ACTION AND ACTIVISM IN SELECTED NOVELS BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

BY

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Abstract

This thesis examines individual and societal action and activism in five science fiction and utopian novels by Ursula K. Le Guin, namely, The left hand of darkness, The word for world is forest, The lathe of heaven, The dispossessed, and Always coming home. Le Guin is a politically committed author whose ideological perspective is informed by feminism, Taoism, and anarchism, as well as a strong ecological awareness. These determine the structure of her fictional societies and the actions of her characters. Each novel is approached on its own terms, with the commentary adhering closely to the text. Individuals and their societies are conceived of as embodying different and conflicting ways of being and doing. The author is seen as an activist by virtue of her political commitment, especially in the case of the self-reflexive, self-critical Always coming home. Included in the Introduction are sections on: Tom Moylan's concept of the critical utopia, which tailors the utopian genre to fit modern views; Le Guin's concept of the yin utopia, one possible form of the critical utopia; and a short section on Taoism, familiarising the reader with concepts and terminology used in the thesis.

In The left hand of darkness Genly Ai, whose mission it is to bring Karhide into the Ekumen, acts wrongly because he fails to communicate with the Gethenians, cut off by his egotistical isolation and his attempts to force the androgynous Gethenians into his conceptual framework. His alienation from his own feminine side further isolates him because he fears and distrusts the femininity he sees in them. The Gethenian Estraven, being in touch with his inner self and with the whole, which leads to understanding and communication, is able to act in complete certainty and appropriateness, accomplishing the mission. Genly has to admit and assimilate what he fears in order to act rightly.

In The word for world is forest the tribal Athsheans live in complete symbiotic relationship with the forest (their world) which shapes and paces their lives. The forest is symbolic of the unconscious, and the source of all, including all significant action, which the adept Dreamers bring from the dream-time into the world-time by means of controlled dreaming. The arrival of the Terrans to exploit both planet and inhabitants destroys the Athshean way of life, necessitating the Dreamer, Selver, to bring from the dream-time the ability to mobilise and to engage in organised warfare. They rout the Terrans, but are irrevocably changed by now having to live with and keep control of their new dangerous ability.

In The lathe of heaven the Taoist principle of wu-wei is embodied in George Orr, who has the unwanted ability to change reality by dreaming, which conflicts with his

Taoist nature. The psychiatrist (Haber) he consults to cure him of effective dreaming takes advantage of him to try and create a utopia. Being wholly out of touch with himself and his environment, Haber - who is entirely cut off from the whole which is Tao, the root of all - creates only dystopia. George's unconscious works according to non-rational logic which distorts the results of attempts to manipulate it consciously, as Haber tries to. George eventually regains his balance, lost when he tried drugs as a way out of his predicament, and acts decisively to stop Haber.

In The dispossessed the utopian community of Anarres is losing its utopian character to bureaucracy and narrow-mindedness. The scientist Shevek, finding his personal and scientific progress impeded by those unwilling and unable to accommodate new thought and change, is politically activated, and works towards re-activating the original utopian conception underlying Anarres, involving change and stability.

The self-reflexive, self-critical text of Always coming home uses plurivocality to depict the utopian Kesh in great detail. They live interconnected with the whole of the universe, which they call the "Dance". The metaphor illustrates the essential balance of stillness and change which characterises the whole. The two longest Life Stories included, concern female quests, redressing the imbalance in the earlier novels. The discoverer/creator of the Kesh, Pandora, can be seen as an activist who destroys civilisation to enable the Kesh to come into being, lamenting because she can find no other way. The dystopian society of the Dayao represents Le Guin's most explicit feminist indictment of contemporary society to date.

The thesis concludes with the observation that the quest to create a new collective social system which excludes alienation of any kind is Le Guin's main object in all the novels under consideration, taking precedence over the depiction of individual activism, adding that the quest itself is her main mode of activism.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and grandparents, my late grandfather, A.D.J. Deetlefs, and my late aunt, D.C. van der Walt.

Rethea Deetlefs

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Introduction

The terms action and activism can be defined in any number of ways, depending on one's point of view. Since Le Guin's perspective on the world is, for my purposes, mainly informed by feminism, anarchism, and Taoism, all of which include a very strong ecological awareness, these particular ways of viewing and structuring the world direct my inquiry into action and activism in the novels I have chosen. I let myself be closely led by the novels under consideration, concentrating on the individuals and societies depicted, since they embody the various ways of being in the world which Le Guin investigates. In most cases the landscape and climate in which the societies exist shape them as well, and are duly considered, along with whatever else the particular novel complicates these issues with. The nature of my approach and the topic of my inquiry both require me to stick rather closely to each text. I chose her most important science fiction novels, namely, The left hand of darkness, The word for world is forest, and The lathe of heaven, as well as the two utopias, The dispossessed and Always coming home.

Left hand, Word, Lathe, and The Dispossessed include chapters told from the point of view of the main characters. In terms of action and activism, one effect of such a structure is to emphasise the connection between actor and action - as well as actor and responsibility for the action's consequences. This is important to my theme, especially when characters represent specific world-views as is mostly the case, for instance Taoism in Lathe and anarchism in The Dispossessed. The characters have different ways of seeing and acting, that is, corresponding to different ways of being in the world. Readers are afforded the opportunity of comparing the consequences of these different ways of being. This, combined with the structure, provides readers with a way of evaluating events - keeping in mind that every event, as well as the other characters, is seen from the perspective of a character. Both my theme and the device of alternating points of view in most of the novels therefore require my concentrating on the dramatis personae, on their individual psyches and behaviour, as well as the larger wholes they form part of, their societies. As I indicated, the societies themselves represent ways of being in the world. Investigating and exploring the societies, which I do in some detail, therefore also means investigating and exploring action.

What is examined when delving into the psyche and actions of a character is ultimately bigger than a single individual's actions and their results, of course. The actions (or non-action) resonate beyond the immediate novelistic circumstances into the realm of "real-life" morality and politics. Le Guin is a political author, committed to feminism, pacifism, and anarchism - in short, an activist, in that she sees her novels (her

"acts") as contributing to ideological contestation with the forces of oppression. According to her, art is not inert, not removed from "reality":

> Fiction in particular, narration in general, may be seen not as a disguise or falsification of what is given but as an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives, and an enlargement of present reality by connecting it to the unverifiable past and the unpredictable future (Le Guin 1989a: 44-45).

This has implications for the role of art and artists in society.

Although Le Guin has reservations about activism being dished up as art, saying that she prefers to keep her activism and her art apart (McCaffery 1984: 84), I think of her as an activist (and of her novels as instances of activism). Activism is about options and alternatives to the undesirable given. Feminist consciousness is necessarily activist since it demands social and political change and its very existence is action towards bringing it about. Activism in this sense may for my purposes be defined as deliberate (political) effort aimed at exposing (and undermining) the absurdities and self-destructive tendencies of the dominant culture, and paving the way towards alternatives - or at least affirming the possibility of alternatives and the potential to realise them. The form of activism of the characters depends on the kind of individual they are and the type of society they are members of, as does the kind of action they engage in.

I thought it advisable to include separate sections on the critical utopia and on Taoism in my introduction, in order to familiarise the reader with certain terms and concepts used and referred to in the following chapters. In the section on Taoism I consider it in its unadulterated form, Le Guin adapting it to her purpose in each novel. Anarchism being fairly self-explanatory, I will discuss it only very briefly. Le Guin notes that anarchism "rejects the identification of civilization with the state, and the identification of power with coercion" (1989a: 93). Since anarchism and Taoism "converge both in matter and manner" as far as this is concerned, she combined them in The dispossessed, and both continue to help structure her fictional communities and individuals. According to Kropotkin anarchism is:

> the name given to the principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government - harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law or obedience to any authority, but by free agreement concluded between various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of an infinite variety of the needs and aspirations of a civilized being (Sargent 1983: 5).

Le Guin does not have faith in centralized government - those in her fiction are dictatorships or otherwise undesirable - but rather in localised rule by consent and shared power, as in her more utopian communities.

In conclusion: whenever quoting from a novel in a chapter which it is the subject of I use only the page number as reference. The titles of the novels are abbreviated to one or two words. Each chapter is headed by the date of composition of the novel in question.[i]

The Critical Utopia

Tom Moylan coined the term "critical[1] utopia" to describe that kind of utopian writing which (a) "is aware[] of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream", (b) "dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated" and (c) "focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives" (1986: 10-11). He notes that "whatever the particular set of social images each text sets forth, the shared quality in all of them is a rejection of hierarchy and domination and the celebration of emancipatory ways of being as well as of the very possibility of utopian longing itself" (op. cit. 12). The texts are "as much concerned with the discrete process of consciousness raising and political engagement as they are with iconic social images" (op. cit. 205). In the end "it is their own radically hopeful activity as meaningful proto-political acts which they contribute to the current opposition" (op. cit. 112). An integral part of the strategy of opposition, and characteristic of the critical utopia, is the provision of a forum for what is excluded and marginalised. These texts

> reject the metaphysical structuring of reality that restricts perception and activity by excluding the negative and marginal. ... the margins are brought back into the historical situation, thus rendering the situation more complex, more conflictual, more subject to revolutionary change. Once included the contradictions must be faced, the struggle cannot be avoided (Moylan 1986: 211).

More specifically, the changes to the utopian tradition occur at the levels of the iconic register "in which the image of the alternative society is generated" and the discrete register "which generates plot and character" (Moylan 1986: 44, 45). As far as the iconic register is concerned, the critical utopia "breaks with previous utopias by presenting in much greater, almost balanced, detail both the utopian society and the original society against which the utopia is pitted as a revolutionary alternative". Also at this level, "in addition to this binary opposition of old/dominant and new/oppositional societies, the

critical utopia ... deviates by presenting the utopian society in a more critical light". So, "in each of the new utopias the society is shown with its faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse in the form of the persistence of exploitation and domination in the better place" (op. cit. 44).

In the traditional utopia "societal imagery takes precedence over character and especially over plot" whereas, at the discrete level in the critical utopia, "the primacy of societal alternative over character and plot is reversed, and the alternative society and indeed the original society fall back as settings for the foregrounded political quest of the protagonist" (op. cit. 45). The critical utopia produces (or has the potential to produce) active, effective (if not always completely) protagonists - which is of great importance to oppositional discourses since, as Cranny-Francis puts it, "the social critic who is concerned to effect change must alter the status of the individual subject from passive to active" (1990: 114).

> Readers once again find a human subject in action, now no longer an isolated individual monad stuck in one social system but rather a part of the human collective in a time and place of deep historical change. The concerns of this revived, active subject are centered around the ideologeme of the strategy and tactics of revolutionary change at both the micro/personal and macro/societal levels (Moylan 1986: 45).

In other words, the issue of activism is directly addressed in these texts.

The form of utopia has changed considerably too.

> The apparently unified, illusionary, and representational text of the more 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 (op. cit. 46).

Secondly, it has become more self-reflexive and self-critical, partly because of the simultaneous presence of the originary and alternative societies, as well as the presence of the ideological "sediment" of the older utopian form. More specifically,

> the older ideological message of the genre - the ability to create and establish a given social system - persists in the more recent, more self-aware, and complex critical form and clashes with the new ideological message - which denies the primacy of system while holding open the radical act of utopian imagination. System persists in the iconic, societal images, but it is negated by the privileging of action that is generated in the discrete character activities and by the self-reflexive and open nature of the form (op. cit. 50).

In this "play between generic norm and deviation" (or "generic discontinuities", as Fredric Jameson terms it) "can be found the symbolic activity that expresses the current tensions in the political unconscious"[2] (op. cit. 43).

The critical utopia not only produces active fictional subjects but "activates" readers as well. Both traditional and critical utopia challenge the originary society and its members - although the critical utopia strives for a more radical critique of society and "activation" of the reader. The "challenge" is not only at the iconic level (or discrete level, for that matter). The changes in the manner in which the text presents itself to the reader, its self-reflexivity and self-criticism, complicate the process of reading, of making sense of the text, itself. The reader has to actively engage with the text, has to collaborate with the author and the text to construct meaning. To put it another way, the critical utopia - just as the traditional utopia - situates the reader in an active reading position. According to Anne Cranny-Francis, "reading position" is "the position assumed by a reader from which the text seems to be coherent and intelligible. It is essentially a set of instructions about how to read the text, constructed by the text by means of the conventions which simultaneously encode discursive positionings" (1990: 25). In general, "as each detail of the social structure of the [traditional] utopian figure is logically described, the (sic) implicit[3] comparison with that of the reader's own society is made. In this way a detailed (re)vision of the reader's society is constructed within the text" (op. cit. 110-111)[4]. Therefore

> the reader is ... positioned to question the mechanisms of her/his own society, because another social structure with apparent advantages over her/his own, but also many similarities, is shown operating simultaneously. In other words, the sense of inevitability, of naturalness, about the contemporary social order is challenged (op. cit. 111).

The question of the "naturalness" of the contemporary social order is an important one. It is the task of conservative discourses (such as patriarchy and racism) to make it seem that way. A "naturalised" social order is in a seemingly unshakable position - things are the way they are because they are naturally ordained[5], hence not subject to change, especially change with the individual as source. Considering that "so long as a society is seen to be universal or permanent or impervious to the actions of individuals, it will seem irresistible" (op. cit. 114), and that it is the aim of oppositional discourses to resist and change it, the "activation" of individuals is vital. As Moylan puts it, "the false utopia created by postwar consumerism which required a passive consumer is deconstructed in favor of the more radical utopia that re-engages the gears of active human resistance and creation" (1986: 49).

One way in which utopia accomplishes this is by not allowing readers (not that the traditional utopia allowed them to) to escape from the problems of empirical reality: "Utopian narrative does not offer the comfortable, resolved reading position often associated with narrative texts, because of this continual interruption, this continual referral of the reader to a problematic, often alienating and hostile, real" (op. cit. 115). In fact,

> this convention ... works against a passive reading position and for the construction of an engaged, activist reader, a reader not constrained by the narratives which structure everyday events, beliefs, and values, but one who actively questions those ideological positions" (op. cit. 115).

Fredric Jameson arrives at much the same conclusion from a different angle:

> utopia's deepest subject, and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to project the other of what is, a failure that, as with fireworks dissolving back into the night sky, must once again leave us alone with this history (quoted by Moylan, 1986: 41).

Moylan sums up the characteristics of the genre in the conclusion to his book:

> The critical utopia gives voice to an emerging radical perception and experience that emphasize process over system, autonomous and marginal activity over the imposed order of a center, human liberation over white/phallocratic control, and the interrelationships of nature over human chauvinism - and they give voice to the seditious utopian impulse itself (1986: 210-211).

The Yin Utopia

It is Le Guin's argument that we should go back to our roots in order to find and create utopia, an argument which she notes is "not reactionary, nor even conservative, but simply subversive" (1989b: 85). Her reason for going backwards is that it "seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth" (do.). She rejects the notion that human beings have only one choice - "happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness" (Zamyatin, quoted by Le Guin, do.). This is the product of the "euclidean mind" "which is obsessed by the idea of regulating all life by reason and bringing happiness to man whatever the cost" (Robert C. Elliot, quoted by Le Guin, do.)[6]. And "the purer, the more euclidean the reason that builds a utopia, the greater is its self-destructive capacity" (op. cit. 87). Reason wishes to have perfect control over everything going on in utopia, therefore no dissension is allowed, no idiosyncrasy. This

means that the Tirins who inevitably crop up, pointing out utopia's flaws - in this case, its inhumanity - are dealt with harshly.

Since things are always on their way to becoming their opposites, especially if strict measures are used to try and ensure it does not happen, utopia turns into dystopia. This is why utopia has to be process (as the critical utopias are), not product, not static. Le Guin describes the utopia constructed by euclidean reason, the "rationalist utopia", as

> a power trip. It is a monotheocracy, declared by executive decree, and maintained by willpower; as its premise is progress, not process, it has no habitable present, and speaks only in the future tense. And in the end reason itself must reject it (op. cit. 87).

She notes that utopia so far "has been euclidean, ... European, and ... masculine", in other words, "yang" or rationalist. "In one way or another", she writes, "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"[7] (op. cit. 90). Now she is "trying to suggest, in an evasive, distrustful, untrustworthy fashion, and as obscurely as [she] can"[8] that losing faith "in that radiant sandcastle may enable" us to see "another kind of utopia". Since "our civilization is now so intensely yang ... any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal"[9] (op. cit. 88), not re-shaping or re-hashing present systems or ideas. And a reversal, she finds, aided by Lao Tzu, involves return:

> Returning to one's roots is known as stillness.
> Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.
> Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment.
> To ignore the constant
> is to go wrong, and end in disorder (Lao Tzu, quoted by Le Guin, op. cit. 90).

Therefore, "to attain the constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward" (do.). The yin utopia - which is one kind of critical utopia - "would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting and cold" (do.). An utopia established along these lines would be like an organism which does not engage in "a progress towards achievement, followed by stasis, which is the machine's mode" but - keeping in mind such qualities as "participatory", "circular", "cyclical", and "nurturant" - in "an interactive, rhythmic, and unstable process, which constitutes an end in itself" (op. cit. 91). A "non-euclidean" society established according to these lines would be

> a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a

> low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door (op. cit. 96).

This is the kind of utopia which comes "out of [the] margins, negations, and obscurities" (op. cit. 89) left out in the planning of the euclidean, European, masculinist utopia. The problem is how to get there[10]. One of the ways, if not the principal way, of reaching (for) utopia is by means of hope - the importance of which Le Guin emphasizes more than once in her writing[11]. The hope we are offered, she finds, is "yang" hope, in the form of "models, plans, blueprints, wiring diagrams", expressions of "our compulsion ... to have power over what happens, to control. Knowledge is power, and we want to know what comes next, we want it all mapped out" (op. cit. 96-97). As she says, "the quality of static perfection is an essential element of the non-inhabitability of the euclidean utopia" (op. cit. 89). She urges breaking with the great tradition of exclusive rationalist reasoning and planning, since she does not foresee us

> ever ... get[ting] to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways; because we're in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live (op. cit. 98).

Faced with a choice between writing about the "injustice and misery" of the world or writing "escapist and consolatory fantasies" she answers "no" (do.). Her kind of utopia offers her a complex form which surpasses binary thought, and in which she utilizes what her roots, her home - "this place where I was born and grew up and love beyond all other, my world, my California" (op. cit. 48) - and its past have to offer[12].

Notes

1 Moylan defines "critical" as follows: "'Critical' in the Enlightenment sense of critique - that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as 'critical' in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction" (1986: 10).

2 The "political unconscious" is "the repressed and buried reality" of the fundamental history of "the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from the realm of Necessity" which is, Moylan notes, "perhaps more simply stated as the process of social revolution and historical change" (Jameson, quoted by Moylan, 1986: 30).

3 As we have seen, in the critical utopia the "implicit comparison" is much more explicit since the originary society is no longer merely the absent referent but actually depicted in the text (in some form).

4 This statement may be understood to indicate that there is a plan or precedent for every contingency in utopia, therefore it would be well to keep in mind that the critical utopia differs from the classical in that the former allows no (or much less) stasis and closure - in other words no blueprints, or nothing which could be mistaken as such.

Formerly, "people, like everything else in utopia, [had to] be shriven from their idiosyncrasies, [had to] be transformed into units that can be manipulated according to a restricted set of laws and presuppositions. In utopia, surprise [was] a heresy" (Holquist 1968: 136). The kind of utopia which Holquist's description fits, is the exact opposite of the critical utopia.

[5] Or because it is the best we can do, as the lie goes.

[6] Haber in The lathe of heaven fits this description perfectly. It need only be added that the ego of the constructor of the euclidean utopia plays a most important role, especially in Lathe - Haber ultimately wishes to benefit himself.

[7] In contrast, especially to the "clear" and "lineal", the critical utopias "privilege that oppositional way of thinking which is 'negative, critical, relational, and differential, in the sense that it refuses to isolate and divide what is interrelated and interdependent'" (Michael Ryan, quoted by Moylan, 1986: 211-212).

[8] In a satisfyingly critical utopian manner in other words, avoiding closure and system. It should be noted that Le Guin here adopts some of the characteristics ("evasive", "distrustful", "untrustworthy", "obscure") of the Trickster Coyote - who, in female form, plays an important role in Always coming home. She later suggests "the utopist would do well to lose the plan, throw away the map, get off the motorcycle, put on a very strange-looking hat, bark sharply three times, and trot off looking thin, yellow, and dingy" (op. cit. 98). Perfection is hardly a quality which Coyote brings to mind.

[9] Elsewhere she asserts that "side trips and reversals are precisely what minds stuck in forward gear most need" (Le Guin 1989a: 95).

[10] Since Pandora "agonises" about this in Always coming home, the following statement by Thomas Disch does not apply to her: "utopias bring out the totalitarian in all of us, for the simple and sufficient reason that whatever a utopia's ostensible government, it is always ruled by an absolute tyrant, the author" (quoted by Somay, 1984: 30). At the very least Le Guin goes a long way to disproving it.

[11] "However ill-founded, however misguided, hope is the basic stratagem of mortality. We need it, and an art that fails to offer it fails us" (Le Guin 1989b: 103).

[12] I'm thinking specifically about Always coming home here.

Taoism

Tao, or the Way, "is its own source, its own root. Before Heaven or earth existed it was there, ... it gave birth to [them]" (Chuang Tzu, 6). Although "the Way permeates all things" (op. cit. 23), it "is not a conscious or intellectual principle" (Chen 1989: 205). It is both the source and destiny of all that is: "Things have their creation in what has no form [Tao], and their conclusion in what has no change [Tao]" (Chuang Tzu, 19). Tao is "the dark, mysterious, unconscious Mother" (Chen 1989: 54), as the following passage illustrates:

> Dark and hidden, (the Way) seems not to exist and yet it is there; lush and unbounded, it possesses no form but only spirit; the ten thousand things

> are shepherded by it[1], though they do not understand it - this is what is called the Source, the Root (Chuang Tzu, 22).

All that is (Being) issues from Tao as Non-Being, and returns there when the course of its life is done: "There is life, there is death, there is a coming out, there is a going back in" (op. cit. 23). The Tao te ching notes that

> Now things grow profusely,
> Each again returns (kuei) to its root.
> To return to the root[2] is to attain quietude (ching),
> It is called to recover life (ming).
> To recover life is to attain the Everlasting (ch'ang),
> To know the Everlasting (ch'ang) is to be illumined (ming) (16.2).

Tao's mode of action is wu-wei, no-action, "yet nothing is not done" (op. cit. 37.1). According to Martin Versfeld, "Tao bring die wêreld deur wu-wei voort, deur 'n soort spontane groeikrag" (1988: 8). As the Tao te ching says, "the ten thousand things will transform by themselves (tzu-hua)" (37.1). Hua is "the process by which natural beings unfold according to their inner rhythm" (Chen 1989: 144). The Chuang Tzu puts it this way: "The inborn nature is the substance of life. The inborn nature in motion is called action. Action which has become artificial [wei] is called loss" (23). Wei is human action which "impos[es] order on nature, [and] is disruptive or destructive" (Chen 1989: 144). Chen remarks that "the proper human role is to respond to the inner dynamism of things and be a part of their flow, not to superimpose on them an order disturbing their pre-established harmony" (op. cit. 170). Imposing human order on nature is superfluous since nature is already profoundly ordered (witness the four seasons, for instance, and natural laws in general). According to Versfeld, "die ware kuns van die lewe is om jou oor te gee aan die misterieuse strominge van die skeppende natuur" (1988: 9). However, to act is sometimes necessary: "because [the True Man of old] regarded wisdom as what is timely, there were things that he could not keep from doing" (Chuang Tzu 6). These actions would still conform to Taoist conceptions of appropriate action, as set out in the Tao te ching and the Chuang Tzu.

Appropriate or right action in Le Guin's sense depends on timing, comprehending the whole and one's place in it, in other words, holding on to the root which is Tao. To "insert" an action into its appropriate place and time in the great round is to do the right thing. The action's consequences will be in harmony with heaven and earth, it will not be imposition or interference, and so not disturb the all-important balance. This is wu-wei or no-action, which may be roughly defined (for my purposes) as a particular kind of action, of the kind one finds in nature, rather than no action at all.

The Chuang Tzu considers "embrac[ing] the One" and "keep[ing] from losing it" (clinging to the Root during life, in other words) as "the basic rule of self-preservation" (23). As we have seen, adhering to and emulating Tao is what both texts counsel since "one who is well established is not uprooted" (Tao te ching, 54.1) and "to be like Tao is to last long" (op. cit. 16.3). Those who are "uprooted", who

> go forth and claim to have gotten something - what they have gotten is the thing called death. They are wiped out and choked off - already a kind of ghost themselves. Only when that which has form learns to imitate the formless will it find serenity (Chuang Tzu, 23).

In order to find serenity the Taoist should "let [the] mind wander in simplicity, blend [the] spirit with the vastness, follow along with things the way they are" (Chuang Tzu, 7). Seeing that pursuing the coming-out process leads to death, as does "daring [to] be at the world's front"[3], it is best to follow Confucius's suggestion: "Don't go in and hide; don't come out and shine; stand stock-still in the middle" (Chuang Tzu, 19).

The Taoist cultivates ignorance (yü) because knowledge and learning belong to the irreversive coming-out process leading away from Tao's unity and harmony into fragmentation, divisions, and distinctions[4]. In a state of yü strife and conflict are unlikely. "While knowledge is called kuo, going beyond or transgressing against nature ..., ignorance (yü) is the original and sacred state of things; thus to remain in ignorance or return to ignorance is the goal of all beings" (Chen 1989: 205). The Tao te ching distinguishes between "verbal and spoken" and "non-verbal or unspoken" knowledge. The former "describes consciousness coming out from nature without return", the latter "belongs to a reversive consciousness in dynamic union with the unconscious" (op. cit. 206).

Yü is also characteristic of p'u, the nameless, undifferentiated Uncarved Block, representing nature in its original state, before culture (op. cit. 126). It is a feminine symbol, "unformed, yielding, and receptive" (op. cit. 92). Importantly, being an Uncarved Block means being without desire[5] (for knowledge, goods, power, etc.) and selfless (like Tao): the virtuous are described as "dull and unwitting, they have no desire; this is called uncarved simplicity [p'u]. In uncarved simplicity the people attain their true nature" (Chuang Tzu, 9). The Tao te ching holds that "without desire there is thus quietude (ching). / The world shall be self-ordered" (37.3).

In Taoism vicissitudes are philosophically accepted: "the sage takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source"[6] (Chuang Tzu, 5). In fact, change is one thing one can rely on, no state of things prevails forever - which happens to be an

argument against wei: "The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash - with every movement they alter, with every moment they shift. What should you do and what should you not do? Everything will change of itself, that is certain!" (op. cit. 17).

> Life, death, preservation, loss, failure, success, poverty, riches, worthiness, unworthiness, slander, fame, hunger, thirst, cold, heat - these are the alternations of the world, the workings of fate. Day and night they change place before us and wisdom cannot spy out their source. Therefore, they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the Spirit Storehouse[7] (op. cit. 5).

The advice is to "harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for joy" (5). The Chuang Tzu advises one to "forget distinctions", and "leap into the boundless and make it [one's] home". This is described as "harmoniz[ing] them [distinctions, etc.] all with the Heavenly Equality" (2). In any case:

> The ten thousand things are really one. We look on some as beautiful because they are rare or unearthly; we look on others as ugly because they are foul and rotten. But the foul and rotten may turn into the rare and unearthly, and the rare and unearthly may turn into the foul and rotten. So it is said, You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world. The sage never ceases to value oneness (22).

Being "one with the Heavenly Harmony" (Chuang Tzu, 23) - which one could gloss as experiencing and perceiving All as it truly is, without distinctions, forms, names, and consciousness; in short, being one with the formless, nameless Root/Tao - means not being uprooted by "the alterations of the world" and the "workings of fate". The Tao te ching points out that

> calamities (huo) are what blessings depend on,
> In blessings are latent calamities (huo).
> Who knows where is the turning point? (58.2)

The Chuang Tzu refers to fate and its unavoidability several times. Contentment is seen as depending on the ability to "harmonise" vicissitudes, seeing that " a thing is always 'becoming' or 'de-becoming', all the time on the way to something else"[8]:

> ... whether you point to a little stalk or a great pillar, a leper or the beautiful Hsi-shih, things ribald and shady or things grotesque and strange, the Way makes them all into one. ... Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use (for categories), but relegates them all to the constant (Chuang Tzu, 2).

From the point of view of Tao binary opposites issue from the same ground and are therefore inextricably interconnected, as in the yin-yang symbol - another reason for

"harmonising" them. To try to define and isolate some attribute or principle is to simultaneously define and isolate its opposite, in this way creating an other, hence breaking up the world and in time impossibly complicating one's relationship with it. "So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong [and all other categories and opposites] and rests in Heaven the Equalizer" (do.).

Notes

[1] According to the Tao te ching Tao "clothes and nourishes ten thousand beings, / But does not lord over them" (34.2) - meaning that "Tao itself [always] remains dark and withdrawn" (Chen 1989: 138). This points to Tao's self-effacing character and its mode of action (discussed below), namely, leaving beings and things to their own natural impulses (tzu-hua or self-transformation).

[2] Note that returning to the Root can refer to death as well as to adhering to Tao during life.

[3] "Daring not be at the world's front" is one of the Three Treasures of Tao, the others being "motherly love" (tz'u) and "frugality" (chien) (Tao te ching, 67.2).

[4] Knowledge and learning hinder rather than help to know Tao, as the Chuang Tzu notes: "Only when there is no pondering and no cogitation will you get to know the Way" (22).

[5] "With the nameless uncarved wood, / There shall be no desire" (Tao te ching, 37.2).

[6] The pronoun is Watson's. The Chinese pronoun refers to both men and women.

[7] "Spirit Storehouse" is "a Taoist term for the mind" (Watson 1968: 74).

[8] Joseph Needham, quoted by Bittner (1984: 1).

Chapter I

The left hand of darkness (1967-1968)

The word for world is forest and The lathe of heaven are told from the point of view of the three main characters of each; they represent the different ways of being and doing which those novels investigate. The same technique is used in The left hand of darkness, which is told by Genly Ai, the Ekumen's Envoy to Gethen, and Estraven, lord of a Domain and of the Kingdom of Karhide, functioning as "the King's Ear", or prime minister (12). However, the earlier novel covers more ground, so to speak, by including various genres - folk tales, myth, journal extracts, and a factual report. "I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination" (9): Genly's introduction represents the recognition that, as he puts it, "facts seem to alter with an altered voice" (though "it is all one story") (9) or, in the words of James Bittner, "meaning is genre-bound" (1984: 110).

There is much "over-lapping" of events and characters in Left hand. This "contrapuntal technique" (Barry 1992: 156) allows Le Guin to create a richly layered plot, as contemporary Gethenian events and actions repeat ancient and mythic events and actions, and the same contemporary events are perceived through the eyes of both Genly and Estraven. The repetitions are not exact, but serve to inform the events as well as the characters by means of both similarity and difference. One of the effects or functions is that "no truth is allowed to stand as the entire truth; every insight is presented as partial, subject to revision and another perspective" (N.B. Hayles, quoted by Cummins, 1990b: 85). Another is that the reader is drawn into the process of telling the story and the construction of meaning, as is often the case in Le Guin's fiction. By way of discussing the nature of action in Left hand, I consider in some detail the main ways in which Gethen differs from contemporary empirical society (as Suvin terms it), and which play major roles in the plot of the novel in some detail. They are the climate, the absence of gender, the two main societies, shifgrethor, the Handdara and the Yomeshta, and the Ekumen. Naturally, the two main characters, the "actors", are most important. Together with the list of aspects examined, they are the "means" to the result of the thought-experiment. "Thought-experiment" is what Le Guin calls Left hand in her introduction to the novel, the purpose of which is "to describe reality, the present world" (1989a: 131). In the societies and especially in the characters themselves are embodied different ways of being and doing, which I examine in discussing them.

Fredric Jameson makes some illuminating remarks about the novel. First, he distinguishes a third technique "of ... systematic variation, by SF, of the empirical and historical world around us", in addition to analogy and extrapolation, which he terms "world-reduction" - and which Le Guin employed in constructing Anarres as well (1975: 223). It is

> a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical excision of empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification (1975: 223).

The process of "ontological attenuation" in Left hand principally concerns the climate, gender, and religion (specifically the Handdarata) - the great determining factors in the shape of society on Gethen. Gethen is in the grip of an ice age - the Ekumen name for it is "Winter". It is an "inimical world; its punishment for doing things wrong is sure and prompt; death from cold or death from hunger. No margin, no reprieve" (88). One is reminded of Anarres, although life on the latter is not quite as harsh. There is no complete absence of land animals as on Anarres, but "the number of native species, plant or animal ... is unusually small", though "the membership of each species is very large" (151). Like the Anarresti the Gethenians are conservative: "even the wilderness is carefully husbanded", as Genly finds during his spell as prisoner in Orgoreyn (151-152).

The precarious nature of existence slowed the pace of life, as Genly notes, since "a man may trust his luck, but a society can't; and cultural change, like random mutation, may make things chancier. So they have gone very slowly" (88). On Gethen there never was an industrial revolution or "any revolution at all" (88). Their pragmatic approach to technology has assured that there is no wasteful runaway "progress", no luxuries. All powered traffic moves at 25 miles an hour. "The people of Winter, who always live in the Year One, feel progress is less important than presence" (48). Genly quotes a Gethenian proverb which sums it all up: "Compare the torrent and the glacier. Both get where they are going" (89). The climate promotes a mindset very different from contemporary empirical society, though at the time of Genly's mission to Gethen this has started to change. Jameson sees the extreme cold as "a symbolic affirmation of the autonomy of the organism, and a fantasy realization of some virtually total disengagement of the body from its environment or eco-system. Cold isolates" (1975: 222). This has implications for the nature and functioning of the Gethenian society.

The Gethenians are further isolated by their physiological difference from the other lifeforms on Gethen, being ambisexual. "Your race is appallingly alone in its world"

(198), Genly tells Estraven[1]. There are no other mammals and, most importantly, no other ambisexual species, which means that there is "an unbridgeable gap between [the human beings] and the lower animals" (198). Oppong's report on Gethenian sexuality explains that Gethenians are "sexually inactive, latent" for most of the month, then they enter estrus or "kemmer". During kemmer "either a male or female hormonal dominance is established" in the individual, "normal individuals hav[ing] no predisposition to either sexual role", and no choice (82). Unless the female partner is impregnated, both return to sexual latency. To "vow kemmering" means to elect to stay with one partner, a practice which "has no legal status, but socially and ethically is an ancient and vigorous institution". Oppong notes that "descent ... is reckoned, all over Gethen, from the mother, the 'parent in the flesh'". Although a limited form of incest between siblings is permitted, "even the full siblings of a vowed-kemmering pair", "siblings are not ... permitted to vow kemmering, nor keep kemmering after the birth of a child to one of the pair" (83).

Life on Gethen is dominated by their sexual cycle. Everything is organised so as to accommodate it. In spite of this, since they are sexually inactive four-fifths of the time, "the society of Gethen, in its daily functioning and in its continuity, is without sex" (84). Gethenian society is "untormented by sex" (1975: 229), as Jameson puts it, having suggested that this set-up "does away with everything that is <u>problematical</u> about it" - the "nature of human desire" being "non-biological" as opposed to "'natural' or instinctual animal need" (226). "Being so strictly defined and limited by nature", Genly remarks, "the sexual urge of Gethenians is really not much interfered with by society: there is less coding, channelling, and repressing". He goes on: "abstinence is entirely voluntary; indulgence is entirely acceptable" (153). The social sanction of both extremes also adds to the "unproblematic" nature of sex on Gethen. In "Is gender necessary?" Le Guin explains her use of androgyny, stating that she "eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human. It would define the area that is shared by men and women alike" (1989a: 138).

The absence of gender affects the relationships between individuals, therefore the nature of Gethenian society - and in terms of my thesis, action and activism. One of the main differences, although it does not affect the plot, is that <u>everyone</u> of childbearing age can become pregnant. As Oppong notes, this

> implies that no-one is quite so thoroughly 'tied-down' here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be - psychologically or physically. Burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make. Therefore nobody here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else (85).

Le Guin explains the Gethenians' tribal nature as being the result of their sexuality as well. She notes that "the basic unit" is a "hearth", consisting of 200 to 800 people, "a structure founded less on economic convenience than on sexual necessity (there must be others in kemmer at the same time), and therefore more tribal than urban in nature, though interlaid and interwoven with a later urban pattern". The hearths themselves further determine society, "tend[ing] to be communal, independent, and somewhat introverted". When they "gathered into a nation for economic reasons ... the cellular pattern still dominated the centralized ones" (1989a: 139, 140).

