The Idea of Empire in Mid-Century Science Fiction of the United States of America

Science fiction texts emanating from the United States of America in the mid-twentieth century often take as a premise the existence of a human-led intergalactic empire. These texts imagine space as the 'final frontier', investigating meetings of humans with extraterrestrial indigenes in neocolonialist settings. This article examines the ideas of empire and indigenous resistance as they are constructed in three such texts. It shows that this genre actively engaged with the ideas of colonialism and the expansion of American borders well before critiques of such projects, such as those found in contemporary post-colonial theory, found common currency.

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The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.

Phillip Marlow[1]

Colonial activity has been a key element in dominant European countries' pursuit of national glory. Not content with the power wielded within their own borders, nations such as England, France and Holland expanded into 'unknown' territories, capturing land, enslaving and 're-educating' indigenous peoples, exploiting natural resources, and thereby creating empires such as those celebrated (ironically perhaps) by Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

By the mid-twentieth century, these empires were dramatically enfeebled, with many previously colonised countries gaining independence. This era also saw the rise of the United States of America as a (if not the) world power. Although this nation's governmental policy and rhetoric were often anticolonialist when directed towards the practices of other countries, the United States itself increasingly enacted its own colonialist practices in this time. Though this country never enjoyed a major period of physical colonialist expansion (perhaps because by the time it had sufficient resources to do so, there were few places or peoples 'undiscovered' by Europe to be colonised), the United States undertook many other forms of colonialism, with its culture, military, world view and economic concerns pervading a multitude of nations.

Some have argued that this change in the praxis of colonialism was a positive one. Donald W White, for example, understands the United States of this era as 'eschew[ing] military coercion to annex territory to their domain',[2] preferring instead to rely on 'respect, loyalty, and common interests'[3] on the part of other nations. Needless to say, others have been less optimistic about the way that the United States pursued (and still pursues) its national and international interests. For many citizens of the United States, the 1950s and 1960s saw an increasing awareness of the violence of their own government's brand of imperialism and increasing criticism and resistance, leading most spectacularly to the mass protests against the war in Vietnam.

There was one space in which the United States could physically enact an expansionist colonialism, 'the final frontier': space. However, the literal expansion facilitated by the nation's space program was limited, delivering none of the riches that colonialist actions on Earth previously had. The United States' intergalactic empire was to be largely an *imaginary* one instead. A key locus for this was the genre of science fiction. The machinations of a human-led galactic empire have in fact always been a central motif in this genre, in its utopic and dystopic speculations about the future. Such narratives are particularly prevalent, however, in science fiction books[4] of the mid-twentieth century originating in the United States. This article, part of a larger work investigating the representation of extraterrestrial indigenes, will argue that such works reflect the colonialist concerns of the United States at that time, reworking old European colonialist praxes, imagining and investigating the possibilities for an intergalactic future empire, and drawing analogies for colonialist actions on Earth.

The history of colonialism in the United States is a complex one. It was itself a colony and its indigenous peoples suffered the effects of this imperialism. Then the formative nation overthrew its own colonialist oppressors. Finally, during the twentieth century it sought to exercise imperial power over other nations. The science fiction books which will be examined in this article—*The Rebel Worlds*, *The Martian Chronicles* and *Close to Critical*—contain filaments of all these histories. Taking as their premise the inevitable colonisation of outer space by the human race (with the United States as its inevitable metonym), they are also aware of the possibility of sometimes complex, subtle and justified resistance by extraterrestrial indigenes, the victims of such colonial actions. By utilising post-colonial theory and drawing on actual colonialist histories, this article will investigate how these texts imagine the 'vision splendid' of a future United States' intergalactic colonialism.

THE REBEL WORLDS

Poul Anderson is a popular, well-respected and extremely prolific science fiction writer. *The Rebel Worlds*, published in 1969, is one of a series of works featuring an overweening, humanoid-led, galactic Empire, the central character being the 'hard-boiled' Starship Commander Flandry. This Empire is ruled by the decadent and ineffectual Josip III, who is little more than a figurehead manipulated by one Aaron Snelund. Josip has appointed Snelund governor of a far-flung sector. Flandry is sent to

informally investigate Snelund's behaviour. He finds that Snelund is abusing, torturing and blackmailing the extraterrestrials under his governorship. Snelund's behaviour has horrified many and civil war is near. Flandry manages to have the evil governor killed and restores some sort of equilibrium to the still corrupt Empire.

