

**Utopian Reconfiguration of the Nature/Culture Dualism in
Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home***

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This thesis examines the intersection of utopia and ecology in Ursula Le Guin's science fiction novel *Always Coming Home* (1985). As such, the thesis approaches the text from the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and utopian studies. By examining the text from these points of view, the thesis presents Le Guin's novel as a particularly ecological utopian text. Thus, the thesis emphasizes the ways in which the novel's ecological depictions and worldview influence its utopian speculation while also contributing to the novel's critical approach to utopia.

At the center of the analysis lies an ecocritical examination of the novel's portrayal of the relationship between its utopian society and its non-human environment. These depictions are examined particularly in terms of their reconfiguration of the anthropocentric, dualistic view of nature and culture. As a result of this reconfiguration, the novel's ecological worldview emerges as one that emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of the human and the non-human. This ecological worldview is argued to contribute significantly to the novel's utopian rhetoric.

The thesis posits that the novel's ecological worldview shapes its approach to utopia in two major ways. First, the novel's ecological worldview is examined as the central feature of the novel's utopia, and as the foundation for the text's utopian speculation. Second, the novel's ecological worldview is presented as limiting the novel's utopian rhetoric by emphasizing the role of material limits. As a result, the thesis argues that the novel is a specifically ecological utopian text, which situates itself in opposition with present-day ideology primarily through its ecological worldview.

Key words: Ursula Le Guin, utopia, ecology, nature, culture, dualism, science fiction

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1 Introduction

The most urgent social problems of our present moment are ecological problems. As we live in the midst of an ecological crisis caused by human activity, the need to re-evaluate and reconfigure our approach to the ecosystems and beings around us is more necessary than ever. Ecocriticism emphasizes this necessity by using literary texts as tools for approaching the relationship between humans and their non-human environment, critiquing the dominant, Western ideology that views nature and culture as distinct and separate entities, and highlighting the ways in which literary texts can be used to reconfigure our ideas of what it means to be human or non-human. Furthermore, in its focus on presenting alternative approaches to our conceptualization of nature and culture, a particularly utopian thread runs through the tradition of ecocriticism. In the present moment, this kind of utopianism can be felt as particularly empowering. Although the future as imagined in the present may seem bleak and marred by environmental catastrophe, ecologically motivated utopian thinking can act as a tool for reclaiming this future, opening possibilities for positive socioenvironmental change.

In this thesis, the connections between utopian and ecological thought are examined via an ecocritical analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *Always Coming Home* ([1985] 2001, henceforth referred to as *ACH*). Set in the distant future, the novel depicts a society of a premodern people called the Kesh inhabiting the Napa Valley of California long after the downfall of modern civilization. The novel emphasizes its utopian nature by presenting itself as an exercise in an "Archaeology of the Future" (*ACH*, 3), a work of imaginative speculation undertaken by the novel's anthropologist-narrator. In its form, the novel is structured as a collection of various texts from and about the Kesh society compiled by this narrator figure, known by the name Pandora. As such a collection, the novel depicts its utopian society through a variety of genres, including Kesh narratives, poetry and drama, anthropological and descriptive sections that outline the Kesh way of life, metafictional sections describing Pandora's process of imagining and arriving at the Kesh utopia, as well as through visual materials, such as maps, illustrations and diagrams, depicting the organization of Kesh society and its surrounding world. As such a collection, the novel has no overarching narrative, but instead attempts to depict the complexity of Kesh society through depictions that emerge from within and outside the utopian society.

What emerges from the collection of fragmented texts, genres and voices is a picture of a largely non-hierarchical society of moderation that inhabits its world in balance with its surroundings. One of the central features of the novel's portrayal of the Kesh utopia is the way in which the fictional society is presented as possessing a deep ecological awareness, manifested in the culture's view of the realms of the human and non-human as interdependent parts of the ecological totality.

In this thesis, I argue that Le Guin's novel exemplifies a particularly *ecological* approach towards the construction of utopia. Doing so, I discuss the novel particularly as a response to the ideological notions concerning the relationship between human *culture* and non-human *nature*. Ecocritic Greg Garrard posits that the anthropocentric, dualistic view of these two concepts, where the realm of culture is seen as *distinct from* as well as *superior to* the realm of nature, is considered by many environmentalist and ecocritical movements to be one of the underlying sources of anti-ecological beliefs and practices in the modern age (Garrard 2011, 26). Thus, to imagine a more ecologically sustainable society, this dualistic view of nature and culture needs to be challenged. Ecocriticism, as argued by Garrard, strives to achieve this by examining "the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction" (Garrard 2011, 179). In this thesis, I argue that Le Guin's novel takes part in a similar examination of the nature/culture dualism, providing a critique of modern attitudes towards the environment and reconfiguring the boundaries between the concepts of nature and culture. By examining the novel's critique of the nature/culture dualism in relation to its utopian rhetoric, I argue that the novel constitutes a specifically *ecological utopia*. As such, I posit that the novel fulfills the following functions:

1. The ecological utopia of *ACH* acts as a *critique* of the anthropocentric ideology of the present-day, specifically as embodied by the concept of the nature/culture dualism. The novel replaces this ideology with a systemic, ecological worldview that emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of human and non-human life.
2. Based on this ecological worldview, *ACH* presents an *alternative and desirable social system* that emphasizes moderation, reciprocity, and respect for the environment as its central values.
3. In addition to this, *ACH's* ecological focus grounds its utopian speculation in material reality, thus contributing to the novel's *critical approach* to utopia.

4. Through the connection between ecology and utopia, *ACH* posits that a change in the way in which we view human/non-human relationships is central to the imagination of more equal and just societies.

By discussing the novel in terms of these four functions, the thesis partakes in the larger critique of the ideological notions concerning human/non-human relationships. In addition to this, the thesis contributes to the discussion of the role of utopian thought within the traditions of environmentalism and ecocriticism.

Focusing on the connection between ecology and utopia, this thesis approaches *ACH* through two different, but in the novel's case inseparable, theoretical frameworks. Primarily, the focus of the thesis lies in an ecocritical discussion of the novel's portrayal of the relationship between human culture and non-human nature. Thus, the central theoretical basis for the analysis undertaken in this thesis is provided by the works of *ecocritical* literary critics such as Greg Garrard (2011), Timothy Morton (2010), and Helena Fader (2014). In addition to this, the discussion of the novel's ecological depictions draws on previous analysis of the environmental side of Le Guin's work from the points of view of systems theory (LeClair 1989), bioregionalism (Barnhill 2012), Daoism (Prettyman 2014), and ecofeminism (Otto 2012, Hardack 2013), among others. Secondly, the thesis considers the novel as a piece of utopian fiction and approaches it from the perspective of the field of *utopian studies*. This is achieved by examining *ACH* from the point of view of Fredric Jameson's (2005) analysis of the common features, limits and possibilities of utopian texts. By discussing the novel in terms of these two frameworks, the ecocritical and the utopian, I highlight the importance of the novel's ecological worldview for its utopian rhetoric.

I begin my analysis by introducing the utopian and ecological features of Le Guin's novel. By doing so, I contextualize the novel as a particularly ecologically motivated utopian text and situate the novel within the critical utopian tradition. In the third chapter, I proceed to examine the novel from an ecocritical point of view. Here, the focus turns to an examination of the novel's rejection of the nature/culture dualism in its ecological depictions. Emerging from this analysis is the novel's ecological worldview, which replaces the dualistic view of nature and culture with a focus on the interconnectedness and interdependence of human and non-human life. In the fourth chapter, I examine how *ACH's* ecological worldview is connected to its approach to utopia. By doing so, I discuss the ways in which the novel's portrayal of the relationship between

nature and culture is intrinsically linked to its depiction of utopia, and how the ecological and utopian sides of the novel function together as a critique of present-day societies and environmental ideologies.

2 Always Coming Home as a Utopian and Ecological Text

In this thesis, I discuss *ACH* from two different but interconnected frameworks. First, I examine the novel within the generic framework of utopian science fiction. Second, I focus my analysis of the novel specifically on its ecological depictions and rhetoric. I argue that in *ACH* these two frameworks, the utopian and the ecological, are fundamentally intertwined, and that the novel, by working within these two frameworks, addresses the relationship between utopianism and ecological realism by creating a synthesis of these two somewhat contradictory ideologies.

To begin my analysis of the novel, I discuss the text in relation to these two frameworks. In this chapter, I situate the text within the traditions of utopian and ecological fiction, respectively. First, I discuss the novel as a *utopian text*, analyzing its utopian features and themes, and situate it on the *critical* side of the utopian tradition. Moving on from utopia to ecology, I proceed to examine the novel as an ecological text in terms of its ecological motivations and features. Elaborating on this, I discuss *ACH*'s ecological depictions in terms of its utopian *world-reduction*, countered by the novel's focus on *systems of information and ecology*. By doing so, I highlight the ways in which the novel functions to criticize, counter, and circumvent the prevailing ideology of its time by using strategies common to utopian texts. In addition, I introduce the ways in which the text's utopian features are counterbalanced by its focus on the portrayal of ecological systems. This provides a basis for an ecocritical analysis of the novel, while also setting the foundation for the thesis' broader discussion of ecology and utopia.

2.1 Always Coming Home as a Utopian Text

I begin my analysis of *ACH* by focusing on its utopian themes and content. In this section, I situate the text within the tradition of utopian fiction and outline its utopian themes and features. Discussing the utopian themes of the text, I approach the environmental motivations and ecological depictions of the novel, on which I concentrate more specifically in section 2.2. Thus, the crux of this section lies in situating the text within the framework of its genre, outlining the utopian features of the text, and highlighting the novel's relation to the concept of utopia itself.

As this thesis discusses *ACH* as a work of utopian fiction, a brief discussion of the range of things that the concept of utopia can signify is required. As a concept, utopia is

ambiguous and subject to various differing interpretations. Deriving from the Greek words 'ou' (not) and 'topos' (place), the term was first used by the 16th century humanist Thomas More in his eponymous prototypical utopian text, and has subsequently come to describe an "imagined or hypothetical place, system, or state of existence in which everything is perfect", as well as the written texts or plans outlining such places, systems, and states (*OED*, s.v. "utopia," n.). However, depending on the interpretation, the ambiguity of the word's Greek root can be used to define the word in two ways, emphasizing its role as either a no-place (*ou-topia*) or a virtuous, prosperous place (*eu-topia*) (Thaler 2018, 673). The dichotomy of these two interpretations of utopia, denoting something imagined or unreal on one hand, and desirable and worth striving towards on the other, provides two interconnected semantic threads found in all utopian texts.

The bifold nature of utopia, as both unreal and desirable, is evident in the novel. On one hand, the novel describes a no-place separate from reality, depicting a people that "might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California" the voices of whom are translated "from a language that doesn't yet exist" (*ACH*, xi). On the other hand, the novel's utopia is presented as a desirable place, as a society free from many social, economic and environmental problems of the contemporary historical moment, and of people inhabiting their no-place in a peaceful and spiritually deep connection with their surroundings. The interplay between the non-existence and desirability of utopia forms an important thread throughout both the genre of utopian fiction overall and *ACH* specifically, and it is a theme that, likewise, recurs throughout this thesis. With this in mind, I begin the examination of the novel's utopian features and themes by situating it in relation to Le Guin's other utopian works.

2.1.1 Le Guin's Utopian Fiction

The novels of Ursula Le Guin inhabit a central position within the tradition of utopian fiction. Her science fiction works, most obviously those of the Hainish cycle series, such as *The Dispossessed* (1975) and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), exemplify the kinds of critical and ambiguous utopias common to utopian fiction of the late 20th century. As a similarly speculative utopian text, *Always Coming Home* can be viewed as a continuation of the utopian discussion that saw its beginning in these earlier novels. By comparing *ACH* to Le Guin's earlier utopian works, the novel's utopian themes and its place in the utopian tradition can be arrived at. Therefore, to begin my discussion of the novel as a utopian

text, I first examine it in relation to Le Guin's other science fiction work, before moving on to discuss its more specific utopian features and functions.

As one of Le Guin's later science fiction works, *ACH* displays an approach to utopia that both shares and elaborates on features found in her earlier novels. First of all, the novel depicts a utopia that is at once ambiguous and critical in both its approach towards the socio-historical problems of its time, as well as towards the notion of utopias as perfect societies. In this sense, *ACH* continues the *critical approach* to utopia exemplified by Le Guin's earlier works. This approach is described by Mathias Thaler, in his analysis of *The Dispossessed* in relation to realist political theory, as a method that functions by way of "reflective, dynamic and ambiguous" depictions that construct a "critical utopia" that "rejects the status quo without aiming to construct a perfect society" (Thaler 2018, 674). Elaborating on this, Thaler outlines a division between two types of utopias. Thaler describes these two types as *form-based* utopias, which can be described as "blueprints" of desirable or just societies which, at the same time, "[assume their] self-realizing power", and *content-based* utopias, which serve not as ends in themselves but, instead, take a more informed and critical approach to envisioning how to satisfy changing needs in different historical contexts (Thaler 2018, 680). In other words, whereas form-based utopias seek to alleviate needs and overcome social problems by presenting desirable, static worlds in which these problems have been rendered non-existent, content-based utopias highlight the fact that the criteria of what constitutes a need or a social problem, as well as the means available to solve such problems, are dependent on their historical context. This, in turn, leads to a more critical approach to the idea of utopia.

Such a content-based critical approach to utopia is found in *ACH*, where the Kesh utopia is presented not only as a desirable society free from several oppressive hierarchies, but also as the setting of occasional feuds, war, and individual misfortune. Thus, far from being portrayed as a perfect, non-problematic society, the novel's utopia is instead constructed as a series of defamiliarizing negations of hierarchies and socio-environmental problems inherent to contemporary capitalist ideology. This reflects Le Guin's idea of science fiction's essential function as being to present "reversals of a habitual way of thinking" (Le Guin in Hardack 2013, 49). In other words, the novel does not seek to provide a prescriptive utopia as such, but instead attempts to defamiliarize and disrupt the hegemonic ideology of the historical moment from which it emerges. The way in which this is accomplished is discussed in more detail in section 2.1.2.

Secondly, *ACH* continues the thematic discourse undertaken in Le Guin's earlier science fiction novels. Among these are the focus on equal, non-hierarchical and decentralized utopian societies and the prevalence of feminist themes. Many of Le Guin's science fiction works display anarchist influences, and the utopias presented in them often take the form of non-hierarchical, decentralized, and reciprocal societies. That is the case with, for example, the anarchist Annaresti society depicted in *The Dispossessed*, as well as the decentralized, kinship-based structure of the Karhidian kingdom in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. A similar focus is found in *ACH*, where the Kesh are organized in a non-hierarchical system of reciprocity based on systems of kinship and tribal organization centered around "the five Houses" and their corresponding professional Lodges (*ACH*, 432). Furthermore, this anarchic, non-hierarchical approach to society is reflected in the ecological worldview of the Kesh, as discussed in further detail below.

In addition to the centrality of anarchism to her utopian fiction, Le Guin has often been read as a feminist writer, and her utopian works often discuss feminist themes. Of her previous works, the genderless society presented in *The Left Hand of Darkness* serves as an obvious example, and a similar focus on gender as a societal and ideological construction is evident in *ACH*, as well. For example, Eric C. Otto has examined *ACH*'s ecofeminist themes and argues that the novel posits "the intellectual consideration of gender difference" as its critical strategy (Otto 2012, 39). In addition to the features exemplified above, *ACH* continues the discussion of several other themes that recur throughout Le Guin's work, such as Daoism, ecology, myth and the non-human, all of which I will return to in more detail during my ecocritical analysis.

Finally, the novel further develops the formal techniques previously presented in Le Guin's earlier utopian novels. As previously mentioned, *ACH*'s depiction of the Kesh utopia takes the form of a collection of different texts and narratives that encompass different styles, voices and genres. Similar formal techniques are evident, albeit in a less pronounced form, in Le Guin's earlier novels. For example, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, as described by Fredric Jameson in his analysis of the novel, is comprised of a "heterogenous group of narrative modes", such as those of travel narrative, myth, and adventure story, which maintain a "thematic coherence" across the novel's "generic discontinuities" (Jameson 1975, 221). Such a thematic unity is also found throughout the various texts of *ACH*, as will become more evident in the ecocritical analysis of the novel in this thesis.

The importance of the fragmented, discontinuous form for the novel's utopian and ecological rhetoric will likewise be discussed below, in section 2.2.2.

The purpose of this section has been to provide context for the novel as a utopian text by discussing it in relation to Le Guin's other utopian works. I have presented *ACH* as a continuation of Le Guin's earlier utopian novels in terms of its critical approach to utopia, its themes and influences, and its heterogenous structure. In the following section, I proceed to elaborate on this discussion by examining how the novel functions as a utopian text.

