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Beyond Space Colonialism:

Otherness in Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead*

As a sequel to the much acclaimed *Ender's Game*, *Speaker for the Dead* presents a future where most of humanity's actions are a result of dealing with the guilt of destroying the only other known intelligent life form in the universe, the "buggers." Taking place some three thousand years after the events of *Ender's Game*, the sequel explores the social implications of Andrew "Ender" Wiggin's actions, as well as the results of space colonization. The society presented in the novel is composed of "the Hundred Worlds," planets colonized by humans and bound by "ansible" communication and the laws of the "Starways Congress." When Portuguese colonizers discover the "pequeninos" or "piggies," intelligent alien life forms in the newly colonized Lusitania, humanity is given the opportunity to coexist with aliens and make amends for the destruction of the buggers. However, soon the inability of humans to understand the seemingly brutal customs of the pequeninos threatens to trigger another alien war. The discovery of the pequeninos and the resulting relations between them and the humans reflect old colonial anxieties that were present during Euro-American colonization. These anxieties result from the age-old fear of "otherness." In *Speaker for the Dead*, otherness not only takes the form of an alien "other," but Card takes it one step further by exploring different levels of foreignness outside and within a community. Individuals in the novel are not merely foreign or alien because they belong to a different race or community, but because societal barriers intended to protect

them (and the community) result in the inability to communicate effectively, and thus in foreignness. While *Ender's Game* briefly considered how the inability to understand alien minds can lead to destruction and devastation, *Speaker for the Dead* focuses on attempting to breach communication barriers and make interaction with foreign minds possible. In addition, Card introduces the reader to Demosthenes' "Hierarchy of Foreignness," which classifies otherness in relation to an individual, in order to promote understanding. Hence, the novel explores interaction with foreign minds on nearly every level, not merely between human and alien. While the novel may seem to echo colonial narrative, Orson Scott Card breaks away from conventional notions of what interactions with an "other" ought to be like, thus "questioning, critiquing, [and] moving beyond the colonizing impulse" (Grewell 26). Consequently, *Speaker for the Dead* becomes not merely a postcolonial critique, but a philosophical exploration of how to overcome one of humanity's oldest fears: the other.

According to Dominic Alessio and Kristen Meredith's "Decolonising James Cameron's Pandora: Imperial History and Science Fiction," there seems to be an "academic reluctance to engage" in discourse with the science fiction community, in spite its relevance as speculative fiction. They note that even though the medium is used to explore colonialism, scholars like "Edward Said ignored the genre and concentrated instead on so-called 'high culture' or examined other lowbrow literatures, such as the 'Boys Own' adventure genre" (Alessio and Meredith). Yet, even though the genre borrows from other more favored literature, scholars should not ignore science fiction, as it came "into its own during the late nineteenth century—the High Age of European imperialism," and thus it is no surprise that its themes primarily focus on space colonization, advances in technology, developments in communication, and places great emphasis on "contact with alien others." What promoters of science fiction studies do find

surprising is that many fail to identify the correlation between "the plot lines of colonial history" and science fiction (Alessio and Meredith).

In "Colonizing the Universe: Science Fictions Then, Now, and in the (Imagined) Future," Greg Grewell explains how "underlying most science fiction plots is the colonial narrative, whether or not readers and viewers of science fiction readily recognize it" (26-27). The colonial narrative refers to literature produced as a result of Euro-American colonization. These texts generally reflect the ideas of the colonizers, who considered it their right to take over or control those thought of as savage or inferior. These texts reveal the anxiety produced by clashing cultures and the exposure to an "other." As Grewell explains, according to George S. Wilson's 1882 essay "How Shall the American Savage be Civilized?," "there are 'three courses' beings of 'superior race' may take when confronting 'inferior and barbarous' peoples: 'exterminate the savages,' 'let them alone,' or 'accept them as dependents of the government'" (25). The anxiety over the notion of "colonize or be colonized" is a recurrent theme in science fiction, where more recently the "other" has been transformed from earthly "savage" to "alien." As Grewell notes, in an effort to consider the side of the colonized, Wilson's essay reflects on, from a nineteenth-century colonial standpoint, the idea of a superior race from another planet colonizing humanity. Wilson's conclusion eerily predicts the event's of *Ender's Game*: "Unable to imagine colonization on any other terms than those practiced by Euro-Americans, Wilson desires a violent resolution: 'Perhaps our first lesson in the new life would be to learn to use with precision our conquerors' improved fire-arms, and to slaughter a thousand of them at one shot'" (Grewell 25). Thus, science fiction's fear of and desire to control the "other," whether in literature or film, often reflects this primarily European and American "literature of earthly colonization," with "early colonists' constructions of an 'other'" informing the way the industry

