LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

Androgyny and the Uncanny in Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*

Kevin Palm
ENG K01
Autumn 2014
English Studies
Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
Supervisor: Ellen Turner

Index

Introduction

In 1969, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published. The book, set on a planet where the androgynous inhabitants do not have categories such as "man" or "woman," calls every character by male pronouns by default. This decision was controversial among certain critics. Le Guin, in her own words, "eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human" ("Is Gender Necessary? Redux" 160). Male critics mostly lauded the book; Harold Bloom for example included it in *The Western Canon* as one of the books which have left indelible marks on Western literary culture. The culture surrounding science fiction literature was overwhelmingly male at the time. In that environment *The Left Hand of Darkness* won both the Hugo and Nebula awards for best science fiction novel. It was mostly women, mostly feminists, who were dismayed by how the book dealt with gender: these gender politics did not remove gender from the equation, they said, but they did remove women (Le Guin, "Winter's King" 93).

In 2013, Ann Leckie's début novel *Ancillary Justice* was published. The narrator-protagonist of Leckie's book refers to every character, regardless of gender, by female pronouns by default. The book has been a success, winning the Hugo and Nebula awards as well as a host of other awards, most of which were not in existence when *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published. The culture of science fiction has grown since the sixties, both in size and diversity, which is reflected in the awards the book received or was nominated for. The James Tiptree Jr. Award, which *Ancillary Justice* made it to the Honors List for, awards "science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender" (James Tiptree Jr., Literary Award Council, "2013 Award Winner;" "Welcome"). Critics have lauded the book for its treatment of gender and androgyny. Meryl Trussler, who to my knowledge wrote the first academic work on *Ancillary Justice*, considers the book's protagonist to provide one of few "much-needed models for non-binary characters," i.e. characters who do not fit current society's two-gender template (33). There has also been negative criticism from other feminists. Alex Dally MacFarlane laments the treatment of gender in *Ancillary Justice* as "out of date," because she sees it as not much more than a reversal of what Le Guin did in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (MacFarlane, "*Ancillary Justice*").

Ancillary Justice is indeed a reversal of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, but not just in the use of default single-gender pronouns. Fundamentally, what I will argue in this essay is that *The Left Hand of Darkness* carries the message that everyone is whole, and *Ancillary*

Justice, in reply, carries the message that at the heart of everyone is not wholeness, but disunity. I seek to explore the conversation that *Ancillary Justice* is having with *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in terms of androgyny, gender, and identity. My writing is heavily informed by Nicholas Royle's 2003 monograph *The Uncanny*. I argue that *The Left Hand of Darkness* describes a journey from ignorance to understanding through empathy, where androgyny is at first strange and disturbing – uncanny – but ends up being familiar and simply human. I argue further that *Ancillary Justice* starts out with androgyny being familiar and human but ends with it being uncanny, and the source of this uncanniness is the very idea of gender. The books also differ in their use of telepathy as a plot device. In both books telepathy is used to explore the idea of wholeness and unity in identity. *Ancillary Justice*, however, lets telepathy fail, and exposes the disunity beneath.

The background section offers definitions of the philosophical and literary terms used in the analysis, as well as a contextualisation for where this essay fits within current literature and scholarship. Though elusiveness is one of its key traits, the uncanny will be defined as rigorously as possible within the allotted space. Three aspects of the uncanny will be identified at first. They will be used throughout the essay when discussing whether the uncanny is present or not in certain parts and passages of the books, and what causes the uncanny feeling. The second part of the essay details *The Left Hand of Darkness'* structure and symbolism, which mimics the protagonist's expanding view of what is human. In the third part, the conversation between *Ancillary Justice* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* is described, in terms of the relationships between androgyny, gender, and the uncanny. Particular attention will be paid to the mechanics of the annexations of the Radch empire. These mechanics contain information about how gender and androgyny function in the world of *Ancillary Justice*. The last part returns briefly to theory to describe discourse on telepathy and identity in literature before filling in the rest of the conversation between the two books, which depends on the question of telepathy and identity to be understood fully.

Background

> The uncanny *is* queer. And the queer is uncanny. [emphasis in original] (Royle 43)

The above quote presents the main problem considered in the present study. The statement looks downright offensive. The uncanny is a concept closely related to unease and fear. It is

the feeling that something is wrong, especially in a way that is difficult to explain. It is perhaps "a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself *as* a foreign body" [emphasis in original] (Royle 2). The uncanny is often understood as an elusive, unplaceable wrongness. To apply the concept to a marginalized group of people such as queer people seems like more marginalization. To say that they are connected to this "foreign body" seems to place queerness as the outlier, abnormal and therefore bad, and non-queerness as the default, normal and therefore good. At the same time, abnormality is whence queerness gets its name. Its etymology trails from a meaning of "strange, peculiar, eccentric," to "homosexual" (Harper), to today's usage in queer studies where it also signifies something outside society's rigid, binary notions of gender and sexuality. The word retains its old meanings, however, and it is true that queerness is often seen as frightening and foreign. The problem presented is, then, the question of whether queerness is uncanny by nature or whether current society merely presents it that way. *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Ancillary Justice* answer that question in two different ways. Both books handle queerness in the form of androgyny. Using Royle's theories on literature and the uncanny, this essay will study this presentation of androgyny and its possible implications. To do that properly, a vocabulary of specialized terms will be provided and explained below, starting with the uncanny.

The seminal text in the study of the uncanny is Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny,'" written in German as "Das Unheimliche." Freud's essay lays out many aspects of the uncanny; three of these will be the focus of the present investigation. The first aspect under consideration comes from Ernst Jentsch, who equates the uncanny with a feeling of unfamiliarity and what Freud later calls "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud 221). Intellectual uncertainty comes from the inability to properly categorise something; it is a failure of categories. The second aspect comes from Friedrich Schelling, who explains the uncanny as everything which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud 225). It is things that are suppressed but bubble up again. The last aspect comes from Freud, and it is often used as the definition of the uncanny itself. It is "something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or … something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context," for "the uncanny is that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Royle 1, Freud 220). The uncanny is a strange mixture of that which is familiar and that which is unfamiliar. These three aspects of the uncanny will be used throughout the essay to understand how and when uncanniness arises from a text.

