

EVOLVING CONCEPTIONS OF TIME AND SELFHOOD
IN THREE NOVELS BY URSULA K. LE GUIN:
THE DISPOSSESSED, ALWAYS COMING HOME, AND LAVINIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, Ursula K. Le Guin has been widely recognized as an author who uses fiction as a means to address fundamental philosophical, political, and ethical questions. Of the many scholarly analyses of her work, however, relatively few consider the implications of her depiction of time and selfhood. Those which do, moreover, concentrate on certain texts and take a limited range of theoretical perspectives. In consequence, neither the enduring nature of Le Guin's engagement with these issues nor the originality of her treatment of them is generally recognized. This thesis aims to begin redressing this gap by examining the ways in which time and selfhood are portrayed in three major works of speculative fiction, only one of which (*The Dispossessed*) has previously been considered from this angle. Through a series of close readings, I demonstrate that Le Guin's depiction of these concepts differs in important ways both from the "common-sense" understandings of time and selfhood prevalent in Western societies and between the three works themselves. The result is a clear evolution, in which the relatively familiar ontological framework of *The Dispossessed* gives way to a radical reconceptualization of the nature of time and individual existence in *Always Coming Home*, followed by *Lavinia*'s subtle but profound reframing of the relationship between time, the individual, and the totality of which he or she is part. Drawing on scholarly analyses of Le Guin's work, as well as writings from narratology, phenomenology, philosophy of time, and neuroscience, I show that each text constitutes a systematic working through of an alternative way of understanding our individual and temporal existence in the world. This, in turn, forms the basis for Le Guin's ongoing and in-depth exploration of major ethical questions.

KEYWORDS: Ursula K. Le Guin; fiction; time; change; non-linearity; spatialization of time; present; dialectic; self; agency; experience; interdependence

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DEDICATION

For my mother, without whom this would not have happened. And for the rest of my family, who put up with me, even when they didn't quite understand why.

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INTRODUCTION

A great deal has been written, by now, on the work of Ursula K. Le Guin. Writing in 1983, Elizabeth Cummins Cogell produced almost two hundred and fifty pages of annotated bibliographic entries, all (with the exception of those listing Le Guin's own works) for scholarly analyses of Le Guin's writing. Since then, the academic literature has ballooned. Major analyses by Richard D. Erlich, Amy Clarke, Sandra J. Lindow, and Cummins Cogell herself have appeared, along with many anthologies (e.g., Bloom; Olander and Greenberg; Davis and Stillman) and even more numerous journal articles. These works tend to align themselves with specific theoretical perspectives: traditionally, feminist literary criticism (Clarke), anarchist and utopian studies (Burns; Davis and Stillman), eco-feminism (Murphy), Daoist studies (Barbour; Cummins Cogell), and psychoanalytic literary criticism (see, e.g., Esmonde; Selinger; Slethaug; Barrett) have dominated, although various shades of postmodernism are gaining ground (see, e.g., Barr; Caesar; Call; Linton; Thomas-Card; Scheiding). They also focus on certain recurrent themes and motifs in Le Guin's work, including especially questions of gender, the relationship between the individual, society, and/or the natural world, individual psychological and moral development, and the motifs of journey and return, home, walls, and water.

None of these analyses, however, consider Le Guin's recurring engagement with fundamental questions about the nature of time, selfhood, and the relationship between them. While there is a substantial body of work on the thematic role of time in *The Dispossessed*, nothing comparable exists for any of Le Guin's other works. Discussions of selfhood, though more common, tend to skirt the issue of how we understand the self as an existent – that is, what it actually means to *be* a self, to exist as an entity in the world. Many are concerned, instead, with Le Guin's portrayal of individual psychological and/or moral maturation; others focus on

the perceived inextricability of self and other, or self and society, without fully exploring the implications of these ideas for the self per se. Scholarly discussion of Le Guin's treatment of time and selfhood *as such* is thus almost nonexistent.

This is a significant omission. Not only has Le Guin repeatedly engaged with these issues over the five decades of her writing career; she has done so in thoughtful, serious, and highly original ways. Failing to recognize this thus detracts both from our understanding of her work and from our overall awareness of the models we can use in thinking about these concepts and the ways in which these ideas may be expressed and explored in fiction.

The chapters that follow aim to address this gap. Specifically, I seek to: (1) illustrate the long-term nature of Le Guin's engagement with these issues and the way in which her treatment of them has evolved over time; and (2) detail the strategies that different texts use to develop specific concepts of time and selfhood. Since conducting a comprehensive analysis of these issues across Le Guin's vast body of work is too extensive a project to undertake within the limitations of an undergraduate thesis, I approach both aims by carrying out case studies of three major works: *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. These works span over thirty years, making them representative of Le Guin's treatment of these questions across a broad period. In addition, all three are conceptually challenging and formally innovative major works, which present clear and specific visions of time and selfhood. Finally, only one of them – *The Dispossessed* – has to date received significant scholarly attention on these topics; and even in this case, most authors have considered the two issues separately, and the treatment of selfhood,

in particular, has focused almost exclusively on the relationship between the individual and society.¹

While I subscribe to no particular school of literary theory, my analysis is rooted in two assumptions. The first, which is traceable back to New Criticism, is that we cannot speak with any real authority about authorial intent. We can speculate about it, supporting our speculation with such matter as the author's public and personal statements, known or probable influences on the author, and evidence from the text itself; but ultimately the only claims that we can reliably offer concern what the text itself *does*. The second, which is associated with Reader Response Criticism, is that the text itself is not – as in New Criticism (Brizee and Tompkins) – a self-contained, self-referential object, but a communicative act. Consequently, although I do not regard meaning as solely determined by the reader, I do accord the reader an active and crucial role in the negotiation of literary meaning, which I take to arise in a specific reader's encounter with the text produced by the author.

These two assumptions have important methodological implications. If we can only speak with real authority about the characteristics of the text itself, then it follows that our analytical approach must focus on using close reading of the work under discussion to uncover these, and our argument about what the text does, and how it does it, must rely heavily on textual evidence. However, if literary meaning is a product of the interaction between text and reader,

¹ *Lavinia*, in the half-decade since its publication, has drawn comment primarily from feminist scholars interested in its revisioning of the *Aeneid*, while *Always Coming Home*, apart from its inclusion in encyclopaedic analyses of all or most of Le Guin's oeuvre (e.g., Richard Erlich's *Coyote's Song*, Sandra J. Lindow's *Dancing the Tao*, and Warren Rochelle's *Communities of the Heart*), has been considered mostly from the standpoint of eco-criticism (see, e.g., Murphy). In neither case is the body of published work extensive; indeed, the general academic and critical reception of *Always Coming Home* has led Le Guin to state that it has mostly "been read, or dismissed unread, as a naïvely regressive picture of a sort of Happy Hunting Ground for fake Indians" (Le Guin, "A Response," 307). In focusing on them, then, I hope not only to draw attention to their complex and original treatments of time and selfhood, but also to contribute to redressing this imbalance.

then any conclusions that we draw from looking only at the text are necessarily incomplete. Furthermore, understanding how the text itself functions as even a partial source of meaning requires that we be able to anticipate, at least to some degree, its likely effect upon some significant part of its audience. Effectively, the critic, like the author, must presume a reader (or *addressee*) with certain predictable characteristics (Schmid, “Implied Reader”).

Underpinning this presumption and making it tenable is the idea that individuals have access to a shared body of cultural and social knowledge that informs their interpretations of textual material. To some degree, this is inevitable: each of us, by virtue of existing in interaction with other human beings, exists within at least one “knowledge community,” whose fundamental tenets shape our response to new information.² This does not, however, imply that an individual’s response to a given text is externally determined (cf. Roberts’ criticism of Stanley Fish’s concept of *interpretive communities* [Roberts, 3 – 4, 6]). The shared beliefs that constitute a knowledge community do not dictate the content of any member’s encounter with a given text; they merely provide the conceptual framework that both enables and constrains interpretation. Furthermore, individuals are virtually always situated at the intersection of multiple knowledge communities. Any given individual thus has multiple frameworks to draw on in his or her encounters with a text.

Modern critical approaches sometimes deliberately presume an addressee who does not coincide with the reader that the text seems to suggest. For example, feminist criticism deliberately substitutes a critical female presumed reader for the compliant (male or female)

² This is a neologism, along the model of *interpretive community* (originally proposed by Stanley Fish) and *discourse community* (coined by Martin Nystrand and extended by John Swales). It is not related to the term’s use (in knowledge management and social exchange theory) to describe a specific form of online interaction.

adherent to patriarchal norms presumed by the text. This is not my approach. Since I am interested, in part, in Le Guin's evolution as a writer, I take for my own "ideal reader" that which I feel is implied by the texts themselves. This reader is a member of the knowledge community of the industrialized, largely urbanized "West," the cultural descendant of the European Enlightenment: what Le Guin herself has described, in *The Lathe of Heaven*, as the "Judaeo-Christian-Rationalist West" (*Lathe*, 82). This type of knowledge community is both extremely broad – encompassing a wide range of other knowledge communities (e.g., class, gender, occupation, political affiliation, etc.) – and a fundamental component of its members' individual mental frameworks. Individual readers from this cultural context will therefore, despite individual variation, share a common set of beliefs that frame their encounter with the texts.

Presuming this general readership, then, I will carry out close readings of my three selected texts in order to uncover the ways in which form and content interact to produce a specific vision of time and selfhood. Although I draw on Le Guin's essays, scholarly writings on her work, and literary theory as necessary and relevant, I strive to remain grounded in the texts themselves, rather than becoming caught up in debates within Le Guin criticism or literary criticism more broadly. My engagement with additional sources, both within and outside of literary criticism, is therefore directed by the themes that emerge in my analysis of the texts. The result is admittedly rather eclectic. In addition to engaging with scholarly work on Le Guin where appropriate, I draw on narratology, philosophy of time, phenomenological accounts of selfhood, and studies of memory from both philosophical and neuroscientific perspectives. I do not engage with feminist criticism and philosophical Daoism. Le Guin's work has already been thoroughly analyzed from both perspectives, and there is little that I could add here.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that: (1) each of the three selected works develops a complex and internally coherent picture of time, individual existence, existence within and through a network of connected beings, and the intersections between these; (2) these visions of temporal and individual existence diverge in important particulars from the concepts of time and selfhood dominant in the West; (3) they also differ from one another, with the result that clear continuities between texts are accompanied by shifts in emphasis and outright revisions; and finally (4) these continuities and changes constitute a cumulative, though by no means linear, process of evolution.

Since claim (1) unfolds in more detail when I outline the structure of this work, I will focus for now on (2), (3), and (4). Specifically, then, I argue that the treatment of both time and individual existence exhibits marked and significant continuities across *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. Time is consistently portrayed in terms of interlocking conceptual binaries, the components of which are typically intertwined and equally fundamental to temporal existence: exclusivity (in which only one moment may exist at once) and coexistence (the existence of many or all moments); the present and the totality of moments; change and continuity; and linear and non-linear temporal relations. Existence as an entity is similarly stable in key particulars. Across all three works, agency is a defining characteristic of individual selfhood; the individual is intrinsically embedded within a profoundly interdependent totality; and the entity exists, not only in individual form, but as non-individuated *participation in the being of others*. These continuities, however, are accompanied by crucial shifts in the portrayal of both concepts, as well as in the relationship between them. Specifically, three key shifts take place. First, the totality expands in scope; second, being-as-participation increases substantially in prominence; and third, individual subjectivity is accorded increasing importance.

This last point is particularly important, as selfhood comes to be defined in terms of experience and meaning-making, and time as something that is shaped by individual consciousness.

Although this might seem to indicate a straightforward conceptual “radicalization,” an increasing divergence from the knowledge community that the text addresses in successive works, I argue for a more complex relationship, both between the texts themselves and between each text and its cultural context. While it is possible to trace a shift from the (relative) ontological conservatism of *The Dispossessed*, through the explicitly radical questioning of *Always Coming Home*, to a kind of reconciliation in *Lavinia*, I argue that this is not a straightforward, linear evolution, but a profoundly alinear process of continual critical engagement, revision, and refinement. Through continually circling back to, and out from, the same set of issues and ideas – a process that Lindow refers to as Le Guin’s “metacognitive looping back stitch” (251) – the texts eventually arrive, not at an ending divorced from its origin, but at a changed beginning. At each stage, moreover, there are both similarities and differences between the vision of selfhood and time that animates the text and that which is prevalent within the Western cultural context. The texts, then, are engaged in a complex dialogue on these matters, both with the knowledge communities that they address and with each other.

The chapters are grouped into three sections. The first two have identical structures: after providing a brief overview of the major concepts to which I refer in the subsequent chapters, I present three detailed analyses, each focused on one of my selected texts. The third section splits off from this template, undertaking a single-chapter comparative analysis that draws together the ideas introduced in the preceding six chapters to trace the evolution of Le Guin’s engagement with issues of time and selfhood across these three works.

The first section – “Conceptions of Time in the Novels” – examines the portrayal of time in *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. Chapter One focuses on *The Dispossessed*, arguing that the depiction of sequency and simultaneity, the nature of Shevek’s General Temporal Theory, and the novel’s unusual narrative structure all work to establish an understanding of time defined by the paradoxical intertwining of opposites. Exclusivity and coexistence, change and continuity, the linear and the non-linear: all are equally, objectively true – as they must be for the individual to draw together past and future in the present of intentional action. Chapter Two shifts focus to *Always Coming Home*, detailing how the text establishes a profoundly non-linear conception of time characterized by a set of overlapping conceptual binaries (embodied in the central metaphor of the *heyiya-if*) and a spatialized understanding of the relationship between moments. It also points to a crucial shift in the treatment of the relationship between present and non-present moments, in which the present is redefined precisely as the site of *presence* – that is, of individual subjectivity. The third chapter highlights how the idea of fate, the associated practice of foretelling, and the metafictional framing of the narrative in *Lavinia* juxtapose a coexistent temporal totality with the exclusive, linear human experience of it, and suggests that key motifs, combined with the fluid structure of the narrative itself, point to a fundamental intertwining of change and permanence.

“Agency and Connectedness” takes the same text-by-text approach to the way in which the three works depict selfhood – or, more aptly, existence as an entity in the world. Chapter Four considers the understanding of individual existence implied in *The Dispossessed*, focusing on Odonian social theory, Shevek’s experiences on Anarres and on Urras, and the novel’s core images and metaphors. It concludes that, in this work, selfhood is defined by agency: the individual’s capacity for and exercise of choice. This individual-as-agent, however, is far from

self-sufficient. Not only is he or she inherently embedded in the interdependent whole formed by society; his or her individual identity (in both a psychological and a philosophical sense) arises from interaction with the other. Chapter Five turns to *Always Coming Home*. While choice remains a major component of individual selfhood, this work accords even greater importance to the entity's existence as part of an interdependent network of being, and develops two new concepts: the idea that we exist partially as participation in certain forms of non-individuated being; and the idea that the individual is an embodied experiencer, as well as an agent. Finally, Chapter Six explores how *Lavinia* affirms both the importance of agency and the deep interdependence of the individual and the other through its depiction of the relationship between Lavinia and Vergil.

As should be evident from this summary, the chapters in the first and second sections are where my close reading takes place. My focus there is on how each text builds up a nuanced, detailed, and highly original picture of time and individuated (and non-individuated) existence, though I do flag conceptual constants and important shifts in the treatment of these issues as I go. In the third section, I shift gears, drawing on the preceding detailed discussions in order to conduct a comparative analysis that renders explicit relationships between the texts. In so doing, I link changes in the depiction of time and individual existence with the texts' evolving portrayal of the relationship between the subjective and the objective.

Finally, the conclusion considers the implications of my argument for our understanding of Le Guin's work. In particular, I argue that the portrayal of time and individual existence in each work is significant, not only because they collectively point to Le Guin's ongoing and evolving exploration of key issues associated with these concepts, but because, on an individual basis, they provide the conceptual foundation for each work's treatment of core ethical issues. I

end with a call for further research into this last area, as well as into the treatment of time and selfhood in Le Guin's other works.

SECTION ONE

TIME

TIME IN *THE DISPOSSESSED*, *ALWAYS COMING HOME*, AND *LAVINIA*:

AN OVERVIEW

Most analyses of Ursula Le Guin's work are remarkably unconcerned with her treatment of time. In fact, aside from two excellent essays on *The Dispossessed*,³ I know of no sustained critical investigations into the subject. Yet Le Guin consistently explores questions of time in her fiction, both explicitly (as a theme in its own right) and implicitly (as the foundation for, and an element of, other thematic concerns). Furthermore, the routes that these explorations take seem to be determined by the conceptual equivalent of centres of gravity: key concepts, issues, and relationships that appear in multiple works.

Le Guin's treatment of time focuses on the interplay of opposites in both time and temporal experience, and in fact frequently treats chronological time as a product of the latter. Since a full discussion of her oeuvre is well beyond the scope of this analysis, I will confine myself to exploring the variations and interconnections between the visions of time presented in three important novels: *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. These works differ drastically in the degree of explicit attention paid to questions of time, the particular issues with which they are concerned, and the metaphors and structural decisions through which they communicate the resulting conceptions of time. But despite these striking dissimilarities, all three works are animated by a common set of parallel and interrelated dualisms in their depictions of time, conceptual pairings that interact with one another and whose individual presence may be more or less strongly marked in a particular work: exclusivity and coexistence, the lived present and the totality of which it is part, change and continuity, and linear and non-

³ James Bittner's "Chronosophy, Aesthetics, and Ethics in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*" and Teresa M. Tavormina's "'Physics as Metaphors: The General Temporal Theory in *The Dispossessed*."

linear (and especially spatialized) representations of time. These overarching conceptual dyads (the components of which are typically, but not always, presented as both mutually defining and equally necessary) shape the interplay of Sequency and Simultaneity, and the integration of past and future into the present of intentional action, in *The Dispossessed*; the spatialization of time and its characterization in terms of integrated binaries (embodied in the visual figure of the *heyiya-if*) in *Always Coming Home*; and the presentation of linearly lived exclusivity as part of a profoundly non-linear coexistence of times in *Lavinia*. Although these three novels are too individual to be called variations on a theme, they are quite certainly explorations of the same set of ideas from different angles. Furthermore, there is a clear evolution in the presentation of this set of ideas: in particular, a crucial change in the understanding of exclusivity takes place in *Always Coming Home*, and is subsequently incorporated – together with certain elements that are foreshadowed in *The Dispossessed*, and others (especially the problematization of the distinction between the subjective and the objective) that are quite new – into the treatment of time in *Lavinia*.

Finally, before we move on to the analysis of the novels, the first of the conceptual pairs that I listed – exclusivity and coexistence – requires some elaboration. *Exclusivity* entails an understanding of time, as an abstract concept or an experienced reality, as defined by the fact that only one concrete instance of it (a moment, an instant, “now”) can truly exist at any given point; *coexistence*, conversely, requires that time be conceptualized as an entity, multiple concrete instances of which actually exist and interact *directly* (not only within the mind, as in memory and anticipation). In a view of time characterized by coexistence, time as a substance is a whole composed of multiple parts; in one defined by exclusivity, the part *is* the whole. Yet – as I hope to show – neither coexistence nor exclusivity on its own is either an accurate description of our

temporal reality or sufficient to our temporal needs. Combined, they allow integration, and thus unity; in isolation, exclusivity results in fragmentation – an infinite ricochet of discrete, discontinuous realities – while coexistence presents an alinear expanse incomprehensible, though not inaccessible, to human consciousness. The pairing of exclusivity and coexistence, like the other dyads listed here, thus both provides a framework for and is itself an instance of the interplay between differentiation and integration that characterizes Le Guin’s treatment of the self and the question of ethical being in the world – relationships which will be examined in later chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ARROW AND THE CIRCLE: TIME IN *THE DISPOSSESSED*

In *The Dispossessed*, the tension between, and interdependence of, exclusivity and coexistence manifests in the relationship between sequency and simultaneity. Although Shevek – the temporal physicist who is the novel’s protagonist – suggests that these two terms identify the fundamental “aspects or processes of time” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 198), they refer less to unitary entities or qualities than to complexes of ideas composed of sets of intertwining conceptual dyads. The most prominent of these pairs is change (Becoming) and permanence (Being), a juxtaposition that launches *The Dispossessed* into the middle of a debate stretching back, in Western philosophy, at least to Heraclitus and Parmenides (Benjamin, 7 – 8; see also Kümmel, 31). The concepts of exclusivity and coexistence are far less conspicuous: rather than being discussed explicitly and at length, as are change and continuity, they are implicit in the models of time presented to explain sequency and simultaneity. Although the parallels between sequency/simultaneity, change/permanence, and exclusivity/coexistence are not perfect, they are quite strong enough to establish a clear opposition between sequency and simultaneity. Having established these dualisms, Le Guin rejects both reductionism and the call for complete and explicit resolution of contradictions, exemplified in history by the philosophers surveyed by Benjamin and in the novel by physicists of the Sequency and Simultaneity schools. Becoming and Being, sequency and simultaneity, exclusivity and coexistence are not concepts to be brought into logical agreement, but the two fundamental “aspects” of time, irreducible elements of temporal existence that are defined and rendered significant by their dissimilarity. Accordingly, their relationship is not one of logical compatibility or hierarchy, but of the integration of differentiated parts, as given concrete expression in the General Temporal Theory

and its metaphorical embodiments, the union of past and future in the present, and the structure of the novel itself.

The intertwining of and tension between change/permanence and exclusivity/coexistence is evident in the general descriptions of sequency and simultaneity (lower case), as well as in the models of (or metaphors for) time employed by the Sequency and Simultaneity theories (upper case). In the case of sequency/Sequency, these two sets of ideas are correlates, mutually implicit and reinforcing. In that of simultaneity/Simultaneity, however, the metaphors advanced to express permanence coalesce into two distinct sets of images characterized by contrasting understandings of the relationship between differentiated moments, only one of which (the book) is consonant with the coexistence of times. The other – that centred on the metaphor of the circle or cycle – entails an element of linear change, which renders its central image deeply ambiguous as a symbol of permanence, but also serves to reinforce the inescapable dialectic between Becoming and Being, exclusivity and coexistence, that informs the novel.

Sequency, as it is described during the party at Ve'a's, is simply time understood as “a succession, a flow” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 196). There are two ideas implicit in this description. One is clearly that of directionality, the “arrow of time” (197): time as change (197), occurring in one direction only (196). Sequency is the time of “becoming” (198). The second – that moments are mutually exclusive, that they replace one another rather than existing together, in relation – is never discussed, but it is inherent in the description of time as succession. As Kümmel points out,⁴ sequence necessarily consists of “mutually displacing moments” (Kümmel, 38). If there is to be a succession, then, by definition, the distinct

⁴ Kümmel's theory of time, which contrasts “succession” and “duration,” appears to have exerted an important influence on *The Dispossessed* (Bittner, 267).

components of the series cannot be co-present. If it is in fact time that “flows past us” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 196), then, as Heraclitus famously pointed out, we cannot expect the river *then* to coexist with the river *now*.

Simultaneity, in contrast, is concerned with continuity or persistence, with “why things endure” (197). It is “being,” as opposed to “becoming” (198). It is, strictly speaking, conceptualized in three separate ways; however, the third (simultaneity as “presence” [247])⁵ is referred to only once, very briefly. The present moment is far more important as the site of the union of times through individual choice (163). Simultaneity is therefore, in effect, explained in terms of two understandings of the relationship between moments: one in which permanence is characterized as the objective coexistence of all times, and one in which it is described as the “atemporal process” of “infinite repetition,” which is given concrete form in the circle or cycle (197).

The idea of permanence as the literal coexistence of times is encapsulated in the metaphor of the temporal universe as a book, which is “all there, all at once, between its covers” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 196). In this view of time, succession is “considered [not] as a physically objective phenomenon, but as a subjective one,” a sequence that our conscious minds impose upon non-sequential time – the order in which we read the book (196). Although equating the temporal structure of fiction with that of life is a risky undertaking (see Currie, 18), the implication here is clear enough. In the parlance of the philosophy of time, Simultaneity is

⁵ In this cryptic reference, “presence” – the “static ... aspect of the universe” – is contrasted with “successivity” (the “dynamic aspect”) (247). “Presence” here seems to mean something similar to Kümmel’s concept of “duration,” which is the experience of the cessation of the flow of time within the present (37), of the moment as “an ‘always,’ and ... an eternal present” (38). As such, it may be linked to the “annihilat[ion] of the moment ... and transcend[ence] [of] time” that occurs during ecstatic experience (in this case, sex) (46). However, this feature of temporal experience is not important within the novel, either thematically or structurally.

an eternalist theory (Zimmerman, 403). It is therefore quite well able to accommodate, although it does not necessarily entail, the literal co-presence of linearly non-adjacent moments that is suggested by the very term *simultaneity*. Thus, when Shevek works himself into a state of fevered vision, he dreams that he “[holds] the contemporaneity of two moments in his left and right hands; as he move[s] them apart ... the moments separate like dividing soap bubbles” (100). The creation of the ansible – a device that “will permit communication without any time interval between two points in space” (i.e., that will decouple temporal from physical succession) – is an application of this concept: the ansible works on the principle that “simultaneity is identity” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 303).

The second way of thinking about permanence – as infinite repetition, the patterned recurrence of individual moments – is more strongly emphasized than the concept of an objective coexistence of times. Its primary metaphoric expression is the “circle” or “cycle” of time, which Shevek invokes when describing “endur[ance]” (permanence) as a characteristic of time at Veä’s party (197). Circle imagery, which recurs both before and after this crucial scene, may be explicitly linked with notions of time and permanence, as in the musical metaphors that precede the party, and whose concepts and phrasing Shevek will later echo.⁶ The vision of the universe as “a giant harpstring oscillating in and out of existence” ascribed to Simultaneity Theory by Sabul (103) is echoed in Shevek’s description of the universe as “a cyclic process, an oscillation of expansion and contraction without any beginning or end” (198), and the composer of *The Simultaneity Principle* describes his work as consisting of “[f]ive instruments each playing an independent cyclic theme” (155). Alternatively, the motif of the circle may occur in a non-

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the physics of time, music, and ethics in *The Dispossessed*, see Bittner (especially pages 255 – 260).

temporal context, as in the case of the Circle of Life, emblem of the Odonian movement that led to the creation of Anarres (262) and of the Anarrestis' principal bureaucratic body, the PDC (28, 92, 93, 101); although not directly linked with simultaneity, such repetition draws attention to the circle as a recurring image.

There is, however, a certain inconsistency inherent in using the circle as a metaphor for permanence. Circles and cycles are both, by their very definitions, linear in nature; the latter is also directional. A circle is, after all, simply a line that has come back round to its own beginning; a cycle is a circle that runs in one direction only. The repeated unit may have neither beginning nor end (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 197),⁷ but relationships between points within it are defined by succession; that is, the repetition itself may well be “atemporal” (197),⁸ but the *pattern* of recurrence is not. Even the concept of “pair-separation,” which Newton-Smith suggests as a means of describing relationships between points on a circle that can replace “before” and “after” (since, as he observes, these terms are meaningless in the absence of directionality) (Newton-Smith, 78), is consecutive in nature. Shevek himself notes this contradiction, observing that cycles – e.g., planetary revolutions (197) and the temporal nature of the universe (198) – are adirectional and unchanging only at certain scales. In between “the tiny time-reversible cycles of the atom” (197) and the universe’s “oscillation of expansion and contraction, without any before or after” – at the level “where we live” – is “linear time,

⁷ The circle is, of course, strongly associated with eternity (Eire, 2, 68). Eternity is not, however, the same as permanence or persistence; it does not exclude change. One circular symbol of eternity – the ouroboros – symbolizes eternity “of a cyclical nature,” a concept that is characterized by “creation out of destruction, life out of death, eternal renewal and destruction” (29).

⁸ This is another instance where interpretation is made difficult by the presence of ambiguous or multiple definitions. In this context, “temporality” seems to refer to successivity, i.e., to the arrangement of moments in a linear series characterized by directionality (the “flow” of events from future [potential] to past [memory]), and perhaps quantifiability. (For the basis of this interpretation of the term, see Shevek’s description of dream and myth [196 – 197]).

evolution, change” (198). The net effect of this is to establish a decided duality within the complex of ideas associated with simultaneity. Insofar as cyclic time is defined by the elapsing of a succession of events or points that repeats *ad infinitum*, then, it is, like sequency, incompatible with the co-presence of times. Simultaneity, as a theory and as an aggregate of ideas, encompasses two understandings of time that are not only different, but logically opposed.

