Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral

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AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY the threat of ecological breakdown is deeply embedded in our social consciousness. Although the intensity of announcements of the "environmental crisis" in the 1970s has faded and even been absorbed and normalised by the institutions of capitalist modernity, through the lens of environmentalism the future can seem an unthinkable or utterly miserable prospect. Whether framed in terms of the risk of catastrophic disasters associated with nuclear accidents like Chernobyl, or the steady decline implied by current scenarios of global climate change, it appears that things can only get worse. Environmental thought since the late 1960s has been strongly associated with prophecies of doom, apocalyptic predictions, and dystopian scenarios. However, in the last 30 years ecological philosophy has been equally concerned with recouping a better future from these unpromising materials, insisting not only that the earth can be saved but that the environmental crisis can prompt a reconceptualisation of the good life for human societies. This article focuses on these utopian attempts to find routes out of the ecological crisis and map the possibilities of better, greener futures. I begin by arguing that whilst utopian theory has begun to consider the content of ecological future visions, there has been little attention to the ways in which the reflexive and critical strategies of recent utopian narratives can make a distinctive contribution to radical ecology's social critiques and the process of imagining more environmentally cautious forms of society. I therefore look in detail at two examples of green utopian fiction to analyse how they address the question of how humans can live better with nonhuman nature in the context of contemporary Western debates about the environment. They are Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge*. Specifically, I look at the ways in which these novels use strategies of genre critique and narrative reflexivity to negotiate and deconstruct three of the dominant tropes through which human social

relationships with nature have been managed and imagined in modernity. I discuss the narrative of environmental apocalypse as it has been articulated in recent environmentalist and science fiction writing, and its interrogation and reconstruction in relation to themes of agency and utopian desire in *Pacific Edge* and *Always Coming Home*. And at greater length, I address the linked tropes of the domination of nature in the ideology of progressive futurism, and the regressive ideal of a pure nature and a stable, pre-modern society evoked by pastoral and Arcadian traditions. Whilst I treat apocalyptic narratives as a relatively recent development in cultural constructions of the environment, progress and the pastoral have a more enduring relationship with modernity's ambiguous conceptualisation of the natural world and an especially problematic relationship with the utopian tradition itself. Thus the complex challenge that each novel addresses to the closed binary of forward-looking progress versus the backward-looking rural idyll will be elaborated in discrete sections. I begin by examining the relationship between ecological philosophy and utopia.

Utopian Theory and the Green Narrative Utopia

There has been some recent theoretical interest in the relationship between ecopolitical thought and utopia, most notably, perhaps, in Marius de Geus's *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society* and Lucy Sargisson's *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*. Sargisson's analysis of ecological philosophy highlights its utopian dimensions. According to her transgressive concept of utopia, ecocentric ecology (as opposed to its light green, reformist and technocentric cousin) is a radically "utopian and ambitious" body of thought which seeks to challenge and subvert the ideological frameworks that support the industrial, materialist and expansionist cultures of modernity and deconstruct the closed humanity/nature binary (19). Ecopolitical philosophy builds its vision of a greener future on a desire fundamentally to transform present human relationships with nonhuman nature. Rather than seeking simply to modify global capitalism to attend to issues of resource depletion and pollution, radical ecological approaches insist that the environmental crisis demands a philosophical and cultural orientation to the natural world that would embed human societies in a much closer and less instrumental

relationship to the ecosystems that support them. As Robin Eckersley has argued, this can be characterised as an "emancipatory" ecocentric discourse, where ecocentrism refers to approaches that recognise the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature, deconstruct the binaries that position human beings as oppositional and superior to it, and privilege dynamic interrelatedness over separation and essentialism as ways of knowing the world.[1] Ecocentrism can be understood as emancipatory insofar as this decentring of the human as the epistemological and ethical centre of the world involves an expansion rather than a contraction of possibilities for self-realisation and "the good life" (49–55). According to this reading, emancipatory forms of ecological philosophy are founded on drawing out the liberatory potential of the ecological critique of industrialism, as well as stressing the urgent need to treat the environment in more respectful and sustainable ways. The environmental crisis is seen as an opportunity for enhancing and expanding human well-being in the context of ecological integrity. As Wolfgang Sachs has put it, deep green philosophy constructs the environmental crisis as the motivation for "a fresh inquiry into the meaning of the good life" (186).

In this sense, emancipatory ecologism is an intrinsically utopian body of thought; the many "greenprints" for a sustainable future that radical ecology has also produced are part of a wider utopian orientation, rather than exclusively constitutive of green utopianism.[2] In the light of this recognition of the utopian—as opposed to simply reformist—strands of green philosophy, de Geus draws attention to their expression in a formal and mostly literary utopian tradition. Based on readings of works including More's *Utopia*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Morris's *News from Nowhere*, and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, de Geus outlines a composite picture of a distinctive ecotopian alternative to Western industrial modernity, a vision that, he argues, has played a minor counter-theme of "sufficiency" to the dominant utopian tradition of abundance (21–22). Green utopias of sufficiency resolve what J.C. Davis has called the "scarcity gap"—that is, the contradiction between human wants and their satisfaction—by recourse to a "limits" framework, imagining universal restraint and the substitution of nonmaterial for material satisfactions. In the green utopia, human wants are reduced or reconfigured. By contrast, de Geus argues that in the dominant tradition utopias resolve the scarcity gap by recourse to what we might call a "productive" framework, imagining universal affluence, latterly built on technological and industrial

expansion. In the utopia of abundance, any and all human wants can be satiated. The ecological utopia, then, is distinctive insofar as it uncouples the hope of a better future from hegemonic discourses of progress and advances a "radically different conception of happiness and the good life" (210).

While de Geus argues for a dynamic and plural concept of utopia and recognises its diverse formal manifestations, the overarching search for commonalities of content in the green utopia and the schematic descriptions of texts in *Ecological Utopias* tend to treat heterogeneous instances of ecotopian writing as versions of the same, enduring "utopia of sufficiency," notwithstanding the different cultural, political and historical circumstances in which they were produced. Although de Geus usefully establishes an ecological tradition in utopian thinking, there is little consideration of how visions of a more sustainable society are articulated, nor of how the utopia achieves the effects imputed to it. Overlooked is the "specificity of the narrative utopia's representational and cognitive practices" (Wegner xvii) in relation to the ideological and cultural conditions of their time, so that Ebenezer Howard's plans for garden cities, Thoreau's lone woodsman memoir, and Callenbach's literary vision of a near-future Pacific Northwest United States are treated as equivalent. A similar focus on content dominates Krishan Kumar's analysis of the ecotopia in *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, although his time-frame is limited to the 1970s and the emergence of the green utopia is firmly rooted in that era's ideological and cultural critiques of industrial capitalist modernity. Kumar sees the green utopias of this period as part of a wider critical exploration of the grounds for a genuinely post-industrial society, and identifies a range of formal manifestations of the ecotopia. Nonetheless, Kumar is less interested in textuality than in situating ideas within a common analytical and political framework, and establishing the content of the green utopia and its prospects for occupying in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the position as a fulcrum for socio-political critique held by the socialist utopia in the ninteenth century.

