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The Last Martian: Postcolonial Metaphors of the New Frontier

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The Last Martian: Postcolonial Metaphors of the New Frontier

Abstract

This paper is a reading of Ray Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles as a commentary on American identity. Published exactly in the middle of the 20th century, the anthology of short stories provides a unique perspective due to its placement in the journey of American expansion. At Bradbury's time, not only were Americans seeking to expand out into the New Frontier of space, but criticism of the original frontier was severely lacking. Scholars such as John L. O'Sullivan and Frederick Jackson Turner had made their mark on the American subconscious by arguing that expansion was necessary to form an American identity that was entirely separate from the old European. Bradbury's science fiction setting retells the frontier narrative by having his characters wipe out the original Martian identity to make room for their new American Martian. This paper argues for Bradbury's text as an early postcolonial analysis that should not be disregarded as pulp fiction, as it often has been.

Keywords

Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles, postcolonialism, American identity, Frederick Jackson Turner, The Turner Thesis, John L. O'Sullivan, manifest destiny, The New Frontier

The Last Martian: Postcolonial Metaphors of the New Frontier

A rocket shoots off from the freezing Ohio fields in the winter of 1999, its heat gathering the attention of the small town, burning into them the excitement of something new, something out there to escape to. This is how Ray Bradbury begins his tales of extraterrestrial colonization, *The Martian Chronicles*, with the excitement those back on Earth feel at the sight of a new expedition. Written from 1948-1951, the theme of pioneering American exploration carries the characters from beginning to end. This novel, which was originally written as a series of short stories and later compiled into a narrative, imagines what the American colonial process would look like in a truly New World. The first story, *Rocket Summer*, described above, portrays the people of Earth as eager to spread their influence on Mars. A series of military expeditions over the course of only two years pave the path that enable settlers to travel to Mars in their rockets, eventually creating a Mars forever changed by the people of Earth. By the final story in Bradbury's tale, *The Million-Year Picnic* set in October of 2026, there are no Martians except for those that used to call themselves Earth people. All the indigenous people are dead or disappeared, and the goals of the original Earth explorers to make Mars into their home has been achieved, at a great cost.

Coming into these stories, many of Bradbury's readers may expect to be aligned with the priorities of Earth, as none have grown up on the planet Mars. With the advent of rockets and space exploration occurring during his time, the urge to align with the Earthling explorers was all the more potent for his readers. However, this process of settlement in the book comes with many dire consequences that may make some reconsider their loyalties. Moreover,

the context of this story is not truly of Earthlings versus Martians. Bradbury isn't really talking about Mars, and the settlers that land on its face don't represent the interests of all the people of Earth; rather, he is questioning our assumptions about the myth of frontier exploration. An American author whose stories comment on the many facets of American culture, for good and for bad, it should come as no surprise that even in writing in an otherworldly setting, Bradbury's focus is still on America. Therefore, his presumed audience of Americans aren't being asked to choose between Martian and Earthling, but to question their own place in the dynamics of colonizers and colonized. Rather than portray his novel as a general critique of exploration, Bradbury is specific to the American colonial practice and how the sense of American nationalism frames it differently than imperialism and more traditional conquest. The story arc of *The Martian Chronicles* goes from a pristine precolonial land that thrives in its own culture to one defined and nearly destroyed by the culture that settles on it. By creating this metaphor that parallels American history, Bradbury pushes his readers to question how these ideals of American creation really differ from the imperialism they're so eager to escape.

Part of the essential American identity is the fact of its separation from European morals, which allows a denial to accept full responsibility for colonialism, or to simply see it as necessary in the pursuit of a democratic nation. This belief, while common at Bradbury's time and even now, was cemented by certain individuals. John L. O'Sullivan (1813-1895) and Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) were both influential to the argument that rural

exploration in America was of benefit not just to Americans, but to the world at large. O'Sullivan's 1839 essay *The Great Nation of Futurity* and his 1845 *Annexation* worked together to create his thesis of Manifest Destiny, which argued that the United States had a divine fate to expand its ideals across North America. This set the stage for Turner's 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which encouraged Americans to see the frontier as "the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (Turner 4). Bradbury explores this meeting with supposed savagery by questioning who is really the more civilized and where those expectations come from. As he lays out the themes of settlement, tourist enterprise, and a redefinition of national identity, the conversation between Bradbury and Turner grows louder. This book acts a criticism of the specific type of exploration that happened in Turner's beloved frontier and draws attention to the consequences that follow.

