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Ursula K. Le Guin's Holistic Ecofeminism in *The Word for World is Forest*, "The Matter of Seggri" and *The Left Hand of Darkness*

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**Ursula K. Le Guin's Holistic Ecofeminism in *The Word for World is Forest*,
"The Matter of Seggri" and *The Left Hand of Darkness***

MA Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the intersection of feminism and ecology in Ursula K. Le Guin's science fiction novel *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), in relation to the later short story "The Matter of Seggri" (1994) and the earlier novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). As such, the thesis approaches the text from the theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism and Taoist studies. By examining the text from these points of view, the thesis presents Le Guin's novel as a particularly holistic ecofeminist anti-war text. Thus, the thesis emphasizes the ways in which the novel's holistic ecofeminist approach to current ecological destruction proposes a Taoist solution of finding balance between yin and yang. In many of Le Guin's science fiction works, the proposal for the solution of the survival of the planet is finding balance between yin and yang and thus accepting that they must work together. In other words, in Le Guin's work the holistic worldview calls for the voice of women to be given more weight when it comes to making important decisions on climate and other issues in general for now the balance between men and women is not equal.

At the centre of the analysis lies a Taoist worldview that explains that everything is part of the sacred whole. Many texts within Le Guin's oeuvre are structured upon this basic Taoist principle; but Le Guin also includes a feminist element, highlighting female experiences and portraying female characters in authoritative positions. Ebor Dendep, in *The WFWF*, is a prime example of an independent female voice in the novel who has authority independent of the male Athsheans without standing above men hierarchically. These depictions are examined particularly by comparing how the Athshean Ebor Dendep and the Terran Captain Davidson's relationship with their human and nonhuman environment affects the wellbeing of the planet and its ecosystems differently.

The thesis hypothesizes that the novel's portrayal of the speculative planet Athshe and the jeopardization of its survival by the arrival of the yumens from planet Earth, and the resistance of the Athsheans, expresses what would happen if hateful men such as Davidson (who stand outside of the yin/yang symbol of harmony) would become the status quo. This happens in two major ways. First, Ebor Dendep's harmonious relationship with her Athshean community and the natural environment has a positive effect on the wellbeing of the planet's ecosystems, being healthy and lively and depicted as a dense green forest with leaves of all colours green and the sounds of the wind and the creechies peacefully at the background. Second, Captain Davidson's hierarchical relationship with the human Terran Colony and exploitative attitude towards nature has a negative effect on the wellbeing of the planet's ecosystems, being a bare and empty land that is dying from cutting trees and erosion. Therefore, this thesis argues that the novel is a specifically holistic ecofeminist text, portraying the struggle to find wholeness in a divided world through the contrast between the harmonious vision of Ebor Dendep and her Athsheans community and the hierarchal, binary worldview of Captain Davidson and his Terran colony.

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1 Introduction

This master's thesis analyses Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), the short story "The Matter of Seggri" (1994), from her collection *The Unreal & the Real Volume 2: Outer Space, Inner Lands* (2012), and her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), taking an ecofeminist approach to the texts' representation of the relationship between people and the natural environment. More specifically, I approach these texts with a holistic ecofeminist framework. Holism should be understood here to mean that "every whole is more than the sum of its parts" (360), as eco-philosopher Peter Marshall explains. "Everything that exists therefore has its place in the order of nature" and "all things and events are sensitive to the existence of all others and the relation between consist of a kind of feeling or desire" (Marshall 361). For Marshall, "Nature is therefore an organism; that is to say, every existing thing resembles a living organism since its essence depends on the pattern or structure which its components make up (361). Stewart McFarlane explains that ecofeminist philosophers turned to aspects of Taoism to develop such a holistic perspective of humankind's relationship to the natural environment: "The traditional Chinese concern with harmonizing the personal, social, natural and cosmic, in terms of yin-yang and the notion of a universal energy, are frequently elaborated as contributing to a deeper ecological understanding" (Macfarlane 195). Marshall has defined Taoism as "the first clear expression of ecological thinking" (9) and alludes to the speculation about its roots in "an earlier matriarchal society" (10), suggesting a historical relation between feminism and ecology.

In many of her science fiction works, Le Guin speculates about different and maybe happier ways to be in her fiction; in other words, how humans can develop a more harmonious existence, in relation to each other and the environment. In *The Word for World is Forest* the relationship of Ebor Dendep, Headwoman of Cadast, and her more egalitarian and holistic relationship with the wider Athshean community and the natural environment are

contrasted to Captain Davidson's hierarchical and patriarchal relationship with others in his Terran Colony and his destructive relationship to the natural environment. This thesis proposes that Le Guin portrays speculative societies, struggling with finding balance in a world in which the symbolic concepts of yin and yang are not successfully integrated. By exploring the tensions and conflicts between these different societies, Le Guin tries to find reasons for and potential solutions to the harmful divisions she recognised as structuring human relations in her world: domination and exploitation of minorities, women, non-white people, and animals, which resulted not only in socio-political and economic injustice but also exacerbated the current climate change issues.

The first chapter shall discuss ecofeminism as a critical framework for the study of literary texts. It will explain why I focus on holistic ecofeminism specifically. In relation to Le Guin's work, it is significant that ecofeminist holism is inherently connected to Taoism. Le Guin was a student of Taoism for decades and published her own translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, in 1997. In an interview with Brenda Peterson, Le Guin explains how Taoism and the concept of yin and yang have informed her "view of the world – extremes always do implode and begin to turn into the other thing" (n.p.). Le Guin expresses how she finds hope in dark times through this perspective: "We're in one of those big yin-yang movements, and the yang is so extreme. But then it will do what all extremes do, it'll suddenly begin turning into the opposite" (n.p.). In other words, Le Guin was hoping for a future where women and other unheard voices can be more dominant and be listened to in world discussions on climate change. During her career, Le Guin was particularly aware of the challenges of contemporary society, protesting against cutting forests for human profit, Western neo-imperialism, as well as the war in Vietnam (Porter 245). Particularly, her writing allowed Le Guin to express her feelings and fears of destructive events such as war and water pollution happening in the world at the time (the second half of the twentieth century). Her literary oeuvre has the

potential to change readers' minds about sexism, capitalism, and environmental destruction for it can invite the reader to open other doors. In an interview with David Streitfeld, Le Guin explains why she allows herself to be proud of her prestigious literary awards: "always remember, you're talking to a woman. And for a woman, any literary award, honors, notice of any sort has been an uphill climb. And if she insists upon flouting convention and writing SF and fantasy and indescribable stuff, it's even harder" (n.p.). Le Guin admits that writing as a woman is hard; however, it is even harder to write as a woman in the SF and fantasy genre, which is why she encourages other female writers to be proud of receiving awards for their hard work.

Qian Li explains that "few writers have done better than Ursula K. Le Guin in thinking thoroughly about Chinese Taoism and integrating it into various aspects of her works" (168). This scholar "concludes that Le Guin constructs her understanding of androgyny [in *Left Hand of Darkness*] on the basis of [a] Taoist concept: the harmony between yin and yang, and that she expresses her concerns with the ecological problem in the light of another Taoist idea: *wei wu wei* (not doing)" (168). It is relevant, therefore, to explore ecofeminism's engagement with holistic, spiritual philosophies of the relationship between humankind and the natural environment. The second chapter analyses how Le Guin's female character Ebor Dendep governs her community in a feminine and holistic eco-friendly way. It will explain the positive outcomes on the natural environment of the Athshean culture and spiritual worldview in relation to the eco-feminist, holistic aspects in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the "The Matter of Seggri." The third chapter explains how Le Guin's Captain Davidson is the embodiment of a toxic masculinity that represents the destructive behaviour in the Terran Colony, which stands outside of the holistic ideal. Davidson's militaristic and corporate perspective on Athshe, as merely a collection of resources to be exploited, highlights the negative outcome on the wellbeing of nature as well as humankind of a dualistic mindset.

Le Guin portrays how the Athshean's holistic approach has a positive effect on the wellbeing of nature, and how Captain Davidson's dualistic approach and his rejection of and exclusion from the holistic eco-feminist worldview of yin and yang¹ (the worldview of the Athsheans) has a destructive effect on the wellbeing of nature; This portrayal was inspired by an anger deep inside Le Guin – as she explained in a later introduction to the novel – about the state of the world in the late 1960s. Particularly Captain Davidson, as a toxic alpha male, represents Le Guin's anger about the domination and exploitation of nature, women and many non-western peoples by Western, patriarchal societies. According to Zoe Carpenter, “for Le Guin,” the concept of “‘elsewhere’ has always been a lens magnifying the vexations of our own time and place, including militarism, sexism, governance, and ecology” (paragraph 3). Furthermore, “Le Guin has long been an activist, though a quiet one—marching, writing letters, holding signs—against nuclear testing, for civil rights, and more recently against the Iraq War. To inform her activism, she sought out pacifist and anarchist literature in little bookstores in Portland. That led to *The Dispossessed*, her ‘ambiguous utopia’ set on two planets—one much like earth, the other inhabited by anarchists” (paragraph 17). In her introduction to Gollancz's Science Fiction Masterworks edition of *The WFWF*, Le Guin explains how she had been involved in “non-violent demonstrations, first against the atomic bomb testing, then against the pursuance of the war in Viet Nam” (7). Even though she knew that purely evil men such as Davidson (probably) did not exist, she began to speculate about

¹ In the essay “Chinese Dialectical Thinking—the Yin Yang Model” (2013), Xinyan explains the basic principles of this Taoist concept. Yin and yang should be understood as “opposite but interdependent. They work together to produce all things in the universe” (438). Within this ancient philosophical tradition “The world as a whole consists of yang and yin; there are an infinite number of yang yin pairs in the universe, such as heaven vs. earth, high vs. low, large vs. small, and so on. Every single thing also involves yin and yang, i.e., consists of these two opposites, too” (Xinyan 438). A contemporary example is provided: “a car is a positive thing on the one hand, since it can bring us so much convenience in traveling; but also a negative thing on the other hand, since it contributes much to air pollution and even encourages people's laziness” (Xinyan 438). Key to this philosophy is the understanding that “Since the yang and yin coexist inside everything and the differences in power between these two opposites are constantly changing, everything is in eternal flux and can change into its opposite” (Xinyan 439). The concept will be discussed in more detail in section 2.4 of this thesis.

what would happen if figures such as Davidson would become the status quo. Furthermore, she began to speculate about how figures such as Davidson, Selver, Lyubov and Ebor Dendep can live peacefully together because they cannot be banished from the world and there can only be balance when they learn to exist harmoniously together. Here Le Guin's Taoist perspective shines through as, according to Taoism, good and evil shall always be in the world; however, they need each other because otherwise the world would be purely dystopian or utopian and neither are in balance. In the words of David L. Porter: "in Le Guin's view, the unity and equilibrium of good and evil in human nature reflects on the individual scale the larger universal balance and interdependence of opposites in the broader natural world" (243).

