



No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters

Ursula K. Le Guin

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From acclaimed author Ursula K. Le Guin, and with an introduction by Karen Joy Fowler, a collection of thoughts—always adroit, often acerbic—on aging, belief, the state of literature, and the state of the nation.

Ursula K. Le Guin has taken readers to imaginary worlds for decades. Now she's in the last great frontier of life, old age, and exploring new literary territory: the blog, a forum where her voice—sharp, witty, as compassionate as it is critical—shines. *No Time to Spare* collects the best of Ursula's blog, presenting perfectly crystallized dispatches on what matters to her now, her concerns with this world, and her wonder at it.

On the absurdity of denying your age, she says, "If I'm ninety and believe I'm forty-five, I'm headed for a very bad time trying to get out of the bathtub." On cultural perceptions of fantasy: "The direction of escape is toward freedom. So what is 'escapism' an accusation of?" On her new cat: "He still won't sit on a lap...I don't know if he ever will. He just doesn't accept the lap hypothesis." On breakfast: "Eating an egg from the shell takes not only practice, but resolution, even courage, possibly willingness to commit crime." And on all that is unknown, all that we discover as we muddle through life: "How rich we are in knowledge, and in all that lies around us yet to learn. Billionaires, all of us."

No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters Details

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From Reader Review No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters for online ebook

David Schaafsma says

RIP, January 22, 2018

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/01...>

Kids used to have a whole lot of spare time, middle-class kids anyhow. Outside of school and if they weren't into a sport, most of their time was spare, and they figured out more or less successfully what to do with it. I had whole spare summers when I was a teenager. Three spare months. No stated occupation whatsoever. Much of after-school was spare time too. I read, I wrote, I hung out with Jean and Shirley and Joyce, I moseyed around having thoughts and feelings, oh lord, deep thoughts, deep feelings... I hope some kids still have time like that. The ones I know seem to be on a treadmill of programming, rushing on without pause to the next event on their schedule, the soccer practice the playdate the whatever. I hope they find interstices and wriggle into them. Sometimes I notice that a teenager in the family group is present in body — smiling, polite, apparently attentive — but absent. I think, I hope she has found an interstice, made herself some spare time, wriggled into it, and is alone there, deep down there, thinking, feeling.

I am not exactly retired, because I never had a job to retire from. I still work, though not as hard as I did. I have always been and am proud to consider myself a working woman. But to the Questioners of Harvard my lifework has been a “creative activity,” a hobby, something you do to fill up spare time. Perhaps if they knew I'd made a living out of it they'd move it to a more respectable category, but I rather doubt it.

Diane S ? says

It has only been in the last several years that I have added essays into my already cumbersome reading repertoire. As a younger reader I was all about the books, prose and plot, not realizing how much of an author's own self goes into the writing of each and every book. I fell in love with this literary form, such a wonderful way to get to know what is important to an author, glimpses into their personal lives, how they think, and how they feel about things impacting their lives. What may be even stranger, is that I am not a scyfy reader, well except for post apocalyptic novels, so I have never even read oned of her novels. So why did I decide to read this? She is going to be eighty one, and the wisdom she has accumulated, as well as all the changes she has seen, had to be interesting.

It was, and so much more. Her wisdom and inner grace shines in her writing, as does her acerbic wit. There are some that deal with her personal life, mainly her one year old cat named Pard. These are absolutely delightful and insightful. She has intelligent opinions about many things, from our government, and the corporation owned Congress, to feminism and it's results through the years.

Love this quote, which is only one of many witty comments within. She writes about the absurdity of denying your age, "If I'm ninety and believe I'm forty five, I'm headed for a very bad time trying to get out of the bathtub." Common sense for sure and she has plenty of it, shown again and again in her writing. She writes exceedingly well, and I think I will stretch myself this coming year, and actually try one of her shorter works. If nothing else I am sure I will enjoy her writing, will see about the plot.

Tomislav says

I received a kindle format version of this book at no cost, in return for promising to write an honest review. I am a long-time fan of Ursula LeGuin's writing – especially the books of the Hainish Cycle, so was actually quite pleased to have this opportunity to read and comment on the book shortly before publication.

