

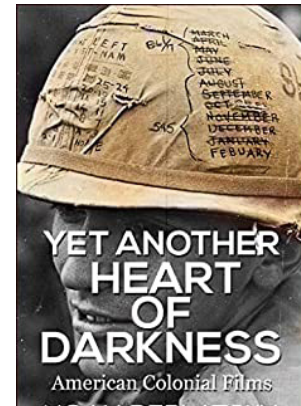
Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films, by Noah Berlatsky



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Noah Berlatsky. *Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films*.
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Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films by Noah Berlatsky is a digital collection of essays previously published in magazines such as *Playboy*, *SpliceToday*, *Pacific Standard*, the subscription service Patreon, or the author's blog, the *Hooded Utilitarian*. Berlatsky's essays cover film, fiction, non-fiction, and 21st Century U.S. Politics. If that sounds eclectic, it is an eclectic book. However, the collection is united by certain touchstone fictional texts such as H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1897) and *The Time Machine* (1895), as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Berlatsky also references the critical work of John Reider, *Colonialism and Science Fiction* (2008) throughout many of his essays, demanding the reader see the underlying colonial and imperial motifs in popular film, television shows, and fiction.



The text is organized by sections: The Lost World of Colonialism (an introduction to his thesis on colonialism and his touchstone texts, including *Heart of Darkness* [1899]); American Colonial Films (16 essays on war films that include *Aliens* [1986] and *Predator* [1987]); Invasion of the Mummies (four essays on Mummy films from 1932-2017); Invasion of the Superheroes (three essays on superhero films primarily from the Marvel Comic Universe); Invasion of the Science Fiction (six essays primarily about science fiction novels, although some films are mentioned for context of tropes); Off-Screen Imperialism (four essays concerning non-fiction texts and 21st century political narratives); Coda: Full Metal Bunny (a single essay that returns the reader to Berlatsky's touchstone texts).

Berlatsky's organization is hyperpermeable because as a digital text it allows for links within the essays. Thus, a reader might be reading the Coda, find a reference and a link to an essay on *Rambo* [1985] and be offered the jump to an earlier essay in a different section. This flexibility makes up for categorization which at times feels awkward or oddly drawn. *Aliens* seems to be excluded from the section on Science Fiction based on its genre (film), yet Berlatsky intentionally moves between film and text in his discussion of other Science Fiction novels and films or television shows. In addition, not all of his touchstone texts appear in all the essays. Seen as a collection of individual expositions written for different venues over time, this makes sense, as

does the occasional repetition of a point made in an earlier essay. What makes the collection work is his scrupulous cinematic analysis, the depth of his comprehension and range of familiarity with films across genres (War Films, Horror Films, Science Fiction Films), and his consistent commitment to reading visual and written texts for their colonialist text and subtexts, as well as the occasional subversion of imperialism.

While this last comment may suggest a theory-heavy read, this book eschews deep theory or even a genuine literature review. Instead, the essays function as a series (not a sequence) of examples of colonialism in popular culture spread over more than a century. Berlatsky adds links to Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* (2017), as well as links to sources such as *Slate* and *The Guardian*, rather than offer a bibliography, reference pages, or pages of footnotes. Like the organizational structure, the selection and use of references is not slapdash, it is simply designed for a more popular audience, and a comparatively relaxed reading.

Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films belies its title. Rather than a text purely focused on "American colonial film" it is an application of select components of theory (America's colonial past reappears in 20th century films; contemporary films are still busy domesticating America's past; viewers pleasurably participate as colonizers in these films and other texts) applied to various genres, mediums, and time periods. The language and tone befit the essays' previous publication in magazine and blog formats. There are some spelling/format errors which may be attributed to self-publishing, and they occasionally distract from the text.

Overall, this is an enjoyable and fascinating read. Select essays would be particularly effective for undergraduates being introduced to colonial theory, feminist theory, and popular culture. Some essays may lack the critical foundation for more advanced academic researchers, but they offer detailed readings in historical context. Berlatsky's essays cover both British and U.S. historical imperialist actions and their sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle, inscriptions in fiction and film. However, despite the historical underpinnings, the book does speak to fantasy. Even when he is writing about a non-fantastic visual text (*Rambo, Full Metal Jacket* [1987]), Berlatsky identifies the colonialist, time-travel fantasy that allows film makers and audiences to replay, recast, and rewrite historical events. The science fiction and horror texts he discusses exemplify the public's desire and the authors' impulse to continue colonizing (even if they have to do it in the center of the earth or outside the galaxy).

Berlatsky's rendering of American War film as an expression of a science-fictional attitude toward history is perhaps the most fascinating focus of his essays. His critique of whitewashing in Marvel Comic Universe's Superhero films is clear and solid, but rethinking the fantastic cultural displacement underlying *Rambo* or *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and seeing it as kind of time travel narrative is especially thought provoking, as is his recognition of viewers' ongoing attraction to the fantasy of colonization from the viewpoint of the good guy/superhero/colonizer.

Frances Auld, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Language and Literature at State College of Florida where she teaches coursework in Horror, Science Fiction, and Fantasy; Fairy Tales; Medieval Literature. She watches way too many horror movies, occasionally writes horror and dark fantasy, and loves to introduce students to creepy literature.