2.1.2 Aspects of the Utopian Text

In the previous section, I situated the novel within the utopian tradition by examining it in relation to Le Guin's other utopian works. In this section, I continue this discussion by examining the novel in terms of its utopian features and functions. In addition to situating the text more precisely within the context of its genre, the purpose of the following analysis is also to provide an outline of the novel's utopian content. By doing so, I prepare ground for the ecocritical analysis of the novel's utopia in the following two chapters.

In his analysis of utopian fiction, literary and cultural critic Fredric Jameson defines utopian texts as constituting a subgenre of science fiction "specifically devoted to the imagination of alternative social and economic forms" (Jameson 2005, xiv). Jameson's writings provide a framework for a critical analysis of utopian fiction, while also highlighting the complexities and limits inherent to utopian texts. In a manner influenced by Marxist literary criticism, Jameson highlights the "situatedness" of utopian texts in their material, historical and subjective contexts, which results in utopias always being inherently ideological (Jameson 2005, 170–171). Thus, according to this view, a utopian text is always constructed as a *response*, whether conscious and explicit or unconscious and implicit, to certain social problems perceived or experienced in the contemporary moment of its creation. In addition to discussing utopian texts as such "projections of our own social moment and historical or subjective situation", Jameson argues that the function of the utopian themes of these texts is based on a "critical negativity" of oppositions that contrast utopias and present-day reality (Jameson 2005, 211). Finally, Jameson highlights the fact that utopian texts require a utopian "closure", both in terms of their narrative form and their content, most specifically in the way in which utopias

separate themselves from the conditions of the real historical moment (ibid.). All of these elements of utopian texts are evident in *ACH*, and by examining the novel's portrayal of these utopian features, most importantly its critical approach to the question of utopian closure, the text can be situated more firmly within the critical utopian tradition while also providing a clearer picture of the specific utopian content of the novel.

To begin, the novel's content can be regarded as thoroughly utopian in the sense that it envisions a society radically different from the dominant ideology of the contemporary historical moment from which it emerges. In addition, the novel clearly fulfils Jameson's criteria for utopian fiction in terms of its debt to the genre of science fiction. This is exemplified by its future setting, the existence of advanced technology in its fictional world, and its scientifically informed and speculative approach. Furthermore, the novel can be examined as an *ideological* and *contextually situated response* to the conditions of the time of its writing. Published in 1985, *ACH* emerges from the conditions of the late 20th century and displays an awareness of the social problems of its time, such as the detrimental effects of industrialization, patriarchal social structures. Most significantly, the novel displays a jaded, fatalistic perspective on the accelerating developments of consumer capitalism in the 1980s and an awareness of the system's socially and environmentally destructive aspects. The awareness of these perceived social and environmental problems provides the novel with the starting point for its construction of utopia. The novel's critique of modern approaches to the environment is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

ACH also approaches its utopian themes with an attitude of *critical negativity*. According to Jameson, utopian texts work primarily through varieties of negation which comprise their dialectic method (Jameson 2005, 142). In other words, a utopian text distinguishes itself from the dominant ideology of its socio-historical context, from other societies of its fictional settings, and, by extension, from other utopian texts, in terms of negations and critical oppositions. Here, Le Guin's own presumption (in Hardack 2013, 49) of ideological "reversals" as the basic function of science fiction is once again relevant. In particular, the novel takes part in two threads of discourse that, according to Jameson, have been central throughout the history of utopian fiction: the dialogue between abundance and asceticism, concerning labour and its products (Jameson 2005, 148–149), and the dialogue between the urban and the rural, concerning societal organization and individual freedom (Jameson 2005, 159–161). The way in which *ACH* situates itself in

relation to these oppositions serves as an example of how the novel functions within a dialectical mode and constructs its utopia through an attitude of critical negativity.

First, the simple, agricultural, and relatively unwealthy society of the novel's utopia can be considered a response against the dominant 20th century capitalist ideology centred on growth, consumption, and accumulation of wealth. However, it can also be read as an example of what Jameson considers the "ascetic, self punishing impulse" in utopian thought (Jameson 2005, 151). This focus on asceticism is central to Le Guin's utopian fiction, as is the case with *The Dispossessed*, where scarcity is displayed as an inseparable condition for utopia (Jameson 1975, 228). In terms of *ACH*, the ascetic impulse is evident in the way in which the novel's Kesh society approaches the concepts of personal ownership and wealth. The Kesh ideas concerning these concepts are displayed as radically different from those that dominate Western capitalist ideology: for example, in the anarchic, communal settlements of the Kesh, every member of the community is allowed to take and give as much food from the common storage houses as they want or need to (*ACH*, 7), personal property is seen by the Kesh as essentially temporary and transient and whereas excess wealth is frowned upon. The essence of this ideology is best encapsulated in the Kesh proverb "Owning is owing, having is hoarding" (*ACH*, 313). Thus, wealth in the Kesh utopia is centered not on material abundance but rather on moderation and sharing, a focus that sets the novel's society as starkly different from the economic growth and abundance of the 1980s.

Second, the novel also sets its Kesh utopia in opposition to the wealth and abundance found in other cultures of its fictional world. The most important of these is the acquisitiveness and amount of material wealth of the novel's Condor society, which, in contrast to the Kesh, is displayed as a kind of extension of the patriarchal and hierarchical facets of present-day society. Thus, the Condor society serves as a kind of an antithesis to the utopian, non-hierarchical Kesh. In terms of the ideas of wealth and abundance, the Kesh notion of wealth as sharing, demonstrated by the Kesh language having the same word mean both "to give" and "to be rich" (*ACH*, 42), is juxtaposed with the Condor ideology of wealth as power, as exemplified the society's patriarchal family structure and slave-ownership. By highlighting moderation and contrasting the equal Kesh with the patriarchal Condor, the novel juxtaposes its fictional utopia with the violent, hierarchical, and oppressive features of historical and present-day societies.

Therefore, in terms of ideologies of wealth and ownership, the Kesh utopia is portrayed as fundamentally in opposition to its fictional neighbours.

Third, the rural and largely decentralized nature of the Kesh society can similarly be interpreted as an argument in the utopian dialogue between urbanism and rural. In the language of the Kesh, the word for “city” is used not to imply human settlements but to signify spaces that include a degree of otherness from the Kesh people’s lived experience. The novel outlines two distinct but connected Kesh concepts of the city: “the City of Mind”, denoting the network of cybernetic beings scattered across the novel’s future Earth, and “the City of Man”, the term used by the Kesh to describe the period of civilization and history during which humans, according to the Kesh, “lived outside the world” (*ACH*, 149–153). Thus, in terms of this dialectic, the novel once again creates a distinction between the lifestyle of the Kesh society and modernity. This is achieved by the way in which the Kesh society sets itself in opposition with the idea of the city through processes of alterity and othering. In other words, the novel’s utopian society constructs a differentiation between the Self (the Kesh, “living in the world”) and the Other (the two Cities, “living outside the world”). As the Self can construct its identity only by situating itself in relation to the Other (*The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “Alterity”), the construction of critical oppositions between utopia and its surroundings, both historical and fictional, emerge as central to the formation of the utopian identity of the Kesh. Furthermore, in chapter 4 of this thesis I claim that these oppositions are significantly shaped by the novel’s ecological focus.

Finally, *ACH* displays a *utopian closure* necessary to utopian texts while at the same time challenging the idea of isolation suggested by such a closure. The utopian closure, according to Jameson, is a “permanent structural feature” of utopian fiction that can be outlined as the utopian requirement of separation from the historical and material conditions of the surrounding world, motivated by “secession and the preservation of radical difference” (Jameson 2005, 204). Thus, a utopian closure is a *prerequisite* for the formation and function of utopian critical oppositions. In the novel, this closure is achieved in a number of different ways. Most obviously, the utopian society of the Kesh is closed off from the contemporary historical moment in terms of time. *ACH* is set in a future where the industrial capitalist society has by all accounts destroyed itself through war and a self-inflected ecological crisis. Emerging from the ruins of this society long after its downfall, the Kesh society neatly and conveniently takes the place of the old system

without having to confront it or develop as a continuation of it. In other words, the novel's utopia is free of the situatedness that permeates any historical moment and able to construct itself within a kind of temporal vacuum. Thus, the temporal separation between lived reality and the novel's fictional society serves as one source of utopian closure.

The Kesh utopia is also separated from contemporary reality in terms of its access to advanced technology in its fictional future. This technological closure from the present is achieved by the rural Kesh society as a result of its dependence on the network of cybernetic organisms of the City of Mind. The Kesh and the cybernetic network of the City are portrayed as living in a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship. In this relationship, the City of Mind provides the Kesh with crucial means of survival, in the form of access to the network's "[e]ndless knowledge" and the means of communicating and conducting trade with neighbouring societies through computer terminals known as "Exchanges" (*ACH*, 150–151). In turn, the Kesh provide the City of Mind with information of their own choosing, which is used by the network to fulfil its own goal, which is outlined as the cybernetic network's desire to become "a total mental model or replica of the Universe" (*ACH*, 151). The information provided by the City of Mind facilitates the existence of the Kesh utopia by providing a shortcut to information which would otherwise be unattainable for the Kesh in terms of their own level of technological advancement. Thus, the thriving of Kesh society is displayed to benefit from their relationship with the City of the Mind, adding a level of technological separation between the novel's utopia and the historical moment from which the novel emerges.

As the importance of the technological prerequisite for the existence of the Kesh utopia is highlighted throughout the novel, the notion of utopian closure is also called into question. Jameson considers the problem of utopian closure to lie in the fact that such closures, while necessary for "the establishment [...] of utopian space", nevertheless "always tend to betray the ultimate contradictions in the production of utopian figures and narratives" (Jameson 2005, 291). To apply this notion to the novel, the Kesh utopia is displayed as *separate* from the contemporary historical moment in terms of time and technology, and it is this separation, according to Jameson, makes the novel's utopian speculation possible in the first place. However, contradictory to this closure, the novel's utopia is displayed not as completely isolated, but also as fundamentally *dependent* on the relationship it has with its surroundings. In other words, the existence of the Kesh utopia is rendered possible by its relationships with the surrounding cultures of the

Valley, be it through trade in essential materials, as is the case with the nearby society of Usudegd or “Cotton People” (*ACH*, 141), or in information, as is the case with the City of Mind. Thus, the success and survival of the Kesh utopia emerge not only as results of its temporal and technological closure from the contemporary historical moment, but also as results of its embedded position in relation to its environment and its surrounding cultures. As a result, the novel employs a self-aware, critical approach to the concept of utopian closure that accepts the necessity of isolation for utopian societies while simultaneously rejecting the kind of absolute autonomy implicated by such isolation. This further exemplifies the ambiguity and criticality of the novel’s approach to the concept of utopia, as well as the novel’s central themes of embeddedness and reciprocity, to which I will return in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

In this section, I have discussed *ACH* as a utopian text following Jameson’s definition of utopian fiction. The novel displays many common features of the utopian genre. First, the novel can be read as an ideological and situated response to the socio-historical conditions of the time of its writing. Second, as a situated response, the novel’s utopian themes function by employing a strategy of critical negativity common to utopian texts. By way of these oppositions, the identity of the Kesh utopia is formed by constructing a utopian Self in relation to the Other of contemporary culture. Third, the novel displays the necessity of utopian closure, in terms of separating its utopia from the contemporary historical moment. Simultaneously, the novel employs a self-aware, critical approach to such a closure, highlighting the embeddedness and dependence of the Kesh utopia in the novel’s larger network of cultures. These ideas of embeddedness and dependence will grow increasingly significant in the following section, where I elaborate on my discussion of the novel’s utopia by shifting my focus to examine the context of the novel’s ecological depictions.

2.2 *Always Coming Home* as an Ecological Text

In addition to its utopian focus, *ACH* can also be considered an ecologically and environmentally motivated text. In this section, I introduce the novel as such a text. I begin by discussing the environmental motivations of *ACH* considering two of the frameworks from which it has been previously studied: Daoism and ecofeminism. Following this discussion, I proceed to examine the two contradictory ways in which the novel’s ecological depictions function: as examples of utopian *world-reduction*, and as

systemic representations of ecological reality. By contextualizing the novel as particularly ecologically motivated utopian text, I provide a basis for the ecocritical analysis that follows in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

2.2.1 Daoist and Feminist Ecologies

As discussed in section 2.1.1, *ACH* continues and elaborates on themes central to Le Guin's earlier science fiction novels. In addition to focusing on non-hierarchical societal structures and questions of gender, which I have briefly outlined above, the majority of Le Guin's science fiction also displays a central interest in ecology and environmental issues. Such a preoccupation is evident in *ACH*, where the Kesh utopia is portrayed as existing in balance with its environment and maintaining a deep awareness and connection with non-human nature. To begin the discussion of *ACH* as an ecological text, I examine the novel's environmental focus in terms of how it is informed by Daoism and ecofeminism, basing my discussion on previous readings of the novel by Gib Prettyman (2014) and Eric C. Otto (2012), respectively. By doing so, I introduce *ACH* as an ecological text and emphasize the centrality of human/non-human relationships for the novel's utopia.

As previously mentioned, Le Guin's approach to environmental issues displays influences from Daoism. However, according to Prettyman, the centrality of these influences in Le Guin's utopian fiction has been continually downplayed in the discussion of her work by influential literary critics such as Darko Suvin and Frederic Jameson (Prettyman 2014, 56). Considering this, and as these influences have a significance for the ecological motivations of the novel, a discussion on the influences of Daoism on *ACH*'s ecological worldview and its utopia is in order. First, the novel displays a fundamentally Daoist approach to ecology in terms of using the natural world as a source of analogous meaning. Thus, the Kesh texts of the novel display a preoccupation with preferring "analogies to impersonal natural processes" to intellectual abstractions when discussing philosophical questions (Prettyman 2014, 64). This is most evident in Kesh poetry, where such analogies often serve a didactic function. In Kesh poetry, the non-human environment is presented as displaying examples of how human beings should think or act. This is exemplified in the short Kesh poem "The Blue Rock Song":

I am coherent, mysterious and solid.
I sit on dirt in sunlight between the live oaks.

Once I was a sun, again I will be dark.
Now I am between those great things for a while
along with other people, here in the Valley. (*ACH*, 112)

Through the voice of the eponymous blue rock, the poem displays a Daoist preoccupation on the impermanence of all things, which in turn leads to a focus on the present moment emphasized in the poem's final two lines. Similar themes of impermanence and the present recur in most of the Kesh poetry scattered throughout the novel. For example, in the poem "Old Woman Sings", the speaker describes her aging process by comparing herself to a plum that has become a prune "dried on the seed" (*ACH*, 118). In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker asks to be eaten so that her seed can be spit out to become "a tree [...] / blossoming plum" (*ACH*, 119). Thus, like "The Blue Rock Song", the poem highlights the impermanence of earthly existence while displaying a preoccupation with ecological processes. By using non-human nature, such as a rock and a plum, as a source of analogous meaning, these Kesh poems also highlight the way in which the Kesh worldview is influenced by Daoist ideas.

Furthermore, as argued by Prettyman, the novel uses Daoism as an "ecological strategy" that refutes the modern egoistic worldview by "challenging conventional knowledge" and "recognizing the intrinsic characteristics of things" (Prettyman 2014, 66). Thus, the novel challenges the contemporary, conventional society of the present not only through its utopian techniques of negation but also through embodying Daoist values of humility and moderation that emerge "out of a respect for natural processes" (*ibid.*). As such, the previously discussed Kesh idea of ownership as giving instead of hoarding can be argued to exemplify the Daoist influence in the worldview of the novel's utopian society. Furthermore, as in many of Le Guin's science fiction works, the novel uses the idea of an ecological crisis as a means of challenging the righteousness of conventional knowledge. As Prettyman claims, the idea of an ecological crisis is a powerful way of making ecology perceptible, as "only when things go wrong and a crisis arises do most people understand that they have lost the way" (Prettyman 2014, 68). The ecological crisis that serves as the source of the downfall of modern capitalism in the fictional future of *ACH* is evident and still experienced in the form of "permanent desolation of vast regions through release of radioactive or poisonous substances" in the areas surrounding the Valley and the "permanent genetic impairment from which [the Kesh] suffered most directly in the form of sterility, stillbirth and congenital disease"

(*ACH*, 159). The Kesh view this crisis as a result of “deliberate and conscious acts of evil, serving the purposes of wrong understanding, fear, and greed” (*ACH*, 159). In other words, the novel accuses modern, Western modes of knowledge of being responsible for the ecological crisis, while contrasting these modes of knowledge with the Daoism-influenced, ecological thinking of the Kesh. Thus, Daoism-influenced approaches to the natural world and knowledge emerge as one side of the novel’s ecological approach.

