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Lost Humanity:
Dystopias and the Loss of Moral Values in
Contemporary Science Fiction

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ABSTRACT

During the last decades, there has been an increase in the number of literary dystopias published, especially within the genre of Science Fiction. Despite differences in style, setting of the works and plot, a possible common feature is the lack or degradation of moral values in these literary dystopias. This paper explores that possibility as the determinant factor in the creation of literary dystopias through the analysis of *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. Le Guin. The analysis is focused on some specific features – politics, education, social structure, culture and sexuality – of the two worlds depicted in this novel. It will be proved that the removal or ossification of the moral values – altruism, respect, family, etc. – is which makes the final difference between utopia and dystopia.

Keywords: utopia, dystopia, moral values, Science Fiction, Ursula K. Le Guin

RESUMEN

Durante las últimas décadas, puede observarse un aumento repentino en el número de distopías literarias publicadas y distribuidas, especialmente dentro del género de la Ciencia Ficción. A pesar de las diferencias de estilo, escenario de las obras y trama, una característica común es la falta o la degradación de los valores morales en estas distopías literarias. Este trabajo explora esta posibilidad como factor determinante en la creación de distopías literarias a través del análisis de “Los Desposeídos”, de Ursula K. Le Guin. El análisis se centra en algunas características específicas – política, educación, estructura social, cultura y sexualidad – de los dos distopías literarias representadas en esta novela. Este análisis prueba que la eliminación o la osificación de los valores morales – el altruismo, el respeto, la familia, etc. – marca la distinción última entre utopía y distopía.

Palabras clave: utopía, distopía, valores morales, Ciencia Ficción, Ursula K. Le Guin

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INTRODUCTION

During the last years, a sudden increase of the popularity a particular genre within Science Fiction has been observed: the dystopia. The fan phenomena has spread the idea of ‘dystopia’ to the massive public, especially among teenagers. The dystopian genre is nowadays known and almost familiar to every one of us, since movies based on these literary dystopias have been released with great success – *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *The Giver*, *The Maze Runner*... – while a great number of these dystopian literary works remain in paper format, but are also widely known, especially in the English-speaking literary community – *Steelheart*, *Uglies* series, *Across the universe* series. Most of the literary dystopias mentioned above are settled in distant post-apocalyptic futures and depict totalitarian regimes.

This fact drove my attention towards these literary dystopias; a pattern could be seen in these works. The one which was more remarkable for me was *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry. Despite the fact that it is a children’s book, it has most of the characteristics that I wanted to study. In this novel we are presented to a world in which feelings, emotions, reactions and moral are carefully controlled, in order to create a perfect society. Moral values, as generosity, altruism, respect, family or education are either completely removed or fixed in an artificial version of them.

After a close reading of that book, I started to analyse every literary utopia or dystopia that I could find. Soon, I realized that one of the most dystopian features of these literary works were the absence or corruption of moral values, and that this was repeated in most of the literary dystopias. After realizing that this was a real possibility, I developed a hypothesis: that which makes the final difference between a utopian society and a dystopian one does not depends on the political or philosophical system chosen but on the moral values present, corrupted or absent on the mentioned systems. This hypothesis was what I wanted to confirm or reject this paper.

I chose to prove this hypothesis by reading and analysing one of the most important works of the Hainish Cycle, by Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*.

The analysis of this novel focuses on the contrast between two planets, in terms of society. The interest of the analysis in relation with the chosen topic is clear from the title

itself: *An Ambiguous Utopia*. At very beginning, the reader struggles between the hard but utopian Anarres, and the comfortable and dystopian Urras. But as the novel progresses, the distinction between utopia and dystopia is less clear, to the point that the reader cannot know if it even exists.

The methodology followed in this paper in order to prove this hypothesis will be developed through comparison. After a brief introduction to Science Fiction as genre and to the author of *The Dispossessed*, the paper will develop an analysis of the two planets (Anarres and Urras) by comparing them in different aspects of their systems – politics, education, social structure, culture and sexuality.

At the end of the paper, it will be seen how the extreme dystopia of Urras is caused by the absence of a system of moral values, while Anarres shows the consequences of the corruption and ossification of these moral values.

1. SCIENCE FICTION, UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

1.1. What is Science Fiction? Definition and main features

This paper deals with a specific subgenre – the dystopian fiction – within the genre known as Science Fiction (henceforward SF). Those involved with this genre explain that there is no clear about the definition of SF. Farah Mendlesohn writes that SF is not exactly a genre – which could be defined as a body of writing in which it is expected to find specific plots and elements – but “an ongoing discussion” (1). Mendlesohn defines SF as “a mode of writing which has seemed to exist at variance from the standards and demands of both the literary establishment and the mass market” (1). Joanna Russ suggests that SF “cannot be judged following the usual literary criteria” (3). Russ sees reading and writing protocols in SF which differ from those in other genres. Lem and other critics define SF as “a literature of debate” (3). SF is constantly revisited and changed, with writers writing against their predecessors.

Darko Suvin defines SF as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (7-8).

Tom Shippey explains that SF is a “high information genre”, meaning by this that its writings go beyond the rest of literature in its symbols and gives the words – either the pre-existent ones or those invented by authors – unpredictable meanings (15-6). Shippey argues that SF “habitually breaks down the boundary ... between literature and other forms of signification” (23). Shippey also explains that SF does not only deal with intellectual and emotional issues, but it is also “ideologically challenging” (21). SF is not only concerned with the aesthetic, intellectual and sentimental part of the stories, but it is also intended to make the reader think about the possibilities of what he or she is reading. It can be concluded that SF is a genre which is highly independent from the rest of genres, and closely related with the possible futures of our world, and the moral, ethical and ideological consequences that the future would bring.

Gwyneth Jones describes some of the elements which usually make SF recognizable to us. The most important and remarkable of these elements would be the existence of a world different of our own – and this world can be a different planet, different universe or simply a future time (163). Jones defines these “icons of SF” as the author’s way of warning the reader that he or she is dealing with a world different from the one that he or she knows, and at the same time they are constituents of this difference (163). For her, the most important “icons of SF” are the space life, started by the image of rockets and then slowly replaced by the spaceship (164-5); the image of “the Other”, being this Other a human creation – as the robot developed by Isaac Asimov (166) which evolved towards the question of ‘machine intelligence’ or ‘artificial intelligence’; the possibility of machines, human creations, having same or superior intelligence as human beings, and even a soul (167) – or a visitor from the outer space: the extra-terrestrial creatures (168). The image of aliens has experienced various changes according to the development of the real world. Jones writes that the image of aliens was ‘sober’ during the late 19th century, until the moment in which H. G. Wells presented his *The War of the Worlds* (1898) (168). Lately, the range of roles of aliens has become wider: they appear as immigrants, underprivileged workers, ethnic minorities or diplomatic opponents (168)

Regarding more specific characters, it is said that in SF the characterization is not completely developed (Jones 171). The writers simply do not have the space for character

development. According to Jones, this is due to the fact that they are tied by the necessity of describe in deep the imagined world and the elements on it (171). Despite the fact that there exist some extraordinary exceptions to this generalization, SF trusts in a series of pre-fixed characters (171). One of these characters is the hero; in this genre, the hero-tales are innumerable. The other two would be the 'mad scientist' (Jones 171) and some desirable heroines that have evolved from the fixed ladies in distress of the pulp magazines (Jones 172).

