



Changing Planes: Armchair Travel for the Mind

Ursula K. Le Guin

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Missing a flight, waiting in an airport, listening to garbled announcements - who doesn't hate that misery? But Sita Dulip from Cincinnati finds a method of bypassing the crowds at the desks, the long lines at the toilets, the nasty lunch, the whimpering children and punitive parents, the bookless bookstores, and the blue plastic chairs bolted to the floor.

A mere kind of twist and a slipping bend, easier to do than to describe, takes her not to Denver but to Strupsirts, a picturesque region of waterspouts and volcanoes, or to Djeyo where she can stay for two nights in a small hotel with a balcony overlooking the amber Sea of Somue.

This new discovery - changing planes - enables Sita to visit bizarre societies and cultures that sometimes mirror our own and sometimes open doors into the alien.

Changing Planes: Armchair Travel for the Mind Details

Date : Published 2004 by Gollancz (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780575076235

Author : Ursula K. Le Guin

Format : Paperback 214 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Short Stories, Fiction

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From Reader Review Changing Planes: Armchair Travel for the Mind for online ebook

Althea Ann says

A collection of stories/vignettes connected by an amusing premise: while caught in the unique state of boredom experienced only by the traveller stuck with a layover at an airport, a person can quite literally "change planes" and visit other realms of existence.

(One gets the feeling that LeGuin doesn't like modern travel much - and indeed, on her website it says that the author is currently taking a sabbatical from any kind of book tours or speaking engagements.)

Each section describes, from the visitor's perspective, a different 'plane' and the people who live there. The segments are a bit too brief and lacking in full development for me to consider then full 'stories' - but the writing is wonderful, and the book is just full of brilliantly insightful and amusing ideas. LeGuin apparently has many more flashes of creativity on a routine business trip than most authors do in a career. These are the ideas she hasn't fleshed out into full novels, but the book is still a rewarding experience - both funny and with many serious-yet-wry observations about our own world as well as potential alien ways of life.

Kristen says

I scanned, rather than read, because the beginning wasn't too promising. The rest is mildly interesting, but not as engaging as her earlier works. Also, the essay having to do with genetic engineering is only fiction, I realize, but I found it simply silly science fiction that seems to come from an uninformed perspective on the subject. It creates a rather alarmist look at the topic.

Fey says

Changing Planes begins with a tale about how Sita Dulip discovered a method of transporting oneself to another plane of reality, whilst waiting for her delayed flight at the airport. There then follows a series of short stories about one person's trips and experiences to these alternate planes.

My favourites among these were:

Seasons of the Ansarac: About a semi nomadic race, who live on a world where there are four seasons, but each season lasts for 6 years. And still their way of life is set by the seasons. Every twelve years, the entire race of people migrate between 2 continents, and every 'year' (24 years in fact) there is a mating season.

Porridge on Islac: a world where the populace experimented freely with genetic modification, and as a result almost none of the human population is entirely human anymore. Some people are in fact part vegetable, which brought a whole new meaning to 'you are what you eat'.

Although I did like most of the stories, I couldn't keep listing them. Suffice to say they were all very innovative and thought provoking ideas. But I could see that each 'plane' had certain flaws in it's world building, where you could see that if LeGuin had attempted to embellish any more on them they were going

to run into huge problems of physics or metaphysics, or some plot hole or other that was going to need too much crafty explaining... Makes me think that this book was LeGuin's round filing cabinet for ideas that were never going to make it as real novels. Nifty idea really, good for her, don't let an interesting idea go to waste!

Several of the stories, I did feel, were trying a little to push some kind of moral on the reader, which sometimes I find uncomfortable. It's a little hard to explain, but there was a lot to do with governments or authorities and oppression, or people attempting to interfere with another people's way of life.. it was a very Star Trek: The Next Gen feel to it, if anyone knows what I mean by that! :)

But of course I did like the book, and I would definately reccommend it.

eva says

le guin is one of my favorite authors, but i have a tendency to buy her books and then stick them on my shelf and forget which ones i've read. finally i decided to do things right and read them all, in chronological order by publication date (except the ones that...i don't want to). i started the project by immediately breaking the rules and picking up this 2004 book of short stories that a friend of mine recommended: since i was about to embark on a 12-hour flight to bali, it seemed like an appropriate choice.

anyway, i loved these. every one was like a little science fiction fable, and in that way they reminded me of some of stanislaw lem's short stories, light and thoughtful - but with more heart. her dry, restrained style works really nicely here, and the framing story is just enough, not too much. it was also interesting to see her playing around again with some of the SF themes that she's visited so much in her earlier works, like humanoid migration.

