VIA
PANORAMICA
Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos
A Journal of Anglo-American Studies

THE DISPOSSESSED: 50 YEARS SINCE 50 YEARS HENCE

A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

SUBSECTION BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

THEMATIC SECTION

False History, False Gods: The Connection between Power and Information in *Dune* (1965) and *City of Illusions* (1967)

INÊS PASTOR
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

ABSTRACT: The interest in understanding how information is controlled and circulated has recently increased exponentially, mostly due to the spread of *dis*information from those in power (those looking to attain it or increase it). Seemingly widespread — though by no means a recent occurrence — during the 2016 American Presidential Campaign, the reliance on disinformation to steer public opinion has also characterized, for example, the rise of far-right political parties such as *Chega* (Portugal) and *Vox* (Spain) across Europe as well as how the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are presented on social media. It has become, thus, mandatory to rely on fact-checking platforms but, above all, on our own critical thinking and ability to scrutinize information and its sources. As a result, it seems relevant to also analyze this subject matter in literature, as a way of attempting to obtain some insight into how to navigate and mitigate the problem. This article aims to examine how information, history and

RESUMO: A análise de como o controlo e divulgação da informação acontecem tem recentemente aumentado exponencialmente, devido principalmente ao aumento da *des*informação por parte daqueles que estão no poder (pretendem obtê-lo ou expandi-lo). Tendo-se aparentemente normalizado — ainda que não seja de todo uma ocorrência recente — durante a Campanha Presidencial Americana de 2016, a dependência da desinformação para orientar a opinião pública tem também vindo a caracterizar, por exemplo, a ascensão dos partidos políticos de extrema-direita como o *Chega* (Portugal) ou o *Vox* (Espanha) assim como a forma como os conflitos na Ucrânia e em Gaza são retratados nas redes sociais. Tornou-se, portanto, obrigatório recorrer a plataformas de *fact-checking* mas, acima de tudo, ao nosso próprio pensamento crítico e capacidade de examinar a informação e as suas fontes. Como resultado, parece ser relevante também analisar este assunto na literatura, de forma a tentar

legend are weaponized by different entities to oppress those with less power in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *City of Illusions* (1967), and also consider the presence, in both novels, of elements of hope and liberation from oppression through the unveiling of truth, whatever it may be. To achieve this, key and representative moments in both novels are contemplated briefly and then compared, establishing a sort of dialogue between Herbert and Le Guin's respective *imaginaria*.

KEYWORDS: *Dune*, *City of Illusions*, Power, Information/Disinformation, Oppression

obter algum conhecimento sobre como navegar e mitigar o problema. Este artigo tem como objetivo examinar como a informação, a história e as lendas são instrumentalizadas por diferentes entidades para oprimir aqueles que têm menos poder em *Dune* (1965) de Frank Herbert e *City of Illusions* (1967) de Ursula K. Le Guin, e ainda considerar a presença, em ambos os romances, de elementos de esperança na libertação da opressão através da descoberta da verdade, seja ela qual for. Para isto, momentos-chave e representativos dos romances são brevemente contemplados e depois comparados, estabelecendo uma espécie de diálogo entre os imaginários respetivos de Herbert e Le Guin.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Dune*, *City of Illusions*, Poder, Informação/Desinformação, Opressão

'Let us never deceive ourselves, Nefud. The truth is a powerful weapon.'

— Frank Herbert, *Dune*

'There's always more than one way towards the truth.'

— Ursula K. Le Guin, *City of Illusions*

In 1965, Frank Herbert told us the story of a planet which succumbs to the control of “the Voice from the Outer World”, a messiah prophesized to lead the native population to freedom from their oppression and exploitation by feudal lords. As a "messiah", his actions are perceived as "justified" by “history” and legends planted there by a powerful order of mystics hundreds or even thousands of years earlier. Two years later, Ursula K. Le Guin introduced us to Earth’s tyrannical Shing Lords, whose strategies of control alternated between keeping some parts of the population in ignorance and isolation, and spreading false history to protect their own position. In Le Guin's story, the Shing's status quo is then challenged by a “messenger” from an alien world whose actions might later lead to the deliverance of those people, kin of his ancestors, from their plight. There are clear parallels and contrasts to be drawn between the two texts, especially considering the relationship between power and information is presented in *Dune* through the point of view of the rulers, while in *City of Illusions* it is mostly viewed through the lens of the ruled. Though both are by no means recent publications, it seems imperative that stories about this subject matter be reassessed in light of the past few years, with the rise of the dissemination of mis- and, more worryingly, disinformation and “fake news” as direct attempts (successful or not) to obtain political power. After all, as Elizabeth Cummins remarked, “[s]cience fiction, as the commonplace saying goes, is about the here and now” (1990, 65).