In the spirit of “no time to spare.” I will offer this quick overview of my thoughts. This is a compilation of entries from Ursula LeGuin's blog, posted during the years of 2010 through 2016. Reordered topically, they are short pieces dealing mostly with becoming old, gender, writing, philosophy, and nature – and with interstitial sections about her cat. I found the sections on the cat to be mundane, while the majority of the others were insightful and thought-provoking but fragmented.

Before going into it a little more, I should reveal some things about myself, as that has shaped how I respond to her work. In spite of my name, I am American born and grew up in the Upper Midwest. I am a 62-year old recently retired biomedical engineer, take a secular view of my own existence, but am married to a Unitarian Universalist parish minister. Ursula LeGuin is of my parents' generation; in fact she was 18 months old when my father was born. So, while her generational outlook is not mine, I think of my parents, and then I do understand.

Generally, I don't take the time to read blogs. I really only wish to spend that kind of attention on the people who matter to me most – my family. Blogs are mostly disorganized, arbitrary, and indeed sometimes not well thought through. Ursula LeGuin's career has shown her to have a visionary perspective, and important ideas to relate, but I find the finished product of a novel or story to be a more satisfying form in which to digest them. I started reading her work about 45 years ago, and upon periodic re-reading have found sometimes different meanings in the same pieces. However, as LeGuin observes in one of the included blog posts, with aging comes even less time to do things other than what has to be done. So, at this book, we have her perspective and ideas in a more raw state. But that is interesting to me. I'm in early and active retirement now, but my near future will be the lifestyle of my parents and of LeGuin, I should be so lucky.

Feminism – LeGuin sees gender and the male/female power imbalance in everything, more than I do. For example, I do not think the word “American” is implicitly male. I have lived most of my lifetime in an era of an articulated feminism, and at some point, some of the shift has become internalized. Not that equity is here, but I think for my parents' generation even the basic tenets of feminism will always be a forced stance.

Writing – LeGuin loves words. She analyzes meanings. Me, I just use them – but I appreciate being shown more about what is implied by word choice. LeGuin loves story. She sees story as not just a series of interesting events, but reflective of prior story and culture. I think her understanding of existence is to be alive in a universe of interwoven stories. While for me, math and physical science are more fundamental. So, when someone like me reads her recent novel *Lavinia*, not having previously read *The Iliad* or *The Aeneid*, in fact barely being familiar with them, it is an excursion into another universe and another way of thinking. Her blog entry “Papa H” reveals some of her thoughts on our archetypal stories, and shores up my understanding.

Nature – LeGuin has a philosophical love of nature, and of the tension between acting on it versus perceiving and entering into relation with it. However, as a person of words, she conveys nature through words. Personally, I find words to be a low bandwidth (allow me to say) way to appreciate what is essentially

experiential. I am a bicyclist, kayaker, snowshoer, backpacker, and observer of nature, and her blog entries read to me like a note-to-self, "remember this in its full depth later". It doesn't work so well for outside readers though.

It was both wonderful and sad for me to read this book, wishing for more, but gratefully receiving it.

Peter Tillman says

Short essays on many topics, all written in the past six or seven years. I particularly liked her cat stories ("Annals of Pard") and a dramatic rattlesnake encounter ("First Contact"), but they're all interesting. I'll probably reread the book sometime.

Her choice of the title was prophetic. Ms. Le Guin passed away on Jan. 22, 2018 at 88. She will be missed.

Here's the New Republic's take,
<https://newrepublic.com/article/14471...>

"In 2010, at the age of 81, the acclaimed novelist Ursula K. Le Guin started a blog. ... [her new book, which] harvests a representative sample of her blog posts, feels like the surprising and satisfying culmination to a career in other literary forms. ... "

Carol. says

Ursula Le Guin is one of my heroes, in as much as I have them. Which is, to say, hardly at all, but her writing has often astounded me, literally impacting how I perceived the world. When I was a teen, *The Left Hand of Darkness* did more to challenge my conception of gender identity than anything I would read or hear for years. However, her writing has also felt somewhat laborious to me, so when I saw this book of blog-style posts, I leapt at the chance to read it (figuratively, naturally. You think I leap at my age? What am I, a frog?) At any rate, I absolutely loved her in short-form, her words seemingly a little less crafted than her novels, sounding more like her voice, talking about everyday things--"**The point of a soft-boiled egg is the difficulty of eating it, the attention it requires, the ceremony**"--writerly things and general opinion pieces.

