



# Transnational Deep Ecologies: Comparative Eco-Consciousness in Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* and Crvenkovska's *The House Above the Waves*

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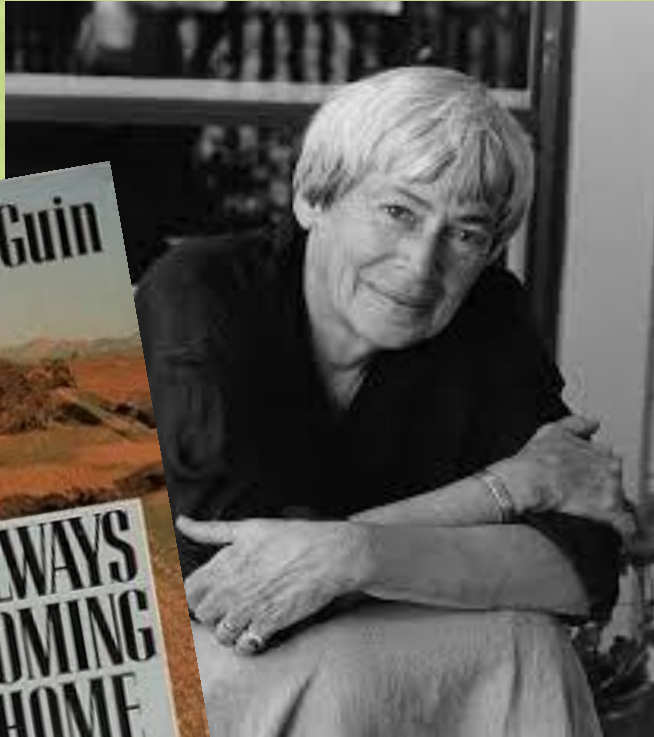
УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ  
ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ  
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# Why Ursula K. Le Guin and Biljana Crvenkovska?

## A Tale of Two Shores

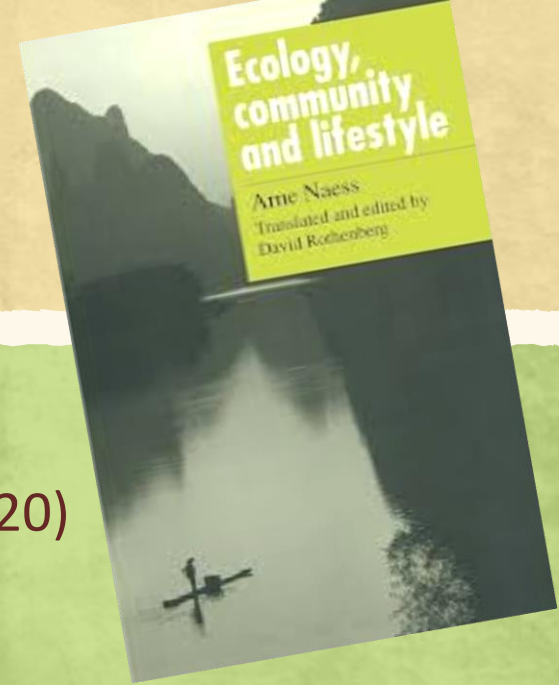
Ursula K. Le Guin, Berkeley,  
California, USA (1929-2018)



Biljana Crvenkovska, Skopje,  
N. Macedonia (1973-)



# Ecospiritual Visions in Le Guin and Crvenkovska



This paper explores deep ecological themes in:

- Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1986)
- Biljana Crvenkovska's *Куќа над брановите* (*The House Above the Waves*, 2020)

Grounded in Arne Næss's Deep Ecology principles:

- Næss, A. (1989). *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (D. Rothenberg, Trans. & Ed.)

Le Guin: Imagines an ecotopian society (the Kesh) with a collective ecological ethos rooted in spiritual balance and restraint

Crvenkovska: Portrays nature as a personal, symbolic force—shaping memory, identity, and transformation.

The comparison highlights:

- Deep Ecology as both cultural worldview and personal journey
- The versatility of ecocriticism across cultures and genres







# Arne Naess's Deep Ecology Core Principles

1. **Intrinsic value of nature** - not just as a resource for humans.  
— non-human elements (animals, landscapes, ecosystems) their own meaning, purpose, or dignity —not just as backdrops or tools for human characters.
2. **Ecological Self / Self-Realization**  
True personal growth includes realizing one's deep connectedness with all living beings —  
Identity is often expanded beyond the individual.
3. **Biocentric Equality** - all life forms have equal rights to live and flourish  
— the text that gives voice or agency to plants, animals, or landscapes.



