Cognition, Freedom, *The Dispossessed* as a Classic (2007)

To Don Theall, who hired me in 1968 to teach SF within our common humanist horizon

Part 1. On Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Its Liberating Librations: A Commentary[8]

1. A Pointer to Fictional Articulation, Poetry, and Freedom

I have argued elsewhere at length three points about narrative in general.

First, that fictional narrative – as any thinking – can be understood as based on *thought-experiments and models* (see Suvin "Can People"). Representation in fiction takes model images of people and spacetimes from non-fictional ways of understanding and reconstructing social reality into a process that (in good or significant cases) develops roughly as follows: the new schemes of how people live together glimpsed by the writer go about subverting the heretofore received fictional norms of structuring; but as this is happening, the schemes themselves are in turn modified in and by some autonomous principles of fictional articulation. All of this together enables the resulting views of relationships among people, elaborated by the restructured piece of fiction, to return into our understanding represented and reformulated *with a cognitive increment*, which can range from zero through very partial to very large. This better understanding permits what Brecht called intervenient, effective, or engaged thinking – in the

8 My thanks for help with materials go to Johan Anglemark and the Carolina Library in Uppsala, and to Rich Erlich for comments and editing assistance much beyond normal collegiality. James Bittner was the first to broach thoroughly and interestingly in his 1979 dissertation many central problems of *TD*, and I think with pleasure of our discussions at that time, from which much must have continued to work in me subconsciously.

I use the abbreviations: *TD* = *The Dispossessed*, Sh = Shevek, A = Anarres, U = Urras. The citations are identified by chapter no.: page no., keyed to the Avon 1975 paperback edition of *TD*. Unacknowledged translations are all mine.

technical sense of meshing or being engaged in gear. It allows the reader to pleasurably verify old and dream up new, alternative relationships: to *re-articulate*, in both senses of the word, human relationships to the world of people and things. As Aristotle argued in *Politics* (I.2), humans necessarily live in political communities. Thus, all central human relations are, in this widest sense, communal or communitarian, what we humans have or are in common: significant fictional re-presentation of relations among people presents the reader with the possibility of rearticulating our political relationships.

Second, that any text unfolds a *thematic-cum-attitudinal field* and that fiction does so by necessarily presenting relationships between fictional agents in a spacetime. According to the way these are presented, a fictional text is either simply metaphorical (as some non-narrative poems) or narrative. My contention is that all texts are based on a certain kind of metaphoricity, but that the narrative texts add to metaphorical ones a concrete presentation in terms of space and time, the chronotope. I cannot argue it here but only indicate my text "Metaphoricity and Narrativity," which has at least the virtue of discussing a large bibliography. The argument permits us to define narrative as a finite and coherent sequence of actions, located in the spacetime of *a possible world (PW)*, proceeding from an initial to a final state of affairs, and *signifying possible human relationships*; the agential signifiers or vehicles can, of course, be gods, Martians, Virtues, talking animals or Bauhaus machines, and the chronotopic ones any spacetime allowing for coherent events. All fictional (and non-fictional) texts are in this view "analogical mappings" (Gentner 109) of one semantic domain upon another. Among the great virtues of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (further *TD*) is the fact that such a mapping is discreetly foregrounded in it by means of Odo's *Analogies*.

Third but not least, my essay "The Science-fiction Novel as Epic Narration" (Chapter 19 here, where I briefly touched upon *TD*), I argued in favor of a central distinction between the *epic and mythological horizons* and their ways to articulate fiction. Epic events are presented as contingent and not fully foreseeable (and thus historical and as a rule reversible), while mythological events are cyclical and predetermined, foreseeable descents from the timeless into the temporal realm. The verse or prose epic therefore

foregrounds *the plot*, which was a foregone conclusion in mythology. Thus, an epic text will be meaningful only if each significant event is the result of a value *choice*, as opposed to a pre-established or automatic sequence reposing on unquestionable fixed values of the mythological text. That choice constitutes the poetry of post-mythological prose, opposed to the myth's incantatory repetitions of always already given names and patterns. Choice shapes the agential relationships within the narration in unforeseeable and therefore potentially new and better ways. It is the narrative equivalent and rendering of freedom.

I could easily document how much of the above is consonant with Le Guin's views about fiction. But I think it is better if I do so on the material of *TD*, and restrict myself here only to one essay, her thoughts on narrative ("Some"). She focuses, in Odo's "ethical mode," on the fact that all actions imply choices and entail consequences: "[Narrative] asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful" (39). In the syntactic or epistemological mode (if I may add one), she cheers George Steiner's suggestion "that statements about what does not exist and may never exist are central to the use of language," which often means a "refusal to accept the world as it is" – though she rightly notes that celebrating some choice aspects of a world is often as significant (43–44). The "scientific" focus on statements of fact is ably swatted as a noxious fly:

> Surely the primary, survival-effective uses of language involve stating alternatives and hypotheses. We don't, we never did, go about making statements of fact to other people, or in our internal discourse with ourselves. We talk about what may be, or what we'd like to do, or what you ought to do, or what might have happened: warnings, suppositions, propositions, invitations, ambiguities, analogies, hints, lists, anxieties, hearsay, old wives' tales, leaps and crosslinks and spiderwebs (44).

Le Guin's conclusion speaks to what I also want to come to as a main horizon of *TD* – a kind of freedom:

> The historian manipulates, arranges, and connects, and the storyteller does all that as well as intervening and inventing. Fiction connects possibilities, using the esthetic sense of time's directionality defined by Aristotle as plot; and by doing so it is useful to us. If we cannot see our acts and being under the aspect of fiction, as "making sense," we cannot act as if we were free.

> Only the imagination can get us out of the bind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesising or pretending or discovering a way that reason can then follow into the infinity of options, a clue through the labyrinths of choice, a golden string, the story, leading us to the freedom that is properly human, the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality (45).

2. *A Hypothesis on The Dispossessed*

I am attempting in the rest of Part 1 a commentary on Le Guin's *TD*, following the stance of "commentaries" on Brecht by Walter Benjamin, who noted this genre presupposes the classical status of the text to which it refers. *The Dispossessed* will be here treated as the qualitative culmination of the great SF age or wave of 1961–75, which indeed crested and broke with it: a classic.

I focus first on the most striking feature of *TD*: its organization into two parallel narrative "strands," the Anarres (A) and Urras (U) one, which body forth the central and all-pervasive concern with a unity-through-dualism. I shall proceed as inductively as possible.

The two plot strands, the Urras story and the Anarres pre-story of Shevek (further in the tables shown below), proceed each sequentially in linear time. Table 2 provides a first orientation:

However, my hypothesis is that the two strands are woven together not only as history and prehistory of the protagonist but at least as much as adjoining two-by-two pairs in analogic space. A unified thematic-cum-attitudinal common denominator and trope obtains in chapters 1–2, and then a different one each in chapters 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, and 11–12. There is also a final inversion between the "spaceship" chapters 13 and 1 – the humiliation, disorientation, and claustrophobia of the outbound voyage vs. the spacious hope of the inbound return – which brings it all together. The analogic space exemplifies what the thematic development is all about, it is the how of its what. Thus, the following pairs will be presented at a somewhat higher level of generalization. For one thing, I shall here disregard focalization and the frequent use of "free, indirect discourse," the

Table 2: Parallel Narrative Strands in *The Dispossessed*

Chapter 1: (A—>)U1, pp. 1–20. Sh, age 38, travels in Urrasti ship from A to U and lands there.
Chapter 2: A1, pp. 21–50. Sh's growth and education from baby to age ca. 19.
Chapter 3: U2, pp. 51–73. Sh surveys the "possessed" U.
Chapter 4: A2, pp. 74–101. Sh, age 19–20, comes to A capital, he and we learn about Anarresti society and a worm in the apple.
Chapter 5: U3, pp. 102–24. Sh begins to learn about the inner workings of U society.
Chapter 6: A3, pp. 125–54. Sh, age 21–24, learns in Abbenay further about walls inside Anarresti minds but also about friendship (Bedap) and partnership (Takver).
Chapter 7: U4, pp. 155–87. Sh finds out how wrappings work in U (Vea).
Chapter 8: A4, pp. 188–217. Sh, age 29–30, writes a book and has a daughter but faces drought.
Chapter 9: U5, pp. 218–46. Sh breaks through in his work and in meeting the U rebels. Revolt on U is put down bloodily, Sh hides.
Chapter 10: A5, pp. 247–69. Sh, age ca. 33, reunites with Takver after four dry years, realizes what
is possession, and decides to found a printing "syndicate."
Chapter 11: U6, pp. 270–82. Sh in Terran Embassy on U. He has understood time and politics. The ansible equations will be broadcast to everybody.
Chapter 12: A6, pp. 283–305. Sh, age ca. 38, decides to go to U.
Chapter 13: U—>A, pp. 306–11. Sh returns in Hainish ship with prospect of unbuilding the wall around A.[a]

[a]I have read an interview by Le Guin, but I cannot find it again, in which she credits me for pointing out there should be a separate thirteenth chapter. I remember well reading the MS. of *TD* and two small textual changes I gingerly proposed (she accepted one and firmly rejected the other) but I do not remember this proposal. I do not doubt I committed it, and I shall gladly take whatever small credit thus accrues to me, though I much doubt Le Guin's highly colorful dramatization of our dialogue, which makes me out as much bolder with her than I would ever dare. As to chapter 1, it technically begins on A and thus might in a very formalized notation be rendered as $A + (A \rightarrow U_1)$. But I think this would be superfluous: it deals after all with going away from A.

interplay between the authorial explanatory voice and Shevek's experiences, which is increasingly slanted toward the latter and to my mind works admirably (though I shall have a not unimportant cavil at the end). The parallels between U and A chapters are expressly pointed out in the first pair of Table 3 but they continue until they are mentioned again as diverging in the fifth pair.

