
**Visions of Nature: A Study of
Ecology and Colonialism in
Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word
for World is Forest***

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Abstract

Human and nature are inextricably coupled. Human depend upon plants, animals, and other organisms for their survival. Nature is an integral part of human civilization. We rely on them for numerous purposes. However, these relationships metamorphose when human activities intervene with nature in an inappropriate way. To study the existing association in between humans and environment in addition from the literary point of view an acquaintance with Ecofiction is required.

Ecofiction is the branch of literature that deals with the fictional works focused on environment. The history of this genre has been traced to the year 1970. The ancient myths, pastoral literature, traditional pastoral forms, magic realism, science

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fiction, and transcendentalism are some of the prevalent written forms of Ecofiction.

The word for world is Forest is a science fiction novella written by Ursula K. Le. Guin published in the year 1976. It explores the theme of sensitivity towards nature and connection with ones language and culture. The novella also carries anti-colonial and anti-militaristic tones. The setting is on a fictional planet, *Athshe* and *Terra* (referrer to Earth). The people of *Terra* intrude on *Athshe* that leads to military logging. It was also Le Guin's reaction against ongoing war and a strong disapproval against the combat. In the due course of the events, the novella depicts the revolt of *Athshe* against *Terrans* who had exploited their women's that eventually leads to the devastation of their peaceful culture which they loved.

Keywords

Nature, Science fiction, Transcendentalism, Ecology, Colonialism, Ancient myths, Traditional pastoral, Magic Realism.

Le Guin N was a distinguish American author. She is best known for her speculative fiction. Her forte is science fiction and fantasy. She was born on 21st October, 1929 in Berkeley, California, US and died on July 22nd, 2018 in Portland at the age 88. Le Guin began publishing science fiction in the early 1960s, perpetually she wrote for 10 years with the publication of her notable works *A Wizard of Earthse* (1968), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and *The Dispossessed* (1974).

The Tedios work of Le Guin acknowledges her as one the most distinguished author in the genre. In a span of nearly sixty years she has produce more than twenty novels, over a hundred short stories along with this she also worked on poetry, literary criticism, translation, child fiction, etc.

Le Guin was honoured with several prestigious awards. She has to her credit the Hugo and the Nebula awards for the best novel. Being the daughter of an anthropologist and a writer it was quite natural for Le Guin to get fascinated towards the aspects of human beings, society and culture. The influence of her mother can be effortlessly noticed in her creative writings. Cultural anthropology, Taoism, and Feminism were some of her dominating influences that created a deep impression on her writing.

The authorized biography of the late Portland literary legend, Ursula K. Le Guin is scheduled to be published in the year 2026 by Virago, a British publisher. Julie Phillips is the biographer of Le Guin.

The interrelation between human and environment is complex. In order to fulfill the societal needs various political, social, cultural processes and human activities are involved in modification of natural environment. This novella projects the distinction and the interactions of the natural entities, human race, and technology. Together they are an integral part that deals with each other in the modern set up. In order to maintain a balance and to create an understanding among the human beings we need to form strategies and plan accordingly. There has been a condition of order and disorder in the universe. The author is focused to resolve this chaos.

Ursula Le Guin imagines a dystopian land (*Terra*) where the inhabitant (Terrance) faces the problem of existence due to the depleting resources. This lack of existing resources leads the native to intrude in other territories. Eventually, *Terrance* practiced violence in the *Athse* planet resulting in the exploiting their natural and human resources.

The major novels of Le Guin are set in the fictional Hainish universe, the idea of expanding human empire, environmentalism, anarchy are some of the major themes in her novels. In her fictional world she makes her living and non-living things interact. Moreover, she is inclined towards the formation of an egalitarian society. Her idea of proposing dimensions through her literary works is visible in categories from living to non-living nature, mythologies, religion, oppressive systems, science, and technology, etc. in spite of the use of fantasy in her novels, LE

Guins novels are realistic in tone. Her novels depict the aspects of civilization and the role of human in the conservation of the same. She raises a question before the entire inhabitant of Terra that is the question of the preservice of life on Terra.

Le Guin solidified her reputation in the world speculative fiction with the publication of her novels from 1968 to 1974. Her novella *The Word for World is Forest* is one of her personal favorites. The underlying concept in the novella is anti-colonial and anti-militaristic. This perhaps is partially derived from her reaction against the Vietnam War. The novella condemns the faces of colonialism of the Terran colonists. On the planet Athshe also referred to as New Tahiti by the Terran colonists. Planet Athshe is considered as a green paradise, a lush wooded tropical planet with four continents, ecologically balanced. The indigenous inhabitants of Athshe are short heighted covered in green fur. They are similar to the other inhabitants in the Hainish Universe. Their physiology, culture, outfits and language depicts the local environment.

Le Guin commented, "Writing is usually hard work for me, and enjoyable; this story was easy to write, and disagreeable." The American soldiers killed and raped nearly 500 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians during the Vietnam War. Le Guin in her work narrates this excruciating tale of the natives of Athshe who are also referred to as "creechie" by the human colonizers (Terrans). Captain Davidson, a villainous Terran who was responsible for the most conspicuous conduct of torturing the inmates of the colonized planet. He is the prototype of William Calley, former US Army officer accused of murdering several unarmed South Vietnamese civilians in 'My Lai Massacre' on March 16, 1968 during the Vietnam War. In like manner the novella brings into light the human colonists who were desperate to occupy the Athshe and combat with the inhabitants for their forest resources. They take them to become their 'voluntary workers.' This violence leads to several upheavals in the story.