2 Holistic Ecofeminism, Theoretical Framework for Analysing Le Guin's Texts

2.1 The Relevance of Ecofeminism in Finding Solutions for Current Climate Change Issues

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, feminism and environmentalism are intellectual and socio-political movements that exist alongside each other because the oppression and exploitation of nature has most effect on women, especially poor women of colour in third world countries (paragraph 2). The *Encyclopedia* explains that “data show that women—especially poor, rural women in less developed countries (LDCs) who are heads of households—suffer disproportionate harms caused by such environmental problems as deforestation, water pollution, and environmental toxins” (paragraph 2). Moreover, because women are often the head of the household, they are responsible for providing water for the family's food and hygiene and, therefore, have important knowledge on the condition of water and the environment surrounding it, experiencing the effects of the environmental crisis directly.

Greta Gaard explains that next to scientific solutions, it is important to listen to women in climate change discussions: “issues that women traditionally organize around—environmental health, habitats, livelihoods—have been marginalized in debates that treat climate change as a scientific problem requiring technological and scientific solutions without substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism” (20). Furthermore, Gaard adds that “issues that GLBTQ people organize around—bullying in the schools, hate crimes, marriage equality, fair housing and health care—aren't even noted in climate change discussions” (20). In *The Word for World is Forest*, Le Guin represents various under-addressed concerns through the misogynist bullying of Captain Davidson and his total othering of the Athshean population who share a heritage

with Terran humans but have developed differently due to the environment of their planet. For Davidson, there is only one “real” human: the powerful, aggressive, heterosexual Terran male. Furthermore, Gaard argues that:

A queer, posthumanist, ecological and feminist approach—brought together through the intersectional lens of ecofeminism—is needed to tackle the antifeminist threads companioning the scientific response to climate change: the linked rhetorics of population control, erotophobia and ecophobia, anti-immigration sentiment, and increased militarism. (20)

In conclusion, women and GLBTQ people should be taken seriously in the debate about climate change issues, having essential information of healing the ecosystems, experiencing climate change differently and therefore can bring innovative solutions.

2.2 Mary Wollstonecraft, Founding Mother of Modern and Eco Feminism

Barbara K. Seeber writes that Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), founding mother of modern feminism, “develop[ed] a political critique rooted in the perceived interconnectedness of structures of domination based on gender, class, *and* species” (173). Therefore, she was also a pioneering ecofeminist. Wollstonecraft remains a central figure in the history of feminism, and her thoughts on feminism and nature are useful for this thesis because Le Guin has “acknowledge[d] that her midwives are ‘the feminist thinkers and writers ... from Wollstonecraft and Woolf through the furies and glories of the seventies and eighties’”; these writers “‘empowered [her] to criticize... [her] society and [her]self’” (qtd in Cummins 153). In Wollstonecraft’s work, Le Guin could “recogniz[e] that the subordination of women within patriarchy is rooted in the ideology of women’s proximity to the natural and physical realms, rather than the rational (masculine)” realm (Seeber 173). By reading Wollstonecraft, Le Guin

would have learned how this pioneering feminist “interrogate[d] the social construction of not only women’s but also animals’ nature” (Seeber 173). Wollstonecraft saw that within a patriarchal society, nature and women have the status of an animal, whereas men have the status of human. Environmental problems come from this human-nature dualism; therefore, this dualism should not be there. Furthermore, Seeber adds that “in Wollstonecraft, the crucial question of how humans view nature and animals is inextricably connected to power relations among humans” (174). Wollstonecraft saw that women did not have equal rights to men and, therefore, were not allowed to educate themselves. This resulted in unequal political and personal power relations among men and women (Wollstonecraft 3-7). Wollstonecraft’s theories on power relations among humans were revolutionary to women in the eighteenth century and served Le Guin to further develop her understanding and critique of gendered power relation in her modern literary science fiction texts.

Le Guin uses science fiction and fantasy tropes to develop a critique of power relations among humans in speculative settings, which forces the reader to look differently at contemporary western societies. Le Guin proposes alternative, (sometimes) positive ways of living which can have a profound impact on the natural world. Particularly, in *The WFWF* she depicts an alternative community on planet Athshe who approach the environment holistically and matriarchically. In short, Le Guin’s eco-critical feminist writing shows that women are indispensable in healing humanity’s relationship with nature. Moreover, Wollstonecraft was one of the first women who wrote about the urgency of granting women the permission to educate themselves to become better moral human beings which would be beneficial for the whole of society (6), because “for, if women are not permitted to enjoy legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious, to obtain illicit privileges” (Wollstonecraft 7). In other words, she was the first woman who saw that dualistic societies are not sustainable, which is one of the basic principles of ecofeminism and Le Guin’s science fiction.

2.3 Ecofeminism

In the Introduction of the book *Ecofeminism in Dialogue* (2018), Valerie Padilla Carroll explains that “the way Western culture understands and treats women is similar to and reinforces the way it understands and treats nature” (2). In other words, the term ecofeminism connects women and nature because both are seen as inferior to men. Furthermore, Carroll argues that ecofeminism is multi-focused and intersectional and, therefore, continually in dialogue (2). She ends her essay with the call that: “we need to listen to all voices, including people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, and nations, as well as all species and the land itself” (10). In other words, to save the planet we need to listen to the voices of women and many other traditionally marginalised voices. Le Guin supports this, creating strong female characters, living in marginalised cultures, showing their ability to connect with nature. Moreover, the term ecofeminism explains how human-nature dualism in Western societies leads to suffering for women of all classes and races as well as the natural environment.

In her science fiction novels, Le Guin presents this human-nature dualism through characterisation and setting, focusing on how unequal gender and power dynamics result in environmental extremities. Douglas Barbour explains how in *The WFWF*, “the Earthmen, from a technological, well-lit, treeless Earth, have lost in their relentless pursuit of power. They would clean out the forest, burn it off, to let the light shine on the barren ground that they mistakenly believe will bear growth again” (170). The Terrans, led by Davidson, represent the dualistic perspective that stresses hierarchy, binary oppositions, and exploitation, in contrast to the Athsheans who Barbour explains have developed “the awareness that balance must be sought where dark and light meet and mix” (172). For Le Guin, this awareness was represented also by Taoist thought, of which she became a devoted student.

2.4 Taoist Holistic Ecofeminism

Rachel Hart Winter confirms that women could have a positive influence on nature. In part III of *Ecofeminism in Dialogue*, “Religion and Spirituality,” she explains that:

These women (and the women I write about in this chapter from research) present an alternate view of water to the view that our economy and society prioritize today—water as a commodity. When water is treated as a commodity the value of both women and the resources of the Earth are pegged against a market system that often fails to account for the true worth of things beyond their monetary value. (146)

I argue that in Le Guin’s fiction, especially in *The WFWF*, women view nature differently from men, particularly from Captain Davidson; the woman’s perspective is that nature is not for profit only, but something to respect and nurture. The scholar Ann Hidalgo explains that: “the notion of interdependence that is so clearly evident in ecological thought is also at the heart of feminist holistic spiritualities” (142). Le Guin shows the interdependence of men and women, culture and nature (yin/yang) in her fiction, portraying men and women working together in the case of the Athsheans, for instance. According to Hidalgo, holistic ecofeminism is about understanding that everything is part of the sacred whole (142). In Carroll’s words: women “overcome and dismantle oppressive ideological frameworks as well as revalue female experiences and power” (4). In that way, I expect that analysing Le Guin’s fiction through a holistic ecofeminist framework shall give insight into the ecological essence of her literature and depict how the women regain strength in their femininity in a sacred whole. These ecofeminist views are similar to aspects of ancient (Chinese) wisdom, as expressed through Western interpretations of Taoism, like Le Guin’s.

Qingqi Wei, who wrote about holistic ecofeminism, argues that “all these up-to-date ecocritical/ecofeminist voices have their prophetic existence in ancient Chinese holistic philosophies, as exemplified most vividly by Daoism” (775). Lao Tzu, who developed the

spiritual philosophy of Tao Te Ching, also sees the connection between femininity and nature as he compares the valley spirit (nature) with female fertility (775). Lao Tzu praises femininity and nature and teaches that toxic masculine government that seeks power and domination never profits (775-776). In other words, finding fulfilment in power and greed is never going to help find happiness according to Lao Tzu. However, nature and introspection, often stereotypically associated with femininity, are sources that can bring fulfilment.

Wei explains that holistic ecofeminism, according to Chinese tradition, means that each and everything complements each other as yin and yang symbolizes (777). He proposes “the coaction of West and East, masculine and feminine, *yang* with *yin*, and all the other complementary pairs they symbolize, and where we may be embraced by a dynamic world of the harmonious whole” (785). In brief, without female strength and qualities, yin and yang are out of balance. Qingqi also mentions that “Le Guin, who for years indulged herself in the translation of *Dao De Jing*, is fully conscious of how deeply interconnected *yin/yang* holism and (eco)feminist androgyny are supposed to be” (782). All in all, those strict human-nature or male/female dualisms and hierarchies are not sustainable.

In conclusion, Le Guin’s SF worlds are built upon holistic structures such as yin and yang. The world of Athshe in *The WFWF* is no exception. Its overall “message” is that bringing together contradictory powers is the solution to both women’s, minorities and environmental suffering. As Porter’s also highlights: “[a]ccording to Le Guin, to neglect the need for balance, for moderation, for appreciation of the inherent contradictions in individuals and society, is to cause individual and social egoism and all their disastrous consequences” (245). This central concern of Le Guin is also explored in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which portrays the development of a close and profound friendship between Estraven and Genly Ai. Their initial differences of nature and cultural and planetary background merge holistically together in the course of the novel. In “The Matter of Seggri,” the gender roles are the

opposite from modern Western societies, but still cause frustration and violence because they are not in balance. A more hopeful future lies in harmonizing yin and yang. Qingqi also explains that “a better construal and a better way of reconstructing Daoist ecofeminism would bring *yin* and *yang*, female and male, into a reconciled, nondualistic equilibrium” (762). And thus, yin and yang should be non-dualistic.