In order to understand Turner's thesis, it is crucial to dig into what built the framework for his thesis and for the need for a new American identity. When O'Sullivan created his thesis, The United States and the world itself were under a period of great change. With a newly industrialized world and a greater awareness and appreciation for democratic ideals, people like O'Sullivan were proud to say that America was a country of the present, not the past. Manifest Destiny essentially states that America is not just great in its own respect (for creating democracy and capitalism in the New World), but great in that it is unlike the British Empire. Thus, in order to protect the world from succumbing to monarchy and other unjust rulings, it is America's destiny to spread both physically and ideologically. Even in O'Sullivan's first paragraph of *The Great Nation of Futurity*, he is adamant in

his belief that America will inevitably surpass all others in leading the population to a modern world. He states that "our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only" (1). Because America is seen as the country of the future, it makes sense that science fiction and speculative fiction in general would be drawn to a theory of furthered expansion, especially in a time where this type of advancement was becoming a possibility.

However, the speculation of space travel, when imagined through the thesis of Manifest Destiny, implies that this encounter would be beneficial for both the explorers and any aliens they might encounter. O'Sullivan's 1839 essay presents the ideals of a study capitalist economy and democracy as necessary to improving the world in the American model. In order for this to be made possible, the United States must separate itself from the European economy and halt any reliance on their monarchy. He argues that American enterprise has not truly severed ties with its European origins and that true "freedom of trade and business pursuits" (3) among Americans is imperative to create a legitimately independent country. If this economy can flourish, O'Sullivan argues, America will be able "to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man" (3), a dignity free of monarchs, but not of the expansion that may also take its model after imperialism. When O'Sullivan wrote his *Annexation* six years after this essay and created the term Manifest Destiny, Texas had officially become a state and America was starting to spread into western territory with great acceleration.

As America moved farther from the Atlantic, much of O'Sullivan's hopes for the

United States and its people were realized, and Texas was far from the most western state to join the union. While statehood legitimized these settlers as Americans, their identity as part of this new country came from the exploration more than it did from being seen as legally American. The frontier American is the new American, the representation of exploration and separation from Britain. Frederick Jackson Turner's essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" outlined this concept when it was delivered in 1893 as a speech at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. Turner emphasizes the importance of this identity creation, as he believes a nation must have certain traits that define its people. While he describes what he envisions as "free land," he also emphasizes what effect he believes this has on the personality of the American settler. He writes,

The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought... Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick, he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe... here is a new product that is American. (2-3)

Not only does this demonstrate the prevalence of the fantasy of the frontiersman as being improved by the realities of

nature—this improvement clearly based on stereotype of the tribes whose land he settles on—but it shows how crucial it is that this identity creation comes with a casting aside of the old European identity. Expansion of the American land gives the country enough legitimacy as a Western nation to create a new culture out of this colonization.

However, the creation of this new national identity only benefits those who are able to shift to it. This nationality revokes any European ties by making the settler (and the generations that follow) native to American soil. Turner's argument is similar to that of O'Sullivan, who wrote in his above-mentioned essay that "American patriotism is not of soil; we are not... of ancestry, for we are of all nations; but it is essentially personal enfranchisement, for 'where liberty dwells,' said Franklin, the sage of the Revolution, 'there is my country'" (3). However, Turner's placement of this identity's creation in the frontier period demonstrates the belief that further exploration will only make a more American world.

If the American frontier is the beginning of "effective Americanization," then there must be a reason any non-American would be expected to appreciate this process. In the conversations of Turner and his peers, the idea that settlement could be detrimental to the indigenous peoples is either unconsidered or quickly shoved away. In this thesis, he opposes the suggestion that the "English authorities would have checked settlement at the headwaters of the Atlantic tributaries and allowed the 'savages to enjoy their deserts in quiet lest the peltry trade should decrease'" (7). Turner argues that even if such a decree to stop legal settlement was placed, the American frontier would not be halted, as the individuals would still continue it. This is the frontier practice, that expansion is so important for the benefit of the settlers that there is a belief the land

must be settled. However, this expansion is also justified by the ideology that Western American tribes will be benefitted by American influence. In the frontier, a major motivation to go west was the eagerness for industry and faith in American improvement. Not only are there the benefits of wealth for the settlers in gold mining and vast farming land, there is also a belief that the entire world will benefit from this encouragement of industrial growth. The American goal is seen as a necessity for the greater good of the world, as O'Sullivan outlines in his thesis. The frontiersman is merely the manifestation of this goal's achievement. However, an appreciation for pioneering capitalism also implies that a precolonial world needs colonization to improve it.

