

“Does Not Fempute”: A Critique Of Liberal And Radical Feminism In Three Novels By  
Ursula K. Le Guin

by

Catherine Hynes

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## Abstract

Ursula K. Le Guin is often called a feminist science fiction author. Drawing on such theorists as bell hooks and R. W. Connell, I analyze three novels by Le Guin from a social constructivist feminist perspective. I discuss *The Dispossessed* as it relates to gender and the family in utopian writing, *The Lathe of Heaven* with respect to gender and race, and *Lavinia* and gender within the context of the overall trajectory of Le Guin's writing. I conclude that these novels depict gender in ways that often essentialize identity, whether the novels' presentations of gender align with liberal or radical feminist ideas, and sometimes represent characters more conservatively than the label "feminist author" might imply. I propose that Le Guin's status as a feminist writer requires more specific qualification that accounts for the variety of beliefs in existence in contemporary feminist discourse.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In an essay discussing Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Samuel R. Delany writes,

in so conventionalized a discourse as fiction (and science fiction has almost all the conventions of mundane fiction as well as a panoply of its own), we have the choice of saying precisely what we want to say (which requires a massively clear vision and intense analytical energy), or saying what everyone else has said (which is what happens either when vision fades, analysis errs, or energy fails). There *is* no middle ground (294).

He states this while analyzing the homophobic characterization of one particular character in the novel, a treatment Delany argues arises from a “reading of the text [that] is *not* the one Le Guin intended” (293). Yet such a reading exists. In the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” world we inhabit, as bell hooks describes it, many fictional works draw upon prejudiced stereotypes and conventions that can be socially damaging (*Will to Change* 29). Many of the things that “everyone else has said” (Delany 294) are complicit in the system bell hooks labels with such a powerfully illustrative, condemnatory name. Delany's discussion of the way in which fiction offers “the choice of saying precisely what we want to say” (294) is particularly relevant for the imagined worlds of science fiction and fantasy, where the social problems of modern societies are often remedied or exacerbated, specifically because these are imagined worlds; they do not necessarily have to mimic the world as it currently exists, “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and all (29).

The idea that imagined worlds in science fiction and fantasy do not need to reflect the ills of the world in which they were created can be found expressed by both creators and consumers of science fiction and fantasy works. The television writer Jane Espenson, who worked on such shows as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Battlestar Galactica*, remarks in an interview: “if we can't write diversity into sci-fi, then what's the point? You don't create new worlds to give them all the same limits of the old ones” (“TV Mastermind”). A commenter on *The Mary Sue*, a popular culture and gaming blog, expresses frustration at claims to realism being used to defend sexist imagined worlds in video games:

We can create a fantasy or sci-fi or steampunk or any non-REALITY setting where you can fling fireballs with the snap of your fingers, or beat up mythical dragons with your bare fists, or come across aliens turning your entire species into garden mulch just so they can use said mulch to make more of themselves, or hurl laserbeam light swords and wield powers of Chi and psionics and matter-creation beyond destructive reckoning, and we're supposed to swallow all of that wholesale and without question. Yet, egalitarian societies, or equality in the treatment of men and women is somehow unbelievable, pushing the limit of reasonability. (Devijja n.p.)

As a reader of such media myself, the above sentiments strike a chord for me. It seems to be far too frequent that science fiction or fantasy worlds rely on stereotypical, implicitly or explicitly prejudiced portrayals of society.

Ursula K. Le Guin has often attempted to build new fictional worlds in her works so as to challenge stereotypical thinking found in the material world. Her writing spans decades, genres, and forms, but she is best known for her science fiction and fantasy novels and stories. Le Guin has garnered much critical attention for her works' political engagement, in particular for her interest in and representation of feminism and gender. Her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), set on a planet where the inhabitants can be male, female, or neither, depending on their mating cycle, has led to a lively debate about "how well Le Guin did or did not depict this androgynous culture" (Clarke 60); many of her other works have also received attention from critics interested in gender. She has also expressed the importance of race in her works, including her outrage at the Sci Fi Channel's "Earthsea," a miniseries adaptation of her 1968 fantasy novel *A Wizard of Earthsea*— whose "protagonist is Ged, a boy with red-brown skin" ("Whitewashed Earthsea" 1)— that cast a white actor in the lead role. She comments, "Whites of course have the privilege of not caring, of being 'colorblind.' Nobody else does" ("Whitewashed Earthsea" 2). Le Guin, then, often writes her worlds in an attempt to address social problems and wishes to preserve the elements of her texts that do so.

Le Guin's commitment to reimagining the world through a potentially progressive lens, however, does not mean that her works present a perfected, harmonious vision of social justice. Indeed, such perfection is impossible given the varying social interests and visions of the future that exist. In this project, I offer a particular feminist reading of three of Le Guin's works, examining some of their inconsistencies and analyzing the works' depiction of gender and other categories of identity, such as race. Part of what spurred this project is that many Le Guin works have been recommended to me as feminist-

friendly reading material, and such recommendations raise questions about what kind of feminism Le Guin represents, and whether she can be found relevant to more recent feminist thought given the span of her career, and given that many of her most famous works were written several decades ago. A blog post discussing Le Guin's career describes her as "something of a goto name for someone who wants to make sure their list of Great Science Fiction includes something, anything, by a woman: she's white, she has by now become a big name and is award-winning and Taken Seriously" (Mary n.p.). This comment suggests that Le Guin is a palatable submission to the "list of Great Science Fiction" and perhaps therefore not particularly subversive. This thesis is my attempt to discover to what extent this idea – of Le Guin as either a potentially feminist or potentially conservative figure – is helpful or accurate.

To begin, several definitions will be necessary for discussing Le Guin's works. I will be working with the concept of liberal feminism, which Rosemarie Tong describes as the "wish to free women from oppressive gender roles –that is, from those roles used as excuses or justifications for giving women a lesser place, or no place at all, in the academy, the forum, and the marketplace" (34). Chris Beasley writes, "in liberal feminist thought there is a focus on the public sphere, on legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals . . . Public citizenship and the attainment of equality with men in the public arena is central to liberal feminism" (51-2). I will also discuss Le Guin with respect to radical feminism, more specifically the branch of radical feminism that Tong calls "radical-cultural feminis[m]" (50) and that Beasley argues "gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into arenas of activity associated with men" (54). This type of feminism argues that women "should



not try to be like men” and that, instead, women should “try to be more like women, emphasizing the values and virtues culturally associated with women,” such as “sharing” and “community” (Tong 50). Both of these terms can apply to Le Guin’s works in varying degrees, for her own relationship with feminism shifts over the course of her career. I will use the definitions of both liberal and radical feminism provided in this introductory paragraph, among other critical approaches, such as those expressed by bell hooks and R. W. Connell, in the chapters to come.

In Chapter 2, I discuss gender and the state of the family in Le Guin’s 1974 novel *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. The novel depicts two contrasting societies, one capitalist, and one anarchist, on different planets. On Anarres, the anarchist colony organizes its children into nurseries and generally frowns at the nuclear family as such a family runs counter to the colony’s cause. The novel’s protagonist, Shevek, experiences the patriarchal nuclear family on a visit to Urras, the capitalist world, and grows to accept the value of such an institution in tandem with the established collectivized families of Anarres. I read this novel as it relates to the history of gender, family, and utopias, drawing on the work of Sidonie Smith and Lyman Tower Sargent to contextualize the gender essentialism found on Urras and the collectivized family found on Anarres. I conclude that, although Le Guin presents Shevek’s own nuclear-style family as a necessary addition to the available family structures on Anarres, one that works against totalitarian domination and dehumanization, the cultural context of *The Dispossessed* means that such a presentation undermines the allegedly radical nature of the anarchist society she depicts.

Whereas in Chapter 2 I focus on Le Guin's attempt to provide a middle ground between collectivized and patriarchal family structures, giving freedom to women and minimizing the dehumanizing effects of a totalitarian impulse, in Chapter 3, I analyze *The Lathe of Heaven's* critique of hegemonic masculinity. In this novel, a burly, bearded dream scientist manipulates a man, whose dreams can literally change the world, under the guise of therapy. William Haber, the psychotherapist, suggests to George Orr, the dreamer, under hypnosis, that he change reality for the better, and the dreams' changes often have unexpected or even disastrous results. I use R. W. Connell's discussion of multiple masculinities in this chapter in order to articulate the way in which Le Guin critiques the masculine desire for progress and control through Haber, whose version of masculinity becomes increasingly hegemonic as he hypnotically suggests to Orr things that institutionalize his power. She presents Orr, a passive, intuitive man, as the counterpart to Haber's hegemonic masculinity, as an alternative, supposedly non-hegemonic masculinity that could right the wrongs Haber introduces into the world. Orr, however, treats his lawyer and love interest, Heather, in a way that essentializes and fetishizes her multiracial identity, and the racial and gender politics surrounding Heather ultimately undermine Le Guin's potentially subversive treatment of masculinity.

Moving from Chapter 3's discussion of masculinity, femininity, and race, in Chapter 4, I read Le Guin's 2008 novel, *Lavinia*, as it relates to the overarching shifts in her feminist views. I incorporate the criticism of Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy and her subsequent addition to the trilogy, *Tehanu*, in order to contextualize Le Guin's gender politics in the novel, arguing that *Lavinia* represents a shift past *Tehanu*, involving some of the radical feminist perspectives she wrote in *Tehanu*, but also altering some of the

problematic gender essentialism that critics found in that work. *Lavinia*, a somewhat fantastical re-telling of a section of the *Aeneid* from the character Lavinia's perspective, offers a feminist revision of the tale of Aeneas and Lavinia's marriage. In it, Le Guin depicts characters who are invested in the hierarchy of the sexes in a critical light, and she presents the women's world as worthy of literary depiction and honour. *Lavinia* elaborates on the story of Lavinia's life, adding material that reaches past the end of the *Aeneid*, and argues for the value of a specifically female form of *pietas*, or religious virtue and duty. In this chapter, I discuss the way in which Le Guin's feminism incorporates both liberal and radical perspectives, like those found in the later Earthsea books. I posit that Le Guin's version of Lavinia's reluctance to express anger regarding her meagre depiction in the *Aeneid* and her treatment at the hands of her family limits the feminist value of Le Guin's retelling, and I conclude that the social order in the novel remains relatively damaging with respect to gender politics, and to female characters specifically.

By reading several of Le Guin's novels from my own particular feminist perspective, drawing primarily on the work of bell hooks and R. W. Connell, I determine that the recommendation of Le Guin's works as feminist comes with certain caveats. The above theorists represent part of the larger movement of social constructivist readings of gender, which questions binary assumptions and hierarchical interpretations of those binaries. Recommending Le Guin as a "feminist author" tends to assume that there is one specific version of feminism that prevails, that feminism is a monolith. In reality, a multiplicity of voices exist within feminism, as is demonstrated by such dissent as black feminist critiques of white feminism's limitations and oversights. Even the course of Le

Guin's career reveals that a label can apply in different ways at different times, as authors' views may – and indeed, often do – change over time. Furthermore, the three novels I read in this study offer a complicated portrait of science fiction's potential for challenging conceptions of gender specifically and identity more generally. Each of *The Dispossessed*, *The Lathe of Heaven*, and *Lavinia* reimagines some aspects of gender and identity, and represents other aspects more conventionally. Le Guin's works, broadly speaking, offer the opportunity to discuss feminist issues within a science fiction and fantasy framework. Whether or not the worlds Le Guin depicts seem radical, progressive, or conservative, depends on the point of view of any given reader. While Le Guin can be read as 'properly' feminist from a liberal feminist perspective in *The Lathe of Heaven* and *The Dispossessed*, her later work falls more into the category of radical-cultural feminism, and social constructivist readings such as mine will note tendencies to attribute behaviour to essentialist stereotypes in both Le Guin's earlier and later work.

## Chapter 2: Reconsidering The Utopian Family In *The Dispossessed*

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) depicts two contrasting societies: the dominant capitalist nation of A-Io on the planet Urras, and the anarchist society on Urras's moon, Anarres. As the novel's subtitle suggests, neither society is intended to represent perfection. Mario Klarer writes that Le Guin "is very cautious about idealizing [Anarres], and the reader is left with the sense of a utopian undertaking that includes corruption, hatred, and proprietarian attitudes" (117). *The Dispossessed*, then, offers readers a complex portrait of an imagined society on Anarres, one that is not meant to operate as a blueprint,<sup>1</sup> but to show both desirable and less desirable aspects of that society. In this portrait, there are elements of Anarresti society that are purportedly positive, such as a stated commitment to gender equality, but Le Guin also shows the society's calcification into a less-than-revolutionary complacency. One of the elements in *The Dispossessed* that exemplifies this complexity is the family, especially as it relates to gender. Although Anarresti families are meant to be gender egalitarian and non-possessive, the ideology surrounding the family on Anarres still poses some problems. Le Guin's novel critiques the collectivized family—a staple of utopian writing and a structure that exists on Anarres – as well as the more traditional patriarchal family type found on Urras. The novel also attempts to construct a more balanced—though not rigid—family unit, one that expresses a particular vision of gender equity while maintaining freedom of choice for its fictional society.

## 2.1 - Utopian Families: Collectivism, Mizoran Mothers, and More

*The Dispossessed* follows in the footsteps of many utopian texts in trying to envision a new structure for the family. Bryce J. Christensen, in a polemical, and even reactionary religious piece, usefully summarizes the ways in which “most . . . utopians” depict societies where “recognizable family life disappears” (3).<sup>2</sup> He traces this tendency to Plato, whose *Republic* “established the predominant pattern on [the] question” (3) of family. Christensen details “Plato’s plan” (3), which, he explains, “requires that rulers share their wives in common and that child rearing be completely collectivized” (3). He claims that, in Plato’s vision, “Even in those matters where basic biology prevents complete equality –conception and childbearing—the traditional family no longer prevails” (4). Although Christensen clearly writes from a non-scholarly, particularly biased standpoint, where he aims to defend “the family . . . against the further advance of utopia” (12-3), his comments on Plato’s *Republic* offer insight into the historical roots of utopian family structures. Plato, though he “concedes the common view that in most pursuits ‘a woman is inferior to man’, . . . is willing to go far in his utopian state to promote gender equality” (3). This vision includes “collectivized” (3) childcare and a more equitable distribution of labour, for “women ‘share in the toils of war and the defense of their country’” (4). Thus, an early literary precedent is set for the utopian vision of family and gender.

Christensen also discusses the state of the family in more recent utopian writing, arguing that in texts such as Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888), William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1891), and B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two* (1948) “the utopian impulse . . . turns against the family” (7). He focuses on how these works

alter the family in ways that “[shift] . . . the relationship between the sexes” (5) and seek “to end the economic dependence of women upon men” (6). He also details the family in these utopian texts as it relates to offspring, noting of *Walden Two* that “parents do not raise their own children” (7). Christensen interprets these alterations to the family as negative, for he writes from the antifeminist perspective of “resisting the false promises of utopia” (13) by reinstating “the truths . . . pronounced in Genesis” (13); he believes that the family ought to reflect the model given in the Bible (1). The authors of the works he attacks, though, endeavoured to depict societies that had improved upon the existing conditions of the family. Examining the history of the family in utopian writing reveals writers’ attempts to equalize the process of child rearing and to liberate women from historically oppressive circumstances. One of the important limitations of Christensen’s survey of utopian writing, however, is that it does not include any attention to women’s utopian writing. Christensen’s discussion of family and utopia reveals the interests of several utopian writers in addressing questions of gender equality and child rearing, but his examples do not include any writing by actual women.

Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora* (1880-81) is an example of a utopian work that is written by a woman and “predominantly read as a feminist utopia” (Broad 248). *Mizora*’s version of the family differs from the utopian works Christensen discusses in that, in the land of Mizora, men no longer exist. The family, then, is entirely defined by motherhood. As the Preceptress states when explaining the biological processes of reproduction in Mizora to Vera, the novel’s protagonist and visitor to the land of Mizora, “the MOTHER is the only important part of all life” (Lane 103). Vera notes that “The only intense feeling that [she] could discover among [the] people [of Mizora] was the love between

parent and child” (32). Although *Mizora* restructures the family by eliminating men from society, parent-child bonds are still strong, and the Mizoran version of the family is still deemed extremely important. Of course, as Katherine Broad discusses, there are many problematic aspects of Lane’s utopia. Among the “repressive visions of reproductive and social engineering that undermine the radical potential of the text” (Broad 247) that Broad identifies is the problem that “In *Mizora*, Lane reconfigures traditional female realms of domesticity and reproduction as sources of power and value, without questioning the supposition of women’s innate biological capacities for domesticity and maternity” (249). In other words, *Mizora*’s vision of the family restricts women through an “essentialist celebration of female biology” (249). That Lane is a female writer does not necessarily mean that her writing offers unproblematic feminist revisions to the family, for *Mizora* was written prior to what is generally considered the first-wave feminist movement, and as such belongs more to the American women’s movement of the nineteenth century (Tong 23).

A more recent female writer, Le Guin depicts the family in *The Dispossessed* in a collectivized structure on Anarres, and offers several layers of critique of that structure. The collectivized state of the family on Anarres is shown both in the protagonist’s, Shevek’s, childhood and his adulthood. Shevek’s past on Anarres is introduced with a scene in a nursery, where he lives at least part time with a “matron” and ten other babies (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 26). Shevek’s father, Palat, admits that Shevek will need, as the matron puts it, to be “take[n] . . . into the nursery full-time” (26); the matter-of-factness of this exchange shows that children often live in nurseries from a young age. Even if infants do not typically live in nurseries full time, they do so often enough that Palat’s



request does not cause more than a slight amount of concern. In fact, as Avery Plaw argues, “parents are encouraged to move their children as early as possible into dormitories to be raised collectively” (294). Indeed, Takver, Shevek’s partner and the mother of his child, encounters resistance when she continues to nurse Sadik, their daughter, “till she was three” during the drought: “But they disapproved, at the research station at Rolny. They wanted me to put her in the nursery there full time. They said I was being proprietarian about the child and not contributing full strength to the social effort in the crisis” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 319). Takver’s comment, though, that “They were right, really” (319), indicates that Anarresti ideology dictates the importance of collective kinship over the nuclear family, and that families are expected to place young children in nurseries, especially if the collective good is threatened.

Part of this expectation grows out of the Anarresti belief in anti-“propertarian” (319) values. Both parents and children are encouraged to divorce themselves from possessive views of family. This attitude is embedded in the Anarresti language, Pravic: “The singular forms of the possessive pronoun in Pravic were used mostly for emphasis; idiom avoided them. Little children might say ‘my mother,’ but very soon they learned to say ‘the mother’” (58). Moreover, children’s notions of familial bonds often encompass a larger group of people than the nuclear family; rather than a child considering one person “his” or “her” parent, a footnote on the word “*tadde*” (47) explains that “A small child may call any adult *mamme* or *tadde*. Gimar’s *tadde* may have been her father, an uncle, or an unrelated adult who showed her parental or grandparental responsibility and affection” (47). It is the relationship as it is defined by “responsibility and affection” (47) that matters in Anarresti conceptions of the family, not simple blood ties. Moreover,

children and parents alike are not to conceive of blood relations or other relations as “theirs.” Anarresti families, which encompass larger groups of people than the nuclear family, are meant to be fundamentally anti-possessive institutions.

## *2.2 - Gender and the Family: Egalitarianism and Essentialism*

The family on Anarres is also founded on the presumption that men and women are equal. Shevek’s discussion of gender politics with Kimoe, an Urrasti, in the opening chapter shows that, as Kimoe puts it, “women’s work” (16) is no different from “men’s work” on Anarres (17). Shevek states, “Often I have wished I was as tough as a woman” (17), and Kimoe sputters in response: “But the loss of—of everything feminine—of delicacy—and the loss of masculine self-respect—You can’t pretend, surely, in *your* work, that women are your *equals*?” (17). Kimoe’s indignation prompts Shevek to consider the institution of marriage as it existed 200 years ago, when Odo, the founder of Anarresti thought, lived on Urras. He notes that the “matter of superiority and inferiority must be a central one in Urrasti social life” (18). To Shevek, the conception of romantic partnerships through such a hierarchical lens is perplexing and bizarre. He wonders: “If to respect himself Kimoe had to consider half the human race as inferior to him, how then did women manage to respect themselves—did they consider men inferior?” (18). Shevek’s thoughts reveal the importance of gender equality in Anarresti relationships. Mario Klarer further explains Anarresti gender relations: “Anarres is an overtly egalitarian community in which women are regarded as equals in political and private matters, such as in the labor force or in partnerships” (117). Shevek’s presumptions of

gender equality shown in his conversation with Kimoe emphasize that the Anarresti family is also based on the idea of gender equality.

Le Guin's writing often deals with questions of gender. Alexis Lothian writes, "Le Guin's fiction has always expressed her political commitments, and the changes in her imagined worlds reflect the ways those commitments have developed over the years" (380); she further describes "the changing attitudes to gender and politics in Le Guin's work" (381). She quotes Le Guin as saying that "To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths of race, have to be exploded and discarded" (Le Guin, qtd. in Lothian 383). That Anarresti families are invested in gender equality is no surprise, then, for *The Dispossessed* represents another part of Le Guin's "imagin[ing] freedom" (383). Questions of gender and family are especially important with respect to what Lothian calls Le Guin's "antiessentialist feminism" (383), where "the myths of gender" (Le Guin qtd. in Lothian 383) often inform attitudes towards the family, granting higher status to men than women and devaluing the domestic. In other words, Le Guin constructs Anarrest to reflect her views that gender should not be used as an excuse to valorize some and denigrate others. Furthermore, Le Guin has articulated the importance of being aware of gender politics in her writing: "Feminist ideology . . . has forced me and every thinking woman of this generation to . . . separate, often very painfully, what we really think and believe from all the easy 'truths' and 'facts' we were (subliminally) taught about being male, being female" (Le Guin, qtd. in Lothian 382). This statement comes after *The Dispossessed*, for which she received much criticism, but Le Guin has claimed, "In the mid-1960s . . . I considered myself a feminist" (*Dancing 7*) even if that feminism was

critiqued as it appeared in her work. *The Dispossessed*, then, is but an early part of Le Guin's overarching project to examine gender through a critical lens.

Le Guin offers, through Shevek, this type of critical lens for the reader of *The Dispossessed*. The equality of men and women on Anarres means that Shevek is especially surprised to find that Urrasti society is deeply segregated according to gender. When he asks, of the women he met at an Urrasti welcoming party, "Who were they?" he is told "Wives" (73). Rather than independent contributors to society in their own right, women are reduced to a single, dependent identity: that of companion to men. They are defined in relation to marriage, rather than by their skills or accomplishments. Furthermore, the women are not even accorded individual identities, but lumped together into the group category of "Wives" (73). Klarer writes, "on Urras, women are confined to their traditional roles as mothers and sexual objects" (117). The conversation about female scientists that ensues from Shevek's inquiry into gender roles on Urras emphasizes the way in which the Urrasti categorization of women hinges on a biological understanding of gender; Pae claims that women have "no head for abstract thought" (73), and further exclaims, "You know how it is, what women call thinking is done with the uterus! Of course, there's always a few exceptions, God-awful brainy women with vaginal atrophy" (73-4). On Urrasti, women are thought to be inherently, biologically limited to a certain role; they are restricted by what the Urrasti see as essential truths about female bodies that confine them to being "wives" (73), rather than individuals. Furthermore, any aberrations from the allegedly innate feminine qualities the Urrasti associate with female bodies are grotesque and "atroph[ied]" (74).

Sidonie Smith discusses this type of “cultural inscription of the female body and . . . biological essentialism” (4) in her examination of the “occluding vision of . . . universal selfhood” (2). She writes, “To woman is attributed . . . an essential selfhood” (11) where “female identity inheres in woman’s embodiment as procreator and nurturer” (11). Rather than the “universal human subject” that men are able to exemplify, where “The primacy of reason and self-consciousness [are] separated off from the contingencies of that most personal entity, the body and its irrational desires” (8), Smith argues that women’s bodies are seen as limitations. Instead of allowing for the “self [to escape] all forms of embodiment” (6), the cultural views of gender found on Urras replicate those articulated in Smith’s analysis, for “anatomy becomes the irreducible granite at the core of woman’s being” (12) on Urras, just as it does in the patriarchal discourse Smith analyzes. The women on Urras “embrac[e] encumbering identities in service to family, community, and country” (16) just as Smith argues. Similar to Pae’s comments about “vaginal atrophy” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 74), those Smith analyzes see “the woman who would reason like universal man [as] unwomanly” (15). According to this rubric, any woman who tries to lay claim to a stable core of “selfhood,” connected to rationality and not the body (2), cannot be truly defined as a woman; Smith argues that such a woman “becomes a cultural grotesque” (16). Thus, Urrasti gender stereotypes can be seen to reflect essentialist conceptions of gender in the material world in which Le Guin is writing. Urrasti understandings of gender and the self mirror Smith’s discussion of conceptions of “selfhood” (2).

A portion of Le Guin’s critique of the family on Anarres, though, comes from Shevek’s experiences with family on Urras. Given the gender inequity prevalent in

Urrasti society, Shevek does not expect to observe love and companionship there. Shevek's visit to Oiie's home for dinner offers him a closer view of the family on Urras as it functions, rather than in the abstract terms and propaganda discussed on Anarres. The narrator states, "Shevek had heard a good deal of Oiie's views on women, and was surprised to see that he treated his wife with courtesy, even delicacy" (147). Shevek notes that "Oiie was fond of his wife and trusted her" (147), and that Oiie's "family treated him with respect, but there was mutuality in the respect" (147). The individual family manifests quite differently from what Urrasti conceptions of gender might imply. Rather than a miserable group of people pitted against one another because of their views about gender, Shevek finds a relatively happy and mutually respectful enclave that highlights the similarities between Anarres and Urras. He even hears echoes of either his or Takver's parental voice in Sewa Oiie's telling her child to "Be quiet!" (147). Oiie's family life provides a reference point for Shevek's understanding of marriage and partnership as it relates to both worlds, and shows Shevek that Urrasti families can indeed be happy.

This move to recognize the value of something that strict Odonianism "condemn[s]" (18), that is, "a partnership authorized and enforced by legal and economic sanctions" (18), is part of Shevek's evolving views on monogamous partnership in general. As a teenager, Shevek states, "Life partnership is really against the Odonian ethic" (50), a proclamation the narrator terms "harsh and pedantic" (50). This tension between the narrator's and Shevek's statements about partnership highlights that "the Odonian ethic" (50) does not represent a utopian blueprint for human relationships. Rather, the strict interpretation of Odo's writings misses a key component of the

interaction between the individual and the community. When Shevek and Takver confess to one another that they want “the bond . . . Body and mind and all the years of life” (180), they then transition to a “life partnership” (50). Upon doing so, they become “central” to the people in their social circle, who “c[ome] to them as thirsty people come to a fountain” (188). The narrator states that Shevek and Takver’s friends and acquaintances “sought to share in what [they] shared, and to celebrate, and to praise” (189). Takver and Shevek, in forming a monogamous partnership, become a focal point of joy and emotional sustenance to those around them. Rather than this partnership taking away from the mutual respect and aid upon which Anarresti society is founded, it in fact supports these goals even further. Le Guin’s depiction of Shevek and Takver’s relationship, then, offers a critique of the “harsh and pedantic” Odonianism Shevek espouses at the start of the novel.

Another key component of Le Guin’s criticism of the Anarresti family can be found in the characterization of Rulag, Shevek’s mother. Rulag is introduced through her absence when Palat, Shevek’s father, explains to the matron in Shevek’s nursery that “The mother’s been posted to Abbenay” (26). Moreover, Rulag “wants him to stay [in the nursery]” (26). She visits Shevek when he falls ill, but he does not even recognize her at first. Laurence Davis writes of this exchange in the hospital that Rulag “comes across as cold, calculating, rigid, and devoid of human feeling” (29). Indeed, the narrator states that “Her gaze did not show what emotions she felt or did not feel” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 122), and Samuel Delany aligns Rulag with the “symbolic category . . . [of] the Great Bitch Mother,” the term he associates with “the cold, tradition-bound mother” (294). Rulag later becomes Shevek’s main adversary when he discusses the possibility of a trip

to Urras, and another character thinks Rulag has “a personal grudge against” Shevek (360). Rulag does have emotions, though. Her passionate arguments at the PDC meetings indicate that she is very much emotionally invested in the Anarresti community.

Furthermore, during Rulag’s visit to Shevek when he is ill, the narrator states that Rulag speaks in a “controlled, pleasant voice” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 123), indicating that she is keeping her emotions “controlled” (123) and underneath the surface. That “Her gaze did not show what emotions she felt or did not feel” (122) is therefore indicative of her self-control, not a complete lack of emotions. Rulag simply does not exhibit the emotions a twentieth-century reader might expect to see in a mother visiting a sick son.

In fact, Rulag does not exhibit any characteristics stereotypically associated with motherhood. Smith’s discussion of essentialist definitions of female embodiment addresses the expectation that mothers sacrifice themselves for their families. Smith argues that women are “Affiliated physically, socially, psychologically in relationships to others” (13), and defined as “procreator[s] and nurturer[s]” (11). Furthermore, Smith quotes Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell’s argument that woman’s “individuality [is] sacrificed to the ‘constitutive definitions’ of her identity as member of a family, as someone’s daughter, someone’s wife and someone’s mother” (Smith 13). Rulag, however, is detached, logical, and willing to sacrifice her family life for her work. She does not construe herself as “affiliated . . . in relationship to others” (Smith 13) except as an Odonian. She is willing to leave young Shevek in a nursery in order to pursue her career. Takver, however, characterizes the relationship between Rulag and Shevek as “Nothing unusual . . . Except Shev’s feelings” (364). In other words, Rulag is fulfilling



parental duties as the Anarresti would expect her to, and it is Shevek's emotional reaction to this relationship that is abnormal.

Shevek's view of his parents, though, forms the basis for Le Guin's criticism of Anarres's family structure. His relationship with Palat is fond and caring, and even Rulag admits that Palat "was supportive, he was parental, as I am not" (125). The contrast between Shevek's parents, the one distant both geographically and emotionally, and the other loving, makes use of essentialist conceptions of gender to undermine Anarresti ideology surrounding families. It is important that it is Shevek's mother who, in fulfilling Odonian expectations for work and placing her son in nursery care at a young age, barely knows Shevek. This acceptance of Anarresti family life contrasts more starkly with essentialist gender stereotypes about motherhood than it would have had Le Guin made Palat the unattached, absentee parent. Women, according to biological stereotyping about femininity and emotions like Shevek witnesses on Urras, are expected to embrace motherhood as an identity, just as they are not scientists, but "wives" (73).

Margaret Miller states, of the women in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's nineteenth-century feminist utopia *Herland*, that "their personal qualities are a function of motherhood. They are perfect mothers, and all their perfections are for the sake of their children" (192). Since Rulag exhibits such un-maternal behaviour with respect to Shevek, even calling him "brother" rather than "son" (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 124), she contrasts with the *Mizora*- and *Herland*-like, and real-world patriarchal, expectation that a utopian woman would exemplify her perfection through motherhood. Rulag is a central figure in Le Guin's critique of the Anarresti family because she, unlike Palat, exhibits no loving attachment to Shevek, and thus strikes a chord with the gender essentialism implicit in

some readers' conceptions and expectations of the family. Rulag's detachment can be read as cold and distressing, and draws attention to the way in which the Anarresti system fosters that detachment.

