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The Right Hand of Light: Dark and Light Imagery in the Science Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin

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THE RIGHT HAND OF LIGHT:
DARK AND LIGHT IMAGERY IN THE SCIENCE FICTION
OF URSULA K. LEGUIN

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Patricia Lynn Keister

November 1993

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OF URSULA K. LEGUIN

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The Right Hand of Light:
Dark and Light Imagery in the Science Fiction
of Ursula K. LeGuin

Preface

Science Fiction has had a somewhat spotted reputation over the years, being dismissed by mainstream authors and critics as too hardware oriented and too juvenile. However, the work of such authors as Heinlein, Asimov, and Bradbury has done much to bring Science Fiction into the field of legitimate literature and into recognition as a respectable genre. Ursula K. LeGuin is another addition to the rank of Science Fiction master. Her work has drawn the attention of the critics; the amount and quality of the criticism generated demonstrates that good science fiction reveals ideas, not things.

The idea that unites all of LeGuin's work is her concept of dynamic equilibrium. In each of her novels, LeGuin depicts a world that is unbalanced. Most often, her main characters are also unbalanced, finding equilibrium through the course of the novel and with it a way to aid the world in which they live. LeGuin does not indulge in false happy endings, however. While the character with which she deals may find equilibrium and help his world, the world itself may not be balanced by the novel's end. However, there is always the understanding that the world is better off than it was,

and that balance is possible.

In many of LeGuin's novels, dynamic equilibrium takes the form of Taoism. Critic/biographers Charlotte Spivack and Elizabeth Cummins have made the most detailed analysis of LeGuin's use of Taoism, citing her exposure to Taoist ideas as far back as her childhood. Certainly LeGuin's use of dark and light imagery is based on Taoism; light and darkness correspond to the elements of yang and yin. Light, which is associated with yang, represents the masculine forces of action, order and the conscious, while darkness corresponds to yin, representing the feminine elements of passivity, chaos, and the unconscious. Perhaps the most important Taoist idea that LeGuin uses, however, is the idea that dark and light are equal forces. In the Western hierarchy, darkness has been associated with evil and negation, while light represents good. In dynamic equilibrium, there is no hierarchy, so light and darkness, as well as male and female, are simply two halves of the same coin. Micheal Page, in his book The Tao of Power, sees yin and yang as a white tiger and an azure dragon, always mating.

This image is particularly helpful when considering the idea of balance. It is easy to picture balance as a set of scales, static and unmoving once the elements of each side are even, but that is exactly what dynamic equilibrium is not. Dynamic equilibrium comes from the creative tension of opposites, with the forces of darkness and light in constant give and take, always mating. Thus each character that LeGuin creates bears both masculine and feminine forces. Imbalance arises when one force is suppressed; traditionally, the most suppressed force has been darkness and the feminine.

Critics have discussed LeGuin's use of balance. Taoism has been the theme most frequently examined, not only by the critics already mentioned, but also by Dena C. Bain and Robert Galbreath. Douglas Barbour has examined Leguin's use of wholeness in her science fiction novels, as has Darko Suvin. There is a great deal to be found in LeGuin's work; critics have explored mythology, utopianism, suffering, politics, and humanity. In every theme, however, lies LeGuin's great theme of dynamic equilibrium.

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THE RIGHT HAND OF LIGHT
DARK AND LIGHT IMAGERY IN THE SCIENCE FICTION
OF URSULA K. LEGUIN

Patricia Lynn Keister November 1993 47 pages
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Ursula K. LeGuin uses dark and light imagery to emphasize her theme of dynamic equilibrium. This theme can be found throughout her work; the novels discussed are The Left Hand of Darkness, The Lathe of Heaven, The Dispossessed, and The Beginning Place. In each novel, LeGuin focuses on a different aspect of dynamic equilibrium. The themes are respectively, gender identity, chaos and order, and the individual versus the community. The final novel, The Beginning Place, unites and sums up all three themes. In each novel, one or more main characters suffers from imbalance that reflects the theme of the novel. Throughout the course of the novel, the character learns to find balance, thus resolving the issue that LeGuin discusses.

Chapter I

The Ai Report:

Gender Identity in The Left Hand of Darkness

The Left Hand of Darkness is the most obvious place to begin a discussion of Ursula K. LeGuin's use of dynamic equilibrium, but in some ways the most difficult. As in all the works discussed here, LeGuin uses light and dark to symbolize dynamic equilibrium on all the levels she describes; here she even uses the Taoist yin/yang symbol to decorate the text. The difficulty lies in that there are so many levels, all tightly interconnected, to be interpreted. To name a few, LeGuin combines betrayal and fidelity, self and other, order and chaos, freedom and repression in one text, all connected with light and dark. LeGuin also uses these shades to symbolize Genly Ai's, and by proxy, humanity's dualistic gender, as well as to underscore Gethenian gender unity. Gethenians unite both male and female gender with a third, neutrality. Two-thirds of their time, Gethenians are sexless beings; thus, while on Winter, Genly Ai, a male, is a "pervert," always in kemmer (the active phase of the Gethenian sexual cycle).

For LeGuin, gender or androgyny determines to a large degree the behavior of an individual. Barbara Brown, in "The Left Hand of Darkness: Androgyny Past, Present, and Future" notes, "In androgyny, but rather the alternating thrust and withdrawal of the masculine

and feminine principles within each individual psyche" (228). On Gethen, where the people are androgynous, there has been no war for thirty thousand years, while human history has been filled both with gender-specific identity and war. Ai's mission on Gethen almost fails because he is a conventional young man from Terra; he cannot deal with Gethenians as anything other than as heterosexual human males because of his psycho-social conditioning. As the first explorer to Gethen notes in her report, "A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. On Winter they will not exist. One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience" (LHD 95). Ai does not realize the limits a gendered upbringing has on his interactions with Gethenians. Ai's mission, to join Gethen with the Ekumen, almost fails because of those limits; yet Estraven, the Prime Minister of Karhide, realizes that joining the Ekumen is perhaps the only thing that will save Gethen from its first war in thirty thousand years. Ai refuses to heed Prime Minister Estraven's advice because he distrusts him; Ai's distrust lies in constantly seeing the woman in a "manly" figure. In this way, Ai's discomfort with Gethenian sexuality runs far deeper than a simple confrontation with the alien would suggest. Genly Ai is a sexist. We can assume that Ai knows women in a sexual sense, as he is a heterosexual human male; moreover, his second in command is female. Yet Ai's mistrust of Gethenians, especially Estraven, lies in his suspicion and distrust of the feminine in them.

The feminine, in terms of dynamic equilibrium, is associated with darkness, as well as with intuition, chaos, and creation, while

the masculine is coupled with light, knowledge, and order. However, equilibrium lies in the fact that dark and light are complementary, not hierarchical. As LeGuin demonstrates with the yin/yang symbol, light and dark, masculine and feminine, are two sides of the same coin. Genly Ai, however, views the feminine and the dark as negative. He has not come to terms with the feminine in himself, much less in other "males."

Ai begins his narrative by declaring that "Truth is a matter of the imagination" (LHD 1). From the beginning, two sets of facts are presented, often contradicting each other, but each affirmed by Ai to be true. Although by the end of the novel Genly Ai has grown considerably and changed his attitude, in the interests of Truth, he makes no attempt to soften or hide his patronizing attitude toward the feminine in Gethen. He continually associates all that he dislikes about Gethenians with negative stereotypes of women, seeing "effeminate intrigue" in the talk of Karhidish politicians, shrillness in King Argaven, who "laughed like an angry woman." Attempting humor, Ai refers to the superintendant of his building as his "landlady," citing his "fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature" (LHD 48). Ai makes this same equation between fat and female when he is imprisoned in the Pulefen Voluntary Farm. The guards there, given drugs to suppress ~~kenner~~, appear to Ai as "effeminate . . . a gross, bland fleshiness, a bovinity without point or edge. . . . I had also for the first time on Winter a feeling of being a man among women . . . their emotional tone seemed always low, their talk trivial" (LHD 176). Due to his manner of expression, Ai's attitude toward women, hence

toward the female in each Gethenian, is blatantly sexist. Women, to him, are trivial, shrill, and angry, soft and fat. Barbara Bengels, in "Sex and the Single Man," notes that "they [Gethenians] are frequently seen in terms of animal imagery," citing Ai's reason for the lack of war on Gethen: "They lacked, it seemed, the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals in that respect, or women" (LHD 49).

