

The background of the entire page is a detailed illustration by Charles Vess. It features several dragons in various colors (orange, blue, green) and a long wooden ship with a single mast sailing on a body of water. The style is characteristic of Vess's work, with fine lines and a rich, textured color palette.

Speculative Fiction (ENGL 5225): Ursula K. Le Guin

MW 8:05-9:25 / LNCO 3875

Scott Black

This course will be a deep dive into one of the most inventive, daring, and visionary writers of twentieth-century American literature, Ursula K. Le Guin.

Though now recognized as a central figure of American letters (her novels and stories have recently been published in the Library of America), for most of her career Le Guin's works were confined to the literary ghettos of speculative fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. In those circles, however, she was hugely influential, highly respected, and indeed beloved. (For readers of a certain age, her *Earthsea* books were as important as *Harry Potter* was for later generations.)

For Le Guin, the wider realities available to writers of speculative fiction, sci-fi, and fantasy allowed her to explore the most profound questions of human life, society, and art. Indeed, her novels and stories are philosophical fictions: intense and challenging meditations on culture, ecology, gender, sexuality, power, oppression, liberation, justice, and peace. At the same time, they are gorgeous examples of the arts of narrative and prose. Le Guin can be considered an experimental novelist, asking us to consider what narrative does and what it can do, but at the same time her works are a pleasure to read because she is a superb storyteller and an exquisite writer.

— THE BOOKS OF —
EARTHSEA
THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED EDITION
URSULA K. LE GUIN
— ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES VESS —

This course will focus on two of Le Guin's most famous fictional universes, the fantasy world of Earthsea and the sci-fi universe of the Ekumen cycle. We will consider Le Guin's most famous and most influential works from the late 1960s through the early 2000s, as well as a sampling of her luminous essays. The reading load for this course will be fairly heavy, but (see above) thoroughly interesting and fun.

Readings will include *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*, the novellas collected in *The Found and the Lost* and other stories and essays.