Le Guin's critique of the Anarresti family, then, makes use of a particular expectation of readers' essentialist gender stereotypes, such as those discussed by Smith, but does not necessarily endorse such views. Rather, she employs stereotypes about gender – that a woman more interested in work than motherhood is somehow flawed— to highlight the problematic aspects of Anarresti ideology. Rulag, though she may seem “cold” (Davis 29) to some readers, has fulfilled her parental duties according to Odonian expectations. She brought Shevek to the nursery at an appropriate age and did not allow any “propertarian” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 319) feelings to develop. Bedap, a friend of the family and Shevek's collaborator in challenging the Anarresti status quo, discusses Rulag after finding out that she is Shevek's mother, raising the question of Rulag's flaws, but as they represent Anarres's flaws: “What's unusual . . . is her feelings about [Shevek]! . . . she hates us because of him. Why? Guilt? Has the Odonian Society gone so rotten we're motivated by *guilt*?” (364-5). Bedap's frustration with Rulag's condemnation of the Syndicate stems from the fact that she is one of the most stubbornly ideological opponents he and Shevek face. Davis describes Rulag as “Set in her ways” (30), contrasting with the “dynamic and revolutionary utopia premised on an acceptance of the enduring reality of social conflict and historical change” (31) that Le Guin ultimately espouses through Shevek. Thus, it is not essentialist conceptions of gender that *The Dispossessed* supports, but continual re-evaluation of social ideas as a whole. Rulag exemplifies strict interpretations of Odonianism that do not necessarily allow for the

“dynamic . . . utopia” (31) that Le Guin attempts to reach through Shevek’s journey. The novel’s seeming critique of Rulag’s lack of stereotypical maternal feeling is thus in effect a stand-in—though a problematic one, given the novel’s supposed feminist vision—for its critique of the potentially dehumanizing and emotionally destructive effects of collectivized childcare and, further, of any rigid, socially prescribed behaviour. What LeGuin is really criticizing is not the essentialized gender stereotyping of traditional families – although she is critical of these stereotypes as they appear on Urras – but the coldness and inhumanity that a utopian, non-nuclear vision of the family might entail. She uses Rulag for this critique not because Rulag should be more traditionally ‘motherly’, but because were Palak to be the cold, distant one, readers might not notice as much, since that is the gendered stereotype in the society in which Le Guin is writing of how fathers are supposed to be.

### *2.3 - Freedom of Choice: Revolutionary or Reactionary?*

What form of the family does Le Guin envision taking the place of Anarresti communal and Urrasti patriarchal family structures? Shevek and Takver’s partnership, as well as their relationship with their children, best exemplifies a balance between Anarresti and Urrasti family types. They embrace the original Odonian notion that “the promise, the pledge, the idea of fidelity, [is] essential in the complexity of freedom” (245). Although the Anarresti as they exist 200 years after the revolution have moved to a more anti-monogamy stance than Odo propounded, Shevek and Takver see value in “the bond” (180). Susan Storing Benfield writes,

Through Shevek's relationship with Takver, Le Guin shows the degree to which a committed, loving, long-term partnership made possible by monogamy offers something that some, if not all, human beings desire deeply, rather than being merely an inappropriate wish to possess another person, which could be socially engineered out of existence. (133)

Benfield's discussion of monogamy here can also be extended to the relationship Takver and Shevek have with their children: their parental love is not "an inappropriate wish to possess another person" (133), despite Takver's receiving disapproval for keeping Sadik with her for a longer time than is typical on Anarres. Not only does Le Guin argue for the value in having monogamy as an optional part of "the complexity of freedom" (245), but she also critiques the fully collectivized version of the family found in Anarresti society, and advocates, through Shevek and his family, for a middle ground between the conservative family found on Urras and the radically altered family of Anarres. Shevek and Takver are not an example of what must be, but simply an illustration that there must be flexibility in the family structure in order to fully allow for "freedom" (245) on Anarres.

Le Guin's attempt to allow for "freedom" (245) by offering the choice of monogamy within a system that balances the option of collectivized childcare with gender egalitarianism is somewhat atypical in terms of the history of utopian families. Lyman Tower Sargent offers a historical survey of the status of women in utopias, arguing that "Classical eutopians<sup>3</sup> either abolish the family and make women fairly equal . . . or maintain the family and make women definitely inferior" (302). Sargent's analysis, as it was published in 1973, does not necessarily reflect the current state of utopias, but

provides a context in which to place *The Dispossessed*, a work published in the same period. Le Guin neither fully “abolish[es] the family” nor “make[s] women definitely inferior” (302), and in doing so, maps relatively new territory for utopian writing. Even Margaret Miller’s 1983 article states that “children are raised communally . . . in all feminist utopias” (195). Although the degree to which Le Guin succeeds in creating a “feminist utopia” (195) is debatable, *The Dispossessed* represents an effort to reconcile family with utopia in a way that does not exclude women from the workforce nor actively restrict their rights. Though children on Anarres are, at the time of the novel’s events, “raised communally” (195), Le Guin opens up the possibility of parenting more privately as well. In her critique of the Anarresti family, Le Guin’s attempt at fashioning a balance between the individual and the community, especially as this struggle relates to gender, critiques the binary of approaches to women and utopia that Sargent identifies.

The question remains of whether this balance between Urras’s traditional, nuclear families and Anarresti collective child rearing is a desirable one. Mark Tunick explains that “Le Guin has been accused of conservatism for espousing family values” (141). From the perspective of gender, especially as it relates to the history of utopia, *The Dispossessed* appears to advocate for choice—individuals can choose to participate in long-term monogamous partnerships, but they are not required to, and, regardless of the choice made, there would be structures in place, like nurseries, to support various family options. It is the freedom to choose that is important to a “new” Odonian society, as exemplified by Shevek, Takver, and their children. That Le Guin presents a family that wants to be a more traditional version of the family does not necessarily mean that all Anarresti would be required to follow suit; Takver notes that Shevek “doesn’t make a

general principle out of it, that parents should always keep the children, or anything” (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 364). Rather, Shevek and Takver simply do not wish to embrace the Anarresti model as it currently stands – the version of the family that does not allow for full freedom to choose. Thus, the potential for a more complex and accepting model of family arises out of Le Guin’s criticism.

Le Guin has also written critically about the depiction of families in non-utopian literature. She takes up the “falseness of Tolstoy’s famous sentence” (Le Guin, “All Happy Families” 45), that “All happy families are alike; unhappy families are each unhappy in their own way” (Tolstoy, qtd. in Le Guin, “All Happy Families” 44). She argues that Tolstoy “impl[ies] that happiness is easy; shallow, ordinary; a common thing; not worth writing a novel about” (Le Guin, “All Happy Families” 45). Le Guin connects this view to “gendering” (45), where “male readers have strong, tough, reality-craving natures, while female readers crave constant reassurance in the form of little warm blobs of happiness—fuzzy bunnies” (45). She contests this idea, valuing the depiction of a happy family and resisting the notion that it is trivial to do so; she concludes that “happiness is . . . rare . . . imperiled . . . [and] hard won” (46) and advocates viewing “the ability to describe happiness” as “a rare gift” (46). Le Guin’s argument that depicting “happiness” is worthwhile, and should not be devalued through “gendering” (45), though it addresses Tolstoy specifically, can be broadened to apply to her approach in *The Dispossessed*. Le Guin’s critical assessment of the importance of depicting “happiness” (45) informs her portrayal of Anarresti and Urrasti families. She sees “happiness” (45), however fleeting it might be, as “worth writing a novel about” (45). Takver and Shevek’s family represents an effort by Le Guin to portray such domestic happiness.

It is possible that Le Guin's portrayal still has some problems, though. Samuel Delany's discussion of Bedap offers an important counterpoint to Le Guin's alternate model of the family. Although Le Guin stresses that Shevek and Takver's version of the family is but one potential version, and not a didactic example, the depiction of Bedap as he relates to the family is somewhat problematic. Delany focuses on the moment when Bedap realizes "that if he would be saved he must change his life" (371), noting that "We have only been given three tangible factors about Bedap's life: he bites his nails, he holds certain political beliefs, and he is homosexual" (Delany 292). Delany argues that Bedap's "political beliefs at this point are one with Shevek's; so that cannot be the life-element to be altered" (292), and that Bedap "has gotten over his nailbiting" (292), "leav[ing] only one thing in the universe of the novel for him to change" (292). Delany believes that "the innuendo that . . . Bedap must change his homosexuality" is "*not* the one Le Guin intended" (293, emphasis in original), but that the responsibility exists to "[say] precisely what we want to say" (294), especially in science fiction. Although Delany argues that Le Guin did not mean for this discussion of Bedap to imply that "Bedap must change his homosexuality" (293), the fact remains that the language does offer the possibility of such an interpretation. There is a gap in Le Guin's depiction of the family in that this scene with Bedap leaves the reader with the impression that ideal families on Anarres are meant to be heterosexual.

Another problem arises from Le Guin's essentialist gender stereotypes, for Rulag is not the only female character portrayed in a way that makes use of an implicitly patriarchal form of essentialism, one that works against the supposedly egalitarian feminism of the novel. Sarah Lefanu laments the way in which Takver is characterized,

summarizing her views with the resigned sigh of “Oh dear, Takver” (133). In other words, as Amy Clarke writes, “She is a strong character, accustomed to hard work, rather contemptuous of those who are not, and hot tempered. Yet she seems passive in her inability to resist biological imperative and particularly in her role as the wife and mother who waits for her man to return” (66). If Takver is “the quintessence of woman as natural being” (66), then Rulag, as discussed above, is the opposite, running counter to essentialist stereotypes about women as “natural” mothers. But, as Lefanu writes, “Shevek’s mother is horribly punished for being a career woman by being given a really unpleasant character” (141). Although she is perhaps meant to be abrasive to highlight the potentially problematic nature of Anarres’s approach to childcare, the way in which Le Guin constructs this abrasiveness is itself problematic. Rulag’s ferocity and sheer distastefulness, when contrasted with Takver’s seemingly wholesome geniality (a mark of her maternal femininity, perhaps), suggests that even though Takver discusses Rulag as if she has done nothing wrong, we are meant to sympathize with Shevek. There is a conservative streak to these gender essentialist aspects in Le Guin’s characterization, for they reinforce the notion of a traditional, non-utopian family structure without acknowledging the value of the collective model found in Anarres. Instead, the collective is presented as dehumanizing and wretched.

This conservatism links to another critique of Le Guin’s adaptation of the family—that it does not go far enough. Frederic Jameson writes that the family “is . . . [the] one particular small group whose existence cannot be banned from Utopia or successfully forbidden and expelled by the supreme operation of Utopian unanimity” (206-7), and that it “threatens the geometrical Utopian diamond with a flaw in the form



that cannot be corrected or fantasized away” (207). From this perspective, Le Guin’s re-establishment of the nuclear family on Anarres can be seen as conservative and as hindering the social progress sought by the Odonians. This argument, however, seems to be rather similar to the arguments put forth by the Odonians who take issue with Takver’s and Shevek’s model of the family. Both Jameson’s and the Odonians’ arguments seek to prescribe a specific form of the family for all of the people on Anarres, and it is that uniformity that Le Guin strives to combat. Perhaps her social vision does not reshape the family as radically as some might hope for it to, but, in arguing for the freedom to choose a more nuclear model of the family, Le Guin attempts to counteract the totalitarian impulse of a single prescriptive and enforced version of the family.

The limitation of such a defense is that Le Guin’s writing does not arise in a cultural vacuum. As Moylan writes, “The narrative choices made within the traditional ideology of male privilege and world capitalism undermine Le Guin’s radical desire to express a vision that would critique and transcend that ideology” (119). Although the “ideology of male privilege and world capitalism” is not “traditional” for Anarresti, at least not according to their foundational teachings, *The Dispossessed* presents ideas that manifest as conservative in that they are “traditional” in the material context of Le Guin’s own world (119). Moylan argues that “Le Guin exhibits in at least three instances a traditional male-identified, heterosexual, monogamous nuclear family bias that undercuts her textual assertions of personal emancipation” (101). Rather than depict that “emancipation” (101), perhaps with a few members of the collectivized model of the family who live happily on Anarres, Le Guin strives to highlight the potential problems of a world where collectivized childcare and non-monogamous interpersonal

relationships are an overwhelming, socially enforced norm. Given that such structures are not the norm outside the world of the novel, Le Guin's critique reads as regressive. Although she strives to depict the limitations of Anarres in order to increase the freedoms of the Anarresti and to continue their revolution, many of the institutions she defends hardly seem to be revolutionary.

*The Dispossessed* presents a vision of a future society on Anarres in which the family is meant to be anti-possessive and egalitarian. This type of family, though, is not without its flaws. Le Guin shows how the collectivized Anarresti family structure does not necessarily work for everyone, and how the more traditional and conservative Urrasti family still has its virtues. She uses Rulag, Palat, Shevek, and Takver to construct a critique of how Anarres's conception of family still has room to improve, how the utopian project depicted on Anarres is never finished evolving. Le Guin's attempt to create a version of family that values both gender equality and the possibility of choice works against a history of utopian writing that often sacrificed egalitarianism for the family, or the family for egalitarianism. *The Dispossessed* posits that family, as represented by Shevek and Takver's partnership and relationship with their children, can be invested in the equality of men and women and be part of the "complexity of freedom" (245). In arguing for this "complexity of freedom" (245), Le Guin's novel critiques both the more traditionally utopian model of collectivized childcare, and the patriarchal family's gender essentialism. *The Dispossessed* presents a middle ground between the potentially alienating and emotionally distant collective utopian model of the family found on Anarres, and the conservative, patriarchal family that existed on Earth when Le Guin was writing and which is exemplified in a fictional way on Urras. That middle

ground, however, is not a neutral space, and some of Le Guin's characterization itself perpetuates essentialist conceptions of gender and homophobic ideas of family. By upholding the values Le Guin suggests are lost on Anarres, she presents a conservative view of gender and the family in that her critiques are reactionary in an Anarresti context, but traditional outside of it. This overarching trajectory mimics the inconsistencies in Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, the topic of Chapter 3; in *The Lathe of Heaven*, Le Guin critiques a particular form of hegemonic masculinity, presenting an alternative to that masculinity that undermines her potentially progressive aims.