3 The Athsheans, the Gethenians and the Seggri: Holistic Ecoworlds and Finding Balance on a Divided Planet

One of the most important women in Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Word for World is Forest* is the headwoman of Cadast, Ebor Dendep. Dendep has a calm female presence in the novel, which has a positive impact on the natural environment of Cadast compared to Captain Davidson's toxic masculine presence on the Terran Colony. Like yin, in Chinese Taoism, Ebor is feminine in her behaviour and governance of her community in Cadast; she is respectful, considerate and kind to her fellow citizens and her natural environment. Ebor must make important decisions and includes the weaker ones of the community as "she put the town of Cadast on alert, making sure that each family was ready to move out, with some food packed, and litters ready for the old and ill" (34). Moreover, she makes sure the old and ill are provided for. Therefore, she is caring and acts like a mother and is rather stereotypically feminine as such. Consequently, Le Guin essentialises womanhood in her novel. However, this is part of her literary strategy, which I will explain in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Next to that, the novel was first published in 1972 and, therefore, must be understood in its historical context regarding feminism.

Sari Biklen (et al) explains that in the 1960s and 1970s feminism focussed much on "Equal pay for equal work; Affirmative action; Title IX; The politics of housework; The glass ceiling; Men's only clubs; The concept of gender privilege; Domestic Workers Unite; Date rape; Roe v. Wade; and 'The personal is political'" (451). In this period, feminist thought and action was often driven by "the idea that the world would change if women were elected to public office because they were more peaceful and nurturing"; mainstream feminist thought, "ignored the fact that some women had benefited from slavery, colonialism, had waged wars, and were not necessarily or naturally oriented toward change that would support women from all class, ethnic, racial locations, and sexual orientations" (Biklen, et al 451). As an author and

feminist, Le Guin belongs to this second wave of feminism, which made huge strides in bettering the position of women in Western society, but which did not contain a radical critique of all aspects of hegemonic Western culture. Le Guin needs to be understood as a woman writer during this period in feminist history and in a male dominated world of literary genre science fiction. SF remained a genre by men and mostly for men until well into the 1970s, which had an influence on how Le Guin wrote about gender identities and institutionalised gender roles.²

In contrast to Ebor Dendep, Captain Davidson is selfish, toxic and aggressive; he thinks “it’s the men that count. Not the animals. If a little extra-legal hunting helps the men get through this godforsaken life, then I intend to blink. They’ve got to have some recreation” (13). After all, he finds men more important than animals and women. Next to that, when Selver speaks about the Terran Colony to Ebor Dendep and her brother Coro Mena, he explains that he “watched the trees fall and saw the world cut open and left to rot. The men might have escaped, but the women were locked in more safely and could not, and they were beginning to die” (30). And so, women have been held captive just like the animals in the Terran Colony. Moreover, nature and women are dying because they are not seen as equal to men in the Terran Colony. Le Guin contrasts her characterisation of Davidson, as embodying the masculinist ideology of domination and exploitation, to Dendep’s characterisation as embodying harmony with nature (and the men of the Athshean community). Through this contrast she criticizes the dominant, dualistic, male authorities in Western societies that seek power through subordination. Moreover, unequal power relations have a destructive effect on

² Veronica Hollinger discusses Lester del Rey’s short story, “Helen O’Loy” (1938) as a telling example of science fiction’s “masculinist orientation”; she explains that “The title character – whose name deliberately recalls the beautiful Helen of Troy – is a robot programmed to be the perfect woman; del Rey’s narrator describes her as ‘one part beauty, one part dream, one part science’. It does not take a very sophisticated reading to appreciate how this story, a rather conventional power fantasy about the creation of artificial life, participates in Western culture’s long-standing marginalization of women” (126). Le Guin’s SF stories in novels, while not in line with contemporary feminist thought, stand in stark contrast to the mainstream masculinist SF that was still being produced when she wrote her most influential novels in the 1960s and 1970s.

the planet in the novel. Le Guin's fiction proposes solutions for environmental disasters which often come from Taoist philosophy. In doing so, she uses concepts such as yin and yang and the idea that the cosmos is one sacred whole. In *The WFWF*, Le Guin proposes that a solution for war and violence is a non-dualistic existence of yin and yang: the coming together, in peace, of the Athsheans and the Terrans. However, Captain Davidson rejects this worldview. Throughout the novel, Davidson holds onto his strictly hierarchical, dualistic perspective that prizes dominance over cooperation, exclusion over integration. He uses violence to enforce his sense of authority over the Athsheans and bullies his fellow Terrans into submitting to his commands. Davidson's toxic masculinity (discussed in more detail in chapter 4) is foregrounded by his inability to recognise Athsheans, male and female, as belonging to galactic humanity and by his constant misogynist language when speaking of Terran women. Davidson's failure to take women and Athsheans seriously—to recognize them as sharing with him the same "human" heritage—stands at the heart of the environmental catastrophe that unfolds in the novel. As such, Davidson should be considered a foil to the characters striving towards integration and balance, like Ebor Dendep and Selver, and to some extent the Terran anthropologist Raj Lyubov who constantly seeks to understand and connect with the Athsheans, despite their differences.

Dennis Friedrichsen argues that: "since the starting point for Le Guin's moral core in *Earthsea* is Taoist, characters and their beliefs are informed by Taoism as well, in their motivations (Ged's quest for restoring balance), their conversations, which often center around equilibrium and wholeness, and the interrelationships between characters" (21). Thus, "the interrelationships between characters" in Le Guin's texts are often not in balance at the outset; the texts often question whether balance is possible and speculate what such a balance would look like. Moreover, Le Guin's literature critically explores dualistic systems of government based on inequality and depicts alternative more holistic worlds which can

provide different perspectives on how human interrelations and human relations to the natural environment can be approached differently. In what follows, I focus on Ebor Dendep and how she governs her community with female, non-hierarchical, strength and what its positive outcomes are on nature. In this chapter I focus more on the holistic aspects of *The WFWF*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and the “The Matter of Seggri.”

3.1 Cadast’s Mystical Relationship to the Natural World

The forest has a prominent place in the novel. It is described as a sacred and whole ecosystem in the following depiction of Cadast, when Selver sees Cadast for the first time: “nothing was pure, dry, arid, plain. Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty. The colours of rust and sunset kept changing in the hanging leaves of the copper willows, and you could not say even whether the leaves of the willows were brownish-red, or reddish-green, or green” (27). This depiction of the forest gives a sense of the unknown.

Colours are flowing into each other, nothing is rigid and clean cut, everything is part of the sacred whole. Nature is mysterious and wise all together. Douglas Barbour argues that “this preoccupation with wholeness and likenesses is found throughout the *Tao*, for the Way unites all things” (168). And, therefore, for the *Tao*, or the Way,³ nature is whole and thus one of the most important and mystical sources of knowledge on which Le Guin has built her worlds upon.

³ Defining the concept of “the Way” proves to be complex for even in the Taoist texts themselves this concept is most vague or mysterious. Because as Ian James Kidd explains: “although Dao’s ineffability is argued for on various grounds, what each ground rules out is the use of literal, propositional language, which crucially keeps open various roles for more figurative, metaphorical language” (5). In other words, speaking about and explaining the term Dao, therefore, is a rather difficult task. However, Kidd explains it as follows: “Dao is not an entity object or god with will, purposes, or desires that can be identified and theorized. It is, as the *Zhuangzi* puts it, the active ‘wellspring’ that ‘gives forth’ the ‘ways’ of ‘the myriad things’, not ‘something that causes the world’. Dao is formless and therefore not some very striking thing or being, but rather that which ‘forms forms’ and ‘things things’” (5). Moreover, the Way is actually unnameable and formless, however is at the same time everything together, depicted particularly in nature and in Le Guin’s *The WFWF* of the forest of Cadast.

The Athsheans in *The WFWF* are living with this knowledge and mysticism in nature. They live in symbiosis with nature since “the voices calling here and there and the babble of women bathing or children playing down by the stream, were not so loud as the morning birdsong and insect-drone and under-noise of the living forest of which the town was one element” (38). In brief, the Athsheans are part of the sacred whole of the forest, living harmoniously together with the sounds of the birds, the animals and nature. Barbour argues that: “the sanity and balance of Athshean society, the Athsheans’ awareness of ‘the whole of which living things are a part’ (*Left Hand* 16), stands in stark contrast to the emotional and mental imbalance of the Earth-imperialist colonial culture which represents a logical extension of certain present-day technological and political trends” (169). With the Athsheans Le Guin shows how disastrous technology and colonialism can be and shows the importance of living harmoniously with the environment.

The book *Religions of the World and Ecology* contains a chapter on the relationship between Daoism and ecology. It says that: “knowing in the Daoist sense is always alchemical and ecological in nature since it depends on the revelatory experience and practice that comes in and through the transformation of the human body in corporate relation with all other particular bodies” (paragraph 21). Moreover, in Daoism knowledge comes from human bodies in relation to everything that is around them. Also, humans are part of the sacred universe and are not more superior or powerful. For example, in *The WFWF*, there is a scene where the sound of the children and women living daily life in the forest of Cadast merge harmoniously with the sounds of the birds (nature) around them: “yet the voices calling here and there and the babble of women bathing or children playing down by the stream, were not so loud as the morning birdsong and insect-drone and under-noise of the living forest of which the town was one element” (38). Thus, the particular bodies of the Athsheans are one element of the living forest.

3.2 Gender Power Imbalance, Sexuality and Social Aggression

In the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin explores a world where androgyny is the status quo and, therefore, its society is calm and unaggressive. In current feminist thought, androgyny is not a popular concept, but during the second-wave of feminism androgyny was often invoked to allude to an idea of gender identities disconnected from power. Thelma McCormack explains that “Le Guin’s vision of sexual equality and its consequences for a peaceful world and harmonious social organization have given the book a cherished place in feminist literature” (118). But she also highlights the short-comings of representing aliens as beings that change sex: “biological androgyny belongs to the domain of ancient myth and contemporary science fiction”; for McCormack, “psychological androgyny is another matter, an idea that is at once more intuitively credible” (118). She explains that “androgyny can also mean that the duality [of masculine and feminine] is integrated and synthesized to form a new and different repertoire of behavioral predispositions” (118). This last notion creates a conceptual link between the yin-yang symbol and a symbolic form of androgyny. Both refer to the inherent interrelationships, mutual dependence and flux of what conventionally is seen as a binary scheme.

