

# Postgraduate English

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ISSN 1756-9761

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Issue 39

Autumn 2019

Editors:

Aalia Ahmed and Lucia Scigliano

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## **Similar Visions, Essential Difference: Mass Violence in Tolkien and Le Guin**

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## Similar Visions, Essential Difference: Mass Violence in Tolkien and Le Guin

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*Postgraduate English, Issue 39, Autumn 2019*

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J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (LotR), published in three volumes over 1954-1955, is the foundational work of the fantasy genre. It influenced Ursula K. Le Guin's own fantasy series, the Earthsea novels, the best-known of which were published between 1968 and 1972. Le Guin admires Tolkien for his moral clarity: Tolkien realizes that evil arises from the dark aspects of ourselves. She writes that while Tolkien 'seems to project evil into 'the others,' they are not truly others, but ourselves; he is utterly clear about this.'<sup>1</sup>

The manifestations of evil that Tolkien sees in LotR are very similar to those that Le Guin sees in her 1972 novella *The Word for World Is Forest* (WWF). The similarities stand out in the penultimate chapter of LotR, 'The Scouring of the Shire' ('Scouring'), which one scholar has called 'the narrative and thematic focus' of LotR.<sup>2</sup> In both 'Scouring' and WWF, a race of small, nature-loving beings battles to expel an invading race that is larger, more violent, and territorially expansive: the hobbits of the Shire expel Saruman and his human 'ruffians' just as Le Guin's Athsheans expel the Terrans who are spreading colonies across the universe.<sup>3</sup> The invaders in each text have even brought the same two cultural evils with them: centralized government and abuse of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Marc DiPaolo, *Fire and Snow: Climate Fiction from the Inklings to Game of Thrones* (SUNY Press, 2019), p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> David M Waito, 'The Shire Quest: The "Scouring of the Shire" as the Narrative and Thematic Focus of *The Lord of the Rings*', *Mythlore*, 28.3/4 (2010), 155-77 (p. 155).

<sup>3</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Lord of the Rings, 3, Kindle ed. (Harper Collins, 2008), p. 147.

Yet there is a basic difference: Tolkien believes a good society must be willing to fight reluctantly in self-defense, while Le Guin believes a good society can be pacifist. The hobbits and the Athsheans both become more willing to fight, and at the same time, both develop a two-tiered system that treats outsiders as less morally consequential—less “human” in the moral sense—than insiders. To Tolkien this is an improvement, rendering the hobbits better able to defend themselves. To Le Guin, this is a disaster, for the dehumanization that the Athsheans apply to the invaders is uncontrollable: it will rebound back on the Athsheans themselves.

Certainly, Tolkien is far from lionizing violence. Indeed, his skeptical eye towards violence distinguishes LotR from the epics that inspired it. Marc DiPaolo observes that ‘One of Tolkien’s central themes is that—even if there is such a thing as a “just war”—war should never be desired or glorified’.<sup>4</sup> In the ‘Scouring’ chapter, the hobbit Frodo (the central character of LotR as a whole) has become a Christ-like moral teacher, soon to leave the known part of Middle-earth for a kind of afterlife in the Grey Havens, a mysterious land across the ocean. Frodo observes that ‘nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped’.<sup>5</sup> Yet Tolkien is not a pacifist. He believes that the threat of violence between groups is necessary for self-defense, and that a bit of aggression or uppishness is beneficial to individual hobbits.<sup>6</sup> We see this in ‘The Scouring of the Shire’.

By the final chapters of LotR, the quest to destroy the One Ring by throwing it into Mount Doom has been accomplished.<sup>7</sup> A band of four hobbits now returns to the Shire: Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. They find their home has been taken over by Saruman and his ‘ruffians,’ the word Tolkien invariably uses throughout the chapter for a group made up mostly

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<sup>4</sup> DiPaolo, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Waito, p. 165.