Scott says

This is a collection of sketches of alternate universe worlds that LeGuin uses to say some fascinating things about the nature of... not humans necessarily, but beings. Each world is related to our own, but the people or the lifestyle differ in ways that make for some fascinating commentary on our own reality. What if we lived in a world without language? What if we shared our dreams with our neighbors every night? Each story has a different character and some are more whimsical than poignant, but the collection works. A thought-provoking but not too heavy read.

Aerin says

Changing Planes is a delightful book. It delights me.

This anthropological tour through some of the stranger societies in the multiverse begins by explaining its basic premise: Airports are not only portals to other terrestrial cities, but also to other dimensions. Interplanar travel requires no machine or vehicle, no magical incantations or special knowledge. The remarkably simple method was developed by one Sita Dulip, who discovered it when her flight out of Chicago was delayed several times and finally canceled. Trapped, exhausted, uncomfortable, and bored, she realized that:

By a mere kind of twist and a slipping bend, easier to do than to describe, she could go anywhere - be anywhere - because she was already between planes.

(Normally, I would have no truck with any book whose premise was based on such a ridiculous pun - but over the years I have made a *few* grudging exceptions to this policy.)

The rest of the book is divided into fifteen short stories - or really, ethnographies - about life on the different planes. Some of them are moral allegories, some are social satires, some portray strange and unsettling alien philosophies. None of the chapters have much plot to speak of, but they are all fascinating vignettes. The formula is essentially: "Let me tell you a few things about the people of ____."

Despite this common approach, the stories are fairly diverse in style and theme. Four of the standouts highlight some of the different tacks Le Guin takes:

Seasons of the Ansarac is an ethnographic description of the migratory people of Ansar. On a plane where each season lasts for six of our years, the people spend spring and summer raising children in idyllic northern homesteads before heading south to the vibrant cities every fall and winter. Le Guin's detailed description of Ansarac folkways is fascinating, but the story takes a darker turn when visitors from another plane (one similar to ours) arrive, convince the Ansarac that they are primitive, backward, and hormone-driven, and offer to help them adopt a modern lifestyle.

Great Joy satirizes the American obsession with meaningless holiday kitsch, describing a privately-owned plane where one island is always Christmas, one the 4th of July, one New Year's Eve, and so on. This plane's sickly-sweet candy coating covers a horrifying system of slavery and exploitation - not that Christmas-loving midwestern Cousin Sulie and her fellow patrons give much of a shit about that. "I just get right into the spirit just *thinking* about Christmas Island! Oh, it is just such a *happy* place!"

Wake Island is a cautionary dystopia about science gone awry. Based on their theory that sleep is a vestigial trait that keeps most humans from accessing their latent genius, a group of scientists genetically design babies who need no sleep. This is essentially the same premise as Nancy Kress's *Beggars in Spain*, but Le Guin's aftermath is much more disturbing.

The Island of the Immortals is in many ways a horror story, cloaked in the guise of classic science fiction. It reminds me quite a bit of the better works of H.G. Wells, where a lone traveler encounters a society he at first cannot understand - and then later wishes he never tried. In this story, the narrator has heard of an island on the Yendian plane which is populated by immortals. Curious to learn the secret of their longevity, she visits - only to find the locals quiet, standoffish, and oddly somber. There are immortals among them, yes, but they are not what the narrator expects. This is the story that has remained in my mind most vividly since I first read this book almost a decade ago. It is, in my opinion, one of Le Guin's most powerful and thoughtful pieces.

~

Ursula K. Le Guin died last month; I reread this book in part as a memorial (and in part because I just love it so much). Given her recent passing, this excerpt in particular struck me:

When I was twelve or thirteen, I used to plan what I'd wish for if they gave me three wishes. I

thought I'd wish, 'I wish that having lived well to the age of eighty-five and having written some very good books, I may die quietly, knowing that all the people I love are happy and in good health.'