The Martian Chronicle's new frontier cynicism comes out of a period with great fascination for this period of American history. In Bradbury's lifetime, nostalgia for the frontier period appeared in the form of Western books, movies, and many country and western musicians. While vaquero culture had begun relatively early during settlement in the West of North America, the cowboy persona started to gain more popularity after industrialization started to take up many of those wide-open spaces of the American West. Bradbury's book came out of an era that had both a great awareness and great appreciation for this shift in America from the rugged supposedly free frontiersman to the modern industrialist. The book often plays with this contrast of American culture, the urban and rural conflict baked into its pages. It seems no coincidence that one episode of the 1980 *The Martian Chronicles* PBS miniseries features a rhinestone cowboy as the titan of postcolonial Martian industry. Even in the direct text of the book, the dreams of American industry as seen on Mars are not glorified as Turner might have it. The

success of the frontiersman in improving himself and the colonized world seems unlikely as Bradbury's portrayal of the new frontier extends beyond the original dreams of American expansion.

In Bradbury's tales, the process of improvement is questionable from the start, once we are told in his first full-length story that the Martians are far from lesser to the American settlers. The American values created through settlement do not improve the world it is brought to, but bastardize its landscape to such an extreme that it makes it unbearable to live in. As he draws the Martian plain, Bradbury quickly delves in to focus on Martian livelihood that allows his reader to see the majesty of a precolonial world. The story of *Ylla* is about a Martian woman (also referred to as Mrs. K) who lives with her husband in what could not be described as anything short of a utopia. The story introduces the readers to a precolonial Mars, forcing the readers to imagine the possibility that the colonized peoples may not only have been surviving prior to colonization, but may have been more advanced than the colonizers in some ways. Bradbury lays out the scene as follows:

They had a house of crystal pillars on the planet Mars by the edge of an empty sea, and every morning you could see Mrs. K eating the golden fruits that grew from the crystal walls, or cleaning the house with handfuls of magnetic dust which, taking all dirt with it, blew away on the hot wind. Afternoons, when the fossil sea was warm and motionless, and the wine trees stood stiff in the yard, and the little distant Martian bone town was all enclosed, and no one drifted out their doors, you could see Mr. K himself in his room, reading from a metal book with raised hieroglyphs over which he

brushed his hand, as one might play a harp. And from the book, as his fingers stroked, a voice sang, a soft ancient voice, which told tales of when the sea was red steam on the shore and ancient men had carried clouds of metal insects and electric spiders into battle. (2)

This beautiful Martian home, with both agricultural and technological advancements, is far from uncivilized. However, after Mars has been settled by the people of Earth, these homes are no longer shown, and their inhabitants start to disappear from the scene as well. In this story, the New World actually grows *less* civilized after the intervention of the colonizer. As Bradbury parallels America and Mars throughout the book, stories like this challenge the myth of the frontier in American history just as they do Martian. By framing a narrative of colonialism through the perspective of colonized people such as Ylla in a world without American democracy and capitalism that is just as—if not more—successful, the premise of Western Expansion being a necessity is null.

This image does not fit with the more stereotypically depicted precolonial world: one of uncivilized peoples that need the colonizer to come save them. When the settler comes to Mars, the world is not improved by their presence. Instead, it is transformed to fit what the Earthling (and specifically American) settlers view as a civilized world. After military expeditions from Earth have paved the path for civilians to land on Mars, they don't hesitate to change it to their liking. The story "The Locusts," tells of thousands of settlers emigrating to Mars, its name evoking an invading force that is so overpowering simply by number that there is no fight to be had. One locust is no threat, but a swarm of them cannot be willed away. Not only have

many of the Martians died from the spread of disease by this point, but everyone on Earth is so eager to join the frontier that Mars cannot defend itself against the hoard. Bradbury writes that the settlers come with "hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all the strangeness, their mouths fringed with nails so they resembled steel-toothed carnivores, spitting them into their swift hands as they hammered up frame cottages and scuttled over roofs with shingles to blot out the eerie stars, and fit green shades to pull against the night...in six months a dozen small towns had been laid down upon the naked planet, filled with sizzling neon tubes and yellow electric bulbs" (78). The comparison to "carnivores" emphasizes the point that they are the threat approaching Mars, not the saviors coming to fix it. The mentality of saving allows the settlers to believe they are helping the land they've arrived on, ignoring their primary motivation of escaping a civilization they've destroyed. The reason they come to Mars is not because they received a message from the Martians asking for help, but because they have no desire to help solve the destruction in their own world.

