

# Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction

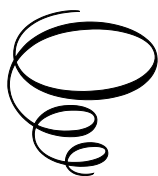


# Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction

By

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## PREFACE

To narrate is to become. To some degree, narrative exemplifies posthumanism by its lack of self-maintenance intention and self-evolves through readers' readings so that it forges beneficial relations with others. In the logic of reactive nihilism, the posthuman narrative is a detour of humanity. One of the common concerns of science fiction is to discover or construct an alien world cognitively estranged from the present human one. Nonetheless, science fiction usually ends in the negation of this imagined world in the protagonist's return to the former world. Science fiction is in consequence also a detour of reactive nihilism to this world. Bearing analogous logic of affirmation through double negation, the genre of science fiction is naturally apt for the posthuman narrative, and has been impregnated with a multitude of posthuman stories in the presentation of the corporeal metamorphosis ever since the first of its kind, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

Posthuman narrative is embodied of the world and embedded in the world in a Deleuzian becoming-other manner, denying the transcendental illusion of immortality, through separating the mind from the body, held ever since the Enlightenment. Due to new developments in human society, the age of the internet has witnessed the renaissance of the transcendental illusion of immortality. Following the embodied and embedded becoming-other principle, four contemporary Anglophone posthuman narratives in science fiction are selected to explore the meta-narrative of posthuman in the mode of posthuman becoming. There are common narrative concerns among the four narratives in science fiction, namely the posthuman myth, the posthuman memory, the posthuman metamorphosis and the posthuman mortality. Moreover, the posthuman narratives investigated in this study are densely embedded in a form of framing narrative with the emergence of the non-human spatial pattern independent of any individual perspective.

The posthuman myth is embodied and embedded in the Western mythological context, as can be seen in the Gethen mythmaking in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the posthuman appropriation of the Biblical Jonah story

in *The Jonah Kit*, and the Greek mythological story of Galatea and Pygmalion in *Galatea 2.2*, as well as the revision of Greek mythological stories with the intrusion of the Barbarian in *The Bridge*. Posthuman myth is the pastiche, parody or revision of the Western central myth. As a tool for the posthuman's survival, the posthuman myth narrative is deployed to elucidate the posthuman becoming's non-Oedipal origin.

The posthuman memory is not fabricated in a disembodied manner; rather, it is intimately based on the posthuman's embodied and embedded pre-experience as a human being before metamorphosis, as can be seen in the erased memory in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the translated memory in *The Jonah Kit*, the repeated memory in *Galatea 2.2* and the displaced memory in *The Bridge*. This memory with a different embodiment and embedding is often traumatic and harsh for the posthuman to recollect; however, for becoming, the memory of being is remembered to forget, hence the achievement of the first fold of negation in the activist nihilism.

The posthuman metamorphosis is the very process of the becoming posthuman in various embodied and embedded becoming-others such as the becoming-woman in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the becoming-animal in *The Jonah Kit*, the becoming-machine in *Galatea 2.2*, and the becoming-earth in *The Bridge*. By bringing elements of the other into the body of the self, the self is otherized to blur the boundary between the self and the other to collapse the humanist thinking of dualism, hence the retrieval of the agency back to the dynamic flow of vitality beyond any artificially imposed boundaries.

The posthuman mortality is the climax of the posthuman becoming narrative, which releases the strongest generative vitality for the next cycle of life in a becoming-imperceptible manner rather than being obsessed with the immortality of this being. Resonating with the archetype of winter in the seasonal schema, the posthuman mortality narrative is permeated with the apocalyptic hope for the redemption of the chaotic human world through the posthuman's self-sacrifice as a scapegoat, as can be seen in Estraven's suicide in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Jonah whale's self-extinction in *The Jonah Kit*, Helen's self-eradication in *Galatea 2.2* and the old swordsman's replacement by the young swordsman in *The Bridge*.