She was 88 when she died, and she wrote a great number of incredible books. I hope that the rest of her wish came true as well.

Pragya says

I read all stories except The fliers of Gy because I just couldn't do it. I was thoroughly bored by this time. I appreciate Guin's creativity, imagination and writing but I believe this genre isn't for me.

Phèdre Banshee says

“È una storia triste e violenta, ma in un luogo così dolce e tranquillizzante come i Giardini di Lettura sembra non solo possibile, ma anche saggio aprire il proprio cuore alla follia, al dolore e al rimpianto.”

L'autrice prende il concetto di “viaggiare con la mente” e lo rende reale, creando una vera e propria rete di viaggi fra gli innumerevoli Piani di esistenza. Nonostante abbia la forma di raccolta di racconti, questo romanzo è molto più simile a degli appunti di viaggio, vissuti in prima persona dalla protagonista o appresi da altri visitatori di Piani e riportati. La Le Guin ha la grande abilità di saper creare dei mondi, anche completamente diversi dal nostro, eppure credibili al punto giusto.

IL SEMOLINO DI ISLAC

Ho trovato davvero geniale questo racconto, che ci mostra un mondo in declino in seguito all'abuso smisurato della genetica applicata, dove ogni essere vivente non è più del tutto umano, ma con percentuali vegetali e animali, e i politici vivono per secoli.

IL SILENZIO DEGLI ASONU

È senza dubbio il racconto più ironico, dove una popolazione silenziosa scatena negli stranieri le teorie più disparate sul 'perché' del loro silenzio, e quelle rare volte in cui scappa qualche parola, tutti a cercare di interpretare il significato nascosto e le circostanze. Davvero molto divertente.

COME SENTIRSI A CASA TRA GLI HENNEBET

*«Non sono sicura di quello che sono», dissi.
«Molte persone non lo sono mai» rispose lei, parlando con grande sincerità, questa volta, e sollevando lo sguardo dal punto catenella. [...] «Ma non ha importanza, lo sa», disse. «Se per un momento in tutta la sua vita lei sa chi è, allora quella è la sua vita, quel momento, e quello è 'unnua', tutto qui. In una vita breve ho visto la faccia di mia madre, simile al sole, e perciò*

sono qui. In una vita lunga sono andata laggiù, laggiù e anche laggiù; ma ho scavato nel giardino, ho estratto con la mano la radice di un'erbaccia e così sono 'unnua'. Quando lei invecchierà, lo sa, continuerà ad essere qui e non là, tutto è qui. Tutto è qui.»

Qui la protagonista arriva in un piano con persone molto simili a lei esteriormente, ma appena aprono bocca, quello che dicono è di difficile comprensione e crea barriere difficili da superare. Gli Hennebet hanno una concezione della vita e di loro stessi talmente diversa dalla nostra, che è praticamente impossibili capirli a pieno. La reincarnazione per loro non sembra essere solo un concetto o un'ipotesi, ma un fatto reale. L'autrice lascia molto spazio all'immaginazione del lettore, senza dare delle risposte precise.

L'IRA DI VEKSI

L'autrice ha preso delle caratteristiche dell'essere umano come: aggressività, violenza e predisposizione al conflitto, e ha creato una popolazione usandoli come caratteristica principale. È interessante vedere le varie incoerenze che si creano e il bisogno di socializzare che contrasta con quello di volersi isolare; o il dolore della perdita in contrasto con la rabbia per l'abbandono.

LE STAGIONI DEGLI ANSAR

“Ma anche se si sono sparsi come i grani di sabbia di una clessidra rotta, i legami che li univano non si sono spezzati, sono soltanto cambiati.”

Questo racconto ha un incredibile impatto immaginativo e suggestivo. L'autrice qui riesce a trasportare il lettore nel mondo che descrive, creando un viaggio nel viaggio. Parla di una popolazione che ha solo tre fasi di vita fondamentali, scandite ogni volta da un pellegrinaggio lungo ed estenuante. Una fase dedicata alla famiglia, al sesso, ai figli; la seconda dedicata a tutto il resto, come scuola, lavoro, divertimenti, arte, hobby, amicizie; e la terza e ultima riguarda la loro morte.

