



The Lathe of Heaven

Ursula K. Le Guin

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George Orr is a man who discovers he has the peculiar ability to dream things into being -- for better or for worse. In desperation, he consults a psychotherapist who promises to help him -- but who, it soon becomes clear, has his own plans for George and his dreams.

The Lathe of Heaven is a dark vision and a warning -- a fable of power uncontrolled and uncontrollable. It is a truly prescient and startling view of humanity, and the consequences of playing God.

The Lathe of Heaven Details

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From Reader Review The Lathe of Heaven for online ebook

Miriam says

WHY TIME?

That's what I was asking Le Guin (or, rather, myself) as I read the first half of this book. You have this guy, George, who is ordinary -- literally *median*, in fact -- except that when he dreams, reality changes to match his dreams. It does this by changing the past so that whatever new thing he dreams of **has always been that way** so as far as everyone else is concerned nothing has happened. I read a lot of fantasy and science fiction and am willing to make some pretty damn suspensions to disbelief, but this is just over the limit impossible.

It's supposed to be. I'm sure Le Guin could have thought up some more marginally-plausible mechanism by which one individual could unintentionally and uncontrollably alter reality for the entire universe, but then the readers would have spent half the book thinking about how this worked and whether it was internally consistent, and she didn't want that. It's not possible, forget about that part. The point is to create an original arena for raising a number of huge ethical and philosophical questions.

What is evil? What makes us human? What is the relationship between memory and personality? Can one justify doing harm for the greater good? Is it possibly for a human being to really understand what the greater good is? Do we have free will? What are the moral and practical obligations of power? How do we balance conflicting moral dilemmas? Could we ever really communicate with aliens?

The aliens, by the way, seemed to me suspiciously like a joke about how this isn't really science fiction. This is a novel of ideas, and it doesn't matter how many alien invaders, space battles, time shifts, psychic powers, and futuristic machines you toss in.

All that was the part that was interesting to me. As an actual reading experience the book wasn't very enjoyable. The prose was skillful but not pleasurable, and the characters were boring. To a purpose, and I understand why, but still boring. The most interesting was Heather LeLache, and it bothered me how her character was so reduced in later incarnations. Again, I understand why and that Le Guin was raising issues of free will, gender norms, etc, but I think it was heavy-handed. Really a lot of the didactic purpose of the story seemed heavy-handed, and I wish the hard work involved had been me thinking instead of the struggle to persevere in reading it.

Tatiana says

Would you like to play God?

Would you like to shape the world to your liking? Maybe to rid it of war, overpopulation, hunger, racial prejudice, disease? To make it into your own idea of Heaven?

Well, the two main characters of *The Lathe of Heaven* have different opinions on this subject. George Orr, who possesses a unique ability to change the world by dreaming about, seemingly, the most mundane things, wants this power to be gone, he is sure the events should take their natural course, no matter how dire the consequences are to the humanity. His doctor, William Haber, thinks it is his responsibility to make this

world a better place. He is adamant he will achieve his goal of a perfect society! And he will use Orr's ability as a means to his megalomaniac ends. Does it matter that people in his utopia are all of a battleship gray color? That sick people are euthanized? Not to Haber, as long as it is for the common good.

The Lathe of Heaven was the first Le Guin's book that tickled my visualization "powers," which are very modest, to put it lightly. My imagination went in overdrive picturing our planet changing - billions of people disappearing, landscapes transforming, climate adjusting - all retroactive results of Orr's unconscious dreaming. This story would make a visually stunning movie a la Inception

[image error]

only a million times better, because Le Guin explores much cooler ideas of fatalism, equanimity, and God complex.

4 stars because it took so long to come up with the idea how to fix Orr's dream problem. I had the solution the moment I knew what his complaint was and I don't understand why Orr himself never thought of it. A bit of a weak plotting there.

Besides this minor issue, the novel is just immensely exciting and imaginative.

Apatt says

This is by far my favourite Ursula K. Le Guin's novel (well, neck and neck with her novella *The Word for World is Forest*). Her most popular science fiction books (thus excluding the classic *Earthsea* fantasy series) tend to be *The Left hand of Darkness* or *The Dispossessed*, both of these are excellent books but *The Lathe of Heaven* is the most mind blowing. It is as if she was channeling Philip K. Dick, and according to Wikipedia it is actually her tribute to the late great author.

The Lathe of Heaven is the story of George Orr an insignificant little man who dreams *big!*. Whenever Orr has an "effective" dream, the dream becomes real ("effective" dream as opposed to normal dreams which he also has). Reality reshapes in accordance with his effective dreams and even changes retroactively to ensure consistency and avoid paradoxes. Orr gives a great example of this during a session with his dastardly psychiatrist William Haber: if he dreams "effectively" of a pink dog when he wakes up there will be a pink dog, but it would not surprise anybody as there will have always been pink dogs in the world, and one has wandered into the room. So it is not a case of a pink dog suddenly popping into existence.

