SCIENCE FICTION TELEVISION

M. Keith Booker

Greenwood PUBLISHING GROUP

Science Fiction Television

Recent Title in
The Praeger Television Collection
David Bianculli, Series Editor

Spy Television
Wesley Britton

Science Fiction Television

M. Keith Booker

The Praeger Television Collection
David Bianculli, Series Editor

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Booker, M. Keith.
Science fiction television / M. Keith Booker.
p. cm.—(The Praeger television collection, ISSN 1549-2257)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-275-98164-9 (alk. paper)
1. Science fiction television programs. I. Title. II. Series.
PN1995.8.S35B66 2004
791.45'615—dc22 2004040056

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004040056
ISBN: 0-275-98164-9
ISSN: 1549-2257

First published in 2004

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Amy, Adam, Marcus, Dakota, and Skylor

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Photo essay follows page 148.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

Early Predecessors to *The Twilight Zone*: The Birth of Science Fiction Television

This book is a history of science fiction television (SFTV) series that appeared in America from the 1950s to the early years of the twenty-first century. It describes the principal characteristics of the most important series, at the same time placing each program within the historical contexts of SFTV as a whole and of the American culture and society within which it was produced and consumed. Science fiction series have been among the most innovative and successful programs ever to appear on commercial television. Classic American series such as *The Twilight Zone* and *Star Trek* were among the pioneering programs that defined the phenomenon of cult television, continued by more recent, highly respected series such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Babylon 5*. Such series have had some of the most dedicated core audiences in the history of television, as evidenced by their ongoing popularity in syndication and, more recently, on DVD. In the 1990s, *The X-Files* boldly went where no SFTV program had gone before in terms of production values and mainstream audience appeal, while cable programs such as *Farscape* and *Stargate SG-1* carried the banner of science fiction television into the new millennium. It is also worth noting that science fiction programs such as *Space: 1999* have been, at least for short periods, among the most successful British imports in the American market, while near-legendary British programs such as *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner* have included strong elements of science fiction, along with elements of other genres, such as the spy drama and detective story—a

characteristic that can also be found in *The X-Files*. And, in terms of British imports, there is always the incomparable *Doctor Who*, which ran for twenty-six years on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and still has a strong cult following in both Britain and the United States (and, for that matter, in dozens of other countries).

It should come as no surprise that some of the best television ever has been produced within the science fiction genre. Television, as an overtly technological medium, would seem to be a natural venue for science fiction. Moreover, the recent proliferation of cable channels (including especially the Sci Fi Channel) has opened vast new territories for programs, such as many science fiction series, that may not attract a huge mainstream viewership but do quite well with well-defined niche audiences, allowing them to explore more interesting and quirky possibilities without the necessity of widespread mass appeal. Though science fiction television has sometimes fallen prey to the same cliché-ridden sameness for which commercial television is often criticized, the genre seeks, by definition, to imagine worlds that are different from the one in which we now live. SFTV, by its very nature, explores thought-provoking concepts and alternative perspectives that can challenge its audience to rethink long-cherished ideas. In short, science fiction is, as a genre, particularly well suited to the kind of thoughtful and imaginative visions that demonstrate the positive potential of television as a medium.

In point of fact, however, the roots of science fiction television reach back in time well before the invention of television itself. As modern film technology began to take shape in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the pioneering Lumiére brothers of France saw tremendous potential in the realistic capabilities of the new medium. Accordingly, they produced a series of reality-based films in which they simply recorded real-life places and events for viewing by their audiences, thus making their films the predecessors of modern-day documentaries. At the same time, however, another early French filmmaker, Georges Méliès, saw the medium very differently. For Méliès, a magician by trade, the true potential of film lay not in the simple photographic representation of reality, but in illusion and visual trickery. By the end of the century, he had made dozens of films that relied centrally on what would now be referred to as special effects to create worlds of visual fantasy for his audiences. By 1902, he had made what is still his best-known film, the fourteen-minute *Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*). This work of whimsical imagination,

based on a novel by the groundbreaking science fiction writer Jules Verne, was a major milestone in the history of film, and still has the ability to entertain and fascinate audiences even today.

