

DREAMS, POWER, AND COMMUNITY: AN ANALYSIS OF BALANCE IN URSULA K.
LE GUIN'S *THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST* AND *THE LATHE OF HEAVEN*

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ABSTRACT

Throughout her work as a novelist, Ursula K. Le Guin revisits the theme of balance. In *The Word for World is Forest* and *The Lathe of Heaven*, she brings dreaming into contact with balance as a force that either supports and facilitates a state of equilibrium or undermines and impedes it. The indigenous Athsheans of *Word for World* achieve psychological and physical balance by participating in a communal dreaming process in which they enter the lucid dream-time state that takes place between dreaming and waking. George Orr, in *Lathe*, however, fears his personal balance and that of the world are jeopardised by his capacity for “effective dreaming,” an ability that allows him to change “reality.” The ways in which balance is treated in the two novels provide grounds for comparison. This paper will reveal how balance is achieved through dreams for the Athsheans, while George Orr’s balance is threatened by dreams, and how community and threatening external forces play into this difference.

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Dreams, Power, and Community: An Analysis of Balance in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* and *The Lathe of Heaven*

In her essay "Dreams Must Explain Themselves," Ursula K. Le Guin recalls a telephone conversation in which she made an intriguing claim concerning how she developed the *Earthsea* world: "I didn't plan anything, I found it" ("Dreams" 6). Furthermore, she divulges the location where she "found" this world and all its inhabitants: "In my subconscious" (6). She describes this imaginative phenomenon through her need to know the characters she is writing about: "If the character isn't so clear to me that I know all . . . about him, what am I doing writing about him? What right have I to describe what William did when Helen bit his knee, if I don't even know what he looks like, and his past, and his psyche, inside and out, as well as I know myself? Because after all he is myself. Part of myself" (6). Le Guin's subconscious is where she dreams up her characters and their worlds. She does not go searching for them; they come to her. It would seem, then, that Le Guin, in her creative process, is bridging the void between the dream-time of her subconscious and the world-time where she brings her dreams to life. The dream-time and the world-time, however, are to be considered equally real; after all, as Le Guin says, "If William is a character worthy of being written about, then he exists. He exists, inside my head to be sure, but in his own right with his own vitality" (7). She does not build him from fragmentary ideas of his identity, but she "find[s] him" (7) already whole and developed, ready to be translated from the mind to the world-time. Evidently, Le Guin's creative process involves translating her subconscious into her stories, a translation from dream-time to world-time that manifests itself in, and is explored through, such stories as *The Word for World is Forest* (hereafter referred to as *Word for World*) and *The Lathe of Heaven* (hereafter referred to as *Lathe*). Le Guin uses the title "Dreams must Explain Themselves" to conceptualise the link between her creative process and dreams. This important link manifests itself in her works; for instance, two of her novels from the same era deal with the importance of dreaming. *Lathe* is concerned with George Orr's ability to dream "effectively" and the moral questions that arise from the wielding of such a power. While George's power seems unique to him, the Athsheans in *Word for World* participate in the dream-time that is an integral and incorporeal aspect of their community. The dream-time benefits the world-time (that is, the waking world) and is an important facet of their community.

One very interesting facet of the treatment of dreams in these two novels is that in each case Le Guin brings dreams into contact with a topic that has always preoccupied her as a novelist: the idea of balance or equilibrium. The Athsheans' manner of living, for example, results in a state of equilibrium and balance that is disrupted by the invasion of Terran colonialists who exploit the planet and its indigenous people. Seemingly, the only tactic to restore balance to Athshe is to rid it of the Terrans by warring against them, a concept that was previously unknown to the Athsheans. Similarly, in *Lathe*, George Orr's personal balance and his moral integrity are the only things that keep his powerful ability of effective dreaming from obliterating the world. Le Guin juxtaposes George's virtuousness and balance with his psychiatrist Dr. Haber's strange mix of benevolence and power envy. While George struggles to maintain his own balance as well as that of the world he lives in, Haber fiddles with it and throws things more and more into disorder. George Orr, the central figure in *Lathe*, is a balanced man despite his hectic dreams, while the Athshean people of *Word for World* are balanced because of their symbiotic relationship with their surroundings and the dream-time; it becomes evident that George Orr's dreams run awry because he does not have the steadying community of dreamers that the Athsheans are a part of.