The people of Le Guin’s biologically “androgynous” society, the Gethenians, have no continuous sexual capacity, becoming man or woman only a few weeks per month. Consequently, they do not have organized social aggression on planet Winter. The period when the Gethenians become a man or woman and thus sexually active is called Kemmer. In the novel, Le Guin explores what could happen when a society becomes androgynous and sexually inactive, showing how much societies run on stereotypical gender roles, having continuous sexual capacity leading to social aggression. Because the gender of a Gethenian changes every cycle, they do not have gender power imbalance in their society. Furthermore, when the Gethenians are in Kemmer their sexual drive is very strong. They can think only of

finding another person in Kemmer and, therefore, are not able to work. Moreover, on planet Winter they acknowledge how much their sexuality influences their society. With that Le Guin successfully depicts how much gender power imbalance and continuous sexual capacity lies at the root of society. Because what would societies look like without gender power imbalance and continuous sexual capacity? Le Guin answers this question as she depicts the society of the Gethenians, having a pregnant king and androgynous people, being quiet and introspective not easily tempted to acts of violence: “being so strictly defined and limited by nature, the sexual urge of Gethenians is really not much interfered with by society: there is less coding, channeling, and repressing of sex there than in any bisexual society I know of. Abstinence is entirely voluntary; indulgence is entirely acceptable. Sexual fear and sexual frustration are both extremely rare” (177). In other words, the society of the Gethenians has become rather passive without continuous sexual capacity and gender power imbalance, of which again the question could be asked whether that is a good thing? Either way, it does make them less violent and aggressive.

The Left Hand of Darkness contains a chapter with notes about this relationship between gender, sexuality and social aggression from an investigator from another planet. In this chapter the investigator discusses the Gethenians and the question of sex. The investigator asks when “did the Ancient Hainish postulate that continuous sexual capacity and organized social aggression, neither of which are attributes of any mammal but man, are cause and effect?” (95-96). With that the investigator proposes an interesting question whether constant sexual desire from men and social aggression are connected. Following this thought experiment, thus, a patriarchal society with continuous sexual capacity has organized social aggression.

In *The WFWF*, when the novel begins, and Captain Davidson awakes, he first thinks about women: “two pieces of yesterday were in Captain Davidson’s mind when he woke, and

he lay looking at them in the darkness for a while. One up: the new shipload of women had arrived” (11). His first thought when he wakes is about women as if they are newly arriving cattle. For Davidson, everything on Athshe exists for his exploitation. Man dominates woman and nature, and exploits both for his benefit and enjoyment. At one point in the novel, however, Davidson’s aggressive colonial tactics on Athshe are questioned by an investigator, who asks: “like Tumass Song Angot, did they consider war to be a purely masculine displacement-activity, a vast Rape, and therefore in their experiment eliminate the masculinity that rapes and the femininity that is raped?” (96). In other words, the investigator, is suggesting that androgyny could be a solution to war and violence, such as rape, because then there would be more respect between the sexes. And by asking this question, the investigator is also implying that Captain Davidson is currently occupied with raping women in his war against the Athsheans. However, if, like the Athsheans, he would live in accordance with nature and with appreciation and respect for all living creatures around him, of which he is a small part, then the planet would not be dying. *The WFWF* ends with the message that the planet can survive when the societies represented by Ebor Dendep and Captain Davidson can accept their differences and live harmoniously together. For this to work, Davidson, as the commander of the Terrans, first needs to reject his strictly binary and hierarchal worldview that places Terran men in a position of innate superiority over all other life in the universe. The defeat of Davidson’s militaristic, imperial project, at the end of the novel, brings hope that a form of balance can be restored between Terrans and Athsheans. When Selver talks to Lepennon at the end of the story, he tells him “Lyubov will be here ... and Davidson will be here. Both of them. Maybe after I die people will be as they were before I was born, and before you came. But I do not think they will” (128). The novel ends with a tentatively hopeful prediction of change for the better, because everything always changes and, therefore, it is possible that currently destructive figures such as Captain Davidson may change as well.

In “The Matter of Seggri,” Le Guin writes about a society which is divided between men and women. Men are competitive and sexual beings for “these men know little of art, only a kind of leaping dance, and their science is little beyond that of savages” (134); the “matters of common knowledge such as the working of machinery, the weaving of cloth, the transmission of holovision” (135) is left to women, who are also teachers and lovers. In brief, the gender roles in this society, therefore, are completely opposite from the traditional, stereotypical, gender roles in modern Western societies; in such societies, for example, there are often more men in influential intellectual positions than women. The gender roles of the Seggri are turned upside down from the gender roles of modern Western societies; however, both have in common that they are not based on equality and struggle with finding balance. In the story there are special “fuckeries” for the inhabitants on the planet to go to for their needs. Nevertheless, in this case the “fuckeries” consist of male prostitutes instead of female prostitutes and women are the costumers. Men can only be good bedpartners and strong good fighters in Seggri and live separately from the women in castles. In this story, where Le Guin speculates about a society in which men mostly exist for satisfying women’s sexual needs, producing babies and fighting with each other, men are not allowed to be in love with someone, to be kind or “weak.” However, this is not sustainable because there is a man in the story who falls in love with a woman and does not want to live the life he is supposed to live. He runs away but is accepted nowhere outside the castle or “fuckeries.” Next to that, there is also violence in Seggri because the men in the castle resist and kill all the lords and bullies. This short story is another illustration of Le Guin’s focus on how institutionalised inequality leads to violence and destruction and should be replaced with a quest for harmony and cooperation.

3.3 Ebor Dendep's Softness, Respect and Consideration in her Decision-Making

On an “average” day in Cadast, Ebor Dendep makes a basket of fern in the birch grove, whilst the community goes around doing its business, living everyday life. Dendep is presented as being at the centre of her community and in direct connection with the natural environment whilst also governing her people. Wei Qingqi explains that: “human civilization has long sensed the connection between “harmony” and “green,” in which female power has always played a crucial role” (750), and thus femininity has been associated for centuries with harmony and nature. Moreover, female wisdom, being non-acknowledged and thus non-existent in the Terran Colony, represents Taoist concepts such as “not doing” in Cadast, resulting into a peaceful and harmonious community. Ebor Dendep is calm, vulnerable and steady in the community which portrays a traditionally stereotypical image of womanhood. When Le Guin wrote the novel, in 1968, during the Vietnam War, she began to criticize these traditional stereotypes of men and women by exaggerating them. She had realised that gender, race, and class played a significant role in global economics, politics and environmental destruction: “it was becoming clear that the ethic which approved the defoliation of forests and grainlands and the murder of non-combatants in the name of ‘peace’ was only a corollary of the ethic which permits the despoliation of natural resources for private profit or the GNP, and the murder of the creatures of the Earth in the name of ‘man’” (Le Guin, Introduction to *WFWF* 7).

According to Lao Tzu, preventing war and violence is possible “when you do not-doing, nothing’s out of order” (Le Guin, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* 6). Ebor is not doing much, and yet nothing is out of order. The forest and its people can go about their business peacefully because Ebor is doing not-doing. Le Guin talks about this female quality in her famous speech, “A Left-Handed Commencement Address” (1983) for Mills College:

Machoman is afraid of our (women's) terms, which are not all rational, positive, competitive, etc. And so he has taught us to despise and deny them. In our society, women have lived, and have been despised for living, the whole side of life that includes and takes responsibility for helplessness, weakness, and illness, for the irrational and the irreparable, for all that is obscure, passive, uncontrolled, animal, unclean – the valley of the shadow, the deep, the depths of life. (n.p.)

Ebor Dendep governs through this language of women, taking care of the helpless, weak and ill. Because when Selver comes with his prophecies and stories from the toxically masculine Terran colony, she “listened to Coro Mena’s reports and prophecies, and acted. She put the town of Cadast on alert, making sure that each family was ready to move out, with some food packed, and litters ready for the old and ill” (34). Moreover, Ebor cares and thinks for the “weak” and works together with the rest of the town. She really cares for her people, the forest, the planet and actually listens. However, next to her passiveness, Ebor can also be practical since she “forced women and undreaming men who did not understand these things to listen again, until they understood, and were frightened. For Ebor Dendep was a practical woman” (34); thus, Dendep also knows when and how to act in difficult situations. According to the “machoman” perspective, it is “weak” to make a basket of fern in the middle of all business in Cadast and govern a community with female passiveness. But in Le Guin’s text this is presented as a powerfully positive way of being.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin shows the importance of showing emotions and crying for all people, no matter their biological sex or gender identity, emphasizing its importance to healing the connection between humans and the natural environment. The Karhidiers are described as follows: “most Karhidiers cry easily, being no more ashamed of tears than of laughter” (105). In other words, in Le Guin’s fiction, communities that seek to gain profit, wealth and money who do not allow themselves to feel emotions have a disturbed

relationship to nature often. Communities who can show vulnerability and emotions, however, are able to connect to nature more easily and thus form a more harmonious bond.

Ebor Dendep was considerate in her decision-making when she “was anxious for her people; but she did not want to ask that a hurt man be disturbed, nor to offend the Dreamers by insisting on her right to enter their Lodge” (30); therefore, her own wishes are not more important than someone else’s. By contrast, Captain Davidson is much more selfish when he wants something. This is revealed in his attitude towards women whom he sees only as objects of use for his own pleasure. When Ebor talks to Selver about the bloodthirsty yumens,⁴ it becomes clear that Davidson is a negative exemplar; she says “they’re like the people in the Elm Dream who come at you rumpfirst, with their heads put on front to back. They make the forest into a dry beach” (39). Thus, she is concerned for her forest and aware of climate change brought about by the Terran’s destructive actions. With Ebor Dendep’s governance there are no dry beaches, however, in Cadast: “the ground was not dry and solid but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long, elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across” (27). In brief, under Ebor Dendep’s governance, the community lives holistically together with the natural environment. And thus, nature is very much alive and springy because the forest is dense, thick, and full of leaves in all colours green. This is depicted in the following section of the novel when Selver sees Cadast: “the roots of the copper willows, thick and ridged, were moss-green down by the running water, which like the wind moved slowly with many soft eddies and seeming pauses, held back by rocks, roots, hanging and fallen leaves. No way was clear, no light unbroken, in

⁴ Le Guin here alludes to the fourth book of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), in which the British satirist created a caricature of humanity described by the intelligent horses, the Houyhnhnms, as “yahoos” (217).

the forest” (27). As such, the novel is another example of a strong interconnectedness between female mysticism and ecology.

