

ALIEN IN AN ALIEN WORLD: THE JOURNEY OF DISILLUSIONMENT IN *THE DISPOSSESSED* BY URSULA K. LE GUIN¹

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ABSTRACT

The appealing journeys of the protagonist in Ursula K. Le Guin's worlds are frequently both physical and spiritual. The reader witnesses the transformation and growth of the character in the course of events while the setting also changes from the known to unknown. This journey enables the reader to understand the nature of the maturation with the hero's process of being independent. What is emphasized here by a journey is not particularly a series of adventure, but a life-long process of changing and transformation of the self through time and experience. In *The Dispossessed*, the protagonist, Shevek the physicist arrives on the foreign planet and inevitably finds himself as "aliens" mostly as a result of the strange culture. Many times, we find out that Shevek is alienated from his own society and living in isolation in a way. But it lights the way for him that leads to his disillusionment with a perspective helping him see the things outside. *The Dispossessed* offers us two completely different worlds with their climate, social orders and ideologies. Coming from Anarres, an apparently utopian but flawed anarchist society, Shevek grasps the realities of Urras, which seems flawless from afar, and also the cracks in her own community through his journey.

Key Words: Anarchism, Alien, Disillusionment, Journey, Utopia, Worlds.

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1. Introduction

If you weren't a writer what would you be?

Dead.

(From M.E Woods BellaOnline interview with Ursula K. Le Guin)

When Le Guin answers this way in an interview with M.E. Wood, she is extremely serious. She is the writer of great numbers of novels, short fiction, essay and articles, screenplay, children's stories, poems, translations, and so on. But her main field of specialty, not just my personal opinion, is practicing thought-experiment in her fiction. Le Guin easily exposed the reader to a subtle questioning of their realities known as absolute by wondering among different human races in her other worlds and putting protagonists in quite extraordinary journeys both through a strange land and their inner self. Her fiction opens the door of alternative worlds acting to enable the reader to look at their static reality from a brand-new perspective aiming to create a change in her consciousness. What is targeted here is a cognitive estrangement which I discussed in chapter I. Within the scope of cognitive estrangement, as its theoretician Darko Suvin stated, imaginary worlds create an alienating/distracting effect, allowing the reader to distance themselves from the subject. With the help of this distance, some hierarchical and unequal relationships and practices that are regarded as natural since they undergo little change, in the long run, are reviewed and the question appears "could it be another way?"

Other worlds regardless of being neverlands or future lands, "have the ability to extrapolate metaphorically about the human condition and help readers cope with their lives and restore some sense of wonder to a world where reason has triumphed" (Dauphin, 2011, s. 76). This is what speculative fiction tries to explore: the human condition in extraordinary situations. Le Guin explores so many human conditions in *The Dispossessed* and the novel has so many layers and embodies so many disciplines in itself that it can be discussed within the framework of ecology, feminism, utopian politics, anarchism, gender, science, technology, capitalism, and so on. For the editor of the book *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The*

Dispossessed, Peter Stillman, “one of the most important accomplishments of the novel is to provide a “thought experiment” of how an anarchist society might realistically confront scarcities in a sustainable manner” (Davis & Stillman, 2005, s. 12). Le Guin “describes reality, the present world”, in fact, through building a world similar to ours together with its opposite which seems like a utopia at first sight with its anarchist society but turns out that it has its own flaws. And what will be focused on is Le Guin’s depiction of the protagonist's process of disillusionment about the realities of both worlds initiated by his physical journey to the other world and ends up returning to his own.

2. Two Worlds: Anarres and Urras

The book starts with an image of a wall, which is a metaphor and can appear throughout the book in different ways that separates Anarres from the rest of the universe, making it “free”. Landing on the Port of Anarres, a spaceship has come to, except for exchanging some products from the other world, transport this time a crucial passenger: Shevek the physicist, the first one to travel from Anarres to Urras. Le Guin begins the story by telling Shevek’s physical journey to Urras. Two planets have regarded each other as an enemy, so to speak, and remained silent to each other for generations. “Seven generations of peace had not brought trust” (Le Guin, 2014). The protagonist Shevek, seen as a traitor by most of the Anarresti for going to Urras, was in contact with Urrasti physicists for a while, with the hope of improving complete his General Temporal Theory and striking a balance between two worlds that remained distanced for too long. But his intention to break the walls between worlds leads him to review his anarchist society’s operation and his initial thoughts about the alien world Urras.

Le Guin uses an alternating narrative format between Anarres and Urras in each chapter and this juxtaposition of two opposite sides makes it easier for the reader to see the whole frame by comparison. The journey of the protagonist as a mediator between two different cultures is typical in Le Guin’s fiction and provides the chance to know the foreign land thoroughly from the perspective of a stranger to the land just as the reader. Through him, the writer underlines the

