

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*: A *Bilateral Envoy on the Posting*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the analysis of diplomatic aspects of the groundbreaking classical science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin. Its main diplomatic characteristic is the role of bilateral diplomacy and the ad hoc envoy, its promoter as the focal point. Bilateral diplomacy has marked diplomacy ever since, during the periods of modern and postmodern, also in pursue of multilateral activities. Le Guin discusses the Earth's envoy on an alien world trying to persuade the receiving authority to join the cosmic multilateral arrangement of worlds for known benefits. Her protagonist is a typical ad hoc envoy, who's assignment precedes opening of the residential diplomatic mission provided his endeavour is accomplished. Le Guin presents the envoy's diplomatic report in a form of a story. The highly unconventional fictional narrative is full of clear diplomatic lines in spite of the fact that the envoy finds himself in a totally different environment, incomparable with his own experiences. Diplomatic functions of presentation and observation, including reporting, stand out.

KEYWORDS: bilateral diplomacy, science fiction, Ursula Le Guin, the Left Hand of Darkness, envoy, protocol, observing and reporting

POVZETEK

Prispevek se osredotoča na analizo diplomatskih vidikov enega od prelomnih klasičnih romanov znanstvene fantastike *Leva roka* teme Ursule K. Le Guin. Osrednja diplomatska značilnost romana je vloga bilateralne diplomacije in ad hoc odposlanca kot njenega izvajalca v središču. Bilateralna diplomacija karakterizira diplomacijo vse od njenih začetkov, v obdobju moderne in postmoderne diplomacije pa podpira tudi multilateralne aktivnosti. Le Guinova predstavlja zemeljskega odposlanca na tujem svetu, ki poskuša prepričati sprejemne oblasti, da se pridružijo kozmični multilateralni združbi svetov zaradi znanih koristi. Njen protagonist je tipičen ad hoc odposlanec, ki mu bo sledilo odprtje rezidenčnega diplomatskega predstavništva, če bo njegova misija uspešna. Roman predstavlja diplomatsko poročilo v obliki zgodbe. Izrazito nekonvencionalna fiktivna naracija je polna jasnih diplomatskih značilnosti, čeprav se odposlanec znajde v popolnoma drugačnem okolju, neprimerljivem z njegovimi izkušnjami. Izstopata diplomatski funkciji predstavljanja in opazovanja, vključno s poročanjem.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: bilateralna diplomacija, znanstvena fantastika, Le Guin, Leva roka teme, odposlanec, protokol, opazovanje in poročanje

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INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy has in its essence always been political and bilateral. Being an instrument of peaceful communication between, originally, states and along with this of the international intercourse as well, it reflects intentions and interests of political entities in the international arena. Hence, its activities are above all political, although progressively stretching to other areas of social activities, too. Bilateral diplomacy dominated the diplomatic arena till the emergence of modern era and multilateral diplomacy (Anderson, 1993). This all means there many faces and appearances of bilateral diplomacy in practice, that serve different purposes and meanings. However, they always remain in service of one primary goal, advancing cooperation by peaceful means; as the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations puts forward, to establish and deepen friendly relations among states and nations.²

We dwell significantly on these aspects of bilateral diplomacy later on when we focus our research interest on one of the groundbreaking science fiction novels, namely *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin. The role of bilateral diplomacy and its envoy mark the whole novel, situated in an alien world, absolutely different from the envoy's formal preparations, intuitive perception and expectations. This makes the implementation of the envoy's task by no means easier, but successful anyway. Le Guin published this outstanding novel of her in 1968 and won in an unprecedented manner both Nebula and Hugo awards, as well as opened a new chapter of the science fiction creativity. Our approach is that works like the one discussed here help us understand and comprehend diplomacy better and more thoughtfully. At the same time they also enrich diplomatic studies and the study of diplomacy. This paper primarily focuses on diplomacy as an activity and method. Such works also offer a more comprehensive view in complying with the literature works as well.

The tendency if this paper is to answer two research questions in this paper. Firstly, how does the distinguished author present and perceive bilateral diplomacy and the role of an ad hoc envoy, preceding a possible later opening of a residential diplomatic mission, in his monumental work; and secondly, what is her contribution to diplomatic studies and their expertise on the phenomena of diplomacy as exercised in

² Comp. functions of a diplomatic mission, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article 3.

this text. The following methods are used in this research: analysis, comment, comparison, synthesis, interpretation, generalization, and – since the author is a career diplomat – also the method of observing through one's own participation.³ Last but not least, with our research endeavour we try to further add to the innovative study of diplomacy in literature, in particular in science fiction.

BILATERAL DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy has been since its beginning a bilateral endeavour.⁴ It was pursued firstly, during the period of early diplomacy, by ad hoc envoys, and became from the outset of the residential diplomacy in the period of the Italian city states, as well as later with the establishment of the first Foreign Ministry in France in the period of classical diplomacy, towards the end of the 18th century, the business of career diplomats. This institutional change in the pursuit of diplomacy did not influence the exercise of ad hoc diplomacy significantly, since the latter became part of the bilateral diplomatic business as a whole.

When foreign ministries, i.e. permanent diplomatic apparatus, started to offer diplomats at disposal for all relevant activities, there still remained place for ad hoc diplomatic envoys and for special tasks to be exercised by them. One such example is the opening of the diplomatic mission (embassy in particular) by a career diplomat in a function of an ad hoc envoy (common term in such cases is *charge d'affaires a.i.*) or pursuing negotiation with the receiving authority to enter a given multilateral arrangement, or any other similar task. We could note that originally ad hoc envoys were only persons being close to the ruler, but later on also career diplomats started to perform this business, which is today usual practice. Envoys hold different diplomatic ranks, usually the one they already have in the hierarchy. But an envoy could also be promoted to a higher rank when tasked with the new mission. Diplomatic mode always adapts to a given situation with a variety of tools that make the profession stronger, useful and adaptive.

