

Climbing Lightly Through Forests

A Poetry Anthology
Honoring Ursula K. Le Guin

Edited by
R.B. Lemberg and Lisa M. Bradley



Aqueduct Press
PO Box 95787
Seattle, Washington 98145-2787
www.aqueductpress.com

Copyright © 2021 by Lisa M. Bradley and R.B. Lemberg

All rights revert to authors and artists.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, including mechanical, electric, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Publishing histories provided in Reprint Credits, p. 165

First Edition, First Printing, January 2021

ISBN: 978-1-61976-197-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020951642

Book and cover design by Kathryn Wilham

Cover photo courtesy Russ Moore

Printed in the USA by McNaughton & Gunn

Land Acknowledgments

I worked on this book from my home in Iowa, the Land between Two Rivers. Iowa has been the homeland for many independent nations: Ioway, Otoe, Omaha, Ponca, Sioux, Sauk, and Meskwaki (Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi). By force and by colonialist treaties, the US acquired the entirety of land in Iowa. Only the Meskwaki Nation, the Red Earth People, managed to purchase land and still maintain sovereignty in the state. Place names like Wapello, Tama, Sioux City, Black Hawk County, and many others remind me daily that colonialism is a destructive, ongoing process. May telling these truths be a small step toward reconciliation.

—Lisa M. Bradley, Iowa City, IA, March 2020

I did most of my editorial and writing work on this book in Lawrence, Kansas. This town is the ancestral homeland of several nations—the Kaw, Osage, and Shawnee peoples, who were relocated by force in the nineteenth century. Today, Kansas is home to many Indigenous people, including the four federally recognized nations: The Prairie Band Potawatomi, the Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri. Lawrence, Kansas, is the home of Haskell Indian Nations University, a federally operated tribal university that was founded in 1884 as a residential boarding school for Indigenous children, many of them forcibly removed from their homes. This is on my mind as a migrant now living in a place with rich, painful, and vibrant Indigenous presence and history.

—R.B. Lemberg, Lawrence, KS, April 2020

Editorial Acknowledgments

R.B.: I am grateful to Bogi Takács, my spouse, for eir help, encouragement, and good advice at various stages of this project. And I'm grateful to Lisa for sharing this work with me—it's been a sheer delight to edit with you. Thank you to the wonderful LGBTQIA+ writers at the virtual pub. Special thanks to my Patreon supporters, who followed along as the process unfolded. Last but not least, I'm grateful to my child Mati for fuzzy hugs and letting me work from time to time.

Lisa: Yes, big thanks to Bogi for crucial input and to our friends at the pub for inspiration and support. We are immensely grateful to Timmi and Aqueduct Press for championing inclusive, feminist SFF. Special thanks to Eileen Gunn for helping us include JT Stewart's work. R.B., thanks for sharing this journey with me (also, stop making me blush). Most of all, gracias a mi familia: José Jimenez, who counters my neurotic rambling with patient reason, and our child, Ash, who understands me even when I can no longer "word."

Contents

NOT AN INTRODUCTION	1
1. WIND AND WATER	5
Dear Ursula, Edmond Y. Chang	7
Where Are You? Jo Walton	9
Wind Writes the Water Roger Dutcher	10
Distance, Interval M.J. Cunniff	11
In Latin, <i>foris</i> Christopher Phelps	12
The Forester's Stratagem Neile Graham	13
Redwood Houses Amelia Gorman	15
Gallopig Hooves Tricia Knoll	16
Kudzu Stephanie Burt	17
Pacifica/Evergreen Hal Y. Zhang	18
The Other Lives Sonya Taaffe	19
Of Winter and Other Seasons Kiya Nicoll	20

“Might as well say I’m the words she read” Betsy Aoki	21
Poet Stumbles upon the Ten Thousand Things Brandon O’Brien	22
2. REBELLIONS	23
Speculative Fiction Linden K. McMahan	25
sound science Hal Y. Zhang	26
Upwards Toward the Light (a found poem) Rachel Swirsky	27
Physics 6 Ursula Whitcher	28
Dream Logic Ada Hoffmann	29
The Trees Are Waiting Gita Ralleigh	33
We Dream the Future in Our Songs Eva Papasoulioti	34
Atmospheric Inversion Kim Goldberg	35
The Keystone Out of Your Arch Sonya Taaffe	36
Tolk So Mayer	37
On the Long Road Back Aimee Ogden	39
The Day before the Revolution Izzy Wasserstein	41