3.5 Cadast, as a Matriarchal (Gender Unity) Society

Cadast is very much a matriarchal⁵ society. The narrator describes how:

Presently two of the Old Women came with the messenger, moving silent in single file along the sunflecked path. Ebor Dendep raised her hand, enjoining silence. The messenger promptly lay down flat, and rested; her brown-dappled green fur was dusty and sweaty, she had run far and fast. The Old Women sat down in patches of sun, and became still. Like two old grey-green stones they sat there, with bright living eyes.

(38)

Female power and “yin” qualities have room to flourish in Cadast. However, they also have male qualities and, therefore, Le Guin’s Athshean characters represent yin and yang by integrating both qualities (in contrast to Davidson who rejects every quality he considers feminine). Furthermore, the women depend upon each other and form supportive bonds.

Especially the depiction of the Old Women sitting down like two old grey-green stones with

⁵ The term matriarchal has many different definitions in academic literature. However, the definition I believe most productive for the context of this thesis and the understanding of the matriarchal society of Cadast, is the gender unity definition of Du Shanshan. This scholar did fieldwork among the Lahu of Southwest China and in Thailand in which she explored “the ways in which gender *unity* is constructed as a master motif—as encapsulated in the Lahu metaphor, ‘chopsticks only work in pairs’—that fosters gender equality and that prevails in ideological, institutional, and practical domains alike among the Lahu” (3). Considering the fact that this idea of gender unity implies the Taoist concept of balance and has a Chinese context, leads me to believe that this definition provides the theoretical framework of the matriarchal society of Cadast.

The Lahu perception of the pair (the marriage couple) is dualistic holism (66). According to Shanshan, “the Lahu pair is characterized by “*one* entity that is made complete by two components,” rather than “*two* entities or elements that co-exist with each other,” as the pair is perceived from a dualistic point of view” (66-67). She goes on explaining that “identifying with each other through their shared membership in the same pair, the differences between the two components of male and female are minimized, although they are distinguishable from each other” (67). In conclusion, like the Athsheans of Cadast, the Lahu people believe that men and women exist in a yin/yang equilibrium, which should be respected and practised according to this cosmological construction.

bright living eyes shows how deep-rooted female wisdom is in nature. Women have authority and can be headwoman. Furthermore, the Old Women decide on urgent matters such as myths and dreams, because “it was always the Old Women’s choice whether to believe or not” (35). The women in Cadast have more authority than in the Terran Colony, where women are slaves rather than human beings. The women in Cadast are peaceful, calm, and introspective. The Old Women sitting down completely still are alive and present, however; they are “not doing,” practising the Taoist idea of *wei wu wei* (Qian Li 168). Elaborating on this, Cadast has a Men’s Lodge and a Women’s Lodge, dividing men and women between their strengths and knowledge, representing the Taoist concept of yin and yang.

Nonetheless, women are in the centre of the Athshean community, running the cities and towns and being headwoman. However, women cannot be part of the men’s dream lodges. Furthermore, the novel explains that “it was the Dreamer’s responsibility to be careful, to be certain that his judgment was true. Her responsibility was then to take that judgment and act upon it. He saw what must be done; she saw that it was done” (34). Women do have authority and can govern the community, but the men make decisions first. The men provide the women with their dreams and knowledge on what must be done. The Old Women decide whether it will be done. Thus, women have much more authority in the community of Athshe than in Terran colony; however, they also depend on the visions of men’s dreams. Notwithstanding, in Cadast the women have much more responsibility than the women in New Tahiti Colony, where Captain Davidson governs, and are seen as human beings who have qualities that are necessary for the planet and all its life to survive.

4 Captain Davidson's Toxic Masculinity in New Tahiti Colony: Without Forests and no Female Authority

This chapter discusses Captain Davidson's toxic male world in juxtaposition to Ebor Dendep's holistic female world. Ebor Dendep's Athshean world, as envisioned by Le Guin, is holistic, feminine, and inclusive, whereas Captain Davidson's New Tahiti Colony is dualistic, masculine, and exclusive. Crucial in the opposition between the two cultures is the contrast between holism and dualism. The Athshean culture of Dendep, may be feminine, but it is not hierarchically ordered in terms of placing the feminine inherently above the masculine, or culture above nature. The Athsheans' acknowledgement of how their dream-world is as relevant to their daily lived experience as their waking life is symbolic of their overall holistic worldview in which apparent opposites are shown to be equal, complimentary, and inherently intertwined. The Athsheans are one with the planet on which they thrive. By contrast, Davidson's masculinist dualism is shown to be destructive for the planet; the Terran colonists cut down all the trees, endangering the health of the sacred whole that is the planet's ecosystem. What is more, not only Athsheans and their environment, but even other Terrans are made to suffer under the masculinist, exploitative regime of Davidson.

The Terran colony is controlled by Captain Davidson who believes that nature and women are inherently inferior to industry and man. On his side of the planet women and trees are seen as objects of use and resources for profit, respectively. In achieving the goals of maximizing profit by efficient industry, Davidson is aggressive and uses the latest technology, as well as militaristic organisational structures, which are shown to be harmful to the Athshean environment and the wellbeing of its indigenous population. Within the boundaries of the Terran Colony, nature is dying; in the community of Athshe nature is thriving and full of ancient old trees and extraordinary animals. Moreover, I will argue that Le Guin criticizes Western patriarchal society through her representation of the Terran Colony and its

figurehead Captain Davidson. She criticizes the continued exploitation and domination of nature, women and indigenous cultures within the masculinist, industrial ideologies of the Terran colony, especially as represented by toxic men such as Captain Davidson who are extremely self-centred, aggressive and hateful towards all those who fail to correspond to his short-sighted notion of what it means to be a human being. However, I argue that the image of this specific toxic man can divide men and women even more in the debate about current climate change issues.

4.1 Toxic Masculinity versus Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Carol Harrington, the term toxic masculinity can be problematic for gender studies because the term describes specific troubled men who are often mentally unwell (345). Moreover, the term describes one side of masculinity and does not consider nonviolent men (345). Furthermore, Harrington points out that using the term toxic masculinity can maintain gender hierarchies because the term portrays an image of men which is very traditional and stereotypical (345). It does not include more positive sides and is mainly negative. To add to that, the term is also problematic because when scholars use the term, they “frequently fail to define it or integrate it within broader theorization of masculinity” (Harrington 345). And thus, the term toxic masculinity lacks nuance and is too narrowly defined to be a useful critical concept. Gender dynamics in society and politics are complex and this complexity is missing in the standard definition of toxic masculinity. Furthermore, she explains that the term is part of “this newly ‘post-feminist’ popular feminist vernacular, treating sexism as a character flaw of *some* men” (345). In brief, this term foregrounds a rather negative approach to masculinity as a gender identity marker. Next to that, Harrington argues that the term is often used by men in powerful positions who claim that “sexual violence and harassment can then be discussed as features of ‘backward’ and ‘mentally unwell’ men” (352). Therefore, it

even helps men in powerful positions to hold on to their power. To conclude, the term does not seem to help to bridge the gap between men and women.

Another term for masculinity that is often used in academic literature is hegemonic masculinity. According to the online *Cambridge Dictionary*, hegemonic means “strong and powerful and therefore able to control others, or relating to the idea that a country is like this” (Web, 6 Feb 2023). Consequently, the term hegemonic masculinity focuses more on power relations instead of on character flaws. According to R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, who wrote about hegemonic masculinity, there should be a:

Reformulation of the concept in four areas: a more complex model of gender hierarchy, emphasizing the agency of women; explicit recognition of the geography of masculinities, emphasizing the interplay among local, regional, and global levels; a more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power; and a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, recognizing internal contradictions and the possibilities of movement toward gender democracy. (829)

In conclusion, as demonstrated in the section above, in academic literature the term hegemonic masculinity is much more developed and gives a much fuller and complex theorization of masculinity on all levels. I argue that in *The WFWF* the term toxic masculinity still applies to Captain Davidson because he is a very specific troubled man; however, as a stereotype, he is also an exaggeration. Therefore, there are quite stereotypical images of men and women in Le Guin’s novel. All the faults of Western society at time she wrote the novel (the 1960s-70s) are represented in Captain Davidson. Moreover, the novel is a specific desperate and angry reaction to the exploitation and destruction of women, minorities, and nature by the hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism, as Le Guin acknowledges in the introduction of her novel:

I knew, because of the compulsive quality of the composition, that it was likely to become a preachment, and I struggled against this. Say not the struggle naught availeth. Neither Lyubov nor Selver is mere Virtue Triumphant; moral and psychological complexity was salvaged, at least, in those characters. But Davidson is, though not uncomplex, pure; he is purely evil—and I don't, consciously, believe purely evil people exist. But my unconscious has other opinions. It looked into itself and produced, from itself, Captain Davidson. I do not disclaim him. (Le Guin 8)

While evil, toxic men such as Captain Davidson do not actually exist as real people (one hopes), Le Guin acknowledges here that she unconsciously feared the evil that does exist in human beings. This fear is represented through the hyperbolic character of Davidson. He represents the fear of the capability of humans to kill each other all too easily, as illustrated at the time by the atrocities of the war in Vietnam, and the continued destruction and exploitation of the natural environment by powerful patriarchal, capitalist Western societies. In other words, in harmony with the 1960s countercultural protests, Le Guin called out for humans to stop killing each other, which must begin with finding more balance in the currently unequal power dynamics between men and women, and human beings and the environment. Captain Davidson is part of her literary strategy to elicit shock and disgust in her readers of the dominant ideology that validates the exploitation of women, minorities and the natural environment for the sake of so-called progress. The catastrophe that unfolds on Athshe is a literary speculation to see what would happen if such an extreme stereotype of a toxic male would become the status quo. In contrast to the Athsheans' persistent search for balance within their culture and the environment stands Davidson's persistent need to dominate and exploit people and environment. For Terrans to succeed in developing a more constructive and balanced relationship with the natural environment, they need to learn from the Athsheans and need to reject the ideology Davidson represents.

