The American Alien: Immigrants, Expatriates
and Extraterrestrials in Twentieth-Century U.S. Fiction

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
At the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Ph.D. in English

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MAY 2012
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The American Alien: Immigrants, Expatriates and Extraterrestrials in Twentieth-Century U.S. Fiction

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Hoberek, Karen Piper, Noah Heringman and Kristin Kopp for their careful responses to the current work, their insightful suggestions, and their generosity with their time. This dissertation has been shaped, extended, trimmed, and otherwise improved by their suggestions. In particular, Dr. Hoberek has been a part of the project from its inception, and his erudition, as well as his skill at identifying the best way to expand upon and make explicit the implicit connections between this work’s far-flung texts, has been invaluable. Karen Piper read an early version of this project as a seminar paper for her seminar in postcolonial theory, so it benefitted from her comments even in its first stage. Noah Heringman’s expertise in conceptions of the environment, as well as Kristin Kopp’s in the history of colonialism, have also been extremely helpful.

A previous version of this work was presented at the University of Missouri’s Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, then known as the Body Project. I would like to thank the attendees of my presentation for their thoughtful comments. In addition, many of the central arguments of this dissertation were first fleshed out in a course I taught at the University of Missouri on The American Alien. The students in this course contributed greatly to the conception of aliens discussed here, and I discovered many of
the ideas in this work together with them. I am grateful for their interest and responsiveness to the topic.

Finally, I would like to offer Kibby Smith my thanks for her encouragement and proofreading skills. Needless to say, the contributions of all these readers have only served to improve the present work, while any errors remaining in it are solely mine.
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This project argues that such widely differing figures in twentieth-century American literature as the immigrant and the expatriate, the colonizer and the colonized, whether human or extraterrestrial, can all be described under the same rubric: that of the alien. Aliens in science fiction often serve as stand-ins for aliens in terms of nationality, allowing SF authors to discuss immigration issues more freely than would otherwise be possible. At the same time, the description of extraterrestrial aliens in SF also exerts an influence on the treatment of immigrants in “realistic” fiction, and even in legislation related to immigration. Consequently, this project applies postcolonial theory, diasporic and globalization studies to analyze colonial discourse in representations of aliens in science fiction and immigrant fiction, while also seeking a less theoretical, more practical way to open up the subversive potential of SF.

Seeing the cultural encounter in terms of a meeting between differently-acculturated aliens, who are mutually strange to one another, presents a way to reimagine the troubled, alternately constructive and destructive, multiplicity of voices which is an unavoidable result of the meeting of different cultures. To that end, this project employs both SF and “realistic” novels about immigrants with attention to the insights gained from multiculturalism and postcolonial theory, tracing the historical development of conceptions of immigrant labor, reproduction, and trauma and including well-known novels by pre-WW II novelists such as Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather and Ernest
Hemingway, as well as more recent “realistic” fiction by Arthur Phillips and Jessica Hagedorn.
Introduction

The Fascination of the Unfamiliar:  
The Alien in Twentieth-Century American Literature

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz describes the Dominican Republic’s long history of racism and political and domestic violence, from the time of “the Admiral” (a euphemism used by the novel’s Dominican characters in order to avoid saying the name of Christopher Columbus), through the turbulent years of the Trujillo dictatorship to the 1990s, focusing on three generations of the de León family. The overweight and socially awkward protagonist, Oscar, is fascinated by fantasy and science fiction novels, as well as SF films and role-playing games. Oscar’s love for fantasy and SF supplies the novel with its idiosyncratic use of fantasy and SF characters and narratives as a source of metaphors for this destructive history. When Oscar finally falls in love, it is with Ybón Pimentel, a former prostitute who is currently involved with a dangerously violent police captain. Ybón appears distant and affectless due to trauma experienced as a prostitute and a victim of domestic violence in her relationship with the captain. Characteristically, Oscar explains Ybón’s emotional distance in a vocabulary he understands: “there was something slightly detached about her . . . as though . . . she
were some marooned alien princess who existed partially in another dimension.”

Similarly, Yunior, Díaz’s narrator, speculates that Oscar’s grandfather may have been writing a book about Trujillo’s magical powers, describing the murderous leader as “a supernatural, or perhaps alien, dictator.” Yunior expresses the loss of culture and the liminal status of diasporic Dominicans when Oscar returns to his mother’s homeland, which he barely knows: “he refused to succumb to that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside themselves, the whisper that says You do not belong.”

The novel uses SF-inspired metaphors to describe a wide range of psychological states, but the common thread among these differing situations is that the characters all experience some degree of emotional dislocation as a result of their culture’s painful history. The whisper that Oscar resists is his sense that he is as much an alien in the Dominican Republic as he is in the U.S. In some sense, his choice to leave his home in the latter and return to the former to face death at the hands of the violently jealous police captain is his admission of that whisper’s truth. Much as Oscar, the SF fan, comes to realize that he belongs in neither of his homelands, Ybón experiences dissociative fugue as a result of her relationship with the captain, who serves as a representative both of the Dominican Republic’s culture of macho masculinity and of a repressive police state. Similarly, Trujillo’s subjects are astonished at his cruelty and the impunity with which he exercises it. All these characters are rendered unfamiliar to themselves by the Dominican Republic’s history and its consequences on their individual lives. In this way, the figure of the alien becomes a way to express the unfamiliarity, the alien-ness of Hispaniola’s colonial past, even to those who live there.
Postcolonial theory has much to say about the political underpinnings of fiction that describes the encounter between different cultures. All too often, the enduring appeal of representations of contact between cultures owes much to discourses drawn from the era of European colonialism. In such discourse, the narrative tends to adopt the point of view of one of the two cultures, often a white, European or North American culture which is held to be normative, and to place the other culture in a subordinate position. Such narratives serve both to characterize the Other as somehow fundamentally different and to obscure the real inequalities of power between the dominant and subaltern cultures. Given the power of this insight, it is surprising that it has seldom been applied to one of the twentieth century’s most compellingly, and most frequently, imagined encounters—that between the human and the extraterrestrial. What are the historical connections between immigrant fiction and science fiction, between the colonial encounter and the close encounter? This project attempts to seriously think through the fact that such very different figures as the immigrant and the expatriate, the colonizer and the colonized, whether human or extraterrestrial, can all be described under the same rubric: that of the alien.4

Postcolonial theory has been able to explain persuasively the troubled relation between colonizer and colonized. In Orientalism, Edward Said famously argues that the relation between the self and the Other is maintained by literary and anthropological discourses which characterize the Other as culturally different, exotic, and inferior. In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon argues that colonizer and colonized are bound together by physical and psychological need, by desire and fear. More recently, critics have begun to analyze SF novels in terms of postcolonial theory. John Rieder points out that
science fiction emerged at the historical moment of the high-water mark of European colonialism. Rieder argues that the “colonial gaze” is reproduced in much SF and that “colonialism . . . is part of the genre’s texture, a persistent, important component of its displaced references to history, its engagement in ideological production, and its construction of the possible and the imaginable.” Patricia Melzer is more direct in her claim that much SF is complicit in racism, either by adopting a stance of “liberal color blindness” or by reducing racism to a metaphor which ignores actual racial issues, but that feminist SF has the potential to challenge this tendency of the genre. Can these arguments about colonial discourse be applied to representations of aliens in science fiction? Or does the figure of the alien in SF present a less theory-based, more practical, less judgmental way to open up the subversive potential of SF?

In some sense, the alien is a special case of the Other. An alien, then, is a figure in literature which is seen by the narrative voice of the work of fiction as other in some way, in terms of nationality or race. The fact that the word is a marker of difference may be seen in its etymology; it comes from the Latin alienus, meaning “other.” The figure of the alien, as I will use the term, differs from the figure of the other as used in postcolonial theory in that an alien is a person, an object or a place that is marked as other through spatial displacement. In other words, an alien shares “our” living space, but is different because he (or she, or it) is from somewhere else. This suggests that it is far from a lexical coincidence that both terrestrial and extraterrestrial aliens may be referred to by the same, often pejorative, word. In fact, one of the claims I advance in this work is that aliens in science fiction often serve as stand-ins for aliens in terms of nationality. Thus, in times of deep-seated cultural anxiety about the difficulties of competing with or
assimilating those who are seen as culturally alien, science fiction often becomes a way of working out these anxieties. However, this cultural logic about the radical alterity of aliens works in the other direction as well, so that the description of extraterrestrial aliens in SF also exerts an influence on the treatment of the very terrestrial aliens in “realistic” fiction. My point is not only the familiar argument, advanced by Rieder and Melzer, that thinking about race and ethnicity in the U.S. has influenced American SF, but also that American SF has influenced thinking about racial and ethnic others, and more specifically about immigrants in the U.S. In this way, changing attitudes toward immigration leads to changing attitudes toward aliens in SF, and vice versa.

I. The Figure of the Alien in Science Fiction

Why introduce the new term, alien, instead of using the accepted shorthand of the Other? Like the Other, the alien is described by hegemonic discourses as physically and culturally different, as something less or more than, but certainly not, human. Like the Other, the position of the self and the alien may be exchanged in discourses that challenge the dominant discourse. But the alien, in my formulation, is an important new concept because understanding the interaction between cultures in terms of their mutual alien-ness avoids some of the problems with the two most common leftist and egalitarian ways of understanding interactions between differing cultures, postcolonial theory and multiculturalism, neither of which adequately explains the complex interactions between cultures.

Postcolonial theory persuasively explains the destructive, and often obscured and counterintuitive, effects of colonialism. However, despite the explanatory power of this
approach, many critics of postcolonialist thought have pointed out its weaknesses. For instance, Walter Benn Michaels has criticized the identity politics on which postcolonial theory depends, arguing that it supports what he calls “the primacy of the subject position” and ultimately reinforces the racism it attempts to oppose. In addition, proponents of postcolonial theory have themselves pointed out that textual strategies similar to those advocated by postcolonialism have also been used in support of such hegemonic projects as the U.S. “war on terror.” Finally, postcolonial theory was designed to explain the colonial relationship, an antagonistic relationship between cultures based on an unequal distribution of power. What this means is that postcolonial theory has a certain difficulty in imagining a non-antagonistic encounter between cultures, an encounter which escapes the painful legacy of empire. This is a kind of encounter which postcolonial theory would probably consider to be the ultimate hope, yet it is unable to achieve it; thus, instead of lessening the differences between colonizer and colonized, postcolonial theory reinforces and preserves these differences.

Though multiculturalism is often seen as related to, or even synonymous with, postcolonial theory, and though both depend on a strategy of claiming equal rights for minority groups based on racial or ethnic identity, the two movements are often at odds. During the “Culture Wars” of the 1980s, multiculturalism was criticized from the right by such critics as Harold Bloom, but more recently it has also been criticized from the left. Jenny Sharpe points out that multiculturalism originated as a means of easing cultural tensions within industrialized Western countries with diverse immigrant communities and serving the demands of business leaders for culturally sensitive employees, while postcolonialism arose in newly independent former colonies and gained prominence in
the U.S. only when intellectuals from these countries began to move to U.S. universities. Furthermore, critics like E. San Juan, Jr. and Sara Ahmed have pointed out that multiculturalism depends on, and reinforces, the military power of the state. In a similar critique of the counterintuitive and unintentional negative effects of multiculturalism, Christopher Douglas argues that literary multiculturalism grew out of Franz Boas’ refutation of pseudoscientific racism, but that by instituting culture as a category to replace race as a marker of difference, Boas and his followers in this valorization of culture reinforced the racism they were trying to oppose.

Multiculturalism, however, is also problematic because of its too-easy elision of the very real inequalities of power between competing racial or ethnic groups, and is not a preferable alternative to postcolonial theory. Where postcolonial theory assumes an antagonistic relationship between cultures, multiculturalism too quickly assumes a non-antagonistic one, and so fails to account for the real historical and present-day suffering caused by colonialism. Seeing the cultural encounter in terms of a meeting between differently-acculturated aliens, who are mutually strange to one another, presents a way to reimagine the troubled, alternately constructive and destructive, multiplicity of voices which is an unavoidable result of the meeting of different cultures.

Though this project will attempt to offer a more complete understanding of the cultural encounter than either postcolonial theory or multiculturalism is able to provide alone, it will employ both SF and “realistic” novels about immigrants with attention to the insights gained from multiculturalism and postcolonial theory. This choice of such a wide range of texts has been dictated by the dual nature of the figure of the alien: the alien as immigrant and the alien as extraterrestrial. In choosing canonical novels for
examples of terrestrial aliens, I have turned both to immigrant fiction and to novels which have not commonly been seen as “immigrant literature,” including well-known novels by pre-WW II novelists such as Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway, as well as more recent “realistic” fiction by Arthur Phillips and Jessica Hagedorn. Putting realist fiction that deals with immigrants in company with SF novels will allow us to see both in a new light. In particular, using postcolonial theory in order to understand SF may offer a way to better understand both SF and colonial discourse. Looking at science fiction through the lens of postcolonial theory opens up a body of source material seldom considered by postcolonialism. In fact, because it removes a discussion of colonialism to a hypothetical realm, science fiction is able, in some ways, to be more truthful than so-called “high art” fiction about the central dilemma of colonialism: what do you do with the aliens? As John Rieder has pointed out, “science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes.”

Science fiction often brushes aside colonialism’s humanist façade to show the colonialist’s hostility to environments and bodies which are constructed as other than human.

In addition, reading all these kinds of literature together challenges accepted notions of genre. The divide between high and low art is still maintained by historical and institutional factors in the academy, though this notion is beginning to be challenged. The craft of high art novels is important, and their social cachet is important as well. Also, it is a positive development that literature by and about immigrants has expanded the literary canon. But SF also has a place in this canon, because it deals with the same issues of social difference, and sometimes does so with a metaphorical panache and a philosophical subtlety greater than that of more carefully-crafted and less commercial
fiction. In fact, SF reaches a larger audience, and this larger audience balances, and may even outweigh, the higher status accorded to the high art novel. An example of the ways in which thinking about race appears in SF, as in Rieder’s argument, may be seen by reading Frantz Fanon’s famous account of the construction of blackness in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; transl. 1967) against the Martian ability of telepathy in Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*.

II. The Mask of Race in Fanon and Bradbury

Fanon’s insistence on the unknowability, the difference of being black is particularly valuable for a discussion of science fiction, in which the defining character trait of the alien is its physical strangeness. Fanon reminds us that “Ontology . . . does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.”\(^{13}\) For Fanon, blackness as difference is a social construction, a difference only “in relation to the white man.” Furthermore, this constructed difference is accompanied by desire and miscommunication, hatred and fear; while it is allowed to continue, genuine love—“a gift of self, the ultimate stage of what by common accord is called ethical orientation”\(^{14}\)—is impossible. But precisely because it is a construction, this difference must be actively and repeatedly imposed by society.

Hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. Hate demands existence, and he who hates has to how his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; in a sense, he has to become hate.\(^{15}\)
Fanon’s analysis of the complex, historically and economically overdetermined relationship between colonizer and colonized is given concrete shape in the famous passage in which the latter is named as black by the child of the former:

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
“Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amazed me.
“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!”

This fear, which accompanies a construction of difference, is one of the most prominent legacies of colonialism in science fiction. Science fiction is seldom able to envision the encounter between the alien and the human in any way that avoids this fear. The physical strangeness of the colonized peoples is translated to the physical strangeness of the alien, and so the fantasy of contact between worlds follows the shape of contact between peoples on Earth. As I will demonstrate through close readings of four of the genre’s most widely-read novels in the sections that follow, science fiction is unable to escape the historical forces that created it, and instead continually repeats them. Yet Fanon’s analysis suggests a means of breaking out of this repetition of the antagonistic fantasy, a way of taking off the mask of race.

In *The Martian Chronicles* (1946), Ray Bradbury reverses H. G. Wells’ Martian colonization of the Earth in *The War of the Worlds* by imagining the human colonization of Mars. Bradbury’s Martians, like Wells’, have created a society which is older than, and technologically superior to, that of humanity. However, in the later work the Martians are peace-loving telepaths who offer little resistance to the human invasion. The collection of stories laments the destruction of Martian society by human violence,
pollution and disease. Bradbury is able to grasp, in an analysis reminiscent in some ways of Fanon’s, the mechanism by which the colonizer constructs the colonized in order to suit the desires and fears required by the colonial project. Bradbury’s Martians are telepathic and are able to use this telepathy to cause others to hallucinate and to show themselves to humans in any shape they wish. One might expect that this gift would give the Martians some degree of power over the humans, and in several of the stories it does, to varying degrees. For example, in “The Earth Men,” a group of human astronauts encounters Martians who, skeptical of their claims to have come from the Earth, refer them to an insane asylum. The humorous misunderstanding leads to serious consequences for both humans and Martians when the director of the asylum shoots the astronauts, then, thinking himself mad when the supposed hallucination of the dead bodies refuses to disappear, shoots himself. In “The Third Expedition,” another group of astronauts land in what looks to them like a small town in the Midwestern U. S. Warned by the earlier expeditions, the Martians use their telepathy to make the humans believe they have returned to their childhood homes and met relatives who have died long before. Once the humans’ suspicions have been lulled, the Martians then kill them.

However, in several of the other stories, like “The Martian,” it is shown that the Martians change forms for the benefit of humans, to conform to human expectations and desires. In “The Martian,” Lafe and Anna LaFarge, an old couple who have retired to Mars and whose son Tom died when he was fourteen, suddenly find Tom waiting outside their house one night. Lafe immediately guesses that Tom is actually a Martian, who only looks like Tom to the LaFarges because the telepathic link he forms with them forces him into the shape of their dead son; Anna prefers to believe that the boy is
actually Tom. When Tom encounters another family, the Spauldings, who have lost a
daughter, he is transformed into the daughter. In attempting to explain to Tom, the
Martian says, “Perhaps I’m not their dead one back, but I’m something almost better to
them; an ideal shaped by their minds.” Lafe persuades the Martian to return to him, but
at the end of the story, when the Martian goes to town with Lafe, the press of humans
around them forces him to take one shape after another in rapid succession, and the
town’s residents pursue the Martian through the streets in search of what they have lost:

    All along the way, the same thing, men here, women there, night
watchmen, rocket pilots. The swift figure meaning everything to them, all
identities, all persons, all names. How many different names had been
uttered in the last five minutes? How many different faces shaped over
Tom’s face, all wrong?

Ultimately the Martian dies from the weight of the human desires which have imposed
themselves on his body, and his body lies on the street, “melted wax cooling, his face all
faces, one eye blue, the other golden, hair that was brown, red, yellow, black, one
eyebrow thick, one thin, one hand large, one small.” The colonized reaches into the
mind of the colonizer, sees himself or herself mirrored there, and becomes that image.
The subtlety of Bradbury’s understanding of the colonial situation is even more
astonishing when one considers that The Martian Chronicles preceded Fanon’s
description of the mutual desire and fear of the colonized and colonizer by six years.

III. American Aliens: A Brief History

American literature by or about immigrants in the U.S. has traditionally been seen
as primarily urban and largely centered on questions of labor. One well-known early
eexample of critical work in this vein has been David M. Fine’s The City, the Immigrant,
and American Fiction 1880-1920 (1977). In this project, I hope to build on this familiar narrative of immigrant history by reading it against the history of extraterrestrials in SF. As I have argued, though SF has its origins in the rhetoric of colonialism, it has been changed by, and has had a hand in changing, evolving attitudes toward aliens here on Earth as a result of the major cultural moments of the twentieth century. As John Rieder points out, in early SF, most notably in H. G. Wells’ genre-defining War of the Worlds (1895), the aliens serve as an expression of colonial anxiety that Britain could experience the same colonial violence it had inflicted on its territories. World War I and the subsequent Red Scare of the late teens and early twenties lent a specific anti-communist tinge to xenophobic rhetoric in the U.S., and this was accompanied by anti-fascist rhetoric before, during, and after World War II which was often used to justify the war against fascism, and the later Cold War. The competing political stances of fascism and communism, both coded as foreign, both led to an intensification of xenophobic rhetoric in popular culture.

The changes the Cold War brought about in SF are clear: in particular, it led to a new tendency toward political allegory in SF. This use of SF as political allegory is particularly evident in Robert A. Heinlein’s xenophobic and jingoistic Starship Troopers (1959), in which humans from a wide range of countries join to fight an alien race known as “bugs.” Even in SF that did not consciously engage in political allegory, the repeated images of flying saucers and hostile aliens in low-budget SF films from the 1950s serve as a focus for Cold War anxieties. In the 1960s, the original Star Trek television series (1967-1969), like Starship Troopers, imagined a future in which humans unite against hostile aliens who serve as a common foe. Both Starship Troopers
and Star Trek specifically include Russian characters, and Heinlein also includes German characters. Both texts imagine a post-Cold War future in which the wounds of the twentieth century are healed, but are able to do so only by imagining future wars with future enemies. Thus, though Starship Troopers celebrates Cold War xenophobia and Star Trek is able to some extent to critique it, neither text is able to imagine a future without an alien threat.

The 1990s witnessed the continuation in SF of these xenophobic and xenophilic trends, both of which adapted as the concerns of American society changed. Paul Verhoeven’s film version of Starship Troopers (1997) parodies the novel’s xenophobia and valorization of military force. This parody extends even to costume design, as the uniforms of the film’s troopers bear a noticeable resemblance to Nazi uniforms. Another film from the same year, Barry Sonnenfeld’s Men in Black, reflects the growing emphasis in U.S. culture on the policing of illegal immigrants. In the film’s opening scene, an extraterrestrial disguised as an old Latino man is riding in a truck that has illegally crossed the border from Mexico into the U.S. The truck is stopped by Border Patrol agents, but Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones) interrupts the bust, identifies the alien because he does not speak Spanish, and dismisses the INS agents with a sarcastic command to “Keep on protecting us from the dangerous aliens.” The irony is that protecting Earth from dangerous extraterrestrials is exactly K’s job since the eponymous organization is not a governmental agency, but operates “above the law.” By making its heroes a sort of INS on a transnational and even interplanetary scale, the film expresses a social fantasy of the surveillance, detainment, and control of immigrants.
SF from the first decade of the twenty-first century has continued to explore these intersections between extraterrestrial aliens and immigrants in ways which question what it means to be human. Taking post-Apartheid South Africa as its context, Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9* (2009) describes the detainment by the South African government of an alien race dismissively nicknamed “prawns.” The government has contracted out the management of the concentration camps to the pointedly-named Multi-National United Corporation. Wikus Van De Merwe, an agent of Multi-National United who is in charge of the removal of aliens to a new, smaller detainment camp and who shares most South Africans’ contempt for the prawns, is changed into one of the aliens when he comes into contact with a strange black fluid used in the aliens’ technology. As Van De Merwe slowly comes to terms with his own alien-ness, he makes friends with one of the aliens and is eventually even willing to sacrifice himself so that the aliens can return to their ship. The film’s critique of South Africa’s racist past and of multinational capital is undercut, however, by its portrayal of Nigerian gang members as menacing and even subhuman. In other words, while the film depicts the aliens as more sympathetic, and in a real sense more human, than the (white) Wikus and the leadership of the corporation he works for, it also denies (black) humans the same degree of sympathy and humanity. The film thus illustrates the subversive potential of the fluid definition of the alien, while it also shows the limits of this subversive potential.

**IV. “Yes, I Am an Alien from Mars”: SF and the Debate over Immigration Reform**

In recent critical writing about science fiction, as a result of the work of Donna Haraway, considerable attention has been paid to the figure of the cyborg. Rather less
attention, however, has been paid to the figure of the alien. Mark Rose offers a psychoanalytical reading of the alien in SF, in which aspects of the self’s id, which the self is forced to repress, are displaced onto the alien. Though this Freudian account seems a bit dated now, it offers an understanding of the alien a creation of the self, a necessary creation; in effect, the aliens are us. As a result, the “distinction between the self and the other is dynamic, breaking down and being reconstructed as long as life lasts.”

What Rose’s account misses, however, is an understanding of science fiction which takes into account science fiction’s place in the history of colonialism.

Citing examples from the history of SF, such as Ming the Merciless, Edward James argues that SF writers often reinforce xenophobic rhetoric and racist stereotypes, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, but that SF writers are often more aware of the negative effects of racism than the culture as a whole. However, James rightly points out that “A cynic might wonder . . . whether the latent xenophobia of so many members of the human race—including SF writers—has not been transferred from the human to the alien.” In other words, James argues that extraterrestrials in SF are often used to represent those who are racially other, while in the second half of the twentieth century, SF often emphasizes “the message that humanity is one race, which has emerged from an unhappy past of racial misunderstandings and conflicts.”

In a more theory-driven analysis, Jenny Wolmark’s description of the alien emphasizes the political aspects of SF’s history which Rose’s lacks. Wolmark argues that

To be different, or alien, is a significant if familiar cultural metaphor which marks the boundaries and limits of social identity. It allows
difference to be marginalized and any dissonance to be smoothed away, thus confirming the dominance of the center over the margins.\textsuperscript{29}

In Wolmark’s analysis, traditional science fiction maintains this sense of radical difference between human and alien, though work by feminist SF writers like Octavia Butler and Gwyneth Jones challenges this notion and leaves room for “a sense of slippage between sameness and difference, between centre and margins, so that the boundaries blur and become indecisive.”\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, Elaine Graham argues, taking Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Voyager as examples, that much SF is an attempt to police the boundary between human and non-human, though more recent works may also call this boundary into question.\textsuperscript{31} Wolmark’s and Graham’s analyses move toward a politicized and historicized conception of SF, but a specific grounding in postcolonial theory will allow for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the colonial relation as it is played out in SF novels. To this end, my close readings of SF novels will utilize insights garnered from historicizing the connections between these novels, “realistic” fiction, and the historical milieu which created both.