It may be appropriate to first clarify the difference between misinformation and disinformation before considering the novels. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, John Palfrey defines misinformation as incorrect information being shared unintentionally, while the European Commission describes disinformation “as false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (2018, 10). Though most of the discussion in this article will pertain to disinformation, it is undeniable that the two are intrinsically connected, and both are present in *Dune* and *City of Illusions*, as further analysis will demonstrate.

One of the first things that a reader comes across in either novel is just how often information is discussed: both novels include considerations on the flow and control of information from the beginning of their respective narratives. Quite early on in *Dune*, the author delves into the topic in a dialogue between the main character — Paul Atreides — and his father, the Duke Leto Atreides:

> 'You lead well,' Paul protested. 'You govern well. Men follow you willingly and love you.'
> 'My propaganda corps is one of the finest,' the Duke said. . . . 'We mustn't run short of filmbase,' the Duke said. 'Else, how could we flood village and city with our information? The people must learn how well I govern them. How would they know if we didn't tell them?' (Herbert 112)

When House Atreides first take control of Arrakis, one of their first concerns is how to win the native communities to their side — be that the village dwellers who are considered subjects of the Empire, or the Fremen, who seemingly live more on the fringe of *Dune*'s galactic society. To achieve this, they immediately devise plans to spread propaganda both among those already loyal to the House — "'This lets the men know their Duke is concerned for their safety,' Halleck said. 'Word will get around. . . .'" (129) — and those who must still be convinced to accept (and perhaps even come to revere) them — "'I've read the propaganda you've flooded into sietch and village,' Kynes said. 'Love the good Duke!'" (121). In other words, the opening scenes on Arrakis easily establish "the control and ownership of information [as] being a crucial political issue" (Connerton 1999, 1).

In a completely different context, *City of Illusions* opens with a main character who is essentially a blank slate — Falk's mind has been erased of all memories and knowledge, forcing him to rely on the "histories" and quasi-folkloric myths shared by the people of Zove's House (a Forest community who takes him in and helps him become a functional being again) to build his understanding of the world around him. But though the situations are vastly different, one is immediately reminded of "How would they know if we didn't tell them?" (Herbert 112) when reading the following dialogue:

> 'So you taught me yourself, and the books, the histories —'
> 'You believe them? You believe all we tell you?'
> 'What else can I believe?' He flushed red. 'Why would you lie to me?'
> 'We might lie to you day and night about everything, for either of two good reasons. Because we are Shing. Or because we think you serve them.' (Le Guin 16)

What could Falk, someone with no personal, cultural, or social memory, believe but that which he had been taught by those around him since his rescue from the wilderness? To recall Herbert's words, *how would he know if they didn't tell him?* Lorenzo Veracini

describes the relationship between information and construction of self as such: "Narratives and their availability matter . . . their construction constitutes an act that allows nations, communities, and individuals to make sense of the world" (2010, 96). The "histories" the community of Zove's house shared with Falk as they harbored him allowed him to "make sense of the world" after the loss of his memories. Though, of course, in this part of Le Guin's novel Falk is encouraged to question the information he is given even by people he trusts, while in *Dune*, the information being spread by the propaganda corps of the Atreides is meant to be accepted as truth. Nevertheless, the importance of *narratives* cannot be overstated.

Another matter House Atreides must contend with when they arrive on Arrakis is the lack of official or credible information regarding activities on the planet. Specifically, they theorize that its former rulers, the Harkonnens, intentionally had withheld information:

> 'The Harkonnens sealed off many sources of information about Arrakis. Perhaps there was reason to suppress this.'
> . . . 'There are things here behind the Harkonnen veil that bear close investigation, and not all of those things are directly involved with the spice.'
> 'We are indeed behind the Harkonnen veil,' he said. (Herbert 66)

Despite perceiving themselves and being seen by others to be superior rulers to the Harkonnens (136), it is nonetheless thought-provoking that the Atreides employ the exact same methods they accuse the Harkonnens of, and which also impacted their own transition from their homeworld of Caladan to Arrakis, which were: suppressing and manipulating information according to their own needs.[1] Mulcahy words it best:

> The key to the novel is not a simplistic opposition between the Harkonnens and the Atreides but the disturbing similarity between the two. . . . That [Leto], unlike the Harkonnens, loves his pawns and regrets their loss bitterly is ultimately of little comfort to the thousands who die in his cause. (29)

Regardless, despite the Atreides' belief that the Harkonnens purposefully kept the truth about Arrakis obscure from the rest of the Imperium, we come to realize that it was more a case of underestimating the native population considering them an ignorant

minority. In fact, once the Harkonnens retake control of the planet after massacring House Atreides, they immediately begin to downplay Fremen activity once again. In the latter half of the novel, there is a scene which proves this quite distinctly:

> 'Have you heard the latest word from Arrakis?' the Baron asked. . . . 'They've a new prophet or religious leader of some kind among the Fremen,' the Baron said. 'They call him Muad'Dib. Very funny, really. It means "the Mouse". I've told Rabban to let them have their religion. It'll keep them occupied.' (Herbert 396)

One of the main reasons as to why information may be misrepresented, misinterpreted or just *false* is not having, or in this case, not looking for, reliable sources. If an entity believes another to be less than, any data that corroborates this belief will be taken as truth, especially if there is, perhaps, a subconscious need to validate their own superiority. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes:

> [Imperialism and colonialism] are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination . . . : the vocabulary of nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like "inferior" or "subject races," "subordinate peoples," "dependency," "expansion," and "authority." (1994, 9)

Though the quote addresses real-world imperialism and colonialism, the parallels (to both novels, in fact, and especially regarding language) are clear, and it is undeniable that the feudal system in *Dune* operates within the scope of both imperialism and colonialism.

Similarly, the sense that there is a missing historical context permeates *City of Illusions*. Unlike in *Dune*, rather than certain knowledge about the planet being intentionally concealed by the native community, in Le Guin's novel each faction Falk meets as he makes his way to Es Toch keeps little knowledge of the past, even in the cases where they have attempted to preserve it:

> 'What do we really know of the time of our greatness? A few names of worlds and heroes, a ragtag of facts we've tried to patch into a history. The Shing law forbids killing, but they killed knowledge, they burned books, and what may be worse, they falsified what was left. . . . They let us be so long as we stay here, in the cage of our ignorance and the wilderness, bowing when they pass by above our heads.' (Le Guin 18)

But while the reasons for the lack of information on Le Guin's Earth and Herbert's Arrakis widely differ, there is one constant: much as the Harkonnens strongly underestimate the Fremen and their beliefs, the Shing are also condescending towards Falk/Ramarren and the other inhabitants of Werel about their own history, despite having had no involvement or prior knowledge of it:

> After several centuries, then, the colony had come on to hard days. Few children were conceived, still fewer born alive. Here again the boy paused, explaining finally, 'I remember your telling me that Alterrans didn't know what was happening to them, they thought it was some bad effect of inbreeding, but actually it was a sort of selection. The Lords, here, say it couldn't have been that, that no matter how long an alien colony is established on a planet they remain alien. . . . Anyhow, the colonists were getting near extinction when what was left of them finally managed to make an alliance with a native Werelian nation . . . and when the spring breeding season came, they found that Tevarans and Alterrans could reproduce. Enough of them, at least, to found a hybrid race. The Lords say that is not possible. But I remember you telling it to me.' (Le Guin 99)

The need for control and the belief in their own intellectual superiority — markings of the Shing's politics of imperialism and colonialism, much like those of the Great Houses of *Dune* — are both so strongly ingrained in these *Lords* that they cannot even believe that a different society might have achieved what they could not (as we later learn that the Shing have failed to do what the Alterrans did on Werel — reproduce with the native population — and their numbers seem to be dwindling). Consequently, they attempt to rewrite the history remembered by a young, malleable mind. As expected, power dynamics cannot be ignored when considering how information flows. Margaret MacMillan explains that "[p]olitical and other leaders too often get away with misusing or abusing history for their own ends because the rest of us do not know enough to challenge them", and while the statement certainly applies to the leaders presented by both Herbert and Le Guin, it is also true that even when others *do know* more than them, they still attempt to enforce their own "truth" (2009, n/p).

