

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE DISPOSSESSED* AND *THE LATHE OF HEAVEN*

ursula k. le guin



a fisherman
of the
inland sea

STORIES

"LE GUIN WIELDS HER PEN WITH A MORAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SOPHISTICATION RARELY SEEN. . . .
SHE WRITES PARABLES, SPLENDIDLY INTRICATE AND NOVELLY IMAGINATIVE TALES." —*NEWSWEEK*

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A Fisherman of the Inland Sea Ursula K. Le Guin

The winner of the Pushcart Prize, the Kafka Award, and the National Book Award, Ursula K. Le Guin has created a profound and transformational literature. The award-winning stories in **A Fisherman of the Inland Sea** range from the everyday to the outer limits of experience, where the quantum uncertainties of space and time are resolved only in the depths of the human heart. Astonishing in their diversity and power, they exhibit both the artistry of a major writer at the height of her powers and the humanity of a mature artist confronting the world with her gift of wonder still intact.

A Fisherman of the Inland Sea Details

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From Reader Review A Fisherman of the Inland Sea for online ebook

Mövlüd says

Hainish Circle dünyalar? haqq?nda m?lumatlar t?qdim ed?n, "çörtme teorisi" ad?n? verdiyi (Eyn?teyn vs LeGuin?) v? kosmosda s?yah?ti mümkün ed?n vasit?d?n dan???lan hekay? d? var. Kitab?n ?vv?lind? is? "Bilimkurgu okumamak üzerine" adl? çox göz?l bir LeGuin m?qal?si d? var.

Nikki says

I love the way Ursula Le Guin builds (on) worlds. Some of these stories are about worlds we already know about, if we've read her other work; some of them are almost entirely new. I liked all of them, some more and some less: I particularly liked the opening essay, The Rock That Changed Things, and Another Story. I didn't get the "I'm not smart enough for this" feeling so much with this set of stories, which is good, and I enjoyed the way she writes as much as always, so clear and with wonderful images.

I think my favourite thing is the way she writes about people, though. Regardless of whatever trappings they come with of world-building or whatever, whether they're supposed to be aliens, you can relate to them and feel for them. The only thing I was sad about was that I wished that there was more written about the Night marriage between Hideo and Sota, in Another Story, because the love between them seems to me as notable as the love between Hideo and Isidri.

There are other worlds contained in this relatively small book, and it's lovely.

Nehirin~ says

Kitab?n ad? kesinlikle "?çdeniz Bal?kç?s?" olmamal?ym??. Okursan?z ne demek istedi?imi anlayacaksınız?z. ?yyidi... Bir yerden itibaren Mülksüzler esintisi çok yo?undu. Hatta hikâyeler Mülksüzler'e ba?lanm?? da denilebilir.

Peter says

Read as a part of The Found and the Lost: The Collected Novellas of Ursula K. Le Guin

This sci-fi novella is told from the perspective of a man on another human-like planet who goes on to work in the new field of teleportation. That's obviously a gross oversimplification of the plot since we actually spend most of the novella finding out about the world and its customs.

This world wasn't as interesting as the one in The Matter of Seggri, but it was interesting nonetheless. I preferred the sci-fi part of the story more though and while the science wasn't as fleshed out as I usually prefer with my sci-fi, I liked the twist and the conclusion.

Emily says

"The First Contact with the Gorgonids" - Hilarious. That's all I'm saying.

"Newton's Sleep" - I had a hard time figuring out what was going on in this story; I had to read the first few pages a couple of times to figure out where exactly the characters were located. Spoiler alert: they're on a space station. I guess they feel guilty about it or something because the "ghosts" of the people they left behind on the dying earth keep showing up there. The main character can't see them and thinks everyone else is insane. This is an interesting premise, but I wish it had been fleshed out more (no pun intended).

"The Ascent of the North Face" - I had to read this short-short twice, but when I figured it out, it was awesome.

"The Rock that Changed Things" - LeGuin likes to write about alien societies in order to experiment with gender relations and permutations. This is one of those. It's a pretty depressing one, too. LeGuin states in the introduction, "I wish I could have given my blue-green stone a lighter setting." I wish that, too.

"The Kerastion" - A little creepy, but sorta poetic. I kind of liked it.

The last three stories are longer and have to do with LeGuin's new invention, Churten. It's like the ansible, but for matter. Eventually, it's supposed to be able to transport people instantaneously between planets, but there's a small issue with the technology that seems to affect people's perceptions of reality.

"The Shobies" - The first higher-intelligence crew to attempt Churten begin by trying to come together as a cohesive unit. This is very important, as it turns out. The crew is made up of persons from several different planets and cultural backgrounds. This is also important. LeGuin does a good job of conveying the crew's confusion in writing. It didn't end up as confusing for the reader as it probably was for the characters, but again, that's a good thing.

"Dancing to Ganam" - A very charismatic commander is able to ascertain that the confusion effect of Churten is lessened by making the voyage alone. The next phase of the experiment is to take several others, all originally Terran, to the same planet the commander visited before. Again, individual perception is challenged, with somewhat tragic results for both the crew and the natives.

"Another Story" - This is my favorite in this collection. The action takes place somewhat at the same time as those other two stories, following the experience of a scientist from O (and by do they have some interesting romantic/sexual/gender relations) as he works on the Churten theory. The narrative is more character-focused, and I really loved the character and enjoyed learning about society on Planet O, but it reveals something extremely interesting about Churten. I hope LeGuin continues to explore that.

This is a decent collection, not my favorite, but still very entertaining.