The indigenous Athsheans in *Word for World* participate in the dream-time, a state between waking and dreaming, between rationality and subconscious irrationality, as the dream is the root of their being, the thing that maintains their sanity. The Athshean understanding of dreams is that they are real and have power in the world-time. Douglas Barbour explains the complementary natures of the Athshean dream-time and world-time: "The concept of living in both dream-time and world-time reflects [the Athsheans'] wholeness." For Athsheans, the dream-time and the world-time are each just as real as the other; in fact, they are two facets of the same reality (a concept George Orr struggles with in *Lathe*). One capable of entering the dream-time dreams awake and can "hold the dream in [his] hands" (*Word for World* 42), he can "weave and shape, direct and follow, start and cease at will" (43), and he can "walk the road [his] dream goes" (43). The Dreamers in Athshean society are the adept men who learn to control their dreaming state, which they enter throughout the day, two hours at a time. The dream-time is a state in the Athshean sleep cycle that is somewhere between sleeping and waking, something like a lucid dream. Unlike the hectic state of George Orr's subconscious dreaming state, the Athshean dreamers bring all the rationality of consciousness into their dream-

time state. According to the sleep cycles of the Terran colonialists (who sleep throughout the night with uncontrolled dreams), the Athsheans appear never to sleep, except when they are children who haven't yet learnt to enter the dream-time (a waking dream somewhere between the sleep-dream and the world-time) or in illness. This half sleeping, half waking state is often seen as laziness by the Terrans. Athshean children and the ill dream as Terrans do, in the unreined chaos of the "sleep-dream" (52) or "fever-dreams" (44), which are uncontrollable. The adept men, those who can enter the dream-time where one is aware, have control of their minds in the dream-time and they can explore it, ethereally, as they do the world-time, physically. Although Lyubov, the Terran anthropologist who befriends the Athshean leader Selver, is unable to enter the dream-time, he tries to understand it and is intrigued by its power for the Athshean people.

Certain adept men in Athshean society have enhanced abilities which allow them to bridge the void between the dream-time and the world-time; such men are called gods, and Selver is amongst them: "Selver [is] a god, a changer, a bridge between realities" (*Word for World* 46). The Athshean word "*sha'ab* meant god, or numinous entity, or powerful being; it also meant something quite different, but Lyubov could not remember what . . . Of course: *sha'ab*, translator" (123). Gods are able to bring something from the dream-time into physical existence within the world-time, thereby changing the dreams of everyone to include the dreamt-up knowledge; they can interpret things that they find in the dream-time and disperse the knowledge amongst their people:

[Selver is] one who could translate into waking life the central experience of vision: one serving as a link between the two realities, considered by the Athsheans as equal, the dream-time and the world-time, whose connections, though vital, are obscure. A link: one who could speak aloud the perceptions of the subconscious. To 'speak' that tongue is to act. To do a new thing. To change or to be changed, radically, from the root. For the root is the dream. And the translator is the god. (123-4)

Unfortunately for the Athshean people, the balance that is so well facilitated by their sleep cycle is disturbed by the Terran colonialists, and Selver must sacrifice his balance in order to salvage his people's mode of living.

While the indigenous Athsheans rely on their dreams as a necessary piece of reality, George's uncontrolled dreams are a source of concern. George Orr's ability to dream effectively causes him (rather than allows, since he cannot control his effective dreams) to change the

waking world that is often referred to as reality. An effective dream is one that has the power to change reality, but only the dreamer is aware of the change; for everyone else, the new reality, as far as they know, has always been in place, no matter how drastic the change is. George's ability to have effective dreams allows him to dream up scenarios that become part of reality. The dreamed reality overwrites the old reality, and nobody else is aware that anything has changed. George can both enter the dream-time and bring dreams into existence in the world-time, or as Terrans call it, reality. George became aware, or at least convinced, of his effective dreaming during his adolescence when he dreamed his sexually coercive Aunt Ethel out of existence. Since Orr is too passive to confront his Aunt Ethel, his subconscious devises a way to get her to leave him alone—his merciless, uncontrolled dreaming mind sorts out his waking mind's problems. When Dr Haber questions how nobody else, such as George's own mother, noticed the change in reality, George makes it clear that his dreams create whole new realities, ones that have existed all the while; a new reality wipes out the previous reality and accounts for every change: "Well, she [George's mother] didn't dream it. I mean, the dream really did change reality. It made a different reality, retroactively, which she'd been part of all along. Being in it, she had no memory of any other. I did, I remembered both, because I was . . . there . . . at the moment of the change" (*Lathe* 13).

George does not think it is right for any one man to change everyone's reality, even if nobody else is aware of the change. Due to this concern, George starts trying to deprive himself of sleep by experimenting with prescription drugs: "He had been trying to lock the door through which the dreams came, but none of the keys had fit the lock" (3). He gets drugs from others as well when his own allotment is not enough to keep his dreams at bay. Following a medic's advice, George starts Voluntary Therapeutic Treatment (VTT), which is how he ends up in the office of Dr Haber, the psychologist to whom he is assigned. It takes some convincing, but once Dr Haber becomes aware that George's dreams are, in fact, real, he is intrigued, and soon enough he has his own plans to exploit their potential. Part of George's concern for his effective dreams is that they are the products of his subconscious trying to work through his waking problems (hence Aunt Ethel is dreamt out of existence), but since rationality is not involved, his subconscious mind can deal with his issues in completely immoral, rather amoral, ways, even though morality is one of (conscious) George's nagging concerns.

