

“You can only be the Revolution”:
The Utopian Embodiment of the Ones Who Walk
Away from Omelas

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ABSTRACT

One of Le Guin’s “more complex” works, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” occupies a curious position in the way in which it is typically poised between simple utilitarian critique and literary utopianism. However, positioning Le Guin in such a restrictive climate is counteractive to her revolutionary notions of being and transforming. I wish to present that by making the text an analogue of its context, Le Guin’s approach resists political and literary codification. The space is fraught with social contestation, and unsettles hegemonic acceptance of institutional cooperation. Le Guin intensifies an element of social concern, and her generic reliance presents in a way of observation and probability without overt attack. The authorial intent of submerged subversiveness sublimates the body as a site of utopian performance, of discontent, of possibility of transformation. Through the depiction of a coagulated body society followed by identifying seceding individuals, Le Guin poses a challenge to societal codification and attempts at generic classification.

KEYWORDS

Ursula K. Le Guin; Utopia; Science Fiction; Biopolitics; Utilitarianism

“Nur das Denken, das wir leben, hat einen Wert.”

(Hermann Hesse, 1921)

Mary Stuart was five going on six when she was spirited away to France. At eighteen going on nineteen, she returned to her russet of people, retaining the Gallic grace and gaud. Having moved from castle to castle like a pawn, Mary, Queen of Scots, was forty-four, going on the scaffold at Fotheringhay Castle in (reportedly) scarlet, satin *red* shaded by velvet black. Of all the contests, a linguist may say the accounts vary through attribution rather than reference: satin is a lighter fabric than velvet, and a difference is provoked in the feeling of the colour rather than the colour itself. This qualitative difference is, as Kastan writes, “as much conceptual as it is chromatic.”¹ It hovers in between, as between the sea and the Eighteen Peaks half encircling her bay wavers Omelas like a Fata Morgana.

As the swallows soar through the sky, Omelas’s gentle fog washes over us with all her mauve, blue, green, grey, silver, and gold. Alongside, we are also introduced to another colour peculiar to Omelas: that of skin. Unlike the aforementioned pigments, it is difficult to synthetically tube flesh. Thus, it aptly serves its purpose to colour the guiltless, cautious joy wrought by the inhabitants of Omelas.

Mary Stuart was an infant of six days when she became the Queen of Scots. With too many knives pointed at her back, her body had to be garbed and guarded immediately. Omelians² have to face no such quandary—they are free to run about nude as they’ve done “without monarchy and slavery, [. . .] the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb.”³

Their “freedom” is reflected in their corporeal form (nude for

The quotation in the title is from Le Guin’s novel *The Dispossessed*. The full quote reads: “You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.”

Hesse’s quotation, as translated by Damion Searls, reads, “Only a thought we’ve lived has any value.”

some) and actions (braiding hair, flute playing, etc.). Thus, their body is representative of their utopia.

To formulate further, one shall recall two critics, Ruth Levitas, who writes that utopia is an expression of a “desire for a different, better way of being”⁴ and Lyman Tower Sargent, who theorises that humans, while idealising, dream of a “radically different society than the one in which [the] dreamers live”.⁵ This essay seeks to emphasise and conflate two aspects: the “radically different” and the “way of being,” thereby a “radically different way of being.” In particular, Le Guin astutely manipulates personal and civic issues to problematise the body in her work. The utopian potential and challenge emerge in and through bodies and act as a stimulus for active social transformation. In “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (hereafter, “Omelas”), this essay studies the layered application of this “radically different way of being”: it is the general populace of Omelas on one level; the child’s radically altered expression in the cellar serves as another.

Finally, the most stark “radically different way of being” is embodied by the individuals eponymous with the title of the short story: *the ones who walk away from Omelas*.

