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THE DISPOSSESSED: 50 YEARS SINCE 50 YEARS HENCE

A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

SUBSECTION BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

THEMATIC SECTION

From Anarres to the Earth:

The Dispossessed and the Evolution of Utopian Science Fiction

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ABSTRACT: This article's main primary is to look into Ursula K. Le Guin's writings and examine how her words have influenced utopian literature while also giving particular focus to her crucial role in the genre of science fiction, consequently diving into the analysis of one particular book she wrote entitled of *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. Le Guin's description of the twin planets, Anarres and Urras, and their inhabitants' lives, defy traditional concepts and extend the frontiers of speculative fiction through the use of opposing ideologies and philosophical insights presented in the novel. This essay will also deepen on Le Guin's legacy as a visionary author who played a crucial role in reshaping the views on fiction and leading us to reformulate our thoughts on utopia and the way we see the world we live in, therefore influencing the following generations of writers and readers and inspiring new possibilities within utopian literature. While making references to important topics such as

RESUMO: O objectivo principal deste artigo é analisar o trabalho da autora Ursula K. Le Guin e mergulhar no impacto transformativo que as suas palavras tiveram na literatura utópica, dando particular atenção à sua obra de ficção científica *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. Recorrendo ao uso de ideologias contrárias e introspeções filosóficas, a exploração de planetas idênticos, Anarres e Urras, juntamente com a vida dos habitantes destes, Le Guin desafia noções tradicionais do conceito de utopia, ao mesmo tempo que expande os limites da ficção especulativa. Este artigo aprofunda o legado da autora que reformulou as visões em ficção e que nos incentivou a questionar o nosso entendimento sobre a utopia e a forma como observamos o mundo à nossa volta, dessa forma influenciando as próximas gerações de escritores e leitores, e inspirando-os a conceber novas possibilidades dentro da literatura utópica. Com referências a certos tópicos de elevada relevância, como por



anarchism and feminism, which are subjects that remain matter of discussion still, the author leads the readers to also reflect upon freedom, power dynamics, and what makes us human. By examining the multiple layers of *The Dispossessed* along with the context and the author's legacy in literature, this study reflects the power of speculative fiction in making us question societal norms and to resist the limits on our understanding of the possible and the better.

KEYWORDS: literature, science fiction, utopia, Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

exemplo o anarquismo e o feminismo, assuntos prementes nos dias de hoje, a autora impele os leitores a refletirem sobre temas como liberdade, dinâmica de poderes e tudo aquilo que nos define como humanos. Ao analisar as múltiplas camadas de sentidos de *The Dispossessed* e o legado da autora na literatura, este artigo pretende refletir sobre o poder da ficção especulativa, que nos leva a questionar as normas sociais e a resistir aos limites da nossa compreensão sobre o que é possível e o que é desejável.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: literatura, ficção científica, utopia, Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

HUMAN CONDITION AS A PREDISPOSITION TO UTOPIAN CREATIONS

Humans have always been dreamers. Either in the practical sense, to devise new tools or methods to improve life conditions and discover new places, as well as in the most metaphorical/ontological sense, which is the one we will be focusing on. From the time when humans had a nomadic lifestyle with the scarcity of food (circa 10,000 BCE - 2000 BCE) to the problem of limited resources and territories (8th century BCE - 5th century BCE), the realisation of an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of the natural world (16th – 18th century), among other aspects, we have always been ready to point flaws. However, regardless of the issue, we have worked to try to solve it. We have managed to transition to settled farming, domestication of plants and animals (leading to stable food supplies and the development of villages and cities), expand the empires and development of the scientific method, along with major discoveries in multiple areas, solving the respective problems mentioned earlier.

Humans have always had the habit of not being satisfied, and there is always something that could be improved. But it goes farther than that. Some humans – which we can call them “utopians” due to their ways of thinking - would even go as far as conceiving a wholly new and innovative life order; almost like a parallel universe, a place where everything would be better. Imagination grew exponentially once scientification (a concept that will be approached later on in the article) became a popular literary genre, since it allowed them to dream beyond what they knew and create without being restricted by reality’s limits and allow them to come up with a different and better world, reflecting deeply about the world they lived in.