Iain says

A short collection, but packed with wonderful ideas and imagery. The high points: a thoughtful introduction by the author in which she discusses not only the stories to follow, but also in more depth why she writes science fiction, what she sees as its characteristics, and its role in the literary canon.

Also, the non-Hainish stories are mostly superb. 'The Rock That Changed Things' is a powerful and simple story about prejudice and social change that really works on every level. 'The Ascent Of The North Face' is a hilarious little vignette that appealed to me. 'The Kerastion' and 'Newton's Sleep' are good too, though the latter falls away after a strong start. 'The First Contact With The Gorgonids' is somewhat less good, a rather slight comic piece that shows its age a little.

The final three stories are all based around the Hainish universe of 'The Left Hand Of Darkness', specifically dealing with the concept of FTL travel known as the 'churten'. Le Guin uses this as a tool to explore the importance of story in human relationships and in our experience of the world: as she says in the introduction, 'story is our only boat for sailing on the river of time'. The concept is intriguing, but I found the execution disappointing in the first two stories: somehow, the characters fell flat and the situations didn't feel 'real' enough. The final story, though (from which the collection's title comes) worked much better, perhaps due to a tighter focus.

Overall, the entire collection is worth buying for the intro and 'The Rock That Changed Things' alone: the other stories add to the value!

Dane Cobain says

This is the first Ursula K. Le Guin book that I've read and to be honest, I'm a little disappointed. I found it to be rife with exposition and long, rambling paragraphs about how the various technologies functioned even though in her introductory essay, Le Guin basically talked about how it's all actually impossible.

Still, there were a few good lines in it here and there and one or two of the stories in this collection did stand out to me. But for a lot of it, I was just reading it for the sake of reading it. It also explores some interesting themes in terms of time paradoxes and faster-than-light communication, but any joy that would usually bring was kind of offset by the rambling writing style that meandered instead of getting to the point.

All in all, it was fine, and I can now say I've read some Le Guin. I'm just not sure I want to read any more of her work, and that's a shame.

Burak Mermer says

Bir Le Guin kitabından bekleyeceğimiz üzere çok güzeldi. Özellikle "Newton'un Uykusu" -bir Black Mirror bölümü dahi çakar bu öyküden- ve "Bir Bakı Masal ya da Çıdeniz Balıklar?" -Omelas ile beraber okuduğum en iyi Le Guin öyküsü- isimli öyküler şimdiye kadar okuduğum öyküler içerisinde en iyiler listesine rahatlıkla girerler. Ursula K. Le Guin'in öldüğünü öğrenince bu kitabı okumaya başlamıştım ve şimdi bitirince diyebilirim ki Le Guin gerçekten de yazdıklarıyla her daim bizi etkileyecek, bizimle beraber olmaya devam edecek. Yoksa Çıdeniz Balıklar? isimli öyküyü günlerce hatırlayacak olmam, dönüp dolaşıp tekrar okuyacak olmam baka nasıl açıklayabiliriz ki?

Alexandra says

Quite a disparate set of stories in this collection from Le Guin, and actually not what I had vaguely anticipated, which was stories connected to the Earthsea set - and why I thought that I have no idea.

Anyway.

One of the interesting parts about this collection is that it opens with an introduction by Le Guin herself, discussing her attitudes towards some of the stories and I think responding to some criticism from people

when they originally appeared in magazines and the like. It also includes a robust defence of science fiction in terms of character (SF has them), ideas, and not always being heavy on the science (Egan, she didn't know about you). In talking about technology, she has one of my now-favourite put-downs, regarding someone who said that Native Americans had no technology: "As we know, kiln-fired pottery is a naturally occurring substance, baskets ripen in the summer, and Machu Picchu just grew there." She also rather defiantly claims BEAUTY as an aspect of science fictional writing, to which I say HELL YES.

Anyway. Again. The stories are a mixed bunch. The first, "The First Contact with the Gorgonids" is a weird one set in outback NT, with an unhappily married woman as the central character and (deliberately, I think) wince-worthy descriptions of Aborigines. "Newton's Sleep" is about people who have managed to get themselves into orbit in a habitat to get away from the world, which is going to hell in a handcart; they're mostly quite ordinary, although by necessity all skilled. Ike - Isaac - is a fairly unlikeable character, although I sympathised, especially when things appear to be going wrong. The third story is just odd, and not in an engaging way - "The Ascent of the North Face" does not refer to a mountain (nor an actual face).

"The Rock that Changed Things" is a story that I more easily associate with Le Guin's style of writing. Based in an entirely non-human society, where there is a very strict hierarchy to the point of almost being separate species, the nurobls spend their time making sure that the obls can live lives in serenity without messy things like tidying or cleaning. They also help fix the rock patterns that are part of the very reason for being of many obls... and then one nurobl notices the colour of a particular pebble. This is a really delightful story. "The Kerastion" is not delightful, because it is more on the heart-wrenching side; it's also less of a story and more of a vignette into a world where profession is caste and determines every single interaction.