It is, thus, made clear by the previous examples that authority over (dis)information is spread across many groups and entities in both novels and that this authority shifts as the narrative evolves: House Harkonnen, House Atreides, the Bene Gesserit/the

Missionaria Protectiva, the Lisan al-Gaib/Muad'Dib; the community of Zove's House, the old Listener, Estrel, the Prince of Kansas, the Shing, Orry, Ramarren. Out of all these, it may now be pertinent to compare Muad'Dib (with support from the Bene Gesserit) to the Shing directly, given their unique positions at the top of the hierarchal power structure in their respective settings.

In "Terminology of the Imperium", one of the appendices to *Dune*, the Missionaria Protectiva are described as "the arm of the Bene Gesserit order charged with sowing infectious superstitions on primitive worlds, thus opening those regions to exploitation by the Bene Gesserit" (Herbert 567). The legend of the Lisan al-Gaib, central to the conflict of the novel, was one such superstition and prophecy planted by one or more members of the Missionaria Protectiva hundreds of years (or perhaps even longer) before the Atreides arrived on Arrakis, meant to aid a member of the Bene Gesserit on the planet, should necessity arise: "the protective legends implanted in these people against the day of a Bene Gesserit's need" (59). Paul Atreides (who is later known as Muad'Dib), under the tutelage of his Bene Gesserit mother, Jessica, makes use of the prophecy after the Harkonnen attack which decimates their House, including Paul's father, and causes the two of them to go on the run: "'We'll find a home among the Fremen,' Paul said, 'where your Missionaria Protectiva has bought us a bolt hole'" (211). They successfully, as Paul predicted, insert themselves into Fremen society by implying, at first subtly but eventually truly "accepting" the mantle, that they are the individuals prophesized. Most of their time among the Fremen, if not all of it, is spent winning them to their cause (initially of revenge against the Harkonnens, though it eventually becomes a cause of religious and political conquest) by manipulating their belief in the local legends, the origins of which they were both already aware. To put it simply, they give continuity to *lies* to obtain power among the native population, seeing them as little more than a means to an end: "The revelation shook him, and Jessica thought: *If only he knew the tricks we use! . . . These Fremen are beautifully prepared to believe in us*" (305).

In the same degree, Judith Caesar suggests that in *City of Illusions,* "Le Guin seems to be implying that . . . societies also dominate one another by control of the narrative" (2010, 50). One scene which seems especially relevant to this discussion is the following:

> 'Some desperate men on Earth, dominating the struggle for a moment but knowing further counter-revolt and wreckage and ruin was inevitable, employed a new weapon. They lied. They

> invented a new name for themselves, and a language, and some vague tales of the remote home-world they came from, and they went spreading the rumour over Earth . . . that the Enemy had come. . . . Men believed the tale. It suited their panic . . . Since men insisted that the Enemy had come and ruled the Earth, we called ourselves the Enemy, and ruled.' (Le Guin 105)

Therefore, the Shing weaponized the belief that the communities were isolated in the world and prey to a much more dangerous enemy – an utter lie - in an effort to maintain the status quo on Earth. Resorting to this sort of strategies, the Shing could effectively control the communities and discourage them from initiating a "counter-revolt". As MacMillan wrote, "Dictators, perhaps because they know their own lies so well, have usually realized the power of history. Consequently, they have tried to rewrite, deny, or destroy the past" (2009, n/p). Additionally, Rachel Kuo and Alice Marwick have stated that "the powerful have historically used 'knowledge' to establish, justify, and support racial inequality and colonialism" (2021). Though both statements were written in the context of real-life history and real-life politics, it is undeniable, when considering the full narrative of *City of Illusions*, that what is described in both pieces still applies to the (historical or on-page) events of Le Guin's novel. The Shing perceived the benefits of rewriting the past in certain situations (such as when attempting to convince Falk that his previous beliefs about them were untrue), portraying themselves as misunderstood, secret heroes who bear a heavy burden. Ironically enough, whatever the truth is (which, closer to the end of the novel, is discovered to be that the Shing are indeed "the Enemy" from another world), there is never a situation in which the Shing do not lie regardless of intentions.

