

Exploring the Cold War through *The Twilight Zone*:

Five episodes in a journey to a dimension of sight, sound and mind

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The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was largely characterised by the *threat* of military conflict rather than its actuality.¹ The ideological nature of the Cold War led both sides to recognise the critical importance of not only building up their military capabilities, but also of securing the hearts and minds of their respective populaces. As the early years of the Cold War coincided with the rise of the mass media and, in particular, the increasing popularity of television, popular culture played a significant role in Cold War propaganda.² As such, the themes of films and television programs produced in the United States during this period often reinforced the official narrative that Americans were ‘under threat from a rapacious anti-capitalist, atheist ideology intent on world domination.’³ However, as time passed, the stories told on these programs became less blatantly propagandistic, and began to include more critical commentary on the Cold War and some of its key players.⁴ This article will focus on one such program: *The Twilight Zone*.

The seminal science fiction television series *The Twilight Zone* originally aired between 1959 and 1964. The series’ creator and chief writer, Rod Serling, understood that, compared with other television genres of the time, science fiction was taken less seriously by censors and critics.⁵ As a result, the content of science fiction programs was less closely scrutinised than that of television

1 Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, ‘East is East and West is West? Towards a comparative socio-cultural history of the Cold War,’ *Cold War History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2003), 4.

2 *Ibid.*, 16.

3 Jim George and Michael Hutchison, ‘Culture war as foreign policy in the US and Australia,’ in *The Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century*, ed., Jim George and Kim Huynh, (South Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37.

4 Rick Worland, ‘Sign-Posts Up Ahead: *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits*, and TV Political Fantasy 1959-1965,’ *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 23 (1996), <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/68/worland68.html>, accessed 24 March, 2013.

5 The Golden Age: History of Sci-Fi & The Future, ‘The Twilight Zone,’ <http://www.goldenageofscifi.info/twilightzone.php>, accessed 17 March, 2013.

dramas, for example.⁶ Indeed, before devising *The Twilight Zone*, Serling had established his reputation as a writer of quality television dramas in the 1950s, and had been a vocal critic of the level of interference and censorship imposed on his work by television networks and advertising sponsors who were terrified of alienating viewers of any political persuasion.⁷ Such conservatism on the part of television executives was by no means uncommon. In his analysis of popular 1950s television programs, Richard A. Schwartz found that allusions to the Cold War were virtually absent from sitcoms and dramas, primarily because programmers were loath to risk offending viewers and sponsors, and incur the wrath of conservative network executives.⁸

Serling therefore turned his hand to science fiction. As producer Dick Berg observed, Serling ‘had much on his mind politically and in terms of social condition, and science fiction – and *Twilight Zone* specifically – gave him ... flexibility in developing these themes.’⁹ Long-time producer of *The Twilight Zone*, Buck Houghton, confirmed that censorship of the program was minimal, attesting that, ‘we never had a script rejected [by the network] on any grounds.’¹⁰ *The Twilight Zone*’s popularity, its relatively youthful audience demographic (in an era when television sponsors were only beginning to recognise the teenage market¹¹), and the comparative levity with which science fiction was treated, enabled the storylines of *The Twilight Zone* to critique aspects of the Cold War with relative impunity.

The early years of the program were characterised by events which took the world closer to the brink of annihilation than at any other time during the Cold War.¹² The shooting down of the United States’ U2 spy plane over Russia in 1960, the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 brought the superpowers to the verge of nuclear war, and the potential ramifications of this for ordinary Americans informed some of the most memorable and important episodes of *The Twilight Zone*.¹³ Five such episodes from these years form the basis of the following discussion: ‘Third from the Sun’ (1960), ‘The Monsters are due on Maple Street’ (1960), ‘Two’ (1961), ‘The Shelter’ (1961), and ‘Four O’Clock’ (1962). These episodes exemplify how the program reflected and addressed specific concerns about the Cold War, such as the threat of imminent nuclear destruction, the notion of the external threat, and the concept of the enemy within.

