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THE DISPOSSESSED: 50 YEARS SINCE 50 YEARS HENCE

A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

CETAPS
CENTRE FOR ENGLISH, TRANSLATION AND ANGLO-PORTUGUESE STUDIES

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A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

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Preface

JOANA CAETANO
Executive Editor

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.

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THEMATIC SECTION


Ser todo é ser parte;
A verdadeira viagem é o regresso.
Os Despojados
'24

é arquiteta no gabinete JJ Silva Garcia, Arquitecto Lda, e uma leitora ávida de Ursula K. Le Guin, cuja influência na sua própria concepção de espaço - como um contínuo do humano - é inegável. Para além da arquitetura, as artes plásticas são a sua grande paixão.

HOW TO CITE

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Ursula K. Le Guin e Kim Stanley Robinson: Diálogos Utópicos

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ABSTRACT: The article explores the similarities and differences in Ursula K. Le Guin's and Kim Stanley Robinson's narrative discourses, highlighting their distinct but complementary approaches to utopian literature. Le Guin uses the *reduction of the world* to explore social and political critiques, mainly in *The Dispossessed*, while Robinson adopts *logistical utopia*, focusing on practical and sustainable solutions to environmental and social problems, exemplified in *New York 2140* and the Mars Trilogy. The analysis addresses how both authors use dialogues and metalogues to engage readers in in-depth discussions about the construction of alternative futures, highlighting the relevance of their works in the contemporary context.

KEYWORDS: utopia, logistic utopia, metalogue, ecology, anthropology

RESUMO: O artigo explora as semelhanças e diferenças nos discursos de Ursula K. Le Guin e Kim Stanley Robinson em suas obras, destacando suas abordagens distintas mas complementares na literatura utópica. Le Guin utiliza a *redução do mundo* para explorar críticas sociais e políticas, principalmente em *Os Despossuídos*, enquanto Robinson adota a *utopia logística*, focando em soluções práticas e sustentáveis para problemas ambientais e sociais, exemplificado em *New York 2140* e na Trilogia de Marte. A análise aborda como ambos os autores utilizam diálogos e metálogos para envolver os leitores em discussões profundas sobre a construção de futuros alternativos, destacando a relevância de suas obras no contexto contemporâneo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: utopia, utopia logística, metálogo, ecologia, antropologia

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Em seu livro *Arqueologias do Futuro* (2005), Fredric Jameson propõe uma análise crítica das utopias literárias. Partindo da evolução histórica do conceito de utopia, ele investiga como as utopias refletem os contextos históricos e culturais em que foram criadas, abordando tanto os sonhos de uma sociedade ideal quanto as críticas das condições existentes. O título do livro reflete a abordagem de Jameson de "desenterrar" as camadas de significado nas narrativas utópicas. Ele trata a utopia como um artefato cultural que pode ser estudado para revelar *insights* sobre o desejo humano, as estruturas sociais e as possibilidades futuras.

Jameson dá uma atenção especial à ficção científica, considerando-a uma forma moderna de literatura utópica e argumentando que esse gênero literário permite uma exploração mais flexível e expansiva do que as utopias tradicionais, servindo como um campo fértil para a imaginação utópica e para a especulação sobre futuros possíveis – particularmente como um espaço onde se pode imaginar alternativas ao capitalismo e onde as contradições deste sistema econômico são expostas e debatidas.

Em meu artigo *New York 2140 – Logistic Utopia*, tomei como base o conceito de utopia crítica de Tom Moylan e Jameson para propor o conceito de *utopia logística* a fim de investigar como a utopia literária criada por Kim Stanley Robinson pode sugerir mudanças concretas na realidade, em vez de servir apenas como espelho do mundo através de analogias.

No ano em que se comemoram os cinquenta anos de publicação de *The Dispossessed* (1974) de Ursula K. Le Guin, este artigo propõe, através da análise de elementos do discurso desse livro e de *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) de Kim Stanley Robinson, demonstrar como ambos os autores propõem mudanças radicais que vão além das figuras de linguagem. Mais especificamente, no caso de Le Guin, os diálogos de Shevek com seus interlocutores, tanto em Urras quanto em Anarres, e no caso de Kim Stanley Robinson, os metálogos, forma dialógica proposta originalmente por Gregory Bateson. O objetivo deste artigo é sugerir que a forma pela qual as personagens dialogam em suas narrativas constituem elas próprias parte de um sistema de construção de utopia, tomando aqui também como base a teoria de *romance de sistemas* proposta por Tom LeClair.

Jameson não chega a elencar de modo sistemático os tipos de utopias em *Arqueologias do Futuro*. No entanto, é possível destacar algumas variedades por ele comentadas no decorrer do livro, a saber: clássica, crítica, concreta e anti-utopia.

A utopia clássica remonta aos textos fundacionais como *Utopia* (1516) de Thomas More. É caracterizada por uma descrição detalhada de uma sociedade ideal organizada segundo princípios racionais e justos. Apresenta um contraste direto com as condições imperfeitas da sociedade existente, servindo como um espelho crítico das falhas contemporâneas. É o modelo clássico que irá inspirar tentativas de construção de sociedades utópicas no mundo real, como as de Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier e Robert Owen.

Já na utopia crítica, Jameson utiliza a reflexão dialética para discutir como as utopias funcionam através de contradições e tensões internas. A utopia crítica envolve uma abordagem dialética, reconhecendo as contradições e complexidades da sociedade. Em vez de oferecer uma visão final e completa de uma sociedade ideal, ela apresenta um processo contínuo de reflexão e transformação. Tom Moylan, em seu livro *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), define a utopia crítica como um gênero de ficção utópica que conscientemente evita o fechamento utópico e a representação de um ideal completamente realizado. Em vez disso, essas narrativas reconhecem as limitações e as contradições inerentes à criação de uma sociedade perfeita. Jameson cita *A Mão Esquerda da Escuridão* (1969) e *Os Despossuídos* como exemplos de utopia crítica, bem como as trilogias de Orange County e de Marte de Kim Stanley Robinson. Esta variedade da utopia nos interessa particularmente neste artigo.

Diferente das utopias abstratas ou idealizadas, as utopias concretas buscam uma implementação prática de ideais utópicos. Elas se concentram em aspectos específicos e viáveis da mudança social, como reformas políticas, econômicas ou tecnológicas que podem ser realizadas dentro do contexto atual. Essas utopias são frequentemente pragmáticas e detalhadas, oferecendo um caminho mais realista para a transformação social. Jameson conta que Tom Moylan, em conversa com ele, apontou que essa utopia concreta já existia no mundo real: seria a União Soviética – muito embora Jameson dê como exemplos *Hard to Be a God*, dos irmãos Strugatsky, juntamente como as obras de Stanislaw Lem, de uma "FC escrita a partir de horizontes socialistas" (261), ainda que sem entrar em detalhes de como elas poderiam constituir utopias concretas.

Por fim, a distopia apresenta uma sociedade onde os ideais utópicos resultaram em consequências desastrosas ou opressivas. Obras como *1984* (1949) de George Orwell e *Admirável Mundo Novo* (1932) de Aldous Huxley são exemplos clássicos. Jameson classifica o livro de Huxley como o "poema épico" da direita na discussão de uma degradação da cultura de massa, e contrapõe *Star Maker* (1937) de Olaf Stapledon pela via da esquerda. Esta categoria também nos interessa porque Jameson faz uma reflexão sobre as distopias da cultura de massa, com foco na questão do consumo, ou melhor, na "antítese com a qual somos confrontados", a saber, aquela entre abundância e pobreza (2021, 262). Mas Jameson aponta que nem a abundância nem a pobreza franciscana existem em nosso mundo:

> Ambos são Utópicos: a visão da abundância se desenvolve da fantasia marcuseana da alta produtividade, enquanto a escolha da pobreza se constitui a partir de uma simplificação estética radical de nossa vida cotidiana no presente, uma redução do desejo aos limites da necessidade que tem tão pouco a ver com a moderação enquanto uma virtude de classe miserável quanto com a miséria real e o sofrimento da fonte e da indigência reais. (2021, 262)

É essa redução que para Jameson constitui o que ele chama de "desequilíbrio ou a dissimetria oculta na maravilhosa justaposição desses dois estados do ser feita por Le Guin nos planetas gêmeos de Urras e Anarres, em *Os Despossuídos*, cujas ecologias expressam seu antagonismo ideológico" (*idem*, 263).

Jameson aponta que Le Guin tenta transcender os estereótipos da guerra fria, "transformando seus comunistas em anarquistas, com traços taoístas" (263), se referindo aos habitantes de Anarres, ao mesmo tempo que Urras é visto como um mundo mais próximo do capitalismo – ao menos a nação de A-Io, pois o país vizinho de Thu aparenta ter um regime semelhante ao stalinismo, embora isso nunca seja deixado claro no livro. A verdadeira ênfase de Le Guin em *Os Despossuídos* estaria no consumo, com Shevek servindo ao mesmo tempo de observador e termômetro por intermédio do qual o leitor pode medir o nível de reificação da mercadoria e o consumismo de Urras.

Na trilogia de Marte de Kim Stanley Robinson, Jameson também aponta algo semelhante ao desequilibro ou dissimetria observados em *Os Despossuídos*, mas numa questão mais estética do que política propriamente dita. Ao começar o capítulo 12 de *Arqueologias*, dedicado à trilogia de Marte, ele faz uma catalogação algo borgeana dos

temas elencados ao longo dos três volumes, o que ele chama de "reflexões de bolso sobre um conjunto de temas das ciências chamadas duras", a saber:

> a bioquímica das rochas e sólidos; a dinâmica dos gases e a composição da atmosfera; aquíferos e a liberação de água e outros líquidos; microorganismos geneticamente modificados e DNA geneticamente reconstruído; radiação, luz e calor; cadeia alimentar; a estrutura do solo; meteorologia e a dinâmica dos ventos e do clima; sistemas botânicos e sua classificação; "teoria das cordas" e a teoria do campo unificado na física; a mecânica da velocidade em situações astronômicas e militares. (2021, 623-4)

Jameson ressalta que, em que pese a grande quantidade de assuntos tratados, Robinson consegue costurá-los na trama narrativa de modo eficiente e atrativo para os leitores, daí o viés estético. Apesar de exaltar a forma, entretanto, ele aponta que o mais importante é

> o modo como esses fatos e descobertas, pressuposições e atividades científicas são, eles próprios, apresentados: como dados e matéria-prima para a solução de problemas, em vez de como características abstratas e contemplativas de uma epistemologia ou de uma imagem do mundo científico. (*idem*, 625)

Para ele, os problemas apresentados nessa série de livros dão margem para "um tipo diferente de imaginação e um conjunto mais extravagante de proposições e soluções de enigmas" (*ibidem*).

A isso, Jameson dá o nome de "solução de problemas especulativos". Nós chamamos (não apenas essa solução como também as etapas que a antecedem) de *utopia logística*. Antes de nos determos mais sobre esse conceito, porém, é necessário apresentar outra ideia, que serve de moldura para as obras de Le Guin e Robinson: o romance de sistemas.

Em *The Art of Excess* (1989), Tom LeClair analisa alguns romances estadunidenses que classifica como *excessivos*. Mas ele deixa claro que o conceito de excessivo como critério se refere não necessariamente a um transbordamento, algo que escapa das bordas, mas um tipo de narrativa que explora conscientemente "o tamanho e a escala da experiência contemporânea" (5). Para tanto, ele lança mão de um paradigma, a teoria dos sistemas, formulada pelo biólogo austríaco Ludwig von Bertalanffy na década de 1950.

LeClair cita especificamente o escritor alemão Dietrich Schwanitz em seu ensaio "Systems Theory and the Environment of Theory": "A teoria dos sistemas cortou todas as conexões com as tradições epistemológicas da filosofia, adotando, em vez disso, atitudes epistemológicas desenvolvidas nas ciências naturais, particularmente na biologia e na teoria da evolução" (*idem*, 6).

Mas é em um livro anterior – na verdade a primeira versão de *The Art of Excess* – que LeClair explica com mais precisão o que quer dizer. Na introdução a *In The Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, publicado em 1987, ele descreve os livros do escritor estadunidense Don DeLillo como *romances de sistemas*. Após uma breve explicação sobre Bertalanffy e sua teoria geral, ele fornece o seguinte resumo: "A teoria de sistemas tem como seus propósitos compreender os processos fundamentais e particulares da vida, encontrar as relações essenciais entre ciências que isolam partes do ecossistema para estudo, e fornecer um novo paradigma para pensar a realidade" (3).

Em artigo publicado no jornal *The Guardian* em 2016, o crítico Damien Walter estende o raciocínio de LeClair às obras de Umberto Eco, Jonathan Franzen, Margaret Atwood e outros autores, com ênfase justamente na trilogia de Marte de Kim Stanley Robinson:

> Na melhor das hipóteses, quando os romances de sistemas se transformam diretamente na ficção científica, eles podem manter o próprio infinito em seu alcance – e ninguém chega mais perto disso do que Kim Stanley Robinson. A trilogia seminal de Robinson sobre Marte começa com os esforços da humanidade para colonizar nosso vizinho cósmico em *Red Mars*, e termina dois séculos depois em *Blue Mars*: a essa altura, a água está fluindo na superfície do planeta, uma conquista alcançada após centenas de páginas de reflexões de Robinson sobre ciência, política, economia e religião. (Walter 2016, s/p)

Embora nem todos os romances de sistemas, segundo as análises de LeClair nos seus dois livros, possam ser categorizados como ficção científica (*JR* de William Gaddis, 1985, e *The Public Burning* de Robert Coover, 1977, certamente não são, ainda que os demais, como *Gravity's Rainbow*, 1973, de Thomas Pynchon, e *Always Coming Home*, 1985, de Ursula K. Le Guin, efetivamente o sejam), a questão das "relações essenciais entre ciências" deixa claro que, ao menos em seu aspecto mais *hard* (ou seja, voltado para as ciências duras), o romance de sistemas tem uma grande afinidade com esse gênero literário. Embora *Os Despossuídos* não se encaixe exatamente nessa definição (a menos

que o encaremos, a título de *thought experiment*, como um capítulo de um mega-romance composto por todas as histórias do universo Hain), podemos ver sementes disso nos diálogos de Shevek. Já na trilogia de Marte, Kim Stanley Robinson faz uso de uma outra forma de diálogo, o *metálogo*, para obter o efeito sistêmico já citado anteriormente por Jameson.

O metálogo é uma forma narrativa criada pelo antropólogo e cientista social Gregory Bateson em seu livro *Steps for an Ecology of Mind*, de 1972. É uma ideia fundamental na teoria dos sistemas e na cibernética, que Bateson desenvolveu ao longo de sua carreira. Um metálogo é uma unidade de comunicação que vai além da mera troca de informações entre duas partes, envolvendo um processo mais complexo de entendimento mútuo e co-criação de significado.

Para Bateson, os metálogos são padrões de comunicação que envolvem múltiplos níveis de significado e contexto. Eles não se limitam ao conteúdo explícito da comunicação, mas também incorporam aspectos como contexto cultural, emoções, relações interpessoais e pressupostos compartilhados. Em outras palavras, um metálogo não é apenas sobre o que está sendo dito, mas também sobre como é dito e interpretado.

Bateson argumenta que muitos dos problemas na comunicação humana surgem quando as pessoas não reconhecem ou consideram adequadamente esses níveis mais profundos de significado. Por exemplo, uma simples troca de palavras pode transmitir significados diferentes dependendo do contexto cultural ou do relacionamento entre os interlocutores. Portanto, entender e trabalhar com metálogos é essencial para uma comunicação eficaz e para a construção de relacionamentos interpessoais saudáveis.

Além disso, Bateson sugere que os metálogos desempenham um papel essencial na coevolução de sistemas complexos, como as relações humanas e os ecossistemas. Ao reconhecer e interpretar os metálogos presentes em diferentes sistemas, podemos desenvolver uma compreensão mais profunda de suas dinâmicas e interconexões, o que, por sua vez, pode nos ajudar a lidar de forma mais eficaz com os desafios complexos que enfrentamos em nosso mundo interdependente.

Por exemplo, no metálogo *What is an Instinct?*, um homem conversa com sua filha sobre a noção de instinto:

> Filha: Papai, o que é um instinto?
> Pai: Um instinto, meu querido, é um princípio explicativo.

> Filha: Mas o que isso explica?
> Pai: Qualquer coisa – quase qualquer coisa. Qualquer coisa que você queira que explique.
> Filha: Não seja bobo. Isso não explica a gravidade.
> Pai: Não. Mas isso é porque ninguém quer que o "instinto" explique a gravidade. Se o fizessem, isso explicaria. Poderíamos simplesmente dizer que a lua tem um instinto cuja força varia inversamente ao quadrado da distância...
> Filha: Mas isso é um absurdo, papai.
> Pai: Sim, certamente. Mas foi você quem mencionou "instinto", não eu.
> Filha: Tudo bem – mas então o que explica a gravidade?
> Pai: Nada, minha querida, porque a gravidade é um princípio explicativo.
> Filha: Ah.
> (Bateson 1972, 47)

A estrutura desta conversa é em si um princípio explicativo. Estamos observando um pai explicar para sua filha o que são explicações.

Os metálogos são ferramentas úteis não só para o diálogo, mas também para apresentar e alcançar de forma eficaz entendimentos partilhados sobre questões delicadas. Poderíamos dizer que um metálogo é uma tentativa de construção de um modelo, ou mesmo uma espécie de experimento mental: coloca o leitor bem no meio da ação, tornando-o mais um participante da discussão. Cada orador do metálogo contribui com uma abordagem para um problema que não o resolve, mas chama os participantes à ação, convidando-os a oferecer enquadramentos e explicações alternativas.

Se Ursula K. Le Guin pensa criticamente sobre o conceito de utopia nas histórias do seu universo Hain, como em *A Mão Esquerda da Escuridão* (1969) e *Floresta é o Nome do Mundo* (1972), é em *Os Despossuídos* de 1974 que ela atinge o seu ápice. O subtítulo "Uma Utopia Ambígua" deixa isso claro, pela visão de seu protagonista, o físico Shevek.

Convidado para apresentar sua teoria inovadora, o Princípio da Simultaneidade, que pode revolucionar a comunicação interestelar (e que em outras histórias de Le Guin vemos que gerou o ansível, dispositivo de comunicação instantânea através da galáxia). Ele sente que em Anarres, com seus recursos limitados e certa estagnação intelectual, não conseguirá progredir como deseja. Urras, com suas universidades avançadas e recursos abundantes, oferece a ele a oportunidade de completar e disseminar sua teoria.

Mas a estada de Shevek em Urras não é tão simples quanto ele imaginava. Anarres havia sido colonizada pouco mais de um século antes por dissidentes de Urras, que desejavam criar uma sociedade sem propriedade privada, sem governo centralizado e baseada na cooperação e na igualdade, acabou por desenvolver suas próprias formas de burocracia e conformismo social. Mas a sociedade de Urras se revela a ele como igualmente

burocrática e conformista, ainda que de outras maneiras: as mulheres não são emancipadas e o apego ao dinheiro e ao *status quo* são incompreensíveis para ele.

O livro alterna capítulos que se passam ora no presente em Urras, ora em flashbacks da vida de Shevek em Anarres desde a juventude até pouco antes de embarcar na nave para o outro planeta. Mais do que física, a viagem de Shevek é também uma jornada filosófica e pessoal para entender melhor a natureza da liberdade, tanto individual quanto coletiva. Ao experimentar a vida em Urras, ele ganha uma nova perspectiva sobre o que significa ser livre e quais são as verdadeiras barreiras para a liberdade em qualquer sociedade.

Uma das ferramentas narrativas que Le Guin utiliza com destreza para mostrar essas contradições aos leitores é o diálogo. Um dos mais significativos dentre tantos é o de Shevek com Efor, que serve como seu criado durante parte de sua estada em Urras:

> Efor o observou por um momento. Quando Efor funcionava como criado, seu rosto enrugado e bem barbeado era bastante inexpressivo; durante a última hora Shevek o tinha visto passar por mudanças extraordinárias de humor, rispidez, cinismo e dor. No momento, sua expressão era solidária, embora distante.
> - Diferente de tudo lá de onde o senhor vem – Efor disse.
> - Muito diferente.
> - Ninguém nunca sem trabalho lá.
> Havia um leve traço de ironia, ou de dúvida, em sua voz.
> - Não.
> - E ninguém faminto?
> - Ninguém passa fome enquanto outro come.
> - Ah.
> - Mas já passamos fome. Já morremos de fome. Houve uma grande fome, sabe, há oito anos. conheci uma mulher que, nessa época, matou seu bebê porque ela não tinha leite, e não havia mais nada, mais nada para dar ao bebê. Nem tudo são flores em Anarres, Efor.
> - Não duvido, senhor – disse Efor, com um de seus curiosos retornos à dicção culta. Então disse com uma careta, contraindo os lábios e mostrando os dentes. – Mesmo assim, não tem nenhum deles lá!
> - Deles?
> - O senhor sabe, sr. Shevek. O que o senhor disse uma vez. Os proprietários.
> (Le Guin, 279-80)

No começo do livro, recebemos a explicação de que o prazer de Shevek em dialogar não provém somente de sua educação como cientista, mas é algo enraizado na sociedade de Anarres: "Discutiam porque gostavam de discussões, gostavam do movimento rápido da mente livre pelos caminhos das possibilidades, gostavam de questionar o que não se questionava" (52).

Os diálogos em *Os Despossuídos* são basicamente confrontos, menos dialéticos que didáticos, como no trecho abaixo:

> - O senhor encontrou mulheres capazes de trabalho intelectual criativo, dr. Shevek?
> - Bem, na verdade foram elas que me encontraram. Mitis, no Poente Norte, era minha professora. Gvarab também; acho que já ouviram falar nela.
> - Gvarab era mulher? – perguntou Pae, com surpresa genuína, e riu.
> Oiie pareceu não convencido e ofendido.
> - Não dá para saber pelos nomes de vocês, é claro – disse friamente. – Vocês fazem questão, suponho, de não fazer distinção entre os sexos.
> - Odo era mulher – disse Shevek calmamente.
> (...)
> Shevek percebeu que tocara numa animosidade impessoal muito profunda dentro daqueles homens. Aparentemente havia neles, como nas mesas da espaçonave, uma mulher, uma mulher reprimida, silenciada, bestializada, uma fúria enjaulada. Ele não tinha o direito de provocá-los. Eles só conheciam as relações de posse. Estavam possuídos. (81-82)

Em *New York 2140 – Logistic Utopia*, este autor define o romance de Kim Stanley Robinson (sobre uma Nova York parcialmente submersa devido ao derretimento das calotas polares (publicado em 2017) como uma utopia logística. A saber:

> uma utopia logística é uma utopia cujo horizonte pode ser facilmente visto pelas pessoas que começaram a construi-la. Ao contrário de utopias anteriores, como a Revolução Russa, onde esse horizonte estava num futuro distante e as pessoas eram convidadas a fazer sacrifícios pelo bem comum, mas provavelmente não viveriam para ver isso dar frutos. (Fernandes, 318)

Embora a obra inteira de Robinson caiba nessa categorização, num primeiro momento o autor optou por analisar inicialmente *Nova York 2140* por seu caráter paradidático: esse romance conta a história de uma cidade do século XXII que tem quase metade de sua superfície coberta por água. A subida de aproximadamente 15 metros do nível do mar transforma Manhattan e outras partes da cidade de Nova York naquilo que os seus habitantes chamam (não sem alguma ironia) de Super-Veneza. A cidade italiana é palco de um fenômeno conhecido como subsidência, ou seja, o rebaixamento gradual de sua superfície, que cria a sazonal *Acqua alta*, quando grande parte da superfície da cidade fica ocasionalmente coberta na maré alta. E, assim como Veneza, a cidade de Nova York aprendeu a lidar com o resultado dos dois Pulsos que inundaram parte dela. A cidade é bastante funcional e os seus habitantes esforçam-se por mantê-la assim.

O termo *utopia logística* vem daí: desde o início do romance, através de Vlade, especialista em construção e zelador de um dos edifícios, aprendemos que o trabalho para garantir que eles permaneçam à tona (literal e metaforicamente) é constante: literalmente porque o edifício deve ser constantemente tratado com novos materiais para evitar o

desmoronamento com a erosão marinha. Metaforicamente porque estas coisas consomem dinheiro e ainda precisamos de dinheiro e de mercados neste futuro.

Robinson é conhecido por integrar preocupações ambientais e ecológicas em suas narrativas. Em *Red Mars* (1992), ele explora o processo de terraformação de Marte, apresentando debates teóricos e práticos sobre a viabilidade de transformar o ambiente marciano em um habitat sustentável para os humanos. *New York 2140* (2017) aborda um futuro em que Nova York é parcialmente submersa devido à elevação do nível do mar, resultante das mudanças climáticas. Ambas as obras enfatizam a importância do trabalho coletivo e das soluções logísticas para enfrentar desafios ambientais.

Em *New York 2140*, Robinson retrata uma cidade onde a comunidade se une para sobreviver e prosperar em um ambiente drasticamente alterado. A narrativa mostra personagens que, em conjunto, desenvolvem estratégias para manter a cidade funcional, desde a manutenção de edifícios submersos até a implementação de soluções financeiras e legais para enfrentar a crise. A abordagem holística de Robinson, combinando teoria e prática, reflete a ideia de uma utopia logística, onde a mudança é visível e tangível para aqueles que a constroem.

Essa abordagem é a marca registrada de Robinson, e pode ser encontrada em quase todos os seus romances. Outro exemplo é *Aurora* (2015), que descreve a vida a bordo de uma nave-geração viajando para estabelecer um assentamento humano em uma lua no sistema estelar Tau Ceti. Em ambos os casos (e em muitos outros romances), KSR gosta de lançar personagens uns contra os outros, mas não necessariamente com grandes confrontos. Em vez disso, ele parece gostar de colocá-los em cenários – sessões do Congresso, seminários, simpósios ou reuniões semelhantes – onde duas ou mais pessoas discutem política, sociedade e economia, mas sempre enquadradas pelos acontecimentos atuais da história.

Seu foco é sempre "o que fazer?" de acordo com a famosa pergunta de Lênin. E tentam encontrar respostas reais – respostas logisticamente orientadas que possam servir de base para planos concretos. O último livro de ficção de Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future*, está repleto de exemplos. Um dos mais interessantes (e literais) está no Capítulo 81, que é uma transcrição de uma conversa telefônica entre dois atores-chave do ministério titular do romance, Mary e Tatiana. Em menos de quatro páginas, a conversa começa como um diálogo comum e rapidamente se transforma em um metálogo sobre paraísos fiscais,

blockchain e o valor do dinheiro em seu tempo. Tatiana pergunta a Mary se ela se lembra do dinheiro:

> Mary: Eu ainda uso! Era numerado, certo?
> Tatiana: Claro. Mas depois que era movimentado algumas vezes, era apenas dinheiro. Havia muitas maneiras de lavá-lo e não era possível rastreá-lo. Agora ele pode ser rastreado, na verdade tem que ser para permanecer real. Portanto, não há lugar para se esconder, não há paraísos fiscais. (Robinson 2020, 383-84)

Depois falam sobre as alterações climáticas e como podem convencer os ricos, especialmente na Rússia, onde Tatiana vive, a investir em formas de amortecer esta catástrofe climática, apelando ao seu bom senso e ao mesmo tempo dando-nos uma resposta rápida e eficiente. Uma aula-relâmpago de climatologia e geografia russa:

> Tatiana:... E a Sibéria está derretendo, o que não é brincadeira. Algumas pessoas pensaram que seria uma coisa boa, que cultivaríamos mais trigo e assim por diante, mas acontece que temos apenas um monte de pântanos, e você não pode dirigir nos rios congelados como costumavam fazer. É uma bagunça. Além disso, está liberando tanto metano e CO2 que poderíamos criar um planeta-selva. Ninguém na Rússia quer um planeta-selva. É muito confuso, não é russo. Portanto, as ideias estão mudando. (Robinson 2020, 384)

Tanto Robinson quanto Le Guin compartilham uma visão humanista e uma preocupação profunda com as questões ecológicas e sociais. Ambos os autores criam mundos onde a interação entre seres humanos e seus ambientes é central para a narrativa. No entanto, suas abordagens diferem significativamente.

Robinson adota uma perspectiva mais prática e científica, focando na implementação de soluções técnicas e logísticas para problemas ambientais. Seus personagens frequentemente discutem e aplicam teorias em busca de mudanças tangíveis e imediatas. Le Guin, por outro lado, enfatiza as dinâmicas sociais e culturais, explorando como as comunidades se organizam e se adaptam a seus ambientes. Seu enfoque é mais antropológico, investigando as relações de poder, gênero e cultura.

Jameson explica que o princípio de *redução do mundo* é uma ideia derivada da Le Guin, especialmente em *Os Despossuídos*. Esse conceito se refere à maneira como Le Guin estrutura sua narrativa para explorar diferentes possibilidades sociais e políticas através de uma redução ou simplificação do mundo real.

Jameson argumenta que essa redução do mundo é uma técnica eficaz para explorar ideias utópicas e distópicas, pois permite uma comparação direta entre diferentes sistemas sociais e políticos. Além disso, ao simplificar o mundo para destacar essas diferenças, Le

Guin torna mais clara a sua crítica às estruturas existentes e às possibilidades alternativas de organização social. Mais, é principalmente através dos diálogos que Le Guin se vale desse princípio.

Enquanto Le Guin usa o princípio de redução do mundo, Robinson se vale de uma estratégia narrativa diametralmente oposta: a narrativa polifônica, que compartilha visões díspares, não só do ponto de vista de vários personagens, mas até mesmo de processos físicos e políticos. Isto poderá sugerir que, no uso do metálogo, Robinson vais mais além do que Le Guin.