As a sometime drama critic, let me note that this plot uses in its own way, with temporal and thematic overlaps proper to a novel, the classical scheme of presentation – collision – crisis – (ambiguous) resolution. Taking into account also its intimate molding by time's quirks, we might say it is Aristotle twisted through Shevek's Temporal Theory.

Table 3: Narrative Pairings in *The Dispossessed*

First pair (chapters 1–2), fifty pages: presentation of being walled-in, walls as imprisonment, and the reaction to it, directly and through the education of Sh: in Urras, beginning with the confinement in the Urrasti ship, and in Anarres, as baby and youngster.
Second pair (chapters 3–4), fifty-one pages: overview, anthropological look from a height, mainly through Sh's interactions with the community of people and of physics.
Third pair (chapters 5–6), fifty-four pages: experience of living and working inside the society, getting deeper into it or behind the scenes, glimpsing the central problems such as power; Sh's first important contacts with people.
Fourth pair (chapters 7–8), sixty-three pages: attempts at breakout and frustration at obstacles: Vea, Sabul; first fruits but also drought.
Fifth pair (chapters 9–10), fifty-two pages: crisis, direct battering at walls – divergent possibilities in A (unbuilding difficult but feasible) and U (violent suppression); building the edifice of time.
Sixth pair (chapters 11–12), thirty-six pages: the walls are getting breached, the time theory and Sh get out of confinement.
Singleton round-off (chapter 13 – contrasting with chapter 1), six pages: walking through the wall;
"true voyage is return": open but hopeful ending.
(The first five pairs are roughly of the same size, while the last three chapters rush toward an end.)

3. Some Buttressing

Having set out this hypothesis, I had better substantiate it inductively. Alas, it is impossible to capture the richness of a true novel (rather than an extended long story, which many SF long prose fictions marketed as novels have been) into a critic's mesh, so this commentary can only suggest it by probes. I begin with the chronological beginning, chapter 2. (Chapter 1 is a kind of fortissimo overture to the book, an alluring taste for the reader to find out more.) It is divided into eight situations, instantaneous snapshots from the flow of time in and around Shevek.

Situation 1, pp .21–22: it begins – parallel to the famous opening sentence of chapter 1 and the book, "There was a wall" – with the paragraph: "In a square window in a white wall is the clear, bare sky. In the center of the sky is the sun." Shevek's father and the nursery matron discuss his permanent stay after the separation of parents. (Separation – and then need for reunion – is a running theme and image of the book; it applies analogously to people, planets, and instants of time.) Infant Shevek sits in the square of sunlight and has a fit of rage at being crowded out of it. It is a very rich situation, a rule in this book of richly observed or "thick" relationships shot through with sense-making. It gives us the first glimpse of Anarresti ethics: "Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share" – possessiveness is childish. It establishes the recurrent imagist equation of Shevek and the light, while his refusal to share it prefigures both his problems as highly gifted individual in conformist societies of different kinds and the symmetrical refusal of profiteers in both A and U to let him share the gift: "The baby … hid his face in the darkness of the lost sun."

Situation 2, pp. 23–25: Shevek, age eight, tells a children's Speaking-and-Listening circle his vision of Zeno's Paradox (if time is divisible, the arrow can never get to its target), is scolded by the adult pedagogue for not sharing understandable, two-way speech, and excluded for this "egoizing" (to share is another running, specifically Anarresti, theme). He finds comfort in thinking of the harmonies between the "cool and solid" numbers, which are always just, always in a balanced pattern.

Situation 3, pp. 25–27 (it could perhaps be called 2b, a continuation of 2 above; the intervals in my closely printed edition are not always clear): two

months later, Shevek, who had had to learn how to wait or endure time, gets from his father the logarithmic tables, and finds transcendence in mathematics; he dreams of a huge fearful wall barring his homecoming through a desert and destroyed by the number 1, "that was both unity and plurality," but can neither recover that piercing joy nor forget it.

Situation 4, pp. 27–32: Shevek, age 12, plays a game of "prison" with his friends Tirin, Bedap, and others. The prisoner is locked into an improvised dark space for a night, he beshits himself; Shevek vomits (as in 7: 186 in Urras, explained in 9: 219).

Situation 5, pp. 33–37: Shevek, age ca. 16, and three friends look at their moon, Urras, and argue about it; Tirin begins doubting how valid are today the Odonian movies of 150 years ago and why the PDC (Production and Distribution Coordination, the central institution on A) will not let anybody go there. With its rare focus on Tirin the artist – who had imagined the prison of situation 4, and who will be later psychically destroyed in asylum for his deviance – this could be called "another part of the prison."

Situation 6, pp. 37–43: at age 18, Shevek works in an afforestation group in the desert (a forest in a previous geological age). His interests and personality already set him apart. He glimpses in this project the Odonian principle of Causative Reversibility, "ignored by the Sequence school of physics currently respectable on Anarres." Sex rears its bewildering head, and he finds in one such experience another transcendence of self and time. A brief coda is constituted by a discussion with a travelling partner about sex, women, and possessing/possession.

Situation 7, pp. 43–47: Shevek, age 19, is back "home" at the Northsetting Regional Institute of the Noble and Material Sciences (scene of the first five situations, his upbringing). Authorial glimpse forward to his final Temporal Theory that asserts that "home," the return so important to Shevek, is not a point but a process melding transience and eternity. He finds his male friends mostly callow and women friends wary. An answer to his first paper on physics by Sabul, physicist at Abbenay, is waiting. His teacher pleads it is Shevek's duty to go to the center, but warns him that power is there; he doesn't (yet) understand.

Situation 8, pp. 47–50: the night before leaving, at a climactic party for Shevek, the group of friends discusses time and life. Shevek orates on

unavoidable suffering, on sharing it in solidarity but also attempting to go beyond it and forget the self – a high point of this chapter. Only Bedap and a girl with short hair fully agree. We later learn (6: 146) she was Takver and the speech was decisive for her life.

In this chapter, we are not merely following the hero's education in youth, and getting intense glimpses of his friends and A. It is also, richly, a sequence of metaphors – in a wide sense, that is, tropes – and analogies. I would approximately identify them as, in order of appearance (but then they go on through the novel, additively): (a) the difficulty of the seeker after light (situation 1); (b) his loneliness, both necessary and due to societal narrowness, and a way of resolving it through mathematical physics (situations 2–3); (c) showing and debating the prison, the darkness (situations 4–5); (d) the political is the epistemological, social or political activity is how we humans understand the world (here, causative reversibility); true journey is not only an arrow but also a circle bending back to its origin, an origin that one then finds changed; so it is a kind of spiral, as in his later Time Theory (situations 6–7); (e) a highly suggestive, though inconclusive, debate on the sense of life, on how to justify this world of too much pain (situation 8).

I note a repetition in this micro-example of the narrative macro-syntax of chapters, each of which is separate yet most are also twinned. Exceptions are the beginning and ending, which must be sensitive to other plotting needs. This might be a general narratological device of *TD*, but to establish this more probes would be necessary. At any rate, I think there would be a major difference at the macro-level. The value insights in this Anarresti chapter are mostly *additive* (e.g., chapter 4 shows a concrete prison and chapter 5 then generalizes or "abstracts" this by debate, a technique recommended by G.B. Shaw). To the contrary, I think the common denominator of each pair of chapters in Table 2 is mostly developed as Anarresti cognitive freedom-as-solidarity vs. Urrasti possessiveness, with the important proviso that possessiveness is infiltrating the freedom in unforeseen ways: the value insights are *contrastive* rather than additive.

In all, the chapter might perhaps be called "an introduction to Shevek's world and views": world as view and view of the world. This is then foregrounded at the beginning of the twinned chapters 3 and 4, as the view

from a height – from an imaginary dirigible (3: 52) and a literal one (4: 74), A being as always the open materialization of U but with contrasting value-horizons (Sh takes his looking down from dirigible on A as wonder and clarity, on U as confusion and lack of involvement). Musically speaking, chapter 1 has five movements, with a brief but very important tone-setting beginning (*Auftakt*) and a widening or crescendo with a clear culmination, after which the wave of sense subsides in a pause and we begin anew in chapter 3 (as well as 4) – understanding the "possessed" and the dispossessed society, always as Shevek's field of consideration and action. The sequence of thematico-analogic movements goes from the personal through the communal to the politico-epistemological, and finally to the metaphysical. I am not sure how representative this chapter is for the whole novel, and therefore whether the sequence indicates the growing importance of these four stages. I tend to doubt this as too "sequential," and note with relief that the metaphysical discussion is self-confessedly inconclusive. I believe polluted class humanity is not ready for serious, that is, cosmological metaphysics: if Urras (i.e., Earth) ever finds its way to Anarres, after some centuries we might begin to grow ready.