The musical play The Capeman (1998, book by Derek Walcott and music by Paul Simon) is based on the true story of Salvador Agrón, a Puerto Rican teenager, naive in many ways, who is recruited by a street gang and convicted of murder. In the play’s final musical number, “Trailways Bus,” an older Agrón, who is now an activist and college graduate, is on a bus that is stopped by immigration agents:

The border patrol outside of Tucson boarded the bus
Any aliens here? You better check with us.
How about you son?
You look like you got Spanish blood.
Do you “Habia Ingles,” am I understood?\textsuperscript{32}
Sal replies:

    Yes, I am an alien from Mars.
    I come to Earth from outer space.
    And if I traveled my whole life
    You guys would still be on my case.\textsuperscript{33}

Agrón’s sarcastic comeback exemplifies the conflation of alien as extraterrestrial and alien as immigrant which is the subject of this work. It is significant that Agrón’s attempt to reclaim the name of alien, to separate it through his humor from the interpellation of otherness for which it is intended, is connected to his oppression and to his crime. In this section, I will follow the effects of the aliening of immigrants down to the present day, focusing primarily on political rhetoric. Political debates and speeches, as well as the language of legislation itself, will provide examples of the pervasive attempt to render immigrants utterly alien, and thus utterly inhuman. I will also discuss the attempts of more recent SF writers to blur the boundaries between human and alien in a way that potentially empowers immigrants in their struggle to overcome precisely these types of border control. Taken together, these examples support my claim that images of extraterrestrials from SF have shaped and focused the debate over immigration in the U.S.

The example of \textit{The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao} demonstrates the usefulness of SF for Latino immigrants in the U.S. Oscar adopts the language of SF both as a way to acculturate himself and as a means of expressing the unfamiliarity to other Americans of his own experience. Similarly, Agrón’s lines from \textit{The Capeman}, though by a non-Latino writer, suggest the potential for Latinos and immigrants of other ethnicities to reclaim the figure of the alien, to use the conflation of alien as
extraterrestrial and alien as immigrant in a politically empowering way. Moreover, these examples raise a point which I have suggested earlier in this work, and which I will now discuss at greater length: the fact that who and what can be described as alien is far more fluid and mutable than it may at first appear to be. Thus, one of the most salient ways in which the figure of the alien in SF differs from the figure of the other in postcolonial theory is that Said, and many thinkers who draw on his work, see the other as synonymous with the colonized, and thus as permanently subaltern and disadvantaged. In SF, alienness is a label which can be taken off and reattached at will. In this way, the alien of SF is more similar to the Lacanian Other than to the postcolonial other; it is a structural marker, a place-holder which indicates an individual’s position in a logical system, and that position may change.

It may seem counterintuitive to claim that “alien” in SF is a more fluid category than “other” in postcolonial theory, since aliens would appear to have a fundamental and unchangeable difference from humans, that of species. However, SF writers have been fascinated by the possibilities of human-alien hybrids. In the Saga of Pliocene Exile, a series of SF novels by Julian May, aliens who are genetically compatible with humans land on Earth approximately six million years before the present, during the Pliocene Epoch. Meanwhile, misfit humans who have elected to leave an orderly, bureaucratic future by taking a one-way time portal back to the Pleistocene are surprised to encounter the aliens, who then enslave them and force them into a breeding program. Similarly, the SF television series V, both in its original form (the original miniseries, 1983; sequel miniseries V: The Final Battle; television series, 1984-1985) and in the recent
reimagined series (2009-2011), plays on the discomfort likely to be felt by viewers presented with alien-human miscegenation.

Perhaps one of the more notable recent SF novels to deal with the subject of human-alien hybridization is the novel *Dawn* (1987) by Octavia Butler. *Dawn* is set in a distant future in which the Earth has been destroyed in a nuclear war. Aliens known as the Oankali have rescued the few remaining humans and kept them alive in suspended animation. The Oankali are physically different from humans, covered with gray hair-like sensory organs that are capable of changing shape. They also have three genders, male, female, and ooloi. The Oankali constantly search for new sentient species with which they can exchange genetic material in order to renew their gene pool. The humans, including the main character, Lilith, are initially extremely reluctant to agree. However, Lilith grows accustomed to the Oankali and comes to trust them. Eventually, she is made the leader of the humans who will repopulate the Earth, which has been reconstructed by the Oankali. Her genetic makeup is also altered by them to give her increased strength and memory and to allow her to use Oankali technology. The other humans begin to distrust her, and they see her as alien herself. At the end of the novel, Lilith is pregnant with a hybrid child, a daughter which will contain human and Oankali genetic material. Lilith is, to put it mildly, troubled by the idea: “But it won’t be human.... It will be a thing. A monster.” The ooloi Nikanj reassures her: “Nothing about you but your words reject this child.”

The relationship between humans and aliens in *Dawn* is complex and both the Oankali and the humans demonstrate positive and negative traits. However, the novel’s sympathies clearly lie with Lilith and with the Oankali who become her friends, the male
Jdahya and the ooloi Nikanj, who work for cooperation between the two species. Nikanj predicts that

Our children will be better than either of us.... We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations. Our children won’t destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way they’ll be able to do it.  

Lilith is unconvinced: “But they won’t be human,” she answers, and predicts that “This will destroy us.” Certainly, since no unaltered humans will be left, she is correct that sharing genes with the Oankali will destroy humanity as she has known it. Lilith forgets, however, that she is a survivor of humanity’s effort to destroy itself, and that the Oankali have not come, like the silver-suit-clad aliens of a 1950s B movie, to conquer the Earth, but to repopulate it with humans, whom they have rescued from extinction. 

The typical reader is likely to share Lilith’s discomfort when presented with a future for humanity which is both human and inhuman. In fact, the novel’s goal is precisely to provoke this discomfort while simultaneously associating it with the possibility of a future without war. In other words, the novel associates hierarchical social structures and war with humanness, and points out that abandoning these human traits may not be such a bad thing. Hegemonic anxieties about hybridity similar to those seen in Butler’s imagined distant future may also be found in present-day U.S. political discourse on immigrants. Though there may seem at first glance to be little connection between the two topics, both Dawn and the anti-immigrant rhetoric which plays such an influential role in the political landscape of the U.S. demonstrate the strength of resistance to those seen as genetically different. Moreover, just as Dawn hints at the possibility of a future in which human and alien may take on one another’s
characteristics, the stakes in public policy are precisely whether or not immigrants are to be allowed entry to social institutions like schools.

The debate over illegal immigration in the U.S. is a continuation of the historical forces I have described in the preceding sections of this chapter. Characterizing immigrants as aliens, as a hostile presence that endangers the sovereignty of the United States, makes it easier to force immigrants, legal and illegal, into jobs that are dangerous, ill-paid and low in social status. Thus, the debate over immigration is perhaps the clearest example of how the alien as a literary figure affects the lives of real people. One of the most commented-on focal points for this debate at the moment is the controversy over Arizona State Bill 1070, passed in 2010. SB 1070 imposes new, stringent penalties on “smugglers of human beings” into the U.S., as well as on employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens. The bill has as its stated intent “to discourage and deter the unlawful entry and presence of aliens and economic activity by persons unlawfully present in the United States.” SB 1070 contains several provisions that enforce federal immigration law and require officials or agencies in violation of it to pay fines and court costs. One particularly controversial provision states that a law enforcement officer “may lawfully stop any person who is operating a motor vehicle if the officer has reasonable suspicion to believe the person is in violation of any civil traffic law and this section.” Opponents of the bill are concerned that the “reasonable suspicion” in the bill refers to skin color, and as a result the bill has attracted protest from immigrant and human rights advocates on the basis that it encourages law enforcement to practice racial profiling.

The ostensibly impartial legislative language of SB 1070 does little to obscure an intense hostility toward immigrants. As previously mentioned, the bill describes the
practice of conveying illegal immigrants into the U.S. as “smuggling of human beings,” a choice of words which denies the agency of immigrants, as though they were inanimate objects, a kind of human contraband. The bill also refers to illegal immigrants as “unauthorized aliens,” and this terminology similarly dehumanizes the immigrants to whom it refers. In fact, the law describes penalties for law enforcement officials and agencies who fail to enforce laws that already exist. In each case, the effect of the bill’s language is to dehumanize illegal immigrants and to attempt to create an essential difference between immigrants and citizens.

The ongoing debate over immigration reform illustrates the contradictions implicit in the attitudes of Americans toward “unauthorized aliens.” The Republican field of contenders for the 2012 Republican Presidential nomination in the series of debates in 2011 engaged in a rush to the right in which each contender made great efforts to be the “toughest” on health care, gay marriage, and other controversial issues. Predictably, immigration has become one of these issues. During the September 22nd, 2011 Fox News/Google debate, the Republican candidates for the 2012 Presidential race were asked, “Would you support each state enforcing the immigration laws since the federal government is not?” The contentious tone of this clearly contrary-to-fact question points to the debate over Arizona SB 1070, though without naming the bill. Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann’s reply is representative of the candidates’ tone: Bachmann answered that “the federal government has failed the American people and has failed the states. It’s reprehensible that President Obama has sued the state of Arizona and the governor of Arizona for trying to protect the people in Arizona.” Similarly, Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney takes it for granted that “we have to have a fence,
[and] we have to have enough Border Patrol agents to secure the fence. Here, immigration serves both Romney and Bachmann as a talking point popular with the conservative base they are courting. But the lasting popularity of the issue with conservatives suggests that something more is in play. At the same time that xenophobic rhetoric dehumanizes immigrants, it also becomes a way to rally anti-government sentiment by stressing the failure of the (Democrat-held) federal government. It is also indicative of the contradictions within this stance, however, that the candidates’ solution to the problem involves more governmental intervention.

These internal contradictions in xenophobic rhetoric were highlighted when, in the same debate, Rick Perry defended his decision as governor of Texas to allow illegal immigrants to pay reduced in-state tuition rates in Texas’s public colleges. Perry, a socially conservative Republican who is certainly not known for his “soft” stance on the favorite issues of conservatives, said that it would be unfair to deny a child access to public education because his parents had come to the U.S. illegally: “If you say that we should not educate children who have come into our state for no other reason than they've been brought here by no fault of their own, I don't think you have a heart.” He was loudly booed by the audience, and prominent conservatives criticized him for the remark, a fact which was emphasized by Fox News coverage of the event.

For conservatives, and sometimes for liberals, immigrants themselves all too often become a means to an end, political pawns without individual agency. As these examples from the 2011 Republican debates demonstrate, the stakes for conservatives are the purity of American society and capital’s need to maintain a pool of cheap labor. These competing demands have pitted social conservatives against business-oriented, fiscally
conservative Republicans, and even lead individual Republicans to contradict themselves. In other words, the rhetoric about aliens demands both that they be assimilated and that they maintain their own cultures, that they learn English and that they have no access to public education, that they that they stay at home and that they come to the U.S. to work for starvation wages. In such situations, what gets lost in the rhetoric is the real person on whom these contradictory demands are placed.

V. Overview of Chapters

Several principles have guided my thinking in this work.

1. *Each of the following chapters traces the historical development of one thematic element, current in literature and in the dominant culture, about aliens.*

Discourse about aliens is persistent. It changes surprisingly little over time. Fanon’s insight about the damaging discourse of colonialism is that it must be repeated in order to be believed, to soothe anxieties about aliens experienced by the dominant culture.

2. *SF often shows the workings of this discourse more clearly than does “realistic” fiction.* Not only does SF give authors scope to discuss issues related to race and immigration more freely than would be possible in “realistic” fiction set in the present, but it also forces writers to create speculative situations which bring out these philosophical issues still more clearly. This “what-if” element of SF is its most important contribution to discourse about historical and political issues and events.

3. *SF is influenced by the dominant culture, but it also influences that culture.* It is, of course, clear that SF, as a product of its time, has been influenced by political events and realistic fiction contemporaneous with it. However, one of the more
interesting features of SF is its potential to, in turn, influence the political situation in the U.S., both for better and for worse.

In Chapter 1, I follow the historical development of a nativist discourse of fear of immigrant reproductive capacity in the twentieth century. An often-repeated fear in nativist rhetoric was that immigrants from Eastern and Northern Europe would bring disease and would reproduce so quickly that the “native” population would be overwhelmed. This nativist fear of the reproductive capacity of immigrants takes shape in a linking of immigrants with disease, and is carried forward in literary depictions of recent immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the U.S. in the twentieth century, including Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906). The same fears of aliens’ reproductive capacities are reflected in SF aliens’ imagined life cycles. In some cases, alien life cycles are described with sympathy for the aliens, as in *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. LeGuin, but in others, they are associated with fear, as in the SF-horror *Alien* series of films.

Chapter 2 traces the roots in of SF novels about the colonization of new planets in a colonialist discourse of the Westward expansion of the U.S., and specifically compares the settlement of alien landscapes with the settlement of the Great Plains in the late nineteenth century. This attitude toward land as a commodity to be mapped and colonized is present in the earliest SF, as it can be seen in H.G. Wells’ seminal *The War of the Worlds* (1895). Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1923), and Ole Rölvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* (1927) demonstrate a parallel tendency in realistic fiction to see land as alien. This tendency intensified in SF from the 1950s and 1960s, in which conquest of alien landscapes is a recurring metaphor. Frank Herbert’s *Dune* series, for example, describes
a project of terraforming in which a desert planet is gradually changed to a planet with open water; the novel shows, however, an ecological awareness in that this terraforming project has unintended negative consequences. In Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars* (1995) and its sequels, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*, Robinson describes sympathetically a movement to leave Mars as it was before the project of terraforming began, but, in the end, the novels’ narrative celebrates the ingenuity of the scientists who carry out the terraforming and rejects the claim that the uninhabited planet has rights of its own. Thus, the alien landscape in Stanley’s novels is seen sympathetically, but in the end the novels endorse the human reshaping of that landscape.

In Chapter 3, I consider the place of irony in the special case of the alien known as the expatriate. Unlike Sinclair’s, Cather’s, and Rolvaag’s immigrants, who strive for assimilation into their host country’s culture, in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, the expatriates are voluntary exiles, and they retain their national identities, though they often adopt many aspects of the culture of their host country. In this ambivalent stance toward the host culture, irony plays an important role. Irony continues to be central to expatriate lit in more recent Generation-X expatriate novels such as Arthur Phillips’s *Prague* (2002). The analog to expatriate fiction is SF written from the point of view of the alien, and like expatriate fiction, much SF from the alien’s point of view uses irony to level a social critique, which may be more or less effective.

In Chapter 4, I follow the historical development of a tradition of alien abduction narratives. These narratives struggle to represent trauma induced by the Cold War, but they also point out the difficulty of any such attempt at representation. The difficulty of remembering the traumatic event, but even more importantly, the compulsion to forget it,
plays a central role in these narratives. Similarly, memory becomes a central concern in recent U.S. literature from first-generation immigrants, such as such as Tomás Rivera’s . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (1971) and Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters (1990).

In these novels by and about immigrants, as in alien abduction narratives, the compulsion to remember is often forestalled by this compulsion to forget.

The present is a crucial time in U.S. immigration policy. The Obama administration’s lawsuit against SB 1070 has yet to be decided. In addition, difficult economic times often serve as an impetus for nativist rhetoric, as I point out in Chapter 1. Thus, continued high unemployment and the resulting competition for jobs is likely to contribute to the already prevalent anti-immigrant atmosphere in the U.S. While literary theory often too glibly speaks of social control as an effort to “police the boundaries” between hegemony and subaltern, anti-immigrant rhetoric, such as Arizona SB 1070 and the call of socially conservative Republicans for the erection of a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, represent a very literal effort to police the boundaries, to “have a fence” between aliens and U.S. citizens. Clearly, influential political figures, one of whom could become the next President of the U.S., have the power to effect far-reaching social change. Similarly, legislative language, while it may be analyzed as a literary text, also has practical results on the lives of real individuals. Thus, border control is an idea that has momentous consequences. At this point, each lawmaker, and indeed each citizen of the U.S., has a choice similar to that faced by Lilith in Dawn: whether to reject the “aliens” or to accept them as equals. It is hoped that, by raising these issues of oppression and equality, this project will contribute in some way to understanding of the lives of the people behind the rhetoric.
Chapter 1

“Imported Disease”: Reproduction and Health
In Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film

In a 2004 photograph from CBC News, a baby from Uganda, born with AIDS, looks directly at the camera as though pleading for help, looking through the bars of its crib which serve both as protection and quarantine.1 The photo derives its emotional impact from the baby’s status as an innocent victim, as if the disease’s adult victims were somehow deserving of punishment. But while the baby seems to ask the viewer for assistance, it also serves as a warning, a grim reminder of the danger presented by this disease. A second image, more than twenty years older but with an unsettlingly similar composition, shows E.T., the peaceful alien from Steven Spielberg’s film E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982), dying in a hospital bed from exposure to Earth’s hostile elements.2 Like the baby, E.T.’s enlarged eyes and gray skin call attention to his illness, and as with the baby, he is connected to his hospital bed by IV tubes, though E.T.’s eyes are closed in exhaustion. These two images of illness may seem at first to have little in common with the scene from the film Alien (1979) in which the immature “chestburster”
form of the film’s eponymous alien species peers out of the abdominal cavity of its human victim. This second, far more threatening, alien’s eyes are closed because we are witnessing the moment of its horrifying birth. Rather, it is the alien’s devouring teeth that demand attention. These images, separated by time, place, and subject, all appeal to contemporary fears of contagion by linking reproduction and disease.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S., nativist rhetoric, which made its way even into such respected sites of public discourse as major city newspapers, often described first-generation Central and Eastern European immigrants as carriers of disease, so that “the customs and habits of particular ethnic groups came under increasing scrutiny by public health officials combating the disease of the city.” This tendency to blame ethnic minorities for disease has been a long-standing feature of U.S. society, and the suggestion of an uncontrolled fertility, a horror of feminine sexuality and of reproduction, often accompanied such characterizations. This construction of the material bodies, and more specifically of the reproductive habits, of immigrants as dangerous to public health has become such a persistent part of American culture that it now often goes unquestioned, and as a result of this lack of critical awareness, those who are seen as being biologically alien are often demonized as threats to the physical and moral health of the U.S. This conception of the alien as a danger to health has gained an ability to lie dormant across long stretches of time only to subsequently revive itself, like bacteria or fungal spores waiting for their next host. Unsurprisingly, this virulent, alienating rhetoric of reproduction and contamination, originally attached to immigrants, has often been an attribute of aliens in SF. Moreover, this discourse has also moved in the other direction, so that the conception of the dangerous reproductive behavior of
aliens in SF reinforces discourse concerning the dangerous reproductive behavior of immigrants, which gives this discourse about immigrants practical consequences as well.

The focus of this chapter is on the representation of aliens in discourse on reproduction and health in the U.S. This account of the historical development of discourse in aliens and health begins with Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), which despite its sympathetic account of immigrants’ daily lives reflects deep-seated nativist and misogynist fears about immigrant women’s role in reproduction. A more egalitarian and inclusive approach appears in Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), in which reproductive difference is linked not to biological disease but to psychological health. Finally, the complex imagined life cycle of the aliens from the *Alien* series of films expresses xenophobic anxieties about immigrant reproduction that played out against the contemporaneous backdrop of fears of uncontrollable contagion resulting from the AIDS scare of the 1980s. These texts all imagine life cycles that are in some way alien to the intended audience, and they all present reproduction as a potential danger to hegemony. At the same time as these texts represent reproduction, they also reproduce a multiplicity of discourses that both reinforce and contest nativist rhetoric, and these uneasily coexisting multiple discourses offer a possible way to contest nativism and accept those whom the text construes as alien.

I. Immigrants, Disease, and Fear of Reproduction in Sinclair’s *The Jungle*

When Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* resulted in the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act, though the author’s stated intention was to level a socialist critique of the excesses of capitalism practiced by the meat packers of the Union Stock Yards, he
famously expressed his disappointment by saying, “I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach.” One reason for *The Jungle*’s failure to carry out Sinclair’s planned social critique is that in many ways it is a novel that argues against itself. Though *The Jungle* clearly views the suffering of Jurgis and his family in a sympathetic light, this pro-immigrant stance is undercut by the novel’s reliance on a nativist discourse that sees immigrant femininity as fecund, uncontrolled, and monstrously alien. Critics have written about the horror with which Jurgis views reproduction in the book, in part because the birth of a child means another mouth to feed. As I hope to show, this horror of femininity can particularly be seen in the bloody birth of Jurgis and Ona’s child. In addition, the novel’s thematic concerns have formal consequences. Thus, Sinclair’s contradictory stance toward alien femininity results in the novel’s tendency toward a multiplicity of discourses and points of view.

*The Jungle* appeared against a backdrop of xenophobic fear of disease borne by recent first-generation immigrants in Chicago. On June 30, 1881, an article in *The Chicago Tribune* with the headline “THE PUBLIC HEALTH” described “An Important Conference of Physicians on Small-Pox.” The article trumpeted: “A More Rigorous [sic] Inspection Demanded at Seaports at Home and Abroad. An Interesting Discussion on the Enforced Vaccination [sic] of Immigrants. BROUGHT IN BY IMMIGRANTS. AFFLICTED WITH CONTAGIOUS DISEASE. IMMIGRANTS TO BE VACCINATED AVERSION TO VACCINATION.” This program of enforced vaccination was carried out as suggested, but public hysteria over the small-pox outbreak continued. An article from March 3, 1882, describes “IMPORTED DISEASE. How Infectious and Contagious Diseases Are Brought into the Country. And How the Small-
Pox Importation Might Be Stopped by Quarantine.” The article itself begins with this somber announcement:

Nearly 500,000 immigrant [sic] passed the New York quarantine last season—the largest number ever known in a single year in the history of this country. The indications now are that at least 650,000 immigrants will arrive this year. Already the tide has begun to sweep hitherward.

The article achieves the intended effect on the audience by referring to the sheer numbers of immigrants arriving on American shores, and this social anxiety about being outnumbered by immigrants, about the dangerously unlimited fecundity of the female immigrant, has led to the nativist fear of alien femininity.

This public epidemic of anxiety over smallpox borne by racial or ethnic minority groups was not an isolated outbreak in the late nineteenth-century U.S. Sylvia Hood Washington’s useful concept of “environmental others” draws attention to the fact that such groups, considered to be non-white or “inferior white,” were (and often still are) forced to live in environmentally degraded areas. Constructing these racially and ethnically different groups as morally and physically corrupt allowed WASPs to construct themselves as healthy, and allowed them to exert power over disenfranchised groups by forcing them into cramped and unsafe living spaces which also became sites for the dumping of industrial wastes. In New York City, the cholera epidemic of 1832 was blamed on Irish immigrants, and the polio outbreak of 1916 on Italians. Nor was this fear of outsiders directed only toward immigrants from Europe. In the same decades, a period often referred to as the Great Migration saw the movement of millions of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities to escape Jim Crow laws and other examples of overt discrimination. Washington points out a number of headlines
from Chicago papers of the time which react to the new population of blacks with a
similar hysteria over public health (“NEGRO INFLUX BRINGS DISEASE. Health
Commissioner Orders Vaccination of Arrivals to Check Small Pox”). Washington finds
evidence of the oppression faced by immigrants and African-Americans in stereotyping
newspaper accounts, but she also finds it in African-Americans’ overcrowded living
situations and in the dumping of stockyard wastes into the South Branch of the Chicago
River. However, in Chicago in the decades leading up to the publication of The Jungle,
it was recent immigrants from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe who were most
often associated with disease and uncontrolled reproduction. The negative effects of the
environmental degradation Washington describes are often blamed on the immigrants
themselves, and this circular logic plays an important role in The Jungle.

The area most affected by the pollution resulting from the Union Stock Yard’s
wastes was the adjacent neighborhood known as Back of the Yards, and the most
noticeable concrete example of the unhealthy living conditions to which these immigrants
were subjected is the West Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, which locally
became known as “Bubbly Creek.” Washington relates Chicagoans’ memories of the
polluted stretch of water:

As a result of the decaying material that had sunk to the bottom, bubbles
of gas were constantly being released. “Local legend claims that the
diameter of these bubbles had to be measured in feet. One eruption was
said to have encircled a boat. In calmer moments, residents recall bubbles
five to eight inches across. They remember workmen on a small barge
skimming the slime off the surface and collecting it in 50-gallon drums.
The water was so dense that Bubbly Creek never froze.”

William Cronon describes the horrifying environmental degradation of the Chicago River
in similarly shocking detail:
The stench that hung over the South Branch and the filthy ice harvested from it were clear signs of its pollution. Decaying organic matter, whether in the form of packing wastes, manure, or raw human sewage, was the chief water supply problem the city faced.\textsuperscript{15}

It was not the wealthy owners of the stockyards, such as the Armour and Swift families, that lived in the unlivable Back of the Yards district. Instead, it was the stockyard workers, who at the time of the founding of the stockyards were primarily recent immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, but who later on were predominantly African-American.\textsuperscript{16} The nativist discourse which claimed that immigrants constituted a health risk created a circular logic in which those claims forced immigrants into crowded and polluted living conditions, which exposed them to a constant risk of poor health. This logic, which imposed on immigrants both the actuality and the imputation of bad health, is one of the most affecting points Sinclair makes in his famous account of life in the Back of the Yards.