LITERATURE AND THE CONCEPT OF SCIENCE FICTION

Before delving into the main argument, allow us a few contextual considerations about science fiction as a literary genre. Since its creation, science fiction is, a very popular genre, a massive number of books, movies and series associated with it. It has been inspiring awe since its beginning, either by its association with the grotesque (i.e., *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley) or with the wonderful (i.e. *The Voyage to the Moon* by Cyrano de Bergerac).

Nevertheless, as far as we know, the term “science fiction” itself only appeared in the 1920s, due to the felt necessity to come up with a fixed expression that would cover all the subgenres that were being written. According to Roger Luckhurst, descriptions like “different”, “off-trail”, “pseudo-scientific” or “weird-scientific” were used; yet, there was not an official term for it (Fleming and Allen n/d, 15). That changed when the term was first used by William Wilson in 1851 (Bould and Vint 2011). However, only decades later, in 1923, was the concept “science fiction” widespread by the journalist and magazine proprietor Hugo Gernsback, who (in 1924) proposed a contraction of that same expression, known as the word “scientification”. Despite that same suggestion, Gernsback continued to prefer the term ‘science fiction’, term itself that appeared multiple times in his editorials to *Astounding Stories* magazine (1926), having the term coined in the year of 1929. Over time, its usage became common, and in 1938, the magazine’s title was changed to *Astounding Science-Fiction*, which shows the concept’s dissemination.

SCIENCE FICTION, UTOPIA AND ITS COMPLEMENTARY RELATIONSHIP

Science fiction has changed dramatically, as it is a genre that has evolved through time. With the advance of technology and the appearance of new innovative ways of thinking, science fiction has become quite a complex genre, not only involving characteristics related to time or space travel (sometimes both at the same time) or adventures in other worlds. In fact, these plot devices have been co-opted to discuss aspects of contemporary societies, either to criticize them, by pointing out one or multiple societal issues within the societal model at the time that should be changed, or to propose a way to improve living conditions.

Science fiction is clearly molded by utopian thinking, when there is this concern with societal problems. If solutions are proposed, it is probably a utopian science fiction story. On the other hand, if the narrative suggests that the fictional society is even worse than the real world, then it is probably dystopian

¹ science fiction. They indeed have different characteristics and goals; however, they are not contradictory. In fact, their relation may be similar to the yin and yang² relationship. This symbol, which consists of two halves (each of them having a portion of the other within), shows how they complete each other’s interdependence and continual

intermutability. As the Yin and the Yang, utopia and dystopia also do not live without the other. According to Ursula K. Le Guin: “Every utopia since *Utopia* has also been, clearly or obscurely, actually or possibly, in the author’s or in the readers’ judgment, both a good place and a bad one. Every eutopia contains a dystopia, every dystopia contains a eutopia” (2017, 1). That justifies said comparison, since the Yin-Yang symbol implies this understanding of complementary forces rather than opposing ones. That is also the case between utopias and dystopias.

In dystopian science fiction, the writer resorts to exaggeration and writing mechanisms to urge people to see their work as a warning and a motivation for social critique, which means that its power is also transformative and, thus, utopian³. A similar line of thought is described in Tom Moylan’s *Scraps of Untainted Skies*, in the way it links the characteristics of utopia to its transformative powers:

Rather, it is Utopia's capacity to generate conditions and strategies for change rather than change itself that ties at the heart of its radically oriented function. This transformative work nevertheless needs to be carried out in terms of actual material conditions and contradictions, for if utopian yearning remains the stuff of abstract or universal dreams, it will simply die on the vine of dilettantism or escapism at best, or become fodder for the cynical machinery of anti-utopianism at worst. (2018, 87)

Thus, it might have a positive impulse for change. There lies its connection with utopias. Utopian science fiction is different in the way that it has a much more positive view on the world and implies thought-experimentation. It is a non-existence society that is described in detail in a certain time and place, showing an ideal way of living. In other words, it is more complex in a way, since not only denounces what is wrong in society, but also suggests means to overcome problems, independently of their efficacy. When it is associated by ethical issues, such as ecological harmony, equality, prosperity, and social justice, science fiction becomes a platform, a space to explore new possibilities and experiment with different social structures and systems.