Evidently dreams are of interest to Le Guin as she explores the dreams of the Athsheans who use dreams effectively to maintain their harmonious relationship with each other and their surroundings, and those of George Orr who tries to avoid the hectic results of his effective dreams. In other words, she uses dreams to explore balance; for instance, the indigenous Athsheans' sanity falters when they are forced to adhere to a foreign schedule that pulls them away from the dream-time, and George Orr's moral, balanced conscious self is threatened by his immoral, unbalanced subconscious self. Balance is a theme that recurs in many of Le Guin's works. For instance, her *Earthsea* series of novels involves balance, its disruption, and its restoration. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged is a young wizard who in disregard for the Balance unleashes an evil force when he uses magic to validate his pride. In order to restore the Balance he disrupts, he must recognise and confront the dark part of himself. By the fourth book, *Tehanu*, Ged has been thoroughly stripped of his powers, which turns out to be such a large part of his identity that what remains is an unbalanced fragment of a man. He must learn to live as a mere man, without the powers that were such a source of pride and indicator of worth for his younger self. It seems that for Le Guin balance is a product of living in harmony with one's surroundings rather than trying to control, exploit, or alter them—issues she explores through the equilibrium of the Athsheans' mode of living, and the passive personification of balance in George Orr.

Just as George Orr is concerned with balance, the entire Athshean community constitutes a network of balance in *Word for World*. They maintain balance by living in a symbiotic relationship with the planet and its vast forests. Their balance is achieved through their dreams and their oneness with their community and their planet. These symbiotic relationships create a sense of equilibrium on the planet that is deeply rooted in the Athshean mode of living. As Ian Watson states, *Word for World* “is a vivid presentation of the dynamics of a sane society which lives in harmony with its natural environment because its members are themselves in psychological equilibrium” (231). It is important for the Athsheans to spend time within the dream-time to maintain their balance both mentally and physically. Le Guin strives to relate this balance to an ecology, a oneness with nature: “I wanted to write about . . . the forest and the dream; that is, I wanted to describe a certain ecology from within, and to play with some of Hadfield's and Dement's ideas about the function of dreaming-sleep and the uses of the dream” (Le Guin cited in “Forest as Metaphor” 231). There are often anthropological facets to Le Guin's works, one of which is the evident use of the Australian Aboriginal dream-time in the practices

of the Athsheans. The dual meanings of many words in the Athshean language concretise the connection between the people and the land, and the world-time and the dream-time. Like the Athshean language, the Arrernte language provides a double-meaning to the word *Tjukurrpa*: “the Dreaming, or ‘Tjukurrpa’, also means to ‘see and understand the law’ ” (Frank Gillen and Baldwin Spencer cited in Big Black Dog Communications). The common Aboriginal belief is that “the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past and the present, the people and the land” (Big Black Dog). This connection between the land and the people is evident in Athshean culture, and relates to the forest in which the people live; like the trees, they have roots, and those roots are associated with the dream-time in which all times, peoples, and beings are connected. Even George Orr comes to understand this network of being when he says, “Rocks have their dreams, and the earth changes” (*Lathe* 167). Some of the creator dreamers in Australian Aboriginal spiritual beliefs turned into rocks after making the world. The network of being and dreaming is so whole and so balanced that even the rock, which to some people is the epitome of the inanimate, is an essential part of this system of oneness. The reality of the dream-time is illustrated in the Australian Aboriginal belief that the people themselves were born of the dreams of their ancestors, but have existed since the beginning of time in the dream-time: “We have been here since time began. We have come directly out of the Dreamtime of our creative ancestors . . .” (“Dreamtime”). The Athshean understanding of land, as part of their network of balance, is that it is not something that can be utilised the way it is by the Terrans: “To Indigenous people land is not just something that they can own or trade. Land has a spiritual value” (“Meaning of the Dreamtime”). Essentially, the Athshean sense of balance is based upon their oneness with nature, with each other, and with their complex sleep cycle.

While the Athsheans need to maintain a strong connection to the dream-time for a number of reasons, including sanity and other health factors, George thinks that messing with reality with even so little as an assertive decision is too invasive, so he often settles for passive inaction. As Ian Watson discusses, George’s “prime characteristic is his inability to ‘choose’ in conscious waking everyday life” (“Le Guin’s *Lathe*”). Where the Athshean people are balanced because of their dreams, George Orr seems to be balanced despite his hectic dreams. George is concerned that his wild dreams disrupt his personal balance and that of his surroundings. While George desires stability, he does not want to be the tool with which balance is achieved. He thinks it is wrong to impress himself on reality to the extent that his dreams allow him to do. His