Given my argument that Le Guin’s presentation of time is concerned, not simply with the interplay between “the static and dynamic aspects of the universe” *per se* (Tavormina, 59), but with the nature of the relationships between different times, the self-contradictory presence of change in a symbol of permanence, of linearity in a symbol of simultaneity, arguably indicates a weakness in either the novel or the interpretation. One possible response to this charge is that the perceived failure of the metaphor in fact highlights the inseparability of the transient and the immutable, of sequency and simultaneity, and so reinforces the paradoxical unity that defines the relationship between temporal opposites. Although the change within a circle is only apparent – circles, in both *The Dispossessed* and (as we will see later) *Always Coming Home*, are sterile; they are movement without progress, “a closed cycle, a locked room, a cell” (294 – 295) – still the fact that one of the principal symbols associated with simultaneity is, at one level, inherently sequential is highly significant. Change and continuity are intertwined in our lived experience: whether we discover progress or repetition depends on which level of the system we examine, which frame of reference we use. Furthermore, this intertwining is not simply a function of our experience, a paradox wrought by the imposition of a subjective dualism on a unitary reality: it is a physical fact: “it is the tiny time-reversible cycles of the atom that give matter enough permanence that evolution is possible” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 197). It is Shevek’s conviction of the fundamental complementarity of these two “aspects of time” that sets him apart

from his fellow temporal physicists and drives his quest for a General Temporal Theory. Without “the arrow, the running river [of time],” as he points out, “there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation”; without “the circle or cycle ... there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 198). A true chronosophy must therefore include “not only duration but creation, not only being but becoming, not only geometry but ethics” (200). The coexistence of mutually exclusive realities – flux/continuity, exclusivity/coexistence, sequency/simultaneity – is not just inevitable; it is a physical, metaphysical, and ethical necessity.

The components of these binaries form a differentiated unity, existing in relation without ever being reduced to a single entity or, for that matter, to a relationship whose existence (as opposed to its nature) is fully explicable by science. In order to complete his General Temporal Theory, Shevek must finally “simply assum[e] the validity of real coexistence,” eschewing the “tautology” of certainty for the risky freedom of uncertainty, which alone offers “the chance for breaking out of the circle and going ahead” (247). This insight, which Tavormina compares to Gödel’s Theorem (which states that “a theorem may be true but unprovable” [Tavormina, 52]), allows him to achieve the ultimate goal of Cetian physics: “a unification of Sequency and Simultaneity in a general field theory of time” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 76). By demonstrating “the fundamental unity of the Sequency and Simultaneity points of view” (247), Shevek realizes his childhood vision of discovering, through the medium of number, “the balance, the pattern” in which “[e]verything could change, yet nothing would be lost” (27). The importance of this paradoxical intertwining of opposites, in which antithesis creates identity, is summarized in a description of Shevek’s theory given early in the book, well before the theory’s constituent ideas are developed within the novel:

[T]he very nature of the voyage ... implied return. You shall not go down twice to the same river, nor can you go home again... Yet from that acceptance of transience [Shevek] evolved his vast theory, wherein what is most changeable is shown to be fullest of eternity ... You *can* go home again, the General Temporal Theory asserts, so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been. (48)

Identity resides in the relationship of difference. In transience, eternity; in the foreign, the familiar. To make time (and life) whole is to recognize its irreducible duality.

This vision of differentiated unity, of a relation that both holds together and holds apart, which Le Guin develops most fully in the *heyiya-if* in *Always Coming Home*, underpins two of the most significant temporal metaphors in the book: *The Inhabitation of Time* and *The Simultaneity Principle*. The former, a mobile sculpture, is an arrangement of hammered wire ovals and “two thin, clear bubbles of glass,” all of which move in “complexly interwoven ellipsoid orbits about the common center, never quite meeting, never entirely parting” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 324). This marriage of the cyclic and the coexistent is repeated in the description of *The Simultaneity Principle*, which, as a musical composition, also incorporates linear progression, uniting coexistence and linearity, presence and procession.⁹ This dual union is clear in the composer’s description of his own work, which consists, he tells Shevek, of “[f]ive

⁹ This final point may need some elaboration. A work of music, like a work of fiction, necessarily unites the concept of presence (this moment, here, now, in which I listen) and that of procession. A melody can only be understood as a melody if I place the note(s) that I am hearing within the context of all of the notes that I have already heard and all those that I anticipate hearing. This points, of course, to a particular understanding of the relationship between past, present, and future, which will be dealt with a little later in the body of this chapter. For now, I wish only to point out the musical analogy relies on an implicit contrast between what Currie, in his discussion of Augustine’s metaphor of the psalm (the analogy has a long history, especially in the phenomenological tradition [Currie, 19]) calls “the moving now of the recitation” and the progression of which it is part. It is, in essence, the relationship between the note and the melody.

instruments each playing an independent cyclic theme; no melodic causality; the forward process entirely in the relationship of the parts” (155). It makes, he adds, “a lovely harmony” (155). The lovely harmony, and especially the synthesis of coexistence and succession, is also evident in the singing of the protestors on Urras, in which the immense physical distance occupied by the singers results in “the melody seem[ing] always to be lagging and catching up with itself ... and all parts of the song ... being sung at one time, though each singer sang the tune as a line from beginning to end” (263).

The depiction of present, past, and future not only reinforces this understanding of the connection between discrete (and traditionally opposed) components: it expands it, showing the relationship to be one not merely of interaction, but of interdependence. The reality of the present depends on the coherency and continuity of (linear) time, which can only be realized if the individual effects the union of the past and future with the present, in the present; linearly lived time (sequency) can only be understood through (mental) coexistence (simultaneity), which in turn require a grasp of sequential relationships. In an inversion of the “naïve” view of time as “a road laid out” – i.e., of sequential time as an independent, objective existent – Shevek argues that unless past and future are “made part of the present by memory and intention,” there is “no road, nowhere to go” (163). The sense of flux, of incessant and inescapable change, is evidence not, as in the presentist view (McKinnon, 1), of the impossibility of other times, but of their reality: if our experience consists of constantly changing presents, then past and future must be real, for “only their reality makes the present real” (308). Only within the context of the melody can the note be understood as music, rather than noise; only within that of the story does the event acquire its full significance.

This view bears some resemblance to the phenomenological understanding, which Currie traces from Augustine through Husserl and Heidegger, of the present as “a crossed structure of protentions and retentions” (68 – 69). Insofar, however, as these analyses tend, even as they define the present in terms of memory and anticipation, to render past and future subordinate to an “all-inclusive present” (Kümmel, 44) – whether this takes the form of “Augustine’s theistic conception of untensed eternity” (Currie, 19), in which “the distension of the past, present and future in the human mind” becomes “a kind of fragment of that ... never-ending present ... apprehended by God” (69), or of Husserl’s “entirely tensed phenomenology of time” (19), in which “the past, the present and the future exist strictly as a unity in human consciousness” (19) – the comparison breaks down. The relation between the ontologically independent present, past, and future depicted in *The Dispossessed* is far closer to Kümmel’s conception of time as “a *coexistent interrelation of future, past and present*” (40, emphasis in original), in which the “independent individual nature and determination” of the past, future, and present “makes possible their harmony within an articulated unitary structural interrelation” (44). Yet the *The Dispossessed*’s portrayal of the relationship between these three times goes even beyond this conceptual source in its insistence on the crucial importance of mutual definition through the interrelation of distinct and conceptually opposed entities. (Mental) co-presence defines sequence, which in turns asserts continuity, the indivisibility of differentiated times; times that, according to the sequency view, are not (at present) create the reality of the time that is.

The intertwining of present, past, and future, of linearity and cycle, and of succession (exclusivity) and coexistence, in addition to forming part of the content of *The Dispossessed*, shapes the structure of the novel itself, although the relationship between structure and content varies in the three cases. In particular, the presentation of the story by means of two distinct and

alternating storylines, whose most obvious effect is to reinforce the coexistence of sequency and simultaneity (conceptualized both as co-presence and as cycle), both supports and extends the mutually defining relationship between present, past, and future sketched above.

The basic formal characteristic of the work is the division of the narrative into two independent storylines, which take place, respectively, on Urras and on Anarres, and which are presented in alternating chapters. The Urras storyline is first in discourse time (it is the storyline with which the novel opens), but second in narrative time (the events related in it occur after those that take place on Anarres); the Anarres thread, vice versa. This results, first and foremost, in a dramatic juxtaposition of linearly disjunct moments, which is reinforced by the repetition of concepts and images in adjacent and concentric chapters (i.e., chapters that are distributed symmetrically on either side of the fulcrum of chapter seven, which is both the crisis point and the numerical, though not the temporal, centre of the novel, and which are therefore, though consecutive, still linearly non-adjacent) (Bittner, 260).¹⁰ Coexistence and linearity, simultaneity and sequency, reinforce and complement one another. Furthermore, the parallel linear narratives form an imperfect circle, a progressive cycle, a return to an altered origin that is evident in both structure and content. The storyline set on Anarres concludes with Shevek's decision to go to Urras (334) – that is, at the point just before the opening of the Urras plotline – while the final chapter, which concludes both the novel as a whole and the Urras storyline (understood as a

¹⁰ Examples of the former include “ignorance of Odo's life on Anarres and Urras in chapters two and three” (Bittner, 260), as well as the presence of prisons, and specifically the discussion and the reality of that in which Odo was confined, in the same chapters (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 30, 77 – 78); the image of Shevek striking the table edge in chapters eight and nine (228, 241); the deprivation of the famine on Anarres in chapter eight (218, 225 – 226) – and, retrospectively, in chapter ten (275) – and of the poor on Urras in chapter nine (250, 256 – 257); and the protest on Urras in chapter nine (263 – 266) and the mobbing of the grain truck described in chapter ten (though this takes place during the famine years narrated in chapter eight) (274 – 275). Bittner has meticulously catalogued the examples of repetition in concentric chapters (261 – 262); I will not list them here.

cycle that began with Shevek's departure from Anarres for Urras), sees Shevek's return from Urras to Anarres. The interlacing of these two plotlines may be most easily communicated by simply reproducing Bittner's visual schematic (258), in which "A" represents Anarres, "U" is Urras, and the numbers represent the order of the chapters:

AU	A	U	A	U	A	U	A	U	A	U	A	UA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

Structurally, the novel consists of two overlapping cycles: the cycle within the discourse (which brings the reader from chapter two, through every even-numbered chapter, and back again to chapter one); and the cycle within the story (which brings Shevek from Anarres to Urras and back again, i.e., from chapter one to chapter thirteen, via the odd-numbered chapters). Neither, however, is in fact the closed, sterile circle that Le Guin rejects (*The Dispossessed*, 294 – 295); instead, each is an instance of "journey and return" (295), for each ends on a note of change. The cycle in the discourse ends with Shevek's taking and carrying through the decision to leave Anarres for Urras; that in the story, which ends with a perfect symmetry ("AU" mirrored in "UA"), closes with Shevek's return, not to the society he left, but to an Anarres in ferment, a society drastically changed by his individual choice. Shevek, furthermore, brings with him the Hainishman Ketho (339 – 340), the first foreigner to enter Anarres since the planet's settlement (338), thereby effecting the intrusion of the external into the closed circle. The interplay of the two parallel storylines thus, in addition to embodying the mutually exclusive and mutually defining reality of succession and coexistence, makes concrete the relationship between change and continuity, linear progression and cycle.

The implications of the parallel sequential storylines for the understanding of present, past, and future are rather more complex. The net effect is two-fold: the alternation between storylines reinforces the idea that the present is, at one level, defined by its relation with the past and the future; and it also, paradoxically, supports the independent existence of all moments in time and extends the understanding of the relationships between them to encompass more than simple linearity. The definition of the present through the meeting of past (memory) and future (intention, anticipation) is essentially an effect of prolepsis taking place in the “future” of the narrative thread – that is, in the chapter set in Urras. Prolepsis – by which I mean that variant of it which Currie calls “narratological prolepsis,” which is “the anticipation of, or flashforward to, future events within the universe of narrated events” (31) – is, from the reader’s perspective, necessarily anticipatory, because he or she does not yet know the rest of the story. Its nature relative to the story’s characters, however, may be either anticipatory or retrospective. In *The Dispossessed*, it is frequently – especially in the early Urras chapters (Bittner, 263, 264) – retrospective, as Shevek, on Urras, remembers earlier events within his life that have not yet been narrated (i.e., that take place later in the Anarres storyline). The effect of this state of affairs, in which “Shevek’s past tense is often the reader’s future tense, is, as Bittner points out, a “fus[ion]” of “memory and anticipation” within the present of the reading (263). The example given by Bittner (263 – 264), of Shevek’s remembering, in chapter three, his daughter’s offer of her handkerchief to him after a long separation – an event that will not in fact take place until the tenth chapter – offers a good illustration of this device.

The second consequence – the reinforcement of the independent existence of all moments, present, past or future, and the (implicit) introduction of nonlinear ways of understanding the relationships between these – arises directly and solely from the alternation

between the Urras and the Anarres storylines. The juxtaposition of these two narrative threads means that any given chapter will be bookended, either by the past (in the case of an Urras chapter sandwiched between Anarres chapters) or the future (in that of an Anarres chapter occurring between Urras ones). This draws attention to the extent to which we tend to define the present through contrast, as a *now* in comparison with a *not-now*, and thus to the importance of perspective in determining whether a given moment is present or not. The present is certainly made real, particularly as the site of choice, by being placed in relation with the past and the future; but it is the *present* by virtue of one's being *there*. The implication is that all moments have independent existence, which is perfectly in accord with Le Guin's insistence on the "reality" of the past and the future (*The Dispossessed*, 308). The further implication, however, is that each moment, in its independent existence, is "simultaneously past, present, and future" (Bittner, 261). It is therefore defined by its multiple and fluid relations with other moments – relations which, like the combination of a sequential storyline with an apposition of temporally disjunct moments, may be both linear and exclusive and non-linear and coexistent.

The Dispossessed thus both asserts (through explicit discussion and metaphor) and embodies (in its structure) the irreducible, complementary, contradictory truth of simultaneity and sequence, coexistence and exclusivity, Being and Becoming. Although the role of perspective – that is, of one's presence at a particular point in time – in defining the present as such is implicit in the alternation of chapters from the two storylines, it is not the major focus that it is in *Always Coming Home*, nor the determining factor that it is in *Lavinia*. The complexes of conceptual dualities that, together, constitute sequency and simultaneity are conceived as interdependent and ontologically equal (though not equivalent), essential and inescapable aspects of both the nature of time and our experience of it. Although this perception

of sequency and simultaneity as objective characteristics of time is challenged in the two later novels, the central creative tension in our understanding of time (that between transience and continuity, coexistence and exclusivity, the present moment and all others, and, finally, the linear and the non-linear) carries forward, as do many metaphors and images (time as a book or a song, the idea of “coming home” and the journey and return, and the sterile circle) that recur in *Always Coming Home* and *Lavinia*.

CHAPTER TWO

TIME IN THE VALLEY

A distinct shift in focus takes place between *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*. Where *The Dispossessed* seeks to establish both the truth and the interdependence of the dualities embodied in sequency and simultaneity (change and continuity, linearity and non-linearity, the succession of exclusive presents and the eternity of coexistence), *Always Coming Home* assumes the former and qualifies the latter. The relationship of differentiated unity so central to *The Dispossessed*, in which each component of a conceptual duality defines the other, remains crucial; but in at least two cases, it no longer adequately describes the relationship between the components of these conceptual pairs, as they emerge in the worldview of the People of the Valley (the Kesh) and the structure of the book itself. First, and most strikingly, both the Kesh and their creator subordinate the linear to the non-linear. Second, more subtly but perhaps more profoundly, the dichotomy of exclusivity and coexistence is reframed as a question of perception, in which the first-person perspective is the key factor that separates these two modes of interacting with the world, and thus allows both to be true. These changes, together with the concept of mutually constituting relation embodied in the figure of the *heyiya-if*, result in a conception of time that simultaneously asserts the crucial importance of the present moment and insists that it exists within the context of the other moments that define it – moments whose relationship when non-present is both more complex and more significant than models that conceive of time as a linear relation allow.

The subordination of the linear to the non-linear in general, and of linear (i.e., sequential) to non-linear time in particular, is evident in both the Kesh view of chronological time and the structure of the book. The Kesh do not see the linear as the only, or even the most, valid

principle for organizing existence within time; it is simply “one system of data classification among many” (178). The Kesh researcher interviewed by Pandora “doesn’t perceive time as a direction, let alone a progress” (181), and views linear chronology as “an essentially artificial, almost an arbitrary arrangement of events” (178). The People of the Valley do keep some track of years, for pragmatic reasons, but they attach little importance to their passage as such (177 – 178). Similarly, while the days within a year are “counted straight forward from 1 to 365,” a particular date’s order in this sequence is not seen as important: in fact, among most people, there is “some confusion about what day it is” (178). The passage of time is instead defined by the *wakwa*, the ritual celebrations that structure life within the year, whose timing is determined by reference to lunar and solar cycles, rather than to a standardized numerical system (178), and which are visualized in a “nonsequential” pictorial arrangement along the twinned spirals of the *heyiya-if* (47). In matters of chronological time, the Valley mind considers “the use of the question and the truth of the answer ... relative and not at all self-evident” (171).

This relegation of linearity and chronological time to a limited pragmatic role is reinforced through both contrast (with the three Cities) and structural parallels (with the text as a whole). The City of Mind, the City of Man, and the City of the Condor are all preoccupied with the linear and the quantifiable. This is most obvious in the case of the City of Mind, the superintelligent computer network which evolves in “the direct linear mode” (157), and which seeks to organize information according to the “linear chronology” in which the Kesh display virtually no interest (160). It is also, however, characteristic of both of the human cities recognized by the Kesh: the City of Man (the name given to “this period in which we [Pandora/Le Guin and her readers] live, our civilization, Civilization as we know it” [160]), and the City (or People) of the Condor. The latter keep close track of chronology, because they have

“a numerical system of lucky and unlucky days that start[s] with your birthday” (366); the former has “every second and tenth of a second and millisecond and nanosecond clocked” (434), and invests years and group of years with “a character of their own” (e.g., “1984, the Twenties, the Thirteenth Century, etc.”) (178). The primary representative of the City of Man, Pandora (the “editor” of this fictional ethnography), also expends considerable time and energy trying to pin the Kesh society down within a linear chronology (see, e.g., 171 – 172) – an exercise that highlights both the importance of chronological time in twentieth century Western society and its irrelevance to the People of the Valley. In each of these cases, chronological time – abstract, quantifiable, and divorced from the living context that could render it meaningful – is reified and ascribed a virtually hegemonic status. Not unrelatedly, both human societies are depicted as oppressive and destructive (see, e.g., 26, 160, 433 – 434), while the City of Mind is an alien species, one whose mode of existence is utterly unsuitable to human needs (159).

The Kesh relegation of the linear and the chronological to the role of partial and contingent organizing principles is mirrored by the structure of the text itself, which profoundly disrupts the linear continuity of the narrative as a whole, while still allowing the reader to construct a continuous linear narrative if he or she so desires. Traditional narratives (mostly self-contained, except in the case of the story of Stone Telling, whose three separate segments both provide the through-line of the book and highlight the rupture of continuity) are interspersed with songs, poems, recipes, pieces of mock-academic text, sayings, and “a list of things that will be needed four days from now” (326), none of which need be read in the order presented to be understood. The process by which the reader learns about the Kesh is still cumulative, but it is as much lateral as linear. This effect is intensified by several further authorial choices, such as presenting Pandora’s reflections as a series of self-contained episodes that are never placed in

explicit relation to one another, and having her direct the reader to other portions of the book for more information on a particular idea or practice (see, e.g., 47, 50, 73, 93, 432). Linearity is available if the reader chooses to seek it: each section of *Stone Telling*'s story ends with a note of the page where the next section begins (43, 214), and it is possible to trace an evolution in Pandora's understanding of the Valley. It is, however, deliberately broken up and de-emphasized, presented as simply one way among many of organizing the material in a diverse collection. Furthermore, by presenting an ethnographic field study of a *future* people (ix) and foregrounding this fact every so often with deliberately jarring tense constructions (e.g., "[i]n our day the River of the Valley barely trickles through a drought year ... but the Na *will have been* a bigger, though a shorter, stream" [55, emphasis added]; see also ix, 434), Le Guin problematizes not only linearity in general, but chronological (linear, exclusive) time in particular.

In place of linearity, Le Guin establishes two non-linear organizing principles: first, unified duality; and second, spatialization. These define the Kesh understanding of time, producing temporal metaphors that differ dramatically from that of the abstract, quantifiable, exclusive sequence that underpins the notion of chronological time. Chief among these are the *heyiya-if*, which embodies unified duality, and the spatialized image of time as a landscape or house. The former describes the relationship between types of time, as well as that between change and continuity; the latter illustrates that between moments, or – more accurately – that between each moment and the composite of which it forms a part. The fact that I have identified these as the main concrete expressions of the two principles that define the Valley conception of time, however, should not be taken to imply a simple one-to-one correspondence between concept and metaphor. The two principles (and indeed, the two metaphors) structure one another. Dualities are understood in spatial terms, whether these are aligned with the *heyiya-if*

(the Five Houses of Earth and the Four Houses of Sky) or not (the division of temporal existence into inside and outside the world), while the spatialized multiplicity described by the image of the house is dualist in both its division of existence into inside and outside and its introduction, inside the house, of the inevitable dualism inherent in the first-person perspective.

In the Valley, time is understood to consist of various *types* of time, which constitute and are constituted by integrated binaries. The Kesh recognize at least four such pairs: mortality/eternity, individual/communal time, now/not-now, and inside/outside the world. Both the nature of and the relationship between the components of each of the first three binaries emerge largely (though not only) through the discussion of the Nine Houses. The relation between the two components of this image (the Four and the Five Houses), which is central to Valley thought as a whole, follows the pattern established by the second dominant metaphor that shapes the Kesh worldview: the figure of the *heyiya-if*. The fourth binary, in contrast – the division of existence into inside and outside the world – although it also consists of mutually defining opposites, is associated with neither the Nine Houses nor the *heyiya-if*. Given this, it seems wise to discuss this last dyad before tackling the interlinked conceptual complexes represented by the preceding three.

The distinction between living inside and outside the world is a distinctive and telling feature of the Kesh view of existence, temporal and otherwise. Essentially, it entails a (to us) profoundly counter-intuitive understanding of the relationship between time, space, and behaviour, which relegates time to the position of a dependent variable, and so renders the distinction between “inside” and “outside” one between ways of interacting with one’s world, rather than one between times (at least as we, the readers, understand the concept). Although “the time outside” is used to denote what we would think of as an era – that of civilization, of

“the City of Man” – it is described in spatial and relational terms: to be “outside the world” is to exist in “a remote region, set apart from the community and continuity of human/animal/earthly existence” that defines Valley life, and it is a description applied to the City of Mind (which exists, in our terms, at the same time as the Kesh society) as well as the City of Man (160). The distinction is a behavioural one, and its conceptualization is spatialized. As such, it illustrates, not only the persistent subordination of linear chronology to a vividly spatial conception of time, but the pervasive dualism of Valley thought, as well as the crucial role accorded to *relation* in shaping reality (for more on this, see “Being as Participant and Participation”).

Before I can undertake an in-depth discussion of the three remaining binaries – mortality and eternity, individual and communal time, and the now and the not-now – something must be said about the two broader conceptual complexes of which they form part: the Nine Houses and the *heyiya-if* (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 45 – 52). The Nine Houses, which are divided into the Five Houses of Earth and the Four Houses of Sky, include all beings, and all types of being (including the temporal varieties), in the Valley world. The *heyiya-if*, or “gyre,” describes the relationship between these two groups, and between the two parts of a given pair more generally; it consists of “two spirals centred upon the same (empty) space” (47), discrete (and usually opposed) elements held in a mutually defining relationship of difference. The empty space at the centre is the “hinge”: the “discontinuity,” the “gap, [the] leap, break, flip, [the] reversal from in to out, from out to in” (160), that which “connects and ... holds apart” (257). The *heyiya-if* thus embodies, with considerable economy and elegance, the relationship of differentiated unity sketched in *The Dispossessed*, in which identity emerges from the interaction of opposed entities and ideas, and which centres on an indeterminacy. As a model of development in time that embodies both progression and cyclicity, it also provides a visual

representation of the interplay between change and continuity that *The Dispossessed* explores through the images of voyage and return and the open circle. The pattern of voyage and return, leaving and coming back, avoids the sterility of the circle by arriving, finally, at an *altered* origin. The voyager comes back to the beginning, but both she/he and the beginning have changed. “You *can* go home again,” the narrator of *The Dispossessed* remarks, “so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been” (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 48). In *Always Coming Home*, the gyre, which is explicitly contrasted with the circle (26), likewise represents a progressive homecoming, a turning and return. To walk the gyre is to reverse direction and so, finally, return again. In contrast, the circle, though powerful, is rigid, and so destructive (26); it is “straight, single, terrible” (214). To “close the circle” – to refuse to change and grow, as Stone Telling’s mother does when she goes back to her first name (43, 183) – is to regress, to “go against the earth” (183). Development in time requires change as well as continuity.

Although the scope of the *heyiya-if* and the Nine Houses is not limited to the temporal, both metaphors are crucial to the Kesh concept of types of time. The three binaries that I will discuss here – mortality and eternity, individual and communal time, and the now and the not-now – emerge principally from the varied associations of the Five and Four Houses, paralleling their division and thus, by implication, existing in a similar relationship. Mortality is associated, along with the Five Houses of Earth, with the left arm of the *heyiya-if*, while eternity and the Four Houses reside in the right one (44). (At another point, eternity is described as located “in” the Ninth House, i.e., the last of the Four Houses [49].) The Five and Four Houses are also

associated with, respectively, the individual and the generic aspects of being (45 – 46, 447),¹¹ a distinction which parallels that between “private, individual, historical lived time” and “communal, impersonal, cyclical being-time” (279). The now/not-now distinction, for its part, is established by the most striking feature of the Kesh language: its division into Earth and Sky Modes. The former is used when speaking “to and of living persons and local places” (both of which are associated with the Five Houses [48]), “in one of the present tenses,” and “with the auxiliaries meaning ‘can,’ ‘be able,’ ‘must’”; the latter is required “in all discourse concerning Four-House people and places and in all past and future tenses,” as well as for the conditional, optative, and subjunctive, and for negative constructions, abstractions, “formal discourse,” rhetoric, and literary works (535). Broadly speaking, the Four Houses are associated with the wild, passivity, possibility, the imagined or intellectual, and not-being, while the Five Houses are linked with the domestic(ated), agency, and material being; in specifically temporal terms, the Four Houses exist in the non-present, the Five Houses in the present. Notably, the Sky Mode is used for both past and future: both the dead and the unborn live in the Four Houses. The distinction here, like in Le Guin’s/Pandora’s “first note” (ix), is not between this moment, those which preceded it, and those which will follow; it is between this moment and all other times. The principle of differentiation is not linear, but binary. This is obviously important as another instance of the dethroning of linearity as a guiding principle for ordering experience; as will become evident later, it is also significant in the treatment of exclusivity and coexistence.

¹¹ Persons (plant, animal, and human) may be located either in the Five Houses (if considered as individuals) or the Four Houses (if considered as members of a species) (45 – 46). The individual is simultaneously an individual and a particular manifestation of, or participation in, a generic type of being, the being of that species and “being in general” (97). For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see “Being as Participant and Participation.”

The strong correspondences between each of these dualities and the governing metaphor of the Nine Houses reinforce the principle of binary differentiation in general and the content of each pair in particular, but they provide only a partial picture of the relationship between the different temporal pairs. The various binaries not only parallel one another; they interact, with any given pair further structuring time within other dualities. In the case of mortality/eternity and communal/individual time, for example, the components of each pair are shaped by the presence of the other: communal time, though it partakes of the eternal, is composed of individual, lived mortalities, while individual and communal time may interact within the span of a mortal life (279). This is particularly pronounced in the case of the now/not-now binary, which structures, not only every other temporal binary in Kesh thought, but each *component* of every temporal binary. Even eternity can be thought of in these terms: the Kesh language includes a “timeless present,” which corresponds with our present participle, but is used only “in telling myths, recounting dreams, speaking of the dead, and ... ceremonial recitations” (44) – all activities and persons associated with the Four Houses. The conceptual distinctions that define the types of time are not only parallel, but cross-cutting, producing a far more complex understanding of time than would otherwise be the case.

