

Subversion and Containment in Orson Scott Card's *Xenocide*

Daniel K. Muhlestein
Brigham Young University

Xenocide (1991) is a peculiar book. Although it occupies the space between *Speaker for the Dead* (1986) and *Children of the Mind* (1996) in Orson Scott Card's canon, much of the plot of *Xenocide* revolves around a cluster of characters new to the saga, and the book's emotional center of gravity is less Ender Wiggin than Han Qing-jao. Further, although *Xenocide* received a Hugo nomination, its critical reception has been surprisingly mixed, with one reviewer grumbling about the book's "frequent, irksome, and interminable theological/philosophical interludes" (rev. of *Xenocide* 699). But if *Kirkus Reviews* was partly in the right, it was also wholly in the wrong: the most perplexing thing about *Xenocide* is not the sudden emergence of some grand theology but rather the way in which that theology is employed. More than any other novel in the Ender Wiggin series, *Xenocide* wrestles with fundamental questions of faith and free will. And it does so by way of a rhetorical strategy that is interesting and powerful but not always entirely successful. This strategy is not new; it can be found in texts ranging from *Beowulf* to *Ulysses* (1922). But the critic who describes it most succinctly is the New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt, whose essay "Invisible Bullets': Renaissance Authority and its Subversion" is thus a helpful place to begin an exploration of what

goes wrong—and right—in *Xenocide*. Helpful and oddly appropriate, Greenblatt writes from within the Marxist tradition, and Card's novel describes a civilization whose roots go back to Mao Tse-tung.

I

In "Invisible Bullets" Greenblatt describes a process commonly called "subversion and containment." Many apparently orthodox cultural texts, he observes, plant the seeds of revolution. They describe something or do something which poses a potential threat to an important aspect of the culture of which they are a part—a threat to a dominant institution, perhaps, or to a prevailing ideology. In that sense they are subversive texts. *King Lear* (1608)—to choose an obvious example—is a subversive play insofar as it calls into question the ideology of the divine right of kings and describes the carnage that follows a king gone awry. At the same time, Greenblatt explains, such texts work overtime to control the subversion they are creating, to lock it down, to contain it in the sense in which a prison contains a prisoner. They create a threat in order to destroy it, and in doing so they reinforce the very ideologies and institutions that they put at risk. Thus, *King Lear*—to continue the example—subverts the notion of kingship precisely in order to reaffirm it. But if *King Lear* represents subversion and containment at work, *Xenocide* shows subversion and containment gone astray.

The novel describes the life, death, and rebirth of a religious community comprised of the people of Path. At the center of their religious life are the godspoken: men and women to whom the gods are said to manifest themselves through what appear to be obsessive-compulsive disorders. In the Catalogue of Voices of the Gods, for example, Door-Waiting, Counting-to-Multiples-of-Five, Object-Counting, Checking-for-Accidental-Murders, Fingernail-Tearing, Skin-Scraping, Pulling-Out-of-Hair, Gnawing-at-Stone, and Bugging-Out-of-Eyes are all identified as penances demanded by the gods, rituals of obedience which cleanse the souls of the godspoken so that the gods can fill their minds with wisdom (51). In spite of the odd nature of their religious rituals, however, the people of Path face many of the same chal-

lenges encountered by other—more earthbound—religious communities: they must translate evidence of divinity into rules of conduct, they must mediate between science and religion and between religion and politics, and they must find a way to transmit their faith from one generation to the next. In these respects the people of Path are like people of faith everywhere.

In describing the people of Path, *Xenocide* explores a number of important philosophical issues, including the nature of education, of history, and of obedience. In the process it tests—and appears to prove as true—four subversive hypotheses about the nature of religion. The first hypothesis is the same one Greenblatt discusses in his reading of Thomas Harlot's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588): it is the Machiavellian theory that religion is a political tool of the ruling class. Early in *Xenocide* the link between obedience to the gods and obedience to the government is stated—in positive terms—by Han Fei-tzu, the most honored of the godspoken. In the following passage he is conversing with his daughter, Qing-jao, who has just discovered that he has been lying to the people of Path on behalf of the political rulers: “Just as the gods speak only to a chosen few,” declares Han Fei-tzu,

“so the secrets of the rulers must be known only to those who will use the knowledge properly. . . . The only way to retrieve a secret, once it is known, is to replace it with a lie; then the knowledge of the truth is once again your secret.” . . .