It is, of course, no accident that this early landmark in the development of movie magic was a work of science fiction. For one thing, early film was as much science as art, and early filmmakers such as Méliès and the Lumiéres were inventors who had to develop, on the fly, the technology that was needed to carry out their cinematic visions. Indeed, much of the appeal of film to early audiences came not from the actual content of specific films, but simply from the technological marvels embodied in the medium itself. Attending an early film was itself almost like participating in science fiction. In addition, science fiction is perfectly suited to the kind of fantasy-based filmmaking pursued by Méliès: By definition, science fiction imagines worlds other than the one in which we live, and Méliès was simply the first to realize that the capabilities of the new medium were perfectly suited to the exploration of such alternative visions of reality.

Science fiction became a staple of filmmaking very early on, and it has continued as a crucial film genre from Méliès forward to *Star Wars* and beyond. A similar story, of course, pertains to television—and for many of the same reasons. Indeed, science fiction film was an important predecessor to science fiction television, and the two forms carry a close generic kinship. Perhaps the most direct predecessors to science fiction television were the film serials of the 1930s, in particular the three Flash Gordon serials and the Buck Rogers serial of that decade, all featuring Buster Crabbe in the central roles. These serials were in turn based on popular syndicated comic strips, extending the generic genealogy back even further.

The Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials were produced in episodes of fifteen to twenty minutes in length, with each serial running for twelve to fifteen episodes that were shown weekly in theaters in an attempt to attract young audiences to the movies. Each serial involved a continuous plot, and each episode typically ended with a cliff-hanger in which one or more of the major characters was threatened with some sort of dire danger (usually overcome rather easily at the beginning of the next episode). The plots of the various serials involved classic science fiction themes. For example, the first Flash Gordon serial, *Flash Gordon: Space Soldiers* (1936), is an alien-invasion story in which Flash and his attractive, rather skimpily clad sidekick, Dale Arden (Jean Rogers), foil the plans of Emperor Ming of the planet

Mongo to colonize Earth. In *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (1938), Ming the Merciless resumes his assault on Earth, this time in an alliance with the queen of Mars. But Flash and a more demurely clad Dale (the Hays Code—a self-regulatory code of ethics created by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America—having clamped down) take the battle to Mars, winning another victory over interplanetary evil. In *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1940), Ming is at it again, this time showering the earth with a purple powder that causes a deadly planetwide plague. However, Flash and Dale (this time played by Carol Hughes) manage to find an antidote and foil Ming once again. In the 1939 Buck Rogers serial, on the other hand, invaders from Saturn are actually the good guys, helping Buck and the rebel forces of the Hidden City defeat twenty-fifth-century dictator and criminal kingpin Killer Kane. This serial thus involves a dark, dystopian vision of the future, though all turns out well in the end. It also involves considerable interplanetary travel (as Flash shuttles back and forth from Earth to Saturn) and a sort of time-travel plot in which Flash, a test pilot from the 1930s, is placed in suspended animation, awaking five hundred years in the future.

By today's standards, the special effects of these serials, marked especially by their sparking and spitting rocket ships, were extremely crude. However, to a generation of young Americans, they offered thrilling images of other planets and other times that presented an exciting alternative to a dreary Depression-era world that was drifting toward global war. Despite the importance of the visual dimension, these serials depended primarily on their suspenseful plots and on identification with their swashbuckling heroes to keep their young audiences coming back for more. Indeed, both Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers also became the protagonists of radio serials in the 1930s, indicating that the stories worked even without visuals. Such early science fiction radio programs were important predecessors to science fiction on television, just as radio serials were important predecessors to television series in general.