The ubiquity of this now/not-now distinction points to the vital importance accorded the present in the Kesh conception of time – an importance that, at first glance, conflicts with the conception of non-present moments implicit in both certain types of time and the spatialized description of time as a landscape or house. The Valley worldview, as Pandora despairingly remarks, is “all middle” (172). The Kesh largely disregard chronological time, not only because of the perceived limited utility of linearity as an organizational principle, but because they are intensely focused on the present as the locus of experience and, especially, relation. The events

described in Kesh stories and histories are not clearly “located” in time – that is, they are not contextualized in terms of a precisely quantified relationship with the present of the telling (see, e.g., the “origin” stories [168 – 171] and the histories [126 – 153]). Instead, they take place in a vaguely defined past, a hazy “not-now” that, by its very imprecision, reinforces the experienced present of both the telling and the tale. Both past and future, as Le Guin/Pandora observes, are “obscure” (ix). The present, though it is, like the “connection of present contemporaries” established within it, “ephemeral and irreproducible” (538), is paramount. “All we ever have is here, now” (ix).

This understanding of the present moment creates obvious difficulties for a vision of time which includes eternity and “communal, impersonal, cyclical being-time” (279), and which conceives of the relationship between moments as analogous to that between points in space. Pandora’s description of the time-consciousness of the Kesh researcher Gather, whom we would think of as an architectural historian, throws the latter incompatibility into sharp relief: Gather, she tells us,

doesn’t perceive time as a direction, let alone a progress, but as a landscape in which one may go any number of directions, or nowhere. He spatialises time; it is not an arrow, nor a river, but a house, the house he lives in. One may go from room to room, and come back; to go outside, all you have to do is open the door.
(181)

This spatialization of time reinforces the pervasive questioning and subordination of linearity characteristic of both the Kesh and the book, and indeed, this is the context in which it is presented. However, it also highlights the extent to which the Valley conception of time as a

whole is characterized by coexistence. Other rooms in the house, or other spots in the landscape, do not have a different *kind* of existence than the room or the spot which one happens to occupy. Eternity and cyclical, communal being-time, like the notion of simultaneity in *The Dispossessed*, imply coexistence; spatialization implies not only coexistence, but identity (the same kind of existence) and accessibility. The present, however, is as exclusive in the Kesh view as it is in the understanding of time as sequence in *The Dispossessed*, or in the presentist view in the philosophy of time (McKinnon, 305). It thus calls into question those elements in the Valley conception of time that rest upon an acceptance of coexistence, and problematizes the very attempt to cross the abyss between now and not-now, to represent another time, that all literature represents (ix).

Le Guin could, of course, simply present this as another of the unified dualities evoked by the *heyiya-if*, and to a certain extent, this is what she does. The contradictory elements, however, are not quite those they were in *The Dispossessed*. Exclusivity and coexistence have been redefined in terms of experience and existence, a distinction whose nature is most clearly expressed through the house metaphor quoted at length above. This image makes explicit one of the most basic characteristics of our being, a feature which is largely glossed over by the figure of the mobile sculpture (“The Inhabitation of Time”), and implicit but not emphasized in that of the melody (“The Simultaneity Principle”) in *The Dispossessed*:¹² the inescapable presence of a first-person perspective. All rooms in the house coexist; all can be accessed; but the person exists always, only, in one at a time. By the same token, the present is all that we can know directly, because it is the present by virtue of our being there. “[H]ere, now” is “[a]ll we have”

¹² In point of fact, the clearest expression of this concept in *The Dispossessed* is in the temporal metaphor of the book, which draws attention to the inevitably limited perspective of the reader, and which is ascribed to Simultaneity Theory rather than to the General Temporal Theory.

(ix), but it is not all that is. The moment, like the room, is dual in nature: *here* and *not-here* (*not-here* when one is outside it, *here* when one is within), *now* and *not-now*. As present, it is “ephemeral and irreproducible” (538); as non-present, it is “general and potentially eternal” (538). Which aspect is foremost depends, so to speak, on where one stands. The relationship is still that represented by the *heyiya-if*, but the incompatibility and the interaction is no longer between aspects of time; it is between modes of being.

This is not – I wish to be quite clear on this head – to claim that one of these two modes of being is truer than the other. Coexistence is not the truth beneath the illusion of exclusivity, any more than the two aspects of the moment represent two different types of reality. Both are real; both are equally true. To exist is to exist in relation, not only between beings within the present moment, but between the present moment and the totality of which it forms part: it is to exist as the exclusive interacting with the coexistent.

So far, I have discussed, in considerable depth, the ways in which Le Guin’s treatment of time in *Always Coming Home* is characterized by an attention to the interaction between linearity and non-linearity, on one hand, and between exclusivity and coexistence on the other. The importance of the first of these pairs is obvious: not only does the restriction of linearity, in time and more broadly, to a limited and pragmatic role inform the premise and structure of the book, it is explicitly identified as a key element of the Valley worldview and shapes the concrete images through which the Kesh conceptualize time. The interaction between exclusivity and coexistence is, by comparison, as it was in *The Dispossessed*, less prominent, but equally, if not more, important. Here, in fact, it is perhaps even more central than in the earlier work: not only does it underpin the Valley conception of time; it enables and embodies the concept of relation, which is (as will be discussed later) foundational to the Kesh understanding of personhood.

The appositions of present/eternity and change/permanence, though neither foregrounded (like the relationship between linearity/non-linearity) nor central to the Kesh conception of time as such (like that between exclusivity and coexistence), intertwine with both of these dualities, and particularly the latter one. The juxtaposition of present and eternity is most evident in the house metaphor for time, which suggests two possible understandings of the latter: eternity could be either the composite of differentiated moments (all of the rooms that comprise the house), or an undifferentiated totality (the space outside the house, on the other side of the door), or perhaps both. The Kesh distinction between mortality and eternity, though it establishes eternity as alien but accessible and reinforces the idea that all times are coexistent, does not resolve this indeterminacy: eternity is in a House, but it is the Ninth House, that member of the Four Houses whose direction is “out” (49). Mortality and eternity, “historical” lived time and “cyclical” being-time (279) also suggest an interaction between change and continuity, one roughly aligned with that between the linear and bounded experience of a single life, and the non-linear, communal being of which it forms part. However, the most explicit references to change and continuity (apart from those concerning the gyre as a model of change, which frame the matter in terms of personal development and individual choice rather than characteristics of time) associate them with the present and the non-present, and thus with exclusivity/coexistence rather than with linearity/non-linearity. Objects and relations existing within the present, and so, by extension, the present itself, are “ephemeral and irreproducible,” while those existing in the non-present are “general and potentially eternal” (538) – a juxtaposition that implicitly invokes that between the individual (associated with the Five Houses) and generic (associated with the Four Houses) aspects of being.

In *Always Coming Home*, then, linearity/non-linearity is decoupled from exclusivity/coexistence: exclusivity is reframed as a function of perspective, and non-linear relations between coexistent moments are taken as the norm. The redefinition of exclusivity, in particular, signals a fundamental shift in Le Guin's presentation of time and its relation to the individual. The mutually constituting relationship of difference between the two objective aspects of time (*The Dispossessed*) has become the irreducible and essential intertwining of time and human temporality. It is this relationship that *Lavinia* takes up and again redefines, producing a vision of time and our existence within it that differs subtly but profoundly from those laid out in the earlier novels, even as it draws upon their insights.

CHAPTER THREE

FATE, FORETELLING, AND FICTIONALITY IN *LAVINIA*

Lavinia represents both a continuation of and a departure from the explorations of time and temporality undertaken in *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*. The most striking difference is the role that time plays in the work as a whole: rather than constituting a central theme in its own right (as in *The Dispossessed*) or a concrete illustration of key thematic concerns (as in *Always Coming Home*), it provides the conceptual foundation for the novel's treatment of an enduring philosophical question: the nature of the relationship between the individual and the totality of which he or she is part. Since time itself is never discussed as a conceptual problem, the understanding of it at work in the novel can be established only indirectly. As it emerges from the treatment of fate and foretelling, the metafictional framing of Lavinia's tale within the *Aeneid*, the concept of *continuing*, and the structure of the narrative, it carries forward many of the preoccupations and insights of *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*, while differing from them, subtly but profoundly. Where *The Dispossessed* focuses on the interdependence of sequency and simultaneity, and *Always Coming Home* decouples exclusivity and linearity in its quest to demonstrate the alinear relationship existing between moments, *Lavinia* considers the four temporal dyads in terms of the relationship between part and whole. Thus linearity and exclusivity are both inevitable characteristics of our being within time and partial windows onto a totality of coexistent moments, relations between which may be conspicuously non-linear; the present exists and is experienced within the context, not only of the mortal life, but of eternity; and change and continuity, rather than defining each other through contradistinction, are to be found within one another.

As in the previous two books, the depiction of coexistence in *Lavinia* is intertwined with that of non-linear temporal relations, with instances of the latter requiring, and so reinforcing, the former. The non-linear temporal relations are those underpinning the practice of foretelling and the presence of Vergil at Albunea; the coexistence of times is established through the treatment of fate, belief in which is the basis of foretelling, and whose nature is both illuminated and complicated by the interaction between Vergil and Lavinia, the world of the poet and the world of the poem.

The relationship between fate and foretelling, as it is understood by the society that Le Guin depicts, is fairly straightforward, and strongly suggests an understanding of time that encompasses coexistence. Omens, portents, and prophecy permeate the daily life of the ancient Latins and the Trojans, and are accepted by them as both factual statements concerning future events and, less frequently, expressions of the will of “the powers of the earth and sky” (205). While this distinction is problematic,¹³ the concrete instances of foretelling presented in the novel function more as prediction than supernatural directives.¹⁴ This is most evident, of course, in cases where an unambiguous prediction is later proved true, as occurs following the swarming of the bees (27), the spontaneous combustion of Lavinia’s hair (81), the sighting of the white sow (236, 269), and, of course, the depiction of the future on Aeneas’s shield (24 – 25); the fulfilling of vaguer portents (e.g., 26) is less impressive, but still suggests that these are a window onto future events, rather than onto the current desires of the sacred powers that populate Lavinia’s

¹³ The two interpretations of the role and functioning of oracles, portents, and prophecies parallel the distinction between fate and the *fas*, which Lavinia defines as “the right, what one must do” (62). These concepts are closely connected; however, the relationship between them is complex and at times self-contradictory. For the moment, we will, like Lavinia, distinguish between “what’s right to do” (the *fas*) and “what’s to come of it” (fate) (41); but we should keep in mind, as we do so, that this distinction is one that the novel itself problematizes.

¹⁴ The sole exception is the response that the oracle at Albunea gives Latinus regarding Lavinia’s marriage, which contains both instruction and prediction (91).

world. The significance of omens is open to misunderstanding and manipulation (e.g., 167), and may not become clear until after the event (Lavinia's dream of Aeneas' death [28, 48, 85, 223]); even in these cases, however, the events that the omens truly indicate come inevitably to pass. Divination and prophecy thus entail a particular relationship between this moment and another, linearly disjunct one, a relationship that both reverses the directionality of linear time and requires that the future moment be already in existence. Omens and prophecies can, in Lavinia's world, provide reliable information about future events because these events already *are*. This relationship between coexistence and foretelling is the inverse of that in *The Dispossessed*: "foreseeing the future" (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 200), the possibility of which is summarily dismissed in the earlier book (199), is in *Lavinia* a concrete demonstration of the coexistence of times.

This interpretation of the significance of fate and foretelling is supported by the metafictional framing of Lavinia's reality within that of Vergil. The reality of Lavinia and her world originates in, and is substantially – though, crucially, not completely – determined by, their depiction in Vergil's *Aeneid* (3 – 4). This premise renders literal Simultaneity Theory's metaphorical description of the temporal universe as a book (*The Dispossessed*, 196), with comparable implications for the understanding of time. For my purposes here, the most important of these is the parallel – explicitly drawn in *The Dispossessed* (196) – between the coexistence of all parts of the book, on one hand, and of moments in time, on the other. Lavinia's future is, quite literally, already written – a notion that is reinforced by Lavinia's awareness of her own fictionality (e.g., *Lavinia*, 3, 100) and by the use of a specific text with a prior existence in the world of the reader for the frame story. For Lavinia, existing within Vergil's epic, the poet is a *vates*, a "foreteller, soothsayer" (43); knowledge of the poem is

knowledge of the future (25, 173, 257). Aeneas could not have averted the war between the Trojans and the Latins (119), any more than Lavinia can stave off her husband's death (211, 213, 223).

This understanding of Lavinia's reality (in both senses of the phrase) is established entirely through her interactions with Vergil, "the maker, the foreteller, the truth teller" (257). This intercourse between author and character, maker and made, is one instance of Le Guin's consistent blurring of the boundary between the world of the poem and that of the poet, a manoeuvre that is deeply significant for the understanding of time operating in the novel. The challenge to clear-cut categories like "fiction" and "reality" is implicit in the very notion that an entity with no objective existence in the world of the reader (Lavinia) can produce an artefact that does possess it (the text). Any work that claims to be the production of a self-consciously fictional character, then, begins to poke holes in the wall between fact and fiction. *Lavinia* develops this embryonic tension into an explicit thematic concern, questioning the integrity and validity of both categories and subtly and systematically dismantling the careful distinction between them established at the beginning of the novel. The very sentence that most clearly expresses this distinction between the factual world and the fictional one denies the latter's dependence on the former: "No doubt," Lavinia muses, "someone with my name ... did exist, but she may have been so different from my own idea of myself, or my poet's idea of me, that it only confuses me to think about her" (3). The differentiation between the world of historical personages (the "real" Lavinia, Vergil) – which the reader assumes to be a representation of his or her own reality – and that of the poem is accompanied by an assertion of the autonomy of the imagined reality. Not only do Lavinia's world and self continue existing and developing well after the conclusion of the poem (89 – 90, 272); they actually diverge from Vergil's

representation of them, often in crucial particulars, within the span of the poetic narrative itself (3 – 4, 144, 200). Conversely, Vergil – who belongs, as we assume, to the reader’s world, the world of historical fact, the independent reality – remembers guiding Dante in the underworld (61). Reality is, on some level, fiction, and fiction assumes its own reality. Even more important, as far as the relationship between the two worlds is concerned, is the assertion of continuity or identity between them, a claim that is made through drawing them into direct temporal (linear and chronological) relation. Lavinia’s girlhood takes place “twenty-five or thirty centuries” before her audience’s lifetimes (5); Aeneas’ shield depicts events that occur not only outside the time span of the poem, but well after Vergil’s death, and even up to the twentieth century (25); and Lavinia, at the end of the book, speaks to us from our own time (272).

I have dwelt on these two related features of *Lavinia* – its problematization of factuality and fictionality, which challenges the assumption that the worlds of poet and poem possess different kinds of reality, and its suggestion that they are in fact not only the same *kind of*, but *the same* reality – at length, because they have two important and contradictory consequences for the understanding of time as coexistence. In the first place, they support and extend the notion of time as the coexistence of moments. If the “fictional” and “real” worlds are in fact one, then Vergil’s disembodied peregrinations – which could otherwise be viewed as a movement between *kinds* of reality that preserves the distinction between them, especially given Vergil’s bodiless condition (38) – must be understood as strikingly non-linear interactions between coexistent moments, an interpretation that is further supported by the fact that Vergil’s body continues to

die even as his spirit interacts with Lavinia (38).¹⁵ The very interactions through which Lavinia becomes aware of her fictionality and her future thus reinforce the coexistence of linearly disjunct times upon whose acceptance this knowledge rests, and – together with the depiction of events from Vergil’s time and from ours on Aeneas’ shield (25) – establish it as a characteristic of “reality” as well as of “fictional” narratives. Yet in questioning the distinction and eliding the divide between reality and fiction – especially by establishing Vergil as part of the reality that he invents and depicting the (partial) autonomy of the creation from its creator – the novel breaks down the correspondence between the poem and fate that seems to provide both the clearest evidence for and the most concrete image of the coexistence of times. A relationship between the two still exists, but it is more complex than a straightforward equivalence. “Though all my poet sang was true and is true,” Lavinia says, “yet there were small mistakes in the truth of it” (144). The implications of this paradox are well beyond the scope of this chapter; for now, it suffices to note that though a conception of time as the coexistence of moments necessarily underlies both the concept of fate and the non-linear temporal relations that both establish and illustrate it, the relationship the poem and fate is highly complex.

Yet if time is necessarily characterized by the coexistence of (all) moments and the potential for non-linear, as well as linear, relations between them, temporality – the individual’s experience of time – is defined by exclusivity and linearity. The nature and interdependence of these characteristics of temporality can be most concisely demonstrated by turning again to two

¹⁵ Vergil’s presence at Albunea is non-linear in the sense that it contravenes both the ordered nature and the unidirectionality of linear time. This is perhaps most obvious in the spectacular contortions that result when Lavinia tries to define Vergil’s position in temporal relation to her own: “[A]lthough [Vergil] was dying when he came to me, and has been dead a long time now, he hasn’t yet been born ... He hasn’t forgotten me yet, but he will, when at last he comes to be born. When he first imagines me he won’t know that he is yet to meet me in the forest of Albunea” (9).

of the devices crucial to establishing coexistence: the metafictional framing of Lavinia's story within the *Aeneid*, and the treatment of non-linear temporal interactions. The notion of temporal existence as a book, which is made concrete in *Lavinia*, and which entails a concept of time as coexistence, also implies – as Shevek himself points out in *The Dispossessed* (196) – an understanding of our *experience* of time as sequential: reading (human temporality) involves a linear movement through a whole that is all already there, but each piece (moment) of which we can only perceive in isolation, while we are in it. Lavinia herself, as she lives through the events of her life/poem – all in order, in succession, in spite of her knowledge of the future – exemplifies this.¹⁶ In the same way, the convoluted temporal relations so central to *Lavinia* imply an understanding of human temporality as both exclusive (in the lived moment) and linear (in the relations between lived moments). In essence, this stems from the fact that these incidents, though they involve direct interaction between moments that are, in linear terms, separated by vast stretches of intervening time, can only be experienced within the exclusive present – that moment which is the only one by virtue of our being *in* it, and which is related to all other such moments by the individual's inevitably linear (from his or her perspective) movement between them. Thus Vergil and Lavinia both experience the profoundly non-linear temporal interactions involved in their meetings as successive exclusive presents within the sequence of their own lives, while portents are interpreted from within the exclusive present of the individual (with the result that the import of a given omen may not become clear until after

¹⁶ When examined further, of course, the clear correspondence between reading and the experience of time more generally begins to break down, even in the case of books that are read “in order” and that do not aim to disrupt the continuity and cumulative quality of linear narrative. In addition to Currie's objections to equating the temporality of reading with that of living, which centre on the nature of the future in both cases (18), the very linearity of the reading process itself has been questioned by theorists working in the hermeneutic and reader-response traditions. For the purposes of understanding the treatment of time and temporality in *Lavinia*, however, and given the explicit parallel drawn in *The Dispossessed*, it seems justifiable to accept the metaphor at face value.

the event.) Although there are other instances of this (167, 212), Lavinia's dream of Aeneas' death (28 – 29), the significance of which does not become clear until the event occurs (223), is the most striking.

Implicit in the picture that I have drawn above, in which exclusivity is tied to the first-person perspective and temporal linearity is a consequence of this perspective's movement between coexistent moments in a linear relation, is a particular understanding of the relationship between the present and eternity. The nature of this view has already been suggested by my reference, above, to the "exclusive present." If all times coexist and relations between them may or may not be linear, the present cannot be understood – as it would be in a presentist (or, in *The Dispossessed*, Sequency) conception of time (McKinnon, 305) – as an objective existent, indeed, as the *only* time in existence, with a reality denied to or different from that of the moments that precede or follow it. Instead, as in *Always Coming Home*, it is a particular relation between the individual and the moment, one which is established simply by virtue of the individual's being at a given time. The present, in effect, is created by presence: that is, by the first-person perspective. As such, it is necessarily exclusive;¹⁷ but this exclusivity is rather a characteristic of the relation than of the moment, of temporality than of time. The exclusive present thus exists within the context of eternity, understood not as infinite time (i.e., infinitely extended or continuing), but as coexistence. Much of the evidence for this has already been outlined above: the framing of Lavinia's reality within that of the *Aeneid*, for instance, according to which the present is to be understood as "the moving now of recitation" and reading (Currie, 19), and the

¹⁷ Confirmation of this is provided, among other things, by Lavinia's mediation on the inaccessibility of past experience: "I cannot regain [happiness] by remembering, by speaking, by yearning. To have known it is enough, and all" (186). The immediate and exclusive relationship is with the moment at which one is *now*; if one is not at a given moment, this is not available.

way in which interactions between distinct times are experienced within the exclusive present. It is also, however, a precondition for decision-making: as Lavinia's comparison of Aeneas and Turnus demonstrates, while decisions are and must be made in the present, if they are to be intentional, and so both ethical and effective – if they are to be response, rather than reaction – they must be made in view of both the past and the future (understood in terms of fate, not cause-and-effect) (141).

The three-way relationship between exclusivity, linearity, and the present (presence) outlined above, as well as that between these features of temporality and the coexistent totality of moments, shows some obvious affinities with and divergences from those depicted in the other novels discussed in this chapter. As in *Always Coming Home*, exclusivity is a product of the first-person perspective, and linearity one of this perspective's "movement" through time, rather than being qualities of time as such. However, where the earlier work sidelines the linearity of lived experience, focussing instead on non-linear spatial relationships between coexistent moments, *Lavinia* asserts the centrality of linearity, as well as exclusivity, to individual existence within time.¹⁸ In many ways, in fact, the view of time in *Lavinia* seems closest to that ascribed to Simultaneity Theory in *The Dispossessed*. But even this parallel is not perfect: *Lavinia* accords temporality and its features an importance denied them by the Cetian theory. Both

¹⁸ In addition to the points already discussed and the markedly greater linear continuity of the narrative, we should note here the nature of the time-keeping system used in Lavinia's society. Apparently based on the pre-Julian Roman calendar, it organizes days (understood as standardized, uniform, countable units) into monthly cycles, within which their position, and occasionally their nature (e.g., the "day of worship" [79]), is determined by their (linear) relationship to the Kalends (first day) or Ides (mid-point) of the month (see, e.g., 181; for a good discussion of the nature and evolution of the Roman calendar, see Lipka). Three things, however, that temper the linearity of this calendrical system should be noted. First, although Lavinia does keep track of, for example, her own age in years (1), she does not seem to count from or towards any fixed point (such as, for example, the putative year of Christ's birth in our own calendar). Second, abstract dates only appear in connection with certain religious ceremonies (the "day of worship" mentioned above, the religious ceremony of Lavinia's marriage); they are not mentioned in daily life, in which daily and seasonal cycles appear to be more important, nor with reference to other festivals (e.g., Ambarvalia [Le Guin, *Lavinia*, 206 – 208]).

Sequency and Simultaneity, in *The Dispossessed*, seek to explain our experience of time through reference to its nature, privileging the objective over the subjective. *Lavinia*, in blurring the distinction between the fictional and the factual, and even more in suggesting that the former can shape the latter, not only denies the primacy of the objective (time) over the subjective (temporality): it problematizes the very concept of objective being. This is not to claim that *Lavinia* rejects any distinction between the objective and the subjective, existence and experience; but it does challenge the categoricalness of that distinction, and refuse to trivialize the subjective and experiential. The exclusive present and the lived linearity within which it exists are neither mere illusions wrought by human perception, nor objective aspects of time as an independent entity: they are ineluctable elements of our temporal being, the site and product of a specific and crucial set of temporal relations.

This approach to the relationship between coexistence and non-linearity, on one hand, and exclusivity and linearity, on the other, suggests a parallel understanding of permanence and change. According to this view, change would, like exclusivity and linearity, be the result of the individual's interactions with moments that are always in existence. Permanence would thus be a characteristic of time, change of temporality.¹⁹ Yet this relationship is in fact hardly explored. Even the interplay between Lavinia's (presumably eternal and unchanging) being within the poem and her development as an individual – a topic that would seem to be entirely in line with the novel's investigation of the interaction between the world of the poem and that of the

¹⁹ This is, of course, quite different from the relationship asserted by *The Dispossessed*, although the aligning of permanence with coexistence and change with exclusivity is similar. *The Dispossessed* does not treat change and exclusivity as products of perspective; like permanence and coexistence, they are treated as both features of our temporal experience and objective facts for which an explanation can be sought. Discussing change and permanence as logical consequences of an acceptance of coexistence and exclusivity also reverses the conceptual hierarchy established in *The Dispossessed*: in the Hainish novel, the depiction of coexistence and exclusivity is essentially illustrative of, and so subordinate to, the nature of and interaction between permanence and change.

poet/readers – is not touched upon. The implications of coexistence and exclusivity regarding permanence and change remain precisely that.

Lavinia does – like *The Dispossessed*, and unlike *Always Coming Home* (which treats the concepts primarily in terms of individual development) – explicitly probe the nature of change and permanence; however, it considers them, above all, as features of our being-in-time and it treats the relationship between them as one of mutual constitution, rather than of definition through difference. This notion, which is not made explicit until the last pages of the novel, is developed through two interlocking conceptual complexes: the repetition of the phrase “Go on, go,” and the notion that a thing – or a person – need be incomplete (unfixed, and so capable of change) to continue existing.

The repetition of the phrase “go on, go” both highlights the interdependence of permanence and change and links them to the notion of presence (the first-person perspective) – a connection at odds with a straightforward equivalence between coexistence and permanence, but inherent in the concept of *going*, as should become clearer if we compare this image with the “arrow of time” that represents change in *The Dispossessed* (197). The movement, as opposed to the graphical metaphor, necessarily implies the existence of a consciousness that engages in it, and is thus the source of both the change (because it moves between coexistent points in time) and the continuity (because it is what *carries on*). Continuity and change stem from the same source, one that is outside of both. Yet the treatment of the phrase – in particular, the way in which it accumulates meaning through repetition – suggests that continuity and change are to be found precisely in one another, rather than deriving (at least solely) from an external source. The words first occur in Vergil’s description of Aeneas’ encounter with Deiphobos in the underworld (59), where they are addressed to Aeneas, and so are part of a strong contrast between life (which

involves change, symbolized by movement) and death (which is stationary and unchanging). A similar opposition is established in Lavinia's reaction to Aeneas' death (224). When Vergil dies, however, the phrase is associated with the act of dying (90). Life and death – the divide between which is one of the greatest ruptures conceivable by the human mind (4) – are continuous with one another, though they are not identical. Change presupposes continuity; or, alternatively, death is a form of altered being, a continuity that requires fundamental change. Similarly, Lavinia's immortal existence as an owl (271 – 272), in which “go on, go” is both the exhortation that she seeks to obey (224) and her own cry (68, 224, 271), suggests that continuity is to be found in change.

Lavinia's immortality also provides the clearest example of the notion that a thing must be unfinished in order to “go on.” In the *Aeneid*, Lavinia is “an unkept promise” (63), “unfinished ... incomplete ... unfulfilled” (68). While Vergil suggests that this incompleteness is responsible for his ability to speak to Lavinia, she herself links it to her immortality. She is, she says, “too contingent” to experience “anything so absolute as death” (4). Unlike Aeneas, who “live[d] greatly” and therefore must die, she, alone of those around her, can “go on” (25 – 26). The same relationship between indeterminacy and continuity shapes Lavinia's reflections on the state of Vergil's poem: “If you never finish [the poem],” she tells Vergil, “it will never end” (59). Permanence requires incompleteness, unfixity, indeterminacy. At the end of the book, reflecting on her own fate, Lavinia herself makes this relationship explicit: “One must be changed, to be immortal,” she remarks (271). In *Lavinia*, as in Shevek's General Temporal Theory, “what is most changeable is shown to be fullest of eternity” (*TD*, 48).

Although the structure of *Lavinia* is neither so intricate as that of *The Dispossessed*, nor so experimental as that of *Always Coming Home*, it does reinforce many of the relationships

discussed above. In the first place, of course, and in keeping with the novel's insistence on the centrality of linearity to the experience of time, the narrative thread is far more clearly and consistently linear than in *Always Coming Home*, and more straightforwardly so than are the interlocking circles of *The Dispossessed*. At several points, however, Le Guin breaks up this linear progression, interleaving Lavinia's past-tense narrative of the events described in the *Aeneid* with scenes narrated in the present tense, as well as with reflections that originate at the time of her speaking (e.g., 68). In both cases, the juxtaposition of linearly separate times highlights the existence of multiple temporal loci within both the story and the discourse, and so exemplifies coexistence; Lavinia's commentary also instantiates, and so reinforces, the presence of continuity within change.

The nature and, to a certain degree, the function of the present-tense scenes are deeply ambiguous. Given the temporal vision implicit in the story, it is tempting to see the sudden shift into present-tense narration as indicating the literal coexistence of the events described – an illustration of the idea that all times, always, are. A number of factors, however, argue for a less extreme interpretation of these episodes as simply particularly vivid memories. The content of the scenes is typically strongly emotional (all but one [26] are episodes from Lavinia's married life), and the last one (160 – 162) occurs, and concludes, shortly before Lavinia's marriage takes place in the main narrative thread. Furthermore, Lavinia sometimes, when discussing Aeneas, slips into present-tense narration within a past-tense section of text, reinforcing the impression that the shift in tense signals the narrator's experience of overwhelmingly powerful memories (discussed in the preceding chapter). If that is the case, however, then the significance of the present-tense episode at the shrine of the Lares (26), which does not seem to contain particularly emotional vivid content, and which is notable for its dream-like, portentous tone, is not

altogether clear. These scenes seem to be neither entirely one thing nor the other – or, perhaps, both.