### Chapter 3: Lathe New World?: Race And Gender In *The Lathe Of Heaven*

While in Chapter 2, I discussed gender with respect to family in Le Guin's work, this chapter analyzes the ways in which Le Guin's 1971 novel *The Lathe of Heaven* deals with the intersection of masculinity, femininity, and race. The novel's protagonist, George Orr, has the ability to change reality with his dreams. He visits a psychologist, Dr. William Haber, to attempt to rid himself of these dreams, because he does not want to change reality. Haber, however, manipulates Orr's dreams through hypnosis, seeking to improve the world by fixing problems such as war, overpopulation, and racism. Orr explains his power to Heather Lelache, a lawyer he employs to help him get Haber to stop manipulating the dreams:

You see, it works like this. If he told me under hypnosis to dream that there was a pink dog in the room . . . What would happen is, either I'd get a white poodle dyed pink, and some plausible reason for its being there, or, if he insisted that it be a genuine pink dog, then my dream would have to change the order of nature to include pink dogs . . . They would always have come black, brown, yellow, white, and pink . . . Each dream covers its tracks completely. (46-7)

The novel, set in Portland, Oregon, in approximately 2002, cycles through different realities as Haber works with Orr's power, though the effects of those dreams are often surprising. Orr addresses racism, for instance, by dreaming that everyone has the same gray skin tone. Haber becomes increasingly powerful as he manipulates Orr's dreams to improve society and to benefit himself. Importantly for my project, Le Guin contrasts Orr's passivity with Haber's desire to influence the world, and thereby depicts the

existence of multiple masculinities in relation to the larger social dynamics addressed through Orr's dreams. Haber's masculinity becomes increasingly hegemonic, in R. W. Connell's terms, as he gains institutional power through Orr's dreams. Through the characterization of Haber, Le Guin criticizes the largely emotionless form of masculinity that is hegemonic masculinity, suggesting that this masculinity damages the world. Orr, in many ways Haber's opposite, offers an alternative form of masculinity that the novel posits as superior. Orr, however, still treats Heather,<sup>4</sup> his lawyer, in a way that essentializes her; his fascination with her brown skin and desire to become romantically involved with her undermines the potential strengths of his form of masculinity. Thus, while *The Lathe of Heaven* seems to challenge dominant conceptions of masculinity, the novel's depiction of Heather with respect to both race and gender weakens this project.

### *3.1 - Hegemonic Haber: Bearded "Bear-God"*

Haber values and embodies rationality. He is introduced as "Dr. William Haber," (5), emphasizing his education and professional status. As he interviews Orr for the first time, Haber "nod[s] judiciously and stroke[s] his beard" (12) like a caricature of masculine contemplation, keeping himself cool and distant from Orr's emotional description of his problem. He initiates Orr into the world of oneirology, the study of dreams, through an extended monologue of (pseudo)-scientific technobabble, and Haber seeks to "understand" (33) Orr's ability through rational means. Indeed, Haber himself proclaims that "reason will prevail" (146) in the world he attempts to create using Orr's power. Haber believes strongly in the ability of reason to both make sense of the world and to change it for the better. His investment in the power of rationality connects him to

Connell's discussion of hegemonic masculinity, which she argues is "culturally linked to both authority and rationality, themes in the legitimation of patriarchy" (90).

Furthermore, Connell writes, "hegemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represent the interests of the whole society" (164). When Haber influences Orr's dreams to create HURAD [Human Utility: Research and Development], the building is emblazoned with the phrase "THE GREATEST GOOD FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER" (Le Guin 135); Haber's utilitarian approach parallels Connell's discussion of hegemonic masculinity. Haber believes that he can improve humanity via rational means, and in attempting to do so, he begins to embody aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

As well as rationality, Haber also demonstrates significant investment in control. When Orr first arrives at Haber's office, Haber makes sure to show the appropriate power dynamic for a psychiatrist and his secretary: "She was only three feet away through the wall, but an interoffice communicator, like a diploma on the wall, inspires confidence in the patient, as well as in the doctor. And it is not seemly for a psychiatrist to open the door and shout, 'Next!'" (5). He does not wish to appear out of control, and so displays formality with his secretary. Haber's desire for control often veers into ominous territory, as it does when he first begins treating Orr: "to dominate, to patronize him was so easy as to be almost irresistible" (17). Once he begins to hypnotize Orr, Haber "[feels] a thrill of enjoyment of his own skill, his instant dominance over the patient" (19). Haber's reaction to this seemingly weaker man betrays his need to control others, to "dominate" (17). He uses Orr's dreams to effect change in a way that makes Orr feel that Haber sees him as "an instrument" (44). Later, as Haber changes reality, making himself more and more

powerful, Orr notes that Haber is “so sure of himself now that he ha[s] no need to try to hide his purposes, or deceive Orr; he [can] simply coerce him” (130). Connell discusses the way in which psychoanalysis, as a medical field, has had a tendency to make use of the patient-therapist relationship in a manner similar to Haber; she notes psychoanalysis’s “efforts at normalization and social control” (8). Although Haber does not attempt to “normalize” (8) Orr, for he wishes to make use of Orr’s power, he does use his therapy sessions with Orr for “social control” (8) – not only encouraging the passive, seemingly effeminate Orr to embrace action, but also asserting dominance on a regional and global scale, where Haber can control multitudes of people.

As much as Haber wishes to control other people, he is also thoroughly invested in policing his own appearance in the eyes of others. The example with his secretary above illustrates this as well, for he is continually aware of how others see him. When introducing himself to Orr, he “hear[s] his own genial, easy tone, well calculated to put the other person at his ease” (Le Guin 6). This particular instance of a “well calculated . . . tone” (6), though, does not achieve the results he intends because Orr remains anxious and tense in spite of Haber’s efforts. Haber, though he considers how others see him, is not necessarily an accurate judge of their thoughts and feelings – somewhat alarming for a psychiatrist; he thinks Orr’s distress arises from “sex-guilt” (11) when first assessing him. Haber remains detached from others as he tries to control them and control how they see him. He also “consider[s] himself a lone wolf” (113), remaining free from personal relationships as much as he can; he “prize[s] independence, his free will” (113). Thus, he keeps himself detached from emotional connections but is simultaneously very aware of himself in relation to others. Indeed, Haber’s view of himself is of someone in control,

and the appearance he wishes others to see is that of an “independen[t]” (113) man capable of controlling situations both personal and professional.

Beyond his attempts at control and rationality, Haber’s physicality also shows him as wishing to embody hegemonic masculinity—in this case, quite literally. For all of his desire to appear in control, Haber is often compared to wild animals. They are, of course, extremely powerful animals. Aside from the “lone wolf” (113), Haber is also described as a “bear” and a horse (28), but not just any horse—Orr comments on the resemblance between Haber and a painting of “the great racing stallion Tammany Hall”<sup>5</sup> (22), which appears “big, healthy, hairy, reddish-brown, bearing down at a full gallop” (24) in the mural. These parallels draw out Haber’s sheer physicality. Much is made in the narration of Haber’s beard, too; Heather comments that she “had forgotten how big a man he was, how big a beard he had, how drastically impressive he looked” (160) when she sees him for the second time. Haber’s physical presence is “impressive” (160). He is active, strong, exceptionally well bearded, and takes up all kinds of space, ranging from the physical—he is “massive” (174)—to the auditory. When Haber talks, he “boom[s] and thunder[s]” (169). He laughs a “big, gusty laugh” (166). In short, he is like a force of nature. Haber’s masculinity is tied to his physical presence and his ability to occupy space. As he gains power through the various realities, Orr notes, “Nothing could prevent [Haber]. He only got bigger at every reincarnation” (129-30).

Not only does Haber rely upon mere physical presence to display his masculinity, but he also considers resorting to a more physically active form of violence when his dominance is threatened. When Heather visits his therapy session with Orr and witnesses the change in realities after Orr’s effective dream, Haber tries to conceal the shift through



confident behaviour and excessive, manipulative chattiness. But when Heather does not appear to be convinced, Haber becomes more sinister: “He would stop her at any cost. He turned to her, ready for violence, his hands clenched” (63). The potential threat to Haber’s control unsettles him and makes him prepare to hurt others in order to maintain his power. He curses Orr, too: “Damn the stupid little bastard! He had got out of control” (69). This willingness to resort to violence connects Haber to the dominant figures in Connell’s study of masculinities: “men cannot hold state power without having become, collectively, the agents of violence” (248). Admittedly, Haber diverges from this portrait of hegemonic masculinity in that he is an individual, not a collective, but he certainly holds significant power over the world by the end of the novel, and functions as a synecdoche for this type of masculinity. Orr even mentions that Haber used Orr’s dreams to “juggl[e] the Federal and State Governments around to suit some plan of [his]” (125). Haber becomes a one-man government, and is willing to resort to violence to maintain his power.

Haber’s power grows as the novel progresses, and his version of masculinity becomes more and more entrenched in institutions, making this masculinity increasingly hegemonic. Haber begins the novel as a psychiatrist working in an “Efficiency Suite” with a secretary (5), evidently a man of some means but not earning enough to house his practice in a more ostentatious building. He makes a mental note of the fact that the “Med School bigwigs . . . always sent the nuts they couldn’t crack to Haber” (10), showing that he has enough professional expertise and skill to deal with these difficult patients, though this commentary also indicates his somewhat grandiose sense of his own importance. This detail, however, also reveals that there are others to whom Haber must be

accountable, the “bigwigs” (10), and that he does not care for them, as evidenced by his somewhat disparaging slang. Haber’s ambitions are considerable, and he refers to his office as the “Palace of Dreams” (14) when speaking to Orr, as if Haber views himself as psychiatric royalty. Once Haber begins to use Orr to create new worlds, Haber rapidly becomes more powerful through installing himself in legitimate social institutions. He steps into a new position as Director of the “Oregon Oneirological Institute” (50). Heather, commenting upon Haber’s success, notes that “A man doesn’t get to that sort of position unless he’s awfully good” (75), attempting to legitimize Haber’s power in a way that belies her own statement, for Haber is not “awfully good” in the way she thinks he is, but simply awful. He has merely employed Orr’s power for his own gain. Eventually, Portland becomes “Capital of the Planet” (126) and Haber becomes “Director of HURAD, the vital centre of the World Planning Centre, the place where the great decisions were made” (130). He has, in effect, taken over the world. Connell and Messerschmidt state, “cultural consent, . . . institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities” (846). Haber institutionalizes himself through a series of upward moves, and because Orr so fully changes reality when he dreams, “cultural consent” (846) is indirectly achieved by rewriting others’ memories, as evidenced by Heather’s remarks about Haber deserving his success.

Haber also participates in the marginalization of others who do not embody hegemonic masculinity. He is a profoundly self-centered individual, and primarily marginalizes others through his self-absorption. When he meets Orr, Haber focuses so much on himself that he does not even remember basic details about his patient, for when

he starts to treat Orr he accidentally refers to him as “John” and thinks to himself, “No, what the hell was the subject’s name?” (Le Guin 20). The novel then presents Orr’s thoughts, stating, “the doctor was not, he thought, really sure that anyone else existed” (27). Haber is also unable to see things from others’ perspectives: “Haber seemed to refuse to believe that [Orr] was contented with his job. No doubt Haber had a lot of ambition and found it hard to believe that a man could be without it” (32). This inability to see through the eyes of others mirrors Connell’s assertions about the way in which “a capacity for empathy, for taking the viewpoint of the other . . . is systematically denied in hegemonic masculinity” (240). Haber’s solipsistic tendencies thus ally him with hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, when Haber is informed that a lawyer will oversee a session with Orr, Haber expects the lawyer to be a man: “The lawyer arrived at 3:45, and Haber came striding into the outer office to greet him –her, it turned out” (52), and Haber is irritated by all the noise that Heather makes, irritated by her presence’s auditory intrusion into his space. Haber thinks of Heather and Orr as “the harsh fierce woman [and] the meek characterless man” (57). Not only can Haber not empathize with others, but he also thinks of them disparagingly when they do not comply with his expectations of gender.

Haber’s form of masculinity, with its focus on rationality, control, and impressive physical presence, allies him with the notion of rugged individualism, a particularly American version of masculinity. Anthony Rotundo charts the development of this masculinity in the nineteenth century, which he calls “self-made manhood:”

Reason, still viewed as a male trait, played a vital role in the process of governing passion, but important new virtues were attributed to men. In

the new era of individualism, the old male passion of defiance was transformed into the modern virtue of independence. Now, a man was expected to be jealous of his autonomy and free from reliance on external authority. In this world where a man was supposed to prove his superiority, the urge for dominance was seen as a virtue. (3-4)

Haber's desire to rid himself of other medical practitioners' management clearly echoes the individualism Rotundo describes. John Pettegrew links the rugged individual to Theodore Roosevelt, who "put forward a historical vision of the frontier as a source of rough and rugged American character and manhood" (21). The frontier does not exist as such in Le Guin's world, but Haber still embodies the same traits associated with the individualistic masculinity that grew out of frontier expansion in the American West. He further represents the rugged individualism Pettegrew describes in that he is also "psychologically unable to enjoy his prosperity because of the felt need to 'rush forward' and acquire all the more" (37) in an ever-expanding frontier of dream science and world-improving progress.

Haber represents, then, an increasingly hegemonic masculinity over the course of the novel, as figured through his physical aggression, rationality, control of self and others, and the desire to act and change the world through that control and aggression. Malmgren writes, "In effect, Le Guin uses Haber in order to critique a certain kind of applied science and to expose the idea of incremental progress as a scientific fiction" (315). This idea, though, is a gendered one; science and progress are linked to hegemonic masculinity through Le Guin's depiction of Haber, whom she contrasts with the generally passive and seemingly effeminate Orr.

### 3.2 - “Jor Jor” the Jellyfish: Alternative Masculinity

While Haber represents Le Guin’s critique of hegemonic masculinity—in that it is his character traits most clearly associated with dominant masculinity that damage the world—Orr embodies an alternative to hegemonic masculinity. Orr is Le Guin’s answer to the problems shown through Haber’s characterization. Le Guin uses Orr to reveal the way in which, in Connell’s words, “There is a gender politics within masculinity” (37). For nearly every quality that Haber embodies, from rationality to physical dominance and prowess, Orr represents the inverse: he shows the “subordinated masculinity” (79) that Connell describes as interacting with and subject to hegemonic masculinity. Orr is a soft, quiet, passive, intuitive man entirely lacking in ambition. Le Guin positions Orr as the answer to Haber’s dangerous dominance, and shows Orr embracing this role over the course of the novel. This version of masculinity, however, is not wholly positive. It suggests fundamentally conservative elements in the social order that legitimate patriarchy and solidify or even exacerbate racism.

Haber’s self-absorbed masculinity reaches a breaking point when faced with the irrational, often embodied in Orr. Upon first witnessing the effects of Orr’s power, Haber’s thoughts are scattered and frantic as he tries to convince himself that he has not just witnessed Orr change reality with a dream: “Oh Christ it had been Mount Hood the man was right It had not been Mount Hood it could not have been Mount Hood It was a horse it was a *horse* It had been a mountain A horse it was a horse it was” (23). This overflow of words and lack of structured grammar reveals a breakdown in Haber’s confidence and rationality. Indeed, much of the trouble that arises from Orr’s dreams

happens because influencing dreams, as Orr puts it, means that “you’re handling something outside reason” (85). In Carl Malmgren’s words, “Orr’s power is . . . counterscientific – it violates the norms of scientific possibility” (319). Haber’s attempt to use Orr’s power with his own mind, once he has mapped the right brain waves to do it himself, results in chaos. Orr claims that this happens because Haber “isn’t in touch” (155); Haber cannot function properly when interacting with the irrational, and his inability to empathize means that his dreams cause significant problems, breaking down the fabric of existence in some places. Because of this effort to use his own dreams to change reality, Haber goes mad and is placed in the “Federal Asylum for the Insane” (179). He suffers a breakdown because of the irrational and moves from dominating the institutionalized power of hegemonic masculinity to being rendered powerless and becoming subject to that institutionalized power in a mental hospital.

It is significant that Haber’s mental breakdown at the end of the novel is accompanied by alienation from his body. After Haber’s failed attempt at effective dreaming, Le Guin uses definite articles to describe Haber’s body parts rather than personal pronouns, indicating a shift in Haber’s attitude towards his body: “After a while the big body moved, and presently sat up. It was all slack and loose. The massive, handsome head hung between the shoulders” (174). He becomes detached from his physical presence. Connell writes, “The constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained” (54). In this instance, Haber’s inability to fully control his e-state dreams, the dreams with the power to change reality, forces him to break from his physicality. That disconnect destabilizes his previously robust masculinity.