LeGuin is too adept an artist for these subtle and not-so-subtle hints not to be taken seriously. The Ekumen, the semi-mystical alliance of planets and species that Genly Ai represents, has been functional for around fifteen hundred years at the time of the novel. Why then are we given a "conventional" human as a hero? Are we to assume that Ai is atypical of the Ekumen, or that he is their spokesperson in gender issues also? Genly Ai is conventional because he is us, the reader. He views Gethen through the same eyes we would use, were we there; his reactions do not surprise us until he starts to examine them. When Ai realizes that his attitude toward the feminine is patronizing, we too realize that we devalue the feminine. Like Genly Ai, however, we can change and learn acceptance.

The female principle is active in Gethenian society, which Genly Ai, as a conventional male, even in Ekumenical year 1497, finds disturbing. He seeks power structures, even including the structure of war, with its accompanying rape, poverty, and destruction. This is not to suggest that Genly Ai wishes for a war on Gethen, simply that war is an activity to which he is accustomed, a structure that is familiar, if distasteful. Its lack, through thirty thousand years of Gethenian history, is alien. Cleverly enough, to support her theory

of male and female principle, and its effects on individuals, LeGuin has Ai attribute the lack of war to the feminine qualities of the Gethenians, rather than to its more obvious cause, the permanent Ice Age on Gethen, which makes survival chancy and mobilization difficult. However, the Orgoreyn, who follow the Yomeshta cult, which denies darkness, are arming themselves for that first war. Even in Karhide, which is steeped in the "fecund darkness" of the Handdara faith, the new Prime Minister, Tibe, is beginning to ignore shifgrethor in favor of "patriotism." Shifgrethor is the Gethenian idea of honor or 'face.' Originally the word for shadow, it is closely associated with darkness. Acting with shifgrethor means acting indirectly, by implication rather than direct action, so that no one's honor will be sacrificed. Real motives are disguised by shadow. When Tibe sets aside the concept, he sets the stage for direct action: in this case, war.

Having established Ai's sexism, LeGuin ties the feminine and suppression of the feminine to darkness in the person of Estraven, the temporary Prime Minister of Karhide. LeGuin illustrates dynamic equilibrium in three ways; Estraven is the first person in the novel who is balanced. He engages in activities that are traditionally associated with the masculine: politician, dockworker, traitor. However, Ai more clearly sees the feminine in him: "Estraven's performance had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him . . . whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness" (LHD 12). Ai damns Estraven for his "effeminate deviousness," and even when they pull together for survival across the Gobrin Ice, Ai sees himself

as "a stallion in harness with a mule" (LHD 218), assigning Estraven only sterility in place of the sexuality that upsets him so much.

LeGuin depicts Estraven almost always in darkness, but especially when he is in company with Ai. The first time we see them together, dark stormclouds hang over the dark city of Ehrenrang. Their second meeting takes place in the red dark before Estraven's hearth, when he and Genly Ai misunderstand each other acutely for the first time. Ai sees Estraven "in shadow: a dark face always shadowed by the thick lowgrowing hair and heavy brows and lashes, and by a somber blandness of expression" (LHD 15), and sums his character up with: "Of all the dark, obstructive, enigmatic souls I had met in this bleak city, his was the darkest" (LHD 19). When they meet in Orgoreyn, Ai describes Estraven as "Dark, in dark clothing, still and shadowy, he sat at my elbow, the specter at the feast" (LHD 122).

Estraven is the quintessential Gethenian, (feminine) darkness allied with (light) masculinity. When Estraven chooses to take direct action, he is surrounded by light. His rescue of Ai from the Farm where he is imprisoned takes place during a fall of thick, wet, white snow. Their subsequent flight across the Gobrin Ice, which Estraven orchestrates and leads, leads them to cross the ice, where "thousands of square miles of white reflect the sunlight" (LHD 243). For many weeks, Ai sees Estraven either traveling across the Ice, active and surrounded by light, or resting in the tent, passive and surrounded by darkness. It is no accident that Ai finally communicates with Estraven and begins to discover his own balance while on the Gobrin Ice.

Ai's mistake is to try to see himself in Estraven, a human male

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to whom he can relate, for Estraven is neither male nor female. He is both and one, a balance of light and dark and their attendant attributes. He is not a static character, however, but a dynamic one. He moves with events, not against them, while taking action, when necessary, to support Ai's mission, which he sees as a unifying factor for Gethen. Ai does not understand the way in which Estraven functions, because he is not prepared for a "masculine" figure to function in a "feminine" way. As noted, even on the Gobrin Ice, when Estraven has saved his life, Ai is "galled" to be patronized, as he sees it, by Estraven's womanliness: "[He was] built more like a woman than a man, more fat than muscle; when we hauled together I had to shorten my pace to his, hold my strength so as not to outpull him" (LHD 218). Estraven's "patronizing" has been his concern for Ai's health and level of endurance. Ironically enough, Estraven's deposits of fat make him far more likely and fit to survive life on the glacier than does Ai's fat-free male physique. Estraven, after all, can rely on his fat in the Gethenian practice of starvation, while Genly Ai must stay perpetually hungry and guilty for eating more of the rations.

It is no accident that LeGuin portrays Estraven as a member of the Handdara discipline for it is that faith, or more specifically, Genly Ai's experience of it, that is the second point of balance in the novel. LeGuin not only brings light and dark together in balance with masculine and feminine, but also describes Ai's sexist and deeply fearful response to the feminine force of darkness that he encounters when she describes Ai's experience with the Foretellers. Ai goes to the Foretellers to find out what they are; the first explorers

on Gethen had no idea. The Foretellers do just that, foretell the future in response to answerable questions for people who can afford to pay their price. Ai can and does ask an answerable question, "Will the planet Gethen be a member of the Ekumen in five years?"

A Foretelling group consists of two Zanies (schizophrenics by Ai's diagnosis), two Celibates, one Pervert, and one Weaver, who is the leader (or asker) and physical center of the group. Ai's Weaver is a young Gethenian named Faxe. During the Foretelling, the group, including Ai, is surrounded by physical darkness, but also illuminated:

in the center of all darkness Faxe: the Weaver: a woman, a woman dressed in light. The light was silver, the silver was armor, an armored woman with sword. The light burned sudden and intolerable, the light along her limbs, the fire, and screamed aloud in terror and pain, "Yes, yes, yes, yes! (LHD 66)

Thus Ai is answered. This image represents dynamic equilibrium because it combines and balances the forces LeGuin works with, yet does not render them static. The feminine has been associated with darkness, most especially in the portrayal of the Foretelling group; even Ai reports having felt the "an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara" (LHD 60) during his stay with the group. During the Foretelling, however, Faxe's female form is bathed in or producing light rather than darkness. The balance of this image, and the reason that it supports, rather than opposes LeGuin's symbolism, is that the woman is armed, and presented as a martial figure, in an inversion of both the traditional passive female role, and Ai's own observation that Gethen lacks war because its people

are too female. LeGuin skillfully weaves the forces she is dealing with into one point, with a more important result than answering Ai's question. Ai does not understand what happened or why, but he has changed during the course of the Foretelling. At the very beginning of the event, as Ai mindspeaks the Foretellers in an effort to learn about them we see his fear and loathing of the female: "I was surrounded by great gaping pits with ragged lips, vaginas, wounds, hellmouths, I lost my balance, I was falling" (LHD 65-66). This experience is hellish for Genly Ai, and it is in part female, but he is transformed by the experience. At the end of the Foretelling, he sees Faxe momentarily as he was during the prophesy, as female. Ai accepts both the female in Faxe and the answer Faxe has provided for him, beginning his eventual achievement of equilibrium.

As a counterpoint to the Handdara discipline, based in Karhide, LeGuin illustrates for us the cult of Yomeshe, a faith that is paired with the totalitarian state of Orgota, and one that represents lack of balance rather than equilibrium. The main difference between the Handdara and Yomeshta cults is that the former values darkness and light equally, while the latter denies the darkness. Meshe, founder of the Yomeshta cult, found "enlightenment" and thereafter denied the darkness and all things connected with it. LeGuin places a chapter on the Yomeshta creed in the center of Ai's journey through Orgota, where the cult flourishes. The Yomeshta creed reads, "In the Sight of Meshe there is no darkness. Therefore those that call upon darkness are made fools of and spat out of the mouth of Meshe There is neither darkness nor death" (LHD 164).

