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A subversive in hyperspace: C.J. Cherryh's feminist transformation of space opera

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A Subversive in Hyperspace: C. J. Cherryh's

Feminist Transformation of Space Opera
(TITLE)

BY

Susan J. Eisenhour

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Thesis Abstract

A Subversive in Hyperspace:
C. J. Cherryh's Feminist Transformation of Space Opera
by
Susan J. Eisenhour

C. J. Cherryh has written more than fifty novels since 1976, varying from high fantasy to planetary romance. Among the most popular are the space operas of her Union/Alliance series, but these are space operas revitalized and transformed. Cherryh revises some of the basic tenets of space opera in a way that makes room for both female and male heroes outside the patriarchal mold and with a utopian concern for social and political change. In doing so, she creates a more female-friendly universe, and she does this with a subtlety that allows the reader, male as well as female, to enjoy an adventure story while internalizing lessons in gender equality in a non-threatening manner.

Space opera, throughout its history, has had a mixed reputation. If science fiction has been considered at times a marginalized genre, space opera is a sub-genre that has garnered even less respect. Yet this branch of science fiction has always been one of the most popular forms with readers, containing as it does so many of the elements that readers find attractive in science fiction: exploration of the unknown, alien races both benign and evil, fantastic space ships and futuristic gadgets, fast-paced action and the chance to satisfy one's curiosity with grand "what if's."

Since its birth in the 1930's space opera has never completely lost its market, as seen in the continuing "Dorsai" series by Gordon R. Dickson and Poul Anderson's "Ensign Flandry" stories, to name but two. While these newer space operas have

maintained the general machismo bias of the early tales, in the last twenty years the form has enjoyed a transformation in the hands of several women science fiction writers. C. J. Cherryh was one of the first to find in the structure fertile ground for opening a discourse on feminist issues.

In this thesis I examine five of her novels in detail: *Downbelow Station* (1981), *Merchanter's Luck* (1982), *The Pride of Chanur*, (1982), *Rimrunners* (1989) and *Heavy Time* (1991). Relating Cherryh's use of character and setting to the studies of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* and Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*, I examine her exploration of the problems of government and social upheaval in relation to the personal and family concerns of the characters and the challenge faced by those without power trying to survive in times of political disruption. Besides exploring the nature of power and the inequalities of androcentric rule, these novels look closely at what might constitute family other than the nuclear-family-based patterns we see in our present culture.

Cherryh's novels offer a rich field of study in the ways in which a woman writer can use the forms of science fiction and especially of space opera to further a discourse in gender issues.

To

Margaret Atwood
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Lois McMaster Bujold
Emma Bull
Octavia Butler
Suzy McKee Charnas
C. J. Cherryh
A. C. Crispin
Diane Duane
Suzette Haden Elgin
Mary Gentle
Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Barbara Hambly
Zenna Henderson
Tanya Huff
Janet Kagan
Lee Killough
Mercedes Lackey
Ursula K. Le Guin
Tanith Lee
Elizabeth A. Lynn
Anne McCaffrey
Vonda McIntyre
Patricia McKillip
Marge Piercy
Joanna Russ
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and to

Jerry, who doesn't even like science fiction

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Introduction - A Subversive in Hyperspace: C. J. Cherryh's Feminist Transformation of Space Opera

C. J. Cherryh has written more than fifty science fiction and fantasy novels since 1976, varying from high fantasy to planetary romance. Among the most popular are the "space operas" of her Union/Alliance series, but these are space operas revitalized and transformed. Space opera is a distinctive category of fiction defined in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* as "colorful action-adventure stories of interplanetary or interstellar conflict" (Clute 1138). Cherryh revises some of the basic elements of traditional space opera with a utopian concern for social and political change in a way that makes room for both female and male heroes outside the patriarchal mold. In doing so, she creates a more female-friendly universe, and she does this with a subtlety that allows the reader, male as well as female, to enjoy an adventure story while internalizing lessons in gender equality in a non-threatening manner.

The space opera genre had its beginning in the Golden Age of science fiction-- a period of approximately ten years beginning when John W. Campbell became editor of *Astounding Stories* in 1938 (Clute 506). His editorship provided the impetus for a phenomenal growth both in terms of quantity and quality of science fiction and in the development of some of its most important themes and patterns.

Space opera, throughout its history, has had a mixed reputation. If science fiction has been considered at times a marginalized genre, space opera is a sub-genre that has garnered even less respect. The name, a snide reference to both soap operas and horse operas, was coined by Wilson Tucker for the "hacky, grinding, stinking,

outworn, spaceship yarn" (Clute 1138). Yet this branch of science fiction has always been one of the most popular forms with readers, containing as it does so many of the elements that readers find attractive in science fiction. Though critics find difficulty in giving a precise definition of space opera--Brian Aldiss, in an introduction to his anthology, resisted the "impulse here to define space opera" (Monk 296)--general criteria can be established, as Patricia Monk has done in her essay defending the genre:

The effective way to proceed with a discussion of space opera is to abandon definition on the grounds that space opera is not susceptible of definition, being neither static nor monolithic. It is not a collection of texts but an attitudinal bias. (300)

This attitudinal bias, aimed at creating an atmosphere in which the universe is "both knowable and manageable" (Monk 300), revolves around romantic action-adventure plots, war on a galactic or intergalactic scale, aliens, futuristic paraphernalia, heroes and villains, and the chance to satisfy one's curiosity with grand "what if's."

Since its birth in the 1930's space opera has never completely lost its market, as seen in the continuing "Dorsai" series by Gordon R. Dickson which began in the early 1960's and continued into the 1990's, and Poul Anderson's "Ensign Flandry" stories, which also began in the 1960's and continued into the mid 1980's (Clute 1140). These newer space operas have maintained the general machismo bias of the early tales. Aliens, when included, are little different from the stereotypical "Red Indian" in traditional westerns--the "horse operas" that contributed to the name "space opera." Traditional space opera heroes are always men with the strength and

intelligence to overcome all adversity; women exist to provide a love interest for the hero or a sounding board to explain the intricacies of the plot. As Cherryh herself wrote, decrying the lack of female role models in science fiction, "Like most women who read science fiction I learned to identify with male characters. Actually it's easy. They do things I'd do" ("Female Characters in Science Fiction" 23). Women characters do nothing. They only exist as props, flat, cardboard non-characters of less importance to the story than warships and space stations:

Why do we skimp on a physical description of all the men in the book, but we *have* to stop the action to tell Sally's shape? Examine the motive for it and I'm afraid we're more worried about Sally's exterior than her interior. ("Female" 27)

However, in the last twenty years space opera has enjoyed a transformation in the hands of several women science fiction writers. C. J. Cherryh was one of the first to find in the structure fertile ground for opening a discourse on feminist issues among science fiction critics and readers.

By appropriating the forms of space opera and revising them to suit her own desires, Cherryh is part of a literary history going back to Shakespeare and beyond. As Nancy A. Walker wrote in *The Disobedient Writer*, for women writers divorced from the mainstream of language, literature and cultural traditions, the need to subvert texts to their own uses is the only way to express their own ideas:

literary history...is frequently constructed by successive writers turning to their own purposes the patterns and materials created by other writers. And yet it is also true that women's relationship to such an

inheritance has normally been fundamentally and dramatically different from that of men. (4)

Walker goes on to say that "fiction reflects the author's concern with social realities, and that to 'change the story' is not merely an artistic but also a social action, suggesting in narrative practice the possibility of cultural transformation" (6).

Cherryh herself wrote:

Being science fiction writers, we can handle sexism in the same way we treat racism: first point it out; second, show the harm and quicken consciences; third, write the future with models where it's been put out of business. ("Female" 26)

Thus Cherryh's novels show women as heroes, not just as decoration or victims, in ways that subtly re-shape and redefine the very concept of heroism.

I will examine five of C. J. Cherryh's novels in detail: *Downbelow Station* (1981), *Merchanter's Luck* (1982), *The Pride of Chanur* (1982), *Rimrunners* (1989) and *Heavy Time* (1991). These novels are all linked in what has been called the Union/Alliance Series--a set of independent stories set in the same imagined universe. Like the novels set in Ursula K. Le Guin's Hainish universe, each of these books can stand alone, but considered in combination with the others they present a fuller picture of the development of her themes of communication, community and change.

While Cherryh's fantasy writing has been the subject of critical appraisal, almost nothing has been written of her science fiction, and this neglect should be remedied. There is a tendency in science fiction criticism to examine those works most approachable by the criteria used in mainstream literary criticism. This can

ignore or slight some of the qualities that make science fiction a vital, exciting genre. As Robin Roberts suggests in *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*, "by resisting the hierarchy of the high art--mass culture dualism; and, by resisting facile definition as either/or" (141), feminist writers can redefine our culture and open a discourse that questions the basis of many of our dominant, androcentric structures. Space opera can suffer from all the faults attributed to it, but when well done, like any science fiction, it can offer unique insights to ways in which literature can comment on the human condition and on the role gender bias plays in our lives.

Gary Westfahl, in a response to Patricia Monk's defense of the genre, basically states that space opera is trash, so if a novel is good it can't be space opera; poor writing and bad, inaccurate science are part of its definition (177). This blanket condemnation of an entire subgenre too closely echoes the condemnation frequently applied to science fiction as a whole by mainstream writers and critics. As in any genre, space opera has good and bad representative works, but to deny the possibility of quality because of occasional dreck dismisses too many well-written novels.

All the novels in this study show Cherryh's revision of space opera toward a greater emphasis on character, concern for family and community, and exploration of the effects of social and political change on the individual. By studying each novel in detail it is possible to note a differing emphasis on these concerns and a progression in Cherryh's examination of these themes.

Despite Westfahl's rather circular reasoning, Cherryh's Hugo Award winning *Downbelow Station* certainly fits the criteria of space opera while also exhibiting the literary value he claims impossible. It contains the space opera elements of vast

distances, powerful FTL (faster-than-light) ships, human populations spreading to the far reaches of the galaxy, and war between rival factions. While Cherryh follows the space opera formula in her broad outline, she differs considerably in the details of how she treats these various elements. Her use of subtle themes, complex plot elements and especially her considerable skill in creating fully-realized characters all contribute to the quality of her writing.

Ursula K. Le Guin, in her essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," describes a novel as not necessarily a linear progression toward a point, a "spear, starting *here* and going straight *there* and THOK! hitting its mark" (169), but as a bag containing the people, their problems, their peculiar solutions. *Downbelow Station*, unlike the typical space opera, follows this latter model, being more about people than about battles. There is no single hero standing tall and leading his people to victory, but many heroes doing their best to cope, to survive, to create connections.

It is a dense tale of the disintegration of a galactic empire, focusing on the events engulfing Pell Station as antagonistic space fleets try to control or destroy it. But Cherryh goes far beyond the mere action/adventure story, giving instead a detailed, reasoned examination of the cost of such power struggles to the humans and aliens caught up in the conflicts.

One of the first individuals introduced is Signy Mallory, Captain of the Earth Company Ship *Norway*. That this captain is a woman in a position of great power and authority is Cherryh's first departure from the usual expectations of space opera. There have been women captains in other science fiction, such as Lady Gloria Lurr in Van Vogt's *Mission to the Stars*, but, like Lady Gloria, they were weak, vacillating

creatures all too willing to give up their power to a "real" man who could tame them. Mallory holds her power without question, and the reader soon learns that in Cherryh's created universe, there is complete gender equality. We see women as soldiers, captains, merchants, diplomats; it is clear that this equality is a long-standing practice by the way these women's positions are never defended.

Viewed in the light of Carol Gilligan's study of the distinction between male and female problem solving, *In a Different Voice*, Mallory leads as a woman, both defining her problems and finding her solutions from a different perspective than that of the usual hero. Gilligan found that, given identical problems to solve, girls and boys looked for solutions in different ways. The girl in one study saw the people in the problem as involved in a "network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend. Consequently her solution to the dilemma lies in activating the network by communication" (30). The major problem in *Downbelow Station* is for the various individuals to find a way of surviving in a collapsing world. The leader of the Earth Company Fleet, Conrad Mazian, faced with the absolute need to support and supply his ships when the Earth Company has abandoned them, would seize control of the space station, just as one boy in Gilligan's study would rely on theft to secure survival (32). That the fleet was originally built to protect Pell Station does not influence Mazian, for he sees the problem as binary: either his survival or that of the stationers. Mallory, out of the habit of loyalty to Mazian and the fleet, accedes to this plan even though such piracy conflicts with her own ideas of honor. In the end, however, Mallory finds a way to survive by joining with the merchant ships and the station to form an Alliance, a "network of relationships." Similarly, in her dealings

with her crew, Mallory's way of establishing rapport and a community of people is by, in Gilligan's words, "a process of communication" (32). On her ship, the intercom is always open so even the lowest-ranking crew members always know what decisions are being made.

From another theoretical perspective, Cherryh's contrast in this novel of human political structures with those of the indigenous race of the planet Pell can be related to Riane Eisler's comparison of dominator and partnership models of cultural organization in *The Chalice and the Blade*. For the Downers, as they are called by the human colonists, "diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority" (xvii) and they can incorporate even the technologically superior humans into their world view, learning to desire a chance for reaching out to other worlds without compromising their own cultural mores (164). Both the Union and Earth governments, while making no gender distinctions in position or authority, are still clearly modeled on the principle of domination by force, and Cherryh shows the flaw in this structure when even the well-intentioned Konstantin family cannot save their Pell installations until they abandon their paternalistic habits of protecting the Downers and instead accept partnership with them. Following a pattern common to many feminist utopian novels¹, Cherryh postulates an improved world not through finding better rulers, but through incorporating disparate elements to create a non-hierarchical unity.