Multilateral diplomacy emerged with the major structural changes in the international community after the end of the World War I, with a series of Paris Peace Conferences and with the establishment of the League of Nations soon afterwards. It blossomed with the forming of

3 For more on the latter method see Burnham, 2004, and Mason, 2002.

4 For more on this see for example Janković, 1988, pp.34-40, and Rozental and Buenrostro, 2013.

the United Nations Organization after the end of the World War II and continued to progressively develop during the following decades.⁵

This produced an impression that multilateral diplomacy will dominate diplomatic practice and approaches, pushing the bilateral one aside. With the growing complexity of international phenomena and processes, this impression was only gaining on importance. However, as diplomatic practice after the end of the Cold War is showing, both aspects of diplomatic practice are getting on complementarity, offering each other a variety of opportunities to be an irreplaceable part of the whole diplomatic intercourse, serving jointly to the common goal. Global multilateral gatherings and summits show, that at the end of the day, success is reachable only with bilateral discussions among key players persuading them to join the mainstream of the discussed issue. Another such example is conferences, a typical form of multilateral diplomacy.⁶ Relation between bilateral and multilateral diplomacy is as complementary and as synergetic as it ever could be.

To illustrate the above presented view on diplomacy, one could find the Barston's (2006, p.1) definition very useful for its broad and comprehensive overview and understanding. The respected author claims that "[D]iplomacy is concerned with the management of relations between states and between states and other actors." The former is bilateral diplomacy and the latter multilateral one. For the last hundred years they coexist, while their synergy and complementarity is continuously growing. No doubt that globalization is only accelerating this trend.

Diplomacy in this sense "is the means by which states through their formal and other representatives, as well as other actors, articulate, coordinate and secure particular or wider interests [...]" (ibid.). So it is interests of each state that make the backbone of a state's performance in the international arena. This could be the microcosmos of the Greek city states⁷ or the Mediterranean system of states in the renaissance period or a purely fictional system of planets and worlds in the Left Hand of Darkness. And how do diplomats perform these duties? As Barston comments, by "using correspondence, private talks, exchanges of view, lobbying, visits, threats and other related activities"

5 For more on this see for example Mahhubani 2013, and Groom 2013.

6 Comp. Berridge and James, 2003, p. 21, as well as ibid. pp.176-177.

7 We borrow this phrase from Benko (1997, pp.23-26).

(*ibid.*). There is a variety of approaches at hand for a diplomat, tasked with an instruction. Usually, the sending authority does not advise its representative on the spot how to do it, which way to choose, since each of these approaches has its own and known mode, depending on a concrete situation as well as on the diplomat's evaluation of that situation.⁸ However, threats and similar approaches are very seldom in diplomatic business.

Another rule has been of the utmost importance for the diplomatic conduct, namely the mutual agreement of both states. Mutual consent and mutual understanding form the basis for diplomatic relations and their pursuit (Feltham, 1993, p.3). It has always been like this and it will remain so. Without this, nothing is achievable in the profession. States establish diplomatic relations by mutual agreement.⁹ They open diplomatic missions by the same approach.¹⁰ Also when deciding about the Head of the Mission of the sending state in the receiving state, the latter has its say, in a form of a consent, an agreement, explicitly issuing for the nominated person (or not, of course).¹¹

But when an ad hoc envoy is coming to the receiving state, there is no formal agreement procedure prescribed that would enable the receiving state to decide whether to receive him/her or not. It is just a matter of diplomatic curtesy, meaning to accept in practice by the rule the sent diplomat. If the latter is not just welcome, though, as the informal rule says, he/she will have to wait for a certain period of time to be received by the high authority; such a meeting could be very brief or at an unusual place or omitting common protocol rules etc. There are numerous, basically unlimited ways to show restraint to an envoy. The protagonist of the Le Guin's novel faces those challenges practically throughout his stay on the alien world.

The utmost guide to diplomacy and its practical implementation, to say so, is the set of diplomatic functions, presented in The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, in Article 3. Summing up the five functions of a diplomatic mission, one could say that diplomats observe and report, negotiate and represent as well as exercise pro-

8 Of course a diplomat receives a clear instruction when the given state of relations between two states is so sensitive that the exact approach must be coined at the sending authority (usually in consultation with the diplomat on the spot).

9 The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article No 2.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, Article 4.

tection of interests, all of these within bilateral and multilateral mode of diplomacy, including their numerous practical examples and cases.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

Immediately after its appearance in 1969, the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* raised huge attention of readers of the genre but also broadly. It has become a model groundbreaking piece so far and one of the genre's classics. And the author was the first one, who won both Nebula and Hugo Awards, for this masterpiece, while altogether seven Nebula and six Hugo Awards.¹²

In its very essence, the novel is as science fiction novels are: continuous imagination of numerous nuances of aspects, elements and dimensions of space and time with dwelling (direct, preferably indirect) on destiny of humanity at its core. This very imagination is in a dialectic, dynamic and mutual relation with truth, as the author quotes her main protagonist ("...Truth is a matter of the imagination", Le Guin, 2016.a, p.1) and what we take as a backbone string of this paper as well. Such approach – of our author – offers unlimited, infinite creativeness for its writers. It means that each of them is in a position to bring something new to the genre, to contribute to its vibrations and add to the overall expression. This further means that science fiction is a part of *la grande* mission of uncovering human beings, i.e. ourselves: where we are, what we are, what we stand for and what is our purpose. This genre is specific since it uses (and invents) all possible imaginable means, methods and frames to go further and deeper, in the infinitive variations of existence-able and coming back, showing that we are only a part of a huge orchestra of nature, beyond our current capability of comprehension, having our own place, together with others. In what form, in what sense and meaning this is presentable; each exercise of a given pen shows in its own way.