After the decision to accept Mars as a worthy conquest, humans bring what they see as the makings of a civilized society to improve the simple landscape. In order to settle in this strange world, the industry that the Earth settlers created on American soil must be built again. This comes as a sort of recreation of early 20th century Americana. The "good old days" of early industry and small towns that hail their names from the workers within them. Once settled on Mars, each settlement is quickly named after these Americana ideals: "IRON TOWN, STEEL TOWN, ALUMINUM CITY, ELECTRIC VILLAGE, CORN TOWN, GRAIN VILLA, DETROIT II, all the mechanical

names and the metal names from Earth. And after the towns were built and named, the graveyards were built and named, too” (103). The industries that define many of these names are a source of pride for the settlers, even though it has nothing to do with Mars or what Martians may see as essential industries. Iron, steel, and corn present a simple and humble image of hardworking Americans that creates the illusion of settling rather than colonizing. For Bradbury’s era amid Cold War terror and a rise in McCarthyistic ideology, the pride in these American enterprises is extensive, and any critique or mockery of it is unexpected and perhaps unwelcome.

This exploration of American industry appears again in the story *The Off Season*, when settler Sam Parkhill opens up a hot dog stand on Mars to prepare for the expected influx of Earthling immigrants. Rather than initiate trade with the remaining Martians as Turner may suggest, Parkhill is incredibly territorial over his properties and paranoid of any Martian interaction. When a Martian approaches him with a gift, he assumes it to be a weapon and is quick to pull his gun first and kill him. Increasingly suspicious, he runs from the scene and when another Martian reaches him, he shoots her too. When he finally listens to the Martians, he learns that they are leaving the planet and were attempting to talk to him in order to give him a land deed for half of Mars. After they’ve gone, Parkhill and his wife Elma look to the night sky to see a large portion of Earth, which we later discover to have been Australia, demolished by an explosion. In a following story, *The Long Years*, we learn that this sight inspired Parkhill to return to Earth, leaving his new enterprise behind. Everything that makes up the great American frontier—exploration of the new, large stretches of settlement, even businesses like Parkhill’s hot dog stand—have done nothing to help the Martians nor

the Earth settlers. Where has the great American destiny gone? Is there still hope to build something better from what’s left? It may be possible, but any positive outlook on Mars will not come from the Martians, nor will the spoils of a greater frontier go to them.

Earlier in the book, even before civilian settlement had begun, there were mentions of the consequences of the extraterrestrial frontier. Due to *The Martian Chronicles*’ intent to push its reader towards introspection, it only makes sense that the characters within it start to experience some questioning as well, still prior to Sam Parkhill’s Martian reality. As the Martian settlement is more seriously undertaken and starts to move past the point of reversible action, there’s a turn in how the Earth settlers see the actions of their peers and of themselves. In the story *And the Moon be Still as Bright*, the role of archeologist Jeff Spender brings about the first hint of postcolonial reflection in the midst of active colonization. We’re shown his sudden shocking realization that, even as the more gentle and academic side of colonialism, these rocket men are participating in the undoing of a civilization even in the pursuit of archiving their understanding of it. As Spender listens to the stories of suddenly dead Martian cities, he is shocked by the reality of the expeditions:

“Did you check other towns? Did you see *anything* alive?”

“Nothing whatever. So I went out to check the other towns. Four out of five have been empty for thousands of years. What happened to the original inhabitants I haven’t the faintest idea. But the fifth city always contained the same thing. Bodies. Thousands of bodies.”

“What did they die of?” Spender moved forward.

“You won’t believe it.” “What killed them?” Hathaway said simply, “Chicken pox.” (50)

While we are led to believe that the early expeditions were a complete failing, this mass death from a disease brought from Earth means that, unfortunately for the Martians, settling on Mars has been made simpler. While the spreading of chicken pox may have been unintentional, it lessens the number of Martians, making the colonial project easier. Of course, the allusion between chicken pox and smallpox in American history is evident. A disease brought by the outsiders who hope to settle on the land leads to thousands of deaths of the original inhabitants, proving an opening for the settlement. Spender, upon realizing the process being undertaken and his own role in it, is disgusted and shocked at the facts laid before him. As an archeologist, he cares deeply for the culture he is researching and is surprised that his colleagues do not feel the same.

