

Writing Irrationality: A Bergsonian Reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's Selected Fictions

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Abstract

Science fiction with its speculative characteristics provides feminists an ideal literary space to imagine, suggest, and construct a more plural and heterogeneous social relationship, a world where irrationality is a delicate balance with rationality. Ursula K. Le Guin's fictions consistently address the theme of balance, denouncing a world ensnared by hierarchical dualism that perpetuates domination and alienation. However, previous scholarly analyses often overlook the irrationality embedded in her works and rarely detect the influence of Bergson philosophy on Le Guin's works. Therefore, this study examines Le Guin's two masterpieces *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, revealing that Le Guin embraced Bergson's concepts of intuition and duration during a period of declining rationalism. Nevertheless, it's essential to recognize that these fictions were not meant to elevate irrationality to an absolute, but rather to earnestly seek a harmonious equilibrium between these ostensibly conflicting forces. This revelation is significant for the world today, as it is time to question the linear way of development, and challenge the conception that rationality, represented by science and technology, is the only way to solve all problems. Sometimes the more we strive for rationality, the more we may find ourselves ensnared in irrational predicaments.

Keywords: Irrationality, Intuition, Duration, Reason, Science Fiction

Introduction

Irrationality often implies behavior, thoughts, or decisions that deviates from what is considered reasonable or sensible. In various contexts, irrationality can manifest as emotional responses, cognitive biases, or choices that seem to defy logic or go against expected norms. Irrationality is frequently associated with a negative undertone, implying thought processes

and behaviors that may be less practical or more illogical when compared to alternative, more rational choices (Fletcher, 1994). Since irrationality has an entwined relationship with reason, it is appropriate for us to first see humans' discovery, development and understanding of reason/rationality.

Rationality originated from the Enlightenment of the Renaissance in the 17th century, which enabled mankind to emerge from the ignorance of religion and theology. Later in the 18th century, the global expansion of capital promotes the rational spirit of the Enlightenment throughout the world. In the 19th century, under the illumination of the spirit of reason, natural science made great progress, and reason became the scalpel for dissecting all aspects of the world and is elevated to an almost divine status. Supremacy of reason has become people's unwavering value concept.

However, the two world wars in the 20th century, coupled with many problems that violated social and environmental justice brought about by the development of science and technology, questioned the West's firm belief in the value system of rationality and prompted a critical examination of irrationality. Particularly, in the 1970s, when the feminist movement closely entwined with the environmental movement, feminists began to critique the prevailing belief of traditional rationality supremacy manifested in both gender oppression and the degradation of the natural environment. They maintain that the patriarchal society associate rationality exclusively with men, while irrationality linking women and nature, eventually, this association eventually serves to legitimize the oppression of the latter by the former, resulting in an unsustainable state of tension within both societal and ecological systems (Plumwood, 2003; Warren, 2000). Justin E. H Smith argues that 'the Enlightenment has been a parochial project that falsely proclaims its own universal legitimacy, and thus has been hypocritical or at least unforthcoming about the question of who stands to benefit from it, and what a society or an individual must give up in exchange' (Smith, 2019, p.24). Smith's words recently prompt again a critical examination of the Enlightenment's legacy of rationality and also of the long-devalued irrationality.

Science fiction with its speculative characteristics provides feminists an ideal literary space to imagine, suggest and construct the marginalized group's subjectivity, a more plural and heterogeneous social relationship, a world where irrationality is at delicate balance with the rationality (Wolmark, 1994; Eighan, 2013). Against this backdrop, this study aims to revisit Ursula K. Le Guin's renowned feminist science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* to reveal their exploration of irrationality and their envisioning of a balance between rationality and irrationality. This study asserts that irrationality is an integral component in maintaining a healthy existence, operating alongside rationality to steer individuals towards the path of truth. The desire to impose rationality on individual or society will often leads to dramatic display of irrationality. It is imperative to strike a harmonious balance between the two.

Theoretical Framework: Henri Bergson's Philosophy

Henri Bergson, the renowned French philosopher, is celebrated for his assertion that grasping reality through immediate experience and intuition holds greater importance than relying solely on abstract rationalism and scientific methods. He states in his introduction to *Creative Evolution* that 'our thought, in its purely logical form, is incapable of conceiving of the true

nature of life and the deep meaning of the evolutionary movement'(Bergson, 2023, p.xx). Bergson suggests that when we approach life purely through logical and rational thinking, we are limited in our ability to fully understand its true nature and profound significance. He implies that the conventional, linear, and reductionist modes of thinking, which emphasize strict cause-and-effect relationships and abstract concepts, fall short in capturing the complexity, dynamism, and depth inherent in life and the evolutionary process.