Favorite cover

When I read that I had to pause and imagine the implication and it really is one of the most intriguing sci-fi concepts ever. Unfortunately for George Orr and the rest of the world he is manipulated by Haber who turns out to be an egomaniac. With the aid of an "Augmentor" machine of his own invention he is able to indulge his God complex and alter reality the way he sees fit. From that point reality start warping and changing like taffy. It would be a crime for me to elaborate on the numerous changes wrought by Orr's effective dreams, I really recommend that you find out for yourself.

Le Guin has one advantage over PKD in that she does write better prose, dialog and characterization. Personally I do not have any problems with PKD's writing style but in term of literary merit I think Le Guin

is in a different league. (PKD is the champion in the brilliantly wacky plots department I think). Here is an example:

“And since then Haber had at least been candid with Orr about his manipulations. Though candid was not the right word; Haber was much too complex a person for candor. Layer after layer might peel off the onion and yet nothing be revealed but more onion. That peeling off of one layer was the only real change”

"Wobbly reality" cover

Add her prose prowess to her massive imagination and her legendary status within the SF/F genres is not at all surprising. During the last few chapters Le Guin's imagination goes into overdrive and I felt totally immersed in her dream like shifting reality. Her characters are always believable and suitably lovable or despicable as the plot requires. Beside Orr and Haber there is another central character called Heather LeLache who is both tough and sympathetic. There are some poignant scenes involving her that I find to be quite moving.

I could go on and on about this book and I will probably read it again one day (this is already a reread). It is one of the all-time greats and if you love science fiction it is not to be missed.

Notes:

- Update Jan 25, 18: Sadly Ms. Le Guin just passed away a couple of days ago. I am so grateful for all her great stories, beautiful writing, sense of humour and compassion. She was also a staunch defender of the sci-fi genre.

- The 1980 movie adaptation is good! Ms. Le Guin approves.
 - Video interview with Ursula K. LeGuin about *Lathe of Heaven*.
-

Stuart says

The Lathe of Heaven: An early 1970s classic of reality-altering dreams with Taoist undercurrents

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

I love Ursula K. Le Guin's novels from the late 1960s and early 70s. She just couldn't go wrong during this period. Although *The Lathe of Heaven* may not be the first book that comes to mind as one of her masterpieces (that honor would likely go to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, or the *EARTHSEA TRILOGY*), it was nominated for the Hugo and Nebula Awards and won the Locus Award in 1972. It's what I consider one of her smaller books, but still one of her best.

What makes *The Lathe of Heaven* great is that it can tackle some of the biggest issues of the time — overpopulation, environmental destruction, war, racism, the lost soul of the modern world, exploration of the dreaming mind, alternate realities, and the urge to shape society for the better — all in under 200 pages. I really feel that is a lost art in this day of massive doorstoppers, multi-book mega-series, and self-indulgent info-dumps.

The story is also simple in concept, with a very small cast of characters, so it could easily be a stage play and has been made into a film twice, once as a PBS production in 1980 and later as an A&E Network film in

2002. It centers on George Orr, an unremarkable man who happens to have “effective” dreams which alter reality. Horrified by this, he tries to suppress his dreams with drugs, but runs afoul of the law and is given the choice between therapy or a mental asylum. He chooses therapy, and is assigned Dr. William Haber.

The early parts of the story detail the therapy sessions of George and Dr. Haber. George is a very passive, almost timid man. He doesn’t want to be in this situation, and certainly doesn’t want to be altering reality with his unconscious dreams. Dr. Haber is the polar opposite, a confident, brash, and aggressive man who quickly recognizes the potential to harness George’s dreams to shape reality in the ways he wants.

Although he makes repeated and valid arguments as to why he should utilize this unique ability to do good and improve society and the world, each time he inserts suggestions to George such as “let’s imagine a world without overpopulation, war, pollution, racism, etc.,” the outcomes invariably are not what he expected and include some serious unforeseen side-effects. Notably, with each new iteration, Dr. Haber’s status and career seem to also improve.

The middle portion of *The Lathe of Heaven* then explores a series of alternate realities dreamed up by George’s unconscious with prompting from Dr. Haber. The ways in which things go wrong are quite ingenious, and it’s clear that Le Guin does not subscribe to the power fantasy that someone with the means has the right to shape society and reality to their liking without consultation, even with the best of intentions. As the worlds get stranger and more distorted, Dr. Haber hatches an idea that if he can replicate the process on himself, he can cut the reluctant George out of the equation and dream the world himself exactly to his specifications. This forms the climactic final events of the story.