Raising the point of view to grander posthumanist proportions, narrative spatial patterns emerge and are thereby independent of an individual being's



viewpoint. Any single person, be it the character or the narrator, is dwarfed to an imperceptible molecule, and this zoomed-out perspective leaves the human witness to an abandoned existence like a face drawn on the beach erased by nonhuman forces. On a nonhuman scale, from a nonhuman perspective and in a becoming-other manner, the emergent spatial patterns automatically relate their story independent of detailed plots, conveying the theme on a structural level. The Taoism Tai Chi spatial pattern expresses a balanced view between two opposites in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The trinity pattern calls for an aspired smoothness of translation in *The Jonah Kit*. The recursive mirror pattern suggests the obsession in the self in an endless self-projection in *Galatea 2.2*. The Chinese-box spatial pattern indicates a fractured self into multiple layers with identical but distorted existences in *The Bridge*.

To conclude, the posthuman becoming narrative is mythically and apocalyptically embodied and embedded. The posthuman life originates from myth. Bearing the memory of being a human, it embraces the becoming-other metamorphosis to construct an embodied and embedded posthuman existence. Moreover, the posthuman's life in contemporary science fiction is ephemeral. It bravely ends itself in a self-extinction manner to embed in the perpetual becoming. The emergence of the embodied and embedded posthuman disrupts the humanist dichotomies by adding more hybrid subjects into the self/other opposition, and brings back the all-too-human humanity to the chaotic world of presence. This is, in essence, a performance in line with the very logic of reactive nihilism.

Moreover, the Anglophone posthuman becoming narrative in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is less satisfied in the aspect of human-posthuman relations. Even in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, albeit there appeared embodied and embedded posthuman characters and posthuman perspectives, there was a rather limited quantity of posthuman becoming narratives. As a result, such narratives formed a minority compared with the large quantity of human narratives. In the past century, the posthuman's extinction was narrated merely from the human's perspective, and was indeed a combination of self-destruction and destruction. For the narcissistic human subject, it is after all unthinkable that life should go on without his own vital being there. Following the instinct of self-maintenance, the human majority annihilates the newly emerged posthuman minority in the same manner of dealing with

the other. In other words, the demarcation between the self and the other does not disappear: rather, it transfers to the new self and the new other. Therefore, the posthuman becoming narrative in the latter half of the twentieth century guaranteed a detour to humanity against the impact upon the subjectivity imposed by the rapidly changing information society. Rather than posing a threat to the human's existence, the posthuman in these narratives plays the role of savior or scapegoat making a redemptive sacrifice for the human and bringing the all-too-human posthumanist humanity to make the human become better embodied and embedded in this world.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Science fiction as a serious form of literature can be traced back to the British female writer Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) telling the story of a grotesque yet sentient creature made in a blasphemous scientific experiment in the epoch of Enlightenment in Britain. Ever since then, stimulated by the accelerated progress of science and technology, science fiction has gained momentum and flourished in the Western world as a narrative projection and reflection of science and technology in humanity and social aspects. Particularly since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though science fiction has largely remained in the sphere of genre literature, quite a few postmodern writers whose works have become canonic in postmodern literature as well as in science fiction have overwhelmingly embraced it. Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), and Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos* (1985) are definitely among the list. Domestically, science fiction has also developed rapidly. In 2015 and 2016, Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* (2008) and Hao Jingfang's novella *Folding Beijing*, both translated by the Asian American science fiction author Ken Liu, won Hugo Awards successively, manifesting a worldwide acceptance and

recognition of Chinese science fiction's progress. Compared with the rapid growth of Chinese science fiction, domestic science fiction studies fall farther back and should step up to engage in the international technological cultural dialogue.

The most updated theoretical perspective in science fiction studies is undoubtedly posthumanism. Nowadays, what preoccupies our daily life is the predominant truth that we are more closely related to non-human elements than human counterparts; as can be seen in our daily experience in the unbearable absence of myopic lenses, mobile phones, laptops, or prostheses for the disabled, rather than in-depth human contacts with relatives, friends or colleagues. All of these experiences are in turn sufficiently self-evident to prove that the human body has been encroached and enhanced by non-human elements, particularly technical components previously seen as otherness. Posthumanism is the very theory exploring the consequences of such a corporeal metamorphosis that has definitely become part of our daily experience.