Whereas Haber initially seems to be powerful and imposing, the first impressions others have of Orr introduce the notion of his subordinated masculinity. Haber categorizes Orr as “Unaggressive, placid, milquetoast, repressed, conventional” (Le Guin 6) when he arrives for treatment, a description that connects to Connell’s discussion of subordinated masculinities:

Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy. The process is marked by a rich vocabulary of abuse: wimp, milksop, nerd, turkey, sissy, lily liver, jellyfish, yellowbelly, candy ass, ladyfinger, pushover, cookie pushier, cream puff, motherfucker, pantywaist, mother’s boy, four-eyes, ear-‘ole, dweeb, geek, Milquetoast, Cedric, and so on. Here too the symbolic blurring with femininity is obvious. (79)

Haber even uses one of Connell’s sample insults. Haber also thinks, “there was an acceptant, passive quality about [Orr] that seemed feminine, or even childish” (Le Guin 17). When Heather meets Orr, she makes the connection to femininity explicit: “A born victim. Hair like a little girl’s, brown and fine, little blond beard; soft white skin like a fish’s belly; meek, mild, stuttering. Shit! If she stepped on him he wouldn’t even crunch” (41). In both instances, those meeting Orr see him as laughably weak and lacking in conventionally approved forms of masculinity. Heather’s first impression does not even dignify Orr with a comparison to an adult woman, drawing a connection between Orr and a “little girl” (41) instead. Where Haber is a robust and impressive male specimen, Orr is seen as underwhelming and emasculated.

Orr himself sometimes echoes these negative characterizations of his masculinity. When he feels particularly helpless after the session with Haber in which he changes history so that six billion people die in a plague, Orr launches into a self-excoriating rant: “He spread out his hands and looked at them, then sank his face into them; it was wet with tears. Oh hell, hell, he thought bitterly, what kind of man am I? Tears in my beard? No wonder Haber uses me. How could he help it? I haven’t any strength, I haven’t any character, I’m a born tool” (73). According to the template of masculinity set forth by Haber, there are not supposed to be tears in a beard; a beard is meant to bristle with unbridled masculine prowess. Orr’s beard, then, symbolizes his alternative version of masculinity, for he mixes stereotypically feminine tears with the more overtly masculine facial hair. Further on in the same instance of emotional upset, Orr is compared to a “newborn baby” (73). Having first been described as a “milquetoast” (6), and then compared to a “little girl” (41), this description completes his emasculating regression. Babies are completely helpless, just as Orr feels helpless and weak in the face of Haber’s hegemonic masculinity. His emotional reaction to the dream’s effects, though, is understandable, for Orr caused “the murder of six billion nonexistent people” (73). Surely this is one circumstance in which a teary beard is acceptable or even encouraged. Although Orr sees his emotional and passive nature as a flaw or a liability, Le Guin contrasts his empathic abilities with Haber’s complete lack of empathy, showing that Orr embodies a more positive form of masculinity.

Orr’s more subordinated masculinity is also emphasized through the animal parallels Le Guin uses, especially compared to those for Haber. Whereas Haber’s hegemonic masculinity is strengthened through being likened to a bear, stallion, and



wolf, Orr's animal associations are weak or immobilized and lacking in agency. He thinks of himself as "the goose that laid the golden eggs . . . A damned white vapid stupid goose" (76), as well as a "Rat in a trap" (74). Haber calls him a "moral jellyfish" (147), a description that parallels the novel's introductory paragraph on the jellyfish: "Current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of the ocean, the jellyfish drifts in the tidal abyss . . . the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature" (1). This, too, is one of the insults Connell lists as being associated with subordinated versions of masculinity. The animals associated with Orr are not wild, but tame, such as a laboratory rat, or so inconsequential as to not need to be tamed, like a jellyfish. These parallels emphasize Orr's passivity, contrasting with Haber's active and hegemonic masculinity.

This passivity, however, is not necessarily a bad thing, just as subordinated masculinities are not necessarily worse than hegemonic masculinity – though Orr's alternative masculinity is arguably not entirely subordinated thanks to his all-encompassing dream power. Indeed, Haber and Heather both have moments wherein they realize that their initial impressions of Orr missed something important. Indeed, the jellyfish symbolism reveals the potentially deadly nature of Orr's powers, as jellyfish are often toxic and dangerous. For Haber, the realization that Orr may be more complex than he seems occurs shortly after his first appraisal of Orr as a person with "no defences" (7); Haber says to himself "No, this fellow was no milquetoast" (12) once he sees that Orr is serious about his power to alter reality with his dreams, and not psychotic. Heather's moment of reassessment comes during her meeting with Orr at her law office: "There he sat, mild as ever, but she now thought that he certainly wouldn't squash if she stepped on him, nor crunch, nor even crack. He was peculiarly solid" (44-5). In both cases, Orr's

poise and matter-of-factness while discussing his dreams' power convinces his audience that he is important, maybe even formidable, in his own right. Orr may not have the impressive bluster that Haber has, but the quiet confidence Orr embodies still manages to command some form of respect in those around him. Moreover, for all Haber's bravado, Orr has much more power than Haber does, since he can change anything about the reality in which they live through dreaming. The difference between the two men is that Orr values restraint, while Haber wishes to involve himself as much as possible in the world's activities. Although Orr's version of masculinity is not socially valued in the way that Haber's masculinity is, Orr's detractors realize they underestimated him after they get to know him better. Le Guin positions Orr's alternative masculinity as something that is initially viewed as inferior but that has its own strengths.

One of the most important strengths Le Guin highlights in depicting Orr's alternative masculinity is that, contrary to Haber, he does not want to change things. This desire—or lack thereof—shows itself in Orr's attitude toward both himself and others. As Haber influences Orr's dreams, Orr eventually finds himself promoted into a job “as a City bureaucrat” in one of the later realities, a job that Orr considers “way out of line” (125) since he had “always been some kind of a draftsman” (126) in earlier lives, and drafting was a job he enjoyed. Orr does not want to have a promotion, or this new responsibility as a bureaucrat, for he was happier in the other realities. When it comes to others, Orr “has no desire to change the world; he even questions the possibility of change, of improvement” (Malmgren 316-7). He disagrees with Haber's assumption that there is a “purpose” to existence: “Things don't have purposes, as if the universe were a machine, where every part has a useful function. What's the function of a galaxy? I don't

know if our life has a purpose and I don't see that it matters. What does matter is that we're a part, like a thread in a cloth or a grass blade in a field. *It is* and we *are*" (Le Guin 81). Orr's passive attitude exhibits similar characteristics to the subordinated masculinities Connell describes, where "the moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity basically involves choosing passivity" (132). Orr questions the assumptions that underpin Haber's view of the world, and would rather remain inactive than strive to change, improve, and control things. Furthermore, the items Orr describes are more naturally occurring things that contrast with the created machines Haber makes and values specifically for their functions. Le Guin uses Orr to suggest an alternative mode of masculinity that does less damage to the world than Haber's utilitarian machinations.

One of the primary manners in which Orr's version of masculinity is less destructive than Haber's is its relationship to rationality. Where Haber's hegemonic masculinity is founded on reason, Orr embraces and embodies intuition:

Orr was not a fast reasoner. In fact, he was not a reasoner. He 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. He did not see connections, which is said to be the hallmark of intellect. He *felt* connections – like a plumber. (Le Guin 38)

This intuition is precisely what Orr accuses Haber of lacking; without being "in touch" (155), Haber's dreams are incapable of doing the good he wishes to do. Dreams, as fundamentally irrational experiences, cannot truly execute what Haber intends, and remain out of his control. Haber's effective dream even causes a "plague of mental

breakdowns” (179). Through Orr, Le Guin suggests that Haber’s inability to intuit and to empathize is the source of his dream’s destructiveness, meaning that Orr’s ability to feel things rather than think them is an important alternative to hegemonic masculinity. Sidonie Smith writes of “the less authoritative ‘feminine’ mode of engagement with the world, one characterized as intuitive, irrational, particularistic, and practical” (14); Orr’s masculinity clearly embraces these characteristics associated with the feminine, and Haber generally rejects them, valuing instead the “self . . . [whose] epistemological engagement with the world is through the agency of reason” (7), and keeping himself detached from the events in the world around him. While Orr was shaken and teary after his dream that caused “the murder of six billion nonexistent people” (73), Haber calls this incident “a mere ethical point” (117). Haber’s intellectual abstraction here obscures the emotional reality that Orr feels quite urgently. Le Guin contrasts Haber’s cold rationality with Orr’s intuitive and compassionate nature, implying that Orr’s alternative masculinity is superior to Haber’s more hegemonic behaviour.

Although it appears that Orr is characterized to act as a foil to Haber’s traits, Orr’s personality is remarkably balanced. Haber comments upon the results of Orr’s psychological assessment: “You are so sane as to be an anomaly . . . Where there’s an opposed pair, a polarity, you’re in the middle; where there’s a scale, you’re at the balance point. You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left” (136-7). Orr lands squarely in the middle, while Haber exists in terms of extremes. Mathematically, this means that Haber outweighs Orr, for if Haber is +100 and Orr is 0, Orr cannot hope to counteract Haber’s influence. Haber’s colleague comments upon Orr’s test results, suggesting that Orr’s “lack of social achievement is a result of [his] holistic adjustment . .

. and that what [Haber] see[s] as self-cancellation is a peculiar state of poise, of self-harmony” (137). The “self-harmony” (137), however, no matter how much it benefits Orr, cannot hope to negate Haber’s destructiveness, since the math does not add up, so to speak. Although Orr has experienced Connell’s “moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity” (132), he must do more to counteract the negative effects of that hegemonic masculinity –to result in a balanced society. Orr, as he exists for the bulk of the novel, represents the passive, balanced opposite of Haber’s wholly unbalanced personality.

Orr’s moment of action, then, occurs when he pushes the button on the Augmentor, Haber’s machine that now induces reality-altering dreams because of his work with Orr, to stop Haber’s chaotic effective dream. The major difference between Haber’s actions and Orr’s actions, though, is that Orr is willing to seek help from others rather than attempting to control everything on his own. He finds a way to dream without changing reality thanks to an Aldebaranian, one of the aliens he dreams into existence, who tells him “auxiliary forces may be summoned” by saying the untranslatable Aldebaranian phrase “*Er’perrehnne!*” (141). Orr safely dreams, leaving reality unchanged, when he says this before sleeping, and this realization is strengthened by Orr’s epiphany while listening to the Beatles’ “With a Little Help from My Friends.” Le Guin shows that Orr’s subordinated masculinity has the ability to draw upon others for aid, while Haber’s ruggedly individualistic (bordering on megalomaniacal) masculinity refuses this possibility. This willingness to accept aid is not as humble as it initially seems, though, because Orr creates his own help in the form of the Aldebaranians by dreaming them into existence. Orr is open to help from others throughout *The Lathe of Heaven* – from when he tells the medic “I need help” (3) to when Heather coaches him

into sleep during his stay in the cabin, but his acceptance of help from others is not without self-aggrandizing elements. Ultimately, though, Orr's willingness to recognize that a rugged individuality alone is not the solution is what helps him to counteract Haber's destructive influence.

Orr's version of masculinity, then, is passive, intuitive, and seemingly collaborative. His only notable action is in reaction to a negative event, an attempt to restore balance lost. Le Guin paints Orr as a portrait of an alternative to Haber's hegemonic masculinity, where reason, control, and progress converge to change the world in dangerous ways. Clarke writes, "The novel takes on science fiction's trope of 'white man makes right,' positing instead a Taoist philosophy that we must use the utmost care in every action we perform. Orr epitomizes the wisdom of *wu wei* (action through stillness) while Haber exemplifies the Western idolization of progress" (58). The downside to this approach, though, is that the novel is imbued with a fundamental conservatism that runs contrary to the ostensibly progressive vision of gender that Orr could otherwise be seen to embody. Malmgren calls this "the novel's reactionary view of change" (317). Indeed, whenever Orr discusses the nature of existence, he verges on perilous territory, since such notions as "it's wrong to force the pattern of things" (Le Guin 81) assumes that the "pattern of things" (81) is necessary, correct, and something he is able to discern for others. In the world Orr inhabits, a rough approximation of what bell hooks calls the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (*Will to Change* 29) found in the real world, this "pattern" (Le Guin 81) is hardly without biases, and inaction can be just as damaging as Haber's schemes. Although Le Guin constructs Orr as an alternative masculinity to Haber's participation in hegemony, the conservative elements

of the text, which I will discuss in the next section, undermine any subversive vision of gender she attempts to convey.

### 3.3 - Heather, the “Black Widow”: Clicking Mandibles, Clashing Interests

Race is also an important part of *The Lathe of Heaven*. Clarke’s quotation above obscures the fact that Orr’s actions still result in a plot of “white man makes right” (58) – though this is not the usual white man who saves the day insofar as Orr does not embody the complete spectrum of the interests of hegemonic masculinity. Despite this fact, Orr’s interactions with and dream-created alternate versions of Heather reveal that Le Guin’s novel represents gender and race in ways that reinforce the status quo. Heather, a biracial woman and lawyer, is the only female character in the novel, as well as the only non-white character. Le Guin’s critique of so-called color-blind anti-racism, portrayed through Orr’s perception of Heather, ultimately normalizes whiteness and essentializes blackness. Heather’s characterization highlights the potential paradoxes of Le Guin’s gender politics, since Heather’s final incarnation reduces her to an exotic love interest.

Orr and Haber both have strong reactions to Heather. Orr likes her immediately and is impressed by her confidence and intensity, while Haber finds it “not altogether easy to be cordial and warm with [Heather]. She snapped and clicked. Heavy brass snap catch on handbag, heavy copper and brass jewelry that clattered, clump-heel shoes, a huge silver ring with a horribly ugly African mask design, frowning eyebrows, hard voice: clack, clash, snap” (Le Guin 53). Although Haber is a loud and imposing person, he does not enjoy meeting someone who is also loud and imposing. Most of the evidence Haber considers in the above quotation also emphasizes Heather’s status as racialized,

female other: her feminine clothing and jewelry, and the “African mask” on her ring (53). Haber loathes the way in which Heather distracts him from himself, as evidenced by his reflection that he was “glad to hear his own voice instead of her snapping and bangle-clattering and teeping” (55) when Heather asks him to explain something. Heather shows the variations in Orr’s and Haber’s versions of masculinity; Haber’s hegemonic masculinity cannot stand the insubordinate, competitive nature of her presence, while Orr admires Heather for her “courage” (75) and calls her “kind” (102). She acts as a litmus test for the ability of each type of masculinity to deal with a formidable, non-white woman. Orr’s views, as well, are generally sympathetic and presented in the novel as those with which we should identify.

Orr’s apparently appreciative view of Heather, however, does not withstand scrutiny. Although he may admire her for her courage and kindness, Orr also changes Heather in his dreams. Orr’s dream of the solution to racism, which turns everyone in the world into the same gray skin tone, erases Heather from the face of the earth. Orr claims that she “could not have been born gray. Her color, 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” (129). This detail seems somewhat complimentary in that Orr values this quality of Heather’s existence, showing a similar sentiment to Audre Lorde’s claim that “community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (112). But by dreaming Heather out of the world because he cannot imagine her without “her color of brown” (Le Guin 129), Orr – and indeed the novel – reduces Heather to her racial identity; he equates Heather only with her status as a biracial woman. The narration states that the gray people in this version of



the world do come “from Thailand, Argentina, Ghana, China, Ireland, Tasmania, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Honduras, Lichtenstein” (128), but none of these non-white-turned-gray characters are central enough to counterbalance the erasure of Heather. Furthermore, Heather’s mixed racial background seems to be important in marking her as more other, more exotic than those from the above countries. She exists in a liminal space between distinct racial categories easily ascribed to nations, and thus is even more different – she is not black, nor white, but a mixture of the two. Since Haber and Orr both exist in the gray world, Heather’s absence normalizes whiteness and reinforces non-white people’s alterity, especially those people who do not easily fit into one racial category.

