Embracing the Other in Ursula Le Guin's Science Fiction "The Left Hand of Darkness": A Multicultural Perspective

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Abstract

The concept of multiculturalism establishes the notion of an integrated, assimilated and pluralist society that comprises a variety of races, ethnicities as well as cultures. But the juxtaposition of contrasting values, behavioral patterns, diverse traditions and variable cultures gives rise to profound ideological gaps and material inequalities which lead to a crisis. Hence, what Antonio Gramsci calls "hegemony" wherein multiculturalism serves as an index of the crises of a racially hierarchized society at the same time as it seeks to incorporate racial, ethnic and class minority groups into one all-encompassing culture through a promise of equal participation and representation.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate how Ursula Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness draws borders and barriers – geographical, political, psychological, economic, social and cultural between nations as well as peoples. It unfolds the multifaceted multicultural crisis in all its alienating and separatist results which shield a multitude of divisions, dualisms and biases within a system of supposed integration and balance. Le Guin exposes the separation – symbioses dilemma that is the heart of multiculturalism. The novel challenges the reader very much in the same way that the protagonist's experience has challenged him to see things from the prospective of diversity rather than opposing dualities. Le Guin gives no solutions but raises questions about the other – the being who is different from ourselves. This being can be different in sex, in annual income, in the manner of speech, in dress code, in skin colour or in the number of legs and heads. For the novelist, science fiction is explanation, not technology.

This paper substantiates the fact that Le Guin's culture is a rhetorical production of multiculturalism, a complex of explanations, justifications and interrogations based on a science which conditions the sensibilities of every individual within that culture. Jungian psycho-analysis, Claude-Levis Strauss's cultural mythology and feminist deconstruction are viable tools of analysis in this research.

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الآخر في رواية أورسولا لوجوين
من الخيال العلمي "اليد اليسري للظلام" من منظور تعدد الثقافات .

فاطمة المهيري

ملخص

إن فكرة مجتمع متعدد الثقافات تقوم علي تضـامن وتكامـل مجموعـة مـن الثقافات والأعراق والأجنـاس في مجتمع واحد. وتتضـمن فكرة تعدد الثقافات أيضاً إحتواء أوجه الخلاف والتنوع بين مختلف الثقافات مما يتطلب قدر كبير مـن التكيف والتآلف مـن أجل التعايش السلمي وتقبـل الآخر. وبينمـا تتجاور الثقافـات المتعددة بما فيهـا مـن قيم مختلفـة وأنمـاط سـلوكية عديـدة يطفو الـي السطح العديد مـن مظـاهر التعصب والتنـاقض النـاجم عن الإختلافـات الأيديولوجيـة والتناقضـات الجوهريـة بين الشعوب. ومن هنا تبدو ظاهرة "السيطرة" لمبتدعها أنطونيو جرامسكي الـذي يوضـح أن ظاهرة المجتمع المتعدد الثقافات مـا هي إلا مؤشر لسيطرة المجتمع الأقوي علـي المجتمع الأضـعف مـن خـلال إدعاء المسـاواة فـي المشـاركة والتمثيل لكل الأعراق والأجنـاس والطبقـات الإجتماعيـة المختلفـة ممـا يحقـق أزمـة حقيقيـة علـي الصـعيد العالمي الإجتماعي والثقافي والسياسي.

وبالتالي فإن الهدف من هذا البحث هو إلقاء الضوء علي مـا تقدمـة أورسـولا لوجوين كاتبة الخيال العلمي الأمريكية في روايتها "اليد اليسري للظلام" من معالجـة لظـاهرة المجتمع المتعدد الثقافات. تظهر الروايـة بوضـوح مـدي التخبط العنيـف والتنـاقض الشـديد بـين التـوازن والتضـامن الـذي ينبغـي تحقيقـة والإنقسـام والتعصب والثنائية الناجمة عن الإختلاف بين الشعوب.

لا تعطي الكاتبة حلا لكنها تطرح العديد من الأسئلة خاصـة بـالأخر ومدي قدرتنا علـي تقبلـه سـواءً كانت الإختلاف مـن حيث المظهر أو اللغـة أو الجـنس أو الطبقـة الإجتماعيـة. تتطـرق الكاتبـة للخيـال العلمـي والفانتازيـا والأسـطورة والسـحر والمذهب الطـاوي والأسـاليب المختلفة للتواصل من أجل نقل رؤيتها. يلجـا البحث للتحليل النفسي لكارل جوستافيونج والإجتماعي لكلود ليفي ستراوس وكذلك للتحليل النسائي. تدعو الكاتبة الي ثقافة جديدة تحتوي علي مفاهيم وتساؤلات ومعتقدات تحث الإنسان المعاصر علي التعايش السلمي وتقبل الأخر من أجل حياة أفضل.

The term multiculturalism denotes a concept the meaning of which is vigorously contested. On one level, it valorizes the notion of an integrated, assimilated, pluralist society that comprises a variety of races, ethnicities as well as cultures. On another level, it celebrates cultural and ethnic diversity and difference as tokens of a democratic policy response embracing educational, linguistic, economic and social components. Meanwhile, the very juxtaposition of different values, behavioural patterns and the suppression of tension and contradiction emanating from profound ideological gaps and material inequalities into a cornucopia of harmonious multicultures have given rise to a crisis. Hence, what Antonio Gramsci calls "hegemony" whereby the ruling group determines the cultural, ideological and political character of a multinational state. Multiculturalism thus serves as an index of the crises of a racially hierarchized society at the same time as it seeks to incorporate racial, ethnic and class minority groups into one all-encompassing culture through a promise of equal participation and representation. Multiculturalism can therefore be "presented in both utopian and dystopian terms" (Lowe).

Consequently, the very logic of multiculturalism is double-edged. While assimilating and integrating different races, classes, sexes and cultures into mainstream American culture, it also stigmatizes those very same groups who remain outside "the melting pot" resisting total dissemination and embracing national identity. The notions of equality of all cultures, inclusion versus exclusion and tolerance above bias presuppose a false totality within which are subsumed a set of false particularities. These become "commodities to appease a zealous passion for genuine difference with traces and images of dignity and even of rebellion" (Wilson).

Critics of multiculturalism describe it as a strategy to save America as "the melting pot" embracing all cultures, and as a system of social control whereby all cultures are allowed just a little measure of self-identity and a few simulacra of autonomy within the mainstream of American culture. The multicultural discourse is eventually transformed into a discourse of power. Furthermore, it is agreed that the rise of a multicultural society is at the expense of a more progressive one. The demand of equal recognition for all cultures is at odds with the claim that cultures are incommensurate.

"Campaigning for equality means challenging accepted practices, being willing to march against the grain, to believe in the possibility of social transformation. Conversely, celebrating differences between people allows us to accept society as it is" (Malik). But, to make all cultures equal is to deny competition and to abandon individualism. The embrace of diversity and the desire for equality are therefore not compatible.

Another critique of multiculturalism is that ethnic diversity decreases trust and cooperation in communities. Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam explains that when the data were adjusted for class, income and other factors, they showed that the more people of different races lived in the same community, the greater the loss of trust. "they don't trust the local mayor, they don't trust the local paper, they don't trust other people and they don't trust institutions" (qtd.in Sailer, Multiculturalism).Racism, religious fundamentalism, economic interests and political aspirations increase mistrust and disloyalty between diverse cultural groups.

Moreover, a multicultural ideology is supposed to reflect all the world's cultures, not merely a Western culture. Because multiculturalism is a sweeping idea in America, multiculturalist agendas and the rhetoric of diversity inform the key institutions and official expressions of American society. But "for the multiculturists , Western individuality is nothing but a mask of illegitimate dominance which must be stripped away" while "for Westerners, Western individuality is an integral aspect of their being. Therefore to get rid of Western individuality is to destroy the very essence of Western people" (Auster).

