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Schemata of estrangement in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

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Abstract

Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* (1974) is the first literary treatment of anarchic utopianism, presenting the society on the moon Anarres as operating on social principles lacking any sort of State or governmental oversight (known in the novel as Odonianism). Scholarship on Le Guin's novel has focused primarily on the overt political and philosophical aspects of the text, while the scant linguistic scholarship goes no further than uncovering fairly superficial aspects of Le Guin's invented language of Anarres, Pravic. This paper investigates exactly how Le Guin presents a richly detailed conceptualisation of an anarchic society to readers on a planet full of states. This is generally achieved through the technique of estrangement (defamiliarisation), and more precisely, by various means of schema disruption.

Keywords

Anarchism, defamiliarisation, *The Dispossessed*, Ursula K. Le Guin, schema theory

1. Introduction

Half a century ago, in 1974, Ursula K. Le Guin provided us with the first literary treatment of an anarchist utopia in her novel *The Dispossessed.* The story focuses on the plight of Shevek, a physicist who is forced to reconcile his commitment to the idea of anarchism – living in a world absent of the State – with living in a society that has fallen short of its purported ideals.[1] The novel progresses chronologically along two parallel plot lines: Shevek's birth and growth into a renowned physicist and committed anarchist, or Odonian,[2] on his home world Anarres (which is actually a moon), and his journey to the

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planet Urras – a world of states which looks very much like Earth – in an attempt to further his research into developing a General Temporal Theory.[3] And while on Urras, he inadvertently becomes the catalyst of a major uprising against the State; his life is saved only when the Terran and Hainish emissaries evacuate him off the planet.[4] The novel ends with Shevek's return journey to Anarres, his own future as well as the future of the two planets remaining an open-ended question. Because Le Guin's novel confronts the many faults of Anarresti society in falling short of anarchist ideals (de facto centralised control by the Division of Labour (DivLab) and the Production and Distribution Committee (PDC), censorship exerted by several of the syndicates, undue collective pressure exerted on individuals to conform to social norms (which often leads to self-censorship), etc.), as opposed to simply presenting idealised models of society as one finds in more conventional utopian works like Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626) or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), *The Dispossessed* has been labelled a novel depicting a 'critical utopia' (Moylan, 1986: 35ff.) or a 'heterotopia' (Stockwell, 2000: 208–210; see also Delany, 1976: 345) because the focus is not necessarily on presenting a blueprint for an alternative society, but rather on highlighting the challenges encountered on the way to establishing – or in the case of Anarres, maintaining – such a society. Indeed, Le Guin's own subtitle to her novel is "an ambiguous utopia".

Le Guin's literary treatment of anarchism has received a fair amount of critical attention, especially from those interested in the novel's more overt political angles (see, for example, Burns, 2008; Davis and Stillman, 2005; Jaeckle, 2009), and the novel is often mentioned in passing as a significant contribution to the genre of science fiction (Mandala, 2010; Stockwell, 2000; Suvin, 1979). Detailed stylistic treatments of *The Dispossessed*, or even Le Guin's writings in general, are unfortunately few and far between. Myers (1983) was an early attempt at such an endeavour, featuring a speech-act analysis of certain scenes in Le Guin's 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Meyers (1980: 193–226) appears to be the most comprehensive stylistic treatment of *The Dispossessed* to date, but the focus here is exclusively on the invented Anarresti language of Pravic and its coercive role in maintaining the deeply flawed social order on Anarres (with a clear nod towards the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis). No attention has been paid to less overt linguistic features of *The Dispossessed*, particularly in how Le Guin constructs her worlds in the first place. The novel is quite interesting insofar as it first provides the reader with a glimpse into the anarchic world of Anarres (something quite familiar to the protagonist Shevek, yet very unfamiliar to Earthling readers, to whom the idea of an anarchic society is an intellectual abstraction at best). Not until chapter 3 do we encounter the planet of Urras, a statist world quite familiar to us as readers, yet deeply unfamiliar and overwhelming to our protagonist. How Le Guin achieves these multiple layers of estrangement, also known as defamiliarisation, is the focus of this essay.

2. The theory of estrangement (defamiliarisation)

2.1. Overview

The idea of a literary or stylistic technique of 'estranging' the reader goes back to the early twentieth-century Russian Formalists, most notably Viktor Shklovsky, whose notion of

ostranenie ('estrangement, defamiliarisation') is fundamental to the success of any art form.[5] Shklovsky (1993) argues that "by 'estranging' objects and complicating form" (6), art draws attention to the ideas, objects and concepts the viewer or reader should be focusing on. In doing so, it succeeds – in the words of another Russian Formalist, Roman Jakobson – in preventing such art from "referring indifferently to reality" (1987: 378). It can draw attention to even the most mundane or commonplace things because it "changes its form without changing its essence" (Shklovsky, 1993: 6); that is, it can make the most familiar things seem unfamiliar, as well as unfamiliar things appear quite familiar (hence the terms 'estrangement' and 'defamiliarisation'). Shklovsky continues:

> The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a 'vision' of this object rather than mere 'recognition'.
>
> (1993, 10)