<sup>7</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 108.

of humans from the ‘fierce culture’ of Dunland.<sup>8</sup> The Shire has become unrecognizable, cursed with two alien cultural practices. First is bureaucracy: ‘on every wall there was a notice and a list of Rules.’<sup>9</sup> These rules have been hypocritically exploited, but that is not the core of the band’s dislike of them. To the band, who recall unspoiled hobbit culture, rules are largely officious and unnecessary. Nicholas Birns observes that ‘Tolkien’s hobbits, and his conception of them, exude a love of near-anarchy’.<sup>10</sup> The Shire does have a government, but it is local and weak. Perhaps the reason Tolkien was comfortable with minimal government was that, as his friend C. S. Lewis observed, ‘Tolkien’s ethics could be boiled down to this: the distinction between good and evil should always be apparent to anyone with a heart and a brain’.<sup>11</sup>

The other cultural invasion is industrialization, which is damaging the land. Tolkien describes the band coming on a newly-built mill: ‘It was one of the saddest hours of their lives [...] they saw the new mill in all its frowning and dirty ugliness: a great brick building straddling the stream, which it fouled with a steaming and stinking outflow.’<sup>12</sup> No wonder this chapter is described as ‘Tolkien’s wish-fulfillment reversal of industrialization, in which evil machines are destroyed and polluted lands reclaimed’.<sup>13</sup>

Two members of the band come to the fore in the scouring of the Shire: Frodo, the now-Christ-like, wounded observer and moral commentator; and Merry, the *de facto* military leader. Merry is responsible for the most individual violence in the chapter (he is the only member of the band named as personally killing someone), as well as the one who summons the rest of the

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Dunlendings’, *The One Wiki to Rule Them All* <<https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Dunlendings>> [accessed 10 August 2019].

<sup>9</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Birns, “‘You Have Grown Very Much’: The Scouring of the Shire and the Novelistic Aspects of The Lord of the Rings”, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23.1 (2012), 82–101 (p. 87).

<sup>11</sup> DiPaolo, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> DiPaolo, p. 41.

Shire to form an unofficial army. The two form a kind of composite character, a model of how a mature hobbit should balance protection of his people and homeland with compassion for all.

Frodo's role is to preserve compassion and minimize violence. At first the band focuses on Lotho, the corrupt hobbit who has taken over the Shire, but when they speak with a group of ruffians, they learn that Lotho has lost control to his unnamed backers and is now under threat himself. Pippin is taken aback by Frodo's compassion: 'Save Lotho? Whatever do you mean? [...] Destroy him, I should say.'<sup>14</sup> Frodo replies, "'Lotho never meant things to come to this pass. He has been a wicked fool, but he's caught now [...] He's a prisoner in Bag End now, I expect, and very frightened. We ought to try and rescue him''.'<sup>15</sup> How does Frodo know Lotho's original intent or his current feelings? Frodo has no more information than the rest of the band. Rather, his Christ-like compassion seems to give him near-mystical insight into the nature of evil. Lotho is, in a sense, a prisoner of his own evil, which has taken over from him. Even though Lotho may have taken his first wicked steps voluntarily, he still deserves compassion, and salvation if possible.

Pippin says he would never have imagined that at the end of the long quest to destroy the One Ring, there would have to be a fight within the borders of the Shire. Frodo responds with his philosophy about mass violence:

'Fight?' said Frodo. 'Well, I suppose it may come to that. But remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean [unlike Lotho]; not just obeying ruffians' orders because they are frightened. No hobbit has ever killed another on purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped. Keep your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment!'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

Frodo subscribes to minimum violence. Another principle is implicit, drawn from the Christian philosophy of ‘just war’: the principle that ‘only defensive war is just’.<sup>17</sup> The hobbits are home-focused and relatively isolated from the rest of Middle-earth. They love creature comforts but evince no greed for others’ resources. It is unimaginable that they would ever seek to conquer others’ territory.