For Clarke this is his all-encompassing enthusiasm with technology and its advancement, for Asimov his proficiency of plots that seem, when resolved, obvious as they could be, and for Le Guin it is the mastery of imagination. Their unprecedented ethics is at Asimov packed in his three laws of robotics¹³, at Clarke in his laws of technology¹⁴

12 <https://www.ursulaklequin.com/about-ursula> (Accessed 07 December 2021)

13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Laws_of_Robotics (Accessed 07 December 2021)

14 <https://www.newscientist.com/definition/clarkes-three-laws/> (Accessed 07 December 2021)

and at Le Guin in the power of deep, subtle lyrical persuasion of her approach and the ability of forming protagonists and the context of that style. Her bravura stands out for “its radical investigation of gender roles and its moral and literary complexity”¹⁵, for being “a beautifully written mind expanding” (Vinge, 1992, p.vii), having a clear “poet’s touch and an anthropologist’s eye” (Gaiman, 2016, p.xix). Much of her power of expression is also placed in the fact that she is a child of an anthropologic background.¹⁶ When asked about this noticeable aspect of her novel, she said that “she had not intentionally approached the novel that way” (Vinge, *ibid.*, p.viii). However, this dimension is clearly obvious in the novel, since anthropology gives the “sense of sudden parallax – a view from a height of human behavior” (*ibid.*) as well as “the ability to glimpse the forest through the trees” (*ibid.*).

When researching and discussing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it is important, therefore, to keep in mind that this text has been a significant contribution to “worldbuilding science fiction” (*ibid.*, p.vii). Such works (comp. also Herbert’s *Dune*) “create cultures, human and otherwise, that are as “alien” and rich in detail as the psychical settings of the distant planets on which they are set” (*ibid.*). Thus, with such approach, Le Guin and others, “have broadened and enriched the entire field, by adding the social sciences to the “science” in “science fiction” (*ibid.*). For this same reason, one could at least speculate, if not also prove, that this novelty has also enabled works from the discussed field to become a research interest of diplomatic studies; to broaden understanding of works from this genre through the eyes of diplomatic studies and the broader context of social sciences, since diplomacy has been studied by them from its origin.¹⁷

Le Guin says that science fiction is descriptive (2016.b, p. xxiv). Claiming this, she denies that it would be either predictive (*ibid.*) or extrapolative (*ibid.*, p. xxiii). The former is the business of prophets and the latter becomes, in its very end and carried to its logical extreme, depressing, if not carcinogenic (*ibid.*). So her book discussed here is not extrapolative. “If you like you can read it, and a lot of other science fiction, as a thought-experiment” (*ibid.*). With this, she continues, one

15 <https://www.ursulakleuin.com/about-ursula> (Accessed 07 December 2021)

16 Her father was the noted anthropologist A. L. Kroeber, her mother was the writer Theodora Kroeber, the author of *ISHI* (Vinge, 1992, p. viii).

17 For more on social sciences’ research of diplomacy comp. Jazbec, 2021, b.

intends “to describe reality, the present world” (ibid., p. xxiv). All in all, “[S]cience fiction is metaphor” (ibid., p. xxvii).

Hence, her protagonist Genly Ai is a metaphor for a diplomat, an envoy on a mission to an alien world. He carries his task through, upon reports and expertise of his predecessors (First Investigators), backed up by his previous, similar diplomatic experience. His environment, the international community in which he operates, is an inter-galactic one. His own world Ekumen is a hundred light-years away from his host place (ibid., p.13). And, as we learn at the very beginning of this Le Guin’s descriptive metaphor, he presents his diplomatic mission in a form of a story, not as a pure, professional diplomatic report. The story is based both on the previous findings of that alien world, where he temporarily resides, as well as on his personal diplomatic experience.

The story of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in one sentence, could be summed up as “the story of a lone human emissary’s mission to Winter, an unknown alien world (...) to facilitate Winter’s inclusion in a growing intergalactic civilization”.¹⁸ One would hardly find a more promising beginning of a science fiction novel for an in-depth diplomatic analysis. And a highly challenging one for its interdisciplinary character: apart from pure fictional narrative, it includes psychology, anthropology, sociology, international law and relations, to name but a few.

In addition to all these, the discussed novel stands out also as a predecessor of gender studies: “It is a novel of what would now be thought of as a gender politics” (Gaiman, 2016, p. xix). Briefly: “The inhabitants of the world called Winter have only one gender. Once a month, for a couple of days, they come into a state known as kemmer, in which they develop either male or female primary sexual characteristics” (ibid., p. x). This means that each of them could be during that time a male or a female, as it comes. As Genly Ai cannot comprehend this phenomenon, also they cannot cope with the fact that each human has one permanent gender only. Le Guin derives a variety of social, psychological and other consequences from that fact throughout the text.¹⁹ The novel as such belongs to the so called Hainish Cycle with it in the focal point of importance.

¹⁸ Le Guin, 2016.a, first inner page of the book.

¹⁹ For details see Vinge, 1992.

But as stated at the beginning, it is diplomacy that lays in our focus, though with an eye from all these scientific points of view. Additionally, it is the form of a postmodern diplomacy that fully enables us with a possibility of such research effort.²⁰

THE PERCEPTION OF DIPLOMACY IN THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

On a general level we could point out at least three important characteristics of this novel for the purpose of its diplomatic understanding. They are observation, reporting and protocol, which one should also understand as the fourth diplomatic function (to ascertain and to report), as well as the first one (to present the sending state in the receiving state with an impact on protocol). They form three diplomatic clusters and each of them uncovers a variety of diplomatic meaning, nuances, specifics and messages that vibrate from the novel. We discuss them throughout the course of this paper.

From this researcher's point of view, Le Guin goes immediately at the very beginning into the diplomatic medias res: the title of the first Chapter says "A Parade in Erhenrang" (Le Guin, 2016.a, p. 1), which is the "capital city of Karhide" (ibid., p.2).