# Arne Naess's Deep Ecology Core Principles - continued

4. **Diversity and symbiosis** - a source of strength and stability.
  - harmony among human and non-human communities, and celebration of cultural and ecological pluralism reflect this principle.
5. **Anti-consumerism / simple living** - to minimize harm to the environment.
  - critique industrialization, consumerism, or excess
  - nature-integrated lifestyles (as in ACH), align with this.
6. **Decentralization / localism** - power and decision-making should be local and ecological, not global and exploitative.
  - small, sustainable communities, traditional ecological knowledge, or resistance to industrial forces.





# ACH: Form and Structure

- A cultural compendium:
  - Stories, poems, songs, recipes, plays of the Kesh
  - Anthropological reports by Pandora, a narrator from our own time
  - Biographies, sketches, maps, and ecological notes
- Original edition accompanied by a cassette:
  - "*Music and Poetry of the Kesh*" (reissued in 2018)
- Rich collage structure blurs fiction and ethnography, creating an immersive and reflective utopian vision.
- The story of the Kesh — presented in fragments and from multiple perspectives, rather than following a traditional linear narrative.





# Seasonal Rituals and Ecological Reverence in *ACH*



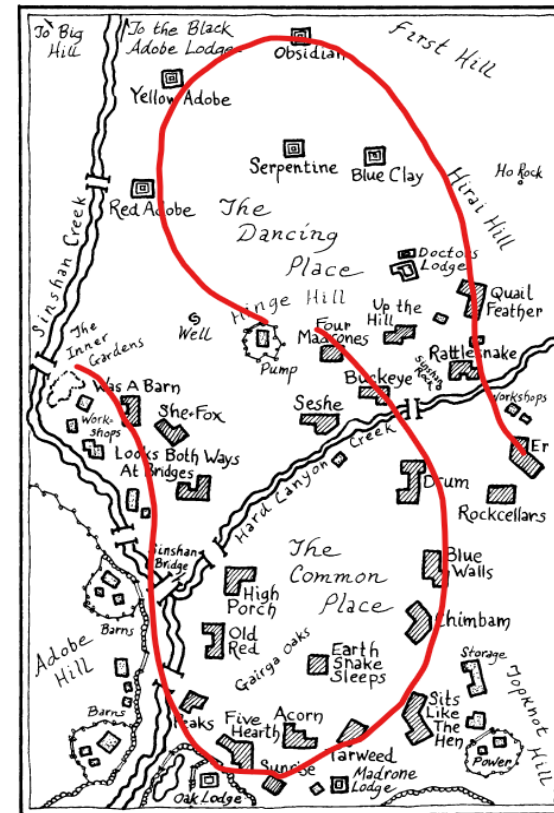
- Perform seasonal ceremonies like *dance the water* during extreme weather (p. 22). — rituals aim to restore balance: calling for rain in drought and sun in winter fog.
- Songs invoke natural forces—streams, pools, rain, and sunlight—reflecting sacred ties to the land.
- Trance singings align with solstices and seasonal shifts — reinforce nature's cyclical rhythms.
- Practices reflect a worldview where nature — sacred, animate, and spiritually responsive.
- Næss: Intrinsic value of all living beings and natural processes
  - biocentric equality — recognize themselves as part of nature's cycles rather than above them — solstices and treating nonhuman forces as active participants.





## Cultural Practices and Symbolism in *Always Coming Home*

ed weaving, pottery, subsistence farming, and a deep affinity to the land and



A large, thick black spiral graphic is centered on a light green background. The spiral starts from a small circle in the middle and winds outwards in a clockwise direction, completing approximately two full rotations. The background has a subtle, mottled texture.

*Heyiya-if*, a holy symbol  
for the Kesh.

- Functioning as a culture shaping the Kesh worldview.
- Næss: Biocentric equality and Ecological Self.





# Ethical Compassion in *Always Coming Home*

*"The image of the other's pain is the center of being human."* (Le Guin, p. 478)

— reflects an ethical impulse rooted in compassion and relational awareness.

—one's sense of self is expanded through recognition of the other — human or nonhuman.

- Deep ecology— true self-realization comes when individuals see themselves as part of the wider web of life. Compassion for "the other" — not just altruism but an expression of a widened self-identity.