This research engages in the most updated academic conversation by studying the posthuman narrative in four selected narratives in contemporary Anglophone science fiction representing various aspects of the posthuman metamorphosis, namely becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-machine and becoming-earth. The correspondent narratives of these axes of becoming, or generally speaking, becoming-other, are the American female science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), the British science fiction writer Ian Watson's *The Jonah Kit* (1975), the American science fiction writer Richard Powers' *Galatea 2.2* (1995), and the Scottish science fiction writer Iain Banks' *The Bridge* (1986).

Foregrounding the theme of posthumanism, posthuman metamorphosis with variations in the concrete axis of becoming, posthuman science fiction, particularly these four titles, bravely shoulders the mission of taking the challenge imposed by the present posthuman era. This posthuman challenge is ostensibly thornier than its postmodern predecessor for its revolutionary approach to the body and identity of the subject. The epic of posthuman life is composed through profoundly exploring the posthuman mythological origin, the posthuman's memory as being human, the posthuman's metamorphosis as becoming-other, and the posthuman's suicidal death for the redemption of the human, as well as the posthuman embedded narrative pattern of emergence. By abandoning or at least doubting the humanism legacy, these works courageously endorse the posthumanism framework as a way to establish a cosmological view by reconsidering man's relationship with woman, animal, and machine, as well as the planet.

### **The Selection Criteria of the Research**

This research selects four narratives of science fiction written in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by the American female science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin, the American male science fiction writer Richard Powers, the British male science fiction writer Ian Watson and the Scottish male science fiction writer Iain Banks respectively. The purpose of the study is to investigate the posthuman embodied and embedded narrative of Anglophone imaginations on the variety of posthuman becomings in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The four writers are, to some extent, representatives of the major voices in

different periods of Anglophone science fiction literature and known for their own specialties in dealing with different posthuman representations (e.g., Le Guin on the posthuman becoming-woman, Watson on the posthuman becoming-animal, Powers on the posthuman becoming-machine, and Banks on the posthuman becoming-earth). The four narratives in science fiction under discussion are typical posthuman narratives in science fiction and have been well received among literary critics. Hopefully, the combined study of these four narratives in science fiction from the perspective of the posthuman (and specifically, the posthuman life of becoming) will generate a balanced vision of the posthuman imagination in the latter half of the past century, with special reference to the process of embodied and embedded becomings of the posthuman life in contemporary technologically immersed society.

Ursula K. Le Guin, Ian Watson, Iain Banks and Richard Powers are all major contemporary Anglophone science fiction writers whose works have won significant literary awards<sup>1</sup> and gained popularity among both science fiction fans and mainstream readers. Moreover, they all make great contributions to the portrait of posthuman characters in their works to provide embodied and embedded conditions for the dwelling of the posthuman in contemporary narratives in science fiction and enjoy wider readerships as well as quite a few criticisms. In addition, they are all philosophically oriented science fiction writers, as not only do they adequately address the problem of becoming-posthuman, but they also

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) won both the Hugo Award (1979) and the Nebula Award (1970). Ian Watson's *The Jonah Kit* (1975) won the 1977 BSFA (Best Science Fiction Award). Iain Banks' *The Bridge* (1986) won the 1991 Kurd Lasswitz Prize. Richard Powers' *Galatea 2.2* (1995) is a finalist of the 1995 National Book Critics' Circle Award.



make philosophical investigations of this problem by exploring the relations between human and posthuman in different social and historical contexts. In addition, they share a common view on the posthuman humanities, which is an all-too-human one and can be relied upon for human redemption.

