hesitation between radicalism and revolution. When *The Left Hand of Darkness* was first published, it was negatively received by from feminist detractors who complained that Le Guin's revision of the sexual dispensation was not radical enough. Many of these complaints centre on the use of the pronoun 'he' to refer to the androgynous Gethenians. Annas succinctly summarizes feminists' objections:

Feminist criticism of this novel has focused on the use of the generic "he" and on the choice of a man, Genly Ai, as the main character and interpreter of Gethen ... . Looking through Genly's eyes, directed by the generic "he," and as a consequence of Le Guin's putting Estraven, the main Gethenian character, "almost exclusively into roles which we are culturally conditioned to perceive as 'male' - a prime minister ... a political schemer, a fugitive, a prison-breaker, a sledge-hauler,"<sup>27</sup> Estraven and the other Gethenians appear male to us.  
(1978: 151)

Other detractors were Lem, whose article on the novel was translated into English for the

Australian fanzine *SF Commentary* in 1971 (Le Guin 1993b: 127); Lefanu (1988: 137-41) and Barr (1981: 141).

In reply, Le Guin wrote in 1976 that critics had misunderstood the 'real subject' of the novel:

The fact is that the real subject of the book is not feminism or sex or gender or anything of the sort; as far as I can see, it is a book about betrayal and fidelity. That is why one of its two dominant sets of symbols is an extended metaphor of winter, of ice, snow, cold: the winter journey. The rest of this discussion will concern only half, the lesser half, of the book.

(1993b: 157)

This self-commentary is disingenuous, since she wrote two articles on *The Left Hand of Darkness* in the same year (1976)<sup>28</sup> and yet the above comment, which forms part of a parenthesis in the text, is the only reference in either to the 'real subject of the book'. Possibly the author is articulating, not her understanding of the novel, but her wish for it, even as the structure of her critical self-reflection reveals another impulse altogether. Typically, Le Guin recognizes the discrepancies, and in the 1987 version of the essay, published in a phase of more overt sympathy with feminism, she comments on the above remarks as follows:

*This parenthesis is overstated; I was feeling defensive, and resentful that critics of the book insisted upon talking only about its "gender problems," as if it were an essay not a novel. "The fact is that the real subject of the book is ..." This is bluster. I had opened a can of worms and was trying hard to shut it. "The fact is," however, that there are other aspects to the book, which are involved with its sex/gender aspects quite inextricably.*

(1993b: 157)

The 'can of worms', to which this passage alludes, is probably the question of feminism and its attendant debates. In discussing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, where gender is a central concern, Le Guin cannot afford to underplay the themes of gender and power because, as Florence puts it:

*Gender-power is a major theMatrix [of feminist science fiction] ... . I can't think of a single narrative that does not somewhere touch on the lies and dementia of*

patriarchy's fascination with power-over and its fundamentally competitive motivation/s.

(1990: 71)

Having raised the question of gender by imagining alternatives to the current dispensation, for Le Guin to state that 'the real subject of the book' is something else can only be sophistry.

In the 1976 version of 'Is Gender Necessary?', Le Guin firmly defends her choice of pronoun on grammatical grounds: 'I call Gethenians "he" because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for "he/she"' (1993b: 169). But on revising the essay in 1988, she agrees with her detractors that this usage is far from satisfactory:

*This "utter refusal" of 1968 restated in 1976 collapsed, utterly, within a couple of years more. I still dislike invented pronouns, but now dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse; and which was an invention of male grammarians, for until the sixteenth century the English generic singular pronoun was they/them/their, as it still is in English and American colloquial speech. It should be restored to the written language, and let the pedants and pundits squeak and gibber in the streets.*

(1993b: 169-70)

Indeed, I agree that 'he' is not an appropriate pronoun for a people who are portrayed as containing both sexes. I believe that the consistent use of the masculine pronoun undermines the force of Le Guin's critique of current visions of gender, because it domesticates and neutralizes the subversive Otherness of Gethenian sexuality. Although it may seem a minor aspect of language, the pervasive use of the masculine pronoun has a profound effect on the text. This can be demonstrated by reference to Le Guin's short story set on Gethen, 'Winter's King'. In the first version of the story, conventional pronouns are used for gender-specific roles. But in the revised version (1975), all the pronouns were changed to 'she', while 'masculine' titles of honour were retained. Both 'Winter's King' and *The Left Hand of Darkness* depict a meeting between the Gethenian king and a messenger from the Ekumen. The corresponding passages use different pronouns to represent the same interaction:



She and the Plenipotentiary were walking side by side up the long, immensely high room toward the dais and chairs at the far end. The windows were little more than slits, as usual on this cold world; fulvous strips of sunlight fell from them diagonally to the red-paved floor, dusk and dazzle in Axt's eyes.

...

... But a servant, coming in a side door behind them, set a small table by the Plenipotentiary's chair and loaded it with fruit, sliced bread-apple, a silver tankard of ale. Argaven had noticed that her guest had missed his breakfast.

...

"The dream of the Ekumen, then, is to restore that truly ancient commonalty; to gather all the peoples of all the worlds at one hearth?"

Axt nodded, chewing bread-apple. "To weave some harmony among them, at least. Life loves to know itself, out to its furthest limits; to embrace complexity is its delight. Our difference is our beauty. All these worlds and the various forms and ways of the minds and lives and bodies on them - together they would make a splendid harmony."

(1975b: 104-106)

Argaven was standing in front of the central and largest fireplace of three, on a low, large dais or platform: a short figure in the reddish gloom, rather potbellied, very erect, dark and featureless in silhouette except for the glint of the big seal-ring on his thumb.

...

The face that turned towards me, reddened and cratered by firelight and shadow, was as flat and cruel as the moon. Winter's dull rufous moon. Argaven was less kingly, less manly, than he looked at a distance among his courtiers. His voice was thin, and he held his fierce lunatic head at an angle of bizarre arrogance.

...

"I've made no secret of it, sir. The Ekumen wants an alliance with the nations of Gethen."

"What for?"

"Material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life. The enrichment of harmony and the greater glory of God. Curiosity. Adventure. Delight."

(1969: 33-35)

Significantly, the sentence, "Our difference is our beauty", followed by a eulogy to diversity, appears in the speech by the Plenipotentiary, Mr Axt, but is absent from the corresponding speech by Genly Ai, in the novel where sexual difference is partially obliterated.

In the 1976 version of 'Is Gender Necessary?', Le Guin writes of her growing awareness of feminism and identifies *The Left Hand of Darkness* as the product of her reflections. She cites three texts as germinal in shaping her thoughts: De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1954), Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1971).<sup>29</sup> All these works arise out of a concern for social problems. De Beauvoir's existentialist affinities make experience - the

living conditions of flesh-and-blood women, including those in the 'Third World' countries of North Africa<sup>30</sup> - the starting point for her analysis of the position of women in society. *The Feminine Mystique* draws conclusions based on partly statistical investigations into the causes of unhappiness among American women, while *Sexual Politics* analyses the representations of women in literature in order to demonstrate that male perceptions of women are based on unequal power-relations. Defining the scope of her work, Millett states that 'The first part of this essay is devoted to the proposition that sex has a frequently neglected political aspect' (1971: xi). Her position may be seen as a version of the oft-cited feminist slogan of the 1960s: 'The personal is political'.

By citing these three writers, Le Guin aligns herself with political feminism, which addresses social manifestations of women's oppression such as relegation to the domestic sphere (Friedan 1963: 33). Such efforts aim to elevate women to a higher status in society by challenging the mechanisms that keep them in an inferior position. The opening paragraphs of Le Guin's essay imply that she shares their aim. I would argue, by contrast, that such a woman-identified position is not borne out by the solution posed by *The Left Hand of Darkness* to the problem of gender inequality, namely androgyny. Heilbrun describes androgyny as follows:

Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom.

(1964: x-xi)

This passage accurately records the advantages of androgyny as an egalitarian solution to hostility between men and women.<sup>31</sup> I would argue, however, that Heilbrun does not take account of the gender inflections that an androgynous vision may inscribe. *The Left Hand of Darkness* can be seen to endorse a man's perspective on androgyny, where primary maleness is qualified by the addition of feminine attributes, rather than a woman's. Craig and Diana Barrow see this as a strength, arguing that the novel is addressed to a male audience (and presumably, therefore, should not be censured for failing to satisfy feminist critics):

Just as [Martin Luther] King sought to convert whites to the cause of racial equality, so Le Guin is arguing for sexual equality but with male fans and

science-fiction writers.

(1987: 84)

Le Guin takes a less charitable view of this aspect in 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux':

*I now see it thus: Men were inclined to be satisfied with the book, which allowed them a safe trip into androgyny and back, from a conventionally male viewpoint. But many women wanted it to go further, to dare more, to explore androgyny from a woman's point of view as well as a man's ... I think women were justified in asking more courage of me and a more rigorous thinking-through of implications.*

(1993b: 171)

These comments point to the conservative, male-centred representation of androgyny in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. This may account for the novel's popularity amongst a predominantly male readership, demonstrated by the fact that science fiction awards, were generally won by men.<sup>32</sup> The novel may be seen to superimpose physical innovation on a social structure which largely replicates Le Guin's own, where sex is a weapon in power-struggles, as in Gaum's attempted seduction of Estraven (1969: 134-35). On Gethen, as on Earth, success belongs to those who best exemplify 'masculine' qualities, such as strength and emotional restraint, as Estraven does in the journey across the Ice.

Feminist objections aside, since *The Left Hand of Darkness* embraces androgyny as a re/solution to problems of gender-power, I wish to explore the implications of its inclusive agenda. Le Guin presents Therem Harth rem ir Estraven as heroic in his commitment to a communal good which extends beyond himself. This seems to be an instance of the novel's guiding ethic, since its plot progresses on all levels towards union with that which is outside oneself.<sup>33</sup> Selinger argues ably, from a psychoanalytical perspective, that Estraven and Ai are different aspects of the same person (1988: 56), the artist-figure that he sees at the centre of all Le Guin's fiction. While his argument is persuasive, I do not think it takes cognizance of the political aspects of the novel. *The Left Hand of Darkness* consistently valorizes Estraven, the unknown foreigner, above Genly Ai, the familiar (although black) Terran. The two protagonists are partners in the trek across the Gobrai Ice, in self-discovery and in establishing Gethen as a member of the Ekumen, but Estraven is always the author of the process. In addition, Estraven's

psychological strength - his resilience and intelligence - complements and completes Genly Ai's weakness in the same situations. It seems, then, that Le Guin privileges the stranger, the unfamiliar, the Other, over more familiar elements such as the native and the self.

As various critics have noted,<sup>34</sup> Ai and Estraven's journey across the Ice leads to a psychological union which, like that of Rolery and Jakob Agat in *Planet of Exile*, is based more on difference than on similarity. In the radically minimalist environment of the Ice, Ai abandons his distrust of Estraven's Otherness, based on the Gethenian's feminine qualities. For a cultural ambassador, Ai is strikingly ignorant of O/others, especially sexual others. Asked by Estraven to describe 'the other sex of your race', Ai takes refuge in metatheoretical generalities such as 'It's extremely hard to separate the innate differences from the learned ones' and finally has to admit that 'I can't tell you what women are like' (1969: 199-200). Estraven, on the other hand, is more tolerant of Otherness. Even when angered by Ai's misinterpretation of his motives, he is able to think that 'he was an ignorant man, a foreigner, ill-used and frightened' and to take the blame for the difference in their views of events: "Mr Ai, we've seen the same events with different eyes; I wrongly thought they'd seem the same to us" (1969: 169).

Ai's suspicion of Gethenian sexuality can be read as a projection of his fear of his own repressed feminine attributes. Seen in this light, his acceptance of Estraven's difference signals transcendence of his own internalized misogyny.<sup>35</sup>

And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality.

(1969: 210)

As Selinger says, Genly Ai has realized that 'the other is both me and not-me' (1988: 62). This coincides with the realization that parts of his self, namely his sexist attitudes, have become Other to himself.<sup>36</sup> Le Guin carefully orchestrates the relationship between Ai and Estraven so that the categories of self and other, thought to be firm and mutually exclusive, are revealed as blurred, interpenetrating and relative. As these categories become 'fuzzy',<sup>37</sup> a relationship

develops that 'might as well be called, now as later, love' (1969: 211). This is the intimate, interpersonal counterpart of Ai's realization that Estraven is working for the same goal of union with a larger self (the Ekumen) as himself (1969: 170). Nevertheless, the question of why Ai and Estraven do not consummate their love remains unanswered. Lamb and Veith give two possible reasons:

The first is that sexual relations between Genly and Estraven must be avoided if the reader is to maintain belief in Le Guin's depiction of Winter's androgynous society. The second is that, by the time such a possibility arises in the story, the reader has already come to think of Estraven as male, for love between two males is a "forbidden" love in the romantic tradition, which stereotypically casts the male in the active role and the female in the receptive, passive role, regardless of the realities of an eroticism unaffected by gender differences.

(Palumbo 1986: 224)

I agree that Le Guin's adherence to the troublesome masculine pronoun domesticates Estraven's sexual and cultural Otherness, making him appear as a conventional human man, and defuses the radical content of the union between the protagonists.

Recently, a number of commentators have reclaimed *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a feminist novel, bearing out Le Guin, who referred to it as 'certainly an early feminist book' in her interview with me. For the most part, these critics respond positively to Le Guin's representation of androgyny, which they read as demystification and destabilization of current rigid categories of gender. Keulen, for example, identifies Karhide as a feminist utopia (1991: 93). She reads utopian elements in the novel's radical resolution of gender conflicts when it suggests, in Le Guin's words, that 'if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weathers, we already are [androgynous]' (1993b: 153). She also points to Gethen's thirteen centuries without a war; and to the equitable division of tasks normally assigned to women, such as childbearing and childcare. In the same vein, Cranny-Francis includes *The Left Hand of Darkness* as an example of 'feminist fiction', claiming that Le Guin 'evokes this debate about the relationship between women and knowledge in her novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*' (1990: 48). She cogently points to Ai's naturalized use of patriarchal stereotypes in his discourse about women as a strategy on Le Guin's part to defamiliarize, and thus critique, the assumption that women are Other and hence inferior:

Repeatedly throughout the book LeGuin [sic] shows in Genly's language the encoding of attitudes to women which ensure their exclusion from all positions of power within a patriarchal system.

(1990: 50)

Echoing Keulen, Roberts claims that 'Winter is a feminist utopia' (1993: 77), while Jacobs gives an extended and convincing discussion of the novel, arguing perceptively that

... as a thought-experiment observing and analyzing life without fixed gender, the novel maps and explores that "other" place or no-place implicit in the liberal feminist dream of a world without our culture's socially created gender differences and hyperawareness of sexuality.

(Donawerth and Kolmerten 1994: 198)<sup>38</sup>

In my view, some aspects of *The Left Hand of Darkness* articulate a less utopian treatment of sex and gender than Keulen and Roberts claim. Even in the original version of 'Is Gender Necessary?' Le Guin admits that

... for the reader, I left out too much. One does not see Estraven as a mother, with his children, in any role that we automatically perceive as "female": and therefore, we tend to see him as a man.

(1993b: 170-71)

Sexual homogenization of the population produces a society in which everyone is male all the time except for four to six days monthly, according to Investigator Ong Tot Oppong (1969: 81-82). Even during kemmer about half the community is male, since heterosexuality is the norm (1969: 82; 1993b: 169). Considered statistically, Gethen is a male world. The novel's failure to portray Estraven in any 'female' roles and the resulting impression of him as a man extends to his society. Women's roles, such as mothering, are described by Ong Tot Oppong as matters of sociological interest; but they are not directly portrayed, and the closest representation of a Gethenian mother is the abortive pregnancy of King Argaven.<sup>39</sup> As Le Guin notes (1993b: 170), the social functions executed by Gethenians are stereotypically male, for example engaging in diplomatic intrigue, manual labour and undertaking an arduous journey across a continent-sized sheet of ice. In view of these factors, I suggest that the novel's androgynous vision addresses

feminist debates about gender roles by proposing, not that responsibilities and tasks should be equally shared, but that a man's job can be done equally well by a person who is partly a woman.

As I have mentioned in my Introduction to this thesis, however, there are always a number of possible interpretations of Le Guin's writing. I read the representation of sexual Otherness and difference in *The Left Hand of Darkness* as too complex for a unidimensional assessment. At the least, I suggest that the novel must be read as a serious attempt to answer the question, 'Is sexuality a fair test of humanness?' (Hull 1986: 70). I have shown that feminists who uncritically embrace the novel as a 'feminist utopia' do not take its conservative aspects into account. In addition, I would argue that early feminist critics who lambasted the text for failing to revolutionize sexual roles overlook its intricate subversion of received views of gender. Counterbalancing the bias towards male interests in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the education of Genly Ai, the conventional - that is to say sexist - human male. Through interacting with Estraven, Ai is subtly distanced from his own Othering of women until, at the conclusion of the novel, he sees the human representatives of the Ekumen, with their extreme division between gender-positions, as unnatural (1969: 249). From this perspective, Le Guin can be seen to subject patriarchy to a demystifying critique which reveals it as a construct, or, as Barr puts it, a fiction (1992: xv, xxviii). Despite some feminists' objections, it is also possible to read *The Left Hand of Darkness* as grappling imaginatively with complex and deep-rooted questions of familiarity and unfamiliarity, self and other in sexual relationships. As I show in Chapter Three, 'Sex/Identity', it is an enduring concern in Le Guin's writing.

This chapter sees (at least) two possible readings of the political content of Le Guin's major novels. For lack of more satisfactory terms, these may be called 'consenting' and 'dissenting' interpretations. A consenting reading complies with the novels' dominant values, and considers the ways in which the texts articulate these. A dissenting reading focuses on contradictions and aporias in the texts, through which some limitations of Le Guin's reformist project can be discerned.

As I have observed, the success of the novels may be ascribed to the fact that they directly address urgent social problems of America in the late 1960s. *The Dispossessed* concerns the

hierarchical structuring of society along economic lines, while *The Left Hand of Darkness* responds to the burgeoning feminist movement. In each case, a consenting interpretation would see Le Guin's fiction as a revolutionary creative challenge to the status quo. *The Left Hand of Darkness* offers balance as a solution to conflict between various social groups: men and women, Gethen and the Ekumen, the Handdarata and Yomeshta, Ai and Estraven, self and other. Union with the unknown, the other or alien is the goal of the educative heroic quest undertaken by Ai and Estraven across the Gobrin Ice, and it is only through union that social evolution can take place. In the process, Genly Ai experiences alternative social arrangements in the nations of Karhide and Orgoreyn, whose virtues are in some measure a corrective to the violence and social ills of terrestrial society. It is Ai himself, the First Mobile of the Ekumen to Gethen, who develops the privileged faculty of combining Terran and Gethenian viewpoints. He thus becomes the torch-bearer for his people's cultural and spiritual growth.

A dissenting reading of the novel, however, would see *The Left Hand of Darkness* not as a dialectic ending in the synthesis of two poles, but as the articulation of politically weighted choices that prefer Estraven to Ai, Gethen to the Ekumen, and Handdarata darkness and irrationality to Yomeshta light and clarity. When the Ekumen ship finally does land, even the most stubborn advocate of sexual difference, Genly Ai, sees his people as sexual perverts (1969: 249). In this concatenation of decisions in favour of less valued poles, it is incongruous that the novel should align itself so firmly, on a sociological and grammatical level as well as psychopolitically, with men as opposed to women, so that the 'androgyny' it represents can only be seen from a male perspective.

*The Dispossessed* is similarly open to (at least) two possible readings. A consenting view would see the establishment of links between Anarres and Urras as the articulation of a transcendent ethic which valorizes inter-cultural union and communication above difference, separation and dissent. The impetus of the novel would be seen to lie with Shevek's project of 'unbuilding walls' between the two planets and societies. Shevek is its hero, precisely because of the breadth of vision that enables him to see the political extension of his work in temporal physics, where he unites two previously incompatible models of time into a unified theory, in the goal of inter-planetary co-operation. His struggles on Anarres, in the name of Odonian perpetual



revolution, for the right to publish his theories are ultimately vindicated in his return as a hero of the Urrasti proletariat. In this light, Anarres is a truly utopian society.

A dissenting reading, however, would see the flaws in both the societies depicted in *The Dispossessed* - Urras's greed and Anarres's poverty and crypto-fascism. It would have to acknowledge that capitalist Urras is more successful in providing for the needs of its people, although it does not offer justice to all. Shevek's visit to Urras can similarly be seen as the realization of a desire to find in a society based on free enterprise what is lacking in his own anarchist world. Shevek himself is a misfit in both worlds (which both expel him). His only authentic social milieu is at home with Takver, where his authoritarian and patriarchal aspirations can be validated. The utopian aspect of the novel is, in this reading, a-topian, since it is not located in any temporal world at all, but outside both Anarres and Urras, in Odo's writings and the dream of a better world that inspired them. And from a feminist viewpoint, *The Dispossessed* does grave disservice to women by portraying them as mere adjuncts to the 'real heroes' of history, who are men.

I do not propose to choose between the two competing readings I have outlined for Le Guin's most acclaimed works, although there are areas of incompatibility which call for a choice. Rather, I would like to suggest that the tension between interpretations is a function of the contradictions within the texts. On the one hand, they espouse a radical, revolutionary approach to society; but on the other, there is a contrary, conservative impulse towards sustaining the status quo. That Le Guin maintains the irresolution of these divergent impulses throughout both novels is possibly one of the major sources of their appeal to a readership which had seen the limitations of its own utopian and reformist aspirations by the end of the 1960s in America (Bittner in Rabkin, Greenberg and Olander 1983: 245).

## NOTES

1. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 'first published by Ace in 1969, won both the Nebula Award of the Science Fiction Writers of America and the Hugo Award of the 28th World Science Fiction Convention as best science fiction novel of its year' (Le Guin 1993a: 127). *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, also won both awards. The Hugo Award is granted by science fiction readers, and the Nebula Award is bestowed by Science Fiction Writers of America (Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 242-43).
2. Goodman's 'One Thing Leads to Another: A Quick Chronology of the Movement' begins in 1956 and ends in 1970. As this indicates, 'the 1960s' is less a chronologically accurate designation than a descriptive term intended to unify, in some measure, a disparate 'Movement' aimed loosely at revolutionizing American society.
3. See, for example, Bierman (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 279-85); Bucknall (1981: 63-82, 102-24); Hayles (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 97-115); Ketterer (Bloom 1986: 11-21); Craig and Diana Barrow (1987); Finch (1985); Clemens (1986) and even Jose (1991).
4. The opposition felt by the American public to the war, and its damage in economic, social and human terms to both American and Vietnamese society are well documented. The spate of films focusing on Vietnam, including *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Platoon* (1986) (Halliwell 1991: 284, 415, 866), finds its documentary counterpart in works such as *Vietnam and America* (Gettleman, Franklin, Young and Franklin: 1985).
5. Le Guin uses 'he' in *The Left Hand of Darkness* to describe the androgynous Gethenians, and I am following her lead here. Her use of the masculine pronoun is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
6. Keulen, for example, equates shifgrethor with Chinese face-saving and with interaction between members of the Hopi North American Indian tribe, who may not give each other advice for fear of impugning an equal's standing (1991: 66).
7. As Gad's encyclopedic work, *The History of Greenland* (1970), shows, the Greenlanders only heard of war in 1908.
8. The transition from naive belief in America's involvement in Vietnam to embittered disillusionment with the whole project is clearly traced in Oliver Stone's film, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (1987) (Halliwell 1991: 140, 422). Other works, such as Wright's war diary, *Meditations in Green* (1988), also testify to this shift.
9. Deetlefs comments more directly than most on Le Guin's well-known pacifist leanings when she describes the author as 'committed to feminism, pacifism, and anarchism' (1994: i).
10. American anti-Russian sentiments gave rise to the notorious McCarthy era, in which purges were conducted among civil servants that rivalled the Stalinist pogroms in the U.S.S.R. (Heale 1990: 167-90). The damage wrought by a national fear of 'the Communist threat' is depicted in works such as Ritt and Joffe's film *The Front* (1976; Halliwell 1991: 413).

11. See, for instance, Slusser (1976: 22), Barbour (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 148) and Ketterer (Bloom 1986: 16-17).

12. The terms 'History' and 'history' are used in Chapter Four, 'Re-Inventing H/history', to distinguish between sequences of important public events ('History') and smaller narratives of localized happenings ('history').

13. So many critics have noted the 'dialectical structure' of Le Guin's writing that this aspect has become a *leitmotif* in Le Guin criticism. See, for example, Bucknall (1981: 102); Theall (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 290); Bloom (1986: 3) and Ketterer (Bloom 1986: 15).

14. In her essay on character in science fiction, 'Science Fiction and Mrs Brown', Le Guin states that *The Left Hand of Darkness* owes its origins to an artistic vision of character (1993b: 107). Likewise, in the 1976 Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* she writes:

If I could have said it nonmetaphorically, I would not have written all these words, this novel; and Genly Ai would never have sat down at my desk and used up my ink and typewriter ribbon in informing me, and you, rather solemnly, that the truth is a matter of the imagination.

(1993b: 154)

15. My use of the term 'colonialism' closely follows Memmi's usage in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965). A large part of Memmi's text is devoted to describing the psychological and political/ideological process of establishing difference, and hence distance, between an imperial power and colonized group.

16. Spivak uses inverted commas to refer to the 'Third World' in texts such as 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985: 243). I am following her usage, which implies that the 'Third World' is a constructed category rather than an immutable or natural one.

17. See, for example, Fotheringham (1978: 188). Van Sickle discusses the growth of unions and their opposition to government in detail (1969: 95-119). He defines trade unions as 'organization[s] of *social protest*' (1969: 113).

18. The science-fiction device of locating the narrative centre of focalization in an alien visitor to the society being depicted has the effect of defamiliarizing and therefore foregrounding known aspects of society, so that it can be portrayed as if it were an imaginative construct. Using this technique, Le Guin forces the reader of *The Dispossessed* to realize with a shock of recognition that the despised world of Urras is the capitalist world of contemporary experience.

19. Most utopias are based on increased material prosperity, on the grounds that a better life would include more goods. See, for example, Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888); Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890); and Lewis's *Perelandra* (1943).

20. Jameson bases his use of this term on the fact that Le Guin's depicted worlds are ecologically less abundant and diverse than the author's empirical environment. His comments form part of a considerable body of criticism focusing on Le Guin's topography. See, for example: Cummins (1990a) and Bain (Bloom 1986: 211-24).

21. Suvin identifies negation as a characteristic feature of Le Guin's writing in his article, 'Parables of De-Alienation: Le Guin's Widdershins Dance' (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 295-304).
22. The process by which tyranny is enshrined in the individual mind is analysed by Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Mask of Anarchy* and *The Triumph of Life* (1951: 54-130, 200-14, 343-59). In these works Shelley identifies the origin of dictatorship and repression within the soul. He goes on to look for its psychological supports, and finds that custom, or routine behaviour, is one of its strongest henchmen. The way to dethrone the inner tyrant is through continual revolution by means of constant change. Odo, similarly, insists that revolution must always be renewed.
23. Several critics have remarked on the similarities between Le Guin's and Kropotkin's anarchism. The first is Le Guin herself, who cites Kropotkin as a direct influence on her anarchist thought in *The Dispossessed* (1993b: 108). Brennan and Downs and especially Smith (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 116-52 and 77-96) have pursued the correspondences in more detail, even noting that the organizing principle of Anarresti society is *Mutual Aid*, the title of Kropotkin's exposition of his anarchist views.
24. Williams has cogently analysed 'the high valorization of individual self-responsibility' (1994: 167) in *The Dispossessed* in her article, 'The Moons of Le Guin and Heinlein' (1994).
25. I am using the term 'symbolic code' as it is used by Kristeva, to connote the force of expected and socially legitimated and rewarded behaviour (Kristeva 1986: 199-200).
26. Equating these two forms of interaction gives them equal status and subverts current power-relations between genders. Shevek reinforces this effect when he refers to prostitution as 'a wider term [than marriage], copulation in the economic mode' (1974: 23).
27. Here Annas is quoting Le Guin (1993b: 170).
28. These are the Introduction to the 1976 Ace edition of the novel (1993b: 150-154) and 'Is Gender Necessary?'.
29. Le Guin does not specify which of Millett's works she has in mind, but since *Sexual Politics* was originally published in the same year as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), it seems reasonable to assume that she is referring to this ground-breaking work.
30. Beauvoir's sympathy for 'Third World women' in North Africa is documented by Crosland (1992: 389, 393, 399).
31. See also Rosinsky (1984: ix-x) and Singer (1989).
32. Asimov expresses surprise, in *The Hugo Winners Volume 3: Part II, 1973*, that a woman has won a Hugo award:

Here we have a Hugo-winning story that was written by a woman. As you all know (if you are old enough) there was once a time when science fiction was as masculine as testosterone ... . In Volume One, there were nine Hugo winners in

the less-than-novel categories and not one, *not one*, was written by a woman.  
(1977: 223)

33. The movement towards ending isolation through union with the Other is identified as the guiding pattern of all Le Guin's fiction in an eloquent article by Nudelman (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 240-50).

34. See, for example, Craig and Diana Barrow (1987: 83-96); Nudelman (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 240-50); Barry and Prescott (1992: 156-58). While I applaud Barry and Prescott's discussion of Ai's patriarchal prejudice, I cannot agree with them that 'gender becomes irrelevant' in the text (1992: 158).

35. Jung notes that male psychology includes the unconscious archetype of the anima, which is the repository of repressed feminine attributes (1990: 162-66). Bittner also interprets Genly Ai's task as the integration of unconscious contents, namely his fear of sexual difference, into his conscious mind (1984: 26).

36. Deetlefs also notes that Genly Ai's mission to Gethen entails dislodging his misogyny and leading him towards a more egalitarian perspective (1994: 4, 12-14), as does Le Guin (1993b: 160).

37. I have borrowed this term from McNeill's *Fuzzy Logic* (1993), which describes the effects on mathematical logic of sets losing their firm boundaries.

38. In the same volume, Green also writes that *The Left Hand of Darkness* 'reject[s] the binary construction of sexuality, insisting that the gender-defining characteristics of males and females are socially rather than biologically based' (Donawerth and Kolmerten 1994: 167).

39. These anomalies are, to some extent, rectified in Le Guin's 1991 story, 'The Shobies' Story', where the Gethenian kemmerings Karth and Oreth are portrayed with their children Rig and Asten (1991b: 60-62).

## CHAPTER THREE

### SEX / IDENTITY

To be a self is to possess and to be possessed by a name.  
(Taylor 1984: 34)

Coming of age is a process that took me many years; I finished it, so far as I ever will, at about age thirty-one; and so I feel rather deeply about it. So do most adolescents. It's their main occupation, in fact.  
(Le Guin 1993b: 50)

In this chapter I examine four novels written by Le Guin for and about adolescents - *The Earthsea Trilogy* (1977),<sup>1</sup> *Threshold* (1982),<sup>2</sup> *The Eye of the Heron* (1978) and *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* (1976a)<sup>3</sup> - in order to determine what they reveal of adolescent psychology. Many psychologists see adolescence as a period of crisis in the subject's inner development, which comes to an end with the stabilization of heterosexuality. As I shall show, the characters in Le Guin's novels traverse typical adolescent crises, revolving around unresolved pre-oedipal and oedipal concerns.

Blos describes adolescence as:

... a second step in individuation, the first one having occurred toward the end of the second year when the child experiences the fateful distinction between "self" and "non-self". A similar, yet far more complex, individuation experience occurs during adolescence, which leads in its final step to a sense of identity.  
(1962: 12)

He goes on to say that the period comes to a close with 'heterosexual object finding' (Blos 1962: 87). Chodorow makes the same point when she identifies the goal of socialization by parents as the attainment of heterosexuality and the consequent reproduction of the family with its gender-unequal status quo (1978: 94, 111-112). Both writers follow Freud in describing adolescence as a period when unresolved conflicts from childhood resurface, to be addressed anew. I contend that the novels I am examining here represent young people's struggles to come to terms with

precisely the same oedipal and pre-oedipal concerns that are identified by psychoanalytical and object relations thinkers as central to a sense of identity. These thinkers include Freud and Lacan, although I have not adhered to an exclusively Lacanian frame of reference in my reading. Essentially, oedipal and pre-oedipal issues deal with the distinction between 'self' and 'not-self' that Blos succinctly places at the heart of individuation. Put another way, the individual's relationship with difference (and as I shall show, particularly sexual difference) is central to a stable subjectivity.

An interest in issues of self and other, identity and difference, leads me to the realm of object relations theory. Rycroft defines

... *object relationship* as "the relation of the subject to his object, *not* the relation between the subject and the object which is an *interpersonal* relationship ... because psychoanalysis is a psychology of the individual and therefore discusses objects and relationships only from the point of view of a single subject."

(Bacal and Newman 1990: 227)

Psychoanalysis, and especially object relations theory, shows a concern with the individual's relationship with others (using a model of growth that involves at least two people) and also focuses on the individual in that relationship.<sup>4</sup> That is, it emphasizes the self in relation with others.

Psychoanalysis and object-relations theory are, nevertheless, counter to Le Guin's explicit account of her writing. In 'The Child and the Shadow' she asserts that she prefers Jung to Freud:

Jung saw the psyche as populated with a group of fascinating figures, much livelier than Freud's grim trio of Id, Ego, Superego; they're all worth meeting.

(1993b: 59)

She goes on to discuss individuation, using a Jungian framework for the confrontation between the self and the shadow. Most critics have followed Le Guin's lead, and where they have drawn on psychological theory, have adopted a Jungian reading. For example, Slethaug claims authoritatively in his article on *A Wizard of Earthsea* that

*A Wizard of Earthsea* exemplifies Le Guin's adherence to Jungian theories of the personality and of the struggle for power between the conscious and unconscious, the rational and the shadow, and of the necessary reconciliation of the two ...

(1986: 327)

Craig and Diana Barrow register this trend at the beginning of their essay on *The Earthsea Trilogy*, in a summary of previous approaches:

Several interpretive communities have gathered on the shores of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea*: Jungian myth critics such as Bailey, Gunew, Pfeiffer, and Thompson;<sup>5</sup> critics interested in Le Guin's Taoism as it informs her work, such as Slusser, Barbour, Cogell, Bucknall, and Galbreath; critics with an interest in romance or fantasy forms, such as Hume, Bittner, and K.V. Bailey; critics interested in the relation of science, particularly anthropology, to Le Guin's work, such as Sinclair, Scholes, Shippey, and Koper; and critics with Freudian leanings, such as Selinger and Bloom.

(1991: 20)

I admire the Barrows' erudition in compiling such an exhaustive list, but it does contain some misreadings. I doubt that eclectic critics such as Cogell, Scholes and Shippey can be categorized in the way they claim. In addition, I can find no 'Freudian leanings' at all in Bloom's 'Introduction' to *Ursula K. Le Guin*. The list does, however, bear out my claim that Le Guin critics, except for Selinger, tend to avoid Freudian readings.<sup>6</sup> A noticeable result of this omission is the tendency to read the texts as though they did not deal with sexuality at all, or only tangentially.<sup>7</sup> I find this a puzzling omission in relation to novels where the primary focus is on adolescence, when sexuality dominates the individual's psyche to an unprecedented extent. As I have indicated, a major task of adolescence, as described by Le Guin and object relations theory, is to deal with sexual difference. In addition, the 'anatomical difference between the sexes', which Freud identifies as constitutive of the individual's approach to life,<sup>8</sup> produces different concerns dominating the psyche of young men and women. Like Selinger,<sup>9</sup> I believe that a psychoanalytical approach can usefully illuminate areas of Le Guin's writing that are not usually explored.

Although many Freudian psychologists disagree with Freud's analysis of the development of sexuality in childhood, they agree on the centrality of the oedipus complex as the gateway to inscription in social relations in the child's psycho-sexual development. Within



the constellation of conditions constituting the oedipus complex, the child confronts the 'fateful distinction between "self" and "non-self"' (Blos 1962: 12). The pre-oedipal child is concerned exclusively with the self, since no difference is perceived between self and environment, represented by the child's mother. Pre-oedipal concerns, which linger into later childhood and resurface strongly in adolescence, are those which arise from the self. The oedipus complex is brought on by the realization that other people are different, and specifically that the child's parents embody sexual difference. The oedipus complex begins with the child's first awareness of itself as a gendered subject. This in turn provokes a comparison with the child's primary caregiver, the mother, who is the object of different responses from children of different sexes. Children experience 'the desire of the Other'<sup>10</sup> for the genital configuration that they do not have. The boy-child desires access to his mother's genitals. The girl-child, in a famously sexist but unexplained inequality, wishes for her body to include a penis like her father's (Freud 1990: 299). Her failure to achieve this causes a life-long sense of inferiority, to which the boy is not prone. For both sexes, oedipal concerns, relating to others and the Other, assume a centrality they never lose, and are felt with particular force at the onset of puberty.

Freud's account, although pivotal to an understanding of childhood, presents obvious problems. Dissent tends to focus on the apparently arbitrary centrality Freud ascribes to the penis in infant psychology. Accordingly, revisions of Freud have tended to reinterpret this configuration in various ways. Lacan, with characteristic emphasis on the role of language, argues for the 'phallus' as a linguistic equivalent to the physical penis (1977a: 102). In Lacan's account, the phallus is the signifier of patriarchal power. This concept may explain why Ged, in *The Earthsea Trilogy*, who is a man and possessor of a penis, also comes to possess the phallus. His wizardly power inheres partly in himself, partly in an unambiguously phallic object: his staff. On the other hand, although Tenar is a priestess, she lacks access to the phallus since she is a woman surrounded entirely by women and castrated men. Her envy of Ged's power can be read as a version of penis/staff envy. Equally, it may be a sense of inferiority arising from her gender that leads her to shun public fame in Havnor for the more secluded slopes and pastures of Gont. But I believe that the inequality of male and female destinies can also be explained historically, in terms of an active patriarchal system where men hold social power and women are deprived of it. Tenar's preference for a private life on Gont may also be attributed to the

radical seclusion of her existence at the Tombs. It may even be a more valuable option than the life of public action chosen by Ged, as *Tehanu* suggests (1993a: 528).

For my purposes, the most important attack on Freud's theory of sexuality has come from feminist writers.<sup>11</sup> Most of these thinkers, such as Beauvoir, Friedan, Millett and Greer (1970), reject Freud, while Mitchell (1974) attempts to reclaim Freud for feminism simply by explaining his views more clearly than he could. In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Chodorow synthesizes Freud's insights with object relations theory and a sociological analysis of women as mothers. She argues that the role of the mother as primary love object for children of both sexes is fundamental to psychological development. She replaces Freud's emphasis on the child's response to genitalia with an interest in affective/emotional issues. Since Le Guin's novels consistently present deviations, even pathology, in the nuclear family, and because they stress the emotional dimensions of adolescence more than overtly sexual issues, my views of her writing are influenced by Chodorow's interpretation of the different emphases in the psychological development of boys and girls. In her account, a son experiences his first feelings of love and cathexis in relation to his mother, but because she is sexually different from him,

... masculinity and sexual difference ("oedipal" issues) become intertwined with separation-individuation ("preoedipal") issues almost from the beginning of a boy's life.

(1978: 106)

On the other hand, because daughters receive primary care from a person of the same sex (a mother is always a woman), they do not experience the same opportunity as boy-children to develop a sense of self as separate from others. The extended attachment between daughters and their mothers means that girls achieve oedipalization, which entails the sexualization of relationships, later than boys. At the same time, their relationships manifest an ambivalent need to merge with the other together with fear of fusion. Chodorow describes the situation:

The cases I describe [of women remaining attached to their mothers for extraordinarily long periods] suggest that there is a tendency in women toward boundary confusion and a lack of sense of separateness from the world.

... As long as women mother, we can expect that a girl's preoedipal period will be longer than that of a boy and that women, more than men, will be more open to and preoccupied with those very relational issues that go into mothering -

feelings of primary identification, lack of separateness or differentiation, ego and body-ego boundary issues and primary love not under the sway of the reality principle.

(1978: 110)

Chodorow's distinction between pre-oedipal and oedipal issues, and their different importance for sons and daughters, is seen in the protagonists of Le Guin's fabulation. Each character, in a different way, manifests traces of continuing oedipal and pre-oedipal concerns. Importantly, object relations theory bridges the distinction between 'oedipal' and 'pre-oedipal' matters by its interest in 'selfobjects', that is, 'the experience of functions provided by an object that is felt to sustain, enhance, or restore the sense of self' (Bacal and Newman 1990: 188). Object relations theory shows how the subject's concerns with difference and relationship shape his or her sense of self.

As I have mentioned, the novels recount the individual characters' response to pre-oedipal and oedipal crises, which revolve around issues of identity and sexual difference. Ged's psychological journey in *A Wizard of Earthsea* transcends his ambivalence towards women and produces an adult, but celibate, male wizard. Tenar, in *The Tombs of Atuan*, is catapulted into maturity by her first sight of a man, who turns out to be Ged. In *Threshold*, Hugh and Irena discover the alternative realm while escaping from the dominance of their families. The political education of Luz Marina Falco Cooper, in *The Eye of the Heron*, coincides with her breaking her ties with a domineering (oedipal) father. And in *Very Far Away From Anywhere Else*, Owen and Natalie's relationship enables them to create valid identities in the face of an inimical bourgeois society. The male characters tend to concentrate on pre-oedipal issues connected with individuation, while the women are more preoccupied with oedipal, or relationship concerns. These two modes define the polarities of my title. Ultimately, though, the distinction between pre-oedipal/individuation/identity issues and oedipal/relationship/sex concerns proves to be a matter of degree rather than kind. The characters can establish a stable sense of self only through healthy relations with love objects drawn from the opposite sex.

*A Wizard of Earthsea* traces the development of Ged, the apprentice wizard, from a child into an adult mage. Le Guin equates Ged's adulthood with mastery of his craft, that is, with the

awareness of his role in relation to others. Blos identifies this quality as a hallmark of late adolescence:

At late adolescence recreational, avocational, devotional, and thematic preferences emerge, the pursuit of which equals in psychic economy the pursuits of work and love.

(1962: 141)

Compared with this portrait of adolescence, though, Ged shows a puzzling lack of interest in 'the pursuits of ... love'. Heterosexual object finding, which is a major achievement of adolescence,<sup>12</sup> is startlingly absent from his evolution. A discussion of Ged's psychology, I maintain, must explore why this is so. In *Tehanu*, Moss explains to Tenar that celibacy is the precondition for a wizard's vocation:

"They witch 'emselves. Some'll tell you they make a trade-off, like a marriage turned backward, with vows and all, and so get their power then ... . You don't get without you give as much. That's true for all, surely. So they know that, the witch men, the men of power, they know that better than any. But then, you know, it's an uneasy thing for a man not to be a man, no matter if he can call the sun down from the sky. And so they put it right out of mind, with their spells of binding."

(1993a: 570-71)

Le Guin explains Ged's chastity in terms of the conventions of heroic narrative:

Readers and reviewers of the trilogy did not question Ged's masculinity, as far as I know. He was seen as thoroughly manly. And yet he had no sex life at all. This is of course traditional in the hero-tale: the hero may get a pro-forma bride as final reward, but from Samson and Delilah to Merlin and Nimue to the war stories of our century, sexuality in the hero is seen not as prowess but as weakness. Strength lies in abstinence - the avoidance of women and the replacement of sexuality by non-sexual male bonding.

(1993c: 11)

Moss's explanation for Ged's abstinence coincides with Wilber's discussion of shamanism, where he writes that shamans channel their sex, or *kundalini*, energies into the pursuit of unconscious knowledge (1983: 81). The shaman's devotion precludes a sexual relationship and

the consequent establishment of a family. Le Guin's pertinent analysis of heroes articulates the same view. Wizards in fantasy works are mostly celibate,<sup>13</sup> and I infer that this is necessary for them to concentrate on their vocation, although the reason is never explicit. Indeed, none of the wizards in *The Earthsea Trilogy* successfully makes the transition to heterosexuality.

I intend, nevertheless, to explore another source for Ged's failure to find a heterosexual love object, namely the psycho-sexual dynamics of the family. Chodorow's description of how boys constitute themselves in relation to their mothers is strikingly similar to Ged's story. Ged's mother 'died before he was a year old', while his father 'was a grim unspeaking man', with the result that 'there was no one to bring the child up in tenderness' (1993a: 13). Ged is effectively isolated from the usual context of socialization, namely the family. He does not encounter oedipal issues, concerning sexual difference, in a normal way. As a result, Ged's relationships with women are always marked by the ambivalence that is characteristic of sons' attitudes to their mothers. Women are seen, without exception, as part good (the nurturing mother) and part bad (the castrating, abandoning mother).<sup>14</sup> He treats his aunt, who acts as a surrogate mother, more as a professional rival than as a care-giver (1993a: 14). Also, as critics have noted,<sup>15</sup> it is his (sexual) confusion in the presence of Serret at puberty that lures him first to invoke the shadow that will become his antagonist (1993a: 30-31). I see Serret, not in Ogion's suspicious terms (1993a: 31), as Eve tempting Adam to mortal sin, but as the sexual Other whom Ged both desires and fears, because he has not experienced women's sexuality in contact with his own mother.<sup>16</sup> The young man sees women as though from a great distance, as objects he can admire but never reach. His response is evident in his brief meeting with the Lady of O-tokne (1993a: 53-55) and when he meets Serret as an adult (1993a: 105). Finally, the shadow appears together with the spirit of Elfarran, a mythological mother-figure.

Oedipal issues resurface in a muted and oblique way in *The Tombs of Atuan*, when Ged meets Tenar. Eventually, the two protagonists become love objects for each other, although undeclared. However, as Le Guin says (1993b: 50), *The Tombs of Atuan* concerns female, not male, adolescence, and Tenar is the focalizer of events. Her agitation at finding a creature she has never seen before, a man, in the Labyrinth, generates the sexual overtones of their interaction, such as when Ged creates an illusion of a royal gown for her (1993a: 250-51). What he does not

say is that he is showing her herself as he sees her, with the gaze of sublimated desire that reconstructs her in his specular image. Probably through his vow of celibacy, Ged retains the power in their communication and evades a resurgence of oedipal conflicts, which Tenar is experiencing. Even when he promises devotion to her, his pre-oedipal needs, expressed as duty to his vocation, preclude the possibility of sexuality:

"I follow my calling ... . Do you see that? I do what I must do. Where I go, I must go alone. So long as you need me, I'll be with you in Havnor. And if you ever need me again, call me. I will come. I would come from my grave if you called me, Tenar! But I cannot stay with you."

(1993a: 291)

As the more logocentric partner, whose ego-boundaries are not threatened by desire, Ged can discuss their relationship in words:

"... You have knowledge, and I have skill, and between us we have ..."  
He paused.

"We have the Ring of Erreth-Akbe."

"Yes, that. But I thought also of another thing between us. Call it trust ... That is one of its names. It is a very great thing. Though each one of us is weak, having that we are strong, stronger than the Powers of the Dark."

(1993a: 273)

It is likely that another name for what Ged, whose skill is in knowing names, calls trust is 'desire', which he cannot admit and therefore has to leave Tenar. Is this the behaviour of a stereotypical woman-deserting male ogre? Is it masochism that will not let Ged foster intimacy with the woman everyone but he knows he loves? Is it devotion to his career, as he claims? Or is it because he has simply not reached the appropriate stage in his oedipalization process for the establishment of a sexual relationship? Whatever the reason, the resolution of Ged's oedipal issues is deferred by his commitment to the Kristevan Symbolic and his own quest for a place within it.

Ged's most 'heroic' deeds are done in the realm of the self: as I have implied, he needs to find a sense of self rather than relationship. At this point it is fruitful to draw on a Jungian view of the self. Jung defines individuation as

... becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization.”

(1990: 147)

Jung also describes individuation as the integration of unconscious contents into consciousness (1990: 336), which aptly summarizes the climactic events of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The idea of the self is ambivalent in both Le Guin’s and Jung’s writings. To a certain extent they both appeal to the notion of a single, essential self, Jung in his references to the subject’s ‘incomparable uniqueness’ and Le Guin in her statement that ‘our job in growing up is to become ourselves’ (1993b: 66). Samuels embraces a similar view of the self:

A working definition of the self as Jung envisioned it would be: “the potential for integration of the total personality” ... . The self involves the potential to become whole or, experientially, to *feel* whole.

(1985: 91)

Nevertheless, both Jung and Le Guin acknowledge that the stability of ‘the self’ is illusory. Jung explains that the self cannot be fully described:

... the self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man [sic] ... . But in so far as the total personality, on account of its unconscious component, can be only in part conscious, the concept of the self is, in part, only *potentially* empirical ... it characterizes an entity that can be described only in part but, for the other part, remains at present unknowable and illimitable.

(1990: 274-75)

Equally, *The Earthsea Trilogy* presents, not a single narrative of the self, but three tales. The elusive nature of ‘the self’, like the wizard’s tasks, reminds one that oedipal and pre-oedipal concerns cannot be resolved according to a predetermined standard (Blos 1962: 130).