More recently, Van Peer (1986, 3) clarifies that this can refer to two processes in written texts: (1) the use of specific literary devices in an effort to (2) achieve a certain effect on the reader and the reading experience. So there are both textual and readerly aspects to the process of estrangement/defamiliarisation. Gavins (2014) takes things a step further and integrates this dualistic angle into Text World Theory (TWT), a framework that attempts to model the cognitive effects that texts evoke on their readers in the creation of richly layered "text worlds" (Gavins, 2007; see also Werth, 1999). That is, by drawing the reader's attention to specific objects or concepts, the process of estrangement evokes various 'world-building elements' that assist the reader in mentally construing the worlds of the texts they are reading (Gavins, 2014; see also Giovanelli and Mason, 2015; Scott, 2016; Norledge, 2019). This does not so much add to Shklovsky's idea of estrangement but rather augments the way it can be modelled to reflect the cognitive processes at work in the reader during the reading process (through the use, for example, of diagrams that reflect sub-worlds and world switches).[6] Although the current study of Le Guin does not take TWT as central to the analysis, it acknowledges the notion of world-building elements as key in the early chapters of *The Dispossessed*, presenting an anarchist society unfamiliar to the reader, as well as a statist society unfamiliar to the protagonist Shevek. In a similar vein, Herman's (2009a, 2009b) criterion of 'worldmaking/world disruption', which features "violated expectations" (2009a: 21; cf. Bruner, 1990) as an essential component of narrative, points directly to the process of estrangement without labelling it as such.

2.2. Estrangement and science fiction

Although the technique of estrangement is not exclusive to the genre of science fiction, it has long been acknowledged that this particular genre is by its very nature an estranging genre of literature, whereas others are not (Adams, 2017; Mandala, 2010; Stockwell, 2000; Suvin, 1979). One of the earliest works on the subject, Darko Suvin's seminal 1979 monograph, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, remains the most comprehensive

theoretical treatment of estrangement in science fiction literature to date. Science fiction is, by its very nature, the literature of "cognitive estrangement" (Suvin, 1979: 4) because its "necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and its main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7–8). Unlike realist fiction, science fiction illuminates the "textures" of our world – textures simply reproduced in naturalistic fiction – by presenting them in different, alternative frameworks in the hope that readers will critically reflect upon them (10, 18). Regarding utopian literature in particular, subversive rhetoric employed with an eye towards "sociopolitical revaluation" (42–43) is at the heart of this subgenre of science fiction, as it "endeavors to illuminate men's relationship to other men and to their surroundings by the basic device of radically different location" (53). Estrangement arises through the depiction of alternative, ostensibly more positive forms of social organisation, institutions and individual relationships in an effort of drawing attention to the here-and-now of *our* reality through sociopolitical critique (61). The hallmark of science fiction, utopian literature included, is the presence of a *novum* – some sort of novelty or innovation that, through its inherently estranging effects, serves the narrative logic of conceptually vacillating between the "alternate reality" of the story world and our own world as "an analogy to empirical reality" (63–64, 70–75; see also Moylan, 1986: 15–28). This cognitivist orientation reflects a departure from Shklovsky's original conceptualisation of estrangement, for the *novum* requires the introduction of new material, whereas – as stated above – the original formalist notion could and did involve the 'strange' presentation of commonplace, everyday objects. In addition, Suvin's notion is content-based, whereas Shklovsky's focuses on the use of language in the presentation of the (un)familiar. That said, both orientations to estrangement provide insight into Le Guin's modelling of familiar and unfamiliar sociopolitical structures in *The Dispossessed*.

And as useful as Suvin's theoretical position may be, however, next to no attention was devoted to the actual linguistic realisations of estrangement in science fiction texts. This has been done more recently in works by Stockwell (2000, 2003), Mandala (2010) and Adams (2017). But even here, the focus has been limited, with a heavy interest in invented languages, neologisms and alien-sounding names. Stockwell (2003) is perhaps one exception to this, whereby schema theory is employed in a study of the speculative cosmology of Greg Egan's writings. And it is in fact schema theory which provides a suitable framework to better understand Le Guin's techniques of estrangement – both in a formalist and a cognitivist sense – in her creation of an anarchist heterotopia in *The Dispossessed*.

3. Schema theory

3.1. Overview

The idea of schema (plural schemata) is generally dated back to Bartlett's (1932) psychological research on memory, although it is not really until the cognitive turn in fields such as linguistics and psychology during the 1960s and 1970s that the idea of schema theory really gained traction (see, for example, Minsky's 1975 conception of 'frames' or Schank and Abelson's 1977 discussion of 'scripts'). In short, schemata are "packets of

knowledge" and "active computational devices capable of evaluating quality of their own fit to the available data" (Rumelhart, 1984: 163–167). They are in essence how we store information about the world and process new information as it comes our way. The quintessential example of a schema is that of the RESTAURANT schema: any time we go to a restaurant – whether we have been to it before or not – we expect to encounter things such as being seated at a table, ordering our food from a menu, eating our food, being attended to by a table server throughout the experience, and then finally paying for our food and leaving (see also Schank's 1982 discussion of dynamic memory and Memory Organisation Packs, or MOPs, which postulates that a number of different 'scenes' are involved in such 'scripts' or schema, and it is the accumulation of these scenes into a single conceptual event that constitutes a script or schema). Rumelhart and Norman (1978) and Rumelhart (1984) also postulate how such schemata can be learned or change over time: accretion involves new information being placed into existing schemata; tuning concerns the process when new information forces us to modify existing schemata; and restructuring is when the acquisition of new information forces us to fundamentally revamp or even develop entirely new schemata in our conceptualisation of reality. Rumelhart (1984) also paid some attention to the role of schemata in understanding, or misunderstanding, texts (176-177); however, this angle was not elaborated upon in any great detail.