Popular Culture and the Study of History

Before analysing how *The Twilight Zone* addressed Cold War ideologies, it is important to recognise the role played by popular culture in any form - whether it be music, film, fiction or, in this case, television - in assisting us to better understand particular historical periods or events. The intrinsic connection between popular culture and history stems from the fact that neither occurs in a vacuum. Not only do events of historical significance inform and affect the lives of the

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Richard A. Schwartz, ‘Family, Gender, and Society in 1960s American Fiction of Nuclear Apocalypse: *Shadow on the Hearth, Tomorrow!, The Last Day, and Alas, Babylon!*’ *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (2006), 407.

9 Marc Scott Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, (Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 1992), 15.

10 Ibid., 451.

11 Anonymous, ‘1950s TV Turns on America,’ *Advertising Age*, Vol. 76, No. 13, (2005), 44-48.

12 The College of William and Mary, ‘America in the Twilight Zone,’ <http://web.wm.edu/americanstudies/370/2004/sp3/TheColdWar.htm>, accessed 17 March 2013.

13 Ibid.

population, but the events themselves may be influenced by and reflected in spheres as diverse as the cultural, social, economic and scientific.¹⁴ Indeed, the fact that the Cold War was ‘more a war of words than a shooting war’ renders it necessary for any analysis of the era to include some consideration of its popular culture, given the latter’s role in reflecting and communicating certain values and beliefs.¹⁵

As Barry Brummett noted, television is a particularly important aspect of popular culture because most people watch it and, even if they do not all watch the same programs, they tend to know something about the shows they do not watch.¹⁶ To gauge how accurately a cultural product (in this case a television program) reflects the views of its audience, Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause pointed to the ‘Popular Culture Formula’. According to this equation, the more popular a program is, the more accurately it reflects the zeitgeist of the period in which it is screened, since viewers tend to watch those programs that offer a ‘reassuring reflection of their beliefs, values, and desires.’¹⁷ Although *The Twilight Zone* garnered relatively low ratings for its first few episodes, the series built a large and enthusiastic following during its first season – particularly among teenage viewers.¹⁸ When the second season debuted in September 1960, a solid audience base had been established, which continued for much of show’s five-season run, with its popularity reflected in the volume of fan letters received each week, and the establishment of scores of fan clubs across the country.¹⁹

If we accept that *The Twilight Zone* reflected the zeitgeist of its time, what was the nature of the prevailing beliefs, values, and desires into which the show tapped? In an essay published in 1965 – shortly after the end of the series’ original run, Susan Sontag opined that,

we live under continual threat of two equally fearful, but seemingly opposed destinies: unremitting banality and inconceivable terror. It is fantasy, served out in large rations by the popular arts, which allows most people to cope with these twin spectres.²⁰

Sontag described how fantasy provided a distraction from reality whilst simultaneously reflecting the audience’s anxieties.²¹ F. M. Hodges concurred, pointing out that, when the content of science fiction television shows of the 1960s reflected real-world events (for example, when dealing with such issues as the development of nuclear weapons), the message of the program was not always entirely positive.²² Instead, the writers and producers acknowledged and explored their viewers’

14 Carlos Antonio Aguirre Rojas, ‘Popular Culture and the Teaching of History: A Critical Reflection,’ in *Mirror Images: Popular Culture and Education*, ed. Diana Silberman Keller, Zvi Bekerman, Henry A Giroux, and Nicholas Burbules, (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 212.

15 Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, ‘Culture,’ in *Palgrave Advances in Cold War History*, ed. Saki Dockrill and Geraint Hughes, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 240. See also Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, ‘Getting to Know Us. An Introduction to the Study of Popular Culture: What is this stuff that dreams are made of?’ in *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*, ed. Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 1-35.

16 Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 27.

17 Nachbar and Lause, ‘Getting to Know Us,’ 5.

18 Rod Serling Memorial Foundation, ‘Fading into the Twilight Zone?’, <http://www.rodserling.com/tvguide1963.htm>, accessed 15 April 2013.

19 Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 134.

20 Susan Sontag, ‘The Imagination of Disaster,’ in *The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Gregg Rickman, (New York: Limelight Editions, 2004), 112.