1.2. Brief history of Science Fiction: origins and development

Brian Stableford establishes the first works belonging to the genre of SF as appearing in the seventeenth century (15). He describes these writings were works of speculative fiction: they dealt with the new scientific discoveries and technologies and the way in which they would alter the life in that time. An example of this is Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619), including large dissertations about how the technological progress would affect social structures (Stableford 15). During the eighteenth century, speculative fictions based on the travel-books genre collided with the gradual decrease of unknown lands in which settle the stories (Stableford 17). This forced the writers to move the setting of their utopian and satirical images to the space, the interior of the Earth or dreams, as for example Chevalier de Béthune's *The World of Mercury* (1750) (Stableford 18). In the nineteenth century appeared in England and France the idea of the "scientific romance", being these works dealing with the consequences that the assimilation of science would have (Slusser 32), as in the case of Honoré de Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* (1841).

From this point, there was no proper evolution of the genre until H.G. Wells realized that dreams and distant lands were no longer an appropriate setting for SF. Instead, he introduced the idea of the time machine as a way to exploring the possible futures of Earth (Stableford, 24) in his *The Time Machine* (1895). After Well's works were published, more passionate writers of action-adventure fiction started to work in new setting, moving to worlds which would permit them create stories and setting which would be impossible in naturalistic fiction (Stableford 25). Stableford writes that Wells influence in Great Britain

caused the movement from the “scientific romance” to the “future war chronicles, apocalyptic fantasies, interplanetary romance and karmic romance” (26).

Meanwhile, in the USA a new format of SF publications appeared; the pulp magazines (Stableford 29). Most of the stories displayed on these magazines were colourful and simple tales with a futuristic setting, but still they were fundamental on the spread of SF to the public. According to Mike Ashley, “the SF magazine has been the primary driving force in the generation of SF for some 80 years” (60). This pulp fictions, fused with the European scientific romance, where the origin of the American SF.

From this point onwards, the genre of SF was finally established. John Clute describes this genre during the twentieth century as “a series of outstanding texts which figured to our gaze the significant futures that, during those years, began to come to pass” (64). During the last two decades of 20th century, the genre experienced a transformation due to the ageing of the authors (Clute 65). Those writers were older or dead, and the genre was forced to change in order to remain fresh and open to speculation (Clute 65). Some of the old-styled writers of SF – such as Isaac Asimov, Jack Williamson, and Robert A. Heinlein – remained extraordinary active, maintaining the original features of the genre; and others distinguished authors – such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia E. Butler, and Joanna Russ – made attempts to renovate the genre (Clute 67).

A genre whose purpose is to describe the possible futures – and to do it in such a way that the works advocate for a better world –, must adapt its features quickly in order to remain contemporary, in order to make the described worlds possible. Those works who are not able to do this would die and became just a loved memory of the die-hard fans. It can be concluded that in the past decades SF has experienced a division between those works written mainly to provide entertainment – as the spin-offs written for main franchises as *Star Wars* – and those who searched more challenging plots and ideas – as Ursula K. Le Guin.

1.3. Utopias and dystopias

This paper will analyse a specific subgenre within SF; the dystopian fiction. But in order to better understand what dystopian fiction is, we need to explain the concept of utopia.

It must be highlighted that the distinction between utopian and dystopian fictions is not absolute. It can be diffuse sometimes, and the utopias can be ambiguous and subjected to the position of writer and reader (Douwe Fokkema 21). The best known utopian fiction is that written by Thomas More in 1516, titled *Utopia*.

Edward James writes that all utopias share some outstanding features; small communities with village-style life and communal work appear in almost all of utopias of the time (220). They also removed money and the idea of private property, and some occupations as that of lawyer and priest (James 220) – all of this can be seen in *The Dispossessed*. Another outstanding feature of utopian fiction, that finally has constituted a subgenre in itself, is the elimination of gender discrimination. Helen Merrick defends the existence of ‘feminist utopias’, a term proposed by Joanna Russ in the 1970s (247). These are works where gender is no longer a defining feature of the characters, but a product of social relations (Merrick 247-8). The gendered hierarchy of our world is displaced in favour of an equal society; Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) would be an example of these feminist utopias; and this feature is also present in *The Dispossessed*. Nicole Pohl (70) and Kenneth M. Roemer (98) also address to feminism as a characteristic of Utopian fiction.

Fokkema writes that the main feature of utopian fiction is the fact that it describes a world which is not only attractive to us, but realizable (15). For Fokkema, the utopian literature is always a sort of didactic literature; it ‘teaches’ us the appropriate ways of living (15).

According to Ken MacLeod, there are no place for politics in utopian fiction (230). Nevertheless, Fokkema argues that utopian fiction is “the most political of all literary tradition”, and that it is possible to study this subgenre from both a political and literary point of view (1), which seems much more convincing, given the fact that most literary utopias and dystopias reflect in a certain way our real world and political systems.

James explains that nowadays SF is no longer ground for utopian fictions in the classical sense (220). Classic utopias were harshly criticised during the twentieth century; one of the most recurrent points for these attacks was the fact that, theoretically, all of these systems would turn into ‘dystopias’ – the opposite of utopias, oppressive and tyrannical societies (James 220). This is the origin of dystopian fictions.

Gregory Claeys points to Jonathan Swift as the first “dystopian herald” (110). The primary difference between utopian and dystopian fiction, is the origin of these stories (Fokkema 20). Utopian fictions are appealing abstractions, possible worlds which are attractive to us and which are settled in distant places of imagination. Dystopian fictions are “usually inspired by a dreadful socio-political reality”; and most of times are perverted utopias (Fokkema 20). Claeys writes that the term “dystopian” is used “in the broad sense of portraying feasible negative visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form. By ‘feasible’ we imply that no extraordinary or utterly unrealistic features dominate the narrative” (109). *The Dispossessed* is absolutely consequent with this asseveration. Claeys also asseverates that “totalitarian dystopias are clearly dystopias, mirrored if refracted realities” (109). As it will be developed in the analysis, in the case of *The Dispossessed*, there are not only two dystopian totalitarian regimes, but they are the literary representations of two totalitarian regimes in our real world. Also, in dystopias the plot is often based in the main character’s escape from the oppressive situation – as the case of Shevek in *The Dispossessed* –, or his or her death. There is actual conflict in dystopias, which did not appear in classic utopian fictions (Fokkema 21).

For Csicsery-Ronay, Le Guin’s work clearly inspires the idea of a critical utopia; and ambiguous utopia which can challenge the reader’s ideals (120). Fokkema also mentions *The Dispossessed* as a writing which shows the reader the relativity of any utopia by confronting the visions of two completely different worlds through the eyes of an analytic and sensitive character (398). On the basis of this information and Shevek’s analysis, I will develop my hypothesis dealing with the importance of the moral values in the creation of utopias and dystopias. Since, as explained in the introduction, I consider the lack of moral values as the defining and final difference between utopia and dystopia, I will analyse two social and political systems in which moral values are present and applied in different ways, and I will prove their importance in the development of this ambiguous utopias.