Gethenian sexuality represents the "catch" as far as Genly's mission is concerned. The Envoy is supposed to make contact, explain his mission - the eventual admission of Gethen into the Ekumen - and bring it about. To do this he must get to know them intimately, for the sake of both Gethen and the Ekumen. Gethenian ambisexuality proves a crippling complication in addition to the problems normal to this type of mission - for a reason having more to do with Genly than the local inhabitants themselves, as I discuss below. Oppong was well aware of the gravity of this aspect of the situation, as her report shows:

> The following must go into my finished directives: When you meet a Gethenian you cannot and must not do what a bisexual naturally does, which is to cast him in the role of Man or Woman, while adopting towards him a corresponding role dependent on your expectations of the patterned or possible interactions between persons of the same or opposite sex. Our entire pattern of socio-sexual interaction is nonexistent here (85).

She adds: "A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated. ... On Gethen ... [o]ne is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience" (86). Oppong (or Le Guin) may seem to lay herself open to accusations of sexism, but the point is that one unconsciously expects such treatment and behaviour as she describes, having been culturally conditioned to that effect, and that its <u>complete</u> absence is disorienting and bewildering in a way that a mere greater physical difference between the Gethenians and us would not have brought about - and in a way which significantly influences how Genly acts. Oppong's and Genly's reaction shows that they are not too secure in their respective socio-sexual identities in any case, which may well be one of the results of society's socio-sexual conditioning (or tampering). The Gethenians simply <u>are</u> in a way other humans are not, calmly living in the Year One, more concerned with presence than progress.

Oppong sees the androgynous sexual arrangement as part of the reason that "the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking" is "lessened, or changed" on

Gethen. She writes: "There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive" (85). It means the absence of exploitation: "the Gethenians do not rape their world" (Le Guin 1989a: 141). This is related to her speculation that the absence of war is directly related to androgyny, leading her to wonder whether the Ancient Hainish, who (hypothetically) experimented with the Gethenians to see what sort of society androgyny resulted in (like Le Guin herself), "consider[ed] war to be a purely masculine displacement-activity, a vast Rape, and therefore in their experiment eliminate[d] the masculinity that rapes and the femininity that is raped" (86-87). Due to the estrus-cycle of course, rape is impossible on Gethen. Oppong ends her report by reminding the reader that "in the end, the dominant factor in Gethenian life is not sex or any other human thing: it is their environment, their cold world" (87).

The dominant societies are Karhide and Orgoreyn. Genly notes that Gethenians "lacked ... the capacity to mobilize", which is a prerequisite for nation-states and war (47). Instead of a nation Karhide is, in Estraven's terms, a "family quarrel" (13). Local interests are of most importance to the lords of the various Domains and Clans; Genly remembers Estraven saying that "the Domains are Karhide" (89). Mad King Argaven is more or less ignored. According to Genly "the seeming nation" of Karhide, "unified for centuries", is "a stew of unco-ordinated principalities, towns, villages, 'pseudo-feudal tribal economic units', a sprawl and splatter of vigorous, competent, quarrelsome individualities over which a grid of authority was insecurely and lightly laid" (89-90). According to Estraven, "king and kyorrhemy have a good deal of control over what people do, but very little over what they hear, and none over what they say" (133). In any case, the Karhidish government "was not a public performance, normally; it was covert and indirect" (90), which must have further helped to maintain their basic anarchist arrangement - and the age-old way in which they conduct their lives (their action).

According to Genly the Karhidish Handdara is a religion without institution, priests, hierarchy, vows, or creed; he admits that "I am still unable to say whether it has a god or not". As is Taoism, it is "elusive", "always somewhere else". The Fastnesses, "retreats to which people may retire and spend the night or a lifetime", are "its only fixed manifestation" (52). Jameson sees its nature as part of the world-reduction of the novel: it is "a mystique of darkness, a cult of non-knowledge parallel to the drastic reductionism of the Gethenian climate. The aim of its spiritual practice is to strip the mind of its non-essentials and to reduce it to some quintessentially simplified function" (1975: 224). Such a function is "Presence", "a kind of trance - the Handdarata, given to negatives [again

like Taoism], call it an untrance - involving self-loss (self-augmentation?) through extreme sensual receptiveness and awareness" (54). Living with the Handdarata Genly finds it

> an introverted life, self-sufficient, steeped in that singular "ignorance" prized by the Handdarata and obedient to their rule of inactivity or non-interference. That rule (expressed in the word nusuth, which I have to translate as "no matter") is the heart of the cult (56).

"Inactivity or non-interference", of course, is the more contemplative version of wu-wei (non-action), and ignorance is yü, prized by Taoists, enabling them to adhere to the unconscious, undefined root which is Tao. Genly later glosses "ignorance" as "to ignore the abstraction, to hold fast to the thing" (181). Understanding the Handdarata facilitates understanding of the puzzling nation of Karhide: "Under that nation's politics and parades runs an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara", quietly shaping them (56).

The Handdarata are arguably the most powerful group on Gethen, but have no interest in ruling it. Faxe tells Genly that person[2] is willing to change with the world, but has "no wish to change it" (64). Far from having the answers, the Handdarata try to avoid them. They have the power of Foretelling, and occasionally answer questions "to exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question" (65). The paradoxical truth of this is shown by their answering of Genly's question, which goes: "Will this world Gethen be a member of the Ekumen of Known Worlds, five years from now?" (58). The answer is yes, which leaves Genly in the same situation as before - with no idea of which course of action to take while his patron at the court is in exile, and the king not interested in his story, only apprehensive. "The nineteenth day" illustrates the tragic consequences of asking the wrong question, the title being the answer to the question, "On what day will I die?" (43). The question can never be formulated in such a way as to make the answer truly informative, and to ease the burden of life. In fact, the Handdarata see the eternal uncertainty which accompanies existence as essential: "the only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next" (66). They see ignorance as "the ground of thought. Unproof is the ground of action" (65). If everything were known there would be nowhere to go and no reason to go anywhere, one place to go and every reason to go there. Instead, the Handdarata "have broken the circle, and go free" (132).

The similarities between Taoism and the Handdara should be clear. The most important similarity, and the most important aspect of both, is that there is an unbroken connection between the root (Tao, the Mother of all) and everything it gives rise to. This

is the answer to Richard Erlich's question, "How can there be truly significant action, action leading to true change - or a plot - in a Taoist world?" (1987: 108). He does answer it himself:

> All things that exist participate in Being, and human beings can, with luck and the proper attitude and with what we might call uneffort, return to our roots and touch Being[3] - briefly, momentarily. In that instant we can feel the Reality of things and know our place in that Reality, and in that moment experience the I-Thou relationship and see the Other whole (1987: 109).

Genly sees in Faxe

> a way of thought and way of life so old, so well established, so integral and coherent as to give a human being the unselfconsciousness, the authority, the completeness of a wild animal, a great strange creature who looks straight at you out of his eternal present (65).

Their intimate connection with the root, many times amplified by the intense interconnection of the nine members of the Foretelling circle, namely the Weaver, two insane people called "Zanies", five celibate Indwellers (the term for the inhabitants of the Fastnesses) one of whom is in kemmer, the "Pervert" (someone with "permanent hormonal imbalance toward [in this case] the male"), is what enables Foretelling to take place (59). Genly finds himself unwillingly drawn in through his ability to mindread:

> The emphatic and paraverbal forces at work, immensely powerful and confused, rising out of 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, were far beyond my restraint or control (61).

In the tent on the Ice Estraven tells Genly that the Handdara "are more occupied with the likenesses, the links, the whole of which living things are a part", than they are with the gap, the differences between them (199). Person quotes Tormer's Lay, from which the title of the novel is taken, and which illustrates the essential, dynamic complementarity of all opposites:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> and darkness the right hand of light.
> Two are one, life and death, lying
> together like lovers in kemmer,
> like hands joined together,
> like the end and the way (199).

In contrast to Karhide, Genly notes that Orgoreyn has developed into "an increasingly mobilizable society, a real nation-state". As a result shifgrethor (see below) is forcing

Karhide to go the same way, not to lose face, and become a patriotic nation. He remarks that "if this occurred the Gethenians might have an excellent chance of achieving the condition of war" (47). In Orgoreyn strict central government enables its rulers to "subordinat[e] local interests to a general interest", giving them considerable advantage over Karhide (24). A ponderous bureaucracy and a wealth of laws, rules, and regulations enable the government to lead its citizens' lives for them, so to speak - to determine their actions. Orgoreyn bears more than a passing resemblance to the former Soviet Union, as Genly finds out when he is quietly "disappeared" to a "Voluntary Farm and Resettlement Agency". A very active Secret Police, the Sarf[4] , have their fingers in every pie. "The government can check not only act but thought", writes Estraven, "Surely no men should have such power over others" (133). The State or "Commensality of Orgoreyn" is divided into Districts, each ruled by a Commensal. Genly notes that the root of the word translated as "commensal" is "a word which means 'to eat together'", and that it could be applied to "both the whole and the part, the state and the individual" - "in this imprecision is its precisest meaning" (97). There has been a perversion of a word and a sentiment originally indicating community and sociality. Now the diners are yoked together in an enforced uniformity which obscures the individual in complete contrast to the kaleidoscopic communal anarchism of the more vigorous Karhide. Genly describes the Orgota as "incurious", "colourless, steady, [and] subdued", as opposed to the Karhidish "colour, choler, and passion" (101). Later Genly sees them as they really are, in the truck on the way to the Farm: "trained from birth in discipline of co-operation, obedience, submission to a group purpose ordered from above", with "the qualities of independence and decision weakened" (149). Children live in the "Commensal Hearths", "rank by descent" does not exist, "all start equal", and private wills are illegal - the only beneficiary, in more ways than one, is the State (103).

Genly realises too late that "in Orgoreyn, despite the vast visible apparatus of government, nothing is done visibly, nothing is said aloud" (131). His existence is kept a secret, so that when he becomes too uncomfortable he is effortlessly spirited away. State power is increasing, and so is the incidence of inhumane behaviour towards others, represented by the "regime of the Voluntary Farms", where prisoners are "chemically castrated" - in short, dehumanised (133). Estraven comments that Karhide is as yet too unsophisticated to make use of Farms (168). In spite of the existence and efforts of the Open Trade faction, who favour entry into the Ekumen, and are against hostilities with Karhide, things look bleak, especially with the madman Tibe bent on plunging Karhide into war, for which there is not even a word in Karhidish (36).

In Orgoreyn the "Yomesh cult" is "promulgated by the Commensality" (102). It is the exact opposite of the Handdara, since it denies darkness completely. The Handdara, it should be noted, prefers darkness the way Taoism prefers yin to yang, but does not deny light. At the climax of Foretelling "the light burned sudden and intolerable", as though Faxe were on fire (61). The Yomeshta have their origin in a Foretelling gone wrong, attempting to answer the question, "What is the meaning of life?" (57). The group was wrecked, and the Weaver, Meshe, became the recipient (or victim) of a moment of complete vision, having seen "all things clearly". In the section, "On time and darkness", from the Yomesh Canon, it is stated that "Meshe is the Centre of Time", and that "nothing is unseen" (140). According to the Yomeshta, "there is neither source nor end, for all things are in the Centre of Time. ... There is neither darkness nor death, for all things are, in the light of the Moment, and their end and their beginning are one" (142). Compared to the Handdara with their discipline of Presence and nusuth-attitude (if I may call it that), the Yomesh cult is arrogant, brazen, and challenging, although the extract from the Canon is beautiful. Choosing light over darkness and the shape of their society in general point at the Orgota having pursued the "coming-out" process, away from the Root, all the way (Chen 1989: 206).

That secretive, insecure, underhand Orgoreyn should choose the Yomeshta, that is, a permanent state of light and knowledge, as state religion, is one of the reversals in which Left hand abounds. Categories and qualities are frequently and unexpectedly reversed, or have new meanings contributed to them, tripping up the unsuspecting reader and, more seriously, ignorant (in our sense) Genly Ai. For example, Estraven first comes to our attention, as numerous critics have noted, as the person to the left of Genly - who is particularly (and peculiarly, given his employer the Ekumen, discussed below) guilty of conventional (read "mistaken") categorisation, and of subsequently judging things on those grounds (11). Estraven, and Karhide in general, is attributed with the qualities of darkness and shadow. Genly says of him, "of all the dark, obstructive, enigmatic souls I had met in this bleak city, his was the darkest" (24). Keeping in mind that these qualities apply to Karhide and all associated with it in general, Genly's description speaks volumes of his complete failure to understand Estraven and Karhide, a failure which almost gets him killed. This renegotiation of meaning forms part of the production of meaning in which the reader has to participate in order to understand Genly's report. All the novels under consideration make use of devices such as this to change the reader's state from passive to active, which is the hallmark of any politically committed position or genre worth its salt.

The trouble between the two countries starts quietly enough with a border dispute, and with the Envoy impatiently and airily thinking to himself that "the ins and outs of a border-dispute ... were of no interest" to him (21) - at the same time that Estraven is engaged in trying to warn him of the various calamities lying in wait for both of them. Estraven had been trying to defuse the situation by resettling some of the Karhidish farmers living in the valley the ownership of which is the subject of the dispute. Unfortunately Argaven took a dim view of the proceedings because they were unpatriotic, "cowardly", and "impugn[ed] the shifgrethor of the king himself" (21). In all fairness to bungling Genly, shifgrethor causes a sizable percentage of the trouble he soon finds himself in.

Le Guin writes on shifgrethor - which comes from "an old word for shadow" (210) - in connection with aggression in "Is gender necessary?": "Rivalries between hearths, as between individuals, are channelled 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" (1989a: 139-140). However, it rules all other forms of social contact and action as well. Genly defines it as "prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship, the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority" on Gethen as a whole (19). In practice it means that social contact is never direct, and that advice, for instance, can never be openly offered. Genly and Estraven occasionally find themselves being very rude to each other, either failing to use (Genly, unintentionally) or using shifgrethor; when Estraven is finally goaded into insulting Genly, the latter only sees it as "harsh, elaborate courtesy" (115). Genly is not the only one trapped in his cultural conditioning - though in Genly's case purely individual short-comings, the result of his youth and his inability to assimilate the feminine side of him, play a most important role. Shifgrethor turns out to be limiting as well, since it must inhibit individuals (apart from kemmerings and family) from relating to each other openly and freely, without being constantly on guard, ultimately prescribing one form in which all action must be cast. On the other hand, one would not be surprised to learn that the slow pace of life on Gethen, which is considered a Good Thing, is facilitated by shifgrethor.

Estraven's place as "the King's Ear" (12) is taken by the insanely ambitious Tibe, whose ambition unfortunately includes Karhide as well. Tibe wishes to press the claim to the Sinoth Valley which, in former times, would have lead to a local skirmish. Orgoreyn having become a nation-state, hence more powerful because mobilisable, Karhide suddenly finds itself in a position in which it might lose face disastrously. The only sane alternative is Estraven's plan, because engaging Orgoreyn in a game of shifgrethor can

only be accomplished by meeting the nation-state on its terms. Tibe is faced by the daunting task of transforming the nature of Karhide entirely, which person does by strengthening in them the kind of national patriotism the growth of which Estraven has watched with dismay, knowing its implications. Estraven describes it to Genly as "fear of the other", expressed in "hate, rivalry, aggression", which "grows in us, year by year. We've followed our road too far" (23). From Estraven's (Handdarata) point of view, Genly offers them "the new road", planetwide co-operation of Self with Other for the good of all, each recognising in the other its complement. Tibe, however, wants Karhide to be on par with Orgoreyn and, as Genly says, "the sure, quick, and lasting way to make people into a nation" is war (92). His technique is ceaseless propaganda about "pride of country and love of the parentland", "deliberately avoiding talk of shifgrethor because [person] wished to rouse emotions of a more elemental, uncontrollable kind", removing the pacifist curb of shifgrethor (91). Genly reflects that the time is ripe because Gethen is no longer absolutely at the mercy of its climate, and therefore forever engaged in the struggle for survival: "On this basis of material stability Orgoreyn had gradually built up a unified and increasingly efficient centralized state", with Karhide now set to do the same, only by means of war (92). This is the situation in which Genly has to promote Gethen's membership in the Ekumen, and the significance of which he fails to appreciate. It is the answer to his problem (providing a motive for Gethen to join the Ekumen - as Estraven and even the Orgota Open Trade faction realise), and at the same time that which may terminate it. As a result, he is out of touch and acts wrongly.

Behind Genly is the Ekumen, whose purposes are "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" (35). Genly describes it as "a society" which "has, at least, potentially, a culture. It is a form of education". He goes on: "The motives of communication and co-operation are of its essence, and therefore in another aspect it's a league or union of worlds, possessing some degree of centralized conventional organization". Genly represents the League aspect of the Ekumen (119). I discuss the Ekumen mode of action, sending Genly on his mission alone, below.

Quite apart from political unrest, the Envoy has his own demons to contend with, which is part of his value to his author. Brian Attebery sums him up as follows: Genly

> is sensitive enough to allow [Le Guin] to display her gifts for description and metaphoric analysis; he is fallible enough to generate considerable tension through gaps in understanding; and he is deeply enough involved in the story to lend it tremendous emotional weight (1981: 271).

In short, the Envoy's fallibility lies in his failure to understand the Gethenians, and in his own immaturity. Estraven sees him as "young: impatient, inexperienced" (136). Bittner comments that Genly's "adversaries are the categories he uses to interpret reality [and then act on], the most obvious being the dualism of male and female" (1984: 10). In spite of Oppong's warnings Genly finds himself unable to relate to the Gethenians without imposing on them his preconceived notions of how people should behave and be. In attempting not to he only succeeds in "self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own" (18).

The attributes he assigns to the Gethenians when categorising them reveals his attitude towards men and especially women. After a supper at Estraven's house he reflects that the Gethenian's "performance [at table] had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit". He finds it impossible to think of Estraven, "that dark, ironic, powerful presence" as a woman, "yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture: in him, or in my attitude towards him?". For all practical purposes he acts as though the imposture was Estraven's, though he briefly entertains what turns out to have been the truth with regards to his distrust of the Gethenian: "Was it perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him?" (18) He goes so far as to ascribe Estraven's convoluted efforts to warn him of the Gethenian's imminent fall from grace (and the implications for Genly's safety and mission), yet which is still so obscured by shifgrethor that its meaning passes the Envoy by, to "effeminate deviousness" (19).

The complete misunderstanding is, on the one hand, due to the clash of cultures to be expected when two alien people try to communicate. On the other, it must be attributed to the rather extreme way Genly recoils from the feminine qualities the Gethenians display, and which he can only see as untrustworthy and threatening. Spivack notes that Genly's reaction "betray[s] his own limited sense of the feminine", and that "accordingly his sense of his own masculinity is self-conscious, justifying, and highly stereotypical" (49). He constantly feels the need to prove and bolster his masculininity, especially in the trek across the Ice, in harness with Estraven. He mistakes the Gethenian's factual appraisal of his (Genly's) condition (he has diarrhoea) as patronising, therefore compromising his manliness and virility. Angrily mulling over the physical differences between them - person being shorter, built like a woman, a mule in harness with a stallion - he is brought up short by Estraven's explanation that person was anxious about him, and contritely realises that if the Gethenian could lower "all his standards of shifgrethor" with him, he could "dispense with the more competitive elements of [his]

masculine self-respect" (187). Both eventually reach out further towards the other than that.

What Genly has to do, is to unlearn his cultural conditioning, to attain ignorance, to finally comprehend and see Estraven as person really is. For this personal growth is required, to break free of the "egotistical isolation" which is "a fundamental source of [Genly's] pain", as Clemens says (1986: 431). She is referring to Estraven's comment that it is the name which interested per in Genly initially. It struck per as "a cry of pain from a human throat across the night" (195). According to Bittner: "as his name (containing puns on 'I' and 'eye') indicates, the real goal of his quest is a discovery of self, a discovery that his own existence as an I is a function of his relationship with a Thou" (24). He has to reach out to the Other, and is assisted in this and in finally fully accepting his own self and all its components by being cooped up in a tent on an icesheet with the very person he understood least and therefore disliked most, in a situation in which they are both aliens, equally far removed from the socio-cultural frameworks of their existence which falsify relations at least as much as they clarify them. Cultural categories are exposed as being social constructs, dependent on a specific social structure, rather than natural imperatives - therefore as transcendable.

Estraven's journal records this moment, noting that

> after all, [Genly] is no more an oddity, a sexual freak, than I am: up here on the Ice each of us is singular, isolate, I as cut off from those like me, from my society and its rules, as he from his. There is no world full of other Gethenians here to explain and support my existence. We are equals at last, equal, alien, alone" (198).

This moment is narrated from the point of view of both, as part of Genly's report and one of Estraven's journal entries - it is the only instance which is told from both points of view, indicating its central importance. As Bittner says, "what Genly needs to do is search for and struggle with (not against) what he has alienated, with what he fears to admit to consciousness, fears, because to admit it to consciousness would change that consciousness, would destroy the identity he brought to Gethen" (1984: 26). He admits it to consciousness on the Ice when Estraven is in kemmer, with him in the close confines of their tent, and turning into a woman, hormonally prompted by Genly's permanent maleness:

> And I saw 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 (210).

That which alienated Genly from Estraven, and which is heightened by the latter entering kemmer, is what finally brings them together: "it was from that sexual tension between us, admitted now and understood, but not assuaged, that the great and sudden assurance of friendship between us rose" - which, as Genly notes, "might as well be called ... love". Importantly, "it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge across what divided us" (210-211). It is one of many illustrations in Le Guin's work that the Other has what the Self needs in order to be whole, or at least to approach the condition of wholeness. The act required is reaching out, taking the risk of rejection or being hurt. Whether the Other is treated as complement or threat is up to the Self. Interestingly, although Le Guin did not realise it at the time, "ai" is "love" in Japanese (1984: 81).

The "discovery of self", as Bittner calls it, "involves Genly's realization that sexuality is not a dualism of male and female, but an integrated whole in which masculinity and femininity are so inextricably involved with each other that they cease to exist as independent entities" (1984: 25). This state of affairs, if one can call it that, is what is symbolised by Gethenian androgyny and, as Tormer's Lay indicates and Taoism also teaches, encompasses all other dualisms. Bittner provides a final word: "Now that Ai has ceased to refuse Estraven his-her own reality, he has ceased to refuse <u>his own reality</u>; the sources of his fear of seeing Estraven, his alienated identity, disappear as it is negated, absorbed, and transcended in a new identity" (1984: 26). This is to some extent, but in broader terms, what has to happen to Gethen itself, in becoming part of the Ekumen. Significantly, Faxe the Weaver replaces Tibe as the King's Ear.

The moment of vision on the Ice is a meeting of Self and Other, with reaching out and understanding facilitating the co-operation without which they would not survive. It is community at its most basic level, consisting of the meeting of two human beings, Self and Other, I and Thou, opposites and complements, in the most ultimate instance of world-reduction in personal terms. In terms of the Ekumen and Genly's mission,

> Gethen and the Ekumen meet and merge in the persons of Ai and Estraven. We are given to understand that this is what the Ekumen is, a meeting face to face or mind to mind of unlike individuals, like a marriage on a grand scale (Attebery 1981: 273).

Estraven is a tragic character, whose life follows a course charted in the tales "The place inside the blizzard" and "Estraven the traitor". The first tells of two full siblings who vowed kemmering and stayed together after the birth of a child. Being commanded to break their vow leads to the suicide of one sibling - a crime for which there is no

forgiveness on Gethen. Genly remarks that they view it as "the abdication from option, the act of betrayal itself" (241). The other, Getheren, renounces shadow and name, going into exile intending to commit suicide as well, and fleeing pursuers, ends up on the Ice where person meets the dead lover, Hode. Person succeeds in evading Hode, who cannot say Getheren's name, and goes back, living in exile with a different name. Shath Domain, origin of Getheren and Hode, is blighted by these events until, finally, Getheren takes back name and shadow, dying shortly after.

"Estraven the traitor" tells of the children (Therem of Stok - Stokven, and Arek, lord of Estre - Estraven) of two feuding lords who fall in love and have a child, Therem (which is Estraven's name). Arek is killed, and the child Therem given to Arek's parent in the flesh, Lord Sorve. Years later, young Therem is ambushed by some jealous "hearth-brothers" (112), and chances on the same hut person was conceived in. Stokven, parent in the flesh of Therem, finds and nurses per back to health. They vow peace, and at Sorve's death, Therem becomes Lord of Estre, ending the feud by giving up half of the disputed territory to Stok. This, and the murder of those who ambushed per, results in the "title", "Estraven the traitor".

Keeping in mind the Sinoth valley dispute, some of the parallels with the Estraven of the tale should be clear already. Although the details are never spelled out, one gathers that Estraven vowed kemmering with a full sibling, called Arek, who died fourteen years ago: "the only true vow of faithfulness I ever swore was not spoken, nor could it be spoken, and the man I swore it to is dead, and the promise broken, long ago" (69). Apparently, Estraven "left home", that is, went into exile, "for his [Arek's] sake" (215). Genly is cast in the role of Arek when he finally succeeds in teaching Estraven mindspeech, wishing to come closer to his friend, "now that the barriers were down" (211). After several unsuccessful attempts, as Estraven is falling asleep, Genly feels that the "emphatic bond" (214) necessary to telepathic communication is there, and "bespeaks" Estraven as "Therem", the first name used by "hearth-brothers, or friends" (182). A shocked Estraven hears the mindspeech in the dead Arek's voice, which ever after causes the Gethenian great discomfort in bespeaking and being bespoken. Hearing Genly mindspeaking with Arek's voice strengthens the link with the tale, although it is the opposite of what happened there. Hode could not say Getheren's name on the Ice, having broken the vow, renouncing it and life by committing suicide. Genly's successful bespeaking of Therem in Arek's voice represents and reinforces the bond between them, it affirms life and hope. From Genly's point of view however, "that intimacy of mind established between us was a bond, indeed, but an obscure and austere one, not so much

admitting further light (as I had expected it to) as showing the extent of the darkness" (216).

When considering the character of Estraven, one should keep in mind that person is an adept of the Handdara. It is crucial in terms of <u>how</u> person acts, what person does. It is one of the advantages person has over Genly. Estraven is native to Gethen, and in touch with things by virtue of that <u>and</u> a Handdara upbringing: "I never had a gift but one, to know when the great wheel gives to a touch, to know and act". Person describes it as "certainty" (163). It brings to mind Le Guin's discussion of heroism in fantasy:

> Evil ... appears in the fairy tale as something not diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol. Neither is greater than the other, nor can human reason and virtue separate one from the other and choose between them. The hero or heroine is the one who sees what is appropriate to be done, because he or she sees the <u>whole</u>, which is greater than either evil or good. Their heroism is, in fact, their certainty. They do not act by rules; they simply know the way to go (1989a: 56).

It is a good description of Estraven, even if person temporarily loses that foresight, as discussed below. Genly speculates that the Yomeshta "also have a point: the gift is perhaps not strictly or simply one of foretelling, but is rather the power of seeing (if only for a flash) <u>everything at once</u>: seeing whole" (175). Being in touch with the whole, Estraven is able to act "wholly and rapidly to a changed situation", more so than any other person known to Genly, who adds, "when I came he was ready. Nobody else on Winter was" (174). The <u>Tao te ching</u> does say, "One who is well established is not uprooted" (54.1).

Genly describes Estraven as "a mover of great events" (12), a phrase which resonates much further than he could have dreamed, person being the most important actor in the novel. Estraven recognises the only way out of the dilemma, writing in his journal, "You must go somewhere else; you must have another goal; then you walk a different road" (132). The way out lies with Genly and the Ekumen. Unfortunately, Estraven made some mistakes in championing Genly's cause. Going about informing Argaven about the Ekumen as though person were rational had the effect of merely inducing an inferiority complex inspired by fear and madness. "It was ill done, ill timed " (22). Estraven later explains why person had "err[ed] in the timing of [the] act and the weighing of shifgrethor": "Fear outweighed caution in me", fear of "the continuation of the prestige-struggle in the Sinoth Valley; the humiliation of Karhide, the anger that rises from humiliation; the use of that anger by the Karhidish government" (76). It had the effect of throwing Estraven out of synch with the whole, but only temporarily. "My greatest

error", Estraven tells Genly, "was in not making myself clear to you. I am not used to doing so. I am not used to giving, or accepting, either advice or blame" (170).

Person succeeds in manoeuvring Genly into Orgoreyn, suggesting to members of the Open Trade faction that he is a "way towards power, a way out of the increasing rivalry with Karhide and back towards the restoration of open trade, a chance perhaps to break the grip of the Sarf" (170). This forms part of person's treachery, from Argaven's point of view. When the uncomprehending Genly asks what Estraven was after, the reply is "the alliance of my world with your world" (170). Estraven's loyalty transcends the limited dualistic perception of treason/loyalty to include all Gethen.

Before embarking on rescuing Genly from Pulefen Farm, Estraven informed Argaven of Genly's whereabouts, following an impulse. Reflecting on it later, person says that in all likelihood the King would "see a chance to play shifgrethor", inquiring after the Envoy's whereabouts and hearing Orgota lies in answer (218). Genly's arrival back in Karhide would mean great loss of face for Orgoreyn, and a warm welcome for the Envoy. Estraven counsels Genly to act at once at that stage, bringing the Ekumen ship in orbit round the sun to Gethen, before he once again outstayed his welcome. Still, Estraven realises - even if Genly refuses to face this - that the warmest welcome would be considerably tarnished by the re-appearance of the exiled traitor, which would seriously impugn Argaven's shifgrethor. Back in Karhide, after sending the signal to waken the ship, they hide out with an acquaintance of Estraven's. The extent to which Genly has changed is indicated by his reflection that "I did not know if I had done right to send [the signal]. I had come to accept such uncertainties with a quiet heart [nusuth]" (236). Thessicher alerts Tibe to their whereabouts, thereby becoming the only real traitor in the novel, betraying a friend. Estraven philosophically notes that they "strained a small spirit too far" (237).

Estraven describes per as "born to live in exile, so it appeared, and my one way home was by way of dying" (68). Estraven's end, foreshadowed by the fates of Getheren and Estraven the Traitor, is the final political act enabling Gethen to join the Ekumen, whatever else it might be. On the run, trying to cross the border back into Orgoreyn, Therem skis straight into the guns of the border guards, just as Genly realises the impossibility of per escaping both Karhidish and Orgota retribution. This act, seen from a certain perspective, looks like suicide, but it is necessary to look beyond the surface. If Karhide views suicide as "the act that, sealing despair, denies the chance of forgiveness, change, life", then Estraven's death is not suicide, but sacrifice. Genly would not see what Therem saw: his continued existence was an unbridgeable obstacle in the new road

to the Ekumen. To use another metaphor, his death provided the mortar needed to put the keystone in the arch, it having been an ancient custom to use "a mortar of ground bones mixed with [human] blood". "Without the bloodbond the arch would fall, you see", Estraven told Genly at the parade long ago (12). Estraven is an activist; everything person does is aimed at having Gethen becoming part of the Ekumen. Estraven's activism and actions are motivated by love, for Gethen and Genly, by personal and political considerations, in other words. Estraven's activism never loses its personal emotional dimension - which would have meant acting like a traitor, and which Genly first suspects per of. Genly's speculation on the methods of the Ekumen, in answer to Estraven wanting to know why he came alone, throws light on Estraven's deeds and vice versa.

> Alone, I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical (219).

The whole passage applies to Estraven's actions as well. It is what happened between person and the Envoy - one could say that. Coming together as they did, Estraven and Genly validate the Ekumen's way of doing things. From the Ekumen point of view, Genly is an extraordinarily flexible and ingenious "tool", if I may be forgiven a mechanistic metaphor. This is also what both Genly and Estraven are to their creator.

In conclusion, "because of the alien who lay ill, not acting, not caring, in a room in Sassinoth, two governments fell within ten days" (242). The Orgota government falls and is replaced by the Open Trade faction, and Tibe is replaced by Faxe. Curiously, Genly appeared to do all the work and mostly got nowhere, finally doing nothing. Estraven's mode of action was subtle, consisting of acting with circumstances, keeping a hand on the wheel to be aware of any movement, not trying to force anything, as though reluctant to draw attention to what person was doing - which is a fair assessment. In short, this mode of action is wu-wei.

Jameson sums up Gethen as follows:

> Gethen thus stands as an attempt to imagine an experimental landscape in which our being-in-the-world is simplified to the extreme, and in which our sensory links with the multiple and shifting perceptual fields around us are abstracted so radically as to vouchsafe, perhaps, some new glimpse as to the ultimate nature of human reality (1975: 223).

Ontological attenuation lays open the bedrock, in the process exposing the interconnectedness of opposites. It is no accident that Karhide and Orgoreyn are situated

each on one of the halves of a great double-lobed continent, or that the protagonists' journey has them travelling from Orgoreyn to Karhide across a bridge of snow, a frozen ocean. Orgoreyn denies the bedrock, and the Orgota "pervert their potential for darkness into the furtive ways of political treachery and impersonal cruelty" (Spivack 1984: 52).

There is considerable difference of critical opinion as to whether ambisexuality is integral to or incidental to the plot. As for androgyny, Le Guin was "merely observing" that "if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weathers, we already are [androgynous]" (1989a: 133). The novel's reading position changes according to how much weight one allows the gender question to have. I find it of great importance to the novel, since both Genly's political and personal quest is affected by his difficulty in accepting the ambisexual nature of the people he has to deal with and whom his mission and life depend on. In addition, and of no less importance, it is inextricably involved with his struggle to accept his own bisexuality, that is, his alienated feminine side. His personal and political problems have the same solution: the bonding which takes place between him and Estraven on the Ice.

Notes

[1] In The dispossessed, which shares quite a few characteristics with Left hand, Takver notes, "it's a queer situation, biologically speaking. We Anarresti are unnaturally isolated" (159). In their case the isolation is the result of the choice to move to the barren planet of Anarres to escape political oppression. The Gethenian isolation, it is speculated, may be the result of an ancient Hainish experiment in genetic manipulation, explaining the uniqueness of Gethenian sexuality on the worlds known to the Ekumen (81). The Investigator Oppong considers the elimination of sexual exploitation and frustration, and the elimination of war possible objects of the hypothetical experiment.

[2] Marge Piercy uses "person" and "per" in Woman on the edge of time as a replacement for "he/him/his". My use of "person" and "per" is motivated by the clumsiness and unsatisfactory option of referring to Gethenians as s/he or her/him. Le Guin has admitted in the "Redux" to "Is gender necessary?" that her refusal "to mangle English", as she thought of it initially, skewed the feminist reading position of the novel (1989a: 145).

[3] I question his use of the term, "Being", to indicate the bedrock underlying everything, feeling that "Non-Being" is actually what is meant, Non-Being giving rise to Being.

[4] "Sarf" means "trash" in "gutter-Orgota", at least indicating a healthy disrespect for them (125).

Chapter II

The word for world is forest (1968-1969)

The word for world is forest consists of chapters told from the points of view of the three main characters, who represent the ways of being and doing which the novella examines. In Captain Don Davidson, for instance, is incorporated harmful attitudes and views prevalent in twentieth century society, forming a many-faceted psychosis - composed partly of disregard of the environment, racial and sexual chauvinism, xenophobia, paranoia, and megalomania. Through him and most of the other "yumens" (as the Athsheans call the Terrans) Le Guin explores the effects of such a psychosis on a non-aggressive people living in symbiotic relationship with their environment, and the irrevocable changes this contact brings about. The consequences of justifiable violence on the part of the oppressed Athsheans are a central concern as well.

The rhetoric of the main Terran actor is devoid of reason in the first place, expressing a self-contained, self-justifying, and warped outlook on the world of which it is impossible to disabuse him since he believes himself to be the only one in touch with reality. Davidson's views initially coincide with the ideologies subscribed to by the authorities, but even then they are a more demystified version, more obviously insane. The practices involved (war, exploitation) are themselves shown to be irrational (whichever way you go about them) - illogical and self-destructive. War and exploitation are shown without the political and ideological trappings which are designed to hide their true nature. In other words, they are demystified, and exposed as having no justification from whatever angle you approach. Word uses devices such as irony, overstatement, estrangement, and shifting points of view to allow its audience to view the self-contained "logic" of self-destructive war and exploitation from a distance, without becoming ensnared in their circular, self-justifying arguments. Part of the effect, to put it another way, is the "activation" of the audience, the creation of an active reading position.

The reader ought not to have too much trouble finding the reading position from which Word becomes coherent and intelligible. It needs to be said that it is not Le Guin's best work. Her depiction of the Terrans is too one-sided; Davidson, for instance, is relentlessly evil. Good and evil come close to being depicted as self-contained opposites (certainly in the case of Davidson), the line between them only dividing instead of "joining/dividing" them (Bain 1980: 209). The authorial die is somewhat "loaded".

The Terrans have come to "New Tahiti" - as they call Athshe, disregarding its local name in true imperialist fashion - "to end the darkness [of the forest], and turn the tree-jumble into clean sawn planks, more prized on Earth than gold" (7). There is no recognition on their part that light and darkness co-exist in necessary balance on Athshe. The "rape" of the forest takes little account of the effects of exploitation on the balanced ecology and local population. As the novella's title indicates, on a planet where the forest is the world the way it is with Athshe, not forgetting the intimate relationship between forest-dwellers and forest, the damage reaches much further than is usual - into the psyche of the inhabitants. To the Terrans these effects matter only to the extent that they endanger further exploitation, and even that is not viewed with too much trepidation. The loss of an entire island ("Dump Island" - "just rocks and gullies now") to indiscriminate deforestation is accepted philosophically by Captain Davidson, who merely notes, "then scratch it; start over on a new island and do better" (2). On Athshe the Special Services ["speshes"] (104), comprising anthropology, exobiology, agriculture and forestry coordination, and ecology, seem to be an empty gesture towards conservation and caution, lacking any authority. Lyubov's reports are ignored.

