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HUMANITY DIVIDED: SOCIAL DICHOTOMIES IN POST MODERN FICTION

Society's natural gravitation towards "in group"/ "out group" dichotomies poses a serious threat to humankind as it facilitates the creation of hierarchies of domination, fear, and hate. Postmodern authors Kurt Vonnegut, Ursula Le Guinn, and Toni Morrison work to expose the fundamentally destructive nature of such exclusivist attitudes as those expressed by the "good versus evil," "us versus them," and "masculine versus feminine" mindset. They demonstrate that these dichotomies are based upon arbitrary distinctions that ultimately obscure the reality of a shared universal humanity.

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CHANANIE

It seems that human nature makes us predisposed towards creating social dichotomies. The “in group” and the “out group”, concepts we become well acquainted with as early as grade school pervade society at large, directing and defining our cultures and identities. In psychology, this is explained by Self-Categorization Theory, which asserts that social identity is based upon available social comparisons, so that the individual is defined “in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories.”¹ The theory further contends that by identifying with a group of discernibly similar individuals, people increase their likelihood of being protected against the unknown. This theory helps to explain why, in many situations, people polarize arbitrary traits and treat the resulting groups as meaningful bases for self-identification. Although this is a property apparently ground into our psychology and may at some point have served as a kind of evolutionary survival purpose, in today’s society, our predilection towards creating “in groups” and “out groups” with an “us verses them” mentality manifests itself more as a social-ill than anything else. By this process, we readily dehumanize those who are not members of our group and condemn, rather than celebrate, our differences.

It is this divided and exclusivist attitude of society that many post-modern writers, such as: Kurt Vonnegut, Toni Morrison, and Ursula Le Guin, seek to address and dismantle. To illustrate, Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* blurs the line between allied and enemy forces to call into question the good against evil mentality that we subscribe to during warfare. By giving all deaths in his novel the epitaph of, “and so it goes,” Vonnegut depicts a common human equity. In death, it doesn’t matter who shot whom, a life lost is a life lost, regardless of the side on which it once stood. In *Paradise*, Morrison

focuses on the racial insularity of one town to reveal that racial dichotomy is an artificial construct, exploited by those in power at the detriment of society as a whole. The drive for purity in the town, Ruby, ultimately results in the deaths of several defenseless and broken women. Le Guin, however, addresses this issue differently than the preceding authors. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she not only calls to light the problems

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that arise when we define ourselves by gender, but also offers a solution to this dichotomy through the creation of a world where gender is not recognized and individuals are judged and appraised as people rather than as men or women. Ultimately, Le Guin calls for the dissolution of the fear that characterizes a world ruled by division. Thus these authors challenge and deconstruct our adherence to the social norms that condone a “good verses evil”, “us verses them”, and “masculine verses feminine” polarized world-view. For they show that it is the acceptance of the “in-group”/“out-group” mentality that ultimately hinders our participation in a universal human identity.

1. Kurt Vonnegut’s Disruption of the Wartime “Good verses Evil” dichotomy

The common “us verses them” mentality is particularly prevalent during war,

when national groups are distinguished as allies or enemies. The “us verses them” manifests itself as “good versus evil,” and an underlying preference towards the familiar results in a fear and hatred of the other. In his novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut uses World War II as a lens through which he deconstructs wartime metanarratives that portray such a wholly dichotomous world-view as a patriotic and factually valid method of thought. Rather than pepper his story with fiercely confrontational interactions between idealized Allied forces and demonized Axis forces, Vonnegut turns the conventional war narrative on its head by distinguishing soldiers involved in the fray based on their individual merits and qualities instead of by the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices of his day. By blurring the usually clear line that divides men as agents of battle, Vonnegut highlights the way an artificially constructed enmity, often inseparable from war, confounds our ability to recognize the existence of basic humanity in members of groups deemed dissimilar to our own.