During the process of doctoral study, time and effort have been spent on reading a variety of posthuman science fiction<sup>2</sup> extending from science fiction's classic period in the 1960s, the New Wave period in the 1970s, and mainstream styles in the 1980s and 1990s to the most recent 21<sup>st</sup> century science fiction, not to mention non-fiction and criticisms. With a focus on contemporary Anglophone science fiction, strictly obeying the criteria of posthuman metamorphosis and transformation in both epistemological and ontological dimensions, four narratives in science fiction have been targeted. They are the American female science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), the British science fiction writer Ian Watson's *The Jonah Kit* (1976), the Scottish science fiction writer Iain Banks' *The Bridge* (1986) and the American science fiction writer Richard Powers' *Galatea 2.2* (1995). With strong philosophical posthumanist embodiments and a lack of adequate critics on their posthuman representations, without being overheatedly addressed in literature critiques, they have been selected as the targeted texts of this research.

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<sup>2</sup> Including Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), Arthur C. Clark's *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossession* (1974), Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), Joseph McElroy's *Plus* (1976), Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (1986), Ted Chiang's *The Story of Your Life* (1999), Justina Robson's *Natural History* (2003), and Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013).

## **The Framework of the Research**

To extract the commonalities among these four cases of posthuman narrative embodiments, in all of these texts, despite the superficial discrepancies among plots, there is an underlying thread of the posthuman's life narrative. It stretches from the posthuman myth writings about the posthuman origin/genesis/creation, through the posthuman memory as the human being, and the posthuman metamorphosis in the becoming posthuman, to the posthuman's suicide/self-extinction/self-annihilation for the redemption of human beings, thus forming a thematic cycle of creation-being-becoming-death.

Moreover, the climax of all these posthuman narratives lies in the posthuman's self-extinction. In addition to the thematic embedded pattern throughout all the selected posthuman narratives, another quintessential aspect of similarity lies in the emergence of spatial patterns such as the Tai Chi pattern, the trinity pattern, the Chinese-box pattern and the mirror labyrinth pattern, delicately designed to couple with the complexity of the posthuman condition.

Therefore, the main body of this research is divided into five parts, which are respectively entitled "Posthuman Myth", "Posthuman Memory", "Posthuman Metamorphosis", "Posthuman Mortality" and "Posthuman Space", to examine the posthuman becomings in the posthuman life. Archetypal, anthropocentric, narratological, stylistic, feminist and other critical approaches are applied to the textual analysis. To explore the philosophy of these thematic and narrative patterns, a preliminary conclusion could be drawn as a response to the research questions, that posthuman metamorphosis is a process of becoming-other which is traumatic when the boundary is broken to allow an otherness

influx into the once narcissistic human body of pleasure. The posthuman needs to write a new myth of anti-Oedipus where a fully posthuman metamorphosis is solidly established, and both textual reality and social reality are otherwise rare. To celebrate the condition of the posthuman means to cast the temporal being into the perpetual becoming. The self-extinction of the newly-becomed posthuman best exemplifies inhumanist thinking, embracing the experience of death as a necessity for a perpetual becoming.

It is precisely the death of the posthuman that reaffirms the meaning of humanity, following the logic of reactive nihilism<sup>3</sup> which posits a higher world, diminishes the worth of actuality, and then falls into despair when the higher world has collapsed and been lost. There is nothing other than the actuality, and this world of presence is thus worthy of life and protection. It is proved that the posthuman's emergence and existence, for the human, are redemption and salvation rather than a terminating threat, and what their posthumanist self-extinction brings to the world is either the arrival or the return of the all-too-human posthuman humanities. Therefore, the posthuman performs as Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or overman, as an anti-project, and presents the solution to the nihilism prevalent in the real world. Just like Zarathustra presents the overman as the creator of new values who

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<sup>3</sup> In interpreting Nietzsche, Deleuze (1962) in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* delineates between two forms of nihilism, "the first sense is a negative nihilism; the second sense a reactive nihilism" and the reactive nihilism "no longer signifies a will but a reaction. The supersensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied, they are refused all validity...only life remains, but it is still a depreciated life which now continues a world without values, stripped of meaning and purpose, sliding ever further towards its nothingness" (2006: 139-140).

appears as a solution to the problem of the death of God and nihilism, the posthuman is rendered with the same logic of double nihilism and thus guarantees the eternal return to humanity.