However, how should one find balance and harmony when one side of the sacred whole is presented as intrinsically evil and something to avoid at all costs? Here recognising Le Guin's deliberate hyperbolic representation of Davidson as the symbol of a pernicious ideology is relevant. Davidson does not represent the complimentary "masculine" side to Ebor Dendep's holistic "femininity." He represents a strictly dualistic, masculinist ideology that places only men and traditional, even stereotypical, male values of strength, domination and exploitation at the centre of power. In Davidson's world, all other identities and values are marginalised, including forms of masculinity that could form part of a more holistic worldview. Raj Lyubov, the Terran anthropologist who attempts to understand and genuinely connect with the Athsheans, represents such an alternative. Although under Davidson's command, Le Guin shows, it is hard for Lyubov to achieve any of his aims at integration.

R.W. Connell argues that scholarship on gender studies should examine masculinities in relationship to the feminine and focus on the polarization of character traits (67). Next to that, the image of the masculine should be examined in relation to other factors such as for example politics and personal relationships (67). Moreover, Connell explains that, according to Western societies, men have "to be violent, dominating, able to kick a football and [be] interested in sexual conquest" (67). Connell explains that the image of "masculinity" exists in contrast with "femininity" because: "'Masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity'. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture" (68). As a result, men and women must conform to stereotypical role models. In other words, polarization of the sexes leads to power imbalance. In *The WFWF*, both Ebor Dendep and Captain Davidson conform to these stereotypical gender roles; the key difference between them being Ebor Dendep's holistic perspective and the Davidson's dualistic perspective when it comes to relations between men and women, and people and the

environment. Where Ebor Dendep recognises the significance of interrelations, mutual respect and the achievement of harmony, Davidson only sees otherness and conflict.

Connell points out that the relationship between masculinity and femininity is complex because “economy, state and global relationships are involved as well as households and personal relationships” (86). Consequently, other factors influence the understanding of masculinities. Next to that, cultural customs during specific historical periods have an influence as well and should be considered in developing an overview of the stereotypical image of men. In brief, cultural trends develop and, therefore, the stereotypical images of men and women change over time (84). To add to that, Connell writes that: “more recently, Women’s Liberation and defeat in Vietnam have stirred new cults of true masculinity in the United States, from violent “adventure” movies such as the *Rambo* series, to the expansion of the gun cult and what William Gibson in a frightening recent study has called “paramilitary culture” (84). Captain Davidson’s extreme stereotypical image of a toxic man results from this trend of “paramilitary culture,” which became popular after the defeat in Vietnam. Writing before the end of the war, Le Guin foreshadowed the rise of Rambo in Davidson.

4.2 Captain Davidson’s Toxically Masculine Dystopian Paradise

In this section I discuss what, according to Le Guin’s antagonist, Captain Davidson, is a real paradise for human beings. As a military leader, Davidson is an important leader of the Terran Colony and governs through threats of violence and aggressive coercion. In this colony, women do not have much authority and cannot decide on urgent matters such as the overall health of the planetary environment. Therefore, I argue that his governance is toxic because it is shown to be inherently destructive to both the wellbeing of women and the natural environment. Furthermore, Davidson is an exceptionally aggressive man in both his politics as well as social relations with others; therefore, he is an extreme example of patriarchal and

masculinist hegemony. I focus here mostly on his governance of the colony compared to Ebor Dendep's governance of the Athshean community.

The first thing Davidson thinks about when he wakes up at the beginning of the novel are the Colony Brides and Recreation Staff. He thinks of women as “the second batch of breeding females for the New Tahiti Colony, all sound and clean, 212 head of prime human stock. Or prime enough, anyhow” (11). The narrator here focalizes through Davidson, and his thoughts reveal that he does not mind exploiting women as breeding stock for the benefit of the colony, a male-dominated industrial enterprise. In his “paradise,” women are mainly living reproductive factories to maintain a consistent level of male human workers. After thinking about the role of women in the colony, he thinks about the environmental disaster on Dump Island and “the report from Dump Island of crop failures, massive erosion, a wipe-out” (11). Focalizing through Davidson, the narrator juxtaposes his thoughts on women directly with thoughts about the environment, foregrounded the eco-feminist theme of the novel. Moreover, the juxtaposition reveals that for Davidson, nature, like women, is merely a resource to be exploited; significantly, the reader finds out that through Davidson's approach the environment is dying in the Terran Colony.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, one reason for the development of environmental disasters today is the exploitation and domination of women over centuries; ecofeminists like Carolyn Merchant (and others) have shown that attitudes towards women and attitudes towards nature are inherently connected. In her pioneering ecofeminist study, *The Death of Nature* (1980), Merchant explains that “both the women's movement and the ecological movement are sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy's modus operandi in nature and society” (xx). In short, Le Guin explores this exact concern by imagining how Davidson's style of governing his people has a negative effect on the entire environment, including all aspects of nature.

Davidson does not regret his behaviour because he believes “this world, New Tahiti, was literally made for men. Cleaned up and cleaned out, the dark forests cut down for open fields of grain, the primeval murk and savagery and ignorance wiped out, it would be a paradise, a real Eden” (12-13). To conclude, Davidson’s paradise is rather empty and dystopian.

Ebor Dendep’s governance as headwoman of Cadast, focuses more on the “weak” such as the old and sick and on a strong collaboration. The forest is very much alive. The recognition amongst Athsheans of the interrelation between all the different forms of life within their planet’s ecosystems makes their world resemble an eco-utopia. Davidson does not see the world as a sacred whole. From his perspective, the dominant male Terrans’ drive to exploit Athshean resources is validated because on their home planet, patriarchal and industrial attitudes have been hegemonic for centuries. Because Davidson has never been forced to adopt another perspective, women and nature do not really matter beyond their status as objects of use. Davidson seeks to destroy the Athsheans’ harmonious existence within nature by forcing the Athsheans to become violent and aggressive towards the Terran colonists. By threatening to destroy their homes he seeks an aggressive response that will give him a reason to overpower and destroy their culture. The cost of the Athsheans’ physical act of resistance is that their peaceful and holistic existence has become endangered by their adoption of violence against a lifeform.

Seeing these acts of violence, coming from a power imbalance between men and women, in a broader political sense, Raewyn Connell explains that “to identify the ‘man question’ in international relations is to recognize that gender is an integral, not an accidental, feature of the worldwide structure of diplomatic, military and economic relations” (8). Thus, gender plays a crucial role in governing communities and, therefore, is essential to understand them. Furthermore, Connell adds that “spectacles of aggressive masculinity, such as football, motor racing and ‘action’ movies and video games, have a large presence in mass media and

have acquired huge popular followings” (11). Moreover, Captain Davidson represents a cumulation of all these aggressive male images. As in some video games with male, militaristic protagonists, his main occupation is destruction. Furthermore, Captain Davidson rejects spiritual and emotional fulfilment as a valid goal, as becomes clear in the following passage:

Davidson turned, only a microsecond late in his reaction, but that was late enough to annoy him. There was something about this damn planet, its gold sunlight and hazy sky, its mild winds smelling of leafmould and pollen, something that made you daydream. You mooched along thinking about conquistadors and destiny and stuff, till you were acting as thick and slow as a creechie. (16)

In other words, Davidson feels ashamed of himself when he is slowing down and starts daydreaming, because on Earth he has learned that he should be going fast and be productive. On Athshe, however, the creechies do not care about being productive. According to the Athsheans, dreams should be taken more seriously because they hold powerful knowledge about themselves. Their focus is more on being than on doing, which could be why they did not have a war since the arrival of the yumens.

Le Guin portrays a speculative society where daydreaming is more important than being productive. In the Athshean universe, the world-time and the dream-time do not exist separately which is clearly depicted when “Selver came up a path beside the water, going slowly and often stumbling on the willow roots. He saw an old man dreaming, and stopped. The old man looked at him through the long willow-leaves and saw him in his dreams” (27). Thus, the old man sees Selver walking towards him in his dreams and, therefore, can be in two different dimensions at the same time. Dreams are a great source of wisdom for the creechies which becomes clear when “Coro Mena felt unreasoning fear press upon him, and slipped into dream to find the reason for the fear; for he was an old man, and long adept. In

the dream the giants walked, heavy and dire” (29). To Coro Mena, dreaming is a way to process and understand his emotions. The yumens, however, believe that dreams are not real. Selver explains that “Lyubov, who taught me, understood me when I showed him how to dream, and yet even so he called the world-time ‘real’ and the dream-time ‘unreal’, as if that were the difference between them” (33). The creechies do not believe there is a difference in terms of significance between dreaming and waking; both forms of consciousness are real and equally important to developing an understanding of the self as well as the individual’s and community’s relation to the larger environment. Consequently, creechies have a completely different set of values compared to the yumens, believing that dreaming reveals great wisdom on how to live and that “not doing” brings emotional satisfaction and spiritual growth. In Terran gendered terms, the Athsheans have a high regard for, and employ, values often associated with feminine qualities such as introspection and self-reflection, taking femininity seriously as a key constituent of their nature. In contrast, Davidson and most other male Terrans on Athshe, understand dreaming only as an escape from reality; they use drugs to heighten their dreams to replace the negative aspects of their waking life with what they believe to be temporary fantasies of pleasure; but they reject their dream-time as a meaningful and integral part of their existence from which they can learn much about themselves. This marked difference in the Terrans’ and Athsheans’ attitude towards dreaming further enhances the difference between Athsheans’ constructive holism and the Terrans’ destructive dualism.