Um metálogo bastante importante em *Red Mars* acontece ainda no começo do romance, no momento em que a tripulação da primeira nave a visitar o planeta vermelho, os Cem Primeiros (pessoas de vários países que estão indo para lá em caráter definitivo para montar a primeira colônia) precisam se refugiar num trecho isolado e protegido da nave a fim de se protegerem de uma chuva de raios cósmicos. Ali, eles começam a conversar para matar o tempo, e começam a se dar algumas discussões. A primeira delas é sobre design:

> “Acho que deveríamos fazer novos planos", disse ele. "Acho que deveríamos fazê-los agora. Tudo deveria ser redesenhado desde o início, com nosso próprio pensamento expresso. Deveria se estender por toda parte, até aos primeiros abrigos que construímos."
> "Por que se preocupar?" Maya perguntou, irritada com sua grandiosidade. "Eles são bons designs." Realmente era irritante; Arkady frequentemente tomava o centro do palco, e as pessoas sempre olhavam para ela como se de alguma forma fosse responsável por ele, como se fosse seu trabalho impedi-lo de importuná-los.
> "Os edifícios são o modelo de uma sociedade", disse Arkady.
> "Eles são quartos", apontou Sax Russell.
> "Mas os quartos implicam na organização social dentro deles." Arkady olhou ao redor, atraindo as pessoas para a discussão com seu olhar. "A disposição de um edifício mostra o que o designer pensa que deve acontecer dentro. Vimos isso no início da viagem, quando russos e americanos foram segregados nos módulos D e B. Supostamente deveríamos permanecer duas entidades, você vê. Será o mesmo em Marte. Os edifícios expressam valores, têm uma espécie de gramática, e os quartos são as frases. Eu não quero que pessoas em Washington ou Moscou digam como devo viver minha vida, já tive o bastante disso."
> "O que você não gosta no design dos primeiros abrigos?" John perguntou, parecendo interessado.
> "Eles são retangulares", disse Arkady. Isso arrancou uma risada, mas ele perseverou: "Retangulares, a forma convencional! Com espaço de trabalho separado dos quartos, como se o trabalho não fizesse parte da vida. E os quartos são ocupados principalmente por espaços privados, com hierarquias expressas, já que líderes recebem espaços maiores."
> "Isso não é apenas para facilitar o trabalho deles?" Sax disse.
> "Não. Não é realmente necessário. É uma questão de prestígio. Um exemplo muito convencional de pensamento empresarial americano, se posso dizer."
> Houve um gemido, e Phyllis disse: "Precisamos que politizar isso, Arkady?" Ao mencionar a palavra, a nuvem de ouvintes se rompeu; Mary Dunkel e outros dois saíram e foram para o outro lado da sala.

> "Tudo é político", disse Arkady para as costas deles. "Nada mais do que esta nossa viagem. Estamos começando uma nova sociedade, como poderia não ser política?" (Robinson 2020, 41-2)

O metálogo é bem mais extenso que o trecho aqui apresentado, como é de costume na obra de Robinson. Ele leva a formulação de Bateson e as ideias de Le Guin mais além, mas ainda se mantendo no mesmo conjunto de valores, isto é, questionando: como criar uma utopia ecologicamente correta através de palavras mas também de ações?

Tanto Le Guin quanto Robinson são autores literários e também didáticos, prontos a oferecer sugestões de respostas para as perguntas que eles mesmos fazem ao longo de suas histórias. São sugestões inteligentes e quase sempre pacíficas, e incentivam os leitores a pensarem por si mesmos.

A morte de Le Guin, em 2018, interrompeu esse diálogo em tempo real. Depois de seu romance *The Ministry for the Future*, no mesmo ano, Kim Stanley Robinson declarou que não escreveria mais livros de ficção, e se dedicaria de agora em diante a escrever sobre o meio ambiente. Seu primeiro livro nesse sentido foi *The High Sierra: a Love Story*. Publicado em 2022, ele traça uma história da Sierra Nevada, que ele frequenta desde 1973 – um ano antes da publicação de *Os Despossuídos*.

Esses diálogos ainda não se esgotaram. Eles continuam vivos – talvez à espera de outras autoras, outros autores, que peguem no bastão e continuem nessa trajetória, ampliando o escopo dos EUA para o Sul Global, a Europa, a Africa, a Ásia. Talvez os autores que neste momento escrevem uma ficção mais otimista e decididamente voltada para a ecologia, como Malka Older, Francesco Verso, Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki e Renan Bernardo, entre muitos outros... Talvez eles possam criar mais que diálogos, um imenso metálogo não muito diferente daquele que Arkady, Maya, Sax e os demais membros do grupo dos Cem Primeiros travaram a bordo de sua nave no caminho para Marte.

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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

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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 yang[2] 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, utopian[3]. 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 Odoism[6], 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 inequality[7], 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 Vea:

> 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

[1]Dystopia, 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.

[2]A concept from the Chinese philosophy that describes an opposite but interconnected cycle. According to those values and believes, 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.

[3]The 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.

[4]Amongst 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.

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

[6]Laia 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.

[7]Gender 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.

[9]There 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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The Utopia in Omelas, a Yin-Yang analysis

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ABSTRACT: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. Le Guin delves into the complexities of the human condition and nature, exploring through them the concept of utopia. Resorting to the Yin-Yang theory, Le Guin proposes the interdependence between utopian and dystopian traits, exploring the cycle they form and the transformation they allow. Omelas stands, in this article, as the perfect example of this interdependence, as it presents a seemingly utopian setting marked by inherently dystopian traits, i.e., the child and the abuse to which it is the victim. The paradoxical nature of Omelas prompts contemplation regarding the true meaning of utopia and the means through which it can be achieved (or not). By analyzing the departure of those who refuse to perpetuate Omelas' social contract through the Yin-Yang lens, this article clarifies where the utopia truly resides in Omelas. In light of this, one finds that the true utopia in Omelas can be found in three places: the ones who choose to leave, as the

RESUMO: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" de Ursula K. Le Guin detalha as complexidades da condição e natureza humana, explorando-as através do conceito de utopia. No seu entendimento da teoria de Yin-Yang, Le Guin propõe a interdependência entre traços utópico e distópicos, explorando o ciclo que formam e as transformações que permitem. Omelas serve, neste artigo, como o exemplo primo desta interdependência, apresentando um cenário aparentemente utópico, marcado por traços inerentemente distópicos, i.e., a criança e o abuso de que é vítima. A natureza paradoxal de Omelas incita contemplação relativamente ao verdadeiro significado de utopia e os meios pelos quais pode, ou não, ser alcançado. Analisando, através da lente Yin-Yang, a partida daqueles que recusam perpetuar o contrato social de Omelas, este artigo oferece clareza relativamente ao verdadeiro lugar da utopia em Omelas. Neste sentido, é possível encontrar a verdadeira utopia em Omelas em três partes distintas:

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embodiment of utopia; the journey on which they embark; and, finally, the out-of-reach destination they are heading towards, and which will keep moving them. In this story, Le Guin parts with the tradition of utopian writing, advocating for a dynamic state rather than a static one.

KEYWORDS: utopia, dystopia, Yin-Yang, Omelas, paradox, tradition

aqueles que escolhem partir, como a personificação da utopia; a jornada em que embarcam; e, por último, o destino, sempre fora de alcance, para onde se movem e que os move eternamente. Neste conto, Le Guin afasta-se da tradição utópica, estabelecendo e defendendo um estado dinâmico, em vez de um estático.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: utopia, distopia, Yin-Yang, Omelas, paradoxo, tradição

Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" stands as an exploration of the human condition, morality, and the pursuit of utopia. In this idyllic city where the narrative unfolds, an unbelievably perfected state of society is presented, one that is reigned by happiness, abundance, and communal harmony. The narration begins with the clamor of bells indicating the start of the Summer Festival and a cheery tone is attributed to the city and its people, painting a picture of unparalleled bliss.

However, behind this utopian façade lies the city's fatal flaw, a truth so unsettling and profoundly discordant that it completely dismantles the reader's initial sense of comfort. At the core of all the festivities and joy that characterize Omelas resides a desperate, feeble-minded, solitary child, locked away in a dark room. On this mistreated child lies the weight of Omelas' high spirits.

Le Guin manages to intricately depict the complexities of the human condition and ethical responsibility while also calling into question the nature of utopia. Through the lens of her perception of the Yin-Yang theory, Ursula K. Le Guin proposes an intricate balance of opposing forces. Much like in the ancient Chinese symbol, whose merging halves represent "complete interdependence and continual intermutability", Le Guin expresses her belief that utopia and dystopia are not merely contrasting concepts, but rather deeply connected and intertwined entities, that the creation of all utopian and dystopian settings rely on their relation to each other as well as the balance achieved between them (Le Guin 2017, 97). They are two sides of the same coin, constantly influencing each other, evolving together in a dynamic state of existence. In Omelas, this balance is found amidst its contradictions. As the Yin-Yang symbol suggests, the good and the bad become juxtaposed, starting - in fact - to blur into each other. This means that the perfection, to which the reader is exposed at the beginning of the story, is not sustainable without some form of sacrifice; i.e., the abused child. Following this logic, one can establish that the same goes for a dystopian setting, with an ever-present sense of hope, resilience and resistance, which can lead to the birth of light amidst the dark.

In that sense, the definition of utopia becomes less clear, expanding towards an amalgamation of contradictions and fundamental truths, ultimately measured by the reader's moral compass. By becoming aware "of the limitations of the utopian tradition", and therefore "reject[ing] utopia as blueprint while preserving it as a dream", Le Guin's story becomes a "critical utopia", as defined by Tom Moylan, so that it is made up of a

subversive facet, a "sense of critique" (Moylan 2014, 10). Summarizing Moylan's definition, the critical utopia is not only critical in the sense of being essential in establishing a process of change, but it also presents a critique of the author's surroundings. This means that, unlike a blueprint utopia, which introduces the reader to an exemplary society, where the perfect socioeconomic structure has been achieved, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" provides and articulates "the process of social change (...) focus[ing] on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself" (*ibidem*) rather than simply presenting the reader with a static image of the blueprint society, as is the case in More's *Utopia*, and thus becoming a dynamic pool of constant change, perpetuated by the Yin-Yang structures set in place.

There are two opposing sides in Omelas: a utopian one, made up by the city's jubilant atmosphere; and a dystopian one, comprised of the child's mistreatment, and even further, of the people's acceptance and participation in the child's oppression. There is however, a hidden third side, consisting of those who, when confronted with their reality, revolt and leave behind the utopian façade in search for a true utopia, where happiness and well-being are not corrupted and do not come at such a cost, a place that possibly "does not exist" yet (Le Guin 2015, 259). Their search for utopia might not have a final destination, it might simply serve as an engine to keep them moving further and away from Omelas. In this sense, "utopia is something we set in your horizon: we know that we will never reach it (...) but we need it to proceed, as it forces us to walk", continuously slipping away as the deserters draw nearer, urging them on their journey (Fernando Birri *in* Vieira 2016, 2). The hope that moves them is synonymous with the wish for utopia. By acknowledging Omelas' flaws and by taking on this journey, the deserters become themselves living embodiments of utopia. Their bodies, in this context, function as heterotopias – spaces that exist outside the norms of conventional society, becoming subversive and challenging of the cultural structures of Omelas. These bodies are, therefore, spaces of resistance, platforms of change and activism. As heterotopias, these bodies disrupt the established norms of Omelas, questioning its utopian façade and calling to question the ethical and moral implications of staying and abiding by social norms. Their physical presence outside the city's confines is a symbol for their rejection of the oppressive systems that sustain the city's peace. Therefore, they offer an alternative narrative and perspective, embodying resilience, courage and the transformative power of dissent. By

assuming their place as heterotopias, the deserters become the vessel of change, challenging the established norms of utopia and dystopia as we know them, synonymous to good and bad respectively, and becoming a symbol for a new, different approach (Mead 1995, 13).

THE YANG UTOPIA

At first glance, one would assume that utopia is in the city itself, painted as a safe haven and utopian sanctuary, where prosperity knows no bounds and the citizens flourish endlessly. The festivities serve to trick the reader further into assimilating Omelas as a vibrant city, filled with glee, buzzing with excitement, full of life, with descriptions of a happy people delighting in the celebrations and children running in and out of homes. The people, their customs, and their way of life are all teeming with happiness, freedom, sophistication, and wealth. Everything the narrator presents to the reader helps create a well-rounded, paradisiacal atmosphere, free from any suffering.

This listing of the city's utopian traits elicits the narrator to question the credibility of such a place. Could a place like Omelas, "a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time", where only good things happen, actually exist (Le Guin 2015, 254)? That is when the narrator presents the reader with one more piece of information: the child. The child, referred throughout the story as "it", is nearly ten years old (although the continued mistreatment has affected its growth) and lies naked in a damp room hidden from the town's scenic landscape, behind a locked door, surrounded by its own excrement. The child has long ago lost all sense of time, is constantly scared, malnourished, neglected, and constantly terrified. It is said that the child used to cry for help, promising to be good, having known a better life before it took this tumultuous turn, but as time goes on and it realizes no one is coming to help, the child has begun to speak less and less, resorting to a low whining.

As the children of Omelas grow up, their parents will tell them about this child, how the immeasurable "happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies" are

the product of the damage inflicted on the child (Le Guin 2015, 257). Upon being made aware of Omelas' social contract, the children will usually go on to visit the hurting child. This experience will incite a plethora of feelings. Despite all the explanations, when they still do not understand why things are the way they are, they are told that to rescue the child, or to show it even the smallest kindness, would jeopardize the town's well-being and prosperity. A few of them revisit the child again as adults with their questions still unanswered. The whole population knows the child is there, save for the small children who will eventually be made aware of it, and they all participate, more than simply accept, in this agreement, for, even if they are not actively hurting the child, taking their frustrations out by beating it, they will never help it for fear of disrupting the town's harmony. The dehumanization of the child is never-ending and aids in its continuous mistreatment. As the citizens of Omelas do not perceive the child as an actual human child, barely even as a living being, it becomes increasingly easier to justify the abuse inflicted on it. The child is a necessary sacrifice to be made and the citizens further justify their detachment to the child's situation, claiming the child "is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too untouched for it to respond to humane treatment" (Le Guin 2015, 258). This is a tactic often used in dystopias, literary or otherwise, seeing as through the dehumanization of people, especially children, one can transmit a stronger sense of dissonance and, consequently, dystopia. For example, in *The Hunger Games*, a dystopian novel written by Suzanne Collins, Katniss refuses to let Rue's body symbolize yet another loss to the Capitol's oppressive regime, weaving flowers around her lifeless body and bluntly ignoring what is expected of her as a participant. Katniss's display of affection, made up of the flowers she gathers, the lullaby she sings and the sign of resistance she lifts towards the camera, is highly subversive, and, while making Rue a symbol of resistance and resilience, Katniss is also acknowledging and transmitting to the viewers her innocence as a child, contradicting the nature of the games and reminding the spectators that humanity cannot be extinguished.

In her Ph.D thesis (yet to be published), Joana Caetano defines Le Guin's utopianism as a "utopian paradox", implying the "reversed-mirror image of the other", two halves that are eternally in a cycle of merger and transformation. The utopian paradox lives off this "permanent tension between utopia and dystopia, their conflicting

interdependence, each with a seed of the other inside their belly" (Caetano 2023, 23). The utopian paradox contained within this story resides in the town's acceptance and participation in the continued mistreatment of the child. The entirety of the town sees the child's situation as a necessary sacrifice to be made in order to maintain the city's balance and union, placing the collective well-being over that of the individual. The utopian paradox is made up of two antagonistic forces, whose co-existence is made impossible by the overarching consequences that they imply. The suffering of the child is rationalized as everyone becomes complicit in perpetuating this continued, failed search for utopia. Confronting the reader with contradicting facets of the same reality, Le Guin is daring the reader to indulge in her "thought experiment"[1], criticizing or praising the actions she describes, consequently fine-tuning the reader's moral compass. Moreover, this paradox can be extended beyond the confines of the narrative, serving as a symbol for the ethical queries of which our society's history is comprised. From the exploitation of marginalized communities to the perpetuation of systemic injustices, the story of Omelas resonates with the timeless struggle of consolidating collective prosperity with individual dignity. Here, the child in Omelas symbolizes the hidden suffering and sacrifices often required from our society in order to achieve harmony and success. It might serve to mirror the exploitation of labor, where the comfort of some is the consequence of the hard, underpaid work of others, who mostly live in deplorable conditions. In this sense, racial discrimination, the gender gap and socioeconomic disparities can be reflected in Omelas' moral conundrum. The moral ambiguity to which the reader is exposed upon reading the story is the main tool Le Guin uses to form this "thought experiment". Being forced to make connections between reality and the story, the reader is encouraged to put things into perspective and reflect about living ethically, in a world where the line between utopia and dystopia is as blurred as it is in Omelas'.

These aspects ultimately prevent the reader from viewing the city of Omelas as utopian, being comprised of aspects on opposing sides of a spectrum. In her perspective of the Yin-Yang theory, Le Guin sets a term of comparison between the ancient Chinese symbol and the process of utopian creation, claiming that dystopian and utopian traits are not so easily separated, having to rely on each other to create balance. She establishes that both halves constitute "great and equal powers; neither can exist alone, and each is always in the process of becoming the other" (Le Guin 2017, 97).

As stated in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* the Yin-Yang is a harmonious depiction of light and dark, one half always contains traces of the other, leaving ample room and opportunity for growth and change. When applied to utopian writing, balancing dystopian and utopianism, allowing traces of one to bleed into the other, it enables a cyclical change. Both parts are essential in keeping the balance, too much of one might overtake the other, dimming the chances for transformation, resulting in a state of stasis. That they are in the process of becoming the other is clearly established in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", either a utopian setting that leads to the rise of a dystopian one, or the other way around. In any case, Le Guin claims that the inability to find this balance, can lead to "a non dynamic statis that allows no change", leading to the creation of "pure dystopias", much like Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the Yang has completely overtaken the Yin (Le Guin 2017, 97).

TOWARDS THE YIN UTOPIA

Whereas, in Le Guin's perspective of the ancient symbol, Yang stands for control, Yin stands for hope and subversion, which respectively stand for dystopia and utopia. However, she also explains how in each of them resides a seed of the other, allowing change and transformation, keeping the works dynamic. This "seed of transformation" and the ability to grow into each other makes utopian/dystopian fiction cyclical, for, as soon as this seed takes over and becomes the bigger part, a new seed is planted, spurting new change (Le Guin 2017, 97). The Yin-Yang relation established in Omelas takes the town's dystopian nature as Yang, encompassing both the child's situation and the town's effort in perpetuating the utopian façade through the overwhelming need for control, and opposes it to Yin, those who choose to leave Omelas who are fundamentally the embodiment of utopia. In them is represented the black "seed of transformation" contained within Yang's white, dystopian half. In the same way that Yin and Yang are interdependent, so are acceptance and revolt in Omelas, seeing as they are divergent forces that merge on the same front. In utopian and dystopian literature, one often finds the same objects, symbols, places or actions, which are then constructed and worked to fit within the utopian or dystopian scene that is being painted.

In this sense, Yin represents the wilderness beyond Omelas, freedom, hope and utopia, while Yang represents the inside of the city's borders, oppression, control and dystopia. Le Guin establishes that "through psychological and political control" there is no opportunity for change, no "seed of transformation", which will inevitably lead to stasis (Le Guin 2017, 97). This being the case, the deserters who leave their hometown behind, embark on a journey towards "the dark mysterious wilderness surrounding a bright, safe place, the Bad Places", Omelas (*ibidem*). Much like what happens in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where one side has been completely overtaken by the other, establishing, in terms of Yin-Yang, a remarkably static monochromatic circle. The true balance in Omelas is found in those who leave, representing the dynamic nature of utopia. As such, the eternal quest for equilibrium on which they embark is defined by the duality from which it is born. In this framework, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" can be categorized as a Yin dystopia, i.e., a dystopian set of circumstances that is actively being contradicted by forces of utopian nature.

Between the city's contradicting traits, stands the most significant group of citizens, the true focus of this "thought experiment" who, moved by their conscience, moral clarity, revolt and hope, opt to leave Omelas, leaving behind their seemingly utopian society and lives, embarking on a journey in search for a true utopia, one that does not rely on the oppression of an individual to thrive. It is in their act of defiance that the utopia lives, rejecting the incontestable truth that all others around them seem to accept unquestioningly. Through their actions, utopia stops being a finalized state of society, filled with descriptions of unfailing social dynamics, which one or more explorers happened to stumble upon, providing a detailed description of the State's affairs. Through those who leave Omelas, utopia becomes an on-going quest, fueled by the hope for something better.

In the midst of this set of contradictions, the child itself is not the embodiment of Yang, rather the engine on which the town's obsessive need for control runs. Meanwhile, the ones who walk away are the embodiment of Yin, whose engine is hope and the acknowledgement of injustice. As such, could the city of Omelas be a representation of a Yin state and could its people represent Yang's control and the acceptance of the sacrifice of an individual for the greater good? Can a place be truly utopian and harmonious if it emerges from such dystopian behaviors? But do not all utopias contain traces of Yang's

controlling dystopian side? Where do we draw the line, and how does one achieve the balance provided by the Yin-Yang?

The departure from Omelas represents more than a mere physical departure, encompassing a spiritual and ethical awakening, a disruption in Omelas' state of affairs, which define the city's collective consciousness. The ones who walk away, refusing to be complacent in the perpetuation of the utopian façade, are able to see beyond the collective well-being of the town and revolt against its social contract, challenging the status quo. Their departure is a declaration of individual agency and an affirmation of their values as individuals, rather than as a part of a corrupt collective. Their desertion is not without sacrifices, as they leave behind the town's comfort and safety that the mistreatment of the child provides, venturing into the unknown and renouncing the outcome of the abuse, more than just the abuse itself.

The paradoxical nature of Omelas raises questions about the essence of utopia, namely some mentioned above, because, while the city of Omelas gathers the criteria necessary to be seen as utopian, its foundation and engine reveal an underlying dystopian reality. The journey of those who walk away offers possibility for a new kind of utopia, one that is not grounded in the sacrifice of an individual for the greater good, but rather that centers itself on inherently utopian traits, such as justice, human integrity and dignity.

Considering this, there are three new fragments of utopia that arise, focusing respectively on the embodiment of utopia, the journey in search for something better as utopia and the utopia set on the horizon, always just out of reach, for which the person or community strive, and they each represent a different part in relation to "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas". On the one hand, these rebels are the embodiment of utopia, for in them resides the "seed of transformation" that Le Guin tells us is necessary in order to establish balance and harmony when it comes to creating a utopia. However, upon deciding to leave, the journey on which they embark, in search for a true utopia, set in motion by their conviction that it is possible to lead a different way of life, represents continuous and cyclical growth, especially seeing as these deserters have no destination. Subsequently, the wish for utopia is what keeps them moving along on their journey, with the true utopia remaining unattainable on the horizon, forcing them – those who are seeking utopia - to keep on evolving. The three aspects of utopia are all present in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", enhancing the grandeur and importance of the ones

who give their name to the text. All three allow the pursuit of balance and harmony, rejecting Omelas' utopian façade.

CONCLUSION

Traditionally, utopian writing provided detailed descriptions of non-existent communities located just off the map, which seek to present the reader with a set of prosperous, fairer and more advanced conditions and regulations, which goal is to bring to light certain societal flaws, causing in the reader a sense of alarm for the state of their surrounding society, and therefore constructing blueprints for the best society imaginable. Thomas More relied on the leeway that an uncharted world provided him, which is why his *Utopia* had the impact that it did, shaking up controversy among his contemporaries. After the world was charted, some utopian writers took to the skies and intertwined utopian thinking and science-fiction, others leaned further into fiction, concocting purposefully absurd societies, others looked at death as a necessary step in achieving utopia (i.e. alotopia), but, as utopia remained just out of reach, their purpose remained the same – to ask questions. Therefore, I would argue that, up until this point (meaning the second half of the 20th century), utopia had always been the final destination.

While Le Guin's perspective of the Yin-Yang theory seems to have a place among texts like More's which, while highly utopian contain some dystopian traits (perhaps a true testament to the passage of time) allowing for a cyclical change and criticism within the text, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" does not, for it completely breaks away from the tradition of utopian blueprints. Utopia is never attained in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", unlike other works in the Canon, such as More's *Utopia* and Gilman's *Herland*, which both constitute blueprint utopias, effectively separating it from the tradition of utopian writing. Because in Le Guin's story utopia is never realized and, contrastingly, it is something the citizens are aiming to achieve, Le Guin establishes a new mode of utopian creation.

In this new mode of utopianism, Le Guin begins by forgoing conventional utopian structures, emphasizing the exploration of nuanced, complex societies, rather than the arrival at perfected ones. She does this by proposing "thought experiments" and creating

settings in which the reader is forced to draw judgements and arrive at hard-to-reach conclusions. Using these tools, Le Guin manages to separate the concepts of utopia and dystopia from that of society, placing the emphasis on the unknown path and improbable destination, and those who choose to take it. Much like traditional utopianism, Le Guin's vision also intends to be thought-provoking and to instill a sense of unrest in the reader. However, by taking a different approach, she allows the reader's imagination to work with her in imagining what that utopian society might look like, how it might be organized politically and socially, and how it might be achieved.

In conclusion, Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" serves as a powerful exploration of the complexities of utopia, touching on morality and the human condition, deconstructing and redefining the concept of utopia. Through the Yin-Yang theory and the journey of those who walk away, the reader is faced with profound questions regarding the nature of happiness, the price of prosperity and stability, as well as the ethical implications of considering the collective well-being over that of the individual. Omelas' contradicting nature challenges the reader to call into question the traditional notions of utopia and utopian writing, exposing the paradoxical compromises set in place to establish this idealized state of society. While the city of Omelas, with its Summer Festival and happy people, is painted as a utopian setting, its foundation is based on the known sacrifice of a person, to which all citizens are privy, and which works to perpetuate the never-ending harmony that marks Omelas so strongly. Being faced with the city's obscure secret and uncomfortable reality, the ones who walk away offer a new kind of utopia, grounded in hope for justice, responsibility, accountability and true prosperity. Unlike traditional utopia, which often relies on peer-to-peer control and observation to maintain a stable and well-rounded environment, in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", the utopia is a celebration of individual autonomy, celebrating diversity and the inherent worth of every human being, no matter the bounds to which they are subjected. Embracing this new paradigm of utopian writing, where the people and their journey, fueled by utopia, are the utopia, the concept of utopia becomes untidy, falling out the box it had been put in with the original description of *Utopia*.

In her perspective of the Yin-Yang theory, Le Guin establishes a sense of balance that is necessary when entering the process of utopian creation. By relating Yin and Yang to utopian and dystopian traits, Le Guin creates an unshakable connection between them,

claiming that it can't be broken if a piece of utopian literature is to be dynamic, to allow for growth and change, because, seeing as the two sides are always present within the other, they are always in the process of transforming into their opposite, creating a cyclical change. This harmonious relation between them is present in Omelas, where the utopian and dystopian traits are interdependent and where there is vast room for cyclical transformation.

The citizens who choose to leave Omelas are a new representation of utopia, as is their journey and what guides them, allowing them to keep moving forward. The new paradigm that they establish represents a break from the utopian tradition, where the utopia is no longer an already established society, but rather the goal for which the deserters strive.

END NOTES

[1]Literary device used to explore complex ideas or philosophical concepts through hypothetical scenarios or imaginative narratives. It serves to test the boundaries of reality and challenge conventional assumptions, while probing the reader's principles, allowing them to envision new possibilities. As Ursula K. Le Guin states in her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), "In a story so conceived, the moral complexity proper to the modem novel need not be sacrificed, nor is there any built-in dead end; thought and intuition can move freely within bounds set only by the terms of the experiment, which may be very large indeed" (2019, 14).

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

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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).

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Navigating Utopian Waters: Dreams, Power, and Consequences in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* and Octavia E. Butler's "The Book of Martha"

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to delve into the thematic intersections of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* and Octavia E. Butler's "The Book of Martha", within the realms of dreams and their importance for utopianism. To achieve this goal, crucial and relevant scenes in both works are analysed and compared against each other. Firstly, there is an exploration of the fact that the existence of a perfect world for everyone is impossible. Secondly, it scrutinizes how each narrative grapples with the ethical and moral implications of wielding extraordinary power. Thirdly, it reflects on the characters' agency and free will. Lastly, it examines how the characters deal with the consequences of their actions as well as their sense of guilt. Other aspects are also explored such as race, utilitarianism, and the ambiguity of utopia.

KEYWORDS: Dream, Utopia, *The Lathe of Heaven*, "The Book of Martha", Power

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo aprofundar as intersecções temáticas entre *The Lathe of Heaven*, de Ursula K. Le Guin, e "The Book of Martha", de Octavia E. Butler, no domínio dos sonhos e da sua importância para a utopia. Para o efeito, são analisadas cenas cruciais e relevantes de ambas as obras e depois comparadas entre si. Em primeiro lugar, explora-se o facto da existência de um mundo perfeito para todos ser impossível. Em segundo lugar, analisa-se a forma como cada narrativa lida com as implicações éticas e morais do uso de um poder extraordinário. Em terceiro lugar, reflete-se sobre a agência e o livre arbítrio das personagens. Por último, examina-se a forma como as personagens lidam com as consequências das suas ações e com o seu sentimento de culpa. Outros aspetos são também explorados tais como raça, utilitarismo, e a ambiguidade da utopia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sonho, Utopia, *The Lathe of Heaven*, "The Book of Martha", Poder

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INTRODUCTION

Both "The Book of Martha" (2003), a short story by Octavia E. Butler, and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), a novel by Ursula K. Le Guin, explore the dichotomy Dreams/Nightmares in connection with Utopia/Dystopia. "The Book of Martha" starts with Martha Bes, the protagonist, having a conversation with God, in which He asks her to find a way to help humankind "survive its greedy, murderous, wasteful adolescence [, and] help it to find less destructive, more peaceful, sustainable ways to live"(Butler 192). *The Lathe of Heaven*'s focuses on George Orr, a man who has the ability to transform the world around him with his so-called "effective" dreams. Later, upon learning of this ability, William Haber, Orr's psychiatrist, cannot resist using George's powers for his personal gain and his own view of a perfect world. Despite being different pieces of literature, both focus on similar aspects, which are essential to analyse. Therefore, this article will delve into and compare not only the aforementioned dichotomies, but also themes such as "playing God", agency and the consequences of our actions, guilt and the various moral implications, and finally the question of race.