Her main protagonist Genly Ai, the envoy, finds himself in the opening Chapter of the novel in the parade in the capital of the receiving authority.²¹ The parade is organized at the occasion of the king's speech, related to the completion "of the unfinished Arch of the River Gate (...), which completes the new Road and River Port of Erhenrang" (ibid., p. 3). So it is protocol at a state event as the context with which everything begins. It is the first and direct encounter of the reader with diplomacy in this text, what, as a matter of fact, is rare for a science fiction, but also for other kinds of novels. It makes this research effort from one point of view easier, since this fact is so obvious, but from another one also more demanding and complex, since the scenery is direct, full of diplomatic aspects and gradations, hence more to dwell about, comment and uncover.

But before digging into this, we have to point out one aspect that is

²⁰ For postmodern diplomacy see Jazbec, 2021.a.

²¹ However, as we learn at a later stage of the story, Winter is not the only state entity on this planet. Orgoreyn, with which Winter has a border dispute, is another one (ibid., p.12).

of a defining importance for the way this novel is styled, written and placed into the diplomatic finery as well as for its general and diplomatic understanding. It is determining and also specific in the way of introducing and presenting novels that touch upon diplomacy as an approach, method, tool of messaging, narrative or its context.

Immediately after the title and before the first sentence, there is an entry, in an Aesopian language as if we are going to read a diplomatic sum up report from the Policy Planning Department²² of any given Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

“From the Archives of Hain. Transcripitor of Ansible Document 01-01101-934-2-Gethen: To the Stabile on Ollul: Report from Genly Ai, First Mobile on Gethen/Winter, Hainish Cycle 93, Ekumenical Year 1490-97.” (ibid.)

The report of Genly Ai or the story that he produced (and we read) as the respected author claims with a nice metaphor (“...and Genly Ai would never have sat down at my desk and used up my ink and typewriter ribbon in informing me...” – Le Guin, 2016.b, p. xxvii) was written upon material in the Hain Archives. It originates from reports of Genly Ai, the Ekumenical envoy on the world called Winter (or Gethen in the terminology of the receiving authority). There is the number of the archive classification of the document, although the reader is not provided with a possibility to understand, i.e. de-code the numbering. The envoy’s rank is “the First Mobile”, meaning the first diplomatic envoy, one could also say ambassador in our terminology. We also learn the number of the Hainish Cycle in which the report was received and the years during which he was sending reports. But it would have been very difficult to translate the time data to the Winter’s calendar with an aim to have a clear and straightforward understanding of the time difference, since “[I]t is always the Year One here. Only the dating of every past and future year changes each New Year’s Day, as one counts backwards or forwards from the unitary Now” (ibid, pp.1-2).²³

While discussing those entries, it should be pointed out that, for example, Asimov (1988) uses the same approach in his Foundation Trilogy,

22 The author of this paper served four years in a capacity of the Policy Planning and Research Department Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

23 The purpose of this quotation is to illustrate how complex the world of Le Guin’s imagination is and what is the mastery of this achievement – but also to show challenges to which diplomats are exposed to, although here only in a fictional reality.

at the beginning of each chapter – placing entries, which are de facto quotes from the Encyclopedia Galactica, explaining various terms, that the text deals with in the related part.²⁴ Le Guin also uses entries at various, but not all chapters. The quoted beginning informs the reader what the text is, how it was composed (style, composition, time), where to find it and to which field it belongs (diplomacy). From other entries we learn similar data for the referring chapters, informing us about authors, time and place, all together telling us how those parts / chapters structurally fit in the whole story / report. It is also worth to notice that the story of Genly Ai is in a few chapters told or written by other authors (we are informed about this from those entries). Additionally, if while reading the Foundation Trilogy we get an impression that we read excerpts from the real, existing Encyclopedia Galactica (there really might be one once), in the Le Guin's text there is an impression, when starting reading it, as if we were reading a diplomatic report in a diplomatic library or archive, crafted out in a form of a story.

Generally, studying archives to be able to get material for the novel, its narration and course, is a usual approach in literature, also in the diplomatic one. The first Slovene diplomat, Sigismund Herberstein, wrote his Notes upon Russia (1851-1852), stemming from his two reports from his two ad hoc missions to Russia.²⁵ And Ivo Andrić, the Yugoslav Nobel laureate for literature (1961), also diplomat by profession, did the same while writing his diplomatic novel *Bosnian Chronicle* (1963).

PROTOCOL, CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONS

After this short discourse, let us continue with diplomatic protocol and the way it is presented in the discussed novel. We point out and discuss hitherto a few cases where Genly AI is meeting top officials of the Winter authorities, including the already discussed parade, private dinner with the prime minister and two meetings with the king.

Diplomatic protocol and its implementation from the envoy's, ambassador's point of view in the receiving state, is a matter, as said already, of the first diplomatic function, representing the sending state in the receiving one. Diplomats attend ceremonial and other social events

²⁴ The fictional Encyclopedia Galactica (at least in our parallel world, to use the approach of this genre) is another example of the Asimov's brilliance and proficiency.

²⁵ Comp. Jazbec, 2009, pp.263-265, as well as <https://www.ucd.ie/readingeast/essay7.html> (Accessed 07 December 2021)

and with this they already present their (sending) states. When speaking about high protocol ceremonial events in the receiving states, diplomats have a special place in the order of appearance with a relation towards home representatives.²⁶ According to the precedence list of each state, they are usually placed immediately after the top state officials. Details at such opportunities may vary from case to case, since they are defined by the home authorities, but also depend on the size, structure complexity of the state etc.²⁷ Protocol events are important because they show, in nuances though, respect, prestige, importance, but also hidden influence with its higher or lower level of politeness towards the high guest. Apart from obliged and codified precedence and equal treatment, the rest lays in a variety of distinctions and in between the lines messaging. Practically everything comes good for such expressing.