What adds interest to *The Lathe of Heaven* and places it firmly in the late 60s & early 70s is not just the political issues of the time, but also the underlying elements of Eastern philosophy, specifically the Taoist quotes at the beginnings of chapters from Chuang Tzu, as well as *Tao Te Ching*, *The Book of the Way and Its Virtue* by Lao Tzu, along with western philosophers such as H.G. Wells, Victor Hugo, and even Lafcadio Hearn. You can see how well-read Le Guin is and how much Eastern philosophy was gaining prominence and popularity in the West as an alternative to traditional Western philosophy, especially on college campuses and in intellectual circles. This is similar to the profound influence of the *I Ching*, *The Book of Changes*, in Philip K. Dick’s dystopian masterpiece of alternate reality, *The Man in the High Castle*.

Taoist thinking can be found in the character of George. From many perspectives, this protagonist is very frustrating due to his passivity, reluctance to take any action to change the world around him, and instinctual distrust of authoritarian behavior. Whereas some people might seek to harness their powers to shape reality through dreams, George is repelled by this. Taoism is one of those slippery, non-dogmatic philosophies that espouses the pursuit of *The Way* through natural, uncontrived living. Disciples seek to discard the ills of civilization and material desires and pursue the simple, unadorned joys of a basic agrarian existence. One key concept is called *Wu Wei*, which is defined as “effortless action,” “non-action,” much as the planets orbit the sun without any effort, just following the natural rhythms of the universe.

So while from a Western perspective George is a spineless man, afraid and reluctant to do anything with his powers of dreaming, from a Taoist perspective he might be a very dedicated individual trying to avoid doing harm to the natural order of the world around him. Of course this becomes an interesting point of debate in the story — if Taoists look to the ancient past of a simple existence as the ideal, does this principle still apply in the dystopian future society of George and Dr. Haber, living in massive towers packed with millions of people living on minimal rations due to overpopulation, a deteriorating environment, wars throughout Europe and the Middle East, and a general spiritual malaise? Faced with such conditions, is it wrong for Dr. Haber to want to change that? And is it right for George to resist any such manipulations? As always, it is the

questions that Le Guin raises that are more important than the answers. *The Lathe of Heaven* is a concise, though-provoking journey into multiple realities and the dreaming unconscious, but is in no way an escape from reality.

Lyn says

“To sleep, perchance to Dream; Aye, there's the rub,?For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,? When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,? Must give us pause.”

Ursula K. LeGuin delivers a riveting but simple tale of a man whose dreams can affect and alter reality. Told with an Arthur C. Clarke like elegance and minimalism, but with her signature mastery of the language, LeGuin goes beyond an interesting concept and explores the ins, and outs, and what-have-yous of someone with God-like, but mercurial powers. Reminiscent of Frank Herbert at his best, this is a psychological thriller and a philosophical examination rolled up in a LeGuin gem.

LeGuin's gift of descriptive narration is in full form in this 1971 publication that was nominated for both the Hugo and Nebula awards and won the Locus Award for Best Novel. Her prose is stylish and beautiful: “Are there really people without resentment, without hate? People who never go cross-grained to the universe? Who recognize evil, and resist evil, and yet are utterly unaffected by it?” I also loved the descriptive terms she used to describe Miss LeLache the lawyer, with words and phrases that made her appear menacing and bug like.

LeGuin's protagonist is George Orr and he is another Shevik (from *The Dispossessed*) like character: minimalistic, with inner peace, calm, unaffected by outside forces but enmeshed and swallowed whole by his own inner problems to solve. But unlike Shevic, who had a purposeful dynamic, LeGuin has cast Orr as a peaceful, humble dreamer.

I don't always cast the characters in a book like a film, but this time I did, I imagined Dr. Haber as a bearded, fast talking George Clooney even though LeGuin's description of him was more larger than life and like a huge bear.

This was a great pleasure to read.

** 2018 - Ms Le Guin passed from us yesterday, she will be missed and never forgotten.

Carol. says

For those new to or unaware of the wonders of Le Guin, this is a short book about George Orr, a man who has been taking too many drugs in an attempt to stop dreaming. Some of his dreams become true—not in the prescient sense, but in the reality-is-reordered sense, and George is haunted by the changes. In his highly regulated society, his drug deviance results in a mandatory visit to a psychologist and his dreaming machine. Dr. Huber discovers George's power is real and convinces him that intentional dreaming is the solution. As the political world, environment and history change around them, George and the psychologist struggle with

reality, responsibility and consequences.

A number of thoughts after finishing this very powerful story.

One: we are roughly the same age.

Two: I can't help but feel like LeGuin was scarily prescient."The Greenhouse Effect had been quite gradual, and Haber, born in 1962, could clearly remember the blue skies of his childhood. Nowadays the eternal snows were gone from all the world's mountains, even Everest, even Erebus, fiery-throated on the waste Antarctic shore." Humanity, I'm disappointed in you: you mean that we've known about climate change for fifty years and it's accelerating? That the snow is indeed receding from the world's mountains? It is disorienting to realize we are living the dystopia.