In contrast to de Geus's and Kumar's breadth of reference and focus on the content of the ecological utopia, I attend here to the signifying practices of Le Guin's and Robinson's texts to show how they produce a distinctive cultural space for green philosophy's challenge to modern values of progress, expansion, and consumption. Over the last twenty years or so, utopian studies has been concerned with the relationship between the formal

operations of utopian texts and their functions or effects, epitomised by Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible*. Moylan argues that the early 1970s saw the emergence of a distinctively new form of utopian narrative, the "critical utopia," which was bound to deconstruct the formal devices and generic conventions of the traditional utopian novel in order to express a new kind of utopianism emphasising agency, dynamism, and the free play of dream and desire. In short, the critical utopia rejected the structural blueprint in order to reinvent utopia as a space of estrangement and critique. A significant question in this respect is whether the literary utopia was itself reconfigured, or whether it is the "reading protocols" (Delany), especially those of utopian criticism itself, that have changed. This debate is usefully outlined by Chris Ferns (8–9). Moylan and others, including for example Angelina Bammer and Lucy Sargisson (in *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*), argue that the new critical and feminist utopias marked a radical break with an older formal utopian tradition. The alternative argument is that the open, reflexive and partial characteristics strongly associated with recent science fiction utopias can be read into literary utopias as a whole; that, as Peter Ruppert has argued, "open-endedness" is "implicit in the dialectical structure of all utopias" (161). The move from More's "writerly" text to the readerly, "reflexive" narratives of, for example, Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin, then, is a "shift in degree, not in kind" (161). Similarly, Anne Cranny-Francis argues that utopian literature has always been open and transgressive rather than closed, static, and prescriptive.

        This debate—as Ferns notes—is not one that can be settled once and for all (9). However, *Always Coming Home* and *Pacific Edge* exemplify the ways in which the formal innovations and reflexive operations of the critical utopia are particularly important in attempting to think beyond deeply embedded frameworks for conceiving of social/natural relationships, especially in fiction. By interrogating and deconstructing the powerful tropes of apocalypse, progress and pastoral, green utopian fiction makes a cultural space for the imagination of transgressive and oppositional ecotopian alternatives. Unlike the programmes for a sustainable society often set out in deep green political theory, these alternatives cannot be conceived of as blueprints or concrete goals; rather, following Thomas Moylan's, Frederic Jameson's, and Darko Suvin's analyses, the play of utopian desire in these novels is best read as a process of critical estrangement and alterity through which the desire for

radical green alternatives can emerge into, and in opposition to, the dominant culture.

Apocalypse and Agency

The figure of apocalypse in the form of a catastrophic collapse of ecological and social systems has loomed large over both green discourse and science fiction futures in the mid to late twentieth century. One of the most influential early announcements of the environmental crisis, the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report, framed its warnings about the future of exponential material growth on a finite planet in terms of the inevitability of "overshoot and collapse" within a hundred years or so (Meadows et al. 126). The imagining of large-scale ecological disaster became a marked trope in science fiction from the mid-1950s onwards. By the late 1960s, previously rather diffuse and symbolic depictions of eco-catastrophe (for example in J.G. Ballard's work) had taken on a sharp social and political edge, reflecting the critique of industrialism expressed by increasingly vocal ecological and countercultural movements (in the fiction of, for example, John Brunner and Harry Harrison).[3] Future scenarios extrapolating contemporary environmental problems to form a none-too-distant "apocalyptic horizon" (Dryzek 26) continue to frame anxieties about global climate change in popular culture (as seen in the recent film *The Day After Tomorrow*) and in policy and political debate (see Killingsworth and Palmer; Buell). And as Andrew Ross has been pointing out since the early 1990s, the visual aesthetic of the "dark, degraded eco-future" has become a staple backdrop for dystopian science fiction film (Ross *Chicago; Strange*).

The figure of the large-scale eco-disaster signifies the urgency and gravity of the environmental crisis and the need for radical action in response. It suggests in the starkest terms what might happen "if this goes on." But it can also effect, metaphorically, a fresh start in terms of the imagination of future social possibilities. The apocalyptic scenario can thus enable the transition from an unsatisfactory present to a preferable (or at least different) way of life to be scripted as a decisive break, allowing for the prescription of a new socio-political system ostensibly on the grounds of necessity rather than desirability. Such legitimating strategies are evident in the authoritarian

survivalist environmentalist that swiftly developed in response to the limits-to-growth paradigm. In science fiction, the post-holocaust scenario has often been used to explore the possibility of non-repressive, communitarian societies emerging from the ruins of advanced modernity, wherein a simpler and richer good life thrives away from the shadow of technology, the city, and global industrial capitalism. In both versions, however, a fundamental discontinuity between present and future is figured which tends to devalue or disregard the importance of agency, creativity, and desire in the making of a different kind of future from history and the present moment. A utopia that sets out to explore utopia as a shift in values, as Raymond Williams has suggested, depends on figuring the transition in terms of a "willed transformation" rather than as a necessary response to an "externally changed world" (Williams, *Problems* 196; see also Sargent 10–11). The shadow of environmental catastrophe and dystopian visions of disintegrating societies and natures can be found in the narratives of Robinson's *Pacific Edge* and Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*. However, both hint at eco-apocalypse in order to foreground choice and agency, rather than to refute them. The dystopias that shadow the boundaries of the novels' utopian worlds do not function simply to undermine or, conversely, to "cause" utopian outcomes in a linear sense, but work rather to highlight both the necessity and the frailty of utopian desire and political choices in circumstances that are always already less than perfect. In the context of the catastrophism of much environmental discourse, the possibility of profoundly dystopian futures is an indissoluble part of the exploration of utopian desire as an aspect of the conditions under which human agents must grapple not just with survival but with a commitment to the hope of better ways of living and being (Levitas 8–9).

In *Pacific Edge*, the main narrative set in the future utopian community of El Modena, Orange County, is intermittently interrupted by the reflections of a would-be utopian writer sometime in our near future and El Modena's recent past. The world of the utopian writer, Tom Barnard, is the dystopia at the margins of *Pacific Edge*, a recognisable extrapolation of our own "maddened" present slipping "from crisis to crisis": civil war, mass migration, climate change, deforestation, and the increasingly xenophobic nationalism that grows up in response—a politics of withdrawal and survival (31; 257). Tom grapples with the problems and possibilities of utopian desire, initially embracing utopia as a way of "clarifying my beliefs, my desires." The

utopian mode promises to make the future "seem more plausible to me" (31).
It fortifies a dream and pits imagination against impending catastrophe,
allowing him to find a way of accounting for his own experiences of the good
life in the context of the environmental decay and social inequalities around
him. But as Tom struggles to write his literary utopia, the models he grasps
for let him down:

> [s]tatic, ahistorical, why should we read them?
> They don't speak to us, trapped in this world
> as we are, looking at them in the same way
> we look at the pretty inside of a paperweight.
> (81)