3. BODIES AND BOUNDARIES	43
Icarus	
Thoraiya Dyer	45
From the Ansible, a Voice	
Charles Payseur	46
The Topography of Ambition	
Wendy Howe	48
Frost Ascending	
Kendra Preston Leonard	49
Ossify	
Jennifer Mace	50
Keepsake	
A.J. Odasso	52
Gebbeth	
A.Z. Louise	53
A Headful of Hair	
Leah Bobet	54
Evening (terza rima)	
Susannah Mandel	55
And So if You Go Down, You Go Down Whole	
Jeannelle D’Isa	56
ode to illness	
Gwynne Garfinkle	57
The Place Where We Don’t Touch	
(To Therem Harth rem ir Estravan, from Theirs to Thine)	
Xian Mao	58
An idea of boundary	
Shweta Narayan	59
Concern (a found poem)	
Brandon O’Brien	61

The Brown Thing Sofia Samatar	63
4. KIN AND KIND	67
Subjunctivitis (or: a Stratagem of Mortality) Margarita Tenser	69
The Scent of Green Sandra J. Lindow	70
Dancing at the Edge Margaret Wack	71
Until the Ships Came Nicole Field	72
Song of the Guardians of the Rainbow Ana Tapia Translation by Lawrence Schimel	76
The Humanist Chaplain Watches Her Daughter Walking through the Herb Garden T.D. Walker	77
Couch Burning Tania Pryputniewicz	79
My 1980 Stephanie Burt	80
On Reading Le Guin Mary Soon Lee	81
Earthsea Bernard Horn	82
Time Is Being and Being Time Eva Papasoulioti	83
Lessons from Mother Lynne Sargent	84

A Metaphor of Sparrows Erin K. Wagner	85
5. THE FARTHEST SHORE	87
Journey Lyta Gold	89
Dragon Haiku Mary Vlooswyk	91
The Ineffable Valeria Rodríguez	92
Cat's Canticle David Sklar	93
Reincarnate Kate Boyes	94
Spring Nisi Shawl	95
Note To Ursula K. Le Guin From JT Stewart in Seattle	96
Oregon: Local News Tricia Knoll	98
There Must Be Darkness Catherine Rockwood	99
THE POETRY OF URSULA K. LE GUIN: A RETROSPECTIVE	
R.B. Lemberg	101
POET BIOGRAPHIES	151
EDITOR BIOGRAPHIES	164
REPRINT CREDITS	165

Not An Introduction

Lisa: I'm on record as hating introductions. I'm an impatient reader who wants to dive right into the author's work. As an editor, however, I feel the best anthologies are conversations, and newcomers to a conversation often appreciate having some context before joining in. As a tribute anthology, *Climbing Lightly Through Forests* gathers multiple conversations: the poets are responding to Ursula K. Le Guin, her work, or their own responses to her or her work; and as editors, R.B. and I put the poets in conversation with each other and with the readers. So let's begin as we wish to proceed, not as an introduction but as a conversation. R.B., tell me about Ursula's influence on your life.

R.B.: Her work has meant so much to me over the years. *The Left Hand of Darkness* was a revelation and a lifeline for me as a queer, nonbinary, and then-closeted immigrant teen; I read it first in Russian translation. In 2010, I founded *Stone Telling Magazine*, a speculative poetry venue named after the main character in *Always Coming Home*. I approached Ursula to let her know about the new magazine and asked if I could reprint one of her poems. She wrote back with a new poem, "The Elders at the Falls," which appeared in the inaugural issue of the magazine. I did not know a lot about Ursula's poetry before that, except that I loved the poems in *Always Coming Home*, but I began to seek her poetry out after that. How about you, Lisa?

Lisa: I came to love Le Guin's work in college, when I aspired to write speculative fiction about philosophy. *The Dispossessed* rocked my world—here was a book serious about political philosophy but with a fascinating science fiction plot and characters I cared about! It was a model for everything I wanted to write. I must've been aware of Le Guin's poetry, but I don't remember seeking it out.