Bergson highlights the concept of duration to rediscover the fundamental essence of life. 'Duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, on concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances' (Bergson, 2023, p.11). Duration in Bergson's view refers to the inclusion of both the present, the past and the future. In duration, each moment interpenetrates each other, and together they form a unified whole that becomes a vast torrent of time. Bergson also gives the example of waiting, though willy-nilly for the sugar to melt in water. (Bergson, 2023, p.16) He takes this little fact of great meaning, because the time of waiting here is not only the mathematical time but also his own duration for its coincidence with his impatience. 'It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*.' [emph. Bergson's] (Bergson, 2023, p.16) Bergson conveys that time forms a continuum intricately woven with the subject's will, deeply enmeshed and engaged. Time is life itself. Time is no longer externalized by the will but coexists with the will of the subject. It is the process of the subject's experience. It's only when the subject engages in the expanses of time that significance permeates existence, and time assumes its true essence. Duration manifests as a tangible expression of the subject's encounter, emotions, and vitality. Bergson's notion of duration and time constitutes a potent critique of the mechanistic, deterministic theories that have held sway since Newton's era. He contends that we must embrace uncertainty, acknowledging that the indeterminate nature of duration forms the bedrock of our existence.

Then, how does one go about apprehending and acknowledging the essence of duration and the pulsations of life? Bergson posits that our reliance should rest solely on intuition, as opposed to reason. Reason, by its inherent nature, adopts a geometric stance, ill-equipped to grapple with the intricacies of true vitality. Entities aren't encapsulated by the convoluted constructs of the intellect; yet, within the realm of intuitive experience, they unfold as ceaseless currents, an unbroken continuum of change. In his *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson pointed out that 'by intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.' (Bergson, 1912, p.7) In other words, Bergson argues that only by entering into the object, by jumping into the current of movement itself, can one truly grasp absolute movement. Scientists can only deal with the dead mechanical world, while the real living world should be studied by philosophers. Through intuition proposed by Bergson, people can gain a direct perception of life itself. Bergson's conception of duration and intuition was embedded in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*.

Problem Statement

Rationality cannot solve all problems. The history of Enlightenment and rationalist thought shows that the more we strive for rationality, the more we may find ourselves ensnared in irrational predicaments (Smith, 2019). Just as the Chinese proverb goes, 'When things reach

an extreme, they must turn around.' Attempts to impose rationality in order to make humanity and society more sensible may ironically fuel the flourishing of irrationality. Therefore, the author contends that seeking to eliminate irrationality, whether in constructing social order or in the exercise of our own mental faculties, is unreasonable and unnecessary. We should break free from blind worship of rationality and learn to keep balance between rationality and irrationality.

The theme of balance prominently resonates throughout Ursula K. Le Guin's works. Le Guin's early works were created amidst the second wave feminist movement and the burgeoning ecological movement. She attained a profound understanding of the entrenched hierarchies within Western culture. This hierarchy, shaped by a patriarchal 'rational' framework, relegated women and nature to the position of 'others' subjected to oppression. She castigates a world besieged by hierarchical dualism, wherein domination and alienation remain veiled. Le Guin said in *The Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) 'the world is in balance. To light a candle is to cast a shadow.' 'the world is in balance, in Equilibrium.' (p.57). In *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989), Le Guin said 'Our curse is alienation, the separation of yang from yin [and the moralization of yang as good, and yin as bad]. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied' (pp.33-34). Le Guin ardently yearns for equilibrium, integration, and interconnectedness in her fictions. However, the previous research on the theme of balance in Le Guin's works mainly focus on balance between beauty of the text, and morality and politics; between genders, between civilization and nature, between marginalized genre and mainstream literature, between dominant males and some form of alien Other (dragon, dark powers, children, or adolescents) (Hatfield, 1993; Lothian, 2006; Petersen, 2005; Barbour, 2020; Stone, et al., 2021). Given the prior studies have rarely delved into balance between the irrationality and rationality presented in her works, this study maintains that a comprehensive exploration of this concept would significantly contribute to a deeper comprehension of the theme of balance within Le Guin's body of work.

Furthermore, given prior studies have found the influence of Jungian thought (Monteiro, 2018; Rochelle, 2005), Lao Zi's Taoism (Porter, 1975; Rolim Filho, 2021), Peter Kropotkin's and Paul Goodman's anarchism (Call, 2007; Davis, 2009; Dobson, 2018), Virginia Woolf's feminist thought (Rashley, 2007) on Le Guin's writing, there's a notable gap in revealing the possible influence of Henri Bergson on Le Guin's writing considering the notable Bergsonian concept of time and instinct portrayed in Le Guin's works.

