Concurrences and the Planetary Emergency: Ursula K. Le Guin in the Capitalocene

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> *"Recognizing concurrences is about respecting pluralism*
> *and expecting entanglements."*
> Gunlög Fur

> *"Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made,*
> *like bread; remade all the time, made new."*
> Ursula LeGuin

The past, as Gunlög Fur (2017) reminds us, is full of concurrent and conflicting voices. Of these voices, the one that rises out of European modernity and the colonial and capitalist projects that made this modernity possible has been particularly loud and influential. As a long and vital tradition of radical, feminist, and postcolonial scholarship has shown, history has not simply been written by and for the people that expanded out of Europe to colonize most of the rest of the planet; the very discipline of history became a mechanism for Eurocentric power, as argued by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Gurminder K. Bhambra (2007) in somewhat

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different ways. In conversation with this scholarship, Fur has proposed the concept of *concurrences* as a sociological/historical methodology that directs attention towards the voices that Eurocentric, universalizing, grand history has systematically drowned out. When the historian recognizes the presence of a plurality of voices (from indigenous people, from women, from workers, from the poor) and begins to listen to these voices, not just the past but the very discipline of history appears as entangled, fractured, and impossible, but also as a multi-layered repository and a practice full of possibilities.

This realization is arguably crucial for how the past is narrated within the discipline of history, but it is equally important for what futures we can imagine. Going back in time to listen to the voices that describe immensely rich life worlds not premised on normative European conceptions of civilization, gender, sexuality, and skin color yields a better and much more complex understanding of the past, while at the same time making it possible to imagine futures other than those extrapolated from the present moment of violent neocolonial/capitalist world dominance. At a time when the planetary emergency is unfolding against increasing international conflict and war, the ability to imagine new and different futures beyond those seemingly programmed into what Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) has termed the world-system, is more important than ever. As scholars such as Donna Haraway (2015) and Jason W. Moore (2015) have convincingly argued, colonialism and capitalism (two systems so entangled that they cannot be usefully separated) have reorganized human society and ecology since the early colonial period and set the planet towards the present moment of ecological, environmental collapse. Focusing on the role that the slave plantation, as a site of white, heteronormative exploitation and extraction, Haraway has suggested the concept *Plantationocene* as an alternative to the more popular moniker Anthropocene. Centering the same colonial and capitalist history, Moore has proposed the alternative term *Capitalocene*. Both concepts recognize how the present moment of climate upheaval and global ecological and economic injustice grows out of a specific, post-1500, capitalist and colonial history.

What can humans (and the various species with which humans are entangled) do to break out of a 500-year tradition of exploitation and extraction? What can humans do to halt this accelerating journey towards climate collapse, the sixth mass extinction of species (Kolbert 2014), and the oblivion that this is bringing about? What are the alternatives to (ever-expanding) capitalism, to violent geopolitics, to neoliberal globalization,

and to the global social and ecological injustice that these systems underwrite? How do you put an end to the Plantationocene/Capitalocene? Arguably, a first step is to recognize and listen to the concurrent voices speaking (to us, with us, for us) from positions that may have been invaded by, but are not necessarily premised on, capitalism. The concurrent and complex political and social worlds that these voices rise out of can potentially help us imagine, and thus work towards, just and egalitarian futures not built on competition, exploitation, extraction, and accumulation.

Ursula Le Guin is an author who has always attempted to think outside the Eurocentric, Enlightenment paradigm and who has made the effort to imagine future worlds premised on social systems very different from those that fuel and organize present capitalist society. This chapter explores her novel *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) as a narrative that identifies militarized capitalism and colonialism as the actual drivers of climate change and pandemic violence. The novel also, I argue, clearly traces capitalism and colonialism back to the origins of European Enlightenment. As I will argue, *The Lathe of Heaven* thus envisions a future where global warming caused by war and capitalism has brought the ecosystem to its knees. Oceanification, constant warfare, racism, a multitude of pandemics, and uneven and endemic precarity characterize the world in ways that are often disturbingly like the present moment and that square remarkably well with the Capitalocene or Plantationocene theses. While this alone makes *The Lathe of Heaven* into a singularly prescient novel, what makes it unique is its strangely optimistic vision of a multitude of concurrent futures—at once dystopian and utopian—through which the climate emergency, the precarity, the pandemics, and the violent conflict described in the novel can be undone or at least addressed.