apartment reflects the unimpressive, almost insignificant, kind of person George wants to be, or thinks he should be: “There was little impress of his personality on the rooms, yet [Heather] saw him living there, a quiet man living quietly” (*Lathe* 91); after all, “He had no character. He was a lump of clay, a block of uncarved wood” (130). George not only desires balance, he admires it, and he sees it as something good: “He hefted a solid steel hammer and admired its balance; it was a well-made tool, a good thing” (153). George finds balance in the physical world, in tactile things; for him, balance is best maintained in physical existence, not in the flightiness of the mind. The same qualities that make this particular hammer a good tool are what make George a good tool for effective dreaming. He is the epitome of balance, as he is “right in the middle of the graph” (90) for susceptibility to hypnosis, and he scores almost right in the middle of all the psychological tests Haber conducts on him. He turns out to be neither extraverted nor introverted, neither dominant nor submissive, neither independent nor dependent, and neither creative nor destructive: Haber explains, “Both, neither. Either, or. Where there’s an opposed pair, a polarity, you’re in the middle; where there’s a scale, you’re at the balance point. You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left” (137). While Haber doesn’t agree with another psychiatrist, Walters, it seems Walters’s understanding is just as, if not more, correct; he thinks George’s “lack of social achievement is a result of [his] holistic adjustment” (137) and that he is in “a peculiar state of poise, of self-harmony” (137-8). George has an unintrusive view of the world: “We’re in the world, not against it. It doesn’t work to try to stand outside things and run them that way. It just doesn’t work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world *is*, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be” (140). George doesn’t want to take responsibility for the world’s issues; he doesn’t think he has the authority to decide what is right and wrong, since he is a part of the world, an intricate detail within the balance, not a creator or ruler. He consistently stresses that he does not have the authority or the right to change things from their natural order.

Although George Orr is not practiced in the art of wielding the power of the dream-time, he has a strong capacity to dream ‘effectively’. By Athshean standards, he would be considered a god, one who is able to bridge the gap between the dream-time and the world-time, that is, to bring concepts from the dream-time into existence within the world-time. However, in Terran culture, this ability, effective dreaming, is not a common practice; in fact, it’s strange and unbelievable. Most Terrans are considered insane by Athshean standards for their inability to

enter the dream-time; George, on the other hand, is deemed insane by Terran standards for his alleged ability to dream effectively. His ability is a heavy burden for one person to deal with alone, so it threatens his balance and the world's balance. He is not able to control his ability enough for it to be benign. George's capacity to change reality is so strong that he once saved the world from the brink of oblivion, but George is modest about the meaning behind his actions, claiming, "It isn't evolution. It's just self-preservation" (106). George relates his understanding of his ability to Dr Haber: "It's my unconscious mind that changes things, without any intelligent control. . . . Dreams are incoherent, selfish, irrational—immoral . . . They come from the unsocialized part of us. . . Dreams take shortcuts" (14), and he demands (although demand is probably too strong a word for the passive George), "I want to be cured, not used" (49), because he cannot bear the guilty burden that comes with his ability: "I don't *want* to [dream effectively]. I want to get off the hook. I can't take it" (87). It is not until Dr Haber is present with George at the time of a dreamt up change to reality that he starts to recognise George's power and its potential uses. George wants to rid himself of the burden of feeling guilty for changing the world, because he does not think it is anyone's right to influence the world the way he does.

Due to the fact that he has unconsciously changed reality so many times, it becomes difficult for George to recognise reality; he thinks that there is nothing left but his own imaginings. Conversely, Heather Lelache, the lawyer whose help George seeks when he feels Haber is overstepping his boundaries by utilising George's effective dreams, does not see the difference between one reality and the next. She thinks it's all the same—one reality is just as real as the next. Maybe that's all reality is: an ever-changing layering of distinct, yet connected, realities that overwrite and are overwritten. Unlike Selver's dream in *Word for World*, Orr's dreams create whole new realities through changes that nobody is aware of. George once quietly saved the world from the brink of oblivion; a nuclear holocaust had destroyed the world and it was about to be the end of everything when George, dying, had one last dream that restored the world to a once again unravaged, habitable place. Recalling this end of existence that he brought the world back from, George Orr says, "I've told myself ever since that it was a dream. That *it* was a dream! But it wasn't. This is. This isn't real. This world isn't even probable. It was the truth. It was what happened. We are all dead, and we spoiled the world before we died. There is nothing left. Nothing but dreams" (*Lathe* 107). This struggle, between what is real and what is dream, appears throughout the novel. Heather, although she cannot dream effectively herself, has

seen the effects of George's dreams and she astutely says, "Maybe that's all it's ever been! Whatever it is, it's all right. . . . What does it matter whether you call it real or dreams? It's all one—isn't it?" (107). Formerly, her knowledge of the previous realities made Heather "keep wondering what things are changed, and whether anything's real at all" (98). Evidently, as time goes on, she gains a more balanced understanding of dream-time and world-time (as it is called in *Word for World*); she no longer places realities on a scale from real to unreal, but places them all on par with one another, as equally real.

