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GENDER IN 21ST CENTURY SF CINEMA: 50 TITLES

Sara Martín Alegre (ed.)



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Preface. Gender in 21ST Century SF Cinema, an Overview

The e-book here offered is the product of the activities carried out in the elective MA course 'Gender Studies: New Sexualities/New Textualities', which I have taught in the Spring semester of the academic year 2018-19, within the MA in English Studies of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. A series of previous projects produced with students¹ convinced me of the suitability of the idea I had for this specific course: publishing a collective volume focused on how gender is represented in current 21st century Anglophone cinema.

Since the current focus of my research is science fiction, I have selected 50 English-language SF films from the abundant production of recent years, beginning with Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001) and ending with Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018). The selection does favour Hollywood films, though it includes as well diverse American independent films, co-productions with other countries, and a handful of foreign films (from UK, Australia, and France). Also, one TV movie, *Black Mirror's San Junipero*, as a nod to acknowledging the high quality of current TV production. All the 50 films use English as their only or their main language, simply because we have studied them within a degree in English Studies and the selection depends on this circumstance.

The factsheets here presented follow a chronological order, established in the hopes that my students and I would be able to show the positive evolution of gender representation in the 21st century. As the reader will see, this evolution has failed to materialize though, hopefully, it will gain momentum soon enough. The selection, I grant, is quite personal and has eschewed, for instance, all superhero movies for two reasons: I believe that they deserve a separate volume, and I'd rather leave their exploration in the hands of less prejudiced researchers. Superhero films are not all at my cup of tea, not only for their repetitive fantasies of post-human empowerment but also because they take themselves too seriously (with the honourable exception of *Deadpool* and *Thor: Ragnarok*). This does not mean that I personally endorse all the 50 films discussed with my students, just part of the list. The students have, in any case, expressed their own opinions freely.

In principle, this volume supposes that the factsheets will be read only after the reader has seen the corresponding film. This is not a guide to introduce readers to SF cinema based on reviews, but a volume intended to highlight any gender-related questions that the 50 films raise, wittingly or unwittingly. We have not avoided the spoilers as it would make no sense to discuss gender without a full awareness of how each movie represents it. I have taught my students that the label Gender Studies refers to all aspects of gender, not only to women, which is why they refer also to masculinity and to LGBTBI+ issues.

This is a feminist book, but it is, above all, an anti-patriarchal volume written to raise general awareness about the need for make room for more variety on the screen. It might seem that SF cinema, like SF print fiction, should lead the way, being set in a future which we all assume will be post-patriarchal (or simply post-sexist). Actually, this is not the case at all simply because it is totally over-optimistic to suppose that cinema's patriarchal structure of production can offer an anti-patriarchal message. It is obvious that cinema (of any type) must incorporate more women of all kinds and LGBTBI+ persons to the ranks of the directors and the screen writers, and that those already in key positions (I was truly surprised to see that there are many women producers) must do more to improve gender representation.

¹ See: Sara Martín Alegre (ed.), *Reading SF Short Fiction: 50 Titles* (2016), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/163528>; *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View* (2015, 2018), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/129180>; *Charming and Bewitching: Considering the Harry Potter Series* (2014) <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/122987> and *Addictive and Wonderful: The Experience of Reading the Harry Potter Series* (2014), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/118225>.

As the reviews quoted by the students show, in any case, since 2001 and particularly since the beginnings of the recent #MeToo movement, in 2017, the impatience generated by stereotyped gender representation has been growing. Some pro-feminist directors and writers are responding to that demand but what is needed, I would insist, is opening up cinema to other persons and other ways of narrating stories. In fact, current print SF in English, with its long list of first-rank authors who are not white, heterosexual, men, can offer a splendid source of innovation in gender representation. Adaptation, I would say, is the key to the necessary transformation of SF cinema, regardless of its budget and the screen it is made for.

Barcelona, June 2019

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<http://gent.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>

<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>, *The Joys of Teaching Literature*

A.I. Artificial Intelligence (2001)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay by: Steven Spielberg, Ian Watson (screen story), Brian Aldiss (short story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long")

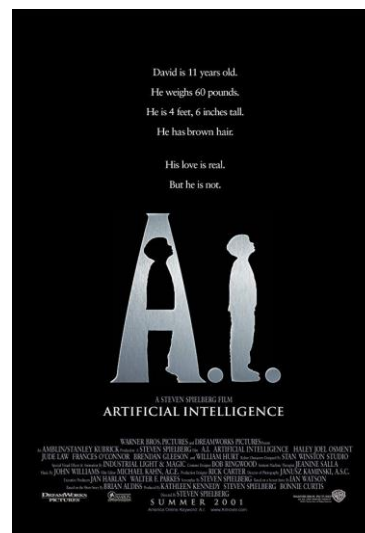
Producer(s): Kathleen Kennedy, Steven Spielberg, Bonnie Curtis

Main performers (credits order): Haley Joel Osment (David), Jude Law (Gigolo Joe), Frances O'Connor (Monica Swinton), Brendan Gleeson (Lord Johnson-Johnson), Sam Robards (Henry Swinton), William Hurt (Professor Allen Hobby), Jake Thomas (Martin Swinton)

Company: Amblin Entertainment, Stanley Kubrick Productions, Warner Bros.

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 26'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *D.A.R.Y.L.* (1985)
- *Short Circuit* (1986)
- *Bicentennial Man* (1999)
- *I, Robot* (2004)
- *Robot and Frank* (2012)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscar) 2002 (nominee)

Best Music, Original Score: John Williams

Best Effects, Visual Effects: Dennis Muren, Scott Farrar, Stan Winston, Michael Lantieri

Golden Globes 2002 (nominee)

Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture: Jude Law

Best Director - Motion Picture: Steven Spielberg

Best Original Score - Motion Picture: John Williams

BAFTA Awards 2002 (nominee)

Best Achievement in Special Visual Effects: Dennis Muren, Scott Farrar, Michael Lantieri

REASONS TO SEE A.I. Artificial Intelligence

- *A.I.* was first developed by Stanley Kubrick as producer-director. He passed eventually the project to Steven Spielberg, but the film was only made after Kubrick's death in 1999. The blend of Spielberg's sensitivity and Kubrick's strong vision of the future is evident from beginning to end.
- It takes a different approach to the SF representation of robotics by integrating the story of Pinocchio into its plot.

- The child actor Haley Joel Osment, famous for *The Sixth Sense* (1999), gives an outstanding performance as David.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Global disasters have reduced the human population in the 22nd century. Reproduction is limited and only the ones who have a licence can have children. Therefore, to maintain human society, human-like androids (disparagingly known as *mechas*) have been manufactured.

David, who looks like a young boy, becomes the first android ever programmed to feel human emotion. Later, he is adopted by a couple whose son, Martin, is in a coma. An emotional bond is created between the mother, Monica, and David. Yet, Martin's miraculous recovery changes everything. Jealousy flashes between him and David over their mother's love. Henry, their father, wants David to be returned to the factory where he was built, to be destroyed. Monica, unable to deal with this loss, abandons instead David in the woods to save his life.

Once alone, David meets another android, Gigolo Joe, who helps him on his quest to become a 'real boy' so that he can be loved by his mother. In the meantime, the collapse of Earth progresses.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In "Love and Death in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*", James Naremore claims that "As in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), (...) Father isn't simply an imaginary danger but a real one—a deadly threat who needs to be expunged so that the son can fulfil his romance with Mother" (2005: online). Besides the countless questions raised by the presence of child robots, the movie fails to criticise fatherhood indeed, solely focusing on David's 'programmed' Oedipus complex, villainising motherhood in addition.

Although his unconditional love for his adoptive mother Monica stretches over most of the plot, the mass production of android children like David and of the gynoids called Darlene proposes a more problematic implicit discourse. These machines are programmed to love their adoptive parents, the persons who activate them in the first place. But, as it is conveyed in the movie, a child robot's eternal love might not always be returned (as it happens to David). Thus, their inbuilt fidelity is open to be abused by uncaring parents. Apart from the child android's vulnerability to parental mistreatment, s/he might even become a victim of sexual abuse in other adult hands.

The ethical questions about the vicious exploitation of sex robots (or sexbots) have been around for a while. Whether the proliferation of these robots will truly encourage abuse, rape, and paedophilia or not is still unknown, but the booming industry of the child sex dolls and its normalisation have been considered a danger on various platforms. The future of sex robot production is touched upon in science fiction movies such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and its sequel *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), or *Ex-Machina* (2014). Spielberg's *A.I.* handles it from a different perspective by focusing partly on a male prostitute android (Jude Law), a *mecha* programmed to satisfy female customers. Nevertheless, despite this innovative outlook, the movie falls short of offering a clear critique of the (sexual) abuse of androids, preferring to focus on David's sentimental Oedipal issues.

SEE: Naremore, James. "Love and Death in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*". *Michigan Quarterly Review* XLIV. 2 (Spring 2005): online. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0044.210>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- David's secretly cutting a lock of Monica's hair
- David and Monica sleeping side-by-side forever
- **David's meeting his creator/father**

David goes through many dangerous adventures with Gigolo Joe during his quest to become 'a real boy.' However, when he eventually ends up in the robotic institution, Cybertronics, where he has been produced, what he finds is not what he wishes for. Professor Hobby, who has created David in the image of his deceased son (also called David), tells the disappointed boy that his experience is only a part of a test to have him prove that a robot can love unconditionally and will do anything to be loved back.

Seen as a threat by his adoptive father, who wants to return him to Cybertronics to be destroyed, David is further subjected to various risky situations and psychological mistreatment by his creator/father Professor Hobby. In addition to the adoptive father's incomprehensible dislike of David, Professor Hobby's wish to create a boy that will love his parent forever raises questions about his relationship with his deceased son. His emphasis on eternal robotic love suggests an actual lack of love between him and his late son. It might even be argued that by creating an android in David's own image, assuring him that he is a real boy only to torture him psychologically and tell him the truth about his programming, the father appears to be taking revenge against his son.

A.I.'s focus on fatherhood is thematically close to other movies which Spielberg has directed including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *E.T.* (1982), the *Indiana Jones* franchise or produced (such as J.J. Abram's *Super 8* [2011]). In *A.I.*, Spielberg carries the tense relationship between the father and son into the future, connecting it with the fall of human civilization. The mother, in contrast, is idealised despite her problematic abandonment of the child robot.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Anthony Oliver Scott, "Do Androids Long for Mum?", *The New York Times* 29 June 2001.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/29/movies/film-review-do-androids-long-for-mom.html>

The very end somehow fuses the cathartic comfort of infantile wish fulfilment –the dream that the first perfect love whose loss we experience as the fall from Eden might be restored– with a feeling almost too terrible to acknowledge or to name. Refusing to cuddle us or lull us into easy sleep, Mr. Spielberg locates the unspoken moral of all our fairy tales. To be real is to be mortal; to be human is to love, to dream and to perish.

Charles Taylor, "Artificial Maturity", *Salon* 29 June 2001.

https://www.salon.com/2001/06/29/artificial_intelligence_2/

When the film takes a turn and Monica, unable to divide her love between David and her real son, abandons David and Teddy, it's nearly impossible to know how to react. Essentially, we're watching a screaming, confused child abandoned in the forest by his 'mother'. While Spielberg's distance keeps the scene from being as manipulative as it might be, it's distressing to watch and not be able to fully sympathise with either character (or to feel divided against ourselves as we might be if we were made to sympathise with both).

Roger Ebert, *RogerEbert.com* 7 July 2011.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-ai-artificial-intelligence-2001>

Of course, we must ask in what sense Monica is really there (at the end of the film). The filmmaker Jamie Stuart informs me she is not there at all; that an illusion has merely been implanted in David's mind, and that the concluding scenes take place entirely within David's point of view. Having downloaded all of David's memories and knowledge, the new *mechas* have no further use for him, but provide him a final day of satisfaction before terminating him. At the end, when we are told he is dreaming, that is only David's impression. Earlier in the film, it was established that he could not sleep or therefore dream.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0212720>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.I._Artificial_Intelligence
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/artificial-intelligence-ai>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ai_artificial_intelligence

Donnie Darko (2001)

CREW & CAST

Director: Richard Kelly

Screenplay by: Richard Kelly

Producer: Adam Fields, Nancy Juvonen, Sean Mc Kittrick

Main performers (credits order): Jake Gyllenhaal (Donnie Darko), Holmes Osborne (Eddie Darko), Maggie Gyllenhaal (Elizabeth Darko), Daveigh Chase (Samantha Darko), Mary McDonnell (Rose Darko), James Duval (Frank), Arthur Taxier (Dr. Fisher), Patrick Swayze (Jim Cunningham)

Company: Flower Films, Pandora Cinema, Newmarket Films

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 53'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Donnie Darko: Director's Cut* (2004)
- *S. Darko* (2009), sequel
- *Donnie Darko: Deus Ex Machina – The Philosophy of Donnie Darko* (2016), making of documentary
- *The Truman Show* (1998)
- *Requiem for a Dream* (2000)
- *Memento* (2000)
- *The Machinist* (2004)
- *The Butterfly Effect* (2004)
- *Primer* (2004)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA 2002 (winner)

Young Filmmaker's Showcase: Richard Kelly

Amsterdam Fantastic Film Festival 2002 (winner)

Silver Scream Award: Richard Kelly

Film Independent Spirit Awards 2002 (nominee)

Best First Feature, Best First Screenplay: Richard Kelly

Best Male Lead: Jake Gyllenhaal

REASONS TO SEE *Donnie Darko*

- It is an excellent mind-puzzle, very hard to solve (if it can be solved at all).
- Frank, the six-foot-tall rabbit that always accompanies Donnie, which became a pop culture icon.
- Jake Gyllenhaal's great performance as Donnie, his breakthrough role.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

1988, election year. Donnie Darko is a member of a typical American family. They have a conventional house in the suburb, he is plagued by the usual teenager problems: parties, sex, school... The film starts with Donnie waking up in the middle of a road at the top of a hill, in his pyjamas. He appears not to know exactly what he was doing up there but, rather than look worried, Donnie seems happy riding his bike back home.

He starts next seeing a sinister gigantic rabbit that appears mostly at night, and which seems to be the cause of Donnie's somnambulism, strange behaviour, and also of the odd events affecting the area. Could the rabbit be a hallucination caused by Donnie's schizophrenic illness? Frank, the rabbit, claims to be instead a kind of prophet. He directs Donnie to discover the date of the world's end (28 days away) and a wormhole to save his loved ones. But for this, he must sacrifice himself: the only way to save the others is in his hands.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

As Joe Donnelly reports in his review of *Donnie Darko* (2001, see below), when someone asked Jake Gyllenhaal "How would you describe this movie or convince friends to go see it?", the actor replied "I would say the mere fact that I don't know what the hell it's about is the exact reason why I'd go see it". This ambiguity is also evident in relation to the subtle gender issues that are woven into the main plot.

Starting with the rabbit, only when we learn that this animal is called Frank do we understand that it is a male –though the truth is that rabbit's huge stature (six-foot-tall) and sinister look suggests to our imagination that it cannot be a female. Also, the intimate way in which he connects with teen Donnie's troubled masculinity.

Elizabeth, Donnie's elder sister, appears in a scene during a family supper fighting against typical gender roles, stressing that she won't rely on a man's money ever. Yet, she also becomes an object of sexual desire for Donnie. She embodies, then, a classic contradiction: while director and screenwriter Richard Kelly shows us how she is trying oppose what is expected from her in a patriarchal society (to be the angel in the house), she becomes at the same time the mirror of her brother's sexual desire (as an object rather than a subject).

There are, besides, in the movie two smart, strong women defeated by the community: Mrs. Pomeroy (Donnie's teacher) and Gretchen (Donnie's girlfriend). Both have a strong personal voice and are quite capable of correcting men's faulty reasoning. However, Mrs. Pomeroy gets fired for giving her students a book intended to make them think critically, whereas Gretchen's life is conditioned by her having had to escape her abusive father. She and her mother had to abandon their city and even take new names in order to survive. Kelly seems to be telling us that if you try to overthrow the patriarchy, you will have to face the consequences of becoming an outcast (losing your job, your identity, etc.). Again, his critique is ambiguous: the movie shows what is right (from a feminist perspective), yet it punishes the female characters for being brave enough to behave accordingly.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The strongly sexualised dance by Samantha, Donnie's pre-teen youngest sister.
- The discussion in which Donnie calls her mother a bitch. When she complains to her husband, he replies: "you are not a bitch, you are bitching, but you are not a bitch".
- Jim Cunningham's arrest for paedophilia.

■ Donnie's Smurfette monologue

Donnie Darko is with two friends in an abandoned field shooting bottles and drinking beer. Suddenly they start talking about Smurfette; the two friends laugh at her and crack sexist jokes at her expense because "she is the official slut" of the Smurfs all-male group. Donnie, however, surprises his friends by explaining that Smurfette was created by the villain Gargamel in order to spy on the Smurfs. She was originally meant to be an evil, smart *femme fatale*, but the happy, utopian community of the Smurfs and their kindness transformed how she saw herself. Their goodness changed her life's purpose and she could in this way free herself from her role as sexual object and destroy Gargamel's wicked plan.

Even though Donnie appears to show a positive awareness of gender issues – defending Smurfette's right to reject her roles as sexualized object for the pleasure of the Smurfs and pawn in Gargamel's evil plans– he ends-up joking as well, wondering about the little blue guys: "They don't even have any reproductive organs underneath those little white pants. That's what's so illogical about, y' know, being a Smurf. What's the point of living if you don't have a dick?" This sudden change of tone shows again the contradictory presentation of gender issues in Kelly's film: Donnie can make them visible, but though he initially appears to oppose his friend's sexism with his feminist speech in Smurfette's favour, his phallogocentric comment shows that he is, like them, a patriarchal caveman.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Lou Lumenick, "A 'Darko' Victory", *New York Post* 26 October 2001.

<https://nypost.com/2001/10/26/a-darko-victory/>

Donnie is already notorious in the leafy suburb of Middlesex, Va. –he's been on heavy medication ever since he tried to burn down an abandoned house. But regular sessions with a psychiatrist (Katharine Ross) –during which he fondles himself and fantasizes about Christina Applegate of *Married with Children* while under hypnosis– aren't really keeping his demons at bay.

Jim Emerson, "Donnie Darko in his Mind's Eye (One Little Boy, One Little Man)", *RogerEbert.com* 2 November 2004.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/scanners/donnie-darko-in-his-minds-eye-one-little-boy-one-little-man>

Poor Donnie Darko. He's 15 years old and, boy, has he been "acting out". He's been in trouble with the law for torching an abandoned house, and now he's seeing a shrink who's put him on medication that he thinks is making him crazy, except it might just be puberty, but whatever it is he's been sleepwalking and having nightmarish visions (and "daylight hallucinations") involving a man-sized fuzzy bunny rabbit with a grotesquely contorted metallic head (bulging eyeballs, vicious teeth) named Frank who keeps reminding Donnie that the clock is ticking on the end of the world and ordering him to do destructive, semi-apocalyptic things involving fire and flood. As if puberty alone wasn't bad enough.

Meanwhile, Donnie is tormented by the usual obsessive teenage thoughts about sex and death. Sex is on his mind constantly, but girls consider him invisible (if they consider him at all – ha!).

Megan Hess, “‘Mad World’: The Gendering of Mental Illness in *Donnie Darko*” *Cinemablography* 17 October 2016.

<http://www.cinemablography.org/blog/mad-world-the-gendering-of-mental-illness-in-donnie-darko>

Research from the World Health Organization states “there are no marked gender differences in the rates of severe mental disorders like schizophrenia”. However, because of the societal expectations and stereotypes of and about mentally ill individuals –schizophrenic ones in particular– Kelly’s film is almost contingent on its protagonist’s gender.

With some films, changing the gender of the main character would not make too much of a difference. However, in *Donnie Darko*, it would change the film extraordinarily. When using the schizophrenia narrative, the film relies on audience perceptions of how that particular illness manifests itself –something which happens in a very male way. *Donnie Darko* plays out the cultural narrative of women as saviours for damaged men, as well as a world where men perpetrate violence and women are victims. Since women are seen as less capable of committing violent acts, parts of *Donnie Darko* could seem less believable when viewed through the mental-illness framework.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0246578/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donnie_Darko
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/donnie-darko>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/donnie_darko/

Minority Report (2002)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay by: Scott Frank and Jon Cohen, Philip K. Dick (short story "The Minority Report")

Producer: Bonnie Curtis, Jan de Bont, Gerald R. Molen, Walter F. Parkes

Main performers: Tom Cruise (Chief John Anderton), Samantha Morton (Agatha), Max von Sydow (Director Lamar Burgess), Lois Smith (Dr. Iris Hineman), Kathryn Morris (Lara Clarke), Colin Farrell (Danny Witwer)

Company: Twentieth Century Fox, DreamWorks, Cruise/Wagner Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 25'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Minority Report* (2015), TV series
- *Blade Runner* (1982)
- *Total Recall* (1990)
- *The Matrix* (1999)
- *Impostor* (2001)
- *Equilibrium* (2002)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscar) 2003 (nominee)

Best Sound Editing: Richard Hymns, Gary Rydstrom

BAFTA Awards 2003 (nominee)

Best Achievement in Special Visual Effects: Scott Farrar, Michael Lantieri, Nathan McGuinness, Henry LaBounta

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films USA (2003) (winner; seven other nominations)

Best Science Fiction Film

Best Supporting Actress: Samantha Morton

Best Director: Steven Spielberg

Best Writing: Scott Frank, Jon Cohen

REASONS TO SEE *Minority Report*

- It is an excellent mixture of science-fiction, action thriller, and mystery.
- Samantha Morton gives an outstanding performance as Agatha, one of the precogs.
- The film shows an interesting portrayal of a future which is, nowadays, not too far away.

- The different enigmas that build the plot keep you hooked until the end of the film, as does the idea that crime can be foretold.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In 2054, the Pre-crime Division of the US Justice Department has made of Washington D.C. a murder-free city. The Division uses the psychic powers of three ‘precogs’, genetically modified humans, to prevent future homicides. When the three precogs dream about a future homicide, the group is provided with the names of the victim and the perpetrator, images of the crime, and the exact time in which the murder will happen. Then, the Pre-crime unit only needs to figure out the exact place where the homicide will happen, and rush to arrest the potential murderers before they act. But can a person be accused of murder before they have committed such an act? John Anderton, the Chief of the Pre-crime Unit, believes this is certainly the case until the precogs dream of a murder which he himself will commit. Anderton will have then to escape, to be chased by his own colleagues, while his trust in the system weakens as he discovers that the precogs’ predictions may be wrong and even manipulated.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Cynthia Weber complains in her article “Securitising the Unconscious: The Bush Doctrine of Preemption and *Minority Report*” that “even as it portrays the feminine as innovative, intelligent, and active, *Minority Report* caricatures each of its female characters through gender stereotypes so much so that the film at best sends mixed messages about the feminine and what it wants ‘us’ to see” (2005: 494, see below).

On the one hand, Agatha is said to be the most powerful precog; however, along the film she is portrayed as a physically weak woman in need of protection from John. This can be clearly seen in the scene in which Agatha and John are trying to escape from the Pre-crime Unit, chasing them in a mall. John has to protectively embrace Agatha because she is so weak that she can barely walk. It could be said that in this scene, while John represents the strong knight, Agatha represents the weak damsel in distress, despite her supposedly unique powers.

On the other hand, we know that Dr. Iris Hineman is extremely intelligent, as she is the (accidental) mother of the whole Pre-crime project. She is (or at least was in the past) also a compassionate and goodhearted woman, as she desired to save the children that later became the precogs. However, she is in the present of the film portrayed as the typical eccentric madwoman that lives secluded in her home and has developed an unhealthy obsession for killer plants.

In addition, Lara, John Anderton’s ex-wife is, according to Weber “always first and foremost characterised as wife and mother” (2005: 495). In fact, even though she is the one to figure out Director Lamar Burgess’ betrayal, we are asked to just remember her as the wife who once abandoned her husband after their son disappeared. Also, as the woman who contributes the happy ending to the film: the final scene shows a pregnant Lara who has gone back to John.

All in all, it could be said that although the (limited) female representation in *Minority Report* has potential, this is left unexplored to favour the main hero’s deeds against an unjust patriarchal system, which he fights just for his own sake.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The recorded conversation between John and his missing young son raise important parenthood questions
- The unexpected kiss between Dr. Iris Hineman and John Anderton

- The film's ending: Lara's pregnancy
- **John Anderton kidnapping/rescuing Agatha from the Pre-crime offices**

After John Anderton learns from Dr. Iris Hineman how the existence of 'minority reports' puts into question the reliability of the Pre-crime system, he decides to kidnap (or rescue, depending on how you understand the act) Agatha from the Pre-crime headquarters. He does so because he believes that, with Agatha's help, he may expose the unreliability of the system and therefore, prove himself innocent.

During John and Agatha's escape scene, we witness how powerful Agatha's precognitive powers are; in fact, her ability to see what the future holds makes their escape successful. However, that power contrasts with Agatha's physical weakness. We see her struggling to speak and breathe; and she even needs John's help to walk because she seems to be unable to do so without falling to the ground.

This segment has been much discussed in the reviews of the movie. On the one hand, the scene is said to parallel the kidnapping of John's son Sean (both Sean and Agatha are taken from a pool). On the other hand, the whole rescue/escape scene is said to represent a child's birth and their vulnerable state right after leaving their mother's womb: the pool in which Agatha lays in the Pre-crime headquarters is believed to represent the female womb and the amniotic fluid in which fetuses live. Agatha's fragile state and constant need of protection from John seen during the mall scene is said to represent the assistance a child needs right after being born. This, of course, infantilises her and undermines her presentation as a powerful precog to favour John's heroic role.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Cynthia Weber, "Securitisising the Unconscious: The Bush Doctrine of Preemption and *Minority Report*", *Geopolitics* 10.3 (2005): 482-499. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650040591003499>

Strikingly, every time Anderton loses the trail, it is a woman who sets him straight. Agatha pleads with him to see her prevision about her mother's death properly. Iris Hineman informs Anderton that there is such a thing as a 'minority report' and that it is always held by the most gifted of the precogs, the girl. And Anderton's ex-wife Laura (Kathryn Morris) takes no time to figure out that Lamar Burgess has betrayed Anderton, at which point she rescues him from prison and convinces Anderton's ex-colleagues to cooperate in a plot to expose Burgess. *Minority Report*, then, locates invention (Iris), knowledge (Agatha), and meaningful action (Laura) not in our male hero but in the feminine. For without the feminine guiding Anderton at every turn, one eyed or not, he wouldn't see a thing.

Roger Ebert, "*Minority Report*", *Roger.Ebert.com* 21 June 2002.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/minority-report-2002>

Samantha Morton's character (is 'Agatha' a nod to Miss Christie?) has few words and seems exhausted and frightened most of the time, providing an eerie counterpoint for Anderton's man of action. There is poignancy in her helplessness, and Spielberg shows it in a virtuoso two-shot, as she hangs over Anderton's shoulder while their eyes search desperately in opposite directions. This shot has genuine mystery. It has to do with the composition and lighting and timing and breathing, and like the entire movie it furthers the cold, frightening hostility of the world Anderton finds himself in. The cinematographer, Janusz Kaminski, who has worked with Spielberg before (not least on *Schindler's List*), is able to get an effect that's powerful and yet bafflingly simple.

Mick LaSalle, "FUTURE TENSE / Spielberg Returns to Form with Menacing, Suspenseful *Minority Report*", *San Francisco Chronicle* 21 June 2002.

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/FUTURE-TENSE-Spielberg-returns-to-form-with-2827287.php>

Minority Report is not cuddly. It has an austere look to it. The streets have a noirish, menacing feel. When Anderton comes home at the end of the day, he steps out of his car into an apartment lit in a cold, loveless light. He watches home video of his estranged wife and of his son, who was abducted and killed some years before, only the video here is life-size and has the illusion of three dimensions. Just the thing to drive a grieving person crazy.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0181689/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_Report_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_Report_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/minority-report>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/minority_report

28 Days Later... (2002)

CREW & CAST

Director: Danny Boyle

Screenplay by: Alex Garland

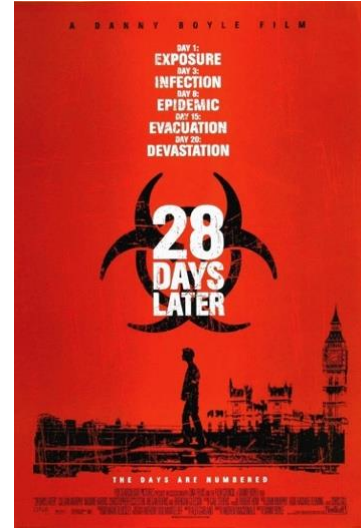
Producer: Andrew Macdonald

Main performers: Cillian Murphy (Jim), Naomie Harris (Selena), Christopher Eccleston (Major Henry West), Megan Burns (Hannah), Brendan Gleeson (Frank)

Company: DNA Films, UK Film Council

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 53'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *28 Weeks Later* (2007), sequel
- *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- *Dawn of the Dead* (2004)
- *Shaun of the Dead* (2004)
- *[Rec]* (franchise, 2007)
- *World War Z* (2013)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction & Horror Films (Saturn Awards) 2004

Best Horror Film (winner)

Best Director (nominee): Danny Boyle

Best Writing (nominee): Alex Garland

British Independent Film Awards 2003 (nominee)

Best British Independent Film

Best Director: Danny Boyle

Best Achievement in Production

REASONS TO SEE *28 Days Later...*

- It is an independent British production that competes very well with similar American products, director by Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting*) and written by Alex Garland (*Ex Machina*)
- It combines successfully elements of science fiction and horror in its zombie-focused plot.
- The representation of gender, ethnicity, and politics is quite interesting, especially as regards Naomi Harris's character Selina.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Jim, a bicycle courier, awakens in hospital after 28 days in a coma caused by a crash and, once in the streets, finds the whole city of London apparently deserted. Eventually, Mike and Selena save him when he is chased by a horde of murderous zombies. Selena explains to Jim that a virus has infected most people and that the zombies are killing each other and the non-infected massively. Later, the trio meet Frank and his daughter Hannah, and he suggests that they should go to Manchester which, according to radio broadcasts, is a safe zone. However, the group of survivors find a very different, cruel truth when they finally reach Manchester: there is no cure for the virus. Major Henry West is lying about this in his broadcasts because he wants to attract female survivors to the city and then force them to reproduce with him and his followers. In this way, he thinks, his community will survive.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

As many critics had already mentioned, *28 Days Later...* is a film which presents many political metaphors. Its resemblance to the world order at the time when the film was released, the crisis year of 2008, also indicates the director's concerns about many social issues.

If we interpret the film as a representation, in particular, of British society, one thing that must be noticed and criticized is how quickly women's role changes once the zombies appear and patriarchy returns. Selena and Hannah are forced to please the soldiers in a scene in which they must change their ordinary clothes for red dresses which are typically associated with seductive, feminine characters. They are not, though, dangerous *femme fatales* but objects of men's desire, about to be raped. The soldiers also expect the women to cook well, forcing on them traditional gender roles on the way to being abandoned before the zombie infestation. Most importantly, Major Henry West summons women to this place to be used by him and his male followers as tools to guarantee the men's sexual and domestic wellbeing, and the fertility of the patriarchal community.

Selena and Hannah manage to run away from that terrible place of imprisonment though they are, nonetheless, rescued by a man instead of rescuing themselves. This contradicts their characterisation as extremely brave, strong, and intelligent women. Women reviewers such as Cecilia Sayad have noted that "the possibility of renewal suggested by the survivors' attempts to start over certainly points toward hope" but also pointed out that "However, the circularity of the movie's plot is most likely to inspire dismay. After all, if according to the old saying, 'order is born from chaos', it must also be true that chaos is born from order" (2003: online). In the case of the women, this chaos is brought on, however, by patriarchal men as much as by the zombies (or even more).

SEE: Cecilia Hayad, "Review: *28 Days Later...*", *Film Comment*, March-April 2003. <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-28-days-later-danny-boyle/>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Selena and Hannah, wearing red dresses, wait for the soldiers to do as they wish with them.
- Survivor Selena at the end of the film (wearing a homely cardigan and sewing...).
- **Selena kills her companion Mark**

Survivors Mark and Selena had been staying together to help each other before they met Jim. Later in their ordeal, Mark is unfortunately bitten by an infected person when the trio are

attacked. Immediately, Selena kills Mark, hacking him to pieces with her machete with no hesitation whatsoever. She stresses to the deeply shocked Jim that she will kill anyone “in a heartbeat” if that person becomes infected, whether she cares for them or not.

Selena’s characteristic toughness and determination are highlighted in this scene. On the one hand, she presented as an emotionally strong figure, as shown by her killing Mark without mercy. She will kill anyone who threatens her life, putting her own safety in the first place. On the other hand, her physical sturdiness is manifest in the bloody scene of the killing and by her choice of weapon, an ever-present machete. In later scenes, Selena is always seen acting as Jim’s and Hannah’s protector.

Her hardness is, besides, connected positively with her racial identity (Selena is black). In horror films, most final girls are white whereas black women mostly play the role of victims. Selena’s survival in *28 Days Later...* offers, thus, an endorsement of black feminism.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Kinitra D. Brooks, “The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories”, *African American Review*, 47.4 (Winter 2014): 461-475.

Boyle deliberately constructs the initial relationship between Jim and Selena to resemble that between a mother and child. Selena steadily admonishes him for his curiosity in such a dangerous environment, whether it is for his entering unfamiliar buildings without caution or not taking proper care of himself in their dire circumstances. Jim is an active participant in the maternal nature of their relationship; it is Selena’s name he screams for help each time he is in danger. He even comments after she warns him not to go into a building, “It’s like going on holiday with my bloody Aunt”. (471)

MaggieCat, “*28 Days Later...*”, *The Hathor Legacy* 25 July 2007.

<https://thehathorlegacy.com/28-days-later/>

At this early juncture Selena and Jim have both been firmly painted with the characteristics usually reserved for the opposite gender –it’s Jim’s sentimentality (understandable though it is) that puts them in this particular piece of danger, and Selena is the one who steps in with immediate action to save them both. She is the one with the experience and the strength to keep them alive, Jim’s the naive and compassionate one.

Everyone working together gets them out, and no one person is just a hero or a victim, and that message is consistent throughout the entire film. I think that’s what makes *28 Days Later* a drama-with-a-horror-backdrop rather than a straight up horror film; horror movies aren’t usually very hopeful, but I can’t think of much more to hope for in terms of female characters displaying strength and intelligence than the ones shown here.

Harold Varmus, “FILM; Virus as Metaphor: Microbiology and *28 Days Later*”, *The New York Times* 6 July 2003.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/movies/film-virus-as-metaphor-microbiology-and-28-days-later.html>

As we near the end of the movie, it seems the main British Isle is effectively under global quarantine –with the sinister implication that the rest of the world likes it that way. After another 28-day interval, everyone who was infected is presumed dead, and a few exhausted, amiable survivors begin life anew in an England restored to its pastoral virginity. A crisply white small plane, dipping its wings to acknowledge a colorful ‘hello’ spelled out in bedspreads on emerald hills, reminds us that the rest of the world, apparently spared from the epidemic, is now ready to pick up the pieces cheerfully.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0289043>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/28_Days_Later
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/28-days-later>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/28_days_later

Signs (2002)

CREW & CAST

Director: M. Night Shyamalan

Screenplay by: M. Night Shyamalan

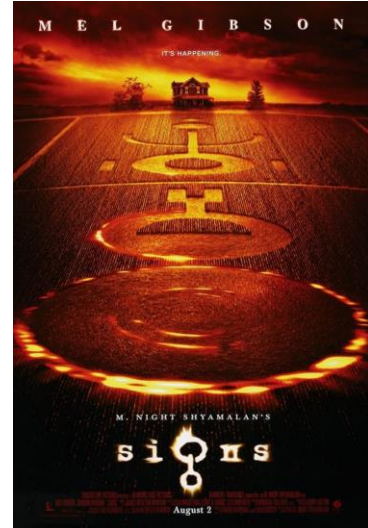
Producer: Kathleen Kennedy, Frank Marshall, Sam Mercer, M. Night Shyamalan

Main performers (credits order): Mel Gibson (Reverend Graham Hess), Joaquin Phoenix (Merrill Hess), Rory Culkin (Morgan Hess), Abigail Breslin (Bo Hess), Cherry Jones (Officer Paski)

Company: Touchstone Pictures, Blinding Edge Pictures, The Kennedy/Marshall Company

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 46'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *E.T.* (1982)
- *Silent Warnings* (2003)
- *War of the Worlds* (2005)
- *Skyline* (2010)
- *Super 8* (2011)
- *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards 2003 (winner)

Top Box Office Films: James Newton Howard

Christopher Awards 2003 (winner)

Best Film: M. Night Shyamalan (director/screenwriter/producer), Frank Marshall (producer), Sam Mercer (producer), Kathleen Kennedy (executive producer)

REASONS TO SEE *Signs*

- The subtle acting, even by the children Rory Culkin and Abigail Breslin.
- How suspense is built up through the entire film with little touches, without showing the alien invaders.
- Fans of M. Night Shyamalan will appreciate his notorious style of filmmaking, with the moments of humour providing relief from the tension.
- The different theories regarding the origins of the aliens (they might be demons).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Graham Hess, a former Reverend struggling with the recent death of his wife, and consequently his loss of faith, awakes to find his crops mutilated. While he and his brother Merrill suspect a few of the locals of the vandalism, news reports from around the world soon point a finger at the overwhelming possibility of an eminent alien invasion. The family – including Graham’s young children Morgan and Bo– must decide the best course of action, while they navigate the new turbulent domestic dynamic and their own demons. The last words of his dying wife, the strange quirk of a child, and a potentially lethal asthma attack may be a series of lucky coincidences, or they may be the signs that this father needs to save his family, but also the world, as his faith is tested.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Writer/director M. Night Shyamalan pushes past the stereotype of All-American Hero to give his characters new depth. What Elizabeth Abele in her article “The Home-Front Hero in the Films of M. Night Shyamalan” describes as the “Home-Front Hero” is a figure more focused on saving his family and home than the world. His choice of actors is also of interest, as Mel Gibson was previously best known for his ‘hard body’ action films. Graham Hess, Gibson’s character in *Signs* is subdued and family oriented. He must be coached by his brother, Merrill, in intimidation tactics, though he can only muster up, “I am insane with anger!” as he barges into the backyard trying to scare off the vandals.

It is refreshing to see characters who are aided by their vulnerability, not hindered by it. As Abele wrote, Hess’s “model of masculinity is not the problem; in fact, it is essential to the family surviving the alien threat together” (15). Yet some critics disagree with this assessment. R. Barton Palmer’s article “Melodrama and Male Crisis in *Signs* and *Unbreakable*” claims that “Hess’s ‘proper’ role as husband and father is simply assumed, his particular masculine style (which turns out to be all authoritativeness) is presented a given” (43). Further evidence, however, is given by Abele of the male characters’ propensity for sensitivity and compassion, highlighting how the film is “full of nurturing masculinity, as Graham, Merrill, and Morgan nurture and protect Bo and each other” (15).

The few women in the film aren’t portrayed as weak or vulnerable to compensate for the softening of the male characters. During her last moments of life, Graham’s wife remains a beacon of emotional strength for her husband, giving his clues to his survival. Bo, the younger daughter, calmly wakes her father in the night to alert him to a monster outside of her room, and in the same breath asks for a glass of water. Though she is the youngest, the smallest, and the only girl, she is the only one with supernatural powers. There are several mentions of her prophetic dreams, especially the one that foresees something bad happening to Morgan. Officer Paski is the only other woman in the film and compliments the atmosphere of the film with her calm yet compassionate nature.

SEE:

Abele, Elizabeth. “The Home-Front Hero in the Films of M. Night Shyamalan”. *Critical Approaches to the Films of M. Night Shyamalan*, ed. J.A. Weinstock. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 3-18.

Palmer, R. Barton. “Melodrama and Male Crisis in *Signs* and *Unbreakable*”. *Critical Approaches to the Films of M. Night Shyamalan*, ed. J.A. Weinstock. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 35-51.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Merrill coaches Graham to be intimidating, without much success
- The death of Graham's wife (in a car crash)
- A minor crisis becomes major: Morgan has an asthma attack
- The family must stay together to get a good signal (and understand what is happening)
- **The last supper**

The invasion is imminent. Each member of the family picks what might be their final meal, but no one eats. The boy Morgan wants to say grace, but faithless Graham doesn't want to waste any more time on prayer. Angry, Morgan tells his father that he hates him, and that it was his fault their mother died. Graham tries to appear unshaken by the comment, grabbing food from everyone's plate, but quickly breaks down into tears. The family embraces, lending each other support and forgiveness. The subtle metaphor of the food is echoed at the film's finale where everyone has a part to play in the victory of human over alien.

As the head of the household, Graham could simply have been cast as the strong, hardy hero. Instead, this scene allows a range of emotions, even what some might consider weakness, all stemming from fear. Morgan is the first to approach his sobbing father, and Graham pulls everyone in. Similarly, Morgan's asthma, which appears to be a fatal weakness, ends up being the reason why he survives, just as Graham's emotions are shown as an asset instead of something negative. Merrill's impulse to swing "because it felt wrong not to", the reason for his failed baseball career, is his strength in the end. Bo's habit of leaving water glasses around the house provides the family with another weapon to defend against the aliens. Apparent shortcomings are thus turned into strength.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Peter Travers, "*Signs*", *Rolling Stone* 2 August 2002.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/signs-124111/>

Signs deserves the chance to creep up on you. In his own elegant and exacting way, Shyamalan knows how to grab you, put your nerves in a vise and squeeze. But his first job, one he handles beautifully, is to make us care about the Hess family, which includes Graham's younger brother Merrill (Joaquin Phoenix), a local baseball hero who blew his chance. "You could have made it, had beautiful women lick your toes", a townie tells Merrill, who has moved back home to help his brother. Phoenix registers impressively, finding the humor and the pain in this lost boy.

Roger Ebert, "*Signs*", *Roger Ebert* 2 August 2002.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/signs-2002>

Instead of flashy special effects, Shyamalan creates his world out of everyday objects. A baby monitor that picks up inexplicable sounds. Bo's habit of leaving unfinished glasses of water everywhere. Morgan's bright idea that caps made out of aluminum foil will protect their brains from alien waves. Hess' use of a shiny kitchen knife, not as a weapon, but as a mirror. The worst attack in the film is Morgan's asthma attack, and his father tries to talk him through it, in a scene that sets the entire movie aside and is only about itself.

Bob Smithouser, "On DVD *Signs*" *Plugged In* 2003.

<https://www.pluggedin.com/movie-reviews/signs/>

There's a sweetness about the family relationships here that's typical of Shyamalan's work. It's implied that the patient, kindhearted Graham adored his wife and is liked by his neighbors. He remains devoted to his children, and even offers tearful forgiveness to the man responsible for

his wife's death. After the accident, Merrill supports his brother's family by moving onto the farm. Morgan looks out for his little sister, in one scene protecting her from a vicious dog and in another promising, "I won't let anything bad happen to you". As intruders threaten to invade his home, a rattled Graham takes comfort in telling his children the stories surrounding their births. (While very pro-family, this moment has a theological downside. It's a sweet substitute for prayer that puts supreme faith in the ties that bind rather than in God.)

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0286106/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signs_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signs_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/signs>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/signs>

***Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Michel Gondry

Screenplay by: Charlie Kaufman (story and screenplay), Michel Gondry (story), Pierre Bismuth (story)

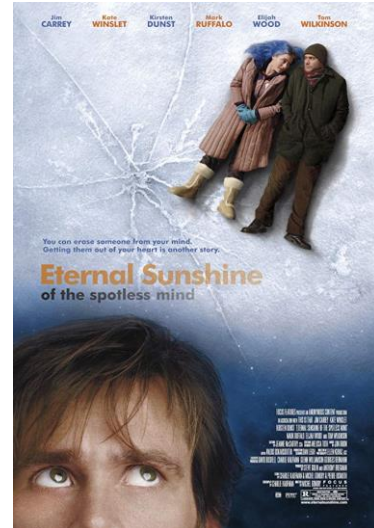
Producer (s): Georges Bermann, Steve Golin

Main performers (credits order): Jim Carrey (Joel), Kate Winslet (Clementine), Kirsten Dunst (Mary), Tom Wilkinson (Dr. Mierzwiak), Elijah Wood (Patrick), Mark Ruffalo (Stan)

Company: Anonymous Content, This is That, Focus Features

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 48'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Total Recall* (1990)
- *Dark City* (1998)
- *The Truman Show* (1998)
- *Being John Malkovich* (1999)
- *Vanilla Sky* (2001)
- *Mr. Nobody* (2009)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2005

Best Original Screenplay: Pierre Bismuth, Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman (winner)

Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role: Kate Winslet (nominee)

Golden Globes 2005 (nominee)

Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical: Jim Carrey

Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical: Kate Winslet

Best Screenplay - Motion Picture: Charlie Kaufman

Best Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical

BAFTA Awards 2005 (winner; four other nominations)

Best Editing: Valdís Óskarsdóttir

Best Original Screenplay: Charlie Kaufman

Best Film: Steve Golin, Anthony Bregman

REASONS TO SEE *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

- It is an excellent mixture of romance and science fiction, though many viewers may miss that it is actually science fiction for its low-key use of technology and lack of special effects.
- The complex sentimental struggle between keeping and erasing the memory of love.

- How human emotion (specifically love) overruns the cold facts of science.
- How romantic breakup is seen to affect both members of the (heterosexual) couple.
- The great performances by Jim Carrey (in an unusual role) and Kate Winslet.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Joel is a timid, introverted, and moody man who loves drawing. On Valentine's Day, he skips work and goes to Montauk, Long Island, searching for some inspiration. On the train, he encounters manic, extrovert Clementine Kruczynski. She initiates the talk with Joel on the ride home to New York, and over the next two nights love begins to bloom.

After a two-year relationship, they break up and Joel is plunged into a deep depression. Later, Joel comes across Clementine by chance, but she does not seem to recognise him. One of Joel's friend discloses that Clementine has undergone a memory erasing procedure, developed by one Dr. Mierzwiak. Joel decides to do the same. However, in the process, he re-discovers his love for Clementine and tries but fails to stop the operation. Determined not to forget Clementine, Joel associates her with other memories. When they meet again, love returns –again and again, no matter how many times it fails and they try to erase its memory.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Christopher Grau claims that in *Eternal Sunshine...* “the deprivation of the truth (...) could rightly be seen as a form of harm or misfortune”, a masochistic stance supported “through characterising Clementine as self-destructive, Mary as easily manipulated, and Joel as a depressive –just the types of people who could and would harm themselves” (2006: 123). In any case, these three characters suffer equally, regardless of their gender.

Clementine and Mary vividly represent two current types of women. Clementine is the alternative kind of woman shaped by feminism. She initiates the talk with Joel and invites him first to her house, somehow departing from traditional expectations. Likewise, she is never afraid of revealing her feelings, even in public, when arguments arise. On the other hand, nurse Mary (Dr. Mierzwiak's former mistress), conforms with patriarchal social norms placing women in submissive, weak positions in their relationships. Mary, indeed, cannot overcome her dependence on her uncaring lover. In any case, even though Clementine is portrayed as a strong woman, she, like Mary, undergoes the memory-erasing operation because she cannot control the effect of lost love. Both characters fall, anyway, again in love with the same man they wanted to forget, which leads to the romantic conclusion that feeling will always prevail over science.

Joel's characterisation as a comparatively sentimental figure, who often cries because of his uncontrollable love for Clementine, contradicts the traditional representation of men as strong and in control of their emotions. Supposedly, men should find it relatively easier to forget the memories of lost love. Throughout the movie, however, Joel's depression sends the audience another message: the effects of romantic love are felt by men even more intensely than by women. This message questions the stereotype of the man immune to sentimental failure, without discrediting at all Joel's masculinity, quite the opposite. Michel Gondry and talented screenwriter Charlie Kaufman alter traditional gender roles to insist that emotions are human and, thus, shared by both men and women.