OF AUTHORITY

A seminal work in the field of literary utopianism, “Omelas” was first published in 1973. In 1975, it was included in Le Guin’s short story collection *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*. The sixties and seventies are particularly interesting in Le Guin’s oeuvre due to a marked shift in societal attitudes and in Le Guin herself. This was a period marked by civil shifts, active counterculture, and the emergence of the marginalised in mainstream society. While in retrospect the political success of this period may be debated, Le Guin’s writings now acquire a new flavour. Her early works, which at various junctures she terms “romantic”⁶ and “almost womanless”,⁷ start to

transition into “something harder, stronger, and more complex”.⁸ In conversation with H el ene Escudi e in 2002, Le Guin notes how this time period was one where she was “reeducated,” where she “had to learn how to write as a woman, and [...] had to fight a lot of [her] own training and prejudices.” It is at the near end of the sixties that the questions of gender, marginalisation, “otherness,” appear in her works such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970/1), *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), “The Day Before the Revolution” (1974), *The Dispossessed* (1974), and the one in our interest, “Omelas.” Following Le Guin’s “more complex” narrative, “Omelas” juxtaposes a cautiously gratified multitude with one desolate creature, the child in the cellar room. There is a contract in place in Omelas: the polis’s “happiness” is dependent on the misery of this lone child confined in a cellar room of one of the resplendent buildings.⁹

A thought-provoking short story, “Omelas” is curious not only from the circumstances presented to us but also from *how* it is presented. The nameless narrator, all in dignified privacy, gives us an evaporating view of Omelas, moving from the resplendent Green Fields to the russet cellar room. It is, by no means of assertion, an omniscient narrator capable of giving us a “bird’s eye view” of Omelas: they¹⁰ present primarily one aspect, the “contract.” The narrator may also be said to be located in the society they are speaking of.¹¹ They present themselves as a part of society but simultaneously withdraw themselves by not explicitly subscribing to the Omelian system of happiness. By maintaining this approximate distance and not cooperating with the Omelian system, they undermine its political authority to a certain degree. The narrator’s contestable non-identification with the Omelians, therefore, makes them a figure as wavering as the polis of Omelas.

Herein arises a tension between the narrator and the author, who are not congruent. The work’s “duplicity” is of intrigue for there is a distinction between the authorial intention and that of the narrator,

underscored by Le Guin’s label of “psychomyth.”¹² In the foreword to *Wind’s Twelve Quarters*, she defines “psychomyth” as “more or less surrealistic tales, which [...] [take] place outside any history, outside of time, in that region of the living mind which—without invoking any consideration of immortality—seems to be without spatial or temporal limits at all.” This “outside” spatiotemporal limits serves the narrator, who, as this literary construct existing in the “living mind,” exceeds the readers’ bounds of time and space. This tension is furthered when it’s written, “They were not less complex than us.” Here is a reference point for the reader to identify with, the “us.” Throughout the tale, the authorial voice seeps through the narrator’s voice.

The author, in this “hovering” position, is able to create a safe distance: she parses facets of her milieu to topical elements of concern and writes in a manner that eludes overt criticism.¹³ The Omelian “psychomyth” primarily erupts as an abstraction of the social “utility monster” (one may gauge from Le Guin’s engagement with William James and *The Brothers Karamazov*). Certain works of SF which focus on a consequence of an action or attempt to prove (a practical application of theory) may be better categorised as “thought-experiment[s].” Le Guin’s own “psychomyth,” unlike a “thought-experiment,” is not an attempt at proof. While both involve the exploration of the implications of a hypothesis without “spatial or temporal limits” but with delimitations of concern, the “psychomyth” functions imaginatively. The lack of geo-spatial specificity lends it abstraction, but it distils into itself and highlights topical social concerns.¹⁴ The “psychomyth,” in this context, may be read as a response to “a specific and independent sort of emotion” which would “make us immediately feel [...] how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain.”¹⁵ Through such means of equivocation, critical examination is presented in a palatable form, “[f]or the best of these modern writers [...] have the knack of imparting knowledge, and

even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught.”¹⁶ Therefore, the “duplicitous” commentary enables one to elude literary and political authority.