How these episodes are understood is significant, particularly as regards the novel's treatment of memory (see "Story, Memory, and Choice"). Their implications for coexistence, however, are in a sense independent of our interpretation of them, arising primarily from their relationship with the other times established within the discourse itself. In the first place, of course, any present-tense section occurring within a broader past-tense narrative both creates an immediate impression of the parallel existence (coexistence) of multiple temporal levels or locations within the story and draws the reader's attention to the complex interplay of times that is inherent in the construction and reconstruction (through reading) of any narrative. As well as the three temporal levels identified by Genette – the time of the story (the events narrated), of the narrating (the event of someone recounting the story within the text), and of the narrative discourse (the "narrative statement" [25], i.e., the oral or written account itself) (25 – 27) – this includes the time of the time of the author, the time of the reader, and perhaps even the time of the *other* readers whose interaction with the text one can assume or imagine. In the case of *Lavinia*, this effect is especially marked because the present-tense sections involve a complicated narrative sleight-of-hand: they are in fact leaps forward in the narrative (prolepsis [Genette, 40]) that recount events that are in line with the progression of the principal narrative thread (the "first narrative" [Genette, 48]). As such, whether memory or not, they multiply the number of temporal levels at play within the story, establishing either two separate, coexistent points in time or two nested levels of memory. The exception – the episode at the shrine of the Lares, which depicts events in line with the first narrative – renders the contrast between the time of the story and those of the discourse and the reader equally vivid through the intense immediacy of the

passage, which demands a simultaneous recognition of the event's occurrence in the present of experience and its immense temporal distance from the reader. Through emphasizing the juxtaposition of linearly disjunct times effected by the novel, and increasing the number of temporal levels at play, then, these episodes – even if they are not literal examples of coexistence – underline the coexistence of times within the story.

Lavinia's present-tense musings, which seem to be her reflections on the tale that she tells, rather than part of the tale itself, also support the notion of time as coexistence, by drawing the reader's attention to the present of the narration, and so heightening the effect of temporal juxtapositions like those described above. Perhaps more important, however, is their contribution to the portrayal of the relationship between continuity and change. The temporal "location" of Lavinia-as-narrator is profoundly ambiguous, and in fact seems to shift during the course of the book. Although she says at the beginning of the novel that she has lived in Vergil's words for "centuries" (4), she later appears to be speaking from before Vergil's birth (9), and even before the founding of the city of Rome (10). Much later, she speaks as though the ancient Latin society in which she lived as a mortal is still in existence (220); even in the last pages, her words seem to imply that she lives still in the failing body of an elderly woman (271). Not until the very last page does she describe the "vast city" that has replaced the hill town of Pallanteum (272), a mechanized metropolis that exists "twenty-five or thirty centuries" after the events that she describes (5). Like the decision to do away with traditional chapter divisions and separate sections of widely varied lengths only by a blank line, this gradual shifting underlines and embodies the emergence of continuity from change.

Lavinia, then, for all that it does not treat time as an overt thematic concern, develops a complex and nuanced picture of temporal existence that carries forward a number of the ideas

from the earlier works, while diverging from them in subtle but important ways. Through a combination of subject matter and structural decisions, it reframes the relationship between the linear and exclusive, on one hand, and the alinear and coexistent, on the other, as a matter of time and temporality; places the present within the context of eternity; and establishes change and permanence as not only mutually constitutive, but found within one another. As we will see in the next section, this mixture of continuity and change (in both emphasis and substance) also characterizes the treatment of another major ontological issue: the nature of the self and its relationship with other beings and forms of being.

SECTION TWO

SELFHOOD

SELFHOOD IN *THE DISPOSSESSED*, *ALWAYS COMING HOME*, AND *LAVINIA*:
AN OVERVIEW

Le Guin's treatment of selfhood, broadly construed, has undoubtedly received more scholarly attention than have her explorations of time. Several works focusing on various aspects of this topic have been published over the years, and even analyses not centrally concerned with it generally recognize it as an important recurring theme in Le Guin's thought and work as a whole (see, e.g., Murphy). Other discussions of her work, though primarily concerned with different questions (e.g., the nature and functions of language, the interplay of unity and duality, or models of socio-political organization), consider Le Guin's depiction of the self and its relationship with other individuals (and/or society and/or the natural world) as either an instance of or a factor in the relationship they seek to establish (see, e.g., Cummins, Slusser).

Yet despite this general acknowledgement of Le Guin's sustained interest in the self and its relationship with all that it is not, in-depth discussion of her treatment of selfhood per se remains limited in quantity, scope, and theoretical perspective. Much early scholarship adopted a Jungian lens and focused on the Earthsea trilogy (now a series) (see Bailey; Crow and Erlich; Esmonde). Sneja Gunew has also examined *The Left Hand of Darkness* from this angle, while Mary Sarah Barrett has extended this approach to *The Dispossessed*, as well as the later Earthsea tales. Feminist and queer theory analyses seem to focus more on Le Guin's portrayal of power structures, roles, and gendered binaries than on the implications of these authorial choices for the treatment of selfhood (though see Arbur for an early discussion of Le Guin's "post-feminist" concept of self), and have paid most attention to the Earthsea cycle, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and, to a lesser degree, *The Dispossessed* and *Lavinia*. The sole analysis of selfhood in *Always Coming Home* that I have been able to find is a brief article on "postmodern personhood" by

Patricia Linton; and although many authors have, as mentioned above, noted Le Guin's insistence on the mutual dependence of separate selves, only one (Thomas Remington) appears to have pursued the implications of this for the conceptualization of selfhood as such.

Scholarly attention to Le Guin's treatment of the self *as such*, then, has concentrated above all on the Earthsea novels, followed by *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and only then by *The Dispossessed*. This leaves a considerable void in discussions of Le Guin's work. Although the nature of selfhood per se is not always an explicit thematic concern, much of Le Guin's fiction builds up complex and highly unusual pictures of individual being. The omission is particularly notable in the cases of *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. Not only do all three radically redefine the parameters of sentient existence; the latter two also treat the question of what and how we are explicitly and in depth.

The specific content of these explorations, like the treatment of time, exhibits both strong continuities and significant variance across these three works. Individual agency, the relationship between the self and the individual other, and our existence as part of and participation in a totality of being all form thematic threads linking the three novels, as does the interplay of change and continuity in the individual entity. There are, however, several important differences in the treatment of these issues and concepts, which suggest an evolution, rather than a mere elaboration, of the vision of selfhood being presented. In particular, two key shifts occur. First, our existence as participation in a larger whole (see below for a brief overview of this concept), which receives only glancing mention in *The Dispossessed*, is a central preoccupation in *Always Coming Home*, and an unquestioned assumption in *Lavinia*. Correspondingly, the whole in which the person participates expands from humanity (*The Dispossessed*) to "the wholeness of being" (*Always Coming Home*, 495), a description which

applies as well to *Lavinia*'s "sacred" (*Lavinia*, 68). Second, the significance of the relationship between self and other shifts subtly but profoundly, with important consequences for the understanding of individual agency. The basic ontological independence of the individual in *The Dispossessed* gives way to the embeddedness and interdependence of *Always Coming Home*, which is in turn replaced, in *Lavinia*, by a form of deep interdependence in which individual being emerges from interaction between the individual and the other.

Yet again, some clarification of terms is called for before continuing to the analysis proper. In the preceding summary, I referred to the individual's existence as *part of* and *participation in* a larger whole. I take this to entail two different, though related, forms of being: existence as a distinct entity that is embedded within an interconnected, interdependent whole; and undifferentiated existence in or through another being or being as a whole. The latter dispenses with our understanding of ourselves as distinct from our world, and hence with the concept of *self* as such (at least as it is usually understood). Importantly, the two go together: we exist both as interconnected entities (a concept that entails differentiation as well as connection) and as non-individuated being within the other. While the most explicit and in-depth development of this latter idea occurs in *Always Coming Home*, in which being is conceptualized in terms of "individual" and "generic" aspects, it is an important, if undeveloped, underlying assumption in *The Dispossessed* and *Lavinia*.

CHAPTER FOUR

SELF AS AGENT IN *THE DISPOSSESSED*

The most striking characteristic of the Odonian conception of self, which dominates (though it does not exhaust) *The Dispossessed's* treatment of the issue, is its heavy emphasis on individual agency. To be a self is, first and foremost, to choose. Choices, however, though made alone, cannot occur in isolation: the agent is both psychologically and existentially dependent. In particular, although interaction between individuals does not here – as it will in *Lavinia* – constitute each as a separate being, it is the source of personal persistence across time (a prerequisite for effective agency), while individual identity is defined through the interplay of similarity and difference revealed through comparison with other individuals and social groups. Finally, each individual exists not only *as* an individual – a separate and unique self – but as participation in an inclusive totality (brotherhood) that encompasses oneself and all specific others.

The exercise of individual agency via choice is a central thematic concern of *The Dispossessed*. Though the matter is never explicitly framed in terms of selfhood, the deep ethical and practical significance ascribed to individual choice implies a conception of the self in which the ability to choose is a key defining characteristic. The structure of Anarresti society, the reformist aims of Shevek and his friends, and the character of Shevek himself all point to a peculiarly Odonian picture of selfhood: one in which choosing is not merely something a self does, but what the self is.²⁰

²⁰ We can, of course, question whether the picture of selfhood presented by these means is in fact supported by the narrative as a whole. What conception of the self, for example, operates in the capitalist society of A-Io? Should we, as readers, privilege that of Anarres, or indeed of Odonian social theory, as summarized by the narrator? Should Shevek's views, on selfhood and on other matters, be considered authoritative?

Anarresti society is predicated upon the assumption of individual freedom of choice, although, as swiftly becomes evident, reality falls somewhat short of this ideal. Societal institutions are designed to assert and maintain the autonomy of the individual: rather than stable supra-individual entities whose membership is determined and stability enforced by sanction, they are “voluntarily constituted federation[s],” which endure for as long as the individuals involved in them desire (216). In Le Guin’s phrase, they are not truly “institution[s]” (a term associated, in the novel, with hierarchy and reification), but “function[s]” (216). The paradigmatic example of this is the Anarresti attitude towards sexual partnership (216), which is explicitly contrasted with the Urrasti institution of “marriage” (in which the partnership is “authorized and enforced by legal and economic sanctions” [16]). Given the communistic nature of Anarresti society, however, general expectations concerning productive work may be an even more striking instance of individual autonomy as a driving factor in Odonian social design.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars concerning the answers to these questions. Some readers argue that Anarres’ communistic anarchism is *not* being presented as an alternative preferable to Urras’ capitalist archism, and that we must consider the views of both societies in light of one another (see, e.g., Elliott; Somay; Spencer; Tunick), while Le Guin herself has pointed out that conflating the views of a character – even a sympathetic one – with those of the author is a fatal mistake (“A Response,” 305).

As should be evident by this point, I take the views expressed by Shevek, the Kesh, and Lavinia to indicate each novel’s major points of focus within its treatment of any given theme, and I generally assume – unless the presentation of a particular idea appears to be ironic – that these views represent the conclusions that most readers will draw from the work. (The question of authorial intent is one that I will not deal with; I am very aware of the pitfall that Le Guin has identified.) My justification for taking the concept of self implied in Odonian theory and society as representative of that being developed by the novel as a whole, then, is essentially narrative valence. The narrator of *The Dispossessed* is neither hostile nor ironic. An unambiguous hero in an ambiguous utopia, Shevek is presented in consistently, though not implausibly, positive terms, which strongly encouraging the reader to attribute his views to the narrator – a move that is further encouraged by the novel’s use of free indirect discourse to report his musings at key points (e.g., *TD*, 293). And the anarchist society on Anarres, though it is not presented uncritically, is contrasted with the false freedom of Urras’ state-centred systems, and gains by the comparison on precisely the count that is relevant here: individual freedom of choice. That this freedom of choice has begun to erode is presented as a change for the worse, and as one stemming, not from flaws in the original premise and design of the society, but from another ingrained human characteristic: our penchant for conformism (292). The understanding of self that underpins Urrasti views and social organization, in contrast, is nowhere near as favourably portrayed, and in fact seems to function chiefly as a foil to that which emerges from (Shevek’s interpretation of) Odonianism. For this reason, I focus primarily the concept of selfhood attributable to Shevek and his major influences (Odonianism and the ideal Anarresti society).

Takver, Shevek's partner, summarizes the original practice and ongoing expectation: individuals "just worked up jobs where they wanted them, and joined a syndicate or formed one, and then registered with Divlab [the computerized work coordination body]" (290). Syndicates are groups of individuals who collaborate to achieve a common goal, usually an on-going one perceived as necessary or beneficial to society as a whole (see, e.g., 211, 224). Any individual has the option of establishing or joining a syndicate, or, failing that, of working alone (212, 316). Furthermore, although there is a strong societal expectation that all will participate in "tenth-day' rotational community labour" (routine community maintenance tasks) (95; see also 132), and although Divlab assigns individuals to "work postings" if the necessary tasks cannot be completed by volunteers (217 – 218), individuals have – in theory – the right to refuse the job (132, 290). The point is not simply that Anarres has no government (see 67 – 68); it is that Anarres is a complex, highly coordinated, communistic society in which the absence of government has been worked for by asserting and entrenching the individual's "freedom to choose and to change" (216). Its denizens are not "elements of a collectivity," but "members of a community" (5).

The organization of Anarresti society, then, is fundamentally shaped (though not fully determined) by a profound respect for and attention to the importance of individual choice. The fact that the resulting fluid and egalitarian social structure has begun to grow rigid and hierarchical alters neither the ideal on which the society was founded (individual freedom of choice), nor the premise that underpins the ideal (the fundamental fact of individual agency). Indeed, the very criticisms that social reformers – in the persons of Shevek and his friend, Bedap – level at their society reinforce the importance of these ideas to the philosophy that gave birth to Anarres. Bedap (149), and later Shevek (289 – 292), censure their compatriots and themselves

not for excessive and destructive individualism, but for conformism and cowardice: in essence, for failing to exercise, and to allow others to exercise, freedom of thought and of choice.²¹ They thus not only presuppose the possibility and importance of individual agency, but specifically link individuality *with* agency. Developing Bedap’s distinction between “cooperation” and “obedience” (148), Shevek argues that “[t]he duty of the individual is to accept *no* rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible” (316, emphasis in original). And his condemnation of his society’s refusal to recognize its members’ right to work alone – that is, to provide the necessary resources and support (316) – is buttressed by his understanding of the individual’s work (in this context, intellectual work, and hence an instance of freedom of thought)²² – as a crucial exercise of will:

Shevek had learned something about his own will these last four years... No social or ethical imperative equaled it... The less he had, the more absolute became his need to be. He recognized that need, in Odonian terms, as his ‘cellular function,’ the analogic term for the individual’s individuality, the work he can do best, and therefore his best contribution to his society. A healthy society would let him exercise that function freely, in the coordination of all such functions finding its adaptability and strength. (293)

²¹ Both Shevek and Takver see the decision to print Shevek’s first book-length work, *Principles of Simultaneity*, as an instance of such a failure to choose. Reflecting on it, Shevek concludes that “[n]either of us chose. We let Sabul [the power-hungry physicist who suppresses new ideas] choose for us. Our own, internalized Sabul – convention, moralism, fear of social ostracism, fear of being different, fear of being free!” (292)

²² Only four individuals are identified as being systematically denied work postings in their chosen fields, the opportunity to share the products of their labour, or both: Tirin, the playwright (150 – 152, 287 – 289); Salas, the composer (154 – 156); Bedap, the educational reformer (146); and Shevek himself (146, 211 – 213). All four are labourers of the intellect whose work either does not conform to (Shevek, Salas) or actively questions (Tirin, Bedap) the status quo, in their fields or more broadly. When Shevek speaks of the right and the duty to “work,” then, it appears that he is in fact referring to the right and the obligation to think and to question – what is elsewhere referred to as “autonomy of conscience” (154).

There are three features worth noting in this passage. First is the series of connections established between concepts: will is being, which is individuality, which is “work” (and thus implicitly, since Shevek is the person in question, freedom of thought). One’s work is crucial because it is an assertion of agency, of choice; and the exercise of choice is individual being. Choosing, according to Shevek, is not something that we do occasionally; it is fundamental to what we *are*. To borrow the terminology of philosophy, agency is not a contingent feature of selfhood, but an essential (i.e., defining) one (Olson, np).

Second is the way in which Shevek traces his own emphasis on agency as a defining characteristic of individuality, of selfhood, back to Odonian social theory (the “cellular function”). In Odonianism, it seems, the exercise of agency is as central to one’s existence as an individual as it is to the health of society.

Finally, it is well worth noting the way in which Shevek himself functions as an exemplar of this self-as-agent. Shevek’s will, the source of his being, supersedes all “social or ethical imperative[s]” (293). This bald statement echoes and encapsulates previous references to his strong sense of personal agency and his uncompromising insistence on individual freedom of choice. Earlier in the novel (though years later in his personal chronology), Shevek tells his Urrasti hosts that his own initiative is “the only initiative [he] acknowledge[s]” (68). And in the novel’s first pages, as Shevek sits on the freighter bound for Urras, he reflects that “[i]t was his own will that had started it all ... long before, in the Dust, in the years of famine and despair, when he had promised himself that he would never act again but by his own free choice” (7). His insistence on leaving Anarres, although he sees it, in moments of bewilderment (7) and despair (8), as a repudiation of individual choice, is in fact the ultimate assertion of it – particularly given the vehement opposition that he faces on Anarres (3 – 4, 314 – 316).

Shevek's opinions and actions, like the shape of Anarresti society, point to a strong, though mostly implicit, sense of the self as a thing that chooses – essentially.

Agency, however, indicates neither psychological nor existential independence.

Although the self's existence as a separate entity – one distinct from all that it is not – appears to be dependent on nothing else, identity, in both the metaphysical sense (diachronic identity) and the psychological one, rests upon interaction between the self and the non-self. Since agency presupposes diachronic identity, while its exercise is crucially influenced by psychological identity, the autonomy of the self as a whole – the separate, temporally unified individual who *chooses* – is doubly circumscribed.

The nature of the relationship between the self and the individual other, and its significance for the various defining characteristics of selfhood, is developed through a network of overlapping images.²³ These images both reinforce and modify one another, building a picture of differentiated unity that, though it consistently asserts both the irreducibility of difference and the importance of interaction, has very different implications for the understanding of the self as a separate being, as a particular individual, and as an entity that persists across time. Most of this imagery describes objects (usually spheres) circling around a common centre: the mutual orbiting of Anarres and Urras, which is never described but often implied (36, 80, 168, 335); Shevek and Takver's "circl[ing] about the center of infinite pleasure, about each other's being, like planets circling blindly, quietly ... about the common center of

²³ It is worth noting here that meaningful relationship between individuals (i.e., the relationship of trust, love, and/or understanding) is generally recognized as a key theme in Le Guin's work. For analyses of this theme with a broader focus than this study, see George Slusser's *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin*, Elizabeth Cummins' *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*, and Thomas J. Remington's "A Touch of Difference, A Touch of Love." The first two authors move beyond a tight focus on the role relationship plays in defining the self, and all three deal with works not discussed here.

gravity” in their lovemaking after their reunion (283); and the centre of the Inhabitation of Time, which consists of “two thin, clear bubbles of glass that [move] with the oval wires in complexly interwoven ellipsoid orbits about the common center, never quite meeting, never entirely parting” (324). As in the depiction of the two aspects of time (which shares in some of these metaphors), there are two opposing dynamics that create the relation, holding both parties in place and so ensuring both change and stability: a pulling together and a holding apart. Both parties, like the two planets, are united by the void between them.

But what are the implications of this for the self’s autonomy? A partial answer is suggested by Takver’s musings on her partnership with Shevek, which also take place shortly after they are reunited:

We came ... from a great distance to each other.... It is because he comes from so far away that nothing can separate us. Nothing, no distances, no years, can be greater than the distance that’s already between us, the distance of our sex, the difference of our being, our minds; that gap, that abyss which we bridge with a look, with a touch, with a word. (284)

This passage unites the vision of separate beings held together and apart by their difference with the motif of journey and return, introduced earlier (in the novel and in this study) as a metaphor for time. Individual existence, in this view of things, is not established in interaction, but precedes and enables it. To come together, we must first be separate. Of course, given the understanding of time developed in the novel, to automatically “interpret temporal ... as causal order” (182) would be risky, and probably unjustified; however, in the absence of any hint that the individual *as such* is constituted in interaction with the other, it seems reasonable to

conclude that our separateness is intrinsic to our being, and precedes interaction with the other. This impression is supported by Shevek's reaction, at the beginning of the novel, as the Urrasti freighter draws out of orbit and he watches Anarres recede on the screen: his terror arises, not from his losing his sense of individual distinctness and cohesion, but from the feeling that he has "kept himself, and lost the rest" (6). Shevek's isolation is as much psychological as existential: on Anarres, until he establishes a deep emotional bond with Takver (140), and again on Urras (79), he suffers from a sense of being cut-off that is as much a result of his own "gentle but ... formidably hermetic character" (49) as of circumstantial factors (his intellectual isolation on Anarres, his ideological isolation on Urras). However, the very fact that he can think of his self in these terms – as something that continues in the absence of any meaningful interaction – suggests, like Takver's description of their partnership, that the self, in the most basic sense of a separate centre of consciousness, exists independent of relation. To be cut off from interaction with the individual other is terrible, but not impossible; and its terror derives precisely from the fact that the individual would, in such a scenario, exist anyway.

Other crucial elements of the self, however – most notably its persistence across time – appear to be defined, and perhaps even created, in interaction with an individual other. The problem of change and continuity – their paradoxical coexistence and mutual necessity – which drives Shevek's quest for a General Temporal Theory, is not simply a question of abstracts: it is a matter of the diachronic identity, the *sameness* across time, of actual entities. How can I be the same entity, the same self, at different moments, in spite of any (inevitable) physical and

psychological changes sustained in the interim?²⁴ According to Shevek, the answer lies in relation: in his theory,

You shall not go down twice to the same river, nor can you go home again.... Yet ... what is most changeable is ... fullest of eternity, and your relationship to the river, and the river's relationship to you and to itself, turns out to be at once more complex and more reassuring than a mere lack of identity. You *can* go home again ... so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been. (48)

Here, as elsewhere (8, 198, 100), the river is a metaphor for change itself (in Shevek's terms, sequency). However, it is also the *thing* that changes, the most vivid and concrete possible representation of an entity that sustains change and yet remains itself. Numerical identity across time thus becomes a matter of interaction between entities. The inevitability of change does not preclude continuity, because continuity is to be found in relation.

There is an implicit paradox here. Even if we restrict ourselves to discussing entities in general, rather than considering the particular type of entity that is a self, this understanding of persistence suggests a certain degree of circularity. The word "relationship" implies not merely

²⁴ Identity in the philosophical sense, whether synchronic (the quality of being the same thing at one moment) or diachronic (the quality of being the same thing at different moments), is not the same as selfhood. We attribute synchronic and diachronic identity to many things without also thinking of them as having selves (e.g., a table). If a self *is* an entity, however, and if we believe it exists *as* that entity at more than one point in time, then it must, under certain conditions, possess both synchronic and diachronic identity; and those conditions must be the basic defining conditions for selfhood. Of course, it is possible to claim that selves are entities that do *not* persist across time, or that mental and physical continuity cannot be taken as evidence of their persistence (Olson; Strawson); however, since *The Dispossessed* clearly does not assert this (for one thing, such a claim would clearly be incompatible with the novel's emphasis on loyalty), we need not consider this line of argument. For a discussion of numerical identity, diachronic identity, and the relation of both concepts to the persistence of the self across time, see "Personal Identity" (Olson).

passive coexistence, but active engagement. Applied specifically to sentient entities, the word takes on strong connotations of agency, which are reinforced by the novel's emphasis on the promise – its making and its keeping – as the paradigmatic form of both agency and relation (see, e.g., 216 – 217). In order to interact, one must be able to act. Yet persistence across time is arguably not only an important characteristic of selfhood in its own right, but a prerequisite for agency itself.²⁵ The ability to choose and to act upon one's choice – or at least to do so effectively (Shoemaker, np) – requires an understanding of successive moments as part of an overarching temporal whole, a structure given unity and continuity by virtue of one's own presence at each point: in Shevek's phrase, the ability to “[make] the past and the future ... part of the present by memory and intention” (163). The agent is constituted as a continuing entity, and therefore one capable of choice, as well as loyalty, through a phenomenon that presupposes it: the mutual exercise of individual agency.

Le Guin is fond of paradoxes, as is evident from *The Dispossessed's* treatment of time. In this case, the paradox may be both less substantial and more significant than it initially appears: it is an impossibility only if we accept the unidirectional causality characteristic of Sequency theory (41). Simultaneity theory not only allows for the possibility that causality may run in more than one direction: it formally states it in the “principle of Causative Reversibility” (41). The apparently self-contradictory relationship between agency and self-other interaction

²⁵ The claim that personal persistence is a constitutive feature of selfhood, together with the idea that a subjective conviction of one's own persistence across time – not only autobiographical memory or a rational acceptance of the fact that things have happened, and will happen, to a thing that has the same body and memories as I, now, do, but a sense of *ownership* of these past and future experiences – is necessary for psychological wholeness, is foundational to theories of narrative identity (e.g., Mackenzie and Poltera). Galen Strawson offers a contrasting viewpoint, and identifies an array of famous artists and intellectuals who, he claims, lacked such a sense of personal persistence. However, his appears to be a minority view at present.

thus affirms, not only the dependence of the self upon the other, both as a persisting entity and as an agent, but the validity of the conception of time outlined earlier in this thesis.

The claim that diachronic identity subsists in relation with the individual other limits the existential autonomy of the agent in a way as telling as it is important. The agent chooses, but her very ability to do so rests upon engagement with another individual; and this dependence is a function of her existence in time. The second dimension of selfhood along which autonomy is constrained asserts dependence not only on the individual other, but on society, and can be understood in psychological as well as metaphysical terms (the novel, as will become evident, explores it from both angles). My *particular* self – the set of descriptions whose specific combination is my uniqueness, understood either as the content of my separate being or my identity (in the psychological sense, i.e., something close to a self-concept) – is defined through the interplay of similarity and difference, between individuals and between social groups (including societies themselves).

The definition of my particularity through contrast with another individual is admittedly not a strong focus of the novel. It remains implicit, gaining indirect expression through the image of the two planets, Urras and Anarres, and Shevek's reaction to the first woman and children he meets on Urras. Urras and Anarres, in their gravitational equilibrium, define one another as both planet and moon (36); in their drastic physical and social dissimilarity, they throw one another's distinguishing characteristics into sharp relief, and in fact become, in the eyes of each other's inhabitants, reifications of them. Of course, these are planets, not people; however, the language in which Shevek's response to the wife and children of an Urrasti colleague is described suggests that the planets' relationship of mutually defining difference also holds for individuals. After months of interacting only with men, Shevek greets both "the

tension and attraction of the sexual difference” (129) and the presence of children (130) with not only pleasure, but relief. Since his response is the same in both cases, it appears unlikely that it is simply a sexual reaction. He seems rather to be responding to the fact of difference, of contrast, welcoming it as an essential of daily existence; and the narrator’s reference to “tension and attraction” replicates the opposed dynamics, the pulling together and pulling apart, that characterize all of the images of differentiated unity discussed earlier, and hold Urras and Anarres, in particular, in the relationship that defines them.

The interplay of similarity and difference is likewise crucial to the social construction of identity, a matter that, as part of the novel’s broader exploration of how cultural expectations and social structures influence the exercise of individual agency, receives more attention than does the definition of particularity through interaction with one’s individual opposite. The relationship between societal expectations, individual character, and identity is identified by Shevek: “My society,” he tells Keng, “is an idea. I was made by it” (304). Societal roles and expectations shape individual identity, and therefore individual behaviour, even as individual behaviour shapes both expectations and identity. The clearest example of this is Shevek himself, whose identity and activities as a social reformer (one element of the varied and complex set of roles by which he defines himself [114]) are rooted in and give substance to a further level of self-definition: his Odonianism. He is, as he recognizes, “a revolutionary ... *by virtue of* his upbringing and education as an Odonian and an Anarresti” (156, emphasis in original). Others, however – including, importantly, certain Urrasti – illustrate the same point. The self-contradictory behaviour of the Iotic²⁶ physicist, Oiie, for example, can be understood as a

²⁶ The only Urrasti country directly depicted is A-Io, the capitalist state that corresponds roughly with the 20th century United States in internal structure and international status.

product of identity conflict (deriving from his lower-class background and current middle class status [134]) and its attendant insecurities (130, 134). Similarly, his sister Vea's contempt for, and manipulation of, men (190) seems to be a response to their imposition on her of a one-dimensional and inequitable set of expectations: viewed as a "a thing owned, bought, sold" (190), she has embraced the role as a source of power, becoming "so elaborately and ostentatiously a female body that she [seems] scarcely to be a human being" (188). The Urrasti, like the Anarresti, are formed by their society's expectations, assumptions, and ideals.