SEE: Grau, Christopher. “*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and the Morality of Memory”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64.1 (2006): 119-133.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Joel takes the operation, inspired by Clementine's example
- Joel cherishes a last good memory of Clementine when the procedure is almost completed
- Joel and Clementine fall in love again

- **Clementine initiates the talk with Joel that triggers their relationship**

On Valentine's Day, Joel decides to skip work. He goes instead to Long Island, searching for some artistic inspiration. Clementine notices him, and soon they meet at the train station. On the journey back to New York, the outgoing Clementine initiates the conversation with the timid Joel. Interested, she invites Joel to her house for a longer chat and, implicitly, sex. This is how they fall in love: out of her initiative.

This scene has not, unfortunately, elicited many comments connected with the alternative gender imagery in the movie. However, in my perspective, Clementine's proactive attitude challenges the traditional perception that men should be active and women passive in the first encounter. Realising that Joel is shy, Clementine is the one to initiate and maintain dialogue, a move which he welcomes. This scene could be interpreted as a symbol of female empowerment, as Clementine stands for all the women now openly expressing their interest and desire thanks to the lessons of feminism. On the other hand, the timid Joel also provides another new perspective, illustrating the simple fact that men need not be always in control to find happiness in love.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Peter Bradshaw, "*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*", *The Guardian* 30 April 2004.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/apr/30/dvdreviews.shopping4>

Moving on, getting closure, that is what the end of relationships is supposed to be all about. Not dwelling or brooding or obsessing about why someone fell out of love with you. In the absence of marriage for life, serial monogamy is what people expect, and so they must cultivate the art of forgetting if these transitions are to be managed. But oblivion offers peace at the cost of self-destruction, and Joel passionately feels that his unhappiness over Clem is part of his identity. Oddly, one literary allusion that Kaufman doesn't turn up is Proust, whose narrator is told by Swann that should he move to a paradisiacal Pacific island, he would forget all about Paris. That may be so, but it is frightening to imagine a future in which our current happinesses and unhappinesses will no longer exist.

E. Oliver Whitney, "*Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind* Is Truly the Love Story of Our Time", *Huffpost* 19 March 2014. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/erin-whitney/eternal-sunshine-10-year-anniversary_b_4988672.html

No matter what we try to tell ourselves, or what every other romantic comedy claims, love can become its worst, its ugliest, and its most painful. But once we accept the darkest memories, acknowledge inevitable future mistakes, and cut away the soiled spots to let the beautiful ones shine through, that's when love is transcended. *Eternal Sunshine* is not about forgetting the bad moments, getting over them with a new lover, or making up and pretending they never existed. Kaufman's ingenious love story reminds us that we will hurt, we will disappoint one another, and even if we remain in denial and force ourselves to forget, things are likely to repeat themselves.

TommyE, “*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a Realistic Love Story”. *Medium* 21 February 2016. <https://medium.com/nefelibata-online/eternal-sunshine-of-the-spotless-mind-2004-48874946407a>

The characters are *supposed* to be imperfect. The depiction of these imperfect main characters is useful for its viewers because it shows both the pleasurable and difficult sides of love. Because of this, it helps us accept the imperfections of someone else in order to build and maintain long-term relationship(s). We are more likely to consider and address the way we place too high of ideals in front of others if we can see and empathize with imperfect characters before us on the screen. It shows that we are not alone in our imperfections and wanting to improve upon them. The value and purpose of art, in other words, is about empathy, and *Eternal Sunshine* succeeds in that purpose.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338013/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_Sunshine_of_the_Spotless_Mind
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/eternal-sunshine-of-the-spotless-mind>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/search/?search=Eternal_Sunshine_of_the_Spotless_Mind

War of the Worlds (2005)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay by: Josh Friedman and David Koepp, H.G. Wells (novel)

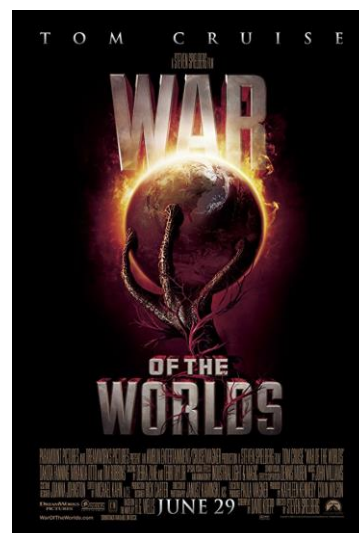
Producer(s): Damian Collier, Kathleen Kennedy, Paula Wagner, Colin Wilson

Main performers (credits order): Tom Cruise (Ray Ferrier), Dakota Fanning (Rachel Ferrier), Miranda Otto (Mary Ann), Justin Chatwin (Robbie), Tim Robbins (Harlan Ogilvy)

Company: Paramount Pictures, DreamWorks, Amblin Entertainment, Cruise/Wagner Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 56'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The War of the Worlds* (1953)
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and all its sequels and new versions
- *Independence Day* (1996)
- *Transformers* (2007)
- *Battle Los Angeles* (2011)
- *The Sixth Wave* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2006 (nominee)

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing: Andy Nelson, Anna Behlmer, Ron Judkins

Best Achievement in Sound Editing: Richard King

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Dennis Muren, Pablo Helman, Randal M. Dutra, Daniel Sudick

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films 2006 (winner)

Best Performance by a Younger Actor: Dakota Fanning

Cahiers du Cinéma 2010

Top 10 Film Award, Best Film of the Decade: Steven Spielberg (Eighth Place)

REASONS TO SEE *War of the Worlds*

- It is a great adaptation of the 1897 classic science fiction novel by H.G. Wells.
- It is a movie directed by Steven Spielberg with Tom Cruise in the lead role.
- The wonderful acting of thirteen-year-old Dakota Fanning as the daughter of Tom Cruise's character.
- The alien tripods designed by Doug Chiang have become iconic (and so has their eerie sound).

- It's an indirect but significant portrayal of the American family after 9/11.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Present time. Ray Ferrier (a New Jersey port crane operator) is left with his children for a weekend while his pregnant ex-wife Mary Ann and her new husband go to visit her parents, who live in Boston. Ray, who rarely sees his teen-year-old daughter Rachel and his teenage son Robbie, is trying but failing to act as a proper father when an alien invasion takes place and the world panics. Ray runs away with his children, towards Boston, while he learns how to evade the gigantic tripods and their lethal rays. His shortcomings as a father become apparent in his difficulties to deal with his frightened daughter and a son that wants to leave and join the military.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In an interview with *USA Today*, Steven Spielberg declared that “I always felt all of my films were personal, because I’ve never made a film where some part of the story didn’t come from some experience I shared with my family” (in Breznican 2005: online, see below). *War of the Worlds* narrates a family crisis, indirectly alluding to the reactions of panic to 9/11 and the shifts of mentality in the aftermath, here connected with a brutal alien invasion. The father, Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise), displays an obsession to cover his daughter’s eyes throughout the film as if that could save his child’s innocence even after she has seen hundreds of killings. In fact, the lavender horse purse created by costumer designer Joanna Johnson to act as ‘safety blanket’ for Rachel (Dakota Fanning) seems more effective.

At the beginning of the film, working-class Ray is presented as the opposite of middle-class Tom, his ex-wife Mary Ann’s new husband. Tom is the idealised representation of the responsible breadwinner, while loser Ray remains isolated because he is unable to be a nurturing father, keep a good job, and even defend his nation as a soldier (as his son Robbie wants to do later in the film). Actress Miranda Otto happened to be really pregnant when the film was shot, and Spielberg took advantage of this circumstance to make Ray’s defeat before Tom more explicit. Only once she leaves for Boston can Ray can start exploring his nurturing side –though it takes an alien invasion for him to act as he should.

Ray handles the alien attack by hiding, choosing survival over more active strategies of defence. However, he eventually proves his manhood by demonstrating that the protective shield of the tripods can be destroyed. Ray’s masculinity is, in any case, always more balanced than that of crazed survivor Harlan, though neither can compete in strength with the colossal tripods. Although Ray and his son Robbie are also apparently in juxtaposition, they are dressed in similar outfits (both wear a leather jacket) to highlight how similar they are in reality. At the end, the aliens are defeated, and Ray delivers Rachel to Mary Ann and Tom. His problems as a father are far from solved, but at least he and his children can express their feelings honestly and openly to each other.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The baseball game with Ray and Robbie turns into nasty confrontation
- Ray cannot protect Rachel from the terrible vision of the bodies floating down the river
- Ray returns Rachel to Mary Ann
- **Ray feeds his children while on the run from the aliens**

Ray, Robbie, and Rachel get into Mary Ann’s house, hoping she and Tom have not departed to Boston yet and they can take care of the children during the alien invasion. However, the house is empty and, in a vain attempt to act as a responsible father, Ray

prepares peanut butter sandwiches for his children. Unsurprisingly, Robbie bashes his father for the poor quality of the food and refuses to eat it. Likewise, Rachel mentions her birth allergy to peanut, deeming Ray as utterly ignorant about his own daughter's health. Consequently, Ray gets frustrated and throws the sandwiches violently against the window, all while saying, ironically, "Everybody just relax, okay? Because we're here now. We're safe, and we're gonna stay".

This scene exposes Ray's bumpy road to adulthood in the absence of his wife and the presence of the aliens. It shows Ray's preference for hiding, as well as his lack of parental abilities: he can barely take care of himself, so how is he going to protect his children? The children, of course, understand this deficiency. Ray does not like being a father, never did, and he is forced to face the apocalypse while taking care of Rachel and Robbie. He cannot join the fighting forces because he needs to act like a 'real' father, and at the same time he is unable to be nurturing and assuring. Ray is a 'child-man' and the movie shows his alienation in a society where his personality is not socially accepted.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Anthony Breznican, "Spielberg's Family Values", *USA Today* 23 June 2005.

https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2005-06-23-spielberg_x.htm

Spielberg says his films about alien visitors (or, this time, invaders) are fueled by his evolving points of view on family. "They're all landmarks as we get older about how we're changing and how we see the world", Spielberg says. *War of the Worlds* reflects his own uncertainty after the devastation of the terror attacks of 9/11.

"We live under a veil of fear that we didn't live under before 9/11. There has been a conscious emotional shift in this country".

Still, the director says, he didn't want to reflect that in a fantasy about generals, scientists and politicians.

"I wanted this to be a very personal story about a family fleeing for its life. And a father trying to protect his two kids —a father who isn't much of a father but has to catch up along the way".

Rocio Carrasco Carrasco, "Alien Invasions and Identity Crisis: Steven Spielberg's *The War of the Worlds* (2005)", *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 29 (2016): 7-23.

https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/68008/3/RAEI_29_01.pdf

Previously in the movie, Robbie's relationship with his father has been depicted as troublesome and distant. Robbie admits wanting to see the war with his own eyes. He needs to feel better with himself and he sees an opportunity to do so by enlisting in the army. That way, he will not depend on his father's decisions and will be able to show determination and courage. Also, he will stand out from a mass of people only interested in self-survival. Robbie's supposedly patriotic feeling is partly grounded on individual interests as much as on the lack of a stable father figure. Hence, the problematic father-love is displaced to the service of the nation. (14)

Kirk Combe, "Spielberg's Tale of Two Americas: Postmodern Monsters in *War of the Worlds*", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44.5 (October 2011): 934-953. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00881.x>

Harlan is not insane. Ray is not a murderer. If it were not for the outside aggression of the aliens, these two men would be buying one another a beer. (...) Ray, on the other hand, still has Rachel to protect and thereby the slim hope of a return to normality. He is not ready or able yet to throw himself irrevocably into the fight. (...) Both men are behaving appropriately for their different situations. (...) Under the normal conditions of civilization, Harlan appears a

wild-eyed zealot in this scene and Ray a calculating killer. But people being attacked and occupied are hardly under normal civilized conditions. (942-39).

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0407304>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Worlds_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Worlds_(2005_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/war-of-the-worlds>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/war_of_the_worlds

Children of Men (2006)

CREW & CAST

Director: Alfonso Cuarón

Screenplay by: Alfonso Cuarón, Timothy J. Sexton, David Arata, Mark Fergus, Hawk Ostby, P.D. James (novel)

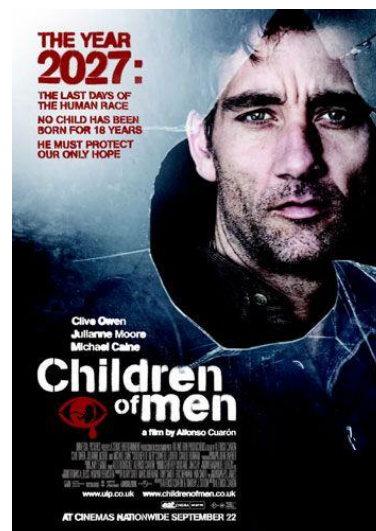
Producer: Marc Abraham

Main performers (credits order): Clive Owen (Theo Faron), Clare-Hope Ashitey (Kee), Julianne Moore (Julian), Chiwetel Ejiofor (Luke), Pam Ferris (Miriam), Michael Caine (Jasper), Charlie Huhnam (Patric)

COMPANY: Strike Entertainment, Hit & Run Productions, Ingenious Film Partners 2, Toho-Towa, Universal

NATIONALITY: UK/USA

DURATION: 1h 49'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Village of the Damned* (1960, 1995)
- *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990)
- *Twelve Monkeys* (1995, 2015)
- *The Astronaut's Wife* (1999)
- *The Road* (2009)
- *Contagion* (2011)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2007 (nominee)

Best Cinematography: Emmanuel Lubezki

Best Adapted Screenplay: Alfonso Cuarón, Timothy J. Sexton, David Arata, Mark Fergus, Hawk Ostby

Best Film Editing: Alfonso Cuarón, Álex Rodríguez

BAFTA Awards 2007

Best Photography: Emmanuel Lubezki (winner)

Best Special Visual Effects: Geoffrey Kirkland, Jim Clay, Jennifer Williams (winners)

Best Production Design (nominee): Frazer Churchill, Tim Webber, Mike Eames, Paul Corbould

REASONS TO SEE *Children of Men*

- It depicts an extremely realistic version of dystopia, but with a glimmer of hope.
- The issue it raises deeply affects how we think of humanity –what if we simply stopped breeding?
- It is a quality film, made with ambition but without the fuss of bigger productions.
- It is very moving but not sugary and sentimental.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In 2027, with an Earth devastated by pollution, nuclear warfare, anti-biotic resistant plagues, and climate change, only Britain remains relatively habitable. Among the refugees seeking help there is a young African girl, Kee, the first woman to be pregnant in the last eighteen years. Terrorist 'Fish' leader Julian Taylor entrusts her ex-husband Theo with the mission of taking Kee to a refugee camp on the coast, where she can be fetched by members of the Human Project and taken to a safe haven in the Azores. Julian fears that the British Government may take Kee's child but when she herself is killed, Theo realizes that her terrorist group, now led by Luke, is also a threat for mother and baby. He also understands that Julian chose him to protect Kee's baby thinking of Dylan, the baby they lost to flu (the grief over his death is the reason why they separated). Aided by others (mainly Fish member Pam and gypsy refugee Marischka) Theo tries to fulfil the mission.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Despite the centrality of pregnancy in the script, the main character is a man and the film deals primarily with his heroic mission to rescue a (pregnant) damsel in distress. The screenplay, based on a novel by a woman, P.D. James, was written by four men who substantially altered her original plot. Even the poster, featuring the face of Clive Owen (Theo) with no image of Kee, is clear about who and what matters in the movie.

Most significantly, whereas in the novel the men are suddenly infertile, in the film the women are the ones that fail to become pregnant apparently through no fault with the men's bodies. Since infertility is widespread, women like young Kee take no contraceptive measures, and this is the reason why Kee cannot know the name of her baby's father, as she had sex with many men. The implicit critique of her sexual promiscuity is compounded with her dependence. Kee's advanced pregnancy (she's eight months pregnant when Theo meets her) and the delivery of her baby makes her constantly require Theo's help even during labour and birth. Pam, the Fish member who runs away with Theo and Kee, is a midwife but she's pushed off the film with poor excuses: it is suggested that she has probably told the Fish group how to find Kee, and she is anyway arrested and possibly killed by the brutal UK police.

Finally, it is also worth noting that Kee is black but her protector, Theo, white. In contrast, the villain Luke is also black, which suggests that black women are better protected by white rather than black knights – a suggestion that forgets, to begin with, the historical truth of how white men abused enslaved black women and the still ongoing racist subordination of both black men and women.

SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Kee reveals to Theo that she is pregnant, showing him her bulky belly, in a stable surrounded by cows
- Theo helps Kee deliver her baby in the refugee camp
- **Theo and Kee leave with her baby, and even the soldiers are awed**

Theo manages to travel with Kee to the small port in the South of England where refugees await an improbably rescue. Either because of the stress endured during the dangerous journey or because she is really due, Kee starts labour in a derelict building crowded by other refugees and soon surrounded by troops when her presence is suspected. With Theo acting as midwife, Kee delivers a healthy baby. There is no time to waste, however, and Theo convinces her to leave and risk being detained. It is impossible for them to conceal the crying baby and as

people realise that Kee might be either the last mother on Earth or the first of a new generation, they allow her to pass, admiringly. Even the troops are awed, letting her go away.

Motherhood is hardly ever the focus of attention in film, being actually more present as a source of horror than of respect. For this reason, it is particularly moving to see how Cuarón manages to surround Kee and her baby with the wonder that the act of giving birth should elicit. It is a pity, however, that he cannot bring himself to tell the whole story through Kee's point of view.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Dana Stevens, "The Movie of the Millennium: Alfonso Cuarón's Fantastic *Children of Men*", *Slate* 21 December 2006.

<https://slate.com/culture/2006/12/alfonso-cuaron-s-fantastic-children-of-men.html>

As reluctant hero Theo, Owen has the weary gravity of a Mitchum or a Bogart. He seems like an adult, a rare thing in action heroes these days, and Moore is a perfect match as the rebel leader who gave up long ago on the luxury of personal happiness. Michael Caine plays Jasper as John Lennon if he really had lived to be 64, a loopy, irreverent sage with a taste for strawberry-flavored pot. The scenes in Jasper's cozy hideout in the woods provide the only warmth in Theo's uncompromisingly chilly world, until he opens himself to the fragile hope growing inside the body of the decidedly unfragile Kee (played by 19-year-old Ashitey with great freshness and verve).

James Berardinelli, "*Children of Men*", *Reel Views* 21 December 2006.

<http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/children-of-men>

The tone of the movie is bleak –perhaps even bleaker than that of the book. (The novel contains a love story to lighten things that is absent from the movie.) 2027 England is a depressing, crumbling place. Man, in his last years, is shown to be reverting to animal form as anarchy spreads. How much longer before the concept of government will have no meaning? How much longer before basic services, such as electricity and running water, will no longer be possible? *Children of Men* provides us with a glimpse of the possible beginning of the collapse. It's a unique view of the end of the world –one that comes not through war, famine, or disease, but from the human race's inability to reproduce. (Note: Cuarón, like James, does not assign blame for the sterility. It's scientifically inexplicable –an act of fate or God.)

Manola Dharguis, "Apocalypse Now, but in the Wasteland a Child Is Given", *New York Times* 25 December 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/25/movies/25chil.html>

There are, Mr. Cuarón suggests in *Children of Men*, different ways of waking up. You can either wake up and close your ears and eyes, or like Theo you can wake up until all your senses are roaring. Early in the film Theo and the restlessly moving camera seem very much apart, as Mr. Cuarón keeps a distance from the characters. Every so often the camera pointedly drifts away from Theo, as it does with the dead policemen, to show us a weeping old woman locked in a cage or animals burning on pyres. In time, though, the camera comes closer to Theo as he opens his eyes –to a kitten crawling up his leg, to trees rustling in the wind– until, in one of the most astonishing scenes of battle I've ever seen on film, it is running alongside him, trying to keep pace with a man who has finally found a reason to keep going.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_of_Men
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/children-of-men>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/children_of_men

A Scanner Darkly (2006)

CREW & CAST

Director: Richard Linklater

Screenplay by: Richard Linklater, Philip K. Dick (novel)

Producer(s): Tommy Pallotta, Jonah Smith, Erwin Stoff, Anne Walker-Mc Bay, Palmer West

Main performers (credits order): Keanu Reeves (Bob Arctor), Robert Downey Jr. (James Barris), Winona Ryder (Donna Hawthorne), Woody Harrelson (Ernie Luckman), Rory Cochrane (Charles Freck)

Company: Thousand Words, Section Eight, Detour Film production, 3 Arts Entertainment, Warner Independent Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 40'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Altered States* (1980)
- *Naked Lunch* (1991)
- *Pi* (1998)
- *eXistenZ* (1999)
- *Waking Life* (2001)
- *Upstream Color* (2013)

MAIN AWARDS

Austin Film Critics Association 2007 (winner)

Austin Film Award: Richard Linklater

International Cinephile Society Awards 2007 (winner)

Best Animated Film

Cannes Film Festival 2006 (nominee)

Un Certain Regard Award: Richard Linklater

REASONS TO SEE *A Scanner Darkly*

- It is yet another dystopian approach to the science fiction by Philip K. Dick.
- For its unique animated movie style, using rotoscoping.
- To see Winona Ryder and Keanu Reeves playing again together, after *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.
- If you are interested in mind-bending stories dominated by monopolistic corporations, altered states of consciousness, the nature of reality, identity, drug abuse, schizophrenia...

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In a society dominated by drugs, the police are carrying out an investigation to discover who is behind the production of the popular Substance D, and to eradicate its use by the community. One of the officers, known as Fred when working in disguise but in reality Bob Arctor, is chosen to infiltrate the drug-dealing gang. During the operation Bob/Fred ends up being addicted to Substance D and admitted to a detoxification centre, New Path. In this institution the addicts are, unsuspectingly, the ones in charge of tending the drug's plantations and production. The police patiently wait for Fred to recall his identity and his mission, though there is a possibility that he knows them only too well and prefers his new state and situation.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

A Scanner Darkly is set, a reviewer notes, "in a future where America has lost the war on drugs. When one reluctant undercover cop is ordered to start spying on his friends, he is launched on a paranoid journey into the absurd, where identities and loyalties are impossible to decode" (IGN Filmforce 2006: online). The difficulties to understand identity come not only from drug abuse but also from the 'scramble suit'. This is the uniform used by the police when on duty. Its constant shape-changing is intended to maintain the agent's anonymity by superposing different faces and bodies of men, women, and children. This appears to be a step forward towards the eradication of discrimination and towards a future with total gender equality.

Linklater's film, however, takes actually a step backwards. There is only one woman in a leading role (Winona Ryder as Donna Hawthorne) and practically no other female characters. Besides, Donna, initially just an object of desire and Bob's girlfriend, also turns out to be the manipulative male boss in the scramble suit: Hank. She needs, thus, to present herself as a man to act out the power she does have as police supervisor. The scramble suit is hardly working here at random.

Masculinity in this movie is represented by a variety of men but in quite similar characterisations: there are no heroes nor models to follow; almost all male characters are drug addicts and even the main ones are depicted as losers trapped in hallucinations caused by drugs. They seem to have no purpose in their life, are immature, ignorant, and irresponsible. This movie shows, then, the counterpart of the idealised man and makes the weaknesses of this other masculinity painfully patent.

SEE: IGN Filmforce. "Interview: Tommy Pallotta", *IGN* 30 May 2006.
<https://www.ign.com/articles/2006/05/30/interview-tommy-pallotta>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The discovery of Hank's real identity
- James Barris, Charles Freck and Bob Arctor are terrified by some strange noises
- James Barris imagining the waitress naked
- Donna Hawthorne rejects Bob and he goes to a motel with another woman
- **Bob Arctor has a either a hallucination or remembers his actual past**

Bob wakes up in the middle of the night and goes downstairs wondering what has happened and how he got to this unknown place. He starts having an hallucination, or maybe remembering the truth, which we perceive as paranoid feeling. This scene shows that once Bob was the perfect husband and father, he had the perfect family, the perfect house with the perfect backyard. But after he hits his head with the cupboard, Bob realizes the novelty of the

unexpected pain and that he was not happy, nothing new could never happen, he hated his family, his house, his life. It was a dead end. That is why through this scene he is not only trying to convince us, but himself, of the good decision he took in leaving the routine and embarking on an adventure where he never knows what to expect and what is going to happen next.

This scene shows the contradictions and the pressure Bob endured as a family man supposed to be a breadwinner, and a complete, successful individual. However, the scene also shows Bob's freedom to choose another life without taking into account society's prejudices and his family's expectations, thus liberating himself from any responsibilities. His choice, endorsed in the film, is not easily available to women and appears to be, ultimately, a selfish one.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Christopher Orr, "Keanu, Darkly", *L.A. Weekly* 5 July 2006.

<https://www.laweekly.com/film/keanu-darkly-2144202>

On one level, Reeves is sensible casting for Bob/Fred, the character's multiplying confusions providing a rather good fit for the aura of bafflement that the star brings to every role. But in a film that's largely about the internal life of Bob/Fred, Reeves is at pains to show that he has one. Though he shambles persuasively through the film, he gives us no real reason to focus on him, especially not when there are such giddy delights around to distract us.

Peter Hartlaub, "Scanner Stays True to Dick's Novel – Plus Psychedelic Animation", *SFGate.com* 7 July 2006.

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Scanner-stays-true-to-Dick-s-novel-plus-2532005.php>

More than his predecessors, Linklater mines the often tragic humor in Dick's writing. This is made much easier by the psychedelic properties of rotoscoping –which overlaps the actors' features with the amoeba-like animation, so everyone looks as if they're made out of Jell-O. (...) For most of the film, Arctor doesn't really know what's going on with his life, and Linklater doesn't clue the audience in, either. Themes are explored –the artistic advantages of drugs and the fear of human contact that results– but the path isn't always clear. *A Scanner Darkly* is mostly people talking, and they don't always make very much sense.

Azra Ghandeharion, "Anxious Masculinity: A Comparative Study of Philip Dick's *Scanner Darkly* and Richard Linklater's Adaptation", *Forum for World Literature Studies* 8.2 (June 2016): 333-350. <https://profdoc.um.ac.ir/articles/a/1058614.pdf>

The definition of masculinity in novel/ adaptation is three-dimensional. As for being science fiction, it lives between the scientific medicalization of male body and the fictive paranoia of control. This dialogic interrelationship of science and fiction is well played in the novel. Furthermore, *Scanner Darkly* is an autobiographical mingling of personal definition of factual masculinity and the fictitious quality of ideal masculinity. It is not simply the multiplication of the text since the author changes history to fiction; it is also the multiplication of the postwar context. The narration of self-referential hallucination, drug abuse, digital camouflage clothing, and technological snoop drowns readers in anxiety and crisis. (336)

LINKS

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- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Scanner_Darkly_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Scanner_Darkly_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/a-scanner-darkly>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/scanner_darkly/

I am Legend (2007)

CREW & CAST

Director: Francis Lawrence

Screenplay by: Mark Protosevich and Akiva Goldsman, Richard Matheson (novel, *I am Legend*)

Producer(s): Akiva Goldsman, David Heiman, James Lassiter, Neal H. Moritz

Main performers: Will Smith (Robert Neville), Alice Braga (Anna), Charlie Tahan (Ethan), Salli Richardson (Zoe Neville), Willow Smith (Marley Neville), Dash Mihok (Alpha Male), Joanna Numata (Alpha Female)

Company: Warner Bros.

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 41'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Last Man on Earth* (1964)
- *The Omega Man* (1971)
- *28 Days Later...* (2002)
- *World War Z* (2013)
- *Los Últimos Días* (2013)
- [REC] (franchise, 2007)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films 2008

Best Actor: Will Smith (winner)

Best Science Fiction Film (nominee)

Screen Actors Guild Awards 2008 (nominee)

Outstanding Performance by a Stunt Ensemble in a Motion Picture

Teen Choice Awards 2008 (winner)

Choice Movie: Horror/Thriller

Choice Movie Actor: Horror/Thriller, Will Smith

REASONS TO SEE *I am Legend*

- The zombies/vampires of the film are visually very interesting.
- The image of a deserted post-apocalyptic New York City in contrast with its usually crowded and vivid image is shocking.
- The important questions of morality in the pharmaceutical business raised in the film.
- The discussion of rationality vs. spirituality/faith offered by the plot.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In 2009, a modified virus is presented as the ultimate cure for cancer. However, three years later, by 2012, a mutation of that same virus has already killed most of the inhabitants of the world. The few survivors have become monstrous vampires hungry for fresh human flesh. Only a handful of people are immune to the virus, which is airborne but also is transmitted by biting. One of them is Robert Neville, a scientist of the US army who has spent the last three years in ground zero, New York City, trying to come up with an antidote for the virus. He is about to give up what seems an impossible mission when two unexpected visitors (Anna and her son Ethan) show in the city and get to restore his faith.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In his book *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*, Adilifu Nama discusses at length Will Smith's crucial contribution to the visibility of black men in Hollywood SF cinema. Smith, he writes, "reinvigorated the status of blackness" (39) in his genre. Nama attributes this to Smith's "popularity, much of what traded off his hip-hop persona, his successful television show (*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*), and the mainstream popularity of rap music" (39). His star value allowed Smith to "open the door for black characters to become at least central figures, if not headliners, in a small but growing canon of SF films" (39).

Until Will Smith managed that feat, African-American male actors usually played two types of roles (if any): that of secondary characters who were unimportant and easily killed off, or that of hateful villains. These kinds of roles contributed to the perpetuation of both racial and gender stereotypes of black men. In fact, before Will Smith headlined the film *Independence Day* (1996), only another black male actor had played the leading role in a science fiction film. It was Denzel Washington, who starred as Parker Barnes in the mostly forgotten 1995 SF film *Virtuosity*. As Nama further explains, "In the science fiction cinema of the past, it was a host of white protagonists who confronted the science fiction metaphors of American cultural crisis. Now Will Smith as the ultracool black character Del Spooner in *I, Robot* [and other roles] spearheads the charge to confront the SF metaphors for the troubling social and material conditions of contemporary American life" (39).

This might be true, but it is also important to note that the presence of African-American actors in leading roles, whether in SF films or other genres, is still far from being equal to that of white actors.

SEE: Adilifu Nam. *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Robert painful choice to sacrifice his dog Sam when she is infected by a 'vampire'
- Robert wins Ethan over by imitating Shrek's voice
- Robert's final sacrifice (but see the Director's cut...)
- **Robert and Anna quarrel over the existence of God**

After Anna saves Robert from the vampiric monsters, she announces that she and Ethan are going north to Vermont because there is a colony of survivors there. Robert seems reluctant to believe that the settlement exists, since he has been sending radio messages with no reply whatsoever, so he asks Anna how she knows about the colony. When Anna tells Robert that God told her about the survivors, Robert snaps. He does not understand how anyone can still believe in God after such a catastrophe, so he screams at Anna that if God

existed, he would not have allowed the plague to happen. He is convinced that God does not exist. However, Anna remains faithful to her beliefs. This scene perpetuates the idea that while women tend to be more spiritual, more prone to believe in something that cannot be scientifically explained, men favour more rational thinking. On the other hand, the film slyly blames a woman, Dr. Alice Krippin (played by an uncredited Emma Thompson), for the creation of the virus, somehow hinting (wittingly or unwittingly) that when women take men's place in science, catastrophe follows from their usurpation.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

David Ansen, "Will Smith *Legend* Review", *Newsweek* 12 December 2007.

<https://www.newsweek.com/will-smith-legend-review-94267>

The transformation of New York into a postapocalyptic landscape, masterminded by production designer Naomi Shohan and vividly shot by Andrew Lesnie, has a haunting, desolate, plausible beauty. And the screenwriters, relying on only a few crucial flashbacks to the last time Neville saw his wife and child as they were evacuated from the quarantined city, find clever ways to sustain what is, for more than half the movie, a one-man (plus dog and zombies) show. It helps, of course, that Smith is that one man; there are few movie stars who can hold the screen with such effortless charisma. When you have to deliver most of your lines to a dog, that's no mean feat. He throws himself into this physically demanding role with great conviction.

Scott Foundas, "Legend Has It", *The Village Voice* 4 December 2007.

<https://www.villagevoice.com/2007/12/04/legend-has-it/>

Smith is simply dazzling here, and for all the undeniably impressive work the actor has done on his physique for this role, what's most appealing about him is his active intelligence—how he thinks his way through a role—and his capacity for human weakness. Watch him, especially, in the scene where he nurses his wounded canine companion, and later, when he refuses to abandon his 'post' to follow fellow disease-free survivor Anna (*City of God* star Alice Braga) to a supposed survivor's colony in (where else?) Vermont. If he just stays put in his lab, he tells her, testing one vaccine after another, he's sure he can put things right. There's a manic edge to Neville by that point, and Smith makes you feel every inch of his impotent rage. In what has been a pretty remarkable career up to now, it's this performance that fully affirms Smith as one of the great leading men of his generation.

Amy Biacoli, "I Am Legend: Patient, Solid, and Suspenseful", *Houston Chronicle* 14 December 2007. <https://www.chron.com/entertainment/movies/article/I-Am-Legend-1817452.php>

Matheson's book has been reworked a few times before, most famously in 1971's literally defanged, thoroughly Charlton Hestonized *The Omega Man*. But even this smart new 21st-century update—from *Constantine* director Francis Lawrence and screenwriters Mark Protosevich and Akiva Goldsman—has the feel of old-fangled loner heroism, weighty and proud. Man in basement struggles to restore the human race. The man, in this go-round, is Will Smith—the anti-Heston. As Dr. Robert Neville, he wears both his chesty heroism and his suffering lightly, even in tearful flashbacks to his separation from wife and child.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0480249/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_Legend_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_Legend_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/i-am-legend>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/i_am_legend

The Mist (2007)

CREW & CAST

Director: Frank Darabont

Screenplay by: Frank Darabont, Stephen King (novel)

Producer(s): Frank Darabont, Martin Shafer, Liz Glotzer

Main performers: Thomas Jane (David Drayton), Marcia Gay Harden (Mrs. Carmody), Laurie Holden (Amanda Dumfries), Andre Braugher (Brent Norton), Toby Jones (Ollie Weeks), William Sadler (Jim Grondin), Frances Sternhagen (Irene Reppler), Alexa Davalos (Sally)

Company: Dimension Films, Darkwoods Productions, Metro-Golden-Mayer

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 6'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Mist* (2007), TV Series
- *The Thing* (1982, 2011)
- *Dreamcatcher* (2003)
- *Cloverfield* (2008)
- *Carriers* (2009)
- *The Road* (2009)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films 2008

Best Horror Film (nominee)

Best Director: Frank Darabont (nominee)

Best Supporting Actress: Marcia Gay Harden (winner)

Fright Meter Awards 2007 (winner)

Best Horror Movie

Best Director: Frank Darabont

Best Supporting Actress: Marcia Gay Harden

REASONS TO SEE *The Mist*

- It is another successful adaptation of a Stephen King novel, by the director of *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994).
- It is an effective horror movie which keeps audiences on their toes throughout.
- The dark ending of the film is tragic, sad, and thought-provoking.
- The great performance by Marcia Gay Harden as the bigoted, Bible-thumping Mrs. Carmody.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In a supermarket in Maine on an ordinary day, the shoppers are shocked by the news that there is some dangerous threat hidden in the mist outside. Soon after, these people are divided into two groups. One is led by David Drayton, who convinces his followers to fight the mysterious, unseen monsters. Meanwhile, another group is bewitched by a pious woman, Mrs. Carmody, who claims that the End of Days is coming and must be welcome. The two groups fight and finally Mrs. Carmody is shot. Then David, his young son Billy, and two other persons decide to leave the supermarket and find rescue. Tragically, David, believing their car to be surrounded by invincible monsters, agrees with his companions that he will shoot them and Billy, and then be himself killed, either by his own hand or by the monsters. Unexpectedly, the mist dissolves but it is by then too late.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

David's wife Stephanie appears in the first scenes of the film, depicted as a good wife and a mother that fits well the traditional values associated with women. Despite the fact that Stephanie does not appear in the later scenes of the film, for she is left stranded in the family home by the mist, the positive, ideal image she embodies encourages David and his son to fight the unknown monsters and have a chance to go back home.

Steff contrasts with the more important female figure in the film, the fanatical Mrs. Carmody played by Marcia Gay Harden. This is a witch-like character, malicious and inflammatory, who soon leads a violent group, ready to wage an internecine war. Obviously, the malevolent characteristics associated with women, as supposed witches, by patriarchy can be found in History since the early Middle Ages. Mrs. Carmody is borrowed directly from Stephen King's novel, with the writer's typical ambiguity. Lara Williams writes that "A low-key feminist, one of the more memorable aspects of *The Mist* is the way King writes misogyny as an almost default mode of this sort of petrified, collective mentality; women are slapped around the face for hysteria, called cunt, witch, whore" (2017: online, see below). King manages in this way to deflect accusations of misogyny while still bordering on it (Mrs. Carmody, by the way, is missing in the TV series).

In contrast, the male protagonist David (played by Thomas Jane) is almost flawless. In this film, he is presented as a brave, rational, and sympathetic character which is totally unlike Mrs. Carmody. Yet, his very rationality leads him to take the tragic decision that results in the terrible final twist. Perhaps, King and Darabont are suggesting extreme situations require more patient heroes.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The opening scenes of harmonious domestic life
- As the leader of his group, David holds his son in one hand and a cudgel as the weapon in the other hand to fight the monster with
- The final scene, with the mist dissolving
- **Mrs. Carmody is killed**

Mrs. Carmody is a pious woman who believes that this disaster is the beginning of Armageddon, brought on by our sins. She prays and preaches every night, and soon she recruits more survivors in the supermarket to her side. When Private Wayne Jessup discloses that the mist and the awful monsters are possibly caused by the Arrowhead project being developed in the nearby military facilities where he works, Carmody urges her followers to expel him from the premises, which causes his death. Incensed, she turns the entire store

against David's group to demand that other two people be sacrificed. To prevent this absurdity, assistant manager Ollie Weeks shoots her dead.

Mrs. Carmody's death is one of the many bloody scenes of the film, but the only one that seems justified because of her malice. Her association with religious fanaticism would be quite different had the character been a man, but in her case the film underlines her presentation as a witch even more wicked than the monsters. Her death, caused by a man, is therefore, justified and even welcome. In contrast, the military men that originate the disasters are never punished, appearing eventually as saviours.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Philip French, "*The Mist*", *The Guardian* 6 July 2008.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2008/jul/06/film.horror>

Just as scary as the initial suspense and the grotesque monsters is the response of the isolated community in the store. They divide first over class and race, then on religious grounds, with the insane Mrs. Carmody's faith faction seeking to make blood sacrifices to placate an angry God and the rational Drayton's secular survivors risking their lives to seek help from outside. It's an allegory of a sort that harks back to the Cold War anxieties that produced the wave of 1950s horror flicks (in this it resembles M Night Shyamalan's recent, much inferior *The Happening*), but it's unusually harrowing and relentless in its apocalyptic pessimism.

Lara Williams, "What to expect from the TV rework of Stephen King's *The Mist*", *Dazed* 12 May 2017. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/35910/1/what-to-expect-from-the-tv-rework-of-stephen-kings-the-mist>

The Mist was previously adapted as a film in 2007, by Frank Darabont, who directed two earlier films of King's works: *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*. Both themed on the redemptive qualities of faith and hope –Darabont's take on *The Mist* makes for a rapid backpedalling of that thesis; offering a bleak and utterly hopeless (but very stylish) film– with one of the most nihilistic endings in cinematic history. Darabont's elegant direction and uncompromising plotting lent the film something of a cult status. While the subtext of group, fascistic mentality is a little ham-fisted – there are some moments of distinct beauty; and it's a hell of a scary film.

Manohla Dargis, "Something Creepy This Way Creeps, and It Spells Bad News", *The New York Times* 21 November 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/21/movies/21mist.html>

Mr. Darabont does some estimable work in *The Mist*, particularly when he moves away from the chattering mob and returns to the mist and its riddles, to its eerie, insect like whirring and periodic elephantine trumpet blasts. In the haunting images of men and women cautiously venturing outside, their bodies melting into the mist, he offers a stronger, more palpable sense of what it means for human beings to be truly frightened than he does with any of the dialogue. He makes fear visible.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0884328/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mist_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mist_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-mist>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mist>

The Man from Earth (2007)

CREW & CAST

Director: Richard Schenkman

Screenplay by: Jerome Bixby

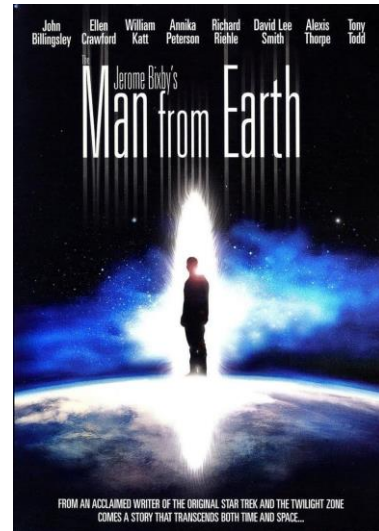
Producer(s): Richard Schenkman, Eric D. Wilkinson

Main performers (credits order): David Lee Smith (John Oldman), Tony (Dan), John Billingsley (Harry), Ellen Crawford (Edith), Annika Peterson (Sandy), William Katt (Art), Alexis Thorpe (Linda Murphy), Richard Riehle (Dr. Will Gruber)

Company: Falling Sky Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 27'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Man from Earth: Holocene* (2017), sequel
- *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976)
- *Starman* (1984)
- *K-Pax* (2001)
- *Primer* (2004)
- *Mr. Nobody* (2009)
- *Coherence* (2013)

MAIN AWARDS

Málaga International Week of Fantastic Cinema 2008 (winner)

Best Screenplay: Jerome Bixby

Youth Jury Award Best Feature Film: Richard Schenkman

Rhode Island International Film Festival 2007 (winner)

Best Feature: Richard Schenkman

Best Screenplay: Jerome Bixby

Port Hueneme International Film Festival, Feature Award 2007 (winner)

Best Picture: Richard Schenkman (director)

REASONS TO SEE *The Man from Earth*

- It is an intellectual science fiction film that makes something impossible seem plausible.
- The concept is simple, yet engaging, making the watcher feel they're part of the conversation among the characters.
- It was filmed for only \$200,000 in about a week, but it doesn't feel cheap!

- How the gimmick of filling the room with friends in academics allows deeper questioning into John's life.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

As John Oldman prepares to depart to a new chapter in his life, a group of his friends and colleagues gather for a going away party. At first, he avoids their inquisitions about his future plans with jokes and deflections, but eventually embarks on a story that will change what they think of him, and possibly the world, forever. His claim to be 14,000 years old is emboldened with anecdotes from various periods of his life, from his earliest memories as a caveman, to his missed chance to sail with Christopher Columbus. His friends and colleagues vary in their reception to his story, some trying to accept it as truth, and others becoming enraged at his claims. He finally reaches a point in his tale that makes him reconsider his decision to share his life story.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

While gender issues aren't immediately apparent in this film, the reactions of critics, professional and recreational, shed light on a few. Linda is a young woman who accompanies her professor, John's friend, to the going away party. It is assumed they are romantically involved, though there is an obvious difference in age. He is assertive, while she is passive, allowing John to tell his story while she mildly agrees and asks questions that are intellectually inferior to the others.

Edith is an art historian, older than the other two women (Linda and John's girlfriend Sandy), and a Christian Literalist. When her beliefs are threatened by John's story, she lacks rationale. Jan Kershaw reviewed the live play version of the film and she noted the imbalance of the character's portrayal. She writes,

Although Bixby did not complete the screenplay until close to his death in 1998, the idea had been with him since the 1960s and this is reflected in the gender roles. Lyn Wilson, playing Edith, an Art History professor, is only allowed a brief comment on a Van Gogh 'copy'. Rather than her academic knowledge she is left to portray a somewhat irrational, Christian side of her nature, finally breaking down into tears. (2018: online)

Sandy, John's girlfriend, is also a professional historian, but her intelligence is overshadowed by her feelings for him. Some critics and reviewers neglect to mention her profession at all, simply referring to her as the woman who loves John, in some form or another. She is one of the only people that believes his story, and insists on being with him, knowing that it will only bring her heartbreak when she starts ageing and he still stays young. Worse than this, John coolly admits he doesn't think he loves her. Still, she begs to go with him.

The decision to make John male also greatly affects the story. Had he been a woman traveling through history, he would have faced misogynistic oppression and may have been accused of being a witch and killed. His story would have been very different from the one he tells, if he was alive to tell it at all. This would also have been a great twist on the religious aspect of the tale.

SEE: Williams, Jan. "Theatre Review: *The Man from Earth*", *Glam Adelaide* 17 August 2018. <https://glamadelaide.com.au/theatre-review-the-man-from-earth/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- John tells the group his real age
- Edith asks about Van Gogh's painting and how she reacts to John's story
- **Sandy confesses her love to John**

After learning that John may be a 14,000-year-old man, Sandy confesses that she has loved him since her first week at work. She asks him if he loves her as well, but he confesses that he doesn't, that he's been through love too many times. He is fond of her but can never love her. Sandy, however, concludes that this is enough for her. She is reduced to accepting less and sacrificing her chance to be loved. Even though it is her choice, and John never tries to persuade her to stay, her character is written as a woman who would do anything for her man without expecting anything in return.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

RJ Carter, "A Hit 14,000 Years in the Making: Jerome Bixby's *The Man from Earth*", *Critical Blast* 27 November 2017.

<http://www.criticalblast.com/articles/2017/11/27/hit-14000-years-making-jerome-bixbys-man-earth>

The action is all verbal sparring, the special effects are non-existent as they are unnecessary. All the big things happen in your mind as you become as enthralled with John Oldman's tale as do his colleagues, who are left questioning everything they ever knew about their respective fields, particularly when some of John's claims about places he's lived and people he has been create cognitive dissonance within his friends of shattering proportions.

Anthony Ray Bench, "*The Man from Earth*", *Film Threat* 16 October 2017.

<http://filmthreat.com/reviews/the-man-from-earth/>

I wish John's relationship with Sandy was a bit more fleshed out, I really liked Annika Peterson in the role, but I wish I could understand her attraction to John more. If what he says is true, their relationship will eventually hit some major snags, and if he's just a nut, or worse, a con man, she's in for a major heartbreak. If she truly loves John as much as she claims to love him, I wish these hypotheticals had been explored more.

Dennis Schwartz, "An Intriguing Cerebral Psychological Sci-fi Yarn". *Dennis Schwartz Movie Reviews* 11 July 2016. <http://homepages.rovers.net/~ozus/manfromearth.html>

The men of science begin to doubt his sanity or think he's pulling their leg with this hoax story. They talk about such things as historical events, famous artists he ran into from other centuries and how he survived the black plague. When the talk turns to religion, he reluctantly reveals he was Jesus, a more worldly one from the Bible, who never died on the cross because he learned from Buddha how to quiet the pain through meditation. This tale is more than the group can take.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0756683/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Man_from_Earth
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_man_from_earth

NOTE: Metacritic has no entry for *The Man from Earth*

WALL-E (2008)

CREW & CAST

Director: Andrew Stanton

Screenplay by: Andrew Stanton (also story), Pete Doctor (story), Jim Reardon

Producer(s): Jim Morris

Main performers (credits order): Ben Burtt (voice, Wall-E), Elissa Knight (voice, Eve), Jeff Garlin (voice, Captain), Fred Willard (voice, Shelby), MacInTalk (voice, Auto), John Ratzenberger (voice, John)

Company: Pixar Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures, Forty-Four Studios

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 38'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Silent Running* (1972)
- *Short Circuit* (1986)
- *Short Circuit 2* (1988)
- *The Iron Giant* (1999)
- *Robots* (2005)
- *Big Hero 6* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2009 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Animated Feature Film of the Year: Andrew Stanton

Golden Globes 2009 (winner; another nomination)

Best Animated Film

BAFTA Awards 2009 (winner; two other nominations)

Best Animated Film: Andrew Stanton

REASONS TO SEE WALL-E

- It is an excellent mixture of romance, comedy and science fiction.
- It proves that animated movies for children can be outstanding films capable of pleasing adult audiences.
- It raises multiple issues: environmental protection, obesity, human connections, consumerism...
- The peculiar gendering of the robots WALL-E and EVE, though they look nothing at all like living beings.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

It's the 29th century and the Earth has been abandoned for more than seven centuries. Massive consumerism has left the land inhabitable and covered by huge piles of garbage. WALL·E is a small robot designed to clean up the trash. One day, a spaceship arrives carrying EVE, a much more sophisticated robot searching for organic life of any type. WALL·E is almost killed when EVE mistakes him for a threat to her safety but eventually she completes her mission thanks to his finding a wisp of grass for her.