Consequently, this essay undertakes an examination of Le Guin's seminal works, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, through the lens of Henri Bergson's philosophy. The aim is to unveil how Le Guin engaged with and reacted to the prevailing irrational zeitgeist in her literary creations and to achieve a balance between rationality and irrationality, and to reveal the influence of Bergson's philosophy on Le Guin creation.

Research Questions and Objective of the Study

This study, adopting Bergson's irrationalistic philosophy, analyzed the characters, intuition, and time in the fiction Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, aiming to reveal the influence of Bergson's irrationalistic philosophy on Le Guin's chosen works, intuition

and time embodied in these works, and the portrayal of balance between irrationality and rationality. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

1. How Bergson's notions of intuition and time are embodied in the chosen fictions?
2. How the balance between irrationality and rationality is portrayed in the chosen fictions?

Significance of the Study

Modern society places great emphasis on rationality, science, and logic, especially in technological and economic realms. This over-reliance on rationalism can overlook the value of emotion, intuition, and other "irrational" dimensions of human experience. When facing global issues (such as climate change, social inequality, etc.), purely rational and technical solutions are often insufficient. Emotional resonance, moral intuition, and collective cooperation—irrational elements—become increasingly crucial.

The paper, through the philosophical lens of Henri Bergson, explores the "irrational" elements in Le Guin's works. Bergson's philosophy, especially his concept of intuitionism, challenges traditional mechanical rationalism, arguing that human intuition and irrational thought are equally important. Le Guin's novels often build their characters and worlds through imagination, emotion, and intuition, aligning with Bergson's views. By analyzing these irrational elements, the paper likely shows how Le Guin critiques rationality-dominated modern social structures and ways of thinking through her fiction.

Discussion

Intuition-Arriving at Truth

The Left Hand of Darkness tells the story of how the protagonist Genly Ai, a gender-stereotyped Earthman eventually becomes a person with no gender bias. Ai as the envoy of an interplanetary trade alliance Ekumen is sent to the planet Gethen for inviting the Gethenians to coalize into the humanoid worlds. He arrives in the Gethenian kingdom of Karhide, investing two years in his endeavor to convince the rulers of the advantages of joining Ekumen. Despite assistance from the prime minister, Estraven, Ai's efforts yield little progress. Consequently, he sets out for another significant nation on the planet—Orgoreyn, where Estraven, too, has sought refuge following his banishment by the King. Nevertheless, for distrust by Orgota politicians, Ai is arrested and sent to a labor camp in the far north. There, he grapples with harsh cold, grueling labor, and debilitating drugs. As his demise looms, Estraven intervenes, rescuing Ai from this plight. Embarking on a perilous 80-day trek across the northern Gobrin ice sheet, they journey back to Karhide. Throughout their trials, Ai eventually triumphs in persuading Gethen to align with the Alliance, although this victory comes at the cost of Estraven's sacrifice. The novel subtly reveals the palpable influence of Bergson's philosophy of intuition on Le Guin's narrative.

In the fiction, reason is portrayed as a force frequently misleads the protagonist. When Ai first arrived on Gethen, he tried to approach and persuade the king to join the Ekumen through Estraven (his full name was 'Therem Harth remir Estraven'), the then Chancellor of Karhide. He thinks 'rationally' and analyzes his status quo and concludes Estraven to be 'the darkest soul' (Le Guin, 2003, p. 41) he has ever met in the city of Elkhorn in Karhide. According to his viewpoint, Estraven's initial interactions with him upon his arrival in Erhenrang—facilitating introductions to key allies for his mission and altering the locals' perception of him—appeared to be deceitful and marked by conspiracy. However, in an ironic twist, it was

only toward the conclusion that Ai grasped the truth: throughout their time on Gethen, Estraven was the sole individual whom he had hesitated to trust, while Estraven had exhibited unwavering trust in him (p. 284).