¹ Some of the feminist utopias with this pattern: *Motherlines* by Suzy McKee Charnas, *A Door into Ocean* by Joan Slonczewski, *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, *Always Coming Home* by Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Gate to Women's Country* by Sheri S. Tepper.

In the other novels of my study the problems of government and social upheaval are examined in relation to the personal and family concerns of the characters. Again, Cherryh's strong emphasis on character is, as Moylan suggests in his description of the "critical utopia," a transformation of traditional modes. In *Merchanter's Luck*, *Rimrunners* and *Heavy Time* especially, this transformation is accomplished through the novels' focus on the lives of ordinary people. Where *Downbelow Station* looked at change through the activities of captains and station masters, these novels focus on merchants, common soldiers and asteroid miners. If these people do not create a final, fixed utopia for a whole society, each does find a small space in which to make their private world a better place.

Family and family relationships are not generally treated in science fiction, especially not in space opera. If family is mentioned at all, it is usually only to provide a restrictive nest from which the hero will flee to find adventure, as in Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, or the western tradition of the lone hero exemplified by Jack Schaefer's *Shane*. Another of the limited uses for family is for the eccentric scientist to have a beautiful but stupid wife to whom he can explain his inventions, as in E. E. "Doc" Smith's *The Skylark of Space*. The focus of traditional space opera is the (usually male) hero and/or the gadgets of technology that take him out into space. There is no room in the story for wife or family, and certainly not for children, except as non-participating props for the hero.

In *Merchanter's Luck*, however, Cherryh not only shows the presence of family, but makes this basic human connection an integral focus of the story. Like the women of Gilligan's study who repeatedly saw connection as safety (41) Cherryh

examines the dilemma faced by a man who has lost his family, contrasting this with the confidence of a woman who has always known the security and support of a strong family environment.

Rimrunners offers a variation upon another of the traditional elements of space opera by focusing on a single woman who is anxious to establish Gilligan's "network of relationships." This character is a common trooper who, temporarily stranded on a star station, manages to find a new ship to serve, one that belongs to a former enemy. This novel offers details of the routine of shipboard life for an ordinary crewperson and insights into the creation of loyalty and camaraderie between crew mates, much like Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. But in Cherryh's revision, the trooper is a woman, Elizabeth "Bet" Yeager, who finds not only survival but friendship among her enemies.

Bet's experience in being completely alone on the station strengthens her desire to form a web when she is again on a ship. She uses this desire to forge friendships where there is originally suspicion and, as a result, draws in the ship's outsider, NG Ramey, so that he, too, discovers the safety that can exist inside this web. Gilligan found that women's experience in relationships can serve to create stability, providing:

a nonhierarchical vision of human connection. Since relationships, when cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic, their transposition into the image of web changes an order of inequality into a structure of interconnection. (62)

To further her examination of ordinary people and clarify the basic assumptions that lead to *Downbelow Station*, in *Heavy Time* Cherryh moves back approximately fifty years in time and many lightyears in distance to the sources of a truly space-centered society. Set in Earth's solar system, this novel explores the beginnings of the Earth Company Fleet from the viewpoint of insignificant people: system miners. These people are trapped in the cogs of a mega-corporation gradually exerting control not only over its employees, but over Earth governments as well. In an essay, "Science Fiction and History," Poul Anderson discusses this familiar science fiction theme only to dismiss it. "In practice, though, private organizations exist on sufferance of the state, and the real dictator is always the man who controls the armed forces and the police" (158). Cherryh shows just how this corporate take-over is completely possible: the corporations *do* control both the military and the police. Adding control of the commodities that come from space-centered trade, they consolidate their power by controlling the goods and services people of Earth want and need.

Heavy Time offers interesting insights as well about the growing differences of attitude between Earth-born "blue-skyers" and spacers. The spacers' attitude is generally that, while nice for certain luxuries, such as coffee, "gravity wells"--as they refer to planets--are not really safe. This view of planets as environments only fit for infant or decadent cultures is explored by Cherryh in an essay from 1985: "I just can't figure out why a species that has gotten out of its own native gravity well and gone interstellar . . . will *ever* be motivated to use a planet other than as a source of exotica" ("Goodbye Starwars, Hello Alley-Oop" 19).

The difference between the space-centered culture and that of Earth involves more than just suspicion of stationary planets, though. Earth's attitude is "Dump the past," because the corporations have more control over people when they've forgotten ideas of working together, while the spacers say "Stop thinking Earth's it," out of a desire to find new ways of living together and new ways of solving basic social problems (189).

In making central, and sympathetic, the characters who will eventually form the Earth Company Fleet, Cherryh makes a telling point about protagonists and antagonists: that the best intentions can lead to future wrongs and that the worst villains didn't start out that way.

These books explore the challenges faced by those without power trying to survive in times of political disruption and look closely at what might constitute family other than the nuclear-family-based patterns we see in our present culture.

Pride of Chanur, in a departure from the other novels, is told completely from the viewpoint of an alien species, the Han. Cherryh uses gender-role reversal to comment tellingly on gender stereotypes, as in the Han culture males are considered too volatile to be trusted in critical positions.

Males exist to obtain or hold property through personal combat, and to procreate. They are pampered and protected by their sisters and wives, but not encouraged to develop their creativity or intelligence, and when they have gotten too old to hold property by physical strength, they are defeated and either killed or exiled. The females who support their male relatives are the ones who actually do the

work of their estates, including crewing the starships that travel throughout a sector of space in trade operations.

Pyanfar Chanur, captain of the *Pride of Chanur*, only begins to question this "natural order" as her contact with other species of The Compact, a loose association of worlds, allows her to see the flaws of this system. In her musings about the structure of these alien societies, she learns to look at her own with an outsider's viewpoint. The introduction of a lost human male on to her ship furthers her questioning of tradition and shows her that the Han treatment of males means half the population can't develop to its fullest potential and that this means lost possibilities for the world as a whole.

The Han see the emotionality and instability of males as having a biological basis, much as, in our own world, it has been argued that women are innately incapable of rational thought. This reversal of our expectations serves, as Darko Suvin has suggested much science fiction does, to create a "cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 4), to make the familiar seem strange by a reversal that forces the reader to look more closely at the cultural mores it reverses.

While none of these books is utopian in the classical sense, since they are not formal descriptions of the ideal, but impossible, society, they do share a utopian concern for social change. As Tom Moylan writes in *Demand the Impossible*, these may be considered "critical utopias," describing the details of possible future societies. These are changeable, changing, imperfect worlds that postulate the possibility of social transformation and what that transformation may mean to the people involved. These are not finished, perfect, static worlds, but cultures and

peoples in transition in a cycle of advance and retreat as they approach their own utopian goals (11).

Cherryh's assumption of gender equality and her merchanter families with their non-propertarian attitude toward women are certainly utopian in intent. And in all these novels, rather than a single, white male bringing about a new social order, change is launched by heroes who are, in Moylan's words: "off-center and usually . . . characters who are not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males but female, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively" (45). In *Downbelow Station* the change that starts the Merchanters' Alliance is brought about by the actions of a prisoner of war, an exiled bureaucrat, a renegade fleet captain, furry aliens and a woman totally confined to a bed with complete medical support. In *Merchanter's Luck* a petty thief and a spoiled rich girl create their own personal family and utopia. *Rimrunners* shows how a common trooper uses what she has learned in a renegade Fleet to build a sense of community on a ship of her former enemies. A slang-speaking old radical, a corporate "wannabe" and a man suffering mental imbalance come together in *Heavy Time* to help define the shape of a new social order. And in *The Pride of Chanur*, it takes the work of an alien woman and a human man, who, in reaching out to communicate, find a place where they can work and live together in peace, and in the process open doors to a reexamination of gender roles.

Cherryh's novels offer a rich field of study in the ways in which a woman writer can use the forms of science fiction and especially of space opera to further a

discourse in gender issues. In the following chapters, I will examine in detail the methods Cherryh uses to effect this change.

Chapter 1 - "Words, not shots": People, Non-violence and Community in
Downbelow Station

The events of *Downbelow Station* begin in the year 2352 with confusion, violence and death during the evacuation of outer star-stations. But this is not a story of rescue or even of destruction; this is a story about people surviving a changing environment and how they use that change to forge a positive future rather than a destructive one. Cherryh has taken some of the staple elements of space opera and performed the subversive act of making them tell another story. In Le Guin's words, she is using the novel as "a sack, a bag. . . . holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us" ("Carrier" 169). And by this subversion Cherryh says something about the real effects of conflict on those who do not make policy decisions, but suffer for them anyway, just as she says something about the importance of community and equality to the health of a society. So there are war ships without a battle and death without much killing and heroic acts without a hero-- at least without a single, powerful hero standing alone.

Cherryh's use of multiple heroes rather than one strong central figure is another departure from tradition, and one that reflects Gilligan's findings that women "see a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone" (29). This also fits Tom Moylan's definition of a "critical utopia," in which change is brought about by those seeking to supplant power structures with a community-based system of reciprocity (11).

None of these characters alone can solve the problems they face, or even ensure their individual survival, but all working together can make a new world, a

new social order. So each of these heroes contributes to the whole, with each representing, perhaps, some aspect of a truly ideal hero, not the single, strong leader of androcentric stories. These heroes include: Signy Mallory, captain of the Earth Company Fleet ship *Norway*; Joshua Talley, a prisoner of war dumped on Pell with refugees from destroyed stations; Damon Konstantin of the legal affairs office and son of the stationmaster of Pell Station; the stationmaster himself, Angelo Konstantin; Elene Quen, who was part of a merchant family but is now a stationer and married to Damon; Satin and Bluetooth, as they are named by human friends, who are natives of the world called Pell; Alicia Konstantin, Angelo's bed-ridden wife who is utterly dependent on the station for life support.

In the character of Signy Mallory, Cherryh has created a most ambiguous hero and one of her strongest contrasts with traditional space opera. As the only female captain in the Fleet, Mallory has a different attitude toward the people around her, a different way of leading her ship, a different perspective on the problems she faces. Her character may be analyzed in terms which Gilligan defines as culturally female: "Against the background of the psychological descriptions of identity and moral development which I had read and taught for a number of years, the women's voices sounded distinct" (Gilligan 1). This difference is a contrast between the so-called "feminine" and "masculine" interpretations of morality and relationship.

Carol Gilligan does not claim that the difference in problem-solving or moral development is absolutely gender related, but it is a recognizable pattern of behavior (2). This pattern of opposed ways of looking at the world is echoed in Riane Eisler's account of the historical and pre-historical change from partnership to dominator

models in *The Chalice and the Blade*. This change moved humanity from a "more harmonious and peaceful age. . . . where woman and man lived in harmony with each other and nature" (xv), to a domination based on male supremacy. The so-called feminine mode involves the creation of a "web of relationships" rather than a "hierarchy of power" and the promotion of this web by communication (Gilligan 32).

In *Downbelow Station*, we first see Signy Mallory, who personifies Gilligan's feminine mode, directing the evacuation of ten merchant freighters full of refugees from the captured station Mariner. She is quick and blunt, having no time for courtesy, but even in this disaster she is concerned for the trouble these ten ships are bringing to Pell Station. She has prepared plans to help Pell cope with seven thousand frightened and desperate refugees, and is concerned for the lives of those crowded on ships not designed to handle such a mass of people (10-13).

Signy Mallory has lived her whole life in a state of war, from "freighter pilot, rider captain, the gamut, all in the Earth Company's service" (10). In this life she has lost sight of many of the things others take for granted, such as safety, comfort, even art. She is surprised at and somewhat amused by the sight of the Downer art work in Pell station center:

...this reminder of luxuries and civilization. Forgotten things, rumored things. Leisure to make and create what had no function but itself, as man and none, but himself. She had lived her whole life insulated from such things. (30)

As time has passed, Earth has lost interest in the colonies that have become too distant for it to control and has abandoned the Fleet, so her ship and the Fleet are

Mallory's only community. She feels out of touch with the stationers she tries to protect, though even early in the novel she sees the possibility of unity in a moment of communication shared with Angelo Konstantin, when he seems to offer her "support in the face of Company pressure. . . but that was too much to expect of stationers" (33). The habits of a lifetime make her believe the fleet must be alone as it had always been alone. In this isolation, Mallory has created a family out of the varied people that make up her ship's crew, some of whom were conscripted into service from merchant families. She keeps the inter-ship communications always open, so even the most junior crew are always aware of the decisions being made (167). When *Norway* is preparing for a major battle, she makes a personal tour of her ship, "touched a shoulder here and there. . . ," (166) establishing contact and rapport.

As events progress, Mallory is thrown into conflict with Mazian and the other captains of the fleet because she will not change the way she runs her ship to follow the more militaristic orders of Conrad Mazian.

When the fleet, defeated in a final push against Union forces, returns to take control of Pell, Mallory is put in charge of station security. In that job she discovers that some troopers from other ships have set up an illegal black market and slave ring. While arresting these personnel, she shoots one of them who defies her authority. She does not delegate this duty, nor does she relish it. Gilligan, in her studies of women's decision making, notes that one woman "casts the dilemma not as a contest of rights but as a problem of relationships, centering on a question of responsibility which in the end must be faced" (59). Mallory could have either

delegated this shooting to one of her crew or turned the trooper over to his own captain for discipline, but she acted on her own as a direct response to what she saw as a public refusal to accept her authority (344). This also reflects Cherryh's contention, in an essay about female characters, that a woman in conflict with a man will act in a more direct way, shooting without warning, because her strength is less than his and she may not have a second chance: "a man *might* frighten an attacker or bloody his nose and get him to change his mind. A woman can't. . . . If a woman goes in, there's no halfway; either she kills the man or she loses" ("Female" 26).