They seem to be a "cheat," an engineered "fresh start" that fails to "deal
with our history" (81). Thus Tom reprises Moylan's criticism of the classical
literary utopia. As the programmatic blueprint for a fixed end or goal, it
too easily ossifies and becomes separated from the texture of human life.
In circumstances approximating the catastrophic, this mode of utopianism
threatens to paralyse rather than enhance the prospects for agency. Certainly,
as the horrors of Tom's world intensify and he is forced into an internment
camp on the grounds of his membership of socialist and environmentalist
groups, withdrawal into utopian dreaming signifies a lack of engagement.
Only by abandoning his utopian novel does Tom rediscover his utopian desire,
not in the grand schemes of history but embedded in ordinary situations. His
recollections of his sunny, secure, West coast childhood, bathed in a glow that
is only partly nostalgia (257–58), and the camaraderie and support he finds
in the camp amidst the growing barbarity of the wider world, signify a refusal
of despair and a depth of human kindness that intimates a better future.
By reconfiguring utopia as the open-ended struggle of desire in relation to
living history—a history that palpably includes the possibility of catastrophe,
a struggle that is "dynamic, tumultuous, agonizing" (82)—Tom confronts
both his current situation and his hope for the future.

In Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, the question of
environmentalism's catastrophic narrative and its consequences for agency
is a problematic one. Le Guin's text is complex, fragmented and densely
multi-faceted, and the relationship of time and history to her Valley utopia
stubbornly refuses even the problematised linearity evident in Robinson's

text. However, the spectre of eco-apocalypse is referred to by the text's most prominent reflexive voice, that of the author/narrator figure who sometimes appears in the guise of "Pandora." In this way, dystopia remains symbolically and reflexively in the margins of the book to remind us of the context in which it was written and the possibility of seeing beyond it. The people of Le Guin's future ecotopia, the Kesh, make a primary distinction between living "inside" and living "outside" the world which broadly corresponds to the distinction between an ecocentric, relational and phenomenological conception of the lifeworld, and Western modernity's rational, objective and external apprehensions of self, time and space. (See also Le Guin *Dancing on the Edge of the World*.) In *Always Coming Home*, living in accordance with modern concepts of linear history and the idea of progress displaces one from a "mindful" relationship with the lived world of nature and interpersonal relationships, causing one to fall "outside" the world. By taking us—temporarily and jarringly—"outside" the fictional world of the Kesh, deploying the reflexive devices that define *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin shows us the environmental apocalypse immanent in our own.

Composed of a multitude of documents, stories and voices which range across genres, including plays, poetry, myth, (auto)biographical tales, recipes and musical notation, the world of the Kesh is presented in *Always Coming Home* as found rather than made—a future already inhabited by others who have "always lived there," as Le Guin says in the exposition of her utopian writing in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (99). However, Pandora's habitually worried voice hints at the creative process that has produced the Valley utopia, and its roots in fallen, even post-apocalyptic, times. Pandora asks:

> Am I not a daughter of the people who
> enslaved and extirpated the peoples of three
> continents? Am I not a sister of Adolf Hitler
> and Anne Frank? Am I not a citizen of the state
> that fought the first nuclear war? Have I not
> eaten, drunk and breathed poison all my life,
> like the maggot that lives and breeds in shit?
> (*Always* 147–48)

A closer glimpse of this debased and denatured world is afforded in

one of the Kesh's allegorical stories. "The Hole in the Air" (154–57) tells of a Kesh man who falls "outside the world" and into a condensed version of the worst of own fatal and catastrophic culture:

> The first thing that happened to him was he
> was killed. A four-wheeled motor hit him at
> great speed and went over him and went on.
> (154)

The road is "coated with rotten blood and grease and flesh and fur and feathers" (154). The air is "thick and yellow" and the man eats an apple that "tasted like brass, like bluestone" (155); his knowledge of this world eventually kills him with "grief and poison" (157). Traces of apocalypse persist into the Kesh's utopia. In hints and fragments, their texts tell of "poisoned lands at the brink of polluted waters" (104) and drowned cities beneath new oceans on the South Peninsula (139).[4]

However, the Kesh have reconfigured their historical connection with this world. Their cosmology constructs it not as a time which preceded them, but as another place entirely. While Pandora can identify in the Valley landscape "the desolation of vast regions through release of radioactive or poisonous substances," the Kesh simply live with the evidence of another, "backward-headed," civilization (159). What they do see, however, is what perhaps we cannot very clearly, from our own vantage point in history. For the Kesh, living "inside" the world entails a consistent, culturally-sanctioned responsibility for all acts that impinge upon ecosystems—that is, all human acts. It is inconceivable that the poisoned regions, the lost cities, the world through "a hole in the air," are things that have happened "by accident." To the Kesh, these must

> have been deliberate and conscious acts of evil,
> serving the purposes of wrong understanding,
> fear, and greed. The people who had done
> these things had done wrong mindfully. They
> had their heads on wrong. (159)

Thus from a point of view "inside" Kesh cosmology, Le Guin hands back to us our collusion in the making of our world. While Robinson concentrates

the theme of agency in a utopian protagonist, *Always Coming Home* presents us directly and uncomfortably with the problem of agency as readers and as conscious, mindful social actors.   In this way, the figure of environmental apocalypse is transfigured from its reified status as an event into an accretion of our present choices.

By recognising and challenging the spectre of eco-apocalypse, these critical utopian texts open up a way to re-imagine social relationships with nature that aren't simply about survival but include the possibility of a better way of being. However, although catastrophic narratives are powerful discourses in both the political environmental and the science fictional imaginary, other, more diffuse, ideologies have a perhaps even stronger hold on our ideas about the future of human/natural relationships. I discuss these below under the rubric of "progress" and "the pastoral."[5]

Progress and Pastoral

Ecocentric philosophy's visions of an alternative way of living and being rest on a radical critique of industrialism and its "super-ideology," progress, which is taken to be the root cause of human alienation as well as the domination and exploitation of nature (Dobson 29–33). Political ecologism challenges ceaseless economic expansion and technological development, and argues that real change in the direction of an ecological society must be founded on a deconstruction of the idea of progress, that is history as a linear process involving the constant improvement of material conditions of life. The domination of nature is rooted in instrumental rationalities that privilege the efficient achievement of ends over both non-instrumental values and satisfying and pleasurable means of achieving them. A fulfilling and sustainable way of life would thus be rooted firmly in the smaller rhythms and cycles of the everyday and of nature itself, rather than in hock to a future that means "more" and "better." The deep green utopianism prevalent from the late 1960s onwards has thus been indissolubly antipathetic to the idea of progress. However, the idea of "progress" has become indelibly written into utopianism itself. As Raffaella Baccolini has observed, the utopian narrative's convention of the journey to a spatial and/or temporal elsewhere means that whilst it might be able to avoid some of the specificities of "historical process," it remains

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wedded to looking forward and hence to "the idea that history is progressive" (115). Moylan argues that this facet of utopianism was intensified due to its colonisation by the "glittering surface" of consumer capitalism in the late twentieth century, effectively "enclos[ing] utopian desire" and eliminating its "subversive . . . impulse as a negation of the present system" (16).