When Ai is exiled by the King of Karhide, he goes to Mishnory in Orgoreyn, where he hopes to complete his mission of alliance, he once again analyzes his situation with 'reason' and believes that those around him have accepted him. In fact, he is placed under house arrest by the politicians and is eventually betrayed by the politician Shusgis. What awaits him is to be loaded onto a large truck and hauled off to Kundershaden prison. All the way naked, cold, and hungry. In the work, Le Guin appears to convey the notion that rational analysis doesn't always lead to the truth, whereas intuition occasionally can. Reason, by its very nature, has limitations. Placing absolute trust in reason to unfailingly guide individuals to the truth is inevitably doomed, given that reason's foundation rests upon a finite knowledge base and a specific level of cognitive understanding about a given subject. Genly Ai, an extraterrestrial visitor to Gethen, possesses limited insights into the planet and its cultural dynamics. Consequently, relying exclusively on reason for making judgments becomes perilous for Ai.

Nevertheless, Ai had briefly approached the truth of his status quo by intuition. However, this time he chooses to distrust his intuition for which he is later put into prison. When his intuition comes down to him, he felt the buildings in the center of Mishnory in Orgoreyn blurred by the rain melting away, the corners of the houses blurring. There was something fluid, unreal, in this city, in this country. The host, Shusgis, had also become unreal. And those around him made him feel insubstantial, as if they had no shadow. He suddenly felt insulated. The intuition ultimately led to the truth that Ai had been placed under house arrest and deceived by the duplicitous politicians in Orgoreyn. It became evident that no one there is sincere about offering him help. Ai believed that his feeling in this way stemmed from an ability he had acquired on the planet Hain called the Farfetching. Ai explains 'What one is after when farfetching might be described as the intuitive perception of a moral entirety; and thus it tends to find expression not in rational symbols, but in metaphor' (p. 216). The farfetching could be taken as a symbol of Bergson's intuition. Bergson states in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 'by intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible' (Bergson, 1912, p. 7). Both Le Guin and Bergson believe that intuition cannot be expressed with rational symbols. However, the difference between them lies in that Bergson completely denies the interpretability of intuition, whereas Le Guin allows it with metaphor, because Le Guin is a novelist. She said in the introduction of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 'All fiction is metaphor' (p. 14). Nevertheless, if considering that Le Guin also states 'The artist deals with what cannot be said in words. The artist whose medium is fiction does this in words. The novelist says in words what cannot be said in words' (p. 13), the difference of their understanding of intuition will be eliminated.

In the fifth chapter of the fiction, Le Guin focuses on how intuition helps the prophets of Handdara in the Karhide to perceive the truth. In the chapter 'The Domestication of Hunch', Ai wishes to go to a hermitage in the eastern part of Karhide, hoping that this trip will answer the many questions about the Handdara Foretellers that have not been answered by the first investigators from Ekumen on this planet. Ai asks the Foretellers: Will the planet Gethen become a member of the Ekumen in five years' time? The prophets sat in a circle, and it

seemed that all of them silently wove a web. 'I felt, whether I wished or not, the connection, the communication that ran, wordless, inarticulate, through Faxe, and which Faxe was trying to pattern and control, for he was the center, the Weaver' (p. 102). Ai tries to get rid of that spiritual connection between the prophets. But 'I was made very uneasy by that silent electric tension, by the sense of being drawn in, of becoming a point or figure in the pattern, in the web' (p. 103). Time passes slowly and the dark central Faxe finally cries out the answer: Yes—. Ai recalled 'Five years from now Gethen would be a member of the Ekumen: yes. No riddles, no hedging. Even then I was aware of the quality of that answer, not so much a prophecy as an observation. I could not evade my own certainty that the answer was right. It had the imperative clarity of a hunch' (p. 105). In Ai's opinion, the Foretellers did not so much prophesy the future as they discovered the answer to Ai's innermost questions. Bergson states that with intuition 'I shall no longer grasp the movement from without, remaining where I am, but from where it is, from within, as it is in itself. I shall possess an absolute' (Bergson, 1912, p. 3). The Foretellers in the novel use intuition to place themselves within their object, Ai, conforming their feelings to Ai's unique, inexpressible inner experience. They grasp the inner feelings of Ai from within and thus the answer they got are 'not so much a prophecy as an observation' (Le Guin, 2003, p. 105).

Another time, when Ai and Estraven escaped the prison and decided they had to do a Glacier crossing in winter, Estraven explained to Ai the feasibility of the plan was based on his belief of 'luck'. Estraven believed himself to be a slow thinker and therefore has to "guide his acts by a general intuition of which way his 'luck' was running, and this intuition rarely failed him" (p. 291). Ai thought what Estraven had said may well be true. It is not only the Foretellers of the Fastnesses can see the future on the Winter Star. 'They have tamed and trained the hunch, but not increased its certainty. In this matter the Yomeshta also have a point: the gift is perhaps not strictly or simply one of foretelling but is rather the power of seeing (if only for a flash) everything at once: seeing whole' (p. 291). The intuition is the ability the native citizens on Gethen have all tamed and trained, but this is not the ability to foretell the future, instead, the power of seeing whole—the past, the present and the future. The 'whole' is Bergson's 'duration' which only intuition could get access to.

