

**A Speculative Reading in Ursula K. Le Guin's short story**

**"Old Music and The Slave Women"**

**as a Social Science Fiction.**

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## Abstract

*One of the most time-honored literary practices is the construction of made-up worlds for the aim of speculating on the ways in which societies could advance. Speculative fiction investigates potential futures that are currently in our society but have not completely manifested. In this regard, Ursula K. Le Guin, American author, places more emphasis on the social landscape than the particular protagonist, on the creation of artificial social models than on the interaction between people in fictionalized versions of real-life counterparts, and on suppositions from reality than on variations of real-life social situations. These issues will be explained by considering her short fiction: "Old Music and the Slave Women" as a pattern of social science fiction. Following the MLA writing style, In this paper, we will explore and make predictions about the future of the physical universe by speculating on the positive and negative outcomes that could result from advances in physics. Also, the significance of this genre will be questioned as well. This new genre can usefully be employed to identify narratives that guess from current social science concepts in order to predict or speculate about the future shape of society.*

### قراءة تأملية في قصة أورسولا ك. لوجوين القصيرة "الموسيقى القديمة والنساء العبيد" كخيال علمي اجتماعي

واحدة من أكثر الممارسات الأدبية العريقة هي بناء عوالم مختلفة بهدف التكهّن بالطرق التي يمكن أن تتقدم بها المجتمعات. يبحث الخيال التأملي في العقود المستقبلية المحتملة الموجودة حالياً في مجتمعنا ولكنها لم تظهر بالكامل. في هذا الصدد، تركز أورسولا ك. لوجوين، المؤلفة الأمريكية، على المشهد الاجتماعي أكثر من التركيز على بطل الرواية المعين، وعلى إنشاء نماذج اجتماعية مصطنعة أكثر من التركيز على التفاعل بين الناس في نسخ خيالية من نظرائهم في الحياة الواقعية، وعلى افتراضات من الواقع أكثر من الاختلافات في المواقف الاجتماعية الواقعية. سيتم شرح هذه القضايا من خلال النظر في روايتها القصيرة: "الموسيقى القديمة والنساء العبيد" كنمط من الخيال العلمي الاجتماعي. باتباع أسلوب كتابة MLA، في هذه الورقة سوف نستكشف ونتنبأ بمستقبل الكون المادي من خلال التكهّن بالنتائج الإيجابية والسلبية التي يمكن أن تنجم عن التقدم في الفيزياء. أيضاً، سيتم التشكيك في أهمية هذا النوع أيضاً. يمكن استخدام هذا النوع الجديد بشكل مفيد لتحديد الروايات التي تخمن من مفاهيم العلوم الاجتماعية الحالية من أجل التنبؤ أو التكهّن بالشكل المستقبلي للمجتمع.

L. Marie Wood, an instructor at Southern New Hampshire University, state that : "Speculative fiction lives in the space where real life and make-believe converge, allowing for interplanetary travel, time travel and the undead to come out and play." (Girolimon 28). Speculative fiction frequently features action-packed, expansive plots that involve world-building, as Wood noted. On the other hand, general fiction is character-driven and examines human issues and people's inner lives in a realistic context. Any piece of speculative fiction that places social criticism as opposed to, hypothetical technology, at the forefront is referred to as "social fiction." A subgenre of this category is called social science fiction, in which social criticism, either political or cultural, occurs in a science-fiction setting.

Despite the fact that most works of science fiction may be construed as containing social commentary of some type or another as a significant component, utopian and dystopian fiction is a traditional, divided genre of social science fiction. Therefore, it is typical for a piece of science fiction to carry various different labels in addition to the social sci-fi one (Gerlach & Hamilton. 2003: 161-173). Generally, The interdisciplinary dialogue between the social sciences and science fiction literature and criticism acknowledges the profound function of science fiction thought in late modernity and provides useful theoretical and methodological resources for addressing crucial social concerns (Rosenau 57).