The relationship between utopia and progress, especially material progress, is central to the analysis of green utopianism. As I have outlined, de Geus argues that throughout their history utopias have been in thrall to dreams of abundance and expansion, and ideal societies conceived in terms of sufficiency—"simplicity, restraint and moderation"—have been a minority (21). This stark distinction between abundance and sufficiency oversimplifies the complex history of utopianism. This history has been shaped as much by Arcadian dreams of unchanging harmony with a nature that is generous within the limits of modest human wants as it has by the Cockaygne tradition, with its superabundant nature and total satiation of human desires, however fantastical or excessive, as well as the modernist discourse of the Ideal Republic, in which rational social and technical developments fulfil and manage human desires. Utopia is not reducible to a monolithic discourse of progress and plenty; rather, dreams and expectations of improvement and abundance have been articulated and contested within a polyvocal conversation. However, as a form inaugurated in the Renaissance and developing largely in the context of Western modernity, the utopian tradition as a whole bears the hallmarks of its association with humanist and Enlightenment ideals of rational social and individual improvement, ideals which in the industrial era became inextricably linked with a productivist faith in the logic of economic expansion and technocratic organisation to guarantee human well-being. From the scientific utopias of Bacon and others in the seventeenth century, and reaching an apogee in the socialist utopias[6] of the ninteenth, abundance has increasingly been articulated in relation to the human capacity to transform and use nature instrumentally through science, technology and industrial production, rather than located in nature itself. In the twentith century, this dominant model of a better future rooted in materialist and consumerist expansion and Promethean scientific development was forcefully reiterated in the technophile "progressive futurism" of science fiction and Western popular and political culture (Ross, *Strange* 101; Gibson).

Against this backdrop, the problem of the ecotopia becomes the

imaginative reconstruction of human societies' relationships with a much less giving nature than that explicitly or implicitly assumed in much utopian thought, and the replacement of nature's taken-for-granted domination and exploitation with a utopia of environmental collaboration and caution. A way out of developmental, progressive, or rational-instrumental ways of thinking has often been found in exploring simpler, rural ways of life in which small-scale societies are harmoniously embedded in their natural setting. Decentralised, stable, rooted communities are crucial to ecologism's social and political vision, which prescribes economic limits—the "no-growth" or "stable-state" economy—and a dramatic reduction in material wants as the basis for ecological security and an expansion human well-being. The parallels between an Arcadian model of utopia and of deep green pictures of sustainability are clear. In both, nature is generous within limits, and humanity adapts to live harmoniously with it. Human well-being is not contingent upon systems of external order (as in the ideal republic), nor upon superabundance and satiation (as in Cockaygne), but upon organic adaptation and interdependency. However, the Arcadian ideal is not without its problems, either as a literary mode or a sociopolitical utopia.

Critiques of the Arcadian mode focus on its representation of a regressive or romantic fantasy of a rural idyll which is ahistorical, escapist, or simply stultifying. This myth of pre-industrial natural benevolence and organic unity is closely associated with nostalgic and conservative ideologies and deeply entwined with the pastoral vision of a countryside enduring out of time, pre-modern yet eternal, a symbol of stability and permanence in a ceaselessly changing world. Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, pastoral visions present nature as a retreat; its aestheticisation as an object of contemplation and source of pleasure and tradition obscures the material conditions of rural life. Soper explains in *What is Nature?* that the unreflexive naturalism of the pastoral mode normalises and legitimates some forms of society whilst vilifying others, in either case obscuring the necessity for making explicitly political choices about social relationships and relationships with the nonhuman nature. Thus Kumar's 1981 paper "Primitivism in Feminist Utopias" criticised some (green) feminist narratives of the 1970s for their "primitivism" and desire to return to the "myths and mores" of pre-industrial societies (62). Their "mystical" attitude to the prospect of an unproblematic harmony between humanity and nature, he argued, is indicative of "impotent

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nostalgia" and "escapist fantasy" (66). However, rewriting the future outside the dominant discourse of progress does not necessitate falling into an unreflexive pastoralism. Many deep green theorists insist that their visions of a sustainable society are post-industrial, that is, they focus on how society might move beyond the environmental crisis rather than capitulate to nostalgia for earlier, simpler times.[7] As Kumar explains in the later *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, ecotopian theory has, on the whole, "resisted the temptation to turn to into a primitivist utopia of a Rousseauist kind. It has looked to a post-industrial future not a pre-industrial past" (414). Radical ecology recognises the value of some aspects of pre-industrial life but seeks not so much a reversion as a distinctive fusion of "organic" community with radically democratic (post)modernity; as one of the characters in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* puts it, ecophilosophy attempts to "put the old good with the new good into a greater good" (71).

The complex dialectic between forward-looking, post-industrial utopian desire and the re-evaluation of aspects of the pre-modern past is not well-served by the often rather rigid, structural "greenprints" for an ecocentric society articulated within deep green theory. (See Pepper.) These tensions and indications of directions for their resolution are more fully addressed in the richly imagined and reflexive utopian fictions of Robinson and Le Guin. The textual tactics of the critical utopia can work to deconstruct traditional utopian assumptions about nature, history, and progress, freeing ecotopian desire to envision the culture and values of a sustainable society. Whilst green utopian fiction reclaims aspects of the content of pre-industrial society, it does so by pulling them out of their original context and re-setting them in relation to contemporary debates. Key to this recontextualisation in both ecotopian novels is the reflexive thematisation of time, history, and change as a central aspect of their narratives.

The remainder of this paper explores the ways in which the reflexive devices deployed in *Pacific Edge* and *Always Coming Home* enable the rethinking of the future in terms that subvert both the ideology of progress and the timeless seductions of Arcadia. Their self-conscious discussions of generic futurities and critical interrogations of the form and conventions of the traditional literary utopia clear a (contingent and temporary) space from which the green future can be thought from a different perspective, rejecting the sterile binary of progress and pastoral in favour of a new synthesis that

makes sufficiency both imaginable and desirable.

Utopian Reflections: *Pacific Edge*

We have already seen above the importance of the character of Tom Barnard and the device of problematising the form of the literary utopia in marking out the space of a green utopianism in *Pacific Edge*. Two further forms of utopian reflexivity in the narrative work on questions of progress versus natural simplicity. First, *Pacific Edge* dramatises the problem of progress through its plot. Second, Robinson introduces into El Modena the cosmopolitan and endlessly curious "visitor" figure of Oscar Baldaramma, providing another forum for a conversation about utopia that reaches beyond its naturalistic representation within the main narrative, commenting in particular on the Arcadian elements of El Modenan life. Thus, the content of Robinson's utopia is the object of dialogue and critique from two outsider figures, Tom and Oscar, at the same time as developments in a dynamic plot challenge and reconfigure ideas about nature and social-natural relationships.

