
Colonizing the Universe: Science Fictions Then, Now, and in the (Imagined) Future

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In an 1882 essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, titled “How Shall the American Savage be Civilized?,” George S. Wilson, First Lieutenant of the Twelfth U.S. Infantry, proposes the organization of a reservation for Pima Indians, one that would become the model for colonizing other tribal peoples indigenous to the Americas. Motivating Wilson’s proposal is an anxiety similar to that which the then-nascent science fiction literature, and later film, industry would make central: colonize or be colonized.¹ According to Wilson, there are “three courses” beings of a “superior race” may take when confronting “inferior and barbarous” peoples: “exterminate the savages,” “let them alone,” or “accept them as dependents of the government” (597). While U.S. policy toward American Indians has, at various times and in differing places, followed each of these “courses,” what would Wilson have Euro-Americans do given a similar — albeit reversed — colonizing scenario? “Suppose some superior race should come from another planet,” Wilson warns, “and find us as inferior and barbarous, according to their standard, as we consider the Indians, when measured by our standards. And suppose they should conquer and put us on reservations” (597). Unable to imagine colonization on any other terms than those practiced by Euro-Americans, Wilson desires a violent resolution: “Perhaps our first lesson in the new life would be to learn to use with precision our conquerors’ improved fire-arms, and to slaughter a thousand of them at one shot” (597). Wilson’s fear that Native Americans might act as he supposes Euro-Americans would is likely what prods him to claim that the colonizing of Native Americans on reservations is the kinder, gentler, safer policy. Besides, if Native Americans are to be “let . . . alone,” Wilson believes, “The lead required to shoot at them would cost more than bread to feed them” (597).

Despite — or perhaps in spite of — scientific and technological advances, in the morning of the 21st century the universe registers in the popular imagination much as it did in Wilson’s 19th-century mind. While orthodox Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and people of other creeds may profess to believe otherwise, to many the universe is a “place” habited and inhabitable, by friendly and

hostile beings, a place where, sooner or later, humans will dare to travel, point camcorders, and plant flags. This is, after all, the fantasy of the science fiction literature and film industry — not to mention NASA² — and of the many space-minded people whose web sites mean to enable galactic colonization. While the science fiction industry purports to be “new,” to use as vehicle for its tenor the most advanced sciences and technologies — even when merely inventions of convenience (rather than necessity), such as those hand-held communicating devices that made it possible for *Star Trek*'s Enterprise crew members Captain James T. Kirk and Mr. Spock to converse over long distances — its “new” is nonetheless delimited by the ranges and productions of the human imagination. As Fredric Jameson argues, the science fiction industry’s “deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future” (153): most science fiction “does not seriously attempt to imagine the ‘real’ future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (152). If First Lieutenant Wilson’s projection into the universe of hostile invaders of earth may have been extraordinary in 1882, it would be, and is, quite commonplace today — consider, for one recent example among a plethora, 1996’s *Independence Day*. What Wilson’s fantasy and *Independence Day* have in common is fear of colonization, which for the most part informs the whole of the science fiction industry’s productions. That is, the literature of earthly colonization, produced largely by colonizing Europeans and Americans, and those early colonists’ constructions of an “other” have informed ways the science fiction industry has understood its relationship to more recently constructed Others — those allegedly from outer-space. As a result, the science fiction industry has essentially borrowed from, technologically modernized, and recast the plots, scenes, and tropes of the literature of earthly colonization — but without, except in rare cases, questioning, critiquing, or moving beyond the colonizing impulse.

But apparently this would be news to the science fiction industry. Most books written about science fiction begin by trying to define its subject, offering an answer to the question, “What is science fiction?”³ Most formulations tend to claim one of several elements — science and technology, human, or change, in whatever form — make a fiction a science fiction. In 1961, however, Kingsley Amis foregrounded something since oft overlooked when, following Edmund Crispin’s work on the detective story, Amis claimed that the “hero” of a science fiction tale is often the plot itself, and then the “idea” that the plot must resolve (137). Put another way, the motivations and resolutions of a generic science fiction plot are often its heroic or seminal qualities. Underlying most science fiction plots is the

colonial narrative, whether or not readers and viewers of science fiction readily recognize it. The term “science” implies fact, knowledge, certitude, while the addition of “fiction” on the one hand seems to contradict an implicit scientific code of accountability but on another points to the active role of the imagination in the creation and the experience of science fiction, whether literary or cinematic. Those experiencing science fiction may accept and thus believe as plausible or may reject its science as well as the cultural context enabling the trajectory of the plot.⁴ But, as Darko Suvin has shown, a science fiction text is senseless without “a given socio-historical context”: “Outside of a context that supplies the conditions of making sense, no text can be even read.... Only the insertion of a text into a context makes it intelligible” (“Narrative Logic” 1). Science fiction productions, then, rely on what Suvin calls a “universe of discourse” to be intelligible (“Narrative Logic” 2). The “dark” sun in the galaxy of science fiction, I argue, is the imagination that informs science fiction, that takes from and revises earth history, puts it out there, in a (de)familiarized but cognitively plausible and contextually recognizable “future,” even if “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away....”

In very general terms, there are two basic types, and related plot-projections, of alien-contact science fiction films: one inward, one outward; one dealing with alien visitors to or invaders of earth, one chronicling the experiences of earthlings in space — in *Star Trek* parlance, that “final frontier.” In the former category, these aliens are sometimes well-meaning, friendly beings who drop by to help the inhabitants of earth mature, become universal citizens, such as in the 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*; the 1956 cult-classic *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, whose good alien Eros means to lend a hand to the humans he calls a “stupid” race; or the more recent 1996 production *Star Trek: First Contact*, which has Vulcans landing on earth to encourage its “primitive” inhabitants’ humanity to evolve. But more often these aliens who visit earth are hostile beings or bug-eyed monsters (BEMs) bent on destroying the planet and its inhabitants, enslaving humans and imposing a foreign regime, or assimilating them into another being — the latter of which is the plot-motivating intention of *First Contact*’s Borg. Often these sorts involve the fantasy of human control, which typically comes in two forms: a fantasy projected onto aliens who intend to take over or enslave the human body, such as in 1953’s *Invaders from Mars* or 1955’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, or a not so fantastic reality in which humans mean to control humans, as represented in *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Handmaid’s Tale* — and while these latter three are based on a literary text, each also has the all-too-familiar trope of a woman, and in these examples a white woman, seemingly in need of masculine protection. Sometimes it is not humans, however, but aliens who desire to mate with and control the