In addition to the influence of Daoism, *ACH* also displays an ecofeminist notion of the connection between gender and the environment. As explained by Garrard, *ecofeminism* is a branch of feminism that considers the anthropocentric dualism of nature and culture and the androcentric dualism of man and woman to be intrinsically linked through the cultural identification between nature and women, thus connecting the gendered oppression of women with the human oppression of non-human nature (Garrard 2011, 23). As an ecofeminist text, *ACH* is shown to attack these two forms of oppression by emphasizing a positive connection between gender and environment. This is apparent in the way in which the Kesh display a “identification of woman and animal” that, unlike in patriarchal societies where such an identification “is used to devalue”, is for the Kesh portrayed to accomplish “rather the opposite” (*ACH*, 420). By extension of this connection between femininity and non-human nature, *ACH* equates the patriarchal with the imperialistic (Jameson 2005, 67), and the gendered domination of men over women, by the novel’s Condor culture for example, is displayed as connected to the domination of human culture over non-human nature. Thus, the novel, displays what Otto considers a “cultural ecofeminist” link between the feminine and the non-human, while embracing this link “as a way of dealing with the social and environmental problems inherent in patriarchal culture” in its construction of a utopian society (Otto 2012, 21). As a result, the Kesh utopia of *ACH* emphasizes the culturally imposed “feminine” values, of nurture, caring and interdependence, over patriarchal values of individualism and rationalism (Otto 2012, 21–22). At the same time, however, the novel also employs a critical approach to the by highlighting “the artifactual nature of gendered categories” through its fragmented structure, and rejects the idea of the gendered spectrum being “natural and something to be dealt with using separatist categories” by instead presenting gender difference as culturally and linguistically constructed (Otto 2012, 32–33). Thus, an ecofeminist approach to gender and the non-human emerges as another central aspect of the novel’s ecological worldview.

Considering the importance of Daoist ecology and ecofeminism to *ACH*, the Kesh utopia emerges as significantly ecologically motivated. As discussed above in section 2.1, the novel's utopian impulse, the way in which it sets itself as a response to its historical context, stems, in part, from the consciousness of environmental problems in the time of the text's creation. As a manifestation of such an impulse, the novel reconfigures both society and the historical material conditions and the prevalent ideology of the time period to provide ground for a more ecologically sustainable way of being. I will return to this idea in the ecocritical analysis of the following two chapter. Before this, however, I provide further context for this analysis by discussing the novel's ecological depictions in terms of their utopian and systemic features.

2.2.2 World-reduction and Systems

In this section, I discuss *ACH*'s ecological depictions in terms of their utopian and systemic features. As a utopian text, the novel displays techniques of simplification and idealization, while as an ecologically focused text, the novel also seeks to depict the world in a realistic, systemic manner. Thus, I argue that the novel attempts to ground its utopian speculation by situating this speculation within ecologically focused depictions of the relationships between nature and culture.

First, as *ACH* is a utopian text and therefore both ideological and speculative, the realism of its ecological depictions must be discussed. As a utopian text, the novel can be argued to employ the technique of *world-reduction*. World-reduction, as outlined by Jameson in an analysis of Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is a narrative technique of science fiction in which "the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification" (1975, 223). In other words, the concept of world-reduction suggests that works of science fiction often simplify reality in order to make their worlds more suitable for ideological and scientific speculation. In *ACH*, world-reduction can be perceived firstly in the novel's use of an utopian closure to achieve a degree of alterity in relation to contemporary reality, and secondly in the fact that the novel's themes function through critical oppositions that are fundamentally based on the *absence* of certain features of contemporary reality, such as industrial societies or capitalism, from the novel's fictional future. In other words, the novel's utopia exists within a world from which the complexity of historical situatedness is erased. Therefore,

the novel, via its utopian features, can be considered to employ world-reduction as a method of “wished-for escape from the frustrating complexity of lived existence in the modern world” (Prettyman 2014, 61). However, I argue that despite its use of world-reduction, *ACH* in fact *highlights* the complexity of lived existence in the world. This is achieved by the novel’s focus on systemic portrayals of ecological relationships.

I argue that *ACH* rejects world-reduction by embodying a worldview that presents reality as a totality of interconnected and interdependent systems. Such a view of *ACH* is put forth by Tom LeClair (1989) in his analysis of what he calls 20th century *systems fiction*. According to LeClair, the genre of systems fiction comprises fiction that displays a *systemic worldview* rooted in 20th century scientific theories, most importantly in the form of ecology and systems theory, which have also influenced many environmentalist movements of the 20th century (LeClair 1989, 13). Systems fiction applies this worldview to literature by depicting the world as a network of *interconnected* parts or actors that construct *embedded and hierarchical* wholes, with the highest whole being the ecosystem of the planet, in which all other systems, such as the cultural systems of ‘society’ or ‘family’, are embedded (LeClair 1989, 12). LeClair outlines the emergence of systems fiction as tied to an epistemological shift in scientific discourse that took place in the early 20th century with the emergence of the new fields of ecology and systems theory, a shift in which the 19th century focus on independent parts and reductive laws gave way to a focus on the study of wholes and the relationships between them (LeClair 1989, 7). Thus, in systems fiction, the world is displayed as a network of interconnected, interdependent actors, such as human and non-human individuals and communities, embedded within a hierarchy of larger totalities.

For LeClair, in addition to displaying such a worldview, systems fiction is also marked by various distinct formal and narrative approaches. Systems fiction approaches its subjects via “excess”, presenting vast amounts of dense, disparate and often fragmented information to achieve a sense of “proportion” and “scale”, as well as using various narrative methods and aesthetic strategies, such as the use of multiple framing devices and the use of a “systems persona” that collects and arranges the vast information depicted in the systems novel (LeClair 1989, 20–24). *ACH* clearly fulfils the thematic and methodical criteria discussed above, and LeClair dissects the novel’s systemic features at length in his survey of 20th century American systems fiction (1989, 204–237). Considering this, I refrain from a thorough analysis of the novel’s systemic features here.

Instead, in the following discussion, I focus only on the significance of the novel's systemic methods and strategies for its ecological depictions.

In terms of its ecological depictions, the most important systemic method displayed by the *ACH* is its focus on presenting large amounts of different and disparate information. As discussed above, the novel takes the form of a collection of texts from different sources and genres. This structural strategy makes it possible for the novel to construct a "systemic" view of its Kesh utopia by highlighting the embeddedness and connectedness of different kinds of information to "simulate simultaneity, process, and reciprocity" (LeClair 1989, 210). As such, the fragmented, non-linearly ordered texts, such as the central narrative of Stone Telling (*ACH*, 7-42, 173-201 & 340-386), are independent texts in themselves, and as such comprise wholes of their own while being simultaneously crucially embedded in the larger whole of the novel. This embeddedness is highlighted by the way in which the individual chapters form connections with the texts that surround them. Thus, the world of Stone Telling's narrative, for example, is enhanced by other parts of the novel, such as the non-fictional or purely "anthropological" descriptions found in the "Back of the Book" (*ACH*, 407-532). By doing this, the novel highlights the embeddedness of the personal narratives of individual characters within the larger context of the novel's society and culture. As a result, the novel's structure reflects its systemic worldview by highlighting the embeddedness and interconnectedness of both its texts and characters.

Most significantly, the structure of *ACH* reflects the systemic focus found in its ecological depictions. First, the fragmented, embedded structure of *ACH* makes it possible for the novel's ecological depictions to take many forms. These ecological depictions range from those situated within Kesh narratives, those found in Kesh literature in the form of myth, drama and poetry, and those of more descriptive, anthropological sections. By presenting its world as a collection of fragmented texts, the novel's ecological depictions provide both subjective and personal as well as objective and general portrayals of the environment and the non-human. Despite their generic and stylistic differences, most of the ecological depictions found in the novel share a similar thematic focus. This focus can be outlined as one that emphasizes the embeddedness, interdependence and reciprocity of all beings existing within the ecological system. The novel's thematic focus is most lucidly displayed in the tale of Flicker from the Kesh village

of Telina-na, who during a vision sees the world “with the hawk’s eyes” and describes the experience as follows:

It was the universe of power. It was the network, the field, and lines of the energies of all the beings, stars and galaxies of stars, worlds, animals, minds, nerves, dust, the lace and foam of vibration that is being itself, all interconnected, every part part of another part and the whole part of each part, and so comprehensible to itself only as a whole, boundless and unclosed. (*ACH*, 290–291)

Flicker’s depiction of the universe shares many similarities with the worldview of systems theory. First, Flicker sees the universe as a “boundless” and “unclosed” whole, a network comprising of all living and non-human beings that reflects the idea of the interconnectedness of beings emphasized in systems theory. Second, Flicker displays an awareness of the systemic notion of the hierarchical embeddedness of parts and wholes, where “every part [is] part of another part and the whole part of each part”. These similarities display the systemic focus of the novel’s ecological depictions.

In this section, the *ACH*’s utopian and ecological aspects have been examined via a discussion of utopian world-reduction and systems fiction. I have claimed that the novel’s ecological depictions reject the simplification of reality suggested by the concept of world-reduction by presenting reality in a systemic manner, emphasizing the interconnectedness and embeddedness of beings within the larger totality of the ecosystem. In addition, I have posited that *ACH*’s use of systemic strategies and methods influences its ecological depictions in various ways. First, the novel’s systemic approach to information, embodied in the novel’s fragmented yet interconnected structure, reflects its ecological worldview by emphasizing the idea of embeddedness. Second, the novel’s fragmented texts display a thematic unity, in which the concepts of embeddedness and interconnectedness emerge as central aspects of the novel’s ecological worldview. These themes will be discussed in further detail in the ecocritical analysis of chapters 3 and 4.

2.2.3 Towards Ecocriticism

In this section, I have contextualized *ACH* as a utopian and ecological text. During this discussion, I have presented the novel as a work of utopian fiction, concentrating on its utopian themes and features, and situated it within the critical utopian tradition. Following this, I have shifted my focus towards the novel’s ecological side and introduced *ACH* as an ecologically motivated text. During the discussion of the novel’s systemic

ecological depictions towards the end of this chapter, I have already approached some of the thematic features concerning the relationship between the human and the non-human that recur throughout the novel in the form of the concepts of embeddedness and interdependence. In the following chapter, I take this analysis further by looking at the novel's ecological portrayals through an ecocritical lens. During this analysis, I examine the ways in which the novel challenges the anthropocentric worldview embodied in the concept of the nature/culture dualism, and focus on the ways in which *ACH* seeks to reconfigure the relationship between the realms of the human and the non-human. This, in turn, leads to a clarified picture of the novel as an ecological utopian text.

3 *Always Coming Home* and the Nature/Culture Dualism

In the previous chapter, I discussed *ACH* in terms of its utopian and ecological features in order to contextualize the novel as a particularly ecologically focused utopian text. During this discussion, the analysis has gradually approached the central focus of this thesis, the novel's ecological depictions. In this chapter, I proceed to analyze these depictions in detail from an ecocritical point of view. By concentrating on the novel's discussion of ecocritical questions, specifically its reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism, I highlight how the novel's ecological depictions provide both a critique of and an alternative to contemporary environmental ideologies. In addition, this analysis provides the foundation for my re-examination of the novel's approach to utopia in the following chapter of this thesis.

I begin my ecocritical analysis of *ACH* in section 3.1 by introducing ecocriticism as a field and presenting the ecocritical questions central to the novel. After this introduction, in section 3.2, I proceed to analyse the novel's depiction of the relationship between the human and the non-human in terms of its rejection of the dualistic view of nature and culture. By examining the novel's reconfiguration of the anthropocentric nature/culture dualism, I highlight the ways in which the novel portrays ecological relationships in a systemic, non-dualistic manner, emphasizing the importance of the interconnectedness and mutual significance of the human and non-human realms. Finally, in section 3.3, I connect the threads of my ecological analysis and direct my focus on the question of utopia and ecology, providing a basis for my re-examination of the novel as a specifically ecological utopian text in chapter 4.

3.1 Ecocriticism and *Always Coming Home*

I begin my ecocritical analysis of the novel by introducing ecocriticism as a field of research and its relationship to *ACH*. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as a field of literary and cultural criticism that aims to "bring environmental considerations into the discourse of literary criticism and theory" that first emerged as a discipline in the early 1990s, "born of an awareness of environmental crisis and a desire to be part of [its] solution" (Glotfelty 2014, ix-x). Its developmental history can be summarized by using a wave metaphor, as popularized by Lawrence Buell. According to Buell, the first wave of ecocriticism, emerging at the beginning of the 1990s, was directly inspired by

environmental activism and thus “inclined to celebrate nature rather than querying [it] as a subject”, whereas second-wave ecocriticism, being more “diverse and diffuse”, displays a more critical view of environmentalism, its ideology and its politics, and emphasizes that science and literature are to be “read both with and against each other” (Buell in Garrard 2014, 1–2). Thus, the difference between the first and second waves of ecocriticism can be outlined as a difference in attitude to environmentalism on one hand, and to science on the other. In addition, the two waves differ in their theoretical emphasis: whereas early ecocriticism called for “a greater scientific literacy” and saw “science as a corrective to critical subjectivism and cultural relativism”, subsequent ecocriticism has moved towards an extended critique of Foucauldian “bio-power”, outlined as “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power” (Buell in Garrard 2014, 2). It must be noted that Buell’s wave metaphor, although useful in a general sense, is a broad simplification of the history of the critical genre, and as such does not account for the existence of second wave concerns in early ecocriticism, and vice versa. It also downplays the importance of ecofeminism and feminisms of colour that displayed ecocritical ideas well before the emergence of what Buell considers the first wave of ecocriticism (ibid.). As such, Buell’s wave metaphor is offered here not as a strict categorization, but instead as an illustrative method of representing the general development of the field of ecocriticism.

Always Coming Home, published in 1985, predates the emergence of ecocriticism as a field of study, and as such only anticipates what Buell considers its first wave. However, as discussed below, the novel’s portrayal of the natural world and the relationship between the human and the non-human displays various similarities to the approach emphasized in ecocritical literature. Thus, I argue that *ACH*, by displaying both ecocritical ideas and methods before the emergence of the critical field, serves as a significant proto-ecocritical text. The connection between *ACH* and the ecocritical tradition is evident in the novel’s ecofeminist features, as discussed in section 2.2.1, its focus on scientifically influenced natural depictions, and its portrayal of a utopian culture emerging from and existing within a bioregional context.

First, *ACH* anticipates ecocriticism by approaching the relationship between the human and non-human from an ecofeminist point of view. As previously discussed in section 2.2.1, the novel can be considered to approach the divide between human culture and non-human nature in terms of the ecofeminist identification between the feminine

and the non-human and the related connection drawn between oppressive patriarchal hierarchies and the oppression of non-human nature. Thus, the roots of *ACH*'s depiction of the relationship between the human and the non-human can be derived from its "intellectual consideration of gender difference" which simultaneously highlights "the malleability of the structures and symbolisms determining female and male relationships with nonhuman nature" (Otto 2012, 39).

Second, as discussed above in section 2.2, the novel displays a strong ecological focus. This focus can be further divided into two types. First, the novel's environmental depictions function, in a manner similar to nature writing, as a form of celebration of the natural world, and as such display a significant environmentalist influence similar to that found in early ecocriticism. This is highlighted by the vast amount of nature writing found in the novel, the specificities of which will be discussed in the following ecocritical analysis. Secondly, as discussed above, the novel displays an interest in ecology and systems, emphasising the hierarchical embeddedness of actors and parts within the larger ecological whole. As such, the influence of scientific literature on the novel, especially in the form of ecology and systems theory, is evident, and, similarly to first-wave ecocriticism, this scientific background is used to critique the forms of culturally constructed ideas of the relationship between the human and the non-human.