The Orgoreyn people and Genly Ai are the unfortunate victims

of this suppression of darkness and death, both of which do exist in Orgota in spite of Yomeshtan denial. David Lake, in "LeGuin's Twofold Vision: Contrary Image-Sets in The Left Hand of Darkness," states, "for a healthy relationship between individuals, darkness must always remain. Total clarity annihilates individualities, as we shall see in regard to totalitarian Orgoreyn" (157). The Commensals, the political alliances that run Orgota and replace each other with frequency, strongly resemble the Yomeshe cult. They hide and deny many things to their own people, including the right to raise their own children, freedom of individuality, freedom of movement: "Better to be naked than to lack papers, in Orgoreyn" (LHD 111). People in Orgota are known as "units" and assigned numbers; all units are assigned work by the Commensals because there is no unemployment and no poverty in Orgoreyn. While in Karhide, Ai and his mission were matters of public record: he walked in the parade before the king, while his "landlady" showed the "Mysterious Envoy's Room" to the public for fame and fortune. Ai fails to realize that the people of Orgota know nothing about him. As Estraven notes, "Shusgis [a politician] and the others take Genly Ai about the city openly. I wonder if he sees that this openness hides the fact that he is hidden. No one knows he is here No information, no interest, nothing that might advance Ai's cause, or protect his life" (LHD 154).

In fact, Ai's blind acceptance of Orgota and Yomeshe is in keeping with his own reaction to darkness and its feminine identification, for he denies and suppresses the darkness also; it is no wonder that he feels at home in Orgota: "The Orgota seemed not an unfriendly people, but incurious; they were colorless, steady, subdued. I liked

them" (LHD 114). Ai does not realize, until he has been arrested and thrown into a prison van, what denial of the darkness truly means. The forces of darkness, the feminine, and death do exist, and their corresponding forces can't exist properly without acceptance of them. When a force like the feminine is suppressed, it becomes perverted; the darkness hides imprisonment, torture, and unnatural death from the incurious Orgoreyn people. Ai travels to the Pulefen Voluntary Farm in an involuntary manner, with a dead man in the prison truck: "Darkness was total inside our steel box" (LHD 168). The steel box is a literal coffin for the dead man and a symbolic one for Ai; the man he was does not survive the trip to the Farm, while the man who emerges is a new being altogether, finally understanding a great deal at a very late date.

The last dark secret that Ai discovers in Orgota is a very real suppression, not merely of the female, but of any kind of sexuality; both prisoners and guards are given **kenner**-suppressing drugs to block their sexual cycles. Ai can list the positive reasons for such an action to himself and even recognize that active sexuality, for Gethenians, is demanding and difficult to deny. But Ai cannot convince himself with his reasons and concludes, "They [the prisoners] were without shame and without desire, like the angels. But it is not human to be without shame and without desire" (LHD 177). Ai notes that the long-term use of such drugs produces permanent effects, including a passivity that seems ominously mindless to him. Ai fears what the Gethenians could do to themselves.

The final point at which LeGuin demonstrates the necessity of dynamic equilibrium is in the tent on the Gobrin Ice, after Estraven

has saved Ai from death in the Pulefen Voluntary Farm. The time that Ai and Estraven have spent on the Ice has been filled with misunderstanding and miscommunication, as has every other time they have tried to speak to each other. Ai is still uncomfortable with Estraven, but his continuing experiences help him, finally, to meet Estraven on his own terms and accept him for what he is. The moment comes when Ai finally shares mindspeech--a meeting of the minds in the fullest sense--with Estraven, after numerous trials. The moment arrives after Ai and Estraven discuss what makes a human female. Estraven, never having seen a human woman save in pictures, cannot grasp Ai's explanation because Ai himself cannot formulate a clear answer. He discovers that he does not know what a female is beyond the rudimentary roles they play in society (childbearing, etc.). Ai makes the discovery that women "are more alien to me than you are. With you I share one sex, anyhow" (LHD 235). In LeGuin's world, naming a fear is accepting it.

This identification lasts through Estraven's *kemmer*, which he experiences on the Ice. Responding to Ai's masculinity, Estraven becomes female. At long last, Ai not only sees Estraven for what he is, but accepts him and admits his own failing:

He was the only one who had entirely accepted me as a human being . . . and who therefore had demanded of me an equal degree of recognition, of acceptance. I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man. (LHD 248)

He has seen the male in Estraven and identified with it, and now

sees and accepts equally the feminine as well, thus enabling himself to accept his own female side. Elizabeth Cummins, in Understanding Ursula K. LeGuin, notes, "Just as Ged's shadow in A Wizard of Earthsea was threatening because it was Ged's own dark, repressed self, so Estraven seem untrustworthy to Ai because Ai has not acknowledged his own female characteristics" (76).

Estraven has recognized Ai as a human being all along; once Ai is able to reciprocate and acknowledge Estraven as a human being, the walls between them dissolve and they achieve mindspeech together. Genly Ai feels "the emphatic bond" for the first time, his mind slips easily to Estraven's, and the voice that Estraven hears is the voice of his sibling. Dynamic equilibrium is achieved in the meeting of masculine and feminine, dark and light, Self and Other. War on Gethen is averted as the countries join together in the Ekumen, as Estraven foresaw they would.

Genly Ai has grown from sexism to acceptance, changing from a "rather stuffy young man" to a human being. In the end, Genly Ai acts as Estraven would have acted had he lived, putting Gethen and its admission to the Ekumen before his own honor. He continues the work that Estraven died for and, traveling full circle, goes to Estraven's Hearth (family/community dwelling) to tell his family the truth of his death, to assure them that he did not die a traitor. Genly Ai finds in Estraven's son another person willing to look beyond his own contry and see the stars, as Estraven was. His shipmates do not know Ai when they arrive, nor do they seem familiar to him after so long, but he accepts them and their love, as Estraven once accepted a strange young man from the stars.

Chapter II

George and the Jellyfish:

Order and Chaos in The Lathe of Heaven

The dark/light patterns of The Lathe of Heaven are a blend of subtle and overt, a LeGuin trademark. One of the themes of the novel is the function and purpose of dreaming. An obvious connection arises between night and day, sleeping and waking, unconscious and conscious. Typical of LeGuin's subtlety, however, most of the dreams of the mild-mannered hero, George Orr, take place during the day, in a blaze of light. Conscious and unconscious connect directly to the main theme of order and chaos. LeGuin applies light imagery to order, and dark imagery to chaos. Dreams are elusive things, the fruit of the unconscious, meant to thrive in the darkness of the mind. George Orr's dreams, however, effectively change the fabric of reality, not through changing his patterns of behavior or through post-REM sleep analysis, but by working in the material world to make reality fit the dream, no matter how fantastic. As Orr explains to Heather Lelache, if he has an effective dream about a pink dog, "then my dream would have to change the order of nature to include pink dogs. Everywhere. Since the Pleistocene or whenever dogs appeared" (LH 50). The unconscious is the place of chaos in the human mind. In the case of dreams, however, chaos is meant to stay in the mind, influencing

the dreamer through the unconscious. George's dreams force themselves into the daylight, rational world, where they don't belong. When Dr. Haber, the dream therapist, tries to control the dreams, rather than helping George to return his dreams to the proper place, he unleashes nightmares onto the world.

Dr. Haber represents rationality and order, but, contrary to expectations, George Orr is not his opposite, or even his adversary. George Orr is mostly balanced already; Haber represents light too exclusively and extremely to find a successful opposing tension with Orr. Instead, Orr acts as a fulcrum, balancing Haber with the Aliens. Direct from George Orr's unconscious, the Aldebarians represent as complete a force of chaos and darkness as Haber does order. LeGuin never chooses to explore a world unbalanced in favor of darkness, but she does imply in this work, if in no other, that a world of chaos would be just as bad as a world made entirely of order. In Lathe, the Aliens become necessary to balance the destruction that Haber has caused in his attempt to improve the world through rational dreaming.

When first we meet Dr. Haber, he is a ordinary human psychiatrist: cheerful, false, and faintly bullying. Increasingly, LeGuin depicts Haber, as the novel progresses and his power grows, in terms of light and space. His office is the only setting in which we see him; it enlarges with each continuum shift that Haber controls through Orr's dreams. At Orr and Haber's first meeting, the office is windowless and cramped: "It was an Interior Efficiency Suite on the sixty-third floor of Williamette East Tower and didn't have a view of anything" (LH 11). The walls are flimsy; people and toilets sound all around.