“If we can lie in the service of the gods, what other crimes can we commit?”

“What is a crime?”

“An act that’s against the law.”

“What law?”

“I see—Congress makes the law, so the law is whatever Congress says. But Congress is composed of men and women, who may do good and evil.”

“Now you’re nearer the truth. We can’t do *crimes* in the service of Congress, because Congress makes the laws. But if Congress ever

became evil, then in obeying them we might also be doing evil. . . . However, if that happened, Congress would surely lose the mandate of heaven. And *we*, the godspoken, don't have to wait and wonder about the mandate of heaven, as others do. If Congress ever loses the mandate of the gods, we will know at once."

"So you lied for Congress because Congress had the mandate of heaven."

"And therefore I knew that to help them keep their secret was the will of the gods for the good of the people." (90-91)

Midway through *Xenocide*, however, Han Fei-tzu becomes convinced there is no heaven, there is no mandate, and the way of Path is a lie propagated by a tyrannical government. He becomes convinced, in short, of the Machiavellian view of religion: "[W]e, the godspoken," cries Han Fei-tzu, "are not hearing gods at all. We have been altered genetically . . . [to perform absurd, humiliating rituals]—and the only reason I can think of is that it keeps us under control, keeps us weak. . . . It's a monstrous crime. . . . We are the slaves here! Congress is our most terrible enemy, our masters, our deceivers" (289). Perhaps more importantly, Han Fei-tzu's conclusions about the way of Path are shared by Ender Wiggin, the protagonist in the series and the character who typically articulates Card's perspective. Subsequent events—including the release of a virus which cures the godspoken of their behavior—appear to justify both Han Fei-tzu's assertions and Machiavelli's theory. Indeed, only one of the godspoken—Qing-jao—continues to believe that her obsessive-compulsive behavior is a form of purification sent by the gods. Her continued faith, however, ultimately serves a subversive function as well, for it points toward—and seems to prove true—a second subversive hypothesis about the nature of religion.

This hypothesis concerns the power of hegemony, especially religious hegemony. In his *Prison Notebooks* (1947) Antonio Gramsci defines hegemony in terms of class warfare. A given class can gain power, he says, by *consent* as well as *coercion* (in Anderson 20-25). It can do this by disseminating its particular class-based ideology throughout society and then persuading the other classes to accept that ideology as the Truth. Universalize, naturalize, and conquer, Gramsci in-

sists (Anderson 19). Later critics have built upon Gramsci's theory, and today the term *hegemony* means something like "a society's dominant system of meanings, practices, and values." Hegemony is what most people believe; it also describes how most people *act*. Hegemony is more than mere ideology; it is ideology in action, ideology put into practice by its believers. And when people live an ideology as the Truth, they generally do so in a very specific way: they attempt to act upon their beliefs in precisely such a way as to ensure that their actions ratify their beliefs. They act—that is to say—in such a way as to confirm reciprocally the validity of their beliefs, whether those beliefs are true or not. Hence the equation: Hegemony = Ideology + Action + Reciprocal Confirmation.