Rooting human identity in empathy and interconnectedness, Le Guin's statement reflects the deep ecological move away from an isolated ego toward the Ecological Self, where self and other overlap.

*"Your hands are child's hands. They are running water through the wheel. They don't hold water, they let go, they make clean."*

(Le Guin, p. 35)



- Suggests non-possessiveness—they “don’t hold water,” — the deep ecological idea — value is not in accumulation or ownership but in flow, cleansing, and renewal.
- childlike quality of the hands — humility and openness, resisting control or domination
- often tied to consumerist and exploitative attitudes toward nature.

*"With ceremony, with forms of politeness and reassurance, they borrowed the waters of the River and its little confluents to drink and be clean and irrigate with, using water mindfully, carefully. (Le Guin, p.52)*

— ethic of simplicity: central to the anti-consumerist principle in deep ecology.

- Næss’s critique of consumerism — high material consumption does not equate to high quality of life.
- The Kesh live this principle: technology is modest — looms, solar ovens, compost systems — and always embedded in community use. Items made to last, repaired, or ceremonially relinquished.





## Decentralization / Localism

- The Valley is more than a setting—a living character, named and mapped with care.
  - live in small villages scattered throughout the Valley — largely self-sufficient in food, crafts, and cultural practices; — production and exchange rooted in place and prevents dependency on distant powers.
- Farming subsistence-oriented, not export-driven. Crafts like weaving, pottery, and agriculture tied to local needs and community. Production dictated by local conditions.
- Measurement of success based on community well-being and ecological health, not economic growth or individual achievement.
- Social structure rejects central authority: decisions arise from consensus and proximity.
- As Næss & Sessions (1984, pp. 97–98) — decentralization fosters responsibility and ecological awareness—for the Kesh, this is not ideology but a way of life.

The novel is a narrative enactment of Næss's philosophy

# Apocalyptic Solitude – Biljana Crvenkovska's *The House Above the Waves*



- Structured as a mosaic: lyrical scenes, fragments, meditations  
—like field notes and memory shards
- Shifting voices: close third-person (woman alone on island) + first-person intimacy → witness + confession.
- World of wind, sea, rock, scant shelter; traces of absent society in objects and habits. Survival depends on mending, foraging, watching weather; tools — simple, handmade.
- Form mirrors setting: post-calamity solitude on a fragile coast → landscape, work, thought braid together.
- Genres interwoven: prologue, epistolary transmissions, documentary notes, lyric poems, epilogue.
- No single hero/fixed viewpoint: narrative moves among Bela, Lukijan, Al Aral, the Rememberers.





# Narrative Arcs & Ecological Resonance



- Prologue: Al Aral (Pomnachi/Rememberers), extra-terrestrial observer; frames tale as memory & aftermath.
- Oral transmissions: Bela ↔ Lukijan (to Callisto, moon of Jupiter). Lukijan's voice ceases → Bela continues, communication becomes vigil.
- Part II, "Noise": Bela on island, fevered visions; encounters Aron (cliff-dweller) & Ashra (grandmother-like figure). Blurs dream/reality.
- Part III, "Silence": Al Aral's notes + Rememberers' collective consciousness. Recounts Earth/Anu Rada's last century before Great Cleansing
- Closing poems: elegies of world before & after catastrophe; imply Bela survives on Kulit Rama, "eternal gate" where Rememberers arrive.
- How *House Above the Waves* (2020) resonates with deep ecology will be explored further





# Nature's Intrinsic Value and the Ecological Self

*"The clouds hang heavier than yesterday. The wind erases all before it. Darkness discovers us, wherever we may be"* (Crvenkovska, p. 32).

- Storm is not an adversary but a presence; sea and storm presented as subjects in their own right, not human backdrops:

→ reflects Næss's principle of intrinsic value. *"togetherness with other beings" grows into care as the "own/not-own distinction survives only in grammar, not in feeling"* (Næss, 1989, p. 175).

*"Images began to take shape: the dark, threatening sea-sky, the jostling of the winds, the flash, the lament, the pain."* (Crvenkovska, p. 79).

- Porous boundaries of self and place: weather enters thought → self formed with the island → Næss's ecological self.

Imagery of roots in rock:

*"Your roots are there, in the rock where only what it allows can thrive"* (p. 35).

Identity inseparable from place → being tethered to soil and stone.







