

Introducing Le Guin

Le Guin is not a French name at all; it's Breton. It's pronounced, to the best of my knowledge, just like its Welsh cognate gwyn — white, blond, fair.

Not many people can read IPA anyhow, so here I am in English:

URsuhluh (UR as in burr; or, in England, URsyoola) KROb'r l'GWIN. If you want to see it in IPA, Paul Topping (three cheers for him!) got through to Wikipedia and got them to correct it — so, [look me up](#) — I'm ever so phonetic.

“Ursula on Ursula,” [ursulakleguin.com](#), 2024.

Folk Song from the Montayna Province

The circles widen and widen
Of light from the white sun.
O neither wife nor maiden,
 Why do you go alone?

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Farther the hawk and farther
Over the hills in the sun.
I go, neither maid nor mother,
 Alone, alone, alone.

The Complete Orsinia, ed. Brian Attebery (New York: Library of America, 2016), 351. Originally published in *Prairie Poet*, Fall 1959. This was Le Guin's first publication.

[As a Radcliffe undergraduate in 1948 trying to write fiction] I wasn't drawn to the topics and aims of contemporary American realism....Most of what I read drew me to write about Europe; but I knew it was foolhardy to write fiction set in Europe if I'd never been there. At last it occurred to me that I might get away with it by writing about a part of Europe where nobody had been but me.

Introduction to *ibid.*, xi.

1929	b. Berkeley, CA, to anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and writer Theodora Kroeber
1940	story rejected by <i>Astounding Science-Fiction</i> magazine
1950	has an abortion (then illegal)
1951	A.B., Radcliffe, in Romance languages
1952	M.A., Columbia, in Romance languages
1953	Fulbright fellow in Paris
	m. Charles Le Guin
1957	daughter Elizabeth b.
1958	moves to Portland, OR (Charles: history professor, Portland State)
1959	"Folksong from the Montayna Province," <i>Prairie Poet</i>
	daughter Caroline b.
1964	son Theo b. (night-time is for writing)
1966	UKL, <i>Rocannon's World</i> , and Arvam Davidson, <i>The Kar-Chee Reign</i> (New York: Ace)
	UKL, <i>Planet of Exile</i> , and Thomas M. Disch, <i>Mankind under the Leash</i> (New York: Ace)
1967	<i>City of Illusions</i> (New York: Ace)
1968	<i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i> (New York: Parnassus)
1969	<i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> (New York: Ace); Hugo and Nebula Awards
1973	"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in <i>New Dimensions</i> 3, ed. Robert Silverberg (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday); Hugo Award
1974	<i>The Dispossessed</i> (New York: Harper & Row); Hugo and Nebula Awards
1990	<i>Tehanu</i> (New York: Atheneum); Nebula Award
1997	<i>Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching</i> (Boston: Shambhala)
2000	<i>The Telling</i> (New York: Harcourt)
2002	Grand Master of the SFWA
2014	National Book Foundation Medal
2016–24	Library of America editions
2018	d.

To the givers of this beautiful reward, my thanks, from the heart. My family, my agents, my editors, know that my being here is their doing as well as my own, and that the beautiful reward is theirs as much as mine. And I rejoice in accepting it for, and sharing it with, all the writers who've been excluded from literature for so long — my fellow authors of fantasy and science fiction, writers of the imagination, who for fifty years have watched the beautiful rewards go to the so-called realists.

Hard times are coming, when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine real grounds for hope. We'll need writers who can remember freedom — poets, visionaries — realists of a larger reality.

Right now, we need writers who know the difference between production of a market commodity and the practice of an art. Developing written material to suit sales strategies in order to maximise corporate profit and advertising revenue is not the same thing as responsible book publishing or authorship.

Yet I see sales departments given control over editorial. I see my own publishers, in a silly panic of ignorance and greed, charging public libraries for an e-book 6 or 7 times more than they charge customers. We just saw a profiteer try to punish a publisher for disobedience, and writers threatened by corporate fatwa. And I see a lot of us, the producers, who write the books and make the books, accepting this — letting commodity profiteers sell us like deodorant, and tell us what to publish, what to write.

Books aren't just commodities; the profit motive is often in conflict with the aims of art. We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable — but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.

I've had a long career as a writer, and a good one, in good company. Here at the end of it, I don't want to watch American literature get sold down the river. We who live by writing and publishing want and should demand our fair share of the proceeds; but the name of our beautiful reward isn't profit. Its name is freedom.

"Speech in Acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters," November 19, 2014, ursulaklequin.com. Le Guin notes on her website that "My Beautiful Reward" was meant as a [Springsteen reference](#).