The lonely WALL·E, however, does not want EVE to leave and he sneaks into the spaceship which carries her to the flagship Axiom. There, humans, grown fat and lazy, are pampered by various kinds of robots. People have lost the ability to walk and more importantly, they only talk to a personal computer rather than to each other. When EVE presents the blade of grass to the villainous Captain, he hinders the process of regeneration so that humanity can remain in the Milky Way. This wicked act requires WALL·E and EVE's intervention.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Although their bodies have no sexual organs, certain conventional gender roles are forced upon WALL·E and EVE. It is, then, inevitable to refer to them as 'he' and 'she', rather than 'it'.

As Putri claims "on one side, I can see an atypical male character, WALL·E, who looks weak and shy, and on the other side there is EVE who seems robust and domineering. Yet, the male character is still the hero in the movie" whereas she plays the role of "a mere sidekick to the male hero" (2017: 113). This is correct. WALL·E may look weak, but he can be strong if needed. He is designed to clear the trash left by humans and, therefore, he has no powerful weapons –unlike EVE. He becomes a hero when the organic machine supposed to regenerate life is shut down by the villain a.i. AUTO, on Captain's orders. WALL·E is ready, without hesitation, to sacrifice himself in order to allow the return of humankind to Earth. However powerful EVE is with her laser beams, she cannot react to this threat and is ultimately presented a traditionally weak female character, incapable of interacting with great adversity. It is also important to note that EVE's body looks, wittingly or not, like a human uterus, an impression intensified when she places the blade of grass inside it for protection. Children may not notice this similarity, but surely it cannot escape adult members of the audience. EVE's toughness is thus connected to motherhood, which somehow softens her.

The gendering of the robots and the heroic male plot is also analysed by Brittany Long. She suggests that "WALL·E is noticeably disproportionate and not taken care of, suggesting a masculine gender" (2011: 12). When he boards the transport ship in order not to let EVE go, a direct contrast between their bodies is noticeable. While EVE possesses a slick, gleaming white body, WALL·E's is rusty and dirty, as if poorly groomed. This corresponds to the stereotype by which women must be more devoted to outer beauty and men pretend they don't care for their own. Although this situation slowly turned over, with male Hollywood heroic figures displaying well-toned, muscled bodies symbolising their capabilities, this is still a relatively original concept compared to the long-established predominance of the male gaze.

SEE:

Long, Brittany. *Creating Gender in Disney/Pixar's WALL-E*. BA Honors Dissertation, Tennessee State University, May 2011.

<https://dc.etsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1153&context=honors>

Putri, R. T. "Gender Role Ideology in Pixar's *Wall-E* and *Monsters University*". *K@ta Kita* 5.3 (2017): 113-120.

<http://katakita.petra.ac.id/index.php/sastra-inggris/article/view/7940/7171>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- WALL-E makes friend with a cockroach, the only living creature on Earth
- WALL-E 'falls into love' with robot newcomer EVE
- The life of the obese humans, disconnected from each other
- **WALL-E and EVE kiss**

Throughout the entire film, WALL-E and EVE kiss three times. Actual kissing is impossible because they lack a mouth. Instead, when their heads touch an electric shock is created, as a sort of kiss. These kissing scenes are sweet but reinforce heterosexual values attached to romantic relationships. Since EVE and WALL-E have no genitalia, there is no specific reason to gender them respectively as female or male, but this is done through their voices and the general traits of their anatomy. The question that arises is why this gendering is necessary, and whether they could have been presented as a same-sex couple. Science fiction is supposed to provide the audience with new perspectives on gender, but *WALL-E* fails to change the existing gender roles even in its supposedly asexual robots.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Mellissa Hughes, "*Wall-E* Review: From a Feminist's Perspective", *Mellissa Hughes- Soprano* 7 July 2008.

<https://mellissahughes.com/2008/07/07/wall-e-review-from-a-feminists-perspective/>

Eva (which is the Latin form for Eve, first woman) comes from some heavenly source, and is kind of a bad ass chick robot *femme fatale* on a mission. When that mission is completed, and 'life' is found, it is placed inside her 'womb' she falls silent, having fulfilled her reproductive duties... (...) Eva's physical form is actually pretty womby. Completely footless, she could easily be seen as a giant hovering egg, with pretty blue LED eyes. 'Box' has the obvious genital slang, but a roomy, womby jar has quite a different sense of symbolism. When Pandora opened the jar/box, the evils of the world were let loose, only *elpis*, or hope remained. Or, from within the vagina only comes trouble for man, except hope (life) clinging to the jar the way a fertilized embryo clings to the uterine wall.

Purtek, "*Wall-E*: The Gender-fication of Robots", *The Hathor Legacy* 11 July 2008.

<https://thehathorlegacy.com/wall-e-the-gender-fication-of-robots/>

One scene in particular –showing Wall-E clinging to the outside of a rocket that has absorbed Eve automatically and that is taking off with her inside, desperately shouting her name– had me asking whether I would have felt as sympathetic towards a female lead doing the same. (...) I strongly doubt that Disney would have felt comfortable with the idea that this same movie, except with a female 'Wall-E' lead character, would have been quite so marketable to kids of both sexes, or could have had quite the same level of balance between action and romance. And that, in itself, emphasizes the unequal treatment of male and female characters, even when they're robots.

Roman V. Barrosse, "Is WALL-E Male or Female?", *Medium* 25 June 2018.

<https://medium.com/s/story/wall-e-eve-the-great-gender-debate-407befd7d932>

As far as robots go, WALL-E may be sapient, but WALL-E has no genitals to speak of and cannot reproduce sexually. WALL-E cannot have a sex –yet he can have a gender. This, to me,

is the key to understanding the difference between gender and sex. Sex is biological and therefore tangible. Gender is neither.

EVE, like WALL-E, has no genitals. EVE cannot reproduce sexually. EVE is a machine that has no biological sex. Yet, she's a girl and WALL-E is a boy. Not only that—but they're in love! I could write a whole book about how two inanimate objects in love have to be perceived as heterosexual couples, but we'd be here all day.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0910970/>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WALL-E>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/wall-e>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wall_e

Cloverfield (2008)

CREW & CAST

Director: Matt Reeves

Screenplay by: Drew Goddard

Producer(s): J.J. Abrams, Bryan Burk, David Baronoff, Bryan Burk, Sherryl Clark, Guy Riedel

Main performers (credits order): Mike Vogel (Jason Hawkins), Margot Farley (Jenn), T.J. Miller (Hud Platt), Odette Yushman (Beth McIntyre), Michael Stahl-David (Rob Hawkins), Lizzy Caplan (Marlena Diamond), Jessica Lucas (Lily Ford)

Company: Paramount Pictures, Bad Robot, Cloverfield Productions (uncredited)

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 25'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016), sequel
- *The Cloverfield Paradox* (2018), sequel
- *King Kong* (1933), and all its diverse sequels and versions
- *Godzilla* (1954), and all its diverse sequels and versions
- *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)
- *The Mist* (2007)
- *Super 8* (2011)
- *The Meg* (2018)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films 2008

Best Science Fiction Film (winner)

Best Supporting Actress: (nominee)

Cahiers du Cinéma, Top 10 Film Award 2008

Best Film: Matt Reeves (third place)

Internet Film Critic Society, IFCS Award 2008 (winner)

Best Experimental Film

REASONS TO SEE *Cloverfield*

- People that have seen it either love it or hate it. Discover which side you are on!
- It is an intriguing, effective addition to the found-footage film sub-genre started by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).
- It is a post 9/11 film, with the USA pitted against a Godzilla-like monster.

- It aligns perfectly with *The Cloverfield Paradox* at 18:20, so if you like directors playing close attention to details, this is your film.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

A wealthy group of young adults celebrate a farewell party in Manhattan for Robb, who is supposed to move to Japan for a job opportunity. During the party, Robb and Beth, the girl he is in love with, have a fight and Beth flees the scene. Marlena, Hud (the cameraman), Jason (Robb's brother) and Lilly (Jason's girlfriend) are also introduced. Then, there is a huge commotion and the city is suddenly under the attack of Clover, a 25-storey tall monster from another dimension, and its human-scale parasites.

After losing his brother in the Brooklyn bridge and receiving a call for help from Beth, Robb decides to risk everything for love. His friends choose to accompany him in this quest.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In a press conference, director Matt Reeves revealed that the monster Clover is apparently sexless, and that "having just been born, it was going through separation anxiety and had no idea where its mother was and was freaking out and was in a completely foreign place, didn't understand a thing and that that would be sending it into a kind of infantile rage" (in Dobbs, 2008: online). Clover's age is reflected by its extra-long limbs compared to the size of its body and its clumsy way to move. In picturing Clover frightened by its surroundings, the creators sought to make the audience empathise a little with it. The parasites that drop from the Clover were created in order to give the human protagonists the chance to win a fight against a creature their own size during the film.

Similarly to other movies, in which only a huge crisis sets the hero in motion, Robb only decides to fight for Beth's love once the apocalypse has arrived. Beth complies with the image of the stereotypical good-looking and candid girl. However, Marlena and Lilly prove to be determined, courageous and even sarcastic in some moments, mocking their male companions. In the first encounter against the parasites, Marlena chooses to help Hud instead of running away, becoming the first character to knock down one of them. Later, when Robb fights a parasite with an axe to protect Beth the scene is far more violent and less realistic.

All the characters in the movie run around screaming at some point. However, there are two types of masculinities presented to have into account: Robb's and Hud's. On the one hand, Robb is fearless, willing to do anything for love, and this is received positively because he is a man. Beth obviously loves him back. On the other hand, Hud enjoys eavesdropping extremely, which is why he becomes the cameraman in the movie. He is also very loud when afraid and keeps hitting on Marlena, even when she has shown to have no interest for him. Hud is perceived as a freak. At it is to be expected, by the end of the movie Robb is the only character that remains rational and calm, despite the truly extreme threat the monster poses.

SEE: Dobbs, Sarah. "Press Conference Report: Matt Reeves, director of *Cloverfield*". *Den of Geeks* 29 January 2008. <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/13202/press-conference-report-matt-reeves-director-of-cloverfield>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Marlena and Hud's first conversation in the movie
- Robb's decision to go toward danger and save Beth
- The scene when Marlena protects Hud vs. the scene when Robb protects Beth

■ The last scene

In the last scene of the movie, Robb and Beth hide from Clover under a bridge, knowing that the area where they are will be bombed soon by the military in order to kill the monster. Thus, they both know they will die, and Robb decides their best choice is to leave a videotape that tells the survivors about their experiences since Clover's first appearance. They mention the date, the time, and talk about their losses and reactions. Beth is far less calm, not knowing what to say, and expresses her confusion and emotional breakdown before the trauma. In the very last moment, and after the bombing and their off-camera death, a short clip about their happy fore-incident lives is shown.

This scene is supposed to make the audience empathise with the Robb and Beth, but their characters are so plain and cliched throughout the movie that it is not achieved. Robbie and Beth conform to the stereotypical upper-class young adults, not to mention that they conform entirely with the gender roles traditionally imposed by society. Beth is shown as emotionally unstable, a damsel-in-distress, while Robb quickly acknowledges their new reality and welcomes death as it is impossible to escape from it. Moreover, both of them expose the current obsession with media and social platforms by spending their last minutes talking to a camera. It is, then, not impossible to read their presentation as an implicit critique of the social type they represent.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Emanuelle Wessels, "‘Where Were You When the Monster Hit?’ Media Convergence, Branded Security Citizenship, and the Trans-media Phenomenon of *Cloverfield*", *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17.1 (2011): 69-83.

NOTE: This refers to the online contest organized by Paramount, asking potential audiences to upload their own 'found footage' videos for free:

These amateur videos, by depicting a relatively large cross-section of the US population, effectively naturalize and generalize the use of recording technology for security and surveillance purposes across regional, racial, gender, and class lines. As a holistic experience, then, the videos extend the scope of security citizenship beyond the white, upper-middle-class youth demographic represented in the movie itself, mobilizing the entire home front. Many of the clips, moreover, discuss terrorist attacks and incorporate You Tube footage of the 9/11 attacks into their projects, making the connection between terrorism and the *Cloverfield* story explicit. Thus, in addition to their work as labouring audiences producing advertising and surplus value for Paramount and *Cloverfield*, contest participants also labour to construct themselves as security-citizens, performing, enacting, and displaying online the rituals of monitoring, surveillance, and product loyalty associated with the vigilant security-citizen initially introduced in the *Cloverfield* film. (80)

James Stone, "Enjoying 9/11: The Pleasures of *Cloverfield*". *Radical History Review* 111 (2011): 167-174.

While *Cloverfield*'s characters are quite able to see and record, they have far more trouble expressing their emotions. Speaking of a bereaved friend, Hud laments, "I don't know what to say to him. Like, I feel I should say something, but I don't know what to say". That line, "I don't know what to say", becomes a motif in the movie motif in the movie, characters feeling tongue-tied as they try to express their feelings about the attack on New York. Perhaps we should, after all, feel some empathy for these people. When contemplating 9/11, it is hard to know what to say. Perhaps "Did you see that?" is the best most of us can do. (174)

Daniel North, "Evidence of Things Not Quite Seen: *Cloverfield's* Obstructed Spectacle". *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 40.1 (Spring 2010) 75-91.

One character defies the danger and attempts to cross the city to rescue the girl to whom he wants to declare his love, believing her to be in mortal danger. In this sense, *Cloverfield* follows a rather formulaic quest narrative, driven by a hero's race to rescue a damsel in distress from a high tower, avoiding the mortal threat posed by a fearsome beast. The story is the stuff of myths and fairy tales, but the film's elaborate experiments with form clothe it in very modern attire. (76)

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1060277>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloverfield>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/cloverfield>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cloverfield>

Avatar (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: James Cameron

Screenplay by: James Cameron, Ursula K. Le Guin (novel *The Word for World is Forest*, uncredited)

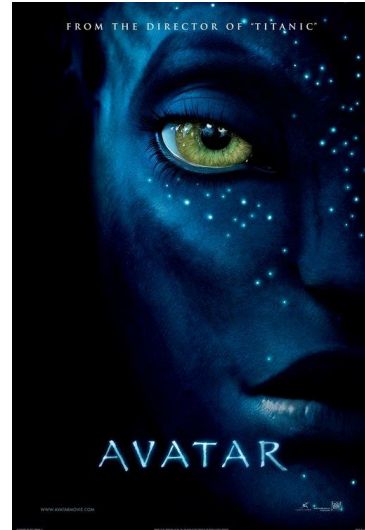
Producer(s): James Cameron, Jon Landau, Brooke Breton, Josh McLagen

Main performers: Sam Worthington (Jake Sully), Zoe Saldana (Neytiri), Sigourney Weaver (Dr. Grace Augustine), Stephen Lang (Colonel Miles Quaritch), Michelle Rodriguez (Trudy Chacón), Giovanni Ribisi (Parker Selfridge), Wes Studi (Eytukan)

Company: Lightstorm Entertainment, Dune Entertainment, Ingenious Film Partners, 20th Century Fox

Nationality: USA/UK

Duration: 2h 41'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)
- *Dances with Wolves* (1990)
- *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest* (1992)
- *The Last Samurai* (2003)
- *John Carter* (2012)
- *Ender's Game* (2013)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2010 (winner; six other nominations)

Best Cinematography: Mauro Fiore

Best Effects/Visual Effects: Joe Letteri, Stephen Rosenbaum

Best Art Direction: Rick Carter, Robert Stromberg, Kim Sinclair

Golden Globes 2010 (winner; two other nominations)

Best Director - Motion Picture: James Cameron

Best Motion Picture – Drama

BAFTA Awards 2010 (winner; six other nominations)

Best Production Design: Rick Carter, Robert Stromberg, Kim Sinclair

Best Special Visual Effects: Joe Letteri, Stephen Rosenbaum, Richard Baneham, Andrew R. Jones

REASONS TO SEE *Avatar*

- *Avatar* marked the starting point of 3D movies becoming the mainstream (though this is now a questioned trend).
- It has spectacular visual effects that depicts a beautiful alien world.
- This is James Cameron's comeback from his previous epic film *Titanic* (1997).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Upon the death of his brother, paraplegic marine Jake Sully is sent to planet Pandora as his replacement avatar driver, due to their similar genetic makeup. After an accidental encounter with the handsome, blue-skinned, native Na'vi people, Sully is given the 'diplomatic' mission of infiltrating and persuading the Na'vi to abandon their Hometree. Underneath, there lies an enormous amount of unobtainium, the rare mineral which is the whole purpose of the human colonization of Pandora (carried out by the Resources Development Administration on behalf of Interplanetary Commerce Administration). There are, however, hidden politics at work. Colonel Quaritch, the military commander, entices Jake's allegiance with the promise of healthy legs: his actual, secret mission is to probe the geography of the Hometree, so that it can be targeted for attack, regardless of what may happen to the Na'vi. Dr. Grace Augustine, the leading scientist, who mistrusts Quaritch, tutors Jake about how to approach the natives. Eventually, Jake learns to admire and identify with the Na'vi, helping them to fight the human invasion.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Avatar does not escape the sexualization of all the main characters, men or women, human or Na'vi. James Cameron revealed in an interview a telling detail about Neytiri's body image: "Right from the beginning I said, 'She's got to have tits' even though that makes no sense because her race, the Na'vi, aren't placental mammals" (in *Huffpost* 2010: online). The anonymous author of the articles observes that, anyway, "As much thought as Cameron put into creating perfect breasts for his heroine, her nipples had to remain covered by a strategically placed necklace because of the movie's PG-13 rating". Similarly, the very bold soldier Trudy Chacón, played by Michelle Rodriguez, always appears wearing a tank top tight enough to attract attention. On the men's side, the upper body of Jake's avatar grows to an outrageous size in a short time, dwarfing the finest Na'vi warrior, Tsu'tey, the heir apparent of the Omaticaya clan and Jake's main rival. These unsubtle manipulations are carried out to suit the common beauty standard of the audience, legitimizing Jake's heroism and smoothing the narrative as far as gender is concerned.

The movie is not at all progressive in its gender issues. Jake, a man who appears to be both courageous and reckless, conquers the fearsome leonopteryx (the flying Na'vi mount) to become the sixth Toruk Makto rider, in order to prove his alpha masculinity and capacity for leadership. Predictably, the clan worships Jake for the feat: "I see you", says the admiring Neytiri. The setting of Pandora implies harmony and unity between its people and nature. Notably, Jake begs Neytiri's consent before sexual intercourse, showing a positive component of his masculinity. Yet, consent is nowhere to be found in the ritual of taming the mountain banshees known as ikrans, which is extremely violent. The bottom line is that the movie still celebrates domination but hides its patriarchal intent well. Jake's warrior traits are presented as positive and righteous, whereas Quaritch's similar inclinations are hypocritically condemned. In contrast, the inevitable violence in response to aggression is deeply regretted in the novel *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) by Ursula K. Le Guin, from which Cameron surreptitiously borrowed a great deal of the plotline. No wonder she hated *Avatar*.

SEE: Staff. "James Cameron Explains Why the Na'vi Have Breasts", *Huffpost* 26 April 2010. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/james-cameron-explains-wh_n_475156. NOTE: The *Playboy* interview, to which this and other sources refer, is not available online.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Jake's negative reaction to the safety brief by Colonel Miles Quarich
- Dr. Grace Augustine's intense argument with Parker Selfridge and Colonel Quaritch Miles over the so-called diplomatic programme
- Jake's taming of the flying leonopteryx
- **Trudy Chacón's refusal to follow orders**

Villain Parker Selfridge, the representative of the colonialist Resources Development Administration, orders the destruction of the Na'vi Hometree. He grants Dr. Augustine's request to give her and Jake one hour to evacuate the Na'vi people. The pair fails, for time is too short, and the attack is carried out anyway. Trudy Chacón pilots one of the combat aircraft. Seeing how the Na'vi people suffer and die, she hesitates to open fire. In the end she tells herself "I didn't sign up for this shit" and leaves. One can only imagine how severe the consequences are for disobeying orders in battlefield. But between genocidal orders and her moral compass, Trudy chooses the latter and decides to disobey, which shows her courage and humanness. The military can thus be undermined from the inside by women who see beyond its patriarchal rules.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Christiane König, "Not Becoming-Posthuman in the Ultimate Postfilmic, Posthuman Male Fantasy: Queer-Feminist Observations on James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009)". *Gender Forum* 32 (2011): 86-108.

http://genderforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HistoricalMasculinities_Complete.pdf

(*Avatar*) creates a world as a whole, stable and organized one, that seems to be beyond the capitalist, exploitive, racist, sexist, militaristic facets of (post-)human existence. It effaces (colonial/imperialist) history, politics, technology and ontological difference all at once, to which correlates a stable, coherent male subject that becomes the successful, invincible leader of this perfect virtual world, thus, a fantasy, of which it's seemingly grounding in nature and biology is its ultimate closure. (105)

Michael Peterson, Laurie Beth Clark, & Lisa Nakamura, "'I See You'?: Gender and Disability in *Avatar*". *Flow* 5 February 2010. <http://www.flowjournal.org/2010/02/i-see-you-gender-and-disability-in-avarmichael-peterson-laurie-beth-clark-and-lisa-nakamura/>

Here, while Weaver appears in a kind of homage to both her earlier role with Cameron and to her characterization of Diane Fossey in *Gorillas in the Mist*, Michelle Rodriguez essentially reprises her role from *Aliens* as a butch marine with a penchant for salty tag-line dialogue (and has her own moment of going native when she wears a discreet swoosh of war paint as she pilots her helicopter into battle against the human mercenaries). The film is full of gestures of equality and showcases female combat and leadership, yet those touches should not obscure how deeply the narrative is organized by gender. For example, the male Na'vi understand weapons, and the women understand the network.

Lauren Bans, "Is *Avatar* a Feminist Movie?" *Slate* 22 December 2009.

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2009/12/is-avatar-a-feminist-movie.html>

It's true that Sigourney Weaver as an ultra-sharp scientist and Zoe Saldana as the gorgeous Na'vi princess Neytiri are both strong characters in *Avatar*. But ultimately, the success of their struggles is entirely dependent on a male –Jake Sully, the paraplegic jarhead who comes into their land, learns their ways (better than the Na'vi even-he becomes the first Na'vi warrior in generations to tame the dragon bird), ends up leading their war, and mating

with their princess. The male is still the chosen one in *Avatar*, just as John Connor is the chosen one in *Terminator*.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0499549>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar_\(2009_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar_(2009_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/avatar>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/avatar>

District 9 (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: Neill Blomkamp

Screenplay by: Neill Blomkamp (from his own short feature film *Alive in Joburg*), Terri Tatchell

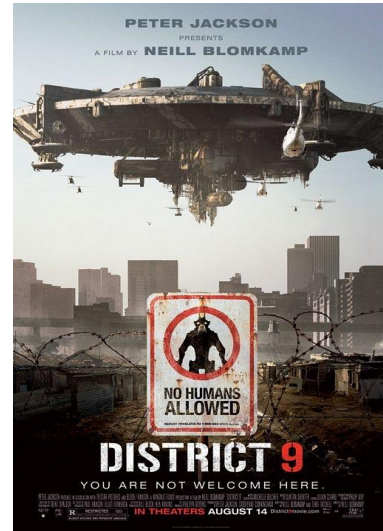
Producer(s): Peter Jackson, Carolynne Cunningham

Main performers: Sharlto Copley (Wikus van de Merwe), Jason Cope (Grey Bradnam - UKNR Chief Correspondent / Christopher Johnson), Nathalie Boltz (Sarah Livingstone), Louis Minnaar (Piet Smit), David James (Koobus Venter), Vanessa Haywood (Tania Smit Van de Merwe)

Company: QED International, WingNut Films

Nationality: New Zealand/USA/South Africa

Duration: 1h 52'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Alive in Joburg* (2005), short feature film
- *Alien Nation* (1988)
- *Independence Day* (1996)
- *Men in Black* (franchise, 1997)
- *Elysium* (2013)
- *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014)
- *Arrival* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards 2010 (nominee; two other nominations)

Best Motion Picture of the Year: Peter Jackson, Carolynne Cunningham

Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay: Neill Blomkamp, Terri Tatchell

Golden Globes 2010 (nominee)

Best Screenplay - Motion Picture: Neill Blomkamp, Terri Tatchell

BAFTA Awards 2010 (nominee; four other nominations)

Best Screenplay - Adapted: Neill Blomkamp, Terri Tatchell

David Lean Award for Direction: Neill Blomkamp

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Award 2010 (winner)

Best International Film

REASONS TO SEE *District 9*

- It is a political satire of xenophobia and the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
- It offers a different view of aliens who are portrayed as suffering, starving creatures seeking refuge on Earth.

- Sharlto Copley's magnificent debut performance as the witless Wikus van de Merwe.
- Despite being a low-budget movie, *District 9* became a great success for its unusual plot and realistic visual effects.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In March 1982, a spaceship filled with more than a million aliens landed in Johannesburg, South Africa. Three months later, the military decided to enter their hovering ship, finding it full of starving, sick aliens with anatomies similar to that of prawns (this soon became their pejorative name). A powerful corporation, Multi-National United, moved the aliens into a refugee camp (or, rather, concentration camp) in District 9. After years of protest from civilians including blacks and whites, MNU finally decides to evict the aliens from District 9 and move them to a more controlled and 'protected' area. While supervising this forced eviction, MNU officer Wikus van de Merwe comes across an alien christened Christopher Johnson and finds an illegal lab in his shack. While investigating, Wikus is sprayed with a mysterious alien chemical that will transform his body, turning him into a fugitive alien.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

If not entirely, *District 9* can be considered a male-dominated science-fiction movie. Except for a couple of scientists commenting on Wikus's transformation as well as his wife, Tania, and his mother, there is no other female representation, either human or alien. The Victorian idealisation of woman as the 'Angel in the House' is the main depiction of women in the story. Tania is portrayed as a stereotypical loyal wife, Wikus's "angel with a halo", as he calls her, who keeps her faith even after it is quite clear that her husband can never come back. Due to her limited portrayal, focalized through Wikus and her father, and her lack of backstory she comes across as unidimensional.

As for the aliens, their reproduction process and the existence of females is also being debated on various platforms. In a deleted scene one of the scientists explains that aliens have both male and female genitalia, and they reproduce asexually by laying their eggs in batches. Nevertheless, there is no clear indication throughout the movie concerning the gender of the prawns. As all of them are male-voiced, and given male names, they are rightfully perceived as a male-only community, which endorses the idea that it is a movie about males that lacks a female voice.

In her essay "A Gendered Shell Game" Claire Sisco King claims that "*District 9* challenges the ontological stability of the category of 'masculinity' and critiques hegemonic masculine norms by offering a range of male characters that cannot live up to or grossly exceed conventional expectations for what it means to 'be a man'" (81). Both Wikus (Sharlto Copley), the bumbling MNU officer, and Koobus Venter (David James), the embodiment of hyper masculinity, become the victims of the rigid heteronormative impositions on man. Ultimately, the endeavour to meet patriarchal social expectations leads to Wikus's brutal transformation and alienation, and to Koobus's self-destruction. No alternative, however, is offered either to human males or aliens, whatever gender they are.

SEE: King, Claire Sisco. "A Gendered Shell Game". *Communicating Marginalized Masculinities: Identity Politics in TV, Film, and New Media*, eds. Ronald L. Jackson II and Jamie E. Moshin. London: Routledge, 2012. 80-98.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Wikus's aborting the prawns' eggs
- The fake news about Wikus's being caught having sexual intercourse with a prawn
- Wikus's metamorphosis (several scenes)
- **Koobus Venter's fate**

The human/alien hybrid Wikus has been hiding in District 9 from the MNU and the mercenaries. Losing all his hopes of reversing his transformation and having witnessed the MNU's medical experiments on prawns, Wikus helps his alien friend, Christopher, and his little son to escape. Christopher gets caught by the mercenaries before being able to fly the spaceship, but Wikus saves him and his son. The head of the mercenaries, Koobus Venter finds Wikus and shoots him. Koobus, however, finds himself immediately surrounded by aliens, who do not hesitate to coolly dismember him.

This scene shows how Koobus is thoroughly poisoned by his hyper-masculinity. Out of pure hatred, grown even before Wikus turns into an alien, Koobus gleefully express his desire to see Wikus cut up by the scientists, offering to kill him after the experiments. Considering his literally alienated self/body, Wikus symbolises failed masculinity in the eyes of society. Koobus, his total opposite, feels charged with the mission to destroy this disgrace to manhood. Yet, his rage blinds him to the loyalty that Wikus has inspired from the aliens –and he pays for that with his gruesome end.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Helen Kapstein. "The Hysterics of *District 9*", *English Studies in Canada*, supplement *Hysteria Manifest: Cultural Lives of a Great Disorder* 40.1 (March 2014): 155-175. <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/esc/index.php/ESC/article/download/24861/18319/>

The movie sets up a traditionally essentialized relationship between hysteria and femininity, since Wikus's bodies shows all the signs and symptoms of the hysterical pregnant body but then explodes that essentialism because his body is not feminine—it is hermaphroditic and alien; that is, profoundly other. (...) But the revelation about alien reproduction does more than make him not a very good man; it makes him not a man at all. (...) Since Wikus turns into an alien, he has the potential to reproduce, to literally become the pregnant body. (163)

David Lundberg Kenrick. "Two Kinds of Bad Guys: *District 9* and Human Prejudice", *Psychology Today* 3 February 2010. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-caveman-goes-hollywood/201002/two-kinds-bad-guys-district-9-and-human-prejudice>

Unlike *Avatar*, *District 9* hardly demonstrates characters Getting Along, Getting Ahead, Getting the Bad Guy, or Getting the Girl. Indeed, most of this movie is spent showing the hero losing the girl, losing status, being betrayed by his friends, and being foiled by the bad guys. At the very end, we get a slight reversal, but it's not a cathartic one. And while all this makes the movie interesting and artsy, it also makes it painful to watch.

Prof. Susurro, "*District 9: Do You See What I See? Like a Whisper* 19 August 2009.

<https://likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2009/08/19/district-9-do-you-see-what-i-see/>

The black women in this film are even less relevant to the main plot. They do not even have names, they are just background noise. They fall into two categories: sex workers and food service workers. The food service workers stare out in the same blank way that most do in the real world, neither speaking nor commenting, just silently working with clear disdain. Though they are the first disinterested party to recognize Merwe during the manhunt, none of them are interviewed for the documentary reinforcing their irrelevance from the perspective of the

film. As for the sex workers, they too are silent props in Blomkamp's world. In one scene, where the main character confronts the head of the Nigerian gangsters exploiting district 9, a woman screams in the background clearly being physically and possibly sexually abused by several of the men. Blomkamp pulls back his camera just moments before revealing what they are doing to her behind the curtain but uses her torture as another example of what the Nigerians will do to get their hands on alien technology.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1136608>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District_9
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/district-9>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/district_9

Moon (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: Duncan Jones

Screenplay by: Nathan Parker, Duncan Jones (story)

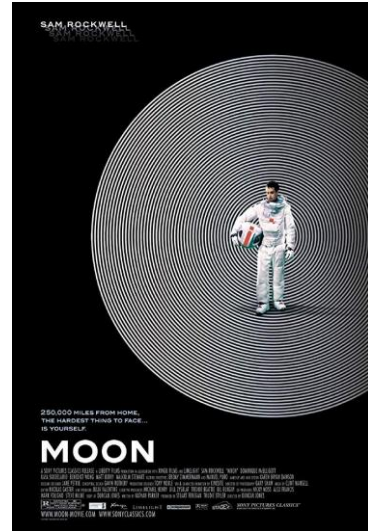
Producer(s): Stuart Fenegan, Trudie Styler

Main performers (credits order): Sam Rockwell (Sam Bell), Kevin Spacey (voice, GERTY), Dominique McElligott (Tess Bell), Rosie Shaw (Little Eve)

Company: Liberty Films UK, Xingu Films, Limelight, Lunar Industries, Independent, Stage 6 Films, Sony Pictures Classics

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 37'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Silent Running* (1972)
- *The Island* (2005)
- *Never let me go* (2010)
- *Gravity* (2013)
- *The Martian* (2015)

MAIN AWARDS

BAFTA Awards 2010 (winner)

Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer: Duncan Jones (director)

British Independent Film Awards 2009 (winner; five other nominations)

Best British Independent Film

Douglas Hickox Award: Duncan Jones

Sitges/Catalonian International Film Festival 2009 (winner)

Best Actor: Sam Rockwell

Best Film: Duncan Jones

Best Production Design: Tony Noble

Best Screenplay: Nathan Parker

REASONS TO SEE *Moon*

- It offers a raw, realistic vision of loneliness in space.
- Sam Rockwell's outstanding performance.
- The positive, interesting perspective on artificial intelligence with the robot GERTY.
- The ethical and moral issues related to cloning that it raises.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Lunar Industries LTD provides power to Earth from the Moon. Employee Sam Bell lives there, controlling the robots. After three years alone, he starts to hallucinate. Sam wants the contract to finish so he can go back to Earth and be reunited with his family but is told to wait. Sam has eventually an accident that apparently kills him and the robot GERTY, following the corporation's protocol, wakes up another of his clones. This clone goes outside, where he finds the body of Sam Bell I. Shocked, Sam Bell II takes it to the station and starts interrogating GERTY about what is happening. The a.i. explains that both are copies of the real Sam Bell, provided with his memory implants. Many other identical clones with the same implants are waiting for GERTY to wake them up if required. Sam I determines then to sacrifice himself so that Sam II can return to Earth and report to the authorities their enslavement, supposing, that is, that they don't know about it.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

GERTY is, to begin with, a curious case: as a robotic artificial intelligence, it has no gender, but, still, it has a female name and a male voice (that of Kevin Spacey). How strange is this mix? And how come they never use in films a neutral voice and a neutral name for something that cannot be gendered?

The astronaut (or, rather, space worker) in *Moon* is a man. Despite the many examples of women in many professions, society still takes it for granted that some are masculine, like mechanic, fire-fighter... and astronaut. The clones are made from a man though they could have made likewise out of a woman, a possibility the film discounts. The only women that appear in it are Sam's wife and daughter, who are seen only through a video screen; their function is telling Sam how proud they are of him, send their love, and wait for his return.

To keep the clones in good spirits, the corporation has implanted them with the memories of the real Sam Bell and made his family videos available, as if they were a live feed. These manipulated images represent the traditional ideal family: the breadwinner works away from home (in this case very far away), while wife and daughter keep the home fires burning without complaint. The company keeps its male clones under control in this way while cheating on them, highlighting their heroic sacrifice for the wellbeing of their family. This, of course, raises the issue of what kind of memory implants would have been used had the space worker been a woman.

The Moon workers have never been in contact with anyone and need not repeat prejudices and stereotypes from Earth. Yet, the insertion of Bell's memories also introduces gender issues with no real function except reproduce traditional gender roles. This is patent when Sam I and Sam II are fighting and one of them tells the other "You fight like a girl". What does that mean to the clones? Why should it be a bad thing to fight like a girl? How should they know? Their masculinity is just a false perception borrowed from Sam Bell's individual prejudices. As Scott Sundvall writes "The Big Bad Wolf in these fairy tales [about cloning] does not emerge from the deep dark woods, but rather stands brightly lit in the mirror in front of us" (2012: 36). Not only the memories but also the sexism of the 'real' Sam Bell persists.

SEE: Sundvall, Scott. "Clonetrolling the Future: Body, Space, and Ontology in Duncan Jones' *Moon* and Mark Romanek's *Never Let Me Go*". *Politics of Place – Technology 2* (February 2012): 18-39.

http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/politicsofplace/files/2012/02/POP_Issue02_Sundvall.pdf

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Sam watches, lovingly, the videos of his 'wife' and 'daughter'.
- Sam I and Sam II fight each other like alpha males.
- GERTY helps Sam II to escape.
- **Sam I calls 'home'**

Sam I remains sceptical and rejects GERTY's revelations. He insists that he is the real Sam Bell. When the two Sams override a communication tower that was jamming the signal from the Moon to the Earth, Sam I makes a videophone call to the Bell residence –supposedly his own home. A teen girl, who turns out to be Eve (his/their daughter) answers. During the course of the conversation, Sam I learns that Tess (his/their wife) has been dead for at least three years and that his little daughter is now fifteen. When Sam asks how Tess died, Eve begins to be alarmed and calls her father, the real Sam Bell, for help. Sam I understands then that he really is a clone and his world collapses. Since the clones are just a copy of the original Sam Bell, created to work and die, do their lives matter? How, indeed, is that different from our fate in capitalist society where we live only to work and eventually die?

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Bob Mondello, "In *Moon*, Glimpses Of A Lonely Soul's Dark Night", *NPR* 13 June 2009.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105201326>

You can see why Jones might have decided there was a need to be filled. There haven't been a lot of films lately to offer a glimpse of a future that isn't alien-infested or populated by folks for whom photon-blasters are the score-settlers of choice.

The story in *Moon*, about an astronaut who starts deteriorating mentally as his three-year solo stint on a lunar mining site is nearing an end, is a throwback to an earlier breed of science fiction: the techno-sceptical, isolated-in-space psychodrama. The form blossomed for a time after Stanley Kubrick demonstrated its possibilities in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, only to be eclipsed a few years later when *Star Wars* ushered in a cowboys-in-space era.

Ruth Hessey, "Moon", *ABC* 9 October 2009.

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/movietime/moon/3124196>

David Bowie's son Duncan Jones has directed an eccentric sci-fi [movie] which cleverly deconstructs the mythology of the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* which have colonised the future of our imaginations with their glamour, self-importance and operatic soundtracks.

Made for \$5-million using a couple of sets and some toy trucks, Sam Rockwell gives us a brilliant imagining of what really happened to Major Tom.

George Hadley, "Sam's the Man in this *Moon*", *The Japan Times* 16 April 2010.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2010/04/16/films/sams-the-man-in-this-moon/>

However, in this cult creation directed by Duncan Jones (aka Zowie Bowie), it's never easy to know who's really who, apart from the robot of indeterminate gender most indefinitely named GERTY. In *Moon*, GERTY the robot sports a round-face sticker that frequently changes expression but usually features the "smiley face" that may give viewers a sinister impression. Says Rockwell, "As with any mechanical or robotic being in this sort of movie, you don't know how much, shall we say, 'soul' it has".

Does the fact that the male-voiced robot has a female name reflect on Spacey's sexuality?

Rockwell laughs. "Well, that you'd have to ask whoever named GERTY. But I do think it was a great choice, having Kevin voice her or him... or whatever. His voice has always had that

sort of ambiguity to it and a quality of, like, sarcasm and even implied menace. And yet, sometimes, a warmth”.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1182345/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/moon>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/moon/>

Star Trek (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: J.J. Abrams

Screenplay by: Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, Gene Roddenberry (TV series)

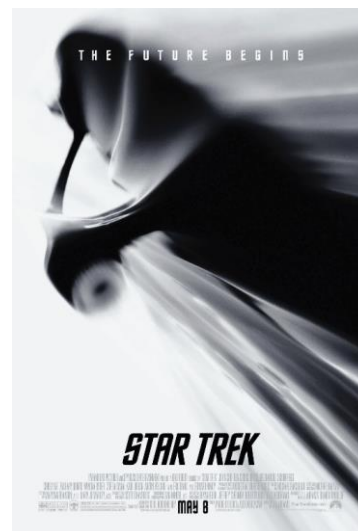
Producer(s): J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof

Main performers: Chris Pine (Kirk), Zachary Quinto (Spock), Leonard Nimoy (Spock Prime), Eric Bana (Nero), Bruce Greenwood (Pine); Karl Urban (Bones), Zoe Saldana (Uhura), Simon Pegg (Scotty), John Cho (Sulu), Anton Yelchin (Chekov)

Company: Bad Robot, Mavrocine, Paramount Pictures, Spyglass Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 7'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Star Trek* films I-VI (1979-1991)
- *Star Trek: Generations* (1994)
- *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996)
- *Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998)
- *Star Trek: Nemesis* (2002)
- *Star Trek: Into the Darkness* (2013)
- *Star Trek: Beyond* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2010

Best Achievement in Makeup (winner)

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing (nominee)

Best Achievement in Sound Editing (nominee)

Best Achievement in Visual Effects (nominee)

Screen Actors Guild Awards 2010 (winner)

Outstanding Performance by a Stunt Ensemble in a Motion Picture

Empire Awards (UK) 2010 (winner)

Best Sci-Fi/Fantasy

REASONS TO SEE *Star Trek*

- It is *Star Trek*'s eleventh film and the first one in the current *Star Trek* reboot.
- Its visual effects and make-up are excellent.
- Chris Pine and Zachary Quinto give outstanding performances as Captain Kirk and Spock.
- It is a very entertaining film!
- The film has a great soundtrack by Michael Giacchino.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

On the very day of James Kirk's birth, his father sacrifices himself in order to save the crew of his spaceship, under attack by a Romulan vessel commanded by Captain Nero; the Romulans seem to be seeking revenge against Ambassador Spock. Twenty-five years later, James Kirk has grown up to be a problematic youngster; however, Captain Pike is convinced that his potential would be put into great use in the Starfleet. Pike offers Kirk a place in the Academy, and although Kirk is initially reluctant, he decides to accept the offer. When an emergency happens on Vulcan, the *USS Enterprise* sets off into space with a crew of young cadets. This crew will have to face the same Captain Nero that killed Kirk's father, as he is still avenging the disappearance of his planet. Nero gets to destroy Vulcan by opening a black hole inside the planet. Earth is his next objective, and only the *USS Enterprise* can stop him.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In her article on Lt. Nyota Uhura (played by Zoe Saldana), Christine Scodari claims that the 2009 *Star Trek* film "presents a flawed portrait of women. Uhura's is the only female role that spans the film, and we are left craving more demonstrations of her competence" (339). In fact, the (only) four female characters appearing in the film serve two purposes: those of being a mother (and wife) and a love interest.

Two of those female characters are only portrayed as mothers/wives. On the one hand, we have James Kirk's mother, Winona (Jennifer Morrison). She only appears briefly at the beginning of the film, when we get to know that James Kirk Jr. was born while his father sacrificed himself in order to save the rest of the spaceship under his command. The other female character in a traditional role is Spock's mother, Amanda Grayson (Winona Ryder), whose role is not much bigger than that of Mrs. Kirk. Amanda is the human woman who married a Vulcan (the Ambassador) and gave birth to Spock. What matters here is not her unique life experience but that she tragically dies in sight of her beloved son.

The other two main female characters are Uhura and her roommate Gaila. The latter only appears as James Kirk's sexual partner in a scene which serves the purpose of bringing a little bit of comedy to the film. Lt. Uhura's role more extensive but still she is mainly the love interest of both Kirk and Spock. We are told that Uhura is incredibly smart and capable, but her presence is only relevant in the film when she is with one of the two men. Besides, the interest that Spock shows in her goes very much against character and seems to be fuelled only by the need to reduce the homoerotic bond between him and Kirk (much more evident in this film in which gay actor Zachary Quinto plays Spock).

All in all, we could say that the female representation in *Star Trek* is not only insufficient, but also highly stereotypical, something that the film's audience has noticed and severely criticised.

SEE: Scodari, Christine. "Nyota Uhura is not a White Girl: Gender, Intersectionality, and *Star Trek* 2009's Alternate Romantic Universes". *Feminist Media Studies* 12.3 (2012): 31-51.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Uhura kisses Spock to comfort him after he loses his mother
- Uhura kisses Spock before Kirk to make him jealous
- The fight between James Kirk and Spock

■ The bar brawl between James Kirk and four other men over Uhura

When Uhura gets to a bar in Iowa, she meets a very drunk James Kirk who flirts, or at least tries to flirt, with her. She states that she is not interested in him, responding to his annoying comments with elegant wisecracking. Uhura needs no help to defend herself but a man and three of his friends approach Kirk to 'save' her. Kirk and this man start a verbal confrontation that leads to a huge fistfight for the position of alpha male. Only a higher-ranking man, Captain Pike, can stop them. In this scene we see how Uhura's voice is silenced three times. First, James Kirk continues his flirtation even though Uhura tells him she is not interested; then, the man (we do not know his name) and his friends ignore her when she assures them that she does not need any help; finally, neither Kirk nor the other man listen to her when she begs them to stop, though supposedly she is the reason why they were fighting. All in all, in this scene we see how Uhura's wishes are dismissed by all the men and how displaying their macho attitude matters more to them than her attention.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Melissa Silverstein, "Star Trek's Gender Problem", *Huffpost* 12 June 2009 (updated May 25 2011). https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-treks-gender-problem_b_202066

But I think the film missed a huge opportunity with its women. Maybe I'm spoiled from *Battlestar Galactica* and I know TV is different from films, but I think they blew a big opportunity by stereotyping women's roles. What I loved about *Battlestar Galactica* was that gender didn't matter and in this film it clearly did. There were a lot of women in miniskirts just walking around. *Star Trek* has lots of inter-planetary diversity, including Kirk's relationship with an all green woman, yet it still can't get over the gender stereotypes.

Peter Bradshaw, "Star Trek", *The Guardian* 8 May 2009.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/may/08/star-trek>

You want "bromance"? I'll give you bromance –the greatest of them all. It's the bromance that flowers in this wildly exciting and enjoyable summer action movie, about the manly relationship between a mercurially talented starship commander and his mixed-race first officer, whose virile otherness is signalled by discreetly tapering pointy ears, eyebrows in a thick geometric frown and that extraordinary straight fringe, a hairdo he must maintain in front of the bathroom mirror every night with a ruler and pair of scissors. Why have we filmgoers wasted so much of our time and attention on all those other beta-male bondings and under-par buddy hookups when the greatest friendship of all was right there under our noses?

Elién Jones, "The Embiggening Power of Star Trek '09", *The Exiled* 11 May 2009.

<http://exiledonline.com/the-embiggening-power-of-star-trek-'09/?09>

Star Trek '09 is, arguably, already on the case, embedding the new James T. Kirk firmly in the iconography of the '50s rebel white male, showing him joyriding in a vintage hot rod through Iowa cornfields, riding a motorcycle wearing a black leather jacket, hitting on girls relentlessly, always in favor of hotdog bravery, etc. He is, at first, out of place in the cool diverse '60s-looking world of the Starship *Enterprise*, the high-modernist, space-age pad which still spells the utopian future for us, mainly because it was the last one we ever envisioned.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0796366/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/star-trek>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_trek_11

Inception (2010)

CREW & CAST

Director: Christopher Nolan

Screenplay by: Christopher Nolan

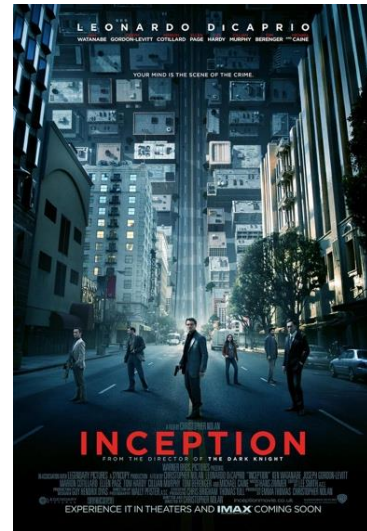
Producer(s): Emma Thomas, Christopher Nolan, Kanjiro Sakura, Yoshikuni Taki

Main performers: Leonardo DiCaprio (Cobb), Joseph Gordon-Levitt (Arthur), Ellen Page (Ariadne), Tom Hardy (Eames), Ken Watanabe (Saito), Dileep Rao (Yusuf), Cillian Murphy (Robert Michael Fischer), Tom Berenger (Browning), Marion Cotillard (Mal)

Company: Legendary Pictures, Syncopy, Warner Bros.

