

[Annie Dobson](#)

1. Ursula Le Guin, writing about the fantasy genre, argues that ‘the literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives, and therefore offers hope.’
2. I am reading Ursula Le Guin in this last death-winter, in her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Gethen is a winter-world. The planet is in the midst of an Ice Age. One hand turning the heating on, one hand holding *The Left Hand of Darkness*: I am doubly wintered. I read Le Guin in the night-worlds of winter seven pms.
3. There is a reason most people read in bed: all good books are night-worlds.
4. It is autumn now & I am reading Ali Smith’s *Winter* in preparation. Smith declares everything dead & I am reading *Winter* in the midst of the process; outside, autumn is showing off at being autumn. I read Ali Smith’s *Autumn* last December so I could time-travel backwards in only a slightly different way as when I reread the first page of *The Bell Jar* every couple of months. In some ways, rereading is revisiting is re-envisioning. But sometimes it is just going home to say hello.
5. In a podcast, Ali Smith notes that the seasons are inherently tied to memory. I imagine an autobiography of autumns: every autumn of a life perfectly recorded & compared & when November comes, a few blank pages except for tiny titles *Winter, Spring, Summer*, because they are in their own, separate autobiographies. For Christmas, I give everyone autobiographies of winter & demand their return in Spring.
6. I like to think of fiction as memory in the same way dreams are memory. That is not to say neither are real. That is not to say I am nostalgic.
7. Would I remember *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a summer book if I had read the entire thing on a park bench in August? I returned the book to the library over six months ago so who’s to say it was not just a compelling block of ice.
8. There are books with little to no weather, like the weather feature has not yet been installed. In Fran Ross’ *Oreo*, she writes ‘there is no weather per se in this book. Assume whatever season you like throughout.’ Everyone that reads *Oreo* will come to the text with their own, separate memory winter: these winters could be lived winters, or the winters on Christmas films, or the winters in fairytales. Our winters are not the same winters. And that is only if we pick the same season. Absolutely no one is stopping you from seeing Spring. Though she advises you, ‘summer makes the most sense in a book of this length. That way, pages do not have to be used up describing people taking off and putting on overcoats’.
9. Weather takes time. Reading takes time.
10. Words turn into images. If I wanted to give you the image of an angel who looked like an angel in a school play, I would write to you and say *here is an image: an angel who looks like an angel in a school play*. Or I could ring you & tell you because storytelling is a talking tradition. I could say *an angel who looks like an angel in a school play* to ten people around a campfire & if I were magic I

could walk around the campfire & screenshot every angel-image in the ten brains & I could give you ten different angels.

11. Though Ursula Le Guin is speaking specifically of a kind of worldbuilding usually only associated with science fiction, I think she means this: that the process of creating a fictional world is, in itself, utopian. That reading a fictional world & having infinite interpretations of that world, infinite memories & images is utopian. The science fiction genre is the most obvious example of this, but not the only one. Book-worlds that resemble the *real world*, book-worlds set in *real places* with *real street names*, *real weather*, are still fictional-worlds, still fantasy. And fantasy, as Le Guin writes, 'offers a world large enough.'