Ged’s quest in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is to encounter and defeat his shadow, a concretization of internal forces. Jung describes the role of the shadow in personal growth in terms highly reminiscent of Le Guin’s narrative:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality,

for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.

(1959: 8)

Jung uses colour symbolism to describe the shadow as dark and murky (1990: 315-17). This accords with the first appearance of Ged's shadow as 'a shapeless clot of shadow' (Le Guin 1993a: 30). Nevertheless, Le Guin sees the archetype of the shadow in more positive terms than Jung. In 'The Child and the Shadow', she describes it as follows:

The shadow is on the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind.

... The shadow stands on the threshold between the conscious and unconscious mind, and we meet it in our dreams, as sister, brother, friend, beast, monster, enemy, guide. It is all we don't want to, can't, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used.

... For the shadow is not simply evil. It is inferior, primitive, awkward, animallike, childlike; powerful, vital, spontaneous. It's not weak and decent, like the learned young man from the North; it's dark and hairy and unseemly; but, without it, the person is nothing.

(1993a: 59-60)

Both in this essay and in *A Wizard of Earthsea*,<sup>17</sup> Le Guin makes the Jungian point that recognition of the shadow is integral to individuation. Her identification of it as a 'threshold' or liminal figure is appropriate for Ged's final confrontation with it in a topos that is neither land nor sea (1993a: 162-63).

The shadow may also be read in other ways. It is the only entity in *Earthsea* which may possibly be nameless. Archmage Gensher says confidently, 'It has no name' (1993a: 68), but Ogion avers with equal surety, 'All things have a name' (1993a: 119).<sup>18</sup> The shadow's uncertain status in the register of signification makes it possible to see it as an irruption of Kristeva's semiotic into the Symbolic, especially as Elfarran, woman ancestor and mother-analogue, attends its summoning. The topoi of its later appearances suggest undifferentiation (in the snow-covered Osskilian landscape) and, in the cove of the East Reach, the landscape imagery of an enclosed, narrow, dark inlet between high, sunlit cliffs is redolent of the sexuality Ged cannot admit in



himself. The conservative side of the fantasy, which guards the Equilibrium unchanged,<sup>19</sup> reinforces the shadow's disruptive potential, not only for Ged, but also for the entire natural system which it has 'torn open' by coming into being (1993a: 65). On one level, the text implies that unconscious forces must be controlled since they threaten the social order if left unchecked. Le Guin's comments on coming of age, however, imply that the individual must confront the shadow as an inevitable part of the resolution of pre-oedipal concerns on the path to adulthood.

A unique aspect of *The Earthsea Trilogy* is its foregrounding of the role/rule of names. I see names and naming as a means of bridging the distance between self and other/s, and so, between pre-oedipal and oedipal issues. The name of the individual, the proper name, is the repository of identity in western culture. This state of affairs begs several questions. What's in a name?<sup>20</sup> What is a 'proper' name? Can a name be improper? What is the connection between *le nom propre* and *le nom du père*? Does the child, on receiving a name, somehow partake of the Name of the Father? In societies where patronymics are not used, how is the child's identity shaped by the history of his or her culture? Who may name a child (or anything else)? How does naming a child participate in Adam's originary activity of naming the birds and beasts of Creation?<sup>21</sup> Is the name of *wo+man* also part of originary naming? How can a name convey identity? Is personal identity the identity of equality, or of continuity through time?<sup>22</sup> Is there such a thing as 'essential' identity? Do persons possess an essence? If so, might there be a 'non-essential' or inauthentic form of identity?<sup>23</sup> Would two different identities, one authentic and one inauthentic, require two different names?

As I see it, there are at least two possible interpretations of the relationship between names and identity. A logocentric world-view, or one interested in social replication, would hold that a name conveys one's inner self, and also is, importantly, a passport to inscription into the social order: the form of behaviour and language described by Lacan's and Kristeva's Symbolic. A view that is more sceptical of the value of reproducing social relations would consider the matter differently. It would point to the slippage of meaning between signifier and signified and hence between name and person.<sup>24</sup> It would also comment on the difficulty of assigning a single, stable, 'essential' identity to an individual subject, whose existence is constituted more by the

interactions between conflicting drives than by a governing centre of selfhood. Finally, it would call attention to the fact that social replication is not politically innocent. The Symbolic is patriarchal in more than one sense; it is patrilineal since it is passed on from father to child, and is therefore constituted by the Law of the Father.

I believe that all these views of name-bearing are relevant to the use of names in *The Earthsea Trilogy*. At first glance, Le Guin appears to describe the situation more simply, in terms that imply a belief in the ability of names to convey essences:

People often ask how I think of names in fantasies, and again I have to answer that I find them, that I hear them. This is an important subject in this context. From that first story on, *naming* has been the essence of the art-magic as practiced in Earthsea. For me, as for the wizards, to know the name of an island or a character is to know the island or the person.

(1993b: 46)

These remarks point to a logocentric wish for truth to be enshrined immutably in the world of signs by congruence between signifier and signified, name and thing. But the notion of a necessary relation between name and thing (which is a 'fictional' thing, an idea in the mind of the author and later, with modifications, in the mind of the reader) is belied by Le Guin's admission, in the same essay, that extraneous influences directed her choice of names: 'Three small islands are named for my children, their baby-names' (1993b: 46) and 'One place I do exert deliberate control in name-inventing is in the area of pronounceability' (1993b: 47). Even in the fantasy of a direct, pure relation between word and thing, signifier and signified, language and meaning, *différance* enters and the shadow of arbitrariness falls over the dream of a 'true' or natural language. In the old debate over whether language is natural or constructed,<sup>25</sup> Le Guin positions herself, in a typically deconstructive move, on both sides of the fence.

While names delineate difference between entities, and therefore belong in the realm of pre-oedipal or individuation concerns, they are also markers of relationship and thus are connected with the oedipal realm. In western society the choice of given name or surname depends largely on the intimacy between the speaker and addressee. In the same way, in *The Earthsea Trilogy*, everybody has three names - a name given by the parents, a true name, and a

'use-name' or nickname. Different names betoken different relationships, as they do in contemporary society:

No one knows a man's name but himself and his namer. He may choose at length to tell it to his brother, or his wife, or his friend, yet even those few will never use it where any third person may hear it. In front of other people they will, like other people, call him by his use-name, his nickname - such a name as Sparrowhawk, and Vetch, and Ogion which means "fir-cone" ... . Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping.

(1993a: 70)

The asymmetry between Ged and Tenar, which I read as a result of inequalities in gendered socialization, is signalled by the most intimate marker of identity: names. Ged follows the usual sequence of names for inserting a child into the Symbolic. He is called Duny by his mother (1993a: 13), receives his true name, Ged, from the wizard Ogion (1993a: 24), and is called Sparrowhawk by most people (1993a: 28). In the same way, Tenar is named by her parents (1993a: 175); but, in a reversal of the usual order, she is called Arha, 'the Eaten One' when, at six, she becomes the One Priestess of the Dark Powers of the Tombs of Atuan (1993a: 181). She retains the name given to her by her parents as her true name (1993a: 258), and 'Arha' is a 'use-name' or name for her social function. Only when she is fully inserted into human community as a citizen of Gont, in *Tehanu*, does she acquire a viable use-name, Goha (1993a: 483).

The unity between names and things extends to animals, plants and inanimate objects in Earthsea. In a much-quoted passage,<sup>26</sup> the Master Hand explains the wizard's responsibility for the 'proper', socially reinforcing use of names:

To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done. Indeed it can be done ... . But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium.<sup>27</sup> A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow ... .

(1993a: 48)

The identity/identity of name and thing in *The Earthsea Trilogy* points to an idea of

transcendent truth unambiguously inscribed in concrete objects and controllable by the appropriate knowledge. But Le Guin's discourse also allows for the opposite point of view, by incorporating a (Saussurean) arbitrariness in language. Kurremkarmerruk, the Master Namer, writes lists of true names and teaches them to his students, who must learn them by heart in a day. Kurremkarmerruk is part lexicographer, part taxonomist, whose task is never done because the world is always changing. Read another way, there is always a surplus of reality which exceeds the power of language to name it and escapes the control of even the most powerful will-to-know. Kurremkarmerruk himself is aware of this excess and what it implies about his task and, possibly, the whole enterprise of logocentrism:

And still the lists are not finished. Nor will they be, till world's end. Listen, and you will see why ... that which gives us power to work magic, sets the limits of that power.<sup>28</sup> A mage can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly. And this is well. If it were not so, the wickedness of the powerful or the folly of the wise would long ago have sought to change what cannot be changed, and Equilibrium would fail. The unbalanced sea would overwhelm the islands where we perilously dwell, and in the old silence all voices and all names would be lost.

(1993a: 50-51)

Kurremkarmerruk's words level a telling attack on a scientific ideology which regards taxonomy or list-making as a form of power.

*The Farthest Shore* consciously subverts the identity of name and thing. Ged faces another resurgence of oedipal and pre-oedipal issues when he realizes that the name = thing equation no longer holds. The result is that the distinctness and diversity of things disappears, with catastrophic effects. To the victims of this specialized aphasia, the loss of names is equated with the attainment of 'reality' and the failure of death. Ged is an adult; but the emphasis falls on his adolescent companion, Arren, who confronts death by accompanying Ged to the Dry Land. Le Guin sees the theme of death as integral to adolescence:

*The Farthest Shore* is about death ... . It seemed an absolutely suitable subject to me for young readers, since in a way one can say that the hour when a child realizes, not that death exists - children are intensely aware of death - but

that he/she, personally, is mortal, will die, is the hour when childhood ends, and the new life begins. Coming of age again, but in a larger context.

(1993b: 50)

I agree with Le Guin's comments, since the awareness of death, as the onset of adolescence does, brings to consciousness several pre-oedipal and oedipal themes. The failure of names is carefully connected to death in *The Farthest Shore*. I have already mentioned that the loss of names ushers in a condition of non-differentiation where entities shade into one another. A failure in distinctness also implies the end of dynamic relationships. This state is reflected in the 'Dry Land', the land of death at the end of the novel. Here everything is grey, 'like a late twilight under clouds at the end of November, a dour, chill, dull air in which one could see, but not clearly and not far' (1993a: 455). In addition, no interactions take place (1993a: 456) and there are no emotions, as Attebery points out (1980: 275).

Le Guin is writing here of matters which have no substance except in the mind; as she says, '*The Farthest Shore* is about the thing you do not live through and survive' (1993b: 50). The appropriate discourse is that of the unconscious,<sup>29</sup> where the subject relegates the desire to return to primal unity with the mother, through abolition of the boundary between self and other. This desire can be fulfilled only by the dissolution of the self as a discrete entity.<sup>30</sup> The topography of the Dry Land is similar to Jackson's largely psychoanalytical account of the landscape of fantasy:

The topography, themes and myths of the fantastic all work together to suggest this movement toward a realm of non-signification, towards a zero point of non-meaning. The represented world of the fantastic ... [contains] relatively bleak, empty, indeterminate landscapes, which are less definable as places than as spaces, as white, grey or shady blanknesses.

(1981: 42)

Freud, Kristeva and Lacan all testify to the force of the desire for the cessation of separateness through the removal of boundaries. For Freud, it is the death drive, but also the most advanced form of the pleasure principle (Gay 1989: 613-15; Jackson 1981: 72). Kristeva sees the semiotic realm, issuing from the maternal *chora* or space of unity with the mother, as disruptive of the symbolic order (1986: 95). For Lacan, it is 'an eternal and irreducible human desire ... an eternal

desire for the nonrelationship of zero, where identity is meaningless' (Jackson 1981: 77). For Arren, the Dry Land exerts a terrible compulsion to despair (1993a: 467-68). Nevertheless, he defies the forces of dissolution in his own unconscious and returns to consciousness - which is to say, to the realm of differentiation. The task of his passage through adolescence is to realize that consciousness and unconsciousness, the life and death instincts, must be kept separate for community life to continue. Brown also makes this point:

It is the distinctive achievement of man to break apart the undifferentiated or dialectical unity of the instincts [of Life and Death] at the animal level. Man separates the opposites, turns them against each other, and, in Nietzsche's phrase, sets life cutting into life.

(Wilber 1977: 122)

At the end of *The Farthest Shore*, Ged has defeated the disruptive forces in himself and in society that threaten his pre-oedipal quest for separateness and individuation. But he has not yet resolved the oedipal conflicts of his childhood by finding a love object outside his family. As a result, he remains psychologically an adolescent, as Moss recognizes in *Tehanu*: 'It's a queer thing for an old man to be a boy of fifteen, no doubt!' (1993a: 570). Ged has proved himself a hero in the tradition of heroic literature (Le Guin 1993c: 11). One of the conditions is that, in Chodorow's words: 'Men ... do not define themselves in relationship and have come to suppress relational capacities and repress relational needs' (1978: 207).

Hugh Rogers in *Threshold* and Owen Griffiths in *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* have problems with individuation which are similar to Ged's, although they do gradually accept their own sexuality. The masculine pattern of emphasizing pre-oedipal individuation issues over oedipal ones is repeated in these novels.<sup>31</sup> At first reading, Hugh Rogers is strikingly different from Ged. He works as a supermarket cashier in an anonymous town in the American Midwest; but his adolescent dilemmas are similar to Ged's. As the mage has, Hugh has experienced inadequate mothering. Mrs Rogers, deserted by her husband, is a neurotic adherent of cheap religion, who clings desperately to her son despite the fact that 'it was his deep voice, his size, his big feet and thick fingers, his heavy, sexual body that she couldn't stand, that drove her to the edge' (1982a: 19). Hugh's father was an adored role model who betrayed him when, without warning, he left the child, aged thirteen:

His dad punched his shoulder gently and said: "You know, Hughie, I have a lot of confidence in you. You know that? I can count on you. You're steadier than a lot of grown men I know. Your mom's got to have somebody to depend on. She can depend on you. It means a lot to me, knowing that." ... [Hugh] sat silent in the sudden blissful sunlight of praise. Next day when he got home from school their neighbour Joanna was there, thin-lipped, in the kitchen; Hugh's mother was lying down under sedation; his father had gone off in the Ford truck leaving a note saying he had a job in Canada and thought this was a good time to make the break.

(1982a: 62-63)

This event, at the onset of puberty and adolescence, shapes Hugh's life. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Hugh has probably inferred that oedipality and sexual difference lead to abandonment. He would conclude that it is dangerous to venture into object relations with someone outside the nuclear family. Paradoxically, this choice traps him in an oedipal relationship with his mother. He obeys his father, sacrificing every personal wish to his mother's insecurity, so that she can depend on him. Hugh is afraid of both pre-oedipal and oedipal conflicts. He vaguely wants to get away from his mother's influence and pursue his own needs. But, whenever these thoughts come up, his primary attachment to his mother intervenes to prevent him from taking these impulses further:

If he hadn't fallen into the job he might have gone ahead and bought a car so that he could work downtown, as he had planned ... He would rather live in town and get along without a car of his own but his mother was afraid of inner cities.

(1982a: 7)

As Le Guin describes Mrs Rogers's behaviour, clinging to Hugh and demanding that he subordinate his needs to her insatiable hunger for companionship, the possibility arises that Mr Rogers had sufficient provocation to leave his wife. Hugh does not make this connection even though his mother annoys him. In linguistic terms, his father's injunction has become the Law of the Father and the extent of the Symbolic code: it completely defines his interaction with society. Psychic contents that do not fit his father's command, such as his own drive for individuation, together with emotions of anger, fear and desire, are simply repressed. They take on an autonomous unconscious existence in his psyche and become the 'thing in his throat' that pleads, 'I can't, I can't' (1982a: 10). This 'thing' catalyses Hugh's discovery of the enchanted

world.

Chodorow's description of mothers' experience of their sons strongly recalls Mrs Rogers:

A mother, here, is again experiencing her son as a definite other - an opposite-gendered and -sexed other. Her emotional investments and conflicts, given her socialization around issues of gender and sex and membership in a sexist society, make this experience of him particularly strong. The son's solution, moreover, emphasizes differentiation buttressed by heavy emotional investment. He projects his own fears and desires onto his mother, whose behavior [sic] he then gives that much more significance and weight.

(1978: 105)

Like many women with absent husbands (Chodorow 1978: 104), Mrs Rogers has taken Hugh as a surrogate for her husband. Her behaviour towards him is seductive, especially when she refuses to speak to him because he has displeased her (1982a: 106); and she is extremely dependent. Like many women, her socialization has taught her to focus her attention on relationships with others. She is preoccupied with oedipal concerns, rather than concerns within the ambit of the self. She wants Hugh to be an ideal lover who will always provide company and never challenge her authority. Her son's sexual otherness provokes deep ambivalence; she simultaneously desires it as the fantasied receptacle of all she does not have, and recoils in horror from contact with it (1982a: 19). Her failure to resolve oedipal and pre-oedipal issues produces deep sexual and identity confusion in Hugh. He reacts to his own sexual difference from his mother with a sense of inferiority and shame, arising from the persistence of the oedipal situation into his adolescence. Without breaking his mother's hold over him, Hugh cannot pursue his individuation goals.

In a way that ironically mirrors popular views of fantasy as an 'escapist' genre,<sup>32</sup> the alternative realm in *Threshold* offers Hugh the means to escape his intolerable relationship with his mother.<sup>33</sup> This realm can be read, then, not as a world with autonomous existence, but a fantasy landscape, constructed from the protagonists' unconscious desires and fears. It is not surprising that it contains everything Hugh's life lacks. The people of Tembreabrezi hail him as the long-awaited hero who will rescue them from the nameless threat (1982a: 82). This role partially resolves his pre-oedipal individuation conflicts by providing him with the purpose he



can never have as a checker at Sam's Thrift-E-Mart. It also offers oedipal gratification in the form of Allia, the objectifiable, ideal woman that he imagines he loves (1982a: 100-101). Blos notes that adolescents often idealize members of the opposite sex before adopting a valid love object (1962: 102-103) and goes on to note that:

The first choice of a heterosexual love object is commonly determined either by some physical or mental similarity to the parent of the opposite sex, or by some striking dissimilarities.

(1962: 103)

The reader can hardly fail to notice that blonde, feminine, gentle Allia is the opposite of diminutive Mrs Rogers, with her 'pencilled black eyebrows' (1982a: 18) and aggressive manner.

Hugh resolves his adolescent conflicts in both the pre-oedipal and the oedipal realms when he recognizes Irena as the love object that will break his claustrophobic bond with his mother. This shift occurs when she affirms his need for individuation, signalled by aspirations to pursue 'Library work' (1982a: 163). Irena's role in Hugh's psychological development bears out Bacal's notion of a selfobject:

... the selfobject ultimately ensures the psychological survival of the self. But the selfobject ... is also usually experienced as a resource of intermediary psychological functions, such as soothing, holding, providing a sense of security, being liked and admired, existing as a source of stabilizing idealization.

(Bacal and Newman 1990: 212)

The consummation of Hugh and Irena's relationship takes place under rather unlikely circumstances. Hugh has been severely injured by the dragon and can barely walk, let alone make love (1982a: 163-64). Nevertheless, it is an important event for him. It signals the belated dissolution of the oedipus complex, together with his fear of sexual difference; and it affirms his pre-oedipal individuation strivings. It is only natural that, after this resolving interlude, Hugh does not go back to his mother's apartment. Instead, taking the suitcase that symbolically contains his psychological past, he moves in with his new love object (1982a: 176).

The process of resolving pre-oedipal concerns through finding a love object is repeated

in *Very Far Away From Anywhere Else*. Owen Griffiths's attitude to his parents is fraught with ambivalence. He believes that his doggedly middle-class parents are the source of all his problems with individuation (1976b: 18-21), but he also blames himself for his inability to fit in with a peer group (1976b: 4-5). Aged seventeen, he has not resolved either his pre-oedipal conflicts concerning identity, nor his oedipal situation with his parents, particularly his mother.

Owen describes his parents in terms that evoke stereotypical American middle-class society so clearly as almost to caricature it:

You see, in giving me that car, my father was saying, "This is what I want you to be. A normal car-loving American teen-ager."

... My mother was and is a good wife. Being a good wife and mother is the important thing in her life. And she is a good wife and mother. She never lets my father down ... . And if you think all that, running even a small family and house so that things are decent and peaceful, is a small job, maybe you ought to try it for a year or two. She works hard and used her head at it. But the trouble is, she's afraid of doing anything else, of being anything else.

(1976b: 18-19)

In a rare blind spot, Owen fails to see his oedipal relations clearly. The cursory description of his father suggests that he has not yet achieved identification with the parent of the same sex. The attention he pays to his mother reveals that his primary attachment to her is still in force. Owen's description of his mother sounds remarkably similar to the malaise among American housewives described in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In psychoanalytical terms, Mrs Griffiths's life is entirely centred on her relationship with men; her husband and her son. She has never even felt the need for individuation (1976b: 20). Mrs Griffiths does not permit herself any desires; others are the only loci of desire that she knows. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, she is the centre of the family. Owen's father is described only in terms of his unwanted and inappropriate gift, the car that he wants more than his son does. The blurred boundaries between Mr Griffiths and the machine constitute a powerful indictment of the tendency in American capitalism to treat objects with the respect due to people, and to objectify human beings.

The Law of the Father is passed on to Owen as the command to be ordinary, to reproduce

his parents' trajectory through life:

I could get to State without studying. I could probably get clear through State without studying. I could probably go on and become an accountant or a tax auditor or a math teacher and be respectable and successful and get married and have a family and buy a house and get old and die without ever studying, without ever thinking at all. Why not? A lot of other people did.

(1976b: 24)

In hospital after a car accident,<sup>34</sup> Owen sees the demands of bourgeois society, represented by his parents, as programming:

I was finally able to be realistic about myself. There was school to finish, and then next year at State, and the next year and the next and so on. I could hack it. I was actually much stronger than I'd thought ... . Man of steel ... . I could see no particular reason for going on and finishing school and going to State and getting a job and living fifty more years, but that seemed to be the program. A man of steel does what he is programmed to do.

(1976b: 62)

Owen's ego is not yet sufficiently established for him to accept the pain of individuation, which entails contravening 'general conscious attitudes and ... the collective unconscious' (Samuels 1985: 102). These voices tell him that, like Hugh in *Threshold*, he must sacrifice the concerns of the self - his desire to study neuropsychology at MIT - to society's demands for its own perpetuation. The side of his psyche that is most concerned with relatedness wishes to substitute parental happiness for his own and so please everyone. But in hospital he realizes that if he capitulates to his parents he will become a machine (1976b: 62). After this realization, Owen's rebellion against his parents and the conservative values they espouse is inevitable. Here Le Guin presents the conflict between individual and social interests in a similar light to Schweitzer, who writes in *Civilization and Ethics* that 'society is full of folly and will deceive us in the matter of humanity' (1955: 262). To this extent she is as radical as Schweitzer in defying society's authority over its members.

I mentioned earlier that Owen, with the strange double vision of the intelligent adolescent, sees conformity as a desirable but unattainable goal. In so doing he poignantly evokes the dilemma of an unindividuated person:

I think what you mostly do when you find you really are alone is to panic. You rush to the opposite extreme and pack yourself into groups - clubs, teams, societies, types ... . You have to be with it. That's a peculiar phrase, you know? With it. With what? With them. With the others. All together. Safety in numbers. I'm not me. I'm a basketball letter. I'm a popular kid. I'm my friends' friend. I'm a black leather growth on a Honda. I'm a member. I'm a teen-ager. You can't see me, all you can see is us. We're safe.

(1976b: 3)

Owen's crisis is precipitated by failure to fit into his peer group, which leads him to feel that he is painfully alone, an outsider on the margins of what the group sanctions as meaning. He also realizes that 'the nearest thing I had to friends' (1976b: 13) will not resolve his pre-oedipal and oedipal difficulties. The solution he imagines, but cannot attain, is strikingly similar to Blos's description of American teenagers:

From my own experience of American adolescents I have recognized another rather widespread defense which no doubt has its roots in the American family structure - and in particular, the social attitudes favored by American society ... . Under group pressure toward conformity the gap between genuine emotion and standardized, peer-licensed behavior is widened ... . Motivation resides in being equal in outward behavior to others, or in living up to a group norm.

(1962: 117)

Like many middle-class adolescents, Owen takes refuge from his personal conflicts in intellectualization (Blos 1962: 111, 180; Le Guin 1976b: 2, 86). This mechanism intensifies the crisis, as his intellectual pursuits lead him still farther from his peers and his parents' aspirations for him. His interest in physiological psychology becomes the arena for a choice between his own individuation needs and his parents' wishes. Only his connection with Natalie enables him to defy and decathect from his parents. At the beginning of the narrative, Owen knows nothing about women except what he has observed of his mother, a woman without any identity apart from her family. When he meets Natalie, whose autonomous existence is more important to her than relatedness, he is confused. Natalie both resembles and is different from his mother. Her capacity to listen empathetically evokes maternal nurturing, while her single-minded pursuit of music contrasts sharply with Owen's expectations of women. Knowing himself to be the object of his mother's desire, Owen responds by objectifying Natalie in terms that echo archetypal

figurations of women by men:

... I deliberately thought about the way her hair looked when she'd just washed it and it was all sleek and soft, and the texture of her skin, which was white and very fine. And pretty soon I had managed to develop her into the real thing, the mysterious female, the cruel beauty, the untouchable desirable goddess, you name it. So that instead of being my first and best and only real friend, she was something that I wanted and hated. Hated because I wanted it, wanted because I hated it.

(1976b: 52-53)

From here the narrative recounts Owen's detachment from his own idealization. He gradually converts his perception of Natalie from *unheimlich*, not-self, to *heimlich*, a self in her own right. She becomes a love object because she affirms Owen's aspirations to individuation in his studies (1976b: 16-18). Like Irena's relationship with Hugh in *Threshold*, Natalie's relationship with Owen bridges pre-oedipal and oedipal concerns. The young man develops an attachment to her as a selfobject, which reinforces his sense of self, while detaching himself from his oedipal connection to his parents and thereby resolving his adolescent dilemmas.

So far I have focused on the pre-oedipal and oedipal concerns experienced by boys in Le Guin's fiction. To some extent I am following Freud in considering first the psychological situation of males. It is important, though, to remember that these novels were written by a woman, with a particular (woman's) view of issues relating to identity and difference. In the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin writes of sexuality in a way that bears out Chodorow's assertions about women's psychological priorities focusing on relatedness rather than sexuality or individuation:

... the sex itself is seen as a *relationship rather than an act*. Sex serves mainly to define gender, and the gender of the person is not exhausted, or even very nearly approached, by the label "man" or "woman." Indeed both sex and gender seem to be used mainly to define the meaning of "person," or of "self." Once, as I began to be awakened, I closed the relationship into one person, an androgyne. But more often it appears conventionally and overtly, as a couple. Both in one: or two making a whole. Yin does not appear without yang, nor yang without yin. Once I was asked what I thought the central, constant theme of my work was, and I said spontaneously, "Marriage."

(1993b: 138-39)

This statement recognizes the interplay of pre-oedipal and oedipal concerns in asserting that 'both sex and gender seem to be used mainly to define the meaning of "person," or of "self"'. In other words, coming to terms with sexual difference is necessary for individuation. This confirms what I have said so far about the adolescent process in boys and young men. But it also assumes that both parties in the relationship are equal, a position that Le Guin later revoked. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, she argues that women in heroic tales are relegated to an inferior destiny:

Women's work, as usual, is the maintenance of order and cleanliness, house-keeping, feeding and clothing people, childbearing, care of babies and children, nursing and healing of animals and people, care of the dying, funeral rites - those unimportant matters of life and death, not part of history, or of story. What women do is invisible.

(1993c: 15-16)

I now propose to examine the portrayal of women's adolescence in the novels, keeping these two statements in mind. I argue that sex and gender determine the way pre-oedipal and oedipal conflicts and strivings are resolved in the process of adolescence. I shall also explore the reasons for women's choice of the 'invisible' work of tending to relationships and domesticity.

In 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves' Le Guin writes ambivalently that the central issue in Tenar's adolescence both is and is not sex:

The subject of *The Tombs of Atuan* is, if I had to put it in one word, sex. There's a lot of symbolism in the book, most of which I did not, of course, analyze consciously while writing; the symbols can all be read as sexual. More exactly, you could call it a feminine coming of age. Birth, rebirth, destruction, freedom are the themes.

(1993b: 50)

I believe that Tenar's psychological history predisposes her, not to a flowering of sexuality, but to the role of caretaker in relationships. In infancy, the child is especially close to her mother (1993a: 175), who resorts to painting her with berry-juice to make her appear ill and hence unfit

to be the One Priestess (1993a: 184). This can be interpreted as a wish to prolong the girl-child's pre-oedipal attachment to her mother. In Chodorow's account, it is typical of the socialization of girls, who have a longer pre-oedipal phase than boys (1978: 97).

Tenar is the only character in *The Earthsea Trilogy* to retain the name given by her parents as her true name. She does not pass through the rite of initiation into social selfhood that others experience when they receive a true name. The retention of her 'first' name suggests that she is psycho-socially stuck in childhood. Indeed, her development is wilfully restricted in the name of orthodoxy. The priesthood at the Place of the Tombs are to blame for Tenar's pain in accepting a more complete vision of self, since they have stunted her identity. I read the portrayal of an imprisoned individual struggling to achieve individuation as an example of Le Guin's wider indictment of institutionalized religion.<sup>35</sup>

Tenar's mother-identification extends beyond childhood because her education takes place, like Ged's, in a community of same-sex members, except for some eunuchs. Bucknall interprets the presence of the eunuchs as an indication that only men are capable of living in self-sufficient, separatist societies (1981: 50-51). This inequity reinforces the sexist values of patriarchy, which, Le Guin comments, she had not yet begun to question (1993a: 155-56). The all-women environment at the Place of the Tombs probably has the same goal of instilling celibacy as the all-male School for Wizards: desire is excluded by forbidding the occasion for desire. Although Ged and Tenar are raised in parallel environments, they do not develop symmetrically. The outcome of their socialization is that Ged becomes a wizard, a man of public action, while Tenar's socially-ordained destiny is to live sequestered away from all normal communities, in the walled Place of the Tombs of Atuan. It may be that the text conservatively endorses the division of action into public and private spheres along gender lines.<sup>36</sup> Such a reading would be supported by the fact that the major part of Tenar's duties, as the One Priestess in the Place of the Tombs, is domestic: weaving, cooking and cultivating food (1993a: 195). By contrast, even as an apprentice wizard Ged is spared the labour of cooking (1993a: 43). On the other hand, the gender inequality can also be explained in mimetic terms, as a reflection of the state of affairs in contemporary society. Le Guin ascribes this function explicitly to (her) science fiction when she writes: 'Science fiction is not prescriptive; it is descriptive' (1993a: 151). Men

do monopolize the public domain of heroic and political activities, leaving private and domestic affairs to women.

The psychological shifts that Tenar experiences during adolescence imply that women experience individuation and relationship concerns differently from men,<sup>37</sup> in a way that guarantees the perpetuation of gender inequality in society. Since Tenar's pre-oedipal period has been prolonged, her inscription into the Symbolic, via oedipalization, is also delayed. She inhabits non-Symbolic codes and realms more than Ged. As the One Priestess, her existence focuses mainly on form, on rituals she does not understand, conducted in an empty language no one knows (1993a: 179-80), where language itself ceases to signify. The real source of signification in the Place of the Tombs is the underground Labyrinth. The maze is ostensibly a safe for the treasure and a prison where heretics and thieves are tortured to death by hunger and thirst. Other readings of the Labyrinth, though, might make more of its darkness and emptiness. These aspects evoke the unconscious, buried part of the psyche, where fears and desires, specifically those associated with otherness and sexuality, are located. Appropriately, among its tortuous paths, Tenar attains awareness of sexuality, a disruptive aspect of herself which is divorced from the orderly Symbolic and linked with the drive for primal unity that, in Kristeva's terms, characterizes the semiotic (Kristeva 1986: 95).

I have already mentioned that Tenar's pre-oedipal period is unusually prolonged. Her delayed sexual awakening precipitates an intense crisis in her inner world. In conversation with Ged, Tenar suffers strange physical disturbances (1993a: 237-38, 243). She faces a conflict between conscious thought, articulating the directives of a socially-conditioned superego and telling her to kill the infidel, and emotions and drives that lie beyond the reach of consciousness. The discourse of social preservation, the Symbolic, struggles with the less logocentric discourse of drive in the language of Tenar's body, the semiotic that wishes for oblivion in unity with another. In Freudian terms, she vacillates between cathexis of the other she desires and decathexis of his claims because of his hateful alienness.

Ged has a different (conscious) agenda. He recognizes that the Labyrinth is the home of the Nameless Ones, the powers of the dark, whose priestess Tenar has mistakenly become:



All their power is to darken and destroy. They cannot leave this place; they *are* this place; and it should be left to them. They should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshipped. The Earth is beautiful, and bright, and kindly, but that is not all. The Earth is also terrible, and dark, and cruel. The rabbit shrieks dying in the green meadows. The mountains clench their great hands full of hidden fire. There are sharks in the sea, and there is cruelty in men's eyes. And where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds; there places are made in the world where darkness gathers, places given over wholly to the Ones whom we call Nameless, the ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the Light, the powers of the dark, of ruin, of madness ...

(1993a: 266)

Emptiness underlies plenitude; absence underpins presence; darkness gives form to light, and death is the horizon of life. The forces of non-being are necessary for identity, just as are the forces of being. This is a radically subversive view of evil compared with orthodox binary thinking, which seeks to exclude non-being. Le Guin's schema articulates a view of being and non-being as interdependent and interpenetrating. Nishitani also expresses the interface between emptiness, or non-being, and the realm of being:

... [śūnyatā] is at bottom one with being, even as being is at bottom one with emptiness. At the elemental source where being appears as one with emptiness, at the home-ground of being, emptiness appears as one with being ... . For the field of emptiness stands open at the very point that things emerge into being.

(1982: 123)

In Jungian terms, the conscious mind is grounded in the unconscious, which, he says, is often symbolized by a descent into darkness (Jung 1990: 313-16).

Tenar, raised exclusively by women and castrated men, is encouraged to identify with the powers of darkness that destroy differentiation and give rise to the maternal semiotic that disrupts the rigid hierarchy of the priesthood at the Tombs. Her failure to develop a stable ego is expressed as confusion about pre-oedipal issues, such as names and identity. The day after meeting Ged she says: 'I have my name back. I am Tenar!' (1993a: 258). Later the same day she asks herself, 'Who am I?' (1993a: 260) and the following night she cries in despair, 'I am not Tenar. I am not Arha' (1993a: 264). In a state of incomplete individuation, she actively seeks

fusion with the (oedipal) other, Ged, only to respond to him with a mixture of fear and desire.

Ged and Tenar escape from the Labyrinth amid mighty quakes and shudders of the earth that suggest both orgasm and birth-pangs. As the doorway to the outside world opens, Tenar hesitates on the threshold like a baby reluctant to be born:

She crouched on hands and knees there between the earth and sky.

... She cowered away from him, shrieking in a thick voice not her own, as if a dead tongue moved in her mouth, "No! No! Don't touch me - leave me - Go!" And she writhed back away from him, into the crumbling, lipless mouth of the Tombs.

(1993a: 280)

This extraordinary passage poignantly describes Tenar's anguished hesitation on the margin between the realm she knows, the dark, amniotic womb of the Tombs and the strange, menacing unfamiliarity and boundlessness of the 'stars and sky' outside. It also evokes Tenar's attraction to the nameless horror<sup>38</sup> that has owned her for so long and drives her to use language inauthentically with 'a voice not her own'. There are also frightening echoes of the Labyrinth as a devouring maw threatening to engulf her.

Outside the Labyrinth, Tenar appears as an infant whose life is beginning again.<sup>39</sup> Ged describes her aptly as 'truly reborn' (1993a: 287); he has been the midwife of her birth. It is as though she has never lived in the Place of the Tombs and has regressed to the age of five. In some respects this is appropriate: to the extent that she has not received 'motherly'<sup>40</sup> nurturing care, her psychological development is stunted and can continue only when she finds a caring mother-figure,<sup>41</sup> namely Ged. This explains why one of the first acts of her new life is to learn Ged's language, Hardic, which will provide the Symbolic means for her to be inserted into society in Havnor.<sup>42</sup> But the description of Tenar as a child, however feasible, does not account for her sexuality. Perhaps Le Guin is implying that expressive sexuality is not appropriate for teenagers;<sup>43</sup> it is also possible that female sexuality cannot be accommodated within the fantasy. I find it incongruous that in a work written for adolescents, neither of the main protagonists experiences the physical and sexual dimensions of puberty.

When Tenar realizes that Ged will leave her in Havnor and there will be no fairytale ending to their love affair, her discourse becomes petulant, like that of a child abandoned by an idolized parent, or an adolescent rejected by an idealized love object:

He had made her follow him. He had called her by her name, and she had come crouching to his hand, as the little wild desert rabbit had come to him out of the dark. And now that he had the ring, now that the Tombs were in ruin and their priestess forsworn forever, now he didn't need her, and went away where she couldn't follow. He would not stay with her. He had fooled her, and would leave her desolate.

(1993a: 294)

Bucknall explains the failure of their relationship to develop into marriage in terms of Tenar's individuation needs:

The reader may share Tenar's disappointment that they are not going to marry, but such a reaction is absurdly traditional in the context of this tale. How can Tenar marry anyone? She is not complete; she has never learned to be free. She has to learn to go her own way before she can give herself completely to anyone.

(1981: 54)

The appeal to a predetermined, universal trajectory of psychological development (the subject must achieve individuation before attaining unity with another) makes this explanation sound convincing. Nevertheless, I find its premises questionable and its conclusion superficial. Psychoanalytical research indicates that oedipal concerns of sexuality and relationship sometimes, paradoxically, precede the attainment of individuation. I conclude that Bucknall has not paid enough attention to the unconscious oedipal issues that motivate the separation of the 'lovers'.

In one sense, Tenar's experience mirrors that of Hugh in *Threshold* and Owen in *Very Far Away From Anywhere Else*. But where they find relationships a source of difficulty, Tenar struggles to achieve individuation. Pre-oedipal issues provoke the crisis she needs to resolve, through finding a love object, who helps her to break her oedipal ties to the 'family' of the Tombs. In terms of social expectations, which see heterosexuality as the goal of maturation, she gains more than Ged, for she confronts the oedipal issues of sexuality and difference, even though she does not establish a 'normal' heterosexual marriage.

Irena in *Threshold* has a similar family history to Tenar's, for men are also functionally absent from her socialization. Irena's father died shortly after the birth of her brother Michael, and her mother, Mary Hanson, is fixated on the wish for children, having borne six children and an indeterminate number of miscarriages (1982a: 72). In psychoanalytic terms, her wish to remain in a mothering position can be explained in terms of her own unresolved pre-oedipal and oedipal issues. As Chodorow explains, motherhood provides an occasion for psychological regression:

A mother's regression to early relational stances in the course of mothering activates these early constituted internal object-relationships, defenses, and conflicts.

(1978: 89)

Ego-formation in girls is almost entirely dependent on their early relations with their mothers (Chodorow 1978: 109-10). As a result, it seems likely that Irena will replicate the disproportionate focus on experiences of primary love and unity that have led her mother to seek an extended sequence of pregnancies. Indeed, her inner world manifests intense ambivalence towards issues and objects connected with primary love:

I have got to get out. I can't keep coming home ... . Love! What good is love? I love her. I love Michael, just like she does. So what? God help me, I'll never fall in love, never be in love, never love anybody. Love is just a fancy word for how to hurt somebody worse. I want to get out. Clear out, clear out, clear out.

(1982a: 77)

Irena and Michael respond to family tensions in keeping with their gender-biased socialization. Michael makes a psychological break with all forms of femininity, presumably based on aspects of his mother's different sexuality which he finds threatening (1982a: 74). Irena remains attached, not only to her rejecting brother but to her hapless mother. Over-identification with her mother leads her to share a flat with an emotionally destructive couple at a higher rent than she can comfortably afford, in order to be near her family. Interestingly, she justifies her dependency in terms that echo Hugh's rationalization of his attachment to his mother:

But she could not just clear out, like Michael, so long, been good to know you. Her mother had to have somebody around *to depend on*.

(1982a: 75, my italics)

This reiteration of Hugh's dilemma prefigures later similarities in their development and the fact that they will each become the means for the other to resolve adolescent tensions. A complex system of projections has led Irena to believe that separation is not her lot because she is not a man 'like Michael'. Irena's concerns are those of relatedness, attachment<sup>44</sup> and bonding, rather than the individuation her brother needs. A failure to acquire functional personal boundaries is evident in the transfer of her overextended pre-oedipal attachment to her mother onto Mary Hanson herself. Like Tenar, Irena's difficulties with identity are expressed in an ambiguous name, where she is 'Irene' to acquaintances and 'Irena' to love objects (1982a: 86). Hugh's use of the more familiar name heralds an unconscious recognition of the girl's pre-oedipal concerns, and creates the conditions for their bond.

Irena's desire to 'clear out', which she understands superficially as a wish for escape, also expresses a drive for individuation via separation from her family. I see the alternative world she (sentimentally)<sup>45</sup> calls 'the ain country' (1982a: 35) as being for her, as for Hugh, the locus of unconscious desires and fears. When she is there, she displaces her regressive identification with her mother onto the country itself:

Then she dropped down on all fours and kissed the dirt, pressing her face against it like a suckling baby ... . "So you are, so I am, so."

(1982a: 33)

Among the adults of Mountain Town, Irena experiences herself as uncomfortably positioned between childhood and adulthood. Her relationship with Sofir and Palizot is based on her accepting the role of a surrogate child, but she realizes with the onset of late adolescence that she cannot play that part any longer (1982a: 39). She needs to break the surrogate family's hold over her oedipal strivings, and withdraw her libido from them<sup>46</sup> in the search for a love object outside the family.

An important index of Irena's developing sexuality is her view of the Master as a transcendent Father and an ideal lover: 'But she would obey him. He was her law' (1982a: 45).

This response springs from her failure to resolve the ambivalent erotic and authoritarian elements in her oedipal relationship with her father, whose name, Nick Pannis (1982a: 72), puns on the castration complex so effectively that it is impossible to believe the resonances are unintentional. Irena's relations with male family members are marked by desire and guilt. She rationalizes her mother's unhappiness, and, by extension, her own, as a failure in the woman's devotion: 'If she had stayed loyal to his [Michael's] dead father, then her loyalty to him would have counted; but she had remarried ....' (1982a: 74). She thinks of men, who represent sexual difference, as belonging to each other; they are *unheimlich*. Her interactions with Michael are intensely ambivalent. When he rejects their childhood closeness during adolescence, Irena passively accepts his contempt:

She wanted to tell Michael [about her stepfather's sexual advances] and get some support from him, a little help. But she couldn't tell him now. He would despise her for allowing, inviting, Victor to hassle her. He already despised her for it, for being a woman, therefore subject to lust, therefore unclean.

(1982a: 74)

These conflicts in relation to sexual difference are reiterated in her interaction with her lustful stepfather Victor (1982a: 74), whom she dare not confront. In sum, Irena views masculinity, as Tenar does, as a form of otherness profoundly to be feared, and either to be avoided or adored and obeyed without question.

It is not surprising that when Irena meets Hugh she responds to him with hostility, as an invader of her territory. Initially, invested with the fear that she feels towards all men, he appears 'massive' to her (1982a: 52). Her shifting oedipal energies are evident, though, when she perceives him in terms of similarity rather than difference, as 'her own age or younger' (1982a: 70). Her jealousy of his heroic status in the alternative world betokens a failure to create and maintain effective personal boundaries (Chodorow 1978: 110, 140) as a result of unresolved pre-oedipal conflicts. But once her libido has been withdrawn from her surrogate parents - Sofir, Palizot and the Master - she easily makes the cathectic shift to a love object outside the circles of primary love.

The agent that resolves Hugh's and Irena's pre-oedipal concerns is the dragon. Irena's

idealization of the Master, and Hugh's of Allia, ends when they realize that they have callously been sacrificed to a terrifying, supernatural being. This 'dragon' is a far cry from the majestic, supra-human dragons of *The Earthsea Trilogy*. Unlike them, its attributes are all human features, exaggerated to frightening proportions:

The voice beat all thought from the mind, louder yet, horrible and desolate, enormous, craving. Hugh looked up and the creature from which the voice came was there, on the path above them, wrinkled, twice a man's height, dragging its bulk painfully and with terrible quickness, round mouth open in the hissing howl of hunger and insatiable pain ...

(1982a: 141-42)

The creature contravenes the conventions of heroic conflicts with unnamed monsters<sup>47</sup> by evoking pity for its obvious pain and blindness, together with fear. Its hunger evokes the primal terror of being swallowed or engulfed by another. The insatiable wish to consume, which is evident in all its gestures, echoes Mrs Rogers's need for companionship and security. Both can satisfy their needs only by destroying other creatures' vitality. It is possible, then, that the dragon is a concrete, generalized version of Hugh and Irena's true antagonist: their over-extended dependence on their mothers. It does not arise from outside the self, but within it (Jackson 1981: 58-59), and what it threatens is the dissolution of the self in the insatiability of its own fear and desire. It also functions for Hugh and Irena in the same way as Le Guin's Jungian shadow, for it is 'on the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious mind' and although it is 'inferior, primitive, awkward, animallike, childlike' (Le Guin 1993b: 60), it is nevertheless their 'guide' to individuation.

*The Eye of the Heron* (1978) is unusual among the novels I am discussing here since it does not portray the formation of a 'couple'. Rather, the novel focuses on a single female protagonist, Luz Marina Falco Cooper, whose many names testify to the overdetermination of her identity by a surplus of forebears. Luz is in the intensely ambivalent position of lacking a mother and consequently depending on her father, Boss Luis Burnier Falco, for nurturing and primary love attachment. Luz is dimly aware that the pre-oedipal and oedipal overtones of the father-daughter relationship prevent her from achieving a successful transition to a heterosexual relationship:

She had evaded marriage only because Falco, whether he knew it or not, didn't want to let her go from his house. He was used to having her there. They were alike, very much alike; they enjoyed each other's company more, perhaps than anyone else's.

(1978: 26)

This description evokes Chodorow's description of fathers' ambivalent role in the development of their daughters' sexuality:

[Leonard] gives clinical examples of ways a father can be not there enough, which leads a girl to idealize her father and men, or to endow them with immensely sadistic or punitive characteristics - or can be there too much (be too possessive, seductive, or identified with their daughter), requiring her to develop defensive measures against involvement with him and with men. Fathers, Leonard argues, must be able to make themselves available as a heterosexual love object and to offer affection without being seduced by their daughters' fantasies or seducing them with their own.

(1978: 118)

The possessive overtones of Falco's attachment to Luz point to his 'being there too much' and identifying too closely with his daughter. It seems likely that, after his wife's death, he has taken Luz as a surrogate love object in her place. In the process, he prevents her from finding a love object outside the family.

Falco appears to have succeeded in inculcating 'defensive measures' in his daughter against involvement with men. Luz dreads the heterosexual involvement that marriage will bring:

And what use was she, what was she good for? The continuation of the house of Falco, of course. And then what? Either Herman Marquez or Herman Macmilan. And nothing whatever she could do about it. She would be a wife. She would be a daughter-in-law. She would wear her hair in a bun, and scold the servants, and listen to the men carousing in the hall after supper, and have babies. One a year.

(1978: 26)

On the one hand, Luz is articulating feminist resentment against the patriarchal system that defines and measures her identity in terms of her relationships as 'a wife ... a daughter-in-law'



and does not offer her any opportunities for individuation. It is unlikely that either Luz or Le Guin has missed the irony that she will, in this prognosis, be owned by a husband called 'Her man'. On the other hand, I read Luz's distaste for marriage as an index of her pre-oedipal fear of sexuality and (masculine) otherness. This has been internalized as fear of her own sexualized body, which is destined to 'have babies'. In the light of psychoanalytic insights into the pre-oedipal and oedipal tensions of young girls, this passage reveals Luz's unarticulated wish to remain in the familiar circle of primary love with her father.

Luz displays ambivalence towards her own pre-oedipal attachment to her father. Her inner evolution brings with it a deepening awareness that the condition of childhood, an easy acceptance of dependence on her father, is becoming obsolete. She becomes bored with him (1978: 22) and wishes she could change the power-balance of their relationship (1978: 26). At the same time, she is powerless to speed up her own development by initiating a shift in libido away from Falco. This takes place unexpectedly, when Vera Adelson, the spokesperson for the people of Shantih/Shanty Town, is arrested and quartered at Casa Falco. Almost immediately, Vera takes on the role of Luz's surrogate mother, educating the girl in matters outside the family, such as the politics of passive resistance practised in Shantih/Shanty Town (1978: 49). She becomes a mother-like mentor, providing company for Luz in traditionally feminine, that is to say domestic, tasks (1978: 83). More importantly, she draws Luz's interest away from the restrictive confines of the family, where Luis Falco keeps his daughter from growing up.