> [Falk] tried to pull himself together. Standing rigid, not moving towards her, he asked. 'Are you a Shing?'
> 'I am a Shing. All Shing are liars. Am I, then, a Shing lying to you, in which case of course I am not a Shing, but a non-Shing, lying? Or is it a lie that all Shing lie? But I am a Shing, truly; and truly I lie. . . . Strella, this one is even stupider than the child.' (89)

Though this exchange is meant to confuse the protagonist, or for the Shing to perhaps boast their own intelligence by refuting and counter-refuting the beliefs held about themselves — and given that Lord Kradgy, the speaker, openly calls Falk stupid — it is, as most scenes involving any of them, quite telling. In the end, information is always

manipulated somehow, and it always stands to benefit those doing the manipulation since it is usually designed to make others (mostly those they oppress) fear them. In this sense, the Shing do not differ much from other "antagonists in the Hainish stories [who] are almost always men who seek personal power and gratification regardless of the effects on the freedom of others or on the nature of the community" (Cummins 1993, 13).

There is also something to be said about how in both novels there is a sense of irony or paradox tied to how the oppressors, in each case, perceive their manipulative actions and their consequences on the people around them. In *Dune*, this is most obvious in the character of Jessica: "She sighed. '... motivating people, forcing them to your will, gives you a cynical attitude toward humanity. It degrades everything it touches.'" (Herbert 69); "And she felt a cynical bitterness at what she had done. *Our Missionaria Protectiva seldom fails. A place was prepared for us in this wilderness. . . . Now... I must play the part*" (316). There is a recognition of the corruptive nature of manipulation, but it is carried out regardless. Power outweighs integrity. However, it may be also worth pointing out that, as Mulcahy notes, their admission of this corruption is perhaps one of the few points in which the Atreides differ from the Harkonnens (30), despite all their similarities and even shared kinship.

The Shing of *City of Illusions* have a rule regarding not killing other living beings, but as cited before, "they killed knowledge" (Le Guin 18). There is one other scene where this paradox is evident:

> Falk said . . . 'You can restore my earlier memory only at the cost of my present memory — is that true?'
>
> . . . 'And we have been tempted to lie to you about this, to spare you fear and doubt and make your decision easy. But it is best that you know the truth; we would not have it otherwise, nor, I think, would you. . . .'
>
> 'To revive Ramarren you must kill Falk, then.'
>
> 'We do not kill,' the Shing said in his harsh whisper, then repeated it with blazing intensity in mindspeech — 'We do not kill!'
>
> . . . 'To live one must agree to die,' Falk said, and saw the mask-face wince. 'Very well. I agree. I consent to let you kill me. My consent does not really matter, does it? — yet you want it.'
>
> 'We will not kill you.' The whisper was louder. 'We do not kill.' (Le Guin 119)

The Lords do not believe *mindrazing*, as it is called in the novel, to be an act of killing, but is it not an extermination of the self — personal or collective — to lose one's memories, one's history, one's sense of place in the world? Caesar goes further, linking the process to colonial tactics:

> In *City of Illusions*, mind-razing [sic] . . . is developed as a metaphor for the process of colonizing the minds of a subject people. It suggests the ways in which history can be ignored, destroyed, or misinterpreted; the ways in which cultural values can be distorted and misrepresented; and the ways in which people can be made to feel dependent and inferior. (2010, 228)

In contrast to the characters of *Dune*, who at least recognize the truth of their actions, the Shing are obsessed with their own false sense of integrity despite their position as a colonizing, imperialistic power which continues to employ these manipulative methods oppressively.

Another point which carries a certain tone of irony in *Dune* is how despite being responsible for their newfound fanatic fervor, Paul sees his believers as inferior:

> In that instant, Paul saw how Stilgar had been transformed from the Fremen naib to a *creature* of the Lisan al-Gaib, a receptacle for awe and obedience. It was a lessening of the man, and Paul felt the ghost-wind of the jihad in it.
> *I have seen a friend become a worshipper*, he thought. (Herbert 507)

Irony aside, this fact further evidences the colonialist and imperialist outlook (as characterized by Said) Paul has towards the Fremen, who he nonetheless relies on to achieve his goals. Yet, this outlook did not originate with the main character. The political system of *Dune*, as previously stated, especially as it is implemented on Arrakis, is at its core imperialist and colonialist, plainly establishing a hierarchy between the superior "outworlders" who exploit (or try to, given the Fremen's strongly marked independence before the arrival of House Atreides) the "inferior" natives as well as the planet's resources. Gwilym L. Eades also suggests as much: "The economics and culture of Dune form the basis for an imperial and unequal power relationship between off-worlders and indigenous Fremen" (2023, ch. 5), "[The Shield Wall] is a key boundary between the "primitive" Fremen and the "advanced" imperial powers and actors" (*idem*).