OF CONTEXT

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, where the muttering retreats upon seeing the child. The Omelian system relies on this social “contract” with “strict and absolute” terms: “there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child.” The ground for the very foundation of Omelas is lucid: the contract, whereby the security of happiness is dependent on the perpetual misery of a lone child; as William James would term it, a “bargain.” One shall resist casuistry and refrain from indulging in the debate of consequentialism or deontology pertaining to the “moral” facet of the contract. Despite the referential points, Omelas does not subscribe to the notions of morality familiar: it is estranged from *our* space.¹⁷ The fissures created in the text allow us to contemplate the mould of this contract; nonetheless, Omelas is “no place” known to us and cannot be emphatically circumscribed into the moral framework of the reader/s. Hence is the contract: “they all understand that their happiness, [...] depend[s] wholly on this child’s abominable misery.”

As long as the child remains disparaged in the cellar, the happiness of Omelas shall be sustained. Generally true of all social contracts (and hence also a space of feminist, race-conscious critiques) is that beyond the contracting parties, there are externalities, that is, those who aren’t included in the contract but affected by it. Therefore, from the perspective of the contracting parties, the child is an externality in the bargain. “It”¹⁸ is a third complacent party, one without any direct influence on “its” own conditions or induction into the contract.¹⁹

Furthermore, there seems to be no sovereign, no “arbitrator” in the natural sense of the word, to enforce the contract.²⁰ It seems to echo

the Rousseau-ian understanding of the social contract, where “the real foundation of society” is individual persons forming a collective will, a new “body.” Individuals cooperate with this general will; it is something commonly and collectively conceded. When studying the Omelian body society, one can identify individuals, such as the flute-player, the youths in the race, the children, the elderly, the ones who walk away, but upon closer inspection it reveals a self-created social life: despite being perpetuated by individuals, the body society is a collated site of performance.

In this regard, as an externality, the child in the cellar is dehumanised to the point of non-identity. In Le Guin’s words, “The most defenseless kind of human being is a child, [. . .] and so they are the abomination of cruelty.” Children’s individuality is curtailed, particularly because they do not have access to autonomy as adults perpetuate. Richard Courtney, in his *A Dramatic Theory of Imagination*, states that young children’s imagination is directly expressed in action. This merits the recognition that a child gains autonomy through the faculties of memory and the power to imagine. Utopian societies often reveal to employ biopolitical control to suppress individual imagination: the individual poses a threat to this cooperative utopian society. In Omelas, the child is deprived of “its” use of imagination or reason: “[t]he child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, ‘eh-haa, eh-haa,’ and it speaks less and less often.” Here, we have a site of live performance,²¹ which constitutes the utopia of the textual present. In an interview in 1993 with Osborne and Segal, Judith Butler distinguishes between performance and performativity, primarily “think[ing] about performativity as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names [. . .] and suggest[s] that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. [. . .] [P]erformativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established.” Performance, Butler says, “presumes a subject” while performativity “contests the

very notion of the subject.” To account this essay’s line of argument and partially contest Butler, “Omelas” hosts the element of spectacle *and* questions the stability of the body society: the “performance” of the body society also individualises and is performative for it reveals the contingent nature of purportedly inescapable institutions and therefore its hegemonic “acceptance.”

The inertia of cooperation is destabilised through the bodily and metaphorical act of walking away. Therefore, “performance” and “performativity” intersect in Omelas.

These self-performing spectators, as Dubord may have termed it, be it the children, the youths in the procession games displaying the horses, the “divine souffles” of priestesses, or the child peered at in the cellar,²² are presented nude. The body is representative of the utopia: it is a complicated, problematic, debated site, but a “principal actor”²³ nevertheless. And this is where the quagmire of “Omelas” and the ingenuity of Le Guin lie—the ambiguity of “utopia”²⁴—the play of perspectives. The nudity is the bargain manifest. The “utopic” manifestation through the nudity of the children, the youths, the priestesses, is inverted in the “dystopic” nudity of the child in the cellar.²⁵ The body, as argued by Foucault, is the “zero point” where all utopias start. In a contorted way, the child’s emaciated body “starts,” or acts as the foundation of the utopian happiness embodied by the body society. There is but one similarity among all the aforementioned: they are part of a spectacle.