With his clear vision, Frodo keeps the Shire from a spiral of reprisals. At the end of ‘Scouring,’ the band, at the head of an hobbit militia they have raised, confronts Saruman. He taunts them, but Frodo forbids them to kill him: ‘It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing. Go, Saruman, by the speediest way!’<sup>18</sup> Saruman grasps that Frodo has not taken his bait: ‘There was a strange look in [Saruman’s] eyes of mingled wonder and respect and hatred. “You have grown, Halfling,” he said [...] “You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy”.’<sup>19</sup> Yet mass violence is not rejected entirely. The defense of the Shire requires a mass mobilization, though it does not seem that the Shire will ever need a standing army. This mobilization is also salutary for individuals: it is good for ‘us small folk’ to ‘stand up for our rights,’ as one hobbit tells Sam.<sup>20</sup>

The hobbit who organizes the Shire to rise is Merry. Merry is the most military of the band, and in this chapter that meditates on mass violence, he comes forward temporarily to stand as a counterpoint to Frodo. When the band returns to the Shire, Merry is noted as ‘all dressed up for fighting!’<sup>21</sup> It is Merry who leads Pippin over the newly-built gate into the Shire: he does not go alone, but leads another hobbit in a subtle foreshadowing of the militia he will lead later. To

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<sup>17</sup> David Robertson, *The Routledge Dictionary of Politics*, 3rd edn (Routledge, 2004), p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 137.

Frodo's call to avoid killing, Merry responds that "if there are many of these ruffians [...] it will certainly mean fighting. You won't rescue Lotho, or the Shire, just by being shocked and sad, my dear Frodo".<sup>22</sup> In the principal battle against the ruffians, it is 'Merry himself [who slays] the leader, a great squint-eyed brute like a huge orc'.<sup>23</sup>

We see in 'Scouring' that the returned hobbits have changed character. When some ruffians anger Pippin, he draws his sword on them:

He cast back his cloak, flashed out his sword, and the silver and sable of Gondor gleamed on him as he rode forward [...] "You are a ruffian and a fool. Down on your knees in the road and ask pardon, or I will set this troll's bane in you!" The sword glinted in the westering sun [...] The ruffians gave back [...] Fearless hobbits with bright swords and grim faces were a great surprise. And there was a note in the voices of these newcomers that they had not heard before. It chilled them with fear.<sup>24</sup>

Pippin's threat of violence here is meant to impress readers—the once-timid hobbit will not let himself be pushed around anymore. It is this aspect of character that Merry activates when he rouses a militia of hobbits from the Shire. The hobbits have long alerted the Shire to danger by sounding a horn, a practice known as the horn-call of Buckland. Merry uses a new horn for this call: the horn of Rohan, a gift he was given for his role in a battle. The horn of Rohan comes to the Shire from the human nation of Rohan, home to an Anglo-Saxon-like horse people who fought on the side of good in the War of the Rings. The men of Rohan stand in contrast to the men of Dunland, traditional enemies of Rohan who fought on the side of evil in the War and who make up most of the ruffians. Merry himself says that 'the horn of Rohan [will] give them all [the hobbits] some music they have never heard before'.<sup>25</sup> The reaction to this new horn is described several pages later: 'its clear call rang over the Hill; and out of the holes and sheds and

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<sup>22</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 142.

shabby houses of Hobbiton the hobbits answered, and came pouring out, and with cheers and loud cries they followed the company up the road to Bag End.<sup>26</sup>

This joyful, martial response is quite a contrast to when the call was previously sounded, a year earlier.<sup>27</sup> At that point, a hobbit named Fatty Bolger sees that evil Black Riders have intruded into the Shire. In ‘terror,’ he realizes that he must ‘run for it, or perish,’ and flees to get the call sounded.<sup>28</sup> We can assume there is a mass gathering in response, but what Tolkien depicts is confusion and disorder: ‘All about Crickhollow there was the sound of horns blowing, and voices crying and feet running.’<sup>29</sup> This first call drives away the Black Riders, but only quells the threat momentarily: ‘the Black Riders rode like a gale to the North-gate. Let the little people blow! Sauron would deal with them later.’<sup>30</sup>

The ‘Scouring’ chapter, by contrast, lets us know that no future battles will be necessary once the militia has finished its work. Tolkien writes, from the perspective of a far-future historian, ‘So ended the Battle of Bywater [a later name given to the battle described above] [...] the last battle fought in the Shire’.<sup>31</sup> Yet the threat of mass violence remains, and it is what preserves the peace. Tolkien notes that ‘In the Buckland the Horn of the Mark [another name for the horn of Rohan] was blown at sundown every November 2 [the anniversary of Merry first blowing it in the Shire] and bonfires and feastings followed’.<sup>32</sup> The hobbits memorialize the battle as a reminder to themselves and to any potential invaders.