In spite of that, it is perhaps worth noting that it is possible, considering his prescience, that Paul knew what would happen in this instance. Be that as it may, it is still interesting to read his inner monologue regarding the changes brought on the people closest to him by his own actions of taking up the mantle of the messianic figure of the Lisan al-Gaib, lamenting what he (and they) most likely has lost. But there is only a very limited group of people, himself perhaps above all, responsible for the cementing of this hierarchy.

Having previously established that Le Guin's Shing regard themselves as superior to the native Terran population, there is still a specific moment which we may consider in comparison with the one just examined:

> Falk disliked the tone of the word 'natives' in Orry's mouth, and he finally asked with a trace of irony, 'How do you know which you should bow to and which should bow to you? I can't tell Lords from Natives. The Lords are natives — aren't they? . . . I don't understand what keeps the Lords, the Shing, apart from the natives, if they are all Terran men together.'
> 'Why, knowledge, power . . .'
> 'But they keep themselves a caste apart? You said the Lords believe in democracy.' (115-116)

The reader and Falk eventually become aware of the truth, but the child Orry has been groomed by the Shing to believe their version of the story, parroting what he has been told about their being Terran while simultaneously reinforcing the hierarchy that separates the "Lords" and the "Natives", even if he subconsciously comes close to understanding the truth: "'They do not touch common men, prech Ramarren — they are like gods, cold and kind and wise — they hold themselves apart—'" (113). The Shing claim to be common men who depicted themselves as "the Enemy" to keep the peace, while keeping themselves apart. Similarly, they claim that it is not their intention to keep knowledge away from the non-Shing men, while preventing the rise of any other seat of power or knowledge: "'Some of them say that they have sunk so low because the Shing keep them low; that if they seek knowledge the Shing prevent them, if they seek to form a City of their own the Shing destroy it, and them'" (113). Perhaps most telling of all is how Orry's perception of "the natives" has been skewed by the Shing's indoctrination, leading him to echo sentiments such as those described by Said regarding real-world nineteenth century imperialism: "'You see, prech Ramarren, it is not true that the Lords

refuse to teach the natives — it is the natives who refuse to learn'" (115). Overall, there is a clear separation between the Lords and the rest of the population, regardless of whether the Shing are actually Terrans or not, and this separation was created and enforced by one group only — the Shing themselves. Though here the lamentations regarding this fact are most likely faked to inspire trust and faith in Orry and Falk/Ramarren (unlike in Herbert's novel, where Paul's regret seems ever so slightly more believable, considering the context), it is not unthinkable that, after thousands of years of ruling Earth, the Shing would expect to be more ingrained or at least accepted by true Terrans. Falk-Ramarren's inner monologue – after his awakening to both sets of memories, he rethinks all he knows about the Shing and comes to his own conclusions as to what *the truth* may be – points us towards this conclusion:

> "They had refused to believe Orry's tale of how the Terrans on Werel had mutated towards the local biological norm and so finally blended stocks with the native hominids. They had said that was impossible: which meant that it had not happened to them . . . They were still alien, then, after twelve hundred years; still isolated on Earth." (142)

However, once again, they have only themselves to blame for their own isolation. To bend history and legend to obtain power and to set oneself a step (or many) above others, is to reject inclusion and community based on equality (biology could be a valid concern in terms of continuity, but when remembering Falk's experience at Zove's House, one could argue that it is not as important) in exchange for dominance.

Lastly, the utopian belief in a "messenger" from a different world and in hope of deliverance is perhaps the most evident similarity between the two novels. In a 2015 blog post titled "Utopiyin, Utopiyang", Le Guin wrote that "[e]very utopia since *Utopia* has also been, clearly or obscurely, actually or possibly, in the authors or in the readers' judgment, both a good place and a bad one. Every eutopia contains a dystopia, every dystopia contains a eutopia". Both Herbert's Arrakis and Le Guin's Earth are without a doubt dystopian settings. Le Guin's argument brings a new light to understand the messengers of these novels. Both are presented as a source of hope in an otherwise bleak world, since their destinies and their actions inspire hope in the oppressed peoples and instigate resistance. In *Dune*, the Fremen hope that the Lisan al-Gaib, "the Voice from the Outer World", will

come and fulfill their dream of turning the dystopic desert planet into an ecological paradise:

> 'We will make a homeworld of Arrakis —' . . .
> Jessica felt the religious ritual in the words . . . *They're in league with the future*, she thought. *They have their mountain to climb. This is the scientist's dream... and these simple people, these peasants, are filled with it.*
> Her thoughts turned to Liet-Kynes, the Emperor's planetary ecologist . . . This was a dream to capture men's souls, and she could sense the hand of the ecologist in it. (Herbert 343)

However, whereas Paul takes up this mantle of the promised messiah and does begin the terraforming process on Arrakis during his time as Emperor (though this happens in one of the sequel novels, not *Dune*), we know that the Lisan al-Gaib legends were created by the Bene Gesserit. Therefore, the hope he inspired has also a foundation of falsehood. Moreover, Paul/Muad'Dib's rule of the Fremen actually expands Arrakis's dystopian setting to include other worlds due to the imperialistic *jihad*, during which at least over 60 billion people die across the Known Universe over the course of little more than a decade as Fremen warriors forcefully spread Muad'Dib's religion and conquer resistant worlds. As it is explained in *Dune Messiah* (1969), this religious conquest effectively makes Paul Atreides a colonizer not only of Arrakis, but also the conqueror of most of the Known Universe. A false "messenger" who brings hope and the promise of their eutopia to one people while commanding them to decimate the "non-believers" (sowing, for lack of a better word, the seeds of dystopia) is certainly something to consider if we think back on one of the initial proposals of this article, which was to contemplate how the control of information is presented and how it may relate to – or give insight into – our current reality.

On the other hand, in *City of Illusions* there are two "messengers": Falk/Ramarren and Orry. Falk is the first to be seen as such by Zove, the leader of the community which takes him in after finding him lost in the forest:

> 'I will tell you what I believe about you. I think you came from a lost world . . . I think you came here, the first Alien to return in a thousand years or more, bringing us a message or a sign. The Shing stopped your mouth . . . If you go I will grieve and fear for you, knowing how alone you go. But I will hope for you, and for ourselves! If you had words to speak to men,

> you'll remember them, in the end. There must be a hope, a sign: we cannot go on like this forever.' (Le Guin 19)

Zove also refers to something called "the... legend, the guess, the hope...." (17), hinting that among the Forest communities (the "Houses") there is a dream of deliverance from their dystopian living — "Falk had not lived on Earth among children, but among men, brutalized, suffering, and impassioned" (151). On the contrary, Orry has been prepared by the Shing for years to serve as their messenger: "In that case, their grooming of young Orry indicated that he was to be their messenger. . . . Mindless, honest, disastrous, Orry would carry the Lie to Werel" (143). Ramarren was needed for one thing only: information (ironic as that may be) on how to reach Werel, since Orry could not provide it — being too young and belonging to only the First level of "prechnoye.... I don't know how to say it in Galaktika. Knowledge, I guess" (108). It is revealed that "the stratification of Werelian society was directed by the conviction that knowledge and technique must remain under intelligent control. . . . [I]n Kelshy knowledge was religion, religion knowledge" (141). Society is divided by levels of knowledge, keeping those at the lowest levels from knowing too much and those at higher levels to be unable to share key information unless prompted to in a very specific setting. It is important to consider this when examining Falk/Ramarren, who (as Falk) spends the majority of the novel in search of *the truth* and resisting those who would hide it from him or rewrite it, only to find out his/Ramarren's own society enforced a very specific control of information.

Nevertheless, Falk-Ramarren eventually realizes the Shing's intention to use Orry for their purposes and concludes that, instead, he himself must become this messenger *from Earth* to Werel:

> He had not been sent with a message to mankind, as Zove had dreamed. The hope was a stranger one even than that, the sign more obscure. He was to carry mankind's message, to utter their cry for help, for deliverance.
> *I must go home; I must tell them the truth,* he thought. (144)
> Though in the end, there are in fact three "messengers" sent to Werel:
> 'Prech Ramarren,' [Orry] said hoarsely, clutching at Falk-Ramarren's arm, 'where are we going?'
> 'To Werel.'
> 'He's coming too — Ken Kenyek?'

