

Reading response sf 1

Literature



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Literature 5 June Alien. Science Fiction. Reading Response Science fiction films are difficult to define because they can borrow from other genres, namely fantasy and horror. Unlike science fiction literature, which expresses the author's viewpoint and contains a rational appeal, films make a strong impact on the viewer because they address the first signal system, namely image and sound (Cornea 6). In this way, films appeal to the viewer's subconscious. Thus, science fiction films can help uncover the hidden tendencies, uncanny fears, and phobias (Cornea 6). In order to create the emotional impact and appeal to the unperceived fears film directors use the technique of disrupting "realism and by extension the way in which we might view reality" (Cornea 7). Among traditional beliefs in the stability of the world order is the views on the role of women in society. As soon as women were introduced into the science fiction genre, they came to represent the 'alien' element as opposed to the male-dominated reality (Roberts 79). Yet, even the female protagonists could embody the traditional human values and roles. However, the science fiction can incorporate the elements of horror if the film disrupts the traditional framework associated with biological roles of gender the way Alien by Ridley Scott redefines them in procreative process.

At first glance, the movie appears to be based on the gender conflict of female versus male. The former is represented by Ripley as the extreme version of woman and the latter is portrayed by the male characters and the beast itself since its gender is not clearly defined (Roberts 80). However, on closer inspection the encoding of gender in the movie lies in the heart of the conflict of two gender roles linked to the two antagonistic procreative systems: natural or human, which includes moral and functional limitations, <https://assignbuster.com/reading-response-sf-1/>

and artificial or mechanical, which is devoid of any restrictions or moral norms. In this view, the movie is based on the “female” symbols. The first of such symbols is the spacecraft. The outline of the alien spacecraft reminds of the womb, it represents the “artificial”, “unnatural” way of reproduction. This function is mirrored by the company that sends the astronauts on the dangerous mission in order to get the sample of the alien life. Robot Ash is the product of this “mechanic” procreative function of the company because his function is to protect the beast on its way to Earth and he follows the order at the cost of the crew’s lives. Ash admires the beast as the “perfect organism” whose “structural perfection is matched only by its hostility” (Alien). The character’s views reflect the assumption that scientific progress could equal the natural or biological force. Ash says: “I admire its purity. A survivor... unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality” (Alien). What the robot admires is the ability of the beast to uncontrollably reproduce, the function traditionally associated with female characters but reinvented in the movie to create the horror effect. Another female symbol in the movie is the computer called ‘Mother’ that performs the function of protecting associated with female gender. The third female symbol is Ripley, who embodies the ‘natural’ procreative function that takes the form of protecting the weak and the helpless.

In this view, Alien addresses the subconscious fear of gender transformation, the disruption of traditional distribution of gender roles and the destruction of the biological integrity of human beings. The integrity is destroyed figuratively because the beast can impregnate male characters and they ‘give birth’ and literally because the alien offspring is ‘born’ bursting through the torso of people. The film creates an emotional response because it dwells

on the fear of the undetermined gender roles. Only towards the end of the film Ripley takes off the spacewalking suit and gets clear gender identification. In the same scene the alien's shape remind of the phallus marking the beast's ' male' role. As soon as their gender roles become defined Ripley succeeds at blasting the alien into the open space. Thus, the film uses the fear of a life without boundaries, without framework and the familiar encoding of gender. Distortion of gender in the movie undermines the world order and blurs the boundaries between horror and science fiction.

Works Cited

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Cornea, Christine. Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality. Edinburgh University Press, 2007. Print.

Roberts, Adam. Science Fiction (The New Critical Idiom). Routledge, 2000. Print.