

Fremont Public Library Great Books Book Club
“The Found and the Lost” by Ursula K. Le Guin
April 20, 2024

“If we’re going to get anywhere, we really have to start listening to each other and to the voices we have not listened to.” ¹

“Vaster Than Empires and More Slow” 1971

1. The title comes from Andrew Marvell’s poem, “To His Coy Mistress.” ² The full line is “Our vegetable love should grow/Vaster than empires, and more slow.” How does the full line of poetry impact your understanding of the story? Is the author making a statement about environmentalism?
2. How does the future world in this story define and detect sentience? How do sentience, the ability to sense emotions, and emotional intelligence interplay to create the action of this story and reveal the character’s true selves?
3. The Hainish selected 10 people who are willing to leave everything and everyone they know to explore World 4770. Each person seems beset by different flavors of neuroticism. How did the viewpoints of each character change “reality” and tension in the story?

“Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight” 1988

4. The title is a reference to the John Hodges Western song “Buffalo Gals.” Buffalo Gals were girls of potentially questionable virtue who entertained in various venues (bars, brothels, etc.) in the Canal Street District of Buffalo, NY. ³ Who is/are the Buffalo Gals in this story? Why do you think the author set the story in the American Southwest in a story referencing the East Coast?
5. What does the story say about human’s relationships to animals?
6. Which story elements hearken back to indigenous folk stories? Did this story seem like a fairy tale or folk story, or something else?

“Another Story or a Fisherman of the Inland Sea” 1994

7. “Another Story” returns to the Hainish universe and references the Japanese fable of Urashima Tarō⁴. The novella begins with a retelling of this fable and then moves into Hideo’s youth and middle age as a scientist working on radical space travel research. How does Hideo’s story mirror or follow a different path than the fable?
8. Did you buy into the Churten theory of time travel? Do you believe the concepts of time dilation and time warping allowed the end of the story to occur?
9. Was Hideo’s family’s reaction to his return home believable?

“The Finder” 2001

10. Part of the “Earthsea” series, “The Finder” was published after the influential 1968 “A Wizard of Earthsea” and many sequels, but explores the origins of the Earthsea world including the start of the

¹ Ursula K. Le Guin: Listening to the Unheard Voices, 10/13/2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_vzSgkjBEI

² <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress>

³ <https://buffalostreets.com/2014/03/31/canalpart1/>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urashima_Tar%C5%8D

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school of magic. Were you able to understand this pre-established world in the confines of this novella?

11. Some critics suggest that the “Harry Potter” series is based on the Earthsea stories; do you agree or disagree after reading this story?
12. “The danger in trying to do good is that the mind comes to confuse the intent of goodness with the act of doing things well.” Do you agree with this observation?

General Questions

13. Journeys and the idea of home reoccur in the stories we selected. Why does the author return to these concepts and did she use the concepts differently in each story?
14. The author’s work has been classified as speculative fiction, science fiction, or fantasy. Le Guin sometimes railed against being classified into any specific genre. Which genre or genres would you classify the four stories we read from “The Found and the Lost?”
15. What “makes” a person’s identity in Le Guin’s stories? Is it created by friend, family, social constructs, a person’s individual will, etc.?
16. Le Guin was very opinionated about the craft of writing and creating special fantasy, science fiction, and other stories. Several of the stories we read reference other poems, stories, music, etc. Do you believe the author’s works met her criteria of quality fantasy?

Commodified fantasy takes no risks: it invents nothing, but imitates and trivializes. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great story-tellers are copied, stereotyped, reduced to toys, molded in bright-colored plastic, advertised, sold, broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable.⁵

Interesting videos:

[The dangerous philosophy of Ursula K. Le Guin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRC0cK_MSA0): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRC0cK_MSA0

[Ursula K. Le Guin's Passionate Defense of Art over Profits](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2v7RDyo7os):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2v7RDyo7os>

[Exploring Creativity with Ursula K. Le Guin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M73cyc9lhhl): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M73cyc9lhhl>

[Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin, 1929-2018](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daf1FH7fWFk): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daf1FH7fWFk>

⁵ From p. 6 of the Foreword of “Tales from Earthsea” by Ursula K. Le Guin, 1999