

## Fiche

In the English-speaking world, travels and the notion of Frontier and borders have a specific place knowing that territorial expansion and colonization have resulted in dramatic consequences for those who arrive or for those who are forced to welcome the newcomers. The idea of Frontier thus becomes a founding myth that structures the peoples. This was the case in the United States of America with a westward expansion. As a matter of fact, since 1621 and the coming of the first Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower from England, this new territory was "invaded" and colons and settlers did their best to expand the limits of the British Empire and the limits of civilization. This was done to the detriment of the Native Americans who were there first and who became the victims of the European thirst for power. When Christopher Columbus came, the white colons started stealing the wealth of the natives and perverted the native culture. To this day, American "Red" Indian natives in the USA strongly feel the injustice of Columbus' acts and protest against Columbus Day which, for them is celebrates a person who committed genocide.

### The manifest Destiny

The notion of "Frontier" is at the core of the American culture. The US philosophy is based on **the Manifest Destiny** that is to say the belief or doctrine, held chiefly in the middle and later part of the 19th century, that it was the destiny of the U.S. to expand its territory over the whole of North America and to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic influences. This is well depicted in the painting by John Gast, *American Progress*, where a woman, an allegory, symbolizes this westward expansion and the introduction of modernity and civilization. This painting shows a real contrast between the Native populations who are running away from the colons while the latter are walking peacefully, taming Nature and animals, bringing civilization to replace wilderness.

This concept of territory is also fundamental in **the construction of a national history** and a particular identity as shown with the development of the British Empire on which the "sun never sets". The will to explore is anchored in the genes of the British people certainly because of their insularity that makes them feel special and unique, as if they were different from the rest of the world. Many authors, through their writings, described these new territories and put forward the idea of an intricate but tense relationship between the Empire and the other countries whose inhabitants suffer from the oppression which prevents them from expressing their roots. Thus, Rudyard Kipling told stories about people living in India and the difficulty to maintain a balance in the populations subjected to white willpower. Chinua Achebe, and more recently Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explore the way the Nigerians feel and the way they are considered in the UK.

### The spirit of adventure

However, these narratives, full of adventures and **exoticism**, enable the readers to travel, to imagine faraway territories, to project themselves onto virgin and unknown lands where man has hardly trodden. They represent a certain danger, mystery and it is a real excitement for people who can't travel and whose only way to depart from their homeland is through imagination and reading. They are unable to sail across the oceans, unable to penetrate into the most remote parts of the world. For them the notion of "Empire" is vague and obscure; but, with these authors, they have the impression of being involved in this process and they have at last the opportunity to travel and to feel a variety of emotions.

### Science-fiction and space exploration

The manifest Destiny and the spirit of adventure constitute a basis for science-fiction writers who transpose them onto other places or periods, of time creating supernatural worlds or uchronia in order to echo real societies and criticize what is going on in their countries. This is what Frank Herbert did when he published *Dune*. This saga is a way to tackle important issues that we on our Earth are enduring, that is to say environmental issues, gender and other civil rights movements that were in keeping with the decade in which the book was written (the sixties). James Cameron also directed a parable to inform people about the emergency of the global warming with *Avatar*. His criticism and his alarm call to save the planet is also a way to make people realize the importance of protecting our world at a time when our leaders seem to deny or minimize the dangerous effects of global warming. This enables people to feel inspired and to connect themselves to the problems surrounding them. This is what JFK did when he uttered his speech about the *New Frontier*, when he urged his population to dream bigger and to expand civilization in a higher way. The new territory is no longer on Earth, it is now in space to show that human beings should feel the necessity to conquer new lands and to discover new virgin places where they can plant their flag.

Many movies explore this theme by showing space exploration as a way to connect ourselves to our origins and roots: *Interstellar* by Christopher Nolan, *2001, Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick or *Ad Astra* by James Mangold all relate the cosmos to more intimate explorations. Going into space, traveling across the universe is a way to explore our inner self, our intimacy and the immensity of space enables the characters to think about themselves and to discover new parts of their identity. It is also a way to relativize and focus on the quintessential facts of life, in other words, our relationship with others and especially within our family. For instance, In

*Ad Astra*, the character played by Brad Pitt goes to the other side of the universe to literally meet his father. It is a metaphor to express the fact that he discovers the truth concerning his father and it enables him to complete himself and to reach a certain level of self-awareness.

## Next door territories

This exploration takes the form of a quest and reflects an ontological quest to find our true self. Even if the child does not get out of his/her private space, the power of imagination helps him build a variety of possible worlds like in *Strange Things*. The house of the boy who has been abducted becomes a character in itself and a place of great adventures.

Sometimes, the territories that are explored are next to us. We never know what awaits us at the end of the street. This world can be a natural place like the Mississippi River for *Huckleberry Finn* who only knows his whereabouts and then starts exploring things that go beyond his comfort zone. At first He feels uneasy in this new world but he gradually becomes more enthusiastic about it which enables him to broaden his horizon. It can also be an exploration of the subconscious state of a whole town like David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. After the murder of Laura Palmer, the city is under the spotlight and a policeman, who is not from the city, explores the secrets of the city and thus explores the tormented minds of the population that hides dark secrets.

© 2000-2024, rue des écoles