This care for the Martian culture goes beyond a typical appreciation. As the story continues, tensions rise in the group and the character Biggs adds to Spender’s anguish and outrage. While in an ancient and well-preserved Martian city, Biggs (who has been drinking) vomits on the pristine ground and shows little care for this act of disrespect. This is the spark that leads Spender’s ire to a new extreme. He leaves the party and returns after more than a week to confront Biggs with a rifle. Before killing the man, he calls himself the “Last Martian” (57). He then kills the remainder of his party, excluding his captain and a man who calls himself “Cherokee” and who previously claimed that he would befriend any Martian he met, because of his Cherokee heritage.

When Cherokee reacts poorly to Spender’s murderous rage, he is killed as well, with a disappointed “of all of them, I thought you would understand” (58) from Spender. While this is an extreme outburst from Spender, it serves the purpose of showing the emotional reaction brought about by seeing the devastating consequences of colonialism. Because there are no remaining Martians, to the rocket men’s knowledge, a symbol of that loss of culture is created in Spender to speak on their defense. By giving himself the title of the “Last Martian,” Spender aligns himself with the colonized rather than the colonizer. Before Spender is introduced, the tone of the expeditions is more excited and eager to see what can be made of the frontier. Spender is the first to question why the Martian frontier has to be destroyed and remade in order to be worthwhile of understanding.

At a certain point in reading this narrative, the reader’s mind may turn to something similar to Spender’s, questioning the wisdom of the expedition. This is not to say the book encourages a violent outburst, but it may encourage the train of thought that leads the character to react in such a way. The American frontier has already passed, there is nothing that can be done to prevent its creation or many of the consequences that follow. All Bradbury asks in creating this metaphor of the Frontier Myth is for a reconsideration of the acceptance of one singular historical narrative. These stories were organized for publication after many were written with the intention of being published independently. *Ylla* was not written until 1950, 2 years after the majority of the stories. Yet it is placed as the first story to be set on Mars, setting the tone of the book to include the Martian narrative as central to the tale of the colonization of their planet. The Martians may disappear (or rather, be eradicated) by the influence of their Earthen settlers, but

they are not invisible to the story. Even in characters such as Spender, the Martians are partially represented in order to tell the story of their suffering at Earthen hands. It is a story of space exploration that removes some of the expected glory expected and leaves a sour taste in the mouth of colonization.

In some sense, the disappearance of the Martians speaks more than a peaceful Thanksgiving dinner would. By the end of the book, *The Martian Chronicles* starts to look a little less Martian, or at least change how that identity is defined. There are the Martians mentioned in *And the Moon be Still as Bright* who are killed by Earthborn diseases and the Martians in *The Off Season* who decide to leave rather than remain on a land that is no longer meant for them, and many others skipped over by Bradbury's 20-year leap towards the end of the novel. We know that the original Martians are gone, although there isn't a thorough explanation of the process that led to this. This is not unlike how many mainstream American historians chose to view their country and the indigenous people within it. It is easier to appreciate the wonder of the frontier and the shedding away of European identity than to scrutinize the creation of a new American identity, facets of which are based on stereotypes. If the Native American—or the Martian—is not seen as a living person, but as an article of the past from which to create fantasies, the process of colonialism is made easier. This is not just erasing one side of the narrative, but rewriting it to make the history simpler. For Bradbury's stories, while he does fall into tradition by erasing the original peoples, it is done with the intent of creating a feeling of discomfort. By beginning *The Martian Chronicles* on a world before the settlement on Mars, we are shown that there is a time prior to the creation of a new Martian identity. By the end of the book, the new Martian national

identity has been actualized in its settlers. The "last Martian" is from Earth, no longer defined by the Old World, nor by the original culture of Mars.