Additionally, the conflicts arising between multiculturalism and feminism accentuate the attack on the former. Due to its call for flexibility and respect for diversity, multicultural ideology embraces all cultures indifferently even those where the acculturation of women into inferiority, the denigration of women as mere sexual and reproductive beings and the patriarchal condemnation of women are upheld. It is in this particular issue of gender that feminists clash with multicultural logic. For feminists more often than not claims of minority cultures or religions clash with the norm of gender equality that is endorsed by most liberal states. Gender issues like polygamy,

abortion, sexual harassment, clitoridectomy, the subordination of women in general and the servility of women to men's desires and interests in particular, arouse women's antagonism towards a multicultural view of the universe. "Despite all the evidence of cultural practices that control and subordinate women, none of the prominent defenders of multicultural group rights has adequately or even directly addressed the troubling connections between gender and culture or the conflicts that arise so commonly between multiculturalism and feminism" (Okin).

Yet, the fact remains that the multicultural process is one that evolves constantly and unconsciously in the twenty first century. Due to globalization, the diffusion of innovations, consumption patterns and new daily life habits, a new process of standardization has taken place. Advanced technology and scientific knowledge, the uniformization of tools and instruments, higher mobility of persons, cheaper, transport, easier transfer of information and the new telecommunication technologies accentuate the process of modernization and accelerate merging of peoples, practices and values. An involuntary process of assimilation and integration proceeds in a universal dimension. Individuals everywhere become members of a higher regime of multiculture shared by everyone with variations. The great cities of the Western World are increasingly made of a mosaic of cultures. Their reality is multicultural. Whether people choose to accept the recent homogenization of values and ideologies into one universal concept or wish to preserve their national identities and create cultural walls, a new rhetoric of diversity has erupted wherein "we must recognize that multiculturalism is not the cause of present discontents but part of the solution" (Open Democracy).

In The Left Hand of Darkness(1969), Ursula K. Le Guin (1929----) spins her novel around the image of two men pulling a sledge on ice – the central idea is one of isolation and togetherness. Genly Ai, the envoy from the Ekumen or the League of Nations seeks to persuade Karhide and Orgoreyn, the two countries on the planet Gethen or Winter to join in order to achieve progress, development, more prosperity and sharing of knowledge. The journey of the envoy is both physical as well as psychic. It involves a personal encounter

that results in increased knowledge of self and other. Meanwhile, it takes place against the background of an international power struggle that threatens the survival of the human community. The protagonist's guide on his journey is an androgyne, a person who embodies difference. Unless Genly Ai overcomes his prejudice against the ambisexual Gethenians, he cannot complete his mission and will fail to achieve a bond of trust and fidelity with them. Without this bond he cannot persuade Gethen to bond with the Ekumen. Nor can he dissuade them from war with Orgoreyn over a border dispute. Ai's personal difficulties are therefore a microcosm of the complex relationships that create the Ekumen and complicate its interconnectedness with other planets.

Le Guin's novel thus opens with borders and boundaries – geographical, political, social and cultural. She unfolds the multicultural crises and all the barriers that separate one person from another and lead to alienation and isolation within a system that applauds balance and integration. Le Guin exposes the separation symbioses dilemma that is at the heart of the concept of multiculturalism. The novel challenges the reader in the same way as the protagonist's experience challenged him to see things from the perspective of diversity rather than of opposing dualities. Le Guin explains:

> Our curse is alienation, the separation of yang from yin. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. the dualism of value that destroys as, 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 ("Is Gender Necessary?" 169).

Le Guin gives no solution but raises questions about the concepts of community, interconnectedness, communication and integration. Hence, in The Left Hand of Darkness she creates a world where human survival is difficult and in which the inhabitants are alien. She realizes that there is "the sexual Alien and the social Alien, and the cultural Alien, and finally the racial Alien." ("American SF and the Other" 97). This "Alien" or the Other – the being who is different

from ourselves- can be different in sex, in skin colour, in manner of speech or dress code or in number of legs and heads. To accept this alien, however, is the only means by which Genly Ai in LHD can achieve his mission of spreading "material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and extensity of the field of intelligent life. The enrichment of harmony and the greater Joy of God. Curiosity. Adventure. Delight" (LHD 37). The Mission of Genly Ai is, in fact, Le Guin's mission. But whereas her protagonist can perceive the vision of the Ekumen which he represents as the only truth, inhabitants of Karhide and Orgoreyn can but trust only their own version of life. Hence, a clash of interest arises and an essential confrontation between different cultures evolves. Le Guin's target, however, is not to compare and contrast two visions of truth. Rather she engages in a rhetoric of diversity wherein truth is neither realistic nor factual. Le Guin proves that truth is relative and subversive. "If there were anything fixed in nature, if there were truths, all this would, of course, be wrong. But unfortunately, all truths are erroneous. This is the very essence of the dialectical process: today's truths become errors tomorrow; there is no final number ("The Stalin in the Soul" 221).

The opening paragraph of the novel immediately discloses Le Guin's intent where "truth is a matter of the imagination" and "facts are no more solid, coherent, round and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive" (LHD 7). With a skeptical mind and a suspicious spirit, the reader is then allowed to form judgment in which he "can choose the fact [he] like[s] best; yet none of them are false, and it is all one story" (Ibid). Le Guin's multicultural perspective is a rhetorical blend of complex explanations, interrogations and justifications based on a science that conditions the sensibilities of every individual in the universal milieu. N.B. Hayles notes, "No truth is allowed to stand as the entire truth; every insight is presented as partial, subject to revision and another perspective" (109).

As the novel opens, Le Guin immediately evokes feelings of alienation, separation and difference. Genly Ai, the envoy from the Ekumen is bound to join, as a diplomat, in a parade to celebrate the completion of "the unfinished Arch of the River Gate", an act that "will distinguish Agraven XV's reign in the annals of Karhide" (LHD

9). Wherein Ai notices how "though not much taller than the Gethenian norm", yet "the difference is most noticeable in the crowd" (13) and he "longed for anonymity, for sameness" he "craved to be like everybody else" (14). Later on, Ai reflects while sitting at table with Lord Estraven, the king's Primeminister, how "[t]hough I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes, I tried to, but my efforts took the form of 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"(17). For him, "Estraven's performance had been womanly" and is characterized by "tact, lack of substance, specious and adrout" together with a "soft supple femininity" that is perhaps cause of Ai's distrust and dislike of the man (17). Ai also loathes Estraven's "effeminate deviousness" (19). On the other hand, Lord Tibe, the king's cousin, expresses to Ai how he keeps forgetting that Ai "come(s) from another planet"; and how "of course that's not a matter you ever forget" (15). Ai, himself, almost always thinks of himself in Karhide as an alien. Demanding explanation of Estraven about the delay of his audience with the king to achieve his mission, he remembers that "an inept and undefended alien should not demand reasons" (19). Again and again Ai comments " I was tired and down cast. I've been cold ever since I came to this world" (25). Suffering internal coldness as well as external ice, Genly Ai cannot but perceive that "[he] was alone, with a stranger, inside the walls of a dark palace, in a strange snow-changed city, in the heart of the Ice Age of an alien world" (23). Apart from inner loneliness, Ai has been surrounded by what appeared to him as peculiar life – habits and odd attitudes: "the Gethenians have perfected the technique not only of perpetually stuffing, but also of indefinitely starving" (16), and a young couple stood talking with their right hands clasped. "They were in the first phase of Kemmer" (15). Moreover, "Shifgrethor", a matter that Ai has never wholly understood implies "prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority in Karhide and all civilizations of Gethen" (19). Having sent physicians and engineers "to verify the alienness of [Ai's] physique and [his] ship, introduced [him] to people [he] needed to know, Genly Ai is now "gradually elevated from his first year's

status as a highly imaginative monster to [his] present recognition as the mysterious Envoy, about to be received by the king" (18). Karen Sinclair describes Le Guin's protagonists of whom Genly Ai is an example as "social anthropologists who [operate] as both cultural translator and social commentator. [Their] main purpose is to gather knowledge, and by standing in threshold between two different cultures, to try (and usually fail) to explain each culture to the other" (Sinclair 65).