Ai once exclaimed 'We have NAFAL ships and instantaneous transmission and mindspeech, but we haven't yet tamed hunch to run in harness; for that trick we must go to Gethen' (p. 105). Ai as a spokesman of the Terrans, asserts only reason symbolized by technology is not enough, intuition and the irrational also mean a lot for us.

Intuition means using the life of the self to penetrate deep into the inner life of the object in order to achieve a communion of the stream of life. Bergson said, 'By *intuition* is meant the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible' (Bergson, 1912, p. 7). This method grasps the being absolutely, rather than perceiving it relatively; it places one within the being, rather than observing it from an external point of view.

Foreteller Faxe says that although the Handdaras can use their intuition to foretell the future, they do not want to know the answers. 'The unknown, the unfortold, the unproven, that is what life is based on. Ignorance is the ground of thought. Unproof is the ground of action' (Le Guin, 2003, p. 111). For the Foretellers, intuition is not primarily used to foretell

the future and thus imprison people's free will, but to experience the duration of consciousness, the uncertainty and freedom of life.

Bergsonian Notions of time in Le Guin's Novels

Bergson sees the process and manner in which life is created, flows, as time. The time that can be divided in science is not the real time; real time is an indivisible duration. The influence of Bergson's philosophy on Le Guin's reflections on time is also quite evident. As Ai followed the caravan slowly drove towards the hermitage village, Ai described how although the Gethenians had the ability to make the car go fast, they didn't do that.

It all moves along, however crowded, quite steadily at the rate of 25 miles per hour (Terran). Gethenians could make their vehicles go faster, but they do not. If asked why not, they answer 'Why?' Like asking Terrans why all our vehicles must go so fast; we answer, 'Why not?' No disputing tastes. Terrans tend to feel they've got to get ahead, make progress. The people of Winter, who always live in the Year One, feel that progress is less important than presence (Le Guin, 2003, pp. 81-82).

The Gethenians are in no hurry to reach their destination; they are wholly dedicated to embracing the experience itself. They reject the notion of imprisoning their free will within the notion that technology will unerringly lead to an improved existence, and they resist the mechanization and purpose-driven nature of life. Conversely, these are the very dynamics that Earth's inhabitants are grappling with. While technology may effectively address the essentials for human survival—such as sustenance, clothing, shelter, and transportation—it falls short in resolving the profound aspects of human existence: the struggles rooted in desires, emotions, ignorance, and envy. Relying solely on science and technology to enhance lives is insufficient. Instead, humanity needs to engage in introspection, seeking spiritual freedom and inner richness.

According to Bergson, the essence of human existence resides in the liberty of choice, the freedom to experience, and the freedom to create. Aligning with Bergson's philosophy, the Gethenians no longer externalize themselves in time; instead, they internalize their being within the current of time, experiencing its duration firsthand. As the caravan crossed the Kargav hills, the landboat driver gave Ai a graphic account of what he had seen and heard. He talked about avalanches, landboats blown off the road by mountain winds, snowplow crews marooned for weeks in inaccessible heights and so on. In his accounts, one particular scene is impressive, in which he depicted a truck which had plunged into the abyss. 'He described having seen the truck ahead of his skid and go over a thousand-foot precipice; what was remarkable, he said, was the slowness with which it fell. It seemed to take all afternoon floating down into the abyss, and he had been very glad to see it at last vanish, with no sound at all, into a forty-foot snowdrift at the bottom' (pp. 82-83). The driver does not feel a moment's panic and terror at the suddenness of the crisis, but instead describes the car's tumbling down the cliff in poetic, beautiful words. Facing death, the Gethenians embrace the attitude of taking dying as if returning home. They understand that since the end of life is firmly waiting them ahead, all one can do is to pursue infinite feelings of life in a finite time, including even the last experience of life—death. When one is able to face death, one gains spiritual freedom from it, a freedom to choose one's life. Death becomes the motivation for living, and life becomes free because of death. Death for the Gethenians does not seem to be

the end, not the destruction, but only a form of descent in the movement of life, a temporary descent of duration that will lead to a next ascent of it, and this is perhaps why the landboat driver is 'very glad to see it at last vanish'.