The extent to which exploitation in its various manifestations is a major theme in Word should already be evident. In the 1977 introduction to the novella Le Guin considers the "pressures [from which] this story resulted", and which likewise supplied its targets and generated its tone of anger and frustration:

> ... it was becoming clear that the ethic which approved the defoliation of forests and grasslands and the murder of non-combatants in the name of "peace" [in Vietnam] 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". The victory of the ethic of exploitation, in all societies, seemed as inevitable as it was disastrous (1989a: 127).

It is a great deal to be angry about, and one appreciates the degree of pressure it must have exerted; it did change the shape of the story and even the issues Le Guin was originally occupied with, "the pursuit of freedom and the dream" (1989a: 126). In the Afterword to the novella Le Guin compares writing Word to "taking dictation from a boss with ulcers", who wanted to talk about "the destruction of ecological balance and the rejection of emotional balance" (Watson 1975b: 231).

One encounters most of the various forms "the ethic of exploitation" takes in the very first chapter, written from Captain Davidson's point of view. Le Guin describes him as "though not uncomplex, pure; he is purely evil" (1989a: 127)[1]. His mode of action is violence: exploitation, rape, and murder. The Athsheans (and the novella) consider him

insane. Like Dr Haber in The lathe of heaven, which manages to be both similar and antithetical to Word, Davidson's major "problem" is being out of touch, out of communication, with himself and his environment. As regards his "pureness", Le Guin manages to avoid "caricature" because his "actions [are] carefully motivated and his role [is of considerable] importan[ce] to the story" (Yoke 1980: 201).

Davidson sees "New Tahiti" as "literally made for men" (3), and his task as a "world-tamer" (4) to tame it. "Cleaned up and cleaned out, the dark forests cut down for open fields of grain, the primeval murk and savagery and ignorance wiped out, it would be a paradise, a real Eden" (3). It never crosses his mind that the long-term prognosis for "Eden" is not very good, when what "man" did to Earth is taken into account, and considering that "man" is simply carrying on as usual after a change of scene. Athshe has to be turned into Earth, the way imperialist countries established copies of themselves in their colonies, teaching the natives pidgin-versions of their own language, with little thought for native tradition and culture - in fact, the latter becoming a mere obstacle in the way of "civilisation" and progress. Again in true imperialist fashion, that Athshe might already be a kind of Eden does not occur to him because his conception of civilisation, derived from the Terran/human variety (or his view of it), is exclusive (that is, closed), and does not allow for variation. To Davidson it is impossible to better "man", his institutions and his ways. His chauvinist world view allows him to absolve this mythical "man" and his equally mythical "civilisation" from whatever blame may adhere to them for failures by transferring all responsibility for that to those types and individuals he hates (fears) and discriminates against, such as other races, and those of alternate political and moral persuasions. An added perk is that Davidson himself escapes responsibility for misfortune.

He takes the "spesh" Kees to task for not putting "Earth" ("when I say Earth, Kees, I mean people. Men") first on his list of priorities: "you worry about deer and trees and fibreweed ... But I like to see things in perspective, from the top down, and the top, so far, is humans" (5). This is of course precisely the kind of exclusionist attitude (denying being part of a whole) which is partly responsible for Earth's deforestation in the first place. Exploitation is facilitated by alienation, which Le Guin identifies as major human problems, and returns to again and again in her fiction. "Our central problem", she asserts, is

> ... exploitation - exploitation of the woman, of the weak, of the earth. Our curse is alienation, the separation of yang from yin (- and the moralization of yang as good, of yin as bad). Instead of a search for integration and balance, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. The dualism of value that

> destroys us, the dualism of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, might give way to what seems to me, from here, a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity (1989a: 147).

Both modalities are present on Athshe: one native, and one introduced by the "yumens". "Integration and balance" gives way to the pressure exerted by the Terrans' propensity[2] for separating and dividing, for denying relation and interdependence. Cummins writes that Davidson's language creates "a world of adversarial relationships", which makes for paranoia, as opposed to the Athsheans', which "shows relationships of continuities, of dualities that are not competitions" (1990b: 100). Conceiving of "man's" relation to the world in the form of a pyramid with "man" on top, as does Davidson, and thinking that everything else exists at humans' convenience and for their use, makes for exploitation. Davidson and his kind have no understanding of the whole, the web of existence, which is even more tangibly present in the form of the forest (which is Athshe) than on Earth. To the "yumens" a deer becomes "the finest game-animal imaginable" (6), women "breeding females" (1); the forest has worth only when turned into "clean sawn planks" (7), the "creechies" (barely) when organised into a "Voluntary Autochthonous Labor Corps" (63). Deer, women, forest, and Athsheans are defined in terms of their use for "man", never in terms of necessary parts of the whole, not recognised as being of consequence in their own right.

Davidson only perceives objects, not the relations between them. Partly as a cause, his mind is rigidly compartmentalised. The walls in his mind prevent him from recognising the many contradictions in his views and beliefs, and preclude genuine self-analysis. Davidson's alleged concern for humans, immediately qualified as it is by his equating "people" with "men", is also subject to common racism - rendering his term, "men", even more exclusive. He asserts that "you can't be fully human without some blood in your veins from the Cradle of Man", Davidson himself being a "euraf" (142). He believes that "some men, especially the asiatiforms and hindi types, are actually born traitors" (78). The mere fact of more "asiatiforms" surviving the Centralville Massacre than other races, coupled with Central's surrender to Selver, is interpreted as proof of their cowardice in battle; "it ... helped explain their moral collapse under stress" (142). Racial prejudice extends, of course, to aliens - the Cetian, Or, is "a little grey ape" and the Hainishman, Lepennon, a "big white fairy" (76). The Athsheans are dismissed as "a lot of green monkeys" (12). Eventually he finds himself abandoned on Dump Island. It makes concrete what his many rationalisations and his false modesty seek to hide: there is only one man at the top of the pyramid, namely Don Davidson.

In connection with The left hand of darkness Le Guin writes:

> 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 (1989a: 85).

One might preface the whole of Word with this statement. It accurately describes the actions of the "yumens", and Davidson in particular. In terms of Le Guin's fiction, a Self protectively isolated from an Other spells trouble, if not insanity. It is clear from what I have pointed out above that Davidson (and his pyramid) is no exception. He certainly conceives of his relationships with other beings as "power relationships". An alienated Self, denying an Other "its spiritual equality and its human reality" - which is the only way to get to know and learn from it, instead dealing with it only in terms of domination, prevents every chance of coming to terms with its own alienation. It can only continue on "the wrong way" towards dissolution, as does Dr Haber in Lathe (1971: 147), or madness, as in the case of Davidson on Dump Island. Ged, it will be recalled, stops running from the Shadow and faces it, assimilating it into his psyche. In Word as it will be seen, and in most cases in her fiction, the excluded Other has what the Self lacks in order to be whole or, in terms of both Word and Lathe, to be healthy and sane.

Davidson's madness becomes more explicit as the Athsheans' revolt takes shape and, more importantly, as Terran authority on Athshe is "undermined" by the arrival of the ansible. The effect on Davidson and, to a lesser extent, his fellow "yumens", is to drive them further into their ideological "armour". This means, in effect, a strengthening of the psychosis. It makes clear the extent to which they use their convictions as crutches and shields. Davidson reacts with real shock when he realises that his superiors have conceded authority to the Athsheans because they feared them (144) - it represents a blow to his conception of "man" as invincible, destined to be on top in every situation. He leads a retaliatory strike on an Athshean village after his camp is wiped out. Later, after the Centralville attack, he slips into the forest with a band of followers converted to his beliefs to "play", that is, "roasting", "jellying", "burning", and "frying" "creechies" (85). In his madness he strikes out on his own more and more, becoming independent from the military structure (and alienated from his fellow Terrans as well), which (literally) empowers him even further. Empowerment, coupled with increasing alienation, is an important element in the development of Dr Haber's insanity as well.

Davidson may be an extreme case, but the views of the other Terrans correspond to his. Gosse, for instance, expresses the view that the exploitation and destruction (and

eventual supersession) of "lesser" creatures, in this case the subjects of his and Lyubov's studies, is part of "human nature", and "you know you can't change that" (105). To chalk this up to "human nature" is a way of transferring responsibility and avoiding guilt. Guilt is unavoidable however, it is merely relocated into the personal unconscious, fuelling aggression and self-hatred. Davidson interprets one of his men throwing up after killing an Athshean who was lying on the ground (surrendering and begging for mercy) as a reaction to the Athshean's "sickening" cowardice (85) - but it is more likely that it is a manifestation of self-loathing.

The unexpected arrival of higher authority in the form of the Cetian, the Hainishman, and Commander Yung of the Shackleton, as well as the ansible which enables instant communication between Earth and Athshe (which upsets the applecart for the military authority[3]), is viewed with instant suspicion by the Terrans. Even Lyubov, well adjusted by Terran standards, briefly entertains the thought that Or, Lepennon, and Commander Yung are "in league, and lying". He, however, decides that "it was a reasonable but unwarranted suspicion, a defense mechanism", and "discards" it (66). He reflects that "some of the military staff, ... trained to compartmentalize their thinking, specialists in self-defense, would accept it as unhesitatingly as he discarded it". Lyubov, on the other hand, was "trained to keep his mind open whether he wanted to or not" (67).

The "defense mechanisms" needed to shield the beleaguered (literally) Selves of the Earthmen naturally partake of their psychosis and intensify its effect. Davidson's insanity removes him from the realm of normality so that he exists entirely in a world of his own creation (concretised by his eventual removal to Dump Island): a paranoid world in which (in addition to features cited earlier) Or and Lepennon form the spearhead of a "bid for interstellar supremacy" (78), an "alien conspiracy against Earth" (84), which justifies defying the orders of those who fall for their "phony" ansible messages (77) by recruiting a gang of loggers converted to his way of doing (and seeing) things. He contends that "certain ... men were born saviors. It just happened to be the way [he was] made, ... it wasn't anything he claimed credit for" (79).

Davidson's defense mechanisms include his reiterated belief that the other Terrans are "in full retreat from reality" (147), explaining their failure to encourage his proposed war against Selver's Athshean forces - notwithstanding the odds: "twenty-five hundred humans to three million creechies" (84). When he finds himself alone after the final "creechie" attack on his stronghold, he takes refuge in reflecting that "sooner or later they all joined up against him, because they just couldn't take it the way he could", and the equally reiterated "it just happened to be the way things are" (154). As Cummins

notes, this phrase "frees him from having to verbally defend complex ideas" (1990b: 93). The recuperative powers of these mechanisms, which they have in common with exclusionist ideologies, are such that they enable Davidson to assimilate being defeated twice by his archenemy, Selver - defeated in the most humiliating way possible. The most important defeat, the final one, has him intentionally imitate their position of surrender and pleading for mercy[4], "his heart stutter[ing] in his chest" in terror (158). This incident he reinterprets to indicate his cleverness in "us[ing] their own trick[5] against them. ... They couldn't hurt him. It was as if he was a god" (158-159). Ironically, he is right. Selver tells Davidson that he is an "insane god" who brings him "the gift of the killing of one's kind, murder" (160)[6].

Athshean society bears a close resemblance to Le Guin's notion of an anarchist "yin utopia", whose qualities she describes as "dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting and cold" (1989b: 90). On Athshe "nothing was pure, dry, arid, plain" (26), (all yang qualities) - until the "yumens" arrive. The resemblance is even closer in the following passage, listing some of the characteristics of a yin utopia: it is

> a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door (1989b: 96).

Of course, the main difference between Athshe and the utopia she has in mind, The dispossessed, is that Athshe is not practicable. Its psychology makes sense in Earth terms[7], but the dreaming is peculiarly Athshean, product of an alien evolution and environment and, like Gethenian androgyny, out of our reach. At the same time, Athshean society is part of humankind's roots, since some of it is derived from Native American customs, as comparison with Always coming home, whose roots are firmly embedded in California's past, makes clear.

The Athsheans are not a uniform race: "physical types differed on each of the five Great Lands"; they spoke many languages and dialects, and "there were infinite ramifications of manners, morals, customs, [and] crafts" (36). In other words, the necessary prerequisite for war and prejudice, namely difference, does exist. "But", importantly, "the climate varied little, and the forest little, and the sea not at all" (36), Athshe "being mostly water, warm shallow seas broken here and there by reefs, islets, archipelagoes, and the five big Lands ... across the Northwest Quartersphere" (7). Athshean diversity does not end in prejudice and rivalry, Athsheans all having the same

stabilising root - the forest ("world") and the dream ("root"). Diversity is balanced by oneness. "Curiosity, regular trade-routes, and the necessity of finding a husband or a wife from the proper Tree" led to "an easy movement of people among the towns and between the lands" (36), further contributing to stability. Part of the root is the "Old Tongue", spoken and written by the Dreamers in the Men's Lodges. Messages between Old Women, who "ran the cities and towns", were in the Old Tongue, interpreted by the Dreamers, "as were other documents, rumors, myths, and dreams" (36-37). The male adept Dreamers counsel the headwomen: "it was the Dreamer's responsibility to be careful, to be certain that his judgment was true. Her responsibility was then to take that judgment and act upon it. He saw what must be done; she saw that it was done" (35). As Lyubov puts it: "the Athsheans are governed, in so far as they have government, by old women. Intellect to the men, politics to the women, and ethics to the interaction of both" (98). There is "no vital network, no centralised control" (133). As Selver points out to Commander Yung: "if a headwoman in Karach gave an order, it would not be obeyed by the people of the next village, and surely not by all the people in the world at once" (166).

The result of this way of life is the absence of history - which Athshe shares with the Valley and Karhide. Lyubov informs Lepennon that they have "a stable, static, uniform society. ... You might say that like the forest they live in, they've attained a climax state" (62). Life remains essentially the same, there is no progress, and their technology is primitive: the kind of society that the Tao te ching approves of. The Terran reaction is to criticise them. Even Lyubov, who comes to understand and accept them for what they are, thinks of them as "over-adapted" and "stagnated" (68). Yet Word does not assert that they have to change, that their native state is somehow undesirable. They have no need for progress and change, until change is forced on them.

The reader's introduction into Athshe (from an Athshean perspective) takes the form of a description of the forest, the dense poetry of its prose mirroring the complex interconnectedness of its ecosystem. Into this Athshean society blends, their timber houses "almost invisible" (40). The complexity of organicism is illustrated in the way there are no clear divisions between the forest's different components; as in the yin-yang symbol opposites are interconnected and inseparable, springing from a common root:

> 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. ... Nothing was pure, dry, arid, plain. Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty. The colors of rust and sunset kept changing in the hanging leaves of the cooper

> willows, and you could not say even whether the leaves of the willows were brownish-red, or reddish green, or green (25-26).

In analogical terms, the Athshean forest demonstrates Tao in terms of a forest ecology[8] - which offers an ideal opportunity to endow the holistic idea of equilibrium or balance (the interdependence of all beings and things) with physical shape. Naturally, the crucial Taoist principle of Tao as the "dark, mysterious, unconscious Mother, the root of heaven and earth" to which all beings and things return at the end of their existence, thereby enabling the coming into being of others, fits seamlessly (Chen 1989: 54):

> The ground was not dry and solid but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across (25)[9].

Balance and root are intimately related on Athshe. The Athshean word for "dream" also means "root" which, according to Lyubov, is "the key to the forest kingdom" (100). Significantly, their houses are "three-quarters sunk, fitted in among tree-roots" (39-40). They have a "polycyclic sleep-pattern", including a 120-minute "REM or paradoxical sleep" cycle which "ruled their life both day and night" (99). This sleep- and dream-pattern accounts for much of the Athsheans' psychological and emotional stability; as the Tao te ching argues, "one who is well-established is not uprooted" (54.1). Predictably it proves incompatible with the Terran workday, resulting in severely unbalanced Athsheans[10] - and an inferior "Voluntary Autochthonous Labor Corps".

As Lyubov puts it, the Athsheans "balance [their] sanity not on the razor's edge of reason but on the double support, the fine balance, of reason and dream" (99) - which is significant in terms of the Athshean understanding and diagnosis of Terran behaviour. To an Athshean "a realist is a man who knows both the world and his own dreams", in which become visible underlying motives for action, such as fears and desires (125). They apprehend reality more fully, grasping the whole. The dream-time and the world-time are equally valid. From the dream-time the adepts bring prophecies, actions to be taken/solutions to problems. The coming of the new god, Selver, was foreseen in dreams for a few years, until he left it to enter the world-time (35). It is the Great Dreamer, Coro Mena, who realises Selver's importance, his godhood, and understands that irrevocable change has come to Athshe[11].

This indicates the value of dreaming in defusing the threat of pent-up emotion and fear, in facing and dealing with the demons - which the Terrans conspicuously fail to do. The way Coro Mena handles the "unreasoning fear" Selver's arrival awakens in him demonstrates this function of dreaming. He "slipped into dream to find the reason for the

fear", by choice - indicating his conscious control over the process, and sees the "yumens" coming, the cause of his disquiet (28); he is facing the Shadow whose presence oppresses him. The Terrans on the other hand, having no ready access to their subconscious, such as dreaming provides the Athsheans, react to fear, especially "unreasoning fear", by lashing out violently (that is, projecting the Shadow) at an Other (whatever form it takes). "If the yumens are men", Selver says,

> they are men unfit or untaught to dream and to act as men. Therefore they go about in torment, killing and destroying, driven by the gods within, whom they will not set free but try to uproot and deny. If they are men they are evil men, having denied their own gods, afraid to see their own faces in the dark (45).

They hate, slaughter, quarrel, and destroy, even amongst themselves. Their behaviour appalls the Athsheans precisely because they recognise the Terrans as human: "they kill men and women; they do not spare those who ask life. They cannot sing in contest. They have left their roots behind them, perhaps" (44). The Athsheans come to the conclusion that the Terrans, "com[ing] at you rump-first, with their heads put on front to back", are "backwards", "insane" (43) - an image also used in Always. Selver tells the defeated Terrans, "you are all very ill" (135). Even Lyubov, well-adjusted compared to his fellows, suffers severe migraines, struggling with his guilt and uncertainty - guilt being something Athsheans do not know.

The Terrans need to recognise and reintegrate their unconscious, especially its drives and desires, which they instead deny and so empower further. The behaviour of dream-deprived Athsheans closely resembles that of the Terrans, especially, Captain Davidson's. According to Selver:

> ... a man who hasn't dreamed for many days [,] though he be the wisest of his Lodge, still he'll be mad ... for a long time after. He'll be driven, enslaved. He will not understand himself (127).

In addition to dreaming, the Athsheans also use competitive singing instead of fighting as a channel for aggression. Lyubov notes that Athshean "adolescents who haven't mastered controlled dreaming or competitive singing do a lot of wrestling and fist-fighting, not all of it good-tempered" (58). Furthermore, there are certain "aggression-halting gestures and positions", of which the "strongest and completest" is "a prone position, on the back, eyes shut, head turned so the throat is fully exposed" (60). (This is the position which saves Davidson's life.) As a result, "rape, violent assault, and murder virtually don't exist among them" (61). Dangerous psychotics do occur, but they are isolated "on small islands", as is Davidson eventually (61). As Lepennon puts it, the

Athsheans are a "human society with an effective war-barrier" (61). Unfortunately, this pacifism is partly what makes them easy prey for the "yumens", as the Valley will be to the Condor in Always. Davidson, for instance, comments that they are "intraspecies nonaggressive, that meant sitting ducks" (19). As Le Guin says, "the only trouble with an anarchist country is going to come from its neighbors" (McCaffery 1984: 80). For about three years the Athsheans merely submit to their oppressors - until Thele, Selver's wife, is raped (by Davidson) and dies, providing the impetus to revolt.

Selver's recognition of the Terrans' humanity has implications for the Athsheans. Lyubov insists that both he and Selver are "men": "I am like them. A man. Like them. Like you" (117). Even essentially non-violent people such as Lyubov cannot escape all the aspects involved in being human. The Athsheans never knew, never wanted to know, what people were capable of - in the Terrans' behaviour they come face to face with it. Now they have to admit kinship with these violent creatures, and retaliate in kind. They come to resemble them: when Selver takes Davidson prisoner for the last time, the Terran notices that Selver's "scarred features looked like a man's" (159). Needless to say, it is important that a human being caused him to resemble a man by beating him up, sketching the larger Terran/Athshean contact in terms of one individual from each group. Ultimately, Selver has to accept the kinship, even insist on it. When prejudice and revulsion surface among his people after the conference with the imprisoned survivors of Centralville, Selver tells them, "they are men, men, like us, men", "his voice shrill and edged like a knife" (137). On the other hand, Selver's voice, when speaking the Terran language, sounds like Lyubov's (160). Already both Davidson and Lyubov are present in him, Davidson being represented by Selver's scarred face and the attacks he leads.

In dreaming the Athsheans have a powerful tool. Insights translated from dream-time into world-time can affect the latter fundamentally since to dream in this way is to act by bringing a new way of doing into the world. One who dreams in this manner is called a "god" ("sha'ab"), one who can

> translate into waking life the central experience of vision: one serving as a link between the two realities, considered by the Athsheans as equal, the dream-time and the world-time, whose connections though vital, are obscure (106).

A god is

> a link: one who could speak aloud the perceptions of the subconscious. To "speak" that tongue is to act. To do a new thing. To change or be changed, radically, from the root. For the root is the dream (106).

Selver is such a god, as the great Dreamer, Coro Mena, who recognises him from his dreams, notes: "we may have dreamed of Selver these last few years, but we shall no longer; he has left the dream-time". But Selver is "a god that knows death, a god that kills and is not himself reborn" (35), unlike previous ones. Selver finds himself in the unenviable position of an Eve in Eden, to whom is appointed the paradoxical task of bringing suffering and murder into paradise in order to save it. Coro Mena sees him as gathering the "fruit of fear" which has been ripening on the "deep-planted" tree for four years:

> All that we fear to know, you have seen, you have known: exile, shame, pain, the roof and walls of the world fallen, the mother dead in misery, the children untaught, uncherished. ... now you reach up, Selver, now you gather it. And the world changes wholly, when a man holds in his hand the fruit of that tree, whose roots are deeper than the forest (48).

The fact of the dream-time, the origin of the "new thing", being a <u>reality</u>, and of the god being one who "speak[s] aloud the perceptions of the subconscious", suggests that the organised murder which Selver brings into the world-time has always been within the power of the Athsheans, but buried in their unconscious. He paves the way for the others, facing what they "fear to know" (48) - which liberates him into taking action and command. Selver's godhood empowers him to face the only way to retaliate, namely, in kind, with violence, crossing the war-barrier (61). His followers "take[] up the fire they feared into their own hands; take[] up the mastery over the evil dream: and loose[] the death they feared upon the enemy" (116).

Apart from the political realities of the Athsheans' lives under Terran rule, the pressure nudging them into action comes from within. Selver tells the people of Cadast what occurred prior to the attack on Smith Camp:

> We were all very frightened and very angry, and had no way to let our fear and anger free. So at last after long talking, and long dreaming, and the making of a plan, we went in daylight, and killed the yumens ... (30).

The action taken is the way to let the "fear and anger" free, to avoid being driven mad - which is the reason for the massacres Selver gives Gosse eventually.

Still, it is not entirely clear, as Lyubov recognises, whether the "new thing" is truly from the dream-time or from the Terrans, specifically, Captain Davidson. "Had he learned to kill his fellowmen among his own dreams of outrage and bereavement, or from the undreamed-of-actions of the strangers?" (107). Instead of "ris[ing] from the root of his own suffering ... express[ing] his own changed being", it "might in fact be an infection, a foreign plague, which would not make a new people of his race, but would

destroy them" (107). It may be that Lyubov is too naive or too unwilling to accept that the peaceful Athsheans he is so close to may have harboured this "gift" in their subconscious all along. Selver does tell Davidson that he (Davidson) gave him the gift of "the killing of one's kind, murder" (161). Certain is that the Athsheans could not reply in kind until the murder of other humans came to them through the medium of the god - in other words, in an indigenous way, be the origin their own subconscious or Davidson. Either way the responsibility lies with the Terrans. Their only alternative is being destroyed, since their "alienness" renders assimilation unlikely. They would lose too much in the process.

Formerly, Athshean action was "right" action, which did not leave the world different from before, and was not evil. Now, as Coro Mena tells Selver in one of the saddest passages in the novella, "I shall never walk again that path I came with you yesterday, ... that I've walked on all my life":

> You have walked on it and it is utterly changed. Before this day the thing we had to do was the right thing to do; the way we had to go was the right way and lead us home. Where is our home now? For you've done what you had to do, and it was not right. You have killed men (33-34).

This kind of action does not lead home because it leaves Athshe irrevocably changed. Selver tells Lepennon that a god "brings a new way to do a thing, or a new thing to be done ... across the bridge between the dream-time and the world-time. When he has done this, it is done" (168).

The changes to Athshe are profound. For the first time, history comes to Athshe: "direction and irreversibility are introduced into a formerly static world" (Nudelman 1975: 218). The society which used to be "temporally cyclic" becomes "historic" (op. cit. 219). Selver's homicidal attack on Davidson after Thele's death is the first sign of change, followed (quite a long time after) by the mobilisation of Athsheans, streaming into Cadast to join Selver. He carries his message through the forest, recruiting more people, "telling them the new thing, waking them from the dream into the world" (116). The god's task is formidable and terrifying, for he and the "evil dream" change the Athsheans' "unaggressiveness" which "ran so deep in them, right through their culture and society and on down into their subconscious, their 'dream time', and perhaps into their very physiology" (93). It would have been "psychologically improbable", as Lyubov first thinks, if it weren't for his godhood (93). "There is no use pretending, now," Selver admits to Lepennon, "that we do not know how to kill one another" (168). As the Tao te ching warns with respect to "military conquests", "such affairs have a way of returning" (30. 2), meaning that they do not go away as though they have never been -

which is equally relevant to the Terrans, of course. Both Davidson and Lyubov (in terms of what they represent) will be on Athshe forever. Selver is pessimistic about Athshe returning to the way it was before he and the Terrans came, but at least Davidson and Lyubov provide some kind of balance.

The personal cost of becoming a god is heavy. Selver's own dream-cycle becomes disrupted after the first massacre of 200 Terrans at Davidson's camp, and more severely when he assumes the command of the Athshean "forces". By the time of his arrival at Cadast, exhausted, wounded by Davidson, he fears "that he was cut off from his roots, that he had gone too far into the dead land of action [like the Terrans] ever to find his way back to the springs of reality" (38). The reference to "the dead land of action" strikes a familiar note, reminding one of the Taoist reservations about certain types of action, by definition cut off from the root which is Tao, only belonging to the realm of consciousness and reason. Unfortunately, it is in nature of the "evil dream" Selver brings into the world-time to have great power, not always susceptible to reason. As Selver loses his balance he feels the dream he "thought to drive" driving him (117), until he spends "two days and nights" after the Centralville massacre "helpless and insane" (118). The responsibility for many deaths, including Lyubov's, lies on his shoulders.

The character of Raj Lyubov provides an alternate Terran/human response to the rampant exploitation of Athshean natural and human resources and, equally importantly, to the alien society itself. Unlike the military personnel whose training facilitates paranoia and xenophobia, he was "trained to keep his mind open whether he wanted to or not" (67). Lyubov is the only one concerned enough to study the Athsheans and begin to understand the extent to which their "ecology and culture [are] inextricably entwined" (Barbour 1974: 169). However, he finds that his protests about the treatment meted out to the Athsheans are suppressed, "speshes" being of low standing in military eyes in any case. Or and Lepennon are sympathetic but unable to assist him. This leaves him powerless to help the Athsheans through official channels, meaning that the onus is on the individual, Raj Lyubov (as opposed to the "spesh"), to find alternative ways to act.

Initially, Lyubov reacted to the forest in much the same way as his fellows: "at first ... he had felt oppressed and uneasy in the forest, stifled by its endless crowd and incoherence of trunks, branches, leaves" (88). Now, after four years, "he was completely at home under the trees, more so perhaps than anywhere else" (89). His being more at home on Athshe is significant in itself. As Lyubov becomes more adept at truly communicating with the Athsheans, his relations with his own people worsen. One is

reminded of Genly Ai who, after he fully experiences and comes to appreciate the Gethenian way of life, reacts to his fellow humans with feelings similar to revulsion.

At first Lyubov was

> careful to keep on the right side of HQ, objecting only to extreme cases of brutality against the natives, using persuasion not defiance, and conserving what shred of power and influence he had. He could not prevent the exploitation of the Athsheans. It was much worse than his training had led him to expect, but he could do little about it here and now (103).

Goaded into abandoning this policy (which some would surely consider a cop-out) by what happens to Selver and his wife, he rescues the Athshean from being beaten to death by Davidson. This leads to his final rejection by the regular officers, his "spesh" colleagues being of the opinion "that he had been irrational, quixotic, or stupid" (104). Made of less stern stuff than Genly perhaps, Lyubov is, in spite of everything, never able to sever the ties he has with the other Terrans - without which his path would have been much easier. He dies thinking himself a traitor (110).

Not everyone has what it takes to be an activist, especially if <u>force</u> seems the only solution. Even Selver, who has the advantage of the forest people's extraordinary psychological balance, is sorely taxed to keep his sanity while leading his people in violently subduing the Terrans - which, before his godhood, was not in their nature. The moral responsibility both he and Lyubov bear exacts a heavy personal cost. Lyubov, although of exemplary psychological health compared to Davidson, is unable to distance himself enough emotionally. He feels too much which, coupled with his insecurity, impairs his ability to act decisively[12] - in circumstances calling so loudly for rather decisive action that rationalisation seeking to absolve one from responsibility fails:

> It was not in Raj Lyubov's nature to think, "What can I do?" Character and training disposed him 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 (107).

In a nutshell, he finds himself in a situation for which he is temperamentally unsuited - which renders even more difficult (and heroic) the role of Terran conscience which he assumes (albeit involuntarily). <u>Word</u> shows how "even the most unmissionary soul, unless he pretend he has no emotions, is sometimes faced with a choice between commission and omission", so that "What are they doing?" is replaced by "What are we doing?", leading to "What must I do?" (107). The Athsheans' "painful, unanswerable wonder as to why the 'yumens' treated men like animals", and the resulting "burden of

explanation" coupled with "the gnawing of irremediable guilt" are Lyubov's demons, manifesting themselves as severe migraines (90).

There is a distinctly immature feel to his character. Lyubov is very conscious of self-confidence and strength in others - qualities he is aware he lacks - which has the effect of making one feel immature in comparison. The proximity of the powerful Or and Lepennon, to whom he is attracted because of the Hainishman's "serenity and strength" (68), and the chance of reaching them with his reports on the actual situation of the Athsheans under the Terrans, render him "alert and excited, his face ... rather hot" (58). In contrast to his excitable reaction there is Davidson, "straight-backed and handsome, his lean, rugged face calm and rather stern" (54). His reaction to the other characters indicates his own lack of assurance and feelings of inferiority. The only way to help the Athsheans is to be tough in order to reach one's objective. Nevertheless, pressing Davidson to recount the details of his humiliating defeat at the hands of Selver to ascertain whether he accidentally imitated their position of surrender leaves Lyubov feeling "compunction" for compromising the Captain's image of himself as "totally virile" (59).

Far from being tough, the growing realisation that Or and Lepennon are unable to help, and Gosse's failure to back him up (as he was expecting him to), almost overwhelms him. A final attempt at having them listen to reason is discounted as an "outburst" (73) for which he has to apologise, thinking: "to hell with my self-respect so long as the forest people get their chance". "So strong a sense of his own humiliation and self-sacrifice came over him that tears rose to his eyes" (73). When he becomes aware of Davidson watching him, "he sat up stiff, the blood hot in his face, his temples drumming" (73). This concludes his official efforts at preventing genocide.

His close emotional involvement not only causes him suffering at the uncaring hands of the Terrans. Lyubov, whose name (like Genly Ai's) means "love", reached out to the Athsheans, an action usually rewarded in Le Guin's fiction. Reaching out always involves the risk of rejection or loss. Existing in both a private and a public world exacts a high price of the principal actors in her fiction. Lyubov's association with Selver develops into companionship and affection. Meeting Selver after the Smith Camp murders, he realises for the first time "how deep his liking and loyalty to [him] [was]" (94), only to have to accept that his friend "was changed, radically: from the root", meaning that an "unaltered friendship" between them was wishful thinking (95). One can appreciate that rejecting him is necessary for Selver to fulfil his mission as sha'ab; Lyubov tries to understand it as Selver rejecting not him, but "a Terran": "it made no difference. It never does" (97).

It is interesting to note the extent to which Lyubov has been "contaminated" by patriarchal ideas as to male behaviour, which shows in his impatience with his inability to "take things like a man":

> He was always disagreeably surprised to find how vulnerable his feelings were, how much it hurt him to be hurt. This sort of adolescent sensitivity was shameful, he should have a tougher hide by now (97).

(This reflection, one must add, also serves the purpose of keeping the actual rejection by Selver at bay for the time being.) Of course, his feelings toward Davidson, composed of a mixture of envy, admiration, and dislike, point at the same "contamination" - which contributes significantly to his insecurity.

Lyubov finally arrives at the point where not to choose between "commission and omission" (107) would signify real culpability. His visit to Tuntar and the unexpected encounter with Selver made clear the alarming extent to which the Athsheans had changed from their non-aggressive, passive, trusting nature. It is his duty to report this, as well as Selver's presence which bodes the Terrans no good, not to mention Selver's warning him to "leave Central two nights from now" (108). His own immediate reaction to all this is a form of denial, as I pointed out: contemplating his lack of "a tougher hide", the amusing anatomy of "a little [green] crone", and the wisdom of being governed by old women (97). "But all the time, beneath his thoughts of old women and young ones, the shock persisted, the intuition or recognition that would not let itself be recognised" (98-99). He knows that they are going to attack Centralville. Instead of dwelling on that, memories of his rescue of and friendship with Selver lead him to realise that reporting the Athshean leader's presence would probably result in Selver being court-martialed: "Oh no, he thought, and thought no more about it. So he made his choice without even knowing he had made one". He writes "a soothing report", "the most inaccurate one [he] ever wrote" (109). He does not allow himself to consciously recognise what he is doing, rationalising that "he had merely omitted subjective impressions, as a scientist should" (110). This constitutes his activism. Typically, "he had a severe migraine whilst writing the report, and a worse one after submitting it" (110). Only during the attack, being the only one "not taken by surprise", "he faced what he had refused": "in that moment he knew what he was: a traitor" (110).

According to Barbour, Lyubov's death "results directly from his 'liberal'[13] inability to face the reality of the situation, as the Athsheans have seen it" (1974: 170). It does not appear to be Le Guin's aim to discredit Lyubov and his "liberal" inclination, and to insist that socio-political realities take precedence - only taking cognizance of the disposition of the individual involved to denounce those who do not make the activist grade as "weak".

The clash between "public and private imperatives" is treated as the complex, painful dilemma it can be - as also in Left hand (Huntington 1975). She explores with sympathy the psychological implications of the radical activism required by circumstances on Athshe on an essentially non-violent person such as Lyubov (in addition to the more obvious effects on the collective psyche of the Athsheans), without judging him harshly. His weaknesses are human. In addition to indecision as regards what action he should take to help the Athsheans, Lyubov struggles with himself - which endows his character with considerable human complexity and bravery.

For the first time in a novel or novella Le Guin includes the explicit exploitation of women. They only appear as a "batch of breeding females", "212 head of prime human stock" (1). Women are not even endowed with that dubious status when they happen to look different (hairy and green) - in which case they are enslaved, raped and murdered without a second thought (as is Selver's wife). Davidson, through whose eyes they are mostly seen, considers women and "creechies" to be equally devoid of good sense (11). His "concern" for them during the Athshean revolt further objectifies them:

> God knows how many of the women were still alive in the creechie warrens, tied down underground in one of those stinking holes, being touched and felt and crawled over and defiled by the filthy, hairy little monkeymen. It was unthinkable (140).

Incidentally, the passage illustrates the obsessively sordid quality of his imagination - he finds fantasising about "making" a woman and burning "creechies" exciting (81). What he imagines the Athsheans doing to Terran women is more or less what he and his fellow Terrans did to Athshean women (not to mention torturing the men). Since he does not recognise Athsheans as human, as the novella demands the readers do, the thought never occurs to him. Lyubov is the only one with a favourable attitude towards them, describing the "girl" he slept with as "really very nice", with "a kind heart" (98). He has so many problems that one does not have the heart to criticise his use of "girl".