Unlike the Athshean people, who are part of a community of dreamers, George Orr, at least as far as he knows, is alone with his ability to dream effectively. One of the reasons George's ability to dream effectively is so out of control, as he finds out, is that such an ability is not manageable for one person—it is too powerful. The Aldebaranians (a peaceful alien race that George dreamed into the world-time) are practiced in what they call *iahklu*, which relates to effective dreaming, since they are of the dream-time. The Aldebaranians are more experienced "at dreaming—at what dreaming is an aspect of. They've done it for a long time. . . . They are of the dream time" (167). Really, as Ian Watson explains, everything as it now exists is of the dream-time, since none of the novel's characters can live in the continuum that was the end of the world, or they'd all be dead: "All along the irony lurks that we have been in a 'false' world from the very start; for, before ever being referred to a psychiatrist for illegally obtaining drugs to stop himself dreaming, George Orr had 'effectively dreamt' a nuclear holocaust out of existence; there is in truth no way to go homeward" ("Le Guin's *Lathe*"). While the inhabitants of earth "are committed to the false reality," the Aldebaranians' "culture revolves round the mode of 'reality dreaming itself into being'." Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe is the Aldebaranian at the antique store who teaches George that there is, in fact, a way to keep *iahklu* under control, and George "is increasingly comforted (albeit still confused) that his ability is not entirely unique to him but can be conceptualized, but not articulated, by the alien race" (Bernardo and Murphy 37). Uttering *Er' perrehnne* "aloud or in [his] mind" (*Lathe* 168) allows George to get "a little help from [his] friends" (158) as the Beatles record "With a Little Help from My Friends" that Tiua'k Ennbe Ennbe sells him suggests, when he cannot communicate the abstract concept sufficiently.

Something about the planet Athshe itself seems conducive to the dreaming state that the Athsheans, or Creechies, enter. Davidson, the immoral Terran army captain, himself thinks, "There [is] something about this damn planet, its gold sunlight and hazy sky, its mild winds

smelling of leafmold and pollen, something that made you daydream” (*Word for World* 17). One wonders if this tendency towards the dreaming state arises because Davidson is surrounded by a network of dreamers which functions like the community of Aldebaranians that appears in *Lathe*; after all, as the reader later finds out, Davidson is a god. The Athshean people are in sync with each other and their dreaming is a communal endeavour, not a solitary burden.

George does not seek to exercise and master his powers, because he would rather not have them at all; Dr Haber, on the other hand, thinks it is a waste not to utilise such a promising faculty and seeks to harness the powers of effective dreaming. George Orr admires balance and is himself a balanced man, but his ability to change reality by dreaming up whole new realities threatens his sense of balance and his moral code. George wants to be insignificant, quiet, and unnoticed, which makes him different from the loud, overbearing Dr Haber. Where Haber sees the opportunity to fix the world’s issues through effective dreaming, George sees undeserved power in the hands of one who cannot and should not wield it. George’s main concern is that he does not deserve the power that has inexplicably been bestowed upon or engrained in him, because the ability to make such substantial changes to the world puts him in a position of power. He puts himself out of balance with his surroundings when he alters them rather than living in harmony with them. Although Haber reassures George that dreams “exist; they are events; they leave a mark behind them” (*Lathe* 14), a concept that even George finds hard to fathom, it isn’t until Haber witnesses one of George’s effective dreams, in which he changes an image of Mount Hood in Haber’s office into one of a horse, that he really believes in George’s power (even though he won’t admit it) and realises its potential. Haber covets George’s ability, and its potential to make the world a better place, and he uses it to his advantage, so clearly George and Haber have different approaches to the use of effective dreaming; for George, there’s a moral issue at hand—he feels no right to change the world. He is concerned with what is right, what is balanced, and he thinks effective dreams disturb balance: “ ‘The only solution I can see,’ he said, ‘is to kill myself. But I don’t want to. It just doesn’t seem right’ ” (97). Haber uses hypnosis to influence George’s dreams and to restrain them from running wild; however, George doesn’t always satisfactorily dream according to Haber’s suggestions, because, Haber soon finds out, it is difficult to make suggestions that close every possible loop-hole that might allow George’s dream to go wrong. For instance, when Haber suggests that George dream there is no longer a war in the Near East, and that all Terrans are at peace with each other, George dreams

that there is a war on the moon, and all Terrans have ceased war against one another to unite against the aliens on the moon.

George's power is enough to strike fear into Heather Lelache. When she undertakes the task of hypnotising George, she is uncomfortable with the power she possesses through his dreams; seemingly, she, like George, doesn't think it is right for mere humans to interfere with the balance of the world on such a grand scale: "She halted. All of a sudden she was scared; a cold qualm took her. What was she doing? This was no play, no game, nothing for a fool to meddle in. He was in her power: and his power was incalculable. What unimaginable responsibility had she undertaken?" (108).