In the fiction, the story of Meshe is thought-provoking and metaphorical. Thousands of years ago, the Lord of Shorth forced the Foretellers of Asen Fastness to answer the question of *What is the meaning of life?* After six days and nights being secluded in the darkness, 'all the Celibates were catatonic, the Zanies were dead, the Pervert clubbed the Lord of Shorth to death with a stone' (p. 96). Only Meshe got the answer and later became the founder to Yomesh cult.

Here the author clearly maps the different western philosophers and philosophical schools in their different searches for the meaning of life. The ascetic or pessimistic philosophies of life, such as the Cynic's returning to nature and living ascetic lifestyle; Schopenhauer's 'life is suffering' and therefore the absence of desire is the final purpose of life; Heidegger's *dasein's* fear, anxiety and boredom can only be ended by death, all lament the brevity of life and the impermanence of the world. They are full of hesitation, confusion and bewilderment about reality, and ultimately place their hope in the repression of their instinctive desires and even in death to achieve peace and tranquility for their souls. So the Celibates in the novel suffer from catatonia.

The allegory of 'Zanies' in the story is also worth exploring. When Ai goes to a Fastness village in eastern Karhide, a young man named Goss tells Ai that Zanies means schizophrenic, also known as 'time dividers' (p. 99). When Ai wondered whether these people should be cured, Goss answered 'Cured? Would you cure a singer of his voice' (p. 99)? Therefore, in Goss' view, clowns are only different from normal people in the way they perceive things, not that they are suffering from a real disease that needs medical treatment. They are just 'time dividers' and this is the key to deciphering the metaphors laid down by Le Guin. Bergson believed that the essence of time was indivisible duration. The physicists' and astronomers' time, on the other hand, is a uniformly lined up of separate moments that can be measured and divided. Bergson maintains that their time was only for the purpose of recording and observation, which was not the essence of time (Bergson, 2001, p. 107). Therefore, the time dividers are those physicists and astronomers who see time as divisible and measurable. They were representatives of rationalism, but Le Guin did not think that they needed healing, only that they perceived the world differently from the Foretellers who represent the irrationalism. The death of the Zanies is a metaphor for the moribund state of rationalism in the age of Le Guin because of the powerful onslaught of irrationalist philosophies of from Schopenhauer to Sartre and Derrida.

Finally, the Pervert clubbed to death the Lord of Shorth, who asked what the meaning of life was. It's notable that Lord Shorth's demise wasn't due to the audacity of his question being excessively complex; rather, his query presupposed the existence of a definite answer. The Pervert's act of killing him strongly repudiates the notion of a definitive solution to this inquiry. Throughout the extensive annals of human civilization, individuals have tirelessly sought an ultimate purpose transcending their physical reality—ranging from the glorification of deities to the relentless pursuit of truth. Yet, this quest for an unequivocal significance came to an end with Nietzsche's impact. He contends that an elusive ultimate realm remains

nonexistent; what endures is solely the tangible world we inhabit. Nietzsche's 'God is dead' 'perspectivism' puts an end for us to search for a definitive meaning to life. Because the Gethen is a planet where the natives are mostly androgynous, single-sex people like Earthmen are called perverts. Therefore, Le Guin has the 'Pervert' Nietzsche kill the questioner.

In the end only Meshe answered the questioner's question.

In the answering of the Question of the Lord of Shorth, in the moment of the Seeing, Meshe saw all the sky as if it were all one sun. Above the earth and under the earth all the sphere of sky was bright as the sun's surface, and there was no darkness. For he saw not what was, nor what will be, but what is. The stars that flee and take away their light all were present in his eye, and all their light shone presently (p. 237).

Meshe's answer to the meaning of life is 'now'. And this 'now' is the time duration of Bergson. It is a present where it holds a past that is alive and by holding on to the past, which keeps moving forward. After answering Lord Shorth's question, Meshe had a lifelong ability to see the past and the future. He became the center of time. 'And in the Center there is no time past and no time to come. In all time past it is. In all time to come it is. It has not been nor yet will it be. It is. It is all' (p. 235). Le Guin has similar expression in *The Dispossessed* 'unless the past and the future were made part of the present by memory and intention, there was, in human terms, no road, nowhere to go' (Le Guin, 2011, p. 325). The meaning of life lies in seeing history and the future as duration of time inseparable from the present; only then will the present be approached with prudence, only then will humanity be treated as an end instead of a means, only then will human freedom be manifested.

