

# Introduction to Science Fiction

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

October 26, 2023. Le Guin (3).

## review: sex question

- ▶ the significance of ambisexuality
  - ▶ equality and the critique of gender norms
  - ▶ rape and war as masculine problems
  - ▶ the “appalling” revelation of the human
- ▶ “Is Gender Necessary?”
  - ▶ pronoun regrets
  - ▶ the idea of experiment

## what even is sex/gender?

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)

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The fact is that the real subject of the book is not feminism or sex or gender or anything of the sort; as far as I can see, it is a book about betrayal and fidelity. That is why one of its two dominant sets of symbols is an extended metaphor of winter, of ice, snow, cold: the winter journey. (162)

## review: history

- ▶ “Year One”: but it’s not actually stasis
- ▶ Gethen’s slow history as a critique of fast history
  - ▶ “the price that Terra paid”
  - ▶ modernity: industrialization, nationalism...capitalism?
- ▶ the Ekumen as the next phase?
  - ▶ “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)

## the Farm: discussion

As I said, they were not cruel. (193)

- ▶ What makes Pulefen Farm so bad? Use the text.
  - ▶ Bonus: use Estraven's account as well as Genly's.

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I don't know what drugs they used. I don't know the purpose of the questioning. (191)

I had not learned what he [Asra] had been sent to the Voluntary Farm for, what crime or fault or irregularity in his identification papers (197)



## nothing to be done

I was unable to do anything about any of this suffering, and therefore accepted it, as they did, placidly. (186)

They were as sexless as steers. They were without shame and without desire, like the angels. But it is not human to be without shame and without desire. (190)

Being a suppression, not merely a repression, it produced not frustration, but something more ominous, perhaps, in the long run: passivity. (191)

Light is the left hand of darkness  
and darkness the right hand of light.  
Two are one, life and death, lying  
together like lovers in kemmer,  
like hands joined together,  
like the end and the way. (252)

dao

I never had a gift but one, to know when the great wheel gives to a touch, to know and act. (203)

## death and joy

We stowed the wheels, uncapped the sledge-runners, put on our skis, and took off—down, north, onward, into that silent vastness of fire and ice that said in enormous letters of black and white DEATH, DEATH, written right across a continent. The sledge pulled like a feather, and we laughed with joy. (237)

## recognition

“Good night, Ai,” said the alien, and the other alien said, “Good night, Harth.” (229)

And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. (266)

“Arek! is that you?”

“No: *Genly Ai: I am bespeaking you.*” (273)

next

- ▶ finish the novel if you haven't
  - ▶ including Le Guin's preface and the appendix!
- ▶ Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin" (Canvas; print out)
- ▶ short response exercise due Monday 10 a.m.