In The Left Hand of Darkness, Genly Ai learns about the unusual sexuality of the Gethenians, their customs, their mores as well as their language and connotations. Later, he teaches Estraven the ways and habits of mankind in the Ekumen. By so doing they create a community together wherein they become interconnected and interrelated. Ursula Le Guin summons her reader to join the new community. A multicultural situation evolves out of the alienation and difference through Le Guin's rhetorical device of argumentative narrative.

An individual journey may become an exploration of the coming -of-age process that lasts a lifetime or of alienation and connection, or of the difficulties of identifying one's inheritance, or of the nature of utopia. Whatever world, whatever journey, the reader will be immersed in a new "there", which will lead to a better understanding of intelligent beings, the world, and the interaction between the two (Cummins 19). For Le Guin, despite the suspicion, the lack of trust and quite often the severe tension, involved in the multicultural experience, love emanates and an integration of diversities is achieved when interactions and interdependency are respected, difference and uniqueness honoured.

In The Left Hand of Darkness, the protagonist Genly Ai learns to love an alien, Estraven. Despite his early prejudice and adamant rejection of any jests of warmth offered by the Prime minister, Genly Ai could not but be shocked by Estraven's fervent support of his mission for which he eventually loses his position, is accused of treason and finally pays his life. Estraven informs Ai that his mission is not favored by the king who is fully aware of the rationality of Ai's cause and that "in alliance with the Ekumen, Karhide will become infinitely less threatened and more important than it's ever been"

(LHD 22-23). Being too interested himself and too patriotic, Estraven has forgotten that a king "does not see things rationally, but as a king", meaning "that his power is threatened, his kingdom is dustmote in space, his kingship is a joke to men who rule a hundred worlds" (22). He pushed Genly Ai's cause to the extent that led to his exile upon presumably committing a false crime of treason. "Under pretense of loyal service to the king", Harth remir Estraven has pleaded that "the Nation-Dominion of Karhide cast away its sovereignty and surrender up its power in order to become an inferior and subject nation in a certain Union of Peoples", which is composed of a group of traitors who conspire to "weaken the Authority of Karhide in the King, to the profit of the real and present enemies of the land" (33-34). Hence, Estraven's political insight proves true and Karhide's king proves as domineering, as authoritative and as power-seeking as predicted. But the King's anger has not stopped at that and Genly Ai's presence itself has become undesired. The King exclaims, "Fear is King! Now take your traps and tricks and go, there's no more needs saying. I have ordered that you be given the freedom of Karhide" (43). King Agraven as such represents a perfect model of anti-multiculturalist attitudes. He is an accurate configuration of a governmental control that-denies progress and development in fear of loss of power and in preservation of possessive self-righteous rule.

Whether Le Guin's protagonists are "off-worlders" who act as ethnographers as Genly Ai, or "skeptics and free-thinkers in their native society as Estraven, they become generally outsiders to their cultures" (Sinclair 50). Hence, the protagonist be he an outsider, an alien or a marginal man, he assumes a stance of very critical implications. This marginality becomes a metaphor for a critical assessment of society. John Huntington adds "The typical Le Guin hero is a visitor to a world other than his own; sometimes he is a professional anthropologist; sometimes the role is forced on him; in all cases he is a creature of divided allegiance" (Huntington 237). Both Genly Ai and Estraven are unified in Le Guin's portrayal as participant observers. They both share a marginalization that serves as mirror to a fragmented world with possessive social orders where there is little connectedness between theory and practice, between words and deeds, and between feelings and rationality. For both, a

political insight coupled with a social preoccupation dictates similar attitudes; a mutual respect and a rejection of repressive autocratic regimes. Le Guin declares, "today, of course, we have government encouraging business, growth, encouraging the large corporation that either makes money or war against the individual consumer or soldier. The individual is treated only as a member of an enormous mass. I think this is essentially anti-democratic and disastrous, leading to a future of repressive control" (Yost 8).

Fleeing for his life from Karhide, Genly Ai embarks on a journey to Orgoreyn where he would try a new mission of Ekumenical interconnection and communication. As a passenger on a trade-caravan, Ai is confronted with further shocking qualities of Gethenians: they are anti-progressive, beauroucratic as well as inimical. The caravan "moved along however crowded, quite steadily at the rate of 25 miles per hour. Gethenians could make their vehicles go faster, but they do not. If asked why not, they answer 'why?' the fact is, "the people of Winter, who always live in Year One, feel that progress is less important than presence" (LHD 52). Arriving at Orgoreyn, Ai declares to the Commensals that "Open trade" is his goal, a "trade not only in goods, of course, but in knowledge, technologies, ideas, philosophies, art, medicine, science, theory" (133). By means of his "ansible communicator", they could talk with the nearest town as if by radio (134), in order "to communicate with the rest of mankind"(134). The reaction of the Orgotta bespeaks a typical anti-multicultural attack where satisfaction with the status quo is much more preferable than the challenge of advancement, development and progress. Kaharosile, a representative of the Orgotta commensality comments: "Don't you see, commensals, what all this is? It's not just a stupid joke. It is, in intention, a public mockery of our credulity, our gullibility, our stupidity-engineered, with incredible prudence, by this person who stands here before us today" and is flabbergasted by the fact that they "actually shut [their] eyes, abase [their] intellects, and believe" a man who declares himself "from outer space" (152). Estraven, the perceptive observer, reflects about Ai's mission with the commensals of Orgoreyn, "they look at the man from another world and see what? a spy from Karhide, a pervert, an agent, a sorry little political unit like themselves" (154). Le Guin is

undoubtedly a political activist who is able to probe through cultural, social and linguistic barriers to identify "neo-capitalist, individualist alienation" and juxtapose it with "a new collectivist and harmonious creation" (Suvin, SF 6-17). Suvin also commends Le Guin's "ideologico-political breakthrough" wherein she identifies "privileged forms of alienation as propertarian possession" (Parables 271). These men from Orgoreyn have seen in Genly Ai only "a way towards power" and "a way out of the increasing rivalry with Karhide" (LHD 188). Hence, their aim has always been merely possessive, competitive and power-seeking. Estraven, on the other hand, has always been endowed with a wider perspective and a highly advanced spectrum that could evaluate the alliance with the Ekumen as a progressive step in "the field of intelligent life" (LHD 200). Le Guin's political activism is further developed in her delineation of the Orgota 'Sarf' or secret police (who control everything and everybody, running all radios and watching over all communications. "They could and would block-or falsify – any transmission" (153) and through them, "the government can check not only act but thought" (147-48) of every subject. As such their power over others is infinite and absolute.

Ignorant of his crime and blind as to its consequences, Genly Ai is arrested and taken to Kundershaden prison to undergo interrogation. Upon his transfer to Pulefen prison, Genly Ai learns further of the culture of oppression and persecution. Amidst twenty-five prisoners jammed and bumped against each other in a truck after intense clubbing and kicking, Genly Ai is shocked by the absolute silence and estrangement. The prisoners, exposed to continual examination and torture, are to work or die. Chemically castrated by anti-kemmer shots to curb their sexuality, they are without shame and without desire. "This was the first case I had seen of the social purpose running counter to the sexual drive. Being a suppression, not merely a repression, it produced not frustration, but something more ominous, perhaps in the long run: passivity" (LHD 170).