Haber, on the other hand, isn't discouraged by the dangers of trying to harness such powers; he is intrigued and accepts the challenge to make the world a better place. Along with a benevolence that causes Haber to want to fix the world's issues, he is ambitious, and he uses George's power to his own benefit. Haber desires the power that George unwillingly possesses, so he tinkers with his Dream Machine, the Augmentor (a machine that records and replicates brainwaves then feeds them back to the brain), to eventually allow him to wield the power of effective dreaming. This ambition will lead to Haber's downfall from the stately position he builds for himself using George's effective dreams; evidently, the power to change reality cannot be brandished by just anyone, as Haber nearly destroys the world and fries his own brain in the process. Seemingly, the study of dreams and the act of dreaming effectively are two very different things, and, perhaps, Haber never quite understood the reality of the dream-time. Even when he has witnessed the dream-time's power to change 'reality,' George still has to remind Haber now and then that "an effective dream is a reality, Dr. Haber" (123).

Haber, on the other hand, takes the responsibility upon himself to make changes in the world when the power to do so presents itself to him; besides his ambition, he thinks it is morally right to change the things he has the power to change. While Haber's dream suggestions don't benefit everyone, he accepts that consequence; he has a rather utilitarian perspective, so it is all right with him if some people have to suffer for the greater good. At least, that's how he sees it: Haber looks at the good or the end rather than the means, which are sometimes dreadful. Evidently, George and Haber have two clashing morality sets. Where George thinks it is wrong to intrude on the natural order, Haber thinks it is the only right option. Using hypno-suggestion, Haber uses George's dreams to try to rid the world of over-population, war, race issues, and

disease. When he finally perfects his Augmentor to the point that it will allow him to take the reins and dream effectively, he nearly destroys the world, thrusting everyone and everything into the void, into oblivion. It appears that he is missing the factor that allows George's effective dreaming to work: balance. Despite George's urging, Haber doesn't consult the Aldebaranians for help with his effective dreaming. Haber seems to regard effective dreaming as a tool to fix reality, rather than regarding the dream-time as a part of reality. Eager to exercise power over the dream-time, Haber doesn't utilise the "informal support network, what is called *Er' perrehnne* in the language of the Aldebaranians" (Bernardo and Murphy 37), and his effective dream quickly takes a turn for the worse. Instead of trying to live within the world and be a part of it, Haber tries to control the world. His domineering, assertive, overbearing personality makes him an inadequate subject for effective dreaming, and he is not aware of the significance behind George's balanced nature. George asserts throughout the entire story that Haber is coming from a benevolent standpoint, that he means well, but he also has ambition and dominance, so he isn't centred—he is imbalanced, and therefore, unable to wield the powers of the effective dream in a manner that retains the world's balance once George is taken out of the equation. Every time he accomplishes something, the next goal surfaces. He can never reach an endpoint: "Haber was a benevolent man. He wanted to make the world better for humanity. The end justifies the means. But what if there never is an end? All we have is means" (*Word for World* 83). Haber's controlling nature is a product of his imbalance, and the cause of his lust for power.

Like George Orr's tendency toward passivity, another aspect of Athshean balance is their peacefulness. Only the children, who are untrained in the dreaming that allows adults to achieve balance between the two times that make up their reality, lash out in violence. This is not to say that the Athsheans are not capable of violence in adulthood, but rather that "their unaggressiveness [runs] so deep in them, right through their culture and society and on down into their subconscious, their 'dream time,' and perhaps into their very physiology" (109). However, a part of the Athshean culture is stripped away and forced to change because of the Terran influence. Though the Athshean people are innately peaceful, the Terran presence and influence disturb their balance and create a power struggle. The Terrans colonise the planet and exercise control over the Athshean people, so Selver must sacrifice his balance as a dreamer by stripping away the nonviolence that is so integral to Athshean identity. Even so, "an Athshean could be provoked, by atrocious cruelty, to attempt murder" (52), which is what happens with Selver, who

tries to kill Davidson out of rage and grief over the violent death of his wife, whom Davidson raped. Davidson, of all the Terran colonialists, disturbs the Athshean balance the most; as Barbour puts it, “Davidson’s nearly incoherent ‘reasoning’ provides a spectacular instance of how a man’s psychosis (in this case, paranoia) correlates to the excessive exploitation of a world’s inhabitants and natural resources.”