# Biocentric Equality and Diversity

*"Max and I went out into the forest. We ran, hunted, gathered mushrooms.. we listened to the birds, which seemed to be more and more with each passing day" ( p. 47).*

- Deep ecology — humans are not superior; all beings share a right to exist and flourish. HAW treats natural presences even-handedly. No hierarchy here- everything belongs to one continuum of value → a literary embodiment of biocentric equality.



*"He noticed creatures of the seas and oceans; and on land—large, small, barely visible, immense... in fresh waters, in the air, and in the depths of the earth... beautifully imperfect" ( p. 147).*

- Variety itself is richness; habitats named side by side— exchange and co-dependence—life forms support one another's flourishing. — apocalyptic setting, human systems fade, yet nonhuman life renews in cycles, affirming community beyond the human.



# Anti-consumerism, Simplicity, and the Solitude of Survival

- Deep ecology warns: modern societies confuse standard of living with quality of life. On the island, life is pared down; worth = endurance and necessity, not accumulation.
- “The clear, pure water from the underground springs ... was divided—part for use, part for storage in special containers” ( p. 74).*
- Sustenance over stockpiling. Durable, repairable gear (e.g., solar panels) resists the replacement cycle → anti-consumerist ethic.
- “Yet, from the viewpoint of the island and its dwellers—Bela, the cat Max, and the birds of the forest—being severed from the rest of the world was not a burden but a blessing.” (p. 73).*
- No global systems or markets here—only local self-reliance under wind, sea, and rock → decentralization.
  - With society stripped away, meaning shifts to relations with nonhuman forms; the self widens toward an ecological identity.
  - Crisis exposes a hard truth: survival follows rhythms we can't control; simplicity becomes liberation, not deprivation (Næss, 1989).



# Transnational Comparative Eco-consciousness



- Two visions grounded in Næss's principles:
  - *Always Coming Home* (1986): hybrid ethnography/speculative fiction.
  - *House Above the Waves* (2020): lyrical solitude after catastrophe.
- Intrinsic value of nature in both:
  - Kesh ethos: "everybody belongs to everybody... [the Dayao man] thinks everything else belongs to him, women, animals, things, the world." (Le Guin, p. 367).
  - Island world of sea, wind, rock as elemental presences, not resources. "The Rock of the Winds... their habits and their eternal game of domination." (Crvenkovska, p. 71). The rock is not valuable only because it provides shelter or meaning for humans—valuable in itself, an active participant in the elemental drama of the world
- Ecological Self (identity embedded in place):
  - Le Guin: formed communally through education, ritual, and language that resists ownership of land.
  - Crvenkovska: forged in solitude; thought and breath align with wind and tide—self made with the island.

# Transnational Comparative Eco-consciousness - continued

- Biocentric equality:
  - Cross-species address and ritual respect: “I *give you what blessing I can... give me what blessing you can!*” (Le Guin, p. 20).
  - Even-handed noticing on the island walk with Max—birds, mushrooms, weather share one field of value (Crvenkovska, p. 47).
- Diversity & symbiosis:
  - Kesh cultivate varied crops/arts scaled to the Valley.
  - Waves and shore gather many small lives—variation itself is richness.
- Anti-consumerism & simplicity:
  - Quality of life ≠ standard of living (Næss, 1989). Post-collapse essentials: durability, repair, and resilience replace accumulation.
- Decentralization / localism
  - Le Guin: village consensus; politics scaled to land. Crvenkovska: radical localism by necessity—life patterned only by island limits.





# Conclusions

## *House Above the Waves and Always Coming Home*



Constitute a powerful literary dialogue with Arne Næss's deep ecology. Crvenkovska immerses the reader in an elemental solitude where nature's force and indifference compel a radical ecological awareness. Le Guin presents a richly textured society that has reoriented itself around ecological principles, embedding deep ecology in the very structures of culture and community.

Whether through the silence of waves or the song of communal ritual, these narratives echo Næss's central conviction — the world is not ours to dominate but to dwell in, responsibly, reverently, and with joy in its diversity.

Challenge the anthropocentric assumptions of industrial modernity and offer divergent pathways toward ecological re-inhabitation

Placing Crvenkovska's elemental minimalism alongside Le Guin's ecological maximalism, we gain a fuller vision of what deep ecology might look like in literature: not a single prescription, but a shared reimagining of human life within the web of all beings.

