



ZINE

#1

SPACE CRONE

Into the spaceship, Granny.

A conversation between Sarah Shin, Editor, and Sam Walton, Bath Spa University, at Book Haus, Bristol 3 May 2023.

By Sheryl M.

This is my second attempt at writing this review as I'm trying to rewrite it in something closer to what Ursula Le Guin called the 'mother tongue'.

Ursula Le Guin was a writer, most famous for her Earthsea fantasy series and sci fi novels *The Dispossessed* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She also wrote essays and other non-fiction throughout her career. Some of those have been gathered together in a new collection called *Space Crone*, which focuses on her writing about feminism and gender.

The mother tongue

Le Guin spoke about what she called the 'mother tongue' and the 'father tongue' in a speech she gave at a graduation ceremony in 1986. A transcript of this speech is included in the *Space Crone* collection (and has been published elsewhere previously), under the title 'Bryn Mawr commencement address'.

According to Le Guin, the 'mother tongue' is our native language as we learn it at home. But when we go to school, we learn to use the 'father tongue'. This is still our native language but in an official form, like how we hear it in news reports and essays.

Le Guin argued that when we learn the father tongue, we also learn by implication that the mother tongue, the way we talk privately in conversation with our friends and family, is inaccurate and unintellectual. She opposed this, seeing the privileging of the father tongue as a kind of systemic sexism that side-lines the experience of women.



After all, as a middle-aged woman, how often do you find yourself in fiction? Rarely, and even rarer in science fiction. But in an essay? Never.

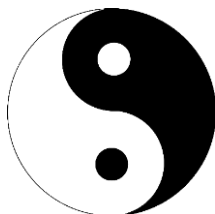
I find the address hugely inspirational and I'd love to put into practice the idea of subverting the patriarchal order by writing in the mother tongue. But after decades of hiding my own voice behind the father tongue when writing about books and ideas, it's hard to work out how to do this.

Carrier bags

Sarah Shin also described her practice as co-editor of *Space Crone* in relation to Le Guin's theory, in her case 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction'. She felt the act of bringing together pieces of Le Guin's writing in a book was in-keeping with the carrier bag form that Le Guin proposed as a feminist model for literature.

'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' doesn't feature in *Space Crone* but Shin has previously published it separately. In this essay Le Guin argues the earliest and most important tool invented by humans was not the spear or any other form of pointy stick, but the carrier bag. Because if you're out gathering wild oats or berries, you'll want a bag or other such container to take them home in.

Le Guin acknowledged it's easier to write exciting stories about the pointy sticks, with hunting and fighting and so on. It's harder to



make the gathering of oats compelling. Yet it's not impossible, and relying on the thrust of a stick for excitement (oh yeah) skews our storytelling towards the masculine.

The carrier bag became a bit of a motif in the discussion at Book Haus. Le Guin herself was described as 'the most capacious of bags' due to her ability to combine ideas from disparate times and places. These include indigenous concepts of ecology and time, Taoist beliefs and the work of Carl Jung.

It was also suggested that, thanks to its yielding yin-like qualities, the bag-as-feminist-structure can even hold paradoxes and inconsistencies. An example of this that Shin talked about was when Le Guin changed her mind on pronouns.

Redux not redact

Shin spoke about how Le Guin would comment on her earlier work – and earlier commentary – rather than redacting or rewriting it. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, published in 1969, Le Guin intended the characters to have no fixed gender but used the pronouns he/his. In a 1976 commentary 'Is Gender Necessary?' she defended this as grammatically correct.

However, in 1988 she created a new version of the essay called 'Is Gender Necessary (Redux)'. In the later version, which is included in *Space Crone*, she added footnotes to the original, pointing out where she no longer agreed with what she had said previously.

Where the original says he/his is grammatically correct, the footnotes say using male pronouns as the generic singular pronoun is an invention of male grammarians and it excludes women. Le Guin's thinking had moved on, but she didn't erase or cover up what she said before. Instead, she created an assemblage that holds both views. Her final position is still clear, plus it says something about how we

can change over time without compromising ourselves.

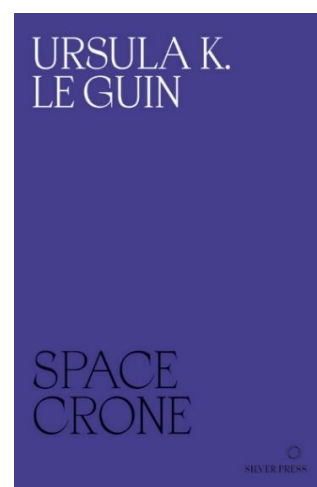
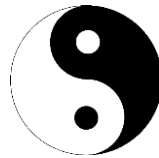
Space crones

This brings me to 'Space Crone', the essay after which the collection is named. In this essay, Le Guin argues the best ambassador for humanity would be a post-menopausal woman. Someone who's been through 'the change' and other changes in her life, will have seen it all. Much more than, say, a young self-certain male – the type that usually goes into space in both science and science fiction.

