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# Writing the World: Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood's Literary Contributions to Ecofeminism

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## Introduction

American environmental literature claims that global sustainability and the ethic of earthly care are humanist issues. From the early examples of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, we see classic environmental authors urging humanity to reconnect with nature. More recently, however, environmental literature has received a post-humanist makeover partly through its integration with feminism. Born of the last thirty years, ecofeminist literature combines the environmentalist focus on reconnection with nature with the feminist focus on gender equality. This combination produces a feminist view on environmentalism that is concerned with the degradation of both earth and its peoples.

Ecofeminism foregoes a back-to-nature approach and instead incites a wake-up call to humanity. Ecofeminist writers insist that there lies an inherent “connection between the subjugation of women (or a group of people) and the domination of nature” (Warren *x*). If we solve one issue, we can solve the other; this goal has become the ecofeminists’ ultimate pursuit. Through handling topics such as gender, power, sexuality, and nature, ecofeminist fiction develops narratives that expose our wrong turns and poor decisions concerning the development of our societies and our treatment of both land and people. Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood are two fiction writers who have produced important ecofeminist discussion through their novels. By analyzing Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) as well as Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), this thesis shows how these authors both contributed to the growth of ecofeminism and how their works remain an important part of the ecofeminist dialogue.

There are nearly as many theories about the beginnings of North American ecofeminism as there are books on the subject. But most ecofeminist writers agree that American ecofeminism in the early 1970s was a response to the threat of nuclear annihilation and the damaging effects of war. At this time, the United States was engaged in both the Vietnam and Cold Wars. Believing that militarization and nuclear warfare were major contributors to the domination and maldevelopment facing the western world, activists in the environmental and feminist communities gathered at nuclear test sites in protest.

Environmental activists at these protests argued that the harmful chemicals, toxic waste, and deadly intent of nuclear weapons made them the largest current threat to the earth's ability to sustain life. On down the fence, feminist activists rallied for the future of their children and against the androcentric destruction. Ecofeminist author Noel Sturgeon, who was present at the Nevada nuclear protests in 1970, writes that these nuclear test sites were the meeting grounds for many like-minded activists looking to secure a more peaceful future. She explains that "[i]n this political context, 'the environment' served feminists as a medium for the connection of critiques of militarism, capitalism, and neocolonialism" (145). Converging causes like these resulted in a network of support and information for both activist groups. Those in this network soon called themselves ecofeminists.

From the start, ecofeminists were animal rights activists, vegetarians, war protesters, civil rights activists, feminists, ecologists and mothers of soldiers, all seeking to end dominance and destruction. From these common goals grew a shared ethic of care and a joint effort against the logic of domination. These goals became rhetorical staples

in the ecofeminist movement. According to Deane Curtin, the *ethic of care* is a synthesis of environmental ethics and feminist maternalism. It refers to an ethical model that suggests “the interests of others should come before my own,” the manifestation of which requires “empathetic projection into another’s life” (71). The ability to view the degradation of the environment and the abuse of subcultures as inherently linked and as a priority issue in one’s own life is the basis for the ethic of care in ecofeminism.

Along with urging humanity to make public matters personal, ecofeminists take special care in criticizing and deconstructing the logic of domination. According to ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren, the logic of domination is the logic of the traditional hierarchy which positions men and culture at the top, based on the assumption of strength, and women and nature at the bottom, based on the corresponding assumption of weakness. Ecofeminists address the culture/nature dialectic that empowers the logic of domination in different ways. While some ecofeminists find the woman/nature identity liberating, others find it confining. This split in the fabric of ecofeminism has spawned criticism about the philosophy’s validity and utility, which I will soon address more thoroughly.

For ecofeminists, the ethic of care is an obvious bridge between environmentalism and feminism. The logic of domination, specifically, has resulted in unifying rhetoric from feminists seeking to make environmentalism an integral part of feminism. To this end, ecofeminists argue that “an environmentalist perspective is *theoretically* necessary to feminism” (Sturgeon 190). This argument posits that since feminism upholds the ethic of care and seeks to subvert the logic of domination, all feminists are thereby ecofeminists and contemporary feminism should work to incorporate environmentalism

into its philosophy. This sequence of philosophical convergence, synthesis, and adoption is the foundation of ecofeminist thought.

The environmental feminist discussion of the 1970s was originally called “the nature question” by cultural and radical feminists (Sandilands 6). As a term, ecofeminism was introduced in 1974 by French feminist Francoise d’Eaubonne, who wrote that “this new global movement of feminists draws upon the ‘specifically feminine’ power to combat the ecological crisis and the systems of male dominance that have given rise to it” (MacGregor 20). D’Eaubonne’s term *eco-feminsime* came to America notably by way of Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron’s translated *New French Feminisms* (Gaard and Murphy 8). *Eco-feminisme* in the context of French feminism of the 1970s refers specifically to the biological role of women, as mothers who produce future generations, in a potential ecological revolution (Warren 19). While d’Eaubonne’s specific goals do not correspond with “the nature question” of 1970s American feminists, those American ecological feminist authors and activists at the time found this term useful for describing their own movement.

What we now call ecofeminism is the resulting collaboration of various aspects of both feminism and environmentalism. Both philosophies developed their own divisions and subgroups which found their way into the ecofeminist discussion. According to philosopher Allison Jaggar, there are four different categories within feminism, all of which have influenced contemporary ecofeminism (Low and Tremayne 4). They are liberal, radical/cultural, social and Marxist feminism. In an explanation simplified for application to ecofeminism, liberal feminism focuses on civil rights issues; radical or cultural feminism promotes a pushing away from androcentric conventions and accepts

the association of women and nature as liberating; and social and Marxist feminism focus on social constructions of power and economic and legal domination.

Many accounts of ecofeminism's beginnings assert that "ecofeminism grew out of radical, or cultural, feminism ... which holds that identifying the dynamics—largely fear and resentment—behind the dominance of male over female is the key to comprehending every expression of patriarchal culture" (Spretnak 5). Certainly this thinking was fodder for early ecofeminism, but most ecofeminist authors also recognize the analysis of oppressive superstructures that comes from Marxist and social feminism, and the fight on behalf of subjugated groups that comes from liberal feminism. The divisions of feminism are intertwined, building off each other and using similar rhetoric. Therefore, for the purposes of a literary analysis of ecofeminism, it is more important to recognize *what* ecofeminism's various influences are rather than decipher which came first.

The environmentalist movement also has several divisions. They are early environmentalism, ecology, and deep ecology. Environmentalism is the older environmental ethics movement associated with the literature of Thoreau and Muir. It remains rational, scientific and concerned with preservation and human connection with nature. Ecology developed as a holistic approach to environmental ethics. It values the connectivity between nature and humanity. Ecology critiques Western culture which "centers on its anthropocentrism, and the placing of humans in the superior position over elements of nature" (Low and Tremayne 4). Ecopolitical author Sherilyn MacGregor asserts that one of the main links between feminism and ecology is "women's dissatisfaction with the environmental movement, in which male domination was a source of frustration" (25). Feminists and ecologists seeking a more holistic approach to

the ethic of care found solace in the ecofeminist movement. Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess first introduced and developed the concept of 'Deep Ecology' which "takes into account distant future generations, the Third World, nonhuman species and, at times, the biosphere as a whole" (Attfield 2). Deep ecology is largely concerned with long-term environmental implications such as over-population and the damaging effects of species extinction. Like cultural feminism, ecology is the division most accredited with the development of ecofeminism. Since ecology is very much defined by its differences from environmentalism and deep ecology, and since the ecofeminist discussion has run the gamut from "back to nature" to overpopulation, familiarity with all three divisions is necessary for an in-depth understanding of ecofeminism.

Composed of fragmented philosophies, ecofeminism has several different positions within itself. Each position describes a unique approach to ecofeminism and each provides a specific use in ecofeminist analysis. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein give a particularly straight-forward explanation of the three ecofeminist positions in *Reweaving the World*. The first position views the earth as having intrinsic value. According to this position, the goal of ecofeminism is to restore and preserve earth's wholeness. This view that "the Earth is sacred unto itself" has brought about several different faith-based movements surrounding the Gaia/goddess pagan traditions (xi). The worship of nature is a reoccurring theme in ecofeminist literature, most notably including fiction and essays by ecofeminist Pagan activist Starhawk. This position has also aided the ecofeminist rhetoric in elevating nature toward spirituality.

The second position holds that "because human life is dependant on the Earth, our fates are intertwined" (Diamond and Orenstein xii). For many ecofeminist philosophers,

this position holds the trump card. They reason that destruction of the earth means destruction of humanity and thus, for our own sake, we must care for the earth. Although this is the least altruistic position, and requires the least amount of empathy described by Warren as essential to the definition of ecofeminism, it holds a great deal of persuasive power. Perhaps that is its purpose. Certainly, another use for this position is that it turns the ethic of care to an issue of social justice which “cannot be achieved apart from the well-being of Earth” (xii). Rhetorically, this position speaks to human guilt and self-preservation because it persuades us that our well-being is tied to the earth’s well-being.

Finally, a third position takes the perspective of indigenous peoples. These ecofeminists receive their identity from their environment. They may be indigenous to a particular land, such as Native Americans or tribal people in Africa who have identification with land ingrained in their cultures, or they may be people who have consciously strived to relearn their identity as part of nature. Contemporary ecofeminists of the 1990s, which includes the “Southern Ecofeminists” of Africa and Asia, use the rhetoric of this position to analyze human relationships with technology, deforestation, and developing economies.

One final philosophical division helps explain the growth of ecofeminism from the 1970s to present day. The feminist debate over essentialism is such a large part of ecofeminist discussion that it has become a defining factor of contemporary ecofeminism. In ecofeminist philosophy, essentialism refers to the culture/nature divide wherein the traditional hierarchy associates men with culture and women with nature. While this kind of essentialism describes the logic of domination, women of the 1970s attempted to reclaim this association and use it as a point of social power.

In the early days of ecofeminism, women felt disenfranchised from the environmentalist movements due to androcentric, or “male-centered,” rhetoric and the male-dominated culture of science. MacGregor writes that “[a]s problems within these movements emerged it became necessary for women to assert their differences from men in order to achieve their political goals. Among the strategies chosen for the task was the deployment of maternalist rhetoric” (MacGregor 25). This strain of ecofeminist thought supports the idea that women are more in tuned with nature than men and therefore have a special role in the environmental movement. These women were able to break free of unsatisfactory movements and create their own. The ecofeminist mantra for essentialism is that there is a link between the domination of *women* and nature.

Those who find this kind of reductionism confining argue that essentializing women as mothers, or as more attuned with nature, is a dangerous use of the same rhetoric that feminism has long fought against. Anti-essentialist ecofeminists point to the long struggle of women to break free from the confining roles of mother and wife. In particular these ecofeminists fear the creation of “a new version of biological determinism that privileges women’s relationship to nonhuman nature” (Lahar 11). Since the tradition of domination relies on determinism to socially stratify men and women, anti-essentialists assert that adopting essentialist rhetoric places women back in women/nature trap where gender differences justify subjugation. Anti-essentialists choose the ecofeminist position that there is an inherent link between subjugated *people* and nature. Anti-essentialists reason that ecofeminism should be useful for analyzing all types of domination, not just the domination of women.

Speculative literature has an important role in the development of ecofeminism. Although some influential ecofeminist literature was written before d'Eaubonne coined *eco-feminisme* in 1974, the development of ecofeminist literary criticism is relatively recent. Gretta Gaard and Patrick Murphy write that it was not until the 1990s that critics were “beginning to make the insights of ecofeminism a component of literary criticism,” and “discovering a wide array of environmental literature by women being written at the same time as ecofeminist philosophy and criticism is being developed” (5). Murphy has based his research in ecofeminist literary criticism on “Ursula K. LeGuin’s famous 1986 statement, ‘Where I live as a woman is to men a wilderness. But to me it is home’” (8). Murphy views this statement as a critical turning point in ecofeminist fiction and focuses his studies on the ways in which literature helped develop the philosophy. Unlike Murphy’s research, which focuses on ecofeminist literature after 1986, this thesis focuses on an earlier, precocious ecofeminist literature that helped conceptualize ecofeminism from its roots.