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut strives to demonstrate the possibility for friendship between individuals in opposing armies, a concept he gives legitimacy to by recounting one of his own experiences. The novel opens with Vonnegut, who, revisiting Dresden with a fellow veteran, befriends their German taxi driver, who was also a prisoner during World War II. He writes, “He sent O’Hare a postcard at Christmastime and here is what it said: ‘I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope we’ll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.’”² This account serves as a poignant start to the novel in that it depicts the meeting of men who, though pitted against one another by the politics of war, were happily able to come together on equal terms of friendship and respect. Understanding that this is a personal experience Vonnegut is choosing to share, the

reader is presented with concrete anecdotal evidence against the validity of engaging in dichotomous thought. If, as made evident by the blossoming friendship of these three men, there exists no basic or insurmountable difference between Germans and Americans, how can one justifiably vilify the entirety of one army while indiscriminately glorifying the whole of the other? By focusing on this personal interaction, Vonnegut forces the reader to separate the atrocities committed by the Nazis from the identities of individuals who happened to be German. Thus, it follows that an American belief in some kind of fundamental German depravity has to be a construct of our own design, rooted, perhaps, in a need to strengthen our own group identities at the detriment of our enemies' humanity. By opening the novel with this scene, Vonnegut begins his demolition of the typical war narrative by favoring a narrative that examines the complex nature of war and the men who fight in it.

Vonnegut works to confound the fantasy of the just and powerful Allied soldier by ascribing non-traditional and unexpected qualities to his depiction of American and German soldiers. Part of a subscription to the Self-Categorization Theory entails an idealization of one's "in-group" with an inverse relationship to that of the "out-group." In terms of the World War II, this translates to a perpetuation of a manly, fit, and honorable image of the American soldier, and a murderous, disgusting, and conniving image of the German soldier. It is a polarity easily promoted and maintained during a time when the American people were being bombarded by news of young men dying, slain by enemy troops. Vonnegut, however, complicates this black and white worldview when the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is saved by German troops from murder at the hands of a fellow American soldier, Roland Weary, a soldier described as "stupid and fat and mean."³ Weary, infuriated by the defection of two men from their four man squad, is taken over by an

inordinate rage that would have ended in Billy's death had five surveying German soldiers not appeared. Weary's actions, along with his deplorable physique and demeanor, deteriorate the prevailing idyllic representation of the American soldier. By acting with such violence and indiscretion, Weary reflects poorly on his group as a whole, thus challenging the credibility of the perceived group norms. When the enemy acts as a force of good, in his case saving Billy's life, and the ally is engaged in murderous activity, the usual perception of "good verses evil" is disrupted. This complication of ideology is exacerbated by the safety and evenhandedness the enemy troops represent to Billy in comparison with Weary.

Previously clear demarcation lines are further blurred by Vonnegut's description of one of the helpful German soldiers. He is a young man, described as having "the face of a blond angel;" Vonnegut writes of the scene, "Billy was helped to his feet by the lovely boy, by the heavenly androgyne."⁴ Thus, this representation of the German army is one of ambiguous sexual designation. It is in direct contrast with the prevailing image of Germans as cold and dangerous men. Instead, Billy is rescued by an individual who is stripped of any of the defining manly qualities that would make him threatening. The presence of the boy's androgyny requires the reader to accept a level of ambiguity in Vonnegut's universe. As this boy blurs the lines of the accepted male/female dichotomy, so too does he expose the faults in the ally/enemy divide. If the men who are supposed to be part of the safe group act homicidally and the men who are expected to pose a threat act without aggression, the established dichotomy is clearly groundless. This exchange calls for a reevaluation of the means by which we appraise characters as they are introduced. As the scene discredits the use of dichotomous thought, the reader is prompted to acknowledge the value of recognizing new characters as individuals with qualities and

merits outside their identities as German or American soldiers. In doing so, Vonnegut brings humanity back to the dehumanized enemy and thus breaks apart the foundation of the "us verses them" mindset.

Vonnegut expands on this concept throughout the novel, often depicting the meeting of opposing sides as that of equally war-weary human beings. When Billy is marched into Dresden as a prisoner,

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the guards assigned to his group are an ill equipped crew of soldiers. Vonnegut writes of the unfit Dresdeners: "They were expected to earn obedience and respect from tall, cocky, murderous American infantryman who had just come from all the killing at the front... their terror evaporated. There was nothing to be afraid of. Here were more crippled human beings, more fools like themselves." Vonnegut parallels the German soldiers to the American prisoners of war; he portrays the two groups of men as more alike than different. The German men enter the interaction believing that they will be engaging with a terrible scourge, but are met instead by people with whom they can

closely identify. Therefore, it stands to show that soldiers battle an enemy that is not, as the media portrays, inherently evil or different. Rather, they fight and kill individuals very much like themselves. War is fought with an “us versus them” mentality, when in reality it is a battle between people, human beings fighting one another as a part of a national group. It becomes easy to engage in the “good versus evil” mentality when the humanity of the opposite side is not seen. Vonnegut places opposing sides vis-à-vis so it becomes impossible to ignore the basic hu-

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man sameness that exits across political lines.