The story of Qing-jiao is a textbook example of religious hegemony at work. Her most important ideology is her belief that the gods speak through her. Her most important actions are those of obedience, of living properly the life of a godspoken. Those actions ratify her ideology and confirm her belief that she is an instrument of the gods. And the lynchpin in this process is a binary formula which juxtaposes religion and science, thus viewing scientific theories and evidence as a heaven-sent screen or cover, a divinely inspired way of concealing the deeper truth of religion. Her father first states this binary formula: "The gods are the cause of everything that happens," he observes, "but they *never* act except in disguise"—the disguise being the fortuitous appearance of a scientific explanation (148). The belief that the gods hide their actions from unbelievers behind a cloud of natural laws and scientific explanations thus becomes the defining tenet of Qing-jiao's faith: "Qing-jiao knew that she must listen [to the scientific explanations] with one question in mind: What do the gods mean by this?" (292). On the basis of this tenet Qing-jiao transforms scientific evidence that Congress manipulated her genes into spiritual evidence of the handiwork of the gods. Every proof that the government engineered her obsessive-compulsive behavior reciprocally confirms Qing-jiao's belief that the hands of the gods were upon her and that the gods are using science to conceal their work. The more the scientists prove her wrong, the harder she works to transform their critique into proof.

When presented with evidence of genetic manipulation, for example, Qing-jao retorts, “Don’t you see? This genetic difference in us—it’s the disguise the gods have given for their voices in our lives. So that people who are not of the Path will still be free to disbelieve” (290). When she is infected with a virus designed to counteract the effects of the genetic manipulation, she reasons:

And if the gods wished to stop speaking to the people of Path, then this might well be the disguise they had chosen for their act. Let it seem to the unbeliever that Father’s Lusitanian virus cuts us off from the gods; *I* will know, as will all other faithful men and women, that the gods speak to whomever they wish, and nothing made by human hands could stop them if they so desired. All their acts were vanity. If Congress believed that they had caused the gods to speak on Path, let them believe it. If Father and the Lusitanians believe that they are causing the gods to fall silent, let them believe it. *I* know that if I am only worthy of it, the gods will speak to me. (581)

Even when the virus produces its intended effect and causes Qing-jao to lose her disorder, after a moment of agonizing doubt she interprets the success of the virus as yet another evidence of the gods’ hidden power. By this point in the novel “[s]he could not bear [her father’s] embrace,” for he has rejected the way of Path, and he is the one who has infected her with the virus—

She could not endure it because it would mean his complete victory. It would mean that she had been defeated by the enemies of the gods. . . . It would mean that all Qing-jao’s worship for all these years had meant nothing. . . . It would mean that Mother was *not* waiting for her when at last she came to the Infinite West.

Why don’t you speak to me, O Gods! she cried out silently. Why don’t you assure me that I have not served you in vain all these years? Why have you deserted me now, and given the triumph to your enemies?

And then the answer came to her, as simply and clearly as if her mother had whispered the words in her ear: This is a test, Qing-jao. The gods are watching what you do.

A test. Of course. The gods were testing all their servants on Path, to see which ones were deceived and which endured in perfect obedience.

If I am being tested, then there must be some correct thing for me to do. . . . She dropped to her knees. She found a woodgrain line, and began to trace it [which is her obsessive-compulsive behavior].

There was no answering gift of release, no sense of rightness; but that did not trouble her, because she understood that this was part of the test. (587–88)

In its description of Qing-jao, then, *Xenocide* both tests and appears to prove true a second subversive hypothesis about religion: that a religious hegemony can become so powerful it can transform even contradictory evidence into confirmation of belief. To ensure that readers do not somehow miss the point, Ender spells it out for them:

Qing-jao, I know you well, thought Ender. You are such a bright one, but the light you see by comes entirely from the stories of your gods. . . . Most people are able to hold most stories they're told in abeyance, to keep a little distance between the story and their inmost heart. But . . . for you, Qing-jao—the terrible lie has become the self-story, the tale that you must believe if you are to remain yourself. . . . I know you, Qing-jao, and I expect you to behave no differently than you do. . . . Few who are captured by such a powerful story are ever able to win free of it. (307)

Interestingly, *Xenocide* uses families, what Louis Althusser refers to in the title of his essay as “Ideological State Apparatuses,” to transmit such powerfully perverse stories from one generation to the next: “Until a few weeks ago,” laments Han Fei-tzu near the end of the novel,

he had been proudest of all of the fact that he had accomplished

his oath to [his wife] Jiang-qing. This was not an easy accomplishment, to bring up his daughter so piously that she never went through a period of doubt or rebellion against the gods. True, there were other children just as pious—but their piety was usually accomplished at the expense of their education. Han Fei-tzu had let Qing-jao learn everything, and then had so deftly led her understanding of it that all fit well with her faith in the gods.