'Yes. He can tell Werel his tale about Earth, and you can tell yours, and I mine...' (158)

One way or another, the truth of what had happened (or *not* happened, as the case may be) on Earth would eventually come to light. The message(s) is (are) delivered, and the Terrans and Werelians wait, holding on to their dreams, of liberation and of homecoming, and, as expected, Le Guin leaves us with an inkling of eutopia at the end of a dystopian story.

To conclude, both *Dune* and *City of Illusions* certainly provide intriguing and useful insight into the dynamics between power (be it political, economic, religious, or otherwise) and information, while also leaving behind a number of warnings, such as to mistrust — or, at the very least, question — leaders, especially the charismatic ones, and how they deal with and spread (dis)information. As Macmillan wrote, "we must always be prepared to consider alternatives and to raise questions" (2009). From the 2016 American Presidential Elections (and the Trump Presidency that followed) to the ways in which social media is, at this very moment, weaponized in relation to the armed conflicts in both Ukraine and Gaza, if the last few years have established anything, it is that it is now almost impossible to ethically absorb information without first questioning whether its source is reliable, and also find out any secondary intentions those sources might have. And, although the two novels were written in a very different socio-cultural context nearly sixty years ago, the lessons left behind by Frank Herbert and Ursula K. Le Guin feel timeless and useful in inspiring us to confront our current challenges.

END NOTES

[1] It is later discovered that it is in fact mostly the Fremen who are responsible for the scarcity of information about Arrakis and its people (by bribing certain entities, such as the Spacing Guild, with large quantities of the spice to keep their deep desert activities as well as other data such as true population number a secret or, at the very least, vague).

WORKS CITED

Caesar, Judith (2010). "A Post-Colonial Ursula Le Guin". *Atenea: A Bilingual Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. XXX, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 47-66. URL: https://cannyuncanny.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/ateneaxxx_1-2.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A135%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22FitR%22%7D%2C-214%2C-53%2C664%2C701%5D. Accessed 08 March 2024.

--- (2011). "*City of Illusions*, layers of deceit, and the sterility of isolation". *Contemporary Justice Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2011, pp. 227-246. URL: doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2011.565981. Accessed 24 May 2024.

Connerton, Paul (1999). *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1989].

Cummins, Elizabeth (1993). *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*. Revised ed., University of South Carolina Press [1990].

Eades, Gwilym Lucas (2023). *Spatialities of Speculative Fiction: Re-Mapping Possibilities, Philosophies, and Territorialities*. E-book ed. UK: Routledge. URL: doi.org/10.4324/9781003198529.

European Commission (2018). Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology. *A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation — report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation*. Publications Office. URL: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2759/739290. Accessed 05 May 2024.

Herbert, Frank (2015). *Dune.* London: Hodder & Stoughton [1965].

Kuo, Rachel, and Alice Marwick (2021). "Critical disinformation studies: History, power, and politics". *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*, 2021. URL: https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-76. Accessed 22 May 2024.

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1973). *City of Illusions.* London: Panther Books Ltd [1967].

--- (2015). "Utopiyin, Utopiyang." *Ursula K. Le Guin Website*, 2015. URL: https://www.ursulakleguin.com/blog/97-utopiyin-utopiyang. Accessed 13 March 2024.

MacMillan, Margaret (2009). *The Uses and Abuses of History.* E-book ed. London: Penguin Group [2008].

Mulcahy, Kevin (1996). "*The Prince* on Arrakis: Frank Herbert's Dialogue with Machiavelli". *Extrapolation*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1996, pp. 22-36. URL: doi.org/10.3828/extr.1996.37.1.22. Accessed 17 May 2024.

Palfrey, John (2024). "misinformation and disinformation". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024. URL: https://www.britannica.com/topic/misinformation-and-disinformation. Accessed 05 May 2024.

Said, Edward W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books [1993].

Veracini, Lorenzo (2010). *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. UK/USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

INÊS PASTOR

has recently completed her bachelor's degree in Languages, Literatures and Cultures with a Major in English at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto. Her research interests are not as yet completely defined, but include considerations on speculative fiction, videogame narratives and comic book narratives, to name a few. She also hopes to contribute to conversations surrounding the meeting points between these types of media and traditional literature.

HOW TO CITE

Pastor, Inês (2024). "False History, False Gods: The Connection between Power and Information in *Dune* (1965) and *City of Illusions* (1967)". *VIA PANORAMICA: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, vol. 13, n.º 1, 2024, pp. 65-82. Web: http://ojs.letras.up.pt/. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21747/2182-9934/via13_1a4