The uncanny is not just a Western concept, however. In Japan, the field that first considered the uncanny was robotics. In 1970, Masahiro Mori wrote a speculative essay titled "The Uncanny Valley" for a small magazine, *Energy* ("The Uncanny Valley" 98). As illustrated by figure 1 (Appendix), Mori hypothesises that robots that look imperfectly human are met with distrust and fright. Robots that look perfectly human or not very human at all avoid such a reaction. He also hypothesises about prosthetics and puppets, for the uncanny valley is not limited to robots. Because Mori's essay was written in Japanese it did not consciously link itself to the etymologies of the Anglo-German uncanny-unheimlich, but Mori's speculations contain all three aspects of the uncanny given above. He writes about "distinguish[ing]" prosthetics from flesh ("The Uncanny Valley" 98). Having to choose between calling something flesh or metal presumes intellectual uncertainty. For Mori, "creating an artificial human is the true goal of robotics" so much of robotics is about hiding the artificial nature of a robot (98). The uncanny valley is where this artificial nature, which ought to remain hidden, comes to light. The last aspect also exhibits itself in the dip in the graph, because it seems logical that something that looks more human should feel more familiar and instead it feels unfamiliar. Mori's essay was largely forgotten until an English translation was presented at a conference in 2005, after which it has "become a sort of principle in the robotics field" (Mori, "An Uncanny Mind" 106). Where Freud sees an unpleasant emotion and tries to root out its causes, Mori sees an unpleasant effect and tries to develop strategies to minimize it. Mori's and Freud's essays describe the same thing, the same uncanniness, approached however from different cultures and disciplines. The uncanny is, if not universal, then culturally independent.

For the present essay, the uncanny valley will be used to explain certain reactions from characters, to understand how they categorize other characters as human or not. For instance, Genly treats the androgynes in *The Left Hand of Darkness* as if they are less than human. They seem to fall into the uncanny valley for him. The reader naturally feels with Genly, the effect of which is that they experience the androgynous Gethenians as Other. "The Other" is a concept used in philosophy and literature, especially postcolonial studies. It refers to people on the other side of an artificial divide between subject and object, a familiar *us* and an unfamiliar *them*, the Same and the Other. The point behind describing this artificial divide is that it is artificial and that the Other is the Same, despite being subjected to Othering. "Othering" is a process, something done to someone to make them Other. The connection between Otherness and the uncanny has been noted by Julia Kristeva. She writes that Freud,

in his ruminations on the uncanny, invites us "[t]o discover our own disturbing [O]therness" (192). This disturbing Otherness is the "foreign object within oneself" that Royle writes about as well (2).

Is queerness then uncanny? Is androgyny? "Queer" here refers to virtually anything that questions the familiarity of heterosexuality, gender binarism (i.e. the idea that there are only two genders and that everyone slots easily into one of the two categories), and other norms to do with gender and sexuality. Queerness is often marginalized and Othered. As such, it is easy to see how queerness could be uncanny. However, it comes down to presentation. *The Left Hand of Darkness* presents, at first, an uncanny androgyny, while *Ancillary Justice* does not. Androgyny presented in the right way might make people question whether to choose male or female pronouns for a person, or they might stick to singular "they" and avoid the aspect of intellectual uncertainty. Androgyny might uncannily bring to light uncomfortable truths, suspicions, and doubts about "one's so-called … 'sexuality'" (Royle 1), which ought to have remained hidden. Alternatively, it might just not. For the aspect of the familiar in the unfamiliar, androgyny can be presented as the familiar elements of male and female remixed in an unfamiliar way, as in much of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It can also be presented as an unremarkable part of life with nothing uncanny about it, as in *Ancillary Justice*. The uncanniness of androgyny depends on a certain work's or a certain tradition's presentation of it.

The uncanniness of androgyny also comes down to interpretation. The present essay's interpretation of androgyny differs from much scholarly writing on the subject before. For Kari Weil, whose book *Androgyny and the Denial of Sexual Difference* traces the trajectory of androgyny as an ideal throughout Western history, androgyny is pervasively male and often "conservative, if not misogynistic" (2). Her contention is that androgyny is conceived of and used as feminized masculinity, in other words a way to ignore or eliminate women. Weil is cautiously optimistic about a future where the ideal of androgyny can be used to emancipate women, but she gives no thought to people whose identities fall outside the gender binary. Weil would agree with Brian Atterby, who proposes that the two ways to handle androgyny in fiction are "approaching it from the masculine end of the spectrum [or] the feminine" (41). The direction of this approach depends on whether the author or character describing the androgyny is male or female (41). Atterby does note that androgynous characters such as Estraven in *The Left Hand of Darkness* describe androgyny as well, but says they do so only "vacant[ly]" – the author behind the character determines the direction

then (45). Both Weil and Atterby interpret androgyny as supporting the gender binary instead of destabilizing it[1].

Critical writing on androgyny often suffers from such a gender-binary frame of mind. In efforts to counter the Othering of women, queer and non-binary identities are Othered and become invisible. Perhaps one reason why there is comparatively little written about the link between the uncanny and androgyny has to do with this process wherein woman is first Othered and then absorbed into the Same. The figure of woman is still Other and this process is still ongoing, so scholarly attention has not been focused on other Others. To paraphrase Judith Butler: one has to be considered a subject to be represented (1-2), meaning that queer androgynous people are not represented as subjects; instead they are used to buttress the gender binary. In the present essay, androgyny will as much as possible be interpreted as something other than simple support for binary structures of gender.