3.2. Schema theory and literature

It was not until de Beaugrande (1987) that any in-depth attempt at connecting schema theory to discourse processing, literary discourse in particular, was taken. For his part, de Beaugrande gave some regard to the idea of 'deviance' in literary texts and the subsequent effects on schemata (57ff.), as well as the connection between schemata and textual coherence (74ff.); however, no systematic framework was conceived or established, so it is unclear how exactly de Beaugrande's comments can be taken forward in any substantial way. It is not until Cook's foundational *Discourse and Literature* (1994) that we are provided with a robust model of applying schema theory to textual analysis. Cook (189ff.) notes that literary discourse[7] can either be schema reinforcing (cf. Rumelhart's notion of schema accretion), schema preserving (which includes the adding of additional information to schema, cf. Rumelhart's tuning), and most importantly to literature, schema disruption, also known as schema refreshment (restructuring in Rumelhart's terms). Within the process of schema refreshment, schemata can either be destroyed entirely, newly constructed, or conceptual links between previously unconnected schemata can be established ('schema connecting') (see also Semino, 1997: 251). Cook (197ff.) notes that such schema disruption can occur at three levels: at the level of our knowledge about the world (world schemata), our knowledge about text layouts and structures (text schemata), and finally our knowledge about language structure and usage (language schemata). Semino (1997) and Culpeper (2001) follow Cook's work with detailed applications of schema theory to the processes of world creation in poetic texts and characterisation, respectively. They adopt Cook's framework for the most part, although Culpeper (75-83) introduces the idea of 'social schemata', which includes assumed (readerly) expectations surrounding individuals, groups, social roles, etc. Both also provide some well-placed critiques of schema theory, although these will be saved until the concluding remarks of

the current discussion as a way of suggesting avenues of future research. Beyond Semino (1997) and Culpeper (2001), Jeffries (2001) offers a stark critique of both Cook's and Semino's approaches, noting problems with defining 'literariness' in the first place, as well as the problem with assuming a lack of diversity among readers, which can entail any number of schemata being either reinforced or refreshed (depending on the background of the reader). Semino (2001) counters many of Jeffries' claims, and notes that some degree of speculative interpretation is inherent in applications of schema theory. More recently, Stockwell (2020: 102–118) provides a state-of-the-art overview of schema theory's place in the field of cognitive poetics and its potential applications.

4. Estrangement and schemata in *The Dispossessed*

The remainder of this paper will focus on applying the principles of estrangement and schema theory to Le Guin's novel, in an attempt to pinpoint how she introduces her readers to the concrete possibilities of living in an anarchic society. This is achieved in two principal ways: through overt tie-ins to language usage on Anarres, and in more indirect ways through interactions between characters and simple descriptions of characters or scenes. And although the former has received some attention in the scholarship on Le Guin (Meyers, 1980: 193ff.; Noletto and Lopes, 2019), no attention appears to have been devoted – either in work on Le Guin or even on science fiction in general (Stockwell, 2000; Mandala, 2010; Adams, 2017) – to how the literary representation of alien languages preserves and/or disrupts readers' schemata, nor how seemingly mundane plot and setting descriptions can play a pivotal role in schema disruption. Even Stockwell's, 2003 application of schema theory to science fiction focused on extraordinary, fictional scientific concepts related to cosmology and astrophysics, i.e. a cognitivist rather than a Shklovskyan form of estrangement.

4.1. Renditions of Pravic

Pravic is an invented language developed by the anarchist (Odonian) revolutionaries who settled Anarres, and now used as the first language of the Anarresti (just under two centuries after the revolution). Its lexicon and grammar were designed explicitly to reflect anarchic ideology in a hope to purge the settlers' minds of any residual thought processes related to living under a State, particularly within a capitalist economic system (this is a clear nod towards the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, as it speaks to how language both construes and is construed by thought, see Meyers 1980: 193ff.). However, there is actually precious little of the Pravic language to be found in the novel. Rather, most information about Pravic comes to us through translations into Anglicised neologisms or metalinguistic commentary provided by the narrator. Even so, all of these techniques serve a cognitivist estranging function by orienting the reader into an anarchic social order and often causing schema disruption (see Adams, 2017: 337–342), both in terms of world and language schemata (Cook, 1994: 197), and they will be examined in turn.

4.1.1. The Pravic lexicon. I was able to find only five Pravic words in the entire novel. The most salient Pravic word to recur throughout the novel is *kleggich* 'drudgery' (Le Guin, 2002: 79), which refers to the expectation that everyone – regardless of their chosen

profession – periodically engages in basic menial (usually manual) work that is required to keep society functional (e.g. ditch digging to install irrigation systems, waste and refuse processing, etc.).[8] In this way, no particular person would be needed to engage in seemingly undesirable labour on a permanent basis. This echoes the anarchic call for the abolition of pointless or unfulfilling labour (Black, 1985; Graeber, 2013; Parsons, 1905), yet maintains the realisation that some work required to keep society functioning may not be all that appealing. Le Guin thus disrupts the readers' WORK or EMPLOYMENT schema – a 'world' schema, to use Cook's term (1994: 197) – by forcing us to (re)imagine a society in which everyone is simultaneously free to choose the kind of work he or she devotes the most energy to, yet at the same time, everyone contributes to the undesirable yet necessary labour required to maintain a functioning infrastructure. No one is relegated to such labour on a permanent or full-time basis, unless of course they decide this for themselves. Related to this is the Pravic notion of the *nuchnibi* (see, for example, Le Guin, 2002: 271) – those who choose not to balance individual liberty with collective responsibility and rather live independently away from organised society.[9] On the one hand, we can view the terms *kleggich* and *nuchnibi* as both schema destroying (in our world's terms of WORK) and schema constructing (in terms of presenting a new model of WORK altogether), but perhaps Semino's suggestion of 'connection' (1997: 251) is preferred here, especially in light of Suvin's claim that utopian literature aims for us to reflect on our own reality (1979: 42–53). That is, the presentation of an alternative schema of WORK should cause us to re-examine our own world's schema related to this concept; in any case, some form of schema restructuring is certainly required (Rumelhart, 1984; Rumelhart and Norman, 1978).