The ideas of Sinclair’s novel range widely and draw on many modes of discourse available to writers at the turn of the twentieth century. Though the novel is intended to be a socialist call to arms, some of these modes of discourse have little to do with socialism. According to June Howard, Jurgis “is conducted through a series of experiences that are not only representative but comprehensive, for this account of the meat-packing industry and the conditions of life for immigrant workers attempts to be encyclopedic.”\textsuperscript{17} This valorization of comprehensiveness results in a novel that is encyclopedic not only in terms of plot, as Howard points out, but also in terms of discourse. For example, the novel’s narrative is often interrupted by overt authorial editorializing, as when Jurgis’s introduction to the concept of labor unions leads Sinclair
to launch an explicitly socialist critique of Social Darwinism and its frequent corollary, “laissez-faire” government policy toward business. On the other hand, socialism, the alternative discourse which Sinclair presents as a solution to Jurgis’s suffering, is often presented in a didactic and unrealistic manner. At the end of the novel, Jurgis passively receives instruction from a series of socialist activists, leading Howard to comment that “when we move from the exposition of a problem to its solution, the story somehow ceases to be Jurgis’s. In the final four chapters, he is merely an observer.” In addition, the novel also owes a significant debt to contemporary religious writing. The scenes later in the novel in which Jurgis finds that Marija has become a prostitute, for example, owe a debt to the fallen woman novel. Furthermore, the socialist’s speech that converts Jurgis is a religious conversion; Jurgis is saved by socialism, as is suggested by his repeated phrase after the meeting at which he is converted: “By God! By God! By God!” Finally, Sinclair’s description of the strike unfortunately relies on uncomfortably stereotypical descriptions of African Americans. As Washington’s account of environmental racism in the Back of the Yards neighborhood suggests, one significant motivation for the conflict between African Americans and European immigrants is competition for jobs. Clearly, though they contribute to the novel’s encyclopedic completeness, the effect of these stereotypes on the effectiveness of Sinclair’s socialist critique is negative.

But another important discourse on which Sinclair relies in the novel is that of monstrous and uncontrolled femininity. Scott Derrick argues that nature is portrayed in the novel as feminine and evil, and that Jurgis (and Sinclair) are horrified by it; nature is dark and Darwinian in the novel, and feminine fecundity is threatening.
notes, Sinclair was starving and poor as he was writing the novel in serial form, and thus Sinclair could doubtless understand Jurgis’s horror at the thought of another mouth to feed. Derrick argues that Jurgis’s horror of femininity is the result of a crisis in masculinity; under the traditional gender roles of Jurgis’s Lithuanian culture, as well as under those of the dominant Anglo American culture, men were raised by women to be clearly different from women. Derrick correctly points out Jurgis’s revulsion at the reproductive process. On the other hand, in Chapter 22, Jurgis makes an escape to nature, and clearly he is happy there. Sinclair appropriates yet another discourse, that of the pastoral, in his description of Jurgis as a single man traveling in a friendly nature. The use of the pastoral discourse leads Sinclair to present another, less threatening, side of nature by removing its threatening fecundity, its excessive reproductive capability. Thus, nature provides a respite from the novel’s primarily urban setting, and from its participation in political discourse. So it is not nature itself, and not femininity itself, that Sinclair reacts against; rather, it is fears of reproduction, seen most clearly in the scene in which Ona dies in childbirth. In fact, Ona’s death is one of the things Jurgis is running from in this pastoral interlude.

It is not only Ona’s fragile health and her eventual death that makes the scene so harrowing and effective. Instead, every aspect of the scene is calculated to provoke horror by emphasizing its unfamiliarity, its alienness, to Jurgis. The winter weather is severe, and Jurgis’ poverty is so abject that he can barely pay five percent of what Madame Haupt, the midwife, asks. Madame Haupt herself is ethnically alien from both Jurgis’ and the imagined reader’s point of view. She is marked as an immigrant (Sinclair calls her “Dutch,” probably meaning German) by a strong accent, and when Jurgis first
sees her, she is drunk and cooking an inexpensive meal of liver and onions. She is also “enormously fat—when she walked she rolled like a small boat on the ocean, and the dishes in the cupboard jostled each other. She wore a filthy blue wrapper, and her teeth were black.” Similarly, the tools of Madame Haupt’s trade, including old goose grease, display a horrifying lack of hygiene, and her greed for money causes a delay which contributes to Ona’s death. Thus, Madame Haupt’s alienness and her rejection of modern medical practices imbue the scene with an intense sense of foreboding that comes from Jurgis’s need to put Ona and his child into this alien’s hands.

Of course, Ona’s fertility is linked inextricably in the novel with death. Thus, Jurgis’s realization that Ona will die is marked by blood. When Jurgis returns from drinking at a nearby bar, he sees Madame Haupt, and he “turned white and reeled. She had her jacket off, like one of the workers on the killing-beds. Her hands and arms were smeared with blood, and blood was splashed upon her clothing and her face.” The comparison to the stockyard worker is especially pertinent, because this birth will bring only death. Thus, in Ona’s death scene, as in the Alien films, which I will discuss in the next section, reproduction is associated with an excess, not only of reproductive capability, but also of blood. Madame Haupt dismissively says, after demanding her full payment, “She vill die, of course . . . . Der baby is dead now.” Thus, Madame Haupt’s lack of empathy and her alienation from Jurgis are associated with one of the most striking entries in the novel’s encyclopedic enumeration of Jurgis’s sufferings. In fact, the callousness of this alien midwife contributes to Ona’s death, and to the terrible birth and death of Jurgis and Ona’s child. In this way, the midwife, whom Jurgis and the
reader might reasonably expect to put forth every effort to nurture human life, becomes
another example of the cruelty of the manmade environment of Back of the Yards.

Sinclair’s novel belonged, of course, to a progressive tradition which attempted to
argue for more humane treatment of immigrants. As I have argued, it is the novel’s
encyclopedic character that leads it to see immigrants both as humans deserving of just
treatment and as sites of fecundity and contagion. Later in the twentieth century,
prevailing egalitarian strands of thought in U.S. culture strove to bring about wider
acceptance of immigrants. One example of this egalitarian stance toward alienness is
Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which a biologically different
humanoid species is viewed not only sympathetically, but also as a model of
psychological health.

II. Reproduction, Health and Adualism in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin imagines a humanoid species
with a life cycle quite different from the threat to life imagined by turn-of-the-last-
century xenophobia. In contrast to the xenophobic nativism described above, Le Guin
links the hermaphroditic—or, in Le Guin’s word, “androgynous”—aliens of the planet
Gethen with psychological stability and health, questioning traditional gender roles and
reversing the rhetoric centering on reproduction and disease followed throughout
American culture in this chapter. Her imagined humanoids, the Gethenians, offer an
alternative to the fear of femininity and reproduction underlying *The Jungle*. The
possibility of imagining a non-confrontational relationship between the Gethenians and
the narrator, a human male named Genly Ai, arises due to the Gethenians’ adualistic
philosophy. Le Guin’s critique, though incomplete and self-contradictory, of the dualistic conception of biological sex serves as an important step toward imagining a less hostile attitude toward the “alien.” Given the long historical connection between reproduction and ethnic or racial otherness described in this chapter, in other words, Le Guin’s attempt to move toward an adualistic conception of gender and reproduction offers an important clue about how to un-alien the aliens.

Much of the critical reception of the novel centers on the degree to which it is a feminist text. Le Guin’s creation of the Gethenians offers a flexible conception of biological sex which challenges the notion of gender as flexible and socially constructed, and of biological sex as a given. Certainly, this challenge to traditional gender roles offers great potential for feminist thought, and indeed, Le Guin is often cited as an example of feminist SF. One typical response is that of Marleen S. Barr, who argues that feminist SF writers “venture outside women’s reality and imagine a social revolution directed toward changing patriarchy,” citing Le Guin as an example. On the other hand, in 1976, Le Guin resisted seeing Left Hand of Darkness as a work about feminism: “The fact is that the real subject of the book is not feminism or sex or gender or anything of the sort; as far as I can see, it is a book about betrayal and fidelity.” In 1987, Le Guin tried to strike a balance:

This parenthesis is overstated; I was feeling defensive, and resentful that critics of the book insisted upon talking only about its ‘gender problems,’ as if it were an essay not a novel. ‘The fact is that the real subject of the book is...’ This is bluster. I had opened a can of worms and was trying hard to shut it. The fact is, however that there are other aspects to the book, which are involved with its sex/gender aspects quite inextricably.
In her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin argues that fiction simultaneously lies and tells the truth” and that SF is “not predictive; it is descriptive”—that SF describes the present. She makes the claim that

> the people in [the novel] are androgynous, but that doesn’t mean that I’m predicting that in a millennium or so we will all be androgynous, or announcing that I think we damned well ought to be androgynous. I’m merely observing, in the peculiar, devious, and thought-experimental way proper to science fiction, that if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weathers, we already are."

Here, Le Guin suggests that men’s and women’s gender roles are more flexible than is commonly assumed and that individual humans have a surprising ability to show both those personality traits commonly considered to be masculine and those commonly considered to be feminine. That is, Le Guin suggests that Gethenian sexual adualism is a metaphor for the multiplicity of human sexuality.

Implicit in this critique of gender dualism is a critique of the dualistic thought so central to humanity’s ways of making sense of the world. Interestingly, at the same time the novel takes great pains to avoid making the Gethenians’ androgyny a sign of sickness, aberration, or insanity, making it instead a sign of psychological health. Le Guin accomplishes this connection of androgyny and mental health by drawing on the fascination with Eastern religions which was current at the time of the novel’s publication. Le Guin’s novel belongs to a historical moment in the 1960s in which Western liberals often adopted (with widely varying degrees of accuracy) several aspects of Asian religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, as a way of escaping the confines of the Judeo-Christian tradition.
Just as the Gethenians’ intersex bodies call into question dualistic assumptions of biological sex, Gethen’s belief systems, which Le Guin based on Eastern systems of thought such as Taoism, call into question the concept of dualism itself. In an encounter based on Le Guin’s understanding of the differences between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, the novel’s main narrator, Genly Ai, develops an admiration for the Handdarata, followers of Karhide’s dominant religion, an adualistic religion reminiscent of Taoism. Genly is an envoy of the Ekumen, a peaceful league of planets whose name, replete with Christian overtones, suggests a combination of the United Nations and the Catholic Church. Genly has been assigned by the Ekumen to visit Gethen, also known as Winter because of its cold temperatures, both as an informal ambassador to prepare the planet for possible membership in the Ekumen and in his capacity as an ethnologist to study the planet’s unique gender system. By way of contrast with the Ekumen, which shares many similarities with Euro-American religious, scientific, and philosophical traditions, the Gethenian nation of Karhide shares many similarities with East Asian thought. From Genly’s perspective, Karhide’s national character has been formed by “an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara.”

One Eastern religious practice which Le Guin makes a part of the Handdara religion, meditation, was much admired in the West in the 1960s for its ability to expand consciousness, but also for its role in health. In fact, the popularity in the West of transcendental meditation, yoga, and other forms of meditation owed much to their claims to improve physical and psychological health. Similarly, Genly’s first opinion of Handdara as “passive” and “anarchic” is later tempered by admiration. He recognizes
quickly than Handdara offers access to knowledge that are unavailable to the Ekumen’s 
more analytical modes of thought.

Genly clearly marks the Gethenians as alien based not only on their religious 
difference from himself, but also on their biological difference. While he is quick to 
accept the value of Handdara, he has more difficulty coming to terms with the 
Gethenians’ sexual behavior. At the beginning of the novel, Genly is far from 
comfortable with the Gethenians’ androgyny, introducing his future close friend Estraven 
as “this person” and repeatedly revising the gendered nouns and pronouns he uses to 
describe “him”: “the man—man I must say, having said he and his.” Genly’s 
“assignment” of a masculine gender to Estraven echoes the discomfort often expressed by 
the dominant society when faced with, for example, transsexuals and others whose bodies 
or behaviors challenge traditional gender roles. However, Genly himself knows that he 
has an incomplete understanding of Gethenian culture. In describing the owner of the 
apartment he rents, Genly speaks of “my landlady, a voluble man.” The landlady “was 
so feminine in looks and manner that once I asked him how many children he had. He 
looked glum. He had never borne any. He had, however, sired four. It was one of the 
little jolts I was always getting.” In fact, Genly admits that he is a somewhat unreliable 
narrator when he begins his account with a claim that “Truth is a matter of the 
imagination.”

In a further exploration of the relativity and the decentered character of 
knowledge, Genly is not the only narrator of the novel. In addition to the folk tales 
quoted by Genly, Estraven himself also becomes a narrator. In fact, the novel continues 
to add voices throughout. Genly is only the first narrator; the novel periodically inserts
between his chapters, first folk tales recorded by Gethenians, then folk tales recorded by Genly, then excerpts from Estraven’s diary, then the findings of other anthropologists. The effect of this multiplicity of narrative voices is to strengthen the novel’s adualism, as proposed by the Handdarata. Like the multiplicity of discourses in *The Jungle*, it also offers a model for the contestation of hegemonic conceptions of gender and ethnicity. By giving a voice both to discourses that reinforce hegemony and to those that contest it, these novels provide a way out of hegemony, but they also assure that this way out will be inconsistent and incomplete.

The novel most clearly demonstrates the inconsistency and incompleteness of its challenge to traditional gender roles at the moment when it deals most directly with the Gethenians’ androgyny, in the scenes in which Estraven goes into kemmer while he and Genly are alone together on the ice. Genly compares Estraven in kemmer with human conceptions of femininity:

> His face in the reddish light was as soft, as vulnerable, as remote as the face of a woman who looks at you out of her thoughts and does not speak. And then I saw again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man.  

They agree to avoid one another, and both are relieved. Genly says that

> It was from that sexual tension between us, admitted now and understood, but not assuaged, that the great and sudden assurance of friendship between us rose: a friendship so much needed by us both in our exile . . . that it might as well be called, now as later, love…. For us to meet sexually would be for us to meet once more as aliens. We had touched, in the only way we could touch. We left it at that. I do not know if we were right.

Genly’s assertion of a friendship that “might as well be called” love is followed by the apparently contradictory claim that sexual contact between Estraven and himself would
undo this friendship and return them to the status of “aliens” to one another, as they had been before their friendship on the ice. The choice of words is startling, since it suggests that Genly sees any sexual act that crosses the boundary between gendered and androgynous as an act that would push the two further apart rather than bring them closer. In other words, Genly declares friendship, and is willing to concede that it may be love, in order to forestall any possibility of a sexual relationship. After Estraven goes out of kemmer again, the discomfort Genly feels is somewhat abated. However, the fact that the relationship never becomes sexual may suggest that the novel, while successfully pointing out the discomfort caused to the sexually “normative” by the androgynous body, itself fails to completely overcome that discomfort. Certainly Genly never overcomes that discomfort, and as the novel’s primary narrator, his is the voice which speaks loudest.

This remaining discomfort with what Genly calls “ambisexuality” is demonstrated by the fact that the novel, in the end, assigns gender to its Gethenian characters in much the same way that Genly himself does. Estraven, a political leader who even becomes something of a traditionally masculine hero when he summons up dothe, a short, voluntary and controlled burst of what Genly calls “hysterical strength,”41 to rescue Genly, is clearly labeled as male by the text, mainly because he fills a traditionally masculine role in the plot. He is ultimately a “man,” as Genly calls him in Chapter 1, because his actions are the actions of a man. Genly has become so comfortable with this accommodation that when he witnesses the landing of the first spacecraft from the Ekumen, the sexed humans “looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them.
Their voices sounded strange: too deep, too shrill. Like Genly, the reader becomes, though gradually and partially, accustomed to the possibility of an intersex society.

Public attitude in the U.S., which welcomed immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s, became more hostile in the 1980s. In 1979, ten years after the publication of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the first film of the *Alien* series expressed growing anxieties about immigration and reproduction. In this immensely popular SF series, the reproductive behavior of an alien species represents a biological threat to humans. The films explore issues of gender and power in a way very different from Le Guin’s imagined androgyny, and they capture a social moment in which biology and reproduction demanded a great deal of public attention in the U.S. as a result of the AIDS scare. The *Alien* films belong to a historical moment in which fears of femininity and of biological difference seen in *The Jungle* experienced a resurgence, leading to these films’ powerful association of reproduction and alienness with blood, disease, and death.

**III. The Sting of the Predatory WASP: Reproduction and Fear in the *Alien* Films**

In *Aliens*, the second film of the *Alien* series, the main character, Ripley, travels to a remote planet overrun by dangerous aliens in order to advise a company of Marines on how to eradicate the extraterrestrial threat. One of the Marines, Vasquez, is a woman who is considered as tough as any of her male counterparts. One of the other Marines, Hudson, played by Bill Paxton, jokes with Vasquez: “She heard alien and thought somebody said ‘illegal alien,’ so she signed up.” Vasquez will die fighting the aliens, so she is clearly an example of the way in which, in SF, humans of different races,
ethnicities, or present-day nationalities are often united against an alien threat, as seen in the reading of *Starship Troopers* in the introduction of this work.

But Hudson’s joke illustrates the complexities of Vasquez’s position in the film, since it suggests not only that Vasquez is culturally an alien herself, but also that she joined the Marines in order to defend the hegemonic culture against those who are culturally similar to herself but who have a different legal status. In the films’ distant future of multinational corporations and a united humanity, significantly, illegal immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border is still imagined to be a political issue.

Finally, Vasquez, like Ripley, is also biologically alien in terms of gender from the majority of the films’ other human characters, since the cast of the series is largely male. Ripley’s gender has led many critics to engage in feminist readings of the films. However, as in *The Jungle* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the most salient difference is reproductive difference, since it is precisely the biological reproduction of the alien threat that is at issue in the films. This emphasis on reproductive difference means that every interaction between the films’ two sentient species is framed by power inequality and war, and that the films, while they are even able to imagine a biological fusion of the two species, are unable to imagine a power-sharing framework between them. The difficulty in imagining a non-confrontational relationship with these aliens lies in their use of human hosts for reproduction. That is, fear of a threat to normative forms of human reproduction is the fear that cannot be overcome in these films.

In fact, the aliens’ imagined reproductive cycle grew out of fears connected to prohibited sexual acts and aspects of human reproduction. The screenwriter of *Alien*, Dan O’Bannon, explicitly intended the alien’s life cycle to be disturbing to audiences
because of its uncomfortable similarities to human sexuality, and particularly to sexual practices considered deviant:

One thing that people are all disturbed about is sex.... I said, “That’s how I’m going to attack the audience; I’m going to attack them sexually. And I’m not going to go after the women in the audience, I’m going to attack the men. I am going to put in every image I can think of to make the men in the audience cross their legs. Homosexual oral rape, birth. The thing lays its eggs down your throat, the whole number.”

O’Bannon’s explication of his intention couples an explicit anti-patriarchal message (“I’m not going to go after the women”) with violent imagery (the description of getting the audience’s attention as an “attack”). Despite O’Bannon’s insistence that Alien’s sexual overtones are used for shock value, as well as to intentionally reverse traditional gender roles and the victimization of women in the horror genre, at the core of the first film, as well as of its sequels, is an understanding of reproduction, and of sexual and reproductive acts considered to be feminine or homosexual, as a threat.

As a result of this focus on biological reproduction, much of the critical literature on the Alien series has centered on the issue of gender in the films. Though these films differ from the majority of action and SF films in having a strong female protagonist, they have also been criticized for reproducing sexist stereotypes of women. Patricia Melzer argues that Ripley’s character serves as an empowering depiction of a strong woman which questions not only traditional gender roles, but also traditional definitions of humanity. Melzer observes that

the most frightening element in the Alien series is the alien’s invasion of the human body. The images and terrors connected to the alien’s appropriation of the human form center around reproduction: “impregnation” followed by eruption from the body and the alien’s mindless drive to reproduce.
In Melzer’s account, the films ultimately call into question this assumption of the aliens’ reproductive difference. On the other hand, Jacqueline Pearson has pointed out that “male writers [in SF] . . . present strong female characters without actually questioning the sexual status quo,” citing the Alien series as an example. Interestingly, Constance Penley sees a difference between Ripley’s portrayal in Alien and that in Aliens:

Ripley is, again, the bravest and smartest member of the team. But this time there is a difference, one that is both improbable and symptomatic. Ripley “develops” a maternal instinct… Ripley is thus marked by a difference that is automatically taken to be a sign of femininity… Aliens reintroduces the issue of sexual difference [to offer a] conservative lesson about maternity… mothers will be mothers, and they will always be women.

Thus, for Penley, the challenge to patriarchy offered by Ripley in the first film is undone by the second. Similarly, David Greven summarizes the critical consensus that Aliens presents “a reactionary retooling of the Ripley character that transforms her renegade femininity into the decidedly less radical one of the Reagan-era supermom, associating her as well with U.S. military power and attendant hostility to foreign threat,” though he points out that Ripley’s relationship to motherhood is complex and troubled.

Despite this extensive discussion of the workings of gender in the films, feminist readings such as Melzer’s fail to take into account the element of “contagion” (Ripley’s word) represented by alien reproduction in the films. Penley’s and Greven’s intriguing claims that Aliens represents a gender politics much more regressive than that of Alien take on new significance when considered in terms of reproduction and disease, because the seven years between the two films saw the onset of the most serious and best-known threat of reproductive contagion of the 1980s, the AIDS scare. Thus, the fact that the first cases of AIDS were identified in 1981, and the disease named only in 1982, after Alien
and before *Aliens*, may explain the differences in Ripley’s performance of gender roles in the two films.

The three photos described in the introduction of the present chapter suggest that *Alien*’s powerful association of reproduction with fear found a receptive viewing audience in 1979, two years before the onset of the AIDS pandemic in the U.S. The public reaction to AIDS/HIV demonstrates that the tendency to blame immigrants, internal and external, for threats to public health is hardly isolated to turn-of-the-last-century Chicago. In fact, it has continued to shape the political landscape in the U.S. into the era of AIDS. Jack Kemp, a Republican who sought the nomination for the Presidential election of 1988, at the height of the AIDS scare in the U.S., suggested “required testing of immigrants, health workers, hospital patients and those undergoing routine medical checkups, seeking insurance, applying for marriage licenses or arrested for drug use or prostitution.”\(^{50}\) The positioning of immigrants first on this list lends a certain punitive purpose to the proposal, since the fact of immigration in itself can hardly be a risk factor for the disease. In fact, AIDS/HIV has often been seen as a “foreign” disease, felt by writers over the world to be a problem belonging to other countries, but certainly not to the writer’s own. In some cases, AIDS is of course still seen as “a deserved punishment for the sexual transgressor; the unchecked growth of deviance was a symptom of a more fundamental social disorder.”\(^ {51}\) In other cases, quarantine has been seen as a viable solution, though history suggests that it has seldom been an effective one.\(^{52}\) All these currents of the public response to AIDS, in the U.S. as well as in developed and developing countries, have contributed to stigmatization of HIV-positive
patients, and to blame of immigrants for the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Women in particular have suffered from this stigma.\textsuperscript{53}

The films’ creation of a detailed, exotic life cycle for the aliens is calculated to show a horror of the basic facts of reproduction that is a logical extension of the same cultural script found in \textit{The Jungle}. In \textit{Alien}, the crew of the salvage vessel \textit{Nostromo} encounters the alien ship, a forbidding black structure which looks vaguely like the exoskeleton of an insect. Captain Dallas (Tom Skerritt) finds the body of an alien, larger than human and with its body exploded outward, whose dead flesh looks like rotten meat. It sits in a phallic control chair, and the openings onto the ship’s many corridors are reminiscent of vaginas.\textsuperscript{54} Soon after, Kane finds an incubation chamber where hundreds of thousands of leathery eggs are resting. One of the eggs starts to move when Kane nears it, then it opens to reveal a soft interior. Suddenly a small crablike alien (a stage in the life cycle called the “facegrabber” in many online sources) attaches itself to Kane’s face and grips it firmly with its insectlike legs. After some time, this immature form/larval form/insertion body drops off and dies, and Kane reawakens. Then, in one of the film’s best-known and most-parodied scenes, while Kane is voraciously eating, he starts to cough and collapses, and an immature adult alien explodes out of his abdomen.\textsuperscript{55} The blood that sprays all over the \textit{Nostromo}’s galley in this alien “birth,” like the blood in the scene of the birth of Jurgis’s and Ona’s child in \textit{The Jungle}, juxtaposes reproduction with pain and death.

The series’ second film, \textit{Aliens} (1986), gives more detailed information about the aliens’ imagined life cycle while complicating Ripley’s gender status, her relationship with other humans, and her relationship with the aliens. In this film, Ripley meets and
takes responsibility for a feral child called Newt. At one point, seeing specimens of the facegrabbers, Newt asks, “Isn’t that how babies grow, I mean people babies? They grow inside.” Ripley answers, “That’s very different.” But much of the effect of the alien life cycle is that it is a perversion of the human life cycle, a kind of pregnancy in which both men and women can be, in the film’s word, “impregnated.” The most serious threat posed by the aliens’ life cycle is not introduced until the final scenes of *Aliens*, when Ripley comes face to face with an alien Queen who produces eggs in a way similar to that of queen ants, termites, or bees. The Queen’s translucent ovipositor churns out hundreds, perhaps thousands, of eggs, and even the determined and tight-lipped Ripley is rendered speechless for a moment before she attacks. Interestingly, Ripley’s own life cycle presents similarities to the Queen’s. Ripley is a mother, but at the beginning of *Aliens* it is revealed—it is never mentioned in *Alien* at all—that her daughter has died of old age. Ripley’s daughter’s death is quickly brushed aside (it was cut from the original theatrical release, and reappears only in the Director’s Cut reissue); it really only came up to provide foreshadowing for, and motivation for, Ripley’s protection of Newt in the famous climax, the fight with the alien Queen in which Ripley wears a power-loader, a mechanical suit which gives her the physical strength to defeat the Queen.

Despite the fear of and hostility toward immigrant reproduction and contagion which only intensified as the films entered the period of the AIDS scare, the similarity of the aliens’ life cycle to that of predatory wasps draws attention to the fact that the aliens are often abetted by the series’ predatory WASPs such as Carter Burke (Paul Reiser). In fact, the films repeatedly point out the negative effects of the greed and cruelty of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, often simply called the Company. In *Alien*, the
Scott’s science officer, Ash (Ian Holm), is secretly an android who has been ordered to protect the alien for the weapons division of Weyland-Yutani: “Bring back life form. Priority one. All other priorities rescinded.” To Ash, the alien is “[t]he perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility…. I admire its purity. A survivor, unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality.” The crew’s human members disagree, and Ash is burned by the crew for following the Company’s orders and abetting the aliens. This critique of the amorality of global capital continues in Aliens, in which Weyland-Yutani has once more requested specimens for the Weapons division. In order to exploit the aliens’ toughness and lethal offensive capabilities, Burke gives instructions for facegraders to be kept alive. Company decisions like this one repeatedly put human lives at risk, and the Company repeatedly chooses to ignore that risk in favor of profit. Thus, the alliance between the aliens and the Company in the films presents a revolutionary critique of the voracious and inhuman greed of global capital.