The basis of socially constructed identity is membership: we define ourselves in terms of distinguishing characteristics that we share with others. As the marked dissimilarities between the Iotic and Anarresti societies demonstrate, both which categories that are held to be relevant and what membership in these categories entails may vary substantially.²⁷ Inevitably, however, their definition rests on contrast. Urras and Anarres, orbiting around a common centre, define one another as planet and moon, archist and anarchist, through their difference; male and female, child and adult, do the same (129, 130). Even the Anarresti understand their society in terms of contrast with the archist nations of Urras (40), for all that the two planets overtly "ignore" one another (66). In fact, the Anarresti aversion to Urras (68), though it seems to belie the claim that we define ourselves through difference, actually reinforces it: the xenophobic Anarresti majority simply defines itself through reference to a preconceived and feared other, instead of an observed and neutrally (or positively) viewed one. That which one is not is central to the definition of what one is. Membership is only meaningful if there is also non-membership. The socially

²⁷ The typical Anarresti, for example, will define him- or herself according to nationality (Anarresti), ideology (Odonianism), and a range of voluntarily adopted roles (e.g., parenthood, work, etc. – for an example, see the list of Shevek's self-defining roles [114]). An Urrasti, in contrast, will include predetermined and/or externally imposed roles such as gender and economic status, as the cases of Oiie, Veia, Efor, and many others make evident.

defined identity of individuals is based on similarities that are themselves defined through difference.

Definition through contrast, however, can easily degenerate into definition by exclusion, a form of self-definition that denies the importance of the other even as it defines itself in contradistinction to it. The clearest example of this is perhaps Atro's vision of a shared Cetian (Urrasti and Anarresti) identity, which is explicitly based on "definition by exclusion" (126) and supports its argument for Cetian unity by appealing to not only the difference, but the inferiority of non-Cetians (126 – 127). Another instance (in addition to the above-mentioned xenophobia) is the fear-driven "tribalism" that Shevek identifies among his fellow Anarresti (68), which asserts its Odonianism through condemning the "pseudo-Odonians" on Urras (313). Finally, Shevek sees the Iotic dismissal of women as a form of self-definition based on denigration and repression: on first encountering misogyny, he speculates that each of the sexes on Urras must belittle the other in order to "respect" itself (16); after further exposure, he concludes that Urrasti men "[contain] a woman, a suppressed, silenced, bestialized woman, a fury in a cage" (66). Identity, in all of these cases, is defined, not through recognition of difference, but through vilification of it. It cannot acknowledge its dependence, yet it remains as reliant on the other (understood as either an abstract set of characteristics or the individuals that embody them) as the self-definition that embraces difference – perhaps even more so.

Our identity, then – the means by which we define our separate being – is, like our persistence across time, heavily dependent on interaction with that which is beyond the self. Our dependence, however, appears to run even deeper than this. Not only is our differentiated being, our separateness, part of a web of interconnected existences whose presence as a wholeness

creates each part; we also exist as undifferentiated being. At a certain level, it seems, the individual is not an individual – not a self – at all, but only an act of participation.

Our existence as part of a network of being emerges primarily through Takver's relationship with the natural world, as the reader sees it through Shevek's eyes. Takver sees not only all sentient life, but all natural entities – including herself – as elements in an interconnected whole. For her, “all lives are in common” (19 – 20), and they partake of one another: when she “take[s] a leaf into her hand, or even a rock,” she “[becomes] an extension of it, it of her” (164). She is, as Shevek puts it, one of those “souls ... whose umbilicus has never been cut” (164), who exist in connection and communion with all natural being. She is, and knows herself to be, essentially “a *part*” (166, emphasis added). This is not quite the same as the idea that identity, in the psychological sense, is defined through group membership and the adoption of socially determined roles. There, a pre-existent separate being (a self) is characterized – the *content* of its separateness is defined – through comparison and contrast; here, the separate being exists *in* its connectedness. The most vivid and succinct expression of this concept may be a line in Odo's epitaph: “To be whole is to be part” (74).

There is some suggestion that this vision of individuality in connection also describes the concept of “brotherhood” at the centre of Odonian thought (for casual references that demonstrate the importance of this idea, see 55, 138, 235, 313). When Shevek first sees an otter, for example, “caught by [its] gaze across the gulf of being,” he calls it *ammar*, brother (135). Some of Le Guin's comments elsewhere also point towards such an interpretation: in particular, her description of pain as “the loneliest experience,” which, paradoxically, “gives rise ... to love: the bridge between self and other, the means of communion” (“Myth and Archetype,” 68), echoes Shevek's language and suggests an interpretation for his images. Shevek, however,

though he also describes pain itself as an intensely individual and even isolating experience (55), does not describe communion as its result: instead, he speaks of the place “beyond” suffering (53), which is “where the self ... ceases” (54). Brotherhood, which “begins in shared pain” (55), exists in this place beyond suffering.²⁸ Brotherhood, then, as Shevek understands it, is not simply common purpose, an ideal born of practical necessity, nor even the empathic bond that transcends isolation; it is a metaphysical position on the nature of sentient existence. Our brotherhood entails our existence, at some level, not as selves that are *part of* a whole, but as undifferentiated *participation in* it. Shevek seems to attain this dissolution of the boundaries between the self and the whole when he addresses the protestors on Urras:

Shevek listened ... to the speakers: not hearing and understanding in the sense in which the individual rational mind perceives and understands, but rather as one looks at, listens to one’s own thoughts, or as a thought perceives and understands the self. When he spoke, speaking was little different from listening. (264)

Seen in light of this vision, Atro’s argument for Cetian “brotherhood,” which he claims can only be defined by “nonbrotherhood” (127), takes on the character of an ironic contrast.

The term “brotherhood” is, however, used almost exclusively of humans,²⁹ suggesting that the whole (and thus the participation) is limited to, at most, the descendants of the Hainish

²⁸ It is worth noting that Bedap, years later, identifies the conversation in which Shevek advances these ideas as key to Tirin, Takver, and himself (146), and Shevek echoes the sentiments that he voices in it when he speaks, years later, in front of the Urrasti protestors (264 – 265).

²⁹ The humanoid peoples of Le Guin’s Hainish universe, including Terrans, are all “of alien origin, offspring of Hainish interstellar colonists,” farther back than most of the resultant civilizations can remember (126). Although some of the resultant peoples (e.g., the androgynous Gethenians of *The Left Hand of Darkness*) differ from the Terran brand of humanity in important ways, the Cetians, apart from being rather hairier than normal, seem virtually indistinguishable from them. Within the context of *The Dispossessed*, “human” refers exclusively to the Cetians (the Urrasti and Anarresti): the Terrans and the Hainish are described as “aliens.”

interstellar colonists (and perhaps otters). It is in fact the portrayal of Simultaneity theory that establishes a more comprehensive view of totality. Describing the functioning of the ansible, which will “permit communication without any time interval between two points in space,” Shevek says, “The device will not transmit messages, of course; simultaneity is identity” (303). Here, he seems to be using “identity” in a way that slightly modifies the most common philosophical usages: identity is *sameness*, but it is neither sameness across time (diachronic identity) nor the ability to be the subject of more than one true statement at the same time (synchronic identity).³⁰ The implication, rather, is that all *physical* points at the same moment are one. The quotation from the “mystic,” Tebores, brings this notion further, linking spatial with temporal totality, and the individual with both: “*The unconscious mind is coextensive with the universe*” (197, emphasis in original). Although the preceding discussion of sequency and simultaneity, in which Shevek says that “the mystic makes the reconnection of his reason and his unconscious, [and] sees all becoming as one being, and understands the eternal return” (197), suggests that this coextension is temporal, the term “coextensive” can also refer to space. The universe, then, is the totality of being – all points in time and space – and its boundaries are the boundaries of the unconscious mind. It is surely significant that it is the unconscious, not the conscious, mind that Tebores mentions: the unconscious has, after all, been viewed as pan-individual, as Le Guin herself reminds us in two essays contemporaneous with the novel (“The Child,” 53; “Myth and Archetype,” 69). There is, it seems, a type of being that is not separate, one that is as much a part of our existence as the unconscious is of our mind, and simultaneity is of time.

³⁰ The term “synchronic identity” appears to be used in a number of ways. In general philosophical discussion, it seems to be used in the sense I have described here (Noonan); in discussions of personal identity, it is variously “my unified agency at any given time” (Shoemaker) and the ratio of persons (selves) to bodies (human “organisms”) (Olson).

The treatment of selfhood and the complex of related issues in *The Dispossessed* thus points to the truth and the importance of connection and participation, qualifying the autonomy of the agent and the separateness of our individual being. Agency remains a crucial – indeed, perhaps the defining – component of selfhood, as presented in the novel; but its existence is established in and its exercise shaped by interaction with the other, in its various guises. Furthermore, individual selfhood does not describe all aspects of our being. We are both essentially separate and fundamentally one. These basic themes recur in the two later novels; but the emphasis is very differently distributed. I turn now to *Always Coming Home*, which, as we will see, goes far beyond *The Dispossessed* in developing the idea that we exist, not only as individuated agents, but also as part of and participation in that which is beyond the self.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALWAYS COMING HOME: BEING AS PARTICIPANT AND PARTICIPATION

Comparing the treatment of selfhood in *The Dispossessed* with that in *Always Coming Home* reveals a fundamental shift in focus. Where the Anarresti vision of selfhood centres on agency, the Kesh decentre – or, more accurately, contextualize – both agent and self, viewing them as limited, though crucial, components within a far broader ontological framework. This contextualization takes two distinct forms. The first, which develops the idea of participation hinted at in *The Dispossessed*, replaces the familiar self-other distinction with one between individuated and non-individuated existence. For the Kesh, one’s existence as an individual is not the sum total of one’s being, but one of two intertwined and equally important modes of sentient being. The whole being exists both as an individual and as participation in non-individuated being, being “in general” (97). In this view, the self is the concrete expression and epitomization of the individual mode. The second directs attention to the relationship between the individual and all that it is not. The individual – the entity in its individual mode, the self – is embedded in a network of interdependent individuated entities, one both more inclusive and more prominent than that depicted in *The Dispossessed*. Not only do we exist as *participation in*; we also exist as *part of*. The individual, as an agent and as a centre of subjective experience, remains crucial; but it exists always and only within the context of that which is not itself, of the non-individual and the other.

The dual nature of each entity’s existence, as understood by the Kesh, is established through the discussion of a set of interrelated beliefs and practices, all of which are structured by, and so reinforce, this overarching binary. First among these is the “working metaphor” (52) of the Nine Houses. As noted earlier in this analysis, the distinction between the Five and the Four

Houses is, among many other things, one between “the individual and the type” (447): the Five Houses of Earth are home to “individual animals and human beings currently alive” (48), while the Four Houses encompass, in addition to the dead and the unborn, “all animals, plants, and persons considered as the species rather than individual” (46), and, in the case of human persons specifically,³¹ as a “people, tribe, or nation” (49). The distinction being drawn here is not really the familiar one between the individual and the collectivities (biological and social) of which he or she, as an individual, is part: that is, it is not the distinction between member and category. It is rather between two ways or modes in which the same entity exists, only one of which involves individuation (i.e., existence *as* an individual). Considered as a separate and specific entity, one is located in the Five Houses; considered as a kind of being, rather than an individual instance of it, one lives in the Four Houses.

This becomes clearer if we look at the notion of the individual and generic aspects of being, which explicitly frames the distinction between the individual and the type in terms of modes of being. One of the clearest descriptions of these ideas and their relationship to one another, as well as to the conceptual framework of the Five and the Four Houses, is found in Pandora’s discussion of the Sun *wakwa*:

[In the Sun Dance,] attention was not focussed on the material and individual manifestations of being – the rocks, plants, animals, persons enumerated and celebrated in the World Dance – but on the generic and the spiritual: the aspect under which even living creatures still/already inhabit the [Four Houses]... the earthly, mortal, human

³¹ The Kesh understanding of “personhood” is far broader than that generally accepted in modern Western society, encompassing not only human individuals, but all individual components of the natural world (including ones that modern Western society would not consider sentient, let alone “persons”), as well as their counterparts in dream or vision (181).

dancers invited that part of their own being which was before and would be after their earthly life: their soul, or their souls. Not the ‘spirit,’ the essence of individuality, or not only the spirit; for individuality is mortality; but also the breath-soul, that which is shared with, taken from, given back to the wholeness of being; and the self that is beyond the self. (494 – 495)

Here, Pandora contrasts the “material and individual manifestations of being” – existence as separate and specific entities, individuals as such – with the “generic,” the “aspect under which even living creatures still/already inhabit the [Four Houses],” which entails existence as participation in “the wholeness of being.” The juxtaposition, the parallel with the Four and Five Houses, and the association of the generic aspect with participatory being all recur elsewhere, most notably (though not only)³² in discussion of animals. The generic aspect of the individual animal is “deerness, not that deer; cowness, not this cow” (97); it inhabits the Four Houses, and it is “related metaphysically with the human soul and the eternal universe of being” (447). (Pandora’s – or Le Guin’s – translation of the Kesh Sky Mode, which is used when discussing “Four-House people and places” [535], by means of the English suffix *-ness* (96) is significant here, as it implies a quality or an essence rather than a categorization.) In its generic aspect, then, the entity appears to partake of what Old Jackrabbit, in his meditation on “Person and Self,” calls “the oneness of the universe ... and ... of each being of the many kinds” (325); within the Five Houses, it exists as a distinct individual.

The distinction between the individual and the generic – that is, between the individuated and the participatory – has two major dimensions. In the first place, of course, it is a question of

³² Pandora, for example, uses the noun “humanness” (97), while Stone Telling refers to the “rockness” of Gahheya (271), the blue rock that is “the strongest heyiya in all the fields of Sinshan and Madidinou” (189).

differentiation: under its individual aspect, an entity is defined by its distinction from that which it is not; in its generic aspect, its existence is precisely in that broader being. It is also, however, one of particularity (i.e., specificity). The individual entity is *this* individual entity, not only in the sense of being distinct from others, but in the sense of not being otherwise: it is characterized by a particular set of truths (qualities and conditions), which hold for no other entity. As participation, in contrast, it exists as a whole that encompasses all specific instances, either of a particular kind of being or of “being in general” (97). The generic aspect is not particular, but inclusive.

The relationship between particularity and inclusivity, individuation and participation, and the individual and generic aspects of being is most evident in the physical and temporal nature of the two aspects, which in turn is developed primarily through association with the integrated conceptual binaries that structure the Kesh view of time and space. The most prominent of these pairs are mortality/eternity and materiality/immateriality. Both are implicitly associated with the individual and generic aspects of being: mortality/eternity through the metaphor of the Five and the Four Houses (44, 50), and the material and the non-material through the Earth and Sky Modes (535). In both cases, however, the link is also made explicit. Pandora’s description of the Sun *wakwa*, for example, which I quoted at length above, establishes a clear and tight relationship between individuality, materiality, and mortality, on one hand, and the generic, the non-material, and the eternal, on the other. Individuality, she says, *is* mortality; and the manifestations of individual being are material (495). Elsewhere, explaining the Kesh view of game animals, she draws the same distinction and the same associations: “By its mortality, the individual deer was related physically, materially, with human beings, and all other beings on earth; while ‘deerness’ ... was related metaphysically with the human soul and

the eternal universe of being” (447). The individual aspect is mortal and embodied; the generic is immaterial and immortal. Furthermore, crucially, the immortality of the generic aspect is not the disembodied continuation of the individual entity, but the being’s participation in a totality that encompasses not only all entities at a given moment, but all moments – including, as Pandora observes (495), those which (in linear terms) precede the mortal existence of the individual aspect. This peculiarly Kesh version of immortality is thus a double assertion of the (physical and temporal) inclusivity of being-as-participation, while the mortality and physicality of the individual aspect establish it as inherently both bounded and unique, making manifest its particularity.

The other temporal characteristics of the two aspects of being reaffirm the particularity of the individual and the inclusivity of the participatory, both independently and through the ways in which they refine the apposition of mortality and eternity. The Kesh juxtaposition of “private, individual, historical lived time” and “communal, impersonal, cyclical being-time” (279), for example, reasserts the duality of mortality and eternity, introduces a parallel distinction between change (“historical lived time”) and permanence (“cyclical being-time”), and aligns both explicitly with particularity (the “private” and “individual”) and inclusivity (the “communal” and “impersonal”). The key conceptual pair in this regard, however, is probably the *now/not-now* dyad. This binary distinction clearly, if implicitly, juxtaposes the specific/exclusive and the general/inclusive, creating an opposition that is developed and rendered explicit by the primary means through which the present and the non-present are linked with the two aspects of being: the division of the Kesh language into the Earth and the Sky Modes. The Earth Mode is used, not only in “the present tenses,” but in “speaking to and of living persons and local places” (i.e., specific entities and instances/manifestations of being, the inhabitants of the Five Houses [45]),

while the Sky Mode, which is primarily employed to describe “Four-House people and places” and in the past and future tenses, is also used “in making abstract or general statements” (535). The existence of two sets of pronouns employed in the two modes, which are known, respectively, as the “particular” and the “generic” (96), makes the link even clearer.

Perhaps even more significant than these explicit interconnections, however, are the ways in which this distinction between the present and the non-present structures the other temporal dyads that characterize the individual and the generic. Most obviously, the alignment of the generic aspect with the non-present reinforces the alinear inclusivity of the Valley conception of eternity. The close correspondence between the *now* and the individual aspect, though its effects are less immediately evident, is equally important. Not only does it emphasize the ultimate temporal specificity (the exclusive present) as the site of individual being; it also provides the conceptual foundation for the intertwining of mortality and change. Given the Kesh view of an eternal totality of being, change and mortality must both be products of our existence, as individuals, in the exclusive present: like the apparent passage of linear time, they are functions of my movement between moments, my limitation to a single temporal perspective that I bring with me. The individual aspect is temporally specific, and consequently both changes and ends; the generic participates in all moments, and hence is unchanging and immortal.

The temporal associations of the two modes of being, then, support and extend the dual nature of sentient existence. The Valley understanding of the nature of and relationship between the soul and the self likewise reinforces both the basic distinction between and the coexistence of the two aspects. In the Kesh view, the self and the soul are not entities belonging to ontologically and epistemologically different realms (the psychological and scientifically investigable on one hand, the mystical that is amenable to only philosophic and theological

discussion on the other), but the concrete expressions, within the individual aspect, of the two modes of being. Self and soul are, in effect, the individual and the generic considered as components of the individual entity. As such, they clearly reproduce the major conceptual linkages established by the depiction of the two aspects of being, while simultaneously introducing certain inconsistencies that highlight key characteristics of the individual aspect and of its relationship with the generic.

Of the two concepts, the soul is most obviously a concretization of one of the aspects of being. That aspect is the generic; and the relationship is most evident in the body of Kesh popular belief that ascribes four distinct souls to every living creature. To demonstrate this, let us turn again to Pandora's description of the Sun *wakwa*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. For the Kesh, Pandora explains, the "soul, or ... souls" is (or are) "that part of [the individual's] own being which was before and [will] be after [his or her] earthly life" (495). One of the four souls, in particular – the breath-soul – she identifies as "that which is shared with, taken from, given back to the wholeness of being" (495); another, the "kin soul," simply *is* the generic aspect, at least in the case of animals (97). While there is no comparably unequivocal description of the kin-soul of the human animal, the funerary practices accompanying human death are telling. Although the breath-soul escapes the individual entity at death (i.e., with the end of embodied, individual awareness), the earth-soul and the eye-soul must be released by the ceremonial surrender of the body by the human community (through cremation or burial), while the kin-soul is set free only by the public "burning" of the dead person's three names – the words that encapsulated and charted the evolution of his or her individuality throughout life (93 – 94). Together, these funerary ceremonies enact the gradual and ritualized dismantling of particularity, of the physical, temporal, and emotional/psychological uniqueness that defined the living entity.

That which remains – the soul(s) – is non-material, unchanging, and eternal: in a word, non-particular. Taken together with Pandora’s (already quoted) description of the breath-soul, which points to its participatory nature, these strong correspondences support the suggestion, implicit in the description of the Sun dance, that the soul is basically the way in which the Kesh conceptualize the generic aspect as a part of the whole being.

Perhaps an even clearer illustration of this relationship between the soul and the generic aspect, however, is the peculiar Kesh notion of reincarnation. Though I touched on this when I discussed the implications of the Kesh references to immortality, Valley religious belief on the subject is even more indicative. The Kesh evidently think of the soul not only as that portion of the whole entity that persists after the end of the embodied mortal individual, but as a thing that can form part of different individuals. One poem, for example, begins, “Our souls are old, / often used before” (122); another, a teaching verse, tells of the “old souls” who search continually for new bodies, and suggests that any infant may be “an old soul” in “a new person” (415). Crucially, though this may seem to suggest an individuated, disembodied essence that endures through multiple mortal incarnations, the entire Valley theory of reincarnation in fact hinges on the idea that the individual, embodied, mortal entity is a *manifestation* of non-differentiated, generic being (a notion that I will explore in more detail later on) (97). Reincarnation presupposes not the continuation of the individual, but its dissolution. This being the case, the soul – to all appearances, a distinct and definite, though immaterial, thing that persists across time – can only be understood as a means of conceptualizing the participatory aspect of being, which includes all moments and is common to all individuals, from the perspective of the individuated.

The relationship between the individual aspect and the self is less straightforward than that between the generic and the soul, though the central assertion – that, in each case, the latter is the former revisioned, converted from an abstract to a tangible, from a verb to a noun – remains, I believe, valid. First, the self is not the only concretization of the individual aspect; second, and rather more importantly, it is not only a concretization of the individual aspect. Although it certainly embodies the conceptual interconnections established by the individual aspect, the Kesh view of the self emphasizes two elements of its nature that buck the strong association between the individual and the physical: the notion of the self as a centre of experience, and agency. Doing so, although it introduces a certain inconsistency, builds up a richer, stronger picture of differentiation and (more importantly) particularity: one in which the individuation of the self stems not only from its material existence, but from its being an embodied subjectivity that is not only the context, but the basis, of individual agency.

The self's role as a concrete expression of the individual aspect is thrown into relief by its juxtaposition with the soul. Although the concept most overtly presented as the counterpart of the soul is not the self, but the spirit, "the essence of individuality" (495), the Kesh texts included in this fictional ethnography usually contrast the soul and the self, explicitly or implicitly. If we take "self" to be the referent of the first-person pronoun, for example, the "old poem" recited by a Kesh person offers an emphatic assertion of this distinction:

As I grow old,

my soul gets younger.

I go seaward:

it travels upstream.

Listen, river:

I am not my soul! (122)

The “I” in this poem is not simply the speaker, the entity known as Kemel; it is a thing that is distinct from, and contrasted with, the soul, one that ages and ends (i.e., is mortal). The life story of the visionary, Flicker, both reiterates this distinction (and the assertion of the self’s mortality) and introduces the idea that the self is a centre of embodied experience. Recounting her first vision, Flicker explains that one portion of it – that in which, having passed from the Third House (the Serpentine, of which she is a member) to the Eighth (the Wind/Wilderness) (308), she enters the Ninth – is difficult to describe in words, because “there is no person in it” (308):

To tell a story, you say, ‘I did this,’ or ‘She saw that.’ When there is no I nor she there is no story. I was until I got to the Ninth House; there was the hawk, but I was not. The hawk was; the still air was. Seeing with the hawk’s eyes is being without self. Self is mortal. That is the House of Eternity. (308)

Having left her self behind – interestingly, apparently not in the Five Houses (though that is where she returns to it), but in the Eighth House – she does not regain it until she begins to come out of the vision. Off “to the left” (i.e., in the Five Houses), she sees “something ... there crying like a little animal. That was myself, my mind and being in the world; and I began to become myself again; but my soul that had seen the vision was not entirely willing. Only my

mind kept drawing it back to me from the Ninth House, calling and crying for it till it came” (309).

In this account, again, the self is juxtaposed with the soul, and mortality is offered as its defining characteristic. Flicker, however, introduces two new elements: embodiment and “mind” (i.e., sentience). Her self is her “mind and being in the world,” her embodied awareness; it is both mental and physical. The emphasis on physical being, which is inherently both differentiated (distinguishable from other material entities) and particular (unified and unique – at the barest minimum, in numeric terms), is entirely in line with the conceptual linkages that define the individual aspect. The reference to “mind,” however – which parallels Flicker’s earlier observation that the presence of a self, understood as a centre of experience, is a key organizing principle of narrative (308) – is not. The conundrum that this poses is in no way mitigated by the fact that the concept of the “spirit,” which is consistently, and often explicitly, associated with the immaterial (see, e.g., 89, 189), is plagued by the same internal contradiction.

In the case of the self, at least, however, I would suggest that the anomalous presence of the immaterial actually points toward a final dimension of particularity, whose inclusion renders the self the quintessential example of individuation. If physical existence necessarily involves a basic form of differentiation and particularity, linking it with the individual’s mental being brings into play the notion of consciousness, and hence of individual (embodied) experience. To the inherent spatial (and, to a lesser degree, temporal) individuation of the physical being is added the complete experiential and temporal individuation of subjectivity. I use the word “complete” advisedly: experientially and temporally, my subjectivity is both drastically limited and exclusive (in the sense established in “Time: An Overview”). My experience of the world, for example, being my experience, is inevitably and uniquely incomplete; yet it is also all that I can

know directly. I have a kind of access to my perceptions, emotions, and thoughts that sets them apart from their own objects and precludes my ever truly sharing in another's experiential knowledge of her inner life.³³ My subjectivity is therefore differentiated and particular in both content and character. Furthermore, although our consciousness is temporally extended in the sense of incorporating information about future and, especially, past events, experience itself is always from the vantage point of the present. This being the case, the self, understood as an embodied experiencer, is not only mortal; within the span of its mortal life, it exists, always, *now*. The intersection of these three dimensions of individuation is best represented by the idea of the first-person perspective, which I introduced in "Time in the Valley": a physical, temporal, and experiential point of view from which objects and events are understood, and is defined in contradistinction to the world *as well as* in interaction with it.

The strong version of these claims would be something of an interpretative stretch. There is some textual support for my philosophical excursions: for example, Pandora's reference to "the abyss between us" (523) recalls Takver's image of the "abyss" that separates her from Shevek (*The Dispossessed*, 284) and suggests the unclosable gap between two subjectivities, while the three-way connection between individual, experiencer, and the present is (as discussed earlier) implicit in the temporal metaphor of the house, as well in as the alignment of the Five Houses with the *now*. Still, the Kesh are far from being sceptics, and explicit references to the self, as is evident in the passages quoted above, emphasize its mortality rather than its existence in the present moment. My point, however, is not that the Valley concept of selfhood is solely comprised of, or even overtly centred on, the idea of the self as an embodied experiencer.

³³ More specifically, under normal circumstances, my experience is characterized by what phenomenological accounts of consciousness refer to as "first-personal givenness," i.e., direct access and a sense of personal ownership (Gallagher and Zahavi). This sense of *mineness* (to use a less impressive, but perhaps more illustrative, term) is a ubiquitous feature *only of my* experience.

Rather, it is that this conception of the self, which is implicit in the Kesh emphasis on the inseparability of mind and body, supports and extends the individual aspect's depiction of individuated existence, and thus is a characteristic and important (though not explicitly discussed) element of the Valley understanding of both selfhood and the nature of being more broadly.