The Law of the Father, as articulated by Falco, enjoins political and sexual acquiescence in the status quo on Victoria. Vera embodies the appeal of radicalism together with the drive to break the hold of the Father. It is psychologically as well as politically necessary for Luz to transfer her libidinal investment from Falco to Vera. In so doing she takes the first step towards a resolution of her pre-oedipal and oedipal conflicts. The second is provided by Lev Shults, the young 'leader' of the passive resisters in Shantih/Shanty Town. Luz remembers Lev as someone who catalysed her own individuation by virtue of his difference. In a previous incident, the Shanty-Towners' refusal to accept being subjugated by the Bosses combines with Lev's (sexual) Otherness to give Luz a glimpse of the City through the lens of political idealism (1978: 29). When she is alone again, Luz's resentment of the narrowness of her socially-ordained destiny is

redoubled:

She strode on, fighting tears that had come upon her unawares: tears of anger because she could never walk alone, never do anything by herself, never ... . The men thought everything, did everything, ran everything, made everything, made the laws, broke the laws, punished the lawbreakers; and there was no room left for the women, no City for the women. Nowhere, nowhere, but in their own rooms, alone.

(1978: 31)

This important passage provides insight into Luz's psychological processes, which epitomize the paradoxical needs of the adolescent for individuation (aloneness) and relationship.

As Hugh does for Irena, Lev offers Luz the chance to make a final break with her primary love object. From the outset, she is struck by his political and sexual Otherness:

He was so utterly different from the man whose name she had just said [Herman Macmilan] and whose image filled her mind - the splendid face and muscular body, broad chest, long legs, strong hands, heavy clothing, tunic, trousers, boots, belt, coat, gun, whip, knife .... This man was barefoot; she could see the ribs and breastbone under the dark, fine skin of his chest.

(1978: 114)

Marrying Herman Macmilan would perpetuate Luz's pre-oedipal dependence on her father. But, by leaving Casa Falco and going to Lev, she has already chosen to invest her energies in the difference represented by the Other's sexuality. In a reiteration of the pattern I have described in sexual relationships, Luz affirms Lev's identity, that is, his pre-oedipal drive for separation from others (1978: 129). He, in turn, fulfils her oedipal need for relatedness. After his death, she poignantly mourns her loss of belonging and connection:

But where shall I go? Where shall I go, alone?

Without Lev, without the mother I never knew and the father I can never know, without my house and my City, without a friend ... . He was my chance, my luck. And I was his.

(1978: 168)

The outcome of Luz's bond with Lev is not marriage, as (symbolically) in *Threshold*, but final separation when Lev is killed by the Bosses in a striking portrayal of the indifference of political

conflict to individual destinies. Nevertheless, the connection gives Luz the impetus she needs to achieve individuation, to 'becom[e] her own self' (Jung 1990: 147) when she leads the expedition from Shantih/Shanty Town into the wilderness to establish a new community. This pattern of political and sexual awakening conjoining to bring about a woman's individuation also appears in *A Woman's Liberation* (1995a).

At first glance, Natalie in *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* has little in common with Tenar, Irena or Luz. Natalie appears to have resolved her pre-oedipal conflicts to the point where she can say with absolute assurance: "No teacher. Just music" (1976b: 15). Nevertheless, a closer examination of her psychology reveals significant similarities with the other female characters. While Tenar is literally cloistered in the Place of the Tombs, Natalie is psychologically cloistered by her devotion to music. Of all the protagonists in the works under discussion, Natalie has the most well-adjusted parents. They respect their daughter's need for individuation, even to the point that they collaborate with her in preserving her isolation:

Her father was this grim, fundamentalist type, her mother was always calm and serene, her older sisters had both married and moved away, she worked and taught and practiced and composed and dreamed music. There wasn't anything funny, anything ridiculous in her life ... . What I realize now is that she needed me just as badly as I needed her.

(1976b: 38)

Owen shrewdly recognizes that Natalie's parents have helped their daughter to remain in a pre-oedipal phase to the point where she has never confronted oedipality in the form of sexual difference. In a way, this sounds like a restatement of the theme of marriage: men and women need each other to establish a stable identity. But because Natalie has achieved individuation, it must be read in other ways as well.

Like Ged, Natalie is an artist-figure. Selinger contends that creative individuals recur in Le Guin's fiction as versions of the author herself (1988: 26). He goes on to argue that schizophrenia is an essential component of artistic temperament. While I do not agree with all the examples he cites in defence of his thesis,<sup>48</sup> the description of the artist locked into a private language that prevents communication with others applies both to Natalie and Le Guin. The

author admits difficulty in this area:

... the problem of communication is a complex one, and ... some of us introverts have solved it in a curious, not wholly satisfactory, but interesting way: we communicate (with all but a very few persons) in writing. As if we were deaf and dumb. And not just in writing, but indirectly in writing.

(1993b: 42)

Similarly, Owen recognizes that Natalie can only communicate in music (1976b: 80). Her own creations function for her as selfobjects, but she does not invest libido in anyone outside her bond with music. At the beginning of the narrative, oedipal concerns are surfacing in her psyche. She wants to establish a rapport with others to ensure successful oedipalization, but, like an autistic child, she finds it difficult (1976b: 35-36). The problem is compounded by her artistic need for an audience.<sup>49</sup> These dilemmas are resolved by 'Heterosexual object finding' (Blos 1962: 87).

Blos's description of burgeoning sexuality in the phase of 'adolescence proper' strongly recalls Natalie:

Heterosexual object finding, made possible by the abandonment of the narcissistic and bisexual positions, characterizes the psychological development of adolescence proper. More precisely, we should speak of a gradual affirmation of the sex-appropriate drive moving into ascendancy and bringing increasingly conflictual anxiety to bear on the ego.

(1962: 87)

Natalie does indeed experience 'increasingly conflictual anxiety' as her attachment to Owen sparks ambivalence towards oedipal issues connected with the body and sexuality. On their second trip to Jade Beach, the intensity of these conflicts provokes an explosive outburst when Owen tries to kiss her (1976b: 55-56). She displaces her own tensions onto a cosmic standard of 'rightness' in a remarkably concise expression of the adolescent's self-contradictoriness towards a love object: 'No, I don't. I don't, Owen. I love you. It isn't right' (1976b: 55). This

rationalization appeals to Owen's intellectual aspirations, and he accepts this deferment of sexual energy, but I believe a closer look reveals an underlying terror of sexuality and difference. Natalie's greater capacity for emotional relatedness, which comes from her pre-oedipal connection to her mother, is evident in the avowal of love. Ultimately it is she who ensures that her relationship with Owen continues, but her ambivalence around sexuality persists. At the end of the narrative, she has, like Tenar, achieved a qualified acceptance of sexuality in herself and others:

Natalie and I saw each other several times a week in May and June. It was difficult sometimes, because we did not always manage to stick to the six-second maximum. As she said, neither of us are good at taking things lightly ... we both were basically certain that we couldn't make any commitment yet, and that sex was no good to us without a commitment, but that we were no good without love.

(1976b: 86)

The strict insistence on a 'six-second maximum' for physical involvement probably comes from Natalie, who is more ambivalent towards sex. Likewise it is her position that 'sex was no good to us without a commitment'; that is, relational issues take precedence over sexuality. Finally, this novel by a woman ends on a note of typically female valorization of relationship.

This chapter has examined the portrayal of adolescence in *The Earthsea Trilogy*, *Threshold* and *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* in the light of psychoanalytic insights into the creation of individual identity, a self with a name that differentiates it from other selves. While I do not think that a psychoanalytic reading is the only possible approach to Le Guin's texts, I believe that my examination of pre-oedipal and oedipal concerns in the novels reveals a closer fit than has previously been recognized between these fictions and psychoanalytical interpretation. This congruence is most clearly seen in the portrayal of the different development of young men and women. In this respect, even the 'fantastic' aspects of the novels have a 'realistic' orientation since they reflect, rather than challenge, the prevailing status quo. This leads men to aspire to be public heroes as a result of their successful differentiation from others, while women are socialized into accepting roles that have more to do with relationship and domesticity. All the men in the novels are more preoccupied with their own separateness and individuation than with object needs. Ged is particularly unaware of the need for a love object,

and in psychological terms this suggests a failure to come to terms with oedipal concerns relating to self and other, such as sexual desire.

Young women, by contrast, are depicted as more concerned with oedipal issues, namely sexuality and difference, than with pre-oedipal matters relating to individuation. I believe this is true, even though Tenar (once freed from the Tombs) and Natalie are strong, individuated women characters.<sup>50</sup> The degree of anxiety and ambivalence towards men in the inner worlds of the woman characters is a striking index of their failure to come to terms with oedipalization. It is also notable that the male characters do not represent women to themselves with equivalent intensity. As I have shown, Le Guin also offers insight into how women's sense of self is constructed in relation to the nuclear family and sexual others. In my view, the novels endorse Chodorow's argument, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, that women attach more significance to relatedness than men, for whom the most pressing psychological issues are those concerning the self.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the novels' representation of 'the family of the family' (Estés 1992: 68). In my view, some aspects of the fiction attack social norms, while others reinforce them. The pre-eminence of names in *The Earthsea Trilogy* lends support, albeit with some qualifications, to the notion that individuals have an essential identity that distinguishes them from others. On the other hand, there is a consistently sceptical view of the institution of the nuclear family, which is constitutive of both the individual and the collective self in Western society. Parents, especially, are targets: they are either absent, as in the case of Ged and Tenar, or they are psychologically inadequate. Parenting appears more as training in psychopathology than as wise education of the young, and parents themselves are seen as antagonists rather than nurturers. The proper behaviour for adolescents, Le Guin implies, is to leave home, not only physically but psychologically as well. Psychoanalytic thinking makes the same point when it represents the withdrawal of libido from primary love objects as a major task of adolescence.

As I have shown, Le Guin's novels repeatedly stress the necessity of union with an other, usually a sexual other, in order for individuals to develop psychologically. This is in keeping with psychoanalytic models of development, where oedipal issues of sexuality and otherness

must be resolved in the adolescent period, in order for pre-oedipal concerns with individuation and separation to be dealt with successfully. At this point Le Guin, contemporary psychoanalysis, and society are in harmony: the transition to heterosexuality is the primary goal of adolescence.

## NOTES

1. *Tehanu*, published in 1992, twenty years after *The Farthest Shore*, is sub-titled 'The Last Book of Earthsea' since it deals with the characters and topoi of *The Earthsea Trilogy*. Nevertheless I consider that the time interval between the third and fourth books of what has now become *The Earthsea Quartet* (to which all page numbers in this chapter refer), together with Le Guin's radically different approach to her fictional material in the fourth book, justify its being discussed in a later chapter. Accordingly *Tehanu* is examined in Chapter Five, 'Disempowerment'.

2. Published in the United States as *The Beginning Place*.

3. Published in the United States under the present title; published in the United Kingdom with the title *A Very Long Way from Anywhere Else*.

4. Bacal quotes Balint's summary of this tension:

Almost all ... [the] terms and concepts [of classical psychoanalysis] were derived from ... One-Body Psychology ... . That is why they can only give a clumsy, approximate description of what happens in the psycho-analytical situation which is essentially a Two-Body Situation.

(Bacal and Newman 1990: 250)

5. The Barrows are probably referring to Thompson's essay on 'Jungian Patterns in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*', which astutely investigates Le Guin's deployment of Jungian archetypes such as the shadow and the alter ego (Coyle 1986: 190-91).

6. Here I am using the term 'Freudian' loosely, to include neo-Freudian interpretations advanced by thinkers such as Klein and Lacan, as well as by object-relations theorists.

7. See, for example, Cummins (1990a); Esmonde (Olander and Greenberg 1979 15-35); Crow and Erlich (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 200-24); Slusser (1976); and Shippey (Bloom 1986: 99-117). Two notable exceptions to this trend are Bucknall (1981) and Selinger (1988).

8. Freud's famous essay, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes' (Gay 1989: 670-78), sets out his findings, both in relation to children and adolescents.

9. Selinger's book, *Le Guin and Identity in Contemporary Fiction*, offers what is to my knowledge the only psychoanalytical reading of Le Guin's fiction. Selinger reads the novels mainly as avatars of the problems of differentiation and communication attendant on selfhood. In keeping with the title of my thesis, I focus more on concerns of self and other - that is, on themes such as identity and sexuality - than he does.

10. Lacan makes it clear that the ambiguity of this phrase, which may mean either the desire for the Other or the Other's desire, is entirely intentional (1977: 115).



11. As early as 1924, Horney took issue with Freud's reading of women's sexuality (Mitchell 1974: 125) on the grounds that the sense of inferiority Freud imputed to girl-children, based on their 'defective' genitalia, was unjustifiable except in terms of male chauvinism. Several later feminists have taken the same starting point for an attack on Freud's reading of biological determinism in the making of a woman's psyche. See, for example, Beauvoir (1954), Friedan (1963) and Millett (1970), whom Le Guin mentions as important influences in her growing awareness of feminism (1993b: 156). Chodorow differs from these feminists in that she assimilates many of Freud's central insights, such as his division of sexual development into a pre-oedipal and an Oedipal phase; but she adds a sociological dimension to her research by giving weight to women's position in society, specifically as mothers of children. Given my interest in parental influence on the developing sexuality of adolescents, Chodorow's brand of (post-)Freudian theory has proved the most useful.
12. See Blos (1962: 72, 75, 87); Bacal and Newman (1990: 242); Chodorow (1978: 155-56).
13. See, for example, Gandalf in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1968) or Merlin in Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982).
14. Ambivalence towards one's mother, and its consequences for the splitting of the self, is discussed in detail by Klein (Bacal and Newman 1990: 64-69).
15. See Bucknall (1981: 40) and Slusser (Bloom 1986: 75).
16. Ged reacts with a powerful mixture of fear and desire when he meets Serret as an adult (1993a: 110-12). Their encounter has overtones of sexual stereotypes, for here Le Guin depicts Serret, less ambiguously than in their first meeting, as a temptress seeking to enslave Ged to her service (1993a: 112).
17. The tale of Ged's integration of his shadow into himself is the most frequently described aspect of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. See, for example, Slusser (Bloom 1986: 75); Shippey (Bloom 1986: 106); Esmonde (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 17-18) and Crow and Erlich (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 203).
18. Shippey makes the same point in connection with the shadow's liminal status (Bloom 1986: 106), but does not pursue the psychoanalytical implications of his assertion.
19. Manlove, whom Bassnett describes as 'hardly left of centre' (1991: 50), claims that conservatism is integral to the genre of fantasy at the beginning of his essay on *The Earthsea Trilogy*:

Fantasy is a profoundly conservative genre. It usually portrays the preservation of a status quo, looks to the past to sustain the nature and values of the present, and delights in the nature of created things.

(1980: 287)

I would argue for a double movement in fantasy towards conservatism and radicalism. It seems to me that the representation of 'anti-cognitive' elements in fantasy (Suvin 1979: 24)

encapsulates a profoundly subversive impulse.

20. Shakespeare. 1983. *Romeo and Juliet*. II, ii, 43.

21. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

(Genesis 2: 19-20, NIV version)

Le Guin reverses this narrative sequence in 'She Unnames Them', where the (unnamed) protagonist strips plants and animals of their names (1985c).

22. Taylor makes an important distinction between identity as sameness and identity as the ability to persist through time as oneself (1984: 37).

23. Versfeld believes that a person may adopt a *persona* or inauthentic identity, different from his or her 'true' identity, when to do so will foster social conformity or achieve economic ends such as job promotion. His distinction between *person* and *persona*, or 'true' and 'false' identity, is contained in the essay 'Morality and Moralism' (1972: 81-98).

24. I am indebted for this insight to Derrida's discussion of the unreliability of names in his discussion of signatures and iterability in 'Signature Event Context', as analysed by Culler (Derrida 1982a; Culler 1983: 125-28).

25. Coleridge takes up this problem at length in his *Treatise on Method* (Snyder 1934), where he examines the relationship between language and thought and concludes:

In the infancy of the Human Mind all our ideas are instincts, and Language is happily contrived to lead us from the vague to the distinct, from the imperfect to the full and finished form ... .

(Snyder 1934: 6)

Much earlier, Aristotle explored various models of language and concluded that truth or falsity resided, not in words whose meanings were arbitrarily assigned (1963: 59), but in propositions (1963: 137). This represented a break with the Socratic understanding of language as imitating reality (Plato 1983: 425) and set up the two opposing views of the question, which remained dominant until Derrida's investigation of the relationship between speech and writing in *Of Grammatology* (1976).

26. See, for example, Scholes (1975a: 83-84) and Cummins (1990a: 32).

27. The Equilibrium, mentioned several times in *The Earthsea Trilogy*, operates as a kind of supreme value (Wood, in Bloom 1986: 206; Crow and Erlich, in Olander and Greenberg 1979: 201). It is almost a substitute for God in what might be called Le Guin's 'humanistic atheism'. Taylor denigrates humanistic atheism on the grounds that it 'inverts the Creator/creature

relationship and transforms theology into anthropology [Le Guin's favourite science]' (1984: 20). He does admit, however, that 'it remains closely related to critical developments in theology, science, and philosophy' (1984: 20), thus providing, at least, an effective substitute for theism. The Equilibrium is more usually equated with the Tao (Bittner, in Bloom 1986: 123; Cummins 1990a: 35; Crow and Erlich, in Olander and Greenberg 1979: 221), but I think that Taylor's term adequately describes both Taoism and the Equilibrium.

28. The idea of self-regulation here, hinting that the entire system of islands and sea together with their life-forms is alive, represents a point of similarity between Earthsea and General Systems Theory. Not only have Lovelock and Margulis suggested that the earth is a single living organism (Capra 1982: 307), but self-regulation is, according to Capra, one of the defining qualities of a system (1982: 290).

29. Here I am using the term 'unconscious' to denote the realm of the psyche that lies beyond and on the margins of conscious awareness. This sense of the term is common to both Freud and Jung (Gay 1989: 19; Jung 1990: 294-97). The space of the unconscious has much in common with what Suvin calls the 'anti-cognitive', which, he asserts, is the defining quality of fantasy as opposed to science fiction (1979: 8, 24).

30. Here again I am reading Le Guin in a manner that is probably counter to her own intentions. Given the author's fondness for Jung, it seems likely that her understanding of the unconscious is a Jungian one. Nevertheless, I believe that a Freudian model of the unconscious as a repository of repressed psychic content is pertinent to *The Farthest Shore*.

31. I am aware that my reading of the novels at this point contradicts Lacan's view of the entry into the realm that he calls 'the Symbolic' at the oedipal stage as an assumption of the Law of the Father.

32. With a similar desire to rehabilitate so-called escapist writing to mine, Talbot explores the positive features of women's escape in *The Earthsea Quartet* (Filmer 1992: 135-47).

33. Attebery points to the function of the fantasy world as a supplement to both Hugh's and Irena's inadequate family lives in his essay, '*The Beginning Place: Le Guin's Metafantasy*' (Bloom 1986: 235-42).

34. Blos attributes the high number of car accidents among adolescents to a stage in the withdrawal of libido from their parents:

As an intermediate step, the ego becomes the recipient of the libido withdrawn from object representations; all ego functions - not only the self - can become cathected in the process. This circumstance gives the individual a false sense of power which in turn impairs his judgment [sic] in critical situations, often with catastrophic consequences, a good example being the frequent automobile accidents of teenagers.

(1962: 100)

35. Other examples of Le Guin's distaste for religious orthodoxy are to be found in the obsessive logocentricity of the Yomeshta in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and the worship of the cruel patriarchal god One by the Condor in *Always Coming Home* (1985a).

36. This interpretation does not apply to *Tehanu*, where Le Guin brings to bear a more overtly feminist paradigm in the depiction and valorization of women's social contribution.

37. This is not an original insight. In 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes', Freud concludes that: '*Whereas in boys the Oedipus complex is destroyed by the castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the castration complex*' (Gay 1989: 676). Similarly, Blos's description of early adolescence contains the statement: 'Let us now turn to the girl in early adolescence. She shows no narrow parallelism to the boy's development' (1962: 82).

38. Kristeva has given a profound discussion of the attraction of fetishism and the drive towards what is horrible, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

39. After her delivery/deliverance from the Tombs, Tenar can also be read as a home-seeking pioneer. Her first steps outside the Tombs take her to the western mountains, and later she travels west from the Kargad Empire to Havnor. Stout describes the significance of 'westerling' in American literature as the direction of the good life:

... westerly movement is typically associated with positive values such as freedom and progress ... . More abstractly, like the westerly march of society, the journey symbolizes Progress, mankind's [sic] efforts toward intellectual or moral goals, even the search for meaning itself.

(1983: 6)

40. My use of quotation marks indicates a recognition of Chodorow's point that mothering need not be the exclusive province of women, although this is most often the case (1978: 11). In addition, the eunuch Manan's nurturing behaviour towards Tenar during her childhood at the Place of the Tombs comes close to what is usually described as maternal.

41. See Chodorow's summary of the research indicating that babies deprived of affection do not develop normally (1978: 32-33).

42. This is also in line with research in cognitive psychology, where language acquisition is seen as a crucial early key for children to achieving goals. See, for example, Kristeva (1986: 100) and Wilber (1983: 94).

43. The mandatory celibacy of Kesh adolescents in *Always Coming Home* (1985a: 488) can be seen as a later version of the same idea.

44. Bacal and Newman identify an interest in 'attachment' and 'attachment behaviour' as the hallmarks of Bowlby's object-relations theory (1990: 208-13).

45. Blos attributes excessive sentimentality in one adolescent girl to confusion about sexuality and gender identity (1962: 86-87), a finding which is also pertinent to Irena.

46. The withdrawal of libido from the original love objects (the parents) is seen by Blos as an inevitable phase of adolescence (1962: 100, 122).

47. Baldick's discussion of the monster in *Frankenstein* includes an explication of early meanings of the term 'monster', including the sense of being made of ill-assorted parts (1987: 12-18).

48. Selinger's approach has interesting implications for Ged. As I noted earlier, mages in Earthsea function similarly to mystics or shamans in 'real' societies. Wilber notes in *The Atman Project* that mystics and schizophrenics have similar psychological configurations in that both experience dissolution of their ego-boundaries. But he distinguishes between them on the grounds that 'the mystic is exploring and mastering some of the same higher realms that overpower the schizophrenic' (1980: 157-58, my italics). In other words, the mystic actively seeks to break down his or her ego-boundaries by means of spiritual exercises. I believe Ged's intuitive connection with the Equilibrium belongs to the order of mystical transcendence of the limitations of self, and not to symptoms of schizophrenia, as Selinger maintains.

49. Le Guin's description of her early career as an author acknowledges the futility and solipsism of creating works of art solely for oneself:

To put it briefly, I had been writing all my life, and it was becoming a case of publish or perish. You cannot keep filling up the attic with mss. Art, like sex, cannot be carried on indefinitely solo; after all, they have the same enemy, sterility.

(1993b: 23, my italics)

50. It is only in later novels such as *Always Coming Home* (1985a) and *Tehanu* (1992), as well as in many of the short stories published in *The Compass Rose* (1982b), that Le Guin directly challenges the position of women in the sexual status quo.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RE-INVENTING H/hISTORY

... [H]istorical narratives are not only models of past events and processes, but also metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings.

(White 1978: 88)

The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

(Le Guin 1989: 168)

Fiction and history have a troubled relationship. The historian (supposedly) deals with what 'really' happens, with events in the real world. The fiction writer (supposedly) deals with imaginary events - with what does not happen. In crude terms, this is how many readers and writers of history and fiction distinguish between the two modes. This chapter is based on the assumption that this distinction is mistaken, and that the converse is true: fiction and history have a close relationship of reciprocal influence. In my discussion, I shall rely not on 'history' as a sequence of past events, but rather on metahistory, as defined by White:

Every proper history presupposes a metahistory which is nothing but the web of commitments which the historian makes in the course of his interpretation on the aesthetic, cognitive and ethical levels ... .

(1987: 71)

It is not Le Guin's representation of the 'facts' of 'what happened' that interests me, but her representation of history itself in four novels where history is carefully foregrounded - *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), *Orsinian Tales* (1976a), *Malafrena* (1979a) and *Always Coming Home* (1985a).

In the last century, Ranke defined the task of history as 'simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen* [sic])' (Carr 1961: 8). His views, which dominated historical studies for a long time, have given way to a more complex view of history as discourse. To write discourse is, following the insights of Foucault and Derrida,<sup>1</sup> to deal in the slippery medium of language, which always means more and less than the author or reader can know or control. Secondly, history as written must be written by someone, and this fact destroys its aspirations to 'objectivity'. Carr describes the historian's intervention in his material as follows:

History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.

(1961: 9)

Ricoeur devotes an essay to the question of 'Objectivity and Subjectivity in History', concluding that:

After having observed and insisted that history *reflects* the subjectivity of the historian, we must say that the historian's craft *educates* his subjectivity. History makes the historian as much as the historian makes history. Or, to be more precise, the historian's craft makes history *and* the historian.

(1965: 31)

Another way of putting this might stress the shaping role of 'theory', understood as value, in historical accounts. Looked at in this light, as discourse mediated by its writer's subjectivity, history begins to share crucial features with fiction.

I believe that fiction is as dependent on history as history is on fiction, despite claims that fiction is 'escapist'. This is clearly a Marxist position, espoused by Jameson when he claims that

[*The Political Unconscious*] conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today - the psychoanalytic or the mythcritic, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural - but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.

(1982: 17)

But it is not the exclusive preserve of Marxist critics. A less aggressive understanding of history,

viewed as 'context', also sees it as making an indispensable contribution to literary meaning:

Meaning is a continual shuttling back and forth between the language of the work and a network of contexts which are not in the work but are essential for its realization.

(Scholes 1975b: 147)

It is perhaps less obvious that 'non-realist' fiction depends on history for its production. But in 1972, Le Guin formulated her own response and responsibility to contingent, 'extra-textual'<sup>2</sup> factors as follows:

Sophisticated readers are accepting the fact that an improbable and unmanageable world is going to produce an improbable and hypothetical art. At this point, realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence.

(1993b: 52-53)

And later, writing of responses in science fiction to the threat of nuclear war, she says that what writers need to make their work answerable to the pressures of contemporary life is

... to face the present, to live in the present, to live as a responsible being among other beings in the sacred world here and now, which is all we have, and all we need, to found our hope upon.

(1989: 103)

In this chapter history is considered largely as story. This view links Le Guin's view of story-making as a fundamental human practice<sup>3</sup> to post-structuralist understandings of the interdependence between history and narrative. White, who may be the foremost proponent of this position, formulates his views polemically as follows:

... there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.

(1987: 82)

A milder version of the same notion is found in Veaser's summary of the key tenets of New Historicism, which specifies 'that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably' (1989:



xi).

Evidently, as there are many different kinds of story,<sup>4</sup> there are also many different kinds of history. Several of these will be examined in this chapter. Lyotard's distinction between 'grand Narratives' (1987: 15), the overarching narratives of legitimation that see history in terms of a pre-ordained pattern of significant events made by great individuals, and 'the little narrative [*petit récit*]' (1987: 60) of local significance is particularly important here. It strikingly echoes Le Guin's distinction, articulated in 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' between two trends in story-making:

It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then I scratched my gnat bites, and Ool said something funny, and we went to the creek and got a drink and watched newts for a while, and then I found another patch of oats .... No, it does not compare, it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk, writhed screaming, and blood spouted everywhere in crimson torrents, and Boob was crushed to jelly when the mammoth fell on him as I shot my unerring arrow straight through eye to brain.

(1989: 165-66)

Later in the same essay, Le Guin labels the two kinds of story 'the killer story' and 'the life story' (1989: 168). The predominance of the killer story in the (dis)course of western history gives rise to the need to re-write history and Le Guin's attempt, in all four of the works under scrutiny in this chapter but especially in *Always Coming Home* (1985a),<sup>5</sup> to do so.

The impulse to re-write history, to re-make the world, may be one of the spurs to Le Guin's creation of alternate worlds that exist nowhere but in her own imagination. In this way, time and place - a re-written history, a reconfigured topos - conjoin to produce a space in which Le Guin feels comfortable. In the autobiographical essay, 'A Citizen of Mondath' (1993b: 20-25), she records her early discovery of Dunsany's 'Inner Lands' and the accompanying sense that 'I had discovered my native country' (1993b: 21). Later in the essay it becomes clear that the Inner Lands are the topos of 'non-realistic' fiction (fantasy and science fiction), when she describes her first attempts at writing:

One of the novels [written before her first published story in 1962]<sup>6</sup> was set in contemporary San Francisco, but the others were set in an invented though nonfantastic Central European country, as were the best short stories I had done. They were not science fiction, they were not fantasy, yet they were not realistic.  
(1993b: 23)

The 'nonfantastic Central European country' is Orsinia,<sup>7</sup> the topos for *Orsinian Tales* (1976a) and *Malafrena* (1979a). *Orsinian Tales*, as critics have pointed out,<sup>8</sup> is a complex series of short stories. Each story is followed by the date of its occurrence so that the reader experiences the events it portrays before being able to give it a definite 'setting' in chronology. Bittner astutely explains the effect of the system of dates:

Le Guin's ordering of the tales guides us through the history of Orsinia so that we move forward *only* by circling back to the past; we understand any present moment only as we understand it to be an organic part of its past and future. After beginning in 1960 ("The Fountains"), we return to 1150 ("The Barrow"), move forward to 1920 ("Ile Forest" and "Conversations at Night"), then on to 1956 ("The Road East"), back to 1910 ("Brothers and Sisters"), forward beyond 1956 to 1962 ("A Week in the Country"), back to 1938 ("*An die Musik*" [sic]), forward beyond 1962 to 1965 ("The House"), back to 1640 ("The Lady of Moge"), and finally forward to 1935 ("Imaginary Countries") ...

(Bloom 1986: 123)

I agree with Bittner's impression of a complex chronology, but I do not see the tales as making up an 'organic vision of history' (Bloom 1986: 123). It seems to me that organicism implies an inner order, if not a telos; and *Orsinian Tales* does not seem orientated towards any ultimate goal or overarching structure. Indeed, it is doubtful that Le Guin ever makes a commitment to an uncomplicated view of history as progress, although traces of teleology can be discerned in *Always Coming Home*. Rather, I shall argue that *Orsinian Tales* emphasizes the iterability<sup>9</sup> of history together with a rejection of the 'grand Narratives' of western civilization.

In 'A Week in the Country' Stefan Fabbre, the protagonist of the previous story, explains to his grandson (and the narrator explains to the audience) what is wrong with western civilization:

What would we do with freedom if we had it, Kosta? What has the West done with it? Eaten it. Put it in its belly. A great wondrous belly, that's the West. With a wise head on top of it, a man's head, with a man's mind and eyes - but the rest all belly. He can't walk any more. He sits at table eating, eating, thinking up machines to bring him more food, more food.

(1976a: 115)

The rampant consumerism and commodity fetishism,<sup>10</sup> which characterize western history and make it a story of eating, are contrasted with the values Le Guin endorses in 'A Week in the Country': love and family. On the one hand there is the 'killer story' of Kasimir's needless death because 'Man they wanted got away' (1976a: 126). Kasimir falls victim to a story larger than his own or his family's: the story of public, political violence. On the other hand there is the 'life story' of the love between Stefan and Bruna, which Kasimir says is 'real' (1976a: 124). Other stories in the volume reiterate the interplay between the two kinds of story. By careful juxtaposition Le Guin creates a relation of mutual qualification between them. For example, in 'The Barrow', Count Freyga sacrifices a Christian priest, who is his guest, to the pagan god Odne, because he believes that this will save the life of his wife who is dying in childbirth. A single action intertwines the killer story and the life story, and it appears that they are inextricable. But sacrifice has also dominated the previous story, 'The Fountains', where the Orsinian scientist Adam Kether<sup>11</sup> sacrifices his desire to defect from the tyrannous State because of 'mere fidelity' (1976a: 10). Eight centuries separate the time-frames of these two stories, and yet the repetition of the narrative patterns conjures the iterability of events and experiences in history. Local differences between them - Kether sacrifices his desire, Freyga sacrifices another human being - supply the condition of possibility for iteration. In addition, I read Le Guin's tampering with normal chronological sequence as reinforcing the emphasis on the iterable situations rather than their situation in time.

Another version of the interaction between the 'killer story' and the 'life story' in *Orsinian Tales* is the gentler tension between private and public histories. 'An die Musik', which follows 'A Week in the Country', reiterates the previous tale's musical image, but places it in the

centre stage of signification. The tale's protagonist is an aspirant composer, Ladislav Gaye, seeking encouragement from the maestro, Otto Egorin. Gaye is shabbily dressed and no wonder: Le Guin tells us, tangentially, that the year is 1938 and in Germany storm-clouds are gathering. What he gains from the encounter is a realization of the precedence of his musical talent over other commitments - familial, social or national. The final paragraph presents music and history as contrapuntal:

What good is music? None, Gaye thought, and that is the point. To the world and its states and armies and factories and Leaders, music says, "You are irrelevant"; and, arrogant and gentle as a god, to the suffering man it says only, "Listen." For being saved is not the point. Music saves nothing. Merciful, uncaring, it denies and breaks down all the shelters, the houses men build for themselves, that they may see the sky.

(1976a: 143)

Public and private realms, together with their conflicting claims on the individual, are juxtaposed in most of the stories, so that their interplay acquires something of the status of a theme.<sup>12</sup> At times this takes the form of a conflict between family responsibility and individuation, for example in 'Ile Forest' and 'The Road East', where the protagonists face a choice (the same choice) between their own desires and those of family members.

Bittner's statement that *Orsinian Tales* sets out 'the history of Orsinia' (Bloom 1986: 123) implies more about Le Guin's view of history, I think, than he is aware. The events that shape the national destiny of Orsinia, its History, are, properly speaking, only narrated in *Malafrena*. Parliamentary debates, international relations and epoch-making discoveries do not appear in *Orsinian Tales*. Rather, the country's history is figured as 'little narrative[s]' (Lyotard 1987: 60) concerning individuals and their domestic situations. National and international affairs are only alluded to indirectly, chiefly by the dates at the end of each story. 'An die Musik' and 'The Lady of Moge' are the only tales to include references to wider events. In 'An die Musik', the aspirant composer Ladislav Gaye tells his wife, "'The English Prime Minister is in Munich with Hitler'" (1976a: 141). And in 'The Lady of Moge', Orsinian History is invoked to explain the otherwise unaccountable hostility between Andre and Isabella:

Four years passed, in the second of which, 1640, began the civil struggle for

succession known as the War of the Three Kings.

(1976a: 158)

Similarly the stories 'Ile Forest' and 'Conversations at Night', both set in 1920, give no mention of the socio-historical turbulence attendant on the First World War, but calmly narrate parallel love stories between men who are damaged in some way and the women who choose them. This approach invites accusations of historical irresponsibility, but I think these are inappropriate. Rather, I suggest that the effect is to displace History from its usual place at the centre of meaning and replace it with what I have called 'history': the narratives of particular, ordinary, individuals.<sup>13</sup> This method, Le Guin's texts imply, generates a more authentic account of conditions than a list of important events. Far from being irresponsible, Le Guin's approach participates in the same validation of detail that marks Foucault's metahistorical reflections in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History':

Effective history [which Foucault opposes to 'traditional history' in the essay] ... shortens its vision to those things nearest to it - the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies; it unearths the periods of decadence, and if it chances upon lofty epochs, it is with the suspicion - not vindictive but joyous - of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion.

(1984: 89)

In a loftier vein, Ricoeur makes the same distinction between History and history as I do, but in different terms:

... we say history, *history in the singular*, because we expect this unique history of mankind to be unified and made reasonable by a human meaning ... . But we also say men,<sup>14</sup> *men in the plural*, and we define history as the science of past men because we find persons who emerge as radically manifold centers of mankind.

(1965: 38)

*Always Coming Home* makes the same distinction as Ricoeur does, with the exception of his insistence on the masculine pronoun. The Kesh do not distinguish between History and history at all: for them, the History of the group is literally made up of individual histories. At the end of the section on 'Time and the City' Pandora, frustrated by Gather's failure to provide her with a History of the Kesh, or even to understand what she means by the term, complains to

the Archivist: "If you don't have a history," I say to her, "how am I to tell your story?" The Archivist grasps what Pandora does not, that story-telling is the foundation of (H)history-making, and in consolation offers the autobiography of a single woman, *Stone Telling*: "Let Stone Telling tell her story. That's as near history as we have come in my day, and nearer than we'll come again, I hope" (1985a: 172).

Two sections in *Always Coming Home* are entitled 'Four Histories' and 'Eight Life Stories'. To judge (using conventional standards) by the titles, these sections ought to give different views of the Kesh, with its collective (public, male) past being described in 'Four Histories' and the individual (private, female) aspect documented in 'Eight Life Stories'. But this is not the case, because Le Guin uses the categories of 'Histories' and 'Life Stories' to demonstrate the interdependence and interpenetration of the two modes of discourse among the Kesh and, by implication, in our own society. The four histories turn out to be domestic tales of singular personal experience, especially 'Old Women Hating', where the two old women's hatred destroys themselves and their families.<sup>15</sup> But it is also true of the more public (Hi)story of 'A War with the Pig People', where the narrator's attempt at an objective record of events is frustrated by the commentary that follows it and begins with a colloquial, admonitory tone that is nearly parental:

I am ashamed that six of the people of my town who fought this war were grown people. Some of the others were old enough to behave like adults, too.

(1985a: 133)

Similarly, at first glance 'Eight Life Stories' contains narratives of purely individual and even esoteric significance. But the editor explains how these tales contribute to the group History:

Commonplace as most of them were, they were a "hinge" or intersection of private, individual, historical lived-time with communal, impersonal, cyclical being-time, and so were a joining of temporal and eternal, a sacred act.

(1985a: 263)

Evidently, not only *Stone Telling*'s life story, with its dramatic content of inter-cultural conflict,

but any part of the biography of any of the Kesh qualifies as a part of their collective history. Each 'life story' is written down by the autobiographer, and consequently flaunts its subjectivity in the material it chooses to record as well as the narrative technique. This privileging of minor personal stories partakes of the same scepticism towards received notions of suitable Historical material as much New Historicist scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Most of the 'Eight Life Stories' relate experiences of mystical consciousness, which the Kesh would call a 'Four-House' encounter since the Four Houses of the Sky are the realms of 'death, dream, wilderness and eternity' (1985a: 47). As written offerings that were preserved, they encapsulate part of the Kesh value system. In striking contrast to our own 'euclidean' thinking (Le Guin 1989: 88), the Kesh valorize the gap and interplay between 'normal' consciousness and the dreaming state of mind. There is an obvious connection with *The Lathe of Heaven*, which also represents an attempt to come to terms with the effect of dreams on 'real' life. But the metahistorical point that Le Guin is making is that the individual's (most private) experience of her or his own consciousness makes historical meaning.

I have argued that *Orsinian Tales* embodies a view of history, not as progress or unfolding, but as iteration of the same kinds of situations. But even this interpretation proves unstable in the light of the metanarrative of 'Imaginary Countries'. The closing statement of this very domestic story of a family moving house, with little reference to an external context, suggests that what has been reiterated in the volume is the project of creating imaginary countries itself:<sup>17</sup>

But all this happened a long time ago, nearly forty years ago; I do not know if it happens now, even in imaginary countries.

(1976a: 175)

These words also convey doubt that what 'happened', the uneventful 'little narrative' of family harmony and mutual understanding, is iterable in other contexts. The volume ends on a sense of history as entropy, eroding social bonds and the attachment of people to specific locations.

The interplay between public and private histories is an important, almost the guiding metahistory in *Malafrena* (1979a). On one level *Malafrena* is a conventional *Bildungsroman*,

describing the moral education of the Orsinian gentleman Itale Sorde as he moves from his initial position of student radical at the novel's opening to contented lover at its end. But there are more complex (historical) issues at stake. Like many of the stories in *Orsinian Tales*,<sup>18</sup> *Malafrena* is set in an unstable juncture in European history: it spans the reorganization of European politics in the wake of the French Revolution and the rule of Napoleon. I believe that, following the 'microcosm' model of knowledge, Le Guin uses turmoil in the wider socio-political world as a mirror-image of her protagonist's psychological instability. Foucault describes microcosmic thinking as follows:

... it applies the interplay of duplicated resemblances to all the realms of nature; it provides all investigation with an assurance that everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale; it affirms, inversely, that the visible order of the highest spheres will be found reflected in the darkest depths of the earth.

(1970: 31)

Possibly a more generous reading of the reciprocal reflections of Itale's predicament and that of Europe at large might see it as affirming the determining effect of socio-political circumstances on individual psychology. Conversely, the text also espouses a Romantic view of society as made by, and for, individuals.<sup>19</sup>

There are other Romantic echoes in the disillusionment expressed in *Malafrena* with the outcome of the French Revolution.<sup>20</sup> Itale takes his motto from the discursive context of writings at the time of the Revolution:

There were some odd volumes of the *Moniteur*, the French government newspaper. He looked at one from 1809 and found it like all newspapers he had ever seen, the mouthpiece of authority. But later he chanced on a volume from the early 1790s ... . He came on speeches made by M. Danton, M. Mirabeau, M. Vergniaud; they were strangers to him ... . He held the French Revolution in his hands. He read the speech in which the orator called down the wrath of the people on the house of privilege, the speech that ended "*Vivre libre, ou mourir!*" - Live free, or die.

(1979a: 23)

This extraordinarily subtle passage hints at the key points in one view of history presented in the



novel. These are history as a discourse which does not exist until read; the opposition between 'the people' and 'the house of privilege' which will shape Itale's life; and a belief in the inalienable right to individual freedom. It also bears witness to the fact that, less than twenty years after the Revolution, one inauthentic form of government has been replaced with another so that the textual version of State power, the newspaper, is still 'the mouthpiece of authority'. This cycle of events, marked by a return to the same, is borne out by the account of conditions in Orsinia. The country rebels against the domination of the Austrian Empire, led by Metternich, whose hegemony is revealed in the language spoken in Assembly meetings. Frenin lampoons Orsinia's position as the last link in a chain of subordination that violates authentic power:

... the ornate Latin speeches were addressed to him [Johann Cornelius, the Orsinian prime minister] since the grand duchess was absent - "And since Metternich is also absent," said Frenin. "We thank the puppet minister of a puppet duchess vassal to a puppet emperor controlled by a German chancellor for his kindness in letting us speak a dead language together for six hours a day according to the ancient custom of our people. My God! Why are we standing here watching a puppet show?"

(1979a: 161)

Le Guin's anarchic distrust of the bureaucratic machinery of State power is evident in the depiction of Itale and Frenin jammed into a tiny room with other reporters, desperately trying to record the contents of a long series of trivial speeches in Latin. But equally conspicuous is the insistence on language as the site of the struggle for Orsinian independence.<sup>21</sup> The point is underlined when 'the people' challenge the 'house of privilege' at the beginning of the 'revolution', and one of their first acts of self-liberation is to demand the right to use their own language for parliamentary debate (1979a: 324).

So far the 'killer story', the (hi)story that Le Guin says 'not only has Action, it has a Hero' (1989: 166) has given way to the 'life story' of ordinary people liberating themselves from the dominion of larger powers who govern inauthentically. But the revolution rings curiously hollow, since what the Orsinians want is not democracy or self-determination but constitutional monarchy under Matiyas Sovenskar (1979a: 325). The most radical change that Itale and his

colleagues at the left-wing journal *Novesma Verba* can envision is an exchange of one member of 'the house of privilege' for another. I am not sure why Le Guin, who has said that she favours anarchy above other political theories (1975a: 285) presents the anarchists' aspirations in such limited terms. Does she mean that the shift from grand duchy (under Austrian governance) to constitutional monarchy is a dramatic change for its epoch in the early nineteenth century? Would a successful Orsinian revolution have been destined to change nothing in the same way as the French Revolution, where King Charles has taken the place of King Louis XVI, to be replaced in his turn by constitutional monarchy under Louis-Philippe of Orleans (1979a: 319, 325)? And why does the uprising fail, bringing about nothing but renewed pressure from the authorities and the proscription of the radicals from Krasnoy and Molsen Province (1979a: 338)? I think that a sceptical attitude towards history, considered as the changing fortunes of nations, governs *Malafrena*, giving rise to the same trope of iteration, the return of the same, as in *Orsinian Tales*.

On his way home to Val Malafrena, Itale reflects despairingly on the failure of his hopes:

I thought I must succeed, because my hopes were so high, and I have failed. I thought I must win, because my cause was just, and I have been defeated. It was all air, words, talk, lies: and the steel chain that brings you up short two steps from the wall.

(1979a: 349)

But what Itale sees as imprisonment, the lack of choice in the 'steel chain' is, in the context of *The Earthsea Trilogy*, responsible behaviour. With the accumulated wisdom of his career, Ged tells Arren:

"... if there were a king over us all again, and he sought counsel of a mage, as in the days of old, and I were that mage, I would say to him: My lord, do nothing because it is righteous, or praiseworthy, or noble, to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you must do, and which you cannot do in any other way."

(1993a: 361-2)

*The Earthsea Trilogy* presents intervention in the affairs of others as dangerous because it will affect the cosmic Equilibrium (1993a: 51, 361). In the 'nonfantastic' realm of Orsinia,

intervention in History is similarly shown to be futile. But the clearest warning against thoughtless intervention in Le Guin's writing is surely *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971).<sup>22</sup> George Orr has the 'magical' ability to change the world through his dreams, but does not want it; indeed, the whole narrative revolves around his attempts to get rid of it. For him, as for Stephen Dedalus, 'History ... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake' (Joyce 1986: 28). But for Orr, the complaint is literal: his 'effective' dreams, which change both the History of the world and his own personal history, are the source of his discomfort. He is responsible for the changes wrought by his dreams. As he explains to Dr Haber:

"... You can't go on changing things, trying to run things."

"You speak as if that were some kind of general moral imperative." He looked at Orr with his genial, reflective smile, stroking his beard. "But in fact, isn't that man's very purpose on earth - to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?"

"No!"

"What is his purpose, then?"

"I don't know. Things don't have purposes, as if the universe were a machine, where every part has a useful function ... I don't know if our life has a purpose and I don't see that it matters. What does matter is that we're a part. Like a thread in a cloth or a grass-blade in a field. It *is* and we *are*. What we do is like wind blowing on the grass."

(1971: 73)

Throughout the novel, Haber and Orr present two sides of a debate over the meaning of history. For Haber, history is *telos*, the end of which is 'a better world'. But (ironically for him) the outcome of his well-intentioned meddling in history is that he becomes subjugated to the worst possible version of the nightmare. His only effective dream brings about, as befits unconscious contents, the blurring of distinctions and edges:

The buildings of downtown Portland, the Capital of the World, the high, new, handsome cubes of stone and glass interspersed with measured doses of green ... were melting. They were getting soggy and shaky, like jello left out in the sun. The corners had already run down the sides, leaving great creamy smears.

(1971: 146)

As Selinger cogently notes (1988: 82-84), despite Haber's best attempts to make present in the world that which is absent, but appears in dreams, what he achieves is literally 'the presence of

absence' (1971: 147). The end point of Haber's self-aggrandizing meddling is that he can never see anything other than 'the void ... the world as misunderstood by the mind: the bad dream' (1971: 153). *The Lathe of Heaven* posits this as the ineluctable result of the familiar Enlightenment 'grand Narrative' of History as progress towards an ameliorated future. White documents Kant's (reluctant) deconstruction of this notion:

Historical evidence alone, Kant noted, permitted belief in any of three views of history: eudaemonistic, terroristic, and abderitic, reflecting belief in historical progress, decline, or stasis, respectively. It was one's moral duty to believe in the progressivist view, because the other two views promoted attitudes unworthy of a morally responsible man.

(1987: 148)

In Le Guin's novel, as in White's account, the role of an interpretive paradigm is central in making sense of history. I believe, however, that the three views offered by Kant would prove too restrictive for Le Guin, as they are all based on the binary opposition between linear and static. The 'iterability' that clings to visions of history in *Orsinian Tales*, and the generative metaphor of the 'heyiya-if' or interlinked spirals in *Always Coming Home*, lead me to think that she would insist on a fourth model, probably based on a spiral movement of return to an altered beginning.

Haber follows Kant's injunction and makes his belief in progress a moral value and, like Godwin,<sup>23</sup> he stresses man's<sup>24</sup> role as the 'driver' of history. The desire for a 'better world', to which he appeals repeatedly, is also behind the utopian impulse in fiction, which Le Guin satirizes in this novel, as Cummins notes (1990a: 156). Suvin's celebrated definition of utopia is useful here:

Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.

(1979: 49)

To the extent that utopia is a 'verbal construction', it occupies the a-topian space of literature and is consequently outside history. Or as Le Guin puts it in her brilliant essay 'A Non-Euclidean

## View of California as a Cold Place to Be':

... it is of the very essence of the rational or Jovian utopia that it is *not* here and *not* now ... . It is pure structure without content; pure model; goal. That is its virtue. Utopia is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia.  
(1989: 81)

Le Guin's distrust of 'rational or Jovian utopia' places the status of *Always Coming Home* in question. It clearly fits Suvin's definition of utopia, as a 'verbal construction', depicting a society 'organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community', and it appeals to 'an alternative historical hypothesis' (1979: 49). But Le Guin insists on a reading of the genre that is inflected by gender:

Utopia has been yang. In one way or another, from Plato on, utopia has been the big yang motorcycle trip. Bright, dry, clear, strong, firm, active, aggressive, lineal, progressive, creative, expanding, advancing, and hot.

Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.

...

To attain the constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward. What would a yin utopia be? It would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting, and cold.

(1989: 90)

*Always Coming Home* manifests the qualities of the yin utopia Le Guin is looking for. It values darkness as a counterbalance to light, as in the creation story 'Owl, Coyote, Soul' (1985a: 305-6) and the parable of essence, 'The Black Beetle Soul' (1985a: 309). Water, or wetness, forms the central point of all town planning (1985a: 411). The distinction between History in the past and history now is only one of several 'obscure', or blurred, aspects of Kesh life (1985a: 163). Although they go to war reluctantly with the Pig People and the Condor, the Kesh are, by western imperialistic standards, 'weak, yielding, passive, peaceful' people who would rather talk than fight (1985a: 133-34; 382-85). Their rituals are communal and participatory, and their term 'people' includes an enormous array of natural phenomena:

... the earth itself, rocks and dirt and geological formations, the moon, all springs, streams, and lakes of fresh water, all human beings currently alive, game animals, domestic animals, individual animals, domestic and ground-dwelling birds ... the sun and stars, the oceans, wild animals not hunted as game, all animals, plants and persons considered as the species rather than as an individual, human beings considered as a tribe, people, or species, all people and beings in dreams, visions, and stories, most kinds of birds, the dead, and the unborn.

(1985a: 43-44)

In another sense, too, *Always Coming Home* is a participatory utopia. It requires participation from the reader, rather than prescribing to her or him, as utopias are wont to do (Cummins 1990b: 161-62). Although the Kesh are aware of the linear time-system used by the global computer to keep records, they use 'cycles' and 'gyres' to ascertain dates and 'count from and to full moons' (1985a: 168-69). The parable 'Person and Self' (1985a: 306-307) expresses the communalist ethos that makes nurturing life an important ethic. Spatial and demographic limitations make Kesh culture rather small and endangered; the town of Sinshan is so small that individual houses can be mapped (1985a: 178). Finally, their collective behaviour embodies aspects of contraction to a centre that evoke cold (1985a: 489). But all this does not, in itself, make a utopian society. What it does make is explained by the Kesh Archivist to the editorial persona called Pandora:<sup>25</sup>

This is a mere dream dreamed in a bad time, an Up Yours to the people who ride snowmobiles, make nuclear weapons, and run prison camps by a middle-aged housewife, a critique of civilisation possible only to the civilised, an affirmation pretending to be a rejection, a glass of milk for the soul ulcered by acid rain, a piece of pacifist jeanjacquerie, and a cannibal dance among the savages in the ungodly garden of the farthest West.

(1985a: 316)

Despite the fact that the Archivist's comments violate the illusion of realism that separates the utopian from the author's community, they make the point that (yin) utopia is relativistic and that not everyone will find Kesh life an improvement on current conditions. What *Always Coming Home* presents, then, is a qualified utopia:<sup>26</sup> a utopia which makes explicit its connection to History and its ideological biases.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast with the utopia in *Always Coming Home*, the grotesque ego-inflation that is

the end-point of Haber's pursuit of a better world strongly recalls the image of the West as an inflated belly in *Orsinian Tales* (1976a: 115):

He had always wanted power to do good. Now he had it.

...

The quality of the will to power is, precisely, growth. Achievement is its cancellation. To be, the will to power must increase with each fulfillment, making the fulfillment only a step to a further one. The vaster the power gained, the vaster the appetite for more.

(1971: 113)

Although this description of Haber participates in the 'moralism' that Le Guin decries in her writing (1993b: 124), it also explains the danger in a teleological vision of History, the way in which 'good' motives can give rise to the 'killer story'.

George Orr's experience of History is strikingly different from Haber's. Although he finds History susceptible to his influence, it operates in accordance with the laws of association that Freud and Jung<sup>28</sup> ascribe to the unconscious mind, rather than in a rational, goal-directed way. Association, as a linguistic process, evokes Lacan's famous dictum, 'The unconscious is structured like a language' (1977: 149). Language, like the unconscious, is prone to exceed what people wish to find (or put) in it. History, in *The Lathe of Heaven*, shows the same propensities. The futility of trying to subjugate it to rational control is seen in the outcome of Orr's dreams. Directed by Haber to correct the overpopulation problem by dreaming of space and freedom to move, Orr creates a Plague that wiped out six billion people (1971: 62-63); and when Heather Lelache asks him to eradicate the Aliens from the Moon, his dream brings about their first Earth landing (1971: 97). When he is asked to dream of a world free of racial problems, the outcome is ludicrous and tragic. Everyone becomes grey, and Heather disappears along with the ethnic difference that she embodied:

She was brown. A clear, dark, amber brown, like Baltic amber, or a cup of strong Ceylon tea. But no brown people went by. No black people, no white, no yellow, no red. They came from every part of the earth to work at the World Planning Center or to look at it, from Thailand, Argentina, Ghana, China, Ireland, Tasmania, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Honduras, Lichtenstein. But they all wore the same clothes, trousers, tunic, raincape; and underneath the clothes they were all the same color. They were gray.

(1971: 111)

Haber is delighted, but Orr is downcast because the loss of difference, where 'every soul on earth ... [has] a body the color of a battleship' (1971: 112), also means that identity has been lost and people have become machines. This moment marks the apotheosis of the resistance of History to Haber's will-to-power and of the assertion of a force beyond his control shaping human affairs. This force resides in Orr's unconscious.

The surplus ~~effects~~ of Orr's changes to society appeal to a transcendent 'order of things' that probably takes its inspiration from the Tao.<sup>29</sup> Here Le Guin evokes a vision of History as subject to suprahuman governance that comes close to teleology, but finally shies away from it in the face of randomness. When Orr asks the Alien Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe, "Is there any way to control *iahklu*', to make it go the way it ... ought to go?" (1971: 132), he is asking how to subsume his history, his individual Tao, to the greater whole. The Alien's response carefully balances Orr's individual predicament with larger Historical concerns:

"One swallow does not make a summer," it said. "Many hands make light work." It stopped again, apparently not satisfied with this effort at bridging the communication gap.<sup>30</sup> It ... picked out one of the antique disk-records displayed there, and brought it to Orr. It was a Beatles record: "With a Little Help from My Friends."

"Gift," it said.

(1971: 132)

Community turns out to be the significant meaning of History that enables Orr to deal with an excess of change. Since Haber, whose will-to-power is a version of the will to be the sole survivor, as Canetti notes (1960: 227), all that is left to him is 'the dark, ... the void, ... the unbeing at the center of William Haber' (1971: 148). The Aliens embody the (unlikely) Other that resides within the creative individual mind (1971: 133) and brings sense to both History and history: "What comes is acceptable," says Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe (1971: 131).

I think the text, by aligning History with the unconscious, makes a point about different levels of historical knowledge. On the one hand there is the Historical script, being written by



Haber in his self-appointed role as director of operations (all for the public good, of course). On the other hand there is Orr's experience of history, of living in a dizzying succession of dramatically different 'continuums' (1971: 113). Each dispensation is contingent on his unconscious reshaping of History and brings with it an entirely new set of personal circumstances. While Haber grows rich and famous, Orr's lifestyle see-saws crazily between deprivation and affluence. When the population of Earth is seven billion, he lives in a 'one-room 8½ X 11 with the pullout stove and balloonbed and co-op bathroom down the linoleum hall' (1971: 66): when he has reduced it to only one billion, his flat has 'three large rooms, a bathroom with a deep claw-foot tub, and a view between roofs to the river' (1971: 66). Among the points being made here is an insistence that the script of History, written by people like Haber, has an impact on the history of ordinary people like Orr. The public/private History/history dichotomy is not very firm, after all.

*Malafrena* also blurs the distinction between History and history by showing how national events affect the private allegiances of individuals. I believe that Le Guin privileges private history in this text, and consequently downplays public incidents such as the Orsinian revolution. The binary opposition between public and private is, of course, a gendered one: the 'grand Narrative' of Western History is the story of significant actions performed by men of outstanding quality. The division is particularly apparent in the economic sphere, where men are assigned to public action,<sup>31</sup> while women are relegated to domestic labour. There is an implicit power-relation in the binary opposition, which was even more apparent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than currently (Poovey 1984: 3-6, 15-30); 'men's work' is considered 'real work' and rewarded with fame, economic remuneration and social status, while women's activities are viewed as inferior. Le Guin's response in *Malafrena* is not to try to overcome the inequality, as some feminists do,<sup>32</sup> but to reverse the value associated with each pole by re-valuing women's contribution as central. In her 1986 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address',<sup>33</sup> she identifies language as symptomatic of the different social position of men and women:

... what I learned [at college] was the language of power - of social power; I shall call it the father tongue.

This is the public discourse, and one dialect of it is speech-making ... . This is the effect, ideally, of the public discourse. It makes something happen, makes somebody - usually somebody else - do something, or at least it gratifies

the ego of the speaker ... .

... The father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected, or heard.

...

Using the father tongue, I can speak of the mother tongue only, inevitably, to distance it - to exclude it. It is the other, inferior. It is primitive: inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, trivial, banal. It's repetitive, the same over and over, like the work called women's work; earthbound, housebound. It's vulgar, the vulgar tongue, common, common speech, colloquial, low, ordinary, plebeian, like the work ordinary people do, the lives common people live. The mother tongue, spoken or written, expects an answer ... . The mother tongue is language not as mere communication but as relation, relationship. It connects. It goes two ways, many ways, an exchange, a network. Its power is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but in uniting. It is written, but not by scribes and secretaries for posterity; it flies from the mouth on the breath that is our life and is gone, like the outbreath, utterly gone and yet returning, repeated ... .<sup>34</sup>

(1989: 147-49)

Le Guin goes on to say that the mother tongue is 'the language stories are told in' (1989: 150). Probably History, the 'grand Narrative', is not told in it. Nevertheless, in *Malafrena* it is not (public, male) History but (private, female) histories that are valorized.

Gordon, writing a collective biography of a group of women friends in South Africa, specifies the difference between what I have called History and histories in less lyrical, but equally subversive, gender terms:

What unrealized possibilities lie unnoticed behind the silence of women's lives in the outback of history, biography, and memoir, the standard records of the past? I shall approach this through my own past in South Africa, through diaries, letters, and memories ... .

(1992: 6)

The qualitative and power-differences that both Gordon and Le Guin notice between men's and women's experience of history is a founding conception of *Malafrena*. Itale heads to Krasnoy, the Orsinian capital, in the hope of intervening positively in his country's political life and History. The two women he leaves behind in Val Malafrena are his sister Laura and their neighbour, Piera Valtorskar. Le Guin repeatedly stresses that men and women have different

destinies and that women's part is mostly boredom, to be, not do, except in the restricted domestic sphere. Piera and Laura debate the matter naively at the end of their teens:

"It really isn't fair," she [Piera] said at last, "him getting all the excitement, and you none."

"It isn't the excitement. It's just that he's ... doing something, being someone. I don't get bored, it isn't that ... . But anybody in the world could do everything I do."

"Nobody else could be Laura Sorde, though."

"What's the use *being* me if I don't *do* anything?"

(1979a: 108-109)

Later Piera is seen in a rather frivolous light as giving all her attention to romance (1979a: 111), and indeed there are two broken engagements before she and Itale fall in love. Piera and Laura embody the domestic/homely/*heimlich* pole of the novel's value system, but this is not shown to be attractive. On the night of her decision to break the second engagement, Piera accepts her lot in gendered terms:

If this was her world, she was strong enough to live in it. She was a woman, not trained for any public act, not trained to defiance, brought up to the woman's part: waiting. So she would wait ... .

... To be nothing, a girl confused, grieved, frightened, foolish, shivering in the January frost, all that, yes, but also to learn at last the stature of her spirit: to come into her inheritance.

(1979a: 251)

This comes dangerously close to endorsing the role that society prescribes and proscribes for women, as does the portrayal of Laura Sorde, whose vitality is wasted in the absence of any mental or social stimulation (1979a: 275). In tones of unconvincing resignation, Laura admits to Itale, newly freed from prison, that she has been living vicariously:

"All that has given my life any meaning for five years has been my belief that you were free - that you were working for freedom, doing what I couldn't do, for me - even when you were in jail - then most of all, Itale!"

(1979a: 359)

It is difficult to know whether Le Guin intends this as a critique or affirmation of the status quo,

but Laura's lack of conscious discontent suggests a degree of affirmation. As in other novels,<sup>35</sup> the author seems to want to document, rather than comment on, women's social position. But the documentary impulse itself, with its appeal to objectivity, is inhabited by values and value-judgements, as Ricoeur eloquently shows in 'Objectivity and Subjectivity in History' (1965: 21-40). Le Guin's refusal to offer a critique, here, gives a measure of implied assent. *Malafrena* may be one of the early novels Le Guin alludes to in 'A Citizen of Mondath' where she mentions having written 'five novels in the last ten years [before her first published work in 1962]' (1993b: 23);<sup>36</sup> in this case it is probable that she had not yet given much attention to feminist critiques of women's position.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the long revision of the manuscript could have provided the opportunity for rethinking the role of women in early eighteenth-century Orsinia, and given rise to a more critical presentation.

The accusation that *Malafrena* and, to a certain extent, *Orsinian Tales* betray the cause of feminism by failing to interrogate women's position in nineteenth-century Europe cannot be sustained in a similar examination of *Always Coming Home* (1985a). It is, self-consciously, a feminist utopia. One of the most conspicuous features of the text, apparent from a comparison with Le Guin's essay on utopia, is its reversal of contemporary patriarchal value-systems.<sup>38</sup> Although Le Guin does not say so, the Taoist opposites of yin and yang are associated with female and male respectively; also, as Cummins remarks, 'Le Guin uses ... female voices to create the open-ended utopia in *Always Coming Home*' (1990a: 176). The Kesh are matrilineal and matrilocal: 'descent was through the mother' (1985a: 424) and 'a couple marrying were expected to live at least for a while in the bride's mother's household' (1985a: 426). But they are not matriarchal. Their social organization is based on the values associated with women, on (Le Guin's idea of) womanhood, not on individual women themselves.

The text draws on a strong, often essentialist, valorization of femininity. For example, men are not considered intelligent enough to participate in the sacred rituals of the Inner Sun. This is clearly a reversal of the contemporary view that it is a waste of time to educate women:

She [Milk] thought a man's place was in the woods and fields and workshops, not among sacred and intellectual things. In the Lodge I had heard her say the old gibe, "A man fucks with his brain and thinks with his penis." Tarweed knew well

enough what she thought, but intellectual men are used to having their capacities doubted and their achievements snubbed ... .

(1985a: 293)

Flicker defends Tarweed, saying, ““Even if he is a man he thinks like a woman!”” (1985a: 293), recalling the repeated gibe in the short story ‘Intracom’: ‘fantastically good ... for a woman’ (1982b: 149, 153, 160). These reversals are historically based; they reveal less of the utopian society than of Le Guin’s perception of her own community (Suvín 1979: 49), which spurred the creation of the utopia in the first place.

Myth as originary, meaning-making story also participates in the critique of masculinist values. The creation story, ‘Big Man and Little Man’, is a revision/reversal of the patriarchal account of creation in the Biblical book of Genesis, complete with an ‘Eve’ made out of adobe clay. In the Kesh tale, creation is sexualized but, because the creator is a man, he can only consume, make copies of himself or destroy (1985a: 158). When Little Man has destroyed all life out of fear, the creative female power of Coyote comes, to bring about the authentic creation of the world:<sup>39</sup>

Coyote came. Where she walked she made the wilderness. She dug canyons, she shat mountains. Under the buzzard’s wings the forest grew. Where the worm was in the dirt, the spring ran.

(1985a: 159)

Conflict with the Condor people generates a story of the intrusion of History into the lives of the Kesh. In the short essay, ‘Conflict’, Le Guin formulates her opposition to the tradition that holds conflict to be the motive force of narrative. She writes:

Existence as struggle, life as a battle, everything in terms of defeat and victory: Man versus Nature, Man versus Woman, Black versus White, Good versus Evil, God versus Devil - a sort of apartheid view of existence, and of literature. What a pitiful impoverishment of the complexity of both!

(1989: 190)

I believe that the tale of the war between the Kesh and the Condor should be read in the light of this expression of distaste. The conflict provides the opportunity to stage the opposition between

masculine and feminine views of life, as represented by the Kesh and the Condor respectively, by using powerful symbolic practices such as group mythology and social stratification. The Condor have only one story and that is the History of their own conquest of surrounding peoples. That this History is a linguistically-constructed discourse, aimed at the perpetuation of patriarchal power, is explicit in their policy about writing:

The Dayao will blind the eye or cut off the hand of a woman or a farmer who writes a single word ... . They say that since One made the cosmos by speaking a word, the universe is His book, and to write or read words is to share the power that belongs to One; and only certain men are supposed to share that power.  
(1985a: 192)

Unfortunately the Condor people are depicted as villainous to the point of implausibility. They are consistently cruel, restrictive and destructive of all life around them, including their own (1985a: 380). Further, the absence of dissent among the Condor, Le Guin's portrayal of them as united in villainy, with the exception of sympathetic individuals such as Terter Abhao, compromises their effectiveness in the novel. They function more in opposition to the Kesh than as a fully realized people in their own right: their 'sickness' highlights the 'health' of Kesh society (1985a: 380) and adds a dimension of vulnerability to the utopia.<sup>40</sup> But possibly, too, Le Guin created them as a representation of genocidal societies such as Nazi Germany.

There is a degree of cultural interpenetration in the interaction between the Kesh and the Condor. I view Stone Telling, not as an example of ideal fusion of the two cultures, but rather as the means to bridge the gap between them; and it is the gap, the aporia, that remains open and important. Stone Telling resembles many other Le Guin protagonists in her role as the purveyor of her own society's values to a foreign culture.<sup>41</sup> To a certain extent, she carries the Kesh habits of gender equality to the Condor people. She questions the prohibition on women writing (1985a: 192); breaks the social hierarchy that insists that her parents' marriage is legal (1985a: 196); and, importantly, she suggests to the other Condor Women that they can make their own decisions (1985a: 346), sowing a seed of revolution against male domination.

The cross-cultural interpenetration provided by Stone Telling's story is most powerful as it concerns the impact of the Condor way of life on the Kesh. After the first skirmish with the

Condor warriors, brought about primarily by Terter Abhao's desire to see his foreign wife Willow, life at Sinshan begins to change. New Lodges are set up: the Lamb Lodge for women and the Warrior Lodge for men. The practices of these groups are based on estrangement between the sexes and initiates of the Warrior Lodge are forbidden to speak to women (1985a: 183). Stone Telling joins the Lamb Lodge as a way of getting closer to her beloved cousin Spear, who is a warrior, and is told that she 'could not know the Warrior rites because the only suitable way for a woman to understand such mysteries was by loving, serving and obeying the men who understood them' (1985a: 184). The strict sexual separation reiterates the gulf between Stone Telling's Kesh mother and Condor father. The severance of Lamb Lodge women from men exaggerates their social position in the Blood Lodge, where they are taught 'animal mysteries':

The identification of woman and animal went deep throughout the sexual and intellectual teaching of the Blood Lodge (and where in our man-dominant culture that identification is used to devalue, this must not be assumed to hold for the Kesh: rather the opposite).

(1985a: 420)

But where animal killing is seen by the Blood Lodge as self-sacrifice by the animal, the Lamb Lodge rituals are based on sacrifice that makes the killer guilty, and the blood on Stone Telling's hands signifies her participation in the 'killer story'.<sup>42</sup> At the end of Stone Telling's story, Steady diagnoses the growth of the Warrior and Lamb Lodges amongst the Kesh as an outbreak of the sickness that is endemic to the Condor (1985a: 381). Here, as in *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), Le Guin presents cross-cultural exchange as negative. The Kesh regain social 'health' by closing the two Lodges where the foreign influence is strongest and returning to a 'pure' way of life. This decision, which is impossible because the purity of 'home', the self, is always already invested with the alterity of the Other, can be read as an espousal of ethnocentricity; the Kesh are in any case unfriendly to strangers (Selinger 1988: 138). I prefer to read it, however, as an informed choice to return to the maternal ways of 'home', where the word for 'house' is *ma* (1985a: 518)<sup>43</sup> and *she* means both 'being' and 'Nature' (1985a: 275, 520).

In my view, the threat of the Condor underlines the point that a harmonious communal future is vulnerable; that is, the progress of History towards a better dispensation is not guaranteed, however desirable. Le Guin makes this point several times in editorial asides. In

'A First Note' she writes that 'The people in this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California' (1985a: xi).<sup>44</sup> And in 'Towards an Archaeology of the Future' she recommends a method of 'finding' the Kesh that stresses the ephemerality of their existence:

The only way I can think to find them, the only archaeology that might be practical, is as follows. You take your child or grandchild in your arms, a young baby, not a year old yet, and go down into the wild oats in the field below the barn. Stand under the oak on the last slope of the hill, facing the creek. Stand quietly. Perhaps the baby will see something, or hear a voice, or speak to somebody there, somebody from home.

(1985a: 4-5)

The linearity of temporal sequence is at issue here, as elsewhere in *Always Coming Home*.<sup>45</sup> In 1985, the year of the novel's publication, Le Guin gave an address entitled 'Science Fiction and the Future', in which she discusses temporality:

... it is not possible that we will "conquer" the future, because there is no way we can get there. The future is the part of the spacetime continuum from which - in the body and in ordinary states of consciousness - we are excluded. We can't even see it ... .

... It's when we confuse our dreams and ideas with the non-dream world that we're in trouble, when we think the future is a place we own.

(1989: 143)

It seems to me that the elusiveness of the future resides in its dependence on the past.<sup>46</sup> Le Guin's use of 'home' encapsulates the novel's reference, not to the future, but to a particular reading of her present. There is also the sense of a goal to be attained, but not by means of linear or teleological progression; the linked spirals of the heyiya-if figure appeal to the aspect of return to the same that is inherent in Le Guin's vision of History.

The Kesh themselves do not view either History or history as a sequence of events arranged in a linear progression. In the section on 'Time and the City', the editor becomes frustrated by Gather's inability to understand her demands for chronological accuracy:

It's hopeless. He doesn't perceive time as a direction, let alone a progress, but as a landscape in which one may go any number of directions, or nowhere.



He spatialises time; it is not an arrow, nor a river, but a house, the house he lives in. One may go from room to room, and come back; to go outside, all you have to do is open the door.

(1985a: 171-72)

Gather's view of time determines his identity. Although he has spent his life on the 'retrieval of data concerning certain doings of human beings in the Valley of the Na' (1985a: 169), he is not a historian in the conventional sense of collecting information regarding sequence. Instead, he has 'a fascination with the formal significance and occurrence of certain architectural elements and proportions' (1985a: 169): with the recurring patterns of his own discipline, that is. I see Gather's preoccupation with patterns as an analogy of a structuralist, that is, Lévi-Straussian, view of H/historical information.<sup>47</sup> Said describes the key tenets of structuralist thought in terms that strikingly resemble Gather's view of time:

The problem as seen by all the structuralists ... is that the authority of a privileged Origin that commands, guarantees, and perpetuates meaning has been removed.

(1975: 315)

The lack of an Origin does not seem to bother either Le Guin or the Kesh in *Always Coming Home* in the same way as, Said says, it produces an 'idea of loss' for the structuralists (1975: 315). On the contrary, with a peculiar double vision that simultaneously clings to her own perspective and deconstructs it, the editor explains the lack of sequence in Valley time:

A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, Aristotle said, and nobody has proved him wrong yet; and that which has no beginning and no end but is all middle is neither story nor history. What is it, then?

The universe of seventeenth-century Europe began 4400 years ago in the Middle East, the universe of twentieth-century North America began 24,000,000,000 years ago somewhere else with a big bang AND THERE WAS LIGHT, and they will end; that follows; in judgement with trumpets or in the thin, dark, cold soup of entropy. Other times, other places may not begin or end that way at all; consult the Universal History of the Hindus for one of the alternate views. Certainly the Valley doesn't share those beginnings or those ends; but it seems to have none of its own. It is all middle.

(1985a: 163)

This view of sequence insists that stories that account for present conditions are ineluctably

products of the societies that write them. It can usefully be juxtaposed with Said's discussion of the status of beginnings in structuralist thought:

It is no longer possible either to designate a beginning or to think of an origin except (in both cases) as concessions to the empty fact or priority.

(1975: 316)

In *Always Coming Home*, the absence of either an Origin or a beginning is a feature to be celebrated. This is achieved by the sustained denial of linear sequence that marks the text's many discourses. It points to the centrality of the present, which is Le Guin's preferred time frame:

As a science-fiction writer I personally prefer to stand still for long periods, like the Quechua, and look at what is, in fact, in front of me: the earth; my fellow beings on it; and the stars.

(1989: 143)

In the same vein, she writes in 'A First Note': 'All we ever have is here, now' (1985a: xi). Nevertheless, it is a mistake to assume that the here-and-now is a unitary category, capable of being understood completely. Like the category of 'historical fact' in Carr's metahistorical reflections (1961: 22-24), Le Guin's present is a complex entity that is open to interpretation. One of its complexities is the co-existence of different forms of time, which the editor calls 'Time' and 'Dream Time':<sup>48</sup>

"Listen," says the Archivist - they're always saying that, these people, very gently, not an order but an invitation, "listen, you'll find or make what you need, if you need it. But consider it; be mindful; be careful. What is history?"

"A great historian of my people said: the study of Man in Time."

There is a silence.

"You aren't Man and you don't live in Time," I say bitterly. "You live in the Dream Time."

"Always," says the Archivist of Wakwaha. "Right through Civilisation, we have lived in the Dream Time." And her voice is not bitter, but full of grief, bitter grief.

(1985a: 172)

The Kesh 'exist' in a different probability continuum, which runs parallel to what the Archivist calls 'Civilisation'. The editor tells us that the Kesh word *tavkach* translates as 'civilisation, or history' (1985a: 152). I think it corresponds to what I have called History, or the sequence of

significant events with ramifications for large units of the population (such as nations). The Kesh, however, do not see either History or history in this way, but blur the distinctions on which conventional metahistory is founded to produce

... a language and way of thought in which no distinction is made between human and natural history or between objective and subjective fact and perception, in which neither chronological nor causal sequence is considered an adequate reflection of reality, and in which time and space are so muddled together that one is never sure whether they are talking about an era or an area.

(1985a: 153)

This metahistory participates in the deconstructivist project of 'Displacing the opposition that it initially apparently questions' (Spivak 1988: 103). As Ricoeur insists that a responsible historian should, it abolishes the distinction between objective and subjective discourse (1965: 21-40); and in the absence of faith in the interpretive structures of chronology and causality, it points towards a structuralist (that is to say, Lévi-Straussian) preoccupation with patterns. In other words, Le Guin's alternative metahistory offers as trenchant a theoretical challenge to the discipline of history-making as current theories of history as expounded by Ricoeur (1965), Said (1975), Foucault (1970) and White (1978).

Just as the Kesh do not differentiate between public History and private history, neither do they distinguish between fiction and non-fiction. Their categories, however, reflect the dependency of both forms on event, on 'historical fact' (Carr 1961: 10):

The kind of narrative that tells "what happened" is never clearly defined by genre, style, or valuation from the kind that tells a story "like what happened."

(Le Guin 1985a: 500)

Both of these are forms of literature, as are 'Spoken and Written Literature' (1985a: 502-5). The Kesh genre system is based on the need to separate truth and falsehood, which Le Guin applauds (1985a: 500). The insistence a broad understanding of 'literature', encapsulating both 'fact' and 'fiction', both embodied in discourse, gives a deconstructivist flavour to the subversion of current theories of History in *Always Coming Home*.

This chapter has argued that Le Guin consistently exposes accepted views of History to

questioning and criticism. Convention dictates that Historical significance derives from the ramifications of a given event for as large a group of people as possible: the more public an event is, the more Historical it becomes. Equally, History is male, because not only does it suppress the concerns of women,<sup>49</sup> but it tells the story of patriarchal values of dominion, achievement and conquest. Le Guin's metahistory, in the four novels under consideration here, challenges this understanding of H/history in several ways.

White sees interpretation, in the form of discourse, as central to any figuration of history:

... the discourse is intended to *constitute* the ground whereon to decide *what shall count as a fact* in the matters under consideration and to determine *what mode of comprehension* is best suited to the understanding of the facts thus constituted.  
(1978: 3)

The four novels by Le Guin examined in this chapter reveal, in different ways, the dependence of History, as well as history, on discourse and on modes of comprehension. *Orsinian Tales* presents a view of the national History as a sequence of iterable domestic situations that resist either chronological or causal ordering. In addition, as *Malafrena* does, it presents the history of the individual as ultimately more important than the History of nations. These two attributes belong, in White's terminology, with the trope of synecdoche, which generates a plot based on the representation of the whole by the part (1978: 73). In his account, a synecdochic reading of History gives rise to an idealistic, or comic, story structure. Indeed, both *Orsinian Tales* and *Malafrena* insist idealistically on individual interiority rather than collective event, and they both articulate a qualified optimism, proper to comedy, in their valorizing of the domestic.

*The Lathe of Heaven* is equally optimistic about the cosmic Tao, or order, of life, but its metahistory is governed by a different trope, namely irony. Irony is based on dissimilarity and difference (White 1978: 73), and gives rise to a critical view of History, characterized by a 'suspicion of system' (White 1978: 75). Haber's will-to-power in *The Lathe of Heaven* is also a will to create order, to subjugate conditions to his own metanarrative of human progress. But his desire, being dependent on unconscious factors, produces only the ultimate, nightmare Otherness of a world without difference: 'the void' (Le Guin 1971: 148). In the meantime, it is the little man, George Orr, who is so uniformly average that his normality is extreme (1971:

118), who triumphs over an excess of history by refusing to resist it. The succession of alternative conditions created by Orr, only to be jettisoned in their turn, enact his refusal to embrace any preordained system of reality but the paradoxical 'system' that is the avoidance of system.

In *Always Coming Home*, the Kesh are said to have 'no god; they had no gods; they had no faith. What they appear to have had is a working metaphor' (1985a: 49). And indeed, the novel itself is based on 'a working metaphor': it asserts 'a similarity in a difference and, at least implicitly, a difference in a similarity' (White 1978: 72). Here the similarities between our own society and 'the gentle Kesh' (Selinger 1988: 131) are based on the tenuous relation of filiation. Our descendants might become the Kesh, or people like them, if certain trends, related to what Le Guin calls 'the life story' are encouraged and others, the components of 'the killer story', are removed. But Le Guin takes the significance of her alternative (meta)history beyond the creation of Romantic plot (White 1978: 75). Rather, she emphasizes that the ethic of connection and community, itself an embodiment of 'similarity within difference', which guides the Kesh, is a necessary alternative to the present dispensation. The profoundly ambiguous existence of the Kesh, present in the narrative but absent from physical form, poses a choice for the reader between two kinds of stories. Pursuing the killer story will cause environmental destruction and the waning of the values cherished by the Kesh. The only way to bring them into existence, to allow them to leave the 'Dream Time' of wish-fulfilment and enter 'Time', is to embrace the 'biophilic' (Daly 1984: 308) values of the 'life story'. Le Guin is playing with high stakes here, refusing the conventional separation between art and life, and insisting instead that what we do in art, the stories we tell, ineluctably shape our life H/histories. The reader's response is dependent on her or his choice of story.<sup>50</sup>

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970); *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1992); Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference* (1982b).
2. The quotation marks here bear witness to the fact that, as Culler says, 'meaning is context-bound but context is boundless' (1983: 128). Culler goes on to discuss Derrida's deconstruction of the idea of 'extra-textuality' since even 'history' is part of 'the general text, which has no boundaries' (1983: 130). I share Derrida and Culler's scepticism towards the notion that there are elements 'outside' the text. In one sense, all human experience can be read and participates in textuality.
3. I have discussed this feature of Le Guin's writing in the Introduction to this thesis and in Chapter One, 'Un/Earthly Powers'. Le Guin's views on narrative are expressed, for example, in her essays 'It was a Dark and Stormy Night; Or, Why are we Huddling About the Campfire?' (1989: 21-30) and 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1989: 165-170). A recent publication, 'The Shobbies' Story' (1991c), also gives a crucial role to story-telling.
4. White discriminates between four kinds of historical 'emplotment' in terms of their "master tropes" ... of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony' (1987: 5). These tropes in turn generate the four narrative patterns of 'Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire' (1987: 70).
5. 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' was written in 1986, shortly after the publication of *Always Coming Home*. It can be seen, I think, as part of the same project in Le Guin's writing.
6. Le Guin does not give this date. It is cited by Cummins (1990a: 126) and Bucknall (1981: xiii).
7. Bittner points out that Orsinia is Le Guin's 'native country' since it bears her name:  
  
The country's name ... and its creator's name have the same root: *orsino*, Italian for "bearish," and *Ursula* come from the Latin *ursa*.  
  
(1984: 29)
8. See Cummins (1990a: 131), Bittner (1984: 33) and Bittner (Bloom 1986: 123).
9. Derrida explains iteration as a complex interaction between similarity and difference in *The Post Card* (1980). My use of the term derives from his, as well as from Culler's discussion of it in *On Deconstruction* (1983: 110-134).
10. In a Marxist analysis of capitalist society, Cohen defines commodity fetishism as follows:  
  
Commodity fetishism is the appearance that products have value in and of themselves, apart from the labour bestowed on them.  
  
(1978: 119)
11. Adam Kether's name strongly evokes the "primordial man" in the *Kabbalah*, Adam Kadmon (Scholem 1974: 130). This echo gives his actions a flavour of supra-individuality: the

transpersonality of the iterated act, in fact.

12. In using this term I wish, nevertheless, to distance myself from Cummins's account of the 'unifying theme' of *Orsinian Tales* as 'fidelity' (1990a: 142). While fidelity certainly occurs several times in the tales, I do not see them as susceptible to any unitary interpretation at all.

13. My use of the terms 'History' and 'history' to refer, respectively, to momentous, public events and to more localized or private happenings is similar to Foucault's distinction between 'traditional history' and 'effective history' (1984: 87-90). Nevertheless, I believe that I place more emphasis on the role of individual subjects in H/historical narrative than Foucault does.

14. I find Ricoeur's use of the term 'men' objectionably sexist, but his theoretical point is persuasive and well-reasoned. Besides, it is difficult to know whether the original term was *les hommes*, men, or *les gens*, people.

15. The warning implicit in this 'history' constitutes a rather strange reworking of the injunction against feuding in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

16. A comparison with Fineman's essay 'The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction' (Veesser 1989: 49-76) is particularly pertinent here.

17. Several of the tales give detailed descriptions of place that reinforce Le Guin's assertion in 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be' that 'the Spirit of Place is a more benign one than the exclusive and aggressive Spirit of Race, the mysticism of blood that has cost so much blood' (1989: 84).

18. 'An die Musik' is set in 1938, just before World War II; 'The Lady of Moge' is set in 1640, during the civil struggle for succession known as the War of the Three Kings; 'Ile Forest' and 'Conversations at Night' are set in 1920, just after World War I.

19. This view can be discerned in various Romantic works, for example in Blake's 'London' (1972: 216) and in Act III of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, where a renovated society is made up of individuals whom Shelley describes as

... man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself ...

(1951: 111)

20. Several Romantic poets hoped for the establishment of a new social order with the overthrow of the monarchy in France; but they were disappointed when a new tyranny arose to take its place. Such sentiments can be discerned, for example, in Wordsworth's *Prelude Book Ten* (1954: 371-89); in Blake's *The French Revolution* (1972: 134-48) and *The First Book of Urizen* (1972: 222-37).

21. This has particularly striking (unintentional) resonances in the South African context, where the political meaning of language is explicit, as Alexander demonstrates in his essay,

*Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (1989).

22. These injunctions and lessons evidently participate in the Taoist philosophy of *wu-wei*, or non-action. Page defines *wu-wei* as follows:

*Wu-wei* is sometimes translated as non-selfishness. That is, the doing of things for entirely altruistic reasons. This is often a closer interpretation of what the *Tao Te Ching* means than the overly negative and totally passive sense of non-action.  
(1991: 8-9)

Several critics have commented on Le Guin's propensity to create protagonists in the model of Taoist sages who follow this approach. See, for example, Wood (Bloom 1986: 184) and Bain (Bloom 1986: 211-24). Both these critics see George Orr in *The Lathe of Heaven* as a Taoist sage.

23. Godwin's notion of 'perfectibility' as an essential aspect of History is expounded in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1798: 109-115).

24. In the light of the fact that most Histories are written by men and present a view of history as a succession of male achievements, I believe I am justified in using the masculine pronoun here.

25. Cummins refers to Pandora as one of 'six voices or roles' adopted by Le Guin to 'narrate' *Always Coming Home*: 'ethnologist, editor, translator, novelist, middle-aged housewife, and Pandora' (1990a: 188). I do not share Cummins's impulse to identify the narrative function in the text, as it seems to me that the many discourses in the novel are collected and arranged rather than narrated. Consequently, I prefer to subsume the functions she lists into the single role of editor.

26. I am using the term 'qualified utopia' to mean something similar to what Moylan means by his 'critical utopia'. He explains the differences between critical utopia and traditional utopia in terms of epistemological openness, which I see as a key feature of Le Guin's writing:

The apparently unified, illusionary, and representational text of the traditional utopia is broken open and presented in a manner which is, first of all, much more fragmented - narratives intertwining present and future, or past and present, single protagonists being divided into multiples, or into male and female versions of the same character.

(1986: 46)

At the same time, critical utopia 'hold[s] open the radical act of utopian imagination' (Moylan 1986: 50).

27. Mannheim states that utopia is always rooted in history and is, to that extent, always ideologically determined, in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936: 49-96). It is important to note, though, that many utopian works do not acknowledge their own conditions of possibility, and that the



self-consciousness of Pandora's reflections on 'What She is Doing' (1985a: 53, 147, 239) breaks with this tendency.

28. See, for example, Freud's essay on 'The Interpretation of Dreams' (Gay 1989: 129-42) and Jung's analysis of dreams in terms of verbal associations in 'On the Nature of Dreams' (1990: 381).

29. Various critics have explored the idea of the Tao in *The Lathe of Heaven*. See, for example, Wood (Bloom 1986: 200); Nudelman (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 257); Porter (Mullen and Suvin 1976: 273); Crow and Erlich (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 219).

30. Here the Alien understands the slippery and imprecise nature of meaning in language, together with the difficulty of communicating exactly what one intends in dialogue, much better than either Orr or Haber.

31. Feminists show varying degrees of anger about this division of labour. A sympathetic reading is found in Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), where the author attempts to explain conditions in men's family of origin that prepare them psychologically for a life orientated to public action. Klein, in *The Feminine Character* (1946), attempts a 'value-free' discussion of the matter; while Poovey (1984) sees it as an injustice to women.

32. See, for example, responses in speculative fabulation by Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Charnas in *Motherlines* (1978). Both these novels address the social relation of inequality between genders. Piercy creates an androgynous utopia where men and women are equal; Charnas imagines a separatist society where men are neither needed nor permitted.

33. This piece, like 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', was written shortly after the publication of *Always Coming Home* in 1985. I read the agendas of the three texts as overlapping to a great extent.

34. The technique of reversal that Le Guin uses here to achieve a defamiliarizing effect is so common in *Always Coming Home* (1985a) as to constitute a hallmark of that work.

35. For example, the narrator's comments on the unequal destinies of Shevek and Takver in *The Dispossessed* (1974: 160); and the different roles played by Ged and Tenar in *The Earthsea Trilogy* (1993a).

36. This seems plausible in the light of her statement, in an interview with McCaffery and Gregory, that she 'worked on the ideas and the story for twenty years, trying to get it right' (Cummins 1990a: 130).

37. In the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, Le Guin writes that the book was written in '1963-4, before the awakening of feminism from its thirty-year paralysis' (1993b: 135) from a perspective on women's concerns that she describes as 'early, "natural" (i.e. happily acculturated), unawakened, un-consciousness-raised ... self-confident, unexperimental, contentedly conventional' (1993b: 135). She also states in the same essay that 'Taoism got to me earlier than modern feminism did' (1993b: 136). It seems likely, then, that *Malafrena* predates Le Guin's development of a feminist sensitivity to gender issues.

38. Several texts in speculative fabulation reverse the gender inequality in contemporary society, in order to create a society where women rule and men are subservient. For example, Dodderidge's *The New Gulliver* (1979) is based on a sex-role reversal. The same device is used to examine the basis of sexism by Slonczewski in *Daughter of Elysium* (1993) and Charnas in *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines* (1989).
39. Coyote is a common creator/trickster figure in the mythology of Native Americans in the northwestern states of America (see, for example, Ramsey's collection, *Coyote Was Going There* (1977)). Le Guin has revised the myths to make Coyote a woman, because, as she put it in her interview with me, 'Why does the Trickster always have to be a man? Why does the Creator always have to be a man?' Coyote appears frequently in Le Guin's writing; for example, she is a key figure in 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight' (1987: 17-60); in the critical essays 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be' (1989: 80-100) and 'The Woman Without Answers' (1989: 127-29).
40. Wytenbroek mentions that 'there is a dialectical opposition set up between [Kesh and Condor societies]' (1987: 331). She goes on to note that 'Unlike most of Le Guin's works structured along dialectical principles, however, there is no synthesis of the two societies' (1987: 331). In support of Wytenbroek's argument, I would point to Stone Telling's identification with the Kesh on her return from Sai as an endorsement of her native society. Indeed, it is not difficult to reject such extremely unpleasant people as the Condor.
41. Other examples are Gaverall Rocannon in *Rocannon's World* (1966a); Rolery in *Planet of Exile* (1966b); Falk-Ramarren in *City of Illusions* (1967); Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969); Selver in *The Word for World is Forest* (1976); and Shevek in *The Dispossessed* (1974).
42. This is probably a reworking of the bloody hands that haunt Lady Macbeth after the murder of Duncan (*Macbeth* V., i).
43. I am indebted to Selinger (1988: 130) for drawing my attention to this word in Kesh vocabulary.
44. Baggesen quotes Delany as 'calling attention to the "subjunctivity" of SF as that genre dealing with "events that have not been"' (1987: 34). Le Guin's use of a complicated conditional tense ('might be going to have lived') reflects this 'subjunctive' mood.
45. The complementarity of linear and cyclical theories of time is the discovery that makes Shevek a great physicist in *The Dispossessed* (1974).
46. In this respect *Always Coming Home* is similar to Piercy's novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), where the outcome of the story - which future comes into being - depends on the character's actions in the narrative present and on the reader's response to the text.
47. In 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', Le Guin mentions Lévi-Strauss's work with admiration (1989: 91, 95).

48. Le Guin uses the distinction between waking and dream as a polyvalent metaphor for different forms of consciousness. The idea occurs powerfully in *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), and is also mentioned in 'Science Fiction and the Future' (1989: 142-43).

49. In this respect Le Guin's opinions are very similar to those expressed by Russ in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983). See, for example, Le Guin's 'A Left-Handed Commencement Address' (1989: 115-17) and 'Woman/Wilderness' (1989: 161-64).

50. In saying this, I may create the impression that 'the killer story' and 'the life story' are mutually exclusive narratives. On the contrary, I believe that the differences between them are those of degree, not kind; and that they are mutually interpenetrating. In this respect narrative parallels the drives towards Eros and Thanatos which, as Freud notes, are interwoven.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISEMPOWERMENT

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.  
(Psalm 118: 22)

The child irreparably wronged, whose human inheritance has been  
taken from her - so many children in our world, all over our world  
now - that child is our guide.  
(Le Guin 1993c: 25)

The complex noun 'disempowerment' can be read in several ways. It contains the root (*radix*) of Power (Foucauldian<sup>1</sup> or otherwise): disemPOWERment. The word's signifying force lies in the existence of power, which it evokes obliquely. According to Foucault, power is inescapable in post-modernity. The terrifying image of the Panopticon brilliantly highlights surveillance as a condition of modern life and shows it up as an exercise of power (Foucault 1975: 200 ff.). As an artist, Le Guin faces some of the same challenges as a theorist who perceives the pervasiveness of power and power-relations. Some states of affairs cannot be represented unambiguously without complicity in systems of profound and cruel inequity. On the other hand, can the author draw on the energy of an ethical imagination to step outside his or her empirical environment and, by challenging power-systems, undermine their force? Or are acts of writing intimately and inescapably interpellated with the discourse of power?

An important aspect of disempowerment is the question of who has power and who does not. There are several possibilities. The disempowered may be those who once had power, but had it taken away from them. Or they may have the potential for power, but it has been truncated. Or, more alarmingly for those in power, they may already have power, but their power has been suppressed or overlooked. 'Disempowerment' also connotes the process whereby one is divested of power, and the question is raised: have the disempowered lost their power, or did they never have it? And, in deconstructive fashion, 'disempowerment' evokes its opposite, the over-used term 'empowerment'. This raises the question of whether empowerment, power to do

something, is different from power over someone or something else, or whether they are two forms of the same quality. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged possesses both kinds of power. He has (personal) power, like the earthquake-taming mage Ogion,<sup>2</sup> to control wind and waves. As Archmage and supreme keeper of the Equilibrium in Earthsea, he is also the most publicly powerful man in his community. In this respect the text implies, conservatively, that Ged has a responsibility to use his wizardly powers in the service of the community. In other words, the private form of power, the 'power from within' that comes with individuation, serves its public, and sometimes coercive form, power over others.

As Trinh might argue, 'we' (who have power) all know who the disempowered are when 'we' see 'them'. In using (and foregrounding) the pronouns 'we' and 'they', I am also exhibiting the capacity of language to distance me from the groups I wish to reflect on. In so doing, I am aware of what Trinh says about the anthropological perspective:

A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subject of discussion, "them" is only admitted among "us," the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an "us," member, hence the dependency of "them" and its need to acquire good manners for the membership standing. The privilege to sit at table with "us," however, proves both uplifting and demeaning. It impels "them" to partake in the reduction of itself and the appropriation of its otherness by a detached "us" discourse.

(1989: 67)

I need, therefore, to be mindful of my own complicity in power-relations as I write about disempowerment. I am conscious that I am not I (single, unitary), but, as Trinh puts it, 'I/i': both 'the plural, non-unitary subject' and 'the personal race- and gender-specific subject' (1989: 9): disempowered in some respects, but strongly empowered<sup>3</sup> in others.

Another perspective on disempowerment appears in *Outsiders USA: Original Essays on 24 Outgroups in American Society* (1973). The writers use the term 'outsider' for those who are disempowered in and by the current dispensation. They define the 'object of their study'<sup>4</sup> as follows:

*...an outsider is a member of an "outgroup" which society relegates to a social status that is generally perceived as undesirable or that otherwise involves restrictions on the freedom to pursue reasonable life goals.*

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: xiii)

In these terms the outsider sounds like an ideal 'politically correct' cause to espouse, whether from a position of sensitivity to social injustice or with a view to deconstructing the norms that define outsiders in the first place. Smith, in his chapter on 'The Physically Deviant', identifies three approaches to outsiders:

When category 1 social theorists look at persons who are labeled "bad" by our society, the theorists see them as *intrinsically* deviant (not just *called* "bad" by our group) ... When category 1 theorists see "outsiders" as the *cause* of their own deviance (as overweight people are perceived to be the *cause* of their high food intake), then category 1 theorists "blame" the outsiders.

...

Category 2 kinds of social theorists see the deviants as "bad" in relation to some value held by a group (that is, some concept of the way things ought to be).

...

In category 2 social theories, "badness" and "abnormality" and "ugliness" are relative concepts, instead of something absolute and intrinsic to the deviant.

...

Category 3 social theorists look at deviating from the rest of society as something *good* in itself (unless it violates the deviant's *own* values, or hurts other people). Such harmless deviance - depending upon what kind it is - is considered "creative" or "nonconformist" or "being yourself."

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 120-22)

Smith's description of attitudes to outsiders, the people and groups<sup>5</sup> who are rejected by society, is a useful precursor to poststructuralist theorizing on the subject by Foucault and Derrida (for example). In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973) and *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (1977), Foucault displays an interest in previously neglected sections of society, such as hospital patients and prison inmates. As a historian of the representation of ideas, he focuses on the epistemes that underlie disempowerment. In *The Birth of the Clinic* he figures the patient as a venue for 'his' pathology and for a relation of interdependence with the doctor:

The patient is the rediscovered portrait of the disease; he is the disease itself ...  
 . Doctor and patient are caught up in an ever-greater proximity, bound together,  
 the doctor by an ever-more attentive, more insistent, more penetrating gaze, the  
 patient by all the silent, irreplaceable qualities that, in him, betray - that is, reveal  
 and conceal - the clearly ordered forms of the disease.

(1973: 15-16)

Foucault is, in Smith's terms, a category 2 theorist, who is interested in the way outsiders are perceived and labelled by self-appointed knowers and representatives of society such as doctors. He takes an anti-humanist view of the outsiders themselves, considered as individual subjects, in an entitled 'Questions on Geography':

... it's my hypothesis that the individual is not a pre-given identity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces.