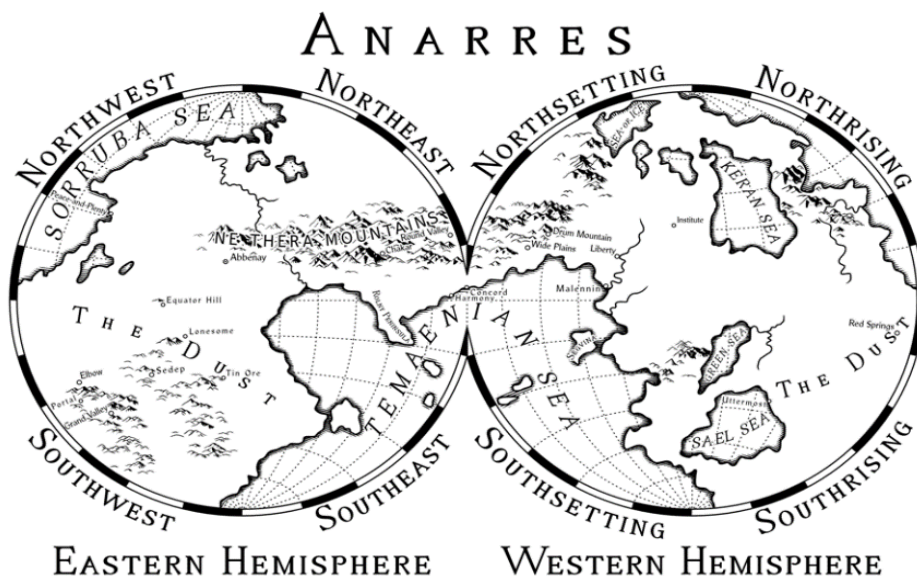
social structure of the two worlds. “The novel begins in the middle of Shevek’s quest and moves forward with the Urras events while using extended flashbacks to establish the Anarres background. Tellingly, this serves a useful function as Shevek’s disillusionment with Anarres finds a parallel in his disillusionment with Urras” (Bernando & Murphy, 2006, p. 49). Le Guin’s alternating between chapters functions as a critical approach to worlds allowing us to observe Shevek’s journey to Urras in Urras episodes, and in Anarres episodes narrative functions bildungsroman, too which makes clear for the reader what leads him to take this journey, what is in his mind.

Before going into specific, it is crucial to highlight the social dynamic of both worlds. A large group of anarchists, calling themselves Odonians, who rebelled against the capitalist order in Urras, which is a habitable planet for the human race, and settled on the moon of Urras one hundred seventy years ago thanks to the government carrying them to in spaceships for 20 years. Compared to Urras, Anarres is not very suitable for life in terms of climate. The vegetation is weak with the exception of trees called hollum and a few plants. Some minerals are mined and exchanged for trade goods that are impossible to produce in Anarres. The political system of Anarres is anarchism and the system rejects the possession of any kind. “Elimination of material acquisition” goes to the extent of a mother’s inability to raise her child as well as physical things.

Figure 1

Map

*of Anarres
(Medium.com)*



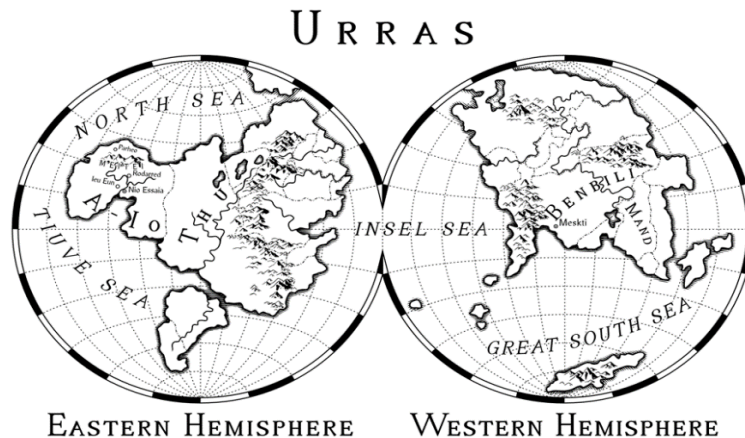
In the second chapter, we witness Shevek's childhood and Palat, Shevek's father, called as "the father" instead of "my father" or "his father". Any statement attempting to express possession is labeled as "egoizing" by the community (p. 29). There are dorms housing children as well as adults since "the economy of Anarres would not support the building, maintenance, heating, lighting of individual houses and apartments" (Le Guin, 2014, p. 110). Also in these dorms, children gain the "responsibility to the collective social order" (Bernando & Murphy, 2006). Food is also limited just as the scarcity of materials and portioned equally in all community dorms. There is no selected leader or government but some committees conducted by volunteers in order to maintain social operations. Anneresti people are free to choose their own profession as long as it for the good of the social community. The community regardless of men or woman has to deal with some harsh conditions of the planet, dusty air, dryness, in the meantime, they are appointed to the afforestation areas assigned by a computerized system of the Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC).

Monogamy is not the only accepted way of sexuality since it would bring along possessing that is "egoizing". However, people are totally free to choose have long-term but limited duration partners. Sexuality is freely experienced, thus, regardless of the person being heterosexual or homosexual in Anarres. Anarresti calls sexual intercourse as "copulate" and private rooms are provided for those who want to copulate. "Sexual privacy was freely available and socially expected; and beyond that privacy was not functional. It was excess, waste" (Le Guin, 2014, p. 110). The Anarchism in *The Dispossessed* on planet Anarres, Le Guin underlines, is a peaceful anarchism, not the anarchism of a man with a bomb in his pocket. She expressed many times that *The Dispossessed* is the embodiment of most of what she knew about anarchism and felt drawn with its central ideas as much as her affinity to Taoism. Anarchism was basically defined by people like Kropotkin, who had influence in the early days of the Russian Revolution, and was defined by Paul Goodman and Emma Goldman in the USA. She also noted that she could write the story after reading a great deal of these thinkers and charmed by the similarity of anarchism with Taoist thought which is Le Guin's other major intellectual tendency. Taoist philosophy finds harmony in contradictions and balance in the universe, "apparent dualities or oppositions always embody or reflect an underlying, interdependent and dynamic, unity that embodies the

concept of dualism, Yin Yang, which expresses the functioning mechanisms of the universe and nature in terms of opposition (Sabia, 2005, p. 125). It explains the dynamics of the universe with opposite poles reminding us of Shevek's endeavor to create a balance between two opposite worlds.