Harassment by Mazian strengthens Mallory's ability to find common cause with the stationers and the merchants. Although her break with Mazian seems abrupt, it is, in fact, the result of a growing dissatisfaction with Mazian's proposal to loot the station and then go back to Earth to use the ships to take control of the government there. She realizes his plan will make the fleet no different than the Union undercover operatives who come in ahead of its fleet to sabotage stations, "And that was what the Beyond came to be--a renegade Fleet and a world that bred creatures like Josh. Who could do what Josh did. . . . What they prepared to do" (406). Mallory sees clearly, through Josh Talley, that Mazian's plan to destroy Pell Station makes him no different than the Union agents, and it is this clear seeing that makes her chose to oppose the rest of the fleet and protect the station.

This Josh Talley, whose presence on Pell serves to help Mallory change her allegiance, is first seen as a Union prisoner captured on Mariner Station. He is also a hero in the classic sense. Following Joseph Campbell's description in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Talley undergoes the hero's journey, leaving the familiar to go into

strange lands where he is tempted, wins a victory and brings back the boon of unity (Campbell 30). But Talley, while exemplifying all the qualities of the traditional hero, is a relatively minor character in this novel. Rather than dominating the action, he serves as the catalyst that unites Signy Mallory with the stationers and the merchants, bringing these elements together to form a community that allows them all to survive.

When Talley is first introduced he has been captured by enemies after his own ship is destroyed. He is questioned by the station and fleet officials using drugs and torture, but, like the battles we do not see, all of this is presented as something in the past, not as an exciting element to the adventure. To get released from detention on Pell he agrees to Adjustment, a partial mind-wipe that will erase any memories he has of his former life. This will protect him from further questioning and make him, supposedly, safe to release into Pell's population.

When he first emerges from detention, having lost everything he ever knew, he clings to the few associations he has made on Pell--with the guards who befriended him, and with Damon Konstantin. Damon is one of the two sons of the stationmaster Angelo Konstantin, and he offers Talley friendship out of guilt for the part he played in Talley's Adjustment. Talley wants to trust, to find friends, but also fears too much closeness. All his associations from the past are dead or erased: "He desperately tried to maintain his balance, walking the line of too much trust on the one side and on the other--a terror of trusting anyone. He hated being alone" (143).

As some of his memories do return, they are memories of connection, of relationship and of his youth: "Home. That was home. He ached after it" (147), and

not of war or his job in that war. What he does remember of the Union ship he came from are all of his friends there, not battles or action. "He recovered faces, glad to remember them. They had worked close--in more than one sense. . . . They had been together . . . years" (147).

But, as Josh learns when he is approached by a Union agent, these memories, of the farm where he grew up and the woman who raised him, are false--planted in his mind to provide cover. He is himself one of Union's agents of sabotage. He is expected to rejoin his partners to help destroy Pell. But the associations he has formed on the station, the friendships and connections are more important than his past or his conditioning and he helps Pell survive. The station offers the kind of friendship and connection to others he has only known in false memories. In the end, he joins Mallory as crew on *Norway*, because this is a chance to help defend those he cares about, "I want to remember. I've got something. The only real thing. All that I value" (438). These are the things that are important to him, not politics or his job, but the relationships he has made.

One of these important relationships is with Damon Konstantin, one of two sons of stationmaster Angelo. He is essentially an ordinary person caught in extraordinary events and trying to cope as well as he can. Damon is one of the first of Cherryh's honorable humans, a man who wants to treat others with courtesy and fairness, but is forced by circumstances into acts he considers cruel. This type of character shows up in many of Cherryh's novels, serving as an example of decency, a person who wants to do what is right, but often is either unable to act because of weakness or is driven to wrong acts by a misjudgment. Growing up on the station,

even in time of war, Damon's life has been easier than Signy Mallory's and he lacks the hard edge her life has given her. He wants to continue his life as it has been and tries to treat others with the kind of courtesy and justice he has known in the past even though he recognizes that is no longer possible. The presence of thousands of refugees from destroyed stations, the harsh measures required to secure Pell from the criminals in Q (the quarantined sector) and the take-over by the Earth Company Fleet have changed his whole way of life. He wants the survival of his home and family, but is not willing or able to pay the price that survival might require.

Though he is in a position of power on the station, and uses that authority to help Talley when he first arrives, Damon is so completely out of his element in the changed situation that ultimately Talley must protect him. Damon knows only station life, and even the merchants are alien to him. When his wife meets Talley for the first time, Damon sees a similarity in their attitudes based on the fact that both come from ships. They have a shared background that extends even to the jokes they both appreciate, that Damon sees as "Merchanter's humor, impenetrable as another language" (112). Damon does not have the skills to survive in the changed environment or in Q, where he and Talley are isolated for several days. There, he depends on Talley's skills for survival, in many ways functioning like the "damsel in distress" of traditional space opera.

Another of the links Tally values is with Elen Quen. She is part of a merchant family from *Estelle*, a ship destroyed in the collapse of Mariner Station. Unlike most merchant women, she has stayed on the station and married Damon Konstantin. Her

first impulse, when she hears that her entire family is dead, is to want a child, one that will carry on her family name.

When Quen is separated from her husband and her new family by riots on the station she naturally turns to the "family" she knows: the merchanters. She uses her influence to change the course of the political upheaval taking place by helping the merchants change the way they look at themselves. Before, they had handled changes in government and policy by surviving on the edges, by running for safe points in space when there was violence and by bowing to the authority of whatever government was most powerful. When the merchanters who have survived Pell's take-over by Mazian gather at a safe haven, Elen convinces them to stop running this time:

We can stop trade--all worlds, all stations--we can shut them down.

Half a century of being pushed around...half a century of being mark for any warship not in the mood to regard our neutrality. And what do we get when the military has it all? (324)

They learn that by working together they have enough power to protect themselves and set the rules by which they will live, a power that comes because both stations and ships need the service they provide, both in supplies and communications. Only the FTL (faster than light) ships can bridge the vast gaps of space between worlds and stations and this communication is necessary to prevent the disintegration of that community. But they can only have strength by working together.

The aliens of Pell present a significant alternative to traditional dominator cultures, although we see them first through the eyes of Jon Lucas, to whom they are

only the "dirty savages" of traditional space opera, little changed from the presentation of Native Americans in the western genre. As he is leaving the planet Pell to return to the station, he is confronted with Downers on the shuttle: "The air stank of wet Downer, a smell he had lived with for three years . . . half-witted Downer labor with their religious taboos and constant excuses" (39).

When the aliens are presented from their own perspective, however, they show a culture that is a clear contrast to the authoritarian, hierarchical Earth Company. Cherryh's human culture has nearly complete gender equality, but is still formed on the dominator model. As European explorers did when coming to this continent, the humans who have "found" this planet name it and its people according to their own standards and whims, so that the planet is called "Downbelow" by the station in orbit above it and the fur-covered natives "Downers." In establishing bases on the world in order to grow food for the station and the ships and to mine its natural resources, the humans make use of the hisa as cheap labor. While they do not actually make slaves of the hisa, they do disrupt the patterns of behavior of this hunter-gatherer people, expecting them to maintain human schedules and teaching them to domesticate herd animals (95).

Even the well-intentioned Konstantin family has a paternalistic attitude toward the hisa, while Lucas, when he is in charge of the Downbelow base, tries to force them to behave as proper workers, neglecting their needs as well as their safety and referring to them as "coddled Downers" (38).

But the hisa have a true partnership culture, as defined by Eisler, in which "diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority" (xvii). They have no

real leaders, though they do respect the experience and wisdom of the older among them. They admire skills like the ability to tell stories well, not the wealth of goods the humans offer them. They also learn, especially the hisa woman, Satin, to admire the technology the humans bring, but only because such technology can bring them to the station and thus closer to the Sun, which they revere. The first time Satin sees space through a viewport on the station, she wants the truth she sees there in the stars, not for the sake of the things she could find in space, but simply for curiosity, to see what is out there (164). The hisa have a tradition of wandering, of making long journeys to see new things, and Satin wants to make her journey as the humans do, out to other stars (439).

The last and most unlikely hero of *Downbelow Station* is Alicia Konstantin. Unable to live away from the life support provided by the station, she would seem to be helpless and in need of rescue herself. Instead, she is one of the keys to Pell's survival. Called "Sun-she-friend" and "Dreamer" by the hisa who attend her, Alicia lies in her bed watching the station, its corridors and the world below through monitors in her room. When Mazian's plan to hold Pell Station falls through he gives the command to destroy the station so it cannot be used by Union. But Alicia is kept informed by the hisa that have taken refuge with her and knows of the danger to the station. She conceives the plan of sending the hisa out in large numbers to block access to the central control areas and protect vital installations from destruction. Satin, who is also known as Storyteller, takes her instructions: "The Dreamer told her, step by step; and the thing itself frightened her, but her mind was set on the remembering, each move, each turn, each small instruction" (418). When Mallory

and the merchanters retake the station, they find the Downers "inside the control center, beyond the windows, on the floor, sitting on the counters, in every available niche" (427). They open the locked doors only when Damon Konstantin arrives, because his is a face they know and trust.

That Alicia's plan works depends on Mallory returning to help the station rather than just running for deep space, and on her keeping Damon alive. The Merchanters' Alliance works only because the station is kept from complete destruction by the hisa and because Mallory breaks with Mazian in time. Mallory's bid for freedom from Mazian's plan brings survival for her ship and her crew only because there is a station to provide a base and because the merchants return in sufficient numbers to keep Union from taking Pell as they have taken Viking and other stations. The survival of all depends on each doing their part. As Eisler postulates in her vision of a truly egalitarian world, "individual development proceeds *only* by means of affiliation" (190).

If the heroes of this novel are a departure from tradition, Cherryh's villains are no less so. In *The Chalice and the Blade*, Eisler cites the popularity of the image of a strong, charismatic leader to protect the weak and destroy their enemies (180-181), and Le Guin writes of the excitement of the valorous hunter and the appeal of the spear. By these criteria, and in the tradition of older space operas, Conrad Mazian would be that hero. The commander of the Earth Company Fleet, he has the power of the twelve ships behind him and the charisma to command loyalty in his followers. Even Mallory, jaded by years of war and hardship, feels the pull of his personality:

"It was intended for effect; possibly it was sincere affection, that open look.... Knowing him...Signy still found herself drawn in by the old excitement" (169).

But Mazian sees survival as an either/or condition. He and his ships must survive and, if Earth will not support them, they must take what they need, even if this means turning on Earth itself. He does not see beyond the immediate problem, does not realize or care that if he destroys Pell he destroys his only source of supply. And that if he then takes control on Earth, his looter methods will destroy that, as well. Being on the top of a hierarchical pyramid, he cannot accept the possibility of working with the stationers and merchants; he thinks only of controlling them. What he cannot control, he will destroy, and this applies to captains in his fleet as well (397-98). By this attitude, one that leads to destruction, not to the building of community that is needed for humans to survive in space, Mazian becomes, instead of this novel's hero, its primary antagonist. His actions become more of a threat to the survival of the station and its people than even the Union forces with whom they are at war.

Vassily Kressich, a refugee from destroyed Mariner, is presented as one who could be part of Pell's salvation, but his fear makes him too weak to follow his own instincts. He is the mirror image of both Angelo and Damon, one of Cherryh's decent humans who ultimately does more harm than good by his misjudgment of the forces with which he tries to work. He also reaches for family, but has lost his in the evacuation of Mariner. His desire for safety overcomes his good intentions and he continually makes choices that destroy the very thing he wants. He tells himself he can be a force for good in a dominator world (Q) but cannot succeed because he has

lost his center (47). In his fear, Kressich agrees to be a respectable front for a gang of thugs in Q, telling himself that he will be able to protect the helpless people there, but knowing he is lying to himself: "He cared for nothing now, except to live; and to be atop the force and not under it" (51).

By contrast, Angelo Konstantin, the stationmaster of Pell, chooses to maintain the world his family has built against the temptation to arrange an accident to destroy Q, "to kill thousands of innocent along with the undesirables . . . keeping Pell what it was" (69). But he resists this, knowing that to act only for survival will destroy that world as surely as would the Maziani forces or the chaos in Q.

Jon Lucas is Angelo Konstantin's brother-in-law and, as part of the station family, should work toward the survival of Pell. However, personal power and success are so important to him that he will sacrifice honor and family to achieve his own ends. He cannot see that trying to dominate will mean his own destruction. Like Kressich, his methods destroy the very thing he is trying to create: the success and power of himself and his family. He uses his family, in the person of his son, to try to buy favor with Union, but not to create a strong bond that would save him, as Elen Quen and the Konstantins do by nurturing and expanding their family ties.