1.4. About the Author: Ursula Kroeber Le Guin

Ursula K. Le Guin was born on October 21, 1929, in Berkeley, California (Warren G. Rochelle 408). Born in a family of readers, she started writing stories in an early age. Among her influences, she accounts a long list of writers and poets; she was never committed to a single genre, moving from poetry to social realism (Rochelle 408). Rochelle lists a great number of themes in her works. Between them, it should be highlighted the importance of psychology, anthropology, Taoism and feminism for Le Guin (Rochelle 410-1-2). This is clearly reflected in *The Dispossessed*, where we can see the importance of psychology and feminism, and even an anarchism system with basis in Taoism.

What makes this author so interesting for the study of the lack of moral values as related to the topic dealt with in this paper is her interest in human beings and their societies:

When I create another planet, another world, with a society on it, I try to hint at the complexity of the society I'm creating, instead of just referring to an empire or something like that. (Le Guin, *The Art of Fiction* n° 221)

Since this world deals with the importance of human values and the societies created on these values the deep interest and rich development of societies that Le Guin displays in her works make them more than attractive to be analysed in this paper.

2. *AN AMBIGUOUS UTOPIA: ANALYSIS OF URSULA K. LE GUIN'S THE DISPOSSESSED*

There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. ... But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall. Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side you were on. (Le Guin 1)

The focus of this paper is on the importance of the presence or absence of moral values in the creation of literary dystopias. My hypothesis is that which makes the final difference between an utopian society and a dystopian one does not depend on the political or philosophical system portrayed (being this Marxism, Anarchism, Capitalism...) but on the moral values present or absent on the mentioned systems.

Laurence Davis writes that *The Dispossessed* “is a utopia, and it is intended as such” (2-3). Nevertheless, the subtitle itself contradicts this asseveration, since the complete title for the novel is *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. This paper will prove that *The Dispossessed* is actually the depiction of two dystopias, but two dystopias which could have been perfect utopias – Anarres with its philosophical and political system, Urras with its land full of natural resources and opportunities for everyone – if the moral values were kept in their societies.

In order to prove this hypothesis, this paper makes an analysis of the politics, education, society, sexuality and gender behaviours and culture in *The Dispossessed*, one of the most important works within the Hainish Cycle, by Ursula K. Le Guin. The Hainish Cycle is a series of novels and shorts stories settled in an imagined future, dealing with the expansion of the human race through the universe. The inhabited planets in this universe are under the guidance of the oldest of them, Hain – since in this fictional world, all human beings are the progeny of the Hainish colonizers. This progeny presents a wide variety of genetic variations between individuals – as, for example the physical differences between the Anarresti and the Urrasti people. In this saga of novels and stories, Ursula K. Le Guin explores anthropological and sociological issues, by creating hypothetical societies and systems and developing them.

Shevek, the protagonist of *The Dispossessed*, is a physicist born and raised in Anarres, a desert and barren moon of the planet Urras, which in turn is presented as the epitome of natural, social and cultural wealth. The plot deals with Shevek's problems to develop an instrument called the *ansible*, which enables superluminal communication between planets distant in the universe.¹ Since in Anarres the technology to develop such instrument is not available, Shevek travels to Urras in order to obtain the needed resources, invited by the scientists in the planet – who covet Shevek's ideas. He accepts this invitation not only because of the poor technological resources in Anarres, but also due to various problems with his coworkers. Shevek flees to Urras abandoning his family, driven by the frustration of not being able to work on his ideas.

As the plot progresses, we are presented at the same time with flashback chapters about Shevek's childhood and life in Anarres, and with his experiences in Urras. These chapters show the dramatic differences between Urras and Anarres; Anarres is isolated and poor, a barren place where society is governed by an anarchist system with philosophical origins – the Odonianism – where people are 'forced' to work endlessly and to relocate constantly in order to satisfy the needs of the community, leaving little room for individual free will. By contrast, Urras enjoys an extraordinary natural wealth and seemingly unlimited individual freedom. Moreover, it is the settlement of a powerful university where there are physicists who could help Shevek to develop his technology.

Unfortunately, Shevek soon discovers that under the image of earthly paradise that Urras projects, there is a planet corroded by political, social and moral corruption. This situation, together with some troubles that he confronts during his effort to spread some of the Anarresti ideas, forces him to escape back to Anarres.

Anarres and Urras are depicted as opposites even in the strictly physical sense. Anarres is actually the moon of Urras. On its beginnings, it was intended as a sort of "voluntary exile" where the revolutionaries who followed Odo's ideology were sent. As seen in the following excerpt, Anarres is a wasteland, a planet very similar to our own moon:

¹ The importance of the *ansible* is discussed in several novels within the Hainish Cycle, as in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969).

For on the screen now was a strange sight, a great pallid plain of stone. ... The edge of the plain flashed with the brightness of light on water, light across a distant sea. There was no water in those deserts. What was he seeing, then? The stone plain was no longer plane but hollow, like a huge bowl full of sunlight. ... It was not a plain or a bowl but a sphere, a ball of white stone falling down in blackness, falling away. It was his world. (Le Guin 5-6)

This is Shevek's last sight of Anarres, from the spaceship that leads him to Urras. Anarres is a sterile moon, a place in which survival is hard, and only possible because of the collaboration of the entire society; while Urras is an exuberant world, full of life and nature. In the following excerpt, we see the comparison that Shevek establishes between Urras and his home planet:

It was the most beautiful view Shevek had ever seen. ...

Compared to this, every scene Anarres could offer ... was meagre: barren, arid, and inchoate. The deserts of Southwest had a vast beauty, but it was hostile, and timeless. Even where men farmed Anarres most closely, their landscape was like a crude sketch in yellow chalk compared with this fulfilled magnificence of life, rich in the sense of history and of seasons to come, inexhaustible.

This is what a world is supposed to look like, Shevek thought. (Le Guin 65)

As we can see, Anarres and Urras are completely opposite, regarding geography at least. We can see, from the last image that Shevek has of his home planet, that Anarres is almost completely desert, while "the surface of Urras was fivesixths water" (Le Guin 64).

Urras is often depicted as "Paradise". At the end of the book, Shevek meets some inhabitants of a planet called Terra² and they describe Urras in the following terms: "Urras is the kindest, most various, most beautiful of all the inhabited worlds. It is the world that comes as close as any could to Paradise" (Le Guin 347). Urras is an earthly paradise, a dreamt land; while the few that know about Anarres had the image of a desert land.

At first sight, these two planets could not be more different and more independent from each other; in fact, the Anarresti consider themselves "independent" from the rest of the universe³ and the rest of the world consider them to be exiled.⁴ But, as the novel progresses,

² "Terra" is a clear reference to the planet Earth, which in his future is a dystopia: "We destroyed ourselves. But we destroyed the world first. There are no forests left on my Earth. The air is grey, the sky is grey, it is always hot. ... You Odonians chose a desert; we Terrans made a desert..." (Le Guin 347)

³ 'The wall [...] enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free.' (Le Guin 2)

⁴ 'Looked at from the other side, the wall enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine.' (Le Guin 2)

the reader comes to realize that the differences are only skin-deep and that Anarres and Urras are not as unrelated as they pretend to be: “You will not achieve or even understand Urras unless you accept the reality, the enduring reality, of Anarres” (Le Guin 349).