Now he had reaped his own sowing. He had given her a worldview that so perfectly preserved her faith that now, when he had discovered that the gods “voices” were nothing but the genetic chains with which Congress had shackled them, nothing could convince her. (478-79)

In the conclusion he bluntly reveals his heartbreak: “I wish dogs had torn my tongue out before I taught you to think that way” (525).

Having tested and apparently proven both Machiavelli’s critique and Gramsci’s theory, *Xenocide* then proceeds to test a third subversive hypothesis about the nature of religion: that when people of faith are confronted with evidence that what they believe is false, they invariably attempt to preserve their faith by retreating from reason to emotion. Not surprisingly, Qing-jao’s actions provide an obvious example of just such a psychological defense mechanism. When she confronts evidence that her obsessive-compulsive behavior has been caused by genetic manipulation, she retreats from her head to her heart:

Qing-jao knew that these were all the lies of a seducer. For the one thing she could not doubt was the voice of the gods inside her. Hadn’t she felt that awful need to be purified? Hadn’t she felt the joy of successful worship when her rituals were complete? Her relationship with the gods was the most certain thing in her life; and anyone who denied it, who threatened to take it away from her, had to be not only her enemy, but the enemy of heaven. (301)

This is a particularly poignant passage, one that helps make Qing-jao a

very sympathetic character. By the end of the novel, however, what was at first touching has become tragic, for the most certain part of Qing-jao's life has proven damnably wrong, and her quick shift from reason to feeling is revealed as a false step, a dangerous retreat.

Subversion upon subversion upon subversion—and *Xenocide* is not done yet. In its exploration of the dynamics of hegemony the novel tests a fourth subversive hypothesis. This time, though, the stakes are, if not higher, at least broader. The issue is epistemological and theological, and the question is whether one can discover truth of any kind, be it religious or otherwise. The Buggers—an alien species Ender helped defeat—pose the question in its most fundamental form. “Maybe we’re the fools,” they muse, “for thinking we know things. Maybe humans are the only ones who can deal with the fact that nothing can ever be known at all” (317). Qing-jao herself wonders whether in the final analysis either external evidence or powerful emotions can be truly reliable guides. After all, does not what they “mean” ultimately depend upon the frame of reference from within which they are interpreted?

What if she was wrong? How could she know anything? Whether everything Jane said was true or everything she said was false, the same evidence would lie before her. Qing-jao would feel exactly as she felt now, whether it was the gods or some brain disorder causing the feeling. (304–05)

This is a moment of authentic agony in the novel as well as one of authentic subversion, a sudden sunburst aporia (impasse) in which even the trace of truth becomes untraceable.

Church as a tool of the state, the power of hegemony, religion as retreat aporia: all are subversive impulses in *Xenocide*. All reverberate outside of the text as well. For what is ultimately at stake in *Xenocide* is not the way of Path but rather religion in general. That is, the issues raised by the novel are clearly portable issues, as relevant to Card as to Qing-jao, to Christians as to the godspoken. Christianity has long been accused of hiding behind emotion, and discussions of aporia are a

commonplace in contemporary analyses of philosophy and religion. Certainly, Machiavelli is no stranger to earthbound debates over the covert relationship between religion and politics. The most substantial threat to religion *per se*, however, is the ease with which Qing-jao turns contradictory evidence into evidence of divine providence. What matters here is not just Qing-jao's way of confirming her faith but the whole process of reciprocal confirmation itself. If religious hegemony can become so powerful that it can confirm even Qing-jao's beliefs, and confirm them in the face of (and indeed precisely because of) an enormous amount of evidence to the contrary, then it can potentially confirm *any* religious belief; and if it can do that, if religious hegemony can potentially confirm all belief, then all reciprocal confirmation is necessarily suspect. Whatever else readers may think of *Xenocide*, they can surely agree on this point: it produces the subversion half of the subversion/containment dialectic, and it does so in spades.