THERE IS NO PERFECT WORLD FOR EVERYONE

The idea of the impossibility of a perfect world for everyone has been explored for a while now, even before the publication of both texts.

One great example is the feminist separatist utopias of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Feminist utopian writers of this time wanted to write worlds where women were front and centre. One of these utopias is Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose novel *Herland* describes an island with a society that consists solely of women. Another similar case is *Mizora, A Prophecy* by Mary Bradley Lane, which also explores an all-female community. In this novel, the Mizorans promote eugenics by only having blonde, white women in their society as well as despising those with darker skin tones. In these works, women often wrote of places where they were free from patriarchal oppression, and therefore independent, with no real need for men. Despite not being aware of this at the time, these writers, being largely upper-middle white women, were perpetuating eugenicist ideas, which often lead to both racism and misandry. Having this in mind, it is clear that some contemporary readers would not find

these feminist separatist utopias very eutopian. This example shows that even if a world may appear perfect to a group of people, there is always a minority that may be harmed by it, therefore there is always a dystopian aspect in the seemingly eutopia. Lucy Sargisson gives us another important example in which the idea of perfection is disputed:

> Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) is a further example of a Utopian text in which the concept of perfection is challenged. *The Dispossessed* privileges harmony and unity and represents an ambiguous utopia that has perhaps more links with ecology movements than with feminism. None the less, Le Guin is clearly wary of the stagnation of process . . . (Sargisson 1996, 24)

Additionally, it is relevant to mention that, historically, eutopias, or "ideal cities", have not exactly been perfect for every reader, particularly those who are racialized. E. K. Chan corroborates this by stating:

> [The] early texts that define the Western tradition such as Plato's *Republic* (360 BCE), about which at least one scholar presumes that the inhabitants of the ideal city are all one "race"—that is, Greek, to the extent that people from different national groupings are racialized. (Chan 2022, 360)

In Butler's "The Book of Martha", Martha, upon being given this huge responsibility by God, says: "What, exactly, do you want? A utopia? Because I don't believe in them. I don't believe it's possible to arrange a society so that everyone is content, everyone has what he or she wants" (Butler 202). Despite wanting to make the world a better place, Martha does not believe in the possibility of making a world where everyone is fully satisfied with their lives. This idea inevitably reminds us of another work by Le Guin titled "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973). In this short story, there is a depiction of the utopian city of Omelas, whose prosperity depends on the eternal misery and suffering of a single child. As a paradigmatic example of a new utopianism, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" might validate Martha's belief.

In *The Lathe of Heaven*, Dr Haber is driven by the belief that it is a man's duty to forge a utopia, aiming to mend what he perceives as a fractured world. As he enquires: "But in fact, isn't that man's very purpose on earth – to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?" (Le Guin 81). On the contrary, George Orr is reluctant to shoulder the immense responsibility that accompanies the task of reshaping the world and is hesitant to be the catalyst for such alterations, stating: "Who am I to meddle with the way

things go?“ (Le Guin 13) and “I can’t be the only one [to dream effectively]; maybe I just happened to become aware of it. But I don’t want to do it.” (Le Guin 86)

This paradox is further explored in another of Le Guin’s texts, “Utopiyin, Utopiyang” (2015), in which she states:

> Every utopia since *Utopia* has also been . . . both a good place and a bad one. Every eutopia contains a dystopia, every dystopia contains a eutopia. In the yang-yin symbol each half contains within it a portion of the other, signifying their complete interdependence and continual intermutability . . . The symbol represents not a stasis but a process. (Le Guin 2017, 97)[1]

The powerful negotiation between utopia and dystopia led to a new understanding of utopianism and a break with traditional utopias. Hence, the eruption of "critical" utopias and dystopias. Tom Moylan describes the “critical utopia” as:

> A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as dream. Furthermore, [it] dwell[s] on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, [it] focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (Moylan 2014, 10)

Additionally, when it comes to “blueprint” utopias, Lucy Sargisson points out:

> One component of the commonly held view of what constitutes a utopia that is particularly puzzling is the assumption that utopias are blueprints for the perfect polity . . . This blueprint is an image of a future that is idyllic and perfect in all senses . . . To perfect is to make complete. On a superficial level, the equation of perfection with finality and death can be read as expressing fears that utopianism has traditionally evoked . . . This book advances a critique of utopianism as perfection-seeking that is different from those mentioned above. It hinges on a critique of the equation of perfection with closure . . . (Sargisson 1996, 2-3)

“The Book of Martha” and *The Lathe of Heaven,* by emphasizing the idea that a perfect world for everyone is impossible*,* cut with the “blueprint” tradition of utopian/dystopian writing, and introduced - especially Le Guin's works - a new way of perceiving the utopian impulse: as a path.

As far as utopia is concerned, Fátima Vieira explains it best:

> The best definition of utopia, in this sense, I have ever come across has been offered by the Argentinian film director Fernando Bírri, who famously said that utopia is something that we set on your horizon: we know that we will never reach it, that every time we take ten steps forward, it will walk ten steps away; but we need it to proceed, as it forces us to walk. Utopian thinking inspires us to be ambitious while asking the inaugural utopian question "what do we want for our society? (Vieira 2016, 28)

Utopia is thus the process of making the world a better place, and not the "perfect place" itself. Lucy Sargisson reiterates this idea: "Perfection, I suggest, symbolizes death: the death of movement, the death of progress and process, development, and change; the death, in other words, of politics. To strive for perfection is to strive for death." (Sargisson 1996, 37)

The shift within utopianism - from the classical idea that utopia is a perfect place to this notion of utopia as a path towards a horizon, implying constant renewal - makes clear how dreams - as utopian impulses - are key to literary utopias..

IMPORTANCE OF DREAMS IN UTOPIAN THINKING

In "The Book of Martha", when confronted with God's task, Martha suggests the following:

> 'Dreams,' she said. 'Powerful, unavoidable, realistic dreams that come every time people sleep.' . . . 'I want them to have the only possible utopia.' Martha thought for a moment. 'Each person will have a private, perfect utopia every night – or an imperfect one. If they crave conflict and struggle, they get that. If they want peace and love, they get that. Whatever they want or need comes to them. I think if people go to a ... well, a private heaven every night, it might take the edge off their willingness to spend their waking hours trying to dominate or destroy one another' She hesitated. 'Won't it?' (Butler 203,204)

Martha believes that the power of dreams will help guide humanity not to a perfect future, but to a better one: "'None of this will make them perfect, Martha' . . . 'But this will help?' She said. 'It will help more than it will hurt.' 'Yes, it will probably do that.'" (Butler 211) It is thus clear that Martha considers dreams to be a powerful tool for social change in the real world.

In *The Lathe of Heaven*, dreams literally do change reality when it comes to George Orr: "' I have had dreams that... that affected the... non-dream world. The real world . . . I dreamed something, and it came true . . . I simply change things . . . the dream really did

change reality. It made a different reality, retroactively'" (Le Guin 10, 12). However, these dreams are powered by his unconscious mind, which means that they are "incoherent, selfish, irrational – immoral".

Despite both being given this power to change reality, Martha and George react differently. Martha, on the one hand, decides to do the best she can help humanity, by giving them realistic dreams. On the other hand, George, having "effective dreams", cannot wait to be free from this burden, as he believes them to be more harmful than good. Dr Haber, as has been said before, uses Orr's power to change the world as he seems fit. Nevertheless, because Orr's dreams are unpredictable, his wishes do not always come to fruition, even with the use of hypnotic suggestion.

Both works present the idea of the importance of dreams in utopian thinking, since they force the characters to question their present reality and plan for a better, and different, future. Therefore, dreams and utopian thinking are indeed driving forces for change.

"PLAYING GOD" AND HANDLING POWER

Prior to discussing how these characters "play God", it is important to describe the state of their respective worlds before they decided/ were forced to change it.

Despite being published thirty years apart, both works present worlds with similar issues. In "The Book of Martha", both her and God mention that the world is struggling with overpopulation, environmental destruction, and "famines, epidemics, floods, fires, greed, slavery, revenge, stupid, stupid wars..." (Butler 202). In *The Lathe of Heaven*, they mention undernourishment, climate change, "overpopulation . . . cancer as the major killer . . . the color problem, racial hatred . . . war . . . species deterioration . . . poverty, economic inequality, the class war" (Le Guin 146). While Martha's solution for these issues is dreams, Haber's, and consequently Orr's, solutions are various, depending on the problem, and Haber's intentions did not exactly match the outcomes.

After God stated His proposal, Martha's reaction is one of fear and rejection. She does not "want to hurt people, not even by accident" (Butler 196). Later, God tells her that if she cannot do it, "there are millions of human beings who would give anything to do this work" (Butler 200). Considering this, Martha must ponder between two possibilities, both flawed. On the one hand, she can choose to give up the responsibility that comes with this

job and give it to someone else. On the other hand, she knows that there are cruel, tyrannical, hateful people that could be chosen if she refuses to perform the task. For a brief time, she is torn between her own comfortable and guilt-free life, and billions of people that could potentially suffer if she declines God's task. Despite the impossibility of making every human happy with her decision, she knows the other option would be too risky and, possibly, much worse:

> And instantly, she thought of some of these – people who would be happy to wipe out whole segments of the population whom they hated and feared, or people who would set up vast tyrannies that forced everyone into a single mold, no matter how much suffering that created. And what about those who would treat the work as fun – as nothing more than a good-guys-versus-bad-guys computer game, and damn the consequences. There were people like that. Martha knew people like that. (Butler 200, 201)

Her intersectional identity as a Black woman that grew up poor, made Martha much more empathetic to others' suffering, in comparison to many other people who could possibly thrive or profit from such suffering. Despite thinking that no one should have the right to "play God", Martha still chooses the path she thinks might help the vast majority of people. Martha appears to be the typical "chosen one" character who is afraid of the burden but reluctantly accepts the responsibility. Wondering whether there had been other people who had helped Him to do tasks such as these, Martha asks:

> 'But there have been a number of people who've had to deal with smaller disasters.' 'People you ordered to save a few and let the rest die?' 'Yes', God said . . . 'Some [of them] took refuge in madness, some in drunkenness, some in sexual license. Some killed themselves. Some survived and lived long, fruitful lives.' . . . 'I don't do that any longer', God said. No, Martha thought. Now, he had found a different amusement . . . 'What will please you and cause you to let me go and not bring in someone else to replace me?' 'I don't know', God said, and he smiled. He rested his head back against the tree. 'Because I don't know what you will do. That's a lovely sensation – anticipating, not knowing' 'Not from my point of view', Martha said bitterly . . . 'Because I don't know what to do. I really don't.' (Butler 201, 202)

It is almost ironic that God Himself doesn't want to "play God" – not even God wants that responsibility. Instead, He forces that responsibility onto His subjects, His "children". At the same time, Martha believes that God is doing this for His own amusement, as if He is having fun by gambling people's lives away.

After everything has been done, Martha states that the ways of God scare her, and she wants to go home. In response, God said:

> 'No, they don't', she said. 'You're beginning to like my ways.' After a time, Martha nodded. 'You're right. It did scare me at first, and now it doesn't. I've gotten used to it. In just the short time that I've been here, I've gotten used to it, and I'm starting to like it. That's what scares me.'(Butler 212)

Martha, here, shows exactly what this amount of power can do to a person if given free rein to it.

Unlike Martha, Dr Haber immediately thinks himself the man for the task of making the world greater. Upon learning about Orr's reality-changing ability, the doctor uses it for his own gain, manipulating awake-George, along with dream-George, by telling him that what they were doing was for the greater good of humanity. By using hypnotic suggestions during Orr's "d-state", Haber tries to create his own idea of a perfect world. Despite all the change they were able to achieve, William Haber still blames Orr for the bad outcomes, and rejoices in his own hubris for the ones that turned out as he desired initially: "Orr's irresponsibility was the cause of death of many innocent people, the wreckage and panic loose in the city: he must face up to what he had done" (Le Guin 117), which in comparison to "'To a better world!' Dr. Haber said, raising his glass to his creation . . ." (Le Guin 71), really show the difference between Haber's attitudes.

Even Heather Lelache states that "[He's] power-hungry. He's found a great way to run the world without taking any responsibility for it" (Le Guin 100): It is clear that Haber rejoices in the power of "playing God" but rejects the responsibility (and guilt) that comes with it.

"Playing God", thus, reflects exactly on how the characters handle power. It is not a coincidence that "with great power comes great responsibility" is an adage so vastly used.

In her thesis, *Dreams, Power, and Community: An Analysis of Balance in Ursula K. Le Guin's* The Word for World is Forest *and* The Lathe of Heaven, Brittany Pickering notes:

> George does not seek to exercise and master his powers, because he would rather not have them at all; Dr Haber, on the other hand, thinks it is a waste not to utilise such a promising faculty and seeks to harness the powers of effective dreaming. George Orr admires balance and is himself a balanced man, but his ability to change reality by dreaming up whole new realities threatens his sense of balance and his moral code . . . Haber, on the other hand, isn't discouraged by the dangers of trying to harness such powers; he is intrigued and accepts the

> challenge to make the world a better place. Along with a benevolence that causes Haber to want to fix the world's issues, he is ambitious, and he uses George's power to his own benefit. (Pickering 2014, 10-11)

George himself, reflecting on his psychiatrist's choices, understands that even though his intentions might be good, he is corrupted by his desire to "play God":

> It's not that he's evil. He's right, one ought to try to help other people . . . You have to help another person. But it's not right to play God with masses of people. To be God you have to know what you're doing. And to do any good at all, just believing you're right and your motives are good isn't enough. You have to... be in touch. He isn't in touch. No one else, no thing even, has an existence of its own, for him; he sees the world only as a means to his end. It doesn't make any difference if his end is good; means are all we've got... He can't accept, he can't let be, he can't let go . . . He could take us all with him, out of touch, if he did manage to dream as I do. (Le Guin 155)

This eagerness to change the world for the better drives Haber to try and, eventually, succeed in giving himself the ability to "effective dream", as he believes that George is too weak a man to have this amount of power. Ironically, this unstoppable hubris of his is what will doom him in the end. Evidently, the power to change reality cannot be brandished by just anyone, as Dr Haber nearly destroys, not only his own brain, but also the whole world.

AGENCY AND FREE WILL

The "tests they gave [George Orr] . . . Personality inventories, IQ, TAT, and some simulated encounter situations" (Le Guin 136) showed that George is the epitome of an average person: "Both, neither. Either, or. Where there's an opposed pair, a polarity, you're in the middle; where there's a scale, you're at the balance point. You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left." (Le Guin 137) Despite this being the case, it's also true that Orr was used, manipulated, and a passive bystander of what was happening in his life and in his own dreams. Since the beginning of the novel, Haber has seen Orr as someone he could use, as someone he thought was inferior to him (Le Guin 17).

George himself, all throughout the novel, reflects on how passive he has been. He feels trapped and cannot imagine a way to break the shackles of Haber's manipulation:

> I haven't any strength, I haven't any character, I'm a born tool. I haven't any destiny. All I have is dreams. And now other people run them . . . I must get away from Haber, he thought, trying to be firm and decisive, but even as he thought it he knew he wouldn't. Haber had him hooked, and with more than one hook. (Le Guin 73)

The only option he can envision to free himself from both Haber and his "effective dreams" is to end his own life. As he admits, "'The only solution I really can see,' he said, 'is to kill myself. But I don't want to . . . But I have to stop it somehow. I have to be stopped'" (Le Guin 96). When it comes to George Orr, the question of agency and free will is, thus, a complex one for he is self-aware of his condition, but he cannot seem to escape Haber and his power-hungry attitude.

In "The Book of Martha", however, agency is dealt with in a completely different way, and that is manifested in the representations of God throughout the story. At the beginning, Martha sees God as a "twice-live-sized, bearded white man" (Butler 190), and upon asking God the reason why she saw him in that manner, God answered "[y]ou see what your life has prepared you to see" (Butler 191). As the story progresses, Martha Bes sees God as a black man, and finally "she saw that God had, in fact, become a woman . . . 'I think you look a little like me. We look like sisters." (Butler 209). After realising she is the one deciding the appearance of God, she becomes frustrated:

> 'It does bother me. If I'm doing it, why did it take so long for me to see you as a black woman – since that's no more true than seeing you as a white or black man?' 'As I've told you, you see what your life has prepared you to see.' . . . 'I believe you. I just thought I had already broken out of the mental cage I was born and raised in – a human God, a white God, a male God...' 'If it were truly a cage', God said, 'you would still be in it, and I would still look the way I did when you first saw me.' (Butler 209, 210)

Despite being put in this situation against her will, she still makes the unconscious choice of deciding how God appears to her. Throughout her whole life she has been conditioned to believe that God was a white man, for not only the paintings depicted God that way, but also because, in her experience, power was always held by white men, not anyone else. Nevertheless, as the story developed, Martha went through a process of deconstruction of her own ideas of power and of who could possess it. Indeed, she went through a process of "deculturation", dismantling the preconceptions she had been put through her whole life. Precisely because she was "playing God" and had this unimaginable amount of power in her hands, she started seeing God as a reflection of herself – as a Black woman. Martha,

therefore, reclaimed her agency and her free will. Even if, per the terms of her agreement with God, she must go back and live on "the bottom level of society" (Butler 193), her experience as a Black woman has been brought to the centre of the conversation standing equal to God. T. L. Stanley, perfectly complements this idea by saying:

> Martha's life has prepared her to envision a world that considers the consequences for everyone who occupies it, not just the elite. The "bottom" becomes the center, the margins become the lens, and they expose the bias in the oppositional positions as a way of framing a more nuanced critique . . . This is further evidenced by the evolution of God. By the time Martha decides on the change she wants to take place in the world, God has morphed from a 12-foot-tall white man, to an average white man, to a Black woman—who looks like Martha. Martha's conception of utopia is formed as a direct challenge to the traditional Eurocentric expressions of civilization, evolving until divinity can also be found inside her own female, brown, previously poor and homeless, writer's body. (Stanley 2019, 251-252)

CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS: INTENTIONS VERSUS OUTCOMES

Both in "The Book of Martha" and *The Lathe of Heaven,* the characters must deal with the consequences of their actions. In the former, the consequences are manifest in the sacrifice Martha is forced to make at the end of the story to ensure the betterment of the world. It is a bittersweet decision, since she ends up asking God for forgetfulness, as it will negatively impact her passion and profession – writing fiction. In the latter, however, there is a great difference between their intentions and its outcomes.

Due to George Orr's frustration with the overcrowding of the city, Dr Haber hypno-suggested him to dream of a world less populated. The outcome is shocking, as billions of people disappeared in the blink of an eye: "My God, [Haber] thought, what has Orr done? Six billion people. Where are they?" (Le Guin 64). Orr had dreamt a new reality where there had been a carcinogenic plague which killed six billion people:

> 'Do you remember the Plague Years?' . . . 'They took care of the overpopulation problem, didn't they?' . . . 'There is no overpopulation now. Was there any other solution, besides nuclear war? There is now no perpetual famine in South America, Africa, and Asia . . . There are no floods now in the Ganges caused by the piling up of corpses of people dead of starvation.' (Le Guin 67)

Although Haber's intentions seem to be good, since ending overpopulation would eventually end famine, pollution, and floods, the outcome virtually the extinction of humankind. As Orr's dreams are unpredictable, so is the ability to control them. Haber, however, is blind by power, and continuing his self- proclaimed mission, he tries to solve yet another problem of their civilization – War –, by commanding Orr to dream about peace:

> No more mass killing of humans by other humans. No fighting in Iran and Arabia and Israel. No more genocides in Africa. No stockpiles of nuclear and biological weapons, ready to use against other nations. No more research on ways and means of killing people. A world at peace with itself. Peace as a universal life-style on Earth. You will dream of that world at peace with itself. (Le Guin 84)

Interestingly, George's subconscious mind is unable to imagine a world without war. Being at war seems to be a part of the human condition:

> But I guess I can't, or my subconscious can't, even imagine a warless world. The best it can do is substitute one kind of war for another. You said, no killing of humans by other humans. So I dreamed up Aliens . . . Maybe rationally I could conceive of the human species not trying to kill each other off by nations, in fact rationally it's easier to conceive of than the motives of war. But you're handling something outside reason. You're trying to reach progressive, humanitarian goals with a tool that isn't suited to the job. Who has humanitarian dreams? (Le Guin 85)

As a psychiatrist and a dream specialist, Haber knows how impossible to predict dreams is, and yet he does not care whether the outcomes of his hypnotic suggestions are not exactly what was desired, because for him all that matters is the results. As George constantly mentions, everything is a means to an end to Haber.

Lastly, it is important to mention how Haber's intention to end racism had an outcome that completely erased any kind of diversity: "No black people, no white, no yellow, no red . . . underneath the clothes they were all the same color. They were gray . . . Dr. Haber had been delighted when that happened" (Le Guin 128). It is both curious and

sad that the only non-racist world that Orr's subconscious could conjure was a world where there was no colour difference whatsoever.[2] Successful in solving racial prejudice, they also end diversity and inevitably destroyed entire cultural and social experiences. George thinks immediately of Heather Lelache, his love interest. As a bi-racial woman, her identity had been moulded by her experiences as such. Her attitudes, her obstacles, and her boundaries were all conditioned by her life as a mixed-race woman. In a "gray world", could such a person have been born?

> That's why she's not here, he thought. She could not have been born gray. Her color, her color of brown, was an essential part of her, not an accident. Her anger, timidity, brashness, gentleness, all were elements of her mixed being, her mixed nature, dark and clear right through, like Baltic amber. She could exist in the gray people's world. She had not been born. (Le Guin 129)

Although George himself could tolerate a gray people's world (Le Guin 129) – he could not tolerate the fact that Heather would not have been born, which shows precisely where his loyalties lie – with his beloved and not with the end of racial discrimination.

In the light of these examples, is it possible to understand Haber's attitudes? Although the outcomes of his actions are not exactly what he intended, he still believes that it is worthwhile it if it leads to a better world.

Simply put, utilitarianism is the belief that the morality of an action is determined by its impact on the happiness of the majority. The goal is to maximize overall happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that the building where William Haber has his office has the following inscription: "THE GREATEST GOOD FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER" (Le Guin 135).[3] However, this line of thought inevitably leads to eugenics, as George encounters a person being euthanized for having cancer. As he discusses this occurrence with Haber, he discovers that the doctor simply does not care about these people, as they "threaten" society, in his opinion: "'. . . the future will justify it. We need health. We simply have no room for the incurables, the gene-damaged who degrade the species; we have no time for wasted, useless suffering'" (Le Guin 140). As it happens in the separatist utopias mentioned in the section, "There is no perfect world for everyone", Haber's utilitarian ways also lead to eugenics. For him, the means justify the end, even if the means are cruel and vile. Moreover, following the theories of Fátima Vieira in her essay "The four modes of thinking

framed by utopian discursivity; Or why we need Utopia", in a pluralistic society, there cannot be simple solutions to complex issues, which is exactly what Haber is trying to achieve.

In "The Book of Martha", the consequences of Martha Bes' actions have quite a different outcome. Her decision to give all humans vivid, realistic dreams, affects people's need for fiction negatively:

> 'Reading will suffer, won't it – pleasure reading, anyway?' 'It will – for a while, anyway. People will read for information and for ideas, but they'll create their own fantasies. Did you think of that before you made your decision?' Martha sighed. 'Yes,' she said. 'I did.' (Butler 212)

To make the world a slightly better place, she sacrificed her passion and her profession. Unlike Haber who, with the help of Orr's powers, gets himself a better office, a better position in his field, Martha gives up her life-long passion so that humanity might have a better chance at survival. It is important to mention that Martha, being a black woman, is part of two groups of people often discriminated against. Her background definitely shapes her decisions in the story, as she is clearly more empathetic and altruist than the selfish and cruel Dr Haber.

The characters in both stories exhibit contrasting reactions and attitudes towards the consequences of their actions. This disparity can be attributed to the distinct genres of the works: one being a dystopia and the other a philosophical utopia.

GUILT AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS

Mentioning guilt (or the lack of it) is unavoidable when we discuss how people deal with the consequences of their actions. As previously mentioned, George desires to free himself from the weight of guilt associated with altering the world, as he believes that influencing the world in the way he does is not within anyone's rightful authority. Dr Haber, however, appears to show no guilt whatsoever. As long as he achieves his goals, he believes every action, harmful or not, is justified. Brittany Pickering adds that:

> Le Guin juxtaposes George's virtuousness and balance with his psychiatrist Dr. Haber's strange mix of benevolence and power envy. While George struggles to maintain his own balance as well as that of the world he lives in, Haber fiddles with it and throws things more and more into disorder. (Pickering 2014, 2)

At the end of "The Book of Martha", Martha is so consumed by guilt that she asks God to make her forget her decision:

> 'Do you want to remember being here?' God asked. 'No.' . . . 'I'm afraid of the unintended damage that dreams might do.' 'Even though in the long run they'll almost certainly do more good than harm?' God asked. 'Even so,' Martha said. 'I'm afraid the time might come when I won't be able to stand knowing that I'm the one who caused not only the harm, but the end of the only career I've ever cared about. I'm afraid knowing all that might drive me out of my mind someday.' . . . 'I want to forget.' (Butler 212, 213)

She is afraid for both her and the whole of humanity's future. She is torn between the pain she might cause others and the pain she might cause herself – the self versus the social. In the end, she chooses to not know. In this situation, for Martha, ignorance is bliss. Although, just like Dr Haber, she believes that good for most is better than good for none, her approach is completely different, and that reflects on how distinct she is from him, despite having mostly the same powers.

Again, T. L. Stanley perfectly complements this by stating:

> However, as God points out, to so powerfully satisfy people's fantasy lives in dreams will negate the need for many other past times—including the reading of fiction. Though immensely saddened, Martha sees this as a worthy sacrifice. She understands utopia not as perfect, but as better, and "the good place" as good for most instead of good for all. She is able to exercise God-power for a day, all the while recognizing her continued humanity. So, knowing she will lose her livelihood, she asks God to erase her memory. She doesn't want to recall that this new world was her idea. Martha also doesn't want to be [aware] of her responsibility for whatever subsequent fallout will come from this society she has conceived. (Stanley 2019, 254)

CONCLUSION

Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopianism as: "social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (Sargent) .

Sargent's definition reflects exactly why both works studied and analysed in this article are widely considered utopian. "The Book of Martha" explores the philosophical question of: "if we had Martha's power, what would we do to make the world better than it currently is?", for which there is no clear answer. As both texts studied demonstrate so differently, "better" is utterly subjective. Martha's decision to give everyone vivid and satisfying dreams further proves that for her, and for utopian texts in general, dreams, and hope, are powerful tools for change, as they force us to walk towards a better world. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, George's "effective" dreams, Haber's abuse of power, and the consequences of their actions, function as a cautionary tale by warning the reader that no one has the right to "play God" with other people's lives. Their story reflects not only the idea that dreams, when imposed, become nightmares, but also how one's eutopia could be another's dystopia.

In conclusion, dreams, along with the hope they bring, prompt dreamers to yearn for a better world. This desire for change, combined with our own agency, compels us to move forward. The essence of utopia is in the process of attempting to achieve a better world.

ENDNOTES

[1] All the other citations by Ursula K. Le Guin are from *The Lathe of Heaven*, except this one.

[2] As Orr reflects: "'I suppose that you suggested that there be no more color problems. No question of race' 'Precisely. And of course I was envisaging a political and ethical solution. Instead of which, your primary thinking processes took the usual short cut . . . this time they went to the root. Made the change biological and absolute. There never has been a racial problem . . . Nobody was ever outcaste in India – nobody was ever lynched in Alabama – nobody was massacred in Johannesburg! War's a problem we've outgrown and race is a problem we never even had! Nobody in the entire history of the human race has suffered for the color of his skin'" (Le Guin 128,129).

[3] Ironically, "the greatest good for the greatest number" that Haber so fiercely wanted to achieve lead to the genocide of millions of people.

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DeFreitas, Susan (ed.). *Dispatches From Anarres: Tales in Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin*. Forest Avenue Press, 2021

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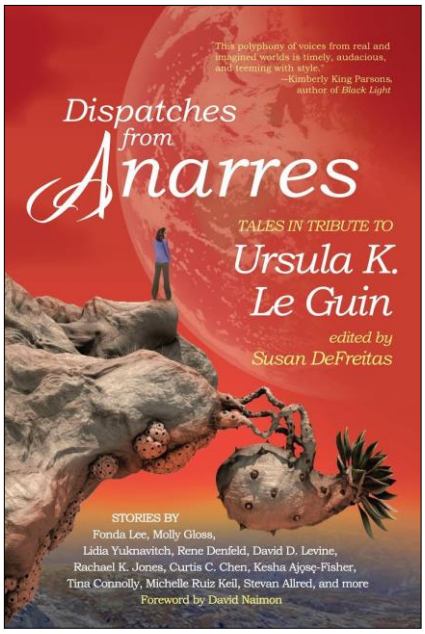
Portland, a city in the state of Oregon, USA, is probably best known for its beautiful parks and somewhat eccentric people, whose local mantra, "Keep Portland Weird", may be their best introduction to newcomers. It was also the home of late science and speculative fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin. One could go on, and most likely never finish, discussing how she inspired the literary world from one hemisphere to the other. In a research paper entitled "The Influence of Ursula K. Le Guin" for Portland State University (Spring 2021), author Bailey Potter explains how Le Guin broadened the science fiction genre, being one of the best representations of the New Wave Science Fiction movement during the 1960s and 1970s. However, how has she inspired the writers who lived in the same city as her – the ones who walked the same streets, woke up to the same surroundings, and perhaps even crossed her path?