4. Simulsequentiality, or Preaching by Example

The recreatable causal temporality of events in the narration vs. its actual sequence as it unfolds for the reader, what the Russian Formalists called story (*sjuzhet)* and plot (*fabula*), are here foregrounded as systematically disjoined. The story may be reconstructed in linear time as: U1 to U6→A1 to A6→return; or, in the chapter numerations, 2–4–6–8–10–12→1–3–5–7–9–11–13. Yet two analogical, circular and/or timeless, movements contrast and complement the linearity, on what I shall call the *meso* (middle-sized) and *macro* (overall) levels.

On the meso level are the analogic pairs as shown in Table 2, where the great contrasts between U and A – Sh as growing and (mainly) adding wider understanding on A vs. Shevek as grown and (mainly) facing inimical maneuvers on U – are infiltrated by the common metaphoric tenor of each pair. This does not result in six or seven stories, for the common denominators or metaphors are themselves fitted into the double (A and

U) linear developments: the linear and circular movements are both two and one, they are a duality and unity, varying in a quite different shape the balancing of the yang-yin symbol. In a critical X-ray, the paired chapters would stand skeletally out as introductions of the metaphoric themes of walls (pair 1), cognitive overview (2), thick inside cognition (3), obstacles (4), assault on walls (5), and their breaching (6+7). The template for this sequence and for the overall liberating feel and horizon of *TD* might be section c) of chapter 2: both realizing there is a prison, often very concrete but always centrally consisting of what Blake called "mind-forged manacles," and acting against it, attempting to get out. In propertarian hypocrisy the prison might be a rich campus and colorful wrappings (and when this fails helicopter gunships as murderous enforcers), in Urrasti bleakness it might be concrete walls, in both cases they are so to speak consubstantial with false categorization and dogmatic prejudice. In fact, Anarres is, as Shevek comes to understand at the end, the truth of Urras: it is what the Formalists would call "the baring of the device" (of the ploy, proceeding, category) of power and repression so carefully hidden out of sight in wrapped-up Urras. Its bareness is also a poetic and cognitive metaphor, a cutting to the bone and showing of the joints, an X-ray. Metaphors are so indispensable and useful because they invoke sensually based evidence, validated by central human needs and desires, against the current ossified, often willfully faked, categories. They explode literal semantic and referential pertinence and propose a new, imaginative pertinence by rearranging categories that shape our experience. Metaphor sketches in, thus, lineaments of "another world that corresponds to other possibilities of existence, to possibilities that would be most deeply our own …" (Ricoeur, *Rule* 229).

One of Shevek's formulations of his time theory, perhaps the pithiest because put into a debate on U, runs:

> There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises (7: 180).

To unpack this a bit, adding some of his other terms: the arrow is dynamic becoming, which yet has no sense unless it feeds into a recognizable – changeable but sufficiently firm – being: in the case of humans, a person

and/or a society with needs in the present based on memories of the past and desires for the future. Both together constitute a unity-in-duality (or vice versa). One-sided change, such as the overheated bourgeois "progress" over, say, the last 150 years, is meaningless and thus destructive. Le Guin has been permanently fascinated by what Lévi-Strauss called the "cool" tribal societies (and she will come to rate them higher in her later works such as *Always Coming Home*, having despaired of progress altogether). However, their one-sided permanence is, as Shevek remarks, boring. Once we have eaten of the apple of knowledge, I would say, there is no way back to the "primitive communism" of tribe, animal or plant, repressed by physical necessities. We have the choice between growing class repression or libertarian communism on a higher rung of the spiral, such as the one Le Guin is attempting to get at in *TD*.

The macro-circle is constituted by the novel's whole, chapter 13 circling back on a higher level of understanding and achievement to chapter 1 in the novel, the A→U voyage coming back home to A. While a good way to think of the overall structure – which Le Guin might prefer – is as librations in a dynamic balance, the union of arrow and circle results also in Time's simulsequential spiral (here open-ended, ongoing in historical time). The circlings (the six pairs of chapters) open up to a spiral which we might optimistically think as going upward (Figure 5). The upward arrow of progress is not seen but implied; however, as I have argued, it could be represented by the dotted lines touching the left (A) and right-hand (U) side of the circles as drawn below. The arrow of historical time begins with the original choice by the Odonians to accept exile on A (to which I shall return in my cavil) somewhere below the beginning of the spiral, it points at the end to the future choices flowing out of Shevek's return with a representative of the Hainish, and includes everything in between. The spiral is an image out of dialectics, but I advance it with some hesitation, for the clean perfection of geometric curves much oversimplifies messy human relationships, and I don't know how to draw a fuzzy spiral. Most important, it shows the finished product without the process creating it: the spiral metaphor leaves out the element of choice, the bifurcations to which catastrophe theory speaks, lurking at many turns. It is useful only if Hegel's own religious connotations of an automatic, predestined course

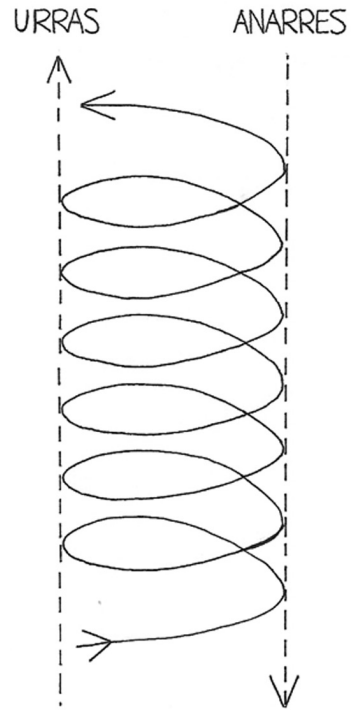

Figure 5: TD's *Simulsequential Spiral*

are refused. In perhaps the only useful instrument Po-Mo has left us, it is indispensable that the spiral be there as a model but it is also indispensable that it be "under erasure" – as it is in Marx, who simultaneously expects collapse of capitalism and works for revolution.

At any rate, the too neat spiral is in the novel balanced both by the complex, on the whole advancing but also often see-sawing meso-structures, and even more by the subtle yin-and-yang of the micro-level, well exemplified by the superb sentence I cited from the end of situation 1, "The baby … hid his face in the darkness of the lost sun." Thus, we are led to cognition by contraries – or (dare I say) by dialectic contradictions between and within people and chronotopes.

But what is the, or at least one, focus around which *TD* turns or librates? It might be found in one of its richest semantic clusters, that of *possession*, melding as it does the meanings of ownership and of something stronger than obsession: a subjection to demoniacal powers (in some ways a counterweight to Dostoevsky's anti-nihilist *Besy*, literally *The Demons*, translated into English as *The Possessed*). The possessors possess both things (on U) and power over others (on U and, more rarely but crucially, in the power center of A). Yet the coin has another side: things (i.e., reified human relationships) are in the saddle and ride mankind – or manunkind, as e.e. cummings would phrase it:

> You the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes – the wall, the wall (7: 184).

The terminological family of "possessed" is a set of brilliant portmanteau words, but it has a not unimportant drawback. The U possession as capitalist alienation of and from central characteristics of humanity calls forth on A a dispossession that is simultaneously a/ lack of property ownership, b/ lack of demonic possession (class power), and c/ lack of things. The last term of the triad, my c/, is on the whole negative – as testified by the permanent siege mentality on A enforced by the drought and culminating in the near-famine of chapter 8. Politico-economically speaking, the last term of the triad muddles up the positive meanings of dispossession.[9] Le Guin's equally wondrous neologism "propertarian" (noun and adjective) has an analogous drawback: it is a mixture of legal and ethical language, without political economy, so that it might be mistaken for ascetic refusal of worldliness. I am not sure the word "capitalism" is ever used in *TD*: only its consumer effects are shown in Shevek's astonishment at money, the shopping mall, etc.

9 There are at least two further semantic variations to be mentioned here: (A) a further positive meaning of possession, arising in and from shamanic possession of or by the goal (Radin 132); but it would scarcely fit Shevek to say he was possessed by the Time Theory; (B) the ironic danger, materializing on A, of its becoming again possessed by propertarianism and domination.

The question that follows is, in theological language, why do the wicked prosper? It is not a minor question, for no monotheism has so far been able to answer it – from Job through the Parable of the Tares to the Dr. Faust us legend – without inventing Satan. In anthropological terms, the questions in *TD* would be: is there a necessary or only an accidental connection, first, between anarchist bareness as well as the immediate readability of direct human relationships on A and its meager, largely desert ecology (see Jameson's pioneering meditation on *TD*, now in *Archaeologies* 155–59, and many passages in *TD*, perhaps most explicitly in the Shevek-Bedap discussion of chapter 6: 131–39); second, between the lush fertility and the manifold propertarian (capitalist) wraps and traps of U; and third, between the two planetary situations, encompassed in the image of twins circling about each other?[10] Surely William Morris was right when he called for a radical diminution of unnecessary – usually kitsch – things accompanied by useless toil ("Useful"); yet, must capitalism be always (as here) associated with abundance, however unjustly gotten and distributed, and communism with scarcity, however puritanically useful as stimulus in adversity and heroically battled against by a united collective? Here we get into the domain of competing social systems and ways of life, a properly historico-political critique, which I shall face at the end of this chapter. To be able to do so, I need a long detour.

Part 2. Some Propositions About Cognition in Science and Fiction[11]

0. Le Guin's *TD* is that actually rather rare thing, a real *science fiction* novel: a work of fiction seriously exploring science or systematic cognition – both as a human way of knowing and as human social activity. To understand this better, I proceed here with a discussion of cognition.