It's really, really good. The book comes with an introduction by Karen Joy Fowler and a note from Le Guin about her purpose and the informality of the writing. 'Part One: Going Over Eighty' is one of my favorite sections. 'Part Two: The Lit Biz' is in theory about literary stuff and contains some insight into the life of the writer --readers' questions and awards--as well as discussion on things like ubiquitousness of swearing, and narration. 'Part Three: Trying to Make Sense' of it is the most topical section. It was interesting, but not as favorite. 'Part Four: Rewards' shines, with writing beautiful enough, polished enough to remind me why she's a master. Parts One, Two and Three are all followed by 'The Annals of Pard,' brief pieces about her latest cat. I have a ridiculous amount of highlights, my Kindle equivalent of 'mm-hmm' affirmations.

The posts on aging are excellent and I probably could have just highlighted the entire piece of 'The Diminished Thing.' It does not sound as if aging has come easily, and I appreciate that she is both honest and old in claiming it. "**Old age isn't a state of mind. It's an existential situation.**" How beautifully she negates the 'you are only as old as you think you are' mouthings!

I admire how she somewhat irascibly shares what she perceives as her failings. I love that she calls out the new generations of almost-memoirs with a writerly note on genres, and then gracefully turns it into a discussion of Delores, her 'hired help' who was so important to her ('Someone Named Delores'). I was fascinated by the entries on Pard, the latest cat, and his periodic skirmishes with mice. I think she summarized the entire problem with modern politics in three sentences (from 'The Diminished Thing' in *Aging*, no less):

"This is morally problematic when personal *decision* is confused with personal *opinion*. A decision worth the name is based on observation, factual information, intellectual and ethical judgment. Opinion--that darling of the press, the politician, and the poll--may be based on no information at all."

There's an interesting piece on what fantasy is that affirms why I've read so much in the field. My favorite highlight: **"It doesn't have to be the way it is. That is what fantasy says... Yet it is a subversive statement."** Can we please remind those who are nostalgic for the sprawling epic fantasies of the 80s and 90s or the pulp fantasy of the 50s and 60s that we can do more?

Part Three definitely spoke to me, with parts of it echoing my own hopelessness. From 'Lying it All Away': **"It appears that we've given up on the long-range view. That we've decided not to think about consequences--about cause and effect. Maybe that's why I feel that I live in exile. I used to live in a country that had a future."**

It makes me wish for a coffee conversation, time to dive in and chew at these ideas. I wished I knew even more about her life, because I sense a kindred spirit, an introvert who communicates best through words, who appears transparent about ideas but extremely private about details of real life. The closing piece, is so crafted and beautiful it makes me tear. From 'Notes From a Week at a Ranch in the Oregon High Desert':

"Hundreds of blackbirds gathered in the pastures south of the house, vanishing completely in the tall grass, then rising out of it in ripples and billows, or streaming and streaming up into a single tree up under the ridge till its lower branches were blacker with birds than green with leaves, then flowing down away from it into the reeds and out across the air in a single, flickering, particulate wave. What is entity?"

Many, many thanks to NetGalley and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for the advance reader copy. Quotes may change in final publication but are included to give a sense of the excellent writing.

Tiffany Reisz says

A great collection of Le Guin's blog posts. The star of the show is really Pard, her kitty. Highly enjoyed it but then again, I got it 50% off. I doubt I'd love it as much if I'd paid full price. ;)

Anna Kander says

This is an eclectic collection of about forty blog posts by Ursula K. Le Guin, a trailblazing author of feminist

science fiction/speculative fiction. She wrote the posts in her late 70s and into her 80s. She discusses getting older, capitalism, politics, religion, Homer, and her cat. She alludes to her “feud” with Hugh Howey (which sent me down a rabbit hole of internet research, because it was news to me and she’s graciously vague). She solves a minor mystery of being weirdly, widely misquoted on the internet. She writes about her best friend in high school—and her best friend’s uncle, John Steinbeck. (Another internet rabbit hole.) Her writing is casual here, less polished than familiar; it felt like she was writing to me.