has understood its relationship to new "Others" (26). As a result, science fiction has effectively "borrowed from, technologically modernized, and recast the plots, scenes, and tropes" of such literature (26). Therefore, it is not too surprising that Wilson's 1882 solution to alien colonization is not dissimilar to the outcome of *Ender's Game*: it is by acquiring their alien technology that humanity is able to defeat the buggers and begin colonizing the Hundred Worlds.

In *Speaker for the Dead*, the ideological discourse presented by the novel becomes just as important as the plot or the character's actions and thoughts. Demosthenes' "Hierarchy of Foreignness" becomes part of the lexicon of the Hundred Worlds, and, throughout the novel, characters are constantly referring to these hierarchical terms when talking about others. Ender's sister and companion, Valentine, publishes the Hierarchy of Foreignness in *History of Wutan in Trondheim*, under her Desmosthenes' pseudonym, in order to help people understand how others are classified as "alien" in relation to one's self. The hierarchy discourages society from indiscriminately labeling others and encourages unity between worlds that are light-years apart. Characters in the novel use these terms not only in their assessment of the pequeninos (or when labeling the bugger annihilation as xenocide), but also when thinking of others as being within or outside their community. The hierarchy is composed of four tiers based on terms derived from Nordic, a language which "recognizes four orders of foreignness" (Card 34). The order of the tiers represents ease of communication between individuals. The first tier is *utlanning*—"the otherlander"—an individual who is of the same world and species as the subject, but from a different region, city, or country; this represents the easiest communication between foreigners. Second is framling—which are those individuals of the same species as the subject, but who are from another planet—in this case there may be some cultural differences, but it is not too difficult to relate to them as they are still similar. Next is *raman*—this is an individual who is

recognized as a sentient being from another species, but with whom communication is possible. The fourth tier is *valrese*—these are the "true aliens:" they are sentient beings, but they are so foreign that it is impossible to communicate meaningfully with them; it "includes all the animals, for with them no conversation is possible" (34). Additionally, Ender mentions the term *djur*, which is a non-sentient being—it does not have rational thought or self-awareness: worse than valrese, it is "the dire beast that comes in the night with slavering jaws" (36). By the time Ender reaches Lusitania, twenty-two years after the hierarchy was published, its vocabulary is well established and even the piggies have been exposed to it. As Deborah Cartmell explains in the introduction to *Alien Identities: Exploring Differences In Film And Fiction*, the meaning of word "alien," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was initially "foreign," and thus the addition of "extraterrestrial being" to the meaning "is an obvious extension of this notion of otherness, for the very concept of the alien is grounded in ideas of difference and boundary definitions" (3). As history shows, people often define themselves through defining an "other:" one is what one is not (Cartmell 3).