In particular, this thesis examines the conceptualization of ecofeminism in the speculative fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood. Speculative fiction is especially fertile ground for ecofeminism because of its idea-driven plots and its tradition of utopias. Ecofeminist speculative literature contrasts our current society with utopic ecofeminist visions, or else, hyperbolic anti-ecofeminist dystopias with idyllic ecofeminist utopias. Calthleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire that “[w]e regard ecofeminists as pragmatic visionaries and feel it is our business to ‘activate utopia’” (186). These idyllic utopias activate ecofeminism by creating alternative cultures that have made ecofeminist choices in their relationships with nature and each other.

Dystopias contribute by exaggerating maldevelopments in our society so that these cultural decisions are obvious social failures deserving of reform. Dystopias also warn us, if hyperbolically, that the same kind of oppression and chaos, which many of them depict, loom as a possible fate for humanity.

Ecofeminist speculative fiction has several themes that help identify ecofeminist literature and contribute to its philosophical growth. For the purposes of analyzing the works of Le Guin and Atwood, the relevant subjects are ahistory, gender, androgyny, otherization, technology, and development. First, ahistory is a topic that has many names and implications. Ahistory as a term refers to the solution to the problem of androcentric history. Speculative fiction dealing with ahistory tends to describe the creation of new cultures that deviate from older ones, the dawn after the apocalypse, new generations of humans, and other motifs of renewal. Ahistory specifically attacks the maldevelopment and tradition of domination in traditional androcentric history.

In fiction, gender and androgyny themes often play out in ways that undermine gender stereotypes, downplaying the practical importance of gender differences. Speculative gender bending also helps prepare readers for other such earth-shattering assertions made through these speculative cultures. It forces readers to unlearn traditional gender for the duration of the reading leading to an overall openness to unfamiliar ideas.

Otherization as a theme is literary criticism's way of addressing anti-essentialism. Characters who feel isolated, confined, or "otherized" due to social duties or roles are expressing anti-essentialist sentiment. "The other" is a feminist concept which aims "to reject the notion of absolute difference and the binary construction of inside and outside"

(Sturgeon 5). Ecofeminist fiction often illustrates how insistence on binaries is dangerous and inaccurate, similar to the anti-essentialist's rebuke of the culture/nature dialectic.

Technology is an increasingly important topic in contemporary ecofeminist literature. In speculative ecofeminist fiction, the focus on technology has shifted from its antagonistic effects on nature to its influence on human cultural development. McGuire and McGuire explain that this shift is useful for identifying stages of ecofeminist literary development. They write, "it is in the nexus between nature and technology that the authors most starkly demarcate the differences between seventies radical feminism and ecofeminism" (196). Later chapters discuss such differences as discussed in Atwood's early and recent ecofeminist novels.

Along with Le Guin and Atwood, there were several authors publishing in the 1960s and 1970s who are very influential on the style and rhetoric of the ecofeminist literary genre. Authors Rachel Carson, Earnest Callenbach, and Marge Peirce provide a helpful timeline for contextualizing ecofeminism's literary roots. Although not a fiction writer, Carson's work is certainly part of the nascent ecofeminist literary movement. She wrote before the emergence of ecofeminism and her works do not handle typical feminist issues of gender equality, birth control, and disparate pay, but many ecofeminist scholars still either mention her work or give her honorary status as a "recovered" ecofeminist author (Murphy 45). Significantly, Carson wrote *Silent Spring* (1962) which changed the way Americans used pesticides and influenced governmental policy concerning the use of DEET, a highly toxic chemical found in popular pesticides.

*Silent Spring* also draws a narrative picture of the connectivity between humanity and the environment. Carson traced the decline in the American bird and fish population back to DEET and the companies and politicians who supported it. She writes “[f]or each of us, as for the robin in Michigan or the salmon in the Miramichi, this is a problem of ecology, of interrelationships, of interdependence” (189). Precociously, Carson invokes the rhetoric of the ecofeminist position that views human fate as intertwined with the earth’s. Of our relationships with birds, fish, nature and each other, Carson writes “[t]hey reflect the web of life—or death—that scientists know as ecology” (189). Carson, a woman writing a controversial, scientific exposé of a chemical backed by corporations and politics, paved the way for women’s involvement in ecology and the literature that followed.

Earnest Callenbach also deserves to be mentioned although he is not an ecofeminist author, or even a “recovered author” for that matter. He made his mark on ecological utopian literature with *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* published in 1975. This short novel is the diary of protagonist William Weston’s investigation of Ecotopia, a country that seceded from America and covers the territory of the American northwest. Weston reports on innovations of transportation technology, energy sources, gender relations, communal living and other such flavors of the utopian stock. Callenbach’s technique of contrasting Ecotopia’s plausible innovations and ideas with Weston’s exaggeratedly prudish commentary creates a generous critique on American (and Western) society. This technique of exaggerated contrast has become standard in the ecofeminist utopian genre.

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) is mentioned in nearly every book on ecofeminist literature. This is likely due to the consensus as noted in one such book that "[t]he most influential of ecofeminism's roots was the radical feminism of the seventies ... as personified in *Woman on the Edge of Time*" (McGuire and McGuire 196). Piercy's protagonist channels two worlds, an ecofeminist utopia and a horrifying dystopia. A differentiating factor between the two worlds is their relationships with technology. The utopian vision embodies the 1960s and 1970s feminist hopes of using technology to further liberate women in the same way that the technology of the birth control pill is credited with jumpstarting the women's liberation movement. In the dystopic vision, humans use technology for oppressive and unnatural organ harvesting projects. *Woman on the Edge of Time* set the trend for the ecofeminist literary treatment of technology. This discussion continues to warn that we cannot embrace technology without recognizing its danger.

Carson, Callenbach, and Piercy show the emergence of feminism literature from its earliest inklings in Carson's research and Callenbach's standard utopian techniques to its literary speculative form with Piercy. Before *Woman on the Edge of Time* made its 1976 debut, Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood's early works helped set the stage for ecofeminist literature and philosophy. Both authors contributed significantly by conceptualizing ecofeminist themes and expanding on ideas of power relationships. Due to d'Eaubonne's *eco-feminisme* coined in 1974 (which did not find its way into America until later) and Marge Peircy's novel in 1976, some scholars are tempted to assert that ecofeminism began in the mid or late 1970s. However, because no movement or philosophy can spontaneously appear fully formed, it is important to analyze those

authors such as Le Guin and Atwood who had significant influence on the ecofeminism's incubation period. An ecofeminist analysis of Le Guin and Atwood's novels provides profound insight into where the movement is coming from and where it has gone.

Le Guin is a long celebrated author of science and speculative fiction. She has won the Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, and National Book Awards for books she steels with hard hitting social critiques particularly in the realm of gender and power dynamics. But most literary criticism that discusses Le Guin's ecofeminism focuses on her writing after 1976. As previously noted, Patrick D. Murphy has produced a good deal of research and criticism using Le Guin's wilderness quotation as a departure point for contemporary ecofeminist studies. Murphy writes that "The novel that balances and integrates ecology and feminism more evenly and successfully than any other I have ever read is Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985)" (238). This tends to be the kind of reception her 1980s work receives from contemporary ecofeminist analyses. However, few ecofeminist scholars extend their research to Le Guin's earlier novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974). As this thesis later discusses, both novels contain critical ecofeminist ideas and provide necessary context for the beginnings of ecofeminism in speculative fiction.

Le Guin uniquely executes her commentary on these themes through experiments with subjectivity. Her readers must expand their ideas of identity in order to relate to her stories. Protagonists Genly Ai and Shevek, of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* respectively, are both displaced characters whose survival depends on their success in integrating with new worlds while retaining their identities. The result is a flexible, borderless understanding of the self. This is one of the ways that Le Guin fights

against the essentialist traps of early ecofeminist writing; she “rejects the possibility that dualism may be resolved by returning to an original state of unity” (Armbruster 114). Le Guin’s refusal to let her characters arrive at one convenient identity becomes a standard strategy in the anti-essentialist discourse as well as for the otherization themes in ecofeminist literature.

For the very reason that Le Guin was handling ecofeminist themes well before 1985, it is necessary to “recover” or bring both *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* into the realm of ecofeminist literary analysis. In the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin writes “The science fiction writer is supposed to take a trend or phenomenon of the here-and-now, purify and intensify it for dramatic effect, and extend it into the future” (i). For Le Guin, this process typically includes gender-bending, social revolution, environmental consciousness and a complete turning on end of self-identity. Murphy writes that this method is important because “these stories are part of a project to rethink human/nonhuman and self/other relationships” (Murphy 234). Thus is the goal of ecofeminism and so it is of these two novels.

Margaret Atwood is an interesting match for an ecofeminist literary analysis involving Le Guin. Both authors make the same arguments about essentialism, identity, and human/nature connectivity, but they take noticeably different routes. Atwood tends toward speculative fiction featuring alternate cultures and realities, rather than the science fiction involving new races, species, and planets favored by Le Guin. Le Guin’s novels focus on the dual dominations of nature and subgroups, while Atwood’s 1972 novel *Surfacing* invokes slightly more overt feminist rhetoric centering her narrative on the domination of nature and *women*. In Atwood’s 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake* she takes up

the cause of dominated peoples as well, showing a progression of ecofeminist thought with the changing social climate.

Atwood comes from a great tradition of environmental writers and, as a woman, her work consistently discusses feminist themes. However, much of Atwood's early writing does not attempt to combine the ideas of feminism and environmentalism, but instead treats them as two major, intersecting themes. The protagonists in both *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Bodily Harm* (1981), for instance, are females who "have accepted the morès of the twentieth-century consumer society and lived according to them, in many cases by directly serving that society" (Woodcock 15). The protagonists struggle with their jobs, relationships, and choices. Alongside this struggle they also witness abuse of the natural world. *Surfacing* is the exception. It uniquely connects the oppression of women and nature when its female character *becomes* nature. Through this perspective, *Surfacing* discusses pressing feminist and ecological issues and combines them through the eyes of the morphing narrator.

*Oryx and Crake* provides a picture of Atwood's ecofeminist growth thirty-one years after *Surfacing*. Quite a lot has changed. Atwood's protagonist is male, and her themes reflect less of the women's liberation sentiment of the 1970s and more of the nature versus technology rhetoric of contemporary ecofeminism. Contemporary or radical, Atwood's literary perspective has always been especially valuable for its personal and emotional reaction to all sorts of oppression. Atwood's contribution to ecofeminist literature has been her ability to show growth over a long and prolific period of writing during which she empowered many ecofeminist arguments. This joint analysis of Le Guin and Atwood examines the growth of the ecofeminist discussion from two of its

earliest literary contributors, so that we who are currently invested in contemporary ecofeminist studies may better understand its roots.

The first chapter analyzes Le Guin's earlier novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. I begin by examining the milieu of criticism discussing Le Guin's use of gender and the ways in which both the criticism and Le Guin have affected ecofeminist literature. In the novel, Genly Ai travels to Gethen, a world where the humans are neither male nor female, but rather they contain qualities of both genders. As I point out, the novel addresses with a wealth of topics beyond gender. Two of those topics that correspond with ecofeminism are ahistory and demilitarization. I examine Le Guin's innovative use of time and calendar to create a world without traditional history. The removal of androcentrism from history is an important motif in ecofeminism, which asserts that history should not be dominated by one culture's perspective. Without androcentrism, the Gethenians have yet to invent war. I also analyze the novel's anti-militarization rhetoric and explore the Gethenian's maldevelopment toward gender, history, and war.

In the second chapter, I examine the logic by which Le Guin links environmental sustainability and social equality as connected social movements in *The Dispossessed*. Shevek travels between his home, an ecofeminist utopia, and the pre-revolutionary planet in order to open communication between the two. Using this narrative, I examine Le Guin's treatment of dominance through the contrasting cultures' positions on possession and ownership. I also analyze how Le Guin uses the two societies' reactions to these dominance themes to justify or eradicate racism, classism, and sexism.

Departing from Le Guin, I focus on Atwood's *Surfacing* in chapter three. Because essentialism is such a large part of ecofeminist discourse, and because *Surfacing*

covers the debate best of all the books in this analysis, I use this chapter to explain and explore this broad topic. Atwood argues her anti-essentialist stance through otherization and anti-maternalism. I explore the way that these themes have grown in ecofeminism and how they are now at the heart of contemporary ecofeminism.

