

The Left Hand of Darkness has a premise that immediately intrigues me. I am someone who has debated if my identity is nonbinary. I don't care about being called a man, and I think it's a waste of time trying to explicitly define what either a man or a woman is. I don't necessarily feel that I have a feminine edge that's being repressed, or object to being labeled as a man, but rather am a fan of simply being human, with whatever traits that encompasses.

I've already spent time thinking about how convenient it would feel for me to be asexual, as it would rid myself of the complexities dealing with sexual behavior brings to social interaction. Not only would I be free of this extra layer of tension and ambiguity, but also the frustration that comes along with it. When Ai talks to another prisoner, they ask whether our world of constant kemmer is a reward or a punishment. It's not explicitly either since that's just how things are, but the fact of the matter is that our system of sex creates more punishing consequences in society as a whole, eg. gender roles, seduction, rape, and questionably war.

My favorite aspect of this novel is the idea of integration, of seeing the whole rather than the parts, in all aspects of life. Reading about how Le Guin incorporated Taoism into her writing, this makes perfect sense, and also that she took inspiration from her parents' work in anthropology. Moving higher than gender and the individual, the discussion on patriotism is eternally relevant. It's so important to remember we all share the same planet, and that lines drawn in the sand shouldn't affect us, yet rule our entire lives. I'm born on the land known as the USA, but that shouldn't stop me from seeing the goodness in any part of the world. This is also commented on by Ai, as he's held captive multiple times he comments on the decency of humans with nothing left, saying goodness is within us all and can never be taken away.

The commentary on prejudice is executed wonderfully in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. We spend the first half of the novel wondering why Ai refuses to trust Estraven, only for him to slowly realize himself that he was holding an ingrained bias against him the whole time. Only once they've fully established their common goal, and been traveling for days in the harsh wild is Ai completely able to admit what he's done.

*“And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality. He had been quite right to say that he, the only person on Gethen who trusted me, was the only Gethenian I distrusted. For he was the only one who had entirely accepted me as a human being: who had liked me personally and given me entire personal loyalty: and who therefore had demanded of me an equal degree of recognition, of acceptance. I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man” (ch.18, p.10)*

– Ursula K. Le Guin

The biggest counterpart I can see from this judgment and developed acceptance comes in the form of transsexual rights in our own world. People fear that which is unknown to them, and rather than get to know what they fear, they deny them the rights which allow them to be understood in the first place. If you're not allowed to exist, then you will never be understood. Ai faces this same issue as the people of Gethen write him off as a freak, a sexual deviant, a pervert

who shouldn't be trusted. For him to mirror this trait makes sense, but as always, love conquers fear.

Society that's not ready for change is in itself a dystopia. Being trapped in the ideology of those around you can be an oppressive existence if you live outside of their boxes, suffering at the hands of those less inclusive in nature. In many ways, the leaders of Gethen being resistant to the idea of integration with the Ekumen, with mankind as a whole, is indicative of our own world on Earth. Those that oppress others ultimately only do themselves a disservice, as they oppress our whole species' progress towards becoming whole. Trans rights matter, women's rights matter, men's rights matter. Human rights matter.