2.1. Political systems in Anarres and Urras

According to Andrew Reynolds, the Odonian political and philosophical system can be read as ‘a classical or “scientific” stage of anarchism’ (86). The Oxford Dictionary of English defines anarchism as “the abolition of all government and the organization of society on a voluntary, cooperative basis without recourse to force or compulsion” (2010). On Anarres, the principles of anarchism – the so-called Odonianism – are applied in order to create a quasi-utopian society. The subtitle of *The Dispossessed* is clear about the fact that the utopia is not perfect, being this *An Ambiguous Utopia*.

Anarresti organization is very different from the Western organization. Following the anarchist or ‘Odonian’ system, the Anarresti people do not have a government as such: “There was to be no controlling centre, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy” (Le Guin 95). Following this idea, there is not an authority as such; nobody dictates the rules that the Anarresti people follows. They behave on the basis of Odo’s philosophy, but there is nobody forcing them to act one way or another. The idea of “punishment” does not exist either, at least theoretically.

Despite the fact that there is not a government named as such In Anarres, there is still a way of organization: the Product and Distribution Coordination (PDC).⁵ This organization is formed by syndics, and on its beginnings it was intended just as a way to organize production. Nevertheless, Bedap (Shevek’s childhood friend) claims: “We have government by the majority. But it is government! The social conscience isn’t a living thing anymore, but a machine, a power machine, controlled by bureaucrats!” (Le Guin 167). After one hundred and seventy five years, the initial function of the PDC has corroded:

⁵ ‘The network of administration and management is called PDC, Production and Distribution Coordination’ (Le Guin 76)

Learning centers, institutes, mines, mills, fisheries, canneries, agricultural development and research stations, factories, one-product communities – anywhere that function demands expertise and a stable institution. But that stability gives scope to the authoritarian impulse. In the early years of the Settlement we were aware of that, on the lookout for it. People discriminated very carefully then between administering things and governing people. They did it so well that we forgot that the will to dominance is as central in human beings as the impulse to mutual aid is... (Le Guin 167-8)

With these words, Bedap explains the crude reality on Anarres. The moon is no longer an anarchist colony where people live without the pressure of a government; they have a government, but a hidden one. The government of Anarres works in the illusion of freedom and equality. This hypocrisy, this absolute lack of honesty regarding government, is one of the most oppressive and dystopian characteristics of Anarres.

The government decides where and when people works, moving them according to their needs or as a punishment. And there is a way of punishment in the Anarresti society, but not in the conventional sense. A good example of how alien it is for the Anarresti people the idea of punishment in the conventional sense, or the idea of forcing people to do something they do not want to do, can be found in the following episode:

The concept “prison” had become self-explanatory. ... a prison was: a place where a State put people who disobeyed its Laws. But why didn’t they just leave the place? They couldn’t leave, the doors were locked. Locked? Like the doors on a moving truck, so you don’t fall out, stupid! But what did they do inside one room all the time? Nothing. There was nothing to do. (Le Guin 34)

We can see clearly how strange it is for the children in the school the sole idea of being punished, locked or forced into something they do not want to do. They do not know any of these concepts, and therefore they do not understand them. Anarresti children are educated to reject everything coming from the exterior,⁶ and at the same time, they are educated in complete ignorance of the wide universe that surrounds them.

This idea of lack of punishment is quite hypocrite, since they have a way to force people to do what they want them to do. Moreover, they have a sort of prison, even if the Anarresti people is not sure about its real function; the Asylum.

⁶ Shevek talking: “On Anarres, you see, we have cut ourselves off. We don’t talk with other people, the rest of humanity.” (Le Guin 345).

What do you think the Asylum is — a prison? It's a refuge. If there are murderers and chronic work-quitters there, it's because they asked to go there, where they're not under pressure, and safe from retribution.⁷ (Le Guin 131)

In Anarres they do not know punishment under that name; but there is a punishment for those who break the mould, and it is arguably as hard as those of the Urrasti government. Anarres is intended as a community without government or punishment, and without the idea of forced job. Theoretically, in Anarres nobody can be forced in something that he or she does not want to do. Nevertheless, reading close we find that this apparently complete freedom is simply an illusion.

Mark Tunick explains that in Anarres there is not authority but the public opinion (134); nobody would force his or her neighbour to do something they do not want to do. Nevertheless, Dan Sabia writes that the corruption of the ethics and solidarity is what leads to the major hidden punishment in Anarres: social exclusion (122). From my point of view, it is a combination of public opinion and social exclusion which could force an Anarresti person to do something that they do not feel like doing: social pressure. Since, as I will discuss later, the idea of the nuclear family does not exist as such in Anarres, the community becomes the most important element for the individual.

At first, Shevek seems unaware of how this social pressure works:

They [the PDC] do not govern persons; they administer production. They have no authority either to support me or to prevent me. They can only tell us the public opinion of us — where we stand in the social conscience. (Le Guin 76)

In a world where community is the most important thing for the individual, something that apparently seems as simple as the public opinion can become everything. The community has the power to accept or isolate; the PDC is in charge of education – which can drive population in one direction or another – and of almost everything in Anarres. Shevek and his partner, Takver, come to realize it talking about Tirin, who was a sort of rebel between revolutionaries, a man who liked to go out of the norm. For this difference he is excluded

⁷ This passage makes reference to Tirin, one of Shevek's childhood friends, whose story will be developed in detail later; summarizing, he wrote a play which defied the Anarresti ideology and as result of this he was first sent to jobs that he hated and isolated by his neighbours, and later secluded in the aforementioned Asylum.

from the Anarresti society, and the social pressure drives him to madness. At the end of the conversation, Shevek declares:

We don't cooperate — we obey. We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. We fear our neighbour's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice. ... We force a man outside the sphere of our approval, and then condemn him for it. We've made laws, laws of conventional behaviour, built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're part of our thinking. (Le Guin 330–31)

This is the moment in which Shevek realizes that they are slowly becoming the very same thing that they despise: the 'propertarians', who only think in material things, punish men with prisons and are unable to accept different ways of thinking. Sabia explains that this kind of people, called 'nuchnibi' in the novel, are those who "wholly remove [themselves] from the community and its expectations and obligations by playing the role of hermit" (118). But this is not completely true; sometimes they are simply expelled from society. Shevek, with his family, becomes a nuchnibi himself in a point of the novel, when he and his partner and children – especially his eldest daughter, Sadik – start to be isolated and abused because of his decision to travel to Urras.

The deep disapproval towards Shevek and Bedap, simply because they think different from the rest of people in Anarres, since they believe that the Anarresti community should be more open towards new ideas, leads to the isolation of the entire family. Even adults, as the monitors called 'big sisters'⁸ are ready to discriminate a young child just because of her parents' behaviour. In a world where laws are not written in paper but driven by conduct patterns and where the community is the most important thing for the individual, social exclusion is the hardest punishment, as seen both in Tirin's seclusion in the Asylum and Sadik's isolation in the village.