Thanks to Susan DeFreitas, independent editor, and writer, we have the answer to that question in the



> Le Guin often wrote about the importance of the imagination and put forth a philosophy that, interestingly, did not place the imagination in opposition to the real. Can a book be truly called 'realistic' if it does not include the imaginative, given that our imaginative faculties are so central to what makes us human?
>
> *David Naimon*
> "Foreword"

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form of an anthology entitled *Dispatches from Anarres: Tales in Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin*, first published in November 2021. Named after the anarchist utopian society 'Anarres' in Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*, this anthology compiles thirty-one short stories from twenty-nine different minds – all with a tie to Portland – composing an amalgam of beautiful but divergent creations that share their tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin by portraying how she inspired them to follow the trail she blazed in the American literary world.

In an interview with *Think Out Loud,* a public show for *Oregon Public Broadcasting* that aired on the 4th of March 2022, Susan DeFreitas explained that, despite having requested stories that included a bit of Le Guin's care with themes such as feminism, pacifism, anarchism, her revolutionary take on utopianism, among many others, DeFreitas knew every story would be its own. Moreover, just as Le Guin left us with more than twenty novels, a dozen volumes of short stories, works of poetry, and many essays, so could twenty-nine different minds take infinite interpretations of the unique inspiration they have taken out of her work. Thus, DeFreitas divided the book into three parts, each with its distinct purpose: for the first part, "Magelight", she selected eight short stories that leaned towards fantasy; for the second, "Returning to the Root", she compiled eleven stories that focus on speculative fiction, which, even though it is a broader term that encompasses many different genres within itself, each story tries to change the laws of our current society and explore its outcomes; and lastly, "On Time and Darkness" is composed by twelve tales more inclined towards the "classic" science fiction – which can only lead to curiosity, considering how much the genre has changed since Le Guin started publishing, and since the New Wave movement, known for its experimentation with other areas such as social sciences.

To conclude each part, there is an Interlude, followed by an "Ib & Nib" tale, with two charismatic characters written by Stevan Allred. This literary strategy makes it both a fun pause and a comedic relief, as these stories are similar to popular children's fables. It also operates as a sort of "reset button" for the mind to change scenery and prepare for the next part. In addition, the book features a foreword by David Naimon, who had masterly interviewed Le Guin and later published *Ursula K. Le Guin: Conversations on Writing* (2018). At the end of each story, there is also a short statement clarifying the author's motivation for what they wrote, whether it is a recollection of the first time they picked up a Le Guin book or a simple explanation of how their story can be tied to her work. Whatever the case, these statements work as a thank-you note to the late author.

The book's first part, "Magelight", is introduced with a stanza from 'The Creation of Eà', from Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea.* It features stories that range from young characters trying to avenge their parents' sacrifice against an oppressing society; ostracised characters who have unique magic that can save their society from domineering forces; women who become reptiles to escape the prison that their daily lives have become, and much more. The story entitled "The Night Bazaar for Women Becoming Reptiles", by Rachel K. Jones, is one that almost begs for a whole novel. Very much like Le Guin's view on Taoism, this moving tale shows that good and evil are not always antagonist entities, but complex (and sometimes interdependent) forces. In the already mentioned March 2022 interview with *Think out Loud*, Jones explains that she took inspiration from Le Guin's understanding of contemporary utopianism, of how no society is perfect because, in a plural diverse society, it is impossible to solve intersectional problems by presenting simple solutions. She says, "[Le Guin] was just this quintessential anthropologist in how she looked at societies (...) The whole reason that we don't have easy answers even within our own societies is because there isn't really one thing that works for everyone." Jones's story shows us the need to first question what is good for ourselves, and the importance of leaving if we cannot find whatever we are looking for in what surrounds us. Jones's beautiful prose provides a unique gem that introduces characters living in a culture very different from our own, with very different needs, and the story's weird and transformative content, as well as its meaning, is far more profound than it first appears.

The second part, "Returning to the Root", opens with some verses of Le Guin's rendition of *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way*. Its stories range from a tale within a colony of bees, another about the possibility of finding oneself during the apocalypse, the importance of past lives, and also a new perspective of Le Guin's short story "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas". The title of this short story is just as straightforward as the original: "The Ones Who Don't Walk Away", by Rene Denfeld, takes the stand of one of the sacrificed children of Omelas. As the oppressed and essential cornerstone of Omelas's prosperity and utopian façade, in Denfeld's story, the child is given a voice. This perspective deconstructs the false appearance of Omelas's happiness, while the narrative ventures an answer to what happens once that child grows up. It is worth saying that this story is just as heart-wrenching as Le Guin's.

"Finding Joan", by Hugo Award winner David D. Levine, is also a remarkable tale of speculative fiction, that follows Joan who, getting back from a meditation retreat in a cave-system over the weekend, finds out that the world as we know it has ended due to a gamma ray burst. This energetic galactic event – which occurring, according to the text, "would mean the end of life on Earth, [although] the chance of that happening had been considered remote" – has turned Earth into a barren wasteland, destroying almost entirely the ozone layer, turning our planet into a deadly field utterly unprotected from radiation (165, 2021). Joan, a woman in her late fifties, goes against all odds and chooses to find herself amidst this cataclysmic event. Despite its unconventionality, she decides that now that she is free from her former obligations – such as having a profession and managing life with a partner – she has been given the perfect opportunity to tackle the things that she had always wanted to do for pleasure, but never had the time for – like reconnecting with literature. Although some of her decisions may frustrate the readers, by the end of the story, one cannot help but feel pleasantly surprised. This journey about an unlikely protagonist driving us through a dying world shows us how inner peace can be found in the most improbable forms. Joan does not turn into an altruist warrior destined to help others; instead, she works on her inner self, finds power in books, and shows us that, sometimes, it is possible to find hope in hopelessness.

"On Time and Darkness" is the last section of this anthology. It opens with a quote from Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and its twelve stories feature a myriad of characters, from an emotionally torn puppet, a character whose job is to taste food for millions of bodiless people, or even a girl who transforms into a neuron, among several others.

"Hard Choices", by Tina Connolly, included in this part, is a curious narrative. As the title implies, it is composed of choices that the reader must make. Connolly explains that this interactive short story was inspired by the complexity of Le Guin's characters and the challenging decisions they must make – as depicted in *The Dispossessed* with Shevek, who is faced with difficult quests and hard choices during his journey between Anarres and Urras. Connolly designed the narrative as follows: 1) each paragraph starts with a letter, from A to Z, and 2) at the end of each paragraph, the reader is invited to jump to a letter-led paragraph, depending on the action they think the character must take. Here lies Connolly's plot twist: the reader hops from paragraph to paragraph without knowing if

their choices will truly make a difference or if the end will inevitably be the same despite the character's apparent agency in choosing divergent paths.

While much could be said about the remaining stories, readers will benefit from knowing as little as possible about what they will encounter. This anthology stands out for its remarkable diversity in content and style. Reading it is in itself an adventure; readers will encounter a spectrum of emotions – from joy and hope to fear and sorrow. Every tale vividly showcases the boundless creativity and ingenuity of the human mind, continually surprising and engaging those who delve into the worlds crafted within these pages.

This review opens with a question on how Le Guin may have inspired the creative writing of the ones closer to her geographically, just like DeFreitas had done while compiling this anthology. In their notes, some of the authors claim that they had the chance to meet her personally. Such is the case of Lidia Yuknavitch, bestselling author, whose story "Neuron" was inspired by a conversation with Le Guin herself. Sonia Orin Lyris wrote at the end of her short "When Strangers Meet" that "Ursula Le Guin's worlds and wisdom shaped [her] from childhood (...) [Le Guin] met [her] with a gentle graciousness that changed [her] as surely as any of her stories ever had. Without her [Lyris] would not be the writer [she is] today." (295, 2021). Others had only the pleasure of finding her among the library shelves, but even then their connection to Le Guin's worlds and characters proved magical. At the end of "Each Cool Silver Orb a Gift", author Nicole Rosevear writes: "My earliest memory of Ursula Le Guin's writing is pulling *The Tombs of Atuan* from the shelves of the local library. (...) I can still picture this cover, and I remember sitting down to start reading it, tucked between the library stacks, before I'd even checked it out. Something about this protagonist spoke directly to that younger me, (...) and set the stage for my future interactions with her work." (344, 2021)

The homage this anthology presents goes beyond the simple borrowing of Le Guin's ideas and themes, since it also plows some of the fruit her work has planted; it is a portrayal of her legacy. *Dispatches From Anarres* is an eye-opener, a beacon that illuminates the corners Le Guin touched with her varied work, as every story is so different from the next, but always with a nod to what connects them.

To the readers who have not yet had the chance to delve into a book by Ursula K. Le Guin, this anthology may spark the curiosity to do so, for in her endless tales and intricate worlds, she fiercely pioneered the trespass of all the traditional borders of the

genre, and revolutionised its canonical tropes. Once again resorting to "The Influence of Ursula K. Le Guin" (Spring 2021) for Portland State University, author Bailey Potter states that "(...) her significant improvement and widening of the science fiction and fantasy genres; her inclusion and diversification of her characters within her oeuvre, effectively uplifting and encouraging marginalized voices (...)" (3, 2021) are some of the best examples of her influence, that are mirrored in this collection.

To those who are fans of Le Guin and mourn the end of her storytelling, may this book fill up the desire to rereading her stories. Though not her work, in this collection, readers will find stories that resonate with Le Guin's own creations, references and themes familiar to her worlds, and it will feel like meeting an old friend, after a long time... a very missed, but never forgotten, friend.

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Mesa-redonda "50 Anos de *The Dispossessed*"

JUNIOR RESEARCHERS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN STUDIES
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Univ. NOVA de Lisboa

No dia 4 de junho de 2024, os Junior Researchers in Anglo-American Studies da NOVA FCSH celebraram o 50.º aniversário da publicação da obra *The Dispossessed*, de Ursula K. Le Guin, com uma mesa-redonda intitulada "50 Anos de *The Dispossessed*". A iniciativa surgiu no seguimento de uma mesa-redonda que se tinha realizado a 7 de novembro de 2018, que celebrava o 50.º aniversário da obra *A Wizard of Earthsea*, bem como o legado da autora, que falecera nesse mesmo ano.

À semelhança da mesa-redonda de 2018, a conversa sobre *The Dispossessed* contou com a presença da Professora Emérita Teresa Botelho, doutorada pela Universidade de Cambridge e investigadora em áreas como utopias e distopias tecnológicas, o pós-humano, e cultura visual e cinema; da Professora Maria do Rosário Monteiro, doutorada em Ciências Literárias pela Universida Nova de Lisboa, autora de vários livros, incluindo o primeiro volume académico sobre J.R.R. Tolkien publicado em Portugal, e tradutora de várias obras para português, entre as

You can't crush ideas by suppressing them. You can only crush them by ignoring them. By refusing to think, refusing to change.

The Dispossessed
Ursula K. Le Guin

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quais *Lavinia* (2008) da autora celebrada; e, por último, de Luís Filipe Silva, nome incontornável da ficção científica portuguesa, autor de diversos romances, contos, críticas e artigos em publicações portuguesas e internacionais, entre os quais se destaca *O Futuro à Janela* (Prémio Caminho de Ficção Científica).

A mesa-redonda contou com a moderação dos alunos e investigadores Ana Brígida Paiva, Beatriz de Almeida Santos, e Rui Mateus. Foram lançadas questões aos convidados, a partir das quais se iniciou uma estimulante discussão acerca de temáticas como utopia e ficção científica, géneros literários e como estas questões se aplicam a este romance de Le Guin em particular.

O debate iniciou-se com uma questão relativamente ao que tinha sido feito em termos de investigação, traduções para português ou outros projetos que celebrassem a autora desde a data da sua morte. Foram destacadas algumas traduções para português, nomeadamente das obras *A Mão Esquerda das Trevas* (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), *Do Outro Lado do Sonho* (*The Lathe of Heaven*) e *Um Feiticeiro de Terramar* (*A Wizard of Earthsea*), bem como a criação do Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction em 2022. Concluiu-se que muito havia ainda por desenvolver no âmbito dos estudos sobre a obra da autora.

Um ponto com o qual todos concordaram foi o de que a utopia de um indivíduo poderá representar o pesadelo de outro. Aplicado ao romance em questão, foram sugeridas várias leituras da obra, tendo sido destacado o facto de que o conto "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" de Le Guin foi escrito ao mesmo tempo que *The Dispossessed*, levantando-se a questão de como se pode conceber e organizar uma sociedade melhor. No contexto da conversa sobre sociedades em revolução, foi discutida a forma como os primeiros revolucionários tendem a ser idealistas e, por contraste, os seus descendentes facilmente se tornam dogmáticos, uma questão abordada no próprio romance. A tendência do ser humano para a normalização e regulamentação cria uma previsibilidade ilusória em termos ideológicos. Nesse sentido, a Professora Maria do Rosário Monteiro declarou que o legado que nos foi deixado por Le Guin é o amor profundo à liberdade de escolha, sempre associada a uma absoluta responsabilidade. Perguntou-se, de seguida, onde poderá residir a utopia nesta obra. A Professora Teresa Botelho sugeriu que o grande potencial utópico da obra é o contacto entre planetas e o contacto entre sociedades, ponderando se esta seria, de facto, a utopia por atingir; isto é, o aprender com o outro. A Professora Teresa Botelho acrescentou ainda que a forma como a sociedade de Anarres gere a sua falta de

recursos constitui uma das reflexões mais interessantes (e mais atuais) de *The Dispossessed*, nomeadamente, a possibilidade de viver sem crescimento, uma noção de "degrowth" económico com menos impacto ambiental. A possibilidade de de-crescimento é uma característica rara nas utopias, que frequentemente se centram na ideia de crescimento e de progresso, tornando este romance de Le Guin, na opinião da Professora Teresa Botelho, ainda muito atual, especialmente tendo em conta a crise climática, o crescimento económico exacerbado e a exaustão de recursos naturais.

Além disso, concluiu-se que *The Dispossessed* permite ainda um constante diálogo – tema a que os convidados regressaram ao longo da conversa. Existem, no entanto, outras questões a enfrentar enquanto sociedade, algumas delas inclusivamente abordadas previamente por Le Guin. Há 50 anos, a autora já apresentava indícios claros de uma ansiedade face às questões climáticas, examinava temas transtemporais a partir de exemplos contemporâneos (como a Guerra através do conflito no Vietnam); temas essenciais na sociedade dos dias de hoje. Estas questões estendem-se igualmente ao género literário, à sua presença internacional, e às suas fronteiras e conexões com outros géneros. Constatou-se que, em relação a Portugal, existe ainda um grande caminho a percorrer, existindo, de certa forma, um paralelismo entre as dificuldades académicas sentidas por Shevek e o panorama académico atual.

Neste momento do debate, colocou-se uma pergunta provocadora aos convidados: por que é que Le Guin nunca ganhou um Nobel da Literatura? Argumentou-se que Le Guin nunca pensou ativamente em ganhar o Nobel, querendo apenas ser lida sem preconceito, tendo consciência dos impedimentos que rótulos como "ficção científica" ou "fantasia" possam ter no contexto literário convencional. Foi ainda de destacar o papel fulcral que a autora teve na construção de uma nova visão do Fantástico, como um género literário com qualidade e como um instrumento de transformação social e pensamento crítico.

Luís Filipe Silva dirigiu a seguinte questão à mesa: se Shevek fosse mulher, quão diferente teria sido a narrativa, nomeadamente, como teria a protagonista sido recebida em Urras. As moderadoras propuseram que a receção em Urras seria informada pelo seu sistema patriarcal, enquanto que a narrativa de Anarres poderia manter-se relativamente semelhante. A Professora Teresa Botelho acrescentou ainda que a questão da estrutura

familiar teria mais peso se Shevek fosse mulher, particularmente no que diz respeito à sua receção em Urras.

O momento de conversa com o público (tanto presencial, como online) revelou-se extremamente dinâmico, com várias questões pertinentes sobre diversas temáticas, incluindo as fronteiras entre géneros literários, tanto a nível académico como editorial, a Inteligência Artificial enquanto tema na ficção científica e o seu impacto na produção literária, assim como a importância das adaptações para o pequeno e grande ecrãs na receção de obras de ficção científica na cultura popular. A sessão foi gravada em formato áudio para divulgação online. Ouça aqui!

| OS ORGANIZADORES

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também conhecidos por JRAAS, são um grupo de jovens investigadores do CETAPS, composto por alunos de Mestrado e de Doutoramento em início de carreira. Esta atividade foi promovida por Ana Brígida Paiva, Beatriz de Almeida Santos, e Rui Mateus, colaboradores do Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS).

| OS CONVIDADOS

LUÍS FILIPE SILVA

é um autor português de ficção científica. Entre as suas obras publicadas, temos *O Futuro à Janela* (Prémio Caminho de Ficção Científica), *Terrarium – Um Romance em Mosaicos* (com João Barreiros), além de vários contos, críticas e artigos em publicações portuguesas, brasileiras e internacionais. Como antologista, organizou *Os Anos de Ouro da Pulp Fiction Portuguesa* (com Luís Corte Real) e *O Resto é Paisagem* (com Pedro Cipriano), entre outros.

MARIA DO ROSÁRIO MONTEIRO

doutorada em Ciências Literárias pela Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, lecciona unidades curriculares na área das Literaturas e Culturas Comparadas na NOVA-FCSH. É autora de vários livros, incluindo o primeiro volume académico sobre J. R. R. Tolkien publicado em Portugal bem como de diversos artigos no âmbito da Fantasia, Ficção Científica e Utopias. Traduziu várias obras de fantasia em língua inglesa para português, entre as quais *Lavínia* (2008) de Ursula K. Le Guin.

TERESA BOTELHO

doutorada pela Universidade de Cambridge, leccionou na NOVA FCSH unidades curriculares na área científica dos Estudos Norte-Americanos até 2023. De entre os seus interesses de investigação, destacam-se as utopias e distopias tecnológicas, o pós-humano, a literatura norte-americana, a teoria da identidade, a cultura visual e cinema, a relação estabelecida entre literatura e ciência e, por fim, as representações literárias e visuais do 11 de Setembro.

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50 ANOS DE
THE DISPOSSESSED
MESA REDONDA COM
MARIA DO ROSÁRIO MONTEIRO
TERESA BOTELHO
LUÍS FILIPE SILVA


THE DISPOSSESSED
MARIA DO ROSÁRIO MONTEIRO
TERESA BOTELHO
LUÍS FILIPE SILVA

é artista, ilustradora e criadora de banda desenhada. Estudou na ESAP de Guimarães e participou em várias exposições. Colabora com a Universidade do Porto em projetos culturais e científicos.

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VARIA SECTION

For Auld Lang Syne': A Tale of Two Songs

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ABSTRACT: Besides the Royal Family and the touristic, artistic, aesthetic, and literary fruition and appraisal of Scotland and her landscapes since the mid-18th century, two distinguished English artists have paid a musical tribute to Britain's northernmost nation, offering us two "lyrical ballads" which, in a joint framework of the heritage and culture industries and the new memory studies, can be subject to some brief comments: Paul McCartney's *Mull of Kintyre* (1977) and Rod Stewart's *Every Beat of my Heart* (1986).

KEYWORDS: Paul McCartney, *Mull of Kintyre,* Rod Stewart, *Every Beat of my Heart*, British pop/rock music, Memory Studies

RESUMO: Além da Família Real e da fruição e valorização turísticas, artísticas, estéticas e literárias da Escócia e das suas paisagens desde meados do século XVIII, dois artistas ingleses consagrados prestaram um tributo musical à nação mais setentrional da Grã-Bretanha, oferecendo-nos duas "baladas líricas" que, num quadro conjunto das indústrias do património e da cultura e dos novos estudos da memória, podem ser objecto de breves comentários: *Mull of Kintyre* (1977), de Paul McCartney, e *Every Beat of my Heart* (1986), de Rod Stewart.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Paul McCartney, *Mull of Kintyre,* Rod Stewart, *Every Beat of my Heart,* Música pop/rock britânica, Estudos de Memória

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> As Humberto Lopes (21) once wrote, "... em matéria de identidades culturais, as fronteiras estão longe de ser adamastores invencíveis." Indeed, ... the existence and/or the very concept of "frontiers" or "borders" ... can blind us to the fact that they can also be ways of bridging, uniting, dissolving or transcending oppositions, as they are, after all, two-edged, double-faced peripheries centrally located in some common (and therefore shared) middle ground (Alarcão 2016, 103-104).[1]

These words were written for a paper presented at "Transcending Oppositions in Scottish Culture: a Symposium", organized by the Porto branch of CETAPS in 2014. Its timing was obviously meant to coincide with, and celebrate, the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Waverley* (1814) by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), as well as the Scottish referendum on the issue of independence from the UK)[2] opening up the possibility of "The Break-up of Britain", to borrow Tom Nairn's title. This referendum may actually be repeated sometime in the wake of Brexit and a new British monarch, considering the fact that, as Krishan Kumar points out,

> ... "Europe" for the so-called Celtic Nations of the British Isles represents a way of escaping the longstanding clutches of the imperial power in the Isles, England.... But it was always envisaged that separation from England would be accompanied by Scottish entry into the European Union as an independent unity. (2017, 76-77)

Since the Acts of Union (1707) and the Jacobite defeat at Culloden (1746), not to mention earlier examples from the Middle Ages (the Scottish wars of independence) and the 16th century (the disastrous defeat of James IV's army at Flodden Field, 1513, and especially the political and religious conflict between Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart), the relations between England and Scotland have had their ups and downs.[3] Stepping back in time to the beginning of George III's reign (1760-1820), Linda Colley has this to say:

> ... in official eyes, Scotland was no longer the old enemy, and ... an alien province to be left gingerly alone or viewed with unrelenting suspicion, the standard ministerial responses to it in the first half of the eighteenth century. Instead, Scotland was coming to be seen by those in

> power as useful, loyal and *British* ... For ministers had no wish to destroy all of the Highlanders' ancestral values. Their obedience and bravery when their chieftains summoned them to war were entirely admirable characteristics in Whitehall's view, so long as from now on they were channelled exclusively into British military service....
> Here was a *volte face* of striking proportions. Scotland – including its Highlands – was no longer an expensive nuisance. It had become the arsenal of the empire. (2009, 120-121)

Although one of the earliest proponents of (Great) Britain as a historical and political entity was, curiously, himself a Scot (John Major, or Mair, 1469-1550, author of *Historia Majoris Britanniae,* 1521), the hasty, though still frequent, usage, at colloquial level, of "Britain" and "England" as more or less synonymous has an obvious impact on conceptual and discursive definitions of (a) Scottish identity(ies), or "Scottishness(es)", neither to be confused with "Englishness(es)" nor diluted by, or into, "Britishness(es)"..., however inclusive the latter may profess and purport to be. Stig Abell states it loud and clear:

> It is striking ... that we live in a country without one uniform name: Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) vs the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man) vs The British Isles (everywhere, including the Republic of Ireland). Britain and the UK are different entities, although I blur them like everybody else. (2019, 290)

Henry W. Meikle's words, written in the mid-20th century and warning precisely against the dangers that may lurk behind such "blurrings", are also worth quoting:

> Under modern conditions of intercommunication, and the influence of the radio and the cinema, national characteristics tend to be lost in *a featureless uniformity*. Scotland, however, like other small countries tenacious of her memories of the past ... still preserves an alert national consciousness. (my emphasis; 1955, 48)

During Tony Blair's (himself a Scot) term in office, the signing of the Belfast, or "Good Friday", agreement (1998), as well as the creation of a Scottish parliament and a National Assembly in Wales (both in 1999) and in Northern Ireland (2000), signal a clear devolutionary drift in British domestic policy, which may perhaps be correlated with the publication, towards the end of the century, of some "plural" or "decentred" histories of

Britain, like, for instance, Hugh Kearney's *The British Isles. A History of Four Nations* (1989), Jeremy Black's *A History of The British Isles* (1996), and Norman Davies' *The Isles: A History* (1999). In the context of this growing post-imperial concern with national identity(ies) – including the English – and a reinvented and renewed sense of patriotism, associated with, and openly reclaimed from the old Tories by, New Labour, Robert Crawford argues that "Scottish culture seems to have moved into a post-British phase" (qtd in Bassnett 2003, 99), whereas Susan Bassnett herself states, in her important 2003 "Afterword", that "... as the Scots have become steadily more assertively independent, so the English have become less certain of who they are" (182; see also 183-184).[4]

If we consider the British monarchs whether in their personal or institutional capacity as Heads of State, there has certainly been no lack of examples of interaction with, and love of, Scotland, its culture, history, and landscape: suffice it to mention a tartan-clad George IV's famous visit to Edinburgh in August 1822, when he was actually greeted by Scott himself (Alarcão 2016, 107); Queen Victoria's sentimental attachment to domestic life in the Highlands from 1848 onwards, fondly reminisced upon in her Journals;[5] the late Queen Mother's childhood and upbringing in Glamis Castle, and, more recently, Elizabeth II's own death at Balmoral (September 2022)[6] where, twenty five years before (August 1997), the Royal Family had also been informed of Diana's tragic death *sous le ciel de Paris*.

But, as we shall see, besides the Royals and the touristic, artistic, aesthetic, and literary fruition and appraisal of Scotland and her landscapes since the mid-18th century,[7] two distinguished English pop and rock artists have paid a musical tribute to Britain's northernmost nation, offering us two 'lyrical ballads' which, in a joint framework of the heritage and culture industries and the new memory studies, can be subject to some brief comments: Paul McCartney's *Mull of Kintyre* (1977)[8] and Rod Stewart's *Every Beat of my Heart* (1986). The reader can make, of course, his/her own list, thus expanding the corpus.

With the title of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's anthology (1798) at the back of my mind, I must make clear that I will also be using the term "ballads" here in a *musical*, not just *literary*, or *poetical*, sense, even though both pieces are heavily moulded by lyrical moods and modes as can be found in poetry and literature in general. In fact, theoretically and otherwise, I believe that the contemporary connections between *musical* ballads and

their *literary/poetical* counterparts should be explored further by qualified experts in both fields.

Secondly, I believe that if one has not received a thorough and sound musical education (sadly, my own case!), it will be virtually impossible ever to analyse and interpret songs properly, in terms of chosen instruments, octaves, notes, patterns, beats, rhythms, tempos, etc.; besides, it may not be unfair to add that, when listening to songs with lyrics, we sometimes tend to forget them and follow the music alone... Therefore, I would like to suggest that those lyrics (and the very word "lyrics" is probably more significant than we may realize at first sight...), as *verbal* primary sources *musically* and *mediatically* conveyed, *can* – and indeed *should* – also be profitably submitted to linguistic, literary, visual, and cultural assessment and evaluation. Indeed, the very title of this article was inspired by a well-known *song* and *poem* which *lyrics* were written by Scotland's first national poet (Robert Burns, 1759-1796), besides the fact that the expression "Auld Lang Syne" actually occurs in Stewart's song.

In Claus-Ulrich Viol's words,

> ... I will try to show ... that a good deal of British pop music is, in fact, permeated with national discourse(s) ... The different musics which operate under the umbrella term of 'pop' are ... important sites where national identity is negotiated and (re)constructed, so that particular songs make use of symbols and myths that are nation-specific ... to which they then give a meaningful twist, shaping them into a statement about British identity. (2000, 82)

As is well known, a sample, subjective, and stereotyped list of icons and traditions of England and her culture(s) was provided in the 1940s by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)[9] and George Orwell (1903-1950).[10] Were we to do the same for Scotland (particularly the Highlands), tartans, kilts, sporrans, and bagpipes, to name but a few,[11] it would certainly loom large in the (inter)national and global imaginary, even though, as Hugh Trevor-Roper has convincingly argued, some Scottish traditions, widely perceived as organic and immemorial, may, in fact, have been construed and constructed in a not so dim and distant past:

> This apparatus, to which they [the Scots] ascribe great antiquity, is in fact largely modern. It was developed after ... the Union with England against which it is, in a sense, a protest. Before

> the Union, it did indeed exist in vestigial form; but that form was regarded by the large majority of Scotchmen as a sign of barbarism: the badge of roguish, idle, predatory, blackmailing Highlanders who were more of a nuisance than a threat to civilized, historic Scotland....
>
> Indeed, the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention. (1987, 15)

A few pages later, Trevor-Roper suggests two possible reasons for this "invention" and shift:

> One is general and European and can be briefly summarized. It was the romantic movement, the cult of the noble savage whom civilization threatened to destroy. Before 1745 the Highlanders had been despised as idle predatory barbarians. In 1745 they had been feared as dangerous rebels. But after 1746, when their distinctive society crumbled ..., they combined the romance of a primitive people with the charms of an endangered species.... The second cause was ... the formation, by the British government, of the Highland regiments. (*idem*, 25)

Considering the particular nature of my primary sources, I would like to start by drawing attention to the way how, irrespective of genres, the music played by the pipers in traditional fashion[12] blends with, and into, the tunes of two original compositions by British pop artists, who, although both born in England, had Celtic ancestors, as somehow suggested by their own surnames: Paul McCartney (Irish) and Rod Stewart (Scottish).[13] Moreover, in spite of the natural differences between their overall musical styles and careers, McCartney and Stewart are contemporary, having been born, respectively, in 1942 and 1945.