When it comes to conversing with the little green men, Le Guin concludes that Granny is the best person we could possibly send. Not that she'll think she's the right person to go, but we must persuade her anyway. 'Into the spaceship, Granny!'

Summary

I found the evening at Book Haus fascinating and invigorating. It was a love in for Le Guin and a celebration of her non-fiction writing. I bought a copy of the book and intend to keep it close to refer to whenever the masculinist imperatives of this world for progress and objectivity threaten to shake my confidence. I hope it has been of interest to you for me to share the experience with you.

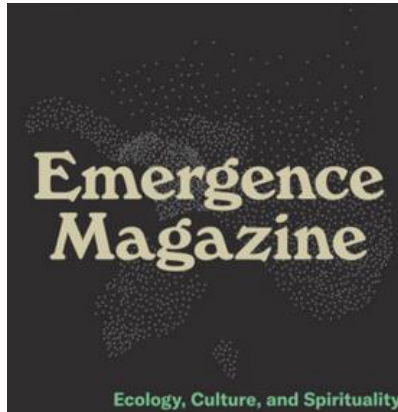


The very tasteful* cover of *Space Crone*.
*It's a bit plain, isn't it?

3 Utopian Podcasts



1. Another Kind of Time – A Conversation with Jenny Odell
Emergence Magazine Podcast



Odell discusses key concepts from her new book on resisting capitalist notions of time. Sometimes you can pick up everything you need to know about a book from a podcast, and I think this might be one of them.

2. From Cyber Punk to Time Hunting
Container Podcast

Mark Nwunwa on when melanin meets silicon, how the hi-tech low-life of cyberpunk resonates on the African continent, and rethinking masculinity when you come from a hyper-masculine culture. Amongst many other things!



3. Science Fiction Special
Backlisted Podcast



Una McCormack is a dream utopian sci-fi book group guest, bringing recommendations both well-known and not, and discussing her own joy at sneaking anarchist and feminist ideas onto the shelves of Walmart through writing Star Trek novels.

Free online dystopias course!

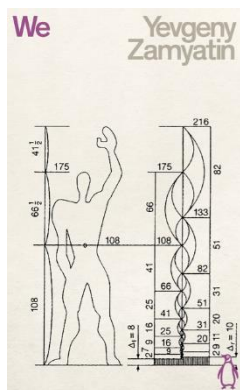
Utopian scholar Katie McGregor Stone has put together a series of videos based on a utopian studies module she taught at the University of Roehampton.

The series, titled 'Welcome To...' is designed to be freely accessible to all with an interest in the subject.

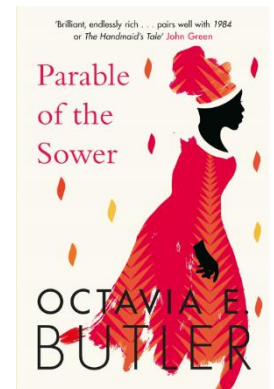
So far, the videos cover:



Genre



Utopia



Space



Time



Reproduction

Texts discussed include *The Matrix*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Sorry to Bother You*, and *What Not* by Rose Macaulay, but you don't need to have read/seen any of them in advance.

Find the videos and other course material at

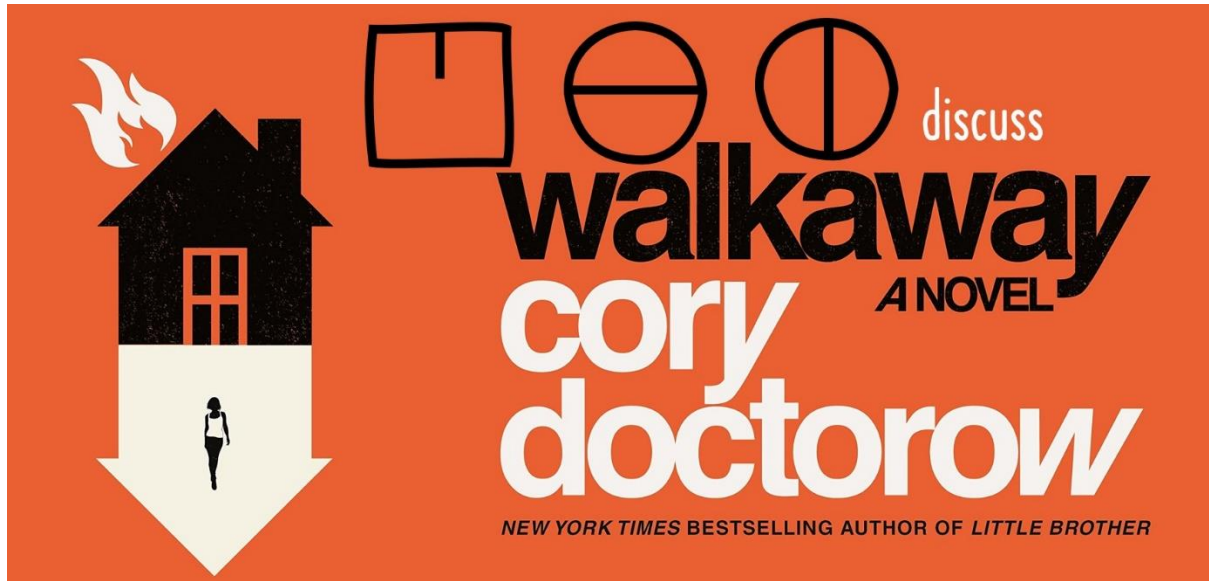
<https://katiemcgregorstone.co.uk/welcome-to/>