Striving for the balance between "individual and the community personal autonomy and social solidarity, individual freedom, and responsibility to others... aimed at showing why and how self and society, or individuality and community, can be reconciled or harmonized". What the novel illustrate us, "beyond its informed and sympathetic portrayal of anarchist communism in general.. is to portray why that promise can never be wholly satisfied" (Sabia, 2005, p. 112). As it is impossible not to notice that utopia and the application of principles of anarchist ideals in Anarres are flawed. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition "anarchism is a political theory holding all forms of governmental authority to be unnecessary and undesirable and advocating a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). This is a sort of mutual relationship between individual and community, the idea of reconciliation between them, in that "the individual as essentially a social being who can achieve full development only in society, while society can benefit only when its members are free" (Novak, 1966, p. 10). But it is arguable that whether Anarresti people are completely free and there is a complete reconciliation between society and the individual. The anarchist world of Anarres obviously is not a perfect utopia as it seems but it has its own defects. The fragile balance between being oppressive and minding about free will may be spoiled any time when the countless "social relationships, groups, and associations within any social order" act dictatorial or "self-governing individuals can deploy their freedom in irresponsible ways" (Sabia, 2005, p. 113).

Urras, the complete opposite of Anarres, with A-Io state offers us an exact free-market capitalist order unlike Anarres' harsh arid climate, scarcity of resources, and principle of mutual cooperation and computerized job posting. In the first place, "this is what a world is supposed to look like, Shevek thought," however, but the days will come when he would yearn to return to Anarres (Le Guin, 2014, p. 65).

Figure 1*Map of Urras (Libcom.org)*

He is amazed by the greenness, abundance, and wealth of Urras although many things seem too ostentatious, useless, and wasteful for him. Having a huge room for his use, a closet which has the size used by ten people in the dormitory, luxurious furniture, and even the toilet system was strange to him.

Le Guin presents us three states in the planet Urras “a free-market capitalist state (A-Io), plainly modeled on the West, confronts an authoritarian socialist state (Thu), just as clearly based on the Soviet Union, with the two engaged in a power struggle largely waged in an analogy of the Third World (Benbili)” (Ferns, 2005). Shevek, who came with the intention to improve his knowledge of physics in order to benefit his own people and consequently humanity in general, within the body of Ieu Eun University in A-Io government, is more than satisfied with the absence of mandatory posts assigned for everyone regardless of her/his pursuit, as on Anarres. He had already begun to question this situation while he was in Anarres, he remarks, “people who had chosen to work in centrally functional fields such as physics should not be called upon for these projects and special levies. Wasn’t it immoral to do work you didn’t enjoy?” (s. 48).

What brings Shevek to Urras in the first place is not only his success in physics, even winning an award on Urras in absentia, but also his aspiration to develop his theory with the help of the physicists as good as himself and benefit from their endless academic sources. “ With the immense pleasure and with that same sense of profound recognition, of finding something the way it was meant to be, Shevek discovered for the first time in his life the conversation of his equals” (p. 71). Shevek would have to curb his enthusiasm, however, when he finds out the underlying reason for an educated upper-class group of Urrasti physicist welcoming him with such generosity and tolerance. Since they desire to take possession of the General Temporal Theory of him in order to gain superiority over other human nations especially Hains, despite Shevek’s noble cause of building a bridge between the worlds

3. The Journey of Disillusionment

Shevek, the physicist, comes with an image of a person to Le Guin’s mind, she remarks years after writing the novel, while she mentions about the story’s origin. She does not visualize the novel’s plot, setting, or theme in the first place but an image of a person comes to her mind, “a citizen of a utopia”. Then she engages years of reading about utopian anarchism and physics. She states afterward, “thus in the process of trying to find out who and what Shevek was, I found out a great deal else, and thought as hard as I was capable of thinking, about society, about my world, and about myself (Davis & Stillman, 2005, p. 24). She also emphasizes *The Dispossessed* is a novel “because at the heart of it you will not find an idea, or an inspirational message, or even a stone axe, but something much frailer and obscurer and more complex: a person” (Le Guin, 1993, p. 26).

The novel starts with Shevek’s journey to Urras in the Port of Anarres with the image of a wall separated Anarres from the outer world. The angry crowd calls him a traitor since he apparently attempts to remove the borders between two worlds by setting out on a journey to Urras. The first wall we come across in *The Dispossessed*, the first alienation is what is between the two worlds. Anarresti people, after the revolution in Urras and settlement to the moon, a hundred seventy years ago, has grown up hating “profiteer” Urras. But something isn’t right for Shevek and his friends even in their teenage years. They have difficulty in believing a rather bad image of Urras shown in lessons in schools. One of the boys, Tirin, questions, “all the material on Urras available to students is the same. Disgusting, immoral, excremental. But look. If it was that bad

when the Settlers left, how has it kept on going for a hundred and fifty years? Why haven't their propertarian societies collapsed?" (Le Guin, 2014, p. 43).

