

## Ursula K. Le Guin: Biographical Sketch

Ursula Kroeber was born in 1929 in Berkeley, California, where she grew up. Her parents were the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and the writer Theodora Kroeber, author of *Ishi*. She went to Radcliffe College and did graduate work at Columbia University. She married Charles A. Le Guin, a historian, in Paris in 1953; they have lived in Portland, Oregon, since 1958, and have three children and four grandchildren.

Ursula K. Le Guin writes both poetry and prose, and in various modes including realistic fiction, science fiction, fantasy, young children's books, books for young adults, screenplays, essays, verbal texts for musicians, and voicetexts. She has published seven books of poetry, twenty-two novels, over a hundred short stories (collected in eleven volumes), four collections of essays, twelve books for children, and four volumes of translation. Few American writers have done work of such high quality in so many forms.

Most of Le Guin's major titles have remained continuously in print, some for over forty years. Her best known fantasy works, the six *Books of Earthsea*, have sold millions of copies in America and England, and have been translated into sixteen languages. Her first major

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work of science fiction, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is considered epoch-making in the field for its radical investigation of gender roles and its moral and literary complexity. Her novels *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home* redefine the scope and style of utopian fiction, while the realistic stories of a small Oregon beach town in *Searoad* show her permanent sympathy with the ordinary griefs of ordinary people. Among her books for children, the *Catwings* series has become a particular favorite. Her version of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, a translation she worked on for forty years, has received high praise.

Three of Le Guin's books have been finalists for the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and among the many honors her writing has received are a National Book Award, five Hugo Awards, five Nebula Awards, SFWA's Grand Master, the Kafka Award, a Pushcart Prize, the Howard Vursell Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the L.A. *Times* Robert Kirsch Award, the PEN/Malamud Award, the Margaret A. Edwards Award, etc.

Le Guin has taken the risk of writing seriously and with rigorous artistic control in forms some consider sub-literary. Critical reception of her work has rewarded her courage with considerable generosity. Harold Bloom

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includes her among his list of classic American writers. Grace Paley, Carolyn Kizer, Gary Snyder, and John Updike have praised her work. Many critical and academic studies of Le Guin's work have been written, including books by Elisabeth Cummins, James Bittner, B.J. Bucknall, J. De Bolt, B. Selinger, K.R. Wayne, D.R. White, an early bibliography by Elizabeth Cummins Cogell and a continuation of the [bibliography](#) by David S. Bratman.

Le Guin leads an intensely private life, with sporadic forays into political activism and steady participation in the literary community of her city. Having taught writing workshops from Vermont to Australia, she is now retired from teaching. She limits her public appearances mostly to the West Coast.

Recent publications include *Incredible Good Fortune: New Poems* (Shambhala 2006); the **Annals of the Western Shore: Gifts**, (Harcourt 2004, paperback edition 2006); *Voices* (Harcourt, September 2006), and *Powers*, (Harcourt, September 2007); *Lavinia* (Harcourt, April 2008).

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### Some quotes:

“Like all great writers of fiction, Ursula K. Le Guin creates imaginary worlds that restore us, hearts eased, to our own.” — *The Boston Globe*

“She wields her pen with a moral and psychological sophistication rarely seen... and while science fiction techniques often buttress her stories they rarely take them over. What she really does is write fables: splendidly intricate and hugely imaginative tales about such mundane concerns as life, death, love, and sex.” — *Newsweek*

“Idiosyncratic and convincing, Le Guin’s characters have a long afterlife.” — *Publishers Weekly*

“Eloquent, elegant... insightful, funny, sharp... and nearly always provocative” — *The Washington Post*

“Her worlds are haunting psychological visions molded with firm artistry” — *The Library Journal*

“If you want excess and risk and intelligence, try Le Guin.” — *The San Francisco Chronicle*

“Her characters are complex and haunting, and her writing is remarkable for its sinewy grace.” — *Time*

“I really liked Catwings a lot and I hope you will write more about them. I drew a picture of a Catwing.” — Josh B., Age 8, Detroit