There are two problematic moments of dehumanization (morally speaking) in ‘Scouring’. The first is when a ruffian, confronting Merry, is warned that a band of hobbit archers are hidden

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<sup>26</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 148.

<sup>27</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Lord of the Rings, 1, Kindle ed. (HarperCollins, 2008), p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Tolkien, *Fellowship*, pp. 230–31.

<sup>29</sup> Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 231.

<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 231.

<sup>31</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 199.

in the landscape behind him. The ruffian is offered the chance to surrender, but attacks anyway: 'He aimed a savage blow at Merry who stood in his way. He fell dead with four arrows in him.'<sup>33</sup> Neither the loosing of the arrows nor the striking of the arrows are described; the decision to kill and the moment of killing are both elided. The ruffian simply 'falls dead'. A hasty reader might struggle for a moment even to grasp that the hobbits have killed him.

How should we interpret this elision of violence? A charitable reading might be that Tolkien is reminding us that violence is something to regret, not to relish. If we must engage in it, we should not dwell on it nor glory in it. But look at the earlier moment when Pippin unsheathes his sword; there is glory in strength there. With the archers as well, the threat is impressive; it is only the moment of killing that is skipped over. I interpret Tolkien's elision as a moment of domination that erases the suffering of the ruffian and conceals the blood on the hands of the archers. I am reminded that Frodo has different rules for hobbits, who are never to be killed, and humans, who may be killed when necessary. But if we must kill, is it not better to look those we kill in the face? In the same way that some argue we should ourselves kill the animals we eat, or that some take issue with drone strikes that allow remote killing, we might ask, if there is nothing to hide from here, why does Tolkien's narrative appear to be hiding it?

Another problematic moment occurs after Saruman has been spared by Frodo. As Saruman turns to leave the Shire, he takes out his frustration on his servant, Wormtongue. Saruman kicks Wormtongue in the face, orders him to follow, and leaves. At last pushed too far, Wormtongue 'with a snarl like a dog [...] sprang on Saruman's back [...] cut his throat, and with a yell ran off down the lane'.<sup>34</sup> Wormtongue is a human from Rohan, and by Frodo's rule he is entitled to mercy if possible. But Tolkien tells us that '[before] Frodo could recover or speak a

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<sup>33</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 149.

word, three hobbit-bows twanged and Wormtongue fell dead'.<sup>35</sup> This is convenient for an epic coming to its end: it concludes the scouring of the Shire with the deaths of the chief invaders, Saruman and Wormtongue, so that readers need have no lurking worry about their return. But given all the calamity Frodo has seen throughout LotR, how plausible is it that he would be stunned into silence by a murder, stunned for long enough for Wormtongue to 'run off down the lane'? Once again, the hobbits' killing is performed by bows, weapons that allow the hobbits distance from the actual infliction of wounds. It is true that here the bows 'twang,' which does evoke the bows themselves, and so calls the hands of hobbit archers faintly to mind. But Tolkien still says only that the bows themselves twang, not that the archers make them twang, and once again the victim simply 'falls dead'. Compassion is the first lesson that the band brings back to the Shire from the wider world, but self-defense is the essential second lesson. In the two moments above, I see a conflict between these two lessons. Readers may disagree, but they will surely grant that Tolkien is not a pacifist: to him, just war is sometimes necessary. Ursula Le Guin, on the contrary, dreams of a world without mass violence at all.

Ursula K. Le Guin published her novella *The Word for World Is Forest* in 1972. It narrates the encounter between two cultures, an encounter that absorbed Le Guin throughout her career. In WWF, the two cultures unmistakably echo the United States and Vietnam. Terrans have invaded the forest planet of Athshe to steal its wood for their exhausted home planet. The Terrans enslave some Athsheans to work for them, and make some of the women into sexual slaves. The book's villain, Don Davidson, rapes and kills the wife of Selver, an Athshean who is driven nearly insane with grief and rage. This trauma makes Selver into 'a god, a changer, a bridge between realities' who can imagine mass violence as the Athsheans never have before.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tolkien, *Return*, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World Is Forest (Hainish Cycle Book 6)*, Kindle ed. (Tor, 2010), p. 45.