Ho apprezzato molto anche la loro scelta di “protegersi” da una popolazione straniera che ha cercato di cambiarli, affinché nessuno più potesse farli sentire diversi o sbagliati. Finale commovente e suggestivo.

IL SOGNARE IN COMUNE DEI FRINTH

«Il sogno da noi sognato è la strada che ci permette di attraversare la notte. Gli stranieri conoscono il nostro giorno, ma non la nostra notte, non la Via che percorriamo. Allora solo noi possiamo trovare la nostra strada, mostrarcela l'un l'altro, seguire la lanterna delle nostre menti forti, seguire l'oscurità dei nostri sogni.»

In questo Piano i sogni non sono qualcosa di personale e privato, ma vengono condivisi fra tante altre persone, creando un legame del tutto estraneo e incomprensibile per un esterno. Il concetto di individuo viene messo in discussione, in quanto una delle cose più private come può essere il sogno, viene messa sotto lo sguardo, il giudizio e l'influenza di tutti gli altri.

I REALI DI HEGN

Anche questo racconto è molto ironico. L'autrice ha preso il concetto di morbosità che abbiamo noi esseri umani per le celebrità o i reali, e lo ha ribaltato, creando un mondo in cui sono tutti nobili e ricchi e solo una

famiglia è povera di umili origini. I reali provano per questa famiglia dei veri e propri sentimenti, ne idealizza i membri, vogliono scoprire ogni più sordido particolare, ne parlano e spettegolano di continuo, hanno loro foto nelle loro case e se un membro di questa famiglia muore, tutti i reali si stringono in preda al dolore. Un vero e proprio ribaltamento del nostro mondo.

STORIE DOLOROSE DEL PIANO DI MAHIGUL

“Molti la considerano un’attività noiosa, quando si è in un altro piano, o anche nel proprio, ma io, al pari di Borges, penso al paradiso come a qualcosa di molto simile a una biblioteca.”

La protagonista racconta di andare spesso su questo piano dove è presente un Giardino di Lettura meraviglioso, con una grande Biblioteca dove si può scoprire la storia del Piano di Mahigul. Da qui si dipanano tre storie, che non mi hanno entusiasmato particolarmente, complice anche una povera disgraziata che, in seguito ad uno stupro da parte di un dio, partorisca poi cento figlie... Diciamo che la mitologia non è l’ambito in cui preferisco questa autrice.

GRANDE GIOIA

L’autrice qui si concentra sul consumismo relativo alle festività, creando un piano dedicato esclusivamente ad esso. Il questo piano ci sono varie isole dove è festa tutto l’anno (Natale, Pasqua, Halloween...) e i depliant pubblicitari girano di piano in piano. Tutto è puntato sull’immagine e sulla popolazione del Piano sfruttata per tenere bassi i costi. “Il consumismo è diventato il vero spirito della festa” è un argomento che sentiamo di continuo con l’avvicinarsi delle festività, quindi l’autrice ha provato a togliere ogni spirito e vedere cose succede.

L’ISOLA DELLA VEGLIA

Qui si parla di un esperimento scientifico molto interessante: uno studioso sostiene che il sonno sia un inibitore del cervello, che lo rallenti dall’esprimere tutto il suo potenziale, quindi decide di intervenire geneticamente per provare ad eliminare il sonno per creare persone molto più intelligenti. Interessante leggere dell’esito di questo suo esperimento.

LA LINGUA DEI NNA MMOY

“Imparare il Nna Moy è come imparare a tessere l’acqua.”

I Nna Mmoy sono il risultato di un ecocatastrofe, intenzionale o casuale non si sa con certezza, che ha gradualmente eliminato tutto il superfluo intorno a loro, lasciando solo l’essenziale. Una discesa alla semplicità che inaspettatamente va a scontrarsi con il bisogno intrinseco di complessità dei Nna Mmoy, (e dell’Essere Umano) che rendono difficile, articolato ed esteticamente bello e particolareggiato tutto ciò che è rimasto, cioè il loro linguaggio e la loro scrittura. Comprendere il loro linguaggio è praticamente impossibile, e lo stesso vale per il loro passato.