These two readings of reproduction in the Alien series, the reactionary one in which the aliens represent the threat of AIDS carried by immigrants across U.S. borders and the revolutionary one in which the aliens represent global capital’s insatiable greed, are hardly mutually exclusive, and indeed their coexistence offers an explanation for the series’ knotty political stance, which critics have often attempted to untangle with little success. In the third film of the series, Aliens, Ripley discovers that she has been “impregnated” with an alien Queen. In the film’s final scene, she throws herself backward into a foundry’s furnace just as the immature alien is bursting out of her chest, clasping the alien to herself as she falls with an embrace designed to kill. While
Ripley’s choice to kill herself rather than allow herself to become the “mother” of an alien serves as an affirmation of her humanness, it also serves as a repudiation of traditional femininity, and perhaps her repudiation of global capital and hegemonic whiteness as well. Like Vasquez, Ripley is herself alienated from hegemony and social norms, and like Vasquez, she dies fighting the aliens.

IV. Conclusion: Rural Immigrants and Health

Of course, it was not only to the cities that waves of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe came in the late nineteenth century. These immigrants were essential in the settling of the Great Plains as well. While immigrants were associated with disease in the cities, they faced a different set of social expectations in rural areas, which were increasingly seen as a site of health, “a place apart from the decadence and decay of urban landscapes.” Willa Cather describes two very different families of European immigrants to the Great Plains in two of her best-known novels, *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*. In *My Ántonia*, the Shimerdas, a recently-immigrated Bohemian family, are regarded with suspicion by Anglo-American settlers. Before Jim Burden has even met the Shimerdas, his travelling companion and guardian, Jake, approves when Jim shyly declines to meet the family because “you were likely to get diseases from foreigners.” This warning, Jim’s first introduction to the Shimerdas, reiterates the xenophobic rhetoric linking immigrants with disease discussed throughout this chapter.

However, for Cather, Ántonia Shimerda becomes precisely a symbol of health. It is Ántonia’s association with the land that gives her this health, since, as the narrator of the Introduction (purportedly Cather herself) points out, “More than any other person we
remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood.”

The last time that Jim sees her, he is first struck by the differences between the older Ántonia and the child he grew up with, but immediately he is reassured by looking into her eyes: “She was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished.”

She tells Jim that she loves her apple trees “as if they were people,” and his final comment on their reunion underlines Ántonia’s health and strength, and reiterates the point that this health and strength is derived from the land on which she lives.

She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions. It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.

Ántonia’s emotional relationship with her farm’s specific natural objects, her sense of belonging to the place she lives in, allows her to manage it successfully. As I will argue in the next chapter, in O Pioneers!, Alexandra Bergson, a very different immigrant woman farmer, also has an emotional connection with her home which is an important element in her success, but it is her view of her farm as an alien and hostile landscape that is the foundation of her success as a farmer. Thus, in the next chapter I shift my focus from an urban to a rural environment in order to trace the history of American attitudes toward alien landscapes, beginning with the turn of the twentieth century and ending with the 1990s, as well as the effects of those attitudes on SF depictions of the colonization of new planets in the second half of the twentieth century.
Chapter 2

“It is America’s Destiny to Lead”: Alien Landscapes and the Limits of Manifest Destiny in Twentieth-Century American Fiction

On July 20, 1989, President George H. W. Bush marked the twentieth anniversary of the first manned landing on the moon with his announcement of the Space Exploration Initiative. Bush justified the program with language clearly drawn from an earlier chapter in North American history, the westward expansion of the U.S.: “Why Mars? Because it is humanity’s destiny to strive, to seek, to find. And because it is America’s destiny to lead.”1 Bush’s justification for this expensive and dangerous future undertaking is also a nod to a particular mythic vision of America’s past, since his language derives much of its force from American exceptionalism. In particular, his repeated invocation of “destiny” echoes the Manifest Destiny rhetoric of U.S. westward expansion in the nineteenth century. More recently, the first President Bush’s call to put humans on the ground on Mars was taken up by his son George W. Bush, who announced the Constellation program in 2003. Constellation’s chief goals were a return to the moon and, ultimately, a manned NASA expedition to Mars.2 In 2010, Barack Obama cancelled the Constellation program, but challenged NASA to launch a manned mission to Mars by 2030.3 In protest against the cancellation of Constellation, several prominent astronauts,
including Neil Armstrong, circulated an open letter lauding America’s past involvement in the exploration of space and calling the cancellation “destructive.” However, Buzz Aldrin supported Obama’s decision, arguing that Constellation’s focus on moon voyages was a distraction and calling Mars “our ultimate destination in space.” It is no surprise that many writers, thinkers, and scientists share Aldrin’s view, given the long-standing fascination Mars has exercised in popular consciousness. Often, as in the case of the debate surrounding the future of the U.S. space program, the appeal of Mars, and of the wider reaches of space beyond, has even shaped public policy.

The rhetoric of manifest destiny which led the first President Bush to advocate the colonization of Mars has also exercised a formative influence on science fiction. At times, SF texts treat the concept of manifest destiny with clear authorial endorsement, while at others they self-consciously comment on or critique it. Few phrases are more recognizable to fans of SF than the first words of William Shatner’s voice-over narration to the opening credits of the original Star Trek series: “Space: the final frontier.” However, the conception of space as frontier extends far beyond the opening credits of Star Trek. In fact, science fiction has employed, and sometimes critiqued, a terminology of discovery, exploration, conquest, mapping and the claiming of new lands which it shares with Manifest Destiny and the Anglo settlement of the American frontier. Ultimately, what is at stake in SF about the settlement of alien environments is the preservation or degradation of the real environment on Earth today. Much SF extends notions of personhood and “human” rights to aliens because aliens possess sentience, a quality usually considered human, while denying the same rights to alien landscapes. In fact, the speculative character of SF often allows it to frame the central questions of the
environmental movement, and to illustrate the practical consequences of attitudes toward the environment, more clearly than does realistic fiction.

Thus, while in the other chapters I focus on encounters between humans and sentient alien beings, in this chapter I focus primarily on “barren” alien landscapes and non-sentient alien life-forms, in order to describe changing attitudes toward the colonization of alien landscapes in American literature from the twentieth century. I begin by discussing the concept of alien landscape in H. G. Wells’ genre-defining novel *War of the Worlds* (1895). Next, I show the similar characterization of the Great Plains as alien landscape in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1923) and Ole Rölvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* (Norwegian, 1925; English trans., 1927), two early-twentieth-century novels about first-generation immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe on the Great Plains, set in the late nineteenth century. In order to show the more recent evolution of American cultural attitudes toward land, I will read Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres* (1991) in company with well-known science fiction novels about the settlement of planets with no sentient indigenous alien life, such as Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars* (1993), to follow the historical development of the conflict between human colonizers on the one hand and a colonized alien landscape on the other. One important feature of this historical development in the trope of the alien landscape is the emergence of an ecological consciousness. Thus, in Cather and Rölvaag the landscape is the “outside” against which the novel’s events unfold, while Smiley’s text attempts to give the landscape more agency and value as a thing in itself. Similarly, SF novels from the second half of the twentieth century show an increasing tendency to
critique the exploitation of alien landscapes like that of Mars and a growing sympathy for those who wish to preserve them.

I. Rationalization of Land and Ecological Invasion in H. G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*

Ecological models of land use that emphasize a non-destructive relationship between humans and their environment have often come into conflict with other models that emphasize human mastery of the environment. Historically, Europeans and white North Americans engaged in colonizing new areas have often seen natural objects in these colonized landscapes as unfamiliar, as alien, and thus as lacking inherent value and rights. A full history of the historical causes of and philosophical justifications for the colonial annexation of foreign lands, as well as for the related concept of manifest destiny, is outside the scope of this chapter. However, two justifications in particular are often repeated in fiction that tries to justify or critique the colonization of new lands. The first of these philosophical underpinnings of colonial attitudes toward land in the nineteenth century is a series of technological and economic shifts that made travel both easier and more lucrative, and the second is an increasing tendency for land to be subjected to a rational order, explored, surveyed, mapped, and fenced in order for it to be made suitable for human settlement.

The global nature of capital in the nineteenth century brought about an increasing ease of travel which made European colonialism and U.S. westward settlement possible. For Karl Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, capitalism requires an ever larger pool of resources to draw from. As a result, international capital
has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes.6

In addition to providing a rationale for European colonialism and U.S. expansionism, this globalizing tendency of capitalism also brought about new technological developments such as the steamship and train, which made travel easier, cheaper, and thus more profitable. In the U.S. context, these new modes of transportation enabled immigrants from Central, Northern, and Eastern Europe to travel to the Great Plains. Furthermore, these more recent immigrants began to displace English-speaking immigrants who had been born within the borders of the United States, igniting intense competition for jobs and land. This competition then led Anglos and non-English-speaking first-generation immigrants westward in ever greater numbers.

In addition to the forces of capitalism described by Marx, another factor in the colonial drive for expansion was the cultural dominance of an Enlightenment philosophy which saw nature as chaotic and recalcitrant, as a source of raw materials which could be exploited through a process of rationalization and urbanization of previously unsettled lands. In her influential work of feminist environmental history *Ecological Revolutions*, Carolyn Merchant describes the industrialization of agriculture in New England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Merchant’s account, philosophers ranging from rationalists like René Descartes to empiricists like Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith described the natural world in mechanical terms, as a sort of wind-up automaton composed of discrete atoms and subject to scientifically explainable laws. Merchant sees traces of this instrumental attitude toward nature in such divergent sources as farmers’
almanacs and the speeches of such prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans as Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams. She also cites Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858), U.S. Senator from Missouri and noted exponent of manifest destiny. In particular, John Locke’s conception of property is often cited, by Merchant and others, as a rationale for European colonization of the New World. For Locke, land which is idle is open to settlement, and an owner who does not improve it may reasonably be replaced by one who does: “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labor does, as it were, enclose it from the common.” For Merchant, in this mechanistic view of nature,

The mechanical paradigm of association and dissociation of atoms provided the rationale for agricultural and social improvement, while males moving in free association became the entrepreneurial pattern. The western movement encouraged spatial mobility; emerging capitalism promoted social mobility…. Productivity and profit were the deciding factors rather than emotive bonds between individuals.

Under the mechanistic model, these strands of Enlightenment philosophy, together with the concept of manifest destiny, led to the conquest and subjugation of the Indians as well as the conversion of agriculture to a market economy, with the resulting environmental damage.

The result of all these historical tendencies identified by Marx and Merchant is to bring about a tendency to see the white space on the map as a vacuum, as empty “space” which needs to be filled by settlers as molecules of gas will distribute evenly over a vacuum. This concept of filling empty space is the motivating force behind narratives of settlement of the Plains, and of the planets. Thus, as with the settlement of the western U.S., a compulsion to rationalize and map new lands has been a driving force behind the
space program. The rationalization model has been one important cause of the persistent fascination with Mars which has led to the Constellation program and other NASA efforts to settle the Red Planet, and it has also made the human settlement of Mars one of the most persistent themes in science fiction. For more than a century, science fiction has driven, and been driven by, this fascination with Mars.\textsuperscript{10} Carl Abbot argues that American science fiction about the settlement of new planets often utilizes tropes drawn from the Western. According to Abbot, in SF based on themes and tropes drawn from U.S. westward expansion, the stakes often have to do with labor—\textit{with who has access to it and whether it is to be done using individual or collective, traditional or industrial methods.}\textsuperscript{11} Thus, according to Abbot, much early SF follows the Western in depending on a conception of the alien landscape as hostile, as a site for individual explorers, usually seen as male, to test themselves, while more recent SF often questions this conception. Abbot’s interesting generic study of SF tropes drawn from the Western focuses on the ways in which American history has influenced American SF. However, the opposite movement is also true, and SF has colored the way in which Americans have looked at the land.

Early SF was a product of its time in that it showed little sustained interest in or understanding of environmental issues, at least in the most common present-day sense of the word to describe criticism of human abuse of ecological systems. However, as early as H. G. Wells’ \textit{The War of the Worlds}, ecological systems have provided SF authors with subject matter. In Wells’ novel, the invading Martians bring Martian vegetation (which is, of course, red) to overrun the Earth’s indigenous fauna. While the narrator is imprisoned by the Martians, he witnesses the growth of vegetation native to Mars, which
he calls the “red creeper,” and which he finds “broadcast throughout the country.” As the agricultural metaphor suggested by the casting of seed suggests, the Martians are alien farmers bringing invasive species to Earth, as in the rationalization model of land use described by Merchant. Similarly, the Martians’ attempt to colonize the Earth is made possible by their superior technology and is motivated by their plan to exploit the Earth’s natural resources in a manner similar to the process described by Marx.

In the end, however, it is the Earth’s own biological diversity that allows humanity to resist this attempt at ecological colonization. In Wells’ account, human technology is unable to defeat the Martians, but the environment of Earth itself acts as a last line of defense, so that the land itself rises up against the invaders:

> These germs of disease have taken toll of humanity since the beginning of things—taken toll of our prehuman ancestors since life began here. But by virtue of this natural selection of our kind we have developed resisting-power . . . . But there are no bacteria on Mars, and directly these invaders arrived, directly they drank and fed, our microscopic allies began to work their overthrow.\(^{13}\)

Wells’s imagining of disease as a defense of humankind reverses the well-known role of disease in Europe’s conquest of Africa and the Americas. In Guns, Germs, and Steel, Jared Diamond points out that the devastation brought on by diseases imported from Europe was astonishing, particularly in the Western Hemisphere: “Throughout the Americas, diseases introduced with Europeans spread from tribe to tribe far in advance of the Europeans themselves, killing an estimated 95 percent of the pre-Columbian Native American population.”\(^{14}\) So Wells’ reversal of the direction of European colonialism, in which the colonizer becomes the colonized, is accompanied by a similar reversal of the
role of disease in colonialism, which Wells changes from an offensive to a defensive weapon.

The European colonialist model Wells uses and critiques here has many historical differences from U.S. westward expansion under the manifest destiny model. However, the Martians’ use of technology and mobility to gain resources and the Martians’ plan to rationalize the landscape of Earth suggest that the issues of globalization of capital and rationalization of land are at play in Wells’ critique of colonialism. On the other side of the Earth, in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the same forces of globalization of capital and rationalization of land enabled alien immigrants to map out grid-shaped spaces for themselves on the Great Plains of the American Midwest.

II. “A Magic Ring Extending up to the Sky”: Alien Landscapes in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* and O. E. Rölvaag’s *Giants in the Earth*

O. E. Rölvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* is an account of a fictional Norwegian pioneer family who arrive in South Dakota in 1873. The novel’s events take place between 1873 and the winter of 1881-82, but its first page begins, not with the wagons which are carrying Per Hansa and his family, but with a description of the Dakota grasslands as they appeared before the first European settlers came, timeless, yet an expression of a natural, cyclical alternation of day and night:

Bright, clear sky over a plain so wide that the rim of the heavens cut down on it around the entire horizon . . . Bright clear sky, to-day, to-morrow, and for all time to come.

. . . And sun! And still more sun! It set the heavens afire every morning; it grew with the day to quivering golden light—then softened into all the shades of red and purple as evening fell . . .\(^\text{15}\)
The prairie landscape, unfamiliar and alien in its agelessness, is disturbed by a human family determined to make a living by extracting resources from it. The situation is rendered more complex by the fact that this family are themselves aliens, first-generation immigrants to the United States.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe played an important role in the westward expansion of the United States and the settling of the Great Plains. The increasing interconnections between distant points of the Earth that brought these immigrants to the Plains was driven by the global character of capitalism described by Marx. In this period, immigrants from Norway and Sweden, Bohemia, Germany and Poland came to Nebraska, the setting of Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* because they “had strong traditions of agriculture [in their origin countries] and . . . felt the pressures of technological change during the 1880s when rich farmland in eastern Nebraska was available.” Cather’s novels sympathetically describe these immigrants and their role in colonizing this new alien space. In Cather’s novels, assimilation into American society is seen as necessary and desirable in order to earn the right to live on the land. Cather’s successful farmers like Alexandra Bergson are Americanized; they are not marked as alien by retaining accents or customs from “the old country.” In contrast, other immigrants, like Cather’s Crazy Ivar and the Hansa family in Rölvaag’s work, maintain traditional agricultural methods and, to varying degrees and with varying amounts of authorial approval, consciously resist assimilation and modernity.

*O Pioneers!* positions itself in opposition to the Scandinavian immigrants it describes, figuring them as aliens. Certainly, a wide range of details in the text
(Alexandra with her Swedish Bible, Ivar with his Norwegian Bible) mark Cather’s first- and second-generation immigrants as foreign. But in this novel, while the immigrant characters are often assimilated into American society, the land is shown to be a far more threatening alien entity. The reader has the feeling, as in SF, of entering a completely alien landscape. In the novel’s opening paragraph, the town of Hanover is “trying not to be blown away.”17 The houses in the recent settlement are

set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod; some of them looked as if they had been moved in overnight, and others as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blew under them as well as around them.18

The town’s utter vulnerability to this hostile landscape is underlined when John Bergson contemplates his farm from his deathbed:

The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them. Most of them were built of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form. The roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were scarcely noticeable. The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings.19

While critics like Mike Fisher have argued that passages like this one attempt to erase Native Americans from the history of Nebraska,20 it is also worth noting that the “record of the plow” which the novel finds to be “insignificant” is that made by Bergson and the other European immigrants, and that the novel calls attention here to the difficulties the farmers face in their attempts to bring this alien landscape under rational control.

The drought in which the Bergson family almost loses its farm is the moment at which the settlers’ ability to endure the onslaught of the hostile land seems most in doubt.
But it is precisely at this moment of crisis that Alexandra Bergson develops a successful plan to save her family’s homestead. Alexandra’s success is based on using modern, rational, industrial methods of farming, and on doing so better than her male relatives. Her brothers, Oscar and Lou, are resistant to these changes, and as a result, she is able to succeed even against their opposition. Alexandra argues that “a pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves.”

Alexandra’s right to farm the land is derived from her vision of the land’s potential under human guardianship: “the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower [to Alexandra] than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.” It is this claim to vision and imagination that allows Alexandra to legitimate herself, to establish her claim to her property, in the Lockean sense. Similarly, in contrast to some feminists’ arguments that Alexandra’s relationship with the land is characterized by an emotional bond and by creativity as a result of her femininity, it seems the important point about Alex is her rational use of the land. Melissa Ryan has pointed out that the act of pioneering Cather celebrates depends on the enclosure of wild lands. Ryan claims that “settlement introduced boundaries: the demarcation and delimitation of those ‘outdoor’ spaces.”

Alexandra is a motivating and guiding force behind this process of creating boundaries, and under her leadership the Divide is divided and rationalized in much the same way as Merchant describes in the case of New England.

In keeping with Alexandra’s role as “the Genius of the Divide,” her relationship with the land has changed significantly by the beginning of Part II, which begins with a
description of the hostile land of Nebraska tamed by Alexandra’s modern farming methods.

From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checker-board, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light. Telephone wires hum along the white roads, which always run at right angles…. There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow.\(^{25}\)

The grid pattern Cather describes, the result of the Homestead Act of 1862, which allotted settlers 160 acres (a quarter-section) based solely on proof of use,\(^{26}\) is a clear example of the rationalization of land described by Merchant. And yet, this imposition of order on nature is always of uncertain duration, as in the description, in the first paragraph of Part III, of winter,

\[\text{the season in which Nature recuperates, in which she sinks to sleep between the fruitfulness of autumn and the passion of spring… It is like an iron country, and the spirit is oppressed by its rigor and melancholy. One could easily believe that in that dead landscape the germs of life and fruitfulness were extinct forever.}\(^{27}\)

In this way, the land escapes Alexandra’s containment, if only temporarily, regaining in the process some of the hostile, alien character it had at the beginning of the novel. But on the whole, the narrative voice of \(O\ Pioneers!\), which seems to endorse Alexandra’s project of mechanized and rationalized agriculture, is the voice of order, while the landscape appears to be irredeemably alien.

Many of the characters of O. E. Rölvaag’s \(Giants in the Earth\) share this sense of the landscape as alien. \(Giants in the Earth\), a novel with a similar setting to \(O\ Pioneers!\)—the Great Plains in the late nineteenth century—and similar subject matter—first-generation European immigrants—tells the story of European immigrants on the
plains from first-hand knowledge, since Rölvaag himself was a first-generation immigrant from Norway. In contrast to Cather’s endorsement of the rationalization of nature, Rölvaag’s novel adopts a more balanced stance which combines rationalization with a more traditional and less environmentally destructive relationship with the land. In *Giants in the Earth*, the father, Per Hansa, is endlessly optimistic about the project of settling the Plains. Rölvaag describes Per Hansa’s attitude toward settlement as that of “a wondrous fairy tale—a romance in which he was both prince and king.” For Per, the land is peopled with the gnomes and trolls of Norwegian folk tales, which suggests that Per maintains an older, more traditional relationship with the natural environment. The novel endorses Per’s enthusiastic embrace of the family’s new life, at least to a certain extent, since this enthusiasm repeatedly works to his own advantage. Per takes risk after risk in his efforts to establish his new farm quickly and succeeds much of the time. For example, his first spring Per, an inexperienced wheat farmer, sows his seed wheat early, and a blizzard soon follows; however, the wheat sprouts and the family reaps an unexpectedly large crop in the fall.

While the family’s two oldest sons, Ole and Store-Hans, share their father’s excitement at the fairy tale adventure, the mother, Beret, has a far less optimistic response to their homesteading experience. She sinks into a depression so deep that she is unable to clean the house, wash her children’s clothes, or perform the numerous other repetitive, wearying tasks demanded of a pioneer wife. For Beret, the settlers’ isolation from “civilization” is unavoidable, and she sees the horizon around the family’s homestead as “a magic ring . . . extending upward in to the sky; within this circle no living form could enter.” In contrast to Per Hansa’s Norwegian folk beliefs, Beret sees the Plains through
the dark lens of dour Lutheran Protestantism; the Plains belong to Satan, and they are not meant for human habitation: “How could the good God permit creatures made in His image to fall into such tribulations? To people this desert would be as impossible as to empty the sea . . . . Was it not the Evil One that had struck them with blindness?” As she thinks these thoughts, Beret sees the face of Satan in a cloud on the western horizon. When grasshoppers eat many of the settlers’ crops, she is driven to panic by the Biblical “plague of locusts.” While this ecological catastrophe serves Beret as evidence that the alien landscape of the Dakota Territory is unfit for human habitation, it may serve a modern reader as a warning of the negative environmental consequences of a rationalization model which encourages monoculture of cash crops at the expense of biodiversity.

Surprisingly, Beret’s and Per Hansa’s competing views of the settlement of the Plains are both described, and to some degree endorsed, in the same text. The novel’s omniscient third-person narrator shows the reader both Per Hansa’s and Beret’s thoughts and makes them equally eloquent and moving. In conventional narrative, the reader expects conflicts to be resolved tidily, but this novel refuses to give in to this expectation. The novel ends with Per Hansa’s death at the hands of the malevolent Plains. When the illness of Per’s friend and neighbor, Hans Olsa, leads Beret to demand that Per travel at the height of a blizzard to fetch the minister, Per freezes to death on the way. Thus, the novel maintains an ambiguous stance towards Beret’s Christianity, which sustains her hope while at the same time killing her husband. Per’s thinly Christianized folk religion, however, allows him to prosper on the Plains but cannot save his life. Rölvaag’s ability to fairly describe two competing narratives by balancing the two, to include all the actors
of the narrative, and to include the fullest possible stretch of the narrative demonstrate his careful framing of the history of the settling of the Plains. By frustrating the reader’s impulse to arrive at meaning in a facile and incomplete way, the novel achieves a comprehensiveness and balance which allow it to do justice to the complexities the settlement of the Plains, a process with many different and potentially conflicting meanings.

III. The Alien Familiarized: Rights to (and of) the Land in Jane Smiley’s A Thousand Acres

In Jane Smiley’s A Thousand Acres, a retelling of Shakespeare’s King Lear set in contemporary Kansas, the process of rationalization of land described by Merchant and already under way in O Pioneers! is complete, and industrial methods of agriculture dominate the Great Plains. The thousand acres of the novel’s title, for instance, are determined not by natural boundaries but by the section lines of the Homestead Act. For the novel’s narrator, Ginny Cook, the landscape where she grew up calls to mind past cultures’ belief in a flat earth, and the Cook family’s farm is “as flat and fertile, black, friable, and exposed as any piece of land on the face of the earth.”35 The ambiguity of Ginny’s description suggests the complexity of the attitude toward the land which she learned as a child. The reference to the outdated and unscientific belief in a flat earth emphasizes the family’s perpetuation of outdated social habits of patriarchy, environmental devastation, and manifest destiny. Ginny’s description of her father’s farm points not only to the land’s usefulness as a resource, but also to its vulnerability; both “friable” and “exposed” point to the impermanence of this seemingly unchangeable
land. Indeed, *A Thousand Acres* lends itself to ecocritical analysis. In an ecofeminist reading of the novel, Glynis Carr points out that Ginny

replaces the simple heroic (manly) narratives of her forefathers—including especially the myths of national progress and desirable development under capitalist agriculture—with the complex, ambiguous stories that allow for the representation of women.36

Carr’s examination of the novel’s critique of agribusiness even makes an apparently offhand reference to “agricultural colonization.”37 However, Carr does not pursue this analogy between industrialized agriculture and the colonization of land.