When I was little, Le Guin visited my local public library. My dad—who is such a fan of science fiction and fantasy that he named me after a character in the *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*—took me to see Le Guin. Afterward, I stood in line for her autograph, clutching a puffy, plastic “autograph hound” book shaped like an actual hound. She signed a pink page in the book for me, and I kept it for years. Then I grew up and wrote boring academic articles about feminist speculative fiction. (Sometimes I wrote them with my father. The articles were still boring, but writing them was one of the joys of my life.)

Le Guin’s posts on politics and gender have held up least well. (I was a third-wave feminist, and I’m sure some of my writing doesn’t hold up either. Also, almost everybody who writes about politics has made claims that got thrown out the window after the 2016 US presidential election.)

While I was reading this book, I mentioned it to my father. I said, “So much cat stuff.” (Cats are great. Please don’t send comments.) He said, “Oh, yeah, she famously loves cats.” Then he wanted to hear about every single thing she said in the book. This book is for Le Guin fans. This book is for speculative fiction fans. I’m glad to have read it, to know more history and to consider the future.

Bonus quotes from *NO TIME TO SPARE*, by Ursula K. Le Guin...

(view spoiler)

Richard Derus says

Rating: 5* of five

I have always had friends, good and close friends. They have always been of all ages, genders, and ethnicities. They have not infrequently cordially loathed each other. To me, each of them was, and mostly still is, a treasure and a boon and a blessing. A dear, dear friend of mine recently passed her 89th birthday and, in a chat we were having today, I mentioned Ursula K. LeGuin and this collection of essays.

"Who?" asked my friend, blankly.

"A *Wizard of Earthsea! The Left Hand of Darkness!* We talked about her politics in the 1970s, how she was so very Berkeley...ringing a bell?"

"Nooo..."

light bulb "Alfred Kroeber's daughter!"

"Ooohhh, yes, {her sociologist husband} liked Alfred and his work, good heavens she's dead?"

The point of my anecdote is that all writers worth your eyeblinks to read will build bridges among all your friends. My Goodreads friends know LeGuin's novels. My elderly academic friends know her mother's and father's ground-breaking work. But everywhere, in every corner of the friendverse, there stands Ursula. She furnished my world with metaphors..."do I need an ansible to reach the planet you're on?" demanded a blood relative of my inattentive "mm hmm"ing self recently...she formed my political thought with her questions like, "and why is capitalism, which condones x and demands y and creates z , so great again?" where x , y , z are a subset of injustice and unfairness.

She died at a good age, eighty-eight, good for us because it is large and good for her because it liberated her from the doubtless painful task of comparing the world she grew up in to its decidedly inferior present-day counterpart. A world in which 45 and his kakistocracy of deplorables have snatched ascendancy from the merely venal, selfish, and greedy kleptocrats who have ruled us for a half-century now.

Reading these short blog posts was like having a last chat with your revered teacher, a *Tuesdays with Morrie* that's been shorn of the mawkish sentimentality and portentous Message Making that made that book such a fucking chore to ingest. In every way, this collection of aptly titled blog posts is the opposite, being a uniformly satisfying reading experience. The wide range of Ursula's readership is celebrated in her posts about letters from fans, especially kids; how completely she adored us all. Some of the stuff kids wrote to her is sidesplitting, and to read her recounting of the letters is to hear a delighted cackle from the page. She ends her post on "Kids' Letters" with a particularly puzzling signature she's been mulling over for years, and has decided is perfect in its way, so she says to us all: "mth frum Ursula."

And before someone says it...yes, there are lots and lots of words about Pard, her *shudder* c-a-t. And yes, I gave it five stars anyway. Rank Has Its Privileges.

mth frum Richard.