URSULA K. LE GUIN: HER ORIGINS AND LEGACY

One of the authors that completely redefined science fiction (and fantasy) was Ursula K. Le Guin. Born in 1929, in Berkeley, California, where she grew up, Le Guin is known for

her prolific top-quality genre literature, essays, realistic literature and poetry: 23 novels, 12 volumes of short stories and novellas, 11 volumes of poetry, 13 children's books, five collections of essays, and four volumes of translation. Considerably popular and highly admired by both critics and readers, her work has been translated into over 40 languages, and sold millions of copies worldwide. Considered groundbreaking in her field due her subversive approach to sensitive subjects, such as gender and sexual roles, environmental destruction, diplomacy and cooperation, she received multiple awards.⁴ In fact, her speech at the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters about the importance of Literature and the Arts in our dystopian times has become iconic of her ethics and her courage.

During her lifetime there were a considerable amount of events that represented political frictions, which were driven by various factors, such as social, economic, and international. Despite the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, there was (and still is) a continuous struggle for racial equality. There were anti-war protests related to the Vietnam War, as well as social movements in favour of the environment, and women and gay rights. There were also cultural shifts, with its emphasis on anti-establishment attitudes, free speech, and alternative lifestyles, continued to challenge traditional norms, which led to the rise of influential music, literature, and art that reflected the era's revolutionary spirit. By reading her essays, we understand how this political and social context had a evident impact on her way of thinking and writing.

When Le Guin started to become popular in the late 1960s, a new trend of science fiction was emerging. "New Wave" science fiction was characterized by new and innovative ideas, themes, and styles, contrasting greatly to then popular "pulp" science fiction. More literary and conceptually challenging than traditional science fiction, this genre tended to deal with more complex themes and ideas, often taking a more experimental approach to storytelling. The concept appeared from the need to describe a group of writers who "reacted against the conventions of traditional SF to produce avant-garde, radical or fractured science fictions" (Bould and Vint 2011, 231). However, the movement that represents "a reaction against genre exhaustion" (in the words of Damien Broderick) and emphasizes the abandonment of the characteristics of traditional science fiction was not perceived by all authors the same way. This sub-genre within the science fiction was innovative, because it pushed the boundaries of traditional science fiction by



experimenting with literary techniques (such as stream-of-consciousness and nonlinear storytelling), by exploring new themes, and addressing contemporary social and political issues. Ursula K. Le Guin was one of the authors that contributed massively to with this shift in science fiction, alongside Philip K. Dick, Harlan Ellison, and Joanna Russ, among others. Credited with elaborate and moving ideas, expressed through great literary artistry, Le Guin's work, however, stands out.

THE DISPOSSESSED AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE LITERARY MOVEMENT

The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia (1974) is an illustrative example of a New Wave utopian science fiction novel. It explores themes of anarchism, utopianism, social structure, and individual freedom by comparing two contrasting worlds: Anarres and Urras. The main character of the narrative is a physicist named Shevek from Anarres, depicted as a harsh desert environment with limited resources and communal living arrangements. Anarres was settled by anarchists who sought to create a society without any form of hierarchical structure and injustice, rejecting the discriminatory systems inherent to their native planet: Urras.⁵ The inhabitants of Anarres act according to a philosophy known as Odoism⁶, based upon principles such as communal living, equal distribution of labour, and cooperation.

As an intellectual, Shevek is unhappy with the limitations the anarchist society seems to impose, which constrains his scientific work. He desires to pursue his research unbounded by any political regulations. Despite skepticism and direct opposition, Shevek develops a revolutionary theory of time and space called "The Principle of Simultaneity". Driven by his need to share his discoveries with the wider universe, Shevek travels to Urras, where he hopes to collaborate with scientists and disseminate his ideas. Although Urrasti societies are known for their individualism, which Shevek mistakenly associated with individual freedom, he soon discovers that Urras was not what he imagined. In fact, Urras is plagued by severe social and political problems, created by that great "quality" – as Atro, one of the doctors Shevek knows, describes – of the Urrasti societies: discrimination. In Urras, discrimination has many faces: class divisions, gender inequality⁷, ecological exploitation, militarism and war, and injustice. During his stay, Shevek also goes through

a personal journey, questioning his own sense of loyalty, integrity, and the true meaning of freedom.