Through a growing awareness of pain and torture, Genly Ai comes to understand culturally alien others and to appreciate difference. A person has the power of moral choice only if he is free and only through social security and stability. Le Guin "warns that

institutional means cannot generate a transformation of human heart but only foster possession and isolation. Transformation of heart can occur only through one's personal journey, and only through its sharing can the new society emerge" (Tift 185). Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish (1975) explains how punishment of a deviant by hideous mutilation of the body implies the inscription of a sign of the sovereign's awesome power as opposed to moral reform by means of surveillance and a disciplinary regime. For Foucault, no relationship exists outside the anonymous and continuous operations of power. Institutionalized political technologies enhance oppression and obedience. The taboo on sex is a productive as opposed to a repressive form of power, and it actively creates new forms of subjectivity. Against institutional tyranny and repressive power, thus, Le Guin engages her protagonists and readers alike in the networks of power, or circuits of social energy that are comprised in several cultural discourses and compose, consequently, a strong wall against any multicultural trends. At Pulefen Farm, Genly Ai has been constantly injected with drugs, weakened on both limbs and will and cast in hunger and cold as a means of domestication, not interrogation. Estraven, later explains that domesticating implies, "Rendering you docile by a forced addiction to one of the orgrevy derivatives" – a practice not unknown in Karhide, or "carrying out an experiment on you and the others" – testing "mind changing drugs and techniques on prisoners in the Farms" (LHD 186).

Out of Pulefen Farm, Genly Ai's escape has been calculated and executed by the one person he mostly distrusts and suspects. Estraven risks his life again for the sake of Genly Ai. Obliged to turn to enemies, rather than friends, Estraven has to buy Ai's life – bribing, blackmailing, disguising himself and even forging papers to be allowed into the so-called prison – himself already reported as a traitor and threatened with arrest at any moment. Carrying Genly Ai in a bag over his shoulders as a dead corpse, Estraven succeeds in his mission. Perceptive and sharp-sighted, Estraven is able to realize that difference does not preclude interconnectedness and integration. He tells Ai, "Mr. Ai, we've seen the same events with different eyes; I wrongly thought they'd seem the same to us" (188), and finds it strange that "I am the only man in all Gethen that has trusted you

entirely, and I am the only man in Gethen that you have refused to trust" (189). Apologizing and admitting self-delusion and blindness, Genly Ai begins another phase of the quest for self-knowledge and understanding. He can now resolve the paradox of opposition and unity and can, very much like Estraven, overcome the invincible barriers that he has erected for himself. "The irony is that in their realization that opposition does not necessarily imply impenetrable boundaries, they erect barriers between themselves and their society. Their perception of balance is an appreciation of differences" (Sinclair 64-5). Both Genly Ai and Estraven are now criminals by law – one is a threatening invader from outer space, the other a traitor to his native society. In fact, "both man and technology are defeated; survival of the fittest is not a matter of guts or guile, but rather of adaptation, of knowing the limits of self and others, of reaching other minds, communicating with them but not coercing them" (Slusser 11).

But in order to overcome all his misconceptions and prejudices Genly Ai is bound to confront the sexual barrier between himself and Estraven in particular, and himself and the Gethenians in general. This confrontation bids Ai finally deal with his own problems of sexuality and gender identity, which have been projected throughout the novel and have unconsciously led to his unjust growing distrust of Estraven and the Gethenians due to "sense of effeminate intrigue" (LHD 8), "effeminate deviousness" (14) and "the soft subtle femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him" (12). In the caravan en route to Pulefen Farm, Ai tries to hide from a prisoner who is attracted to him. At the Farm he has "a certain feeling of being a man among women, or among eunuchs" (176). Unable to ignore Estraven's double sexuality and biased by his knowledge of the ambisexual Gethenians, Genly Ai is forced to question a whole history of patriarchal authority and sexist culture when he is enclosed with Estraven inside the tent, on their way to cross the border in the chapter entitled (On Ice) considered the most pivotal in the novel. For Le Guin, the use of Genly Ai as a "naïve male narrator is a deliberate authorial outreach to male readers who would reject an androgynous central character particularly in a book written by a woman"(Chee).

Le Guin's invention of an ambisexual society is, in fact, "another blurring of boundaries" wherein "the figure of the androgyne

itself connotes a kind of balance, or at least a kind of ambiguous reality" designating "our sexual preoccupations which stem from our earliest days" (Selinger 64). Hauling a sledge across an ice-sheet in the deadening cold of winter, hungry, overstrained, anxious, Genly Ai is overwhelmed by Estraven's continual caring ordeals, offering him breakfast, lighting up the Chafe stove to keep him warm, and tyrannically insisting that he be "coaxed" into living. Genly Ai realizes how "he hated the harsh, intricate, obstinate demands that he made on [him] in the name of life" (LHD 232). More and more Ai finds himself craving the warmth of the tent "an enveloping, protecting ambiance" wherein "death and cold were elsewhere, outside", and "hatred was also left outside" (Ibid). But at this very moment, Genly Ai also happens to recognize that these very gestures of love emanate from "a gentle gaze" and "soft" and "vulnerable" face "as remote as the face of a woman" (234). Genly Ai could see now and for good "what (he) had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man", and that "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" (Ibid). Hence, a new kind of love evolves – a love that has become possible because Ai can now respect the other's reality and accept him as he is. The new relationship between Genly Ai and Estraven is one based on human qualities and not on gender roles.

In her feminist study, Laura Mulvey seeks to understand the processes and power relationships in culture which consistently represent women (and men) in socially idealized roles, using sexually idealized imagery. Mulvey's objective is consciously political, seeking to deconstruct the fundamental patriarchal conditions of phallocentricism. She explains: "the paradox of phallocentricism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (Mulvey 746). For Mulvey, phallocentricism is not merely the pre-eminence of the male sexual organ, but the symbolic and cultural pre-eminence of the gender male. Her analysis demonstrates how the ubiquity and centralization of the male gaze upon the female form is an outcome of significant psychological and cultural processes. Ursula K. Le Guin, like Mulvey, adopts feminist ideology, and like her, seeks to

deconstruct the male gaze and the incorporated dogmas of our society about female and male stereotypes. But she does not do that by adopting an all-woman community to the exclusion of all men. For her, that is another exclusion of an other (Lewis 159). In reply to a feminist attack on her all male protagonists and the masculine pronoun used for her ambisexual Gethenians, Le Guin says:

> One thing I seem to have dug up is this: the "person" I tend to write about is often not exactly, or not totally either a man or a woman. On the superficial level, this means there is little sexual stereotyping – the men aren't lustful and the women aren't gorgeous – and sex in itself is seen as a relationship rather than act. Sex serves mainly to define gender, and the gender of the person is not exhausted or even very nearly approached, by the label "man" or "woman". Indeed both sex and gender seem to be used mainly to define the meaning of "person" or of "self" (Introduction to Planet of Exile 143).

Le Guin asserts that the theme of her work is "marriage", i.e. marriage of contrasts, of dualities, of inner and outer, of self and other, of man and woman. Le Guin has a passion for balance and integration, for synthesis and community. Her feminism is not radical. French feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva calls for "an anarchical discourse for the liberation of women and men from the limitations of logocentricism and the authority of phallocentric symbolic order" (qtd.in Moi 13). A radical feminist position implies a literature in which femininity is extolled. But for Le Guin, sexuality is merely an integral part of a philosophy of binary systems. Her diction addresses men as well as women in a manner that is unconstrained by difficulties of sexual difference. She speaks "to liberal rather than misogynistic male readers, to readers who feel at ease with the kind of feminism that seeks to remove conflict and difference" (Lefanu 140).