Ross Blocher says

In "No Time to Spare", prolific author Ursula K. Le Guin has collected some 44 blog entries and published them together as a collection that examines aging, relationships, recognition, cats, nature, feminism, writing, cats, belief, society, childhood, and cats. The entries are dated but not chronological, and if there is a particular organization to their ordering, I have not figured it out. Some of the stories deliver neatly-wrapped parables, and others end abruptly with an admission of no particular takeaway. We get a glimpse into Le Guin's mind and the thoughts she thinks; the patient and scrutinizing way she looks at the world. It's a short book, with digestibly small entries that can be read apart from one another, and probably best for people who

already consider themselves Ursula's fans (as I do). It is also the last book published before her death, making her observations on aging and dying all the more poignant.

At first (and at various stops along the way) Ursula comes across as a curmudgeon, or, as my wife put it, "a cranky pants". Ursula will take a college alumni questionnaire (sent to an 81-year-old) and pick apart the absurdity of the questions, writing furiously in the margins. She'll dissect a common phrase and find fault with it semantically and logically, or bemoan various attitude shifts in kids-these-days. I next pegged her as a contrarian, someone constitutionally predisposed to latch on to any statement and find fault with it. However, she is just as quick to turn her analytical focus back upon herself and ponder her own biases and attitudes. I think, more appropriately, Ursula Le Guin is ruled by a predisposition to question and examine everything. It is a level of curiosity that feels akin to the scientific enterprise: always asking new questions and never fully trusting the conclusions.

Much of the writing is about Ursula's personal life and daily routines, everything from how to properly prepare and eat an egg at breakfast to answering letters from fans to memories of facing down a rattlesnake. I jokingly mentioned cats three times in the first paragraph because much space is devoted to describing her black-and-white adopted cat, Pard. Ursula's descriptions of everything are a delight to read: she is a master of the language and has a way of baking metaphors into her descriptions that highlight what is beautiful, complex, strange and surprising in every situation, however mundane it may be. She also has some powerful thoughts to share on economics, ideal societies, gender equality, belief, and similarly weighty issues.

I leave you with a few quotes (that are even better in context):

"Opinion all too often leaves no room for anything but itself."

"Art isn't explanation. Art is what an artist does, not what an artist explains."

"Words are my magic, antiproverbial cake. I eat it, and I still have it."

"In taking uncontrolled, unlimited, unceasing growth as the only recipe for economic health, we've dismissed the ideas of optimum size and keeping the organism in balance."

"Maybe the problem is that believers can't believe that science doesn't involve belief."

"Envy coexists only too easily with righteous disapproval. Indeed perhaps the two nasty creatures live off each other."

"In the realm of science, the value of belief is nil or negative; only knowledge is valuable. Therefore, I don't say I believe two plus two is four, or that the earth goes around the sun, but that I know it. Because evolution is an ever-developing theory, I prefer to say I accept it, rather than that I know it to be true. Acceptance in this sense is, I suppose, the secular equivalent of belief. It can certainly provide endless nourishment and delight for mind and soul."

Ted Morgan says

A lovely rambling and ruminating but uneven collection of observations. Fun to read.

Liz says

I am still learning what kinds of books I like to listen to. What I discovered is that essays don't cut it with me. I could not stay focused. Parts I was able to concentrate on seemed decent with some good points. But

just not my style. Returned to audible.

Diane Barnes says

Sometimes it's really nice to spend time with a truly intelligent woman.
Her words speak for themselves.

Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

I expected essays picking up this book, but instead I got a series of random blog posts (or as I liked to call them by the end, "Ursula chats") where she talks about anything from being old, to her new cat, to writing and reading, the great American novel, shopping and so on.

It feels rather random, the selection of those posts and also the things she writes about are so odd, but that is exactly why I found this book so utterly charming. It was like meeting up with Ursula and having chats. Over coffee. Stroking her cat while she tells you what's on her mind and I answered back while reading it. Disagreeing or agreeing but thoroughly enjoying every minute of it.

Adored it.

Vivian says

Insightful and incisive series of essays on everything from cats to the Sartre Refusal Prize.

"If we insist in the real world the ultimate victor *must be* the good guy, we've sacrificed right to might."

