

## A POST-COLONIAL URSULA LE GUIN

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For many years, Ursula K. Le Guin has been exploring complex and controversial ideas in her fiction. An early novel, *City of Illusions* (1966), anticipates many of the ideas about power relationships and the effects of imperialism on the colonized that later became central to post-colonial criticism. However, *City of Illusions* has not received the serious critical attention it merits, perhaps due to a kind of genre snobbery that defines certain types of fiction as popular and other forms as literary without examining the individual works. Of course, this attitude is changing. Nevertheless, the critical attention Le Guin's writing has received has focused on her Hugo and Nebula award-winning novels, *The Dispossessed* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*. *City of Illusions*, on the other hand, has been neglected despite its astonishing political relevance, not only to the Vietnam and civil rights era in which it was first published, but to the twenty-first century as well. *City of Illusions* is part of a trilogy that explores what happens when technologically advanced societies encounter less "developed" ones. Looked at carefully, *City of Illusions* in particular reveals itself to be an evocative political novel about the uses of power and effects of power. Instead of using fantasy for escapism, moreover, Le Guin uses non-realistic elements to comment on the reality of the "real world," just as writers of magic realism and postmodernism were to do later. Le Guin has observed that science fiction's gift to literature is a way of seeing the world as "an open universe, a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy, but an immensely complex process in time. All doors stand open. All alternatives are thinkable" (qtd. in Cummins 66). *City of Illusions* provides such an open universe.

Since the novel is not well known, a brief plot summary may be helpful. As the novel opens, the protagonist Falk is a man with no memories. Since the novel was written against the backdrop of the American civil right movement (four civil rights workers were murdered in Mississippi in 1964, and the civil right marches to Selma were in 1965, presumably when the novel was being written) it is significant that Le Guin has made her protagonist and indeed most of her terrestrial

characters black. Falk has been mind-razed, left incapable even of speech, his mind blank as an infant's. A small community of artisan-farmer-hunters takes him in, teaches him its ideas and customs, and thus gives him a new identity. From the forest community, he learns that The League of all Worlds, a sort of idealized inter-galactic United Nations, has been destroyed by the Shing, an extra-galactic conqueror. The Shing now rule Earth. As the novel opens, the Shing have destroyed all the cities and most of the technology of Earth, leaving only isolated communities of at most a few hundred people. All of Earth seems to be under a sanctions regime in which both communications and weapons technology are prohibited. Falk learns also that he is not genetically human. Who he is and from where, only the Shing can tell him. He sets out on a quest to find them, knowing only that they reside somewhere in the west. On his quest, he travels through an American landscape like that before the European settlers arrived, since all the natural forests and grasslands have regenerated in the absence of any concentrated human population.

On the way, he encounters various communities who have found different ways of adapting to their isolated and subordinate condition, some brutal, some well-intentioned, but all maimed. Each encounter seems to represent a different example of how human beings respond to being isolated and under threat from a superior power and to the loss of identity that comes with loss of narrative and autonomy.

At one point, Falk and a woman name Estrel escape from a particularly brutal group of captors, and the two continue their search together, encountering more cultures, and apparently falling in love with one another. When Falk and Estrel do arrive at Es Tock, the Shing metropolis, he learns that the Estrel is a Shing agent, one of the many native people who has been raised and educated by the Shing. The Shing tell him that his space craft crashed when attacked by rebels and that they have been looking for him to restore him to his own world. They tell him the history of his society and their own as they have supposedly reconstructed it from their archives and from what the lone survivor of the crash told them, a story which is similar to the story of Werel (his home planet) and the League of All Worlds that we know from the previous novels, but with key facts changed and an entirely different spin. Falk distrusts this version because of what the forest community told him about the Shing, but he has no way of knowing for certain if their version of events is false. The only other survivor of the crash, then a child, now a teenage boy, wholeheartedly accepts the Shing version of events. He is also harmless, confused, lonely, and drug addicted, a rather obvious example of the effects of a colonized mind.

When the Shing offer to restore Falk to his former personality, that of an Alterran named Ramarren, Falk realizes that he cannot refuse the offer; they will do it whether he agrees or not. He also realizes that they have sought him out and want to “restore” him so that they can find out the location of Ramarren’s world and conquer it. He also reasons that the Shing are relatively few and the native resistance to them is strong. If he could return to his home planet Werel and tell what he knows, he and the rest of his people could then rescue earth from the Shing, or at least prepare themselves for a possible Shing invasion. But of course, once he is Ramarren again, he will not know what Falk has reasoned, since the Falk personality will be destroyed in the process. Ramarren, he fears, having no reason to distrust the Shing, will reveal the location of his planet the moment he sets the navigational control of the spacecraft they have provided for his return flight. The Shing will then destroy him and his ship and set out to conquer Werel. The only way to avoid this is to find some way of reminding his identity as Ramarren of the existence of his identity of Falk.