Instead of focusing on spiritual and emotional fulfilment, Davidson seeks his fulfilment in physical pleasure, using violence and aggression to satisfy his sexual needs. In doing so, he believes that the female creechies are merely tools, or robots, to control and abuse. Davidson explains to Oknanawi Nabo, the logging foreman, how he should approach the female creechies: “look, you’ve laid some of the females, you know how they don’t seem to feel anything, no pleasure, no pain, they just lay there like mattresses no matter what you

do” (17). In other words, according to Davidson, women are not actually human beings. Also, the wife of Selver, Thele, becomes a victim of Davidson’s aggression against women because “it was when Thele was returning to HQ from one such meeting that Davidson had seen her and apparently been struck by her frail, frightened grace. He had had her brought to his quarters that night, and had raped her” (81). This presents an image of Davidson as a purely evil man who even enjoys Thele’s fear. Even worse, “he had killed her in the act, perhaps; this had happened before, a result of the physical disparity; or else she had stopped living” (81). As a result, Selver endangers his philosophy of life to never murder or commit acts of violence when he tries to kill Davidson.

4.3 The Connection between Toxic Masculinity and the Threat to Environmental Health

Traci Brynne Voyles explains the connection between toxic masculinity and the threat to environmental health. She writes specifically about toxic masculinity at California’s Salton Sea. According to Voyles “at the Salton Sea and elsewhere, environmental vandalism has been a crucial ingredient of constructing white masculinity and sexuality and making meaning out of nonhuman nature” (139). And thus, as Voyles points out, when white men dominate a piece of land they often damage or change the environment. As leader of Terran Colony, Davidson’s responsibility is to make meaning out of nonhuman nature “for that’s what Don Davidson was, way down deep inside him: a world-tamer” (13). In other words, he believes his purpose in life is to tame worlds. Consequently, his worldview results in massive erosion and crop failures. Furthermore, Voyles argues that “this analysis applies to myriad places well beyond the Salton Sea. Here, as elsewhere, robust men’s bodies engaging in environmental vandalism has been a constitutive feature of white settler manliness” (129). Indeed, when looking at the history of colonialism, white settlers often led by men did not respect the natural environment and its inhabitants because they enslaved people and cut down trees.

Captain Davidson is an exaggerated example of this white-settler masculinity because he does not respect anything else except strong white males; he believes that “it’s Man that wins, every time” (14). And thus, according to Davidson, everything that is different from Terran men does not really count. *The WFWF* also contains the character of Raj Lyubov, who is very different from Captain Davidson. As an anthropologist, Lyubov has more respect for the environment and the Athsheans. Constantly under pressure to conform to Davidson’s view and obey his commands, he eventually exclaims: “to hell with my self-respect so long as the forest people get a chance, Lyubov thought, and so strong a sense of his own humiliation and self-sacrifice came over him that tears rose to his eyes” (60-61). Therefore, not all Terran settlers are as toxic as Davidson in their masculine drive to dominate and exploit through aggressive language and action.

4.4 True Friendship at the Heart of the Solution of Finding Balance in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

The title *The Left Hand of Darkness* sums up the universe in the novel, according to Le Guin. This universe includes both light and dark, which are inextricably bound together. This fundamental correspondence between the two is “found on Earth, and on Hain-Davenant, and on Chiffewar. It is yin and yang. *Light is the left hand of darkness...* how did it go? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow” (267). Moreover, this passage and the title succinctly explain Le Guin’s life philosophy, which is that the universe is dualistic and holistic at the same time and that everything complements each other. However, the novel also portrays that it is important that both oppositions should be taken seriously because otherwise destruction and suffering exist. On planet Winter, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, there is the Handdara which has “no theory, no dogma ... Maybe they are less aware of the gap between men and beasts, being more

occupied with the likenesses, the links, the whole of which living things are a part” (233), which could be why they do not have an ecological crisis on Planet Winter. Next to that, the novel depicts how the friendship between Genly Ai and Estraven makes the harmonious coexistence of opposite beings possible through love and mutual respect which is described in the following passage by Le Guin:

Light is the left hand of darkness
and darkness the right hand of light.

Two are one, life and death, lying
together like lovers in kemmer,
like hands joined together,
like the end and the way. (233)

In brief, the opposing forces existing in the universe cannot exist peacefully without love. It is through this friendship between Estraven and Genly Ai, which survives despite all the hardships they encounter during their journey on the ice, that Le Guin shows what really matters in life. Genly Ai talks about this to his friend Estraven in the following way: “alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical. In a certain sense the Ekumen is not a body politic, but a body mystic” (259). In the end, the solution to destruction and despair in the world is making it whole again. Therefore, according to Le Guin’s philosophy, a world that is primarily dominated by white men, like the Terran colony in *The WFWF*, is not sustainable anymore. However, according to academic literature about masculinities, setting aside certain men with the label “toxic masculinity” will not help to bridge the gap between men and women because masculinity is much more complex and not all men are toxic. Le Guin, however, uses this extreme example of a toxic man such as Captain Davidson as a

literary strategy to elicit only extreme negative responses to make her readers more aware of the fact that earth is dying. In other words, human beings are not a body politic, but a body mystic. Therefore, according to Le Guin what makes human life worth living are not political or pragmatic relationships but mystical relationships without inequality.

Craig and Barrow argue that in *The Left Hand of Darkness* “the role of Genly Ai is not to reinforce stereotypical male attitudes but to expose them; he is the means whereby men can confront their own ambiguous responses to women through the cultural shock of seeing feminine qualities in Gethenians that Genly Ai unconsciously perceives as male” (85). In brief, Le Guin uses stereotypical male images such as Genly Ai not to reinforce them but to expose them to her male readers and possibly change them. In the end, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, “of course this personal coming together of I and Thou is cultural as well as personal, with the more masculine Orgoreyn following the more feminine Karhide into a union with the Ekumen” (95). In brief, it is important that the masculine and the feminine are united in the novel. According to Craig and Barrow, “the yang utopias, with their war and their world raping exploitation, are being chastened in *The Left Hand of Darkness*” (95). In short, as in *The WFWF*, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* Le Guin criticizes toxic masculinity. She criticizes toxic men who vandalize the environment and exploit women; such men reject the holistic view that stresses the inherent relations between masculinity and femininity and the need for balanced integration. Such toxic masculinity stands outside of the yin-yang symbol representing balance and integration, which is why in the form of Captain Davidson it is presented as purely destructive a force that needs to be defeated before the holistic balance can be achieved.⁶

⁶ It would be interesting to explore more the psychology behind specific toxic men in Le Guin’s oeuvre; but the lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Michael Pitts discusses feminist utopias in literature and writes that Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) expresses "every ideal of the counterculture movement: ecological wisdom, community, androgyny, ritual, respect for madness, propertylessness, etc." (2). Therefore, a feminist utopia is holistic and not toxic because it does not exclude women and nature from society. According to the Athsheans, the world should be holistic because this prevents war and destruction. Even the structure of the novel is holistic. Writing about Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Mario Klarer explains that "in the central chapter the protagonist expounds his philosophy of science which at the same time is Le Guin's theory of science fiction and of the science of fiction: the necessary fusion of sequentiality with a circular structural pattern" (111). In the end, in this novel, but also in *The WFWF*, and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin portrays how the universe is holistic despite its seeming differences and oppositions.

To sum up, Davidson makes decisions based on his own desires which are money, profit and pleasure. He wants Athshe for himself and does not mind hurting others to get it. His world would be a world without trees and women as Colony Brides or Recreation Staff. Therefore, he has not much empathy for creatures he considers weaker than himself. He wants to tame the world of the Athsheans even if it endangers the existence of the planet. It is, therefore, a rather desperate reaction of the author on patriarchy and capitalism and its destructive tendencies as witnessed by Le Guin in the military conflicts of 1968, as well as the civil-rights and feminist protests the pernicious ideology the fictional Davidson represents. Davidson remains a negative exemplar foregrounding the need for a more holistic approach to relations between different people and human beings and the environment.

4.5 The Cost of Resistance and Resilience in the Athsheans' Peaceful and Matriarchal Society

This section discusses the costs of resistance and resilience in the peaceful and matriarchal society of the Athsheans against the bloodthirsty yumens. Once the killing starts, their peaceful and holistic existence is in danger because violence and destruction go against the very foundations of their society. Next to that, war destroys their natural environment and its ecosystems. Yet resistance is difficult for the Athsheans because they have never known such violent conflict, and nothing should be destroyed because every part of their ecosystem matters to their overall wellbeing. I will discuss key ideas from Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) in support of this argument. In this book, Merchant explains the following:

Systems theorists claim for themselves a holistic outlook, because they believe that they are taking into account the ways in which all the parts in a given system affect the whole. Yet the formalism of the calculus of probabilities excludes the possibility of mathematizing the gestalt – that is, the ways in which each part at any given instant take their meaning from the whole. The more open, adaptive, organic, and complex the system, the less successful is the formalism. It is most successful when applied to closed, artificial, precisely defined, relatively simple systems. Mechanistic assumptions about nature push us increasingly in the direction of artificial environments, mechanized control over more and more aspects of human life, and a loss of the quality of life itself. (291)

In other words, when the yumens, driven by scientific and industrial aspirations, come to Athshe to control and tame the planet they endanger the quality of life itself. Furthermore, Selver explains to Coro Mena about the yumens that “they will strike a bowed neck, I have seen it! There is a wish to kill in them, and therefore I saw fit to put them to death” (33).

Therefore, the aggression of the yumens is not only destructive for themselves, but also for the Athsheans because it changes their whole existence. Secondly, Coro Mena dreams about the yumens and that “behind them crawled huge moving things made of polished iron. The trees fell down in front of them” (29). And, therefore, his dream portrays how this mechanical moving thing destroys trees. In addition to this, Captain Davidson explains that “the NAFAL ship of the line, *Shackleton*, was half a million kilos up, in orbit. The launch was just a hint, just a fingertip of the hugeness, the power, the golden precision and grandeur of the starbridging technology of Earth” (20). In brief, the novel is a reflection on how Western societies are too aggressive and how the scientific revolution and its drive to ever-increasing mechanisation can have a negative impact on life itself.

Mike Donaldson explains how masculinity and capitalism are connected to systemic inequality since “patriarchal capitalism delivers the sense, before a man of whatever masculinity even climbs out of bed in the morning, that he is ‘better’ than half of humankind” (655). Therefore, capitalism is based on unequal power relations between men and women and thus is inherently toxic. Donaldson raises the important question: “but what is the nature of the masculinity confirming not only that, but also delivering power over most men as well? And what are its attractions? A sociology of ruling-class men is long overdue” (655). Consequently, it would be interesting to investigate a sociology of ruling-class men here more in depth. In other words, the novel *The WFWF* is a critique on war and its destructive effects on societies and the environment. Furthermore, through Davidson, it shows how technology, industrialism, capitalism and patriarchy are connected and destroy the planet. According to Le Guin’s speculative novel, women should be taken more seriously and be given a more central role in governance and intellectual life to safeguard human existence.