21 Ibid.

22 F. M. Hodges, ‘The promised planet: alliances and struggles of gerontocracy in American television science fiction of the

fears and anxieties about these issues and the potential dangers the audience faced in the real world.

Although Sontag was specifically referring to science fiction films, her insights into the role and function of the genre with respect to Cold War concerns were equally applicable to *The Twilight Zone*. For instance, her argument that 'science fiction films can be looked at as thematically central allegory, replete with standard modern attitudes' describes one of the key storytelling devices used in *The Twilight Zone*.²³ The program regularly used allegorical characters and situations, such as a birthday party (in 'The Shelter'); a neighbourhood blackout ('The Monsters are due on Maple Street'); a vindictive informant ('Four O'Clock'); and a nuclear war ('Two' and 'Third from the Sun') to comment on issues pertinent to the time. In these episodes, three key Cold War themes emerged: the threat of nuclear destruction, the external threat, and the fear of the enemy within. By deliberately tapping into the zeitgeist, *The Twilight Zone* provides a space from which to examine and reconsider perceptions of the Cold War.

The threat of nuclear destruction

The use of the atomic bomb in 1945 not only ended World War II, but also ushered in an age in which total annihilation of the human race became a very real possibility.²⁴ In 1961 President Kennedy encouraged families to construct fallout shelters in their homes.²⁵ This request, together with the regular bomb drills conducted in schools, simultaneously empowered American citizens against the threat of nuclear annihilation while reminding them of the danger of complacency.²⁶ This form of Cold War preparedness was explored in *The Twilight Zone*, in an episode first screened in September 1961, 'The Shelter'.²⁷

'The Shelter' opens with a birthday dinner for Dr Stockton, at which his friends good-naturedly tease him about having built a bomb shelter – something they consider unnecessary. Suddenly, a radio announcement says that UFOs have been spotted overhead, and all citizens should retreat to their shelters. When his guests leave, Dr Stockton takes his wife and son down to their shelter. However, his guests soon return with their children and demand to be admitted to the shelter as well. When Dr Stockton refuses, explaining that the shelter can only hold three people, the neighbours fight amongst themselves and eventually use a pipe to beat down the shelter door - rendering it useless. At that moment, the radio declares that the UFO alert was a false alarm, that they were just satellites. Although the neighbours apologise for their behaviour, Dr Stockton recognises the irreparable damage that has been done to their relationships. This episode highlights two dominant socio-psychological attitudes towards the Cold War. While some Americans (such as Dr Stockton) duly constructed a basement shelter as advised, others (such as Dr Stockton's friends and neighbours) engaged in what was known as 'psychic numbing' - an

1960s,' *Aging Male*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2003), 176.

23 Sontag, 'Imagination of Disaster,' 111.

24 Schwartz, 'Family, Gender, and Society,' 406.

25 Christian Appy, 'Gimme Shelters,' *Commonweal*, Vol. 125, No. 1 (1998), 21.

26 Hodges, 'The promised planet,' 175.

27 Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 226

unwillingness or inability to accept the reality of the threat, and the consequent failure to take any steps to prepare for it.²⁸

‘The Shelter’ was inspired by an incident in Schenectady, New York in July 1957. Early one morning, air raid sirens urged residents to evacuate their homes and go to civil defence shelters. However, just one family responded while all of the other residents stayed in bed. Ultimately, it was declared to be a false alarm.²⁹ ‘The Shelter’ takes this premise and explores its implications: what would happen if it was widely known who had - and who had not - built their own shelter? When the safety of one’s family is at risk, how long before hidden prejudices and jealousies surface? How far will we go in times of desperation to protect our family?

The good-natured teasing of Dr Stockton’s party guests about his bomb shelter acknowledges not only that the nuclear threat was so topical as to be routinely discussed in 1960s American middle-class society, but also that not everyone was equally prepared for its possible eventuality. Of the four families portrayed in ‘The Shelter’, the Stocktons were the only ones who had prepared for a nuclear attack, indicating how prevalent ‘psychic numbing’ was during the early 1960s.