However, Falk is able to survive by leaving a message to himself to read the first page of his copy of the Tao Te Ching, an instruction that seems so innocuous that it escapes the Shing’s interference. This acts like a trigger awakening him from a hypnotic trance. He senses the presence of the Falk personality. By a rather incredible act of will, he is able to meld with the Falk personality and have both sets of knowledge and experience available to him. Moreover, the Ramarren personality is a member of a select group who are particularly adept at telepathy, called mind-speech, and all of its forms. With his far superior knowledge of mind-speech and mind-control, he is able to tell that the Shing are deceptive. He knows that they are able to lie even with mind-speech, something both he and Falk had thought impossible, because he realizes that their thoughts and feelings do not coincide. Ultimately, he is able to seize control of a spacecraft and head back to Werel. To do this, however, he has to use the same mind-control on one of his Shing captors as they themselves use, which adds to the novel’s moral ambiguity. When he returns to Werel, he takes with him both the boy-survivor and the captive Shing, now released from mind-control and able to give his version of events to the people of Werel. Although he is outnumbered two to one, he allows both to tell their version of events because “there is more than one path to truth” (369).

One way of reading the novel is to understand it as an examination of the social and psychological effects of colonization on the colonized, the tactics of the colonizers, and the methods by which

psychological colonization can be resisted. Le Guin's Shing dominate and control primarily through psychological manipulation and illusion. However, Le Guin is also exploring concepts of identity and knowledge: how does who we are depend on what we know? How can one know what is real? And to what degree are both reality and knowledge subject to manipulation and control?

Three central metaphors evoke much of the novel's meaning. None of these metaphors is the simple concrete-for- abstract equation of allegory; rather, each of her invented tactics of mind exploration and control evokes a cluster of interconnected meanings. One dominant metaphor in the book is mind-speech. Throughout the trilogy (and sometimes it will be necessary to refer to the earlier novels) all the literate societies make use of mind-speech, a form of empathy and telepathy which seems to be a metaphor suggesting literature, culture, art, love, empathy, and indeed all that enables human beings to understand and feel the thoughts and emotions of others. In *City of Illusions*, mind-razing, the destruction of a person's memories, is developed as a metaphor for the process of colonizing the minds of a subject people. It suggests the ways in which both personal and cultural history can be ignored, destroyed, or misinterpreted, the ways cultural values can be distorted and misrepresented, and the ways in which people can be made to feel dependent and inferior. The third metaphor, fertility and sterility, seems associated with the ways cultures and societies evolve or stagnate.

Le Guin implies complex and nuanced answers to the questions she raises about power, control, and resistance. They are writers' answers, not those of an anthropologist or a political theorist, and thus they are ambiguous, suggestive, and metaphorical, designed to evoke thought rather than suggest specific solutions. Nevertheless, if we look at the power structure in *City of Illusions*, Le Guin seems to be implying that at least three factors must be present for one society to dominate another: technological superiority, particularly in weapons; a hierarchical social structure in which an individual's sense of self-worth comes from his ability to dominate others; and an ethic that justifies violence and deception if practiced against the other culture. To this she also adds the poet and the writer's answer: societies also dominate one another by control of the narrative and by having a means of understanding and manipulating the thoughts and emotions of both the Other and the members of one's own group. She also seems to suggest that any of these factors can change and the domination of one society by a more technologically advanced society is not inevitable. Counter-narratives evolve and so do cultures and individuals.

We see such an evolution in the novel that precedes *City of Illusions* in the trilogy. The second novel of the trilogy, *Worlds of Exile*, describes the blending of two cultures on the planet Werel. The Tevarians are a traditional, pre-literate, technologically primitive, native society, and the Alterrans are a small advanced enclave of colonists from another planet. Neither society dominates the other, but neither society progresses as long as the two cultures remain separate. However, when the two cultures work together to defeat a common enemy, each society begins to re-examine its traditions and taboos. The blending of the two societies is suggested by the Pocahontas-like love story that evolves between the one of the leaders of the colonists and the daughter of the local chieftain. This story, in which a technologically primitive and an advanced society meld peacefully and fruitfully, serves as a counter example to the domination of the all-powerful Shing in *City of Illusions*.

*City of Illusions*, set over a thousand years after *Worlds of Exile*, shows that the two societies on Werel have flowered into one great civilization. They have also built a space ship to carry them back to see for themselves why they have had no communication with the Alterrans' ancestral planet, which we learn for the first time is Earth. But in this novel, the focus is not on the society of Werel and its evolution, but the societies of earth, and their lack of evolution.

One reason for the stagnation of earthly society is that the Shing have also destroyed and altered historical records, so that the people of Earth have little sense of what they were. As Falk's first mentor Zove (of the forest community) explains to him, "They {the Shing} killed knowledge, they burned books, but what may be worse, they falsified what was left. They slipped in the Lie...We aren't sure of anything concerning the Age of the League; how many of the documents are forged? ....They let us be as long as we stay here in our cage of ignorance..." (228). In short, the Shing seem like the quintessential colonial or hegemonic power, controlling a numerically superior population of natives and native cultures by dividing them from one another and rewriting or suppressing their history. The Shing have done to Earth what Franz Fanon asserts the colonial powers did to their subject peoples: "not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brains of all form and content....it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (210).

The Shing also co-opt their subjects by bringing them to their city, Es Toch, to be "educated" and "civilized," convincing them of an alternate version of history and of the superiority of Shing ethics, which they claim is based on a reverence for all life. Some of these

people are indeed convinced, others seem to be mind-controlled zombies, and others a combination of the two. This practice is not quite the same as the way in which the colonial empires of Europe attempted to co-opt the upper classes of their colonies, which was a far more complex and contradictory process as well as more widespread. Nevertheless, these manipulative tactics sound familiar to anyone who has studied the history of colonialism.