Having said that, these songs cannot, obviously, be considered as "popular" or "traditional" – at least not in the sense that Folklore Studies would define and use these labels, involving, by and large, an ancient, undatable, and anonymous authorship, and a collective cultural appropriation by the community(ies) in question –, although their commercial popularity and possible inclusion in musical anthologies or repertoires of Scotland in the decades to come may, in fact, bring about their "traditionalization" and canonization by, and into, collective memory, a process certainly worthy of further ethnomusicological research.

Speaking of memory, Astrid Erll recalls that

> since the 1980s, with the emergence of the 'new' cultural memory studies, 'memory' has ... been understood as a genuinely transdisciplinary phenomenon whose functioning cannot really be understood through examination from one single perspective. Cultural memory studies is therefore *not merely a multidisciplinary field, but fundamentally an interdisciplinary project.* (2011, 38; my emphasis)

Erll continues:

> As far as the future of academia is concerned, the most promising and challenging fact about memory studies is that it is developing steadily into a true convergence field. Memory research has not only inspired new alliances between the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Slowly but palpably, it is ... bringing together the knowledge and approaches of scholars from very different parts of the world. (*idem,* 175)

Astrid Erll's book, useful and inspiring as it is, fails, however, to cover music *as such* – unless included, that is, in the all too broad category of art[14] – even though the songs I have chosen highlight and demonstrate the role and importance of memory(ies) *per se*, but also of musical heritage, composition, and production as a *lieu de mémoire* (to borrow Pierre Nora's celebrated expression), despite all the epistemological indefinition still surrounding this concept (Erll in Erll and Nünning 2010, 10).

These are the selected songs:

Paul McCartney and Wings, "Mull of Kintyre" (1977; 4'43'')

Rod Stewart, "Every Beat of My Heart" (1986; 5'17'')[15]

As the reader shall see (and hopefully hear!), Paul McCartney's song and videoclip are located in a rural and remote spot – The Mull of Kintyre, in the southwestern tip of Scotland, spying on Northern Ireland in the distance –, a place endowed with "natural", unspoilt scenery, with more than a hint of utopian primitivism, picturesque and sublime landscapes (viz. "Dark distant mountains with valleys of green"), somehow reflecting the presence and weight of British aesthetic sensibility, theorized and debated at length since the long 18th century, and, finally, romantic nature-worship, voiced in almost Wordsworthian terms ("... oh mist rolling in from the sea"), though without any visible

pantheist overtones. Speaking of Wordsworth, incidentally, vague "intimations of immortality" may perhaps be detected in the line "My desire is always to be here".

It should also be stressed that McCartney's characters, including his father Jim, his first wife Linda and their daughters Mary and Stella, are portrayed at home, thus offering peaceful images of family settlement, domesticity, union, and rest. These are biographically supported by the fact that Paul McCartney actually owned High Park Farm from 1966 onwards (apparently until 2010), and the sentimental attachment to the property is the subject of fond reminiscence: "Smiles in the sunshine and tears in the rain / Still take me back where my memories remain. / Flickering embers grow higher and higher / As they carry me back to the Mull of Kintyre".

Contrary to Paul McCartney's videoclip, Rod Stewart's opts predominantly for an unidentified (and thus anonymous) urban and "civilized" cityscape, although nature is not totally discarded. Besides, Stewart's character comes across as someone displaced/misplaced and overtly on the move; and in fact, whether dictated by war, vagrancy, exile, job opportunities, a sense of adventure, or just restlessness in general, mobility and migration have always been a strong feature of Scottish (and Irish) culture(s) and ways of life.

However, irrespective of political, economic, social, religious or any other reason or motivation, the allure of nostalgia and the desire to return shine through such lines as "Pack my bags tonight / Here's one Jacobite / Who must leave or surely die / Put me on a train / In the pouring rain / Say farewell, don't say goodbye"; "Seagull carry me / Over land and sea / To my old folk / That's where I wanna be"; and, finally, "There's my family and my country / Heaven knows where I belong". This emotional or sentimental frame of mind is reinforced at the end of the refrain, and of the song itself, through Stewart's acknowledgement that "Every beat of my heart / Tears me further apart / I'm lost alone in the dark / I'm going home".

Despite the use of the word "country", which, in the Middle Ages (just like "nation"), applied to birthplaces and/or dwelling places, rather than nationalities, as we now know them, in both these videos the local or regional dimension seems to me to prevail – *et pour cause* – over the national one, privileged by Benedict Anderson in his seminal study of the historical, ideological, and political making of nationalism. However, much to my point here, Anderson argues that

> In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals ... to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other ..., it is useful to remind ourselves that *nations inspire love* .... The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, *music*, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles. (2016, 141; my emphases)

In spite, then, of some obvious differences, both videos manage to show, through word, sound, and image, the importance of individual and collective identity; of being aware of, paying attention to, and cherishing one's roots, allegiances, and experiences in space and time. Additionally, they depict and display a clear, though perhaps idealized, sense of (imagined) communities and belonging; of the crucial role of home, family, and friends; and, last but not least, of the relevance of memory(ies) and recollection(s) for one's personal and social balance, well-being and fulfilment.

END NOTES

[1] To Peter Childs, "It is important to remember that such feelings of belonging do not cease at the border and, in England ... there is a strong sense of Scottish identity --- as any 25 January spent at thousands of English pubs will demonstrate. This is Burns Night, when the birth of Scotland's national poet ... is celebrated with drink, song and dance in a way that Shakespeare's very seldom is" (in Storry and Childs, 2017, 48-49).

[2] According to the piece "Scotland Decides". *BBC News*. (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results; archived), in 2014 there were 2.0001.926 votes (55,30%) against the independence and 1.617.989 (44.70%) supporting it.

[3] One of Linda Colley's works, published in the year of the referendum, bears the title of *Acts of Union and Disunion*.

[4] This is almost the title of Derek J. Taylor's book, published in 2017.

[5] Out of the many examples that could be provided, I will just quote the following, taken from Victoria's earliest visits: "This [Sept. 14, 1842] is our last day in *Scotland*; it is really a delightful country, and I am very sorry to leave it." (51); "As the fair shores of Scotland receded more and more from our view, we felt quite sad that this very pleasant and interesting tour was over; but we shall never forget it." [Sept 15, 1842] (53); "Every little trifle and every spot I had become attached to; our life of quiet and liberty, every thing was so pleasant, and all the Highlanders and people who went with us I had got to like so much. Oh! The dear hills, it made me very sad to leave them behind!" [Oct.1, 1844] (73); and "... I told him [Lord Aberdeen] I was so attached to the dear, dear *Highlands*, and missed the fine hills so much. There is a great peculiarity about the *Highlands* and Highlanders, and they are such a chivalrous, fine, active people. Our stay among them was so delightful. Independently of the beautiful scenery, there was a quiet, a retirement, a wildness, a liberty, and a solitude that had such a charm for us." [Oct. 3, 1844] (1868, 75).

[6] As some readers will remember, after Queen Elizabeth was laid to rest in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, a funeral march was solemnly played by a solitary Scottish bagpiper on leaving the cloisters.

[7] See, for instance, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-26, 3 vols.) by Daniel Defoe (c.1660-1731), an early domestic travelogue in thirteen letters, the last three of which collectively entitled "Introduction to the Account and Description of Scotland"; *A Journey to The Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) by James Boswell (1740-1795); *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland, AD 1803* by Dorothy Wordsworth (1771-1855), etc.

[8] Also mentioned thus by Queen Victoria: "The yacht had had a good passage round the *Mull of Cantire* [sic]. We ... went on deck; and the blaze of the numerous bonfires – the half moon, the stars, and the extreme stillness of the night – had a charming effect." [Aug.18, 1847] (1868, 90).

[9] "It [culture] includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar" (Eliot 1983, 31).

[10] "It [English culture] is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar boxes. It has a flavour of its own." (Eliot 1983, 64) and "We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also ... of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossworld-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'" (*idem*, 66).

[11] In *Notes from a Small Island*, Bill Bryson adds some items to this list: "I passed the time browsing in the windows of the many tourist shops that stand along it [Royal Mile,

Edinburgh], reflecting on what a lot of things the Scots have given to the world – kilts, bagpipes, tam-o'-shanters, tins of oatcakes, bright yellow jumpers with big diamond patterns ..., plaster casts of Greyfriars Bobby looking soulful, sacks of haggis -- and how little anyone but a Scot would want them." (1996, 303)

[12] In the case of McCartney's *Mull of Kintyre*, the Campbeltown Pipe Band; unfortunately, I was unable to identify the bands featured in Rod Stewart's videoclip.

[13] See also Voyage's "Scotch Machine" (1977), an instrumental hit launched during the disco fever that took world music and the dance floor by storm in the late Seventies.

[14] "Over the past two decades, the relationship between culture and memory has emerged ... as a key issue of interdisciplinary research, involving fields as diverse as history, sociology, art, literary and media studies, philosophy, theology, psychology, and the neurosciences, ... thus bringing together the humanities, social studies, and the natural sciences in a unique way." (Erll and Nünning 2010, 1; see also the preface, V)

[15] Regarding the title, could there be any intentional phonetical pun playing on "beat" vs. "bit"?

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"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)

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ABSTRACT: Taylor Jenkins Reid's novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, published in 2017, was an international success on social media, emerging in a time of political disarray in the Unites States of America with Donald Trump's election. The book tells the story of a successful woman, Evelyn Hugo, who perfectly represents the self-made individual at the heart of the American Dream. Even if she has achieved worldwide fame and success by herself, this article will argue that this myth of the self-made man does not lead necessarily to a happy ending, following Evelyn's own recounting of her story as one of profound grief and disenchantment. To deconstruct this myth, there will be an analysis of the different ways in which the character of Evelyn Hugo had to adapt to accomplish upward mobility, namely by agreeing to the objectification of her body, by erasing her ethnicity and sexual orientation, and by becoming someone immoral and self-serving, thus proving that this

RESUMO: O romance de Taylor Jenkins Reid *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, publicado em 2017, foi um sucesso internacional nas redes sociais, surgindo num período de desordem política nos Estados Unidos da América com a eleição de Donald Trump. O livro conta a história de uma mulher bem-sucedida, Evelyn Hugo, que encarna na perfeição o indivíduo *self-made* no cerne do sonho americano. Mesmo tendo alcançado fama internacional e sucesso por si mesma, este artigo defende que o mito do *self-made man* não resulta necessariamente num final feliz, em concordância com a história de profunda perda e desencantamento contada pela própria Evelyn. De modo a desconstruir este mito, procede-se a uma análise das diferentes maneiras em que a personagem Evelyn Hugo teve que se adaptar para concretizar a mobilidade social, nomeadamente ao ceder à objetificação do seu corpo, ao distanciar-se da sua etnia e orientação sexual, e

American myth does not pertain to everyone, nor does it imply and lead necessarily to happiness and personal fulfilment.

KEYWORDS: *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo,* Self-Made Man Myth, American Dream, Identity, Gender, Ethnicity, LGTBQIA+, Hollywood

ao tornar-se uma pessoa imoral e autocentrada, assim provando que este mito americano não é aplicável a todos, nem implica e leva necessariamente à felicidade ou concretização pessoal.

KEYWORDS: *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, Mito do *Self-Made Man,* Sonho Americano, Identidade, Género, Etnia, LGTBQIA+, Hollywood

"When you're given an opportunity to change your life, be ready to do whatever it takes to make it happen. The world doesn't give things, you take things."

- Taylor Jenkins Reid
The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo (2017)

INTRODUCTION

Glamour. Fame. Success. All these are words that can be applied to a self-made man successful story, and the book *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid, published in 2017, can be considered one such story. It tells the story of fictional Evelyn Hugo, a retired Hollywood actress who decides, at the age of seventy-nine, to disclose the story of her life and her rise to world-fame to unknown journalist Monique Grant. At first glance, her story is one of hard work and success, the epitome of the American Dream. However, the story that Evelyn discloses is not one of glamourous success and personal accomplishment, but rather of hardships and loss, representing the disillusionment of what it means to be successful in the United States of America, of what it means to be a true self-made individual.

In the nineteenth century, self-made narratives were at the forefront of the American cultural production (Paul 2014, 373), as the idea of social mobility (or going from "rags-to-riches") was extremely present in the American mindset due to existing discourse that had "been used to contrast the US to European societies with rigidly stratified social hierarchies, and to support the claim that the American economic system leads to a higher standard of living in general as well as to a higher degree of individual agency and economic opportunity" (*idem*, 367). The idea that the American individual could easily climb through the ranks of society to become a "self-made man" was promoted in popular fiction of the time, particularly in the stories of Horatio Alger (1832-1899), an American writer, teacher and pastor (373). Alger's tales often depicted stories of young, impoverished boys who, through hard work and good morals, were able to reach a wealthier and more respectable position in society, as was the case of *Ragged Dick* (1868), or Harry Raymond in *Sink or Swim* (1870). Even though Alger's stories gained recognition during the nineteenth century, the ideas of "Algerism" reached a new height during the twentieth century, when there was a need to assert the "'American way of life' in contrast to the 'un-American' notions of socialism and communism" (Paul 2014, 374). Many of the themes present in Alger's stories prevail to this day, as self-made narratives still constitute an integral part of the American mindset.

The premise of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* may appear to fit into this formula. However, similarly to what already happened in Horatio Alger's stories, where

the young protagonists benefitted more from luck rather than intrinsic personal value, several problems inherent to the self-made narrative resurface in this novel, thus questioning the viability of this "American way of life" (Paul 2014, 374). This article aims to explore the different ways in which Evelyn's story undermines the self-made man myth by presenting a successful individual that simultaneously does not fit the linear conception of the self-made individual, considering that Evelyn is a Cuban American, bisexual woman and "a son of a bitch" (Reid 332). Additionally, it intends to prove that the self-made man discourse does not necessarily lead to happiness, in contrast to the ideas at the core of American culture and mindset.

Therefore, this paper will delve further into these themes by analyzing them in three different branches. The first will focus on the theory behind the self-made man myth and explore how it has to be adapted when considering the story of a female sex-symbol in Hollywood; the second will deal with Evelyn's erasure of her immigrant roots and bisexuality as a way to achieve the dream of upward mobility; and the third will focus on Evelyn's morally ambiguous actions to achieve material success and fame, and the real price of the myth of the self-made individual.

1. SELF-MADE WOMAN: ON BEING OBJECTIFIED IN HOLLYWOOD

American exceptionalism as a concept was propounded in the first half of the nineteenth century by Alexis de Tocqueville in reference to the American political system, which was "quite exceptional" in contrast to France's unstable politics of the time (Paul 2014, 14). Despite its initial connotation, the term quickly spread to describe the American nation's ideology, a nation that was "created differently, developed differently" (Shafer 1991, v), and the American society as special, and therefore, superior, as opposed to all that was un-American. This ideological paradigm, then, poses the very foundation for all the American myths, including that of the self-made man.

The concept of the self-made man, originally created by Henry Clay in 1832 is based on the belief that anyone, through sheer hard work, can achieve success, mainly the material and economic one, and climb the social ladder. In a way, it is intrinsically linked to Max Weber's (1864-1920) idea of Protestant Work Ethic as a major contributor

to the "spirit of capitalism", since it derives from "an increasingly secularized logic of work-discipline, which . . . took material wealth as a sign of God's blessing" (Paul 2014, 372). This myth falls under the broader spectrum of the American exceptionalism, and it is connected to the perception of the United States' exceptionality as a classless society which allows social mobility, so long as the individual works for it. It is also connected to the overall idea of the American dream, for the American nation presents itself as an ideal land, with opportunities for everyone to live a better and fuller life.

The American dream and the myth of the self-made man are clearly represented in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn* Hugo. Evelyn Hugo achieved material success in the terms already alluded to: she rose from poverty all the way to the Hollywood elite by herself, thus apparently proving that the myth is indeed attainable.

However, as previously mentioned, Evelyn is not just "self-made": she is a "self-made woman", a word that makes all the difference, as it places her immediately outside of the traditional conception of the foundational myth of self-making (Paul 2014, 398). Historically, this myth pertains to men, as, in fact, its name suggests: "the self-made man". This immediately places women in a position of inferiority and fragility, thus making their journey towards success both different and more arduous. In more recent examples of 'self-made' women success stories, their self-making is usually closely tied to men's desires and to the improvement of physical appearance. As Heike Paul puts it, "Women's upward mobility thus depended on their relations to men" (2014, 399).

In the novel's dedication, Taylor Jenkins Reid writes "Smash the patriarchy, sweetheart". This is a curious way to start a book whose narrative is marked by the burdens of patriarchy, in which the protagonist loses her sense of self. According to Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, the United States was founded on white patriarchal capitalism (2021, 8), which inevitably constructed colonial relations of power between men, perceived as superior, and women, as secondary. The Hollywood industry reflects this patriarchal system, where men had the power and authority both in front of and behind the camera (*idem*, 223). This male dominance over the image of women represents a form of control that finds its strength in the objectification of women, which entails a reduction from a full-on being with prospects and importance to mere body parts to be abused and consumed through the practice of fetishization (Hall *et. al* 2013, 256). As Laura Mulvey explains,

> women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle . . . she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and narrative. (1985, 809)

Hence, in the movie industry, mostly led by and catered to men, body and appearance stand at the center of women's journey to success, and Evelyn Hugo is not an exception.

From the age of thirteen, when her body starts to hold "a sexuality . . . that my mind wasn't ready for" (Reid 43), Evelyn begins to associate her personal value to her body, something that she uses as a "currency, . . . like money" to trade her way through the social ranks of the Hollywood elite and, in general, to the American society (239). Evelyn's entire image, when she is already a well-known movie star in Hollywood, is that of a bombshell, the sex-symbol of her time, in a Marilyn Monroe fashion, that bedazzles readers of every magazine. She is at the top of the American Dream to the point in which a single glimpse of her body is worth millions: "In the editing room, Max . . . cut the footage a millisecond before you can see my full breasts. . . . There was so much anticipation. . . . Six months after we finished shooting *Boute-en-Train*, I was an international sensation" (*idem*, 160).

Evelyn achieves success using her body, thus understanding how to get what she wants. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, she tries to make a start and find connections in Hollywood by applying to a job at a popular café near a production studio. It is through luck and because of her body that Harry Cameron, a young producer at a movie studio, notices her: "Harry looked up at me and said, 'Jesus.' Two weeks later, I had a job at Sunset Studios" (*idem*, 46).

Despite her efforts to make this happen, her start in Hollywood is not necessarily a consequence of her hard work and talent in acting, but rather a consequence of luck and cunning. In fact, throughout the rest of the novel, several are the instances where Evelyn mentions her own lack of talent for acting: "I wasn't well educated when I got to Hollywood, I wasn't book-smart, I wasn't powerful, I wasn't a trained actress. What did I have to be good at other than being beautiful?" (*idem*, 239). What she had

accomplished, then, could not necessarily be attributed to meritocracy, but rather to her luck in genetics. In a way, this already placed her in a position of privilege, seeing as most likely any other Cuban American girl[1] like her, whose body was not perceived by society with the same awe and fetishization as Evelyn's, would not have had access to the same opportunities as her.

This entire process of objectification and fetishization is a manifestation of the patriarchal power that aims at restraining women to a subordinate position, reducing them to an "object" that can be owned and controlled. Even though Evelyn appears to find her freedom and power in her body, which allows her emancipation from her impoverished background, one may argue that it is precisely her body that imprisons her to an oppressive male structure. Furthermore, it makes her a subordinate in the industry and of the public in general. Her perception as a strong, powerful woman is nothing more than an illusion, as her condition and path to success is always limited to what patriarchy allows her to be, considering "[women stand] in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions" (Mulvey 1985, 804). This conscious reduction of her image from a whole individual to a body to be consumed reflects the same necessities felt by Hollywood actresses of the past century, who understood what the path to their success meant: "To survive, Monroe, Crawford, and others became 'signs' or caricatures of themselves, yielded to the pressure of mediocrity that emanated from the American public as much as from the pulses of Harry Cohn and Darryl Zanuck. Audiences didn't want to see Monroe as a sensitive comedienne, but as a sexual monster . . ." (Haskell 2016, 38).

The myth of the self-made woman is indeed achieved by Evelyn, but within these constraints that, in the end, do not allow her to be happy and satisfied with the decision that she made throughout her life, because this bombshell persona that she was forced to embody was not one she could be fully separated from.

2. SELF-MADE SHADOW: ON BEING A MINORITY OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo was published in 2017, a time marked by political tensions with the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, whose

Administration policies and discourses greatly targeted immigrants (Clapton 2022, 105) and minorities such as the LGBTQIA+ community. Irrespective of the Immigration Act of 1965, a policy that attempted to progressively facilitate and encourage the immigration of non-Europeans to the United States (Anderson 2021, 89), or the progress made in LGBTQIA+ history since the Stonewall riots[2] and boosted by contemporary media, Trump's discourse constituted a serious setback to these communities. In this sense, this book represents an important representation for those whose voices are being silenced, by exploring the story of a Cuban American who is also a bisexual woman.

Born the daughter of impoverished Cuban immigrants, Evelyn Hugo achieved a glamorous life due to her career as a world-renowned Hollywood actress. When she dies, she dies in an Upper East Side luxurious apartment, surrounded by money, international success and a lifetime of achievements. Nonetheless, behind this self-made woman there is not solely a story of hard work, but mostly one of self-erasure, and it is that story that Evelyn decides to tell Monique, thereby casting light on a shadow that she herself created. In order to follow her dream of making it in Hollywood, Evelyn was forced to negate one half of herself, the half that was Cuban. When she describes herself physically, at the age of thirteen, she mentions how she had "dark, shiny brown hair" and "light bronze skin", both physical characteristics belonging to her Cuban descendance (Reid 42). However, during her interview with Monique, she explains how, to enter Hollywood, her Cuban heritage would have only restricted her to specific roles and that she would have to appear "white"[3] to play roles attributed to "white" people. Immigrants presenting themselves as "white" in order to assimilate themselves into the American society is an old pattern that can be considered a question of "sheer survival" (Paul 2014, 388), the only way to guarantee a minimal degree of prosperity. This is due to the fact that the term of comparison forced upon these people is the standardized and foundational conception of Americanism as "white", a term which in recent times came to include more than just the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). Evelyn was aware of this when she agreed to have her physical appearance changed, namely her hair which was bleached, as Evelyn herself acknowledges: "I knew what it would mean, playing Jo. I knew Jo was a white woman. And still, I wanted it. I hadn't gotten on my back just to take a baby step" (Reid 50).

Even though her physical changes already allowed her to create a persona detached from her ethnic heritage, her success was also dictated by the calculated crafting of an identity that would satisfy the audience, giving the illusion of permeating the American society of the time. As Stuart Hall states, identities are forever shifting, constructed not only through nature and heritage, but also through history, language, and culture (2013, 4). This is a process of transformation made possible through the contact with others, and it is in this middle ground between being something and reaching something else that identity is found (*ibidem*). Evelyn builds her identity basing it on the perception that she has of the world's expectations and the prejudice she might face. The change in her name, that goes from Evelyn Diaz[4] to Evelyn Hugo, is an example of how she tries to mirror the expectations of her surrounding society. During the first half of the twentieth century, the practice of name change was common amongst Hollywood stars belonging to ethnic groups (Benshoff and Griffin 2021, 61-62). Considering that the Hollywood industry can represent a microcosm of the Western society and of the United States in particular, this issue can be connected to the forceful obligation of immigrants to change their names, particularly at the turn of the twentieth century, in order to sound more American upon arrival in the country (Portes and MacLeod 1996, 543). This was a symbolic and violent practice they endured to facilitate their integration in the American society, and to enter a system from which they would otherwise be certainly excluded.

Evelyn herself acknowledges that these alterations constituted the necessary requirements to be able to succeed in a predominantly "white" industry. She did not even protest when an elocutionist was assigned to her and "banished Spanish entirely" (Reid 50). After that, Evelyn stopped speaking Spanish completely and abandoned this part of her heritage, as exemplified by certain interactions with other characters that did not recognize her as Latinx,[5] or even assume she spoke Spanish: "Luisa's eyes went wide, and she hung up the phone on her mother and said to me, '*No sabía que ústed hablaba Español*'" (*idem*, 198). According to Alejandro Portes and Dag MacLeod, immigrants tend to adopt what they call "symbolic categories" (1996, 528) favored by mainstream society, in which language can be included. This assimilation of the non-parental language, or, in the case of Evelyn, the complete abandonment of Spanish in favor of English was fundamental for the integration of these immigrants in American groups and

for their upward mobility, and as such it did not constitute merely a question of choice, but of necessity provoked by a biased society. In the end, Evelyn's path towards success and her integration into the American elite were greatly dependent on the erasure of her Cuban and parental roots.

Another symptom of the biased social constraints is Evelyn's concealment of her bisexuality. During a major part of the book, she recognizes that she had been in love with fellow actress Celia St. James. However, not once in her life, did she allow herself to live this relationship openly. For her, hiding was, first, a matter of survival, as Evelyn explains: "We'd tell the truth about our lives, and they'd bury us. We could end up in prison or in a mental hospital" (Reid 171). It was not until 1961 that homosexual sexual acts were decriminalized for the first time in the United States, albeit in Illinois only (Eaklor 2008, 186); and in the 1950s and turn of the 1960s, when Evelyn discovered her sexual orientation, there had been a general increase in the persecution of homosexuals, with episodes such as the Lavender Scare[6] (*idem*, 87) or the general increase in police raids of LGBTQIA+[7] spaces, such as the case of the famous raid of the Stonewall gay bar in 1969, which led to the Stonewall Uprising, one of the key turning points for the gay rights movement (Carter 2010, 307). Secondly, she also feared she would lose her fame and money, the fear of downward mobility: "Because I worked my ass off . . . . And I did that so I could be famous. So I could live the life we're living. And if you think I'm not going to protect that, you've lost your mind" (Reid 170).

Even as a Cuban American and a bisexual woman, Evelyn succeeded, although her success was not only due to hard work, but also to the erasure of parts of her identity: "I kept thinking, *How dare she try to take my own identity away from me?* . . . , I realized Luisa hadn't done that to me. I had done it to me. I'd made the choice to be different from my true self" (*idem*, 198).

3. SELF-MADE MISERY: ON CHOOSING SUCCESS OVER HAPPINESS

Although Evelyn's story as a self-made narrative has been demystified hitherto by reasons outside her control, the same cannot be said after considering her actions and choices throughout the book, which are profoundly individualistic. The concept of

individualism was developed in Britain, according to Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham's ideas (Pereira 2023, 145). However, it has direct ties to important concepts for the American framework of mind, such as personal freedom, self-reliance, Social-Darwinism or the 'survival of the fittest', and minimal governmental interference in economic affairs, or *laissez-faire* capitalism (*idem*, 140). In a sense, Evelyn's actions, even when she talks to Monique, reflect most of these ideas: she rarely relies on anyone but herself, something she tries to make Monique understand; she achieves emancipation by leaving Hell's Kitchen, her impoverished neighborhood, and fighting against the odds on her own: "I like the Evelyn Hugo who sees the world for what it is and then goes out there and wrestles what she wants out of it" (Reid 190). At the end of the book, she commits suicide, after accomplishing the goal she had set out for herself, that is, telling her real story to Monique. All of this points to a profoundly individualistic mentality that is praised in the American society to the extreme extent of controlling one's own death.

The myth of the self-made man relies on individualism to justify its own existence, as it forms under the assumption that people should seek and need self-realization. For Evelyn, it is the search for self-realization, through economic prosperity, and a wish for fame that drive her out of Hell's Kitchen. However, as Paul argues, "There are contradictory forces at work in this notion, as it includes both aspects of self-denial (education, hard work, and discipline) and self-realization based on an ethic of self-interest that aims at the sheer accumulation of property, recognition, prestige, and personal gain without any concern for others" (2014, 369-370). This can be considered the case of Evelyn, someone who chose, but who, to an extent, was also forced by society, to sacrifice ideals and even relationships over prospects of more fame and monetary gain, and even over fear of losing what she had earned. Evelyn's path to success and prosperity was marked by a behavioral shift, going from good moral values to lies, deceit, and manipulation. For example, to leave Hell's Kitchen, she had to lie to her first husband about her age and pretended to love him. Most of her seven husbands, in fact, were conduits to Evelyn's success or to her self-realization: she married Ernie Diaz to leave Hell's Kitchen for Hollywood, Don Adler to boost her fame at the beginning of her career, Mick Riva to hide her relationship with Celia St. James, and Rex North to promote their new movie, among other examples.

Even though her own individual interests led her to become "cynical and . . . bossy, and . . . vaguely immoral" (Reid 220), it is important to note that Evelyn's decisions, as cold-blooded or cruel they may appear, should not be the true indicators of her character. Indeed, they are a consequence of the American society, as a system which rarely favors those belonging to gender, sexual and ethnic minorities, and which instead conveys to them the message that they need to willingly sacrifice all that they care about in order to succeed. In fact, throughout the novel, Evelyn never takes pride in hurting people she loves, and this can be seen in some instances of the book, where seemingly poor and hurtful actions that she takes are immediately met with guilt: "I'm not proud of what I did to him" (Reid 52), "And it wasn't until I was back in my apartment that I lost it. Sobbing as if she'd died. That's how final it felt. I had pushed her too far. And it was over" (Reid 268).