Nationality: UK/USA

Duration: 2h 28'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999)
- *The Matrix* (1999)
- *Memento* (2000)
- *The Butterfly Effect* (2004)
- *Paprika* (2006)
- *Source Code* (2011)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2011 (winner; four other nominations)

Best Achievement in Cinematography: Wally Pfister

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing: Lora Hirschberg, Gary Rizzo, Ed Novick

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Chris Corbould, Andrew Lockley, Pete Bebb, Paul J. Franklin

BAFTA Awards 2011 (winner; six other nominations)

Best Production Design: Guy Hendrix Dyas, Larry Dias, Douglas A. Mowat

Best Sound: Richard King, Lora Hirschberg, Gary Rizzo, Ed Novick

Best special Visual Effects: Paul J. Franklin, Chris Corbould, Pete Bebb, Andrew Lockley

REASONS TO SEE *Inception*

- The fascinating topic of the lucid dream is very well presented in the film.
- The visual effects and the music of the film are great.
- The cast. Actors like Leonardo DiCaprio, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ellen Page and Cillian Murphy give excellent performances in this film.
- The storylines are really imaginative and intriguing.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Dom Cobb is an industrial spy specialising in sneaking into dreams and robbing individuals of their ideas. He is also a fugitive from the law. A Japanese businessman, Saito, offers Cobb help to go back home to his children in exchange for his planting an idea that will benefit him in the mind of a man, his main competitor's son (this is the complex process called inception). Cobb assembles a team for the job but conceals from them that, as dream architect Ariadne discovers, a projection of Cobb's dead wife Mal lies in his subconscious; this projection is a big threat to Cobb's stability and, therefore, to the team's mission. Their target also proves to be far harder to manipulate than expected.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Mal's ghostly presence is central to the film. Her death, a suicide which she uses to frame him for her murder, characterises her as a *femme fatale*. Since he cannot prove his innocence, Cobb must abandon their children (left in the care of his father-in-law and mentor, Dr. Stephen Miles) and lead the clandestine life of a fugitive. Mal appears in many important scenes of the film but, as many critics have complained, her presence is just Cobb's projection of her, or his memories. We cannot know what the 'real' Mal was like, nor how she interacted with other people. Or whether Cobb's subconscious contains the truth about their relationship.

The other female character in *Inception*, the intelligent and rational Ariadne (Ellen Page), plays a rather secondary role in the film as well as in the mission. She is a foil to Cobb, with her own sub-mission consisting of helping him to face the issues he still has with the dead Mal. A blogger notes that "during dialogue, Nolan likes to shoot from the person talking at the person listening. When the conversation is between Ariadne and Cobb, he portrays them differently. As Ariadne talks, we still see her head in the corner of the shot. But as Cobb talks, he disappears as the camera watches Ariadne. The camera can be construed as coming from the man but refuses to identify with a woman" (2016: online). In other words, even from the perspective of cinema technology, *Inception* can also be interpreted as a story constructed from the perspective of the male gaze, in which women are, once more, the 'others'.

As for the men, the corporate business environment and Cobb's very mission (manipulating a son against his father) are undeniable patriarchal. Cobb may be redeemed by his feelings for his children, but it takes him, anyway, long enough to do something effective to return to them.

SEE: Shamberger, R.J. "Inception, Gender Politics, and Perspective: Answering the Masculine Malaise". *The Prolongation of Work – Cultural Theory* 15 December 2016. <https://sites.williams.edu/engl-117-fall16/uncategorized/finding-truths-n-hood-fiction/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Ariadne discovers what is hiding in Cobb's mind
- Cobb persuades Mal to commit suicide with him to end their long dreamlife together
- Cobb reunites with his children at the end of the film
- **Mal commits suicide**

Cobb and Mal once built together a dream and they lived a happy life inside it for decades. Later, seeing Mal stuck so deeply in the dream that she thought this was reality, Cobb planted a thought in Mal's mind to make her see that was a fake world and she should wake up and return to real life. However, although they returned to reality, there was a side-effect to Cobb's manipulation of Mal's thoughts. She was convinced that the real world where they

were was also a dream, and so she decided to return to what she considered real by killing herself. Fearing that Cobb would not commit suicide with her, Mal frames him for her death, as she explains to him before jumping off a high-rise building.

Mal (played by Marion Cotillard) is presented, then, as an incongruous mixture of the lovely woman who is adored by her husband and the controlling *femme fatale* intent on destroying her man. Leonardo Di Caprio's brilliant performance as Cobb earns the character sympathy from the audience, as he is shown here as a vulnerable man on the verge of losing not only his wife but also control over his life. Death empowers Mal and disempowers Cobb. However, the figure of the *femme fatale*, men's fantasy about the threat posed by women's power, always tends to exaggerate women's actual power. Cobb's power over Mal's mind and life is never questioned, in contrast. This scene is, then, further evidence of the sexist perspective in *Inception*.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

A.O. Scott, "This Time the Dream Is on Me". *The New York Times* 15 July 2010.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/movies/16inception.html>

Cobb, whose life depends on suppressing emotions and memories that he cannot control, is thus a typical Christopher Nolan hero. His air of guilt and sorrow —the sense of unfinished psychic business pushing against his conscious intentions— marks his kinship with Christian Bale's Batman, with the detective played by Al Pacino in *Insomnia* and with the anguished amnesiac played by Guy Pearce in *Memento*. Mr. Di Caprio exercises impressive control in portraying a man on the verge of losing his grip, but Mr. Nolan has not, in the end, given Cobb a rich enough inner life to sustain the performance.

Roger Ebert, "Inception", *Roger Ebert* 14 July 2010.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/inception-2010>

Nolan helps us with an emotional thread. The reason Cobb is motivated to risk the dangers of inception is because of grief and guilt involving his wife Mal (Marion Cotillard), and their two children. More I will not (in a way, cannot) say. Cotillard beautifully embodies the wife in an idealized way. Whether we are seeing Cobb's memories or his dreams is difficult to say —even, literally, in the last shot. But she makes Mal function as an emotional magnet, and the love between the two provides an emotional constant in Cobb's world, which is otherwise ceaselessly shifting.

Mrs. Squash, "Inception Falls Flat", *Feministing* 17 September 2011.

<http://feministing.com/2010/09/17/feminist-film-review-inception-falls-flat/>

The motivations of our hero, Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) are based on a cheesy subplot about his relationship with wife and kids. The attempt to 'humanize' Cobb, an otherwise violent character, essentializes both woman and children. The wife is jealous, scheming, and hysterical while the kids are faceless, silent and angelic. We like the spunk of Ariadne (Ellen Page), a smart and confident woman but she serves merely as a foil to Cobb whose wife, kids and crush, Ariadne herself, hold the whole emotional weight that the plot rests on. The film's dependence on a shallow emotional story weakens the plot and characters.

LINKS

- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1375666/>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inception>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/inception>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/inception>

Monsters (2010)

CREW & CAST

Director: Gareth Edwards
Screenplay by: Gareth Edwards
Producer(s): Allan Niblo, James Richardson
Main performers: Andrew Kaulder (Scoot McNairy), Whitney Able (Sam Wynden)
Company: Protagonist Pictures, Vertigo Films
Nationality: UK
Duration: 1h 34'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *War of the Worlds* (2005)
- *The Mist* (2007)
- *Cloverfield* (2008)
- *District 9* (2009)
- *Carriers* (2009)
- *The Road* (2009)

MAIN AWARDS

British Independent Film Awards 2010 (winner)

Best Achievement in Production

Best Technical Achievement: Gareth Edwards (for visual effects)

Best Director: Gareth Edwards

London Critics Circle Film Awards 2011 (winner)

Breakthrough British Filmmaker: Gareth Edwards

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Award, 2011 (winner)

Best International Film

REASONS TO SEE *Monsters*

- The great acting by the two main actors, Andrew Kaulder and Sam Wynden (the supporting cast was made up of people from the street, met during shooting the film).
- It's a quite accomplished science-fiction thriller with elements of road trip and romance genres, which offers quality filmmaking and special effects with a limited budget (£500,000).
- Andrew and Sam are relatable characters who, despite their flaws, are very likeable.

- The US vs. Mexico theme is even more relevant today than when *Monsters* was made, specially its emphasis on the idea of building a wall on the border.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Six years before *Monsters* begins, a NASA probe containing alien DNA exploded over the Mexican desert. The sample grew into dangerous monsters that are contained in Northern Mexico, segregated from the United States by an immense border wall. During the creatures' migration season, Andrew, an American photojournalist chasing them to take pictures, is given the mission to ensure the safe return home of his boss's daughter, Sam, from Mexico. Their plans for a relatively easy trip back to the USA are shattered after a robbery, which forces them to travel through the Infected Zone relying on a series of strangers. As they traverse the jungles and the shambles of former villages, the pair discover who the true monsters are. The US has been bombing Mexico with deadly gas in a useless attempt to destroy the aliens (who only attack when provoked), thus killing innocent people in their efforts. When they reach the border, Andrew and Sam realise that nothing can stop the alien infestation.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

The main gender issue in *Monsters* (a British film) is the US Government's patriarchal hold over Mexico and its people. Although the fault lies completely on the US's failed NASA mission, Mexico is left to cope as it can with the aliens that survived and thrive on Earth, culminating their isolation with a massive border wall. The powerful become chicken hawks, able to dictate the situation, but never putting themselves in the actual fight. Sam's wealthy, powerful father is a perfect example because though he orders Andrew to save his daughter, he never contemplates the idea of saving her himself.

As the audience learns through the course of the film, the aliens are not the monsters, but, as Kirk Combe explains, "the imperialism of the hegemon and the belligerence of its dominant masculinity are the real monsters of Edwards's film" (2015: 1011). This initial appearance of good and bad based on past masculine action heroes is transposed, exposing the military as chemical bombers of innocents and the aliens as peaceful beings, just trying to survive in a land they never chose to come to. Combe corroborates, "The alien Bad turns out to be, surprisingly, the familiar Good, whereas the accustomed masculine heroic becomes, disturbingly, the monstrously perverse" (1012).

The main characters, Andrew and Sam, also defy expectations. It is inferred from Andrew's conversation with her father that Sam is a helpless girl in need of saving. The truth is that Sam is much more adept at integrating with her Mexican surroundings than Andrew. After giving up her engagement ring for safe passage through the Infected Zone, she comments on her relief from the weight of the ring. This is both physical and emotional/psychological and giving up the ring freed her, temporarily, from the patriarchal hold of her fiancé and father.

Andrew's growth during the film changes him from someone who "turns a blind eye toward systemic exploitation and prejudice, as members of the dominant group are trained to do" (Combe, 1019). When asked if he feels guilt profiting off tragedy, he explains that whereas a photo of a dead child could bring him fifty thousand dollars, a live child's portrait is worthless. Later in the film, he finds a slain family, a child lies lifeless on the ground. Without hesitation, he reaches into the bag for a blanket to cover her, and even finds a few flowers to put on her body.

SEE: Combe, Kirk. "Homeland Insecurity: Macho Globalization and Alien Blowback in *Monsters*". *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48.5 (October 2015): 1010-1029.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Sam speaks to the Mexican cab driver
- Sam's phone conversation with her father
- The locals' memorials and pleas for peace
- **Andrew's explanation of photo worth/Andrew finds the dead family**

Sam asks Andrew if he feels bad that something bad has to happen for him to be successful as a photojournalist. He explains that a photo of a dead child is worth a lot of money, while a photo of a happy child worthless. This is hardly his fault but how the market is built. Later, however, when he finds a dead child, he covers her with a blanket and flowers instead of taking a picture. His allegiance to the patriarchy is no longer in control, and he is finally able to make compassionate choices. In an interview with the actor, Scoot McNairy, who improvised most of the dialogue, he explains his character's change of heart. "The only thing he cares about is making a name for himself, but she (Able) provokes him to start thinking of some things you should be thinking of and in the process challenges him in a way nobody ever has before" (in Barnard 2010: online). Once again, Sam is the stronger of the two, and is able to inadvertently influence him to be a better person.

SEE: Barnard, Linda. "Interview: Whitney Able and Scoot McNairy". *The Toronto Star* 12 November 2010.

https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2010/11/12/interview_whitney_able_and_scoot_mcnairy.html

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Roger Ebert, "Monsters", *Roger Ebert* 17 November 2010.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/monsters-2010>

There's an obvious parallel with our current border situation and the controversy over undocumented aliens. And another one with our recent wars, where expensive and advanced aircraft are used to fire missiles at enemies who are mostly invisible. A process of demonization is also going on: Are these beings actually a threat?

Leslie Pitt, "Review: *Monsters*", *The Afrofilmviewer* 6 December 2010.

<http://afrofilmviewer.blogspot.com/2010/12/review-monsters.html>

Also as a romance I can't say that the meandering pace of the love story and the small chit chat make me believe in the central relationship much. This may be because I've been forced fed sickly sweet rom-coms since mainstream cinema gave up on trying to give us anything different, but with all that said, I didn't just truly buy it.

This is not due to the two wide eye performances of the leads with Scoot McNairy being the standout. It is his character that is given the most development and he runs with it well, with the films more emotional moments stemming from him. This is not to say that Whitney Able's role isn't any less important, it is merely more subdued.

Jennie Punter, "Monsters: Aliens Adventures in the Infected Zone", *Globe and Mail* 12 November 2010. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/monsters-alien-adventures-in-the-infected-zone/article1392388/>

With *Monsters*, Edwards transcends the special-effects auteur label, creating a memorable sci-fi story in which the hero and heroine are true equals in the adventure. How's that for an alien concept?

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1470827/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsters_\(2010_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsters_(2010_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/monsters>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/monsters_2010

Attack the Block (2011)

CREW & CAST

Director: Joe Cornish
Screenplay by: Joe Cornish
Producer(s): Nira Park, James Wilson
Main performers (credits order): Jodie Whittaker (Sam), John Boyega (Moses), Alex Esmail (Pest), Leon Jones (Jerome), Franz Drameh (Dennis), Danielle Vitalis (Tia)
Company: Optimum Releasing, StudioCanal, Film4, UK Film Council, Big Talk Production
Nationality: UK/France
Duration: 1h 28'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Thing* (1982)
- *Gremlins* (1984)
- *Critters* (1986)
- *Predator* (1987)
- *Attack the Gas Station!* (1999)
- *Cockneys vs Zombies* (2012)

MAIN AWARDS

Black Film Critics Circle Awards 2011
BFCC Award -Top Ten Films: Sixth
Special Mention (winner)
Black Reel Awards 2012 (winner; five other nominations)
Best Actor: John Boyega
Outstanding Foreign Film
Sitges - Catalanian International Film Festival 2011 (winner)
Audience Award - Best Feature Film: Joe Cornish
Best Original Soundtrack: Steven Price
Special Prize of the Jury - Feature Film: Joe Cornish

REASONS TO SEE *Attack the Block*

- It is an excellent mixture of science fiction with the teen horror movie.
- Its attention to multiple social issues: the power of brotherhood among male teens, racial discrimination in inner cities, social class, woman's (dis)empowerment.
- Its alternative to the classic heroic plot: the hero is a marginalized 15-year-old black teenager.

- The cast of teen actors, and particularly newcomer John Boyega and, indeed, Jodie Whittaker (the first female Dr. Who!)

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In South London, a gang of five teens led by Moses rob nurse Sam in the street. Unexpectedly, a flame descends from the sky, turning out to be an alien creature. Moses, playing leader of the gang, kills the alien and brings it back to the building in the working-class estate where they all live. Soon, more and more aliens appear. As they flee them, the boys realise that Sam is their own neighbour. Although she is still angry that she was robbed, Sam helps the gang fight the monsters and even saves Moses's life. It later turns out that those aliens are all male and the one killed by Moses and brought to the building is the only female. The male aliens chase them because Moses's jacket is smeared with the blood of the female alien. Moses eventually attracts all the aliens into his home to blow them all up. But since no trace is left of them, the police arrest him anyway for what they see as a criminal act.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Amy Luke claims that "although *Attack the Block* features several other characters, such as laid-back drug dealer Ron (Nick Frost) and trustafarian Brewis (Luke Treadaway), the spotlight is never taken away from its core young adult cast. Jodie Wittaker is certainly an important character, but the film is only stronger for Cornish's commitment to this being at heart the story of Moses and his friends" (2011: online).

Throughout the movie, nurse Sam conforms, despite her ambiguous name, with conventional gender roles. She appears first as a victim, when she suffers the gang's robbery though it is obvious that she has little money. She is portrayed then as an irrational female in a state of panic, an aspect also connected with her being white in a mostly black neighbourhood. When she is later told to take a weapon to defend herself, Sam wields a guitar instead of a knife. Later, she does kill an alien with no hesitation when it almost wounds Moses, but in most scenes she appears as Moses's supporter instead of as the heroine in her own right. While Sam's importance is enhanced until she somehow becomes the boy's equal, a point marked by Moses's apology, her status can never override his.

Although the gang's activities certainly include crime, Cornish emphasises the advantages of being part of a solid brotherhood, which provides the teen boys with mutual encouragement and support in the absence of the adults (or because of their neglect). Of course, the film argues that the group needs to leave crime behind and understand how it hurts victims like Sam, but also shows that group cooperation leads to ending the alien threat. Cornish's casting of John Boyega as Moses is, in that sense, inspired, for it challenges the classic male heroic plot. Here the hero comes from an extremely limited socio-economic background; his race, age and gang life make Moses a very unexpected hero. Cornish (who is white but also a South Londoner) empowers working-class black British masculinity with Moses, though the final twist reveals that though the spectators may welcome this novelty, it will take the British authorities much longer to regard boys like Moses as other than criminals.

SEE: Luke, Amy. "Review: *Attack the Block* (2011)". *What Messes with Your Head?* July 2017. <https://blogs.adelaide.edu.au/what-messes-with-your-head/2017/07/26/review-attack-the-block-2011/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Moses and his gang members rob nurse Sam in the street
- Sam becomes Moses's main support as he approaches the shed with the alien
- Moses blows up all the aliens alone
- **Sam saves Moses's life**

After killing the female alien and a second, male alien, Moses has gained enormous confidence. He is no longer seen panicking or frightened by the creatures. Grabbing a Japanese sword one of his gang members gives him, he is ready to engage in face-to-face combat with an alien. Since he is no expert swordsman, however, his katana gets stuck in the wall. As he struggles to pull it out, the alien gets closer, and it is up to Sam to come out of hiding and kill the alien, which she does by neatly stabbing him with a dagger.

This scene has not elicited, unfortunately, much comment. However, Sam's reaction is remarkable. Initially, she is portrayed as a victim in the robbery, and mostly ignored by the boys in the scenes when they flee the aliens. However, Sam is the one who saves Moses's life. Her behaviour contributes significantly to the plot establishing him as a new male hero. This scene could be interpreted, then, as a sign of female empowerment, intended to show that women must learn to face danger like their male counterparts. Moses's impression of Sam also shifts from that moment onward; he learns to trust her, realising as well that as a man he needn't be and look tough in all occasions. As a result, this female-dominant rescue scene positively alters the male-centred heroic discourse.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Peter Bradshaw, "Attack the Block, Review", *The Guardian* 12 May 2011.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/may/12/attack-the-block-review>

Jodie Whittaker plays Sam, an overworked, underpaid nurse who is walking home from the tube station, talking to her mum on the mobile. She finds herself surrounded by a crew of five teenagers, led by the hard, impassive Moses (John Boyega). They demand her valuables and threaten her with a knife. She is white; they are black and mixed-race; she speaks RP English and they speak London patois-slang, the language in which the rest of the movie is to be conducted. Moses and his mates don't realise it, but Sam lives in the same place they do –the awe-inspiringly gaunt, grim tower block that looms into the night sky like a marooned spaceship. Just as trembling, terrified Sam hands over her possessions, the extra-terrestrial assault begins. Furiously, Moses attacks the invader and becomes as terrified of these interplanetary beasts as Sam is of them. Yet Sam and Moses have to team up to fight the aggressor.

Wesley Morris, "Attack the Block: Brit Alien-invasion Satire Attack is Full of Surprises", *The Boston Globe* 19 August 2011.

http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/08/19/british_alien_invasion_satire_attack_the_block_is_full_of_surprises/

There's a smart moment in the new alien-invasion action-comedy *Attack the Block* in which a young black hood named Moses (John Boyega) speculates that the monsters roving around his South London high-rise apartment complex must have been sent from the Government to kill black people. His rant doesn't rile the teenage girls who've just listened to him. They laugh, which is a surprising reaction, not because they ought to agree with him, but because the movie knows they shouldn't. Agreeing with him would somehow excuse the thuggery that Moses and his friends practice in the opening sequence. Even though these girls know London race and class dynamics, they won't go there.

Jeannette Catsoulis, “Inner City vs Outer Space”, *The New York Times* 28 July 2011.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/29/movies/attack-the-block-review.html>

A canny blend of jokes and jitters, *Attack the Block* (the title is a homage to a marginal 1999 South Korean movie, *Attack the Gas Station!*) is about breaching class barriers to defend your home turf. As the resourceful hoodlums —armed mainly with bikes, brooms and baseball bats— join forces with a stoned college student (an excellent Luke Treadaway) and their earlier mugging victim (Jodie Whittaker), Jonathan Amos edits every scene to the bone. Thomas Townend’s photography gives the soaring high-rises a penumbral fairy tale look, and the largely inexperienced leads effortlessly engage. Their patois may be impenetrable, but their ragtag courage is as clear as day.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1478964/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_the_Block
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/attack-the-block>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/attack_the_block

***Battle Los Angeles* (2011)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Jonathan Liebesman

Screenplay by: Christopher Bertolini (as Chris Bertolini)

Producer(s): Ori Marmur, Neal H. Moritz

Main performers: Aaron Eckhart (Sgt. Michael Nantz), Ramon Rodriguez (2nd Lt. William Martinez), Will Rothhaar (Cpl. Lee Imlay), Cory Hardict (Cpl. Jason Lockett), Jim Parrack (LCpl. Peter Kerns), Gino Anthony Pesi (Cpl. Nick Stavrou), Michelle Rodriguez (TSgt. Elena Santos), Bridget Moynahan (Michele)

Company: Relativity Media, Original Film, Columbia Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 56'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Aliens* (1986)
- *Independence Day* (1996)
- *War of the Worlds* (2005)
- *Cloverfield* (2008)
- *Skyline* (2010)
- *Pacific Rim* (2011)

MAIN AWARDS

ALMA Awards 2011 (nominee)

Favorite Movie Actress - Drama/Adventure: Michelle Rodriguez

Favorite Movie Actor: Michael Peña

BMI Film & TV Awards 2011 (winner)

Music Award: Brian Tyler

Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Awards 2011 (nominee)

Best Film: Jonathan Liebesman

REASONS TO SEE *Battle Los Angeles*

- There is a perfect mixture of war and alien invasion themes that gives its audience an astonishingly realistic, engaging feeling.
- Its grand visual effects, which lend credibility to the plot.
- Aaron Eckhart's role as the battle-wearied Sergeant who knows better than his Academy-trained superior.
- Michelle Rodriguez's always effective presence as tough soldier TSgt. Elena Santos, and the fact that her gender is not an issue here.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Michael Nantz, an Iraq war veteran who is about to retire, gets re-conscripted to help with the evacuation of Los Angeles, which is threatened by a meteor rain. Soon, however, the L.A. inhabitants learn that these are no meteors but aliens colonizing the Earth for its water. Sgt. Nantz is put back in service under raw, young Lieutenant William Martinez. Their platoon's mission is to rescue a group of civilians trapped in an abandoned police station in an area infested by the aliens; they only have three hours, after which the US military will bomb the area with nuclear devices. The platoon combats with aliens, loses soldiers along the way and encounters other soldiers from units dispersed in other missions. Having completed their own mission and retreated to the safe zone, they puzzle about why no bombing is being carried out. Are the aliens winning?

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

There can be no creditable discussion of masculinity without mentioning power, and the negative emotions that hide in its shadow. The character Lieutenant William Martinez is a perfect portrayal of this negativity: he is young, ambitious, capable, but at the same time inexperienced and, thus, ineffective. He endeavours to hold onto power, but the more thoughtful he tries to be, the more insecure he appears. Insecurity and power are the two sides of a coin. In Martinez's case his failure is justified by the emotional stress he suffers yet people have lost much more than him if we look back in history. His celebrated moment of leadership and heroism is based on his self-sacrifice: stuck under close siege, he orders Nantz to fall back before he ignites some grenades to perish together with as many aliens as possible. The movie ends up arguing that, in an uncontrollable situation as that is, power and hierarchy are only useful if they offer altruistic protection. When they do, as Martinez's death shows, then patriarchy is validated.

Already on the other side of the patriarchal masculinity battle, Nantz has no wishes to compete. He even acts like a mentor to his superior Martinez. On the one hand, Nantz has influence over the whole team because of his experience but, on the other hand, his integrity is frequently questioned due to previous history. This undercurrent is brought to daylight soon after Martinez's death. Nantz manages to resolve the crisis by offering moral education through his personal influence rather than his (modest) rank. Notably, his masculinity is also demonstrated with maverick character actions: first bombing an alien aircraft out of his own initiative, and in the end deciding to get off the helicopter to locate the mothership alone. Beyond its overt celebration of American militarism (Combe & Boyle, 2013: 202), these other issues affecting the representation of masculinity deserve a more careful inspection.

SEE: Combe, Kirk & Brenda Boyle. *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Nantz teaching Martinez how to lead after the Lieutenant's first decision leads to an ambush
- Martinez questions himself and panics
- Nantz manages to bomb an alien aircraft
- **Martinez's death**

Indecisiveness has been clouding Lieutenant Martinez's leadership since the beginning of the mission, especially after his first mistake. This changes completely when he is stuck under a

truck, some twenty meters away from an alien squad, and he realizes he has no chance of survival. Nantz strives to save him as if trying to remedy his past guilt, but Martinez gives a firm order demanding the sergeant to fall back. Next, the Lieutenant turns on the radio to attract enemy attention and kills himself along with the aliens in a deafening explosion. This scene marks the maturation of Martinez as a decisive leader but with the great cost of his life, as it comes too late. The message conveyed here endorses patriarchy: self-sacrifice provides a strong moral defence of the military, making it not only difficult but dangerous to criticize it. For, is the aliens ever come, who will save us if not the soldiers? Whether that is a likely scenario is irrelevant, what matters is the need for the military and, hence, for patriarchy.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Yvonne Tasker, “Hollywood Hard Bodies: The Stars that Made the Actions Films Famous”. A *Companion to the Action Film*, ed. James Kendrick. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019. 256-269.

The extreme context of war normalizes violence, while the fantasy frame of science fiction removes such films from the reference points of actual battles and scenes of combat. In *Battle: Los Angeles*, Santos is quizzed as to whether she is ready to use her weapon, addressing and dispatching an assumption of women’s non-place in combat. Of course, she passes that test, providing crucial intelligence and input on strategy, as well as firepower. Audiences already know she will pass the test—after all, she is played by Michelle Rodriguez—just as we know that Nantz will continue to fight. Her masculinity is also framed by codes of moral authority and sacrifice. The fact that the tough female soldier is such a familiar figure of the futuristic or science-fiction war film suggests the sort of generic remove required to make female heroism credible. (395)

Beth Acommando, “Review: *Battle: Los Angeles*, Aliens 2, Hollywood 0”, *KPBS* 11 March 2011. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2011/mar/11/review-battle-los-angeles/>

There are a couple kind words I can spare for the film. I liked Michelle Rodriguez’s character and I always like her. They don’t make an issue of her gender, she just fights alongside the men and proves her worth along the way. (...) Not only do we not bond with these characters, but the action is so chaotic and the characters so interchangeable that we can’t tell who dies when. (Although the film does make a very concerted effort to have as many racial, gender, and religious group represented as possible.)

Gerry Canavan, “‘I’d Rather Be in Afghanistan’: Antinomies of *Battle: Los Angeles*”, *Democratic Communiqué* 26.2 (Fall 2012): 39-54.

https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1288&context=english_fac

This version of the alien invasion fantasy is also familiar in dozens of instances across the alien-invasion genre; think only of the speech from Bill Pullman’s President Whitman in *Independence Day* (1996): “Mankind, that word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can’t be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interest”. Here then is an alternative political valence for differentiation; now it is revealed as not only the nightmare that reduces that privileged subject of Empire to the unhappy position of the wretched of the Earth, but also and at the same time the desire for a new and genuine universality that could somehow include every member of the human species as true equals. (49, original emphasis)

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1217613/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle:_Los_Angeles
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/battle-los-angeles>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/battle_los_angeles

Super 8 (2011)

CREW & CAST

Director: J.J. Abrams

Screenplay by: J.J. Abrams

Producer(s): J.J. Abrams, Bryan Burk, Steven Spielberg

Main performers: Joel Courtney (Joe Lamb), Elle Fanning (Alice Dainard), Riley Griffiths (Charles Kaznyk), Ryan Lee (Cary McCarthy), Gabriel Basso (Martin Read), Zach Mills (Preston Scott), Kyle Chandler (Deputy Jackson Lamb)

Company: Bad Robot Productions, Amblin Entertainment, Paramount Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 52'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)
- *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)
- *The Goonies* (1985)
- *Cloverfield* (2008)
- *Attack the Block* (2011)
- *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Awards 2012 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Performance by a Younger Actor: Joel Courtney

Best Director: J.J. Abrams

Best Music: Michael Giacchino

ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards 2012 (winner)

Top Box Office Films: Michael Giacchino

Cahiers du Cinéma 2011

Top 10 Film Award - Best Film: J.J. Abrams, eighth place (tied with other two films)

REASONS TO SEE *Super 8*

- It is J.J. Abrams's homage to Spielberg classics like *E.T.*, with advanced special effects.
- The child actors' performances are noteworthy.
- The elements of youthful innocence, the sense of adventure and horror are well blended.
- It manages to sustain quite well the suspense created around the presence of the alien.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In the summer of 1979, a group of middle schoolers in Ohio decide to film in secret a zombie movie for a local film festival. Charles, as the script writer and director, persuades pretty Alice Dainard to play the part of the detective's wife in the movie. Fourteen-year-old Joe, Charles's best friend, plays the detective. The boy, who has lost his mother in a work accident and has a troubled relationship with his father (a police officer), and Alice are drawn to each other. Yet, their fathers forbid their meetings due to an obscure reason related to the death of Joe's mother. While shooting the movie one night, the children witness a disastrous train crash. Unknowingly, they film the escape of an alien monster from the train, which they find out about only after watching the footage. The officials track the kids down while inexplicable disappearances and events start happening in the town.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

With the avowed purpose of eliciting nostalgia, J.J. Abrams transfers to *Super 8* the classic father-son tension present in many Spielberg movies as a main sub-plot. Instead of breaking down the toxic masculinity surrounding fatherhood, however, Abrams does very little to offer an alternative, constructive view of masculinity. The backstory of the strained relationship is left unexplained, and Deputy Jackson Lamb (Kyle Chandler) is simply dropped into the plot as an indifferent father, who has no idea of how to take care of his son after the death of his wife. Just like many other sci-fi movies, *Super 8* unfairly hints that only when the mother is absent, and a monster stalks the town, will there be a space for recuperating a father-son bond. Even this minor improvement to end the father-son dichotomy is left on shaky ground due to the lack of a solid reason for their sudden compromise at the end of the movie.

Apart from this, the movie fails to contribute to gender equality on screen. It simply portrays stereotypical female figures once more: an all-giving mother/wife (Mrs. Kaznyk played by Jessica Tuck), a teen blonde bombshell (Jen Kaznyk played by A.J. Michalka), and a beautiful sweet girl (Alice Dainard played by Elle Fanning), the 'romantic interest' of the white male protagonist, Joe (Joel Courtney). Although Fanning's character is primarily introduced as rebellious and brave, gradually she is shown as a damsel in distress waiting for the hero to save her, and as a Smurfette in an all-boy group, who exists as a non-factor. In an interview, producer Bryan Burk asserts that "What I hope and get excited about with *Super 8* is that kids seeing this film might be inspired to go out and make their own movies. (...) J.J. will give people that bug, when they realize all you need is a camera, a group of friends and an idea to make great things happen" (in *Cinema Review*, undated: online). Clearly, the intention is good. Nevertheless, the message sent to kids is less positive than Burk assumes, for by 'kids' the film means 'boys'. Considering Alice's role as a wife in the kids' 8 mm film, and her ineffective role in the actual movie, *Super 8* fails to "make great things happen" and change the stereotypical gender roles dominating the movie screen.

SEE: Staff. *Cinema Review*, "Super 8's Movie Inside a Movie", undated. <http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid=6468>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Joe's father forces the boy to stop seeing Alice
- Joe rescues Alice from the hiding place of the monster
- The monster leaves Earth and father and son are reconciled

■ Charles Kaznyk casts Alice as the wife in his 8mm film

Joe (Joel Courtney) has been shooting a zombie film with his friends, and Charles (Riley Griffiths) as the director tells him that Alice (Elle Fanning), their cool blonde schoolmate, will be playing the wife of the detective. When asked about the purpose of having her in the movie, Charles responds that he has read in a movie magazine that a love story –or more specifically, a secondary female character– will show the male protagonist’s dilemma better.

A question mark hangs over the way the actors of *Super 8* were cast, considering how self-reflective the film-within-a-film plot is. Elle Fanning, just like Alice in Charles’s zombie movie, is the only main female character, and she only exists in relation to Joe as his ‘romantic interest’. Given her limited relevance in the story, and the superficial backstory with her father and her run-away mother, we may wonder whether what Charles tells Joe echoes a conversation between the director and the producers. It is just a suspicion.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Eliana Dockterman, “More Female Heroes in Hollywood? Yes, but Not Nearly Enough”, *Time* 23 December 2016. <http://time.com/4599585/hollywood-female-action-heroes/>

It’s been dubbed the Smurfette principle —named after that one lady Smurf who pals around with all the male Smurfs— and it’s near-universal in blockbuster action films, if you discount love interests and female baddies. The list of token women is a long: Black Widow in *The Avengers*. Wonder Woman in *Batman v. Superman*. The Ancient One in *Doctor Strange*. Tauriel in *The Hobbit*. Alice in *Super 8*. Ariadne in *Inception*.

“The Making of *Super 8*” (Paramount press kit), *Huntington News* 9 June 2011.

<http://www.huntingtonnews.net/4838>

Ha Nguyen (the costume designer), explains: Each kid has his or her own completely unique look, with different patterns and colors. (...) We especially had a lot of fun with Joe’s clothing which changes as he goes from being more soft-spoken to really gaining confidence. The colours he wears get stronger and stronger, building towards the climax.

The description of Alice in the script was that, even though she is still a kid, she is also very beautiful. That’s not hard to get across with Elle because she, herself, is absolutely stunning. J.J. also wanted her to be a bit tomboyish. I found softer fabrics for her t-shirts to give her a little more shape, but still kept her tomboy look by using a slightly rougher fabric for the outerwear.

Sara Reihani, “Dark of the Matin”, *Bitchmedia* 5 July 2011.

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/dark-of-the-matinée-that-boys-life-super-8>

Elizabeth Lamb (Catrina Balfe), Joe’s mom, is an untouchable, immaculate beautiful angel martyr. The movie opens with her tragic death in a steel mill accident and she is seen only in old home movies, smiling beatifically and caressing baby Joel like a danged Madonna. The amount of sheer gall needed to create such a blatantly idealized character and expect audiences to find her convincing or emotionally affecting is kind of staggering. The emotional pull of her death feels false, like a shoved-in plot device, because it is.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650062>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_8_\(2011_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_8_(2011_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/super-8>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/super_8

Prometheus (2012)

CREW & CAST

Director: Ridley Scott

Screenplay by: John Spaihts, Damon Lindelof, Dan O'Bannon (also *Alien* films), Ronald Shusett (also *Alien* films)

Producer(s): David Giler, Walter Hill, Ridley Scott

Main performers (credits order): Noomi Rapace (Elizabeth Shaw), Michael Fassbender (David), Charlize Theron (Meredith Vickers), Logan Marshall-Green (Charlie Holloway), Idris Elba (Janek), Guy Pearce (Peter Weyland)

COMPANY: Scott Free Productions, Brandywine Productions, Dune Entertainment, 20th Century Fox

NATIONALITY: UK/ USA

DURATION: 2h 4'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Alien* (1979)
- *Aliens* (1986)
- *Alien³* (1992)
- *Aliens: Resurrection* (1997)
- *Alien vs Predator* (2014)
- *Alien: Covenant* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2013 (nominee)

Oscar Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Richard Stammers, Trevor Wood, Charley Henley, Martin Hill

BAFTA Awards 2013 (nominee)

Best Special Visual Effects: Richard Stammers, Charley Henley, Trevor Wood, Paul Butterworth

Fright Meter Awards 2012 (winner)

Best Supporting Actor: Michael Fassbender

REASONS TO SEE *Prometheus*

- It is the prequel of the *Alien* franchise universe.
- It offers a science fictional approach to the beginning of life on Earth, presenting the origins of humankind as an extra-terrestrial experiment.
- Its ethical and theological dilemmas.
- The use of H.R. Giger's original designs for the Engineer's spaceship.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Two scientists (Elizabeth Shaw and Charlie Holloway) discover in different parts of the world very similar ancient paintings; all point out to the stars outside the solar system, possibly to a planet. Weyland-Yutani, the corporation exploiting the space colonies, prepares a mission to find the civilization which, according to Shaw, are the Engineers who could have created us. The mysterious planet is their home. They find there a colossal construction, a pyramid full of strange organic materials, like the worms which apparently caused the death of the Engineers. When the team approaches the only survivor, he attacks them, and they discover that these alien worms are the weapons the Engineers intended to use to destroy the Earth, which is their own failed experiment. Elizabeth kills the Engineer and, using the severed head of the robot David, prepares to leave the planet.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

The first question is elicited by the movie poster, which shows a small female figure in silhouette standing before the enormous statue of an Engineer's head. Why, to begin with, do the alien Engineers have to look male?

There are just two lead female characters: Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron) and Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace). Meredith's role consists of waiting for her moment to sit on the patriarchal throne and play meanwhile ice princess (or iron maiden?), to the point that she seems more robotic than the robot David. It is as if we could not have strong women without dehumanizing them. Elizabeth Shaw plays the role of the scientific nerd, occupying thus a male position (the other male characters constantly hint that hers is no place/job for a woman). Elizabeth is, in some sense, degendered, or like a man, because she cannot be a mother (even though an alien makes her pregnant). In the end, she becomes yet another Final Girl, for, as Tom Seymour reminds us, this character "has always been a feature of the *Alien* franchise" (2017: online, see below). Talking about aliens, Linda Juhasz-Wood rightly notes that "A great deal of scholarship has dealt with the male birth metaphor (chest-burster aliens as murderous, parasitic foetuses), issues of motherhood and fertility, as well as with the ways in which the *Alien* films represent gender and sexuality" (2012: online). It is very important to pay attention to the aliens' phallogocentric figure, which they use to penetrate the mouth of their victims, whether male or female. Elizabeth is, in any case, the most direct representation of alien 'pregnancy'.

The representation of the men's comradeship and heroism at the end of the movie, when together they decide to sacrifice themselves, crashing the Engineer's spaceship to prevent the destruction of Earth, is, of course, endorsed –they are the savers of the world. Charlie's generous sacrifice to avoid spreading contagion is also celebrated. All give their life for the others, if they can, except Peter Weyland, of course. He is the patriarchal king of the corporation and follows the corresponding Machiavellian way of thinking to conquer space. He does not care about anybody but himself and his interests, even if that costs the destruction of Earth. But this is no wonder for, after all, he takes after our makers, the Engineers...

SEE: Juhasz-Wood, Linda. "Ripley/Scott: Gender in *Prometheus* and the *Alien* Movies". *Mediascape* 28 November 2012. <http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/index.php>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The cave scene, with Elizabeth's eye scrutinising the public
- The first meeting of the team, when the men accuse Elizabeth of belittling centuries of Darwinism
- Humaniform robot David asks scientist Charlie about creation
- **Elizabeth's operation**

Despite being sterile, Elizabeth Shaw becomes pregnant. This happens because David infects Charlie (Elizabeth's partner) with a glass of water containing the alien's DNA, and then they sleep together... When Elizabeth realizes that she is pregnant and that hers is a really weird pregnancy (her womb is swelling very quickly) she tries to check what is inside her. David (a robot gendered male) denies her request for, of course, he is manipulating her for an experiment he runs on behalf of his owner, Weyland. David, in short, does not allow Elizabeth to make an informed decision.

Logically, she does not want this alien baby inside her, nor to be used in David's experiment. Elizabeth decides, therefore, to get an abortion using the medical machine in the spaceship. The problem is that this machine is programmed only to treat men's bodies and cannot offer an abortion or a caesarean procedure (which is what she needs at this advanced point). This whole segment is perhaps intended to make the audience consider men's privileged position in contraposition with the risks that pregnant women face if they decide to have an abortion, though it can also be read as an endorsement of pro-life policies. Elizabeth, in any case, *must* have an abortion for her life is at risk, yet she has no option but to cut her own body open. On the other hand, we need to wonder why the medical machine cannot deal with female bodies, when, apparently, women are also an integral part of spaceship crews.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Joanna, "Gender and Creation in *Prometheus*", *Geekalitarian* 13 June 2012.

<https://geekalitarian.wordpress.com/2012/06/13/gender-and-creation-in-prometheus/>

The questions about creation can all be further applied to gender theory, since women are traditionally seen as the creators. (Despite Judo-Christianity telling us that a man made the universe.) Speaking of that: the gender or lack thereof of the Engineers is rife for exploration. Were they intended to look male? We saw no genitalia, but the Engineers certainly had a typically masculine look to their bodies. Was this an attempt at gender neutrality, or were we supposed to assume they were in fact male? If they were genderless, we would need to decide why a genderless race would create a gendered species. If they were intended to be male, we would need to figure out why female Engineers were absent, other than because Hollywood is sexist. Was it an intentional inversion of the typical notion of women as creators? Was it a thoughtless omission of women? Was it meant to make a statement about patriarchy?

Tess Williams, "Arrival of the Fittest", *Cultural Studies Review* 22.2 (September 2016): 132-148.

<https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrij/article/download/4580/5675>

Gendering is central to the cinematic gaze, and this switch of viewpoints disrupts the traditional masculine cinematic gaze in a specifically confusing way. As the entry to the cave is worked into a small orifice of light, it is Elizabeth Shaw's female eye that scrutinises the watching viewer through the opening.

Here, however, the woman's eye is the only thing visible and it is scrutinising the audience. Certainly, this cinematic introduction to the female lead in *Prometheus* is very different from the introduction to Ripley in *Alien* where early in the narrative the camera carefully studies her underwear-clad body. In this 'breakthrough' scene, the woman scientist

studies the viewer seated on the chair watching the film and her eye is the only part of her anatomy visible. (142-3)

Tom Seymour, "Alien Is Sci-Fi Horror's Most Feminist Movie Franchise". *Vice* 19 May 2017.

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qvdn4d/alien-is-sci-fi-horrors-most-feminist-movie-franchise

To impregnate humans, Scott's alien inserts its proboscis down their throats. Or an octopus-like face-hugger covers their mouths, forcing them to play host to a baby that, once ready to hatch, bursts from the depths of their chests.

Alien screenwriter Dan O'Bannon has gone on record to say he used Giger's design motifs to force male audience members to reflect on the effect of sexual violence; he wanted to force male audiences to understand and experience the visceral horror of rape and sexual assault.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1446714/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheus_\(2012_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheus_(2012_film))
- Metacritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/prometheus>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/prometheus_2012

Wreck-it Ralph (2012)

CREW & CAST

Director: Rich Moore

Screenplay by: Phil Johnston (also story), Jennifer Lee, Rich Moore (story), Jim Reardon (story)

Producer(s): Clark Spencer

Main performers (credits order): John C. Reilly (voice, Ralph), Sarah Silverman (voice, Vanellope), Jack McBrayer (voice, Felix), Jane Lynch (voice, Sergeant Calhoun), Alan Tudyk (voice, King Candy), Mindy Kaling (voice, Taffyta Muttonfudge), Joe Lo Truglio (voice, Markowski)

Company: Walt Disney Animation Studios

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 41'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018), sequel
- *Tron* (1982)
- *Toy Story* (1995, franchise)
- *Despicable Me* (2010)
- *Inside Out* (2015)
- *The Lego Movie* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2013 (nominee)

Best Animated Feature Film

Golden Globes 2013 (nominee)

Best Animated Feature Film

National Board of Review 2012 (winner)

Best Animated Feature Film

REASONS TO SEE *Wreck-it Ralph*

- The very high quality of its animation and its treatment of arcade games.
- The film is a funny and witty mixture of adventure and comedy for all ages.
- Ralph and Vanellope's friendship against all odds is highly enjoyable.
- The film sends important messages about politics, friendship and morality.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Wreck-it Ralph has been the villain of a videogame for thirty years. His job is to destroy a residential building that then Fix-it Felix repairs. Ralph is loved by nobody and feared by all. Since Ralph only wants to have friends, he decides to win a medal in the videogame *Hero's Duty* to prove that he is a good-hearted man. Ralph gets the medal, but returning to his game, he causes a destructive cy-bug to escape *Hero's Duty*, endangering the whole videogame system. Ralph lands next in the game *Sugar Rush*, where he loses the medal to little Vanellope, a mischievous glitch who dreams of becoming a kart racer. Ralph helps Vanellope to build her dream car in exchange for the medal. However, King Candy persuades him to wreck the car hinting that Vanellope's participation in an upcoming race could be fatal for the little girl. Ralph eventually realises that something doesn't add up in King Candy's story and that he needs to save both Vanellope and the videogame universe from extinction.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Since *Wreck-it Ralph* premiered in 2012, both the regular public and scholarly criticism have been torn in their opinions about how gender issues are portrayed in the film. While some have stated that the film breaks gender stereotypes, others have maintained that the movie subtly perpetuates traditional patterns.

Those who have praised the film for its positive portrayal of gender have mainly focused on the characters of Ralph and Vanellope, and their unique friendship. Ralph breaks with the stereotype of the bad guy; at first glance, he seems just a brute baddie who destroys the building of his neighbours whenever someone puts a coin in the videogame he inhabits. However, and as we can see throughout the film, he is really a big-hearted person who wants to spread and receive love. Similarly, Vanellope, with her quirky, witty and mischievous personality, breaks with the stereotype of the princess-like little girl. The relationship between these two has been widely celebrated and praised for being based on equality and mutual respect.

On the opposite side of the debate, those who argue that the film perpetuates gender stereotypes have mainly focused on the characters of Sergeant Calhoun and, again, Vanellope herself. Blogger David Addis maintains that Calhoun is "an excellent example of a writer trying to make strides to satisfy feminists like me around the world, and while I'm definitely glad the film wasn't filled with Princess Peaches (who would inevitably be kidnapped at the drop of a hat), she had to be propped up by the Fix-It Felix character" (2013: online). In a similar tone, Addis argues that despite her great racing skills, Vanellope depends on Ralph's aid to free herself from King Candy (and free her world). In fact, she does nothing until he gets to *Sugar Rush*. "She does come to Ralph's rescue near the end of the film", Addis writes, "but it's done in such a flashy and unfeasible way I felt a little nauseous watching the scene play out".

Taking into account the two sides of the debate, then, I would argue that even though *Wreck-It Ralph* does sometimes break gender stereotypes, the truth is that it also perpetuates them.