For more off-topic commentary not subject to removal by Goodreads, please finish reading at:

<http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2014/0...>

OR

<http://carols.booklikes.com/post/8025...>

David says

Coincidentally I had just previously read (part of) *Ubik* by Philip K. Dick which is *also* a novel about a person 'gifted' with the power to change the past retroactively, so my opinion of *The Lathe of Heaven* was probably (unfairly) affected by this glut—do two books qualify as a *glut*?—of past-altering fiction in my reading schedule. I want to alter the past and start with a different Ursula K. Le Guin novel instead.

As a disclaimer of sorts, I have to admit that these kind of wackadoo premises are a tough sell for me. It's not that I'm an intensely rational reader who expects rigorous scientific realism from all of my literary entertainments; it's just that there are certain things I'm willing to suspend my disbelief for—ghosts, aliens, talking dogs—and other things that seem too metaphysically muddled to accept—like the subjective manipulation of the past and Adam Sandler's film career—just to name a few.

I thought Le Guin would overcome the raising of my eyebrow. She's certainly no slouch in the writing department and leaves many of her genre colleagues in the dust, but the plot gets old after awhile. This milquetoast guy named George Orr discovers that his dreams have the power to change reality (so that nobody else in the world notices the difference), so he starts abusing drugs to stave off sleep. A psychiatrist named Dr. Haber is at first skeptical about George's talents but later discovers he can manipulate them and turn himself into a makeshift god. What follows are too many episodes of Haber trying to 'save' the world (often with negative results) by directing George's dreams—while George frets about the rightness or wrongness of the arrangement with little consequence.

You can almost hear the simple construction of the tale buckling and snapping under the weight of the ponderous allegory. For the first two-thirds, *The Lathe of Heaven* was a diverting little narrative, but at the end it got to be too much and too little at the same time.

Darwin8u says

"The end justifies the means. But what if there never is an end? All we have is means."

? Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*

"Those whom heaven helps we call the sons of heaven. They do not learn this by learning. They do not work it by working. They do not reason it by using reason. To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood is a high attainment. Those who cannot do it will be destroyed on the lathe of heaven." —Chuang Tse: XXIII

"We're in the world, not against it. It doesn't work to try to stand outside things and run them, that way. It just doesn't work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world is, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be." - Ursula K. Le Guin

Le Guin seems to have mixed Taoism with PKD and produced a funky SF novella on determinism, dreams, psychology, control, love, wholeness, and power. It wasn't a perfect SF novel. I think the last bit kinda rolled away from her, but like any good PKD or Vonnegut novel, the imperfections of this novel are small enough to let it float and be read far into the future.

Manny says

When I first came across this book as a teenager, I think I only really noticed the surface story. George Orr is a man whose dreams, literally, come true; he dreams something, and when he wakes up the world has changed. There's an unscrupulous psychiatrist who wants to exploit George's gift, a love story, some interesting aliens, and a good ending. I really liked it.

I've read it three or four times since then, and each time I've appreciated it more. One could imagine a book with a similar plot being written by Philip K. Dick, but, if Dick had done it, it would have had a different focus. Le Guin is also interested in the arbitrary nature of reality, but she is above all a *moral* writer, and it's easiest to explain why I think *The Lathe of Heaven* is a great novel if I compare it with some of her other books. Perhaps my favorite moment in her work is the ending of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Ged has been relentlessly pursued for years by the deadly Shadow, whose one purpose seems to be to destroy him and everything he cares for. If only he could learn its true name, he would be able to use his magic powers to overcome it. Finally, when he can run no further and is forced to confront it on the open sea, he realizes what he has known all along. The Shadow's true name is his own name. He, himself, is the dark force that is trying to ruin his life.

The struggle with the dark forces inside oneself is one of Le Guin's main preoccupations. This shades over into her fascination with creativity and the creative process, and in particular with the scientist, whose dreams can create reality in the most unexpected manner. Einstein turned a dream of matter, energy, space and time into a reality which soon crystalized as nuclear weapons. (My Japanese friend Yukie, who studied in Hiroshima, met several people who had come directly into contact with Einstein's escaped dream). In *The Dispossessed*, Shevek is a scientist who manages to control his dream. Le Guin, who clearly understands

scientists well, shows just how difficult this is for him. He has to fight his society, and many of the ideas he has been brought up to believe in. As in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, a lot of the time he also has to fight himself.

The Lathe of Heaven, published three years before *The Dispossessed*, is a kind of rehearsal for the later novel, but with a myth-like treatment more reminiscent of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. George Orr's supernatural gift hands him a huge responsibility, which he is slow to accept. Like most dreamers, he lets himself be manipulated. And, just as in *The Dispossessed*, love is the key. There, Takver's unquestioning love for Shevek is what makes it possible for him to unlock the Principle of Simultaneity; here, the simple and touching romance with Heather is what gives George the strength to make the right decision when he reaches the crucial moment.