The final three stories are all Hainish stories, like *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Rocannon's World* and so many others. In "The Shobies' Story," a crew is setting out to test the effects of fast-as-light travel on sentient beings. As Le Guin herself notes in her introduction, as well as playing with such physical ideas it's also playing with metaphysical ideas, and the notion of creating reality through storytelling. So, too, is "Dancing to Ganam," also looking at testing the new fast-as-light 'drive' (the Cetians are constantly reproving people for describing it as a drive). In this case, Commander Dalzul has decided that a small crew who are closer together than the Shobies might have a better chance at not having their realities warped. As well as looking at how we tell stories about our lives, I think there's also a post/colonial message here, about the stories and political ideas etc that people bring with them when observing foreign cultures. And finally, there's the paradoxical, sweet-bittersweet "Another Story," whence comes the title of the collection: Hideo's mother used to tell him the story of the fisherman of the Inland Sea, who went with a sea-princess and returned after one night to discover generations have passed. Hideo goes on to become a great physicist, and tries out fast-as-light travel.... This is definitely my favourite of the stories in this collection, and I love it dearly. It's also set on O, a planet I'm sure I've read another short story about, perhaps in *The Birthday of the World*; here people have marriages involving four people, two men and two women, based around when they are born. It's a fascinating view of society.

This has been part of my desire to read All The Le Guin, and it was overall a very satisfying one.

martha says

I never know what to expect going into a book of UKL short stories, but I'm always *hoping* for something from the Hainish cycle. This delivered in spades, in the three final stories, interconnected around the same idea so interestingly that they could make a nice novella. This is the farthest into the future of anything I've

read in this universe (though I should point out that the same characters basically never reoccur between stories/books; I only know when a book is set based on references to technology or politics). In these stories, physicists have developed faster-than-lightspeed travel and are trying it out, but it turns out human perception plays a huge, complicated role in how/whether the technology works. The first story is a crew's very weird experience as the first to test the new churten technology, the second is a delicious, eerie all-is-not-as-it-seems trip to an uncontacted planet, and the third, "Another Story," is a heartwrenching, fascinating story about O and family and regret. One of my favorite things about her writing and this kind of scifi in general is the extrapolation of the human element from science fiction concepts: sure, nearly-as-fast-as-light travel makes you age much more slowly than people back home, but how does that actually feel? I could read this kind of thing forever.

The whole time I was reading these three I had the delicious feeling you get when you've studied all the exact right things for a test: I knew about the religious/scientific overlap of Annares-based physics because I'd read *The Dispossessed* earlier this year, understood the Gethen family in the Shoby's crew because I finished *The Left Hand of Darkness* a few months ago, I was excited to read about Dalzul because of the references to him in *The Telling*, and I knew about sedoretus, the four-person marriages on O, from *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories*, the mixed-species crews from the word for world is forest.

This is the strength of the Hainish cycle, I think: you can start essentially anywhere among the novels and stories she's written in this universe and not be lost, but the more you read, the more you understand, in fulfilling, interesting ways. The worldbuilding is so rich but so laid back at once, which takes a very deft hand.

Of the other, non-Hainish stories in this book, a few are fine but unremarkable (published quite early, I think). The two that stood out for me were "The Rock that Changed Things," which I read as social commentary story on class/race/overlooked art forms, and "Newton's Sleep," which I so wanted to be at least twice as long. The privileged, white inhabitants of a spaceship, who've fled an earth in chaos, begin having mass hallucinations about everything they've left behind: other races, animals, nature. That's the frustrating part of SF shorts, when there's a big idea trying to fit into just a few pages.

Those last three stories, though! I'll be thinking about them for quite a while.

Chris says

Ursula Le Guin is best known for her fantasy and her science fiction writings, though she also writes other fiction as well as poetry, articles and reviews. The short stories in this 1994 collection, while firmly in the SF genre, also demonstrate her ability to compose in various tones, from light to dark, from gentle humour to philosophical musings. Originally published in various periodicals between 1983 and 1994, the narratives are clearly placed in context by an excellent introduction in which she not only discusses the tales but also mounts a spirited defence of SF as a genre, a defence which twenty years on may be less urgent though no less valid or effective.

She explains that she experiments with SF by using the form to explore character and human relationships, rather than exploring the 'scientism' and elitist technocracies that much traditional 'hard' SF was associated with and which put off the unconverted. She also denies that SF (and by extension, I suspect, fantasy) is necessarily escapist; instead, by exploring human characteristics, even or especially in alien humanoids, she throws light on our own humanity, humaneness, human-ness; she focuses on the potential strengths of SF,

most particularly on a quality that is not always attached to this genre: beauty.

There is no doubting the beauty of many of these stories. “The Kerastion” (the name is for ‘an instrument that cannot be heard’) concerns the impermanence of a society’s art created for their divinity, and how sacrilege may be committed when an individual tries to make sculptures that are not transitory. His funeral is accompanied by music played on a ceremonial flute made by his sister, soundless except to the ears of the dead. This haunting tale feels like an anthropological commentary in that there is no implied value judgement given on what transpires, but it is told with poetic sensitivity and a sympathy for the individuals involved.

Preceding “The Kerastion” is “The Rock That Changed Things”, another story that verges on the fantasy genre but which has a very political purpose, dealing with gender and caste issues for instance. There is also the strange human obsession with unusual stones, as here where the placement of coloured stones within a pattern has a significance which only the initiates have the right to interpret. Aspects of this story reminded me of Hesse’s *The Glass Bead Game* or Robert Graves’ short story “The Shout”, but only distantly; and the presence of a third eye in these beings reminded me that this was no earth-bound tale.

Another aspect of SF that Le Guin plays with is humour. As she herself says, ‘Is anything deadlier than somebody explaining a joke?’ And so there is nothing to explain in “The First Contact with the Gorgonids”, about tourists coming face to face with extra-terrestrials in the Australian outback, other than that the title and the label suggest a inversion of the more familiar Perseus myth. As for the earliest story in the book, “The Ascent of the North Face”, that transposes the typical names for obstacles and camps on mountaineering expeditions to the more domestic setting whence many of the terms originated; it may be a one-joke story, but it is staunchly and consistently maintained.