Finally, in chapter four, I discuss the ecofeminist perspectives on technology and ahistory in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Because *Oryx and Crake* was written three decades later than the previous three novels, this chapter also examines themes that have been present in ecofeminism from its beginnings and point out how they have changed with both ecofeminism and the political climate as well.

Ecofeminism has decried the logic of domination and encouraged a global ethic of care from the Vietnam War to the Iraq War times. Some would say not much has changed in the American political and social landscapes. Ecofeminism, which has only existed within this time frame, speaks to the contrary. From the seeds of a common need for social reform between feminist and ecological activism, ecofeminism has grown to purport and inextricable relationship between social equality and environmentalism. The following chapters seek to both further explain ecofeminist philosophy as well as chart its growth through time and literature. The various themes found in the selected novels by Le Guin and Atwood show how these authors continue to help conceptualize the goals of ecofeminism. In doing so, these authors reveal truths about humanity and our relationship with the earth that no amount of philosophical text alone could achieve alone.

## Chapter I

### On the Brink

*The Left Hand of Darkness* has been heavily analyzed for its gender-bending characters and scrutinized for Le Guin's use of masculine pronouns describing androgynous people, but criticism addressing other interesting aspects of the novel is lacking. While Le Guin's commentary on gender construction is thought provoking and relevant to the radical feminist movement, it is important not to overlook the novel's other dimensions. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is an ecofeminist novel and as such its thoroughly discussed gender criticism provides a window into Le Guin's commentary on domination and care. An androgynous world with no written history or war is certainly fodder for an ecofeminist analysis. Therefore, by taking an ecofeminist look into Le Guin's androgynous world (including the criticism thereof), we can also glean the formation of ecofeminist ideas on history, androcentrism, and militarization.

Because Le Guin wrote pre *eco-feminisme*, her ecofeminist themes are defined in terms of what they are not instead of what they are. Experimenting with gender constructs is central to the effectiveness of her commentary on other social constructs, especially that of domination. This experimental approach continues to differentiate Le Guin from other ecofeminist writers who have come after her. In a widely studied 1986 talk titled "Woman/Wilderness," Le Guin asserts that all knowledge is based on androcentric constructs, including our concepts of women and nature. She states,

The women are speaking ... And what they say is: We are sacred ...  
Listen: they do not say, "nature is sacred." Because they distrust that  
word, Nature. Nature as not including humanity, Nature as what is not

human, that Nature is a construct made by Man, not a real thing; just as most of what Man says and knows about women is mere myth and construct. Where I live as woman is to men a wilderness. But to me it is home. (162)

Le Guin's philosophy on domination begins with fear of the unknown. Androcentric societies readily link men with culture and women with nature because the latter two are outside of their frame of reference. Le Guin follows human fear of the unknown to its logical end, which is that that what we fear we attempt to control. In "Woman/Wilderness," Le Guin reiterates the very foundation of ecofeminism: that gender and nature are inextricably linked, and that the same logic of domination befalls them both. This understanding of domination extends all the way back to her 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

The discussion of dominance in *The Left Hand of Darkness* begins with gender. In arguing that Le Guin's use of gender bending lies within the greater context of ecofeminism, it is appropriate to begin by analyzing a few of the most common gender-identity readings of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The first is that Le Guin's ambitious invention of Gethen as an androgynous utopia is undercut by her use of masculine pronouns. As an unreliable narrator, Genly rationalizes his choice of using masculine pronouns in his report with the simple logic that he had been doing it subconsciously all along; no reason to stop now. He explains, "*man* I must say, having said *he* and *his*" (5). Some critics believe that these are Le Guin's reasons for not "inventing new words to accurately depict her vision of the androgyne" (LeFanu 115). However, an ecofeminist reading takes into account that this is Genly, the male protagonist, speaking—not Le

Guin—and that Genly comes from an androcentric society. Le Guin creates an imperial convoy so apparently male that the androgynous Gethenians have no other descriptor for him than Pervert. The story is told through his truth and as he states “truth is a matter of imagination” (1). As if to warn *you can take the man out of Terra but you can’t take Terra out of the man*, Genly explains in the beginning, “if the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you just choose the facts you like best” (2). For many critics, blaming *The Left Hand of Darkness*’s shortcomings, flaws and unexplained plot holes on Genly’s inadequacy as an intercultural reporter is too convenient, but concluding that Le Guin “could not conceive of Gethenian sexuality without first relegating her characters to male/female roles,” is too obtuse (LeFanu 117). A reader who misses that Genly is a flawed narrator literally interpreting an alien culture and language through his always-masculine lens is a reader who misses the point.

Another frequent criticism of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is that Le Guin’s treatment of characters, especially Estraven, denies that “androgyny can be seen as a space of resistance that redefines the ways in which gender identity is constructed” (Fayad 59). This vein of criticism focuses less on the idea that Le Guin does not employ enough creativity in the creation of these androgynous characters. The complaint about Estraven’s character is that he is composed of gendered pieces quilted together instead of a completely new gender. Of Le Guin’s choice in characterizing Estraven, critic Mona Fayad asks “can we move beyond androgyny as a mere merging of gender roles in a polarization of traditional oppositions (passive/ active, emotional/rational, left/right)?” (60). Critics in this line of thought feel that Le Guin did not utilize well-enough the creative space afforded by both science fiction and androgyny.

One instance wherein Estraven seems restrained by the male/female binary is his first meeting with Genly. Upon meeting Estraven, Genly notes, “Even in a bisexual society, the politician is very often something less than an integral man” (15). Estraven is at once the authoritative Prime Minister of Karhide and damned by Genly for his “effeminate deviousness” (14). Le Guin (or Genly) seems to fall into the trap of associating Estraven’s powerful characteristics with masculinity and his passive-aggressive characteristics with femininity. Critics like Fayad argue that a genderless world would not have these binary characteristics.

In answer to this critique, John Pennington suggests that “male and female readers cannot escape their own genders” and that *The Left Hand of Darkness* demands that “each reader must define his or her inner space where gender finds its own ideological space; the novel requires readers to resist a gendered reading of the narrative” (352). The pronoun critics reply that responsibility for flaws in the androgyny narrative too conveniently shifts away from Le Guin; this time the reader takes the charge. It is reasonable to make the author responsible for her work, but as Pennington asserts, “the text asks that both male and female readers become resisting readers, who must identify against their gendered selves and critique those stereotypes” (353). In the great tradition of science fiction, authors and readers alike are challenged by the composition of alternate realities. Perhaps Le Guin meant for readers to notice how unfitting masculine pronouns were on androgynous people and to account for the same kind of pronoun misuse in their own culture. Deconstructing gender through androgynous characters allows for many other constructs to come under question. This is, of course, Le Guin’s intent.

While one set of critics notes that Le Guin's "androgynous" characters default to masculinity, and another scoffs at the wasted creative freedom where androgyny is concerned, a third set asserts that her use of power struggles undermines the utopia. LeFanu praises the idea of an androgynous utopia for providing "a retreat from conflict, a retreat from the symbolic order and the construction of the subject within language, back to the pre-Oedipal imaginary order, or, as Frederic Jameson puts it, the ancient dream of Freedom from sex," but she disputes that Le Guin succeeds at creating this utopia (140). Fayad furthers the critique arguing that "Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance" (65). Those expecting Genly to stumble upon a true utopia and report an experience similar to William Weston's will be disappointed.

Particularly, this utopia falls apart as Genly becomes more sensitive to Gethenian power struggles. Estraven's indirect speech, the Gethenian value of saving face, and the recognition of social position and authority all grow from the Gethenian norm of *shifgrethor* which is, in itself, a power struggle. *Shifgrethor* performs as if the participants are trying to lower a very heavy piece of furniture to the ground in concert and each is overly careful not to disrupt the balance of weight (or power) so that they neither receive more or less of the burden than the others. *Shifgrethor*, however, is a superficial performance because underneath the appearance of equality exists an underlying hierarchy of social position and authority. Fayad disagrees that the novel's "purpose is to eliminate the 'struggle for dominance' through assimilation, and hence, by extension, through 'denying difference,'" and suggests that the novel can be read as "a parody of the patriarchal need for assimilation and sameness, one in which the male eye is incapable of seeing anything other than what it wishes to construct" (65). This idea of

the “male eye,” or masculine dominance, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* aligns with Le Guin’s ecofeminist perspective. The power struggles in *The Left Hand of Darkness* purposefully illustrate the destruction manifested by a logic of domination.

An ecofeminist reply to the novel’s gender criticism insists that Genly is a masculine interpreter, the reader is responsible for making his/her own critiques on gender construction, and that Gethen is an unraveling utopia wrought with power struggles. But a pure gender-reading of power struggles within *The Left Hand of Darkness* treats only one half of the novel’s whole commentary on dominance. This assertion calls back to Le Guin’s remark about the androcentric society’s determination to accept only what it constructs or controls. Remembering Le Guin’s words about dominant culture defining this dark, wild “other” as woman and nature, these terms become metaphors for all that is subject to an enduring dominant paradigm. With gender analysis more than sufficiently discussed, it is important to investigate power structures in the specific context of ecofeminism.

Along with subverting gender, *The Left Hand of Darkness* engages in several other tenets now part of ecofeminism, namely ahistory, demilitarization, and the ethic of care. The novel especially assumes ahistory as a key component of its ecofeminist utopia. On the rejection of history, ecofeminist writer Stephanie Lahar explains that history, dominated by androcentrism, justifies human “maldevelopment” in which humanity begins to commodify people and nature (7). For these maldeveloped cultures, ecofeminism prescribes ahistory, or the subversion of historical development that has led to domination. Ecofeminism posits that departing from a maldeveloped history is an

initial step toward subverting dominant power structures that have pursued the subjugation, control, and abuse of nature and people.

One prominent example of ahistory in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the Gethenian calendar. On Gethen, the year is always One. Genly reports, “Only the dating of every past and future year changes each New Year’s Day, as one counts backwards or forwards from the unitary Now” (2). The Gethenian relationship with time is expressly ecofeminist as they do not allow history to determine the present but instead change history each year as dictated by the present. Clearly, the past cannot be eradicated. Ahistory’s objective is to end cultural use of history as a moral compass with which the tradition of dominance is transmitted through generations of people. Without history, tradition cannot justify atrocity. Gender, for instance, is part of Genly’s socialization—his history and culture—and his perspective is relentlessly skewed by the trap of gender. As part of Le Guin’s thought experiment, departing from history and refuting gender are different means to the same end. Ahistory, however, treats an entire scope of subjugation including that of the environment instead of focusing solely on gender roles or the subjugation of women.

In Noel Sturgeon’s account of the first ecofeminist Nevada nuclear protests, she asserts that demilitarization was an impetus for merging environmentalism with feminism. As a founding ecofeminist objective, anti-militarism is a tell-tale sign of an ecofeminist utopia. Gethen fulfills this requirement because, as Genly clarifies, “I did not speak of war for a good reason; there’s no word for it in Karhidish” (35). The states of Gethen do not war with each other though they may not be especially friendly with each other either. Genly eventually realizes that Gethenian pacifism is a ruse. He notes,

Tibe evidently was going to press Karhide's claim to that region: precisely the kind of action which, on any other world at this stage of civilization would lead to war. But on Gethen nothing led to war. Quarrels, murders, feuds, forays, vendettas, assassinations, tortures and abominations, all these were in their repertory of human accomplishments; but they did not go to war. (48)

These alternatives to war are not ideal but the absence of war is essential to Gethenian philosophy. Genly's wry report of the war situation on Gethen criticizes the Gethenian's pretentiousness. Genly uses the past tense when he describes how the war situation "was" on Gethen because on Genly's first voyage Gethen had not yet militarized. This leads us to believe that his future knowledge of Gethenian political relations involves the innovation of war.

When Genly first arrives on Gethen it is an ecofeminist utopia that is just beginning to maldevelop. Genly notices that anti-militarization on Gethen may have more to do with convenience than with conscientious objection. Genly's race also refers to the planet Gethen as "Winter" because of the constant snow and cold weather. He hypothesizes that the snow and winter landscape, which create difficult transportation conditions year-round, has shaped the Gethenian people making them slow moving and careful. Genly reasons the Gethenians lack war because "they lack, it seemed, the capacity to *mobilize*" (49). Not only does the environment shape the Gethenian people and not the other way around, but the environmental conditions also lead to demilitarization. Christine Cornell suggests that as Genly forms these conclusions, he "begins to see that there is no final distinction between personal and political" (324). The

environment influences both the personal and political action on Gethen, which has yet to conceive of war, signifying an ecofeminist utopia.