Dreams, truth, responsibility, love. If you're interested in that kind of thing, you should consider reading *The Lathe of Heaven*. Like all her books, it's beautifully written.

Nataliya says

The Lathe of Heaven asks the reader - is it ever okay to play God?¹

(¹ Of course, when it comes to **Morgan Freeman** there is NO question.)

You have to help another person. But it's not right to play God with masses of people. To be God you have to know what you're doing. And to do any good at all, just believing you're right and your motives are good isn't enough.

Who would you normally root for? A guy with the power to change the ugly dystopian world² but is unwilling to do so? Or a guy who actively tries to harvest this power to change the world for better? If you think the answer to this one is easy, think again.

² *It never stops raining in this dystopian Portland, Oregon. ~~So basically just like present day Portland.~~*

This short beautifully written novel is very eloquent and thought-provoking. It raises endless questions. *What is our responsibility as humans?* Are we responsible for changing the world if we have the means? And for fixing the damage? How far can we go? When do we stop? Is it possible to stop? *What are the consequences of playing God?* How do we decide who should hold power? How much power can we handle? Can we control it? *Do the means justify the ends?* What do we choose - activity or passivity? Is it balance or complacency? *Is our vision of the perfect world actually perfect and who is to decide?*

George ~~Orwell~~ Orr is quiet, passive, introverted. **On every scale from 0 to 100 he is an average 50.** His "style" is to escape, get away. He is "afraid of his own mind", as Haber puts it. He is afraid indeed - of his unexplained ability to change reality via his "effective" dreams in an unpredictable way, while retaining the memories of the previous realities. **As a matter of fact, he may have dreamed his present world into existence when dying in the middle of a nuclear war four years previously.** Outwardly docile, he has inner strength. And he has zero desire to play God.

"A person who believes, as she did, that things fit: that there is a whole of which one is a part, and that in being a part one is whole: such a person has no desire whatever, at any time, to play God. Only those who have denied their being yearn to play at it."

Dr. Haber is an extroverted proactive sweet-talking dream specialist who wants to harvest Orr's power to make the world a better place (and get himself a bit of power in the meantime). He is frustrated with Orr's passive resistance. After all, ***"isn't that man's very purpose on earth - to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?"***. His is sleazy, condescending, and manipulative, but ultimately NOT evil. His intentions are good - but what do they lead to? What means are used to change the world?

"The end justifies the means. But what if there never is an end? All we have is means."

George becomes Haber's unwilling accomplice/subject, his goose who lays golden eggs. He is afraid of what his subconsciousness may do. **Just because something is "ought to be", should it?** What are the consequences? And he is right to be afraid - what we get in Haber's attempts to better the world is horrifying Plague to deal with overpopulation, gray skin color to battle race issues, euthanasia to battle cancer, alien "invasion" to achieve peace. Seems that the world may be better the way it is, imperfect as it may be.

"We're in the world, not against it. It doesn't work to try to stand outside things and run them, that way. It just doesn't work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world is, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be."

And yet ultimately the frustration is with George as much as it is with Haber - after all, George's non-interference allows the horror to continue. But does he have the right to interfere at all? The previous attempts were not so good, after all. **So is it our place at all to mess with the world order? Who are we to do this? What happens to the balance of things?**

Haber: *Life - evolution - the whole universe of space/time, matter/ energy - existence itself - is essentially change.*

Orr: *That is one aspect of it. The other is stillness."*

It's a short read, but the one that is bound to stay with the reader for quite a while as we ponder over the questions it raises. The questions to which there may never be satisfying answers.

Beautiful, intelligent book. **4 solid stars** (not 5 only because Orr can be quite clueless. He could have solved his predicament halfway through the story, and it's a bit frustrating.)

Kevin Ansbro says

"The dream is the aquarium of night"

—Victor Hugo

Oneirophobia: noun. A fear of dreams.

Nonentity pencil pusher, George Orr, increasingly worried that his dreams can alter past and present reality, has therefore become afraid to dream. Caught using another person's pharm card to obtain drugs to keep him awake, he's referred to narcissistic psychiatrist, Dr William Haber, for an innovative course of dream

therapy.

The book started brightly and the first chapter promised much, a nice run of assonance feeding proceedings: *jellyfish, abyss*.

Then, to further reinforce Le Guin's writing credentials, some beautiful imagery: ...*the moondriven sea*.

A-ha! A sci-fi author fond of her literary devices. We bonded almost immediately!

Sadly, the second chapter became mired in some stodgy science stuff that had me glazing over for a while ... s-states, d-states, v-c induction, blah, blah, blah. I'm not in the least bit techy (I still use an abacus and a sextant) and, man, I was beginning to get bored!

But, happily, things improved dramatically. Doctor Haber asks Orr to don a trancap which is wired to a dream machine that monitors his sleeping thoughts and right off the bat this seemingly unremarkable patient ruffles the psychiatrist's clinical countenance by effecting an outlandish happenstance.