female of the species (ever since D.W. Griffith's 1915 production *Birth of a Nation* the threat of miscegenation has motivated many a plot and much violence) as one 1958 film made evident in its title, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, and another more bluntly in 1966, *Mars Needs Women*. Finally, in some instances the plot motivation of the earth-bound, alien-lacking science fiction production is the result of some aberrant or malign scientific project or of an environmental catastrophe, resulting in something as big as Godzilla, as misunderstood as the Frankenstein monster, as angry as a tomato, or as small as a fly.

But it is the latter sort of film, those projecting earthly desires and anxieties outward, into the universe, which are in question here. Of these, there are three basic sorts of master-plots or, to borrow from Jameson, "master-narratives" (148), which I call the explorative, the domesticative, and the combative. In the explorative model, the concern is with the "discovery" of inhospitable, alien wildernesses, and with the possibility of human contact with the often-unfriendly beings inhabiting these foreign worlds. In these cases, the focus is less on the culture or civilization of these otherworld beings than on the physical and psychological torment the galactic colonist experiences. This focus is very much in line with what Perry Miller called the Puritans' "errand into the wilderness,"⁵ where the concern is not on the effect the Puritans had on the local Pequot, Massachuset, Narraganset, Wampanoag, Pocasset, Nipuc, Nauset, Seneca, and Iroquois tribes but on the Puritans' project, experiences, and intellectual productions, which then justify the Puritan invasion. One critic of science fiction literature even goes so far as to claim that "the wilderness theme has now become the property" of science fiction (68).⁶ Clearly Frederick Jackson Turner was wrong in 1893 to call the frontier closed, for the westward gaze has merely moved upward (not to be confused with inward) toward what *Star Trek* perhaps too boldly called the *final* frontier.

The second type, which I call the domesticative, has largely to do with establishing a home, whether in the singular or plural as a small settlement, trading post, or larger colony somewhere out there. In these cases, confrontations with unusual environments and aliens are often more deadly, as there seems to be something universally opposed to successful human visitation and occupation of alien worlds. Chronicling the Puritans' attempt to establish a little colony in a "new" world, William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* is a direct precursor to this sort of narrative. In both the explorative and the domesticative models, the number of earthlings involved is generally relatively few — from one, as in the instance of *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, to a dozen, as in the example of *The Forbidden Planet*, to enough to comprise a small community, whether on *terra firma* or in a space-

station. No matter the number, the ultimate goal tends to remain the same: to seek out and settle — that is, colonize — *new* worlds.

Dominant in that most contemporary science fiction productions are of this type, the combative model takes several forms and tends to enlarge the scale of things. In this case the impulse is usually whole-scale conflict, with one civilization battling it out with another for existence or sometimes for something less immediate such as territorial or trade rights. Additionally, the combative, as the name suggests, tends to be more action-packed, or violent, and usually it is a violence directed at aliens or “others,” howsoever they may be raced. Earthly analogs are numerous and various (and nearly any past event shares affinities with the imagined future, as all come to determine it), including the battle at Troy of which Homer sang, naval warfare between the Spanish and British empires, and even World War II and its aftermath, the Cold War, which informed much of the best, and worst, American science fiction produced during the latter half of the 20th century.⁷ The combative model had an early example in the 1936 *Flash Gordon* flick, became household with the 78 episodes of the original *Star Trek* television series that ran from 1966 to 1969 and continues to find air-time, but did not come to fruition until 1977, with the birth of the *Star Wars* project and the many rogue copy-cats, such as the television series *Battlestar Galactica*, that would follow in its wake. The combative model is not apart from the explorative and domesticative models; rather, it represents a late, progressive stage in a continuum, whereby the earlier model-stages are subsumed as more efficient means of colonization are developed. But what differentiates the combative from the other models is not just the scale but also, as will be discussed below, a postmodern penchant for deflating space and collapsing time, for making the alien familiar and the familiar alien, the universe known and mapable.

Now, of course, there are numerous exceptions to the generalizations I have been making and am about to make. The science fiction industry is productive, its forms and concepts varied in broad and especially detailed ways (and the details are often what make a difference between science fiction films, since the projection of the plot and motivation of the narrative are usually similar). But even when a science fiction production does not seem directly to invoke or be informed by the colonial narrative, there remain the multifarious relations to colonialism, to its history, to the ways that it has shaped this old world. A production that directly evokes colonialism usually makes itself known through its alien-contact, and at that alien-contact in alien worlds — what ought to be called “universal science fiction,” the science fiction of space, a space that has been and is still being inscribed by the efforts of colonizers.

Two science fiction films clearly modeled on narratives of colonization are 1956's *Forbidden Planet* and 1964's *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*. While *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* provides an example of the explorative colonial narrative, *Forbidden Planet* contains elements of the explorative but is largely domesticative, even if the endeavor to domesticate the planet fails. Based on Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* essentially maintains the novel's plot while casting its scene on Mars. After astronaut Paul Mantee's spaceship and partner are destroyed in a crash-landing that Mantee alone survives, aliens visit the planet, bringing with them humanoid slaves, one of whom Mantee rescues and renames Friday. The film intentionally plays down the role of Friday as slave, making him instead a rather grateful friend-servant, but the theme remains apparent, as does the master-subordinate relationship. *Forbidden Planet*, based loosely on Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*,⁸ also has its servant, although in this case it is the laugh-generating robot Robby, prototype of so many robots yet to be invented, from those cooking, cleaning, and drink-making ones of the television comic *The Jetsons* to that whistling, portable video projector R2-D2. Some other parallels to *The Tempest* include Morbius as Prospero, his daughter a Miranda who has never seen any other man than her father, and Robby as Ariel. Extremely versatile and programmed for contentment, Robby is capable of doing anything demanded but one: hurting humans. However, *Forbidden Planet's* Caliban, the invisible monster that is allegedly Morbius' Id, has according to Morbius killed all other human explorers to the planet but he and his wife, who has since died. Where Shakespeare's Caliban verbally and violently counters Prospero's treatment of him, *Forbidden Planet*, like *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, waters down the enslavement theme, adopts the plot but removes the subjugation of one human by another. That, however, is generally the case in space: with rare exception, such as too much of the so-called dark-side in the spleen, humans do not do battle with humans.⁹

