



PALGRAVE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY: A NEW CANON

palgrave pivot

Ursula K. Le Guin's "A Wizard of Earthsea"

A Critical Companion

Timothy S. Miller

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon

Series Editors

Sean Guynes

Independent Scholar

Ann Arbor, USA

Keren Omry

Department of English

University of Haifa

Haifa, Israel

Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon provides short introductions to key works of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) speaking to why a text, trilogy, or series matters to SFF as a genre as well as to readers, scholars, and fans. These books aim to serve as a go-to resource for thinking on specific texts and series and for prompting further inquiry. Each book will be less than 30,000 words and structured similarly to facilitate classroom use. Focusing specifically on literature, the books will also address film and TV adaptations of the texts as relevant. Beginning with background and context on the text's place in the field, the author and how this text fits in their oeuvre, and the socio-historical reception of the text, the books will provide an understanding of how students, readers, and scholars can think dynamically about a given text. Each book will describe the major approaches to the text and how the critical engagements with the text have shaped SFF. Engaging with classic works as well as recent books that have been taken up by SFF fans and scholars, the goal of the series is not to be the arbiters of canonical importance, but to show how sustained critical analysis of these texts might bring about a new canon. In addition to their suitability for undergraduate courses, the books will appeal to fans of SFF.

Timothy S. Miller

Ursula K. Le Guin's “A Wizard of Earthsea”

A Critical Companion

palgrave
macmillan

Timothy S. Miller
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL, USA

ISSN 2662-8562 ISSN 2662-8570 (electronic)
Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon
ISBN 978-3-031-24639-5 ISBN 978-3-031-24640-1 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24640-1>

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

This book is dedicated to my parents.

SERIES PREFACE

The infinite worlds of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) dance along the borders between the possible and the impossible, the familiar and the strange, the immediate and the ever-approaching horizon. Speculative fiction in all its forms has been considered a genre, a medium, a mode, a practice, a compilation of themes, or a web of assertions. With this in mind, “Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon” offers an expansive and dynamic approach to thinking SFF, destabilizing notions of *the canon*, so long associated with privilege, power, class, and hegemony. We take canon not as a singular and unchallenged authority but as shifting and thoughtful consensus among an always-growing collective of readers, scholars, and writers.

The cultural practice and production of speculation have encompassed novels, stories, plays, games, music, comics, and other media, with a lineage dating back at least to the nineteenth-century precursors through to the most recent publications. Existing scholarship has considered some of these media extensively, often with particular focus on film and TV. It is for this reason that “Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy” will forgo the cinematic and televisual, aspiring to direct critical attention at the other nodes of SFF expression.

Each volume in the series introduces, contextualizes, and analyzes a single work of SFF that ranges from the acknowledged “classic” to the should-be-classic, and asks two basic, but provocative questions: *Why does this text matter to SFF?* and *Why does (or should) this text matter to SFF readers, scholars, and fans?* Thus, the series joins into conversation both with scholars and with students of the field to examine the parameters of

SFF studies and the changing valences of fundamental categories like genre, medium, and canon. By emphasizing the critical approaches and major questions each text inspires, the series aims to offer “go-to” books for thinking about, writing on, and teaching major works of SFF.

Haifa, Israel; Ann Arbor, MI

Keren Omry
Sean Guynes

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to Elizabeth Miller for being the first reader of this book and to Paul Beattie for assistance navigating some Japanese when it came up unexpectedly. I would especially like to thank the five members of the undergraduate honors thesis writing course that I led at Florida Atlantic University in the spring of 2021: Sarah Bagnall, Maegan Barber, Talia Magielnicki, Tristan Sheridan, and Maiya Xirinachs. These students graciously allowed me to contribute my draft of the third chapter of this book to their writing workshop, and quickly overcame their initial intimidation to offer some excellent constructive feedback on their professor's own work in progress. I also thank all of the other students over the years who have read and discussed *A Wizard of Earthsea* with me along their way to this or that degree: "You have made a good beginning."

CONTENTS

1	The Boy Wizard and the Young Grand Master	1
	<i>References</i>	13
2	Between Children’s Literature and “Adult Fantasy”: The Antecedents and Audiences of <i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i> Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Old King Arthur: <i>Earthsea and Its Predecessors</i>	17
	<i>Earthsea Pedagogies: Learning to Live in an Enchanted World</i>	25
	<i>References</i>	30
3	Fantasy and the Weight of Whiteness: Racial Dynamics in <i>Earthsea</i>	33
	<i>A Wizard of Earthsea in Black and White: Uncoupling Whiteness and Goodness</i>	33
	<i>Illustration, Adaptation, and the Racial Politics of the Visual Imagination</i>	40
	<i>References</i>	49
4	Light and Shadow, Good and Evil: Ethical, Psychological, and Other Critical Approaches to the Fantastic	51
	<i>A Brief Taxonomy of Critical Approaches to Le Guin</i>	51
	<i>The “Way” to Read Le Guin?: <i>Earthsea and Daoism</i></i>	55
	<i>Fantasy and the Unconscious: Jung and the Nature of the Shadow</i>	58
	<i>References</i>	62