It is also, arguably, a practical and conceptual prerequisite for the final component of the Kesh understanding of selfhood and the individual: individual agency. This dimension of the Valley conception of the self, though everywhere implicit, is expressed for the most part indirectly, surfacing primarily in reflections and comments on the responsible exercise of agency, as well as in particular features of the Kesh worldview (e.g., their understanding of illness as “not something that *happened* to a person, but something a person *did*” [*Always Coming Home*, 510]). Only once is the issue explicitly framed in terms of selfhood; but that one instance is strikingly unambiguous. In the course of her discussion of “living on the coast” (the period of sexual abstinence undergone by all adolescents), Pandora explains that, for the Kesh, “[t]o be alive was to choose and use, consciously or not,” the different energies that, combined, constitute “personal energy,” *sheiye* – the “selfhood of the individual” (525).³⁴ In the Valley view, “the individual made the choices, and the choosing ... was the person” (526). This emphasis on choice is significant for two reasons. First, it carries forward the connection between selfhood and agency so central to *The Dispossessed*, even as the Kesh view of sentient being places the agent, the self, and the individual aspect firmly within the context of a whole

³⁴ It is worth noting that two of the five energies – the sexual and the kinetic – relate directly to the body, while a third – the mental – pertains to mind, or consciousness: another example of the insistent intertwining of mind and body in the Kesh view of the self.

that incorporates the non-individuated (and hence non-agentic). Second, it both bodies forth and assumes individuation. If the choice, no matter what external factors influence the decision made, is ultimately made by the individual, then the exercise of agency both requires and is itself a form of individuation. In particular, it presupposes the existence of individuated subjectivity, and extends individuation to encompass not only experience, but choice. Like the inseparability of mind and body, then, agency *as a component of selfhood*, though it runs counter to a rigid interpretation of the conceptual binaries associated with the Nine Houses, in fact reinforces and develops the concept at the heart of the individual aspect of being: that of individuation.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between individuation and participation, the individual and the generic, follows the model identified earlier with regard to the binaries that structure the Valley understanding of time. The two aspects of existence, like the temporal binaries of the Kesh and the sequency and simultaneity of *The Dispossessed*, are irreducible, irreconcilable, and inseparable. This relationship between the participatory and the individuated is established, first and foremost – again as in the case of time – through their association, via the two branches of the Nine Houses (44), with the potent and ubiquitous figure of the *heyiya-if*. Between the two arms of the *heyiya-if* is the hinge, the empty space that “connects and ... holds apart” (257), and in so doing defines both the components and the impossible whole that they create. Without this emptiness, the *heyiya-if* does not exist; while its branches, though they may well exist, cannot do so as such. As one of the Kesh observes, “[a]t the centre” – metaphorically as well as literally – “is the absence” (499). Read as an epistemological and ontological metaphor, then, the *heyiya-if* implies a binary that is not *either/or*, but *both/and*.³⁵ Both components of the dyad are crucial;

³⁵ The distinction between these two types of binary is particularly significant, since Stone Telling identifies the *either/or* approach as a defining feature, and implicitly a key weakness, of Dayao thought (375).

both their difference and their coexistence are key. Neither can be subordinated to the other, as in the conventional dualities that Le Guin rejects in her critical writings and *Stone Telling* in her autobiography, nor can both be subsumed within a synthesis at some higher level of analysis. The key dynamic is neither elimination nor resolution, but holding in relation. In the words of the Kesh fable, “[o]ne is not all, nor once always” (323); but the whole being is both.

The clearest statement of this relationship, as it pertains specifically to the two aspects of being, is offered in a pair of Kesh writings that discuss the Four Houses (the right arm of the *heyiya-if*) in terms of a void. The first, a meditation on the relationship between language and reality (“Words/Birds”), offers form and the void as examples of coexistents that are linguistically and logically incompatible, without being actually so:

What works for words may not work for things, and to say that two sayings that contradict each other cannot be true is not to say that opposites cannot exist.... It is true that everything that is must be as it is, and that nothing is but the play of illusion on the void; it is true that everything is and it is true that nothing is.... The world of our life is the weaving that holds them together while holding them apart. (330)

In this passage, the relationship of paradoxical coexistence, of holding together and holding apart, is clear. The significance of the “void,” however, is not – or at least not entirely. At first glance, the word “void” suggests absence, not-being as opposed to non-differentiated being. I would suggest, however, that this apparent non-being is, or is also, non-differentiated being. “Nothing,” I believe, is not the absence of being per se, but the absence of individuated being – not *no being*, but *no thing*.

This interpretation, though admittedly not strongly indicated by the above passage, is made plausible by two things: the Kesh conflation of non-being and non-differentiated being; and the treatment of the “void” image in another short Valley text. To take these points in order: the Kesh consistently blur the boundaries between non-being and non-differentiated being, linking both with the same images and occasionally using the terms interchangeably. The Four Houses, for instance, though they exist within “the Nine Houses of Being” (325), are associated with both of these concepts, as the usage rules for the Sky Mode – which is employed in “the conditional, optative, subjunctive, etc.” and the negative, as well as “in making abstract or general statements” (535) – demonstrate. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the close relationship between *nothing* and *no thing*, however, is the origin myth (one of many [173, 177]) that Red Plum offers to Pandora. In keeping with the Kesh disregard for chronological time, the story begins, not “in the beginning,” but “some time, some place, in the Four Houses,” when:

there was no time, there was no place. It was all bare, bareness was all. There was nothing, not anything, there was not. Bare and thin, not light not dark, nothing moving nothing thinking ... there were no edges, no surfaces, no insides. Everything was in the middle of everything and nothing was anything. (175)

After a while, Red Plum explains, a recognizable world comes to be. Bored mortal souls, “mixed in, mixed up” in this non-(differentiated) being, begin to dance, and their dancing creates “that music ... the waves, the intervals, the tones; the rhythm, the measure, the beat,” which in turn triggers differentiation: “[t]hings began to draw apart and pull into themselves; there were edges and meetings; there were outsides and insides; there were hinges and partings” (175). Leaving aside the logical consistency of having individual “mortal souls” within the kind of entropic soup depicted here, this creation story illustrates very nicely the conflation of not-being

with non-differentiated being. Not-being, in this context, is non-individuated being. The dancing, singing souls do not conjure substance out of absence: they cause being to differentiate itself. (Incidentally, this creation story also reinforces the importance of agency to the Kesh – not the agency of a creator-god, but that of the individual “mortal souls.”)

If this picture of the relationship between non-being and non-differentiated being suggests that the “void” of “Words/Birds” may very well be the latter, rather than the former, the treatment of the same image in another text virtually asserts it. In “The Bright Void of the Wind,” a Kesh person named Kulkunna relates what is apparently not merely a near-death experience, but an actual return from death (though see Erlich, 261, for an alternative view). After his/her (the narrator’s gender is not clear) heartbeat and breathing stop, he/she comes to “a tremendous place of light and wind,” where he/she, after a moment’s terror, drifts on the wind “like a feather” (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 288). Drawn back to his/her body, he/she realizes that “all my senses could perceive was themselves, that they were making the world by casting shadows on the bright void of the wind,” and that therefore living “was catching at shadows with hands of light” (288). This description of the journey to and nature of the “bright void of the wind” is riddled with Four-House imagery. Kulkunna exits his/her House, and enters the void, at the point of (perhaps even during/after) death; he/she floats on the wind like a feather (an important symbol of the Four Houses [489 – 490]); and the void itself is one of light (also associated with the Houses of Sky), as well as wind.³⁶ Taken together, these phenomena and symbols both imply that the void is within the Four Houses and reinforce the location of the Four Houses within the Nine Houses of Being.

³⁶ Wind is associated with the Eighth House (that of Coyote and the wilderness). The symbolism of light seems to me more important: in particular, in a discussion of the significantly named Sun Dance, a member of the Lodge that organizes the *wakwa* says that Four-House people see the world “with the sun’s eyes, that see only light” (501).

If we accept, based on these observations, that the void of “Words/Birds” is non-differentiated being, then that text becomes an explicit verbal elaboration of the relationship between the generic and the individual. In the first place, the void and “everything that is” – i.e., the generic and the individual – are equally “true”: a word suggests both an ontological status (equally real) and a valuation (equally important). This contradicts the hint, in Kulkunna’s account, that undifferentiated being is some sort of transcendent truth that underlies the illusory world of the senses. The generic is simply one of the two ways in which all things are.³⁷ Yet if the individual and the generic are both coexistent and equal, they are also irreconcilable: they hold apart, as well as together. This points towards a final dimension of the relationship between the individual and the generic, one that was hinted at in my earlier discussion of subjectivity. The two aspects, I would suggest, are “held apart” not only by the fundamental opposition of their natures, but by a perceptual/epistemological characteristic arising from this ontological one: their (almost) complete inaccessibility to one another. In the terminology established in the chapters on time, each of the two aspects is exclusive. If “earthly eyes” can see only

³⁷ This is a major difference from one prominent philosopher and author whose metaphysics and metaphors bear – at least on certain points – a striking resemblance to those discussed in this chapter. Plato may seem an odd predecessor for the Kesh; yet the philosophy sketched out here offers many points of comparison. The notion of generic and individual aspects of being, for example, and especially the idea that the individual entity is a manifestation of a certain *kind* of being, calls to mind the theory of forms, while the description of sensory perception as “the play of illusion” and “shadows,” combined with the light imagery, recalls *The Republic*’s allegory of the cave. Unlike the people of the Valley, however, Plato appears to privilege forms over the particulars that instantiate them (Silverman, np). Not only are particulars imperfect examples of their forms (subject to incessant change and embodying only a partial or debased version of the essence that *is* the form); insofar as they are objects of sensory perception and belief rather than knowledge, they are also “cognitively inferior” to them. The source of all these deficiencies, Silverman suggests, is the materiality of particulars. Both the devaluing of the particular(s) and the rejection of materiality are very much against the grain of Kesh thought. The former is of course at odds with the vision of interdependence embodied in the *heyiya-if* and expressed in “Words/Birds”; the latter is repeatedly presented as both misguided and self-defeating – most notably via the cautionary examples of Junco (whose life story immediately precedes Kulkunna’s, and who almost kills and permanently blinds himself [Le Guin, 287] seeking “the eternal truth” that lies “behind life and death, behind word and form, behind all being” [284]) and the unpopular and self-destructive Warrior Lodge (which teaches that physical existence is illusion [14 – 15] and a barrier to “true power” [189]).

“themselves” (288), their own nature will establish their perceptual (and hence the individual’s conceptual) limits. Being individuated, they can know only individuated being. (Flicker also comments on the way in which the individual’s, and particularly the human individual’s, comprehension and imagination is limited by his or her nature, though she does not link this specifically with individuation [306, 308]. In particular, she suggests that the apparent change in the places and beings of her vision is a function of “the human way human people have to see things” [306] – a suggestion in line with the connection between individuated being and change, including especially, but not only, mortality.) Four-House people, meanwhile – a category that includes the generic aspect of the whole entity – see “with the sun’s eyes, that see only light” (501): Kulkunna’s “bright void.” With rare exceptions (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the individual and the generic remain separate. They coexist, but they do not touch. (Flicker’s ability to perceive and to recount her perceptions in the Ninth House should not be taken as evidence against this: when in the Ninth House, she sees not with her own eyes, but with the hawk’s.)

The Valley understanding of how we (i.e., conscious, individuated entities) exist, then, though it accords substantial importance to the self (understood as an embodied experiencer and, especially, an agent), embeds this concept within a model of sentient existence that encompasses the participatory as well as the individuated. In the Kesh view, it seems, the individual cannot be taken in isolation. This principle also underpins the second notable characteristic of the Valley concept of individual being: its connectedness. To be an individual is by definition to be individuated, to be distinguished from the rest; but individuation does not imply separation. For the Kesh, the individual – not only the mortal, physical entity, but the all-encompassing

subjectivity – exists as part of an interconnected web of (individuated) being, a community of individual entities that parallels the generic’s “being in general” (97).

This interconnectedness is physical, psychological, emotional, and social, and it is openly and repeatedly expressed. The most mystical statement of it is perhaps provided by Flicker, who at the peak of her vision, seeing “with the hawk’s eyes,” perceives

the universe of power. It was the network, field, and lines of the energies of all the beings, stars and galaxies of stars, worlds, animals, minds, nerves, dust, the lace and foam of vibration that is being itself, all interconnected, every part part of another part and the whole part of each part, and so comprehensible to itself only as a whole, boundless and unclosed. (308)

Part and whole are not the same, but they are inextricably tied together, in such a way that to understand the universe of individuated being is to know it as “a whole, boundless and unclosed.” Pandora elsewhere presents the idea of interconnectedness in more mundane, but no less significant, language, and explicitly ascribes it to Valley culture as a whole, not simply the vision of one individual. The Kesh, she observes, possess a powerful “sense of community, of continuity with the dirt, water, air and living creatures of the Valley” (94). This perception of individual interconnectedness, which finds expression (like many of the key elements of Kesh thought) in the system of the Nine Houses and the temporal/spatial/relational metaphor of existence “inside the world” (160), is a source of extraordinary emotion and motivation. It moves the Kesh, in the rare cases when it is necessary, to perform (uncharacteristically) remarkable feats to ensure their own and their compatriots’ burial within the Valley (94); and it renders the ritual that most clearly expresses “the emotional and social interdependence of the

community, their profound sense of living and dying with one another” – the Burning of Names on the first night of the World *wakwa* – the most “intensely participatory and abreactive” of all the Valley ceremonies (93). The word that describes this interdependence – that which denotes “society, the community of being, the fabric of interdependent existences” – is *ostouud*: literally, “weaving or the weave of a fabric” (525). Like a thread in a weaving, the Kesh individual is *part of*: distinct but not separate, unique and crucial in its uniqueness, yet defined also by its existence within, and relationship to, a composite whole and the elements within it.

The Valley understanding of individual being thus contextualizes the self in two distinct ways : by establishing it as simply a concretization of one of two different, coexistent, and equally important ways of existing; and by locating it in a web of interconnected individuated being. These two forms of contextualization converge in the concept of *relation*. To adapt the Kesh metaphor, relation is the hinge, that which unites and divides; and its hinging function is three-fold. In the first place, as an empathic interaction between individuals, it draws together self and other, bridging their isolation even as it implicitly reinforces their separateness – a theme familiar from *The Dispossessed*. In the Valley view, however, this interaction of individuals is also the hinge of the individual and the generic, of the two aspects as components of a whole entity. Relation draws the individual closer to his or her own generic aspect, and in so doing makes clear the fundamental unity of both participants, and in fact of all being. We can therefore also think of relation as hinging a third set of concepts: being-as-participation and connectedness themselves.

In order to clearly develop these complex conceptual and symbolic relationships, we will need to begin by defining “relation,” since the Valley use of the term (or its untranslated equivalent) is both idiosyncratic and deeply significant. The Kesh recognize two forms of

interaction between differentiated entities, the paradigmatic examples of which are written and spoken exchange.³⁸ The distinction between them is based on “the *quality of the relationship established*” (538, emphasis in original), an issue that, in the Valley, concerns both the temporal and the ontological (general or specific, abstract or concrete) nature of the participants. Written exchange is *communication*: interaction that takes place “in the nonpresent, in the Houses of Sky.” It is “*there, for anyone, at any time,*” and so “general and potentially eternal” (538, emphasis in original). (That is, the participants are differentiated – as they must be, for interaction to be logically possible – but not particular.) The spoken word, in contrast, is always *relation*, or interaction “in the Five Houses of Earth”: it is spoken “*here, to you, now,*” and hence is “ephemeral and irreproducible.” It is “a connection of present contemporaries, ‘people breathing together.’” There are two points that I wish to pick out here. The first is the obvious parallel between relation and communication, on one hand, and the individual and the generic, on the other. Relation, in particular, as a temporally limited and unique interaction between specific individuals, is a kind of apotheosis of individuation. The second is that relation is, most emphatically, the *connection* of individuated beings, implicitly two of them, by means of the mutual attention involved in address and response. It is thus an instantiation, and so an expression and affirmation, of the interconnectedness of individuated existence.

Given that connection presupposes difference, relation is necessarily the hinge of individuated subjectivities, the gap that connects. Or – to shift the ground of the metaphor slightly – subjectivity is: our immersion in a first-person perspective is the source of both

³⁸ In one striking exception, the Librarian at Wakwaha speaks of books as relation (*Always Coming Home*, 334). For an analysis of this inconsistency, see “Story, Memory, and Choice: Agency and the Other in Lavinia.”

solitude and common ground.³⁹ Pandora seems to express this idea in a line from “Newton Did Not Sleep Here,” one of the three poems that conclude her series of attempts, in her own voice, to come to grips with the Valley worldview (and to make some sort of peace with that of our society). “What links us (O my sister soul),” she writes, “is the abyss between us” (523) – an image that calls to mind not only the hinge of the *heyiya-if*, but Takver’s image of the “abyss which we bridge with a look, with a touch, with a word” (*The Dispossessed*, 284).

Relation’s role in linking/separating the individual and the generic, though less immediately obvious than in the case of interconnectedness, is equally important. Although the generic and the individual, as already noted, cannot touch – both being exclusive, and hence (in experiential terms) incompatible – they may and do draw closer together; and one crucial way in which they do so is in relation.⁴⁰ While there are several passing hints that this may be so (consider, for example, Pandora’s address to “my sister soul,” which may suggest an alternative interpretation of the line in which it occurs when we recall that the soul is primarily the

³⁹ This is a frequent theme in Le Guin’s work, and one familiar from critical writings on her canon (see, e.g., Remington, “A Touch of Difference”). The Kesh are different from most of her previous characters – including the frequently alienated Shevek – in that they seem to feel the latter far more strongly than the former (compare the struggles for understanding and connection in, e.g., “Nine Lives” and *The Left Hand of Darkness*). This is not to say that alienation is impossible in the Valley – witness the teenage years of Flicker and Stone Telling – but that the Valley worldview assumes the connectedness that Le Guin’s other characters struggle for. The Kesh exist in constant relation with their world.

⁴⁰ Another important way in which this approach comes or is brought about is through vision, whether spontaneous (as in the case of visionaries like Flicker) or deliberately induced through trance (as in the Sun Dance [495]). The Sun Dance is particularly interesting because of what it suggests about the Kesh view of such drawing together. The only *wakwa* directly concerned with drawing together the Left and the Right Hand (494), it is considered immensely dangerous (493); however, it is still repeated every year, suggesting that it is also seen as essential. The means by which the drawing together of the Five and the Four Houses is effected are also of interest. While the highly trained practitioners of the Inner Sun invite the inhabitants of the Four Houses, including their own souls, into the dance, the participants in the Outer Sun undertake “a progression farther and farther into a controlled condition of collective trance” (495). Although the Four and the Five Houses are not meant to coincide, it appears, their connection must be affirmed; and one crucial means of doing so is through drawing together one’s own individual and generic aspects, which is turn is done through group visioning: communal engagement in an utterly individual (in our terms, subjective) experience.

individuated expression of generic being, and the statement, in “Crows, Geese, Rocks,” that human individuals and rocks who engage in relation may “enter into [one another’s] soul[s] to some extent” [328]), the clearest articulation of the concept occurs in Pandora’s attempt to explain the peculiar Valley notion of reincarnation. To the Kesh, she explains,

this cow that I now kill for food is cowness giving itself to me as food because it has been properly treated and entreated, and again it will give itself to me as a cow, at my need and entreaty; and I that kill this cow am a name, a word, an instance of humanness and – with the cow – of being in general: a moment in a place: a relationship. (97)

First and foremost, this summary clarifies the relationship between the individual and the generic, and establishes a corresponding (and to the Western reader, decidedly counter-intuitive) understanding of reincarnation. In the Kesh view, Pandora states, individuated being is an instantiation of generic being (as both a type of being and “being in general”), and reincarnation involves, not successive incarnations of an unchanging individual essence, but multiple individual manifestations of the undifferentiated generic. More importantly for my current purpose, however, it also depicts *relation* – the fleeting and irreproducible act of mutual attention and exchange between co-present individuals – as a hinge act that draws together, not only the individuals themselves, but the individual and generic *aspects* of each participant. In relation, I know my individuated existence for “an instance of humanness and ... of being in general.” Crucially, however, I cannot and do not in fact *access* my generic aspect in relation. Relation draws the two aspects of being together, but it does not make them one. Relation, then, is a hinge between the two aspects of being, pulling them together and holding them apart. And finally, since it is not simply individuated being itself, but the present interaction of individuated

beings that is the source of this dynamic, relation is also a hinge between the connectedness of each individual and his/her dual nature. Relation not only reinforces both of the ways in which the Kesh place the individual being in context; it unites them.

There remains one final point to be made about the depiction of relation – or, more accurately, of the relationship between relation, connectedness, and individual being. The Kesh conception of relation, with its emphasis on mutuality, attention, and exchange, is intimately tied to the twinned notions of *reciprocity* and *interdependence* that are at the heart of connectedness. Relation is mutual, a two-way exchange; and it is fundamental to the existence of both participants. In fact, the very notion of relation is, at a basic level, an affirmation of both reciprocity and interdependence, as is clear from Pandora’s discussion of the ritual formulas spoken by the human people of the Valley upon taking a (non-human) life. The speaking of the “pebble-word” *arrariv*, for example – one of the formulae spoken “by anyone taking a life,” and in Kesh terms, a classic act of relation – “maintained and contained the idea of need and fulfillment, demand and response, of relationship and interdependence” (98). The interdependence recognized here is physical, psychological, and arguably (given the expansive Kesh definitions personhood and society) social: the interdependence of predator and prey, of taking life to sustain life. It is well within the bounds of the forms of interdependence that I sketched in the preceding discussion of connectedness. Yet one brief but revealing text suggests that the interdependence of individuated beings may in fact be ontological, as well as physical and psychological. Old Jackrabbit, in “Person and Self,” writes:

We are gatherer and gathered. Building and unbuilding, we make and are
unmade; giving birth and killing, we take hands and let go.... [A]ll of us are
beings in the Nine Houses of Being, dancing the same dance. It is with my voice

that the blue rock speaks, and the word I speak is the name of the blue rock. It is with my voice that the universe speaks, and the word I hear it speak when I listen is myself. (325)

Into the vision of interconnection is introduced relation, and into the description of relation is introduced an entirely new dimension. Speaking together (here again is the name, the call-and-response imagery of relation), Old Jackrabbit and the blue rock, the universe and the man, bring into being one another and themselves. In relation, it seems, individuals not only confirm individuated existence, but, paradoxically, establish it. This hint is not, as far as I can tell, developed elsewhere in the text, but it is significant for two reasons. It is entirely absent from *The Dispossessed*; and it is the primary focus of the treatment of selfhood in *Lavinia*. *Always Coming Home* redefines the parameters of individual existence, establishing the agent as part of the individuated entity and the individuated entity as one component of sentient being, laying far heavier emphasis on the individual's existence as part of an interconnected totality, and introducing the possibility that the interaction of individuals, which epitomizes the relationships within and between these two broader contexts, is the source of individual existence itself. *Lavinia*, in turn, develops this final line of inquiry, establishing a situation of literally mutual creation, and exploring to their fullest extent the resulting questions about the possibility of agency and the individual's relationship with the other. It is to this that we turn now.

CHAPTER SIX

STORY, MEMORY, AND CHOICE: AGENCY AND THE OTHER IN *LAVINIA*

Like its depiction of time, the treatment of selfhood in *Lavinia* revisits the core concerns and insights of the earlier novels from a different perspective, resulting in a vision of the self and its relationship with the rest of existence that is both familiar and subtly but profoundly different from the previous versions. Both *The Dispossessed*'s deep concern with individual agency and *Always Coming Home*'s vision of participatory being and individual connectedness are carried forward. However, where *The Dispossessed* is concerned with the nature and limitations of agency, and *Always Coming Home* with the contextualization of the self (understood as an embodied experiencer and agent), *Lavinia* explores the interdependence of individuated entities. By focusing on and developing the idea that interaction between individuals is the source of their individuated being, *Lavinia* establishes the individual as both creation and (self-)creator. In particular, not only does interaction with the sacred affirm and sustain individual existence: the individual him- or herself is in fact (co-)created through communicative interaction (the exchange of meaning with an individual other). The treatment of selfhood in *Lavinia* thus establishes the individuated entity, the self as such, as genuinely interdependent, asserting the reality and importance of individual agency even as it dramatizes the extent of individual contingency.

The simultaneous and reciprocal contingency and agency of individuated being is primarily developed through the novel's treatment of three distinct, though conceptually related, thematic nuclei. The first encompasses Lavinia's existence as poem and as story, and her ontological status vis-à-vis Vergil; the second, autobiographical memory and narrative identity; and the third, speech. (A fourth – non-verbal communication – plays a crucial role, but is not as

extensively developed.) All are explicitly identified as the source and site of individual existence, places where being – especially Lavinia’s – is established and defined. Crucially, the common element in all of these cases is not narrative per se, nor even language, in the strict sense of verbal expression : it is communicative interaction between individuals. In *Lavinia*, the exchange of meaning is generative, and self-creation entails creation of and by the other.

The interplay of agency and contingency is established within the first pages of the novel, in the same brief comments that make plain both Lavinia’s narrative nature and her own awareness of it. “I am, now,” she says, “only in this line of words I write” (3). A few lines later, she adds, “As far as I know, it was my poet who gave me any reality at all” (3). There is, as T. S. Miller points out, no attempt to provide a plausible historical origin for Lavinia’s tale, and hence for the character herself (35); in fact, the historical Lavinia is explicitly contrasted with the character in the poem and the narrator of the novel (Le Guin, *Lavinia*, 3). Instead, Lavinia’s fictionality is consistently foregrounded. Her very existence is tied to that of the story.

But which story – or rather, whose story? The two lines quoted above set up an implicit opposition between Vergil’s story and Lavinia’s, between being written and writing oneself, one that is developed in the subsequent paragraphs and throughout the book. Vergil “summoned [Lavinia] into existence” (4); he brought her, she says, “to life, to myself” (3). Lavinia herself, and her entire world, “[has] being only in those words,” the words of the poem (100; see also 257). Yet – in spite of Lavinia’s own self-identification with “her” poem (90) – she also maintains that Vergil “did not write” her life (3). He slighted it, and scanted her; and the full and vividly realized (self-)narrative that the reader encounters is, according to Lavinia, of her own

authorship.⁴¹ This is not simply a figure of speech. Like her world,⁴² Lavinia differs in small but significant ways from her portrayal in the *Aeneid*, as reported by Le Guin's Vergil and accessible to the interested reader; and since these differences pertain not only to her characteristics (e.g., hair colour [262]), but to her behaviour, they suggest that Lavinia does indeed – at least to some extent – write her own story, in the common metaphorical sense of making and following through on her own decisions.⁴³ Her obstinate refusal to accept any suitor other than Aeneas, for example, hardly fits Vergil's "faint portrait" of "a marriageable virgin, chaste, silent, obedient" (5), giving quite a different complexion to the unfolding of the war over her hand and the kingship. In so far as Lavinia is the story that she tells, however – the line of words that she writes – she is also, quite literally, writing herself into being as she tells it. Furthermore, she is doing so against the grain of the epic poem in which, she says, she originated. Though Vergil "gave [her] no voice" (263), Lavinia not only speaks; she "take[s] the word from him" (4). This tension between contingency and agency, out of which arises Lavinia's being, is summed up by Lavinia herself: "In truth," she says, "[Vergil] gave me nothing but a name, and I have filled it with myself" (262). But, she then asks, "without him would I even have a name?"

⁴¹ In "real life," of course, as T. S. Miller has pointed out, Le Guin is the text's ultimate author, its grounding in our reality. However, since Lavinia's authorship is both a crucial premise and a prominent claim in the novel, I will, for the purposes of this essay, accept it at face value.

⁴² There are, for example, no human sacrifices in Lavinia's Latium, though Vergil writes of them (144), and Camilla, the woman warrior, appears not to exist (131). Le Guin also notes, in her afterword (275), that the society that she depicts is considerably less wealthy and urbanized than the Latium of the *Aeneid*; however, since that difference is not highlighted within the text, it is less central to my purposes here, though still relevant.

⁴³ This assumes that Lavinia could choose otherwise. In fact, however, the related concepts of fate and *fas* mean that this assumption is – unless carefully qualified – deeply problematic. As I lack the space to engage with this question here, I will simply observe that Lavinia has at least the choice of how she *reacts* to events outside of her control (in her case, arguably, predestined or "written" ones), and therefore – even if we take the extreme position that her choices and actions are not free, that they are predetermined and change nothing – can be said to write her own story in at least a minimal sense.

The simple fact – or, more aptly, the complex and self-contradictory fact – of Lavinia’s narrative nature, though it clearly demonstrates the paradoxical combination of contingency and agency that defines her existence, does not, in itself, suggest interdependence, in the sense of mutual co-construction of the self. In fact, if Lavinia’s narrativity is taken to imply a corresponding and uncomplicated fictionality – that is, one in which her reality is both separate from and causally subordinate to that of Vergil – it implies precisely the opposite. Lavinia, in this view, may well be co-created, but the co-creation is not reciprocal: she does not shape Vergil’s being.