L’EDIFICIO

È uno dei racconti che più mi ha colpito, con questo popolo scacciato dalla sua terra da una razza più numerosa, che a distanza di secoli sviluppa l’istinto di costruire case ovunque, forse in nome di quella che a loro è stata strappata secoli prima, e la motivazione stessa della costruzione dell’Edificio mi è rimasta impressa.

I VOLATORI DI GY

“«E io: ‘Ho volato mamma’, e lei scoppiò a piangere. Mi dispiaceva per lei, ma non potevo dire molto. Non mi chiese se volessi continuare a volare. Sapeva che l’avrei fatto. Non capisco le persone che hanno le ali ma non vogliono usarle. Suppongo che siano troppo interessati a fare carriera. O che siano innamorati di qualcuno a terra. Ma sembra... non so. Non riesco a capirlo. ‘Voler’ rimanere a terra. ‘Scegliere’ di non volare.»”

Sicuramente il mio preferito: In mezzo ad un popolo piumato, che vive con i piedi per terra, ad alcuni di loro capita che crescano delle ali. Un evento molto raro, fatto di atroci sofferenze e lunghi isolamenti; alcuni trattano questi Alati come dei prescelti, ma la maggior parte considera avere le ali un handicap. Ho adora la questione della paura di volare, per la paura concreta che le ali si blocchino; dei rischi e della scelta di vivere con i piedi per terra o nel cielo in tempesta, che riprende molto il concetto ripreso spesso nella letteratura e che si può trasporre ad innumerevoli argomenti della vita: “Vola solo chi osa farlo.” È l’unico per cui mi sono commossa davvero.

“È una questione di temperamento. Gli alati che scelgono di volare sono coloro che sono disposti a correre il rischio di un blocco delle ali. Coloro che non vogliono assumersene il rischio, non volano. O, viceversa, forse coloro che lo giudicano un rischio non volano, e coloro che volano non lo considerano un rischio.”

L’ISOLA DEGLI IMMORTALI

Un racconto molto inquietante, che tuttavia non mi ha colpito particolarmente. Parla di come ogni cosa abbia un prezzo, e che a volte quello che si desidera non è quello che potremmo aspettarci. Ho apprezzato il paragone Immortali-Diamanti.

LA CONFUSIONE DI UÑI

Questo racconto mi è piaciuto soprattutto dal punto di vista tecnico. L’autrice riesce a raccontare un viaggio onirico, dando un senso, quando in realtà un senso non c’è. Una fusione continua di personaggi, ambienti e dialoghi che angoscia e affascina in egual misura.

In generale l’unica cosa che non ho molto apprezzato è la mancanza quasi totale di azione. Tutta la narrazione è come un lungo sogno patinato, dove si raccontano i vari Piani, ma in cui effettivamente succede ben poco, mi sarebbe piaciuto forse un minimo di imprevisti o comunque qualche avvenimento che avrebbe potuto illustrare anche “il come” una determinata popolazione reagisce al problema e le eventuali differenze con noi.

“La gente dice ogni volta: «abbiamo sempre fatto così», poi si scopre che il loro ‘sempre’ significa una generazione o due, un secolo o due, al massimo un millennio o due. Le abitudini culturali e i costumi sono moneta spicciola, al confronto delle abitudini e del modo i comportarti del corpo, della razza.”

È un romanzo rilassante, che permette al lettore di evadere e al tempo stesso fornisce continui stimoli e spunti. A molti di noi sarà capitato, almeno una volta, di voler essere in un altro Piano, di evadere del tutto dal nostro e di crearne uno nuovo, magari completamente diverso; questo romanzo è per tutti quei sognatori a cui un solo Piano non basta. Se amate il wordbuilding o volete qualcosa di diverso dal solito, questo fa al vostro caso.

“[...] soltanto chi è morto è immancabilmente attendibile.”

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Kat Hooper says

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

Airports are horrible places — the boring waits, the noisy rush, the germy stale air, the ugly utilitarian décor, the nasty food. That is, until Sita Dulip, while waiting for her delayed flight from Chicago to Denver and noticing that “the airport offers nothing to any human being except access to the interval between planes,” developed a technique to change planes inside the airport. She discovered that in the airport the traveler is uncomfortable, displaced, and already between planes and can therefore easily slip into other planes of existence while waiting for a flight.