The Dispossessed leads us through a voyage between opposite concepts, such as individualism and collectivism, freedom and authority, idealism and pragmatism. By resorting to this dialectical literary strategy, the contrasting societies of Anarres and Urras, Le Guin invites us to think about the shortcomings of both anarchism and capitalism, and perhaps to reflect about the possibilities and limitations of utopian ideals. Many experts in the area recognize her work and its importance, such as Tom Moylan in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* that claimed that the novel is “perhaps the best known and the most popular of the critical utopias published in the 1970s” (2014, 87). By describing it as an “alternative to bleak experimental novels or didactic tracts”, it highlights her narrative style, making a connection with the word “ambiguous” in the title of her novel, as, in his opinion, it is used to “warn the reader that the dreams of the last century are long past and that this utopia is being reasserted in a more complex and cautious way” (*ibidem*).

A NEW WAY OF WRITING

This novel stands out from traditional science fiction novels for multiple reasons, one being its structure. The non-linear narrative structure that alternates present and past events in Shevek’s life is a technique that allows the reader to explore both Shevek’s development as a character and the socio-political dynamics of Anarres and Urras. Besides experimenting with language and style, such as using descriptive language to evoke the landscapes and cultures of both Anarres and Urras, Le Guin also makes a point of adding elements of stream-of-consciousness, particularly in Shevek’s internal monologues and reflections on his experiences and emotions. These types of internal monologues often happen within the main character, Shevek, throughout the novel. An example of that would be:

All their conversations were like this, exhausting to the doctor and unsatisfying to Shevek, yet intensely interesting to both. They were Shevek’s only means of exploring the new world that



awaited him. The ship itself, and Kimoe's mind were His microcosm. There were no books aboard the Mindful, the officers avoided Shevek, and the crewmen were kept strictly out of his way. As for the doctor's mind, though intelligent and certainly well-meaning, it was a jumble of intellectual artifacts even more confusing than all the gadgets, appliances, and conveniences that filled the ship. These latter Shevek found entertaining; everything was so lavish, stylish, and inventive; but the furniture of Kimoe's intellect he did not find so comfortable. Kimoe's ideas never seemed to be able to go in a straight line; they had to walk around this and avoid that, and then they ended up smack against a wall. There were walls around all his thoughts, and he seemed utterly unaware of them, though he was perpetually hiding behind them. Only once did Shevek see them breached, in all their days of conversation between the worlds. (Le Guin 1993, 15)

Influenced by Virginia Woolf's writing style, which uses a linguistic tool that is already enshrined and considered to be a Modernist feature, it clearly shows a complex and multifaceted character that faces his internal struggles, doubts, and conflicts. These "internal struggles" drive much of the narrative, allowing the reader to have insights into his motivations and values, creating a Character-Centric Narrative, a concept that is used by experts to describe Le Guin's style of narrative.⁸ Moreover, it is also seen how other characters, such as Shevek's friends and colleagues on Anarres, reflect on the diverse perspectives and personalities within Anarresti society by being described with depth and nuance. Throughout the novel, themes such as anarchism, capitalism, social inequality, and the nature of freedom keep on being subtly mentioned, therefore engaging with a range of social and political issues by contrasting societies of Anarres and Urras to explore those themes and at the same time to question different political systems.

Another important issue addressed is gender politics. Takver, Shevek's partner, challenges traditional gender roles and assumptions about women's roles in our society, not only by being a skilled and respected scientist in her own right and having an egalitarian relationship based on mutual respect and collaboration, but also by sharing responsibilities with her partner while balancing her career with motherhood. As the epitome of the Anarresti gender equality, Takver illustrates the possibility of a gender free society, in which women do not have to choose between career and family, how women can be free, independent and have agency over their own lives. She is an autonomous character, having life beyond her relationship with Shevek. Indeed, she has her own goals, aspirations, and desires. She is assertive, confident, and self-assured, advocating for her beliefs and

asserting her voice within the community, speaking her mind openly, as well as challenging injustices, and actively participating in discussions and decision-making processes.⁹ But not all female characters in the book are portrayed the same way. One obvious contrast is how the women in Urras are described throughout the book, having a very different life and ways of thinking from Takver.

An example of that is a moment when Shevek is drunk and sexually assaults Veä:

He took hold of her and kissed her mouth, forcing her head backward, and then her throat and breasts. She yielded at first as if she had no bones, then she writhed a little, laughing and pushing weakly at him, and began to talk. "Oh, no, no, now behave," she said. "Now! come on, we do have to go back to the party. No, Shevek, now calm down, this won't do at all!" Even after her cries as she rejects him and tries to get him to stop, he still didn't listen, which is shown by the lines "Oh, no, no, now behave," she said. "Now! come on, we do have to go back to the party. No, Shevek, now calm down, this won't do at all!" (...) "Now, stop," she said." (Le Guin 1993, 189-190).