10 It would be instructive to compare *TD* with the first – the only readable – *Dune* novel by Frank Herbert. I heard a talk by him in Berkeley 1965 where he claimed the desert grew from his newspaper writing about the Oregon deserts (not too far from where Le Guin lives). He blew them up, of course, into a super-Arabia that mixes T.E. Lawrence, Aramco, and his own Baroque galactic twists at the borders of Fascist sword-and-sorcery. *TD* is in almost all ways an anti-*Dune*.

11 Sections 1–3 here are a much abridged summary of a long discussion in my "On the Horizons."

I wish to deal with two varieties of science: one, the positive older sister (below called "S1"); the other, the troublesome, and let's say for now, problematic younger brother ("S2"). But I need to introduce this by first considering science as a way of asking how to understand the universe, that is, science in terms of epistemology. I shall then come to fiction as cognition.

2.1. Central Orientation Points for Epistemology

I am not aware of a systematic basis for epistemology we could today use, but I postulate that our interpretations of what is knowledge or not, and how can we know that we know, are largely shaped by the "framework of commitments" we bring to them. Catherine Z. Elgin usefully formulated in 1982 a strategic "soft" skepticism that still allows such commitments:

> Philosophy once aspired to set all knowledge on a firm foundation. Genuine knowledge claims were to be derived from indubitable truths by means of infallible rules. The terms that make up such truths were held to denote the individuals and kinds that constitute reality, and the rules for combining them … were thought to reflect the real order of things. – This philosophical enterprise has foundered. Indubitable truths and infallible rules are not to be had.

Instead, thinking always begins with working approximations based on "our best presystematic judgments on the matter at hand" (Elgin 183). As we advance toward understanding, we often discover these approximations are untenable or insufficient – but there is no other ensemble to be had.

Scientists of a positivist inclination will discourse on evidence, in the sense of proof. Evidence is important, but it is always "theory-laden," determined by "our conception of the domain and … our goals in systematizing it …" (Elgin 184–5). The *New York Times* claims it brings "All the news that's fit to print," but who determines what is fit of the news? Alternatively, a tradition from the more radical Skeptics through the Post-Modernists and extreme constructionists has questioned whether there is a reality to be known and whether, if it is there, we could know it or talk

about it. Neither tradition is satisfactory. The horizon I am sketching is characterized by Elgin and Nelson Goodman in 1988 as "reject[ing] both absolutism and nihilism, both unique truth and the indistinguishability of truth from falsity" (3). A univocal world – *the* fixed reality out there – has been well lost, together with the Unique Final Truth (divine or asymptotically scientific) and other Onenesses of the monotheist family. A sense of panic at the loss of this clear world, at the loss of theological certitude, not only permeates dogmatists of all religious and lay kinds, but has also engendered its symmetrical obverse in an absolutist relativism. How is a third way possible beyond this bind?

It can begin by recognizing that right and wrong persist, but that rightness can no longer be identified with correspondence to a ready-made, monotheistic Creation, but must be created by us, with skill and responsibility. Goodman and Elgin think that the term "truth" as usually conceived is too solidly embedded in faiths and certitudes of monotheistic allegiance to be safe and useful; categories and argument forms that are products of continual human cognition, on the other hand, are better instruments for practical use, testable for situational rightness. Truth is strictly subordinate to rightness in this approach, and this rightness is dependent on our various symbol systems (see Aronowitz vii–xi and passim). One consequence is that science loses its epistemic primacy: like art and everyday perception, "[it] does not passively inform upon but actively informs a world" (Elgin 52–3). The arts and sciences overtly repose on intuitions, which are for science buried in their axioms as indubitable certainties. Whether you prefer Marx's or Balzac's description of nineteenth-century France will depend on your general or even momentary interests, but they're in no way either incompatible or subsumed under one another: and both are cognitive.

Sketching an operative epistemological way can further proceed by recognizing that there are still some logical ways if not of defining truth then at least of defining untruth (Goodman and Elgin 136). As Orwell might have put it, all opinions are constructed and relatively wrong or limited, but some are more wrong than others. This holds pre-eminently for those I would call *monoalethist* (from *aletheia*, truth): all those – from monotheists to lay dogmatists (Fascists, Stalinists, and believers in the Invisible Hand of the Market) – who hold they have the Absolute Truth,

including the belief that relativism is absolute (see more in essay 16). Only belief in the absolute right – Haraway's "God-trick" ("Situated" 589) – is absolutely wrong.

2.2. Cognition Is Constituted by and as History: Multiple Sources and Methods

In a remarkable passage right at the beginning of *Works and Days*, Hesiod invents the myth (or allegory) of the two Erises, the benign and the malign one (I: 11–26). The bad Strife favors wars and civil discords. But the firstborn is the good Strife, whom Zeus has placed at the roots of the earth, for she generates emulation: one vase-maker or poem-singer envies the other, the lazy and poor peasant imitates the industrious and richer one. This *polar splitting of concepts* seems to me a central procedure of critical reason, dissatisfied with the present categorizations and trying to insinuate opposed meanings under the same term. I shall adopt this Hesiodean procedure for knowledge and then science.

The principal ancestors to this endeavor may be found in Marx and to a minor, but still significant degree in Nietzsche. I take from Nietzsche that belief in the correspondence of intellect to thing/s – an Aristotelian correspondence of knowledge to reality – is an ideal impossible to fulfill and leads to faking and skepticism. This Truth is a lie, and whenever erected into a system, as in religion and in Galileian science, compels lying. Any cognition developed against this fixed horizon partakes for Nietzsche of a huge, finally deadly "illusion" (*Zur Genealogie* 128). The constructivist account, on the other hand, is a creative transference of carrying across, in Greek *meta-phorein*, whence his famous hyperbolic statements that knowing is "Nothing but working with the favourite metaphors" (*Philosophy* xxxiii). For Nietzsche wisdom arises out of the knowledge of nescience, which, as distinct from self-satisfied ignorance, marks the will toward the unknown: "And only on this by now solid and granite basis of nescience may science have arisen, the will for knowing on the basis of a much more

powerful will, the will for *unknowing*, for the uncertain, the untrue! Not as its opposite, but – as its improvement!" (*Jenseits* 24). Nietzsche is not necessarily a source for Le Guin, she rightly prefers the Dao, but nescience and non-being are important ideas for her. Yet take care: in terms of Le Guin's worlds and ours, these horizons are the opposite of the illusionistic one, they rule out angels, UFOs, Mickey Mice, and the Invisible Hand of the Market. Nescience demolishes The Monolithic Truth while preserving verifiability for any given situation, and denies the illusions that so often lead to fanatical belief.

More useful still is Marx, whose relevant views I discuss at length elsewhere (Chapter 15 in this book and "On the Horizons"; see also Aronowitz, especially chapters 2 and 3). Suffice it here to say that Marx had a dual view: on the one hand he rejected positivistic approaches, pouring his scorn on the falsities of bourgeois political economy, but simultaneously he chastised all attempts to subject science or cognition to "a point of view from the outside, stemming from interests outside science" (*MEW* 26.2: 112). *Capital* itself is presented as a project of "free scientific research," which assumes the task to clarify the inner relationships of the phenomena it deals with without imposition from the outside, and in particular against "the Furies of private interest" (*MEW* 23:16). His two major, consubstantial cognitive insights are first, that societal injustices are based on exploitation of other people's living labor; but second, the insight that the proper way to talk about the capitalist exploitation which rules our lives is not in the *a priori* form of dogma, a closed system, but in the *a posteriori* form of critique. Legitimate cognition is epistemically grounded in the process it describes, and strategically developed by developing and articulating a radically deviant stance against a dominant in a given historical situation (see Marcuse). After Marx, it should be clear that "All modes of knowing presuppose a point of view … Therefore, the appropriate response to [this is] … the responsible acknowledgement of our own viewpoints and the use of that knowledge to look critically at our own and each others' opinions." (Levins 182) The rightness of a theoretical assertion depends on evidence as interpreted by the assertor's always sociohistorical needs, interests, and values.

Approaching science from this epistemological basis, I suggest the Hesiodean procedure of splitting the institutionalized horizons of

science-as-is fully off from those of a potentially humanized science-as-wisdom, which would count its casualties as precisely as the US armed forces do for their own (but not for those they bomb). I wish I could call the latter "science" and the former something else, perhaps technoscience, but I do not want to give up either on science or on technology. I shall provisionally call the firstborn, good science "Science 1" (S1), and the present one, whose results are mixed but seem to be increasingly steeped in the blood and misery of millions of people, "Science 2" (S2). S1 is always situational and situated, S2 pretends to be timelessly valid. The medieval theologians would have called them *sapientia* vs. *scientia,* though in those early days they optimistically believed *scientia* could be tamed by the former, by knowledge which was the highest intellectual virtue. This splitting can be philosophically justified by Hegel's observation that truth as such is essentially a cognitive process, so that life (social practice) has to be figured in (469).

These are ideal types only, intermixed in any actual effort in most varied proportions: also, the beginnings of S2 are in S1, and amid its corruption, it retains certain of its liberatory birthmarks to the present day. Nonetheless, the fixation on *domination* and the consubstantial *occultation of the knowing subject* in S2 "is a particular moment in the division of labor." The avoidance of capricious errors "does [not] protect the scientific enterprise as a whole from the shared biases of its practitioners." In sum, "The pattern of knowledge in science is … structured by interest and belief … Theories, supported by megalibraries of data, often are systematically and dogmatically obfuscating." It is not by chance that "major technical efforts based on science have [led] to disastrous outcomes: pesticides increase pests; hospitals are foci of infection; antibiotics give rise to new pathogens; flood control increases flood damage; and economic development increases poverty" (Levins 180, 183, and 181).