As we learn from the first sentences, Genly Ai was well positioned in the parade, as it goes with diplomats: “I walked just behind the gossiwors and just before the king” (ibid.), while “[N]ext come the lords and mayors and representatives (...) a vast ornate procession...” (ibid.). The first few pages are astonishingly full of vibrant and multivectorial diplomatic messaging and telling, all stemming from the protocol as its fundament. The envoy continues his careful and full of details presentation of the parade, like this one: “Next, the royal parts, guards and functionaries and dignitaries of the city and the court, deputies, senators, chancellors, ambassadors, lords of the Kingdom, none of them keeping step or rank yet walking with great dignity: and among them is King Argaven XV. in white tunic and shirt and breeches, with leggings of saffron leather and a peaked yellow cap” (ibid., pp.2-3). Being a top diplomatic envoy, his place was there: “The royal party, myself among them...” (ibid., p.3). His – as it could be noticed – thorough examination produces a full context for the later understanding and elaboration of relations and circumstance on Winter.

Standing “on a platform of new timbers” (ibid.), he does what each diplomat on his place would do: to get involved in a chat with their immediate neighbour. To use the opportunity to establish contacts and relations with dignitaries, since it’s dignitaries that group the roy-

26 This goes also for the precedence among foreign diplomats, but that is not the case of our interest in this paper. For precedence among diplomats, in particular heads of mission see the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, articles 13, 14, 16 and 17.

27 For protocol issues in general and details comp. Berridge and James, 2003, Feltham, 1993, Mikolić, 1995, Trajkovski, 1990 etc.

al party. The man on his left is “wearing a heavy overtunic of green leather worked with gold, and a heavy white shirt, and heavy breeches, and a neck-chain of heavy silver links a hand broad” (ibid.). H. E. Ai tells the reader that his neighbour “is one of the most powerful men in the country; I am not sure of the proper historical equivalent of his position, vizier or prime minister or councilor; the Karhidish word for it means the King’s Ear.” (ibid., p.4).²⁸ The person is a top ranking one: “He is a lord of a Domain and lord of the Kingdom, a mover of great events. His name is Therem Harth rem ir Estraven” (ibid.). From this we learn how high and well is the discussed envoy placed in the receiving state, and he knows how careful his neighbour is: “So he often speaks, frank yet cautious, ironic, as if always aware that I see and judge as an alien; a singular awareness in one of so isolated a race and so high a rank” (ibid.).

This is the destiny of diplomats: no matter how close you are to the host country’s dignitaries, no matter how frank they are with you, you are an alien, not one of them. You may establish close personal relations, they trust you, but at the end of the day – apart from respecting you as the emissary of the sending state – they treat you the way they want and expect your authorities would treat their representative. There is always a thin line in between, if only a small one, that marks the relationship. Hence, diplomats have to work on the long run with everything they are occupied with and therefore much of the fruits of their work often fall in the successor’s hand: “It doesn’t do to be impatient in Karhide” (ibid., p.5). Or in any other places, diplomatic experience demonstrates.

The parade ends with an unexpected move from his interlocutor: “Estraven turned to me again and said, “Will you have supper with me tonight, Mr. Ai?” I accepted, with more surprise than pleasure” (ibid., p.6). Also the wording of the invitation was rather informal, almost personal: the envoy was addressed as Mr. Ai, not by his official title. This pretty much displeased him than the other way around: “Estraven had done a great deal for me in the last six or eight months, but I did not expect or desire such a show of personal favor as an invitation to his house” (ibid.).²⁹ We learn a lot from these sentences about the formal and informal positioning of the envoy, relations he established as well as about his inner feelings. He both heard and felt the crowd whis-

²⁸ We learn later on that he is the Prime Minister.

²⁹ We learn later on that Genly Ai has been nearly two years on Winter (ibid., p.9).

pering when the parade was off: *“That’s him, look, there’s the Envoy. Of course that was part of my job, but it was a part that got harder not easier as time went on: more and more often I longed for anonymity, for sameness”* (ibid.).

Le Guin is a master of pen. Psychology, including the capability of being emphatic, plays an increasingly important role in life of diplomats, in particular when being on the posting. This even more when posting, i.e. the receiving society is remote, far away not only in the geographical sense. Any envoy stands out, that’s part of this job, as also Mr. Ai is well aware of. As also any envoy by definition is “lone [human] emissary”³⁰, Barder presents (2014) this feeling on a diplomat’s first posting (“Adam is suddenly aware of a sharp feeling of loneliness. There isn’t a soul whom he knows within hundreds of miles.” - p.39), but also as being an ambassador (...being a head of mission is in some ways a lonely job, especially if you don’t have the kind of relationship with your number two that enables you to discuss sensitive matters frankly with him.” - p.184).³¹

On his way from the parade, the envoy encounters Mr. Tibe, a fierce political rival of Estraven and the king’s cousin as well. An opportunity for him to exercise a diplomat’s and diplomatic tactfulness, cautiousness with words and the utmost politeness. Yet in a place so alien as Winter is, this is a demanding task (and in diplomatic life by the rule even more): “I was trying to speak insipidly, yet everything I said to Tibe seemed to take on a double meaning” (ibid., p.7).

When the latter remarks “Indeed Lord Estraven is famous for his kindness to foreigners” (ibid.), the former replies “Few foreigners are so foreign as I, Lord Tibe. I am very grateful for kindnesses” (ibid.). To this interlocutor’s next remark (“This is a hard age we live in, an ungrateful age” - ibid.), he replies bluntly, “I’ve heard the same lament on other worlds” (ibid.). From this we learn that H. E. Ai is an experienced diplomat. His lordship reacts immediately: “Ah yes! Yes indeed! I keep forgetting that you come from another planet” (ibid.). The receiving elite, as we can notice, is not always (i.e. hardly ever) a unisono social group, not also for foreign ambassadors. The latter could easily become part

30 Comp. Footnote No. 18.

31 When this author was the first Slovene Consul in Klagenfurt, Austria, since the international recognition of Slovenia on January 15, 1992, he was for a couple of months all alone at the consulate. On the other side, when he served as the ambassador to Turkey and later to North Macedonia he had best possible deputy heads of mission with whom he was able to discuss everything that one encounters on the mission.

of the elite rivalry, their bargain, which is an additional aspect of diplomatic business they have to be very careful about.