Only when Shevek saw the look on her face after more pleas of her for him to stop and after she had already pushed him did he realize that it was not consensual. This scene not only shows how differently men and women interact with each other in Urras comparing to how it is in Anarres but also how the decision-making process of the main character works. Whereas in Anarres romantic relationships are built upon a clear discussion of desire, where the parties debate their wants and needs, in Urras - and due to the unequal power relations in which women are hypersexualized and objectified - consent is a word that seems not to exist, simply because women's agency is not recognized.

Le Guin portrays the Anarresti society as dynamic and flawed, acknowledging the complexities and contradictions inherent to any social system, while at the same time exploring the challenges and tensions that arise within Anarres, namely the conflict between individual freedom and collective responsibility. However, there is also evidence of certain latitude in terms of social freedoms. For one, Anarres operates under a decentralized form of governance based on anarchist principles, in which individuals have a high degree of autonomy and agency. Furthermore, Anarres embraces diversity and non-conformity, which allows the inhabitants to choose from and have a wide range of lifestyles, beliefs, and opinions, which is not always seen in utopian societies. One example of that could be their views on women and their capabilities. Utopian societies usually focus

on equality and on assuring everyone has their human rights in full. However, throughout the novel, we can see that women on Urras are despised, perceived as less smart and motivated, and thus not welcomed in scientific areas. It also explores the interactions and interdependencies between Anarres and Urras while highlighting the challenges and dilemmas that arise when utopian ideals collide with external realities. These literary strategies add depth and complexity to the narrative, challenging simplistic notions of utopia and dystopia.

ELEMENTS OF SCIENCE FICTION AND UTOPIAN LITERATURE WITHIN THE NOVEL

Throughout the novel, we can understand how science fiction elements in *The Dispossessed* contribute to enlarging our understanding of utopian thinking in multiple different ways. By employing science fiction as a tool for speculative world-building, Le Guin creates two contrasting societies to allow the reader to question different approaches to social organization and their implications on individual freedom, community, and justice.

Indeed, *The Dispossessed* explores alternative sociopolitical systems and their impact on human behavior and relationships, which, by juxtaposing these different systems, create an atmosphere where Le Guin prompts the readers to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of various political ideologies and their potential to shape human societies. In this sense, not only the utopian tropes are challenged, but also the classic science fiction elements in a successful attempt to interrogate traditional utopian ideals and defy simplistic notions of utopia and dystopia, as epitomized by the Anarresti society. While founded on principles of equality and freedom, Anarres is not depicted as a perfect society but rather as a place of struggle, sacrifice, and compromise. Moreover, the novel explores the tensions and contradictions inherent to utopian thinking, highlighting the complexities of building and sustaining a just and equitable society. Finally, by setting the novel in a distant future and on different worlds, Le Guin creates a space for speculation and imagination, exploring what utopian ideals might look like in practice and how they could evolve over time. This speculative aspect of science fiction invites readers to envision new possibilities for human societies, and consider the ways in which utopian thinking can inform and shape our collective future.

“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” (1993, 247) and “There's a point, around the age of twenty, when you have to choose whether to be like everybody else the rest of your life, or to make a virtue of your peculiarities” (*idem*, 206) are symbolic quotes that testify to the strength and ethos of the novel. They inspire change and a willingness to fight for what we think is right, not giving up regardless of the obstacles that appear in the way or if you stand alone in that fight. And that is a true trademark of Utopian Literature.

For we each of us deserve everything, every luxury that was ever piled in the tombs of the dead kings, and we each of us deserve nothing, not a mouthful of bread in hunger. Have we not eaten while another starved? Will you punish us for that? Will you reward us for the virtue of starving while others ate? No man earns punishment, no man earns reward. Free your mind of the idea of deserving, the idea of earning, and you will begin to be able to think. (1993, 293)

This is another quote that makes us wonder about the world we live in and how the basic needs and what we have might influence who we are, how we act and think. Moreover, it is also clear how the novel has stood apart from the traditional utopian narratives known from the time by challenging the limitations associated with those narratives presenting a more nuanced and complex portrayal of utopia; indeed, an *ambiguous* utopia.