Bourgeois civilization's main way of coping with the unknown is aberrant, said Nietzsche, because it transmutes nature into concepts with the aim of mastering it as a more or less closed system of concepts. It is not that the means get out of hand but that the mastery – the wrong end – *requires* wrong means of aggressive manipulation. S2 is not only a cultural revolution but also a latent or patent *political* upheaval. The scientific, finally, is the political.

There are strong analogies and probably causal relations between a determinist "search for truth, proclaimed as the cornerstone of progress" and "the maintenance of a hierarchical, unequal social structure," within which capitalist rationalization has created the large stratum of "administrators, technicians, scientists, educators" it needed (Wallerstein, *Historical* 82–3). In particular, it created the whole new class of *managers*. As Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* pointed out, "to manage" originally meant to train a horse in his paces, in the *manège* (67). F.W. Taylor did exactly this – he broke "the men," calling in his *Shop Management* for "a planning department to do the thinking for the men" (Braverman 128). Later, since "machinery faces workers as *capitalised* domination over work, and the same happens for science" (Marx, *Theorien* 355), control was built into the new technologies. During the nineteenth century, "science, as a generalized social property" (S1) was replaced by "science as a capitalist property at the very center of production." This is "the scientifico-technical revolution" (Braverman 156), while technoscientific ideology becomes, as Jameson notes, "a blind behind which the more embarrassing logic of the commodity form and the market can operate" (*Singular* 154). Already by the early 1960s, 3/4 of scientific R&D in the USA was corporate, financed directly or through tax write-offs by the Federal government, that is, by money taken from tax-payers, while profits went to corporations (164–6). It is almost a century by now that scientific research is mainly determined by expected profits to the detriment of S1 (see Kapp 208ff.), where it is not neglected for purely financial speculation. It has become "commodity scientism" (see the discussion in chapter 8, section 4.1).

The supposition that science does not deal in values, which began to be widely doubted only after the Second World War, had as "its actual function to protect two systems of values: the professional values of the scientists, and the predominant [status quo] values of society as they existed at that moment …." (Graham 9, and see 28–29). The stances of "objectivity" and erasure of the subject actively fostered a treatment of people (workers, women, patients, consumers) as objects to be manipulated as a part of nature. As a hierarchical institution devoted to manipulation, S2 was easily applicable to "human resources": the Nazi doctors' experiments were only an extremely overt and acute form of such *Herrschaftswissen*, knowledge used for domination.

We must ruefully accept, with due updating, Gandhi's harsh verdict about science: "Your laboratories are diabolic unless you put them at the service of the rural poor" (Gandhigram). S2 is Power (over people), S1 is Creativity (within people). In this view science is a usable and misusable ensemble of cognitions, not an absolute truth we can approach asymptotically. It is principally a "by whom" and "for what" – an "impure" productive relationship between (for example) workers, scientists, financiers, and other power-holders, as well as an institutional network with different effects upon all such different societal groups, which can and must become less death-oriented. S1 aspires to holistic understanding, which would englobe and steer analytical knowledge (Goodman and Elgin 161–64). This would not at all diminish its impressive status as institution; on the contrary, S1 would finally be as truly liberating, both for its creators and its users, as its best announcers have, from Bacon to Wiener and Gould, claimed it should be. It could at last embark not only on the highly urgent damage control (more on it below) but also on a full incorporation of aims for acting that would justify Nietzsche's rhapsodic expectation: "An experimenting would then become proper that would find place for every kind of heroism, a centuries-long experimenting, which could put to shame all the great works and sacrifices of past history" (*Fröhliche* 39) – truly, a joyous science. It would have to ask: what questions have not been asked in the last 400 years, and for whose profit have we ignored them?

2.3. Whither Science Now?

In 1932, sensing the worse to come (which has not ceased coming), Brecht asked:

> Faced with all these machines and technical arts, with which humanity could be at the beginning of a long, rich day, shouldn't it feel the rosy dawn and the fresh wind which signify the beginning of blessed centuries? Why is it so grey all around, and why blows first that uncanny dusk wind at the coming of which, as they say, the dying ones die? (GBFA 21: 588).

He went on for the rest of his life to worry at this image of false dawn through the example of Galileo. His final judgment was that Galileo (reason, science, the intellectuals) failed, and helped the night along, by not allying himself with a political dawn-bringer. But then, we might ask today, where was a revolutionary class or historical block who wanted such an ally, and where indeed was Brecht to find it after 1932?

So, what would an updated, sophisticated S1 mean – how can we really get a science for (the) people, science wedded to easing human life and to a humane quality of life? This is a question dealt with by fictional cognition in *TD*. For our world, I shall suggest (in cahoots with Le Guin) that our first necessity is radical social justice, so that rethinking would get a chance.

Second, we must truly learn the lesson that our technical competence, based on an irresponsible S2 yoked to the profit and militarism that finance it, vastly exceeds our understanding of its huge dangers for hundreds of millions of people and indeed for the survival of vertebrate ecosphere (cockroaches and tube worms might survive). To survive, we imperatively have to establish and enforce a graduated system of *risk assessment* (Beck) *and damage control* based on the negentropic welfare of the human community and the eco-system in which we are embedded. This means retaining, and indeed following consistently through, Merton's famous four basic norms of science – universalism, skepticism, public communism, and personal disinterestedness (see also Collingridge 77–85 and 99ff.) – as well as strict scientific accountability, adding to the sense of not falsifying findings the sense of being responsible for their consequences. This further means that science should be practiced from the word go, its teaching, as being most intimately co-shaped by the overriding concerns of what and who such an activity is for: "A stronger, more adequate notion of objectivity would require methods for systematically examining all the social values shaping a particular research process …" (Haraway, *Modest* 36, building on Harding; see also Wallerstein, *End* 164–67, 238–41, and 264–65).

Major scientific projects should not be allowed to become "in house" *faits accomplis* without a public debate that follows the juridical norm of hearing more than one side: "Every decision involves the selection among an agenda of alternative images of the future, a selection that is guided by some system of values" (Boulding 423). Hence, all individuals, including

corporate "fictive individuals," involved in screening, testing, and monitoring should provide the "bias statement" demanded already a third of a century ago by the American Academy of Sciences: a list of all previous major research funding, occupations, investments – and even public stands on political issues (cited in Collingridge 186, with disfavor).

These suggestions are just the beginning of a first pass at a solution. Among the huge gaps in my quick survey is lack of discussion on who should establish and administer such reviews and controls, and how to prevent an unnecessarily cumbersome bureaucracy to take root. These are however not beyond human ingenuity, if transparency and democratic accountability are achieved.

2.4. Narrations in Science and Fiction

Kant had a major difficulty in the *Critique of Judgment*: judgments deal with particulars, which is the only logical category to be actual. But how is one to account for any particular, notoriously contingent and as it were anarchic, for which the general concept has still to be found? He sometimes finessed this by using examples, which hide a generalized allegory: the particular Achilles is the example of Courage in general. This welcome subterfuge pointed already to the indefensibility of claims for science as the best (or only) knowledge, since an example partakes both of image and of an implied story, as Achilles before Troy. It reintroduced history as a story, enabling us to understand why the *Iliad* was an unsurpassed cognitive fount for the Hellenes. It follows that science and other ways of cognition (say art) do not relate as "objective" vs. "subjective" (or strong male vs. weak female), but as human constructions guided by different constraints for coherence and different conventions of anchoring or "entrenchment." As Bruner argues, the arts are *differently entrenched* from sciences: they implicitly cultivate hypotheses, each set of which requires a Possible World but not the widest possible extension for applying that set in our World Zero, that is, testability in the scientists' sense; rather, they must be recognizable as "true to conceivable experience" or verisimilar (52 and passim). However, I would argue that arts quite compensate for this

by showing in "thick" detail what may be a lived truth of a conceivable experience, or how to both contextually arrive at cognition and how to live with it further.

For one thing, sciences may have a "long-duration" additiveness, until the paradigm and the powerful institution supporting it changes. Science deals with univocal and stereotypic contrivances or arrangements – that is, those in theory repeatable with identical effects (though every engineer knows practice is different). Yet this horizon is not unknown in art: think of Athenian or Renaissance performance, supported (like science) by institutions geared to foreseeable results. This is also the ideal horizon of the more decentralized institutionalization of the publishing of poetry or the novel in periodicals and books, operating with statistical projections. Institutionalization then turns out to be largely necessary for both, but not necessarily from top down: from bottom up is the tradition of S1 and most art. When one gets down to the non-institutionalized creator or artifact, the univocity wavers: in the case of people, projects and stereotypes (e.g., genre conventions, from the epic poem to SF) are enmeshed with the creator's complex past and present histories, with not quite foreseeable choices. The novel has since its birth, and poetry has since the Romantics, played off constant cognitive innovation against the generic enablement, the New against the recognizable. A computer is foreseeable, a human brain is not. Science is what can be fully repeated, art what can not.