The grief and rage that Selver suffers at the hands of Davidson manifest themselves in the dream-time, and since the dream is the root of his being, he is changed: “Selver had changed. He was changed, radically: from the root” (*Word for World* 112). The Athshean language is made up of several words with double meanings; for instance, the word for “dream” is also that for “root,” and the word for “god” is also that for “translator.” Selver translates his dreams of violence into acts of violence in the world-time, but it is a dangerous knowledge to have, because he does not acquire the guilt that should accompany it: “Selver had brought a new word into the language of his people. He had done a new deed. The word, the deed, the murder. Only a god could lead so great a newcomer as Death across the bridge between the worlds” (124). Selver’s lack of guilt is evident when Gosse tells Selver, “All this blood is on your head” (142), and Selver doesn’t know what he means: “Selver did not understand the idiom. He had learned murder, but of guilt he knew little beyond the name” (142). After all, the Athshean peacefulness appears to be an integral part of their nature rather than a moral choice.

By introducing murder to his people, Selver loses his balance; he unleashes a concept into the world-time that he does not fully understand, and once it is released from the dream-time, it takes on a power of its own. Selver cannot mould, weave, or control the world-time as he does his dreams, so the dream of murder runs rampant in the world-time: “Kneeling there in the mud among the dead he thought, This is the dream now, the evil dream. I thought to drive it, but it drives me” (133). Even though Selver is a powerful dreamer, a god, even he cannot fully recover from his actions. In dreaming about the vengeful violence he wishes to inflict upon Davidson, and, by extension, the Terrans as a whole, Selver must leave the world of balance and introduce imbalance. The Athsheans cannot live in a co-operative relationship with the Terrans, because the Terrans are insane (by Athshean standards) and have already corrupted the balance and network of being on Athshe by deforesting the land and enslaving the Athshean people. This treatment of the Athshean people penetrates their peaceful balance because the two opposing ways of living are not compatible; the Athsheans cannot be the slaves the Terrans want them to

be because an Earthlike workday interferes with the “polycyclic sleep pattern” (116) that allows the Athsheans to maintain sanity. The Terrans fill the Athsheans with fear and anger by inflicting pain and foreign rules on them, and, being predominantly peaceful people, the Athsheans don’t have a way to confront their oppressors; therefore, it is a sadly necessary step that Selver must take in introducing the Terran knowledge of inflicting pain on fellow men in order for his people to be free: “We were all very frightened and very angry, and had no way to let our fear and anger free. So at last after long talking, and long dreaming, and the making of a plan, we went in daylight, and killed the yumens of Kelme Deva with arrows and hunting-lances, and burned their city and their engines. We left nothing” (41). Therefore, as R.M.P. and Søren Baggesen put it, the Athsheans, if not forced, are “compelled towards a transgression into violence” (36) in order to sacrifice part of their culture to salvage what is left of the rest of it.

Selver fears that he has been “cut off from his roots” (*Word for World* 49) when he cannot dream waking for a while after the massacre he led at Central, so he embraces his waking dream-state when he enters it once again, no matter how bad the dreams are, for “he had feared . . . that he had gone too far into the dead land of action ever to find his way back to the springs of reality. Now, though the water was very bitter, he drank again” (49-50). However, he finally loses this ability when he must continue his mission; Tubab, an Athshean man, observes that Selver does not “know one time from the other, . . . because [he] did not dream either sleeping or waking for far too long” (144), and Heben, another old Athshean man, adds, “The poisons the yumens take do much the same as does lack of sleep and dream. . . . The yumens poison themselves in order to dream. I saw the dreamer’s look in them after they took the poisons. But they couldn’t call the dreams, nor control them, nor weave nor shape nor cease to dream; they were driven, overpowered” (144).

In his dreams, Selver constantly visits Davidson, where their initial confrontation took place, until he breaks Davidson’s teeth with a rock rather than singing over him in the non-aggressive Athshean manner; once he dreams of the violence, he knows he is ready to confront the Terrans in the world-time once more:

The dream was useful, a straight wish-fulfillment, but he stopped it there, having dreamed it many times, before he met Davidson in the ashes of Kelme Deva, and since. There was nothing to that dream but relief. A sip of bland water. It was the bitter he

needed. He must go clear back, not to Kelme Deva but to the long dreadful street in the alien city called Central, where he had attacked Death, and had been defeated. (50)

As Lyubov interprets it, “Davidson’s cruelty would drive even Athsheans to violence” (109), and it does. Davidson’s cruelty both literally and figuratively causes Selver to be “blinded with blood” (119), and he attacks “not with berserk rage but with intelligent despair” (119).

Everything that leads Selver to introduce violence and murder to his people comes from this intelligent despair, the knowledge that there is no other way to confront the immoral Terrans, and the anguish this realisation causes. Ultimately, the cruelty that is imparted on the Athshean people, specifically Selver, penetrates the Athshean network of peace and balance with Terran violence and imbalance, and the Athshean people are changed by the Terran ignorance that causes humans, especially Davidson, to treat fellow people as animals and commit murder:

Had he learned to kill his fellowmen among his own dreams of outrage and bereavement, or from the undreamed-of-actions of the strangers? Was he speaking his own language, or was he speaking Captain Davidson’s? That which seemed to rise from the root of his own suffering and express his own changed being, might in fact be an infection, a foreign plague, which would not make a new people of his race, but would destroy them. (124)

The insanity of the Terrans affects the dream-time balance of the Athsheans, so it has to be dealt with before they become as insane as the Terrans:

A realist is a man who knows both the world and his own dreams. You’re not sane: there’s not one man in a thousand of you who knows how to dream. . . . You sleep, you wake and forget your dreams, you sleep again and wake again, and so you spend your whole lives, and you think that is being, life, reality! You are not children, you are grown men, but insane. And that’s why we had to kill you, before you drove us mad. (142-3)

It is this dangerous ignorance of the Terrans that causes Selver to introduce violence to his people.