It’s less easy to say precisely what “Newton’s Sleep” is about. The title is a reference to a poem by Blake which includes the line ‘May God us keep | From single vision, and Newton’s sleep!’ Ike is part of a group, the SPES Society (named for the Special Earth Satellite), which eventually leaves a devastated earth forever to orbit around it. Discussion and argument arises amongst the travellers about the necessity of learning about Earth geology or even aping Earth culture, such as in the station’s architecture, when the intention is that they will never return. Despite a supposedly rational ethos, the satellite’s inhabitants increasingly see ghosts and find their environment changing, suggesting that you can take humans away from Earth but you can’t take Earth away from humans.

“Newton’s Sleep” is a deeply-layered story. Ike Rose’s family all have Jewish names like Noah and Esther, which suggests a Biblical aspect. Ike, of course, is named after the patriarch Isaac, who went blind in later life, while Ike’s own daughter Esther is becoming similarly afflicted. Newton was another Isaac, a complex thinker with heterogeneous beliefs, one of whose accomplishments was to institute the science of optics. Because he helped lay the foundations for the Enlightenment pursuit of science, he was credited by the mystic poet Blake with only following Reason, the ‘single vision’ of his poem.

Does this imply an anti-Science stance by Le Guin? Not at all. Into the mix comes a reference to Goya’s etching *The Sleep of Reason Engenders Monsters*, a self-portrait of the artist being assailed by beasties. The text attached to Goya’s work actually tells us that “Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels.” In other words, humans need fantasy as much as rational thought in order to create and innovate, in order to be truly human. “Newton’s Sleep” is not an anti-Science diatribe, then, but a plea for combining two human qualities in order to be free of nightmares. The final pages quote an almost biblical message from his daughter Esther: ‘I am going up in the mountains for a while.’ In his desperation to find her in the metallic shell of the orbiting

satellite he finds his perception of reality altering, fantasy and reason somehow united. The SPES has become a little like a Pandora's Box: when everything else has escaped what remains is Hope; and in Latin *spes* of course means precisely this.

The remaining three stories are part of the Hainish Cycle, Le Guin's SF universe. Having many years ago conceived the *ansible*, a device for instant communication across light-years, and seeing it taken up by other writers as a convenient plot-device, she here devises *churten theory*, which allows for *transilience*, a way for humans to instantaneously travel across vast distances in space, and much faster than NAFAL speed (Nearly As Fast As Light) would allow. She's not interested in the nuts-and-bolts rationale behind *churten theory*, just the impact it has on people and their psyches. To start with, "The Shobies' Story" is about a group of ten travellers attempting transilience for the first time who find that their individual versions about what happens on arrival are at variance with each other. This is more than just the unreliability of eyewitness memory as it seems to imply that reality changes according to perception. Can the crew of the Shoby find a narrative that they all agree with?

"Dancing to Ganam" is a further exploration of the application of *churten theory*, this time involving fewer voyagers led by the charismatic figure of Dalzul to the planet of Ganam. This time the dissonance of different perceptions cannot be resolved, does not result in unison but in a fall that inevitably follows hubris. Where there is no clear communication a common narrative can't come into being.

The last and longest tale "Another Story" is another step along the development of *churten technology*, set on the planet O. It begins with a traditional tale *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*, which to us has elements of the literary fairytale Undine and similar accounts of mortals inadvertently spending centuries in the land of the fairies. Put simply, "Another Story" is as the author tells us an 'experiment with time-travel' which 'explores the possibility of two stories about the same person in the same time being completely different and completely true'. Hideo travels from his home planet to help develop *churten technology*, but something goes wrong. Will he not only become estranged from family and friends but also lose the potential lover he knew in childhood?

Le Guin describes many of these tales as metafiction, or stories about stories. This quality of tales-within-tales is part of what makes her writing special, along with the lucidity of her prose and the timelessness of her style. Above all, you get the impression that she cares about her creations, deeply flawed as many of them are, and that caring is something that she generously invites the reader to share.

<http://wp.me/p2oNj1-mk>

Erika says

For those of you familiar with Ursula K. Le Guin's Science Fiction works, her return to Gethen and Hainish characters is both comforting and intriguing. But not all of the stories in *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* do this; of eight total stories, five do not. The collection opens with an introduction by Le Guin on Science Fiction and its appeal (or lack of) to those who don't--or choose not to--read in the genre. Among other things, Le Guin defends Science Fiction with a humanist approach, contrary to any preconceived notions of the "science" inevitable in the fiction. The human foundation behind the works is what inevitably drives SF forward, "It's stories. It's fiction that plays with certain subjects for their inherent interest, beauty, relevance to the human condition" (p. 1).

Le Guin encourages and emphasizes this approach in the face of hesitation due to technophobia or the belief that readers, as humans, can only understand the lives and purposes of other humans. After all, the “freedom of metaphor” (p. 4) Science Fiction as a genre provides is the ability to explore the human conditions in many different ways, from many different angles. She writes, of Science Fiction, “it includes other beings, other aspects of beings. It may be about relationships between people--the great subject of realist fiction--but it may be about the relationship between a person and something else, another kind of being, an idea, a machine, an experience, a society” (p. 5). The impression left behind is the influence Earth-thinking has on us as humans as our fictional counterparts leave to explore other beings, other ideas, other machines, other societies. Our experiences will always be drawn with respect to where we have been and where we as readers are now, picking up this collection to begin a journey through eight different stories.

Science Fiction is relevant to our lives, to our examination of life and of living because “we have to take our dirt with us wherever we go. We are dirt. We are Earth” (p.11).