In addition to these ecocritical preoccupations, the novel's ecological worldview is marked by its similarity to indigenous literature. The literatures of various indigenous cultures have emerged as an important subject of study and analysis in some branches of the environmental humanities, which find these cultures to display a deep ecological awareness that challenges Western notions of the relationship between the human and the non-human (see e.g. Adamson 2014). In terms of Le Guin's fiction, the similarity of the Kesh lifestyle to those of traditional Native American cultures has often been noted. For example, Jameson outlines Le Guin's utopian ideal as "a nostalgic celebration of the societies of an older Native American mode of production" (Jameson 2005, 67). This similarity between the novel and Native American literatures has been noted by Le Guin who, in an interview with Jonathan White (1994), comments on the influence of Native American literature on the Kesh utopia of *ACH* as follows:

When I started thinking about [*ACH*] I took a lot of time to discover what the book was going to be. Once I realised I wanted it to grow out of the Napa Valley I looked around for a literary precedent. [...] The only literature *of that earth* was Native American oral

literature. The people of the valley itself, the Wappo, are gone. Even the name they used for themselves is gone. [...] So I read other Northern Californian myths and legends and songs. [...] I read widely from traditions all over the United States. My problem was to find a way to use the literature *without stealing or exploiting it*, because we've done enough of that to Native American writing. I certainly didn't want to put a bunch of made up Indians into a Napa Valley of the future. That was not what I was trying to do. What I got from reading California oral literature was a sense of a distant and different quality of life. (Le Guin in White 1994, n.p., emphases added)

This quotation highlights the importance of the Native American literary tradition on the creation of the novel's utopia while pointing out two important features concerning its ecological depictions: the idea of the text as stemming from its environment, and the idea of using indigenous literature as an influence without exploiting it.

First, Le Guin's statement and its emphasis on the reading of Native American literature *of* the Napa Valley reflects the bioregionalist aspect of the construction of the novel's Kesh utopia. A *bioregion* can be defined as a unit of space, defined by the properties of the natural environment (in contrast to spaces defined borders drawn by humans), within which individuals exist "in a physical, mental, and spiritual relationship with the whole" (Robertson in Barnhill 2012, 212). Thus, the connection between an environmentally defined space and the cultures that exist within it becomes central. The bioregionalist aspects of *ACH* have been examined by Davis Landis Barnhill, who uses Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch's term *novum*, suggesting a "critical and subversive" vision of a radically new society, to present the bioregionalist term *natum*, describing ecologically focused texts that present both "an ecosocial critique of contemporary culture and an ecological alternative" (Barnhill 2013, 216). Barnhill argues that *ACH*'s Kesh society is an example of such a *natum*, displaying an ecological critique of the environmental ideology of the present, and a radically different, ecologically sustainable society (Barnhill 2013, 223). Thus, the novel can be argued to be a paradigmatic, albeit narrowly localist, bioregional text (*ibid.*). In this sense, *ACH*'s utopia, constructed partly upon the tradition of Native American literature that is viewed to be deeply connected with its natural surroundings, emerges itself as a bioregional construction that reflects the ecocritical notion of the connection between environmentally defined spaces and cultural identities. Thus, an ecocritical reading of the novel must consider the way in which human actions emerge from and exist within the non-human environment.

Second, the quotation also addresses the questions of representation and cultural appropriation. By doing so, it exhibits a postcolonial awareness of the power representative systems, such as literature, have in repeating oppressive hierarchies and power relations. In the case of *ACH*, the Kesh utopia and its idealization of the relationships of historical and present-day Native American communities with the non-human can be construed as a somewhat appropriative simplification of the diversity and complexity of indigenous cultures. Thus, through its environmental depictions, the novel's utopia can be viewed to contribute to what some ecocritics consider "inaccurate and politically dubious" myths about "supposedly 'authentic' premodern peoples who dwell in perpetual harmony with nature" (Adamson 2014, 172). As Le Guin's text uses the literatures of these cultures as influences for the Kesh utopia without attempting to depict or copy the cultures themselves, the answer to the question of whether the novel's portrayal of its fictional society is appropriative of indigenous peoples remains ambiguous and provides fuel for a broader debate concerning cultural appropriation that lies outside the focus of this thesis. Despite this, I argue that any ecocritical reading of *ACH* must confront the similarities between the novel's Kesh utopia and real indigenous cultures from a critical point of view, and use previous ecocritical examinations of indigenous worldviews as tools with which to approach the novel's ecological depictions.

As discussed in this section, *ACH* can be considered an ecologically motivated, proto-ecocritical text that both interacts with ecocritical ideas and displays similarities to the kinds of strategies found in early ecocriticism. In addition, the novel displays a bioregionalist approach to the relationship between nature and culture, and shares similarities with the ecological worldviews found in various indigenous literatures of North America. These features greatly influence the ecological worldview in the novel. In the following section, I begin my ecocritical analysis of this worldview, examining the ways in which the novel addresses the central ecocritical topic of the relationship between human culture and non-human nature.

3.2 Ecology Between Nature and Culture

Having discussed the novel in relation to the development of ecocritical thought, I now turn to analyze the novel's reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism. Doing so, I emphasize the ways in which the novel displays nature and culture primarily as *culturally constructed* conceptual categories that betray the underlying ecological reality of the

interconnectedness and *interdependence* of human and non-human life. This further cements *ACH*'s role as an ecocritical text, as it echoes Garrard's argument that "[t]he challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse" (Garrard 2011, 10). In the following analysis, I examine the ways in which the novel navigates its way around these challenges to present a critique of contemporary society and the nature/culture dualism. I begin my analysis with an examination of the ways in which the novel challenges the dualism in section 3.2.1, and follow this with an analysis of the novel's reconfiguration of this dualism in section 3.2.2.

3.2.1 Challenging the Dualism

In this thesis, I argue that *ACH* reconfigures the anthropocentric notion of the nature/culture dualism and replaces it with an ecological worldview that stresses the interconnectedness and interdependence of human and non-human life. I argue that *ACH* challenges the idea of the nature/culture dualism by portraying it as a malleable and artificial cultural construct. In this section, I argue that the novel achieves this by reconfiguring the boundaries between nature and culture in its ecological depictions, specifically by challenging the validity of nature as a conceptual category. I begin by introducing the theoretical framework of the analysis, before proceeding to analyze the novel's utopian reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism.

In the following analysis, I examine *ACH*'s ecological rhetoric in terms of cultural theorist Timothy Morton's concept of *the ecological thought*. For Morton, this concept forms a strategy of critical thinking that is both *about* and *informed by* ecology, and seeks to understand reality as a totality of connections between human and non-human beings (Morton 2010, 7). This focus on the interconnectedness of beings displays similarities to the kind of a systemic worldview embodied in *ACH*, as outlined above in section 2.2.2. Thus, I argue that a reading of *ACH* that makes use of Morton's concept as a tool for examining the novel's ecological depictions is valid as Morton's model provides a critical strategy for discussing the ideas displayed in Le Guin's work. Most importantly, Morton's ecological thought serves as a critique of the nature/culture dualism. As a model that views reality as an interconnected totality, Morton's ecological thought is fundamentally in opposition with the kinds of ideologies in which nature is idealized and alienated from

the realm of the human (Morton 2010, 5). Indeed, Morton argues that even modern-day environmentalism often finds itself guilty of such an idealization of nature, one that reinforces the myth of nature as a “faceless mother” that provides for humanity, a myth that originates from the idea of “possession” central to sedentary agricultural societies (Morton 2010, 7). In contrast to this, Morton’s philosophy is presented as an “ecology without nature” (Morton 2010, 3) that challenges the divisions between what are traditionally considered nature and culture. Considering this, according to Morton, a truly ecological reading practice would resist the idealization and acceptance of nature as a pre-packaged and artificial concept, aiming rather to “think the environment beyond rigid categories” (Morton 2010, 10–11). In the following analysis, I approach this kind of an ecological reading, using Morton’s work as a critical tool for examining the ways in which *ACH* challenges and reconfigures the concepts of nature and culture.

To begin my analysis, I examine how *ACH*’s Kesh utopia conceptualizes the difference between the human and the non-human. The most significant source for the novel’s reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism stems from the Kesh system of kinship and tribal organization, known as the system of Houses. This model is considered by the Kesh to be a “working metaphor” rather than a rigid religious system (*ACH*, 49). As such a metaphor, it influences all facets of Kesh life and experience. In the system of Houses, the world and its beings are grouped into the “nine Houses of the living and the dead” that encompass all living and non-living things, past and present (*ACH*, 43). In this system, the borders between nature and culture are blurred, and humans and non-humans alike share equal status as “people” (*ibid.*). Thus, the novel displays similarities to what Morton proposes as the ethics of ecological thought, outlined as an effort “to regard beings as people even when they aren’t people [...] without the concept of Nature” (Morton 2010, 8). Thus, *ACH* reconfigures the nature/culture dualism by constructing a categorical system that both rejects the dominance of culture over nature and emphasizes equality between humans and non-humans.

Being emphasized as a metaphorical system instead of a religious or totalistic ideology, the system of Houses echoes Morton’s resistance towards the rigid, dualistic categorization of the natural and cultural realms. In the Kesh system, the nine Houses are divided into two main groups, the “Five Houses of Earth” and the “Four Houses of Sky” (*ACH*, 43). The Houses of Earth include humans and the “peoples that live with human people”, such as all domestic and game animals that are considered individuals, all plants

used by human beings, bodies of water, and the earth itself (*ACH*, 43–44). In turn, the four Houses of Sky are home to the “the peoples of the wilderness”, such as the sun, “all animals and plants considered as the species rather than the individual”, the people in dreams and stories, as well as “most kinds of birds, the dead, and the unborn” (*ibid.*). Within individual houses, Kesh people belonging to certain professional and ritual groups, known as Lodges, Societies and Arts, are grouped together with various species of living organisms and other non-human beings. For example, the House of Obsidian is displayed to include humans belonging to the ritual “Blood Lodge” and the practitioners of the “Glass”, “Tanning” and “Cloth Art[s]” (*ACH*, 432), as well as all domestic animals (*ACH*, 414). Thus, the House system does not draw categorical lines between culture and nature, or the human and the non-human, but instead categorizes beings according to their individuality, materiality and distance from the immediacy of Kesh experience.

The system of Houses is also connected to the Kesh idea of the universe as an embedded, systemic whole, introduced in section 2.2.2. As such, all living and non-living things are portrayed to exist as equals in an interconnected system of “the network, field, and lines of the energies of all the beings” (*ACH*, 290), all existing within the “house of houses” of the universe (*ACH*, 306). This reflects Morton’s ecocritical concept of *the mesh*, which emphasizes “the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things” (Morton 2010, 28). For Morton, this ecological interconnectedness is evident in all living organisms due to their shared evolutionary descent, whereas the link between living and dead organisms is found in the ways in which dead organisms shape the ecology of the present: as examples, Morton points out fossil fuels and sedimentary mountains, both made out of parts of dead organisms (Morton 2010, 29). Most significantly, Morton argues that this interconnected totality has “no definite center or edge” (*ibid.*). Instead, Morton claims that “[w]e orient ourselves according to backgrounds against which we stand out” (Morton 2010, 30). Thus, in *ACH*, the Kesh system of Houses exemplifies a model in which the novel’s utopian society orients itself not against the background of nature as an anthropocentric conceptual category, but rather by making a division between the world of their immediate experience and the more distant world of “the wilderness” (*ACH*, 43). Nevertheless, this system is explained by Pandora to be “profoundly metaphorical” (*ACH*, 49), and the Kesh are displayed to view both realms as interconnected and integral parts of the ecological whole, as all beings of the Nine Houses are “dancing the same dance” (*ACH*, 307). In other words, the novel reconfigures the

nature/culture dualism by challenging the validity of nature as a conceptual category, and by integrating both nature and culture into an interconnected and unified conceptual framework.

In addition to challenging the validity of the nature/culture dualism, *ACH* displays non-dualism to be central to the formation of its utopian society. In the Kesh system of Houses, the novel displays a model in which a non-dualist approach to the nature and culture is envisioned as a source of new cultural meanings and practices. By doing this, the novel directly challenges the perceived validity and fixity of the nature/culture dualism while also displaying how the rejection of such a dualism is central to envisioning new social and cultural forms. Beginning as a model of categorization of human and non-human beings and the world around them, the system of Houses spreads to inform other areas of Kesh society and culture. As a “working metaphor” (*ACH*, 49), the House system manifests itself in Kesh culture and society in a variety of ways. For example, the system’s influence is evident in the House-specific public buildings known as “heyimas” that serve as the centres of communal activity in all Kesh towns and settlements of the Valley (*ACH*, 49). Likewise, in the language of the Kesh, the system’s influence is visible in the the form of two grammatical modes, the “Earth and Sky Modes” (*ACH*, 44). The system also informs various ritual practices, most importantly the House-specific ritual dances or “wakwas” that follow the changes of the seasons (*ACH*, 45). Thus, the ideological system that begins as a tool for the categorization of human and non-human beings becomes a model that informs the cultural existence of the Kesh, manifesting itself in their architecture, language, and ritual practices. As a result, the reconfiguration of the boundaries between the human and the non-human emerges as a central guiding force in constructing the novel’s utopia. The centrality of the Kesh’s approach to the non-human for the construction of the novel’s utopia is further discussed in chapter 4.

Significantly, the novel’s non-dualistic approach to nature also opens possibilities for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the human and the non-human. Firstly, by viewing non-human beings as equal people, and therefore accepting them into the same categorical realm as human beings, the novel’s utopian society creates space for the receptiveness towards non-human agency that is not accounted for by a dualistic view of nature and culture. As a result, the Kesh are portrayed as providing for and receptive to the non-human beings in a variety of ways. For example, in the first part of Stone Telling’s narrative, doors are left open “for the cat and the wind” (*ACH*, 10), manzanita leaves shout

“She’s moving!” when one tries to sleep among them (*ACH*, 19), and deer are given blessings when encountered (*ACH*, 20). Thus, as implied by their conceptual system of Houses, the Kesh are shown to approach other beings as equal people, whose meanings, actions, and well-being are given the same weight as to those of humans. As such, the Kesh display a deep awareness of the ways in which humans and non-humans coexist in the novel’s future Napa Valley. This focus on coexistence is shared by Morton, who claims that “[e]cology is profoundly about coexistence” (Morton 2010, 4). Thus, the Kesh are displayed to possess a heightened ecological awareness, being receptive to the agency of non-human beings as well as the meanings created by them, coexisting with them within a relationship that both supplies and draws cultural meaning from non-human nature.

The novel highlights the role of non-human nature as a source of cultural meaning for the Kesh, further challenging the idea of the dualistic isolation between the categories of nature and culture. This is evident in the way in which the literature of the Kesh is particularly preoccupied with drawing metaphoric meaning from the non-human beings with which they share the novel’s Valley. Most significantly, non-human beings supply Kesh literature and philosophy with ways to conceptualize the world. As discussed above in section 2.2.1, the role of non-human nature as such a source of conceptual meaning is particularly prominent in Kesh poetry. Most specifically, Kesh poetry displays similarities to Daoist texts by approaching nature as a source of analogies that serve a moral or didactic purpose. In other words, the Kesh use non-human nature as a model that can be studied in order to learn how human beings should act. Therefore, human culture is portrayed to never exist separately from non-human nature. Instead, the novel depicts non-human nature as something humans can and should appreciate and learn from. Thus, culture is displayed as being molded and influenced by the non-human environment.

In addition to poetry, non-human nature is depicted as a source of cultural meaning in Kesh myth. In this aspect of *ACH*, the influence of Native American literature on it is at its most evident. Folklorist Barre Toelken notes that Native American folklore serves various purposes: among other things it stores and dramatizes cultural, artistic and moral values, provides teaching and instruction, while also preserving cultural history (Toelken 2003, 10). Similarly, the mythological narratives of the Kesh found in *ACH* can be read as manifesting the values and worldview of the novel’s fictional culture. As such manifestations, they exemplify the novel’s reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism by highlighting the essential connectedness of human and non-human worlds.

Thus, I now turn to discuss the depictions of the non-human in Kesh mythology, examining two of the novel's most central non-human symbolic figures: coyotes and birds.

Non-humans are central to the Kesh mythical narratives, most notably in the form of generic animal figures with rich symbolic meanings attributed to them. Arguably the most central of these is the Coyote, whose depiction as a trickster-like figure in Kesh myths and folk tales reflects a similar depiction of the animal in Native American folklore. In various Native American mythologies, the Coyote is a simultaneously clever and foolish shape-shifting archetypal trickster, characterized by an unquenchable appetite and a disdain for taboos (Leeming 2005). In Kesh stories, the Coyote is presented as a similar kind of figure, often making mischievous fun out of humanity's desire to possess and reign over other beings. For example, in one oral story recorded by Pandora, the Coyote tries to prevent a war between bears and human beings by cutting off the testicles of their leaders, but ends up angering the humans who subsequently end up shooting and killing almost all bears. After the war, the few surviving bears confront the Coyote for not helping them, to which the Coyote responds as follows: "Those people fuck too often and think too fast. You bears only fuck once a year and sleep too much. You haven't got a chance against them. Stay here with me. I don't think war is the way to live with those people." (ACH, 55). The storyteller uses this tale to illustrate why bears and other animals stay "in the wilderness with Coyote" instead of struggling against the unredeemable human people (ibid.). Thus, this story exemplifies the figure of the Coyote as a mischievous and clever trickster. Furthermore, the tale presents the Coyote as a non-human symbol of the wilderness.