Actually, however, it was not until the 1950s that science fiction radio really hit its stride, even as science fiction was beginning to appear on television as well. Radio programs such as Mutual's *2000 Plus* and NBC's *Dimension X* (both of which began broadcasting in 1950) were anthology series that offered a variety of exciting tales of future technology, with a special focus on space exploration (including alien invasion), though both series also often reflected contemporary

anxieties about the dangers of technology. *Dimension X*, in particular, featured adaptations of stories by some of the leading science fiction writers of the era, including Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, and Robert Heinlein, not to mention L. Ron Hubbard, later to become the founder of the Church of Scientology. That the first episode of *Dimension X* was a space exploration tale called "The Outer Limit" (actually, first broadcast as an episode of the *Escape* program before *Dimension X* even became a series in its own right) marks the series as a predecessor of the later television series *The Outer Limits*. Meanwhile, one of the most important science fiction radio anthologies of the 1950s was *Tales of Tomorrow*, broadcast on ABC Radio beginning in early 1953, then switching to CBS Radio shortly afterward. This radio program directly paralleled a science fiction television series of the same name, though in this case the television program, produced in association with the Science Fiction League of America, had begun broadcasting on ABC Television two years earlier, in 1951.[1]

Indeed, radio and television jockeyed for position in the science fiction race throughout the first half of the 1950s, as they did in other genres as well. Of course, by the end of the 1950s, television had established a clear dominance in this and other areas, and radio drama was forever banished to the margins of American popular culture. In the meantime, science fiction television of the 1950s was seriously limited by technological and budgetary restraints, employing special effects that were often, if anything, inferior to those of the movie serials of the 1930s. These serials clearly provided models for early SFTV series, and television versions of both *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* in fact appeared during the 1950s. While much of the SFTV programming of the 1950s was clearly aimed at children, these early programs also struck a chord in the popular imagination.

For one thing, television itself was such a new and amazing technology in the 1950s that it seemed almost like an example of science fiction in its own right. Meanwhile, it is clear that early programming of the 1950s reflects the deep ambivalence of that decade toward science and technology, which were opening bold new possibilities for mankind as a whole (and even within individual households), but which also had created the possibility of global nuclear destruction. As the decade proceeded, early children's series such as *Captain Video and His Video Rangers*; *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*; and *Space Patrol* helped to establish science fiction as a central television genre, while the television version of *Tales of Tomorrow* established a tradition of

thoughtful, adult-oriented programming that many see as a direct predecessor to *The Twilight Zone*, which can perhaps be considered the series that marked the maturation of science fiction television as a genre.[2]

One of the most sophisticated early productions of science fiction television was a series of three British miniseries, each consisting of a sequence of six thirty- to thirty-five-minute episodes. *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass II* (1955), and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958–59) all featured British rocket scientist Bernard Quatermass (played by Reginald Tate, John Robinson, and André Morell in the respective series) involved in various battles against alien invaders, government conspirators, and strange, demonic forces. In the first series, Quatermass must overcome a gigantic rampaging vegetable monster that comes to Earth by stowing away aboard a British spacecraft. The second series closely anticipates the classic science fiction film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) by featuring an alien invasion in which Martians come to Earth inside meteorites, then secretly take over the bodies and minds of individual earthlings, including highly placed government officials. In the third and creepiest of the three series, excavations in London unearth evidence that the evolution of humans on Earth was furthered by Martian intervention, while also setting in motion a chain of events that threatens to re-activate the Martian influence.

The three series, though limited by the special effects technology available at the time, managed to produce a sinister sense of threat that was very much in tune with the anxieties of the 1950s. Quatermass himself, a flawed individual who often seems on the verge of madness, is a particularly interesting character whose battles against bureaucracy embodied the sense of many in the decade of being surrounded and engulfed by gray-suited conformism. Meanwhile, the motifs of conspiracy and looming hidden dangers anticipated such later science fiction series as *The X-Files*. Writer Nigel Neale, the creative genius behind *Quatermass*, also managed to make the three series consistently thought-provoking, despite the over-the-top plots and lame effects. Hammer Films eventually condensed each of the three original *Quatermass* miniseries into a feature film (in 1955, 1957, and 1967, respectively). The first two films were in black and white and starred Brian Donlevy in the title role; the third was in color and starred Andre Keir. The *Quatermass* franchise was renewed in 1979 (with Neale still as the writer) for a fourth series of four sixty-minute

episodes shown on British ITV, condensed for distribution abroad as a 105-minute TV movie.