Vonnegut does not shy away from illustrating the atrocities committed by both sides of the war, discussing at times the Nazi death camps and, extensively, the Dresden firebombing. At the beginning of his novel a colleague outlines some of the Nazi’s war crimes for him. This brief nod to the horrendously destructive force that was the Nazi celebration of group purity demonstrates the deplorable extremes that the “us versus them” can cause, a theme that will be further explored in Morrison’s novel. However, he also urges his readers to consider battle on

a smaller, more human level where the impact of the individual can be observed. The stark lines drawn in war are easily blurred when soldiers begin to see one another for who they actually are instead of who they are supposed to be. It is this recognition of a shared humanity that works to deconstruct the metanarrative of dichotomous thought.

2. Toni Morrison’s Critique of the “Us versus Them” Mentality of Group Purity

For many, purity is an ideal to strive for in order to obtain a special sense of security. Purity, by definition, denotes a safety from the degradation and contamination of that which one holds dear or sacred. Within a community of the pure a shared history, ethnicity, and value system is celebrated, bolstered by the protection of exclusivity and unity. However, for those on the outside, those deemed tainted or diluted, deviations from the accepted norm are alienating or worse, damning. Self-Categorization Theory helps explain the creation of particularly insular societies. Purity, and ultimately social insularity, is the means by which societies maintain the safety of the “us versus them” dichotomy. Skin color has historically been a marker of purity, usually in the sense of white purity at the expense and hurt of black communities. Toni Morrison’s novel, *Paradise*, turns this white standard on its head by crafting the tale of Ruby, a homogenous community where black purity reigns supreme. She uses Ruby as a lens through which she comments on the costs insularity exacts on those who maintain it. In doing so, Morrison deconstructs the metanarrative followed by many groups in America that place racial and religious purity on high. Morrison reveals that though the racial dichotomy and drive towards societal purity may be facilitated to protect against historical hurt and the degradation of group values, it is ultimately a destructive force that leads to the rejection and dehumanization of “out group” individuals.

Morrison’s novel explores the use of in-

ularity as a salve for historical wounding but also highlights the inherently hypocritical nature of this technique. *Paradise* centers around Ruby, a town built exclusively for and by the entirely black community that founded it. Located far from any nearby town, Ruby revels in its isolation. “Unique and isolated, [this] was a town justifiably pleased with itself... From the beginning its people were free and protected.”⁵ As a self-regulated and self-protected populace, the people of Ruby enjoy a level of sovereignty denied to them by the white and light skinned black people they encountered while searching for a home some eighty years earlier. Therefore, Ruby becomes for them a refuge from those who viewed their dark skin as low or impure. However, rather than create a haven of openness to counter the prejudice with which they were treated, they, mirroring the behavior shown to them, create a community characterized by its exclusivity and racial intolerance. Importantly, “they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black”⁶ and this becomes an unspoken law by which Ruby is ruled, a triumph over those that turned them away before. Thus their purity acts as a shield for them, protecting them against the possible hurt to which they might be re-exposed.

The protective purity of Ruby also enables its people to reinvent their world’s social order, granting them lasting power they never before experienced. Pat, one of the sole light-skinned individuals in Ruby, ascribes to the rest of the townspeople the term “8-Rock,” indicating that they have dark black skin, untainted by white blood. She writes that they are, “blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren’t 8-rock like them.”⁷ The racial purity signified by these people’s skin color grants them a level of superiority classically enjoyed by whites in America. Morrison thus inverts the usual standard, elevating those with pure black blood and lowering those tainted with whiteness. This inversion

continues into Ruby's Christmas show; children dress up as the light-skinned members of the towns that turned Ruby's forefathers away. Morrison writes, "four figures... in two big suits stand at a table, counting giant dollar bills. The face of each one is hidden by a yellow and white mask featuring gleaming eyes and snarling lips, red as a fresh wound."⁸ This parodies the black face of southern minstrel shows, a major source of historical hurt for the American black community. Ruby's general racial purity allows for them to construct a world where white, instead of black, skin is mocked and degraded without opposition. For the people of Ruby, a more satisfactory social order has been created and imposed than the one they lived under in the outside world.

