

# [Jason the theme of gender is heavily explored.](https://assignbuster.com/jason-the-theme-of-gender-is-heavily-explored/)

Jason Servera-Reyes                                                               603-103-MQLiterary Themes GenderFluidity vs Essentialism In” The LeftHand of Darkness” InUrsela’s K. Le Guin’s science fiction novel entitled “ The Left Hand ofDarkness” published in 1969, the story is set in a utopian society in which thetheme of gender is heavily explored. The main character, Genly Ai, is an alienenvoy from a confederation of 83 loose planets who have joined forces to createthe society known as “ The Ekumen”. Genly ai is sent out to recruit new planetssuch as the planet of Gethen, to facilitate and improve his growingintergalactic civilization, however he seems to struggle with persuading themto join because of his poor understanding of different cultures.

The Gethenians, part of Gethen, are ambisexual creatures with no fixed genders. So, what exactlydoes this story have to say about gender, sex and sexuality?                 LeGuin uses the difference between humans and the Gethenians in her novel toillustrate how society could exist without set sexual norms, as well as howsocial and political affairs can be seperated from the identity of anindividual.            In Ursela K. Le Guin’s novel, readers will understandthat Genly Ai is a masculine character that struggles with Gender roles withinGethenian territory. At the beginning at the story, he is conflicted withtrying to adapt to the gethenian lifestyle and he is unpleased with hisattempts as he refers to gethenians as males. “ A man wants her ferminityappreciated however indirect and subtle the indications of regard andappreciation.

” (Le Guin 77) Ursela K le Guin suggests that it wasn’t untilGenly ai has met Lord Estraven that he was truly able to experience Genderchange and to realize what it means to be Gethenian. Genly Ai has a hard timeunderstanding why the inhabitants of Gethen are androgynous, and even with thefact that he has inhabited the land known as “ Winter” for almost 2 years, hestill sees Gethenians as a masculine place. Estraven had invited Genly Ai forsupper in which Genly sat down and thought to himself: “ Though I had beennearly two years on Winter, I was still far from being able to see the peopleof the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the formof self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcinghim into these categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential on myown.” (Le Guin 12) The author integrates this concept into her novel todemonstrate how possessing feminine or masculine traits does notforeshadow  the life that they willchoose to follow. Ursela K Le Guin explains that there will be a society inwhich their gender roles or sex are not attributed to certain types ofcharacteristic traits, and they might take up any form they desire. She focuseson the notion that Gender is not the predominant concept in the story.

Theauthor states that people take for granted that men can accomplish the samethings women can. During the late 1960’s, the year the book was published, thefeminist movement began to rise drastically as women were limited in almostevery aspect in life. Women were restricted to getting married, staying at hometo either complete house chores or to babysit children. This relates to theconcept of Gender Essentialism, where a fixed gender is defined by thecharacteristic traits or views that they adapt. So, in short, think of sexism.   In the story however, it is stated that:” Thefact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be ” tied down to childbearing”, implies that no one is quite so thoroughly tieddown here as women, elsewhere are likely to be psychologically. Burden andprivileges are shared out equally, therefore nobody here is quite so free as afree male anywhere else.” (Le Guin Ch7 Parag12) Ursela K.

Le Guin hadquestioned the importance of Gender roles during the time of her publication, whether or not it was physicological, if we are all gendered at birth, assumingwe have to be a girl or a boy and incorporating traits that are deemed bysociety to be feminine or masculine. The author explains that the book was simplyjust a thought experiment. “ What happens if we take away gender from thepeople?” During an ongoing arranged journey into the east, Genly Ai refers tohis” landlady as a voluble man. “(Le Guin 49) Ursela K Le Guin elaborates thatshe can perceive different kinds of professions for 2 different genders.

Sexand gender do not define the specific roles of man and woman in society withinthe story. They are both public and at the same time, very personal. By definition,” Gender” describes: the characteristic traits that a society or culture maydeem as masculine or feminine. Sex on the other hand refers to: the biologicaldifferences in chromosomes, hormonal profiles as well as internal and externalsex organs or reproductive systems. In Ursela K.

Le Guin novel, she has createda unique sexual cycle called “ Kemmer”, in which Gethenians come out of their period of androgyny and can choose tobecome either male or female, inheriting their respective traits and biologicalorgans. The Gethenian kemmer cycle lasts 6 days and after that they return totheir neutral and genderless state. On the Gobrin Ice, Estraven recites apassage from the Handdara scripture to Genly Ai.” Light is the left hand ofdarkness and darkness the right hand of light. Two are one, life and death, lying together like lovers in Kemmer, like hands joinedtogether, like the end and the way.” (Le Guin 252).  Ursela K. Le Guin pulls out the concept of Dualityin which both gender roles complement and bring out the best in each other aswell as the idea that one cannot live without the other.

The light and darknessrepresent the balance between contrasting forces between the known and the unknown, very similar to the idea of Ying and Yang inside Taoism. In short, the kemmercycle can also relate to the idea of genderfluidity in which humans can adapt and change their different types ofGender traits. The novel respects feminine equality so much so that, during aconversation with Estraven , Genly Ai is surprised at the fact that ” Equalityis not the general rule, then? Are they mentally inferior? (Le Guin 196) Theauthor claims that a world inhabited by ambisexual beings must bring with italso the concept of equality as well as equal opportunity. Inconclusion, by comparing the main similarities and differences between Genderand sex, as well as understanding the core principles of Essentialism andGender fluidity, Ursula K. Le Guin uses the difference between humans and theGethenians in her novel to illustrate how society could exist without setsexual norms.

And although this novelhas sparked a lot of controversy, it has opened our eyes to the preconceivednotions about what Gender and sex is all about.