LeGuin illustrates the feeling of cramped, enclosed space to convey a feeling of life in the twenty-first century, when poverty, overcrowding, and starvation reign, as well as to make a connection with life in the twentieth century, where rooms without views are commonplace. We can picture Haber's office, with its enclosed space and lack of windows, as a dark little room, while he is a fairly well-meaning psychiatrist. LeGuin does not, by any means, represent the world in which the action starts as balanced; in fact, the world only exists because of an effective dream that George Orr had while he was dying in the nuclear holocaust humans inflicted upon themselves. However, the world LeGuin begins with is accepted by those living in it; it is the "normal" world, if an unpleasant one. Haber, with the best of intentions, attempts to improve the world for humanity, tackling the problems of hunger, overpopulation, and war in a systematic, "logical" manner.

By chapter five, Haber has gone from the sixty-third floor to the Oregon Oneirological Institute, of which he is director. This office has a double window and a view with a vengeance: "the city's countless towers high and milky in the spring mist . . . the suburbs receding out of sight till from their remote outbacks the foothills rose" (LH 53-54). The sun is shining because Haber has fixed the weather; all about him is light and bright. By chapter nine, the once dingy office has become the World Planning Center, "larger in ground space than the British Museum, and five stories taller" (LH 132). The window has grown from nonexistence to a "wall to ceiling" with a view of the world that Haber now controls. As Haber's power proliferates, so does the light that surrounds him.

George Orr recognizes that Haber is a basically benevolent man, but also a misguided one, who, like any other ordinary person, should not have been allowed access to absolute power. His career as a dream therapist is ironic, for Haber simply does not grasp the forces with which he deals. He plans a bright future for the world, a logical surcease to the problems human have created, but his reasoning fails when he tries to carry out the plan through George Orr's dreams. Dreams belong to chaos and the unconscious; they are not meant to make sense or order the world. Haber, however, continues to dictate his plans for the new world to George's unconscious, as if they were blueprints and he an engineer. Haber dictates an order to solve the problem of overpopulation to George's unconscious; in response, Orr dreams of the Plague that killed six billion people a number of years ago. Six billion deaths weigh heavy on Orr's conscience, while to Haber, the hunger-free world that results is well worth the price. Haber tries to impose order on a chaotic force, ignoring the inherent strengths and forces of chaos. To a certain extent, Haber confuses daydreams--escape, heroics--with real, uncontrolled, dreaming. By imposing order onto chaos, and conscious onto unconscious, Haber, rather than bringing the two into creative equilibrium, only suppresses darkness and chaos. The result is a world of shabbiness, dreariness, and sameness, where democratic government does not exist, but everyone is fed.

LeGuin places a large, dark, echoing lobby at the center of the WPC complex where Haber eventually rules. Instead of being an encouraging sign, an unconscious recognition of darkness on Haber's part, the chamber is vast, cold, and very empty. LeGuin uses an onion

metaphor to describe Haber at one point; he, too, has only emptiness at his core, when layer after layer is peeled away to reveal nothing. Haber has suppressed his own darkness to such an extent that he can no longer function as a balanced, or even sane human being. Ironically, Haber declares to Orr, "Don't be afraid of your unconscious mind! It's not a black pit of nightmares. Nothing of the kind. It is the wellspring of health, imagination, creativity" (LH 88).

In fact, Haber is only half-right. The unconscious is the well of creativity and chaos, but it is also the very place where nightmares come from. In conjunction with rationality and conscious, the unconscious can be balanced. When one is imposed on the other, imbalance occurs. In the end, when Haber hooks himself up to the dream Augmentor to dream his own blueprints, the result is a true nightmare world, where the foundations of the earth melt as the suppressed darkness of Haber's unconscious, without control or volition, reaches out to envelope the world.

Contrary to expectation, the Aldebarians, rather than George Orr, serve to balance the ordered ruin that Haber has made of the world. Like the rest of the world, they go through several transformations, the first of which is an aggressive incarnation. Haber attempts to produce peace on earth, but Orr's unconscious, unable to dream of peace among men produces, war in space. In this first incarnation, the Aliens are archtypal villains, brutal, savage, and ruthless. However, LeGuin does not portray the Aliens as committing acts that humans are not capable of; dreamed by a man, they are within the scope of the human archetype. Similarly, when the Aliens are dreamt passive by Orr in Haber's attempt to save the world he has nearly

destroyed, they are still within human ken. They give Orr the key to dreaming successfully; since they came from Orr's mind, the key was within himself all along. Significantly, George Orr cannot find the equilibrium he lost four years before until he has dreamed of the Aliens. It is only after their introduction to the world that he can dream himself "normal": i.e., unable to dream effectively and, thus, to adversely affect the world. Orr, unlike Haber, is content to let the world spin on its own; as he regains the equilibrium he lost, Orr understands his place in the world: "He was back where he belonged. He felt an equanimity, a perfect certainty as to where he was and where everything else was" (LH 139). By the time Orr can regain his balance, Haber has subjected the world to so much order that the chaos-born Aliens are necessary to maintain an equilibrium.

The Aliens burst forth from George Orr's mind during Haber's attempt to create peace. George, dreaming, is "in the dark. Not quite night yet: late twilight on the fields. Clumps of trees looked black and moist" (LH 83). The Aliens appear from the dark night sky; the only light is from the exchange of fire between human and Alien. During their first peaceful appearance, one lone Alien emerges, fetus-like, from the snout of their ship. However, in the clearest connection between darkness, chaos, and the Aliens, LeGuin portrays one Alien in the clutter and jumble of a junk shop:

It was cool and rather dark inside. A leg of the ramp formed one wall, a high blank dark expanse of concrete, like the wall of an undersea cave. From the receding prospect of shadows . . . from those tenebrous reaches of no-man's things, a huge form emerged, seeming to float forward slowly, silent and reptilian. (LH 147)

The Alien is calm and congenial, attempting no sales and showing an inherent understanding of George's problems. They do not need specific verbal interaction in order to communicate. More specifically, this passage recalls the opening paragraph, wherein LeGuin describes a jellyfish floating on the primordial ocean: "the light shines through it, and the darkness enters it . . . pulses move slight and quick within it, as the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moon-driven sea" (LH 7). The jellyfish is the quintessential equilibric symbol of the novel, replacing the yin/yang symbol of The Left Hand of Darkness. The Alien, Tiau'k Ennbe Ennbe, floating gracefully through the dim light, is reminiscent of the jellyfish. The jellyfish moves as the current takes it, with, rather than against, the tide. However, LeGuin does not equate the two beings, but merely connects them, for the Aliens, unlike the jellyfish, are not meant to represent equilibrium, but rather darkness. To this end, LeGuin places the Aliens in George Orr's dreams as sea turtles, "swimming with heavy inexhaustible grace through the depths, in their element" (LH 170). By picturing the Aliens in the sea, rather than on it, LeGuin makes the connection to darkness, creation, and chaos; the Aliens only represent one half of the total unity. The land and the sea are united in constant motion, as are the forces they represent in the novel.

LeGuin makes ironic use of the color grey, when considered with her use of light and dark. Grey is a blend of black and white, but instead of using it to represent equilibrium, she uses it to illustrate imbalance. Haber's attempt to solve racial problems through Orr's dreams results in a world of grey people. There are no racial problems because there is no race but a grey one. The people have matching

skin tone and matching clothes; they blend in with their surroundings and with each other. Haber delights in the change, while George feels only sorrow for the Gettysburg Address that was never delivered and the man named Martin Luther King who was never born. LeGuin makes a valuable point about equilibrium with her grey race: for equilibrium to exist, there must be differences, there must be tension between opposites. Equilibrium can only be achieved through a constant pull in both directions, like the ebb and flow of the tide. Greyness can only lead to the static, not the dynamic.