Flandry is a jaded, but ultimately loyal, exponent of the creed of empire, offering insight into how the Empire is administered and the ideology informing it. Savage extraterrestrials are nominated by Flandry as the reason for the existence of the Empire, as it is 'the single thing that stands between civilisation—*our civilisation*—and the Long Night' [emphasis added].[5] This dichotomy of civilization and chaos is intrinsic to this text, and the conflation of *our* civilization with *all* civilisation marks civilisation as being naturally defined according to human standards. The importance of this civilisation is marked by the fact that the protagonist, however jaded, works within the system rather than inviting its collapse.

Flandry's discovery of the extent of corruption in the Empire is not a sufficient argument for social change, however. Flandry knows the limitations of civilisation, just as a 'hard-boiled' detective would know the limitations of the law. He is also aware of the consequences of the breakdown of civilisation, just as a detective would be of the results of lawlessness in the streets. So Flandry must take the law into his own hands; he transgresses imperial laws in order to preserve that rule. He becomes an outer space vigilante. Flandry is afraid, not of another civilisation taking control of the galaxy, but of the reversion of the galaxy to its 'heart of darkness'.

The Empire as a whole is based on a fear of the unknown and unknowable. *The Rebel Worlds* firmly blames the existence of savages on a human-led Empire that has given up its exploration of the galaxy. This refusal to properly shoulder the 'white man's burden' has allowed uncolonised extraterrestrial savages to develop as a threat; in this text, empire-building is the fundament of a peaceful, civilised universe. Here, there is a clear reflection of the United States' self-appointed role as the 'world's policeman', containing and mediating the 'savagery' of the 'third world'.

The specifics of the human code of empire are demonstrated early in the narrative during Flandry's visit to the colonial outpost governed by Snelund. The history of this planet in itself illustrates the goals of empire. The indigenous people, the Shalmuans, when 'discovered' by the

humans, were living in a Bronze Age. Up until the appointment of its corrupt governor, the Shalmuans had garnered all the so-called benefits of empire for the indigene familiar from European colonialism, namely education, modernisation and assimilation. The Shalmuans had a military base installed on their planet and began receiving scholarships to study 'abroad'. They returned to their planet with 'modern educations … The dream grew of entering civilisation as a full-fledged member'.[6] In return, they paid taxes and agreed to obey the imperial resident agent 'whose word was the ultimate law but who in practice let native cultures fairly well alone. His marines did suppress wars and banditry as far as practicable, but this was considered good by most'.[7] Such imperial control is benevolent, liberal and commonsensical, with certain privileged aliens being cultivated by the ruling class and the entire race 'saved' from their own 'savagery'. This indeed is an exemplar of colonialism, an extremely positive imagining of its possibilities worthy of any benevolent empire. Details of how this is achieved are scanty, however. Many questions are glossed over; how is the Shalmuan culture kept alive, for example, since its citizens have been fully re-educated, modernised and assimilated? How do the marines tell what level of violence is necessary and what level is destructive of the indigenous culture?

Shalmu is not exceptional in its 'success'. *The Rebel Worlds* states that 'the planet was typical of the majority that had fallen under Terran [human] sway. Backward, they had more to gain than lose; they saw mainly the bright side of the Imperial coin.'[8] Although this passage seems to imply that there is another less positive side to the Imperial coin that the indigenes of this planet have not seen, it also claims that empire works in the interests of the indigene the majority of the time. If a colonial power can keep the natives peaceful, leave the 'worthy' parts of their culture alone, and give them the chance to advance themselves, then they will understand the value of their colonised state. This perpetuates a familiar hierarchy of culture in which only the colonist (because of her/his position atop that hierarchy) has the ability to distinguish clearly the worthy 'foreigner' from the unworthy 'savage'. In this way, *The Rebel Worlds* is a utopian text which ignores the inevitably problematic power differentials intrinsic in the colonial project. Instead, it characterises the problems of empire as lying in the detail or in human error—unfortunate betrayals of the 'civilising' ideal—and so imagines a reworking by a United States-led humanity of a fundamentally sound European ideology of colonialism.