Many times, we find out that Shevek is alienated from his own society and living in isolation in a way. But it lights the way for him that leads to his disillusionment with a perspective helping him see the things outside. However, Shevek's alienation within a society that is based on mutual aid and solidarity, begins earlier. Le Guin, thanks to the alternating narration technique between chapters, begins in the middle of Shevek's journey to Urras in the first chapter, on the other hand, we witness Shevek as a child in Anarres in the second chapter and a wisely planned ongoing shift between worlds provide us the background information about the process that pushed Shevek to leave his world to break the walls. In chapter 2, when he is young, in a Speaking-and-Listening group, his interest in physics which begins at an early age causes him removed from the group, when he talks about throwing a rock to a tree which nobody can understand, with the claim that he is against the "two-way-function" of the speech and he is "merely egoizing" by speaking. "The young physicist who tries out an original idea is ignored, reproached, demoted, or even conspired against" (Somay, 2005). Young Shevek could not fully fit into his society in some ways and finds reconciliation the balance of the life in number: "if you saw the numbers you could see that, the balance, the pattern. You saw the foundations of the world. And they were solid" (p. 31).

Later on, we witness Shevek's afforestation duty in the barren region of Dust which was used to be a more fertile area in the previous ages and now, Anaresti expects to restore by replanting hollum trees. During his mandatory labor which is a necessity in Anarresti society's communal order, all he thinks about is physics and how he applies Odo's ideas to temporal physics. As a matter of fact, somewhere deep in his mind, he wanted to be treated differently from any member of the society, since what he was dealing with, physics, served, to him, a superior purpose: serving humanity, better living conditions for his people. But special treatment for any reason which is something he would never have in Odonian community just like all the other possession. His friends are not posted by the computerized system of PDC (Production and Distribution Coordination), continue their researches in the Regional Institute and "their central function wasn't being wasted. They were working: doing what they wanted to do. He was not working. He was being worked" (p. 49).

In a childhood dream, on the same night, his father Palat gives him a book full of numbers, logarithmic tables with the Circle of Life on the cover, he sees a wall. There was a road in a barren vast land he wants to run but the wall stops him. He had to continue or he could not come home again. Feared by a voice, Shevek finds out it was his father. Palat points him to the dried ground, a stone written 1 and 5 on it. Shevek, at that moment, understand that they are the primal numbers “that was but unity and plurality. That is the cornerstone” (Le Guin, 2014, p. 33). Once he looks far he couldn’t see the wall. There was no wall. “He knew that he had come back, that he was home.” (p. 34). Shevek never forgets the joy when he finds out that there is no wall in that dream. Shevek’s faith in science can tear down the walls has much to do with what he felt when he had this dream.

When Shevek is accepted to the Central Institute of Sciences in Abbaney which means ‘mind’ in Pravic and the center of Anarres, on a physics scholarship, his dreams come true but the time he spent in Abbaney also paves the way substantially for his disillusionment and leads questioning what has been thought to him and the others. For the first time in his life, he stayed alone in a dorm room. His isolation in the room makes him felt remorse in the first place, he decides to stay thinking that he needs this to work on his theory. “His job was centrally functional to his society. The responsibility justified the end” (p. 112). Sabul who is Shevek’s mentor in the institute demands from him to learn Iotic in order to understand the physics of Urrasti and physicist such as Atro, To, Baisk. As he is used to working alone, it is not a problem for him to learn Iotic in his isolated room. As I stated before, Le Guin’s protagonists frequently experience a journey, physical then maybe inward, that creates a transformation in themselves or their world. After the journey to the Dust, to Abbaney, Shevek journeys into his disillusionment, and adulthood begins when he faces the truth about Sabul. And his journey to Urras teaches him a lot both about his society and the alien society. Spending almost half of the year in the Institute and learn Iotic, Shevek writes three pages critic of Urrasti physicist Atro’s Infinite Sequency Hypothesis. The excitement that he felt when Shevek learned about the ship that secretly exchanges letters, as well as the book between two worlds, fades after a while as Sabul wants to keep his learning and Urrasti physics private. “It occurred to him once that Sabul wanted to own it, as a property, a

source of power over his colleagues on Anarres. But this idea was so counter to Shevek's habits of thinking... he suppressed it at once" (Le Guin, 2014, p. 110).

Shevek's realization of the flaws in the system shows up especially in the Institute in Abbaney. The dessert served once or twice in most refectories is served every night in the refectory of Central Institute. "Why? Were the members of the Central Institute of the Sciences better than other people?" (p. 111). Above all, what bothered him most is Sabul's putting his name on the printed version of Shevek's critique of Atro's Infinite Sequency Hypothesis. "Shevek was to do the thinking, and Sabul would take the credit" (p. 117). Besides this discovery, "Shevek grows increasingly disillusioned when he finds out that the prominence Sabul has garnered as a premier physicist on Anarres is largely due to his translations of Urrasti physicists" (Bernardo & Murphy, 2006, p. 52). How unethical he finds this attitude, however, Shevek does nothing, since he knows that he needs Sabul to publish his theories. In this case, it would be very appropriate to say that he begins to learn to play the game by the rules, losing his naivety. "So, they bargained, he and Sabul, bargained like profiteers" (p. 117).