LeGuin's most dynamic character, Heather Lelache, cannot exist as a grey person; her blackness is too much a part of her. Heather is an everchanging mixture of things, but she is not static:

That's why she's not here, he [George Orr] thought. She could not have been born grey. Her color, her color of brown, was an essential part of her, not an accident. Her anger, timidity, brashness, gentleness, all elements of her mixed being, her mixed nature, dark and clear right through, like Baltic amber. She could not exist in the grey people's world. She had not been born. (LH 127)

When George dreams up a grey Heather, she is not the same woman who existed as a black woman. George notes that he remains the same through each continuum shift; like the jellyfish, he is still and passive, ready to be carried by each tide. But Heather is George's opposite, active and aggressive. To be born grey she must change. Her fierceness is lost, while her timidity and gentleness take over. In the end, LeGuin returns race to the world and the fierce black Heather with it, suggesting that dynamic Heather and passive George

make good equilibrium. Passive is generally considered to be a negative word, but in a balanced LeGuin world, it connotes stillness and quietude rather than spinelessness. George's passivity does not bar him from acting when action is necessary; he is balanced, after all. In fact, the one meaningful action he takes--hitting the off button on the Augmentor--saves the world from annihilation by Haber.

The only times during which LeGuin joins light and darkness, except for the jellyfish, are the meetings between Heather and George. There are three balanced meetings between the two. The first takes place in the original continuum, when George goes to Heather for legal advice. At first, Heather dismisses George as milquetoast, even as Haber did. Unlike Haber, Heather helps George because he needs help, rather than through a sense of duty, benevolence, or self-interest. The meeting ends on a hopeful note of balance:

She stuck out her brown hand, he met it with a white one, just like that damn button her mother always kept in the bottom of her bead box, SCNN or SNOC or something she'd belonged to back in the middle of the last century, the Black hand and the White hand joined together. Christ!
(LH 52)

LeGuin follows up this hopeful note when Heather, beyond the call of duty, tracks George to the log cabin where he hides from Haber. Her concern for George is just that: concern, mixed with anger at having to follow him and enjoyment at playing detective. The surrounding area, land and water, provides the balance of darkness and light to support the balance of Heather and George:

Great hemlocks blackened the moonlit sky. The sign she looked for was almost invisible in the branched and ferny dark that swallowed the pallid headlights. She turned again, and bumped slowly down ruts and over humps for a mile or so until she saw the first cabin, moonlight on a shingled roof. (LH 93-94)

Heather recognizes George's strength for the first time in the cabin, and helps him out of friendship. The final meeting occurs when George has regained his balance and Haber has lost his forever. The world has melted and begun to recover. Race has returned, as has war. Heather and George meet again, Heather unaware that she was ever grey or that they were married. The meeting occurs in evening, when light verges on dark, with an Alien standing passively by. This ending strikes the most positive note in LeGuin's work. Balance is achieved here and the world is made anew.

Chapter III

The World, the Flesh, and Shevek:

Community and Individuality in The Dispossessed

Dynamic equilibrium applies to every aspect of life; LeGuin explores a different theme with every novel. Until now, the themes explored have been applied in very personal ways: Genly Ai learned equilibrium through gender equality, and George Orr regained his equilibrium when he found a balance between order and chaos. Although both experiences translated to wider plateau--Genly Ai brings Gethen to the Ekumen, and George saves the world from Haber--the fundamental struggle is on an individual level, while the theme is the issue that LeGuin explores, such as androgyny, or dreams. In The Dispossessed, the individual becomes the theme, as LeGuin explores the theme of community and individual, or more specifically, the needs of the community in conflict with the needs of the individual. As usual for LeGuin, darkness represents the suppressed. However, in The Dispossessed, LeGuin applies darkness to both the individual and the community, because both are suppressed at different points in the novel. However, the elements of darkness and light do not change fundamentally; archetypally speaking, darkness still represents the feminine, the unconscious, chaos, and passivity, or stillness. Because those things traditionally have been suppressed in human society,

LeGuin attempts to demonstrate that a community, like an individual, can be oppressed. A community can be passive if it accepts oppression, while a different community (or the same community in different circumstances) can actively suppress an individual. LeGuin explores the effects that both situations have on individuals and communities; Shevek and the two societies that he joins pay a painful price during the course of the novel.

The action focuses on the attempts of one individual, Shevek, to find human connections and to find the freedom to practice the theoretical physics that is his life's chosen work. His search for freedom takes him from the anarchist society, Anarres, in which he was born to the planet his people originally fled from, Urras, in order to create their new world. The two worlds circle, each the other's moon. His lack of freedom is one of the ironic themes of the novel, for Shevek lives in an anarchist society. There are no laws to bind him, nor are there profits to be made or lost on his work; thus no monetary influences distract or stop him. Due to the demands of his community, however, Shevek finds himself blocked, discouraged, or just forced to cease work entirely. Although LeGuin seems to favor Anarres over Urras as her "ambiguous utopia," she still illustrates the imbalance of Anarresti society after seven generations of isolation.

In a series of events from Shevek's life, from infancy to young adulthood, LeGuin demonstrates, ironically, how an individual can be excluded or even rejected entirely from a society that values brotherhood above all. On Anarres, brotherhood is all, but according

to LeGuin, all is too much, even when the society depends on the cooperation of all its members. The first occurrence is a typically subtle one; Shevek, fascinated by the sun, is crowded out by another child: "He sat down heavily beside the knobby one [Shevek], crowding him into the shade" (TD 27). Objecting to this, Shevek pushes back, until the matron intervenes, "'If you will not share it, you cannot use it.' And she picked the knobby baby up with gentle inexorable hands and set him aside, out of the square of sunlight" (TD 27). The scene is significant for two reasons. LeGuin demonstrates even here Shevek's fascination with light, and the accompanying elements of light. His fascination could, and almost does, lead Shevek to a dangerous imbalance, when he tries to substitute physics for life without realizing that fully half of life is missing from his equation. The scene also serves to associate shade (darkness) with punishment and exclusion on Anarres.

The association continues in a later scene from Shevek's adolescence, when the history teacher must teach the concept of Prison to his students. Seizing on the idea, the boys make their own prison, a dark place under the foundations of the learning center. One boy, the prisoner, is locked in for thirty hours. However, the boy is only locked in after refusing to "share" a turn in the prison with the rest of the group. He is left, not knowing his fate, isolated and in the dark: "they all crowded around the air hole to see their prisoner, but since there was no light inside the prison except from the air hole, they saw nothing . . . Kadagv was alone in the dark" (TD 36-38). The dark here becomes a literal prison for the individual

who goes against the wishes of his group.

Shevek is isolated, in part, because of his intellect. When he discusses theoretical physics with those ignorant of the subject, he is accused of 'egoizing' and forced to leave the "Speaking and Listening" group. Such rejection causes Shevek, as a young adult, to seek isolation; he immerses himself in physics and languages, excluding himself from human contact, except for the strangers he sees on work detail. During an episode of sickness, his mother, Rulag, who abandoned him in his infancy, tries to nurse him; he rejects her also. This final isolation results in profound fear and loss for Shevek: "even from the brother there is no comfort in the bad hour, in the darkness at the foot of the wall" (TD 125). This darkness refers to a dream Shevek had in his youth, in which his parents were squat creatures in the shadow of a wall. The dream also showed him the primal number, in white on a black stone, that contained both unity and plurality. The dream, thus, contains both balance and imbalance, showing that both are possible to achieve. However, Shevek remains in the darkness due to his isolation, both externally and internally imposed.

Shevek is unbalanced at this point. His colleagues exclude him because of his ideas; he exacerbates isolation by applying himself wholly to the orderly realm of physics. Shevek lacks a human connection, a community for himself and his ideas, which even he realizes: "he had been keeping himself for himself, against the ethical imperative of brotherhood" (TD 155). Shevek's heart is in the right place, but his efforts lead him nowhere, because the external forces

that isolate him--objections to his ideas--continue to keep him apart from his community. Shevek saves himself and begins to find balance rediscovering old friendships and renewing them, rather than shutting himself out. A community of two is small, but it is a community. Shevek meets first with Bedap, then with Takver, both old friends. The bond with Takver is especially important to Shevek; she is female (he is heterosexual), and she is a fish geneticist. Her work, unlike his, deals with living creatures rather than abstract thought. Her life's work deals with the web of life and all the living creatures, even as Shevek's deals with the web of time and space and all the creatures in it. LeGuin balances light and dark during the times that Takver and Shevek are together:

Their naked arms and breasts were moonlight. The fine, faint down in Takver's face made a blurring aureole over her features; her hair and the shadows were black. Shevek touched her silver arm with his silver hand, marveling at the warmth of the touch in that cool light. (TD 190)

Takver helps Shevek find balance by providing the things that were missing from his life, including brotherhood. LeGuin contrasts Shevek's time alone in Abbenay, the central city on Anarres, with his time alone during the drought. Takver and Shevek do not see each other for four years, but because the bond between them exists, and provides Shevek with crucial balance even at a great distance of time and space, he does not experience the same isolation that he did before. Had he not had Takver, the loss of his work at the instigation of his colleagues, followed by four years of privation, in terms of

starvation and separation from his mate, might have destroyed him. LeGuin stresses the importance of the relationship with Takver by describing their union in terms of heavenly spheres: "they both liked making love in darkness . . . like planets circling blindly, quietly, in the flood of sunlight, about the center of gravity, swinging, circling endlessly" (TD 322). Elizabeth Cummins, in Understanding Ursula K. LeGuin, sees the circling of planets as the potential for an equilibric relationship: "A second image which suggests the richness of the both-and relationship is that of the two worlds, Urras and Anarres, circling each other . . . Figuratively they have the opportunity to circle one another in a relationship of integrity and integration" (107-108). Although Cummins applies her argument to the planets, Shevek and Takver have the same relationship.