The narrative of *Pacific Edge* focuses on Kevin Claiborne's crusade to save Rattlesnake Hill, the last area of untouched wilderness in El Modena, from redevelopment. Thus, a confrontation is staged between Kevin's radically ecocentric idealism and the moderate and pragmatic structures for environmental sustainability represented in the novel's utopian world—a confrontation, in Moylan's terms, between the "iconic" and "discrete" registers of the text (35–41).[8] The "quiet revolution" instituted by Tom Barnard's generation dismantled global capitalism and legislated the building of a decentralised, radically democratic, and environmentally careful society (244). Basic resources—energy, water, land—have been made the common property of regional communities, and legal limits on company size restrain capitalist enterprise. New cooperative and federalist structures have developed, complemented by steeply progressive taxation guaranteeing a basic income scheme ("town shares") and an extensive welfare infrastructure. There is room in this utopia for expansion, but only within tightly circumscribed legal limits and subject to the democratic autonomy of each town. The presence of a powerful Green Party reflects El Modena's commitment to an ecological culture. El Modena, then, is already part of a utopian future in which material

expansion and progress have been subordinated to ideals of environmental and social justice, and any redevelopment of Rattlesnake Hill will be modest and cautious.

The fight over Rattlesnake Hill enacts long-standing conflicts within environmentalism between the primacy of wilderness preservation and the possibility of environmentally responsible forms of development. Utopian desire in the novel is identified with Kevin and his allies' objection to the development of the Hill, which they feel is of vital significance to the ecocentric ethics increasingly lacking in El Modena's cultural and political life. Rattlesnake Hill itself, and Kevin's openness to an experiential connection with it (and by metonymic extension with nonhuman nature per se), represent ecotopian desire in *Pacific Edge*, setting a processive and dynamic utopianism against the ossification of environmental ideals in the structures of the narrative's green society. Robinson's plot suggests that the greening of society is not a set of technical criteria that can be achieved once and for all. Rather, radical green utopianism is better read as an ongoing struggle over the meaning of development, environmental ethics, and human well-being. Whilst at the iconic level of the text, the linear, expansionist ideology of progress has been successfully challenged and overcome, the struggle over the Hill enacts a self-critical utopianism that resists the closure of the future around any single set of ideals. Kevin's success in blocking Rattlesnake Hill's development reprises the green utopian critique of progress, revealing the knot of corruption and desire for material gain that motivates proposals to develop the Hill. However, the means by which Kevin achieves his success—not by a democratic vote, but by tying the place-identity of Rattlesnake Hill to the memory of Tom Barnard, whose death at sea towards the end of the novel is memorialised there—keeps alive the relationship between history, desire, struggle, and a progressive utopianism. Indeed, whilst Kevin wins the battle over the Hill, the future relationship between El Modena and its surrounding environment remains in the balance. Kevin's personal narrative ends in his laughing realisation that he was "without a doubt the unhappiest person in the world" (280): his lover, Ramona, marries another man; Tom is dead; and his feeling for the Hill cannot permanently endure. Closure around a final set of green values is resisted through the subtleties of a narrative that entwines the personal and the political so that no final resolution is possible.

Pacific Edge also works at the iconic level to offset the conservative,

static certainties of the Arcadian utopia by integrating high technology and grass-roots democracy into its culture of ecological respect, steady-state economy, and small, decentralised communities deeply embedded in their natural environments. Robinson to some extent reconfigures the patriarchal family so that the social technology of extended intentional communities sharing domestic responsibilities in large, remodelled apartment blocks is both environmentally efficient and socially liberating. Nonetheless, El Modeña does retain Arcadian qualities, as Oscar observes. He constantly returns, with perplexed good humour, to the outdoor nature of El Modeñan life, where "culture consists of a vigorous swim workout, followed by a discussion of the usefulness of hand paddles" (76). A utopia in which everyone grows their own tomatoes but no-one ever goes to the theatre (32; 233) might be seen, as Oscar suggests, as "arcadian . . . idyllic or bucolic depending on mood" (75). The opening lines of *Pacific Edge* seem to support Oscar's observations. They trace a panoramic view from the snow-topped San Gabriel mountains, over blue foothills, and down to the olive, avocado, and lemon groves below: a "*garden* run riot, the dawn flushing the landscape every shade of green" (1; emphasis added). Against this landscape is the figure of Kevin, walking down a hillside trail; and the end of the novel sees him restored to nature, carving his initials into a rock on his beloved Rattlesnake Hill (280). The enduring, almost timeless qualities of a very particular landscape, and a harmonious accommodation between nature and society, inform the narrative and saturate Robinson's language, where natural metaphors abound. Aspects of El Modeñan life—in particular, its relative insularity, rejection of economic growth as a source of progress and well-being, and its apparent endorsement of a simple life in touch with nature, eschewing the complex pleasures of a diverse and sophisticated cultural sphere—might be read as Arcadian.

However, Oscar brings these tendencies into explicit focus and situates them with reference not to unreflexive nostalgia for a lost past in harmony with nature, but in relation to the complex dynamics of our own present and near future. Oscar's sometimes critical, often admiring, always detached response to El Modeña is ethnological, looking for "the locals' view of things" (231), but he mediates and relativizes the insiders' view with reference to his own sophisticated cosmopolitanism.[9] Oscar takes great delight, with more than a hint of postmodern irony, in the low cultural entertainments on offer outside El Modeña: wrestling (he fights as "The Rhino"); drag racing

(the cars are powered by grain alcohol); the annual "redneck" festival in Los Angeles; and the "historic district" of Bishop nearby, a depthless simulacrum of everyday life in the late twentieth century, where people can eat at a coffee shop called "Huk Finn's" or visit an old-style auto-shop (83; 94; 193). As a liminal figure, Oscar effects a narrative juxtaposition between El Modeña's modest, nature-loving way of life and elements of our own commodified and spectacular culture; in contrast to the rich and vibrant everyday life of the former, the latter seems the more nostalgic and given to anachronistic pastiche. Through Oscar's point of view, the text identifies the contours of an Arcadian aesthetic which is immediately relativised and disrupted.

Genre and History in *Always Coming Home*

An extensive literature attests to the unusual and experimental character of Le Guin's layered, fragmentary, and polyvocal novel.[10] *Always Coming Home* is built on a generative contradiction between an aspiration to verisimilitude in its representation of Kesh life, and the narrative's insistent claims of its "nowhereness" (Khanna 132). A vibrant fictional verity is packed into the text's accounts of Valley life, but their finality and integrity are disrupted by a discontinuous structure and the doubting, self-reflexive voice of Pandora (Jacobs 41–42). The radical epistemological uncertainty exhibited by the text and particularly by Pandora is intimately related to Le Guin's critique of modern, linear notions of history and their implicatedness in the classical utopian project. Through Pandora, the book evokes and rejects the abstractions, schematics and blueprints of the traditional utopia, that is, the narrative conventions that frame the longed-for better society "in the big end of the telescope . . . distinct, tiny and entire." Rather, she wants to approach the Valley "lifesize . . . jewel-bright, in the hand, to be felt and heard" (53). *Always Coming Home* embodies a close-up and experiential utopian mode, signifying through "bits, chunks and fragments" the irreducibility of ordinary life and its partial, local, and ecological temporalities. Le Guin's chief criticism of the traditional literary utopia is that it takes the form of a linear quest for "static perfection":

> a power trip . . . a monotheocracy, declared by
> executive decree and maintained by willpower;