The overarching plot of *Speaker for the Dead* focuses on defining the level of foreignness of the pequeninos. The trouble with labeling the piggies as ramen or valrese lies in the inability to communicate due to the protocols established by the Starways Congress. These rules are supposed to "protect" piggies from human influence. The xenologists are not allowed to ask questions that may reveal human culture. This hinders their ability to ask the right questions, leading to a misunderstanding of the piggies' culture. What appears to be a senseless act of savagery is actually a very natural and honorable pequenino ritual. The laws put in place to "protect" the piggies soon reveal themselves to be a product of human anxiety over the "other." The protocols are only in place to protect humans from the potential danger that an alien "other"

may pose. The government of the Hundred Worlds only wants to prevent the pequeninos from acquiring superiority over humans, again reflecting the notion that it is better to colonize than be colonized. In the end, those in power do not care whether true communication is achieved or not, as long as humans have the upper hand. However, not allowing free communication between humans and piggies only leads to misunderstanding, death, and potential war. By breaking down the communication barriers, Ender exposes humanity's flaws and fears. This, again, reflects the literature of earthly colonization. As Alessio and Meredith explain, Edward Said's *Orientalism* illustrates some of these anxieties about the cultural clash with the "other," in this case the Orient, the exotic and foreign. The concepts presented by Said note how "western representations of the Orient typically describe those regions as mythic and include stereotyped assumptions about the peoples and places encountered there" (Alessio and Meredith). Much like the representations of the orient, the piggies are shrouded and mystified by human fears and assumptions. Towards the end, the novel reveals that the way events unfold are a direct result of human attempts to retain a perceived superiority. The negative aspects attributed to the "other" are not more than a reflection of our colonizing anxieties. As Alessio and Meredith expound, "such Orientalised perspectives tell us more about the culture of the colonizers rather than the colonized, revealing 'by proxy more about *those that describe* … than the people in places that are being described'" (Alessio and Meredith). Cartmell further explains about this anxiety and Peter Hutchings' concept for alien notions and responses: "The alien, he points out, can be defined as both non-human and foreign, and reactions to it can demonstrate both fear of 'them' and anxiety about 'us'" (4).

Science fiction's "imaginative possibilities," whether inspired by familiar sources or not, allow writers to "hypothesize worlds where existing social problems have been solved" or

consider futures where the same problems "have been magnified or extended into a grim dystopia" (Leonard 253). Historically, science fiction has been a forum where present day societal issues could be explored in the context of the future. Through the creation of future worlds, science fiction writers can explore different societal structures and consider how their inhabitants may react to different types of "otherness." Ethnicity, race, and religion have long been markers for labeling the proverbial "other," and have often been considered literary "hot topics." The anxiety over the "other," greatly echoing colonialism, is still a present concern: "the metaphor of the alien taps directly into contemporary anxieties about multiculturalism and gender politics" (Cartmell 3). In science fiction, as Farah Mendlesohn, editor and contributor to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, explains, issues like religion have been essentially labeled "of the 'Other', the backward and the primitive" (264). Moreover, she notes that in the light of science fiction's predilection for secularism, the role of religion in the genre "was to be either undermined or to indicate a level of civilization which any given alien race had achieved" (264-265). In its exposition of foreignness, *Speaker for the Dead* explores, in various degrees, otherness in racial, ethnic, and religious terms.

Interestingly enough, in *Speaker for the Dead* Orson Scott Card moves from the secularism of *Ender's Game*, where the Wiggin parents had to suppress their religious beliefs, to a future where entire planetary colonies freely practice a single religion. Furthermore, Card has created what is considered by some as a new religion—the speakers for the dead, who are charged with bringing truth to the memory of the dead. Yet, beneath the apparent religious freedom and acceptance of the Hundred Worlds hides intolerance and fear. From the prologue, the reader may note that religion will play an important role in the novel, as the creed of Lusitania's colonists is clearly stated as Catholic—which, historically, is a religion that has often

been at the heart of ideological conflict. Moreover, the prologue states that, even though they "worshipped many gods or none," the members of the Starways Congress agree that the newly discovered porquinhos may give humans a chance for redemption (Card xxx). The emphasis on religious beliefs suggests that ideological differences often lead to disagreement. Throughout the novel, this issue can be perceived by the way individuals respond to Ender's attempts to have free and open discourse. As Andrew probes the mind of his students, he notes how their religious convictions may produce close-mindedness:

> Andrew sighed at Styrka's unforgiving attitude; it was the fashion among Calvinists at Reykjavik to deny any weight to human motive in judging the good or evil of an act. Acts are good and evil in themselves, they said; and because Speakers for the Dead held as their only doctrine that good or evil exist entirely in human motive, and not at all in the act, it made students like Styrka quite hostile to Andrew. Fortunately, Andrew did not resent it—he understood the motive behind it. (Card 35)

Styrka's inability to think beyond her religious doctrine may reflect Card's attitude toward religion, and its power to hold back societal progress. Lusitania's label as a "Catholic License colony" is repeated constantly, even before Andrew arrives at the planet. The repetition of religious labels often reflects potential points of contention before they are explicitly stated. By the time Ender acknowledges that by going to Lusitania he will have to deal with the "resentment of a speaker coming to a Catholic colony," the reader is well aware of religious groups' reluctance to accept those who think differently (66).

Even if Ender is only a minister of truth—being a Speaker "isn't like a religion—you don't have to memorize any catechism" (39)—he causes much turmoil and anxiety within the

Catholic community of Lusitania because he is seen as a potentially corruptive "other." Bishop Peregrino, the Catholic leader of Lusitania, fears that an agnostic/secular Speaker will prove a threat to the beliefs of his community, therefore, he instructs his congregation to boycott the Speaker's efforts to seek truth: "The truth is not to be found in the speculations and hypotheses of unspiritual men, but in the teachings and traditions of Mother Church. So when he walks among you, give him your smiles, but hold back your hearts!" (91). The bishop's words show fear of religious dissent. This reflects old colonial fears, where small groups could be overtaken. Thus, fear of otherness is magnified in small isolated communities such as that of Milagre (Lusitania's only city). This results in Ender's alienation before he even sets foot on the planet. Once on Lusitania, Ender can sense his status as "other" everywhere he goes: "Not since he was a child in the military had Ender felt so clearly that he was in enemy territory" (158). The bishop's warnings and antagonizing remarks about him—"hadn't the bishop told them that the Speaker spoke with Satan's voice?" (256)— force Ender to resort to threats of legal action from the Starways Congress in order to get Lusitanians' cooperation. The threat reveals that the Starways Congress "was formed to stop the jihads and pogroms that were going on in half a dozen places all the time" (157). This fact recalls the inherent problems brought on by colonization, particularly when religion is involved. Ender's threat is not taken lightly as "an invocation of the religious persecution laws is a serious matter," and the penalty would result in the revocation of the colony's Catholic License (156-157). Losing the religious license would result in the influx of settlers from other faiths, and would reduce the Catholic population drastically. They have no choice but to heed Ender's warning, since such actions would truly result in the loss of the community's identity at the hands of the "other."

The Bishop's efforts to "protect" his flock only obscure communication and promote anxiety and fear of otherness. It is not until Ender's persistence finds an ally in the Filhos da Mente de Cristo (the Children of the Mind of Christ)—a monastic order founded on truth and knowledge—that he is able to gain some trust and advance in his search for truth. Father Amai, also known as Dom Cristao, is one of the first to recognize that Bishop Peregrino's crusade against Andrew is not only unfounded, but it is "stupid, destructive, [and] bigoted" (157). As a leader from the Filhos, he has some word of influence in the opinions of others in the community. He is the first to try to make the Bishop see the error of his judgment by explaining that, as a Speaker, Andrew does not pose a threat: "the Speakers for the Dead are really quite innocuous—they set up no rival organization, they perform no sacraments, they don't even claim that the Hive Queen and the Hegemon is a work of scripture. The only thing they do is try to discover the truth about the lives of the dead, and then tell everyone who will listen the story of a dead person's life as the dead one meant to live it" (Card 156). Card uses the Filhos' kind nature and rational temperament to counterbalance the negative close-minded bigotry of the other religious figures in the novel.