THE KING AND THE PRIME MINISTER

The Palace of Erhenrang with the Royal House, where only the king inhabited, was an inner city by itself and to much of an extent the product of centuries of paranoia on a grand scale, goes through the envoy's mind when approaching the host's part (*ibid.*, pp. 8-9).

During the supper event we get to know how strong supporter of the Envoy Lord Estraven was. He "introduced me to people I needed to know and gradually elevated me from my first year's status as a highly imaginative monster to my present recognition as the mysterious Envoy, about to be received by the king" (*ibid.*, p.10). And additionally, "the audience he had arranged for me with the king tomorrow" (*ibid.*). From one point of view we recognize the importance of the Envoy's connection with the Prime Minister for his mission and from another one how mistrustful the Head of the State is and people around him (like Lord Tibe). The Envoy will be received by the king two years after his arrival and even this upon careful recommendation by the Prime Minister. Diplomats always have to be patient and work restlessly. It is their mission.

The discussion and the whole atmosphere was somewhat stressed, although the Envoy did not intend to make it happen. From the whole intercourse one can notice a high degree of the diplomat's incapability to understand his host, the country and manners on a whole. The Winter was indeed strange to him in spite of studying previous fact finding reports.³² At a sudden moment he recognizes how huge task it is to "understand the foundations of power and the workings of government in that kingdom" (*ibid.*). This task is even more demanding since his hosts are hardly capable of speaking directly. His expression of that wish comes almost as an outcry.

The explanation follows: "He looked at me curiously. "Well, then, put it this way. There are some persons in court who are, in your phrase, in favor with the king, but who do not favor your presence or your

32 They were prepared by the First Investigators, who also gave Winter as the name for Gethen, for its severe season (*ibid.*, p.16). One would hardly find a more suitable name as far as Genly Ai was concerned: "I've been cold ever since I came to this world" (*ibid.*, p.16).

mission here” (ibid., p.11). It was direct, open and frank statement, but also cautious and friendly. Hence also this remark from the Prime Minister: “You came to my country,” he said at last, “at a strange time. (...) I thought that your presence, your mission, might prevent our going wrong, give us a new option entirely” (ibid.).

Much of the discussion related to the forthcoming audience with the king, who “does not see things rationally, but as a king” (ibid., p.14). Additionally, “I am afraid that Argaven also believes you. But he doesn’t trust you” (ibid., p.15). That only added confusion to the Ai’s understanding of Gethen. When he left dinner at midnight, he “was cold, unconfident, obsessed by perfidy, and solitude, and fear” (ibid., p.16). One would hardly find a more suitable name as far as Genly Ai was concerned: “I’ve been cold ever since I came to this world” (ibid.); he was “ceaselessly and more or less thoroughly cold” (ibid., p.22).

In the morning, the Envoy, although full of mixed feelings, “arrived at the Palace for [my] audience with the king at Second Hour full of calm and resolution” (ibid., p.23). He was, after all, the First Mobile, one man, and a professional diplomat, enough for the ad hoc mission. Self-assured, aware of his mission, well dressed. We learn about the dress code for the audience from the way he was arranged: “everything new, very heavy and well-made as clothing is in Karhide – a white knit-fur, gray breeches, the long tabardlike overtunic, *hieb*, of bluegreen leather; new cap; new gloves tucked of the proper angle under the loose belt of the *hieb*; new boots...” (ibid., p.22). Hence “[T]he assurance of being well dressed augmented my feeling of calm and resolution” (ibid.). While waiting for the king, he kept himself busy with observing the anteroom: “Like all the King’s House this room was high, red, old, bare, with a musty chill on the air as if the drafts blew in not from other rooms but from other centuries” (ibid.).

Comparing with how we understand diplomacy nowadays, this must have been perfect scenery from the period of classical diplomacy: a picturesque dress code, furnishing and outlook somehow between baroque and rococo style; to impress the visitor and to frame him. It might be that Herberstein felt the same while waiting to be received by the Russian Tsar or Marco Polo by the Chinese Emperor. Such discrepancies are normal in diplomacy, since, according to the Preamble of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, it is “the development of friendly relations among nations, irrespective of their differ-

ing constitutional and social systems",³³ what they strive for. Anyhow, the Envoy is obviously well proficient in observing and remembering; as a career diplomat he must indeed be.

Just before entering to face the supreme authority he heard on the radio, when the Palace Bulletin was broadcasting, Lord Estraven was taken off all his positions for state treason and sentenced to death if he did not leave the country in three days. The explanation was even more horrifying for H. E., waiting to be received at any moment by the king: Estraven was lobbying "that the National-Dominion of Karhide cast away its sovereignty and surrender up its power in order to become an inferior and subject nation in a certain Union of Peoples, concerning which let all men know and say that no such Union does exist, being a device and baseless fiction of certain conspiring traitors who seek to weaken the Authority of Karhide in the king, to the profit of the real and present enemies of the land" (*ibid.*, p.23). In other words, it was the Ai's diplomatic mission and his effort that was used as a pretext to get away with Lord Estraven. And the king was receiving him in the next room. Diplomacy is always at test.