Sita Dulip’s technique has now been publicized and travelers everywhere are using it to alleviate airport boredom. *Changing Planes* is a collection of fifteen of their stories. A few of the stories are mainly anthropological or linguistic explorations of imaginary cultures, but readers who are familiar with Ursula Le Guin won’t be surprised to learn that many of the stories make some sort of satirical statement about human behavior, and especially American culture. Even the short introduction manages to take a swipe at conservative politicians, authors who write bestsellers and, of course, corporations that run airlines.

Le Guin’s method of using several different worlds to highlight the problems (or potential future problems) in our own, and the social satire, make *Changing Planes* feel somewhat like Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, which I enjoyed many years ago. Almost all of the stories in *Changing Planes* are poignant, and some of them will stick with me for a long time. Those I liked most are:

- * “Porridge on Islac” — In an attempt to genetically engineer better species of humans, animals, and plants, the Islacs are now left with a very strange society. The cover art for the first edition comes from this story.
- * “The Silence of the Asonu” — Adults on Asonu don’t say much, so people from other planes think they are hiding a sacred secret. They desperately want to find out what it is.
- * “Feeling at Home with the Hennebet” — The people of Hennebet have strange but charming ideas about self-identity and time perception.
- * “Social Dreaming of the Frin” — In Frin, dreams are not private. Each night, the Frins dream communally.
- * “The Royals of Hegn” — In Hegn, everyone has descended from royalty, except for one family. This funny social satire pokes fun at our love of celebrities.
- * “Woeful Tales from Mahigul” — The four very short tales in this mini-collection were read by a traveler sitting in the beautiful outdoor library of Mahigul. I wish I could go there!
- * “Wake Island” — Genetic engineering again. This frightening story is about a cohort of youngsters who were engineered to need no sleep. Scientists hoped they’d be geniuses, but it didn’t turn out quite like that.

* “The Island of the Immortals” — On this plane, diamonds are not valuable and immortality is a disease.

Each of these stories is, of course, written in Le Guin’s straightforward, unpretentious, smart and lovely style. The audiobook version is narrated by Gabrielle de Cuir, whose attractive voice perfectly fits this style. Whenever I review an audiobook, I like to pick up a print copy from my library, too, just so I can see if I’m missing anything. Sure enough, if I hadn’t looked at the print version, I would have missed the delightful black and white illustrations by Eric Beddows. I especially liked the picture of the communal dream in “Social Dreaming of the Frin.”

Changing Planes won the 2004 Locus Award for best story collection. Many of the stories had been previously published over several years before being combined to form this themed collection, but they work beautifully together. All of them are short escapes into fascinating new planes of existence. Changing Planes would be the perfect book to read next time you’re waiting for a flight!

Robert says

An amusing set of shorts based on the conceit of being able to *change planes in airports*...planes of existence that is. Many of these are more by way of reports on the cultures of strange and alien lands and peoples than conventional narratives, but the doses of amusing satire prevent them becoming dull, and this sort of thing plays to Le Guin's strengths, what with her family background in anthropology and all.

Jake says

The Basics: I’ve loved LeGuin’s writing ever since my father introduced me to the Wizard of Earthsea trilogy when I was a child. I even named one of my dogs after the main character in that trilogy (though, as my father was fond of pointing out, the dog was no wizard). I’ve yet to read a story of hers that I really disliked; some are, of course, better than others, but I love ‘em all.

Changing Planes is a collection of sixteen short stories grouped around a single conceit; in a world very much like ours, it is possible to travel to other dimensions, but only if you’re stuck in an airport for long enough to become sufficiently frustrated, bored, and irritated to simply will yourself into another dimension. It’s a neat little idea, and mostly just serves as an excuse for LeGuin to shunt her narrator to a bunch of different planes where she can play with different ideas. As is her wont, most of the stories involve her playing with ideas about alternative social structures, or ordinary people thrust into strange circumstances. It’s social-science fiction, essentially.

The Good: I love Leguin’s writing style; it’s simple, but evocative. She paints beautiful pictures with words, and it all just flows. There are very few writers who can keep me distracted enough to nearly miss a T stop. LeGuin is one of them.

The stories themselves are all fairly interesting. I particularly enjoyed “Porridge on Islac”, more for the atmosphere than for the bits about genetic engineering; “Woeful Tales from Mahigul” does some interesting story-within-a-story things, “The Building” tells a weird and sort of haunting story about a race of people

who keep constructing an enormous building for no apparent purpose, and “The Fliers of Gy” posits an society where some people get wings, and it often kills them.