Shevek is isolated by his community, for his ideas, and by himself, because he can find no outlet for his ideas, but he does make the connections necessary to find balance. Nevertheless, LeGuin does demonstrate the fate of an individual not lucky enough to find a balancing principle with which to reconcile the conflict between individualism and community. As Charlotte Spivack explains in Ursula K. LeGuin, "The goal of social harmony creates tensions with the demands of the individual . . . The individual with an outstanding talent may be discouraged by the group who show an interest in his work, not being motivated by respect for personal achievement" (79). Tirin, a playwright and boyhood friend of Shevek's, is isolated by his community for the same reason Shevek was, only to a much greater extent: the community will not tolerate his ideas. Ironically, Tirin

was one of the "guards" in the early "prison" scene on Anarres; he is the guard who denies light to Kadagv. Shevek notes that, "he spoke with authority about things like this [creating a prison], because his imagination put him straight into them [allowed him to create the unknown]" (TD 35). Yet Tirin himself ends up in prison, both literally and figuratively. He is sent away to Segvina Island for therapy, when his plays upset the community with their apparent criticism of Anarresti society. As an artist, Tirin creates for the purpose of sharing, but if his community will not hear him, he has no one left to share with. On a world supposedly without codified laws, with freedom and brotherhood, where anyone may turn his hand to anything, Tirin is given "public reprimand" and menial labor posting. With Tirin's fate, LeGuin demonstrates that community, when upheld without question, can become as repressive as any other form of government. Brotherhood is made of individuals, yet on Anarres, Tirin apparently ceased to be a brother when he criticized or "praised with rage" in his satiric plays.

On Anarres, darkness represents the individual, especially the individual who is suppressed. On Urras, the situation is the opposite. On Urras, brotherhood is only a word, with a few individuals controlling most of the world by suppressing the community. While at times LeGuin chooses to represent the Urrasti community with specific individuals, she concerns herself with the repression of the community and the detrimental effect this has on the whole of society. Darkness represents the community on Urras. LeGuin contrasts each scene of individual isolation on Anarres with a scene on Urras

in which the community, or that representing the community, is repressed.

One of Shevek's first experiences on Urras is a visit to the Fort at Drio, where Odo, the founder of Anarres, was imprisoned for nine years. Odo first appears to be an individual being repressed by her community: "you've seen pictures of Odo in the prison cell in Drio, haven't you? Image of defiant patience, bowed grey head, clenched hands, motionless in the encroaching shadows" (TD 34). In fact, however, she represents the community that is being oppressed by those individuals in power. On Urras, an elite of individuals hold power, while the lower classes, although fed and clothed, do not have access to power, or any voice in their government. Both Odo and the Fort are depicted in terms of darkness, but the Fort is a much heavier, blacker darkness: "on the bluff there was a building, heavy, ruinous, implacable, with broken towers of black stone. Nothing could have been less like the gorgeous lighthearted buildings of the Space Research Foundation" (TD 87). While the prison on Anarres was an experiment that literally imprisoned only one person, the Fort at Drio was an actual prison, in that it physically confined large numbers of people. In a symbolic sense, Odo, the founder of Anarres, represented the oppressed classes on Urras, and was jailed for speaking for them and leading them to revolution. Symbolically, when Odo was jailed, the lower classes were denied a voice in their society; in effect, they were imprisoned with Odo. Shevek recognizes that the Fort is a permanent part of Urras without realizing the implications of this, for himself or Urrasti society. In spite of his own

experience with "prison" on Anarres, Shevek, at this point, doesn't grasp that large numbers of people can be imprisoned, as he is imprisoned, by the means of manipulation and oppression. Physical walls are the most obvious, but not the only, way to create prisons. LeGuin's description of the Space Center in terms of light is hardly an accident. The same individuals who run the Space Center, benefiting from prestige and power at the cost of their lesser brothers, are the ones who run Shevek's life on Urras.

A companion of Shevek's experience with Takver on Anarres is his experience with Vea, which shows Vea representing the females on Urras, who, like the rest of the underprivileged populace, have been oppressed. On Urras, there are no brothers and sisters. In Ursula K. LeGuin, Barbara Bucknall notes "The Anarresti, while sexually permissive, are modest. In contrast, Urrasti women, while openly displaying themselves, are supposed to be inaccessible" (112). Women are put on pedestal, so they are told, and expected to be above such things, yet all of Vea's attentions to Shevek, even to her gestures, seem designed to entice. Women do not attend universities, or become police officers, or take any kind of control in the government. Vea, the sister of one of Shevek's Urrasti colleagues, claims that the women control the men without their realizing it, but to Shevek this makes Vea a 'body profiteer,' one who uses her (or his) sexuality for gain. Although Vea is female and repressed in the societal sense, LeGuin does not choose to describe her in terms of darkness. Vea, however, is completely a product of her society, parroting the ideas of those males privileged to run the country. Even her assumption

that women truly run things by using their sexuality leads her to play sexual games with all the men she meets, including Shevek. LeGuin surrounds and drapes Veä with white, here associated with the individuals who repress the community: "Veä's rooms were large and luxurious, with glittering views of the lights of Nio, and furnished entirely in white, even the carpeting" (TD 218). Veä's husband, whose name she bears, is a captain of industry. In spite of her assertion that women rule, Veä fails to realize that she participates in her own oppression. The more Veä acts like a sexual toy, the greater the chance that she will be treated like one. Shevek, mistaking Veä's games for positive invitation and becoming aroused by them, ejaculates onto her white dress.

LeGuin's association of white with Veä is atypical. Apart from suggesting Veä's identification with and participation in the power structures on Urras, LeGuin may have another purpose in mind. To Shevek, Veä represents the "woman in the table," a reference to an experience he had in the freighter on the way to Urras. The mattress, the furniture, even the air dryer in the shower irritate Shevek in an extremely erotic way; the softness and curves and textures seem him decidedly feminine and sexual. Shevek does not understand why even the furniture should be female, until he meets Veä. She "incarnated all the sexuality the Ioti repressed into their dreams, their novels and poetry . . . their architecture with its curves and domes" (TD 213). Since on Urras women are not allowed to be artists or architects, the male Urrasti hide the women in their objects. By declaring women to be inferior, the Urrasti men can hardly

acknowledge that they also are a balance of male and female elements; by denial, they create imbalance. By bathing Vea in white and declaring her the woman in the table, LeGuin not only depicts the suppression of half the race by the men of Urras, she depicts the men's repression of themselves. LeGuin depicts men on Anarres caring for their children equally with their mates, but she presents no such pictures on Urras. When the men of Urras cannot accept females as equal, indeed, as vital, they cannot accept or even admit to the feminine in themselves. Without such acceptance, they cannot find balance.

One of Shevek's final acts on Urras is to join the revolution. While on Anarres, Shevek and his friends, a few individuals only, formed the Syndicate of Initiative, to give a voice to those whose work did not please the community. On Urras, when the whole community demands a voice, a revolution takes place. The strikers protest unemployment, high taxes, food shortages, and the war that their country is involved in on another continent. The government ruthlessly suppresses the revolution; it ends in gunfire and bloodshed. For Shevek, the experience of the revolution symbolizes his entire experience of Urras. Once again, he has been isolated by some individuals, for his ideas. This time, the idea is not what he thinks, but what he is, a living representative of a way of life that seems, in the face of riots and repression, a better way than the Urrasti way, in spite of its flaws. Shevek finds that instead of the freedom he was seeking, Urras has only "a black cellar full of dust, and a dead man. A man whose hand was shot off because he held it out to

others. I have been in Hell at last. Desar was right; it is Urras; Hell is Urras" (TD 347).