By revealing the threat of attack as having been a false alarm, this episode suggests that there is, ultimately, less to fear from the prospect of nuclear annihilation than from a society of individuals who turn on one another in a time of crisis. While Dr Stockton is holed up with his family in their basement shelter, his friends throw off all semblance of civility as they engage in racial abuse and petty infighting in a bid to gain entry to the shelter. By beating down the door, they prove their willingness to sacrifice the lives of everyone in the group - including the Stocktons, whose shelter now offers no protection whatsoever - in the quest for their own survival.³⁰

The sombre message of ‘The Shelter’ is underscored by Serling’s closing monologue in which he says, ‘for civilisation to survive, the human race has to remain civil.’³¹ These sentiments are echoed in ‘The Monsters are due on Maple Street’, in which the residents of a suburban street turn on each other in increasingly sinister ways as their fears of an alien invasion take hold. Also tapping into the ‘Armageddon zeitgeist’ is the episode ‘Third from the Sun’, in which the conversations between characters reflect some of the Cold War anxieties of 1960s America.³² In this episode, William Sturka, a scientist at a bomb-making plant, learns that a nuclear holocaust will occur within the next 48 hours. He and his friend Jerry, who is a test pilot, plan to flee to another planet with their families in an experimental spaceship. Their plan is almost foiled by Carling, a suspicious colleague, but both men manage to overpower Carling and the guards stationed around the spacecraft before successfully escaping. In the spaceship, William and Jerry discuss their destination, a planet 11 million miles away that is populated by ‘people just like us’: a planet called Earth.

28 Beckman, Peter, ‘Living in the Nuclear Age: The Social and Cultural Impact of Nuclear Weapons,’ in *The Nuclear Predicament: Nuclear Weapons in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Peter R. Beckman, Paul W. Crumlish, Michael N. Dobkowski, and Steven P. Lee, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000), 287.

29 Appy, ‘Gimme Shelters,’ 19.

30 The Cold War Museum, *The Cold War Museum Blog*, www.cwmblog.globspot.com.au/2012/06/friday-movie-review-twilight-zones.html, accessed 17 March 2013,

31 ‘The Shelter,’ *The Twilight Zone*, DVD, directed by Lamont Johnson (1961; Los Angeles: CBS DVD, 2007).

32 Arlen Schumer, ‘The Five Themes of *The Twilight Zone*,’ <http://arlen schumer.com/twilight-zone/the-five-themes-of-the-twilight-zone>, accessed 17 March 2013.

Before the family's escape, Sturka's teenage daughter speaks of the sense of foreboding that she and her friends feel at the prospect of nuclear war: 'Everyone I've talked to lately, they've been noticing it, that something's wrong; that something's in the air; that something's going to happen – and everybody's afraid.'³³ Sturka himself is cynical about any advantage his nation would hold over the enemy by striking first, asserting, 'It's a waste of time, let me tell you. We get the first licks, so they can't do much ... instead of losing 50 million [people], we lose only 35'.³⁴ Three issues emerge from this particular line of dialogue. First, the identity of the opposing side, on whom the bomb is about to be unleashed, is not explicitly named, but is instead referred to as 'the enemy' or 'they.' Within the context of this episode, this omission is because the twist in the final frame reveals that the action takes place on another planet. However, another explanation for failing to explicitly name the enemy transcends *The Twilight Zone* and speaks more broadly to trends in televisual representations of Cold War issues in the 1960s. Although science fiction was relatively immune from the intense scrutiny that dogged other genres, in order to avoid potentially exacerbating tensions within the already fraught realm of international relations, it was conventional to either use euphemisms for Communist countries, create fictional names for government agencies (such as THRUSH in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* or KAOS in *Get Smart*), or simply refer to opponents as 'the enemy.'³⁵

Second, by framing the likely result of his country's attack on the enemy as a pyrrhic victory in which 'only' 35 million lives would be lost rather than 50 million, Sturka expressed the sentiment shared by many people at the time of the futility of starting a chain of events guaranteed to deliver nothing short of Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D).³⁶ Indeed, Serling infused several episodes of *The Twilight Zone* with similar messages of ambivalence towards the superpowers' relentless quest for superiority - both here on Earth and in outer space.³⁷ The subtext of these episodes, including 'Third from the Sun,' is that there could never be a winner if the Cold War actually descended into all-out military conflict.³⁸