(1980: 73-74)

Accordingly, he reads the histories of specific individuals for what they reveal of the pervasive workings of power in western society.

Foucault's and Derrida's thinking bears the impress of a postmodern epistemology. In this approach truth-claims are viewed with scepticism and knowledge is no longer the bedrock of human cognitive security. It is, instead, a product of relative and contextual conditions which are likely to be unstable, localized and inconsistent. Accordingly, Foucault and Derrida treat power and disempowerment, in which they are keenly interested, differently from Le Guin. Le Guin's strategy is personal and anecdotal. She prefers to foreground the disempowered as (imaginary) individuals. The 'meaning' of her tales is contained as much in their specificities as in the generalizable conditions of outsider status, which provide the implicit horizon of her critique.

In an interview with me, Le Guin explains her concern with local matters (as opposed to 'national' or 'universal') in writing *Blue Moon over Thurman Street*, a book of photographs and poems celebrating the street in Portland where she lives:

My street of thirty blocks covers such an incredible social gamut. It does go from the homeless in an industrial warehouse district, right up through most American social classes, to end up in a forest. And I think that's rather representative; it's a kind of story ...

It is, in some respects, a deliberate social statement: "Look at this street! This street is the street that covers most of America. You probably live somewhere along this street if you're an American" ...

We took [the book] to many publishers who were afraid of it. They would say, "This is of only local interest," and we would try to say we think it's of more than local interest, that you get to something universal by dwelling upon the local.

This is a fascinating example of Le Guin's representational techniques. Typically, in the texts I am examining, she aims at 'something universal by dwelling upon the local'. This strategy contrasts markedly with that of Foucault, who would be extremely suspicious of the category 'universal'. He would argue, I believe, that the micro-histories of disempowerment, while pointing to the pervasive existence of power, do not furnish grounds for speculation about anything as 'universal' as its inherent nature. Le Guin, by contrast, depicts localized instances of disempowerment as a means to scrutinize the wider ideologies and epistemic conditions that have produced particular inequities. My attitude towards postmodern theorizing here is similar to Allen's sceptical position in 'Women who Beget Women must Thwart Major Sophisms':

... unless a [postmodern] narrative recognizes women as individuals who inhabit distinctive histories, unless a narrative moves with a certain intimacy to tangible events, unless a narrative questions the privilege of its own discursive requirements, that narrative may make little difference for women's lives.

(1987: 320)

I believe that Le Guin's fondness for 'distinctive histories' and 'intimacy to tangible events' draws attention to specific, personal experiences of disempowerment in a way that implicitly questions and complements postmodern theory's suspicion of the particular.

The opposition between local and universal (or national) concerns mentioned by Le Guin is an example of the binary thinking that is the target of deconstructive theory and practice. Deconstruction views polar oppositions as value-laden since one term is usually construed as



superior. Its attacks on binarism often take the form of proving that the privileged term does not naturally take precedence over the less privileged one. In the famous example of the speech/writing opposition,<sup>6</sup> Derrida proves, by analysing the theories of linguists who privilege speech over writing, that writing is the prior condition. He uses rhetorical strategies, isolating the binary opposition and then carefully examining its function in the text, to make the point that the conceptual hierarchy implicit in the opposition is, ultimately, false. In this way, deconstructive practice often calls into question the mental paradigm which set up the opposition. In Smith's terms, Derrida is a 'category 3 theorist', who regards society as culpable for labelling the outsider 'defective' in the first place (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 122). As I shall show, Le Guin's strategies for displacing binary oppositions often resemble deconstruction.

As I have mentioned, Le Guin's approach to power and its derivatives - empowerment and disempowerment - often takes the form of representing particular individuals as instances of wider inequities. I read these devices as manifestations of a profound underlying interest in the conditions and ramifications of power and power-relations in contemporary society. Characteristically, though, Le Guin does not articulate a single or self-identical position on these matters. Rather, she uses the testimony of several voices to express divergent experiences of power. In this way she subverts the requirements of monological discourse<sup>7</sup> and insists on difference and *différance* within even her own texts. The effect is to refuse closure and foreground discontinuities, insisting on complex, localized readings of power, which resist integration into a single tale.

An example of Le Guin's multiple perspectives on power is the story of Ged's growing self-knowledge in *The Earthsea Trilogy*. On the level of heroic narrative, this is the process which fits him to assume power. But the narrative also signifies as part of a wider discursive network encompassing the social system. Le Guin recognizes in *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993c) that hero-stories<sup>8</sup> like Ged's participate in well-oiled conventions of literary power:

In our hero-tales of the Western world, heroism has been gendered: the hero is a man.

Women may be good and brave, but with rare exceptions (Spenser, Ariosto, Bunyan?) women are not heroes. They are sidekicks. Never the Lone Ranger, always Tonto. Women are seen in relation to heroes: as mother, wife,

seducer, beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden. Women won independence in the novel, but not in the hero-tale ...

Since it's about men, the hero-tale has concerned the establishment or validation of manhood. It has been the story of a quest, or a conquest, or a test, or a contest. It has involved conflict and sacrifice. Archetypal configurations of the hero-tale<sup>9</sup> are the hero himself, of course, and often the night sea journey, the wicked witch, the wounded king, the devouring mother, the wise old man, and so on. (These are Jungian archetypes; without devaluing Jung's immensely useful concept of the archetype as an essential mode of thought, we might be aware that the archetypes he identified are mindforms of the Western European psyche as perceived by a man.)

(1993c: 5-6)

Here Le Guin provides a second perspective on her own heroic narrative, one that leaves intact the underpinnings of *The Earthsea Trilogy* even while it reveals their imbrication in systems of power. She goes on to recall that her father's hero-stories gave her familiarity with these conventions (1993b: 6). I infer that in the early stages of Le Guin's creative development, the individual father, Alfred Kroeber, merged with the Father as inscribed in language and the unconscious (Lacan 1977b: 67, 199). Both the Father and her own father instilled in the young writer's psyche a sense of how the world, and she, ought to behave: with men in pride of place. But Le Guin has not entirely adhered to the precepts of F/fatherly wisdom. In the 1975 essay, 'American SF and the Other', for example, she aligns herself publicly with less powerful groups. She trenchantly defines 'the Other' as 'the being who is different from yourself' (1993b: 93) and goes on to criticize the lack of sympathy for this figure in contemporary American science fiction (1993b: 96). In a similar vein, Le Guin's fiction and poetry since 1980 have tended to focus on 'non-heroic' people and events.<sup>10</sup> This trend is particularly evident in the texts I examine in this chapter, namely *Tehanu*, *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (1991a) and the story, 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight' (1987).<sup>11</sup>

Because disempowerment is a pervasive theme in Le Guin's writing, and in keeping with the author's own practice, I have chosen to consider various figures as examples of particular kinds of disempowerment. The first figure is the wounded child who, Le Guin claims, is 'our guide' (1993c: 25). Other disempowered groups I examine in this chapter are women, especially older or menopausal women, unemployed men, the non-human world, people of colour, homosexuals and mentally retarded people. In each instance Le Guin displays compassion mixed

with an attitude I can only call curiosity about the mechanisms of disempowerment. As I shall show, these qualities take different forms in each situation.

In *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea*,<sup>12</sup> Le Guin uses deconstructive strategies to dislodge several binary oppositions and reveal how they underpin and empower cruelty to individuals. None of the novel's three protagonists is an 'insider': all are outcast for some reason. The most important protagonist, according to Le Guin (1993c: 19), is Therru, the 'child irreparably wronged' invoked in the epitaph to this chapter. I can only speculate what Therru and Myra (in 'Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight') may signify. Some of their resonances include an appeal for a deeper compassion towards suffering; a rejection of the ideology that says only a heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon man can lead; and an alternative mode of perception that is only available to the partially blinded. However one reads it, the image of the wounded child as a guide defies any attempt at comprehensive explanation and remains evocatively compelling. Therru is a helpless victim whose 'freedom to pursue reasonable life goals' (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: xiii) has been damaged by men's violence. She is disempowered on several counts: as a child, as someone who is 'physically deviant' (Smith, in Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 116) because of her fire-scars, and as a raped woman. This is the woman who is to become Archmage of Earthsea. This sounds ridiculously implausible, yet Le Guin makes exactly this outcome believable, even appropriate.

Therru's disempowerment is not only physical; it has legal dimensions as well. According to the Forum on the Rights of Children at the 1971 White House Conference on Youth constitution, children's rights are as follows:

1. The right to grow in a society which respects the dignity of life and is free of poverty, discrimination, and other forms of degradation.
2. The right to be born and to be healthy and wanted through childhood.
3. The right to grow up nurtured by affectionate parents.
4. The right to be a child during childhood, to have meaningful choices in the process of maturation and development, and to have a meaningful voice in the community.
5. The right to be educated to the limits of one's capability and through processes designed to elicit one's full potential.
6. The right to have social mechanisms to enforce the foregoing rights.

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 66)

Therru's rights have all been violated. The men who raped her and then pushed her into the fire obviously do not 'respect the dignity of life'. Le Guin calls her violation 'a bad thing' in the novel because it is a symptom of something amiss in society at large; as Keith-Spiegel notes, the well-being of children is an index of social health (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 31-32).<sup>13</sup> The violence inflicted on Therru has no identifiable cause, which is more horrifying because one of the perpetrators is her father, and her fear of him identifies him as the rapist. Evidently, she is neither wanted by her family nor nurtured by affectionate parents; and she will not grow up healthy after she has been irremediably scarred. Therru's capacity to respond spontaneously has nearly been destroyed, so that she has effectively lost her childhood, and regains it only in part under Tenar's care. The scars on her face and hands make her look more like an animal than a child (1993a: 630), but they point symptomatically to the destruction of her well-being. She has not been educated (1993a: 630) by her family, and after being wounded her chances of developing to the limit of her potential are minimal. Therru will need to earn a living, and has a gift for magic, but none of the local wizards or witches is willing to take her as an apprentice (1993a: 632). Her burned hand makes her unfit for any craft, except possibly weaving, but Tenar senses that repetitive manual work will not stimulate the child sufficiently (1993a: 578).

The cruellest aspect of Therru's disability is the derision of the community. Smith describes the reactions of college students to people who are 'physically deviant', 'whose anatomy makes them different from the rest of society' (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 117):

*... all the students in these classes (there were over a hundred persons altogether) expressed horror and disgust at the faces lacking noses or ears or being partly caved-in or otherwise deviating significantly from the American norm of "beauty" ... . The moral seems rather clear: if you want college students to accept you, be an Indian, be gay, or something - but for God's sake DON'T BE "UGLY"! You may get pity, perhaps (mixed with a lot of revulsion), but you will not be looked at as an acceptable human being.*

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 122-23)

Therru is the butt of this kind of contempt. People in the village call her names such as 'monster brat' (1993a: 496) and 'foul imp' (1993a: 586); boys throw stones at her in the road (1993a: 594); and some make the sign to avert evil when they see her (1993a: 630). Most people on

Gont view Therru as though they were 'category 1 theorists' in Smith's scheme of attitudes towards outsiders (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 120). They see the disfigured person as intrinsically bad because she is wounded (1993a: 630). Le Guin clearly shows that stigmatization by an ignorant and prejudiced society will ruin the child's life more surely than her physical wounds. Shunned by all, she will never find physical love, nor will she achieve a stable place in the community.

Using a familiar device from Kantian epistemology,<sup>14</sup> the disparity between appearance and reality, Tenar tries to comfort the child by explaining that she 'is' not her body:

'You are beautiful,' Tenar said in a different tone. 'Listen to me, Therru. Come here. You have scars, ugly scars, because an ugly, evil thing was done to you. People see the scars. But they see you, too, and you aren't the scars. You aren't ugly. You aren't evil. You are Therru, and beautiful. You are Therru who can work, and walk, and run, and dance, beautifully, in a red dress.'

(1993a: 624)

This noble-sounding formulation hints at a level of personal ontology that goes beyond the identification of patient and disease in Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973: 15-16). Later, though, Tenar knows she has lied (1993a: 625). Cartesian theories about a mind-body split, Christian ideas about an 'essential' self, and poststructuralist argumentation about the false dichotomy between beauty and ugliness, are all powerless to give Therru her rights as a child once she has been brutalized and ruined. I believe that this portrait of misery, a child's body in pain and a child's future destroyed, gives the lie to much theorizing which does not take into account bodily and psychological suffering. If, as Le Guin asserts in *Always Coming Home*, 'the image of the other's pain is the center of being human' (1985a: 478), then those who shrink from contact with an incurably scarred eight-year old child are not conspicuously human.

In another sense, Therru does have the parental love and nurturing that she is entitled to. Although physical mothering is past for her, Tenar decides to adopt the burned child, and Therru becomes the daughter 'chosen by her soul' (1993c: 19). In a small revolt against the cult of family values in America and Britain, *Tehanu* shows that an adoptive mother can care more effectively than the child's biological parents. Tenar's love accomplishes 'all that can be done

... a wonder' (1993a: 627). Although she cannot undo the wrong that has been done to Therru, Tenar turns it to healthy ends in her nicknames for the child: 'finchling, birdlet' (1993a: 525) and 'Little bird, little sparrow, little flame' (1993a: 580). This deconstructs and counteracts the prejudiced and pejorative names the villagers call Therru. It also suggests that names may be a product of the namer's psyche or ideology, rather than (as *The Earthsea Trilogy* claims) an embodiment of the bearer's essential nature.

*Tehanu* makes the extraordinary claim that Therru's power comes to her because of her disempowering disfigurement, not despite it. This idea not only deconstructs the beautiful/ugly (or healthy/scarred) opposition; it even transcends reversal, Le Guin's tactic in *Always Coming Home*, in addressing the plight of the disempowered. If it were not for the author's explicit repudiation of Christianity,<sup>15</sup> the similarities between Therru and Christ, as wounded spiritual leaders, would be striking. However, the novel's structures of signification, including an insistence on details of context, militate against any impulse towards turning the child into a legend. Instead, the reader is left with the unsettling possibility that Therru, an ordinary child, may transcend terrible violation and become a dragon's kin.

Therru and the dragon who is 'wildness seen not only as dangerous beauty but as dangerous anger' (1993c: 23) are linked by the element that has scarred the child: fire. Therru's body temperature is so hot that Tenar cannot tell when she is feverish (1993a: 521, 605). When Tenar speaks the dragon's name, the child emits heat like a dragon (1993a: 520). She has other strange qualities as well. With only one seeing eye, she sees/perceives differently from people with healthy vision. When Tenar brushes her hair on a dry morning, Therru, sensitive to fire's beauty and its danger, sees 'fires, all flying out' (1993a: 574) and laughs for the only time in the novel:

At that moment Tenar first asked herself how Therru 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. And Ogion's words, *They will fear her*,<sup>16</sup> returned to her; but she felt no fear of the child. Instead, she brushed her hair again, vigorously, so the sparks would fly, and once again heard the little husky

laugh of delight.

(1993a: 574)

Le Guin corroborates: 'What is this double vision, two things seen as one? What can the blinded eye teach the seeing eye?' (1993c: 21). Later she writes that Therru does see past appearances: 'Therru, blinded, sees with the eye of the spirit as well as the eye of the flesh' (1993c: 25). What she sees, what Tenar sees in her moment of double vision with the weaver's fan (1993: 557), is always dragons and wildness.

Therru's kinship with the dragon who calls her 'my child' (1993a: 689) proffers the revolutionary possibility of living outside binary oppositions, owned by no-one, since 'the dragons were, above all, wildness. What is *not owned*' (Le Guin 1993c: 22). In a feminist paradigm, this means living beyond the patriarchal oppression that awaits Therru, whose virginity has been taken by rape. As Tenar knows, she probably will never know a loving embrace in a society with conservative gender norms (1993a: 549). Magic, in *Tehanu*, has lost the moral calling it followed in the other Earthsea novels. It is no longer a power or an art; it does not serve the public good, the Equilibrium, alone. In Therru it is the emptiness that damage by fire has created in her being and that is the receptacle of power. She uses magic to call Kalessin, not intending to cleanse the population of Gont of evil forces, although that follows, but to rescue her (spiritual) 'mother and father' (1993a: 685). Here, as in 'Hernes', authentic family connections, which are generally relegated to women's domain of the 'merely' domestic, are privileged above wider social concerns.

A wounded child also takes the central role in the story, 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight' (1987: 17-60). Like Therru, Myra has lost an eye. Myra is not the victim of men's violence, but men's error: she is wounded and lost in the desert after an aeroplane crash. An animal she recognizes as a she-coyote finds and takes care of her. Of course, as Le Guin and her readers know, and Myra later finds out, this is Coyote, the trickster goddess who made the world and did not perfect her handiwork (Le Guin 1993c: 19-20). Coyote is a very different care-taker from Tenar. Without consideration for the child's injury and shock, she leads the child, at her

own pace, to her village (1987: 19). Then she abandons her to the 'people' who live there, the desert animals such as Chipmunk, Chickadee, Jay, Horse and Horned Toad Child. Throughout the story, a double perspective is used. The animals are, simultaneously, animals and people.<sup>17</sup> This approach subverts many traditional attitudes, including philosophical and well-meaning ones. It negates the view of animals as inanimate instruments for human use, while also avoiding a condescending anthropomorphism. Here, as in *Always Coming Home* (1985a: 420), Le Guin links animals' concerns with those of women, who are another disempowered group. Certainly, in our anthropocentric culture, animals have been disempowered, robbed of the power they once had. In this story they have a voice, but their otherness is never domesticated or assimilated, because of the perspective that insists that they are animals, not humans.

Among the denizens of the desert, Myra loses her privileged human position and becomes just another young animal. Jay fashions a replacement eye for her out of pine pitch, and she too acquires the narrator's double vision. Coyote explains that it is all a matter of perspective:

"I don't understand why you all look like people," she said.

"We are people."

"I mean, people like me, like humans."

"Resemblance is in the eye," Coyote said ... . "So, to me you're basically greyish yellow and run on four legs. To that lot -" she waved disdainfully at the warren of little houses next down the hill - "you hop around twitching your nose all the time. To Hawk, you're an egg, or maybe getting pinfeathers. See? It just depends on how you look at things ... ."

(1987: 35)

The eye, according to Coyote, makes the world in its own image, and can see only what resembles the perceiver. The Other cannot be seen as other, but will always be re-configured to look like the perceiver. I see Coyote's canny insight as an attack on twentieth-century epistemology, based on the mutual exclusivity of Self and Other. This ideology does not hold in the story, since Le Guin has found, and shows, a way to see from more than one viewpoint. Like Therru's, Myra's extraordinary powers of perception stem from a wound to her vision. The story implies that, in order to see as the Other sees, it is necessary to lose some degree of the vision of one's kind and to become detached from one's own (partial) viewpoint.



Myra is driven by a need to rejoin her own people, and this is seen as natural and appropriate. She visits the human settlements twice. Each time her double vision extends to the human community as well, and she sees them as inimical because she has adopted the animals' way of seeing:

"It's a ranch," the child said. "That's a fence. There's a lot of Herefords."  
The words tasted like iron, like salt in her mouth. The things she named wavered in her sight and faded, leaving nothing - a hole in the world, a burned place like a cigarette burn.

(1987: 46)

Here, as in *Always Coming Home*, and, as I have shown in Chapter One, in *The Word for World is Forest*, the way of life of most contemporary humans appears as unnatural, and it occupies a different reality continuum from that of animals. Le Guin has reversed the conventional binary opposition, which holds that the (white, male) human perspective and lifestyle are superior and those of other beings are inferior. In so doing she aligns herself with the environmentalist position that the non-human natural world has equal rights with humans. This is not a new opinion. Two striking instances are articulated by Roszak, one of Le Guin's contemporaries, and Capra, a metaphysicist she admires (1989: 89). In 1972, Roszak wrote that 'The science we call ecology is the nearest approach that objective consciousness makes to the sacramental vision of nature which underlies the symbol of Oneness' (1972: 400). Also, the General Systems Theory propounded by Capra in *The Turning Point* (1982) bridges the gulf between human and non-human by demonstrating that all natural phenomena participate in systems. Le Guin's unique contribution to the environmentalist cause lies in the voice she gives to non-human creatures and objects. Even despised things, like Coyote's turds, have rights and a voice (Le Guin 1987: 38). This kind of thinking also underpins a children's story by Le Guin, *Catwings* (1988a), where four 'outsider' kittens, born with wings and consequently deformed like Therru, search for an environment where they can belong.

I have already mentioned that *Tehanu* shatters the conventions of the hero-tale by presenting a narrative in which the main characters are all, in Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel's terms, outsiders. The main focalizer, Tenar, is the woman Ged helped, in *The Tombs of Atuan*, to a life devoted to death. Twenty-five years have elapsed (1993a: 656), and Tenar is forty-one: that is,

approaching menopause.<sup>18</sup> She describes herself as 'only an old woman' (1993a: 657), contradicting her years. Underlying Tenar's self-deprecation is the (male) assumption that a woman's usefulness and attractiveness is over by the time she has borne children. In a patriarchal economy, where woman's use-value and therefore her power are defined by her sexual viability, Tenar has lost all the power she once had. Nevertheless, she represents a disempowered group that Le Guin is particularly fond of: older women. In 'The Space Crone' she explains why she would choose an ordinary woman over sixty as an emissary from humanity to a hypothetical extra-terrestrial culture:

She has worked hard at small, unimportant jobs all her life ... . She was a virgin once, a long time ago, and then a sexually potent fertile female, and then went through menopause. She has given birth several times and faced death several times - the same times. She is facing the final birth/death a little more nearly and clearly every day now.

... She knows, though she won't admit it, that Dr. Kissinger has not gone and will never go where she has gone, that the scientists and the shamans have not done what she has done.

(1989: 6)

As I shall show, *Tehanu* articulates a similarly positive view of older women, which resembles theorizing on the subject by feminists such as Greer.<sup>19</sup>

In my third chapter I examined psychological reasons for male wizards to be celibate in Earthsea. Le Guin explains this state of affairs in *Earthsea Revisioned* by reference to the conventions of heroic narrative (1993c: 11). There is a gender discrepancy here because the author asserts, both in the essay (1993c: 15) and in *Tehanu* (1993a: 571-72), that witches are not required to be celibate. Nevertheless, in Tenar's life so far, magical power and domestic power have alternated. She appears first as the beloved five-year-old daughter of a mother who would rather lie than give up her child to the Dark Powers of the Tombs, even though her father asserts that she is worthless (1993a: 175). Later she becomes the virginal One Priestess of the Tombs. Her occult power over the Dark Powers depends so strongly upon celibacy that she may never come into contact with a man who is sexually potent (1993a: 529). After Ged has liberated her from the service of the Tombs, she becomes the student of the mage Ogion, who loves her but never touches her (1993a: 532). So far her development parallels that of Ged, who embraces

(wizardly) power at the expense of sexuality. When his magical power is spent, Ged returns to human relationships, saying:

It is time to be done with power. To drop the old toys, and go on. It is time that I went home. I would see Tenar. I would see Ogion, and speak with him before he dies ... . There is no kingdom like the forests. It is time I went there, went in silence, went alone. And maybe there I would learn at last what no act, or power can teach me, what I have never learned.

(1993a: 441)

In an equivalent move, Tenar leaves her studies with Ogion in search of what Remington calls 'touch',<sup>20</sup> a connection with the other, which for women means marriage and children. While insisting on the differences between Tenar's life and Ged's,<sup>21</sup> Le Guin has structured their lives along strangely similar lines. The distinction between a 'heroine' and a 'female hero', used by Le Guin (1993c: 9) and also by several other feminist literary critics,<sup>22</sup> may help to explain this anomaly. As the tale's 'heroine', Tenar is entitled (and possibly even expected) to mimic the development of its hero, Ged. But she may not attain greater wisdom or fulfilment than he does. Throughout *The Earthsea Trilogy*, Tenar functions as Ged's reflection, not as an empowered or autonomous person in her own right.

Once her years of re/productivity as a woman are over, Tenar reflects on her life in terms of the negation of different forms of power:

[Wizards] were men of power. It was only power that they dealt with. And what power had she now? What had she ever had? As a girl, a priestess, she had been a vessel: the power of the dark places had run through her, used her, left her empty, untouched. As a young woman she had been taught a powerful knowledge by a powerful man and had laid it aside, turned away from it, not touched it. As a woman she had chosen and had the powers of a woman, in their time, and the time was past; her wiving and mothering was done. There was nothing in her, no power, for anybody to recognize.

(1993a: 537)

The meditation begins with a truism; every reader of wizard-tales knows that '[Wizards are] men of power'. Le Guin's revisionist imagination, however, ensures that the full weight of 'men of power', men's power, is felt. Here, as later, the question of what differentiates men's power from women's is thoroughly investigated. Tenar, as a woman, does not have access to wizardly

power. She has been 'a vessel' for power, not contained it within herself as the wizards do. She renounces the power that comes with the (wizardly) knowledge that Ogion offers her. Her reflection ends with the awareness that she has lost even 'the powers of a woman', so that she is 'empty'. Later, in deconstructive fashion, Le Guin shows that emptiness is the precondition for being full - among other things, of power. This is a revolutionary insight into the psychology of empowerment and leadership.<sup>23</sup>

All Tenar's insights into power are contextualized and relativized in the gaze of the Other: since nobody can recognize her power, it does not exist. Greer, more angrily, also figures the middle-aged woman's disempowerment as a function of the male perspective on her: 'Even at menopause woman is to most medical writers nothing but a reproductive machine on stilts' (1991: 27). Later she speaks of the cessation of the reproductive function as an opportunity for self-empowerment:

... you do not continue living your life mainly through responses to the needs of those in your household and workplace ... . Your mind and heart, which have always been full of concern for others and interest in the pursuits of others, may now begin to develop spaces where your own creativity might begin to extend its range, feel its strength, make its contribution on a wider stage, a different stage. This *need not be a public stage*; the threshold where you stand may open upon a region of the mind, or of the soul.

(1991: 45-46, my italics)

Tenar comes to similar conclusions when she muses stoically that serving others' needs is simply 'Like all women, any woman, doing what women do' (1993a: 499). Her canny observation that she has been invisible in her activity bears out Greer's assertion that people do not see women over fifty (1991: 60). Tenar's choices all lead away from the 'public stage', towards a private domain of domesticity and relationship. As many feminist writers have commented,<sup>24</sup> social roles are distributed in such a way that public significance is men's domain, while women are relegated to private affairs. Le Guin, too, is aware of this opposition; in *Malafrena* (1979a) and *Always Coming Home* (1985a), she depicts the gender inequity that it produces.

The ideology that constructs the public domain as belonging to men and opposes it to the

private, where women belong, is eminently suitable for a deconstructive approach. If I (or Le Guin) were to take this approach, I might reasonably proceed to prove the dependence of the 'superior' term (man, public life) on the inferior one (woman, the private realm). This would be easy to illustrate, even by arguments from biology (the existence of a man presupposes the existence of a woman: his mother) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (hunger must be gratified before great public exploits can be achieved; the kitchen precedes the assembly-hall, or the battlefield). Reasoning in this way would destabilize the hierarchy by proving that the supposedly absolute value it assigns to the superior terms is grounded in an arbitrary, ideologically-coloured belief system.

In my view, *Tehanu* goes beyond a deconstructive critique of the masculinist system of binary oppositions. Although Le Guin presents Tenar in a deconstructive way, showing her crucial role in the life of her community, she goes on to portray 'women's concerns', such as the family and the home, as inherently valuable, not only important for others' well-being. A striking, and, to me, very attractive innovation in the representational register of *Tehanu*, compared with *The Earthsea Trilogy*, is the attention paid to domestic detail in the fourth book. Almost all the novel's opening references are to homely matters: the people in Goha's family; her skill in spinning; the extent of the farm; Goha's memories in the kitchen of her husband lighting the lamp. When Lark comes to call her for help with the 'bad thing', she is weeding her bean patch (1993a: 483-84). On first reading, this insistence on things that are often labelled concrete or trivial, in a genre that privileges supposedly larger deeds and concerns, strikes a discordant note. This is precisely Le Guin's point: when women's concerns are introduced into fiction, especially in an heroic tale, they do not seem to belong, because they have been excluded by powerful groups (such as the literary academy) for so long:

Certainly, if we discard the axiom *what's important is done by men*, with its corollary *what women do isn't important*, then we've knocked a hole in the hero-tale, and a good deal may leak out. We may have lost quest, contest, and conquest as the plot, sacrifice as the key, victory or destruction as the ending; and the archetypes may change. There may be old men who aren't wise, witches who aren't wicked, mothers who don't devour. There may be no public triumph of good over evil, for in this new world what's good or bad, important or unimportant, hasn't been decided yet, if ever ... History is no longer about great men. The important choices and decisions may be obscure ones, not recognized

or applauded by society.

(1993c: 13)

Although, to (patriarchal) society, Goha is only a middle-aged widow whose reproductive abilities have failed her, she discovers other capacities in herself. These are signalled by the dragon Kalessin's willingness to speak to her. In my view, Kalessin exceeds any attempt to identify it<sup>25</sup> with a single quality. Even Le Guin's description of it as 'wildness seen not only as dangerous beauty but as dangerous anger' (1993c: 23) does not seem to go far enough, since dragons are not only 'What is *not owned*' (1993c: 22), but also are not known and cannot be known. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Ged tells Tenar that a dragonlord is 'One whom the dragons will speak with' (1993a: 248). When Tenar looks into Kalessin's eye, which men are forbidden to do (1993b: 22), the dragon recognizes her enough to exchange names with her, making her 'one whom the dragons will speak with', a dragonlord despite her status as a woman. The gift suggests that the woman has dragon-like qualities. She, too, exceeds the roles that men have scripted for her.<sup>26</sup> Daly's eccentric prose uses lyrically appropriate terms for a similar vision of women's wildness:

The ultimate Guide of each Weaver/Journeyer [woman] is her Final Cause, her indwelling, unfolding Purpose. A woman is really "leading her own life" only when she is in harmony with her Final Cause ... .

Of course, there are obstacles and traps set by the rulers of snooldom [patriarchy], intended to distract and deafen each woman to the Call of her Final Cause, which is the Call of the Wild.

(1988: 44)

Daly theorizes what Tenar lives. The passing away of Tenar's fertility signals the end of obligatory service to others. With this, she gains the ability to transcend the 'obstacles and traps' of a patriarchal definition of herself and travel to the 'Wild', untamable region of her own dragonhood, which Therru's supernatural, visionary powers of sight enable her to see (1993a: 582).

I read *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (1991a) as another challenge to the view that only publicly prominent people are worth writing about. Proponents of this position would

probably not bother to represent the doings of a tiny village on the coast of Oregon at all.<sup>27</sup> They would argue, like the publishers who initially declined *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*, that 'local interest' is no interest at all. Significantly, most of the stories in *Searoad* focus, to some extent, on the strategies used by older women for finding spaces outside patriarchal demands. The story 'Hand, Cup, Shell' and the novella 'Hernes' pay particular attention to tracing these devices.

'Hand, Cup, Shell' focuses on the family of Dean Inman, a significantly named, famous educationalist who is to be the subject of an academic biography. Sue Shepard, the graduate student assigned to assist 'Professor Whozis' (1991a: 19) in compiling the biography, decides to interview the Dean's wife, Rita, about herself, instead of concentrating on her relationship with the great man. Rita's granddaughter Gret pin-points the story's central, metadiscursive target:

"All of us - the family, I mean - nobody will ever know any of us existed. Except for Grandaddy. He's the only real one."

... the hawk [Gret's mother] blinked and stooped to the prey: "Whatever do you mean, Gret? Reality is being a dean of the School of Education?"

"He was important. He has a biography. None of us will."

"Thank goodness," Gran said, getting up.

(1991a: 31)

Rita Inman's epigrammatic statement subverts the conventions of the hero-narrative by suggesting that some forms of existence may be even more valuable than a public life, immortalized in a biography. The story also offers an explicit gender politics. People who are considered important enough to have biographies, and the people who evaluate their importance, are all men. Their scale of values is wrong (and Gret is wrong, although the parodic intent behind her words is not); their premise is the phallocentric maxim that '*what women do isn't important*' (1993c: 13). In a sentence enacting the difference between official and private histories, Rita Inman, like Tenar, has found a space within herself that is untouched by others' perceptions and demands, and is inaccessible to the younger woman interviewing her:

Poor little whatsername, trapped in the works and dark machinations of that toughest survivor of the Middle Ages, the university, ground in the mills of assistantships, grants, competitions, examinations, dissertations, all set up to separate the men from the boys and both from the rest of the world, she wouldn't

have time for years yet to look up, to look out, to learn that there were such bare, airy places as the place where Rita Inman lived.

(1991a: 30)

The first part of the sentence uses a frenzied syntax to indict the male world of 'assistantships, grants, competitions, examinations, dissertations' as a crushing machine. It destroys individual freedom and prevents Sue from developing a wider vision. This is necessary to perceive the 'bare, airy places' where the older woman, who, like Tenar, no longer exists only for others, has found a psychological space that suits her.

Rita Inman's complex refusal of the patriarchal norms that define importance is echoed in the inversion of conventional sex-role stereotypes in the marriage of Mag and Phil Rilow. Mag, too, is a mature woman, accomplished in the public realm of her career and in the private domain. She is a successful academic, married to an unemployed drywaller who laughingly calls himself Phil the Failure (1991a: 26). Mag can live with her own success, but her husband's failure makes her uneasy even while she feels drawn to it 'because of the awful need strength has for weakness' (1991a: 33). She transfers her disappointment with him onto herself, echoing women's acclaimed 'fear of success'.<sup>28</sup> Phil (P)hilanders (1991a: 29), but underpinning his easy charm and serenity are disturbing emotions: dissatisfaction, contempt and a lack of inner responsiveness that makes Mag feel he is 'irresponsible' (1991a: 26). Their strained and difficult interaction cautions against simply reversing the poles of the sexual hierarchy and disempowering men so that they become dependent on women.

The critique of patriarchal values in 'Hand, Cup, Shell' extends to the lexical level, in the rather self-effacing allusion to a 'mother tongue' for women. This is explained in Le Guin's 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address' (1989: 147-160), which I examined in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, Le Guin's definition of the mother tongue is pertinent enough here to bear repeating:

It is primitive: inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, trivial, banal. It's repetitive, the same over and over, like the work called women's work; earthbound, housebound. It's vulgar, the vulgar tongue, common, common speech, colloquial, low, ordinary, plebeian, like the work ordinary people do, the lives common people live.



(1989: 149)

In 'Hand, Cup, Shell', Mag reflects on the difficulty of using the father tongue, which, Le Guin says, does not expect an answer (1989: 149):

... it took a certain effort to say *yes* just flatly, to refrain from qualifying it, softening it: *Yes, I think so; Yes, I guess so; Yes I thought I would ....* Unqualified *yes* had a gruff sound to it, full of testosterone.

(1991a: 16)

Later she finds it equally difficult to use the mother tongue with Gret (1991a: 27-28). Mag is in the unenviable position of lacking fluency in both discourses: the language of simple self-assertion is a strain, and so is the language of relationship. Her difficulty in expressing herself argues against a straightforward conflation of gender with behaviour in relationships. For her, as for many women who are trying to satisfy the conflicting demands of family members, language reveals disempowerment in relation to the O/others. Women need to interact with their family, but, as Mag knows, this entails making concessions, qualifying their wishes and self-definitions more often than they like. The pressure on Mag to qualify and explain her statements is symptomatic of the social pressure on women to compromise and distort their needs in order to meet the demands of others.

'Hernes' is an extended fictional examination of the conditions of women's lives, which form the major part of 'Hand, Cup, Shell'. The history of the Hernes is the H/history of Klatsand, as the dates on the two maps of the town attest. In this story, a disregarded sector of society - women - has become the index of the town's evolution, in contravention of the usual features of History writing, which focuses on the public deeds of men. For example, the (Hi)story of origins of Johannesburg in the last part of the nineteenth century is primarily a narrative of men's property ownership and business deals. It begins with 'The first owner of the farm Braamfontein ... Gert Bezuidenhout' (Chris van Rensburg 1986: 3). It then proceeds to recount the exchange of goods between men, including 'The first substantial quartz gold discovery ... made by the Struben brothers (1986: 5) and ends with a section on 'THE MEN WHO MADE JOHANNESBURG' (1986: 13-20). This supposedly authentic record bears out the

masculinist bias inherent in much historiography, which Le Guin subverts in *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand*.

Virginia Herne encapsulates the complexity of older women's psycho-social position. Her sense of an individual story, a history not a History, recapitulates the concerns of *Searoad*:

There's always the story, the official story, the one that is reported, the one that's in the archives, the history. Then there's the child of the story, born of the story, born out of wedlock, escaping from between the sealed lips, escaping from between the straining thighs, wriggling and pushing her way out, running away crying, crying out loud for freedom! freedom! until she's raped by the god and locked in the archives and turns into white-haired history; but not before her child is born, newborn.

(1991a: 187)

Virginia Herne has, if not a biography like Dean Inman, at least a chronology. She was born in 1929, has a degree from an Eastern university, is passionately fond of the Northwest coast of America, and writes. One of her books is called *Searoad*. She shares these biographical details with Ursula Le Guin, and I see her as a fictional aspect of Le Guin's psyche<sup>29</sup> that incorporates autobiographical elements.<sup>30</sup> As *Always Coming Home* (1985a) does, 'Hernes' describes a matrilineal line of succession. Le Guin's use of it in an apparently realistic text<sup>31</sup> implies that matrilineal descent may be a more valid way of locating women in a family history than tracing their male descendants. Virginia Herne describes her lineage in this way:

A strong woman whose strength is her solitude, a weak woman pierced by visionary raptures, those are my mothers. For a father no man, only semen. Sown, not fathered. Who is the child of the rapist and the raped?

(1991a: 154)

As the story progresses, and Virginia gives more attention to her own search for her roots, the tale of the Herne women emerges as the product of her preoccupation with the meaning and fruit of the past. Greer comments on older women's interest in their past:

The middle-aged woman's new consciousness of the finiteness of individual life, which involves an awareness of the limitations on what can be accomplished in a single life, is another of her guilty secrets.

(1991a: 293-94)

In answer to her curiosity about her own history, Virginia Herne re-writes, or, in Rich's phrase, re-visions,<sup>32</sup> the myth of Demeter and Persephone so that it becomes a story about mothers and mothering. The goddess Persephone becomes 'Sephy' to her mother; she bears a daughter and is scolded for failing to watch her adequately. In effect, 'Hernes' reconceptualizes the legendary tale, as *Tehanu* re-visions the parameters of the hero-tale, to incorporate women's domestic concerns.<sup>33</sup>

After Virginia's divorce and the death of her 'mothers', she returns to the myth again, to give meaning to her self-narrative. She draws strength from her foremothers' success in escaping, or transcending, the demands of patriarchy to reach an authentic self-definition. Like her, I want to examine their strategies for doing so. The first ancestor to speak, Fanny Crane Shawe Ozer, marries twice and, after the death of her second husband, becomes economically self-sufficient as postmistress of Klatsand and the owner of considerable property. Although she defines love as 'what I was born for', she notes that marriage, touted as the ultimate relationship, robs women of their opportunity for individuation and self-realization:

All the promises kept. And all the promises broken. In love you stake it all. All the wealth of the world, all your life's worth. And it isn't that you lose, that you're beggared, so much as that it melts away and melts away into this and that, day in day out wasted, work and talk, getting cross, getting tired, getting nowhere, coughing, nothing.

(1991a: 136)

Waiting for her daughter's wedding, she fears that Jane 'won't amount to anything, won't come to be who she is. What woman ever did? Not many' (1991a: 136). What Fanny calls 'coming to be what one is' may be what Greer calls 'turning into oneself', one of the benefits of women's ageing:

The woman of fifty has even more reason to long for that time [of thoughtfulness at the end of life]; after menopause, when she may be permitted to give up being someone's daughter, someone's lover, someone's wife and someone's mother, she may also be allowed to turn into herself.

(1991: 45)

Neither Le Guin in 'Hernes' nor Greer in *The Change* espouses a separatist position: they both present relationships with men as essential to women's growth. Virginia's foremothers all believe in love as a means of fulfilment. Jane, echoing her mother, thinks that 'I was born so that he might see me, he was born so that I might see him' (1991a: 134). Similarly, and tragically, Lily believes firmly that Dicky Hambleton proves his love by raping her twice (1991a: 148). Nevertheless, as I have shown in Chapter Three, relationship concerns and separation/individuation concerns, although related, are different. In 'Hernes' Le Guin shows, as do Greer and Chodorow, that women tend to over-emphasize relationship, the needs of the O/other, at the expense of their individuation needs. Virginia's husband hinders her own creativity, although initially she inverts the constraint: 'Her work would sap and drain the energy that must be his for his hard, his important work' (1991a: 158). But later she realizes that his need saps her energy and that she must seek individuation outside the marriage.

The choice of lexis in Virginia's 'need for oxygen' stresses the alliance between women and nature that is found in the writing of several gynocentric essentialists,<sup>34</sup> and is an important part of Le Guin's discourse:

"I'm not a tree. I tried to breathe nitrogen in and oxygen out, like trees do, I tried to be your elm tree, but I got the Dutch elm blight. I'm going to die if I go on trying to live here. I can't live on what you breathe out. I can't make your oxygen any more."

(1991a: 165)

As in 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight', natural phenomena such as the sea, the wind, the trees and the elk are all cherished and sentient parts of the landscape as perceived by women. In turn, the women cherish their relationship with these 'beings' without trying to domesticate them, or decode their language, as Johanna does in the grip of a logocentric and anthropomorphic obsession in 'Texts'. Water, especially, is feminine:<sup>35</sup> in a hauntingly ephemeral image, the sea makes 'foam women' and 'rain women' (1991a: 1, 126, 145), and Jane sees herself as a foam-bubble on the shore that cannot be caught (1991a: 131, 169). In her polemical essay 'Woman/Wilderness', Le Guin subverts the patriarchal association between women and nature to re-position women, not in Nature, but in wilderness:

Listen: they [women] do not say, "Nature is sacred." Because they distrust that word, Nature. Nature as not including humanity, Nature as what is not human, that Nature is a construct made by Man, not a real thing; just as most of what Man says and knows about woman is mere myth and construct. Where I live as woman is to men a wilderness. But to me it is home.

(1989: 162)

Finally all the Herne women find that they can fare better without men than with them. A bond with a man is, to an extent, inimical to a woman's freedom and fulfilment. But she always retains the capacity to escape, like the daughters in Virginia's re-visioning of the Persephone myth. Escape from patriarchal oppression is a common theme in feminist writing, where it is a prerequisite for self-definition.<sup>36</sup> The Herne women's self-sufficiency, success and empowerment in homes without men is a challenging vision in a world where the patriarchal assumption that a woman can find fulfilment only with (and through) a man is seldom questioned. In a similar vein to Le Guin but in stronger terms, Daly describes the fate of women who escape from men:

*Pure Lust* Names the high humor, hope, and cosmic accord/harmony of those women who choose to escape, to follow our hearts' deepest desire and bound out of the State of Bondage, Wanderlusting and Wonderlusting with the elements ... . Choosing to leave the dismembered state, [such a woman] casts her lot, life, with the trees and winds, the sands and the tides, the mountains and moors. She is Outcast, casting her Self outward, inward, breaking out of the casts/castes of phallocracy's fabrications/fictions ... .

(1984: 3)

The basis of Daly's 'elemental philosophy' is, as in 'Hernes', that women are inherently different from men and inhabit different spheres of existence. Further, Daly concludes, as Le Guin does, that women should break free of their imprisonment in patriarchal self-definitions and pursue their inner wildness in search of a more authentic self-understanding. The Herne women consistently escape definition, as Tenar does in *Tehanu*. They have found ways of transcending patriarchal views of themselves as 'someone's daughter, someone's lover, someone's wife and someone's mother' (Greer 1991: 45) and have become themselves. This involves re-imaging sexuality in terms that recognize the need for contact with the other, but subordinates it to the search for oneself in the other:

In the fulfilment of sexual desire I have found the other not the one I seek. I believed what all the books said; though my mothers did not say it, I believed it: The other is the foundation. But I built nothing on that foundation. A firm ground it may be, but a foreign one, the country of the other. I wandered in his kingdom, a tourist, sightseeing - a stranger, bewildered and amazed - a pilgrim, hopeful, worshipful, but never finding the way to the shrine, even when I read the signposts that said Love, Marriage, ...

Body's all the question. What could be more one's body than one's child shaped in one's womb, blood, flesh, being?

(Le Guin 1991a: 174-75)

Reflecting on her failed marriage, Virginia seeks a way to fulfil both her sexual/relationship and identity/individuation needs, and concludes that it is impossible.

Although my discussion so far may give the impression that Le Guin takes an exclusively feminist view of disempowerment, this is not the case. Male disempowerment is a major part of the fiction I am considering here. In *Tehanu*, the humorous consequence of Ged's loss of power is that he has regained the sexual desire he sacrificed in his apprenticeship on Roke. Le Guin has said that she initially entitled the book *Better Late than Never* because Tenar and Ged finally consummate the love relationship that began in *The Tombs of Atuan* (1993b: 250-51; 1993c: 15); indeed, Tenar also uses these words (1993a: 657). But although Tenar, Moss, I and, to a certain extent, Le Guin may find Ged's newly restored sexuality funny, the ex-Archmage does not. Ged has lost his magical powers in the conflict with Cob on Selidor, and the return of sexuality is the index of a crushing loss. In the portrayal of Ged, the retrenched wizard, Le Guin evokes male loss of power, which, in a society that demands career success from men, does not usually evoke sympathy:

But as for Ged, well, he has indeed lost his job. That's something we punish men for very cruelly. And when your job is being a hero, to lose it means you must indeed be weak and wicked.

(1993c: 14)

In certain respects Earthsea is a feudal, almost pre-monetary society, but it is still the product of capitalist America, where 'youthism' prevails (Greer 1991: 2-3) and a man who becomes unfit

for his career is despised. The scorn he must bear is worse if, like Ged, he is middle-aged, since employers want younger people whom they can train to become successors.<sup>37</sup> He is likely to face unemployment and social ridicule, which to a psyche that has been primed for achievement (Chodorow 1978: 106) is almost unbearable. I think many readers will find Ged's sorrow at the loss of his magical power, and his desire not to meet the supreme achiever, the youthful king Lebannen, self-indulgent at a first reading. Tenar does occasionally (1993a: 632-33); but mostly she understands that Ged has different ego-needs from her. He has found meaning in what he could achieve in the public eye as Archmage, a man whose actions resonated throughout entire kingdoms. In losing his position, he has lost the core of his identity.

Moss, the village witch who does not use words in a linear or logocentric way (1993a: 526), comments on Ged's disempowered state in terms of the difference between men's and women's power:

"A man's in his skin, see, like a nut in its shell ... . It's hard and strong, that shell, and it's all full of him. Full of grand man-meat, man-self. And that's all. That's all there is. It's all him and nothing else, inside."

Tenar pondered awhile and finally asked, "But if he's a wizard -"

"Then it's all his power, inside. His power's himself, see. That's how it is with him. And that's all. When his power goes, he's gone. Empty ... . Nothing."

"And a woman, then?"

"Oh, well, dearie, a woman's a different thing entirely. Who knows where a woman begins and ends? Listen, mistress, I have roots, I have roots deeper than this island ... . No one knows, no one knows, no one can say what I am, what a woman is, a woman of power, a woman's power, deeper than the roots of trees, deeper than the roots of islands, older than the Making, older than the moon."

(1993a: 528)

It is difficult to know what to make of Moss's rhapsodizing. Does Tenar agree with her? Is Le Guin endorsing Moss's essentialist views?<sup>38</sup> Are women 'a different thing entirely' from men? This question leads to a major debate in feminism over whether the differences between men and women are due to their intrinsic natures, or the different ways in which they are socialized.<sup>39</sup> I think Le Guin is taking a gynocentric essentialist position here. Several of the essays in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989) articulate a similar viewpoint. For example, the 1986 essay

'Woman/Wilderness' aligns woman with nature and both against man in a way that strikingly recalls both Daly's theorizing and Gearhart's essentialist utopia, *The Wanderground* (1975). In effect, in *Tehanu* Le Guin re-visions the man/woman opposition, so that woman (as a term) emerges as more important than man. This reversal incorporates deconstructive procedures, because it does not entail reverse sexism, and in that way it avoids the absolutism of misogyny. Instead, the valorization of women and women's concerns is grounded in a canny analysis of the ways in which they have been marginalized in contemporary society. By considering how Tenar has been disempowered, Le Guin re-empowers her, through a new perspective on her previously disregarded domestic activities. As the narrative of *Tehanu* progresses, Ged increasingly shares these concerns.

Whatever one thinks of Moss's theorizing about sexual difference, she is mistaken about Ged. She identifies the source of his malaise accurately as the loss of the power that was himself (1993a: 528); but Ged is not an empty shell. The ability he has left is the counterpart of Tenar's domestic skills. As Le Guin points out, a side-effect of living only with men is that the tasks that are usually relegated to women have to be done by the men themselves (1993c: 16). Tenar also wonders at this:

... he too got up, and brought his dish to the sink, and finished clearing the table. He washed the dishes while Tenar put the food away. And that interested her. She had been comparing him to Flint; but Flint had never washed a dish in his life. Women's work.