Carr is certainly correct that the novel’s depiction of farming on the Plains owes much to the insights of environmentalism. In the decades that intervened between Cather’s and Rölvaag’s novels and Smiley’s, Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) argued for the rights of animals and plants, and even of features of the landscape itself. Leopold proposes a “land ethic” which “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”38 For Leopold, “land” includes not only all these natural objects, but also the ecological processes which connect them, and therefore land “is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals.”39 In addition, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) drew attention to the dangers of the widespread use of pesticides. These developments in American attitudes toward the environment, which gained widespread attention during the first Earth Day in 1970, are reflected by Ginny in the novel. Both Ginny and her sister Rose suffer from cancer caused by ingesting pesticides, and Rose dies as a result. Larry Cook’s stance toward land clearly reflects the stance of rationalization and exploitation of resources, and Ginny becomes more
suspicious of this stance as the novel continues. When Ginny’s husband, Ty, decides to start an industrialized hog farming operation, partly in an effort to impress Larry, Ginny opposes the plan.

However, the novel simplifies some aspects of the relationship between Americans and their natural environment found in *O Pioneers!* and *Giants in the Earth*. This loss of certain complexities of agriculture on the Plains is due partly to the fact that the rationalization of land is a *fait accompli* in *A Thousand Acres*. First, no character in *A Thousand Acres* represents pre-industrial agricultural traditions as do Ivar in *O Pioneers!* and Per Hansa in *Giants in the Earth*. In addition, immigrants have disappeared from Smiley’s account of farming the Plains, since *A Thousand Acres*’ main characters all have Anglo last names. While one reason for this lack of ethnic diversity is the fact that many immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe settled farther north on the Plains, in Nebraska and the Dakotas rather than in Kansas, another is the degree to which immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe have been assimilated into the dominant Anglo culture. Most importantly, the novel’s erasure of immigrants ensures that the role of alien in the novel is ultimately played by the land itself. While Ginny’s attitude toward the land is still complex at the end of the novel and she certainly comes to reject industrialized agriculture, she ultimately decides to leave the farm. Carr explains this decision as the outcome of the tragedy of patriarchal abuse of women and of the land, carried down through generations. Ginny associates the farm with her father, telling Ty, “He is this place.” Thus, she sees leaving it as breaking her connection with her childhood abuse by him. But in leaving the farm, Ginny surrenders any chance she may have had to argue for sustainable methods of using it.
Smiley’s environmentalist critique in *A Thousand Acres*, then, is undercut by the same sense of the Plains as an alien landscape which dominated *O Pioneers!* and *Giants in the Earth*. These realistic novels about farming all deal with the consequences of rationalizing an “alien” landscape and subjecting it to a capitalist economic system which sees it primarily as a source from which to extract resources. However, each misses important environmental and moral consequences of figuring a landscape as alien. In order to find more fully-realized attempts to think through the complexities of living in alien landscapes, then, it is necessary to turn toward SF. The emergence in the U.S. of ecological consciousness as seen in these novels of the Great Plains is also reflected in twentieth-century science fiction, and SF about the colonization of alien planets may serve in some ways as a stronger model for environmentalist-themed fiction.

IV. “All the Consciousness Mars Has Ever Had”: Ecological Awareness in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars*

Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars*, published two years after *A Thousand Acres*, represents a slowly-evolving trend of SF that deals with ecological issues. Though Brian Stableford describes a gradual increase in interest in ecology as a source of ideas for plot devices or for inventing believable worlds in SF from the 1930s to the 1950s, he argues that sustained interest in ecology was rare. For example, in *The Martian Chronicles* (1946), Ray Bradbury describes the devastation of the Martian landscape by human violence, pollution and disease. One of the early astronauts, Jeff Spender, protests the impending human intrusion on the Martian landscape:

There’d be time for that later; time to throw condensed-milk cans in the proud Martian canals; time for copies of the *New York Times* to blow and
caper and rustle across the lone gray Martian sea bottoms; time for banana
peels and picnic papers in the fluted, delicate ruins of the old Martian
valley towns. Plenty of time for that. And he gave a small inward shiver
at the thought. Spender is one of Bradbury’s most engaging and sympathetically portrayed characters,
and his eloquence suggests some degree of authorial endorsement. Yet, significantly, the
environmental concerns here are mainly aesthetic ones, with little awareness of such
ecological concepts as biodiversity. The novel’s primary focus is on the conflict between
sentient beings of two different cultures, between colonizer and colonized, and not
between colonizer and the colonized land.

In contrast, Frank Herbert’s *Dune* shows a degree of ecological awareness new in
SF of its time. *Dune* both came out of and participated in the rapid growth of popular
interest in ecological issues which led to the first Earth Day in 1970. In *Dune*, which is
set in a future so distant it is not mapped onto Earth history at all, humans have
encountered no sentient aliens. However, Herbert describes a non-sentient life form, the
sandworm, which is indigenous to the desert planet that gives the novel its name and
which is central to the novel’s plot. Herbert explains the life cycle of the sandworm in
intricate detail. The adult sandworm (also called Shai-hulud or the Maker) lives in the
desert; water is poisonous to it, and in the deep desert the worm grows to an astonishing
size, sometimes reaching four hundred meters long.44 An immature developmental stage
of the sandworm, the microscopic “sand plankton,” eats the spice mélange, which for
humans has psychotopic and life-extending properties. A third stage, the “little maker,”
consists of sand plankton which have grown larger; the little maker burrows deep beneath
the sand and hoards water. Its excretions become the formative stage of the spice.
Herbert’s use of ecological concepts has thus allowed him to imagine a complete ecosystem, all of whose niches are occupied by a single species at different developmental stages.

The novel also demonstrates a secure grasp of the vast resources and long periods of time which would be necessary to completely reshape a planet’s ecology to human requirements. *Dune* describes a terraforming project in which the goal is to gradually change this desert planet into a planet with open water. The Fremen, with their ally and leader, the renegade imperial planetologist Liet-Kynes, have set up water traps in the desert to capture trace amounts of water vapor from the atmosphere, and have established a timetable of about three hundred fifty years, involving the gradual introduction of flora and fauna, first from arid biomes, then eventually from wetter and wetter biomes. However, the alien landscape of *Dune* suffers in the novel in that it is subjected to nuclear weapons. Later novels in the series, however, show perhaps an even more considered grasp of ecological principles in that the terraforming project has unintended negative consequences. By the time of *God Emperor of Dune*, thousands of years after the end of the first novel, Kynes’ dream has been realized. However, the introduction of open water on Arrakis has killed all the sandworms, except for Leto Atreides, Paul’s son, who has fused himself with sandtroat and has become an adult sandworm. Without the sandworms, mélange is unavailable, and the unique ecosystem of Arrakis has been destroyed. However, in *Heretics of Dune*, the planet’s original ecology has been restored, and when Arrakis is destroyed at the end of *Heretics of Dune*, a single sandworm is saved which will continue the species’ survival and change a new planet, Chapterhouse, into a second desert planet where spice can be harvested. Thus, the series’
overall arc follows an attempt to rationalize an alien landscape, which is ultimately found to be unsuccessful and is replaced by an ecological model.

The final text of this chapter, Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars*, returns to our starting point, the human settlement of Mars. *Red Mars* describes the human colonization (Robinson’s own often-used word) of Mars, and this novel and its sequels, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*, describe a conflict between a rationalization model of settlement on Mars, in this case a plan to terraform the planet, and an ecological model of settlement which argues that Mars should be left as it was before settlement. *Red Mars* seems to manage the balancing act of being sympathetic to each member of its large cast, including the Reds, a group of rebels and saboteurs who resist the terraforming of Mars. Ultimately, though Robinson describes the ecological movement sympathetically, he argues for the right of humans to settle the planet.

Of the many ethical dilemmas faced by the First Hundred settlers of Mars, the most interesting and serious is the question of whether or not to transform Mars to make it more habitable for humans. The First Hundred settlers of Mars are a culturally diverse group, and though Americans and Russians predominate, due to their longer expertise with space travel, many other nations are represented as well. With his access to recent scientific data, Robinson is able to revise Wells’ and Bradbury’s earlier fantasies of alien life forms on Mars, and to accurately portray the planet as lifeless. Yet some of the settlers believe that humans have no right to terraform Mars, though it has no indigenous life forms. The Reds, led by geologist Ann Clayborne, originally argue that Mars should not be terraformed because of its value to scientists; but eventually other voices of protest arise which suggest that the Martian landscape has ethical value in its own right. Later in
the novel, the Reds are aided by Hiroko Ai, the Mars Colony’s chief botanist, who becomes the founder of a new fertility religion in which Mars is worshiped as a giver of life.

One formal aspect of the novel which allows it to be so even-handed is its use of the third-person limited point of view. Each long chapter follows a different character, and as a result the reader’s sympathies are divided and he or she is continually forced to reassess his or her opinions of the characters and their beliefs. Because of this use of multiple points of view, it is difficult to see where Robinson’s sympathies lie. For example, the novel begins with a speech given by John Boone at the opening ceremony of a new Martian town, in which Boone claims that “We are all the consciousness that Mars has ever had.”^46 Boone’s point is that, though Mars has fascinated humans for millennia, it is only with the population of Mars by humans that the planet can be fully and accurately understood as a self-contained environment with a unique identity, rather than as an object of mythology and speculation. In Boone’s words, Mars “had been a power; now it became a place.”^47 Boone is shown to be an engaging and somewhat sympathetic character, but one who seems at times to have little to offer to the First Hundred except his charisma, and his vision of the future, though stirring, remains in the end quite vague. Not long after his speech, Boone dies through the machinations of his friend and rival Frank Chalmers, and Boone’s fuzzy boosterism for the settlement of Mars dies with him.

Boone’s concept of humans as the consciousness of Mars, as witnesses to the Martian land which is described as a “place,” is an attempt to synthesize the arguments of both Sax Russell, the chief proponent of terraforming, and Ann Clayborne, the leader of
the Reds. The disagreement between Russell and Clayborne begins early; even before the Ares, the spacecraft which carries the First Hundred, reaches Mars, Clayborne asserts: “Mars is its own place. You can play your climate-shifting games back on Earth if you want, they need the help. Or try it on Venus. But you can’t just wipe out a three-billion-year-old planetary surface.” Russell dismissively replies: “It’s dead.” Not long after the colonists land, when permission to begin the first terraforming efforts has been requested of the U.N. but not yet received, Clayborne loses an important verbal skirmish with Russell because of her inability to control her temper. Clayborne accuses terraforming efforts of being “not science,” and the impassive Russell counters:

Science is part of a larger human enterprise, and that enterprise includes going to the stars, adapting to other planets, adapting them to us.... We are the consciousness of the universe; and our job is to spread that around.... We can transform Mars and build it like you would build a cathedral, as a monument to humanity and the universe both. We can do it, so we will do it.  

The exchange is recorded and replayed on Earth, and it influences the U.N. to allow the beginning of terraforming. The emphasis on rationalization inherent in Russell’s terraforming plan is so influential among the colonists and those on Earth who oversee colonization that terraforming is soon seen by the majority of humans on Earth and Mars as “an unavoidable part of progress, a natural part of the order of things. A manifest destiny.” Though certainly many historical changes intervene between the settling of the Plains and the imagined colonization of Mars, the persistence of what Merchant calls “the rhetoric of manifest destiny” is noteworthy, because Russell’s language, reminiscent of Carolyn Merchant’s historical account of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New England, combines manifest destiny rhetoric, with “mechanical metaphors” in “a modern
philosophy that saw the world as a vast machine that could be mathematically described, predicted, and controlled." The First Hundred are scientists, and lawmakers on Earth are influenced by their opinions. As a result, Clayborne’s emotional involvement in the issue reduces her position’s effectiveness. Thus, Clayborne’s insistence on leaving Mars in its original state is abandoned by the group.

Debate on public policy is not the only situation in which the novel shows Clayborne’s personality to work to her own detriment. In the earlier chapters, the other colonists, even those who agree with and like her, see Clayborne as isolated and a bit too intense. At one point, Clayborne defends herself in language which appeals not to reason, but to the emotions: “I mean I look at this land and, and I love it. I want to be out on it traveling over it always, to study it and live on it and learn it.” Clayborne, however, is able to persuade many individual colonists of the value of an intact Martian landscape. On their trip to the Martian North Pole, Ann shows Nadia Cherneshevsky a Martian sunset, and this leads Nadia to notice for the first time, and to wonder at, the unique beauty of Mars:

And this beauty was so strange, so alien. Nadia had never seen it properly before, or never really felt it, she realized that now; she had been enjoying her life as if [Mars] were a Siberia made right, so that really she had been living in a huge analogy, understanding everything in terms of her past. But now she stood under a tall violet sky on the surface of a petrified black ocean, all new, all strange; it was absolutely impossible to compare it to anything she had seen before.

The eloquence of Ann, Nadia, and others who argue that Mars should be left in its original state has led critics like Brian Stableford to argue that Robinson’s series sounds “a distinct note of skepticism” about the ethical propriety of colonizing and terraforming Mars, and it is certainly true that the Reds are given a fair hearing by the novel. The
last part of *Red Mars*, “Shigata na Gai,” is told from Clayborne’s point of view, and this organizational choice places great emphasis on her as a character, and on her beliefs as well.

However, Robinson ultimately resists the idea that Mars, a truly barren place which nonetheless may still deserve the term ecosystem, should be left untouched. In part, this is because the novel sees terraforming as inevitable. Late in the novel, the Mars Colony declares its independence from Earth, and many of Mars’s cities are obliterated in retaliatory attacks by United Nations troops backed by multinational corporations. The novel ends with the environmental disaster caused by the war, as nuclear weapons and the collapse of the “space elevator,” a cable many kilometers long which led to an orbiting space station outside of Mars’s gravity well, release massive amounts of water vapor into the atmosphere, raise the planet’s surface temperature and lead to floods of liquid water. Thus, one unexpected side-effect of the war is that it accelerates the melting of the polar ice cap and other aspects of the terraforming process. Thus, in the end, the Martian landscape is subjected to rational human control because, paradoxically, rationalization is abetted by the irrational forces of accident and the charisma of individual characters.

But perhaps the most important reason that Russell’s project wins is that it is seen as more viable. In contrast to Stableford, Carol Franko argues that Robinson’s sympathies clearly lie with the terraformers. Franko claims that Robinson’s series of novels “revitalizes the myth of science as the powerful, versatile took that can be used for good and recreates the scientist as humanist hero.” Indeed, Franko calls Sax Russell and the other members of the First Hundred Robinson’s “scientist-heroes” and argues that
they “succeed in their projects at least partly because they are forced to debate and revise them.” The terraforming model thus receives a certain amount of authorial endorsement, simply because it is the one which survives discussion and revision. In the end, the novel’s thrust is pragmatic. Terraforming is the approach to Mars that works, and the Reds are shown to be misguided because they do not succeed. However, the terraforming of Mars itself, like the narrative arc of the novel, is not a single project whose outcome is negotiated between the Greens and the Reds. Rather, it is a collection of competing projects, including Boone’s cheerleading and Nadia’s hands-on construction work as well as Russell’s climate-change plans, each of which is given nearly equal weight by the novel.

Since Robinson, unlike Wells, has access to late-twentieth-century science which indicates that there is no life on Mars, in Red Mars it is the lifeless landscape itself that becomes the object of colonial, and only subsequently of ethical, concern. Because the main thrust of the novel’s narrative is to celebrate the ingenuity of the scientists who carry out the terraforming, the alien landscape in Stanley’s novels is seen sympathetically, but in the end the novels endorse the human reshaping of that landscape. Red Mars seriously considers the proposition that a xenosystem is in itself an object of ecological concern, but ultimately the novel rejects that proposition. Since Mars has no life other than that which humans bring with them from Earth, the Red Planet is the most extreme possible test case for Leopold’s concept of land health. In other words, the novel’s act of ecological imagination is to offer the possibility that the lifeless Martian landscape fits the definition of healthy land under Leopold’s land ethic and that consequently it should be granted the same rights as an ecosystem on Earth, so that Red
*Mars* raises, more clearly than realistic novels of the settlement of the Great Plains, the possibility of living ethically in an alien landscape. However, the novel also demonstrates the social processes—war, individual personality, and scientific argument—that work against widespread acceptance of this idea. In this way, *Red Mars* demonstrates more successfully than realistic fiction the limits of ecological awareness in U.S. culture.

V. Conclusion: Ecology and Exile

The texts in this chapter offer an outline of the historical growth of ecological awareness in both realistic fiction and SF during the twentieth century. Certainly, Merchant’s description of the rationalization of land is still at play, even in works as recent as *Red Mars*. While the novels discussed in this chapter offer numerous alternative voices which critique this rationalization of land, it continues to be a dominant force in people’s attitudes toward, and use of, land itself. But one important characteristic of the settlers who colonize alien worlds in these novels is that they are often aliens themselves. Humans who critique land misuse, like Ann Clayborne from *Red Planet* and Ivar from *O Pioneers!*, are often uncomfortable with other humans. Consequently, these characters who most clearly show an ecological consciousness often intentionally separate themselves from others in varying degrees of self-imposed exile. In much the same way, literary expatriates like those described by Ernest Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* have entered a voluntary exile. Like Clayborne and Ivar, Hemingway’s expatriates choose isolation from their homeland, as well as from their own culture. In contrast to Clayborne and Ivar, the expatriates I describe in the next
chapter have chosen to immerse themselves not only in an alien landscape but also in an alien culture, and thus to become aliens themselves. Clayborne and Ivar might well see their closeness to nature as one of the best features of their home culture, a positive value which they have carried with them to new homes. Expatriates, on the other hand, are forced to abandon key aspects of their own cultures, and irony, a common strategy for dealing with this immersion in a new culture, is the subject of Chapter 3.
Chapter 3

Irony and the Expatriate in Twentieth-Century Realistic Fiction and SF

In order for contact with the alien to be peaceful, or even mutually intelligible, a friendly alien is one necessary element, but a second, equally necessary, element is a host culture that is receptive to the encounter and willing to overcome the cultural divide between itself and the alien culture. Thus, a central concern both of twentieth-century American fiction about expatriates, as well as of twentieth-century American SF, has been an effort to understand the interactions between differing cultures. In American SF films from the 1980s, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977, Director’s Cut 1998) and *Cocoon* (1985), typical Americans opt to leave Earth with aliens. In both films, the humans who decide to leave Earth and live with the aliens are socially alienated in some way: electrical technician Roy Neary of *Close Encounters* is a working-class father who is having trouble with his wife, while the nursing home residents of *Cocoon* are denied full participation in the dominant culture due to their age. In both films, the low social status of these voluntary outcasts is a reason why they decide to accept the aliens’ invitation, and also possibly a reason why the aliens chose them. The most
notable element in both films is a certain wide-eyed wonder, which serves to convey to the viewer the strangeness of the encounter with the alien.

But in twentieth-century American fiction and film, there exists an alternative tradition of going to live with the aliens, one which centers on a different kind of voluntary exile, the figure known as the expatriate. In this chapter, I consider the place of irony in the special case of the alien known as the expatriate. Unlike Sinclair’s, Cather’s, and Rölvaag’s immigrants, who strive for assimilation into their host country’s culture, in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, American and British expatriates in France and Spain retain their national identities, though they often adopt many aspects of the culture of their host country. An aptitude for this kind of partial assimilation distinguishes the expatriates that the narrative finds admirable, like Jake Barnes, from those that it critiques, like Robert Cohn. In this ambivalent stance toward the host culture, irony plays an important role, and it continues to do so in Generation-X expatriate novels such as Arthur Phillips’s *Prague* (2002).

In SF, the equivalent of the expatriate is the alien who voluntarily comes to Earth to study human culture. In contrast to the childlike wonder and the conspicuous lack of irony in films like *Close Encounters* and *Cocoon* that describe a conscious loss of cultural identity on the part of a willing traveler, the ironies inherent in the liminal status of aliens living on Earth are the subject of a series of SF novels, and SF-influenced film, television, and nonfiction, beginning with Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). In these texts, irony is used to critique the dominant culture of the U.S., and these texts share with expatriate fiction the assumption that a conscious acceptance of a loss of culture is necessary in order to achieve understanding between representatives of
different cultures. Thus, while realistic expatriate fiction employs irony as a means of reclaiming cultural identity, Heinlein’s novel and other SF texts written from the point of view of the “alien” use it to consciously defamiliarize the reader, who experiences an enforced loss of cultural identity that advances a critique of the violence and greed of their own contemporary U.S. culture. Ultimately, both expatriate fiction and the “aliens among us” tradition of SF struggle with questions of identity, individual and national, as well as with larger questions related to the meaning of humanity and to the effects of granting humanity to, or withholding it from, others.

I. “One of Us”: Irony and the Good Expatriate in *The Sun Also Rises*

The American expatriates in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* show their aptitude for travel, and even their ethical worth, by displaying their ability to adopt, at least temporarily, the customs and to interact with the people of the host culture, while at the same time wrestling with the cultural identity which provides the expatriate’s tenuous link to home. The device which allows Hemingway’s expatriates to inhabit this liminal space, between homes, between languages, and between cultures, is an ironic distance from both the host culture and their own. In varying scenes, *The Sun Also Rises* positions itself in opposition to all of its main characters, including the narrator Jake Barnes, so that the novel figures as aliens not only Robert Cohn, whom Jake clearly dislikes, but also the novel’s other British and American expatriates whom Jake likes, and most notably the French and Spanish people whom Jake respects, but who are seen from the outside, with a certain amount of auctorial distance. It is irony that establishes this distance between Jake and the reader and between Jake and the residents of the French and Spanish towns.
he loves, that prevents the formation of strong, lasting relationships among all of the novel’s characters, that renders difficult, or impossible, any mutual understanding among the novel’s expatriates and the representatives of the host cultures they love. Although alienation is a familiar term in the critical literature on Hemingway’s “Lost Generation,” taking the “alien” in this term at face value allows for a new, more nuanced understanding of the use of irony in this well-known novel.

Hemingway’s identity, and the identities of the principal characters in the novel, as American expatriates in Europe has been an important part of readings of *The Sun Also Rises* since its publication. Allyson Nadia Field points out that Hemingway “was reputedly disdainful of tourists, yet the novel’s repetition of place names is organized into itineraries similar to those of travel guides.”¹ Field argues that the expatriate lifestyle becomes itself a form of tourist experience, that “there is a tautological relationship between Hemingway and tourism.”² Similarly, Jacob Michael Leland focuses on the intersection between Jake’s impotence and his identity as an American. For Leland, Jake’s affluence allows him to regain the power to master his environment which he has lost as a result of his impotence. For Jake, then, spending money is a means of expressing his identity, not only as a man, but also as an American.

Jake Barnes exercises spending power. To make money and to circulate it . . . allows Jake to imagine himself as a fully realized male and an agent of U.S. economic power, in control of the modernizing marketplaces he inhabits.³

While Leland’s critique of U.S. capitalist expansionism perceptively describes Barnes’ claim to economic mastery, it fails to note that his claim to mastery of French and Spanish culture plays a similar role for Barnes in overcoming his postwar trauma and
asserting an individual and national identity. In a similar vein, Donald Pizer also focuses on Hemingway’s characters as expatriates. Pizer finds that the stance of the American expatriates of the Lost Generation toward Paris consists of an “interplay between repulsion and attraction.” Pizer argues that American expatriates like Hemingway, Miller, and Fitzgerald “viewed themselves as apart, as different, as capable, in short, of drawing upon the creative potency of the Paris movement rather than succumbing to its faculty for corrupting further an already vitiated or flawed spirit and will.” As a result of this assumed moral superiority of the “good” expatriate, compared with the traveler who lacks the strength of character necessary to successfully negotiate the demands of this self-imposed exile, Pizer points out that “The American abroad is often portrayed satirically, because of his gauche falsification of the ideals of freedom and creativity.”

Thus, an ironic distance from their environment is an essential feature of the attitude of Hemingway’s “good” expatriates toward their host cultures and toward other expatriates. They critique both their host cultures and other expatriates in order to construct for themselves an identity as Americans who are able to exist in two cultures at the same time.

Another staple of the critical literature on The Sun Also Rises is Hemingway’s use of irony, which has become such a commonplace that William Dow writes, “There appears to be, for most Hemingway scholars, no subject more banal than ‘irony in Hemingway.’” In one representative opinion, Earl Rovit claims that Hemingway’s use of irony preserves the “measured distances between characters” and “holds the reader at bay.” In contrast, Dow argues that irony “asserts the intersubjective nature of identity, which is not based on an a priori individual consciousness but rather on group
understanding. For even as irony excludes, while disprivileging the status of personal knowledge and discrete identities, it builds a community of believers.” According to Dow, in Bill Gorton’s use of irony, in particular, “the building of amiable communities is far more relevant than the exclusion of naive victims.” It is certainly true that Bill, Jake, Brett, and many of the novel’s other expatriates intend irony in this way, since the effect of irony in these characters’ conversation is to renew bonds with and entertain old friends, as well as to recognize new ones, people who are instantly “one of us,” as Brett says of Count Mippipopolous. Dow’s emphasis on irony as a communal experience, however, fails to explain the outsider status of Robert Cohn and the fact that the members of this community of expatriates have distant, or troubled, relationships with their French or Spanish hosts.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, two very different kinds of expatriate are represented by Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn. Barnes speaks Spanish well and repeatedly shows himself to be willing to adapt to Spanish culture. Cohn, on the other hand, is unable, even temporarily, to immerse himself in Spanish culture. Cohn is conspicuously absent from Barnes’ fishing trip to Burguete with Bill Gorton. On the bus to Burguete, Gorton and Barnes drink from wineskins with Basques while riding on top of the bus, a sign of their rapport with their host culture. During the running of the bulls at Pamplona, Brett Ashley and her lover Mike wear Basque berets, while Cohn is bare-headed. For Barnes, Cohn’s reluctance to fall in with the mood of the festival compares unfavorably with the others’ willingness to do so.