The colonial desire to assimilate the opposing "other" is also present in the assumptions made about the pequenino's culture and their rituals. The humans have projected their anxieties unto the piggies and can only rationalize and speculate about their actions in human terms. Furthermore, as part of a colonial enterprise, the humans have not been able to break away from the notion that because the "other" is not technologically advanced, its mind is primitive as well. The xenologers in Lusitania assume that the pequeninos will exhibit similar behavior to already known subjects. Therefore, when they hear that the piggies talk to their father trees, the xenologers fail to see it as truth, and just assume that it is their religion. As Mendlesohn notes,

the piggies "seem eminently rational and scientific until we discover that they have crucified a human anthropologist;" soon the attempts to rationalize the incident, coupled with the barriers that prevent effective communication, produce a mystified concept of the alien (265). Thus, it becomes clear that "human mysticism, with notions of idealism, sacrifice and redemption, has served to obscure the pequeninos scientific truth": the sacrifice takes them into a new life stage, triggering a biological change (Mendlesohn 266). The failure to look beyond self and its needs hinders the assessment of others.

Card's extensive treatment of religion in *Speaker for the Dead* seems to criticize theological belief. In the novel, for the most part, religious notions seem to cloud the mind of the individual, impede communication, and promote fear. However, read more carefully, Card's critique seems focused on those who do not balance reason with belief. Those who stick to their convictions and refuse to see beyond idiocentric needs have the potential to cause the most social damage. These individuals, more than others, echo the sentiments of the earthly colonizer. They desire to destroy or control (whether figuratively or literally) those which they believe have "inferior" ideologies. This is evident in the actions of the Bishop, who, although much more amicable and almost redeemed toward the end of the novel, only concedes to a rebellion when he sees the opportunity to convert the piggies. The idea that the "other" had to be civilized and converted was one of the main justifications for the expansion of European, and later American, empire. Those "noble" intentions, as history and literature show, do not often have a favorable outcome, as they have often been a vehicle for oppression.

Card makes it evident that communication is a key factor to understanding otherness and overcoming the anxieties presented by the foreign. In this sense, Card's focus moves away from stereotypical colonial representations of interactions with the other. Ender serves as a vehicle for

communication: he exposes the problems caused by alienation and breaks the barriers that promote foreignness. Through Ender, Card criticizes the notion that the other is to be feared and questions the policy that ignorance is best. As a speaker for the dead, Ender's purpose is to seek truth, but truth cannot be found without communication. In the novel, lack of communication, or willing ignorance, is generally employed as a means to protect society or the individual. This can be seen throughout different social circles in the novel, from Novinha and her family to the relations between male and female piggies to the Bishop and his congregation; lack of communication, whether self imposed or promoted by society, only encourages foreignness. In seeking truth, Ender opens up communication, and thus is able to help others overcome their fears regarding otherness. Ultimately, as Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony proposes, "culture has the potential to sustain the status quo as well as to evolve also into 'a site of struggle, as plural subjects under the sway of [this] hegemony… assert their multifarious and contradictory forms of social consciousness'" (Alessio and Meredith). Demosthenes's Hierarchy serves a tool to break from the ideology of colonial hegemony which seems so ingrained in human nature and promotes cultural clash. The novel attempts to understand and breach the foreignness created by it and to form a new society where the members are able to communicate with each other regardless of their race or background.