One senses that Davidson's "when I say Earth, Kees, I mean people. Men" (5) represents the author's ironic recognition that the term fails to include women. Yet Word makes no attempt to avoid the use of "man" when humankind is meant: for instance, Selver acknowledges (with anguish) that the "yumens" are "men, like us" (137). This has implications for the novella's reading position. There is feminist sentiment, but its reading position is not primarily feminist - the novella chiefly concerns itself with the other forms of exploitation discussed. Still, it should be kept in mind that exploitation is a way of life; all forms are related.

Although Word opts for activism of a particularly violent kind and provides compelling reasons for it, making it justified violence, it does not feel at ease with it. Normally Le Guin would subscribe to the policy of not replying to violent actions in kind, which means - from the point of view of the aggressor - not to reply at all, to be passive. As Dena C. Bain says, "passivity negates argument and teaches the aggressor to break the circle of cause and effect, and shows him that 'To yield is to be preserved whole'" (1980: 211). It is clear that preservation through yielding was out of the question in this case. Welch notes that should events (such as those on Athshe) be allowed to become full-blown, "one will face a much more difficult - perhaps impossible - undertaking for inaction" (1966: 25). The Athsheans' initial passivity which merely made their oppression that much easier, caused events to become full-blown indeed. Non-action is no option in this case, seeing that wu-wei "succeeds by being rather than doing, by attitude rather than act, by attraction rather than compulsion" (Welch 1966: 21). Non-action is time-consuming, and the Athsheans ran out of time.

As far as Taoism is concerned, the Tao te ching does recognise war and the use of force as part of human existence, and counsels people on how to go about it, advising: "be resolute because you have no choice" (30.3) - which is the case here. Concerning the depiction of war and destruction, Watson notes that Word is "a considerable relief from other reflections of America's war experiences in SF, which, albeit the moral is one of futility and savagery nevertheless frequently intoxicates the reader with the gungho mood of combat and the lavishly presented technology per se" (1975b: 231). This links with a "cardinal point of Taoism", namely, that force should be regarded as "regrettable necessity" and exercised with and followed by sorrow - especially at the loss of life, should that occur (Welch 1966: 25). Sadness and regret at the choice which had to be made and its consequences are built into Word - in the suffering of Selver and Lyubov, in Lyubov's death, in the horror of the violence committed by both sides, in the irrevocable changes wrought on Athshe, and in the uncertainty of its future. The only certainty is that Davidson and his will to exploitation and death will always be on Athshe, as will Lyubov and his will to peace and life - including, unfortunately, his inability to prevent violence.

It should not be forgotten that Athshean society is more mature than most Earth societies. Selver is "allowed" to cease being a god - which, as Barbour recognises, "is a significant example of the sanity of his culture" (1974: 172). What he brought into the world-time cannot be denied, as is made clear; to do so would imperil the Athsheans, as would embracing it as a way of life, instead of as an inescapable ability which has to be sanely dealt with. One feels on the whole that they should be able to cope with it, that

"the Athsheans' wisdom will contain and restrict the new knowledge" (Baggesen 1987: 39). After all, Selver's "evil dream" is balanced by Coro Mena's vision:

> But listen, Selver, this is what I see that perhaps others do not, this is why I have loved you: I dreamed of you before we met here. You were walking on a path, and behind you the young trees grew up, oak and birch, willow and holly, fir and pine, alder, elm, white pine-flowering ash, all the roof and walls of the world, forever renewed (48).

Unfortunately, as Pandora finds in Always, Selver has to lose, even destroy, a world to create a new one. This is why the final tone is elegiac.

Notes

1 It is worth quoting in full her remarks on Word's characters: "Neither Lyubov nor Selver is mere Virtue Triumphant; moral and psychological complexity was salvaged, at least, in those characters. But Davidson is, though not uncomplex, pure; he is purely evil - and I don't, consciously, believe purely evil people exist." (1989a: 127). This is part of the effect of "succumb[ing], in part, to the lure of the pulpit" which robbed the novella of the necessary authorial distance (1989a: 126).

2 It should be noted that Le Guin does not see this as a "human propensity", or "human nature", period. The point of her fiction is that she believes the "much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity" to be a human possibility, something which could be achieved. Activism has value. Suvin does define science fiction as "not pretend[ing] to hold up a mirror to either present or future nature but to the possibilities inherent in nature - human, social or cosmic" (1988: 42).

3 Interestingly, Lepennon notes that the ansible makes possible "a society" (66). That the Terrans are alarmed by this is significant. As Or says: "there is no longer any excuse for acting on outdated orders; for ignorance; for irresponsible autonomy" (67-68). No longer will they be able to hide behind interstellar distances. Bittner comments that "the creation of a society" means "the institution of a language-communication system that can connect humans in a network of ethical relationships, making them morally responsible" (1984: 117) - precisely what the army is not.

4 The first time having been accidentally.

5 Emphasis mine. His use of the word, "trick", shows that he is still unable to appreciate it and its result for what it is: an appeal for mercy, instinctively undeniable, indicative of a "civilised" and, above all, humane society. The Terrans respond by killing those who adopt this position - to the horror of the Athsheans, who know of such acts only in psychotics. This judgement of Terran/contemporary empirical society's behaviour as insane recurs in Le Guin's work. In The dispossessed Shevek reflects that "a psychopathy on Anarres [Sabul's possessiveness and secretiveness] was rational behaviour on Urras", the latter society being ours estranged (1974: 231).

6 I inspect the Athshean notion of "godhood" below.

7 I use the phrase, "Earth terms", advisedly, since "human terms" would mean excluding the Athsheans from humankind.

[8] A small echo of the Tao te ching also appears in the following sentence: "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" (25-26). The Tao te ching tells us that "great straightness appears bent" (45.1), meaning that the straightest path circumvents obstacles (as do the Athsheans) instead of laboriously trying to negotiate or remove them, which is characteristic of a more aggressive, impatient people - such as the Terrans.

[9] "Now things grow profusely, / Each again returns (kuei) to its root" (Tao te ching, 16.2).

[10] The following illustrates the extent to which Athshean health and sanity depend on their sleep and dreaming-pattern: "... many of the men became groggy, confused, withdrawn, even catatonic. Women [non-adepts], bewildered and abased, behaved with the sullen listlessness of the newly enslaved". "Male non-adepts and some of the younger Dreamers", on the other hand, "did best; they adapted", explaining the young Dreamer Selver's surviving intact (99).

[11] And it is the "practical woman", Ebor Dendep who "believe[s] and act[s] (35) on his advice, seeing to it that the word of Selver and the murders is spread. This is the beginning of the mobilisation of an Athshean force with Selver as commander, as men and women start drifting into Cadast, "drawn by Selver's presence" (40).

[12] In this he is analogous to his creator whose anger compromised her artistic distance to the work of art. It is tempting to see him as the character into whom is built Le Guin's acute consciousness of the senseless horrors perpetrated in Vietnam, and the impotent frustration and anger at not being able to do a thing about it.

[13] Le Guin states that she "do[es] not like to see the word 'liberal' used as a smear word" (1976: 45).

Chapter III

The lathe of heaven (1970)

To some extent The lathe of heaven utilises stock characters. There are the mad scientist, the hero (who has trouble getting on top of the situation initially), and his girlfriend (who needs to be rescued occasionally). All of them are revamped to some considerable extent, partly by means of the ironic tone of the novel supplied by the narrator and some of the events. The mad scientist (psychiatrist) William Haber is an activist and utopist trying to "improve" the world - an attitude which ordinarily elevates characters to "herohood". The "hero" George Orr is an "anti-hero" who desperately tries to stop improving the world (with his involuntary "effective dreams"), wishing only to leave it to its own devices or natural destiny - which would normally qualify him, if not exactly as a villain, at least as guilty of gross indifference. The "girlfriend", Heather Lelache, is a strong and complex woman capable of doing some rescuing herself, with a world-view similar to George's - which is validated at the end of the novel. Each character has a way of being in the world which is related to that character's success or failure. This way of being in the world is the consequence of the specific psyche of that character, particularly in Lathe, but also in The left hand of darkness and The word for world is forest. Like the main characters in the latter, those in Lathe represent positions or world-views, but are much more than mere types, even though Haber approaches this in his "madder" moments.

Lathe is unique in Le Guin's fiction in being permeated with "straight" Taoism, with quotes from the Tao te ching and the Chuang Tzu serving as epigraphs. Phrases from both texts, such as "following" or "following the Way", and "block of uncarved wood" ("p'u"), are employed in describing the characters. According to the Chuang Tzu, "fish thrive in the water, man thrives in the Way" (6); therefore it advises humans to "follow along with things the way they are" (7). The novel opens with an image of a jellyfish in the ocean which illustrates and explains this, besides symbolising an ideal Taoist view of beings and things in the universe: "current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of the ocean ... from anywhere to anywhere" (7). The jellyfish is in the ocean, the ocean in the jellyfish. "Hanging, swaying, pulsing, the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature, it has for its defense the violence and power of the whole ocean, to which it has entrusted its being, its going, and its will" (op cit). The jellyfish has no desires, merely going ("following") wherever the ocean tugs it. Compared to the

jellyfish, a land animal is a lonely (willful) being. In terms of the passage (and Lathe) the land animal is conscious.

In the Tao te ching lack of desire characterises the sage - while no offence is regarded as greater than "having what is desirable", and no blame greater than "the desire for gain" (46.2). Haber's very name indicates his need to have, his desire. George Orr on the other hand tells Haber that one reason for his failure to perform satisfactorily for him (dreaming what Haber desires into existence) is that he is "too defeatist, or passive, ... maybe. I don't have enough desires" (77). Ironically, Haber once calls Orr "a moral jellyfish" (126). It is Orr's tendency to go with the flow. He says of himself that he does not "choose", but "follow[s]" (108). Like Wang T'ai in the Chuang Tzu Orr "takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source" (5). The benefits of following and being in touch with Tao ("holding fast to the source") are sureness in one's being and doing. Things will change and go the way they are supposed to, the way their internal determining principles nudge them to. Human action or wei (such as Haber attempts) imposes on nature; in an ideal world human action is superfluous, since "the Taoist allows events to unfold according to their inner rhythms; ... act[ing] by non-action (wu-wei), which is acting with, not against, the inner rhythm of things" (Chen 1989: 41).

Haber and the world of action he adheres to are the opposite of the ocean - "that dry, terrible outerspace of radiance and instability, where there is no support for life", "the stubborn continents" (of the opening passage), on which George finds himself beached. The question is "what will the creature made all of seadrift do on the dry sand of daylight; what will the mind do each morning, waking?" (7) This points to the ocean also symbolising the unconscious and the universe of dreams, with the continents signifying consciousness. Tao is the source of all beings and things (as the ocean is of the jellyfish and its other inhabitants), the way the dream-time is the source of dream or nightmare creatures which have the power to enter into the day-time. Significantly, the Aldebarans (the dream-time creatures from one of George's effective dreams) look like turtles in their armour - and the epigraph to chapter seven speaks of the dream as "the aquarium of Night" (79). Tao, dreams, and the ocean are interconnected in a web of imagery.

George's power of dreaming effectively, though never fully explained - in spite of Haber's scientific efforts - has Taoist characteristics. The power of George's dreams is incalculable, fueled - as they certainly are - by his intimate connection with the whole, with the all-powerful Tao, as well as by his nature. Orr suggests that his very lack of desire and his passive disposition may have something to with his power to dream effectively (77). The dreams never operate "miraculous[ly]" or "unnatural[ly]" in that

they "cover [their] tracks completely" (45). Being told to dream up a pink dog would result either in a normal dog dyed pink or pink having always been a natural colour for dogs. Effective dreams make "a different reality, retroactively" (17). It is Haber's first reaction to take advantage of these dreams, George's to somehow stop them since it is his Taoist conviction that he has "no right to change things" (44). It is worth noting that Orr's Taoism "is not learned but instinctive", as Bucknall puts it (1981: 91); Haber sneeringly calls him "a sort of natural Buddhist" (73). Incalculable power can wreak incalculable damage when misapplied, as George knows, and in Haber's case the old adage of absolute power corrupting absolutely holds true. True to his Taoist nature George favours non-action, and believes in resorting to action only when he has no choice, and when the timing is right. He tells an uncomprehending Haber that he knows his "obligation" to his "gift": "to use it only when I must. When there is no other alternative" (127). To use the dreams consciously for personal reasons would mean imposing human will on the world contrary to Tao, to the world's normal impulses. There is a continuity running through George's changes to reality, linked to George's belonging in and to Tao, to his following the Way: George is always a draftsman - which fits him since "he knew ... he was best at design, the realisation of proper and fitting shape and form for things" (109). This talent is no surprise in a Taoist, someone who forms part of and follows the great, natural way of all things. His street address remains the same, so do geography, national boundaries, human nature, and the earth's climate. The more Haber "masters" George's "gift" however, the more the changes break with and fail to resemble earlier realities - George ends up a city bureaucrat, everyone turns gray and Heather vanishes, for instance. The "essential continuity, [the] coherence, among all the existences resultant from [George's] dreams" (op cit) ceases to hold as the psychiatrist follows his own head - which happens to be "on backwards", to use an image from Always coming home. Haber's reality changes affect the world adversely, which Orr's never did.

It is easier to understand Orr's gift and its consequences, and the disastrous results when it is utilised by Haber, when one studies both of them more closely. Haber sees George initially as "unaggressive, placid, milquetoast, repressed, conventional" (12). Heather sees him as "a born victim" (40), "not exactly feeble-minded, but revoltingly simple" (41). It is easy to see why a Taoist would affect others this way: the characteristics of Tao are qualities scoffed at by non-Taoists - Taoist strength seems weakness at first sight, non-action is preferred to action, yin to yang, etc. The reader's first glimpse of Orr's strength comes in the second chapter narrated from his point of view. The first chapter presents the reader with a man suffering from drug-abuse, therefore not with much to form an estimate of his character. Now George realises that

Haber has observed a change of reality caused by an effective dream - although the psychiatrist does not acknowledge this to Orr or even himself, for some time - which means that George is not insane, as he has begun to fear[1]: "So great a joy filled Orr that, among the forty-two persons who had been jamming into the car as he thought these things, the seven or eight pressed closest to him felt a slight but definite glow of benevolence or relief" (38). This is only momentary however.

In the same chapter, one learns that George is no "reasoner", as opposed to Haber, but "arrived at ideas the slow way, never skating over the clear, hard ice of logic, nor soaring on the slipstreams of imagination, but slogging, plodding along on the heavy ground of existence" (op cit). Instead of "see[ing] connections", George "felt connections" (38-39). Sight is external to that which is observed, feeling synchronous and in touch with that which is felt. In order to "feel" connections one has to be in touch with "the heavy ground of existence", "below" reason and consciousness.

This is important, since consciousness (allied to seeing, and reasoning, of course) is viewed with suspicion through Taoist eyes. Consciousness belongs to the coming-out process which leads away from Tao, bringing fragmentation and division. Later one reads that there are no destructive psychological and philosophical contradictions in George's being - normally, that is. His mind is "resistant to ... divisions" - although he knows they exist and recognises them in Haber (77). Interestingly, especially in relation to Haber and his desires, consciousness can be seen as an awareness of the self as distinct from and opposed to everything else - a condition of loneliness, even motherlessness - leading to desire which "aris[es] from self-awareness and the feeling of a lack [which] prompts humans to act (wei) in the world, to appropriate the world for the self" (Chen 1989: 144). This goes some way towards characterising Haber and explaining his obsession with "improving" the world. To some extent, the two modes of knowing that Chen distinguishes in the Tao te ching, and which I quoted in my Introduction, describe Haber's and George's ways of being in the world. "Verbal or spoken" knowledge "describes consciousness coming out from nature without return", ultimately losing touch completely, as Haber does. "Non-verbal or unspoken" knowledge "belongs to a reversive consciousness in dynamic union with the unconscious"[2] (Chen 1989: 206). Orr may lose his Way temporarily, but never entirely - the jellyfish never really leaves the ocean.

George is in touch with "the heavy ground of existence" because he is "like a block of wood not carved" (84). This is p'u, the Uncarved Block. The characterisation of Orr closely follows the characteristics of p'u - George is without desire (or has very few and simple ones, at least) as befits the Uncarved Block. In the cabin in the woods Heather

comes to realise that George is possessed of "the infinite possibility, the unlimited unqualified wholeness of being of the uncommitted, the nonacting, the uncarved: the being who, being nothing but himself, is everything" (84). This serves as a good description of George's vitality and strength, and its source, the root [Tao] which he adheres to. Even Haber notices - without fully comprehending - this quality of being in touch with the whole during the psychiatric session attended by Heather. He sees Orr as having "a singular poise, almost a monumentality": "he was completely still, still as the center of something" (61). In psychological terms Orr's ego is stable, providing him with sanity, steadfastness, strength, calm, and patience. Heather senses that "he could not be moved away from the center", making him "the strongest person she had ever known", contradicting her earlier judgement (84). Psychological tests show George to be "right in the middle of the graph", possessed of "holistic adjustment, poise, [and] self-harmony" (as interpreted by another psychiatrist) - though Haber is incapable of seeing this as anything other than "self-cancellation" (118). "Stillness" is one of the attributes of Tao - as is, paradoxically, its never-ending activity, the activity of the round, of the bringing forth of beings and things. To people like Haber, the stillness is worthless, to be avoided - only activity makes sense: ambition, scheming, going places.

As has already been pointed out, Orr's mode of action is in rapport with Tao. He "did not know what to do", "had never known what to do", but "had always done what seemed to want doing, the next thing to be done, without asking questions, without forcing himself, without worrying about it" (66)[3]. This description reminds one of Le Guin's definition of heroism in fairy-tales in "The child and the shadow" (1974). Le Guin is considering the fairy-tale struggle between good and evil, noting that evil "appears in the fairy tale as something not diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol" (1989a: 56). Therefore "neither is greater than the other, nor can human reason and virtue separate one from the other and choose between them" (as it is difficult to say whether Haber is evil or misguidedly good) (op cit):

> The hero or heroine is the one who sees what is appropriate to be done, because he or she sees the whole, which is greater than either evil or good. Their heroism is, in fact, their certainty. They do not act by rules; they simply know the way to go (op cit).

Le Guin calls the standard obtaining here "appropriateness", rather than "right" or "wrong" (op. cit. 55). "Appropriateness" has to do with timing, comprehending the whole and one's place in it, holding on to the root, in other words. To "insert" an action into its appropriate harmonious place and time in the great round is to do the right thing, from a Taoist point of view. The action's inevitable consequences will also be in

harmony, it will not be interference, it will not disturb the balance of the forces of Tao, whether micro- or macrocosmically. This explains the great importance of not straying from the Way, from adhering to the Root. As George tries to make Haber see, "you don't know whether you're doing good or evil or both" (120), because one cannot know the consequences of an act beforehand, the more so when one is as isolated as is Haber.

As for being in tune with the whole, George sees all human beings as a part of the whole, "like a thread in a cloth or a grass-blade in a field" (73): "I walk on the ground and the ground's walked on by me, I breathe the air and change it, I am entirely interconnected with the world" (133). This certainly helps to account for his ability to affect its course with his dreams. Because of his intimate lived relationship with the world, the notion of human beings having a purpose on earth - "to do things, change things, run things, make a better world" (73), which is what Haber believes - is unsettling to him; he comprehends the foolhardiness of all this "over-doing", as the Tao te ching would call it (29.3). It would be "forc[ing] the pattern of things" through intervention and imposition, which is wrong (73). Only someone who has followed the coming-out process too far could believe in humans having the right (even the duty) to change things, since it necessitates seeing humanity as somehow outside or above the rest, in charge, in power. Such people regard the world as a thing over which power and will can be exercised. As Le Guin says "the only possible relationship [to a thing] is a power relationship" (1989a: 85). She adds that the consequence is that "you have fatally impoverished your own reality. You have, in fact, alienated yourself" (op cit). Orr believes that "we're in the world, not against it":

> It doesn't work to try to stand outside things and run them, that way. ... it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world is, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be (120).

Unfortunately his current circumstances are such that he finds himself completely in Haber's power, held by various "hooks" (67). According to Haber his research on Orr could eventually benefit humanity (the moral hook). There is also a legal hook - leaving "Voluntary Therapy" meant becoming liable for prosecution for obtaining drugs illegally, which process ended in jail or a "nut hatch" (op cit). In addition Orr is prevented from leaving Haber by his dependence on the dream-suppressant drugs which are only available from the psychiatrist himself.

His problems are not only material and psychological, however. One should keep in mind the extent to which Lathe is Taoist in tenor. Reading that George's "sureness of foot had deserted him when he began taking drugs, and by now he was quite astray"

(emphasis mine, 73) alerts one to George's predicament being a Taoist predicament. Orr has been separated from the Way to some significant extent, turning him into prey for the bear Haber. George is no actor, and certainly no activist. Ironically, his Taoist way of being becomes a serious handicap when he loses the Tao and his equilibrium with it. As Orr reflects, he has no choice in the world of action which traps him now, being "only a dreamer" (74) - albeit a very ambiguous phrase in terms of Lathe as a whole, of course. "The creature made all of seadrift" is stranded on "the dry sand of daylight" (7). Even though "he must act, he had to act" (66) to stop Haber's plans, he is powerless to help himself - and the world, since his very sustaining enmeshment with it ironically imperils it now. He is, after all, extremely dangerous: a disturbed effective dreamer whose power is abused by an increasingly insane man. Incidentally, George's desperate need to act is not unTaoist. The Chuang Tzu says of the "True Man of old", "because he regarded wisdom as what is timely, there were things that he could not keep from doing" (6). In George's case, he finds himself prevented from doing "what is timely".

George's imbalance was caused four years earlier in April 1998, "when the world ended", destroyed by nuclear war (92). Dying of radiation poisoning he had an effective dream preventing the holocaust from happening, representing a profound intervention in the course of history - exactly what no Taoist would ordinarily dream of doing. Orr tells Heather this during his stay at the cabin, in hiding from Haber, almost delirious with sleep- and dream-deprivation. It is one of the most chilling passages in the book, even now that nuclear holocaust is no longer such an immediate concern:

> This [their present world] isn't real. This world isn't even probable. It [the holocaust] was the truth. It was what happened. We are all dead, and we spoiled the world before we died (93).

It is pertinent to recall here what Le Guin has to say about setting her fiction in Portland:

> One thing I've noticed about my settings is that when I have something I really don't want to say but which insists on being said I tend to set it in Portland. The lathe of heaven and The new Atlantis are among the saddest things I've written, the nearest to not being hopeful, and they're both set right here. I don't know the reason for this (McCaffery 1984: 76)[4].

The passage is chilling because it is devoid of the irony and humor which characterise the novel. Instead there are bitterness, accusation, and finality - it shocks. It resonates beyond the novel's plot because it voices the greatest fears there are: that of the possible inevitability of the ultimate holocaust, therefore of absolute hopelessness. This future scenario is the shadow which an author as concerned with working towards a better

future as Le Guin is, has to turn about and face in order to be able to eventually write an Always coming home. To approach the passage from another angle: its impact is the result of the realisation that the world destroyed by the holocaust was the "real" one, the present one being a dream - literally.

In a desperate effort to stop dreaming George overdoses on illegally obtained drugs and is referred to psychiatrist Haber - who, it is clear before long, needs therapy more than George does, especially from a Taoist point of view. In contrast to Orr, Haber believes that it is "man's very purpose on earth - to do things, change things, run things, make a better world", as I quoted earlier (73). Rather than impartial altruism this is fanaticism, however. George tells Heather that the psychiatrist is "power-hungry" (89) - and that power intoxicates him is soon apparent. When hypnotising Orr for the first time, he feels "the thrill of enjoyment of his own skill, his instant dominance over the patient" (22). Initially Haber contents himself with his patients and with heroic daydreams ("Messiah dreams, do-gooder dreams"), as he tells Orr, but effective dreams come true (33). Unfortunately for everyone, Haber does not have the mental equilibrium to use so much power without it turning his head. As Orr puts it, "it's the chance of power that my dreams give him that twists him around" (67-68). Unlike George who is strong because he cannot "be moved away from the center" (84), Haber is like

> an onion, slip off layer after layer of personality, belief, response, infinite layers, no end to them, no center to him. Nowhere that he ever stopped, had to stop, had to say Here I stay! No being, only layers (72-73).

One might add that it is because Haber has no centre that there is "nowhere that he ever stop[s]" or "ha[s] to stop". He is a man compelled by the desires and fears resulting from the emptiness inside. There is no stable ego to protect him from insanity - in fact, it is evident that his ego, in Freudian terms, is disintegrating[5], foreshadowing the complete disintegration which is his fate. The energy set free by the disintegrating ego empowers the id, in this case strengthening Haber's lust for power, his ambition, and his determination to get his way - which is irrational and unreasonable even when judged in terms of the world of daylight: "he's not interested in what's true, in what is; he can't see anything except his mind - his ideas of what ought to be" (88). A lust for power is never satisfied, even when in the guise of good will, as is pointed out in the following passage:

> 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 towards a further one. The vaster the power gained, the vaster the appetite for more (113).

It coincides with the Taoist argument against certain types of action - the actor becomes involved in a spiral of acts and reactions, cause and effect. In this case, it is Haber's "determination to improve the world" to which there is no end (op cit), in spite of the fact of "the dream[s] almost never [coming] out the way he intended" (55), wreaking havoc along the way.

Stillness and being revolve around a stable centre, which the psychiatrist does not have. He only has a semblance of being, a false sense of self - and then of Self utterly opposed to Other (the world, people, etc.) - when he is "moving", when he acts his parts as doctor, messiah, utopist, all the while climbing the career ladder, satisfying the desires which drive him on[6]. And, as Orr says, all "this gives him such an awfully big part to play" (68). Ironically, he is isolated and alienated from the very human beings for whom he ostensibly wishes to change the world. As Cummins notes, this is symbolised by his seat of power in the HURAD Tower, "reflect[ing] his desire for power and for distance between himself and the individuals whose lives he is affecting" (1990b: 162-163). Orr reflects that Haber is not "really sure that anyone else exist[s], and want[s] to prove they d[o] by helping them" (30). "He (Haber) was all alone, and nothing seemed to be real in solitude", one reads later (100). This is one of the signs pointing to the "unreality" inside him, into which he disappears in the end, and which is symbolised by the "immense black-marble foyer, modeled after the Pantheon" in his Tower (117). Orr's observation (30) is confirmed by Haber's reaction to the crowd he encounters on his way to his institute during the Alien attack. He finds it "distressing", but it is even worse when they cease and he has to walk on alone (100). The extent to which Haber is "out of communication with himself" (and therefore the extent to which he acts parts) is demonstrated by the ironic statement, "he prized his independence, his free will", following on a passage detailing Haber's inability to engage in substantial relations with his fellow human beings, and his paranoid fear of intimate contact (op cit). Community is one of the main themes in Le Guin's oeuvre: "Being human isn't something people can bring off alone; we need other people in order to be people. We need one another" (1989b: 158). Haber's evasion of others explains his inability to be fully human - a serious drawback in an altruist.

Haber makes good use of the divisions in his mind to hide from himself what he cannot consciously face. Elaborate intellectualisation and rationalisation ("for there is nothing important except people" (49)) form part of his defense mechanisms as is clear when he browbeats a helpless Orr into assisting him: he hides from himself behind arguments concerning his moral duty to humanity. His mottoes are "the greatest good for the greatest number" and "the proper study of mankind is man" (117). The narrator

comments witheringly that "the straight Roman capitals['] ... proportions lend nobility to any phrase whatsoever" (op cit).

Haber has George dreaming effective dreams more frequently than they naturally occurred - in spite of not fully knowing what he is dealing with, ignoring Orr's protests about using them only when one must - thereby imposing on nature. In Haber's case consciousness is not backed up by the unconscious, by the great web of existence, by an intimate awareness of the whole. The result is a "life that lacked realness; it was hollow; the dream, creating where there was no necessity to create, had worn thin and sleazy" (130). When Haber disappears into the void inside himself he leaves behind a shambles: "the city, half wrecked and half transformed, a jumble and mess of grandiose plans and incomplete memories" plagued by "fires and insanities" (149) - much as the "real" First and Third worlds are a shambles of imperialist, capitalist, and communist creations and legacies.

Haber's "utopist" comedy of errors is of some importance to my theme. He aims at utopia, but achieves something quite different for the reasons cited above: he is insensitive to the whole and its balanced forces, and to his true motives, psychologically speaking. In the first two chapters one is introduced to a world in which hunger, disease, strikes, an advancing Greenhouse Effect, overpopulation, and the like shape the lives of its inhabitants. Animals have been crowded out, war rages in the Middle-East, and certain drugs are available in regulated doses via Pharm Card to keep the populace placid. It is not too different a world from ours. The first real changes concern Haber who becomes the powerful founder-director of the Oregon Oneirological Institute - his one patient, George Orr (48). His first major social intervention, in the overpopulation problem, results in a carcinomic Plague having killed 6 billion people, a solution which initially shocks even Haber (57). Naturally this leads to more food and better housing, but 25% of all babies are still being killed by the Plague - those who survive are cancer-free (72). The war is somehow even worse than before the Plague, involving all the major (nuclear) powers and their satellites (op cit). This is next on Haber's agenda: he instructs Orr to dream up "a world at peace with itself" (75), and George wakes up in a world engaged in the "Defense of Earth" (76) against Aliens who had suddenly appeared on the Moon. Heather and Orr experiment with hypnosis in the cabin in the woods in order to remove the Aliens from the Moon - and end up with them landing on the planet. It transpires that the Aliens were merely trying to communicate, not attack, and Haber uses the resulting chaos to his advantage, "lead[ing] his country out of the mess" (which he got them into in the first place), as he phrases it to himself (108). It is at this time, with Haber in control of more power than ever as Director of HURAD[7], "the vital center

of the World Planning Center", and steadily improving in shaping George's effective dreams according to his own desires, that the changes wrought by him become more sinister, more dystopian: sport involves people being killed, everyone is gray-skinned after an effective dream-attempt at solving racism (resulting in Heather never having been born), all citizens are subjected to a "battery of tests and records" (138). Haber himself feels ill at ease with some of these "improvements", such as having all children brought up in Child Centres, or summary enforced euthanasia for those with a "serious communicable or hereditary disease" (116) - which he calls "the use of controlled violence for the good of the community". Orr notes that his enthusiasm rang "hollower" than usual (121). Yet he still claims, "I know precisely what I'm doing" (128) - his megalomania becomes increasingly evident. Individual human rights become of secondary concern in this "utopia". As George says:

> where's democratic government got to? People can't choose anything at all any more for themselves. Why is everything so shoddy, why is everybody so joyless? You can't even tell people apart - and the younger they are the more that's so (126).

One is reminded of Le Guin's description of the "rationalist utopia" as

> a power trip. It is a monotheocracy, declared by executive decree, and maintained by willpower; as its premise is progress, not process, it has no habitable present, and speaks only in the future tense. And in the end reason itself must reject it (op. cit. 87).

Haber's seems to qualify. Since there is no point at which Haber's megalomania is going to be satisfied, it follows that his utopia will never be allowed to be "an interactive, rhythmic, and unstable process, which constitutes an end in itself" the way Anarres (ideally) should be a continuous revolution (1989b: 90). Nor would he allow it to reach a point of stasis . A better world should be organic in nature, that is, in organisation and function - as are Anarres and the Valley in their respective ways, instead there are tasteless food and gray people - death-in-life (115). Haber is in search of scientific precision and perfection, which is unattainable in human affairs, though it may look good to reason. The world never stays still to be imposed upon in this manner, so the utopian ruler either becomes involved in endless repair jobs (the effective dreams' "inaccuracy" forces Haber into this) or resorts to a police state - which is how Orr experiences what Haber has accomplished.

All too aware how much of his utopia has gone wrong but unable to admit it, the psychiatrist dodges responsibility by blaming Orr, whose "irresponsibility [in having an uncontrolled effective dream] was the cause of the death of many innocent people, the

wreckage and panic loose in the city; he must face up to what he ha[s] done" (103). Heather says of Haber, "he's found a great way to run the world without taking any responsibility for it" (89). The only times Haber recognises that the effective dreams are actually worsening his fellow human beings' lives are when he blames Orr for causing his ventures to miscarry. In this way the responsibility is channelled away from him.

Acting brings with it grave responsibility. The Master Hand's advice to Ged in A wizard of Earthsea is relevant to this novel and most of the others under consideration:

> 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 ... (1987b: 48).

This is good advice to budding utopists. Holmes Welch points out, in connection with wu-wei, that "in human relations force defeats itself. Every action produces a reaction, every challenge a response". One has to take into account "the inertia of existence": it is "the tendency of every existing object or arrangement to continue to be what it is" (1966: 20). This is partly what is meant by one being "destroyed on the lathe of heaven" (28). Interference meets with resistance; to the consequences of the original act are added the consequences of the resistance. In the novel one witnesses the clash between the natural order of things where natural changes come from the root of all things, and Haber's misguided, ill-considered changes from the outside, lacking all connection with the root. This is part of the answer to his question, "why had this gift been given to a fool, a passive nothing of a man? Why was Orr so sure and so right, while the strong, active, positive man was powerless ...?" (107-108).

Orr tries to convince Haber to consult the Aliens, who are from the dream-time, before using his machine to have an effective dream himself:

> Everything dreams. The play of form, of being, is the dreaming of substance. Rocks have their dreams, and the earth changes. ... But when the mind becomes conscious, when the rate of evolution speeds up, then you have to be careful. Careful of the world. You must learn the way. You must learn the skills, the art, the limits. A conscious mind must be part of the whole, intentionally and carefully - as the rock is part of the whole unconsciously (143).

Since the Aliens are from the dream-time, from the unconscious, they are like the fairy-tale heroes whose "heroism is ... their certainty. They do not act by rules; they simply know the way to go" (1989a: 56). To a lesser extent, not actually from the dream-time

himself, George is like this as well, following the Way. Haber has followed the coming-out process all the way. His response is to intellectualise, calling what George tries to tell him "prescientific synthesis", and "mysticism" - which is "not acceptable to those willing to use reason, and able to", though it is clear that even reason eventually ceases to be his strong point (143).

This is an important theme in Le Guin - namely, the recognition of non-rational modes of thought as valid approaches to truth and understanding, and the results when they are disregarded. In Lathe Haber's inability to understand, and "to let understanding stop at what cannot be understood" leads to his destruction "on the lathe of heaven", and very nearly plunges the world into oblivion (28).

The Aliens describe themselves as a "nonaggressive unfighting species" (105). There exists an empathy between Orr and these products of his unconscious (a tangible demonstration of his connection with the whole) which proves ultimately life-saving. Orr is told that "before following directions leading in wrong directions, auxiliary forces may be summoned" by saying "er' perrehnne" (122). The Aliens' offer of help finally heals Orr of the breach with the whole which he fell prey to after the events of April 1998 and what followed them. Immediately after the vision of the Alien in Haber's office

> a sense of well-being came into him, a certainty that things were all right, and that he was in the middle of things. Self is universe. He would not be allowed to be isolated, to be stranded. He was back where he belonged. He felt an equanimity, a perfect certainty as to where he was and where everything else was. This feeling did not come to him as blissful or mystical, but simply as normal. ... it was his natural mode of being (123).

At last he can defy Haber: "without premeditation and without timidity, Orr said, 'Dr. Haber, I can't let you use my effective dreams anymore'" (124). Startled, Haber "seem[s] to recoil, as a man might who thought to push aside a gauze curtain and found it to be a granite door" (op cit). On his way home, George meets the Alien Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe, who tells him that iahklu (apparently the ability to dream effectively) is best handled by someone not in isolation ("many hands make light work"[8]), and presents him with the Beatles' "With a Little Help from my Friends". At home Orr plays the record and dreams Heather back into existence. As Bittner notes, "the means and ends of the heroes' quests is community" (1984: 57).

During the last session with Haber, George says "er' perrehnne" before he dreams away his ability to dream effectively, as Haber finally allows him to. He tries to convince Haber to consult the Aliens, saying that "'iahklu' is too much for one person to handle alone ... it gets out of hand" (143). Predictably, Haber does not do this and has an

"effective nightmare" which precipitates the dissolution all of reality (149). Orr, using the "power of will, which is indeed great when exercised in the right way at the right time", in a Taoist manner (147), saying "help me" to fend off the void and feeling "a sort of dull rousing in his mind" in answer (148), pushes the OFF button on the Augmentor. When he falls asleep in E'nememen Asfah's apartment, he dreams of "the great green sea turtles ... swimming with heavy inexhaustible grace through the depths, in their element" (152). Haber's interference in the natural order has ended.

It remains to explore Heather's character. Not only is she a strong, complex character, she is black. Genly Ai, in Left hand, is black as well, but this is noted in passing, and has no influence on either him or the events in the novel. In Heather's case her skin colour (as well as the circumstances of her childhood) matters to the extent of determining her disposition. Her aggressive initial judgement of Orr has already been noted. She likes to think of herself as a Black Widow, "poisonous", "hard", and "shiny" (40), and works hard at coming across like this, enabling her to "intimidat[e] ... lesser insects" (80). Haber interprets her mask as composed of "a lot of sound and fury signifying timidity" (50). Contrary to her name (Lelache meaning "coward"), and her private self-image ("a sneaky, sly, shy, squamous personality" (82)) Orr sees her as possessing "great courage" (68). Heather proves this by facing the incredible reality change (the solving of the over-population problem) she witnesses in Haber's office, after denying the evidence of her senses at first, and goes off in search of Orr when he disappears.