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that the Shing simply “are” the great imperial powers of the past and present. They are more evocative than a mere parallel would be. For one thing, they are not exploiting and destroying the land under their control. America has become the wilderness it was before the coming of the white settlers. This suggests comparisons to what the control of the white settlers did to the once unspoiled land of America. In addition, the subject peoples have been allowed to retain two important markers of identity: their languages and their religions. Since the Shing consider all earthly religion and philosophy to be ignorant superstition and thus no threat, the people of earth have allowed been allowed to retain their “canons,” which seem to be mixture of Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, and American Transcendentalism. The Shing have not pressured the inhabitants of earth to read their narratives while estranging them from the language in which their own narratives were written. However, the literature that the forest community retains are texts such as the Tao Te Ching and the writings of Henry David Thoreau, isolated relics of an unremembered past which can provide individual comfort and spiritual support, but which cannot give them a united sense of national or planetary identity. Concerning language, various cultures speak their own languages, while also using an inter-galactic lingua franca to address one another and the Shing. (The Shing, more wisely than the real-world imperialists, speak their own language only among themselves, so that it acts as a secret code). Having her Earth characters retain these elements of identity allows Le Guin to focus more fully on the effect of the loss of narrative, both on a social level, history, and an individual level, literature.

The implications of the mind-speech metaphor are vital to understanding this novel. As the novel opens, the literate people of earth are capable of mind-speech, but they seldom use mind-speech anymore. They believe mind-speech makes deception impossible because “Between thought and sent thought is no gap; they are one act. There is no room for the lie” (231). However, this very characteristic makes mind-speech dangerous. Falk later reflects that “A free man can speak freely, but a slave or a fugitive must hide the truth and lie” (231). Because they can never be sure of the motives

of anyone outside their community, they fear revealing their intentions. Thus, it seems no coincidence that literature has disappeared as mind-speech became increasingly dangerous. In *Worlds of Exile*, the connection between mind-speech and literature was suggested when the Tevarian woman Rolery is confused by what the Alterrans mean when they use the phrase “the books say,” when she can’t hear them speaking. Are books like mind-speech, she asks. Her husband answers no, and then, thinking carefully, agrees that it is very like. Mind-speech gives the power to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, as a common literary language does when combined with literary sensitivity and empathy. Mind-speech, moreover, is “the most perfect form of communication,” (231) as literary language is for the non-telepathic of the real world.

The forest community in which Falk first lives does have a counter-narrative to that of the Shing, but it is a fragmentary and static oral tradition which only a few people know and which cannot be objectively scrutinized. They believe they were once part of a united planetary civilization that traveled through space, until the Shing destroyed their civilization, depopulated the earth, and then colonized it. However, they have no current literature and they have no detailed written history; this lack of narrative is destroying them as individuals and as communities. Here, Hauruki Murakami’s concept of the function of narrative in shaping identity is helpful in understanding exactly what this loss of continuing narrative means. Murakami suggests “Humans ... cannot live very long without some sense of a continuing story” (231). Narratives of self, he explains, the stories about ourselves that we invent out of bits and pieces of the culture around us, help us make sense of our memories. Indeed, they determine how and what we remember. And they are what enable us to “heal the loneliness of being an isolated individual in the world” (231). The writer’s job, Murakami says, is to provide his fellow beings with “complex multi-layered” (232) narratives so that they do not fall prey to simplistic, dangerous ones. The Earth natives of *City of Illusions* lack any such complex narratives, and so they do fall prey to simplistic narratives, as we see in the various individuals and cultures Falk encounters. The effect of the loss of narrative also works on the level of nations and societies. As Edward Said suggests, cultural narratives also give people a basis for identity, a way of thinking about themselves which they can then question and reinvent as the society evolves (229).

Because their narratives have been destroyed, the people of Earth live in isolation and fear, and because they live in isolation and fear, they can invent no new narratives. The eastern forest community in which Falk first stays has no new art because there is no larger

community with which to share ideas, and they fear revealing their true thoughts and feelings to anyone they haven't known since birth, hence their reluctance to use mind-speech or literature. According to Le Guin, "Serenity and monotony arose from the isolation" (225), the monotony of life without art or hope.

If mind-speech is art, culture, literature, love, empathy, and all the other vital human connections it seems to represent, then another important question arises. What is implied by the fact that the Shing, unlike the natives of earth, have found a way to lie with mind-speech? Can literature and culture lie in the way that the Shing's mind-speech lies? And why is it only the Shing, the alien conqueror, who can use mind-speech in this way? Is the literature of the conqueror then—a conqueror—a kind of lie? Post-colonial criticism would suggest that it is—that literature can serve to distort history and further the aims of an authoritarian structure by creating master-narratives, as Edward Said has argued (11-15).

Le Guin need not have time-travelled a decade into the future and read Edward Said's *Orientalism* to have realized that literature and all the positive concepts that mind-speech represents can lie. It is implicit in the Taoist philosophy used throughout the novel that everything contains a counterbalancing and complementary force. Thus if literature is a great truth, it must also contain falsehood and be balanced by falsehood, or at least, by narratives which are sometimes lies, sometimes illusions, and sometimes alternative truths. All of this can make literature a lie at the same time that is a truth, or a swirl of conflicting truths, instead of The Truth. Essentially, Le Guin is implying metaphorically what post-colonial critics later postulated as a literary and political theory.