The symbolism of the Coyote is further emphasized in another Kesh folk tale describing the ecological crisis that has taken place in the novel's past. In this story, as in other Kesh origin myths, humanity is blamed for destroying the world: "He cut every tree he saw, he shot every animal he saw, he made war on all the people." (ACH, 158). As a result of these human actions, the world is turned into a "poisoned" wasteland (ibid.). In this wasteland, the surviving humans, "weak, dirty, hungry, no-account people" (ibid.), ask the Coyote for help. The Coyote listens and comes to rebuild the world: "Where she walked she made the wilderness. She dug canyons, she shat mountains." (ACH, 159). By remaking the wilderness, the Coyote revitalizes the world, making human and non-human life flourish: "Under the buzzard's wings the forest grew. Where the worm was in

the dirt, the spring ran. Things went on, people went on.” (ibid.). This too displays similarities to the mythical figure of the Coyote in Native American mythologies, where the animal is often portrayed as either partaking in the creation of the world or saving humanity from destruction (Leeming 2005, n.p.). Thus, the Kesh Coyote is portrayed in Kesh mythology as a symbol of a wilderness that nurtures and cares for both human and non-human beings. In other words, these myths emphasize how humans exist as embedded within non-human nature. Furthermore, the symbolic significance of the Coyote in Kesh folklore also serves as a “constant reminder of man’s natural origins, of wilderness” (LeClair 1989, 229). Thus, in addition to highlighting the dependence of humans on the non-human beings around them, the figure of the Coyote challenges the anthropocentric idea of human exceptionalism as something more than animal, by reminding humans of their inherent similarity to non-humans.

In addition to the trickster figure of the Coyote, birds are also central to Kesh mythology. Likewise, their role also displays similarities to the significance they have in Native American mythologies. Examining the role of birds in Native American cultures, Thomas Gannon notes that birds, with their capability of flight, are often viewed to symbolize spirituality and the soul, while being perceived as being “as much agents of consciousness and volition” as humans themselves (Gannon 2009, 224–245). Thus, while often viewed by Western commentators as *symbols* of pure transcendence, birds in Native American mythology are more precisely animals that serve as *metaphors* for transcendence (Gannon 2009, 225–256). Therefore, unlike the “anthropomorphic projections” of animal figures in Western literature, the role of birds in indigenous American folklore suggests a “dialogic” and “veritable interspecies relationship” (Gannon 2009, 225). In other words, the significance of birds to Native American cultures highlights how these cultures both impose and derive meaning from their relationships with non-humans. The ecological rhetoric of *ACH* shares a similar emphasis, as exemplified by the role of birds in Kesh mythology.

In the Kesh system of Houses, most species of birds are distinct from other animals in that they are not included within the houses of Earth, instead grouped as belonging in the houses of Sky (*ACH*, 44). Therefore, they are viewed by the novel’s culture to exist in the same realm as ghosts, the dead, and spirits. However, as they can also interact and coexist with the people of the Earth, the Kesh view birds as messengers that “fly back and forth across the canyon” between the realms of the living and the non-living, “singing and

speaking from one side to the other” (*ACH*, 311). As a result, birds gain a specific significance in practices that are concerned with death and interaction with the spiritual realm. In Kesh funerals, seeds are often scattered on the new grave “so that birds would gather there to carry the mourner’s songs to the Four Houses [of Sky]” (*ACH*, 88). Likewise, the feathers of birds are viewed to be messages from the houses of Sky, “the words that the dead spoke” (*ACH*, 43). Thus, similarly to Native American folklore, the Kesh use birds as metaphors for transience that are, as people of the Sky capable of interacting with the people of the Earth, simultaneously both material beings and metaphors for spirituality.

As discussed above, non-humans are central to Kesh experience, literature, and folklore. By doing so, the novel is outlined to accomplish three things. First, the novel displays obvious similarities with the approach to the non-human found in Native American folklore. Second, the centrality of non-human figures in Kesh literature and folklore emphasizes the significance non-human nature has in shaping human culture. Third, the meanings attributed to non-human figures in Kesh folklore are used to challenge the idea of human dominance over non-human nature. As discussed above, this is exemplified by both the trickster figure of the Coyote, who reminds humans of their animal nature, and by the special role of birds, who act as messengers between the houses of Earth and the houses of Sky, and therefore hold a more central position in the ideological system of the Kesh than humans do.

To summarize the analysis thus far, *ACH* challenges the notion of a nature/culture dualism by highlighting its malleability as a cultural construction. The novel achieves this by reconfiguring these categories into a conceptual system in which culture and nature are not distinct or isolated from each other, instead being displayed as profoundly interconnected. Thus, the novel’s portrayal of the relationship between nature and culture does away with the idea of nature as a separate, subordinate conceptual category. By doing so, the novel’s ecological worldview displays similarities to Morton’s philosophy of ecology without nature. In addition to this, by reconfiguring the nature/culture dualism, the novel sheds light on the relationship between the human and the non-human. This is achieved in two ways. Firstly, *ACH* displays its utopian culture as having a keen awareness of non-human agency. Secondly, the novel emphasizes the role of non-human nature in constructing cultural meaning. As a result, the novel questions the dominance of human culture over non-human nature by displaying nature as a culturally

experienced and constructed category. In the following section, I turn my focus to more specific implications of *ACH*'s reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism, in which the traditional categories of nature and culture are further entangled, and replaced with a systemic model that suggests an interconnected, interdependent ecological totality.

3.2.2 Nature as Culture

In the previous section, I discussed the ways in which the novel challenges the validity of the nature/culture dualism by reconfiguring the two categories. As such, the analysis has remained faithful to previous ecocritical readings of the novel that have found *ACH* to display the realm of non-human nature as shaping the realm of human culture. To summarize these readings using a quotation from Otto, the novel can be viewed to dismantle the dualistic view of the nature/culture dualism in favor of “a spirituality of individual, social, and cultural embeddedness in nonhuman nature” (Otto 2012, 30). However, although this kind of an ecocritical reading does well to highlight the ways in which nature is portrayed to influence culture, it is still limited in a variety of ways when approached from the point of view of Morton’s concept of ecology without nature, which emphasizes that “[s]ince everything is interconnected, there is no background and no foreground” (Morton 2010, 28). In terms of the nature/culture dualism specifically, a reading that sees culture as *embedded* in nature is essentially flawed in that it still subscribes to the myth of nature as a *distinct* conceptual category that, despite being considered as dominant to culture, still fundamentally exists as a *background* to human activity. In other words, this kind of a reading sets itself up to challenge the nature/culture dualism, but ultimately finds itself bound by its rigid conceptual categories, incapable of doing away with the dualistic view altogether. Most significantly, I argue that this kind of a reading does not fully correspond with the systemic ecological depictions and rhetoric of *ACH*, where the universe is presented as “all interconnected” (*ACH*, 290–291). Instead, in the following discussion I propose a new kind of an ecocritical reading of the novel, in which I emphasize its focus on the *interdependence* of human and non-human life.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the ways in which the novel presents nature as an anthropocentric and malleable conceptual category. However, by doing so, the novel also reconfigures the other side of the traditional dualism. Thus, I begin with a re-examination of the concept of culture itself. In this task, I employ the *biological idea of*

culture as put forth by the ecocritic Helena Fader. Fader, drawing on research from the fields of animal studies and biology, argues that while “the experience of nature” as studied by ecocriticism is always culturally mediated, biology and other natural sciences can help to “remind us that culture is itself a natural medium, created by and subject to evolutionary and other ecological processes” (Fader 2014, 228). In other words, this biological idea of culture suggests that culture be conceptualized as a biological and ecological phenomenon instead of a purely human construction. Thus, the concept of culture is broadened to encompass a variety of socially transmitted traditions, practices, and forms of knowledge found both in human societies and non-human populations (Fader 2014, 231). According to Fader, humans are only “one animal among many in this shared world, living in interwoven interspecies communities, a series of polities themselves comprised of differing societies” (Fader 2014, 227). By arguing that culture is inherent to both humans and non-humans, as well as that it is fundamentally shaped by ecological forces, Fader’s biological idea of culture is both material and posthumanist in its focus (Fader 2014, 228), rejecting the anthropocentrism inherent to the dualistic separation of nature and culture. Instead, the biological idea of culture suggests that non-human nature *is* cultural in the same way as human societies are, and that all cultures, both human and non-human, are shaped by ecological forces.

The biological idea of culture opens another way to examine *ACH*’s ecological depictions. As discussed in the previous section, the Kesh view other living beings as people, equal to humans in their “working metaphor” (*ACH*, 49) of the system of Houses. In addition, as discussed above, the Kesh literature presented in the novel displays a significant awareness of the similarities between humans and non-humans, as well as an acknowledgement of the cultural meanings derived from non-human actions. In this sense, the novel’s ecological rhetoric resonates with Fader’s idea, where the recognition of the fact that humans and non-humans coexist in “interspecies communities” and the acknowledgement of “the implications of our real similarities with and differences from other creatures” are emphasized (Fader 2014, 227–278). By presenting non-humans as equal people that are central to the Kesh way of life, as well as by acknowledging the role of non-humans as the source of interspecies cultural meaning, *ACH* moves away from the anthropocentric idea of human exceptionalism that is inherent to the dualistic view of nature and culture. Thus, although in *ACH* the non-human cultural activity is limited to creating cultural meaning through human experience, the novel’s concept of culture

nevertheless moves away from encompassing a purely human construction. Instead, the idea of culture as presented in the novel is displayed as a phenomenon shared by humans and non-humans alike. More significantly, analyzing *ACH*'s depictions through the framework of the biological idea of culture renders a more detailed examination of its portrayal of the material relationship between the Kesh and their environment possible. By characterizing culture as a natural medium subject to ecological forces, Fader's idea suggests that cultures, both human and non-human, are defined and shaped by their environment. I argue that the ecological depictions of *ACH* share this emphasis, displaying human and non-human cultures as products of ecological processes and relationships.

Highlighting the importance of non-humans for the development and survival of human culture and vice versa, *ACH* displays human and non-human individuals and cultures as profoundly interconnected and interdependent. Thus, the novel's ecological depictions can be examined in terms of what the feminist scholar Donna Haraway conceptualizes as *natureculture*. As explained by Garrard, Haraway's term synthesizes the concepts of nature and culture and suggests a "continual interpenetration and mutual constitution of the human and non-human worlds" (Garrard 2011, 208). Drawing on feminist theory, biology, and anthropology, Haraway's work rejects the nature/culture dualism by highlighting the ways in which the two categories are neither universal nor opposite (Haraway 2003, 8). Instead, Haraway uses the concept of natureculture to dismantle this dualism, highlighting the ways in which humans and non-humans shape each other by continuous, long-term processes of "co-habitation, co-evolution and embodied cross-species sociality" (Haraway 2003, 4). For Haraway, one example of a naturecultural relationship is the coevolution of dogs and humans as "companion species" that has drastically shaped and continues to shape the bodies and minds of both species throughout their intertwined history (Haraway 2003, 31). For Haraway, such relationships form the basis for all human and non-human life, as "[c]o-constitutive companion species and co-evolution are the rule, not the exception" (Haraway 2003, 32). As a result, Haraway shuns away from both cultural and biological determinism, instead likening the world to a "knot in motion" (Haraway 2003, 2), where the realms of natural and cultural activity are tied together inseparably, shaping each other over long periods of time.

Haraway's concept replaces the dualistic view of nature and culture by a complex web of multidirectional relationships that are significant for the evolutionary

development of both human culture and non-human nature. In the following analysis, I use the concept of natureculture and its implications as tools for examining the interdependence and mutuality of the human/non-human forces depicted in *ACH*, highlighting how the two realms are portrayed to shape each other in significant ways. As a result, a more nuanced picture novel's ecological worldview is presented. This serves to support my argument that the novel's ecological worldview moves away from *both* anthropocentrism and biocentrism in favor of a more ambiguous and holistic conceptualization of ecological relationships.

I begin the discussion of natureculture in *ACH* by examining the ways in which the Kesh interpret the material relationship between themselves and their environment. I argue that the complex relationships of interdependence and coevolution suggested by the concept of natureculture are echoed in the ecological ideology of the Kesh. Thus, the novel's portrayal of ecological relationships suggests that nature and culture are intertwined and shaped by their continuous coexistence. This connection is emphasized in the way in which the Kesh view their interaction with their non-human environment in terms of reciprocal, dynamic relationships of gift-giving and gift-taking. For the Kesh, the natural world manifests itself as "a river of gifts flowing" (*ACH*, 229) that accommodates and nurtures the well-being of their society. For example, one brief Kesh text praises oak trees as "giving much shade, giving much food, great wealthy ones worthy of praise" (*ACH*, 311), connecting the Kesh idea of wealth as giving with the life-nurturing role of non-human nature. In accordance with the previous ecocritical readings of the novel discussed above, this can be viewed as a conceptualization of human embeddedness in non-human nature. However, I argue that the novel's portrayal of ecological relationships as gift-giving and gift-taking also highlights the interdependence and bidirectionality of such relationships.

As the Kesh view every being as an equal part of the larger totality of the universe, the use of non-human beings as *resources* that accommodate human survival is seen by the Kesh as an ecological act that should be approached with great respect and moderation. This ideology is exemplified in the short text "Person and Self" authored by Old Jackrabbit from the Kesh village of Telina-na:

[I]t is one another whom we greet, and bless, and help. *It is one another whom we eat. We are gatherer and gathered. Building and unbuilding, we make and are unmade; giving birth and killing, we take hands and let go.* Thinking human people and other animals,

the plants, the rocks and stars, all the beings that think or are thought, that are seen or see, that hold or are held, all of us are beings of the Nine Houses of Being, dancing the same dance. (*ACH*, 307, emphasis added)

As every being is viewed by the Kesh to be fundamentally equal, the use of other beings as resources is justified by an awareness of the impermanence and interdependence of all things that “*make and are unmade*”. Most importantly, this requires an acceptance of one’s own mortality, an understanding of the fact that like all living beings, humans are both “*the gatherer and the gathered*”. Thus, each being within the ecological whole is seen by the Kesh to ultimately return to it as a resource, to be used by other living beings. This understanding of the cyclical nature of the ecosystem is also connected to Kesh spirituality. In a chapter concerning Kesh funeral practices, Pandora explains the Kesh attitude towards the use of other living organisms as food in terms of the people’s belief in the transmigration of souls. According to Pandora, for the Kesh a cow that is killed for food is viewed to be “*cowness giving itself [to the Kesh] as food because it has been properly treated and entreated*”, which leads to the act of killing exemplifying an instance of “*being in general: a moment in place: a relationship*” (*ACH*, 92–93). Thus, the act of killing is seen by the Kesh to be an ecological act of gift-giving and gift-taking.

However, as the Kesh view that “*it is one another whom [they] eat*” (*ACH*, 307), the practices of foraging, hunting, and agriculture also gain ritualistic aspects. The goal of Kesh rituals concerning these processes is to approach “*the mysteries of animal-human interdependence and cooperation*” (*ACH*, 420). Although justified by the Kesh belief in the cyclical flow of all things and the transmigration of souls, the act of killing a non-human for food emerges as a specifically ritualistic act, stemming from the need to acknowledge the killed being as an equal person. Pandora explains that when domestic animals are killed by the Kesh for food, a woman of the Blood Lodge has to address the animal with a short, formulaic verse thanking the animal for giving the Kesh “[*their*] need”, receiving in turn “[*the Kesh’s*] words” (*ACH*, 90). According to Pandora, the formula is “*gabbled without the least feeling or understanding often*”, but “*never omitted*” (*ibid.*). Even when breaking a branch, picking a flower or swatting a mosquito, the formula is always uttered by the Kesh, often shortened into only “*my word[s]*” (*ACH*, 93). Similarly, the Kesh are told to have “*hundreds*” of specific ritualistic hunting and fishing songs (*ACH*, 91). Thus, the material gifts received from the non-human environment are returned with spiritual gifts, in acknowledgement of the ecological consequences of human actions. These

ritualistic verbal practices highlight the way in which the Kesh acknowledge their dependence on their non-human environment, and the way in which they approach the material relationship with the non-human in a careful, conscious manner. Most significantly, these practices emphasize the way in which the novel portrays the human/non-human relationship to be bidirectional. As a result, the relationship is portrayed as not only as a manifestation of human embeddedness in nature but also as a two-way process in which the material and spiritual gifts between humans and non-human are given and taken, and in which the ecological consequences of these gift-givings and gift-takings are acknowledged.

Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of the way in which Kesh approach their material relationship with their non-human environment further questions the validity of nature and culture as independent and separate conceptual categories. This is most evident in the way in which the Kesh's foraging and agricultural practices influence the non-human environment around them. As Pandora explains, the Kesh society lives off a combination of foraging and farming: "Hunting-and-gathering is supposed to be a mode of subsistence incompatible with farming; when people learn to herd and farm they stop hunting and gathering, as a rule. The Kesh disobeyed this rule." (*ACH*, 437). In terms of subsistence methods, the similarities between the novel's future Kesh society and the historical Native American peoples of California again become relevant. As the ethnoecologist M. Kat Anderson, who has studied the agricultural practices of California's historical Native American peoples, writes, their approach to environmental resources does not comprise a static relationship with the environment, but rather a collection of sophisticated practices that significantly modify and preserve the diversity of plant and animal populations (Anderson 2005, 1). According to Anderson, the historical Native American cultures of California exemplified a type of land management that was both selective and careful in its intensity and frequency, and therefore allowed for the sustainable harvest of plant and animal resources over the course of long periods of time (Anderson 2005, 1-2). Thus, Anderson challenges the anthropological hunter-gatherer stereotype, where foraging is viewed as a precarious lifestyle that makes use of environmental resources more or less randomly and without much planning, instead arguing that these kinds of cultures actively modify and make use of plants and animal populations in a careful and calculated ways, through selective cultivation and other land management practices (*ibid.*). In other words, foraging cultures can be viewed as actively

shaping and influencing the diversity and richness of the non-human environment around them through their land management practices. This kind of an active, sustainable relationship between the human and the non-human is evident in the Kesh society's agricultural and foraging practices.

By viewing foraging cultures as active agents in shaping the ecology of their environment, the boundaries between natural and cultural realms are further blurred. As Pandora explains, the Kesh live primarily off gathering "wild produce – acorns, greens, roots, herbs, berries, some requiring great patience to collect and process", doing so "not at whim but methodically, going yearly in due season to the family's trees, the town's seed meadows or cattail-beds" (*ACH*, 437). Hunting is outlined as another form of subsistence for the Kesh, although "of very little importance to their food supply", being mostly done "by children" (*ibid.*). In addition to hunting and gathering, the Kesh are also portrayed to live off small-scale farming. As Pandora explains, "since large families, a large private food-supply, and a competitive attitude were all socially disapproved, there was no need or motivation to give up gathering for heavy farming" (*ibid.*). However, Pandora emphasizes that "what they planted and prepared as food was various" (*ACH*, 438), and that there is "no word in Kesh for famine" (*ACH*, 437). Thus, the Kesh approach to foraging and agriculture is displayed to be like those of historical Native American societies. What is important in this similarity is what it entails for the relationship between humans and non-humans. According to Anderson, the land management practices of the Native American peoples of California display a "complex" and "intimate" ecological knowledge arrived at over long periods leading into "some measure of ecological harmony" (Anderson 2005, 127). Similarly, the Kesh utopia of *ACH* is presented as ecological in the sense that the novel's fictional society displays a level of ecological knowledge and harmony in its land management practices.

Instead of providing a static background for cultural activity, the non-human environment of *ACH* is displayed to be shaped by its continuous interaction with the Kesh. This idea is encapsulated in the way in which the Kesh divide their environment not into strictly natural and cultural spaces, but instead to their world and "the wilderness" of the houses of Sky (*ACH*, 46). This displays a further similarity with Native American ecological thinking, where "wilderness" is often considered "a negative label for land that has not been taken care of by humans for a long time" (Anderson 2005, 3). As a result, the idea of human contact and interaction with the non-human environment emerges as

central when discussing the novel's ecological worldview. This serves as another example of how, in *ACH*, human and non-human life is presented as continuously and inseparably intertwined, influencing each other as a result of their interconnectedness. As a result of this, the novel not only portrays the realm of human culture as embedded within non-human nature, but also displays these two categories as continually shaping each other in a bidirectional relationship, where the environmentally embedded society influences the diversity of its non-human surroundings. Such a relationship moves away from both anthropocentrism and biocentrism to instead suggest a *decentered* relationship. This is argued by Morton, who posits "[t]here is no being in the middle" of the interconnected ecological system (Morton 2010, 38). Likewise, in the novel, the natural and cultural realms are shown to merge into the kind of "knot in motion" (Haraway 2003, 6) implicated by the concept of natureculture, where humans and non-humans are portrayed as defined by their ecological interdependence.

In summary, then, the ecological worldview of *ACH* seems to be more nuanced than what previous readings have suggested. When approaching the novel's ecological depictions from the perspective of material relationships between humans and non-humans, the novel can be argued to reject both anthropocentric and biocentric ideas of nature and culture in favor of a complex, ambiguous examination of ecological relationships. As always, this is not to say that this kind of a reading is by any means conclusive itself, either. Since *ACH* is marked by its multiple perspectives and genres, its ecological depictions can be analyzed in a number of ways, with differently weighted analyses resulting in a different idea of the text's ecological rhetoric. However, as I have sought to prove in my analysis, the rejection of a dualistic view of nature and culture in favor of a more systemic understanding of ecological relationships remains the central feature of the novel's ecological portrayals.

3.2.3 Towards an Ecological Utopia

In this chapter, I have examined *ACH* through an ecocritical lens and discussed the ways in which the novel rejects, challenges, and replaces the notion of a dualistic division between nature and culture. To summarize the discussion thus far, I briefly readdress my central arguments and their implications here. First, I have argued that the novel displays both an ecocritical focus and an ecocritical approach in its environmental and cultural depictions. The novel can be characterized as a proto-ecocritical text that echoes

ecocritical themes and methods despite being published some time before ecocriticism emerged as a field of literary criticism. Secondly, I have posited that the novel's ecocritical rhetoric is hinged on the way in which the novel refutes the traditional, Western notion of a nature/culture dualism. *ACH* challenges this idea by presenting a fictional culture where such dualistic categories do not exist, and by depicting the relationship between the human and the non-human in non-dualistic terms. By analyzing these depictions, I have highlighted the ways in which the novel's non-dualistic approach to nature and culture displays similarities to contemporary ecocritical philosophies, such as those presented by Morton, Fader, and Haraway. Finally, I have argued that the novel does not merely challenge the idea of nature/culture dualism but seeks to replace it with a more unified ecological ideology where natural and cultural realms are interconnected and shape each other through different ecological and evolutionary processes. Thus, the novel displays an ecocritical approach to the relationship between the human and the non-human that refutes the idea of nature and culture as distinct, separate, and valid conceptual categories in favor of a systemic understanding of ecological relationships.

Having examined the ways in which *ACH* challenges a dualistic notion of nature and culture and how it replaces this notion with an ecological ideology of the interconnectedness of all beings within the ecological whole, I next return to the subject of utopia and ecology. In the following chapter, I argue that the novel's rejection of the nature/culture dualism is central to its utopian rhetoric. I use the ecocritical discussion of the novel presented above as the basis for my re-examination of the novel as a utopian text. Approaching *ACH*'s Kesh utopia from an ecocritical standpoint, I posit that the ecological focus of the text serves as the basis for its depiction of utopia while simultaneously providing the starting point for the novel's critical approach to utopia. More precisely, I argue that a significant portion of the novel's utopian rhetoric stems from the ecological worldview embodied in its non-dualistic approach to the relationship between nature and culture. By doing so, in the next chapter I present *Always Coming Home* as a significantly *ecological* utopian text.

4 Ecological Utopianism

The focus of this thesis now returns from the discussion of the novel's ecological focus back to its utopian functions. In this chapter, I discuss how *ACH*'s reconfiguration of the nature/culture dualism is intrinsically linked to its depiction of utopia. Using the analysis of the previous chapter as my critical tool, I examine the novel's utopian rhetoric in ecocritical terms. By doing so, I argue that the novel's non-dualistic approach to nature and culture serves as the basis for its utopian depictions. Thus, I posit that *ACH* is an inherently *ecocritical* utopian text that gains much of its utopian features from its ecological worldview, and presents its utopia in a critical fashion as a result of its ecological focus. I begin by elaborating on the first part of this argument, focusing on the ways in which the novel's non-dualistic approach to nature and culture influences its utopian rhetoric. Moving on from this, I readdress *ACH*'s critical approach to utopia by discussing it from an ecocritical perspective, highlighting the way in which ecology acts to limit the novel's utopian speculation. By doing this, I bring the utopian and ecocritical readings presented in the previous two chapters of this thesis together, and present the novel as an ecocritical utopian text that displays ecological concerns as central and inevitable to the imagining of a desirable society.

4.1 Utopia Stemming from Ecology

In this section, I discuss how the ecological worldview of the novel *influences* its utopian depictions. Using the ecocritical analysis of the previous chapter as the starting point for this discussion, I argue that *ACH*'s utopian rhetoric stems from its non-dualistic approach to the relationship between nature and culture. Thus, I present the novel as a fundamentally ecocritical utopian text.

I argue that *ACH*'s ecological worldview influences its utopian speculation in a variety of ways. The most prominent of these is the way in which the non-human environment of northern California serves as the basis for how the novel's utopia is imagined. I have already discussed this briefly in Chapter 3, when highlighting the importance of the bioregionalist connection between human experience and the non-human environment in the novel's ecological depictions. Considering both Barnhill's (2013) analysis of the novel and Le Guin's statements about the novel "growing out of the Napa Valley" (Le Guin in White 1994, n.p.), *ACH* can be regarded as a bioregional text that

emphasizes the importance of the non-human environment in shaping human societies. Thus, emerging from the “difficult land” of the Napa Valley that “answers greed with drought and death” (*ACH*, 52), the novel’s utopia is revealed to be intrinsically and inseparably connected to its setting. In addition to this, as discussed in section 3.2.1, the system of Houses that encapsulates the Kesh’s non-dualistic approach to nature and culture is displayed to be the source for many of their cultural and social practices, such as architecture, rituals, and language. Thus, both the environment of the Valley and the ecological worldview of the Kesh are portrayed as central to the formation of the novel’s utopia.

The significance of the non-human environment in shaping the Kesh utopia becomes even more clear when considering the novel’s metafictional sections. In this case, the most important sections of the novel are the short, fragmented chapters that focus on the novel’s main narrator Pandora and her process of imagining and ultimately arriving at the Kesh utopia. These chapters are scattered throughout the novel in a chronological fashion and describe the process of an “archeology of the future” (*ACH*, 3) that transports Pandora from present-day reality into the imagined, utopian Kesh society. To explain Pandora’s role, I return briefly to LeClair’s systems theory-influenced analysis of the novel, introduced in the second chapter of this thesis. According to LeClair, Pandora’s character can be viewed to be an example of a *systems persona* (LeClair 1989, 205). LeClair views the systems persona to be one of the generic features of systems fiction, a narrator or focal character who acts as a “collector rather than creator” while serving as a kind of “front” for the systems novelist themselves (LeClair 1989, 22–23). Thus, the systems persona acts as the arranger and connector of the vast amount of fragmented information presented in the systems novel, while also reflecting the systems author’s position as an arranger of information. As a collector and arranger of material both from and about the Kesh utopia, Pandora fulfills this role, acting as a liaison between the present reality and the novel’s imagined future. In this sense, the goals of Pandora and Le Guin are very similar, and the character can be viewed as a manifestation of the process of utopian speculation.

The importance of the novel’s ecological focus to its utopian speculation become evident as Pandora’s narrative progresses. At first, Pandora feels unsure and anxious about her process: “She shuts her eyes, she does not want to see, she knows what she will see: Everything Under Control. The doll’s house. The doll’s country.” (*ACH*, 53). Because

of this, Pandora refuses to look to the future through the distancing, objectifying instrument of science, "the telescope", instead choosing to begin her process from the material fragments she finds in her environment, such as "[a] piece of madrone wood", "a piece of obsidian", and "[a] piece of red clay", all things that can be "felt and held and heard" (ibid.). This sets up the material, ecological reality of the present as the starting point of the novel's utopian speculation. Later, when sitting by a creek and watching small flies "dance in a swarm" over the bodies of two dead birds, Pandora experiences her first concrete step towards imagining the Kesh utopia, beginning to see "[t]he people [...] dancing the Summer" (*ACH*, 95). In other words, Pandora arrives closer to the Kesh utopia by likening the movements of insects to people partaking in a ritual dance. Thus, like in Kesh poetry discussed in the previous two chapters, the non-human is used by Pandora as the source of analogous meaning, transporting the novel's central narrator and metafictional imaginer closer to her utopian vision through an identification between non-human and human activity. Pandora's perceptual association can be viewed to highlight the way in which humans identify with nature, "finding correspondences [...] that shuttle back and forth between human and other life, solidifying the bonds between them" (LeClair 1989, 213). As discussed in the previous chapter, such correspondences are central to the ecological thinking of the Kesh and are prominent in *ACH*'s various Kesh texts and narratives. Thus, the scene displays Pandora as approaching not only the specificities of the Kesh utopia, but also their ecological thinking. Most significantly, the human experience of the non-human environment is displayed to be the starting point for Pandora's imaginative journey towards utopia, while the utopian and ecological themes of the novel are shown to be directly linked from the very beginning.

Pandora's arrival at the Kesh utopia through her experience of the natural environment brings the connections between ecology and utopia to the foreground. As the novel's utopia is approached by Pandora through an identification between non-human and human life, the Thus, the novel's ecological worldview can also be examined as determining the nature of its utopian strategies. Here, Jameson's idea of the critical negativity of the utopian text becomes once again relevant. To briefly restate this idea, the utopian text can be viewed as being constructed through critical, categorial oppositions between the experienced reality from which the text emerges and the utopian fiction it imagines. As previously discussed, *ACH* displays such categorial reversals of its historical context, most importantly in terms of favoring an ascetic, rural,

decentralized, and non-hierarchical society drastically in opposition with the predominantly capitalist, urban, and hierarchical Western ideology of the 1980s. As the novel's utopian society can be considered to stem from the beginning with ecological concerns in mind, these concerns can be viewed to shape the critical oppositions with which the society is constructed.

As the novel's focus on the relationship between the human and non-human is displayed to serve as the starting point for its utopian speculation, the connections between its ecological focus and its other themes are likewise emphasized. Thus, the novel's non-dualistic portrayal of nature and culture can be viewed to be closely connected to its examination of other themes, such as gender, philosophy, art, and society. As previously discussed, these kinds of connections have been emphasized in previous ecocritical readings of the novel, where *ACH*'s ecological approach has been most notably presented as an extension of either ecofeminist examinations of gender (Otto 2012) or Daoist philosophy (Prettyman 2014). My emphasis on the connection between the novel's ecological worldview and its utopian strategies is clearly echoed in these previous readings, where the novel's environmental focus is viewed to contribute to its utopian function of presenting an alternative, desirable society that serves as a critique of the present: Otto posits that *ACH*'s ecofeminist message demands "the liberation of women and nonhuman nature from oppression" (Otto 2012, 40), whereas Prettyman argues that the "Daoist ecology" of Le Guin's work functions to provide a "critical cognitive reframing" of the ideology of endless growth inherent to 20th century capitalism (Prettyman 2014, 72). However, as the above discussion of the novel as a fundamentally ecological utopian text suggests, the novel's ecological focus should not be considered simply an extension of its feminist, Daoist, or other themes, but rather be examined as the *foundation* for its utopian discussion of societal and philosophical issues. As such, the novel's ecological worldview, centered on its non-dualistic approach to nature and culture, emerges as one of the primary tools with which the novel questions the rigidity of gendered categories and the connection between anthropocentric and patriarchal forms of oppression, while echoing the ecological implications of Daoist philosophy.

In summary, *ACH*'s ecological worldview can be perceived as constituting the foundation for the novel's utopian speculation. As discussed above, the novel's utopia is constructed in bioregionalist terms, emerging from a specific space as the result of its consideration of the relationship between the human and the non-human. Thus, the

novel's ecological rhetoric can be perceived as forming the basis of its utopian critical oppositions and influencing its approach to the other themes of the text. Considering this, the novel emerges as a truly *ecological* utopian text that displays ecological concerns in its utopian speculation. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this by examining the ways in which the novel's ecological focus contributes to its critical approach to utopia.

4.2 Utopia Limited by Ecology

Finally, if *ACH* is to be considered a specifically ecological utopian text, the novel's critical approach to utopia also needs to be re-examined in terms of its ecological depictions. Thus, in this section, I discuss the ways in which the ecological worldview of the novel serves to *limit* its utopian rhetoric. I posit that *ACH's* ecological focus serves as the most central source of its critical approach to utopia by providing material limits for the novel's utopian speculation.