What are then a few of the relevant differences and similarities between the cognitive horizon and route of science (S1) and of creative writing, poetry in the wider sense? The horizon, source, and finally the aim (the Supreme Good) of both is to my mind the same: making life, that precious and rare cosmic accident, richer and more pleasurable; fighting against entropy by making sense, in different ways, of different segments of nature (cf. Suvin, "Introductory"), very much including human relationships. In brief, both are cognitive tools and pursuits. But more particularly, both participate in the definition of *poiesis* which Plato seems to have been the first to propose: "action causing something to emerge from non-being to being" (*Symposium* 205b). Against his upper-class snobbery, Aristotle pointed out this entails that any *tekhne*, "art and craft," is deeply akin to ethico-political praxis in that its field

is "that which might also be otherwise," a *hexis poietike* (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.i and VI.4: 1140a), a creative stance or bearing of potential novelty, of open possibility. This *tekhne,* an artful third way beyond the determinism-chance split**,** relates to technique as S1 does to S2 (see Castoriadis 231–35).

Therefore, both S1 and poetry deal with *situations* against a horizon of human interest and evaluation. The formalizations of S2 wish to taboo this horizon and to erect the very specialized, fenced-in lab as the exemplary situation-matrix extrapolatable to reality (which then fails immediately and obviously in all social and biological studies, say primate research). The chronotope of an S2 experiment is manipulated so as to be mathematically explainable, the human agents must be kept out. Yet the situations of both fiction and today's science are constructed or taken up for (different but converging) purposes co-defined by the interests of the subject constructors. Each has necessarily a formal closure – involving among other matters a beginning, middle, and end, as Aristotle phrased it for plays – but they are often open-ended, and their multiplicity is always such. Further, a longer work, a theory or a novel, is articulated like a chain or a tapeworm, in a series of delimited events which stand together (this is a literal translation of Aristotle's *systasis pragmaton*) as segments to result in as final unity. When, in several branches of quantum mechanics and similarly in catastrophe theory, a whole battery of models is regularly used, and "no one thinks that one of these is the whole truth, and they may be mutually inconsistent" (Hacking 37), the differences to Balzac's *Comédie humaine* series or the set (the macro-text) constituted by the poetry of – say – Byron, Shelley, and Keats remain obvious, but the overall formal similarities as cognitive pursuits do not deserve to be slighted either.

I shall conclude with a pertinent excerpt from a longer discussion in one of my previous books: formally speaking, "atom" is the name of an agent in a story about "chemistry," just as "Mr Pickwick" is the name of an agent in a story about "the Pickwick Club" (Harré 89), though there are different rules of storytelling in the two cases. "[Theoretical] fictions must have some degree of plausibility, which they gain by being constructed in the likeness of real things," concludes the middle-of-the-road historian of science Harré (98). If we take the example of literary and scientific

"realism," we find they are consubstantial products of the same attitude or bearing, the quantifying this-worldliness of bourgeois society. This is a contradictory stance, with great strengths (obvious from Cervantes and Fielding on) based on looking steadily at some central directional lines of this world, and increasingly great dangers based on the possessive reification of bourgeois atomized individualism. The dangers surface when institutionally sanctified science stakes out a claim to being the pursuit of *the whole truth* in the form of *certainty*, while the apparently weaker and certainly more modest Dickens evades this *hybris*. S2 science likes to think of itself as deductive. However, as a planet's map is regulated and shaped by the grid of cartographic projection, so is any system based on a deductive principle, for example, the Aristotelian excluded middle or the Hegelian necessarily resolved dialectical contradiction. And this principle is also a kind of meta-reflection about, or key to the method of, the system that is in its (obviously circular) turn founded on and deduced from it. When a philosophical or scientific system develops in the form of a finite series of propositions culminating in a rounded-off certainty, its form is finally not too different from the nineteenth-century "well-made," illusionistic stage play; no wonder, for they both flow out of the Positivist orientation, where decay of value leads to despair. The Lady with the Camellias and the Laws of Thermodynamics are sisters under the skin: both show a beautifully necessary death.

2.5 The Poet's Politics: Thinking as Experience

Poetry or fiction always implies a reader standing for a collective audience, ideally his/her whole community (this is foregrounded in plays). It was the accepted norm not only for ancient Greece but also for Leibniz or Kant that such creations in words reach some transmittable understanding of human relationships, so that Baumgarten called his foundational *Aesthetica* of 1750 the "science of sensual cognition." In proportion to its coherence, richness, and novelty a work of art gives

shape and voice to a previously uncognized, mute and non-articulated, category of being – that is, of human relationships to other people and the universe. For many poets it then became logical and ethical to think of translating such cognition into politics as concrete human relationships of power.

How may artistic creators *professionally* participate in politics? This was no problem in the era of Homer, Alcman or Solon but became complicated when political units grew larger as well as more acutely based on divergent class interests and the attendant oppression of a major part of the body politic. Ever since the advent of class society, tales, romances, ballads, love songs, have been principally a plebeian delight, often transmitted orally. Plato clearly felt poets as worrisome competitors to his philosopher-king and advocated banning all those who did not fit his norms. After many painful experiences, including the splendid but today not often applicable attempts of the Romantics to either participate directly as bards of revolt or turn away totally from politics (which means leaving it to the status quo), we may today follow the lead by Rancière (but see on poetry as cognition also Spivak 115ff.) and posit something like the following:

The poet-creator can (in fact, cannot but) participate in politics but only paradoxically. This means, literally, that she is one who doubts the reigning commonplace opinions, one who swerves from them by infringing old usages and meanings and, implicitly or explicitly (this is a matter of situation and personal temperament), creating new ones. Epicurus' ruling principle of the atoms swerving from the automatically straight path may stand as the great ancestor of all creative methods and possibilities (see Chapter 15 in this book); from Epicurus' interpreter Lucretius it passed on – via Cyrano – to Swift, Wells, and thence lay into the foundations of SF.

Yet an operative, efficient or creative paradox is inherent in language (and this is foregrounded in poetry). Sensually perceived reality contains only particulars. However, this cannot be fixed and formulated in language without an indispensable anchoring in the general. Both are wonderful, necessary, and unavoidable tools of cognition; yet dialectically, when isolated, both the particular concrete and the general abstraction

are alienated from the plenitude of reality which is in feedback with human understanding. Therefore, as a place of useful thinking (not sundered from feeling), verse and prose poetry – and SF – have often been a different but converging mode of cognition (*alter non alius),* that filled in the voids left by institutionalized science and institutionalized philosophy, and of course by most institutionalized politics. The latter use generalization, irremediably wedded to concepts, which cannot fully account for the relationship between people and nature, the finite and the infinite. Symmetrically obverse, sensual representation focuses on the particular as immediately apparent and needs generalizing tools (both concepts and figures such as allegory) that go beyond the here and now. Poetic creation sutures conceptual thought to justification from recalled immediate sensual, bodily experience which is (thus far) much more difficult to falsify or disbelieve.

This creative stance, however, immediately leads to an intimately personal paradox of living in politics as an anti-politics. All that is commonly taken for politics – for us, say, since the effects of the anti-fascist wars, such as peace and the Welfare State, have been largely or fully expunged – is alien and inimical, where not actively threatening and deadly. Where personality is valued for and as consumption and carefully shaped phrases pertain increasingly to mendacious advertising, art has to upset. Our immediate major poetic ancestor, Rimbaud (in a filiation beginning with many Romantics and Baudelaire), was led to exasperation at having to reconcile his deep hatred of the bourgeoisie and existing society with the irrefragable fact of having to breathe and experience within it:

> … industrialists, rulers, senates:
> Die quick! Power, justice, history: down with you!
> This is owed to us. Blood! Blood! Golden flame!
> All to war, to vengeance, to terror …. Enough!
> … I'm there, I'm still there. ("Qu'est-ce pour nous …," 113)

The obverse of this aporia (*the assez* vs. *j'y suis toujours*: enough of these horrors, but I am still *there* – embroiled in, amid, and by them) is Thomas More's great coinage of utopia: the radically different good place which is in our sensual experience not here, but must be cognized – today,

on pain of extinction. What is not here, Bloch's Yet Unknown, is almost always first adumbrated in fiction, most economically in verse poetry. From many constituents of the good place, I shall here focus, as does Rancière (92–93), on freedom – Wordsworth's "Dear Liberty" (*Prelude* l. 3) which translates the French revolutionary term of *liberté chérie* – that then enables security, order, creativity, and so on. It is of freedom that Rimbaud's *Boat* is drunken: the method or *epistemic principle* of great modern poetry from him on (and prose too, in somewhat differing ways), is *freedom as possibility of things being otherwise*. This is to be understood by interaction between what is being said and how it is being said, in a consubstantiality of theme and stance. Poetic freedom is a historically situated, political experience of the sensual, which is necessarily also polemical swerve from and against the *doxa*, in favor of fresh cognition. The common, brainwashed understanding includes much that has in the past truly been liberating politics but has retained only a few impoverished slogans from its heroic ages (the liberal, communist, and anti-fascist ones) when it directly flowed out of human senses. Therefore, "creators have to retrace the line of passage that unites words and things" (Rancière); and in prose, I would add, the line that unites human figures and spacetimes, as we see in *TD* and the desire, personified in Shevek, for "a landscape inhabitable by human beings" (*TD* 10: 268).

Part 3. *The Dispossessed* Seen as Fictional Cognition – Laudation with a Cavil

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I have long been proposing that we treat SF as loose modern parables or *exempla*. If this is the privileged way for understanding SF texts, is Shevek the parable's vehicle, on the order of Jesus's Mustard Seed? And what is then the tenor, the worldly and therefore imperfect (ambiguous) Kingdom of Heaven he may be the seed of and for? What is Shevek more

precisely an example of or exemplary for? I shall first focus on him as the central signifying figure of *TD* and then on what his course signifies.