Mind-speech, and using mind-speech to lie, however, is an open metaphor. Lying with mind-speech seems to be a metaphor for any intimate and trusted form of deep communication that can be used to conceal and deceive, as perhaps all can. It could be the imperialistic use of literature. It could also be a metaphor for the mass media, a form of communication which people tend to believe and which has had such a role in shaping, informing, and deforming public opinion. The emphasis on the Shing's penchant for visual illusion would seem to suggest this reading as well. In an evocative metaphor, the Shing's city, Es Toch, is build of semitransparent plastic and suspended about an enormous canyon (the Grand Canyon?), suggesting the emptiness and artificiality of the Shing culture's values and ideas. They are plastic with nothing underneath it. The description of Es Toch also makes it sound a bit like Hollywood. It isn't a question of deceptive mind-speech's being literature *or* mass media. It could well be both



as once, since both have the power to use narrative as propaganda. The lies of mind-speech, moreover, are part of a larger theme within the novel concerning the difficulty of distinguishing what is true and what is not, what can be relied upon and what cannot. Much of the novel seems to suggest that there are no certainties, both a modernist and a post modern concept.

The novel's emblem of mind-razing is also metaphorically important. At the beginning of the novel, the blank person who later becomes Falk has been mind-razed. He doesn't know who he is, literally, and he becomes the person that the forest community shapes both with their formal teaching and with their treatment of him. Because they were kind, he goes out into the world like a well-brought up child, far too trusting, loyal, and truthful to escape the traps that the Shing lay for him—such as Estrel. The person he was, Ramarren, would have known better. When the Shing decide to restore the Ramarren personality, the Falk personality, they think, will be gone, because all of the memories that he acquired as Falk were not part of Ramarren's experience. This raises many questions about the degree to which people are their memories and their experiences, both individually and collectively, and what happens to personality when the memories of those experiences are distorted or erased. What is an individual person if not his memories, for within those memories are his values and beliefs as well as his sense of continuing consciousness? If the workings of the mind itself can be changed by external forces, then how is anyone to know if what they perceive and what they believe are "true" even in a personal sense? Mind-razing might have been suggested by the techniques of brainwashing, the use of electro-shock therapy, and indeed any of the ways in which memory can be altered and/or destroyed, whether for supposedly benign purposes or as an oppressive government's tool of control. Like Murakami, *Le Guin* seems to be exploring the use of psychology and technology to violate the mind and the self, as well as raising questions about the subjectivity of reality.

The horrifying process of mind-razing parallels on a personal level what the Shing did to the whole planet in destroying its records and attempting to rewrite its history. This raises larger questions about human history and the politics of identity and control. When you take away or distort a culture's history, is this the same as destroying a person's memories? Can you then easily convince a people of their inferiority? Does it work as a means of control? These questions are relevant because Native Americans, African Americans, and the colonized peoples of the world have been subject to the destruction, distortion, or removal of their cultural history to varying degrees. If we

look at the various cultures Falk encounters, a pattern emerges.

The Forest People Falk first encounters seem to live a good life, as Falk admits to the head of the Forest Household, Zove. However, this appearance is deceiving. Zove also points out to him, "We hide from the Shing. Also we hide from what we were. .. We keep a little knowledge, but we do nothing with it. But once we used that knowledge to weave a pattern of life like a tapestry across night and Chaos" (228). And indeed, they do seem like a stagnant society, living from day to day, not content with remembering what they once were, but afraid to plan improvements for the future. They are like any people trying to live their daily lives under a dictatorship, trying to escape official notice by not standing out in any way from the rest.

And some of the Forest People live in considerably more fear than Zove's household, which has no direct encounter with the Shing. The group that Falk next encounters, in what he calls the House of Fear, drug him with a truth serum and imprison him, assuming before he even speaks that he will lie to them. In treating him brutally and in killing outsiders, whom they think are all "servants of the Other. ...tool-men," (240) they think they are proving that "We are men... free men, killers" (240). Deprived of the power to create, which Zove had rightly pointed out is one of the things that makes humans fully human, they resort to killing as a means of asserting a false freedom. They are doing exactly what beleaguered communities in the historical world do. Speaking of the violence in the Middle East and elsewhere, the French/Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf has written, "Any human community which feels humiliated or fears for its existence will tend to produce killers. And these killers will commit the most dreadful atrocities in the belief that they are right to do so" (24) which is exactly the way in which the men in the House of Fear react. Yet their weapons are puny in comparison to those of the Shing, so their acts are not really of significant defiance or defense. They succeed primarily in preventing other humans from contacting them, which plays directly into the hands of the Shing.

The next group Falk encounters, the Basnasska Nation, are culturally less sophisticated but even more brutal. Initially, they seem a bit like the Plains Indians because of their name and the fact that they are referred to as a nation. They also live on cattle the way the Plains Indians did on buffalo. However, they are not Native Americans but descendants of the people of the League of All Worlds, now reduced to barbarism out of paranoia. They are certainly far less developed than the Plains Indians, who were of course an evolving culture which had quickly adapted to the presence of horses by becoming great light cavalrymen (and women). Unlike the Plains

people in which women were a respected part of the community, the Basnasskans abuse women, especially sexually, which they see as a way of establishing status and manliness. They are less like Native Americans than Hell's Angels. Their violent ways help to explain why the civilized societies cling so desperately to the remnants of their pasts. To lose those memories of the past would seem to be to become like the Basnasskans, people who, "cut their roots from the human past" (265).