While ahistory and demilitarization promote departure from the dominant tradition, the ethic of care encourages the creation of a more conscious human culture. This tenet of ecofeminism promotes a caring relationship between humans and the environment. One such relationship that exists within on Gethen is the landscape's impact on the Gethenian's vegetarian diet. On vegetarianism, Curtin argues, "The injunction to care...should be understood to include the injunction to eliminate suffering whenever possible" and notes that "in the case of killing animals for human consumption where there is choice, this practice inflicts pain that is completely unnecessary and avoidable" (76). The Gethenians have little choice in food because the wintry landscape makes farming difficult and much of the land unworkable. Even still, the Gethenians are vegetarian. Genly reports rather dismally that "there are no large meat-animals on Winter, and no mammalian products, milk, butter or cheese; the only high-protein, high-carbohydrate foods are the various kinds of eggs, fish, nuts and the Hainish grains" (10). Despite the harsh conditions of this planet, the Gethenians work with their land to farm as best they can, eating fish and eggs only when necessary. Although the Gethenian society has technological capabilities, Gethenian cars are all electric and slow moving. When there is much snow, there is little or no mobility. Genly notices that unlike back home on Terra, the Gethenians have never thought to mine or raid their planet for fossil fuels nor have they ever conceived of genetically altering their food for preservation. In relationship to the land, the disparity between Genly's home planet and Gethen is this

ethic of care, the consciousness and cultural decision to abstain from unnecessary destruction or suffering.

In 1978, Le Guin spoke at a Planned Parenthood symposium on the topic of “Moral and Ethical Implications of Family Planning.” The insight she offers is this: “The survival of our species and of all higher forms of life on the planet now depends primarily and, as I understand it, very urgently on the limitation of the human population” (18). In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin reiterates that the human population exacerbates the destruction of both human and non-human life. Gethen is not perfect and is becoming less so all the time. However, Le Guin stresses that its utopian aspects develop from limitations on the Gethenian destruction of land and people. The ecofeminist utopia she creates on Gethen illustrates the development of a human culture that has made many ethical decisions regarding the environment but that has begun to maldevelop in the treatment of its people. Ecofeminism maintains that the relationship between the dominant group and the environment and the relationship between the dominant group and its people are one and the same; when one relationship goes awry, so will the other. For Gethenians, this means that once they create war, the destruction of their environment will follow.

Gethen, then, is an allegoric semi-utopia, bridging many facets of feminism and environmentalism but is still far from ideal. In her essay “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics,” Stephanie Lahar appreciates the enormity of the ecofeminist challenge. She notes, “Ecofeminism makes such big promises! The convergence of ecology and feminism in to a new social theory and political movement challenges gender relations, social institutions, economic systems, science, and views of our place as

humans in the biosphere” (1). *The Left Hand of Darkness* sheds light on each of these topics and warns that the delicate balance of humanity’s relationship with the environment relies on human consciousness.

## Chapter II

### Revolution into Being

In the five years between *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), cultural feminists continued to combine environmental ethics with feminist issues of social equality. By 1974, anti-militarist sentiments were beginning to peak in the American public as the Vietnam War approval rating approached an all-time low. Reflecting the quickening momentum of these social currents, Ursula K. Le Guin creates another unraveling utopia with *The Dispossessed*. This novel upholds the same principles of gender, demilitarization, and sustainable living as *The Left Hand of Darkness*, but this time it emphasizes human nature as the impetus for social maldevelopment. *The Dispossessed* is the story of two worlds of dueling ideas and lifestyles. However, rather than contrasting a utopia and dystopia, a formula familiar to the science fiction genre, Le Guin refutes the idea of true utopia. The novel shows that the human habits of ownership, excess, and domination can at best lead to “an ambiguous utopia.”

*The Dispossessed* reveals a growth and balance in Le Guin’s ecofeminist writing as well as illustrates ecofeminism’s emergence as its own philosophy instead of two separate but complimentary movements. By telling the story of an ecofeminist utopia gone complacent, Le Guin illustrates that sustainability requires constant revolution against those characteristics of the human race that tend toward possession, domination, and waste. While reinforcing the idea that environmentalism and feminism are inextricably linked, Le Guin composes two contrasting social worlds whose tragic flaw is humanity.

*The Dispossessed* follows Shevek, a physicist, whose scientific ambitions prompt him to open travel between Annares and Urras for the first time in over two hundred years. Le Guin's ecofeminist commentary arises from Shevek's account of the contrast between Annares' cooperative anarchy and Urras' patriarchal autocracy. Shevek's home, Annares, is the moon of the planet Urras and hosts an experimental, revolutionary society of Odonians. The Odonians' fabled leader Odo united the labor class on Urras with her anarchist writings, and led a revolution which resulted in a mass exodus to the moon, where the Odonians work and live according her teachings. Like on Gethen, much of the Annaresti utopia is superficial but began with good intentions. Shevek realizes that many of the Urrasti maldevelopments such as ownership, classism, and waste are beginning to emerge on Annares. Le Guin argues that these maldevelopments grow from the logic of domination, which is inherent in human nature. For Le Guin, wherever humans are present, there can be no utopia.

Domination is a major theme in the novel involving motifs of property, ownership, language, and identity. Through Le Guin's insistence that dominance is part of human nature, humans on both worlds come to identify themselves by what they own and what they control. *The Dispossessed* derives its title from the concept of property. It is a title that summons visions of the ideal Odonian society—one without property or ego. Because the Odonians boycotted ownership they derisively refer to the Urrasti as "propertarians." When Shevek first discusses women with a group of Urrasti men, they are appalled to learn that the Odonian society practices gender equality. Shevek determines that their disgust also carries animosity but decides that "[h]e had no right to tease them," for "[t]hey knew no relation but possession. They were possessed" (75).

However, Shevek becomes the real subject of this novel's title when he loses citizenship on Annares and is received as an outsider on Urras. Once he truly has nothing, he begins to fully understand Odonianism and the importance of revolution. Le Guin emphasizes that we do not recognize the destructive quality of dominance until we are affected by it.

Le Guin illustrates that dominance is instinctual and that humans must systematically unlearn it in order to achieve equality. On Annares, there is no concept of property or money. All necessities are shared and administered by the Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC), which is the institution most closely resembling a formal government. Shevek later describes the PDC to the Urrasti as "a coordinating system for all syndicates, federatives, and individuals who do productive work. They do not govern persons; they administer production" (76). Susan Storing Benfield notes that "Le Guin provides a vivid picture of those aspects of human nature that create hierarchies and bureaucracies even in the absence of formal government" (128). When Shevek is an infant, he has an altercation with another child who wants to sit where he is sitting. Shevek protests and shouts "Mine!" The caretaker explains to him, "It's not yours ... Nothing is yours. It is to use" (27). Le Guin takes great care to communicate that there is no need for corruption on Annares because there is no money, property and no formal power. The PDC's main function on Annares is providing necessities for the people and appointing jobs. All work on Annares is voluntary and everyone receives the same amount of food and clothing, the same kind of domicile, and the same amount of bedding. That the people of Annares begin to fail their Odonian ideals of equality and community can only be the fault of those who participate in the community.

Along with asserting that dominance is tied to human instinct, *The Dispossessed* follows the logic that ownership and control are at the heart of human motivation. Le Guin argues that it is human habit to want to own, dominate, and destroy. The choices that the Annaresti make which lead them further from Odonianism are the same choices that Le Guin recognizes in American society. Odo, a woman who saw the need to end the dominance of the “propertied” class and to live in cooperation with the earth and produce as little waste as possible, espoused a philosophy that is parallel to contemporary ecofeminism. Le Guin creates Odo as a legendary figure who now represents a utopia unto herself, someone who made the right choices. Of human motivation Odo wrote, “A child free from the guilt of ownership and the burden of economic competition will grow up with the will to do what needs doing and the capacity for joy in doing it. It is useless work that darkens the heart” (247). Since all possible necessities are provided by the PDC, all work is voluntary and there is no concept of money. According to Benfield, Le Guin “points out how narrow and incomplete our usual views of human motivation may be” (128). We assume that humans want to own things and will work hard to earn money to buy things. However, Le Guin argues that without ownership human motivation changes from a dominating and destructive logic to one that embraces community and the greater good.

Le Guin also comments on how language constructs reality, an issue discussed by radical feminists who believe that defaulting to masculine pronouns helps create an androcentric culture. In *The Dispossessed*, the absence of possessive pronouns in Odonian speech shows a conscious effort to eradicate the concepts of property from Odonian culture. When Shevek is an infant, his caretakers refer to “the mother” instead

of “his mother” and this same trend continues throughout Shevek’s account of Annares (28). It takes only a few months of life on Urras, a world of ownership and laws, thieves and crime, before Shevek speaks the Iotic language with skill. Shevek notes that he “is accustomed to the constant use of the possessive pronoun by now, and spoke it without self-consciousness” (134). After Shevek reflects on his life back on Annares, he becomes physically ill with disgust at the ease with which he adjusts to life on Urras, the economy, the idea of property, and the use of possessive pronouns. *The Dispossessed* emphasizes that the subtle aspects of culture, such as the structure of language, steep humans in cultural norms so that we often fail to question if such norms are ethical.

The Annaresti try to discourage self identification through ownership, but inevitably, human nature begins to unravel the communal system of shared property. During his last years of school, Shevek writes a book on the Simultaneity Principle, a very complex perspective of the time-space relationship understandable only to Shevek, a physics genius. In Shevek’s first encounter with betrayal, his mentor, Sabul, puts his name on the book and postures as if the ideas were his own. When Shevek confronts Sabul about this betrayal, Sabul accuses him of “egoizing” and argues that what is important is the contribution of the ideas to the community instead of whose ideas they are. Shevek conceded without rebutting that if Sabul believed what he said, then he would not have troubled to put his name on the book. Sabul is Shevek’s main source of distress on Annares and symbolizes the way in which the Odonians’ informal power structures are becoming corrupt. Shevek does not want to own his idea of simultaneity; however, he does not think it is right that some one else should claim it either. This conflict opens Shevek’s eyes to other power struggles developing in the PDC. As power

and coercion become realities in Odonian society for the first time, Shevek reaches out to the Urrasti where he can do physics without bureaucratic interference. There he will learn identity through ownership.

*The Dispossessed* also analyzes the ways that the logic of domination justifies sexism and classism. Ecofeminist essayists Karen Warren and Jim Cheney explain that “[e]cological feminism is a feminism which attempts to unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement in order to bring about a world and worldview that are not based on socioeconomic and conceptual structures of domination” (244). Since contemporary ecofeminism focuses on equality for all people, a shift away from the focus on equality for women of early ecofeminism, Le Guin’s portrait of Urrasti classism and environmental destruction anticipates the future tenets of this philosophy.

Le Guin’s discussion of subjugated groups involves both women and the labor class. Shevek’s first encounter with inequality is to the detriment of Urrasti women. The first Urrasti Shevek meets are a group of fellow scientists—all male. Shevek dines with them and their wives at an enormous party during which Shevek naively asks “where are other women?” (73). A helpful Urrasti scientist says “[j]ust tell us your preferences. Nothing could be simpler to provide.” Shevek remains unaware that the men are offering him a prostitute, having no reference for the concept, and presses on: “Are all the scientists here men, then?” Incredulity and coughing ensues. Pae, another helpful Urrasti, explains that all of the scientists on Urras are men because the women “can’t do the math,” have “no head for abstract thought,” and “don’t belong.” He even goes as far as to joke “what women call thinking is done with the uterus” but admits that “there’s

always a few exceptions, God-awful brainy women with vaginal atrophy” (73-74). This is Shevek’s first encounter with constructions of gender differences and sexism.