Evelyn's path through the depths of immorality should not be seen as a reflection of her true intents, but rather as a desperate reaction to stay afloat in a castrating and oppressive society. This process of fighting for survival, in a discriminating industry, would cost her everything she truly cared about – not money, but rather those she loved: "When you write the ending, Monique, tell everyone that it is the people I miss. Tell everyone that I got it wrong. That I chose the wrong things most of the time" (Reid 358). Thus, in Evelyn Hugo's case, the achievement of the myth of the self-made man occurs through immoral actions and it is based on false promises of prosperity, proving that outer success does not always equal inner fulfillment. Moreover, as Evelyn explains, the real path for success does not rely on hard work and talent, but on "luck *and* being a son of a bitch" (Reid 332).

Effectively, the pursuit of success at the cost of integrity and relationships is a recurring theme in American cultural expression, as it can be seen in novels such as *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fizgerald, or the play *The Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller. All these examples present a world where the American Dream is far from its idealization. In Miller's play, the story of the main protagonist, Willy, shares some key aspects of Evelyn's narrative. Willy believes that, in order to achieve the American Dream, what is truly necessary, above hard work, is "being liked" (Miller 62), similarly to Evelyn, who understands that her image and persona will lead her to success. However, Willy's

incessant search for success, mainly for his sons, will lead him to questionable acts, such as lying and cheating, like Evelyn, and to distancing himself emotionally from his family. At the end of the play, Willy commits suicide, as Evelyn. However, even if it could be argued that Willy does not reach the American Dream and Evelyn does, the truth is that both die unfulfilled and unaccomplished. Stories that revolve around this myth, and, at a first glance, apparently promote the self-made man dream, are in fact deconstructing it, since they show the contradictions and flaws of such belief.

As proved by Evelyn, the self-made man myth may lead to success, though one that is merely material and economic. Within this narrative, inner success is rarely a priority, since the search for prosperity comes at a high cost because, to rise through the ranks of a capitalist society, one is forced to instrumentalize others around them. In the end, and if we take Evelyn's case as paradigmatic, if someone makes it through this profoundly individualistic path to produce capital, what they encounter is a life of loneliness and misery, an understanding that they were the ones being instrumentalized, pawns to this myth that may lead to wealth, but not necessarily to happiness.

CONCLUSION

This novel emerges under a tense political climate, with Trumpism reaching its height with his ideologies of hatred and exclusion towards minorities. Given Trump's new resurgence, it is important to turn to literature like *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, where quintessential American values are deconstructed to reflect upon them. The novel sheds a light on the sacrifices that need to be taken in a society where everyone relies on themselves, and where division and self-interest are promoted. Furthermore, it holds interesting discussions that can be related to the contemporary realities of minorities, as they are forced to confront a new wave of oppression, similar to Evelyn's self-imposed repression in a hostile society. By showcasing the hard truth behind an American self-made woman, Reid brings to light the inner voices of Evelyn, giving space to her untold story of marginalization.

To conclude, Evelyn Hugo can be seen as a self-made woman who accomplished the American dream. She achieved economic prosperity and world-wide fame, adapting to a life in Hollywood, all the necessary steps to attain the self-made man myth.

However, it also seems quite clear that she died unhappy too. If Evelyn always prided herself in being powerful, someone who had the world in the palm of her hand, at the end she realizes this had always been an illusion — she was always just a body in the Hollywood industry, a minority in disguise, a pawn in her own game. She dies alone and, in the end, she tells Monique: "That's how my story ends. With the loss of everyone I have ever loved. With me, in a big, beautiful Upper East Side apartment, missing everyone who ever meant anything to me" (Reid 358).

Evelyn's self-made journey turns her into a victim to patriarchal forces. Patriarchy as a power structure means that it employs several hierarchical and oppressive strategies interconnected with ideologies of capitalism. Considering that the United States is founded on the ideologies of a white patriarchal capitalism (Benshoff and Griffin 2021, 8), it centers its power structures on the hands of a selected male few. *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* analyzes these issues, though sometimes hidden by the eventfulness of Hollywood life, and directly connects these oppressive structures to the American ideology of self-making. Therefore, at its core, the myth of the self-made individual is nothing more than a branch of these systems of control, thus losing its credibility as something that can bring happiness to someone's life. The self-made man myth, reinforced by stories such as Alger's, heavily relies on and reinforces the illusion that "the exception is the rule" (Paul 2014, 368). Effectively, Evelyn is an exception. However, even after reaching the American Dream, happiness is not a guarantee, because the material conception of success that is promoted in American self-made narratives does not equate to the true, immaterial happiness that most often individuals seek, as Evelyn grew to found out.

END NOTES

[1] To be further discussed in the second topic of this article, "Self-Made Shadow: On Being a Minority out of the Public's Eye".

[2] The Stonewall Riots or Stonewall Uprising were a five-day rebellion between LGBT individuals and law enforcement that became one of the turning points in the history of the LGBTQIA+ community. According to Eaklor, these riots began in the early morning of June 28, 1969, at a popular gay bar called the Stonewall Inn in New York, after "police began one of their frequent raids on the place and expected the patrons either to slink off guiltily in the night or come along in the paddy wagons" (2008, 122). However, the contrary happened, with multiple patrons forming a resistance force against the police, thus leading to the riots that occupied the streets of New York for several days, and which directed mass media attention towards the LGBT community: "Local press, TV, and radio reported the fight and Saturday night the Stonewall was mobbed. Police arrive and the riot was again underway; acts of resistance now included not only throwing objects but also public displays of affection between same-sex people, and a chorus line of drag queens" (*idem*, 123). The importance of Stonewall relied on it being "the motivating force in the transformation of the gay political movement" (Carter 2010, 1).

[3] The term "white" is used between apostrophes in this article in accordance with Garner's explanation regarding "whiteness": ". . . whiteness has no stable consensual meaning, and has been conceptualized in a number of different yet not mutually exclusive forms. As much as anything, it is a lens through which particular aspects of social relationships can be apprehended" (2007, 1).

[4] While Evelyn's birthname is Evelyn Herrerra, at this point in the book she was married to Ernie Diaz, a Mexican man, hence the adoption of his last name.

[5] The term Latinx is used in accordance with its definition by Méndez – a "gender-neutral and inclusive" alternative to Latino, which "refers to everyone from Latin America".

[6] According to Eaklor, the Lavender Scare began in 1947 and constituted a period in time where there was an "elimination of suspected homosexuals from government service" since "In 1950 many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists" (David K. Johnson qtd. in Eaklor 2008, 87)

[7] Transgender (T), queer (Q), Intersex (I) and Asexual (A) are terms that only became part of this acronym from the 1990s onwards (Blakemore). For the sake of representativity, and considering the time this essay is being written, it only makes sense to utilize the term "LGBTQIA+" to refer to this community.

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Embodying Bodies in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

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ABSTRACT: The 2019 novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo tackles concerns prevalent in contemporary society. Because the body is such an elemental factor in the novel, as it has become in different realms of life, the bodies of its twelve characters serve as a canvas through which various class, gender, ethnical, sexual, and religious paradigms are presented and questioned. This article intends to explore, through an intersectional lens, the experiences lived by some of these womxn which are reflected, conditioned and filtered through their bodies. It focuses on the role of the body as both a vessel for expression and/or oppression of identity, separately, having in mind that these womxn are (second-generation) immigrants of differing ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: Body, Intersectionality, Feminism, Otherness, Identity, Patriarchy, Representation

RESUMO: O romance *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) de Bernardine Evaristo aborda preocupações prevalentes na sociedade contemporânea. Visto que o corpo é um elemento essencial no romance, tal como se tem vindo a tornar em vários campos da vida, os corpos das suas doze personagens servem como uma tela sobre a qual diversos paradigmas de classe, género, etnia, sexo e religião são apresentados e questionados. Este artigo pretende explorar, por meio de uma perspetiva interseccional, as experiências vividas por algumas destas pessoas, que são refletidas, condicionadas e filtradas através dos seus corpos. O artigo foca-se no papel do corpo tanto como um veículo de expressão como um veículo de opressão de identidade, separadamente, tendo em conta que estas mulheres são imigrantes (de segunda geração) de diferentes idades e grupos socioeconómicos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Corpo, Interseccionalidade, Feminismo, Alteridade, Identidade, Patriarcado, Representação

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Perceptions of bodies are altered with time, as historical influences continually shape them. The body has long ago left the realm of biology to become a cultural expression, something that immediately exposes a socio-cultural identitary construct (Demello 2014, 5). Thus, following a social constructionist approach to the body, qualities like beauty, weight, sexuality and ethnicity are molded by the historical, societal, and cultural context (*idem*, 7). Women, in particular, suffer from these social constructs, since they are persistently objectified by society, as they are subjected to constant scrutiny from the male gaze (Conboy 1997, 54).

Contemporary culture, for instance, is obsessed with the body. It has become the center of contemporary feminist theory, offering a material *locus* for the critique of Western culture (*idem*, 55). Night television programs and media in general are focused on the body, emphasizing its performance and appearance. Continuously, various media sources convey messages about how bodies ought to behave and present themselves, whether by dictating clothing choices, ideal weight, leisure activities, and even their aging process, which tend to influence their audiences (Egbert 2012, 411). One can easily reflect on reality shows, which, by exploring the superfluous depiction of the body, especially the female body, perpetuate stereotypes[1] and narratives about how women should behave regarding their body. This is the case of shows such as *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2007-2021) where the protagonists are constantly seen eating salads, exercising or trying on expensive clothes; or dating programs like *Too Hot to Handle* (2020-) in which physical appearance and attraction are the core of the show and its interpersonal connection. While many women dislike, or even attempt to challenge these unrealistic standards of beauty, many more exploit them to their own advantage, what sociologists call "patriarchal bargain" (Demello 2014, 122).

The patriarchy is the strongest oppressive force against all women (Walby 1991, 20). Being defined as institutionalized sexism (hooks 2018, 39) or as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate and exploit women (Walby 1991, 20), it is deeply connected with the capitalist system which supports colonial and hierarchical structures (hooks 2018, 185, 189), thus exercising colonization upon the female body, the first Other[2] it encounters. Judith Butler, in her 1990 groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, identifies the female body as an Other by arguing that the hierarchical power of culture over nature allows the first to "Otherize" the latter

by appropriating it limitlessly and imposing meaning onto it (2006, 50). This correlates to a misogynistic world in the sense that "reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject" (*ibidem*). It is only natural, then, that black women's body suffers not only from the sexist and class oppression that white women's do,[3] but also from a racist one (hooks 2018, 24), establishing it as a victim of triple-colonization.

It is in this sense that Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) perfectly reflects on this issue by portraying twelve womxn[4] of different skin-colors, mostly black[5] womxn, as unique mirrors of individual experiences, while keeping the intersectional lens that is examining how power relations, such as gender, ethnicity and class, are intertwined and dependent on one another (Collins and Bilge 2016, 28). Their bodies are depicted not as a stereotypical representation of a whole ethnic community, but instead defy the conception of the Other, turning it into the Self of each narrative told. The body of the text mirrors this singularity for its irregular structure defies normativity in form – there is no usage of capital letters, save for names and specific instances, there are no full-stops apart from the endings of individual chapters, and the text is not justified. A connection can be drawn between this body, a curvilinear body transformed with each turn of a page, and the womxn's bodies, having each womxn their own chapter, molded by their individual experiences.

Throughout this work, body will refer not only to a physical object, but also to a vehicle through which people articulate all their identifications of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion (Richardson and Locks 2014, ix). Having all these elements in mind, it is fairly interesting to consider in what way these womxn's bodies mirror their identity. Considering the intergenerational aspect of this novel, a proper way to analyze this matter is by exploring how the body of different generations manifests itself in relation to the outer world and to themselves as a vessel for the expression of identity or its repression. Therefore, this essay will be divided into these two main branches of analysis, exploring some of these womxn's stories.

The body is the stage that defines these twelve womxn and separates them from one another. Thus, paradoxically, the body is both their confinement and the key to freedom, since it serves as the root of prejudice, as mentioned before, but also as the

means through which they can express their individuality and/or rebel against the societal oppression imposed upon it, claiming their space and identity. This is the case of Amma, a single mother and middle-aged woman who works on alternative theater. She liberates herself from the stereotypes associated with her body, in particular with her skin color, when she boycotts her acting career, and her wish to succeed in this field, in order to stay truthful to herself and to refuse a direct act of racism and sexism. When she goes to an audition for a play about emancipation, Amma is told that "with African hips and thighs", she is "perfect slave girl material" (Evaristo 6). On the one hand, by going against this opportunity, she is going against the instrumentalization of her body. She is also departing from the remnants of the Empire that prevail in England, when she refuses to act as a slave. According to Nripendra Kishore Mishra and Tulika Tripathi, "Women's agency is an important constituent of women's empowerment . . . being operative when it results in a fundamental shift in perceptions, . . . so that women are able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able, but entitled to make choices" (2011, 59). However, as stated by Pramod K. Nayar:

> Within postcolonial studies . . . individual under colonialism has been for so long humiliated, rejected and marginalized that s/he loses all faith in her/his abilities to carry forth a plan of action or make decisions. Institutionalized marginalization, in the form of racism for example, denies the social and political structures in which an individual can assert choices or make decisions. (2015a, 5).

Amma recognizes that the director's words come from a place of prejudice, especially considering she is a daughter of immigrants and not an immigrant herself. Therefore, by refusing this role as Other and assuming her blackness as hers and hers only, Amma is, then, refusing to have her agency robbed from her. On the other hand, her refusal of this acting part is also a refusal of the fetishization, that is, the practice of objectification through (sexual) fragmentation (Hall *et al.* 2013, 256), of her body, seen as "more sexual, erotic, and exotic" simply by being black (Demello 2014, 106).

Bummi, one of the older womxn in this novel, is another example of body liberation as she defies the idea of an aged body as being a sexually dead one – she already has had kids and her husband died. In her essay "The Double Standard of Aging", Susan Sontag argues that "Women become sexually ineligible much earlier than men do . . . Thus, for

most women, aging means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification" (1972, 32). In a society where beauty is deeply connected to youth, and youth is connected to sensuality and fertility (Demello 2014, 46), being older equals having passed an expiration date, almost as physical bodies that wander around with no purpose any longer. Bummi deconstructs this idea surrounding her age and body by starting an intimate relationship with a woman and allowing herself to rekindle her sexual desires: "Bummi followed her into the room as if in a trance, just as she could help but allow Omofe to explore her relaxed and warm bathed body . . . Omofe felt like home to Bummi and her expert activities culminated in the most intense pleasure" (Evaristo 179). It is this denial of heteronormativity,[6] of accepting the way that the world sees her and sees her body, that allows her to discover a side of her that has always been hidden, that allows her to rediscover her identity.

A similar liberation is seen in the case of Winsome, a woman in her 70s. She reaches the peak of her sexuality in this stage of her life when she starts having an affair with her son-in-law, Lennox. This sexual liberation is reflected on the daring and evocative descriptions of their exciting encounters: "who was this woman who kept up with this young man who exploded multiple times inside her and because he was virile and could go on forever and so could she until they died from exhaustion because she was completely out of her mind and inside her body?" (Evaristo 272-273). In contrast, her relationship with her husband, Clovis, to whom her body has always belonged, is a stable and comfortable one. This stability and comfort, however, are associated with dullness and lack of sexual fulfillment, as it can be deduced from the following passage: "I was grateful to having him to support and steer me, even though he wasn't particularly good-looking or with a dashing personality . . . it was easier to dream than it was to make the dream come true" (258). This is in direct opposition to the relationship she has with Lennox: "he . . . kissed her the way Clovis never did because when they first met he'd said full-on kissing was unhygienic" (272). In a sense, she allows herself the exploration of her sexuality, something stifled until then and only mobilized to correspond to the social roles expected of women's bodies.

As a transgenerational narrative, these acts of transgression towards the norm can also be viewed in the younger womxn of this novel. They also use their bodies in an attempt to oppose cultural hegemony, in this case by modifying its image as an act of insurgence (Richardson and Locks 2014, 78). Even though these womxn are trapped by the color of

their skin, they find ways of freeing themselves through other elements of their bodies. In Morgan's case, a young adult that at the beginning of the chapter goes by Megan, there is an active distancing from gender and sexuality norms. Morgan changes their pronouns, shaves their head, tattoos their body to fight against the hetero-cis-normative system ("except it felt wrong, even at a young age something in her realized that her prettiness was supposed to make her compliant, and when she wasn't, when she rebelled, she was letting down all those invested in her being adorable"[7]; Evaristo 308), but also stays truthful to themself as the body becomes a mirror to their own true identity. To modify one's body means to reclaim control over it, to reclaim what was stolen by the patriarchal and colonial structures (Richardson and Locks 2014, 78). Hence, Morgan weaponizes their body against the oppressor, transforming what could have been their prison into a stronghold. When they shave their hair, for example, they cut the archetypal of femininity, beauty and sexuality,[8] rendering them unapproachable and untouchable (Morris 2004, 14). The same happens when they change their clothing style and tattoo their arm, treating the body as a blank canvas over which they have full control and through which they can express themself. They are unapologetically themself even if it means going against everything they know.

Yazz's relationship with her hair is not too dissimilar from that of Morgan's, meaning that it represents, for both these individuals, a source of empowerment. However, while Morgan sees it as an element associated with social constructs, Yazz sees it as the representation of who she is, something that perfectly encapsulates her identity and does not restrain it. Her hair is described as "amazingly wild, energetic, strong and voluminous afro" (Evaristo 41), and she appears to embrace the stereotype associated with her black body and displays it with pride.

Even though this work shows this possibility of liberation through the female body, the body is also the thing that condemns them from the start, since ethnic characteristics are inscribed on the actual body; it is essentially connected to their skin color. In Yazz's story, throughout her journey at university, it is evident that she has this perception of herself as a free woman who is accepting and proud of her history, and this is shown through her hair and body. Nonetheless, this mentality has never gone unquestioned and her agency is in reality just an illusion, for this hair she is so proud of is tied back in the same sentence, ". . . because people sitting behind her in venues complain they can't see

the stage" (Evaristo 41). Yazz does not see this statement as a racist micro-aggression, however, this can already be perceived as her trying to diminish these issues for the sake of her survival in a society that will always have internalized racism, manifested in the smallest of actions. This is made even more obvious in stories such as Shirley's, when ". . . women clutch their bags nervously when they pass her in the street or sit next to them on the bus . . . Shirley tries not to succumb to the paranoia that comes from thinking every negative reaction is due to her skin colour" (224). Moments such as these prove the structural racism that the white privileged people do not even consciously inflict upon these womxn and their bodies.

Similarly to Yazz's, Bummi's liberation is prone to end, when the moral compass is influenced by the external, heteronormative society. As aforementioned, she discovers her sexuality and that she might be attracted to other women, but after some time she starts questioning her actions and internalizing the heteronormative discourse, self-inflicting prejudice upon herself. She terminates the relationship with Omofe in favor of one with a man, even though she still thinks about Omofe affectionately (Evaristo 187). More so, in a previous point in the story, she is forced to sell her body to a pastor in order for him to give her a loan to start her private cleaning company, since after her husband's death, this is the only way that she can find to survive financially. It is only through the objectification of her body that she would be able to achieve some form of emancipation, even though her body here is turned against her to degrade, threaten and constrain her.

The same can be said about Bummi's daughter, Carole, a married, successful banker. Notwithstanding the fact that her parents immigrated to England to be able to provide her with a better life, Carole experiences a similar situation to her mother's when she is raped.[9] Thinking back to Amma's story, and on how these black womxn are put in positions of inferiority, rape is compounded by the legacy of racist and controlling images of women as overly sexual, intrinsically connected with colonialism, and the legitimation of rape of black women by slave owners (Collins 2000, 69). It is due to this deeply rooted mentality that Carole loses control over her body at the age of thirteen and a half, and this elimination of her agency leads to a traumatized mind that desperately tries to separate itself from a traumatized body, as if it no longer belongs to her and her to it (Herman 1997, 58). This could explain why, from this moment on in her narrative, Carole appears to be in a constant search for a new identity in order to annihilate the one that was violated that

night, even considering taking her own life, that is, killing her impurified body. It may also be perceived as an attempt to protect herself by rejecting the physical characteristics that might have led to her being raped. In itself, her behavior is a proof that patriarchy runs deep even in those most affected by it as Carole's first instinct is to blame and immerse herself in guilt and shame in the aftermath of the sexual abuse: "Carole never told a soul definitely not mama who tell her off for lying or LaTisha and the others because everyone said it was Sheryl's fault for wearing slutty clothes when it happened to her . . . was it Carole's fault? she suspected it was . . ." (Evaristo 127). This reaction is explained by Prachi Bhuptani and Terri Messman-Moore, who claim that rape is "a highly stigmatized experience", since, unlike with any other groups of trauma, "victims are blamed for their ordeal" (2019, 309).

However, it perhaps also reveals the internalized racism and the colonial structures still prevalent in Britain, because when Carole decides to retain control over her body again, she starts assimilating[10] into everything but her parents' culture, the one with which she was educated. Here it could even be applied the term *mimicry*[11] to describe Carole's behavior – she stops eating with her hands and using idiomatic expressions of her African heritage. The same changes can be seen in her body. For instance, "she ditched the weaves sewn into her scalp for months at a time . . . she then had her tight curls straightened, Marcus said he preferred her natural hair, she told him she'd never get a job if she did that" (Evaristo 137), meaning here that the hair is not a symbol of freedom, but of forced assimilation, as the hair remains a domain where beauty and acceptability are heavily influenced by ethnical distinctions: this bias favors long, sleek, and smooth hair as the epitome of beauty and femininity, excluding individuals with naturally curly or kinky hair from this conventional standard (Morris 2004, 17-18). Carole also pursues other people's hobbies, namely that of doing fitness exercise, blood measuring, among other things that not only bring her closer to the society she wants to integrate, but also results in a materialization of the stereotypical Western beautification of the body. In the passage

> Freddy arranged for Bummi to meet his parents in a London restaurant, which she was looking forward to
>
> except he warned her that although they'd warmed to the idea of Carole, once they saw how classy, well-spoken and successful she was (most importantly for his mother, how slim and pretty, too) (Evaristo 186)

Carole's body color is ignored in favor of her beauty attributes which progressively resemble those of a white woman's idealization. This is why she is accepted into social spaces that she would not have been otherwise, such as her fiancée's white, British, upper-class family. It is also through the clothes she wears that she is able to better blend in with these groups and eventually succeed in her career as a respectable banker. The passage "Carole came in before going to work looking all *English,* as usual, her navy-blue raincoat tightly to show off her reduced waist, her hair slicked back into a bun, pearls around her neck" (Evaristo 157) reunites the aforementioned ideas, showcasing this construction of her body as a new identity.

Irrespective of this attempt to fit in, the idea previously mentioned returns: oppression always sneaks up even on those who work hard to deny it. As a black woman working in the investment sector, Carole experiences great hostility, since even with her classy style and elegant personality, her clients cannot hide their shock when she introduces herself and excels at her job. Not only do people not expect her to be an investment banker, they also mistake her for the waiter in meetings (Evaristo 117). Similarly, Shirley's workplace exercises discrimination upon her when other teachers dismiss her opinion and/or judge Shirley as a whole because of her blackness: ". . . when Shirley and the other women try to interject, their less assertive voices struggle to be heard, are cut off by the alphas before they've even finished making their points" (225). Both Carole and Shirley, then, are perceived as Others in their workplaces, because, in the first place, they are women occupying positions that used to be attributed to men and, in the second place, their body puts them immediately in a subaltern[12] position as the vicious cycles of societal oppression often locate black women in non-qualified jobs (Bell 1990, 461).

Additionally, Shirley's story offers the perspective that the mere fact of being a woman does not automatically align with embracing feminism in the broadest sense of the term (hooks 2018, 256). The same happens to Penelope, a white teacher and colleague of Shirley's. In her chapter, one notices that her narrative reveals her enduring status as a victim subjected to double colonization throughout her lifetime, illustrated by the following passage: "she raised the issue of returning to her job as a teacher with him . . . he replied that it was impractical to have two masters: a boss at work and a husband"

(Evaristo 287). Despite grappling with the weight of this, through adherence to stereotypes and stigmas associated with black skin, Penelope paradoxically exercises a form of colonization on Shirley, akin to the historical oppression imposed by men upon her, thereby perpetuating the colonial and patriarchal discourse:

> Penelope
> is the only woman to speak up at staff meetings . . .
> whose superior voice slices through the booming alpha-male teachers . . .
> Shirley abhors the fact that they're all pathetically resigned to letting the men, and Penelope make decisions for the rest of them . . .
> Shirley decides it's time to step up and speak out . . .
> Penelope doesn't disappoint, I, for one, am not a social worker, she replies in a tone that affects great weariness at Shirley's obvious naiveté and dim-wittedness, and I really think more than two terms on the job before you challenge someone with fifteen years' experience to a duel
> Someone who actually knows what she's talking about (Evaristo 225-227)

Hence, it is not solely racism that becomes ingrained in women's thoughts, as previously mentioned, but also sexism through the adoption of patriarchal principles; these notions aligning together when observed through an intersectional perspective.

LaTisha's story is an example of how this mindset shapes black women's experiences and how they use their bodies. On different moments of her narrative, LaTisha has sexual intercourse with three different men with no condom. In these instances, sex is something that she does not see necessarily as hers but is inherently connected with the man she has it with. There is an everlasting hope or ingenuity that men are not objectifying, sexualizing or prostituting her, even though this is the case in the three occasions: "she couldn't believe her luck and what with his bedroom eyes making her feel sexy and the drink making her feel romantic, she gave it up without protection in the back of his car in an empty parking lot that very evening" (Evaristo 208). The three times she became pregnant and was left on her own to take care of the children. In this case, her body is used as an expression not of rebellion against the system, but of this inherently patriarchal mindset that is present in women, so much so that it replaces all their sense of self-esteem and self-care. This is even more apparent when considering the stereotypical images of

black women's bodies as ready sexual objects for men's use; already degraded and constantly available (Ptacek 2023, 44).

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, womxn's bodies are, thus, not a clear expression of their identity, of their true selves. Instead, their bodies serve as a space through which both inner and outer forces battle each other, serving, then, as a *locus* of conflict, imposed conflict even when it is self-conflict. On the one hand, there is a system of stigmatized values associated with the body and the way it is perceived through a capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal society that surrounds and suffocates these womxn, turning them into racialized and politicized bodies. On the other hand, there is still a search for identity within the borders of each womxn's body as a form of resistance to the systemic structures aforementioned. It can be said that they struggle as their identities become nothing more than resistance and their bodies mirror this battle between who they feel they are and who they ought to be. For example, returning to Bummi's story, she indulges herself in this other side of her sexuality only to force herself back to her previous role as an obedient partner to a man; or Carole who molds her appearance in conformity to the norm in order to fit in, even though by doing this she is forced to reject familial ideals. What is more striking is that these womxn fall into the trap of self-erasure, in a way, as if it is something natural, because this enemy is a silent one. The Self builds an identity in opposition to the Other for these womxn react to their own Alterity and it is in this space that they find themselves. Obviously, every single aspect of these womxn's lives constitutes their story and not only the ones discussed. It is the contact between every little aspect of these womxn's lives that shapes them in different ways. The fact that these womxn are so similar, yet so singular, is the core of Evaristo's novel. These womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their ethnicity; these womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their gender; these womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their class, because their bodies are multilayered, unique and complex.

END NOTES

[1] This article will follow Stuart Hall's definition of stereotype: "Stereotyping, in other words, is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them. It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them" (2013, 248).

[2]"Alterity [or 'Otherness'] is what enables us to distinguish ourselves from the world, to see the world as outside us and our consciousness. Within postcolonial studies the term is deployed to convey the sense of a radical racial-cultural otherness and the *processes* through which this 'otherness' is constructed." (Nayar 2015b, 6-8).

[3] Drawing on Gayatri Spivak, Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho reflects on the concept of "dupla colonização feminina", concluding that women are both subject of oppression in the domestic sphere and in the public one (2005, 21).

[4] The word "women" is changed to "womxn" due to the existence of a non-binary character in the novel, Morgan. This term will be used to refer to the characters of the work whenever this one is included.

[5] "In Britain the term 'Black' is used to designate a broad spectrum of people including Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, Latin Americans, and Arabs" (Ray 1997, 51).

[6] According to Robinson, "Heteronormativity is a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality" (2016, 1). Additionally, Warner purposes an exercise of imagining a world where heterosexuality is not the norm stating, however, that "People are constantly encouraged to believe that heterosexual desire, dating, marriage, reproduction, childrearing, and home life are not only valuable to themselves, but the bedrock on which every other value in the world rests. Heterosexual desire and romance are thought to be the very core of humanity" (2000, 47).

[7] At this point in the novel, Morgan still uses she/her pronouns.

[8] According to Morris, "For men, this shaved look has nearly always been unappetizing and . . . has had little or no sex appeal, being a complete denial of all that is sensual about long female hair" (2004, 16).

[9] According to Ptacek, "Rape is often related with class" (2023, 84) and ". . . poor and working-class women reporting more sexual abuse as children, pornography, attacks on the sexual parts of their bodies, and forced sex" (*idem*, 99).

[10] Even though this expression can be used in a current discourse, in a Postcolonial context of analysis, to be assimilated or "*assimilado* . . . indicates a colonial policy that consciously determined to make the colonized subject assimilate into the European country/culture" (Nayar 2015c, 15).

[11] In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha claims that *Mimicry* "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (2004, 120-121). As Teresa Pereira further explains: "Mediante o recurso ao termo *mimicry*, Bhabha descreveu a reconstrução dos nativos à semelhança dos europeus, através da assimilação da religião, da educação, da literatura e de práticas culturais europeias. Os nativos pretendiam aumentar o seu grau de parecença aos europeus, anglicizando-se ou europeizando-se" (2023, s/p).