Bedap clearly denounces this situation of repression towards new ideas during a discussion with Shevek; 'You can't crush ideas by repressing 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!' (Le Guin 165). Bedap exposes clearly how the Anarresti society, which

⁸ Term that strongly resembles George Orwell's Big Brother in *1984*, maybe suggesting a similar level of control. Both dystopias appropriate family names (brother and sister) in order to mask the domination over the individuals, although in *The Dispossessed* this is much less extreme.

was designed to be perfect, has become an ossified body about to die, but that society still refuses to change. Two hundred years after the first settlers of Anarres started their dream society on the basis of Odo's words, the structure remains the same but times have changed. And they refuse to change, remaining in a system which is no longer valid.

The Urrasti political system is more similar to our own Western society than the utopian anarchism of Anarres. There is an all-encompassing organism called the Council of World Governments that supervises the worlds in the Hainish league.

When Shevek lands in Urras, there is a conflict between the superpower which hosts him – A-Io – and another superpower – Thu. According to Laurence Davis these two superpowers are a clear representation of the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in the moment in which the novel was written (38). These two would represent, therefore, capitalism and communism.⁹

The Ioti government, apparently, is a compound of several institutions and levels: the Directorate and the Senate. There is no specific description of the Ioti government, but apparently it has a lot in common with the capitalist systems of the Western world, since Le Guin uses the existing Western institutions and applies them in A-Io. This capitalist system implies an extreme inequality between the privileged and the poor in A-Io.

This inequality is shown in Shevek's conversation with his assigned servant in Anarres; at first, when he arrives to A-Io University, he is received with all sort of honours and provided with servants. Firstly these servants feel uncomfortable towards Shevek, and he does not know how to interact with them. However, he finally earns the trust of Efor, his butler. The man tells Shevek about the reality of A-Io, beyond the image of wealth and beauty that the higher classes and the government try to project to the rest of the planet, to the rest of the Worlds in the Council of World Governments:

He [Shevek] had never seen a rat, or an army barracks, or an insane asylum, or a poorhouse, or a pawnshop, or an execution, or a thief, or a tenement, or a rent collector, or a man who wanted to work and could not find work to do, or a dead baby in a ditch. All these things occurred in Efor's reminiscences as commonplaces or as commonplace horrors. (Le Guin 284)

⁹ This is another clear parallelism with the dystopian novel *1984*, by George Orwell.

The government of Thu is more obscure to us than the one of A-Io. Thu, which according to Davis represents the Soviet Bloc (38), appears as a much more rigid regime; “Censorship is absolute, in Thu. The state is all, and all for the state” (Le Guin 80). It also appears as a much more centralized state: “The State of Thu is even more centralized than the State of A-Io. One power structure controls all, the government, administration, police, army, education, laws ...” (Le Guin 136). The government also appears as much more authoritarian: “A Thuvian never knows when he’s going to get an order from his Presidium ... He just knows that when it comes he’d better hop. And not stop for any leave takings on the way” (Le Guin 140).

We can see a clear parallelism between Thu and Anarres in this quote. Just as the Anarresti travel wherever their PDC commands them to go, Chifoilisk – a Thuvian scientist – travels under his government’s commands.

It can be concluded that despite the big differences in the political systems – Anarchism, Capitalism and Socialism – the three of them remain dystopian in *The Dispossessed*. There is not respect for new ideas in Anarres, and its repression of thought is mirrored in Thu, and arguably also in A-Io. There is not freedom of thought in any of the three political systems, nor respect for the other’s ideas. Altruism is also lost; the authoritarian way of thinking has replaced in the three of them the idea of sharing and cooperating, resulting in three political systems which promote repression and inequality. There is neither respect, nor altruism nor equality in any of this political systems, and this is what makes both Anarres and Urras so dystopian.

2.2. Education in Anarres and Urras

Anarresti people are educated in altruism; since they are children, they are educated to suppress egoistic behaviours and to be ready to sacrifice themselves for the community. Sabia (116), explains that in Anarres ‘mutual trust is the basis of social cooperation, and social cooperation is the basis of both individual and social well-being, insuring responsible conduct must be the central goal of education’.

The educational system in Anarres is one of the most important things in the novel. The earliest memory that the reader receives of Shevek's life is that of him in the kindergarten, being indoctrinated to share. Despite the fact that the baby is too young to understand the concept of 'sharing', he is reprimanded in the following terms: "It is not yours ... Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it, you cannot use it" (Le Guin 27).

Davis writes that even though the education in Anarres was designed to create individuals who will become "independent minded, freethinking adults who would question, adapt, and develop their society's values and institutions" (11). After all, as Bedap claims, "Nobody's born an Odonian any more than he's born civilized!" (Le Guin 168). Children learnt Odonianism in school, and they were educated in free thinking.

However, after two hundred years the institution has been progressively degraded to the repetition of a series of fixed ideas. As Bedap explains, Anarresti teachers "... don't educate for freedom. Education, the most important activity of the social organism, has become rigid, moralistic, authoritarian. Kids learn to parrot Odo's words as if they were laws!" (Le Guin 168). Those who were supposed to be part of a liberal society are indoctrinated from childhood to repeat words that they do not even understand, and to exclude those who do not behave in the way that words apparently command. Bedap says that what was in its origin an institution to teach the Anarresti people to think by themselves has become a power machine controlled by bureaucrats (Le Guin 167).

Fekkete explains that "the bureaucratization of formal systems ... also implies, to be effective, bureaucratization at the deeper levels of consciousness in the culture. ... Bureaucratization management involves the colonization of the personality" (130). Education in Anarres mirrors the bureaucratized political system, and as a result the individuals are shaped to think all the same, instead of being educated as free thinkers. This indoctrination in "only thought" is typical of dystopia, as in the cases of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.

When education turned into something prefixed and automatized, when they failed in their aim to teach children to be open-minded and to share not because they are going to be branded as 'egoistic' but because it is the right thing to do, society became something

oppressive and fixed, without space for the free thinking and the development of the personality towards altruism by their own means.

Education in Urras is very different than education in Anarres. We receive no image of children's education, but apparently Urrasti students have succeeded in life as their only objective. Urrasti people do not educate in values at school, and education is reserved only to the highest classes. The conditions in A-Io University are perhaps best described in the following extract:

Like all the students and professors, he [Shevek] had nothing to do but his intellectual work, literally nothing. The beds were made for them, the rooms were swept for them, the routine of the college was managed for them, the way was made plain for them. And no wives, no families. No women at all. Students at the University were not permitted to marry. Married professors usually lived during the five class days of the seven-day week in bachelor quarters on campus, going home only on weekends. Nothing distracted. (Le Guin 129)

As we can see, college students in A-Io are focused only in their 'intellectual work'. They are not educated in values in University, and apparently neither during previous years. The only target of education is economic success, which will propitiate the extreme consumerism.

