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By characterizing Estraven as a martyr in *The Left Hand Of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin highlights how the broad love dismisses the boundary between people.

Estraven is an ideal character which represents the beauty of human nature. When Estraven is asked about whether he hates Orgoreyn, he answers, “How does one hate a country, or love one?”(228). The rhetorical question shows a tone of certainty toward the character’s own belief: It is impossible to draw a boundary to divide one’s love. This idea of unity and treating difference as one, presents Estraven as a noble, unselfish and sincere man because he dismisses not only the borders between rival countries, but also overcomes the human nature of greed and possession — a line called “them” and “us”. Love and pride themselves, meanwhile, hate and envy others. This is the selfishness of human nature, but here Estraven claims: “…what is the sense of giving a boundary to all that, of giving it a name and ceasing to love where the name ceases to apply?”(228). He has a broader love for his world and this love is breeding when he recalls the lands.

In Estraven’s speech, the scene of the peaceful lands which have “towns, farms, hills ,river and rocks and sunset”(228) is spread out in the readers’ mind. The scenery ought to be static, but when the verb “fall” is used to describe the “the sun at sunset in autumn fall[ing] on the side of a certain plowland in the hills”(228) the picture just come alive. The motion of the imagery infuses a sense of time into the 2D picture, so it is no longer motionless. The plain but emotional words reveal that the memory has been collected preciously by one in heart for a long time. People tend to display the things they have passion and love for, so counting the list of views demonstrates that Estraven is quite familiar with these views of his country and planet. Behind Estraven’s plain description is his great love and devotion to his planet, Gethen.

By creating the character Estraven, Le Guin conveys an ideal example of how individuals should value the nations and react to his/her world. The author reflects a universal concept — the general love of people for the world and life, an undivided love. However, since this love is beyond the interest of self or group, it is usually against people’s “knowledge”. People are educated to believe in “patriotism” but they fail to realize that its nature is fear, as Estraven says(20). The Karhide farmers misguided by patriotism “had dashed across the border south of Sassinoth, had attacked an Orgota village, burned it, and killed nine villagers, and then dragging the bodies back had dumped them Inyo the Ey River…” (111). The killers who are addressed as “brave Karhide farmers, true patriots” in Karhide radio displays that people are encouraged to kill. This makes people unable to see all the others as a union of humans, aggravates the conflicts, and finally a consequence of blood needs to be paid for the narrow minds.

Out of the love and responsibility for his world, Estraven wants to avoid the holocaust. He is ready in both mind and behaviours as Genly Ai describes, “ I never knew a person who reacted so wholly and rapidly to a changed situation as Estraven…When I came, he was ready. Nobody else on Winter was”(218). The thing differs Estraven from others on Winter is his open mind. He uses fear to motivate himself but never lets it lead himself as he believes, “Fire and fear, good servants, bad lords”(246), and as a result, he is ready to accept and embrace the difference of the others (even such alien as Genly Ai), instead of using nature of fear and hatred to decide for him. Because of his broad love, he is able to see other with himself as a whole — human.

Estraven is ready to sacrifice to achieve his goals. His death considered by Genly as suicide is actually an altruistic sacrifice: His death catalyzes the mission — neither Karhide nor Orgoreyn would blame him for his “betrayal” so the two countries could focus on the alliance itself. Besides, the death of Estraven is also his protection to his friend Genly Ai. His enemy would not harm Genly as the revenge if he died. When he closes eyes on the land of his country, Estraven finally completes his love to his country and the world.

Estraven is a martyr, and has been perfected by his tragedy. Le Guin uses Estraven’s martyrdom to increase the tolerance towards the unknown. Thinking of Estraven, if people could dismiss the boundary and treat others as their own peers, no more people would need to sacrifice themselves.

Work Cited

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand Of Darkness.* The Berkley Publishing Group, 1969, 375 Hudson Street, New York.