Selver recalls Merry, who brought back the horn of Rohan from human culture and used it to inspire a new self-image among the hobbits. Like Merry, Selver leads his race to violently expel the invaders. Selver and the Athsheans secure a promise their planet will be left alone, so the Athsheans, like the hobbits, have made themselves safe from future invasions. But WWF ends in mourning rather than exultation. We feel the Athsheans have been infected by mass violence and irreversibly degraded. Politically, Tolkien seems to hold that we can treat others differently than ourselves without collapsing into immorality: hobbits must never be killed, but humans may be killed if it is unavoidable. Le Guin suggests that this distinction is unsustainable. The Athsheans must dehumanize the Terrans in order to kill them, but this entails that they will eventually dehumanize one another as well.

Before colonization, the Athsheans have never fought a war. They feel anger and ‘aren’t incapable of personal violence,’ but they have developed ways of resolving aggression without killing: competitive singing and a posture—lying on the back with the head turned away—that makes it impossible for a dominant Athshean to kill a submissive one.<sup>37</sup> Our informant about Athshean violence, the human anthropologist Lyubov, believes there has never been a killing among the Athsheans. Le Guin leaves open the possibility that Lyubov is mistaken: there may have been rare individual killings, particularly among Athsheans who have not yet matured into their culture. But a group of Athsheans organized to threaten violence, like the hobbits’ militia, is clearly impossible: the Athsheans have neither the governmental structure to mobilize it nor the ability to imagine it.

At first, the Athsheans are similarly unable to imagine killing Terrans. Lyubov explains why, and how things have changed:

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<sup>37</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 70.

Despite the physical differences, they recognized us as members of their species, as men. However, we have not responded as members of their species should respond. We have ignored the responses, the rights and obligations of non-violence. We have killed, raped, dispersed, and enslaved the native humans, destroyed their communities, and cut down their forests. It wouldn't be surprising if they'd decided that we are not human [...] [and] therefore can be killed, like animals.<sup>38</sup>

How this initial recognition happened is mysterious. Perhaps it is biological: in Le Guin's cosmology, the Athsheans and the Terrans are both descendants of a single alien race known as the Hainish, although neither knows this at the time they meet. But Lyubov suggests that the core of 'humanity' to the Athsheans is cultural: humans are precisely those creatures that would never kill another human. It is because Terrans kill other humans—Athsheans—that Terrans are not human, and it is because Terrans are not human that Athsheans can imagine killing them. But Terrans remain flickeringly human in Athshean eyes, which means the Athsheans are themselves becoming a species that can kill humans. This puts the Athsheans' sense of their own humanity in jeopardy.

Selver hopes that after the war, the Athsheans will return to the idea that all humans—Terran or Athshean—are unkillable. He hopes to put nightmare of the war into a kind of moral quarantine, but he doubts he will succeed. At the end of the book, he says, "Maybe after I die people will be as they were before I was born, and before you [the outsiders] came. But I do not think they will".<sup>39</sup> He nonetheless strives to preserve as much humanity for the Terrans as he can, even during the war. After a battle, another Athshean reflects on the Terrans and draws a rebuke from Selver:

"Poor ugly things—great naked spiders they are, ugh!"  
"They are men, men, like us, men," Selver said, his voice shrill and edged like a knife.

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<sup>38</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 189.

“Oh, my dear lord god [referring to Selver], I know it, I only meant they look like spiders,” said the old woman, caressing his cheek.<sup>40</sup>

Selver suspects the dehumanization of the Terrans cannot be contained; indeed, he cannot always contain it within himself. Speaking to an imprisoned Terran named Gosse after a raid that sterilized the Terran population, he displays this: “Should we have let them live?” said Selver with vehemence equal to Gosse’s, but softly, his voice singing a little. “To breed like insects in the carcass of the World? To overrun us?”<sup>41</sup> Selver remains more temperate than Gosse, yet to hear Selver use the term ‘insects’ is chilling. The villain of the book, Captain Don Davidson, is distinctive for regularly describing Athsheans as animals. His typical term for Athsheans is ‘creechies,’ from ‘creatures,’ but he also compares them to dogs, rats, and chimps. We must hear an echo of Davidson here.