Carl Gustav Jung substantiates the fact that all human beings are fundamentally alike. "We all have the same general tendencies and configurations in our psyche, just as well all have the same general kind of lungs and bones in our body. Human beings all look roughly alike; they also think and feel alike. And they are all part of the universe" (Le Guin "The Child and The Shadow" 63). Ego or individual consciousness of any person identifies with the individual

egos of other persons to form a mass mind or a "collective consciousness" which includes all the cults, creeds, fads, fashions, conventions, received beliefs, ideologies and all the hollow forms of communication and togetherness which lack real communion or real sharing. Other regions of the psyche which Jung calls "the collective unconscious" comprise true community, true love and true grace. But to get there, in Jungian terms, one must turn around and follow his shadow which is on the other side of our psyche. The shadow stands on the threshold between the conscious and unconscious mind. In it lies all the taboos, the repressions and suppressions of tendencies, desires and qualities wished for but socially unaccepted. Jung says: "Every one carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is" and adds "If he only learns to deal with his own shadow he has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in shouldering at least an infinitesimal part of the gigantic, unsolved social problems of our day" (Psychology 76,83). But because the shadow embodies whatever is inferior, primitive animal like, childlike, spontaneous and instinctive, each person has to learn to deal with his own shadow, to look inward into himself, into that part of himself, accept it and direct it. For the shadow is the guide. Without it, a human being is lifeless and uncontrollable. "Unadmitted to consciousness, the shadow is projected outward onto others. There's nothing wrong with me – it's them. I'm not a monster, other people are monsters. All foreigners are evil. All communists are evil. All capitalists are evil" (Le Guin "The Child and The Shadow" 64). Along those lines all others are evil. These others may be aliens, women or blacks.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Estraven demonstrates a proper handling of his 'shadow' by abandoning service to what he recognizes as an "insane" and "stupid" King (LHD 24). He says: "I'm not anyone's servant. A man must cast his own Shadow…." (25). In the eyes of the Commensals of Orgoreyn, Genly Ai, an alien from outer space, is evil and power-seeking. From Ai's own perspective, "each of them lacked some quality, some dimension of being , and they failed to convince. They were not quite solid. It was, I thought as if they did not cast shadows" (142). Unable to confront their inner darkness, Gethenians cannot proceed to Light. Unable to follow the guide, the

shadow, no one can achieve self-knowledge; no one can control the evil, the injustices, the grief and the suffering of the world.

Noticing that Genly Ai is a creature with a sexuality different from his, King Aggraven of Karhide is shocked at the idea of a society of human beings in permanent kemmer, and inquisitively remarks, "A society of perverts?" and adds, "it's a disgusting idea" concluding, "I don't see why human beings here on earth should want or tolerate any dealings with creatures so monstrously different?" (40). But the king draws attention to another shocking difference when he asks Ai, "Are they all as black as you?"(39). However, again and again Estraven reveals greater wisdom, better judgment, and higher ability to curb his prejudices and control his biases. Upon asking Ai about females of his kind and wondering if they form a different species, Ai's answer reveals absolute sexism and phallocentric bias, "the difference is very important. I suppose the most important thing, the heaviest single factor in one's life, is whether one's born male or female. In most societies it determines one's expectations, activities, outlook, ethics, manners-almost-everything . Vocabulary. Semiotic usages. Clothing. Even food" (223). Estraven could not then but wonder, "Equality is not the general rule, then? Are they mentally inferior?"(Ibid). Le Guin, thus, succeeds in denigrating the male gaze and raising awareness as to the unjustified inferiorized position of women in patriarchal society. By using a male protagonist, she is able to create a situation that conglomerates the presumingly insurmountable cultural differences between men and women – making the man, himself, shocked at his own shallowness, his own prejudice and his own hollowness. Brooding, Ai tells Estraven, "Perhaps you are obsessed with wholeness as we are obsessed with dualism" (222). But Estraven recapitulates, "Duality is an essential", but "So long as there is myself and the other" for "I and Thou:" would "go even wider than sex" (Ibid).

Le Guin's protagonist thus has embarked on a physical as well as psychic journey on his way to self-knowledge. She provides him, along the journey, with internal exploration as well as acceptance of the subconscious and collective conscience. "Le Guin thus illustrates the development of cultural relativism by permitting the reader to witness the maturity of the ethnographer" (Sinclair 55). Such maturity

is conditioned by practicing self-examination as well as overcoming egoism. By realizing the consequences of different cultural conditioning, Ai perceives the expression of differences as means of discovering underlying similarities. He conceives opposition as a means of relating not separating. He embraces the other.

Once the sexual barrier is dealt with, Ai and Estraven are able to cross over to the language barrier in order to reach further levels of communication and interconnectedness. Le Guin, thus, uses narration or story as an instrument to mediate duality and to create unity. Bittner points out how story becomes "a metalanguage that can carry meaning across linguistic and cultural barriers, and presumably across biological and psychological ones as well" (Bittner 4). Le Guin's method of narration throughout the whole novel is subservient to her purpose of achieving difference and diversity of cultures on a journey to overcome cultural barriers and reach mutual understanding and communication. A shift in choice of narrator from one chapter to the other, the use of several anecdotes from the past and the exploration of several names of persons, places as well as words serve to distance the reader and create alienness and otherness drawing him back again in a spiral or circular journey that encompasses dichotomies as public and private, community and individual, past and present, and their rhetorical mediations. "The narrator or main character often (in addition to being a teacher or anthropologist) has insider/outsider status, and he or she is often juxtaposed against aliens of one kind or another. Genly Ai, Estraven (and others) are all, to some degree, outsiders or aliens in their own cultures, and travel to other cultures where they are even more alien. Their difference – whether in their home culture or outside it – creates Le Guin's utopian dialectic" (Rochelle 149).

Naming, in the novel, is part of the narrative process. The Envoy is Ai's public designation (besides being known as the Mobile to the Ekumen); Mr. Ai is public and formal; Genly Ai is both public and personal; Genry is the private name used by Estraven. The multiple naming functions in individuation, an emblem of one's difference as well as unification, a token of intimacy and closeness. Estraven, on the other hand, has three names: Estraven is his public name; Harth is a private name; and Therem, is his most private name

- the one that Ai discovers through mindspeech. Le Guin's intent is to draw a sharp line between public identity for which the proper name signifies distinction and differentiation, and the private self whose name is genuine and therefore represents connection and integration. Jacques Derrida defines naming as "the narcissistic desire to make one's own 'proper' name 'common', to make it enter and be at one with the body of the mother tongue; and, at the same time, the oedipal desire to preserve one's proper name, to see it as the analog of the name of the father" (Derrida *Of Grammatology* IXXXIV). Hence, a merger of the mother principle suggesting fusion and connection and the father principle representing uniqueness and separation is attempted in the naming process which, accordingly, becomes a boundary blurring and boundary forming technique to highlight Le Guin's multicultural perspective.

George Steiner believes that "language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is" (217). Hence, Le Guin's coinage of new words is to offer a vision and an insight – a language of alternity to map new worlds and future utopias. Genly Ai explores the word "commensal" and "commensality" the root of which in Orgotta implies "to eat together". On a public level, it includes all national/governmental institutions of Orgoreyn. As an adjective, it describes the thirty-three component substates or districts, townships, communal farms, miners, factories, and so on, that compose these. In the form "the Commensals" means the thirty-three Head of Districts, who form the governing legislative and executive body of Orgoreyn. But it could also mean the citizens or the people themselves. "In this curious lack of distinction between the general and the specific applications of the word, in the use of it for both the whole and the part, the state and the individual, in this imprecision is its precisest meaning" (LHD 107).

Moreover "the Ekumen" is another ingredient of Le Guin's narrative. Genly Ai explains that the Ekumen which in the common tongue implies household and in Karhidish represents Hearth is in fact similar to the Commensal Government , "It is an attempt to unify the mystical with the political." "It is a society" that has "a culture" with "communication and cooperation" as essence. On another level, it is "a league or a union of worlds, possessing some degree of centralized

conventional organization" (132). Le Guin thus creates a global entity with multicultural traits. Diversity and difference are applauded within an interconnected and integrated whole. Politically, it functions through coordination whereby "decisions are reached by council and consent, not enforced by rule or command". Economically, it activates interworld communication "by keeping the balance of trade among the eighty-three worlds" (133,134). Le Guin's political, cultural and psychological insight enables her to create one word to signify a whole new concept. Above all, it is Le Guin's imaginative talent that dominates the entire narrative and probes into layers of possibility, probability and fantasy. "Only the imagination can get us out of the blind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesizing or pretending or discovering a way that reason can then follow into the infinity of options, a clue through the labyrinths of choice, a golden string, the story leading us to the freedom that is properly human, the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality" (Le Guin Dancing 45).