Like the people in the House of Fear, the Basnasskans make up for the lack of ability to create and innovate by violence. They also are ruled by conformity. Le Guin perceptively writes, "The more defensive the society, the more conformist" (262), and the conformity itself is one of the reasons for their failure to evolve. It seems also to be a confused response to the loss of their previous identity that they see everything as a threat. The Shing do not directly threaten them—indeed, the Shing seem to be the source of their weapons—but everything and everyone else in the world does. The existence of difference within the group seems in itself a threat to their identity, and yet they need an Other, the people upon whom they prey, in order to feel who they are by contrast. (Very similar ideas about the relationship among difference, identity, and violence were later explored by David Wood in his essay "Identity and Violence" in which he sought to explain the horrific violence and sexual abuse that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia). Le Guin writes of the Basnasska, "they were less a community than a club or a herd, independent members of one entity. In the effort to attain security, independence and privacy were of course suspect" (264). It is this single affiliation as identity which enables them to see anyone different from them as legitimate prey. Again, as Maalouf suggests, "the notion that reduces identity to one single affiliation encourages people to adopt an attitude that is ...intolerant, domineering...and frequently changes them into killers" (26). Like the people of the House of Fear, they are too technologically backward to be a threat to the Shing, and indeed serve their interests by preying upon anyone who, like Falk, tries to travel across their territory. Thus they keep the literate societies to the east and west isolated from one another.

The other two societies that Falk encounters are to some degree mediated through Estrel, whose interpretations concerning why these people act as they do are questionable. We know what they do and how they look through Falk's observations, but why they act as they do is explained by Estrel. This reinforces the theme of the difficulty of separating truth from lies, how to interpret the evidence one sees, and how one knows whom to trust. To the reader, the Bee-Keepers, who

give Falk and Estrel shelter when they have been lost in the desert, seem to be a kind of monastery or perhaps a Christian religious group rather like the Shakers. The name “Bee-Keepers” also suggests the Mormons. The members of this group all wear crosses. The group contains both men and women, but the women dress as men and all seem to have taken vows of chastity and silence. There are no children or elderly in the community, which Estrel explains by saying they take women captive and breed them “like sows” (278) to bring new members into their community. However, some knowledge of the Shakers and monasticism would suggest simply that people do not join the community until they are adults and can understand the meaning of their choice. Estrel also states that they practice ritual cannibalism and human sacrifice, which could be a misinterpretation or distortion of the Eucharist. On the other hand, the religion may indeed have degenerated to that point. Perhaps people join the Bee-Keepers voluntarily, in search of a collective identity to replace a heritage lost. Perhaps they seek personal identity through religion. Their society is so intense in its self-denial that it would seem to be a desperate attempt to find some kind of collective identity. Is it a distorted and debased version of Christianity, or is it living remnant of some Christian ideals? The Bee-Keeper’s charity to Falk and Estrel would suggest the latter. We don’t know. They do not seem to serve the aims of the Shing directly. However, their vows of chastity prevent an increase in the human population, and their silence prevents the dissemination of a counter-narrative. Again, they seem to be clinging to a remembered past rather than innovating and growing; chastity and silence may be ambiguous emblems of both their admirable dedication and their cultural sterility.

The final community Falk and Estrel encounter is the Kansas Enclave, a community centered on a benevolent and charismatic personality. This man could either be a madman, as Falk first thinks and Estrel avers, a kind of philosopher-king, or perhaps the wizard of Oz. This savior is black, and yet claims descent from “the Yellow Emperor” (290). His aquiline features suggest Caucasian ancestry as well. He seems to represent a blending of ethnicities (“races”), the very multicultural and multi-affiliational identity which Maalouf advocates as an antidote to communal violence. Moreover, the “king’s” delusions of grandeur (his kingdom seems to be a large ranch) also seem to be at the same time a belief in the potential nobility of mankind. Again, we find the concept that we don’t know the reality of what we are seeing, and that seemingly contradictory realities can exist at once.

Within the context of the novel, the Kansans seem to suggest

that if some remnants of the old civilization can be preserved and if it has leaders who can blend the remnants in new ways rather than just repeating old patterns, a society can rebuild itself even after part of its history and culture has been destroyed, as long as the hegemonic power allows this. However, the blind adherence of the followers to their leader also makes the community politically suspect. Despite its attractiveness, the Kansas Enclave is certainly very different from the Kropotkin influenced socialist anarchy that Le Guin advocates, and which she explores in *The Dispossessed* (Cummins 106). Even the most hopeful community is still maimed, still more of a cult than a community.