II

But what of containment? Does *Xenocide* produce that as well? Is Machiavelli overthrown, religion justified, free will proven and demonstrated? In part, yes. For although Qing-jao is never able to depart the way of Path, others are, including her father and her secret maid, Si Wang-Mu, a working class foil to Qing-jao and equal parts sister, double, and replacement. By counterbalancing Qing-jao with Han Fei-tzu and Wang-mu, *Xenocide* makes clear that reciprocal confirmation sometimes fails and that not all believers abandon reason at the first sign of trouble. Nevertheless, this character-driven attempt at containment is tentative and provisional simply because in part neither Qing-jao's father nor her double has anything like Qing-jao's stage presence. Han Fei-tzu is not nearly as compelling a character as Qing-jao; nor is Wang-mu, though readers with a proletarian bent probably wish she were. Further, although their abandonment of the way of Path underscores the limits of religious hegemony, both Han Fei-tzu and Wang-mu become stout defenders of the Machiavellian view of religion. And although both characters choose reason over emotion, that choice

leads them to cast off their religion like so much dead weight. Thus, although Han Fei-tzu and Wang-mu are interesting foils for Qing-jao, neither does much to contain the subversion that lies at the heart of *Xenocide*. Apparently, apostates are not especially good defenders of the faith.

For that defense *Xenocide* brings in the heavy hitters: Ender Wiggin and Jane, a computer-entity which has achieved sentience. And in a series of discussions—those “frequent, irksome, and interminable theological/philosophical interludes” noted by *Kirkus Reviews*—Ender makes a spirited defense of the doctrine of free will, a doctrine which (if it can be proven true) is capable of overthrowing Machiavelli and Marx alike, capable of justifying the belief that truth does not merely exist but is accessible. Interestingly, Ender’s first attempt at containment begins in subversion; he initially plays the devil’s advocate, reiterating various ways in which philosophers explain—and explain away—free will:

“Either we’re free or we’re not,” said Miro. “Either the story’s true or it isn’t.”

“The point is that we have to believe that it’s true in order to live as civilized human beings,” said Ender.

“No, that’s not the point at all,” said Miro. “Because if it’s a lie, why should we *bother* to live as civilized human beings?”

“Because the species has a better chance to survive if we do,” said Ender. “Because our genes require us to believe the story in order to enhance our ability to pass those genes on for many generations in the future. Because anybody who *doesn’t* believe the story begins to act in unproductive, uncooperative ways, and eventually the community, the herd, will reject him and his opportunities for reproduction will be diminished—for instance, he’ll be put in jail—and the genes leading to his unbelieving behavior will eventually be extinguished.”

“So the puppeteer requires that we believe that we’re *not* puppets. We’re forced to believe in free will.”

“Or so Valentine explained it to me.”

“But she doesn’t really believe that, does she?”

“Of course she doesn’t. Her genes won’t let her.”

Ender laughed again. But Miro . . . was outraged. . . .

“Calm down,” Ender said.

“No,” Miro shouted. “My puppeteer is making me furious!”
(385–86)

After a moment of lightheartedness, however, Ender turns deadly serious by responding to the argument against free will with a counter-claim of his own. Man has free will, he asserts, precisely and only because he has always existed:

I think that we *are* free, and I don't think it's just an illusion that we believe in because it has survival value. And I think we're free because we aren't just this body, acting out a genetic script. And we aren't some soul that God created out of nothing. We're free because we always existed. Right back from the beginning of time, only there was no beginning of time so we existed all along. Nothing ever caused us. We simply *are*, and we always were.
(386)