Eventually, my interest in Spanish poetry brought me back to Le Guin. I can read Spanish, but I rely on English translations as back-up. Imagine my delight when I found a translation by Le Guin! Her work gave me the confidence to write about the speculative poetry of an amazing Chilean poet, which you bought for *Stone Telling Magazine*. That was our first collaboration related to Le Guin.

What did you learn from your deep dive into Le Guin's poetry?

R.B.: Much of her poetry felt very personal to me and not nearly as speculative as her fiction; and there was much less engagement with it, from both readers and critics, so I was interested in why that might be. Le Guin herself said her poetry was dismissed because it was written by a novelist; but I am not sure if that is quite true. It's just that her poetry was so much less speculative, and her readers expected speculative works from her—grand feats of imagination, of *naming* what has been silent for long. The magic of her poetry is quieter. It is in the wind and water, the landscape and the trees, whole forests of them. Ursula called herself an arboreal writer, and the title of this book, a line from one of her poems, reflects that.

Lisa: Arboreal! Certainly, Le Guin looms as large as a sequoia for readers of her speculative fiction. But perhaps we should imagine her as a whole forest, because she wrote astutely and passionately about many things in many genres. I agree, spec readers seem nonplussed by Ursula as Poet, probably because her poetry lacks the comforting protocols of much spec fic. Many spec readers shy from contemporary literary poetry, which is how I'd classify Le Guin's work, and so those readers are even less likely to know that Ursula *translated* poetry. Yet it was Le Guin's translation that crystallized my love for her, specifically *Select-ed Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (University of New Mexico Press, 2003). Mistral was a Chilean educator, diplomat, and poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, and that essay I mentioned from *Stone Telling* was about Mistral. As a Latina, I'm deeply grateful that Le Guin spotlighted Mistral's work. Western literature, and speculative literature in particular, can feel oppressively white. Le Guin's tribute to this amazing woman is a powerful act of inclusion. This anthology continues in that inclusive vein.

R.B.: Yes, it was wonderful for me to discover the poetic conversations she had with Mistral and other Latinx poets, and her abiding interest in translation. Inclusion has been very important to us as anthologists, and we have been blessed to receive submissions from poets from all ways of life—poets who were readers and who were friends, poets of many ages and genders, poets from different corners of the world. The poems in this book engage with Ursula’s legacy from a multitude of perspectives—from the landscape of the Pacific Northwest to family to feminist issues. I am especially proud of how many queer, trans, and nonbinary voices appear in this anthology. So many of us have felt seen and empowered—and some of us also hurt—by her works, which reached beyond cisnormativity towards a more inclusive world.

Lisa: Indeed, this anthology is enriched by the work of poets from all over the world: Greece, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, the UK, Australia, Uruguay, and Canada, in addition to the United States, where R.B. and I are located. (We speak more about that in our land acknowledgments above.) As a fan of Le Guin’s translation, I’m so pleased to share Lawrence Schimel’s translation of a poem by Spanish poet Ana Tapia, here titled “Song of the Guardians of the Rainbow.” Several of our poets wrote in English, although it is not their primary language. We are grateful for their generosity and virtuosity.

We’ve also included work from over a dozen poets of color, many of whom, like me, felt *seen* by Ursula. She may not have always seen us correctly or fully grasped our contexts, but she recognized non-white, non-Western lives and artists. From that recognition, Sofia Samatar, Shweta Narayan, Brandon O’Brien, and others have spun fascinating, sometimes critical discourse.

R.B.: I love how the poetry in this volume has such a range of tone. Taken as a whole, the resulting book is deeply Ursuline—in its contemplativeness, in its rebelliousness and resistance, in its thoughtfulness, in its sadness and its hope. When I pitched *Climbing Lightly Through Forests* to Timmi Duchamp at Aqueduct, shortly after Ursula passed away, I did not expect how emotionally difficult it would be for me to choose between so many wonderful, heartfelt poems. I am immensely grateful to Lisa, who came on board a bit later. We worked together

previously, but not as co-editors; I loved her editorial approach when she worked on poetry for *Uncanny Magazine's* special issue "Disabled People Destroy Fantasy." Co-editing this book with Lisa has brought tremendous joy to the process and made the book richer and so much more satisfying.