As previously discussed in chapter 2, *ACH* can be considered a critical utopian text. As such a text, the novel's Kesh society is presented as a utopian reversal of the material conditions of the novel's historical context, rather than as a definitive, totalistic blueprint of a perfect society. As discussed above, the criticality of the novel's approach to utopia can be considered as stemming from the ambiguous, multifaceted, and fragmented presentation of its Kesh culture. In addition to this, as discussed in the previous section, the specificities of the Kesh utopia can be regarded to stem from the novel's ecological worldview. As a natural extension of this idea, the criticality of the novel's approach to utopia can likewise be regarded as a result of its focus on ecological concerns. Thus, I next examine the ways in which the novel's ecological depictions function to provide critical limits to its utopian speculation. I accomplish this by analyzing the novel's juxtaposition between the Kesh utopia and their neighboring people, the warlike and hierarchical Condor. By comparing these two societies and their greatly different approaches to the non-human environment, the centrality of ecological limits to *ACH's* utopian speculation is emphasized.

The novel displays the environment as partaking in the construction and success of societies. This is most evident in the novel's examination of the Condor, a patriarchal and war-like society that serves as an antithesis of the Kesh utopia. The differences between the novel's utopian society and its Condor antithesis, as well as the ultimate downfall of the Condor society, are described in the novel's central narrative, a coming-

of-age story told from the perspective of Stone Telling, a young woman born to a Kesh mother and a Condor father. During this narrative, Stone Telling, living in the Kesh village of Shinshan, is reacquainted with her absent father, a high-ranking Condor war chief. Torn between the two sides of her divided identity and grieved by feeling like “half one thing and half another and nothing wholly” (*ACH*, 29), Stone Telling decides to leave the Kesh to live with her father in the cities of the affluent Condor. However, after being accepted into the Condor society, Stone Telling is quickly disillusioned by its hierarchical and patriarchal structure, which she sees as a symptom of a society continuously “at war with everyone else” (*ACH*, 345). As a result, Stone Telling begins to long for escape back to her childhood home. At the end of the narrative, she manages to escape the Condor society just before its self-inflicted downfall, and returns to live among the Kesh. Thus, Stone Telling’s narrative navigates between the Kesh society and its antithetical neighbors, examining the differences between the novel’s utopian culture and its totalitarian, patriarchal alternative.

The downfall of the Condor civilization is portrayed to be the result of various ecological and environmental factors. Ideologically, the Condor and the Kesh are displayed as having contradictory views on the relationship between nature and culture, as the Condor are shown to approach the non-human as subordinate to the human. This is evident in the patriarchal Condor hierarchy, where an emperor-led ruling class of “True Condors” rules over the farmer class of the “tyon”, as well as the underclass of the “hontik”, comprised of “women, foreigners, and animals” (*ACH*, 193). As previously discussed in section 2.2.1, this kind of a patriarchal system highlights the novel’s ecofeminist identification between gendered and anthropocentric forms of oppression. In addition, the Condor hierarchy displays a vastly different approach to the non-human than that of the utopian, non-dualistic, equal ecological ideology of the Kesh. The Condor are displayed throughout the novel as a violent culture that views both non-humans and non-Condor humans as inferior to them. The society is described by Pandora as communicating only “through aggression, domination, exploitation and enforced acculturation” (*ACH*, 379). Thus, the Condor society is portrayed as a mirror image of the Kesh utopia, approaching the non-human environment through violence and domination.

Later in the novel, the patriarchal, anthropocentric, and aggressive ideology of the Condor becomes the source of the society’s downfall. As Stone Telling’s narrative progresses, the Condor people begin to suffer from famine as a result of their excessive

and inefficiently directed use of natural resources: Stone Telling explains that the causes of this famine emperor “had ordered The Condor to make the City in the lava beds to be safe from enemies, but nothing much grew in that black desert”, and that “[g]rain that animals and humans would have eaten was eaten by the machines” designed for use in the Condor’s continuous wars (*ACH*, 351–352). Finally, while concentrating on wars against its neighboring peoples in search of more agricultural and mineral resources to support its ever-growing empire, the Condor society suffers a self-inflicted collapse. Discussing the downfall of the Condor empire, Pandora outlines the inefficient use of the information available to them via the cybernetic network of the City of Mind as a central cause. As Pandora explains, by using the network to obtain the information needed to build powerful and advanced weaponry and other material advancements instead of pursuing co-operation with their neighboring peoples, the Condor are revealed not to realize “the hopelessness of [their] project” in the absence of “the world wide technological web” on “a planet depleted of many of the fossil fuels and other materials from which the Industrial Age made itself” (*ACH*, 379–380). As Pandora notes, the cost of such projects throughout human history has been “incalculable, impoverishing the planet’s substance forever and requiring the great majority of humankind to live in servitude and poverty”, reframing the question of the downfall of the Condor to be not “why did they fail” to “why did they try” (*ACH*, 380). Thus, the future ecosystem of the planet is displayed to limit and ultimately suppress the growth and technological advancement of the Condor empire by the very absence of the materials and large-scale cultural systems necessary to build such an empire. As a result, ecological and environmental factors are displayed to greatly shape the fates of societies in the novel’s post-industrial future by way of providing limits to cultural and technological advancement.

In contrast, the thriving Kesh utopia is displayed to be a direct result of environmental and evolutionary forces that shape human cultures in the novel’s future. This is best exemplified in Pandora’s analysis of the Kesh in comparison to the destroyed Condor society. Discussing the unsuccessfulness of the Condor imperialist project, Pandora presents the idea of the utopian society as an adaptation to ecological and evolutionary forces:

Is it possible that the genetic changes worked by the residues of the Industrial Era upon the human race, which I [Pandora] saw as disastrous – low birth

rate, short life expectancy, high incidence of crippling congenital disease – had a reverse side also? Is it possible that natural selection had had time to work in social, as well as physical and intellectual terms? [...] [I]s it possible that in thus opting not to move “forward” or not only “forward,” these people did in fact succeed in living in human history, with energy, liberty, and grace? (*ACH*, 380–381)

Here, the idea of evolutionary forces shaping human culture echoes, once again, the ideas suggested by the biological idea of culture and the concept of natureculture. In essence, Pandora posits that the Kesh utopia is in fact a result of a long-term adaptive process, in which long-term ecological and evolutionary forces, such as genetic mutations and natural selection, have shaped human culture to fit its environment in a more vital and sustainable manner. Therefore, unlike the Condor, whose attempts to command, harness, and wage war on the environment are displayed to result in the destruction of their society, the Kesh are portrayed to thrive as a result of their level of adaptation to their surroundings. Thus, the Kesh society becomes a utopia as a result of its decision to not move “forward” from their subsistence lifestyle, a choice that stems from the culture’s acknowledgement of the ecological limits that restrain and influence it. In contrast, the destruction of the Condor society is portrayed to be the result of a culture that does not acknowledge or act according to these limits. Therefore, in *ACH*, existing in harmony with the environment in a way that favors subsistence above progress is displayed as a necessity for the formation of a sustainable, feasible utopia.

The contrast between the fates of the novel’s two cultures highlights the idea of ecology as a force that limits the agency of human societies. Displayed as being connected with, reliant on, and shaped by their non-human environment, the novel’s Kesh and Condor cultures are portrayed from an ecologically critical perspective. This focus on ecology as a force that provides critical limits to utopian speculation in Le Guin’s work is highlighted by Prettyman, who argues that the ecological focus of Le Guin’s novels not only challenge the ideology of endless growth inherent to 20th century capitalism but also represent “challenges to the conventions and priorities of critical theory”, namely as they focus on “materially reduced lifestyles” and “philosophical changes” in favor of the forms of “collective and material political action” (Prettyman 2014, 72–73). According to Prettyman, this critical reluctance to recognize the importance of the ecological limits of utopia in Le Guin’s work reveals how critical theory is implicitly reliant on “the industrial vision of endless growth” (Prettyman 2014, 73). Thus, Le Guin’s ecological utopia can be

viewed to be thoroughly critical in two ways, firstly in the way that it challenges the environmental ideology of modern capitalism, and secondly in the way in which it provides a critique of the implicit ideology of material growth inherent to many utopian ideologies. As my analysis of the ecological forces that form and limit *ACH*'s utopia suggests, this criticality stems from the way in which the novel emphasizes the central role of the environment – and the human relationship with the environment – in constructing, maintaining, and shaping its utopian and non-utopian societies. Thus, my analysis echoes Prettyman's assessment of *ACH*'s ecological utopia, which posits “that real limits exist, that knowing those enduring limits and relationships is wisdom, and that ‘ruin and disorder’ result from forgetting or ignoring the limits” (Prettyman 2014, 73). As discussed above, in *ACH*, the forces of ecology provide these limits. As a result, they also bestow the novel with most of its critical weight.

As the need for material limits in utopian speculation is emphasized, the novel's Kesh utopia is portrayed to embody ideas of moderation and sharing when it comes to its material relationship with the environment. This, in turn, results in the novel's utopia setting itself in opposition with the ideas of growth and material abundance of the historical moment from which the text emerges. As discussed in chapter 2, this method of critical negativity can be considered the fundamental critical strategy of utopian texts. Considering this, the significance of *ACH*'s ecological focus in shaping its utopian rhetoric becomes even more central. Examining the environmental and utopian themes of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1975), Christine Nadir argues that Le Guin's work “explores how discourses of liberation [such as ecological liberation] naturalize certain ways of being and foreclose others” (Nadir 2010, 45). *ACH* can be argued to partake in this exploration, displaying the ways in which a society that is constructed as a product of ecological limits may necessarily have to confront the traditionally negative ideas of scarcity and moderation, and set itself in critical opposition with the present-day ideology as a result of this ecological focus. Thus, to conclude my analysis of the connection between ecology and utopia evident in *ACH*, I turn to discuss the ways in which the novel approaches its environmentally informed re-evaluation of the values of scarcity and moderation.

The Kesh society is displayed to manifest the philosophy of *degrowth*. This philosophy has previously been examined in relation to Le Guin's utopian fiction by Giorgos Kallis and Hug March (2015). Degrowth, as exemplified in the work of economic anthropologist Serge Latouche, is an environmentally informed political philosophy that

opposes the capitalist ideology of limitless economic growth by emphasizing the re-evaluation of values concerning scarcity and abundance, the restructuring of production, and the relocation of the economy (Kallis & March 2015, 361). Thus, the ideal society is envisioned as a collection of “autonomous communities with restricted trade, organized in confederations of autonomous municipalities and bioregions” (ibid.). This vision shares two central similarities with the utopian society presented in *ACH*. First, as argued by Barnhill (2013) and supported by my analysis of the novel, the Kesh utopia is constructed according to bioregionalist ideas of societal situatedness in the environment, and thus shares a foundational similarity with the kinds of societies envisioned by the ideology of degrowth. Second, as previously discussed in chapter 2, the future California of the novel is displayed as a network of autonomous societies, organized through the cybernetic network of the City of Mind. Third, as examined throughout this thesis, the novel’s utopian society displays a re-evaluation of the capitalist ideas of growth, scarcity, and ownership in favor of ideas of moderation, subsistence, and communal sharing of resources. Thus, the Kesh utopia displays central similarities with the ideology of degrowth, which argues that only “collective self-limitation, premised on sharing the commons, dissolves scarcity and opens up the possibility for a society that is not capitalist” (Kallis & March 2015, 366). Through its re-evaluation of ideas concerning wealth and material growth and its portrayal of a society where these ideas are replaced by an ideology capable of supporting more environmentally sustainable means of social organization and production, the novel presents a truly ecological utopian alternative to the present.

In summary, then, both the utopian society of *ACH* and the novel’s critical approach can be argued to stem from the novel’s ecological focus. I have posited and provided support for the notion that the novel should be regarded as a specifically *ecological* utopian text, the alternative, desirable society of which is *formed* and *limited* by its non-human environment and ecological forces. Thus, the novel navigates between utopian and ecological concerns throughout its multiple narratives and genres, using its utopian society as a critique of the present and as an alternative to the societies in which we find ourselves. In the final chapter of this thesis, I examine the implications of this ecological utopianism as presented in the novel.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined *Always Coming Home* as a specifically ecological utopian text that presents a critique of and an alternative to the predominantly Western, capitalist, and dualistic ideas of the relationship of nature and culture. Throughout my analysis, I have emphasized the way in which the utopian and ecological sides of the novel interact and influence each other, highlighting specifically the significance of the novel's ecological worldview for its critical utopian rhetoric. But what are the implications of this ecological utopianism?

First, as argued throughout my analysis, the novel's ecological approach to utopia provides a critique of the modern, Western, and capitalist views of the relationship between the human and the non-human embodied by the concept of the nature/culture dualism. By constructing a utopia set in opposition with the ecological ideology of the present moment, the novel displays ecocritical strategies and ideas, highlighting the artificiality of the dualistic, anthropocentric categories of nature and culture, and replacing these with a systemic, ecological worldview that emphasizes the interdependence, embeddedness, co-existence and coevolution of human and non-human beings. Thus, the novel echoes both Morton's (2010) and Haraway's (2003) ecologically informed critiques of the nature/culture dualism, while also displaying fundamental similarities with the ecological ideologies found in various indigenous literatures of North America.

Second, informed by the novel's ecological worldview, *ACH's* Kesh utopia presents an environmentally focused alternative to modern societies, constructed in accordance with ideas of reciprocity, moderation, and respect for non-humans. Thus, the novel accomplishes the central goal of utopian fiction in opposing the inevitability of the future implied by the current society and political system, considered by Jameson to be "simply a prolongation of our capitalist present" (Jameson 2005, 228). Jameson argues that by presenting an alternative to this "predicted and colonized future", utopian fiction presents "future as *disruption* [...] of the present" (ibid., emphasis in original). The analysis of undertaken in this thesis has applied this idea to *ACH*. What has emerged is the idea that Le Guin's novel, through its utopian speculations, challenges the inevitability and righteousness of continued material growth and human domination over the non-human, presenting a mode of social organization that is more ecologically sustainable,

more socially just, and more equal in terms of its approach to human/non-human relationships than the present moment. As such, the novel's utopia, embodying philosophies of degrowth and bioregionalism, manifests a desirable alternative to our contemporary social systems.

Third, *ACH*'s ecological criticality helps to ground the novel's speculation in material reality and thus render its criticism of the present and its utopian alternative more viable. This view is supported by Barnhill, who argues that the idea of critical utopianism "helps counter the narrow understanding of utopianism that has made it easy to reject" as a social philosophy (Barnhill 2013, 214). Thus, by portraying a utopia that is formed, maintained, and shaped by the material and ecological forces of its non-human environment, *ACH* can be argued to provide a more complex, systematic, and compelling utopian vision. As such, the novel is firmly situated within the critical utopian tradition as a result of its ecological focus.

Fourth, the ecological focus of the novel is interconnected with its other utopian themes and strategies, emphasizing the necessity of change in our approach to the non-human in the continuing quest for a more equal and just society. In doing so, *ACH*'s ecological worldview, which emphasizes the similarities and differences between the human and the non-human and argues for the consideration of non-humans as equal beings with their own agencies, becomes part of the novel's larger message of ending social and ecological oppression. Thus, as Otto (2012) argues and as my analysis echoes, the novel specifically challenges both patriarchy and anthropocentrism, seeing these two forms of oppression as intrinsically linked. Therefore, *ACH*'s ecological utopianism is connected to feminist philosophies, and argues for a holistic reconfiguration of the historical and present-day forms of ideological hierarchy and oppression. Therefore, the novel emphasizes the centrality of a shift in cultural attitudes concerning the non-human in the conceptualization of a more socially just and equal alternative to contemporary society.

I conclude this thesis by pointing out the centrality of *difference* as an ecological experience, an idea exemplified by both *ACH* and the ecocritical theories discussed in this thesis. For Morton, thinking interdependence "involves thinking difference" and "confronting the fact that all beings are related to negatively and differentially, in an open system without center or edge." (Morton 2010, 39). In *ACH*, the Kesh are shown to confront this difference and construct their society in a way that is thusly decentered,

existing outside the ideas of anthropocentrism and biocentrism. This, in turn, leads to utopia. As the influential feminist writer Audre Lorde argues, the experience of nondominant difference between essentially interconnected and interdependent individuals can become a tool for imagining and shaping the future:

Within *the interdependence of mutual nondominant differences* lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. (Lorde [1978] 2007, 18, emphasis added)

Nondominant difference, then, can be conceived as a force for reclaiming the future. In terms of the novel, the acceptance of the necessity of ecological interdependence particularly leads to the reconfiguration of the systems of domination humans have historically imposed on non-humans. By emphasizing nondominant interdependence, the novel's Kesh society becomes truly utopian in the way in which it uses differences between the human and the non-human not as a source of oppression, exploitation, or domination, but rather as tools for thinking interdependence. Thus, I suggest that in future examinations of ecological utopian texts such as *ACH*, the role of ecological difference in imagining sustainable and non-oppressive alternative societies should be paid closer attention.