Action, violence and conflict are often key elements in space opera. Cherryh, however, subverts this tradition treatment of using violence for excitement: she establishes a pattern of not describing violent actions directly, but from a distance. Russ argues that "women's usual experience of war is just that: social collapse and natural disaster" and experienced indirectly ("Recent" 76). When Signy Mallory kills the trooper who defied her authority, we never see this incident; we only hear about it

in Mallory's report to Mazian. For a war story, there is remarkably little fighting or battle experienced directly. All the violent action takes place off stage. We are with Signy Mallory and the crew of *Norway* just before a major battle, so we share their anxiety:

What was coming was the kind of operation the troops dreaded, a multiple-ship strike, which raised the hazard of getting hit....they were at their lowest, and she saw eyes brighten at a word, a touch on the shoulder in passing. (167)

And then the setting shifts to just after that battle, dealing with the results of a defeat for the Earth Company Fleet. The actions we do see are generally those of people fleeing from the violence of others, as when Damon and Josh are caught in the Union-engineered riots on the station: "They were pushed back, all of them, against the crush of bodies behind. Shots streaked overhead, and the whole jammed mass quivered and rang with screams" (266). We are shown the fear and pain of those who can only run, who do not even know for certain what is happening or where safety might lie.

In her essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Ursula K. Le Guin discusses the difference between the narrative of gathering oats and that of the hunter:

It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another and then another....it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk, writhed screaming. (166)

But the oat-gathering, the act of learning to save food for later, to carry things that will benefit a whole people, these are the things that make civilization more than just a gathering of people. Cherryh is not telling the story of how the blaster cut in to the side of the enemy ship, but how the people who are in space are creating a civilization. War and conflict are part of that creation, but not the most important part and not the part she makes central to her novel. Again in Le Guin's words: "It's just one of those damned things you have to do in order to be able to go on gathering wild oats and telling stories" ("Carrier" 168). Cherryh's heroes do not glamorize fighting; their goal is to reach a position where other methods are used to solve conflicts. At a climax of this adventure, Mallory, who has spent her life fighting the Union fleet, instead leads them in the rescue of Pell Station from Mazian's ships. She knows she has reached a point where peace is possible when her overtures to the Union leader are met with "Words, not shots" (419). Like Alicia Konstantin, who uses the passive resistance of the hisa, Mallory's victory does not come from her ability to lead in a battle, but from her integrity and willingness to talk instead of shoot.

In *Downbelow Station* Cherryh's changes on the traditional formulas of space opera present, instead of a mere adventure story, pleasant enough but soon forgotten, a fully realized universe of complex characters. Space opera has been denigrated for being a gadget-oriented narrative with little "scientific or literary value" (Westfahl 177), but Cherryh uses its form to create a female hero, and to examine the importance of community and cooperation. Her novel shows the changes that result when the usual stories of war and destruction are viewed through a feminist lens.

Chapter 2 - "It's all one account": The Importance of Affiliation in *Merchanter's Luck*

Riane Eisler has speculated that when human culture transforms itself from a dominator to a partnership model basic assumptions about the nature of our relationships must be transformed, too. In an androcentric society, only women are taught to focus their energies on nurturing relationships while men "tend to see their human need for affiliation as 'an impediment' or 'a danger'" (189). As a social group approaches a more egalitarian mode this traditionally "feminine" pattern of building relationships will be found to benefit men as well as women (190). This human requirement for association is illustrated in the lives of the characters in *Merchanter's Luck*, particularly in Sandor Kreja, captain of a debt-ridden merchant ship, and Allison Reilly, born on *Dublin Again* and a member of one of the most respected merchant families.

Family and the relationships people make to create family are central to *Merchanter's Luck*. For those who live on both great and small merchant ships, the ship itself, as home and shelter, is more important than the profits made from trade, more important than loyalty to any one government. For these merchanters, the ship is not just a means of transporting goods but is their only home. While this mobility allows a great deal of freedom, for merchanters can leave a dangerous or repressive environment when necessary, it also means they are dependent on the services provided by either star stations or planets for such necessities as food and fuel. Lacking the strength or speed of war ships or the stability of a planetary base, their strength is based on affiliation both within the ship and with other merchant ships.

Set a few years after the events of *Downbelow Station*, *Merchanter's Luck* deals exclusively with people who live on these merchant ships, traveling from station to station across the reaches of interstellar space. While the war between the Union and the newly formed Merchants' Alliance is over, there is now the threat of pirates: the former Earth Company Fleet, now called the Maziani after their leader, Conrad Mazian.

Merchants and pirates are popular in space opera and are featured in such stories as Robert A. Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy*, James Blish's *Earthman Come Home* and Jack Vance's *The Space Pirate*. Space opera adopted many of the conventional conflicts found in genres such as high-seas adventures, as well as westerns and tales of colonial conquest, merely moving the location to space (Monk 306). In many of the traditional stories, the action of hunting down pirates, or fighting them, is central to the plot, but Cherryh performs another of her subversions of the genre in *Merchanter's Luck* by making this conflict much less central than the personal conflicts of her protagonists. Piracy is a threat, but not nearly the threat that lack of family or affiliation is for these people, and their discovery of the value of intimate relationships is more important than the action, adventure and conflict.

Gilligan examined the importance of intimate relationships to women. In a psychological study the subjects were asked to write stories based on several pictures, and the responses of men and women showed a marked divergence as to which situations were seen as dangerous or involving violence: "The men in the class, considered as a group, projected more violence into situations of personal affiliation than they did into impersonal situations," while the women perceived danger in

isolation (41). In a picture of male and female acrobats grasping each other's wrists, the only picture of the series with physical contact, the men most often saw only the potential for danger. Women, on the other hand, invented a net for the acrobats and saw this picture as an example of trust (43). Both Eisler and Gilligan have stated this difference in world view is not with "men as a sex, but men and women as they must be socialized in a dominator system" (Eisler 185). To maintain their dominance, men must be so focused on their own strength, their own success, that they perceive caring for others as a weakness. Given a more egalitarian environment, such as the one Cherryh invents for her merchant families, there is a greater dependence on relationship for both men and women.

In *Merchanter's Luck*, Cherryh examines the dilemma faced by a man who has lost his family, contrasting this with the confidence of a woman who has always known the security and support of a strong family environment. Cherryh even begins the book in a way that underscores this difference and suggests the possibility of connection: "Their names were Sandor and Allison . . . Kreja and Reilly respectively. Reilly meant something in the offices and bars. . . . Kreja meant nothing" (5). Cherryh links their names in the very first sentence of the book, foreshadowing their coming connection, and at the same time showing the contrast of their relative positions in merchant society. Sandor has no associates while Allison is a member of a highly respected and wealthy family.

All but two members of Sandor Kreja's family have been killed by Maziani pirates in a raid on their ship, *Le Cygne*, and his brother died ten years before this story opens. He operates as a "marginer," a merchant with a small ship dealing in

small cargoes and barely making the expenses necessary to keep his ship and himself. The ship, with false registration under the name *Lucy*, is all he has left of his family and he would rather die than give it up. But his marginally illegal practices--using, then restoring, funds from a company for which he is not actually working--have forced him to abandon one station after another, as the chaos of the war years gives way to increasing cooperation and information exchange between stations. Sandor's illegal operations depend on scant record-keeping and the fact that large companies were formerly unable to keep track of operations on distant stations (43).

This existence, so isolated from all friendly human connection, has recently made Sandor take greater chances than in the past. Some part of him would rather the whole structure of lies and deceit fall apart than to have to go on alone as he has: "And once, just once to see what others had, what life was like outside that terror, with the fancy bars and the fancy sleep-overs and a woman with something other than larceny in mind--" (43). When he meets Allison in a bar on Viking Station, he is attracted as much to her air of confidence and belonging as to her beauty.

Like the girls Gilligan studied who saw a moral dilemma not in terms of either keeping or breaking a law to save a life, but in trying to establish a connection (28), Cherryh shows Sandor's problem does not lie in the laws he breaks, but in the fact that he is not part of a community. Being alone, he must hire temporary help, but fears that these people will either be honest and report his dishonest business, or they will be criminals themselves and try to kill him for control of the ship. This isolation makes Sandor suspicious and uncommunicative, even when he has the most to gain from trusting others. Being without family has damaged his ability to trust or to

allow himself to depend on the good will of others. For merchanters in this time of political turmoil, when Mazian's remaining ships can overpower them for the supplies they carry and when the authority of stations can change between one visit and the next, only family can be trusted. All others are outsiders and represent possible danger.

In contrast Allison Reilly is part of a world where community and family are identical, for anyone accepted onto *Dublin Again* is considered family. She has grown up on this huge merchant ship filled with her relatives. The world Cherryh has created here is a strong contrast to the vision of merchants presented in most science fiction. One of the few traditional novels to deal with family in any way is Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy*. This novel also features merchant ships and the families that live on them, but the similarities between Heinlein's and Cherryh's respective ships only underscore the great differences between the way the authors envision these worlds.

The ship in Heinlein's story, *Sisu*, is filled with the members of one family; however, while the sons stay with the ship, daughters are traded away, sometimes without their consent. Since Heinlein assumes marriage will still be the accepted route to children, daughters must leave their home ship to find non-related husbands. As an anthropologist, included for exposition, explains, it is a "patrilocal matriarchy," in that wives join their husbands' families, but a woman is the ultimate boss of the whole crew (92), at least so Heinlein would have us believe. It is clear, however, in the development of the story that the male captain will pretend to take orders from his mother, the Chief Officer, only so long as he agrees with her commands. When his

wife succeeds his mother as Chief Officer, Captain Krausa defies her explicit orders and takes their adopted son to the Hegemonic Military, behind the back of his supposed superior officer (156). Heinlein, for all his imagination in other aspects of the future, could not imagine family other than in marriage, and could not imagine this structure without the male in ultimate authority.

On *Dublin Again* all 1,082 people on board are Reillys, "excepting Henny Magen and Liz Tyler, who were married aboard from other ships" (27). These marriages are the exception for Cherryh's merchanters. Most children are acquired from station sleep-overs so that only the women have descendants on the ship, as the children of the males will belong to their mother's ship and family.

This structure of matrilineal descent encourages a very egalitarian society. As Joanna Russ suggests in her article "Recent Feminist Utopias," the female permissiveness of the merchanters serves "not to break taboos but to separate sexuality from questions of ownership, reproduction and social structure" (76). Since patrilineal inheritance is not in question--all born on *Dublin Again* have shares in its ownership--men cannot "own" women nor control their offspring. Only daughters contribute to the continuation of the family, which may split off to new ships if the family grows too large for one. But this does not mean that women "rule" the ships. As Eisler affirms, matrilineal descent does not mean matriarchy (24). The idea that one sex or the other must be in charge, must "rule," is based on dominator principles. Instead, on Cherryh's merchanter ships, there is complete equality between the sexes.

The governing structure of *Dublin Again* relies on a system that follows Eisler's partnership mode. The mainday captain, one of four captains for each of

four shifts, is nominally the ultimate authority, but in fact decisions are made by an executive council composed of all seated bridge crew and all those retired from active duty in those positions (26). These are the Reillys who make the decisions for their family, not one all-powerful captain, but a committee of siblings, cousins, sons and daughters.

Unlike Heinlein's merchants, whose captains are always male, and usually sons of the former captain, in Cherryh's universe both men and women can aspire to be Number One mainday captain, as Allison Reilly does. Her chances of becoming captain are slim, however. Merchanters routinely use rejuvenation treatments that allow those who take them to stay healthy and able to work for well over one hundred years. Thanks to this, there are often five or six generations living on the ship at any one time. Those in training, like Allison, can expect the current operating crew, who may be of her great-grandmother's generation, to remain active for many years--and to be followed by the next generation. Allison herself is far enough down the list that she envisions herself being "silver-haired and still not able to cross the line into the posted lounge, still waiting, still working the number two bridge to stay current" (34).

It is because of the years she must wait to have her chance at working on the bridge that Allison decides to leave her family and, with the other three members of her officer's training group, go on *Lucy* with Sandor Kreja where she can jump "over the line of succession. . . . Alterday command right off" (90).

Sandor and Allison have a one-night liaison on *Viking*, which should end the relationship. But Sandor finds himself wanting to see her again and out of this desire, as well as the fear that his false papers are about to be discovered on *Viking*, he

follows *Dublin Again* to Pell Station: "*Lucy* was out of havens; and he was out of answers, tired of fear, tired of starving" (43). With no cargo, he makes the trip in a shorter time than usual, which is seen as some kind of romantic adventure by the newservices on Pell and attracts more attention than Sandor can afford. He is investigated by station authorities and by Signy Mallory of *Norway*, who suspects Sandor of working for the Maziani, spotting likely targets for piracy. This threat also gets the attention of Allison's Captain, and she saves Sandor from legal trouble by arranging a partnership between *Lucy* and *Dublin Again*, one that involves putting four Reillys on Sandor's ship as permanent crew.

With this chance of partnership with a larger, more powerful ship and the opportunity to form a new family with the Reillys, Sandor constantly shifts back and forth from trust to suspicion:

He had his doubts....he kept thinking; the life that he had--It was a miserable life, but he controlled it....But it had to be....He had never had such a chance. Never could dream of such a chance....and the warmth of that drove the chill away. (104)

But his doubts keep returning. Before his death his brother Ross had programmed all essential functions in the computer in a conversational style to prompt a much younger Sandor through ship's operations. Over the years he has been alone, Sandor has not changed this because the sound of Ross's voice reminds him of the family he has lost, just as their possessions locked in their cabins reminds him of the rest of his dead relatives. But now that he has four Reillys living on *Lucy* in a permanent partnership, he is embarrassed about the childish way the computer talks to him and

too suspicious of all strangers to explain why. Out of this shame, and fear of their laughter, Sandor refuses to release computer operations to his shipmates and this in turn makes them suspect him of treachery or insanity. Their mistrust of him, and an attempt by one of the Reillys to force Sandor to give up the computer locks, feeds Sandor's suspicion and so a spiral of increasing mistrust on both sides is built out of an inability for either side to communicate effectively. Sandor has been alone too long to easily trust others and the Reillys have their own innate mistrust of someone who is not family. Coming from the world of *Dublin Again*, they've never had to deal with outsiders on an equal basis. Both Sandor and the Reillys have to learn to trust and to expand their definition of what family means.