She is able to comprehend and appreciate Orr's paradoxical Taoist qualities. Her own world-view corresponds with George's. She believes "that things fit: that there is a whole of which one is a part, and that in being a part one is whole" (94). This is a profound belief in terms of Lathe, where so much hinges on whether one is in touch or not. It enables Heather to cling to hope, to believe in George, and to recognise the evil in Haber.

Heather recognises George's great strength, something which she has need of since she had "no strength around her [as a child], nobody to lean on ever: people had leaned on her" (84-85). She comes from a mixed background, and has mixed feelings about it, accounting for her aggressive exterior and Black Widow image. Her father was "a real militant Black Power type" from a welfare family without a father, her mother a gender-issue-conscious, white corporation lawyer's daughter, a dropout and drug addict (90). Her father left for Ghana in search of his roots, and a dirty needle eventually killed her mother. She then became her white family's "token Negro" (91).

What confuses her is what colour she is. Orr calls her brown, "the color of the earth", significantly (op cit). Her colour (in other words, her mixed and turbulent background) determines her being to the extent that she disappears when everyone becomes gray, having never been born. George realises that "her color of brown [] was an essential part of her, not an accident. Her anger, timidity, brashness, gentleness, all were elements of her mixed being, her mixed nature, clear and dark right through" (112). When George succeeds in dreaming her back into existence, she reappears as his wife, but minus a dimension or two (keeping in mind the way the dreams work) (135). Her ancestry is no longer mixed, neither is her being therefore. "Violent feelings", for example, are usually "foreign" to this Heather, who feels strangely "bolder" and "harder" than before, and even says "shit" twice - all contrary to the gray Heather's character. All that is left of Heather is her "Lelache" part, her erroneous self-image. The "out of character" behaviour just mentioned is ghost images from the past she never had in this reality, but which persists eerily in the gray Heather, like the memory of the water roaring in the creek in the woods - all evidence of the fabric of the many realities wearing thin. Needless to say, she is completely overcome by awe at the sight of the bear Haber who "only got bigger at every reincarnation", since "nothing could prevent him" (112).

After George fends off ultimate oblivion he finds Heather again when she comes into the Alien shop in which he is employed. Instead of the gray-skinned timid and gentle person, this Heather is black, "fiercer", "vivid and difficult" (155), "recalcitrant [] and fragile ... forever to be won again" (156). Seen from a feminist perspective Heather makes the grade because she is her own woman, making her own decisions, and not meekly putting herself in the power of a man, in spite of her search for a stronger person. Heather advances the events in the novel by providing George with the support he needs when he reaches the end of his tether in the cabin, she is in his mind when he asks for help to push the button on the Augmentor. Her counterpart in Le Guin's fiction of the same time period is Tenar in <u>The tombs of Atuan</u>, but she is less dependent on a man to save her (it is extremely doubtful whether Tenar would have been freed without Ged's help), and more complex in terms of experience. It should be kept in mind that when Heather has to be saved from oblivion, it is together with the rest of the world. She is only weak for a part of the novel after being robbed of her will to act and survive by Haber's intervention in the natural order of things.

In spite of the Taoist bent of <u>Lathe</u> Heather does not appear to subscribe to <u>wu-wei</u> - apart from believing that no-one has the right to play God with the world. It was Rolery's non-action (as well as that of many other female characters in her novels) which caused the accusation that Le Guin let men be the prime movers in her novels[9]. Heather's

character may be supportive rather than prime, but she cannot simply be collapsed into the total character of Orr; she exists in her own right, as an individual - their world-views may coincide, but she differs considerably from George in not at all being as "purely" Taoist as he is. Yet she is able to operate and succeed on her own in a novel in which success has to do with great integrity, strength, and wholeness. She is still a partly unknown quantity at the end, "forever to be won again", not completely known and absorbed (as in used) by the male character (156).

As for action and activism in Lathe: Versfeld says that wu-wei "is eerder teen aktivisme en woeling gemik as teen aktiwiteit" (1988: 8). Activism is what topples the world of Lathe into chaos. George does not answer with an activism tailored to Taoist needs and principles - as one finds in the Earthsea trilogy to some extent - but eventually with one decisive (Taoist) action made possible by his adhering to the Way, and by the help from his friends. It would seem that acceptance is what is advocated at the end. When Heather asks George whether the fragmented world after "The Break" is "the best you could do for us - this mess?", he responds that "it'll have to do" (156). There is no hope in terms of activism aimed at improving life succeeding, but glimpses of what I can only call hope do occur. In the cabin in the woods, Heather listens to the creek "shouting and hollering eternal praise! eternal praise!"[10], and hears "a distant note in it, far away upstream it seemed, like the voices of [unborn] children singing - very sweet, very strange" (96).

Notes

1 One has to keep in mind that Orr's anxiety is a result of sleep-deprivation and drug-abuse - he is not himself.

2 Verbal or spoken knowing "go[es] beyond or transgress[es] against nature" whereas to "remain in ignorance or return to ignorance" is to retain or approach "the original and sacred state of things" (Chen 1989: 205). Knowledge "sharpen[s] the divisions among beings" (Chen 1989: 216): "From not knowing to knowing (pu chih, chih), / This is sickness" (71.1). Versfeld writes in this regard that "ware wysheid ... [ken] sy eie beperkinge" whereas "geleerdheid of slimheid ... perke aan ander mense en dinge wil stel" (1988: 8).

3 Compare the "artisan Ch'ui [who] could draw as true as a compass or a T square because his fingers changed along with things and he didn't let his mind get in the way. Therefore his Spirit Tower [mind] remained unified and unobstructed" (Chuang Tzu, 19). When George ceases to be able to act in this way, he is forced to fall back on conscious action - but gets no further than an agonised sense of the immediate necessity for action (66).

4 Raymond Williams notes that "most direct extrapolation of our own conditions and forms - social and political but also imminently material - has been in effect or intention dystopian: atomic war, famine, overpopulation, electronic surveillance have written 1984 into millennia of possible dates" (1979: 63). It would seem to be

especially true concerning near future fiction, such as Lathe. In spite of Haber's best efforts, and often because of them, 1984 hovers in the background.

[5] Compare his increasing hysteria - he turns to Heather "ready for violence, his hands clenched" when he thinks that she is going to wreck his plans (58), and his increasing megalomania towards the end - Orr reacts with disquiet to Haber's "grin of ecstasy", a "straining, staring smile ... both terrifying and pathetic" (128).

[6] Le Guin's great achievement with regard to Haber is creating a character whose problems are equally convincing whether interpreted from a Taoist or a psychological point of view, apart from him being a satire on power-mad "utopists". Orr's being a convincing Taoist character is as great an achievement - non-action, pacifism, and "weakness" do not promise much as character traits. I should mention that I do not mean to imply that Orr satisfies all Taoist criteria. The Tao te ching and the Chuang Tzu are famous for their internal contradictions - taking certain liberties with them is quite acceptable. Le Guin did call herself an "unconsistent Taoist" (1975: 139).

[7] HURAD - Human Utility: Research and Development (140). It is at this point, as I discussed above, that the continuity linking the realities created by George is disrupted, simultaneously indicating Haber's improvement at controlling George's dreams, and Haber's following "the wrong way" (147).

[8] The Aliens express themselves in platitudinous expressions - which, however, by no means invalidates the truth they speak. Unfortunately, some critics disregard what they have to say completely. For instance, Spivack: "when George attempts to question one of [the Aliens], the response is charmingly irrelevant: 'One swallow does not make a summer. Many hands make light work'" (1984: 63).

[9] Le Guin writes in response to criticism of Rolery, among others, that "in [Planet of exile], as in most of my other novels, the men do most of the acting, in both senses of the word, and thus tend to occupy the center of the stage" (1989a: 119).

[10] I am reminded of the Handdarata saying "Praise then Creation unfinished", which celebrates fertile organic (natural) chaos - in other words, eternal astonishing natural change (Le Guin 1986: 194).

Chapter IV

The dispossessed (1971-1973)

Unlike Karhide and Athshe, which naturally evolved to their current social states, Anarres was constructed according to the principles Odo set out in her works (Analogy, The social organism, and Prison letters). The planet was settled by a million Odonians (85) when the Urrasti World Council presented "the International Society of Odonians" with the planet to "buy[] them off with a world, before they fatally undermined the authority of law and national sovereignty on Urras" (84).

The ambiguity of the novel's subtitle goes back to the very establishment of the alternative society. Since Urras needs certain raw materials from Anarres, and the latter some goods from Urras it cannot manufacture itself, the so-called "Free World of Anarres" can be seen as "a mining colony of Urras", a fact which "gall[s]" the Anarresti (83). It is an open question whether Anarresti society, which keeps the revolutionary spirit on Urras alive by its very existence, would have been tolerated for so long if it were not for this arrangement. This solves some of the major problems of an anarchist utopian society and its author, namely, "how to get there", and the threat posed by neighbouring states (Le Guin 1984: 80). Though it fails to consider the road to utopia in any detail, the value of the novel lies in its depiction of a practicable anarchist utopia and the self-generated difficulties it encounters - although Le Guin reflects that anarchism cannot really be considered "a practical proposal" since "it's never really been practiced". However, she regards the "kind of thinking" which results in Anarres "a practical necessity". It means thinking "in different terms" (1984: 80), without which there is no getting to utopia.

Le Guin explains what she did in The dispossessed as follows:

> The whole idea of the state has got to be rethought from the beginning and then dismantled. One way to do this is to propose the most extreme solution imaginable: ... you ... say let's have no government, no state at all. Then you try to figure out what you have without it (1984: 80).

Part of the "extreme solution" is the predominantly yin nature of the utopia, although its chief exponent, Shevek, is rightly criticised for his "excess yang" (Le Guin 1989b: 93). In the process, she "tr[ied] to rethink our assumptions about the relationships between human beings" (1984: 81).

The names of the twin planets indicate their respective utopian and dystopian characters:

> [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); and Urras is not only a phonetically heightened shadow of Earth, but the primitive (Ur) and stunted (only disyllabic) opposite of Anarres; it is the place which has not yet got rid of res" (Suvin 1988: 139).

The natural environment plays an important role in the character of the utopian locus in The dispossessed, as in The left hand of darkness, The word for world is forest, and Always coming home. What immediately strikes one about Anarres is that, in contrast to Urras, "life had not evolved higher than fish and flowerless plants. The air was thin ... The sun burned, the wind froze, the dust choked" (84). There are no animals, plants "got on well enough, in their sparse and spiny fashion", but life abounds only in the three oceans.

> Man fitted himself with care and risk into this narrow ecology. If he fished, but not too greedily, and if he cultivated, using mainly organic wastes for fertilizer, he could fit in. But he could not fit anybody else in. ... Only the Settlers came, and so well scrubbed internally and externally that they brought a minimum of their personal fauna and flora with them (158-159).

As Takver notes, "it's a queer situation, biologically speaking. We Anarresti are unnaturally isolated" (159). On Anarres, as on Gethen, human beings "have nothing but each other" (192). In addition to being transplanted from their world of origin to an alien planet, the subsequent voluntary termination of almost all ties with Urras compounded their isolation. Once on Anarres they closed the door permanently, formulating the "Terms of the Closure of the Settlement": "Nobody will be allowed off the freight-ships farther than the boundary of the Port of Anarres" (295). As the narrator notes, this wall not only closed off the only spaceport, sealing out the rest of the universe, it also sealed off Anarres, so that it appears "a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine" (9). This has a profound effect on the utopian community, as I discuss below. The only connection which remains with the twin planet is that of the exchange of goods already referred to, as well as the occasional exchange of ideas.

The barren nature of Anarres has implications for any society established on the planet. Naturally the number of people each region can support is limited. This fits in with Odo's plans for an anarchist society in which decentralisation is the central element. Briefly, she "suggested that the natural limit to the size of a community lay in its

dependence on its own immediate region for essential food and power" (85), as is the case in More's Utopia. As a result of the aridity of Anarres the communities had to be widely separated, causing them to "cut back their notions of what is needed for support ... very hard indeed" in order to be reasonably self-supporting (85). The Anarresti had no intention of "regress[ing] to pre-urban, pre-technological tribalism" however: "they knew that their anarchism was the product of a very high civilization, of a complex diversified culture, of a stable economy and a highly industrialized technology that could maintain high production and rapid transportation of goods" (85).

Odo

> intended that all communities be connected by transportation and communication networks, so that goods and ideas could get where they were wanted, and the administration of things might work with speed and ease, and no community should be cut off from change and interchange (85).

As far as the administrative arrangements of life on Anarres are concerned, and in keeping with the anarchist idea that "any rule is tyranny" (296), "there was to be no controlling centre, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy and the dominance-drive of individuals" (85).

It should be noted that the reference to "the dominance-drive of individuals" is significant because it means that the psychology of the inhabitants of Anarres is comparable to ours[1]. Only "social but not entire human nature has been modified", Widmer observes. "People have some right, as it were, to selfishness ('egoize', as it is disapprovingly labeled in Odonian morality), a right to stupidity, waywardness, all crucial freedoms" (1983: 9). From a larger perspective it means that their society is feasible. Klein states that it is Le Guin's intention to "show that the two societies equally belong to human possibility" (1977: 288).

Instead of being "run from the top down", the society operates according to the anarcho-Taoist idea of a "complex organicism" (85-86):

> The special resources and products of each region were interchanged continually with those of others, in an intricate process of balance: that balance which is the characteristic of life, of natural and social ecology (86).

Anarres fits Le Guin's generalised description of a yin utopia, quoted earlier in connection with Word - although the article looks forward to Always rather than back at The dispossessed:

> a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door (1989b: 96).

Administrative and organisational centralisation proved unavoidable, and "right from the start" Abbenay became home to the "computers that coordinated the administration of things, the division of labour, and the distribution of goods, and the central federatives of most of the work-syndicates" (86). The "network of administration and management", called PDC (Production and Distribution Coordination) is "a coordinating system for all syndicates, federatives, and individuals who do productive work". Yet, "they do not govern persons; they administrate production", and so have no authority to either "support" or "prevent" any undertaking (69).

In The dispossessed Le Guin subscribes to the thesis that, as Hythloday puts it,

> where possessions be private, where money beareth all the stroke, it is hard and almost impossible that there the weal-public may justly be governed and prosperously flourish [since] no equal and just distribution of things can be made ... unless this propriety be exiled and banished. But so long as it shall continue, so long shall remain among the most and best part of men the heavy and inevitable burden of poverty and wretchedness (More 1910: 50, 51).

Odo's thought was shaped by the injustices of Urrasti capitalist society. Shevek reflects that it is "human suffering" in which "the ideals of his society were rooted" (237). Therefore her ideas aim at eliminating suffering caused by social institutions: "poverty and wretchedness", alienation, possession, oppression, and exploitation. Instead Anarres redresses the imbalance between individual and individual, and individual and society, making them mutually interdependent, and equal in material terms. In short, in one of the central images of the novel, she breaks down the walls caused by the division into the privileged classes (those who have) and the underprivileged (those who do not have - the exploited), which still endures on Urras.

The absence of private property is the key concept of Odo's formulation of a more ideal society, even more important to the nature of the utopian locus than organicism, anarchism, and the profound influence of the planet's natural conditions. Widmer notes that it is "a commonplace in cultural anthropology that communitarian equality is usually linked with relative non-abundance" (1983: 9) - as it is in the community of the Valley in Always. In fact the absence of private property is seen as aiding organic anarchism. The all-important balance of the natural and social ecology of their barren world is facilitated

and reinforced by the absence of private property. No one has more than she or he needs; there is no excess of either production or consumption. Odo specifically addressed the issue of excess in her Analogy, in which she wrote that "excess is excrement": "Excrement retained in the body is a poison" (88). Having more than one needs, although there are of course no laws preventing the collection of excess consumer products, say, incurs severe social disapproval. The social reaction to "excess" (waste) is understandable when one keeps in mind that "the private and the public economy was the same" (211). It is also indicative of the authority of Odo's teachings, which is partly accounted for, in this particular case, by "the principle of organic economy [being] too essential to the functioning of society not to affect ethics ... profoundly" (88).

The novel illustrates the far-reaching impact of private property on the individual psyche by the manner in which its absence on Anarres and presence on Urras affect the inhabitants. Possessions tie one down, necessitating endless laws for their protection. Shevek sees Oiie for example as someone whose "private insecurities [and] anxieties as a property owner [] made him cling to rigid notions of law and order" (171). These "rigid notions", and law and order in themselves, imprison the individual. In The social organism Odo warns "to make a thief, create an owner; to create crime, create laws" (120). In this type of social structure, especially because of the absence of private property, doing away with most or all laws is possible without creating anarchy (as opposed to anarchism). In More's Utopia "they have but few laws," as well, "for to people so instruct and institute very few do suffice" (1910: 103).

"Possession" is to be understood in more than just the material sense. Shevek describes the Anarresti as "free, possessing nothing they are free", and accuses the Urrasti, "the possessors", of being "possessed": "You are in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns" (192-193). According to Suvin

> the dispossessed are those ... who are no more possessed (in the Dostoevskian sense of demon-ridden) or obsessed by the principle of Having instead of Being, no more ridden by profiteering possessiveness whether applied to things, other people, nature, knowledge ... or to oneself (1988: 138).

Suvin calls the dispossessed "the De-Alienated", "those rid of alienation both as physical reification (by things and impersonal apparatuses) and as physical obsession (by demons and what Marx calls fetishes)" (1988: 138). Le Guin concurs: "... true freedom is gained by giving up things, possessions. And that's a very strong streak in human nature. We all know we're imprisoned by things, money, by buying and selling" (quoted by Bittner, 1983: 252).

Since there are no private property and no money, there is no remuneration for services rendered and goods produced. Also, there is no economic underclass who "naturally" do the "dirty" work, no economic upperclass who only have "white-collar" jobs. In Utopia More raises the old argument that "where all things be common", "whom the regard of his own gains driveth not to work, but the hope that he hath in other men's travails maketh him slothful" (1961: 67). This is neatly turned around in Shevek's discovery on Urras that he is mistaken in his assumption that "if you removed a human being's natural incentive to work - his initiative, his spontaneous creative energy - and replaced it with external motivation and coercion, he would become a lazy and careless worker". He realises that "the lure and compulsion of profit was evidently a much more effective replacement of the natural initiative than he had been led to believe" (74). This points an accusing finger at Anarresti propaganda concerning Urras, which I deal with below.

Unlike More, Odo argues that "a child free from the guilt of ownership and the burden of economic competition will grow up with the will to do what needs doing and the capacity for joy in doing it. It is useless work that darkens the heart" (207). Work serves to bond the members of society: "the delight ... of anyone doing needed work and doing it well, - this durable joy is perhaps the deepest source of human affection and of sociality as a whole" (207). "Work is done for the work's sake", Shevek tells Vea, "it is the lasting pleasure of life" (129). Bierman comments that "Anarres is that special place where work is not for something in exchange, but a human vocation, the social task" (1975: 254).

In Odo's "analogic mode" of reasoning (86), each individual is conceived of as a cell in an organism (society) with a specific "cellular function". This term expresses "the individual's individuality, the work he can do best, therefore his best contribution to his society" (275). A "healthy society" is portrayed as one letting the individual exercise "that optimum function ... freely, in the coordination of all such functions finding its adaptability and strength. That was the central idea of Odo's Analogy" (275). The individual's position in society changes from pawn to vital component: "With the myth of the State out of the way, the real mutuality and reciprocity of society and individual became clear" (276). They depend on each other for survival.

Work in the practical mode is addressed at school level already, with the children's curriculum including "farming, carpentry, sewage reclamation, printing, plumbing, roadmending, playwriting, and all the other occupations of the adult community" (128). This prepares them for eventually doing their share as far as "tenth-day rotational duty" is

concerned (47), in addition to their chosen vocation. Every tenth day each capable individual (whose name comes up on "rotating lists") is asked by the "community management committee or the block committee or whoever needs him" to join in work such as garbage collecting or cleaning lavatories. "Disagreeable work postings, or dangerous ones like the mercury mines and mills" are normally for half a year (129). As Shevek notes, the drawback is that many postings are filled by "people just learning the job" (129). On Anarres society opts for a degree of inefficiency rather than forcing its members to do work which might cripple or kill them (129). In general "most Anarresti worked five to seven hours a day, with two to four days off each decad". "Details of regularity, punctuality, which days off, and so on" were decided on between the individual and the "work crew or gang or syndicate or coordinating federative" in question (159).

Odo did foresee "the danger of a rigid moralism arising from the use of the word 'work' in her analogic system". "Cooperation and function, essential concepts of the Analogy," for instance, "both implied work". Therefore the identity of the words "work" and "play" in Pravic have "a strong ethical significance" (225), linking with Odo's ideas on the joy of doing what needs to be done.

Some details of the organisation of work are reminiscent of that in Utopia where hard labour such as farming is done by having town dwellers doing stints of two years in the country, ensuring that "no man shall be constrained against his will to continue long in that hard and sharp kind of life" (1910: 57-58). Farming is "a science common to them all in general, both men and women", which they are taught "even from their youth" (1910: 63). Besides farming, every Utopian has a trade of their own. Anyone who wants to may learn another trade, and choose which to practice, "unless the city have more need of one than the other" (1910: 64). Society does take precedence in certain circumstances in Utopia as on Anarres, on the latter in the case of the drought.

More notes how the inhabitants of Utopia have "little liberty ... to loiter", and "how they can have no cloak or pretense to idleness", there being no "wine-taverns" or such to induce loafing. In addition "they be in the present sight and under the eyes of every man. So that of necessity they must either apply their accustomed labours, or else recreate themselves with honest and laudable pastimes" (1910: 76). This links with the seating arrangements in church which ensure that "all their gestures and behaviours be marked and observed abroad of them by whose authority and discipline they be governed at home" (1910: 128).

More's use of public opinion to assure civil obedience and assist in society running smoothly is echoed in The dispossessed. On Anarres the "social conscience" ("the opinion of one's neighbours" (129)) is "the most powerful moral force motivating the behaviour of most Anarresti" (98-99). So, for instance, it is one of the functions of PDC to "tell [the Anarresti] the public opinion of [them] - where they stand in the social conscience" (69). According to Shevek, "there is no other reward ...; no other law" - except for "one's own pleasure, and the respect of one's fellows" (129). "When that is so", he adds, "then you see the opinion of the neighbours becomes a very mighty force" (130). Even in a less perfectly organised society such as ours the approval (or disapproval) of one's peers is a powerful behavioural motivation. This is another of the reasons why no laws are necessary on Anarres. The social conscience is more likely to stop one doing what one should not than a law would be since it is internal rather than external. "Coercion", says Shevek, "is the least efficient means of obtaining order" (130). When the private and social conscience agree, the individual will want to do what should be done. Anarresti society, as has been pointed out, has removed the walls between individual and society - they are mutually independent, together forming an organic whole. Each cell fulfilling its function ensures the well-being of both cell and organism. In contrast to social Darwinism The dispossessed subscribes to the idea that "the strongest, in the existence of any social species, are those who are most social. In human terms, most ethical" (185). This idea is expounded by Petr Kropotkin (whose work Le Guin consulted in planning the novel) in his Mutual aid: A factor of evolution (Bucknall 1981: 116).

The concept of the social conscience of itself indicates the extent to which the Anarresti depend on each other. On Anarres, as Bedap realises, "the only security we have is our neighbours' approval" (300) - here there is no substitute in the form of financial and material comforts to bolster the individual. Social conscience combines with the barren Anarresti landscape and the anarchist concept of mutual aid to generate social "glue". Shevek tells the Urrasti that the Anarresti have "no law but the single principle of mutual aid between individuals" (249). The Anarresti's struggle for survival engages them with their world and unites them with their fellow Anarresti, as opposed to the (social) Darwinist struggle which pits human beings against each other. Odo's ideas facilitate this process.

Yet the barren landscape casts some doubt on Anarres's utopian status in the minds of some critics, who see it as "compromising" the concept of mutual aid as utopian paradigm - yet another example of utopian ambiguity. As Bierman puts it, "a moral choice for communion created and still sustains this holier community, but brute

necessity enforces much of the functioning of the institutions" (1975: 250). Defending his people against being called "a little commune of starving idealists", Shevek counters, "our society is practical. Maybe too practical, too much concerned with survival only. What is idealistic about social cooperation, mutual aid, when it is the only means of staying alive?" (117-118). What is utopian about them under such circumstances? This point is taken up by Moylan, who finds that "the physical parameters set by LeGuin limit the utopian logic of the book and do not pave the way for utopia as much as for individual moral excellence in the face of adversity" (1986: 102). According to Le Guin, "Anarres is a metaphor for the austere life, but I wasn't trying to make a general proposal that a utopia has to be that way" (1984: 81). One might point out that More's utopia, with which Anarres shares quite a few features and is austere itself, is not a Garden of Eden either: "their soil be not very fruitful, nor their air very wholesome" (1910: 94).

The question of whether mutual and social co-operation on Anarres is utopian or enforced may be partly answered by an examination of the effects of the drought which tries Anarresti society severely. In spite of threatening famine and a "convulsive" and "desperate" struggle to prevent it "people were not desperate at all", but found joy instead in doing what needed doing (see Odo on "this durable joy", quoted above): "the old tag of 'solidarity' had come alive again" (207). There is no shortage of people volunteering for emergency work. "Mutual trust allayed depression or anxiety; 'We'll see each other through', they said, serenely. And great impulses of vitality ran just under the surface" (208)[2]. One feels that if social cooperation were just a case of brute necessity the Anarresti would have cooperated in a different spirit altogether.

What is at stake when one questions the Odonian ideal is whether or not the barren planet and its Spartan community qualify for utopian status, whether Odo's ideas would have worked if Anarres were an utopia of abundance, depending on much less work, for one thing? It should not be forgotten that the barren landscape is not the only factor in the equation. Mutual aid is backed up by the social conscience and Odo's principles, as discussed above. Yet it <u>is</u> easy to imagine that abundance as opposed to barrenness would have resulted in a lack of social cooperation, it not being necessary for survival. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that Le Guin's utopia - and utopias in general - explores the thesis that social institutions shape human beings[3], which is related to her "rethink[ing] our assumptions about the relationships between human beings" (1984: 81). The Anarresti are different from us, but not chiefly because they are Cetians. Since the Anarresti social institutions are organised according to different (better/more humane) principles than ours, it follows that the Anarresti themselves should be able to <u>act</u> differently towards each other. They have been emancipated from oppressive social

institutions which dictate existence rather than facilitating it, and which bring about anti-social behaviour, in Anarresti terms. Behind this notion one discerns the "past Golden Age" implied in her work, which assumes that human beings have the capacity to co-exist peacefully, and are basically good (social) when given the opportunity to be so (Suvin 1988: 142). According to this notion, Anarresti society would have been utopian whether located in a barren or a fertile environment.

Another way of looking at this question is by validating Le Guin's choice of utopian landscape, which is what Jameson does in his article on world-reduction in Le Guin, from which I quoted in the chapter on Left hand. It is worth noting his definition of it once more: it is

> a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical excision of empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification (1975: 223).

One recalls Le Guin saying that she imagined a place without a government and then "figure[d] out" what one had without it (1984: 80), which corresponds to her technique in Left hand where gender, amongst other things, is what is "weeded out". Jameson identifies the chief and "positive omission" as "that of the Darwinian life-cycle itself, with its predators and victims alike; it is the sign that human beings have surmounted historical determinism, and have been left alone with themselves, to invent their own destinies" (1975: 224). At the same time, he considers it a "powerful and timely rebuke" to "attempts to parlay American abundance and consumers' goods into some ultimate vision of the 'great society'" (1975: 228).

Back on Anarres Shevek does have a taste of the breakdown of mutual aid in the face of starvation when he is one of 450 people stranded on a train in a town whose 160 inhabitants have no food to spare without probably starving themselves before the next provisions-train arrives. The narrator comments that "it was easy to share when there was enough, even barely enough, to go round. But when there was not enough? Then force entered in; might making right; power, and its tool violence, and its most devoted ally, the averted eye" (214). So the townsfolk hide guiltily in their houses with their food ("breaking" two Odonian "laws", guilt being left to profiteers (218)), and Shevek and the others starve for 60 hours before being able to go on. At the next town they eat, and carry on their journey having "seen each other through" (215). Odo's principles are vindicated once more.

In terms of individual suffering, Shevek is hit hard. He is unable to practise physics, and loses Takver and Sadik to a geneticist emergency posting for four years. In this instance, Anarresti society and a partnership ("a voluntarily constituted federation like any other" (205)) are incompatible, society's survival and working taking precedence over individual happiness: "A couple that undertook partnership did so knowing that they might be separated at any time by the exigencies of labour distribution" (206). Yet Shevek's rage cannot be directed at society's measures: "No-one was to blame. ... Society was not against them. It was for them; with them; it was them" (216).

The barren environment and the workings of Anarresti society could, by themselves, preclude much individual freedom and initiative, hence change. Even though Odo did not have Anarres in mind when writing her books (she died on Urras before the revolution), her ideas allow for, in fact, emphasise freedom and change. "Change is freedom, change is life", Bedap says, "is anything more basic to Odonian thought than that?" (143) It means that "the willingness to live in ambiguity, with continuing change and choice, [is] both the existential condition of [Anarres] and the structural principle" of the novel (Bierman 1975: 251).

"Though it might seem that her insistence on freedom to change would invalidate the idea of promise and vow", and result in the undesirable anarchy of chaos, the importance of their choices is considerably enhanced (205). "The freedom made the promise meaningful. A promise is a direction taken, a self-limitation of choice". Odo knew that "if no direction is taken, if one goes nowhere, no change will occur" (205). Therefore, "Odo came to see the promise, the pledge, the idea of fidelity, as essential in the complexity of freedom" (205). The million Settlers made a choice and Anarres became "the world of the Promise" (15).

Odo's ethical teachings, baldly set out above, are rediscovered and revalidated by Shevek, both as Anarresti and scientist. In Suvin's words, The dispossessed "reconciles linear and circular time - or cosmic, historical and personal sense - in Shevek's simulsequentialist physics, politics and ethics" (1988: 138). Shevek distinguishes between two aspects of time:

> There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation (sequency). And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises (simultaneity) (188).

One cannot choose between the two. One's "model of the cosmos must be as inexhaustible as the cosmos. A complexity that includes not only duration but creation, not only being but becoming, not only geometry but ethics" (190). As I indicated above, Odo's politics and ethics reconcile them as well. Bittner notes how the Anarresti "Circle of Life" which is printed on all Anarresti bookcovers, is "a circle not quite closed", "a synthesis of linearity and circularity" (1983: 255).

In her article, "Physics as metaphor: The general temporal theory in The dispossessed", Tavormina further explains time in the novel: "The conscious, adult mind experiences the sequentiality of discrete moments, sees 'the difference between now and not now', and connects the two moments by memories, plans, promises" (1980a: 57). "Now and not now", she continues, "must be distinct (Sequency) and yet related (Simultaneity) for choice and promise to have meaning" (op. cit. 59). So, "by memory we bind the past to the present; by intention we bind the present to the future". In terms of action and activism this is the most important consideration: "Once we can make the connections across time we enter the realm of responsibility" (op. cit. 58). This links with the Odonian emphasis on individual freedom of choice and change. An Odonian must act responsibly to avoid self-destruction. The promise made has to be kept to avoid no less than the dissolution of Anarresti society, and the consequent reversion to Urras - which is the form Damocles' sword takes in The dispossessed. As Bittner puts it:

> Le Guin has invented an anarchist utopian society, dynamic and revolutionary by definition, designed to operate in history, not outside of or at the end of history, created not only to make freedom an inalienable right of any individual, but also to make an exercise of that right of free choice in innovative and risk-taking acts a necessary condition for keeping alive the promise of freedom made when the utopian experiment began (first emphasis mine, 1983: 246).

Not only are revolutionary action and activism possible on Anarres, they are essential. This makes Anarres a critical utopia according to its and Le Guin's insistence on utopia not being "progress towards achievement, followed by stasis[4], which is the machine's mode", but "an interactive, rhythmic, and unstable process, which constitutes an end in itself" (1989b: 91). This contrasts with the classical utopia's "imprisonment of the utopian horizon within a closed and ordered utopian locus, whose description is the central narrative element" (Somay 1984: 26). Instead the critical utopia's "open-ended text ... portrays a utopian locus as a mere phase in the infinite unfolding of the utopian horizon" (op cit). There is "tension between the narrative actuality of the utopian locus and the potentiality of the utopian horizon" (op. cit. 33). "That horizon", Somay explains, "does not exist as a present paradigm in the narrative; it can only be inferred

from the acts of the personae in their struggle to approach it" (op. cit. 32). It is through their "actions, characteristics, relationships, frustrations, and hopes" that the reader discovers Anarres (op. cit. 34).

In Somay's terms, the utopian horizon becomes "the project of human agents", in this case, Shevek and the Syndicate of Initiative (op. cit. 36). In The dispossessed Shevek reflects that "his society, properly conceived, was a revolution - a permanent one, an ongoing process. To reassert its validity and strength ... one need only act" (151). Action and activism play a central role in the novel. Action is incorporated in Odo's teachings, hence an integral part of the utopia constructed according to her thoughts.

In spite of the validation of action Odonian thought and Taoism are far from incompatible. The activism which Shevek and his fellows eventually decide on is not imposed on anyone - that is, they go their own way, using the anarchist options at their disposal, and they clash only indirectly with their fellow Anarresti in meetings and in daily life, while trying to get their approval and understanding. One supposes that it could be defined as wu-wei, compared to directly taking on those who disagree with them.

The dispossessed is not as explicitly Taoist as Left hand or The lathe of heaven. Yet Taoism underlies Odonian thought, as Bittner's analysis of Odo's name makes clear: "Applied to places, [the Greek word] odos denotes a 'way, road; course, channel of a river; the way to truth'. ... With prepositions, odos means 'further on the way; forwards, profitable, useful'". He points out that the latter meaning concurs with the Anarresti word, "functional". "Used to denote an action," Bittner goes on, "odos refers to 'travelling, journeying; journey, voyage'". Finally, "when used metaphorically, odos has ethical and aesthetic implications: it can mean 'way, manner; ... intent; way of doing or speaking; ... course of action'" (1983: 251). Most importantly, as Bittner further observes,

> "Odonians" is the true name for the Anarresti because odos ... refers simultaneously to a thing (road) and a process (travelling), rather than to a state of being, and also because its similarities with Tao suggest the religious dimension of Anarresti life (op. cit. 252).

The Odonian process aims at ensuring that the utopian society is not a static product. Instead, it features the yin version of process, part of the "variety of pacifist anarchism" which is the "major utopic element" in The dispossessed, and which "is about as yin as a political ideology can get", as Le Guin remarks (1989b: 93). And, as Bucknall notes, "perhaps the most striking connection between Taoism and anarchism is the taste they

both show for an organic, as opposed to an imposed, order" (1981: 123). Naturally this, along with other factors, has implications for the kind of activism the characters - and Shevek in particular - engage in. I deal with this below.

Anarchism in Taoism is most evident in the Tao te ching, which speaks out against governmental interference in the lives of the people ("The best government, the people know it is just there" (17.1)), and is of the opinion that "when laws are abundantly promulgated (tzu hun), / There are many thieves and brigands" (57.2). As pointed out above, Odo echoes this as a reason for crime in The social organism, adding private property: "to make a thief, make an owner; to create crime, create laws" (120).

As Shevek grows up and embarks on his career as physicist, he and the reader discover that all is not well on Anarres. The permanent revolution has stalled, necessitating re-activism - purposive political and personal action. Anarres provides many opportunities for contra-utopian urges and processes (one thinks of the powerful social conscience and the almost superstitious horror of excess); their inclusion is one of Moylan's criteria for the critical utopia. It is clear, for instance, that the physical environment is not conducive to the kind of material and spiritual luxury and extravagance found on Urras. On the contrary, coupled with a fundamentalist approach to Odo's teachings (especially concerning work, the economics of balance, and equality), there is room for the development of a rigid morality (or moralising), for self-righteousness, even puritanism. That this is what happened is illustrated, on the one hand, by the inflexible belief system of the juvenile Shevek and, on the other hand, his later clashes with society concerning what they deem his selfish dysfunctional behaviour. Ironically enough, Anarresti society was actually "an attempt to reach [morality]. To throw out the moralizing, yes, the rules, the laws, the punishments - so that men can see good and evil and choose between them" (185). Bittner remarks that it is "the level of moral culture ... [which] distinguishes evolution toward utopia" in The dispossessed (1983: 249).