> as its premise is progress, not process, it has no
> habitable present, and speaks only in the future
> tense. (*Dancing* 87)

This progressive discourse functions to spatialise the present, converting the future into a place to be colonised by our own expansive values. Its blinkered focus on a "one-way future consisting only of growth" (85) blinds it to other ways of being and to the lessons of history. The rational utopia, refusing to acknowledge the relevance of the past and the association between utopianism and totalising social projects of domination, therefore carries with it a baggage of Western history of conquest and colonisation that is projected into the future.[11]

Hence Le Guin's strategy in *Always Coming Home* of imagining a future already inhabited, an/other place outside the "aggressive, linear, progressive, creative, expanding, advancing" press of history (*Dancing* 86). In the modest, agriculturally self-reliant villages and hamlets of the Valley, a house with seven cooking pots might be considered rich (*Always* 12); real wealth, however, consists "not in *things* but in an act: the *act* of giving" (112). The symbol at the centre of Kesh cosmology—the two open but interlocked curves of the heyiya-if, "heyiya" connoting something like "sacred"—speaks eloquently of their spiralling, organic concept of time and a culture in which "owning is owing, having is hoarding" (313). Allegorical accounts of other modes of life, like the story of Valley woman Stone Telling's encounter with the violent, technocentric, and imperialist culture of the Condor people, enact a direct opposition between the values of linear/unitary progress and cyclical/heterogeneous process. Stone Telling's father is one of the warrior Dayao ("Condor") people who, as the story opens, are beginning to claim land around the Valley. Stone Telling accompanies her father, Abhao, to his city. The Condor are shadowy, terse figures, embodying the values of a monotheistic, hierarchical, elitist society. They seek to occupy territory, to conquer, to build, expand, and accumulate. They don't, like the Kesh, "give back." Their way is hyperrational and brutally instrumental—"straight, single, terrible" (210). There could be no greater contrast with the culture of the Valley, spatially embedded in reciprocal and plural relationships between humans and nonhuman nature, temporally characterised by the twists, cycles, and reversals that indicate full human subjectivity in the Valley.

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Thus dislocated from modernity's temporalities and desire for material expansion, Kesh society—a self-consciously simple way of life, almost entirely devoid of high technology, embedded physically and culturally in its surrounding landscape, with its cyclical rhythms and stable and enduring social relationships—brings the iconic register of *Always Coming Home* perilously close, as Peter Fitting has observed, to "a nostalgic return to an almost pretechnological world." Fitting also observes that in the absence of a full "logical exposition" of the advantages of its green utopian society, *Always Coming Home* fails to convince (153).[12] However, both the iconic content and the narrative strategies of Le Guin's utopia systematically disrupt the possibility of reading the Valley as a romantic or naïve vision of a harmonious nature idyll. Le Guin does not offer the explicitly politicised commentaries on history, change, and agency elaborated in *Pacific Edge*, however. Instead, the fragmentary text and Pandora's knowing voice formally disrupt static certainties and organic holism; the Valley is contextualised via stories of encounters with alien cultures; and the Kesh's apparently "simple" society also contains the semi-autonomous, self-perpetuating modes of life referred to as "tavkach" and "yaivkach"—"City of Man" and "City of Mind" respectively. It is here above all that *Always Coming Home* both enacts the repression of linear history and modernity that makes its utopian world possible, and thematises that repression and its repercussions in order to reject a stance that is simply "reactionary" or "conservative" (*Dancing* 85).

As we have seen, Kesh cosmology severs the temporal, causal connection between their society and our history and civilisation, often called the "City of Man": the Kesh maintain that they have "lived in the Dreamtime" right through "Civilisation" (*Always* 153). The utopia rejects the instrumental orientation of the City of Man, a temporal mode of "hurry" and "keeping ahead" (410), adopting instead the dynamic logic of the "gyre"—a cyclical but open channelling of energy in ways that flow evenly rather than building or accreting power.[13] Gyring time resists orientation to objects or goals whilst preserving motion and openness to change (25; 163–69) and embodying ideals of endurance and timelessness not reducible to static fixity. The Valley is "the middle, the living, the changing" (Cummins cited in José 190). Thus, the Kesh's inside/outside distinction subverts linear notions of progress. However, the history and objective epistemology so irrelevant to the Kesh do have a place within the text, both in its reflexive metanarrative voice and within the

iconic register. The people who inhabit the Valley share it with another entity, composed of "independent, self-contained, self-regulating communities of cybernetic devices or beings—computers with mechanical extensions" (149). This is yaivkach, the "City of Mind." Its essence is nothing more and nothing less than information itself, its collection, storage and collation; its purpose that of "any species or individual; to go on existing" (150). It has practical uses for human communities—weather forecasts, technical information, medical instruction, transport timetables, and so on (151)—but it is treated with disinterest bordering on disdain. In the midst of the Kesh's organic world, then, are high-powered information and communication technologies and all manner of rational knowledge systems, accessible to anyone who cares to learn TOK (the utopia's Esperanto). However, they are inserted into this lifeworld without also smuggling in their associated ideologies. A stark distinction is made between the epistemological mode of the Kesh and that of the City of Mind. Knowledge for the former is approached through the metaphor of the gift. Freedom and self-realisation are founded in the material and philosophical act of "unhoarding" (314); the circular, transitive act of giving is "mindful," involving a "great deal of discrimination" and a "disciplined intelligence" (314–15). The City of Mind's epistemology, on the other hand, "keeps"; it accumulates disembodied and free-floating data and preserves a record of linear time. Its freedom is "our freedom reversed" (315).

Thus, the City of Mind is beyond human concerns in the iconic register of the text whilst simultaneously operating at the ideological or metatextual level to situate Le Guin's utopia in relation to the history, epistemology, and politics that are missing in its content. The schism between the book's human community and its informational network is "necessary and significant" to the portrayal of a people living fully inside a world imagined from the context of the linear, mechanistic rationality of this one (153). Human and informational "species" have "diverged to the extent that competition between them was nonexistent, cooperation limited, and the question of superiority and inferiority bootless" (152). Like forests, anthills, or stars, the City is another of the innumerable kinds of being in the world, an aspect of the whole but not instrumentally important or holistically integrated into it. History and rational forms of knowledge are now "finished" and annexed into a purely self-referential bubble of "perfect nonmanipulative objectivity" (151). Whilst it is a small part of the content of the text, and only occasionally

useful to the people of the future, the City of Mind is vital to us, the people of the present, in understanding them. In *Always Coming Home*, it is the key to understanding how a world beyond "progress" need not be reduced to pastoral conservatism or simple Arcadian holism, but rather can function as a truly other place for the exploration of ecological and utopian values.

Conclusion

The green utopianism of *Always Coming Home*, like that of *Pacific Edge*, thus evades the static, atemporal dream of the rural idyll even as it subverts the linear conceptions of time associated with "progress." I have sought to show how the reflexive strategies of both novels open up a way of exploring the hope for a sufficient society that is outside an over-determined history but contiguous with the space of everyday life. Although I have focused here on the deconstructive or critical strategies in Le Guin's and Robinson's novels, both, in very different ways, simultaneously paint vivid pictures of everyday life in a sustainable society. Indeed, both texts are notable for their wealth of experiential detail in working out the ways in which the rejection of instrumental orientations towards the world might enhance and enrich relationships both between humans and between humans and nonhuman nature.