Ender's first attempt at containment, then, comes by way of a grounding assumption which can be neither proven nor disproven, an assumption which is Mormon orthodoxy—Card's own faith—*par excellence*: “The mind or the intelligence which man possesses,” wrote Joseph Smith, is co-eternal with God himself; “the intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end” (353). Ender's second attempt at containment comes by way of a similarly orthodox Mormon definition of the nature and purposes of God. A real god, observes Ender, would have no patience for hegemonic systems or ways of enforcing obedience. He would already have all the control he would need or want. And his work and his glory would be to help, to teach, to lift, to improve: “So let me tell you,” Ender declares,

“what I think about gods. I think a *real* god is not going to be so scared or angry that he tries to keep other people down. . . . A real god doesn't care about control. A real god already *has* control of everything that needs controlling. Real gods would want to teach you how to be just like them.” (412)

A real god, in short, would not merely allow but also guarantee the free agency of his subjects. He would be much like a parent who loves and seeks to persuade but never forces. As Wang-mu, who has by this point in the novel become Ender's student, puts it,

What were the gods, then? They would want everyone else to know and have and be all good things. They would teach and share and train, but never force.

Like my parents, thought Wang-mu. . . . That was it. That's what the gods would be They would want everyone else to have all that was good in life, just like good parents. But unlike parents or any other people, the gods would actually *know* what was good and have the power to cause good things to happen, even when nobody else understood that they were good. As Wiggin said, *real* gods . . . would have all the intelligence and power that it was possible to have. (432–33)

In essence, then, Ender counters subversion with orthodoxy (at least Mormon orthodoxy). He acknowledges the power of various subversive hypotheses about religion, but he does so without accepting a corresponding loss of faith. In the process he contains the subversion that lies at the heart of *Xenocide*—but not completely.

Why? Part of the answer is a simple matter of aesthetic effect. In fiction, showing is almost always more effective than telling. While subversion in *Xenocide* is writ large in its characters' actions, containment comes chiefly through reflection and dialogue, the predictable result being that the novel's subversive elements are felt in a way that its attempts at containment are not. Ironically, the unexpected strength of the novel's subversive elements is due in part, at least, to the fact that Card appears to have made Qing-jao into what he elsewhere calls "too memorable" a character. In the first part of his series on "The Finer Points of Characterization," Card notes that good fiction includes a hierarchy of characters—from central to vanishing—and warns authors against overdoing the minor ones: "Every character who makes an appearance can't be just as important as every other. . . . When you make

a [minor] character too memorable, your audience assumes he will matter more than you intend him to" (27). Yet that is evidently what happens to Qing-jao. In his acknowledgments prefacing the text of *Xenocide*, Card recalls that

A chance meeting with James Cryer . . . led directly to the story of Li Qing-jao and Han Fei-tzu at the heart of this book. Learning that he was a translator of Chinese poetry, I asked him . . . if he could give me a few plausible names for some Chinese characters I was developing. . . . [M]y idea for these characters was for them to play a fairly minor, though meaningful, role in the story of *Xenocide*. But as James Cryer . . . told me more and more about Li Qing-jao and Han Fei-tzu . . . I began to realize that here was the real foundation of the tale I wanted this book to tell. (ix)

Not surprisingly, then, Qing-jao bears the marks of this transformation. On the one hand, she has two of the characteristics that Card typically associates with minor characters: "The way to make such characters instantly memorable . . . is to make them *eccentric* or *obsessive*" ("Finer Points" I, 28). But on the other hand, Qing-jao begins *Xenocide* as a child in jeopardy, has a well-documented past, is driven by unusually complex motives, experiences a full measure of pain, and is drawn in truly heroic proportions: all of which, says Card, are the hallmarks of a major character ("Finer Points II" and "Finer Points III"). "[H]ave characters that are so important and so believable to the audience that they can't forget them," declares Card in the third part of his essay on characterization (36). In *Xenocide* he does just that—he creates a character who is simultaneously unforgettable and uncontainable. Indeed, by the end of *Xenocide*, Qing-jao along with the subversion she embodies has become the focal point of the novel, while Ender, Wang-mu, Jane, and the containment they represent have become almost incidental.