SEE: Addis, David. "Neglected Sexism – *Wreck-it Ralph's* Ruin". *David Addis's Blog* 6 March 2013. <http://www.davidaddis.com/?p=398>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Vanellope is bullied by the other girls in *Sugar Rush* because she's a glitch
- Fix-it Felix gets nervous when he is with Calhoun because he likes her, but worries that she doesn't like him

■ **Sergeant Calhoun's backstory**

Sergeant Calhoun is a strong and determined female soldier who successfully leads an all-men army in a videogame called *Hero's Duty* (in obvious allusion to the popular *Call of Duty*). This army's responsibility is to protect people from the evil cy-bugs, a species of robotic-like bugs that in Calhoun's words "are like a virus. They don't know they're in a game. All they know is eat, kill, multiply!" However, there is more to Sergeant Calhoun than it can be seen at first sight; her hardened heart and harsh outlook is, apparently, the result of a personal tragedy. The very day of her marriage, a cy-bug entered the venue where her wedding was taking place and killed her future husband in front of all the guests and herself. All because she forgot to do a perimeter check. This is the reason for Sergeant Calhoun's current intensity and coldness, a fellow army soldier confesses to Fix-it Felix.

As several reviews of the film have pointed out, Sergeant Calhoun's character could have been a great representation of a kind of femininity that is almost never portrayed on screen. Nevertheless, by justifying her behaviour with such a tragic backstory, *Wreck-it Ralph* sends a questionable message: that a woman can only be strong, independent, determined or cold if there is some personal catastrophe that has made her be so. Particularly one connected with romantic love.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Dave Becker, "#1,499. *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012)", *2,500 Movie Challenge Webpage* 23 September 2014. <http://www.dvdinfatuation.com/2014/09/1499-wreck-it-ralph-2012.html>

But like *Toy Story*, there's more to *Wreck-It Ralph* than mere spectacle. In fact, one of the film's major strengths is its characters. A big, lumbering oaf who only wants to fit in, Ralph is someone most people can identify with, and John C. Reilly (who doesn't bother disguising his voice) brings just the right mix of pathos and determination to the character, making him sympathetic, but strong. I also liked Vanellope, who, despite being an obnoxious brat early on, wins us over with her enthusiasm (the scene where she and Ralph break into the car factory is a lot of fun). In a nice twist, the filmmakers even portrayed Felix, Ralph's in-game foe, in a positive light, giving him an 'Aw Shucks' personality yet still allowing him to be more than your typical game hero (in a brilliantly bizarre romantic subplot, Felix falls in love with Calhoun).

Alakaholic, "Gender and Equality: Disney's *Wreck-It Ralph* Messes with the Program", *Ho-Fun Blogspot* 31 March 2013.

<http://ho-fun.blogspot.com/2013/03/gender-and-equality-disneys-wreck-it.html>

I also remember thinking in the cinema that if *Wreck-It Ralph* were a live-action film, then Vanellope would almost certainly be the 'manic pixie dream girl' character whose primary purpose, other than being a bit kooky and lovable, is to help the hero realise his own destiny and complete his journey –win the medal (metaphorical or otherwise), grow as a person, then return home a changed man with renewed optimism and purpose in life.

But guess what? She's not. What I found wonderfully refreshing is that, when Ralph tumbles into *Sugar Rush* and meets Vanellope, she isn't immediately doomed to the fate of being sidekick. The fact is, she has her own agenda, her own hopes and desires, her own backstory and her own plotline. Because *Sugar Rush* is her game. That's why she fights Ralph for his medal –because she needs it just as much as he does.

Carine Lemyre, "Stereotypes in *Wreck It Ralph*", *Carine Media Studies Webpage* 14 April 2016. <https://carinemediastudies.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/stereotypes-in-wreck-it-ralph/>

The practice of gender inequality was also evident in this film production. Ralph was described as brooding, often angry and dumb as a character. His co-game-mates also considered him dumb because of his size. His manliness was referred to as "empty masculinity" because all he had was strength and wrecking capability and nothing more. He could not think properly; he acted like a child even though he was already an adult; and he was treated as if he was a non-productive part of the community because of his looks. The same thing happened to Vanilla Pee Von Sweets. She was replaced by King Candy in Sugar Rush because King Candy thought that a woman or a child is not fitted to become a ruler of a game. The focus on their status and character were highlighted in order to show the audience how these fictitious characters are victims of stereotype and gender discrimination.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1772341/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wreck-It_Ralph
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/wreck-it-ralph>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wreck_it_ralph

Looper (2012)

CREW & CAST

Director: Rian Johnson

Screenplay by: Rian Johnson

Producer(s): Ram Bergman, James D. Stern

Main performers: Joseph Gordon-Levitt (Joe), Bruce Willis (old Joe), Emily Blunt (Sara), Paul Dano (Seth), Noah Segan (Kid Blue), Piper Perabo (Suzie), Summer Qing (Old Joe's wife), Jeff Daniels (Abe)

COMPANY: FilmDistrict, DMG Entertainment, Endgame Entertainment, Ram Bergman Productions

NATIONALITY: USA/ China

DURATION: 1h 58'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Terminator* (1984)
- *Twelve Monkeys* (1995)
- *The Butterfly Effect* (2004)
- *A Sound of Thunder* (2005)
- *Source Code* (2011)
- *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

IGN Summer Movie Awards 2012 (winner)

Best Sci-Fi Movie

IGN People's Choice Award -Best Sci-Fi Movie

IGN Award - Best Movie Actress: Emily Blunt (nominee)

National Board of Review 2012 (winner)

Best Original Screenplay: Rian Johnson

Top Films

REASONS TO SEE *Looper*

- It's a clever, original science fiction movie with dramatic touches.
- If you enjoy time travel, you will enjoy *Looper*.
- Joseph Gordon-Levitt's extreme makeover (to look like a younger Bruce Willis) is quite interesting.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In Kansas 2074, the mob employs the singular services of the killers known as 'loopers': they can travel thirty years back in time to murder any designated victim and leave no trace. Time travel is illegal and the loopers must close their time loop by killing their future selves after a life enjoying considerable wealth. One day, looper Joe meets his future self but he fails to kill him. Later, Joe finds out that old Joe has come back from the future for a specific purpose: he is looking for the Rainmaker, the crime boss who will murder his beloved wife in the future, to kill him. However, Joe decides to stop old Joe when he finds out that the Rainmaker is just a psychologically traumatized poor boy, who lost his mother in his childhood.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Deborah Knight and George McKnight argue that "Whether it is the focus on a male central protagonist or on the relationship between father and son, the cultural centrality given to the male as a figure of action marginalizes the roles of women" (2016: 99). I believe that *Looper*, which can be defined as a science fiction action film, suffers from this problem as well. Sara (Emily Blunt), the central female character, looks tough when she first appears in the film. She is on her own and carries a gun to protect herself and her son, Cid. However, her limitations are reflected in two aspects. On the one hand, all her courage and toughness originate from her mothering instinct; indeed, she is bound to motherhood throughout the film. On the other hand, the ending of the film shows, typically, the powerlessness of women in extremely dangerous situations. The one who saves the world can only be a man, and woman's role is just that of the damsel in distress waiting for rescue.

The other relevant female character in this film is old Joe's wife, a Chinese woman with no name. This is puzzling, for, avowedly, her death and the love he has for her are the reasons why old Joe travels back to kill the Rainmaker. She is characterised with the most hackneyed clichés one can imagine regarding (Asian) women, being presented as the perfect beautiful, tender, quiet wife. So quiet that, in fact, she never speaks in the film. Her existence only serves one purpose: being lovely enough to make old Joe want to kill someone else to protect her. Her death, in fact, is collateral damage produced during the Rainmaker's attempt to force old Joe to close his loop. Is this love, or as I suspect, possessiveness? After all, old Joe refuses young Joe's only rational solution: the best way to save her is not killing the Rainmaker but not marrying her. Simple, isn't it?

SEE: Knight, Deborah and George McKnight, "Narrative, Aesthetics, and Cultural Imperatives in Recent Science Fiction Films". *Endangering Science Fiction Film*, eds. Sean Redmond and Leon Marvell. New York and London: Routledge, 2016. 89-102.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Suzy's sexy performance in the club
- Old Joe and his unnamed Chinese wife live a happy domestic life
- The black waitress' scene
- **Joe sacrifices himself**

In this final scene, Sara and her young son Cid are chased by old Joe and they face the danger of being killed. Young Joe wants to help the mother and son and stop this cycle of murder, therefore when he finally confronts old Joe, he decides to commit suicide with the purpose of making old Joe vanish. In the end, both young and old Joe disappear while mother and son are rescued by the selfless, younger version of this man.

However, I think that in this scene the film assigns Joe a task that should not belong to him. Sara's toughness and her will to protect her son at any cost are extremely clear in the film and, at my same time, we know that Cid is a boy with supernatural powers. Why do we need, therefore, a saint-like man to save them? Why is the mission of restoring the world always a job for men? What position do women occupy after these 'great men' save the world? On the other hand, there is room to think that the women will be better off without the men that endanger their lives. In that alternative world, Sara will be a mother who loves her son even more unconditionally, old Joe's wife will be happy with another person, though I suspect that the black waitress and the prostitute Suzy will not have a better chance to alter their own endings.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Philip French, "Looper – Review", *The Guardian* 30 September 2012.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/sep/30/looper-review-bruce-willis-emily-blunt>

This all sounds a little too much like *The Terminator*, but Johnson keeps things moving and rings ingenious changes on familiar material, with considerable help from his cinematographer, production designer and actors, among them Jeff Daniels as a grizzled character sent from the future to select and train loopers and Emily Blunt as an intrepid Kansas farmer living beside a withered cornfield right out of *North By Northwest*. It's one of those pictures that courts the adjective "thoughtful" but doesn't stand up to much thinking about.

Omer M. Mozaffar, "Suicide by Way of Homicide", *Roger Ebert* 29 September 2012.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/far-flung-correspondents/suicide-by-way-of-homicide>

On top of that, in Joe's case, his parents abandoned him, leaving him to search for love without receiving that nurturing that would teach him how to give love. When meeting his future self, he is not interested in learning about himself. He wants this crash-landed stranger plucked like a thorn from his foot, so that he can continue with his life. And likewise, the future-Joe does not try to teach him to reform himself. Perhaps, because he cannot see past his own selfish goals. Perhaps, because that would change the future. Perhaps, because he does not know to do that, for those who do not know how to give love, do not know how to give self-care.

James Berardinelli, "Looper", *Reel Views* 25 September 2012.

<http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/looper>

For me, a great film is one in which all the elements are well done. They blend together like a symphony. That's the case here. The screenplay is clever and intelligent; it piqued my interest and kept me involved. The characters are well-rounded and powerfully portrayed. There's plenty of action and suspense, and even a little humour and romance mixed in. There are some profoundly disturbing questions that have no easy answers. (I'm reminded of the time travel hypothetical: If you could travel to 1889 and stand by a crib containing the infant Adolf Hitler, could you strangle the baby?)

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276104/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looper_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looper_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/looper>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/looper>

Robot and Frank (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Jack Schreier

Screenplay writer: Christopher Ford

Producer: Lance Acord, Jackie Kelman Bisbee, Sam Bisbee, Galt Niederhoffer

Main performers (credits order): Frank Langella (Frank), James Marsden (Hunter), Liv Tyler (Madison), Peter Sarsgaard (voice, Robot), Susan Sarandon (Jennifer)

COMPANY: Dog Run Pictures, Park Pictures, TBB, White Hat

NATIONALITY: USA

DURATION: 1h 29'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Forbidden Planet* (1956)
- *Silent Running* (1978)
- *Short Circuit* (1986)
- *The Bicentennial Man* (1999)
- *I, Robot* (2004)
- *Chappie* (2015)

MAIN AWARDS

Sitges - Catalan International Film Festival 2012

Audience Award Best Motion Picture: Jake Schreier (winner)

Best Motion Picture: Jake Schreier (nominee)

Sundance Film Festival 2012 (winner)

Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize: Jake Schreier, tied with *Valley of Saints* (2012).

REASONS TO SEE *Robot and Frank*

- It is, despite the comedic touches, a very good representation of how robots might be used in the future to care for the elderly.
- There are actually few films that present robots in this positive light.
- The theme of dementia is used with great tact but also in interesting ways in the plot.
- Frank Langella's performance is delicious and so is his robot companion (voiced by Peter Sarsgaard).
- Frank's decision to involve his robot in criminality is quite unexpected.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Ex-convict and thief Frank Weld, a man in his 70s, is beginning to show the first signs of dementia. His son Hunter, a middle-class professional, buys him a robot which offers therapeutic care. Frank is initially reluctant, but he eventually discovers that the robot will help him in whatever he chooses. Together, they steal a valuable copy of *Don Quijote* from the local library to impress the beautiful librarian, Jennifer.

Frank's daughter Madison (a journalist specialising in travel) tries to persuade Frank to return the robot, concerned by its presence. Frank, however, uses it to steal some jewels from Jake, the developer who is transforming the library into a community centre, against Jennifer's will. Trying to maintain his pretence of innocence before the Police, Frank must decide whether to wipe out his robot's memory, as the machine encourages him to do. Frank recognizes Jennifer one last time, when she sees their family photos in her library office, before being sent to a specialised centre dealing with dementia. The jewels remain hidden....

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Ageing men who become dependent often see this dependence as humiliating feminisation. Frank, therefore, resists the robot's presence as a sign of his loss of 'masculine' independence. It is not clear in the film whether part of Frank's resistance has to do with the gendering of the robot as male, for in fact its employment as carer reverses the habitual situation in which women take care of the elderly, either as family members or paid workers. Frank may, thus, doubly resent the robot because he initially perceives it as a 'male' authority usurping his own personal authority in ways that a woman, or a robot gendered 'female', could not do.

The robot's petite body is not obviously gendered, but it has a male voice, provided by Peter Sarsgaard. This allows Frank to start a process of bonding which reaches a first turning point when the old man realises that the robot must obey him (in implicit application of the Asimovian Laws of Robotics, or simply because it can be programmed). Once this 'male' bonding begins, Frank starts referring to the robot as 'he' and they are subsequently shown in a series of scenes suggesting that they're 'buddies'. By the time the robot advises Frank to wipe out its memory to eliminate the recording of the burglary, the old man does have feelings for the machine. Both are, besides, placed in an analogous situation, as shortly thereafter Frank's memory loss takes a downward turn towards deep dementia.

There is little to say about Frank's ex-wife, Jennifer, except that Susan Sarandon, the actress in the role, looks stunning. Her silence about their past relationship is perhaps justified but, nonetheless, odd. Their children, Hunter and Madison, appear to be successful, busy professionals with no time for their elderly father. Hunter, the son, buys the robot tired of having to drive a very long distance to visit his father but he never offers the alternative of moving Frank closer to his own home. Madison, in any case, is not more willing than Hunter to take care of their father. Her characterisation is, though, somehow more problematic. Although she hates the robot, being a sort of technophobic neo-hippy, Madison secretly uses it to do the household chores, as Frank discovers. She is thus chastised twice: for not knowing how to run a household, despite being a woman..., and for contradicting her own negative view of the robot. Her profession is not presented as a serious undertaking, either, while her constant travelling appears to be, it is hinted, the perfect excuse to stay away from Frank. She is, in short, presented as a bad daughter, whereas Hunter, at least, provides Frank with the robot...

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Frank and Madison argue over the robot, which she has used as domestic aid to disguise her inability to run the household
- Frank recognizes his wife when he sees the family photos in her office
- Frank says goodbye to the robot before disconnecting its memory
- **Frank apologizes to his son Hunter for being a bad father**

The police are convinced that Frank is back to his old ways and he is indeed the thief behind the burglary at Jake's home. To divert the Sheriff's attention while the robot hides the jewels in the garden, and pretend he is just leading an ordinary life, Frank calls his son Hunter. The conversation takes an unexpected turn when Frank suddenly acknowledges that he was indeed a bad father for his two children, but specially for Hunter. His many absences and a long prison sentence due to his constant criminal activity prevented him from doing all he could for them (it is never clarified whether the mother provided for their education, or whether this was paid by Frank's thieving). Hunter is moved, having seemingly needed this kind of confession for a long time, but Frank ends the conversation abruptly after noticing that the robot has fulfilled its mission, bluntly declaring he didn't mean any of the things he said.

The scene reverses audience expectations while highlighting Frank's shortcomings as a man and as a father. The cliché of the easy father-son reconciliation is avoided but with some cruelty. We do not see Hunter during the exchange, but it is obvious that he must feel hurt and disappointed. For all his charm as an old man, Frank is revealed to be truly selfish. This revelation explains, in part at least, Hunter's and Madison's decision to stay away from their father's home and life as much as they can, as well as Jennifer's otherwise peculiar choice to conceal from Frank her identity.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

David Gritten, "Robot and Frank, Review", *The Telegraph* 7 March 2013.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/9915899/Robot-and-Frank-review.html>

With his lugubrious features and big, pleading eyes, the understated Langella suggests a real relationship between man and home appliance. Essentially, this is a slight piece of work, and not without its faults: Susan Sarandon's role as the town's librarian feels insufficiently thought-through.

Peter Travers, "Robot and Frank", *Rolling Stone* 16 August 2012.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/robot-frank-99739/>

Just like Frank's flirtation with a librarian (a tangy Susan Sarandon), the movie keeps springing scrappy surprises. It also addresses questions of aging and neglect that Hollywood likes to run from. Langella, who's played everyone from Dracula to Nixon onscreen, is giving a master class in acting. Enroll now.

Noel Murray, "Noel Murray @ Sundance 2012: Day 3", *A/V Club – Film* 22 January 2012.

<https://film.avclub.com/noel-murray-sundance-2012-day-3-1798229424>

The main failing of *Robot & Frank* is that too much of it falls under the umbrella of the 'classic buddy movie' (or classic other kinds of movies). It's designed to be a crowdpleaser, which may explain why it's so flat in style, and why it's not all that rich in theme. It's an old-school Sundance offering: more concerned with telling a story and moving an audience rather than challenging anyone. But there's nothing wrong with that, really.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1990314/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot %26 Frank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot_%26_Frank)
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/robot-and-frank>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/robot_and_frank

Elysium (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Neill Blomkamp

Screenplay by: Neill Blomkamp

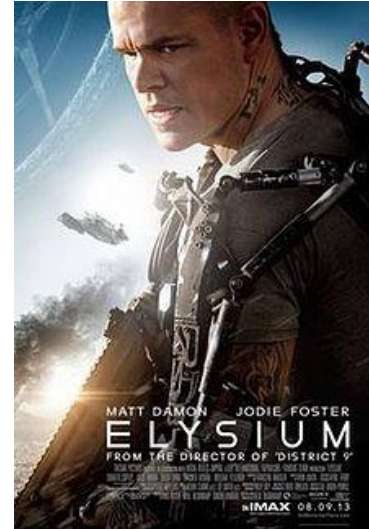
Producer(s): Bill Block, Neill Blomkamp, Simon Kinberg, Stacy Perskie

Main performers: Matt Damon (Max), Jodie Foster (Delacourt), Sharlto Copley (Kruger), Alice Braga (Frey), Diego Luna (Julio), Wagner Moura (Spider)

Company: TriStar Pictures, Media Rights Capital (MRC), QED International, AlphaCore, Kinberg Genre, Sony Pictures Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 46'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Metropolis* (1927)
- *District 9* (2009)
- *After Earth* (2013)
- *Oblivion* (2013)
- *High-rise* (2015)
- *Upgrade* (2018)

MAIN AWARDS

Leo Awards 2014 (winner)

Best Visual Effects Motion Picture

Art Directors Guild 2014 (nominee)

Excellence in Production Design Award

REASONS TO SEE *Elysium*

- Its impressive visual effects, particularly the space station Elysium where the rich live.
- Its focus on class, immigration, and the unequal access to healthcare.
- The presence of popular actors, such as Matt Damon and Jodie Foster, in the cast, which also includes non-US actors such as Diego Luna and Sonia Braga.
- Sharlto Copley's presence in another film by Neill Blomkamp, after *District 9*.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

By 2154, the wealthy have abandoned Earth for an idyllic space station called Elysium. While working in an Armadyne factory on Earth with dreams of getting to Elysium, Max (a former thief) is exposed to lethal levels of radiation, which leaves him with only five days to

live. He accepts a job from the criminals he used to work for and is surgically upgraded with a full body exoskeleton and a download port in his head. His mission to retrieve data from John Carlyle (the CEO of Armadyne) is made even more dangerous because Carlyle and Secretary of Defense Delacourt are planning a coup to take over the government on Elysium. The data in Carlyle's brain has been protected with a virus that will kill Max if it is shared. His only hope lies, thus, in Elysium's advanced medical pods. He, his partners in crime, his childhood friend, and her terminally ill child must fight their way to Elysium, but who will survive?

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Having Jodie Foster cast in a role originally written for a man might have added some much-needed gender versatility to this film. Unfortunately, neither Delacourt's characterisation nor Foster's performance diminish the role of patriarchy and the character appears to be just another instance of how women must assume a mannish behaviour to access power. At least, Delacourt is never depicted as weak nor forced to do anything against her will. She is simply personally conniving and indifferent to other women and their children. Not even when she is dying can Delacourt connect with another female character. As Jill Dolan notes, Delacourt "bleeds out right in front of Frey, who can neither save her nor establish common gender-cause" (2013: online). She prefers to face death, with a slim chance of reanimation, rather than accept help from a female nurse from Earth (possibly also seeing Frey as too low-class).

Max is the only white man, yet he plays the stereotypical hero role. His physical appearance was built around the idea of the muscular superhero, which was for director Neill Blomkamp a central aspect of the character. "Neill was so specific about what he wanted me to look like" Matt Damon (Max) explained in an interview. "He actually had a picture with my face tacked onto this guy with this body and they literally hired me a trainer and I went to him with the picture. It was four hours a day in the gym –and I'm not 26 anymore but I got in shape" (in Schaefer 2013: online). Though he wasn't the first or even the second choice for the part, Damon (aged 42 then) was moulded into the idea of what a leading action star should look like. In *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen*, authors Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann note this trend in Hollywood cinema and claim that the muscled body allows male characters to "align themselves with the animal world" because they gain an "evolutionary advantage" (xxii). However, Max, still requires a metal exoskeleton to achieve his goal and he is, anyway, dying. Hopefully, like the stereotype he embodies.

SEE:

Dolan, Jill. "Elysium". *The Feminist Spectator* 30 August 2013.

<http://feministspectator.princeton.edu/2013/08/30/elysium/>

Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Heumann. *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Shaeffer, Stephen. "Matt Damon: Four Hours a Day in the Gym to Prep for *Elysium*". *Variety* 31 July 2013. <https://variety.com/2013/film/news/matt-damon-four-hours-a-day-in-the-gym-to-prep-for-elysium-1200570185/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The death of Secretary Delacourt
- Nurse Frey is harassed by the villain Kruger
- **Max's exoskeleton is attached to his body**

Progressively weakened by his sickness, Max asks rebel Spider, a former criminal associate, for help. They strike a bargain by which Max will help Spider access secret data leading to

Elysium money and Spider will ease Max's journey to the station. Spider's cyberpunk team attach a powered exoskeleton to Max's body, giving him the strength of a droid, even though strictly speaking this is not necessary for his mission. It is important to note that Max needs the exoskeleton because he has been poisoned, not because he is sick out of natural causes. In contrast, the role of damsel in distress is played by Matilda, the child of nurse Frey (Max's platonic love interest). Matilda suffers from leukemia which can only be cured in Elysium and, although there is here a critique against the lack of healthcare for the working classes stranded on Earth, ultimately the child is just the excuse to justify Max's heroic sacrifice. Incidentally, the exoskeleton turns out to have its uses, but only because villain Kruger also wears one.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Richard Scheib, "*Elysium* (2013)", *Moria: Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film Review*, 2013. www.moriareviews.com/sciencefiction/elysium-2013.htm

Apparently, the role [of Max] was originally offered to rapper Eminem and you could see that working –Eminem does the whole 'hood kid trying to do good well', whereas Damon seems out of his natural social league trying to rough it and convince us he belongs in the barrio. Similarly, Blomkamp casts Jodie Foster as the villain of the show. This is something I was looking forward (to) but the great disappointment of the film is that it casts an actress of Foster's calibre but only ends up placing her in a one-dimensional role that is singularly lacking in any interesting features.

Staff, "*Elysium* – Review", *That Shelf* 8 August 2013. www.thatshelf.com/elysium-review/

It's very clear that the South African filmmaker [Neill Blomkamp] wants to do the same for illegal immigration to the US that he did for apartheid in his previous feature. Right out of the gate, Damon is recognized as the only good white person left in a world full of largely unemployed and entirely impoverished Latino-Americans. He speaks fluent Spanish, so he has to be an okay guy, right? He's our hero and it's almost the exact same idea that went into casting the white Sharlto Copley as the saviour of *District 9*. Both men will undergo a crisis that will destroy their bodies over the course of the film, and they are doing it for the less fortunate. Blomkamp's problem is that he's so aggrandizing about his heroes he probably doesn't fully realize he's just creating the same 'only a white male can save the human race' storyline.

Hawthorn Mineart, "The Gender Flipped Character in *Elysium*", *Common Place Book* 30 July 2013. www.commonplacebook.com/art/movies/the-gender-flipped-character-in-elysium

I'm glad that they're casting women in roles originally written for men, but it would be nice if they just wrote them for women in the first place, given that women play less than 30% of the roles onscreen. (...) And given that Foster's character is basically a class-warfare oppressing villain, is it really all that great that the role was given to a woman? Women are not historically the oppressive forces when it comes to class warfare, and women represent over 70% of the world's poor, disproportionately specifically because of sexism leading to lack of opportunities for women in poverty. So, doesn't making Foster the villain distort the picture quite a bit?

LINKS

- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535108/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elysium_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elysium_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/elysium>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/elysium_2013

World War Z (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Marc Forster

Screenplay by: Matthew M. Carnahan (also story), Drew Goddard, Damon Lindelof, J. Michael Straczynski (story), Max Brooks (novel)

Producer(s): Ian Bryce, Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner, Brad Pitt

Main performers (credits order): Brad Pitt (Gerry), Mireille Enos (Karin), Daniella Kertesz (Segan), James B. Dale (Captain Speke), Ludi Boeken (Jurgen)

Company: Paramount Pictures, Skydance Productions, Hemisphere Media Capital, GK Films, Plan B Entertainment, 2Dux², Apparatus Productions, Latina Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 56'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- *28 Days Later...* (2002)
- *Dawn of the Dead* (2004)
- *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004)
- *I Am Legend* (2007)
- *The Battery* (2012)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films 2014 (winner)

Best Thriller Film

ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards 2014 (winner)

Top Box Office Films: Marco Beltrami

REASONS TO SEE *World War Z*

- If you're a Brad Pitt fan, you'll enjoy *World War Z*.
- Its mixture of the zombie genre in its science-fictional variety with family drama.
- Its excellent visual effects in the scenes with the zombie hordes.
- The attempt to be as international as possible (with different locations all over the world and a main female character who is an Israeli soldier).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Gerry Lane, a former United Nations investigator living in peaceful Philadelphia, is horrified to see how fast the pandemic turning people into vicious, wild zombies is spreading. Recruited by his former UN boss into the search for a vaccine, in exchange for the safety of his

wife and daughters, Gerry travels with a virologist and a team of soldiers to South Korea, where the virus seems to have first broken out. This proves to be a false lead and Gerry travels next to Israel following a more promising clue. It appears that the Israelis have learnt to build walls sturdy enough to stop the zombie hordes, but this proves to be an illusion. Gerry escapes next to Wales, where a World Health Organization team of scientists has concluded that there is no cure for the plague. Gerry, however, boldly makes a decision that might either turn him into a zombie or save the world.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Gerry Lane's main mission in *World War Z* is saving the world but, perhaps more primarily, his own family. His wife Karin, in contrast, has a most passive role, just waiting for him to succeed, together with their young daughters. Of course, as Duncan Reyburn claims, for the hero's mission to succeed he must first abandon his home and "depart from the domain of genuine difference (...). He is allowed to communicate with his family via cell phone, but he cannot be with them, in the flesh; the violence of the system and the urgency of its cause demand this. The cell phone thus becomes a symbol not of media's perpetuation of connection, but (...) rather of its complicity in fostering disconnection" (2018: 58).

The cell phone connection between the male hero and his family provides a certain sense of relief for the entire family, since Gerry is forced to perform the mission or, otherwise, they will be sent back to the mainland where the zombies are attacking. There is a scene when Gerry is required to go to South Korea searching for a solution. While Gerry's wife saves his name in the contact list, Gerry saves 'family' in his own list instead of his wife's name. Noticeably, the cell phone only functions when Gerry calls, and not always to speak to his family; in one of the calls, on the trip to Israel from South Korea, he simply asks his wife to hand the phone over to the undersecretary of the United Nations. From Gerry's perspective, the cell phone not only provides an instrument to check on the safety of his family, but to complete the mission. In contrast, when the cell phone is used by Gerry's wife, though she has been warned not to use it, this action triggers devastating consequences. The ringtone announcing her only call to Gerry attracts the zombies in the camp in South Korea and puts his life into great danger. Several soldiers' lives are compromised to safeguard Gerry. Innocent lives are sacrificed to her impulsive action. She adds, thus, one more burden to the hero's mission.

SEE: Reyburn, Duncan. "Love in the Time of the Zombie Contagion: A Girardian-Weilienne Reading of *World War Z*". *Studies in the Fantastic* 5 (Winter 2017/Spring 2018): 47-77.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Gerry's family is relocated to the safety of the marine ship because of his former work for the UN
- Gerry cuts off in a split second the hand of female Israeli soldier Segan when she is bitten
- Gerry faces barehand the zombies after injecting himself what might or might not be an effective vaccine
- **Karin, Gerry's wife, calls**

The role of Gerry's wife is of interest in reinforcing Gerry's role within patriarchy. Gerry's former job is the sole reason for the family's survival, and his expertise leads the UN to save his and his family's lives during the collapse of civilization. Meanwhile, his wife Karin plays the role of an overemotional woman, dependent on her husband's wisdom for survival. In one scene her feelings are shown for their true destructiveness when she becomes too emotional, missing Gerry, and decides to call him. It just so happens that when she does there are

zombies in the area and, zombies being zombies, they are immediately attracted to the noise. A few soldiers end up dying while protecting Gerry as a result.

Here the movie demonstrates the destructiveness of human sentiments, even though it is natural to miss our loved ones or feel the urge to communicate with them. By linking death to the actions of an overemotional woman, the movie portrays these sentiments as damaging to human survival. In contrast, the entire movie celebrates Gerry's rationality and ability to deal with extreme conflict as an aspect of human behaviour that guarantees survival. From this point of view, Israeli soldier Segen is a more suitable female companion –though she must first lose her hand in an ambiguous scene in which Gerry both saves and mutilates her.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "Brad Pitt, not so Hidden Racism and Sexism, and *World War Z*", *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations*, 23 June 2013.

<https://andrewpegoda.com/2013/06/23/brad-pitt-not-so-hidden-racism-and-sexism-and-world-war-z-2013/>

Pitt's wife in the film has a handful of lines where she fully embodies a stereotypically motherly role. Every scene includes her taking care of and worrying about her children or husband. Pitt's two daughters in the film also have just a few lines and only at the beginning.

In Israel, as zombies attack, Pitt saves a female soldier, Segen, by cutting off part of her arm seconds after a zombie has bitten her. Segen has a few speaking lines. All of her lines consist of supporting Pitt's efforts in saving the world, thanking Pitt, or screaming.

There is also one woman who is still alive and who works at the World Health Care Organization lab that Pitt has been traveling toward to work on the cure needed to stop zombies. She also just has a few lines.

Natalie Wilson, "*World War Z* More Feminist-Friendly Than the Book", *Ms.* 29 June 2013.

<https://msmagazine.com/2013/06/29/world-war-z-more-feminist-friendly-than-the-book/>

Another significant woman character, Segen (Daniella Kertesz), becomes Gerry's right-hand-woman, even after he amputates her hand after she receives a zombie bite. As if her fearlessness, skill, and stoic determination to survive and aid Gerry in his mission were not enough to make any feminist zombie-film lover ecstatic, she does all of this WITH ONE HAND! The best part? Near the end of the film, when the plan is to try and find a 'cure' for the zombie apocalypse by entering a zombie-infested area of the World Health Organization, she is one of three sent on the mission, even though there are men with two hands who could have accompanied Gerry. I applaud the film for not only creating a central female character the book lacks but for insisting that she is the best 'man for the job'.

Brandon Huson, "*World War Z: Race, Gender and Geopolitics*", *Global Research* 30 June 2013.

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/world-war-z-race-gender-and-geopolitics/5341080>

Gerry's role occupies the stereotypical burdened white man forced to do right by honor and dignity. He first bristles at the notion of helping the UN find the source of the disease but is then called to duty by a General who warns him of his family's impending dismissal from the ship due to the fact that non-essential personnel will not be saved. Gerry complies fully with this and submits himself to performing the task that only he apparently can complete.

Gerry's dutifulness is clearly illustrated when he is contrasted with Harvard doctor, Dr. Fassbach. Dr. Fassbach is played by Elyas Gabel, a British actor who has a dark complexion and who comes off as brash and intelligent, but un-savvy, naïve and cowardly in the face of danger.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816711/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_Z_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_Z_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/world-war-z>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/world_war_z

***Under the Skin* (2013)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Jonathan Glazer

Screenplay by: Walter Campbell, Jonathan Glazer, Michael Faber (novel), Milo Addica (uncredited)

Producer(s): Nick Wechsler, James Wilson

Main performers (credits order): Scarlett Johansson (The Female), Jeremy McWilliams (The Bad Man), Lynsey Taylor Mackay (The Dead Woman), Dougie McConnell (Pick-Up Man), Kevin McAlinden (First Victim)

Company: Scottish Screen, UK Film Council, Film4, British Film Institute, Silver Reel, Creative Scotland

Nationality: UK/USA/Switzerland

Duration: 1h 48'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976)
- *Starman* (1984)
- *Lifeforce* (1985)
- *Species* (1995)
- *The Faculty* (1998)
- *Men in Black II* (2002)

MAIN AWARDS

Alliance of Women Film Journalists 2015 (winner)

Best Depiction of Nudity, Sexuality, or Seduction: Scarlett Johansson

Cahiers du Cinéma 2014

Top 10 Film Award: Jonathan Glazer (third place)

REASONS TO SEE *Under the Skin*

- The wonderful acting of Scarlett Johansson as the alien in human disguise.
- It is worth watching even if you have read the original novel by Michel Faber, for there are many changes that affect the interpretation of the story.
- It analyses political, ethical and gender issues with the excuse of the singular alien invasion.
- It is a great depiction of human alienation in the 21st century, particularly that of the working-class men the alien picks up.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In Scotland, a human-looking male alien drags the corpse of a dead woman out of a field and into a van where a female alien (Isserley) steals her clothes and dresses herself. Then, Isserley starts driving around in the van, seducing working-class men into an empty house where they are submerged in a black liquid that removes their flesh from their skin. In this way, the skin can be used to disguise other aliens and their flesh can be eaten. Later, as she meets a deformed man, she starts developing empathy toward humans. This empathy, however, ultimately leads Isserley to become a victim, as a woman rather than as an alien. Or as both.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In a feminist reading of *Under the Skin*, Isserley can be seen as a woman that expresses freely her sexual desire. She does not prey on working-class men because she feels resentful toward them, but because they will not be missed, which raises our awareness about the situation of this collective. In fact, the black pool where their bodies are destroyed can be read as a metaphor for these men's inability to connect with others (after all, they only want Isserley for her body). Likewise, the fact that Isserley leaves a baby crying alone on a beach is read as a rejection of the role of motherhood which society imposes on women, instead of an act of cruelty as it apparently is.

Isserley is an alien and, as such, she is also the personification of women's feeling of isolation in a patriarchal society. It must not be forgotten that Isserley is a threat as a female because she is not totally submissive, which is why the male aliens are constantly watching her. Isserley's human skin suggests that people easily project what they want to be, not what they really are. Both Isserley and the woman she steals her clothes from are, anyway, victims of sexual assault. Thus, the audience is reminded that rape is unfortunately common in all societies and that not even an alien female can protect themselves from it.

The film begins with a scene where an eye is created. Suppia and Mazierska explain that this is intended as a metaphor. A successful infiltration requires a full understanding of the host's culture and community and, so, being able to *see*. Toward the end of the movie, Isserley has an identity crisis because she cannot keep her alien perspective while empathising with the humans. Isserley preys on men with no compunction but when she starts feeling pity for them, she becomes the victim. This might suggest that feelings are a weakness for a woman in our society and that, somehow, this is the reason why they are victimized.

Suppia and Mazierska also claim that "In Glazer's film it is not the plight of white working-class men which attracts compassion of the alien and the audience, but that of a disabled man, somewhat reflecting the politics of the new left, which plays down the importance of class to emphasise the predicament of various minorities, such as the people of colour, LGBT and the disabled, which can be summarised under the umbrella of social justice" (2018: 294, see below). In short, by singling out this peculiar-looking man (actor Adam Pearson really looks like this), the other men and, above all, the ones who rape Isserley, are taken for granted, and their masculinity left unexamined.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The black pool processing of the second victim.
- The mirror scene in which Isserley considers herself.
- Isserley's studying her genitalia.

■ Isserley's human skin falls off

At the end of the film Isserley is sexually assaulted in the woods and, as a consequence of the struggle, her skin breaks and starts to peel. At the sight of Isserley's real coal-black skin, the assaulter runs away and Isserley sits and finishes 'undressing'. She is not only in shock because of the assault, but also seems to have an identity crisis while taking her human skin off. Isserley has a human shape, but she has no eyes and no female reproductive organs. She stares at her human face, which is still functioning (i.e. blinking) and the viewer senses how her dual identity is torn. Only a few moments later, the attacker returns and sets her on fire, afraid of her nature and furious at feeling emotional, and scared.

This scene displays Isserley's isolation as a woman and also as an alien. She has acquired some humaneness (i.e. empathy) but she is not human; she no longer belongs, either, to the alien community anymore. The assaulter sees her first as a victim and next as a threat, with her black skin adding problematic racial issues to the scene and the film. For him, Isserley is both weak enough to take advantage from and too dangerous to be allowed to live. In other words, when not submissive, in Western societies women are regarded as threatening aliens that must be eliminated. *Under the Skin* appears to criticise this but without quite striking the right tone.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Alfredo Suppia and Ewa Mazierska, "Aliens in an Alien World: The Portrayal of the Aliens and Humans in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* by Nicholas Roeg and *Under the Skin* by Jonathan Glazer", *Open Cultural Studies*, 2 (2018): 285–295.

<https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0026/culture-2018-0026.pdf>

[In Faber's book] Isserley, the alien sent to Earth, had to be significantly transformed to look like a human. Her tail was cut, her hair was shaved, and she required a pair of artificial breasts. Moreover, she has to wear special glasses so that her eyes look human-like. As a result, she is much shorter than an ordinary human, and her body looks as if she underwent surgery following a serious accident with much of her skin tissue being scarred. Generally, she does not look attractive from the perspective of people whom she meets, except for her "perfect" breasts which draw attention from the men to whom she gives a lift in her car.

On this occasion, the hypertext significantly differs from the hypotext, thanks to casting a star, Scarlett Johansson, in the role of Isserley. The filmic Isserley wears a wig, flashy red lipstick and is not shy to reveal her bosom –but knowing that this is how the 'real' Johansson looks, we are to believe, as in the case of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, that the alien is more attractive than the humans, not just different. (288)

Ara Osterweil, "*Under the Skin*: The Perils of Becoming Female". *Film Quarterly* 67.4 (Summer 2014): 44-51.

Under the Skin asks the big questions about what it means to be human, but its true inquiry is into femininity. Based on the 2000 novel of the same name by Michael Faber, *Under the Skin* advances a radical proposition: to be female is to be alien. As the film eventually reveals, all of the aforementioned questions are inextricable from gender. In spite of the fact that the appearance of sex may only be skin deep, even alien forms of life become subject to misogynist violence when they are gendered female. (44)

Sean Redmond, *Liquid Space: Science Fiction Film and Television in the Digital Age*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.

The liquid tomb that the single men drown in captures perfectly the sense that modern life is permeable, boundaryless, even as the opportunity to connect and expand connections is never really there. (...)

Scarlet Johansson's character is also eventually caught in this cauldron of anomie. In one pivotal scene, she stares blankly at herself in a mirror, misrecognising who she really is. She examines her body as if it doesn't belong to her (which it doesn't, it has been lifted off a corpse), capturing the sense that the self is a project that can be made, reengineered, in an age of consumer products and surgical transformations. (70)

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1441395/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Under_the_Skin_\(2013_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Under_the_Skin_(2013_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/under-the-skin>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/under_the_skin

Snowpiercer (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Joon-ho Bong

Screenplay by: Joon-ho Bong (also story), Kelly Masterson; Jacques Lob, Benjamin Legrand and Jean-Marc Rochette (graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*)

Producer(s): Tae Sung Jeong, Wonjo Jeong, Lee Tae Hun, Steven Nam, Park Chan-wook

Main performers: Chris Evans (Curtis), Kang-ho Song (Namgoong Minsoo), Ed Harris (Wilford), John Hurt (Gilliam), Tilda Swinton (Mason), Jaime Bell (Edgar), Octavia Spencer (Tanya), Ko Asung (Yona)

Company: SnowPiercer, Moho Film, Opus Pictures, Stillking Films, CJ Entertainment, TMS Entertainment, Union Investment Partners

Nationality: South Korea, Czech Republic

Duration: 2h 6'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Runaway Train* (1985)
- *Source Code* (2011)
- *Dredd* (2012)
- *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)
- *Train to Busan* (2016)
- *The Commuter* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Alliance of Women Film Journalists 2015 (winner)

EDA Award - Best Supporting Actress: Tilda Swinton

Asia-Pacific Film Festival 2015 (winner)

Best Art Direction: Ondrej Nekvasil

Busan Film Critics Association (BCFA) 2013 (winner)

Best Screenplay: Joon-ho Bong, Kelly Masterson

REASONS TO SEE *Snowpiercer*

- One should watch *Snowpiercer* even just for its quirkiness and grotesque premise: Its imaginative script (from a French graphic novel) makes it one of a kind.
- It provides a unique perspective of post-apocalyptic to reflect on class struggle.
- Tilda Swinton's spectacular performance as villainess Mason.
- Its suspense and cleverly managed tension (director Joon-ho Bong's trademark).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

2031, seventeen years after the catastrophic release of CW-7 to combat global warming. The Earth remains frozen and lifeless, except for one train with an eternal motion engine, kept constantly running on a global circular railway designed by Wilford. In this closed ecosystem, the rich live in the front wagons of the train and the poor at the rear. Curtis and Gilliam, from the tail wagon, plan a coup against the preordained order imposed from the front. An interrupted rehearsal attack triggers, however, the premature execution of the plan. When, after the long way to the front, Curtis reaches Wilford's door he discovers that the rebellion had been monitored by him and the late Gilliam. That and all the past revolutions have been their plan to control the population. Too old to continue, Wilford asks Curtis to replace him and even though Curtis seems willing to accept, he ultimately takes a very different decision.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Whether the hero Curtis is courageous or reckless is brought to attention when, at the beginning of the rebellion, he holds a soldier's gun to himself and pulls the trigger, only to prove the point that there are no bullets. If courage consists of doing one's best to help the community, then recklessness can be defined as its opposite: taking unnecessary personal risks for selfish reasons. In *Snowpiercer*, however, Curtis's recklessness is accepted as an integral part of his heroism. Nobody questions, either, among the multi-racial, multi-cultural passage (nor in this Korean movie) why a white American man has the right to lead.

Thanks to the spectacular performance of Scottish actress Tilda Swinton, the distinctive Mason, a character originally written for a man, becomes one of the most singular elements of *Snowpiercer*. Whereas Evans plays Curtis as a straightforward hero, Swinton's Mason is a grotesque villain(ess), played apparently tongue-in-cheek. The long, claustrophobic train ride seems to have drained her of any humanity, turning Mason into a walking shell and the very embodiment of bureaucratic irrationality. She has no feminine traces left, or they are so deeply buried that they only surface when she tries to bargain for her life with the rebels. She is otherwise, with her military medals and her brutal executive orders, a patriarchal underling with a twisted soul.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Mason orders Andrew's punishment: freezing his right arm off
- Curtis starts the coup and pulls the trigger while the gun is pointing at himself
- Black single mother Tanya demands to join the coup
- **Mason's execution**

When Mason, the woman in charge of stopping the rebellion, is held as hostage in the school, a seemingly harmless person pushes a cart full of eggs and starts dispensing them to everybody he sees. Once he reaches the rear cars, he pulls out a machine gun and starts a massacre. Gilliam is executed, broadcast live on TV. Tanya urges Curtis to lead them but he is too angry to think clearly, and, out of control, he kills Mason.

The narration manipulates the audience so that we accept Curtis's anger about Gilliam's death and his gunning down the obnoxious Mason. The sentiment of righteousness is restored with this execution. Nonetheless, this is essentially mob behaviour, connected with the main trait in Curtis's masculinity: recklessness. There is no evidence pointing at Mason as the culprit behind the massacre and she is killed, rather, simply because she embodies class oppression. The rebels need a scapegoat and the movie places the audience on the side of the rebels, asking for blood rather than justice. Mason's execution is a dangerous celebration of Curtis's

masculinity, always presented as positive, despite some his recklessness. After all, he is played by Chris Evans, a.k.a. Captain America.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Milja Radovic, *Film, Religion and Activist Citizens: An Ontology of Transformative Acts*, New York: Routledge, 2017.

Nonetheless, *Snowpiercer* does not concretize the (socio-political or geographical) context but blends all elements to show how within humanity and any political system, acts and activism are authentic but are corruptible in very literal ways, examining why they may be often doomed to fail. It exposes the framing and functioning of activism within totalitarianism not in one form but in multiple, each wagon of the train functioning as a separate ideology. This allegorical framework and the ability to distance itself aesthetically and narratologically from 'reality' is precisely the power of science fiction in providing a more perceptive critique of actual political reality(ies). (63)

Caitie Annear, "Snowpiercer and the End of the World", *Reel Honey Webpage* 23 May 2017. <http://reelhoney.com/snowpiercer-and-the-end-of-the-world/>

Mason, on the other hand, proves her inhumanity from the first scene. When a man throws a shoe at her, Mason orders that his arm be frozen and smashed with a sledgehammer. Originally written as a man, Tilda Swinton's exaggerated, grotesque mannerisms make the gender of the character even more compelling. In the perverted, seventeen-year maintenance of Western patriarchal systems, symbols like the military medals pinned to her jacket, the title of 'Sir', and her ostentatious fur coat, are used by Mason to visually establish herself as the ultimate bureaucratic villain, wearing masculinity as a uniform.