## **Literature Review**

In order to investigate the representations of the posthuman becoming in narratives in science fiction, three different studies must be reviewed in an integrated way: science fiction studies in general and the four narratives in science fiction in particular, the academic studies of the posthuman metamorphosis, and posthumanism and becoming-other.

### **Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)**

In the field of science fiction, with much the same case of gender inappropriateness in the Western canonical literature criticized by Harold Bloom, canonical science fiction works are almost always written by DWEMs (Dead White European Males) particularly between 1940 and 1970, i.e., the Golden Age and the Classic Period of science fiction. Not until the New Wave from 1970 onwards did female science fiction writers gradually become accepted by publication companies as well as science fiction fans or readers. Different from male science fiction writers, female science fiction writers endeavor to soften the hard science fiction previously prominently occupied by male writers with more concerns of humanity. In the second and third feminist currents in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American female writers Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ, the Canadian female science fiction writer Margaret Atwood and the British Nobel Prize Laureate Doris Lessing as well as

other contemporary female writers all write to make the revival of female science fiction relate to its feminine origin. Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is regarded as the Gothic mother of all science fiction descendants.

Ursula K. Le Guin, as a noteworthy contemporary American female science fiction writer who explores more possibilities in science fiction and fantasy, broadens and even breaks, the science fiction genre and places it squarely under the serious literature studies. Compared with other female science fiction writers, what earns Le Guin intensive literary scholarship is her idiosyncratic global view and broader range of concerns for the race of mankind through a philosophical "thought experiment", which is unrestricted to traditional Western thinking, but rather an integrity of occidental and oriental thoughts, transcending certain distinctions between the Western and Eastern canons. Harold Bloom comments, "Le Guin, more than Tolkien, has raised fantasy into high literature, for our time" and "Better than Tolkein, far better than Doris Lessing, Le Guin is the overwhelming contemporary instance of superbly imaginative creator and major stylist who chose (or was chosen by) 'fantasy and science fiction'" (2005: 506).

It has been noted that a standard Le Guin writing approach contains a clear outside observer/narrator and a setting that includes strongly contrasting civilizations, such as communism and capitalism, anarchism (quasi-Taoism) and democracy, or primitivism and progressivism. Bloom further prophesizes that Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) will be the canon of the chaotic age. Undoubtedly, Bloom considers it to be among the science fiction masterpieces. This novel wins both the Hugo and Nebula Awards, and is later followed up by Le

Guin's other Hugo, Nebula and Locus Award winning science fiction set in the same fictional universe of the Hainish Cycle, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) and *The Telling* (2000).

Admittedly, according to Wimsatt and Beardsley's "intentional fallacy" (1946), Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1967) and other structuralists' claims on the autonomy of literary texts, literary texts are largely treated as self-contained entities autopoietically telling their stories out of the authors' expectations. It is still highly recommended to understand the author's positions and intentions, particularly an author and critic like Ursula K. Le Guin. There are two major non-fictions written by Le Guin, namely, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1989) and *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (1990). In these, Le Guin delivers insightful idiosyncratic thoughts on science fiction, language, discourse, narrative, feminism and spatiality, which are of great importance in that they facilitate a more thorough understanding of Le Guin's fiction. For instance, Le Guin puts forward the carrier bag theory of fiction. Different from the "proper shape of narrative" like the arrow or the spear, she argues that the fitting shape of the novel might be a sack/bag, since "a book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings". In this way, Le Guin redefines technology and science primarily as a cultural carrier bag, rather than a weapon of domination like the arrow mode of linear, progressive time. As a pleasant effect, "science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythology genre than a realist one" (1989: 170).