I had to read this quote several times to recognize the truth in the statement. Le Guin brings it up in an essay about Homer and how neither The Illiad nor The Odyssey employ wishful thinking; therefore, not fantasy. But, that quote is counter to almost everything we want to believe--wish to believe. If it were true, better technology would always win over large corporations, the best ideals would always prevail, and the morally corrupt would always fail. Which we know is simply false.

"Art is not a horse race."

This is a thoughtful rumination about book prizes and PR, and how one drives the other.

"The creative adult is the child who survived."

Rather amusing, and since I actually have that "Liked" somewhere in my Goodreads' quotes I found it more than a bit embarrassing/funny/ridiculous that she categorically did not write it, ever. The misattribution and how it came about is humorous.

"I want to say clearly that I do not believe any animal is capable of being cruel. Cruelty implies consciousness of another's pain and the intent to cause it. Cruelty is a human speciality, which human beings continue to practice, and perfect, and institutionalize, though we seldom boast about it. We prefer to disown it, calling it "inhumanity", ascribing it to animals. We don't want to admit the innocence of the animals, which reveals our guilt."

It comes in one of many cat related essays--not a cat fan, at all. Nonetheless, Le Guin uses her relationship with Pard to relay a few thoughts. I like the hard truths in this book, the ripping away of the veil.

It never ceases to amaze me how much synchronicity envelopes my life. I should be immune to it because it happens all the time, nonetheless, in the foreword Le Guin mentions Saramago, and I smiled thinking to myself, 'I have met this writer and I understand'. Literally, not a couple months ago. And again, I find myself starting with a writer at the end. First, Gunter Grass and now Le Guin. That isn't the bizarre synchronicity it might seem at first blush because 2018 is the anniversary of a death--I have been planning to reopen it again, just to make sure everything is in place and to remember. Hence, all the morbidity in the books I've been selecting.

I didn't mean to start here. Le Guin has been on my T0-Be-Read for more years than I will admit and now it's time for me to read her stories.

Favorite quote:

"Anger points powerfully to the denial of rights, but the exercise of rights can't live and thrive on anger. It lives and thrives on the dogged pursuit of justice."

Jeanne says

I've read three of Ursula's Le Guin's books this year and the year's still young. I suspect that I will read others.

Le Guin is primarily known for her writing in fantasy and science fiction. The first books of hers that I read as a teen were, of course, from these genres. Nonetheless, the three I've read this year have all been nonfiction: her translation of the *Tao Te Ching* ; a book on writing, *Steering the Craft* , and now *No Time to Spare*, a book of her recent blogs.

Nothing was too big or too small for Le Guin's pen or observant eye: her cat Pard, softboiled eggs, fanmail, or politics. She held herself and others to high (and reasonable) standards.

About the moral stances that presidents have asked of the US public then (and now):

But still: can you imagine any president, now, asking the American people to deprive themselves of meat once or twice a week in order to stockpile grain to ship to hungry foreigners on another continent, some of them no doubt terrorists? (p. 116)

About having a secretary to handle her letters:

I am envious of people who hire a servant with perfect assurance of righteousness. I envy self-confidence even as I dislike it. Envy coexists only too easily with righteous disapproval. Indeed perhaps the two nasty creatures live off each other. (p. 167)

About chicken farming:

The lobbies who run our lives demand that torture, ordure, and disease continue for thirteen more years. I will not live to see the birds go free.

I've only included examples of her more serious essays, but I enjoyed the playful ones, too: Pard was a good cat and a good friend.

These blogs only go as far as 2014. Le Guin was concerned about President Obama lying, although she did not indicate what he did that she was referring to. Presumably this would have been clear if we'd read her blog at the time. I wonder how she would write about President Trump.

The only essays that I didn't love were those primarily focused on the limitations of aging. Perhaps I'm not old enough yet to really take aging seriously, to come to terms with my own agins.

I first read Le Guin's essays when I was in college. Her essays helped me recognize that one could write fascinating stories and be deeply ethical, moral, and thoughtful. In fact, Le Guin did both simultaneously.

I'm sad that Le Guin died, but a year full of her books will be a good one.