[12] According to Nayar, "Within postcolonialism's reading of colonial histories of South Asia, Africa and South America, the subaltern might be defined as the racial, cultural, gendered and ethnic subordinate of the white colonial, the product of colonial hegemonic practices and discourses. Postcolonialism's interest in post-independent nations' subalterns focuses on structures of power . . . and forms of discourse . . . that exclude the experiences, life stories, belief systems and knowledge production of particular groups of people . . . from the discourse of the nation" (2015d, 143). It can be added to this definition that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 1988, 287).

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TRANSLATION SECTION

Mr. Bennett e Mrs. Brown (1924) de Virginia Woolf

CARLA MORAIS PIRES
Tradutora

Parece-me possível, porventura desejável, que eu possa ser a única pessoa nesta sala que cometeu a loucura de escrever, de tentar escrever ou de não ser capaz de escrever um romance. E quando perguntei a mim própria, já que o vosso convite para falar sobre ficção moderna fez com que me interrogasse, que demónio me segredou ao ouvido e me impeliu para o meu destino, uma pequena silhueta ergueu-se diante de mim... a figura de um homem ou de uma mulher, que disse, "Chamo-me Brown. Apanha-me se puderes!"

A maior parte dos romancistas passa pela mesma experiência. Alguém com o nome Brown, Smith ou Jones surge diante deles e diz, da forma mais sedutora e adorável do mundo, "Anda lá, apanha-me se puderes!" E, assim, levados por este fogo-fátuo, debatem-se, livro após livro, passando os melhores anos das suas vidas nessa demanda e recebendo, pela maior parte, muito pouco dinheiro em troca. Poucos apanham o fantasma; a maioria tem de se contentar com um pedaço do vestido ou uma madeixa dos cabelos.

A minha crença de que homens e mulheres escrevem romances porque são persuadidos a criar uma personagem qualquer, que se lhes impôs, tem o assentimento de Mr. Arnold Bennett. Num artigo que passo a citar, diz, "A base da boa ficção é a criação de personagens e nada mais... O estilo conta; o enredo conta; a originalidade de conceção conta. Mas nada disso conta tanto como a verosimilhança das personagens. Se as personagens forem reais, o romance terá uma hipótese; se não forem, o esquecimento será a sua sorte". E continua, para chegar à conclusão de que, de momento, não temos jovens romancistas de primeira, visto serem incapazes de criar personagens reais, verdadeiras e convincentes.

São estas questões que pretendo, com mais ousadia do que critério, abordar esta noite. Quero perceber o que queremos dizer quando falamos de "personagem" em ficção; dizer algo sobre o tema da realidade que Mr. Bennett levanta; e aventar algumas razões por que os romancistas mais jovens não conseguem criar personagens, caso, como afirma Mr. Bennett, tal seja verdade. Estou bem ciente de que tudo isto vai levar-me a fazer algumas asserções muito abrangentes e outras muito vagas. Porque se trata de uma questão extremamente difícil. Pensem no pouco que sabemos sobre carácter... no pouco que sabemos sobre arte. Porém, para clarificar as coisas antes de começar, vou sugerir que distribuamos os escritores em dois grupos: a Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett e Mr. Galsworthy chamarei eduardianos; a Mr. Foster, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Strachey, Mr. Joyce e Mr. Eliot chamarei georgianos. E peço desde já que me desculpem se falo na primeira pessoa com um egoísmo intolerável. Não quero atribuir ao mundo em geral as opiniões de uma pessoa isolada, mal esclarecida e equivocada.

Creio que a minha primeira afirmação de que toda a gente nesta sala faz juízos de valor sobre a natureza humana terá a vossa concordância. Com efeito, seria impossível viver um ano sem um desastre se não fizéssemos essa análise de carácter e não tivéssemos alguma destreza na arte. Os nossos casamentos e as nossas amizades dependem disso; o nosso ofício depende largamente disso; os problemas que surgem no dia-a-dia apenas podem ser resolvidos com a sua ajuda. E, agora, vou arriscar uma segunda afirmação, possivelmente mais discutível, de que a natureza humana mudou por volta de dezembro de 1910.

Não estou a dizer que saímos de casa, por exemplo, entrando num jardim, e que vimos que uma rosa florira ou que uma galinha pusera um ovo. A mudança não foi repentina e definitiva a esse ponto. Mas, mesmo assim, aconteceu; e uma vez que temos de ser arbitrários, datemo-la ali por 1910. Os primeiros sinais encontram-se registados nos livros de Samuel Butler, em particular em *The Way of All Flesh* [*Caminho da Vida*]; as peças de Bernard Shaw continuam a registá-la. Na vida podemos ver essa mudança, se não se importam que use uma ilustração caseira, no carácter da nossa cozinheira. A cozinheira vitoriana vivia como um leviatã nas profundezas, formidável, silente, obscura, insondável; a cozinheira georgiana é uma criatura de sol e de ar fresco; entra e sai da sala de estar ora para pedir o *Daily Herald* emprestado, ora para pedir conselhos acerca de um chapéu. Querem exemplos mais sérios da capacidade da raça humana para mudar? Leiam a peça

Agamémnon e vejam se, com o decorrer do tempo, a vossa simpatia não está quase inteiramente com Clitemnestra. Ou tenham em consideração a vida de casados dos Carlyles e lamentem o desperdício, a futilidade, para ele e para ela, da horrível tradição familiar que fez com que fosse conveniente, para uma mulher genial, passar o tempo atrás de baratas e a esfregar panelas em vez de escrever livros. Todas as relações humanas mudaram... entre senhores e criados, maridos e mulheres, pais e filhos. E, quando as relações humanas mudam, dá-se ao mesmo tempo uma alteração na religião, no comportamento, na política e na literatura. Concordemos em situar uma destas transformações por volta de 1910.

Acabei de referir que as pessoas têm de adquirir uma boa dose de destreza na análise de carácter se querem viver um ano que seja sem um desastre. Mas é a arte dos jovens. Na meia-idade e na velhice ela é praticada, sobretudo, para fruição própria, e as amizades e outras aventuras e experimentações nessa arte da avaliação da personalidade raramente são feitas. Contudo, os romancistas diferem do resto das pessoas, pois não deixam de se interessar pela natureza humana mesmo quando, na prática, já aprenderam o suficiente. Vão mais além, creem que há nela algo continuamente interessante. Quando todos os assuntos do quotidiano estão tratados, há qualquer coisa nas pessoas que continua a parecer-lhes de extrema importância, apesar do facto de não ter relação alguma com a sua felicidade, a sua comodidade ou os seus proventos. O estudo da natureza humana torna-se para eles uma demanda apaixonante; conferir carácter, uma obsessão. E acho isto muito difícil de explicar: o que querem os romancistas dizer quando falam de personagem, qual é o impulso que os leva, de quando em quando, e tão veementemente, a dar corpo à sua visão quando escrevem?

Como tal, se me permitem, em vez de analisar e sintetizar, vou contar-vos uma pequena história de uma viagem de Richmond a Waterloo, que embora desprovida de graça tem o mérito de ser verdade, na esperança de poder mostrar-vos o que quero dizer com personagem propriamente dita. Para que possam perceber os diferentes aspetos que pode ostentar, e os perigos hediondos que nos assolam diretamente assim que tentamos descrevê-lo por palavras.

Certa noite, há umas semanas, eu estava atrasada para o comboio e saltei para a primeira carruagem que apareceu. Ao sentar-me, fiquei com a estranha e desconfortável sensação de que estava a interromper uma conversa entre duas pessoas que já ali se

encontravam sentadas. Não que fossem jovens e risonhas. Longe disso. Eram ambas de certa idade, a mulher contava mais de sessenta anos e o homem já devia ter passado dos quarenta. Estava um diante do outro, e o homem, que certamente se havia chegado para a frente e falado enfaticamente, a julgar pela atitude e pela cara afogueada, recostou-se e calou-se. Eu incomodara-o, e ele mostrou-se aborrecido. No entanto, a senhora com mais idade, a quem passo a chamar Mrs. Brown, pareceu bastante aliviada. Era uma dessas senhoras de idade aprumadas, com roupas puídas, cujo asseio excessivo — tudo abotoado, apertado, fechado, remendado e escovado — sugere mais pobreza extrema do que roupas rasgadas e sujidade. Havia nela um quê de angústia... um ar de sofrimento, de preocupação e, além disso, era uma mulher extremamente pequena. Os pés, dentro das pequenas botas engraxadas, mal tocavam no chão. Pareceu-me que não tinha ninguém que a amparasse; que tomava sozinha as suas decisões; que tendo sido abandonada há anos, ou enviuvado, levara uma vida de desassossego, atormentada, talvez a criar o seu único filho, que, decerto, naquela altura, começava a descarrilar. Tudo isto me ocorreu ao sentar-me, achando-me, como a maior parte das pessoas, pouco à-vontade a viajar com outros passageiros, a não ser que, de uma forma ou de outra, me abstraísse deles. Depois olhei para o homem. Estava certa de que não possuía qualquer parentesco com Mrs. Brown. Tinha uma constituição mais forte, mais entroncada, era de um tipo menos refinado. Imaginei-o um homem de negócios, muito provavelmente um respeitável negociante de cereais do Norte, vestido com uma boa sarja azul, com um canivete de bolso, um lenço de seda e um saco de couro resistente. Contudo, tinha obviamente um assunto desagradável a tratar com Mrs. Brown; um assunto secreto, talvez sinistro, que não queriam discutir na minha presença.

— Pois, os Crofts tiveram muito pouca sorte com os criados — disse Mr. Smith (assim o passo a chamar), com um ar pensativo, voltando a algum tema anterior com a intenção de manter as aparências.

— Ah, pobres coitados — observou Mrs. Brown, de forma um pouco condescendente. — A minha avó teve uma empregada que foi lá para casa quando tinha quinze anos e ficou até aos oitenta. — (Isto foi dito com uma espécie de mágoa e de altivez, talvez para nos impressionar a ambos.)

— Hoje em dia não nos deparamos muitas vezes com esse tipo de situação — respondeu Mr. Smith, num tom conciliatório.

Calaram-se a seguir.

— É estranho que não abram um clube de golfe ali... seria de pensar que um dos tipos mais novos o faria — comentou Mr. Smith, já que o silêncio o deixara visivelmente desconfortável.

Mrs. Brown nem se deu ao trabalho de responder.

— Que mudanças estão a fazer nesta parte do mundo — continuou Mr. Smith, olhando pela janela e aproveitando para me lançar um olhar de esguelha.

Era evidente, pelo silêncio de Mrs. Brown, pela afabilidade forçada com que Mr. Smith falava, que detinha sobre ela algum poder e que estava a usá-lo de forma desagradável. Podia ser sobre a queda em desgraça do filho, ou sobre algum episódio doloroso do seu próprio passado, ou do da filha. Talvez fosse a Londres assinar algum documento para transferir uma qualquer propriedade. Mrs. Brown estava claramente, contra a sua vontade, nas mãos de Mr. Smith. Eu começava a sentir muita pena dela, quando, de forma súbita e incongruente, ela perguntou:

— Sabe dizer-me se um carvalho morre no caso de as folhas terem sido comidas por lagartas durante dois anos consecutivos?

Falava de forma consideravelmente eloquente e bastante precisa, num tom de voz educado, inquiridor.

Mr. Smith mostrou-se surpreendido, mas aliviado por lhe ser dado um tema de conversa seguro. Apressou-se a contar-lhe isto e aquilo acerca de pragas de insetos. Disse-lhe que tinha um irmão que possuía um pomar em Kent. Contou-lhe o que fazem os fruticultores todos os anos nessa região, etc., etc. Enquanto falava, aconteceu algo muito estranho. Mrs. Brown tirou o seu pequeno lenço branco do bolso e começou a enxugar os olhos. Estava a chorar. Mas continuou a ouvir o que Mr. Smith dizia razoavelmente serena, e ele continuou a falar, um pouco mais alto, um pouco mais irado, como se já a tivesse visto a chorar muitas vezes, como se fosse um hábito penoso. Por fim, irritou-se. Calou-se abruptamente, olhou pela janela, depois inclinou-se para ela, tomando a posição em que eu o encontrara quando entrei, e disse de um modo intimidante, ameaçador, como se não aguentasse mais disparates:

— Então, quanto à questão que estávamos a tratar, vai correr tudo bem? O George vai lá estar na terça-feira?

— Não nos atrasaremos — respondeu Mrs. Brown, recompondo-se com uma dignidade admirável.

Mr. Smith não disse mais nada. Levantou-se, apertou o casaco, pegou no saco e saltou do comboio antes sequer de ele ter parado na estação de Clapham Junction. Tinha conseguido o que queria, mas estava com vergonha de si próprio; sentia-se satisfeito por poder sair da vista da velha senhora.

Mrs. Brown e eu ficámos sozinhas. Ela sentada no seu canto, do outro lado, muito asseada, muito pequena, um tanto estranha e a sofrer imensamente. A impressão que causava era avassaladora. Jorrava como uma corrente de ar, como um cheiro a queimado. De que era composta... essa impressão avassaladora e peculiar? Nessas ocasiões, miríades de ideias irrelevantes e incongruentes povoam-nos o espírito; vemos a pessoa, vemos Mrs. Brown no meio de todo o tipo de cenários. Vi-a numa casa à beira-mar, entre ornamentos excêntricos: ouriços-do-mar, modelos de barcos em vitrinas. As medalhas do marido expostas na cornija da lareira. Ela entrava e saía da sala, encarrapitando-se na ponta das cadeiras, depenicando comida dos pratos, entregando-se a olhares demorados, silenciosos. As lagartas e os carvalhos pareciam sugerir tudo isto. E, depois, eis que Mr. Smith surge nesta vida fantástica e solitária. Vi-o irrompendo por ali dentro, por assim dizer, num dia de vento. A zurzir, a fustigar. O guarda-chuva a pingar deixou uma poça no vestíbulo. Sentaram-se um ao lado do outro.

Foi então que Mrs. Brown enfrentou o terrível segredo e tomou a heroica decisão. Um pouco mais cedo, antes de amanhecer, fez a mala e carregou-a ela própria até à estação. Não iria deixar que Smith tocasse nela. Tinha o orgulho ferido, sentia-se desamarrada do seu ancoradouro; descendia de gente fina, com criados — mas os detalhes podiam esperar. O importante era perceber o seu carácter, imergir na sua atmosfera. Não tive tempo de explicar por que razão a senti de alguma forma trágica, heroica, ainda que com uma pitada de volubilidade, e fantástica, antes de o comboio parar, e vi-a desaparecer, com a sua mala, no meio da enorme e vibrante estação. Parecia bastante pequena, bastante obstinada; ao mesmo tempo, frágil e muito heroica. E não voltei a vê-la, e nunca saberei o que foi feito dela.

A história acaba sem qualquer sentido. Porém, não vos contei esta pequena história para ilustrar, quer a minha própria capacidade de invenção, quer o prazer de viajar de Richmond a Waterloo. O que eu quero que vejam nela é o seguinte: eis uma personagem a impor-se a outra. Eis Mrs. Brown a fazer com que alguém comece, quase instintivamente, a escrever um romance sobre ela. Acredito que todos os romances começam com uma

velha senhora sentada no canto em frente. Ou seja, acredito que todos os romances lidam com carácter, e que é para o expressar — não para pregar doutrinas, entoar cantigas ou celebrar as glórias do Império Britânico que a forma do romance, tão desajeitada, verbosa e pouco dramática, tão rica, elástica e viva, evoluiu. Para expressar carácter, disse eu; mas ireis desde logo achar que estas palavras estão sujeitas à mais ampla interpretação. Por exemplo, a personagem da velha Mrs. Brown terá um impacto muito diferente consoante a idade e o país onde, por acaso, nascemos. Seria bastante fácil escrever três versões daquele incidente do comboio: uma inglesa, uma francesa e uma russa. O escritor inglês faria da velha senhora uma "personagem"; faria sobressair as excentricidades e os maneirismos; os botões e as rugas; as fitas e as verrugas. A sua personalidade dominaria o livro. Um escritor francês apagaria tudo isso; sacrificaria a pessoa Mrs. Brown para dar uma visão mais geral da natureza humana; para criar um todo mais abstrato, proporcionado e harmonioso. O russo perfuraria a carne; revelaria a alma — somente a alma, a deambular pela rua, a colocar à vida uma qualquer pergunta formidável que ecoaria nos nossos ouvidos mesmo depois de o livro estar terminado. E, depois, para além da idade e do país, há que considerar o temperamento do escritor. Vós vedes na personagem uma coisa, e eu outra... dizeis que significa isto, e eu aquilo. E, no que toca à escrita, cada um faz uma seleção adicional conforme princípios só seus. Como tal, Mrs. Brown pode ser tratada de mil e uma maneiras, de acordo com a idade, o país e o temperamento do escritor.

Mas devo agora recordar o que diz Mr. Arnold Bennett. Diz que o romance só tem hipótese de sobreviver se as personagens forem reais. Caso contrário, é morte certa. Porém, pergunto-me, o que é a realidade? E quem são os juízes da realidade? Uma personagem pode ser real para Mr. Bennett, e completamente irreal para mim. Por exemplo, neste artigo que aqui tenho ele diz que o Dr. Watson, em *Sherlock Holmes*, é real para ele: para mim, o Dr. Watson é um saco cheio de palha, um néscio, um bobo da corte. E assim é com personagem atrás de personagem, com livro atrás de livro. Não há nada em que as pessoas mais divirjam do que na veracidade das personagens, em especial nos livros contemporâneos. Mas se olharmos para a questão de uma perspetiva mais abrangente, acho que Mr. Bennett está absolutamente certo. Se pensarmos nos romances que para nós são grandes romances, como *War and Peace* [*Guerra e Paz*], *Vanity Fair* [*Feira das Vaidades*], *Tristram Shandy* [*A vida e opiniões de Tristram Shandy*], *Madame Bovary* [*Madame Bovary*], *Pride and Prejudice* [*Orgulho e Preconceito*], *The Mayor of*

Casterbridge [*O Mayor de Casterbridge*], *Villette* [*Villette*], se pensarmos nestes livros ocorre-nos de imediato alguma personagem que nos pareceu tão real (não quero com isto dizer tão realista) que tem o poder de nos fazer pensar não apenas em si própria, mas, através do seu olhar, em todo o tipo de coisas... em religião, amor, guerra, paz, vida familiar, bailes em cidades de província, pores-do-sol, nasceres de lua, imortalidade da alma. Parece-me que dificilmente existirá algum tema acerca da experiência humana que tenha sido deixado de fora de *Guerra e Paz*. E em todos estes grandes romances, todos estes grandes romancistas se serviram de uma personagem para nos levarem a ver o que quer que queriam que víssemos. De outro modo, não seriam romancistas; seriam poetas, historiadores ou panfletários.

Mas examinemos agora o que Mr. Bennett continuou a afirmar quando disse que não havia um grande romancista entre os escritores georgianos, uma vez que não eram capazes de criar personagens reais, autênticas e convincentes. E com isso não posso concordar. Há motivos, justificações, possibilidades que, julgo, conferem ao caso um cambiante diferente. Pelo menos assim me parece, todavia estou bem ciente de que se trata de uma questão sobre a qual serei provavelmente preconceituosa, otimista e míope. Irei apresentar-vos o meu ponto de vista na esperança de que o tornem imparcial, criterioso e aberto. Portanto, porque será tão difícil aos atuais romancistas criarem personagens que pareçam reais, não apenas a Mr. Bennett, mas ao mundo em geral? Porque é que quando outubro chega, os editores são sempre incapazes de nos brindar com uma obra-prima?

Decerto que uma das razões é a de que os homens e as mulheres que começaram a escrever romances em 1910, aproximadamente, tiveram esta enorme dificuldade para enfrentar — a de não haver um romancista inglês vivo com quem pudessem aprender o ofício. Conrad é polaco, o que o coloca à parte e o torna, embora notável, não muito útil; Mr. Hardy não escreve um romance desde 1895. Suponho que os romancistas mais proeminentes e bem-sucedidos em 1910 sejam Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett e Mr. Galsworthy. Ora, parece-me que abordar esses homens e pedir-lhes para nos ensinarem a escrever um romance — a criar personagens que sejam reais —, é, precisamente, como ir a um sapateiro e pedir-lhe que nos ensine a fazer um relógio. Não fiquem de todo com a impressão de que não admiro e aprecio os seus livros. Parecem-me de grande valor e, na verdade, de grande indispensabilidade. Há ocasiões em que é mais importante ter botas do que relógios. Deixando-me de metáforas, creio que após a atividade criativa da época vitoriana era

absolutamente necessário, não apenas para a literatura, mas para a vida, que alguém escrevesse os livros que Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett e Mr. Galsworthy escreveram. Porém, que estranhos são! Por vezes, interrogo-me se fazemos bem em chamar-lhes sequer livros, já que nos deixam com uma sensação de estranha incompletude e descontentamento. Para que sejam terminados, parece necessário fazer-se algo — aderir a uma sociedade ou, mais desesperadamente, passar um cheque. Isto feito, o desassossego está tratado, o livro acabado; pode ser posto na prateleira e nunca mais precisa de ser lido. Mas com o trabalho de outros romancistas é diferente. *A vida e opiniões de Tristam Shandy* ou *Orgulho e Preconceito* são completos em si mesmos; são independentes; deixam-nos sem vontade alguma para fazer seja o que for, exceto, na verdade, voltar a lê-los e compreendê-los melhor. A diferença talvez esteja em que tanto Sterne como Jane Austen estavam interessados nas coisas em si; na personagem em si; no livro em si. Portanto, tudo estava dentro do livro, nada fora. Mas os eduardianos não estiveram nunca interessados na personagem em si, ou no livro em si. Era algo exterior que os interessava. Assim, os seus livros estavam incompletos enquanto livros e exigiam que o leitor, ele próprio, os terminasse ativa e objetivamente.

Talvez possamos tornar isto mais claro se tomarmos a liberdade de imaginar um pequeno grupo na carruagem do comboio — Mr. Wells, Mr. Galsworthy e Mr. Bennett viajam para Waterloo com Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown, disse-o já, estava mal vestida e era uma mulher bastante pequena. Tinha um ar ansioso, atormentado. Duvido que fosse o que se entende por uma mulher instruída. Aproveitando todos estes sintomas do estado insatisfatório das nossas escolas primárias com uma rapidez a que não consigo fazer justiça, Mr. Wells esboçaria de imediato, sobre o vidro da janela, uma visão de um mundo melhor, mais descontraído, alegre, feliz, aventureiro e galante, em que não existem carruagens mofentas nem velhotas bafientas; em que barcas miraculosas trazem frutos tropicais a Camberwell, às oito horas da manhã; em que há infantários públicos, fontes e bibliotecas, salas de jantar, salas de estar e casamentos; em que todos os cidadãos são generosos e cândidos, corajosos e magnificentes, e de preferência parecidos com o próprio Mr. Wells. Mas ninguém se parece em nada com Mrs. Brown. Não há Mrs. Browns na Utopia. Com efeito, não creio que Mr. Wells, no seu entusiasmo em torná-la no que deveria ser, desperdiçasse com ela um pensamento sequer. E o que veria Mr. Galsworthy? É de duvidar que os muros da fábrica Doulton lhe tomassem a imaginação? Nesta fábrica, as mulheres

fabricam vinte e cinco dúzias de vasilhas de barro por dia. Há mães na Mile End Road que dependem dos tostões que essas mulheres ganham. Mas há patrões no Surrey que ainda agora fumam belos charutos ao som dos rouxinóis. A ferver de indignação, atulhado de informações e a culpar a civilização, Mr. Galsworthy apenas veria em Mrs. Brown uma vasilha partida na roda e atirada para o canto.

Entre os eduardianos, apenas Mr. Bennett manteria os olhos na carruagem. Na verdade, observaria todos os detalhes com imenso desvelo. Repararia nos avisos; nas gravuras de Swanage e de Portsmouth; na forma como a almofada empolava entre os botões; que Mrs. Brown usava um alfinete que custara três libras, dez xelins e três moedas de um dinheiro no bazar em Whitworth; e que remendara ambas as luvas — na realidade, o polegar da luva esquerda fora substituído. E iria ainda observar, atentamente, que se tratava do comboio sem paragens vindo de Windsor, que para em Richmond por conveniência dos residentes da classe média que podem dar-se ao luxo de ir ao teatro, sem terem, entretanto, atingido a posição social que lhes permite disporem de um automóvel próprio, embora seja verdade que há ocasiões (ele dir-nos-ia quais) em que os alugam a uma empresa (ele dir-nos-ia qual). E, assim, calmamente, avançaria a pouco e pouco em direção a Mrs. Brown, apercebendo-se de que ela havia herdado uma pequena propriedade em regime de enfiteuse, não de posse plena, em Datchet, mas que estava, todavia, hipotecada a Mr. Bungay, o solicitador... Mas porque me atreveria eu a inventar na vez de Mr. Bennett? Acaso não escreve ele próprio romances? Vou abrir o primeiro livro que a sorte pôs no meu caminho — *Hilda Lessways*. Vejamos de que modo ele nos faz sentir que Hilda é real, verdadeira, convincente, como um romancista faria. Ela fechou a porta devagar, controladamente, o que denotava a formalidade do relacionamento que tinha com a sua mãe. Gostava de ler *Maud*; estava dotada com o poder de sentir intensamente. Até ao momento, nada havia a dizer; Mr. Bennett, no seu modo de ser vagaroso e confiante, tenta, nestas primeiras páginas em que todo e qualquer detalhe importa, mostrar-nos o tipo de rapariga que ela era.

Mas depois começa a descrever não Hilda Lessways, mas a vista do seu quarto, com a desculpa de que Mr. Skellorn, o homem que recebe as rendas, está a chegar. Mr. Bennett continua:

A região de Turnhill estendia-se por detrás dela; e o distrito sombrio de Five Towns, de que Turnhill é o posto avançado a norte, ficava para sul. No sopé de Chatterly Wood, o

canal serpenteava em curvas largas ao longo do seu percurso em direção às planícies impolutas de Cheshire e ao mar. Do lado do canal, exatamente do lado oposto da janela de Hilda, ficava uma moagem que, por vezes, fazia quase tanto fumo como os fornos e as chaminés a taparem a paisagem de ambos os lados. Desde a moagem, um caminho de tijolos, que separava uma fileira considerável de casas novas dos seus jardins, seguia diretamente para Lessways Street, defronte da casa de Mrs. Lessway. Mr. Skellorn deveria ter chegado por este caminho, pois habitava a casa mais afastada.

Uma frase inspirada teria feito mais do que todas estas linhas de descrição; mas deixemo-las passar à conta do labor necessário do romancista. E agora... onde está Hilda? Que tristeza! Hilda espreita ainda pela janela. Apaixonada e insatisfeita, era uma rapariga com olho para casas. Comparava frequentemente este velho Mr. Skellorn com as casas que via da janela do seu quarto. Por isso, as casas têm de ser descritas. Mr. Bennett continua:

A fila de casas chamava-se Freehold Villas*: um nome deliberadamente pretensioso numa zona onde grande parte dos terrenos estava sob contratos de enfiteuse e apenas podia mudar de mão mediante o pagamento de "multas" e o consentimento feudal de um "tribunal" presidido pelo representante do dono das terras. A maioria das habitações era propriedade dos seus ocupantes, que, autênticos senhores e donos, se entretinham ao fim da tarde nos jardins cobertos de fuligem, por entre o esvoaçar de camisas e toalhas a secar. Este bairro simbolizava o derradeiro triunfo das economias vitorianas, a apoteose do artesão prudente e industrioso. Correspondia ao sonho de paraíso de qualquer secretário de uma cooperativa de habitação. E, com efeito, tratava-se de uma verdadeira conquista. Contudo, o desprezo irracional de Hilda não o admitia*.

Louvado seja o Senhor, exclamamos! Eis que chegamos à própria Hilda. Mas calma... Hilda pode ter sido isto, aquilo e aqueloutro; porém, Hilda não se limitava a olhar para as casas e a pensar nelas; Hilda vivia numa casa. E em que tipo de casa vivia Hilda? Mr. Bennett continua:

Era uma das duas habitações do meio de uma fila de quatro casas autónomas, construída pelo seu avô Lessways, o fabricante de bules. Era a principal de entre as quatro, obviamente por ser a residência do proprietário de todas elas. Uma das casas da esquina tinha uma mercearia e a sua parcela de jardim fora-lhe subtraída para que o terreno ajardinado senhorial pudesse ser um tudo-nada maior. Não se tratava de habitações rústicas, mas de casas avaliadas entre as vinte e seis e as trinta e seis libras por ano, muito

aquém das possibilidades de artesãos e de pequenos agentes imobiliários e de cobradores de rendas. Além do mais, eram bem construídas, espaçosamente construídas. E a sua arquitetura, embora degradada, apresentava uns ligeiros traços de amenidade georgiana. Havia que reconhecer que era a melhor fila de casas naquela zona recém-habitada da cidade. Ao ali chegar, vindo das Freehold Villas*, é claro que Mr. Skellorn se deparou com algo superior, mais desafogado, mais liberal. Subitamente, Hilda ouviu a voz da mãe*.