In the present, where our planet is facing a climate catastrophe caused by human activity, the need for the examination of ecological utopian texts is more important than ever. This is because utopias fulfil two functions: they critique the present and provide alternatives for the future. Given this accelerating crisis that threatens life all over our planet, the ecological critique found in Le Guin's novel is quite prescient. Even as a warning issued in 1985, well before the full gravity of human-caused damage on the environment was realized, the novel suggests that our current trajectory is swiftly leading towards a catastrophic, societal, and ecological collapse. Despite this, as a utopian work, *ACH* also contains a strong message for hope that can be used as fuel for positive social change. As such, the novel argues that a more ecologically sustainable and socially just system is possible, even after such a collapse. This message of hope may be bittersweet, as it essentially posits that a radically different society may be possible only after our present one has exhausted itself and the planet irreversibly. However, Morton sees an additional silver lining in the current ecological crisis, arguing that it supplies us with "an equally powerful and urgent opening up of our view of where we are and who

we are” (Morton 2010, 10) and “makes us aware of how interdependent everything is” (Morton 2010, 30). Similarly, viewed from the vantage point of the present environmental crisis, *ACH*’s ecological utopianism supplies us with ways of exploring our existence within the present and provides us with a vision of positive interdependence, while urging us to reclaim our future from continued social oppression and accelerating ecological destruction. Perhaps this insistence is where the true value of utopian fiction lies: in broadening our imaginative horizons and spurring us to cling on to hope in times of desperation.

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Finnish summary

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee utopian ja ekologian vuorovaikutusta Ursula Le Guinin science fiction -romaanissa *Always Coming Home* (1985). Tutkielma esittää Le Guinin romaanin ekologisena utopistisena tekstinä, jonka ekologinen maailmankuva vaikuttaa siihen, millaisena romaanin utopistinen yhteiskunta rakentuu ja kuvataan, sekä siihen, miten teksti itsessään lähestyy utopian käsitettä. Tutkielman analyysi käsittelee keskeisesti sitä, millaisena teksti kuvaa luonnon ja kulttuurin välistä suhdetta, ja miten tämän suhteen kuvaus linkittyy romaanin utopistisiin ominaisuuksiin ja strategioihin.

Always Coming Home on utopistinen science fiction -romaani, joka sijoittuu tulevaisuuden Kaliforniaan. Romaanin kuvaamassa tulevaisuudessa nyky-yhteiskunta on tuhoutunut kokonaan sotien ja itseaiheutetun ekologisen katastrofin seuraksena. Romaani sijoittuu aikaan vuosituhansia näiden katastrofien jälkeen, jolloin tekstin kuvaama utopistinen yhteiskunta, Kesh-kansa, asuttaa Kalifornian Napa-laaksoa. Romaani esittäytyy sen nykyhetkessä elävän kertojan, Pandoran, koostamana metafiktiivisesti tekstikokoelmana, joka sisältää niin Keshien itse tuottamaa kirjallisuutta kuin Pandoran laatimia Keshien yhteiskuntaa, ympäristöä ja maailmankatsomusta kuvaavia tekstejä. Näiden tekstien lisäksi romaani sisältää myös metafiktiivisiä osuuksia, jotka kuvaavat Pandoran yhteyttä Keshien utopistiseen yhteiskuntaan, sekä erilaisia visuaalisia materiaaleja, kuten karttoja, kuvia, ja taulukoita. Tekstikokoelmana romaani ei sisällä yhtä keskeistä narratiivia, vaan koostuu fragmentaarista teksteistä, jotka pyrkivät esittämään Keshien utopistisen yhteiskunnan mahdollisimman moniulotteisesti eri genreen, muotojen ja kerronnallisten äänien kautta. Romaanin monimuotoiset tekstit luovat kuvan oppressiivisista hierarkioista vapaasta utopiasta, jonka toiminnasta välittyvä syvä ymmärrys ekologisista vuorovaikutussuhteista ja prosesseista sekä ihmisten roolista luonnon osana.

Tutkielma lähestyy *Always Coming Homea* kahdesta teoreettisesta näkökulmasta. Ensinnäkin, tutkielma käsittelee romaania ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta, keskittyen erityisesti siihen, millaisena romaani esittää luonnon ja kulttuurin välisen suhteen. Toisekseen, tutkielma lähestyy romaania utopistisen tutkimuksen viitekehyksestä, käsitellen romaanin utopistisia ominaisuuksia, teemoja ja retoriikkaa. Tutkielma yhdistää nämä kaksi viitekehystä käsitelläkseen Le Guinin romaania ekologisena utopistisena tekstinä, jonka ekologinen maailmankuva vaikuttaa sen utopistisen

yhteiskunnan rakenteeseen ja siihen, miten tämä utopistinen yhteiskunta kuvataan. Näin ollen tutkielma esittää, että *Always Coming Homen* ekologinen utopia täyttää seuraavat neljä funktiota:

1. Romaanin ekologinen utopia toimii *kritiikkinä* nykyhetkestä, keskittyen eritoten nyky-yhteiskunnan antroposentrisen ympäristösuhteen kritisointiin ja uudelleenmuotoiluun. Romaani saavuttaa tämän tavoitteen haastamalla traditionaalisen, dualistisen käsityksen luonnon ja kulttuurin välisestä suhteesta, ja korvaamalla tämän ideologian systemaattisella ja ekologisella maailmankuvalla, joka korostaa ihmisen ja ympäristön yhteyttä toisiinsa ja riippuvaisuutta toisistaan.
2. Romaani esittää *vaihtoehtoisen ja toivottavan sosiaalisen järjestelmän*, joka perustuu romaanin ekologiselle maailmankuvalle, ja jonka arvot korostavat kohtuutta, vuorovaikutteisuutta, ja ympäristön kunnioitusta.
3. Romaanin ekologinen maailmankuva myös rajoittaa sen utopistista spekulatiota korostamalla ekologisten ja materiaalisten rajojen merkitystä. Näin ollen romaanin ekologinen maailmankuva kontribuoi *kriittiseen lähestymistapaan*, jolla romaani lähestyy utopian käsitettä.
4. Korostamalla ekologian vaikutusta utopiaan, romaani esittää ajatuksen siitä, että muutos ihmisen ja luonnon välisessä suhteessa on keskeinen tasa-arvoisempien ja oikeudenmukaisempien yhteiskuntien hahmottamiseksi.

Käsittelmällä tekstiä näiden neljän funktion näkökulmasta tutkielma osallistuu laajempaan, ihmisen ja luonnon välistä suhdetta koskevaan diskurssiin, pyrkien erityisesti korostamaan utopistisen ja ekologisen ajattelun linkittyneisyyttä.

Tutkielma koostuu johdannosta, neljästä analyysiluvusta ja päätösluvusta. Ensimmäisessä analyysiluvussa *Always Coming Home* esitellään utopistisena ja ekologisesti keskittyneenä tekstinä. Luvussa romaani esitetään Le Guinin aiempien utopististen romaanien, kuten *Osattomien planeetan (The Dispossessed, 1975)*, käsittelemien teemojen ja strategioiden jatkeena, ja osana utopistisen kirjallisuuden *kriittistä traditiota*. Tämän lisäksi luku tarkastelee romaania sen utopististen ominaisuuksien perusteella kulttuuriteoreetikko Fredric Jamesonin työhön pohjautuen. Tutkielma esittää Le Guinin romaanin historiallisen kontekstinsa tuotteena, joka toimii *ideologisena vastauksena* kirjoittamishetken yhteiskuntaa ja siinä koettuja

sosioekonomisia ongelmia vastaan. Tekstin utopistinen retoriikka toimii kriittisen negatiivisuuden kautta, jossa teksti asettuu kriittiseen, negatiiviseen oppositioon nyky-yhteiskunnan ideologiaan nähden. Tämän lisäksi romaani sisältää utopistisessa kirjallisuudessa yleisen sulkeuman (*utopian closure*), jonka funktio on erottaa kuviteltu utopistinen yhteiskunta nykyhetkestä, joka saavutetaan Le Guinin romaanin tapauksessa sijoittamalla tekstin utopia tulevaisuuteen, jossa nyky-yhteiskunta ja sen ideologiset jatkeet eivät enää ole olemassa. Kriittisenä utopiana romaani myös kyseenalaistaa tämän sulkeuman kuvaamalla utopistisen yhteiskunnan ympäristöstään riippuvaisena.

Tutkielman ensimmäinen analyysiluku esittelee *Always Coming Homen* myös ekologisesti motivoituneena ja ympäristökysymyksiin keskittyvänä romaanina. Luku esittelee romaanin ekologisenä tekstinä käsittelemällä aiempien tutkimusten pohjalta, korostaen taoismin ja ekofeminististen teorioiden merkitystä sen ympäristökuvauksille. Luku käsittelee romaanin ympäristökuvauksia myös tieteiskirjallisuudessa yleisen yksinkertaistamisen käsitteen (*world-reduction*) kautta. Tutkielma esittää, että romaani pyrkii tasapainottamaan utopistisen spekulationsa vaatimaa yksinkertaistamista korostamalla ekologisten järjestelmien ja vuorovaikutussuhteiden merkitystä ympäristökuvauksissaan. Yksinkertaistamisen ja ekologisten järjestelmien suhteen käsittely pohjautuu kirjallisuudentutkija Thomas LeClairin analyysiin, joka korostaa Le Guinin romaanin maailmankuvan ja luonnontieteellisen systeemiteorian yhteyksiä. Käsittelemällä romaania systeemiteorian näkökulmasta tutkielma esittää *Always Coming Homen* maailmankuvan ekologisiin järjestelmiin ja niiden sisäisiin vuorovaikutussuhteisiin keskittyvänä.

Tutkielman toinen analyysiluku keskittyy *Always Coming Homen* kuvaaman luonnon ja kulttuurin suhteen ekokriittiseen tarkasteluun. Romaani esitellään proto-ekokriittisenä tekstinä, joka käsittelee ekokriittiselle kirjallisuudentutkimukselle keskeisiä aiheita, kuten ihmisen ja luonnon välistä suhdetta, ekokriittisin metodein, mutta joka edeltää ekokritiikin kehittymistä laajamittaiseksi kirjallisuuden- ja kulttuurintutkimuksen haaraksi. Luvun analyysissä *Always Coming Home* korostuu bioregionalistisena tekstinä, joka korostaa luonnon merkitystä ihmisen toiminnan ja kokemuksen muotoilijana. Tämän lisäksi luvun analyysi korostaa romaanin utopistisen yhteiskunnan ja amerikkalaisten alkuperäiskansojen ympäristösuhteiden samankaltaisuuksia. Luvun teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautuu suurimmalta osin ekokriitikko Timothy Mortonin ekologisen ajattelun (*the ecological thought*) filosofiaan,

joka haastaa antroposentriset ja biosentriset näkemykset luonnon ja ihmisen suhteesta ja korostaa ekologisen todellisuuden linkittyneisyyttä. Mortonin filosofia tarjoaa tutkielman primääriset kriittiset työkalut Le Guinin romaanin ympäristökuvauksien ja ekologisen maailmankuvan käsittelyyn. Tämän lisäksi ekokriittinen analyysi seuraa ekokriitikko Helena Faderin ajatusta siitä, että ekokriittisen analyysin tulisi katsoa kulttuurin käsitettä biologisesta näkökulmasta, jolloin käsitteen antroposentrisyys antaa tilaa uudenlaisten, ei-inhimillisten subjektiviteettien ja ilmiöiden tarkasteluun. Kolmantena keskeisenä teoreettisena näkökulmana tutkielman ekokriittisessä analyysissä on feministisen ja posthumanistisen tutkijan Donna Harawayn luontokulttuurin (*natureculture*) konsepti, joka korostaa luonnon ja kulttuurin linkittyneisyyttä, koevoluutiota ja riippuvuutta toisistaan.

Tutkielman ekokriittinen analyysi korostaa sitä, miten *Always Coming Home* ympäristökuvaukset ja ekologinen maailmankuva haastavat dualistisen käsityksen luonnon ja kulttuurin välisestä suhteesta. Ensinnäkin, romaanin utopistisen yhteiskunnan luontokäsitys esitetään ei-dualistisena. Romaanin ei-dualistisen luontokäsityksen kuvaus korostaa dualistisen luonnon käsitteen antroposentrisyyttä ja keinotekoisuutta. Romaanin Keshien maailmankuva perustuu monimutkaiselle konseptuaaliselle yhteiskuntajärjestelmälle, jossa ihmisten ja ihmisen ulkopuolisen luonnon, kuten eläinten, kasvien ja elottoman luonnon, välillä ei esiinny merkittäviä rajoja. Näin ollen Keshien maailmankuvassa dualistiset luonnon ja kulttuurin kategoriat osoittautuvat tarpeettomiksi, ja niiden tilalle ilmentyy ihmisen ja luonnon välistä yhteyttä ja ekologisen todellisuuden linkittyneisyyttä korostava ideologinen järjestelmä, joka heijastuu romaanin utopistisen kulttuurin ajattelussa, kirjallisuudessa ja toiminnassa. Toiseksi, Keshien ekologinen maailmankuva korostaa ihmisen ulkopuolisen luonnon merkitystä kulttuurisena ja merkityksiä luovana toimijana, haastaen näin antroposentriset käsitykset kulttuurisesta toiminnasta ja merkityksestä ainoastaan ihmisille kuuluvana ilmiönä. Kolmanneksi, romaanin utopistisen yhteiskunnan materiaalista luontosuhdetta tarkastellessa ilmenee luonnon ja kulttuurin linkittyneisyyden, koevoluution ja toisistaan riippuvuuden merkitys niin ihmisille kuin ihmisen ulkopuoliselle luonnolle. Näin ollen romaani haastaa dualistiset käsitykset luonnon ja kulttuurin välisestä suhteesta, ja korvaa nämä käsitykset vaihtoehtoisella maailmankuvalla ja yhteiskuntajärjestelmällä, joka korostaa ihmisen ja luonnon linkittyneisyyttä, koevoluutiota, ja riippuvuutta toisistaan.

Tutkielman kolmannessa analysiluvussa ekokriittinen analyysi linkittyy romaanin käsittelyyn utopistisena tekstinä. *Always Coming Home* esitetään luvussa ekologisena utopistisena tekstinä, jonka ekologinen maailmankuva osoittautuu romaanin utopistista spekulatiota muovaavaksi ja rajoittavaksi tekijäksi. Ensinnäkin, luvussa korostetaan romaanin ekologisen maailmankuvan keskeisyyttä sen utopistisen yhteiskunnan rakentumiselle. Luku esittää, että ihmisen ulkopuolinen luonto kuvataan Le Guinin romaanissa utopistisen yhteiskunnan perustana, jonka määreiden perusteella Keshien yhteiskunta rakentuu. Luku tarkastelee sitä, miten romaanin ekologinen maailmankuva linkittyy sen utopistisiin funktioihin ja teemoihin. Näin ollen romaanin utopistinen spekulatio osoittautuu keskeisesti romaanin kuvaavaan ympäristöön ja siinä esitettyyn ekologiseen maailmankuvaan pohjautuvaksi. Toiseksi, luvun analyysi kehittää tätä ajatusta tarkastelemalla romaanin ekologisen keskittyneisyyden merkitystä romaanin kriittiselle utopiakäsitykselle. Tarkastelemalla romaanin kahden yhteiskunnan, utopististen Keshien ja hierarkisten Condorien, ympäristösuhteita ja toimijuutta, luku osoittaa miten romaani esittää ihmisen ulkopuolisen luonnon ja siihen liittyvät ekologiset voimat yhteiskuntia merkittävästi muovaavina ja rajoittavina tekijöinä. Näin ollen romaani esittäytyy ekologisena utopistisena tekstinä, jonka ekologinen maailmankuva niin mahdollistaa kuin rajoittaa romaanin utopistista spekulatiota.

Tutkielman päätösluku kiteyttää analyysin tulokset ja esittää ajatuksia ekologisten utopististen tekstien tutkimuksen merkittävydestä, tulevaisuudesta ja kehitysmahdollisuuksista. Romaanin neljä funktiota ekologisena utopistisena tekstinä käydään läpi tutkielmassa esitettyyn analyysiin tukeutuen. Lisäksi päätösluku esittää ajatuksen eroavaisuuden (*difference*) merkityksestä ekologisessa ja utopistisessä ajattelusta, ja viitoittaa tietä uudenlaiseen utopististen tekstien tutkimukseen.