But on earth it is rarely a different story, as not only history but also narratives of colonization reveal. Much of the early literature of colonization treats the occupants of the lands being explored as less than human, as savage and uncivilized, and sometimes worse. Such denigration of cultures and peoples was to justify the colonization of "alien" peoples and lands, while touting the so-called superiority of the conquering colonizers. In this way, the colonizers defined, usually only for worse, both the people and the places they were exploring and exploiting. Curiously, the first known text that could be called science fiction as well as the first science fiction story written in English do not wholly follow this pattern.¹⁰ Modeled on and parodying the *Odyssey* while anticipating *Gulliver's Travels*, Lucian's *The True History*, written about 175 AD, is a comedic account of the travels of a

vessel, captained by a character named Lucian, that happens upon uncharted islands full of fantastic beings and vegetation; gets caught in a typhoon and lifted to “what looked like a big-island hanging in mid-air” but is earth’s moon (8); returns to earth only to be swallowed alive by a 170-mile-long whale, in which are forests, people, mermen, and other beings; and then escapes to continue the voyage, visiting along the way the Island of the Blest, which is occupied by Greek demigods, “kings who took part in the Trojan war” (41), notable characters such as Homer and Socrates, and other heroic figures, all of whom “give an impression of complete solidity” but are “disembodied spirits” (39). Part treatise on the sciences of astronomy and physics then being developed and part utopian fantasy, Bishop Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone: or, A Discourse of a Voyage Thither*, first printed in English in 1638, tells of one Domingo Gonsales’ creation of a bird-propelled flying machine that takes him to the moon, where he meets intelligent, non-human beings who, while advanced in knowledge well beyond Gonsales’ ken, are God-loving folks — “*Martin* in their language signifieth God” (31). Additionally, these Lunars, as Gonsales calls them, are purported to be far more civilized than earthlings: there is not a “Whoremonger amongst them” (39); they are monogamous for life; murder and corporeal punishment do not exist, and thus “they need there no Lawyers” (40); and since they “hate all vice,” the Lunars “live in such love, peace, and amitie, as it seemeth to bee another Paradise” (39).

Both of these texts are firmly rooted in the context of colonialism. As well, both are examples of the explorative model, with Lucian’s containing an element of the combative, albeit not on this planet. While *The True History* pre-dates what Europeans and, later, Americans have historically defined as the colonial age, the part of the tale that qualifies it as science fiction, rather than as fantasy or imaginative fiction, involves Lucian and his seamen in a battle for territorial and colonization rights. After being arrested by King Endymion’s Flying Squad, the “local police,” who fly about on huge, three-headed vultures — “each of their feathers is considerably longer and thicker than the mast of a fairly large merchant-ship” (9) — Lucian is asked to join in the war against Phaeton, king of the sun. Endymion, king of the moon, tells Lucian that the war has “been going on for ages” and explains that the war is the result of competing colonial enterprises:

It all started like this. I thought it would be a good idea to collect some of the poorer members of the community and send them off to form a colony on Lucifer, for it’s completely uninhabited. Phaeton got jealous and despatched [sic] a contingent of airborne troops, mounted on flying ants, to intercept us when we were half way there. We were hopelessly outnumbered and had to retreat, but now I’m going to have another shot at founding that colony, this time with full military support. (10)

Not that different from colonizing efforts that would occur, in earth time, some 1,700 years later, King Endymion's project is eugenics based (forcefully relocating some of the less desirable, "poorer members of the community") and has the force of "full military support" — a project supported and sanctioned by a political economy. Also establishing context for his readers, Godwin suggests how his book is to mean in relation to colonization in his preface, "To the Ingenious Reader":

In substance thou hast here a new discovery of a new world, which perchance may finde little better entertainment in thy opinion, than that of Columbus at first, in the esteeme of all men. Yet his than but poore espiall of America, betray'd unto knowledge soe much as hath since encreast into a vaste plantation. And the then unknowne, to be now of as large extent as all other the knowne world. (2)

First published a mere 31 years after the establishment of Jamestown in 1607, 27 years after *The Tempest*, nine years after the Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded, and the same year Anne Hutchinson was banished to the territory that would become Rhode Island, Godwin's preface, published in 1638, clearly places his science fiction within the discourse then being formed regarding the British empire's forages into "new" worlds. Apparently some of Godwin's contemporaries understood this, for a third, posthumous edition was included as a partially compressed text in Nathaniel Crouch's popular *View of the English Acquisitions ... in the East Indies*, in 1686.¹¹

But Godwin's treatment of Lunars and humans differs somewhat from that of the usual colonial narrative of the time in its mixed treatment of "others." Taken ill early in the narrative, Godwin's Gonsales is set ashore on an island to recuperate, "with a Negro to attend" him (9). Where Defoe 81 years later would have Friday be Crusoe's manservant slave, Godwin's Diego, his "companion at the cape" (10), lives alone and freely. Yet, Gonsales explains, "though hee were a fellow of good parts, [Diego] was ever content to be ruled by me" (9), which clearly establishes a master-subordinate political relationship and designates Diego the content slave and Gonsales the good master. In this way, *The Man in the Moone* also contains elements of the domesticative model. Moreover, the supremely intelligent, allegedly viceless Lunars relate to Gonsales that occasionally some of them are born "of a wicked or imperfect disposition" (39), so the Lunars send them away to "Earth, and change them for other children, before they shall have either abilitie or opportunitie to doe amisse among" the Lunars (40). Curiously, the Lunars send their degenerates to "a certaine high hill in the North of *America*," so that Gonsales "can easily beleeve [the people indigenous to the Americas] to be wholly descended of them, partly in regard of their colour, partly in regard of their continuall use of Tobacco which the *Lunars* use exceeding much" (40). But whether some or all

Native Americans are the offspring of intelligent but degenerate Lunars or are also the producers of the children exchanged for these Lunars who are then taken back to the “Paradise” that is the Moon to become superior Lunars themselves, Gonsales does not make clear.