Margaret Atwood said that "For me, the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can't yet do ... speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand and that takes place on Planet Earth." (Atwood & Bouson 2019). In the book titled *Critical theory and science fiction*, Freedman explains that speculative fiction is the ability to explore issues through contemplative narration in ways that

realistic fiction cannot. Furthermore, This kind of storytelling offers a source of amusement and relaxation, a means of escaping reality and entering the realm of literature. This rings more true than everywhere else, especially in the realm of science fiction. The imaginative quality of speculative fiction frees our brains to imagine planets, people, and civilizations other than our own. It is a group of genres that puts the "creative" in creative writing. Speculative fiction is very distinctive because it fosters an open-minded mindset (De 59).

Ursula K. Le Guin, American Author, says: "All fiction has ethical, political, and social weight" (Rochelle 28). Fiction or a story that turns into an argument is called rhetorical. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is the art of influencing people to believe something. An author claims that the fundamental truth of the core myth stays the same, even though he or she changes the story for a new audience and a different setting. Esdan is from Hain and goes by the nickname "Old Music." He has been a minor character in three stories set in that system. He leaves the embassy of the Ekumen to meet with the leaders of the revolution on Werel but is captured and taken to an old slave estate. Ekumen is just a background that you can barely see in the distance. It sends an advanced observer to a planet with less technology. In one of the later stories, Le Guin has a character say that Ekumen observers on primitive worlds "often go native," which is a big concern in the early Hainish novels.

In his talk, "Unrealizable Ambiguous Utopias" Dennis Wilson Wise (University of Arizona), Plato's utopia in *The Republic* with Le Guin's *Old Music and Slave women*. He argued, Plato had also authored an ambiguous utopia, and his work should not be viewed just as the design for an ideal society as is customary. Both works might be seen as literary

pieces in and of themselves, with the emphasis on the educative rather than the dogmatic (Creuze 13).

What Le Guin does with mythic truths, or what these truths do to her stories, as she puts it (Rochelle 25). Social science fiction is, usually soft science fiction, concerned less with technology/space opera and more with speculate about human behavior and interactions placed in extreme and strange environment. In other words, it "absorbs and discusses anthropology", and speculates about human behavior and interactions. (Lee 47).

The term social science fiction has been used by some critics and writers dissatisfied with what they consider to be a limitation of science fiction: the need for the story to hold scientific principles. They argue that "speculative fiction" better defines an expanded, open, imaginative type of fiction than does "genre fiction", and the categories of "fantasy", "mystery", "horror" and "science fiction". The term has used to avoid being pigeonholed as a writer. this tendency is a fervent proponent for writers embracing more literary and modernist directions, broke out of genre conventions to push the boundaries of speculative fiction (Eizykman, et al 71).

Ursula K. Le Guin's "Old Music and The Slave Women" is an example of science fiction used to examine the sociology of subjects in the relatively near future. Explain the disruption and subsequent rebuilding of the slave community. The story's protagonist and protagonists both go on journeys into the "wilderness." Esdan has spent the better part of his life on a planet that has been ripped apart by conflict and is now considered a "wilderness." Furthermore, the people he does talk to end up helping him get over the isolation.( Le Guin *New Utopian Politics* 19) In addition, it

seems as though Le Guin's interplanetary civilization has reached its full potential, both as a government and as a positive force in the universe.

With many of her most well-known books and stories examining our own world through tales fusing fantasy with philosophical inquiry, Ursula K. Le Guin's fiction tended to lean toward the genre of science fiction. Her work frequently depicts hypothetical or far-future alternate worlds in politics, the environment, gender, religion, sexuality, and ethnography (Menadue 27).

Le Guin's writing has a keen interest in anthropology, as seen by the attention she takes in imagining other people's traditions and entire planets. Her writings continue to provide an alternative to the Western, commercial ideas that still dominate the majority of genre fiction today. The principles of Taoism, Jungian psychology, ecology, and human liberty are all mirrored in her own work as a desire for harmony and togetherness in society. (Přhová 2020). Le Guin is responsible for the production of enthralling works of history and science fiction that are both classic and contemporary. Exploration is an important part of Le Guin's creative process because it helps her come up with ideas for books with strong plots and characters with many different sides (Bechar 2019).