The spillover of *Quatermass* onto film calls attention to the importance of science fiction film during the 1950s. It is surely no accident that the decade saw an explosion in the production of science fiction films as well as numerous now-classic science fiction novels, even as both science fiction radio and science fiction television were experiencing unprecedented growth.[3] During the 1950s, the American (and British) population was fascinated with science and its potential consequences (both positive and negative) as never before, and the production of science fiction narratives in a variety of media responded directly to this fascination. For one thing, the atomic bombings of Japan at the end of World War II, quickly followed by the development of even more devastating hydrogen bombs by both the United States and the Soviet Union, led to the widespread realization that science had, for the first time, provided the means by which the human race could literally destroy itself. On the other hand, especially in the United States, the proliferation of an array of new high-tech domestic appliances (including that amazing new appliance, the television set) transformed the texture of everyday life, while developments in rocketry made the exploration of outer space, so long a staple of the science fiction imagination, an approaching reality.

It was little wonder, then, that science fiction became an increasingly important part of American television—and American culture as a whole—throughout the 1950s. Thus, science fiction motifs appeared not just in science fiction programs themselves, but also sometimes in more mainstream programming. Even Lucy and Ethel got into the act, for example, dressing as Martians in one episode of the landmark sitcom *I Love Lucy* in order to promote a science fiction film. The popular fascination with science also led to related nonfiction programming, such as the *Bell System Science Series*, sponsored by AT&T and featuring such creative talents as legendary film director Frank Capra.

The latter series strove for entertainment value and popular appeal in an attempt to reach the masses and fulfill their hunger for scientific knowledge, while reassuring them that science was not so far beyond the grasp of the ordinary mind as it sometimes seemed. At the same time, the *Bell System Science Series* was conceived as a prestige production that could proudly carry the banner of its sponsor. In contrast, the science fiction programming of the decade increasingly

gained a reputation as a subliterary form of culture designed to appeal either to children or to the kind of lowbrow plebeian tastes that became the object of much criticism in the 1950s. Indeed, numerous American cultural critics of the decade decried what they saw as the rise of a least-common-denominator "mass culture" that represented a serious dumbing-down of American cultural production. Television as a medium was absolutely central to this phenomenon, and the association between science fiction and television in the decade did little to improve the reputation of either.

Then came *The Twilight Zone*, surely the most important SFTV program of the 1950s, and the first to gain a widespread reputation for genuine artistic merit. This series again had extremely minimal special effects, yet its production values were extremely high. Well written, well acted, and well produced, *The Twilight Zone* quickly became (and still remains) one of the most respected television series of its time. Indeed, Rod Serling—the creator, producer, on-screen host, and frequent writer of *The Twilight Zone*—has long had something of a reputation as *the* genius of 1950s American television. Actually, however, the program did not begin airing until near the end of 1959 (the first episode to be broadcast by CBS Television was shown on October 2, 1959). Of the program's 156 episodes, only 12 were broadcast in the 1950s proper, though it is also the case that most of the period from January 1, 1960, to June 19, 1964, when the bulk of the episodes of the series aired, probably has more in common with the popular memory of the 1950s than with that of the 1960s.

The Twilight Zone, following the anthology series format that had already been established by predecessors such as *Tales of Tomorrow*, was almost infinitely flexible. Indeed, this format allowed the series to adapt to consideration changes in taste and context, which partly accounts for the fact that *The Twilight Zone* underwent two different reincarnations. It returned to its original home on CBS for the appearance of new episodes for an on-again, off-again two-year run from 1985 to 1987, then on to syndication in 1988. The series was then again resurrected for a run on the fledgling UPN, beginning in 2002. This latest version of the series is, at this writing, still in production. *The Twilight Zone* has also served as the prototype for a number of subsequent anthology series with similar themes, including *The Outer Limits* (1963–65), *Night Gallery* (1970–73, which again featured Serling as the on-screen host), and Steven Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* (1985–87, concurrent with the first attempted renewal of *The Twilight Zone*).