But Haber is a man who wants full control over his human guinea pig/rhesus monkey/goose that might lay a golden egg, and seeks to confuse Orr's grasp of reality with the deployment of some devious misdirection. Orr is the underdog we are all rooting for; his innate goodness is in sharp contrast to Haber's artfulness and so the story becomes somewhat parabolic.

More than a few sessions continue and, after another bout of assonance (*saddles, hobbles; slogging, plodding; Brownian, roundian*), an astonishing event unfolded before my mind's eye in glorious Technicolor. An event so monumental, so *Orrsome* that it had me bouncing up and down in my seat! "Bravo, Ursula Le Guin!" I shouted in honour of her memory. "THAT was STUPENDOUS!"

In due course, Orr's God-like powers run amok and all manner of crazy things start to occur, notably the introduction of dreamt-to-life aliens whose tentacles 'retract like a carpenter's flexible rule'.

Now I've often been told that I don't know my arse from my elbow, and that I often talk out of my arse... WELL, the aliens in this story ALL talk out of their elbows, so if Earth is ever invaded for real, we'll get along famously!

I'm delighted to say that the book is really well written. I purred over much of Le Guin's prose and marvelled at the ingenuity of her fascinating story.

I loved the graceful, esoteric ending but, because Le Guin kept ploughing the same doctor/patient furrow throughout, and because of the tedious science bits, I've deducted one star.

But, overall, this was a marvellously entertaining read that lovers of old-skool sci-fi will revere! I loved it!

Big thanks to my supercool sci-fi pal, @Apatt, for recommending this cracking story, and also to @KimberSilver for agreeing to be my buddy reader.

Yakup says

*Tanr?'ya aç?lan kap? var olmay??t?r.

*Ölümün d???nda hiçbir ?ey insan? rüya görmekten al?koyamaz.

*Bilinçalt?ndan korkma sak?n! Kabuslarla kayna?an karanl?k bir la??m çukuru de?il o.

*Güç istencinin özü tam da budur zaten, büyümedir. Ba?ar? onun iptalidir. Güç istenci varl???n?

sürdürebilmek için her ergiyle daha da artmal?, o ergi daha yüksekteki bir sonraki hedefe uzanan bir basamaktan ibaret k?lmal?d?r. Elde edilen güç ne kadar büyük olursa, daha fazla güce sahip olma i?tah? da o denli artar.

Daha önce birkaç politik makalesini okudu?um de?erli yazar Ursula K. Le Guin ilk okudu?um kitab?

Rüyan?n Öte Yakas? ile direkt giri? bölümünde yapt??? do?adaki deniz anas?n?n savrulu?u okuyucuyu

etkileyerek, yazar sanat?n?n icras? ile büyülemektedir. Yazar?n hayal gücü, yarat?c?l?k olgular?n? i?leme teknikleri öyle üstünkörü incelenecek cinsten de?ildir. Ayr?ca yarat?c?l??? tamamen parlak bir zekan?n ürünüdür.

Konu kendi bütünlü?ünde e?lenceli ayn? zamanda ürkütücü. Dikkatli okuma yapmak gerekiyor, çünkü gerçeklik dünyas? hangisi, rüya dünyas? hangisidir diye kafa kar???kl??? durumu olabilir.

Hikayede fantastik bir öykü ile birlikte felsefik konular?n i?lendi?ini görmek mümkün. Ayr?ca hikayenin ilerleyi?i ile birlikte, ?uan ki insanl???n sava?, do?adaki ekolojik sistemin kötüye do?ru sürüklenmesi ve demokrasinin günbegün kan kaybetmesi gibi konularda duyars?z olu?unun, yine insanl?k için ne gibi sonuçlar do?uraca??n? distopya tarz?nda bize iletmi? bulunuyor.

Son bölümde nihilizmi i?lemesi de ayr?ca be?endi?im bir di?er konu oldu.

tim says

I've always assumed chronic readers share the experience of finding connecting patterns from one book to the next. No matter how seemingly disparate books read consecutively may be, I've always come across overlapping concepts or some sort of shared meaning that is more difficult to pin down and describe. Whatever these synchronicities may be, I am always genuinely amazed and interpret them as signs that I'm witnessing something important--or at the very least, that I am reading the right book at the right time.

In the last several books I've read have been an uncanny amount of synchronicities bouncing off each other as I made my way through them. I won't bore with details, but the momentum of these emerging, overlapping patterns seemed to coalesce and bleed over into "real" life yesterday after just finishing *The Lathe of Heaven*. It's not the first time this has happened, nor the most remarkable occurrence, but worth sharing nonetheless.

