



The Dispossessed

By Ursula K. Le Guin
ISBN: 9780060512750

Introduction

Shevek, citizen and acclaimed physicist of the world Anarres, believes that he must free his people from the walls that they have built around their anarchist state, blocking out all other worlds. A freethinker and believer in the power of revolution and the individual's right to self-rule, Shevek must risk all to discover the truth about the land that his people escaped from, Urras.

But all is not as he believes on the glittering world of Urras. Coddled within the ivory towers of its university, Shevek is prohibited from seeing the real world of Urras, the world of the poor and indigent from which his people came. Although shunned by his Odonian society for his cutting-edge theories, the Urrasti hold him captive for his knowledge of the General Temporal Theory, a theory that could bring the Urrasti all the power and fortune they desire.

Aware that he has only traded one set of walls for another, Shevek must make an even more dangerous journey if he is truly to succeed in his ultimate mission of fostering understanding and true brotherhood among the races. Enlisting the aid of sympathetic Urrasti and aliens from Terra and Hain, Shevek succeeds in evading the propertarian Urrasti and shares his knowledge with the universe. For it is only when there is a true understanding, that he can finally return home to a new world.

Questions for Discussion

1. Throughout the novel, the reader is introduced to numerous characters. Who was your favorite and why? Did you have a favorite race of people? Who did you identify with the most?
2. Shevek believes that he made a mistake in putting his trust, his life, in the hands of the Urrasti. Do you agree? What else could he have done? Did he find his utopia in the end?
3. There are many morals and words of wisdom for today's society throughout the novel. What are they? Should they be viewed as warnings? Which one was most important to you?
4. Do you believe that the Odonian society is somehow more moral than the Urrasti? How are the power structures disguised in the Odonian societal model? What is the importance of owning nothing?
5. Shevek states, "Revolution is our obligation; our hope of evolution." If a society is founded upon revolution, as Shevek believes, is it the people's responsibility to maintain the mindset that made the initial revolt possible?
6. Every struggle has its "Odo." Who is the Odo for the following struggles: Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, South African Apartheid, to name a few. Can you think of others? Who are they?
7. What do you think is a more effective tool of governing, popular opinion or laws? Is it our fear of getting caught or of being shunned by our neighbors and society that keep us honest?
8. How does Shevek grow throughout the course of the novel? How effective is the use of flashbacks in every other chapter? Can they really be considered flashbacks once you understand the theories of time with which Shevek is struggling?
9. What role does the family structure play within Odonian society? How are Shevek and Tekver revolutionaries in this aspect?
10. Were you surprised when Shevek decides to go to the Hainish and not the Thuvians, being the enemies of the Urrasti? How do you think each culture will use his theory?

About the Author

A multiple award-winning author, editor, and anthologist, Ursula K. LeGuin was born in 1929 in Berkeley, California -- the daughter of writer Theodora Kroeber and anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber. She went to Radcliffe College, did graduate work at Columbia University and attained a 1953 Fulbright Fellowship. Le Guin married historian Charles A. Le Guin and has three children and three grandchildren. She has lived in Portland, Oregon since 1958.

Throughout her illustrious literary career -- 19 novels, short stories in nine collections, two volumes of translation, 13 books for children, three collections of essays, and numerous honorary degrees, teaching posts, and awards -- Le Guin has held to the highest standards in her writing, taking risks that would bring great rewards and praise from her contemporaries.

Having received countless awards -- a National Book Award, five Hugo Awards, five Nebula Awards, the Kafka Award, a Pushcart Prize, the Howard Vursell Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the L.A. Times Robert Kirsch Award to name a few -- Le Guin has also had three of her books become finalists for the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Le Guin's first major work of science fiction, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, propelled her instantly to the forefront of her field. Since then, she has used the context of her work to delve into such issues as gender roles, morality, and the individual's ordinary grief. Working in so

many forms -- from poetry and prose to screenplays and voice text for recordings -- Le Guin has transformed the genre in which she works countless times over. An intensely private figure like many of her characters, Le continues to create her fantastical worlds for all ages.