In its second part, the introduction concludes, specifically on the stories in the collection, that there “are no messages” in them. They “are stories” (p.7). To remember this important phrase, along with the reminder that we take our Earth with us wherever we go, is key to understanding the beauty behind each story--the beauty inherent in the telling of experiences, of having experiences, of being a story.

“The First Contact With the Gorgonoids” and “The Ascent of the North Face” are both short, humorous stories where expectations are met with very different and surprisingly delightful conclusions. “Newton’s Sleep” is more on the serious side, and Le Guin’s response to “smugly antiseptic” (p. 11) stories that “depict people in space stations and spaceships as superior to those on earth.” In a direct reference to Theodore Sturgeon’s “Cold Equations,” “Newton’s Sleep” is a caution against the harsh reality of science without human consideration, of the dead weight humans represent when not figured into the scientific endeavors. Heraldng science for the sake of science, above and at the expense of humans and humanity is to inevitably lose something that makes us what we are.

The Spes Society values community over culture and nationality, neither of which is needed on a space station. It’s argued whether or not children should learn about Earth when they’ve never been there, or if environmentally conscious decorations should be done away with, favoring the sterility of the space station. What invariably falls victim to this are the rich cultures of Earth. By selectively choosing the fittest, most intelligent people from a dying planet, they are left with a type of survivor’s guilt and suffer the ghosts of those left behind. Esther’s repeated attempts at technological replacements for her degenerating vision mirrors the problems of the space station: technology will never be a replacement for the real thing. As the society of the Spes station begins to unravel, they begin to understand existence cannot be denied by perception alone. Out of sight, out of mind does not work.

The importance of society and of relationships to functioning in “Newton’s Sleep” are extremely important to the last three stories, “The Shobies’ Story,” “Dancing to Ganam,” and “Another Story.” But “The Rock That Changed Things” and “The Kerastion” are not directly related to either. Both are stories of rebellion, of denied freedoms and the artistic metaphors that are quite liberating, quite pertinent to Le Guin’s introduction.

The last three stories in the collection, I believe, should be treated as a micro collection within the larger one. All three return to the Hainish universe Le Guin frequently visits, and all three examine what it is to narrate our lives, whether through shared experiences or alone. Truth lies somewhere in that mixture, but it is neither one nor the other. The introduction of churten technology which gives humans the ability to achieve transilience--“skip” from one location to another, to be in both places simultaneously as an attempt at traveling from one point to the other is attempted--enforces the need for groups to think and work together

despite cultural and age differences to go forward to any one destination. The consequence of not doing this results in dissonance, severe psychological delusion and distress. In “Dancing to Ganam” the events of “The Shobies’ Story” (where churten technology is first applied to a group of humans) is explained just in case it was misunderstood. In addition, the story is expanded upon, examining whether synchronous beliefs (the key to successful transilience) alone achieve “entrainment” (harmonious thought, inter-connectedness of mind) or if previous experience reassures and inspires the confidence needed for the same result. As the crew discovers, getting to their destination is the least of their problems, however delightful the means. Dancing becomes the best method to avoid the disastrous outcome of the *Shoby* crew; dancing requires working relationships, to the music, to each other; dancing brings the entrainment needed for transilience. But when the crew lands on Ganam, the dancing stops and our protagonists are faced with disparate realities that threaten the sanctity of the mission.

“Another Story” is a culmination of both of these stories in which churten theory both works and doesn’t work; its malfunction (time travel) brings about a distressing experience Hideo needs to work through to find the harmonious life he’s been looking for.

Churten theory is a “metaphor for narration...the chancy and unreliable but most effective means of constructing a shared reality” (p. 9). At the end of the collection, which I have not done justice in my review, we can look back at the experience of reading the book (the book itself, an experiment in churten theory; we are both in our reality and in the reality of the book), of looking at the same words from different perspectives and say, “We danced it!” (p. 129)

prcardi says

Characters: 2/5

Writing Style: 3/5

World: 3/5

Resonance: 2/5

I was disappointed in this. I'm not much of a fan of short stories, but I think of Le Guin as one who is adept with the medium. Also, as an added advantage, this was offered as a Hainish title, and having already read the first six entries to the series, I was looking forward to filling in niches and making connections.

Part of my disappointment lies in learning that only about half of this short volume is obviously connected to the Hainish Cycle. Some of the others presumably could, of course, as Le Guin has kept its boundaries vague and the timeline spanning eons. Still, for 5 of the 8 stories, there's no Hainish geographical connections, character links, technology, or political themes.

This also started off badly for me. The author includes a two-part introduction: "On Not Reading Science Fiction" and "On the Stories in This Book." (I didn't read the second one until I had finished the work.) The "On Not Reading Science Fiction" introduction might be portrayed as a defense of the science fiction genre. I think it was intended as just that. It might otherwise be portrayed as condescending hortatory. It certainly came off as that. The content of the introduction clearly is targeted at people who hold science fiction in low regard. I'm not sure why she thought they would be reading this book. Even though I agreed with a lot of her arguments and ideas, I found her tone and posturing belittling and overly defensive. She also presumed a lot, taking it upon herself to define what science fiction was, what it meant, and its strengths and weaknesses. I don't hold Le Guin works up as the pinnacle of science fiction, she's often only marginally sci fi in her

writings and could easily be considered more of a fantasy writer. I found a lot of her ideas on the attributes of science fiction to be too narrow and tilted too heavily toward her own genre contributions. I was surprised by the arrogance she displayed in her opening, and it did not engender my goodwill.