In chapter 6, one of the Anarres chapters, Le Guin shows some of the characters are disillusioned before Shevek. Two old friend's reunion in Abbaney, Bedap, and Shevek, becomes an opportunity for Shevek to realize the corruption his own community even though he does not totally agree with Bedap and persistently, at least in the first place, asserts what Bedap proposes looks like paranoia. In fact, Shevek realizes, too, that something is wrong with Abbaney, but he cannot figure out what it is. "The wall" says Bedap, "you've come up against the wall... In your case seems to be Sabul, and his supporters in the science syndicates and the PDC" (p. 164). Sabul and his supporters exercise their power to take the science union into their monopoly and influence about which work will be published or not. Even worse, this is only a part of the corruption. Bedap underlines the fact that the public opinion functions as a dictatorial government leader to suppress the ideas, to prevent any slight change in the social structure, thus, violating the freedom of the individual by embracing nothing but Odo's teaching principles.

Ideas never were controlled by laws and governments, even on Urras...You can't crash ideas by suppressing them. You can only crush them by ignoring them. By refusing to think, refusing to change. And that's precisely what our society is doing. Sabul uses you where he can and where he can't, he prevents you from publishing, from teaching, even from working. He gets it from the innate cowardice of the average human mind. Public opinion...The unadmitted, inadmissible government that rules the Odonian society by stifling the individual mind (p. 165).

The fact that individuals are not assigned to jobs according to their own abilities, the syndicates are mostly closed to change or the criticism of the system eventually turns out to be excluded from the society clearly shows that there are cracks in the utopian image of Anarres. People who write satirical plays like Tirin ends up in asylum or composers who are posted to "a canal-digging crew" just because whose music is not just approved by the Music Syndicate so not posted as a composer. Bedap, fully aware of this situation, talks about spiritual suffering:

I speak of spiritual suffering! Of people seeing their talent, their work, their lives wasted. Of good minds submitting to stupid ones. Of strength and courage strangled by envy, greed for power. Fear of change. Change is freedom, change is life – is anything more basic to Odonian thought than that? But nothing changes anymore! Our society is sick...You're suffering its sickness (p. 116).

Yes, there is no prison in Anarres for those who commit murder or rape but the mere punishment is exclusion from society. In a society founded on the basis of human solidarity, community conscience, and mutual aid, not a government or centralized power structure, public opinion could be a significant weapon to punish by excluding the person from the community. This is what Tirin experiences when his play is not liked or regarded as dangerous. "The social conscience, the opinion of other was the most powerful moral force motivating the behaviour of most Anarrestis, but it was a little less powerful in him than in most of them" (p. 112). The sickness that Bedap mentions is probably the reason why Shevek feels different and alienated within the society, thus not conforming to the social norms of Anarres. That his theories do not get the value they deserve, his inability to share ideas and contribute to his work together with the physicists at his level, and that he feels that his work is not going anywhere is probably not delusional. He is in a pessimistic mood and mostly isolated from the community before he

reunites Bedap in his third year in the Central Institute. “Three years he had accomplished what? A book, appropriated by Sabul; five or six unpublished papers; and a funeral oration for a wasted life. Nothing he did was understood and... meaningful. He was fulfilling no necessary function, personal or social...He had burnt out at twenty” (Cummins, 1993, p. 161). The current situation of a communist anarchist society that migrated to another planet by making a revolution in their homeland and rejected its norms actually ends up at the point where it all starts. Ironically, there is an implication in the novel that this corruption may necessitate another revolution now. The anarchist social structure of Anarres failed to reach reconciliation between the individual and society. Dan Sabia argues in his article “Individual and Community in Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*”, the significance of solidarity and recognition in anarchist communist societies.

Individuals are on the account of the anarcho-communists radically social. They need one another not only when they are in pain, or in trouble. Rather, there is little the individual can do or be, little he or she can become or achieve, without the help and cooperation of others: “*To be whole is to be part,*” reads the tombstone of the revolutionary founder of Anarres (p. 84). True in all societies, the need for others as a condition of self-development and well-being is especially true in an anarcho-communist society, because there the absence of a state, or of centralized authority, entails that the viability of all social institutions and practices depends, entirely, on voluntary cooperation and sharing. (Sabia, 2005).

Perhaps Shevek's inability to feel this necessary presence of social solidarity is what prompted him to seek help from another world and set out on a journey to tear down the walls.

Shevek meets Takver, with whom he is partnered and have a baby, thanks to Bedap and Takver gives him the devotion that he couldn't feel from society and his mother, who left him as a baby and did not bother to see him until the age of 20. “Shevek moves from feeling isolated from his society to committing himself to a female partner and then to social reform” (Cummins, 1993, p. 110). Anarres, a world struggling with scarcity and mostly desert, has a hard time after four years of drought. A four-year drought leads to famine during which a mother kills her baby since she has no food for it, a train engineer kills people on the tracks who are mobbing a food train, and food rations are reduced for those who are ill” (Cummins, 1993, p. 116). Cracks in anarchist

society Anarres now necessitate a reform. We learn that Shevek intends to start a printing syndicate, the Syndicate of Initiative, to publish the scientific articles, plays, and musical compositions that are rejected by the conventional syndicates. Maybe he and his friends could later liberate education from rigorous teachings, deny the tasks they think their talent is wasted during the labor, and make their planet out of this isolation and into a more open society. Since education is the most important activity of the social organism, has become rigid, moralistic, and authoritarian. They don't educate for freedom. Kids learn to parrot Odo's words as if they were laws" (Le Guin, 2014, p. 168).