Finally, the directness with which 'Third from the Sun' challenged the moral superiority of the United States in the Cold War (albeit while couched within the relative safety of science fiction) demonstrates the changing standards of what was acceptable prime-time fare on American television in the 1960s.³⁹ In this episode, for example, an exchange between Sturka and his colleague Carling regarding the former's cynicism about the bomb concludes, 'Are you a defeatist, Sturka? You'd better mind what you say ... and what you think.'⁴⁰ It is doubtful that such an exchange would have been aired just a few years earlier, at the height of the 1950s anti-Communist crusades of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and Senator Joseph McCarthy. Carling's sinister behaviour in this episode - eavesdropping on Sturka's conversations, shadowing his movements and threatening to kill him rather than allow him to escape to safety - are depicted

33 'Third from the Sun,' *The Twilight Zone*, DVD, directed by Richard L. Bare (1960; Los Angeles: CBS DVD, 2007).

34 Ibid.

35 Erin Ihde, *Television* (lecture recording), HIST561 The Cold War and Popular Culture, Armidale, 2013. See also Wesley A. Britton, *Spy Television*, (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 11.

36 Schumer, 'The Five Themes of *The Twilight Zone*.'

37 Ibid.

38 Worland, 'Sign-Posts Up Ahead.'

39 Ibid.

40 'Third from the Sun.'

in 'Third from the Sun' as less congruent with the traditional American values of freedom and liberty than with the actions of totalitarian regimes.

The external threat

In contrast with stereotypical 1950s depictions of America's enemies as being identifiably different in some way, many portrayals of heroes and villains in the 1960s blurred the lines between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys.'⁴¹ While in some cases this served to reinforce a message about the underhanded and unpredictable nature of an enemy that could convincingly disguise itself as 'one of us,' in other instances - such as the 1961 *The Twilight Zone* episode 'Two' - the effect is to emphasise the similarities between us as human beings, and the irrationality of focusing on our differences.

In the opening scenes of 'Two', an episode with minimal dialogue, a young woman dressed in military uniform searches for food in what appears to be a deserted, post-apocalyptic town. She encounters a male soldier from the opposing side who tries to make peace with her. She, however, is distrustful and threatens him with a rifle before an uneasy truce eventually settles between the pair and they explore the abandoned town together. The male soldier later sees her admiring a dress in a shop window, and gives it to her. But, when the woman goes inside a deserted army recruiting office to try the dress on, she notices the wartime propaganda posters on the walls and is reminded of the bitter history between the two sides. She then takes up her rifle and shoots at the man. Later, the woman - now wearing the dress - contritely approaches the man, who is also now wearing civilian clothes, and they walk down the street together as friends.

Although the nationality of neither soldier is explicitly stated in 'Two', given that the only word uttered by the female soldier is 'překrásný' which is the Russian word for 'pretty,' it is evident that the male soldier is American, and the female is Soviet.⁴² Despite both being initially portrayed as distrustful of one another, the female is the most hostile, in line with US Cold War propaganda which emphasised the threat of attack from - and aggressive nature of - the Soviet Union. Although relations between the two characters thaw somewhat as they unite to explore what remains of the abandoned town, it is significant that the female soldier's hatred for her former enemy is rekindled upon seeing old propaganda posters. In particular, a poster bearing the slogan 'The Enemy Meets Our Troops,' with a picture of two enemy soldiers pointing guns at three unarmed soldiers who wear her uniform, provokes her to fire upon the man she had so recently befriended - a reversion to the kind of violence that presumably caused the devastation which now surrounds the pair. This episode criticises Cold War propaganda by inferring that the relentless quest to portray the other side as evil and untrustworthy was as responsible for the escalating tensions as any actual ideological differences between the superpowers.⁴³ Indeed, it is only at the end of the episode, when both soldiers have donned civilian clothing (which suggests that they have shed their military mindsets along with their uniforms and weapons) that the threat of conflict is removed entirely.