The colonial ideal expressed in *The Rebel Worlds* departs in some respects, however, from that of colonial apologists for Empire, reflecting instead a peculiar version of cultural relativism.[9] Flandry contends that the rule of different worlds must take into account the differing biological natures of different extraterrestrials and the cultures springing directly from these. He lectures his crew on how to run an empire:

> *'What's right in one place may be wrong in another. One species may be combative and anarchic by nature, another peaceful and antlike, a third peaceful and anarchic, a fourth a bunch of aggressive totalitarian hives. I know a planet where murder and cannibalism are necessary to race survival … Not to mention the variations imposed by culture. Just think about Terran history.'*[10]

This passage argues that cultures and/or races are universally and immutably different to a far greater extent than could be suggested by this work's neocolonialism. Such an understanding of colonised extraterrestrial life suggests a respect for their 'natures', a concession to their differing world views. This advice could even be understood as speaking against colonialism, positing as it does the existence of a culture so different that colonisation might not 'work'. A concession to self-rule is never actually made in this work, however. As illustrated by the experience of the Shalmuans, the only way of gaining any status is to be re-educated, to be 'humanised': once again an idea familiar from European colonialist histories. Although this passage displays a superficial cultural relativism, at a deeper level it works as a justification of empire. For if the nature of savages is immutable, and a fundamental element of that nature is the attacking of civilisation, then no concessions can be made to their demands. Instead, the Empire must find the best way to rule, by allowing dissent at the social level perhaps, while keeping government eternally and completely human. Such an ideology clearly reflects the way in which the United States has historically imposed its hegemony: keeping 'third world' nations 'in their place' by keeping a tight rein on overweening power structures.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

A text more critical of the effects of colonisation is Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, one of the most popular and critically acclaimed books of the postwar era. Published in 1951, it is a collection of short, interrelated stories that describe the colonisation of Mars by Earth, the effects of this colonisation on the indigenous Martians and the colony's eventual abandonment. The stories enact different colonial possibilities, and their Martians display characteristics that seem to anticipate some notions central to contemporary post-colonial theory many years before their appearance in academic discourse.

Pre-colonial Mars is an idyllic place, with technology complementing nature rather than warring with it, as the following excerpt shows:

> *Up and down green wine-canals, boats as delicate as bronze flowers drifted. In the long and endless dwellings that curved like tranquil snakes, lovers lay idly whispering in cool night beds. The last children ran in torchlit alleys, gold spiders in their hands throwing out films of web.*[11]

The indigenous Martians we meet at this stage are also physically idyllic: handsome in a 'foreign' way, telepathic, with 'soft musical voices'.[12] They are living in a Martian Golden Age, which tempers its pastoral society with subtle and well-integrated technology.

However, as soon as human contact is made with Mars, the Martians begin to change. Even though the first colonialist mission to Mars does not succeed in its attempt to found a human colony, a kind of cultural colonisation begins that does not even require the humans' presence. Singers and musicians spontaneously start performing Terran songs, children start chanting Terran rhymes[13] and, already, the Martian culture begins to disappear, subsumed by the invader culture. As is familiar from many tropes of terrestrial indigenes, the Martian culture cannot stand up to the introduction of the colonialist's culture, only being able to survive in isolation.

The second party of colonists from Earth are unable to draw any response from the Martian people. Eventually they are all interred in an insane asylum, as Martians believe that those who think they are from other planets are insane (many Martians too manifest such symptoms). Since Martians are telepathic and can auto-suggest, hallucinations can be made as real to others as they are to oneself.[14] The Martian psychiatrist believes the members of the landing party and the Terran spaceship are all hallucinations of the Captain. All are killed by this psychiatrist in a misguided euthanasia.

