

GENDER AND PARENTING IN THE
WORLDS OF *ALIEN* AND *BLADE*
RUNNER

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GENDER AND PARENTING IN THE WORLDS OF *ALIEN* AND *BLADE RUNNER*

A Feminist Analysis

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to my grandmothers, Lorraine Nancy Nuzzo DiGioia and Winifred Bridget Gallagher Cresman, for their unconditional love; to Dr Aura Zahan, who ordered the scan that saved my life; and to the women who are my friends. Thank you for supporting me.

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>About the Author</i>	xiii
1. Gender, Childbirth and Parenting in Science Fiction Films and Gender in Horror Films	1
2. More Human than Human: <i>Blade Runner 2049</i>	11
3. 'We Were So Wrong': The Perversion of Male Creation. Motherhood, Fatherhood and Birth in Recent Incarnations of the <i>Alien</i> Series	31
4. 'You've Never Seen a Miracle': Birth and Parenthood in <i>Blade Runner 2049</i>	53
5. 'I Can't Lie To You About Your Chances, But... You Have My Sympathies.'	69
6. Conclusion	89
<i>Bibliography</i>	91
<i>Index</i>	119

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PREFACE

I sat, numb, in the oncologist's office. I had just been told there were several masses in my chest and that the medical team was not quite sure what they were. The masses, apparently, were very weird. My mind immediately went to pop culture. 'Are you sure it isn't a xenomorph?' I asked. 'No', the doctor replied. 'This is not *Prometheus III*'. That was the moment at which the idea for this volume hatched in my mind.

This book is a comparative, gendered analysis study of Ridley Scott's contributions to the genre of science fiction cinema. This book will also tie into my previous research (and previous Emerald publication) *Childbirth and Parenting in Horror Texts: The Marginalized and the Monstrous*. This previous book focussed on motherhood, an issue that impacts all women who live under patriarchy. Many of the texts that I am studying are new, so this book will add to the literature on Scott, sci-fi and feminism. My fields of women's studies and gender studies have established that, for women, and other marginalised groups, the personal is political: personal experiences are the result of social structures or inequality (Hanisch, 2006), allowing me to use personal accounts outside a solely autoethnographic context, specifically a short chapter reflecting on my cancer treatment and the many parallels between the disease, the treatment and the body shock horror texts examined in this volume.

The book will focus on imagined communities, the objectification of women (both real and 'androids' or holograms) and the depictions of birth, motherhood and fatherhood in recent Ridley Scott science fiction/horror texts, building upon the previous monograph mentioned above. I am fortunate enough to be friends with a special effects artist who worked on *Prometheus*, who has given me permission to publish their insights anonymously. I will include conversations with this artist in this book, as many of the aliens in *Prometheus* have been crafted to resemble variations on the vagina dentata, a topic of academic research to which I dedicated an entire chapter of *Childbirth and Parenting in Horror Text*. In lieu of a strictly psychoanalytic approach (as anything based on Freud is built on quicksand), I instead argue that the vagina dentata is an evolutionary fear that has been learned, due to the

prevalence of the notion of the vagina dentata in societies around the globe (Rees, 2015).

The first chapter, ‘Gender, Childbirth, and Parenting in Science Fiction Films and Gender in Horror Films’, provides the necessary theoretical framework and background for the book. I define the *Blade Runner* films as science fiction works with elements of horror (from the corporeal to the existential) and the *Alien* universe as a collection of horror texts. This is because, at their core, the films, video games, novels and various other ephemera that make up the *Alien* universe all feature discovery, confirmation, confrontation and a supernatural dread of the unknown. While science fiction elements are certainly present within this universe, horror is not limited to the supernatural: it can also be biological, as the alien is in this universe. ‘Science fiction’ as a term is, like some science fiction characters themselves, nebulous, but can generally be used to describe fiction that features extrapolated science or fictitious use of scientific possibilities (Sobchack, 2001), all of which feature in the *Blade Runner* universe. This chapter will describe previous work on gender, childbirth and parenting in horror and in science fiction (Clark, 2011; Corea, 2007; Creed, 1993; Ewing & Decker, 2017; Freeland, 2018; George, 2013; Grant, 2015; Noonan, 2015; Picart, 2004), which I will then link to *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant* in later chapters.