Wavering Definitions of Human in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

> I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive. (1)

This opening paragraph of *The Left Hand of Darkness* serves two significant narrative functions. First, it is an uncanny unmooring of reality and a welcome to the fictive world. Kristeva remarks that "uncanniness occurs when the borders between *imagination* and *reality* are erased" [emphasis in original] (188). Here, those porous borders are blurred at least. Truth is in fiction, and fiction is in truth. The familiarity of the truth blends in with the unfamiliarity of the fiction. The aspect of osmosis between the familiar and the unfamiliar is shown in the blurring of borders, which also invites intellectual uncertainty, unplaceability. If the work contradicts itself, then it is not factual for Genly, the narrator, just as it is not a factual account for the reader who happens to know it was written as a story by Ursula Le Guin. Thus Genly,

[1]Atterby does consider androgyny a tool for destabilization but cannot conceive of it in non-binary terms. The destabilization he conceives of is one of power, not of of the categories themselves. What Royle and Leckie are concerned with is a destabilization of the categories themselves.

with the phrase “as if I told a story,” brings to light the fictional nature of the work without ever stating it outright.

Second, the opening paragraph hints at an adherence to gender roles in Genly's mind, such as the ones concerning women and jewellery or beauty. On Earth, where both Genly and the reader come from, women are often valued and judged more on their looks than anything else. However, women seem absent from the book after this introduction. Why evoke an image of women when they are, or seem to be, not there? Genly describes Gethenians as women very few times in the book. Two of those times he is describing people who are lower than him in the social hierarchy and who he sees as womanly. They are people he has power over and who happen to fit his image of femininity. The first he thinks of “as [his] landlady, for he ha[s] fat buttocks … and a soft face, and prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature” (39). The second is when someone presents himself sexually to him in an invitation to sex: “I saw a girl, a filthy, stupid, weary girl looking up into my face as she talked, smiling timidly, looking for solace” (139). This Gethenian has become hormonally female, as they do half the time they are sexually active, and Genly turns her down. The almost casual mention of these gendered structures in the opening paragraph, that women are supposed to wear jewellery, is the beginning of these Earth-cultural biases.

After the pearl analogy, the Gethenians' uncanny androgyny and the sheer alienness of the situation is introduced. Genly describes King Argaven as a “king-bee,” echoing the more standard phrase of “queen-bee” (4). Such a description exemplifies the presentation of androgyny in the book, as it both blurs gender boundaries and erases the idea of women. Genly is then conscious of calling the androgynes male: “*man* I must say, having said *he* and *his*” [emphasis in original] (4). Yet for all his conscious attempts at seeing Estraven, councillor to the king, as male, it is because of his “soft supple femininity that [Genly] dislike[s] and distrust[s]” him (10). For a while, Genly loses himself in intellectually uncertain thought: “it was impossible to think of him as a woman … yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness” (10). He does not understand his own disgust at the “effeminate deviousness” of Estraven (11). The word “effeminate” is especially telling here, because it connotes a feminized man. Genly has by his own admission superposed a gender binary on the way the Gethenians present themselves. It is apparent that, for him, Gethenians fall into something like the uncanny valley. When Estraven says to Genly that he is “the only man in all of Gethen that has trusted you entirely, and … the only man in Gethen that you have refused to trust” he is saying that he tried to meet Genly as an equal, as the Same (162).

It takes Genly some time to realize the weight of this: "[Estraven] was the only one who had entirely accepted [him] as a human being … and who therefore had demanded of [him] an equal degree of recognition" (202). It is partly because he strives to reach full human likeness that Estraven falls into the uncanny valley in Genly's mind, where he is Other, less than human.

Is is through the aforementioned Earth-cultural biases that this Othering of the androgynous persists. This Othering maintains the link between the uncanny and Gethenian androgyny. One scout admits this bias early on, saying that "the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the [Gethenian] I am with is not a man, but a manwoman" (76). She admits that the gender-binary lens through which Gethenians are viewed has a profound effect on her perception of them. She also stays very aware of their status as Other throughout her log. She opens her log with the remark that Gethenian androgyny must be an "experiment" conducted by the humans who put them there (72). Androgyny, she claims, likely cannot occur naturally. It is therefore *artificial* and not lifelike enough. The Gethenian androgyny falls into something like the uncanny valley for this scout: "[t]he somer-kemmer cycle strikes us as degrading, a return to the estrus cycle of the lower mammals" (77). Their hormone cycles make them less human in her eyes. The Gethenians are thus reduced to their bodies and bodily functions for much of the book. Trussler writes on this method of Othering that the bodies of the Other are visible and "loaded with meanings" in a way that the Same's body is not (31). The Other's differences, especially bodily ones such as ethnicity, are always highlighted (32). In the case of the Gethenians, the nature of their androgyny is in focus. What the Other is different from is always invisible, obscure, and taken as default (31-32). For a large part of the book the androgynes of Gethen are presented as though there is something fundamentally wrong, inhuman, and uncanny with and about them.

Imagery to do with darkness and shadows plays a large part in painting Gethenians as uncanny and inhuman. Genly comments on the Orgota (inhabitants of Orgoreyn, a country on Gethen) that it is "as if they did not cast shadows" (119). The image this description evokes is can be seen through all three aspects of the uncanny. There is intellectual uncertainty in what that quote means; Genly says he does not understand his own metaphor (119). There is the aspect of the familiar and unfamiliar in how the man who sets off the "shadow" thought strikes Genly as "just a little bit unreal," along with the rest of the Orgota (118). The unreal is seeping into the real. The thought also brings to light what is wrong with the Orgota, a thought Genly has been avoiding. It is part of a line of thought

which begins and ends in darkness and which runs through most of his stay in Orgoreyn. When he first enters the country he is taken to a "vast stone semi-cellar with one door locked on us from outside, and no window … perfectly dark" (89-90). Later he finds himself in similar circumstances, "locked in the dark with uncomplaining, unhopeful people," and he understands the mistake in having "ignored that black cellar and gone looking for the substance of Orgoreyn above ground, in daylight" (136). Their "substance" lies in the uncanny shadows. The Orgota are marked as inhuman and Other by the shadow imagery.