Those a part of a spectacle can never really be “free”—they’re under scrutiny of some sort or another—“[t]hey know that they, like the child, are not free.” Omelas is not isolated: in the text, we are told of outsiders who travel here; in the metatextual sense, we are privy to their actions. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.²⁶ Similarly, the child’s emaciated, abysmal state of being is radically different from “its” milieu of Omelas; in the metatextual connotation, the Omelians’ contractual lifestyle is different from the quotidian familiar to the

readers. While early modern utopian conceptions often relied on such body politics as a means of biopolitical governance and desire for a radically different way of being, the Omelian body society is devoid of any superordinate: they themselves partake and perform, and thereby, they *are* the utopia, a bodily state²⁷ of this radically different way of being.²⁸ By way, the child in the cellar exists but as context.²⁹ In the room, the Omelians come and go, talking of the child alone.

OF RADICALITY

The yellow-lit windows rub their backs upon the darkness of the night and the traveller walking by. These people walk down the street alone, their bodies limpid with the intention to walk away from Omelas. In a uniform society of static cooperation, mobility becomes one of the greatest sources of resistance; the refusal to cooperate is refutation. These people emerge as isolated figures rather than a collective, which may be read as their alignment with the lone child over the body society. These individuals defy the expectations and limitations of society. These are the “social dreamers” of Sargent, who, in their quest for a radically different society, reject the projected normative “helplessness” of non-action. The body, though a space rooted in context, is from where innumerable possibilities continue to emerge and are realised.

There is no tangible sovereign to resist in Omelas as aforementioned. Just as the social contract is perpetuated through the body society, social resistance is marked by individuals leaving. Mobility defies Omelas and “Omelas.” The ones who walk away directly resist the political authority of Omelas by removing themselves. There is no certainty of where they are heading; it is truly a gateway of possibilities, the point “where paths and spaces come to meet,” and hence the body is nowhere.³⁰ It is at this point that the utopian potential is realised:

the departing fluidity which contests the contractual rigidity. Here we find a breaking of that circle of biopolitical source of governance, the creation of new utopias by breaking away from an old one.³¹ If the body society is an ensemble of individuals, then the individual is an embodiment of the “zero point” of possibilities and transformation. Individuals make society; individuals make change. One cannot “buy” or “make” a revolution; they can only be the revolution.³² The people walking away is a literal manifestation of resisting political authority, the embodiment which asserts there can be different ways of being from what is repeatedly recited into ratification.

With the breaking of hegemonic acceptance comes the disruption of both “performance” and “performativity.” Through this social performance and breaking away, Le Guin interrogates the delimitations of collective acceptance and possibilities of existing otherwise. Her subversive power lies in interrogating not only the bodies, but also the discourse and context behind the creation of these bodies. This space is resistant to stability, morphing with imagination, accommodating an immaterial parsing of a topical concern. Thus, the intersection seems “bodiless,” or a zero point, which dismantles the idea of a stable, accepted identity.

In the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin makes the epigram, “Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive.” By making the text an analogue of its context, Le Guin estranges and presents an augmentation of a society petrified by extreme utilitarianism. It presents itself as an ambiguous quagmire of ethics and is not “abstractly philosophical.”³³ To classify such complexity under any definition is insubstantial. What at first appears a cognitively estranged, oppositional space to utilitarianism emerges as a contesting environment that reclaims and transforms the utilitarian world which inhibits and enervates one. It is a device created to “destabilize the reader,”³⁴ the authorial intent of submerged subversiveness compelling readers to confront, challenge, and change. Thus, the body is a powerful site of utopian performance *and* transformation.

The germ of the future is contained within the seed of the present, and “Omelas” plants the possibility of change with the language that creates it.

And indeed, there will be time for the yellow-lit windows to light up more pathways. Through her critical and agile engagement with the genre, Le Guin refracts utopia to suit her contemporary age and embodies the utopian potential of a radically different way of being. In the literary oeuvre, too, SF is a radically different way of being, balancing potential with inquisitive challenge. The generic divisions appear to coalesce or dissolve altogether: this is a zero point where all possibilities are born and resist literary authority. SF doesn’t subscribe to the generic bounds: it hovers somewhere in between, as between the sea and the Eighteen Peaks half encircling her bay wavers Omelas like a Fata Morgana.

