

# Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

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## review: novum

- ▶ Gethenian gender
  - ▶ introduced through the outsider's difficulty managing it
  - ▶ gender as an *epistemological problem* (narration)
  - ▶ but not only epistemological...
- ▶ the embedded tales
  - ▶ “I would ask him [Asra] for a myth or tale. Most Gethenians are well stuffed with these. Their literature, though it exists in written form, is a live oral tradition, and they are all in this sense literate.” (194)
  - ▶ functions: anticipations; thematic indications; “world-building”; genre-mash-up-ing
- ▶ NAFAL ships, ansibles, cryogenic stasis...
  - ▶ ...and Foretelling

## the question of the question of sex

- ▶ How does chap. 7 suggest we should think about the significance of Gethenian sex/gender in the novel? Find specific examples. And consider who is speaking.

## species-building

The sexual cycle averages 26 to 28 days...On about the 18th day hormonal changes are initiated by the pituitary control and on the 22nd or 23rd day the individual enters *kemmer*, estrus. (96)

It seems likely they were an experiment. The thought is unpleasant. (95)

The subject of my experiment, then, was something like this: Because of our lifelong social conditioning, it is hard for us to see clearly what, besides purely physiological form and function, truly differentiates men and women. ("Is Gender Necessary?," 163)

## solving patriarchy

The fact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be (as Nim puts it) “tied down to childbearing,” no one is quite so thoroughly “tied down” here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be. (100)

Consider: There is no unconsenting sex, no rape. (100)

solving...what?

Another guess concerning the hypothetical experiment's object: The elimination of war. Did the Ancient Hainish postulate that continuous sexual capacity and organized social aggression, neither of which are attributes of any mammal but man, are cause and effect? (102)

I am a woman of peaceful Chiffewar, and no expert on the attractions of violence or the nature of war. (103)

## borders

Tibe made a speech about a foray in the Sinoth Valley: “brave Karhidish farmers, true patriots,” had dashed across the border south of Sassinoth, had attacked an Orgota village, burned it, and killed nine villagers, and then dragging the bodies back had dumped them into the Ey River, “such a grave,” said the Regent, “as all the enemies of our nation will find!” (111)

I slept an hour and woke in the grip of a nightmare about explosions, invasion murder, and conflagration.

It was a particularly bad dream, the kind in which you run down a strange street in the dark with a lot of people who have no faces, while houses go up in flames behind you, and children scream. (117)

## history in motion

- ▶ What is historical change like, in this novel?



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A Machine Age got going, gradually, without any industrial revolution, without any revolution at all. Winter hasn't achieved in thirty centuries what Terra once achieved in thirty decades. Neither has Winter ever paid the price that Terra paid. (105)

Gde... was warm to start with, and an exploitive civilization wrecked its natural balances fifty or sixty thousand years ago, burned up the forests for kindling (129)

## another experiment: the Ekumen

“Material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life. The enrichment of harmony and the greater glory of God.” (35)

“Now if the Ekumen, as an experiment in the superorganic, does eventually fail, it will have to develop a peace-keeping force, develop a police, and so on. But at this point there’s no need. All the central worlds are still recovering from a disastrous era a couple of centuries ago.” (147)

next

- ▶ finish the novel if you can!