What is wrong with Anarres is that the revolution has run out of steam. Instead of "an interactive, rhythmic, and unstable process", the Anarresti have settled for the classical "progress towards achievement, followed by stasis" (Le Guin 1989b: 91). Bedap identifies inadequate education as a root cause. He points out that "nobody's born an Odonian any more than he's born civilized" (144), which means that education is "the most important activity of the social organism" (144). Bedap recognises that "the will to dominance is as central in human beings as the impulse to mutual aid is, and has to be trained in each individual, in each new generation" (144). It is a well-known fact that

institutions such as schools (and mental hospitals[5]) gradually cease to function in the way they were originally intended, until they are only going through the motions - especially when education is geared to an ideology. Education looses its substance, what is taught turns into rhetoric and propaganda, discipline turns into oppression, until independent thought is discouraged. This process is damaging enough in the author's empirical society, on Anarres it is counter-revolutionary. Education has become "rigid, moralistic, authoritarian. Kids learn to parrot Odo's words as if they were laws - the ultimate blasphemy" (144). The followers of these laws are relieved of responsibility, all their choices being ready-made. It is the opposite of Odonianism - which has become a dogmatic ideology.

Odonianism has built-in counter-measures in its insistence on initiative and change - Shevek's "one need only act" (151) comes to mind - but people gravitate to the easier route: "It's always easier not to think for oneself. Find a nice safe hierarchy and settle in. Don't make changes - don't risk approval - don't upset your syndics. It's always easiest to let yourself be governed" (144). So "cooperation become[s] obedience", a "government by the majority" (143) comes into being in an anarchist society. The "Odonian" laws are enforced by the majority by means of public opinion, "the unadmitted, inadmissible government that rules the Odonian society by stifling the individual mind" (142), and "completely dominat[ing] the individual conscience" (273). Having ceased to be a "living thing", the social conscience has become a "power structure" (142), a "power-machine, controlled by bureaucrats" (143).

The power the social conscience supplies is much more effective at countering undesirable (anarchist) ideas and behaviour than the old violent "archist" ways of suppression. The social conscience is a formidable educational device. The Anarresti depend on each other to such an extent that social disapproval has much greater impact than in empirical society. Bedap notes that "the only security we have is our neighbours' approval. An archist can break a law and hope to get away unpunished, but you can't 'break' a custom; it's the framework of your life with other people" (300). "We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing" (273), Shevek says. The result is not cooperation but obedience: "We fear our neighbour's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice" (273). It should also be understood that the prohibitions of the social conscience (Odo's "laws") are taught and absorbed in such a way that they are endowed with the power of superstition, and become non-rational. So Shevek initially feels guilty when he has a room to himself in Abbenay; he even initially disapproves of the "lavishness" and "thriftlessness" of the Urrasti trees in the Abbenay park (89).

I have dwelled on the social conscience at some length in order to point out what Shevek and the others are up against, what they have to take into account to decide on their course of action. The position of the individual in relation to society is one of the questions foregrounded in the novel. In Somay's terms, there is "tension between the utopian hero and the utopian locus" (1984: 34). It is one of utopian hero Shevek's functions to discover "the faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse in the form of the persistence of exploitation and domination in the better place" and in himself, a process in which he is assisted by Bedap and the other intellectual nuchnibi[6] (Moylan 1986: 44). He becomes the "revived, active subject" which typifies the critical utopia, and whose "concerns ... are centered around the ideologeme of the strategy and tactics of revolutionary change at both the micro/personal and macro/societal levels" (Moylan 1986: 45).

The power of the social conscience is most effectively exploited by those in administrative and management positions. "Power inheres in a centre" (55) as Odo knew, and we have already seen that the centralisation represented by Abbenay (the name means "mind" in Pravic (85)) and PDC proved unavoidable. Shevek explains one of PDC's functions as "only tell[ing] [the Anarresti] the public opinion of [them] - where they stand in the social conscience", as opposed to "support[ing]" or "prevent[ing]" them (69). However, the make-up of PDC (and the syndicates and federatives whose activities it coordinates), as well as the obedient nature of the Anarresti, turns out to provide certain individuals with real bureaucratic power (144). The upshot is the existence of a "clique of mediocrities" who control "intellectual activity ... via covert bureaucratic power" (Widmer 1983: 9).

Sabul, the foremost sequency physicist on Anarres and therefore the man to whom Shevek's work leads him, is one of these. He serves as partial personification of what has gone wrong with Anarres; in him many of the anti-social tendencies which the utopian society gave scope to in spite of its precautions, are full-blown - which justifies having a closer look at the relationship between him and Shevek, to whom he represents a kind of living wall, and whom he eventually forces into social activism. Shevek gets a taste of Sabul's habitual secretiveness and possessiveness at their first meeting. Since the next step in his education is Urrasti physics he must learn Iotic. Sabul supplies him with the necessary books, but warns him that "they're not for general consumption" (93). When he fails to respond Sabul reminds him that "you're now a member of the Central Institute of Sciences, a Physics syndic, working with me, Sabul. You follow that? Privilege is responsibility" (93). Implied is that Shevek occupies a particular position in a privileged

hierarchy with Sabul at the top, and that it is his duty to behave accordingly - to obey by keeping to himself what he has access to.

The beneficiary of the secrecy and possessiveness is, as Shevek learns, Sabul himself. The physicist virtually <u>owns</u> Urrasti Sequency physics on Anarres (Sequency theory being in vogue there), since he is one of the few who understand it and the language it is written in. Shevek initially refuses to believe this, considering it "a genuinely disgusting thought" (97). Yet he soon finds himself taken advantage of when Sabul makes himself "co-author" (on the cover only) of Shevek's "A Critique of Atro's Infinite Sequency Hypothesis" (100). Sabul occupies central positions all along the way a physicist needs to go in order to publish, which enables him to effectively boycott whatever he cannot control (or steal) otherwise.

Shevek needs the Urrasti physicists, "their ideas, their criticism, their collaboration", to make headway (103), since there is no one but old Gvarab working with Simultaneity physics on his homeworld. Sending them letters by spaceship and having papers published on Urras are the means of communication at his disposal, but the spaceport managers and Defence prove hard to bypass. The latter "insists that each word that leaves [Anarres] on those freighters be passed by a PDC-approved expert" (101), which is indicative of the distrust and suspicion of Urras prevalent on the Moon.

PDC controls the Port directly "since its operation involved the coordination of many syndicates". "These Port managers, with their special knowledge and important position, tended to acquire the bureaucratic mentality: they said No automatically". Even though some of the coordinators know Iotic, they do not understand physics (it looks too much like code), hence such letters are "passed if Sabul, their consultant, approved them". And he "would not approve those which dealt with subjects outside his own brand of Sequency physics" (137). Shevek finds himself effectively obstructed, which of course affects his ability to progress with his theories. His immediate recourse would be the Physics Federative, but "nobody there attached importance to the issue of free communication with the ideological enemy" (137). Even teaching at the Institute is denied him; "the faculty-student Syndicate of Members turned down his request", anxious to avoid clashing with Sabul (136-137). Sabul refuses to take Simultaneity theory seriously, and the Syndicate of Members follows his lead. Paper is a luxury on Anarres, which affects what gets published, and Sabul is the "Press Syndicate's consultant on manuscripts in physics" (102).

Indeed the only way Shevek can think of to free himself to at least continue studying Simultaneity physics is by playing Sabul's game better than <u>he</u> does. He points out that

the Sequency work he did forms part of his studies of Simultaneity physics. In return for what he wanted Sabul would have to "stand" Shevek's research in Simultaneity (102). Shevek reflects that it "had not been a battle, but a sale" (103). Ironically enough,

> Shevek's career, like the existence of his society, depended on the continuance of a fundamental, unadmitted profit-contract. Not a relationship of mutual aid and solidarity, but an exploitative relationship; not organic, but mechanical (103).

It is at this point that Shevek reestablishes his relationship with Bedap, who shows him that he is not the only one running into walls that should not exist in Odonian society, and introduces him to others - the intellectual nuchnibi referred to above (149) - in the same position. As Bedap knows and Shevek discovers, ideas can only be "crush[ed] ... by ignoring them. By refusing to think - refusing to change" (142). This refusal proves to be an impenetrable wall. The composer Salas, for instance, "never had a posting in music, or in anything but unskilled labour" (149), because he insists on writing what is termed "dysfunctional music" (150). Trying to negotiate the wall head-on only makes it stronger. That Shevek knows this can be seen in the way he "negotiates" Sabul in the matter of the proposed writing and publication of the "Principles of Simultaneity": "his gentleness was uncompromising; because he would not compete for dominance he was indomitable" (102). This echoes the Tao te ching's "Because he is not contentious (pu cheng), / Hence no one under heaven can contend with him" (22.2). A blustering Sabul merely comes face to face with his own hypocrisy when he tries to bully the younger man into submission, which makes him hate Shevek all the more.

Eventually Shevek finishes the "Principles of Simultaneity" for publication, with Sabul refusing to recommend it either for publication or export (200). Significantly, in the light of the counter-revolutionary malaise of Anarresti society, he motivates the rejection by pointing out that it is "a mutually agreed principle since the Settlement of Anarres" that "Sequency physics is the highroad of chronosophical thought in the Odonian society". It is Takver's idea to let Sabul be co-author which Shevek extremely reluctantly has to agree to. During the drought the "first incomplete, drastically edited version" sees the light with Sabul using his "influence at the Press and in the Information division of PDC" to get a non-essential book printed (202). Sabul convinced them of its "propaganda value", being testament to "the unquenchable vitality of the Odonian Society" even in the face of "threatened famine" (202).

The drought finally provides him with an excuse to get rid of the troublesome Shevek, who had been away on an emergency posting. Since it was a "bad time for pure science, for the intellectual" the Institute had to let some people go, including Shevek

(220). According to Sabul the "abstruse, irrelevant nature" of Shevek's research helped decide the issue (222). "If it means nothing to other people," Sabul asks, "what's the good of it?" (221) - which is a convenient argument to deal with and condemn those who will not toe the party line. There was also "a certain feeling" that Shevek exhibited "a certain disaffection, a degree of privation, of non-altruism" (222). In short, Shevek is an intellectual nuchnib who has erroneous ideas about his "optimum role in the social organism" (221).

After four years, which he spent in the Dust working against the drought, Shevek catches up with Takver and the baby, and at last realises what course of action he has to follow. They come to the conclusion that letting Sabul co-author Shevek's texts was "a surrender to [his] authoritarianism" (274). Shevek sees clearly now that "we let Sabul choose for us. Our own, internalized Sabul - convention, moralism, fear of social ostracism, fear of being different, fear of being free" (275). In a way, the solution is obvious. As Shevek tells the PDC meeting three years later, "if an individual can't work in solidarity with his fellows, it's his duty to work alone" (296). Instead of obeying "the rule of the majority" as they were forced to, "the duty of the individual is to accept no rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible" (296). So Shevek resolves to begin their own printing syndicate, to "fulfil [his] proper function in the social organism", "to go and unbuild walls" (275).

The Syndicate of Initiative[7], as they call themselves, acts within Odonian thought, printing what others refused to and so suppressed, and making radio contact with Urras. Its purpose, which it shares with Shevek's journey, is "to shake up things, to stir up, to break some habits, to make people ask questions. To behave like anarchists" (317). It represents the revolutionary measures built into Anarresti society which fell into disuse for reasons already explored. It is proof that the revolution has not failed. Unfortunately the Syndicate is a small beginning compared to the formidable task of reforming the whole Moon.

The Syndicate runs into trouble on Anarres - as well as with Moylan, whose criticism in this regard I deal with below. Naturally they are accused of behaving "with total irresponsibility towards the society's welfare" (293). At the meeting introducing their plan to send someone to Urras they are threatened with violence which, it is said, they will be to blame for, and which materialises at the Port when Shevek leaves - a member of the Defense crew is killed with a stone. The other syndics do not prove susceptible to argument, even Odonian argument. The Syndicate of Initiative is branded traitor, and accused of wanting to "sell Anarresti science to profiteers" (295). Public opinion is

mobilised in response to their breaking of the "laws of conventional behaviour" (273). Takver's research team turns against her, Sadik runs into trouble in the dorm, Bedap is conscious of them being surrounded by a "circle of silence" (304). Sabul even tries to enlist Shevek by offering him a full-time posting in the Physics Federation, in an effort to separate him from the Syndicate of Initiative (302).

Bedap explains the aggressive social response to their work as the Syndicate "cutting awfully close to the basic societal bond, the fear of the stranger" (300). This fear is fed by the anti-Urrasti propaganda Anarresti are exposed to from childhood on, for example the films Shevek and his friends are shown as part of their course on the "History of the Odonian Movement" (42). This functions a little like an ironic reference to More's Utopia, "for they use with very great endeavour and diligence to put into the heads of their children, whiles they be yet tender and pliant, good opinions and profitable for the conservation of their weal-public" (1910: 125). Tirin is one of few to question the propaganda, and to realise that it is meant to have them "detest Urras, hate Urras, fear Urras" (43). He wonders whether PDC was afraid that some Anarresti might be drawn to Urras if they knew what it was really like (44). Most of the others absorb the prejudicial message, which fuels the opposition to Shevek's proposed journey.

Urras plays an important role in the novel. It is "the original society against which [Anarres] is pitted as a revolutionary alternative" (Moylan 1986: 44). The dispossessed reverses the visitor theme by having the utopian visit the dystopia. He slowly realises that the plutocratic-oligarchic State of A-Io (representing the USA and comparable countries) and its capitalist economy regard him as a valuable possession, as does the socialist State of Thu (the USSR), ironically enough - though they too woo him in vain. Shevek points out that Thu is "even more centralized": "one power structure controls all, the government, administration, police, army, education, laws, trades, manufactures", in addition to possessing a money economy (118). Then there are the Third World countries. War between A-Io and Thu breaks out in the Third World nation of Benbili. According to Pae, they have "outgrown the kind of barbarism that used to bring war into the heart of the high civilizations. The balance of power is kept by this kind of police action" (229). This provides a handy excuse for forcing Shevek to stay on campus and to classify his research.

Shevek is struck by the different psychology of the Urrasti. He finds himself "in a society where men did not trust one another, where the basic moral assumption was not mutual aid, but mutual aggression" (176). Atro holds to the belief that "the law of existence is struggle - competition - elimination of the weak - a ruthless war for survival"

(123). Thinking of Sabul's possessiveness and secretiveness, Shevek reflects that "a psychopathy on Anarres was rational behaviour on Urras" (231). He is appalled at the army's violent and ruthless suppression of the strikers, but it makes him understand why it has to be a non-rational organisation: "the purpose was to enable men with machine-guns to kill unarmed men and women easily and in great quantities when told to do so" (253). It is here, and in the case of the situation of women on Urras and Anarres - which I deal with below - that the novel engages most directly in dialogue with empirical society. What it says, is that human behaviour is not fixed, but dependent on its environment, at least to a great extent.

His visit to the retail street, Saemtenevia Prospect, disturbs Shevek so much that he has nightmares for months. From his Odonian perspective he can view the profusion of goods for sale as only as "acres of luxuries, acres of excrement" (114). Utopia and the Tao te ching agree. The first observes that "where money beareth all the swing, there many vain and superfluous occupations must needs be used, to serve only for riotous superfluity and unhonest pleasure" (1910: 66); the latter warns "do not value (kuei) hard-to-get goods, / So that people will not turn robbers" (3.1). Shevek's moral reaction is hardly surprising coming from someone who some years earlier had such misgivings about the members of the Central Institute of the Sciences being served dessert nightly that he stopped eating it (98). Apart from the multitude of goods available he finds strangest the complete absence of "the hands, the people who made" (115). In contrast, in Abbenay workshops and factories form a vital part of the ongoing life of the city, and "their doors were open" (88): "it was all there, all the work, all the life of the city, open to the eye and the hand" (89) - "nothing was hidden" (88). As Widmer puts it, "socially as well as aesthetically, [Abbenay] poses a radical alternative to our schizophrenic urban environments with their fragmentation and alienation of much life" (1983: 7).

Shevek comes to believe that "there is no way to act rightly, with a clear heart, on Urras" (286). "Profit", "fear of loss", and "the wish for power" get in the way. Instead of "act[ing] like a brother to other people", one has to "manipulate them, or command them, or obey them, or trick them" (286). To Shevek everyone in the crowds of people he sees ("all purposeful, all separate") looks "anxious" (175). He speculates that it is due to their being property owners, always concerned about making money, and perhaps suffering from feelings of money-related guilt.

Eventually Shevek sees the planet as a beautifully wrapped package - "blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities" - which has "a black cellar full of dust, and a dead man" inside - referring to his experiences after the strike (286). This brings to mind "The

ones who walk away from Omelas" which has, at its concealed centre, a tortured child upon whom the continued happiness of its people depends. In fact, Le Guin views The dispossessed as "a kind of an attempt to say where they go, the ones who walk away from Omelas" (quoted by Finch, 1985: 247).

Urras is not presented as relentlessly bad though. Indeed, in some respects A-Io is better off than present-day Earth. All luxuries which "if freely allowed to the public would tend to drain irreplaceable natural resources or to foul the environment with waste products, were strictly controlled by regulation and taxation" (74). Contrary to what he had been taught to expect Urras turns out not to be "a festering mass of inequity, iniquity, and waste" (74). From Ambassador Keng's point of view, coming from a ruined Earth, Urras is utopia: it is beautiful, a world of abundance, "the government ... is not despotic. The rich are very rich indeed, but the poor are not so very poor. They are neither enslaved, nor starving" (283). Yet utopian longing is alive, especially with the utopian locus of Anarres orbiting just out of reach. Keng notes that although Urras is "full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste", it is also "full of good, of beauty, vitality, achievement", "alive, despite all its evils, with hope" (287).

There is more to Urras than being the originary society. It is not only the origin of Anarres and Odonian thought, it is the halfway point of Shevek's journey home, and the key to the reinvigoration of the revolution. Urras is Anarres's past, though they deny it by their voluntary isolation; Anarres may be Urras's future, but is denied as well. The result: "as surely as the future becomes the past the past becomes the future" (80). As Bittner puts it:

> the Urrasti, hoping to stop revolutionary change by buying off the Odonians with a world, cut themselves off from the future and insure the return of revolution; the Anarresti, hoping to eliminate authoritarian power by walling out the profiteers on Urras, cut themselves off from the past and insure the slow growth of authority (Bittner 1983: 250).

It seems like a special case of Estraven's statement that "to oppose something is to maintain it" (Le Guin 1969: 132).

Shevek points out to Ambassador Keng that nothing is "stable" or "solid":

> Things change, change. You cannot have anything ... . And least of all can you have the present - unless you accept with it the past and the future. ... Because they are real; only their reality makes the present real (288-289).

Shevek's revolutionary (reverting in time) activism consists of reconnecting Anarres with its past, which brings with it the future, in the form of hope and intention - more practically, a society in permanent revolution, as Odo intended. The same act reconnects Urras with its future (Anarres, utopia, hope, intention), rendering it more real to those on Urras working towards it, those who remember its past (Odo and her work, the revolution). Shevek's words to Takver come to mind: "unless the past and future [are] made part of the present by memory and intention, there is, in human terms, no road, nowhere to go" (157). Shevek's journey is necessary because, as Bittner argues, one has "to discover and confront the Other in order to find the Self" (1984: 70), and to dissolve the unrealistic and hence threatening aspect the Other has acquired. The Other can be either threat or supplement. Shevek knows that he needs Urras, more specifically, Urrasti science. Anarres cannot give Shevek what he requires to progress, "knowledge of the foreign, the alien: news" (232).

His journey and return to Anarres complete the original voyage, "true voyage [being] return" (76). On his voyage to Urras, very conscious of "coming from a self-exiled society" and "exiled himself from his society", he reflected that "to deny [as the Anarresti did by renouncing Urras] is not to achieve": "the explorer who will not come back or send back his ships to tell his tale is not an explorer, only an adventurer; and his sons are born in exile" (80). On the ship back he feels happy because, as he tells Ketho, "whatever happens, I am coming home" (319).

As primary representative of Anarresti society Shevek functions in a way reminiscent of a character such as George Orr in whom Taoism is embodied. Shevek is more complex in that the novel explores his growth into true Odonianism in Bildungsroman fashion, which I have already touched on in my discussion of Odonian society and its crisis - though, "contrary to the bourgeois Bildungsroman", as Moylan notes, "Shevek does not adjust to his world; rather, he changes it" (1986: 109). He eventually emerges as the embodiment of true Odonianism on both planets. On the other hand, Shevek is the figure exemplifying the paradox at the heart of Odonian society: it "demands a simultaneous commitment to communal solidarity, based on the brotherhood of human suffering, and a radical individual initiative, based on the exceptional person" (Widmer 1983: 8). Tirin is another such person, but his mind fails after a public reprimand followed by discrimination by Divlab and, later, "Therapy", normally meant for rapists and murderers, and those who request to go there (146).

From childhood on, Shevek is "a man whose soul rhythm does not vibrate quite synchronously with that of the ideal social structure, however convinced he is that the

organizing principle of the society is the best" (Bierman 1975: 251). He is an exceptional scientist, even a genius, the accommodation of which is a tall order for any society. Instead of accommodated he finds himself the victim of "false equalitarianism" (54). One of the first illustrations of the extent to which Odo's teachings on equality have been perverted centres on the eight-year old Shevek excitedly telling his uncomprehending Speech-and-Listening classmates (and teacher) about Zeno's paradox (which he has rediscovered). He is accused of "not sharing, merely egoizing", and told that "his presence is disruptive of the group" (32). What and whom they do not understand they reject, as will his fellow scientists and the Port managers later.

Since Shevek is the man at the centre of the novel, and through whom the novel came to its author (Le Guin 1989a: 95), he needs to be examined more closely. Knowing that "in certain ways he was unlike anyone else he knew", Shevek becomes "used to an inward isolation, buffered by all the daily casual contacts and exchanges of communal life, and by the companionship of a few friends" (94). This is a self-perpetuating condition which Shevek consciously acts to change after he breaks down following his bruising encounter with Sabul's theft of "A Critique of Atro's Infinite Sequency Hypothesis" (100), and his full realisation of the kind of relationship he finds himself trapped in, needing Sabul as he does. Re-establishing his friendship with the now socially conscious and critical Bedap, along with his determination to end his isolation from his fellow Anarresti, Shevek's eyes are opened to social injustice - which he tries to deny at first. He becomes aware of other Anarresti "seeing their talent, their work, their lives wasted. Of good minds submitting to stupid ones. Of strength and courage strangled by envy, greed for power, fear of change", in short, of people whose experiences mirror his (143). Bedap enables him to regain impetus, and "force[s] him to realize that he was, in fact, a revolutionary" (150). This does not mean a repudiation of Anarres by rebelling against it, but a reaffirmation of the revolutionary ideals, since Shevek feels "profoundly that he was [a revolutionary] by virtue of his upbringing and education as an Odonian and an Anarresti" (151).

Shevek puts his Odonian freedom of choice into practice by entering into partnership with Takver, which goes furthest towards completing and revitalising him. As Odo said, "to be whole is to be part" (76). Before meeting her again he had stagnated, a condition which he describes as "sterility" (153). It would seem that Odo is right when she asserts that the promise means "a direction taken", hence change - that not to choose, as the "Odonian" society increasingly does, means constructing walls around one, bringing about the absence of freedom, a prison. In terms of Self and Other, Shevek breaks free

by reaching out to the Other; years later he repeats this act as representative of the whole of his society by going to Urras.

Shevek's essential isolation remains in spite of his friendship with Bedap and his circle, and Takver joins him in it. "Neither social nor sociable participation was necessary to them; their partnership was enough, and they could not hide the fact". But, though "the others were peripheral to them ... they were central to the others" (161). His special standing in relation to the other characters is complex. Firstly, his work separates him from Anarresti society which does not value it, although it aligns him with the other nuchnibi in the Syndicate of Initiative. It must be said that Shevek eventually determines by Odonian reasoning that "his sense of primary responsibility towards his work" (276) which led him to demand "the right to work, to be maintained while working, and to share the product with all who wanted it" (230), "did not cut him off from his fellows, from his society" but "engaged him with them absolutely". Given the anarchist nature of his society, "his radical and unqualified will to create was, in Odonian terms, its own justification" (276). From the point of view of his society - "an anarchist society that's afraid of anarchists" (312), as Takver describes them - his conviction makes him dysfunctional, a nuchnib.

Secondly, his genius for physics distinguishes him from the majority of the Cetians in any case. Finally, his force of personality establishes him as the leader of the nuchnibi. On Urras he is the anarchist stranger from the Moon, whose personality is powerful partly by virtue of his Odonian upbringing. Ambassador Keng finds that "the strength of his personality, unchecked by any self-consciousness or consideration of self-defense, was formidable" (286). On Anarres Sabul, as I related above, lost a battle with Shevek because the latter would not fight: "because he would not compete for dominance he was indomitable" (102). Both these encounters demonstrate the similarities between the individual produced by Odonian anarchism on the one hand and Taoism on the other.

Many critics note that too many cultural and sexual stereotypes crop up in the novel, which affects the type of activism they engage in and compromise the activist reading position. The dispossessed makes the right moves towards a more critical reading position and towards innovation, but does not develop them far enough. Moylan asserts that Shevek's elite nature and status, as well as his actions, compromise the critical utopian stance of the novel, because they conflict with the criteria of the genre. "In centering her picture of activism on such a character," Moylan explains, "LeGuin foregrounds a type of commitment that revolves around a single redeemer, a vanguard intellectual, and a dominant male" (1986: 109). Le Guin assents, stating that Shevek is part of the novel's

"excess yang", "dominat[ing] it in ... a very masculine fashion" (1989b: 93). The upshot is that instead of providing a forum for "the negative and the marginal" (Moylan 1986: 211), their marginality is reinforced: Takver plays too much of a supporting role to the leader Shevek, as do the homosexual social critic Bedap and the others ("left-wing" artists), instead of coming into their own as individuals communally striving for societal improvement and change. It should be mentioned that, although the future is uncertain at the end of the novel, there is hope: Shevek tells Ketho that "the good news is the friends [his supporters]. ... It seems there are more of them than when I left" (316).

The presence at the discrete level of the ideologeme of "the activism (and its strategies and tactics) to be engaged in by [the] human subject in opposition to the dominant system" (1986: 49) is of central importance. Without that, the novel in question would not qualify for critical utopian status. The dispossessed does qualify because of the activism of Shevek and the Syndicate of Initiative, in spite of Moylan's reservations about them. In his discussion of The dispossessed's failures as critical utopia, Moylan finds most damaging the failure of the Anarresti activists to transcend the present system. Instead "utopia is appropriated for the reform of the present system rather than its overthrow" (1986: 117). "What more can be expected", Moylan asks, "of a lone individual attempting social revolution than such a cooptation in the very name of that revolution back into the service of the status quo, indeed improving and extending the profit of that given system?" (1986: 117) The activists use the options the old system provides to restart the same revolution: "even the Syndicate of Initiative is a revival of the Anarresti system, not a negation and transformation of it" (1986: 118).

One should remember first of all that Moylan's criticism stems from his effort to include the novel in specific new genre, that of the critical utopia. It falls short of the ideal, failing to fit the bill to the extent that the other, more daring, novels do. Perhaps one might counter that the Syndicate's actions prove that another system is not necessary. In addition, the activism on Anarres is of a kind in keeping with a community whose underlying organisational principles owe quite a lot to Taoist thought - so much so that Moylan speaks of "Shevek's apparent activism" (1986: 118), which would probably have pleased the Taoist sage. In his reluctant activism - he is only goaded into action when circumstances become intolerable - he reminds one of Selver. It would seem that although Le Guin had by this time abandoned the distrust of activism which led her to refer to it as "the dead land of action" in Word, she still has reservations, and still tempers it with Taoism and pacifism (1972: 38).

As far as The dispossessed's treatment of women's issues is concerned, "[Le Guin's] text is silent at the level of the ideologeme, at the level of how to transform society actively, when it comes to feminist activism" (Moylan 1986: 113). The reading position is anarchist, pacifist, and ecologist, but can be called feminist only with considerable reservation. There is a basic kind of feminism - Odo was a woman, the emphasis in their social organisation is yin rather than yang, and there are no "specialized sexual roles" (Somay 1984: 28). However, some of the characters conform to socio-sexual stereotypical behaviour. Vea is the sexual temptress. Lefanu sees Takver, a rather pale female character compared to Heather, as "the token strong woman" who "keeps the home fires burning" while Shevek does his bit to save the world. Rulag is "horribly punished for being a career woman by being given a really unpleasant character" (1988: 141). Rulag's character and Shevek's relationship with her strikes a wrong note on a planet where the traditional nuclear family and its complications are not the norm, and family members are mostly separated from each other quite early on. Shevek blames her for leaving him and his father when he was two, something Takver says is "nothing unusual". Yet Shevek "feels that he lost something essential", and attaches great importance to loyalty because of it (301). Delany notes that "the position Rulag fills in the chain of signifiers that makes up the experience of The dispossessed has usually been filled by a man - by the Father" (1978: 294) - by the same token Palat's role is like that of a mother (if not the Mother). Delany approves of this, but not of Shevek's reaction to her, given the point I made about Anarresti family life.

This is one of several instances where "normal" assumptions and expectations are unexpectedly inverted. I mentioned above Shevek's assumption that replacing one's "natural incentive to work" with "external motivation and coercion" (such as money) would result in "a lazy and careless worker" (74), the opposite of the empirical hoary chestnut.

Urrasti men regard women as inferior, and as the property of their men. On board the spaceship to Urras Shevek realises that "to respect [themselves Urrasti men] had to consider half the human race as inferior to [them]" (22). The first Urrasti man the reader comes across (captain of the ship waiting to pick up Shevek) "look[s] patronizingly at the unarmed woman" who is the "foreman" of the Defense gang, and wears a weapon which, seen through her eyes, is described as "a metal object like a deformed penis" (11).

Compared to the sexual innovation of some of the other critical utopias, such as Triton and The female man, The dispossessed is quite traditional. Takver's and Shevek's bond foregrounds heterosexual monogamy, keeping in mind the high profile they have

compared to the other characters. Free hetero- and homosexual experimentation is seen as being a part of Anarresti adolescence, but the only adult homosexual relationship, between Bedap ("pretty definitely homosexual") and Shevek ("pretty definitely heterosexual") (147), is short-lived; "they had simply reasserted trust" (148). The impression that The dispossessed is essentially biased towards heterosexuality and monogamy is difficult to ignore, even though one knows that the bias is not the result of authorial disapproval.

One of the most serious shortcomings of The dispossessed is the use of the generic pronoun "he" which distracts quite as much here as it does in Left hand. Nevertheless, the novel is language-conscious. The artificial language, Pravic, bypasses profiteering possessiveness by using "the singular forms of the possessive pronoun ... mostly for emphasis; idiom avoided them" (225). Needless to say, "there was no rank, no terms of rank, no conventional respectful forms of address" (90). Interestingly, swearing in Pravic is a problem because, as the narrator comments, "it is hard to swear when sex is not dirty and blasphemy does not exist" (216).

The final word on The dispossessed has to be that the ideological sediment of the classical utopia, and its "excess yang" (the privileging of male activity), as well as the lack of emphasis on alternative modes of being and action, eventually overwhelm its more revolutionary aspects. Moylan calls it "more of a nostalgic look to the older ideological message of the genre that emphasized the perfect utopian system than it is a breakthrough to a critical expression of an open-ended utopian imagination" (1986: 114). Alternative (as opposed to the oppressive norm) modes of being, such as Takver's intimate relationship with the universe (158; a small echo of George Orr's), Bedap's homosexuality, and the position art occupies on Anarres are - for all practical purposes - merely mentioned. Apart from homosexuality, these play crucial roles in the life of the valley in Always, which is much more critical, in Moylan's sense, although it lacks the ideologeme of activism which he defines as being at the centre of, and therefore mandatory, to the genre of the critical utopia.

Notes

[1] The psychology of the Urrasti is the closest to ours, of course, living as they do in more or less demystified versions of current Earth societies.

[2] Apart from "re-concretising" Odonian thought, Shevek reflects on the drought as a kind of purifying agent: "the priorities were becoming clear again. Weakness, soft spots, sick spots would be scoured out, sluggish organs restored to full function, the fat could be trimmed off the body politic" (219).

[3] According to Suvin, "the field of utopia is socio-politics understood as human destiny: people's destiny is not ... outside them, but is incarnated in manmade, changeable institutions, norms and relationships" (1988: 35).

[4] "The quality of static perfection is an essential element of the non-inhabitability of the euclidean utopia" (Le Guin 1989b: 89).

[5] Two examples of the results of this process in a mental institution are the semi-fictional One flew over the cuckoo's nest, and the film, "The other side of hell" (also known as "Sanitarium"), starring Alan Arkin (301).

[6] Nuchnibi normally refers to those who do not do their share in and for their communities. They are either ostracised or have their lives made uncomfortable in various ways, in the spirit of a frontier community hard put to survive with no place for those unwilling to cooperate (130). Of course, it is a spirit that can lend itself to oppression of "andersdenkendes", yet the existence of nuchnibi attests to the freedom of choice on Anarres - even if it has become compromised.

[7] The name refers to that which individuals are denied on Anarres, individual initiative, ironically one of the most important ideas in Odonian thought, and intimately linked to freedom of choice and action. It is the Syndicate's task to re-empower Anarresti.

Chapter V

Always coming home (early eighties)

Exploring the utopian locus of the Always coming home to arrive at the form action takes in their society involves investigating their ceremonies and their beliefs, and their relationship with their world. I opened my discussion on The dispossessed by investigating the relationship between the Anarresti and the place where they lived since, in addition to the guidance of Odo, their barren home plays a significant role in shaping their lives and the character of their society. In that novel Odo's analogical thought generated a society which was then further shaped by the land they found themselves on, but mostly in the same direction Odo's thought tended, reinforcing certain aspects of it. This, in general, seems to be the risk one runs constructing a society and a world in a single-analogy mode: there is the danger of it being too limited and limiting. Apart from this, the traditional utopian isolation - partly self-imposed on Anarres - is always both protective and problematic. At the end of the novel the Anarresti seem to be on the way to revitalising and unconcretising their society, and opening up their world. Ironically, the Kesh, who inhabit a Valley 30 km long, live in a world much bigger than the Anarresti. In fact, their World is infinite. Some of the reasons for this may be found in the extensive (literally) "generative metaphors" behind Kesh society, which open up the universe for them to live and take part in - and which makes Anarresti society seem almost unlivably narrow and somewhat contrived. The Editor remarks that "the cosmos, the universe, was usually referred to rather casually in Kesh as rruwey, 'all this'" (489). It indicates the extent to which the Kesh found themselves comfortable with and at home in it - "all this" as opposed to "all that". The Kesh would think of the Anarresti as living "outside the world" (153), albeit to a lesser extent than we and the Dayao.

Analogy is less versatile - allows for less change - than metaphor, in any case. Tom Moylan quotes Derrida's view of metaphor as "that state of things characterised by transformation, alteration, relationality, displacement, substitution, errancy" - quite a few of which characteristics can be applied to Kesh society. He goes on: "Metaphor holds open our perception of reality to otherness, to historical change", and "challenge[s] ... the forces of containment, authority, totality" (1986: 213). All this should be kept in mind since Le Guin presents a society constructed according to a "working metaphor", the heyiya-if, (48) consequently sharing the attributes of metaphor in general.

In "The back of the book" the Editor provides a list of some of these metaphors. The Editor explains the list as "provided ... as an exercise in cultural relativism, or in a fit of spring cleaning" (483). These metaphors and some of their implications need to be at least mentioned since they do, after all, generate the utopian society, and play an important role in the size of the World inhabited by the Kesh, and in characterising individual and communal action. They need to be kept in mind. I will discuss them further as they become pertinent in my exploration of the utopian society. They are "the Animal" which generates "Life", and allows the universe to be perceived as "organic", an "indivisible wholeness" (483), society as "tribe, clan, family", and the relationship between all beings as "interdependence"; "the Dance" which generates "Music", and allows the universe to be perceived as "harmony" and "creation/destruction", society and individual as "participation" and "cooperation" respectively, and the relationship between all beings as "horizontal linkings"; "the House" which generates "Stability", and allows the universe to be perceived as "rooms in one mansion", and society as "division within unity" and "inclusion/exclusion" (484). Bittner notes that the word "ecology" has at its root the (Greek) word oikos, which means "house" (1984: 110). Finally, there is "the Way" which generates "Change", and allows the universe to be perceived as "mystery" and "balance in movement", society as "imitation of the nonhuman" and "inaction", "person as wayfarer" as "cautious", and the relationship between all beings as "unity". The Images the last metaphor generates are "balance, reversal, journey" and "return" (485).

For the critic the way into the Valley lies through the most important metaphor, the heyiya-if. The governing principle of the Kesh society or, as the Editor calls it, its "working metaphor" (48), is represented by "two spirals centered upon the same (empty) space" (45) - a symbol which replaces/augments the yin-yang symbol in this novel. In fact, it may not be too far-fetched to imagine the heyiya-if symbol as being an adapted version of the t'ai ch'i symbol. The circle, distrusted by the Kesh, is opened up and loosened, becoming more fluid. The two halves become the double spiral's arms, with the empty space, the Hinge, between them.