Though Meshe has many characteristics that fit Bergson's philosophy of life, the author does not intend to make him a typical practitioner of Bergson's philosophy. This is presented through the dialogues between Ai and Estraven when they are crossing the Gobrin. 'The Yomeshta would say that man's singularity is his divinity.' 'Lords of the Earth, yes. Other cults on other worlds have come to the same conclusion. They tend to be the cults of dynamic, aggressive, ecology-breaking cultures' (Le Guin, 2003, p. 332). Le Guin's portrayal of Yomeshta is a deliberate, distorted and one-sided presentation of Bergson's philosophy of life. She narrows the extension of life to human beings, portraying Yomeshta as an anthropocentric religion that recognizes only the meaning of human life, and by doing so, Le Guin intends to remind readers of the need for a comprehensive interpretation of Bergson's philosophy of life. Finally, the similarity between the name of the planet Gethen and that of Bergson also hints at Le Guin's homage to Bergson's philosophy of life.

If the Yomeshta is taken as a distorted embodiment of Bergson's time, then Shevek's simultaneity theory in the novel *The Dispossessed* is a full presentation of Bergson's view of time. In the beginning of the novel, Shevek leaves Anarres for Urras in a spaceship. When the ship flies into space, Shevek finds the clock on the wall of the space cabin is meaningless. To measure time according to the scientists' way is useless, instead, the subject's existence makes the time meaningful. 'Well, the ship would keep its own time, after all. Figuring all this out heartened him immensely' (Le Guin, 2011, p. 27). Shevek feels excited for he understands that men's free will does not externalize itself of time, but instead is time itself. 'He was time' (p. 27). Later, Shevek explains his view of time in simultaneity theory 'Within the strict terms of Simultaneity Theory, succession is not considered as a physically objective phenomenon,

but as a subjective one' (p. 389). Thus, it clearly shows that Shevek's view of time is Bergson's duration which is man's will. Time is not the measurable and divisible, which commonly represented by the unity of symbols by the empirical science, but by the subject's will and feel. According to Bergson, the pure duration that one experiences within is the true entity, an indivisible stream of qualitative change, change itself, not a fixed, unchanging reality. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson states 'as long as we speak only of a qualified and qualitatively modified continuity, such as colored and color-changing extension, we immediately express what we perceive, without interposed human convention—we have no reason to suppose that we are not here in presence of reality itself' (Bergson, 1965, p. 38). Therefore, the reality itself is the qualified and qualitatively modified continuity—the duration. Shevek added later in the novel 'Can one dismiss either being, or becoming, as an illusion? Becoming without being is meaningless. Being without becoming is a big bore' (Le Guin, 2011, p. 394). Hence, in Shevek's view, being and becoming exist one entity, which akin to Bergson's duration.

Balance between Rationality and Irrationality

Though Le Guin writes with Bergson's irrationalistic philosophy, it does not mean that she intends to absolutize and sanctify the irrational, but rather aspires to achieve a balance between the rational and the irrational. This is exemplified by Le Guin's portrayal of Estraven as a representative emblem of this balance. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ai's appreciation of Estraven could prove the point. 'Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow' (Le Guin, 2003, p. 376). In Western tradition which often associates the rational with male and light; and the irrational with woman and darkness, it is not difficult to understand Le Guin's intention of rendering Estraven as a symbol of balance between the rational and the irrational.

This balanced image of Estraven is even more evident in Ai's comments on his contribution after they had successfully traversed the white weather days on the ice field. Ai says 'Estraven, however, was on the track of his luck, following what appeared to be hunch or intuition, but may have been applied experience and reasoning' (p. 376).

By 'applied experience' and 'reasoning' Ai refers to the fact that, when crossing the ice field, Estraven meticulously calculated the speed and length of their journey before they set off: 12-18 miles per day, 70 days to get out of the Gobrai ice field. On the way, Estraven rationed their food according to their difference in height and weight, with Ai eating a couple of ounces more than Estraven each day. At times, the business of setting up camp, securing everything and so on were trying things for them because of coldness and extreme fatigue, but Estraven still insisted with perseverance and experience that the tent be set up and everything be done correctly and thoroughly, rather than just get into their sleeping-bag in the lee of the sledge as Ai had suggested, which could have frozen them both to death.

But by the thirty-fifth day of the journey, they realized that they were far from the midpoint of the journey because they had walked a quarter of the way astray. While Ai is worried that the amount of food will soon not match the length of the journey, Estraven was not that worried because they can reduce the food ration because the sledge will be lighter. His relief comes not so much from optimism as from the experience of living in a cold region for long time.