To what extent are the societies mind-razed and colonized? The implications of the narrative are ambiguous. Other than the Basnasskans and other non-literate societies, most of the groups have retained a fragmentary counter-narrative which serves as a means of limited psychological resistance. It is hard to destroy the collective memory of a literate culture. However, the partial destruction can make it even more difficult to separate truth from lies, history from myth. Moreover, while the cultures are partially intact, the people are still deprived of the challenges that foster creativity. Hating the enemy has become part of the cultural identity of each group, a hatred which in itself absorbs far too much of the society's collective energy, twisting and distorting each society's view of itself. It would be safer to say that the literate societies, at least, have not been mind-razed completely, but their identities have been altered. The destruction and distortion of history seems to have created social pathologies that only some of the societies can begin to recover themselves from, and even then, the recovery is questionable.

On an individual level, Le Guin gives us two examples of colonized minds and raises the question of whether or not the colonized mind can decolonize itself. The answer Le Guin posits is a tentative no, but like all of Le Guin's answers, there is also a yes embedded within the no. The possibility seems to depend on the degree of cultural destruction and on the individual person.

First, let us look at what it has done to two parallel characters on an individual level. The two characters who have not been mind-razed but who have been "educated" by the Shing, Estrel and the boy Orry, are extreme examples of people who have been cut from their own culture and obliged to live marginally in another. Estrel may also be under some form of mind-control all along, which may simply be a metaphorical way of suggesting the degree to which her mind has been colonized and indoctrinated. Estrel, Falk has noted, has a "curious passivity," going along with whatever he wishes. When they

first have sex, it is because she assumes that if she refused, he would rape her. Then when he says that what he wants is “human warmth,” (275) and asks if she wants the same, she just says yes. Later he tries to explain the “want of response, that had seemed almost a betrayal of his own strong feelings” by telling himself that she “had borne too much and could not respond” (275). Her intellectual passivity seems to parallel her sexual passivity, with rape being a metaphor for mind-control and colonization of the mind. She is emotionally devastated to the point of being will-less because she was brought up by the Shing, beings who felt nothing for her and used her as a tool, at the same time convincing her of their own moral superiority. She cannot question this. Throughout the journey, she tells Falk again and again that the Shing are good, that they have brought peace, and that they revere all life.

When Estrel later confronts Ramarren after the Falk personality has supposedly been erased, her anger is not turned against the Shing, who have forced her to betray her lover, but against Falk-Ramarren. Despite all that has happened to her, she still believes, “There is no Enemy” (344). It is central to her beliefs. She needs to believe that, it would seem, to justify herself, which may be part of how the colonized mind effect works. She also seems to believe in her inferiority, when she again and again defends the Shings’ noble morality. Ultimately, she is pitiful, as pitiful as if she had been literally mind-razed. Ramarren, with his mind-speech awareness, quickly identifies her as “psychotic.” With her, the cultural mind-razing has worked. Her colonized mind is psychotic, as perhaps all are, at least metaphorically.

Orry is also a pitiful case, but slightly more promising because he hasn’t been subjected to the same degree of cultural destruction. He has kept his memories of Werel and his native language. However, he was still a naïve and uncritical child when the Shing began to teach him their version of the truth, and he is too lonely and confused to doubt them seriously. Falk says of him, “He was fluent, incoherent, childish. Did he know his loneliness, orphaned and alien, living out his childhood and adolescence among people who kept themselves apart, who did not touch him, who stuffed him with words but left him so empty of reality?” (324). At one point, Falk thinks, “The boy had been so mind-handled that he was essentially their instrument.” (324) However, because he knows something of his own heritage, Orry is also a more complete human being than Estrel. The blending of cultures, the fact that he knows another language, had another life, and knows other ways makes Orry isolated and lonely, but also makes him capable of trust. It is this trust that enables both him and Ramarren to

return to Werel. He is confused about the situation when Ramarren takes over the space ship, but he trusts Ramarren and follows his orders. The key to the hope he represents seems to be in whether or not he can find a way of blending his two experiences the way that Falk and Ramarren were able to blend their identities.

It would seem from this that Le Guin thinks individual minds can be colonized to a much greater degree than cultures, and Estrel and Orry show exactly what it means to have a colonized mind. It means to accept as truth the lies of a culture and community that see you as irredeemably inferior and evaluates you only in terms of your utility to them. The only person who seems to be able live among the Shing and not become a victim of their mind-colonization is Falk-Ramarren, and he is an unusual case and his methods of resistance are a bit too pat. Arguably, his mind has never really been colonized in the first place, since he is confused by the Shing rather than fully believing them, and never accepts that he is their inferior.

Nevertheless Falk and Ramarren resist the Shing only by becoming Falk-Ramarren, a blended personal and cultural identity. If Falk remains merely Falk, he has no way of fighting back against the Shing. When he is only Ramarren, he is also helpless. Ramarren is skeptical of what the Shing tell him, but he lacks Falk's knowledge of exactly what they have done and why. It is only when he can switch back and forth between the two personalities, that of the Earthman and that of the man of Werel, that he can defeat them. The answer lies in blending and then going beyond the original synthesis, just as happened on Werel itself when the two species, the Tevarians and the Alterrans, were able to blend into one culture, with radical changes to both. Hybridity seems to be an answer. This seems to suggest that one can resist mental colonization by becoming multicultural or bicultural.