This novel's richly imagined world-building, complex characters and thought-provoking themes have made it an influential work of science fiction literature. *The Dispossessed* remains widely acclaimed for its exploration of social and political issues, its philosophical depth, and its compelling narrative that challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions about society, power, and human experiences. Nowadays, it is still a highly appreciated book, which points out how Le Guin's work has inspired subsequent authors and expanded the boundaries of speculative fiction. Through thought-provoking exploration of relevant themes, it has inspired subsequent authors to engage with similar topics in their own works, encouraging deeper examinations of political ideologies, power dynamics, and social structures within speculative fiction.¹⁰ It is a rich novel that represents human being's predisposition to never be satisfied, which results in an attempt to try to achieve what they believe to be an ideal place and circumstances or, in other words, a utopia.

At the same time, Le Guin's novel also challenged utopian conventions by having an innovative approach to traditional utopian communities, which inspired other authors to rethink the limitations of utopian narratives and explore more nuanced and realistic visions of ideal societies, expanding the possibilities for utopian fiction within the genre.

Alongside other great feminist utopian writers, Le Guin's feminist representation has inspired subsequent authors to incorporate diverse and empowered female characters into their speculative fiction, contributing to greater diversity within the genre by featuring strong and complex female characters, including Takver, who challenge traditional gender roles and expectations. The way Le Guin experimented with a peculiar narrative structure has inspired subsequent authors to explore unconventional storytelling methods in their own speculative fiction as well, pushing the boundaries of narrative form and style within the genre, while her commitment to social commentary and critique has hopefully inspired other authors to use speculative fiction as a platform for addressing pressing social, political, and environmental issues.

END NOTES

¹Dystopia, or negative utopia, (a term that appears in "The Utopia Reader", an anthology edited by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent published in 1999 by the New York University Press) is similar to the yin and yang relationship. Dystopias usually have a negative view on the world, therefore being a way a writer has of criticizing the existent world, showing the readers what needs to be changed by presenting a worst case scenario.

²A concept from the Chinese philosophy that describes an opposite but interconnected cycle. According to those values and beliefs, Yin represents what's female/passive/negative principle in nature while Yang represents male/active/positive principle in nature. For more information about Le Guin's connection between the Yin-Yang symbol and utopianism, please see the article "The Utopia in Omelas, a Yin-Yang analysis" by Rita Morais F. also published in this issue.

³The term, that was first used in 1516 by Thomas More in his text “Utopia” (where he described an imaginary island society with an ideal political and social structure) to name the described island, grew to mean a lot more. It is known that human beings have always been somewhat unsatisfied with the living conditions, realistically knowing it was far from being ideal and perfect. From Arcadia and the Golden Ages to the 16th century, we have been known to always want to find flaws in the times we were living, times that were (and still are) up to standards of the general population.

⁴Amongst them are: National Book Award, seven Hugo Awards, six Nebula Awards, the Howard Vursell Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the PEN/Malamud Award.

⁵Urras is a lush and stratified planet characterized by capitalism, inequality, and political intrigue.

⁶Laia Odo was the founder of a philosophical, political and economic system. It is mentioned that some of Odo's writings are two hundred years old (such as the ones about marriage, sexual intimacy and prostitution). Odonians know that it is their common nature to be responsible for one another and that the idea of responsibility is linked to the idea of freedom. Decentralization was a crucial element in Odo's plans for the society. She envisioned a society without a center: no capital, no establishment for bureaucracy, and also no dominance over people by any elite. Although her complex vision for a new society, she did not live to see it.

⁷Gender inequality and prejudice are seen throughout the book, one of them being in a discussion between Oiie and Pae witnessed by Shevek about their views on women. It is mentioned how they believe they are not intelligent enough to study and work in science.

⁸ In “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” (1975), Le Guin describes how Virginia Woolf influenced the way “created” her characters. However, Le Guin did not think of the process as “a creation” rather a “way of listening”. She believed that “all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite. I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character (...) The great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character” (98). She claims that, if that was not the case, they would not be novelists but poets or historians instead, defending novels and fiction are connected with individuals since the assertion of human personality is related to the human morality.

⁹There are also references to exploration of subjectivity and reality by having characters grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and purpose throughout the novel. An example is the blur between the reality and perception, namely the way in which Shevek's interactions with the inhabitants of Urras and his experiences reveal cultural shock and alienation.

¹⁰ See the review by Francisca Neto of an anthology of short stories inspired by Le Guin in this issue of VIA PANORAMICA.

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