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THE DISPOSSESSED: 50 YEARS SINCE 50 YEARS HENCE

A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

Preface

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It is a happy coincidence that VIA PANORAMICA has come to a turning point in the same year that two great events celebrate their 50th anniversary: Ursula K. Le Guin's publication of *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, and the Portuguese Carnation Revolution. Apparently unsimilar in every way, these two events (one literary and the other political) are to me personally two beacons of inspiration and hope. They are both born out of an unwavering commitment to freedom, responsibility, imagination and the promise of a more just future. Both are utopian. Although, as a journal of Anglo-American Studies, VIA PANORAMICA will not address the Portuguese historical event, have no doubt that all the principles that motivated and orientated that revolution also beat through the pages of this issue: the desire for personal freedom, an acute sense of social responsibility, the utter respect for the dignity of others, and also the apology for the imagination and critical thinking. These principles are here embodied by – and inscribed in – Ursula K. Le Guin and her fiction.

There are many reasons why I selected the 50th anniversary of *The Dispossessed* as the theme of my first VIA PANORAMICA. Considered by Tom Moylan the “critical utopia” *par excellence*, this novel is in itself a turning point in the utopian tradition, and it epitomises a new way of thinking and writing Science Fiction. One of the fiercest critics of canonical utopianism, Le Guin brought to utopian science fiction the seed of doubt to prescriptive models of conceiving better societies. She added the Yin, the wildness, the shadow, to the Yang crystalised utopias, which were – in the 20th century – obsolete, born dead. However crucial to contemporary utopianism, *The Dispossessed* grows much larger than that literary field. It is, in fact, one of the greatest novels in American Literature. In its protagonist, it combines all the ambiguities of being human, the flaws of character and the struggles to be kind and just in a deeply unjust world. The meeting of highly contrasting forces (individualism and collectivism; the self and the other; personal freedom and social responsibility; competition and cooperation) makes the line between the Yin and the Yang

palpitate and leaves the reader unsettled, anxious for an answer that never comes because the answer is the way, the journey, and true journey is return, the never-ending struggle to be better. A constant revolution. A revolution which is us. Our bodies. Our minds – to dream. Our hands – to build. Our arms – to embrace... each other in solidarity and respect. As Shevek speaks to the masses:

You cannot buy the revolution.

You cannot make the revolution.

You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere. (...)

It is our suffering that brings us together. (...)

The bond that binds us is beyond choice. We are brothers.

We are brothers in what we share.

In pain, which each of us must suffer alone, in hunger, in poverty, in hope, we know our brotherhood.

In times such as ours, voices such as Shevek's inspire. Hence, *The Dispossessed*'s continuous relevance. A great work of literature that is also such a great teaching tool. As is evident by the amount of submissions by undergraduate students, Ursula K. Le Guin is a challenge and a joy to study, such is the quality of her style and the extent of her imagination. However, it is the freedom she offers the readers that I would like to highlight. That and her integrity. Not only she offers us the freedom to make our own minds as to what is right or wrong in the stories, she also proclaims to not knowing the answers herself. "My job is to open windows, to ask questions", she said. What comes through and what answers we might find, those are our own, as readers, and as humans. Her humility to admit that she knew nothing or that she was wrong about something is what makes her admirable and her stories a fertile soil for critical thinking and the imagination: the essential tools to confront "hard times" and to do our jobs as "poets, visionaries", scholars, teachers and thinkers, which is "to remember freedom" ("The Freedom Speech", 2014).