The other odd quality of the introduction was that it set the wrong goals for the compendium. She writes persuasively of the beauty of science fiction. Specifically, she argues for that beauty to be understood as more than a beauty of ideas and messages - for it to be extended to a beauty of the aesthetic, human, emotional, and moral. She makes a clear, bold statement that there "are no messages in these stories." That would be a surprising turn from some of the other Hainish works, namely *The Word for World is Forest*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *The Dispossessed*. Once she set as goals the aesthetic, human, emotional, and moral, I anticipated finding those elements. And they were largely missing. With the exception of the collection's namesake - *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* - these stories were not beautiful. They were not particularly innovative in structure, anthropological, or moving. In fact, the common element to at least five of these was the message - the very trait Le Guin claimed was not present. There was a common theme of a defense of the primitive culture, or its obverse, a criticism of modernity. I have no objections to defending and exploring the irrational, native, forgotten, and backward. I enjoy critical insights in the regressive and predatory sides of the modern. Le Guin had amusing and tragic insights into these areas. But they weren't beautiful by the standard she had given us. The form wasn't creative, the ambience wasn't distinctive, the characters rarely connected, the emotions were not succinctly conveyed, and any conception of morality was swamped by the message.

The last three stories were more deliberate Hainish contributions. The sixth was a short story that could easily have been tacked on to the seventh. The last two, the seventh and eighth, were short novellas. The eighth and final was the best work in this collection. These three did play with a metanarrative that, too, read like message fiction. They fit nicely with the message of the first four stories, and I can see why an editor chose to put these together in a volume. I just cannot understand why Le Guin wrote the introduction she did for this collection. The three Hainish stories were fine additions to the series; better than the original novella, *Rocannon's World*, but not as good as the series' second, *Planet of Exile*. I thought it an odd choice for Le Guin to pursue unconventional sexual relationships again, the *Left Hand of Darkness* had already covered that territory.

The "On the Stories in This Book" portion of the introduction suggests that some of these were basically leftovers - scraps - that she didn't have other purposes for. Some of them were pieces that she was unhappy or unfinished with but didn't know what else to do with. And no where does she suggest that she intended to build up and develop the Hainish world; that seems to have been incidental. What this is, then, is a collection of works that the author herself wasn't happy with and probably would not have been published had they not a) been from Ursula K. Le Guin and/or b) been connected to the Hainish Cycle. This seems like a product of a publishing house looking to capitalize on a respected name and a familiar series. I, as a patron, take umbrage at being sold an inferior product wrapped up on brand-name packaging. There's a serious conceit when an author believes that even their leftovers and oddments are valuable enough to package and sell.

Individual ratings:

The First Contact with the Gorgonids: 2/5

Newton's Sleep: 3/5

The Ascent of the North Face: 2/5

The Rock That Changed Things: 3/5

The Kerastion: 2/5

The Shobies' Story: 2/5

Valerie says

I always hate to see reviews of books of short stories which don't give a table of contents. So I'll follow the Golden Rule, and list all the stories as I read them.

The Acknowledgments are simply a description of when and where the stories first appeared.

Introduction: "On Not Reading Science Fiction"--Frequent readers of LeGuin will have read most of these comments before. But because it was tailored to this particular book, it includes background material on each of the stories. It would probably be best to treat it as an afterword, if this is the first time you're reading the stories, to avoid spoilers

(1) The First Contact with The Gorgonids: The Gorgonids are peacefully setting up their landing camp in the Australian Outback, when they're pestered by an obnoxious American tourist. Ok, so maybe they overreact...

(2) Newton's Sleep: A space colony is haunted by ghosts. Several of the premises are terrifying, including rapidly spreading plagues back on Earth. I have to say that the plan for the biosphere is not one I've ever heard of before. Why would you make a biosphere with no life other than humans? How could you sustain it? Anyone who has watched 'daily' operations on the ISS knows how hard they're finding it without (many) plants or other animals. And that's with a crew that's never larger than 15, even with visiting spacecraft.

(3) The Rock That Changed Things: An oppressed class finds new meaning in old messages.

(4) The Kerastion: It's not clear from the beginning of the story what the 'sin' of the recently deceased is. When it's revealed, it seems rather trivial, by our standards. The sister and chief mourner finds no conflict with the standard: she simply can't understand what went wrong. And it's evident that the man himself was not a real revolutionary, and considered himself a sinner.

(5) The Shobies' Story: What if the story you tell about reality is more fundamental than the reality itself?

(6) Dancing to Ganam: If you get offered a role as a god, make sure you read the fine print before accepting.

(7) A Fisherman of The Inland Sea: I always wonder about the less-documented worlds of the Ekumen. This story, while focusing on the experiences of a time-traveler, also explains cultural and social practices in an area on the planet O. It focuses on marriage practices especially (both heterosexual and homosexual), because such practices are very important to the local people (who all seem to be amateur and/or professional marriage brokers), but also because it's very important to the narrator. The narrator also has a fairly strong understanding of what needs explaining to outsiders, because (one of) his mother(s) was a Mobile for the Ekumen, and born and raised on Terra (in Japan, it's implied, or at least she learned Japanese folktales. But then so did I, and I've never been to Japan.).

One thing I've always liked about LeGuin's stories: they're often not set in those accursed 'interesting times' the sage warns us against. The protagonists often live in stable cultures. They grow up, go to school, take on careers and families, and make decisions about what they will do after due deliberation. This doesn't mean

there's no conflict in their lives, of course. But it does mean that they're rarely herded from disaster to calamity by imprudent choices. Quite refreshing, I've always thought.