Using the character, Patricia Cato, Morrison draws attention to the negative impact Ruby's insularity and purity has on those who deviate from the accepted norm. Pat comes to believe that her light skinned mother, Delia, was quietly hated by the 8-rocks during her life. She writes, "They hate us because [Delia] looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me"⁹ and goes on to say "... they despised Daddy for marrying a wife of sunlight skin, a wife of racial tampering."¹⁰ In this way, Pat highlights that the crux of the problem lies with the idea of "racial tampering." This implies something unnatural, artificial, or impure about the mixing of black and white skin, therefore giving Ruby license to disdain those who are the product of it. For a people with whom pain is directly linked to light skin, whiteness is explicitly linked with suffering and injustice. Black racial purity is their means in combating the evilness associated with the white, even at a cost to some of their own. For example Menus, one of the local 8-rock boys, brings a beautiful light-skinned woman home to marry, but is forced by his family to give her up. Throughout the novel, Menus is characterized by his alcoholism, a byproduct, Pat says, of this terrible blow

to his heart. Menus' future and happiness are thus sacrificed for the preservation of purity. This is reminiscent of American laws that forbid interracial marriage; again Morrison inverts usual expectations. This shows

they were just some "lost folks" prompting him, Steward, to query, "lost folks or lost whites?"¹² His refusal to recognize a family of whites as people mirrors the white mother's refusal to make a responsible

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that although the people of Ruby created the town with the intention of escaping the racism and prejudice that unfairly damned them before, they have in turn created a new racism and prejudice that serves the interests of a ruling class. Ruby thrives on its "us verses them" mentality, with the "them" being anyone not exactly like the "us." Morrison shows that the drive for purity, whatever the skin color, is inseparable from a fundamental capacity for intolerance.

Morrison expands on this idea throughout the novel, illustrating that the "white verses black" mindset can only bring pain and misfortune to those who subscribe to it. In a small but significant scene, a white family drives into town looking to get back onto the highway. The father comes into Anna Flood's general store asking for directions and cough syrup for his sick baby. Although there is a snowstorm approaching and her child is sick, the mother chooses to "stay put"¹¹ in the car rather than wait the blizzard out in the colored town. Anna later explains to one of the town leaders that

choice for her child at the risk of dealing with blacks. This mutual unwillingness to break insularity and recognize a shared humanity across color lines has disastrous results for the family. Two years later, they are found dead in their car in a cornfield just a few miles from town. Here, a choice for racial isolation is literally deadly.

With the drive for purity comes a drive to purge that which threatens the status quo in terms of both racial and sexual deviation. For the older citizens of Ruby, their town of the pure should remain as such unless acted on by some kind of outside contamination. Therefore, when relations within Ruby begin to degrade with the passing of time a scapegoat is found to take responsibility for the damage. This takes the form of the unconventional women who live at the convent, an old mansion that lies a few miles away from town. To each other, they are profoundly broken women, seeking one another for the sake of mutual healing. But, to the town, they are a sexual, abnormal, and disrespectful threat to a hard preserved pu-

rity of race, history, and value. The women's sexual deviance threatens the control Ruby's men have over their town's purity. By controlling their women, the men may ensure the perpetuation of their pure lines. When faced with a new generation of back talking and "slack" children, the impurity of the convent women's sexuality seems a direct influence. They say, "These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in a church... They don't need men and they don't need God."¹³ By connecting the women's sexuality to disrespect for God, the men seize back the control female freedom takes from them and grant themselves divine justification. So, like in the case of the insular white family, a desire for purity leads to death. The men of Ruby take up arms against the defenseless, tainted women of the convent and slaughter them so that "nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain."¹⁴ In the opening lines of the novel, the white girl is shot first, thus extinguishing the threat of Ruby's racial and sexual contamination. Where purity is held as all-important, anything that is representative of "the other" is purged out of necessity. Where insularity is cherished, a human life is worth only as much as it contributes to the status quo.