The beauty of nature, animals, and the abundance of resources amazes him, in the new earth, Urras. "It was not strange. It was the air of the world from which his race had come, it was the air of home" (p. 20). He is welcomed as if he is a world-wide famous person, the first person from the alien planet, Anarres. He is so glad to meet the physicist of his equals and talks about how they disputed each other theories through corresponding between two worlds for a long time. Of course, Urrasti physicists, for sure, are happier than him with the hope of taking possessions of Shevek's theory that is then expected to provide instantaneous space travel. Similar to Genly Ai's maturation process in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Le Guin's most foreign-born visitor characters, Shevek still arrives in Urras as a relatively innocent person and "a figure who is repeatedly estranged from the social systems surrounding him before maturing into a character of experience" (Bernando & Murphy, 2006, p. 49). On a broader scale, Shevek has a universal purpose that concerns all people, he seeks for a "deeper meaning in the universe and attempts to transform the destiny of both Anarres and Urras; however, he is profoundly affected by the failings of those with smaller visions than his own" (Cummins, 1993, p. 50).

In Urras, "Shevek's first challenge is alienation", the kind of alienation arose from meeting a different culture (Cummins, 1993, p. 112). Their clothes, servants, giant structures, women never take part in science and other intellectual fields are strange to him everything except for their physic which they are far ahead from Anarres. The contempt for women in intellectual fields surprises Shevek, after all, Odo who leads the revolution almost two hundred years was a woman but does not judge their way of thinking. "He had no right to tease them. They knew no relation

but possession. They were possessed” (p. 75). No wonder they also treated women as possessions.

By traveling to Urras, Shevek also travels to their past in a way since all his people on Anarres migrated from here, it is the land of their ancestors. Ever since the Odo community emigrated, they have lived in denial and detachment from their past. This is why the children of Anarres are displayed images depicting a decadent image of Urras in the regional institutes, serving as schools. Shevek talk about this mutual ignorance to his colleagues, “since the last ship brought the last Settlers, we ignore you; you ignore us. You are our history. We are perhaps your future. I want to learn, not to ignore. It is the reason I came. We must know each other” (p. 75).

But the privileged Urrasti class physicists had no such aim. They take him for a stroll around the city but show him the places they want him to see, interviews are published in the newspapers that Shevek didn't say but wanted him to say, and they never let him talk to an ordinary citizen or other aliens as Terra or Hain, “but the schedule of events was too tightly planned to permit this...Shevek had the curious feeling that nobody had heard him” (s. 84). The only reason they invited Shevek to Urras and provided him with every opportunity he needed to carry out his work is that they wanted a superior position against the Hainish and Terrans races. Elizabeth Cummins in her book *Understanding of Ursula K. Le Guin* remark about this issue.

As an anarchist, Shevek wants to unbuild walls, but the Urrasti are determined to reinforce the walls that will make clearer their own uniqueness and superiority among the known worlds. To get what they want they are willing to move the wall out far enough to include Shevek and, in using the phrase "we Cetians," to include Anarres itself, at least in name. To resist becoming their pawn Shevek must learn to distrust others and wall himself off from their power. (Cummins, 1993, p. 114).

But it is quite hard for him not to trust the people he is with. He was grown up in a culture that constantly and necessarily relied on human solidarity. “Alienated as he was in some ways from that culture, and alien as he was o this one, still the lifelong habit remained: he assumed people

would be helpful. He trusted them” (Le Guin, 2014, s. 204). Atro, for example, who is one of the most competent of Urrasti physicists is the embodiment of the culture of strife and competition that prevailed in Urrasti rather than brotherhood and solidarity. He wants the superiority of Cetians (means Urrasti and Anarresti) over other races. “It’s not money I want, you know. I want the superiority of Cetian science recognized, the superiority of the Cetian mind” (p. 143). But neither these words of Atro nor Chifoilisk's warnings bring Shevek a complete disillusionment. We learn that physicist Chifoilisk who is an agent of his government, Thu and there are hidden microphones in both of their rooms. He warns Shevek against A-Io state, “Why do they bring you here from the Moon, praise you, print your books, keep you safe and snug in the lecture rooms and laboratories and libraries? Do you think that they do it out of scientific disinterest, out of brotherly love? This is a profit economy, Shevek!” (p. 138). Shevek’s answer is simple. He speaks out his intention to bargain with A-Io which is a very naïve anarchist notion in return for his people coming out of exile. But he does not notice the fact that “individuals cannot bargain with the State” as “the state recognizes no coinage but power.” (p. 272). He mentions that the A-Io government does not fear him and the real revolution, the revolution for justice, less than the Thu government, since they forgot the revolution: “They think if people can possess enough things they will be content to live in prison” (p. 138).

However, Shevek is wrong that A-Io government is not afraid of his anarchist nature and no longer believes in the revolution. As the same privileged elite community around him, his being keep off contacting with poor low-class Urrasti, being followed wherever he goes, not appearing in any public meeting are absolute indications that he is locked up in a gold cage and is seen as a danger for the capitalist state A-Io. As revolts have already erupted in the state called Benbili and among groups that defined themselves as anarchists, A-Io government is worried about Shevek to meet and influence them along with his theory, which is believed then would provide instant space travel, can reach other hands. One of the rebels tells Shevek “you are an idea. An dangerous one. The idea of anarchism, made flesh. Walking among us” (p. 295).