Le Guin and the Capitalocene

To appreciate the original and complex account of the planet's environmental and political history provided by *The Lathe of Heaven*, it is necessary to, in more detail, consider recent scholarship that describes the forces that have produced the current emergency. This is in itself a fraught historical landscape of conflicting and competing voices and claims. In 2001, Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer launched the concept of the Anthropocene to describe an epoch where human activity is the most substantial environmental and geological factor. While this puts the blame for the planetary emergency on the Anthropos, it arguably fails to separate the

people who created the systems and technologies that actually produce climate change from indigenous and precarious communities that have done little to cause the emergency but that suffer the most from the deterioration of the Earth System. In other words, as influentially argued by sociologist John Bellamy Foster (Foster et al. 2011; Foster 2022) and by Moore (Moore 2015), it is capitalism, rather than the human as a species, that causes climate change. According to his scholarship, the beginning of the climate emergency is thus not to be found in human evolution, as the concept Anthropocene suggests, but in early capitalism and colonialism and in the Enlightenment project that legitimized and rationalized these systems.

These different versions of the origins and drivers of the planetary emergency have enormous significance for how this emergency can be resolved and narrated. In geology, environmental science, and environmental humanities, there is a clear tension between research and scholarship that sees the human species as the entity that has caused the climate emergency (Chakrabarty 2009; Steffen et al. 2016) and that identifies capitalism as the engine of the planetary emergency (Moore 2015; Malm 2016; Lewis and Maslin 2015; Davis and Todd 2017; Holleman 2018). If, as Chakrabarty has argued, the human species has become "a geological agent" (2009: 218), and if, as Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill have suggested, the proper beginning of the climate emergency is the discovery of fire by Homo erectus "a couple of million years ago" (2016: 614), it becomes necessary to transform the species itself to halt the current development. If, however, as Moore, Malm, Lewis and Maslin, Davis and Todd, and Hollemann argue, it is extractive capitalism and colonialism that have caused the ongoing crisis, we do not have to stop being human in the sense of being *Homo sapiens*. Rather, we need to identify and embrace other ways of being human, other ways of being on this planet. This is not a simple task, but it is one that was once performed by millions of people for tens of thousands of years before the advent of European modernity.

Le Guin's substantial and radical science fiction oeuvre has been dedicated to interrogating this precise historical development, the gendered and racialized categories that energized this history, and the consequences for human society and for ecology that it produced. Entering the literary scene in the late 1950s, Le Guin began changing the way that American science fiction was written. Novels such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), and *The Dispossessed* (1974) show a profound awareness of the United States' neocolonial project in

Southeast Asia, of the apartheid order practiced within the nation's borders, and of predatory capitalism in South America. In this way, Le Guin's writing has always explored many of the issues central to postcolonial studies. As Wendy Gay Pearson observes, novels such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* may not be "directly informed by postcolonial theory," but they are certainly "informed by the very conditions and historical circumstances that created both the postcolonial condition and the theory that attempts to explain and understand it" (189). Similarly, Le Guin was singularly aware of the havoc produced by patriarchal and heteronormative sexual orders and of the connection between these orders and the capitalist and colonial projects she so often critiqued in her writing. Thus, while *The Word for World is Forest* focuses on slavery and the ruthless sexual and ecological extractive violence practiced by capitalist imperialism, *Left Hand of Darkness* investigates and problematizes the connection between what Adrienne Rich (1980) has termed "compulsory heterosexuality" and (geo)political power. In the words of Pearson (2007), *The Left Hand of Darkness* may not have been the first science fiction novel to discuss colonialism, but it "can certainly be understood as central to any genealogy of works that link issues of gender and race to the history and legacy of colonialism" (184). In this way, as Sean McCann and Michael Szalay (2005) note, authors such as Don DeLillo and Toni Morrison can be said to "have followed the path charted by Le Guin" in the 1960s and 70s (447).