Shevek’s personal history with women has taught him that they are not inferior as the Urrasti believe. His mother and partner are both brilliant women and top performers in their respective scientific fields. Shevek’s earliest mentor and the most prolific, revered Annaresti physicist is a woman whose work the Urrasti scientists have all studied. When Shevek points this out, the Urrasti scientists are genuinely surprised. Finally Shevek states the obvious difference between his culture and theirs: “Odo was a woman” (74). At this, the discussion fizzles. Shevek begins to ponder what kind of people these must be that do not allow women certain lifestyles or choices. Daniel Sabia writes that Le Guin’s motive in this particular dialog is to establish immediately Urras as a maldeveloping society. He writes,

Hence, social survival and well-being require individual well-being; any decent social order must promote the overall development of individuals, and must encourage and protect their freedom, so they can thrive and contribute to society, fulfill social functions, initiate needed action, and innovate and take risks when opportunities and dangers appear. (192)

The kind of unexamined thought and denial of women’s autonomy displayed by the Urrasti not only bodes poorly for the future of Urras but also indicates that these well-meaning men are potentially dangerous. Le Guin speaks the danger of sexism in her 1982 keynote address to an abortion rights conference. She reasons that anti-abortion people are not pro-life but rather pro-control over women and that this control prevents women from functioning as autonomous individuals. About her own illegal abortion she resolves,

“I did what I had to do so that I could do the work I was put here to do” (“The Princess” 78). Le Guin’s criticism of Urrasti life comes from the belief that prevention of autonomy is a sign of a destructive society.

Although startling initially, Shevek soon finds the class systems he encounters on Urras are easy for him to accept—as long as he remains in favor with those in power. Amidst the parties, the servants, and the property, Shevek realizes that the real motive behind the kindness of his hosts is that they are using him for his knowledge of the Simultaneity Principle. He is disgusted and ashamed that he has been a participating in his own abuse. Shevek seeks out an underground organization of dissenters in the Urrasti labor class. He finds that the revolutionary organization has been rejoicing his arrival to Urras and sees him as a sign that another revolution is near. Shevek is humbled that he symbolizes to them what he nearly forgot he was. This illustration of Shevek’s unwitting participation in hegemony exposes human nature’s tendency to engage in oppression.

Earlier, on Annares, Shevek feels the instinctual power of dominance when he first sees his newborn daughter. He examines her, small and defenseless, and “knew consciously, as he had not done before what the attraction of cruelty is, why the strong torment the weak” (361). Le Guin stresses that the capacity for cruelty is a human one. Shevek loves his daughter *and* is aware of his power over her. It does not matter whether Shevek is a Urrasti or an Odonian; cruelty and oppression are human tendencies that we must work against.

*The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* both attempt to awaken their readers to the disastrous realities of our current relationship with the earth and the environment. In both novels, Le Guin makes ecological sustainability part of the culture

inhabiting her utopias. In one of his essays, Werner Christine Mathisen analyzes the eco-politics within Huxley's *The Island*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. He criticizes these authors for failing to detail what a ecological utopian government might look like. In spite of this criticism, Mathisen agrees with Le Guin's approach in creating Annares. He writes, "If the goal is to alter culture in a certain direction, then the medium of that transformation is culture itself. Thus we should learn more about the social conditions and the cultural institutions in these three utopias" (59). Le Guin does not aim to reinvent government; in fact, the Annaresti do their best to abstain from government. What Le Guin does well is target dominant culture as the institution deserving change and then conceptualizes her vision of an alternate, hopefully improved culture. The result is a semi-utopia whose mistakes and achievements are well conjectured and worth learning from.

In matters of environmental sustainability, the Urrasti and Odonian cultures differ most in their production of waste. Conservation is a fundamental characteristic of Odonianism and is likely a reaction to the flagrant wastefulness of Urrasti culture. After the revolution, the Odonians migrated to Annares and began to live out their ideals of equality and sustainability, working *with* their new world instead of against it. In Odo's manifesto, she wrote "Excess is excrement ... Excrement retained in the body is a poison" (98). "Excess is excrement" became the motto for the Odonian way of life. The sterile moon on which the Odonians live gives them little opportunity for excess. Annares is a bleak desert land with no naturally occurring life except for small aquatic creatures surviving in the extremely salty oceans. This is one reason the Odonians keep a vegetarian diet. Aside from pure utility, "strong social conscience functions as an

effective impediment to wasteful consumptions, and the people of Annares react against waste not only for ecological reasons” (Mathisen 64). They cannot afford to waste anything because the land produces very little; therefore, everything they make is reusable. If an Odonian has an extra blanket or piece of clothing, he or she will give it back to the PDC so that the item can be redistributed to someone who needs it. They have effectively eliminated all means of waste.

Shevek notices the Urrasti relationship with waste aligns with their system of ethics. He first encounters trash when he is on the Urrasti spaceship enroute to Urras. The doctor attending to him throws away a piece of paper and Shevek asks, “What happens to the paper?” (12). The doctor answers, “Disposal, it gets burned up.” Shevek is flabbergasted. He confirms, “you *burn* paper?” In all of Shevek’s thirty years he has never seen anything *disposed* of. Towards the end of his visit on Urras, Shevek meets a Terran whose description of Terran culture is very similar to American culture. Currently, however, he says “There are no forests left on my earth. The air is grey, the sky is grey, it is always hot... You Odonians chose a desert, we Terrans made a desert...” (348). They discuss Urras’s equally dismal future alluding to such ecological stressors as air pollution, overpopulation, and the devastation of eco-systems. Shevek muses that the common thread between Terrans and the Urrasti is their cultures’ relationship to property and waste. On Urras ownership leads to dominance and dominance leads to waste. According to Le Guin’s ecofeminist commentary, any exertion of power of one group over another will lead to waste and abuse.

At the aforementioned science fiction symposium in 1981, Le Guin asserted that “[c]onquest is not finding and it is not thinking. Our culture, which conquered what is

called the New World, and which sees the world of nature as an adversary to be conquered: look at us now. Running out of everything” (“World-Making” 47). Le Guin expresses the ecological and social implications derived from human nature’s patterns of domination. Through Shevek’s critique of Annaresti society, she asks that we, too, examine our own cultural history and remain vigilant. If we can understand that we are the participants in our own social maldevelopment, then we can also understand that the next step is reformation.

In our case, Le Guin does not recommend the overthrow of our governing institutions. The revolution she means for us is internal and individual. On Urras, Shevek attends a museum with a newly acquired friend, Vea. While admiring the artifacts of Queen Teaea, Vea “raises the important issue of internal versus external restraints on freedom” (Benfield 130). According to Queen Teaea’s legend, she lives as a tyrant inside the heads of her citizens. Vea compares Shevek to one of Queen Teaea’s serfs because he acts morally without any lawful obligation to do so. Shevek jokes that Queen Teaea belongs in his head, to which Vea insists that it is better to have her in a physical palace where he can rebel against her. As an Odonian, Shevek knows that rebellion against the “tyrants” in our minds is the true victory.

Le Guin insists that this rebellion must be ongoing. When a mass of protestors surround Shevek, he is moved by their passion and agrees to give a speech in which he says, “You cannot take what you have not given and you must give yourself. You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit or it is nowhere” (310). According to Le Guin, it is not within our nature to want to share, preserve, or sacrifice. The logic of domination is cultural and historical.

If it was a survival instinct that instilled selfishness and brutality in our nature, then ecofeminism asserts it is for our survival that we must fight against these qualities now.

### Chapter III

#### One and the Other

Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood produced their significant early works just as ecofeminism began to emerge as a social movement drawing participants to academic conferences throughout the country. The publication of *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), helped distinguish Le Guin as a writer who incorporates critical theory into her novels by challenging the power roles of government and gender. Her later exploration of classism and property as themes of dominance in *The Dispossessed* (1974) shows the quickening social current of ecofeminism in the four years between these novels. In 1972, Margaret Atwood published her second novel *Surfacing*, which placed her in the company of Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker and others who were also working to combine environmentalist and feminist thought in fiction. *Surfacing*, a title which seems to describe the building up or converging of these two movements, is noted by literary critic George Woodcock as “the first successful novel of a writer who ... seemed destined to become a leader of the generation of young and talented writers emerging during the early 1970s” (14). Along with its undeniable significance in Atwood’s career, *Surfacing* also signifies the development of the emotional and personal impetuses behind ecofeminism.

*Surfacing* departs from the science fiction convention used by Le Guin of creating new worlds meant for critical comparison to our own world. However, its approach to ecofeminism matches Le Guin’s use of utopias and dystopias, which less ambiguously note the wrong and the right paths of cultural development. Later, in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), Atwood uses the science fiction and utopian genres to discuss a much

advanced ecofeminism in a way that calls back to *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. Uniquely, *Surfacing* captures a pre-science fiction Atwood treating themes of environmentalism and feminism in a refreshingly emotional voice that prompts its readers to adopt the logic of care. If *Surfacing* does not match Le Guin's works in genre, it certainly does in theme. Before *Surfacing*, Atwood published several volumes of poetry as well as her first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), which explores the psyche of a woman who empathizes with her food and feels that to men, she is a dominated cut of meat. In this, her first novel, Atwood explores the social station of women and compares the pursuing, containing, and killing of animals to the pursuing, obtaining, and degradation of women. In *Edible Woman*, Atwood examines the negative perspectives of women that arise from upholding this theme of woman as nature. *Surfacing* takes woman as nature to the next level, examining woman as *other* and the harmful social ramifications that are the results of designating a weaker sex. The novel also heavily contemplates dialectical ecofeminism, which argues that to subvert dominance is to deny essentialism. Finally, the novel posits that women's link to nature is not inherent maternalism but rather the fulfillment of the caretaker role and recognition that human fate is tied to the earth's. Because *Surfacing* examines some of the founding themes upon which ecofeminist rhetoric still grows, this analysis sheds light on Atwood's development as an ecofeminist thinker and helps elucidate literature's contribution to the burgeoning and continuation of this philosophy.

Simply, *Surfacing* is about essentialism: what women are and what they are not. One of the biggest criticisms of cultural feminism is its proliferation of essentialist arguments about the nature of women. In its attempts to release women from roles

determined for them by patriarchal society, cultural feminism risks containing women in another box with other labels and other specified roles. The feminist goal is to not pigeon-hole or label anybody. In a sense, “[cultural feminists] avoid biological determinism but fall into the trap of ‘sociological determinism,’” which may be even harder to escape (MacGregor 7). Contemporary ecofeminism, which grew alongside the postmodern feminism of the 1990s, now widely contends that essentialist arguments are detrimental to ecofeminist goals. Margaret Atwood has this same premonition thirty years earlier. Atwood’s exploration of woman as other is a reaction to the patriarchal and time-honored comparisons of women and nature that suggest both are inhuman and therefore impotent. Le Guin also incorporates woman as other in *The Left Hand of Darkness* through Genly Ai’s reflexive distrust of Estraven’s feminine side. Clearly Genly comes from a patriarchal society that others women and views them as untrustworthy. Unlike Atwood, Le Guin’s critique on the social othering of women ends after making the point that the practice is used to justify abuse. In *Surfacing*, Atwood writes from the perspective of a woman who is isolated by that presence of patriarchy and is experiencing the emotional trauma of othering. She is caught in the basic social trap of essentialism as used by masculine consciousness: the two-level hierarchy separating the patriarch at the top with everything else, or the “other,” beneath him.

The anti-essentialism in *Surfacing* makes the point that any label placing women outside of the realm of empowerment, whether the label is mother, artist, feminist, or professional, is limiting; to be allowed only one role in a sea of inferior roles is degradation. Atwood begins the motif of woman as other by choosing to leave her protagonist unnamed. As promised by this motif, much of the character’s anxiety is

brought on by her refusal to meet the expectations of the men in her life. As the plot reveals, traditionally “masculine consciousness denigrated and manipulated everything defined as ‘other’ whether nature, women, or Third World cultures” (Diamond and Orenstein *x*). The protagonist discovers that designating the “other” is a large part of the dominant culture’s power. The novel opens *in media res*. The protagonist is in a car with her friends—her boyfriend Joe and a married couple, David and Anna. They are leaving Toronto and heading toward backwoods Quebec to the isolated island home where the narrator grew up. This exodus from big-city life provides the characteristically ecofeminist comparison of two worlds. On this vacation with her friends, the narrator hopes to find her missing father and recover the part of herself she lost to urban life. She finds that the patriarchal interactions within the group are out of place on land that she associates with environmental cooperation and sustainable living.