The other three Pravic words that appear in the novel, *mamme, tadde,* and *ammar*, relate to an MOP (Schank, 1982) of FAMILY, and although they are used periodically throughout the novel (often as terms of endearment), the most succinct explanation comes in the form of a footnote:

> 'Pap'a [<*tadde*]. A small child may call any adult *mamme* or *tadde*. Gimar's *tadde* may have been her father, an uncle, or an unrelated adult who showed her parental or grandparental responsibility and affection. She may have called several people *tadde* or *mamme*, but the word has a more specific use than *ammar* (brother/sister), which may be used to anybody.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 42)

The terms relating to the MOTHER and FATHER schemata, *mamme* and *tadde* (which bear an uncanny resemblance to the English *mama* and *daddy*, respectively), disrupt our notion of biological primacy and focus more on the idea of nurturing and affection as central to the schema. Similarly, the term *ammar* places solidarity on an equal, if not superior, footing to biology within the SIBLING schema. Perhaps even more so than the WORK schema, the idea of schema connection is best applied here, as the more conventional aspects of FAMILY (in our own world's terms) are not dispensed with entirely, but other already existing aspects of the schema are given a greater priority on Anarres.[10] After all, parents can and do raise their children on Anarres, but more often than not,

children are raised communally in local nurseries with various levels of parental involvement. Shevek's mother Rulag, for example, played no role in his life after she gave birth, while his father Palat played some role in his life but was killed in an accident while Shevek was still a child. But it is the practical maintenance of our FAMILY schema, or MOP, in *The Dispossessed* that has brought Le Guin some of the more intense criticism of her novel. Because Shevek and his female life-partner Takver decide to raise their daughters Sadik and Pilun full-time, their life begins to resemble that of a traditional nuclear family on our world, and Moylan (1986: 91ff.) argues that this is one key aspect that causes the novel to fall well short of its ideological aspirations. Even so, the broader uses of the Pravic familial terms throughout the novel at least points to the possibility of schema refreshment among its readers.

4.1.2. Anglicised neologisms. Sometimes Pravic words appear not in their original, but rather as translated, Anglicised neologisms in the text (a common technique of rendering alien languages in science fiction, see Stockwell, 2000: 123–131). One of the earliest cases of this (coming, in fact, before any words are rendered in Pravic) is the term *egoising*, a derivation of *ego* plus the verbalising *-ise* plus the progressive aspectual *-ing* suffixes. In response to a young Shevek vigorously defending his musings on the space-time continuum, the director of the Speaking-and-Listening session rebukes: "'Speech is sharing – a co-operative act. You're not sharing, merely egoising'" (Le Guin, 2002: 28). In this construction of an egalitarian COMMUNICATION schema, we learn that all communicative acts must contain a mutually beneficial component; any sort of one-sided, top-down speech act that threatens the creation of some sort of social hierarchy or authoritarian air is strictly taboo. Whether this actually applies to Shevek is doubtful and speaks to the imperfect, heterotopian nature of Anarres, but the perennial possibility to verbally enact social hierarchy is clearly embedded in this verbal derivation of the *ego*. Another Pravic/anarchic concept involves the process of neologistic compounding: the *body-profiteer*, a woman who uses her "sexuality as a weapon in a power struggle with men" (Le Guin, 2002: 177). This compound contains the noun *profiteer*, which is the "most contemptuous" word in the Pravic vocabulary (186). This should come as no surprise, given that capitalist economics is held to be one of the fundamental evils in anarchist thought (see, for example, Goldman, 1910). This concept is embodied in the character of Vea, the sister of one of Shevek's hosts on Urras, whom our protagonist finds to be the "body-profiteer to end them all" (Le Guin, 2002: 177). She flaunts her sexuality in such a way that confuses Shevek, ultimately leading to him sexually assaulting her. Being anarchists, Anarresti operate with a fundamentally different SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schema than the Urrasti (see also Section 4.1.3.; cf. Semino 1997: 119ff.), although things are different with the PROFIT schema. Unlike all the schema discussed to this point, this schema is structured in exactly the same way: the concept of having one's material inflows be greater in quantity than the outflows. Although money does not exist on Anarres, the Anarresti understand the concept in exactly the same way as the Urrasti; it is the connotative, social value attached to this schema that differs. This difference is best captured by Culpeper's notion of 'social schemata' (2001: 77–79) or van Dijk's earlier concept of 'attitude schemata' (1987, 1988), whereby "different groups . . . have different attitude schemata, associated with the schema for a particular group" (Culpeper, 2001: 77)

– although this applies more to a concept rather than a group of people in this instance. What is sacred to the Urrasti is anathema to the Anarresti, a contrast reaching its zenith at the nexus of sex and money.