A third party from Earth arrives to find Mars looking exactly like a small town in Ohio, populated by all the spacemen's dead loved ones. The crew are so overcome by a longing for these people that they do not question their 'resurrection'. The only one to resist is the Captain. He wonders if the Martians only take such forms to disarm Terrans and so neutralise their incipient colonisation. He asks himself: 'What if the Martians wanted to destroy us, as invaders, as unwanted ones?'[15] He is then promptly killed by a Martian posing as one of his relatives, as are all of his party. The next day the townsfolk hold funerals for the spacemen, with 'their faces melting … from a familiar face into something else'.[16] This scenario offers the obverse of the effects of colonisation as explored in the earlier story in which Martian culture is being destroyed by Terran culture. Here, the Martians use their racial ability to mutate to transform themselves into a simulation of the invader culture and so gain the chance to destroy it. Their mimicry of the colonists' culture, however, makes the literal presence of the colonists unnecessary. The Martians' own culture has in fact disappeared in their pursuit of freedom from the colonist and is perhaps permanently subsumed by the assumed culture of the coloniser.

The Martians' power to mimic the invader culture can be seen as an example of what Homi Bhaba argues to be one of the key characteristics of a colonised culture. He identifies the existence of mimicry in post-colonial societies, usually enacted by the colonised peoples. However, rather than seeing this behaviour as entirely problematic, as a strategy enforced by the colonial culture in order to destroy the indigenous one, he emphasises the threatening, countervailing power of mimicry. If the colonialist imagines that the re-education of colonised peoples to become indistinguishable from the coloniser is a goal of colonisation, then 'he' ignores the fact that this nullifies any need for the colonial presence. So cross-cultural mimicry must never be complete. Mimicry, therefore, is always a source of ambivalence in the colonial experience as it 'fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence'.[17] The colonised person who attempts to mimic the colonial subjectivity will finally, necessarily, fail, and this performance consigns that person to being a *semi*-Westernised presence. However, Bhaba does not see this mimicry as something that simply disadvantages the 'mimic man'. The very presence of such a man 'articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority'.[18] The presence of the mimic disturbs a simplistic categorisation of race, and in

this way s/he threatens the racially reified basis of colonialism. Through her/his simultaneous display of similarity and difference, the mimic challenges not only the pretended ethos of colonialism, but also the limitations of racial typing and undermines the idea of biologically determinate race.

Bhaba argues that it is in partial-ness and ambivalence that the mimic's particular potential lies as a subversive subjectivity. In *The Martian Chronicles*, however, mimicry *is* complete; Martians are able to become indistinguishable from Terrans. Unlike the extraterrestrial's corporeality in many other science fiction narratives, the Martian's corporeality is malleable; this means that the usual biological barrier to successful mimicry of Terran culture by extraterrestrials does not exist. The scale of mimicry by the Martians grows along with their contact with Terran culture. By the third story, the Martians seem to be exceeding Bhaba's definition of mimicry for, at the funeral, the Martians' falsified faces slip and their real faces begin to be revealed. Bhaba makes the point that mimicry is not about hiding another self behind a mask, as it is not a strategic concealment of what he calls a 'presence Africaine'.[19] Instead, mimicry is the 'partial representation/recognition of the colonial object'.[20] At first glance, the funeral scene would suggest that the Martians' mutable nature exceeds the persona of 'mimic men'. However, if this was so, we would be left with the question of why they held the funeral at all. If putting on the mask was entirely for strategic purposes, why continue the masquerade when those purposes are already fulfilled? The Martians' behaviour is not duplicitous, but it *is* threatening; it walks lines between compulsion and choice in a way very dangerous to both the cultural and literal survival of the colonialists *and* the colonised.

At this stage in *The Martian Chronicles*, the dangers to the Terran colonists of the Martian corporeality become inconsequential. When the next party of Terran colonists arrives, they find that—as was less dramatically the case in colonial incursions on Earth—disease has done their genocidal work for them. The Martians have been almost entirely wiped out by chickenpox.[21] Spender, an archaeologist, is a member of this colonising party who is sent mad by seeing Terrans trying to rename and remould Mars, but never capturing its essence.

The decimation of the Martian population allows the colonisation of Mars to proceed. It overcomes the paradoxical imperviousness of an entirely mutable society, the members of which could never be rendered colonial subjects as their 'nature' is such that they can become

indistinguishable from the colonist. This story, however, clarifies the fact that the colonisation of the Martians' land is still a form of colonial exploitation of Martian culture, as their technology, their corporeality and their culture were so successfully combined that there could be no claim of *terra nullius*.