More important to Barnes than these comparatively superficial engagements with the host culture, however, is his appreciation and understanding of bullfighting. He calls
this appreciation by its Spanish name, afición. Bullfighting aficionados who meet Barnes for the first time are invariably skeptical of him, because it is “taken for granted that an American could not have aficion,” but Barnes takes pride in pointing out that he always convinces them eventually. For Hemingway, Barnes’ possession of afición for the consummately Spanish art of bullfighting makes him a successful expatriate. It is Barnes’ afición that allows him to establish a friendship with Montoya, the owner of Barnes’ hotel in Pamplona and a fellow bullfighting aficionado. Barnes’ friendship with Montoya is one of the few examples in the novel of a friendship between an expatriate and a representative of one of their host cultures. In contrast, it is precisely Cohn’s lack of afición, concretized in his fight with Pedro Romero, the bullfighter, which serves as the novel’s strongest critique of Cohn as an inept traveler. As this contrast between Barnes and Cohn suggests, the novel insists on afición so strongly because it represents the expatriate’s mastery of the culture in which he or she lives. Afición presents one strategy for the expatriate to recover from the loss of his or her native culture.

As an American Catholic living in Catholic France and Spain, Jake sees Christianity as another possible means of negotiating the difficulties of living in a foreign culture. However, Jake isolates himself from both his American upbringing and his European host cultures by his ironic attitude toward Christianity. In the cathedral at Pamplona, Jake tries to pray, but is distracted by his own ironic commentary on his friends and on his own attempt at faith. Barnes regrets that he “was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing [he] could do about it, at least for a while, and maybe never, but that anyway it was a grand religion.” Barnes’ mockery of the “pilgrims” on the train, who prevent Jake, Bill, and Cohn from having lunch, is another
example of this skeptical attitude toward Christianity, which is also part of his general sense of alienation from the values of U.S. and European culture.

Paradoxically, Barnes’ Christianity resurfaces in his guilt after he commits a sin of a kind by introducing Romero to Brett. Jake and Montoya admire Romero intensely for his focus, and both make an effort not to distract Romero from that focus. Thus, Montoya asks Jake if it’s acceptable not to tell Romero that the American ambassador wants to ask him to dinner. However, Romero’s sexual relationship with Brett threatens that focus. After Jake has set Brett up with Romero, Montoya refuses to talk to Jake. The fans who have shared Jake’s afición are “hard-eyed” with disapproval as they watch him introduce Brett and Romero. Barnes’s attempt to forget the physical and psychological wounds he has received during World War I by immersing himself in an alien culture is only partially successful. The running of the bulls at Pamplona, which begins with optimism and excitement, also becomes a re-enactment of the trauma Barnes has experienced. Barnes’ association of the fiesta with trauma begins with the rocket that announces its opening, which goes off “like a shrapnel burst.” This trauma is partly responsible for Jake’s inability to completely embrace Spanish culture. In this way, afición is shown to be a tenuous means of establishing an expatriate identity, because even Jake, who is its most notable exponent in the novel, is unable to perform it to his own expectations. Thus, the novel ironically undercuts the only solution it offers to the culture shock experienced by its characters.

At the end of the novel, Jake’s use of irony has isolated him from Cohn, from the other bullfighting fans, from Cohn, and even from Brett. Romero overcomes the distraction created by Brett, and indirectly by Jake, when he performs well in the ring and
Brett leaves him, not because she wants to but for her own good. In contrast, Jake is unable to overcome his guilt. He will never again be able to be the good expatriate who possesses *afición*, who can immerse himself in a foreign culture, as is indicated by Montoya’s stiff greeting (he bows but does not smile) when they leave the hotel. However, Jake receives some redemption from a source that lies outside culture. After the fiesta, the novel once again employs Christian imagery when Jake swims at San Sebastian as a kind of baptism, which washes away his sins. Nature offers Jake his only relief from the sense of exhaustion and trauma that accompanies the end of the fiesta, so that immersion in the ocean, not in a baptismal pool, is the form of baptism legitimated by the novel. According to Dow, “Natural beauty falls outside the realm of irony” for Hemingway’s characters, and Dow’s reading is supported by Hemingway’s remark in a 1926 letter to Maxwell Perkins:

> The point of the book to me was that the earth abideth forever—having a great deal of fondness and admiration for the earth and not a hell of a lot for my generation…. I didn’t mean the book to be a hollow or bitter satire but a damn tragedy with the earth abiding forever as the hero.  

Thus, nature is outside culture, and outside irony. Ultimately, the novel’s ethical values are derived from nature, not imposed by Christianity, and this is the reason why nature ultimately replaces Christianity as the source of Jake’s absolution.

But this form of absolution, from a source which lies outside culture, offers Barnes no means of escape from his continued status as an alien, permanently homeless and permanently unacculturated. Indeed, the novel offers no alternative to irony as a means of forming individual identity and negotiating cultural differences, and thus it offers no secure foundation for intersubjectivity. Similarly, Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger*
in a Strange Land explores the ways in which individual identity and national identity are established through irony. Like Hemingway, Heinlein shows the interaction between cultures to be fraught with difficulty and misunderstanding, but unlike Hemingway, Heinlein offers some hope for his eponymous stranger to adapt to his host culture.

II. “I Am People”: The Laugh of the Good Alien in Stranger in a Strange Land

Robert Heinlein’s well-known SF novel, Stranger in a Strange Land, describes the efforts of Michael Valentine Smith (or Mike, as the novel’s characters call him), a human who has been raised on Mars by Martians, to accustom himself to human social interactions. Mike’s attempts to comprehend (or “grok,” in the novel’s idiosyncratic phrase) humanity meet many difficulties, including misunderstandings of human language and sexuality. These misunderstandings, in addition to their humorous effect, also provide Heinlein with a fascinating opportunity to analyze the centuries’ accumulation of the cultural, religious, philosophical, and legal structures of humanity as if from the outside. In other words, Mike is a human who is himself, in a very real sense, an alien, and Mike’s alien-ness allows Heinlein to critique nearly every aspect of conventional morality. Like Jake Barnes, Mike inhabits two cultural environments simultaneously. Jake is already comfortably familiar with French and Spanish culture before The Sun Also Rises begins. In contrast, the plot of Stranger in a Strange Land follows Mike’s learning process as he familiarizes himself with his own humanity, a strategy which disorients and defamiliarizes the reader with respect to his or her own culture.
Mike’s naiveté leads to many surprises for the group of friends which undertakes his education. These friends are bound to Mike by the Martian custom of water brotherhood. Since water is scarce on Mars, sharing water with friends is, for Martians, a sacred bond of friendship, and Mike utterly trusts his “water brothers.” However, though this trust inspires intense loyalty in them, their confidence in him is sometimes strained by his strange customs. For example, one Martian custom which surprises the novel’s human characters is that, upon a Martian’s death, he is eaten by his friends. Jubal Harshaw, a cranky elderly writer and lawyer who has taken it upon himself to educate Mike, explains to Duke, one of his employees, Mike’s comfort with the concept of cannibalism. According to Jubal, the values taught Mike on Mars are not a matter of free choice for me, nor for you—nor for Mike. All three of us are prisoners of our early indoctrinations, for it is hard, very nearly impossible, to shake off one’s earliest training. Duke, can you get it through your skull that if you had been born on Mars and brought up by Martians, you yourself would have exactly the same attitude toward eating and being eaten that Mike has?

Duke reluctantly agrees, but later in the novel he becomes one of Mike’s stoutest supporters. In other words, Mike is taught about human customs by his water brothers, but he also forces them to reexamine their own beliefs.

One of Mike’s most noticeable peculiarities is his inability to laugh. In the novel’s pivotal scene, Mike and Jill, his lover, guardian, and trainer in all things human, are watching a group of capuchin monkeys at a zoo. When Jill throws a peanut to one monkey,

Before he could eat it a much larger male was on him and not only stole his peanut but gave him a beating, then left. The little fellow made no attempt to pursue his tormentor; he squatted at the scene of the crime,
pounded his knucks against the concrete floor, and chattered his hopeless rage. Mike watched it solemnly. Suddenly the mistreated monkey rushed to the side of the cage, picked a monkey still smaller, bowled it over and gave it a drubbing worse than the one he had suffered—after which he seemed quite relaxed. . . . Mike threw back his head and laughed—and went on laughing, loudly and uncontrollably.  

As a result of his realization at the zoo, Mike later announces to Jill, “I grok people. I am people . . . so now I can say it in people talk. I’ve found out why people laugh. They laugh because it hurts so much . . . because it’s the only thing that’ll make it stop hurting.”

While Hemingway’s alien main character engages in an effort to negotiate the troubled boundaries between individual and cultural identity, Heinlein’s struggles to comprehend those between individual identity and humanity. Mike’s new grasp of human nature demonstrates Heinlein’s cynical attitude toward humanity. The faith in humankind which Mike displays before his epiphany in the zoo is so absolute that he is unable to put on a convincing magic act at a circus, even though he is actually able to perform the magical acts in his show rather than relying on illusion. Mike admits that he does not understand “what makes a chump tick.” After his epiphany, Mike tells Jill “I could set up our act again . . . and make the marks laugh every minute.”

Paradoxically, in understanding, as he has previously been unable to do, humanity’s great unhappiness, Mike laughs for the first time in his life. In understanding humanity from the outside, Mike realizes for the first time that he is human. Similarly, in answer to humanity’s propensity for violence, Mike develops a religion that emphasizes peace. Heinlein’s cynical attitude toward human nature means that, like Hemingway, he maintains an ironic stance toward the encounter between cultures. Indeed, Mike displays
a childlike wonder when he first arrives on Earth, but it is precisely this attitude of
wonder which prevents Mike, at first, from understanding humanity.

This realization is what leads Mike to found a new religious and philosophical
movement, the Church of All Worlds, a syncretic religion based on free love which
attempts to ease the suffering Mike finds concealed within humanity’s laughter. The
Church of All Worlds emphasizes emotional bonding based on human sexuality as an
alternative to jealousy and violence, because, as Mike explains, “Male-femaleness is the
greatest gift we have—romantic physical love may be unique to this planet.”30 However,
Mike’s Church causes him to fall afoul of the existing religious authorities, particularly a
militant Christian sect, the Church of the New Revelation, known as the Fosterites.
Eventually, Mike willingly faces an angry crowd, knowing that he will die, in order to
allow his followers to escape and carry on his message. Mike’s final sermon to his
enemies, simultaneously a parody of Christ’s sermons and a sincere homage to the values
of Christianity and other major religions, represents a fusion of his earlier naïveté and
wonder with his new ironic understanding of humanity. The sermon’s admonition to
“walk in peace and love together”31 is distinctly Christian, while the claim that “Thou art
God”32 is drawn from Hinduism. In response, Mike’s enemies claim his ideas are
blasphemous, and they beat him, douse him with gasoline and set him alight.33 After this
brave death, on the other hand, Mike is humorously shown to be an angel and, in fact, the
new boss of Ben Foster, who started the Fosterite sect.34

The novel portrays Mike as a success, despite his death, because, like the
Martians, he is able to reappear, to have conversations, and to take physical form after
“discorporation.” Mike’s water brothers approvingly comment that “the lad finished in
style.” It is Mike’s insistence on a philosophy of nonviolence, egalitarianism, and intense emotional bonding between friends that gives him an ethical superiority over his enemies, and this ethical superiority stands in contrast to Jake Barnes’ ethical failure. In other words, irony alone is shown in both texts to be an ineffective means of bridging the gap between cultures. This critique of irony is continued in more recent expatriate fiction such as Arthur Philips’ *Prague*.

III. “Seriously = Not Seriously”: The “Good” Expatriate in *Prague*

In *Prague*, a group of mostly Generation-X, mainly American expatriates (with a few colorful Australians and a lone Canadian) live not in the novel’s eponymous city, but in Budapest, in 1990, in the wake of Hungary’s rushed conversion to capitalism and the Soviet Union’s collapse. These expatriates look back to Hemingway’s Lost Generation with a mixture of irony and nostalgia which is their most common attitude toward any historical period. However, their use of irony differs from Hemingway’s in that it is even more self-knowing and even more habitual, a communication strategy relied on increasingly by this later generation as a means of identifying who is included and excluded from a group. Thus, for Phillips’ expatriates, irony is a form of entertainment and a topic of conversation, as it is for Hemingway’s. In addition to being a tool for making meaning as this later group of expatriates struggles to adapt to their host culture, irony is also a fact of life, and as such, they subject it to critique. In doing so, of course, Phillips’ characters use irony, which is the only means of critique at their disposal.

The novel begins with the expatriates sitting outside at a café playing a game named (with obvious intentional irony) Sincerity, in which one wins points by crafting
three lies and one truth, then persuading one’s friends to believe the lies. At one point, John Price, who is new to the game, says with an unlikely-to-win transparent honesty, “Fifteen years from now people will talk about all the amazing American artists and thinkers who lived in Prague in the 1990s. That’s where real life is going on right now, not here.”

John’s sense that life is better elsewhere recurs frequently, for him and for the other characters, lending the book the title of a city in which none of its scenes takes place.

John’s regret for a Prague he has never seen, however, is also a conscious nod to the expatriates of Hemingway’s Paris. John is a reporter for BudapesToday, the city’s English-language newspaper. To test his potential as an employee, the paper’s editor expresses a (sarcastic) hope that John has Hemingwayesque aspirations:

“No sin. Wish you all the best. Hemingway settles abroad, tired and cynical but ambitious, writes dispatches and jots down The Sun Also Rises in his spare time. Lovely. Wonderful career path. Hope things pan out for you and the rest of your lost generation here in Paris on the Danube. You heard that one yet, John-o’? BP is Paris on the Danube? Reliving Paris in the twenties, all that?”

“No, chief.”

“Good. Ear to the ground. I like that in a cub reporter.”

The meeting ends with the editor’s advice to “Write me expatriate and local color. Make it punchy, snide, modern.” The ironic comparison to Hemingway and the injunction to a “modern” style here points out not only the superficial similarities, but also the stylistic gap between the post-World-War-I Lost Generation and their Gen-X imitators. Irony is such a notable feature of John’s articles that they are almost unintelligible to readers outside his Gen-X cultural framework. When John’s brother, Scott, uses one of John’s articles in an EFL class for Hungarian students, some are unable to understand the irony.
One demands angrily, “Does he think it is true, he saved us from Russians by liking to watch MTV?” Another student, who is able to see John’s irony, disapproves of it: “irony is the tool of culture between creative high periods . . . . American culture lies fallow now. There is nothing living, only things waiting. And the earth gives off only a smell. This smell, not pleasant, is irony.” While irony served Hemingway’s expatriates as a means of building community, the Hungarians’ misunderstanding or disapproval of irony in the later novel suggests that it constitutes a barrier between the expatriates and their host culture.

Irony is inescapably connected in *Prague* to another term which is examined obsessively in the novel: nostalgia. The novel’s characters stagger under the weight of cliché and nostalgia, not only for Hemingway’s time, but for any golden age that might have existed in the past. Mark Payton, a Canadian recently awarded a Ph.D. in cultural studies, has taken nostalgia as his subject, and he is driven mad by the oppressive inability to escape the reflexive nature of cliché. The connection between nostalgia and irony is made most clear at the moment when John has an unsuccessful first date with Emily Oliver. John stands alone under a streetlight, smoking, a supremely, expertly cynical adman’s most masterly condensation of fifty years of images of love, loss, solitude, and self-disgust . . . . And then, at last, John is anointed with the soothing balm of irony . . . . As in front of a tailor’s triple mirrors, he sees the silliness of seeing the silliness of it, feels the pleasantly dry, infinitely regressing amusement he can feel at his own expense.

Later in the novel, Karen, John’s co-worker and lover, who (along with many of the novel’s other characters) is working on a screenplay about life in Budapest in 1990, says, “The last time any generation was in our situation was 1919 . . . . We are as lost as any
generation has ever been before, and I for one love it, mister.” She interrupts her notions of saving the world and complaints about the paper’s editor with a story about “a guy from home who is living in Prague now, the lucky bastard, and he’s trying to start a business making frozen desserts shaped like Proust and Freud, and like velocipedes, and they’re called Fin-de-sicles." The passage is representative in that it combines Generation-X irony with nostalgia for the past, with an ironic tinge to this nostalgia as it is commercialized in the Fin-de-sicles. In fact, Phillips’s expatriates differ from Hemingway’s in the degree of self-awareness in their irony. While irony is a feature of Hemingway’s tone, in Phillips’s novel it also becomes a concept with which each of the expatriates is forced to wrestle.

John is the character who is able to shed his irony most convincingly. At one point he wakes from a dream to discover the equation Seriously = not seriously. John reads this equation unironically, and begins to divide his acquaintances into serious and non-serious camps of relatively equal numbers, based on his endorsement or rejection of their opinions and personalities. However, another reading of this equation suggests that irony blurs the difference between serious and non-serious, makes it difficult to say which is which, a quality of self-conscious, self-aware irony. Nicky, an artist and John’s lover, renders this reflexive quality of irony concrete in a life-size composite photograph which combines a Renaissance painting with jarringly pornographic actual photographs of John and herself having sex with her own face added in a mirrors-within-mirrors effect. At the end of the novel, Charles Gábor, one of the most notable exponents of Gen-X irony in the novel, is shot by a Hungarian secretary for selling off the company she works for while the boss and lover she idolizes is incapacitated by a stroke, “and at
last a pure and unironic emotion flashes on the face of Charles Gábor, witnessed by dozens. People scream and hide under plastic seats, will remember forever the internal-organ look of the dried gum they saw in that moment when reality burst through the artifice and irrelevance of every day and everything.” Not long afterward, John leaves for Prague. The novel ends before he arrives there, but his decision to leave constitutes his critique (and the novel’s) of the mirrors-within-mirrors quality of the irony of his expatriate community.

The examples of Hemingway’s and Phillips’s ironic expatriates suggest that, in expatriate fiction, irony offers a strategy for social critique. It also serves as a means of dealing with the loss of culture, the unfamiliarity of even the most familiar objects which is caused by culture shock. In both *The Sun Also Rises* and *Prague*, the expatriates’ dependence on irony for entertainment and to reaffirm the bonds of a group is contrasted with the ineffectiveness of irony as a basis for ethical behavior and, in particular, for a non-antagonistic encounter with the host culture. In *The Sun Also Rises*, nature is shown to be the only force outside of irony and the only means of escaping it. However, in *Prague*, even this way out is not present, and the only force outside of irony is the hope of another city, which will probably have a similar group of expatriates who use irony in a similar way. Irony also plays a significant role in a tradition of novels that depict U.S. culture from the point of view of aliens. Like the expatriate fiction I have discussed, these narratives often center on the aliens’ attempt to think through the loss of their home culture and adapt to a new one. As in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, however, this “aliens among us” tradition engages in a critique of the alien’s host culture, our own.
IV. “I Have No Culture”: Irony, Defamiliarization, and the “Alien” in Contemporary U.S. Literature

Though the majority of SF novels and films have been written from the point of view of the human characters, in the wake of Stranger in a Strange Land, a growing body of SF work has been written from the aliens’ point of view. In many cases, the effect is to use the aliens to voice auctorial social critique of contemporary cultural institutions, to point out the unfamiliarity, the alien-ness, of human society. In order to differentiate this tradition of “aliens’ point of view” fiction from realist expatriate fiction, this section contrasts to the latter three texts which employ irony as a strategy of social critique: the Kurt Vonnegut novel Breakfast of Champions (1973), the U.S. television series 3rd Rock from the Sun (1996-2001), and Earth (The Book): A Visitor’s Guide to the Human Race (2010) by Jon Stewart and many of his co-writers from The Daily Show. In a significant connection with the expatriate novels described above, these works share a common strategy for social critique: humor. In other words, the result of seeing familiar objects and social imperatives in contemporary American culture from the point of view of an intelligent, but completely naïve, outsider is laughter.

The antecedents of this tradition, in which an outsider is able to ironically comment on the culture of the author and the presumed audience, are to be found in speculative fiction, travel fiction, and dystopian fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Mark Twain’s No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger (1916) presents a critique of late sixteenth-century Austria, which is at times also a stand-in for the America of Twain’s time, in which Satan (a young stranger who claims to be the nephew of Satan himself) is seen as a sympathetic character who, as an outsider, is
able to point out the hypocrisy of European culture. Similarly, William Dean Howells’ Altruria novels (*A Traveler from Altruria*, serialized 1892–1893, publ. 1894; *Letters of an Altrurian Traveler*, 1904; and *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 1907) satirize the greed and class prejudices of Howells’ American contemporaries. In *A Traveler from Altruria*, the cultured and eloquent Mr. Homos identifies many of the contradictions in Americans’ attitudes toward labor, money, and social class. Mr. Homos’ foil, the unnamed American narrator, attempts to persuade Homos of the superiority of American social institutions, with the help of many of the narrator’s American friends. These attempts, however, repeatedly fail.

This technique of appealing to an imagined outsider in order to point out the failures of the author’s own culture is used in a late twentieth-century setting with themes drawn from SF in Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*. In large stretches of the novel, Vonnegut employs a conventional third-person omniscient narrator, but this conventional narrative structure is repeatedly interrupted by the narrator’s uncontrollable digressions. In these digressions, the narrator explains various features of Earth’s history and culture, and particularly U.S. history and culture, with which most readers would be familiar, but explains them as though the readers were encountering them for the first time. Thus, the novel’s central conceit is that it serves as an introduction of the U.S. of Vonnegut’s present day to readers from a culture alien in place or time. The novel’s narrator, who is later revealed to be Vonnegut himself, stands outside of American culture. The narrator begins his account in a conventional way, by naming the protagonists and explaining what the novel is about. But then he interrupts himself to directly address the reader, who is not expected to understand the cultural references that most readers will clearly
understand: “Listen. Trout and Hoover were citizens of the United States of America, a country which was called America for short.” The narrator explains the history of America, quoting the words of “The Star-Spangled Banner” as if the reader has never heard them, and includes a crude line drawing of an American flag as well as astonished commentary on the hagiography of the U.S. flag, the national motto, and other “baroque trash,” finally summing up his comments: “It was as though the country were saying to its citizens, ‘In nonsense is strength.’” These narrative digressions are often accompanied by line drawings like that of the U.S. flag, of various objects which most readers would recognize, but which are defamiliarized by the simple, abstract drawings and by the narrator’s faux-naïve descriptions of them. In the novel’s preface, Vonnegut explains his motivations for writing: “I think I am trying to clear my head of all the junk in there…. I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can’t live without a culture anymore.” The narrator’s sense of a loss of culture leads to the narrative strategy that imposes culture shock on the reader in order to point out the strangeness of the reader’s own culture.

Kilgore Trout, one of the novel’s two main characters, serves as Vonnegut’s mouthpiece. Trout is a down-and-out SF writer, a hermit whose novels and stories have been published only as padding for pornographic pictures. Trout’s plots, which are summarized often in the novel, frequently serve as parables for the problems of contemporary U.S. culture. One of Trout’s stories, about a race of aliens that look like automobiles and consume fossil fuels, explains the dangerous fascination which ideas hold for “Earthlings.” Another story features an alien who comes to Earth to bring peace and the cure for cancer, but who is killed when he tries to warn a human family
that their house is on fire. Yet another example is the story of a human astronaut who lands on a planet where no plants or animals survive and humanoids eat fossil fuels. The astronaut is surprised to find that pornographic films, for these aliens, consist of scenes in which the humanoids eat simulated fruits, vegetables, and meats, then throw away the leftovers in a parody of the excess of consumption so prevalent in American culture. Among these aliens, prostitution consists of eating artificial “petroleum and coal products at fancy prices,” and the prostitute “would talk dirty about how fresh and full of natural juices the food was, even though the food was fake.” Trout’s stories are like much SF in that they allow the writer to comment on contemporary social problems. What is unique about Trout’s stories is that they emphasize the greed, short-sightedness and violence of contemporary culture by making them characteristic of alien cultures. The repeated theme of aliens that consume fossil fuels, for example, has a dual effect: it points out the problems inherent in human dependency on fossil fuels, but it also makes the alien characters in these stories seem familiar and the humans seem strange.

Like Trout, the novel’s other protagonist, Dwayne Hoover, comes to hold a point of view outside that of the dominant culture. Hoover represents interests of power: he owns a car dealership, the Barrytron, Limited corporation, and a share in a Holiday Inn. However, Hoover’s descent into insanity produces a defamiliarization with the dominant culture. He becomes rude to his employees and shoots up his own bathroom, growing farther and farther outside of normal behavior. The narrator is certainly critical of Hoover, both in the novel’s beginning chapters where he appears to be an unexceptional self-satisfied upper-middle-class Midwestern entrepreneur and in its later chapters where his growing estrangement from reality and his conviction that he is the only human being
who has free will lead him on a killing spree. However, the narrator sees Hoover’s insanity as an effect of “bad chemicals and bad ideas.” In other words, Hoover’s loss of culture, like the narrator’s own, is seen as a sign of psychological instability caused by the larger culture’s violence and greed. Thus, the narrator, Trout, and Hoover all suffer from a loss of culture because they are unable to accept the violence endemic within the contemporary U.S.

In *3rd Rock from the Sun*, a team of four aliens who come to Earth to gather information slowly adapt to Earth culture, and here, as in *Breakfast of Champions*, the effect on the audience is a process of defamiliarization with humorous results. When the brash, cocky weapons officer Sally Solomon (Kristen Johnston) asks “Why am I the woman?” team leader Dick (John Lithgow) answers, “Because you lost.” In this way, the show uses techniques of humor and defamiliarization to draw attention to the dominant culture’s oppression of women. When Dick negotiates the sharing of office space with his colleague, Dr. Mary Albright (Jane Curtin), he unwittingly offends her by calling her thesis “the funniest thing I’ve ever read…. [The department secretary] Nina said you had no sense of humor. She is so wrong! The conclusions that you draw are laugh-out-loud funny.” She tells him, “You have belittled my work. And you hurt my feelings.” Dick genuinely doesn’t understand, but she attributes this misunderstanding to the fact that “You’re a man!” When Dick attempts to apologize to her, she reveals that she is attracted to him, and her psychoanalytic theory of “the animal within” is tested as she and Dick trade kisses, then slaps, in a parody of Golden Age of Hollywood films in which passion is always just a bit too close to violence. Dick is puzzled by this and misunderstands, so that when his dean kisses him goodnight at the party, he kisses her as
The discomfort of the viewer questions the insistent juxtaposition of passion and violence in popular culture.