Ursula K. Le Guin left us with a wealth of stories and universes, but the most notable might be her Hainish cycle. Ekumen as a functioning society rather than just someplace that people come from. Le Guin really starts to develop the Ekumen as a mixing of cultures: a bustling, noisy, vibrant society. This world has its own political divisions and debates, as it tries to figure out how to engage with the slave-owning culture of Werel, an Earth overrun by religious fundamentalists, and the corporate dystopia of Aka. And even though the Ekumen always seems wiser and more patient



than other societies, its representatives are allowed to have differences of opinion, and to argue among themselves and make things up as they go along (Le Guin *Birthday of world* 34).

When read and considered as a whole, Le Guin's Hainish Cycle feels like an even more impressive accomplishment than its stellar individual works. Not because of any internal consistency, or an over-arching storyline but because of how far she takes the notion of an alliance of worlds interacting with baffling, layered, deeply complex cultures and trying to forge further connections with them. They are wealth that's contained in these books, gathered together (Girolimon 31)

The most intriguing part is Le Guin fictional communities, which frequently combine qualities drawn from her in-depth understanding of anthropology and her upbringing with her father, eminent anthropologist Alfred Kroeber. The majority of the main characters and narrators in The Hainish Cycle are emissaries from a humanitarian organization, the Ekumen, sent to investigate or ally themselves with the people of a different world and learn their ways. This reflects the anthropologist's experience of immersing themselves in new strange cultures (Le Guin, *Birthday of world* 24). The reader will change after taking each of these small voyages, and fully immersing oneself in the whole journey may well give the impression that the Ekumen is a real organization, one that we would all like to join right about now.

In actuality, social science fiction is a contemporary development of traditional science fiction because it makes similar imaginative leaps into the future and employs similar stylized conventions (time travel, interplanetary explorations), props (spaceships, robots), and characters (aliens, androids), but only as incidental backdrops to a different set of

issues. It departs from traditional science fiction in two key ways. The organizing principle of social science fiction is speculation about the future of society through projecting potential innovations in the knowledge and techniques of the social sciences, as opposed to classic science fiction, which is concerned with predicting the shape of the physical world by imagining the favorable and adverse potentialities of the physical sciences. Second, social science fiction emphasizes the societal repercussions of technological advancements while mostly taking them for granted. (McHale 2003).

One of the writers who used science fiction to explore the sociology of near-future topics was Ursula k. Le Guin with her story "Old Music and The slave women" Describes how the slave society underwent upheaval and reconstruction. Throughout the course of the narrative, the characters embark on treks into the "wilderness." For Estdan, the "wilderness" is a planet he has lived on for a very long time that has been torn apart by war. And the ones he does end up interacting with assist him in overcoming the loneliness brought on by his seclusion.( Gerlach 29)

Together, "Old Music and the Slave Women" and "Four Ways to Forgiveness" depict revolt and rebuilding in a slave society through a shared cast of characters and overarching theme. The narrative was labeled a "fifth way to forgiveness" by Le Guin herself. Estdan's suffering is comparable to Solly's in "Forgiveness Day," the opening tale of Four Ways to Forgiveness. They have a deeper awareness of both themselves and people around them as a result of both of their experiences. Estdan's growth throughout the course of the narrative is comparable to Havzhiva's in "A Man of the People." Over the course of the narrative, both characters travel through the "wilderness"; in Estdan's case, the wilderness is a planet he has



lived on for a very long time that has been devastated by war. Similar to Havzhiva, he finds companionship among the individuals he encounters thanks to the isolation brought on by this voyage. This is a reflection of Le Guin's mounting concern over the contemporary political and social climate (Le Guin, *Birthday of world* 87). More, "Old Music and the Slave Women" contains a surprisingly large number of dark comedic themes.