This marks a deep difference with Anarres; while in Urras University, even if reserved for a few, provides all the necessary for the intellectual works of its students, in Anarres is completely different. When he was a student at Abbenay's University, he founds opposition in almost everything he tries to do; and the extreme case is his professor, Sabul, who takes the credit for Shevek's investigations. Shevek knows that it is wrong, but if he wants to publish his work, he must consent this abuse of power: "Sabul had ceased to be a functioning physicist years ago; his high reputation was built on expropriations from other minds. Shevek was to do the thinking, and Sabul would take the credit" (Le Guin 117). We are once again facing authority in a world in which such authority is supposed to be absent: and also a relationship based on exploitation, which is also supposed to be eliminated in Anarresti society.

It can be concluded that since the new generations are the defining element for any society in the future, the pillar of the given society should be education. When education does not provide the suitable thinking environment and the values necessary for the individual to

develop his or her personality but simply imposes a series of fixed words and norms, the whole idea of an open-minded society collapses. As it is seen in Anarres, people twist the given words – Odo’s words, in this case – into a sort of dogma that they follow unswervingly, harshly punishing those who move out of the norm. And that is motivated by the fact that they do not really understand neither altruism, neither sharing nor respect. They are limited to repeat these words unceasingly, without really thinking about their meaning.

Meanwhile, in Urras university is reserved for the highest classes, while the lower classes are limited simply to work; this means a great loss in potential, since they are avoiding the majority of the population from studying. Women are also forbidden from university, not only as students but also their very presence. And regarding values, they simply do not educate in values, since education is reserved for a small part of the population. As a consequence of the lack of these basic moral values, both societies slowly but inexorably move towards collapse.

2.3. Social Structure in Anarres and Urras

Since in Anarres there is not a political class or aristocracy of any kind, the prevailing idea about the community is that of ‘brotherhood’, and since there is not concept of private property, the Anarresti society is egalitarian. There are not social classes as we know them; since there are no differences determined by money or position, the Anarresti people have achieved a situation of equality in which anybody is understood as superior to the rest – at least theoretically. Avery Plaw, explains that it is the “genuine community” of Anarres which “creates the opportunity for full freedom and equality” (296). This association between community and freedom and equality is repeated several times throughout the story, and is one of the most utopian ideas of the novel.

Nevertheless, this extreme equality has its dark side. Fekkete explains that:

Ideological egalitarianism, when put into dogmatic practice, can produce an impoverishing denial of the entire world of culture and civilization; enforced equivalence can mean a disregard for quality in favour of abstract quantity in order to make dissimilar things commensurable. (132)

This would imply that those who are different, in any sense, are seen as a bad thing by the society. Fekkete (130) uses the example of Shevek’s talent: he is accused of egoizing

every single time that he does something to show his talent in physics. Tirin's artistic talent and Bedap's ability in rhetoric are treated in the same way; as something bad. The egalitarian society covers every aspect of the individuals, who are no longer individuals but parts of the community; and this implies that every person who deviates from the norm threatens heterogeneity of the group and must be 'cut' from society.

Reynolds (86) and Tunick (131, 139), describe life in Anarres as quasi-Spartan. Following the Odonian maxim "excess is excrement" (Le Guin 98), most of Anarres' inhabitants voluntarily renounce to possess things. In contrast, from the very beginning, Urrasti society is presented as the opposite to Anarresti. Consumerism is, apparently, the norm in Urras. The clash with Anarresti mentality is obvious in first Shevek's experience on shopping:

Saemtenevia Prospect was two miles long, and it was a solid mass of people, traffic, and things: things to buy, things for sale. ... everything either useless to begin with or ornamented so as to disguise its use; acres of luxuries, acres of excrement. (Le Guin 131-2)

Shevek is completely shocked about this street: he even calls it "nightmare street" (Le Guin 132). While in Anarres frugality is the norm, in Urras consumerism drives the lives of its people. The contrast is disquieting; on the one hand we have the bare moon, with almost no natural resources and people sharing everything, so nobody is extremely poor while others are extremely rich. In Anarres they barely have enough to survive, and their people enjoy a decent life, when talking about material needs, which is one of the most utopian characteristics of Anarres. In Urras, the paradise planet, the orchard of the universe, the inequalities between the rich and the poor are extreme. This is due to a complete lack of values in Urras: while in Anarres they have this ossified, forced altruism, in Urras they do not know anything but greed. There is nothing like altruism in Urras, nor the feeling of belonging to the same community. Shevek describes the Urrasti society in the following terms: "a society where men did not trust one another, where the basic moral assumption was not mutual aid, but mutual aggression" (Le Guin 207-8).

For Shevek, who comes from a sterile world, this situation is shocking. The beauty, but especially the abundance of Urras is what he loves the most of that world; and he is completely shocked when realized that in a world as poor as Anarres "nobody goes hungry while another eats" (Le Guin 285), while in Urras, where there are resources enough for

absolutely everyone, there are people starving, people unemployed and people dying of sickness. This absolute lack of the concept of sharing, the altruism, is one of the most shocking contrast between Urras and Anarres and proves that the presence of this moral value – altruism – is more important for the utopia than the setting of the society in question, since Urras is an utopian planet and Anarres a dystopian one. Nevertheless, Anarres is the most utopian regarding equality, while Urras is a dystopian nightmare of consumerism and inequality.

The difference between Urras and Anarres is notable; in Anarres, the poor world where there is nothing but deserts and dust, people share everything they have and sacrifice themselves during famines and hard times. They are equal to each other. In Urras the powerful greedily accumulate all resources, living a life of luxury but excluding their own women from intellectual life. There is no such a thing as altruism in Urras, while in Anarres altruism – even though it is fixed and ossified in old words – is imposed almost at birth. The lack of altruism, the absolute inequality between the rich and the poor in Urras, the repression of this last ones and all women, are what make of this beautiful and exuberant world a dystopia.

In a world where nobody owns anything, they are free to help each other, to share; but in Urras, where the only concern of people is to *possess* – more money, academic titles, awards, houses, women – they are slaves of their own properties. They lack something as basic as the feeling of belonging to a whole; there is nothing resembling a community in Urras, nothing like ‘brotherhood’. The lack of altruism, the lack of feeling that they belong to the same community, the greed replacing the impulse of mutual aid and the acceptance of extreme inequality as the norm are what make Urrasti society so dystopian, while the altruism in Anarres – despite the fact that it is a learned, forced one – keeps the moon closer to utopia.

2.3.1. Family in Anarres and Urras

Within social terms, another dystopian fact about Anarres would be the lack of the concept of the nuclear family, as I mentioned in page 13. In Anarres the institution of marriage does not exist. When a man and a woman decide to live together, they simply move

to a double room in the dormitories. But they do not own a house, and their children only live with them while they still sleep in cribs. As soon as they grow, they start to sleep in the dormitories, together with the children of many other couples.