Miyo Kachi says

I think that the short story that this book was named for, the Fisherman of the Inland Sea, is my favorite short story of all time. .. although it is a beautiful story in its own right it also struck me as a seamless contemporary re-working of a well-known Japanese fairy-tale . Reading this somehow helped me get over my sense of being displaced when I first moved to the South ten years ago.. Ursula Le Guin navigates cultures and the movements of the soul with such grace, I am awed.. I am so grateful for her writing.

Ellen says

Ursula K Le Guin seems to have (at least) two distinct writing styles. She can adopt the form of a folk tale or legend, and does so in quite a few of her short stories. When she slips into this more mythical format the characters are symbolic in nature; their personality not examined to a great extent, and there is often a clear moral (or clear intention to provoke though in the reader) or concise narrative arc.

Her second style is a more detailed and 'fiction'-like style, in which characters have names, histories, are generally more fleshed out. Dialogue and relationships play a greater role. Her tone, which we see in the more well-known *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* differs to the 'myth' like tone, and I prefer it. There is usually a protagonist which the story centres around which leaves more room still for character development.

A Fisherman of the Inland Sea is a short story collection which mixes both these types of stories; there are a few otherworldly legends thrown in (*The Rock That Changed Things*) which are not really my taste but I could still appreciate them. What really stood out for me were the last three stories, and *Newton's Sleep*, which reminded me slightly in atmosphere of *Paradises Lost* in *The Birthday of the World* collection; claustrophobic yet free, on a space ship, separate and sterile.

The final three stories are tied together by the new invention of churten technology; kind of a development of the ansible, except for matter. I liked seeing this progression and the different tentative angles Le Guin sets up for its development and ensuing confusing situations.

The first of this trilogy (it totally should be a short trilogy on its own!) is *The Shobies' Story*. In this Le Guin depicts the unrealities and confusion of differing perception as a lucid, trippy dream, as the characters experience instantaneous space travel in the form of churten. It's unsettling...Le Guin manages to evoke the fear and confusion of what's really happening in the reader, giving a shared experience with the characters at that point. I think Le Guin is an incredibly immersive writer, which is what you want with science fiction.

The idea of perception differences is explored more in the next story, *Dancing to Ganam*, but more in terms of personality differences, and individuals' outlook and attitude toward the world, and finalises and consolidates this with a shocking conclusion. I feel like it was an understated but cutting criticism of colonialism/orientalism. The charismatic but ultimately ignorant captain of the mission, Dalzul, others and exotifies the inhabitants of the unexplored Ganam, projecting untrue structures and roles onto the people.

The story seems very much about projection... His fatal lack of understanding and underestimation of the people as exotic and uncivilised is his downfall.

I also felt like it was a criticism of the egoist man; gender is considered well in this story. Dalzul is enamoured with Ganam, but he doesn't engage with the reality of it – unlike the female members of the crew, Forest and Riel, who remain more grounded and attempt to study the culture at a grassroots level. The male protagonist, Shan, also comes close to losing touch with the reality of the situation and becoming caught up in exotic romanticising but his turnaround guides the viewer to the point of the story.

The titular (and final) story was my favourite. Beautifully told, and all about wrestling with oneself, I think... regret, selfishness, identity, family and time all are major themes of this story. It is set on the planet O, which I enjoyed; I like it when Le Guin revisits planets in the Hainish cycle so that I can delve deeper into them; I first read about O and the four-way sedoretu marriage arrangement in *The Birthday of the World* collection. When she presents social structures like this it always makes me think about the structures in place in my society. I guess we are not 'the default' as we often assume; monogamy and heteronormativity are just what happened to become the norm here. I guess that is the anthropologist in Le Guin at work, all the time in her writing.

The last story is, as time travel/warping always is, a mindfuck, but one that makes sense (I think). I enjoyed the new churten technology and the twist of the story that tied directly into its usage. I think the comparison/take on the Japanese folk tale was simple yet so original and eloquent. Thought a lot about commitment, expanses of time in our lives and how we wish to use them...

Le Guin always takes into consideration the realism which seems obvious when you read her, but you never would have thought of yourself. Such as, worlds like O which are not massively technologically advanced and the entire society revolves around farming; when you think of 'alien planet' you think of sleek white Apple-esque complex appliances...but of course this wouldn't necessarily be the case! She thinks of every possibility. I think her science-fiction is so readable and fantastic because there is a realism, a humanism in it, and it's so considered and about so much more than outer space, alien peoples and different planets – but then this is also integral to it.

Romulus says

Science fiction, które si? nie starzeje. A do tego napisane przez mistrzyni?.

Jessica says

Le Guin is probably the sole reason for my existence. Every single story in this collection was pure gold, I loved the way the last three linked up. I live and breathe for short stories all winding together and overlapping. Any SF fan should read this, honestly, Le Guin is a master of writing, she deserves every award.

Guillermo says

After reading this book, I don't think short stories are the best way for me to get into a new author. It's just such a different beast from a novel; there's little time to get acclimated to a story and a much steeper learning curve. Just when you think you're getting a grasp on it all, it's over. It can be merciful when the story's not too good (**The Kerastion**), but painful when it's excellent, and it's gone in a blink (**Another Story or A Fisherman of the Inland Seas**). I'm still highly interested in reading more LeGuin, but most of the stories here didn't really hold my interest, short as they were.

The last three however, went from good, to really good, to amazing. They should be considered a micro-collection, since all three explore a new instantaneous travel technology with some pretty harrowing side effects. Although the second story in this micro-collection (**Dancing to Ganam**) has some characters from the first (**The Shobies' Story**), and the third (**Another Story**) also mentions characters and technology from the first two, they are self-contained stories.