Lisa: I'm so grateful that R.B. invited me to this project. I've learned magnitudes from R.B.'s keen yet sensitive reading, their loving but clear-eyed critique of Le Guin's work. I learned from our poets, as well. We received enough poetry that we could've curated an entire book of sad poems, or nature poems, or poems celebrating Le Guin's fiction or critiquing it, but as "Journey" by Lyta Gold reminds us, "Grief keeps its own timetable." We chose to reflect the poets' kaleidoscopic range, because, although we all grieve for Le Guin, we may be at different stages of grief. Hopefully, no matter where the reader is in their process, they'll be able to find solace and support in these pages. They can join in the conversations.

R.B.: Working on the retrospective essay and rereading Ursula's poems about grief and age and the long, long process of writing, I felt seen and held in this one idea: it's OK to take a long time to create something that is true. Poetry—all creativity—is often a circuitous journey.

When Ursula passed on January 22, 2018, many of us felt that she left us too soon, that she left us when we still so desperately needed her. She was 88. Yet, many of us wanted her to continue. Her work was so vital, so life-changing. We still need her voice. We will keep reading and thinking, talking to her, talking about her, talking about her stories, telling our own stories. After reading and rereading through the body of her poetry for the retrospective essay, I came to feel that she said what she wanted to say—she said all she *could* say. The rest is up to us.

1. Wind and Water

Dear Ursula,

Edmond Y. Chang

—*ent*

leant

sent

You rode quietly in the back seat of the car.
Your friend Suzy beside you, laughing.
Margaret was driving; you said you liked my mohawk.
We joked about the run-in with the police
On the way to pick you up from the lecture hall
Where you read letters to the ghost of Tiptree.
I, too, got lost in your time travels, starstruck,
Now by your tottered shape and searching mind
As you peered out the passenger-side window,
Starboard, spying a fragment of a store sign.
You chirp, trying on rhymes like hats, a meditation.

—*ast*

vast

past

A book of yours told me mountains when I was ten.
Decades later it reminds me of promises made,
Then and today, that words are more than their sums,
That the map of the earth is sea and sky and change.
You taught me words are magic, true names,
Old names, strange spellings—wizard, *ansible*,
Forest, lathe, *kemmer*, sparrowhawk, home,
Journey, anarchy, foxtail, mother, Ursula—
The bear, the octopus, the teacher, the guide.
You taught me not to be afraid of dragons,
To play among islands, to never be frugal with hope.

Climbing Lightly Through Forests

—*eth*
breath
death

At the hotel, caught open in the lobby, I asked
For a picture with you, and you nodded gently, tired.
At your ear, I bowed, eschewing my heavy hands,
Caught in your gravity as the day wore you down.
Your smile bore the maps and marks of every story,
Hour, and place your imagination ever visited.
My first contact with ancient generosity and keen grace.
A year later, you came again and remembered my hair.
We would never get the chance to break bread
Or take another ride or talk about how the world hurt
Before the vacuum of loss widened the orbit of your star.

Where Are You?

Jo Walton

You are in a house that creaks with the memory of footfalls.
You are in a boat, far out in the Reaches, changing the rules.
You are contemplating a wall, a threshold, a border.
You are crossing a glacier.
You are singing in the darkness the rhythms that rock a child to sleep.
You are naming and claiming and walking and talking
Challenging, balancing, changing and raging.
You are bemusedly watching a cat.
The moon is rising and you are listening to water in the mountains.
You are extending a hand to somebody.
You are accepting praise, awkwardly.
You are pointing out a heron.
You are reading with delight, greedily, like a child under the covers.
You are watching the dragons rising, spiraling, with furrowed brow,
reconsidering.
You are eating little fried cakes. You are taking pickles to the
communal barrel.
You are making and shaping and blinking and thinking.
You are finding your way back through a story,
Like banging rocks in a circle,
Like light (no, faster than that), like the necessity of narrative,
Uphill, over broken ice, near a young volcano.
You are at home, or at least, you always know where home is.
That you are dead is grave. That you are gone seems impossible.