(1993a: 536)

The dent in Ged's self-esteem is so large that the only skill he will admit to is that he is 'useful with pitchforks' (1993a: 675) when he has used one to save Tenar's and Therru's lives. In fact, since retiring as Archmage, Ged has learned how to herd sheep, to attend to farm crops, and to live as a householder,<sup>40</sup> doing the tasks that Spark disdains as 'women's work' (1993a: 675). He does all this with the same dignity as Tenar, and Le Guin's point is clear: women's menial, disregarded, repetitive household tasks require skill and keep society functioning.

Ged's ability to assume a new social position, however uncomfortably, after the loss of his magical powers points to a quality in his psyche that exceeds/escapes the egoic<sup>41</sup> aspect that



has relied on achievement for gratification. Tenar also has this quality, which enables her to develop, after her value in the sexual economy has been depleted, into a woman dragons talk to. She speculates:

Is there something besides what you call power - that comes before it, maybe? Or something that power is just one way of using? Like this. Ogion said of you once that before you'd had any learning or training as a wizard at all, you were a mage. Mage-born, he said. So I imagined that, to have power, one must first have room for the power. An emptiness to fill. And the greater the emptiness the more power can fill it. But if the power never was got, or was taken away, or was given away - still that would be there.

(1993a: 660)

Tenar's (and Le Guin's) reflections are tantalizing in the context of, for example, Foucauldian evidence for the pervasiveness of power (Foucault 1984: 14, 18-20). In my earlier reflections, I speculated that the disempowered may be those who have lost their power. Le Guin takes a more radical approach here, suggesting that in Ged's case what is publicly seen as disempowerment is a route to another, private form of (em)power(ment) in a sexual relationship. She also implies, in a radical reconstruction of the idea of power, that there is a deeper level in the psyche that is untouched by the individual's location in a web of power-relationships. The idea of an 'emptiness' that precedes and underpins power draws together many threads, conflating the Derridean idea of absence as productive (1982a: 6) and Hindu and Taoist notions of something formless and unknown underlying the manifest universe.<sup>42</sup>

Tenar's insights into the psyche as a receptacle, echoing Kristeva,<sup>43</sup> also articulate a way to transcend power-relations with their inevitable disempowerment. The 'emptiness' she speaks of can expand to hold a revised self-concept, a new way of making meaning not based on actions in the external world, for Ged (and men in general) or service to others, for women. In this way both Tenar and Ged re-vision their own lack of power so that it becomes, like Therru's, the basis for a new ontology beyond the polarities of power/disempowerment.

Without the nameless quality that Tenar speaks of, a man who has lost his job will become, in Moss's analogy, an empty shell. Phil Rilow and Bob Tucket in *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* are such men. Le Guin satirizes Phil's enjoyment of his failure:

Phil the Failure, he called himself, with the charming honesty that concealed a hideous smugness that probably but not certainly concealed despair. What was certain was that nobody else in the world knew the depth of Phil's contempt for them, his absolute lack of admiration or sympathy for anything anybody did or was ... . Indeed he handled it well, cherished it, his dear failure, his great success at doing what he wanted to do and nothing else.

(1991a: 26)

This passage uses Phil's own tone of mock-seriousness to point out that his apparent disempowerment hides the self-assigned power to do 'what he wanted to do and nothing else' at others' expense. Phil denies the reality of ego-failure under the guise of transparent honesty. In the process, he has lost the authenticity of his relationships, which the story presents as ineluctably complex, but valuable. His interactions with Mag are all soured by 'hate and compassion' (1991a: 26), and he is too egocentric to interpret his daughter's views without reference to himself (1991a: 33). Similarly, Bob Tucket chooses idleness instead of working in the motel he and his wife have bought (1991a: 5). Rosemarie's suffering in trying to keep up with an overwhelming workload is a powerful indictment of many married men, who rely on but do not assign worth to their wives' unpaid, never-ending household work.

In *Searoad* Le Guin depicts more men than women in the grip of despair or solipsism after the loss of a career or external ego-validation. In psychoanalytic terms, this can be explained by reference to the different techniques of socialization for boys and girls in the family. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, men are socialized to expect affirmation from the realm of individual and public success, while women are raised to emphasize relationships with others (Chodorow 1978: 106, 110). It is more damaging for a man to lose his job than for a woman, because men typically invest more emotional energy in public success than women do. Ailie in 'Crosswords' never has a socially respectable job, and gives up her job, as Phil does, for personal reasons. But unlike him, she uses unemployment to resolve her relationships with her mother and daughter. Similarly, when Jane Shawe Herne in 'Hernes' is unemployed after her marriage to Lafayette Herne and her clerical job at the Exposition Hotel end simultaneously, she goes on to an illustrious public career that includes property speculation and six years as Mayor of Klatsand (1991a: 192). There are several ways of reading this complex situation. On the one hand, Le Guin says that women are always involved in several tasks (1993a: 502). They seem

to possess the 'emptiness' Tenar speaks of. This makes women multi-faceted, capable of adopting several subject-positions<sup>44</sup> and therefore suited to various careers. On the other hand, 'Hernes' demonstrates that 'not many' women become themselves (1991a: 136), because they are given to valorizing relationships rather than individuation. I contend that *Searoad* offers a complex depiction of gender and disempowerment, in which both sexes suffer, but in different ways.

A strongly disempowered group in white-dominated western society is made up of people who belong to other racial groups. The urge to suppress non-white societies seems to be stronger when the group in question originally inhabited the land now occupied by whites.<sup>45</sup> In America, this group is the Native Americans, who, until recently, were called 'American Indians' by whites. Beatrice Medicine describes the place of Native Americans in American society as follows:

The subordinate status of Indian groups in the larger society, plus their political manipulation by vested interest groups, has perpetrated the puppet status of most Indian groups. This is seen on all levels - municipal, state, and federal.  
(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 399)

Le Guin's writing appears to redress this inequity, not by representing Native American characters, but by incorporating features from Native American literatures. The figure of Coyote, for example, plays a major role in *Always Coming Home* and in 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight'. Coyote is drawn from Native American (and particularly Oregonian and Northern Californian) myth, where he is the male trickster who created the world and yet constantly violates social norms. Ramsey explains Coyote's multi-faceted nature:

... in such a shame society, Coyote's outrageous sexual antics, his thoroughgoing selfishness, his general irresponsibility in the stories allowed the "good citizens" of the tribe to affirm the system of norms and punishments that Coyote is forever comically running afoul of - at the same time that they could vicariously delight and find release in his irresponsible freedom.

(1977: xxxi)<sup>46</sup>

Le Guin has adapted Coyote to her own (feminist) purposes by making her a woman, and in so doing has generated an entirely new cosmogony,<sup>47</sup> but she retains much of Coyote's behaviour

as depicted in the Native American stories. In 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight' Coyote consults her own excrement about what to do next, as her male counterpart does in the Chinook story 'Coyote Invents the Fishing Rituals' (Ramsey 1977: 135). This embarrasses Myra, while emphasizing Coyote's difference from white, western civilization. It also makes a point similar to Pynchon's insistence in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1979) that the so-called 'waste' products of society have their own dignity. For Coyote, nothing is wasted: everything has value in the natural world she created.

Later in 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight', Chickadee, who is highly respected among Native American medicine women (Allen 1991: 3-5), suggests that Myra should consult 'Grandmother' about finding a home and community. Chickadee explains 'Grandmother's' identity:

"Things are woven together. So we call the weaver the Grandmother." She whistled four notes, looking up the smokehole. "After all," she added, "maybe all this place, the other places too, maybe they're all only one side of the weaving ..."

(1987: 50)

'Grandmother' turns out to be a supernatural spider who is weaving 'a rug or blanket of the hills and the black rain and the white rain, weaving in the lightning' (Le Guin 1987: 59). Allen describes the role of this being in Native American myth:

Thinking Woman ... is the Great Goddess of the Keres Indians ... . Usually referred to as Spider Woman or Grandmother Spider, she is ... a being "like a fairy" who is possessed of magical power ... . [S]he lived in the night sky and was somehow present in the vast, deep brilliance of the stars that shone in full dusty beauty over my rural New Mexican backyard. It was more that she was the night sky ... .

(1991: 27-28)

By using aspects of Native American literature in her writing, Le Guin gives voice to a disempowered culture and disseminates these features amongst a wider audience than they would otherwise have had, especially since most Native American tales are for oral performance only. But I find Le Guin's borrowing of these images ambivalent. It seems possible that she is speaking for indigenous peoples and literatures, rather than allowing them to speak for

themselves.

The issue of disempowerment on racial grounds raises the difficult question of people of colour in Le Guin's writing. Several significant characters in her fiction have dark skins: perhaps the most interesting is Ged, the Archmage, who comes from Gont. Le Guin describes a reader's response to Ged as follows:

... I colored all the good guys brown or black. Only the villains were white. I saw myself as luring white readers to identify with the hero, to get inside his skin and only then find it was a dark skin. I meant this as a strike against racial bigotry.

(1993c: 8)

She uses the same strategy in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, where only careful readers will note that Genly Ai, the Envoy of the Ekumen, is dark-skinned like the Gethenians (1969: 103). I find this method of representation intensely ambivalent. On the one hand, as she says, Le Guin is drawing on readers' expectations of heroes and main protagonists, who, conventionally, come from white culture. The reader's surprise discovery that the characters are dark-skinned then reflects subversively on precisely those expectations. On the other hand, people of colour appear culturally disembodied in her work; the metonymy of skin colour is divested of its signifying power in a network of colonial and post-colonial meanings. It is impossible to escape the suspicion that Le Guin is implicated in writing from a centre of white culture and assimilating racial Otherness in her fiction.<sup>48</sup>

So far I have given considerable attention to Le Guin's treatment of certain kinds of disempowerment, namely that meted out to wounded children, older women, unemployed men and racial Others. I now intend to mention her response to forms of disempowerment that play a less prominent part in her fiction. In a heterosexual world where getting ahead in the capitalist job market is important and depends on one's intelligence, homosexuals and the mentally retarded have few prospects for success. 'Quoits' in *Searoad* challenges the first of these prejudices: its protagonist, Shirley, is the butt of misunderstanding and aversion because she is a lesbian. On the death of her lover, Barbara, she does not have the right to grieve because socially-created language does not contain appropriate words for relationships:

There aren't any words that mean anything. For us. For any of us. We can't say who we are. Even men can't any more. Did the paper say she was survived by her ex-husband? What about the man she lived with before she met your father, what's his label? We don't have words for what we do! Wife, husband, lover, ex, post, step, it's all leftovers, words from some other civilization, nothing to do with us. Nothing means anything but the proper names ...

(1991a: 106)

Shirley's frustration exemplifies Le Guin's technique of using specific instances of disempowerment as a basis for critique of wider systems of inequity. The terms 'lover' and 'friend' are both inadequate for her relationship with Barbara (1991a: 106). But then, she notes, more conventional connections are also not described satisfactorily. In this passage Le Guin levels an incisive attack on the failure of linguistic categories to cater for the subtleties of personal interaction. And, obliquely, Shirley's views also call to mind the fact that there are probably more derogatory labels for homosexuals than for any other outsider group:

... [Don and Leslie] are male homosexuals (or in the traditional language of our society, they are "perverts," "mentally ill," "sick," "child molesters," "criminals," "effeminate," "sodomites," "fags," "queers," etc.)

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 270)

Le Guin makes an important distinction here between labels, which are ideologically coloured but do not convey the experience of relationship, and proper names. Shirley asserts that these are the only words that 'mean anything', perhaps because they foreground their own arbitrariness and thereby call attention to the uniqueness and complexity of identity.

Shirley in 'Quoits' is depicted as a woman of insight and conviction, not despite being a lesbian, but because of it. In a similar way, Bill Weisler, the mentally retarded potter in the story that bears his name, is a man of great integrity who does daily battle, unsung, with mental confusion so overwhelming that it can destroy his life. Despite his lack of articulation, he understands that much conversation between men is formulaic and nonsensical, consisting of 'ten or twelve things' (1991a: 61). Behind this familiar-sounding and carefully tuned satire I glimpse the author, Le Guin, asking the reader to acknowledge the Self in the Other, the usually despised village half-wit.

Outsider status may also be a function of numbers. 'Geezers' turns the familiar tables on an 'insider', the corporate (male) executive, Warren, who decides to take a weekend off from his demanding job and finds himself sharing Klatsand with a group of 'Sightseeing Seniors of Cedarwood'. Warren is 'only fifty-two' (1991a: 43), but to his mortification, wherever he goes he is mistaken for a Senior, in a predicament that is familiar to women over fifty who are simply seen as 'old' (Greer 1991: 46). Even worse, the Seniors are enjoying themselves more than he is, despite their position as inferior members of society because of their age. This tale of a 'Machoman' (Le Guin 1989: 116) who disempowers himself by refusing to join the Seniors because that would mean admitting that he is ageing, foregrounds Le Guin's delight in turning the tables on the executive who would, in almost any other context, be empowered.

'Sleepwalkers' reinforces the familiar point that disempowerment is a matter of perspective, by revealing the distortions and cruelty inherent in prejudices. In a rare moment of pessimism about human communications, Le Guin depicts a community in which all the characters misunderstand all the others because they are all unaware, like sleepwalkers. The story makes a metadiscursive point when the writer John Felburne finds the Shotos' maid, Ava, an unsuitable character for his fiction because

She talks in clichés. She *is* a cliché. Forty or so, middle-sized, heavy around the hips, pale, not very good complexion, blondish - half the white women in America look like that. Pressed out of a mold, made with a cookie cutter.  
(1991a: 89)

'Half the white women in America', though, have not killed their husbands. The older women in the story, Katherine McAn and Virginia Heme, who do not perceive women through the lens of sexual interest as Felburne does, sense that Ava's façade of ordinariness hides an extraordinary distress. Deb Shoto, the wife of the owner of Hannah's Hideaway, also appears to be an 'insider'. But she is tormented by inner 'demons' who are intent on destroying her marriage. I read these not as 'real' demons, but as metaphors for the devouring psychic and social forces that erode the well-being of married women, and are described so graphically in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

Having discussed various forms of disempowerment and Le Guin's careful and complex

response to it, I find myself faced with the inevitable problem that so many of the population are members of one or more 'Outgroups' (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973), that the margins threaten to engulf the centre as outsiders clearly outnumber insiders. The editors of *Outsiders USA* are aware of this dilemma, for immediately after defining the category 'outsider' they acknowledge:

According to this definition, every reader has already experienced outsider status and will, more than likely, experience it again. Chances are the reader is currently a member of at least one outsider social category.

(Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: xiii)

In a summarizing essay toward the end of the volume, Keith-Spiegel outlines the problem at the heart of what I would call 'outsider studies', and which forms the foundation for this chapter:

When all of the major outsider-status characteristics presented in detail [in the articles that make up the bulk of the book] are subtracted out, we are left with those people who meet the following eleven criteria:

1. Male
2. Between the ages of eighteen (or slightly higher) and sixty-five (or slightly lower)
3. "White" heritage
4. Educated (at least through high school)
5. Financially secure
6. Physically "normal"
7. Intellectually competent
8. Heterosexual (and preferably married with a family)
9. Not an alcohol or drug abuser
10. No prison record
11. No history of psychiatric hospitalization

You probably know a number of individuals who meet these criteria on all counts. But are they the "insiders"? We informally asked some such men if they felt that they represented those who "had it made" in our society, and few thought that they were. Most did not feel particularly powerful and indicated problems in their lives which were not dissimilar to dilemmas which plague many of our outsider groups.

(1973: 597)

This does not invalidate the project of the volume, which is to give a voice to the voiceless,<sup>49</sup> to examine and contest the processes by which they acquire outsider status.



A similar picture emerges in literary studies, where 'minority' literatures tend to outnumber 'canonized' literatures (written by, and for, people satisfying Keith-Spiegel's eleven criteria for insidership). With characteristic sensitivity to complexity, Le Guin builds this problem into her utterances about and to the disempowered. To me, *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* may be read as a group of stories testifying to the disempowerment of 'ordinary' (white, middle-class) people, whose lives are considered too unexciting to make for enthralling prose and who are forgotten by the media as a result. These individuals are, in the title of Russ's collection of postmodern interrogations of H/history, *Extra(Ordinary) People* (P... 1984). Thus, in 'Crosswords', a black waitress turns out to have psychic powers (1991a: 117-18); Jilly, in 'In and Out', is a middle-aged artist, whose creativity has been sparked by her mother's terminal cancer.

If everyone in society is, or will be, an outsider at one or more stages in her or his life, what can be said about disempowerment or the disempowered? Le Guin's view appears to be the same as that of Coyote in 'Buffalo Girls, Won't You Come Out Tonight': 'Resemblance [or belonging, or not-belonging] is in the eye' (1987: 35). No one is entirely an outsider to himself or herself.<sup>50</sup> One is made an outsider by people who perceive one to be so. Finally, Le Guin asserts that, insofar as everyone is disempowered, made Other and inferior, to that extent society is inhumane to its own members.

## NOTES

1. I am thinking here of the network of power that Foucault sees as closely intertwined with surveillance in *Discipline and Punish* (1984: 209).
2. Ogion is said to have 'spoken to the Mountain of Gont, calming it, and ... stilled the trembling precipices of the Overfell as one soothes a frightened beast' (1993a: 32).
3. This is especially true in South Africa, where History has lent force to privileging whites disproportionately, at devastating expense to the rest of the national population.
4. As Fabian puts it in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983), the categories of subject and object, where they are construed to mean researcher and researched, delineate a relationship between the agents involved rather than giving the conditions of possibility for 'scientific' objectivity (1983: 24-25).
5. In keeping with Le Guin's practice, I include non-human entities, such as animals and the environment, in my understanding of 'outsider' or 'disempowered' groups.
6. This construction is discussed and deconstructed in *Of Grammatology* (1976).
7. My use of the term 'monological' here follows Bakhtin's argument in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin writes that 'The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance' (1981: 296).
8. Several of Le Guin's other works may also be called 'hero stories'. For example, *Rocannon's World* (1966a) recounts how its (male) protagonist saves the planet Fomalhaut II from certain destruction by rebels; *City of Illusions* (1967) leads Falk-Ramarren to knowledge of his true self, and his enemies, in order that he may rescue his own planet; *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) creates a double hero in Ai and Estraven, who together bring about an advance in Gethenian culture; *The Dispossessed* (1974) presents Shevek unequivocally as a hero of spirit and learning.
9. The 'archetypal configurations of the hero-tale' cited by Le Guin are explored more fully by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968).
10. It is possible to argue, though, that the novella *Forgiveness Day* (1994c) contains traces of the 'hero-story', with public figures, the Ekumenical Envoy called Solly and a warrior called Teyeo, in the spotlight. In addition, the novella *A Woman's Liberation* (1995a) is a fictional autobiography of a Rakam, a 'heroic' woman revolutionary.
11. The story serves as the title piece for the collection, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (1987); it was the only new piece included (1987: 8).
12. *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* was published as a separate volume in 1992. Nevertheless, page references to it are all to *The Earthsea Quartet* (1993a), which comprises A

*Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, The Farthest Shore and Tehanu.*

13. Interestingly, *Tehanu* begins in the same way as *The Farthest Shore*: with a nameless sense of unease at the heart of the community (1993a: 305-7, 484-85). In reconceptualizing the moral and political universe of *Earthsea*, Le Guin has retained some aspects of the conventional hero-tale.

14. Körner writes that, for Kant,

The doctrine that the objects of experience are not things in themselves and that things in themselves are unknowable was an important corollary of the inquiry whose aim it was to establish which of the principles of objective experience are synthetic *a priori* ...

(1955: 92)

The idea of a discrepancy between appearance and reality was taken up as a central philosophical tenet by, for example, F.H. Bradley (1994: 103). In a similar vein, T.S. Eliot's work on Bradley assumes 'the contrast between meaning and reality' (1964: 49) and 'the distinction ... of object and representation' (1964: 57).

15. In 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves' Le Guin writes that the suggestion that 'Ged' was meant to recall 'God' 'shook me badly' (1993b: 47); and in the Introduction to *Planet of Exile* she writes that 'Taoism got to me earlier than modern feminism did' (1993b: 136).

16. This phrase is echoed in Le Guin's poem, 'His Daughter', which describes the daughter of the North American chief, Crazy Horse. The daughter 'died a child', losing her childhood as Therru does. The poem ends on an enigmatic ritual incantation:

What was her name, that child?  
Her father named her.  
He gave her this name:  
They Will Fear Her.

(1988a: 48)

17. This device is an integral part of *Always Coming Home*, where the Kesh refer to all kinds of natural phenomena, including inanimate ones such as wind and rocks, as people (1985a: 43-44).

18. In *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*, Greer states that very little is known about menopause: 'No one knows why ovulation ceases or even when it ceases ... . Nothing about menopause can be predicted' (1991: 5). But she does make a loose prediction: 'Generally speaking, we can assume the climacteric to begin at about age forty-five and end at about fifty-five' (1991: 26).

19. Greer's book, *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (1991), and Friedan's *The Fountain of Age* (1994) argue, as Le Guin does, that post-menopausal women are generally overlooked by society, but deserve a more appreciative evaluation.

20. The recurring importance of the imagery of touch in Le Guin's science fiction has been described carefully by Remington in his essay, 'The Other Side of Suffering: Touch as Theme and Metaphor in Le Guin's Science Fiction Novels' (Olander and Greenberg 1979: 153-177). Although *Tehanu* is not science fiction, I think Remington's description of touch in Le Guin's writing is pertinent:

In the word *love* lies the key to the enduring touch that binds human to human in Le Guin's vision, the reality for which physical contact is only a metaphor ...

The relationship of one's self with the other is a constant in the human condition, as found in Le Guin's work.

(Olander and Greenberg 1979: 165)

Nevertheless, Remington does not bring to his analysis of touch the awareness of gender that so insistently shapes *Tehanu*.

21. In 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves', Le Guin writes that 'Wizardry is artistry' (presumably in *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore*) but that 'The subject of *The Tombs of Atuan* is, if I had to put it in one word, sex' (1993b: 48, 50). Similarly, in *Earthsea Revisioned* she describes Tenar in terms that reinforce the division of social roles in current society: 'Tenar, a heroine, is not a free agent. She is trapped in her situation. And when the hero comes, she becomes complementary to him' (1993c: 6).

22. See, for example, Pratt's discussion of heroic women in *Archetypal Images in Women's Fiction* (1981); Pearson and Pope's study, *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (1981); and Cranny-Francis's discussion of female characters in *Feminist Fiction* (1990).

23. Here, as in the representation of emptiness in *The Tombs of Atuan*, Le Guin's perspective has affinities with a Buddhist reading of *sūnyatā* or emptiness. In *Seventy Stanzas*, for example, Nagarjuna asserts that the realization of the inherent emptiness of all phenomena is necessary for spiritual progress (Komito 1987: 174-77).

24. This dichotomy has been discussed in the previous chapter and is therefore not explored in depth here. See, for example, Poovey's discussion of gender roles in eighteenth-century England in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (1984); Klein's *The Feminine Character* (1946); and even Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978: 9).

25. I agree with Le Guin that dragons 'reject gender', so that it is impossible to tell 'if Kalessin, the Eldest, is male or female or both or something else' (1993c: 24).

26. Even in the Place of the Tombs of Atuan, the community of women is subservient to the Godking of Atuan (1993a: 195).

27. There is a body of literature focusing on small, 'ordinary' communities, underpinned by the idea that supposedly trivial affairs can be dramatic and worthy subjects for representation. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (1953) both make similar

points. In a theoretical vein, New Historicism refutes the notion that 'History' must be grand and great and prefers to concentrate on 'local knowledge', asserting that it, too, is historical (Pecora, in Veesser 1989: 264-65).

28. This has been documented by, for example, Friday in *My Mother My Self* (1987: 264-66).

29. I am indebted to Marleen S. Barr for this suggestion, which she made in conversation with me in January 1994.

30. In the essay 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves', Le Guin says that she found Earthsea 'In my subconscious' (1993b: 42), and that each character in her fiction is 'Part of myself' (1993b: 43). As Selinger notes (1988: 8), there is a deep psychic connection between the author and her characters.

31. I use this term advisedly, aware of Barr's classification of *Searoad* as 'feminist fabulation' and therefore not realistic (Barr 1994: 59). I take Barr's point, but I still think that *Searoad* presents itself, albeit only on the surface, as realistic.

32. In an essay on the status of women's writing in the literary canon, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', Rich defines re-vision as follows: 'Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' (1985: 2045).

33. Roberts argues that the myth of Demeter and Persephone underlies most, if not all, feminist science fiction (1993: 102-103). Although I believe this is a gross generalization, the myth certainly furnishes the foundation for 'Hernes'.

34. See, for example, King's article, 'Feminism and the Revolt of Nature' (1981); Daly's *Pure Lust* (1984); Gearhart's classic feminist utopia, *The Wanderground* (1975); and *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) by Griffin, a theorist Le Guin admires (Le Guin 1989: 161).

35. This association is not original. Joyce, for example, refers to the sea as 'our great sweet mother' (1986: 5). As Le Guin herself notes, the yin pole of the Taoist yin-yang dichotomy is associated with women and water (1989: 90).

36. To cite only two examples, the women characters in French's *The Women's Room* (1977) and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1973) all finally sever their relationships with men in order to pursue their own individuation needs.

37. Spivack's article, "'Only in dying, life": the Dynamics of Old Age in the Fiction of Ursula Le Guin', explores Le Guin's fictional representation of aged leaders, namely Wold, Odo and Ged in *The Farthest Shore*. Spivack's emphasis, however, diverges from mine in that she focuses on the empowerment of the aged, while I am more interested in their difficulties. As she says, 'The elderly can initiate change even when they are personally unable to change' (1984: 44).

38. In *Earthsea Revisioned* Le Guin comments that Moss 'is as essentialist as Allen Bloom' (1993c: 16), but she does not indicate whether she agrees with the witch.

39. This debate has widespread ramifications, with adherents of both sides equally vociferous in defending their points of view. Among those who would support 'nature' as the source of gender differences are Daly (1984, 1988), King (1981), Gearhart (1975) and Griffin (1978). Some of the supporters for a cultural explanation of differences between men and women, who attribute these to 'nurture', are Chodorow (1978), Singer (1989) and Heilbrun (1964).

40. It is interesting to note that Hindu philosophers recognize and revere the work of a householder as a necessary stage on the path to liberation of the soul. Radhakrishnan writes:

The four stages of *brahmacarya* or the period of training, *garhastya* or the period of work for the world as a householder, *vanaprasthya* or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social bonds, and *samnyasa* or the period of renunciation and expectant awaiting of freedom indicate that life is a pilgrimage to the eternal life through different stages.

(1980: 59)

I do not know if Le Guin is aware of this Hindu doctrine or not, but I think it would be unsafe to assume she is not.

41. I am using this term in the sense created by Wilber, who uses 'egoic' to describe a stage in human development. He defines egoic consciousness as follows:

The ego is a self-concept, or constellation of self-concepts, along with the images, phantasies, identifications, memories, sub-personalities, motivations, ideas and information related or bound to the separate self-concept.

(1980: 31)

42. See, for example, the *Mandukya Upanishad*, where the silence that follows the sound *aum* is said to be 'that which has no elements, which cannot be spoken of, into which the world is resolved, benign, non-dual' (Radhakrishnan 1969: 701); Nishitani's claim in *Religion and Nothingness* that 'Nihilism is seen then, as the field of the ecstatic transcendence of human existence, that is, the field on which human Existenz comes into being' (1982: 93); and Chapter I of the *Tao te Ching* which states that 'The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth' (Lao Tzu 1963: 57).

43. Kristeva writes that the *chora*, or origin of the semiotic discourse of unity with the (M)other, is best understood as a kind of psychic receptacle (1986: 127).

44. I have borrowed this term from Laclau and Mouffe, who use it to denote the range of roles and functions, often mutually conflicting, which an individual may adopt within society (1985: 11, 13).

45. This is seen with special clarity in the now defunct South African policy of forced removals, which was designed to disempower blacks by taking away their right to live on fertile

land of their own choosing, and dispatching them to far less favourable areas where they would have to build homes out of any scrap materials they could find.

46. I am grateful to Le Guin for bringing Ramsey's erudite collection of Native American literature from the Pacific Northwest to my attention. See also Lopez's collection, *Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping with his Daughter: Coyote Builds North America* (1977), a more general anthology of Coyote stories.

47. The creation stories in *Always Coming Home*, such as 'Big Man and Little Man' (1985a: 157-59) and the story told by Thorn in 'Time in the Valley' (1985a: 164-65), where a female coyote is seen to have created the world, draw upon female productivity rather than male law. As a result, they articulate an entirely different moral system from cosmogonies where a divine Father is seen as Creator.

48. In writing about this complex aspect of Le Guin's fiction, I have found myself regrettably trapped in vocabularies of polarized 'whiteness' and 'blackness' that do not fully allow for the nuances of signification in her work.

49. This is literally the case with at least two of the groups examined - the unborn foetus (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 3-37) and the mentally retarded (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel 1973: 132-56). One might argue that some members of other groups, such as the elderly and the physically disabled, cannot speak for themselves either.

50. Of course, in a psychoanalytical understanding, self-estrangement is a condition of existence.

## CHAPTER SIX

### (PROSE AND) POETRY

... there is no *invention* possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of the other, of variety: separate-people, thought-/people, whole populations issuing from the unconscious, and in each suddenly animated desert, the springing up of selves one didn't know - our women, our monsters, our jackals, our Arabs, our aliases, our frights.

(Cixous and Clément 1986: 84)

Increasingly I have felt that the act of writing is itself translating, or more like translating than it is like anything else. What is the other text, the original? I have no answer. I suppose it is the source, the deep sea where ideas swim, and one catches them in nets of words and swings them shining into the boat ... where in this metaphor they die and get canned and eaten in sandwiches.

(Le Guin 1989: 112)

To date, Le Guin has published eight volumes of poetry;<sup>1</sup> one of these, *Going Out with Peacocks*, is very recent, published in 1994. In addition, *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street* (1994a) is a hybrid text comprising photographs by Roger Dorband and handwritten poems by Le Guin. Also, *Always Coming Home* (1985a) includes four sections of poetry, attributed by the author to the Kesh poets. There is evidence, then, for seeing her as a serious poet and for devoting sustained critical attention to her poetry.

Surprisingly, Le Guin's poetry has attracted scarcely any interest from critics and readers. Most Le Guin critics ignore or neglect her poetry. Bloom, in the Introduction to a collection of essays on Le Guin, quotes two poems from 'Le Guin's rather neglected *Hard Words and Other Poems* (1981)' (1986: 4-5) and then proceeds to perpetuate the neglect by moving quickly on to what he evidently thinks is the real stuff - her fiction. And none of the essays included in the volume even mentions Le Guin's poetry. Bucknall mentions the publication of *Wild Angels* in her Chronology (1981: xiv); but, nevertheless, she sums up Le Guin's career by focusing on the



genre that interests her most:

Romantics are not welcome nowadays in mainstream literature. It is in fantasy and science fiction that such an unfashionable attitude can find a home, since these genres offer a great deal of liberty to the writer ... . Because of her love of personal freedom, Ursula K. Le Guin has chosen the genre that affords the greatest freedom to her mind, for which we can well be grateful.

(1981: 154)

While I respect Bucknall's commitment to Le Guin's writing, I cannot help thinking that, as a final statement in a book ambitiously titled *Ursula K. Le Guin*, this does not do justice either to her or to contemporary fiction. I reserve judgement on the sweeping statement that 'Romantics are not welcome nowadays in mainstream literature'. Moreover, I simply cannot agree that Le Guin has 'chosen' science fiction and fantasy above other genres. Even leaving aside the poetry, there is still a historical novel,<sup>2</sup> a screenplay,<sup>3</sup> and two collections of critical essays<sup>4</sup> by this so-called 'science fiction and fantasy writer' to be accounted for. To me, though, the greatest omission by Bucknall, and critics like her, remains their silence with regard to the author's poetry.

I have read only one essay on Le Guin's poems, Murphy's 'The Left Hand of Fabulation: The Poetry of Ursula K. LeGuin [sic]'. Murphy focuses on some of the same images as I do, such as the hinge or gap (Murphy and Hyles 1989: 128). His agenda, however, is radically different from mine. He aims to slot the poetry into 'three very distinctive types: high fantasy, low fantasy, and revisionist mythopoeia' (Murphy and Hyles 1989: 124). Murphy's taxonomic impulse, I believe, articulates a wish to compartmentalize the poems and thereby assert the critic's control of the material. As I shall explain, this desire is diametrically opposed to my own project of exploring subversive and epistemologically open-ended aspects of the poetry.

Le Guin attempts to explain the critical marginalization of her poetry in her 1983 essay, 'Reciprocity of Prose and Poetry' (1989: 104-14):

... I am interested [in the relationship between prose and poetry] because, although I wrote and published poetry first, my reputation was made as a prose writer, and I find my poetry quite often dismissed on the sole ground that it was written by "a novelist" and so cannot be taken seriously.

My aim in this chapter, which takes its title from the essay quoted above, is to investigate and explore Le Guin's poetry. I am puzzled at the sustained failure amongst Le Guin critics to pay attention to her poems, because I do not think they merit neglect; on the contrary, I believe they are worth, at least, the same praise as her prose has received. To a certain extent, then, I intend to offer a corrective to what I see as critical 'blindness'.<sup>5</sup>

The main impulse of this chapter, though, is not to rehabilitate Le Guin's poetry for the critical industry. It is, rather, to abstract the dominant themes from the poems and examine the ways in which these operate in the author's meaning-making enterprise. Selecting dominant themes is, of course, dangerous, because my choices inevitably reveal my own reading preferences, and what I consider important and interesting might not strike another reader as even remotely significant. Some of these are an interest in transitional or borderline states, imaged as the gap, the hinge, or the centre; a growing engagement with feminist issues in several different manifestations; family dynamics of various kinds; and Le Guin's response to the non-human or natural world. In accordance with my project, I have focused on the contribution of Le Guin's poetry to her oeuvre. In tracing the poetic articulation of recurring themes, I have made some connections with the novels, in cases where similar themes are expressed. But there are several features of Le Guin's poetry that do not appear in her prose, and I have interrogated and explored some of these differences.

My chapter does not offer a reading of Le Guin's poems; indeed, the desire for a comprehensive, incontrovertible or final interpretation runs counter to my approach. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Le Guin's writing resists and defies any attempt at a final interpretation, and often raises as many questions as it answers. I find that this lack of resolution, of semantic stability, is as toughly present in the poetry as it is in her prose works. In my explorations of the poetry, I have taken this premise as a starting point, a critical 'home' to which, like many of Le Guin's wanderers, I return again and again, to find it different each time.<sup>6</sup>

The danger of embracing critical openness and eschewing interpretation is, however, that one does not say anything about the text or about meaning at all. This is not what I aim to do. My chapter presents something of a 'carrier bag' of diverse responses to Le Guin's poems. But as the author herself has said in 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', fiction is a kind of carrier bag too:

... a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story.

(1989: 170)

In my opinion, Le Guin's comments on the portmanteau nature of fiction apply equally to her poetry, and to (my own) critical writing on them both. I contend that the unstable nature of meaning in Le Guin's poetry requires an appropriate mode of reading. Reading in this way involves a non-linear, 'sideways' process of association like the direction the soul is said to prefer in 'Back then', in *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*:

Back then  
any path was here  
went sideways  
edging along the hill between  
trees between creeks.  
Most likely  
wasn't any path here.

For deer  
deertrails.  
To dewberries  
no trails.  
Souls take  
Their own ways  
sideways.

(1994a: 27)

This important idea is reiterated later in the book, when Le Guin writes, accompanying a beautiful photograph of a quiet track beside a stream in Macleay Park (1994a: 125),

Even now

any path up here  
goes sideways,  
goes away.

(1994a: 90)

The concluding poem in the volume, facing a photograph of two people on toboggans at the snow-covered intersection of two streets, also reads: 'Souls take their own ways / sideways' (1994a: 112). The enigmatic and metatextual story, 'The Black Beetle Soul' in *Always Coming Home*, offers a prose version of this aphorism:

It is hard to know a soul; it is the knower knowing knowing. Images are knowledge of the soul. Words are images of images. The deepest of the souls has this image: it smells of the underground, and is like a beetle, a mole, or a dark worm ... . There is no way to know this soul. It is the inmost. A person dies to it.

(1985a: 309-10)

I believe that Le Guin's poetry asks to be read 'sideways' because its meaning is made in an interim sense, by using strategies of deferral and displacement, not by appealing to a positivist theory of signification that would have meaning as a definable referent of words.

An important issue in reading Le Guin's poetry is the question of her allegiance to feminism, and whether she can or should be described as a feminist poet. Matters are complicated by a lack of agreement among critics about what constitutes feminist poetry. Montefiore summarizes a radical feminist poetic, taking women's experience as its central term, as follows:

Poetry is, primarily, the stuff of experience rendered into speech; a woman's poems are the authentic speech of her life and being. In reading or listening to a woman's poem, we share the poet's experience, which is the experience of suffering and resistance common to all women, and we enter into her mind. Women's poetry is a huge resource of both female and feminist meaning, and it is crucial that we identify a tradition of specifically female poetry, not in order to "place" particular poems, but so as to understand female experiences (including sexual oppression), and woman's awareness and criticism of those experiences, as the intellectual and emotional context of the poetry we value.

(1994: 3)

She then goes on to deconstruct this poetic on the grounds that the category of experience, on which it is founded, is too unreliable to sustain the theory. Wisely, in view of the plurality of feminist positions, she refrains from formulating an alternative definition. Nevertheless, in her analysis of flower imagery in women's poetry (1994: 16-20), she presupposes a criterion of feminist allegiance which allows her to state that Lucy Boston's 'Hybrid Perpetual' is not a feminist poem, while Alison Fell's 'Girl's gifts' is 'however unobtrusively, feminist' (1994: 18).

Other critics are even less helpful than Montefiore, because they prefer to use the terms 'woman poet' and 'women's poetry' and to avoid the term 'feminist' entirely. Juhasz sidesteps the question of what qualities or strategies might be found in feminist poetry by focusing on the difficult 'social and psychological situation' of 'a woman poet' (1976: 1). This is probably true, but it does not say much about the poetry, because it falls into the trap of over-emphasizing the poet's experience, which leads Montefiore to reject a radical feminist poetic. Yorke, too, opens her study, which is shaped by poststructuralist critical theory, by appealing to the category of experience: 'Women poets today often write poetry that is rooted in the material realities of women's lives' (1991: 1). She goes on, though, to identify 're-vision' as the central aspect of (presumably feminist) women's poetry:

The re-visionary task of reminiscence and retrieval also involves *re-inscription*, a process in which the old narratives, stories, scripts, mythologies become transvalued, re-presented in different terms.

(1991: 1)

In trying to gauge the extent to which Le Guin's poetry may be said to be feminist, I have drawn on a sense of feminist poetry which has affinities with Yorke's views, and with Montefiore's (unarticulated) agenda. It also includes more 'thematic' features such as protest against gender inequality.

In some respects, Le Guin's poetry shows strikingly feminist sympathies. She vigorously re-writes (western) patriarchal myths from a feminist perspective in poems such as 'The Maenads' (1988a: 33), 'Apples' (1988a: 34-35) and 'To Saint George' (1988a: 36). She uses

satirical poetry to deconstruct conventional (fictional) views of sex and romance in, for example, 'A Semi-Centenary Celebration' (1981: 25-26) and 'School' (1981: 22). She shows appreciation for traditional women's concerns, such as the domestic realm, in several of the poems in *Blue Moon over Thurman Street*. Finally, she shows a finely-tuned sensitivity to natural phenomena which, she asserts, are a source of empowerment for women who have been relegated by patriarchal epistemology to an inferior position, along with nature. I will return later to the paradox inherent in this state of affairs. At times Le Guin's response to natural phenomena approaches an intense, mystical identification with nature, such as Griffin vividly expresses:

*For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature ... because I know I am made from this earth, as my mother's hands were made from this earth, as her dreams came from this earth and all that I know, I know in this earth ...*

(1984: 226-27)

Despite strong feminist tendencies, Le Guin is not an exclusively feminist poet. A crucial and recurring image, which I do not see as participating in a feminist agenda, is that of the gap or centre. This connotes the (productivity of the) void, liminality or borderline states. Equally, the representation of the citizens of Portland in *Blue Moon over Thurman Street* often embodies an impulse towards an almost sociological realism, together with a note of protest, which is not always gendered.

In saying that Le Guin does not only write feminist poetry, I am not implying that she is not a feminist. In her interview with me, she asserts precisely the contrary:

*... I am, and basically always have been, although originally not effectively but at least by intention, a feminist; and always will be. I can't imagine being anything else.*

'[W]riting is woman's,' Cixous and Clément write provocatively; they go on to say, 'That is not a provocation, it means that woman admits there is an other' (1986: 85). In my view, even where Le Guin is not writing directly about the other, the presence of the other is always an unspoken

correlate to her poetry (and prose). In Le Guin's first published volume of poetry, *Wild Angels*, she describes the other in gendered Jungian terms as 'The Darkness':

He is the other,  
smiling from friends' eyes,  
prince of the empty houses  
and the lost domains behind me  
and the last domains before me.

He is the brother  
and the prince and stranger  
coming from far  
to meet me; but we have not met.

And so I fear the darkness like a child.

(1975a: 25)

This poem was published seven years after *A Wizard of Earthsea*, in which the wizard named Ged fears, and is destined to meet, the 'clot of black shadow' that bears his name (1993a: 64). Although the poem has a less heroic tone than the novel, it articulates the same need to encounter and embrace otherness. In this chapter I find in Le Guin's poetry the 'abundance of the other, of variety' that Cixous and Clément identify as necessary for invention (1986: 84).

A woman poet, writes Montefiore, has to grapple with the otherness of a poetic tradition which, by definition, does not include her:

Women have a paradoxical relationship to tradition. As readers and writers, we belong to it, but as women we are excluded. The body of work which constitutes the canon of English literature as taught in schools and universities, is nearly all written by and for men, displays masculine preoccupations, and usually either ignores women or presents us as stereotypes which usually invoke variants of the familiar angel/whore dichotomy.

(1994: 26)

Montefiore's observations can be applied to Le Guin's poetry, with interesting results. *Hard Words and Other Poems* opens with a section entitled 'Wordhoard', in which the poet tries to work out her relation to a language that is always already inhabited and inscribed by tradition. The tone of these poems is often strained, but in the last two poems, the speaker reaches a laconic

acceptance of the inherent duplicity of language. In 'More Useful Truths' she writes:

Words are to lie with  
believe me  
believe me

(1981: 12)

In a similar vein, she echoes hundreds of (male) poets before her when she invokes a creative muse/deity in 'The Writer to the Dancer':

Shifty Lord let me be honest  
Let me be honest shifty Lord

Let me go sideways sideways  
Let me go sideways shifty Lord  
There is doors Lord doors  
opening sideways

(1981: 13)

This is far, indeed, from Milton's invocation, 'Sing Heav'nly Muse' at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* (1980: 159); or from Wordsworth's appeal to 'Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!' (1954: 215). According to the convention of epic/heroic poetry, the earlier poets do not express any doubt about the supernatural powers they are invoking, nor that their influence will promote their efforts to write better, clearer, even morally sounder poetry. The woman poet Ursula Le Guin, writing in the late twentieth century, has no such assurances. The god (with a small 'g') whom she invokes is probably Śiva, 'the dancer' god with a double nature as destroyer and transformer (Stoddart 1993: 113). He is unreliable, and certainly will not straighten her path. The poem does not present linear meaning-making as desirable, though; it presents a 'sideways' path of poetry as opening onto more creative possibilities. In accordance with its own signifying practice, it asks to be read 'sideways'.

Le Guin's debt to a poetic tradition that includes her as a reader, but not as a writer, is evident in her use of symbols from her Modernist forebears: Eliot and Yeats. Like Eliot, Le Guin writes of a centre at the heart of a turning world. Her centre is not stillness, as Eliot has it in 'Ash Wednesday' (1974: 93-105), but dancing. This potent image draws on Eliot's vision of the centre as simultaneously still and constantly in motion. It also owes much to the dance of



Śiva, the Hindu god who is both destroyer and transformer (and who is pictured on the cover of the Harper edition of *Hard Words and Other Poems*):

The dance of Shiva expresses at once the production, conservation, and destruction of the world, considered as phases of the permanent activity of God. Shiva is the "Lord of the Dance" (*Natarâjâ*). He himself revealed the principles of the sacred dance to the sage Bharatamuni ... .

(Stoddart 1993: 113)

The dance betokens patterns within instability, the celebration of change and process as opposed to the finished product or achieved state. Often Le Guin describes the interface between human and cosmic concerns as a dance. In 'Middle' (1981: 23), 'Carmagnole of the Thirtieth of June' (1981: 20-21) and 'The Dancing at Tillai' (1981: 29-30), dancing provides relief and escape from oppressive or frightening circumstances. 'Middle' again echoes Eliot's description, in *Four Quartets*, of the destruction wrought on the soul by a soulless money economy (1974: 200). Le Guin claims that dancing is an imperative remedy for 'the silly sniveling soul' which has been reduced to seeing everything in terms of exchange:

When the pure act turns to drygoods  
and the endless yearning  
to an earned sum,  
when payday comes:

the silly sniveling soul  
had better run  
stark naked to the woods  
and dance to the beating drums.

Turning, turning,  
call the dance out, master,  
call the silly soul.

Curtsey to your partner,  
do-si-do.  
Call out the comets, sister,  
and dance the Great Year whole.

The only act that is its end  
is the stars' burning.  
Swing your partner round and round,  
turning, turning.

(1981: 23)

This poem leads the bankrupted soul through the dance from mundane concerns about 'payday' to the cosmic movement of the stars. At the same time it insists, as Eliot does, that pattern and process, the dance, are at the 'middle' of existence. It also invokes Yeats's description, in 'Byzantium', of the unchanging stars above the 'fury and the mire of human veins' and the bodiless dance of creativity that can cheat the horrors of mutability (1933: 280-81). Perhaps the strongest echo of Yeats is in the idea of cyclical motion, both in the stars and in the human dance, which recalls Yeats's description of the 'gyres' of human H/history in *A Vision* (1962: 68-79).

Le Guin does not simply borrow the images of the centre, the dance and the cycles of existence from Eliot and Yeats. She transforms them, by using them in contexts of her own making, into images that mean something entirely different from what they connote in the poetry of her literary forebears. For example, where Yeats uses the image of the gyres to explain the course of History to himself, Le Guin draws on cycles as a pattern for cosmic change and return.

Two particularly productive themes, drawn from the poetic tradition, are the gap or centre, and the dance. The many-faceted image of the centre is a prolific metaphor for the refusal to use pre-established categories of good/evil (or man/woman, mind/body, human/animal, life/non-life). In a complex exploration of identity as ineluctably plural and unstable, 'Amazed', the centre is a mysterious place that is also a space within the psyche, but it cannot be located:

The center is not where the center is  
but where I will be when I follow  
the lines of stones that wind about a center  
that is not there

but there.

The lines of stones lead inward, bringing  
the follower to the beginning  
where all I knew

is new.

Stone is stone and more than stone;  
The center opens like an eyelid opening.  
Each rose a maze: the hollow hills:

I am not I  
but eye.

(1981: 75)

The centre is always either plenitude or void - which are only different names for the same experience seen in different ways. This empty-yet-full space does not make sense if seen in the light of western thinking. I see the gap or centre in Le Guin's poetry as most similar to the Buddhist notion of *sūnyatā* as Nishitani explores it in *Religion and Nothingness*. Nishitani sees *sūnyatā*, or emptiness, as the field of the unmanifest where things lose their distinctiveness. This applies to natural phenomena:

... the field of *sūnyatā* is the field of a force by virtue of which all things as they are in themselves gather themselves together into one: the field of the possibility of the world. At the same time ... it is the field of the force by virtue of which a given thing gathers itself together: the field of the possibility of the existence of things.

(1982: 150-51)

It also applies to consciousness, or psychological phenomena:

... the field of the so-called self, the field of self-consciousness and consciousness, is broken down. In a more elemental sense, it means that we take leave of the essential self-attachment that lurks in the essence of self-consciousness and by virtue of which we get caught in our own grasp in trying to grasp ourselves.

(1982: 151)

Thus the speaker's attempt to 'grasp herself' in 'Amazed' is futile while she clings to a vision of her psyche as given or unitary. Resolution comes only when she perceives that the 'I' that sees, is the eye at the centre of her being, and not some essence of selfhood.

I read the paradoxical quality of empty nothingness, seen as the ground of experience and meaning, as pivotal to Le Guin's poetry. 'Mount St Helens/Omphalos' locates a hollow-yet-full mountain, the volcano Mount St Helens, at the centre or crux of being:

Earth, hearth, hill, altar,  
heart's home, the stone

is at the center

(1975a: 43)

Murphy perceptively traces the roots of Le Guin's transformation of the 'henge' or centre in 'Mount St Helens/Omphalos' (1975a: 43) to non-rational, Taoist and shamanistic thinking:

[In 'Mount St Helens/Omphalos'] it is a shamanistic and Taoist-oriented mythopoeia that takes the traditional henge and makes it a figure of life in the service of a decentering faith that places the earth, the mountain, and stone at the center of the world rather than men.