NOTES

- 1 Kastan, David Scott, & Stephen Farthing, *On Colour* (London: Yale University Press, 2018)
- 2 There is no standardised demonym/adjective for Omelas; I shall be using “Omelian” rather than “Omelasan.”
- 3 “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” first appeared in *New Dimensions* 3, 1973. It was included in Le Guin’s short story collection, *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*, published in October 1975 by Bantam Books, USA. All quotes from “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” Le Guin’s other short stories, foreword, and prefatory notes have been made following the March 1979 (fourth) reprinting of the volume.
- 4 Levitas, Ruth, *The Concept of Utopia* (Germany: Peter Lang, 2010)
- 5 Sargent, Lyman Tower, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994)
- 6 Le Guin, “Foreword,” *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*.
- 7 In conversation with H el ene Escudi e in 2002, Le Guin refers to her Earthsea books, the early fantasies, as being written in “a literary tradition, which was almost womanless.”
- 8 Le Guin’s prefatory note to “Semley’s Necklace” in *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*.

9 “In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. [...] The floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch, as cellar dirt usually is. The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. [...] The door is always locked; and nobody ever comes, except that sometimes—the child has no understanding of time or interval—sometimes the door rattles terribly and opens, and a person, or several people, are there. One of them may come and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes. The food bowl and the water jug are hastily filled, the door is locked, the eyes disappear. The people at the door never say anything, but the child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother’s voice, sometimes speaks. ‘I will be good,’ it says. ‘Please let me out. I will be good!’ They never answer. The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, ‘eh-haa, eh-haa,’ and it speaks less and less often. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually.

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. [...] *They all know that it has to be there.* Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness [...] depend[s] wholly on this child’s abominable misery.” (Le Guin, “Omelas.” Italicisation added.)

- 10 For the unidentified, ungendered narrator, I shall be using the pronoun “they” in reference.
- 11 “But *we* do not say the words of cheer much anymore.” (Le Guin, “Omelas.” Italicisation added.)
- 12 While “thought-experiment” and “psychomyth” are often critiqued synonymously, I would not be inclined to concur with the conflation of these two terms.
- 13 Le Guin’s utopian conceptions, also to extend to her other “more complex” works of SF, are quite topical through their association with social themes. It is not an exhaustive parsing of all socio-political contemporaneous issues, but rather attempts at garnering critical engagement with the specific topics. “Omelas,” as this essay explores, is an augmentation of utilitarianism. Another example is her *The Dispossessed*, which also topically concerns an exploration of capitalism and the degeneration of foundational ideals through Urras and Anarres. Her works merit recognition of utopia as a sociological method, a subject expounded by Levitas in her *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (2013),

that utopian imagination critiques the upheld status quo and guides one to transformation.