This shadow play runs through the whole book, and for most of it evokes the effect of reminding the reader of the Gethenians' Otherness. In one chapter, "Estraven the Traitor," the reader is presented with a legend filled with shadow imagery. It is hard to tell whether the Estraven of the story is the same Estraven that the reader already knows, or an uncanny double, or some ancestor. The introduction hints at a sort of antiquity: "Long ago, before the days of King Argaven I" (100). In the legend, "a Domain's pride is the length of its borders, and the lords of Kerm Land are proud men and umbrageous men, casting black shadows" (100). Here "umbrageous" seems to mean more than just its dictionary definition of affording shade. The issue of borders is bound up with the imagery of shadows; the moving of borders is suggested to influence the blackness of the shadows those men cast. The meaning of a shadow in this legend is, at this point, opaque to the reader. Such is the case in several stray comments throughout the novel as well. For example, the preparations for war between Karhide and Orgoreyn are described as a "shadow-fight" (65). The opacity of shadows, together with the unclear identity of the shadow Estraven, lend themselves to intellectual uncertainty, an aspect of the uncanny. The aspect of familiarity and unfamiliarity is present when the word is used in a metaphor that is more understandable to the reader. In an earlier inserted legend, for example, it is said that "murder is a lighter shadow on a house than suicide," which seems to use "shadow" to mean something like "curse" (19). The word "curse" is used earlier in the short legend as well, lending weight to this interpretation. The aspect of things brought to light is here the untranslatability of certain cultural expressions, the very alienness of Gethen to the reader and to Genly. The shadow imagery, in the parts of the book up until a certain point, marks all Gethenians as Other.

The shadows, however, also contain the key to understanding the aliens and removing their uncanniness. The Gethenian concept of "shifgrethor" aids in this dispelling. Shifgrethor is explained as "prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship, the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority," a kind of chivalric code, though it is untranslatable

(11). Shifgrethor includes a system of rules for behaviour, which can be "played" at several levels (86, passim). For example, it is used to play at politics, where kings and politicians have to obey certain rules lest they lose face. Gethenians can also "waive shifgrethor" when they want to talk more directly (69, passim). Though it remains an elusive concept. After two years on-planet, Genly has "never even really understood the meaning of the word" (202). Estraven replies: "It comes from an old word for shadow" (202). Thus the imagery of shadows in the legends and in Genly's speculations connects itself to the Gethenian code of honour, and several cryptic passages can be decrypted. The "black shadows" cast by the "proud … umbrageous men" in the legend of Estraven the Traitor can now be understood as illustrations of great prestige or strong morals (100). In the other legend, the phrasing "murder is a lighter shadow on a house than suicide" suggests that someone's suicide, which is more taboo than murder, would perhaps be more visible in the shadow, shifgrethor, of a family. The shifgrethor reveal brings the uncanniness of the shadows to light.

After the shifgrethor reveal, the shadow imagery serves the function of taking uncanniness away instead. After the reveal, Genly teaches Estraven telepathy, and they enter weather conditions called "the Unshadow" (213). With telepathy, "there's no lying" intentionally (206). The condition of being unable to lie is represented symbolically in the Unshadow, where "neither [Estraven] nor [Genly] cast any shadow" (212), which echoes the waiving of shifgrethor to allow people to speak frankly from earlier in the novel. After the Unshadow, phrases such as "[t]he king shortens no man's shadow" appear with a clarity they did not possess before (222). Even Genly uses the phrase "[s]ome shadows got shorter and some longer, as they say in Karhide" in the narration (234). The shadows are not uncanny now, as there is no intellectual uncertainty about them, and nothing more to bring to light. The shifgrethor reveal is also part of the process of making androgyny no longer uncanny. This process uses the same imagery of light and darkness:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> and darkness the right hand of light.
> Two are one, life and death, lying
> together like lovers in kemmer,
> like hands joined together,
> like the end and the way. (190)

This song, sung by Estraven, is perhaps the start of the process that dispels the uncanny. The song lends the book its title, which is proof of its significance. Genly connects the song to to

the yin-yang symbol, and draws it in a notebook. He shows the symbol to Estraven and says what it represents is "[l]ight, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, [Estraven]. Both and one. A shadow on snow" (217). The shadow imagery thus becomes a symbol for the wholeness in Estraven's being, in that his androgynous body can incorporate both maleness and femaleness. Genly could not accept this premise at the outset of the novel, but now his definition of what a human is has expanded. Estraven is no longer in the uncanny valley for Genly. At the same time, the yin-yang drawing also symbolises how the Gethenians are part of the species of humanity in a less personal way. Not long after this scene, Gethen joins the Ekumen, the collection of all human planets for which Genly is an Envoy. Genly says that the symbol is found on more planets than just Earth (217). The song and the symbol represent the same fundamental human nature, so Gethen and the Ekumen are the Same. The Other has become the Same and the artificial divide between them has been scrubbed out. None of the Gethenians have changed in nature, however. The only one who has changed is Genly, who has come to accept the Gethenians as the Same. The uncanniness of the androgynes was, it seems, just culture shock.