The series embodies Stone's own utopian views about making education free and accessible for anyone to pursue in whatever time they have available to do so.

In Katie's words:

Wherever you are and however much time and energy
you have for learning at the moment, you are welcome

UTOPIAN BOOK COLLECTIVE



5 June 2023

7pm

Watershed Café Bar, Bristol

Book group discussion

All welcome!

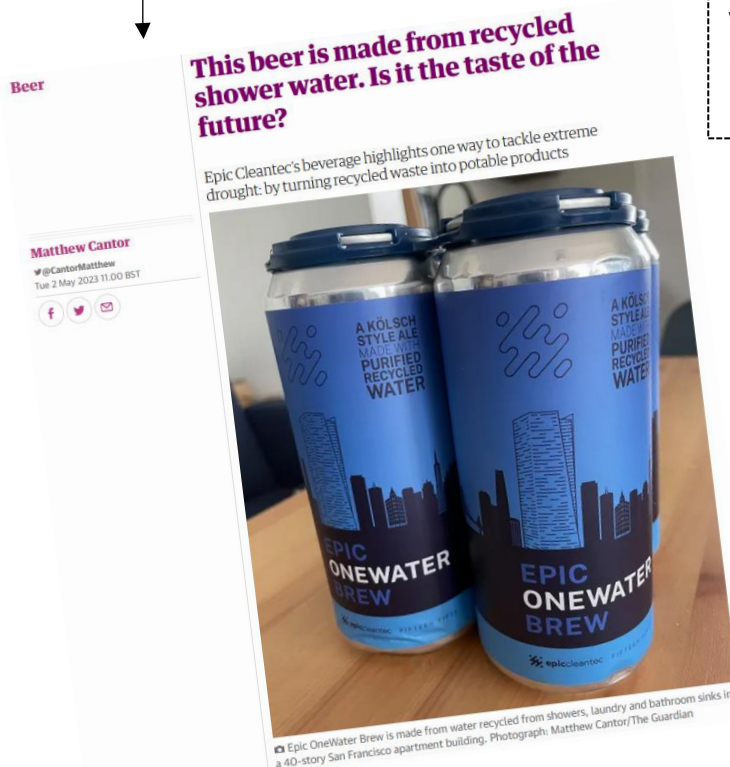
It's so
prophetic?

Hubert Etc. worried about what might be in the transgenic Jesus microbes that could turn water into beer but the girl was looking at him from behind those glasses, her eyes unreadable in the flickering dance-lights. He drank.

"Not bad." He burped, burped again. "Fizzy, though?"

"Because it's fast acting. It was ditch water an hour ago. We sieved it, brought it up to room temp, dumped in the culture. It's live too – add some precursor, it'll come back. Survives in your urine. Just save some, you want to make more."

Walkaway



Scan for the Utopian Book Collective
'Upcoming Events' page



UTOPIAN BOOK COLLECTIVE



New technologies are transforming a 19th-century watchmaking town in Switzerland. Josephine, a young factory worker, produces the unrest wheel, swinging in the heart of the mechanical watch. Exposed to new ways of organizing money, time and labour, she gets involved with the local movement of the anarchist watchmakers, where she meets Russian traveller Pyotr Kropotkin.



Film screening

Monday 19th June

7pm

Spike Island Associate Space

FREE

Private event

Booking essential contact
sheryl@justutopias.com

Film night is open to existing UBC members only, please [contact Sheryl](#) to book.

You can find more great utopian content online on the Just Utopias blog:



WWW.JUSTUTOPIAS.COM

**EXPLORING LITERARY VISIONS OF GREENER,
FAIRER WAYS OF BEING**

The blog and zine are open for submissions, contact sheryl@justutopias.com.

Acknowledgments:

Thanks to Jon Turney for recommending the Backlisted Podcast Science Fiction Special, Nathan Taylor-Gray for initially recommending *Walkaway* and Carolyn Dougherty for suggesting it as a book group choice, and Tim Waterman for recommending *Unrest*. With gratitude to Spike Island Associates for the work and event space.