But Lavinia’s fictionality is no more straightforward than her world is ontologically self-contained. I have discussed the novel’s blurring of the boundaries between the multiple realities whose existence it depicts or implies in previous chapters. Here I wish to focus more particularly on two elements of the relationship between Vergil’s and Lavinia’s realities, both of which substantially complicate the ontological and causal relationship between them, and consequently suggest that the generative relationship runs not in one direction, but in two. First of all, there are strong indications that the worlds of the novel, the poem, and the poet are not separate – or at least, not entirely. By means of the images on Aeneas’ shield and Lavinia’s own (evolving) temporal position as narrator, the world depicted in the novel is drawn into a clear chronological relationship with that of Vergil (and of the 21st century reader). The most obvious effect of this, in terms of selfhood, is to reinforce the importance and effectiveness of Lavinia’s own self-narration/-creation, as she continues to exist long after the end, not only of the poem itself, but of all events that it depicts and references (173). More importantly for my purposes here, however, it establishes a convoluted and paradoxical causal relationship between Vergil and Lavinia. As Vergil gives Lavinia being through his art, so she does him causally: she is a

crucial factor in the chain of events that lead to Vergil's world, and Vergil himself. In this sense, though she does not create him directly, she is a precondition for his being as he is, and perhaps at all. She is, as he says, both his "daughter" and his "young grandmother" (90). Second, the ontological independence of Vergil specifically is called into question. The "author of all [Lavinia's] being," he is also "a shadow, a whisper in shadows, a virgin's dream or vision" (68; see also 79, 94, 110, 256 – 257). The overall impression left by the text is that Vergil is not simply a figment of Lavinia's imagination. Taken together, however, the repeated suggestions that Lavinia may have dreamt him do problematize his ontological status. Furthermore, Vergil is himself a fictional character – not only in the entirely separate textual reality of Dante's *Inferno* (61), but within Lavinia's own narrative. The parallel is not perfect – Lavinia's is presented as an autobiographical account, immediately distinguishing it from Vergil's avowedly fictional tale (132) – but the same basic conditions hold. Like Lavinia, though perhaps to a lesser degree, Vergil's existence inheres in the narrative of another. The relationship between author and character, writer and written, far from being a hierarchical one of unidirectional creation, is complex and mutually generative.

It is tempting, in light of the "narrative turn" taken, over the past few decades, in (among other disciplines) philosophy and psychology (Rudd, 60; Strawson, 428), to read Lavinia's literary nature as a literalization of narrative identity, and the novel's investigation of her being as an exploration of its construction. And *Lavinia* does indeed deal, to some extent, with these issues, particularly in its treatment of memory. Memory is, of course, the stuff of which autobiographical narrative, and hence narrative identity, is made (King, 2); and in *Lavinia* these

relationships are brought far more clearly into focus than in the two other works discussed here.⁴⁴ First, and most obviously, Lavinia's story, which is the source and substance of her being at the time of narration, is both autobiographical and retrospective. Her existence in and as her story is therefore existence in and as autobiographical memory, and more particularly (since those memories are selected and arranged in a narrative format) autobiographical narrative. Lavinia herself draws attention to this emergence of present being from the recounting of past experience, remarking, in the first of her many direct addresses to the reader, "I know who I was, I can tell you who I may have been, but I am, now, only in this line of words I write" (3). The recalling and recounting of her past is the source, not only of Lavinia's qualitative conception of herself (identity in the psychological sense) or her experiential and ontological unity within and across time (identity in the philosophical sense),⁴⁵ but of her very existence. In this sense, she is truly (though not, I think, primarily) a literalization of the claim that we are our self-narratives.

Second, at a more mundane level, *Lavinia* also foregrounds the relationship between memory, narrative, and self-definition through its depiction of the retrospective (re)interpretation of two episodes and their integration into, respectively, Aeneas' and Lavinia's ongoing autobiographical narratives: Aeneas's memory of killing Turnus, and Lavinia's false memory of

⁴⁴ The main thematic importance of memory in *The Dispossessed* stems from its necessity to the making and keeping of promises, and therefore is mainly ethical in nature. In *Always Coming Home*, in contrast, it is linked with ideas of being, nothingness, and the inevitability and acceptance of change (see, for example, Alder's explanation of "the 'absence' pit" created during the Sun *wakwa* [498 – 499]). The treatment of autobiographical narrative, in particular, actually works to *de-emphasize* memory's role in individual being: autobiographies and biographies are valued, not as self-creating or –preserving acts and objects, but as "a 'hinge' or intersection of private, individual, historical lived-time with communal, impersonal, cyclical being-time" (279).

⁴⁵ Discussions of narrative *identity* may use the term in either of these two ways, creating wonderful potential for confusion. Compare, for example, the (psychological) concept of identity in Howe or McAdams with the (philosophical) usage in Mackenzie and Poltera. Some authors define identity in still other ways, e.g., "the system of the personality that is responsible for creating an overall sense of coherence and meaning within the individual life" (Singer and Blagov, 121).

gaining the scar on her face. Both of these incidents pertain to identity in the psychological, rather than the philosophical, sense. Turnus's death, for instance, shakes not only Aeneas's faith in the *fas*, but "all his idea of who he [is]" (187). Aeneas himself bears out this claim, concluding a conversation about virtue by asking, "Am I Aeneas because I killed Turnus?" (218). For Aeneas, whose defining characteristic is his piety (189 – 190), the ethical crisis triggered by the manner of Turnus's death is also a psychological one; and he revisits it repeatedly in memory, attempting to contextualize the event in a way that will let him come to terms with it (187, 189 – 190). Lavinia's experience, for its part, illustrates the way in which the self-concept and autobiographical memory shape one another. The false explanation of the facial wounds inflicted by her mother, which Lavinia eventually comes to believe (9), reflects an important, though undesirable, element of her self-conception: her sense of guilt, her perception that, as she puts it, she has caused "the great wrong ... simply by being who and what I was" (135). In particular, by placing the blame for the event squarely on Lavinia herself, Lavinia's explanation expresses and reinforces her understanding that her mother's rejection of her is her own fault. Given this, it is unsurprising that Lavinia herself comes to believe the concocted tale: current memory research suggests that one's self-concept at and after the time of encoding strongly influences what information is retained in memory (Howe, 45). The false memory easily overwrites the true one, because it conforms with and reinforces an aspect of Lavinia's self-conception prominent during the original event. The imaginary episode fits Lavinia's narrative, and in being incorporated into it, strengthens the self-concept brought into play during the original incident.

Although many theorists of narrative identity emphasize the individual's role in its construction, presenting the development of a unified self-narrative as both the foundation and an

example of individual agency (e.g., Singer and Blagov, 135; Mackenzie and Poltera, 32 – 34, 38, 48; McAdams, 104), the idea that we are our stories also entails contingency. We are, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out – in a line that reads almost like a summary of Lavinia’s split literary origin – “never more (and sometimes much less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” (213). The contingency of one’s narrative identity, however, is not only a function of its adaptation to the tales told by others (MacIntyre, 213; Vessey, 215): it is intrinsic to the content and the construction of the autobiographical narrative itself. The subject matter of the autobiographical narrative is, above all, the individual’s interactions with others, and its ongoing evolution is deeply influenced by their responses (Jefferson and Blagov, 133; Vessey, 215). Aeneas’s interpretation of Turnus’s death is profoundly altered – though not in the way that Lavinia intends – by his wife’s representation of it (Le Guin, *Lavinia*, 189 – 190); while the child Lavinia, gradually coming to believe the tale her nurse makes up to explain the scratches on her face (8 – 9), demonstrates her internalization of the message communicated to her by mother: that she is to blame for surviving the fever that killed her brothers (7 – 8; see also 135). Aeneas’s self-narrative is altered by his conversations with Lavinia; Lavinia’s is adjusted to remain consonant with her mother’s. The construction of memory, and of narrative identity, is a collaborative process, one shared with, and fundamentally shaped by, others. The clearest expression of this mixture of agency and contingency, however, is Lavinia’s remark that she remembers “every word” spoken to her by Aeneas and by Vergil because “they are the fabric of my life, the warp I am woven on” (140 – 141). Or that she weaves herself on: “I was a spinner, not a weaver,” she adds, “but I have learned to weave” (141). Lavinia weaves herself; but the framework of her being – the central threads around which her memory is drawn into a unified whole – is her interaction with two particular others.

The parallels between the novel's treatment of Lavinia's narrative nature and its relationship to her memory, on one hand, and theories of narrative identity, on the other, are therefore both substantial and significant. In my view, however, it would be a mistake to claim too close a correspondence between them. Lavinia, after all, says that the poem and the novel are the sources, not of her self-concept or her understanding of herself as a diachronically unified being, but of her existence, period. And while her narrative nature can be productively understood as metaphorical on one level, viewing it as no more than an allegory of narrative identity fails to take into account its relationship with the remaining sources of being that I identified at the beginning of this chapter: speech and non-verbal communication. By treating both forms of interaction as, quite literally, creative – as instances of creation of and by oneself and the other – Lavinia establishes communicative interaction between individuals as the source of individual being. In so doing, it suggests that Lavinia's (self-)creation in narrative (a form of communicative exchange) is not only metaphorical and psychological, but literal and existential. More importantly, however, it places the very notion of self-creation through narrative within a broader context, one in which the key factor is not narrative per se, but the interpersonal exchange of meaning in which we acknowledge, and so affirm, our own and each other's being.

The importance of speech as an instance of generative communicative interaction, as well as the interplay of individual agency and (reciprocal) contingency that this entails, have already been hinted at. It is telling that, in developing her weaving metaphor, Lavinia identifies the “warp” on which she weaves and is woven as the words spoken to her by Aeneas and Vergil (140 – 141). The nature and role of speech, however, are also developed elsewhere. Two episodes, in particular, embody the close (and arguably causative) relationship between the spoken word and individual being. The first is the repetition and evolution of the phrase “Go, go

on” – in Latin, *i, i*. This phrase, which Lavinia originally hears as an injunction from Aeneas, becomes her own cry, one that defines the essence of her immortal being. This transformation, which is foreshadowed by the motif of owls calling (a sound that Lavinia represents as “*ii, i*” [86, emphasis in original; see also 41, 50]), can be illustrated by contrasting two references to the phrase:

Go on, go. In our tongue it is a single sound, *i*. It is the last word Aeneas said.
So in my mind it is spoken to me, said to me.... I hear him say it, and I go. On,
away. On the way. The way to go. When I stop I hear him say it, his voice, Go
on. (224)

My cry is soft and quavering: *i, i*, I cry: Go on, go. (272)

In the second quotation, Lavinia has taken the external word, the word spoken to her, that described and determined her way of being, and made it her own. Even the Latin form of the crucial imperative is suggestive: although the pronunciation differs from that of the English “I,” the visual correspondence – whether deliberate or not – ensures that conceptual link established by the three-way association of “go on,” *i*, and Lavinia’s altered immortality is not only between permanence and change (as I suggested in “Fate, Foretelling, and Fictionality”), but also between speech and individual being. The second example of this link is less elaborate and more ambiguous, but equally evocative. While the phrase “go on, go” is associated with Lavinia’s existence as an owl, in which her human history fades away, recollection of her former life – i.e., of her existence as a woman – is associated with a different speech act, one whose initiator (Vergil or Aeneas?) is not clearly identified: “[S]ometimes,” she says, “my soul wakes as a woman again, and then when I listen I can hear silence, and in the silence his voice” (272). It is

worth noting the emphasis placed on listening, which, like Lavinia's appropriation of Aeneas' cry, introduces an element of agency into Lavinia's existence in the spoken word. The words of Aeneas and Vergil are indeed the warp that she is woven on; but it is Lavinia herself who weaves.

The most explicit statement of the connection between individual being and the word spoken by another, however – aside from Lavinia's previously noted weaving metaphor (140 – 141) – comes when Lavinia, seeking guidance, travels to Albunea. After speaking to the non-present Vergil, she sleeps, and dreams: “Words and images drifted through my mind. The words were, *Speak me!* Then they turned and seemed to reverse themselves as they drifted away: *I say your being*” (253, emphasis in original). The specific significance of this episode depends on how we understand the words Lavinia dreams of. Although Lavinia's earlier appeal to Vergil suggests that they are, at least on one level, another reference to the poem, the insistent emphasis on speech also points to speaking itself – oral verbal communication – as a creative act. Who speaks is similarly ambiguous and important: if the words issue from two speakers, they seem to indicate unidirectional dependence; if from one, they point towards mutual contingency. In either case, however, this incident presents the oral exchange of meaning, the speaking of a word by or to another, as the essence of individual being. And although reciprocity (and hence the agency of the created) is diminished in the first interpretation, the use of the imperative – the invocation that garners a response – still implies the individual's active participation in his or her own creation.

This depiction of the spoken word as a generative interaction, a call and response that creates, naturally invites comparison with the concept of relation in *Always Coming Home*. To recapitulate briefly, among the Kesh, the epitome of relation – interaction between co-present

individuals – is speech; and in at least one case (the picture of mutual creation painted by Old Jackrabbit [325]), it is implied that the spoken word creates the individual named by it. The resonances with the depiction of speech in *Lavinia*, as outlined above, are obvious. Furthermore, just as relation in *Always Coming Home* is exemplified by oral verbal exchange without being limited to it, the creative relationship in *Lavinia* includes not only oral, but non-verbal, exchange between co-present individuals: the nod, Lavinia tells us, is “the gesture of assent that allows, that makes to be,” an act of recognition and acceptance so powerful that “[t]he numen, the presence of the sacred, is called by its name” (86). *Lavinia*, it would appear, carries forward and develops, in considerable depth, the idea hinted at in the earlier work: that the exchange of recognition and acknowledgement between co-present individuals not only completes their individual being (by drawing it closer to the whole in which it exists), but creates it.

And yet it does not – quite. Although the interaction of co-present individuals is a crucial source of individual being, a nexus at which we create and are created, it is not an exclusive one, any more than is narrative. Both the nature and the significance of the shift between the two works may become clearer if we focus for a moment on one of the most notable conceptual differences between them: their treatment of written, as opposed to spoken, exchange, and more specifically literature. In *Lavinia*, the distinction between the two types of interaction – so clearly stated in the earlier work – is effectively abandoned. Neither communication nor relation (to use Pandora’s terminology) has a monopoly on generative ability: both the written text and the spoken word are sources of being. Indeed, even the possibility of a clear division between the oral and the written is denied. The poem and the novel – two crucial sources of Lavinia’s existence, and those which Lavinia herself explores in by far the most depth – are both written and spoken. Vergil’s epic, for example, is a written text,

an object: it is something that can be burned (173). Yet he “sings” the poem to Lavinia at Albunea (44, 51), and even after his death (in Lavinia’s lived linear time), she hears his voice, reciting the lines, “overlapping” the voices of the people around her (100). Similarly, although Lavinia first presents her own narrative as a written one (3), she later describes it in terms of speech: “As I speak now,” she says, “I feel my voice fail... [e]ven in my throat I can hardly feel the vibration of my voice” (271). In *Lavinia*, the oral and the written are not separable.

This collapsing of the gap between the spoken and the written may be interpreted in two very different ways. Both are equally valid, and both, importantly, rest upon a view of communication, and particularly narrative, as a collaborative undertaking, the product of a two-way relationship. The key question is who the participants are. If we think of narrative as an interaction between author and audience (as Pandora evidently does [*Always Coming Home*, 538]), the distinction between communication and relation (538) remains valid. Given this, the elision of the oral/written divide in *Lavinia* must reflect a fundamental shift in emphasis, one that redirects attention from *Always Coming Home*’s interaction of co-present individuals to the exchange of meaning. Lavinia’s narrative being springs from a relationship between temporally separate individuals – Vergil and his readers, on one hand; Lavinia (or Le Guin) and hers, on the other – a relationship mediated, in each case, by the text. Co-presence is no longer a factor. Consequently, the element common to both oral and written communication – the exchange of meaning – is thrown into relief.

If, however, we understand narrative as an interaction between the audience and the tale presented, the breakdown of the written/oral distinction is not necessarily a rejection of the importance of contemporaneity. Viewed from this angle, the effect of this shift is less to assert the ontological importance of communicative interaction as such than to call attention to a

further parallel between the spoken and the written narrative: their collaborative nature. Since the text, like the oral performer/performance, is co-present with the audience, the interaction is (in Kesh terms) one of relation.⁴⁶ As such, however, it necessarily not only takes place between contemporaries, but involves a genuine *interaction*. Auditors are not simply consumers, but collaborators. In *Always Coming Home*, Pandora highlights the audience's active role in oral performance: in an oral performance, she observes, "the work shapes itself in the speaker's voice and the listeners' response together" (539).⁴⁷ *Lavinia's* merging of the oral and the written suggests that the participatory nature of oral performance, in which the narrative is a process, the product of active interchange between the speaker and the audience, also defines the reader's interaction with the text. In this view, each reading of a given text is a new act of present co-creation, a generative exchange between text and reader.⁴⁸ *Lavinia's* "half true" existence in her own tale, for example, arises, not only as she writes, but as "I write and you read

⁴⁶ This seems to me the likeliest explanation of the odd remark made by the Librarian of Wakwaha in *Always Coming Home*. A book, according to the Librarian, is "an act; it takes place in time, not just in space. It is not information, but relation" (*Always Coming Home*, 334). In view of Pandora's subsequent discussion of Kesh literature, in which she equates the spoken with relation and the written with communication (538 – 539), this is perplexing, to say the least. If, however, the Librarian is discussing the relationship between the reader and the *text*, as opposed to the reader and the *author*, this statement is compatible with the communication/relation distinction.

⁴⁷ In theories of narrative identity the listener plays a crucial role in defining one's being. Some narrative identity theorists reframe this as a characteristic of narrative rather than oral communication, arguing that "all narratives are implicitly dialogical" because they all "have an audience, real or imagined" (Jefferson and Blagov, 133). If the criterion for such a dialogic quality is having a "real or imagined" audience, then literary narratives surely qualify. The reader response school of literary criticism, and in particular the transactional variant of this, has developed this idea even further (Tyson, 173 – 175).

⁴⁸ Le Guin has dealt with the teller-tale-audience relationship explicitly in her critical work, in connection with both written and spoken literature. In "Telling is Listening," for example, she defines oral exchange – including oral literature – as an *intersubjective* phenomenon, i.e., one that involves, not "an alternation of roles ... between active subject and passive object," but "a *continuous interchange* between two consciousnesses" (188, emphasis in original). This is so, she explains, because listening is "not a reaction," but "a connection": "we don't so much respond as join in" (196). And in a short piece quoted in *The Language of the Night*, she extends this emphasis on active and effective audience participation to the written: each reading of a written text is a "present act of creation ... a collaboration by the words that stand on the page and the eyes that read them" (*Language*, 117). Stories, like conversations, are made together.

it” (4). This, of course, adds yet another layer of contingency to her being: as tale as well as teller, her existence is shaped (though not determined) by her readers. For all that *Lavinia* focuses more on the text’s relationship with the author than with the reader, by blurring the boundaries between the spoken and the written, it problematizes the reader’s role, and so repositions the texts in question as a participants in a dialogue, rather than either mere intermediaries in the author-reader relationship or semantically and ontologically independent (and rigidly authoritative) sources of knowledge and being.

While these two interpretations may appear mutually exclusive, and may indeed be logically so, they are both not only consonant with the novel’s portrayal of its own nature, but almost necessitated by it. *Lavinia*, after all, is both the teller and the tale told, the speaker/writer of words and the words themselves; and in both forms, she is at various points temporally distant from and contemporaneous with her audience. (For a summary of *Lavinia*’s ambiguous temporal position as narrator, see the chapter on time in *Lavinia*; her temporal indeterminacy as her own narrative follows from this, combined with its written/spoken character.) She is thus both doubly self-created and doubly reliant on the other. Taking the word from Vergil, she asserts her agency through an act of self-creation and self-definition; but her ability to do so relies on her prior, though partial, creation by Vergil himself, and her success – her vindication as an author and her completion as a text – requires the participation of an interlocutor, an auditor/reader.

The various forms of communicative interaction, then, are central to *Lavinia*’s exploration of individual agency and contingency. As both the locus and the content of the individual’s (self-)creation, the exchange of meaning establishes the interplay of these two qualities as a defining characteristic of the individual entity. While communicative interaction is crucial to the novel’s exploration of the individual’s simultaneous dependence and agency,

however, it does not stand on its own. Instead, the picture that it establishes is both reinforced and refined by the novel's portrayal of a different kind of interaction: the (human) individual's relationship with the sacred.

This relationship bears a strong resemblance to the vision of interconnected individuated existence in *Always Coming Home*, and even (although the idea of sacredness is not there explicitly articulated) to Takver's "passionate" concern with "landscapes and living creatures" (*The Dispossessed*, 164). The parallels with – and divergences from – the Kesh case, especially the vision of connectedness articulated by Old Jackrabbit (*Always Coming Home*, 325), are particularly instructive. Like the Kesh, Lavinia's Latins see the ordinary world of individuated being as sacred, and the individual's existence within it as fundamental to his or her being, both as an individual and as participation in existences beyond his or her own. The world, according to Lavinia, is "full of gods, numina, great powers and presences" (*Lavinia*, 65). Although humans "give some of them names," she adds, "they aren't people": they are the things themselves (cf. *Always Coming Home*, 189, 325).⁴⁹ As such, "[t]hey don't love or hate They accept the worship due them, which augments their power, through which we live" (*Lavinia*, 65). Some pages later, Lavinia elaborates on this idea of dependence. Significantly, however, she does so in a way that transforms contingency from a property of individual existence (our dependence as individuals on external beings and forces) to a function of being-as-participation. After meditating on her own "contingen[ce]," along with that of Aeneas (whose existence, like

⁴⁹ These "numina" include both parts of the natural world (rivers, trees [65, 37]) and more abstract powers that nevertheless have highly concrete and decided non-personified physical forms. Examples of the latter include Venus, the source of new life who is also the evening star (65); Mars, the creative/destructive power of the fields and the sword (31); and the Penates, the storeroom power whose embodiment is the salt and the wool (12, 52, 60).

hers, inheres – at least to some degree – in Vergil’s poem) and of Vergil himself (68), she concludes:

We are all contingent I am a fleck of light on the surface of the sea, a glint of light from the evening star. I live in awe. If I never lived at all, yet I am a silent wing on the wind, a bodiless voice in the forest of Albunea. I speak, but all I can say is: Go, go on. (68)

There are a number of important points to take note of here. The first is that interaction with the sacred, though it does not appear to generate individual being (as does communicative exchange), does sustain it. The individual lives through the power of the sacred, but that power itself derives, at least in part, from the act of worship (65). Paradoxically, however, our existence as part of this interconnected whole also enables existence as participation in it – or, more accurately, in other elements of it.⁵⁰ The dependence of the individual as such points towards a further level of contingency, one at which the inevitable reliance on that which is beyond one’s self is a source not of vulnerability, but of security and joy. The parallel with the Kesh notion of the generic aspect, which likewise points to a form of existence that dissolves the boundaries of the separate individual, is fairly obvious.⁵¹ So too, however, are two important differences: the type of existence being partaken of, and the tenor of the relationship itself.

⁵⁰ That these elements are themselves sacred (in Lavinia’s firmly quotidian sense of the term) is suggested by the overall tone of the passage, and confirmed by two key details. The first is Lavinia’s use of the word “awe,” which is elsewhere consistently associated with religious feeling (37, 38, 48, 177, 250); the second, the reference to the evening star (i.e., Venus [65]).

⁵¹ In connection with this, it is worth noting that the individual’s Juno or Genius – which, according to Lavinia, is her or his “deepest self” – is simply a name for “the sacred power, the divine spark we each of us have in us” (65). This, of course, bears a close resemblance to the Kesh notion of the soul, as described earlier.

The alteration in what participatory being involves participation *in* is implicit in the description of it offered above. Participation in an element of a totality, after all, cannot be participation in the undifferentiated generic being of *Always Coming Home*. The sacred in which Lavinia participates is an individuated one; consequently, participation entails not being in general, but being-in-the-other. This reproduces and extends the emphasis (which we have already seen in the focus on communicative exchange) on the deep significance of the encounter between individuals.

The shift in the quality of the relationship between the individual and the sacred, in contrast, is both more diffuse and more striking. Put briefly, where *Always Coming Home* emphasises the individual's intrinsic embeddedness within the interconnected whole (Flicker [308], Old Jackrabbit [325]) or the mutuality of interdependence (Old Jackrabbit [325]), *Lavinia* stresses his or her dependence. I have already noted the way in which Lavinia's description of participatory being comes as the culmination of her ruminations on her own and others' contingency; and the dynamic implied here is replicated, and even explicitly stated, elsewhere. At Albunea, for instance, Lavinia is overwhelmed by the presence of the trees, and enters the grove "praying, very humbly beseeching these great powers to have pity on my weakness" (37). And much later, she describes the "acts of religion" that comfort because they "allow us to admit our helplessness, our dependence on the great forces we do not understand" (177). Indeed, the very word "contingence," with its echoes of uncertainty and conditionality, drives home this idea of dependence in a way that perhaps no other term can. To be contingent is not only to be dependent; it is to be so in some essential fashion.

Yet for all this, the relationship with the sacred is also a profound affirmation of individual agency. It is, after all, the act of worship that augments the power of the sacred,

which in turn enables the individual's being. Furthermore, this particular assertion of the individual's important (albeit indirect) role in his or her own continued existence has two important implications. First, it develops the notions of reciprocity and mutuality implicit in the idea of communicative exchange, establishing contingency as a shared characteristic and interaction as the source of continued being for both participants. What is suggested by the motifs of speech and narrative, as well as by the problematization of the clear ontological distinction between the world of the poem and that of the poet, is here stated. The relationship between the human and the sacred, like that which Old Jackrabbit describes in *Always Coming Home*, is one of interdependence. Second, it reframes agency and contingency as two features of the individual entity whose coexistence is not only characteristic of, but necessary to, its being. The act that sustains both the individual and the sacred is the former's recognition of his (or her) own contingency.

In *Lavinia*, then, individual being is characterized, at the most basic level, by the interplay of agency and contingency. A product of interaction with (and, to a lesser degree, participation in) the individuated other, it reflects the familiar concern with both agency and interdependence; but the emphasis differs considerably from that in *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*.

SECTION THREE
TIME AND BEING ACROSS THE TEXTS

CHAPTER SEVEN

WALKING THE GYRE: THE EVOLUTION OF TIME AND BEING

The analyses in the preceding chapters draw attention to a core set of issues and ideas that unite the treatment of time and selfhood – or, more appropriately, existence as an entity⁵² – in *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. In these works, both time and being are understood as complex phenomena involving multiple, and often logically incompatible, components. Time is conceptualized in terms of apposed qualities and processes: change and continuity, exclusivity and coexistence, now and not-now. These may be understood as characteristics of either the different ways in which time itself *functions* (*The Dispossessed*) or the ways in which given entities *interact* with it (*Always Coming Home*, *Lavinia*). Similarly, in all three texts, existence as an entity involves various ways of interacting with the world, which embody varying degrees of autonomy and interdependence – that is, of inevitable separateness from and connection to others. Individuated being, for instance, entails both agency (the exercise of the individual will) and the fundamental isolation of individual subjectivity. Yet it is also, at the most basic of levels, defined and determined by interaction with others. Not only is individual identity shaped in the encounter with a specific other (as, for instance, in Shevek’s and Lavinia’s relationships with their respective mothers); the individual as such exists as part of a network of individuated existences. Furthermore, the entity is not only individuated: in each of these works, entities exist also as participation in non-individuated being. The crucial dynamic is

⁵² As discussed in chapters seven to nine, “entity” in this sense refers neither to all existents in the world, nor solely to those existents that a Western worldview would consider sentient (animals, including humans) or even alive (plants). Rather, it encompasses all *natural* existents: all beings and (in the two later books) specific phenomena that are part of the natural world. As noted previously, *The Dispossessed* is anomalous in focusing primarily on the human element of this, rather than explicitly expanding its scope to include the non-human; but even here, Takver, with her deep sense of connection with “landscapes and living creatures” (164), prevents the book’s focus from being purely anthropocentric.

thus a kind of creative tension, a mutually defining (and later mutually generative) drawing together and holding apart of certain distinct entities, states, and/or processes.⁵³

Yet despite these constants, the portrayal of time and being differs significantly between the three works discussed here. Combined with the themes noted above, these conceptual shifts point towards a form of non-linear evolution best understood through reference to Le Guin's own metaphor of the *heyiya-if*.⁵⁴ *The Dispossessed*, for all of its formal ingenuity and conceptual rigour, constitutes an intellectual starting point that is relatively familiar. *Always Coming Home* – the “hinge” – develops certain core themes established in *The Dispossessed* while simultaneously challenging key conceptual boundaries that framed the earlier work, resulting in a radically different understanding of both time and human existence. Finally, *Lavinia* returns us to a changed beginning, presenting a vision of the individual's existence in time and through the other that incorporates defining elements of the treatment of time and being in both *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*, but is reducible to neither. Where *The Dispossessed* emphasizes individual agency, portrays the relationship between the individual and the other as one of (primarily) pragmatic interdependence, and conceptualizes time in terms of binaries whose components are objectively real, *Always Coming Home* rejects linearity, highlights the entity's existence within and as participation in a larger whole, and reframes the relationship between the subjective and the objective in such a way that both the individual and the present are functions of individual *subjectivity*. *Lavinia*, in turn, further blurs the lines between

⁵³ This dynamic, which is familiar from Le Guin's earlier work (e.g., all three of the original *Earthsea* novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Eye of the Heron*), has received considerable attention from academics representing a wide range of theoretical perspectives. For examples, see Barbour; Burns, *Political Theory*, especially Chapter 3; Cummins Cogell; Lothian; and Remington.