However, the blending of cultures that saves Falk-Ramarren does not seem to include much blending with the colonizing culture. Significantly, Le Guin has made the Shing unable to interbreed with humans. Again, sterility seems to be used as a metaphor for the inability to adapt and create. Certainly, the Shing do not seem to have adopted any of the ways of the people of Earth. Moreover, the very artificiality and falseness of the Shing culture makes it seem sterile. At one point Falk thinks of Es Toch that it is "Not the Place of Men...there was no flow of learning or goods. The money was a mere largesse of the Shing, for there was no economy to give the place a true vitality of its own" (327). To use the terminology of post-colonialism, Es Toch is metropolis, as it is quite literally as well. It is the only actual city on the continent, perhaps on Earth. The rest of the communities

that Falk encountered are the periphery, a periphery which has no way of confronting the metropolis, a periphery that is always under surveillance and control. It is also a periphery about which the citizens of the metropolis know nothing, except the false knowledge that all the natives are savages. Like the concept of metropolis, and unlike most real cities, it produces no goods. Ramarren observes, "Es Toch was self-contained, self-nourished, rootless; all its brilliance and transience of lights and machines and faces....its luxurious complexity was built across a chasm in the ground, a hollow place" (327). It is the perfect emblem of a seat of hegemonic power, since all that it produces are intangibles: fear, power, control.

However, the Shing are not the usual evil space invaders of 50s movies, but far more subtle and complex. In fact, they bear uncomfortable resemblances to the American government and society of both 1966 and 2009, and indeed to any hegemonic or colonial power. The Shing are aloof, polite, intelligent, ironic, and plausible. They gently mock their detractors (like Falk) and put forth their own interpretations of events and plans for the future as both practical and moral. They sound very much like the people Noam Chomsky would two years later (in 1968, but the two books might have been written at about the same time) describe as the "new Mandarins," the Washington architects and supporters of the Vietnam War.

Like the hegemonic powers of today and the recent past, the Shing control not just by the threat of force, which they themselves downplay, but by illusion. They are virtually a case study in the use of thought—control and propaganda. Le Guin seems to be using their physical illusions and uncertainties as metaphor for the ways in which they keep their opponents mentally off balance and remain impossible to confront and defeat. The Shing look exactly like human beings, so that it is very difficult to tell who is Shing and who is not. They often project holograms of themselves so that it is impossible to tell if a Shing is really present or not. They cross-dress, so that gender becomes uncertain as well. These physical things serve to keep any opponent (Falk, for instance) constantly uncertain and thus more susceptible to mental manipulation. Everything appears to be what it is not. The illusions are not unlike those of the Vietnam era mass media and administration spokespeople described by Noam Chomsky, which made objections to national policy appear to be challenges to democracy and legality, and the continuation of morally questionable policies appear pragmatic and necessary (163). Moreover, these physical illusions of the Shing also suggest the elusive nature of any hegemonic power. How can one confront it? Who is really there, and who is really in charge? (How does one confront a



colonial empire, or Washington, or the Soviet Union?)

Like their physical ambiguity, the mental games the Shing play can leave any critic so confused that it is easier to give up than to try to reason matters through, much less to try to devise strategies of resistance. Estrel seems to have given up, through her passivity, and Orry has turned to drugs to escape thought. The reader also learns so many different versions of events that it is unclear exactly what the Shing are or what they have done. They may simply have taken advantage of Earth's and the League's weaknesses, moved in, and established order, as they saw it. On the other hand, they may have been brutal invaders who destroyed the civilizations of all the planets of the league by using deceptive mind-speech to project non-violent intentions. Moreover, their narrative—with its mixture of fact, falsehood, and half truth—is internally consistent. When one believes one part of their narrative, it then becomes easy to believe the whole thing. This is what makes the Shing so confusing and makes it so difficult for anyone who comes in contact with them to think clearly about how to resist their power. In their disinformation campaigns, they are like various governments which manipulate their citizens, allies and enemies through a mixture of blatant lies and half-truths, with just enough fact mixed in to make the assertions credible. Again, they seem like the American political intelligentsia described by Chomsky, who, he claims, have achieved a high degree of thought-control while retaining enough “openness” “that pronouncements conforming to the state religion (i.e. foreign policy and the myth of American altruism) are not dismissed out of hand as propaganda” (165).

The Shing also seem to be a version of any empire that justifies conquest in the name of noble ideals. In our world, these ideals have been saving human souls, following manifest destiny, spreading civilization to the dark areas of the globe, or promoting democracy and human rights. The Shing's noble ideal is reverence for all life. Ramarren comes to believe that the Shing reverence for life might not be a total lie, but at least a partial if misleading truth. They don't eat meat and seem to avoid directly killing people. It's a fine point of equivocation, since of course it is only by chance that Falk did not die as a result of being mind-razed. He had the luck to be found by people who decided to help him rather than kill him. However, it isn't through brute power that the Shing rule. Falk-Ramarran reflects, “In order to control populations they evidently pitted tribe against tribe, starting the war but letting humans do the killing” (354). Yet they do seem to believe that killing anything is wrong. If it is a lie, it is a lie that at least some of the Shing believe themselves. They may have once truly believed in this ideal. Some may still. On the one hand, the Shing

reverence for all life may be a mere slogan used as a ploy to create the illusion of superior ethics, a way of winning “hearts and minds,” so to speak. It may also be sincere. It may be both at once. The ambiguity is part of what makes the Shing so nebulous and insidious.