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin's resistance to the tyranny of structure saturates both the form of the narrative and its iconic content. *Always Coming Home* has no single coherent plot or straightforward description of the Kesh's social structure or way of life. Informed by eco-anarchism and Taoism, Le Guin's Valley utopia has no central institutions and no formal politics. However, the characteristic patterns of Kesh life do emerge, built of concrete specifics and from the bottom up. For example, the material basis of life in the Valley—its self-sufficient combination of hunter-gathering and small-scale agriculture—is elliptically introduced in the sections of the book "What They Wore in the Valley" and "What They Ate" (which includes a number of recipes and a treatise on Kesh table manners) (434–36; 437–43). The new and fulfilling modes of self-realisation and intersubjective relationships that substitute for material wealth and linear progress are evoked through the amassing and layering of anthropological and phenomenological detail.

Whilst links and signifying resonances can be made across the many parts of the book, they do not cohere into a seamless whole or dialectical synthesis. Contradictions, differences, and tensions necessarily remain. The reader must trace her own path(s) through the pieces of the text, which firmly resists being read from front to back. Thus *Always Coming Home* has often been interpreted as a series of provocations or incitements to readers to intervene and invent as "participants in the utopian process" (José 188; see also Khanna and Jacobs among others. It invites us to "let the heart complete the pattern" (Le Guin, *Always* 53) to listen to the many voices of the Kesh and connect up the shards of broken Blue Clay pot, the song to a water skater, and the detailed descriptions of the Kesh's World Dance, at which they celebrate the "making and unmaking, the continuity and renewal of the world," into a partial, contingent and ephemeral "good place" (454). A continuous, coherent reading of *Always Coming Home* as a closed linear story about "the good life" is untenable.

By contrast, the narrative of *Pacific Edge* vividly foregrounds the consciousness and Bildung of a single protagonist and makes extensive use of the conventions of the realist novel. *Pacific Edge* hinges on a realistic plot and is peopled by a stable set of recurrent characters. With Kevin at its heart, the novel fans out to introduce the dense and complex network of friends and family in which he is embedded. Tom Barnard provides an explanatory commentary from a historical "outside" on the legal and institutional reform that tamed the expansive and destructive excesses of global capitalism and shaped a new social structure—radically democratic and redistributive, ecologically cautious and economically resistant to expansion for its own sake. At the same time, *Pacific Edge* works through Kevin's point of view to bring these structures to life in vividly specific scenes: his participation in the shared "town work" of transforming and maintaining El Modeña's infrastructure; rebuilding Oscar's house and playing softball; his initially reluctant participation in the Town Council as the Green Party representative and increasingly explicit and self-conscious commitment to wild nature and struggle to save it; falling in love and losing Ramona to his political opponent Alfredo Blair.

The importance of close and deeply-rooted relationships with nonhuman nature to a sense of self and a fulfilling culture is at the heart of both texts, often explored through the expansion of the idea of "home."

In this sense, the ability of *Always Coming Home* and *Pacific Edge* to create inhabitable futures seems temporally to map the deep green exhortation to spatially "reinhabit" nature, that is to re-embed communities both materially and culturally in their local ecologies.[14] The Kesh are "dwellers, not travellers" and the Valley "our house, where we live" (*Always* 35). As a "bio-architect," Kevin specialises in turning twentieth century apartment blocks (those "dead, inert boxes" [109]) into a form of housing suited to El Modena: messy, communal, and ecofriendly. Kevin's conversions blur the boundaries been domestic and ecological space, with

> [b]ig clear walls [that] make it impossible to tell
> if you're indoors or out, an atrium three stories
> tall, perhaps an aviary, solar air conditioning
> and refrigeration and waste disposal, some
> banana trees and cinnamon bushes. (32)

Practically, El Modeñan homes incorporate soft technologies and aspire to be "nearly self-sufficient little farms" (33), but perhaps more importantly they explore an aesthetics of embeddedness in place. They bring nature inside and respond reflexively to the landscape in which they are situated.

For both Le Guin and Robinson, however, nature is never wholly domesticated, with its connotations of the humanisation of landscape found in pastoral imagery. Especially when compared to other "nature" utopias —for example the gentle, garden-like Arcadias of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, and even the near-contemporary political ecotopia of Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*— *Pacific Edge* and *Always Coming Home* emphasise the idea of wilderness and its significance to ecological ethics. The focus on wild nature in these two novels positions them close to the deep/transpersonal and anarchist/communal strands of ecological thought (see Eckersley), forms of "romantic" ecology which privilege intuitive or empathetic ways of knowing and valuing nature, in contrast to purely cognitive or rational modes (Dryzek; see also Sargisson, *Utopian Bodies*). In *Always Coming Home* and *Pacific Edge*, the human subject's sensuous experience of him/herself in relation to a wider natural reality is at the heart of the text. Le Guin often invokes the qualities of the Valley through lists of plants, near litanies that convey the quiddity of the landscape, its profusion and multiplicity and an irreducible materiality that seems to hover

just beyond language: "sweetshrub and oceanspray and yellow azalea, the wild rose and the wild vine of California" in the fertile land near the creeks, "thick shrubs, digger pine, fir, redwood, madrone" on the sheltered canyon sides (*Always* 50). In the richly described landscape of Rattlesnake Hill, with its "braided smell" of "orange blossoms, cut with eucalyptus, underlaid by sage" (*Pacific* 38; 141), Kevin experiences his most intensely conscious moments of connection and identification with nonhuman nature in the form of an "epiphany" as he bikes home after a council meeting:

> He knew the configuration of every dark tree
> he passed, every turn in the path, and for a long
> moment rushing along he felt spread out in it
> all, interpenetrated, the smell of plants part of
> him, his body a piece of the hills, and all of it
> cool with a holy tingling. (28)[16]

Similarly, Stone Telling, leaving the Valley, feels it behind her

> like a body, my own body. My feet were the sea-
> channels of the river, the organs and passages of
> my body were the places and streams and my
> bones the rocks... and I here lying down was a
> breath-soul, going farther away from the body
> every day. (*Always* 189)

But wild nature is also shown to be fundamentally other. The paradox of radical ecological philosophy—which offers heightened possibilities for human-social identification with nature at the same time as insisting on its essential separateness insofar as we accord it intrinsic value —is not resolved in either text. As Carol Franko has argued ("Working"), Robinson's narrative works the "in-between," juxtaposing Kevin's deeply rooted sense of home and identification in relation to Rattlesnake Hill with encounters with wild (natural) "others": a "presence" or "black shape" (Robinson 30) occasionally glimpsed from his kitchen window that is never further explained; and the strange, hallucinatory episode involving a series of brushes with an unaccountable, ineffable something in the hills during the dark and dissonant "Mars Party" section of the book. In *Always Coming Home*, Kesh cosmology

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makes scrupulous distinctions between domesticated and specific aspects of nature (belonging to the Houses of Earth) and its wild and essential elements (the Houses of Sky). In encounters with "Sky People," nature's profound separateness and difference is incorporated into Le Guin's text, often via the figure of Coyote, the Trickster. The adolescent rite of walking on "Grandmother Mountain," for example, involves Stone Telling's entering into Coyote's House where she is changed by her brush with an entirely alien way of being (*Always* 22). Both narratives refuse to reduce the diversity of "nature" (whether in terms of what it is or what culture makes of it) to what William Cronon calls "One Thing with One Name," preferring to explore the unresolved tensions between nature as domesticated and wild, ordinary and sublime, a source of human identification and culture's other.