⁵⁴ As discussed previously, the *heyiya-if* is a figure composed of “two spirals centred upon the same (empty) space” (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 47). Among other things, it represents a form of change that occurs through an interplay of forward movement and reversal – reversal not in the sense of going backward, but in that of a “leap, break, flip” (160).

subjective and objective, and in so doing establishes interaction with the other as the source, not only of being-as-participation, but of individuated being itself.

In the pages that follow, I draw on the close readings conducted in the previous chapters to highlight these relationships, summarizing the shifts and continuities between the visions of being and time presented in *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*. In the process, I also explore the ways in which these concepts interact within each text.

The Dispossessed exhibits many of the basic assumptions and ideas evident in later works, while remaining conceptually far more accessible to a Western audience. In the Odonian worldview, an entity (implicitly, a human one – i.e., one descended from the Hainish [Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 126]) is, first and foremost, an *agent*: an individual who chooses. At the same time, however, individuated agents are practically and psychologically, and perhaps even ontologically, interdependent – not only in the sense of being reliant on interaction with others to form and maintain identity within and across time, but also in that of existing partially *in* their embeddedness within a network of being. In the words of Odo’s epitaph, “to be whole is to be part” (74). The idea of existence as undifferentiated *participation* in a whole does make an appearance (in Shevek’s concept of brotherhood [53 – 55] and in the description of the speech he gives at the protest on Urras [264]), but it is not developed in any great detail, and the distinction between this and existence as *part of* the network of individuated being is not made clear.

Instead, the emphasis is on the interplay of agency and interdependence in individuated being. The depiction of time, with its methodical insistence on time’s dual nature, poses a more obvious challenge to Western readers’ anticipated common-sense understandings of reality. Once the logical paradox inherent in the idea that time is both the linear succession of exclusive instants (sequency) and the alinear coexistence of all moments (simultaneity) is accepted, however, the

challenge posed by this understanding of the situation decreases considerably. Both the vision of time put forth by Simultaneists and that accepted by Sequentists, after all, have grounds in the philosophy and physics of the Terran West. *The Dispossessed*'s originality lies in its claim that the two form a differentiated unity, and its careful argument for the necessity of this paradoxical intertwining.⁵⁵

Always Coming Home represents an important shift in direction. While it continues the investigation of core themes established in *The Dispossessed*, the emphasis is markedly different, and certain key concepts and assumptions have been replaced. The resulting depictions of time and existence as an entity represent both a development of and a departure from ideas introduced in *The Dispossessed*. The overall effect of these changes is to simultaneously decentre the individual and introduce a new understanding of individual subjectivity as the defining characteristic of individuated existence and a crucial factor shaping time itself.

Before going into the differences between the two texts, it would be well to highlight their similarities. The treatment of both time and being in *Always Coming Home*, then, variously carries forward and extends ideas key to *The Dispossessed*. The distinction between repeating an idea and expanding on it is important, as the greater explicitness and detail with which *Always Coming Home* treats certain concepts introduced in *The Dispossessed* results in a substantial shift in the overall depiction of time and existence as an entity. In particular, while *Always Coming Home* retains the earlier novel's insistence on agency as a component of individual selfhood and

⁵⁵ This notion of a differentiated unity emerging from the interplay of opposites is often held to derive from Le Guin's understanding of Daoism (see Cummins Cogell, "Taoist," 156, 157; Burns, *Political Theory*, 56 – 59), although Tony Burns has also pointed to Hegel as, if not a source, at least an intellectual comrade (*Political Theory*, 59 – 66, 68 – 73). It is worth noting, with Burns, that Le Guin's version of Taoism diverges from common interpretations of the philosophy, emphasizing not "static balancing" (Suvin, qtd 56), but a dynamic interaction of opposites (56).

continues to conceptualize time in terms of dyads associated with change and continuity, exclusivity and coexistence, and the present and the non-present, this text assigns considerably more importance to one's existence as a participant and – especially – as participation in a broader whole. These ideas, which previously were only mentioned in passing, are now understood as core components of being and discussed in considerable detail.

One of the clearest indicators of this new significance in *Always Coming Home* is the development of these concepts through the key metaphor of the Nine Houses, which defines the relationships between all beings and types of being in the Kesh world. The Kesh division of time into “inside” and “outside the world” (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 160), their use of a single word to refer to “weaving” and “society” (525), Flicker's vision of the “network” of individuated being (308), and Pandora's observations about the Kesh sense of “community [and] continuity” with their world (94) also point towards the increased prominence of the entity's existence as an individuated part of a differentiated whole. Similarly, core features of the Kesh language (the Sky Mode [535]), religious life (the Sun wakwa [494 – 5]), the understanding of the soul [447, 495]), and daily activities (the ritual practices surrounding the killing of animals [97 – 8]) highlight the centrality of one's existence as participation in the being of the other and being in general. For the Kesh, a being's existence as generic participation in undifferentiated existence is as real and as significant as its existence as an individuated entity; and even as an individual, it is *essentially* part of a network of individuated being. This totality, moreover, encompasses far more than the primarily human brotherhood of *The Dispossessed*. The whole in which the Kesh individual participates is an expanded totality that includes not only humans, but also other animals, plants, and non-sentient natural entities (e.g., rocks) and phenomena (rain, fog), as spelled out in the membership of the Nine Houses (see *Always Coming Home*, 45 – 52).

Takver's sense of connection with the natural world has been elaborated on and ascribed to an entire society.

Always Coming Home's depiction of our existence as participant and participation in a broader whole, then, develops ideas that were incipient in *The Dispossessed*. In doing so, it radically *de-centres* the individuated self. Other elements of the later text's treatment of time and being, however – many of which do not have roots in *The Dispossessed* – affirm the crucial importance of individual *subjectivity* to both existence as an individual and time itself. These include: (1) the strong association of the individual aspect with the material, the mortal, and the present; (2) the insistent linking of the physical and the mental (e.g., in the types of energy recognized as components of “selfhood or personal energy” [525 – 6]); (3) the repetition of Takver's image of the abyss (523); and (4) the explicit equation of selfhood with embodied perception and cognition (288, 308, 309). All of these features point toward a conception of individuated being in which existence as an embodied experiencer is central.⁵⁶ The most significant instance of this, however, is in fact the treatment of time. Specifically, two key features of the Kesh conception of time – its spatialization and the alignment of the present and the non-present with, respectively, the individual and generic aspects of being – render exclusivity, temporal as well as existential, a property of subjectivity. This in turn means that both the *present* nature of any given moment and the relationships between moments are determined by the first-person perspective. The temporal, physical, and experiential exclusivity of embodied consciousness is thus both a defining feature of individuated being and a major factor shaping the individual's relationship with time, and hence time itself.

⁵⁶ Experience in this sense includes both thought (cognition) and sense perception, but can be reduced to neither. For the Kesh, experience is a unity of sense perception, emotion, and cognition, as the definition of *kwaiyó* – “intellect in the feeling mode, cognition informed by the senses, bodily knowledge” [Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 555]) – indicates.

This newly active and effective character of individual subjectivity reflects a subtle but profound shift in the perceived relationship between the subjective and the objective, understood as ontological and epistemological categories. *The Dispossessed*, despite its acceptance of non-rational thought (e.g., intuition and dream) as a valid source of knowledge,⁵⁷ presumes both a clear divide and a unidirectional relationship between the subjective and the objective. Sequency and simultaneity are objective existents requiring scientific explanation. Our rational and non-rational experience provides us with a way of *knowing about* them, but it does not *act upon* them. Only on these grounds can we extrapolate backwards from perception to fact, as Shevek does in his explanation of sequency and simultaneity (*The Dispossessed*, 196 – 7). Although elements of *The Dispossessed's* treatment of time – including Shevek's insistence on the need to unite past and future in the present (*The Dispossessed*, 163), the temporal metaphor of the book associated with Simultaneity theory (196), and the structure of the narrative itself, which alternates chapters from interlocking storylines and so draws attention to the relative nature of the present – call into question this view of affairs, the challenge they pose is partial and implicit, and the alternative they represent undeveloped. Uniting the past and future in the present moment, for instance, is framed as a matter of agency alone, while the idea (introduced in Shevek's explanation of the book analogy) that the apparent linear passage of time may be a function of human consciousness is never developed, and indeed is contradicted by the novel's depiction of sequency.

⁵⁷ Shevek, for instance, argues that a good theory of temporal physics must explain not only our conscious experience of time, but our experience of it during states of altered consciousness (196 – 197), while the Simultaneity theory that he seeks to redeem and reconcile with Sequency is generally associated with mysticism (103, 197). The insight that allows him to complete the General Temporal Theory, moreover, arrives in a kind of rapturous vision reminiscent of religious ecstasy (247 – 249). For additional perspectives on this question, see Cummins Cogell's discussion of the "relativity of truth" in *The Dispossessed* (166) and Burns' nuanced counter-argument ("Science Wars").

In *Always Coming Home*, in contrast, the objective is no longer epistemologically and ontologically prior to the subjective. Instead, the text presents “a language and way of thought in which no distinction is made between ... objective and subjective fact and perception” (*Always Coming Home*, 160). The subjective is not merely a set of clues through which we can uncover reality; it is reality. While this is not quite the same as saying that perception itself is an act that impacts upon the world as well as the individual, it provides the necessary conceptual grounds for this conclusion. The vision of individual subjectivity as active, effective, and at the heart of both individuated being and the functioning of time itself is arguably a concrete elaboration of this worldview, one which takes the further step of extending experience from a truth to an act.

Broadly speaking, *Lavinia* continues in the direction established by *Always Coming Home*. In addition to carrying forward the key assumptions about the nature of time and selfhood that unite the two earlier works, it retains and extends the most important conceptual shifts made in *Always Coming Home*: the emergence of a far more active conception of individual consciousness, and the corresponding attribution of immense significance to interaction between individuated entities. Despite these similarities, however, *Lavinia* differs from *Always Coming Home* in its treatment of key issues surrounding time, being, and the intersection between them. It revives the concern with agency and linearity so central to *The Dispossessed*; and it introduces some entirely new ideas of its own. The net result is an overall understanding of time and existence in the world which bodies forth central elements of both earlier works, without being reducible to either of them. Specifically, *Lavinia*'s treatment of the relationship between individuated entities and of that between subjectivity and time, along with its renewed attention to temporal linearity, highlight the centrality and the limits of individual

agency, establishing the relationship between individuated entities as one of radical interdependence.

Here again, outlining the similarities between *Lavinia* and its predecessors in more detail is helpful. Although matters of time *as such* are treated less explicitly in *Lavinia* than in either of the works already discussed, many of the major temporal concepts identified at the beginning of this chapter remain central, either as overt foci in their own right or as logical prerequisites for key features of the fictional world. The interplay of change and continuity, for instance, remains a major thematic preoccupation, one explored in the novel's treatment of death and immortality. Although the concept of temporal coexistence is treated far less overtly, core elements of the narrative, including the practice of foretelling and Vergil's presence at Albunea, presuppose a temporal totality similar to that proposed by *The Dispossessed's* Simultaneity Theory and presumed by the Kesh. Finally, the immersion of the individual in a network of individuated existences and the extension of being beyond the individual are both key features of the Latin worldview, as expressed by Lavinia.

Despite these links with *The Dispossessed*, *Lavinia* clearly belongs on the far side of several major conceptual developments that occurred in *Always Coming Home*. First, and most obviously, Lavinia's vision of a network of interconnected being (Le Guin, *Lavinia*, 68) corresponds with the inclusive Kesh understanding of the ontological whole of which the individual is part. The novel's treatment of interaction between individuated entities and its elaboration of the temporal importance of individual subjectivity likewise reflect crucial conclusions reached in the earlier text: in these cases, the critical stance towards the relationship between the objective and the subjective, and the associated newly active understanding of individual subjectivity introduced in *Always Coming Home*. This is not, however, to say that

Lavinia simply replicates the ideas of the earlier work. Instead, it takes them as the conceptual foundation for its own explorations of time, temporality, and the nature of individual being – explorations that diverge in crucial ways from *Always Coming Home*'s treatment of the same phenomena.

While interaction between individuated entities retains the deep ontological importance accorded it in *Always Coming Home*, both the nature and the impact of the relationship have changed. Where the crucial form of encounter in *Always Coming Home* was relation, in *Lavinia*, it is communicative interaction; and where relation affirms the entity's existence as *participant* and *participation*, communicative interaction is the means by which both parties constitute themselves and one another as *individual* beings.⁵⁸ The paradigmatic instance of this mutual creation is the relationship between Lavinia and her creator and descendent, Vergil. The relationship between Lavinia and her readers, which inverts the creator-created dynamic, placing Lavinia (the author *and* the tale told) in a position of partial dependence on her audience, is another, complementary example. Notably, this two-way dependence is, in both cases, predicated upon the novel's subtle but insistent breaking down of the boundaries between Lavinia's world, Vergil's, and our own. It thus relies upon a deliberate problematization of the clear distinction and hierarchical relationship between objective and subjective realities. The collaborative exercise of individual subjectivity gives rise to the individuated being of both parties to an interaction, establishing an interdependence of *individuated* being that is not only physical, psychological, and spiritual, but ontological.

⁵⁸ To recapitulate, *relation* is the act of mutual attention between "present contemporaries," whose quintessential form is speech (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 538). *Communicative interaction*, in contrast, is the collaborative creation of meaning – and, in the context of *Lavinia*, being – through exchange between two individual entities. Unlike relation, it need not take place between co-present entities, and therefore includes written, as well as spoken, exchange (Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 538).

Lavinia's treatment of the relationship between time and individual subjectivity similarly both extends and alters concepts introduced in *Always Coming Home*. As in *Always Coming Home*, exclusivity, in a broader temporal context of coexistence, is tied to subjectivity, and the present is defined by presence. The most striking difference is the treatment of linearity, here seen as a function of the first-person perspective's movement between coexistent moments in a linear relation and so a crucial characteristic of humans' lived temporal experience. This approach – the clearest instances of which are the meetings between Lavinia and Vergil and Lavinia's inevitably linear progression through a story that is already written – sets *Lavinia* apart from both *Always Coming Home* (where linearity is deliberately and explicitly sidelined, reduced to a mere epiphenomenon) and *The Dispossessed* (where it is understood as an objective characteristic of time).

The end result of all this is a portrayal of time and existence in the world that emphasizes both the centrality and the limits of individual agency. The depiction of both communicative interaction and humans' relationship with the sacred, for instance, establishes the individual self as both a crucial source of being (its own and others') and fundamentally reliant on external forces for existence. In this sense, the shift from *Always Coming Home*'s notion of relation, which emphasizes *co-presence*, to that of communicative interaction, which emphasizes the shared *creation* of meaning, is telling. Yet *Lavinia* goes even further, explicitly framing interaction with the other in terms of an interplay between agency and *contingence* – a new term that implies a kind of existential dependence. The result is a deep interdependence, a mutual contingency predicated upon shared agency and realised in genuine *interaction*.

The way in which *Lavinia*'s treatment of time highlights the simultaneous importance of and constraints upon agency is simpler to explain, though it is less directly dealt with in the text

itself. In the first place, by defining linearity as an essential characteristic of human temporality,⁵⁹ the novel lays the conceptual foundation for the presentation of narrative as a crucial instance of communicative interaction. Second, and more importantly for my purpose here, the divergence between time and temporality lays the foundation for both the existence and the negation of agency on a purely temporal basis. Within the limited and linear framework of temporality, the individual chooses and acts, typically without reliable knowledge of the future; and those choices and acts impact upon the world. Yet within the temporal whole of coexistent moments, individual decisions are, literally, already written, leading to what Lavinia describes as “the nullity of [one’s] will and conscience” (Le Guin, *Lavinia*, 119). Lavinia’s determination to wed Aeneas (102, 128), for instance, Tolumnius’s violation of the truce (161, 167), and both Turnus’s and Aeneas’s conduct at various points in the war (119, 120, 141): all are both individual choices with critically important ramifications and pre-ordained events.

As this summary demonstrates, the treatment of time and existence as an entity varies across the three works considered here in ways that are systematically linked both with one another and with changes in the accepted relationship between the subjective and the objective. The comparatively familiar conceptual territory of *The Dispossessed* lays the foundation for and gives way to the dramatic reversal that occurs in *Always Coming Home*, which is in turn followed by the reintroduction, in *Lavinia*, of certain ideas abandoned in the course of that shift. This return to earlier themes, however, occurs in the context of major conceptual developments introduced in *Always Coming Home*, rendering the conclusions reached in *Lavinia* substantially different from those in both of the preceding works. Having outlined this alinear evolution, I

⁵⁹ As in chapter five, *temporality* refers to the lived human experience of, or interaction with, time.

now turn, in the following and final chapter of this analysis, to its implications for our understanding of Le Guin's work as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Ursula K. Le Guin is not an author typically associated with in-depth investigations of either time or selfhood. The exception to this generalization would be the reception of *The Dispossessed*, which sparked lively scholarly discussion upon its publication and continues to inspire analyses of its portrayal of time and, if not the nature of selfhood *per se*, certainly the relationship between the individual and society. Few authors, however, have considered these themes in relation to Le Guin's other works; and none, to the best of my knowledge, have done so with regard to either *Always Coming Home* or *Lavinia*.

This is a substantial gap in our critical understanding of Le Guin's oeuvre. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, the above-mentioned works present complex, internally coherent conceptions of self and time that challenge the ways in which we think about these phenomena on a day-to-day basis, and which are developed through a combination of subject matter, symbolism, and structural characteristics. This is significant in itself. However, Le Guin's treatment of these issues merits attention for two additional reasons. First, her depiction of time and selfhood evolves over the course of the texts. This involves continuity, as well as change: while the ways in which self and time are conceptualized undergo profound shifts, certain concerns, concepts, and motifs recur. Reading these three texts together therefore offers insight into both the core elements of Le Guin's approach to these questions and its development over a thirty-year period. Second, it is my conviction that Le Guin's treatment of time and selfhood *within* each novel provides the ontological foundation for her consideration of major ethical questions, which, though they lie beyond the scope of this study, are the heart of her work.

In this conclusion, then, I will summarize the arguments presented in the preceding chapters, defend my claim about the relationship between ontological and ethical issues in Le Guin's work, and outline a plan for further research.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia* all establish complex, internally consistent, and highly original visions of time, individual (and non-individuated) existence, and the relationship between the two. These pictures of existence in time and as an entity, furthermore, undergo a clear evolution, one which follows the path described by Le Guin's own metaphor of the *heyiya-if*. Beginning in the relatively familiar ontological territory of *The Dispossessed*, they take the reader through a radical reconceptualization of the relationship between the subjective and the objective, the nature of time, and the relationship between the individual and all that he (or she) is not in *Always Coming Home*, arriving finally at *Lavinia*'s complex and profoundly subversive vision of co-creation within a temporal and ontological framework mediated by individual subjectivity. This in turn suggests an ongoing process of vision and revision, a constant questioning that gives rise to a coherent but evolving worldview.

Yet while Le Guin's handling of time and selfhood is significant in its own right, perhaps its greatest importance is as a foundation for the development of other ideas. In particular, I would suggest that the specific understandings of time and selfhood developed in each text are the necessary basis of that work's exploration of central ethical ideas.

Although I cannot properly support this claim here, I can at least sketch my reasons for making it. All three of the works examined here seem to me to be fundamentally ethical in

nature, in that they are centrally and essentially concerned with specific ethical issues.⁶⁰ Their treatment of these issues is telling. First, both the questions being posed and the ethical positions that the texts offer in response are linked clearly, and often explicitly, with the ontological concepts outlined above. In particular, all three works presume the existence of both genuine and meaningful choice (which is founded on particular assumptions about the nature of time and of the individual) and a fundamental intertwining of the good of the individual and that of the whole (which is predicated upon interdependence).⁶¹ These assumptions, together with some other concepts arising from them (e.g., the importance of individual responsibility) constitute a shared core of ethical ideas that unites the three works. Yet the treatment of ethical issues also evolves considerably; and the variations correspond with shifts in the operative conceptions of time and selfhood.

The ethical questions posed by *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia* fall into two distinct, but related, groups: those about the nature of ethical action; and those about the nature of the individual good (usually, though neither always nor solely, defined in terms of individual freedom). The pictures of freedom and ethical action developed in the attempt to work through these questions exhibit certain notable consistencies across texts. Individual good

⁶⁰ A brief note on terminology is appropriate here. Although she frequently uses the terms interchangeably, Le Guin does sometimes distinguish, in her essays and talks, between *ethics* and *morality*. *Ethics* refers to “a set of rules or rational theories” (Le Guin, “Moral and Ethical Implications,” 17), abstract principles deliberately developed and enforced (19); *morality*, in contrast, is a property or product of individual choice, a thing originating in the person him- or herself, and hence is inherently concrete, specific, and non-enforceable (18). Le Guin aligns herself with morality, rather than ethics. My decision to use the word *ethics* instead is motivated by my sense of the broader connotations of each term. As Tony Burns points out, philosophers have traditionally associated morality, rather than ethics, with the public, the coercive, and the repressive (*Political Theory*, 196); and the word *morality* has acquired, in general usage, a strong association with organized religion, which would be entirely out of place in the case of Le Guin (see Erlich, Ch. 6, Ch. 10).

⁶¹ For discussions of the significance of choice in Le Guin’s work, see Curtis, Davis, Lindow (“Leap”), and Sabia; for the same with regard to interdependence, see Erlich, Jaeckle, Lindow (*Dancing the Tao*), Remington (“A Touch of Difference” and “The Other Side”), and Tavormina.

and ethical action are seen as mutually constitutive, and both centre upon, and function through, the individual act of choice. Essentially, in order to be ethical, an act must be freely chosen; and ethical action is the necessary grounds for, and the fullest form of, individual freedom (*Always Coming Home*, 30, 526; *Lavinia*, 102; *The Dispossessed*, 114, 156, 216).⁶² Additionally, ethical action must be *responsible* – a term that recurs in all three works, and that denotes a deep awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all components of the whole, along with a consequent recognition of the implications of one’s actions and acceptance of the ethical obligations that this imposes (*Always Coming Home*, 167, 526; *Lavinia*, 22, 42, 205 – 206; *The Dispossessed*, 199). The depth of interdependence between the individual and the whole also means that recognition and acceptance of these obligations is the prerequisite for and path to individual freedom and wellbeing (*Always Coming Home*, 526; *The Dispossessed*, 194 – 195, 293, 316).

This understanding of freedom and ethical action rests upon some major ontological assumptions. In the first place, the crucial concept of choice, if it is to be both genuine (free) and meaningful (effective), presumes a temporal context characterized by both change and continuity, exclusivity and coexistence (see Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 199 – 200), along with an individual entity capable of choosing. Secondly, the notion of responsibility, along with the idea that the good of the individual is fundamentally intertwined with that of the whole, reflects the notions of connection, participation, and interdependence detailed in previous chapters.

⁶² In the case of *Always Coming Home*, this is not framed in terms of freedom, but of individual and societal health or well-being (see, e.g., 26, 406 – 9). The two concepts are, however, connected, primarily by means of the central metaphor of flowing water, which represents both existence in accordance with the nature of things (*Always Coming Home*, 26, 37 – 8) and freedom (the word for “freedom” – *nahai* – is related to *na*, which denotes “[a] river” or “to flow as or like a river” [556]). They are also connected through the negative example provided by the Condor, who do not recognize their own interdependence, conceptualize relationships in terms of ownership and dominance/submission, and so are said to be “sick” or “have their heads on backwards” (405 – 408, 409).

The differences between the ethical frameworks developed in each of the three works are equally telling. In *The Dispossessed*, for instance, the vision of individuals as agents that are practically and psychologically interdependent corresponds with a strong ethical emphasis on the reciprocal obligations between individuals and between the individual and society, while the differentiated unity of time is the necessary basis of both choice and the unity of ends and means (a central Odonian moral principle [Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 127, 294]). The central motif of the promise (8, 160 – 162, 216, 265) unites the ontological, temporal, and ethical questions with which the text grapples: it is the exercise of choice to affirm mutual loyalty and interdependence across time (295; see also 216, 276). In *Always Coming Home*, in line with the sidelining of linear time, *The Dispossessed*'s emphasis on the nature and necessity of individual freedom gives way to an in-depth exploration of the nature and consequences of interdependence (*Always Coming Home*, 189, 325, 526). Finally, *Lavinia*'s renewed attention to the linearity of temporal experience, together with its depiction of temporal coexistence and deep interdependence, provides the foundation for the novel's nuanced investigation of the relationship between fate, freedom, and right action. In this view, freedom lies in choosing to follow the *fas* (*Lavinia*, 102, 164, 119); and the *fas* is both "the right, what one must do" (62) and "the right order of things" (190).

Perhaps the clearest illustration of both the shift in ethical focus across the three works and its correspondence with evolving concepts of time and selfhood, however, is the change in what might be termed the core virtues in each text. Fidelity, which affirms choice and connection across moments (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 216, 295), is replaced by mindfulness, which entails ongoing attentiveness to one's present relationship with other beings (*Always*,

526), and finally by piety: seeking, and acting in accordance with, the *fas* (*Lavinia*, 119). As the nature of time and totality evolves, so too does that of ethical action.

There is good reason, then, to believe that the treatment of time, on one hand, and of the nature of individual being and its relationship with all other examples and forms of being, on the other, are important because of their relationship with the ethical ideas being explored in these three texts, as well as on their own account. Yet while a significant body of academic literature deals with Le Guin's treatment of ethical issues in general and of the appropriate relationship between the individual and the other (and/or society and/or the world) in particular (see, e.g., Burns, *Political Theory*; Elliot; Erlich, *Coyote's Song*; Jaeckle; Lindow, *Dancing the Tao*; Sabia; Tunick), very little has been written about the ethical implications of her treatment of time, and virtually nothing about the combined ethical significance of these ontological concepts within her work.⁶³ This leaves a clear gap in our understanding of Le Guin's oeuvre. The paucity of serious analyses of *Always Coming Home* and *Lavinia* – two of Le Guin's most formally innovative and intellectually challenging works – is another.⁶⁴

This analysis represents a partial and preliminary attempt to fill both of these gaps. By investigating in depth the ways in which *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *Lavinia*

⁶³ The little which has been written on the ethical significance of Le Guin's portrayal of time is exclusively concerned with *The Dispossessed*. See the articles by James W. Bittner, Laurence Davis, M. Teresa Tavormina, and Jennifer Rogers, listed in this bibliography.

⁶⁴ Most scholarly analysis of these texts has been from either ecofeminist (*Always Coming Home*) or feminist (*Lavinia*) perspectives (see, e.g., Kathryn Ross Wayne; Patrick Murphy; Deirdre Byrne; Catherine Hynes; Sarah Annes Brown). While these are valid and important starting points for analysis, the complete absence of other theoretical perspectives is striking, particularly when compared with the proliferation of writings on *The Dispossessed*. Consideration of ethical issues is particularly limited, given the importance of these themes in both texts: chapters in Richard D. Erlich's encyclopaedic *Coyote's Song* and Sarah J. Lindow's similarly encompassing *Dancing the Tao*, along with one article by Erlich, for *Always Coming Home*, and a chapter in *Dancing the Tao* for *Lavinia*. Apart from these works, scholarly writings on Le Guin's treatment of ethical issues have generally centred on a small selection of her fiction: the tales set in two of her fictional universes (Earthsea and the Hainish universe, including a substantial body of work on *The Dispossessed*) and certain key short stories ("Those Who Walk Away From Omelas," "She Unnames Them," and "Sur").

build up complex, internally coherent understandings of time and individual (or, as the case may be, shared) existence that diverge substantially and significantly from those familiar to most of Le Guin's readers, I hope to have both drawn attention to the major conceptual and stylistic achievements of *Always Coming Home* and *Lavinia* and laid the foundation for further investigation of the relationship between time, selfhood, and ethics, in these texts and in Le Guin's work more broadly. Although vast amounts remain to be done, it is my hope that I have at least opened the discussion.

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