The original *Twilight Zone* included a wide variety of episodes that can roughly be categorized as science fiction, horror, fantasy, or some combination of the three. Meanwhile, the episodes that can clearly be considered science fiction are of a variety of types, including space exploration, alien invasion, time travel, and imaginative visions (mostly dystopian) of the future of human society. Though not all episodes could be considered science fiction by most definitions, *The Twilight Zone* as a whole still served as a virtual catalog of science fiction motifs, while at the same time demonstrating through its low emphasis on special effects that science fiction, as a genre of ideas, need not depend on the kinds of spectacular visual effects that would later come to characterize science fiction films. *The Twilight Zone* is rightly regarded as one of the most thoughtful television series of all time, partly because the ideas it explores so intelligently directly address numerous central concerns of American society in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This illustrates the fact that science fiction, no matter how distant its setting in space and time, generally comments first and foremost on the here and now, using imaginative settings and scenarios as a means of gaining new perspectives on contemporary problems.

Many episodes of *The Twilight Zone* can be linked quite directly to the show's historical context. For example, the cold war background of the original series is obvious in a number of episodes. "The Mirror" (October 20, 1961), for example, presents a superficial and stereotypical view of Fidel Castro as a typical strutting Latin American tyrant, while "The Whole Truth" (January 20, 1961) satirizes the fabled dishonesty of used-car salesmen, but ultimately suggests that being forced to tell the truth at all times might be even more embarrassing to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

Other cold war episodes were far more serious. "Four O'Clock" (April 6, 1962) comments on McCarthyism through its focus on a fanatic who is obsessed with keeping tabs on his fellow citizens, then informing on any who seem to harbor suspect ideas, especially communist ones. More effective as a satire of cold war anticommunist paranoia was the classic episode "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" (March 4, 1960). Here (under, as it turns out, the manipulation of aliens conducting an experiment), suspicion runs rampant along previously peaceful Maple Street, turning neighbor against neighbor, as mysterious events are attributed to the nefarious activities of human-looking aliens who may have infiltrated the neighborhood.

A similar theme is treated more comically (and less effectively) in "Will the Real Martian Please Stand Up" (May 16, 1961), in which Martian and Venusian invaders compete with one another, while the humans in the episode bicker among themselves, each suspecting the others of actually being aliens.

In "The Shelter" (September 29, 1961), a sort of companion piece to "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street," the depiction of the attempts of a family to take refuge in their bomb shelter from a perceived UFO attack obviously derives from contemporary concerns about the possibility of nuclear war. When the family refuses to let any of their less-prepared neighbors join them, the neighbors batter down the shelter door; more violence is averted only when news arrives that the supposed UFOs were merely harmless satellites. This bomb shelter motif, meanwhile, indicates the way in which the concern of *The Twilight Zone* (and of much science fiction of the era) with the cold war frequently included the depiction of post-holocaust worlds and the exploration of the aftermath of nuclear war.

The classic post-holocaust episode of *The Twilight Zone* was "Time Enough at Last" (November 20, 1959). In this episode, mild-mannered, myopic bank teller Henry Bemis (Burgess Meredith) is the ultimate alienated individual, understood by no one and tormented by both his domineering boss and his hectoring wife. In particular, neither the boss nor the wife can understand Bemis's love of reading, which clearly serves for him as an avenue of escape from the dreary and regimented routine of his daily life, but which serves for them as something that marks Bemis as abnormal. As Serling's opening voice-over puts it, "a bank president and a wife and a world full of tongue-cluckers and the unrelenting hands of the clock" are constantly thwarting Bemis's passion for the printed page.

The Twilight Zone, however, supported such passions, and a love of books and literature is central to several episodes of the series. Bemis is thus presented sympathetically throughout the episode, despite the fact that his devotion to books has radically increased his alienation from the world around him. Desperate for a chance to get a little reading done, Bemis symbolically locks himself away from the world in the bank vault so he can read without interruption during his lunch breaks. One day, while he is in the vault, a nuclear attack destroys the entire city, and perhaps all of human civilization. But Bemis emerges unscathed, saved by the thick metal walls of the vault. At first, even though he is able to find plenty of food and other ne-

cessities, he feels despair at being the last man on Earth. He even considers suicide. Then, however, he discovers that most of the books in the public library have survived. He suddenly realizes that the nuclear attack was a godsend: now he can have all these books to himself, with all the time in the world to read them and no one to interfere or complain. He joyously begins to arrange the books in stacks, planning out his reading for years to come.