Like the Athsheans, George Orr desires balance. His enhanced ability to dream effectively would make him, by Athshean standards, a god, one who can introduce new things into the world-time, or, as it is sometimes called in *Lathe*, reality. George struggles to reconcile dreams and reality as one, a concept that is so inherent in the Athshean understanding. For Athsheans, one who is not able to enter the conscious state between dreaming and waking is considered insane. On earth, George Orr’s situation is rather the opposite; his belief in his ability

to change reality through his dreams is what leads him to be judged insane, as one who needs to be cured, while, contradictorily, Dr Haber's tests later show that he is the personification of sanity itself; however, unlike like the Athsheans who can "balance . . . sanity not on the razor's edge of reason but on the double support, the fine balance, of reason and dream" (116), George Orr seems to be balanced despite his dreams. Awake, George has his reason—asleep, he only has his dreams—there is no connect between these two things for him; since he is not practiced in entering the dream-time, he can only pass into the unreined dreams of the subconscious, where rationality is abandoned. Since he is not a part of a community of dreamers like the Athsheans, his dreams are hectic and lack reason, thereby threatening his balance rather than supporting it. It is evident that George Orr's ability to dream effectively is not a common trait for a Terran to have. Terrans deny their roots, balance, and the network of beings they should strive to be a part of; rather than living in a mutual relationship with their surroundings, they try to dominate, so they cannot be balanced when that very balance is disturbed by their actions against it: "If the yumens are men, they are men unfit or untaught to dream and to act as men. Therefore they go about in torment killing and destroying, driven by the gods within, whom they will not set free but try to uproot and deny. If they are men, they are evil men, having denied their own gods, afraid to see their own faces in the dark" (57).

So, in Athshean terms, what makes someone sane is the ability to acknowledge and utilise both the dream-time and the world-time as equal parts of the same reality. What makes someone insane is the inability to distinguish between events of the dream-time or the world-time, or to dream in only the uncontrolled state of the sleep-dream or the fever-dream. By these standards, George Orr is quite sane for a Terran, yet unpracticed in wielding his ability. His effective dreams are powerful even compared to an Athshean god, but they are not controlled. When Coro Mena asks Selver if the Terrans dream, he replies, "As children do, in sleep" (45), and "Lyubov, who taught me, understood me when I showed him how to dream, and yet even so he called the world-time 'real' and the dream-time 'unreal,' as if that were the difference between them" (45)—a concept that George Orr struggles with too. George understands that dreams are real, but he often struggles to equate them with reality. He dissociates the dreamt reality from the reality that existed before he started dreaming effectively even though they are connected.

Selver realises he, and all Athsheans, must live with their newfound knowledge of murder because what has been taken from the dream cannot be reversed: “You cannot take things that exist in the world and try to drive them back into the dream, to hold them inside the dream with walls and pretenses. That is insanity” (189). This quotation reflects Davidson’s insanity and his tendency to call unbelievable realities simply dreams or nightmares; he tries to drive actual occurrences into what he sees as non-existent: dreams. Selver, on the other hand, knows that dreams, too, are reality, but once they are acted upon in the world-time, they cannot be forced back into the dream-time: “The irreversibility arises from the fact that violence is being integrated into the Athshean culture because the rebellion becomes part of its history” (R.M.P. and Baggesen 40).

Le Guin’s use of the dream-time highlights the moral issues that cause people to exercise domineering power over their fellows and over nature itself. To divorce oneself from the oneness with nature, from the harmonious relationship one should feel with his or her surroundings, causes insanity, as in the Terrans in *The Word for World is Forest*. They are not themselves balanced, so they disrupt the balance of the Athshean ecology. George Orr, in *The Lathe of Heaven*, learns that one can learn from dreams, gain support and balance from dreams and from those whom one meets in the dream-time, such as the Aldebaranians. The Terran inability to maintain balance comes from their desire to dominate everything, including nature. They don’t try to live in mutuality with their surroundings; they try to control and dominate their surroundings, which leads to their ever-growing quest to utilise the resources of new planets; whereas the Athsheans have all they need on their own planet, since they have learned to live with nature, not against it. Through the use of the power of the dream-time, Le Guin explores the relationships between nature and the self, morality and immorality, sanity and insanity, balance and imbalance.

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