41 Britton, *Spy Television*, 10.

42 Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 216.

43 Major and Mitter, 'Culture,' 240.

The key message of this episode is that the external threat is not necessarily as great as others would lead us to believe. As the male soldier points out to the female when she refuses to accept some food he has retrieved for her, 'Eat! The only reason I can see for our fighting is your uniform is a different colour from mine.'⁴⁴ 'Two' can therefore also be seen as a plea for common sense, for the wisdom to see through the bellicose rhetoric that, at that time, sought to convince the population that the differences between the peoples of the East and the West were of greater importance than their similarities. Should this warning not be heeded, the episode implied, society was destined to become the barren post-apocalyptic wasteland depicted in 'Two', in which 'There are no more boundaries, governments or noble causes, and therefore no reason to fight.'⁴⁵ Screened just months before the Cuban Missile Crisis (arguably the lowest point of the Cold War, and the event which prompted the leaders on both sides to take a step back from the brink of all-out war), 'Two' may well have been the earliest fictional depiction of a shift to the era of détente.⁴⁶ Not only does this episode demonstrate how *The Twilight Zone* tapped into the zeitgeist of its time (in this case by playing out a possible end-scenario of the Cold War), its criticism of the 'us against them' narrative that was so characteristic of Cold War hostilities until the early 1960s spoke directly to the 'beliefs, values and desires' of *Twilight Zone* audiences.⁴⁷

The enemy within

A common fear of the Cold War was that of the 'enemy within': the traitor who, despite appearing to hold dear the same values as the rest of his society, is secretly and subversively working for the enemy.⁴⁸ References to the campaigns by HUAC and Senator Joseph McCarthy to uncover the identities of Communists infiltrating American society pervade two specific episodes of *The Twilight Zone*: 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street' and 'Four O'Clock'. 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street' was first broadcast in 1960, and portrays the population's decline into mob-mentality in the face of a suspected alien threat.⁴⁹ 'Four O'Clock', broadcast two years later, tells the story of an informant whose desire to uncover immorality in those around him results in him – and only him – being revealed as the one lacking in morals.⁵⁰ While the former is a plea for the quelling of mob-rule and hysteria, the latter aims to humiliate those who deem themselves worthy of judging others.

The impact on the American entertainment industry of the HUAC hearings was immense. Not only were the Hollywood figures who refused to identify current or former friends, acquaintances or colleagues as having ever been members of the Communist Party blacklisted, but so too were the more than 200 actors who publicly supported these 'unfriendly witnesses'.⁵¹ 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street' is a thinly veiled allegory of this period in Cold War history, as the residents of Maple Street are not only quick to convince themselves that there are monsters in their midst, but are equally eager to suspect those who have exhibited the merest hint of unconventional behaviour – as well as those who defend them – of colluding with the monsters.

44 'Two,' *The Twilight Zone*, DVD, directed by Montgomery Pittman (1962; Los Angeles: CBS DVD, 2007).

45 Ibid.

46 Marilyn Thomas, *The Cold War*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 52. See also Worland, 'Sign-Posts Up Ahead.'

47 Nachbar and Lause, 'Getting to Know Us,' 5.

48 Major and Mitter, 'East is East,' 12.

49 Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 90.

50 Ibid., 275.

51 Schwartz, 'Family, Gender, and Society,' 407-408.

The episode begins with residents of a suburban street witnessing a flash in the sky followed by a total power failure. One man, Pete, decides to walk into town to find out what happened. Meanwhile Tommy, a teenage comic book reader claims that, in stories he has read about spaceships landing from outer space, the only people who really know what is happening are the aliens - who look identical to humans. The residents grow suspicious when one neighbour, Les, is the only one able to start his car. They march to his yard, demanding an explanation. When another neighbour, Steve, defends Les, suspicion shifts to him. Steve pleads with the mob to stop turning on each other, but when footsteps are heard coming down the darkened street, Charlie, the most vocal of the group, grabs a gun and shoots what turns out to be the returning Pete. Charlie is then accused of being the monster and of killing Pete to protect his real identity. Charlie then accuses Tommy, the teenager who had predicted what would happen. Rioting breaks out when lights come back on in some of the other houses. The camera pans back to reveal two men in spacesuits on a nearby hill watching the chaos unfold. One advises the other that it doesn't take much to turn neighbours against each other and become their own worst enemy.