The parallel between the colonisation of Mars and the colonisation of the United States is discussed in an exchange between Spender and one of the soldiers who is of Cherokee descent. Spender asks: '"[H]ow would you feel if you were a Martian and people came to your land and started tearing it up?", to which the Cherokee answers, "I know exactly how I'd feel ... My grandfather told me lots of things about Oklahoma Territory. If there's a Martian around, I'm all for him".'[22]

Once Spender is expediently killed, mass colonisation of Mars begins, assisted by the planet's extreme fertility that makes it easily 'terraformed' into a lush, hospitable environment for the Terran colonisers.[23] The Martian land, like its inhabitants, shows itself open to influence from an alien culture. The narrative reiterates Spender's view of colonisation as the destruction of difference: 'From the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye.'[24] These colonists from Earth placate their xenophobia by setting out to replicate middle America on Mars, just as many European colonists attempted to replicate their homeland. Mars is so malleable that these colonists can be uncannily successful.

There are few points of contact between Terran and Martian societies after this. A later story of a lone surviving Martian explores in depth the negative side of the Martian ability to mimic. This Martian has ventured into a Terran colony. She/he/it takes on the form of whomever the people around wish she/he/it to be—a lost husband, wife or child, for example. The Martian is finally forced into a group of Terran colonists and dies, overloaded psychically by the colonists' conflicting desires.[25] The mimicry that helped the Martians resist colonisation when in a group is fatal for the disempowered individual. Mimicry has become involuntary and inexpedient. This passage shows the Martian literally destroyed by the colonists' desires. In this respect it suggests the post-colonialist argument that colonial desire is enacted differently by different subjects. The expectation that an individual colonist has of the colonial situation is not only informed by official ideology, it is also subjective, an extension of the colonist's own consciousness. As JanMohamed argues, the colonist's identity becomes inextricably intertwined with her/his position as master.[26] In this way, the indigenous person acts as a repository for the colonist's personal beliefs and desires.

The fate of this particular Martian in *The Martian Chronicles* illustrates the specificity of colonial desire. Each of the Terran colonists desires something different from the colonised Martian, and she/he/it cannot simultaneously fulfil all of these desires. Therefore the possibility of the Martian submitting and inhabiting a stable post-colonial subjectivity is negated by the multiplicity of the colonists' desires. *The Martian Chronicles* has created a colonial scenario in which an indigenous person cannot become colonised, because her/his/its ability to accommodate the coloniser culture is *too good*. However, this involuntary resistance is ambivalently represented; the ability of indigenous Martians to quite literally embody colonial desire is exploited by the Terran colonists and this exploitation ultimately destroys the Martians.

All the Terran colonists leave Mars eventually in order to fight in a World War back on Earth. A family of colonists resists this movement and arrives on a deserted Mars. The following exchange occurs next to a Martian canal:

> *'I've always wanted to see a Martian,' said Michael. 'Where are they, Dad? You promised.'*
> *'There they are,' said Dad ... The Martians were there in the canal reflected in the water. Timothy and Michael and Robert and Mom and Dad.*[27]

Here, the family is seeing their own reflection in the water, and the father is claiming an authentic belonging-to-place equivalent to that of the indigenous Martians. Although this could be interpreted as signifying the invention of a homeland, it is problematic as there are no indigenous Martians left. Terrans have destroyed an entire culture, and then deserted the land in order to return to their internal squabbles. These New Martians certainly have the time to investigate Mars, but can they become Martians, given that they are members of the race that destroyed the Martian culture? Will the Martians, as has happened with so many other indigenous peoples, be appropriated by their colonists as a disembodied 'spirit of the land' while the Terrans reap all of the benefits of Martian citizenship? By raising such questions, *The Martian Chronicles* is clearly reflecting upon the practice of colonialism, especially as it was enacted in the United States. The narrative's positive construction of an

indigenous culture, and its sensitivity to the destructive consequences of colonialism on that culture, act as a warning of the dangers inherent in the colonialism perpetrated by its author's nation.

CLOSE TO CRITICAL

Hal Clement is an important author of 'hard' science fiction, a subgenre which investigates the ramifications of the hard sciences (such as physics, astronomy and mathematics) in clear 'objective' prose. In such works a 'scientific hypothesis' is explored through the 'logical' extrapolation of particular facts. The central question of *Close to Critical*, published in 1958, is how a planet uninhabitable by humans due to its physical characteristics could be colonised. This text finds the answer in the creation of a post-colonial extraterrestrial culture that informs the colonialist Terran culture about the indigenous one through the aid of futuristic communication technologies.