At this point comes the episode's famous, heartrending conclusion: Bemis drops and shatters his thick glasses, without which he is too blind to read. Now, with no one to help him, with no ophthalmologists, optometrists, or opticians left alive to provide him with a new pair of glasses, Bemis is helpless, and all those books are worthless. The point seems clear: it's not so easy to live without other people after all, an alienation-related theme that resounds through many episodes of the series. For example, a similar theme informs the less-successful episode, "The Mind and the Matter" (May 12, 1961), in which the bitterly alienated protagonist gains the power to make everyone else on Earth disappear, then relents and brings them back when he discovers life alone is even worse.

At the same time, the typical *Twilight Zone* protagonist is very much alone in the face of the strange circumstances that confront him or her. And these protagonists are typically treated sympathetically, in keeping with the individualist ideology that permeates the series—and American television programming as a whole. One of the best illustrations of this motif is "The Obsolete Man" (June 2, 1961), a companion episode to "Time Enough at Last," in which the protagonist's love of books again places him in opposition to the official values of his society. Here, a lone librarian, Romney Wordsworth (again played by Meredith, providing an intertextual link that emphasizes the parallel between Wordsworth and Bemis), confronts a totalitarian dystopia that declares both the librarian and the books he so loves to be obsolete and useless. Thus, books again are glorified, and the episode holds up print culture as a bastion of individual liberty and natural enemy of totalitarianism.

"The Obsolete Man" is one of *The Twilight Zone*'s most interesting-looking episodes, employing exaggerated expressionistic sets to enhance the dystopian atmosphere of the episode, in which a totalitarian State exerts total control over the minds of its citizens, having banned all books, all religion, and all independent thought. The episode begins as a chancellor of the State (played by Fritz Weaver) pronounces

Wordsworth "obsolete," a judgment that carries with it a penalty of death. In this thoroughly rational society, nothing that cannot be immediately put to use in the interest of the official goals of the State can be tolerated. Serling's opening monologue, meanwhile, emphasizes the symbolic nature of this State, declaring that it "has patterned itself after every dictator who has ever planted the ripping imprint of a boot on the pages of history since the beginning of time." This boot image probably derives most directly from George Orwell's *1984*, but it also reaches back to Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1907), placing the episode in a long tradition of dystopian fiction. There are historical references as well, for instance, when the chancellor (employing a confused equation between fascism and communism that was a central motif in American cold war propaganda) later identifies both Hitler and Stalin as his predecessors, though declaring that neither went far enough in eliminating undesirables.

Though it is not entirely obvious in the actual episode, director Elliot Silverstein has stated that the texture of the hearing in which Wordsworth is declared obsolete was partly inspired by the infamous Army-McCarthy hearings, a fact that suggests that this dystopian State, while overtly linked with Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, may also have a great deal in common with the United States. Indeed, if the lonely Wordsworth is a paradigm of alienation, this society is the ultimate in regimented routine, a fact that Wordsworth well recognizes, complaining to the chancellor that "your State has everything categorized, indexed, tagged." However, other than such vague hints at criticism of American society in the 1950s, "The Obsolete Man" is pure orthodox Americanism. It presents Wordsworth (not surprisingly, given his surname) as a paragon of Romantic individualism, upholding the values of religion, traditional culture, and human rights in the face of a dystopian regime so extreme that few viewers would be likely to relate it to their own United States. Indeed, the political commentary of *The Twilight Zone* is quite consistently attenuated by the series' ultimate orthodoxy, something that might also be said for the cultural criticism of the 1950s. At the same time, the orthodoxy of *The Twilight Zone* is consistently undercut by unstated hints that all is not well with the American way of life.