Heather’s comments regarding her parents’ interracial relationship reveal that their marriage set a precedent for her relationship with Orr. Her father “was a real militant Black Power type . . . and [her mother] was a [white] hippie” (102). She notes that her mother “loved [her father’s] being black much more than she loved *him*” (103). This situation parallels Orr’s fascination with the fact that Heather is “the color of the earth” (103), in Orr’s words. Both cases foreground the way in which white characters, as Sharon DeGraw writes of white science fiction authors and consumers, “[perceive] a black character as representative of a racial group first and foremost, and as an artist, space adventurer, or politician second” (111). Le Guin does not explicitly link Heather’s parents’ marriage to Orr’s view of Heather. His reaction, however, to her inability to exist in a world full of gray people shows that Orr mirrors Heather’s mother in that both characters see their love interest’s race as of primary importance. Both Orr and Heather’s mother foreground racial identity in justifying their affection for their (potential) partners, though Orr is presented as generally appreciative and kind.

Despite Orr's view of Heather's race as the crux of her identity, he does manage to dream her back into existence in the world of gray people. In this world, the gray Heather is Orr's wife. Her job is no longer as a lawyer, but as a legal secretary. In effect, Orr demotes Heather professionally and marries her without her consent. She is also virtually unrecognizable in terms of behaviour, for she is weak, easily scared, and passive in this reality. When Haber starts to dream, Heather cowers in fear: "She found that all things were gone and that she was lost in the panic dark, crying out her husband's name with no voice, desolate, until she sank down in a ball curled about the center of her own being, and fell forever into the dry abyss" (Le Guin 172). This pathetic behaviour hardly resembles the former Heather's confident, competent comportment. In this reality, Haber repeatedly refers to Heather as "Mrs. Orr" (163), and she herself is much more dependent upon Orr than in other versions of the world. Her old personality, however, shines through in brief moments of "[feeling] bolder, harder" (159) as the divisions between realities blur. This version of Heather makes even more clear that both Orr and the novel equate Heather's brownness with her personality. Indeed, Heather's multiracial identity seems to challenge the binary of black and white, but the novel's representation of her character traits only reinforces such a binary. As a gray person, Heather's personality is meek and timid; her colour is her assertiveness. Orr's reading of Heather as imbued with this boldness because of her race connects to bell hooks' discussion of white feminist stereotyping of black women: "By projecting onto black women a mythical power and strength, white women both promote a false image of themselves as powerless, passive victims and deflect attention away from their aggressiveness, their power . . . their willingness to dominate and control others" (*Feminist Theory* 14). The novel represents

Heather as having this “mythical power and strength” (14) because of her colour, and Orr does not appreciate the significant role he plays in controlling Heather, from dreaming her into marrying him or dreaming her out of existence.

Heather sees herself in a slightly different manner than either Orr or Haber does. Rather than brash or courageous, Heather characterizes herself as “a Black Widow . . . hard, shiny, and poisonous” (Le Guin 41). She thinks of herself as having “a sneaky, sly, shy, squamous personality” (91) and frequently refers to herself in terms that emphasize her arachnid or insect-like qualities, such as “chitinous” (49), embracing the role of Black Widow spider. Her imaginative capabilities are powerful, and she imbues her activities with a certain romance, such as when she talks about having “French diseases of the soul” (89). There is a disjunction, then, between how Heather sees herself and how others perceive her. Orr and Haber both think of Heather as having the “aggressive, assertive personality” (91) Heather claims not to possess, although Orr arguably sees slightly more nuance in her character, for he thinks of her as kind as well as assertive. This disconnect between the characters’ views of Heather, however, does not negate the essentialist, racialized component of her portrayal. Heather’s choice of the “Black Widow” is evidently linked to her ethnic background, for both the spider and her skin are black. Female Black Widow spiders are also generally believed to eat their mates, indicating an aggressive, murderous personality that Heather may be thought to share. Such characterization, though, plays on stereotypes about black women that cast them as possessing “emasculating anger” (Harris-Perry 34). Her perspective on herself, though more complex than Orr’s or Haber’s, still has roots in the novel’s notion that Heather’s black heritage provides her with her loud, abrasive qualities. *The Lathe of Heaven*

presents Orr's views of Heather without significant critique of those views, as it does for Haber's.

Despite Heather's strength and intensity, she is also portrayed as in need of help from Orr. Her frequent swearing – she peppers her speech with exclamations such as “Shit!” (41), “Christ!” (49) – and her self-assured inner narration, where “one thing the Black Widow was good at was the intimidation of lesser insects” (90), contrast markedly with the way in which she behaves around Orr. Le Guin makes clear early on in Heather's relationship with Orr that “she couldn't help him” (77); Heather is not a heroine, not Orr's saviour. She is, however, someone who sees Orr as “her tower of strength,” for she “had longed to meet somebody who didn't lean on her” (95). This claim regarding Orr as source of support, though, goes farther than “somebody who didn't lean on her” (95). Orr is not portrayed as an equal in strength to Heather, as someone who would not “lean on her” (95), but rather as the opportunity for Heather to reverse those roles because he is stronger than her. Thus, Heather needs Orr, but Orr does not truly need Heather. Orr is, as previously discussed, willing to accept help from others, but the main source of his assistance in *The Lathe of Heaven* is the Aldebaranians, aliens he created by dreaming them into existence. Orr essentially helps himself. Even though the dominant Heather in the novel is much stronger than the gray Heather Orr dreams he has married, this stronger Heather still looks up to Orr as a source of strength and reliability. She is far from an independent woman.

The final incarnation of Heather solidifies many of the problematic elements of other versions of Heather. At the end of the novel, Heather is left as a legal secretary, rather than a lawyer. Although Heather “hated the law” (91), her occupation of choice is

“a detective” (91), not legal secretary. This permanent shift in careers and status can hardly be to make Heather happier in the long run. Instead, it seems mostly to soften Heather for Orr, to make her more approachable and suitable as love interest. When Orr encounters this final Heather, he notes that “This was not his wife, but a fiercer woman, vivid and difficult” (182), but he considers this “fierce, recalcitrant, and fragile stranger” someone “forever to be won again” (183). At the end of *The Lathe of Heaven*, Heather is left as a woman with a downgraded career who exists “to be won again” (183) by the male protagonist. Le Guin reduces her to the object of Orr’s affections, and not someone who exists as an equal to Orr. For all of the attempts Le Guin makes to depict Heather as a dynamic, complex, and interesting character, her portrayal ultimately falls flat.

Le Guin writes Haber as an increasingly hegemonic, power-driven and progress-seeking man who embodies a potentially damaging version of masculinity. She contrasts Haber with Orr, a much more passive, intuitive, and open man whose masculinity comes into question numerous times in the novel. Le Guin suggests that Orr’s version of masculinity is the better one, for he saves the world and undoes at least some of the damage that Haber creates. Orr, however, conflates Heather’s race with her personality, and cannot see Heather as anything but a potential romantic interest. Indeed, Orr’s changes to Heather in the various realities he dreams are evidence of his fraught relationship with her. He fetishizes her colour and dreams that they are married in a way that does not actually allow Heather to consent to the marriage. Le Guin’s efforts at creating a positive alternative form of masculinity are undermined, through Heather, by her problematic depiction of race and gender. That Le Guin’s portrayal of race and gender undermines her potentially subversive world is in keeping with the pattern I noted

in Chapter 2, where the collectivized family and the patriarchal family unit co-exist in an uneasy mix. Le Guin's attempts at feminist-friendly family structures without the totalitarian dominance of a fully collectivized society become conservative in the context of the material world just as Orr's alternative masculinity cannot be said to liberate *The Lathe of Heaven* from Haber's hegemonic grasp. Rather, the novel presents a relatively conservative world incapable of providing Heather with the freedom Orr attains.

#### Chapter 4: *Lavinia* In The Context Of Ursula K. Le Guin's Feminist Revisioning

As discussed in Chapter 2, Le Guin's writing shows her interest in interrogating gender norms, and, in *The Lathe of Heaven*, Le Guin depicts an alternative form of masculinity that saves the world, though this depiction is not without its flaws. In this chapter, I will discuss gender in relation to Le Guin's changing attitudes towards feminist theory itself through a reading of *Lavinia*, which takes its inspiration from, and is in some ways a retelling of, a particular part of the *Aeneid*. I will interpret this reading with the help of criticism of the Earthsea trilogy and *Tehanu* in order to examine Le Guin's evolving feminist views. While *The Lathe of Heaven* was written 37 years earlier than *Lavinia*, and Le Guin experienced considerable shifts in her thoughts about feminism and gender during the time between the novels, the two works ultimately have much in common. Both novels strive to place value on the behaviours and attitudes generally associated with femininity, and both novels' approaches aim to respect identity differences while altering hierarchical interpretations of those differences. As well, both novels fall somewhat short of the progressive goals they seemingly set forth to accomplish. The trajectory of Le Guin's "much-discussed feminist awakening" (Clarke, "Distaff" 63), though it results in some changes to her writing, means that *Lavinia* roughly approximates the patterns of some of her earlier work. She adopts some of both liberal feminism and radical essentialist feminism (defined in the introduction to this thesis), valuing femininity, criticizing patriarchal beliefs, and upholding essentialism in some places.

The reception of and subsequent additions to the Earthsea trilogy make a good case study for Le Guin's evolving gender politics with respect to her fiction. The first

three Earthsea books, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), and *The Farthest Shore* (1972), make use of troubling and sexist language, such as “the aphorisms ‘Weak as woman’s magic . . . Wicked as woman’s magic’” (Le Guin qtd. in Clarke 141), and present these statements as truth. They primarily focus on a single male protagonist’s heroism, and the respected form of magic in the world Le Guin depicts, wizardry, is “an exclusively male profession” (Nodelman 189). In Amy Clarke’s words, “In the early books [of Earthsea], the men held the power and the women were secondary” (141). Not only are the women in these books “secondary” (141), but they are also devalued and even reviled, as the above “aphorisms” reveal (141). Furthermore, femininity is portrayed as inferior; Perry Nodelman writes about the way in which *The Tombs of Atuan* “seems to be the story of how Tenar learns to be whole by rejecting femininity as conventionally defined” (184-5). Critics discussing the first three Earthsea books note the novels’ slant towards privileging men’s heroic deeds, diminishment of or disdain for femininity, and sexist language presented without clarification that the language is meant to be seen as anything but truth.

The 1990 addition to the original Earthsea trilogy, *Tehanu*, marks Le Guin’s efforts to “align the world she invented in her earlier career with her feminism” (Clarke 9). By writing this book, Nodelman argues, “Le Guin signaled that she had new thoughts about her old conclusions, and that she wanted readers to reconsider their understanding of what they had read earlier” (179); in other words, Le Guin attempted to make the new novel a way of adjusting or reinterpreting the problematic elements of the first three. Rather than focusing primarily on a lone, heroic male protagonist, *Tehanu* “centers on the awakening of . . . a middle-aged woman . . . [to] the evil in the world, specifically the evil



done to women by men” (198). Even the original hero of the first trilogy, Ged, “comes to represent a new kind of maleness divested of its traditional authority; he happily takes a hand in washing the dishes, whereas Tenar’s son reveals a retrogressive machismo in his refusal to do so” (198). As Clarke writes, “women are more central, more powerful, and much wiser than in the early books” (146). Le Guin’s addition to the series attempts to make right some of the perceived wrongs in her original trilogy. She herself, though she writes that “In the mid-1960s . . . I considered myself a feminist” (*Dancing 7*), later acknowledges the way in which her “writing was controlled and constrained by judgments and assumptions which [she] thought were [her] own, but which were the internalized ideology of a male supremacist society” (233). *Tehanu* stands as evidence for a shift in Le Guin’s thinking, an evolution in her relationship with feminism.

*Tehanu*, however, has been criticized for its gender politics as well. Clarke notes, “what emerges is a feminist essentialist perspective, one that argues for nature over nurture and which here elevates female over male ” (146). Nodelman agrees: “*Tehanu* suggests that Le Guin has reversed her earlier position on male and female qualities; just as she had earlier accepted the identification of traditionally female qualities as an evil that must be transcended, she now seems to be doing the same thing with traditionally masculine qualities” (199). Furthermore, while some of the men in the story are portrayed in a more positive light than women were in the first three books, Clarke perceives a lack of diversity in the female characters: “There are good and bad men here, though it must be admitted that there are no bad women” (146). Thus, while *Tehanu* can be read as a feminist addition to and revisioning of the original Earthsea trilogy, and certainly

provides evidence of the shift in Le Guin's thinking regarding gender, the novel raises new concerns regarding its depiction of gender within a supposedly feminist framework.

Comparing *Lavinia* to the Earthsea novels' reception over the course of Le Guin's proclaimed feminist changes of mind, then, offers insight into the ways in which Le Guin's relationship to feminism evolved in the 18 years between *Tehanu*'s publication and *Lavinia*'s. I contend that *Lavinia* provides evidence of some of the initial shifts found in *Tehanu*, but many of the concerns noted by critics of *Tehanu* are less prominent in *Lavinia*. While essentialist portrayals of gender identity arise in some of the characters' portrayals in *Lavinia*, there is some evidence of Le Guin writing from a perspective more invested in the social construction of gender. She writes characters for whom femininity can be a respected and valuable trait, just as radical-cultural feminism supports, depicts more sexist characters in a negative light, and attempts to complicate her own project by resisting easy answers. The depiction of gender in *Lavinia*, however, avoids anger and depicts a protagonist uninterested in rebellion, and therefore results in a vision of feminism that generally preserves the status quo.

#### 4.1 - "*Without war there are no heroes*": *Valuing the Feminine*

The most obvious way in which *Lavinia* represents a shift in focus for Le Guin, against the approach criticised in the original Earthsea trilogy, is that the novel's protagonist is a woman telling her own story. Where Vergil's<sup>6</sup> Lavinia "never speaks a word in his poem of nearly ten thousand lines" (Miller 29), Le Guin's Lavinia speaks extensively, narrating and ruminating upon the events that take place in her life as well as those immortalized in Vergil's poem. Lavinia herself frames this narration as a response

to her marginal status in the *Aeneid*: “If I must go on existing century after century, then once at least I must break out and speak. He didn’t let me say a word. I have to take the word from him” (4). Clarke connects Le Guin’s novel to “what has become a feminist tradition, writing or rewriting the story of a female character from a classic work” (154). Indeed, Le Guin’s project can be compared to the “common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society” that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss, particularly in the way Le Guin’s novel redefines Lavinia’s “self” (xii). T. S. Miller, however, argues that Le Guin differs from such “righteously indignant feminist re-readings” (29) as Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* because “Lavinia’s measured piety remains many Roman miles away from Atwood’s penchant for the ‘subversive’ for lack of a better term” (31). Miller’s dismissal of Atwood, with its implications that indignation undermines her project, shows that Miller supports Le Guin’s novel because it departs from overt feminist anger while providing female characters a voice.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Lavinia notes that Vergil is “not to blame” for his having overlooked her, and that “he grieved for me. Perhaps where he is now, down there across the dark rivers, somebody will tell him that Lavinia grieves for him” (3). No matter the emotions Lavinia professes to have for her own author, Le Guin creates in her character a woman who has the full opportunity to express those emotions. Whereas the Earthsea books were criticized for their overall lack of female characters and for the existing female voices’ marginality, Lavinia speaks for herself, and her words make up the entirety of the novel.