Le Guin has also been noted for using science fiction not simply to identify, allegorize, and decry unjust sexual, economic, and ecological relations but also to imagine alternative forms of social organization. Thus, Le Guin importantly refuses to see colonialism and capitalism as monolithic and inevitable. Indeed, as Carl D. Malmgren (1998) is one of many to note, many of Le Guin's novels "deal philosophically with the idea of utopia, the possibility of a perfect society" (313). Le Guin's writing rarely, if ever, takes the reader on a journey that ends in the triumphant establishment of such a utopia. Instead, her fiction inventories a range of possible relations between peoples, societies, ecologies, sexualities, and cultures that together make it possible to both perceive dominant capitalist and neocolonial society in a new light and to imagine various alternatives to capitalism's world order. While these futures are never untouched by capitalism and colonialism, they also transcend them by connecting to non-Western and indigenous cosmologies that refuse the extractive priorities that structure capitalist society. Drawing from Taoism (Galbreath 1980), pacifist anarchism (Call 2007), and indigenous systems of knowledge (Spicer 2021), Le Guin helps imagine future worlds beyond the one currently eroding conditions for life on the planet.

The Lathe of Heaven

The *Lathe of Heaven* is one of Le Guin's most intriguing and complex examples of such imagining. As I will argue, the novel attempts to explore the violent material dynamics of capitalist empire and the ways of thinking that have brought the world to its current state, but it also explores alternatives to this world order. The text is set in a dystopian Portland in 2002, some 30 years into the future counting from the date it was published. Social injustice is rampant in this dark future: "Undernourishment, overcrowding, and pervading foulness of the environment were the norm. There was more scurvy, typhus, and hepatitis in the Old Cities, more gang violence, crime, and murder in the New Cities" (28). In addition to this, the "Greenhouse Effect" has melted the snow from "all the world's mountains" (7) and turned the Portland sky a constant gray. Importantly, Le Guin attributes this not to humanity as a species but to the systems that keep capitalist society running:

> Very little light and air got down to street level; what there was was warm and full of fine rain. Rain was an old Portland tradition, but the warmth—70 °F on the second of March—was modern, a result of air pollution. Urban and industrial effluvia had not been controlled soon enough to reverse the cumulative trends already at work in the mid-twentieth century; it would take several centuries for the CO_2 to clear out of the air, if it ever did. (27)

The process that has led to the collapse of the climate is implicitly linked to other types of (military) violence. The first section of the novel takes place against a background of constant geopolitical conflict. In a striking passage, considering the fact that the novel is set in 2002, the reader is confronted with a newspaper headline that reads: "BIG A-l STRIKE NEAR AFGHAN BORDER […] Threat of Afghan Intervention" (27). As in the present moment, much of the conflict occurs in or around the oil-rich Middle East.

In this uncomfortably prescient setting, a man named George Orr illegally collects chemical stimulants capable of keeping him awake for long periods of time. Discovered by police and health services, he is referred to the claustrophobic, windowless office of psychiatrist Dr. William Haber

for "Voluntary Therapeutic Treatment" (8). When Haber begins to question Orr, the latter informs the psychiatrist that he has "effective dreams": "dreams that … that affected the … non-dream world. The real world" (11). Haber is predictably skeptical of this claim, but he discovers, after having sent Orr into a hypnotic sleep, that the assertion is true. Orr's dreams do come true. This is not noticed by other people in the world. To them, the new world is the only world there has ever been. Only Orr and, for some reason, Haber, while he makes Orr dream, remember what the world used to be like.

As critics have observed (Johnston 1999; Malmgren 1998), the name George Orr references George Orwell, another author of prescient, dystopian science fiction. Haber, meanwhile, connotes Homo Faber: a word describing, and simultaneously inventing, the human as a rational and productive species. Suspicious of any attempt to manipulate the future, Orr is extremely wary of his ability: "Who am I to meddle with the way things go? And it's my unconscious mind that changes things, without any intelligent control" (14). By contrast, Haber's rational persona is immensely stimulated by the possibilities that Orr's dreaming provides. With the help of hypnosis and a machine developed by "Russians" and "Israelis" that provides him with a modicum of control over Orr's dreams, Haber soon exits his cramped office by making Orr dream up the government-funded Oregon Oneirological Institute of which Haber is the director. Comfortably ensconced in this new and prestigious institution, he continues to manipulate the world he inhabits.