The Word for World is Forest by Ursula K. Le Guin is a powerful science fiction novella that has earned both praise and criticism over the years. It's a novella about what happens to the world

centuries from now and we as people have drained the earth of all its forests and most of its natural resources. But science has gone far and 27 light-years away earth has discovered another planet and this planet where the other subspecies of Homo Sapiens live the Athsheans. But the Athenians are very different than human beings they are covered in green fur and a bit smaller than us. They are matriarchal in nature, very peaceful species, unlike human beings. They are very in tune with the environment that they live in. There is like a small army of people that have been sent there which is the combination of military, loggers, scientists to sort of discover, learn about the land but also steal some of their forest resources like trees and timber and ship it back to Earth which is like 27 light years away.

The homocentric view of the world is represented by racist, sexual, brutal Captain Don Davidson, the main protagonist of this novella. He thinks the mission they have in New Tahiti, which he uses for Athshe, in which a lot of space is wasted on trees, is to tame it by cutting them. This made their planet a desert in which there are no trees, no wild animals except rats. However, this does not lead them to change their behavior towards nature but to discover new planets and becomes master of them.

The find difficulty in understanding humans who differentiate between dream time and world time that are the same for Asthean people, they translate what they have seen in their dreams. Selver discovered a new word, murder, in their language accepted as a god by the Athshean people. They are not sure if he has seen that in his dream or if it comes from the actions of humans resulting in making Selver speak their language which might be destructive for his people like "an infection, a foreign plague". (*Le Guin* 39)

Selver and his wife Thele both decided to escape from the camp where they worked like slaves. But when Davidson realized that he rapes the woman which results in her death making Selver unsuccessfully attacks him. Then he is released and arrives in another city which is soon and arrives in another city which is soon occupied by humans cutting down the trees, enslaving people dying because of

hard work, which gives no choice to Selver and his friends but to kill two hundred humans in the camp:

“I watched the trees fall and saw the world cut open and left to rot ... So at last after long talking, and long dreaming, and the making of a plan, we went in daylight, and killed the yumens of Kelme Deva with arrows and hunting-lances, and burned their city and their engines.” (*Le Guin* 12).

Captain Don Davidson and his people fall into error that they can exploit the land as they wish since it was basically given just to be shaped by men. This wrong interpretation has consequently led humans to consider animals and nature to be inferior to them by showing them their power over them this also results in the superiority men like Davidson feel over women, which is given in his thoughts: “the only time a man is really an entirely a man is when he’s just had a woman”. (*Le Guin* 30) and in his comparison of the man worried about an attack from creechies, the name he uses to refer to Athshean people, to “some woman afraid of getting raped” (*Le Guin* 31)

Lyubov vainly tries to explain this attitude has made Alaska a desert, and it will not work here, either despite their scientific calculations: “A forest ecology is a delicate one. If the forest perishes, its fauna may go with it. The Athshean word for world is also the word for forest”. (*Le Guin* 27).

Lyubov realizes the reason of how Athshean people achieve to integrate with nature: “the substance of their world was not earth, but forest. Terran man was clay, red dust. Athshean man was branch and root”. (*Le Guin* 33). Though Lyubov is impressed by the bond these people have established with forest, Davidson is proud of how humans have achieved to tame nature in some parts of this dark land:

When they came here there had been nothing trees. A dark huddle and jumble and tangle of trees, endless, meaningless. A sluggish river over-hung and choked by trees, a few creechie-warrens hidden among the trees, some red deer, hairy monkeys, birds and trees. Roots, boles, branches, twigs, leaves overhead and under-foot and in your face and in your eyes, endless leaves on endless tree. (*Le Guin* 3)

His hatred for nature that is not conquered by humans is notably obvious in the words dark, huddle, jumble he uses for the description of forest. However, for Athshean people, this dark forest with endless trees is a source of life and home.

Conclusion

The narrative of this novella explores themes of colonialism, environmentalism, and the complex relationship between humans and nature through the lens of a conflict between Earth colonists and the indigenous inhabitants of a forest planet. The story is engaging and thought-provoking, raising questions about our own relationship with the natural world.

Novella portrays strong characters. It features well-developed characters with nuanced motivations and perspectives. The protagonist, Shevek, in particular, is a complex figure who grapples with the morality of his mission and the impact of human actions on the planet. Le Guin's prose is poetic and evocative, bringing the lush alien landscape and the emotional turmoil of the characters to life.

Regarding this novella there is mixed perceptions of readers. One who compare it with the movie Avatar and the others who deny this comparison. It completely depends upon the perspectives of readers as the story challenges readers to question their own assumptions and consider the consequences of human actions.

Overall, "The Word for World is Forest" is a thought-provoking and beautifully written novella that tackles important themes of ecology, anti-colonialism, environmentalism, pacifism, and the dangers of human arrogance. It is a well-paced, thought-provoking, and a story that offers a unique perspective.

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