

# Science fiction reflections essay sample



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Science fiction, over the years, has become more than just a genre meant to excite, thrill, or make a person think deeply. Instead, scholars have come to see science fiction as a mirror of the world in which we live in. It is the glass house we look through to get a better view as to who we are as humans, and as caregivers to the planet we live on. One of the best known and oldest of the science fiction medley is H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds." This novel was first written in 1898, when British colonialism was at its maximum, and the world was on the edge of another cataclysmic war.

Wells was a man of his time. The novel was written in the last days of the Victorian era during a time when most people were ambivalent about morality and when most were just beginning to think about science.

(Downing, 2007, p. 276). During this period, people were just beginning to learn about Charles Darwin and his book "Origin of the Species." Wells, took his ideas, especially that of the "survival of the fittest," and applied it to his writings. It is evident in his "War of the Worlds" and the desire each human had for survival. (Downing, 2007, p. 276).

Scholars considered, as previously mentioned, that the book, "War of the Worlds" was a criticism of Europe and its actions in Asia, Africa, Australasia and within the western hemisphere. The mindset of the day, most Europeans saw their superiority in the area of technology as evidence that they were a superior people. Since they were people of superiority, the Europeans believed they were the most capable of administering the colonies across the globe, rather than the native tenants. Wells, in his day, challenged these ideas and values with the invasion of the Martians.

The Martian technology was much greater than the technology found on the Earth, but the people would see it as an unjust act (Information 2007). Wells developed his novel playing on many of the attitudes, fears, and a new invention of his own day. One of the new inventions of his time was the machine gun which he has his protagonists use to try to kill the invaders. (Downing, 2007, p. 274) According to Wells in the first chapter of “ War of the Worlds” the aliens should not be too harshly criticized. We must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. ” (Information 2007).

In addition, Wells recalls how the Tasmanians were eradicated within 50 after European invasion. He asks the question as to why humans should complain about Martians acting in the same savage manner. (Information 2007). In every sense of the world, Wells meant for the Martians to be pictured as conquering soldiers such as were the Europeans in imperialistic fervor, while crushing the inferior into submissive inhabitants (Morrow, 2005).

Wells was critical of his own government’s excitement regarding imperialism and suggests there are parallels between the Martian attacks and the colonization by Britain (Downing, 2007, p. 274). Two decades after publication of the novel, World War I began. Wells predicted that such a war would shatter the apathy, complacency and arrogance of Europe in the 19th century. He was correct in his assumption. (Morrow, 2005). Two bitter wars rocked Europe and the Americas turned the once apathetic populations from ambivalent to fearful.

By the middle of the 20th century, there were new battles and new fears for the global population. In 1953 perhaps the most popular version of “ War of the Worlds” hit the box offices. Its star was Gene Barry, a handsome, strong, leading man. In fact, he acknowledged that out of all the characters he portrayed throughout his career, it was the role of Clayton Forester that fans remember the most. (Cowan, 2007). Barry portrayed a doctor of astro and nuclear physics who engages in scientific study while maintaining his romantic interest. (Cowan, 2007).

Throughout the 1950s, there were many feature films that embraced an end of the world theme in one form or another. Producer of “ War of the Worlds,” George Pal highlighted the cultural fears that affected America and Europe after World War II. Some of the fears included: the security and use of nuclear weaponry, the fragile human being in light of possible Armageddon, and the fear of an invasion by the powerful Soviet Union. (Cowan, 2007).

Other films of the era also featured the collapse of humanity. For instance, “ When Worlds Collide” presents a post-apocalyptic look at the earth and humanity.

Then, a pre-apocalyptic warning is issued in “ The Day the Earth Stood Still” by Klaatu. (Cowan 2007) There was an interesting subplot that ran throughout this version of the “ War of the Worlds” concerning religion. The priest asks for help from God in dealing with the aliens and suggests the Earthlings try to communicate with the aliens before shooting at them. Of course, the priest is destroyed by the aliens. David Koepf, co-producer of the 2005 version of the film suggests that the religious subplot may have been influenced by McCarthyism.

He says that there is an assumption that the Communists do not have a God to pray to, but that the westerners do (Downing, 2007 p. 277). Many film scholars question as to why this 1953 version is so different than the original novel. The film ends with the message that the human place in the universe is protected by a loving God. H. G. Wells, for his part, was a critic of organized religion. Scholar Dana Polan explains that in many of the 1950 era science fiction movies feature the priest who wants to reason with the aliens and ends up murdered by the creatures.

She states that the idea behind those scenes is to show that religion is futile when up against such an invasion force as the Martians (Cowan, 2007). The Martians in the 1953 version were hit with humanity's strongest weapon of the day, an atomic bomb, yet they were not fazed and kept on coming. The city of Los Angeles is evacuated, and people are running for their lives trying to find safety. Critics, however, believe that the directors and producers of the film played too strongly to the fears of annihilation and Cold War fears. (Morrow, 2005).