(Murphy and Hyles 1989: 128)

The idea of an empty centre is crucial to all aspects of life among the Kesh, whose sacred symbol is the heyiya-if, two spirals linked by a blank space which they call the Hinge. The definition of the word 'heyiya' in the Glossary for *Always Coming Home* explains the meanings attached to this generative space:

... sacred, holy, or important thing, place, time, or event; connection; spiral, gyre, or helix; hinge; center; change. To be sacred, holy, significant; to connect; to move in a spiral, to gyre; to be or to be at the center; to change; to become. Praise; to praise.

(1985a: 515)

All the towns in the Valley of the Na are designed as a double spiral around a Hinge, 'which was always running water or a well' (1985a: 411), as though to emphasize the generative capacity of unoccupied space. The most powerful invocation of the psychological centre as *śūnyatā* is in the poem 'Artists', where Le Guin defines creativity, the fertility of the imagination, as dependent on emptiness:

What do they do,  
the singers, tale-writers, dancers, painters, shapers, makers?  
They go there with empty hands,  
into the gap between.  
They come back with things in their hands.  
They go silent and come back with words, with tunes.  
They go into confusion and come back with patterns.  
They go limping and weeping, ugly and frightened,  
and come back with the wings of the redwing hawk,  
the eyes of the mountain lion.

That is where they live,  
 where they get their breath:  
 there, in the gap between,  
 the empty place.

(1985a: 74)

As several other poems do, 'Artists' lyrically figures potential as the negative plenitude at the heart of emptiness.<sup>7</sup>

The preposition, 'between', is also crucial to the idea of the gap, hinge or centre. 'Between' is the preposition belonging to the doorways and borders that recur frequently in Le Guin's writing. The coast, the ever-shifting border between land and sea, is a topographical manifestation of liminality. It also lends coherence to *The Earthsea Trilogy*, whose topos is the archipelago, or interface between land and sea. 'Coast' figures the coast, the area between states, as a place of great creativity and receptivity:

In bed in the first salt light  
 with the east ear I hear birds  
 waking and with the right  
 Ocean breaking inward from the night.

(1981: 37)

The speaker of this poem would be lying on the west coast of America, with day breaking on her inland side, and darkness to her west. This small masterpiece chronicles the intersection of two different modes of being: day/night, land/sea, inward/outward, waking/sleep. At the juncture is the experiencing subject, which is never wholly given over to either pole and remains in a space of uncertainty, a 'no-man's land' where, nevertheless, a woman can exist.

In the poem beginning 'Housewife' in *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*, the poet addresses the woman, the inhabitant of the mysterious threshold, as 'Doorway' (1994a: 94). Earlier in the volume Le Guin illustrates the cosmic dimensions of her interest in the realm 'between' by ending the poem 'Doorway between' with a quotation from *The Bhagavad Gita* (2.28):

Doorway between

working in the indoors  
 walking in the outdoors  
     between getting along  
 and getting away  
     between faces  
 and a back  
     between in deeper  
 and on out:

“All being is seen between  
 two unseens”

(1994a: 50)

The other image that Le Guin has drawn from the poetic tradition and transmuted for her own ends is the dance. For her, unlike Yeats, dance has a strongly social function. The Kesh in *Always Coming Home* hold celebratory dances, or wakwa, to celebrate every change of seasons. Le Guin gives the meaning of ‘wakwa’ as:

... a spring, running water, the rising or the flowing of water, to flow, to dance, dancing, a dance, festival, ceremony, or observation, and a mystery, both in the sense of obscure or unrevealed knowledge, and in the sense of the sacred means by which mysterious being or knowledge may be approached and revealed.

(1985a: 491)

Dances among the Kesh are ritual celebrations that point to the constantly changing nature of the world and to the mysterious forces which sustain it. Like the Long Dance in *Earthsea* (1993a: 405-406; 414-16), and like the dance in ‘Middle’, they make ‘the Great Year whole’ (1981: 23). Wakwa are sacred events that draw the community together without obliterating differences between individuals. And the dance is not the prerogative of humans. In the poem, ‘To Gahheya’, the speaker, Stone Telling, promises a rock that at the end of its material life and hers, ‘we will be dancing shining’ (1985a: 255). Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to think of the dance as only creative or productive. Although the wild things in ‘The Trampled Spring’ participate in their dance in the sense of ‘wakwa’ as a spring, they break the grass and the ground:

Stamping and dancing,  
 trampling and dancing,  
 with sharp feet

they cut the water  
 out of the ground,  
 with thin legs  
 they shoot the water  
 up from the ground,  
 jumping and dancing,  
 springing and dancing,

...

where they dance, trampling,  
 where they dance, springing,  
 where they dance, stamping,  
 in secret, in sacred, in danger ...

(1985a: 257)

This is the destructive face of Śiva's dance, danced by animals and also by the unseen forces that keep the water running from the spring to the creek. But as 'Drums' states, whether there is movement or stillness, creation or destruction, it is always only 'one dance' (1981: 28), whether it is danced by the elements, animals, by language or the self.

I have argued that when Le Guin draws on literary tradition, she does so with the intention of re-figuring it according to her own ends. At times she employs this device subversively in the service of feminism. This strategy is congruent with Yorke's view of 'revisionary mythmaking' as an important element in women's poetry (1991: 12-13). Montefiore, similarly, claims that 'European myth and fairytale fascinate women poets to the point of obsession' (1994: 39). Le Guin is definitely 'fascinated' by (re-writing) western myths. She shares this project with writers as diverse as Carter, in the *Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, (1990) and the Native American writer Paula Gunn Allen, in *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (1989). The double meaning of 'myth' as both a lie and a story of origins is relevant here. Campbell defines 'myth' in a way that emphasizes its social/ideological function, as follows:

The rise and fall of civilizations in the long, broad course of history can be seen to have been largely a function of the integrity and cogency of their supporting canons of myth ... . A mythological canon is an organization of symbols, ineffable in import, by which the energies of aspiration are evoked and gathered toward a focus.

(1968: 5)

I suggest that patriarchal society, where men's hegemony is unquestioned, is one of the

civilizations that Campbell mentions, whose continuity is assured through their supporting myths. Seen in this light, Le Guin's subversion of the constitutive myths of phallocracy poses a powerful challenge to the existing order.

The first stanza of 'Apples' irreverently and humorously deconstructs the narrative according to which Eve led Adam into mortal sin:

Judeochristian men should  
not be allowed  
to eat apples, they  
have been bellyaching  
for millennia  
that my mother made  
them eat an apple  
that gave them a bellyache.

(1988a: 34)

After this reversal of the divine right of men (to oppress women), the poem gives pride of place to the undervalued terms in the hierarchical opposition. Women, 'nonjudeochristian men' and children are to eat apples. Le Guin probably intends this privilege to encompass access to the 'knowledge of good and evil' (Genesis 2: 17),<sup>8</sup> in which case she is not only destroying the masculine monopoly on knowledge,<sup>9</sup> but reversing it. The rest of the poem follows this trend by re-writing the myth of the Medusa and the tale of Snow White, so that the snakes on women's heads become a source of empowerment, capable of stunning a man into a coma. In a neat conclusion, the snakes feed on apples.

'Apples', like 'The Maenads' and 'To Saint George' (1988a: 33, 36) re-writes as good what is seen in the patriarchal tradition as bad; the condition of being a woman, and women's (sexual) power over men. The project of re-writing mythological re/presentations of women, in a way that (re-)empowers the previously disempowered, is one that Le Guin embraces vigorously in *Always Coming Home*. There it is the woman trickster figure of Coyote who makes the world, and women dominate learning while men are considered psychologically unsuitable for academic study (1985a: 293). The myths that Le Guin deconstructs are the western ones that create and sustain a society with the 'man on top'. And in formulating generative tales that can empower



women, Le Guin draws on Native American mythology for the figures of Coyote and Grandmother Spider. The spider presides over the feminist incantation, 'The House of the Spider: A Spell to Weave', as the protector of women who are hunted by men:

Good riddance the rider!  
The spinster,  
the sister,  
live here beside her.

They are together,  
the brother,  
no other.  
Here at the center.

(1988a: 43)

The 'spinster' in this poem is probably 'Spider Woman, goddess of weaving at which the Diné excel' (Allen 1991: 27). Daly gives a liberating meaning to 'spinster' that strongly recalls Le Guin's use of the term:

... a woman whose occupation is to Spin, to participate in the whirling movement of creation; one who has chosen her Self, who defines her Self by choice neither in relation to children nor to men; one who is Self-identified; a whirling dervish, Spiraling in New Time/Space.

(Daly 1987: 167)

In using the mythical creatures of the spider and Coyote from Native American legend, Le Guin has given them western, feminist connotations to suit her aim of enabling women to avoid the restrictive categories of patriarchal thinking.

I have already mentioned that I believe Le Guin possesses the quality Cixous and Clément see as necessary for invention, that is, consciousness of the O/other. But for women, this trait is a mixed blessing. Within the constraints of patriarchy, the consciousness of others and the Other can lead to what is known as 'altruism'. An altruistic woman is usually one who, in Daly's terms, 'defines her Self ... [either] in relation to children ... [or] to a man' (1987: 167). This is the way 'normal' women are expected to define themselves in a patriarchal society. Russ

eloquently describes the devastating effects of male expectations on women in *The Female Man*:

dress for the Man  
 smile for the Man  
 talk wittily for the Man  
 sympathize with the Man  
 flatter the Man  
 understand the Man  
 defer to the Man  
 entertain the Man  
 keep the Man  
 live for the Man

(1985: 29)

Le Guin deals more ambivalently with the same concerns in 'Song':

A woman gets and is begotten on:  
 have and receive is feminine for live.  
 I knew it, I knew it even then:  
 what, after all, did I have to give?

A flowing cup, a horn of plenty  
 fulfilled with more than she can hold:  
 but the milk and honey will be emptied,  
 emptied out, as she grows old.

(1975a: 21)

The poem concludes that 'inmost in woman' is the virgin who appears in the first stanza, dreaming about 'some man of thirty' (1975a: 21). Does Le Guin mean, or did she mean at the time, that all women are essentially waiting for men (to complete their deficient psyches)? Or does she mean that the myth of a male soul-mate has been so ingrained in women's psyche that it has come to seem as though it is the 'inmost' part? And when she writes, 'Have and receive is feminine for live', is she exposing or subscribing to the ideology that defines women in terms of their passivity and capacity for nurturing? A similar ambiguity appears, seventeen years later, in *Tehanu*. When Moss and Tenar are discussing women's and men's roles, and Moss says, 'A man gives out, dearie. A woman takes in' (1993a: 572), it is once again difficult to know whether Le Guin is presenting this division of attributes as intrinsic, or as the product of sexual

socialization and ideology.

In later poems, the ambivalence of 'Song' towards gender inequality is completely absent. In its place is a note of protest against injustice. The speaker in 'Pane', fully aware of the homophone 'pain', complains that living for her lover has destroyed her being:

You have painted (out) me  
consenting  
...  
Where am I? Look  
and you'll see yourself  
clearly,  
...  
Nowhere  
my being: (a) reflecting  
(of) your seeming (or) appearing  
so that you can  
believe in yourself  
clearly.

(1988a: 31)

She has become that stock-in-trade of love poetry, a mirror of her lover's identity (Montefiore 1994: 110). In Le Guin's feminist re-writing of this convention, the woman-as-mirror is not fulfilled, but angry that her own existence has been destroyed. Even the lover comes off badly in this unequal transaction, for he is merely deceiving himself that he can see himself 'clearly' in the (sur)face of the painted-out woman.

The inequity in sexual relationships in favour of men, and women's anger and disappointment, are eloquently given voice in 'The Menstrual Lodge' (1988a: 49-50). The lodge of the title has clear affinities with the Blood Lodge of *Always Coming Home*, 'to which all girls were initiated at puberty and to which all women belonged' (1985a: 420). The nameless woman speaker of the poem complains that, even though she has complied with all the rites prescribed by society in order to make her a good wife, her partner still fears and flees from her. The poem intricately re-vision conventional meanings of 'power' and 'powerlessness' to achieve a qualified reversal of the hierarchy. The male's awkward wielding of socially sanctioned power recalls Lacan's discussion of the phallus as a signifier (Lacan 1977a: 102).<sup>10</sup> He fears the woman

because of her power, which is natural, not socially bestowed:

I am the dirt beneath your feet.  
 What are you frightened of? Go fight your wars,  
 be great in club and lodge and politics.  
 When you find out what power is, come back.  
 I am the dirt, and the raincloud, and the rain.  
 ...  
 The roof of my house is thunder,  
 the doorway is the wind.  
 I keep this house, this great house.

(1988a: 49-50)

'The Menstrual Lodge' takes the sexual inequity that annoys the speaker of 'Pane' to a more general plane. This poem reverses the usual process of socialization so that women receive 'power' through their association with nature and men harbour 'fear' (of women).

Old women are surely the most despised of all women in a male society that sees women as (only) good for sexual service. Griffin identifies the roots of this prejudice in eighteenth-century biology (which exercised considerable influence over Freud):

It is recorded that woman's generative organs exercise a strange power over her heart, her mind and her soul.

That woman is what she is in character, charm, body, mind and soul because of her womb alone. (That after menopause a woman is "degraded to the level of a being who has no further duty to perform in this world.") That woman is a natal mechanism.

(1978: 24-25)

These stereotypes may sound extreme in Griffin's register. Le Guin, however, eloquently records their persistence in 'Old Bag' (1988a: 46), where an old woman cannot articulate, to a man, her grief at the loss of her fertility and her children. Older women are neglected by society because they have lost their value in the currency of youth and beauty. The only role that convention offers them is that of a kindly grandmother. In contrast, Le Guin asserts in 'At the Party' that they are complex, wild, even ferocious beings:

The women over fifty  
 are convex from collarbone to crotch,  
 scarred armor nobly curved.  
 Their eyes look out from lines  
 through you, like the eyes of lions.  
 Unexpectant, unforgiving, calm,  
 they can eat children.  
 They eat celery and make smalltalk.  
 Sometimes when they touch each other's arms  
 they weep for a moment.

(1988a: 45)

Her insistence that older women are not the domestic grannies of received wisdom has much in common with *Tehanu*, where Tenar, an ageing woman, unexpectedly finds that she is a dragon's kin because she, too, is wild (1993c: 23). There is wildness, too, in the description of ageing in 'A Semi-Centenary Celebration', which figures the fifty-year old woman as dangerous and sexually aggressive. The speaker says that she is 'afraid of tigers / and in love with god', and later reverses the terms to create an equation between the tigers and god (1981: 25).

A neglected aspect of women's social position is their relegation to the domestic sphere. Friedan, a feminist Le Guin admires (Le Guin 1993b: 156), chronicles, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the misery of women confined to their houses by patriarchal expectations that being a wife and mother is a fulfilling job, and that women should be grateful for protection from the hazards of economic independence. In a (familiar) deconstructive move, Le Guin represents this source of unhappiness as a strength, while carefully steering clear of romanticizing domestic duties. This strategy, and the gender-political agenda that underlies it, is strikingly apparent in the opening paragraphs of *Tehanu*, the fourth novel in a supposedly heroic trilogy, which give a detailed description of Tenar's onerous domestic duties (1993a: 483).

Le Guin's position on domesticity may fruitfully be compared to that of theorist and critic Marleen Barr. In a chapter entitled, after Hamilton's satirical 1956 painting, '*Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*', Barr points out that a house is a gendered space:

Women's past prepares them for a future fairy tale about meeting the perfect husband and making a home for him.

...

... patriarchal fairy tales about women's futures ... are about women, located in houses they do not control, who sacrifice their figurative house/bodies by surrendering to men's passions.

(1992: 120-21)

She goes on to discuss feminist novels which deconstruct the 'fairy tale' by portraying women's successful aspirations to leave their houses, and their experiences of houses as hostile. Le Guin's approach differs radically from that of the novelists Barr discusses in her chapter. Le Guin likes houses, and depicts them as sites of empowerment for women if they are used authentically. The 'Long Names of Houses' in *Always Coming Home* (1985a: 409-13) and the Kesh women's supremacy in their own houses demonstrate this preference.

As though to underline the continuity between the Kesh way of life and our own, houses feature prominently in *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*. The book is structured as a walking tour of Thurman Street, beginning in the mainly industrial, lower reaches, and heading up the hill towards Forest Park, 'the largest city park in the world' (1994a: 127). As the observers travel upwards, the street becomes increasingly residential. Le Guin chronicles these houses with evident enjoyment, as in the following poem:

What does a house  
hold?

Sometimes a fullness  
of shadows.

Light lies outside  
on patterns of glass  
and wood more fragile  
yet. And there are  
forgettings. The held,  
the kept, the lost,  
the leafshadows.

(1994a: 86)

This poem expresses an interest in the windows of the house as a threshold between its interior,

the 'house / hold', and the exterior of which the house is a part. The idea of a threshold, which is common in Le Guin's writing,<sup>11</sup> recurs later in the book, as the poet powerfully expresses a strongly essentialist view of domestic gender politics:

Housewife  
Housewoman  
Woman house  
Lifeholder  
Household  
Stronghold

Doorway I call you  
Door of the mystery  
Woman I call you

Stronghold  
Householder  
Lifehold  
Womanhouse  
Housewoman  
Housewife

(1994a: 94)

The ritualistic rhythms of this poem link womanhood to a sense of the sacramental within the domestic realm. Le Guin has said that *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street* is a social statement and a celebration of a locality (1994a: 8). It seems likely, given her identification with the feminist cause, that she intends this poem, too, as a protest against the stereotype of the woman-as-housewife, whose activities are trivial and minor in contrast with those of her husband, immersed in the so-called real world of business. All the poems about houses, including the blessing-poem 'For the New House', which ends: 'And may you be in this house / as the music is in the instrument' (1988a: 77), seem to me to invoke the figure of a woman presiding over the house. Bearing in mind Le Guin's deconstruction of the idea of a unitary self in poems such as 'Amazed' (1981: 75) and 'Self' (1981: 76), I suggest that representations of women and womanhood in her poetry participate in what Hollinger sees as a double impulse in feminist science fiction:

... this doubleness I am referring to appears as both the construction of strong models/representations of women as the subjects of coherent narratives (i.e.,

humanist feminism) *and* the simultaneous deconstruction of subjectivity, especially of gendered subjectivity, through its representation as linguistic/cultural/ideological construction, frequently within a framework of nonlinear and self-referential narrative (i.e., postmodernist feminism).

(1990: 231)

*Always Coming Home* uses the image of a house in a more far-reaching way. 'The Serpentine Codex' states that all natural phenomena belong to one of nine Houses (1985a: 43-49), or forms of being. I see the symbol of the house in this novel as a 'generative metaphor', like other such images listed in 'The Back of the Book' (1985a: 483-85). These serve as conceptual receptacles that collect and hold together ideas that Le Guin wishes to connect, and not a set of criteria for classifying reality. The generative metaphor thus escapes the rigidity of the taxonomy Foucault discerns in natural science in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*:

The documents of this new history are not other words, texts or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens; ... creatures present themselves one beside another, their surfaces visible, grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analysed, and bearers of nothing but their own individual names.

(1970: 131)

What Foucault chronicles in this account of academic structures is a systematic denial of the alterity of non-human life. Le Guin's grouping of natural phenomena into 'houses' (1985a: 43-49), by contrast, assumes a (gendered) reverence for precisely this otherness. As a Kesh woman presides over her home, and may not be gainsaid (1985a: 40), so a feminine sympathy for all non-human phenomena, which I will explore later in this chapter, creates a non-hierarchical kinship between beings who belong to the same House.

The philosophical foundation of the 'teaching' poems found in the Fourth Section of *Always Coming Home* is the notion of a house, which here connotes belonging. In the beautiful incantation entitled 'A Madrone Lodge Song', unseen forces beyond the realm of material life are presented as living in houses:



From their houses, from their town  
 rainbow people come walking  
 the dark paths between stars,  
 the bright tracks on water  
 of the moon, of the sun.  
 Tall and long-legged,  
 lithe and long-armed,  
 they follow the fog pumas  
 beside the wind coyotes,  
 passing the rain bears  
 under the still-air hawks  
 on the paths of sunlight,  
 on the tracks of moonlight,  
 on the ways of starlight,  
 on the dark roads.  
 They climb the ladders of wind,  
 the stairways of cloud.  
 They descend the ladders of air,  
 the steps of rain falling.  
 The closed eye sees them.  
 The deaf ear hears them.  
 The still mouth speaks to them.  
 The still hand touches them.  
 Going to sleep we waken to them,  
 walking the ways of their town.  
 Dying we live them,  
 entering their beautiful houses.

(1985a: 392-93)

It is impossible to identify the 'rainbow people' definitely, using linear logic, because only 'sideways' thinking can make sense of the negation of sensory information in 'The closed eye sees ... / The deaf ear hears ... / The still mouth speaks ... / The still hand touches'. There is a hint of trance/transcendence in the paradoxical reference to the senses' inability to perceive these forces. This recalls the trance of Presence, practised by the Handdarata (and described, with characteristic failure to understand unfamiliar cultures, by Genly Ai) in *The Left Hand of Darkness*:

... the Handdara discipline of Presence, which is a kind of trance - the Handdarata, given to negatives, call it an untrance - involving self-loss (self augmentation?) through extreme sensual receptiveness and awareness.

(1969: 54)

The Handdarata aim at receptiveness to things that are not accessible to linear, cognitive reasoning: the future, but also the knowledge that the future is beyond human control. 'A Madrone Lodge Song', likewise, pays homage to the awareness that some experiences are not susceptible to the logic of the senses, or even to the ordering structure of a unitary personality. The 'rainbow people' participate in several different kinds of sentient life. The poem, however, offers a more optimistic view of the future than do the Handdarata. While acknowledging that the space beyond physical life is unknown, it gives the consolation that it will be conducted under the protection of the 'beautiful houses' of the rainbow people.

One of the myths that Yorke thinks must be re-visioned by women poets is the (Romantic) idea of a unitary perceiving self. Yorke praises Plath as an exemplary poet because she sees her 'as recognising the potential for the poetic language of metaphor and hieroglyph to reorganise the constructs of identity' (1991: 62). Trinh uses the evocative neologism 'I/i' to reflect the split subjectivity at the heart of being a ('native')<sup>12</sup> woman:

"I" is, itself, *infinite layers*. Its complexity can hardly be conveyed through such typographic conventions as I, i, or I/i. Thus, I/i am compelled by the will to say/unsay, to resort to the entire gamut of personal pronouns to stay near this fleeing *and* static essence of Not-I. Whether I accept it or not, the natures of I, i, you, s/he, We, they, and wo/man constantly overlap.

(1989: 94)

Le Guin makes a similar point in 'Amazed', where she intricately destabilizes and subverts the idea of a stable centre of selfhood:

I am not I

but eye.

(1981: 75)

Le Guin is not writing about post-colonial women's experience, as Trinh is. I believe, nevertheless, that in this poem, where the only possible meanings are transitional because they lead seductively to other meanings, she is speaking, in her own idiom, about the constitutive fracture of being an 'I/i' (or I/i/eye). This is a very different picture of poetic subjectivity from the influential one sketched by Wordsworth in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*:

... the poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion ... the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.

(1954: 18)

An interesting signal of Le Guin's ambivalent relationship to the aesthetic tradition inspired by a Wordsworthian conception of the poetic self is her comparison of poetry with translation in the lines from 'Reciprocity of Prose and Poetry' which preface this chapter. Wordsworth states that '[the poet] should consider himself as in the situation of a translator' (1954: 15). However, where the self is concerned, Le Guin gives lucid and convincing expression to the discontinuities of the individual (woman's) psyche. In the poem that follows 'Amazed', 'Self', she identifies 'a woman washing at a ford' as one of the 'centerpoints' of a subjectivity where 'You cannot measure the circumference' (1981: 76). This gives a gendered inflection to the notion of a split self, so that it is not just any psyche that is portrayed as sundered, but, precisely, a woman's.

Kristeva's germinal essay, 'Women's Time', also deals with the conflicting forces that claim women's energy and allegiance. A mother's centrality in her daughter's psychological development is figured as an important beginning of ego-instability:

... there is also the connivance of the young girl with her mother, her greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function. A girl will never be able to re-establish this contact with her mother ... except by becoming a mother herself, through a child or through a homosexuality which is in itself extremely difficult and judged as suspect by society ... .

(1986: 204)

This passage compactly evokes a daughter's ambivalences towards her parents, and the impulse to become (a version of) her mother. I have dealt with affinities between psychoanalytical thought and Le Guin's fiction in the third chapter of this thesis. Here I want to trace some of the ways in which her poetry addresses family dynamics. I would argue that Le Guin, the daughter of (famous) parents, has an investment in oedipal and pre-oedipal conflicts, and that this concern is rendered in her poetry.

Le Guin's mother appears as an influential figure in her writing, as one might expect, given the dominant role of the mother in the child's formative years.<sup>13</sup> In the essay, 'Theodora', she celebrates her mother's capacity for shifting identities, revealed in the series of names she adopted:

Some people lead several lives all at once; my mother lived several lives one at a time. Her names reflect this serial complexity: Theodora Covell Kracaw Brown Kroeber Quinn.

(1989: 138)

Later in the essay Le Guin comments on the bond with her mother, the gift Theodora gave her, as a woman to another woman:

Her sense of female solidarity was delicate and strong. She made her daughter feel a lifelong welcome, giving me the conviction that I had done the right thing in being born a woman - a gift many woman-children are denied.

(1989: 140)

The 'delicacy' Le Guin inherited from her mother is evident in the poem 'T.C.K.B.K.Q., Telluride 1897 - Berkeley 1979'. The poet summons the image of her dead parent as a younger person, as she does in a poem addressed to her father, 'Central Park South, 9 March 1979' (1981: 39). An intense ambivalence springs from her need for a bond with the older woman:

... . She was many,  
she always comes bringing the others,  
the husbands, the sons, myself.  
I don't want them. I want her,  
whom her lovers encircled, concealed  
with the unending bridal,  
her in the seventh of the seven ways,  
the woman inside the women.  
Not hearth-warmth, bed-warmth, breast-warmth,  
but the mortal light  
revealed.

(1988a: 71-72)

I read this as a casting-aside of the roles women play in relation to others in favour of a more

authentic self, 'the woman inside the women', in (the image of) whom the poet can find a key to her own being.

In writing of Le Guin's search for her mother's 'authenticity', I am aware that my tone of essentialism may not appeal to everyone. A comparison with Piercy, another woman writer of speculative fabulation and poetry, who also writes about her mother, may illustrate alternative approaches in poetry to the topic of motherhood. One of Piercy's volumes of poetry is entitled *My Mother's Body*, and re/presents the memory of the poet's mother more concretely than Le Guin does. In 'What Remains', she describes the ashes of her mother's body, calling her 'My longest, oldest love' (1985: 25). In 'My Mother's Body', she gives a physical dimension to the continuity between generations:

My twin, my sister, my lost love,  
I carry you in me like an embryo  
as once you carried me.

...

This body is your body, ashes now  
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,  
my throat, my thighs. You run in me  
a tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,

you sing in my mind like wine. What you  
did not dare in your life you dare in mine.

(1985: 30-32)

Piercy images filial dependence on her mother as a longing to be her<sup>14</sup> and a fascination with the corporeal details of her mother's life and death. For Le Guin, the relationship is invested with considerably more ambiguity and the awareness that the woman she desires is an imaginative construct, a person no-one encountered, who is, after her death, so ethereal that she can be represented only with great difficulty.

By contrast with Piercy, for whom mothering is one-directional since she is childless, Le Guin re-creates a link with her mother by mothering her own children, and several of her poems deal with motherhood. Indeed, in 'The Song of the Torus', pregnancy, giving birth and nurturing children links the poet with memories of Theodora, whose ashes, like Piercy, she has 'brought

home':

I have borne, I have borne, I have borne.  
 What next, I wonder?  
 I'm not unmothered yet;  
 although I brought her ashes home upon my lap,  
 and took the knife and cut the bleeding part away,  
 yet the old woman will not sleep.  
 She mates with bears and stars to find  
 what may a wombless woman bring to term  
 and suckle with the mind's sweet milk  
 and rock, and sing to, sing the lullaby.

(1988a: 67-68)

This poem sees the 'old woman', a favourite figure in Le Guin's writing (as I have remarked earlier), as a sexually desiring Other and salutes her alterity. It strikes a markedly different tone from Piercy's reminiscences, in which her mother carries on a posthumous existence assimilated into herself.

Several poems in *Wild Oats and Fireweed* deal with childbearing. 'While the Old Men Make Ready to Kill' opposes (men's) need to kill and women's desire for life, positing sexual difference as a matter of language:

But I talk now in the thick tongue of a woman  
 to an unborn baby.  
 In that language is no prophecy.  
 ...  
 You are the Life Eternal,  
 baby, baby, maybe to be born.  
 Sweet summer's daughter's child of winter,  
 come to her, come to me, come.

(1988a: 73-74)

This invocation, addressed to the unborn child of the speaker's daughter, recalls the imaginative route into the Valley of the Na, described in the opening lines of *Always Coming Home*:

You take your child or grandchild in your arms, a young baby, not a year old yet,  
 and go down into the wild oats in the field below the barn ... . Stand quietly.  
 Perhaps the baby will see something, or hear a voice, or speak to somebody there,

somebody from home.

(1985a: 5)

The angry polemic of 'While the Old Men Make Ready to Kill' also recalls the thesis of Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: A Politics of Peace* (1989), which argues that because women can bear children, they are more nurturing than men. Nevertheless, I suspect that Le Guin would not endorse such a principle. While she portrays her own capacity to mother as an important part of her identity as a woman, she goes no farther than suggesting that women and men speak different languages, and that the potential represented by the unborn baby, not the mother who bears it, is life-affirming in a way that counters the need to kill.

The other side of psycho-sexual dynamics which Le Guin's poetry represents is the drive to establish a sexual relationship with another person. In a bold deconstruction of conventional religious thinking, which opposes sex and spirituality,<sup>15</sup> Le Guin portrays romance as linked with divinity. In 'Epiphany', the poet deftly represents herself through the eyes of the 'others', who 'judge as suspect' a homosexual relationship between women (Kristeva 1986: 204):

Did you hear?

Mrs. Le Guin has found God.

Yes, but she found the wrong one.  
Absolutely typical.

Look, there they go together.  
Mercy! It's a colored woman!

Yes, it's one of those relationships.  
They call her Mama Linga.

(1981: 19)

I see this poem less as a biographically accurate account of a lesbian relationship than as an attack on social forces which restrictively prescribe belief in a sexless deity, and a statement of preference for a more erotic God/god. It also inscribes a version of the 'homosexuality' that Cixous and Clément claim is essential for women's creativity:

... there is no invention of any other I, no poetry, no fiction without a certain

homosexuality (the I/play of bisexuality) acting as a crystallization of my ultrasubjectivities.

(Cixous and Clément 1986: 84)

Poems such as 'A Semi-Centenary Celebration' (1981: 25-26) pose a trenchant challenge to the fiction that romantic love is safe and (politically) conservative. At first sight, this view appears incongruous with Le Guin's assertion, in the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, that 'the central, constant theme of my work was ... "Marriage"' (1993b: 139). But on closer examination, marriage in her fabulation only becomes interesting when it involves risks. The union between Shevek and Takver in *The Dispossessed* (1974) appears dull precisely because, although the couple seem to have a spectacular sex life, neither of them seriously challenges the other. On the other hand, the 'marriage' of Genly Ai and Estraven in *The Left Hand of Darkness* cannot be consummated and leads to Estraven's death, but is the more compelling for it.

Several poems in *Hard Words and Other Poems* take up the image of love between gods, or between a human and a god. 'The Night' shows Kālī as a fear-inspiring divine mother who gives birth and makes love to an extremely short-lived god, thus uniting the erotic with the maternal, as a pre-oedipal child would. This is in keeping with the terrible aspect of the goddess, described in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* in terms that strikingly omit any mention of maternal nurturing:

She destroys ignorance, maintains the world order, and blesses and frees those who strive for the knowledge of God. Kālī is the symbol of dissolution and destruction.

(1986: 170)

'Paśupati' is spoken by Parvatī, Śiva's consort and a goddess in her own right, whose immortality resides in her ability to love her husband's 'uncivilized' habits. In a conservative view of godhood, Śiva's failure to comb his hair is unseemly; but the gods Le Guin chronicles here are not the kind that keep the symbolic<sup>16</sup> in place by maintaining decency. Śiva, after all, is the 'Destroyer and Transformer' (Stoddart 1993: 19). The lover-gods in Le Guin's poetry transgress (socially ordained) order in their pursuit of higher, erotic and imaginative, ends.

I believe Le Guin would agree with Kristeva that sexual desire is intrinsically



transgressive (Kristeva 1986: 226), and also that women have nothing to gain from upholding the symbolic order, or social contract, since it opposes their interests anyway. Kristeva writes:

The new generation of women is showing that its major social concern has become the socio-symbolic contract as a sacrificial contract. If anthropologists and psychologists, for at least a century, have not stopped insisting on this in their attention to 'savage thought', wars, the discourse of dreams or writers, women are today affirming ... that they are forced to experience this sacrificial contract against their will.

(Kristeva 1986: 200)

The representation of love between men and women in Le Guin's poetry is, once again, very different from Piercy's. In 1969, as an active member of what she calls 'the movement' (an abbreviation of what Goodman calls 'The Movement Toward a New America'), Piercy expressed her commitment to changing sexual relationships in 'The Grand Coolie Dam':

For a while [around 1967] movement people were briefly more interested in each other as human beings than is the case usually, or now. Movement men are generally interested in women occasionally as bed partners, as domestic servants-mother surrogates, and constantly as economic producers ...

(Goodman 1970: 57)

Piercy dedicated her 1969 volume of poems, *Hard Loving*, 'from the Movement / for the Movement', conveying her on-going support for social transformation. But she focuses on the details of her relationships, rather than in the social and psychological structures that perpetuate a particular kind of relationship. For example, I suspect that she intends the relationship depicted in the poem 'Loving an Honest Man' to appear as a departure from the norm:

So we live with each other: not against  
not over or under or in tangent.  
Secretive in joy and touching, back to back  
sensual taproot feeding deep in the soil  
we face out with hands open and usually bruised,  
crafting messages of lightning in common brick.

(1969: 54)

Nevertheless, her poetry does not go beyond this one relationship to comment on the sexual status quo as it pertains to men and women in general, as she does in the essay and in her

fiction.<sup>17</sup> As a result, her poetry depicts sexual relationships more directly than Le Guin's, where the topic is, like many others, approached in a 'sideways' fashion.

I have already speculated in my second chapter on the possibility that the eulogy to Takver's selfless devotion to Shevek, in *The Dispossessed*, may be an indirect tribute to Charles Le Guin, the husband Le Guin hardly ever mentions in her writing. 'A Meditation on a Marriage' is one of these rare occasions. In this poem, Le Guin carefully blends biography and geography to portray the relationship as a 'space':

We met at sea,  
married in a foreign language:  
what wonder  
if we cross a continent on foot  
each time to find each other  
at secret borders  
bringing  
of all my streams and darkneses of gold  
and your deep graves and islands  
a feather  
a flake of mica  
a willow leaf  
that is our country,  
ours alone.

(1988a: 87)

This beautiful poem delicately expresses sentiments that are compatible with Barr's chapter, 'All You Need Is Love?' in *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*. In her discussion of feminist utopia, Barr quotes Heath's essay, 'Male':

Admiration as utopia, what has never existed between the sexes; so how to open this space of a radical sexual difference that is not the old difference.

(Barr 1992: 154)

At the conclusion of the chapter, Barr explains her social programme in terms of its title:

All you need is love (in regard to this chapter's argument, "you" refers to heterosexual women and men) - and the social structure Russ calls "a two-sexed

egalitarian society." If we can construct a space and place for love, we will die neither of heartbreak nor of nuclear radiation. We will, instead, live happily as lovers in societies which can encompass equal relationships between women and men.

(1992: 179)

To me, 'A Meditation on a Marriage', like *Always Coming Home*, images a 'space', explicitly defined, of radical sexual difference. In this space Ursula and Charles Le Guin, who are incompatible because she comes from (and, in the poem's terms, with) California and he from Georgia, can make a 'country' of their own in which to meet. That this takes place in a poem, and not a utopian novel, does not invalidate its utopian content. 'A Meditation on a Marriage' suggests that a 'space and place for love' must be located outside of either partner's inner and outer 'country', because while each is immersed in his or her origins, there can be no meeting. There is an implicit admission that 'a feather / a flake of mica / a willow leaf' is all that can be shared. The country of love can be created, despite the obstacle of what the poem depicts as cultural 'untranslatability' and incommensurability, when the partners give the ephemeral treasures of their native countries to each other and understand the value of these keepsakes.

'A Meditation on a Marriage' ascribes another dimension to (feminist) womanhood that Le Guin pursues elsewhere: the celebration of the body. Le Guin describes the woman's body as a country: '... I have to live / there, working the creeks my veins, the mines' (1988a: 86). Cixous and Clément express one aspect of the feminist project of reclaiming the female body for women's pleasure, as opposed to men's:

Woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes, and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves ... .

*In body/Still more:* woman is body more than man is. Because he is invited to social success, to sublimation. More body hence more writing.

(1986: 94-95)

And in 'Inventory', Le Guin gives a different tone to the project of writing the body, when she takes stock of her own body, ageing now, in humorous geographical terms:

... . Scars

lie smiling soft and small among the folds  
and hillocks of that broad countryside.  
O have I not my rivers and my stars,  
my wrinkled ranges in the Western sun?

...

I am this continent,  
and still explore and find no boundary,  
for the vast sandy beaches of my mind  
where soft vast waves and winds erase  
the words, the faces - this is still  
endless, this is endless still.  
I am that wind, that ocean.

(1988a: 82-83)

'Inventory' blurs the boundaries of a logocentric mind/body split, and images the woman's whole being as topographical. At the same time the mind is 'endless', while the body is subject to mortality, not in a linear-temporal sense but in the experienced present when its limitations are marked on the flesh. The poem insists on a different understanding of an ageing woman's body from the (patriarchal) stereotype. 'The Space Crone' gives a comparable deconstruction in prose:

[The space crone's] hair would not be red or blonde or lustrous dark, her skin would not be dewy fresh, she would not have the secret of eternal youth ... . She was a virgin once, a long time ago, and then a sexually potent fertile female, and then went through menopause. She has given birth several times and faced death several times - the same times. She is facing the final birth/death a little more nearly and clearly every day now. Sometimes her feet hurt something terrible. She never was educated to anything like her capacity, and that is a shameful waste and a crime against humanity ... .

(1989: 6)

In a similar subversion of received attitudes to ageing women's bodies, 'Inventory' combines the poet's interest in her own body with her enjoyment of topography and sympathy for older women.

A final cluster of themes that recur in Le Guin's poetry concerns her relationship and response to the natural world. As I have mentioned, there is a strongly feminist aspect to this interest. As in the Blood Lodge of the Kesh, the 'identification of woman and animal [and other natural forces]' is 'deep' (1985a: 420) in Le Guin's writing. In a deliberately provocative 1986 essay, 'Woman/Wilderness', she outlines the idea that the wilderness is women's domain. She

draws on Griffin for support of this notion, and Griffin does posit an intrinsic, immanent/transcendent connection between woman and nature. In a typical passage from *Woman and Nature*, Griffin writes:

*We say you cannot divert the river from the riverbed. We say that everything is moving, and we are a part of this motion. That the soil is moving. That the water is moving. We say that the earth draws water to her from the clouds. We say the rainfall parts on each side of the mountain, like the parting of our hair, and that the shape of the mountain tells where the water has passed ... . We are all a part of this motion, we say, and the way of the river is sacred, and this grove of trees is sacred, and we ourselves, we tell you, are sacred.*

(1978: 185-86)

The philosophy underlying Griffin's polemic turns out to be a creative device that she shares with Le Guin. Both writers acknowledge that a patriarchal ideology has relegated women to a lower place on the power hierarchy. In that position, they share features such as materiality and irrationality (against men's supposed spirituality and reason) with the non-human world. It is almost as though, as Merchant has it in *The Death of Nature*, men have 'feminized' nature, constructed it as a woman, the better to dominate and manipulate it:

[Nature] was personified as a female-being, e.g., Dame Nature; she was alternately a prudent lady, an empress, a mother, etc ... .

In both Western and non-Western cultures, nature was traditionally feminine.

(1980: xxiii)

Neither Griffin nor Le Guin debates the validity of ascribing these features to women. Rather, they reverse the entire hierarchy, so that kinship with nature becomes a source of strength, and indeed, places women in a position of superiority over the male lawgivers.<sup>18</sup>

There is, consequently, a paradox in Le Guin's representation of women's relationship to nature. In both a phallogentric and a gynocentric paradigm, women are allied to natural phenomena. When seen from a feminist perspective, both parties gain from this alliance in subverting a repressive ideology, while a patriarchal view would see women's similarity to the non-human world as yet another reason for denigrating them. In a strikingly similar register to Griffin, Le Guin writes:

The women are speaking. Those who were identified as having nothing to say, as sweet silence or monkey-chatterers, those who were identified with Nature, which listens, as against Man, who speaks - those people are speaking. They speak for themselves and for the other people, the animals, the trees, the rivers, the rocks. And what they say is: We are sacred.

(1989: 162)

Le Guin's poetry shows great sympathy for natural phenomena, and poems like 'The Menstrual Lodge' reveal that this sympathy is gendered. From the beginning of her career as a poet, she has consistently chosen to write about nature. 'Footnote', published in *Wild Angels*, sets up a relation of kinship between the speaker and the natural world:

I have not only falcons  
in the family, and towers  
on golden hills, but also  
crabs: ...  
And there are lots of bats  
in my inheritance, the flittermouse  
cracks the cup of twilight by the house  
of owls and grey acacias, writes  
my name in the Almanach  
de Gotha: Ostragotha.

And the moth  
is a kind of cousin, and some nights  
of autumn, rain is my elder brother.

(1975a: 19)

I choose 'Footnote' specifically because it expresses kinship with many different kinds of natural phenomena. The poet is affiliated, not only to animals with cultural significance, such as falcons, but also to natural things that are less grand: crabs, bats, owls, acacias, moths and rain. Here a woman, who is divested of importance by patriarchal culture, proclaims her connection with other phenomena that have been similarly slighted.

This is in keeping with much of her prose. The harmony between women and nature is especially clear in the four poetry sections of *Always Coming Home*. As the Kesh are matrilineal and gynocentric (although they are not matriarchal, being closer to anarchy than to any form of

social hierarchy), many of the poems assume the reverence due to women and nature. The 'Dark of the Moon Songs', sung during the celebration of sexuality in the Moon Dance, make the equivalence explicit:

The black ewe leads,  
her lamb follows.  
The sky closes.  
Heya hey hey,  
Obsidian House,  
its door is shut.

First House Woman  
suckles the lamb  
in the dark fold.  
Hey hey hey,  
Moon's House door  
is black, is black!

(1985a: 248)

This poem juggles meticulously selected images of the sheep, the woman and the new moon to generate a potent but still mysterious sense of sexuality and fertility. These are grounded firmly in women's membership of the Blood Lodge, under the auspices of the First House or House of Obsidian, whose colour is black, whose element is the moon, and which cares for domestic animals (1985a: 46).

I ascribe particular prominence to two natural phenomena in Le Guin's poetry: trees and birds. Trees play an important, if underrated, role in Le Guin's writing. For example, 'Direction of the Road' challenges conventional physics by depicting a highway from the point of view of a tree which is obliged to grow and shrink in order to 'uphold Relativity' (1975b: 267) for the people who pass by. Equally, *The Word for World is Forest* is as much a protest against deforestation, the killing of trees, as against the killing of humans. Le Guin admits that she loves trees in the Introduction to 'The Word of Unbinding' and 'The Rule of Names', two stories that prefigure *The Earthsea Trilogy*:

*I think I am definitely the most arboreal science fiction writer. It's all right for the rest of you who climbed down, and developed opposable thumbs, and erect posture, and all that. There's a few of us still up here swinging.*

(1975b: 71)

Like the tree which (who?) narrates 'Direction of the Road' and whose being far exceeds its meaning as an instructor in fundamental physics, trees take on a complex network of significations in Le Guin's poetry. At times a tree can be a teacher, as in 'Arboreal':

The family tree has not got back  
to trees yet; we uproot  
and move and lack  
the steady knowing what is good  
and living on it, what makes wood.  
Out of the root arises all the dance.

(1975a: 33)

I think the logocentric need for historical and family origins, which participates in a Judeo-Christian search for first causes and an explanatory cosmogony, somewhat undermines the success of this poem, without undoing its pleasurable play with the meanings of 'tree' and 'root'. A more mature poem, which also uses a tree as a teacher, is 'The Aching Air' in *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*. Ostensibly a memorial to a horse-chestnut tree that has been removed, the poem vigorously protests men's abuse of power over natural things in the search for convenience, and attributes this to ugly emotions:

The insatiable vacuum  
of a mean fear  
in envy of that strength,  
that lively age,  
sucked there.  
Destruction, the old man raged,  
give me destruction!  
And he got what he wanted.

Trees are so dirty,  
the lady said.  
The birds make the car  
so dirty. All fall  
I have to sweep the sidewalk.

(1994a: 104)

The poem opposes uses and abuses of humanity to achieve a general criticism. The parasitic 'old



man' is recognizably related to the old men who preside (in absentia) over 'While the Old Men Make Ready to Kill' (1988a: 73-74). The 'lady' is also lethal to living things, because of her unrelenting, narrow focus on domestic cleanliness. But the chestnut tree is human, too: 'five fingers / has the chestnut hand', and when it is sawed down, the procedure is a dismemberment:

So saw off the fingers,  
Then wrists and ankles,  
Then knees and elbows,  
Then hips and shoulders,  
so that nobody  
gets hurt.

(1994a: 104)

The 'humanity' of the tree lends force to the final irony of 'nobody / gets hurt' and reinforces Le Guin's critique of uncaring attitudes to trees.

Portraying a tree as a person is in keeping with the Kesh system of referring to all natural phenomena as 'people' (1985a: 43-44). This approach to non-human things destabilizes the privilege with which humans are regarded in most biological paradigms, while it confers upon less valued beings citizenship in the human world. Le Guin implies the gender aspects of this transfer of value metaphorically, in the 'Translator's Note' to the story of Fairweather's experiments with strains of pear trees:

And the resulting strain of tree was given his name: a type case, in our vocabulary, of Man's control over Nature. This phrase, however, could not be translated into Kesh, which had no word meaning Nature except *she*, being; and anyhow the Kesh saw the Fairweather pear as the result of a collaboration between a man and some pear trees.

(1985a: 275)

This passage expounds the philosophy underlying 'The Aching Air'. Women have been identified with Nature (which is called by Woman's name in Kesh) and the identification has become experienced reality. Le Guin cares for the felled chestnut because, as a woman, she opposes the 'old man' who presides over a patriarchal, exclusively human-centred view of the world. Importantly, her 'biophilic' (Daly 1984: 308) perspective is also contrasted with that of

the 'lady', who is a product of male expectations that women concern themselves solely with domestic matters.

Birds are the other natural beings that occur regularly in Le Guin's poetry and whose connotations I want to explore. Barr attributes to 'feminist fabulators' (her term for men and women writers of science fiction and/or postmodern fiction which challenges patriarchy) a wish to fly as a metaphor for their desire to 'soar beyond restrictive representations, rise above patriarchal language' (1992: 57). Le Guin certainly wishes for freedom from restrictive representations, and I see this need as underpinning the frequent references to birds, mountains and the upward direction she ascribes to individual growth in her poetry. These poems express fondness for the elevated perspective on both the natural and the social world that is gained while flying in planes. 'Flying West from Denver' ends with a vision of an all-encompassing vista of 'light / light clear to the edge of light / and farther' juxtaposed with the 'delicate / enormous rising darkness' of the storm behind the plane (1975a: 41). Light and dark, as *The Left Hand of Darkness* explains, are two halves of a whole: '*Light is the left hand of darkness / and darkness the right hand of light*' (1969: 199). Both poems refuse the conventional hierarchical ordering of light and dark, but insist instead on their complementarity. 'Flight 65 to Portland' shows a world that is even more abstract, made entirely of 'Innumerable delicate rectangles' in monochrome colours. The only humanizing aspect to this poem is the apparently incongruous description of the Dakotas as 'flat vast / (totally maternal)' (1988a: 12). The plains may be maternal because of their capacity to sustain life, or because they appear void of anything man-made; the comparison functions by destabilizing and re-writing conventional notions of what a mother is like in terms of the wildness and foreignness that, Le Guin implies, is woman's preserve (1989: 161-64).