Theoretically speaking, this would promote the close community that was Odo's intention and would reinforce the idea of brotherhood. But, as it is seen in the case of Shevek, this concept comes to be empty. Shevek's mother, Rulag, abandoned his father and him when Shevek was only a little child in order to continue with her career, which apparently is now uncommon in Anarres.¹⁰ But when he is older and ill in the same city where Rulag lives, she goes to visit him. They do not know how to relate with each other; their relationship is almost inexistent. For Rulag, her career was always first; her family was not that important. Before leaving, she asks her son: "we are brother and sister, here and now. Which is what really matters, isn't it?" However, this idea of brotherhood apparently is not enough for Shevek, who answer simply "I don't know" (Le Guin 124).

According to Tunick, with this Le Guin is pointing how empty is the idea of brotherhood when it is imposed and not learned (141). Family is the only thing that can provide the ultimate commitment, that which shapes us as individuals (141). He writes that, when talking about family relationships, "Rulag and other Anarresti are mistaken to deny its significance" (Tunick 141). The opposite case of parent-child relationship can be seen in the case of Shevek himself and his daughter Sadik; even after four years apart, he cares about his daughter and her feelings, especially when she is bullied at school and in the dormitories because of his decision to travel to Urras.

In Urras, by contrast, the concept of the nuclear family is present. When Shevek is invited to his colleague Oiie's house, he is introduced to his family:

Oiie was a changed man at home. ... His family treated him with respect, but there was mutuality in the respect. ... he treated his wife with courtesy, even delicacy. ... In fact, at home, he suddenly appeared as a simple, brotherly kind of man, a free man. It seemed to Shevek a very small range of freedom, a very narrow family (Le Guin 147)

¹⁰ The PDC determines where people works and maybe they must move without their families, and in cases as Rulag's they can only reject the order by choosing a lower position. Takver and Shevek, in fact, spent four years apart.

The last sentence gives us a glimpse of the idea of brotherhood that Shevek would like to achieve; that brotherhood where men do not need to ‘change’ from the exterior to home, but are allowed to be themselves everywhere.

It can be concluded that, although the concept of brotherhood and Anarres’ close community can be potentially fulfilled, it cannot completely replace family relationships, as seen in Urras, where family provides the environment for relaxation and trust. When his daughter Sadik is attacked she turns to him, which shows clearly that even though the traditional familiar bounds are not so clear, children need their parents, and denying them from that is one of the most dystopian characteristics of Anarres, and present in works as *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry.

Family is the ultimate social structure, and also the most primitive of all. Parents are the first shaping the personality of individuals, and also are those who bring comfort and safety to their children. Most of the patterns of relationship and that the individuals develop during their lives are learnt as values from family. Tunick writes that “family ... trains individuals to think beyond their own particular interests, to transcend the state of mind of possessive individualism” (141). Linda Richter postulates that “The lack of personalized care during the early years of life has a devastating effect on the child’s health, growth, personality adjustment and cognitive capacity” (1). In Anarres, where children are raised all together in dormitories, more as a collective than as individuals, they do not receive this “personalized care” completely. Sayers explains that maternal love in childhood is crucial for mental health (141); and in Anarres, without nuclear families and with children living apart from their parents, they are deprived of these two vital things, leading to a society in which moral values and patterns of relationship are not fully developed.

2.4. Sexuality and gender behaviour in Anarres and Urras

One of Anarres’ most representative features is the lack of any kind of regulation in sexual engagement. There is no repression regarding sexuality in Anarresti society; sex is not seen as something bad or reserved to established couples. Stillman remarks the lack of heteronormativity (62); there is nothing understood as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ regarding the choice

of partners in the Anarresti mind. During his adolescence, Shevek intimated both with men and women, and for a week he lived and slept with Bedap, one of his male friends. Bedap is clearly homosexual, but as Stillman (62) highlights, he is not thought to be better or worse than the rest because of his sexuality. Stillman writes that in Anarres “an adolescent usually tries sex with him or herself, with the opposite sex, and with the same sex—and sometimes even tries celibacy” (62).

This sexual disinhibition could be read as corruption of the moral values, but from my point of view it is not. Sex is seen as something natural, avoiding the exclusivity that linking sex and relationships creates.¹¹ When sex is associated with relationships or regulated, some individuals can become objects destined only to this activity, as reflected in the following excerpt: “In the Nation of A-Io ..., women kept for the sexual use of male members of the propertied class ... lie on the sand all day until dinner is served to them by people of the unpropertied class” (Le Guin 42).

Despite the fact that, at first sight, the sexual disinhibition of the Anarresti could be seen as unmoral and cold, compared with the Urrasti vision of sex – where sex is either reserved for the marital bed, or for the slave women mentioned in the quotation above – it is more egalitarian in terms of gender. The fact that there is no engagement needed for the sexual intercourse makes the two parts of the relationship equal; none of the Anarresti inhabitants is used with sexual purposes, as the slave women in Urras.

There is also a sort of disconnection between pairing and laws in Anarres; there is nothing like marriage. As mentioned before, when Shevek decides to start living with the woman who would later be the mother of his children, they simply moved to a double room. Sabia explains that the elimination of marriage suppresses the possibility of dominance relationships between men and women; without any kind of legal compulsion, the relationships are as long-lasting as both individuals on the couple want them to be, and also under the terms that they establish together (117). This means that the relationships are almost

¹¹ This lack of heteronormativity and engagement in couples and its beneficial consequences in society can be seen in other SF utopias, as in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312*.

absolutely egalitarian, at least in terms of legal compulsion; and that women are not dependent on their husbands, which is completely opposite to the situation in Urras.

The Anarresti opinion about Urrasti 'sexual institutions' is made clear in this fragment from the novel:

He [Shevek] knew from Odo's writings that two hundred years ago the main Urrasti sexual institutions had been "marriage," a partnership authorized and enforced by legal and economic sanctions, and "prostitution," which seemed merely to be a wider term, copulation in the economic mode. Odo had condemned them both Le Guin (18)

First of all, this shows that the Urrasti society is stuck in the same patterns that it was two hundred years before; there is no evolution in the Urrasti society regarding this social patterns, since we will see that they remain the same. These two 'Urrasti sexual institutions' are widely rejected in Anarres, were women do not accept to be subordinate to any man and act and behave in conditions of complete equality.

Referring to the status of women, Urras is the complete opposite to Anarres. While in Anarres the situation of women is utopian – they are considered intellectually equal to men, and they can occupy positions of high responsibility – in Urras women are almost mere decorative objects. According to Stillman:

On Urras, sex roles are clearly defined and hierarchical: men live in the public sphere, attending university, holding jobs, doing physics; women decorate parties with their beautiful clothes, pleasantly flirting conversations, and sexy demeanors, but are untouchable except by their husbands, and eventually they raise the children. (262)

While in Anarres women and men are considered equals, we can see how the Urrasti consider their women out of the public sphere but as mere decoration of this social class. They cannot attend to university, but not only as students; women are simply forbidden in these places, in order to avoid distraction to the students (Le Guin 129). We can see how women are not considered to possess any capacity of reason; they are only beautiful and pleasant things destined to delight men, and they are forbidden from the 'serious' places.