The Martian machines in the 1953 version ironically resemble a hood of a Cadillac El Dorado of that year. Ironically, this sends the message that the enemy is right before us, perhaps in subversion. This 50s version, then, reflected the mentality of the Cold War era. The film ends with a bacterium destroying the invaders showing that a tiny aspect of God's earth led to the collapse of the aliens Foster, 2005 Associate Professor of English at Duke University, Priscilla Wald explains how the later remakes of the science fiction genre of the 1950s substitute fear of communism and nuclear attack with the idea of genetic mutation.

She claims that the idea of genetic experimentation becomes both the problem in the movie as well as the answer to the threatened world of man. (Foster 2005). In the Steven Spielberg version of “ War of the Worlds” in 2005, the director inserts many scenes and reference to the tragedy of September 11, 2001. For instance, personal belongings fall from the sky, an airplane crashes into a subdivision, and there is human flesh in the air that has been disintegrated by the aliens. One of the most memorable scenes shows placards on fences and walls advertising the loss of a loved one.

The scene, again, reminiscent of the tragedy and horror of September 11. (Downing, 2007, p. 274). “ The Thing” is a remake of the 1951 Howard Hawks’ original called “ The Thing from another World. ” Both films were based on the 1938 novel by John Campbell, Jr. called “ Who Goes There? ” In the 1982 version, an unidentified object lands thousands of years past in the snow in Antarctica. Scientists dig the craft out today and end up dying under odd circumstances. However, the film is more about the men involved with the alien, rather than the alien itself. (Muir, 2009).

The Thing” as well as late 20th century film, “ Blade Runner” both attempts to explain the meaning of being human. Heroes of both films fight creatures that imitate human shape, but are far from human. Both films use the idea of an infiltrator that is hidden among them within the larger population. These two films are credited with being forward looking movies both ringing in the age of Ronald Reagan. (Muir, 2009). Moral leaders of the day questioned the film, “ The Thing. ” The older generation of science fiction did not care for the remake in comparison to the original.

The film features the claustrophobia of being in close-quarters in the desolate wilderness thousands of miles from any type of help from others. It provides an atmosphere of paranoia, and the idea of what it is like to be alienated from one's own society. (Muir, 2007). The film, "The Thing" is made by John Carpenter. It includes this idea of alienation from the rest of the world and makes viewers uneasy about how fragile the human race actually is. Many people see the shape shifting within the movie as a harbinger of the things to come, especially the AIDS virus.

Therefore, the film echoes fears of disease, contagion, and even that of old age. (Muir 2007). The movie reflects the spiritual dissatisfaction in the west during the 1970s and 1980s. During this period America and Britain were uncomfortable about the world itself. Many saw the world as shallow, untrustworthy, unjust and too material. These issues surge under the plot of the film. (Muir 2007). Some scholarship sees the idea of the film as representing the "monster in man" ideal instead of the vision of invasion. The military and scientific base set in Antarctica becomes a microcosm of the society of the western world.

There are no women, however, in the film. But it is about man and their own masculinity. The society set within that base represents society as a whole as it turns into a study of the men and their conflicting relationships. The movie points out how fragile the human being really is. It plays on contagious terror that underscores global fears of an AIDS epidemic. The play mimics the problems between races and ideologies within society. (Muir 2007). "The Thing" represents man's biggest threat. It becomes a test as to who is strong enough to defeat the evil.

However, the film ends without a clue as to the future of the alien or the contagion within. This leaves open the idea that humanity must answer its own problems and live up to that challenges of the upcoming 21st century. Therefore, the film shows the conflict within society and shows the problems that exist between power struggles, and dysfunctional relationships within a culture of science and military advances. The original film, made in 1951, is similar to the remake in that it does not emphasize the horror, but the dynamics between the characters.

But the film is not an allegory of man's attack upon man, but about an evil force, meant to be communism, trying to rule the world. (Howard, 2009). None of the characters stand out in this film titled, " The Thing from Another World. " Instead the men on the barren, claustrophobic, and enclosed station are meant to symbolize the human race as a whole. The horror is only a sidebar in the story as the main issue becomes how the men act with the existence of the strange creature on the base. (Howard 2009).

In conclusion, science fiction is more than just a genre that invokes fear or causes one to bring about scientific inquiry. Science fiction has become a reflection of the time it is written or produced. The best example is " The War of the Worlds. " First written in 1898, Wells tells an underlying story of how it feels to be a conquered people. The next famous production of the thriller was the version from 1953. In that Gene Barry classic, the underlying theme is of attack, and the fear that communist countries would try to take over the west. Again, in the version from 2005, a troubled people run for their lives through the streets of New Jersey, but the inference is not creatures from space.



The theme beneath the general story is of terror from September 11, 2001 and the fear such an attack brings on the everyday man or woman. Similarly, science fiction tells of the type of people we are as a population. Although “The Thing” also tells of an evil force trying to control the world, it also serves as a method to reflect human beings and how they react to possible attack or even death. Both version of “The Thing” focus on the human aspect of how individuals react under such daunting circumstances. Therefore, science fiction remains a reflection of our society and the type of people we are as a society.