The utopian potential of such manipulation is compromised by the erratic behavior of dreams. When Haber makes Orr dream about the end of the overpopulation crisis, the result is a world where a plague has erased most of humanity. Suddenly, Orr's and Haber's minds are invaded with a new set of memories that vie with the old so that Haber now discovers new memories that tell him that there "are no floods now in the Ganges caused by the piling up of corpses of people dead of starvation. There's no protein deprivation and rickets among the working-class children of Portland, Oregon. As there was—before the Crash" (68). Thus, the end of overpopulation comes at a terrible price. Invaded by the memories this altered reality brings with it, Haber realizes that:

> I was already a grown man when the first epidemic struck. I was twenty-two when that first announcement was made in Russia, that chemical pollutants in the atmosphere were combining to form virulent carcinogens. The next

night they released the hospital statistics from Mexico City. Then they figured out the incubation period, and everybody began counting. Waiting. And there were the riots, and the fuck-ins, and the Doomsday Band, and the Vigilantes. And my parents died that year. My wife the next year. My two sisters and their children after that. Everyone I knew. (68)

In this way, Orr and Haber find themselves having survived a catastrophic pandemic named "The Crash," and they now inhabit a phase known as "The Recovery," when the big cities on the U.S. East and West coasts are trying to amend the damage done not just by the plague but to ecology before the plague. Indeed, Orr notes how the "air was still profoundly and irremediably polluted: that pollution predated the Crash by decades, indeed was its direct cause" (80).

By connecting the pollution of the air by human systemic activity to the eruption of a devastating global pandemic, Le Guin's writing seems to speak directly to our own dystopian moment. A study published in *Nature Climate Change* in late 2022 reveals that climate change exacerbates 65 percent of all pathogenic diseases that affect humans (Mora et al. 2022), and a number of scholars in the environmental humanities and development studies (Malm 2020; Selby and Kagawa 2020; Duncan and Höglund 2021) have argued that the Covid-19 pandemic was provoked by, disseminated via, and experienced through the very same systems that are causing the climate emergency. It is the mapping of such connections that has led Jude Fernando (2020) to suggest that we now live in the "Virocene," an era where the detrimental and uneven ecological and economic conditions created by capitalism and colonialism will continue to produce pandemics.

Orr is deeply distressed by the transformations that Haber forces him to perform through the therapy sessions. "Please, stop using my dreams to improve things, Dr. Haber. It won't work. It's wrong. I want to be cured," (81) he pleads. But Haber remains unconcerned: "isn't that man's very purpose on earth—to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?" (82) he asks in reply to Orr's plea. Indeed, for Haber, some things have improved. Now that grain is not as precious as before the plague, there is suddenly bourbon, instead of rubbing alcohol, in his office desk and he confidently toasts the empty city outside his office: "To a better world!" (72). Never doubting that he is a "benevolent man" who wants to "make the world better for humanity" (83) he takes on the next challenge. The plague may have alleviated the population crisis, but it has done little to relieve international tension: "Jerusalem was rubble, and in

Saudi Arabia and Iraq the civilian population was living in burrows in the ground while tanks and planes sprayed fire in the air and cholera in the water, and babies crawled out of the burrows blinded by napalm" (81). Undaunted by the killing of billions caused by the depopulation dream, Haber sets out eradicate war and hypnotizes Orr to dream a dream about peace. The result is again unpredictable and violent. Orr dreams up a hostile alien species and while this ends war between humans on Earth, war is now moved into space, throwing humanity into yet another crisis.

Orr and Haber manage to dispel this crisis by redreaming the aliens into a generous and pacifist species that enters and interacts with the human population. While this suspends international and interplanetary war, in the process introducing a new species with their own set of creeds and cosmologies into human society, it does not put an end to Haber's futile attempts to design an enlightenment utopia. An effort to erase racism turns all people a shade of grey, social stability comes at the price of authoritarianism and blood sports, and the pandemic is addressed through a strict Eugenic regime where all people with "a serious communicable or hereditary disease" (135) are strictly monitored and euthanized on the spot when digressing from the harsh regime enforced upon them. Simultaneously with these developments, Haber continues to better his own situation. Towards the end of the narrative, Haber resides in an enormous building inspired by the Roman Pantheon and occupying an area larger than the British Museum. Over its entrance, the words "The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number" are written, and inside, the visitor is confronted with a plaque that reads: "The Proper Study of Mankind is Man • A. Pope • 1688 • 1744" (136). In this way, Le Guin makes perfectly clear how Haber's project is aligned with the Enlightenment attempt to reshape the world according to rational principles that simultaneously fueled and concealed, as Bhambra (2007) and Walter Mignolo (2011) have argued, the colonial and capitalist European project.