Really, all the stories are excellent. I can’t think of any I didn’t enjoy.

The Bad: Not much, though some readers might be turned off by the political/moral messages in some of the stories. “Porridge on Islac”, for example, is pretty clearly a parable about the dangers of playing with genetics. I enjoy LeGuin enough that I tend to just enjoy her stories regardless of whether or not I agree with her politics (and I don’t, always), but those more firmly entrenched in their politics might not enjoy it so much.

The Ugly: “The Immortals” is kind of gruesome, in a subtle sort of way.

Overall, I liked this collection a fair amount. It’s not my favorite LeGuin collection ever (I think that goes to Birthday of the World), but it’s definitely worth reading.

Sarah says

I read this on the actual airplane to Worldcon last week. Would have liked to change planes rather than changing planes. It's an odd sort of linked collection, with each piece more of a travelogue than a story with a proper arc. Instead, Le Guin builds new worlds seemingly without effort, giving five pages to ideas that other writers might spend entire novels on, for fear of never having as good an idea again. There's a first person protagonist who is only ever described in relationship to the worlds she is visiting; we learn very little about her, but it doesn't matter. Le Guin isn't known for her humor, but there is a humor here, wry and ironic at times: a world populated by royalty, all intrigued with the single family of commoners; a plane that is exploited by a holiday-themed resort company. Other stories are unexpectedly poignant. There's a casual genius to the ideas here that make me very glad to have read this.

El says

These stories start out in an airport, so based on the title it initially seems the stories will be about literally changing planes, like flights. We quickly find out, however, that these are planes of existence - during the humdrum of waiting in airports it's been discovered how one can change planes of existence, be transported to other worlds... very astral projection meets Gulliver's Travels.

Each story is the story of a different plane, the different inhabitants, the different socioeconomics, etc. It was interesting and smart, just like a lot of Le Guin's writing tends to be.

Unfortunately the stories were so short that I didn't feel like I was getting enough out of them. It's a common problem I have with short stories to begin with, but in a format like this, where it's meant to feel more travelogue-y than fiction-y, I would have loved for these worlds to have been drawn out more - maybe more like Herland.

Definitely not Le Guin's best writing, but worth the read by anyone who enjoys her fantastic and brilliant mind. And for anyone who just wants a quick read on a rather mundane Memorial Day Sunday.

Nikki says

This collection of short stories are all linked by a single idea: when we're waiting in an airport, we can just slip away to another dimension, or 'plane'. If you haven't heard of this phenomenon, I do recommend Ursula Le Guin's travel memoir — a little out of date now, perhaps, but certainly a good introduction to some of the planes that are out there. Her choice of stories might seem pointed at times — there's an inherent criticism of all things commercialised in her discussions of the Holiday Plane, for example — but the locals she speaks to and the stories she reveals are fascinating nonetheless. I don't think I'd want to visit all of these planes, but the Library of Mahigul sounds fascinating, and I'd love to take a DNA sequencer to Islac and try to puzzle out quite how they got their genomes into such a mess.

Of course, there are many other planes out there that Le Guin did not cover, and doubtless there are fascinating stories she could have told and never had time to tell, or never wanted to tell. I'm sure there's a fair share of utter tragedy and horror out there — but also beauty, and Le Guin finds that even in some of the sadder places.

A recommended read — especially if you're going to be flying soon.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

Robert Case says

Having enjoyed so many of her earlier works as a younger reader, I decided to read something more current by this author after hearing of her death. I thoroughly enjoyed "Changing Planes" and am grateful to have renewed my acquaintance with her work. Each chapter offers a story of life and love on different extraterrestrial planes. Each one offers a reflection, through the looking glass, into our own culture. It is quintessential Ursula Le Guin.