4.1.3. The Narrator's metalinguistic commentary. There is ample linguistic commentary on the nature of Pravic throughout the novel, oftentimes in the form of a narratorial intervention. For example, once Shevek learns he has received a posting to study with the renowned physicist Sabul (who we later learn is a serial plagiarist) in Abbenay, his mentor Mitis warns, "'. . . you will be his man'", and this follows:

> The singular forms of the possessive pronoun in Pravic were used mostly for emphasis; idiom avoided them. Little children might say, "My mother", but very soon they learned to say "the mother". Instead of "My hand hurts", it was "The hand hurts me", and so on; to say "This one is mine and that's yours" in Pravic one said, "I use this one and you use that". Mitis' statement, "You will be *his man*", had a strange sound to it. Shevek looked at her blankly.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 50–51)

None of this kind of language is rendered in Pravic anywhere in the novel, but such commentary makes clear that the schema of POSSESSION or OWNERSHIP, although known (and perhaps intuitive, as the child's speech suggests), is devalued in a society based on the anti-capitalist principles of collectivist anarchism where resources are shared among all. Here the social/attitude schema (discussed above in 4.1.2.) is most likely different from the reader's own, so some form of disruption and then restructuring is required in order to make sense of the Pravic linguistic and hence social code. The character Sabul acts counter to anarchist principles in so many ways throughout the novel (he populates an office space meant for two with materials and supplies he treats as *his* possessions, appropriates Shevek's and Urrasti scientists' work as his own, censors all physics research attempting publication and wider dissemination, etc.), and his repressive treatment of Shevek is one of the catalysts driving our protagonist to leave the planet and embark on an unprecedented journey to Urras to further conduct his research. Related to the schema of POSSESSION is an explicit elaboration of the SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schema, first discussed above in 4.1.2. We are provided with an extended narratorial intervention on the language of sex fairly early in the novel:

> The language Shevek spoke, the only one he knew, lacked any proprietary idioms for the sexual act. In Pravic it made no sense for a man to say that he had 'had' a woman; the word which came closest in meaning to 'fuck', and had a similar secondary usage as a curse, was specific: it meant rape. The usual verb, taking only a plural subject, can be translated only by a neutral word like copulate. It meant something two people did, not something one person did, or had.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 47)

As there is no regular use of possessive pronouns in Pravic, there is also no mapping between the POSSESSION and SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schemata in Anarresti language

and thought, as is suggested to be the case with the average English-speaking reader here. Where such an association is made, violent and involuntary sexual assault follow, or in the case with the *body-profiteer*, an equally unholy alliance with capitalist economics. Rather than falling into our schema of individual POSSESSION, the anarchic SEXUAL ENCOUNTER is simply one form of free association among consenting individuals.

There are also a few cases in the novel where it is stated that distinct words in English are synonymous in Pravic, namely *work* and *play* (Le Guin, 2002: 79) and *healthy* and *sick* (101). As the anarchic social ideal is for individuals to pursue endeavours focused on their own interests and talents, and relating with others through acts of free association, thus resulting in the greatest and most beneficial social order to all (see, for example, Goldman, 1940), there is no need to distinguish between the (waged) labour one does necessary for survival and time away from such labour meant for the pursual of personal interests and pleasures. The essential work needed for survival and infrastructure maintenance is relegated to *kleggich* (see 4.1.1. above). More problematic is the latter levelling of the linguistic distinction between health and sickness:

> Most young Anarresti felt that it was shameful to be ill: a result of their society's very successful phrophylaxy, and also perhaps a confusion arising from the analogic use of the words "healthy" and "sick". They felt illness to be a crime, if an involuntary one. To yield to the criminal impulse, to pander to it by taking pain-relievers, was immoral . . . as middle age and old age came on, most of them changed their view.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 100–101)

Here we see a problem arise when two very distinct schemata in our world, HEALTH and SICKNESS, are given the status of an "analogic" singularity in Anarresti language and thought. Of course this is not inherent to any sort of anarchist thought (no notable anarchist philosophers have discussed this distinction, to the best of my knowledge); this is rather a convention – seemingly driven by youthful idealism – that has evolved over time among the residents of Anarres, and it speaks to Le Guin's treatment of anarchic ideals clashing with the apparently human inclination to impose notions (create schemata) of SHAME and CRIME in contexts where no such ideas should exist in the first place. These synonymous relations are the source of Meyers' critiques of the society on Anarres (1980: 203ff.), although he errs in his analysis by treating these as dystopian realities rather than as the heterotopian experiment Le Guin herself acknowledged she attempted with *The Dispossessed* (see Stockwell, 2000: 208–215, for a clear distinction between critical utopias/heterotopias and dystopias).

Finally, we also find that the language associated with the PRISON schema has the status of an obscenity in Pravic: "They had picked up the idea of 'prisons' from episodes in the *Life of Odo* . . . and when a circuit history-teacher came through the town he expounded the subject, with the reluctance of a decent adult forced to explain an obscenity to children" (Le Guin, 2002: 31). As the PRISON is one of the key compulsive mechanisms of the State to uphold its notion of social order, its very essence has received fierce condemnation from anarchist philosophers (Kropotkin, 1886, 1887; Goldman, 1911: 47ff.), so it should come as no surprise it is one of the first concepts expounded upon

in the novel through metalinguistic commentary. And in an episode in which a young Shevek and his friends play a game of "prison", much discomfort and near-disaster befall the "imprisoned" boy Kadagv.