4.6 Finding her Own Female Voice in the Male Dominated World of Science Fiction

Craig and Diana Barrow explain that “just as Martin Luther King sought to convert whites to the cause of racial equality, so Le Guin is arguing for sexual equality but with male fans and science-fiction writers” (84). Also, Le Guin uses this technique because she writes about science-fiction type men such as Captain Davidson. By depicting the disastrous effects of extreme hegemonic masculinity on nature, Le Guin also communicates the negative effects of sexual inequality to her male readers. This is part of the reason why Le Guin created such a toxic stereotype in Davidson. He is the negative exemplar for male readers of her work and is contrasted to the more constructive and holistic worldview of the Athsheans as embodied by Ebor Dendep. Even the mainstream, or hegemonic men and boys reading the novel should be disturbed by Davidson’s misogynist thoughts and destructive actions. Next to that, Le Guin wrote about men such as Davidson not to conform to the expectations of her male audience and the male dominated work-environment of the science fiction industry, but to challenge readers’ and writers’ expectations of masculinist SF traditions.

In her famous essay, “A Room of One’s Own” (1928), Virginia Woolf writes: “yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are ‘important’; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes ‘trivial’. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction” (89). In Le Guin’s fiction, the masculine values prevail in the dominant position Captain Davidson has for much of *The WFWF*. Furthermore, Woolf explains that for female writers it was hard to find approval from literary critics (89). Traditionally, novels about male values, such as heroism and power, values also associated with conflict and war, had more chance to gain approval from literary critics. Woolf writes: “this is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room” (89). Especially in the beginning of her career, Le Guin received criticism from feminist literary critics that *The Left Hand of*

Darkness was not feminist enough. Either way, in Woolf's words: "she was admitting that she was 'only a woman', or protesting that she was 'as good as a man'" (89-90). Le Guin chose the latter, however, without losing her female voice. According to Woolf, a writer should be androgynous and should be writing about experiences of men and women simultaneously (126). Woolf writes: "if one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous" (119). I argue that Ursula K. Le Guin was capable of being both man and woman in a particularly male dominated science fiction world, creating challenging works of literary art in finding her own female voice.

Readers of *The WFWF* cannot position Davidson in the role of the story's hero. Le Guin's method of hyperbolic characterisation and the constant contrasting of the toxic Davidson to the more idealistically presented Ebor Dendep and the other Athsheans—male and female—foregrounds Davidson's role as a negative exemplar. But Davidson does not represent masculinity per se, but a hyperbolic, toxic masculinity, symbolic of a pernicious dominant ideology. Le Guin's representation of the more genuinely heroic male Athshean Selver, the more complex Terran man Lyubov, as well as the powerfully feminine Ebor Dendep, reveals that during her career Le Guin showed that she was capable of writing both as man and as woman; therefore, she was able to practice her life philosophy of holism through her writing.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined *The Word for World is Forest* as a specifically holistic ecofeminist text that presents a critique of and an alternative to the predominantly Western, patriarchal, and dualistic ideas of the relationship between people and the natural environment. Furthermore, I looked at the positive outcomes on the natural environment of the Athshean culture and spiritual worldview in relation to the eco-feminist, holistic aspects in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the “The Matter of Seggri.” Throughout my analysis, I have emphasized the way in which the yin and yang sides of these stories’ themes interact and influence each other, highlighting specifically the significance of the stories’ ecological themes in relation to their exploration of gender identities and roles. *The Word for World is Forest* is especially significant for expressing through the Athsheans a holistic worldview that is as desperate expression of hope to have yin and yang more in balance in our Western patriarchal societies.

Particularly in *The WFWF*, a yin/yang dualism works its way through the novel by means of separate chapters, focusing on Captain Davidson’s Terran dualistic perspective and Ebor Dendep’s holistic Athshean perspective. Davidson, whose hierarchical dualism places him outside of the holistic symbol of yin-yang, is the embodiment of pure patriarchal, exploitative evil, created by Le Guin out of anger in response to the militaristic and capitalist societies, which have proven so destructive of ecosystems, as well as the wellbeing of women and other minorities in the world. Ebor Dendep, by contrast, is the personification of both femininity and harmony, wisdom and kindness with an all-encompassing admiration for the ecosystem of the Athshean community. This is what makes the novel eco-feminist in its intellectual outlook. As the benevolent matriarch of the Athsheans, she represents the holistic idealism represented by the yin-yang symbol, in which opposites are recognised as inherently intertwined and mutually dependent on each other. Davidson’s vision is one of subordination

and exploitation; Ebor Dendep's vision is one of harmony and mutual benefit. As such, Le Guin, on the one hand, is somewhat stereotypical in her portrayal of these opposed characters; however, this marked opposition is part of her literary strategy. The stark contrasts between the two central characters was meant to shock and disgust her readers through the depiction of a hateful and toxic man such as Captain Davidson. The leader of the Terran colony represents, to a large extent, what Le Guin believed to be the destructive aspects of the dominant Western ideology: a hierarchical dualism in which man and woman, culture and nature, first and third world, were defined in terms of dominant and subversive, exploiter and exploited. In opposition to this Le Guin represented a utopian eco-feminine Athshean community with headwoman Ebor Dendep as the embodiment of ideals of harmony and cooperation. With that, Le Guin shows that the holistic Athshean society is most beneficial to the wellbeing of the community and nature overall. This idea of wholeness that is a feature of most of Le Guin's science fiction works, stands at the basis of Taoist concept of the harmony between yin and yang; Le Guin found in this symbolism a potential solution for ecological destruction brought about by the toxic masculinist Western ideology; by emphasising the need to find balance and value in "not doing," so to speak, Le Guin challenged the worldview represented by Davidson. It is significant, therefore, to recognise that in the novel Davidson is defeated; his dark agency is neutralised. The hierarchical dualism that thrives on conflict is negated in favour of a search for (renewed) harmony at the end of the novel.

Le Guin was a woman-writer in the male-dominated world of science fiction; therefore, she created such stereotypical characters as Davidson in order to challenge male colleagues who did not question the dominant gender ideology of the day. As the influential modernist-feminist writer Virginia Woolf argued, the experience of women compared to the experience of men is different, which is reflected through their literature; however, for a long

time the experience of women was not taken seriously, especially not in literature. She argued it should be:

For in imagination I had gone into a shop; it was laid with black and white paving; it was hung, astonishingly beautifully, with coloured ribbons. Mary Carmichael might well have a look at that in passing, I thought, for it is a sight that would lend itself to the pen as fittingly as any snowy peak or rocky gorge in the Andes. And there is the girl behind the counter too – I would as soon have her true history as the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon or seventieth study of Keats and his use of Miltonic inversion which old Professor Z and his like are now inditing. (109-110)

The experience of women, then, can be conceived as a force for reclaiming the future of female writing. Woolf argued that women should not try to write like men but should write as women. However, both should not lose the qualities of the other sex when writing (126). According to Woolf, the creation of art is completed when the maker is androgynous, both female and male (126). Le Guin also examined androgyny in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and speculated what an androgynous society would look like. She questioned how gender and sexuality influenced the structure of a society as well as its relation to the environment. In doing so, she showed how much societies are built upon dualistic ideologies that have a destructive effect on relations between people as well people's relation with the planet. For a novel written in the late 1960s, *The Left Hand of Darkness* displays ideas that clearly question hierarchal gender roles and identities, in which masculinity is always positioned above femininity in terms of value, authority and the right to act. While Le Guin holds on to some traditional gender notions such as equating femininity with nurture, she aims specifically to critique the power imbalance in the context of categories of human gender and sexuality. She reveals that such an imbalance leads to violence on a structural level within societies that leads also to violence against the environment. In other words, the novel is influential in

thinking about gender and sexuality in society in speculative ways. Furthermore, the “The Matter of Seggri” explores this narrative of a community functioning on the basis of men and women living separately, where the men must live in castles to learn to fight and be good bedpartners. Even though women hold the position of authority in this story, men are dominated and exploited; consequently, they become violent, which demonstrates again that structural imbalance in human relations on the level of gender and sexuality is destructive and undermines any chance of social harmony.

Furthermore, informed by the novel’s ecofeminist worldview, *The WFWF* contrasts a toxic masculine dystopia, constructed in accordance with ideas of domination, exploitation, and violence against non-male humans, to a spiritual, feminine Athshean society defined by harmony and cooperation between men and women as well as people and the environment. Therefore, the portrayal of the image of Captain Davidson is extreme and exploits the extreme stereotypical male characteristics which are problematic in relation to women, other minorities and the environment on the planet. However, as Carol Harrington argues, the term toxic masculinity is not constructive to help to solve the problem of inequality between men and women because the term describes specific troubled men who are often mentally unwell (345). In other words, the danger exists that using the term toxic masculinity, and portraying toxic men in literature, generalizes all men as being primarily violent and people to avoid, or hate, which can make the conversation on the ecological crisis more difficult. Therefore, according to R.W. Connell, masculinities should be considered differently and in relation to women because that is where the polarization begins (68). Significantly, Le Guin creates male characters like the Athshean Selver and the Terran Lyubov whose complex identities form a stark contrast to the hyperbolically villainous Davidson. Their presence foregrounds that not all men but the ideology that Davidson represents should be challenged and hopefully replaced with a more holistic worldview.

I conclude this thesis by pointing out the importance of the Taoist concept of balance between yin and yang in Le Guin's science/speculative feminist fiction for the ecological and universal wellbeing of all living and non-living materials floating in the cosmos. For it is in this balance that the healing of the cosmos can happen. In the *WFWF*, characters like Selver and Ebor Dendep, but also Lyubov are shown to confront this difference and imbalance which leads to violence by standing up to Davidson; however, they also develop the knowledge that concepts like dystopia (Davidson's Terran colony) and utopia (the Athsheans' holistic community) cannot be erased from the world entirely; the very fact of the Terrans' presence and impact on Athshe reveals that these conceptual opposites will clash in a "real" world that exists outside the imaginary ideas of one ideal world.

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