Due to budgetary and technological restraints, *The Twilight Zone* actually shows us very little in the way of space travel and alien environments that are the stock-in-trade of "hard" science fiction. When spacecraft, robots, and other high-tech props are shown, they are

typically recycled from earlier MGM productions such as *Forbidden Planet*, as when the model flying saucer from that film appears in episodes such as "The Invaders" (January 27, 1961) and "Death Ship" (February 7, 1963). Meanwhile, the alien landscapes explored on *The Twilight Zone* tend to be rather earthlike, allowing them to be filmed on location without expensive set designs. On the other hand, the series sometimes makes a virtue of this necessity, and one of its favorite motifs involves reversals in which the seemingly simple opposition between earthlings and aliens is undermined, often by leading audiences inadvertently to view this opposition from the point of view of the aliens.

Space travel is a central concern of the series, beginning with the initial pilot episode ("Where Is Everybody?"), in which the loneliness of the long-distance space traveler is clearly used as a metaphor for the sense of many in the late 1950s of being ultimately alone in the world, alienated from and unable truly to communicate with those around them. In this episode, the central character (played by Earl Holliman) apparently awakes to find himself the only man left on Earth, dramatizing the alienation felt by so many during the decade. Here, however, the scenario turns out merely to be part of a staged test to see if he, an astronaut-trainee, will be psychologically able to withstand the extreme loneliness and isolation of solo spaceflight.

The loneliness of outer space was also a central preoccupation of the next episode to deal with space travel, "The Lonely" (November 13, 1959). As this episode begins, James A. Corry (Jack Warden) has been convicted of murder (though he swears it was self-defense) and sentenced to serve fifty years of exile on a barren asteroid. Serling's opening voice-over explains to us that Corry is dying of loneliness in this barren, alien environment, though this loneliness is subsequently relieved when a compassionate spaceship captain drops off a female robot (named Alicia), which looks entirely human. In fact, the directions that come with Alicia suggestively tell us that "to all intent and purpose this creature *is* a woman. Physiologically and psychologically, she is a human being." Initially appalled by the idea of using a mechanical contrivance for company, Corry slowly warms to Alicia and falls deeply in love with her. Indeed, her lack of humanity seems to make her a perfect woman: with no real identity of her own, she simply becomes a reflection of Corry's own interests and desires. The episode thus comments, though in a subtle way that is not at all heavy-handed, on gender relations in the early 1960s, when the

women's movement was beginning to gain momentum in its challenge to the objectification of women. Later, Corry is pardoned and the spaceship returns to take him back to Earth. Unfortunately, he can only take fifteen pounds of luggage on the small ship, so he is told that Alicia must be left behind. When he protests that Alicia is not luggage, but a woman, the captain provides a shocking reminder of her otherness by pulling out his gun and shooting the robot in the face, destroying it and revealing a mass of circuits and wiring. They won't be leaving behind a woman, the captain tells Corry, just his loneliness.

Perhaps the most memorable space-exploration episodes of *The Twilight Zone* are the several that present variations on a basic motif in which we see astronauts set forth to explore new planets and encounter alien species, only to learn at the end that the astronauts are actually aliens and that the strange new planet is Earth. For example, in "Third from the Sun" (January 8, 1960), a group of scientists takes off in an experimental spacecraft to avoid an imminent nuclear war. We learn only at the end that Earth is the destination, not the point of departure, effecting a sudden reversal of perspective that creates an ironic distance and allows audiences to recognize the episode as a commentary on contemporary cold war tensions, while at the same time enjoying the episode as entertainment.

"I Shot an Arrow into the Air," broadcast one week later, represented a variation on this same kind of reversal, in which three astronauts survive a crash landing on what they take to be a barren asteroid. One of the three kills the other two to extend their limited water supply, only to discover that they have in fact landed in the Nevada desert, with civilization (and plenty of water) only a short distance away. Meanwhile, in "The Invaders," a woman is terrorized by tiny invaders from another planet in an episode that reveals, only at the end, that the invaders are in fact astronauts from Earth who have landed on another planet.

Such reversals were highly effective at a moment in American history when many traditional "Us vs. Them" boundaries were being challenged. For one thing, in the wake of World War II, the United States had assumed an unprecedented prominence in international politics, largely assuming the role of global standard-bearer of Western civilization, a role that had been played for the previous two centuries by the British Empire. As a result, American culture was coming into contact with foreign cultures, including seemingly exotic, non-