However, Qing-jao's stage presence is not the only threat to containment in the novel. Another more serious concern is that the very hypotheses Ender's theology seeks to lock up potentially undermine it. His assertion of preexisting free will is susceptible to the counterclaim

that such an assertion itself demonstrates religious hegemony in action, ideology made flesh, as it were. Certainly, Althusser would have thought so, for he builds upon Gramsci's notion of hegemony, paying particular attention to the term "ideology." Ideology, says Althusser, is more than just a worldview or system of beliefs. Rather, it is "a 'Representation' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence" (152). By this Althusser means that although ideology depicts the conditions under which men live quite accurately, it depicts their relationship to those conditions inaccurately. It depicts them as free subjects rather than in subjection to God, to the state, to the boss, etc.—and it does so precisely in order to persuade them to toe the line:

The whole mystery of this effect lies in . . . the ambiguity of the term *subject*. In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity . . . : the individual is *interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely . . . , i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection . . .* (169)

From Althusser's perspective, then, Ender's assertion of free will is not an escape from ideology but an expression of it. The problem, of course, is that both Ender's and Althusser's statements are mere assertions with no proof asked or given. Ender asserts that men are free. Althusser asserts that claims of freedom are ideologies designed to enforce compliance. Men are left to choose which perspective they prefer. Or are they? Unfortunately, no, according to *Xenocide*. For although Ender does not prove his assertion of free will any more than Althusser proves his theory of ideology, Ender does prove something, by deed if not word, and that is that Althusser was probably right all along.

When Ender and Han Fei-tzu conclude that the people of Path have

been manipulated without their consent, their solution to this violation of choice represents yet another such violation. They secretly infect the population with a virus designed to counteract the effects of the manipulation, doing so in secret precisely because they realize that if the people of Path knew what was being done, they would stop it: they would never willingly consent to be infected by the virus. Readers know that this is so because when Han Fei-tzu asks Qing-jao (as a representative of those who follow the way of Path) for permission to release the virus, she stoutly refuses, declaring: "Father, I beg you, don't do this. . . . What can I do to persuade you? If I say nothing, you will do it, and when I speak to beg you, you will do it all the more surely" (526). Further, when the virus becomes effective, Ender and his co-conspirators conceal both their secrecy and their violation of the people's freedom of choice behind a cloak of lies, just as Congress had before them:

[T]he news reader . . . began reading a report about a document that was turning up on computers all over the world. The document said that this plague was a gift from the gods, freeing the people of Path from a genetic alteration

"This document says that the whole world is now purified. The gods have accepted us." The news reader's voice trembled as she spoke. . . . [Han Fei-tzu's] face was radiant. Triumphant.

"Did you see the message that Jane and I prepared?" he said.

"You!" cried Qing-jao. "My father, a teller of lies?" (584-85)

Thus, Ender Wiggin, the great voice of freedom in *Xenocide*, grants the people of Path no more choice and no more access to truth than did Congress. His motives are different, but his covert methods and his calculated willingness to eliminate choice in the name of choice are the same, and Ender proves Althusser right. He subverts his own theology and undoes his own best attempts at containment. That, Althusser would surely declare, is the real lesson *Xenocide* teaches.

An even more serious impediment to containment in *Xenocide*, however, has less to do with technique or ideology than with episte-

mology. How can men know for sure, the novel forces us to ask, that what Ender says is true? How can men *know* that they are free, that God is good, and so forth? How can men ever know, if, as *Xenocide* makes abundantly clear, the evidence can always be seen to cut both ways? How, asks Wang-mu, can men ever figure out such knowledge?

[W]ho was someone like Wang-mu to judge a god? She couldn't understand their purposes even if they told her, so how could she ever *know* that they were good. Yet the other approach, to trust in them and believe in them absolutely—wasn't that what Qing-jao was doing?

No. If there *were* gods, they would never act as Qing-jao thought they acted—enslaving people, tormenting them and humiliating them.

Unless torment and humiliation were *good* for them . . .