The planet being explored in *Close to Critical* has such extreme weather conditions and immense gravitational pull that data must be collected by a robot which communicates via a video link to human scientists orbiting the planet. In its explorations, the robot comes across a large, scaly, multi-limbed life form, an indigenous inhabitant. The humans surmise that it is a fairly primitive intelligent life form from the fact that it is carrying spears with stone heads,[28] thus applying the same criteria of 'intelligence' historically applied to human cultures. The humans then steal the eggs of these creatures, the Tenbra-ites. They raise them via the remote control of another robot, Fagin, primarily operated by one scientist, Raeker. The reason for such an operation is that the human-raised Tenbra-ites are to investigate the planet, map it, analyse it and report back to the Terrans. They are raised by the colonist for the colonist's own ends, and in this way are reminiscent of the 'stolen generations' of indigenous children in colonialist countries such as Australia and America. These creatures exist on their own planet as strangers; they are an experiment in re-education, a result of an extreme colonialist situation.

These beings can in fact be seen as examples of the post-colonial subjectivity of the 'native informant'. This term, importantly used by Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, originates from the field of ethnography to describe the use of an indigenous person by the coloniser to communicate with the other 'natives'. In the resulting ethnographic text, the native informant is simultaneously 'denied autobiography' and 'taken with the utmost seriousness':[29] that is, although key to ethnological findings, s/he is not considered as having her/his own, independent 'story'. The informant is 'a blank, though generative of a text of cultural identity that only the West (or a Western-model discipline) could inscribe'.[30] The informant acts as a transparent intermediary between the native culture and the Western one. The native informant need not necessarily be understood as 'selling out' her/his culture, however. S/he inhabits a space where it is *necessary* to be able to cross cultures, so as not to be '*completely* frozen into a world where teleology is schematised into geo-graphy'.[31] In other words, s/he is given permission by Western culture to move from being a primarily atemporal subject of Western interest to being a participant in a temporally mobile Western history.

Unlike the post-colonial native informant, these Tenbra-ites have never known any culture apart from the Western one they have been taught. In *Close to Critical*, however, as in many other science fiction texts, the nature of a being is seen as fundamentally biologically determined, so a Terran-educated extraterrestrial inevitably displays a cross-cultural subjectivity. The culture that these beings learn from the humans reifies colonialist constructions of 'primitiveness'. For example, when one of the native informants comes across a 'savage' indigene, the native informant is surprised that '"they don't keep animals, they don't use fire"',[32] and that they live in caves, rather than in 'proper' dwellings. S/he has adopted the Eurocentric beliefs of her/his educator, and thus characterises 'uneducated' aliens as manifesting a lack of 'civilised' technologies highly reminiscent of colonialist constructions historically applied to actual indigenous peoples. In fact, part of the' 're-education' of these beings is designed to erase any signs of 'primitiveness' from their culture. They now tend animals and live in settled villages, in order to supplement the 'remote-control education [which] cannot, by itself, transform a group of people from nomadic hunters into a settled and organized culture with leisure time for intellectual activity'.[33] According to *Close to Critical*, an intrinsic part of their 're-education' is giving up their traditional nomadic hunter-gatherer society. All parts of a European-style culture are seen as interdependent and vital in creating a 'superior', more intelligent culture out of an indigenous one. These notions are, of course, familiar from European colonialist praxis, where indigenous peoples were often forced to live in one place, grow crops and keep animals, in order to 'move up' the 'evolutionary ladder'.

