

## Alien (1979)

### Repression

What makes Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien* so disturbing and frightening are its complex sexual Freudian themes of birth and death, and the repressed fears of our own mother containing sadistic agendas of her own. Judith Newton's ideological reading of *Alien* looks at the monster as the male's unconscious fear of female sexuality and the unconscious slowly become repressed which makes the fears appear unnoticed and harder to point out. In the readings of *Alien* and the *Monstrous-Feminine*, Barbara Creed describes much sexual imagery that are contained within the visuals of the story and how sexual repression is slowly brewing in the audience's self-conscious right from the beginning of the story.

As the film opens, it shows crew members awakening from months of being contained in a form of hyper sleep. All seven of these crew members who are both male and female have not experienced any form of sexual intimacy for long periods of time, and so this idea of repression is already there within the mind of the viewer. Sex, sleep, and food are three of the most common drives that human's beings need in order to survive. The crew members in *Alien* already had too much sleep as it is, and eat several times in the film. Ironically it's the iconic

dinner sequence in which Parker suggests to Lambert, “Right now I’m thinking about food, but I’d rather be eating something else.”

If you are familiar with the artwork of H.R. Giger, many of his drawings are very sexual and organic by nature and usually suggest a sexual act of either reproducing or giving birth. Since he was one of the main art designers of the film *Alien*, he brings his artistic style to the story, which creates a much more frightening psychological look on birth and death and sex and reproducing. In Barbara Creed’s readings she points out many of Giger’s sexual overtones being used throughout the film and how these overtones can be thought of as a form of human psychoanalysis. These sexual characteristics are disguised within the monster to represent its purpose to kill, which is its need to keep reproducing in order for its organism to survive. Barbara describes how the unknown spaceship that is being investigated is shaped like a horseshoe, with its curved sides suggesting the spreading of two long female legs. The hole that Kane discovers looks more like a toothed vaginal opening, and when Cain decides to lower himself inside, the insides look like the organic material of a human entering the inside of a vagina.

The film also suggests the psychoanalysis themes of Sigmund Freud and of every child being curious on the sexual origins of their own parents. When Kane descends within the hole of the ship, it’s as if the astronauts are exploring the womb of their own mother, as when Kane discovers the chamber of eggs that are hatching within the womb. In many ways Kane is the only character that is curious enough to explore his own sexual repression, as he decides to investigate the insides of the ship which unfortunately leads to him being impregnated by one of the egg huggers; and will eventually become one of them. You have the hole within the alien ship that looks more like a vagina, the egg hugger which attaches itself to the face of the victim, which

can symbolically look at as a form of intercourse, the iconic birth scene during dinner, the seven astronauts awaking from their pods which suggest a form of re-birth, and the Nostromo ship being controlled by an all powerful computer system called 'Mother'.

The aggressive and violent 'mother' figure within the story is another one of the major themes that makes the film so disturbing. Similar to the frightening works of Alfred Hitchcock, your mother is always the aggressive parental figure within your life. She is the dominant figure that tries to repress your sexual desires, by telling you that sex is sinful, women are evil and lustful thoughts are harmful to your mind and body; which can lead many to unnaturally repress their feelings and impulses. Barbara Creed suggests that when the astronauts try to liberate themselves from their strict domineering mother who watches every move that they make, she suddenly becomes hostile towards them and will do whatever she can to destroy the children who disobey them. The archaic mother is presented in most horror films, and if they have the power to create you and give you life, they have the power to take it back and give you death.

Giving birth is something that is looked at as a natural, beautiful process that occurs in nature. So when the idea of giving birth becomes unnatural and a horrific scene of horror and death, it seems to scare audiences on a more personal psychological level. Some of the most frightening films are when our bodies are infected or taken by an unknown force that seems to be hostile and violent towards ourselves and others. For instance, films like *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Shining*, *The Thing*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and the body horror films of David Cronenberg all involve humans who are in a way impregnated or infected by either a violent spiritual or scientific force that eventually changes who they are and the person they originally were. These types of unconscious 'Freudian slips' are the types of

subtle things that sneak through the unconscious of the viewer, and ultimately are the things that scare them.

Vivian Sobchack discusses how repressed female sexuality in the in the male dominated science-fiction genre is more an ideology on the insecurities and fears of men's sexuality in society. Most women that are written for a science fiction story are usually one dimensional over exaggerated sexual objects that reflect most men's fantasies and desires, like in Fred Wilcox's film Forbidden Planet. Another reason for why these over exaggerated sexual representations of females are created are to create biological urges between the male character's which not only can create friction between the men, but tend to have them lose focus on their main objective within the context of the story.

Ellen Ripley was one of the first 'manly' women character's in a male dominated genre, in which she drained out any female sexual traits within her character and played rough like all the other boys. The climax of the film is probably one of the most unsettling scenes in the film because that is where she finally decides to expose her female sexuality that she greatly repressed throughout the story. In this scene she supposedly feels safe and alone, in which she starts to relax and undress. These types of scenes are what scares people the most, especially females, because our worst fears are being watched and attacked at are most personal and vulnerable state. These types of fears are why the shower scene in Psycho became one of the most iconic and scariest moments in film history; and why Ridley Scott's Alien is considered the one of the greatest and scariest science fiction films of all time.