His first reactions were mixed: to get away, to use the "Ansible and Advise/Urgent! Through to Hain" (*ibid.*), his sending authority; he "was no longer calm or resolute" (*ibid.*). One can be pretty sure that the timing was well thought over, first to settle with the Prime Minister (whose premises for sure have been taped), and next to minimize as much as possible the Envoy's position prior to the audience. However, there wasn't any time (fortunately for him, he states instantly - *ibid.*, p.24), since the "double door at the far end of the anteroom was opened and the aide stood aside for me to pass, announcing me, "Genry Ai" - my name is Genly, but Karhidiers can't say *l-* and let me in in the Red Hall with King Argaven XV" (*ibid.*). And the aide omitted H. E.'s full official title as well. Again, there was an unprecedented breach of diplomatic protocol for well thought over reasons, when the Envoy was officially received by the Head of the Receiving authority, the highest possible formal event in a diplomat's business. Protocol is all about respect, equal treatment and - prestige. A diplomat is constantly sending symbolic gestures to the representatives of the receiving state and is also exposed to their gestures (Morgenthau, 1993, pp.660-667).

Anyway, he remains, though, a top observer: "My new boots go *eck*,

33 https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/9_1_1961.pdf (Accessed 12 December 2021)

eck, eck, eck as I walk down the hall towards the king, a six months' journey" (ibid.).³⁴ Here one, being also a careful career diplomatic observer, has to add how Le Guin provided extremely proficient scenery of the event.

Prior to such event, the ambassador is always advised by the Protocol Department about details: "I stopped at the edge of the dais and, as I had been instructed, did and said nothing" (ibid.). This is the way to behave. And the king did his part: "Come up, Mr. Ai. Sit down" (ibid.), also omitting all signs of the guest's position and rank. When one goes consistently through the discussion (ibid., pp.24-33), it is possible to get an indepth and teachable view in the discussion by itself, the body language, phrases, turning of words around, hidden, but also clear, open messages. We pick up some of the most educative pieces.

And the king continues: "Tell me what you have to tell me, Mr. Ai. You bear a message, they say" (ibid.). Mr. Ai's first impression was that the king, as he writes, was different then in public: "Argaven was less kingly, less manly, than he looked at a distance among his courtiers. His voice was thin, and he held his fierce lunatic head at an angle of bizarre arrogance" (ibid., p.24). The Envoy couldn't resist to touch upon Estraven ("I only just now learned of Lord Estraven's disgrace" – ibid.), be it a mistake or not. A diplomat has to use each opportunity for his sake, but do not necessarily show it. Argaven, with "a stretched, staring grin" (ibid.) informs Ai what the former Prime Minister kept advising him about the Envoy: "He's been advising me to refuse you audience, keep you hanging about waiting, maybe pack you off to Orgoreyn or the Islands" (ibid., p.25). And continued: "Let me give you some advice (...). Let no one else use you, Mr. Ai," the king said. "Keep clear of factions. Tell your own lies, do your own deeds. And trust no one. D' you know that? Trust no one" (ibid.). The mode of the discussion and its mood could be clear from this few quotations.

The king came to the point later on:

"They can't all be liars, and they all say you're not human. What then?"

And the reply:

"Then, sir, there are others like me. That is. I'm a representative..."

"Of this union, this Authority, yes, very well. What did they send you here for, is that what you want me to ask?" (ibid.)

The king was progressively suspicious, did not believe anybody and Ai

³⁴ Obviously, he asked for the meeting that much time ago.

found himself in a certain moment prior to this part anxious ("I was a good deal more afraid of him than I had expected to be." - *ibid.*, p.25). Still, he continued, he knew his job all too well.

"I've made no secret of it, sir. The Ekumen wants an alliance with the nations of Gethen."

"What for?"

"Material profit. Increase of knowledge. The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life. The enrichment of harmony and the greater glory of God. Curiosity. Adventure. Delight." (*ibid.*, p.26).

None of these explanations and the rest was of any use. The king remained as he was: "Now tell me why we, one against three thousand, should have anything to do with all these nations of monsters living out in the Void" (*ibid.*, p.27). Genly was aware of this: "He was - as Estraven had warned me - uneasy, alarmed" (*ibid.*).

The discussion remained basically like this. The king, although a bit touched by the quasi immortality of the time-jumps and the technical ability of Ekumen's system of diplomatic communication, did not change his position: "You want me to believe you, your tales and messages. But why need I believe or listen? If there are eighty thousands worlds full of monsters out there among the stars? We want nothing from them" (*ibid.*, p.31). And the Envoy, after departing from the King's Palace, was free: "The king had given me the freedom of the country; I would avail myself of it" (*ibid.*, p.33). But he knew that he would have to try again and again to complete his mission.

THE POWER OF DIPLOMACY

H.E. met the king for the second time at the end of the novel (*ibid.*, pp.244-247). As we get to know from the first hand, "It had taken Estraven six months to arrange my first audience. It had taken the rest of his life to arrange this second one" (*ibid.*, p.244). We leave to the interested readers to discover this (again or for the first time) by themselves. As already pointed out, the story is a top craftsmanship, touchy, lyrical and persuasive, with some closings and much more of openings. Le Guin produced a groundbreaking science fiction novel. But we analyze it and not retell.

That second time, the king was in favour of concluding the agreement. But first, the Envoy prepared the terrain. He did as advised by Estraven: "...you must act fast, and bring the Ship down soon" (ibid., p.217). "Bring your people to Karhide and accomplish your mission, at once, before Argaven has had time to see the possible enemy in you, before Tibe or some other councilor frightens him once more, playing on his madness" (ibid.). The starship was orbiting around the planet and waiting for Ai's message that the agreement is concluded; upon that it will land. The former Prime Minister finally persuaded the Envoy to do the other way around: the ship's landing will persuade the king and make him earn prestige. That was the risk the diplomat had to take; what he did. It payed off, as we learn from the final pages of the novel (ibid., pp.241-248), with its envoy's diplomatic peak.

The king's behaviour was all different: "Once Argaven was fully informed, he sent me a summons, a request to come at once to Erhenrang, and along with it a liberal allowance for expenses" (ibid., p.242). And in addition: "Ambassadors from friendly powers were usually lodged there" (ibid.). He learned well the customs, habits and protocol rules of the host place.