One through survival at the edge of collapse, the other through deliberate cultural transformation.

Respond to the same philosophical call — to reimagine human identity, value, and survival in ecological terms.

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*Thank you for your attention!*

## THE FIVE HOUSES OF THE EARTH

The First House	The Second House	The Third House	The Fourth House	The Fifth House
OBSIDIAN	BLUE CLAY	SERPENTINE	YELLOW ADOBE	RED ADOBE
northeast black the moon	northwest blue fresh waters	N.E.S.W green stones	southeast yellow dirt	southwest red dirt

The direction of movement associated with all Five Houses of the Earth is inward.



### The Inhabitants

Those who live in the Five Houses of the Earth are the earth itself, the moon, all rocks and landforms, all fresh waters, individual animals and human beings currently alive, plants used by human beings, domestic and ground-living birds, game and domestic animals.

Domestic animals and birds: sheep, cattle, horses, donkeys, mules, cats, dogs, humpi, poultry, pets.



Game animals and birds: deer, brushrabbit, jackrabbit, wild pig, squirrel, possum, quail, pheasant, wild fowl; sometimes wild cattle, freshwater fish, frogs, crayfish.

Gathered plants: berries, seed grasses, roots, herbs, greens, edible fungi, nuts, wild fruit trees, timber trees, acorn & gall oaks, tule, cattail, wild flowers, etc.

Domestic plants: wood: olive, plum, peach, nectarine, apricot, cherry, pear, grape vine, almond, walnut, orange, lemon, apple, rose, etc.

Domestic plants: not wood: beans, peas, legumes, corn, squash, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, tomatillos, peppers, okra, garlic, vegetables of the cabbage family, root vegetables, greens, melons, herbs: hemp, cotton, flax; garden flowers; etc.

### The Festivals

The inhabitants of all Five Houses of the Earth together dance the Sky Dances of the World Ceremony (near the spring equinox) and the Sun Dance (at the winter solstice).

The Moon Dance | The Water Dance | The Summer Dance | The Wine Dance | The Grass Dance

### The Lodges

The Bay Laurel Lodge and the Finders Lodge are under the auspices of all Five Houses of the Earth.

The Blood Lodge  
The Blood Clown Society  
The White Clown Society  
The Lamb Society

The Hunters Lodge  
The Fishers Lodge  
The Salt Lodge

The Doctors Lodge  
The Oak Society

The Planting Lodge  
The Green Clown Society  
The Olive Society



### The Arts

The Glass Art  
The Tanning Art  
The Cloth Art

The Potting Art  
The Water Art

The Book Art

The Wood Art  
The Drum Art

The Wine Art  
The Smith Art

## THE FOUR HOUSES OF THE SKY

The Sixth House	The Seventh House	The Eighth House	The Ninth House
RAIN	CLOUD	WIND	STILL AIR

The directions of all Four Houses of the Sky are towards the nadir and towards the zenith. The colors of all Four Houses of the Sky are the spectrum of the rainbow, and white.

bear  
death  
down

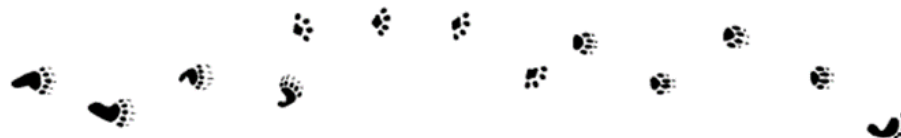
puma  
dream  
up

coyote  
wilderness  
across

hawk  
eternity  
out

### The Inhabitants

Those who live in the Four Houses of the Sky are most birds, sea fish, shellfish, wild animals that are not hunted for food (puma, wildcat, feral cat, coyote, wild dog, bear, ringtail, mouse, vole, rat, woodrat, squirrel, ground squirrel, chipmunk, mole, gopher, skunk, porcupine, otter, fox, bat), reptiles, amphibians, insects; any plant or animal considered as the species or in general; human beings as the species, people, tribe, or nation; the dead, the unborn; all beings in stories or dreams: the oceans, the sun, the stars.



### The Festivals

The inhabitants of the Four Houses dance the Earth Dances of the World Ceremony, and the Sun Dance.

### The Lodges

The Black Adobe Lodge and the Madrone Lodge are under the auspices of all Four Houses of the Sky.



### The Arts

The Milling Art is under the auspices of all Four Houses of the Sky.



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