If WWF ends with a strong sense of impending tragedy, what would have been a better resolution for the story? My reading is that the best result would have been for the Terrans to learn non-violence from the Athsheans; failing that, the second-best result would be for the Terrans never to have come to Athshe. Yet Le Guin has left several possibilities to explore, and many scholars have disagreed with my reading. First, readers must ask whether things would have been different had ‘good Terrans’ or ‘good Terran culture’ been in charge. We see that the soldier-Terrans are more brutal by far than they admit in reporting back to their home-Terran culture. To draw on the historical parallel, many at home in the U.S. did not understand the reality of Vietnam, and might not have stood for it if they did know. Even within soldier-Terran culture, Don Davidson is a pathological extreme, and perhaps things would have been different if he had been contained. The scholar Richard Erlich blames soldier-Terran culture as a whole,

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<sup>40</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 142.

rather than Davidson alone, arguing that ‘even if the Terran military were absorbed into a good system—with sane, ethical people giving orders from Earth—the frontier and/or military *culture* would undermine the new system. More concretely, a charismatic traitor like Don Davidson could get enough support to cause a lot of trouble’.<sup>42</sup> But I think Erlich does not go far enough. In *Lyubov*, we see the novella’s best individual Terran, one who represents the best of home-Terran culture. Yet he too fails to understand his unconscious, the fundamental Terran failing he shares with Davidson.

Ian Watson argues convincingly that in contrast to Terra, Athshe is ‘a sane society which lives in harmony with its natural environment because its members are themselves in psychological equilibrium. The Athsheans [...] do not suffer from the divorce that Terrans exemplify between unconscious urges and conscious rationalization’.<sup>43</sup> Le Guin believes strongly in connection with one’s unconscious: she was an avowed Taoist who seemed to view psychotherapy (particularly of a Jungian stripe) as Western culture making a belated start towards the Taoist wisdom that we must reconcile opposites. In *WWF*, Athshean ‘dreaming’ provides a spiritual connection to other Athsheans and to the planet itself, evocative of both Taoism and a Jungian collective unconscious. What cripples Terrans is their inability or unwillingness to connect with their interiors, their uncomfortable emotions and their unconscious knowledge. We see this unwillingness take its toll on Davidson. He is evil from the first page of *WWF*, but he is driven much further down when he is unable to admit his fear to himself after Selver knocks him down and sings over him.<sup>44</sup> Yet *Lyubov*, the best-intentioned Terran, fails to access his unconscious as well. *Lyubov* is curious, caring, sincere, and in many ways seems set

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<sup>42</sup> Richard D. Erlich, *Coyote’s Song: The Teaching Stories of Ursula K. Le Guin* (Wildside P, 2009), p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Ian Watson, ‘The Forest as Metaphor for Mind: “The Word for World Is Forest” and “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow”’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 2.3 (1975), 231–37 (p. 231).

<sup>44</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 29.

up as an ideal hero to lead the integration of Terra and Athshe. But despite the coaxing of Athshe—the culture and, in a science-fictional way, the planet itself—he cannot break through to his unconscious. His first point-of-view chapter begins, ‘Captain Raj Lyubov had a headache,’ and the headache is undoubtedly psychosomatic.<sup>45</sup> Lyubov responds to it by free-associating rhyming words: ‘Cortex, vortex. Migraine headache, margarine breadache, ow, ow, ow.’<sup>46</sup> Free association is *the* traditional technique of psychoanalysis, and Lyubov even observes that ‘he had been cured of migraine once [...] during his obligatory Army Prophylactic Psychotherapy Sessions’.<sup>47</sup> Describing the Terrans to a fellow Athshean, Selver says, ‘Sometimes they talk of their dreams, the healers try to use them in healing, but none of them are trained, or have any skill in dreaming’.<sup>48</sup> Psychotherapy is a poor man’s dreaming, but Lyubov is never able to succeed fully at either.