Haber's final intervention is to make Orr dream a dream where he confers his ability to dream effective dreams to Haber himself. Haber is certain that his own rational mind is a better agent for dramatic social and ecological intervention than Orr's resistant and anti-authoritarian subconscious. The results of this transfer of dream power are predictably chaotic and catastrophic. Haber's vision is ultimately empty and meaningless. As Malmgren (1998) suggests, William Haber in the end "becomes his name, an empty 'Will-I-Am,' a naked 'will to power' that feeds on itself" (315–6). Because Haber's dreaming lacks true content and is steered by his own

desire for power, his dreaming causes the world to fold, melt, and become disconnected and meaningless:

> The funicular was crossing the river now, high above the water. But there was no water. The river had run dry. The bed of it lay cracked and oozing in the lights of the bridges, foul, full of grease and bones and lost tools and dying fish. The great ships lay careened and ruined by the towering, slimy docks.
>
> The buildings of downtown Portland, the Capital of the World, the high, new, handsome cubes of stone and glass interspersed with measured doses of green, the fortresses of Government—Research and Development, Communications, Industry, Economic Planning, Environmental Control—were melting. They were getting soggy and shaky, like Jell-O left out in the sun. The corners had already run down the sides, leaving great creamy smears. (171)

Orr, not present during Haber's dreaming, sees this transformation occurring and understands what is going on. He immediately rushes to Haber's grand office and manages to abort this collapsing dream at the last minute. The result, however, is a bricolage of the many previous realities dreamed up by Orr:

> The emptiness of Haber's being, the effective nightmare, radiating outward from the dreaming brain, had undone connections. The continuity that had always held between the worlds or timelines of Orr's dreaming had now been broken. Chaos had entered in. He had few and incoherent memories of this existence he was now in; almost all he knew came from the other memories, the other dreamtimes. (174)

Thus, the Earth ends up an incoherent yet organic jumble made up of a patchwork of all the previous realities: instead of a single utopian/dystopian future, the planet enters a state where a number of concurrent realities exists simultaneously. Orr moves through a city

> half wrecked and half transformed, a jumble and mess of grandiose plans and incomplete memories, swarmed like Bedlam; fires and insanities ran from house to house. And yet people went about their business as always: there were two men looting a jewelry shop, and past them came a woman who held her bawling, red-faced baby in her arms and walked purposefully home.
>
> Wherever home was. (175)

Haber's mind, his capacity to dream effectively, does not survive his failure and the chaotic unreality it has produced. In a permanent, catatonic state, he is confined to an asylum. Orr, by contrast, finds the new and divergent reality strangely livable. People are no longer uniformly grey, post-Enlightenment capitalism is still operational, but it coexists with a barter economy and with the enormous turtle-like aliens now both integrated into and apart from human society.

CONCLUSION: *CONCURRENCES* AND LE GUIN'S DYSTOPIAN UTOPIAS

While *The Lathe of Heaven* has not received the same degree of attention as *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *The Dispossessed*, critics have long attempted to come to terms with its enigmatic ending. To Malmgren (1998), this ending suggests that "Utopia is just such a contradiction, a true science fantasy, something that neither reason nor imagination can bring into existence; Utopia is either the nightmare expression of a dangerous selfishness or merely an empty dream" (322). Reading the novel from a traditional, postcolonial, Bhabhian perspective and alongside Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000), Sahar Jamshidian and Farideh Pourgiv (2019) see in her oeuvre a general critique of "cultural imperialism" that "rejects both conservative and assimilative attitudes toward the other" and that "praises hybridity as the culture of our globalizing world" (96). These two readings recognize a prevalent tension in *The Lathe of Heaven* as well as in Le Guin's writing generally, but neither acknowledge the prescient critique of Capitalocene violence that saturates the novel nor the strange hope that resides in the similarly strange ending of the novel, with multiple pasts and realities existing concurrently.

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concepts of third space and hybridity, which Jamshidian and Pourgiv employ to dissect Le Guin's writing, assume a coming together of differing perspectives and modes of being. Out of the wildly divergent modes of thinking and discourses that characterize the meeting between colonizer and colonized—what Bhabha refers to as colonial ambivalence—a third space is formed, and within this space, different discourses and views merge and hybridize. To Jamshidian and Pourgiv, globalization, if done right, is a force that encourages the forming of such spaces and such mergers. However, Le Guin's fiction is clearly suspicious of globalization as a process. As suggested by a host of scholars, including Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), David M. Kotz (2002), David