Perhaps, with Shing society’s collective powers of mind-control, individual Shing are unable to see the contradictions between their beliefs and actions, just as many human beings have, for various social and psychological reasons, been unable to see the contradictions between their own values and their institutions (liberty and slavery, for instance, in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century America). At one point, Falk thinks, “Laws are made against an impulse a people fears most in itself. Do not kill was the Shing’s vaunted single Law. All else was permitted: which meant, perhaps, that there was little else they really wanted to do. Fearing their own profound attraction to death, they preached Reverence for Life, fooling themselves at last with their own lie” (325). Certainly, the Shing seem to be blind to contradictions between their rhetoric and their behavior. Perhaps this also comes from the fact that the Shing seem to be a collective entity. They have individual names, but the characters seem indistinguishable. They seem to be an embodiment of collective thought, which is what happens when a society does not permit individual questioning of received opinion.

This is not only true of their supposed reverence for life, but of much of the rest of their society and again, there are many real-world parallels. The Shing are a highly hierarchal society which believes itself to be a democracy. They have convinced Orry, for instance, that Shing society is superior to his own society. The Shing, Orry tells Falk, are democratic and egalitarian, unlike “us.” At the same time, Falk notices the patronizing contempt with which Orry treats anyone not of his rank. As a “guest” of the Shing, he is an honorary lord. The Shing are all lords. Others are servants. The natives are all backward savages. The Shing are civilized. They are civilized, they think, in part because they have no hierarchy, conveniently ignoring the fact that they are at the top of a hierarchy based on lineage. This to some degree parallels the strange irony of the fact that most of the colonial powers—England, France, The United States (concerning Native Americans, for instance)—were democracies which believed themselves to be egalitarian at the same time that they treated peoples of other cultures as inferiors.

The Shing are clearly not merely an evil Other (or the evil self), however, in the way in which Le Guin presents them. Even the supposed truth that they are liars is called into question as part of the novel’s questioning of the nature of reality itself. Falk-Ramarren asks, “The Shing, the Enemy, the Liars...Did they *in truth lie*?” (368 italics

mine). A striking paradox is suggested by that phrase about the very nature of truth and the human ability to comprehend it. Falk-Ramarren goes on to muse that the Shing themselves might not be as power-hungry and deceitful as they appear, which again makes problematic any kind of knowledge, reality, or truth. He thinks, "Perhaps the essence of their lying was a profound, irremediable lack of understanding. They could not get in touch with men. They had used that and profited by it....but had it been worth their while, after all? Exiles, or pirates or empire builders from some distant star, determined to rule over races whose minds made no sense to them, whose flesh was sterile to them...Alone, isolated, deaf-mutes ruling deaf-mutes in a world of delusions" (368). The Shing cannot blend so their society stays static, or rather, devolves, since they no longer travel around the galaxy. Is this the future of any power that fails to compromise, blend and adapt? All the Shing can add is their story, which goes with Ramarren back to Werel in the form of Kenyak, the Shing he has kidnapped. Thus, paradoxically, something of them may blend even though they seem the essence of sterility.

Let us consider the final question of how hegemony can be resisted. The plot of the story solves the problem of an oppressed Earth by having Falk-Ramarren leave the Earth as a messenger to bring a version of Earth's story to his own people. In the real world, such deliverance for the subject peoples of the world seems unlikely. Nevertheless, an actual solution may be suggested in that what Ramarren takes away with him is his story, an honest if subjective account of what he has experienced. He takes back a counter-narrative that says cultures must blend to grow.

Blending, hybridity, spirituality, these seem to be the most effective tools of resistance to hegemony. The philosophy of the Forest Community and the Kansas Enclave provides its believers with an inner peace that enables them to endure the Shing's domination without accepting this domination as right. In addition, this blended philosophy seems to allow each belief system to retain much of its original character, except that each one is no longer exclusive. Different individuals and societies emphasize different canons, but all the canons exist in harmony. It seems to be a model of what true multiculturalism might look like. We also see the earth societies which seem healthiest—the Forest Community and the Kansas Enclave—are societies which blend cultures and peoples. Their spiritual development and open-mindedness are their strongest tools of psychological resistance, although they do not seem to work as a means of political liberation.

*City of Illusions* is a nuanced and artistic political novel which

makes an important addition to the discussion of the relationships among literature, culture, and power. The novel's fantasy genre is particularly germane here. Unlike a realistic novel or indeed a novel of other more conventionally literary genres, a fantasy novel like *City of Illusions* frees the events from any particular time and place and thus it is not tied to the colonial experience of a particular group of people with a sense of grievance against others. The fantasy form is what makes this novel an exploration of ideas rather than political advocacy. The Shing are and are not the American military industrial complex and the British Empire and the Conquistadors, and the Bee-Keepers and Bassnaskans. All the rest are and are not the various colonized peoples of the earth. They are logical extrapolations derived from all of these relationships and from none of them. They are what could happen given the premise of a colonized earth. Nevertheless, the novel seems particularly relevant today, when the United States is the world's only super-power and is in a position to abuse that power just as the Shing do. Indeed, some of the intellectuals of the Third World seem to view the United States as a dangerous and destructive power that threatens to overwhelm other cultures and civilizations. This is the image of the United States suggested in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in the political writing of Arundhati Roy, to name but two. In this climate, *City of Illusions* seems prophetic.

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