Dylan Moses Griffin, "We Failed This Film: Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013)", *Vague Visages Webpage* 13 May 2016. <https://vaguevisages.com/2016/05/13/we-failed-this-film-bong-joon-ho-s-snowpiercer-2013/>

Tilda Swinton is transcendent as a grimy, gender-ambiguous Margaret Thatcher-looking Deputy Minister from the front of the train, Mason. It's a completely gonzo performance that is dialed past camp into a territory all her own. Her performance must be seen to be understood, and that is a compliment.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1706620/>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowpiercer>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/snowpiercer>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/snowpiercer>

Ender's Game (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Gavin Hood

Screenplay by: Gavin Hood, Orson Scott Card (novel)

Producer(s): Orson Scott Card, Robert Chartoff, Lynn Hende, Alex Kurtzman, Linda McDonough, Roberto Orci, Gigi Pritzker, Ed Ulbrich

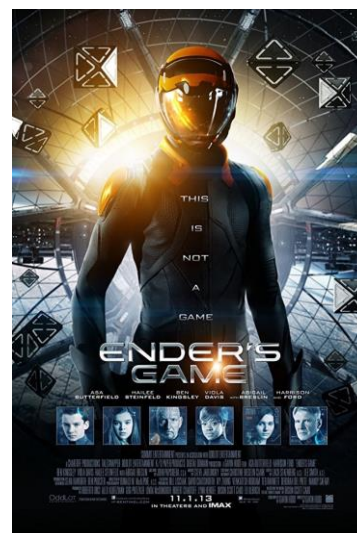
Main performers (credits order):

Asa Butterfield (Ender Wiggin); Harrison Ford (Colonel Graff); Hailee Steinfeld (Petra Arkanian); Abigail Breslin (Valentine Wiggin); Ben Kingsley (Mazer Rackham); Viola Davis (Major Gwen Anderson)

Company: Summit Entertainment, OddLot Entertainment), Chartoff Productions, Taleswapper, K/O Paper Products, Digital Domain, Sierra / Affinity

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 53'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Independence Day* (1996)
- *Soldier Child* (1998), documentary
- *Harry Potter* (2001-2011), film series
- *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2010)
- *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015), quadrilogy
- *The Maze Runner* (2014-2018), trilogy
- *The Fifth Wave* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Awards, 2014 (nominee)

Best Science Fiction Film

Best Supporting Actor: Harrison Ford

Best Performance by a Younger Actor: Asa Butterfield

Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards 2014 (nominee)

Best Young Actor/Actress: Asa Butterfield

REASONS TO SEE *Ender's Game*

- For good, or more probably for bad, it is the long-awaited adaptation of Orson Scott Card's science-fiction classic *Ender's Game* (1985). The author also acted as producer.
- It criticises war politics by touching mainly upon the issue of child soldiers, and questions the ethics of warfare, conventional leadership qualities.

- It brings up the theme of defensive genocide with Ender's controversial victory. Like its original source, it stresses the idea that aggression is often caused by an inability to communicate.
- The coming-of-age narrative is translated into a remarkable visual spectacle with advanced special effects.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In the future, a technologically superior alien race called the Formics attack the Earth and kill millions of humans for our water resources. Luckily, a Maori soldier named Mazer Rackham, becomes a hero when he destroys the alien mothership and defeats them. The military has been preparing for a possible second attack since then by recruiting the most intelligent children to train them as soldiers, hoping to find a charismatic leader like Rackham. Ender Wiggin, a shy but brilliant boy, very good in war games, gets selected by Colonel Graff to Battle School and separated from his loving family. Quickly, he masters the required skills to be promoted to Command School, where he is trained by Rackham himself. Together with a select group of other child soldiers, Ender constantly plays virtual war games in preparation for the eventual conflict. Or so he is told.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In his book *Embodying Gender and Age in Speculative Fiction: A Biopsychosocial Approach*, Derek J. Thiess claims that the novel *Ender's Game* is "highly critical of a certain hegemonic masculinity" (2016: 114). Based on the saga by Orson Scott Card, the movie's supposed aim is bringing in an alternative masculinity onto the screen. Ender is, as a hero, torn between his sensitivity and his inclination to do violence whenever he is provoked. When he eventually realizes that he has been tricked into committing genocide by his patriarchal male superiors, who have disguised the fact that the game he plays is no game at all, Ender chooses to leave the Command School. He decides then to help the only survivor, a Queen, to find another planet and re-start her lost species.

Ender's seniors are the products of toxic patriarchal masculinity, which is why the only solution to the alien threat they contemplate is wholesale slaughter and genocide. Opposed to their destructive ways, female characters such as Ender's sister Valentine, Major Gwen Anderson and the Queen of the Formics propose a more peaceful way to solve the ongoing problems between humans and aliens. However, their voices are constantly suppressed by the Earth's patriarchy. The Formics are killed, Valentine is not chosen for Battle School for her empathy, and Major Anderson is forced to resign for suggesting that Ender should concentrate on his sensitivity and not on violence.

Unfortunately, the movie appears to fall short in its anti-patriarchal critique compared to Card's *Ender's Game* series, which expands into five sequels so far. The film flopped at the box office (audiences seemingly boycotted it in protest against Card's homophobia) and the planned franchise was cancelled. This failure which means that we will never get to see on screen how Ender grows up to be a fully anti-patriarchal man. We are left instead with a movie almost completely focused on eliminating female voices and which uses violence without truly showing any sign of empathy for the aliens while claiming to endorse it.

SEE: Thiess, Derek J. *Embodying Gender and Age in Speculative Fiction: A Biopsychosocial Approach*. New York and London: Routledge, 2016.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The destruction of the Formics' planet
- Major Anderson must resign after suggesting Ender should work on his sensitivity
- Sergeant Dap's threat to castrate new students if they are seen in the girls' bathroom
- **Ender saves the Hive Queen**

The Formics, a matriarchal community portrayed as considerably sensitive, become a victim in the hands of Earth's patriarchal structure. However, they are not the only ones that have been terrorised. Colonel Graff and his colleagues have tricked Ender's team, basically composed of children, into exterminating the alien race under the cover of a game. After realising he has committed specicide, Ender has a breakdown. At the end of the movie, he leaves the space station to help the last survivor of the Formics. The last scene, unlike the rest of the movie, fully endorses Ender's breach of patriarchal discipline and his rebellion. Having sided with peace and empathy, Ender is ready to become an alternative man who does not consider violence as the only way to rule a community. It is true that the movie, and the book, cannot pull away from the stereotypical white male hero, but, all in all, at least they do try to redefine masculinity and separate heroism from patriarchal military values.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Ian Buckwalter, "Everything At Stake, And Everything On The Table" *National Public Radio* 31 October 2013.

<https://www.npr.org/2013/10/31/241601883/everything-at-stake-and-everything-on-the-table>

Ender finds kindness from Petra (Hailee Steinfeld), a female cadet, and cruelty from his squad leader, Bonzo (Moises Arias). Meanwhile, Ender tries to balance the dual natures he sees within himself—one of sociopathic violence that he associates with his older brother, the other of empathy, which he ties to his sister. Look, we get it already: Men are thugs, women are nurturers. The lack of dimension extends beyond the core characters to most of the supporting cast of largely interchangeable cadets. When they're given any kind of characterisation, it's usually to fulfil a one-note archetype: the plucky misfit, the bully with deep-seated insecurities.

Gibbelins, "The Women of Ender's Game", *Observation Deck* 11 April 2013.

<https://observationdeck.kinja.com/the-women-of-enders-game-1458177618>

Something really bothered me about the women of *Ender's Game*. This is a world in which everyone is unbelievably brutal and focused on winning at all costs. Except the women. Every single female character was a portrait of compassion and empathy, wanting nothing more than to take Ender by the hand and gently lead him on his path to greatness. None of these female characters would be problematic by themselves. There is nothing wrong with depicting a woman as compassionate and caring. But this is the only way women were depicted in *Ender's Game*, and it was a persistent theme even when it made very little sense in the circumstances.

Angela Watercutter, "Most Superhero and Sci-Fi Films Would Fail Sweden's New Film Rating System", *Wired* 11 July 2013. <https://www.wired.com/2013/11/sweden-film-rating-bechdel/>

The release of the new cinematic litmus test in Sweden comes as more than a few movies on either side of this spectrum are hitting theaters. *Ender's Game*, for example, has three named female characters—Petra (Hailee Steinfeld), Valentine (Abigail Breslin), and Major

Gwen Anderson (Viola Davis, whose character was gender-swapped from her book's counterpart)– but they never interact with one another.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1731141/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ender%27s_Game
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/enders-game/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/enders_game

Gravity (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Alfonso Cuarón

Screenplay by: Alfonso Cuarón, Jonás Cuarón, George Clooney (uncredited)

Producer(s): Alfonso Cuarón, David Heyman

Main performers: Sandra Bullock (Ryan Stone), George Clooney (Matt Kowalski), Ed Harris (voice, Mission Control)

COMPANY: Warner Bros., Esperanto Filmoj, Heyday Films

NATIONALITY: UK/USA

DURATION: 1h 31'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Alien* (1978)
- *Apollo 13* (1995)
- *Interstellar* (2014)
- *The Martian* (2015)
- *Salyut 7* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2014 (winner; three other nominations)

Best Achievement in Cinematography: Emmanuel Lubezki

Best Achievement in Directing: Alfonso Cuarón

Best Achievement in Film Editing: Alfonso Cuarón, Mark Sanger

Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures, Original Score: Steven Price

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing: Skip Lievsay, Niv Adiri, Christopher Benstead, Chris Munro

Best Achievement in Sound Editing: Glenn Freemantle

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Tim Webber, Chris Lawrence, David Shirk, Neil Corbould

Golden Globes 2014 (winner; three other nominations)

Best Director - Motion Picture: Alfonso Cuarón

REASONS TO SEE *Gravity*

- It is a captivating science-fiction suspense film in which the horror comes from the void of indifferent space. The protagonist is constantly kept inches away from a silent death.
- The 3D technology perfectly renders the tiny self against the endless space, holding the breath of the audience from scene to scene.

- Sandra Bullock's performance, particularly because she is on her own most of the film.
- The realistic approach to space exploration, with no aliens or any other of the habitual motifs in SF.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

On her first space trip, Ryan Stone (a medical engineer) and her fellow crew members encounter a mass of debris resulting from the bombing of an obsolete satellite by Russia. Ryan and veteran Matt Kowalski survive but their Explorer shuttle is destroyed, and a third astronaut, Shariff Dasari, is killed. The two manage to approach the International Space Station, using Matt's space uniform. Upon crashing onto the ISS, however, Ryan gets entangled with the parachute ropes of the Soyuz module and Matt, fearing they might both be thrown off, detaches himself. He gives Ryan instructions to reach the Chinese space station Tiangong, before drifting away. Fate plays a cruel joke as Ryan struggles to free Soyuz only to learn that it is out of fuel. Preparing to die she has a vision of Matt, who tells Ryan how to use Soyuz' landing mechanism to reach Tiangong. Inspired by this, and her personal memories, Ryan refuses to yield before death.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Outwardly, the movie celebrates Dr. Ryan Stone's emancipation. She is the superior intellect in the Explorer crew and demonstrates resourcefulness in the narrative. Ryan is courageous enough to take on deathly trips one after another for survival and does overcome eventually her fear of death. However, it is not difficult to observe that from beginning to the climactic last effort, Stone is under the guidance of Kowalski. She is not incompetent, but neither is she competent. Armstrong complains rightly that Ryan relies on the idealized patriarchal figure of Kowalski, who "allows her to focus, understand, and articulate her experience, without whom she otherwise remains in a chaotic state" (2017: 239, see below).

Indeed, the desire to survive and head back to Earth to defy death is natural regardless of gender. Yet, Stone is portrayed as clumsy and inexperienced from the beginning, which resonates with the "gendered essentialism of femininity in relation to Earth" (Armstrong, 239). The space is not a place for women, not even for those with male names, but for men with Kowalski's ease and confidence. The Earth, which shares with women many presupposed associations with the material and maternity, is where Ryan should have remained (and implicitly take better care of the daughter she lost to a freak accident). "Stone's fundamental despair, before she summons the ghost of Kowalski to save her", Armstrong adds, "(...) and her attempts at [radio] communication merely emphasize her own redundancy as a mother and her helpless relationship with Earth as a woman in space" (241).

Marie Lather's ambiguous term, the "grounding of women" (2000: 7), with its connotations of punishment, extends to *Gravity*. In contrast, the male protagonist Kowalski, who supposedly represents the right mixture of the cerebral and the spiritual, distances himself from the domestic Earth. Behind the heroic male self-sacrifice is the male protagonist's mastery of his own destiny, despite the hostile environment and the catastrophic circumstances. Or because of them.

SEE: Lathers, Marie. *Space Oddities: Women and Outer Space in Popular Film and Culture, 1960 - 2000*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Stone manages to enter ISS. Momentarily, she assumes a foetal posture
- After Stone finds out that the Soyuz is out of fuel she falls into despair. She finds some solace in listening to random stations on Earth, particularly to a baby's voice
- Stone recalls her young daughter
- **The crucial hallucination**

Stone thinks there is nothing she can do to solve the problem of the Soyuz' empty tank. After a failure in communication with Earth's Mission Control, she drops the oxygen level and miserably waits for death. Kowalski comes to the rescue in a hallucination, telling her that she could use the "soft landing jets" to approach the Chinese station. The scene, incidentally, was George Clooney's uncredited contribution to the script, written by Alfonso Cuarón himself and his son Jonás. The three men deprived, thus, Ryan Stone of the scene she deserved: the moment when she would have come up with the crucial idea to survive, on her own merits. Besides, the baby's voice she hears on the radio stresses her failure as a mother, which is telegraphed to the audience from the beginning of the movie. Motherhood defines the woman astronaut still in the 21st century. By the way: make whatever you wish of the fact that it was actress Sandra Bullock who characterized Ryan as the mother of a dead daughter and made the connection between her memory and Stone's final decision to return to Earth.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Armstrong, Esther M. "10.03 Scenographies and Space: Reading the Gendered". *Star Ark: A Living, Self-Sustaining Spaceship*, ed. Rachel Armstrong. Chichester: Springer, 2017. 224-254.

Ultimately, there is a modernist trope of self-mastery in the face of crisis that allows these male protagonists to rise above these environmental limits and nevertheless triumph, despite the final outcome for them.

In contrast, the feminine aspect of space travel translates into an experience that is clearly unnaturally placed in space. Indeed, the film *Gravity* has a direct dynamic within the scenography that firmly locates the female protagonist on Earth and consequently suggests that the grounding of women is both natural and necessary. (238)

Ruth Holloway, "Media and Popular Culture", *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*, eds. Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015. 233-254.

Even in the recent action film *Gravity* (2013), which represents a strong female protagonist—a scientist—and her friendship with a male astronaut, her presence in space has to be explained as a result of extraordinary events in her personal life which also confirm her heterosexuality and thus potential for friendship to develop into romance with her male co-star. (245)

Alan Evans, "Gravity: My Most Overrated Film", *The Guardian* 11 Nov 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2014/nov/11/gravity-my-most-overrated-film>

Gravity embraces all sorts of gender stereotypes. Often clueless, Stone is the very model of the damsel in distress. She is repeatedly rescued, but always by men or by chance—she never escapes catastrophe thanks to her own ingenuity. Plus, there are more unnecessary lingering shots of Bullock in her underwear than you'd find of models in a Pirelli calendar.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1454468/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravity_\(2013_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravity_(2013_film))
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/gravity>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/gravity_2013

Her (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Spike Jonze

Screenplay by: Spike Jonze

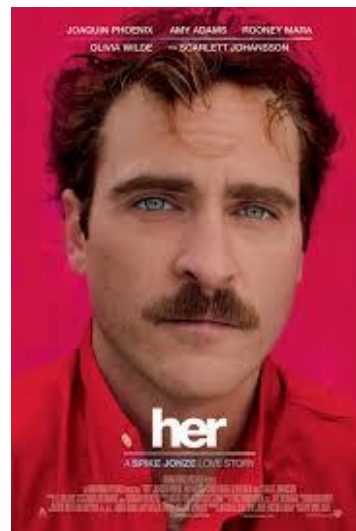
Producer(s): Megan Ellison, Spike Jonze, Vincent Landay

Main performers (credits order): Joaquin Phoenix (Theodore), Scarlett Johansson (voice, Samantha), Rooney Mara (Catherine), Olivia Wild (Amelia), Amy Adams (Amy), Chris Pratt (Paul), Matt Letscher (Charles), Portia Doubleday (Isabella)

Company: Annapurna Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 06'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Weird Science* (1985)
- *Electric Dreams* (1984)
- *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001)
- *S1m0ne* (2002)
- *Ex Machina* (2014)
- *Hot Bot* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2014 (winner; four other nominations)

Best Writing, Original Screenplay

Golden Globes 2014 (winner; two other nominations)

Best Screenplay-Motion Picture

Alliance of Women Film Journalists 2013 (winner; six other nominations)

EDA Award - Best Writing, Original Screenplay: Spike Jonze

EDA Special Mention Award - Best Depiction of Nudity, Sexuality, or Seduction: Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson

REASONS TO SEE *Her*

- It combines very well science fiction, drama and romance, in an unusually intimate plot.
- Joaquin Phoenix gives an excellent performance and so does Scarlett Johansson (using only her voice).
- The film rises very interesting questions of how far a.i. technology could go in the near future, and how that could affect our personal lives.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Theodore is a lonely man trying to come to terms with his recent divorce. His life is quite monotonous: when he is not working as a letter writer, he is either playing videogames or hanging out with his neighbours. However, this changes when he purchases an OS1, the world's first artificially intelligent operating system. Samantha, that's how the system decides to name herself, is almost like an independent person (except for her lacking a body). She grows closer and closer to Theodore, who finds in the system a new friend, and little by little, a new lover. Samantha and Theodore fall for each other, but, as their relationship progresses, doubts about the (im)possibility of human-OS relationships arise. Is it really healthy for human beings to engage in a relationship with an artificial intelligence? Do artificial intelligences 'work' as the human mind? Is the overall superiority of the OS1 system an obstacle? Theodore and Samantha's journey may help us answer these questions.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Since *Her* premiered in 2013, scholarly criticism about the film has mainly focused on the problematic relationship between Samantha and Theodore. On the one hand, questions about whether an a.i. can actually be a suitable substitute for a human being in any kind of relationship have been raised. On the other hand, scholarly criticism of the film has questioned the (im)possibility of a person developing feelings for a computer program. When discussing these questions, Troy Jollimore stated that "such a relationship, no matter how pleasant and satisfying the experience of it might be, might nonetheless be sorely lacking in some important features of human relationships; that it might fail to provide some of the things we want from our love relationships, whether or not the human participants are in a condition to recognize this" (2015: 121). The fact that an a.i. will never provide the kind of physical relationship that one would have with another human being is clear. However, whether an a.i. will ever be able to replicate the human mind remains controversial. The general consensus is that, as long as artificial intelligences do not develop consciousness, human/a.i. relationships will lack the reciprocity that healthy relationships should have (Jollimore 2015). These are exactly the things that make the relationship between Samantha and Theodore ultimately fail.

Scholars analysing the film from a feminist perspective have taken a different approach: they have mostly focused on the negative portrayal of women in the film. Theodore's phone sex partner wants to be choked with a dead cat (?). Isabella hysterically bursts into tears when Theodore stops their sexual encounter because he does not feel comfortable with her being a surrogate sexual partner (for Samantha). Theodore's blind date acts weirdly and asks for commitment as soon as she kisses him. And Theodore's ex-wife freaks out when he tells her that he is dating Samantha. As Sady Doyle complains in her review of the film: "These women aren't people; they're hostile, unknowable aliens" (2013: online, see below). Of course, so is Samantha, ultimately, as Theodore discovers. Far from being his exclusive romantic interest, 'she' is interacting in the same way with a large number of other vulnerable, gullible men—possibly also women, as she claims to be in love with 641 "people". Her polyamory, however, is not explored for the focus is, exclusively, Theodore's (male) wounded heart.

SEE: Jollimore, Troy. "This Endless Space between the Words: The Limits of Love in Spike Jonze's *Her*". *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 39.1 (September 2015): 120-143.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Theodore having phone sex with an unknown woman
- Theodore explaining to Samantha what he would do if she were real and 'having sex' with her
- Theodore and Amy's conversation about system-human relationships
- **Samantha chooses a surrogate sex-partner for Theodore**

Samantha is aware of the fact that lacking an actual body restricts her relationship with Theodore. Worried that not having conventional sex may put their relationship in danger, she finds a solution. Through the service that provides surrogate sexual partners for human-OS relationships, Samantha contacts Isabella, who seems the kind of girl Theodore would like. When Theodore asks whether Isabella is a prostitute, Samantha replies that she is not. In fact, there is no money involved; Isabella volunteers because she is apparently fascinated by the relationship between Samantha and Theodore and wants to be part of it. Theodore hesitates but ends up agreeing. Isabella goes to his apartment and she connects herself with Samantha via an earpiece. This way, she can mimic what Samantha would do with Theodore if she were physically present. This scene has raised many questions about the (im)morality of using a surrogate sex partner. It is true that there is no money involved, but the failure of the triangular date between Isabella, Theodore and Samantha's 'mind' suggests that Isabella agrees to be a surrogate only because she is mentally unstable and needs to feel loved and relevant one way or another. Nothing is said, however, of how things work when the a.i. is gendered male and its user female (or both are the same gender).

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

MaryAnn Johanson, "Her Review: Manic Pixel Dream Girl", *Flick Filosopher* 6 January 2013.
<https://www.flickfilosopher.com/2014/01/review-manic-pixel-dream-girl.html>

The Movies have given us too many Manic Pixie Dream Girls, those adorably kooky perfect women whose only narrative job is to lead troubled, insecure men on a path to mature adult relationships before skipping off into the sunset. We're meant to see those tales as sweet and idealistic. While Samantha may not be the first Manic Pixel Dream Girl (Al Pacino fell in love with a CGI 'actress' in *S1m0ne* back in 2002), *Her* is something new nevertheless: a soothing, gentle science-fiction horror movie. It's the rise of the machines as romantic dramedy, and the Singularity (the oft-speculated-upon future moment when computer intelligence bypasses humanity's) as romantic tragedy. It's *The Terminator* writ nice. And it's all the fault of humanity as represented by one troubled, insecure man who prefers undemanding fantasy women over the real thing.

Carolina A. Drake, "Her and Disembodied Femininity", *Are You Hung Up?* 26 December 2013.
<https://areyouhungup.wordpress.com/2013/12/26/her-and-disembodied-femininity/>

The cybernetic organism is a constructed hybrid, which allows for subverting oppression and is a ground for possibilities of liberation. Although *Her* presents a near-future artificial intelligence that blurs the lines between human organisms and machines (cool!) the disembodied mind of Samantha remains stereotypically feminine, heterosexual, and pretty white sounding (what is new?). Also, Samantha's disembodied identity is a rational one, almost passing for pseudo-universal, with all the negative consequences that universalizing a privileged female experience brings to all those who remain underrepresented (anyone who is not straight, feminine, and white).

Sady Doyle, “Her Is Really More About ‘Him’”, *In These Times* 20 December 2013.

http://inthesetimes.com/article/16031/her_is_really_more_about_him

Feminists have spent decades trying to explain concepts like ‘objectification’—the reduction of a person to a tool for another person’s gratification or use, typically sexual—and now, as a reward for all our hard work, we’re faced with a Movie of the Year in which the ideal woman is, literally, an object. An object that, it is promised, will “listen to you and understand you” and have a personality designed explicitly around your needs. Theodore picks the system up, seemingly both intrigued by the promise of companionship and interested in the OS’s mundane usefulness, but when he turns the system on and adjusts his preferred user settings to ‘female’, out comes a charming personality that is complex enough to be indistinguishable from a person.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/her>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/her>

Pacific Rim (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Guillermo del Toro

Screenplay by: Travis Beacham (also story), Guillermo del Toro.

Producer(s): Guillermo del Toro, Thomas Tull, Jon Jashni, Mary Parent

Main performers: Charlie Hunnam (Raleigh Becket), Rinko Kikuchi (Mako Mori), Idris Elba (Stacker Pentecost), Charlie Day (Dr. Newton Geiszler), Burn Gorman (Gottlieb), Max Martini (Herc Hansen), Rob Kazinsky (Chuck Hansen), Ron Perlman (Hannibal Chau)

COMPANY: Warner Bros, Legendary Pictures, Double Dare You

NATIONALITY: USA

DURATION: 2h 11'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (2018), sequel
- *Godzilla* (1954), and all its sequels and versions
- *Transformers* (franchise, 2007)
- *Real Steel* (2011)
- *Colossal* (2016)
- *Power Rangers* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Annie Awards 2014 (winner)

Outstanding Achievement in Animated Effects in a Live Action production

Internet Film Critic Society 2013 (winner)

Best Action Film

Hollywood Film Awards 2013 (winner)

Visual Effects of the Year

REASONS TO SEE *Pacific Rim*

- It's a fun sci-fi movie, with a great mixture of elements mostly borrowed from Japanese monster film culture (the idea of the giant *mecha*, the colossal *kaiju*).
- The visual effects are impressive and so is the design of the robots and the aliens.
- The notion of mental link between the two pilots of the *jaeger* combat robots is interesting.
- The characters played by Charlie Hunnam and Rinko Kikuchi team up without romance intruding in their relationship (for once!).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Earth has been since 2013 under attack from giant aliens (Kaiju) that first emerged in San Francisco from a space portal located in the Pacific Rim area. Eventually, human beings learned to make Jaegers, giant robots controlled by teams of two, to combat them. The Jaeger program leader, Commander Stacker Pentecost, persuades pilot Raleigh Becket to join the program again, after the death of his teammate and brother. Pentecost's adoptive daughter Mako Mori wants to become a pilot but she can only convince her father to recruit her when Raleigh refuses to fight with anyone else. Despite some initial problems, Raleigh and Mako defeat two Kaiju with their Jaeger Gypsy Danger. Later, they manage to breach the portal after a third victory and face the creators of the Kaiju. Although important sacrifices are required, the heroic mission to save Earth is fulfilled, at least for the time being.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

As many critics have noted, *Pacific Rim* fails the Bechdel Test most markedly. Apart from Mako Mori, there is only another female character, the formidable Lt. A. Kaidanovsky, but her only line is in Russian and addressed to her male partner. Mako is the only woman who speaks substantially but, again, just with men. In the article "Gender in *Pacific Rim*: The Mako Mori Problem", the author claims that even though Mako is a strong female character, "still, she exists only in relation to the men. Her role is to give each of the two males leads a turn to rescue her. If she were deleted from the movie, the only thing that would change would be the running time" (Michaud 2014: online). Indeed, many critics hold similar ideas: *Pacific Rim* ultimately fails to empower women, as many other sci-fi movies fail, despite the originality of Mako's characterisation (including her racial background as an Asian child raised by a black man).

However, Mako Mori does mark some progress in the representation of women in science fiction films, if only a slight one. On the one hand, she is a brave and intelligent woman who does not fall into the cliché of the fragile and helpless sufferer, especially associated with Asian women. She knows how to fight and does so very well. On the other hand, there are no romantic elements involved in the close connection between Mako and Raleigh, in which el Toro's film departs from the heterosexual hegemony present in most commercial movies. In *Pacific Rim*, in other words, women and men are, above all, human beings. The emotional patterns linking them belong to more types of relationships than just heterosexual passion. In fact, possibly the most interesting bond is that connecting the Australian father-and-son team, Herc and Chuck Hansen. It would have been nice, nevertheless, to have a Jaeger team with two women.

SEE: The Editors (Helen Michaud), "Gender in *Pacific Rim*: The Mako Mori Problem", *AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review* 24 June 2014. <https://aescifi.ca/the-mako-mori-problem/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Mako Mori battles several men using traditional Kungfu skills
- The multinational pilot teams are presented
- Mako Mori's rescue as a child (by Stacker Pentecost)
- **The final scene**

Unsurprisingly, at the end of the film the human beings manage to defeat the monsters. The battle is formidable and requires that Pentecost and Chuck Hansen sacrifice themselves. Raleigh's efforts even include a nuclear explosion, which he causes by overloading the Jaeger's

reactor. Fortunately, he and Mako survive and when their escape pods surface in the Pacific Ocean they tenderly embrace each other, in relief. The scene is not intended to be romantic.

This scene may elicit contradictory feelings. On the one hand, when I see that human beings have finally crushed the monsters after a difficult battle, I root for Mako: she is a powerful woman indeed, her efforts are indispensable in this fight. When she and Raleigh embrace each other, I am touched by how well their minds have connected, allowing them to fight together and comfort each other. However, I am made uncomfortable by how Mako still needs to be rescued. She was rescued by a man when she was a child, and, again, even though Mako fights fearlessly for humankind, her success is based on this man's sacrifice and on Raleigh's help when she momentarily falters. In the end, despite their equal relationship, still she must play damsel in distress to his hero, if only for a while.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Peter Bradshaw, "*Pacific Rim* – Review", *The Guardian* 11 July 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/11/pacific-rim-review>

Pacific Rim cheekily disses *Transformers* in the opening scene –[a] slightly ungracious treatment of a film franchise to which it is indebted. It could also have wanted to preemptively stamp its big metallic foot on the recent Hugh Jackman movie *Real Steel*, with a similar story about battling robots. That was pretty ropey, but in the light of *Pacific Rim*, it actually has a kind of unassuming modesty, and at least tried, in its way, to create real human sympathy. That's not to say there isn't interest. The effects are ambitious, and one spectacular urban catastrophe wittily concludes with a collapsing wall nudging a Newton's cradle just hard enough to set it in motion.

Matt Zoller Seitz, "*Pacific Rim* – Review", *Roger Ebert* 12 July 2013.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/pacific-rim-2013>

Raleigh thinks the bond he had with his brother can never be replicated, that his loss was irreplaceable. He learns otherwise when he's paired with a young woman named Mako Mori (Rinko Kikuchi), who lost her parents in a Tokyo monster attack many years earlier. The story of their burgeoning partnership is not just that of pilot/copilot, but brother/sister, or friend/friend (but not boyfriend/girlfriend, refreshingly). It's about learning to trust another person enough to allow their consciousness to fuse with yours.

James Berardinelli, "*Pacific Rim*", *ReelViews* 11 July 2013.

<http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/pacific-rim>

It's an adrenaline-and-testosterone cocktail that fans of monster movies, robot movies, and high-octane action films will swallow in a single gulp. This is bravura filmmaking that only top-notch, special effects-comfortable directors can choreograph. The thing that really makes this work, however, is the human element. There are people inside the robots and *Pacific Rim* never forgets that. In fact, it goes out of its way to develop and amplify the friendship/romance between Raleigh and Mako. Both are damaged souls searching for redemption and the chemistry between Charlie Hunnam and Rinko Kikuchi is effective enough to make us believe in these two as friends and future lovers.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1663662/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Rim_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Rim_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/pacific-rim>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pacific_rim_2013

Edge of Tomorrow (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Doug Liman

Screenplay by: Christopher McQuarrie, Jez Butterworth, John-Henry Butterworth, Hiroshi Sakurazaka (illustrated novel, *All You Need Is Kill*)

Producer(s): Jason Hoffs, Gregory Jacobs, Tom Lassally, Jeffrey Silver, Erwin Stoff

Main performers (credits order): Tom Cruise (Cage), Emily Blunt (Rita), Brendan Gleeson (General Brigham), Bill Paxton (Master Sergeant), Jonas Armstrong (Skinner), Tony Way (Kimmel), Kick Gurry (Griff)

Company: Warner Bros. Pictures, Village Roadshow Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entertainment, 3 Arts, Viz Productions, Dune Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 53'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Groundhog Day* (1993)
- *Run Lola Run* (1998)
- *50 First Dates* (2004)
- *Primer* (2004)
- *Source Code* (2011)
- *See You Yesterday* (2019)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Awards 2015 (winner; six other nominations)

Best Editing: James Herbert & Laura Jennings

Alliance of Women Film Journalists 2015 (winner)

Kick Ass Award for Best Female Action Star: Emily Blunt

REASONS TO SEE *Edge of Tomorrow*

- The clever use of the *Groundhog Day* gimmick by which the protagonist finds himself stranded on the same day again and again.
- The strong female character played by Emily Blunt, hero soldier Rita Vrataski.
- The singular characterisation of the hero Cage (Tom Cruise), who can only learn by dying many times.
- The political issues it raises by presenting the Russian/Chinese alliance as the winners in the war against the aliens.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

The mimics, an alien species, conquer the European continent. After years of defeats, the humans finally regain victory led by the heroic Angel of Verdun, soldier Rita Vrataski. In a renewed effort to win the war, even unexperienced men are sent to the frontline. One of them is Major William Cage, an officer employed so far in advertisement to attract new soldiers. Sent forcefully to the front, Cage is killed at once, only to find himself reborn one day before his death. After several more deaths in combat, Cage deserts but the mimics kill him anyway. He meets next Rita on the battlefield and, once she acknowledges his strange ability to return to life, they cooperate to form new plans based on what Cage remembers from each combat day. His vision of a key element in the mimics' equipment, however, comes too late, when a blood transfusion has made Cage a mortal man again. He decides anyway to engage in battle with Rita and their fellow soldiers.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Teresa Jusino stresses Rita's importance in the movie as an inspiration for "the whole world" as a hero, and specially for Cage: "He's not trying to win her approval, or win her romantically, or even protect her. She inspires him, because she's the kind of person he wants to be, which is extremely rare in film. It's rare that we see a male character (several, in fact) in a film look up to a female character; want to be her" (2014: online).

When Tom Cruise (Cage) is forcefully sent to the frontline, he tries to refuse, by every possible measure, even though he is an officer. He claims that he cannot even withstand a paper cut, let alone the possible injuries in a battlefield. The incapable, cowardly male protagonist, as unlike the classic hero as possible, seems totally useless in the war with the hostile aliens. The owner of an advertising company before the war, he does contribute at least to the war effort his effective skills in public speaking.

Contrasting with the inexperienced Cage, Rita Vrataski is an international heroine, dubbed the Angel of Verdun (after the mythical apparition in the Battle of Verdun of WWI). Her image is propagandized and used for encouraging recruits and the army's morale. Once trust is established between Cage and Rita, when she understands that he is not lying about his unique ability, she trains him in the combat skills required to fight against the mimics. Cage meekly follows Rita's orders, fascinated by her strength and resilience. The training has its peculiar moments, for whenever Cage is physically disabled by the simulated aliens, Rita shoots him without any hesitation so that he can start again. As time progresses, Cage's skills become comparable to Rita's, but he never tries to compete, knowing that she is the better soldier. In wartime, cooperation in order to win the fight matters, after all, more than competition.

In the end, Cage and Rita are the only survivors in the Louvre Museum episode, when the omega nuclear device that the mimics depend on is located. In order to distract the alien leader, either Cage or Rita must sacrifice themselves to buy time for the other to carry out the mission. The movie, innovative in the first part yet conventional in the latter one, chooses Rita to be heroically sacrificed. There is even a cliched final kiss before Rita goes, though Cage wins her for the shortest time. It is rewarding to see a female hero in a war movie, and Emily Blunt does a great job of looking as strong as her male counterparts. However, the second half of the movie falls back onto the traditional view that any major crisis must be tackled by the men, which makes *Edge of Tomorrow* ultimately less attractive than it could have been.

SEE: Jusino, Teresa. "Edge of Tomorrow's Angel of Verdun: Nuanced Female Characters". *The Mary Sue* 20 October 2015. <https://www.themarysue.com/edge-of-tomorrows-angel-of-verdun-nuanced-female-characters>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Cage's panic when he lands on the beach in the middle of battle
- Rita leads her troops into combat
- Cage and Rita's goodbye kiss before she sacrifices herself
- **Rita trains Cage**

Rita recognizes Cage's ability to return from death because, as it turns out, the same has happened to her—this is how she managed to kill all those mimics in Verdun. Being an experienced soldier, Rita is determined to train Cage, who is totally inexperienced, by fighting against the aliens in the simulation room. Whenever Cage is physically disabled by the simulated machines, Rita, without hesitation, shoots Cage, which resets time for him. Cage sometimes begs for survival and yet, the determined Rita is not persuaded. Knowing that if the human army does not carry out its mission successfully the aliens will invade London, Cage accepts his fate and eventually learns to be competent with all the required weapons and combat skills.

It is, somehow, unsettling to watch Rita (a woman) kill Cage (a man and her subordinate) so many times—some reviewers even joked that this is the perfect movie for those who hate Tom Cruise. Her training, however, does turn Cage from a coward into the man he is supposed to be, in which the movie is quite conventional. Thus, the superiority of the female hero (and practically only female character), is closely matched by the transformed Cage. The former battlefield leader ends up relying on Cage's experience (instead of her own) for the final mission, which besides claims her life. As usual, then, the more positive aspects of gender representation are in the end undermined by the urge to uphold the male protagonist.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Tara M. Clapper, "Edge of Tomorrow – A Feminist Film Critique", *Geek Initiative* 8 June 2014. <https://geekinitiative.com/edge-of-tomorrow-a-feminist-film-critique/>

As technology advances, gender and capability becomes less of an issue in modern warfare. These suits would enable (or in practical use, do enable) military personnel to lift x-times their typical capacity. This means that when it comes to lifting heavy objects commonly used in battle (such as ammo crates), women and men wearing the suits can lift them effortlessly. The differences in lifting ability become negligible while the ability to use such technology becomes more relevant.

Using this advanced equipment, in the movie, is akin to firing a pistol in real life: anyone with the proper skill and training is not limited by gender when it comes to firing at a target. Weapons advancement is the ultimate equalizer.

Sandy Cohen. "Blunt Reveals New Toughness in *Edge of Tomorrow*", *Big Story* 11 October 2014. <http://www.bigstory.ap.org/article/blunt-reveals-new-toughness-edge-tomorrow>.

But none [of her previous roles] prepared her to be an action star. What did was three months of rigorous training in martial arts, weapons and wire work; and working with Cruise, who famously does his own stunts. ("I didn't want him to be the only one showing off", she laughs.) Blunt wore a weighted vest to prepare for the 85-pound armored "Exo-Suit" she wears in the film. She nearly broke her nose —demonstrating for a reporter how the on-set physician straightened it with a finger in each nostril and a quick, painful shift— and may have permanently damaged her thumb.

The training helped her become Rita, and taught Blunt about herself.

“I think it did toughen me up in a big way”, she said, “because now I know what I’m capable of”.

Director Doug Liman said Blunt’s character is “the hero of the movie”.

Alica Lutes, “Emily Blunt’s *Edge of Tomorrow* Role is Refreshingly & Unapologetically Feminist”, *Bustle* 6 June 2014. <http://www.bustle.com/articles/26760-emily-blunts-edge-of-tomorrow-role-is-refreshingly-unapologetically-feminist>

As a force to be reckoned with — and the so-called Angel of Verdun, having brought down the aliens in a stunning battle defeat prior to the big brawl at the center of the film — Rita Vrataski (Blunt) is naturally pigeonholed as a ‘bitch’ (because of course! Because strong womens be ter-ri-fy-ing!). At the root of it, the reasons are pretty obvious: she managed to be ruthless and exacting in her takedown (read: murder) of a bunch of aliens. This is very much counter to the age-old ideals about ladies being the constant, delicate flowers of emotional heartstring-pulling. Vrataski is a big ol’ ‘fuck you’ to all of that, thanks to her unwavering commitment to the cause.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1631867/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edge_of_Tomorrow
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/edge-of-tomorrow>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/live_die_repeat_edge_of_tomorrow

Ex-Machina (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Alex Garland

Screenplay by: Alex Garland

Producer(s): Andrew Macdonald, Allon Reich

Main performers (credits order): Domhnall Gleeson (Caleb), Alicia Vikander (Ava), Oscar Isaac (Nathan), Sonoya Mizuno (Kyoko), Corey Johnson (Jay), Claire Selby (Lily), Saymara A. Templeman (Jasmine), Gana Bayarsaikhan (Jade), Tiffany Pisani (Katya), Elina Alminas (Amber)

Company: Universal Pictures International (UPI), Universal Pictures, Film4, DNA Films

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 48'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Stepford Wives* (1974, 2004)
- *Blade Runner* (1982)
- *Electric Dreams* (1984)
- *I, Robot* (2004)
- *Her* (2013)
- *Lucy* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2016

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Andrew Whitehurst, Paul Norris, Mark Williams Ardington, Sara Bennett (winner)

Best Writing, Original Screenplay: Alex Garland (nominee)

Directors Guild of America 2016 (winner)

Outstanding Directorial Achievement in First-Time Feature Film: Alex Garland

Screenwriters Choice Awards, Online 2015 (winner)

Best Original Screenplay: Alex Garland

REASONS TO SEE *Ex-Machina*

- It addresses the ethical implications of creating a humanoid robot with consciousness to serve humans.
- It supports Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity, as Ava learns how to play the role of woman.
- It addresses modern anxieties about women and machines entering the all-male working sphere.
- The amazing special effects to build Ava's body and Alicia Vikander's subtle performance.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Caleb, a young worker of Blue Book, the most important digital company of the near future, wins a contest to spend a week with the company's CEO (Nathan) in a secluded facility, which turns out to be Nathan's own home and lab. There, Nathan asks Caleb to test a gynoid (Ava) with a modified Turing test. Does Caleb believe Ava has a consciousness despite knowing that she is a machine? Caleb soon falls in love with Ava, and he eventually discovers that she is not the first gynoid Nathan has built, abused, and imprisoned. All the previous gynoids have apparently been destroyed after their attempts to escape. Despite knowing this, Caleb decides to help Ava run away, expecting to start a relationship with her. Ava and Kyoko (Nathan's mute gynoid lover) stab Nathan to death but Kyoko dies in the process. Next, Ava covers her robotic body with a deactivated gynoid's skin and clothes and locks Caleb in a room without life supplies, sentencing him to death after she leaves.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Nathan represents hyper-masculinity: he sees himself as a God, the father of Ava (Eva). Women's giving birth is seen as a natural thing, even as an animal process, but men creating robots with a consciousness see themselves as god-like higher beings and, of course, geniuses. Nathan, who rejects common people and lives in isolation, has created gynoids that are superior to humans, including himself; aware of this he sexually abuses them, to show them who is their master. Caleb, obviously, is Nathan's opposite, the good guy. He sees himself as a hero and Ava as a damsel-in-distress, and he helps her because he believes that she loves him back and that she will need him forever. Yet, the reason why Caleb believes that Ava has a consciousness is that she flirts with him, which is highly narcissistic. He sees himself as the man who validates Ava as a woman, no matter how true his feelings for her may be.

Ava represents the fantasy of the 'perfect' woman from a patriarchal perspective and this hints to a dystopian future with rampant male consumerism focused on the sexbot. Ava, however, is more 'perfect' than Caleb and Nathan understand. She can read micro-expressions and adapt her behaviour in order to manipulate others, which ultimately frees her from the two men. Jennifer Henke claims that "The very fact that she is a cyborg with no origin story or idea of sin enables her to kill Nathan and leave Caleb behind" (2017: 138). In my view, however, although Ava's actions make her less sympathetic than the typical victim in a horror movie, she behaves like any desperate captive, who would probably also kill in order to achieve freedom. Alex Garland clearly supports her decision to escape whatever it takes but can we really call Ava a strong female character? I think the answer is no. She uses flirtation in order to escape, and, therefore, she is unable to escape gender.

There are also problematic racial issues in the film. Ava, whose face is white-skinned, takes the skin and clothes off an Asian-looking gynoid, but not her face, in preparation to abandoning her prison. Kyoko, whose robotic identity is concealed through the first segment of the film, is literally mute and represents the ideally silent and submissive Asian woman. The movie presents her murder of Nathan as a fair act of revenge, but Kyoko becomes less human as the film progresses and never receives help from either Ava or Caleb. In fact, she dies in order to free Ava, though her death does not feel necessary or justified for the outcome of the film. Ava's taking advantage of her fellow Asian-looking gynoids signifies, on the whole, Garland's racist rejection of the multiracial future that the 'mulatto cyborg' (using Nishime's label) can help us to imagine.

SEE: Nishime, LeiLani. "The Mulatto Cyborg: Imagining a Multiracial Future". *Cinema Journal* 44.2 (Winter, 2005): 34-49.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Caleb's first glimpse of Ava's robotic body
- The view of Nathan's bedroom with the 'retired' gynoids
- Ava takes the skin and clothes off an Asian-looking gynoid to 'complete' her human look
- **The Pollock scene**

Halfway through the movie, Ava reads Caleb's micro expressions and asks him if he feels sexually attracted to her. Upset about being discovered, partly because he thinks he should not think about a gynoid like that, he confronts Nathan and asks him why he gave Ava sexual organs and feelings. More importantly, Caleb asks Nathan if he has programmed Ava to flirt with him. According to Caleb, a robot does not need sexuality because this is connected to evolution, but Nathan disagrees: an unsexed being is hard to conceive, he claims, and sex is fun. Then, he proceeds to tell Caleb that everyone's sexuality is open to performance, echoing Judith Butler's theories, and that though Ava is programmed to be heterosexual, she cannot be programmed to like Caleb. In a way, Nathan explains, Caleb is also programmed by his past sexual experiences.

This scene is apparently a progressive reading of gender, but the audience might forget that a more interesting approach would have been to let Ava escape the confines of (hetero)sexuality. Ava seduces Caleb in order to escape because she cannot imagine another way to achieve freedom, which means that, although she is not really a woman, she is trapped by her gender. Metaphorically speaking, she never leaves her cage because she carries her gender and her sexuality to the outside world with her.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Jennifer Henke, "'Ava's Body is a Good One': (Dis)Embodiment in *Ex Machina American*". *British and Canadian Studies* 19 (2017): 126-146.

Ex Machina is a narrative that echoes many characteristics of Gothic fiction and thus draws various parallels between Nathan and Caleb. Both can be read as nerdy narcissists who find themselves mirrored in Ava though none of them returns from their voyage "through the looking glass" (see 00:14:43). (...) I argue that Caleb does not rescue Ava out of altruistic motives. He rather expects a relationship and feels entitled to her body which he repeatedly dreams about. His mistake is that he fails to see who or what Ava really is. Instead, Caleb cannot see past her female body; the 'interference' is his (heterosexual) desire. (136-137)

Emilia Musap, "Why Is 'It' Gendered? Constructing Gender in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*". *Anafora* V.2 (2018): online. <https://www.ffos.unios.hr/anafora/anafora-52-7-musap-emilia>

(...) since Ava's path to freedom is paved with dismembered bodies of other female cyborgs, she does not embody an empowering statement of female liberation. Even though Ava manages to escape from Nathan's domestic prison and Caleb's sexual and/or love intention, she can never escape her gendered body, imposed by her (hu)man creator. Ava's empowerment is an illusion since she has to adopt the manipulative qualities assigned by Nathan, falling into the well-established trope of the femme fatale in order to seduce Caleb into trusting her. Even though Nathan and Caleb are punished for exploiting and/or wishing to exploit Ava's body, it is necessary to emphasize that the movie is not about the experiences of women. "Woman" is developed by her observers, rather than by Ava.

Zoe E. Seaman-Grant, "Constructing Womanhood and the Female Cyborg: A Feminist Reading of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*". Honors Thesis, Bates College, May 2017.