Ursula K. Le Guin has existed in the periphery of my awareness for some time, but until now I hadn't read her. Upon finishing the book I read before this one, I had no idea what I would read next. My preference upon finishing a book is not to premeditate what I should read next, but instead let the "choice" come to me. So it was that when I finished Schrodinger's Cat Trilogy *The Universe Next Door* *The Trick Top Hat* *The Homing Pigeons* that *The Lathe of Heaven* popped into my head. I checked the library, a copy happened to be available right then, and so it was. Finally I should read one of the so-called required reads for all Portlanders.

I'm not normally taken to do what is suggested of me, but in this case it worked out. Not only did I really enjoy the journey, but I could only laugh when I discovered its influence did not end on the last page.

So yesterday, upon reading the last page, my family and I decided to catch a bus to Cathedral Park under the St. Johns Bridge--featured in the *The Lathe of Heaven*--and take in some free music. Okay, no, that is not the profound connection. It couldn't be, as that "choice" was determined by us. What wasn't determined by us was that on our way home we accidentally hopped on the wrong bus. It was hot and humid, we weren't thinking right, and the air conditioned bus looked only too inviting. Besides, the bus would eventually loop around and head back downtown. Anyway, as this bus took us farther and farther away from downtown and out into the boondocks, the bus driver pulled over to take a 40-minute break in the "town" of Linnton. So here we were, with no intention of our own, temporarily stuck in the roadside dilapidation of an old settlement 15 miles northwest of Portland. Pinned between industrial sprawl, railroads, the Willamette River, and the gorgeous green hills of Forest Park, it is a surreal landscape to say the least. More to the point, Linnton is where the second to last imagined scene takes place in *The Lathe of Heaven*.

I've lived in Portland nearly 15 years and had never before stepped foot in Linnton. Why would I? Yet, mere hours after encountering Linnton in the finishing pages of a novel, here I was, unplanned for, but really there. Maybe that's not so strange after all, but when the literature I read begins to flow over into and influence the life I lead outside of books, I take notice.

That's it. That's my story. I'm sorry if I built this up into a major let down. But it *felt* major to me at the time.

Oh, and regarding the book itself: I initially thought the character development lacked dimension until I realized this novel is not so much about character development as it is about the seriousness of possible ecological catastrophe and the unknown healing power and potential of dreaming. Read it. It may influence *your* "real" life too.

Meredith Holley says

I have long been a fan of dreams: talking about dreams, working out the interweavings between dreaming life and reality. I almost scare-quoted reality there, but then I realized that this review is probably going to be douche-y enough as it is without adding a scare-quoted reality to it. Anyway, Ursula LeGuin's worlds are typically not my worlds; when I'm reading her books, I tend to bump into walls and trip over furniture, where other readers intuitively know the lay of the interior decorating. And, that is just the way reading goes, I think. Neither bad nor good. Sometimes an author puts the couch where we would like to sit, and other times not. This book, though. This is the LeGuin for me. This book is lovely in a way I can understand.

I grew up in a sometimes-fundamentalist home, so for those who didn't, this comparison might sound like an insult. Please know that I don't mean it that way. It strikes me that in some pretty superficial ways, *The Lathe of Heaven* is to Daoism what *Narnia* is to Christianity. In making that comparison, I am really comparing two things I love, even though they are both representing two very different value systems. I think that both present an emotionally symbolic world in which the roots of a belief system can grow in a simple and understandable way. I think both do a really good job of not sacrificing story to allegory, but still forming a perceptible spiritual message.

The other preliminary thought I have is a spoiler about Heather, so I'll hide it. (view spoiler)

But, that is really only about the structure of *Lathe*, and what I really want to talk about is dreams. In *Lathe*, George Orr has "effective" dreams that change his reality. That is the basic premise that you find out at the opening of the story, and I will try not to spoil the plot beyond that. Joel was making the point that the story is a reflection on writing, which I think is an interesting, but narrow, reading of the story, and honestly was not how the story resonated with me at all. I think it is a good point, though, and worth noting. A writer re-creates the world, and in that way probably also shapes other people's perceptions of the world. I think in many ways, though, we all do that, writing or no writing.

I guess the way the story resonated with me was more literal than Joel's reading. I do think that any of us can have a dream in the Martin Luther King, Jr., sense, and that dream can guide culture, but I also think that literal dreams can do that, and maybe that is more where the book fascinated me. In college, I once went to sleep with no interest in a boy in my class and I woke up with a crush on him that it took me months to get over. And all that happened was that, in a dream I had that night, he looked at me a certain way. Dreams seem mysterious and mysteriously powerful to me. I had a dream like that this week, and the content of it is not very important, but there was a snake in it, and the snake was also human, and the dream changed

something to me, so I thought of this book. I'm not sure what it changed, but it was just different than other dreams.

Once, in college, my best friend from high school had a dream in which we were both preparing for her wedding. About a year later, I had the same dream but from my point of view, which I didn't realize until later that night I started describing the dream to her and she knew all of its details before I told her, but from her own point of view.