Lyubov remains unable to connect to his unconscious even at the end of his story. Selver implies to Lyubov that a new Athshean attack is coming, but Lyubov cannot articulate this uncomfortable knowledge to himself. Lyubov writes a report stating that nothing is amiss and does not leave town as Selver hopes he will. In making this choice, Lyubov never clearly understands what he is doing: ‘[Lyubov] thought no more about it. So he made his choice without even knowing he had made one [...] he had merely omitted subjective impressions, as a scientist should. He had a severe migraine while writing the report, and a worse one after submitting it.’<sup>49</sup> Lyubov holds to the ‘scientific’ and partial view of knowledge he grew up with,

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<sup>45</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 63.

<sup>46</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> Le Guin, *Word for World*, p. 126.

rejecting the (correct) subjective knowledge of the upcoming attack that his unconscious is offering him; as before, this rejection is accompanied by a migraine.

If we reject home-Terran culture as an umbrella for beneficial integration between Terran and Athshean, Le Guin then introduces an alternative: the interstellar League of Worlds. Within the U.S.-Vietnam context, the name is surely an allusion to the League of Nations that became the United Nations. WWF is one of several works set in Le Guin's Hainish world, a world in which the humanoids of the planet Hain 'established different varieties of their race on the habitable planets,' lost contact with those planets for unknown reasons, and then began to re-establish it.<sup>50</sup> After the soldier-Terrans set out for Athshe, the Hainish arrived on Terra, transformed its culture with what must have been remarkable speed, and absorbed Terra into the League. The invention of an instantaneous interstellar communication device called the Ansible then allows all these groups to come into contact; the League discovers the abuses of the soldier-Terrans on Athshe with shock, and bans all League members from Athshe for an indefinite period. The scholar Elizabeth Cummins argues that the League is an enlightened government that we as readers should welcome, observing that throughout the Hainish books and their stories of cultural encounters, Le Guin hopes to see a reconciliation between cultures, one that allows 'integration' while preserving the 'integrity' of each culture.<sup>51</sup> To Cummins, the end of WWF represents a failure to integrate: 'In light of Le Guin's presentation in *The Left Hand of Darkness* [an earlier Hainish novel] of the value of joining the larger human community, the League's decision to set Athshe beyond the League boundaries must surely be judged' as regrettable.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Cummins, *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin* (U of South Carolina P, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Cummins, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Cummins, p. 103.

Yet Le Guin has said that the Hainish books ‘do not form a coherent history. There are some [...] great discontinuities’.<sup>53</sup> And while Le Guin believed in reconciliation between opposites, she also believed that sometimes the change needed was all in one direction, rather than a mutual movement towards the center. She said as much in a 1982 statement drawing on Taoist yin-yang terminology: ‘Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.’<sup>54</sup> There is a chain of invaders of Athshe, ranged from least- to most-plausibly ‘good for all’: from Davidson at the tip of the spear, to the soldier-Terran culture, to the home-Terran culture, to the League culture. Yet in WWF, Athshe seems to be missing nothing it needs, except perhaps for Terran technology, and on the other side of the scale, the destruction of a stably pacifist culture is an unmitigated tragedy.

In Tolkien’s ‘Scouring’ chapter, the hobbits resist the downward spiral that Saruman tempts them with. They repel Saruman and the ruffians, who may remind us of Donaldson and the soldier-Terrans, yet in order to do so they take something they need from Rohan, which may remind us of home-Terra, the ‘good version’ of a martial culture. There is a beneficial integration across Middle-earth that still preserves the integrity of hobbit culture. In standing up for themselves, the hobbits follow Frodo’s rule of treating outsiders with less compassion than insiders. This is a stable strategy that will not degrade the hobbits’ treatment of each other. The Athsheans, by contrast, learn that to dehumanize one is to dehumanize all. Some scholars have seen the ending of WWF story as a happy one, but Selver’s silence suggests the Athsheans have

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<sup>53</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘FAQ’, *UrsulaKLeguin.Com*, 2018 <<http://www.ursulakleguin.com/FAQ.html#BookOrder>> [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>54</sup> Gib Prettyman, ‘Daoism, Ecology, and World Reduction in Le Guin’s Utopian Fictions’, in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, ed. by Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson (Wesleyan UP, 2014), pp. 56–76 (p. 63).

been left only the worse for the coming of the outsiders, having begun a slide towards dehumanization that cannot be arrested.