David is an example of a patriarch who has established the “original” hierarchy, othering his wife, the narrator, and the primitive habitat they are visiting. Atwood’s rhetoric is anti-essentialist in painting David as a ridiculous, awkward character who is entirely convinced of his role as natural dominator. The marriage between Anna and David is its own microcosm in which the severity of the power relationship and domination of Anna disgusts the on-looking narrator. Anna discloses that David has never seen her without make-up, cheats on her, and forces her to take birth control pills. David punishes Anna through sex either by abstaining or by engaging in violent intercourse. On this Anna says, “He’s got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I’m never sure” (123). David confronts the narrator with his misogyny in an awkward proposition for sex. When she declines by

saying “you don’t turn me on,” he loses his poise and calls her a “tight-assed bitch” (153). Immediately she notes, “power flowed into my eyes.” At David’s outburst, the narrator is able to see clearly his charade of power. It comes as no surprise that David has the same attitude toward nature that he has toward women. He wants to hunt and fish, which are acts of dominance, but does not know how to turn his kill into food, which is an act of sustainability. With the narrator’s help, David is able to catch a fish on his line but then asks the narrator to kill it. The narrator prepares the fish as food so that she does not feel guilty for its death. While David may be convinced of man’s biologically determined superiority in his male-dominated urban habitat, his true impotency is revealed after only a couple of days in nature.

The protagonist refuses to laugh at David’s jokes or play along with the generally oppressive norms of the group. As a result the group, ostensibly lead by David, designates the protagonist as other. They do not help her with cooking, cleaning, gathering logs for the fire or any of the set-up and pick-up when the group goes camping. No other member of the party offers to help and perhaps it does not even occur to them that it is not the protagonist’s duty to serve them. As she rises early and begins to prepare for the day, the protagonist notes “I carry the food inside and start the breakfast. Joe and David are up, Joe is sitting on the wall bench, face still fuzzy with sleep, David examining his chin in the mirror” (41). She does not ask her friends to help or enter into a dialogue about her feelings. Canadian literary scholar Ged Martin surmises that “[t]he narrator does not perceive herself as an agent of action, but as a survivor, a victim” (108). She has survived a coerced abortion and an abusive marriage and now feels victimized by her role as other. She feels paralyzed in this role and so does not actively fight her

oppression. At dinner, after the narrator turns down David's proposition, he accuses her of hating men, stating "[e]ither that or she wants to be one. Right?" (155). The narrator does not answer David's with-us-or-against-us ultimatum. Anna seems to answer for her, saying "God, she really is inhuman." Anna, a victim herself, betrays the sisterhood between the women and completes the othering of the narrator, ultimately supporting David's hegemony.

Atwood uses the woman-as-nature theme in a couple of different ways. The first way argues that the identification of woman as nature is not necessarily productive to the ecofeminist cause, and the second way examines women as earthly caretakers. The latter will be discussed later in this analysis. Woman as other grew from woman as nature, a common cultural construct in masculine consciousness. The protagonist's identification with nature goes beyond fulfilling a time-honored stereotype of gender identity and explores how the grouping of woman and nature is detrimental to women's place in society as well as the environment's place in politics. Because the protagonist grew up in the remote, woodsy setting of this novel, she identifies with it as family and feels responsible for protecting it. As she is increasingly disturbed by her friends' presence at her childhood home, she begins to physically identify with nature. While walking outside at night, the protagonist muses "[m]y tentacled feet and free hand scent out the way, shoes are a barrier between touch and earth" (165). Some critics suggest that "because the body becomes a site of subjection for women, Atwoodian heroines experience a strong sense of unease about the body" and feel relieved to deny masculinity by identifying with a traditionally feminine concept (Parker 368). While some cultural feminist readings of *Surfacing* insist that "this [thinking] implies a rejection of

masculinity incorporating reason, discourse, culture, and the mind, and an affirmation of femininity as the locus of irrationality, silence, nature and the body” (Ozdemir 66), contemporary ecofeminists argue that the association is not productive. Espousing a connection between the domination of women and nature is not the same as *identifying* woman as nature. The latter others her as a non-participant in culture and society. When the protagonist does not find solace in her new identity, she becomes mad with desperation, belonging nowhere. *Surfacing* shows how woman as nature is a weighty part of cultural feminism’s essentialist problems and illustrates how woman as nature does not hold a glorious Gaia-esque identity but rather re-establishes woman as other.

One solution to essentialism is role negotiation. Dialectical ecofeminism is an anti-essentialist perspective that views people as holders of multiple, simultaneous, and often opposing roles. For ecofeminism this means that instead of trapping women into identification with nature so that they forfeit any possible footing in society, people must try to move away from the idea of hard-set dualities. Diamond and Orenstein insist that “[o]nce the critique of such dualities as culture and nature, reason and emotion, human and animal has been posed, ecofeminism seeks to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life” (xi). Although dialectical ecofeminism as a widely discussed presence is relatively recent, first discussed in essays in the early 1990s, Atwood’s knack for predicting the future rhetoric of the movement does not falter here. The protagonist in *Surfacing* juggles multiple roles unsuccessfully either because masculine society does not allow her to assume more than one role at once, or because it does not allow her to have two “opposing” roles.

Atwood raises the question, as the narrator psychologically changes into an animal, is she *changing* or simply recognizing a deeper part of herself? Fiona Tolan's dialectical ecofeminist reading of the narrator's transformation suggests that "[i]n relinquishing her victimhood, the system of irreconcilable opposites that she has set up offers aggression as the only alternative ... the narrator recoils from humanity ... and is faced with the uncomfortable fact of her own capacity for human destruction" (110-111). The narrator is at once woman, human, and animal. She attempts to reconcile these roles by imploring Joe, her nice-enough boyfriend, to become an animal with her. Joe is quiet and sad throughout the vacation because the protagonist will not return his declaration of love. As she slips into this Gaia persona, she is only able to make love to Joe one night when she pulls him out of the cabin and feels his "fur" in the dark and imagines that they are both animals. She thinks, "He needs to grow more fur" (164). When Joe tells her he loves her, she tells herself, "he's holding back, he wants to be like the city, baroque scrollwork, intricate as a computer, but I'm impatient, pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure" (165). That the narrator is unable to find peace holding multiple roles is a result of masculine society's refusal to acknowledge them. Masculine consciousness's ability to accept or deny any claim as reality is an ostensible use of its power as the dominant culture.

The protagonist's dialectical personality confuses some critics about why she refuses to confront her oppressors. Most notably, Ozdemir points out that "[p]ower relations between men and women in Atwood's writing, particularly in *Surfacing*, are an ambiguous theme because her heroines are never totally innocent or helpless victims in the hands of male oppressors" (63). The motif of silence *Surfacing* at once isolates and

further oppresses the protagonist, who refuses to answer or object when her male companions are taunting her or making lewd comments to Anna. Particularly asinine is the scene in which David tells Anna to take off her clothes for the movie the men are filming. Anna refuses and David says “just take it off like a good girl, or I’ll have to take it off for you” (136). When David threatens to throw Anna into the lake she agrees to take off her bathing suit. Once stripped, Anna jumps into the lake by herself. David asks Joe if he was able to get Anna’s nudity on camera and Joe, perhaps sarcastic or perhaps not, replies “[m]aybe you could order her to do it again” (137). Joe is a character who recognizes the harm of the patriarchy but is too socially brainwashed to do anything to change it. The protagonist, on the other hand, silently watched this entire scene from the porch and—although it made her furious—did not defend Anna or confront the men about it.

Dialectical ecofeminism argues that nothing is black and white. Living in a society that relies on dualities is dangerous because this logic does not allow us to understand the nature of being. Perhaps the protagonist’s struggles mirror Atwood’s own. Tolan writes that “Atwood charges both feminists and Canadians with perpetuating their victim status, yet struggles to reconcile her instinctual liberalism with a simultaneous belief in communal guilt and mutual responsibility” (105). Atwood sees the essentialist mistakes in cultural feminism as harmful to the goals of equality but also understands that placing blame can be just as unproductive. The protagonist must have these diverging traits—intelligence and impotence, sensitivity and dispassion—for Atwood to accurately depict the inward struggles and choices that give both men and women their autonomy.

Like Atwood, the protagonist confronts blame, which seems a necessity in every solution but which also has harmful essentialist tendencies. The protagonist tries to assess why David and Anna are still together even though they appear to loathe each other. She says, “I remember what Anna had said about emotional commitments: they’ve made one, I thought, they hate each other; that must be almost as absorbing as love” (139). The protagonist does not blame Anna for her complacency because she is also dealing with her own. One of the most difficult qualities to understand about the protagonist is that she both sees the oppression and plays into the hegemony with her silence. Although at times this combination can be unnerving to readers, it also helps depict the protagonist as a true-to-life character. Anna betrays the protagonist multiple times throughout the novel, sleeping with Joe and telling the men that the protagonist damaged their film equipment, but the protagonist does not pass judgment on Anna because then she would also have to judge herself. Dialectical ecofeminism assumes that all people contain what masculine society has called “opposite” traits. Without the pressure of labels and the pressure to comply with one role at a time, dialectical ecofeminism allows failure, education, and progress, understanding that for a social movement and philosophy to work it must account for human nature, which is many things at the same time.

A final theme in *Surfacing* is the rejection of maternalism. At times throughout the novel, the protagonist feels guilty about her abortion but reasons that because she was coerced into the relationship and pregnancy by a man she did not love, the fetus was not really hers. She muses, “[l]eaving my child, that was the unpardonable sin; it was no use trying to explain to them why it wasn’t really mine. But I admit I was stupid, stupidity is

the same as evil if you judge by the results, and I didn't have any excuses, I was never good at them" (25). Following the anti-essentialist trend of the novel, anti-maternalism explores the role of the heroine who rejects the feminine role of mother and instead takes an unexpected route to ecofeminism. As noted in the introduction, there are three different strains of ecofeminism. The protagonist appeals to the third strain, which purports "the perspective of indigenous peoples, whose connection to native lands is essential to their being and identity, it is both true that the earth has intrinsic value and that we are also dependent on her" (Diamond and Orenstein *xii*). This perspective, which is the most contemporary of the three strains, combines the first two—intrinsic value and earthly dependence—to make one dialectical perspective.

The protagonist rejects motherhood but remains an earthly caretaker. This representation of dialectical ecofeminism suggests that while only women can give birth, both women and men can be caretakers. This is an important tenet to develop in ecofeminist thought which seeks to convince humankind that all people are equal and equally indebted to the earth. In the introduction to her book, *Beyond Mothering Earth*, ecofeminist researcher and political scientist Sherylin MacGregor writes,

[a]ware that charges of essentialism have long undermined ecofeminism, these theorists emphasize that the link they make is a socio-material and experiential one: women's mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a *caring stance* towards nature. This rhetoric of "ecomaternalism," as I call it, is pervasive in much of the contemporary ecofeminist discourse. (4)

The argument that women's main connection to ecofeminism is motherhood is to place women back into the bonds of biological reductionism, wherein they are considered birthing mechanisms instead of whole persons. It is an important consistency in Atwood's dialectical ecofeminist perspective that the protagonist rejects motherhood but retains the logic of care. Perhaps the protagonist's only activism is caring for the earth. After David catches a fish, the protagonist secretly releases the frogs (their bait) into the lake. She explains, "they slipped into the water, green with black leopard spots and gold eyes, rescued" (121). That the protagonist never verbally or physically defends herself against the presence of dominance but suddenly animates when nature is threatened reveals a genderless, parental altruism toward the environment.

While white Canadians are clearly not indigenous peoples, Canadian literature and culture professes they are humans who identify with the land and who have a will to protect it. The development of this nationalistic, environmental pride may be due to Canada's relatively peaceful history and long experience with British colonial domination (Wright). The protagonist feels akin with the land she knew as a child and feels that masculine socialization has taken her away from her original identity. Upon returning home for the first time in over a decade, the protagonist studies the land, garden, and wooden cottage as if rediscovering something she had forgotten about herself. She traces the trails she traversed as a child, digs in the soil of her father's garden and looks at her reflection in the lake. Her indigenous peoples' approach to ecofeminism is challenged when she encounters two men who she assumes are American because of their new fishing gear and shiny canoe that to her make it obvious they are catching illegal fish. When on a later encounter they reveal that they are from Toronto, the protagonist thinks

to herself “[t]hey are still Americans” (123). This is a turning point in the protagonist’s consciousness. She is unable to believe that these men can be both Canadian *and* destructive, although she only needs to look at her current company to establish this.