This shift in the definition of a Martian changes as Martian culture warps into one defined by the acts of colonialism. In the last story of the chronology, *The Million-Year Picnic*, a classically nuclear family plans a picnic to go see a Martian, perhaps the only remaining one of its kind. At this point, the reader knows the likelihood of an interaction with a true Martian will be small. When the family arrives at their final location, the promise is met with a twist: "The Martians were there—in the canal—reflected in the water. Timothy and Michael and Robert and Mom and Dad" (181). As Turner had suggested in his thesis, the family has been changed by expansion so that their cultural identity has transformed to create the new. There has come a major shift in the process of colonization on Mars wherein the defining essential features of Martian culture have been completely changed by the acts of colonization themselves. By this change, to be a Martian does not mean to have biological ancestry tied to Martian roots nor to be connected to the traditional cultural practices that existed on Mars prior to colonialism. This implies that to be a Martian, or to be someone native to America, simply living on the land the culture comes from is enough to be considered part of that culture. This isn't an act of immigration where the family is carefully assimilating into the culture whose land they are on, and perhaps maintaining some original cultural pride as well. Instead, the family's move onto Mars is an act of colonialism, where the Martian culture they settle on is destroyed both before their coming and by their continued process of settlement.

If a cultural identity can be created through the act of colonizing a pre-existing culture, what does it mean to be truly native to a place? Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn explores the question of who can be considered native to a place in her 1996 book "Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice." In the titular essay, Cook-Lynn questions the white American author's self-definition as native to the northern plains of the United States. Stegner was not alone in this identification, and his placement away from the industrial colonizer is a poetic method that comes from his identity as a small town American. Consequently, this identity as native inherently revokes those who could actually be qualified as indigenous Americans of their very existence. Cook-Lynn writes that, "In his misunderstanding and dismissal of indigenes and his belief in the theory that American Indians were 'vanishing' he was much like writers everywhere who offer only a narrowness of vision and a confused history" (32). It is true that indigenous Americans still exist and act as active participants in the understanding of the nation's history, Cook-Lynn included. In *The Martian Chronicles*, however, this disappearance of the native Martian is fully actualized in order to make the settlers the Martian. This change of the word Martian fundamentally depends on the fact of the original Martians not being present to defend themselves. In order to become native to Mars as an Earth person, there cannot be anyone left who could be considered Martian by the original description.

Bradbury's inclusion of cultural redefinition is not accidental, nor is it disconnected from the reality of his own country. American historians were not only aware of how the colonial exploration redefined a cultural identity, but saw it as a success of the American dream. Much of

American pride comes from the history of having survived in an unknown land. In Turner's thesis, he writes that, "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy" (9). The phrasing of this passage is rather interesting, because Turner gives credit to the frontier, despite having described the frontiersman a few pages earlier as a collection of stereotypes on indigenous Americans. So, the location of the wild west is to thank for the refinement of American culture and intellect, not the people who lived there before. There's an implication that the frontiersman stumbled upon an identity which has improved him by encouraging him to create his own opportunities. For the family that settles on Mars at the end of the book, maybe there is some truth to the location of the frontier having a greater impact on identity than the individual who lives there. After all, what Martian is left to learn from? However, it may also be speculated that at this point in the story, there is little cultural growth that can happen for this same reason. The Martian land is still there, but there's nothing to be made of it if culture cannot thrive.

Arguably, the most noticeable effect of colonialism is the absence of significant cultural growth, contrary to what Turner and O'Sullivan assume about colonial progress. In his 1961 essay, *On National Culture*, political philosopher Frantz Fanon writes that after the conflict of active colonization, "there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man" (51). The Martian not only disappears physically, but the cultural genocide that redefines Mars' national (or

planetary) consciousness chokes out any original tradition or belief. A Martian originally was defined as someone with brown skin, golden eyes, and telepathy, all features that these white American settlers don't share. Yet, by settling on Mars, a white American becomes the new definition of Martian culture. This is the late-stage colonialism that has forgotten its beginnings. Fanon argues that "By the time a century or two of exploitation has passed there comes about a veritable emaciation of the stock of national culture... Little movement can be discerned in such remnants of culture; there is no real creativity and no overflowing life" (46). Of course, this settlement does create and rebuild—this is essential to the process of colonization. However, the cultural shifts that can be seen come from American culture, not Martian. Additionally, the settlers must destroy the original culture that would have this creation Fanon desires in order to prioritize their own creations. The "stock" that Fanon refers to cannot be added to because there is nothing left to add to. Mars has become Theseus' ship; if all the original defining identity facets that make Martians are gone, can the people on the surface of Mars still be considered Martians?