In my part of the dream, after she got married, I went to help an ex-boyfriend move his things into a new house and there was a soundtrack in that part, which is something I don't think I've had in another dream. After I woke up, I was walking to work and I put the Velvet Underground *Loaded* CD into my discman (I had bought it the day before). "Who Loves the Sun" came on, I realized it was the song in my dream, and I looked up and saw my ex-boyfriend sitting in front of the house he had moved into in my dream. The whole day was off, with the people I cared about in my dreaming and waking life crossing over.

I don't have a moral or a lesson to that story, but it was an experience I had that made me wonder whether my dreams were creeping in to my reality, like they do with poor George Orr. And I do think many dreams can shape the world in a way I don't understand, in a way that makes me small and brittle. I think LeGuin captures that literal power of dreams very gracefully, without creating a heavy-handed allegory, leaving room for many applications of the tone and texture of the story. I also love what she does with George and his therapist, and the yin and yang of their personalities, though I can't think of more to say about that than just stating it. I'm glad I found a LeGuin that is for me; I'm glad somebody wrote a story about dreams.

Diane says

I've been struggling over this review for several weeks. Writing about a classic science fiction novel is daunting, especially one as beloved as *The Lathe of Heaven*.

The story is set in Portland, Oregon, and George Orr is sent to psychiatrist Dr. Haber for his abuse of drugs. Orr had been taking drugs to try and prevent himself from dreaming, because his dreams have the power to alter reality. When he wakes, George remembers both worlds — the pre-dream version and the post-dream. He reluctantly explains his situation to Dr. Haber, who doesn't believe him at first.

The story quickly takes a dark turn when Dr. Haber witnesses George change the world with his dreams, and the doctor decides to try and take control and fix reality to his liking. This being science fiction, nothing goes smoothly. For example, when Dr. Haber tells George to dream about the problem of overpopulation, George imagines a horrible plague that wipes out millions of people. When Dr. Haber tells George to dream of "peace on earth," George conjures up aliens that are attacking mankind, and now there is a war in space. When Dr. Haber wants George to solve the problem of racism, George dreams that everyone is the same color — grey. (Sadly, that dream killed the biracial woman, Heather, that George had fallen in love with.)

George knows that Dr. Haber is manipulating him, but he feels powerless and doesn't know how to escape. Eventually there is a climactic scene in which Dr. Haber has figured out a way to make his own dreams alter reality, but it causes chaos, and George has to try and save the world. Again.

What I liked about this novel was Le Guin's creativity and cleverness. Not only did it show that there are no easy solutions to world problems like war and racism and overpopulation, but it demonstrated that even

people with good intentions could never imagine all of the consequences to a radical change in society.

The book was also smart about the details of the different worlds — each dream could cause significant alterations, and George was forced to remember them all. Both George and my reading self would sometimes get confused about what reality we were in. (A book-club friend remarked that the different layers of reality reminded her of Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*, in which the main character is forced to live life over and over again, with frequent occurrences of *déjà vu*.)

My only complaint about this book is that the writing relied a bit much on jargon and nonsense words, which bogged down the text at times. Dr. Haber has a lot of dialogue that is meant to be explanatory (he uses terms such as d-state, s-state, EEG-plus-trancap, ESB, HEW, the Augmentor, etc.), but the long paragraphs of gibberish caused my eyes to glaze over.

In the end, I have to admit how much I have pondered this book. Before falling asleep at night, I'd be grateful that whatever silliness I was about to dream was not real. I would think about this book while watching news stories about global problems, and remember there are no simple solutions. This was a thought-provoking novel that I would recommend to other readers.

Favorite Quotes

"You know that you need sleep. Just as you need food, water, and air. But did you realize that sleep's not enough, that your body insists just as strongly upon having its allotment of *dreaming* sleep? If deprived systematically of dreams, your brain will do some very odd things to you. It will make you irritable, hungry, unable to concentrate ... liable to daydreams, uneven as to reaction times, forgetful, irresponsible, and prone to paranoid fantasies."

"He was terrified, anguished, exhausted, bewildered. 'I've got to do something, I've got to *do* something,' he kept telling himself frantically, but he did not know what to do. He had never known what to do. He had always done what seemed to want doing, the next thing to be done, without asking questions, without forcing himself, without worrying about it. But that sureness of foot had deserted him when he began taking drugs, and by now he was quite astray. He must act, he had to *act*. He must refuse to let Haber use him any longer as a tool. He must take his destiny into his own hands."

"Things don't have purposes, as if the universe were a machine, where every part has a useful function. What's the function of a galaxy? I don't know if our life has a purpose and I don't see that it matters. What does matter is that we're a part. Like a thread in a cloth or a grass-blade in a field. It *is* and we *are*. What we do is like wind blowing on the grass."

"There were by now so many different memories, so many skeins of life experience jostling in his head, that he scarcely tried to remember anything. He took it as it came. He was living almost like a young child, among actualities only. He was surprised by nothing, and by everything."