4.2. Estranging text passages

Up to now the focus has been on the various ways in which the Pravic language – oftentimes 'translated' into English – serves an estranging function by orienting the readers into an anarchic social order. It thus constitutes the *novum* of the novel, and the estrangement discussed thus far is of the cognitivist kind due to the presentation of radically different or even fundamentally new concepts. The remainder of this paper will focus on how the narrative itself of *The Dispossessed* continues this reader estrangement by further orientation into anarchism, also making use of schema disruption as its primary conceptual mechanism. All of the following passages come from early in the novel (i.e. the first three chapters), as this is when both Shevek first experiences the non-anarchic, capitalist system on Urras while we are simultaneously (de)familiarised with the anarchic society on Anarres. They therefore concern world rather than text or language schemata (Cook, 1994: 197), and often involve some sort of social expectations or attitudes surrounding people or ideas, i.e. social schemata (Culpeper, 2001: 75–83; see also Van Dijk, 1987, 1988). Hence the estrangement is more of the Shklovskyan/formalist kind, as seemingly known or familiar concepts to us readers are presented in a new light – mainly through Shevek's eyes – forcing us to take a new, anarchist-oriented look at concepts and objects we are readily accustomed to. The following is by no means an exhaustive discussion of every schema disruption that occurs within the early parts of the novel, but it should provide a reasonable overview of how Le Guin presents her anarchic world to readers living under the State.

The novel opens with Shevek's crossing to Urras aboard the *Mindful*, an interplanetary freight transport vessel. In a conversation with the ship's medical officer Kimoe, the topic of religion is broached:

> "The Second Officer," he said, "seems to be afraid of me."
>
> "Oh, with him it's religious bigotry. He's a strict-interpretation Epiphanist. Recites the Primes every night. A totally rigid mind."
>
> "So he sees me – how?"
>
> "As a dangerous atheist."
>
> "An atheist! Why?"
>
> "Why, because you're an Odonian from Anarres – there's no religion on Anarres."
>
> "No religion? Are we stones, on Anarres?"
>
> "I mean established religion – churches, creeds –" Kimoe flustered easily . . .
>
> "The vocabulary makes it difficult," Shevek said, pursuing his discovery. "In Pravic the word *religion* is seldom. No, what do you say – rare. Not often used. Of course, it is one of the

> Categories: the Fourth Mode. Few people learn to practice all the Modes. But the Modes are built of the natural capacities of the mind, you could not seriously believe that we had to religious capacity? That we could do physics while we were cut off from the profoundest relationship man has with the cosmos?"
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 15–16)

In a way, this passage gets to the heart of the ANARCHISM schema itself, as it concerns one member of the triumvirate of what Emma Goldman (1910) calls "pernicious influences" against which anarchism has "declared war". Besides Government and Property, Religion is responsible for the "dominion of the human mind", and it is therefore rejected. That appears to be the second officer's – and perhaps the reader's – impression of anarchism, but Shevek (vis-à-vis Le Guin) reminds us that this does not involve a fundamental rejection of spirituality or religious capacity itself. Even Goldman's essay on anarchism implies an inexorable link between the (organised) religions of her/our world, the State and its oppressive economic orders. It is not necessarily religion or spirituality that is the problem; it is when such a system takes on a State-like function of dominion (mental or physical) that problems begin. Anarchist luminary Mikhail Bakunin (1836) himself expressed capacity for religiosity in some of his more personal writings, and similarly, Shevek suggests as much in the exchange above. So whereas there may be a common association made between anarchism and atheism, or an atheistic component to the ANARCHISM schema, it is only when religious or spiritual thought leads to some sort of intellectual or psychological "dominion" in opposition to the pursuit of individual freedom that is in opposition to anarchism. Here we as readers are led to (fine)tune (Rumelhart, 1984; Rumelhart and Norman, 1978) our ANARCHISM schema to accommodate the Fourth Mode.

Later in the same exchange, Kimoe raises the issue of sex difference and social status in Anarres, consequently finding himself mentally estranged and almost unable to comprehend what Shevek tells him:

> But the doctor asked a question in return, a question about Anarres. "Is it true, Dr Shevek, that women in your society are treated exactly like men?"
>
> "That would be a waste of good equipment," said Shevek with a laugh, and then a second laugh as the full ridiculousness of the idea grew upon him.
>
> The doctor hesitated, evidently picking his way around one of the obstacles of his mind, then looked flustered, and said, "Oh, no, I didn't mean sexually – obviously you – they . . . I meant in the matter of their social status."
>
> "*Status* is the same as *class*?"
>
> Kimoe tried to explain status, failed, and went back to the first topic. "Is there really no distinction between men's work and women's work?"
>
> "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 sex to do with that?"

> "Men are physically stronger," the doctor asserted with professional finality.
>
> "Yes, often, and larger; but what does that matter when we have machines? And even when we don't have machines, when we must dig with the shovel or carry on the back, the men maybe work faster – the big ones – but the women work longer . . . Often I have wished I was as tough as a woman."
>
> Kimoe stared at him, shocked out of politeness.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 17–18)

This passage illustrates that, while both the Anarresti and Urrasti have some sort of conceptual social schema associated with SEX,[11] these operate – like much else on both planets – on fundamentally different assumptions and principles, and when one encounters another, schema disruption occurs and subsequent refreshment or restructuring is required, both on the part of the characters in the novel and with the readers. We see this in both of the above passages with Kimoe, who – much like the readers – is required to either tune or restructure his pre-existing notions (or schemata) of what constitutes anarchism and an anarchic social order. Kimoe appears unsuccessful in his ability to restructure his own schemata, although readers should be a bit more successful in their efforts to at least postulate a more egalitarian order, not only related to SEX, but also WORK (relevant here and discussed in Section 4.1.1.): substantial strides, albeit incomplete, have been made in equality and anti-discrimination legislation since the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the time during which Le Guin wrote and published *The Dispossessed*.

The SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schema, already discussed throughout Section 4.1., receives further elaboration in the early parts of the narrative as well. For example, we are informed about a conversation that occurs between a young Shevek and his father Palat:

> He waited till his father came to take him for a dom-visit. It was a long wait: six decads [=60 days]. Palat had taken a short posting in maintenance in the Water Reclamation Plant in Drum Mountain, and after that he was going to take a decad at the beach in Malennin, where he would swim, and rest, and copulate with a woman named Pipar. He had explained all this to his son.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 29)

Although mores surrounding sexual relations are seemingly absent from the writings of notable anarchist philosophers such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, the perennial theme of individual liberty implies that the SEXUAL ENCOUNTER falls within this broader framework of the right to free association. Goldman suggests as much when she writes:

> A natural law is that factor in man which asserts itself freely and spontaneously without any external force, in harmony with the requirements of nature. For instance, the demand for nutrition, for sex gratification, for light, air, and exercise, is a natural law. But its expression needs not the machinery of government, needs not the club, the gun, the handcuff, or the prison. To obey such laws, if we may call it obedience, requires only spontaneity and free opportunity.
>
> (1910)

And it is this "spontaneity and free opportunity" Palat pursues with Pipar while on holiday. But perhaps the most estranging aspect here is not so much related to the SEXUAL ENCOUNTER, as countless analogies to the Palat-Pipar coupling can be found in our own world, but rather in the fact that Palat is so frank and open to his pre-pubescent son about such matters not involving 'the' mother. This then requires a restructuring of our schema for FATHER that also involves the SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schema; generally, one would not expect a father to discuss a casual, short-term sexual relationship with his young son in our world; the radically different familial bonds (or absence thereof) and status of interpersonal relationships on Anarres requires us to restructure a number of interrelated schemata simultaneously even in short scenes such as this.

The final scene I will discuss is perhaps the most seemingly mundane, as it only involves a depiction of home furnishings on Urras ('world-building elements' *par excellence*, see Gavins, 2007: 35ff.); however, Shevek's bewildered response to this environment allows us to envision a fundamentally different socioeconomic order, simultaneously from the protagonist's anarchic point-of-view, as well as from our own more materialist (statist, possibly capitalist) experience in envisioning a world free of the State and private property. When Shevek is first ushered into his dwellings upon arriving on Urras, this is his response:

> The bed, the massive bed on four legs, with a mattress far softer than that of the bunk on the *Mindful*, and complex bedclothes, some silky and some warm and thick, and a lot of pillows like cumulus clouds, had a room all to itself. The floor was covered with springy carpeting; there was a chest of drawers of beautifully carved and polished wood, and a closet big enough to hold the clothing of a ten-man dormitory. Then there was the great common-room with the fireplace, which he had seen last night; and a third room, which contained a bathtub, a washstand, and an elaborate shit-stool. This room was evidently for his sole use, as it opened off the bedroom, and contained only one of each kind of fixture, though each was of a sensuous luxury that far surpassed mere eroticism and partook, in Shevek's view, of a kind of ultimate apotheosis of the excremental. He spent nearly an hour in this third room, employing all the fixtures in turn, and getting very clean in the process.
>
> (Le Guin, 2002: 55–56)

There is not merely a list of furnishings, but rather, these objects are often pre- or post-modified using adjectives and similes linked to a schema of LUXURY, something non-existent on Anarres: *far softer, complex, silky, warm and thick, like cumulus clouds, springy, beautifully carved and polished, great, elaborate,* and *sensuous luxury*. In fact, any such non-essential excesses that surpass basic functional requirements are considered "excremental" in Odonianism. This passage thus goads us to restructure our schema surrounding COMFORT and EXCRETION, albeit in a metaphorical sense: that which is considered comfortable is evaluated negatively and is thus to be viewed contemptuously and dispensed of with disgust. And the fact that the closet is ten times the size Shevek would expect to have for himself underscores the contrast between excess and use value. In some sense Shevek is estranged from his surroundings in a manner similar to the way readers may find themselves when they encounter the radically different world of Anarres,

and although this passage is overtly about Shevek and his initial impressions of A-Io and Urras, it is just as much about how we as readers come to terms with *Shevek's* reality: that is, what is also clear here is that his MOP associated with HOME FURNISHINGS (containing schemata such as BEDROOM, WASH ROOM, CLOSET) is disrupted to the degree he must fundamentally restructure and even integrate new schemata such as LUXURY into his conceptualisation of living arrangements. Meanwhile, we as readers are left to deduce how such things operate in our schema of ANARCHISM; we must rethink what we take for granted and either tune or build a schema that includes shared resources, basic functionality, and the absence of personal possessions and non-essential embellishments.