The negative consequences of this for the 'native informants' are revealed when a small spacecraft containing two children, one a Terran and one a Drommian (another 'civilised' alien race), crashes into the planet's sea. The scientist Raeker mounts a rescue mission through the agency of the native informants which ultimately fails. Instead, the extraterrestrial 'savages' find the crashed spaceship first through their superior tracking and weather prediction skills, skills which the Terran-educated aliens lack. Raeker is forced to admit that '"a lot of fairly primitive peoples on Earth and other places get pretty darned good climate predictors"',[34] simultaneously acknowledging these skills and naming them 'primitive'. However, the 'savage' aliens are not as unskilled as Raeker would construct them: through communication with the children inside the crashed spaceship they manage to fix it. This turn of events causes one character to say to Raeker: '"You spend a decade or two training agents of your own on the planet, and learn more useful facts in a week from natives you never bothered to contact directly".'[35] This is a telling point, even though the character who makes it is represented in the text as a grouchy imperialist. Through their enthusiasm to colonise and transform the Tenbra-ites, human scientists have ignored a valuable source of information. *Close to Critical* acknowledges that the native informants have lost something through their Terran education, namely indigenous knowledge of their planet. Here, the work reflects a similar loss which has been experienced in many actual indigenous societies suffering the effects of colonialism. In *Close to Critical*, the worth of indigenous knowledge is not only acknowledged in the abstract, but the narrative is worked in such a way that it is vital and the lack of it causes the native informants to fail in their tasks. Although this text's representation of Raeker is unsettlingly sympathetic—given that he is responsible for stealing an entire generation and denying them their culture—his authority is ultimately questioned and he is judged, in that harshest of all science fiction criticisms, as unscientific.

CONCLUSIONS

The future of the United States, indeed the whole of humanity, is a colonialist one according to all these three books, but they markedly differ in their attitudes towards this project. *The Rebel Worlds* most obviously regurgitates the European notion that empire exists to ward off encroaching darkness, to control savagery, and to 'save' those indigenes who can be 'saved' from a brutish, primitive existence. The most savage extraterrestrials here have no voice and little actual presence except as something to define civilisation against. In *The Martian Chronicles*, however, it is Terran civilisation that is savage and brutally oppressive of indigenous culture. The indigenous Martian culture, fragile and magical as it is, cannot survive the rigours of a post-colonial environment. This is due to the extreme susceptibility of the indigenes to colonialist desire.

Thus, this text acknowledges the dangers of colonialism, speaking of the psychic and physical damage done to indigenous cultures. Likewise, *Close to Critical*, in its exploration of neocolonialist methods facilitated by technology, warns of possible negative outcomes for indigenes. 'Re-education' and 'civilisation' result in the loss of a culture's traditional knowledge and connection to place. Thus this text acknowledges the possibility that there is more to know in the universe than is available to human science; it validates the worth of indigenous knowledge and questions the use of indigenous peoples for colonialist ends.

That these narratives continued to be fascinated by the machinations of an intergalactic empire is undoubted, and they certainly reflect the colonialist desires of the United States. However, this expansionism is problematised, with human beings, the agents of colonialism, often represented as corrupt or wrong-headed, justifying resistance by indigenous extraterrestrials to the colonial project. Even the imperialistic *The Rebel Worlds* acknowledges the necessity of accommodating radically different cultures in any future empire. The 'glorious future' of the United States as the undoubted conqueror of space must be tempered, these texts warn, by an understanding of difference, and a recognition of the worth of indigenous cultures. The colonialism of the future United States, even when it was entirely imaginary, was always destined to be a fraught and ambivalent process.

ENDNOTES

1 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin, London, 1995 (1927), 20.

2 Donald W White, *The American Century: The Rise and Decline of the United States as a World Power*, Yale University Press, London, 1966, 80.

3 White, 80.

4 Science fiction cinema of this era most often concentrated on the colonisation of Earth by aliens. This can be explained by a number of factors, most practically by the budgetary and technological constraints of this time.

[5] Poul Anderson, *The Rebel Worlds*, Signet Books, New York, 1973 (1969), 54.
[6] Anderson, 24.
[7] Anderson, 24.
[8] Anderson, 24.
[9] Cultural relativism involves the by-now-common understanding that no culture is intrinsically superior to any other, a view which stands in opposition to hierarchical constructions of race and culture such as colonialism.
[10] Anderson, 28.
[11] Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, Grafton Books, London, 1977 (1951), 28.
[12] Bradbury, 14.
[13] Bradbury, 29.
[14] Bradbury, 41.
[15] Bradbury, 64.
[16] Bradbury, 66.
[17] Homi K Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, 86.
[18] Bhaba, 88.
[19] Bhaba, 88.
[20] Bhaba, 88.
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