In short, the heyiya-if is "the visual form of an idea which pervaded the thought and culture of the Valley", being - amongst other things - "an organisational device in town planning", reflected in and by the arts of the Valley, and "serv[ing] as a subject of meditation and as an inexhaustible metaphor" (45). Given its significance it is worth considering the heyiya-if in some detail, and investigating how it compares or relates to the Taoist concepts Le Guin employs. Even before one reads the last entry on the Editor's list one is or should be aware of the fundamentally Taoist character of Always. It

achieves the most seamless incorporation of the Taoist way of being of all the novels utilising Taoist philosophy.

In addition the novel marries East and West (California's past), which means that the Taoist concepts of "balance, reversal, journey", and "return" (485) are rendered even more complex, and multi-dimensional. It is worth noting that, as is the case with Taoism, it is difficult to isolate a Valley concept for consideration since everything is interrelated and interconnected. Anyone exploring a part of it encounters the Whole.

The heyiya-if is "the symbol of the Whole", "the left arm [of the double spiral representing] mortality, the right eternity" (41). The Kesh conceive of the Whole as organised into a system of nine Houses. The Five Houses of Earth (the Left Arm of the World) contain all living human beings, animals and plants humans use, the earth itself, the moon, and water - all mortality (44). They are called the Obsidian, the Blue Clay, the Serpentine, the Yellow Adobe, and the Red Adobe. These Houses are "the basic divisions of the society, the Kesh equivalent of clan or moiety". They are matrilineal and exogamous (44). "All human members of a House [are] considered first-degree kin" and sex with another member of one's House is "inappropriate" (44). One of the effects of "the Animal" and "the House" is to generate this extended family. In the Four Houses of Sky (the Right Arm of the World) live the sun and stars, the oceans, wild animals (not game), "all animals, plants, and persons considered as the species rather than as an individual", and "all people and beings in dreams, visions, and stories, most kinds of birds, the dead, and the unborn" - all nonmortality (43-44). These Houses are called Rain, Cloud, Wind, and Still Air.

The "distinction between individual and type [is] fundamental in Valley thought, and even in the syntax of the language": "By its mortality, the individual deer [is] related physically, materially, with human beings , and all other beings on earth; while 'deerness' or The Deer [is] related metaphysically with the human soul and the eternal universe of being" (420-421). The distinction between the species or type and the individual indicates that there is no absolute division between the Five and the Four Houses. There is a link, a relation: the Kesh distinguish between "the material and individual manifestations of being" of the Five Houses, and "the generic and the spiritual: the aspect under which even living creatures still/already inhabit the Houses of Death, Dream, Wilderness, Eternity". The soul or souls of the human people - animals are considered "people" as well - constitute "that part of their ... being which was before and would be after their earthly life". This is not "the 'spirit', the essence of individuality, or not only the spirit; for individuality is mortality; but also the breath-

soul, that which is shared with, taken from, given back to the wholeness of being; and the self that is beyond the self" (463).

There is a resemblance between the Five Houses and the Taoist concept of Non-Being (Tao) on the one hand, and the Four Houses and the Taoist concept of Being (Te) on the other. In Taoism Non-Being is the formless, divisionless source and destiny of Being - which has form and therefore divisions, and which is also called Nature. In the Valley, all that is/has taken on mortality forms part of the Five Houses, having come from the Four Houses, and returns there in death. Both the Valley and Taoist thought therefore provides for a kind of immortality, by means of returning to the eternal root of all. According to Welch, "in its aspect of Non-Being, [Tao] includes everything that ever was (and has now returned to non-being) and everything that ever will be (and has not yet left non-being)" (1966: 58). In the same way the Four Houses house the dead and unborn. However, as we have seen, in the Valley the mortal/individual manifestation of a being is considered as having a nonmortal/generic manifestation in the Five Houses, which one does not find in Taoism, Non-Being implying formlessness by definition.

The "material manifestation of each of the Five Houses in each of the nine towns [is] the heyimas" (45):

> The heyimas [is] a center of worship, instruction, training and study, a meetinghouse, a political forum, a workshop, a library, archive, and museum, a clearinghouse, an orphanage, hotel, hospice, refuge, resource center, and the principle center of economic control and management for the community, both internally and in regard with trade with other Kesh towns or outside the Valley (48).

The heyimas [is] an underground chamber situated in the Right Arm of the town in which one "met with [one's] greater and permanent family" (48). Each House had Lodges, Societies and Arts associated with it, for example: the Doctor's Lodge, the Oak Society, and the Book Art are under the auspices of the Third House, the Serpentine. In the Left Arm of the town is one's house where one "lived with [one's] kinfolk by blood and by marriage" (48). In the curve of the Left Arm lies the "common place", in the curve of the Right Arm the "dancing place" (48), and between the two is the Hinge.

The functions of the heyimas in the towns can be deduced from the description quoted above. The scholars of each House keep the records "in which [their] guidance as a people lies" (299). Authority in the Valley lies with those who have knowledge and experience, and with the Speakers of the heyimas. Depending on the situation, it seems to have been conferred by mutual tacit or explicit agreement, in some cases only for a special occasion. During a wakwa there is an officiant "full of the strength and dignity of

the ceremony", given to him by the others who, at the end, "gives [it] back, lets it go" (198). This concurs with the anarchist conviction that order, instead of being coercive, must be "voluntary", "functional", "temporary", and "small" (Colin Ward, quoted by Sargent, 1983: 7).

On the subject of authority as it relates to the behaviour of individuals: those who misbehave, also in terms of the complex relationship between the Kesh and the natural world - which distinction would probably puzzle them - encounter considerable pressure from the Lodges or Societies under whose auspices they practice and/or the town in general. Members of the Hunters Lodge, for instance, are "subject to severe and continuous supervision", and "exert[] heavy social pressure upon individuals who overstep[] [their] ethical restraints" (422). Hunting is a complex practice. Game have to be addressed - praised and thanked - before or during the kill, for "consent[ing] to come across into the Second of the Earth Houses, the Blue Clay, in order to die. They ... take[] on mortality sacrificially and sacramentally" (420).

Incidentally, the re-inclusion of the Darwinian life-cycle after its conspicuous absence from The dispossessed must have partly resulted from Le Guin coming home to future California. It is relatively easy to explain the absence of multitudes of people - "I killed them all off" (147) - but not that of all carnivorous animal life. In addition, the wilderness is real wilderness, as opposed "to the traditional notion of utopia as a state where every bit of nature is beautifully domesticated or 'humanized'" (Franko 1989: 58). After all, Always is about "a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment", which is one of the characteristics of the yin utopia (1989b: 96).

To return to the question of authority: in the History, "Old women hating", those who become aware of the problem of the title discuss the situation with others in town, "to see if there was something that should be done", although in that case the problem resolves itself by the women's house burning down (126). It is the Valley practice for those concerned with or about a difficult situation to call a meeting "to decide things together, ... discussing and arguing and yielding and agreeing to do something before they did it" (348). One can imagine that it is not a perfect arrangement - what happens when no agreement is reached? The best example of the Kesh facing a very thorny problem, the meeting concerning the external threat of the Dayao coupled with the internal threat of the Warrior and Lamb cults, will be discussed along with the dystopian and originary societies depicted in the novel. A short circular argument could be that the calm maturity of the Kesh society, compared to our wilful adolescent one, should provide avenues of settling differences unavailable to us. We are inclined to have our own way

whatever the cost; they are inclined to mutual cooperation, and considering things in a much larger perspective than we do.

The Editor notes that since translation of the word "heyimas" ("church, temple, shrine, lodge") is "misleading", she uses the Kesh word, which shares with heyiya-if "the elements heya, heyiya - the connotations of which include sacredness, hinge, connection, spiral, center, praise, and change - and ma, house" (45). "The word heya [is] the word that contained the world, visible and invisible, on this side and on the other side of death" (94). Thorn of the town Sinshan tells the Editor that "the heyiya-if comes in to the center and at the same time it's going out from the center" (242). In the middle is the Hinge which "connects and ... holds apart" (242). "Iya", hinge, is "the center of a spiral, the source of a gyring motion; hence a source of change, as well as a connection. Iya is the eternal beginning, the process of energy arising and continuing" (489).

The word for energy is "iye". The Kesh distinguish between cosmic, social and personal energy. Cosmic energy, "energy in the physicist's sense, the fundamental power interconvertible with matter" is "emiye". Social energy, "the energy of relationship, including both politics and ecology" is "ostouudiye", after the word "ostouud" which "describe[s] weaving or the weave of a fabric, bringing together, relating, and so [is] used to mean society, the community of being, the fabric of interdependent existences". Personal energy, "selfhood of the individual" is "sheiye". This has five components, "relating to sex, mind, movement, work, and play, each with an inward-coming and outward-going aspect" - reflecting the pattern of the heyiya (489). "To be alive was to choose and use, consciously or not, well or ill, these energies, in a manner appropriate to one's stage of life, state of health, moral ideals, and so on. The deployment of iye was really the principal subject of education in the Valley, in the home and in the heyimas, from infancy till death" (490).

Energy is that which gives rise to movement and action, turning the permanent balance of opposites into a dynamic interplay. Its importance to the Valley people transforms the t'ai ch'i into the heyiya-if. The Kesh think of "the interplay of [the] three [main] forms of energy throughout the universe" as "the dancing" (489). It is one of the ways in which the Valley people are interconnected and interdependent with the Whole, since the generative metaphor of "the Dance", quoted above, allows the universe to be seen as "harmony", society as "participation", and the individual as "cooperation". It links all beings horizontally - without any hierarchy (485). All Being, seen from this angle, is the same. This relationship is illustrated in the "teaching song", "The gyres", which follows the Dance through its microcosmic/social manifestations to its

macrocosmic/stellar manifestations. The Dance is both making and unmaking ("Creation/destruction" (485)), movement and stillness.

As for the individual, "personal energy was of course, a personal matter; the individual ma[kes] the choices, and the choosing, wise or foolish, mindful or careless, [is] the person" (490). There is no escaping the responsibility for choices made, for action taken, in the Valley. Given the Kesh's interrelatedness with all that is, the human people are endowed with greater responsibility. They have to be "careful", which is "holding oneself and one's acts in appropriate relation and proportion to the many other beings and intentions" (312). Plucking a strand sets the web vibrating, physically and morally speaking: "no choice [can] be made independent of the superpersonal and the impersonal energies, the cosmic/social/self-relatedness of all existences" (490). This echoes the thematic statement of the Earthsea trilogy as Bittner puts it: "if people act without an understanding and appreciation of the web of relationships in which they are a strand, they will find their actions producing effects and consequences which are the opposite of those intended. But if one acts in harmony with the whole, he will be at home with himself and his world" (italics mine, 1984: 70). In Always this is called "mindfulness", "the intelligent awareness of the interdependence of energies and beings, a sense of one's place and part in the whole" (490).

The best illustration of the web of energy of which the Kesh feel themselves an inextricable part is provided by the vision in the Ninth House of the visionary, Flicker:

> It was the universe of power. It was the network, field, and lines of the energies of all the beings, stars, and galaxies of stars, worlds, animals, minds, nerves, dust, the lace and foam of vibration that is being itself, all interconnected, every part part of another part and the whole part of each part, and so comprehensible to itself only as a whole, boundless and unclosed (291).

Flicker notes that the difficulty in describing what she saw, was that "no image can contain the vision, which contained all images" (291). It is a "central vision", "not for anything outside itself; indeed there is nothing outside it". Central visions "are not for us or about us, any more than the world is". She notes that "there are other kinds of vision, all farther from the center and nearer to the mortal self", such as the "turning vision, which is about a person's own life" (297).

The Kesh's lived relationship with the Whole is acted out or danced in the seven wakwa which "constellates the Valley year" (45). Annually each House is responsible for one of these dances or wakwa, which also means "rite, mystery, ceremony, celebration" (45):

> ... in November ... the Red Adobe dances the Grass. At the winter solstice all nine Houses dance the Sun. At the equinox of spring, the Five Houses dance the Sky and the Four Houses dance the Earth, the whole dance being called the World. At the second full moon after this, the Obsidian dances the Moon. At the summer solstice and after it, the Serpentine dances the Summer. In early or mid-August, the Blue Clay dances the Water at springs, pools and streams. At the autumnal equinox, the Yellow Adobe dances the Wine, or Getting Drunk (45).

The World, which the Black Adobe and Madrone Lodges are responsible for, "celebrate[] human participation in the making and unmaking, the renewal and continuity of the world", in the "Dance" in other words. The Valley people dance the Sky "for all people and beings of the earth" while the Sky People - the dead and the unborn, the birds and the wild animals - dance the Earth. The Editor quotes someone as explaining "animal dancing" as "not like our dancing. We do not know their ceremonies. They dance their lives" (454). One might account for this in Taoist terms: since wild animals have not pursued the coming-out process as far as human people have, their lives are in closer harmony with the "Dance".

The First Day consists of the Mourning; at dusk the names of those who died in the past year are thrown on the fire in the dancing place. As time passes the ritual becomes more emotional until, finally, "the barriers of shame and self-containment were broken down, the fear and anger of loss made public, and these quiet people screamed aloud in their admission of pain" (456). On the Second Day the Houses of Earth are in charge of the ceremonies of praise. Processions are sent to sing to the animals, trees, and plants living in each House. That night people who have decided to get married or "reaffirm[] their bond" dance the Wedding Night. The Editor comments that "like the Mourning, this [is] a community observance of a personal act" (458). On the Third Day young adolescents and children greet the sun, and then re-enact their conception and birth ("com[ing] from the Four Houses to be born" (43)), gathering in the dancing place and forming a procession to the Hinge of the town, calling on the adults to let them in: "Each child hold[s] [a] stone in the right and [a] feather in the left - a cross-over or 'marriage' of the usual ritual position of these two profoundly sacred things, the feather of the Right-Hand Houses and the stone of the Left" (459). At the end of the day the human people of the Valley greet the new moon. The time-reversal of the World - "from mourning after death, through work and marriage, to childhood and infancy" - comes to a conclusion on the Day after the World: some people are led by the members of the Black Adobe Lodge to "certain places in side valleys and canyons, near springs or beside water", "unmarked in any way". These "represent[] (reflect[]) places in the Four Houses, the Right-Hand World, places the reverse of graveyards: birthgrounds, where the unborn

wait to be born" (460). Here they sing Shining of the sun, inviting the unborn to be born at their convenience.

According to Thorn of Sinshan, the World is "a wakwa of sorting out things, getting things right and flowing on the two sides of the world; [it is] a wakwa of lasting and staying" (242). The World is danced by all nine Houses but separately: "people of Earth Houses offer[] all earthly things to the use and for the blessing of the Sky people, who, dancing in their own places, receive[] and return[] the blessing to Earth" (462). In contrast, during the Sun "all that was parted [is] brought back together. All beings of both Earth and Sky, of all planes of being, me[et] and dance[] the Sun together". This wakwa is considered "the most arcane, intense, and dangerous", and those who want "to participate fully ..., to dance the Inner Sun, train[] for years". "The ceremonies of the Sun [are] particularly attractive to people of introverted or mystical temperament", and many only observe from the sidelines. Children and adolescents play an important role in the Twenty-One Days before the solstice. At the "Sunrise, the morning of the solstice" adults are presented with a tree or shrub (462). Before the solstice "the sacred or intellectual practices held in the five heyimas ... [are] concerned with bringing the Left Hand and the Right Hand, the Earth and Sky, closer together, until they should meet in the place and time of the solstice dance" (463). This wakwa focusses attention on "the generic and the spiritual: the aspect under which even living creatures still/already inhabit the Houses of Death, Dream, Wilderness, Eternity". The inhabitants of the Four Houses are invited to take part: "so the earthly, mortal, human dancers invite[] that part of their own being which was before and would be after their earthly life: their soul, or their souls", their link with eternity (463).

The Outer Sun and the Twenty-One Days involve practices facilitating "the direct way, the royal road to communication or relationship with the Four-House World, ... through dream or trance", which is achieved by "fasting, drumming, singing, dancing, and journeying" (464). These journeys involve small groups of people going "outside the usual territory of Valley use" (464). This links with the title of the novel - it is one of the ways in which the Kesh are always coming home: "This exceeding of boundaries [is] an affirmation of the community to which the seekers return[], 'as the child returns to the mother's house, as the souls return from vision'" (464). These journeys are considered "morally or socially" dangerous. Then there are "journeys backward", "rituals in which the normal limits establishing safety and decency in daily life [are] deliberately transgressed", albeit "only under the guidance and direction of students of the Inner Sun". These journeys involve "risk-taking and feats of physical endurance of the kind usually and carefully avoided by the Valley people; drug-taking - purges, emetics, and

hallucinogenics; [also] extreme ascetic practices - fasting, sitting motionless, sensory deprivation" (464). During the Twenty-One Days "most people practice[] a degree of fasting and sexual abstinence", increasingly so as time passes. "The mood of the community gr[ows] increasingly tense and sober" or, "stretched", as they call it (464). The night before the solstitial sunrise is kept completely dark, and all doors and windows are shut.

On that day the Inner Sun people dig a deep hole in the common place, and after sunset people start coming by to drop an article "of personal value and significance" into it, a "small private sacrifice", all in silence. This hole is called "the absence" (466). During the night members of the Black Adobe Lodge, who are responsible for burial, fill in the pit, making sure that its location cannot be discerned. According to Alder of this Lodge, "it is like the memory of the town, there, under the surface where we walk in the common place, in the ground underfoot there, all the things that have been put there in the silence in the dark, all the years, the forgotten things. They are put there to be forgotten. They are sacrificed" (467).

The actual day of the solstice seems like an anti-climax. At dawn the "Winter Carol" is sung, but the actual sunrise is not "formally observed at all". Alder comments, "at the center is the absence" (467). Later the Morning Dances of the Sun are danced, with a spaces left between dancers and musical notes for the Sky people and their music: "if the dances are properly conducted and well danced, the sky people will be there dancing with the earth people" (467). These Songs have the effect of the Valley people "feel[ing] as if everyone singing, the living and the unborn and the dead, [are] all together in the Valley, that no one [is] lost, that nothing [is] wrong" (468). During the final days of the Sun Risen the two Arms of the World slowly separate, and life returns to its daily round.

Always is an a-typical critical utopia because the utopian horizon is not "the project of human agents" in the sense of continued political activism, in the strictest sense of struggling against an ideological enemy or counter-revolutionary elements and impulses (Somay 1984: 36). No revolution brought about the Kesh society, or keeps it healthy. However these wakwa represent a continual affirmation and re-affirmation of the nature of the Kesh utopia and its relationship with its environment - which could be seen as their version of activism. Perhaps one should say that this utopian horizon - the utopia is not perfect, after all - is overwhelmingly a socio-personal "project", striving to balance the energies which constitute an individual and/or a communal whole. "The Dance" never stops, and no people organised according to the principles of "the Dance" of the universe can ever be in stasis. On the other hand, dance and stillness are one, so to speak, and

equally important. The annual round of the wakwa has another function as well: "The recurring structures of the Kesh festivals provide the stability that maturing individuals need, but the absence of dogma provides the flexibility necessary for learning and adaptive behavior" (Heldreth 1989: 62). The result is a critical utopia.

The main thrust of my consideration of the ways of the Valley is that the Kesh's actions, including their ceremonies and daily life - their way or world - imitate the actions and follow the rhythms of the natural world. I said earlier that "the Way" allows society to be perceived as "imitation of the nonhuman" and "inaction", or wu-wei (485). Chen defines wu-wei as "non-action", "acting with, not against, the inner rhythm of things" (1989: 41). This is my justification for regarding the Kesh as the most fully realised Taoist society Le Guin has devised.

The Kesh customs not only imitate and celebrate order. Kesh society makes provision for the existence of and an impulse to disorder in nature and human nature as well. The most important mythological figure of Coyote is at one and the same time the creator (bringer of order) and destroyer (bringer of disorder). The Dances of the Moon and Wine, and some of the Inner Sun practices provide outlets for the build-up of potentially dangerous energy. To put it another way, controlled alternative channels are provided for the flow of energy in the human people. It relates to the Valley recognition of the necessity and inevitability of change. The Moon is a reversal of normal sexual relations in the Valley: women who take part are not allowed to refuse any man who wants to have sex with them, unless they are of the same House; and sex is divorced from "responsibility, marriage, [and] children" which are normally considered as "belong[ing]" to it (243). The Wine or "Getting drunk" is self-explanatory.

It is part of what Clemens calls "socially legitimate techniques for allowing the irruption of impersonal/unconscious elements into the conscious life" which one finds in primitive societies. She goes on, "The modern individual ego tends to regard the irruption of archetypal contents as alien, unwanted, violent intrusions" (1986: 425). In the Kesh society some archetypal figures such as Coyote, the Trickster, play a daily role in life, without losing their potency.

In the essay, "A non-Euclidean view of California as a cold place to be" (1982), Le Guin goes back to California's past (amongst other places) to consult its lost peoples on how to live, saying that "in order to find our roots, perhaps we should look for them where they are usually found" (1989b: 84). Perhaps the most important root Le Guin finds in discovering and making California, is the "benign" "Spirit of Place", as opposed to our "exclusive and aggressive Spirit of Race, the mysticism of blood" (1989b: 84):

> With all our self-consciousness, we have very little sense of where we live, where we are right here right now. If we did, we wouldn't muck it up the way we do. If we did, our literature would celebrate it. If we did, our religion might be participatory. If we did - if we really lived here, now, in this present - we might have some sense of our future as a people. We might know where the center of the world is (1989b: 84-85).

The quote may serve as a roundabout way of describing the Kesh and their lived relationship with their home, as well as Indian cultures of the past. Crow notes that "the aesthetics, the numinous view of nature, the communal values, even the physical appearance of the Kesh, seem infused with memories of California Indians, and especially of Ishi". He adds, "people will come to resemble each other, in time, if they live in deep communion with the same land" (1989: 13). Before being identified as either the Editor or Pandora, the narrator surveys the place where the "first-comers" lived, finding that "they owned their Valley very lightly, with easy hands. They walked softly here. So will the others, the ones I seek" - the Kesh (4).

In The dispossessed discussing the landscape meant discussing the effects of it on the Anarresti, reinforcing or working against Odo's principles. The cooperation between Anarresti and their hostile world was essential for survival. The Kesh and their Valley have a very different relationship. The de-emphasis on survival is part of what makes this possible. Anarres and the Valley are both organic anarchist societies yet, as is clear by now, very different from each other, in the way bare bones differ from a living limb. The biggest difference in the anarchism practiced in the two utopias lies in the Anarresti (who had no intention of "regress[ing] to pre-urban, pre-technological tribalism") knowing "that their anarchism was the product of a very high civilization, of a complex diversified culture, of a stable economy and a highly industrialized technology that could maintain high production and rapid transportation of goods" (Le Guin 1974: 85). The Kesh have no such background, civilisation having failed long before their time, and their smaller scale renders "a highly industrialized technology" unnecessary. Living in intimate communion with their land renders it both undesirable and unnecessary. Yet they are not pre-technological. They have simply chosen against progress.

In The dispossessed the utopian locus is presented in terms of socio-economic and political organisation, personal action leading to political activism. The technique of world-reduction which gives Anarres its lean and austere nature - which the utopia located on it assumes to some extent, especially compared to the Kesh way of being in the world - would seem to inhibit spirituality. Shevek affirms the existence of a spiritual dimension to Anarresti life and outlook, but this remains unexplored apart from a brief mention of Takver's umbilical connection with the universe which is of no real

importance to the plot. It is an example of how what is marginalised in The dispossessed becomes of central thematic importance in Always.

In comparison with the "unnaturally isolated" Anarresti, the Kesh live surrounded by abundant animal and plant life, and have an acute "sense of community, of continuity with the dirt, water, air and living creatures of the Valley" - so much so, that "the idea of dying and being buried in foreign lands is black despair" (90). Yet the Valley is no paradise: "it was always an austere land, generous but not lush, not soft, not gentle. It always had two seasons: one wet, one dry. The rains and the heat can be fierce, frightening", and "the turn from one season to the other is less transition than reversal" (50). The soil is "not a rich, openminded, amenable soil, but poor, opinionated, cranky dirt" (51). The Kesh "lived in a land that answers greed with drought and death", and was "never anything but wild" (52).

One measure of the careful cultivation of the Valley lies in the Kesh language lacking a word for "famine". In keeping with the Kesh's "working metaphor", the double spiral, they "lived half in town and half in the wilderness", without streets (437). They were hunters-and-gatherers in addition to being farmers, gathering being "a major source of food", with hunting "of very little real importance to their food supply", children doing most of it. Although gathering was arduous and not essential, the Kesh felt no need to settle for "heavy farming" instead - which would have had considerable social implications. As the Editor puts it, "the city - the 'opposite' of the farm - does not occur unless or until the land is heavily used for farming", and neither do population explosions. "By our standards", the Editor comments, "their farms ... were gardens" (437). Another motive for the continued gathering of food, apart from simply enjoying the taste, was that "large families, a large private food-supply, and a competitive attitude were all socially disapproved" (437).

Again, as in The dispossessed, the motto is that "small is beautiful". The Editor retrospectively describes the Kesh and the other peoples one encounters in the novel as

> [a] very loose, light, soft network of ... human cultures, which in their small scale, great number, and endless diversity, manufactured and traded more or less actively, but never centralised their industry, did not ship their goods and parts far, did not maintain roads well, and were not engaged in enterprises requiring heroic sacrifice, at least on the material plane (380).

It is not that all technology has been lost after the natural and "manmade" disasters which wiped out civilisation as we know it. It is simply that "the technology of the Valley [is] completely adequate to the needs of the people" (380). On Anarres the needs

of the people are determined by Odo's works (and resulting moral constraints) and by environmental constraints. In the Valley the needs of the people are determined in complete cooperation with the environment - as opposed to using it - and by resulting moral considerations. When the Dayao, Terter Abhao, wants to build a bridge in the Valley the Kesh thought it "a mistake to put a bridge across the River without consulting either the River or the people who lived alongside it" (33).

On Anarres the private and public economy are the same, society and the individual work together for each other's benefit, with individuals organised into syndicates and federatives; there are no family units. In the Valley the basic economic unit "consisted of a mother and her daughter(s), their husbands and children, and unmarried sons or other relatives on her side, living together in one set of rooms and sharing work" (425). Individuals join the Lodges, Societies, and Arts which are responsible for the work they have an aptitude for.

The village economy consists of "the continuous exchange of services and goods" (472). Barter and exchange are not merely economic practices. In "A treatise on practices" all human activities are graded according to their distance from the center - "Outermost", "coming inwards", and "Innermost". Barter and exchange are graded as "coming inwards", "allow[ing] power to move in an appropriate manner from place to place; they imitate life strongly" (478-479). It forms part of "the Dance".

Some of the practices considered "outermost" are hoarding and usury. They are "intractable, insatiable, and to be compared to cancerous tumors" (478). This is an understandably strong condemnation from a people who have a preference for "ubbu", glossed as "middle; middling. To be in the middle"[1] (465). Each family owns the few household articles they need and no more. One of the "Histories" included by the Editor, "Old women hating", concerns the effects of hoarding and not giving (121). On the whole the Kesh seem rather wary of property and keeping. The Archivist tells Pandora, "keeping grows, giving flows" (315). Another of the Valley sayings is "owning is owing, having is hoarding" (313). In Wakwaha the Madrone Lodge has yearly secret destruction ceremonies clearing out the heyimas libraries. The Archivist calls it "a kind of orgy. A fit of housecleaning - the nesting instinct, the collecting drive, turned inside out, reversed. Unhoarding" (314-315). In the Kesh language "the verb 'to have' is an intransitive", and "'to be rich' is the same word as 'to give'" (42). "In such terms, people who don't own much because they keep giving things away are rich, while those who give little and so own much are poor" (128). In this the Valley people are like the Taoist sage who

... does not hoard.
Having worked (wei) for his fellow beings,
The more he possesses.
Having donated himself to his fellow beings,
The more abundant he becomes (81.1).

Widmer's note that it is "a commonplace in cultural anthropology that communitarian equality is usually linked with relative non-abundance", quoted in connection with The dispossessed, applies here as well (1983: 9). On the whole, so do many of the observations on non-abundance and the absence of private property in the section on The dispossessed - especially Suvin's comments on the principles of Having and Being. The Kesh are de-alienated to an even greater extent than the Anarresti, because they have been reconnected with the Whole or, to put it in their terms, they do not live "outside the world" as we do (153).

Far from being possessed and tied down by what they have, the idea of "property as gift" (504) connects them with or relates them to each other. Connection or relation should be understood as movement from one state to another, or between two or more beings. The Valley society is an example of the statement that things are always on their way to becoming something else. The keynote of the Kesh state of being is the crucial element of the heyiya-if, change - that which the Anarresti became so afraid of, even though it was supposed to be vital to the working of their society. Having said that, one must point out that the Valley society is not perfect, and not completely open to change. The Editor remarks that "many of [their] cultural styles [are] limited, resistant to borrowing, and 'pure'" (438). This would seem to be part and parcel of a tribal society.

The utopian locus of Always is present in an ideal and an actual sense. The sections on the metaphorical organisation of their society and the extracts from their teachings outline the ideal, the factual Life Stories and the fictional cautionary Romantic Tales (amongst others) portray the actual. Like the Anarresti the Kesh are not automatons, perfectly programmed. Heldreth notes that Le Guin has "produced ... a cultural model that has an advantage over most utopias: it takes into account human nature, and defines the ideal as much by how people fall short of it as by how they achieve it" (1989: 59). When all is said and done the nine Kesh towns are still small towns, with all that implies. Stone Telling writes that her home town, Sinshan, "like other small towns, was given to prejudice and wilful ignorance" (193). When she, accompanied by her daughter and her Dayao friend, return home after seven years with the Condor people "some [of the human people] were afraid of infection", and avoided them: "Some very superstitious men blew at us whenever we passed them, so that they could not breathe in our outbreath" (365).

On the whole, these people seem the exception that prove the rule. The Valley people are aware of the importance of broadening one's horizons. Stone Telling refers to the necessity "to see the Valley as a part of a whole as well as a whole" (10). When she left for the City, she "had not considered existence, or read books, or trained with the Finders, or thought about history. My mind was not freed. It was held inside the Valley, instead of holding the Valley inside it" - she thinks of it in terms of not being "an educated person", and "not being entirely a person" (192-193).

The Taoist character of the Valley society consists in its not having followed the coming-out process - from Non-Being to Being - too far, losing contact with the root of all things, as civilisation has done. The Chuang Tzu distinguishes "stages of knowing", the first being "unaware that things exist". The third stage seems rather like the state of being of the Kesh: "[it] is knowing that there are boundaries. Here names come to be and natural distinctions are made. While Tao is nameless, its creatures have names that imply natural distinctions. At this stage the many do not yet war against each other; nature as a multiplicity is still in the unity of Tao and its life process is unending" (Chen 1989: 134). In other words, they follow the "Way", which - it will be recalled - means that the relationship between all beings is that of "unity" (485). Their consciousness does not "com[e] out from nature without return", which is the result of the "verbal or spoken" mode of knowing; their mode of knowing "belongs to a reversive consciousness in dynamic union with the unconscious", with the Way or Tao (Chen 1989: 206). Chen notes that "to recover its authenticity [as opposed to "great artificiality (wei)"] the work of human intelligence needs to be reintegrated with the work of nature" (1989: 100). This forms part of the ongoing process which is life in the Valley.

The dystopian locus in Always is the society of the Dayao, and the site of the most direct engagement with contemporary society, apart from Pandora's sections - she is from the twentieth century. The Dayao are presented from the point of view of the Kesh, through the utopian visitor North Owl (later Stone Telling). The Editor's list of "generative metaphors" includes those of the Dayao, and the "City of Man": the "War" which generates "Struggle", and allows society to be perceived as "subjection of weak to strong", and relationship as "enmity"; the "Lord" which generates "Power", and leads to hierarchy and class divisions, allowing the relationship of humans with other beings to be "superiority" (483); the "Machine" which generates "Work", and allows relationship to be understood as "exploitation" (484).

The yang nature of the Dayao society makes it the complete opposite of the Kesh, who live in a yin utopia - which is, to quote Le Guin's definition yet again:

> a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door (1989b: 96).

The Valley people call them the Condor, "their name for themselves as distinct from all other people is Dayao, One-People" - which points out their denial of relation (193). According to Stone Telling, all of them "think that to be a person at all is to be separate from and apart from everyone and everything" (200). This means following the coming-out process all the way.

They live in walled and guarded cities, called sai; the main city is simply called Sai. Stone Telling notes that this word means the same as the Kesh word, kach, which denotes "a different place in time or mind, those people who lived outside the world". The Dayao "have those uses too, but chiefly they use the word to name the place where they live". She expresses her reaction to the Dayao's inexplicable preference to live outside the world, and the difficulty of telling such an outrageous story as follows: "[they say] that they are inhabitants of the City of Man. What to us is disaster to them is their glory. How am I to write all this story in reversal-words?" (192).

They are organised into a tyrannically strict hierarchy. The leader is called The Condor; he is believed to be a messenger from "One", their god. (The condor is a sacred bird. To be initiated into manhood Condor boys have to shoot one.) There are some families whose men are "True Condors", and "One-Warriors", all serving The Condor. Their women are Condor Women, and serve Condor men. All other men are tyon (farmers), and serve the True Condors. "All other women, foreigners, and animals" are hontik. As Wytenbroek says, "in their perception of others as only animals, they are freed from any human responsibility towards them" (1987: 135).

On top, so to speak, is the eternal, omnipotent One, who made the universe, and of whom "human men are imitations". Their religion bears more than a passing resemblance to Christianity - one might say that it is Christianity from a strictly feminist point of view. Stone Telling's description of him reflects the Valley culture and beliefs. She notes that "things are not part of him nor is he part of them, so you must not praise things but only One". Since he is reflected in the Condor, he is worthy of praise, and commands obedience. The True Condors and the One-Warriors are "reflections of the reflection of One", and are therefore also praised and obeyed. Even tyon can claim to be reflections, "dim and faint". Hontik, on the other hand, entirely unrelated to One, are "purutik, unclean, dirt people". The Condor Women are included with hontik in this hierarchy, but

not in practice. As Stone Telling puts it, "this discrepancy is kept out of mind" (200). Needless to say, the sacred as dimension, and apparent requisite to the "Spirit of Place", is missing from their thought and environment.

Eventually One will unmake everything, taking to him all the True Condors and One-Warriors "who obeyed him in every way and were his slaves". Stone Telling comments, "I am sure that there is some sense to be made of this, but I cannot make it". Obedience really means that the "True Condor warriors were to be one thing only, reflections of One, setting themselves apart from all the rest of existence, washing it from their minds and souls, killing the world so that they could remain perfectly pure". Stone Telling comments that it sounds like the Valley reversals, but that "the Dayao way was without clowns and clowning, without reversal or turning, straight, single, terrible" (201) - intractably phallocentric. A Valley saying has it that "if there was only one of anything, it would be the end of the world" (311). "One of everything" means no change, without which - as the Anarresti also believed - there is no freedom, and no life (1974: 143). As Stone Telling writes, they were "going the wrong way" (353).

All Dayao relationships are hierarchical. Stone Telling writes that "everything among the Dayao had to have a chief. ... Everything they did was war", even work (199). Naturally, hierarchy and obedience bring into being laws. The Dayao never discuss and decide together on the action to be taken: "everything was done because there was a law to do it or not do it, or an order to do it or not do it" (348). Blame and punishment for things going wrong fell on the actors not the order. Stone Telling is appalled at the violent physical punishment meted out to hontik, tyon, slaves, and children among the Dayao: "it was frightening to live in this kind of continuous war" (348), which got worse as their civilisation self-destructed.

Some of the reasons for their destruction have already been touched on: their inability and unwillingness to live in the world, and the violent nature of their society in which mutual cooperation for the benefit of all is replaced by One/The Condor dictating to all for his own benefit, allowing no choice, no participation in the decision-making process. They engage in self-destruction more directly by the drain on their resources caused by continuous warfare with their neighbours. By the time of Stone Telling's stay in the City the inhabitants of the lands between the Valley and Sai had begun to retaliate, depleting the forces The Condor sent out to conquer other lands, and re-conquer the rebellious. It was decided to make use of the Exchange, which only The Condor had access to, to build "Great Weapons", tanks and flying machines to counter the resistance (350). Even before the escalation of hostilities the location of the City, in the lava beds for protection from

enemies, meant that food had to be imported. Since the Condor Women were supposed to breed more soldiers, their population grew, putting strain on the production of food. Now the Great Weapons meant in turn that tyon and hontik labour was channelled into building them and supplying them with fuel, the grain which should have been used to feed people and animals.

In addition, internal strife added to the disintegration. The Dayao were originally nomads, until a Condor had a vision in which One instructed them to build a city, a century before the events recounted. Stone Telling remarks, "when they did that they locked their energy into the wheel, and so began to lose their souls" (196). With things going so badly some of the Dayao wished to move to a better place: "the old restless spirit of the Dayao was still in them, and many of their ways were better fitted to a nomad life than a settled one" (352). Others were against disobeying the century-old command and, having no way to debate and decide the matter together, "there was no way for disagreements to come together in agreement. So ideas became opinions, and these made factions, which diverged and became fixed opponents" (352). This crisis led to "The Condor and the One-Warriors ... executing people called enemies of the Condor every day ..., tearing out their own bowels" (354). The Editor reflects that the Dayao

> seem to have been unusually self-isolated; their form of communication with other peoples was through aggression, domination, exploitation, and enforced acculturation. In this respect they were at a distinct disadvantage among the introverted but cooperative peoples native to the region (379).