Shevek's confusion when he meets Veä – an Urrasti woman, as vain and beautiful as all of them – is evident. Veä, according to Shevek's perception, "was so elaborately and ostentatiously a female body that she seemed scarcely to be a human being" (Le Guin 213). This appreciation is due to the contrast with the Anarresti women, who do not care about

their appearance. In her astonishing beauty, Vea has almost lost her humanity; but, since her husband gives her a high social position and therefore more space than the usually permitted for a woman, Vea has developed her own ideas.

Stillman explains that Vea “rages against this inequality and seeks freedom” (62). Nevertheless, the following excerpt shows how Vea, deprived of the education and knowledge to think about the consequences of her actions, and raised in an extremely materialist and capitalist society where people of her social class live to fulfil their desires, believes that she has learnt how to fulfil her desires without really defying inequality:

[Shevek] I want to know, is an Urrasti woman content to be always inferior?

[Vea] Inferior to whom?

To men.

Oh — that! What makes you think I am?

It seems that everything your society does is done by men. ... Why do you let them control everything? Why don't you do what you like?

But we do. Women do exactly as they like.

But what is it that you do?

Why, run the men, of course! And you know, it's perfectly safe to tell them that, because they never believe it. They say, 'Haw haw, funny little woman!' and pat your head.... (Le Guin 214-5)

Vea is a clear product of the Urrasti society. Despite the fact that she is intelligent and independent enough to develop her own aspirations, she is retained by her education – or lack of a proper education. She is intelligent enough to realize, as Shevek says, that she is only a property, but she has no way to escape it. Vea thinks that she has reached a certain freedom, that she is in control of her life; but this is just a vain illusion, as she must obey her husband. This way of oppressing women is one of the most clearly dystopian characteristics of Urras, and is common to other works of dystopian fiction as *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood.

In Anarres women there is not differentiation between male and female work, as seen in the following excerpts:

[Kimoe]Is there really no distinction between men's work and women's work?

[Shevek] Well, no. it seems a very mechanical basis for the division of labour, doesn't it? A person chooses work according to interest, talent, strength — what has the sex to do with that? (Le Guin 17)

While in Anarres the situation regarding gender is utopian, since women are equal to men – they are not subjected to men through marriage or sex compromise, and they can achieve the same jobs as men – in Urras women are in a dystopian situation of exclusion; they are as excluded as the Anarresti *nuchnibi*, but in a much subtler way; and their ideas are as repressed as those of the Anarresti people. In Urras women are treated as objects in every sense, and men do not respect them; these two lost values, respect and equality, are what make the situation of women so dystopian in Urras.

2.5 Culture in Anarres and Urras

Another dystopian element in Anarres is what Douglas Spencer describes as “sterile and intolerant utilitarianism” (102). Since environment in Anarres is almost empty in resources, the efforts of the population are destined to the survival in such a harsh environment. But, as Bedap declares, this is repression and regression to a primal state at the same time:

No wonder I never heard any professional music while I lived in Northsetting. But how can they justify this kind of censorship? You write music! Music is a cooperative art, organic by definition, social. ... They can justify it because music isn't useful. ... music's mere decoration. ... We've gone right back to barbarism. If it's new, run away from it; if you can't eat it, throw it away. (Le Guin 175–76)

Bedap's words summarize how the Anarresti have lost the self-realization achieved through art, through self-expression, which is now relegated to the most intimate sphere. Apparently, there is not public Art in Anarres; Takver builds delicate mobiles in the privacy of her home, and it is mentioned that some people wear small pieces of jewellery in the capital – Abbenay –, but apparently the profession of artist does not exist. The dogmatism prevailing in Anarres creates “an autonomous ideology unresponsive to the lived, spontaneous nature of everyday life” (Spencer 102).

This is clearly oppressive towards the individual. Once again we find that the ideology which started as something utopian has become something radical, transforming ideas into norms. The initial Odonian dogma “Excess is excrement” (Le Guin 98) has been radicalized to the extreme, making Arts something useless, and therefore expendable – excrement. And, since Art – music, paintings, stories – is one of the main differences between human beings and animals removing it from social life seems a waste.¹²

Art, which may result in the trivial, is one of the most important values of the human kind. Paul Bloom writes: “... notions such as morality, humour, art and personal identity are aspects of the normal human condition” (xi). In other words, the lack of art means something abnormal in the human beings. It is a loss much more deep than the loss of mere decoration; art is intrinsic to human beings, at the same level as morality. To Ben-Ami Scharfstein, “the deep emotion that great art arouses is related to the moral consciousness that is the centre of human being” (213).

Tirin writes his satirical plays – and he is expelled from society because of this –; Takver builds her hanging mobiles in the intimacy of her room; and Bedap defends the existence of music. This means that the Anarresti people still need Art; they still want to enjoy beauty just for beauty’s sake, the Art. And in such sterile and ugly environment, Art is more needed than anywhere else; but the radical utilitarianism of the Anarresti society has deprived its people of this enjoyment of beauty, the joy of creation. They live just for survival and, as Bedap says, that means regressing “right back to barbarism” (Le Guin 176).

From this we can deduce that Art is as intrinsic as moral to human beings, and that the absolute lack of art of Anarres, which is a subtle way of repression – since people as Takver create art in private, and others, as Salag, compose music in their free time. This loss of Art is, from my perspective, one of the most dystopian and shocking characteristics of Anarres.

By contrast, art is almost everywhere in Urras. Several museums are mentioned during Shevek’s time in Urras; art is sold and bought in the ‘nightmare street’.

¹² Punset: “Another argument I have heard, even before you will explain as well why we are unique, is that human beings are the only art that other animals do not feel art as us. It is true?”

Gazzaniga: “... We have an incredible craving for art draws us much, either a narrative story, a fictional story, a picture or whatever.”

Interview with Michael Gazzaniga, psychologist at the University of California.

Maybe this last comparison between Urras and Anarres is the hardest of them all; in Urras, the paradise planet, the most beautiful world in the known universe, art is everywhere, beauty is present in every corner of A-Io, at least between the highest classes; in Anarres, the desert and hard moon, art is tacitly forbidden, avoiding those who could create beauty from the dust – people such as Takver, Salag and Tirin – from making their world more beautiful.

CONCLUSION

After the analysis of *The Dispossessed*, it can be concluded that moral values have a direct relation with the origin of literary dystopias, and also with the degree of extremism of these two literary dystopias – Anarres and Urras.

Anarres, a planet of frontiers with an anarchist-communist political system and a bureaucratized society based on altruism, is the one which is closer to the perfect community that is expected from a utopia. Nevertheless this society, which has the potential to become a perfect utopia, remains dystopian because of the ossification of its moral values. When the government is not oppressive and individuals do not really understand the values they are promoting – as, for example, the case of altruism, which is turned into a non-written obligation to share – is the society itself which becomes repressive. Without understanding the system of moral values that they are advocating to, the inhabitants of Anarres are limited to parrot the words that they do not truly understand and to act following fixed patterns that, slowly, radicalize their society into an oppressive dystopia.

On the other hand, Urras, a planet with an almost complete absence of this system of moral values, collapses into a much more extreme dystopia. While in Anarres the corrupted system of moral values maintains – up to a point – an egalitarian society, in Urras the extreme inequality and poverty are caused by the absolute absence of these moral values.

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