It is Vea's party where Le Guin put the climax of the story which Shevek is now at the point of full disillusionment. While his alienation caused him to leave Anarrest in the first place, now he

feels alien on Urras. After the long discussions with the physicist and non-physicists, under the influence of alcohol, Shevek finally relieves his feeling about their insincerity and hypocrisy of the people he met in Urras:

“You are rich, you own. We are poor we lack. You have, we do not have own. Everything is beautiful here. Only not the faces. On Anarres nothing is beautiful, nothing but the faces...We have nothing but that, nothing but each other. Here you see the jewels, there you see the eyes. And in the eyes, you see the splendor, splendor of the human spirit. Because our men and women are free – possessing nothing, they are free. And you the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail” (p. 229).

Shevek knows what to do with his theory now. He must give it to all known worlds without the possession of any specific race, in order to “unbuild walls”. When Shevek escapes to the Embassy of Terra and wants to give the equations of ansible, a device that would allow interplanetary communication “without any time interval between two points in space”, he genuinely shows the power of sharing, without no aim superiority (p. 344). His gift probably will lead the foundations of a federation which would be called as Ekumen, between nine Hainish worlds that grew apart for long times. “Thus Le Guin accounts for the nature of the Ekumen of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, four thousand years away, which administers the exchange of good and knowledge but does not govern people” (Cummins, 1993, p. 120).

Shevek’s final attempt to unbuild the walls between worlds seems finally succeeded. His theory, which will enable to make the ansible and provide communication across interstellar space without time delay, thereby spell an end to both spatial and temporal isolation, makes him all the more determined that it did not become the property of anyone, nation or planet—a resolve that precipitates his involvement with the Urrasti revolutionaries, an act of resistance that turns out in the following chapter to have had its precursor in his decision to return to Abbenay to fight against the growing trend towards conformity by setting up the Syndicate of Initiative. (Ferns, 2005, p. 257).

In the last chapter of *The Dispossessed*, the last journey is Shevek's returning his home Anarres with Ketho from Thu. Throughout the book, there are several journeys: the journey to the Dust, the journey to Takver, or the journey to Urras. These journeys are "circular journeys of cyclical growth that prepare Shevek for further action and change upon his return home" (Davis & Stillman, 2005). Each journey implies a change, enlightenment, or learning in Shevek. He is returning his home, thus, not only by questioning the politics of Urras but also the ideologies of Anarres. His world is likely to have changed, but the man who left that world did not remain the same, too, except for returning with his empty hands just like he left. A stranger from a stranger world may probably mean the complete collapse of the wall that separates Anarres from other worlds and that Shevek has shaken already by going to Urras, an alien world, but, because "the true journey is to return", he must come back.

4. An Ambiguous Utopia

Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* has a subtitle "An Ambiguous Utopia" that has led many critics to examine the point that the subtitle implies and arguing the actual utopian address of the novel. So as to make it clear and to give a concise definition of utopia, we might trace it back to Thomas More's book of that name, meaning both "no place" or "good place". However, Moore's book is seen by some as almost a joke, "utopia can't exist since the fallen human nature doesn't permit it. Nevertheless, his term stuck, and now, by general usage, utopias are thought to portray ideal societies or some version of them" (Atwood, 2011, p. 85). While speculative and utopian fiction criticizes the status quo, they also reveal revolutionary alternatives for the current situation inspired by the potential future outcomes of the existing social trends. In the twentieth century, considerable works of dystopia were written since that century hosted harsh wars, economic crises, and major socio-political shifts in the societies. Dystopia, which is often described as the opposite of utopia and its ideal society perception, involves cruelty, suffering, and all kinds of oppression and criticizes the political and social tendencies of the society in which it was written just like utopia, but unlike utopia, dystopia deals with the worst possible scenarios that may likely to happen in the future. As Margaret Atwood argues, "some books contain both" as each dystopia could bear some utopic elements while each utopia can carry a dystopia in itself like a ying-yang pattern, as is the case with *The Dispossessed* (Atwood, 2011, p. 85). Along with the perfect nature and abundance of Urras, the presence of anarchist groups within a corrupt order

still believing in solidarity and Anarres' human solidarity preserved in such a dystopian environment, despite all the impossibilities, would be the clearest example of this. Neither world is absolute evil and absolute good, not entirely based on equality and solidarity or absolute oppression but they contain evil in good and good in evil.

Since the subtitle of Le Guin's book points to "an ambiguous utopia", the reader's perception of a perfect society is already crumbling at the very beginning. In Bülent Somay's opinion, "the subtitle itself entails of the criticism of anarchist ideology in the book by casting doubt into something that has been always self-confident (Somay, 2005). The achieved social order described by the utopian tradition before 1970 leaves no room for any change since the world they created is seen as perfect. But whichever world we call utopia in *The Dispossessed*, it is clear that each world needs improvements and developments as they have flaws. When Shevek travels to the other world, the past of Anarres, what he finds is mostly abuse and covetousness because governments desire to use his theory and possible ansible for supremacy over other societies and potential annihilation. In the book, *Critical Companion to Ursula K. Le Guin*, writers argue in detail that *The Dispossessed* came out as a different genre from utopias of absolute good and dystopias that are completely bad before the 70s. This form can be addressed as "critical utopia...which is distinctly different from the utopia as it highlights society as perpetually in flux rather than static; thus, readers can see the tensions, contradictions, and frictions of utopian societies as they struggle to articulate social dreaming" (p. 60). Besides, Shevek desires to create a change in his flawed anarchist society by bringing together two worlds, thus, utopia and dystopia. In addition to his, Le Guin finishes her book before Shevek and Ketho's arriving Anarres, which leads us again to the ambiguity: what will be next, how will Odonians react to Shevek's return with a stranger, or will the society open to further change? Nothing is certain.