Mas não conseguimos ouvir a voz da mãe de Hilda, nem a da própria Hilda; apenas conseguimos ouvir Mr. Bennett a falar a respeito de rendas e de casas de posse plena e de contratos enfitêuticos e de multas. O que pretende Mr. Bennett? Eu formei a minha opinião sobre o que ele pretende... está a tentar fazer-nos imaginar por ele; está a tentar hipnotizar-nos e a fazer-nos crer que lá por ter feito uma casa tem de haver uma pessoa ali a viver. Com toda a sua capacidade de observação, que é excelente, com toda a sua empatia e humanidade, que são extraordinárias, Mr. Bennett não olhou uma vez sequer para Mrs. Brown, ali, no seu canto. Está sentada a um canto da carruagem — aquela carruagem que percorre não o trajeto de Richmond a Waterloo, mas de um período da literatura inglesa ao seguinte, pois Mrs. Brown é eterna, Mrs. Brown é natureza humana, Mrs. Brown muda apenas à superfície, são os romancistas que entram e saem —, está sentada e nem um único dos escritores eduardianos tão-pouco reparou nela. Olharam pela janela de forma bastante compenetrada, curiosa e empática; para fábricas, para Utopias, até para a decoração e para o estofamento da carruagem, mas nunca para ela, nunca para a vida, nunca para a natureza humana. E, assim, desenvolveram uma técnica de escrita de romances que serve os seus propósitos; criaram ferramentas e estabeleceram convenções que vão ao encontro do que lhes apraz. Mas essas ferramentas não são as nossas, e essa tarefa não é a nossa. Para nós, essas convenções significam a ruína, essas ferramentas a morte.

Podeis queixar-vos da imprecisão da minha linguagem. O que é, afinal, uma convenção, uma ferramenta, podeis perguntar, e o que quero dizer quando afirmo que as convenções de Mr. Bennett e de Mr. Wells e de Mr. Galsworthy são convenções inadequadas para os georgianos? A questão é complicada: vou tentar atalhar. Uma convenção na escrita não é muito diferente de uma convenção nos costumes. Quer na vida, quer na literatura é necessário haver forma de colmatar, por um lado, o fosso entre a anfitriã e o seu hóspede desconhecido, por outro, entre o escritor e o seu leitor desconhecido. A

anfitriã lembra-se de falar do estado do tempo, uma vez que gerações de anfitriãs decidiram que se tratava de um assunto de interesse universal, em que todos acreditamos. Começa por dizer que estamos a ter um maio miserável e, havendo deste modo entrado em contacto com o seu hóspede desconhecido, passa a abordar temas de maior interesse. O mesmo acontece na literatura. O escritor tem de entrar em contacto com o leitor ao pôr diante dele algo que este reconheça, estimulando, por conseguinte, a sua imaginação e tornando-o disposto a colaborar na questão muito mais complexa da intimidade. E é da maior importância que este lugar de encontro comum seja alcançado facilmente, de forma quase instintiva, no escuro, com os olhos fechados. Eis Mr. Bennett a usar este ponto comum no excerto que citei. O problema que se lhe colocava era fazer-nos acreditar na realidade de Hilda Lessways. Portanto, sendo eduardiano, começou por descrever cuidadosa e minuciosamente o tipo de casa em que Hilda morava e o tipo de casa que ela via pela janela. Os imóveis eram o ponto comum a partir do qual os eduardianos achavam mais fácil passar à intimidade. Por mais enviesado que nos pareça, a convenção funcionava admiravelmente e milhares de Hildas Lessways foram lançadas ao mundo desta forma. Para aquela época e geração, tratava-se de uma boa convenção.

Mas, agora, se permitis que dê cabo da minha pequena história, vereis como senti profundamente a falta de uma convenção e que sério é o assunto quando as ferramentas de uma geração se tornam inúteis à geração seguinte. O incidente impressionara-me muitíssimo. Mas como poderia eu transmiti-lo aqui? Apenas podia relatar, da forma mais exata possível, o que foi dito, descrever ao detalhe o que era usado, dizer, consternada, que as mais diversas cenas me vieram à cabeça para, depois, as deixar sair, de forma desordenada, e descrever esta impressão vívida, dominadora, comparando-a a uma corrente de ar ou a um cheiro a queimado. Para vos dizer a verdade, também eu estava grandemente tentada a produzir um romance em três volumes sobre o filho da velha senhora e as suas aventuras aquando da travessia do Atlântico, e sobre a sua filha e a casa de chapéus de senhora que ela tinha em Westminster, e sobre o passado do próprio Smith e a sua casa em Sheffield, embora essas histórias me pareçam os temas mais aborrecidos, irrelevantes e enganadores do mundo.

Mas se o tivesse feito, teria escapado ao terrível esforço de dizer o que queria dizer. E, para chegar ao que queria dizer, deveria ter recuado mais e mais no tempo; e experimentado uma e outra coisa; e tentado esta e aquela frase, direcionando cada palavra

à minha visão, fazendo-a corresponder tão exatamente quanto possível e sabendo que, de certa forma, teria de encontrar um ponto comum entre nós, uma convenção que não vos parecesse demasiado estranha, irreal e rebuscada em que se acreditar. Confesso que me esquivei a essa árdua tarefa. Deixei que a minha Mrs. Brown me escapasse por entre os dedos. Não vos disse absolutamente nada a seu respeito. Mas, em parte, essa culpa é dos grandes eduardianos. Perguntei-lhes, já que são meus decanos e superiores, "Como devo começar a descrever o carácter desta mulher?" E eles responderam, "Começa por dizer que o pai tinha uma loja em Harrogate. Averigua a renda. Averigua os salários dos trabalhadores do comércio em 1878. Descobre de que morreu a mãe. Descreve o cancro. Descreve o calicó. Descreve..." Mas eu exclamei, "Parem! Parem!" E lamento dizer que atirei aquela ferramenta feia, desajeitada, incongruente pela janela, pois eu sabia que se começasse a descrever o cancro e o calicó, a minha Mrs. Brown, aquela visão a que me agarrei, embora não conheça forma de vo-la transmitir, ter-se-ia esbatido e esfumado e desaparecido para sempre.

É o que quero dizer quando refiro que as ferramentas eduardianas não têm utilidade para nós. Os eduardianos atribuíram uma grande importância à composição das coisas. Deram-nos uma casa na esperança de que possamos ser capazes de deduzir que seres humanos a habitam. Para ser justa, fizeram com que valesse muito mais a pena ali viver. Mas se considerarmos que os romances são, em primeiro lugar, sobre as pessoas, e, apenas, em segundo, sobre as casas em que vivem, essa é a forma errada de o fazer. O escritor georgiano teve, assim, de começar por livrar-se do método que estava a ser usado na altura. Ficou sozinho a enfrentar Mrs. Brown, sem qualquer forma de a levar até ao leitor. Mas isso é inexato. Um escritor nunca está só. Tem sempre o público consigo — se não no mesmo assento, pelo menos no compartimento do lado. Mas o público é um companheiro de viagem desconhecido. Em Inglaterra, trata-se de uma criatura muito dócil e influenciável, que, uma vez captada a sua atenção, passará a acreditar implicitamente no que é dito durante um determinado número de anos. Se dissermos ao público com suficiente convicção, "Todas as mulheres têm cauda, e todos os homens têm bossa", não há dúvida de que ele vai aprender a ver mulheres com cauda e homens com bossa e a achar deveras revolucionário e, provavelmente, impróprio se respondermos, "Que disparate! Os macacos têm cauda e os camelos bossas. Mas os homens e as mulheres possuem cérebro

e coração; e pensam e sentem". Vai parecer uma piada de mau gosto e, ainda por cima, descabida.

Voltando ao assunto, eis o público da Grã-Bretanha sentado ao lado do escritor e a dizer na sua voz alargada e unânime: "As mulheres velhas têm casas. Têm pais. Têm rendimentos. Têm criados. Têm botijas de água quente. É assim que sabemos que são velhas. Mr. Wells e Mr. Bennett e Mr. Galsworthy sempre nos ensinaram que é deste modo que as reconhecemos. Mas, agora, com a sua Mrs. Brown... Como é que vamos acreditar nela? Nem sequer sabemos se a sua casa se chamava *Albert* ou *Balmoral*, quanto pagou ela pelas luvas ou se a mãe morreu de cancro ou de tuberculose. Como pode ela estar viva? Não, é uma mera fantasia da vossa imaginação".

Claro que uma mulher velha deveria ser feita de casas de posse plena e de propriedades em regime de enfiteuse, não de imaginação.

Pois bem, o romancista georgiano encontrava-se numa situação difícil. Ali estava Mrs. Brown a demonstrar que era diferente, bastante diferente, do que as pessoas julgavam, e a seduzir o romancista para a salvar graças ao interessantíssimo, ainda que fugaz, vislumbre dos seus encantos; ali estavam os eduardianos a distribuir as ferramentas adequadas à construção e à demolição das casas; e ali estava o público da Grã-Bretanha a assegurar que, antes de mais, tinha mesmo de ver a botija de água quente. Entretanto, o comboio dirigia-se apressadamente para a estação onde todos temos de sair.

Era esta, creio, a difícil situação em que os jovens escritores eduardianos se encontravam por volta de 1910. Muitos deles — estou a pensar, em particular, em Mr. Forster e em Mr. Lawrence — arruinaram os seus primeiros trabalhos, pois em vez de se desfazerem dessas ferramentas, tentaram usá-las. Tentaram transigir. Tentaram combinar a sua própria noção de particularidade e de significância de uma qualquer personagem com o conhecimento de Mr. Galsworthy acerca de Leis Fabris, e com o de Mr. Bennett sobre o distrito de Five Towns. Tentaram-no, mas tinham uma ideia acerca de Mrs. Brown e das suas peculiaridades demasiado apurada e excessiva para continuarem por muito mais tempo. Algo precisava de ser feito. Não obstante o preço a pagar pela vida, integridade física e danos em bens de valor, Mrs. Brown tinha de ser salva, apresentada e posta de boas relações com o mundo antes de o comboio parar e de ela desaparecer para sempre. E começaram os estrondos e os estampidos. Tanto assim é que ouvimos a toda a nossa volta, em poemas e romances e biografias, até mesmo em artigos de jornais e ensaios, o som de

fratura e queda, de estrépito e destruição. É o som prevalecente da época georgiana — uma época bem melancólica se pensarmos nos dias melodiosos do passado, se pensarmos em Shakespeare e Milton e Keats, ou até em Jane Austen e Thackeray e Dickens; se pensarmos na língua e nos limites a que pode elevar-se, quando livre, e virmos a mesma águia cativa, careca e em agonia.

Tendo em conta os factos — com estes sons nos ouvidos e estes devaneios na cabeça —, não vou negar que Mr. Bennett tem alguma razão quando se queixa de que os nossos escritores georgianos são incapazes de nos fazer acreditar que os nossos personagens são reais. Sou obrigada a concordar que não fazem jorrar três obras-primas imortais, com regularidade vitoriana, a cada outono. Porém, em vez de nostálgica, sou otimista. Julgo que este estado de coisas se torna inevitável sempre que, seja na fase dos cabelos brancos ou na da juventude inconsciente, a convenção deixa de ser um meio de comunicação entre escritor e leitor para, de modo contrário, passar a ser um obstáculo e um impedimento. Atualmente, sofremos não de decadência, mas da falta de um código de conduta que escritores e leitores aceitem como um prelúdio à mais entusiasmante relação de amizade. A convenção literária do momento é de tal modo artificial — temos de falar durante toda a visita sobre o estado do tempo e em nada mais do que isso — que, naturalmente, os fracos são tentados a infringir, e os fortes levados a destruir, precisamente, as fundações e as regras da sociedade literária. Os sinais disto manifestam-se, aparentemente, por toda a parte. A gramática é violada, a sintaxe fragmentada, como um rapaz que a passar o fim de semana com uma tia se rebola, por mera exasperação, no canteiro de gerânios, enquanto decorrem as solenidades do sabat. Claro que os escritores mais adultos não se entregam a tais exibições enérgicas de mau humor. A sua sinceridade é desesperadora e a coragem impressionante; somente não sabem o que usar, se um garfo ou as mãos. Assim, se lerem Mr. Joyce e Mr. Eliot ficarão admirados com a indecência de um e a obscuridade de outro. A indecência de Mr. Joyce em *Ulysses* [*Ulisses*] parece-me a indecência consciente e calculada de um homem desesperado que acha que para respirar tem de partir as janelas. Por momentos, quando a janela está partida, ele é magnificente. Mas que desperdício de energia! E, afinal, como é enfadonha a indecência quando não significa o extravasar de uma energia ou selvajaria excessiva, mas o ato determinado e solidário de um homem que necessita de ar fresco! Quanto à obscuridade de Mr. Eliot, acho que escreveu alguns dos versos mais belos da poesia moderna. Contudo, que

intolerante é no que toca aos velhos costumes e às boas maneiras da sociedade — respeito pelos fracos, consideração pelos chatos! Ao deleitar-me com a beleza intensa e estonteante de um dos seus versos, penso que tenho de dar um salto vertiginoso e destemido até ao seguinte, e por aí fora, verso a verso, qual acrobata a voar precariamente de barra em barra, e confesso que clamo pelo velho decoro e invejo a languidez dos meus antepassados que, em vez de voltearem loucamente pelo ar, sonhavam, tranquilos, à sombra, com um livro na mão. Mais uma vez, nos livros de Mr. Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* e *Queen Victoria* [*Rainha Vitória*], o esforço e a tendência de escrever contra a corrente são também visíveis. Claro que é muito menos visível, pois Mr. Stratchey não só lida com factos, coisas já de si teimosas, como engendrou, sobretudo a partir de material do século XVIII, um código de conduta próprio muito discreto que lhe permite sentar-se à mesa com os mais insignes do país e dizer uma série de coisas sob a capa dessa vestimenta requintada que, tivessem eles ido sem ela, teriam sido postos fora da sala pelos criados. Ainda assim, se compararem *Eminent Victorians* com alguns ensaios de Lord Macaulay, embora fiquem com a impressão de que Lord Macaulay está sempre errado, e Mr. Strachey sempre certo, também encontrarão nesses mesmos ensaios uma substância, um alcance, uma riqueza que mostram que a sua época o precedeu; toda a força que tinha foi diretamente para o seu trabalho; nenhuma foi usada para efeitos de fingimento ou de conversão. Mas Mr. Strachey teve de nos abrir os olhos antes de nos fazer ver; teve de procurar até conseguir encontrar um modo de falar deveras artificioso; e o esforço, ainda que lindamente dissimulado, roubou ao seu trabalho alguma da força que deveria ter-lhe sido destinada, e limitou o seu campo de ação.

Por estas razões, temos de nos conformar com uma época de fracassos e fragmentos. Temos de pensar que se é despendida tanta força a encontrar uma forma de contar a verdade, então a própria verdade está destinada a chegar até nós numa condição bastante exaurida e caótica. Mrs. Brown, ou Ulisses ou Rainha Vitória ou Mr. Prufrock, isto para lhe dar alguns dos nomes que recentemente tornou famosos, encontra-se um pouco pálida e em desalinho na altura em que os seus salvadores chegam até si.

E é o som dos seus machados que ouvimos — aos meus ouvidos um som vigoroso e estimulante —, a não ser, claro, que queiramos dormir, logo agora que a Providência disponibilizou, generosamente, um exército de escritores ansiosos e capazes de satisfazer as nossas necessidades.

E assim tentei — receio ter sido maçadora ao alongar-me desta maneira — responder a algumas das perguntas que comecei por fazer. Expus algumas das dificuldades que, a meu ver, assolam o escritor georgiano de todas as formas. Procurei desculpá-lo. Posso terminar atrevendo-me a recordar-vos dos deveres e responsabilidades que têm enquanto parceiros neste ofício de escrever livros, enquanto viajantes na carruagem do comboio, enquanto companheiros de viagem de Mrs. Brown? Pois ela é tão visível para vós, que permaneceis em silêncio, como para nós, que contamos histórias sobre ela. No decurso da vossa vida diária, e ao longo desta última semana, haveis experienciado situações muito mais estranhas e interessantes do que aquela que tentei descrever. Tereis ouvido casualmente passagens de conversas que vos deixaram estupefactos. Havei-vos deitado à noite perplexos com a complexidade dos vossos sentimentos. Num único dia, ter-vos-ão ocorrido milhares de ideias; milhares de emoções encontraram-se, colidiram e desapareceram em espantosa desordem. Não obstante, permitis que os escritores vos impinjam uma versão de tudo isto, uma imagem de Mrs. Brown que não tem qualquer parecença com essa surpreendente aparição. Na vossa modéstia, parecem considerar que os escritores são de uma espécie diferente, que sabem mais acerca de Mrs. Brown do que vós. Nunca houve engano mais fatal. É esta divisão entre leitor e escritor, esta humildade da vossa parte, estes ares de importância da nossa, que corrompe e empobrece os livros que deveriam ser a prole sadia de uma aliança de proximidade e igualdade entre nós. Daí o surgir daqueles romances untuosos e acessíveis, daquelas biografias pomposas e ridículas, daquela crítica cândida e insípida, daqueles poemas que celebram melodiosamente a inocência das rosas e das ovelhas e que passam hoje em dia, de forma tão plausível, por literatura.

O vosso papel é insistir para que os escritores desçam dos seus plintos e pedestais e que descrevam, se possível, com beleza, em todo o caso, com verdade, a nossa Mrs. Brown. Deveis insistir que é uma velha senhora com capacidades ilimitadas e variedade infinita; capaz de aparecer em qualquer lugar; de vestir qualquer vestido; de dizer o que quer que seja e de fazer sabe lá Deus o quê. Mas as coisas que diz e as coisas que faz e os seus olhos e o seu nariz e as suas falas e o seu silêncio possuem um fascínio avassalador, pois ela é, claro, o espírito pelo qual nos regemos, a própria vida.

Mas não espereis para já uma apresentação completa e satisfatória sua. Tolerai o espasmódico, o obscuro, o fragmentário, o fracasso. A vossa ajuda é invocada por uma boa

causa. Cabe-me uma última e imponderada previsão — estamos no começo de uma das grandes épocas da literatura inglesa. Mas ela apenas pode ser alcançada se nos empenharmos em jamais, jamais, abandonar Mrs. Brown.

NOTA FINAL

As obras referidas ao longo do texto têm sido traduzidas para português desde meados do século XX.

Carla Morais Pires

é mestre em Tradução Literária pela Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto e tradutora literária *freelance*.

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THE DISPOSSESSED:
50 YEARS SINCE 50 YEARS HENCE

A Journey Towards Utopian Science Fiction

THEMATIC SECTION

EXTRA

TRIBUTO A URSULA K. LE GUIN

Testemunhos de Vários Escritores, Artistas e Professores

A.M.P. RODRIGUEZ
Autora e Antologista

Em 1983, já fascinada por ficção cientifica, num Portugal com um grande ausência geral de informação sobre ficção cientifica literária, além de Verne, Wells, Asimov, ou a do estilo literatura de cordel especulativa, uma capa chamou-me a atenção na livraria. A coleção? Ficção Cientifica da Europa-América. O livro? “Os Despojados” de Ursula K. Le Guin. A sinopse fascinava e ainda hoje exerce fascínio, que aumenta com a leitura da história. Embora a autora tivesse outras obras publicadas em Portugal anteriormente, esta foi a primeira vez que notei um livro dela. A ficção especulativa é, antes mais, a ficção das ideias, das abstrações, e das hipóteses. Certas ou erradas, certeiras ou falíveis, as mesmas não devem ser ignoradas ou menosprezadas, porque a discussão e o contraditório fomentam o crescimento e o conhecimento. Imaginar com racionalidade é algo profundamente humano, que não pode ser dissociado da condição de se existir enquanto pessoa, e as obras de Ursula K. Le Guin são nesse sentido o mais humano que se pode ser na literatura.

CARLOS SILVA
Escritor e Professor

Ursula K. Le Guin foi uma pioneira, desbravou mato grosso para que outros escritores, como eu, pudessem atravessar o território da ficção por um caminho bem mais fácil. A ficção especulativa é a literatura do "E se?"; as histórias desta escritora deixam-nos com perguntas e desafios, ousam desafiar regras que nunca considerámos questionar, constroem Omelas da qual hesitamos em abandonar. Le Guin ensinou-me que a ficção especulativa pode ser um instrumento de mudança e resistência às ideias feitas, mesmo as do próprio autor, pois embora não seja factual, pode ser Verdadeira e, muitas vezes, o melhor meio de explorarmos «as realidades inacreditáveis da nossa existência».

Também como teórica, Le Guin é uma referência. «A ficção como cesta: uma teoria» é um dos meus textos favoritos para abordar no contexto das Oficinas de Ferramentas para Escrita de Ficção Especulativa em que sou tutor. Após apresentar A Jornada do Herói, inspirada no trabalho de Joseph Campbell, este ensaio de Le Guin serve como um ponto de reflexão sobre o que é isto de contar histórias, e como perpetuar fórmulas é também perpetuar maneiras de pensar e atuar sobre o mundo. A cesta torna-se, a par da espada, numa nova ferramenta narrativa os construtores de histórias de ficção especulativa, talvez até mais condizente com a nossa cultura, se considerarmos as histórias de autores portugueses que podemos ler fora do género.

TRIBUTO A URSULA K. LE GUIN

Testemunhos de Vários Escritores, Artistas e Professores

Where my guides lead me in kindness
I follow, I follow lightly,
and there are no footprints
in the dust behind us.

- Ursula K. Le Guin
[1929-2018]

TRIBUTO A URSULA K. LE GUIN

Testemunhos de Vários Escritores, Artistas e Professores

FÁBIO FERNANDES
Escritor e Professor

Pouca gente na ficção científica anglófona me marcou mais do que Ursula K. Le Guin. Sua obra, que vem sendo redescoberta pelos leitores brasileiros, aliás, é fundamental para este mundo do século XXI. Le Guin trouxe para primeiro plano as questões ambientais e de gênero no universo antes tão centrado na figura masculina. Ela praticamente foi a responsável pela criação do termo "soft sf", e hoje é um dos focos da minha pesquisa acadêmica sobre a questão utópica. A leitura das obras de Le Guin me incentivou não apenas a escrever ficção científica, mas sobretudo pensá-la academicamente.
Foto © Mari Franco

FÁTIMA VIEIRA
Docente U.Porto e investigadora na área de Estudos sobre a Utopia e Vice-Reitora para a Cultura

Aprendi com Ursula K. Le Guin que a realização da utopia tem um preço. Começo as minhas aulas sobre literatura utópica com “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”. Aprendi com Le Guin que, mesmo assim, vale a pena procurar alternativas. Leio e releio “The Dispossessed” para descobrir, com Shevek, que a chave para uma sociedade melhor está no equilíbrio entre individualismo e colectivismo. Aprendi com Le Guin que há ainda muitas possibilidades por imaginar. O Universo Hainish prova-o. Foi isto que aprendi “estudando” Le Guin. E por isso assumo como uma espécie de missão “ensinar” Le Guin.

INÊS BOTELHO
Escritora

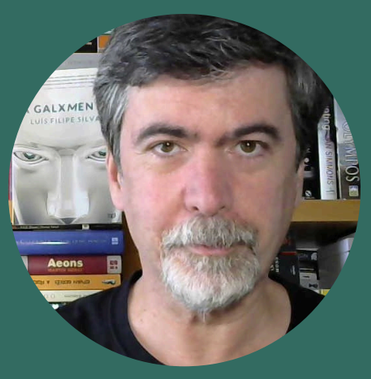
Curiosamente, apesar dos seus muitos mundos e reflexões, as duas influências mais directas de Ursula K. le Guin no que escrevo – ficção ou não – têm uma relação algo tangencial com a obra da autora. Uma vem da indicação que le Guin deu a Charles Vess quando este preparava as ilustrações para The Books of Earthsea: adicionar mais cabras. Sempre me pareceu uma excelente sinédoque para pensar nos aspectos práticos de uma sociedade e lhe acrescentar realismo. E a outra resumo-me àquele hábito de ficar alerta para falhas de raciocínio ou faltas de lógica, e aniquilar umas e outras metodicamente. Tudo práticas saudáveis e que se recomendam.

TRIBUTO A URSULA K. LE GUIN

Testemunhos de Vários Escritores, Artistas e Professores

Sabendo todos nós que a tecnologia concebida pelos autores de FC passa a ser de uso universal uma vez criada (doutro modo seria impossível voltar a escrever sobre a invisibilidade ou a máquina do tempo) quem me dera ter acomodado a Ursula K. Le Guin numa câmara de negaentropia e deixá-la continuar a escrever para todo o sempre. Impossível. Esse futuro ainda não chegou. Por outro lado gostaria "de falar para casa" e comunicar com ela através do Ansible. De novo impossível. A Le Guin inventou um aparelho extraordinário para falar instantaneamente através do Espaço mas não do Tempo. UM dia virá. Dring, dring.

JOÃO BARREIROS
Escritor e Professor



Ursula K. Le Guin tinha pouco mais de 1,6m de altura, mas defrontou gigantes. Na pele de Odo, inspirou milhares a desapegarem-se do conforto e criarem uma nova nação num planeta árido. Nos actos de Estragen, conheceu o sacrifício em prol de um bem maior. Como Ged, conversou com dragões e dominou os ventos. E como mulher, mãe, esposa numa América conservadora, ousou questionar o seu papel, e o das mulheres, com magistral ironia - talvez a luta mais difícil. Fez das palavras a sua contestação, e das histórias, vislumbres de terras distantes, no tempo e no espaço, melhores do que a sua. Vislumbres, ainda assim, imperfeitos, verosímeis, pois afinal conhecia o coração humano e não há sonhos sem pesadelos. Le Guin soube apontar as falhas antes que estas lhe fossem apontadas. Ainda assim, acreditou numa sociedade de entreajuda e solidariedade. Que tenha sentido necessidade de o fazer, habitando num país supostamente democrático e avançado que era, ele próprio, uma utopia para tantas outras partes do mundo, dirá muito desse país - mas também dirá muito de Le Guin, o facto de ter os olhos bem abertos. "Os Despojados" alia magistralmente tema e promessa, ciência e ficção, ética e responsabilidade, e uma voz literária que deixou saudades. Le Guin foi e será para mim a possibilidade literária de transcender o corpo e a época, aos quais a vida, traiçoeiramente nos amarra para mais traiçoeiramente nos soltar logo a seguir. Algures, em distantes arquipélagos, os dragões louvam-na nos seus cânticos.

LUÍS FILIPE SILVA
Autor e Podcaster

O conto "She Unnames Them", publicado a 21 de janeiro de 1985, no New Yorker, foi o meu primeiro contacto com a obra de Ursula K. Le Guin. Nesta breve releitura feminista do mito genesíaco, uma mulher decide devolver o nome que lhe foi atribuído pelo Pai de Adão e abandonar o Jardim do Éden, levando consigo todos os animais da Criação. Em vez de os renomear, esta "já-não-Eva" propõe aos animais que se desnomeiem e, juntos, procurem uma nova linguagem. A nomeação havia instituído a diferença e estabelecido relações de hierarquia e de poder entre os seres, afastando-os; mas o apagamento dos seus nomes tem um efeito poderoso sobre todos eles: desnomeados, todos parecem agora aproximar-se, curiosos, estabelecendo laços entre si. Este gesto simultaneamente resistente e libertador foi a maior lição que aprendi com Le Guin: as palavras devem ser usadas com precaução e consciência, mas também com deslumbramento e liberdade. Como diria a autora num dos seus famosos discursos, "a resistência e a mudança começam frequentemente na arte. Muitas vezes na nossa arte, a arte das palavras". E a arte de Le Guin é suprema.

MARINELA FREITAS
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TRIBUTO A URSULA K. LE GUIN

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SAFAA DIB
Política

Recordo-me bem da minha primeira leitura de "Os Despojados" nos anos universitários e de como passou a existir um antes e um depois dessa leitura. Anos mais tarde, ingressei no mundo editorial, onde tive o privilégio de publicar uma nova edição portuguesa de "Os Despojados" (Saída de Emergência), e que me permitiu trocar algumas palavras com a autora, através do seu agente. Era feliz e não sabia. Nessa altura, dei por mim enredada numa dessas estranhas ironias de vida, em que a política se tornou uma atividade bastante intensa que acabou por me consumir por completo, roubando-me do mundo dos livros.

No mesmo ano em que publiquei "Os Despojados", tomei a decisão de pôr fim à minha carreira editorial e hoje estou no mundo da política, a tentar contribuir para um mundo melhor. Os livros da Le Guin acompanharam-me sempre nesse percurso, em particular, a jornada de Shevek, o seu idealismo e a força das convicções, dos quais nunca me esquecerei. Neste ano em que se assinalam os 50 anos da publicação original de "Os Despojados", dou por mim feliz por ter feito o meu contributo para divulgar entre os leitores portugueses esta obra extraordinária e intemporal.

TERESA BOTELHO
Docente Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

Os cursos académicos sobre literatura e utopia que tenho lecionado são frequentemente estruturados em termos do antes e depois da publicação de “The Dispossessed” (e de “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”), uma vez que neles Le Guin coloca um número de questões pertinentes sobre a construção imaginária de mundos melhores.

Apresentado como uma “utopia ambígua”, “The Dispossessed” propõe ao leitor três eixos de inquérito que resumiria desta forma: como podemos imaginar uma utopia alicerçada não no bem estar económico repartido mas na gestão da escassez e da não-posse; como é possível equilibrar o eu com o nós, ou seja como é possível sustentar a hipótese de que “ser completo é ser parte de”, como sustenta a filosofia Odoniana de Anarres (que de forma incómoda para alguns leitores, parece ecoar a filosofia distópica de Zamyatin, em “Nós” (1921) de que “Ninguém é um mas um de...”; e finalmente em que termos é que o auto-isolamento de uma sociedade que se entende como utópica ou pelo menos melhor do que aquela de que se afastou, conduz a um inevitável sufoco e paralisa criativa.

Le Guin não responde, antes pergunta e desafia...e nós, leitores de “The Dispossessed”, ainda não parámos, passados 50 anos, de escrutinar as suas hipóteses e de imaginar alternativas. Tal como certamente ela esperaria.

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