The Machinery of the Empire in *Ancillary Justice*

Ancillary Justice starts out with an already expanded view of humanity, in which everyone is the Same, or at least Sameish. The narrator and main character, Breq, at one point notes that the group "nonhumans … include[s] quite a number of people who [consider] themselves human," but her narration always treats people as fully human (102). Indeed, the book comments quite actively on Othering and dehumanisation. One character, Skaaiat Awer, mentions that "it's so easy, isn't it, to decide the people you're fighting aren't really human" (323-324). Much of the book makes the reader aware of the artificial divide between Same and Other. For instance, in the language of the empire, Radchaai, the word for a Radch citizen and "civilized" are the same word (62). Therefore anyone who is not a citizen of the empire is uncivilized. Similarly, Breq speaks Radhcaai as her first language, a language which "doesn't mark gender in any way" (3). Therefore she often chooses the wrong gender for people when she is in places that do mark gender in their language. Though callousness and disregard might be expected since she comes from the Radch, she handles gendered terms more like a confused tourist than someone who disrespects the traditions. She may be frustrated that people are "invariably … offended when [she] hesitate[s] or guess[es] wrong" (77), but she

never reduces someone to their bodily attributes. Breq's narration never seems to treat anyone as Other. Perhaps Breq never treats anyone as Other because at heart she is Other herself. Whether a character is androgynous or explicitly binary-gendered, they are presented as fully human and Same.

As a result of Breq's Otherness, the uncanny feelings arising from this book are felt mainly by the reader. The proper pronoun for machine intelligences such as Breq in the Radch are “it” and “its,” as evidenced whenever they talk about ships or ancillaries in the third person (18, passim). She is here described with female pronouns partly for ease of reading. Several times throughout the book she proclaims herself to not be “any sort of individual,” “person,” or even “human,” (153, 144, 4). She is an outsider even in the Radch empire, and she is an outsider to every culture she encounters. She is uncanny, too, though not always in the reader's eyes, since the reader sees through Breq's eyes. The children on the planet Shis'urna call her a “corpse soldier” (22). She is one machine intelligence in many bodies, frozen bodies revived to serve as soldiers in the annexation. All her bodies are in communication using telepathy. There is intellectual uncertainty when one child accuses her of being someone else because the child is used to talking to another body of hers (22-23). There is a commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar in the way she is a machine consciousness, a foreign mind, in human bodies. The aspect of that which is brought to light is also present in how she is a reminder of the violence of an annexation. For most of the book this uncanniness is under the surface, however, and only emerges as a reading effect when one pays close attention or rereads a passage. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* the uncanny operates by feeling with the narrator; in *Ancillary Justice* it emerges as an effect of reading by feeling something apart from the narrator, as a reader, or with a character whose point of view is not shown.

Androgyny and the uncanny are, then, presented in different ways in *Ancillary Justice* than they are in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* the androgyny is a removal of gender, and therefore a removal of gender roles entirely. The book therefore conforms to Butler's idea of gender, not just gender roles, as socially perpetuated. For Butler, and for Le Guin's world, gender and gender roles are synonymous, and one cannot exist without the other. In the Radch empire, on the other hand, the androgynes do have gender. The first Radchaai the reader introduced to is Seivarden, who is male (4). That they should not have any gender, or be all the same gender, in the Radch empire is apparently a common misperception. In one scene Strigan says she “used to wonder how Radchaai

reproduced, if they were all the same gender," to which Breq replies: "They're not" (104). MacFarlane argues that *Ancillary Justice* "inadvertently genders" all the supposedly non-gendered characters, making the same mistake as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (MacFarlane, "Post-Binary Gender in SF: *Ancillary Justice*"). As Breq says, they do have gender, and they are not all the same gender. Their system of gender seems simply to be invisible or indiscernible. For instance, when Breq reaches Omaugh Palace, she sees

> them all, suddenly, for just a moment, through non-Radchaai eyes, an eddying crowd of unnervingly ambiguously gendered people. I saw all the features that would mark gender for non-Radchaai … Short hair or long, worn unbound (trailing down a back, or in a thick, curled nimbus) or bound (braided, pinned, tied). Thick-bodied or thin-, faces delicate-featured or coarse-, with cosmetics or none. A profusion of colors that would have been gender-marked in other places. All of this matched randomly with bodies curving at breast and hip or not, bodies that one moment moved in ways various non-Radchaai would call feminine, the next moment masculine. (283)

The gender of Radchaai is not a social function, but a private, idiosyncratic thing. When these gender expressions are presented to other cultures, such as modern day Earth, they look like and for the most part act indistinguishably from an expression of androgyny.

The lens through which the reader sees *Ancillary Justice* is the unavoidably gendered one of English. In English, the use of male pronouns as default is still the default, as it was in the sixties. The defaultness of the male is prominent in more than just gendered pronouns; the default image associated with a word such as "captain" is male, for example. One of the more lasting criticisms against *The Left Hand of Darkness* has been that, in addition to defaulting to the male pronoun, the story "cast[s] the Gethenian protagonist, Estraven, almost exclusively into roles that we are culturally conditioned to perceive as 'male'" (Le Guin, "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" 170). *Ancillary Justice*, by using the female pronouns as default, is inherently more disruptive than Le Guin's book. However, other parts of the Radch culture are gendered just as, for want of a better word, normal. Typically female roles such as those in the sphere of the family are all denoted with the female version of the word: "mother," "daughter," "sister," and so on (69, 312, 378, passim). In the Radch military, characters say "sir" to their superiors (172, passim). The gendering of different spheres serves as a comment on the inescapable nature of gender in the current language and culture. This gendering also serves another, less obvious function: saying "parent" instead of mother or father would sound alien, and gendering the term avoids that. But even if Leckie had written

“parent,” and avoided terms like “sir,” the book would still be written in English. As noted above, the word “captain” still conjures up an image of a man for most English-speaking readers. The reader is obligated to see the story through the gendered lens of modern day English, and can therefore not escape it.