Hainish universe, created by Le Guin in which the economy of Werel is based on slavery, and during the period in which the stories are set, the society is experiencing upheaval and revolution. The four stories, clustered in the middle of the volume, as focusing on different experiences of a crumbling society, and as the collection's clearest instance of Le Guin's ongoing literary project of intersectional justice (Le Guin, *New Utopian Politics* 57).

According to scholar Warren Rochelle, the five stories set on Werel and Yeowe describe a civilization with the ability to develop a "truly human community," and the prospect of utopia. The Ekumen's recognition of the slaves as human beings, which gives them hope for release, makes this feasible. According to Rochelle, "Old Music and the Slave Women" contrasts two utopian concepts. For the slaves, liberation is utopia, and the revolution makes that possibility possible. The estate as it once was, managed by hundreds of slaves, served as a metaphor for utopia for the rulers.(25) The economy of Werel is based on slavery, and during the period in which the stories are set, the society is experiencing upheaval and revolution.

As with the stories of the linked story suite, "Old Music and the Slave Women" examines themes related to revolution and reconstruction in slave

society. It explores the consequences of war and responses to violence, and suggests that cultural change is a

gradual process. The story was positively received. While the length of the story received some criticism, reviewers praised the character of Esdan and Le Guin's depiction of the culture of Werel. The garden, house, and haunted ground in the story were inspired a description as painfully real, at once beautiful and deplorable (Cummins 88). Seventy-eight percent of the population is slaves, and slavery is legal on the properties controlled by the government. Three years after a slave insurrection, "Old Music and the Slave Women" takes place. Le Guin claimed that a trip to a sizable plantation that had employed slave labor in Charleston, South Carolina, served as the inspiration for the tale.

Building the world in these books also becomes more complex and class. Where we get hints and tangibles from strange habits and strange global destinations, such as the indigenous people on the exile planet who have taboos to contact with the eye, we suddenly get a much more complete understanding of the societies that Le Guin creates. Each paragraph contains some of the wisdom block or some of the beautifully observed emotional moment that must stop and appreciate it completely. In the first hint until his books are adventures, but everything after that is the journey of widening the mind (Cummins 92-93).

In *Ursula K. Le Guin: Conversations on Writing* with David Naimon, Le Guin says that: (93)

Yes. At the very end of the book there is a suggestion that if we aren't forever at war we will be peaceable and boring and dull and not do anything worth doing. All I can say is that's not my experience of war and peace. I was a kid during the Second World

War. All-out war is not a period where creativity gets much play.

After that war, it was like emerging from a very dark space and into a world where you could think and act in ways unrelated to war, the war effort, or combat. where there was opportunity for development rather than just destruction. In "Old Music and the Slave Women," Le Guin resumed her inquiry into peaceful alternatives to violent conflict and violence in general. Le Guin implies that no one is immune to the impacts of violence during times of war during the course of the story. Esdan's statement that "In war, everybody is a prisoner" is one instance of this. Esdan is described as Le Guin's "wisest, most sympathetic protagonist" by Lindow. He becomes aware of the nature of the cultural revolution that occurred as a result of his understanding of the suffering that slave women were made to experience. He realizes that in order to bring about cultural reform, he must put aside his "pure sense of liberty" and participate in the long process of transforming individual views. His attempt, in his words, is to "confuse the nobly basic system of caste by infecting it with the sense of justice." And then to strive toward realizing the aesthetically simple structure of the human equality goal, further complicating it.

contemplative imagination, like science fiction and fantasy, has a unique cognitive value. We look at how speculative imagination and philosophical thought are processed in the brain and how they are similar and different. Both rely on exploring the mind, but imagination is better at attracting readers and making them feel something. Reflective fiction is better at figuring out what happens when philosophical ideas are put into practice than intellectual experiments are. This is because it tells longer, more emotionally moving stories. Le Guin pointed out how such classifying may disguise difficulties and offered speculative knowledge of social science fiction as a technique that could make reality clearer. She

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brought attention to the need of maintaining a healthy balance in our care  
for the world.

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