It is only after the crew as a whole are tested against the Maziani, and work together to survive, that both Sandor and the Reillys learn to trust. Even then, Sandor is touchy about letting Allison and her cousins all the way into the secrets of his life. He resists letting them into the closed world he has made with his own ghosts, until Allison show that she understands what this ship has meant to him, what Ross's computer voice means: "He set it up for somebody who really didn't know how to run a ship. . . . I figure he must have thought a lot about your being able to take care of yourself" (206). It is then that Sandor can admit his false registry to Alliance authority, in the person of Signy Mallory, and take back his own real name. Taking back his own name, and the name *Le Cygne*, becomes a symbol of putting aside the life he has lived, his mistrust of others, and accepting these Reillys in place of his own lost family. It also signals his acceptance by the rest of merchanter society as one of them: "A hand was offered him from his right. One of the

Reillys--*the Reilly*" (207). This puts his ghosts in perspective as a less painful memory and leaves the possibility open for Sandor to make an honest new beginning with his new family.

Cherryh shows that this ability to trust others, to work together as family, is the primary necessity for survival and happiness. As Gilligan found, "the activities of care . . . are the activities that make the social world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression rather than by seeking rules to limit its extent" (43). If, as Joanna Russ claims in her essay, utopian novels "are not embodiments of universal human values, but are reactive; that is, they supply in fiction what their authors believe society . . . and/or women, lack in the here-and-now" ("Recent" 81), then Cherryh sees in our world the need to form bonds of greater extent than the nuclear families we know, to reach out in ways that can end isolation and allow people to work together to make a stronger community.

Chapter 3 - "These good Outsiders": Gender and Estrangement in *The Pride of Chanur*

In *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction*, one of the first works to examine rigorously the genre as literature, Darko Suvin introduced the idea of science fiction as the literature of "cognitive estrangement." According to this theory an author takes the real world we know and looks at it from another viewpoint, making the usual into the unusual and forcing a re-examination of its characteristics. In addition, "SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a cognitive view" (6). Science fiction looks to other ages and places, but does so from the framework of this world, offering a view in which,

The aliens--utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers--are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one. (5)

When the author is a woman, this reflection and transformation often take on a subversive aspect, for both the real and the literary worlds contain an androcentric bias--as seen even in the quote above in its use of the word "man" for all humans--so she comes to both areas as an outsider. In addition, according to many feminist critics, among them Dale Spender, the language itself is androcentric, or man-made:

Historically, women have been excluded from the production of cultural forms, and language is, after all, a cultural form--and a most important

one. In fairly crude terms this means that the language has been made by men and that they have used it for their own purposes. (52)

Of all the novels in this study, *The Pride of Chanur* deals the most directly with issues of culture, gender and "otherness." By setting this novel in a completely alien environment, one in which males are seen as emotionally unstable and females the guiding, resourceful sex, Cherryh reverses our own cultural bias. The reader is forced, by this "cognitive estrangement," to consider the illogic of our own assumptions about male and female nature. If it is true, as becomes clear in this novel, that the aliens' conviction of male irrationality is conditioning, not nature, then we must reconsider the convictions of our own culture.

We follow all the events of this story through the eyes of an alien, and a female alien at that. The only human character is a male who is an outsider, again a reversal of both traditional mainstream and science fiction texts in which the human male is generally presented as the "norm" and the female or alien as "other." Jenny Wolmark wrote, in *Aliens and Others*, "It is Cherryh's appropriation of the generic conventions that enables her to . . . break down the boundaries between what is and what could be, and undermining [sic] fixed notions of sameness and difference" (75). The doubling of the "otherness" in this novel enables Cherryh to explore the idea of gender distinctions from an outsider's point of view and "disrupt conventional definitions of difference and otherness" (Wolmark 72).

This outsider or alien point of view is presented through the main character, Pyanfar Chanur. She is a member of the han, a race with feline attributes in which the males only hold property as long as this property can be defended from challenge

by another male. Their only other purposes in life are to sire offspring and be ornamental. Since males meet only to fight, the various clans on Anuurn, the han homeworld, are autonomous and competitive, except for a few limited alliances based on marriage. A male "owns" the clan's holdings, but it is the females--his wives, sisters and daughters--who administer the estate, negotiate contracts and captain the trading ships.

Pyanfar, as the sister of Kohan Chanur, is captain of one such ship, *The Pride of Chanur*, which operates in an area of space called The Compact, a trading association of many worlds and races. There are those races most like the han, oxygen breathers, including the mahendo'sat, the han's nearest allies and the ones responsible for bringing the han into space; the stsho, a tri-sexed species of formal and strange (to the han) manners; and the kif, an aggressive, combative race none of the others like very much (63). There are also the peculiar, methane-breathing races--knn, chi and t'ca--that are so alien to the han only rudimentary communication is possible, such as docking procedures and the basics of trade.

In the beginning neither Pyanfar nor any of her crew doubt the correctness of their view of male and female nature, nor do they question the superiority of their customs. Pyanfar can deal with other races, even mimic their customs, as she must to trade with them, but she would not consider them friends; only other han females can be friends.

However, in the years Pyanfar has spent as a trader among aliens, she has begun to see these "outsiders" as not just aliens but as worthy individuals with their own cultures and mores. She learns to look beyond her own ethnocentric beliefs, and

to realize that other customs may be as valid as her own, no matter how strange they seem. Most of Pyanfar's fellow han cannot see beyond the narrow confines of their own world, and assume their own way of doing things is the only right way:

And hani went on doing things the old way, the way that had worked when there were no colonies and no outside trade; when hani were the unchallenged owners of the world and hani instincts were suited to the world they owned....but, gods, there were other ecosystems....In one unimagined hell, the kif way had worked best. (200)

But Pyanfar sees, not only that each race has its own system and custom, but that out in space, where these races mix, they have created another kind of environment, one where the prejudice of one species does not matter, where "Right and wrong aren't the same. Attitudes aren't" (223). She invites her planet-bound mate, Khym Mahn, to join her on the ship, an act which, in the han culture, is as scandalous as if Herman Melville had placed a female among the crew of his whaling ship in *Moby Dick*. Pyanfar convinces Khym that on *The Pride* they will be far away from anyone who could be shocked at this breach of convention.

This focus on one alien who can see that any species' way of doing things is a result of enculturation, not of natural law, allows a consideration of the biases that inform our mores. This is a function science fiction is particularly suited to perform, as Suvin wrote:

SF has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and--most important--a mapping of possible alternatives. (12)

When a human male, Tully, is introduced into this Compact, at first Pyanfar is not even sure he is sentient: "There had been something loose about the station dock all morning. . . . it might be some large, bizarre animal" (5). Having escaped from the kif, who had captured his ship and killed all his companions trying to get information about the location of human space, Tully runs into *The Pride's* access, choosing this ship over all the others at dock because "You sit far from kif ship. And you laugh" (61). When "it" uses mathematical symbols to try to communicate, Pyanfar accepts it as a thinking being, though it is several days before any real communication is possible.

Most space operas assume either total lack of communication with aliens, as in Fredric Brown's short story "Arena," or make the process entirely too easy, with some version of a universal translator, as in the *Star Trek* television series, films and novels. In this book, Cherryh shows her characters going through all the problems of establishing some way to speak to an alien who shares no common roots, assumptions or culture. By emphasizing and using Tully's difficulty in communicating, Cherryh emphasizes the importance of communication in creating and maintaining a community. Gilligan also stresses the place of communication in her study, both in the importance women place on communication as a way to solve problems and its lack as the cause of friction, and in the fact that women in many studies were judged deficient in moral development because their interviewers were not hearing the difference in their ways of expressing themselves (1). In the novel, as in Gilligan, there is the assumption that communication is the primary "mode of conflict

resolution" (30), and Pyanfar's first act when the Outsider comes on board her ship is to begin the process of learning his language and teaching him theirs.

Even with the computer and a symbol translator, the human Tully is always limited in what he can say, and when out of range of the ship's computers is completely cut off. This difficulty of communication is a form of subversion of space opera, in which the usual view point is male, with female characters largely silent, not so much unable to communicate as not allowed to do so. According to Spender, this inability to communicate effectively in a man-made language is one of the problems women in our culture face. Women have to describe themselves and their activities in terms of a male norm which cannot help but emphasize their "otherness"-the fact that they are outside the standard.

However, in this novel Cherryh has carried through on her gender reversal by showing the male, Tully, as one who is able to communicate only with the help of the computer and therefore wholly dependent on the female captain and crew. Because of this isolation he is confused, lost, frightened for himself and his species. He also, as he learns to trust the hani crew, exhibits traditionally "feminine" emotions and physical gestures. He cries when he is hurt or afraid, and hugs the hani when he feels the need to show his gratitude. Since he cannot communicate effectively in language, he uses the more emotional means of touch to show his feelings--a style of communication generally ascribed in our culture to women. Pyanfar continually resists this touching, not because her culture does not use touch, but because Tully is alien, an Outsider, whose hairless skin feels wrong, who does not know how to avoid hurting her claw sheaths when he tries to shake hands in the human fashion, and who

even smells wrong (169). But by the end of the book, she has learned to tolerate being touched, as Tully has learned to be careful of her claws.

This communication difficulty extends to the other aliens in *The Compact* as well. With the Mahendosat, their closest neighbors and allies, the han can only talk in a short-hand pidgin. The same is true of the stsho, while with the methane breathing races, only the t'ca can even approach a common speech, and this race has a "multipartite brain," so that translations of their speech are in the form of columns of words that can be read either across or down, as in this attempt by the t'ca to testify to events they witnessed:

stsho	kif	knnn	(*)	hani	mahe	t'ca
station	ship	ship	ship	ship	ship	self
trade	kill	see	here	run	watch	know
fear	want	see	hani	escape	help	knnn

(175).

By the end of this novel Pyanfar and her crew learn to further communication not only with the human, Tully, but with the methane-breathing t'ca and knnn as well.

Cherryh reverses our expectations in the development of her characters as well. While most space opera has a human male as the primary focus, in *The Pride of Chanur* the male character shows the least development, as he is seen only through the eyes of the aliens who dominate this story. As in the other novels of this study, Cherryh creates rounded, believable characters who are more important to the development of the story than all the gadgets that are usually the primary focus of space opera, and all of the most completely developed characters are aliens.

Pyanfar is far more than the capable, smart captain of a merchant ship. She is older, worried about getting soft and gaining too much weight (13). She has a temper

that gets away from her at times (6) and a prickly pride in herself and her ship (7). This pride is the cause of her problems, because, once Tully has landed on her ship and in her care, to give him back to the kif would be to admit to weakness, which would be a severe blow to Pyanfar's self-esteem (134).

Even relatively minor characters, such as the stsho station master, are given complexity:

Plumed and cosmetically augmented brows nodded delicately over moonstone eyes as gtst looked up....Another stsho, of course, might read the patterns with exactitude, the stations in life, the chosen Mood for this Phase of gtst existence....Non-stsho were forgiven their trespasses. (18)

In the stsho language the "gtst" pronoun is used because, for stsho, he, she or it could equally apply, depending on the being's current status, phase or mood. Though the stsho are secretive about personal matters to outsiders, it is known in the rest of The Compact that they change not only status but gender under stressful circumstances. Cherryh's use of a neutral pronoun and a race with mutable gender contrasts interestingly with the human norm of using "he" as a generic pronoun. This is apparently as true in Cherryh's future as it is now, for in the beginning Tully frequently refers to the han he meets as "he," and is as frequently corrected by an exasperated Captain: "'She,' Pyanfar said impatiently. 'All she'" (137).

These stsho are, by nature, non-combative, but will hire other races as guards or security officers. They are shown as aesthetes, vitally concerned for the fashion of

their clothing and the elegance of their surroundings, and do not care if more aggressive races, such as the han, think them weak.

But it is the han who are presented most clearly: Pyanfar herself, her related crew Geran, Haral, Chur, Tirun and her niece Hilfy. Except for Hilfy, who is on her first voyage with *The Pride*, these hani have worked together for years, know each other and each other's habits, and are close friends as well as family, a relationship that in their culture exists only between women. Male to male relationships are based on rivalry or, occasionally, tolerance of a weaker or younger male. And friendship between males and females, at least in this novel, is not considered possible because males are only to be pampered, protected and admired for their physical strength. This pattern is another of Cherryh's reversals of both mainstream literary and science fiction tradition. In novels such as John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* or Gordon Dickson's *Dorsai!*, men are frequently shown in strong friendships, while women are shown only as rivals for male attention. The tradition of male bonding is as old as literature--as in the Bible's David and Jonathan--but recently women writers have begun to put greater stress on the importance of women's friendships without reference to men, as in Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* or Elizabeth A. Lynn's *Watchtower*.