3. Ursula LeGuin's Deconstruction of and Alternative to the "Masculine versus Feminine" Sexual Dichotomy

One of the most basic dichotomies we subscribe to and identify ourselves by is gender. In contrast with the artificial enmity of war or the divisive nature of racism, this sexual issue is one firmly engrained in our physiology and is thus most difficult to escape or ignore. Gender is a dichotomy that is classically treated as a visual, physical, and psychological fact. A fact that even now, in the 21st century, as we begin to explore and recognize the fallibility of this assumption, we still use to conduct our social lives. Ursula Le Guin's novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, deconstructs our understanding of gender identity to challenge the va-

lidity of engaging in the "masculine versus feminine" dichotomy. Unlike Vonnegut and Morrison, Le Guin does not only address the problem of social division but also offers up an alternative. She constructs the world of Gethen, or "Winter", where, save for a week each month of sexual activity, every individual lives in a continuous state of androgyny. Le Guin uses the interaction between the Gethenians and the visiting bisexual Ekumen to assess and challenge the role sexuality plays in our self-identification and to celebrate the human potential that exists in a world populated by individuals identified as people as opposed to men and women.

Le Guin's creation of an androgynous world challenges our investment in the male-female dichotomy. The reader's initial reaction to this world is one of discomfort or reversion. To us, the idea of an individual possessing both male and female traits is abnormal and foreign. However, in a world where androgyny is the norm it is our bisexual physiology that is the ab-

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normality. Genly Ai's permanent engagement in male sexuality is seen as a kind of handicap. The Karhidish king, Argaven, refers to Genly's people, our people, as a "society of perverts" going so far as to say he doesn't see "why human beings here on earth [Gethen] should want or tolerate

any dealings with creatures so monstrously different."¹⁵ The king's attitude inverts our own and raises uncomfortable questions about our understanding of "normal" sexual and gender roles. If our bisexuality can be dismissed and reviled in one world, what gives it authority in our own? Le Guin blurs the lines that we use to understand gender, asserting that it is a more complicated issue than we may be inclined to see.

Le Guin advances this inquiry into our understanding of the male/female dichotomy by rejecting our natural inclination toward using gender as a means of conducting ourselves socially. In Gethen, gender in the way we understand it is absent for the majority of an individual's life. Therefore when Gethenian people interact it is as two human beings coming together rather than two men, two women, or a man and a woman. So, the way one treats another person must be grounded in that person's specific merit or character rather than in social norms that dictate gender relations. For example, on Gethen a man cannot be condescending to a woman based on prevailing attitudes of female inferiority or delicacy. What's more, our expectations of normative gender behavior hold little to no value. A researcher of the planet writes:

"When you meet a Gethenian you cannot and must not do what a bisexual usually does, which is to cast him in the role of Man or Woman, while adopting towards him a corresponding role dependent on your expectations of the patterned or possible interactions between persons of the same or opposite sex. Our entire pattern of social interaction is nonexistent here."¹⁶

When Genly Ai, the first envoy sent by the Ekumen to establish contact with Gethen, a man from a bisexual planet like our own, interacts with Gethenians his gendered understanding of social interactions inhibits him. He says, "I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through

their own eyes... my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own."¹⁷ This handicap in understanding another human being on individual terms asserts the inadequacy of using gender as an indicator of social interaction at all. If our adherence to gender as a valid dichotomy confounds our efforts to relate to one another as human beings, evidently Le Guin proves that it is a flawed means of interaction.

Further frustrating our investment in gender as a social force, Le Guin, from the perspective of her fictive outside researcher, directly connects the existence of an accepted gender dichotomy to the general human predilection towards dualistic thinking. In Gethen the polarity of thought that has been the major of focus of this paper is largely lessened due to the absence of gender. The researcher asserts that there is, "no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive."¹⁸

These stereotypically male and female traits that usually divide our society fade away without defined gender roles. This is not to say that Le Guin removes "in groups" and "out groups" from her work, there is the obvious example of the Karhide/Orgoreyn feud, but she rather asserts that our tendency towards thinking in this manner is lessened in a unisexual society. The tension between Karhide and Orgoreyn is far less heated and bloody than say the violence between the Germans and Americans described in Vonnegut's novel. This suggests then, that our subscription to the male-female dichotomy conditions us towards a polarity of thought in the rest of our interactions. If we could relinquish our adherence to this particular dichotomy then perhaps other social dichotomies would fade as well.