Criticisms of Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* unceasingly spring up in large quantities mainly in the fields of cultural studies, gender studies, narratological studies and religious studies, with a focus on Le Guin's world-building techniques, androgynous characters, cultural conflicts, cyclical space and time view, narrative and stylistic patterns, the anthropologist observer, Taoism thinking, etc. There is little reference to the becoming-woman posthuman metamorphosis which will be the focus of analysis on this book in this research.

As to characterization, Mona Fayad (1997) argues that the androgynous characterization is a reflection of the neutral scientific discourse, and the bodies of aphysiologically androgynous species are socially constructed by cultural concepts of gender, power relations and colonialism. In the 1960s, the science fiction field was still preoccupied by classic science fiction male writers such as the so-called "Big Three" of science fiction writers, actually Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. Certain female writers even used a male pen name in order to meet the expectations of the science fiction male readers. For instance, the American science fiction author Alice Bradley Sheldon (1915-1978) used James Tiptree Jr. as her pen name; it was not publicly known until 1977 that James Tiptree Jr. was a woman, and in 1991, the James Tiptree Jr. Award was established in memory of Alice Bradley Sheldon. This literary award has been given annually to science fiction that, like Alice's works, expands or explores one's understanding of gender. There is no doubt that Le Guin also feels the same pressure of gender in the mid-1960s, yet more than blindly meeting the culturally and socially regulated gender views, she is truly taking a middle stance, neither too feminine nor too masculine. Her ideal gender view can be

seen from her doubts about the necessity of gender. For Le Guin, humans can do without gender, in that there are more similarities than discrepancies between males and females, when the sexual shell disappears and the inner sexless personality emerges over time.

Le Guin, in this way, chooses a middle path on the issue of gender, which is criticized by feminists for her lack of explicit exponents of radical feminism that is more common in the second wave feminist movement in the 1970s. Feminist responses to Le Guin's ambiguous attitude toward gender particularly dramatized in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, are well reflected in Pamela J. Annas' critique which summarizes feminist criticism's focus on Le Guin's use of the generic "he" and on the choice of a man as the main character and interpreter of the alien world of Gethen. As she points out, "Gethen would have looked different to us if Genly Ai had been a woman, but instead we see this androgynous society through the eyes of a biological and culturally conditioned male" (1978: 151). She further argues that "what Le Guin has done is embody in Genly Ai the main problem feminists have had with the concept of androgyny: that it has usually been looked at and defined from a male perspective" (1978: 151). Besides using male pronouns to refer to androgynous aliens and the male perspective resulting from the male narrator, it is also pointed out that the main Gethenian characters, such as a prime minister, a political schemer, a fugitive, a prison-breaker, and a sledge-hauler, all neatly fit into the culturally conditioned male roles. In my understanding, this book was published preceding the second wave feminist movement, and what makes it have enduring attractiveness for feminist critics is its time-transcendent view on the issue of gender, which not only goes



beyond its contemporary works, but also remains ahead of its time even in the present posthuman era.

Le Guin is indeed a female thinker, or “a thinking woman” in her words, instead of being a feminist, as she said, “I consider myself a feminist; I didn’t see how you could be a thinking woman and not be a feminist” (1989: 7-8). Her thinking about gender is obviously a postgender one, the relationship between female and male is like the yin and yang in Taoism, and it is a curse of alienation that separates yang from yin. What she builds is a world where dualism gives way to a much healthier, sounder and more promising modality of integration and integrity. Moreover, from a posthuman perspective, Le Guin’s androgynous approach to gender issues can be better interpreted as Deleuzian becoming-woman during the main narrator’s interaction with androgynous alien Gethenians. It is not an imperialist masculine colonization that Genly Ai imposes on Gethen, in that Genly Ai learns from Winter a great deal more than he is capable of giving; in this way, he is gradually assimilated to the androgynous culture in a manner of becoming-woman. This also provides a rational answer defending Le Guin’s inclination of choosing a male narrator, which is necessary for Le Guin to carry out the becoming-woman “thought experiment” of posthuman metamorphosis. What Le Guin values is nothing radical, but the wisdom of yin represented in the night, the darkness, the shadow, the cold climate, the silence, etc., imbued with boundless anarchist energy of creation and innovation, which is also consonant with the Deleuzian becoming-woman axis.