<https://scarab.bates.edu/honorstheses/202/>

Many critics discussing *Ex Machina* debate whether the film is a narrative of female empowerment and whether Ava should be viewed as a protagonist or a cold-blooded killer. These critics ignore Kyoko's role in the film. Kyoko's presence illustrates the inequity of female empowerment in the film. (...) Ava may gain her freedom, but her freedom is accompanied by Kyoko's murder—Kyoko is a disposable female cyborg body. (...) Jasmine, as a prototype for Ava's eventual creation, echoes the historic use of black women as unnamed and often faceless experimental subjects in medical and scientific discoveries. Typically, those discoveries that used bodies of black women only benefitted white women.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0470752/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Machina_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Machina_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/ex-machina>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ex_machina

Lucy (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Luc Besson

Screenplay by: Luc Besson

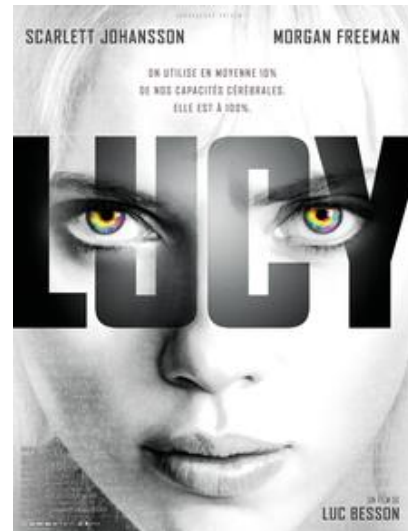
Producer(s): Virginie Besson-Silla

Main performers: Scarlett Johansson (Lucy), Morgan Freeman (Professor Norman), Min-sik Choi (Mr. Jang), Amr Waked (Pierre Del Rio)

COMPANY: EuropaCorp, TF1 Films Production, Canal+, Ciné+, TF1, Grive Productions, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC)

NATIONALITY: France

DURATION: 1h 30'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Fifth Element* (1997)
- *Limitless* (2011)
- *Under the Skin* (2013)
- *Her* (2013)
- *Ex Machina* (2014)
- *Transcendence* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Awards 2015 (nominee)

Best Action/Adventure Film

Alliance of Women Film Journalists 2015 (nominee)

Kick Ass Award for Best Female Action Star: Scarlett Johansson

REASONS TO SEE *Lucy*

- *Lucy* provides a fresh (French) alternative to the Hollywood action movies: the ultimate goal is transformation and reservation instead of winning.
- Certain quickness can be only found in Luc Besson's movies. And he likes to write interesting female characters – see *La Femme Nikita* (1994) or *The Fifth Element* (1997).
- Violence is not used here to cater to the popular craving for barbarity but subtly reflected.
- Scarlett Johansson's performance, one more to add to the long list of roles she has played in science-fiction films.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Beautiful, clueless, 25-year-old Lucy is tricked by his boyfriend to deliver a mysterious case to Jang, a Korean drug lord. Upon discovering that its content is CPH4, a powerful new drug, Jang coerces Lucy to be his drug mule. She is implanted with the drug package. Accidentally she is kicked by her guards and the bag inside her leaks. As a result, she transforms into a superwoman whose usage of brain capacity grows rapidly. She breaks free and secures information on the rest of the mules. Not knowing what to do with the leaping knowledge, Lucy establishes contact with Professor Norman, a renowned scholar who specializes in brain capacity usage. They agree that the purpose of her life is passing on all her knowledge to the rest of humans. This has to be done soon because she foresees her death in 24 hours.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

The tight rhythm of Lucy's brain usage growth is fascinating if watched through the lens of gender. The disastrous initial image of the quite lost Lucy precludes a critical tone on the negative images associated with the female body. Her simplicity, cluelessness and sexualization resonate every patriarchal practice that beautifies women from a patronizing perspective, devalues women and turns them into means to men's ends –in the mid-20th century as housewives, and in *Lucy's* near future as pawn and drug mule.

Early in her transformation, Lucy seems to be wiped out of empathy: she kills or injures without hesitation or remorse. Any lingering intimacy exists only with her mother in their farewell scene. The intermediate form which Lucy assumes might resemble a kind of 'feisty' masculinity, found in female characters in SF films shaped by patriarchal rules of entertainment; nonetheless, the challenge *Lucy* brings does not end here. Without CPH4, actually a hormonal derivative, Lucy's body begins to deconstruct in the plane, which serves as an analogy of the deconstruction of the female gender. Lucy's following actions should not go without notice: even though she drives recklessly she chooses not to kill in the hospital scene, which implies a departure from simply building a 'masculine woman'. The immediate explosion of knowledge brings out the central issue of the patriarchal anxieties over female knowledge and sexuality in the reproduction discourse (see Stevens). Pierre's constant bafflement before Lucy is a clearly indicator of such anxiety. The more antagonized, oppressive anxiety is embodied by Jang and his mafia's fanatic pursuit, which almost leaps from basic logic and subjects the late narrative to his grotesque sexist emotions.

In a biological frame that construes the meaning of life as reproduction, *Lucy* walks past the prevalent fantasy of masculine women and further deconstructs the female body and lastly constructs its pathway to its meaning in a fantastic setting. It is feminist in the sense of deep recognition of the constructed gender but ambiguously patriarchal in the overt or covert fear of that feminism.

SEE: Kirsten Stevens. "Between Attraction and Anxiety: Scarlett Johansson, Female Knowledge and the Mind–body Split in *Lucy*". *Science Fiction Film and Television* 11.1 (2018): 21-28.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Lucy's prison break
- The moment when without C.P.H.4, Lucy's body deteriorates in the plane
- Lucy kisses the dumbfounded Pierre, her love interest

■ The final transformation

After she is forcefully injected with the remaining CPH4, Lucy's body starts to transform completely. Flesh combines with black tendrils that extend physically and search for power, matter, and information. The black tendrils destroy almost all the equipment in the lab but also create a new, ultra-modern computer. Lucy travels through time and the universe as the dark matter covers more of her body. When this is totally engulfed, she disappears into cyberspace, leaving only a USB device behind her.

The ultimate dissolution of Lucy's female body, her transcendence, and the transfer of her superhuman knowledge is carried out by a multi-phallic-shaped computer. On the one hand, the scene can be read as the film's most staunch feminist point. Lucy's womanly physical form departs from the constructed social body and performs its destiny in contributing to the preservation of humankind in a unique way. On the other hand, the piercing shape of the super-advanced, next-generation computer does raise a suspicion about the modernist, essentialist, patriarchal subtext which connects maleness with the cerebral and the spiritual (as happens in Johnny Depp's film *Transcendence*). Since the computer turns into ashes, once the USB is withdrawn, and Lucy somehow becomes a digital goddess, this neutralizes the phallic metaphor—at least in part.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Tod Vanderwerff, "Lucy is a Staunchly Feminist Film that Sometimes Seems Terrified of Feminism", *Vox* 31 July 2014. <https://www.vox.com/2014/7/31/5953645/lucy-scarlett-johansson-luc-besson-feminism>

Even as the movie is delighting in its feminism, it's presenting Lucy's rise with a kind of hushed fear. Twist it just a degree or two, and it's easy to view the film through the lens of that fear, to see it as the worst nightmare of anyone virulently opposed to feminism.

Lucy smashes the patriarchy for a while, but that eventually gets boring. So, instead, she transcends it, becoming humanity's new god. And that, ultimately, is what makes *Lucy* worth seeing, even if it's a mess.

Emily Cook, "Lucy: Scarlett Johansson and the Powerful Challenge of Gender Stereotypes", *Film Focus*, 1 August 2015. <https://reelvision.wordpress.com/2015/08/01/lucy-2014-scarlett-johansson-and-the-powerful-challenge-of-gender-stereotypes-by-emily-cook/>

Lucy's kiss with actor Amr Waked tastes of success for female protagonists everywhere, as Lucy once more challenges the common sexualisation of women within action/ thriller genre. (...) I find this section of the film particularly powerful as it challenges the status quo of gender stereotypes at several levels. Firstly, the male 'love interest' recognises that he is unable to be of any help/ use to her, she then initiates the kiss, and finally owns her reasoning.

Renuka Vyavahare, "Lucy: Movie Review", *Times of India*, 12 May 2016. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/english/movie-reviews/lucy/movie-review/39358072.cms>

Morgan Freeman stands out in his small but significant role. Scarlett Johansson is convincing but after a while, the film gets too far-fetched and her character loses its sheen. While we are keen on counting her rising brain potential, changing psyche and the unexpected repercussions, the overindulgent French filmmaker seems more desperate to focus on his femme fatale's implausible superpowers (telekinesis and mind-reading) instead.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2872732/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_\(2014_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_(2014_film))
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/lucy>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lucy_2014

Interstellar (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Christopher Nolan

Screenplay by: Jonathan Nolan, Christopher Nolan

Producer(s): Christopher Nolan, Lynda Obst, Emma Thomas

Main performers (credits order): Matthew McConaughey (Cooper), Anne Hathaway (Dr. Brand), Michael Caine (Professor Brand), Jessica Chastain (Murphy), Bill Irwin (TARS), Ellen Burstyn (Old Murphy), Mackenzie Foy (Young Murphy)

COMPANY: Legendary Pictures, Syncopy Films, Lynda Obst Productions, Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros.

NATIONALITY: UK/USA/CA

DURATION: 2h 49'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Solaris* (1972, 2002)
- *Contact* (1997)
- *Event Horizon* (1997)
- *Oblivion* (2013)
- *Europa Report* (2013)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2015 (winner; four other nominations)

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: Paul J. Franklin, Andrew Lockley, Ian Hunter and Scott R. Fisher

BAFTA Awards 2015 (winner; three other nominations)

Best Special Visual Effects: Paul J. Franklin, Andrew Lockley, Ian Hunter and Scott R. Fisher

REASONS TO SEE *Interstellar*

- If you are interested in space-time, astrophysics, and metaphysics, from Newton's laws to string theory, passing through Einstein's relativity theory.
- If you are concerned about the future of humanity at a crucial point in our so-called civilization.
- It endorses the figure of the woman scientist, with strong female characters unafraid of feelings.
- If you enjoy other Christopher Nolan's mind-bending films, like *Memento* or *Inception*.
- It is, unusually, a story about a father and a daughter, instead of a son.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Earth is dying, devastated by dust storms that are killing everything on the planet. Humankind must find a way to survive and NASA has sent twelve people in separate missions to find another habitable planet outside the Solar System. Meanwhile on Earth, Murph, the smart young daughter of a former NASA's engineer and pilot, Cooper, starts observing paranormal activities related to gravity in her bedroom. She claims that there is a ghost trying to communicate with her. Cooper, her dad, asks her to record the evidence and analyse it. They discover the encrypted coordinates of a secret NASA's facility. When they go there, Dr. Brand offers Cooper the possibility of being the pilot who will undertake the new mission to recollect data from the habitable planets found by the astronauts of the previous missions. Plan A consists of saving humanity with the data gathered and Plan B of starting a colony in one of those planets.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Murph, the hero who solves the equation that saves Earth's population, is a woman because Christopher Nolan decided to swap the gender that his brother, Jonathan Nolan, had originally given to this character. Yes, Murph was in the screenplay a male. The change was motivated by Nolan's becoming the father of a baby girl. The whole movie is, thus, focused on the father-daughter relationship, and on the pain of the separation required for the father to save humankind. In *Interstellar*, however, typically the main male character is depicted as a good father only in the absence of a mother (as happens for instance in *Signs*). Will we ever see on screen a good, heroic father who shares parenting with a living mother?

Whereas Cooper (and his helpful father) embody positive masculinity, Professor Brand and Dr. Mann, represent weak, selfish masculinity. The former lies to everybody, hiding the equation's solution and condemning Earth's population to die; the latter prefers to send fake data about the planet he has found in order to be rescued rather than sacrifice himself to benefit the Earth's population, as he had engaged to do. In contraposition, the brave, kind, altruistic Dr. Brand (the professor's daughter and also an astronaut), chooses to risk it all by travelling to the planet she believes holds the key to the future, and start a colony there with its discoverer, the man she loves. Understanding her decision to be the new Eve, Cooper endangers his own life to help her, falling into the black hole that transforms him into Murph's mysterious ghost. Thus, the time loop is closed.

Alyssa Rosenberg notes that "The idea that our gender politics are always with us, centuries into the future and light-years beyond the planet where they first developed, is a dispiriting one" (2014: online). So it is, though Nolan's film manages to be in terms of gender, fair to all the main characters. At least, it does try.

SEE: Rosenberg, Alyssa. "From Alien to *Interstellar*: What Happens to Women Alone in Space", *The Washington Post* 10 November 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2014/11/10/from-alien-to-interstellar-what-happens-to-women-alone-in-space/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.46ae7a526e40

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Cooper's farewell to his ten-year-old daughter Murphy
- Dr. Brand and Cooper's first meeting
- Dr. Brand's monologue about the power of love through time and gravity
- Dr. Mann's attempt to kill Cooper

■ Hunting the drone

In this scene Cooper and his two children (Murph and Tom) are driving the family's truck when, suddenly, a surveillance drone flies over them. Since Cooper wants the "solar cells that could power an entire farm", they start chasing the machine through wheat fields, destroying everything in their vehicle's path. This scene is relevant because just before the drone appears, Cooper decides to give the responsibility over the gear change to Murph and not Tom: the boy soon starts complaining that Murph is doing it all wrong. The father, however, believes in gender equality and, lacking any prejudice, he thinks that his daughter is entirely capable of doing whatever she proposes to do (often more so than Tom). When the drone appears and the chase starts, Tom is the one driving the truck while Cooper tries to hack the drone's software with Murph's help. Again, Murph is the one with the higher responsibility, since without her pointing the antenna at the drone, Cooper could not hack it and get its precious solar cells. This prefigures her later main role in the movie.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Anna Klassen, "Christopher Nolan's Feminist *Interstellar* Isn't His First Pro-Women Film", *Bustle* 28 October 2014. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/46389-christopher-nolans-feminist-interstellar-isnt-his-first-pro-women-film>

And this makes sense—Nolan's character of Murphy is the film's true hero. McConaughey's Cooper is simply a red herring for our admiration. Sure, he's the one that goes into space, risks his life for the future and makes huge advances in space discovery, but it his daughter—seen as a 10-year-old and an adult—who saves civilization. Cooper even says it himself: "It was never me, it was her". To what he is referring, I won't reveal, but by the time the credits roll, it is clear who *Interstellar's* hero is—and it isn't a middle-aged white male with a southern accent. And I haven't even mentioned Cooper's space companion, highly-intelligent yet emotional Amelia (Anne Hathaway).

Sam Ashurts, "Jessica Chastain's *Interstellar* Gender-swap", *Dazed Digital* 5 November 2014. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/22407/1/jessica-chastain-interstellar-interview-gender>

When we spoke to Nolan, we asked him about his approach to writing women and he revealed that one of the female characters was originally male. "In the original draft of the script, Murph was originally a boy", Nolan told Dazed. "Maybe because my eldest child is a girl, I decided to change Murph into a girl. I found that came very naturally to me, writing that relationship between a father and a daughter. It was something I really enjoyed, and I enjoyed extrapolating that to the rest of the story".

(...)

Q: In terms of female identity, did the role retain any masculine qualities at all?

Jessica Chastain: I could tell at the first costume fitting – I looked at the costume and thought, 'Wow, there's a way she's presenting herself to the world', and I was curious about it, but then I realised her whole world is her father. So, there's the idea of her wearing her father's jacket. She doesn't present herself as available for love, so there's a way she presents herself to the world that isn't the most welcoming for someone to approach her romantically.

Kyle Kizu, "Dissecting Race and Gender in *Interstellar*", *Movieminis* 17 June 2015.

<https://movieminis.wordpress.com/2015/06/17/dissecting-race-and-gender-in-interstellar/>

Despite being incredibly innovative in spheres such as subject matter and craftsmanship, the Christopher Nolan sci-fi film *Interstellar* makes, within the large scope of cinema, only small steps forward in terms of attributing to the movement for an equal realm for women and minorities in cinema. *Interstellar* has two major female characters in the role of scientists, one

being an astrophysicist and one being a biologist. In addition, for every female scientist in *Interstellar*, there is a lack of character development or a lack of dimensions within the character. And, surprisingly enough, despite there being two named female scientists, the film's passage through the Bechdel test is ambiguous. Additionally, despite its progress with women, *Interstellar* does not feature a woman of color.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816692/>
- Wikipedia: <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstellar>
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/interstellar>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/interstellar_2014

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Matt Reeves

Screenplay by: Mark Bomback, Rick Jaffa (also original characters), Amanda Silver (also original characters), Pierre Boule (novel *La Planète des Singes*, uncredited)

Producer(s): Peter Chernin, Dylan Clark, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver

Main performers (credits order): Andy Serkis (Caesar), Jason Clarke (Malcom), Gary Oldman (Dreyfus), Keri Russell (Ellie), Toby Kebbell (Koba), Kodi Smith-McPhee (Alexander), Kirk Acevedo (Carver)

COMPANY: Chernin Entertainment, TSG Entertainment, 20th Century Fox

NATIONALITY: USA

DURATION: 2h 11'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Planet of the Apes* (1968)
- *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970)
- *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971)
- *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972)
- *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973)
- *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011)
- *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Annie Awards 2015 (winner)

Oustanding Achievement in Character Animation in a Live Production: Daniel Barret, Paul Story, Eteuati Tema , Alessandro Bonora, Dejan Momcilovic

Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards 2015 (winner; another nomination)

Best Visual Effects

Empire Awards 2015 (winner; three other nominations)

Best Actor: Andy Serkis (winner)

REASONS TO SEE *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*

- It's the second instalment in the prequel trilogy of one of the most iconic science fiction universes of the 70s.
- Weta's motion capture animation for the apes is simply amazing.
- It is a good reflection on human nature and human behaviour against other species.
- It offers yet another exploration of the *Frankenstein* complex, for the rise of the apes is the product of genetic engineering.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In a world where Homo Sapiens is almost extinct because of a virus created by the humans themselves, the apes are immune and evolving. They escaped from the cages of the laboratories and now live in the forest, where they have built a small village. The apes are happy and live in peace, until some humans appear to ask for a favour: they need to cross the forest to repair a dam and restore electricity. This leads to a confrontation between the two main alpha apes, the chimpanzees Koba (who does not trust humans because they tortured him) and Caesar (who trusts them because he was raised and loved by humans). Koba tries to kill Caesar and starts a rebellion because he wants revenge. He traps and imprisons the humans and those apes who don't think like him or are too close to Caesar. But when it is discovered that Caesar is still alive, his power is restored. Unfortunately, it is too late: Koba's rash behaviour has already awakened the war between species.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Where are the female characters in *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*? There are just two females, Ellie to serve a minor part in the male arc of the human side and the chimpanzee Cornelia, to serve with her secondary role in the male arc of the apes' side. Both matter, besides, only in connection to motherhood. The gender disruption is manifest on both sides: male apes and men act, while female apes and women serve. Incidentally: we differentiate male from female apes by their jewellery. Cornelia and the other females attending the birth of her baby wear beads in their hair... And even earrings.

The empathy for the ape colony is established by the father/son narrative between Caesar and his elder son Blue Eyes. This narrative mirrors human behaviour, feelings and emotions. The apes' civilization is based on the same patriarchal model as human civilization and it is rendered following the same gender roles and prejudices. Procreation is the most important process to enable the continuity of the specie and, of course, the system, but females are secondary. As Matt Zoller Seitz notes, "Ape reflects man in these movies, and man ape" (2014: online). Whereas *Rise of the Planet of the Earth*, Seitz adds, "about the unlikely savior of an endangered clan, was *The Apefather*, then this sprawling, messy, often sad sequel is *The Apefather, Part II*, turning brother against brother (on both the human and ape sides of the dramatic fence) in a war for resources and turf". The sisters, of course matter little here, if anything at all.

The movie undermines racial and ethnic prejudice by asking us to witness the elimination of the distinction between species: we can identify with the apes' actions and empathize with them at the same level we do with the humans. It fails, however, in terms of gender. The image transmitted by the film is one of domesticity in the case of females and of aggressiveness in the case of males, and both are deeply patriarchal in their human and animal variations.

SEE: Seitz, Matt Zoller. "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes", Roger Ebert 11 July 2014. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes-2014>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Koba points out the presence of human work nearby
- Koba and Caesar fight over the passage of the human through their village
- Caesar and Blue Eyes, father and son like the humans Malcom and Alexander

■ Cornelia gives birth

In this scene, Cornelia is lying surrounded by other female apes, assisting her in labour when Caesar appears. The scene is a clear example of domesticity, with the females in the house, serving, and with the busy, powerful males coming home later, only when the work outside is done. It is a very tender scene intended to have the audience realize that the apes are acting as humans do; they hold hands during the process of giving birth, Caesar caresses lovingly Cornelia's forehead and when finally, the baby ape comes out, they are all seized by strong emotions and deep love. Still, it is patriarchal.

All through this scene, Blue Eyes, the oldest son, has been watching from a distance until Caesar asks him to approach. Then the family of four merge in a hug welcoming the new family member. It is a manifest image of the patriarchal system, in which men are the leaders and the rest of the family just follow their orders and rules, including the injunction to make babies. This is a mirror of our own human behaviour. And even though this is a tender scene, it is also part of the kind of patriarchal style of ruling by males. The males, men or apes, must be brave and strong to protect their family from any enemies but they are also the reason why wars are waged—as this movie shows, once more, without considering why this must be the (inevitable) case.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Kyle Buchanan, "What Even Our Best Blockbusters Are Still Getting Wrong About Women", *New York Vulture* 15 July 2014. <https://www.vulture.com/2014/07/summer-blockbusters-female-problem-planet-apes.html>

Ellie, played by Keri Russell is the one who tags along a few steps behind our male lead in all her scenes, and she's off-screen for most of the movie, including the all-important final act. Ellie's counterparts at the colony of apes don't fare much better when it comes to representation: There, too, we meet countless male apes but only one female, Caesar's love interest, Cornelia.

The film would have lost nothing if Clarke's son had been a daughter, or if a few of the many subordinates to Gary Oldman's beleaguered human leader had been female. Hell, even Oldman's character could have been a woman.

Andy, "Apes in Earrings: The Gender Problem in *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*", *Bloody Good Horror* 4 September 2014. <http://www.bloodygoodhorror.com/bgh/apes-in-earrings-the-gender-problem-in-dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes>

The Apes have officially decided to birth indoors, surrounded by other females, wearing the only semblance of jewellery in this society. That this form of domesticity stands as an ultimate signifier of emerging civilization is something the film's guiding principles take for granted. Would this Ape Colony exist in the way it does without procreation? Most likely not. And this is something that is emphasized in Weta's digital ability to convincingly swarm the screen with them, while human characters have more than a couple of lines emphasizing how many Apes there are. But the numbers game here beguiles a presumed 'natural' way for civilizations to exist and develop complete with 'sons', 'fathers', and 'mothers'.

Anita Sarkeesian, "Masculinity, Rage, and Racism: Some Thoughts on *War for the Planet of the Apes*", *Feminist Frequency* 18 July 2017. <https://feministfrequency.com/2017/07/18/masculinity-rage-and-racism-some-thoughts-on-war-for-the-planet-of-the-apes/>

The only hope of the cycle ending, it seems to say, is if one side is all but completely wiped out, and though the film repeatedly acknowledges the ways in which racism, nationalism, and a certain strain of violent, virulent masculinity are so often linked, it offers no hope of escape

from this particular gender knot, which lends these specific toxic masculinities, damaging as they are, the appearance of being natural and inevitable. What would be truly radical and wonderful would be to someday see a blockbuster that asserts that understanding, compassion, and cooperation can overcome, and that we can happily share the world with those who are different from us, though not so different as we may have once thought.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2103281/>
- Wikipedia: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawn_of_the_Planet_of_the_Apes
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes>
- Rotten Tomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dawn_of_the_planet_of_the_apes

Predestination (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig (The Spierig Brothers)

Screenplay by: Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, Robert A. Heinlein (story "All You Zombies")

Producer(s): Paddy McDonald, Tim McGahan, Michael Spierig, Peter Spierig

Main performers: Ethan Hawk (The Barkeep), Sarah Snook (The Unmarried Mother/Jane), Madeleine West (Miss Stapleton), Noah Taylor (Mr. Robertson), Christopher Kirby (Mr. Miles), Denis Coard (Mayor Davidson), Freya Stafford (Alice), Jim Knobeloch (Belfort), Christopher Sommers (Mr. Miller)

Company: Screen Australia, Screen Queensland, Blacklab Entertainment, Wolfhound Pictures, Stage 6 Films

Nationality: Australia

Duration: 1h 37'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Terminator* (1984)
- *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2009)
- *Looper* (2012)
- *Coherence* (2013)
- *About Time* (2013)
- *Interstellar* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts 2015 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Cinematography: Ben Nott

Best Editing: Matt Villa

Best Production Design: Matthew Putland

Best Lead Actress: Sarah Snook

Film Critics Circle of Australia 2015 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Actress: Sarah Snook

Best Editing: Matt Villa

Best Production Design: Matthew Putland

REASONS TO SEE *Predestination*

- It offers a great mixture of science-fiction, mystery and drama. The mystery of not fully understanding what's going on will have you hooked until the end.
- Ethan Hawk and Sarah Snook give outstanding performances, particularly Snook.
- The film explores very interesting gender-related questions

- It is based on a 1958 short story by Robert A. Heinlein, which is surprising given his very conservative gender views.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In 1975, in New York, a time-traveller agent is trying to disconnect a bomb when he gets severely injured. He burns his face completely and when he travels forward to his own time, 1992, he gets a new face (and, therefore, a new identity). Apparently, this anonymous agent has been trying to stop the 'fizzle-bomber', a terrorist whose attacks will kill more than 10,000 New Yorkers if he/she is not stopped. Once the agent is healed, he travels back to 1970 to attempt to stop the terrorist one last time. There, while working as a barman, he meets a young man with an incredible backstory. That young man is the agent's younger self: John, who was in the past Jane. Jane was born with genitalia of both sexes, but as her male genitalia was underdeveloped inside her, she had always thought herself a woman. Jane had to transition into a man when her female genitalia was removed because of complications in the birth of her daughter. But what does Jane, now John, really have to do with the terrorist attacks of the fizzle-bomber?

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Hanna Schenkel wrote in her 2015 article that "*Predestination* is a film as laudable as it is problematic. Its refusal to be a niche 'issues' film and its portrayal of a strong, interesting intersex protagonist can doubtlessly be considered a step forward in science fiction and mainstream cinema. However, several of the film's choices in its portrayal of the Unmarried Mother's journey, as well as questions of the ultimate humanity of the character, serve to reinforce negative stereotypes and misrepresentations rather than address them" (56). She is basically right.

First of all, the film relies on gender stereotypes to characterize Jane and problematize her being intersex. When Jane was a teenager, she was never interested in gossip or make-up as the rest of her girl schoolmates were; in contrast, she was into fighting, like the boys. While Jane trained to serve the male astronauts going to space, she proved to be both mentally and physically superior to all her female fellow trainees, who were portrayed as weak and promiscuous. As we can see, Jane was given stereotypically male characteristics to make us understand that something was wrong with her 'womanhood'. The film's assumption that some personality traits are connected to femininity and others to masculinity has been harshly criticised by audience and scholars alike.

Moreover, Jane's transition to being John has also been found to be problematic. On the one hand, as Schenkel states "Jane's gender is framed as mainly a question of physical form; her maleness is not satisfyingly confirmed until we see her genitals, and her own psychological transition is no longer in question once her body has been fully 'fixed'" (2015: 58). On the other hand, the story mixes intersexual and transgender identities. Jane had always identified herself as a woman; however, since the doctors choose to provide her with a fully functional penis when her double set of genitalia is discovered, she is forced to transition into a man. This is not how gender identity works, you do not just become a man if you do not identify as such.

Similarly, the end of the film has been much criticised. The crazy and almost inhuman portrayal of the final John/Jane has deprived the trans and intersex communities of a positive representation, the kind that two often alienated and neglected communities almost never get, but definitely need.

SEE: Schenkel, Hanna. "Stuck in time: Intersex and Transgender Representation in *Predestination*". *Screen Education* 79 (Spring 2015): 54-63.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Jane being judged by a jury composed only by men
- Jane and another candidate fight and end up in hospital; the other candidates encourage the fight
- Jane's surgeon decides to reconstruct a male urinary tract on her without previous consultation
- **Jane's acceptance of her new identity**

After waking up from a c-section, Jane is given some shocking news. Despite having lived all her life as a woman, she has always had two full sets of reproductive organs, both female and male. Because of the excessive bleeding during the operation, doctors had to perform a hysterectomy on her; this means that her uterus and ovaries were removed. However, they were able to reconstruct a male urinary tract on her, so with further surgery, the doctor argues, Jane should be able to live a normal life as a man. After eleven months in the hospital and three major operations, Jane is almost the John we meet in the bar. The final stage of her transformation is fulfilled in a powerful scene where while undressing in front of a mirror and then peeing standing up, Jane comes to a full realization that she is no longer a woman. This is traumatic because Jane has not been given a choice: she has been forced to identify as a man. *Predestination* criticises thus the habitual practice of assigning gender to intersex children without their consent (often when they are babies) though this is a too superficial criticism, subordinated to the need for thrills of the mind-bending plot.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Chuck Bowen, "Review: *Predestination*", *Slant Magazine* 2 January 2015.

<https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/predestination/>

Unstuck in time, the Bartender is an outsider, a science-enabled guardian angel to Jane, who, for being born with female and male reproductive organs, is also stuck feeling forever divorced from conventional society's apparent pleasures of love, friendship, acceptance, and communion. The Bartender is proof that the escape with which Jane fantasizes, which is really a fantasy of finding the love she deems beyond her, is just another trap. Perpetual escape is another kind of stasis. The broaching of intersex themes is surprising for a film that initially presents itself as just another time-hopping action thriller, and directors Michael and Peter Spierig handle the subject of Jane's gender with a remarkable casualness (which is loyal to the film's source material, Robert A. Heinlein's short story "All You Zombies") and a sense of empathy that's bracing. And a little startling, as *Predestination* reminds us that gender-identity issues are normally only acknowledged by movies that are marketed as "issue films", as if to give the audience a moment to steel themselves for the content beforehand.

Albert Mei, "*Predestination: The Hollywood Transgender Mindbender*", *Violent Femmes* 2015 Webpage 17 March 2015.

<https://violentfemmes2015.wordpress.com/2015/03/17/predestination-the-hollywood-transgender-mindbender/>

Predestination is a highly entertaining film that succeeds in grappling the viewer's attention. Its plot, however, is even more intriguing in the sense that it does not perpetuate the classic notion of gender binaries (Sarah Snook could have been cast and remained a female protagonist, or even replaced with another actor during her subsequent male scenes by the film directors) but takes its time to originate, cultivate, and deliver the needed story of the

transgendered character to establish his motives which are crucial for the remainder of the movie. Too few large-scale movies with A-list actors have accomplished this feat without fear of losing attraction of their audience.

For *Predestination*, there is no such conflict: the movie liberates Hollywood's rigid gender structures to offer viewers a thoughtful story that instills the idea of people who are human first, transgendered second.

Sherilyn Connelly, "*Predestination*: Time-Travel Plays Hell on Gender Issues", *SF Weekly* 7 January 2015.

<https://archives.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/predestination-movie-review/Content?oid=3330569>

In the 1970s, a man (Sarah Snook, the true star of the film) stops into a dive for a drink. He decides to tell the bartender (top-billed Ethan Hawke) his life story, beginning with, "When I was a little girl...". What a twist! Though there are some implausible sci-fi aspects to the representation, and the waters are muddied somewhat by transgender references, *Predestination* is probably as close to a sympathetic portrayal of intersexuality as can be expected from the crypto-fascist Heinlein. It's notably just a function of the plot, and pains are taken to ensure that Snook's character becoming male is mostly out of his control, since nothing is more inexcusable than deviation by choice, particularly in Heinlein's world. That said, *Predestination* does develop Snook's character as an honest-to-goodness character and not just a story cog, though there are a few tone-deaf moments that bear the mark of cisgender men behind the camera—as does the presence of oversized GENTLEMEN and LADIES restroom signs behind Hawke's bar. We get it, guys.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2397535/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/predestination>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/predestination>

Transcendence (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Wally Pfister

Screenplay by: Jack Paglen

Producer(s): Andrew A. Kosove, Broderick Johnson, Kate Cohen, Marisa Polvino, Aaron Ryder

Main performers: Johnny Depp (Will Caster), Rebecca Hall (Evelyn Caster), Paul Bettany (Max Waters), Kate Mara (Bree), Cillian Murphy (Donald Buchanan), Morgan Freeman (Joseph Tagger).

COMPANY: Alcon Entertainment, DMG Entertainment, Straight Up Films

NATIONALITY: USA

DURATION: 1h 59'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970)
- *The Lawnmower Man* (1992)
- *Limitless* (2011)
- *Her* (2013)
- *Lucy* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

California on Location Awards 2013 (winner)

Location Team of the Year – Studio Feature Film

Golden Trailer Awards 2014 (winner)

Best Motion/Title Graphics

Village Voice Film Poll 2014 (winner)

Worst Film (tied with *Interstellar*)

REASONS TO SEE *Transcendence*

- This film is a remarkably up-to-date exploration of artificial intelligence and of the transhumanist fantasy of surviving death by uploading our minds into a digital domain.
- The film's cast is strong: Rebecca Hall and Paul Bettany, in particular, do their best to sustain the rather weak plotline.
- The sincere, touching love story means that there are no real villains (except the ones who attack Will Caster).

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Dr. Will Caster is a leading researcher in the field of artificial intelligence. He devotes his efforts to creating a sentient machine with a personality able to combine total knowledge with human emotion. His experiments in quantum computing give Caster fame but also result in much controversy. Eventually, he becomes the target of technophobic terrorists who shoot him with a polonium-laced bullet. Will, with only one month to live, becomes a subject in his own experiment when his grieving wife and fellow researcher, Evelyn, decides to upload his mind onto the sentient machine. Evelyn and Will's best friend Max, another researcher, gradually realize that Will's personality is changing and that he is developing an authoritarian, power-hungry character. Will grows omnipresent and, fearing the final outcome of the experiment, Evelyn agrees to use a computer virus to stop him and end her own suffering.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

There are two main women characters in this film, both represented as powerful women each in their way. Bree, the leader of an anti-a.i. technology group, is a tough woman who fights for her goal with extreme braveness and resolution. However, she is mostly silent throughout the film and only speaks to men. More importantly, Evelyn and Bree never speak to one another. In this sense, *Transcendence* fails the Bechdel Test (for a detailed analysis, see Lilly 2018: online). As for Evelyn, she is a scientist who works together with Will in an advanced technology research group; thus her intelligence is unquestionable from the moment when she first appears in the film. Likewise, her importance for driving forward the plot is clear. She is the one to make the choice of uploading Will's consciousness onto a computer and assisting him in expanding into an a.i. Nevertheless, her decisions are mostly reactions motivated by her romantic feelings instead of by rational thinking. Thus, she steals the computer to upload Will's mind because she does not want to lose him forever. Likewise, she decides to upload the virus because she is shocked by Will's uncontrolled power, even though Will himself never harms her; she simply cannot reconcile her love with his dangerous new behaviour. At the end of the film, both Evelyn and Will are dead, and we could even argue that Evelyn kills Will though technically he is already dead (at least his body is gone).

As for Will, he claims that he has always intended to love and protect Evelyn; it is for her that he scatters in the water and in the wind the nano-particles intended to stop pollution and even secure human mortality. His transhumanist selfishness is thus presented as the source of a positive endeavour, even though he has no right at all to make decisions for the rest of humankind. In fact, the muddled discourse of the film results in presenting Evelyn as a wrong-headed, irrational woman obsessed by killing her (former) husband. The end of the film, which shows Max discovering possible evidence of the couple's digital survival also stresses the impression that Will did everything for the love of Evelyn—though his efforts actually lead to a world-wide technological breakdown and, presumably, much human suffering.

SEE: Lilly, Lisa M. "The Protagonist Might Be Anyone in *Transcendence* (Women & Men in the Movies No. 10)". *Lisa M. Lilly: The Official Site* 12 December 2018.

<https://lisalilly.com/transcendence/>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Will's first reaction to his new digital self
- The final scene in which Will explains his real intention to Evelyn before they die together
- Max's discovery in the garden, five years after the events

■ Will takes on a body to talk with Evelyn

In this scene, Will downloads his consciousness into another man's body, to talk with Evelyn and be able to finally touch her. Evelyn is at first delighted, but she immediately changes her mind, feeling frightened by this development and by Will's ability to read her thoughts and even her body's chemical reactions. Thus, even though Evelyn is a scientist and responsible for Will's afterlife, not even she can accept the situation. Technology goes too far even for her, though not enough for Will. His borrowing of Martin's body simply freaks her out and Evelyn is unable to focus with clarity on what is real and what is virtual.

The controversy surrounding artificial intelligence is growing as technology evolves extremely fast and challenges the traditional moral values in many aspects. The film explores the confusion brought about to human beings by artificial intelligence and tries to show that though both act out of love, both Will and Evelyn abuse science. Typically, however, the woman is less certain about what she is doing than the man because she is also less rational.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Mark Kermode, "Transcendence Review – Grand Ideas rather than Spectacle Lie at its Heart", *The Guardian* 27 April 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/27/transcendence-review-grand-ideas-johnny-depp-wally-pfister>

While Depp gets top billing (despite being daringly reduced to a small-screen presence at a fairly early stage), the heavy lifting is done by nominal supporting players [Rebecca] Hall and Paul Bettany, both of whom do sterling work keeping the human blood count high even as rampaging nanobots and secret underground facilities push the narrative toward the overarching Skynet of *The Terminator*. The intelligence may be artificial but the emotions seem real, thanks largely to Hall and Bettany's solidly organic efforts; we believe in them even if we don't always believe in the story.

Matt Zoller Seitz, "Transcendence", *Roger Ebert*, 17 April 2014. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/transcendence-2014>

What we've got here isn't just a *Frankenstein*-like parable of scientific hubris run amok, but also the story of a grieving spouse who's reluctant to let go of her mate and tries to prolong his life artificially. The film's script, credited to Jack Paglen, takes its sweet time confirming whether the being uploaded into the neural network Will Caster or merely a digital copy, and if a copy, what sort.

Will, after all, did not upload himself, and as we all know, when a physical object is destroyed and then reassembled in some other form, it might retain the essence of the original thing, but it is not the same—and its shape and function might be altered, even tainted, by the expectations and agendas of whoever did the reconstructing, as well as by the means of reassembly and the materials used. You may be reminded of the end of Steven Spielberg and Stanley Kubrick's *A.I.*, which distinguishes between an actual person and an idealized image of that person. You might also recall W.W. Jacob's short story "The Monkey's Paw".

James Berardinelli, "Transcendence", *ReelViews* 18 April 2014. <http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/transcendence>

This is the directorial debut for Wally Pfister, the veteran cinematographer who has worked behind the camera on all of Christopher Nolan's films since *Memento*. The film, which was shot on film in a digital era, looks great and the special effects are first-rate, but the same degree of care wasn't accorded to things like storytelling and character development. There are chunks of *Transcendence* that don't make sense including a bit about a computer virus. There's no

chemistry between Johnny Depp and Rebecca Hall and their characters' love story, so critical to making the narrative come alive, never feels real. There's a powerful romantic tragedy in *Transcendence* but it never achieves critical mass.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2209764/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendence_\(2014_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendence_(2014_film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/transcendence>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/transcendence_2014

***Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)**

CREW & CAST

Director: George Miller

Screenplay by: George Miller, Brendan McCarthy, Nico Lathouris

Producer(s): George Miller, Doug Mitchell, P.J. Voeten

Main performers: Tom Hardy (Max Rockatansky), Charlize Theron (Imperator Furiosa), Nicholas Hoult (Nux), Hugh Keays-Byrne (Immortan Joe), Josh Helman (Slit), Nathan Jones (Rictus Erectus), Zoë Kravitz (Toast the Knowing)

Company: Warner Bros. Pictures, Village Roadshow Pictures, Kennedy Miller Productions, RatPac-Dune Entertainment

Nationality: Australia/USA

Duration: 2h



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Mad Max* (1979, 1981, 1985), trilogy
- *Escape from New York* (1981)
- *Waterworld* (1995)
- *The Postman* (1997)
- *Doomsday* (2008)
- *Future World* (2018)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2016 (winner; other four nominations)

Best Achievement in Film Editing: Margaret Sixel

Best Achievement in Costume Design: Jenny Beavan

Best Achievement in Makeup and Hairstyling: Lesley Vanderwalt, Elka Wardega, Damian Martin

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing: Chris Jenkins, Gregg Rudloff, Ben Osmo

Best Achievement in Sound Editing: Mark A. Mangini, David White

Best Achievement in Production Design: Colin Gibson, Lisa Thompson

BAFTA Awards 2016 (winner; other three nominations)

Best Editing: Margaret Sixel

Best Production Design: Colin Gibson, Lisa Thompson

Best Costume Design: Jenny Beavan

Best Makeup and Hair: Lesley Vanderwalt, Damian Martin

REASONS TO SEE *Mad Max: Fury Road*

- It's a very good addition to the original *Mad Max* franchise, director George Miller's own brainchild.

- Its stunning visual effects and cinematography, and heart-pounding action.
- Its strong female characters and anti-patriarchal stance
- The controversy caused by the importance attached to Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron) to the detriment of Mad Max (Tom Hardy)

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

In a post-apocalyptic world, men and women live enslaved as kamikaze soldiers or breeders, respectively. Furiosa escapes with Immortan Joe's five prized breeders, known as the Wives, determined to return to the childhood home she was stolen from. Max, being used as a mobile 'Blood Bag', is running for his freedom and from his demons and partners with Furiosa to reach their destination. Nux, one of Immortan Joe's fatally ill worshippers, sees beyond the deceptions he has been raised to glorify, and becomes a member of Furiosa and Max's rebellion. The group must outrace, outsmart, and outmanoeuvre their enemies through a seemingly hopeless desert landscape.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Although there has been discussion from both sides, this film has been overwhelming hailed as a feminist success. In Alexis de Coning's analysis of the film and its (mostly) male protesters, she defends the director's portrayal of the characters, writing that Max "exhibits traditional masculinity insofar as he is strong and determined, but so too does Furiosa—arguably the film's real protagonist (...) Max is never emasculated, but is also never presented as a typically masculine hero" (2016: 175). The balance between the two is strengthened by the segregated society that surrounds them. Furiosa has been praised as being "a fully-realized, complex female character with physical and fighting prowess, but also one who disrupts gender norms by rejecting both traditional femininity and toxic masculinity" (Boulware 2016: 10). Max doesn't settle in the role of the typical hero. He shares the role with Furiosa because she deserves to be there, and he is not threatened by her strength. He approaches Furiosa and the Wives hesitantly, but not on the offensive. "Max may physically embody traditional masculinity", Boulware confirms, "but he abides by an alternative masculinity that prevents him committing the violence that toxic masculinity demands and celebrates" (14).

The Wives, five women enslaved with the purpose of providing the patriarch Immortan Joe with a healthy male heir, were created with a blend of strength and vulnerability. To provide a level of authenticity to the characters, the actresses were involved with American playwright Eve Ensler, the author of *The Vagina Monologues* and a well-known feminist activist with a sound knowledge of human trafficking. Actress Rosie Huntington-Whiteley who played a pregnant wife, The Splendid Angharad, conducted her own research on women impregnated by their rapists (in Warner Bros., 2015: online video). The Wives functioned both as a group and as individuals, with different personalities working as one organism. Writer director George Miller describes them as "their own musical note. They are different notes in a little melody line in this film" (in Warner Bros., 2015: online video). Their physical appearance has been a hot topic of debate, as they are thin and scantily clad, a poor choice for breeding stock. Leah Schnelbach refutes this argument, reminding the audience that they are escaped sex slaves, and "The diaphanous dresses are their prison uniforms. (Given that no one else in the film is dressed like this, I think it's safe to assume that these are the clothes required by Immortan Joe)" (2015: online).

SEE:

Boulware, Taylor. "'Who Killed the World': Building a Feminist Utopia from the Ashes of Toxic Masculinity in *Mad Max: Fury Road*". *Mise-en Scène: The Journal of Visual Narration Home* 1.1 (2016): 1-17.

De Coning, Alexis. "Recouping Masculinity: Men's Rights Activists' Responses to *Mad Max: Fury Road*". *Feminist Media Studies* 16.1 (2018): 174-176.

Schnelbach, Leah. "We All Agree that *Mad Max: Fury Road* is Great. Here's Why It's Also Important". *Tor.com* 20 May 2015. <https://www.tor.com/2015/05/20/mad-max-fury-road-action-genre-subversion/>

Warner Bros. Entertainment. "Behind the Scenes – The Five Wives: *Mad Max: Fury Road*" (2015). *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTH2fDyAHcY.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Max and Furiosa's symbiotic relationship is established
- The Splendid Angharad shields Furiosa with her pregnant belly
- The Milk Mothers are exploited
- **The bathing slaves enjoy the luxury of water**

This intensively debated scene depicts the newly freed slaves (the Wives) bathing their barely muslin-covered bodies in water as their chastity belts are removed. Critic Tracy King complains noting that "A feminist masterpiece would not have scantily-clad models with improbable thigh gaps hosing each other down" (2015: online), also noting that the Wives' physical type does not correspond to that of a good breeder. Alternatively, Leah Schnelbach views this as a statement of the essential priorities. As she explains, Max is not interested in the women here but in the precious water: "Even as they're drinking water they take turns freeing each other from hideous chastity belts, reclaiming their bodies" (2015: online, see above). This may be true of Max, but is it true of the male heteropatriarchal spectator in general?

SEE: King, Tracy. "No, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is not a Feminist Masterpiece (but That's OK)". *The New Statesman* 20 May 2015. <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/05/no-mad-max-fury-road-not-feminist-masterpiece-s-ok>

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Leslie Pitt, "Review: *Mad Max: Fury Road*", *The Afro Film Viewer* 24 May 2015. afrofilmviewer.blogspot.com/2015/05/review-mad-max-fury-road.html

I consider the men's activist sites again. What they supposedly stand for. The belief that no one can bark orders at Mad Max. If they were to watch the film, I wonder what their answer would be to the question sprawled on the walls of The Wasteland: 'Who killed the world?' It's interesting to see people wishing to boycott a hellish future that in the world of fiction they would not only help to create so quickly but already seem to be a part of. That, to me, is the method in Miller's madness.

Brian Tallerico, "*Mad Max: Fury Road*", *Roger Ebert* 15 May 2015. www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mad-max-fury-road-2015

Max eventually steps into the role of the action hero, but, in one of his most daring moves, Miller gives the weight of the narrative to Furiosa, a woman who holds on to the only thing that could possibly give her hope in this violent world—the next generation. (...) And one shouldn't undervalue the empowerment message at the heart of this film—Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues* consulted with Miller on the script—which suggests that women, as

the creators of new life, will, inherently, always be the gender that holds hardest onto hope for the future.

Mick LaSalle, "Despite Cool Touches, *Mad Max* is Mostly a Long, Dull Chase", *SFGate* 15 May 2015.

www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Clever-touches-enliven-two-hour-Mad-Max-6263383.php

(...) There is some welcome unintended comedy, as when the women playing the king's five wives attempt to act. They seem at a loss at how to play women who have spent their entire lives in medieval-style slavery, but apparently, they'd all really be bummed out about it.

As *Furiosa*, Charlize Theron is much better, investing sincere, raw emotion into portraying a woman who started life happy and was captured and abused. Yet in a way, the quality of Theron's performance almost makes matters worse, making the rest of the barren emotional landscape stand out in sharper relief, as when she walks into the sand, drops to her knees and screams in anguish. She can scream all she likes, but she can't scream her way into a better film. Tom Hardy strikes the right balance. He's a capable actor, but he knows the movie he's in.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1392190/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mad_Max:_Fury_Road
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/mad-max-fury-road>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mad_max_fury_road

The Martian (2015)

CREW & CAST

Director: Ridley Scott

Screenplay by: Drew Goddard, Andy Weir (novel)

Producer(s): Mark Huffam, Simon Kinberg, Michael Schaefer, Ridley Scott, Aditya Sood

Main performers (credits order): Matt Damon (Mark), Jessica Chastain (Melissa), Kristen Wiig (Annie), Jeff Daniels (Teddy), Michael Pena (Rick), Sean Bean (Mitch), Kata Mara (Beth), Sebastian Stan (Chris)

Company: Twentieth Century Fox, TSG Entertainment, Scott Free, Kinberg Genre, International Traders, Mid Atlantic Films

Nationality: UK/ USA

Duration: 2h 24'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Marooned* (1969)
- *SpaceCamp* (1986)
- *Apollo 13* (1995)
- *Stranded* (2001)
- *Gravity* (2013)
- *Interstellar* (2014)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2016 (nominee; other four nominations)

Oscar Best Motion Picture of the Year: Simon Kinberg, Ridley Scott, Michael Schaefer, Mark Huffam

Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role: Matt Damon

Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay: Drew Goddard

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Award, 2016 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Director: Ridley Scott

Global Globes 2016 (winner; another nomination)

Best Motion Picture – Comedy or Musical

Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical: Matt Damon

REASONS TO SEE *The Martian*

- It is an excellent mixture of realistic astronomy and science fiction.
- It gives an interesting twist to the 'Robinsonade' sub-genre inspired by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.
- Matt Damon's performance, as he is on screen alone most of the movie.

