

Friday, May 24, 1996



Mixing feminism and science fiction

Since the publication of "A Wizard of Earthsea" in 1968 and of "The Left Hand of Darkness" in 1969, Ursula Le Guin has been recognized as one of the world's pre-eminent authors of science fiction and fantasy for both adults and children.

What has distinguished the author of the "Earthsea" trilogy and such books as "The Wind's Twelve Quarters" and "Orsinian Tales" is not merely the grace of the writing but also the world she imagines.



Le Guin

Like the best science fiction and fantasy authors across the ages, Le Guin has dared to imagine worlds that are truly distinct — worlds where, perhaps, the boundaries of the present truly have been broken. In such a future where sexism has been overcome — or at least reduced — Le Guin suggests that the role of women may be radically different.

This weekend, she will be in Madison for the WisCon 20, an annual event that for two decades has billed itself as "the only feminist-oriented science fiction convention in the world." Beginning today and running through Sunday at the Concourse Hotel, Le Guin will join more than 100 science fiction writers as well as 700 science fiction readers for a convention that takes seriously the notion that we can imagine a better future.

"WisCon is dedicated to the idea that imagination is the essential first step in any process of change, and celebrates science fiction as the ideal tool for such exploration," says Jeanne Gomoll, the convention's coordinator. "The alternative futures featured in the conference focus on gender roles instead of the more traditional rocket ships commonly associated with science fiction."

That more scholarly — but no less adventurous — approach to science fiction's potential has always been a part of Le Guin's approach. More than most science fiction and fantasy writers, she has explored the genre's potential, particularly in her essay collections, "Language of the Night" and "Dancing at the Edge of the World."

Le Guin's presence highlights a conference that will draw attendees from as far away as Australia and is packed with discussions, film screenings and other events that explore the full potential of Margaret Mitchell's observation that "tomorrow is another day."

— *John Nichols*