This concluding scene in 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street' reinforces the dichotomy between the internal and external threats of the time; namely, that though the external threat was real (as depicted by the two men in spacesuits), the true threat lay in the neighbours quickly and ruthlessly turning on each other. Serling's concluding narration articulates his response, noting,

...the tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, and prejudices – to be found only in the minds of men.⁵²

The moral divide between those who aggressively and emotionally pursue the suspected monsters, and those who espouse a more rational and dispassionate response to the perceived threat is evidenced in the following exchange which begins with Steve's impassioned plea to end the group's mob mentality:

Steve: (*finger pointed at Charlie*) Stop telling me who's dangerous and who isn't, and who's safe and who's a menace. (*Turns to the crowd*). And you with him, all of you; you're all standing out here, all set to crucify somebody. You're all set to find a scapegoat. All so desperate to point some kind of finger at a neighbour. Believe me, friends, the only thing that's going to happen is that we're going to eat each other up alive.

[*Footsteps are heard coming down the street towards the group*]

Tommy: It's the monster!

[*Don gives Steve a shotgun*]

Steve: What good's a shotgun?

Charlie: No more talk, Steve. You're going to talk us right into a grave. You'd let whatever's out there walk right over us, wouldn't you? Well, some of us won't.

[*Charlie grabs the gun from Steve*]

⁵² 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street,' *The Twilight Zone*, DVD, directed by Ron Winston (1960; Los Angeles: CBS DVD, 2007).

Charlie's hot-headed response to the crisis is to shoot and kill what turns out to be a fellow neighbour. Rather than heed Steve's advice to end the panic, Charlie exacerbates the situation by killing an innocent man. The Cold War parallel is quite clear, with the episode's message being that, to allow the fear of Communism to overtake society would only result in the needless suffering of good people. A society united against a threat, rather than one that allows itself to be divided by fears and prejudices, is more likely to survive in troubled times.

Another of the more obvious Cold War allegories presented in *The Twilight Zone* is 'Four O'Clock', in which the vindictive protagonist is obsessed with exposing 'communists, subversives, [and] thieves'.⁵³ By the 1960s, the relentless pursuit and exposure of communists and subversives - often at the expense of individual rights - that had characterised the HUAC hearings and McCarthyism in general just a decade earlier was now widely viewed as unacceptable and, indeed, un-American.⁵⁴ In 'Four O'Clock', the main character, Oliver Crangle, maintains an extensive collection of detailed dossiers on a large number of people, which he uses to discredit them in the eyes of their employers, families, and friends. To prove that he is right about their immorality, Crangle wills that, at 4.00pm, every evil person will be shrunk to a height of two feet tall. This, he believes, will make it much easier to identify who is good and who is evil. But, when the clock strikes 4.00pm, Crangle discovers that he alone has been shrunk.

This episode alludes to the vehemence with which religious leaders supported the exposure of Communists (by publicly linking 'Americanness' with Christian faith) with a needlepoint tapestry containing the Old Testament idiom, 'An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth' placed behind Crangle's desk.⁵⁵ Not only does this suggest an element of religious fanaticism behind Crangle's obsession, but his increasingly obvious mental instability (which is commented upon by all three characters with whom he interacts) can be read as a harsh criticism of those who, likewise, made it their personal quest to expose communists.

In one of the most telling scenes, an FBI agent visits Crangle's home and learns of his belief in the 'total complete and worldwide conspiracy' in which 'all the communists, subversives [and] thieves [have] banded together' and his plan to solve the problem by reducing 'all the evil people in the world to ... a third their present size'.⁵⁶ The agent's observation that 'Mr Crangle, you don't seem rational to me ... I think you need help'⁵⁷ not only questions the mental health of those members of HUAC who had warned of a global Communist conspiracy, but their malevolence is inferred when Crangle himself is shrunk at the episode's end.⁵⁸

This episode's pointed and unequivocal attack on those who informed, or compelled others to inform on those suspected of communist activity demonstrates the extent to which restrictions on television content - irrespective of genre - eased during the 1960s, enabling the broadcasting of

53 'Four O'Clock,' *The Twilight Zone*, DVD, directed by Lamont Johnson (1962; Los Angeles: CBS DVD, 2007).