The protagonist’s failure to keep a dialectical perspective that allows multiple roles and identities thwarts her ecofeminist journey. Her judgment on the fishermen places her at an impasse with her life as a human who is at once capable of caregiving and destruction. In a maddened attempt to deny the guilt of her humanity, she begins to psychologically transform into an animal. Clearly going mad, the narrator describes her imaginary physical transformation: “[s]omething has happened to my eyes, my feet are released, they alternate, several inches from the ground. I’m ice-clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh, the ribs are shadows, the muscles jelly...” (187). This transformation is a contradiction to the anti-essentialism found earlier in the text. Whereas before the transformation she denies the masculine culture which identifies her as mother and nature, during the transformation she surrenders, running unintentionally back into the braces of the dominant paradigm. Of this capitulation Tolan writes, “[w]hen the narrator does succumb to the wilderness, it is not in triumphant identification with nature but as a reprehensible abdication of her social responsibility” (110). By the end of the novel, the protagonist has unraveled under the pressure of labels, masculine expectations, and her own silence. While she cannot be analyzed as a person of sound mind in the last four chapters, the protagonist reminds us of how harmful mindsets within ecofeminism can endanger its development and lead it to betray its goals.

Just as Le Guin leaves us with a call to action in *The Dispossessed*, Atwood warns us that we must be willing to make an emotional commitment to the ecofeminist cause. As ecofeminist literary critic Stephanie Lahar writes, “social projects must be both deeply personal and political to render transformative change” (7). As understood through the various conflicts in *Surfacing*, a large part of the emotional commitment to ecofeminism is the willingness to relearn our understanding of identity and adopt a dialectical viewpoint. In an interview with J.R. (Tim) Struthers in 1976, as *Surfacing* basks in critical acclaim and academic analysis, Margaret Atwood speaks candidly of her growing popularity. Struthers asks, “[d]o you feel you are being treated too seriously?” Atwood answers,

I think a lot of the furor is extra-literary; that is, it doesn't have that much to do with my actual work. It has to do with the phenomenon of somebody my age, of my sex ... doing all these different books, and also making fairly strong statements, and what you have is a conflict of roles. If I were male and sixty-two, nobody would bat an eyelash about a lot of this, I'm sure. (68)

Atwood's personal experience with role conflict is expressed in *Surfacing* through the protagonist's struggles. Atwood argues that to accept one identity is to surrender. Through the exploration of woman as other, dialectical feminism, and the indigenous peoples' perspective on earthly caretakers, Atwood gives ecofeminism a much-needed evaluation. She predicts ecofeminism's growth into a dialectical mindset and offers good advice about the need to monitor the development of this philosophy. *Surfacing's* overall message is that the masculine argument “we are man and therefore we are not nature” is a

dangerous use of essentialism. For Atwood, the answer is not that women represent nature but rather that humankind is part of nature. Through this novel, she warns that if we fool ourselves into believing the human race is not part of nature then we will use this logic to abuse nature and degrade each other.

## Chapter IV

### The End is Here

Three decades after the emergence of ecofeminism, fear of human destruction was still a major component of American consciousness. The threat of nuclear weapons in Iraq compounded by national outrage at terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center towers set the stage for a new theatre of warfare. In March of 2003, the United States announced its plans to invade Iraq and strengthen its efforts in a corresponding War on Terror in Afghanistan. This same year, Margaret Atwood published *Oryx and Crake*, an apocalyptic, dystopian novel that warns of a future where technological and scientific advances commodify human life instead of improving its quality. In her essay on the process of writing *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood explained that she heard the news of the attacks on the World Trade Center after returning from a bird sanctuary where she had stayed immersed in nature for days. She explains that the serenity of the previous week mixed with devastating news of the attacks created an unshakable image of apocalypse and the fragility of humankind. She says “the story came to me in an instant. I had only to write it down” (*Writing*).

In writing *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood captures the tone of the twenty-first century ecofeminist. The novel focuses on the early ecofeminist concerns of technological annihilation and androcentric history and examines them in terms of present-day Western culture. Technological annihilation is a concern that grew from the original ecofeminist demilitarization sentiments of the 1970s, during the Vietnam and Cold Wars. By the time *Oryx and Crake* was published in 2003, ecofeminism and Third Wave feminism alike had begun to focus on developing nations’ struggles with technology. Like demilitarization,

technological annihilation criticisms include concern for human and earthly destruction by nuclear warfare and the dangers of an overly militaristic society, but they also speak to the concerns of integrating technology with human life. The early ecofeminist tenet of ahistory also morphed to keep up with the changing social climate. “Cultural lobotomy” is a metaphor used to describe the ecofeminist idea of unlearning maldevelopments in androcentric culture. The environmentalists and feminists who once explained dominance and subjugation as the results of early human maldevelopment offered ahistory, or the social and cultural disconnection from a maldeveloped past, as a possible answer to the problems of power. By the twenty-first century, criticisms of cultural lobotomy, or reinventing history by starting over, entered ecofeminist discourse.

Similar to the protagonist’s friends in *Surfacing*, the humans in *Oryx and Crake* are culturally removed from the natural world and thus value organic life, even human life, very little. *Oryx and Crake* is sometimes categorized as science fiction but Atwood prefers to describe it as speculative fiction, and in many important ways the novel speculates about the gruesome end to a rapidly maldeveloping society. Upholding the utopian/dystopian themes of the three previous novels, Atwood’s ecofeminist speculations are illustrated through two contrasting societies. In this case, however, they are both dystopian, one bad and one worse; the worlds are pre- and post-apocalyptic Earth.

Jimmy, as he is known pre-apocalypse, or Snowman, as he calls himself post-apocalypse, is one of Atwood’s very few male protagonists. Jimmy grows up in a technologically advanced culture that is enthralled with destruction. In adulthood, he witnesses his best friend, Crake, create a virus that successfully destroys the entire human

race and replace it with a new, genetically engineered race Jimmy calls the Crakers. The novel opens after Crake's apocalypse with Jimmy, now Snowman, surviving hour to hour in an urban jungle. Chapter two introduces Jimmy as a young boy living on a corporate compound with his parents. The chapters alternate from Jimmy to Snowman until the two characters converge in the present and Snowman has to decide whether to remain alone with the Crakers or risk his life trying to find other human survivors.

Like feminism's third wave, ecofeminism has focused much of its recent social growth on the inclusion of all dominated groups, specifically those of the developing world, where the sudden imposition of technology directly endangers the land and lives of indigenous peoples. *Oryx and Crake's* theme of technological annihilation is a criticism of Western culture's dialectical relationship with nature and technology. The novel examines our want to incorporate technology and the want to be free from it. Technology operates as part of the logic of domination insomuch that, as a term, it begins to stand in for *culture*. Instead of focusing on social paradigms wherein dominant cultures subjugate weaker groups and the environment, technology *becomes* the instrument of control, an extension man/culture essentialism. Val Plumwood discusses the Western rationale that humans are separate from nature, noting, "[o]ne key aspect of the Western view of nature... is the view of nature as sharply discontinuous or ontologically divided from the human sphere. This leads to a view of humans as apart from or 'outside of' nature, usually as masters or external controllers of it" (162). In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood speculates what happens when humans identify with technology and bastardize nature.

In their essay on ecofeminist utopias, Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire provide a comparative analysis on *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) by Marge Piercy and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) by Starhawk, in which they write, “it is in the nexus between nature and technology that the authors most starkly demarcate the differences between seventies radical feminism and ecofeminism, specifically through biotechnology” (196). Such is the difference between Le Guin’s 1970s novels and *Oryx and Crake*; both of Le Guin’s utopic societies, the Odonians and the Gethenians, rely on technology due to harsh climates, food shortages, and government or organizational needs. McGuire and McGuire write, “[w]hereas Starhawk relegates biotechnology to the dystopic realm, Piercy incorporates it” (184). In Atwood’s dystopic depiction of a bio-engineering society killed by its own technologies, she adapts the post-Cold War ecofeminist criticisms (noted by Starhawk) to meet the expanding discourse on technology versus the natural self and the natural world.

Disassociation with the natural self is a focus of both ecofeminism and feminism. While feminism encourages fighting social pressure to conform to the male gaze, ecofeminism explores the ways that altering the natural self creates a rift in human identification with the environment. In *Crake*, Atwood creates an ecofeminist dystopian character who embodies human identification with technology. In college, Crake says that Nature and God are the barriers that keep human beings in order. When Jimmy says “I thought you didn’t believe in God,” Crake says “I don’t believe in Nature either...Or not with a capital N” (206). Crake believes he is in control of the universe.

As a youth, Crake rationalizes away any need for a relationship with nature and instead promotes the idea that nature is flawed. Using a technology metaphor, Crake

rationalizes murder, war, violence, and overpopulation as the results of flawed human nature. He says “[w]e’re hormone robots” (166), meaning our natural impulses are misguided and destructive. He vilifies nature for humanity’s imperfections. Although Crake is Jimmy’s best friend, he is the ecofeminist antagonist, written as if inhuman. As teenagers, Jimmy recalls, Crake was so desensitized to human suffering that in all of the public executions, wars, and child pornography they accessed on the Internet, “he didn’t seem to be affected by anything he saw, one way or the other, except when he thought it was funny. He never seemed to get high, either” (86).

Cosmetics also contribute to the technological annihilation of nature in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood satirizes the over-reliance on cosmetics and self-improvement pills initially through Ramona, Jimmy’s stepmother who kisses him “leaving a smooch of cerise lipstick, he could feel it resting on his cheek like bicycle grease” (175). At his father’s work, in the bio-engineered animals sector of the corporate compound where they lived, Jimmy perceives even faux-nature as awkward and shameful in the context of his world. He muses, “[t]he pigeons had no toilets and did it anywhere; this caused him a vague sensation of shame” (26). Years later, as an adult, Jimmy works for Anoooyo, copywriting for “[c]osmetic creams, workout equipment, Joltbars to build your muscle-scape into a breathtaking marvel of sculpted granite. Pills to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier” (248). Atwood writes Jimmy as the unwitting ecofeminist protagonist who is sardonically aware “[h]ope and fear, desire and revulsion, these were his stocks-in-trade, on these he rang his changes.”

Jimmy, as Snowman, resists the mainstream impulse to desire genetically altered, technologically perfected women even when they are the only women left on earth. Atwood writes that the Craker women “arouse in Snowman, not even the faintest stirrings of lust. It was the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design” (100). In the presence of Crake’s version of perfect humans, Snowman recalls seeing DVDs of animals when he was a child which showed “mothers licking their young” and wonders “[w]hy had he found them so reassuring?” (10). Atwood implies that for all of humanity’s perceived imperfections, nature is still part of our collective identity, one that we will crave if denied.

Atwood also comments on Western ecofeminism’s tendency toward what Noel Sturgeon calls “the Third World difference” through *Oryx*. Similar to gothic literature’s Magical Negro, “the Third World difference” denotes an oversimplified Magical Southeast Asian woman, who represents all developing nation ecofeminist activists. When criticizing the bulk of published ecofeminist anthologies, Sturgeon points out, “[t]he discourse about Third World women in these books reduces all women in this category to rural village women engaged in subsistence farming or food gathering.” (124). Atwood describes *Oryx* vaguely as Southeast Asian, naturally beautiful, intelligent, and mysterious. This description matches the dangerous oversimplification in Western ecofeminism on behalf of developing nation ecofeminist activists. Jimmy obsessively questions *Oryx* about her past but assumes that she is fabricating her story to humor him. This is the same relationship Sturgeon points to when she writes about “the Third World difference;” Jimmy does not allow himself to see any truth beyond the convenient, stereotypical narrative of rice patties and child slavery, so this is what *Oryx* gives him.