One of the aspects of this focus on women's friendships involves the ways in which women work together. In space opera, as in most traditional science fiction, little space is given to the routine duties of ship-board life, and this is especially true for the routines of preparing and eating meals. But in *The Pride of Chanur* there is a fairly long section about a meal the crew share. Meals and kitchens are common in a

great deal of fiction by women, as Joanna Russ noted in an afterword to *How to Suppress Women's Writing*; so much of their lives are centered in the kitchen that this space has important resonances for women (142). For Cherryh to include this scene makes it clear that this meal, as representative of others like it through the years, is an important part of their lives together: "food was an obsession, a precious variance in routine, an art they practiced to delight their occasional passengers and to amaze themselves" (72). Geran, especially, is known for her cooking skill, and all the crew delight in the occasional opportunity for a real meal as opposed to the quick sandwiches necessary for busy times: "spread with fantastical culinary artistry, platters of meat, by the gods, no stale freeze-dried chips and jerky and suchlike; gravies and sauces in which tidbits floated" (73). That they share this meal with the human Tully is a mark of their ability to accept him, male though he is, into their community. In a later novel, *Chanur's Venture*, there is a similar meal shared not only with Tully, but with a han male who has joined the ship.

But though he is accepted by the crew, Tully remains an outsider. Even when he is able to communicate more fully, he never asserts himself as a dominant character. In Wolmark's words, "He remains a powerless alien, totally dependent on the care of others for his wellbeing" (76). When the crew of *The Pride* must return to Anuurn, their homeworld, to help Pyanfar's brother Kohan defend his holdings, Tully does act to stop a fight between two male hani by throwing perfume onto the combatants (194). Just as human women are generally weaker than men, and in a situation of physical conflict must use other methods than brute strength, so Tully is outclassed in size and strength by the huge han males and must use a trick when

strength will not suffice. This reversal of our expectations of male heroes draws greater attention to the distortion of gender roles. The fact that Tully is weaker does not mean he cannot fight or defend himself, just that he must use methods that do not require strength. He must, in effect, resort to behavior we would consider typical of human women.

Another of the characters with complex traits is Dur Tahar, another han captain. She has also lived many years away from the influences of home and has learned alien ways, but her response to this exposure serves as a contrast and foil for Pyanfar. Tahar learns alien methods, but uses them in ways that lead to destruction, not alliance. She invokes the strictest interpretation of han law, but in secret allies herself to the kif and uses this connection to try to defeat the Chanur family, traditional rivals. Tahar cannot see beyond her own needs to understand that using these enemies will ultimately allow the kif to threaten the han homeworld itself. By embracing kif ruthlessness, she loses sight of the integrity that is as much a part of the han as their clannish insularity.

In the end, it is Pyanfar's ability to see beyond han ways, yet not forget their value, that save both her ship and The Compact. She allies herself with mahendo'sat, against han custom, and at the same time unites the spacer han so that they are able to defend their own station and homeworld. She also, by inviting Khym to join her on *The Pride*, begins the change that will in later novels bring equality to her people, male as well as female, and open doors to possibilities neither had considered before. This possibility mirrors, in reverse, the potential Riane Eisler sees in our culture's shift to an egalitarian mode: "And after the bloody detour of androcratic history, both

women and men will at last find out what being human can mean" (203). Whether human or han gazes into the mirror, if the mirror reflects truly it doesn't matter if the reflection is reversed--it still shows a truth.

Chapter 4 - "Find yourself a niche": Ordinary People in *Rimrunners*

In an essay titled "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown," Ursula K. Le Guin considered Virginia Woolf's contention that all novels are novels of character and wondered if there was room for Woolf's hypothetical Mrs. Brown on a space ship:

It's funny, the idea of Mrs. Brown in a spaceship. She's much too small to visit a Galactic empire or to orbit a neutron star....Or is that quite it? Could it be that Mrs. Brown is actually...too large for the spaceship? That she is, you might say, too *round* for it--so that when she steps into it, somehow it all shrinks to a shiny tin gadget, and the heroic captains turn to cardboard. (99)

Certainly Mrs. Brown, a real, three-dimensional character, would not fit well with the cardboard cutouts of traditional space opera. But she fits quite well in Cherryh's spaceship, in the person of Elizabeth "Bet" Yeager; in fact she could live comfortably only there, being completely a product of her time and place. And she is not alone; she has the company of other fully-realized people. There are the minor characters, seen only briefly, such as Don Ely, director of the station's job registry office, his secretary Nan, a barman named Terry Ritterman, and McKenzie, Park and Figi who are crewmates on the ship Bet joins. Even in the brief glimpses we get of these characters, they take on a life of their own so we know what kind of people they are as they relate to Bet. The depth of the characterization of these people gives even greater weight to the more major characters: Bet Yeager herself; NG Ramey, a technician lost from a family ship; Musa, Ramey's co-worker in Engineering; Fitch, a commanding officer on the same ship.

As Le Guin wrote of the Mrs. Browns in good novels, "They are people. Characters. Round, solid, knobby. Human beings, with angles and protuberances to them, hard parts and soft parts, depths and heights" ("Science" 105). By these standards Bet is real: moral by her own code, immoral by stationer and Alliance law, caring and affectionate toward her friends, cynical and cold toward outsiders. Her politics are a matter of expediency rather than philosophical conviction. She served on one of Mazian's ships and participated in raids on merchants when ordered to do so, yet can feel sympathy for the vulnerability of those merchants and for stationers, "Not fools. Not cowards. Just people who'd been targets once too often, on stations that had no defense at all" (38). She calls Signy Mallory a turncoat because she broke with Mazian to side with the Merchants' Alliance, and fears falling into her hands, while at the same time admiring Mallory, for landing on the winning side at the end of the Earth/Union war (32).

Rimrunners begins with the point of view of Don Ely, though all the rest of the book is from Yeager's point of view. Through Ely we see first Bet Yeager, but even more, we see *him*, a person with his own troubles on a dying station, but also a person who reaches out to someone in even greater trouble and tries to help as much as he can. Just as for the women in Carol Gilligan's study, Ely's focus is on relationship and community. Gilligan stated that this difference in perspective was not a matter of sex but of enculturation (2), and Cherryh again makes it a theme in her novel. By depicting this need to create relationships a facet of both male and female characters she clearly makes it a positive trait, one that can lead to an improved life for all. As Robin Roberts described feminist science fiction, it can

"depict worlds in which men can adopt feminine values. . . . [it] looks away from separatism and toward the embrace of feminism" (113), so Cherryh's characters, both male and female, embrace those "feminine" traits of connection and relationship.

Ely and his secretary, Nan Jodree, have watched Bet Yeager as she comes in every day to register for work that does not exist: "So the jumpsuit--it looked like the same one day after day--lost its brightness, hung loose on her body; and she walked more slowly than she had, still straight, but lately with a feebleness in her step" (5). Even with his fears that Bet could be dangerous and that he should report her to station security (12), Ely cares about this stranger. The only way he can find to express this care is by offering her cocoa and a credit-a-day job in the office, against regulations and out of his own pocket. In spite of the real danger Bet could be--and he understands that danger, having been a refugee from stations destroyed by Union or Maziani ships--helping a fellow human in trouble is more important to him than the rules he is supposed to follow. Gilligan, in examining women's view of morality, found they saw it "as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than one of rights and rules" (73). As one of Cherryh's decent humans, Ely acts to help another human survive rather than just blindly following regulations.

Ely is careful in his dealings with Bet to protect her, to make sure she knows he has no sexual agenda (24), and she appreciates this, as most of those around her do have sexual designs on her. Of all these novels, this one deals most directly with sexuality, and this use of sex is complex, problematic and, ultimately, unresolved.

Bet uses sex, as it is used against her. She is raped early in the book, and remembers past rapes when she first joined *Africa's* crew (62). In the past, she had

lacked the skill and connections to protect herself, but after twenty years as a marine in the Fleet, she has learned, and kills the man who tries to rape her. Her attitude toward this rape is unsettling. She certainly does not consider rape a "fate worse than death." Her thoughts as the drunk approaches her in a station restroom is, first, a resigned, "you owe me a drink and a sleepover," then, when he turns violent, "Damn mess, she thought, and tried to stay limp" (18-19). She fights back only when he starts to strangle her.

It is not that Bet lacks self-esteem or that she accepts the fact that she can be bullied and dominated. In the course of this novel, she fights back verbally and physically even with officers who try to dominate her (170). It seems more a case of Bet not having a sense of privacy about her own body. In the fleet, as in the Alliance ship she joins, troops live in communal barracks, using communal showers; even the sex may be enjoyed in public view (151). She was born on a small miner ship and joined the Fleet at sixteen, so she has no habits of body privacy. Bet keeps her privacy in her mind, in her soul. She will not tolerate anyone trying to dominate her mind, because this is the only security she has ever had--the privacy of her thoughts.

On Thule Station she is starving and uses sex to obtain a place to sleep and food. Bet will sell the only thing she has left to remain a spacer and not be forced to accept a permanent job on the station. This is a prostitution forced by economic necessity:

She'd done it to pay off a bet, never done it just to pay a tab, but he was quiet, he was lonely, she didn't even care what his name was, he

had something to offer her and she was down to that finally, if it got her a warm spot away from the law. (20)

It is not Ritterman's use of her body that angers Bet, but his attempt to control her, to make her his possession. This is her final reason for killing him. That he threatened her freedom is more important to her than his threats to her body.

Bet is waiting for the arrival of a scheduled freighter, hoping to get a berth on it and get off Thule Station before Ritterman's body is discovered. But another ship arrives at the station first and Bet talks her way on as crew on *Loki*. The ship's name is well chosen: Loki, in Scandinavian mythology, is the god of discord, mischief and deceit. This ship is a spotter, or spook, for the Alliance, acting like a merchanter, but actually helping find and destroy Mazian's renegade fleet. Legitimate after the end of the war, *Loki*, like all the spotter ships, has a reputation for having worked for any side that would pay, so its real loyalty is always questionable. Also, among the crew, who are a mixture of conscripts and hire-ons from many different types of ship and station, there is discord and mistrust.

Once on the Alliance ship *Loki*, Bet uses sex as a bonding mechanism. After being alone on Thule, she is desperate to create a new web of friendship, as she had on *Africa*. The politics or allegiance of her captains are not important to her, but friends are, on both ships: "when you got in on a ship, you could trust people" (102). She learned in her twenty years in the fleet that having a circle of friends, Gilligan's "web of relationships," is the only way to survive in changing times: "being with somebody was safer than trying to lone-it" (73).

Sex for Bet is never an exclusive act, but it can be a friendly activity. She loves NG Ramey, but that love is not exclusive, either, and what she feels for her other friends, especially Ramey's friend Musa and for Gabe McKenzie, is just as important: "Real special, this time. . . . maybe just that they'd gotten beyond acquainted and all the way over to looking out for each other" (219). For her, sexual relations with these men is not betrayal of any one man, but a way to bind them all together. And on a ship full of people hostile and suspicious of each other when she joins, she does find ways to bind them into a unit, a family:

and people were just walking around being deliberately, cussedly po-lite with each other. So it *was* funny, people *started* having a good time and being in a good mood, like it was a joke going around. (200)

Bet's biggest surprise is the reaction she has to Ramey's touch: "She was mostly numb. But what she felt so far, felt all right. . . . oh, really, not bad!--which was a relief to her, she hadn't been sure there was feeling left anymore, since Thule" (81-82). From her remembrances, she clearly had a sexual relationship with at least two mates on *Africa* before she got separated from her ship, and she expects to have sex with male friends, but she does not expect to be able to be so affected simply by a man's touch.

Judging by the cool reaction she gets from the women on *Loki*, this kind of attitude is apparently not usual on the ship, and Bet worries about this because she does want women friends, as well as men (101). Bet was on *Africa* for such a long time, and is so accustomed to military manners, she is never sure whether her problems stem from having broken some *Loki* custom or from her inability to use

"civ," or civilian, manners. But the trouble she has at first is more due to the problems of *Loki's* crew. Gathered from every type of ship and station, and knowing themselves to be suspected of piracy by other ships, the crew is fragmented and mistrustful of each other and their officers. Whatever else she has learned in the Fleet, Bet knows to "find yourself a niche and a couple or three you could trust. That was what was the matter with this ship, that there were so damned few you could, you could pick that up right out of the air" (129). But by expecting solidarity, by forcing people to work together and see the value of this cooperation, Bet does engender more community than had existed on *Loki* before her arrival (184).

The person who benefits most from Bet's attitude is NG (short for No Damn Good) Ramey. He is originally from a merchanter family, and the lack of privacy and his inability to understand the concept of taking orders without question are his major problems. If Bet has almost no sense of body privacy, Ramey has too much, at least too much in the environment of a ship like *Loki*. The discipline on this ship, which to Bet seems very easy after the Fleet, is stifling to NG, and his problems are complicated by the fact that sometime in the recent past he was in the brig during a hyperspace jump and was not given "trank," or tranquilizers. In Cherryh's universe, humans cannot cope with the irrationalities of the unreal space a ship inhabits during jump and must be tranquilized. He has survived the experience, but coping with the trauma makes it difficult for him to feel connected to others and unsure if all he experiences is real or hallucination.

Ramey has been unable to cope with anything about life on this ship and probably would have died sooner or later, either killed by a crewmate or as a suicide.

Bet forces him to turn out from himself, to acquire friends and learn to accept the attentions of those friends:

You can trust me, NG....you got to take a chance on it now while you got a chance. You got a handful of guys come up to a party you was at and they give you a little haze about it, but *friendly*, you understand that? (161)

NG, having lost his connection to the merchant family in which he grew up, has lost all ability to connect with anyone else. He is unable to interpret the overtures of crewmates as either friendly or threatening because he has not learned how to read their behavior, and so he has chosen to live without friends rather than try to resolve this conflict.