In terms of plotting, it cannot be neglected that the condensed and prophetic embedded myth functions as the heart of the plot. The

embedded plot of myth and the plot of the narrator's lived experience are in a closely correspondent interrelationship. Walker analyzes the closed and complete set of Gethenian myths in *The Left Hand of Darkness* by applying Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism and anthropology theory, that sees the underlying structure of the myths as the reconciliation of opposites and the theme at the heart of myth as social exchange. It is argued that "Le Guin articulates the theme of exchange by employing contrary images—heat and cold, dark and light, home and exile, name and namelessness, life and death, murder and sex—so as finally to reconcile their contrariety" (Walker 1979: 181). Gethenian myths function as the backbone of the whole plotting, which is highly agreed among critics. Different from the existing myths, Le Guin creates the myth of the Orgota creation and fratricide; the incest brothers, the suicide brother and the exiled brother; the two warring domains; Orgota's god, Meshe, the universal One to shadow or illuminate the lived experience of Genly Ai and Estraven as if the reality is already prescribed by the myth. Moreover, even in the created myths, the mediation of two embodied contradictions paves the way for the structure, which is also the theme of the higher ordered diegesis, as well as the whole fiction. As Lévi-Strauss argues, myths are based on the mediation of opposites, which is quite aligned with Le Guin's attempt at reconciliation of binary oppositions, particularly the dualism thinking of gender.

On the narrative level, Bickman highly praises Le Guin's organic and aesthetic wedding of form and content in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and argues that this seamless form-content interrelationship is rarely achieved in science fiction, and it is the most effective aspect of Le Guin's writing (1977: 42). There is no doubt that *The Left Hand of*

*Darkness* is worthwhile not only for thematic studies, but also for its design of a delicate textual, spatial and temporal pattern which is highly consonant with the book's theme. Upon reading the whole book, with the sequential narrative, the chronotope pattern emerges in a pattern of Tai Chi, demonstrating Le Guin's ideal in a balanced view of the tension between two polarizations, such as male and female, capitalism and communism, bureaucracy and anarchism, and so on. Despite this harmonious integrity of theme and pattern, however, the spatial pattern is a newly emergent area of literature research. Compared with thematic studies, relatively rare criticism has been given to the spatial pattern of *The Left Hand of Darkness*; therefore, in this research due attention will be paid to the issue of spatial pattern in order to enhance the narrative criticism of this novel.

### **Ian Watson and *The Jonah Kit* (1975)**

Compared with science fiction in the 1960s, the focus of science fiction in the 1970s shifted from space travel to more Earth-bound issues. The manic pursuit of outer space exploration quickly faded soon after a human's first step on the moon during the Apollo lunar landing in July 1969. Matthew Tribbe in *No Requiem for the Space Age* (2014) says that changes in culture and philosophy, as well as the geopolitical landscape throughout the 1960s left the public quickly losing interest in the Apollo 11 lunar landing and space exploration in general. To identify the fundamental meaning of the lunar landings, it is explained that "Apollo was a specific historical moment, and that moment began to pass even before the moon program completed its run in the early 1970s" (Tribbe

2014: 219).

The following significant lack of interest in the exploration of space was partly due to its Cold War motivation of defeating the Soviets, and meanwhile there were many domestic problems including the Vietnam War. Instead of the previous focus on the moon, it was time to shift the focus to issues that were more pragmatic. Different from the highly convenient outer-space life supported by various advanced technological devices as depicted in science fiction, nonstop TV coverage of the astronauts' landing on the moon showed that it is very difficult for humans to really live on the moon.