Le Guin creates yet another cultural interaction through language in "mind speech". Both Genly Ai and Estraven, en route to Karhide, joined and separated by a sledge travelling over an ice-cap that joins and separates Orogoreyn and Karhide, speak out their differences as well as their similarities. United by warmth, food and closeness inside the tent, both release emotional, sexual, political, and social views about their journey, the planet Winter and the Ekumen. Estraven bids Ai teach him mindspeech. Genly Ai explains how such language is a capacity that is both physiological as well as psychological. More importantly he compares it to "[a]bstract thought, varied social interaction, intricate cultural adjustment, esthetic and ethical perception" (LHD 237) all of which have to acquire a certain level of complexity, maturity and development before "[c]onnections can be made – before the potentiality can be touched at all" (Ibid). Yet, Ai, elaborates how even people of the Ekumen who possess a high culture with scientific techniques, high style of life, advanced philosophies and ethics often fail at mindspeaking due to mental darkness. Le Guin thus metaphorically presents the dilemma of the modern world through "mindspeech". People cannot communicate when they are unwilling to, when they are consumed by dualities and

oppsitions rather than connections and similarities. Selinger notices how "the space inside the tent, in which there is symbioses and communication with virtually no barriers, is totally separated from the rest of the world by the boundary created by the tent. The image – isolated and together – is the attempt to balance autism and symbiosis" (Selinger 73). Ai's and Estraven's use of mindspeech is a symbolic way of trying to attain, again, symbioses" (Ibid). very much like the autistic child who attempts to create a private world through a private language, the artist absorbs herself in her private world of fantasy, of utopian existence in order to fulfill her desire to perpetuate the "delusional omnipotent phase of mother – infant fusion – when mother was an extension of the self" (Mahler 297). Breaking down barriers between people and aiming to attain utopian balance, Le Guin wishes for "a collectivity untormented by sex or history" (Jameson 221), a symbiosis uninterrupted by separation. By giving Estraven the art of mindspeech, Ai concludes: "Estraven and I had simply arrived at the point where we shared whatever we had that was worth sharing" (LHD 233). Le Guin's linguistic discourse reveals amazing insight and conscious awareness of contemporary culture. Juxtaposing it with contemporary psychoanalytic discourse reveals her preoccupation with self harmony and her search for wholeness in the self as well as society. For that, like Derrida, she moves "beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing" (Derrida Choreographies 76).

Le Guin's discourse also engages in the rhetoric of Chinese philosophy. As second-wave feminist thought has worked on the philosophical underpinnings of women's oppression, the question of binaries and superior/inferior oppositions has been a lasting focus.And since Taoism is so apparently thoroughly binary, Le Guin's long fidelity to its imagery and its paradigms has collected some serious flak along with simple explorations and explanations (Kelso). Still on ice, Ai draws in Etraven's notebook the yin-yang symbol. Admiring Estraven's personality as a wholesome being who embraces others and sacrifices for the good of mankind, Ai uses the yin-yang circle wherein "yin" which is the passive female principle of the universe

associating the female with the earth, dark, cold, moon, shade is contrasted with "yang" denoting male, sun, warmth, light … He explains the sign to Estraven: "It is yin and yang. Light is the left hand of darkness … how did it go ? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself. Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow" (LHD 252). Descending from Taoist beliefs that are at the heart of Le Guin's narrative, the yin-yang symbol stands for unity and spontaneity of nature. Dualities are enclosed in one circle. Sequency and simultaneity, though opposing concepts, can be unified. Taoist principles imply that within "one entity is always contained its other" and "that there are no true opposites but that all possibilities are contained within one" (Gogell 157). Taoism is paradoxically defined as a combination of being and numbering, named and nameless, action and non-action, being and becoming. It is, in the words of Watson, "the underlying unity that embraces man, Nature, and all that is in the universe" (6).

Again and again Le Guin engages in a rhetorical narrative that is sufficed with persuasive discourse and symbolic action to disseminate cultural walls, to deconstruct stereotyped images of binary opposition and to achieve a world without barriers, without prejudices. The network of oral imagery in the novel strengthens Le Guin's fusion of self and other. As much as eating habits and eating disorders, particularly in feminist literature, is an indication of self-control and autonomy, the novel abandons with images of being engulfed, overwhelmed, drowned and devoured – a sense of losing self – boundaries. Karhide is a land where they eat "four meals a day … along with a lot of adventitious nibbling and gobbling in between … I had got used to eating, as it seemed, every few minutes" (LHD 10). Notably, the operation of satiation and starving is skillfully administered by Le Guin to run parallel to the protagonist's evolution into self-knowledge and love of others. Genly Ai is invited to dinner at Estraven's house in the beginning of the novel at Karhide where the meal was 'superb', followed by "hot beer". Later in Orgoreyn, he is also invited to lunch with Commensals Obsle and Yegey and others where "the buffet was enormores, eighteen or twenty hot and cold dishes, mostly variations on sube-eggs and breadapple" (129). As soon as Ai develops and acquires more insight on his journey on ice, he

becomes hungry "constantly hungry, daily hungrier" and waking up "out of hunger" (228). Breakfast is only "a mug of boiling hot orsh, and one cube of gichy-michy expanded by hot water into a sort of small, doughy ban "which they chewed slowly, solemnly, retrieving all dropped crumbs" (228). On the fortieth day, connection and communication with Estraven complete, Ai almost starved, "though half rations" under Estraven's pressure to keep him alive (241).The more self-aware Ai becomes and the more perceptive he grows, the less food he is inclined to eat. Moreover, Estraven who is conscious of difference in metabolic rate between himself and Genly Ai, provides the latter with "a couple of ounces more food per day" in a most scrupulous "housewifely or scientific" manner (228). Even in this minor detail of food–ration calculation, Le Guin delivers a message of the celebration of difference and equality; individuation and unity; duality and wholeness; distinctiveness and sameness, separation and symbioses; isolation and togetherness. Orality becomes a metaphor of identity. Le Guin manipulates food imagery to designate a whole concept of diversity within unity.

That Le Guin uses fiction and science as her mode of writing is another conscious connection, another mediation of binary opposition, another manoeuvre to create multicultural communities. For science and fiction are often considered at odds, the former rational, the latter irrational. But it is in this junction of the two that Le Guin's rhetoric becomes most persuasive. "One of the essential functions of science fiction, I think, is precisely this kind of question-asking: reversals of a habitual way of thinking, metaphors for which our language has no words for [sic] as yet, experiment in imagination" (Le Guin "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" 159). Such science for Le Guin is more explanation than technology. It connects the reader with reality, with space and time. Fiction, on the other hand, distances the reader from his own world. Together, they delineate human beings who live in the universe as seen by modern science, and in the world as transformed by modern technology. Hence, most of Le Guin's protagonists are scientists, namely anthropologists or ethnologists who study the natures of different cultures. Her scientists develop technological tools for enhancing communication such as a faster-than-light spaceships, or Genly Ai's device called ansible which

makes communication across distances of light years instantaneous. Nearly all her inhabitants have special abilities for communication such as mind speech. The novel focuses on the significance of diplomacy, as Genly Ai is an Envoy from the Ekumen to the planet Gethen, to attempt a balance between the conflicting needs of the human community. Generally, her plots revolve round journeys of self-knowledge of the other. Le Guin exploits the science fiction genre to create new communities where the individual embraces the other, and love and sharing become the dominant values. Thomas Remington illustrates the themes common to most of Le Guin's novels: "The loneliness of the self, the impossibility of understanding the self except through its relationship with the other, and the human need to establish that relationship through reaching out to the other in love" (Remington 28-41). Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* could finally see the friendship rising between himself and Estraven as victory over preconceptions and alienation – "a friendship so much needed by us both in our exile, and already so well proved in the days and nights of our better journey, that it might as well be called, now as later, love. But it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likeness, but from the difference, that the love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge across what divided us" (LHD 235). Thus, in addition to politics and science, Genly Ai's and Estraven's journey on ice becomes a rich and complex story of love and friendship. According to Lefanu, "the intensity of light and whiteness is transformed into a heart of darkness, while the death-dealing extremes of nature force a reappraisal of what it means to be human and alive"(140).