Taking Le Guin's example as a guide, it is, therefore, with a great sense of responsibility that – upon the generous invitation by the Director, Professor Gualter Cunha – I have accepted to become the new executive editor of VIA PANORAMICA and continue the work done by my fellow colleagues, who have paved the way before and have made this journal something CETAPS could be proud of. While still daunted by the task, I have decided to make VIA PANORAMICA a platform not only to spread academic research, but

also to form junior researchers in editing skills and offer even younger students an opportunity to initiate their academic research. I have, thus, proposed to implement new measures as well as a refreshed design, which I hope will be to the reader's liking. I have invited a junior researcher as a Guest Editor – Rui Mateus – to help me with the thematic section. As a PhD candidate in Fantasy Studies, Rui Mateus has proved to be an invaluable guest editor for his expertise and passion for science fiction. I hope that his collaboration with this issue has brought him a few added skills (in editing, for instance) and experience within the field. There are new sections and subsections to stimulate contributions by undergraduate students, illustrators and other artists, as a conscious attempt to involve the younger generation of academics as well as senior researchers, and also open up Anglo-American Studies to the Arts by inviting colleagues from other areas to think about and express their love of literature. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that the Editors introduce VIA PANORAMICA Vol. 13 N.º 1: *The Dispossessed: 50 years since 50 years hence / A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction*.

THE THEMATIC SECTION

This section entirely dedicated to Ursula K. Le Guin and her works is introduced and closed by illustrations inspired by *The Dispossessed*. It is with great pleasure that VIA PANORAMICA publishes other formats besides the traditional articles, reviews and translations. It is a serious attempt to build bridges between scholarship and the Arts, offering a platform for multiple languages and expressions of the imagination. The first illustration by Architect Mariana Oliveira is an interpretation of Shevek's multiplicity of selves. Its title, "Ser Todo é Ser Parte" [To be Whole is to be Part], is a direct reference to Odonion philosophy and the constant meeting at the edge of the self and the social. The illustration's level of abstraction gives the precise degree of subversive ambiguity that the novel implies. The second illustration by Ana da Silva Monteiro highlights Shevek's anxiety before the two contracting worlds, Urras and Anarres, as well as his solitary place between their antagonistic worldviews. Although isolated, Shevek is also privileged in his position as an observer and thinker. We – as readers – share this privilege.

The first academic article presents an interesting comparison between Ursula K. Le Guin and one of the most popular recent science-fiction writers, Kim Stanley Robinson. Admittedly admirer and highly influenced by Le Guin, Robinson is a storyteller who

believes in cooperation as a political tool and in utopian thinking as a driving force for change. He is, therefore, the perfect pairing match for Le Guin, as Fábio Fernandes proves in his “Diálogos Utópicos”. Fábio Fernandes is himself not only an academic but also a science-fiction writer, fact that brings an added satisfaction to reading his article and the perfect opening reflection to the thematic section.

The subsection by undergraduate students is a new addition to VIA PANORAMICA, one which gives me a special sense of pride. As an educator, it was vital for me to find space for our young students to find a voice and grow as researchers. Even so, it was their work and interest in Ursula K. Le Guin that moved me to found this platform for them to test their ideas and delve into academic writing. This subsection contains four articles and a review fully dedicated to Le Guin as a novelist, a theoretical thinker, an axis of comparison between different worlds, and as a source of inspiration to other writers. In “From Anarres to the Earth: *The Dispossessed* and the Evolution of Utopian Science Fiction”, Inês Gonçalves Cerqueira delves into the celebrated *opus* to reflect upon *The Dispossessed* as key in the shift that science fiction suffered in the 1970s and was then forever transformed. Rita Morais F., on the other hand, revisits the short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” to analyse Le Guin’s most interesting analogies between the Yin-Yang symbol and the concepts of Utopia and Dystopia. Next, whereas Inês Pastor compares Frank Herbert’s *Dune* and Le Guin’s *City of Illusions* in a quest to unveil unjust power dynamics and the spread of misinformation – themes so challenging today –, Matilde Ribeiro Cameira proposes a comparatist reading between Le Guin’s classical dystopia, *The Lathe of Heaven*, and Octavia E. Butler’s “The Book of Martha” in order to think about the potentiality and the perils of dreams. Francisca Peixoto da Costa Neto’s review of *Dispatches from Anarres* (2021), edited by Susan deFreitas, is itself a tribute to this celebratory volume, which anthologises short stories inspired by Le Guin and written by fellow Portland authors. Still in a commemorative mood and before the closing illustration, CETAPS’ Junior Researchers in Anglo-American Studies enrich this issue with report about the roundtable they organised to celebrate Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, which had very special guests.