Familiarizing one's self with the terms of the hierarchy of foreignness can only superficially uncover the levels of foreignness explored in the novel. Although the overarching foreign relationship is that of the Lusitanians with the pequeninos, and the meaning of that relationship to the Hundred Worlds, the levels of foreignness within people of the same community is the true backbone of this book. It begins when Pipo decides to take Novinha under his wing. Her story explains how an individual of a community can be alienated when others fail

to understand his/her suffering. The failure of the community to aid this individual creates a foreigner in their midst. Novinha is incapable of relating to her people socially or theologically, they have become beyond utlanning to her, they may as well be framling. Novinha's situation also exposes the foreignness of others. Marcao, for example, is drawn to her because he recognized her as a fellow "alien." Unfortunately for him, she never thought of him the same way. Similarly, Ender recognizes the pain in Novinha as his own. Long before being alienated for his ideology by the bishop and the people of Lusitania, Ender, as a self-imposed punishment, has alienated himself from the rest of humanity. Even though he can understand the ties between people, and can swiftly assess social issues, he is very much alone, and thus foreign to others. His quest to restore the hive queen and the guilt he bears from the xenocide, make it hard for him to allow people to know the real him. Furthermore, he had only surrounded himself with those who knew him before the xenocide: Valentine and Jane (who retains the memory from the original giant's mind game). It is only when Ender has to let them go that he opens himself to be understood by others. This process is triggered by his recognition of a fellow sufferer in Novinha when he first sees her visage in her call for a Speaker. Andrew soon discovers that he must also look for truth within himself in order to help others who are just as alien as he. As Cartmell explains,

> In the end, alien identity is all we have, since we are strangers to ourselves. The strange is made familiar and the familiar strange as we seek to understand ourselves through texts that question our ideas of who we are and what we are not. Whether we look within our society or to other nations, into the future or to another world, we learn about the alien within ourselves which we may not always recognise or want to admit. (Cartmell 3-4)

During the process of assimilation, Ender encounters other foreigners within the Lusitanian community. As a framling and secular entity, he is initially shunned by others and soon discovers that breaching certain barriers (created by anxiety over otherness) is harder than it seems. In order to speak for the deaths he has been called to Lusitania for, he must uncover the truth of both the humans and the pequeninos. During his discoveries, Ender and the reader can observe that Novinha's children, much like their mother, have been alienated in different ways. One cannot speak, one is violent, one is part machine, one is a religious zealot, and two are apprentices with no chance to exercise their profession the way they would like to. Through truth and patience, as opposed to the colonial approach of force, Andrew is able to eventually breach the barriers between them, and mend the bonds that bring them back into society into the social fold.

Furthermore, in science fiction literature, the scientific aspect, "like colonialism, and like patriarchy,…operates through a process of othering: just as the physical world is posited as object, as "other" to the observer, so literary discourse, a discourse of subjectivity, is othered, placed outside the realms of truth-telling" (Leane 85). Thus, the reader must embrace the novel as a whole, including the seeminly innocuous; technological advancements like the ansible and Jane, or the biological nature of the Descolada and the Lusitanian world, help to shape our notions of what "foreigness" encompasses, and how they may influence human anxieties over otherness.

Just like the treatment of piggies by the xenologers and the Starways Congress, "humans tend to externalise, categorise and segregate the alien" in an effort to control it. This shows not only human insecurity about the self, but it also shows the impossibility of "the notion of a single unified self" (Cartmell 7). As science fiction in popular contemporary culture indicates, the

shifting meaning of the "other," the aliens, whether "benevolent or malevolent," reflects

ideological changes, as the definition of otherness exposes political anxieties: the altering of

boundaries among "races, genders, nationalities, even between English and Media, is a political

gesture", and "the most radically threatening moment" will be when one discovers that one's

identity has changed, and finally "the alien bursts out of ourselves" (Cartmell 7-8).

      Thus, *Speaker for the Dead*—both Ender as Speaker and the text itself—forces us to

examine our fear of the "other" within and outside ourselves. Science fiction has "historically

invoked and interrogated visions of colonization" both on earth and in space, and has become a

place where the implications of our actions, past and present may be explored (Batty and

Markley 6). Thus, the novel, like the genre, makes us consider the consequences and costs

colonial enterprise, both past and present: "its effects on imagined indigenes, on ourselves, and

on the lands that it exploits (Batty and Markley 7). It goes beyond colonial space narrative and

questions and critiques the notion that the "otherness" must always be antagonized.

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