However, the series’ questioning of contemporary American institutions, particularly those related to gender, is equivocal, sometimes critiquing, sometimes reinforcing hegemony. In Episode 2, Dick manages to get invited to a wedding as Albright’s guest. When Dick explains that in the wedding ritual, the woman is given away, Sally exclaims, “Like an object? As in, ‘Free girl with every large fries’?” Sally’s reaction points out the strangeness of this strange “wedding ritual.” When all the aliens are sick, Sally says, “I don’t understand. All I want to do is curl up into a ball and yet somehow I’m compelled to nurture you. God, what a cruel disease!” The equivocal “disease” of the last line points out the marginalization and dehumanization of women. However, the show’s assumption that Sally feels the compulsion to nurture because of her feminine biology weakens the series’ critique of gender roles.

Jon Stewart’s *Earth* is perhaps the clearest example of the use of the figure of the alien to critique existing social imperatives by showing them from an unfamiliar perspective. More explicitly than Vonnegut, Stewart and his co-writers create a purported audience of aliens, and then undertakes for them an explanation of humanity, calling the book “a comprehensive history of our planet and our species, conveniently written in the universal language—American English. Consider it a user’s guide to our planet.” These texts differ as a result of the differing concerns of their times. For Vonnegut, humankind’s self-destruction is a potential, much to be feared, event, the result of Cold War fears of nuclear holocaust, while for Stewart it is already
accomplished as the result of environmental devastation. Stewart notes that “We called her Mother Earth. Because she gave birth to us, and then we sucked her dry.”

As this example suggests, in Stewart, as in Vonnegut, the trenchant social commentary is arrived at by means of comedy. In the introduction, entitled “To Our Alien Readers,” Stewart et al. engage in gentle parody of SF classics such as Star Trek:

We’re sorry we’re not here to greet you in person. Really, really sorry. We invited you over…. And we left the place a mess…. [W]e had always assumed we would be the ones gallivanting around the universe, rummaging through the remains of once-great alien civilizations, wearing form-fitting Spandex and solving cosmic mysteries. Eh.

The juxtaposition of the discourse of breezy good-host bonhomie with the parody of James T. Kirk-style planet-hopping throws the human race’s self-destruction by environmenticide into high relief. Stewart continues wryly:

Nothing would have united us as a species like the perceived existential threat posed by you. Not that we had reason to assume your intentions in coming here were anything but honorable. It’s just that in general, our own first-time interactions had a certain “killing each other” feeling-out period.

Thus, Stewart combines critique of environmental destruction with critique of the xenophobia of the colonial traditions. In a typical passage, Stewart’s description of the various continents for the benefit of alien visitors calls attention to the painful history of colonialism. North America, for example, “was settled remarkably quickly thanks to the extermination of one race, the enslavement of a second and the can-do attitude of a third.” The effect of the narrator’s faux-naïve guidebook language is to call into question American exceptionalism while using the language of American exceptionalism. In other words, Stewart is calling on the (presumably human) reader to see the horror of American history as an outsider would.
Stewart’s shrewdly ironic use of a conflict between “human” conventional morality and an “alien” outsider’s perspective that challenges that morality is similar to Heinlein’s and Vonnegut’s. In none of these texts is the reader truly alien to contemporary U.S. culture, but each of these texts constructs an imagined reader from an alien culture, a traveler whose capacity to adapt to another culture confers a degree of ethical superiority over other characters who are more invested in enforcing the demands of conventional morality. The difference is that, while Heinlein offers Mike’s childlike sense of wonder as the starting point for communication between alien and human, Vonnegut and Stewart’s SF from the point of view of an “alien” reader suggests that the only way for alien and human to understand one another is through irony. While for Hemingway’s and Phillips’ expatriates irony becomes a means of creating a tenuous sense of community, a constantly shifting island of Anglo culture in the midst of a European host culture, for Vonnegut it becomes a way to critique his U.S. “host” culture’s involvement in Vietnam, and for Stewart it becomes a way to reflect changing contemporary concerns that drive his more recent American “host” culture’s militarism and destruction of the environment.

V. Conclusion: Expatriates and Culture Shock

While these traditions of a literature of self-imposed exile often perpetuate intercultural conflict, the characteristic stance of such travellers, both toward their host culture and toward their own, is ironic detachment. This use of irony as a tool for adapting to culture shock allows expatriates to defamiliarize themselves from their own culture and to adopt a critical stance toward it. This ability to embrace difference thus
also offers one possible way to resolve such conflicts. The self-imposed exile, whether expatriate or alien, exists in a liminal state, permanently between two cultures. In the end, the ironic expatriates of Heinlein’s SF and of Hemingway’s and Phillips’ “realistic” travel fiction are repeatedly forced to negotiate between their two cultures, but this act exacts a cost in terms of culture shock. The next chapter reads alien abduction narratives and realistic novels by first-generation immigrants to the U.S to explore the role of memory in humans’ encounter with otherness, in an effort to understand how immigrants engage in this act of reconciliation, and how they use memory to deal with the trauma of living in multiple cultures and with the pain of a violent past.
Chapter 4

“If I Should Remember, It Would Be Feasible to Forget”: Trauma and Compulsory Amnesia in Alien Abduction Accounts and Immigrant Fiction

In the pilot episode of *South Park*, Eric Cartman becomes the object of experiments on the part of aliens who, memorably, implant a flame-emitting anal probe that includes a satellite dish designed to establish contact between aliens and cattle, which are found by the aliens to be the most “intelligent and wise” life form on Earth. Though clearly parodic, Cartman’s abduction contains all the well-known features of alien abduction narratives, such as crop circles and cattle mutilations. Cartman describes the experiment:

I dreamt that I was lying in my bed, in the dark, when all of a sudden this bright blue light filled the room. And slowly my bedroom door began to open. And then the next thing I remember, I was being drug through a hallway. Then I was lying on a table and these scary aliens wanted to operate on me. And they had big heads and big black eyes.¹

Long hallways in alien spacecraft, medical operations, and slender aliens with light-colored skin with enlarged heads are all common features of alien abduction narratives,² though it is hardly likely that many other alien encounters feature the abductee being given pinkeye by Scott Baio.³ Matt Stone and Trey Parker’s parody of alien abduction narratives suggests the extent to which they have become a familiar feature of American
culture, but it also calls attention to one of the most important features of such narratives: the fact that the experience of abduction isolates the abductee, who is pursued by a troubling memory which is impossible to fully share with others.

In this chapter, I follow the historical development of a tradition of alien abduction narratives. In some cases, these narratives are expressions of cultural anxiety, while in others they subvert the hegemonic, colonialist tradition and attempt to imagine a non-antagonistic encounter with the alien. Memory and the difficulty of remembering play a central role in these narratives, exemplified in this chapter by the alien abduction narrative of Betty and Barney Hill, in which memory of a traumatic event unites, then divides a couple who experience it. Similarly, memory becomes a central concern in recent U.S. literature from first-generation immigrants, such as such as Tomás Rivera’s . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (1971) and Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters (1990), as it is in Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, discussed in the introduction. As in alien abduction narratives, in these novels by and about immigrants memory, and the lacunae in memory created by trauma, become essential in recovering meaning from the confusion and pain of the past. My argument is that neither of the two immigrant texts is able to successfully use memory to resist oppression. In . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, the narrator’s resistance against Anglo U.S. culture is incomplete because the only strategy offered is the memory of a child, with a child’s limited political power. In Dogeaters, the characters’ resistance is incomplete because memory can be represented only using the techniques of media, which are complicit in a violent and repressive regime. In contrast, the alien abduction narrative of Betty and Barney Hill
demonstrates the compulsion to forget which accompanies trauma, and this compulsion explains the difficulty of memory in the realistic fiction that has followed it.

I. Memory and the Representation of Trauma

In the texts in this chapter, the characters suffer from varying degrees of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The DSM-IV defines PTSD as an anxiety disorder “characterized by the reexperiencing of an extremely traumatic event accompanied by symptoms of increased arousal and by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma.”

Among the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder as listed in the DSM-IV are exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity. The person’s response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The characteristic symptoms include persistent reexperiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness. The disturbance must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

As this brief list of criteria demonstrates, PTSD may result in a wide range of symptoms, some of which may appear to be opposite extremes of affect and behavior. Paradoxically, it may lead to both increased arousal and numbing of responsiveness, both avoidance of stimuli that may call the traumatic event to mind and a compulsion to reenact the event, both amnesia and reexperiencing of the traumatic event in flashbacks characterized by extremely vivid detail. These elements are displayed by many of the characters from the two novels that I will discuss in this chapter, . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him and Dogeaters.
One of the central concerns of literary criticism dealing with the subject of trauma is the question of how to represent it. One notable attempt to theorize the representation of trauma in literature is Cathy Caruth’s psychoanalytical study of trauma narratives, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Caruth locates trauma not only in the psychologically damaging event itself, but also “in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.” Thus, in Caruth’s formulation, the significant defining characteristic of trauma is not the event, but its repression, and Caruth reads between the lines of Freud’s original formulation of trauma “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.” Caruth’s model of trauma makes use of, while offering an alternative to, poststructuralist skepticism regarding the possibility of any kind of representation. Caruth responds to poststructuralist critics’ claim that realistic fiction is ultimately misguided because its claim to refer directly to reality is unfounded. For Caruth, trauma narratives provide a way out of the “political and ethical paralysis” resulting from poststructuralism’s claim that reference to reality is impossible. This is because trauma narratives are historical in the sense that they attempt to represent in language events which are impossible to relate at the time of the trauma, and which demand to be related later, thus “permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not.” Caruth’s claim that traumatic events can be understood only after the fact is borne out by the texts I discuss in this chapter, but subsequent critics have pointed out the weaknesses in Caruth’s argument. Jane F. Thrailkill argues that Caruth’s emphasis of Freud’s example of the father of the burned child perpetuates a tradition of wounded children in sentimental literature, which is
carried on in even those realistic texts which try to repudiate it. In addition, the texts in this chapter also call for a much more literal and political sense of the word “history.” The traumatic events experienced by the characters in this chapter’s texts can be understood only as they relate to political oppression, and this is a type of trauma for which Caruth’s model fails to account.

Michael Rothberg’s analysis of representations of the Holocaust, heavily influenced by literary theory, adds this political dimension which Caruth deemphasizes. Rothberg’s model of the representation of trauma differs from Caruth’s in that it describes two major perspectives in Holocaust studies: the first, typified by Hannah Arendt’s well-known reference to “the banality of evil,” stresses the ordinariness of the Holocaust, and thus its susceptibility to representation, while the second stresses its uniqueness and its unrepresentability. Instead of choosing one approach over the other, Rothberg argues that these differing stances on the representation of the trauma caused by the Holocaust may be reconciled. In Rothberg’s formulation, trauma refers to “the peculiar combination of ordinary and extreme elements that seems to characterize the Nazi genocide” in accounts of the Holocaust. Though it is not my intention to directly compare the Holocaust with other examples of politically-motivated trauma, nor to support or critique claims for the Holocaust’s uniqueness, the texts in this chapter combine the mundane and the extraordinary in ways similar to those described by Rothberg as they grapple with the effects of trauma caused by political events.

The representation of trauma resulting from historical events is also at the center of Amy J. Elias’s reading of post-World War II fiction in the West. Elias’s concept of the “historical sublime,” heavily influenced by Hayden White, allows her to read history
as that which late twentieth-century authors, faced with the trauma of the World Wars, the Holocaust, and the Cold War, cannot express. Elias describes the postmodern conception of history as a “post-traumatic imaginary,” and argues that novelists who attempt to confront the century’s traumatic historical events obliquely, through repetition and deferral. For these novelists,

What we live is the present; what we remember is the past; what is beyond that is History, and for all the efforts of scholars and researchers and novelists, History is untouchable, ultimately unknowable, and excruciatingly tantalizing as well as terrifying, for there resides Truth.

Elias points out that postmodern fiction that attempts to “work through” the traumatic history of the twentieth century often “problematises memory” and exhibits “the repetition compulsion of memory.” In other words, memory fulfils a crucial, albeit ambivalent, function in postmodern historical novels as a result of the efforts of these texts to represent, and thus to comprehend and contain, traumas caused by historical events. Because the effects of a traumatic history may be likened to those of a traumatic event in an individual’s life, memory appears in these texts as an always desirable, but always unattainable, goal.

In a similar vein, Samuel S. Cohen focuses on the representation of Cold War anxieties about nuclear war in historical novels from the U.S. in the 1990s. Cohen argues that historical novels often explicitly deal with historical forces which have shaped current events and that they question narratives, such as that of American exceptionalism, imposed by the dominant culture. In this way, historical novels have the ability to “show that history does not end—that historical narrative, as it is constructed, received, and revived, continues to shape in very particular ways how Americans see themselves and,
so, how they act in the world.” In other words, it is this sense of history that enables these writers to understand both past and present. More specifically, according to Cohen, the end of the Cold War served as a relief from social anxiety caused by the threat of nuclear annihilation, and this relief allowed writers a breathing space necessary in order to understand the historical trends which connect past and present: “This sense of the war being over, of the threat of nuclear apocalypse no longer hanging over the nation’s head, thus makes possible not only these books but also this book about them.” Cohen acknowledges that the fear of nuclear war continued in the 1990s, in a repressed form, and so was available to be pressed into the service of the war on terror after September 11, 2001. Indeed, the persistence over time of this discourse calls attention to the importance of the kind of historical inquiries that Cohen describes. Though Cohen specifically deals with U.S. fiction written in the 1990s, his larger point is well taken. In other contexts, too, relief from historical trauma can allow writers the breathing space to understand their relationship with that history.

Immigrant fiction is outside the scope of these studies by Caruth, Rothberg, Elias, and Cohen in it comes from outside the Western modernist and postmodern traditions. Elias in particular attempts to distinguish between late twentieth-century Western texts, which she, following current critical consensus, calls postmodern, and texts from outside the Western tradition which critique it, which she calls postcolonial. Elias sees some commonalities between the two traditions, and reads some postcolonial texts, but her focus is on postmodern historical novels. Thus, the two immigrant texts in this chapter would, by Elias’s nomenclature, be postcolonial texts, though they follow many of the conventions described in the critical literature on trauma. However, one significant
difference between Elias’s and Cohen’s readings of postmodern metahistorical fiction and the immigrant fiction I read in this chapter is that memory is less desired, less a historical sublime, less seen from a safe vantage point. For authors who write from a less privileged perspective, memory is not a solution, and the intrusion of memory can even be part of the problem. To paraphrase James Joyce’s Steven Dedalus, for the characters in these novels, memory is a nightmare from which they are trying to wake up.

Finally, by using terminology drawn from psychology in this chapter, I do not mean to advance an argument from a specifically Freudian, Jungian, or Lacanian perspective. In particular, I have no interest in psychoanalyzing specific characters, since using therapeutic tools to analyze fictional people seems to be a rather futile exercise, somewhat akin to giving medicine to a ghost. Rather, I am extremely interested in how authors represent the psychological effects of political oppression on fictional individuals, since these imaginings may offer insights into the workings of oppression and, even more importantly, practical tools for resisting that oppression. The alien abduction narrative of Betty and Barney Hill derives a great deal of its interest from what the Hills remember and what they choose to forget, and as a result it is necessary to understand the insight, drawn from a knowledge of current psychology, that memory is always contingent and subject to revision.

II. Memory and Trauma in Alien Abduction Narratives

In the U.S., the 1960’s witnessed the rise to popular attention of a series of alien abduction narratives dating back to the 1950s and before. These narratives share certain striking similarities, such as enforced medical experimentation on the abducted humans
and the description of the aliens as short and slender with large eyes. One of the most important common features, however, is a varying degree of difficulty in remembering the event, a symptom often referred to as lost time. In the alien abduction account of Betty and Barney Hill as recounted in John G. Fuller’s *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours “Aboard a Flying Saucer”* (1966), lost time becomes a central feature of the narrative, one which eventually leads the Hills to recognize that their trauma, as well as their attempts to remember it, is both shared and, paradoxically, solitary.

Alien abduction narratives like the Hills’ are part of a longer tradition of abduction narrative in U.S. literature. In the colonial period, Indian abduction memoirs, such as Mary Rowlandson’s *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), were common. Rowlandson refers to the Native Americans as “murderous wretches,” “barbarous creatures,” “roaring lions, and savage bears.” In addition to these labels which deny the civilization and even the humanity of the Native Americans, Rowlandson emphasizes the physical pain and hardships she endures, relating in great detail the violence inflicted by Indians on white settlers while eliding violence done to Indians by whites.¹⁹ Historians like Linda Colley have argued that these accounts contributed to the construction of a Native American “other.”²⁰ The effect of these narratives is to reinforce the alienness of the Native Americans, with whom the Euro-American settlers were at the time competing for land.

Contemporary alien abduction accounts, like the Hills’, retain many of the distinctive features of this abduction narrative tradition. The Hills’ was one of the first widely publicized alien abduction accounts, and like many other abduction accounts, the Hills’ account emphasizes the trauma of the abduction and the difficulty of remembering
the event. The Hills claim that they were driving back from a vacation which had taken them to Montreal and Niagara Falls when they saw a strange light in the sky which appeared to be following them. They saw an unfamiliar type of aircraft at a range so close that Barney claims to have been able to see, with binoculars, the interior of the craft and its crew of aliens, one of which stared intently at him for some time. At that point, the Hills drove away quickly. Shortly afterward they both lost consciousness, and after the sighting, they suffered from large gaps in their memory of that night. 21

The unpredictable nature of memory, its lapses as well as the Hills’ attempts, and reluctance, to recover it, plays a central role in Fuller’s account of the days and weeks following the event. According to Fuller, Barney remembers later that “we never seemed to agree, completely” about what had happened to them, and their differing responses to the event included disagreements concerning whom and how much to tell about the experience. 22 One of the first outsiders, working in an official capacity, whom the Hills trust enough to tell their story to, Major James MacDonald, points out to them that they are suffering from signs of “battle fatigue” or “shell shock,” 23 and he suggests hypnosis as a means of recovering their memories. Eventually, the Hills approached a Boston psychiatrist, Dr. Benjamin Simon, for aid in dealing with what Simon refers to as “crippling anxiety,” 24 which he at first attributed to their “interracial marriage,” 25 since Barney was black and Betty was white. However, Simon quickly came to understand that the couple’s anxiety is caused in part by their inability to remember what had happened after their sighting of the unfamiliar object. Simon suggested hypnosis as a therapeutic intervention to recover their memories of the incident. Simon’s forward to *The Interrupted Journey* defends his choice of hypnosis as a means of recovering lost
memories: “Hypnosis is a useful procedure in psychiatry to direct concentrated attention on some particular point in the course of the whole therapeutic procedure. In cases like the Hills’, it can be the key to the locked room, the amnesiac period.” Memories recovered under hypnosis have often been used in the treatment of PTSD in an effort to allow traumatic events to resurface, be processed, and be overcome. However, many psychologists now dispute the value of recovered memory as a therapeutic tool, since hypnotized patients are susceptible to suggestion on the part of the therapist. In the Hills’ case, Betty’s and Barney’s memories of the event, recovered under hypnosis, feature time spent in the spacecraft and physical examinations by the tall, gray-skinned aliens who have since become popular elements of popular culture. However, the Hills’ recollections differ on several important details. Under hypnosis, they describe the aliens on board the ship, and their experiences there, quite differently.

One of the most interesting features of the event is that memory becomes not just a vehicle for recapturing the event, but also an intrinsic part of the event itself. In one of Betty’s vivid dreams of the abduction experience, she is warned by the leader of the aliens that remembering the event will be quite difficult:

I might remember but no one would ever believe me; that Barney would have no recollection of any of this experience; in case Barney might ever recall, which he seriously doubted, he would think of things contrary to the way I knew them to be. This would lead to confusion, doubt, disappointment. So if I should remember, it would be feasible to forget.27

In the end, then, the fact that Barney is black and Betty is white is less significant than the fact of the individual differences in their memory. Memory of a traumatic event does not ultimately unite the Hills. It divides them. The paradoxical nature of the alien leader’s command that is not a command, his suggestion that Betty’s memory be followed by the
possibility of forgetting, is an expression of the repressed Cold War anxieties described by Elias and Cohen. As in Caruth’s account, the Hills’ trauma is a “wound that cries out,” but it is political in nature, a fact which is hinted at in Betty’s description of the aliens’ leader as speaking “in English, with a foreign accent, but very understandably,” and of her examiner as having English that “was not as good.” Thus, Betty’s memory reveals displaced anxieties, rooted in the Cold War, about those who are seen as foreign. Taken in this context, Betty’s final promise to the aliens that “I will forget you” represents more than simple repression of a traumatic memory. It represents a socially enforced amnesia which obfuscates the Cold-War trauma to which it points.

The Hills’ account, and others which purport to be nonfiction, have inspired fictional narratives such as *Taken* (2002), a miniseries executive-produced by Steven Spielberg. These narratives, like the *South Park* alien abduction narrative described above, are similar to the Hills’ in featuring traumatic events, recovered memories, and lost time. Like these alien abduction narratives, two prominent novels by first-generation immigrants to the U.S. also prominently focus on trauma and memory. These very different novels, by the Mexican-American author Tomás Rivera and the Filipina-American author Jessica Hagedorn, both stress the importance of memory in overcoming trauma for members of oppressed groups. Thus, the remainder of the chapter examines the extent to which memory in itself may serve as a strategy for resistance for these survivors of trauma.
III. Memory and Collective Narration in Rivera’s . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him

Tomás Rivera’s . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, an early example of Chicano literature, recounts the memories of a Latino child in the U.S. Like several texts discussed in previous chapters of this work, such as The Martian Chronicles and The Left Hand of Darkness, . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him is structured as a series of vignettes. The novella describes a period during the narrator’s childhood, known to the narrator as “the lost year.” The opening page, which constitutes the novella’s first vignette, grapples with the narrator’s fragmentary memories of this period:

That year was lost to him. At times he tried to remember and, just about when he thought everything was clearing up some, he would be at a loss for words. It almost always began with a dream in which he would suddenly awaken and then realize that he was really asleep. Then he wouldn’t know whether what he was thinking had happened or not. . . . his mind would go blank and he would fall asleep. But before falling asleep he saw and heard many things.29

In its original Spanish, the novella’s language is simple and lyrical, the language of a child, but the simplicity also points out the difficulty of setting down in words the events the narrator will attempt to describe. The similarity to the descriptions of lost time in Betty Hill’s account, and even in the parodic South Park account, is striking. However, in . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, the attempt to regain the memory of the “lost year” is an attempt to create a shared cultural memory, which might then provide a means of resistance against the political oppression the narrator experiences. As in the Hills’ narrative, Rivera’s novel points out the limits of recovered memory and ultimately finds this attempt to work toward solidarity through recovered memory of trauma to be ineffective.
The event that precipitates the narrator’s “lost year” is not an encounter with extraterrestrials. Indeed, from the vantage point of the 1940s U.S. culture in which the narrator faces open hostility from his Anglo classmates and the threat of expulsion from the public elementary school that offers him the hope of a better life, it is the narrator, his family, and the other Latino characters who are the aliens. Rather, the lost time which the narrator struggles to record is the result of a series of intensely traumatic events in the life of a child who is struggling with hard physical labor and the additional powerlessness of a child in an openly oppressed minority group. Like a disproportionate number of children in minority groups, the narrator shows signs of posttraumatic stress disorder, and the only way the narrator is able to overcome this trauma is through memory. Thus, Rivera’s novella is able to familiarize the reader with the “alien” Latino culture, reversing the position of the aliens for the reader.

Though Rivera’s novella, of course, features no equivalent to Betty and Barney Hill’s extraterrestrials, it includes an abduction experience of a kind. Presumably because the narrator’s father and mother get a job in Utah, some distance from the unnamed town where the narrator is going to school, the narrator is left alone to finish out the school year. His parents board him with Don Laíto and Doña Bone, who “sometimes steal and [are] bootleggers.” They accept the narrator’s parents’ money for boarding the narrator, then force him to sleep in a dark, cluttered, musty room and feed him rotting, and possibly stolen, meat in order, the narrator implies, to save money. The colorful pair sell cheap used, or stolen, goods, and encourage the narrator to steal for them. Ultimately, they involve him in a plot to murder Doña Bone’s lover for his money, forcing the narrator to dig the grave and, after the corpse is added, to fill it in.
narrator is careful, even from the relatively safe vantage point of memory, to alternate his
censure of Don Laíto and Doña Bone with praise: “It’s not that they weren’t good
people, they were, but like they say, they had their bad side.” The narrator’s defense of
his felonious guardians thus serves not as a reliable statement of fact, but as an indication
of the extent to which they still have a hold on him. The narrator’s trauma continues
even after his parents return for him, as evidenced by his habit of wearing a ring taken
from the murdered man, Don Laíto’s gift to him. The narrator attempts to explain his
compulsion to wear the ring as an act of expediency: “I tried to throw it away but I don’t
know why I couldn’t. I thought that someone might find it.” As a result, the narrator
develops a habit of keeping his hand in his pocket to hide the ring, the physical reminder
of the guilt that he shares with his benefactors. Thus, in addition to the practical
consideration of not getting caught, keeping the ring becomes a way to display, or to
hide, at choice, his traumatic memories, and thus to obtain a degree of control over them.