54 Thomas Aiello, 'Constructing "Godless Communism": Religion, Politics, and Popular Culture, 1954-1960,' *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2005), http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2005/aiello.htm, accessed 12 March 2013.

55 Ibid.

56 'Four O'Clock.'

57 Ibid.

58 Aiello, 'Constructing "Godless Communism"'

incisive and critical statements on the Cold War, and the questionable behaviours that had been perpetrated in its name.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Rod Serling and his fellow writers populated *The Twilight Zone* with easily identifiable and relatable characters, such as doctors, housewives, scientists, and teachers - in other words, 'ordinary' Americans. As a result, whenever the program referenced the nuclear threat, mass hysteria, or a perceived enemy, it was both reflecting and speaking directly to the preoccupations, fears and anxieties of its audience.⁶⁰ Three factors contributed to the program's ability to do this. First, the timing of the inception of *The Twilight Zone* was critical. Had the program been devised just a decade earlier, it would have been much more difficult to imbue episodes with any criticism - oblique or otherwise - of the official Cold War narrative. Second, the comparatively little scrutiny by censors over the content of science fiction television during the years of *The Twilight Zone's* original run played into Serling's hands. The politically conscious writer discovered in the fantasy genre a means by which he would be relatively free to address issues of contemporary significance in a seemingly innocuous format - thereby avoiding the censorship that he believed had devalued his early work in television drama.⁶¹ However, neither of these factors would have mattered had *The Twilight Zone* not connected with and reflected the 'beliefs, values and desires' of its viewers.⁶² The popularity of the program throughout its five-season run attests to fact that the nature of the issues dealt with - and the manner in which this was done - aligned strongly with the views of its audience.

As a product of Cold War-era popular culture, *The Twilight Zone* tapped into the zeitgeist of the early 1960s by acknowledging the very real threat of nuclear destruction, and depicting the population's varied responses to it. The episodes 'The Shelter' and 'Third from the Sun' acknowledge the existence of the nuclear threat while addressing particular aspects of it. Whereas 'The Shelter' is a plea for the populace to maintain a sense of decency and respect for each other in times of crisis, arguing that these cornerstones of civilised society are never more crucial than when danger is imminent, 'Third from the Sun' challenges the official narrative about the threat. Not only does this episode explicitly question the point of a conflict that would ultimately cause the loss of more lives than it would save, it also criticises the perceived abandonment of traditional American values by figures of authority in their quest to uncover suspected subversives. Further, *The Twilight Zone* directly challenged the validity and effect of Cold War propaganda. The episode 'Two' suggests that depicting the external threat as being greater and more dangerous than it actually was served to inflame tensions and played a role in escalating the path towards potential destruction. Finally, the program questioned the ethics (and, indeed, sanity) of the relentless quest to expose the suspected enemy within. The underlying message of both 'The Monsters are due on Maple Street' and 'Four O'Clock' is that a society obsessed with identifying its internal enemies to the extent that it descends into violence and hysteria not only loses perspective on what the real threat is, but loses sight of the very values it claims to hold dear. *The Twilight Zone* not only reflected its audience's fears, anxieties and concerns about the Cold War, but it suggested that beneath American society's veneer of affluence, order and cohesion, there existed vulnerabilities

59 Worland, 'Sign-Posts Up Ahead.' See also Major and Mitter, 'Culture,' 255.

60 Bruce Bawer, 'The Other Sixties', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), 81.

61 The Golden Age: History of Sci-Fi & The Future, 'The Twilight Zone.'

62 Nachbar and Lause, 'Getting to Know Us,' 5.

and flaws that, if left unattended - particularly within the context of fear and suspicion engendered by the Cold War - posed an additional (perhaps even greater) threat to the survival of the American way of life.