It began with the same level of courtesy as at the first time: "Sit down, Mr. Ai" (ibid.). He assured the high host that the ship will not miss the landing place: "Not enough to be afraid, my lord" (ibid.). And the king showed his other side this time: "I am no longer afraid of you, Mr. Ai" (ibid.). Things went on smooth and as they should. Hence, the Envoy's transition was soon to be materialized, as he informed the king: "... when the ship comes down it will have an ansible aboard. I will have thenceforth, if acceptable to you, the position of Envoy Plenipotentiary of the Ekumen and will be empowered to discuss, and sign, a treaty of alliance with Karhide" (ibid., p.245). H.E. was to be advanced from the ad hoc First Mobile envoy to the permanent, residing Ambassador with full powers, what the king ("Very well." - ibid.) immediately accepted. Also the agreement could be issued in various, practical ways, as circumstances provide for.³⁵ Most normally, the final diplomatic point followed within the context: "I'll meet your ... countrymen in audience tomorrow afternoon at Second Hour" (ibid., p.247).

When the ship came down and the door opened, "[T]he first off was Lang Heo Hew" (ibid., p.248), who "said solemnly in Karhidish, "I have come in friendship" (ibid.). It was the first ever occasion for the top

³⁵ Comp. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article No 4.

Karhidish officials to meet a female human.

Two, for the purpose of this paper, last comments should be added referring to the ad hoc envoy, in this case Genly Ai and (his) diplomatic destiny.

Firstly, it was all too strange for him to see humans, people, his country/wo/men, the same as he was, after such a long time among unisex Karhidishers: "But they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them" (*ibid.*). The receiving state's environment influences diplomats and if they stay too long, they get acquainted to it. They get diplomatic blindness and become part of the receiving society that they shall not. They don't perceive it well as foreigners anymore, what they are and have to be at the end of the day, but as almost natives. This means they know it well, what they should, but it affects also the other way around. A diplomat is a stranger in the receiving state and remains one, whatever close he gets. But he must, though, take care not to become stranger in his own country, although circumstances and rules of his occupation drive him slowly that way all the time.

Secondly, a diplomat remains a diplomat, wherever he goes or finds himself. This also means keeping with himself a certain dose of respect, solitude and humbleness that should be exercised to others. Since this is part of the eternal human value cycle, and, last but not least, since others show this to you as well: "You are the Envoy, Gentry Ai?" "I am." He looked at me, and I at him" (*ibid.*, p.251). He visited the late Estraven's home town and the family, when everything was over: "I should like to hear that tale, my Lord Envoy," said old Esvans, very calm" (*ibid.*, p.252).

CONCLUSION

This exceptional science fiction novel – *The Left Hand of Darkness* – is as rich with diplomacy as it can be. The very fact offers a thrilling research exercise to dwell upon, but also a huge amount of pure reading joy, fulfilled with astonishment and admiration. It is like this thanks to two reasons; first, the stylish mastery of the respected author, and second, her interdisciplinary approach to composition and substance of her telling. As she says – or merely repeats after the main promotor – truth is always a matter of imagination. Both aspects, truth and imagination are also harbored in the diplomatic profession. The diplomatic job is an endless repetition of numerous variations of same old rules and approaches. Therefore, diplomats need the command of the truth (professional habitat) and imagination (capability to adapt to the ever changing circumstances).

Diplomatic aspects of the groundbreaking classical science fiction novel offer a big amount of all these. We follow the role, mission and its applicability within the frame of bilateral diplomacy, pursued by an ad hoc diplomatic envoy, who knows that after succeeding on his task, he will become the residential ambassador (extraordinary and plenipotentiary) as well.

He builds his success on the long run approach, patience and knowledge of the host place, collected by his predecessors and by himself. He exercises basic diplomatic methods, with skilled observation and reporting. The whole novel is full of protocol aspects and elements that sometimes seem impossible to understand since the host world is so alien to his own one. This offers the respected author more food for thought and dwelling and to readers more opportunities to learn diplomacy in one of its best variations.

Genly Ai is patient in his endless effort to achieve his goal. He pursues it in spite of several protocol gaps and gaffes from the host authorities that he is facing. With this, the author tells us that in the diplomatic world basically nothing should take a diplomat away from achieving his goal. This could be very demanding, but people from this profession know how to do it: “We adapt solution to the problem” (Jazbec, 2006, p.92). Next, we learn, through the eyes of the author, how careful, consistent and continuous observer Genly Ai is. He learns about the conditions in the receiving state with persistent exercise of obser-

vation and is reporting to his authority hence forth. However, we learn the latter only from the entries to various chapters and not directly.

We learn – or the author teaches us – how words are immensely important in diplomacy, they are everywhere and practically everything.³⁶ The reader is taught that time speaks in favour of diplomacy, hence there's no need to hurry. The way the Ekumen's diplomacy is broadening the alliance of nations is demonstrated: first come the First Investigators, who research, gather information and present an all-encompassing report, then the First Mobile (ad hoc envoy) is sent, and follows the opening of the residential mission with the ambassador as its head.

Finally, there is a lecture about the power of diplomacy. It lays in the fact – as the discussed novel shows – that a single diplomat, armed with diplomatic status, immunities and privileges, being the top representative of the sending authority, and his voice, speaking truth, counts more than armies, hard power and all what comes along. But diplomats, to be able to achieve their goal, i.e. friendship and peace, have to have time. Circumstances show and allow when and how the completion of the mission is possible.

Taking into consideration afore mentioned centerpieces, the highly innovative author produced useful, rich and suitable definition of diplomacy. With all here discussed issues and aspects she brought a special touch of anthropology and psychology into diplomatic business and its understanding through her science fiction masterpiece.

36 Comp. Jazbec, 2019.

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