- 14 Le Guin’s notion of “psychomyth” may be viewed through Levitas’s assertion: “Utopia [...] operates at the more concrete level of the social institutions encapsulating those principles, or from which they emerge. Secondly, it considers those institutions as a system—a social system, embedded in an ecological system. The Utopian approach allows us not only to imagine what an alternative society could look like, but enables us to imagine what it might feel like to inhabit it[.]” Levitas, Ruth, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: A utopian ethic for a transformed future,” *CUSP Essay Series on the Morality of Sustainable Prosperity*, 5 (Guildford: Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, 2017)
- 15 In the prefatory note to “Omelas” where Le Guin quotes William James.
- 16 Hugo Gernsback, “A New Sort of Magazine,” *Amazing Stories*, Volume 1, no. 1 (New York: Experimenter Publishing Co., 1926)
- 17 As Le Guin writes in her prefatory note to Omelas with reference to William James: “[L]ook how he says ‘us,’ assuming all his readers are as decent as himself?” (Italicisation added.) Morals, despite one’s utmost wishes, will never be uniform, and ideologies may or may not be synonymous for two adjacent readers. Therefore, we as readers must refrain from indulging in a moralistic critique, noting that Omelas may not subscribe to our nature of morals.
- 18 Throughout the text, the destitute child in the cellar is referred to with “it.” The child is viewed as a non-entity, stripped of “its” identity and autonomy. The child, therefore, becomes a “zero point” where the possibility of the utopia is born, as well as a zero point where “it” is no longer human. The choice of pronoun to refer to the child reflects this dehumanisation. I shall be using the pronoun “it” to refer to the child.
- 19 It is often purported that the contract of Omelas is “invalid” on legal grounds of age and on the Hobbesian notion that the child is returned to the state of nature. However, as established earlier, Omelas cannot be circumscribed within the readers’ judicial system. Furthermore, rather than being reinstated to nature, the child is institutionally deprived of its faculties and is an externality. Hence, the claim of invalidity isn’t sustained.
- 20 It has been well established in the text that Omelas doesn’t have a monarchy, nor any other form of authoritative enforcement, like sovereigns, kings, priests, etc.
- 21 As Petersen would term it.
- 22 The aforementioned examples feature in the text of “Omelas.” In the antinomial Omelas, the nudity of the body society is because of their autonomy and agency, whereas the nudity of the child in the cellar is because of the lack thereof: “it” doesn’t have autonomy to access any clothes, and is, very literally, also stripped

- of “its” identity and viewed as a non-entity.
- 23 Foucault, Michel, “Les corps utopique,” translated by Lucia Allais, appearing in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, edited by Caroline A. Jones (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006)
- 24 Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* carries the intriguing subtitle “ambiguous utopia.”
- 25 Disregarding their etymological meanings, “utopia” and “dystopia” have become antipodal today. One may use these two terms to lucidly illustrate the play on perspectives present in Le Guin’s works. In the case of “Omelas,” the paucity of happiness of the cellar room heightens the happiness in the polis of Omelas—the absence of misery in Omelas makes it seem utopic to the readers who inhabit earthly spaces abundant with misery. Yet, as previously established and to be further discussed, the construct of the Omelian “utopia” serves those deeply rooted in modern utilitarianism; the “dystopian” perspective of Omelas is presented by those who do not subscribe to utilitarian governance. To those supportive of utilitarianism, Omelas is a possibility of a “desired future,” whilst for others it serves as a word of caution. cf. Levitas, “Where there is no vision”: “Dystopias share with utopias the method of depicting an alternative society, but constitute a warning of what may happen if we go on as we are, rather than a projection of a desired future.”
- 26 Le Guin in conversation with H el ene Escudi e, 2002.
- 27 Petersen, Franziska Bork, “The Body as Non-Place: Utopian Potential in Philippe Decouff e’s Dance Film *Codex*,” *Spaces of Utopia*: 2, no. 2 (2022)
- 28 One may recall here Foucault: “My body [...] has no place, but it is from it that all possible places, real or utopian, emerge and radiate.” (“Les corps utopique”)
- 29 “But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom [...] It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. [...] Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when *they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it*. Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and *the acceptance of their helplessness*, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives.” (Le Guin, “Omelas.” Italicisation added.)
- 30 Foucault, “Les corps utopique.”
- 31 In her prefatory note to “The Day Before The Revolution,” Le Guin writes, “Anarchism’s principal target is the authoritarian State; [...] its principal moral-practical theme is cooperation (solidarity, mutual aid).” Odonianism emerged as a counter-movement, a “revolution.” It is a separate matter of negotiation that upon reading *The Dispossessed* we realise there has been a systemic degeneration of ideals. Anarres and Urras have their own utopic spaces in the literary body. The range of Le Guin’s utopic conception stretches the sky, but we may recall that before the ideals degenerated, the revolution founded by Odo was a “story [...] about one of the ones who walked away from Omelas.” I have used the word “cooperation” throughout my essay in reference to the social contract: a

reason the social contract is maintained is due to the cooperation, the “solidarity” extended by the contracting parties. Hence, with the breaking of this solidarity comes the solitude of the ones walking away.

32 Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*.

33 Levitas, “Where there is no vision.”

34 Le Guin in conversation with H el ene Escudi e, 2002.

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