1. Shevek's Situations and the Binary Librations

Critics of *TD* have often accounted for its plot by following the education and struggle for freedom of Shevek. But as always in Le Guin, and in all proper anthropology, he is "A person seen … in a landscape" ("Science Fiction" 87). He is obviously *en situation*, an instance of what Haraway was to recommend as "situated knowledge." Shevek is centrally an interactor with and interpreter of his twin worlds. He is that in relation to what we (but not *TD*) wrongly separate into the categories of freedom and cognition; discussing Enlightenment, Kant quite unambiguously defines political freedom as "to make public use of one's reason at every point" (4). Perhaps the central duality or binary of this novel is: how does the individual person's urge for these Siamese twins, that is, for unbuilding walls, fare on both worlds, the anarchist and the capitalist one; how is it both modifying and being modified by them?

I shall therefore neglect here, with one brief exception, the interesting characteristics balancing Shevek's exemplariness, making him humanly fallible and believable even while he is outgrowing them, such as a self-reliance bordering on egocentrism even while it is done in the service of the Cause (physics as freedom), a puritanic narrowness making for loneliness in the first two chapters on A, and so on. The exception is the Shevek-Takver binary, of which I shall mainly consider its wondrous lyrical inception (6: 145–54). There would be much to infer from it about *TD* as focused not only on clarity and knowledge but also, consubstantially, on passion and dark suffering. However, I shall approach Takver through her two Tinguelyan mobiles – airy sculptures of wire suspended from the ceiling, the "Occupations of Uninhabited Space," contrasting Shevek's pre-Takver void, and later the "Inhabitations of Time," complementary to his theoretical inhabitation of it. They show how the binary couple's unity is one of separate and complementary equals, Takver the biologist bringing in the immediate life-oriented presentness as the convex

of Shevek's concave long-range abstractions in physics. She is Shevek's other illumination beside cosmology: the whole final third of chapter 6 is suffused by an unearthly radiance, rising in the dark as the silvery Moon (Urras) does and piercing it, like the joy between them, to propagate as well as celebrate clarity. This relationship comes to a head in the pillow-talk coda on being in the middle of life vs. looking at it "from the vantage point of death" (154). True, a separatist sectarian might note that the two characterizations are based on a variant of the hegemonic ascription of male and female qualities, say female concreteness vs. male abstraction. But first, the basis is not the whole beautiful edifice, there is much more in the text to contradict any banal polarization. And second, hegemony also means "a lived system of meanings and values" (Williams 110), in tension between ideology and utopia. The Takver-Shevek pair is a mini-utopia, an ethical harmony quite analogous to the final simulsequentiality theory. No ambiguities in either.[12]

I now regretfully pass over the thickly populated world of A to focus on Shevek. Centrally, he is of the family of Sun Heroes, bringers of the light and slayers of pestilential dragons. Light is of course the opposite of blindness (as in Oedipus and Lear), it is knowledge of oneself as part and parcel of the world as society and as universe. I mentioned that the very first situation of the book, the baby in the sun ray, begins to establish the strong imagery of light as the (physical and cognitive) clarity and "difficult to arrive at simplicity"[13] which recurs often – sometimes as light reflected in Shevek's face or eyes (see 2: 45 and 11: 280) or ideas that crave light (3: 58) or his transparent

12 My original plan for a commentary to *TD* included a section demolishing Samuel R. Delany's "To Read *The Dispossessed*." I believe he has not only failed to read most of what is there, but that the few elements he focuses on and blames, such as heterosexuality and ongoing identities, are those which diverged from his own writerly practice and ideology, so that it is (to put it mildly) very ungenerous to imply everybody should write like himself. Lack of space prevented me from doing a detailed anti-commentary. I am not totally displeased at this, for two reasons. I hope my analysis shows the untenability of his pseudo-destructions. I would also not enjoy pointing out the glaring sectarianisms of a writer I have read with enjoyment and respect, though to respect creative truth it probably should be done.

13 This is one of Brecht's definitions of communism in the poem "Praise of Communism" (11: 234). I hope and trust he would in the 1970s not have withheld the appellative from the equally anti-authoritarian, anarcho-communist *TD*.

moral personality (6: 146). Yet suns and light are not quite the same after Relativity Theory: light dare not forget (nor does Shevek) it is the left hand of darkness, as life is of death, about which I shall have more to say at the end of this sub-section. And heroes are not the same after socialism and feminism (cf. Le Guin's pendulum swing away, "Carrier Bag" 167–69): they are no more given by mythological decree but have to struggle through epic choices, they are Light *Seekers*, a two-legged permanent revolution incompatible with a macho killer role (to my mind *TD* is unambiguously feminist).

Nonetheless, Shevek is also a founding hero, renewer of Odo's correct but corrupted message (see 4: 88), inaugurator of communist freedom in physical theory and (perhaps) in social practice. Like many heroes, he has to pass through a desert exile, first on A (the physical desert in chapter 8 and the moral desert of corrupt power in chapter 10) then amid the lush city jungle and fleshpots as well as the underground hideouts of U. We leave him – a wise cutoff – before he enters the Promised Land (openly named in 1: 7), returning from afar with a new physical Law which does not mean power for one chosen people, caste or gender but breaking down the walls between people in the whole universe, no less (the ansible): Shevek is a dissident and unbuilding builder, the opposite of the channel-digging King Utopus; Remus more than Romulus.

Shevek is presented as having a strong self. But that is to be understood in terms of *TD*'s all-pervasive librations. It is perhaps best shown à propos the first piece of Shevek's world we see: "There was a wall." Yet immediately after that proposition we are led to see (first swing of the pendulum of meaning) it is also not a wall, for it does not bar the road. It is "an idea of boundary." Yet again "the idea was real," it is a wall – second swing of the pendulum. Wall 1, the physical one, was not important; Wall 2, the notional one, is the most important thing/notion on A. The method here is not a hesitation from Yes through No to Yes, it is rather a movement that returns by way of depth analysis from notion 1 (mere physical wall) to a changed notion 2 (wall as all-important idea of boundary that bars passage), where both notions use the same term yet destabilize and dynamicise it. Analogously, Shevek's Self is continually shifting, encountering inner and outer walls and working to unbuild them, infiltrating and being infiltrated by the two worlds of A and U, by the possessed situations, characters, spaces, relationships of U and by the dispossessed – but sometimes

repossessed – ones on A. Very roughly, this shift may be thought as spirally progressing from the isolated individual, through dispossession from egotism by select interaction with his community, to creator. Shevek's rich libration is the incarnation of Odo's tombstone inscription: "To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return" (3: 68); this is signaled in his encounter with her a dozen pages later.

Of a piece with this is Shevek's delving into or affinity with pain (e.g., his speech on 2: 48–50) and death. The very method of librating between Being 1→Unbeing→Being 2 is a sequence of little deaths and joyful rebirths, as his first step onto Urras shows: "[H]e stumbled and nearly fell. He thought of death, in that gap between the beginning of a step and its completion, and at the end of the step he stood on a new earth" (1: 16). Surely this is a conscious subverting of the PR trumpets and cymbals anent the US colonel's landing on our Moon, just a few years before *TD*. The small step for Shevek is not necessarily a giant leap for anything; it is certainly not a step on the upward arrow of progress toward the excelsior of bigger and better military technology (like, say, the giant match-cut leap at the beginning of *2001*) … I cannot make here a richer survey (see now an attempt in "Using"), but only give two more small instances. First is the little death of sexual orgasm, that letting go of the self (2: 41, and then both death and renewal with Takver, from 6: 148 on). Second is the violent death, such as that of the Urrasti demonstrator (9: 243–46), which is horridly different because unnecessary, but possibly part of the same cycle. However, this indispensable theme is pervasive: parting is (as in the French proverb) also a little death, and travel is in Le Guin usually accompanied by loss of consciousness and a (more or less useful and successful) rebirth into a new one, as in Shevek's spaceship experience of chapter 1.

2. The Exemplary Reach for Integrality, and a Limit

Thus, what does Shevek's parable ideally stand for? I think for a double unity-in-duality. The first or thematic one is that of *physics and politics*, in our poor terms: of natural vs. human/social science. Shevek stands for

their integrality in the sense of the Presocratics' *physis* or of our ambiguous "physical," usable for Einstein and Olivia Newton-John. Unbuilding propertarian possession of human nature cannot be divided from their grasp as at the world and vice versa, as we realize today in the capitalist destruction of climate and other eco-systems. We cannot fully imagine any of this, since history has both insufficiently and often wrongly developed our sense(s) – so that Jameson is right to insist throughout *Archaeologies* that utopia/nism relates to the present and not to the future. But perhaps what all of us intellectuals have the greatest difficulty to imagine even feebly is the unbuilding of the division of labor between mental and bodily work (which *TD* exceptionally attempts to envisage). Now Shevek, as all major poetry, also stands for the second, attitudinal or methodological integrality of *the thematic What* with *the relational How*. The metaphors and analogies of the How, steeped in relationships between people and their products, unbuild obsolete categories, as in Rimbaud's cited: "Blood! Blood! Golden flame!/All to war, to vengeance, to terror …. Enough!/ … / … I'm there, I'm still there." The plot arrow may then, in the best case, begin to show, to make visible and understandable, the coming into being of better categories. Only destruction and construction together can result in the fully disalienating melding of sense as meaning with the sensual evidence of poetry fitting words to the world.