Anarres cannot be the utopian address for the book, states Bülent Somay, since it is a hellish place not only because it is arid and isolated, but also "it excludes difference and heterogeneity" (Somay, 2005). While Shevek complains to Takver in chapter 10 about how the social conscience rules society and undermines the free will that the individual should have in an anarchist society:

“We’re ashamed to say we’ve refused a posting. That the social conscience, instead of striking a balance with it. We don’t cooperate we obey. We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. We fear our neighbor’s opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice” (Le Guin, 2014, p. 330).

We can understand, despite its utopian appearance, Anarres genuinely contains a dystopia in itself. How managerial organizations alienates individuals by restricting their self-confidence and creativity is explored with the help of the two different worlds in Le Guin's novel. Thus, it will be understood how these two opposite worlds with different ideologies turn into dystopia. From this point of view, *The Dispossessed* has several similar characteristics with the dystopic parodies of utopian ideals that emerged in the twentieth century. “In Anarres chapters, which depict the process whereby a small group of individuals comes to rebel against the increasing conformity of their society, bear more than a passing resemblance to the narratives of dystopias such as Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, or Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where similar struggles are in evidence” (Ferns, 2005, p. 253).

Le Guin herself questions the Western utopian tradition, with the main character already being a citizen of utopia, that is, not a stranger visiting the utopia. In *The Dispossessed*, instead of a stranger who comes to the utopian world and fascinated by it, we are faced with a protagonist who is traveling from a problematic utopia in order to improve that is not as perfect as it is seen. Utopians rarely question, except for non-functional questions about another world. And when they ask questions, it is probably to justify their own superiority. But Tirin, who seriously questions what is imposed on them on Anarres and the portrayal of Urras as a wretched place that is displayed to school-age children, ends in a mental hospital.

The utopias that Bülent Somay calls as “open-ended” written before 1970, “was authoritarian in style and totalitarian in content” since they narrate a social order “that is finally achieved” and spare no space for “ a further change” (Somay, 2005). Therefore, in this respect, *The Dispossessed* differ from their previous examples since there is an obvious need for change in both worlds. Above all, it already contains a critique of anarchist ideology. However, for Somay, Le Guin does not have a dilemma about which of the two binary opposite’s planets she supports, so she does not have an ambiguous attitude as to which side her hearth stands for.

In his article “Future Conditional or Future Perfect? The Dispossessed and Permanent Revolution”, Chris Ferns discusses the necessity of a permanent revolution in *The Dispossessed*. As in Anarres, the new world of anarchist Odoists who migrated to Urras with a revolution and radical change, we observe signs that they are on the way to transforming into the social order from which they fled.

Le Guin’s interest, however, is less in the fate of the old world, which is depicted as having existed in a kind of uneasy stasis for more than one hundred and fifty years since the anarchists’ departure, than in what happens to a revolutionary society established in isolation from the world whose contradictions gave birth to it... Anarres is now in danger of turning into something far removed from the revolution’s initial intent—a society where individual initiative is increasingly stifled by the pressure to conform to societal norms (Ferns, 2005, p. 250).

Ferns defines Odonian revolutions not as an accomplished, finished, stagnant revolution, but as an ongoing and “permanent one”. From this point of view, the revolution should not be seen as something to be feared, but as an opportunity not to repeat the mistakes of the past (p. 260).

Despite the alien environments of these two planets, what we are told is in fact a human journey that leads to a change in Shevek's identity and left him between hopeful optimism and utter despair. Similar changes can be possible in society. The journey of Shevek to Urras may lead a reconciliation or connect with their Urrasti past; “the Anarresti (and other peoples) can now see Urras no simply as an opposite to oppose but as a past which they can criticize and grow beyond to possible futures” (Davis & Stillman, 2005, p. xvii). His return to Anarres may probably spark a radical change or maybe not. Since there is a clear uncertainty at the end of the dispossessed. What will happen next? Will the relations of the two worlds improve, or what will meet him when Shevek lands on Anarres with Ketho? This is the result of Le Guin's use of the thought experiment of speculative fiction, “a method which does not provide certainty but does provide speculation” (Cummins, 1993, p. 200). *The Dispossessed* can be described as speculative fiction, a type of fuzzy boundaries and ambiguity, even because it contains an ambiguous utopia. Utopia is inherently speculative as it employs the exploration of the possibilities by building new worlds on the topic that how can we do better when what we have does not satisfy? Le Guin thought experiment is based on the question: What if a physicist who grew up in an anarchist society on an isolated planet goes to a planet that is in contradiction to the society he grew up in many

ways? This is an ambiguous utopia or not a utopia at all. Besides, as Shevek says, “it is not the answer we are after, but only how to ask questions”.

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