Despite its focus on the epistemological significance of memory, the novella
adopts a realistic strategy for the representation of trauma. Thus, its stance toward
trauma is similar to the “banality of evil” realistic strategy outlined in the context of
Holocaust studies by Rothberg. For instance, one of the novella’s central concerns is the
narrator’s growing doubt of Christianity. In “The Silvery Night,” the narrator’s elders
have warned him that people go crazy when they summon the devil and he appears. Out
of curiosity, the narrator summons the devil, and when he does not appear, the narrator
describes the moon as contented. This valorization of the physical, material world which
operates under the laws of physics is continued in “. . . And the Earth Did Not Devour
Him,” when the narrator curses God. Instead of the expected punishment, the narrator’s
father recovers from sunstroke. The title suggests the loss of faith in Christianity, and the increased faith in the material world, experienced by the narrator. In this sense, the narrator’s strategy for representing the traumatic events he attempts to deal with is a realistic one.

As in Freud’s example of the burning child described by Caruth, Rivera also deals with a series of traumatic events in which fire is a central image. In “The Little Burnt Victims,” only the parents and the oldest child, Raulito—the one who starts the fire—survive it. In addition to the added tragic twist of the fact that Raulito stays alive to feel guilty about it, this also means that the family’s hopes that one of the children will become a boxer, imposed on them by Hollywood films, are shattered. In “The Night the Lights Went Out,” Ramón and Juanita argue and their story is narrated by the people of the town. Other vignettes, such as “When We Arrive,” also feature this collective narration. The effect of this collective narration is to trust the neighborhood’s collective memory, or perhaps to mistrust it. In the original Spanish, the vignette’s final question, “They just loved each other so much, don’t you think?” receives the answer “No, pos sí.”

No, pos sí is idiomatic Spanish for “No, well, yes,” which makes the response far more equivocal than the English translation of “No doubt.” The townspeople understand love as consuming and destructive, and they miss the fact that this view of love, like the repeated, “No, well yes” with which they respond to it, is a self-contradiction, and it is the novel’s multiplicity of voices that allows it to embrace this paradoxical conception of love as dangerous and consuming. Significantly, in this vignette, too, burning is the metaphor. In the next short vignette, burning is the metaphor again, when the truck full
of workers is hit by a drunk driver, bursts into flames, and the workers run out of the truck with their hair on fire.  

In “The Night Before Christmas,” the narrator’s mother is arrested for shoplifting as the result of cultural misunderstanding and the strangeness of an alien culture. She often becomes disoriented when she goes out, prompting her husband’s solicitude: “Aren’t you afraid to go downtown? You remember that time in Wilmar, out in Minnesota, how you got lost downtown.” However, she wants to buy Christmas presents for her children. In her anxiety, she finally tries to leave the store with a Christmas gift in her hands. She has no intention of stealing, but is accused of doing so because she is unable to explain herself. The man who apprehends her thinks of her as one of “these damn people, always stealing something.” The mother’s anxiety and disorientation, her inability to remember the way to the store and to function in social situations, clearly fit the criteria for PTSD in the DSM-IV.

Memory is connected to resistance against Anglo discrimination against the Chicano community in “The Portrait.” In this vignette, a traveling salesman, presumably Anglo, collects thirty dollars to enlarge and frame a photo of Don Mateo’s son, who has died in the Korean War. When the neighborhood people discover the photos dumped in a ditch, ruined by the rain, they realize they have been cheated. The vignette provides one of the novella’s few moments in which the uneducated Chicano workers, who are repeatedly taken advantage of, are able to partially regain what they have lost, when, in the vignette’s punch-line ending, Don Mateo forces the salesman to finish the portrait, without a photo. Since the salesman has no photo to work from, presumably the salesman must work with a photo of Don Mateo. Thus, the son’s portrait becomes
essentially a portrait of the father. However, the photo of the son, as it was the only one, is irreplaceable, and thus in this case even tangible artifacts of the past are lost, and memory alone is unable to distinguish between father and son. Don Mateo attempts to resist, and his memory of his son is his reason for doing so. But the results are equivocal at best, since memory is so easily fooled.

In the novella’s last vignette, “Under the House,” the narrator attempts a different strategy for resistance from Don Mateo’s: a recovery of his “lost year.” The narrator tries to remember all the traumatic events he has seen in order to work through them and reclaim his anger, and thus his strategy for resisting oppression depends upon memory. The narrator hides under a neighbor’s house “where he can think” and remembers all the events described in vignettes throughout the book. Stream-of-consciousness memories of various characters’ voices are juxtaposed with one another, arranged roughly from the beginning of the novella to the end, so that all of the year is recalled with the narrator’s conscious process of memory. Thus, the novella describes the narrator’s effort to “discover and rediscover and piece things together. This to this, that to that, all with all. That was it. That was everything.” In this sense, memory is the only hope the novella offers of resistance to the oppression experienced by the characters.

However, the novel ultimately finds this strategy to be untenable. The narrator is unable to share his memories. He is alone under the house, and when he finally comes out he is unable to explain to the other children what he has seen, and they mock him. Instead of a shared memory which could unite the Chicano community against the oppression the narrator has witnessed, he is only able to regain an individual memory. Like Betty and Barney Hill, the narrator of . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him comes
to understand that remembering a traumatic event does not serve to unite the survivors, and in fact it often divides them. Thus, sharing “recovered memories” is found to be an ineffective strategy for resisting oppression.

Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* also focuses on the difficulty of remembering and the vital role memory plays in resistance. However, the role of memory in *Dogeaters* is even more complex, since one of Hagedorn’s primary concerns is how memory is co-opted by colonialist and neocolonialist hegemonic interests of power in order to reinforce oppression. While Rivera follows the “realistic” strategy of dealing with trauma, corresponding to Rothberg’s “banality of evil” tradition of depicting traumatic events, Hagedorn’s emphasis on dreams and intertextuality locates her in the “historical sublime” post-World-War-II tradition described by Elias and Cohen. Ultimately, Hagedorn’s characters, like Rivera’s and like Betty and Barney Hill, come to find that memory is untrustworthy as a basis for reclaiming the painful history they have experienced. Hagedorn, unlike Rivera and the Hills, attempts to use parody as a strategy for using memories of traumatic events as a basis for political resistance. Yet Hagedorn, too, demonstrates the limits of memory.

**IV. Memory, Christianity, and Beauty in Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters***

Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* takes place in the Philippines during the regime of a fictional President clearly based on Ferdinand Marcos. Juxtaposed with the novel’s horrifying images of the regime’s repressive violence is a repetitive barrage of sentimental love stories and Western notions of feminine beauty. The trauma inflicted by generations of colonial oppression by first the Spanish Empire, then the U.S., and the
subsequent trauma inflicted by a sadly representative postcolonial dictatorship, leaves lacunae in the characters’ memories. In the colonial period, Hagedorn points out, the means of social control were anthropological and religious. However, in the period of postcolonial dictatorship, direct means of control such as torture and assassination are augmented by more subtle means such as manipulation of the media, so that the effect of the omnipresence of romance narratives in the novel is to fill the resulting gaps in memory with an idealized, Westernized, Hollywood-inspired conception of romantic love, a compulsory cultural memory which replaces and supersedes reality in order to control the oppressed population. The novel’s characters remember compulsively, and contradict one another’s memories. Unlike . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, however, Dogeaters demonstrates a more skeptical and less positivistic stance toward the representation of memory. In fact, memory of trauma is even shown in the novel to be colored by media complicit in that same trauma.

Hagedorn is intensely aware of the extent to which the Philippines’ suffering in the novel’s present (a period which ranges from the 1950s to the 1980s) is the direct result of its colonial past. One of her novel’s primary concerns is to document the repression endured by ordinary Filipinos under the regime of the unnamed President, and to point out the implication in that repression of two forms of Western cultural imperialism, Catholicism and anthropology, which still directly affect the President’s Philippines. The novel begins with a quote from anthropologist Jean Mallat, and quotes from Mallat, and from U.S. President William McKinley, on the character of the Filipino people are distributed throughout the book. Mallat’s description of the Filipinos’ reluctance to awaken any sleeping person⁴³ is an example of the stereotyping and
condescension which have led many postcolonial theorists to criticize anthropology, while McKinley’s description of the Filipinos as “unfit for self-government” and his resolution to “uplift and civilize and Christianize them” serve as representative examples of the attitudes of the colonial powers that decimated the Philippines and left their people vulnerable to dictators like the President.

One of *Dogeaters*’ central concerns is the manipulation by the media of the shared memory of Filipinos. In particular, the media are biased toward the President and other members of the plutocratic elite. One of the main characters is the President’s wife, who does an interview with an American journalist with only one shoe on, a sly reference to Imelda Marcos’s famous shoe collection. The journalist, who is suspicious and a bit fearful of the President’s wife, thinks while she charms him of bananas and mounds of coconuts, and of the waiter, Orlando “Romeo” Rosales whose Elvis pompadour is “certainly innocent.” In the chapter entitled “The President’s Wife Has a Dream,” the President’s wife swims with famous people like George Harrison, who was a jet-set friend of the Marcoses. This scene implicates the media in supporting the President’s regime.

The novel’s main characters are all unable to mount a meaningful resistance against the President because they are distracted by notions of sentimental love and beauty. The B-film star Romeo Rosales is one example of the fascination of sentimental love stories in the novel. Another example is Rio Gonzaga and her cousin Pucha, who watch Hollywood movies and discuss their crushes. Rio also listens to a radio program called *Love Letters* with her grandmother. The chapter “Her Mother, Rita Hayworth” describes the feminine space of the beauty shop, surrounded by beauty products and...
gossip. Hagedorn contrasts this feminine space with the cruelty of the political arena. When the feminine ideal of beauty collides with the political, in “Surrender,” the actress Lolita Luna is figured as the conquered army surrendering to the General.\(^{48}\)

The fortune of the Avila family, which includes some of the President’s most outspoken critics, is controlled by this intersection of feminine beauty and media as repeated and deferred through the media. Senator Domingo Avila criticizes General Ledesma’s human rights abuses, yet significantly, the senator and the President are, or may be, distant cousins, or half-brothers. The novel fairly clearly endorses Avila’s critique of the regime, yet this overt political resistance is shown to be ineffective. In “Sleeping Beauty” Daisy Avila, Senator Avila’s daughter, grows up in the midst of the Philippines’s jungle lushness and her father’s critique of colonialism.\(^{49}\) In the chapter’s title, beauty is said to be *sleeping* because of the quote from Mallat at the beginning of the novel, and indeed dreams are a repeated feature of the content of the novel. The beauty of the chapter title refers to the beauty pageant Daisy wins, which once more critiques Western-inspired ideals of beauty. Thus, in “Epiphany,” Daisy Avila starts to cry continuously after she wins the beauty pageant. Later, due to her anger at the President’s regime, she stops.\(^{50}\) In frustration at all the tabloid reporters, Daisy’s mother angrily cries, “Go back to the jungle!” An educated Filipina would want to avoid stereotypes like this, but she falls prey to the pervasive stereotypes in which all of the characters are immersed like the novel’s ever-present dreams.

The collision of feminine beauty and the cruelty of the political reaches its horrifying climax in “The Famine of Dreams.” In this chapter, General Ledesma and Pepe Carreon interrogate Daisy, and the interrogation is intercut with an episode of *Love*
Letters. The General’s alternation between the threat of violence and politeness, even kindness, offers Daisy humanity, then takes it away. Similarly, the textual interpolation of the clichéd, saccharine melodrama on the radio, interspersed with its commercials and jingles, with the brutal rape of Daisy points out the impossibility of directly expressing in language the trauma inflicted on her. Elias’ concept of the “historical sublime” usefully explains why it is impossible to communicate Daisy’s experience directly to others. In other words, the effect of this series of juxtapositions is not only to intensify the horror of the scene (which it does, effectively) but also to point out that this scene plays out against a radio program which has thousands of listeners all over the nation. Despite the media’s dependence on support from capital which also supports the President’s regime, and despite the program’s implication in the trauma which occurs simultaneously with it, Daisy experiences this event alone. The question of how to represent trauma is taken up here, and Hagedorn’s answer is that it is representable only by this collision of different texts, and even different typefaces, as the “realistic” scenes of the interrogation are in boldfaced type. The intertextuality of Hagedorn’s strategy for representing trauma is a solution which draws attention to both the unrepresentability of trauma and its banality, as Rothberg points out that many representations of the Holocaust do.

However, the novel also calls the possibility of representation itself into question. In particular, memory as a form of political resistance is so unreliable in Dogeaters that the novel contradicts itself. In the novel’s penultimate chapter, “Pucha Gonzaga,” Pucha’s letter to Rio casts doubt on all the events of Rio’s narrative, even disagreeing with her on such basic features as the year and whether Rio’s father is divorced or single, living or dead. The effect of having Pucha’s letter question everything Rio has written,
here at the novel’s end, is to point out that memory, while necessary, is changeable. Rio herself realizes that memory is contingent, that any effort to create a shared narrative based on memory inevitably falls prey to individual differences in remembered experience. Thus, the affirmation of memory in *Dogeaters* is more skeptical than that at the end of . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*.

Yet this skepticism dispenses with a false hope in order to offer a more promising one. While it points out the impossibility of the fantasy of shared memory, the novel offers an alternative strategy: pastiche and parody as a means of working through trauma. The novel’s final chapter, “Kundiman,” is a densely tangled and poetic angry rant that combines Catholic prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer and the “Ave Maria” with the form of a kundiman, a traditional Filipino folk song which began as a love song but has often been given politically-motivated lyrics. The parodic use of Catholic imagery in this section serves as a critique of the colonialist use of religion, but even more so, Hagedorn’s kundiman demonstrates her tortured love for her homeland. In half-remembered prayers and a fully-realized hatred of the country’s tortured past, the communal anger of all the sadness that Rio has experienced comes out in this last kundiman.\(^{53}\) Thus, Jamesonian postmodern pastiche is the only solution offered by the novel, a means of escaping both the compulsion to remember trauma and the media that are complicit in the creation of trauma. The only way to work through the pain of the post-traumatic imaginary of *Dogeaters* is to release this anger in a pastiche. Thus, *Dogeaters* offers a more hopeful means of resistance than . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* because it takes into account the insights about memory and trauma which the Hills slowly came to understand. In a sense, the Hills’ memories of their abduction
experience are a pastiche of different SF B-movie staples of the 1950s, and eventually the Hills come to understand that their differing memories do not invalidate their experience. In the same way, the anger and pain of the characters in *Dogeaters* are no less valued because each character experiences them alone.

V. Conclusion

Each of the two “realistic” novels by immigrant authors in this chapter demonstrates the limits of memory in any attempt to recover a group’s history. Rivera’s and Hagedorn’s argument is that the collective and individual trauma undergone by the oppressed citizens of postcolonial nations creates suppressed memories, and that these memories can be recovered only in communally-agreed-upon narratives. These narratives may be self-contradictory, and may even be only partially understood. The resulting strategies for resisting oppression may be more or less successful. Rivera seems to place a great deal of hope in memory as a means of empowerment for the narrator, while Hagedorn is less optimistic about the empowering nature of memory, or even its ability to represent reality accurately. However, both authors offer memory as a tenable strategy for the oppressed to first remember the pain to which they have been exposed, and then to act upon this shared memory.

On the other hand, as the Hills’ alien abduction narrative points out, the incompleteness of this strategy renders it less than ideal as a basis for practical political resistance to oppression. Betty and Barney Hill experience the same traumatic event very differently, and their differing memories of that event lead to their great difficulty in negotiating a unified response to it. Thus, the Hills’ narrative calls attention to the
constructed and problematic nature of any group identity. Minority groups have often tried to construct a group identity by creating a shared history. However, the Hills’ failure to create a mutually-agreed-upon narrative of their abduction experience suggests that recovered memories are an ineffective tool for the construction of a communal history, and thus that group identity is mutable, continually evolving, potentially stereotyping, and ultimately unreliable as a basis for resistance. Thus, one central advantage of the figure of the alien in SF as a theoretical framework for understanding the experience of immigrants in the U.S. is that it offers an opportunity to generate new ways of thinking about identity. Each immigrant meets the potentially traumatic encounter with a hegemonic U.S. culture differently. Consequently, reading immigrant literature in company with SF presents the possibility of discussing immigrant experience not in terms of group identity but in terms of a non-identity-based politics, which may offer immigrants a more tenable site for resistance.
Conclusion

Open Borders: Immigration and Xenophilic SF in the Twenty-First Century

This project has pointed out several major themes connected with immigration in the twentieth-century in the U.S. One of the most important overarching themes appearing both in SF related to aliens and in realistic fiction related to immigrants is the notion of health. As I have shown, immigrants in the U.S. have been accused of endangering the physical health of the American public, held up as examples of good health, and subjected to psychologically damaging processes of culture shock and trauma in both their home and host countries. One key aspect of the debate over immigrants in the U.S in recent years has been the positive or negative effects of illegal immigration on the health of the economy. Current U.S. President Barack Obama argues that “An orderly, controlled border and an immigration system designed to meet our economic needs are important pillars of a healthy and robust economy.”¹ This statement, which offers hope of constructive changes to U.S. immigration policy, still focuses on what immigrants can do for America, rather than on immigrants as possessing agency and subjectivity of their own. This suggests that, ultimately, the failure of the U.S. to welcome immigrants is a failure of imagination. This inability to imagine an America in
which immigrants are a productive part of society, experiencing good physical and psychological health and contributing to the cultural and economic health of the larger culture, has had profound negative effects on the lives of real immigrants.

Similarly, SF writers have all too often failed to imagine an encounter with aliens in which human and alien can coexist peacefully. This project has shown that some SF writers have begun to make efforts to do so, and it may be that it is with SF that hope for immigrants lies. It is possible that “pro-alien” SF allows for the conceptualization of a utopian vision of the encounter between cultures, a more positive encounter than fiction set in the present-day “real” world is able to imagine. The urgency and persistence of human characters like Roy Neary in Close Encounters of the Third Kind, who is compelled, without completely understanding the compulsion, to seek out aliens and establish peaceful contact with them suggests that the most important point about aliens is that humans need them. Humans need aliens for a variety of reasons: they are a way for the disenfranchised to gain more social power, as in expatriate fiction; they are a mirror for our desires, as in postcolonial theory; moreover, they are fascinating because of their difference. Aliens would seem to be the clearest example of the constructed Other of postcolonial theory, a threatening and dehumanized Other that does not really exist. In fact, however, the threat of aliens in much SF is also balanced by their power to fascinate, to defamiliarize, to offer a point of view from which humanity can be seen from the outside. And this is the final point of this study: that SF has the power to influence the dominant culture. It is to be hoped that SF writers can use this influence to open borders instead of policing them.
The possibilities of science fiction for the twenty-first century are bounded only by the extent to which they preserve outdated national and social boundaries conditioned by history. What is needed now is a science fiction that demonstrates the new anxieties and fantasies of a globalized and interconnected Earth, a science fiction that resists the alienation of racial and ethnic minorities. “Xenophilic” science fiction, which includes both a non-antagonistic conception of encounter and an explicit critique of the antagonistic conception of encounter, would be an important step toward stopping the repetition of feelings of hatred, guilt, inferiority and fear centered on race. More than any other genre, SF offers this possibility for a complete reimagining of the encounter with the other, and the texts in this project demonstrate that it has begun to do so. It remains to be seen whether SF will live up to this radical potential.
NOTES

Introduction


2. Ibid., p. 246.

3. Ibid., p. 276.

4. Of course, many advocates of immigrant rights object to the use of the terms “alien” or “illegal alien” to refer to immigrants, echoing Elie Wiesel’s well-known statement that “No human being is ‘illegal.’” Though the terms “alien” and “illegal alien” are often seen as pejorative, it is certainly not my intention to use them in that sense here. On the contrary, my hope is that this project will contribute to a wider understanding of the dehumanizing effects of the word as it has previously been used, while at the same time, to some degree, beginning a process of reclaiming the term and combating this same process of dehumanization.


12 Rieder, p. 15.


14 Ibid., p. 41.

15 Ibid., p. 53.

16 Ibid., p. 111-112.


18 Ibid., p. 49-66.

19 Ibid., p. 159.

20 Ibid., p. 161.

21 Ibid., p. 162.


23 Rieder, p. 5.


28 Ibid., pp. 47.


30 Ibid., p. 28.


33 Ibid.


36 Ibid.


38 Ibid., p. 1.

39 Ibid., p. 4.

40 Ibid., p. 6.


42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.
Chapter 1: Reproduction and Health in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film


8 Ibid.


11 Qtd. in Washington, p. 27.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., pp. 81-85.

14 Ibid., p. 81.


16 Washington, p. 78.


19 Howard, p. 495.

20 Sinclair, p. 292.


22 Ibid., p. 501.

23 Derrick, p. 500.

24 Sinclair, pp. 202-211.

25 Ibid., p. 175.

26 Ibid., p. 180.

27 Ibid., p. 181.


30 Ibid.


34 For just one example which compares claims of various meditation techniques with the scientific literature on meditation’s psychological effects, see Chris Mace, *Mindfulness and Mental Health: Therapy, Theory and Science*, London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 24-50.


36 Ibid., p. 47.

37 Ibid., p. 48.

38 Ibid., p. 1.

39 Ibid., p. 248.

40 Ibid., pp. 248-249.

41 Ibid., p. 59. Quotation marks in the original.

42 Ibid., p. 296.


54 *Alien*.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.
Chapter 2: Alien Landscapes and the Limits of Manifest Destiny in Twentieth-Century American Fiction


8 Ibid., p. 201.

9 Ibid., pp. 198-203.


13 Ibid., p. 168.


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 16.

21 Ibid., p. 27.

22 Ibid., p. 34.


25 Cather, p. 37.

26 Luebke, p. 67.

27 Cather, p. 79.

28 Rölvaag, p. 110.

29 Ibid., pp. 295-304, 334-341.

30 Ibid., p. 127.

31 Ibid., p. 330.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 342-349.

34 Ibid., pp. 442-465.


37 Ibid., p. 124.

39 Ibid., p. 216.

40 Carr, pp. 121-122.

41 Smiley, p. 111.


47 Ibid., p. 3.

48 Ibid., p. 40.

49 Ibid., pp. 178-179.

50 Ibid., p. 171.

51 Merchant, p. 199.


53 Ibid., pp. 141-142.

54 Stableford, p. 136.


56 Ibid., p. 554.
Chapter 3: Irony and the Expatriate in Twentieth-Century Realistic Fiction and SF


2 Ibid., p. 93.


5 Ibid., p. 75.

6 Ibid.


9 Dow, p. 179.

10 Ibid., p. 182.


12 Ibid., pp. 104-105.

13 Ibid., p. 134.

14 Ibid., p. 132.

15 Ibid., p. 102-103.

16 Ibid., p. 175-176.
Ibid., p. 232.

18 Ibid., p. 191.

19 Ibid., p. 157.

20 Dow, p. 187-188.


22 “Grok” purports to be a Martian word meaning “to drink” or, by extension, to understand something so completely that the understander becomes one with it. As a result of the novel’s popularity in the 1960s, the word has entered common usage as a synonym for “to understand.” See Robert Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, New York: Ace, 1961, p. 385.

23 Water brotherhood is discussed in many passages throughout the novel. See, for example, Jubal’s warning to Duke on p. 164.


25 Ibid., p. 385.

26 Ibid., p. 386. [Ellipses in original.]

27 Ibid., pp. 335-339.

28 Ibid., p. 339.

29 Ibid., p. 389. [Ellipses in original.]

30 Ibid., p. 507.

31 Ibid., p. 516.

32 Ibid., p. 517.

33 Ibid., p. 517.

34 Ibid., p. 524-525.


37 Ibid., p. 38.

38 Ibid., p. 39.

39 Ibid., p. 55.

40 Ibid., p. 69.

41 Ibid., pp. 90-91.

42 Ibid., p. 188.

43 Ibid., p. 249-250.

44 Ibid., p. 362.


46 Ibid., p. 9. [Italics in original.]

47 Ibid., p. 5.


49 Ibid., p. 58.

50 Ibid., p. 59-61.


53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.
Chapter 4: Trauma and Compulsory Amnesia in Alien Abduction Accounts and Immigrant Fiction

1 Ibid.


3 South Park, exec. prod. Matt Stone, Trey Parker, Comedy Central, 1997-present.


5 Ibid., p. 463.

6 Ibid., pp. 464-466.

7 Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996, p. 4. [Italics in original.]

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., pp. 10-11. [Italics in original.]


13 Ibid., p. 53.

14 Ibid., p. 52.


16 Ibid., p. 192.

17 Ibid., pp. 5-6 and 192.

18 Elias, pp. ix-x.


22 Ibid., p. 51.

23 Ibid., p. 47.

24 Ibid., p. vii.

25 Ibid., p. vii.

26 Ibid., p. x.

27 Ibid., p. 301.
28 Ibid., pp. 296-297.

29 Tomás Rivera, . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, transl. Evangelina Vigil-Piñón, Houston, TX: Arte Público, 1987, p. 83.

30 Doña Bone’s name is short for Bonefacia and is thus pronounced Bo-nay, though (given Doña Bone’s various criminal pastimes) the association with the English homonym is probably intentional.

31 Ibid., p. 98.

32 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

33 Ibid., pp. 100-101.

34 Ibid., p. 99.


36 Ibid., p. 127.

37 Ibid., p. 129.

38 Ibid., p. 131.

39 Ibid., p. 133.

40 Ibid., pp. 136-139.

41 Ibid., p. 150.

42 Ibid., p. 152.


44 Ibid., p. 71.


46 Ibid., pp. 121-124.

47 Ibid., pp. 3-17.
Conclusion: Open Borders


48 Ibid., pp. 95-97.
49 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
50 Ibid., pp. 105-108.
51 Ibid., pp. 211-216.
52 Ibid., pp. 248-249.
53 Ibid., pp. 250-251.
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