Nonetheless, Godwin’s text does not directly engage in the usual colonial project’s dehumanizing practices of naming non-western peoples cannibals¹² — a theme perhaps best re-represented in the 1968 horror film *Night of the Living Dead* — and of attributing to them out-of-this-world features. The 1356 *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, in contrast, includes fantastic descriptions of headless men, each of whose torso contains eyes, nose, and mouth (8-9). Sir Thomas More in his 1516 *Utopia* continues in the Mandeville tradition, describing places where “All things are hideous terrible, loathsome, and unpleasant to behold; all things uncultivated and uncomely, inhabited with wild beasts and serpents, or at the leastwise with people that are no less savage, wild, and noisome than the very beasts themselves” (45-46). In 1596 Sir Walter Raleigh, in *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana*, followed the Mandeville-More line, writing not only of “those warlike women” the Amazons (92) — a likely analog for the 1958 *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman* — but also in direct response to Mandeville. Conceding that some may call it “mere fable,” Raleigh confirms Mandeville’s claim that there are beings who “have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and that a long train of hair groweth backward between their shoulders” (93). While such fantastic descriptions seem more an anomaly than the norm, consider how western empirical “science” has historically codified others. A case in point is the definition of the word “Negro” found in the 1798 first American-edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Round cheeks, high cheek-bones, a forehead somewhat elevated, a short, broad, flat nose, thick lips, small ears, ugliness, and irregularity of shape, characterize their external appearance. The Negro women have their loins greatly depressed, and very large buttocks, which give the back the shape of a saddle. Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the roots of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself. (qtd. in Eze 94)

Of course, science has come a long way in the more than 200 years since the above was written. But then it has not, given ways that “science” has continued to be employed, as will be discussed below, in a universe mapped out and defined by galactic colonists.

This is not to suggest that all science fiction films portraying “monsters” or BEMs have their roots in literary colonialist analogues; indeed, science fiction film history itself contains early types and models that later films, with the invention of better technology and special effects, have modified and expanded on. *Forbidden Planet*'s Robby is exemplary of the way an early type has been transformed as technological innovations make possible. But it should be apparent that most aliens and BEMs are to differing degrees personifications of human actualities and creations and, except in rare cases, act on very mammalian if not human impulses — such as the alien of the series of four films of that name who is protecting its brood against human encroachment and slavery. Despite the source of a given space monster or alien, what remains consistent with the early colonizing narratives is the general purpose of human space voyages — not just to “discover” so-called new worlds, but to map, catalog, and describe the resources and beings of other lands in order to open them up for trade, administration, or occupation. This latter purpose, after all, was the gist of Captain John Smith's voyage to the Americas, even if it was the Disneyfication of his limited experience with Pocahontas that mostly results in his being known today by anyone but academics. All of Smith's travel narratives serve the cause of promoting the colonization of the “new world,” and in his first voyage to the area he would name “New-England,” in 1614, as Smith put it, “our plot was there to take Whales and make tryalls of a Myne of Gold and Copper. If those failed, Fish and Furrer was then our refuge” (5).¹³ Like *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, the first of the four *Alien* films is based on an explorative colonialist theme — the seven-person crew of the earthship *Nostromo*, as an opening-scene subtitle informs the audience, was visiting a refinery, “processing twenty million tons of mineral ore.” But by the (so far) last film in the series, *Alien: Resurrection*, it becomes evident the film would be based on the combative model, if only the scientists could properly manage the genetic manipulation necessary to subjugate the alien, teach it to obey humans — a typical colonial fantasy (if the Company has its way, the alien will become a mercenary, waging war on others for the benefit of some humans; if Ripley has her way, the alien is to be annihilated — clearly a no-win situation for the alien). *Forbidden Planet* is grounded on a combination of the explorative and domesticative — the first crew with Morbius on the ship *Bellerephon* were exploring the planet, only to “discover” the remains of an ancient, buried civilization, whose founders, the Krel, were destroyed millions of years ago. The Krel's awesome technology, the same that built Robby, has maintained the planet since, making it both habitable and, especially given Robby's abilities, domesticatable. If not for the unfathomable Id monster, the planet would bear another civilization — this time of

conquering humans — but instead, like Morbius and his monstrous Id, the planet must be destroyed, its colonization forbidden. If earthlings cannot colonize the planet, the film's message seems to be, then call it sour grapes — no one will.

Whereas *Forbidden Planet* transposes Freudian psychology onto an alien setting, other later films, especially those following *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, have tended to transpose earth's topology onto other galaxies. The effect of such was realized long ago, in the 13th century, by an English mapmaker named Richard of Holdingham. Richard's creation, the five-foot high, four-foot wide Mappa Mundi, the most elaborate early map of its type and the largest to have survived from before the 15th century, more than just mapped the world as it was then perceived: it served as an encyclopedia of distant lands, peoples, myths, and natural history, all held together within a framework of Christian belief. And all over that concocted world, except without irony in the area identified as Europa, appear all sorts of mythological beings, such as unicorns, mermaids, and sea-serpents; strange beings, part-human, part-beast, such as the satyr in Egypt and the bird-like people found in the Middle East called the cicone; and the to-be-expected cannibal, in this instance located in northern Asia near present-day Mongolia. Significantly this fixing of topology was also typological — Christ appears at the top of the map, as the focal point by which the world may be understood. The Mappa Mundi, in short, served to fix the world and people's understanding of it.¹⁴