Harvey (2002), and Richard Peet (2009), globalization is best understood as the process by which neoliberal capitalism expands across the planet. Its roots, as Wallerstein (2000) argues, go back to the 1450s, when the current world-system came into being. This beginning is also, of course, the beginning of what Moore has termed the Capitalocene. The origins of extractive capitalism and of European colonialism are thus also the origin of both globalization and of the planetary emergency (Moore 2015; Moore 2016). Le Guin is clearly aware of the existence of an extractive and violent capitalist and colonial world-system and of this system's capacity to generate ecocide, war, and plagues rather than third spaces where hybridity can erupt. It is thus not surprising that Haber's attempt to set the world right by relying on the same Enlightenment principles that underpin this system forces the world further into chaos. Orr's disruption of Haber's misguided and futile enlightenment dreaming does not open the door to a third space where hybridity can take place, but rather to a future where several dystopian, colonial, and capitalist worlds co-exist and vie for space with utopian hopes and projects.

In other words, the divergent ending of the novel does not evidence the type of hybridization that Bhabha suggests occurs in colonial and transcultural spaces. Rather, what emerges out of the chaos is an entangled state full of concurrent voices, of plural world views and practices. Unlike the voices that Fur's historical research has helped to bring to our attention, Le Guin's voices speak to us from an imagined future, yet these voices speak about similar issues: the violence performed on planets and people, the possibility of escaping or unthinking the racialization of people, and the existence of worlds and of modes of being detached from capital and patriarchy. Thus, considered through the methodological and theoretical lens that *concurrences* provides, the ending of *The Lathe of Heaven* cannot usefully be read as a coming together of a disparate chorus. Rather, as I have argued elsewhere, it exemplifies how literature often supplies the discordant hum of "a number of concurrent voices that speak simultaneously and outline multiple, sometimes wildly divergent positions" (Höglund 2013: 288). The sound of such a plethora of voices, many of them repeating the central tenets of capitalism, does not erase the history and ongoing violence of capitalist and colonial violence, nor does it elide the global warming, the social injustice and the pandemics that produce havoc in Le Guin's dystopian 2002, and that are doing so also in the present moment. But these processes now exist concurrently with other worlds and other modes of being. The has not been eliminated, but

it exists alongside ways of interacting with the world that are not necessarily locked into its binaries and logic. People are grey, brown, and white, love is possible across these artificial divides and aliens the shape of giant turtles have opened second-hand shops in the street.

In contrast to Malmgren's analysis of *The Lathe of Heaven*, the realization that the ending of the novel contains a plethora of concurrent worlds, possibilities, and futures suggests that the novel does not dismiss the notion of utopia altogether. Rather, it envisions a world where alternatives to capitalism and colonialism—the—exist but where the history of this system is still in place. In an important article on indigenous science fiction, Kyle P. Whyte (2018) warns readers, critics, and authors of science fiction to avoid imagining indigenous people as "Holocene survivors" somehow unburdened by 500 years of genocide and colonialism. Like the ancestors of European settlers, indigenous people have been thoroughly transformed by 500 years of colonialism and extraction. Thus, indigenous science fiction does not (should not) pretend, like much other science fiction, that the ecological and social collapse the planetary emergency is producing is something new. From the perspective of a very long history of settler capitalist violence, the ongoing planetary emergency is part of a process that began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan, and James Cook.

Although not an indigenous author, Le Guin is clearly aware, and deeply critical, of the material and epistemological violence that has long been practiced on indigenous people, on women, and on the poor. The wars, the illnesses, and the global warming that the novel depicts are intimately connected to the same Enlightenment history that includes both Columbus and Alexander Pope. The concurrent worlds that mark the end of the novel erase none of that violence. Capitalism and colonialism are less dominant in this fragmented world, but they remain in place, and they are growing. But the divergent worlds that exist at the end of the novel also make other futures possible. Trajectories can be discerned that open up futures not premised on capitalism or colonialism. Orr, inspired by conversations with the aliens he has dreamed up, says: "when the mind becomes conscious, when the rate of evolution speeds up, then you have to be careful. Careful of the world. You must learn the way. You must learn the skills, the art, the limits. A conscious mind must be part of the whole, intentionally and carefully" (167). This is a worlding and a form of being radically different from the mechanics of occupation, extraction, and consumption that through which the world-system was build, and it makes it

possible to think of futures very different from those generated by this system. Indeed, (like love or like bread) the future is not a thing set in stone; it can be "remade all the time, made new" (159).

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