There must be a constant influx of new gender, or gender expressions, in Radch culture due to the annexations, making gender somewhat unstable. The empire, being an empire, is constantly expanding their culture by way of annexations. It is mentioned that in the aftermath of an annexation, it takes “a generation or two” for annexed people to become fully Radchaai (147). It can be assumed that they get to keep their gender expressions more or less intact, as they can still talk their own languages; the invading forces even learn the local languages (62). They also keep their religions more or less intact, evidenced by the character who is “the head priest of Ikkt,” a character who is given a lot of leeway to decide what to do with the religion in the city of Ors (43). At the time of the events in Ors she has “not seen her way clear to demoting her god in its own temple, or identifying Ikkt with Amaat closely enough to add Radchaai rites to her own” (43). Amaat is the supreme god of the Radchaai, but it is “normal practice to absorb any religion the Radch ran across, to fit its gods into an already blindingly complex genealogy, or to say merely that the supreme, creator deity was Amaat under another name and let the rest sort themselves out” (175). When a Radchaai encounters a new god, she “ma[kes] the strange god familiar and br[ings] it safely within her mental framework” (262). The cultural assimilation seems to work by the same principles in several levels of society. As Skaaiat Awer says about their way of maintaining power: “we go to the top of the local hierarchy” to make deals, letting the other elements in that structure sort themselves out underneath (147). She is describing legal power, but the quote can be easily applied to the way they spread their religion as well. Therefore it can also be extended to how gender expressions and norms are absorbed and handled by the Radch. Gender is unstable because of the constant influx of new gender expressions from annexed culture, but the Radch androgyny is always placed on top of such expressions, and given priority.

Gender haunts this novel. The role of gender is suppressed and uncanny throughout the book. Consider one more example of the pattern of power and cultural structures in the book: the perhaps most uncanny scene in the book, when Breq gets a new body. At first, she has “no control over the new body” (171). Presumably, the person who used to be this body has a gender, but this gets replaced by the “it” of robot intelligence (or of dead meat) before the person goes away. Then both “I” and “it” are used the body: “'Help,' I

croaked … It was shivering, still cold from suspension, and from terror" (171). Borders are blurred here and it is impossible to say where Breq ends and the original consciousness of the body begins, displaying the aspect of intellectual uncertainty. The familiarity of one identity mixes with the unfamiliarity of another, another aspect of the uncanny. At an earlier juncture in the book, twenty years after this scene chronologically, Strigan says to Breq "*I can bring you back"* [emphasis in original], referring to the person underneath (135). The person does not go away. They are brought to light here, but Breq does what she can to keep them hidden. This structure of the suppressed gender is reflected in the switch of pronoun from "he" or "she" to "it," and in the uncanniness of the situation. Every body that Breq inhabits has been someone else before, before they get deleted. For Radch and in Radch, gender is nothing but uncanny.

Unifying, Disunifying Telepathy

Telepathy is uncanny and highly present in both *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Ancillary Justice*. Royle argues that the growth of technology has made telepathy more and more prominent in the modern era (192). Therefore, the word telepathy will here be extended to machine communications (such as wireless signals) that are connected to telepathy, like the ansible below. Royle writes on telepathy obsessively. On the subject of Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel *Midnight's Children*, he writes that it uses telepathy to explore "the notion that any given moment … depends on the fiction that everyone is experiencing the *same moment*, uncannily interconnected, sharing the same 'now'" [emphasis in original] (270). This notion is a "fiction," which means that it is both literary and false. Its falseness is here taken as axiomatic[2]. This notion is closely related to the narratological idea of an omniscient third-person narrator. This style of narrator is called omniscient in "presumed analogy between the novelist as creator and the Creator of the cosmos, an omniscient God" (Scholes and Kellogg 272). This analogy is insufficient if not false for Scholes and Kellogg, as it is for Royle. The analogy depends on that illusion of unity, but "God *knows* everything because He *is* everywhere – simultaneously … [a narrator] does not 'know' simultaneously but consecutively" [emphasis in original] (Scholes and Kellogg 272). A novel presents a story, not an instantaneous chunk of information, so it cannot be told omnisciently. Furthermore, a

[2]One can, however, ground it in an understanding of Einsteinian relativity where things that accelerate differently age differently. Confer with the "twin paradox" for a short explanation.

story can contradict itself in ways that information acquired by omniscience, presumably, cannot. Royle prefers the term “telepathic” or “clairvoyant” to describe such a consecutively, uncannily knowing narrator (259, passim). Telepathy can disrupt the illusion of unity, the fiction of the “same 'now,'” because it can be an Othering of the self. Telepathy can let someone else – someone Other – into one's skull and give them full agency. That way the telepath knows that everyone is *not* experiencing the same moment. Writing a story with telepathy forces the story to handle that revelation or to suppress it.

The idea of a same “now,” or something much like it, is present in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It is given the name “the constant of simultaneity” (30). Genly Ai brings to Gethen both the ansible, a machine which “produce[s] a message at any two points simultaneously” and telepathy (30). The two are part of the same cultural package. Genly comments that “[m]indspeech [is] the only thing I ha[ve] to give to Estraven, out of all my civilization” (201). At the same time, the only trade the Ekumen can offer Gethen “consists largely of simple communication [via ansible] rather than of transportation” (111-112). The ansible and telepathy are interconnected. The principle of the ansible, of one message in two places instantaneously, seems to also be the principle of telepathy. Moreover, Telepathy is a key factor in the shift in Genly's view of humanity. When he lets Estraven into his head all Estraven's Otherness is dispelled: “the rapport [is] there” and Genly can see things through Estraven's eyes for the first time (207). The pattern of the Other appearing in the mind of the Same is also apparent in the larger scale, where the Ekumen accept Gethen into their midst. All communication with the Ekumen has to be through ansible, machine telepathy. The fiction of the same “now” is thus a fact in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and a key to Genly's character growth as well as the structure of the whole story. In this book, telepathy is connected to the same “now.” Telepathy here is unifying, because the notion of the same “now” is not challenged.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the idea of the same “now” is also connected to the illusion of a unified identity. On this subject Royle writes “identity is never absolutely pure or singular” (271). Again, the falsehood or illusoriness of this notion is here taken as axiomatic. It does not matter for the analysis whether it is an illusion or not. Only the way it is presented, as either a fact or an illusion, matters. *The Left Hand of Darkness* presents wholeness of identity as a truth that Genly figures out. The reader is presented with two facets of Estraven, and they at first do not seem to match up at all. As noted before, it seems as though Estraven the traitor, exiled from Karhide, who vexes and helps Genly, has a double or