Le Guin's "thought experiment" is also a scientific argument, "a heuristic device" whereby she "eliminated gender to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human. It would define the area shared by men and women alike" (Le Guin "Is Gender Necessary?" 163). The scientific method applied in creating the androgynous Gethenians of the planet Winter in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, however imaginary, gives rise to a powerful rhetorical debate about sex roles that has greatly accredited the novel. By a utopian exclusion of the problematics of sex, Le Guin offers an alternative viewpoint. The statement, "The King is pregnant" (LHD

99) is loaded with cultural subversion. "Her alternative planets, from which emissaries report back like space-age anthropologists, are thought-experiments to probe the present, not prediction or extrapolation about the future" (Jaggi). On the other hand, "the physician from Sassinoth" summoned to attend to Genly Ai's sickness upon arrival to Karhide after his painful journey is described as having "a young serious face, not a man's face and not a woman's [but] a human face" (279) is evidence of the deconstructionist effect of Le Guin's experimental scientific approach. Genly Ai accepts the other no longer as alien, but as human. Estraven, on the other hand, finds Genly Ai "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", and adds, "We are equals at last, equal, alien, alone" (221). Equality is finally achieved despite the difference and inspite of the duality. Estraven repeats the words of Tomer's lay:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> and darkess 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 (LHD 222).

Le Guin uses myth as another tool on her journey of creating an alternative society and a multicultural community. But Le Guin's purpose is to overcome binary opposition, this time between the conscious and the unconscious realms. Yet, she bristles at the idea that she could be labeled a "mythpoetic writer" (Freedman 134). Le Guin's myths are social facts, "not something that can be created exnihilo in an author's mind" (Collins). For her, myths are used "for the purpose of gaining understanding of what it means to be fully human" (Prophets and Mirrors 112). Science fiction makes use of the mythmaking faculty by attempting to explain a world profoundly changed by science and technology. Janice Antczak finds that science fiction "gives clear expression to the interconnectedness of myth and literature" in that "the conventions of the science fiction story express the mythic archetypes of the quest in the idiom of the space age" (Antczak 3). In her rhetorical use of myth in science fiction to create an alternative culture, Le Guin creates two myths, that of the hero and

the quest, and that of utopia. The former represents a paradigm of human development wherein the individual undergoes growth of self, maturity and coming of age, an end of his journey and a final return. The latter is concerned with the community and how to recapture the mythic perfect world, the Golden Age or the Lost Eden, and to express the perennial human longing for an ideal society. In both cases, Le Guin is inverting mythical convention and revising old myths in order to create a mythology for the future. As such, Le Guin creates multicultural myths which seek to deconstruct archetypal images inherent in all of us and to dispel the dragons that blindfold the individual and lock him up in total darkness. Le Guin's plots of "spiral structure" (Freedman 139) are journeys to highlight difference in unity and to explore emancipatory possibilities that awaken the reader "from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live" (138).

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly Ai is the protagonist who embarks on a journey to the outer world, to the ice, to the planet Winter where he is separated from his original community to explore other ways of living. The protagonist's psychic or spiritual maturity is achieved, guided by Estraven, the adrogyne as coach, friend, teacher and double, where he overcomes all barriers: cultural, sexual, linguistic and political. Finally, he attains spiritual enlightenment at the end of his journey by accepting Estraven's genderlessness and acquiring love and friendship. When his fellows arrive on the starship upon Karhide's acceptance of the new treaty Ai, declares, "It is a marvelous thing … the coming to a new world, a new mankind" (LHD 280). Noel describes the coming-of age pattern as "the history of self-emancipation of the ego struggling to free itself from the powers of the conscious to hold its own against overwhelming odds" (206) while Henderson calls it "the development of the individual's ego-consciousness" (112). Though the hero is a man, Le Guin makes his spiritual enlightenment a reconciliation of opposites, of light and darkness and of masculinity and femininity.

The utopian myth as used by Le Guin, on the other hand, is modified into a feminist science utopia. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin does not suggest that in many years ahead, people will be androgynes. Rather she reimagines the utopian myth and rethinks it in

feminist terms to draw a more wholesome utopia that embraces women and men alike on equal footing. Such a utopian society would reject binary thinking and celebrate co-operations and collaboration. Rosalyn Haynes describes the goal of such a society as "the establishment of communities … capable of nurturing individuals in their individual freedom" (22) and West adds that such a society will be based on "nonmarket – values – love, service to others", a "love ethic" (16). Le Guin selects both the heroic myth and the utopian myth to create a new mythology for the future wherein the individual, morally responsible for himself and others, capable of love and cooperation, thrives in a multicultural community that celebrates diversity within unity. However, Le Guin's approach to myth is filtered through feminist thought wherein connection is considered a female characteristic. "In this context the science fiction novel provides a forum for fictionalizing frightening possibilities as well as utopian dreams" (Armitt 10).

The novel closes as it opens, with borders, but no barriers. Ai's mission is successful. The Ekumen extends its borders between Karhide and Orgoryen. The competition between the two countries comes to an end as they merge into one large entity. The political boundaries that separate them dissolve. Similarly, the cultural, sexual and linguistic boundaries between Genly Ai and Estraven are overcome. Ai succeeds in his mission and Estraven pays his life for the cause. Ai visits Estraven's family to narrate the latter's heroic achievement, clear his reputation, and declare the revocation of his banishment and exile. He also welcomes the arrival of his fellows from the Ekumen who appear to him, now, strange "men and women", "of two different species: great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in rut, in kemmer …" (LHD 279). Le Guin reminds her readers that the union of Genly Ai and Estraven is just a beginning. The fact that they are separated again by death raises questions as to the possibility of it all. Is it true that a total embrace of the other can take place? Is truth only a matter of the imagination? Can the individual self merge within other selves and fulfill its moral responsibility to others through love and sharing? Can the modern community with its Western hegemony accept cultural diversity and national identity without pressure or repression?

World cultural homogenization typified in the global village has led to the emergence of the concept of multiculturalism – a term that both constitutes the assimilation and integration of ethnic minority groups into Western culture and meanwhile addresses challenges posed by the growth of conflict and violence associated with ethnic difference. The events of September 11,2001, and the succession of conflicts and policy shifts following them have broadly changed world affairs. Hegemony, sovereignty and political governance have yielded to new tensions and new problems on the social and cultural levels of life.

Critiques of multiculturalism imply that positive support of cultural diversity is not universal. Advocates of the concept acknowledge the existence of cultural diversity and ensure the rights of individuals to retain their culture and also enjoy full access and participation in constitutional rights and values prevailing in a society. Reducing pressures and eliminating social, racial, sexual and cultural inequality is enrichment for society as a whole from this point of view.

Critics against multiculturalism, on the other hand, argue that celebrating cultural diversity fosters highly divisive social conflicts. Besides, multiculturalism is anti-progressive. Acceptance of ethnic diversity and equality of all cultures denies the supremacy and hegemony of more advanced ones. On another level, the foundations of Western Civilization are threatened by the implementation of multicultural policies. Inclusion of alternative educational perspectives and different social practices undermine Western leadership. The existence of different cultures and diversified attitudes in one and the same culture, also lead to lack of trust between members of a community. Finally, gender problematic evolves as feminists refuse the acculturation of women into inferiority by several ethnicities wherein religion and educational patterns foster female denigration.

Because Ursula K. Le Guin believes that multiculturalism is the solution to previously mentioned problems and not their cause, *The Left Hand of Darkness* becomes a perfect demonstration of a cultural diversity that embraces the other and resists isolation and separation. The image of two men pulling a sledge over an ice cap – "isolated and together" becomes the central idea of the novel. That Genly Ai the Envoy from the Ekumen has a mission to bid the planet

Gethen (including both its countries – Karhide and Orgoreyn) to join in order to communicate with the rest of mankind is a case in point. That this implies a sharing of material profit, an increase in knowledge and the enrighment of harmony and delight to all humanity without any enforcement of rule or suppression of values furnishes the ground for the novelist's position and her adamant support of the multicultural process.