The details of life given in *Lavinia* that make up the story, too, depart from the Earthsea trilogy’s – and indeed the *Aeneid*’s— heroic deeds. Like *Tehanu*, *Lavinia* is

comprised of mundane details, and these are told from Lavinia's perspective. The novel takes time to show the rituals of worship, the daily events before, during, and after the war, and the domestic. One example describes "pulling wool," Lavinia's "favorite housework," describing it as "easy and perfectly mindless, and the clean fleece smells sweet, and your hands get soft from the oil in the wool, and the blobs and hunks end up as a huge, pale, airy, hairy, lovely cloud towering out of the basket" (17). As Sandra J. Lindow writes, Le Guin "privileges the details of Bronze Age women's lives" (6), and even when the men are at war, shows "battle scenes . . . primarily through women's second-hand talk" (6). *Lavinia* presents these details of the feminine sphere as worthy of attention, an action that aligns the novel with radical-cultural feminist thought. Le Guin comments on her view that the "novel is a fundamentally unheroic kind of story. Of course, the Hero has frequently taken it over, that being his imperial nature and uncontrollable impulse, to take everything over and run it while making stern decrees and laws to control his uncontrollable impulse to kill" (*Dancing* 168). She writes, "That is why I like novels: instead of heroes they have people in them" (169). These reflections, however, took place after her changes of mind regarding feminism and the feminine. As such, Earthsea's first three books do not share the same view of heroes, and *Tehanu* represents her efforts to make right with that past. In *Lavinia*, we see the same commitment to presenting and even venerating otherwise overlooked parts of life, largely those associated with women.

Le Guin addresses the value of femininity by comparing Lavinia with Camilla, the "woman warrior" included in the *Aeneid* (*Lavinia* 43). Lavinia discusses Camilla with Vergil's apparition, and Vergil professes, "I liked her" (43). He reconsiders his views

while conversing with Lavinia, though, and admits, “you are worth ten Camillas. And I never saw it” (44). Fiona Cox argues, “By choosing to create Camilla, and by betraying a secret preference for her, Virgil reveals his attraction to the blood-stained world of war that represents the ‘imperial’ voice of glory in the *Aeneid*” (256). Where Camilla is strong, violent, and representative of stereotypically masculine traits, Lavinia embodies more feminine characteristics. That Le Guin writes Vergil to have him reconsider his assumptions about women--and who is worth depicting--challenges the notion that strong female characters need to be physically powerful or aggressive to be valuable. Miller writes, “Le Guin’s version of Lavinia represents the epitome of (female) *pietas* . . . the emphasis on Lavinia’s commensurate *pietas* elevates her from the position of inferior female counterpart to equal status with Aeneas” (Miller 41). Indeed, James D. Garrison writes, *pietas* is “at the center of [the] interpretation” of the culture Vergil depicted (1). Lavinia herself defines the word *pietas* as “responsible, faithful to duty, open to awe,” and believes in “the value of” such a concept (22). She strives to fulfill her duty, and in doing so behaves in a manner that Le Guin presents as strong or admirable. In depicting Lavinia’s *pietas*, Le Guin’s work supplements the way in which *pietas* can be interpreted; Lorina N. Quartarone describes the *pietas* found in the *Aeneid*: “Generally, *pietas* in the *Aeneid* lies on the male side of the spectrum, since (as portrayed in Aeneas) it evokes self-control, adherence to social structures, and is overwhelmingly practiced by males” (178). As Miller argues, Le Guin presents Lavinia’s decisions and *pietas* as worthy of equal respect as Aeneas’. She writes a character whose traits, though denigrated by those who see no value in femininity, are ultimately more powerful than Camilla’s physical strength and bravery.

In *Lavinia*, though, the appreciation for the mundane, domestic, and feminine does not exclusively show itself in female characters. Latinus, Lavinia's father, embodies a form of masculinity that embraces stereotypically feminine characteristics such as empathy and passivity. Latinus, who loves and respects his daughter, acts as a benevolent patriarch: "In those solitary walks he talked to me as his heir. Though I couldn't inherit his crown, he saw no reason why I should remain ignorant of matters of policy and government" (17). He lets Lavinia escape her suitors' attentions by visiting Albunea, the sacrificial cave, and remains supportive of Lavinia's choice in husband. Amata, Lavinia's mother, says to Lavinia, "He would never go against your heart" (70). Indeed, although Latinus insists that Lavinia must marry someone, he accepts her request to postpone her choice, and then again accepts her announcement that she must marry a foreign man. Latinus also maintains an uneasy *détente* with Amata, ignoring her madness and withdrawing from conflict. This withdrawal parallels his resignation to the war between the Trojans and the Latins, an act for which Lavinia initially judges him:

My father's brief appearance before the doors of the Regia seemed to me, to most of us, an abdication. He had made a formal plea, yet not even waited for a reply. "I cannot stop you," he had said to Turnus. It outraged me to think he had said that. How could he say it? How could he hand his power over to Turnus and creep back into the house? (125)

Latinus's passivity in the face of blood thirst angers and confounds Lavinia here, but she later sees his wisdom: "Latinus had known the enthusiasm of war before and knew better than to try to oppose its first furor, to waste speech on the mindless. But I was a child of peace, and all I could see was a defeated old man hiding in his palace while fools

bellowed in the street” (126). Latinus is willing to appear weak and embrace passivity rather than action. By the end of Latinus’ life, he becomes increasingly frail, but he visits Lavinia once she has moved out of his house and takes great joy in spending time with Silvius, his grandson; he jokes that he comes “to do worship at the altar of his grandson” (201). Through Latinus, Le Guin shows the way in which men can embrace loving, respectful versions of masculinity that do not actively try to make war.

Latinus, though he embraces an alternative form of masculinity, is an old man and therefore more marginal than he would be if he were younger. Le Guin shows, through her characterization of Aeneas, that even men in their prime can embody alternative masculinity. In other words, positive, loving, and pious versions of masculinity can occur within the realm of middle age as well as old age. Lindow argues, “Le Guin makes it clear that Aeneas is able to talk and to listen” (7). Aeneas’ conversation with Ascanius about “manly virtue” (215) reveals his interest in imparting this wisdom to his son, who values aggression and war too much: “If a man believes his virtue can be proved only in war . . . then he sees time spent on anything else as wasted . . . I would not trust that man to farm, or govern, or serve the powers that rule us . . . Because whatever he was doing, he’d seek to make war” (217-8). Although Aeneas becomes a “mad dog among the sheep” (143), Le Guin shows that he is consumed by guilt after battles and that his killing Turnus “weighed on his soul” (217) for the rest of his life. Le Guin makes such ostensibly more feminine qualities such as patience and humility valuable to Aeneas, and she therefore demonstrates that men need not seek to make war in order to prove their “manly virtue” (215). As Clarke writes, “*Lavinia*, while painting war as inevitable, deflates any glamour attached to conflict” (154). When the war first breaks out, Lavinia

tends to the wounds of a young man and thinks, “I wondered why a man would go into battle expecting not to be hurt, what he thought a battle was” (133). Thus, Le Guin shows how even the arguably most powerful man in *Lavinia* is committed to thoughtful consideration of masculinity and to valuing more supposedly feminine traits.

#### 4.2 - “*To sit together at table and speak as equals*”: *Undermining Hierarchy*

Unlike the disdain for women’s roles expressed in the Earthsea trilogy, *Lavinia* continues the trend Le Guin began with *Tehanu* in challenging gender hierarchy. The characters in *Lavinia* who are most attached to the hierarchical division of male and female, as well as masculine and feminine, are unsympathetic, even villainous, and framed as mistaken about their beliefs. One such character is Latinus’ advisor, Drances, whom Lavinia “never much liked” (144). Lavinia describes the way in which Drances “saw women as he saw dogs or cattle, members of another species, to be taken into account only as they were useful or dangerous” (145). She claims, “to him, my mother and I were unimportant persons in tactically important positions” (145). Drances, then, thinks women are fundamentally “unimportant” and, in Lavinia’s estimation, inhuman – inferior to the world of men. Furthermore, Drances’ political maneuvering regarding Lavinia and her mother, Amata, enforces this dehumanization. Drances does not care whether or not Lavinia wishes to marry Aeneas, only that “the breaking of the treaty” (145) be avoided. Drances embodies the attitude towards women that Carolyn Dinshaw, summarizing Claude Lévi-Strauss, describes: “women . . . [function] as tokens of exchange, as gifts, peace offerings, as the means of establishing or maintaining peace between groups of men at war” (57). Lavinia, however, takes some quiet pleasure in her ability to push back against Drances’ limited, dehumanizing perspective when she thinks



to herself: “He might pat the dog, but it declined to wag its tail” (147). Although she does not have the power to openly oppose or resent him, she does not embrace the role he sees her in, either. Le Guin contrasts Drances’ sexist beliefs with Lavinia’s disagreement and, in doing so, highlights the error he makes in seeing women solely as bargaining material unworthy of respect.

Perhaps the character who is most invested in believing women are inferior to men, though, is Lavinia’s mother. Amata’s defining characteristic, her madness, arises out of the death of her infant sons early in Lavinia’s life. Lindow argues, “Amata values Lavinia less than the boys who died. Her self-worth seems to be tied up in her ability to produce male heirs” (3). She has internalized the way in which her patriarchal culture sees women, and has accordingly patriarchal beliefs and behaviours. She also embodies the way in which bell hooks argues that “patriarchy breeds maternal sadism in women who embrace its logic” (61), for she claws at Lavinia’s face in a rage, scarring her for life. Amata further articulates her view of women as inferior to men when urging Lavinia to marry Turnus: “There’s one thing a girl is good for, and that’s to be married well, and you’re no different or better than any other girl. So do your duty, as I did mine” (78). She played her part in the patriarchy, and insists upon Lavinia doing the same. Although Amata claims to embrace the women’s festival up in the forests, this seemingly pro-women act is actually a ploy to force Lavinia to marry Turnus in direct opposition to Lavinia’s wishes. Furthermore, Amata seethes with anger towards Latinus, saying to Lavinia that Turnus will “breed sons who live” (112) as if sheer force of manliness on the part of her husband could have saved her sons from fever. She admonishes Latinus for his passivity, saying such things as “Act like a king” and “Act like a man” (138). As bell

hooks writes, “The single mom who insists that her boy child ‘be a man’ is not antipatriarchal; she is enforcing patriarchal will” (61). Likewise, the wife who says similar things is similarly “enforcing patriarchal will” (61). Through Amata, Le Guin shows the way in which women can be complicit in upholding sexist beliefs.

Amata’s fervent attempts to bully Lavinia into marrying Turnus are in part because she sees Turnus as the appropriately manly foil to Latinus, and Turnus is just as invested in the hierarchy of the sexes as Amata, though perhaps less articulately so. When courting Lavinia, Turnus “look[s] at [her] as the butcher looks at the cow” (34). Throughout his dealings with Lavinia, Turnus never attempts to find out what she wants. Turnus is an unquestioning part of the patriarchal system of trading women as “tokens of exchange” that Dinshaw identifies (57). He even goes to war to prevent Lavinia from marrying according to her wishes; he frames this war as opposing his “promised bride . . . [being] given to a foreigner” (123), emphasizing his view that Lavinia is owed to him, and that, as something “given,” she is more an object than a person. Turnus makes the war into an opportunity for him to “carry off an act of bravery,” and then to “exterminate” the Trojans (134). His interactions with others are selfish and brutal; Lavinia proclaims to Amata: “Turnus doesn’t care a stick for me or you either” (169). In comparison with Aeneas, Le Guin constructs Turnus to be quite obviously an inferior potential husband. Where Turnus fights for what he believes he is owed, and never bothers to learn what Lavinia wants, Aeneas seems to care deeply about what Lavinia thinks. When conversing about the wound allegedly given to him by Turnus, Aeneas asks: “It doesn’t really matter, does it?” and Lavinia claims, “He asks this not boyishly, seeking excuse, but gravely, to find out if it does matter very much to me” (162). Aeneas

gives weight to Lavinia's opinions, while Turnus is the more sexist suitor who sees Lavinia merely as an object he should be able to claim.

Where Turnus sees Lavinia as inferior but wishes to marry her, Aeneas' son, Ascanius, sees Lavinia as inferior but potentially dangerous and seeks to undermine her politically. As discussed above, Ascanius subscribes to the belief that "manly virtue" (215) comes from "battle courage" (217). In this conversation about virtue, Ascanius asserts that "Women can gain wisdom . . . But not true virtue" (216). His criteria for "true virtue" include the assumption that women are fundamentally incapable of such a thing. Consequently, Ascanius later attempts to claim Silvius, Lavinia's son with Aeneas, as his ward, for Ascanius believes Silvius must be brought up in an appropriately manly fashion – "among men" (238), claiming that Lavinia "cannot be his mother and his father" (238), though Lavinia disagrees. Ascanius sees Lavinia, indeed, all women, as incapable of providing the necessary wisdom for raising sons. Lavinia notes that she "heard him say that the best thing about the Greeks was that they knew how to keep their women in their place" (203). Furthermore, Ascanius, according to Lavinia, dislikes women for what he perceives as their sexual infidelity: "I have noticed that some men whose sexual interest is in men not women believe that all women are insatiably lustful of men . . . Ascanius tended to look at women that way, and his ardent wish to keep Aeneas' memory unsullied led him to suspect me with every man" (227). He is suspicious and misogynistic in his belief that Lavinia is, like "all women," unfaithful and "lustful" (227) – though this depiction of Ascanius is homophobic in that the novel's only prominent homosexual character is irrationally, jealously misogynistic. Moreover, that the intensity and seemingly visceral nature of Ascanius's judgment of Lavinia apparently arises from his

homosexuality suggests that Ascanius's views are not only wrong, but also particularly deviant. Ascanius' attachment to the hierarchy of the sexes is constructed differently than that of Turnus, Drances, and Amata, who seek to use women for political gain because that is what is expected of them. His homosexuality means that he is less personally involved in the trade of women, though he is by no means disconnected from it at a social level. Ascanius sees women as inferior to men in that they lack "true virtue" and cannot be controlled sexually, but Le Guin positions him as incorrect by having him disagree with the honorable and dutiful Aeneas.

The final character who has generally patriarchal views is Vergil himself, though Le Guin constructs him as critical of and even repentant for these views. He is the character whose patriarchal beliefs are most revised and challenged through dialogue thanks to his conversations with Lavinia. As Miller writes, "Le Guin's feminist Vergil appears perfectly willing to listen to a woman's advice" (42). Although Miller calls this Vergil "feminist" (42), perhaps a better way of interpreting Le Guin's Vergil would be as open to change, rather than explicitly feminist. Lavinia describes the portrait of herself found in the *Aeneid*: "If you'd met me when I was a girl at home you might well have thought that my poet's faint portrait of me . . . was quite sufficient: a girl, a king's daughter, a marriageable virgin, chaste, silent, obedient, ready to a man's will as a field in spring is ready for the plow" (5). Le Guin's Vergil exists in conversation with the Vergil whose voice makes up the *Aeneid*, and he comments on his new perspective: "Perhaps I did not do you justice, Lavinia" (40). He later notes, having learned from his visits with Lavinia: "what I thought I knew of you – what little I thought of at all – was stupid, conventional, unimagined" (58). Lavinia claims, "he gave me nothing but modest

blushes, and no character at all . . . He simply was not paying attention” (262), but she absolves him of guilt for his having overlooked her, saying “even a poet cannot get everything right” (262). Vergil, though taken to task for his sexist oversights and mistakes, grows to understand more than he did previously. Lavinia converses with him, challenges him, and in doing so helps him reach a different perspective.

