

Anarchists Care About Books

Select Short Stories from Ursula k. Le Guin

January 19, 2020 | ACAB's 2nd Birthday

The Diary of the Rose

- Beethoven's 9th. "He went on aloud, "I'm not censoring. I'm thinking about democracy. That is democracy. Hope, brotherhood, no walls. All the walls unbuilt. You, we, I make the universe! Can't you hear it?" And it was the hilltop again, the short grass and the sense of being up high, and the wind, and the whole sky. The music was the sky." What do you think of Le Guin's use of "democracy" here? What do you think of the use of an artistic work as a stand in for a political system?
- The passages about Ana Jest's case is fairly bleak. "But is there any real point to it? She has been a bakery packager for 24 years and her physical health is poor. She cannot change her life situation. At least with good hormone balance she may be able to endure it." What message can we take from this case?
- What do you think of Flores changing Rosa's worldview so dramatically?
- What point is Le Guin making about psychology in general? How is this story applicable to our current society?

The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas

- Le Guin writes "Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive." To what degree to agree or disagree with this? How does this interact with other themes in the story?
- Le Guin doesn't give us many details about the utopia. What are some key parts she outlines? What does she leave to the imagination?
- Why do they walk away without taking the child? Why walk away without trying to solve the problem? Is walking away from immorality/exploitation ultimately the better choice than staying?
- We all make a truce with our lifestyles in some way or another. What would walking away look like in our society? Is that a real option?

The Day Before the Revolution

- This short story takes place in a big communal house. What do you think of Le Guin's choice to place communal houses as part of a revolutionary movement?

- This story highlights the passing of the torch from one generation to another. What do you think of Odo's contempt for hero-worship in this context? "They just came to look, as if she were the Great Tower in Rodarred, or the Canyon of the Tulaevea. A phenomenon, a monument. They were awed, adoring. She snarled at them: Think your own thoughts! — That's not anarchism, that's mere obscurantism. — You don't think liberty and discipline are incompatible, do you? — They accepted their tongue-lashing meekly as children, gratefully, as if she were some kind of All-Mother, the idol of the Big Sheltering Womb."

Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight

- What are your impressions of the animal world portrayed in this story?
- What do you think of Coyote as a mother?
- Gal eventually has to end her time with the animals. What do you think about this coming of age moment? Why was she, a human child, able to stay there to begin with?

The Matter of Seggri

- Le Guin writes, "Their gender imbalance has produced a society in which, as far as I can tell, the men have all the privilege and the women have all the power... I don't know if the men would cling to their privileged status or demand freedom, but surely the women would resist giving up their power, and their sexual system and affectional relationships would break down." Does this analysis of the society hold up throughout the stories? What message about gender roles can we take from this story?
- In Seggri, respect and teaching are interconnected. What does this tell us about their society?
- "Resehavanar's Choice" is the question of how much societies should be told about other planet's societies. How does the outside influence of the Ekumen help or hurt Seggri?
- The character Ardar Dez writes "The untold story mothers the lie" and "That the story is all muddle, all middle. That the story is never true, but that the lie is indeed a child of silence." How much do you agree or disagree with this? What does this reflect about their society?
- Much like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, this story is focused on the gender binary. How might this story be different if non-binary identities were included?