Unfortunately, despite the obvious shortcomings of gendered thinking, Le Guin demonstrates that it is a dichotomy in

which we are firmly invested. She uses the researcher of Gethen to expand on this matter. She writes, "The First Mobile, if on is sent, must be warned that unless he is very self-assured, or senile, his pride will suffer. A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated... On Winter they will not exist. One is respected

we have to see past normative gender roles. Throughout the novel, the reader watches Genly transform from a man among hermaphrodites to a person among people. The reader, along with Genly, must relinquish his or her basic repulsion in order to experience his eventual shift towards love and respect. By the end of the novel, when

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and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience."¹⁹ On the surface it seems ironic that it is unsettling to be seen simply as a person rather than be defined by sexuality. However, this highlights the level to which our sexuality is engrained in our sense of self, that before we see ourselves as humans, we first see ourselves as men or women. Being thrust into a situation where female and male attributes hold no significance, our self worth is called into question, in so far as it is tied to those qualities. Thus, it follows that perhaps our belief in sexual and gender significance is a hindrance to our personal development. It is a shortcoming imposed on us by a world that is convinced that qualities like masculinity and femininity are more important than the qualities that are fundamental to being a good human.

Ultimately, Genly Ai is profoundly changed by his time spent with the androgynous and provides a model for the potential

Ekumen delegates arrive on Gethen, Genly is so immersed in the way of the Gethenians that the sexual differences of the Ekumenical people, those physically like him, seem strange and wrong to him. It is not until he is back with his Karhidish physician that he feels comfortable. He says, "His quiet voice and his face, a young, serious face, not a man's face and not a woman's face, these were a relief to me."²⁰ By this point, Genly has so removed himself from a culture in which sexual differences are an intrinsically important aspect of an individual that he becomes able to appreciate those around him primarily based on their qualities as human beings. Le Guin is thus challenging the importance of the cultural distinctions that the reader takes as given. If, like Genly, we were able to overcome social patterns that emphasize gender specifications, we might be able to eliminate the negative behaviors that come with those distinctions.

Genly Ai's eventual recognition of his hesitancy to adjust to Gethen's androgyny insightfully exposes the crux of mankind's larger issue with its unwillingness to break from most established group dichotomies and serves as an alternative to our "us verses them" mentality. When trekking through the icy wilderness with Estraven, Genly finally understands his illogical distrust of his companion. Throughout the novel, Estraven has been the only Gethenian to treat Genly as a person as opposed to a sexual freak. In doing so he has demanded a shared respect. Genly realizes, "I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to man who was a woman, a woman who was a man."²¹ This speaks to many people's intolerance towards the gay and transgender community and people's general difficulty in breaking "in group" and "out group" dynamics. Genly's fear is what keeps him from seeing past his gender expectations. When he gives up his fear, he and Estraven become powerfully connected. Le Guin thus demonstrates that it is this fear, the fear of the "other," which traps us in our dualistic thinking. When we engage in dichotomies of thought that which does not fit or that which threatens the status quo is frightening and thus rejected. So, Le Guin offers up an alternative to this fear. Through his respect, Genly comes to love Estraven as a friend. He says, "it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge, across what divided us."²² Doing what Vonnegut and Morrison did not, Le Guin presents a solution to the problem of social dichotomy; she asks her readers to surrender their fear and engage in a respect of all things human, in spite and because of our differences.

In a world that does not place sexual orientation on high, gender discrimination cannot exist and the social ills associated with narrow gender roles may be

erased. This novel speaks for a generation that is told 'real boys don't cry and good girls look like Barbie.' It is especially important now as the rights of those who do not fit into society's expected gender and sexual roles come to the forefront. If we can shift in the way Genly does, our understanding of humanity may be profoundly altered. This novel teaches that we cannot and should not define ourselves and others by limited gender definitions. Le Guin celebrates humanity in and of itself, free of fear and disrespect. If we can do this too, we may be able to live in a world of people instead of a world of men and women.

These three authors thus challenge our adherence to social dichotomies. By exposing the failures, dangers, and shortcomings of engaging in the "good verses evil," "us verses them," and "masculine verses feminine" mentality, Vonnegut, Morrison, and Le Guin encourage a world where the recognition of humanity, above all, is paramount. Whether this is obtainable, as it requires a level of fundamental respect for that which we do not understand or are afraid, has yet to be seen. However, these authors seem to look forward to a day where these dichotomies slip away and we as a people are united by the diversity that makes us all human. 