In the world of *Oryx and Crake*, where self-obsessed humans resent their natural bodies, aging, and are terrified of death, disassociation with the natural self necessarily leads to disassociation with the natural world. As a child, Jimmy was told “ducks were only like pictures, they weren’t real and had no feelings, but he didn’t quite believe it” (15). Confused by the bio-engineered pigeons that were put to death because of infection, Jimmy’s father told him the animals didn’t feel the bonfire: “they were like steaks and sausages that still had their skins on” (18). Because the humans in Jimmy’s life live on corporate compounds and the only animals they interact with are bio-engineered hybrids, they develop a life-long cognitive dissonance between themselves and the natural world. Crake’s identification with technology is a result of growing up in this faux-real world.

Crake eliminates the human race through bio-warfare. He creates BlyssPlus, marketed as a catch-all supplement that turns people into the humans they want to be (more of Atwood’s self-improvement satire) and also secretly contains an indestructible bio-form meant to kill all humans. Bio-warfare is a 21<sup>st</sup> century twist on the 1970s threat of nuclear holocaust and is literally the use of technology to turn life against itself. Crake, an antagonist of the natural world, uses bio-warfare, in the form of a pill sent to the major cities in every country, to attack the humanity and thereby nature that he loathes. Through this transaction, Atwood illustrates that the more disconnected from the natural world humanity becomes, the more we are in danger of technological annihilation. Cognitively to Crake, humans are like the ducks Jimmy’s father described, “only like pictures, they weren’t real and had no feelings.”

Ultimately, Atwood shows that humans contribute to technological annihilation when we begin to identify with technology instead of nature. Once we have convinced

ourselves that human essence does not lie with nature, then we allow ourselves to reject the logic of earthly care. Crake and Jimmy's childhood spent petting hybrid animals bred for organ harvesting and their adolescence spent laughing at violent, pornographic media desensitizes them to human suffering and renders them compassionless. Jimmy and Crake are not concerned with those suffering in developing countries or even in the "pleblands" of their own country. Atwood satires our present-day hyper-sexualized, violent media culture by creating a world where humans are self-obsessed but resent their natural selves—their inconstant libido, bulging bellies, hair loss, and wrinkles. By creating characters that lack human compassion and resent their natural selves, Atwood illustrates how nature becomes the enemy. By the time Crake has thoroughly vilified nature, annihilating the human race never even crosses his mind as a question of ethics.

Along with exploring new concerns in the area of technological annihilation, Atwood takes a contemporary ecofeminist approach to the theme of ahistory. Time is a major theme in *Oryx and Crake*, not only in terms of narrative chronology but in the characterization of time and what it means for the protagonist. Early ecofeminism, which grew out of radical, or cultural, feminism, used ahistory to encourage a departure from traditional androcentric history and the creation of a new history, building a new system from the ground up. These theoretical movements were useful for paradigm subversion in pedagogy, organizational, and interpersonal communication. However, contemporary ecofeminism takes a slightly different view on history and time. *Oryx and Crake* warns against the dangers of ahistory by illustrating what Brian Swimme calls a "cultural lobotomy" (15), wherein historical amnesia causes the Crakers to repeat the past.

We meet Snowman a few months after Crake's epidemic. Oryx and Crake are dead and Snowman knows no other living, natural human beside himself. His watch, too, is dead although he looks at it often. Atwood writes, "[h]e wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is" (3). In a sense, Crake has created a history. His intent was to start over with the "human experiment" which he felt had gone horribly wrong. Snowman's dead watch signifies the obsolescence of time and human history. He watches the Crakers, masterfully engineered by Crake, create their own history, peeing territorial lines in the sand, performing mating dances, and baring children.

*Oryx and Crake* is really the story of Jimmy's history. The second chapter begins "[o]nce upon a time, Snowman wasn't Snowman. Instead he was Jimmy. He'd been a good boy then" (15). Like early humans, like the newborn infants, and, later, like the Crakers, Jimmy begins his history benevolently. His early maldevelopment comes from his dad, who tells him "[w]omen are always getting hot under the collar," (or rather, "women are irrational") and, as previously noted, animals are just "sausages with their skins still on" (16). This is the beginning of Jimmy's maldevelopment. However rich in human atrocity history is, Atwood argues that humans need their history to have a basis for improvement and a reminder of what not to do. The Crakers, oblivious to human history and engineered to have every biological chance at creating a better human society, engage in familiar patterns of dominance and maldevelopment within the first few months of their existence. In their essay on ecofeminist ethics, Karen Warren and Jim Cheney assert that ecofeminism, as a living theory, relies on time and history for growth

stating “it is something both ‘situated’ ... and ‘in process,’ emerging from people’s different experiences and observations and changing over time” (256). Atwood argues that human culture has this same relationship with time, it is recorded by history and redefined through time.

Instead of rejecting history, many contemporary ecofeminists look for answers to cultural maldevelopment in ancient wisdom. In her essay on theology and nature, Carol P. Christ suggests that cultural healing begins with “[a] recovery of more ancient and traditional views that revere the profound connection of all beings in the web of life and a rethinking of the relation of both humanity and divinity to nature” (58). Snowman’s perspective lies close to Christ’s in that he constantly searches his memories for comfort and for answers. Jimmy’s relationship to nature has changed greatly in the recent past. He has gone from life in a sterile, corporate compound to life as an insect-bitten, sunburned, nomad. Snowman chants arcane English words, mulls over memories from early childhood, and replays conversations with his mother, father, Oryx, and Crake. Without his past, he could not make sense of the present.

The Crakers, who have no past, are confused about their lives, their purpose, where they came from, and more importantly where *Snowman* came from. Although Crake did his best to exclude art, religion, and jokes from his Crakers, the Crakers turn to Snowman for an explanation of their origin. In exchange for weekly fish dinners, Snowman humors the Crakers with stories of Crake as God creating them out of mango and Oryx laying an egg full of words. The Crakers begin to worship Snowman as a prophet. Annoyed at the Crakers begging for scraps of history and pointing out his contradictions, Snowman observes “[a]t first he’d improvised, but now they’re

demanding dogma” (104). Even though Crake insisted that “[h]ierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it,” the Crakers readily placed Crake in a Godlike, omnipotence category; below him is Oryx, and then Snowman, the prophet.

To solidify his ahistorical utopia, Crake tries to rid the Craker design of “[s]ymbolic thinking of any kind” (361). Crake says of the Crakers, “[a]s soon as they start doing art we’re in trouble.” Their first symbolic representation is a scarecrow-like statue of Snowman which they erect when he leaves them for a few days to explore the area. When Snowman returns, he finds the Crakers chanting, playing percussion, and worshipping a statue of him. Riane Eisler argues that this behavior is inevitable because human culture is “[t]he story not only of the fashioning of material tools but also of the fashioning of our most important and unique non-material tools: the mental tools of language and imagery, of humanmade words, symbols, and pictures” (32). The Crakers could not exist without mutation or authenticity of some kind. The creation of their own customs, hierarchies, and mythology is a result of their need to narrate history, which contemporary ecofeminism argues is an important impulse in human culture. Atwood concludes that because the Crakers were robbed the lessons of history, they are in no better position to create a utopic humanity than the early humans were. Likely, they are in a worse position.

Throughout *Oryx and Crake* Atwood maintains that annihilating the past does not improve the future while still acknowledging the usefulness of ahistory in ecofeminism. In her essay about writing *Oryx and Crake*, she states “[t]he rules of biology are as inexorable as those of physics: run out of food and water and you die. No animal can

exhaust its resource base and hope to survive. Human civilizations are subject to the same law” (*Writing*). She writes similar words for Crake who he muses out loud to Jimmy “[h]omo sapiens doesn’t seem able to cut himself off at the supply end. He’s one of the few species that doesn’t limit reproduction in the face of dwindling resources” (120). Here Atwood recognizes the argument of ahistory as a kind of logic that misses the bigger picture. This statement to Jimmy is one of Crake’s staple justifications for wanting to destroy the human race. He argues that the world would be better off without the current model of humanity and that humans themselves are miserable and self-destructive. As a contemporary ecofeminist writer, Atwood intercepts this logic, that we must depart from androcentric history, and insists that we must use what we have—a history rich in lessons on atrocity—and build a better human culture from there.

Atwood’s satire of the relationship between humans and technology shows that while humans control technology, it is our main tool of self-destruction. Through the *Crakers* Atwood makes the point that, if we forget this wisdom, however condemning it may be, humanity will never gain the consciousness to produce a more sustainable culture. Jimmy, Atwood’s every-human protagonist, remembers his past to stay sane. Despite the desensitization of his youth, Jimmy remains sentimental about memories of his mother, his pet racunk, and Oryx and cynical about memories of technology. In Atwood’s dystopia, Jimmy’s survival is most likely due to his identity as a human and his refusal to forget.

## Conclusion

In 2007, ecofeminism faces many of the same political challenges with which it began. Public approval of the Iraq War is at an all time low, and the whereabouts of foreign nuclear weapons as well as the issue of disposing the waste caused by our own has resulted in global controversy. However, in its maturity, ecofeminism has also expanded to include issues of human destruction outside of Western culture. The “Southern ecofeminists” of the developing economies in Africa and Asia have contributed a much-needed perspective on the effects of technology and development on the cultures and environments of indigenous peoples.

Noel Sturgeon explains that the recent ecofeminist focus on the struggles with technology and environmental destruction of “women of the Third World” has forced feminists to reexamine the essentialization of these women. She writes that much feminist discourse “reduces all women in this category to rural village women engaged in subsistence farming or food gathering” (124). As the scope of ecofeminism expands outside of Western culture to examine problems of women and oppressed peoples of Eastern cultures, anti-essentialism will continue to play a large part in the future of ecofeminist rhetoric.

The “recovery” of ecofeminism’s precursory authors for study within the movement helps us understand the context of ecofeminism’s roots. Rachel Carson’s contribution to women’s pursuits in ecology is monumental and her rhetoric on the connected fates of humanity and nature is echoed in ecofeminism today. The recovery of ecofeminist works published before the 1974 coining of *eco-feminisme* plays a similar role in contextualizing ecofeminism. Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood are

revered ecofeminist authors; however, their works that receive the most ecofeminist analysis are those published after 1974. By taking an ecofeminist look at Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), we gain a better understanding of the kind of issues that informed the future of ecofeminism. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) gives us perspective on how ecofeminism has grown since its nascent stages in the early 1970s.

Le Guin's unwillingness to create sustainable utopias illuminates important ecofeminist insights into the logic of domination and its stake in human nature. *The Left Hand of Darkness* deconstructs concepts of gender, history, and war in order to conceptualize a departure from the human tradition of dominance. *The Dispossessed* continues this philosophy of instinctual dominance. In this novel, Le Guin highlights the ways that the motivation of ownership and property leads to cultural acceptance of domination. In both novels, dominance begins as vague hegemony and ends in ostensible abuse of land and people. By juxtaposing two worlds, Le Guin takes her characters on introspective journeys during which their critical examination of new cultures leads them to question the mores of their own.

Atwood's early perspective on the anti-essentialism debate in ecofeminism as well as her analysis of technology as a tool for destruction remain major topics in contemporary ecofeminism. In *Surfacing*, Atwood gives arguments for both using identification with nature to break away from male-focused environmental movements and denying the confining binaries of culture/nature, man/woman. While Atwood recognizes the merit of both approaches, she ultimately decides that subjugated peoples cannot reclaim essentialism without falling into the trap of otherization. Written thirty

years later, *Oryx and Crake* focuses less on essentialism and more on technology's affect on human culture and history. Again, Atwood recognizes both sides of the argument. Throughout human history technology has been used to save and improve life, and it has also been used for abuse and environmental destruction. As with Le Guin, Atwood leaves the responsibility of technology to the constant vigilance of human care.

Ecofeminism argues that the fate of all life is interconnected. As the dominant life on earth, humans have a special responsibility to uphold an ethic of care that extends to both human and nonhuman life. Through ecofeminist analyses of Le Guin and Atwood, this thesis has drawn connections between ecofeminism's present and past. The novels examined in this thesis chart the growth and interconnectivity of authors, theories, and events in ecofeminist history. Le Guin encourages that we continuously rebel against the tyranny of human dominance while Atwood reminds us that human consciousness will lead us to the careful development of identity and technology. These lessons help conceptualize ecofeminist philosophy and produce a more holistic understanding of where ecofeminism has been and where it is now. Only with this perspective, may we intuit how ecofeminism will continue to develop and speculate what implications it will have for the future.

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