Hence, the protagonist embarks on a journey that is both physical and psychological. Assuming the role of anthropologist or scientist who records cultural differences, he becomes an outsider or an alien to the new society. He also confronts beings different from himself in dress, in eating habits, in manner of speech and above all, in sexuality. As such, they are also aliens from another perspective. Le Guin thus points out that there is no absolute truth. Every truth is subject to revision and to another perspective. Again and again the novelist points out the need to ask questions. Alienness, isolation and separation are introduced in the opening chapters of the novel coupled by the severe coldness of weather, all of which give rise to a hostile universe. But escorting the protagonist is a guide, teacher, coach or double, who believes in his cause and the mission for the good of Mankind. Distrust and fear of difference on the part of the envoy complicate his journey. Karhidish rejection of progress in the name of a mission from outer space threatens the envoy's mission. Similarly, lack of perception from the Orgotta government results in the envoy's imprisonment. Both the protagonist and his escort, former primeminister of Karhide, are now rejected and expelled, the one dangerously prosecuted, the other accused of treason. Cut-off from their original society and yet drawn to each other by isolation and symbioses – they are bound to accept each other, participate in several rituals and share various experiences through their physical journey. Their psychological journey, on the other hand, enforces their connection and co-operation. The white cold of the ice world drives Ai and Estraven into the warmth of human solidarity. Symbolically, stripped of their shadows, they discover how small their differences are. Jungian analysis validates this point. Imprisoned, tortured, drugged and interrogated, the envoy despairs. It is only when the pain and suffering of his fellows mirrors his own, that he comes to realize

the commonality of humanity within different races and cultures. Michel Foucault's interpretation of the apparatuses of surveillance and discipline as totalizing discourses of power are quite illustrative. The liberation of the self is conceivable only in terms of freedom from fixed preconceptions. Liberation implies exposing social and cultural historical assumptions which seek to fix and rigidify the relationship between power and its subjects. Hence, rejection of the other emanates from a will to power and to supremacy.

Rescued by the only man who believed in his mission, the envoy cannot but break the barriers that have blocked their communication. Le Guin's commitment to feminism emerges through her creation of the androgynous Gethenians who embody both female and male sexuality, and are therefore ambisexual. Her contribution to feminist thought is expressed in this alternative view point of humanity comprising beings equal in social roles, in freedom, in responsibility, in self-esteem and in all legal and economic issues. By deconstructing female stereotypes and eliminating gender, Le Guin creates a world without prejudice and without alienness. Inside the tent on ice, Genly Ai and Estraven share views about Karhide, the Ekumen, self and other. Enveloped with Estraven's caring rituals, his compassion and his overall understanding of Ai's difference, the latter could not but accept him as he is – a woman as well as a man. Only then does the paradox of sameness and difference, symbioses and separation begin its course of resolution. The love and friendship that have emerged between the two, however, are not products of similarity but rather of difference. The new relationship is based on human qualities rather than gender characteristics.

But the journey to self-knowledge entails also the crossing of the linguistic barrier which Le Guin has masterfully exploited to underline isolation and difference as well as togetherness and unity throughout the novel. Naming as a means of identification is also boundary forming as well as boundary blurring. The multiple names of both the envoy and Estraven signify an inner tendency for closeness and intimacy underneath an external cover of separation. The balance between the two achieves communication and connection. Le Guin further coins words which serve as metaphor for what language has no words for. Refusing a language of dualities and opposition, words like

the "Ekumen", "commensality" compromise union as well as individuation. Mindspeech is another narrative technique that Le Guin employs to replace public language with a more private speech. As such it is conditioned by a heightened degree of sensibility shared by both sender and receiver. Le Guin transcends limiting and distorting categorization wherein a purely public speech impairs the sense of self. In order to create a community that celebrates diversity in unity, Le Guin speaks a language of alternity, of contradiction and of counter – factuality where no truths are given but only questions are asked. Oral imagery, an indication of satiation, and starvation is metaphorically used to signify the gradual development of the protagonist's self-knowledge and evolution into final wholeness. Le Guin's language becomes thus a connection between past and present, present and future, dream and reality, conscious and unconscious. Hers is a language of options and alternatives – a language that expresses scientific hypothesis as well as aesthetic narrative.

Choosing science fiction as a genre is another perfect medium for transcending dualities – male/female, light/dark, winter/summer, cold/warmth, isolation/connection, self/other. Science serves to give rational explanations and to connect the reader with space and time. Fiction distances the reader from his own world. Together, they transfer an inhabitant of the world of modern technology to other fantastic realms providing him with advanced tools of communication and sophisticated experiments. The end result is not one of certainty but of speculation.

The yin-yang symbol common to Taoist philosophy is an expression of the warring powers of the universe. The two halves in a circle appear in unstable balance but are still enclosed within the same boundary. Hence, all existence is seen as a composite of complementary opposites and life is in a state of continuous change and transformation. Le Guin's adoption of Taoist philosophy is central to the *Left Hand of Darkness*. The warring dualities in the novel – male and female, being and becoming, essence and change, self and other are not only presented but are disseminated and integrated. Admitted by Ai himself whose psychological transformation becomes complete by the end of the novel, Estraven is yin and yang – two in one – a symbol of wholeness.

Both the heroic and utopian myths are also selected by Le Guin as another resolution of binary opposition along the individual journey of exploration of the self-knowledge process. In order to reach spiritual enlightenment the protagonist undergoes transformation. The actualization of the adult self parallels his physical journey. It also metaphorically symbolizes the final reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious. That gender is a force in the quest demonstrates Le Guin's feminist revisioning of the myth. The final enlightenment is an acceptance of the other, a subversion of patriarchal truth. The utopian myth, on the other hand, is a critique of the contemporary world. In order to recapture the perfect world or the lost Eden, Le Guin's protagonist is bound to reject binary thinking and embrace cultural diversity. Feminist science fiction utopia is rhetorical, persuasive and subvertive.

Le Guin's novel avoids closure. Questions are asked. Connections are made possible. Alternatives are suggested. That two people have overcome barriers to communication and have created mutual understanding is an indication of the capacity of achieving greater freedom, cooperation and connection on international levels. Readers are bound to question the nature of self, the nature of the other and the nature of culture. The reader is forced to see anew and to create anew. Acceptance of the other implies chances for a better future – a future wherein people interact and cooperate in a multicultural community founded on love, sharing and respect. In a time as critical as our contemporary time in the twenty-first century with all its super advanced technology and highly sophisticated communication and information systems, and in a world as explosive as our globalized world with its competing economics, its power-seeking politicians and its fragmented souls and fractured communities, it lies in our hands to patch our differences and bridge any gaps that separate and isolate peoples of the world. Whether the differences are racial, sexual, religious or cultural, we can either transform the future into an imminent disaster that wreaks havoc upon all humanity, or make our days to come meaningful, peaceful and enlightening. It is definitely our choice to unite in togetherness and wholeness to reject all attempts of destructive competition and alienation. Denying affinity with the other will only project hatred and

revolution and can merely enforce the permanent hierarchy of superior and inferior in a power relationship that precludes equality and democracy. James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, accuses "preachers of hate", "irresponsible mass-media", and "politicians" who seek to exploit fear for the political advantage of precipitating terrorism, economic stress and social dislocation (11). With the contemporary acceleration of the Muslim – West crises, Le Guin's warning, however complacent, becomes an alarming signal for those who will listen to her voice and read between her lines. In the words of John Esposito, founding director of the Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU), "we all have a stake in marginalizing preachers of hate. They are a minority that we in the majority, who have more in common than we have differences, can no longer afford to ignore or tolerate in building our shared future" (11).

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