Except for the times between Shevek and Takver, LeGuin only balances light and darkness twice in the novel, during Shevek's flights to and from Anarres. Each time he is surrounded by darkness in his glowing space ship, balanced between Urras and Anarres. LeGuin draws the novel to a close in the garden aboard the space ship; in a scene that includes darkness and light and the vastness of the community, together with the infinite uniqueness and influence of the individual, "a night-blooming flower from some unimaginable world had opened among the dark leaves and was sending out its perfume with patient, unavailing sweetness to attract some unimaginable moth trillions of miles away, in a garden on a world circling another star" (TD 385). Shevek goes to Urras to develop his theories; by the time he returns, he has given those theories, which will eventually lead to the creation of the ansible, an instantaneous communication device, and to the Ekumen, a semimystical union of planets. Both will help to draw the universe together and aid in communication between species, rather than give power to one country that will exploit them. By the time of his return, Shevek has found brotherhood; Anarres is his home, but his community is the entirety of the universe.

Chapter IV

To Go Is To Return:

Summation in The Beginning Place

Of the four novels discussed, LeGuin wrote The Beginning Place last. LeGuin shows typical irony with the title of her novel; thematically, The Beginning Place combines the main themes discussed here—gender identity, order and chaos, and community versus individuality--into one novel. LeGuin uses a contemporary setting in order to relate the basic themes to her readers in a more identifiable way. Even the fantasy elements, which displace the reality of the story, are familiar to the reader; LeGuin uses classic figures--the fair princess, the dark, powerful stranger, the dragon--that have appeared in human mythology from fairy tales to Star Wars. Hugh and Irena are conventional young people with recognizable problems, but they find balance, implying that the reader can find it too.

LeGuin's use of darkness and light remains unchanged. In The Beginning Place, darkness and the elements it represents are repressed, while light represents the forces that are disasterously privileged in a LeGuin world. This is not to suggest that light always represents the force that is privileged; light correlates to order, masculinity, action, and conscious. However, in LeGuin's work, as in human society,

these are the forces that have suppressed darkness and its correlatives.

In this novel, gender identity takes on the form of sexual repression rather than sexual prejudice. Neither Hugh nor Irena possess a healthy sex life, or even a healthy relationship with a member of the opposite sex. In both cases, their role models of both sexes are distorted ones. Hugh's father is absent, having deserted the family years before. Hugh's mother controls his life, refusing him the career that he wants and the most basic forms of affection. LeGuin associates Hugh's nameless mother with light, portraying her always in daylight; significantly, she is afraid of the dark, increasingly so as Hugh gains independence and equilibrium. Because she cannot come home to a dark, empty house, she curtails Hugh's life to conform to her own. While superficially acknowledging Hugh's age, his mother treats him very much like a child. Her determinations to keep Hugh in a state of adolescence and her fear of the dark have their base in her fear of sexuality, particularly Hugh's sexuality. While LeGuin depicts Hugh as a solitary, lonely young man, she portrays his mother as fearful of the sexuality the readers do not yet see: "trying to make his voice soft, neutral, neuter; for he knew it was his deep voice, his size, his big feet and thick fingers, his heavy, sexual body that she couldn't stand, that drove her to the edge" (TBP 18). To date, Hugh's only sexual experience appears to be a masturbatory fantasy of a waitress he once knew.

As long as Hugh tries to remain neuter, he cannot find equilibrium; he unbalances himself. His mother's fear and loathing take root, and serve to make Hugh dislike himself and his own body.

Hugh takes his first crucial step in regaining his sexuality and his love for himself when he goes to Tembrea-brezi, the shadow land that both he and Irena discover, and falls in love with Allia, daughter of the Lord of the Town. In LeGuin's work, when women stand as opposites to men, thus providing dynamic tension, they are dark, or associated with darkness in some way. LeGuin depicts Allia as blonde and fair, a signal that can only mean that she is associated with light and its elements. In this case, Allia, in spite of her passivity and delicacy and fear, represents Hugh himself; similarly, Dou Sark, whom Irena loves, is dark, like her. In order to achieve balance, Hugh must learn to love and accept himself, in every aspect, including a sexual one. Loving Allia means that Hugh loves even those qualities about himself that he finds negative, the same passivity and fear that form Allia. A balanced person contains passivity as well as activity, and fear as well as courage, in a unity of tension. Until Hugh accepts that he is sometimes a passive person, he will not be an active one. Until he learns to love himself, he can't find mature love with someone else.

Loving Allia gives Hugh the courage to move on to the next step on his road to equilibrium, the slaying of the monster. The monster, like Allia, is female, representing the negative sexual role models that Hugh has had to endure. The dragon, with its grasping arms and cries of pain and many flaccid breasts, recalls Hugh's mother, with her "knife edge" voice and iron control over Hugh. Hugh does not slay her when he defeats the monster, but he does destroy the negative, unhealthy hold she has over him. When Hugh slays the dragon, he also destroys the repressive state that he has forced himself into. Only

after the monster is slain can Hugh and Irena make love, the first balanced relationship, and the first healthy sexual experience that he has had.

Irena's experience runs almost parallel to Hugh's, except in the particulars. She, too, has unhealthy role models that force her to suppress her own sexuality, although in Irena, thwarted sexuality takes the path of aggression, with anger to mask her fear. Irena differs from Hugh in that both parental roles are filled, if inadequately. Irena's mother fills the passive role, while her stepfather, a coarse, brutal man, inspires her fear and anger. Victor beats Irena's mother, Mary, and has tried, on many occasions, to molest Irena. Victor's brutality and Mary's passive acceptance of it cause Irena to shy away from anything but the most superficial relationships in the real world. Like Hugh, Irena has suffered rejection due to her sexuality. Irena's one potentially healthy relationship, a close one with her brother Micheal, is thwarted when he grows up, not quite in Victor's image, but enough so to feel only contempt for Irena's sexuality: "He would despise her for allowing, inviting, Victor to hassle her. He already despised her for it, for being a woman, therefore subject to lust, therefore unclean" (TBP 100).

Irena, like Hugh, finds love in the shadow land. Like Hugh, Irena's devotion almost takes the form of worship. And like Hugh, Irena loves a person who matches her physical and emotional characteristics: "the Master or mayor of Tembrea-brezi was a spare, swarthy man with a hawk nose and dark eyes . . . a harsh man, a dark man. She had loved him since she first saw his face" (TBP 51). Unlike Hugh, however, Irena does not learn to acknowledge and accept her

arrogance and anger as a part of herself. She does not learn to love herself through loving Dou Sark. Instead, Irena exalts Sark and all the qualities he represents, leaving no room or acknowledgment for other qualities. She sacrifices a great deal to her onesided relationship with Sark, including a potentially healthy relationship, one of father-daughter, with Aur Horn; she almost sacrifices Hugh, refusing to recognize that his need for the shadow land is as great as her own. By loving Dou Sark and that part of herself that he represents so exclusively, Irena rejects and represses every other part of herself, thus denying balance. Nor can Irena enjoy a balanced relationship in the real world; thus, she seeks out the shadow realm.

Irena begins to find balance only after she discovers that Dou Sark is not the man she thought him to be. Pride must be balanced with humility and arrogance with compassion, or they become empty and meaningless. Sark does not balance his qualities, nor does Irena, especially in her love for him. Irena finally recognizes Sark's unbalance, and her own, when she sees his fear of the dragon, which overpowers him, just as her own fear of men and sexuality overpowers her. In Sark's willingness to sacrifice not only Hugh, but even Irena and the town, in order to remain its master, Irena can see her own willingness to sacrifice, if not Hugh's life, then at least his well-being. Irena recognizes her fault in Sark: "She had mistaken herself, and chosen to be a slave. So now she was left to look at her master, her mirror, and see no trust, no honesty, no courage. His darkness was emptiness, and all he felt was envy" (TEP 174).

