Course Description

This course explores the intersection of two seemingly unrelated realms: postcolonial literature, specifically the literature produced during and after the British colonization of India by British colonizers and their postcolonial subjects in the former Empire, and science fiction, a fictional mode that explores "Other Worlds". Science fiction can be described as "speculative fiction". It is the story of "what if": What if we had discovered other worlds and inhabited them? What if aliens discovered us? In postcolonial fiction, the emphasis is on what happened in the past and how that history has left traces on the present. The questions posed by science fictional narratives reflect the colonial and postcolonial conditions in interesting ways.

What do science fiction and postcolonial fiction have in common? One answer would certainly be the figure of the "alien" and the "Other". As Jessica Langer demonstrates in her book Postcolonialism and Science Fiction, the "classic oppositional SF tropes of the grotesque bug-eyed alien bent on Earthly domination and the beautiful but empty planet, ripe for colonization" are the "twin myths" of both SF and colonialism.

In other words, SF and postcolonial fiction and theory are both structured around similar tropes. If we look at the genesis of the science fictional mode, we shall see it begins in the late 19th century at the height of the colonial project. As John Rieder points out in Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction, "early science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses". We shall see how literary works written at the time reflect the fears surrounding the idea of colonial domination and the encounter with the "Other".

In this course, we'll focus on the links between the British Empire and the "other worlds" envisioned in science fictional texts. We'll begin in colonial times with H.G Wells, one of the "founding fathers" of the science fictional mode who explores the "war of the worlds" at the heart of colonial domination and science fictional imaginings of alien races. We then move to one of the most famous British science fiction writers, Arthur C. Clarke, to see how his stories from the 1950’s and onward examine the links between colonial
expansion, spaces, and alterity. We end with the postcolonial reimagining of nation in Amitav Ghosh’s 1995 novel about the links between Empire, science, medicine, national identities and science fictional imaginings of alternate dimensions and alternative histories of nation and a 2011 British film which imagines an alien invasion in a housing estate in London.

**Literary texts:**

Terry Bisson, “They’re Made out of Meat”


“History Lesson”
[https://siliconshelf.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/arthur_c_clarke_history_lesson_ss.pdf](https://siliconshelf.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/arthur_c_clarke_history_lesson_ss.pdf)

“The Parasite”

H.G. Wells, *the War of the Worlds*

H.G. Wells, *the Island of Dr. Moreau*

Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*

**Film:**

*Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, director)

**Major theoretical texts:**

*Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* John Rieder

*Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* Jessica Langer

*Strange Encounters* Sara Ahmed

*The Postnational Fantasy* Raja, Ellis and Nandi (Editors)

*Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World* Hoegland and Sarwal (Editors)

**Requirements:**
Attendance, participation and class presentations: 20%

In class midterm: (date) 15%

Final paper (at home): (date) 65%

**Schedule (tentative and may change as the course progresses)**

We will read the works in the order they appear on the syllabus

The first lesson is an introductory lesson.

In the second lesson and third lessons, we’ll discuss the Bisson story “They’re Made out of Meat” the Arthur C. Clarke stories and look at some of the theoretical material for the course

We then devote three lessons to each major work: H.G. Wells’ novellas and Ghosh’s novel

Make sure you purchase the books on the Book Depository website (https://www.bookdepository.com/) or any other way you choose and have all the texts at your disposal when the semester begins.

The two Wells novellas are rather short (around a 120 pages). The Ghosh novel is longer. It will be our final text of the semester.

**Midterm exam in class (7th lesson)**

The lesson before last: *Attack the Block*

Final lesson: Discussion of the film and summary