No! She almost cried aloud, and once again pressed her face into her hands, this time to keep silence. (433)

Wang-mu's answer to her own question is illuminating. She says: "I can only judge by what I understand. . . . Perhaps I'm so stupid and foolish that I will always be the enemy to the gods, working against their high and incomprehensible purposes. But I have to live my life by what *I* understand" (434). This is powerful doctrine. Unfortunately, it is powerful in precisely the wrong way. Wang-mu is eloquent and persuasive, but what she says is not a solution but a confession: in this world of flesh and bone there is simply no way to transcend the subjective, the personal, the conditional. At this stage, at least, there is simply no way to know *for certain*.

Wang-mu's response to the riddle of epistemology, then, is neither immanent, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's sense of the word, nor transcendent. Rather, it is what Michel Foucault calls the will to knowledge, which is also, *Xenocide* seems to suggest (as did Foucault), the will to power; for when push comes to shove, Wang-mu challenges the gods to prove her wrong neither through reason nor emotion but through brute force:

And if the gods don't like it, they can poison me in my sleep or catch me on fire as I'm walking in the garden tomorrow or just make my arms and legs and head drop off my body like crumbs off a cake. If they can't manage to stop a stupid little servant girl like me, they don't amount to much anyway. (435)

Wang-mu's defiant challenge sounds much like what Fredric Jameson says when he, too, finds himself in an epistemological crunch. The truth of history, writes Jameson at the most difficult moment in *The Political Unconscious* (1981),

can be apprehended only through its effects This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them. (102)

Jameson's assertion is of course a retreat rather than an explanation, a textual symptom of a subtextual aporia. So is Wang-mu's. They are at once the collapse of containment and the triumph of power and willful subjectivity.

Ironically, the novel's failure to contain its own most subversive elements adequately is probably a partial result, or at least a clear symptom, of Card's own extraordinary confidence in the success of his novelistic enterprise. Only an author who has an abiding faith in religion is likely to have the confidence necessary to put it to the screws the way Card does in *Xenocide*, with full faith in its ultimate triumph. In one respect, at least, Card's confidence is richly rewarded: though *Xenocide* never fully contains its own most subversive impulses, in the smoke and flame of the battle it does become significant art. None of the other novels in the Ender Wiggin saga risks nearly as much as does *Xenocide*, and none burns so brilliantly in the ensuing struggle between faith and doubt. In spite of, or perhaps even because of, its failure at containment, *Xenocide* is oddly like Qing-jao herself: Glori-

ously Bright.

WORKS CITED

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: NLB, 1971. 123-73.
- Anderson, Terry. "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." *New Left Review* 100 (November & January 1976-77): 5-78.
- Beowulf*. Trans. Charles W. Kennedy. *The Literature of England*. Ed. George K. Anderson and William E. Buckler. 5th ed. 2 Vols. Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1966. Vol. 1:15-65.
- Card, Orson Scott. *Children of the Mind*. New York: Tor, 1996.
- . "The Finer Points of Characterization Part I: Just How Important Are These People?" *Writer's Digest* 66 (October 1986): 26-28.
- . "The Finer Points of Characterization Part II: Creating Characters that Readers Care About." *Writer's Digest* 66 (November 1986): 37-38.
- . "The Finer Points of Characterization Part III: Making Your Characters Believable." *Writer's Digest* 66 (December 1986): 32-36.
- . *Speaker for the Dead*. New York: T. Doherty Associates, 1986.
- . *Xenocide*. New York: Tor, 1992.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. 1947. Ed. and trans. Joseph Buttigieg. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "'Invisible Bullets': Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion." *Glyph* 8 (1981): 40-61.
- Harlot, Thomas. *A Brief and True Report of the New Land of Virginia*. London: n. p., 1588.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. 1922. New York: Random House, 1961.

Rev. of *Xenocide*, by Orson Scott Card. *Kirkus Reviews* 59 (1 June 1991): 699.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. 1608. Ed. Kenneth Muir. New York: Random House, 1964.

Smith, Joseph. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Ed. Joseph Fielding Smith. 15th printing. Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1965.