TD brings this off superbly up to Shevek's encounter with the U revolt. But measured by the very high level that far, at that point I grow uneasy. I shall approach this by factoring in Jameson's characterization of Le Guin's SF as world reduction or ontological excision.

The most salient example Jameson gives is the reduction of human sexuality to the periods of "heat" (*kemmer*) in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, though others such as the lack of animals there and even more so on Anarres could be added. He notes that the method is one of " 'thought experiment' in the tradition of great physicists," citing Le Guin's pointers to Einstein and Schrödinger in "Is Gender" – it is "the experimental production of an imaginary situation by excision of the real …" (274). Returning to *TD*, he characterizes the Anarresti utopia as a place "in which [humanity] is released from the multiple determinisms (economic, political, social) of history itself …, precisely in order to be free to do whatever it wants with its interpersonal relationships …" (275). As with *The Left Hand*, it is thus

"[an] attempt to rethink Western history without capitalism" (277). This rich, anthropological vein – validated by the excision of unlimited sex or animals – attains a persuasiveness much higher than exclusive Morean or Bellamyan focussing on sociopolitics would.

Let me try to rephrase this as an ambiguous polarity, inherent in the A landscape or nature, between *bareness* as facilitator of understanding by poetic analogy (Anarres as truth, discussed in Part 1) and *barrenness* as Cold War stigmatizing of all revolutionary politics by identifying it with inescapable stagnation in poverty (and attendant rise of a new privileged class). In the A chapters the stark poetry clearly prevails. The lushness itself of U in chapters 3, 5, and 7 is a corrupt denial of bareness when observed by Shevek's sarcastic eutopian eye. But in the middle of chapter 9 the stance shifts. Where Shevek encounters the protesters and repression, he is merely our camera eye justifying scattered glimpses about a major social movement of which we know little. His usual overview, coupled with the authorial generalizations, is lacking. We do not know the context in any way even faintly similar to the richness of details about A and the propertarian wraps in U; we are restricted to Shevek's fugitive glances. There is a generic kinship to the city revolutions of *News from Nowhere* or *The Iron Heel,* but the U revolt resembles perhaps more something out of *The Sleeper Wakes* (or in terms of Le Guin's opus, maybe out of Orsinia) than any later depiction. But compared to Morris or London, we do not know much about the Urrasti oppositional movement. It is an alliance of non-violent syndicalists and centralizing communists (9: 239), and seems largely followed by the lower classes, but was it really insurrectionary in intent? It seems to have been suppressed, but it is not clear how permanently. However, the political revolt finds no further place in the novel; I'm not sure it's even mentioned during the return to A.

Correction: there is one movement, nearest to the author, which *TD* melds with the pre-World-War 1 template: the mainly non-violent anti-Vietnam protests, violently put down by armed forces in Chicago 1968 and in the shootings at Kent State and Jackson State Universities in 1970. In the *TD* demonstration, the Vietnam War helicopters shoot people at home. It is after all sparked by a war abroad, in Benbili – the Third World of U. Le Guin's view of it shares the 1960s protesters' generosity of spirit, radical swerve, and political limitation.

My sense of something lacking here, of a major failure of interest, is rendered more acute by contrast to the splendid beginning of chapter 9, Shevek's breakthrough to his time theory, which is a culmination of this novel, in particular of the wall vs. light imagery:

> The wall was down. The vision was both clear and whole. What he saw was simple … and contained in it all complexity, all promise. It was revelation. It was the way clear, the way home, the light.
>
> The spirit in him was like a child running out into the sunlight. There was no end, no end … (9: 225).

These are also among the best pages of speculation on the creative, here specifically scientific, process of discovery that I know. If SF is to be examined in its relationship to science and creativity, it will stand out as a beacon with a very few matching examples (say Lem's more systematic *tour de force* on the history of Solaristics).

It is not fair to demand that the incandescent intensity of such passages be sustained everywhere. But in the whole account of the U revolt, only Shevek's speech at the demonstration comes near to it. (Even there, as suggested in the previous essay, I either do not understand or disagree with the final dichotomy: "You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution.") The rest is seen in an accelerated blur. It is workable enough, but predicated on exclusive focus through and on Shevek. Chapter 9 culminates in the Time Theory, and the rest is anti-climactic. The wall is down for the time theoretician but not for the Urrasti insurgents. The splendid analogy between physics and politics seems confined to A. It resurrects forcefully in Shevek's speech to the Terran ambassador (11: 280–1), but restricted to the general philosophy of time. It is not clear whether much hope is left for U: this is not left in the balance, it is dropped. (Of course, historians may argue Le Guin has been prophetic in this too. When has a revolution ever succeeded at the center of an empire unless the empire was already in bad disarray?)

Yet since utopia is about the present, and ours is in 2007 different from the present of the early 1970s, we have to judge this writing in our world. In it, the heaviest artillery of capitalism, the persuasiveness of which eventually brought down State pseudo-communism, was that capitalism delivers the goods while communism does not. Capitalism claimed and claims what is in *TD* the lush

and teeming beauty of U with its ecologically full or overcrowded niches of plant, animal, and city life. Le Guin probably tried to weaken such a claim with the contrast between Urras and ruined Terra in Keng's speech. While an effective bit of eco-criticism on its own, this does not erase the impact of the union, indeed consubstantiality, between communism (however morally admirable) and poverty as shown on A.

We thus get to an imbalance between the morally admirable and the corporeally easy or even feasible, dispossession as lack of ownership with its demons and as lack of things – back to an opposition between purity and (as final horizon denied by poverty) survival. It is politically of a piece with the Odonians' accepting exodus from their society instead of revolution inside it, and Shevek's following this pattern by forgetting his Urrasti brothers. He had, after all, identified the basement where he and other defeated insurgents on U had to hide as Hell (9: 244); but even this hero was not up to a Harrowing of Hell.[14]

By this I do not, of course, mean to indicate psychological or moral stains in a fictional character, and even less to "blame" the poet-author who discovered for us more than anybody else in SF: it is a matter of the novel

14 In sum, "The Odonians on Anarres have created a good society, but even they might have done better to have stayed home on Urras and ensured the Revolution on Urras" (Erlich, chapter 8). Odo's plans were based on "the generous ground of Urras," not on "arid Anarres" (4: 77), quite parallel to Marx's expectation of revolution starting in the most developed countries of France and perhaps England. The aridity of A is analogous to the Odonians opting for separation rather than permeation, for a revolution only for a vanguard and then exile group instead of for all the Urrasti people. Interestingly, it seems Marx blamed Cabet's plan of communists forming utopian colonies in the USA instead of working for the revolution in France. But then, he himself had to become a mainly (but not fully) theorizing exile … Another analogy is the separation of the "Soviet experiment" from the rest of the world, first imposed from the outside by a capitalist *cordon sanitaire*, then assumed by Stalin, as well as the sectarianism of the parties and people oriented mainly to the defense of the USSR rather than change in their own spaces. Certainly the corruption of the revolution by a rising new ruling class in the USSR, as against its admirable early aspects, is rooted there (cf. now Suvin, *Lesson*), and this holds for subsidiary separatisms such as the one to and in Zionist kibbutzes in Palestine. But in the background of everything Le Guin does is her rootedness in the USA, so the fact *TD* was written a few years before the US 200th anniversary (roughly as long as the existence of A) and that many on the Left hold the promise of American Revolution was betrayed is another factor.

as a whole arriving at its own boundary or wall. The properly economico-political critique – that capitalism proceeds by finally ruining the forces of production (people, earth, air, water) at least as thoroughly as it had developed them at its beginnings, that it increasingly delivers destruction – is missing in the U story. It is a void as significant as the absence of industrial production at the heart of *News from Nowhere*, the concave that defines its convexities. I do not at all believe this nullifies the great insights and delights of *TD*. But while the ambiguity between authoritarian and libertarian utopia is a very fertile one, the ambiguity between capitalism and fertility (however corrupt) is simply misleading.

Still, the overriding story in much the greater part of *TD* is one of rare imaginative sympathy by a writer in full command of rich narrative shaped against and by an explicitly cognitive horizon. I hope I have suggested in this chapter some of the main admirable facets of *TD*, very rare in and beyond SF (or utopian fiction if you wish). But in a final abstraction, beyond the great and not to be underrated delights of its micro- and meso-levels, what might be identified as its so to speak transportable insight and horizon for us readers today? What I was getting to at the beginning of this sub-section is – put in an allegorical way – that Shevek brings about the marriage of Freedom and Knowledge (Cognition, including S1 and poetry). It is the vision of *freedom as critical cognition* – which in our epoch means two things: first, solidarity with others of the same horizon, a defense of civil society; second, a radical orientation by contraries to the hegemony stifling us. With warts and all, *TD* establishes a horizon of this-worldly justice centered on people and their knowledge. This is where my cavil at the separation of freedom and knowledge in Shevek's final relationship with the Urrasti people comes from: it is a fall back into our "pure," S2 science. Nonetheless, the overall vision of *TD* is one where freedom and poetico-scientific cognition embrace, sustained by our interest and belief in Shevek's trajectory. What Augustine of Hippo put as "When truths are reached, they renew us," holds both for the hero and us readers insofar we sympathize with him and his understanding.

I do not believe this can get obsolete as long as injustice obtains – and it has been steadily deepening. Truth shall make ye free (if you organize).

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