Ultimately, the characters who are most invested in sexist assumptions are positioned as incorrect in their assumptions. Le Guin constructs a framework in which these patriarchal beliefs are questioned, unlike the early novels of Earthsea. She makes sure that she adds context to sexist statements, and Lavinia often challenges such beliefs outright. Where Earthsea’s first three books were unquestioningly patriarchal, *Lavinia*, though set in a patriarchy, frames that patriarchy in a way that claims that there are problems within it. Hierarchical views of men and women where men are superior and women inferior exist in some of Le Guin’s characters here, but she contextualizes their beliefs in such a way as to critique them.

#### *4.3 - Essentialism and Anger: From Earthsea to Latium*

*Lavinia* does not resolve all of the feminist issues critics identified in Le Guin’s writing in both the Earthsea trilogy and *Tehanu*. Although the novel is set in a real historical time, and thus claims to historical accuracy in its depictions of gender have more grounding than they would within a fully fantastical setting such as Earthsea, *Lavinia* is not without some regressive elements in its gender politics. One of these complications is the novel’s occasional foray into essentialism. Similar to what Clarke identified in *Tehanu*, much of this essentialism – as she would call it, “feminist

essentialism” (146)—exists in opposition to the beliefs of the patriarchy surrounding it. This essentialism, however, treats women as a monolith for whom liberation means giving into biological destiny, leaving patriarchal structures relatively unchallenged, and treats men as innately lesser. Vergil, after Lavinia makes a terse observation, says, “I can never get used to the fact, though I know it, that women are born cynics. Men have to learn cynicism. Infant girls could teach it to them” (54). Granted, this could be evidence of Vergil’s patriarchal beliefs, but later comments by Lavinia, in addition to her apparent acceptance of this statement, contribute to the sense that this is meant to be seen as truth. Aeneas, depicted as a reasonable, dutiful man whose gender politics are relatively egalitarian, hypothesizes, “Perhaps women have more complicated selves. They know how to do more than one thing at one time” (121), painting women as innately multi-tasking, changeable creatures somehow fundamentally different from men. And Lavinia thinks, “Men call women faithless, changeable, and though they say it in jealousy of their own ever-threatened sexual honor, there is some truth in it. We can change our life, our being; no matter what our will is, we are changed. As the moon changes yet is one, so we are virgin, wife, mother, grandmother” (184). If Le Guin is suggesting here that gender is socially constructed, since women shift through a series of culturally determined roles prescribed to them, she argues in a manner that neglects to incorporate the construction of similar experiences for men, and posits the constructivist ideas in a similar way to the above essentialist statements, treating all women as having this changeability.

These statements about women and men, however, connect to some of Le Guin’s thoughts on gender found in her non-fiction. She writes, “If a space ship came by from the friendly natives of the fourth planet of Altair, and the polite captain of the space ship

said, ‘We have room for one passenger; will you spare us a single human being, so that we may converse at leisure during the long trip back to Altair and learn from an exemplary person the nature of the race?’” (*Dancing* 5), unlike “most people [who] would want . . . a fine, bright, brave young man, highly educated and in peak physical condition” (5), she would send a post-menopausal woman, as she would be someone who “has experienced, accepted, and acted the entire human condition –the essential quality of which is Change” (6). Indeed, she argues that the experience of menopause allows for women’s enlightenment. This “Space Crone” (3) – because of her experience with change –somehow has access to deeper knowledge and wisdom about the “human condition” (6). This essay expresses Le Guin’s belief that women have value, of course, value that is generally overlooked, but it also suggests that men cannot access such wisdom, that women are more in tune with existence because of their sex. These beliefs suggest an essentialist view of gender that echoes the essentialism critics found in both the Earthsea trilogy and *Tehanu*. The views expressed in *Lavinia* are comparatively less invested in the superiority of women’s allegedly inherent qualities, but characters do argue that such inherent qualities exist.

The essentialism in Le Guin’s writing introduces problems into the gender politics in *Lavinia*. As noted above, some of the discussions in *Lavinia* suggest that men are inferior to women because of their sex; since men do not undergo menopause, they do not have the ability to embrace the wisdom of change as women do. If Le Guin’s project is, as Miller writes, to “[elevate]” Lavinia “from the position of inferior female counterpart to equal status with Aeneas” (41), then the instances of essentialist thought in the text undermine Aeneas’ station while raising up Lavinia. This action aligns Le Guin with “the

essentialism . . . in the work of some radical feminists who urged reevaluation of women's allegedly natural features, such as their childbearing capacity" (Stone 139). But, in Stone's words, "Essential properties . . . are also universal. 'Essentialism' as generally debated in feminist circles embraces this composite view: that there are properties essential to women and which all women (therefore) share" (138). The essentialism in *Lavinia* not only devalues men, whose bodies also undergo significant physical changes such as balding or growing pubic hair, but also homogenizes women. The link between change and women, especially, assumes that all women have the capacity to menstruate, and that all women undergo menopause. This idea excludes women whose bodies do not function in this way, such as transgender women. Stone writes,

It cannot plausibly be maintained that women's experiences have any common character, or that women share any common location in social and cultural relations, or sense of psychic identity . . . Essentialist theoretical moves thereby end up replicating between women the very patterns of oppression and exclusion that feminism should contest. (140)

The feminism in *Lavinia*, then, copies such "patterns" (7), and supports Alexis Lothian's argument that "Le Guin's work seeks to reconcile her desire to explode the myths of gender with her investment in the gendered dualities of the Tao" (384). *Lavinia* is no exception to Lothian's assessment, as evidenced by its essentialist moments.

While the glimpses of essentialism found in the novel serve to treat women as a uniform group, thereby depicting a form of feminism problematic to those who reject the idea that such essential qualities exist, *Lavinia* also represents a complex and potentially problematic view of anger and feminism. *Lavinia* herself admits, "I am not the feminine



voice you may have expected. Resentment is not what drives me to write my story. Anger, in part, perhaps. But not an easy anger” (68). Le Guin writes *Lavinia* in such a way as to anticipate a readership familiar with feminism as anger and complicates that notion. In the novel’s afterword, Le Guin writes, “More than anything else, my story is an act of gratitude to the poet, a love offering” (273). While she expands upon Vergil’s epic, and in many places works to undermine patriarchal values and emphasize the importance of the feminine, she also does not view her project as one of thankless criticism. This sentiment connects to an earlier claim Le Guin made about the way in which she conceptualizes her writing: “My goal [is] to subvert as much as possible without hurting anybody’s feelings” (vii *Dancing*). Such an ambition seems apparent in *Lavinia*, too; Le Guin’s feminism can be linked to arguments such as bell hooks’ claim that “militant feminism gave women permission to unleash their rage and hatred at men but . . . did not allow us to talk about what it meant to love men in patriarchal culture” (xii Preface). Framing *Lavinia* in such a way as to minimize feminist anger may make Le Guin’s feminism palatable to readers otherwise skeptical of its merits, but it also allows for commentary like Miller’s, in which quotes around “subversive” when discussing Atwood (31) seem to indicate derision or disbelief. Audre Lorde, discussing women of colour’s anger at white women’s racism, writes, “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (127). The feminism in *Lavinia* enables skepticism of feminist anger in a way that potentially upholds patriarchal values, obstructing change.

#### 4.4 - Conclusion: A Softer Feminism, A Gentler Patriarchy

The feminism present in *Lavinia* differs slightly from that of Le Guin's previous feminist re-telling, *Tehanu*. In *Lavinia*, Le Guin attempts to add to the *Aeneid* in order to give life to a marginalized character. She presents the domestic, mundane aspects of life as worthy of attention, and writes characters who embody stereotypically feminine traits, revealing many of those traits to be positive. She presents sexist characters, including Amata, a sexist woman, in a negative light, and even offers a model for re-examining beliefs through her version of Vergil. But some of the criticism about *Tehanu* still applies to *Lavinia*. Le Guin's feminism has moved from the inadvertently sexist and patriarchal Earthsea to the feminist essentialist *Tehanu* and still retains some of this essentialism in *Lavinia*. Ultimately, *Lavinia* shows Le Guin blending liberal and radical essentialist feminism, seeking to reconcile hierarchical beliefs about gender and attempting to do so in a gentle way, rather than an angry one. This feminism, however, risks complacency. After all, how subversive can something be if it hurts absolutely no feelings? *Lavinia*'s approach to gender fleshes out a minor character from the *Aeneid*, and subtly alters the views of men and women within a still-intact, if friendlier, patriarchy. The novel represents a shift from Le Guin's early-career writing, where *A Wizard of Earthsea* depicted a sexist society and seemed to support its views. Within the context of Le Guin's relationship to feminist thought, *Lavinia* offers a critique of patriarchal views while also subduing some of the radical feminism Clarke discusses in *Tehanu*; *Lavinia* may be, then, a middle ground for Le Guin between the two, an attempt at moderation. Reading *Lavinia* alongside *The Dispossessed* and *The Lathe of Heaven*, though, shows that such an

attempt is not particularly anomalous. In all three novels, Le Guin's desire for perceived balance leads to a less-than-progressive, if not regressive, treatment of gender.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Ursula K. Le Guin seems to be particularly skilled at revisiting ideas and changing her mind. The essay “Is Gender Necessary?,” published after *The Left Hand of Darkness* was critiqued for its perceived failures, especially with respect to gender and sexuality, reveals this ability – most obviously when read in the “Redux” format, the essay from 12 years after the original essay was written, available in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. In this revised version, Le Guin converses with her past self, sometimes mildly, and sometimes with flat-out refusals and a chiding tone, noting where critics had it right, and she, in fact, was wrong, despite a stubborn approach to her critics in the original essay. As she herself claims, “Change [is] . . . the essential quality of . . . the entire human condition” (*Dancing* 6); she seems to be rather proficient in embracing the idea as it relates to her writing. In a letter to Amy M. Clarke about feminist critics’ reception of *The Dispossessed*, she admits that those critics “were to some extent right” (Clarke 6). She added new novels to the Earthsea series that took up the criticisms of the original trilogy, and continued writing more of the series after *Tehanu*. Generally, Le Guin shows a willingness to admit perceived mistakes, or politically problematic representations, and to try again.

Reading *The Dispossessed*, *The Lathe of Heaven*, and *Lavinia* together reveals Le Guin’s early-career presentation of gender as well as the culmination of many years of reconsideration of those early beliefs. Where her early novels generally present a more liberal feminism interested in strong women taking places of power alongside of the men in their societies, *Lavinia* shows the influence of radical feminism on Le Guin’s understanding of gender. The women in *Lavinia* are depicted as having their own form of

*pietas*, their own measure of worth alongside that of the men. Gender in *The Dispossessed* appears in both a capitalist and an anarchist society, revealing the cultural differences in approaches to gender; those on Urras are deeply invested in power divides and women's inferiority, while the Anarresti value women as coworkers, whatever the task at hand, and contributors to their society. Orr, in *The Lathe of Heaven*, admires Heather for her seemingly brash and powerful behaviour, and Orr's passive, intuitive masculinity contrasts with Haber's overbearing, rugged masculinity. These three novels reveal the infusion of radical feminism into *Lavinia* after Le Guin's generally more liberal approach from the early parts of her career.

Although reading these novels together provides insight into the course of Le Guin's shifting feminist views, the combination of these works also reveals the way in which some of the potential critiques of her work have remained viable. The early essentialist depiction of Takver and Heather as earthy, supportive creatures is echoed by the later essentialism in *Lavinia* that presents women as innately more wise than men. Le Guin's conservative aspects can also be seen, from the reactionary support of nuclear family structures in *The Dispossessed*, to the reinstatement of a hierarchical romantic relationship between Orr and Heather in *The Lathe of Heaven*, to the unwillingness to overtly challenge the patriarchal social structure in *Lavinia*. Le Guin's attempts to create new worlds<sup>8</sup> for her characters to inhabit reinscribe many of the problems of the material one surrounding her. Delany, however, describes *The Dispossessed*'s "ambition" as what "will excite any reader beginning to look at our world and us in it" rather "than its precise accomplishments" (308), and Moylan, drawing on Delany's comments, calls Le Guin "ambitious and well-meaning" (119). Though the above critiques of Le Guin's works'

conservative elements do indeed remain applicable, so too do her admirable attempts to imagine and create worlds with feminism in mind.

In future studies of Le Guin, a worthwhile investigation might be into the thread of homophobia I have found in all three novels. Delany's critique of *The Dispossessed*, of course, points out the first instance of such bias. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, homosexuality is only mentioned twice, but in both cases it is connected to pedophilia.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in *Lavinia*, Le Guin depicts Ascanius as rampantly misogynistic precisely because of his homosexuality, as if disinterest in women sexually must also equate to dislike of them overall. Alexis Lothian analyzes *The Telling*, a 2000 novel by Le Guin that includes a non-heterosexual character, and concludes that "Le Guin's exploration into queering her worlds is not (yet) concerned with moving too far beyond heterosexuality" (391). As such, feminist readings of Le Guin should include some critical discussion of the way in which she deals with sexuality.

My particular feminist reading of these three Le Guin novels is, of course, limited. But by drawing attention to some of the problematic aspects of Le Guin's depictions of gender, and by analyzing the types of and shifts in feminist views Le Guin's works demonstrate, this study broadens the field of Le Guin criticism. Moreover, the notion of a "feminist author" that my initial recommendations from friends purported Le Guin to be is clearly a reductive one. Le Guin herself exhibits several types of feminist views, sometimes simultaneously, and her works – both fictional and nonfictional – demonstrate many changes of mind. Feminism is not static any more than it is monolithic. Furthermore, science fiction works, given their freedom from the requirements of realistic fiction, have the opportunity to play with conceptions of gender and identity in a

way that can be meaningful in a feminist context. This ability, however, should not be interpreted as a dichotomized box to check where one work is acceptably feminist and another fails the test. Rather, any given work can be simultaneously problematic in some respects and interesting and challenging in others. Le Guin's works exemplify this potential.

## Endnotes

1. I use this term to describe the idea of a utopia's practical applicability. Many others have used "blueprint" in reference to utopias, including Tom Moylan (161), Simon Stow (37), and Le Guin herself (*Mythmakers* 3).
2. While not a scholarly piece, Christenson does provide an accurate summary of several utopian visions of the family, even as his reactionary defense of "traditional" family structures highlights the importance of utopian challenges to such structures.
3. Sargent spells this as *eutopian* to refer to the Greek "*eutopia* or *good place*," while *utopia* as created by Thomas More is a play on words and means "*no* or *not place*" (Sargent "Three Faces Revisited" 5).
4. The novel uses Haber and Orr's last names for the bulk of the narration, but refers to Heather as Heather, not Lelache, perhaps to emphasize Heather's gender. Haber also dehumanizes Heather by thinking of her with definite articles before her name or title – as "the Lelache" (70) and "the lawyer" (69).
5. This stallion shares a name with the New York City organization that was "a political force of hegemonic proportions" ("Tammany Hall"). This parallel further emphasizes Haber's desire for power and control.
6. I use "Vergil" because it is the spelling Le Guin uses.
7. Le Guin does not provide perhaps the most famous female character from the *Aeneid*, Dido, a voice, instead relegating her to brief secondary narration. Indeed, the novel's representation of Dido would be worthy of its own study.
8. Of course, Lavinia is not set in a new world in the same way in which *The Dispossessed* and *The Lathe of Heaven* are – as imagined or futuristic, but instead in a



semi-fantastical historical setting. A feminist revisioning of the story, however, can take whatever liberties it sees fitting, and Le Guin acknowledges having done such a thing with the novel's inclusion of wine (*Lavinia* 278).

9. For example, the first of these instances occurs when Heather Lelache describes the case of a “Man under VTT [who] tried to sue his therapist for implanting homosexual tendencies in him . . . [and who] actually was a terrific repressed homo; he got arrested for trying to bugger a twelve-year-old boy in broad daylight in the middle of Phoenix Park” (41-42).

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