Le Guin's poetry does not often portray people flying (as they do in, for example, *Rocannon's World*). Rather, her own "Dream of Flying" (Barr 1992: 51) takes the form of looking upward, to the airy spaces above and beyond consensus reality. In these places the usual notions of good and evil do not hold, and the (woman's) mind experiences freedom. Thus the hawk in 'For Ted' (probably Hughes) envisions the hawk as always simultaneously a predator and a parent: 'To the old hawk / all earth is prey, and child' (1975a: 47). A woman's need to

escape, to fly the coop is evident when the dead mother in 'The Child on the Shore' tells her grieving daughter in a most un-consoling way: 'I fly upon the feather / Fallen from the falcon's wing' (1981: 67). Women's life process is directed upward. Thus, the poet speculates that, after her death, Theodora is to be found 'high, far, oh, above her birth / before the daylight, snow / on those peaks where a river starts' (1988a: 72). And the dream in 'The Old Falling Down' expresses a grown woman's desire to 'climb' to a 'high room' (1988a: 79). I do not know whether the elevation here is mental, psychological or spiritual, but it is similar to the 'bare, airy spaces ... where Rita Inman lived' in 'Hand, Cup, Shell' (1991a: 30). The desire to go upward, away from a restrictive social system, appears even in a poem-sequence primarily devoted to a description of the landscape. In 'Five South, One North', the speaker says that she 'learned how to get glory' from the highlands of California (1988a: 16).

In this chapter I have explored themes that strike me as central to Le Guin's poetry. At the beginning I posed a question about whether there are significant differences between Le Guin's poetry and prose. The author recognizes that they are different kinds of writing, but she cannot say what the difference consists in:

... what Gary Snyder calls rhythm, is the expression of the relations of sounds and of thoughts among themselves and to one another: the perception of a larger order in which sounds and ideas move together: word-music. This certainly does not (and he says it does not) define poetry and prose as different things, for prose could have its own proper, looser rhythms and measures.

(1989: 111)

When I strive for a measurable, definite distinction between Le Guin's poetry and prose, I am unable to register any concluding statement other than an agreement with the author's misgivings. Like her, I believe that (her) poetry and prose are different forms, but the divergences are so nuanced and shifting that there is no reliable descriptive touchstone for telling them apart.

This leads to the question of whether poetry is 'more personal' than prose. On examination, this idea turns out to be more problematic than useful, although the reasons for its unproductiveness are very interesting. From my postmodern perspective on subjectivity,

'personal' cannot mean 'authentic'; and neither can I imply that Le Guin's poems emanate from a single, (Romantic) unitary self, an unchanging subject of the poetry. Kristeva explains that, although it is possible to think of a speaking subject in poetry, this subject is irreducibly split and plural:

... a system of finite positions (signification) can only function when it is supported by a subject and on condition that this subject is a want-to-be (*manque à être*). Signification exists precisely because there is no subject in signification. The gap between the imaged ego and drive motility, between the mother and the demand made on her, is precisely the break that establishes what Lacan calls the place of the Other as the place of the "signifier".

(1986: 101)

Le Guin uses similar imagery of gaps, splits and distances to evoke the lack of fixity present in the subject (supposedly, in some measure, herself) in 'Self':

You cannot measure the circumference  
but there are centerpoints:

...

... . Distance is my god.

(1981: 76)

Bloom glosses the poem as follows:

Distance, circumference, the unmeasurable, god, the actual future which can only be our dying: *Le Guin evades these*, and her narratives instead measure wisdom or the centrepoin<sup>t</sup>s.

(1986: 5, my italics)

I find Bloom's claim that 'Le Guin evades' the unmeasurable startling, because I think that what lies beyond measurement, classification and the usual means of cognition is a recurrent concern in both her poetry and prose. Furthermore, I see 'Self' as a remarkably deft displacement of normative presentations of the self or subject; the only personal pronoun is 'my' in the last line, and for the rest the contours of the psyche are suggested in terms of a bare landscape outlined in simple diction. 'Self' is typical of Le Guin's presentation of the fractures that constitute the psyche in her poetry. Her poems can be considered more personal than her novels only insofar as they offer a more direct presentation of these splits and fractures.

In reading Le Guin's poetry in and for itself, I have tried to emphasize throughout that it defies and exceeds any attempts to give a single, defined interpretation. Rather, I believe that the poet prefers to play with the inherent instability of 'meaning', constantly deferring resolution in a poetic discourse that constantly differs from itself. One of the poems which most strenuously defies notions of logically understandable 'meaning' is the title poem of the volume *No Boats*, where 'Mrs. Alzheimer' senses 'an unimaginable color / as of transparent peacocks' and rows 'her no-boat over the volcano' (1991b: 6). Conventional means of thinking about denotation fail to generate a linear, 'clear' interpretation of these lines. But the poetry invokes levels of sensation and purpose that are beyond, other to, precisely those conventional notions: perhaps that is Le Guin's point about ageing women whose synapses are no longer as reliable as they used to be. The idea of a form of experience that defies categorization or explanation recurs often in the poems. Long before 'No Boats', Le Guin describes, in the opening poem of *Wild Angels*, supernatural beings that defy even narrative:

Before all legends and before all tears:  
 ...  
 Before all sorrow and before all truth  
 You were: and you were with me in my youth.

Angels of the shadowed ancient land  
 That lies yet unenvisioned, without myth,  
 ...  
 Savage, before all sorrow, your presence is.

(1975a: 7)

I see in this poem an image of childhood that violates conventional notions, portraying it as a realm under the sway of unconscious forces. Other kinds of unconsciousness lie in the potential of the 'unenvisioned' land, and wildness similar to that which Le Guin later ascribes to the dragons who preside over Earthsea (1993c: 22). The poem adds something (indefinable) to the dragons' wildness by placing beings with their attributes in the author's childhood; and from this 'personal' description I gain the sense that, possibly, it is the dragons of Earthsea who are the true guides of Ged and Tenar, if only they would follow them.

The idea of 'wild', undisciplined value beyond (conventional) good and evil tantalizingly evokes the destruction of the hierarchical binary oppositions that Cixous and Clément see as

constitutive of patriarchy. I have quoted from the beginning of their section on 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks / Ways Out / Forays' in the Introduction to this thesis, but their final insights are worth recapitulating:

Man

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection.

Thought has always worked through opposition.

Speaking/Writing

Parole/Écriture

High/Low

(1986: 63)

Le Guin does not deny, either in prose or in poetry, that hierarchical oppositions exist; but she seems to posit a way of perceiving that transcends them; and still, magically, transcends nothing, in the sense of appealing to an ethereal, super-material realm, because nowhere does she forsake the concrete.

## NOTES

1. The 'Bibliographic Checklist of the Works of Ursula K. Le Guin', compiled by Currey and published in *The Language of the Night* (1993b: 240-49), gives the following titles: *Hard Words and Other Poems* (1981); *In the Red Zone* (1983), which contains some poems later collected in *Wild Oats and Fireweed*; *No Boats* (1991b); *Tillai and Tylissos* (1980), which contains some poems later collected in *Hard Words and Other Poems*; *Walking in Cornwall: A Poem for the Solstice* (1979); *Wild Angels* (1975a); and *Wild Oats and Fireweed ... New Poems* (1988a). In addition to the works listed by Currey, the author has published another volume, *Going Out with Peacocks* (1994b).
2. *Malafrena* (1979a).
3. *King Dog* (1985b).
4. *The Language of the Night* (1979; revised 1993b) and *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989).
5. This intention needs to be seen, of course, in the context of work by De Man on blindness and Bloom on mis-reading (De Man 1983; Bloom 1979). What these theorists demonstrate is, precisely, the inevitability and the creative potential of doing the wrong things in critical practice. This chapter is premised on my agreeing with Bloom that 'most so-called "accurate" interpretations of poetry are worse than mistakes; perhaps there are only more or less creative or interesting mis-readings ...' (1979: 43). My work aims, not for "'accurate" interpretations', but for 'creative or interesting mis-readings'.
6. Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Shevek in *The Dispossessed* (1974) are two such characters who return home only to find that their own, altered perspective makes 'home' look very different indeed from what they remember and expect. *The Dispossessed* sums up this aspect of Le Guin's fiction as follows: 'You can go home again ... so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been' (1974: 52).
7. This idea is also explored in my discussion of the labyrinth in *The Tombs of Atuan* in Chapter Three, 'Sex/Identity'.
8. In *The NIV Topical Study Bible* (1989: 5).
9. Le Doeuff exposes and criticizes men's exclusion of women from philosophy in the essay 'Women and Philosophy' (Moi 1987: 181-209), while Merchant shows how individual women, as well as women's perspective, have been excluded from science in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980).
10. Lacan distinguishes between the phallus and the penis as an anatomical organ:

It is not a question of the relation to sexuality, or even to the sex, if it is possible to give any specific reference to this term. It is a question rather of the relation to the phallus, in as much as it is lacking in the real that might be attained in the sexual goal.

(1977a: 102)

11. The novel *Threshold* (1982a), which I discuss in Chapter Three on 'Sex/Identity', may be seen as an imaginative exploration of the notion of a liminal space between two realms. I have investigated the idea of a threshold more fully earlier in this chapter.

12. I have used parentheses here not because I think Trinh's ethnic affiliations are unimportant, but because I wish to stress her situation as a woman, which she shares with Le Guin.

13. See, for example, Chodorow's account of the connection between mothers as primary care-givers and their consequently intense influence over their daughters' psycho-sexual development (1978: 79, 99-104). Friday argues for a similar degree of maternal dominance over women's affective experiences, particularly where sex and gender are concerned, in *My Mother My Self* (1987).

14. This desire is identified and explored by Kristeva (1986: 204-206) in relation to the wish to bear children.

15. In *Earthsea Revisioned*, Le Guin explains with gentle humour that Ged has to forfeit sexuality in order to become a mage, that is, one who is able to act in harmony with the Equilibrium, Earthsea's principle of balance that is at once immanent and transcendent:

Wizards give up one great power, sex, in order to get another, magic. They put themselves under a permanent spell of continence that affects everyone they have to do with.

(1993c: 15)

16. I am using the term 'the symbolic' in the sense in which Kristeva uses it. She defines it as follows:

... there is a general social law, that this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language and ... every social practice offers a specific expression of that law.

(1986: 25)

17. For example, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Piercy creates the utopian society of Mattapoisett, where men and women no longer have rigidly defined social roles.

18. A similar position underpins the nature mysticism Gearhart evokes in *The Wanderground* (1979).



## (NO) CONCLUSION/S

*Usà puyew usu wapiw.*

"He goes backward, looks forward." The porcupine consciously goes backward in order to speculate safely on the future ...

The opening formula for a Cree story is "an invitation to listen, followed by the phrase, 'I go backward, look forward, as the porcupine does.'"

(Le Guin 1989: 84)

*Why did you choose to write a thesis on Ursula K. Le Guin?*<sup>2</sup>

It's very simple and quite sentimental really. Le Guin is my favourite author. She has been ever since, at the age of thirteen, I was asked by my mother to read *The Tombs of Atuan* and give an opinion on whether it was suitable for inclusion in her primary-school library. I couldn't make logical sense of the book, because it went beyond the easy moralism of all the other fairy stories and romances I had read up to then. But I was just at the right age to read it. Le Guin says in 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves' that the subject of *The Tombs of Atuan* is feminine coming of age (1993b: 50), and the novel struck a deep chord in me as an adolescent. I wasn't able to give my mother a definite answer - I recommended the book for her to read, but I didn't know about her pupils - but I knew I wanted to read more.

I only read Le Guin in a sustained way much later, when I had already embarked on a literary academic career. All the old pleasure in her writing came back when I read *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. And there was something else too. When I analysed the 'something else' it turned out to be intellectual stimulation. I was fascinated by the way Le Guin plays with alternative models for society, and I gradually developed the idea of making a scholarly study of this aspect of her writing. Le Guin's writing, in particular (initially) her speculative fabulation, seemed to me to address my discontents with the society I was living in. I think quite often the pleasure of the text turns out to be due to the ability that certain writers have to tantalize our minds and to key in to the conditions and experiences that we are having. These qualities contribute to the feeling of being interested in a writer and wanting to read more of their work.

*What was the main idea that led you to this particular thesis?*

Initially I wanted to do a study of gender in Le Guin's work. Her remark, in the 1978 Introduction to *Planet of Exile*, that the central theme of her work is marriage (1993b: 139), tantalized me. It posed a challenge because there isn't much formal marriage in Le Guin's fiction. Rolery and Agat in *Planet of Exile* marry, and so do Shevek and Takver in *The Dispossessed*, while Kesh marriage customs form a large part of *Always Coming Home*; but I would hardly say that marriage is foregrounded in any of the novels. So I began thinking about analogues for sexual relationships - the many cross-cultural encounters, for example. And gradually it became apparent to me that what I was calling gender was in fact part of a much larger structure in Le Guin's work. As I see it, sympathy for women's oppression, which is a major feature, especially in her writing published after 1980, forms part of a general interest in oppression and oppressed groups. From there it was a small step to an investigation of power and power-mechanisms in Le Guin's writing.

This linked up rather neatly with something I thought when I first read *The Earthsea Trilogy* (as it was then, before *Tehanu* was published and it became *The Earthsea Quartet*). As a reader I was very drawn to Ged - as I think Le Guin intends one to be - and at the same time I detected a profound ambivalence in his relationship with power. Ged is the Archmage of Earthsea, and theoretically the most powerful man in his society; but he uses his power in such a way as to avoid exercising either force or coercion over others. For example, when he and Arren are travelling in the land of the dead in *The Furthest Shore*, Ged tries to reason with the evil wizard, Cob, rather than force him to do his will, and it is Arren who tries to kill him. What struck me about this is that Ged makes a choice between power over and power to. He has the capacity to exercise both, but he chooses power to, empowerment. And in turning away from power over, he acquires the true power of the hero, namely power over himself. This is achieved through extreme caution in using his magical skills, and acute awareness of the responsibility that power carries. The Master Hand makes this point while Ged is still an apprentice mage, when he lectures all the apprentices on power and its consequences:

To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done. Indeed it can be done ... . But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow ...

(1993a: 48)

Ged reinforces the idea when Arren asks why he, the Archmage, is so reluctant to use magic. In answer, Ged gives him a lesson in responsibility:

If there were a king over us all again and he sought counsel of a mage, as in the days of old, and I were that mage, I would say to him: My lord, do nothing because it is righteous or praiseworthy or noble to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you must do and which you cannot do in any other way.

(1993a: 362)

Once I became interested in what Le Guin does with power and its ramifications, I saw it everywhere. Initially I thought she was using a Foucauldian model of power as an undefined force that produces all the relations and practices of society and that nevertheless is resisted (Foucault 1984: 54-55; Sarup 1988: 75, 91). But I came to qualify that idea, because I think that for Le Guin, good and evil are inextricably intertwined with the uses and existence of power. A novel such as *The Word for World is Forest* definitely condemns the misuse of colonial power by the Terrans who are destroying the forests on World 41. The correlative of this is that the novel takes the side of the oppressed, namely the Athsheans who are, by turns, subjected to forced removals, incarcerated and finally killed by the colonizers. In his theoretical discourses, Foucault is less emphatic about appeals to moral imperatives than Le Guin.<sup>3</sup>

Of course my thoughts went through several other stages, but those are the main outlines of my focus. The more I scrutinized the representations of power in Le Guin's work, the more I saw it as an immensely complex and attractive subject. And it engaged me personally because I lived under a régime of oppressive power in the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa. So I was interested, not only in analysing the workings of power, but also in the alternatives to power, as

we experience it in Western society in the late twentieth century. I didn't really have a working hypothesis about what I would find, but I knew that I wanted to investigate representations of power in Le Guin's writing. And that was enough to launch the project.

Another thread that got woven into the cloth of this thesis was a wish, somehow, to give a more comprehensive reading of Le Guin's works than is generally done. There are several critical volumes devoted to her writing, but some of her publications are always neglected. For example, Le Guin writes really tantalizing, and often unsettling, short stories - I'm thinking now of pieces such as 'Mazes' (1982b: 181-86) and 'The Wife's Story' (1982b: 255-59) where the semiotics of the story are in direct contradiction to the direction it is apparently taking. She is also an extremely fine poet, with many volumes to her credit; but as she puts it, nobody pays much attention to her poetry because it is supposedly 'written by "a novelist"' (1989: 109). Somehow these works, along with several others, are neglected by the critical establishment. I think they are 'overshadowed' by the really heavy-duty novels such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. And while this is fair in a way and those two novels deserve all the renown that could ever be showered on them, I think it's a pity that so many of Le Guin's gems remain critically unknown. As my reading progressed and I came to the lesser-known titles, I found that they bore out the sense that power played a central role in the writing as a whole. So the thesis gave me an opportunity to explore, freshly, pieces that I like, which haven't been over-publicized, in the light of a concern with power and difference that I am interested in.

*How did difference come into your enterprise?*

In several ways, many of them rather indirect. In one sense, difference/*différance* is the condition of the outsider, the Other, the person who is marginalized by mainstream society. In my fifth chapter I argue that Le Guin has given increasingly more attention to peripheralized figures and groups as her career has progressed. These are the ones that are somehow different: the women, the racial Others, those who are physically handicapped, children, older people, sexual deviants, and the non-human world. Of course the problem does arise that there are so many groups on the periphery of society that the centre shrinks to the point where the 'Alpha Male' (Le Guin 1993b: 96) is also an endangered species, an Other in his own way; but I haven't

resolved this problem. I have simply left him as the standard from which to measure deviation, because I think society works that way. Even if there is no real centre, no absolutely 'normal', white, heterosexual, middle-class men, we still behave as if there were. And all of us who are Others measure our inferiority by our distance from that constructed standard.

The other aspect of difference has more to do with the Derridean idea of *différance*. As I understand Derrida, he uses the term to mean a linguistic effect, the result of the peculiar mutual reference of signifiers, in which meaning is deferred and at the same time is different from what it seems to be. And I think that Le Guin's writing offers a particularly good example of this effect. To take an example at random from her poetry, the image of the gap or hinge appears often. The Glossary to *Always Coming Home* gives one meaning of 'heyiya' as 'hinge; center' (1985a: 515). On one level the hinge, the idea of the border between two things or states, is a gap, an empty space. But in Le Guin's poetry, that very empty space is something definite and to be prized.<sup>4</sup> It attains this value not by losing the quality of emptiness, but because of it. Many of the images and words in the texts work in this way, by pulling the referential function of language in two different directions. I find this a very exciting way of writing.

*It sounds fascinating, but difficult to give an adequate account of such an effect within the confines of a doctoral thesis. How did you manage it?*

Fortunately for me, writing the thesis coincided with the development of my own thoughts on the subject of interpretation and finality. I have been increasingly aware, in the last few years, of the falsity of claims to critical or interpretive comprehensiveness and of the degree to which such claims inscribe, and are inscribed by, the theoretical paradigms they participate in. This leads to an artificial closure where the critic can claim, and feels justified in claiming, that he or she has written the last word on a particular author or work.

I found this was an assumption that underpinned a great deal of the existing criticism on Le Guin. I am not saying that science fiction criticism is no good: please don't misunderstand me. I do think, though, that many of the people who write on science fiction (and fantasy, too) use a New Critical model of looking only at the text and explicating it. They pretend that the

interpretations they arrive at are theory-free. But as Freedman perceptively says:

... all thought whatever is theoretical; and it may be added that few theories are more narrow and dogmatic than those, like commonsense empiricism, which attempt to deny their own theoretical status.

(1987: 180)

Most of the essays that are written in this vein are, in fact, excellent within their own parameters, because enthusiasts of speculative fabulation tend to be real enthusiasts. And I have read many critical essays and works that have been invaluable in what I might call my 'background thinking', before I actually got on to the main part of the thesis. But they don't take much notice of what is happening in contemporary, post-structuralist literary theory. And as my project was directed at issues which are central to the poststructuralist enterprise - the politics of the text and of othering - they were not much help. I needed, instead, to read the exciting works of theorists such as Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Said and White (which I wanted to do, anyway). The insights they propound helped to free me from the demands of having to say everything about the novels and, furthermore, having to do so from a New Critical point of view, which came from my training in literary studies and is perpetuated in the essays and books of science fiction criticism that I read. In short, poststructuralism gave me an alternative way of writing critically, one which would allow for more openness, more tentativeness, and for a plurality of interpretations instead of a competition between them for the position of top dog.

The more I tried to bring critical plurality to bear on Le Guin's writing, the more possible interpretations and meanings I saw in the texts. I am not sure whether Le Guin intends to build *difference/différance* into her work, or whether this is just another example of critical findings being shaped by one's theoretical paradigm. It would probably be courting danger to say that she does not intend to generate the effect, because she definitely acknowledges the existence of various meanings in her work, as well as the evasiveness of meaning per se.<sup>5</sup>

The open-ended approach that I have chosen in reading Le Guin, then, suits both my views on theory and practice of literary criticism, and what I (choose to) read in her work. Quite

often in the thesis, I have avoided giving an answer to a particular question, because I find the unanswered question more thought-provoking than an answer which might foreclose the debate or give an artificial resolution to creative uncertainty. Le Guin summarizes this way of thinking in the epigraph that begins this discussion when she quotes the Cree maxim, '*Usà puyew usu wapiw*' (1989: 84). She uses this saying to endorse the non-linear thinking behind *Always Coming Home*:

In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go backward.

(1989: 84)

In my dissatisfaction with 'linear' and 'expository' modes of criticism, this struck me as an appealing approach. My thesis begins with the questions that point to what I did not know. And keeping my eyes fixed on my starting point, I have come up with, mostly, more questions.

As a result, it is impossible to give a summary of my conclusions, in the conventional sense of the word. What I have found has more to do with the difficulty of concluding anything than with a generalized statement about Le Guin's work. For me Le Guin challenges and leads thought; she does not dictate or shape it in any hard-and-fast way.

*It sounds very good and even politically correct in the sense of being democratic. But can you really avoid drawing conclusions and closing the debate?*

No, of course not. A thesis that did not find or conclude anything would not be worth writing or reading. I'm talking about an enterprise that is always already doomed to failure, but one that remains an ideal of sorts. Ideally I would like to practise complete interpretive openness, giving equal attention to all kinds of views, even those I do not agree with. But, as I see it, there are two reasons why that is impossible. On the one hand, that would simply lead back to the old fallacy of interpretive completeness, the notion that one could somehow have the last word by including every perspective in a kind of giant critical carry-bag. On the other, we cannot live, and we can definitely not think, without making choices. And when we make a choice for or against a particular view, we are committing ourselves to a theoretical and critical

paradigm. These are inscribed by, and inscribe, power-relationships, because as Pratt says, 'knowledge is interested' (Arac 1990: 52). Whatever I write, and the critical choices I make, reveal my political affiliations. I believe that conclusions, interpretations and evaluations are inevitable in academic writing about literature, however much the liberal in me would like to espouse the idea of 'objectivity'.

To take an example from my reading of Le Guin: when I began research for this thesis, I intended to downplay the feminist element in her work, and I certainly was not going to commit myself to anything as overtly partisan as a feminist approach. But as my research has progressed, I have become more and more interested in feminism, and this is naturally reflected in the way I read Le Guin's work. It happens that the author, too, has become more and more open and explicit about her feminist affiliations. So I have tended to favour feminist interpretations of her writing.

*I'm glad you raised the issue of feminism, because it was something I wanted to ask about. To what extent would you say this is a feminist thesis?*

I could give you the answer Marge Piercy gave me when I asked whether she considered *He, She and It*<sup>6</sup> a feminist novel. She said, 'Of course; it was written by a feminist'.<sup>7</sup> And to some extent it is true. I am a feminist, and my feminist views shape my writing, with the result that it is a feminist thesis. Unfortunately, I don't think it's that simple. I am a feminist in the sense that I support women's resistance to oppression by a patriarchal system of ideology and social praxis; but I am also several other things. Among them, I am an avid reader of well-written books, especially science fiction and fantasy, which I call 'speculative fabulation'.<sup>8</sup> I don't judge the literature I like according to whether it furthers a feminist cause or not. I am also interested in other critical approaches besides feminism. Two that come to mind are poststructuralism and psychological approaches to texts, which, I think, offer useful insights into the ways in which meaning is constructed in language, in society, and in the psyche. All of these interests inform my reading of Le Guin, and of course she has had an enormous influence on the way I think. Her essays on the mother tongue in 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address', on fiction in 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' and 'It was a Dark and Stormy Night; Or, Why



are we Huddling about the Campfire?' and on utopia in 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be' - to name only three of her most accomplished pieces - are, I think, germinal for a feminist perspective on culture. Equally 'The Space Crone' gives a penetrating insight into the social position of older women.<sup>9</sup> In reading these profoundly feminist pieces, and others in Le Guin's work, a dialogue has been set up between the author's feminist insights and my own. At times I have found that Le Guin does not go far enough (for my liking) in thinking feminist issues through; at others, I admire the broad sweep of her analysis of the working of phallogentric social and mental structures.

I have been something of a theoretical opportunist in this thesis. I did not want to settle for a single theoretical paradigm or approach, on the one hand because I think that makes for an authoritarian reading which silences dissenting interpretations. On the other hand, it's so boring to write from only one point of view. As Blake says: 'May God us keep / From Single vision & Newton's sleep' (1972: 818). As I have said, I found a plurality of (mostly poststructural) approaches much more stimulating. And I used whatever was useful for my own purposes. For example, I drew heavily on Said for my discussion of colonialism in Chapter One on 'Un/Earthly Powers'; and White was very important when I was examining history and metahistory in Chapter Four on 'Re-Inventing H/history'.

The two theoretical frameworks that were most useful most often, though, were feminism and deconstruction. I have always been drawn to Derrida and the way deconstruction undermines binary oppositions in their own terms, by analysing them very closely in the texts where they appear. It is also, I think, enormously valuable to undermine the linguistic and ideological power-structures that govern much of our lives. And so Derrida and deconstruction play a major role in the thesis.

Feminism, on the other hand, appears in almost every chapter. At the time of writing, it seemed to be relevant very often. I can't account for this. It may be because I am a woman and a feminist; it may be because Le Guin is both of those things; it may be because her work 'really' does tackle feminist issues in a vital way. Possibly all these reasons play a part. I don't know if a recurring interest in feminism makes the thesis a feminist one. If so, then I have

written a feminist thesis.

*Are there any areas in the thesis you are not satisfied with, or that you wish you could have done differently?*

I can't say I'm dissatisfied with anything in particular, since I've done my best to fill in all the holes and cracks and make everything as good as I can. I have been rather frustrated by the difficulty of getting hold of Le Guin texts in South Africa, especially *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* (1994) and *Fire and Stone*, which, despite my best efforts, I have not been able to read.

But I would rather answer that question, if I may, in terms of the difficulties I experienced. Two of the chapters were especially difficult to write. For some reason I found Chapter Three on 'Sex / Identity' very tricky. I chose to look at the 'adolescent' novels from a (post-)Freudian perspective. In so doing, I was writing directly against Le Guin's psychology, which is more Jungian and even Taoist, in seeking to connect opposites, than Freudian. It may have bothered me on an unconscious level that I was taking such an oppositional line, and that may have made the chapter difficult. I tried to explore all the ramifications of a Freudian approach for the novels, partly out of curiosity, to see the reasons for the different destinies those novels map out for male and female protagonists; but it took a lot of work to get all the parts of the chapter to hang together and I am not sure whether I was entirely successful.

The other chapter that resisted being written was Chapter Five on 'Disempowerment'. In a way that chapter is the core of the thesis, because the concept of disempowerment unites the idea of difference with the fact that disempowerment is not inherent, it's constructed by the people with power. All through her work Le Guin is on the side of the underdogs. These are the people whom our society sees as inferior and, taking that as a justification, proceeds to rob of status, possessions and the right to speak. And a large proportion of her works aim to re-construe the Others in a sympathetic light so that the reader, even if he is an 'Alpha Male' (Le Guin 1993b: 96), can see that Others have a self as well, and that what appears to be an immutable difference between two groups is actually culturally constructed in the interests of power. The more I thought about disempowerment, the more I saw it as a recurring trope in Le Guin's work

and I came to see it as a central idea in the thesis. As Tolkien says, '[t]his tale grew in the telling' (1968: 7) until it became positively unwieldy. I hated the process of selecting which aspects of disempowerment to discuss in order to keep the chapter within manageable limits. And I am sure that, if I weren't constrained by length and time, I could have gone on discussing it for a much longer time than I did.

But there was a curious effect, that I'm sure anyone who's ever written a thesis will recognize; the chapters I battled the longest and hardest with became my favourites, and I came to enjoy the challenge of the battle itself. This is part of writing, I think. It's always a struggle to get the non-linear and sometimes non-rational thoughts in the mind into a readable and rational shape on the page that, moreover, resembles what was in your head.<sup>10</sup>

*Do you have a favourite chapter?*

Not really. Chapter Two, on 'Politifiction', came very easily. It also played a special role in the writing process for me. Up till then I was stuck for what to say, especially about *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, which are probably Le Guin's best-known novels and certainly have received the most critical attention. I had originally intended to title the chapter 'The Major Works' and write about the literary excellence of those two novels, as well as *The Word for World is Forest*. But after trying for quite a while to think about them from that angle, I realized that I didn't want to make value judgements and say anything like 'this work here is better than that one over there'. I also started reading some of the main thinkers from the 1960s in America and I saw all sorts of interesting correspondences between what was happening in American society, and being written about in essays and the arts (not science fiction), and what I was reading in the novels. All of this gave me an 'extra-literary' perspective on the fiction, that enabled me to break away from the need to give an exhaustive analysis. It infused me with new enthusiasm and broke my scholarly block.

*Do you have a favourite novel or work by Le Guin?*

Yes. I got hold of a copy of *Always Coming Home* in 1987, before I had even begun

thinking about writing a thesis on Le Guin. At that time several people I knew had read it and didn't like it, so I was rather wary. But I couldn't put it down. I read it all the way from Durban to Pretoria on the Translux bus, and when I finished it I turned back to the first page and started again. The fact that other people didn't like it just confirmed for me that I had a special relationship with Le Guin, and with this particular novel. For me *Always Coming Home* has endless appeal. I like Stone Telling and her story is interesting, but that's not what attracts me most. It's all the detours and the nooks and crannies - I think of the novel as a big, rambling house, maybe like one of the Kesh *heyimas*, which are largely underground - and every time I open the book the detours beckon to me from the shadows. I have read it several times now, and I know there are intricacies I haven't even consciously registered. And I love the way the book is written in several different styles and voices. The breadth of a mind that can conceive of a society in such detail that she can actually write their literature - not just one or two pieces, but examples of several its forms - is staggering. I feel as if I know the Kesh. I wish I did; and I wish, with Le Guin, I think, that they will be our future, when we've finally finished destroying the natural world.

But you must understand, and put me on record as saying, that there is a difference between liking one particular novel and saying it is better than any other. My response to *Always Coming Home* is very visceral. On an academic level, I would not like to say that anything Le Guin has written is better than anything else. Statements like that are dangerous, and they show one's critical and ideological affiliations more clearly than saying anything about the writing itself. I don't think any one work is outstandingly better than any other. And my opinions are prone to shift upon closer examination of the text in question. For example, when I first read *Malafrena* I was disappointed, because I was looking for the defamiliarizing element that is the hallmark of speculative fabulation. Instead I found a fairly conventional historical novel in which a young man grows up, leaves home to become a revolutionary, and finally marries a girl he grew up with. It was only when I re-read the novel that I appreciated the impact of its being set in the imaginary country called Orsinia, and I saw the extent of Le Guin's subtle questioning of the revolutionary cause. I now think *Malafrena* is very finely executed and demonstrates the author's superb ability to give a thoughtful critique of society and history, without falling into the trap of rejecting it out of hand. I have had similar experiences with several of the novels, and

I've now concluded that most, if not all, of my hasty judgements were simply the product of the way I was feeling at the time. In consequence, I would like to avoid making any more judgements.

Having said that, there are some of Le Guin's works that I think deserve far more critical attention than they have ever received. I am not talking about prose fiction here, because most of Le Guin's critics have read, at least, all her novels and short stories.<sup>11</sup> I am talking about the pieces nobody ever mentions: the poetry and essays. At the beginning of my research for this thesis, I knew Le Guin wrote poetry and I had read *Wild Angels* and *Hard Words*. It came as a shock to find out that she has published seven volumes of poetry, and that poems make up a substantial proportion of *Always Coming Home*. By anyone's standards, that makes her a poet. But nobody ever sees her that way. In all the critical books and essays, Le Guin is seen as a novelist (frequently as the author of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*). Le Guin's poetry is like her prose: complex, intricate, with a broad vision and a disciplined grace of style that I love to read. That it is not more widely known is one of the more unfortunate critical omissions of our time.

The same goes for her essays. These pieces engage seriously, and often provocatively, with philosophical and critical issues. I think they deserve to be read more widely, and to receive a more sustained response in the form of debate. Essays are not a form that is often chosen for scrutiny in literary studies, though; so I don't see much hope for that happening.

*Now that you've finished a thesis on Le Guin, are you tired of reading her work? Or are you still interested in researching it?*

Several people have asked me that, and the answer is a resounding no. I consider myself very lucky to have a thesis topic that has sustained my interest, undiminished, for several years. In part I think this is due to the fact that Le Guin is, in her own words, always 'pushing out towards the limits - my own, and those of the medium' (1993b: 25). She is always trying to see how her next book can be creatively different from anything she's written before. I get the impression that she is never happier than when she is writing something that has never been done

before. *Blue Moon over Thurman Street* (1993) is an example of this experimental aspect of her work. It's very unusual - a portrait, in photographs and poetry, of the street she lives in. I don't know many writers who would devote years to putting together a book about their own street. At the same time, Le Guin and photographer Roger Dorband obviously feel, and convey in the book, that Thurman Street is more than just a specific neighbourhood; it's a microcosm of American society and the changes that four decades have wrought upon it. The result is a work that is unique in terms of structure as well as concept. I am sure Le Guin will go on inventing and using new forms and ideas for as long as she writes; and I, for one, will be eager to read and study anything new that she publishes.

*Do you have any special suggestions for further research, maybe in the same direction as your thesis, by yourself or others?*

Yes, I have several ideas for ways in which my research could be taken further. Some of them are very tentative, half-conceived notions, and others are more fully fleshed-out proposals. For example, in reading Le Guin I came across certain images and tropes that she owes to the Native American literary tradition. The figure of Coyote is the prime example of this kind of 'borrowing'. 'Borrowing' is not really the right word, though, because Le Guin re-fashions Coyote into a creature all her own in her fiction. I have read some of the (oral) literature on which these images are based,<sup>12</sup> and I find it intriguing. I'd like to follow up this connection.

The other project that I would like to undertake would take my research into the politics of difference, as revealed in fictional discourse, further in connection with other women writers of speculative fabulation. Joan Slonczewski comes to mind, as do Octavia Butler, Lisa Tuttle, Pat Cadigan ... that's only a few of them; there are a whole crowd, and they are all very accomplished writers. I would like very much to look at their writing in conjunction with Le Guin's and see how they grapple with similar issues, and the ways in which they deal with specifically feminist concerns like gender politics, the body, motherhood and so on. I'm not sure what form any of this research could take, though; I know it needs to be done, but I haven't

worked out any of the fine details. I have a very strong sense that Le Guin is part of a literary movement that is constituted by subversion of established norms, both in literature and society. And I think that the next stage in 'Le Guin studies' is to abandon the single-author study and look at the ways in which she participates, and even founds, that movement.

*Are you saying that you have written critics like yourself, who engage in single-author studies, out of a job?*

I don't think I have written such studies out of a place in literary academia. But I think they will only have a limited place in the future, with cultural studies assuming a more central role. A better way of putting this is that I, for one, won't be writing any more single-author studies in the foreseeable future. In addition, I think there are several books and theses devoted solely to Le Guin, and I would like to see her work in a broader focus. I would be very glad to participate in such a re-visioning.

## NOTES

1. I have taken the title of my final chapter from Flax's book, *Thinking Fragments* (1990). Flax emphasizes the impossibility of drawing conclusions from the dialogue she creates between psychoanalysis, feminism and postmodern theory:

No neat integration, new synthesis, or *Aufhebung* of psychoanalysis, feminist theories, and postmodern philosophies will emerge from this sympathetic quarrel among and with some of the most important modes of contemporary Western theorizing ... I do not think any such outcome is either possible or desirable. Integration or synthesis would necessarily negate or deny irreducible differences between and among these discourses. To search for synthesis would presume that a theoretical jump over "the Rhodes" of our transitional and fragmented culture is possible through the exercise of a "pure" ahistoric reason.

(1990: 42)

2. The format of this chapter is borrowed from Ackroyd's imaginary interview with himself in *Dickens* (1990: 892-96).
3. Of course, this does not deny Foucault's intervention in political affairs.
4. See, for example, the poem 'Artists' in *Always Coming Home* (1985a: 74-75).
5. See, for example, Genly Ai's comment at the beginning of *The Left Hand of Darkness* that 'Truth is a matter of the imagination' (1969: 9) and Le Guin's gloss on this idea in the 1976 Introduction to the novel (1993b: 150-54). The instability of meaning is also foregrounded in several of Le Guin's short stories, such as 'Schrödinger's Cat' (1982b: 49-57) and 'The Eye Altering' (1982b: 166-80).
6. Printed in the United Kingdom, and sold in South Africa, as *Body of Glass* (1991).
7. These remarks form part of an unpublished interview with me, conducted in January 1994.
8. My choice of this term is explained in the Introduction to this thesis.
9. All the essays mentioned here are published in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989).
10. Le Guin admits to this difficulty in her 1978 Introduction to *City of Illusions*, where she states that there are always two novels: 'Always the book one imagines and the book one writes are different things' (1993b: 140).
11. This is with the exception of Le Guin's fiction for children, *Leese Webster* (1979b), *Catwings* (1988b) and *A Visit from Dr Katz* (1988c), which have not been mentioned in any of the critical texts I have read.
12. In particular, *Coyote was Going There: Indian Literature of the Oregon Country* (Ramsey 1977).



## APPENDIX

AN INTERVIEW WITH URSULA K. LE GUIN<sup>1</sup>

This is a transcript of a telephonic interview which I conducted with Ursula K. Le Guin in February 1994. It has not yet been published.

DB: One of the most interesting things I've encountered in America - although I haven't been able to study it more than superficially - is Native American culture. And it seems to me that Native American culture has had a considerable influence on your work. I would like to know whether you think that's true, and if so, in what way.

UKLG: Yes, that is true. When I came to write *Always Coming Home*, when I realized that I was writing about my particular piece of the earth, that is most home to me (that is, the far west of America, a Californian valley) and I was inventing people that I thought were going to live there, I realized that I didn't have any model for their literature. They're in the very far future, so nothing we do would be appropriate. That's when I first began to read Native American oral literature, not as an exotic literature, not as a model that I was going to use, but something the spirit of which I wanted to integrate. And it had a very deep effect on me. I had never really read very much in oral literature, and I was terribly moved to find that yes, indeed, these works do grow out of the ground that I was born on. It really is indigenous literature: it really is American. It is not transplanted European. That was very moving to me, and it still is. It's had quite an effect on me altogether. But it's hard to say in what way. I'm very careful not to try to imitate or steal. We have imitated and stolen too much from the Indians. So it's a really delicate ethical matter.

DB: I have noticed echoes of the figure of Coyote, which is prominent in Native American culture, in your works.

UKLG: Coyote turns up in many different people's mythologies, particularly all over the West. Sometimes it's a rabbit, or a hare, or a raven, that has much the same kind of behaviour as the Trickster. But Coyote is the one I like, because I like coyotes: they're very smart and they're very strange. So it's not hard for me to believe the coyote stories because I felt very much at home with coyotes. But Coyote is usually a male figure, so when I wrote about Coyote I made it a woman coyote. I thought, why not? Why does the Trickster always have to be a man? Why does the Creator always have to be a man?

DB: Were there any Native American texts that one might read that were particularly important for you in your research into their literature?

UKLG: There's a book that might be quite useful in the context, called *Coyote Was Going*

*There.* The editor is Jarold Ramsey.<sup>2</sup> It's a collection of Oregon Native myths. Of course I also did read some of my father's work, on and off, so the California Indian literature was not unfamiliar to me.

DB: Did your interest in Native American culture begin with your father?

UKLG: There were Indian friends that came to the house. My brother Karl has become an expert in Native American literatures. So we all picked it up.

DB: From my own South African background, I was very interested to find the Trickster so prevalent in Native American literatures, because it appears in African indigenous literatures too.

UKLG: There are different animal figures in Native American literature. They differ in behaviour, but have very much the same constellation of qualities. One thing I like about Coyote in the Oregon mythology, particularly that of the Columbia River people, is that Coyote makes the world, but does it badly. I find that most appealing. Coyote messes up the creation, and this appeals to my whole world-view. It does seem, sometimes, as if whoever made the world did mess it up, at least our part of it.

DB: That idea reminds me of the notion that the world is in the process of being created.

UKLG: There you begin to get into the relationship of a trickster figure with someone like Śiva in the Hindu myth, where creation and destruction are the same thing. There, of course, comes the weight of that figure, its power comes out. We're talking about very ultimate things here.

DB: Something I read as part of the subversive quality of your work is its strong connection to feminism. I'm very aware that feminism is not one thing, but many, and I wonder how you see yourself in relation to feminist debates.

UKLG: I've been there for quite a long time now. The debates come and go. I think my essential position remains very much the same, which is that what feminism is about is, you might say, an attempt to be aware of how gender is constructed by society. It's really an attempt to discover what makes a man behave like a man, and so on. And of course, where the construction of gender is manifestly unjust, then it becomes a political movement to rectify it, to try to put a little more justice and reason into it. I think that is my present working definition of feminism. It doesn't put me on any particular side of any particular current debate. It leaves me feeling that I am, and basically always have been, although originally not effectively but at least by intention, a feminist; and always will be. I can't imagine being anything else. I can't imagine taking the question seriously and not seeing that somehow the way society constructs gender is unfair both to men and to women.

DB: Would you care to elaborate on what you mean by its unfairness to men?

UKLG: Well, of course now we have to start talking about specific things. The expectations that are laid upon a boy: certain expectations of what it means to be male. In the first place, it means to be heterosexual. Also, there are things he's supposed to be interested in and things he's not supposed to be interested in, and for some boys this is death to the soul. They're trying to fit men into a model of masculinity, which very few of them actually fit comfortably, and it can be very, very destructive. And of course, I think the cost of fitting themselves into masculinity is one of the reasons that men are so incredibly defensive of it. They have paid such a high cost to be men that they're very, very easily threatened by a woman who comes and says, "Hey! You don't have to act that way!" or "Hey! Treat me like I was as good as you were." I think they're in such a contorted position that they simply can't straighten up and act naturally.

DB: In my view, one of your most striking articulations of feminist sympathy is in your idea of the 'mother tongue', which appears in 'A Left-Handed Commencement Address', 'Bryn Mawr Commencement Address', and briefly in *Searoad*. I wonder how this beautiful idea came to be, and whether you see much of your own writing as taking place in the mother tongue.

UKLG: I find a vast blank in my mind when I try to say anything more about the Mother Tongue than I said in the Bryn Mawr talk.

DB: Did your feminist affiliation begin in the peace movement, or the women's movement in the 1960s?

UKLG: I was very much a part of the peace movement right from the beginning - from the fifties, in fact, when it was stopping the bomb and that kind of thing. I've been marching with a banner, one banner or another, ever since I was thirty. Sometimes it does get tiring!

In the sixties there wasn't much of a feminist movement; it was really just getting going. After all, the New Left was when the women were supposed to bring the coffee to the brave young men. It was just beginning in the late sixties, when the women began to draw together. At that time I wrote the book *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which is certainly an early feminist book, in fact it's rather a founding book,<sup>3</sup> and yet in some ways I was way behind a lot of other women at that point. I didn't start reading feminist theory, and begin to understand what the debates were about, until the mid- or late seventies. So I was slow to become a theoretical feminist. I was just saying, "I know what all this is about," and actually I didn't. In the late seventies and early eighties I was catching up on reading the theory, reading feminist criticism, reading books by women, all that. But I always, always, all my life, revered Virginia Woolf. If there was no-one else, there was Woolf.

DB: I know that you revere Woolf's idea of androgyny as an ideal for the creative artist. Are there other areas in which her writing has been particularly significant for you?

UKLG: I would qualify 'revere' pretty strongly; I do honour her ideal of androgyny, and if forced would say that yes, probably the deepest art is androgynous. But men co-opted the idea of androgyny a long time ago, and what we need to do, what Woolf indeed did, I think, is to demasculinize it. We need to be sure that it truly means a condition of ungenderedness/allgenderedness, before it can be a *useful* idea.

As for other areas of Woolf's significance to me, how can I say? She has led me towards freedom ever since I was fifteen and blundered through *Orlando*. Each novel (as I slowly grew up enough to be able to read it) was an education in what the novel can do and be - especially *To the Lighthouse*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts* (I am still not grown up enough to feel that I know how to read *The Waves*, though I love to read it aloud, hearing it almost as music). And the essays! And the letters and the incredible, the inexhaustible *Journal*! she is what a writer should be, to me.

DB: I'm fascinated by the phenomenon of the sixties. Could you say a little more about your experience of it?

UKLG: Well, I had three small children and I was writing novels. I was being first published in any consistent way, so my career as a writer was taking off, and I was bringing up little people, so I was fairly busy with that kind of thing. I was not part of the 'Swinging Sixties'. If you want to understand the sixties movement in the United States, there is the most wonderful video which I just saw, called *The Sixties in Berkeley* or *Berkeley in the Sixties* - I cannot remember which. Susan Griffin is one of the people who made it. She's quite a well-known feminist writer; she has a very particular stance of her own. She lives in Berkeley. It is a wonderful picture. It's better than any book I've read about it, because it shows you the idealism with which it began, and the strange things that happened to it along the way. The whole peace movement and the free speech movement at the University of California, which was kind of the centre of it. Everybody else, in a sense, was imitating Berkeley. If you could ever obtain the video, it's absolutely fascinating - a very good piece of history.

DB: You have been very productive recently, with the publication of *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand*; *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street*, and the co-editing of the *Norton Anthology of Science Fiction*. I wondered how *Searoad* came to be.

UKLG: It basically came to be because we bought a little house over in a town on the Oregon coast, and I was able to spend some time there; and the stories grew out of that experience of living in a small coastal town. I made up the town of Klatsand. It is like Cannon Beach, but it isn't Cannon Beach: it could be a

couple of other towns. Life over there is rather different. It intrigued me, and these people and their stories just began coming to me. I always have a terrible time saying where a book comes from, or a story. They're there waiting to be written. It's an object. I made it; I'm pleased with it; I'm very fond of some of the people in it.

DB: The character of Virginia Herne in 'Hernes' shares many biographical details, including her occupation as a writer, with you. I wonder whether you are aware of any autobiographical elements in that character.

UKLG: If I am aware of any autobiographical elements in Virginia Herne, I'm not going to say anything about them. I will remark that I don't have a Pulitzer Prize. Her name is homage both to Woolf and to my beloved literary agent, Virginia Kidd.

DB: *Blue Moon Over Thurman Street* really intrigued me, because I see it as part of a culture of pride of place that is really new to me. Is that how you thought about it?

UKLG: Well, it's a celebration of the neighbourhood, but also there's an element of criticism of some of the recent, somewhat destructive changes in it. I do know why I wanted to do it. My street of thirty blocks covers such an incredible social gamut. It does go from the homeless in an industrial warehouse district, right up through most American social classes, to end up in a forest. And I think that's rather representative; it's a kind of story. It took a long time to do it, or rather, we were unsure how to do it. We knew what we wanted to do, but we didn't know how and we were both kind of feeling our way.

It is, in some respects, a deliberate social statement: "Look at this street! This street is the street that covers most of America. You probably live somewhere along this street if you're an American (unless you live in one of the stranger cities such as New York, where it's really different)."

DB: When I walked around Thurman Street myself, I found I was able to see what you meant by the book.

UKLG: People do seem to see what we were doing. We took it to many publishers who were afraid of it. They would say, "This is of only local interest," and we would try to say we think it's of more than local interest, that you get to something universal by dwelling upon the local. So we finally found a publisher locally.

DB: You mentioned that you're in a writing phase at the moment. May I ask what you're writing?

UKLG: Yes, stories. At the moment, science fiction stories. I'm back out among the planets. There's never any intention: I have no control over these things. They just happen; and I gave up control long, long ago. I'm just glad when they

happen. So I'm rather enjoying myself.

DB: Is 'The Shobies' Story', which I read recently, part of that project? I found the story a very creative mix of your fondness for narrative and storytelling, together with an unusual blend of characters from the Hainish universe.

UKLG: Yes, 'The Shobies' Story' was an early one in the series that I've been writing for over a year now. A volume called *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* will be out from Harper in November, containing it and two related stories, as well as earlier work.

DB: Well, I'm delighted, and I look forward to reading any of your new stories that I can find.

## NOTES

1. This interview was made possible by a generous grant for overseas travel from the University of South Africa.
2. Ramsey, Jarold, ed. 1977. *Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literature of the Oregon Country*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
3. Le Guin discusses the feminist resonances of *The Left Hand of Darkness* in detail in the essay 'Is Gender Necessary? Redux' in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989: 7-16).

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