Irena has equal responsibility in slaying the monster, for, in its whiteness and maleness, it represents the repression and negative

sexuality that she has been forced to endure. If LeGuin meant the monster to be wholly female, it would have been dark as well as breasted. LeGuin makes this dragon a blend of male and female, by coloring it white, traditionally associated with maleness, and scenting it with a semen-like smell. While Irena does not actually slay the monster herself, she challenges it in its lair, drawing it out for the fight with Hugh. In the fighting scene, Irena acts with aggression, as she has in the past, but her anger serves a healthy purpose: the destruction of the emotional sickness that Victor and Micheal and the gang members who raped her friend Doris have caused her. Irena takes charge during the return from the mountain; injured and lost, recognizing Irena's superior familiarity with the land, Hugh follows her gladly, without despising his weakness as he once would have. Once in the real world, Irena, though nervous, asks help of a strange man on the highway, an action she could not have taken without some measure of balance.

On another level, LeGuin combines her examination of gender identity with her examination of individuals interacting with their community. The same forces that distort the sexuality of Hugh's mother and Irena's stepfather repress their ability to communicate and interact successfully with their community. If Hugh and Irena had a community of their own with which to interact, they would have no need of the shadow land. However, due to their parents' shortcomings, they do not have even the most basic of communities, the family, to rely on.

Hugh has never had a family or a community to interact with, for, in response to their desertion by Hugh's father, Hugh's mother

has moved them numerous times, to five different states in seven years. Constant movement disrupts friendships and education, two things Hugh wants and needs, but are denied by his mother. Lacking, in effect, both parents and any other kind of human association, Hugh remains in isolation. His job provides no outlet for him; although he makes one acquaintance, Donna, who shows concern for him, he remains too unbalanced to respond to her. Perhaps the most significant denial of community imposed by Hugh's mother is her refusal to allow him to attend library school. Hugh's instincts are healthy: he seeks an education and a career that will allow him to interact with a variety of people and fulfill his needs by providing help for them. Hugh's focus shifts after he has been in the shadow land a few times, particularly after he has seen and loved Allia. Hugh's job as a grocery checker has meant only an endless parade of prices and small change. After his trip to the shadow land, Hugh sees

the faces he had never seen before, because he had been afraid to look at the beauty of the world . . . the face of a little boy carried through the checkline by a tired mother, the dignity and patience of the little face and the heavy, unconscious grace of the mother's holding arm, made him want to cry out, as if he had cut or burned his hand. (TBP 135-136)

Hugh desires interaction with his community, but he does not have the ability to reach them until he begins to find balance in the shadow realm.

Irena has the opposite problem; she has the ability to interact with people, but not the desire, except for those who inhabit the "ain" country, as she calls the shadow realm. Irena's job allows her contact with numerous people, and she lives with a young couple

rather than alone or with one neurotic parental unit. Yet Irena eschews friendship in the real world for the ones she finds in the shadow realm, maintaining an emotional tie only with her mother, which serves only to inspire her vow: "I'll never fall in love, never be in love, never love anybody. Love is just a fancy way to hurt somebody worse" (TBP 104). In fact, Irena's wish comes dangerously close to being fulfilled, for her "love" for Dou Sark is not love at all, but servitude to her own repression. The relationships Irena finds in the "ain" country serve a purpose while she remains young; Irena can playact that she is the innkeeper's daughter, finding parents and affection to replace their lack in the real world. However, as Irena matures, playacting cannot replace the real thing. Like Hugh, Irena cannot move forward until she recognizes the shadow land as a part of the whole. LeGuin changes Irena's focus in the same way that she changes Hugh's; after slaying their dragon and finding each other, Irena has both the ability and the desire to join her own world. Hence her continued relationship with Hugh, her meeting with his mother, and her recognition of that the stranger who helps her with Hugh is not only willing to help, but actively enjoys it.

Finally, LeGuin explores the world of order and chaos once more. As the novel opens, the 'real' world is a sterile place for both Irena and Hugh. Each, but especially Hugh, has an ordered existence. Hugh's life is circumscribed by his mother's demands into a cycle of work, dinner, television and sleep, while Irena works at a meaningless job as an errand person, a job that pays for the car that she uses in her work. Irena's job is both static and sterile; she runs errands for other people, without accomplishing or producing anything of value.

Irena does not even interact with people as much as Hugh does, spending most of her day isolated in her car. Irena's days are spent in an organized pattern of deliveries and parcel pick-ups, but she is unwilling to leave her mother to find better employment, and unable to do anything that will help her. LeGuin depicts the world in the beginning of the novel in a constant blaze of summer heat and sunlight: "now in summer the treeless streets were still bright and hot at seven" (TBP 3). The nameless suburbs where Hugh and his mother live are bland and sterile, with small rash-like patches of grass, assorted trash that covers the roadside, and an obvious lack of birdsong. LeGuin, with typical subtlety, makes even the rocks that border the lawn patches white. While LeGuin does depict night in the real world before Hugh finds the shadow land, she never describes the darkness. Instead, the night is bathed in artificial light and kept very much outside. The first action Hugh's mother takes when she arrives home is turning on the lights and the television, and castigating Hugh for sitting in the dark. Irena has a similar experience; her visit to her mother takes place in the evening, but Victor stands in the glare of a floodlight that he rigged up himself, one that casts light on the entire surrounding area.

The shadow land, by contrast, contains enough light to see by, a constant dawn or dusk, and no more. Darkness is the prevailing element in "ain" country, and both Hugh and Irena respond to it as they would to a sacrament. Hugh experiences it as wordless worship: "His eyes had grown accustomed, and he could see clearly, though the darker colors and all shadowed places were near the verge of night . . . What his mind had no words for, his body understood entirely

and praised" (TBP 8-9). Irena responds more actively than Hugh, but with as much praise:

She went through into the twilight . . . then she dropped down on all fours and kissed the dirt, pressing her face against it like a suckling baby . . . she could do the things she used to do, the fire worship and the endless dance . . . now she would go, across the triple river and on to the dark mountain, home. (TBP 40-41)

Hugh and Irena's responses are emotional and physical, free of the ordered effect of language. Language is a skill learned in the real world, one that takes reason and logic, in part, to master. Allowing Hugh and Irena to form verbal responses to the land would be to set a barrier of thought between them and their reactions; Leguin avoids this and allows them the full measure of pure emotion.

They both lack pure emotion in their lives in the real world; the evening land provides them both with an outlet for emotion unchecked by the needs of others for the first time. Leguin also frees her heroes from the constraints of time, or at least of clocks. Hugh notes, "there was no carrying on without clocks"; they give order to the day and allow things to get done. Therefore, Hugh particularly is bound by clocks and order in his life; the freedom to "experience time" without it being ordered and controlled for him by someone else becomes as necessary to him as the freedom of his emotions.

When Hugh and Irena fight the dragon, LeGuin shows the effects of too much pure emotion, to demonstrate that imbalance can occur on the side of darkness as well. They respond to the dragon in panic, an emotion that LeGuin cannot be using carelessly. At first, they

react to their pure fear as they have in the past--helplessly. They run from the monster as they always have, as Dou Sark did when he attempted to be a hero. Hugh and Irena do not try to be heroes. Although they react at first with pure fear, they do stop their panic by facing their fear; they have balanced fear with courage and are free to move back into the real world.

Once the shadow land has done its work, providing Irena and Hugh with the balance they need to live in the real world, they must leave it. The shadow land can be no more a home to them, once they have balance, than the real world was before. Irena finds the transition from shadow to real particularly trying; she has lived more completely in the dream land than Hugh has. Her dream, of a home and a place to be loved, has encompassed the whole realm, only to be shattered by Dou Sark's duplicity and envy. The shadow land, in itself, is no more balanced than the real world, less so, in fact. Hugh and Irena's lives have been unbalanced; once they regain equilibrium, they have the stability to maintain it in the real world. LeGuin creates the shadow land as an unchanging place, where people grow and die, but where the pattern of darkness remains the same; the shadow land is chaos and dreams, but humans must balance dreams with their waking lives at some point.

In the closing scenes of the novel, LeGuin shows change occurring in the real world: Hugh and Irena emerge into night and rain, rather than sunlight and heat. They immediately make contact with another person, Irena showing trust for a strange male for the first time. In LeGuin's philosophy, anyone can find equilibrium and help to balance the world. Equilibrium touches every aspect of life; even life itself

is an endless cycle of creation and destruction. The real world must be the place that maintains balance; like yin spinning after yang, night always follows day, in an endless cycle, like a tiger and a dragon, endlessly mating.

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