What *Star Wars* managed large-scale unlike any other science fiction film before it — except, perhaps, for the *Star Trek* television series — was to map the universe, give name to and identify the resources of galaxies, as well as populate galaxies with all sorts of beings whose analogues are found on earth. In this way, as Vivian Sobchack puts it, “[s]pace is now more often a ‘text’ than a context” (232), a “space” more familiar than not, a “space” that, Sobchack explains, has “bec[o]me semantically inscribed as inescapably domestic and crowded” (226). Some of *Star Wars*' aliens are so sophisticated, the first film released in that series suggests, as to have independently created jazz, cantinas, and some form of intoxicating beverage — long before these were invented on earth, as the *Star Wars* creation myth has it. This topology, moreover, is accompanied by a typology — a clear sense of right and wrong, or, if you will, of light and dark permeates the universe, no moral ambiguity about it. The most recent episode, *Phantom Menace*, even goes as far as to give little blue-eyed, blonde-haired Aniken Skywalker Jesus-status as the chosen one the wise-men Jedi have been waiting for, the one who will bring balance to the universe. Moreover, the overall effect of *Star Wars* is to make the universe familiar: time and space are no longer unfathomable, uncognizable. Post-Lockean and post-Kantian, time and space through the me-

dium of science fiction film have become re-cognizable — no matter the time period, no matter the place in space.¹⁵ And with *Star Wars'* use of earth-type racialized beings, aliens have become familiar types: the evil Asian-like Federation representatives trying to enforce a trade embargo on the mostly European-stylized Naboo, whose main urban-center is comprised of Greco-Roman architecture; the cake-walking, dread-locked, Caribbean-like speaking Gungans, of whom Jar Jar Binks is the type, and who, as literal subalterns, live underwater and retreat to a jungle, their “sacred” place, and go to battle with African-like spears and shields; the patriarchal knights templar called Jedi, who will save the day, if not the universe (some Jedi, mostly the elders, have a British accent, while the younger members of the Jedi community speak with an American accent, perhaps symbolic of an historical shift of empire and power on earth); and the future in the little Americanized Aniken, for a time nearly every adolescent American boy's hero. Hence, the familiar becomes alien.¹⁶ In other words, as Jameson writes about science fiction in general, postmodern science fiction films tend less to imagine the future than to “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*” (151; emphasis Jameson's). A combative colonial narrative placed-in-space, *Star Wars* continues the colonial tradition, propagating violence against alien “others,” acting out in that safe place of non-space similar basic colonial anxieties as those First Lieutenant Wilson expressed towards Native Americans.

Although the somewhat recent string of *Star Trek* films has served a similar project, there is an exception, the “Next Generation” film subtitled *Insurrection* — one of the science fiction productions cognizant of the colonial impulse underwriting the genre. In this episode, captain of the Enterprise Jean-Luc Picard faces a dilemma: to colonize or not to colonize.¹⁷ Admiral Dougherty, through the cajoling of the So'na, intends forcibly to remove, or colonize, the 600 Ba'ku inhabiting a planet within an area of space designated the Cabbage Patch. The stated goal is to exploit the planet's natural resources, mainly its ability to promote immortality — a virtual “fountain of youth” much like that Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon once allegedly searched for in 1513, in the process “discovering” the area now known as Florida.¹⁸ When Captain Picard learns of the clandestine effort to colonize the Ba'ku, he protests to Admiral Dougherty: “We are betraying the principles upon which the Federation was founded” — which constitutes, according to Picard, the Federation's Prime Directive. The Prime Directive, a *Star Trek* website explains, “forbids any member of the Starfleet from interfering in the natural development of any society.”¹⁹ Picard continues, “It will destroy the Ba'ku ... just as cultures have been destroyed in every other forced relocation throughout history,” to which Admiral Dougherty responds that it is merely 600

people being relocated. Picard counters, “How many people does it take, Admiral, before it becomes wrong — one thousand, fifty thousand, one million — how many people does it take, Admiral?” While this is a rare instance in which the colonization of a people and their planet is questioned, it is perhaps undermined by the activity of the *Enterprise* and other Starfleet ships.²⁰ The Federation, through treaties and compromises, may mean to create order in the universe, but it is a New Universe Order achieved with the best interests of the Federation in mind, an Order readily familiar even to humans who watch the show in the 20th and 21st centuries.²¹ However “noble” the principles and Prime Directive on which the Federation was founded, the mere presence of a force such as that the *Enterprise* represents will unsettle and alter “alien” cultures, even if unintentionally. A more typical response to contact and interference with “aliens” occurs in the first *Alien* film, of 1979, when Ripley questions Captain Dallas’ authority. His response: “Standard procedure is to do what the hell they [the company] want you to do.” Even in the universe, all four of the *Alien* films make clear, the corporate directive rules.²² As Amis points out, “The right of the explorers — naturally they will be American or British explorers — to go round setting up their trading stations wherever they please is similarly taken for granted in science fiction, as such things are in many other circles” — what Amis calls “the problem of colonialism” (93).²³ And this “problem” is one the science fiction industry, with its tendency to (dis)place other-ness to a (de)familiarized universe out there, continues to promulgate through its use of the all-too-familiar colonial narrative, a narrative that both sanctions and justifies violence against “others,” regardless of their planet of origin.

If science fiction, as Jameson claims, “registers fantasies about the future” (150), then given the clichéd maxim that *history repeats itself* all of this should really come as no surprise. Despite its profit-motive and proclivity to entertain, film is a medium intended to edify and instruct, and if its master-plots are familiar then the truly fantastic of science fiction film remains its visuals, the “science” behind the science. Yet, it is a science once again aiding and abetting racism via perpetuation of colonial narratives.²⁴ Hence, the colonizing impulse is not just a matter of fiction: it has once again captured (if it has ever ceased to attract) the imaginations of myriads of people — witness California millionaire Dennis Tito’s recent jaunt as the first “space tourist.”