an ancestor in the Estraven of the legend "Estraven the Traitor." The truth of the matter is that Estraven is exiled as a traitor twice, once from Estre and once from Karhide. When Genly teaches Estraven telepathy, Estraven hears Genly's voice "as a dead man's, his brother's voice" (208). That voice explicitly connects Estraven to the Estraven in the legend. Even if the reader does not suspect a doppelgänger or ancestor, all the different facets of Estraven are present in this scene. He is unified and whole. Because of that voice, however, Estraven is "disturbed" by telepathy (207). Genly speculates that "[p]erhaps a Gethenian, being singularly complete, feels telepathic speech as a violation of completeness" (207). The fact of the same "now" comes up against the idea of a unified identity and disturbs it, not because the unified identity is false but because it is true. The completeness would not be violated if it was not a completeness. Both notions are presented as truths, and Estraven is no longer Other in Genly's eyes, thanks to telepathy.

There is a large difference between the telepathy in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the telepathy in *Ancillary Justice*. At times in the latter's narrative, Breq is a telepathic first-person narrator. She knows her officers' "every breath, every twitch of every muscle," but the kind of data she receives from them is only "very nearly" mind-reading (9, 289). Someone whose mind she can read, however, is herself. With her many bodies, she has to be in constant self-communication, though each of her bodies functions as full representations of her. The telepathy works by some form of technological communications system rather than the apparent instantaneous transmission in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. This delay in information exchanges between different subnodes of the so-called same person is more obvious in Anaander Mianaai, the Lord of the Radch, who "possesse[s] thousands of bodies, all of them genetically identical, all of them linked to each other" all over the parts of the galaxy she rules (95). So one part of Anaander Mianaai will never know everything that Anaander Mianaai knows. This inherent delay becomes a crucial plot point in the scene at Omaugh Palace. Breq reveals to Anaander Mianaai what she has been hiding from herself, that she is at war with herself: "She's been secretly moving against herself … the whole time all of her has been pretending not to know it was happening, because as soon as she admitted it the conflict would be in the open, and unavoidable" (336-337). After Breq reveals this, Anaander Mianaai shuts down the communications between her bodies to "prevent the knowledge from reaching the parts of her that aren't [t]here" (340). In two previous scenes the same type of device is used to cut off all wireless communications, and Breq is cut off from herself. In the first one, her individual segments sort out a system among themselves so they

can function somewhat efficiently at least. Only a few of them get to perform their most important task of guarding an officer, “and the rest would have to trust that” (114). When telepathy goes away, the fiction of unity in their identity, which has to be connected to the fiction of the interconnected “now,” evaporates.

The communications shutdown in the Omaugh Palace throws into sharp relief what it ought to have hid, what ought to have remained hidden from/for Anaander Mianaai: her disunity. Breq notes that Mianaai deals with herself in shadows, “hiding what she'[s] done from herself,” never making an open move (361). Breq also asks the question “if there [are] now two Anaander Mianaais, might there not also be more?” (268). Anaander Mianaai also uses the illusion of unity in her identity to hide from her own disunity, even when she openly admits she is split. The explanation for these circumstances become that the side of herself that this side is against has been “[c]orrupted” by the Presger (214). Thus she becomes the true self and her disunity is due to infiltration rather than an honest disagreement with herself. The Presger have not in fact corrupted her: “No-one is subverting the Lord of Radch except the Lord of the Radch” (354). She is at war with herself; she is Other to herself. When she shuts down communications in Omaugh Palace, she is doing it so that the information that has come out in the open cannot reach her bodies outside the Palace. She fails, of course. At any moment, as with Breq, the Otherness in Anaander Mianaai is barely held at bay by a WiFi kind of telepathy. When Breq exposes the Lord of the Radch to her own disunity, the empire is cracked in two. It was always split in two, but now the Otherness within the Same is exposed and open.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this essay suggests that the message of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is, if a singular one can be extracted, that the Other is the Same. The artificial divide between Same and Other is exposed to light and removed during the course of the book. Though androgynous characters are first presented as uncanny and somehow inhuman, they are vindicated, and Genly comes to understand them as whole and fully human. His journey of learning to empathise with the Gethenian mindset, of learning to realise their Sameness, is reflected in what emerges as uncanny throughout the book. At first the Gethenian androgyny is uncanny, as Genly cannot fit his gender binarism onto them. The journey ends with Genly

accepting the Gethenians as menwomen rather than men without women. His understanding is aided by the telepathy between him and Estraven.

Conversely, *Ancillary Justice* seems to carry a message that wants to expose the Otherness within the Same, the foreign body within the self. The uncanny is always present in the novel, but it seems subsurface, hidden, for most of it. There is no character growth that mirrors Genly's in *Ancillary Justice*, just an exposure. Anaander Mianaai is brought face to face with her own disunity and forced to confront it. The implication seems to be that everyone, at heart, is disunified, and no-one is whole.

It seems that *Ancillary Justice* picks up themes and ideas where *The Left Hand of Darkness* left them, attempting to incorporate more than forty years of expanding understandings of gender and queerness into one story. The understanding that gender can be and is uncanny opens up *Ancillary Justice* to deeper analysis, and the idea of telepathy disguising a disunified identity does the same. The two ideas are different expressions of the same thing, in fact. In current society, gender places a person in one social group instead of other(s), and unites them with the others of that group. In Radch, gender is a private matter, and chaotic. Telepathy unifies a person with themselves, or seems to, but when it goes away the disunity beneath is obvious. Disunity is seen in *Ancillary Justice* to be a more natural or obvious state of affairs than unity, and unity is often presented as self-deception.

