

Le Guin continues to inspire

Four years have passed since Ursula K. LeGuin breathed her last, but the iconic Portland writer continues to inspire and influence.

For instance, the nomination period has just opened up for the inaugural Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction, which seeks to encourage authors whom Le Guin might have once envisioned as “realists of a larger reality, who can imagine real grounds for hope and see alternatives to how we live now.” The first award will be announced on her birthday in October.

To name another tribute, a lovely edition of “Hernes” was released last year, an updated edition more than three decades after its publication as the final piece in LeGuin’s collection “Searoad.” Conner Bouchard-Roberts, the fellow behind the shape-shifting micro-press called ‘Winter Texts,’ believed this slim but densely detailed story deserved to stand on its own. He decided to obtain

the rights to print up a limited edition of 150 books last spring and distributed the copies by hand and snail mail to just a handful of independent bookstores, the closest for Coast Weekend readers being Cannon Beach Book Co.

Even if you don’t live in Cannon Beach, I daresay this thoughtfully designed paperback volume could be worth the trip. The story is captivating.

Le Guin’s powers of description are immersive. Readers will feel the thrumming ocean and smell the salt spray in the fictional Oregon coastal village of Klatsand, where four generations of women make their home. As daughters become mothers and pass on what lessons they can, they also have to stand back as their children make choices of their own – or simply deal with the hand they’ve been dealt.

At some point this matriarchal line picks up the Herne surname from one of the men who come

This week’s books

‘Hernes’ by Ursula K. Le Guin

Winter texts – 160 pp — \$15

‘Dispatches from Anarres’ Edited by Susan DeFreitas

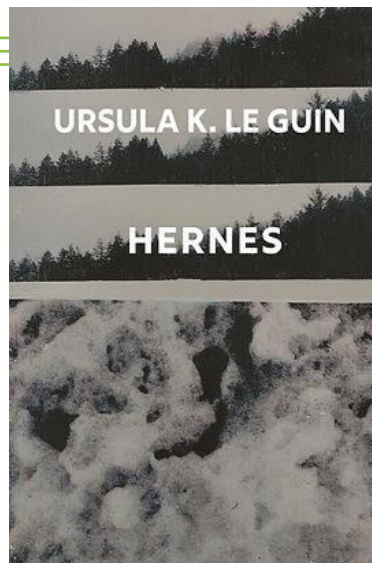
Forest Avenue Press – 400 pp — \$18

into their lives for a while, but Le Guin’s indelibly rendered novella is about the women and their shifting concepts of nurture and power.

There is another book worth mentioning in this discussion.

“Dispatches from Anarres” is an anthology of more than two dozen stories by Portland-based writers wishing to pay tribute to the woman who had been the Rose City’s grande dame of letters.

The stories are far-ranging, just as Le Guin had been in her own work. Readers will find futuristic worlds in these pages, as well as hallucinatory homelessness on the streets of Portland, furtive female integration of 19th century polar



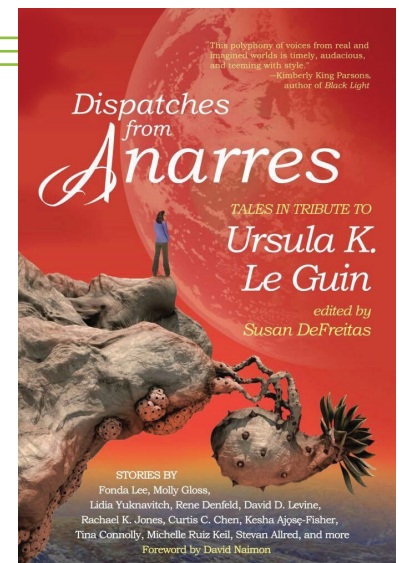
‘Hernes’ is by Ursula K. Le Guin.

exploration, and the trickster tales of cousins Ib and Nib.

The themes are far-ranging – from coming-of-age, to gender oppression, to violence in society.

At the end of each piece, the authors make brief statements about how Le Guin’s work influenced their own. And these, too, are far-ranging.

Taken altogether, “Dispatches from Anarres” is a complex stew



‘Dispatches from Anarres: Tales in Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin,’ is edited by Susan DeFreitas.

of stories, a firehose of ideas. But this anthology also supplies incontrovertible evidence that Le Guin’s influence endures.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at Barbaralmcm@gmail.com

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