A simple search of the Internet will result in a number of websites dedicated to the not-so-far future colonization of the universe. For now, this present electronically emitted colonial narrative is both explorative and domesticative, but as science and technology improve and knowledge of the universe increases the move

toward a combative narrative is likely, should humans encounter an “other” from another planet. While some websites mean to exploit the galaxy’s resources, others mean to enable the full-scale colonization of space. In the case of the former, there’s the “Lunar Resources Company,” which claims that, “[w]ithin fifteen years, you will be able to take a two-week trip to the moon at a price you would expect to pay for the luxury-class European capital tour.”²⁵ Also in this class is the website “Space Future,” which aims in the near future to provide “space hotels” where you can get away for an “orbital holiday” and partake of activities such as “space sports” — “Orbital Olympics” in fifty years, the website claims — and for “lovers” the “Joy of Zero-G.” Whether exploring the atmosphere, the self, or other selves, the concept of a space vacation evokes the colonial explorative narrative as well as calls attention to accessibility: will working-class people, let alone middle-class, be able to afford an “orbital holiday” or, as is the case of most of earth’s “exotic” places, will the pleasures and leisures of space be reserved for the upper-class only? Additionally, given intersections of socioeconomic class and race, will space be racialized as here on earth? (That the faces of NASA’s astronauts, despite some variations in its ground crew, are largely white, as well as male, is telling.) Undoubtedly some select few working- and middle-class people will have access to space — as food servers, maids, receptionists, etc. — until the technology is such, the argument goes, that humans need not labor — a 19th- and 20th-century industrial fantasy never realized on a mass scale. Of course, some of these same people will have access to space as military personnel to protect the interests of space venture-capitalists and space tourists alike.

More common are those websites intending to enable the colonization of space, beginning with a nearby moon and then a little red planet, before moving further out into the universe. As the rhetoric reveals, this project is domesticative in nature. The youth-oriented educational website “Space Colonization: Expansion into the Unknown,” for example, “hope[s] we can get you excited about ... space colonization.” Other promoters of space colonization are less benign. The British website “Space Colonisation” posits: “Most transhumanists are very pro-space, for a variety of reasons. Remaining limited to Earth is ... contrary to the transhumanist mindset of expansion, growth and evolution.” That is, the fantasy of unlimited progress and empire once again writ large. The “Living Universe Foundation” website announces “two main goals” — “We want to bring the galaxy alive with all life from Earth, and we want to heal the damage that humanity has already done to the Earth” — and biannually publishes *Distant Star*, a publication “[d]edicated to human colonization of the galaxy.” Then there’s the “Planet MARS Home Page” and the “Mars Society” homepage, which share a common

“Founding Declaration.” At the “Mars Society” homepage, one can purchase a vertical red, green, and blue barred Mars flag and books such as Robert Zubrin’s *The Case for Mars: The Plan to Settle the Red Planet and Why We Must* and Stanley Schmidt and Zubrin’s *Islands in the Sky: Bold New Ideas for Colonizing Space*.

The joint “Founding Declaration” makes clear that the colonization of the universe remains a fantasy but is not just a fantasy — numbers of people are, as the “Living Universe Foundation” announces, “roll[ing] up [their] sleeves and join[ing] in” the effort to colonize the universe. The Declaration provides what it calls “powerful” reasons for going to Mars, among them “for the knowledge of Mars,” “for the knowledge of Earth,” “for the challenge,” “for the youth,” “for the opportunity,” “for our humanity,” and “for the future.” More to the point, the “Mars Society” doesn’t hedge in the least about its colonizing dream, explaining what it means by “opportunity” very much in line with the rhetoric of the American Revolution of ’76: “The settling of the Martian New World is an opportunity for a noble experiment in which humanity has another chance to shed old baggage and begin the world anew; carrying forward as much of the best of our heritage as possible and leaving the worst behind. Such chances do not come often, and are not to be disdained lightly.” The “Mars Society,” which holds an annual convention, offers the Declaration in five languages — in the so-called universal language English, of course, but also in Japanese, Dutch, Spanish, and French.²⁶ Given that the Declaration is published in five so-called first world languages only, one must wonder who is meant to access it, who not, what “old baggage” is to be “shed,” and what “heritage” is deemed “worst” and to be left behind. According to the self-proclaimed “Society” bent on domesticating the red planet, Mars “is a New World, filled with history waiting to be made by a new and youthful branch of human civilization that is waiting to be born. We must go to Mars to make that potential a reality. We must go, not for us, but for a people who are yet to be. We must do it for the Martians.” Manifest Destiny, anyone?

Here again a postmodern conflation: earthlings, in colonizing Mars, will give birth to Martians, whose offspring in turn will bear Jupiterians, Saturnites, Uranislings, and the Wizard of Oz knows who or what else. For now, the narrative line and impulse may be explorative and domesticative; and it may become combative — as humans tend to treat difference with trepidation and/or violence — but until then the combative urge may continue to be acted out on earth, as it has for centuries, toward familiar “aliens.” Earthlings are still very much acting out colonial impulses, designs, and fantasies — in what still appears to be a colonial age. Call it neo-cyber colonialism, local-galaxy colonialism, universal colonialism, or what you will. But as this essay should make evident, the term *post-*

colonialism, given the continued proliferation of colonial narratives, even if projected into the universe, never has been an accurate descriptor. The galactic colonists are here, still. ✨

Notes

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¹ Although Edgar Allan Poe’s and Jules Verne’s forays into science fiction would appear earlier in the century, it would be 13 years after Wilson’s essay that H.G. Wells would publish his first well-known science fiction novel, *The Time Machine*, in 1895. More to the point, however, is Wells’ 1898 production, *War of the Worlds*, which capitalized on this colonization anxiety — with Martians endeavoring to conquer the earth and its inhabitants, as they continually have, in film, several times a decade since.

² The words of retired NASA astronaut Jerry M. Linenger, who spent five months aboard the Russian space-station *Mir*, in early 1997, are exemplary. In a radio-interview with NPR’s Terry Gross, on her program *Fresh Air*, Linenger explained how he coped with his fears during a space-walk: “You’re out there colonizing space” and it “feels good,” said Linenger, “that’s what keeps you going.” Linenger’s recent book *Off the Planet*, published in 2000, chronicles his experiences aboard *Mir*.