THE VARIA SECTION

The VARIA section includes articles published within Anglo-American Studies, although not encompassed within the thematic scope of the issue. They add, thus, latitude to the framework of this VIA PANORAMICA. The first article of the section is by a CETAPS veteran, Miguel Alarcão, who proposes a reading of two songs allusive to Scottish culture. The article goes, however, far beyond the analysis of Paul McCartney's *Mull of Kintyre* (1977) and Rod Stewart's *Every Beat of my Heart* (1986). From the realm of music, we move on to two very recent – yet distinct – popular novels. Beatriz Carvalho defies the American myth of the self-made man and reframes it in “‘The world doesn't give things, you take things': Deconstructing the Myth of the Self-Made Man in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* (2017)”. To conclude the section, Alice Laurentino proposes the materiality of the body as a tool to understand the subversiveness of Evaristo's genre-bending novel, in “Embodying Bodies in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)”.

EXTRA CONTENT

This issue would not be complete without Carla Morais Pires's new translation of *Mr. Bennett e Mrs. Brown* (1924) by Virginia Woolf into Portuguese. Not only is it a fundamental theoretical text by Woolf about the *human essence* of fictional characters, but also because it was a key piece to Ursula K. Le Guin herself and her conception of Shevek. In “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” (1975), Le Guin evoked Woolf's essay to examine whether popular science fiction could contain the essence of human experience — materialized as Mrs. Brown — in the same way that Woolf addressed the question concerning the modernist novel in 1924. Like Woolf in the original piece, also Le Guin believed that the new generation of science fiction writers needed new literary tools and techniques. Drawing a direct parallel between Mrs. Brown and Shevek, Le Guin – like Virginia Woolf before her – reformed the literary field. I am profoundly grateful for having this translation included in this issue also because it will be made available to students and academics. Although there is a very good and recent translation of the text by Ana Maria Chaves and Catarina F. Almeida, edited by Relógio d'Água, it was paramount to have one also very good translation in Portuguese in open access.

To close this issue, I thought that a tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin of our own was absolutely necessary. Therefore, various writers, artists and professors were invited to

submit a personal/professional statement describing the influence Le Guin’s work has had on their own work. I would like to thank each one of them for their words of praise, for they have proven that Ursula K. Le Guin lives beyond the Anglo-American literary context and lives beyond her years, inspiring us to lead our lives with critical thinking, imagination and respect for the Other.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As executive editor, I would like to thank several people for making this issue possible. First, the general editor, Professor Gualter Cunha, for inviting me to join the team. I am grateful for the vote of confidence and the freedom to find a new version of VIA PANORAMICA that were given to me. To Professor Fátima Vieira, for her continuous support and good counsel. To all the authors who found VIA PANORAMICA worthy of their research (Fábio Fernandes, Miguel Alarcão, Carla Morais Pires, Beatriz Carvalho and Alice Laurentino). To the young researchers (soon to be fine scholars, I am sure), for being brave enough to submit their proposals and for working very hard on them after the revision process (Inês Gonçalves Cerqueira, Rita Morais F., Inês Pastor, Matilde Ribeiro Cameira e Francisca Neto). A special thanks to JRAAS, for promoting interesting activities and sharing them in *VP*, particularly Rui Mateus, for his willingness to participate in the editing and peer-reviewing processes, which kept him away from his PhD research longer than it should. To all the colleagues who accepted our (not-so-voluntary) invitations to join the process of blind peer review (thank you, nameless experts!). An extra-special thank you to Ana Monteiro and Mariana Oliveira for accepting the challenge to illustrate such a complex story and making this new *VP* all worthwhile.

My final thanks go to all the writers, professors, anthologists and editors who have agreed to share their experiences of Ursula K. Le Guin’s stories and their influences upon their own worldviews and ethics, for they are indeed those who walk away from Omelas, working every day to build a better world.

HOW TO CITE

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