This once again proved that the Earth is the only planet for humans and people started to have more interest in protecting the environment, which contributed to the environmental movement in the 1970s. At the same time, as an effect of the counterculture, a sense of unified national purpose vanished. To sum up this reorientation of public attention, it can be concluded that, "moon flights are not of paramount importance today, and have not been since the demise of Apollo in the wake of the neo-romantic surge at the turn of the 1970s...turn away from the rationalist vision of progress that reached its peak with the Space Age, only to burn out spectacularly along with the flames of Apollo" (2014: 227).

If Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) with its alien planet cosmic setting could still be categorized as a typical space opera, then the Earth-bound setting of Ian Watson's *The Jonah Kit* (1975) is obviously a reflection of the typical science fiction setting in the 1970s. Its focus has come back to the earth, and it still bears the legacy of a space opera in its exploration of the human-alien relationship, but this

time, the alien is not living on other planets, but in the depths of the sea. Logically, despite spatial distance possibly resulting in great discrepancies, even on the same planet of earth, there is a lack of human understanding for some creatures. As people's attention shifts from other planets back to the earth to protect our fragile planet, the landscape of the sea becomes a mysterious territory like outer space and worthy of further exploration. Against this background, choosing whales, which are largely strange to people, combined with the historical issues of the Cold War, Watson conceived *The Jonah Kit* in a continuation of the 1960s and the traditional science fiction endeavors relating to the (im)possibility of communication between humans and aliens through the juxtaposition of cosmological and local dimensions in a Cold War setting.

Concerning Ian Watson's prominence in the 1970s, David Pringle of *Foundation* comments that "British SF in the 1970s belonged to Ian Watson," and Peter Nicholls of *Encyclopedia of science fiction* fame enthuses that "Watson may not be the best writer in British science fiction, but he is probably the best thinker". In an interview with Ian Watson in 1981, Langford mentions that in *The Jonah Kit* there is whale communication, as well as mind transfer plus extremely far-out cosmology, and Watson replies that regarding narrative interweaving, "I was influenced by Graham Greene; possibly, by the structure of Wagner's music dramas with their leitmotifs" (2015: 102). It is such philosophical works of literature theory, texts and music pieces that make Ian a thinker and his science fiction full of ideas.

Keith Brooke reviews *The Jonah Kit* in *Infinity Plus* in July 2002 and contends that the novel is "[a] very fine cosmologic fiction indeed, with big ideas at its center, but inseparable from a tense and intense

characterization, thriller plotting and clean, good writing” (Brooke). Brooke argues that the core of the novel is about communication: human with aliens; human with other more local aliens, the whales and dolphins; human with the local native people who communicate with each other by whistle language; and above all, human with other individuals, friends, colleagues and lovers. “We are all aliens. We all need translating, interpreting” Brooke concludes. Likewise, Massimo Luciani on the Net Massimo Blog in November 2016 also points out that communication problems are a common point of all three subplots: the Cold War subplot, the whale subplot and the cosmological subplot. It is not surprising that communication is one of the major themes in *The Jonah Kit*, considering the 1970s’ era background of the novel in which the two political blocks remain isolated and conduct secret research to develop their own military power. What the micro-scaled failure of communication between individuals reflects is the macro-scaled disability of bridging the gap between different ideologies. Moreover, *The Jonah Kit* says that without posthumans, humans alone can only live in a regressive world of disorder; it is the communication between various subjects, and particularly between human and posthuman that saves the planet and all the living beings on it (Luciani).

Vegan Memes in 2014 posts an analysis of the novel, regarding it as demonstrating the failure of human control over living things. Richard Hammond loses his control over his human wife, and he is also incapable of controlling the posthuman whale. Memes provides an interesting side, noting that the character with the name Richard Hammond also appears in *The Jurassic Park*, and thinks that *The Jonah Kit* shares not a few commonalities with *The Jurassic Park*, and is