In their focus on both the value and the "otherness" of wilderness, and the primacy given to experiential approaches to environmental ethics, then, *Pacific Edge* and *Always Coming Home* share a great deal with a range of identifiable ecophilosophical approaches, most notably deep or transcendental ecology in *Pacific Edge*, and strands of eco-anarchism in *Always Coming Home*. Le Guin's work is also deeply informed by Taoism.[17] However, the novels function neither as a simple addition to an already extensive ecophilosophical literature, nor as fictional illustrations of its central tenets. Rather, their narratives offer particular and contingent but vivid and experiential suggestions of what an inhabitable green future might be like, and deploy reflexive devices to suture utopian desire for such a future into a critical relationship with the realities of present history. They work actively to deconstruct the linear visions of future progress and abundance that continue to saturate public discourse and haunt the utopian tradition, and to dislocate dreams of an organic interdependency with nature from escapist nostalgia and social conservatism. Contemporary policy discourse, for example in the dominant framework of sustainable development, offers increasingly rational, technocentric, and instrumental reasons to address environmental issues and promote sustainable forms of society. They suggest both that we can manage our way out of ecological crisis and that achieving a limited, minimally green form of capitalist development is an end in itself. In this context, I argue that green utopian narratives are vital in maintaining an oppositional space for open-ended estrangement and desire, as well as reflexively offering the utopian tradition a route out of its implication in dreams of material expansion.

Endnotes

[1] I use "ecocentrism" here in a rather more general sense than in some ecophilosophical literature, and for the purposes of this article only attend when the arguments invite it to its constituent strands and the differences between them, for example social ecology (e.g. Bookchin), deep or "transpersonal" ecologism (Naess; Devall and Sessions), eco-communal and eco-anarchist approaches (Bahro) and the bio-regionalist philosophy (Sale). More recent approaches addressing questions of ecocentrism and sufficient societies from the perspective of global justice and development might include Merchant, Shiva, and Sachs, among others.

[2] For example The Ecologist's "A Blueprint for Survival," which indexes the multiplicity of utopian proposals for a post-industrial society produced in small journals such as the *Whole Earth Quarterly*, *Mother Earth News*, and *Undercurrents* throughout the 1970s. See also Kumar, *Utopia*; Pepper.

[3] The crossover between environmental polemic and science fiction is notable in the late 1960s, when ecotheorists Garrett Hardin and Paul Ehrlich both produced environmental science fiction novels (*The Voyage of the Spaceship Beagle* in 1972, and *Ecocatastrophe* in 1969 respectively). Sf's increasing concern with ecological issues and the environmental crisis was made self-conscious in two anthologies published in the early 1970s: Elwood and Kidd's *The Wounded Planet*, and Disch's T*he Ruins of Earth*. Kim Stanley Robinson continued this anthologising tradition by editing the collection *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias* in 1994.

[4] Pandora explains that earthquakes and climate change have led to the conversion of most of California into salt marsh, bringing the Gulf of California up to Arizona and Nevada (Le Guin, *Always* 159).

[5] I use the term "pastoral" rather loosely here to refer to the romanticisation of pre-modern forms of society in which humans live modestly and harmoniously with a benevolent and fertile nature that has been tamed and humanised through agriculture and close physical and cultural proximity.

[6] With the exception, perhaps, of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*.

[7] It is not least for this reason that late twentieth century ecotopias

must be read in relation to the specific historical and political context of their production, in the wake of the announcement of the "environmental crisis," resisting the temptation to identify a continuous tradition of the "utopia of sufficiency" (de Geus).

[8] The "iconic" level of the text refers to the content of the imagined utopian society (and its conflict with the originatory or "real" society), conventionally at the forefront of the utopian text, whilst the "discrete" register denotes the narrative of the utopian protagonis—traditionally, the journey of the visitor through the utopian landscape. In *Pacific Edge*, the visitor character, Oscar Baldaramma, is sidelined and the main protagonist is Kevin himself. It could therefore be argued that Kevin's journey through his own utopian society in the light of the disruption precipitated by the struggle over Rattlesnake Hill constitutes the discrete register. (Moylan's third set of textual operations, the "ideological" register of the text, refers to the relationship between the imagined utopia as a cultural artefact and its historical context. I address this throughout the piece, albeit without use of this specific terminology [Moylan 35–41].)

[9] There are obvious parallels here with Le Guin's "anthropologist" narrator figure, Pandora.

[10] A very selective list might include Franko ("Self-Conscious"), Fitting, Ehrlich, Khanna, and José.

[11] This aspect of the history of spatial discovery and progress resonates strongly in relation to the geographical location of Le Guin's work; as she reminds us, "California was not empty when the Anglos came" (*Dancing* 82).

[12] In particular, Fitting charges that Stone Telling's story fails to counter Le Guin's Arcadian escapism; at only one hundred pages in three disjointed sections, it is too small and fragmented a part of the overall text. José also warns against seeing Stone Telling's story as the dominant interpretive frame of the book, since this would suggest a continuity and holism elsewhere explicitly challenged. However, as the only recognisably coherent narrative in the book, its contrast with the plural, dissonant nature of the text as a whole endows Stone Telling's story with significant weight. In Kesh terms, Stone Telling's story is a pivotal or "hinge" episode within *Always Coming Home*—a place where private, individual "lived-time" intersects with impersonal, cyclical "being-time," and hence of both biographical and

ideological/mythical importance.

¹³ The gyre is often contrasted with the closed, repetitive, onward moving motion of the wheel.

¹⁴ This prescription is particularly associated with bioregionalist ecophilosophy—see for example Berg and Dasmann, Devall, and Sale.

¹⁵ The idea of wilderness as an approach to thinking about environmental epistemology and ethics is not without its own problems, however, especially from social constructionist perspectives; see, for example, Cronon.

¹⁶ Oscar's reflexive commentaries on El Modeñan life also situate Pacific Edge in relation to traditions of wilderness writing. The "legends and stereotypes" of this rich literary and ecocentric canon provide another self-conscious interpretative frame through which Oscar reads his new life, locating Robinson's utopia in inter-textual as well as geographic terms (Robinson 231). El Modeña has not simply emerged seamlessly out of the wild landscape of southern California; it is equally a product of the visions of John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder, and Le Guin.

¹⁷ For an extensive exploration of this facet of Le Guin's work, which is beyond the scope of this paper, see Ehrlich.

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