The second chapter, ‘More Human Than Human: *Blade Runner 2049*’, focusses on feminist analysis of gender and sex in *Blade Runner 2049*. I argue that gender, like humanity in *Blade Runner 2049*, is nothing but a social construct. Additionally, I suggest that *Blade Runner 2049* is one in a long succession of science fiction films that reinforce patriarchal myths about gender and power (Hobby, 2000). *Blade Runner* arguably bleeds over into the cyberpunk realm as well (Holland, 1995; Landsberg, 1995). Because so many female replicants in both the original *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* are male playthings of various sorts, I will also use feminist research on the current use, and future production, of female sex robots to frame my argument (Mackenzie, 2018; Richardson, 2015). Finally, I make use of theories about feminism and tech, beginning with Haraway (1991a) before moving on to more contemporary sources (Berg, 2019; Harari, 2016).

The third chapter, “‘We were so wrong’: the perversion of male creation. Motherhood, fatherhood and birth in *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant*’ focusses on *Alien*, *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant*. I show how the female hero in each of these texts has shifted from a place of (near) gender equality (such as in *Alien*) to one where women lack agency and are dismembered or slaughtered nude, solely to satisfy the male gaze. This chapter will include a visual effect creator’s insight into why the extraterrestrial life forms discovered

by the crew in *Prometheus* often look vaginal, drawing upon my previous work on the vagina dentata and why men fear them, and the work of feminist scholars of horror (Creed, 1993; Freeland, 2018). This chapter also updates Jordanova's (1989) theory of mad scientist 'bad dads'.

The fourth chapter, "'You've never seen a miracle': Birth in *Blade Runner 2049*" focusses on birth in *Blade Runner 2049*, which revolves around events stemming from a synthetic replicant giving birth. This birth is viewed as either monstrous ('She was a replicant. Pregnant. This breaks the world, K. Do you know what that means?' (Villeneuve, 2017)) or miraculous ('You newer models are happy scraping the shit... because you've never seen a miracle' (Villeneuve, 2017)) in the film universe. Those involved with law and order in this future society view the birth of a human from a replicant as an abomination that needs to be concealed, whereas those who are on the fringes of society, or subjugated by those in power, view it as miraculous. Notably, the individual with the most power and privilege within *Blade Runner 2049*, Niander Wallace, is a 'bad dad' mad scientist, who perversely uses birth as a means to attain his own goals, which are (1) to prove his supremacy over Tyrell (as Tyrell's replicants reproduce naturally, and Wallace's cannot); (2) to use reproduction in replicants to support interstellar colonisation¹ and (3) profit. This chapter will briefly touch upon scientific research into artificial wombs (Bulletti, 2011; Gelfand & Shook, 2006; Simonstein, 2006), before utilising academic work on roboethics (Siciliano & Khatib, 2016; Veruggio, Operto, & Bekey, 2016) and on robots bearing and raising children (Andries et al., 2018; Batliner et al., 2004; Beran et al., 2011; Robins et al., 2005). The final chapter reflects upon how, in Scott's future, the outlook for women is bleak. I will then ruminate on how this reflects our current patriarchal society.

The fifth and final chapter, 'I can't lie to you about your chances, but... you have my sympathies', is an autoethnography used to explore my own experiences of cancer, infertility and gender-based medical treatment. Here, I connect my real-world experiences with the fictional world of *Alien*. I found reading the experiences of other individuals who had undergone cancer treatment to be extremely beneficial. I hope that this chapter assists others, as reading the testaments of Lorde (1980) and Miller (2014) eased my own burdens and pain.

During the writing of this volume, COVID-19 spread across the world. Because I am extremely clinically vulnerable and COVID shielded due to my

¹'That barren pasture. Empty, and salted. The dead space between the stars. Right here. And this is the seed that we must change for Heaven. I cannot breed them. So help me, I have tried. We need more Replicants than can ever be assembled. Millions, so we can be trillions more. We could storm Eden and retake her' (Villeneuve, 2017).

recent blood cancer diagnoses and chronic cardiac issues from chemotherapy treatment, I have been isolated from society at large. I could not fly home for my grandmother's funeral. The government where I live (the United Kingdom) and a government where I hold citizenship (the United States) proved time and time again that capital was more important than human life. While I am postulating theories as to what happens in these futuristic fictional worlds, in some ways, we are already living in them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda DiGioia is a PhD student at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. Amanda's first monograph, *Childbirth and Parenting in Horror Texts: The Marginalized and the Monstrous*, was published in 2017 by Emerald Publishing. Amanda's second monograph, *Duelling, the Russian Cultural Imagination, and Masculinity in Crisis*, was published in 2020 by Routledge.

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One can [di]verge from the standard form, but one must always retain their humanity, or be lost to the Men of Iron and their ways. *Text of the Oiled Cog*, v.12

Kasedo Games, 2018, *Warhammer 40,000: Mechanicus*.