More analysis on the effects of the choice of single-gender pronouns as default, and the uncanny role of gender in *Ancillary Justice* would be welcome. Perhaps more criticism is needed on the subject of the conversation between it and *The Left Hand of Darkness* as well. It is good when literary critics turn to works from contemporary culture and treat them with as much respect as the old, canonic works.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Leckie, Ann. *Ancillary Justice*. 2013. London: Hachette, 2014. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. 1969. London: Hachette, 2014. Print.

Secondary Sources

Atterby, Brian. "Androgyny and Difference in Science Fiction" in Morrison, Michael A., ed. *Trajectories of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Fourteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*. No. 70. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997. Web. 19 Nov, 2014.

Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon, Appendix A-D.* 1994. Adelaide: The U of Adelaide Library, 2014. Web. 04 Jan. 2015.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny.'" *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis* and *Other Works.* Trans. Alix Strachey, James Strachey, and Alan Tyson. Ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud. London: Hogarth, 1955. 217-256. Web. 15 Oct. 2014.

Harper, Douglas. "Queer (adj.)" *Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Award Council. "2013 Award Winner." 2013. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.

---. "Welcome" n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. Web. 04 Jan. 2015.

Le Guin, Ursula. "Is Gender Necessary? Redux." *The Language of the Night: essays on fantasy and science fiction*. 2nd Ed. London: Women's Press, 1989. 155-172. Print.

---. "Winter's King." *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*. 1975. New York: Harper, 2004. 93-117. Print.

MacDorman, Karl F. “Androids as an Experimental Apparatus: Why is there an uncanny valley and can we exploit it.” *CogSci-2005 workshop: toward social mechanisms of android science*. 2005. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.

MacFarlane, Alex Dally. “Post-Binary Gender in SF: *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie.” *Tor.com.* Macmillan, 18 Feb. 2014. Web. 01 Nov. 2014.

---. “Post-Binary Gender in SF: Introduction.” *Tor.com.* Macmillan, 21 Jan. 2014. Web. 01 Nov. 2014.

Mori, Masahiro. “An Uncanny Mind.” Interviewed by Norri Kageki. *Robotics & Automation Magazine*, IEEE 19.2 (2012): 112-108. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.

---. “The Uncanny Valley.” *Robotics & Automation Magazine*, IEEE 19.2 (2012): 98-100. Trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.

Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966. Web. 21 Dec. 2014.

Trussler, Meryl. *The Fantastic Adventures of No-body: Mechanisms of cyborg disembodiment in five texts by women authors.* MA thesis. Lund: Lund University, 2014. Web. 25 Oct. 2014.

Weil, Kari. *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992. Print.

Appendix

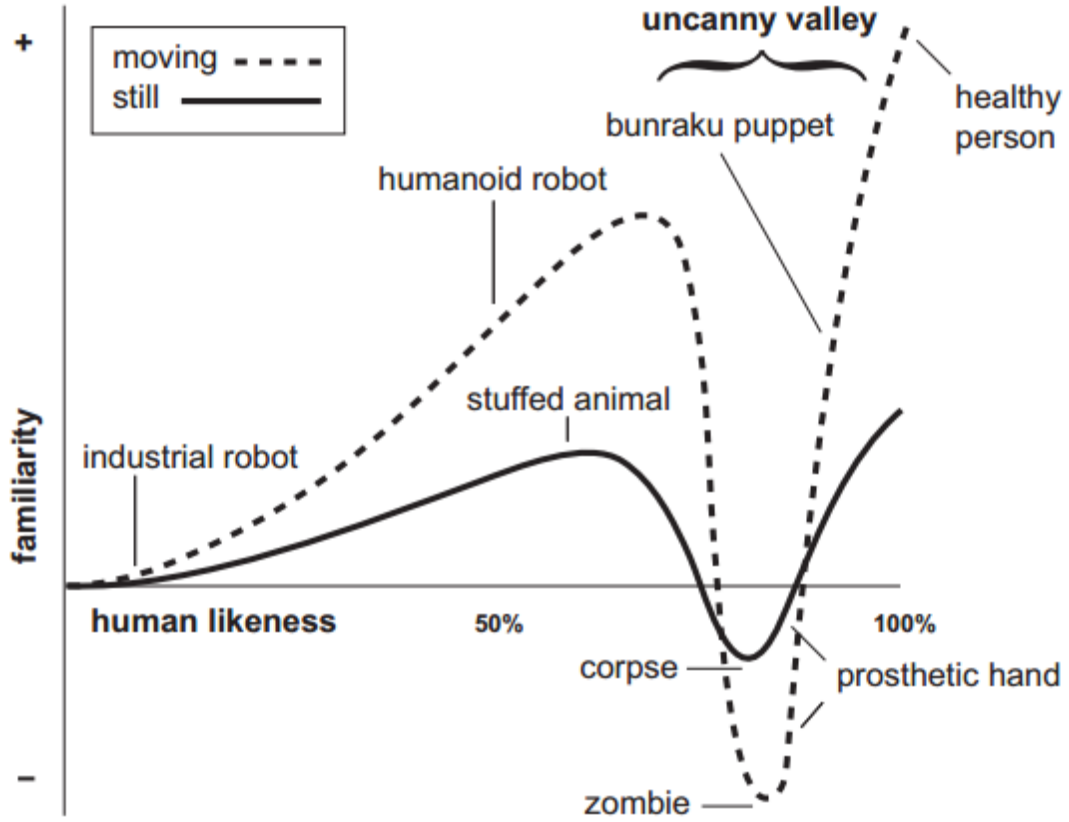

Fig. 1: Mori's graph of the uncanny valley, as translated and simplified by Karl MacDorman. As a robot approaches perfect human likeness, it risks falling into the uncanny valley and be regarded as unfamiliar, unheimlich.