On the fortieth day of the journey they began to experience a series of blizzard. Estraven was extremely thin and weak from the cold and the lack of food. 'With luck we shall make it, and without luck we shall not' (p. 362). Recalling this experience, Ai says "But the Ice did not know how hard we worked. Why should it? Proportion is kept" (p. 363). They both attribute their success in crossing the ice field to 'luck' and 'destiny', but accepting destiny is by no means equal to accepting reality. They did not give up their free will.

In addition to 'luck', intuition also played an important role in helping Estraven to reach the alliance between Winter planet and the Ekumen. Estraven told Ai that impulse had led him, in a panic, to inform the King of Karhide Agraven of the fact that Ai were going to be sent to Pulefen Farm. 'At the time I wasn't clear as to my intent, but merely followed my impulse' (p. 282). Later on, after thoughtful contemplation, Estraven deduces that this approach might leverage the pride of Agraven, potentially affording Ai the opportunity to succeed in the alliance plan. Estraven's instinctive intuition ultimately proves accurate, and this strategic maneuver emerges as pivotal to Ai's subsequent success in his interaction with the King of Karhide.

Estraven and Ai's journey through the Ice serves as a metaphor for the individual journey of life that each of us undertakes. The inevitability of mortality and the presence of life's hardships do not equate to a surrender of free will or permitting our thoughts to be ensnared by preconceived notions and bias. Throughout life's trajectory, the interplay of the irrational force of 'intuition' and the rational process of 'reasoning' facilitates a state of liberation and equilibrium.

In addition to Estraven symbolizing the equilibrium between rationality and irrationality, the presence of the simultaneity theory in *The Dispossessed* serves as further evidence of Le Guin's endeavor in this direction. The novel tells the journey of Shevek, a physicist hailing from the anarchist society Anarres. His exploration of the 'simultaneity theory' precipitates the development of the ansible wave—an instrument enabling synchronous communication across galaxies. However, Anarres' intense xenophobia results in the theory's dismissal, as they perceive no necessity for dialogue with extraterrestrial beings and consequently disregard Shevek's breakthrough. In his pursuit of realizing his theory, Shevek ventures against tradition, returning to his ancestral planet Urras, abandoned by his forebears two centuries ago. The opulent home planet boasts the resources for research that Shevek could only fathom, albeit at the expense of restricting his theories solely to Urras. Displeased by the Urras rulers' callousness and self-interest, he resolutely commits to dedicating his theory to the Ekumen League, or more accurately, to all of humanity.

The content of Shevek's theory argues that 'Time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promise' (Le Guin, 2011, p. 223). Here the arrow of time, and circle of time easily draw readers' association with Bergson's philosophical time and scientists' time respectively. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson argues that two different kinds of time should be distinguished. One is the real time which is live and concrete; The other is the scientific time, which is measured and abstract. Duration is 'real time', which is pure and unadulterated by any element of space. Scientific time, on the other hand, is

influenced by the concept of space. Real time is the object of metaphysical knowledge, while scientific time is constructed by reason to meet the needs of people's life purposes (Bergson, 2001, pp. vii-viii). Duration is the arrow of time, which is ever becoming. Nevertheless, the scientists' time is the time which is divisible according to rotation period of planets and usually presented with symbols arranged in a circle, for example a clock. What's more, Le Guin's circle of time also draws inspiration from Albert Einstein's hypothetic cyclic universes which claims that the universe starts with a big bang, then, after a long period of time, collapses down to a big crunch due to the gravitational attraction of matter in the universe and then goes through the big bang/big crunch over and over again. In the novel, Shevek explains the circle of time with 'the whole universe is a cyclic process, an oscillation of expansion and contraction, without any before and after' (Le Guin, 2011, p. 393). When commenting the simultaneity theory, Shevek said 'Maybe you could see it as an effort to strike a balance' (p. 392). Therefore, the conceived simultaneity theory could be taken as Le Guin's intention to balance the philosophical time and the scientists' time, namely the irrational and rational.

Conclusion

This article delved into the scrutiny of intuition and time as symbols within Le Guin's seminal works, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. The analysis uncovered the incorporation of Bergson's concepts of intuition and duration in these selected fictions. It revealed that surrendering to irrationality could contribute to a more complete fulfillment of the self and a flexible sense of time and eventually develop a subjective freedom. Nevertheless, the irrational element is not overstated in these fictions; instead, it is depicted as achieving a harmonious balance with the rational. Through the genre of science fiction, Le Guin like Hegel's Minerva's owl on its nightly rounds, engages in contemplation on the state of humankind's existence under the rule of reason. She offers a critique of the overarching reign of reason within a patriarchal societal framework.

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