Sezgi says

Yakın zamanda vefat eden yazar mesleğinin zirvesine çoktan ulaşmıştı. Bu kitapta ben yazarın "hayal gücümün tükenmesinden, fikirlerimin bitmesinden korkmuyorum" dediğini hissettim. Farklı boyutlar arasında gidip gelen karakterimizle bambaşka dünyalar geziyor, teknolojiyle inanılmaz deneyimlere devam eden toplum deformasyonlarına şahit oluyoruz. Beni en çok etkileyen genleriyle oynanan insanlar insanlardan başka (balık, mısır, ağaç) üretebilmeleri oldu. Evet, çocuk yapmaktan bahsediyorum. İlginç detaylarla süslü ve sonunda "Nasıl yani?" sorusunu sormanızla saçılayan iyi bir kitaptır. Yerdeniz'den sonra Ursula okumak sıkıcı olabilir diye düşünmüştüm fakat tam tersi oldukça eğlenceliydi.

Zübeyir says

Le Guin'den yine çok enteresan bir kitap. Yazar fantastik kurguyu bir t?k öteye ta??m??, bu sefer kurgulad??? evrenin roman?n? de?il seyahatnamesini yazm??.

Yer yer s?k?c? hatta kitab?n sonunda kafada "ben ?imdi ne okudum?" gibi sorunun dola?ma ihtimali de yüksek. Ama di?er yandan okumaktan da kendinizi alam?yorsunuz.

Özetle Le Guin'in hayalgücü her daim ?a??rtmaya devam ediyor.

Nikki says

This is an interesting book. It's more a collection of short stories with a common theme, and it's fantasy/sci-fi masquerading as a travel book. It's interesting for that, and interesting for Le Guin's writing. Her political/social commentary is obvious, particularly in "Porridge on Islac", but it's also touching. "My daughter lives in the North Sea. On raw fish. She's very beautiful. Dark and silky and beautiful. But -- I had to take her to the sea-coast when she was two years old. I had to put her in that cold water, those big waves. I had to let her swim away, let her go be what she is. But she is human too! She is, she is human too!"

Wealhtheow says

If you're uncomfortably waiting in an airport, you can change planes--by which the narrator means, travel to a parallel dimension. This is basically an excuse to describe all sorts of alien societies, some very similar to ours, some very very different. It takes a lot of confidence to write a book like this, with no plot and practically no characters, but Le Guin never falters. She just blithely writes chapter after chapter, every page unapologetic and imaginative.

I thought the societies were pretty cool. I'm not really into world building for its own sake, so this book didn't hold a huge amount of my interest. I didn't really like the illustrations; they made me feel a bit embarrassed to read the book in public.

Kristen Whitaker says

Overall, I really enjoyed this book and I think it'll be percolating in my head for a while, but these are my initial jumbled thoughts. I might completely flip-flop on some of these tbh so bear with me if I'm super off base.

I loved the anti-capitalist & anti-imperialist themes (Porridge on Islac & Great Joy were so good, also the former felt a bit Gay imo ??) ...but there were times her depiction of extraplanar cultures felt oddly colonialist, drawing from assumptions about "primitive" and "advanced" cultures that in one breath she criticizes, and another she reaffirms (though this may be more related to the narrator's attitudes? but still.... idk)

Also, I sort of wish she took a more critical look at gender, though this was written a while ago, so it didn't bother me as much. I like that she made a point of depicting cultures/planes with different systems of gender but there was some weird recurring essentialism (again, probably influenced by the narrator)-- and the instances of rape etc were... :/ in particular, when describing the incestuous rape in The Royals of Hegn, the narrator said that the girl was milking the tragedy to her own gain and it felt like that wasn't really... questioned....?

That being said, her experimentation with language was really great--the Silence of the Asonu fucked me up. Also, with death..... (Seasons of the Ansarac--i'm still thinking about the journeys, and god... Feeling at Home with the Hennebet!!!!!! interweaving language and death and everything.....!!! I can't rly be coherent about it)

I thought the structure was really innovative and interesting, too, but to be totally honest I found myself missing a cohesive storyline... Reactionary of me! lmao. Like, it was nice to be able to sit down and read a few at a time, nice self contained units, but I missed the forward propulsion and possibility for overarching growth/change that comes with a more cohesive narrative. The description got a bit overwhelming at times and slowed me down, but I have a short attention span. But I knew what I was getting into, and I think the format works well for her content.

Oh also, the concept itself is just great! Nothing interesting to say about it, except that I loved it and wish I had come up with it lol..... ? All in all, really thought provoking and definitely recommended!
