



THE WORLD OF “EARTHSEA” BY W. C. LE GUIN AS AN EXAMPLE OF A “SECONDARY WORLD”

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15202050>

ABSTRACT

This report examines the “secondary world” in fantasy literature using the example of the first novel in the Earthsea Cycle by U. K. Le Guin. The semantic content and genesis of the term “secondary world” in the fantasy genre are determined. The ontological and mythological systematicity in the description of the geography, climate, and culture of the world is analyzed.

Keywords: American literature; U. K. Le Guin; The Earthsea Cycle; fantasy genre; secondary world

The American fantasy tradition begins with The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. F. Baum (1856–1919; The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, 1900) and Tarzan of the Apes by E. R. Burroughs (1875–1950; Tarzan of the Apes, 1912) [1]. Thanks to R. I. Howard, the author of the Conan the Barbarian series (Robert Ervin Howard, 1906–36; The Phoenix on the Sword, 1932), the fantasy genre gained popularity. There are two main types of fantasy: high and low, depending on the setting. Low fantasy takes place in a world that contains fantastic elements, but magic is rare. High fantasy takes place in fictional worlds whose laws do not obey reality.

According to the essay “On Fairy-Stories” by J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973; On Fairy-Stories, 1939), the setting of fictional worlds is divided into a “primary world” and a “secondary world.” The “primary world” refers to the real world, in which fantastic elements appear and magic is a kind of “miracle.” Examples of fantasy with a “primary world” include such works as American Gods by Neil Gaiman (1960; American Gods, 2001), Watch by S. Lukyanenko (1968; 1998–2015), Rivers of London by Ben Aaronovich (1964; Rivers of London, 2011–present), etc.

Works with a “secondary world” that is not connected to reality, full of magic and mythological heroes include Terry Pratchett’s Discworld (1983–2015), Robert Jordan’s The Wheel of Time (1990–2013), Andrey Sapkowski’s The Witcher Saga (1948), etc.

Nikki Gamble (1983; Exploring Children’s Literature, 2008) identifies three forms of coexistence of the real “primary” and fictional “secondary” worlds [2]: 1. the absence of the “primary world”, or its insignificance for the plot; 2. the connection between the “primary” and “secondary” worlds only through a portal; 3. the presence of a magical

world within the real world (Here and below, the translation from foreign sources is ours – S.D.).

The first two forms, according to N. Gamble, are characteristic of high fantasy, and the third – of low fantasy. Of course, not all examples of the fantasy genre fit this classification. Thus, Tolkien said that the action of his books took place in our world 6000 years ago, and this allows us to classify his works as low fantasy. However, his Middle-earth is such a developed and remote world that it is impossible not to call *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) or *The Hobbit* (1937) high fantasy. In *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling (1965; *Harry Potter*, 1997-2007), Harry lives in a “prime world,” but most of the action takes place in a high fantasy world.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carol (1832–98) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) combine both worlds, but much of the action takes place in the magical world, which allows them to be classified as “portal” high fantasy.

An interesting example is George Raymond Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996–present), which is set in a fictional world (high fantasy), but the minor role of magic in this epic saga is characteristic of low fantasy.

An example of the depiction of a “secondary world” in fantasy is *Earthsea* from the series *A Wizard of Earthsea* by W. K. Le Guin (Ursula Kroeber Le Guin, 1929-2018; *The Earthsea Cycle*, 1968–2001).

The worldbuilding on the map of the *Earthsea* archipelagos does more than just help the reader navigate the space and watch the heroes' journey with their own eyes. It was with the creation of the map and the world that the creation of the “*Earthsea Cycle*” began: “I wrote a couple of short stories that took place on islands where wizards and dragons lived...> The islands grew, and boom, it's a whole archipelago, and so I draw a map, name the rivers, mountains, cities...” [1].

Technologically, *Earthsea* is an early Iron Age society, and bronze is used where iron is scarce. Wood and various hard but easily worked metals are used in the making of weapons.

Earthsea's climate is generally temperate, comparable to the mid-latitudes of the northern hemisphere, but in the southern regions, it is similar to subtropical. The world of *Earthsea* experiences the same cycle of seasons as Earth. The northern islands, such as Gont and Osskil, have warm summers and cold winters. *Earthsea*, except the lands of the barbarian hags, whose language is “unlike any language of the Archipelago and the Reaches” [2, p. 12], is a literate society using a script called “Ardic runes.”

Despite the relatively common language of the entire Archipelago, many peoples spoke their own dialects [2, p. 42, p. 104]. “The Ardic language... had its roots... in the True Speech, where all creatures and objects were called by their true names” [2, p. 24].

The skin color of the inhabitants of Gont, Havnor, and most of the inhabitants of the central islands is generally “copper-brown” [2, p. 42], like that of the Native Americans. The citizens of Osskil called them Kelub, “red-faced” [2, p. 104]. In the Southern and Eastern Reaches live dark-skinned people with straight black hair [2, p. 42].

In addition to humans, there is another intelligent species of living creatures in *Earthsea* – dragons. Some dragons are carriers of countless knowledge; others are cruel

monsters. Some dragons (Orm Irian and Tenahu from the second trilogy) can transform into humans.

Thus, the world of Earthsea has no direct contact with the "primary" world. It obeys its own laws, has its own language, culture, ethnic groups, and its own cosmogonic myth. The Earthsea trilogy by Ursula K. Le Guin draws a model of an imaginary world and, with the help of a detailed ontological-mythological system, creates one of the most fully formed "secondary" worlds in fantasy literature.

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