Bet's own conviction is that friends are necessary, that politics, the "mofs" (officers), orders and right and wrong do not matter: friends do. Having someone you can trust at your back is most important. This is why she fights to bring Ramey in from his outsider status and in the process creates a family on *Loki* that had not existed before. While this is often a traditional role for women--that of mediating for the outsider to bring him into the community--in Cherryh's universe it is a trait shared by all her protagonists. Rather than an exclusively "feminine" preoccupation, it is shown in male characters as well, such as Don Ely on the station and Musa on the ship.

Musa, one of Ramey's friends even before Bet comes to the ship, is apparently around fifty, but is on rejuvenation so Bet figures he could be anywhere between fifty and one-hundred fifteen. From the things he tells her, she realizes he is from Earth

originally and she finds it odd, thinking "what a tangled lot of things it took to get an *Africa* trooper and a man like Musa into the same bed" (130). Musa had tried to help Ramey on his own, but having a companion in Bet makes it easier for them both to make a difference in Ramey's status with the crew.

There is one on the ship who does not approve of this change: Fitch, one of the commanding officers. He is suspicious and distrustful of Bet and when she makes a friend of the most mistrusted man on the ship Fitch's dislike only intensifies. In another novel, Fitch would be a clear villain who, by the end of the novel would be defeated or dead. In this story he ends up still an unpleasant, sour man, but one with his own value to the ship. Bet eventually can respect him and work with him--even joke with him. Fitch's antagonism was as much a product of the distrust and tension on *Loki* as anything else. At the least Bet and Fitch can agree about Mallory, as Bet asks: "'You trusting Mallory, by any chance?' 'Not by choice,' Fitch said" (266).

This emphasis on characters who are real people and on the importance of the communities they build is only part of Cherryh's subversion of the traditions of space opera. *Rimrunners* can also be seen as a more direct revision of another book in the genre, Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. As Nancy A. Walker wrote in *The Disobedient Writer*, for a woman to rewrite not just public domain folk tales, but a specific work "questions the singularity and ownership of certain themes, plots, tropes, and narrative strategies" (5). In this way, Cherryh can make *Rimrunners* another version, another way of telling the story of Heinlein's trooper, and make it a feminist story. Thus she creates one of a set of "Revisionary, 'disobedient'

narratives . . . [that] expose or upset the paradigms of authority inherent in the texts they appropriate" (7).

Space opera could hardly exist without the trooper--those faceless, nameless warriors in space armor either backing up the adventures of the hero or, when they are on the enemy side, serving as foils to his clever machinations. Heinlein is among the few to give his soldier a name and make him a central character, not just a spear-carrier. In *Starship Troopers*, however, Johnnie follows the tradition of most heroes and ends up an officer. Bet Yeager is never anything but a trooper. As one of the approximately two thousand troops on *Africa*, "She had stood real close to *Africa's* Old Man once or twice" (45), but that is as close as she gets to the center of power. What she does in the course of the novel is important, heroic for herself and her comrades, but a small part of the whole picture of Alliance space.

Both Johnnie and Bet join their respective fleets for similar reasons. Johnnie is responding partly to a challenge by his best friend and partly out of rebellion against his father's well-meant disapproval of the military (26). Bet joins the Earth Company Fleet to escape a dull life on a refinery ship and because she hungers for the excitement of the great starships (62).

After his initial disillusionment with the Terran Mobile Infantry, Johnnie eventually accepts its rules and traditions, and becomes an officer. He is completely convinced that Earth's war against an enemy they all call "The Bugs" is necessary and shows no interest in examining the causes of that war or in seeking reconciliation with these enemies. He is patriotically sentimental about his ship, its battles and those who have died in them. Just before the last battle in the book, he exhorts his men with: "I

had a letter from Captain Jelal just before we left. . . . he told me to tell you he's got you in mind...and he expects your names to *shine*" (207).

Bet's loyalty is always to her friends, whether on *Africa* or on *Loki*. She shows pride in the toughness of her former captain, and disgust for the way Earth and the stationers turned on them (136). But ultimately, she sees Mazian as wrong, and his insistence on not giving up, even with the war over, as foolish: "Mazian doesn't see it. Still fighting the war--Hell. What's winning? What's winning, when everything's changing so fast nobody can predict what's going to be worth anything?" (223).

What Bet finally believes in is what she has always believed in: friends, lovers, and having a circle to depend on: "he was the voice in her dark too, saying *I know what you've seen. You don't have to make sense. You don't have to explain a thing*" (259). Bet does not really care who is in charge or what group has her allegiance, she only wants to be on the inside, safe in her family of friends.

By focusing *Rimrunners* on characters who would be peripheral in traditional space opera and by examining the realities of life on the lower decks Cherryh has made this more than a simple adventure. She has created complex, multi-leveled characters with all their flaws and virtues. She has also subverted the usual form of military adventure to show the real people inside the stereotypes: people who care more about getting a beer in the rec room than they do about politics; people who are much more concerned about finding friends to depend on than they are with status or rank. As Le Guin wrote: "if we can't catch Mrs. Brown, if only for a moment, then

all the beautiful faster-than-light ships, all the irony and imagination and knowledge and invention are in vain" (110).

Chapter 5 - "MamBitch is scamming her kids": The Corporate Dystopia in *Heavy Time*

Heavy Time is the darkest, most dystopian of the novels in this study. Set closest to our own time, it has an explicitly Orwellian flavor, and with good reason. Just as George Orwell, in *1984*, was describing the ills of a socialist totalitarian state, Cherryh is describing the ills of a capitalist totalitarian state. As Riane Eisler noted, when examined from the standpoint of structure, many seemingly disparate societies are found to be fundamentally alike (xix). Both novels' societies are rigidly authoritarian and hierarchic, and both depict rulers that are concerned not with the good of their people, but with taking and holding power.

According to Eisler, a dominator culture impacts not only the way humans deal with each other, but the way economic and political structures are focused: "Above all, the shift from androcracy to gynarchy would begin to end the politics of domination and the economics of exploitation that in our world still go hand in hand" (196). An androcentric society bases itself on a conquest-oriented value system, one that requires many of its resources to be spent on structures to maintain that power, such as military hardware. Another component that maintains this power structure is an authoritarian rule, which can become stronger if there is threat of war or social disruption. Threat of war can also lead to the suspension of civil liberties, in the name of making a sacrifice for the greater good (154). On a more hopeful note, Eisler sees a shift to an egalitarian--as she names it, gynarchic--system as one that will promote cooperation, harmony and a more equitable use of the resources of the planet. The costs of sustaining a strong military and police will be used instead to add to the quality of life for everyone.

The nature of the authoritarian rulers in *Heavy Time* and *1984* is very similar. The world of *1984* is ostensibly led by "Big Brother," an icon for the party whose picture adorns every wall, every building, and all print media. "Big Brother is Watching," but the figure is a symbol, not an actual person (5). In *Heavy Time*, as in Orwell's world, there isn't any one ruler, only a corporation with control of all aspects of life in the Belt. The miners who must deal with the corporation call it "Mama" or MamBitch," which is a switch in gender from Orwell's leader, but involves a similar distortion of a family relationship that should be positive but has become destructive.

The similarities of setting for *Heavy Time* and *1984* are striking as well, even given that one is set on a refinery station in the asteroid belt and the other in London. Both describe the squalor in which people live. Orwell describes a canteen, "its walls grimy from the contact of innumerable bodies; battered metal tables and chairs . . . all surfaces greasy, grime in every crack" (52). Cherryh's description of a deck on the refinery also stresses the dirt and neglect of a company that cares only about its own officers' comforts, not about the living conditions for its contract miners: "[deck] 8 these days echoed to footsteps, not to music and voices. The bright posters had all gone years ago. . . . the crud and the slogans stayed in the bathroom, not even covered by paint, while 8-deck got nastier and dirtier and showed its age" (79).

In *Heavy Time*, Cherryh shows the growing power of the corporations on Earth. These corporations, in the other novels of this study, become the Earth Company that, in *Downbelow Station*, fights to keep its control both of the stations it considers colonies and of the Fleet it has built to dominate them. Set fifty years

earlier than *Downbelow Station*, *Heavy Time* follows the lives of miners in Sol system's asteroid belt where they work for ASTEX, a subsidiary of the Earth Company, finding the metals needed for industrial development on Earth and also for the extraterrestrial construction of the Earth Company Fleet. Through the viewpoints of five very different people we are shown the company's increasing control over all space operations: Paul Dekker, a young miner originally from Sol Station; Ben Pollard, also a miner and former student in the company's training school; Morris Bird, who grew up on Earth itself; Meg Kady, also from Sol Station and an aging radical; and Sol Aboujib, originally from an elite company family.

Through these characters we see not only the growth of a corporate power, but a change from an Earth-centered to a space-oriented society. Human expansion in space will of necessity bring many changes to ways of living. In Cherryh's novel this expansion is not met by similar changes in forms of governing the people involved, but by an increased attempt on the part of the company to restrain such change.

Morris Bird, as the oldest of the characters in *Heavy Time*, has seen the greatest change in life out in the Belt. In the beginning, the company actively recruited people from Earth and Sol Station (the station closest to Earth itself), encouraging them to come out to the Belt and "get rich on company wages," in the dangerous job of locating metal-rich asteroids (86). But now that most of the mapping is done and the company has its own training program, it has little use for independent miners. Bird worries that he's too long away from Earth to go back and too old to survive much longer in the Belt: "thirty years was too long an absence for

anyone: Earth had changed, attitudes had changed--people worried about things that didn't worry him and they didn't worry where he knew they should" (87).

Bird's partner is Ben Pollard, a graduate of one of the company's training centers who, instead of taking a job with the company, used his savings to buy shares on a miner ship with Bird. Pollard lacked the family connections to get into a high-level job with the company and thinks he will make more money as an independent.

While out in the Belt, mining their sector, Bird and Pollard hear a distress call and pick up Paul Dekker, a confused and sick stranger whose ship has been tumbling, damaged, for weeks. Pollard immediately begins plans to claim the ship as salvage and is completely unable to understand why Bird gets angry with him over his lack of sympathy for Dekker.

Bird and Pollard show two extremes in the differences between the older and younger characters' adaptation to the company environment. In the early days of exploration and colonization in the Belt, people cooperated and helped each other, sharing resources and knowledge. Now, however, as a reflection of the corporations' concentration on profit over all other considerations, there is mistrust and a greater sense of isolation. The separation between Earth and the space installations is enhanced by the fact that on Earth there is a growing movement toward isolationist policies, out of fear of the distant colonies that have rebelled against Earth domination (87).

Bird still has the habits of those early years in space when people watched out for each other and he maintains a basic feeling that people ought to help each other. When the company does award possession of Dekker's ship to Bird and Pollard,

Dekker comes looking for them, partly out of anger and partly because he doesn't know anyone else on this station. Instead of the meeting turning into a fight, Bird buys Dekker a drink, pays for his sleeping room and offers to help him get his pilot's license reinstated (169).

Bird combines this sympathy for his fellow humans with a complete distrust of the company. He knows any rights they have are only those the company allows and is careful to adhere to its rules to protect himself as much as possible (71). Part of an independent miner's job is to find and tag, with a transmitter that refinery ships can read, metal-rich rock in the Belt. All the records of how much metal is taken from a rock and what the metal is worth are in the company computers, and Bird knows to document thoroughly all his tags: "you'd never say that 'drivers ever, ever cheated in reckoning the mass they'd thrown; and you never *ever* say that a refinery would short their receipts. . . . But you did do real well to get a reputation for being meticulous" (113).

Ben Pollard does share Bird's distrust of the company, but he believes it will follow its own rules, as he tries to explain to his partner when Bird doubts they will be able to claim salvage on Dekker's ship:

"It's the company's rules.... You're saying they're not going to follow them?"

"Ben, the rules aren't supposed to cost the company money." (120)

Eisler found that in our supposedly democratic society, based on the rule of law, administrators will break their own laws in covert wars and change laws in order to

take public welfare money for military expenses, all in order to maintain power (166). So the company will break its own rules for greater profit.

And while Pollard is not cruel, unlike Bird, he has a complete lack of any sort of altruism or sympathy toward other people. When they first rescue Dekker from his damaged ship and Pollard conceives his plan to claim it for salvage, he takes videos of Dekker to prove him crazy. Bird gets angry over this insensitivity and Pollard does not understand why:

"I got to tell you, Ben, right up front. We're not robbing this poor sod. He's got enough troubles. Hear me? Don't you even be thinking about it."

"It's not robbing. It's perfectly legal. It's your rights, Bird, same as his." (33)

Like the men in Gilligan's study, Pollard believes in the "morality of rights . . . predicated on equality and centered on the understanding of fairness" while Bird follows the generally "feminine" mode of the "ethic of responsibility . . . [which] relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need" (Gilligan 164). Pollard has absorbed the company's training, which does not encourage attitudes of cooperation, but tries to arrange every aspect of life according to rules and law. To Pollard, the fact that something is in the rules makes it acceptable, and it does not occur to him that what is legal and what is right might be different.

The other two major characters in *Heavy Time* are Meg Kady and Sal Aboujib and they are also contrasts in new and old attitudes. Meg is almost as old as Bird, and when younger was part of the "rab" (for rabble) who tried to rebel against

company policies. Several "rab" were shot during a demonstration on Earth, eight or nine years earlier (190). Though Meg was not among them, this action, for which the corporation was completely vindicated by Earth government, is seen as a watershed by both Meg and Bird: a symbol of the evolution from a company that was in some degree answerable to laws, to one that effectively *is* the law. Meg is old enough that she can see the change in attitudes, while Sal is so much a product of company training she doesn't even know there is a difference.