On Not Reading Science Fiction - 4 stars. A short, wonderful little essay where LeGuin repudiates the common arguments against reading science fiction: "inhuman, elitist, and escapist". She counters that the science is in "service" of the fiction and not the other way around. She also gives examples of the setting for her most famous novel **The Left Hand of Darkness**, and how there is little science and/or technology to be found there, therefore nearly

everyone could get into it. The only slight issue I have with this essay is that it seems more like she is defending her specific brand of science fiction and not the entire genre itself. From what I understand, LeGuin has a distinct style where she skims over the hard science and technology in favor of the story. It's a kind of "soft science fiction" that from what I understand, dips into the fantasy realm from time to time. I have no problem with this and no doubt it's one of the reasons why Ursula is such a highly acclaimed and popular author. However, I sometimes enjoy inhuman, elitist, escapist books from time to time, with a strong emphasis on technology. Some of my favorite authors such as Asimov, Clarke, and Baxter are pretty much LeGuin's polar opposites and really do seem to emphasize the hard science and ideas in sacrifice of round characters and even story. It's just their style, but anyways, I really enjoyed the essay even though I wasn't the target audience that needed the reassurance to widen their reading horizons.

The First Contact with the Gorgonids - 1 star. This is basically a "dumb American husband" joke where the wife ultimately "one ups" her domineering cruel husband in one of the worst ways possible - with the involvement of alien "gorgons" that can turn a dickish guy to stone. She then becomes the "heroine" as the story concludes. Hard not to read between the lines here, as it had the subtlety of a sledgehammer.

Newton's Sleep - 2 stars. In her introduction, LeGuin states that this story is NOT an anti-technological diatribe, but I beg to differ. This had some really interesting science fiction ideas in it, such as an orbiting colony of the "elite", who have escaped an Earth devastated by disease and famine. I won't spoil the mechanism by which these elite are punished for escaping to live on an artificial satellite instead of on mother Earth, but it's kind of heavy handed and frankly a bit silly. And what's the message here, that it's better to suffer and die on our home planet instead of escaping (if you had the means) via technology and trying to build a better life (albeit in orbit) for you and your children? It was ok as an anti-elitist diatribe.

The Ascent of the North Face - 1 star. This felt more like an assignment in a creative writing class about writing about something seemingly mundane like climbing a mountain (wow that sentence sounded absurd), but embedding a clever little trick/joke/twist in the story that makes you want reread it again, knowing what

you know, if you ever happen to catch the little clues throughout. Shamefully, I didn't without the aid of Father Google, afterwhich I felt like a dolt.

The Rock that Changed Things - 3 stars. This was a fun little parable about slavery and revolution. This is more typical of what I imagine LeGuin's longer works to be like. She invents a fantastical setting with fantastical creatures with its own unique set of rules (and no science or technology), to serve as the vehicle for her message. It was much more subtle than **Newton's Sleep** , and **First Contact with the Gorgonids** , so I liked it.

The Kerastion - I'm not going to give it stars because I frankly have no idea what it was about. Went shoom over my head although it was the shortest story in the book at five pages. I've tried to reread it, but I can't get into it.

----- **The Churten Stories** -----

The Shobies' Story 3 stars. The first of 3 interrelated stories about a new method of transportation that is nearly instantaneous. Freaky side effects such as cessation of cause and effect occur, causing the strange hilarity to ensue. It delighted me to learn this was part of her larger Hainish Universe in which many of her novels including **Left Hand of Darkness**, **The Dispossessed**, and **The Word for World is Forest** . I'm a sucker for large series set in one universe, so this was an unexpected introduction into future LeGuin books that use the same technology and some of the settings.

Dancing to Ganam 4 stars. Sort of a sequel or extension to The Shobies' Story, but can be read alone. It proposes a solution to the hilarity that was the side effect of the Shobies' maiden voyage into instantaneous travel, but more than that, it's a great story about how easy and tragic it would be to misinterpret the customs of an alien (albeit human) culture on a mysterious planet. It is extremely satisfying once we and our protagonists understand what's really going on down there.

There's also a great little wink here to those who've read **The Left Hand of Darkness** :

p135 "My God, Shan, is there any world in this universe where men can understand women?" "Gethen, Shan said".

In case you're wondering, Gethen is a world LeGuin created for The Left Hand of Darkness, where individual gender doesn't exist. Gethen's population is sexually neutral for most of the time, only coming into heat once a month either as a male or as a female. It's inhabitants can either father or bear children.

Another Story or A Fisherman of the Inland Seas 5 stars. By far my favorite story in this collection. Anytime you mix time dilation, time travel, and a love story, you've got my attention. A simply beautiful and powerfully moving conclusion to this collection.

Kasia (K?cik z ksi??k?) says

Mimo ró?norodnej tematyki wszystkich zawartych tu utworów, maj? one kilka punktów wspólnych. Autorka porusza w nich problem tolerancji, seksualno?ci i p?ciowo?ci, prawa do stanowienia o samym sobie,

przeładowa? na tle rasowym i ?wiatopogl?dowym, dyskryminacji, wolno?ci, samotno?ci, a nawet klonowania. Ka?dy z tekstów wnosi nowe spojrzenie na dan? kwesti?, cz?sto z do?? gorzkim wyd?wi?kiem i bardzo rzadko pozwalaj?c sobie na nut? optymizmu, ?e ludzk? natur? mo?na zmieni?.

Ca?a recenzja:

<http://www.kacikzksiazka.pl/2017/02/r...>