³ Answers to this question show there is no clear consensus and often emphasize different aspects of the genre. For example, in 1959 Richard Hodgens claimed that “Science fiction involves extrapolated or fictitious science, or fictitious use of scientific possibilities, or it may be simply fiction that takes place in the future or introduces some radical assumption about the past or present” (79). By 1975, Jeff Rovin had not progressed far beyond Hodgens’ formulation, providing one that typically draws attention to scientific elements; according to Rovin, science fiction is “any science-based event that has not occurred but conceivably could, given the technology of the period in which the film is set” (qtd. in Meyers 9). Taking another approach, William Johnson in 1972 had claimed that science fiction “films hinge on a change or changes in the world as we know it. The changes may be caused by man or be outside his control” (10). In 1980 Lester del Rey gave a definition that somewhat echoes Johnson’s by defining the genre as “an attempt to deal rationally with alternate possibilities in a manner which will be entertaining” and one that “accepts change as the major basis for stories” (5, 9). But del Rey furthers Johnson’s endeavor by emphasizing the genre’s mutability: “Science fiction ... rejects the unchanging order of things. It states implicitly, if not explicitly, that the world of the story is different from the accepted

present or past of the reader. The change may be in science, environment, attitude, morality, or the basic nature of humanity” (9). In more theoretical terms, Darko Suvin, in his 1979 book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, defines science fiction as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment,” and it is distinguished “by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional ‘novum’ (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic” (7-8, 63).

More recently, according to Frederik Pohl, Tom Shippey delivered a talk to the World Science Fiction meeting in Dublin in which he claimed that “the task [is] impossible.... [A]s science fiction is the literature of change, it changes even as one tries to define it” (qtd. in Pohl 11). Pohl takes up the issue of defining it thus: if “[p]erhaps we cannot satisfactorily say what SF is, ... we still may be able to identify ... what it ... *does*” (12). What that is, writes Pohl, is proffer itself as “a literature of ideas” and promote “futurology” (14), which includes “the ways in which science-fiction stories may have influenced actual research,” “the future shaping of human beings,” and “what effect, if any, the stories [have] had on the outside world” (16). According to Michael Kandel, when people ask what science fiction is they are “often really asking: What should it be?” (1). Because it defies simple definition, Kandel believes there is a “sf genre-ghetto” (2). But however it is defined, science fiction remains grounded in the colonial narrative.

⁴ Unpacking visual aspects of science fiction films, Vivian Sobchack arrives at a similar conclusion: “The major visual impulse of all SF films is to pictorialize the unfamiliar, the nonexistent, the strange and the totally alien—and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style. While we are invited to wonder at what we see, the films strive primarily for our belief, not our suspension of belief” (88). Without some such context to create verisimilitude, that is, most viewers would not believe a science fiction’s creations, never mind a belief offered and then suspended.

⁵ Perry Miller used the phrase “errand into the wilderness” as title for a 1952 delivery that became an essay and then a 1956 anthology of his writings. Interestingly, as Miller later found out, the phrase had earlier been part of Samuel Danforth’s 1670 sermon *A Brief Recognition of New England’s Errand into the Wilderness*. What Miller writes in the essay of that name about Puritans could easily stand for science fiction’s attitude toward its galactic colonists. Miller writes, “We think of the founders as heroic men—of the towering stature of Bradford, Winthrop, and Thomas Hooker—who braved the ocean and the wilderness, who conquered both, and left to their children a goodly heritage” (2-3). Try it this way: We think of the founders as heroic humans—of the towering stature of Kirk, Skywalker, and Ripley—who braved the universe and the planets, who conquered both, and left to their children a goodly heritage.

⁶ In his article “The Uses of Wilderness in American Science Fiction,” John Dean spells out some ways wilderness has come to mean in science fiction literature, but he

overlooks its connection with the literature of colonization and how that literature has come to inform science fiction literature and film. While suggesting that “the wilderness provides a medium of adventure, a place where an alert protagonist discovers his essential values ... [and] sees why he is alive: he must survive” (68), Dean does not consider how wilderness and its inhabitants have been exploited and colonized, especially in what he calls “the final discovery” (69), meaning that of the Americas. This is likely because Dean fails to follow out the logic of his statement that science fiction “can rewrite history”—it “provides us with new, green worlds for old” (69); while science fiction literature that directly engages the theme of wilderness can re-envision the uses and resulting cultural capital of wilderness, it is imperative to remember at what cost to whom that “theme” has been historically employed as well as what is revised or written out of “history” in further imaginative placement of wilderness in the universe.

⁷ In *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, David Seed argues that science fiction films produced in America during the Cold War foreground “overlapping issues of nuclear war, the rise of totalitarianism[,] and fears of invasion” and show a “responsiveness ... to a whole range of social, technological[,] and political changes taking place during the Cold War” (11).

⁸ Because of its elements of the fantastic, Kingsley Amis opines that *The Tempest* has had “a dilute and indirect influence on science fiction” (30).

⁹ *Barbarella*, however, is an exception—but its phallogocentric universe and nymphomaniac heroine should be familiar as heterosexual, humanoid fantasy.

¹⁰ Lester del Rey speculates that “science fiction is precisely as old as the first recorded fiction” (12) and claims that the epic *Gilgamesh*—which in his view “anticipates the use of the superman hero, the trip beyond the world of reality[,] and the possibility of immortality through drugs” (13)—is an early instance of science fiction: “It would be very easy to transpose all of [*Gilgamesh*] into science fiction by replacing the gods and monsters with alien beings” (13). The veracity of del Rey’s claim aside, there is no need, as I have argued, to “transpose” in this way; analogs of the “colonial past” have already been transposed through present workings of the imagination and projected through literature and film into *the* future.

¹¹ See Grant McColley’s “Introduction” to Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (vii).

¹² That cannibalism continues to fascinate is made evident by the popularity of the film *Silence of the Lambs* and its sequel *Hannibal*.

¹³ Lest some misunderstand Smith’s project, a Powhatan tribal chief, as recorded in *A Map of Virginia ... and the Proceedings of the English Colonie* (1612), revealed the locals did not: “Yet Captaine Smith, (saith the king) some doubt I have of your coming hither.... For many do inform me, your coming is not for trade, but to invade my people and possess my Country” (109).