Redefinition of national identity is so crucial to the act of colonization in America that Bradbury continued to explore this after *The Martian Chronicles* was published. In his 1952 story *The Wilderness*, which seems to fit into the same timeline of his other Martian tales, he tells the story of two women reminiscing on their lives while preparing to leave to join the settlers on Mars. Being their last night on Earth, they ponder on what the future will hold for them and future generations, saying, "Our children, they won't be Americans, or Earth people at all. We'll all be Martians, the rest of our lives." (3). A wistful line, it speaks to the tremendous change that colonialism

causes for both sides of the equation. For the future generations and the present "we," the frontier has met both cultures and done its best to create a new one by removing any remaining reminder of the two. This story also draws more direct comparisons to the frontier than what Bradbury let into the novel, perhaps only included here out of fear of seeming too obvious. In the final line of the story, the narrator imagines what it was like to leave for Western America in the early Frontier Era, framing it as a fear of the new but a necessary exploration. Ultimately, she thinks to herself, "this was as it had always been and would forever continue to be" (8). Instead of a hopeful vision of the spread of the American border, a more cynical outlook displays the real fears felt by both sides of expansion. Although it may eventually benefit the settlers to be seen as American (or Martian), it comes with destruction of more than one culture by their coming.

After America has moved past the age of the frontiersman and settled into its modern era, Bradbury questions what good has come from it, as well as what good may come in a future postcolonial world if Manifest Destiny reaches its extremes. What hope is left at the end of the anthology? Both Earth and Mars have suffered the dire consequences of supposed progress. The American expansion has improved this new world just as much as it did the old one, now succumbed to atomic warfare and whatever else may have happened after so many rockets left. While the redefinition of a Martian as an Earth settler is questionable at best, the father who portrays his family in such a way doesn't come off as a fan of this expansion, either. As he speaks his thoughts to his children, the narrator says that "Even if there hadn't been a war we would have come to Mars, I think, to live and form our own standard of living. It would have been another century before Mars would have

been really poisoned by the Earth civilization” (180-181). The use of the word *poisoned* is both intentionally violent and intentionally critical of this—American, not Earthen—civilization’s expansion.

Somewhat similarly to the women in the story above, however, he also recognizes the reality of his circumstances. Returning to Turner, this falls into an argument that there is no point in preventing settlement. It will happen regardless. However, Bradbury’s writing does not have the same apathetic tone as Turner’s. His characters may be aware that there will always be those who desire to conquer or even more neutrally settle. But they do not accept it as a good thing, something that is surprising for Bradbury’s time, albeit perhaps not for the author himself.

Perhaps part of this comes from the fact that O’Sullivan and Turner did not see themselves as colonizers, they saw themselves as innovative explorers fixing a broken world. Bradbury, a child of hardworking immigrants, certainly didn’t see himself as a colonizer (nor could it necessarily be said that he was). But, unlike O’Sullivan and Turner, Bradbury was able to see some flaws in the American project and put those flaws into his imagination of further expansion. In the end, what comes out of colonial Mars? Manifest Destiny would tell us that the Martians were better off with the implementation of capitalism and true American enterprise on their planet. Mars is certainly changed at the end of Bradbury’s stories, and it may be that it is better for the Earthling settlers than an attempt to save their own planet from atomic destruction. But it is certainly not better for the Martians, who may eventually be

forgotten as generations pass on their planet. This is the tragedy of colonialism, its cultural erasure erases history, which allows us to forget why we are here: on Mars or in America.

In many ways, *The Martian Chronicles* succeeds in a depiction of colonialism curated for an everyday white American reader. It questions the presumed history of American settlement and argues for attention to be given to its consequences. While there are certainly criticisms that could arise looking at this book in a modern context, its creation was not for Americans that had seen extensive literature critiquing colonialism. In comparison to the Martian stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, or even the anti-imperialist H. G. Wells, Bradbury’s chronology is a triumph for his time and paved the path for many that followed in science fiction literature. However, looking at that path, there is still much to be done to make his Mars a truly direct metaphor to American colonialism. Seeing the Martians as victims is a start, and certainly bites back at the ideologies of Turner and his peers. But the ending of Mars as we see it leaves us to wallow in this victimhood of the Martians as an inevitability. If Mars is America, what steps are left to be taken after our own colonial history? What is left for the new generation of American-Martians? Perhaps some of the outrage that Spender feels is needed to avoid settling into comfortable ignorance. If the ending of these stories is not taken as something that will never change, the American readers can imagine a change in their own colonial path as well. Ultimately, Bradbury doesn’t ask us to consider just the way things were, but the way they might be.

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