

# Ursula K. Le Guin

**Ursula K. Le Guin**, original name **Ursula Kroeber**, (born October 21, 1929, Berkeley, California, U.S.—died January 22, 2018, Portland, Oregon), American writer best known for tales of science fiction and fantasy imbued with concern for character development and language.



**Ursula K. Le Guin**  
Ursula K. Le Guin, 2014.  
*Robin Marchant/Getty Images*

Le Guin, the daughter of distinguished anthropologist A.L. Kroeber and writer Theodora Kroeber, attended Radcliffe College (B.A., 1951) and Columbia University (M.A., 1952). The methods of anthropology influenced her science-fiction stories, which often feature highly detailed descriptions of alien societies. Her first three novels, *Rocannon's World* (1966), *Planet of Exile* (1966), and *City of Illusions* (1967), introduce beings from the planet Hain, who established human life on habitable planets, including Earth. Although her Earthsea series—*A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), and *The Other Wind* (2001)—was written for children, Le Guin's skillful writing and acute perceptions attracted a large adult readership. She tapped the young adult market again with her Annals of the Western Shore series, which includes *Gifts* (2004),

*Voices* (2006), and *Powers* (2007). Le Guin also wrote a series of books about cats with wings; the series included *Catwings Return* and *Jane on Her Own*, both published in 1999.

Le Guin's most philosophically significant novels exhibit the same attention to detail that characterizes her science fiction and high fantasy works. *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is about a race of androgynous people who may become either male or female. In *The Dispossessed* (1974), she examined two neighbouring worlds that are home to antithetical societies, one capitalist, the other anarchic, both of which stifle freedom in particular ways. The destruction of indigenous peoples on a planet colonized by Earth is the focus of *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972). *Always Coming Home* (1985) concerns the Kesh, survivors of nuclear war in California, and includes poetry, prose, legends, autobiography, and a tape recording of Kesh music. In 2008 Le Guin made literary news with *Lavinia*, a metatextual examination of a minor character from Virgil's *Aeneid* and her role in the historical development of early Rome.

Le Guin also wrote many essays on fantasy fiction, feminist issues, writing, and other topics, some of them collected in *The Language of the Night* (1979), *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989), *Steering the Craft* (1998), *The Wave in the Mind* (2004), and *Words Are My Matter* (2016). *No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters* (2017) is a selection of personal essays that originally appeared on her blog. Le Guin's volumes of poetry included *Wild Angels* (1975), *Wild Oats and Fireweed* (1988), *Going Out with Peacocks, and Other Poems*

(1994), *Incredible Good Fortune* (2006), and *Finding My Elegy: New and Selected Poems 1960–2010* (2012).

In 2000 she was awarded the Living Legend medal by the Library of Congress.

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