¹⁴ In a recent number of *The Rocky Mountain Review*, Christopher Flynn has shown that Daniel Defoe's 1728 *Atlas Maritimus and & Commercialis: Or, a General View of the World, so Far as Relates to Trade and Navigation* functioned similarly to Richard of Holdingham's Mappa Mundi, although Defoe's interests were clearly more pecuniary. As Flynn puts it, Defoe's atlas "confidently delineates the globe into markets for English goods and objects of British imperialism" (11).

¹⁵ The plot of *Star Trek: First Contact* is enabled by time travel, and time travel in a postmodern vein: the Enterprise and crew travel from the 24th century back to the imagined earth's future-past, in 4 April 2063 (allegedly 10 years after the occurrence of WWIII), which as fictive event gives special meaning to Jameson's claim that science fiction "transform[s] our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (152).

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of the ways recent science fiction films "embrace the alien" and "erase alienation," to borrow from her chapter's subtitle, see Sobchack (esp. 292-99).

¹⁷ Of the numerous film reviews of *Insurrection*, I found only one that describes it in the terms I have outlined here. On his website review, James Berardinelli writes, "The message in *Star Trek: Insurrection* ... has to do with the immorality of displacing a populace and destroying a way of life in the name of progress (i.e., what the European settlers did to the Native Americans)."

¹⁸ Discussing the notion of Utopia, which figures in the myth of Ponce de Leon as much as it does in *Insurrection*, Jameson posits that the "Utopian future has in other words turned out to have been merely the future of one moment of what is now our past" (151).

¹⁹ Citations for all websites quoted may be found in the Works Cited.

²⁰ On the surface, *Star Trek: First Contact* appears to contradict this point. In that film Picard and crew intend to impede forcefully the colonization of one people by others. To do so the Enterprise assists humans against being colonized and assimilated by the Borg, a half-organic, half-machine collective, and in the process violate the Prime Directive. Although Doctor Beverly Crusher claims earthling Lily Sloane will be kept unconscious so that she will be unaware of her medical visit to the Enterprise, thus not violating the Prime Directive, when the circumstance seems to necessitate it Lily is awoken. Similarly, the Enterprise crew enable earthling Zefram Cochrane to meet his historical fate, be the first human to achieve warp-drive. In short, the Prime Directive apparently does not apply to humans, or it may be violated given circumstances, and while *First Contact's* thesis seems to protest colonialism it turns out that it is a protest only against the colonization of humans.

²¹ Though produced following the collapse of socialist Russia and its empire, *First Contact* enters the Cold War discursive field, preferring a version of events: according to *First Contact*, World War III concluded in 2053, with no clear victory for east or

west, as destruction was massive on both sides. But because of the west's superior technology—it achieves warp-drive first—the west makes contact with aliens before the east is able, in that way winning the war after all through technological superiority and by being the conduit through which humanity is to “progress,” establish itself in the universe.

²² In “Reimagining the Gargoyle: Psychoanalytic Notes on *Alien*,” Harvey R. Greenberg, M.D., concludes, “films like *Alien* cannot legitimately be recommended as polemics against capitalism” (103).

²³ Patrick Lucanio's *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films* reads science fiction films of the period through the lens of Jungian psychoanalysis, thus focusing on the psychological context of the genre, or what Lucanio calls “projections from the collective unconscious” (ix). However, the projections that are science fiction, as this essay demonstrates, are not of a psychological but of a *cultural collective*, one determined by the master-plot of the colonial narrative, or what Jameson has called the “political unconscious” (148).

²⁴ And, I should mention, sexism and classism—not to mention discrimination against lesbians and gays. On ways race and class are structured in the urban-settings of films from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*, see David Desser's “Race, Space and Class: The Politics of Cityscapes in Science-Fiction Films” (esp. 91-95). On how the original *Star Trek* television series attempted, in one episode, to make racism seem a thing of the past, see Daniel Bernardi's *Star Trek and History: Race-ing Toward a White Future* (26-28).

To address the obvious lack of critical and theoretical studies treating gender and/in science fiction, the editors of *Camera Obscura* put together an anthology, based on a special issue of that journal (#15, Fall 1986): *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, edited by Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel, and Janet Bergstrom (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

The editors of *Science Fiction Studies*, in a recent issue (#26, March 1999), gave space to four essays around the theme “Science Fiction and Queer Theory.” In the first, titled “Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer,” Wendy Pearson describes correspondence between “the memberships of the U.S.S. Harvey Milk and the Voyager Visibility Project (offshoots of the lesbian and gay sf group, the Galaxyians)” and the producers of the *Star Trek* shows and films regarding a boycott of the film *Star Trek: Insurrection* for its failure to include “a lesbian or gay character in a cast intended to represent all types of humans ... and quite a miscellany of aliens” (1). (To find out more and read the various correspondence, visit the website found at <http://www.gaytrek.com/history.html>.) Given that, as she explains, “we remain aliens within that world [outside of science fiction] in many of the same ways that our characters are aliens within those [science fiction] stories” (“Identifying the Alien” 53), Pearson looks forward to “the vision of a future in which queerness is neither hidden nor revealed *as difference*, but is simply there” (“Alien Cryptographies” 2).

²⁵ The Lunar Resources Company's Articles of Incorporation, given the recent political attention captured by the state of Texas, should be of interest: “The Lunar

Resources Company is organized to advance and engage in space flight as a commercial enterprise, to establish and operate a permanent manned lunar base, and to transact any and all lawful business—on Earth, in outer space, and on other celestial bodies—for which corporations may be incorporated under the Texas Business Corporation Act.” Apparently Texas’ commercial interests and powers extend well beyond its borders.

²⁶ According to “Planet MARS Home Page,” the declaration “was ratified and signed by the 700 attendees at the Founding Convention of the Mars Society, held August 13-16, 1998[,] at the University of Colorado at Boulder.” The 4th annual Mars Society Convention was held at Stanford University, August 23-26, 2001.

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