This is part answer to those uncomfortable with Always's avoidance of/failure to present a direct engagement of utopian and dystopian societies. There was a mobilisation of forces on the part of the conquered and threatened (even if problematic), through the Exchange they kept each other informed of the Dayao's movements, and they did not have to trek far to engage the enemy, nor would they have been debilitated by their own weapons - even if theirs were puny in comparison. If the Dayao's plans had materialised the outcome would not necessarily have been predictable.

The True Condor families live in underground houses, and "the rooms deepest inside [are] the women's quarters" (197). The position of women in Dayao society is their implicit position in contemporary society made explicit: they are not allowed into the sacred rooms of the house (the male-oriented religion effectively shuts them out anyway), they are left out of the intellectual life of the men, and they are taught household skills only. It is easier to manipulate people who are ignorant and uninformed. As happens to people in a situation like that, they believe in their own inferiority to the men. Stone Telling reports that women, not men, told her that "women have no souls" (200). Their

purpose is to supply the Condors with soldiers which they do so diligently that Stone Telling is shocked by their "incontinence", and hearing it praised and envied. A Condor husband has a "first wife" who does most of the child-bearing, and aligns him with politically important families if possible, and then takes a "pretty wife" (345).

Stone Telling sees it as "Dayao women liv[ing] under siege all their lives" (195). It seems to have come to be both cause and effect of their position in society, since "to a Dayao woman outside the walls of her father's or husband's house all men are dangerous, because to Dayao men all women unprotected by a man are victims; they call them not women or people, but cunts" (360). In short, a Dayao woman is a product of a thorough process of dehumanisation. They have no control over their own minds or bodies. Stone Telling is astonished to learn that they may not choose their sexual partners, especially with conception in mind. The punishment for adultery is death, with the woman executed in public by her in-laws. Stone Telling speculates that "people who make life into a war fight it first with people of the other sex, I think, to defeat them, striving to win a victory" (368).

Someone who finds it necessary to have other people live under siege is probably afraid of them, an interpretation voiced in the novel by Valiant, speaking of her husband, Corruption (a Valley Warrior), comparing him to the Dayao men "who are so afraid of women they run a thousand miles away from their own women, so as to rape women they don't know" (179). Both male condescension to women and the male fear/disgust reaction to women's bodies are illustrated by the Dayao doctor's examination of Stone Telling. He is "half jokingly contemptuous because [she is] a woman", interpreting her illness - which stems from being cooped up, as well as a Four-House vision of the death of her father - as "womb-sickness", and recommending "a young husband" (344-345). Women are not taken seriously. When he discovers that she is menstruating "he became nervous and disgusted, as if [she] bore some dreadful infection" (344).

There is no one-sided condemnation of men, however. The Valleys always sees people as agents, as acting rightly or wrongly in terms of themselves and those around them, without being judgemental - they believe "judgment is poverty" (312). It is a case of accepting responsibility for what happens to one. Even disease is seen as "something a person did", rather than as "something that happened to a person" (475). Stone Telling reflects: "there is no way that men could make women into slaves and dependents if the women did not choose to be so. I had hated the Dayao men for always giving orders, but the women were more hateful for taking them" (355). The Dayao women need not be as completely ignorant and small-minded as they are. Stone Telling finds the hontik women

"more like Valley women" (198), and her hontik friend, "bold, restive, strong-willed" Esiryu, is "often in trouble for disobedience and insolence with her 'superiors'" (368).

Tom Moylan notes that "in each of the new utopias the society is shown with its faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse", this being one of the keynotes of the critical utopian novel (1986: 44). The main denial of the utopian impulse in this novel is brought about by the Dayao. Their influence is two-fold: on the one hand, there is the straight-forward threat they pose to the Kesh with their plan of the subjugation and enslavement of the Valley people. On the other hand, some of the Kesh - such as North Owl - are attracted to their militaristic way of being, their "infection" of the Valley (378). In both cases the outcome is dissension, increased superstition, and weakened trust, as one of the Kesh sums it up (378).

Two Valley cults, the Warrior and Lamb Lodges, provide a home for those "infected" by the Dayao. Stone Telling attests to the attraction of "the great energy of the power that originates in imbalance" (32). The Warrior way is contrary to notion of balance. All Warriors are supposed to be celibate, to the point of being forbidden "even to speak to adolescent girls" (179). They turn their backs on the Spirit of Place, denying relation with the environment, with things, which are seen as "screens ... keep[ing] the spirit from pure sacredness, true power" (179) - once more, only objects. Dangerous practices reserved for the Inner Sun (drug-taking, asceticism, etc.) are incorporated into Warrior and Lamb Lodge rites. The Lamb Lodge, accommodating women who are of this inclination, teaches that "[women] 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" (184).

The Warriors usurp the functions of the Bay Laurel Society, whose juvenile members are supposed to make weapons and train people in their use, scout for enemies, teach fighting skills, etc. (176) From the Kesh point of view adults behaving in this manner are severely disapproved of. There is a reason why mostly children and adolescent men hunt and only boys belong to the Bay Laurel Society. According to Stone Telling, "the Lambs and Warriors were houses for adolescents, people who were not able to choose their own way yet, or unwilling ever to do so" (184). This is more than the opinion of an individual (character). Le Guin has said that Always was "a rash attempt to imagine ... a world [] where the Hero and the Warrior are a stage adolescents go through on their way to becoming responsible human beings" (229). This is part of what is dramatised in the Life Story of Stone Telling. It is also a dramatisation of what happens to those who are not "well established" and therefore "uprooted" (Tao te ching, 54.1).

The Valley is thrown into uncharacteristic turmoil eventually partly resolved by holding a meeting addressing these issues. Here are voiced disquieting criticism of the assumed soundness of Valley thinking concerning human behaviour (nature), especially as regards the impulse towards violence and domination - which the Kesh normally think of as the Dayao sickness. As to the topic of discussion, some think that the Warriors and Lambs should be driven out of the Valley, some that the Dayao should be attacked or "cure[d] with human behavior" - the response to the last suggestion from one of the societies farthest removed from the Dayao by a town much closer is, "you come up north here and do that" (378).

A statement by one of the Warriors echoes a sentiment some readers may share: "You eat and drink and dance and talk and sleep and die and there is nothing to you, like ants or fleas or gnats, your life is nothing, it goes nowhere, it goes over and over and over nowhere!" This speaker, like the other Warriors, feels that there is "a higher purpose" to human existence (382). It is a common criticism of any anarchistic way of life (which makes no provision for a centre), and the result of logocentric thinking, whatever form or incarnation the logos may have. Humankind is seen as always aspiring upwards, a view incompatible with the Kesh idea of living in the world.

The most disturbing thought is voiced by Skull, who claims that the Kesh are deceiving themselves in thinking of human people as belonging in the world, and denying that "our sickness is our humanity. To be human is to be sick". Other than the lion, the hawk, and the oak, which are "well", and "live and die in the mindfulness of the sacred, and need take no care", all humans are in fact outside the world, and "not whole":

> You say that human people are no different from the other animals and the plants. You call yourself earth and stone. You deny that you are outcast from that fellowship, you deny that the soul of man has no house on earth. You pretend, you build up houses of desire and imagination, but you cannot live in them (384).

In terms of the Kesh society, the required "denial of the utopian impulse" could not have been more explicit or devastating. It is an expression of the feeling and experience of homelessness caused by a divorce from one's roots, and the resulting search for meaning and purpose in one's life. Skull's answer is war: "Only in war is redemption; only the victorious warrior will know the truth, and knowing the truth will live forever" (384).

Skull's speech disturbs people so much that violence threatens to break out, only diverted by those conducting the meeting remaining silent. The meeting splits into the two groups arguing amongst themselves, the anti-Warrior group splitting up again

because some think the sick people should be driven out by any means necessary, while the others speak against it. The two Speakers almost come to blows but are checked by someone pointing out that "sickness is speaking us" (385). Sanity is restored, and the meeting ended. The event marks the end of the cults in the Valley - some of the Warriors eventually leave to join the Dayao.

Bear Man, whose account of the meeting the Editor includes in the text, concludes by comparing the "sickness of Man" with "the mutating viruses and toxins": "there will always be some form of it about, or brought in from elsewhere by people moving and travelling, and there will always be the risk of infection". Since it is "a sickness of our being human", "it would be unwise in us to forget the Warriors and the words spoken at Cottonwood Flats, lest it need all be done and said again" (386). In this case the non-utopian impulse, "the appeal of Condor life", suggests, as Crow puts it, "that we can never change completely, that violence is an enduring part of human nature, or at least of masculine nature" (1989: 15). It should not be forgotten that many women, in joining the Lambs, display a propensity for violence as well.

The proposed action of the Warriors, who wish to counter the threat to the Valley existence with violence, and the other people of the regions who prepare to band together to stop the invaders, can be called activism. Le Guin dealt with a similar situation in The word for world is forest, and Wytenbroek (and others) feels that "she is still not completely comfortable with such a confrontation and its seemingly inevitable result" (1987: 336). On the other hand, one feels that Le Guin, to put it this way, "makes up for it" by the uncompromising self-critical, ironic attitude of the utopist Pandora. Moylan's comment in connection with The dispossessed, that the "text is silent at the level of the ideologeme, at the level of how to transform society actively, when it comes to feminist activism" (1986: 113), is true of Always as well. In this case, however, the reading position is unarguably feminist. And Moylan does indicate that although the ideologeme at the heart of the critical utopias he discusses is that of activism, it need not be. The ideological sediment which trips up The dispossessed is not evident in Always, although homosexuality is still de-emphasised. Certainly it is "critical in the Enlightenment sense of critique", which Moylan defines as "expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation" (1986: 10).

Stone Telling's narrative is divided into three parts and separated by the other texts comprising the novel. The reader knows the Kesh well by the time we read the second and third parts of her Life Story and, as is the way of the literary utopia, her point of view becomes the reader's, since it plainly makes more sense than the Dayao's. Stone

Telling's point of view estranges the Dayao practices and beliefs, which are quite familiar to us, making them seem absurd. One approaches the Dayao from a reading position informed by the Kesh way of being in the world (Taoism, pacifism, anarchism, feminism), and their way of life - which is a demystified, estranged version of contemporary society - is exposed as being insane, organised according to a perverted logic. Eventually we agree with the Kesh that the Dayao are "sick" and have "their heads on crooked" (24). The Dayao as dystopian society is a much more powerful indictment of our present-day civilisation than Urras was. It should be kept in mind that Urras was not as completely yang as are the Dayao, and the Dayao live in California not on a Tau Ceti planet. Le Guin has come home as well, in space if not in time - but then, to the Kesh time is "spatialised", a landscape "in which one may go any number of directions, or nowhere", rather than a direction or an arrow (171). The Editor notes that "time and space are so muddled together that one is never sure whether they are talking about an era or an area" (153). Seeing time and space in this way, linked with the poem, "From the people of the Houses of Earth in the Valley to the other people who were on earth before them" (404), which asserts that the Valley people were always among us, in the margins of contemporary society, means that this utopia is within our reach. In fact, it is here - a conclusion Le Guin also comes to in "A non-Euclidean view". In this lies much of the hope the novel offers.

In the section "Time and the City" one learns that according to the Kesh the Dayao and our civilisation both live(d) outside the world, in the "City of Man", the expression they use for civilisation or history. The Editor reports that the Kesh thought of our civilisation as "a remote region, set apart from the community and continuity of human/animal/earthly existence" (153). "The relation between the City and the Valley is not clear" (153). It does seem clear that our civilisation is the more direct originary society of the utopian society. "Older human events, the traces of civilisation" still shape the lives of the future human societies in Always who must deal with "the permanent desolation of vast regions through release of radioactive or poisonous substances" and "permanent genetic impairment" (159), which signify an apocalyptic ending to present-day civilisation. Our contribution to Valley art is its "awfulest ghoul", "a human being with its head on backwards". The tales "A hole in the air" and "Big man, little man" clearly identify the backward-headed people with contemporary society. The Editor remarks that this "figure[] of lore and superstition seem[s] to have been the literalisation of a metaphor" (159). The Kesh uncompromisingly place responsibility for the failure of civilisation on its own shoulders: "in their view, human beings did not do things accidentally. Accidents happened to people, but what people did they were responsible for" (159).

The key to this kind of utopia is to recognise the dystopian community as an estranged, allegorised version of ours. This is where many utopias do not succeed, because their readers do not make the connection, perhaps not wishing to take on so much responsibility, or becoming too caught up in the illusionary nature of the narrative. Always takes care of the illusionary nature of the narrative in typical critical utopian fashion, by fragmenting the text as a whole, and by self-reflexivity and self-criticism. In addition, it includes another (dystopian) society, the originary society (though only indirectly) of the Kesh - our civilisation.

Le Guin asks, "what kind of utopia can come out of these margins, negations, and obscurities?" (1989b: 89) - that is, out of that which is left after the traditional yang-utopia has been constructed, and failed. The margins are where all utopian endeavour comes from: "For utopian images are created out of the human desires and material possibilities inherent in the forces of society - in the latest tendencies of the historical situation, in what is unfinished and not yet" (Moylan 1980: 251). Always answers Le Guin's question. The Archivist and Pandora establish that the Kesh live in "the Dream Time", not in Time, and that they have always done so, "right through Civilisation" (172). This is also expressed in the poem, "From the Houses of Earth in the Valley to the other people who were on Earth before them". The Valley people were "silent", "dark", and "formless", "among you, ... coming closer to the world". They were "the words you had no language for", reminding one that utopia says in images what present-day conceptual language as yet has no words for. "From the beginning", the poem ends, "we are your children" (404). This is part of the utopian hope the novel offers, utopia being here and now - within reach in space and time. Our failure to make use of the utopian possibilities which were available to us, albeit hidden "in the chinks of the world machine", to appropriate the title of Lefanu's work, is responsible for the "bitter grief" in the voice of the Archivist as she talks to the Editor.

The fragmented nature of Always and its ethnographic guise, as well as the enormous cast of characters ("fictional" and "factual") extend the ground Le Guin is able to cover constructing her utopia. Rather than contributing to a plot, they contribute to the "lecture", "the always necessary element of explicating the novum", as Suvin puts it. In utopian fiction, he continues, "the conceptual explanation constitutes almost the whole plot" (1988: 39). This changes in the critical utopia, where "the primacy of societal alternative over character and plot is reversed, and the alternative society and indeed the original society fall back as settings for the foregrounded political quest of the protagonist" (Moylan 1986: 45). However, in the fragmented narrative of Always no character's experiences eclipse the "lecture". Flicker's quest is entirely personal. Stone

Telling's quest serves to allow the reader to visit the Dayao, affording an explicit view of them through Kesh eyes. The impetus for her quest is personal, not political, although politics in the form of the Dayao threat and the Warrior response influences her life. She changes, and eventually comes home, able to fit into Kesh society.

Included in The dispossessed is the process of creating/finding utopia. In the section, "Towards an archeology of the future", the narrator - before being identified as either Pandora or Editor - reports that she has found the town of Sinshan after "digging in several wrong places" and "persisting in several block-headed opinions - that it must be walled, with one gate, for instance" (3). The "block-headed opinions" represent traditional notions of utopia. "Archeology" already indicates the fragmented nature of the novel and the utopian society which, by its strangeness and remoteness, can never be fully comprehended. Pandora has no wish to discover a model utopia, "distinct" and "entire", from afar, with "Everything Under Control". Instead she leaves the observatory to find "shards", "to be felt and held and heard", and advises, "let the heart complete the pattern" (53). Active participation is needed to construct and reconstruct utopia.

I should add that another reason why Anarres appears contrived and unlivable, scientific even, is that it was an experiment in the political philosophy of anarchism; it worked through the pros and cons of an economic/political system. Always was created and is presented differently, "us[ing] the textual model of the ethnograph, in which both the voices of the anthropologist and the people being studied are heard", by a non-objective "anthropologist" of course (Bucknall 1981: 181). The fragmented nature of the text actively involves the reader in making sense of the wealth of material on the Kesh and, in spite of the text's self-reflexivity and self-criticism and because one helps the author construct the society - "let[ting] the heart complete the pattern" (53) - the reader enters the Valley along with Pandora, experiencing the vitality of the Kesh's lives and customs more directly than has been the case with Le Guin's other fictional societies. Always gives a whole new meaning to reader participation. Some of the other critical utopias, incorporating so much technology (especially kinds not yet available to us) involving, for instance, human reproduction (Woman on the edge of time) and effortless sex-change (Triton), alienate the reader - which is not the same as estrangement. In comparison Le Guin's novels seem to be written for and include ordinary folk, a somewhat unpopular pastime in revolutionary circles, one would think.

From the critical utopian point of view, "utopia is conditional on political intervention; it will not develop naturally (even pathologically) from the present" (Cranny-Francis 1990: 133). However, the Valley appears to have come about

pathologically, through holocaust and natural disaster. According to the creator/discoverer Pandora, she opened Prometheus's box knowing what it contained, though having her "own ideas about what's in the bottom". Prometheus named it Hope, but Pandora says that she "won't mind if the box is empty", and if all that was left was time and room, "a living room" containing everything (148). It will be remembered that the availability of time is of great assistance in practising wu-wei. This section, "Pandora worrying about what she is doing: she addresses the reader with agitation", dramatises the utopist's inability to bridge the gap, the time and space between utopia and civilisation, with something other than an apocalypse. The apocalypses have a function other than what might be seen as a literary expedient and an instance of pessimism: "These apocalypses were evidently the drastic acts she needed to perform in order to break free of assumptions about female identity, language, social structure, and narrative form which her culture had taught her" (Cummins 1990a: 159). It leaves a void out of which comes only the great need to know how to get to utopia. Pandora makes it to the Valley, taking the reader with her, by rediscovering and recreating the Californian past. However, "I can't give them history. I don't know how" (147), Pandora says. This is a circular problem - her utopians are unable to tell her their history because she did not provide it, and so on. In addition, the Kesh are of little help since theirs are "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 or 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" (153). Their response to her request for history are texts which we would regard as parables and legends, not fact. However, the hinge being the site of great activity, the destruction and dissolution of civilisation and the origin of the Kesh, "they may have perceived it as the most important thing - to them - about civilisation, about history in our terms: that gap, that leap, break, flip, that reversal from in to out, from out to in. That is the hinge" (153). The unbridgeability of the gap cannot be forgotten, it is part of the sense of incompletion, the destabilisation of the reader. On the other hand, the gap is bridged by Pandora leading us into the Valley; imagining utopia is possible.

Having made it into the Valley Pandora and the Archivist discuss utopia, which forms part of the self-critical stance of the novel. The Archivist tells Pandora:

> This is a mere dream dreamed up 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 an 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 (316).

The Archivist's words are intended to jolt and destabilise the reader out of the imaginary world of the Kesh. They spell out uncomfortable truths about utopia and utopia-making, and embody the sense of hopelessness which is an inevitable part of utopia. There is hope because the utopian longing is successfully embodied in Always; there is hopelessness because the dialogue with our society which is part of all science fiction and utopia reveals the extent of the gap between us and the utopians.

Always is not only constructed out of the margins of contemporary society, but also those of The dispossessed. I have referred to the brief mention of Takver's relationship with the universe: "it was strange to see Takver take a leaf into her hand, or even a rock. She became an extension of it: it of her" (1974: 158). This is a pale echo of that relationship in Always, of course. Moylan sees The dispossessed as concerned with superego, emphasising the economic and social, and "dealing with representational types". By way of pointing out what it neglects, he compares it to Delany's heterotopia, Triton, which is concerned with the libidinal, emphasising the sexual and personal, and "focuses on the radically different individual" (1980: 251). Always includes the libidinal and the sexual in their proper places in Kesh society, making enough room for it in the Valley culture by means of sexual education, on the one hand, the wakwa on the other, and by including "fictional" and "factual" texts of various lives with libidinal and sexual themes. The social and the personal are interrelated, as is typical of a tribal society. The Life Stories and other "fictional" pieces feature characters who are all representational by the very nature of utopia but, because of the way one becomes involved in the novel, and the way all the pieces of society fit together, they hardly come across as stick figures erected for demonstrational purposes.

Neither is art shown to play any key role in Anarresti society, although theatre is said to best reflect the communal experience which is life on Anarres. One function of the Valley reluctance to make clear distinctions such as, in this case, that between fact and fiction, is that art is fully incorporated into communal life, becoming an indispensable part. The heyiya-if plays its customary role in art as well, for instance in the function of the Life Stories which are "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" (263).

Much Valley art is seen as a social act, because of its participatory nature. Audience participation, depending on the genre, is integral to the finished work of art. Poems and

songs are composed at the drop of a hat. Valley art is occasional, in keeping with the social organisation of the Kesh. Le Guin defines "occasional poetry" as follows:

> a poetry that escapes the private, the confessional, and the merely esoteric, by observing - in lament or celebration, in drama or description, or narration or lyric, in any mode or tone - a shared occasion. Such poetry may be mysterious but is not idiosyncratic. Its movement is outward from the individual center to the center of a larger whole, a community. That movement is the energy of all theater, and of all oral literatures, performance of which, whether ritual or casual, is their own occasion (1989b: 110).

Incidentally, I have had no trouble calling Always a novel through-out, keeping in mind Le Guin's definition in Dancing at the edge of the world: "the natural, proper, fitting shape of a novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relationship to one another and to us". It fits Always. Not surprisingly, "the Hero does not look well in this bag", and is therefore absent (1989b: 169).

The Four Houses of Sky each have material and symbolical manifestations. The material manifestations are meteorological, the symbols are Bear, Puma, Coyote and Hawk which, the Editor notes, are "mythological devices, imaginative configurations, not to be taken literally; yet one cannot discount the literal aspect" (48). It is an instance of how the Valley always appears to have everything both ways, or at least makes no clear/clear-cut distinction between opposites. The Four Houses are also the Houses of Death, Dream, Wilderness, and Eternity. "All these aspects interconnect, so that rain, the bear, and death may each symbolise either of the others; verbal and iconographic imagery flourish with this interlinking. The whole system is profoundly metaphorical" (48). An encounter with a coyote, for instance, might well be an encounter with the Trickster Coyote, creator and destroyer, and all that implies in Valley mythology and thought.

The Editor notes that the "roots of the Valley are the roots of the digger pine, the scrub oak, the wild grasses careless and uncared for", as well as "in wildness, in dreaming, in dying, in eternity" (52). In terms of Valley thought, its roots lie in the Houses of Earth and Sky; in terms of Valley discourse, it exists in both Earth and Sky Modes. The Earth Mode "was used when one was speaking to and of living persons and local places, in one of the present tenses". The Sky Mode

> would be used in all discourse concerning Four-House people and places (those unborn, dead, thought, imagined, dreamed, in the wilderness, etc.), and in all past and future tenses ...; in making abstract or general

> statements; and in all formal discourse and rhetoric and works of literature both written and oral (499).

From our point of view we would discuss the Valley in Four-House Mode. Between us (civilisation, history) and the Valley (utopia, hope, future) lies the Hinge, the novel itself. In this the novel may be seen to function the way Valley Art is thought to function.

Female experience is also marginalised in The dispossessed, and elsewhere in earlier Le Guin, where the emphasis is mostly on male quests. This imbalance is redressed in Always: the two longest Life Stories are those of Stone Telling and Flicker, and most of the important supporting - but fully realised - characters in their stories are women as well, such as Stone Telling's mother and grandmother. The impetus for Stone Telling's quest lies in her lack of wholeness as a person. Terter Abhao, her father, is a Dayao, hence a no-House person, which makes the young North Owl a "half-person" in her own eyes. Her Condor half needs to be integrated; to this can be traced several visions and forebodings involving the Dayao - such as finding a condor feather (a message from the Four Houses), which she calls "the word I must learn to speak" (25). Her sense of her difference is strong, fueled by adolescent insecurities and defensiveness, with the result that North Owl turns to her Dayao heritage in defiance, and in search of wholeness. She writes that she "walk[ed] the circle of human anger ... all year long" (180). The activities of the Lambs and Warriors disrupt the normal flow of life in the Valley at this time, interfering with education, and drawing to them people in the same psychological situation as North Owl - as is their counterparts' wont in contemporary society. When her father arrives unexpectedly, North Owl leaves with him: "We were both ill, and our illnesses spoke one to the other. We seemed to choose, but were driven" (187).

Sai, apart from being rather a shock, and eventually causing her to fall ill, becomes a kind of education in reverse. Ayatyu, her Dayao name, is married to a young Condor who comes highly recommended - "he never beat his wife" - becoming his "pretty wife" (345). Always sports reversals of the same type found in The dispossessed: North Owl is aghast to find that she is expected to marry while still a virgin, not having come Inland yet. In accordance with Valley practice, marital sex without consent is considered rape, and Ayatyu aborts the child so conceived. In the end, reminding her father that they "made half a journey together, once", she escapes with his help, taking her child and friend, Esiryu, becoming Woman Coming Home.

Woman Coming Home has an experience echoing contemporary female experience along the way home, running into some Valley Warriors who appear to want them as guides to Sai, and become "uneasy" (359) when her intimate knowledge about Dayao

doings conflicts with what they complacently regard as their "superior knowledge" (358). She resorts to acting "the way Dayao women behaved with men, smiling and agreeing with everything and pretending not to know about anything except their own bodies and babies" (359).

Paradoxically Esiryu, the "hontik" immigrant to utopia, who proved resistant to victimisation and dehumanisation in Sai, becomes a candidate for both in the Valley. She is transformed into "the gentle Shadow ... always hanging back and looking down", taught to be "the already defeated" in Sai (369), rendered "tense and distrustful" on finding herself involved in the web of relationships which is the Valley. The Warrior Spear is drawn to her by her unassertive manner, but Woman Coming Home foresees that her growing strength might well turn Spear into her hontik without him realising it (368).

A Finders Lodge "Initiation song" goes: "Please bring strange things. / Please come bringing new things. / ... Let what you do not know come into your eyes" (404), indicating a willingness to experience the alien. As the final line of the song indicates, "return with us, return to us, / be always coming home" (404), the journey must always be completed by returning. As Cummins says, "the Kesh are, metaphorically, always coming home, always renewing their connection with the roots of their world" (1990b: 186). This forms an integral part of the Outer Sun and its journeys outside Kesh territory, the purpose of which is to reaffirm the community they return to. Re-establishing the link between humans and their environment - "the recognition that the human must be rooted in the nonhuman" (Franko 1989: 58) - is also a kind of homecoming.

Coming home is the main theme of the novel, and goes beyond the fictional construct. Since it is situated on the West Coast of America, it represents Le Guin coming home in space and time - Pandora is our contemporary. Implicitly, it points out that we have to make and find our home there (or here). Having arrived at the West Coast, there is no place left to go: "'Things had better work here,' states Joan Didion, 'because here ... is where we run out of continent'" (quoted by Crow, 1989: 3). Home is utopia. In the collection of short stories called Searoad Le Guin comes home to the West Coast of America in our time.

In closing I wish to briefly compare the Valley to the ideal Taoist state, as the Tao te ching sees it:

> A small state with few people.
> Let the implements for ten and hundred men be unused,
> Let the people fear death such that they do not move far away.
> Although there are boats and carriages,

There are no places to ride them to.
Although there are weapons and armours,
There are no occasions to display them.
Let the people again tie ropes and use them (as memory aids).

Let them enjoy their food,
Consider their clothing beautiful,
Be contented with their dwellings,
And happy with their customs.
The neighbouring states overlooking one another,
The dogs' barkings and cocks' crowings are heard from other states,
Yet till they grow old and dying the people do not visit each other (80).

Here "human society blends in seamlessly with the society of nature" (Chen 1989: 228). Chen notes that this state, as I noted earlier, "subscribes to Schumacher's motto - small is beautiful - as well as to an economics of no growth" (1989: 228). She glosses the line, "Let the people fear death such that they do not move far away" as indicating that "humans ... are now like plants so firmly rooted in the soil that to move about would be to court death" (229).

Finally, Always coming home decisively does away with the Lefanu's criticism concerning Le Guin's oeuvre before the publication of Always: "She invites the reader to accompany her as crew, not accomplice, and the reader is returned, dazzled perhaps, but unscathed" (1988: 146). Pandora addresses the reader several times, making it clear that she needs them. Cummins notes that "the narrative techniques she uses in Coming Home call upon the reader to interact with the novel more as one interacts with the experiential world - or with consensus reality - than with an artifact, a finished artwork. Overall, Le Guin offers the reader a collaborative role in making and understanding the text" (1990a: 161).

Notes

[1] One is reminded of Confucius's advice in the Chuang Tzu: "Don't go in and hide; don't come out and shine; stand stock-still in the middle" (19) - as long as stillness is understood to be movement as well, a paradox neither a Taoist nor the Kesh would have a problem with.

Conclusion

In Thomas More's Utopia how to achieve utopia (the state rather than the place) is not as important as what utopia consists of. In other words, the history of utopia, how it came into being, is far less important than the description of the utopian locus. In Le Guin's fiction the shape of utopia, as opposed to the road to utopia, is what is mostly considered. However, the action in these novels consists of showing these utopian and dystopian communities, and some of their members, in action.

Anarchist Karhide has utopian features which are the result of Gethenian biological and social evolution. Their estrus-cycle necessitates communality, which eventually led to the tribal hearth-pattern which a lack of "civilised" progress and the influence of the Taoist Handdara (amongst other factors) kept from being dissolved into urban civilisation. This is threatened by the advent of history in the form of war with the more "civilised" Orgoreyn, which is finally averted by Gethen joining the Ekumen, and the disappearance from power of those responsible for the threat - all manoeuvred by Estraven, the Handdarata adept, and one of the most skilled "actors" in Le Guin's works. Karhide's "salvation" partly lies in a return to the old ways, away from development into another Orgoreyn. Entry into the Ekumen represents the new way to go, but since the ways of the Ekumen and those of the Handdara, which informs Karhide's society, have much in common, the new and the old roads are interlinked. In the final analysis, however, the personal quest and growth of Genly Ai is what is at the centre of The left hand of darkness. It is a science fiction novel, not a utopia, keeping in mind that utopia is a particular form of science fiction.

The Athshean utopian community is also the product of biological and social Athshean evolution. The Athsheans live in symbiotic relationship with their world, the forest, and their lives are shaped and paced by it. The opposing societies involved, Athshe and the Terrans, have no complementary differences. They simply clash, with disastrous effect. It is more apparent that the three characters involved represent three points of view which are systematically opposed and investigated by being shown in action, that its author is following a program. Part of the action in the Athshean community is dreaming, which facilitates the introduction of a new way of doing things, bringing it from the dream-time into the world-time. The Athsheans are forced to dream the ability to mobilise and the ability of organised warfare into their conscious lives, an act which changes Athshe irrevocably.

The lathe of heaven is the odd one out - there is no utopian community, only efforts to create or prevent it. Haber crudely tries to create utopia by eliminating the most obvious signs of dystopia, with a tool he does not know how to use. Making conscious use of the unconscious is a risky, paradoxical business. He succeeds only in becoming more of a dictator than an activist, and in creating what develops into a fully-fledged dystopia. In both Lathe and The word for world is forest dreaming serves as a way of bringing change into the world: in the former, unwillingly, in the latter as part of the nature and culture of the Athsheans.

In The dispossessed we learn that the Urrasti World Council presented "the International Society of Odonians" with Anarres to "buy[] them off with a world, before they fatally undermined the authority of law and national sovereignty on Urras" (84). The "moon" was eventually settled by a million Odonians (85). The result is Le Guin's first fully-fledged anarchist utopian society. The Anarresti are threatened by a breakdown of the utopian community, for once because they avoid history. History catches up with them, although it is rather a case of history being rediscovered, having always been intended to be part of utopia. The Anarresti, having nowhere else to escape to, will be forced to deal with it. "Will be" however, since most of the struggle - with itself, really - still lies ahead when The dispossessed ends. The novel concentrates on a pivotal figure, a man of science, who is socially and politically "activated" when he collides with political "walls" frustrating his scientific and personal progress. The personal and political aspects of his quest are interlinked, as is often the case in Le Guin. Shevek's role becomes the re-activation of the original social anarchist revolution, rather than bringing about something new. He does invent a new physics which makes possible the "ansible", enabling the establishment of a cosmic cultural organisation liberated from paralysing interstellar time-lag. In terms of the critical utopia as defined by Moylan, the settlement of Anarres by a group of people sharing the same ideals does constitute an escape from rather than an active engagement with the oppressors, notwithstanding the settlement being preceded by political activism on Urras - keeping in mind the "Terms of the Closure of the Settlement" (295).

How the Valley came about is known neither to Pandora or the Kesh themselves, yet its lack of history plays an important role in Always coming home. It is not simply glossed over. The activism in the novel is on the part of the author. Le Guin creates a utopia which satisfies the criteria of the critical utopian project, although feminist issues do not play the all-important role, no issue does. A feminist perspective informs the construction of the dystopian society of the Dayao, and the "main characters" of the novel are mostly women. She redresses the imbalance created by all her previous male

protagonists, recounting the female quests of Flicker and Stone Telling, but whether their experiences and problems are specifically female, if I can put it that way, is perhaps debatable. There is no activism to speak of in terms of the actions of the characters, when one discounts Pandora. Included in the cast of characters, her efforts to enter the Valley, which are her efforts to find/create it, comprising an apocalypse or two, qualify her as an activist of the first magnitude.

It should be kept in mind, as Suvin notes, that "a condition of pristine unity is presupposed in the whole of Le Guin's opus [as it appears to be in Taoism] as a past Golden Age" (1988: 142). The notion of "pristine unity" is echoed in the search for and/or (re-)establishment of dynamic equilibrium (as in the Taoist t'ai ch'i symbol) in her fictional societies. Always is the most explicit and detailed expression of the use and need to rediscover the Golden Age. The danger inherent in this mode of utopia is the trap of merely producing escapism, but she avoids this by approaching her utopia in (self-)critical mode. Life is not easy for the Kesh, but they manage to make the most of their personal, social, and environmental resources.

In The dispossessed history (time as the arrow, change) was always supposed to be part of Anarresti society, since Odo's utopia is process not product. In addition, it includes the cycle (which is necessary for meaning and stability). One might say that the earlier utopias, Athshe and Karhide, as well as the Valley, only recognise the circle or cycle. In their ideal state, they are worlds of seasons and promises, but no socio-political change, no direction - no history. The plots of the first two novels involve the advent of history, Always the threat of it. For Karhide there is the threat of war with Orgoreyn and the exploits of the Envoy. In Word the allegorical nature of the story makes it difficult not to see the revolt against the yumen as a kind of Fall into history, history seen as irrevocable change, and the change as potentially destructive. In The dispossessed, although the rediscovery of history means great upheaval and possible destruction, it is seen as to be embraced, as actually forming a vital part of the utopian society. It means change and process as opposed to stagnation and product.

Always again features a society without history in the sense of time as an arrow. History is present only as a threat, in the form of the Dayao, who obligingly destroy themselves - the result of their way of being and doing - before managing to destroy the Kesh. The only permanent change, apart from a slow cultural change affecting the way certain rituals and acts are carried out, is personal. Individuals grow, as Flicker's and Stone Telling's stories show, which is reflected in the Valley custom of changing one's name as one reaches different stages in one's life. Since life in the Valley follows the

pattern of natural life, their existence comprises both change and stability (the Dance) which are so interrelated that it is hard to tell one from the other.

It does remain a very valid question: how can a decentralised anarchist society withstand a full enemy onslaught without compromising its way of life and, even more importantly from their point of view, survive even if not intact? Le Guin dealt with this in Word whose broad outline (apart from the military engagement) has much in common with Always. One feels that she had other fish to fry in the latter: showing a recognisable utopian society and a dystopian society in operation, on our Earth in the future.

Suvin's thesis concerning Le Guin's oeuvre is useful in considering the absence of individual political activism in the novels under consideration, compared to that in the works of other politically committed authors, that is: "my main thesis is that the thrust and strength of Ursula K. Le Guin's writing lies in the quest for and sketching of a new, collectivist system of no longer alienated relationships, which arise out of the absolute necessity for overcoming an intolerable ethical, cosmic, political and physical alienation" (1988: 135). To my mind this quest is of such importance to Le Guin that it finally outweighs the depiction of characters engaged in ideological contestation. Her texts engage contemporary empirical society, however, by virtue of their genres (science fiction and utopia) and, especially in the case of Always, by design.

A quotation from the introduction to Buffalo Gals and other animal presences may serve as final illustration of her way of seeing the world, which she embodies in her novels - the later ones coming closest to the description she gives of it:

> ... for the people Civilization calls 'primitive', 'savage', or 'undeveloped', including young children, the continuity, interdependence, and community of life, all forms of being on earth, is a lived fact, made conscious in narrative (myth, ritual, fiction). This continuity of existence, neither benevolent nor cruel itself, is fundamental to whatever morality may be built upon it (Le Guin 1987: 10).

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