5. Concluding remarks

I hope to have shown how Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is able to successfully depict a complex and multifaceted, albeit flawed and imperfect, anarchic heterotopia quite distinct from anything most of us have seen or experienced on Earth. Through either overt references to the Anarresti language Pravic or mere narrative descriptions, the world and social schemata we take for granted are often thrown into stark relief via the presentation of a radical alternative; this is the essence of estrangement and 'discourse disruption' (Cook 1994). Schema theory has shown itself to be adaptable to both the cognitivist notion of estrangement, through its presentation of fundamentally new concepts, as well as the presentation of seemingly common or familiar concepts in defamiliarising, Shklovskyan terms. But it is also in this application of schema theory where the current analysis faces its most significant limitation. Ultimately any schema exists in the mind of the reader (Bartlett, 1932; Cook, 1994; Schank, 1982), and I as a reader hail from a background quite similar to Le Guin's (American-born, middle-class, white) and have only lived in Western-style capitalist economies (the USA, UK and Germany); I therefore experientially mirror your average Urrasti and can experience the anarchic-statist/capitalist contrasts in a manner quite similar to the contrast established within the novel. However, a reader from a notably different background (e.g. a non-white minority background, non-conventional or communal upbringing, non-Western or non-capitalist economic experience, etc.) may well read the novel differently and a number of different schema disruptions not experienced by me may or may not occur. So to some degree, my analysis here is reflective and partial. And such imprecision is also claimed to be at the heart of schema theory itself (Semino, 1997: 149ff., 254; Culpeper, 2001: 69–70; Jeffries, 2001; cf. Stockwell, 2003): schemata are virtually unconstrained as to what they can contain or what even constitutes them in the first place, so again, how I have elaborated on a schema here is – to some degree – driven by textual features I have found particularly salient. A flip side to this is that schema theory allows interpretive possibilities to be flexible and amenable to a diverse array of readers and texts (Stockwell, 2003, 2020; see also Jeffries, 2001), but perhaps a happy medium can be found in Culpeper's recommendation to conduct reader studies in order to quantitatively gauge how multiple readers might or might not respond to the same text (2001: 146ff.). This has recently been done by Norledge (2019, 2021), who applied Text World Theory to examine readers' responses to mindstyle and world-building elements in various works of dystopian fiction. A similar

study focusing on reader schemata in response to Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* could either confirm or expand what has been discussed here, and pedagogical implications to such reader responses could also be explored (Giovanelli and Mason, 2015). What I hope to have shown is how schemata are fundamental to Le Guin's style of presenting a radically alternative anarchic social order to a non-anarchic world, or to put things in Anarresti terms, how schemata serve part of the novel's organic function.

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Notes

1. Le Guin modelled her anarchist world of Anarres on the principles expounded by renowned anarchist philosophers such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Pyotr Kropotkin, Emma Goldman and Paul Goodman. Taoist philosophy, a long-standing interest of Le Guin's, was also influential in Le Guin's construction of her world (Le Guin, 1975: 260; see also Ward, 2004: 11 for a discussion of the affinities between Taoist and anarchist thought). A substantial amount of anarchist writing is freely available via the *Panarchy* website (URL: https://www.panarchy.org/indexes/anarchy.html).
2. Odonianism is derived from the name of its founding (female) philosopher, Laia Aseio Odo.
3. Shevek only visits the capitalist nation of A-Io on Urras. There is also the socialist nation of Thu and the "third world" equivalent nation of Benbili, often the site of proxy wars between A-Io and Thu (a throwback to Cold War-era conflicts like the Vietnam War). Although this paper will use the terms Urras/Urrasti seemingly synonymous with the novel's critique of capitalism, this is always focused on the nation of A-Io in the novel. Some critique is certainly leveled at Thu and its statist system as well, although since Shevek spends his time in A-Io, the contrast between anarchism and capitalism – rather than between anarchism and socialism – is more pronounced in the novel.
4. *The Dispossessed* forms part of Le Guin's "Hainish Cycle", which is comprised of a number of other novels and short stories. In the Hainish universe, Hain is the planet from which all human space colonisation stems, including the colonisation of Terra (Earth) in the ancient past.

5. More detailed overviews of estrangement/defamiliarisation and the Russian Formalists are provided in Cook (1994: 130–140) and Tihanov (2005). Culpeper (2001: 129–133) discusses the role of the Russian Formalists in developing the related notion of foregrounding.
6. Unless, of course, these world-building elements constitute the *novum* of the text world in question, i.e. new material rather than a defamiliarising presentation of material already known to the reader. See Section 2.2 and the distinction between formalist and cognitivist notions of estrangement.
7. Cook's focus is on literary discourse, but he does acknowledge that such processes can in fact be brought about by any type of discourse. But because literature is by its very nature schema disrupting, his theory of literary discourse is one of 'discourse deviation' (1994, 197ff.).
8. The Anarresti convention is for this to be once every *decad*, or once every 10 days. Although there is no penalty of not engaging in *kleggich*, social pressure can be placed on those who refuse to do so (hence the heterotopian, or critical, nature of Le Guin's vision).
9. 'Living off the grid' is probably the closest concept we have in our world, although even here, State intervention remains a possibility, whereas no such threat faces the *nuchnibi* on Anarres.
10. In this regard, the Pravic familial terms seem to foreshadow what Lakoff (1987) later develops into the notion of Idealised Cognitive Models (ICMs). See especially Lakoff's discussion of ICMs and the semantics of *mother* (1987: 74–76).
11. For purposes of the current discussion, I have used the label SEX for the schema related to notions surrounding biological sex and perceived differences between males and females. The SEXUAL ENCOUNTER schema is reserved for issues surrounding copulation (this label is also used in Semino, 1997, so I have adopted here as well). The matter of gender identity or fluidity does not arise in *The Dispossessed*, although Le Guin treats the subject to some degree in other writings such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories* (2002). Gender fluidity is also central to Samuel R. Delany's *Triton* (1976), another critical anarchic utopian novel written to be "in conversation" with Le Guin's work (see Moylan, 1986: 156–195).

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