Meg tries to make her understand that "MamBitch is scamming her kids" (188) is more than just a statement of the corporation's greed. The corporation is not only cheating the miners in their work, but warping their souls. The entertainment available is all "slash-vids, cop-chasers . . . intensely company, intensely censored. You understand me? MamBitch has been robbing you all along, little bits and pieces" (188). Meg points out the differences in attitudes between Sol Station, still close enough to be influenced by some of the more generous Earth attitudes, and the Belt, which is completely controlled by the company. On Sol Station a second cup of coffee is expected and people who make mistakes are given a second chance, while in the Belt there is no free second cup and no second chance (189). The company has appropriated the spacers' tendency to separate themselves from Earth customs, their desire to think of themselves as tough and resourceful, and used this independence to discourage any generosity or camaraderie among those in the Belt.

Sal and Meg both wear their clothes and hair in styles made popular by the "rab," as do many company employees, but Sal doesn't realize what the popularization of this style means, until Meg tries to explain it to her:

The rab got themselves shot to hell in the '15 and here we got these damn synthetics swaggering around with the company label all over.

The plastics don't know what we were. They turn us into clothes. Into *corp-fad*. (190)

When a radical movement is turned into fashion, it loses its impact and its power to move people to action. In our own world the radicals of the sixties, an era Cherryh herself must know, as she was born in 1942, signaled their politics with their dress. Those same styles--long hair, beads, ethnic-looking tie-dyed clothes--were soon picked up by the fashion industry, so that young people today, looking back, assume the clothes were always just a fashion statement. The import of the ethnic, quasi-tribal appearance is lost just as the messages of spontaneous sexuality and community are remembered as promiscuity and failed communes. This cooptation of politically motivated appearance into fad is a powerful tool for those in authority to use in trivializing the motives and purposes of those who first used these symbols. A movement that is trivialized will inspire not revolution, but fad.

But as Orwell wrote, there are ways other than cooptation to control opposition. In *1984*, the party has a slogan: "Who controls the past . . . controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (32), and they enforce their control by selectively changing all records of the past that contradict their present version of truth.

ASTEX corporation has its own methods of control in the area of communications. As a response to a highjacking ring some years before, the corporation prohibits communications between miners out in the Belt:

It was illegal to hail a neighbor on a run. You spent three months breathing each other's sweat, two guys in a crew space five meters long....but if one freerunner tried to call another a sector away from him, he and his partner went up on Illegal Trading charges. (5)

The corporation claims this is to protect the miners, so they cannot be lured into a trap by false appeals for help, but the result of such a rule is to prevent cooperation between miners, and to keep them from having a safe place to talk about company policies. The refinery station, the only place miners meet, is, like Orwell's world, heavily monitored.

And the corporation has eliminated paper; all records are kept on computers--the company's computers. People used to have access to paper they could use to print news, gossip, even tracts against company policies (78). Now, even toilet paper is made so thin and so quickly degradable that it can't be used to write messages, and paper itself is scarce enough that Bird saves a search notice put on their quarters: "Paper thicker than tissue was worth its weight in gold. Literally" (115). Without actually forbidding the use of paper, the company has made it impossible for those not wealthy or influential to acquire the materials necessary for distributing their own news or opinions. As Joanna Russ points out in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, for many centuries women and minorities were kept from the act of producing art by the simple fact that they could not acquire the materials for producing any art (7). Prevention is more effective than outright prohibition.

The company has learned from history: if one can control means of communications and the information available, as they control the content of

broadcasts in the Belt, one can control people. The corporation even keeps all money handling a matter of data-flow and will not honor any kind of credit chit. Margaret Atwood also uses this economic arrangement; in her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* all monetary transactions handled by computers. When the repressive government takes over the country of Atwood's novel, they can enforce their decree that women may not hold property by the simple act of closing "any account with an F on it instead of an M. All they needed to do is push a few buttons" (234).

The company in the Belt thus controls all aspects of life there: communication, work assignments, access to maps the miners themselves have made, the value and price of the metal mined, and currency.

As in our own current economic structure, the money the company makes is not used to make life better for all, but to give special privilege to the executives and to finance military hardware: the Earth Company Fleet being constructed in the Belt. Bird notices that each time he comes back to the refinery station from a prospecting trip, the facilities get shabbier and dirtier: "You found no luxury here that didn't come out of an automatic dispenser, unless you were working for the company--in which case you saw a whole other class of accommodations" (77-78). Those willing to sign their ships over to the company or those graduates of the Institute who work in company offices have the privilege of using private company recreation areas and living quarters, and those quarters are luxurious by the standards of what is available to the miners. Those, like Bird and his friends, who are independent miners on contract to the company must pay for their own quarters during the times they are on the refinery station, the mandatory "heavy time" of the title, which refers to a set

period of time they must spend on the heavy gravity sections of the station so they do not become acclimated to the weightless condition on the miner ships. This required "heavy time" is not a sign of the company's concern but of its desire to maintain its own profits. A miner whose bones have gotten brittle from too much work in a weightless environment costs the company for medical care, that is if the miner has paid the heavy premiums for optional health insurance. All the company's actions are based on profit, not care.

The corporation's power is not broken in this novel, but a start is made toward a better way of living. Bird, Pollard, Meg and Sol eventually discover that Dekker's partner was killed and his ship damaged because they were bumped by a company-owned ship trying to keep them from claiming an especially large asteroid. When they find out the company is trying to kill Dekker to hide this fact, Sal and Pollard enlist the aid of other miners and reveal the truth. Their actions eventually ruin the corporation executives responsible, but ultimately make little difference in the course of Belt and company policies. Justice is served for the individuals involved, but nothing has changed in the dominator structure of the company. However, the partnership among the miners can be seen as a precursor of the kind of alliance that will eventually weaken the company's power in space. This change, however, does not occur in *Heavy Time*, but is seen in *Downbelow Station*, roughly fifty years later in the internal chronology of the novels. The power of affiliation that Eisler sees as a way out of our destructive cycles can only come when enough people see the need for a different social order. Humans *can* alter their patterns of behavior, "But to do so successfully requires three things: that we perceive the feedback, that we interpret it

correctly, and that we use it to change" (173). It is not enough for a few, like Meg, Pollard and Sal, to see the need for difference. To make a shift in society requires enough people wanting change and enough people realizing they have the power in their affiliation to make that change come about. In *Heavy Time*, the miners are satisfied with seeing one executive brought to justice and one miner, Paul Dekker, saved from corporate murder. They do not realize how much more they could have done to end the corporation's domination, and perhaps at the time of this novel they do not yet have the strength they need.

At the end of this novel, Dekker is drafted into the militia, the company-owned force that will soon become the Earth Company Fleet. And Ben Pollard decides to join him, partly because his partner Bird was killed during the riots on the refinery between miners and company security forces, and partly because he feels a need to keep the associations he has found, even if one of those associations is with Dekker, a man he once considered crazy. Even Pollard is beginning to realize that "for everyone--men as well as women--individual development proceeds *only* by means of affiliation" (Eisler 190).

Pollard has not changed completely, though: "No way to get ahead. You lost the ship, Dek-boy. . . . but a man with my background--there's a real *chance* in this stuff. Military's where the edge is" (330). So he is still looking for a way to status and security.

The most hopeful note comes at the very end of the novel. The ship to which Pollard and Dekker are taken is the nearly finished ECS5--the ship that will be commissioned as *Norway*. And the officer who shows them around the unfinished

ship is named Graff, who in *Downbelow Station* is still one of Signy Mallory's most trusted officers. In this latest-written of these Union/Alliance novels, we are led from a dystopian vision of corporate greed and power back to the possibility of the better, more egalitarian world Cherryh shows us in the first novel, *Downbelow Station*.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion: "Someday the models will be different"

From the dystopia of *Heavy Time* to a *Downbelow Station* that suggests at least the possibility of a new social order, C. J. Cherryh has certainly followed her own prescription for eliminating sexism by writing "the future with models where it's been put out of business" ("Female" 26). She has taken the forms of space opera and used them to tell an exciting, interesting story while at the same time revising some of the basic elements of that form. This revision calls attention to the inequality of such traditions as the male hero, the resourceful (also male) independent trader, and the almost complete absence of real, well-developed female characters. In Cherryh's novels the interstellar wars, the gadgets, the huge space ships that were center stage in so much space opera are replaced by the people, both important and insignificant, who are most truly affected by those wars and gadgets and space ships. By focusing on complex characters, whether ships' captains or common troopers, miners or merchants, and by changing the sex of these traditional characters, Cherryh has offered a new vision of what space opera should accomplish and has, in Nancy A. Walker's words, performed "the disobedient, deliberate reconstituting of a genre to accord with women's experience and vision" (4).

There can be some question as to what that "women's experience and vision" might be, as there are at least two views of gender in feminist theory. One is the view that women are innately different from men, propounded by theorists like Helen Cixous and Mary Daly. Another view is, as Julia Kristeva maintains, that the very label "woman" is a social construct with no meaning beyond what our culture has

made of it (Rosinsky 1)². Both Gilligan and Eisler have written that the contrast between the way men and women view the importance of relationship in our culture is not due to an inherent sex-related difference, but stems from the way men and women are enculturated to their roles, which implies an agreement with Kristeva. Both the male and female characters in Cherryh's novels exemplify this view. Damon Konstantin, Josh Talley, Morris Bird, and Tully all show a drive toward affiliation, a recognition of the human need for family and/or community bonds. Lacking a "web of relationships," these men are lost and unhappy, as are Sandor Kreja and NG Ramey, and when they find the possibility for joining a community, they are willing to take risks to make those bonds permanent. That is, they behave in ways that Gilligan and Eisler have identified as culturally "feminine." Because our culture expects this drive toward affiliation to be primarily feminine, Cherryh's foregrounding of men who seek and create community is revisionary and radical.

All of Cherryh's novels are informed by a realization of the importance to human development of relationship, affiliation, communication and an acceptance of difference, whether in gender or species. She has envisioned environments where men as well as women recognize the importance of community, worlds where women as well as men are free to develop their potential to the fullest. In her novels the bed-ridden Alicia Konstantin is every bit as vital as the starship captain Signy Mallory or the common trooper Bet Yeager. To envision worlds where women can do anything, be anything, is surely a utopian act. For a woman reader of science fiction,

² These differing views of gender are more completely examined in such works as Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, Helen Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa," and Julia Kristeva's "Woman Can Never Be Defined" and *About Chinese Women*.

to find these women and men in adventure stories where the goal is not conquest but community, is liberating and empowering. As Cherryh herself wrote:

There are girls being born who'll read about women heroes, who'll... see women in all kinds of occupations and someday...someday a young woman will get into that line about women being 'vain and foolish things' and in all mental innocence, try to figure out what the writer could possibly mean...never taking a scar from it, as people don't who are armored in a sense of their own worth. ("Female" 24)

Thus Cherryh contributes to what Tom Moylan identifies as the rise in recent years of "critical utopias" that not only speculate on an improved society, but are reactive to the ills of our present cultural mores: "Here, then, critical utopian discourse becomes a seditious expression of social change . . . carried on in a permanently open process of envisioning what is not yet" (213). Of course all science fiction deals with "what is not yet." That idea has even been used as a definition by Samuel R. Delany, who termed it (as paraphrased by Joanna Russ), "what has not happened," which can include "what has not happened yet" (*To Write* 16).

But not all science fiction, and certainly very little space opera, could be considered utopian. Space opera is about adventure and conflict set against the immensity of space. For a novel to reach beyond mere entertainment, it must look not only at what the future could be but what it should be, what human beings could become in some other environment, some other time. Not as prediction, for that is not the task of any fiction, but as speculation, asking questions about possibilities.

That a science fiction novel is entertaining, however, does not lessen its value. As Le Guin wrote in "The Stone Ax and the Muskoxen," "Of course an SF story is entertainment. *All* art is entertainment. That's so clear it's fatuous to repeat it. If Handel's *Messiah* were boring, not entertaining, would thousands of people go listen to it year after year?" (234). Certainly Cherryh wrote her novels to entertain, but also to answer questions. And like the questions Eisler and Gilligan ask about the nature of human development and the way that development could change in a world not founded on domination, Cherryh looks at what human beings, especially women, could become if they grew up in a world where they could realize all their potential without the restrictions of our present culture.

If one looks at the development of Cherryh's future from its internal chronology rather than the publication dates, this change in the social and political climate can be seen as it develops (Meyer). In *Heavy Time*, which is closest to our own age, capitalism in a dominator culture is taken to its extreme; the corporation controls all aspects of life and the only affiliation possible is that between individuals. The darkness of this dystopian tale serves as a contrast to the increasing equality and freedom of the other novels, following what Moylan has seen as a pattern in critical utopias, "for these texts are as much concerned with the discrete process of consciousness raising and political engagement as they are with the iconic social images" (205). By returning to an earlier period of the development of the Union/Alliance universe, Cherryh shows how it evolved from the darkness of *Heavy Time* to the liberation of the spacer culture in *Downbelow Station*. In *Merchanter's*

Luck, The Pride of Chanur and *Rimrunners*, this liberation is taken further and combined with a recognition of the value of affiliation in human dealings.

This freedom to find new norms for society changes the structure of what community and family mean and expands the definition of what it means to be human. These changes are exactly what Cherryh looked for when she speculated on what the appearance of better female characters in science fiction would mean: "someday the models will be different. And what we'll be in them...is going to be different; all of us" ("Female" 25).

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