- The successful rescuing mission, led by a woman commander, and with contributions by a diverse group of different races and both genders.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

About to finish a mission on Mars, astronaut Mark Watney is knocked out in a severe storm. The commander Melissa Lewis must abandon him for the sake of the other four crew members. After performing an operation to heal his own wounds, Mark uses his expertise as a botanist to feed himself by planting potatoes in the base. After a month alone, in which he has been presumed dead, NASA realises that Mark is still alive. Mark manages to re-establish communication with Earth. When NASA firstly launches a supply spaceship to Mars, the carrier explodes. The Chinese government cooperates with the Americans successfully launching another supply ship. On day 461, Mark finally leaves his base to try to reach rocket Ares IV, and next approach the rescue ship Hermes. The plan is extremely risky, but Mark has no other chance.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Jessica Chastain (Commander Lewis in *The Martian*) states in an interview, in relation to superhero movies, that “where a female character that’s supposed to be a badass, her main attribute is her sexiness, usually that fails like Catwoman or whatever, it’s a disaster”. In contrast, when “her sexiness is not the most important thing about her, it’s her mind, her spirit, and when I look at that character, that to me is an example of characters that I like to play and I think it does a great thing for women” (in Lachenal 2015: online).

Throughout the movie, various women contribute significantly to the mission of rescuing Mark. It is essential to note that there is no female character displaying her body in front of the camera. Only their intelligence and skills matter in this Ridley Scott movie. The commander of the Ares spaceship, Melissa Lewis shows a total determination to save Mark, for whom she feels responsible. Her emotions also help the audiences to engage with the plot. In the beginning, Lewis may be perceived as a cold-blooded commander who is willing to sacrifice Mark in order to survive. However, as the movie progress, the audience understands that Chastain always prioritizes the safety of her crew members. She is depicted, besides, as a democratic leader, who understands that only cooperation will save Mark. At the very end of the movie, her leadership traits are reinforced when she leaves the spaceship to catch and rescue Mark. She could have sent another astronaut but for her “it is not a debate. I don’t want to lose another crew member”. Her decision reveals how much she cares for her crew members and that leaving Mark behind was an unfortunate accident.

In short, without being sexualised at all, Jessica Chastain’s role provides a new insight into how strong, powerful female characters can be presented. Commander Melissa Lewis offers us a new perspective on how a beloved female captain can run a crew with intelligence, care, and equality. Without this and despite the many survival skills Mark displays, he could not have been saved.

SEE: Lachenal, Jessica. “Jessica Chastain Shares Her Thoughts on *The Martian*, Ridley Scott, and Women in Sci-Fi”. *The Mary Sue* 19 June 2015. <https://www.themarysue.com/jessica-chastain-women-in-sci-fi/>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The female commander abandons Mark to save the other crew members from the storm
- Mark starts planting the potatoes, making the most of his limited resources
- Commander Lewis decides to leave spaceship Hermes to catch Mark and rescue him
- **Mindy Park finds the trace on Mars discovering the surviving Mark**

Less spectacular than the contribution of the capable Commander Lewis, the crucial contribution of Mindy Park (Mackenzie Davis) seems to have been ignored. In one of the story's most ingenious turns, Mark heads to the ruins of the defunct Pathfinder probe and turns it into his means of communicating with NASA on Earth. His trace is discovered by a relatively low-level analyst, Mindy, on a routine check at her video station. In other words, without Mindy, Mark could not have communicated with NASA and would have most likely lost his life.

Known to be meticulous and better at communication, women are given in real life the kind of job Mindy has in the movie. She carefully compares the satellite photos on two different days and deduces that Mark is probably still alive. This vital information is then made public by another woman, NASA's media manager. In contrast, the male characters are shown in major administrative and decision-making roles, with the main exception of Lewis and her crew. No female scientist or engineer is involved. Movies like *Hidden Figures* (2017), however, have reminded us that women analysts, computers, and engineers, including many African-Americans, have been employed by NASA since its foundation.

It is, then, difficult to say whether *The Martian* is a completely progressive film or whether it makes use of stereotypes. Besides, it is inevitable to wonder, as Sara Frykenberg does, whether audiences would welcome a 'Mary Watney': "Would a director show her making the same exciting intellectual discoveries, discoveries that capture viewer's attention and give them hope when Mat Damon is making them? I would like to think that a woman could be depicted in this way—however, comparing *The Martian* to another recent space survival story, *Gravity*, I fear this is not the case" (2015: online, see below).

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

MaryAnn Johanson, "The Martian Movie Review: Life on Mars", *Flick Filosopher* 12 October 2015. <https://www.flickfilosopher.com/2015/10/the-martian-movie-review-life-on-mars.html>

My one complaint about the movie: it whitewashes a NASA character back on Earth, Mindy Park, the person who uses satellite observation of Mars to discover that Watney is still alive, because who else has been moving stuff around outside the supposedly evacuated base? Though the book doesn't specifically state this, I presumed while reading it that Park is Korean-American—Park is a very common Korean surname in the U.S.—and Weir has stated that this is what he intended. Yet she is played by white actress Mackenzie Davis. (The rest of the amazing cast includes Kristen Wiig, Jeff Daniels, Michael Peña, Kate Mara, Sebastian Stan, Aksel Hennie, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Benedict Wong).

Sara Frykenberg, "What If a Woman Played That Role? *The Martian* and Gendered Space Heroes", *Feminism and Religion* 15 November 2015.

<https://feminismandreligion.com/2015/11/15/what-if-a-woman-played-that-role-the-martian-and-gendered-space-heroes-by-sara-frykenberg/>

Like many survival films, such as *Cast Away* or *127 Hours*, the protagonist is able to overcome personal, physical and intellectual challenges in order to beat the odds and survive (yes, I told you there would be spoilers: Watney makes it home to Earth at the end). Mark is actually somewhat of a genius, as one might imagine astronaut training demands: he is a

botanist who ‘dabbles’ in engineering, mathematics and even computer-science based linguistics. Epitomizing the reasonable logic of a ‘man’ of the Enlightenment, Watney can solve any problem that he, with a team of NASA experts, puts to his mind. ‘Man’ triumphs over inhospitable nature even on other planets.

Anita Sarkeesian, “Some Brief Thoughts on *The Martian*”. *Feminist Frequency* 24 November 2015. <https://feministfrequency.com/2015/11/24/some-brief-thoughts-on-the-martian/>

Jessica Chastain’s Commander Lewis is a particularly great character; she is smart, capable, and deeply concerned about the members of her crew. She is able to experience moments of self-doubt in the midst of the crisis without that making her seem in any way weak or unqualified for her position of leadership; in fact, it helps to humanize her. And she isn’t shoehorned into a romance subplot with the male main character; she has value on her own as the commander of the Ares III mission. Her crew respects her, the film respects her, and so do we as viewers. Movie tropes dictate that a male character who makes sacrifices for love is heroic and romantic, while a female character who does the same is needy and pathetic.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3659388/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Martian_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Martian_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-martian>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_martian

Arrival (2016)

CREW & CAST

Director: Denis Villeneuve

Screenplay by: Eric Heisserer, Ted Chiang (story "Story of Your Life")

Producer(s): Dan Levine, Shawn Levy, David Linde

Main performers (credits order): Amy Adams (Louise Banks), Jeremy Renner (Ian Donnelly), Forest Whitaker (Colonel Weber), Michael Stuhlbarg (Agent Halpern), Mark O'Brien (Captain Marks), Tzi Ma (General Shang)

Company: Lava Bear Films, FilmNation Entertainment, 21 Laps Entertainment, Xenolinguistics

Nationality: USA/Canada/India

Duration: 1h 56'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, 2008)
- *Solaris* (1972, 2002)
- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)
- *Contact* (1997)
- *Avatar* (2009)
- *Annihilation* (2018)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2017 (winner; seven other nominations)

Best Achievement in Sound Editing: Sylvain Bellemare

BAFTA Awards 2017 (winner; eight other nominations)

Best Sound: Claude La Haye, Bernard Gariépy Strobl, Sylvain Bellemare

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Award, 2017 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Writing: Eric Heisserer

REASONS TO SEE *Arrival*

- It deals with the theme of the alien invasion from a peaceful and yet realistic angle.
- The original short story by Ted Chiang it adapts, "Stories of Your Life".
- It is based on tenets from linguistic anthropology, particularly the Sapir-Whorf thesis.
- The amazing performance by Amy Adams, here a linguist who faces a major existential question: "If you could live all your life at once, how would it affect you?"

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Twelve alien spacecraft arrive in apparently random spots of the Earth, where they remain hovering over the ground, and linguistics expert Professor Louise Banks is called to communicate with them. She is taken to a military base in Montana and there she meets physicist Ian Donnelly, who will help her with her task. As the film advances, Louise is asked to learn the alien language instead of teaching them English, and she decides that the best way to do so is to learn their writing, a series of beautiful logograms. With Ian's help, Louise discovers that the aliens communicate without specifying time and that, as a consequence, they can 'see' the future. As Louise learns their language, she eventually discovers how to prevent the war that the fear of the aliens threatens to unleash. She also starts making sense of her own flash-forwards regarding Ian and their still unborn daughter Hannah. But how can Louise face life, knowing the heavy personal losses coming to her in the future?

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

There are two main characters in *Arrival*: Louise, who is a linguist and a college professor, and Ian, a physicist. However, while Louise's contribution to the management of the alien invasion crisis is clear, Ian's is not. In fact, he is most probably a tool to attract the male audience (and be the father of Louise's future child). Secondary characters quickly acknowledge Louise's intelligence, and she shows to be very independent, determined, and self-confident. In a *The New Yorker* review, Anthony Lane adequately points that "It is Louise, not the military men, who dares to doff her headgear inside the spacecraft and to inhale the risky air; it is she who draws near to the board and shining screen within whose frame the creatures loom into view. Just for a minute, she looks like a moviegoer, waiting, with a thumping pulse, for the show, and all its wanders, to begin" (2017: online).

The movie needs to be read as a whole because this is the way in which the time within it is constructed. Louise is very eager to meet the alien heptapods because she is depressed after her daughter's death (which happens many years later), and she is unafraid of them because she already knows how their meetings evolved. There is no doubt that Louise is strong: she chooses to get pregnant despite the circumstance of her already knowing her daughter's tragic end, and no one can change her mind. Being upset about a child's death is a common reaction, though it remains a mystery for the audience why exactly Ian tells Louise that she has made a mistake in one of the professor's flash-forwards. As for Ian, although at first he seems arrogant he turns out to be very supportive of Louise and never tries to overrule her decisions.

We generally do not get much information about the men in *Arrival*, though all are impatient and try to give Louise deadlines about her investigation, while she asks for time to establish communication with the inscrutable aliens. Apart from Ian, the other men are mainly hegemonic, patriarchal, stereotypical military men too anxious about the alien presence to truly help Louise. They, with their inclination to wage war against the intruders, are the real danger and not the strange creatures.

SEE: Lane, Anthony. "The Consuming Fervour of *Arrival*". *The New Yorker* 14 November 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/14/the-consuming-fervor-of-arrival>.

SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Louise's first contact with the alien heptapods
- The flash-forwards in which Louise sees Hannah and how her relationship with Ian involves
- Louise whispers to the ear of the Chinese general leading the defence forces an important message
- **The ending**

In the final scene Louise talks directly to her daughter Hannah, telling her that the day when the aliens departed their story began. Despite knowing that Hannah will die at a young age because of cancer, Louise tells her daughter that she is willing to take the same journey again because the love she feels for her is worth the sadness of her loss. We discover that Louise chooses the name Hannah for her daughter because it reads the same backwards, in an analogy with Louise's new understanding of time. In another scene Louise asks Ian (Hannah's father) whether he would change anything if he could see the future, and he answers that he would probably express his feeling more often. This probably explains why their relationship eventually ends, with him leaving Louise.

The movie's treatment of time is tricky, particularly because the initial flash-forwards appear to be flashbacks. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, now mainly discredited, suggests that each language is connected to a specific cognitive system. In Ted Chiang's original story, then, it is clear that when Louise acquires the alien language, she acquires with it a non-human capacity to understand life with no reference to time. In the film, in contrast, she appears to see into the future. In both story and film, though, she chooses to have Hannah because getting pregnant means having her back and deciding not to have her will not free Louise from the pain of her loss, which she has already felt and continues to experience.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

David Sutton, "Arrival: Anthropology in Hollywood", *Anthropology Today* 34.1 (February 2018): 7-10. <https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-8322.12402>

In *Arrival*, the plot is advanced at various points by demands from Colonel Weber to hurry the translation up and explanations by Dr Banks of the complexities of communication. Each of these examples emphasizes the importance of context and contact in making translation possible. It is only by some immersion in the world of the aliens that communication is possible. Thus, Banks is the first to decide to take off her protective suit so that the aliens can see (through the glass barrier separating them from the humans) that different humans look different – perhaps an oblique reference to the SETI project's inclusion of a drawing of a naked male and female (white European, adult) form. While these scenes extend the theme of communication through interaction – and indeed, the two aliens are given personalities and names ('Abbott and Costello') by Banks and her main collaborator – the problems of interpretation remain.

James Gleick, "When They Came from Another World", *The New York Review of Books* 29 January 2017.

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/01/19/when-they-came-from-another-world/>

If her visions are patchy—limited in perspective, incomplete in detail—well, so are our memories of the past. She is *remembering* the future. (...)

If we knew—really *knew*—that the future was settled and our choices illusory, how would we live? Could we do that? What would it feel like?

Louise is about to find out. What will she do when Ian asks—as we know he will—"Do you want to make a baby?" There's not much worse than a child's death. (...) For Louise, grief

is part of the story from the beginning. The pain must color not only memory but also the experience of each day, each moment. (...)

The only alternative is Woody Allen's version of Buñuel: just walk out of the room.

Stuart Klawans, "Those Wondrous Powers", *The Nation* 7 November 2016.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/those-wondrous-powers/>

So is *Arrival* just another movie about watching movies—another roundabout trip through a self-enclosed system that ends at its own beginning? Yes, and no. We count in films, if they're any good, to be about something beyond themselves; and although the 'sci' half of the sci-fi is thoroughly pseudo in this instance, and the linguistics more attuned to Robert Heinlein's dopey fantasies than Noam Chomsky's research, *Arrival* nevertheless succeeds in making terrestrial contact. It does so partly by deploying the unfailing Adams; partly by using aliens to direct our attention toward a real problem (the political division of Earth into competing national interests); and partly by treating the screen as a space for displaying continually changing possibilities—some that a smart, ethical woman would resist and some that she might joyfully embrace, whatever sorrow comes with them.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2543164/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrival_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrival_(film))
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/arrival>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/arrival_2016

Rogue One (2016)

CREW & CAST

Director: Gareth Edwards

Screenplay by: Chris Weitz, Tony Gilroy, John Knoll (story), Gary Whitta (story), George Lucas (characters)

Producer(s): Leifur B. Dagfinnsson, Simon Emanuel, Kathleen Kennedy, Alison Shearmur

Main performers: Felicity Jones (Jyn Erso), Diego Luna (Cassian Andor), Alan Tudyk (K-2SO), Donnie Yen (Chirrut Îmwe), Wen Jiang (Baze Malbus), Ben Mendelsohn (Orson Krennic), Forest Whitaker (Saw Gerrera), Riz Ahmed (Bodhi Rook)

COMPANY: Lucasfilm Ltd., Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

NATIONALITY: USA

DURATION: 2h 13'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977)
- *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)
- *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983)
- *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (1999)
- *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002)
- *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* (2005)
- *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015)
- *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017)
- *Star Wars: Episode IX - The Rise of Skywalker* (2019)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2017 (nominee)

Best Achievement in Sound Mixing: David Parker, Christopher Scarabosio, Stuart Wilson

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: John Knoll, Mohen Leo, Hal T. Hickel, Neil Corbould

Empire Awards 2017 (winner; six other nominations)

Best Film: Lucasfilm, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

Best Actress: Felicity Jones

Best Director: Gareth Edwards

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Awards, 2017 (winner; eight other nominations)

Best Science Fiction Film

Best Director: Gareth Edwards

Best Special Effects: John Knoll, Mohen Leo, Hal T. Hickel, Neil Corbould

REASONS TO SEE *Rogue One*

- *Rogue One* is different from other movies in the *Star Wars* series: it recognizes the complex ethics of the Rebellion, it eliminates some of the series' traditions, and it focuses on a female protagonist.
- The fantastic visual effects, especially the explosion that breaks through the atmosphere (but also the cynical K2-SO robot voiced by Texan actor Alan Tudyk).
- Its elimination of romance gives the narrative an interesting focus on friendship and team spirit.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Scientist Galen Erso is abducted by the Imperial Forces to develop the Death Star, a weapon that can destroy planets. His daughter Jyn is saved by rebel Saw Gerrera, but then she is abandoned for her own safety. In the present time, Jyn is rescued from Imperial custody by the Rebel Alliance in the hope that she can help them contact Gerrera. He possesses an important piece of information about the flaws in the design of the Death Star, passed on by Galen himself. Reluctantly at first, Jyn goes on a mission with Cassian Andor and K-2SO, a reprogrammed Imperial droid, to locate Gerrera and to finally bring back her father to try him for treason. Unknown to her, Cassian has been asked to kill Galen. The results of the mission are tragic but Jyn must proceed to become the leader required to pass the crucial information to Princess Leia, at any cost.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

One widely criticized issue in *Rogue One* is its limited representation of women and ethnicity. It has been noticed that even though the women possess power and leadership qualities, they are exclusively white—not the protagonist Jyn but also Senator Mon Mothma and, of course, Princess Leia. The rest of the women have little voice, or none at all. In contrast, all the main and the background roles in the action are male. If we consider Jyn's progresses from being a minor delinquent locked into her personal sphere to becoming an inspirational hero who accepts self-sacrifice, *Rogue One* certainly celebrates and consolidates female leadership. Its feminist stance is undeniable though it still fails to properly represent women in a diversity of social groups and from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Another key issue is the film's representation of the relationship between Jyn and Cassian. Some critics celebrate the minimization of romance, even its absence, as a way to facilitate the emancipation of the female protagonists from their role as the hero's love interest. *Rogue One*, makes it very clear from the beginning that romance is irrelevant to its plot and, besides, here Jyn is the hero and Cassian her potential love interest. Critics such as Ruth Holloway have noted that despite the popularity of the few films focused on women, "female protagonists and friendships rarely feature" (2015: 245). As happens in *Pacific Rim*, and to a certain extent in *Gravity*, there is actually some doubt about whether the protagonists in *Rogue One* do have romantic feelings for each other in the end. Thus, the latency of romance is preserved, though in this case the tragic, sacrificial end prevents any continuation of the potential love story.

SEE: Holloway, Ruth. "Media and Popular Culture", *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*, eds. Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015. 233-254.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Jyn and Galen's last scene
- The roundtable meeting where Jyn tries to persuade the Rebellion to go ahead
- The scene when Cassian helps Jyn to obtain the Death Star's plans

■ **The Formation of Rogue One**

After her father's death, Jyn confirms that there is indeed a fatal flaw in the Death Star, which Galen included to secretly help the Rebellion (his heroic status is thus restored, at least in her view). It is, therefore, necessary to raid the top-secret research center of the Empire at Scarif and retrieve the Death Star plans. Jyn's credibility is questioned back at the Rebellion headquarters and her proposal is shut down (only she heard Galen's dying words and he is still seen as a traitor). Baffled and helpless, Jyn is about to give in when Cassian and a group of male rebels express their support. They form the Rogue One team to carry out Jyn's proposed mission with her as leader.

Embodying an ideal and having her own followers: this is the point when Jyn becomes a spiritual leader. Remarkably, although the same process has been narrated countless times in heroic plots about men, it has been rarely applied to stories about women. Jyn's own words, "I am not used to sticking around when things go bad", also mark the culmination of her own personal growth. She passes from merely surviving on her own to assuming responsibilities for others, despite the dire prospects. This scene marks, thus, Jyn's rebirth and deserves attention for its construction of a new woman hero.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Devan Coggan, "She Speaks! Star Wars' Tricky History with Women". *Entertainment Weekly: The Ultimate Guide to Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, ed. Missy Schwartz. New York: Time Inc. Books, 2016 .54-55.

Now, with *Rogue One*, we have the mysterious Jyn Erso. If Rey is Luke Skywalker, Jyn is more Han Solo, a brash, Joan of Arc-style evolutionary who's rebellious even by the rebel alliance's standards. All of the women in *Star Wars* are survivors, maneuvering through the treacherous politics of Naboo or battling the punishing desert wasteland of Jakku, but Jyn has a history unlike that of any of her forebears. She's got battle scars. A criminal history. And she joins Rey as only the second female character to headline a *Star Wars* movie. Still, even in her own movie—and despite the welcome reappearance of Mon Mothma—Jyn is surrounded by men. At least the Rebels seem slightly more attuned to gender equality than the Imperialists. (54)

Valerie Estelle Frankel, *Star Wars Meets the Eras of Feminism: Weighing All the Galaxy's Women Great and Small*. Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books, 2018.

Jyn's team in *Rogue One* also offers a diverse, likable spectrum. Representation for women merges with representation for people of color (and perhaps other representations as fans wondered about the gender-orientation of all the stars after various ambiguous hints). This is one of the hallmarks of fourth wave—the realization that everyone must be included—whatever their gender, race, religion, orientation, or trans status. Because online feminism remains, for the most part, analyzed, here is a perception that feminist organizing may not be happening on the web. The widespread belief that young women are disinterested in feminism is driven by the lack of understanding of the changes in feminist tactics. (170)

Megan Garber, “With *Rogue One*, the Star Wars Franchise Gets Even More Feminist”, *The Atlantic* 16 December 2016.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/12/with-rogue-one-the-star-wars-franchise-gets-even-more-feminist/510944/>

Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) has been forged in the comic-book mold of the heroes who have been defined by their separation from their parents, and she is a natural leader who is not at all a princess. She is a soldier, not just by training and circumstance but also by inclination. She is tough, but kind; she is hardened, but human. She is, as Leia—and as, for that matter, the *Star Wars* denizens Padmé and Rey—have been before her, both a product and a reflection of her times. Jyn is a feminist heroine who is uniquely at home within the feminism of 2016.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3748528/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rogue_One
- Metracritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/rogue-one-a-star-wars-story>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rogue_one_a_star_wars_story

Black Mirror: San Junipero (2016)

CREW & CAST

Director: Owen Harris

Screenplay by: Charlie Brooker

Producer(s): Laurie Borg, Ian Hogan

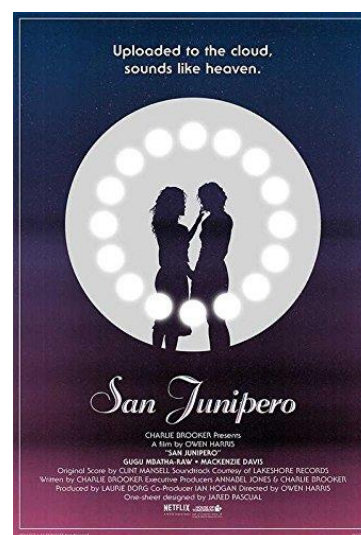
Main performers: Gugu Mbatha-Raw (Kelly Booth), Mackenzie Davis (Yorkie), Denise Burse (Elder Kelly), Raymond McAnally (Greg), Gavin Stenhouse (Wes)

Company: House of Tomorrow

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 01'

In the series: Season 3, Episode 4



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Black Mirror* (2011-), TV series
- *Total Recall* (1990, 2012)
- *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995)
- *The Matrix* (1999)
- *The Young Ones* (2010), documentary series
- *Maniac* (2018), miniseries
- *Ready Player One* (2018)

MAIN AWARDS

BAFTA Television Craft Awards 2017 (winner)

Best Make Up and Hair Design: Tanya Lodge

Best Costume Design: Susie Coulthard

Primetime Emmy Awards 2017 (winner)

Outstanding Television Movie

Outstanding Writing for a Limited Series, Movie, or Dramatic Special

REASONS TO SEE *Black Mirror: San Junipero*

- Its sweet love story, unusual in the *Black Mirror* series.
- The conflict of the plot is a relatable internal struggle though the setting, involving virtual reality, is futuristic.
- Its accurate depiction of the time periods: few movies have managed to capture the essence of the 1980s like this one.
- The LGBTI+ elements are portrayed in a natural way, without fetishization or sexualization.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Kelly, a young party girl, and Yorkie, a timid newcomer to San Junipero, meet one Saturday night and easily bond despite their different personalities. Their friendship soon develops into a romantic relationship, but it is revealed that they are in a simulation, a virtual reality environment. Most of the people there are already dead, while others are testing it out. Kelly isn't planning to stay when she dies, though she only has a few months left to live, because she wants to be with her husband and daughter, wherever they may be. Visiting Yorkie in the real world, she finds that Yorkie has been in a coma for forty years and is engaged to her male nurse. He plans to override her parents' decision to keep her on life support, but Kelly asks Yorkie to marry her instead. Kelly must decide whether to stay at San Junipero with Yorkie, or to die naturally for the chance to see her husband and daughter again.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

San Junipero has given women a chance to stand on their own without the aid of men, exemplified by the love between the main characters, two women. Kelly was married before and contemplates abandoning the digital world to pass on naturally, hoping that she will be with her husband again, though not because it is demanded or expected of her. She explains to Yorkie that over the forty-nine years of their marriage they built a life together and giving that up is not an easy choice, even when that life is over.

The relationship that Yorkie and Kelly share is free from gender roles and expectations. The women may have different personalities, but neither is assigned the masculine or the feminine role. As Hailey Corkery writes, "Many queer couples are thought to have a 'man' and a 'woman' in the relationship, but *San Junipero* does not give into this stereotype, or any gender roles regarding relationships" (2017: online). This is made visually clear when the two women wear wedding dresses to celebrate their union.

Furthermore, the sexuality of the two women is not exploited, but utilized minimally as a reference to the era Yorkie grew up in. The rejection she faces by her family would have been common when she was twenty-one years old. As Mo Johnson explains, "*Black Mirror* refrains from fetishizing the lesbian and queer body" (Johnson 2017: online). Their sexuality is a part of who they are, but it isn't sexualized. Kelly's bisexuality isn't questioned, and, as Johnson elaborates "Her multiplicitous identity does not take a backseat to Yorkie's white lesbian identity but seamlessly coexists" with it (2017: online).

The wedding itself was a strong statement. Though nurse Greg was kind, he would have unintentionally played the role of the classic hero, saving the damsel in distress. It is unfair to judge him as a patriarchal advocate, as his marriage to Yorkie was in response to her mother and father's refusal to let her die, though they didn't want her in their lives, ashamed as they were of her sexuality. This control, the parental hold over a daughter they shunned without remorse, was what Greg was saving her from. Luckily, Kelly arrived before the wedding and became the hero herself.

SEE:

Corkery, Hailey. "San Junipero: Recognizing Inclusion in Awards and Media", *The FemGeniuses* 1 November 2017. <https://femgeniuses.com/2017/11/01/san-junipero-recognizing-inclusion-in-awards-and-media/>.

Johnson, Mo. "Black Mirror's San Junipero is the Queer Love Story Television Needs", *Bust* November 2017. <https://bust.com/tv/18499-black-mirror-san-junipero.html>.

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Kelly and Yorkie meet
- Yorkie's outfit montage
- Kelly's choice
- **Kelly asks Yorkie to marry her**

While Greg is a great advocate to Yorkie, Kelly's proposal allows her to save the woman she loves from permanent death. No man needed to come to their rescue, and Kelly, besides, helps Yorkie to make her own decision about whether to live a second life when she is physically unable to do so. This marriage holds more significance to the characters, as it was illegal in 1987, the setting of their virtual reality, and San Junipero allows them to live out a parallel life where their love is possible. The scene's visual composition reinforces the femininity encompassing both women, defying the assumption that all relationships must be composed of a feminine and a masculine partner, even in same-sex relationships.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Li, "Black Mirror: San Junipero", *Mediaversity* 11 December 2016.

www.mediaversityreviews.com/tv-reviews/2016/12/11/black-mirror-san-junipero

The two female leads feature prominently in this episode. Men have various support roles and are not especially developed, but neither are they caricatures.

One of the two leads is mixed-race black, but her skin color is not a focal point, merely one aspect of her rich characterization.

The plot of this episode features the romantic relationship between two women and is elegantly handled so that it transcends into a beautiful, classic love story.

San Junipero is exactly what the future of inclusive media should look like: nuanced, accommodating of fluid identities, eschewing of stereotypes, and drawing on universal, human emotions so that any viewer can get swept away.

Charline Jao, "Review: Black Mirror Season 3 Gave Me the Most Beautiful Love Story I've Ever Seen (and More)", *The Mary Sue* 26 October 2016.

www.themarysue.com/black-mirror-season-3-review/

San Junipero feels like it should be sinister and in some places like the dark Quagmire, it is. But it's also a world that opens up possibilities, allowing a queer woman who was never given acceptance a place for love. And in a time when it wasn't legal! *Black Mirror* is a powerful show not because it hates technology, but because it's invested in how technology will change human stories.

Gary Shannon, "TV Review: Black Mirror 3x04 *San Junipero*", *The Young Folks* 28 October 2016. www.theyoungfolks.com/review/89660/tv-review-black-mirror-3x04-san-junipero/

San Junipero looks to be a number of things, a colorful statement on LGBT marriage, a deep meditation on life and death and a discussion on culture identity and gender politics. Anything meaningful this episode *wanted* to say, however, is undermined (or more appropriately obliterated) by the detritus melodramatic nonsense it tries to pass off as legible, thought-provoking storytelling. If Brooker's idea of heaven was pastel-coloured nostalgia and sweaty teenage-angst, I'd sooner settle for oblivion. I couldn't stand the immature and facile arguments coming from characters who were supposed to be *old souls*. Unlike the previous three episodes which (mediocre as they were) actually regulated a type of hard-edged credibility grounding them into a believable reality, *San Junipero* works on a the totally inauthentic notion that cheap, human goodness can earn *anyone* a happy ending.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4538072/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Junipero
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/tv/black-mirror/season-3>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/black_mirror/s03/e04

Blade Runner 2049 (2017)

CREW & CAST

Director: Denis Villeneuve

Screenplay by: Hampton Fancher (also story), Michael Green, Philip K. Dick (novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*)

Producer(s): Yale Badik; Dana Belcastro

Production design: Dennis Gassner

Main performers (credits order): Ryan Gosling ('K'); Robin Wright (Lieutenant Joshi); Ana de Armas (Joi); Sylvia Hoeks (Luv); Jared Leto (Wallace); Hiam Abbass (Freysa); Mackenzie Davis (Mariette); Carla Juri (Dr. Ana Stelline); Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard)

Company: Alcon Entertainment; Columbia Pictures; Warner Bros

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 44'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Blade Runner* (1982)
- *Metropolis* (1927)
- *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 2017)
- *The Machine* (2013)
- *Ex-Machina* (2014)
- *Morgan* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Academy Awards (Oscars) 2018 (winner; three other nominations)

Best Achievement in Cinematography: Roger Deakins

Best Achievement in Visual Effects: John Nelson, Gerd Nefzer, Paul Lambert, Richard R. Hoover

BAFTA Awards 2018 (winner; five other nominations)

Best Cinematography: Roger Deakins

Best Achievement in Special Visual Effects: John Nelson, Gerd Nefzer, Paul Lambert, Richard R. Hoover

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, Saturn Award, 2018 (winner; eight other nominations)

Best Science Fiction Film

REASONS TO SEE *Blade Runner 2049*

- It is a sequel to an iconic movie, *Blade Runner* (1982), therefore, the fans might be interested in seeing this emblematic universe, this time from Villeneuve's perspective.

- Its epic soundtrack and stunning special effects make the movie aurally and visually engaging.
- It offers a fascinating blend of film noir and science fiction with its atmospheric settings and plotline.
- The interrogation of what is to be human, and to have a soul, is central to the plot.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

After the collapse of the ecosystem in 2020, and despite the legal injunction against this, businessman and scientist Niander Wallace (Jared Leto) continues producing replicants (bio-engineered human slaves). K (Ryan Gosling), later named as Joe, is a new-model replicant employed by the LAPD to hunt down the older, rebellious replicants. During a mission, he uncovers a secret that might change the future of replicants and humans: even though they are made infertile, the advanced replicant Rachel did have a hybrid baby with a man. K must find out the truth about this miracle child who, as a childhood memory suggests, might be he himself. He is told, however, that the child was a girl. In a remote and uninhabited area, K finds replicant Rachael's partner, the former blade runner Deckard (Harrison Ford), and questions him. K realizes that he already knows who the child is and that he must take Deckard to her. However, K is not the only one chasing the hybrid child. Luv, Wallace's loyal but merciless replicant second-in-command, has already tracked K down to Deckard's home. K must face her not only to protect Deckard and his daughter but also the budding replicant rebellion she is inspiring.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

Blade Runner 2049 is set in a time when the world is controlled by a high-tech patriarchal structure. Despite the disturbing circumstances a dystopia might bring about, the movie has been severely criticised for its sexualised depiction of women, which has been attributed to current sexism. In his interview with *Vanity Fair*, Villeneuve has justified this (mis)representation arguing that "*Blade Runner* is not about tomorrow; it's about today. And I'm sorry, but the world is not kind to women" (in Hoffman 2018: online). His critics agree that the director might be right to use unsettling images to emphasize a current problem; however, he does not provide any alternatives. With no critical approach to the gender issues, or more specifically, to the discrimination against women, the movie, unfortunately, cannot go beyond replicating (pun intended) what patriarchy favours.

Villeneuve has also claimed that he has given voices to different representations of women in his films (notably in *Arrival*). Nevertheless, this only diminishes the movie's value in terms of gender equality, because most of the female characters are solely portrayed as virtual wives, prostitutes, or villains. The main exception, K's LAPD boss, Lieutenant Joshi is given no substantial role. Moreover, all these women only exist in relation to the white male protagonist. Other than the prostitutes, Joshi (Robin Wright) and Luv (Sylvia Hoeks), are presented as working women. However, their depictions are also negative and quite stereotypical. Both portrayals suggest that in order to climb up the corporate ladder, a woman should either *defeminise* herself, like Lieutenant Joshi, or be complicit with the patriarchal villain, like Luv.

Of course, K's virtual, holographic girlfriend Joi (Ana de Armas) has attracted the greatest amount of controversy, as a blatantly sexist fantasy. Villeneuve defends himself claiming that whereas "*The first Blade Runner* was quite rough on the women; something about the film noir aesthetic", he has "tried to bring depth to all the characters". Joi, he says, "evolves. It's interesting, I think" (in Hoffman 2017: online). Her evolution, in fact, consists of learning how to please K sexually by using a prostitute as her bodily surrogate (*Her* has a

similarly sexist, awkward scene). This might be just perhaps acceptable if the film showed Joi's male equivalent, but this is out of the question for the sexist mindset of the filmmaker and his writers.

SEE: Hoffman, Jordan. "Denis Villeneuve Is the Sci-Fi Remake Master with *Blade Runner 2049* and the Upcoming *Dune*". *Vanity Fair* 24 November 2017.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/11/denis-villeneuve-blade-runner-2049-dune>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- K interacts with Joi at his home
- Wallace murders a sterile replicant, his failed experiment
- Joi and the prostitute Mariette synchronise 'mind' and body to sexually please K
- **The rebel group led by Freysa comes to light**

At the end of the movie, Freysa reveals herself to K, disclosing the existence of the struggle for a better future for all replicants. The rebels have been following K to locate Ana, Deckard and Rachael's daughter. Since Rachel's case proves that replicants could reproduce themselves, as humans do, this would mean their freedom, according to their beliefs. Wallace also covets this miracle child, though for a very different reason. To colonise other planets, his company needs more slave replicants. Making an adult-born replicant takes a great deal of time and manufacturing fertile replicants would mean creating a work force in a shorter time with less expense. Wallace seemingly forgets that this has already happened in the world's History, with human slavery. And that the replicants, after all, are human.

What makes *Blade Runner 2049* truly disturbing is how the world is imagined for women. Both freedom and slavery are bound to female reproduction, diminishing women (human or replicant) to the low status of baby makers. As mentioned earlier, not only does the movie fail to offer a different solution but also it somehow approves of traditional gender roles and the way patriarchy functions, despite apparently siding with the rebels. They are, anyway, like Wallace only interested in wombs not in women.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Anna Smith, "Is *Blade Runner 2049* Sexist—or a Fair Depiction of a Dystopian Future?" *The Guardian* 9 October 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/oct/09/is-blade-runner-2049-a-sexist-film-or-a-fair-depiction-of-a-dystopic-future>

Robin Wright is terrific but underused as K's slick, strong, black-clad boss, Lieutenant Joshi, and Sylvia Hoeks's icy baddie Luv is great fun, but in thrall to her male boss (sinister replicant-creator Wallace, played by Jared Leto). Mackenzie Davis's Mariette shows initial promise as a strong character who can give as good as she gets, but she is also a sex worker who is literally used as a puppet. Visually, sexualised images of women dominate the stunning futuristic cityscapes, from pirouetting ballerinas to giant statues of naked women in heels looming over K as he goes on his journey. Of course, one of the themes of *Blade Runner 2049* is a world littered with artifice, from replicants to sexbots—but these mainly seem to cater to heterosexual males. A hint of a woman considering a "pleasure model" is brief and unexplored. Meanwhile Wright's Joshi appears attracted to K, but she is not permitted to use him for her sexual pleasure. Where is *her* holographic lover, her Joi?

Sarah Manvel, “Time to Die”, *Critic’s Notebook* 8 October 2017.

<https://www.criticsnotebook.com/2017/10/blade-runner-2049-movie-review-ryan-gosling-harrison-ford-denis-villeneuve.html>

Screenwriters Hampton Fancher and Michael Green have written a sexist masterpiece and should hang their heads in shame. Women—whether they are real, or the almost-human ones known as replicant—are either all-seeing killing machines or “pleasure models”. Men are all killing machines, but some of them are thoughtful about it. It’s lazy. It’s boring. It’s insulting. And it fulfils the most dangerous male fantasies that have gotten us the world into so much trouble in the first place. The absolute disinterest of men to accept women as well-rounded people with interests or desires of our own is the driver for a lot of tech. The movie’s whole plot is to kill something that prevents men from putting their own desires first, and anything that stands in the way of that must be crushed.

Devon Maloney, “*Blade Runner 2049*’s Politics Aren’t that Futuristic”, *Wired* 10 June 2017.

<https://www.wired.com/story/blade-runner-2049-politics/>

While it returns over and over again to the downtrodden-rises-up-against-the-subjugator model, the genre has always had a remarkable ability to overlook the persecuted groups—people of colour, women, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities—whose experiences it mines for drama. White creators, men in particular, tend instead to whitewash their casts, imagining themselves as both villain and hero. Rather than simply putting the real thing in the story, their tales become *metaphors* for the real thing. *Blade Runner 2049* falls into this trap: Even as Wallace grandstands about “great societies” being “built on the backs of a disposable workforce”, everyone the movie deems powerful or worth exploring is still white and almost 100 percent male, relegating those disposable workforces’ descendants to the story’s incidental margins.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1856101/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blade_Runner_2049
- Metacritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/blade-runner-2049/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blade_runner_2049

Marjorie Prime (2017)

CREW & CAST

Director: Michael Almereyda

Screenplay by: Michael Almereyda, Jordan Harrison (play)

Producer(s): Michael Almereyda, Uri Singer, Daniel Turcan, Tal Vigderson

Main performers (credits order): Lois Smith (Marjorie), Jon Hamm (Walter), Geena Davis (Tess), Tim Robbins (Jon), Stephanie Andujar (Julie)

Company: Passage Pictures (II), 141 Entertainment, BB Film Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 39'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Ghost* (1990)
- *A.I.* (2001)
- *S1m0ne* (2002)
- *Ex-Machina* (2014)
- *Her* (2013)
- *Transcendence* (2014)
- *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

MAIN AWARDS

Satellite Awards 2017 (winner)

Best Actress in a Supporting Role: Lois Smith

Sundance Film Festival 2017 (winner)

Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize: Michael Almereyda

REASONS TO SEE *Marjorie Prime*

- It unfolds in the very near future and stresses the relevancy of the past in the present.
- It explores one's remembering of the past and trauma repression. It also deals with mortality and the relationship between humanity and technology.
- Lois Smith's (Marjorie) amazing act, and the movie's unusual focus on the romantic feeling of an elderly woman.
- The identity of the Primes is not exposed openly; the viewer identifies them through specific hints during the dialogues.
- It is a great example of how one can make a very good (science-fiction) movie with a low budget.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

Marjorie, an 85-year-old woman, decides to get a Prime (a holographic chatbot projection) of her deceased husband Walter in order to deal both with his death and her Alzheimer. Her daughter Tess disapproves of her decision, partly because Marjorie decides to give the Prime the appearance of a middle-aged Walter. However, Tess's husband Jon helps Marjorie (and Walter Prime) in secret. As the movie unfolds, the viewer discovers that Walter was an unloving father, and that Marjorie and Tess have been damaged since the death of Damian, Tess's older brother, and also of their dog Toni Two.

After Marjorie's death, Tess decides to get a Prime to replace her, but the disguise is not convincing enough; eventually Tess commits suicide during a trip to Madagascar. Jon is severely affected by the death of Tess, and decides to live with Marjorie Prime, Walter Prime and Tess Prime.

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

In his review, Richard Cheston talks about how *Marjorie Prime* is focused "on memory and relationships rather than the day-today business of living alongside Alzheimer's disease: it is about the repression of trauma rather than the stress of caregiving" (2018: online). Middle-class Marjorie is 85 years old and a rather traditional woman, from a Western perspective: a bit classist, sexist, and slightly racist. In order to fight Alzheimer's, she lives with Walter Prime, a holographic projection of an a.i. with the appearance of her husband at a young age (he looks about 40) and a similar personality to hers. His presence appears to be her attempt to regress to a happier time in her life before she forgets everything. Her son Damian, who is suggested to have been homosexual, committed suicide at a young age due to a feeling of disconnection, and consequently Marjorie blames herself and damns the rest.

Moving on to Tess, she is quite opposite to Marjorie. All in all, I would describe her as very emotional yet with a high degree of self-control. It is not clear whether Tess's rejection of Walter Prime is due to reluctance for technology or to her having stronger moral values than Marjorie and Jon. Tess often acts as the mother of three adults, and her bad relationship with Marjorie is reflected in her damaged relationship with her own daughter Raina. Tess is described by the other characters as a person obsessed with control, who likes conflict, is afraid about the future and constantly worries about the tiniest things. Her mother's decision to have Walter Prime in her life clearly unnerves Tess.

In short, the movie basically deals with 'good' and 'bad' mothering and shows a concern with the social pressure put on women to become mothers (following the idea of biological responsibility). The real Walter is described as a cold father, but it is Marjorie who feels guilty for Damian's death and who is blamed for Tess's own childhood traumas. In contrast, Walter reappears in his Prime version to be the ideal man he never really was. We do not know much about Raina, whom we never see, but there is surely a lot about guilt and blame involved in her relationship with Tess, too. The fact that Tess is Marjorie's daughter means that she can sympathise with her to a greater extent than a son ever could (she knows the struggles of being a woman), and this intensifies the family drama.

SEE: Cheston, Richard. "Understated and Rewarding". *The Psychologist* 31 (January 2018): 69.
<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-2018/january-2018/understated-and-rewarding>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- The opening scene and our difficulties to understand why cranky, old Marjorie is in the company of the much younger, handsome Walter
- The conversation in which Walter Prime asks Jon for help to be a better version of the late Walter
- The *My Best Friend's Wedding* scene
- **The Primes scene**

In the last scene of the movie Walter Prime, Marjorie Prime and Tess Prime are downstairs talking, and he is telling a distorted version of how the real Walter proposed to Marjorie. They also talk about how they miss Jon, though it is not clear whether he is simply indisposed upstairs or if he has passed. Walter Prime announces that he intends to write a piece of music. They also talk about Toni (II), and Tess and Marjorie Prime discover the existence of Toni I and of Damian (for Primes only have partial memories of the humans they copy). After that, Marjorie Prime refuses to be sad and concludes “how nice that we could love someone”.

This scene echoes a former statement by Walter Prime: “the more time it passed, the more she became the dog in their memories”. All of the Primes have distorted memories because their human creators had memories that became fainter with time. Toward the end, Walter Prime shows some anxiety about youth and successfulness when he reflects on Mozart. In other words, this scene shows that the Primes are evolving and becoming more human and humane, for they are now able to love someone and miss them and have time-related anxieties. Marjorie’s last utterance reflects on the beauty of a limited span of life. Life is worth; short or long, if one has someone to love and is loved back. In a sense, Marjorie almost suggests that the intensity of love is directly proportional to acknowledging death. Just like bad days make one value more the good ones.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Madeline George, “The Future of the Past in Jordan Harrison’s *Marjorie Prime*”, *American Theatre* Jul/Aug 2015. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2015/07/09/the-future-of-the-past-in-jordan-harrisons-marjorie-prime/>

Q: Marjorie Prime is a narrative about the future that is actually about the past.

Jordan Harrison: [laughs] I think that most science fiction is actually about now. Is that a brazen thing to say? Or at least my favorite science fiction involves memorializing the way things are—which so quickly becomes the past. Like in *Solaris*, the tree and house that are reconstituted on a distant planet... And do you know about my obsession with *The Electric Grandmother*? It’s this surprisingly alarming children’s film we were shown in first grade based on a Ray Bradbury story. Maureen Stapleton plays this robot grandmother in a family with three young kids whose mother has died—so their father takes them to the, like, robot factory, and they pick out their ideal grandmother. Finally, they have someone in their life who can keep the promise of “I’ll never leave you”. But the crazy thing is the final scene, where all the little kids are now in their 80s, and Maureen Stapleton is younger than them and taking care of them.

Ella Taylor, “Review: *Marjorie Prime*”, *Film Comment* Jul/Aug 2017.

<https://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-marjorie-prime-jon-hamm/>

(...) these are posh people who conduct their fights in a genteel whisper. The backstory to their current sufferings is sensitively rendered, if standard fare. We hear of inattentive parenting, sibling rivalry, depression, and a tragic death with a long reach into the present and future.

Scripted for resentment and eternal hunger for affection, Marjorie's daughter Tess (a finely tuned Geena Davis) sees rivals everywhere, is estranged from her own daughter, and resents the Prime who's standing in for the withholding father. (...) Whether someday soon we will all need (or get regardless) our own Primes is just one of the questions this likable but slightly anodyne movie raises yet doesn't really run with. That may be the weakness in the play, and Almereyda, expertly juggling the tonal shifts between mordant and elegiac keeps the faith.

Steve Erickson, "Marjorie Prime", *Cineaste: America's Leading Magazine on the Art and Politics of the Cinema* 43.1 (Winter 2017): 51-53.

The Primes exist as living memory banks for the humans who cared about the people they're replacing. In the final minutes Jon is removed from the picture altogether, leaving Walter Prime, Marjorie Prime, and Tess Prime to share memories they didn't actually live out, implying perhaps that these Primes versions are developing feelings and are also seeking comfort from a form of loss (in this case the loss of Jon who was, in a sense, their mentor). This moment also hints at some larger, more ambiguous narrative implications.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4978710/>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marjorie_Prime
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/marjorie-prime>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/marjorie_prime

Annihilation (2018)

CREW & CAST

Director: Alex Garland

Screenplay by: Alex Garland, Jeff VanderMeer (novel)

Producer(s): Eli Bush, Andrew Macdonald, Allon Reich, Scott Rudin

Main performers (credits order): Natalie

Portman (Lena); Jennifer Jason Leigh (Dr Ventress); Gina Rodriguez (Anya); Tuva Novotny (Cass); Tessa Thompson (Josie), Sonoya Mizuno (Humanoid & Katie); Oscar Isaac (Kane)

Company: Paramount Pictures, Skydance Media, Scott Rudin Productions, DNA Films

Nationality: UK/USA

Duration: 1h 55'



SIMILAR FILMS/CONNECTED WITH...

- *Solaris* (1972, 2002)
- *Stalker* (1979)
- *The Abyss* (1989)
- *Dreamcatcher* (2003)
- *Sunshine* (2007)
- *Arrival* (2016)

MAIN AWARDS

Chicago Film Critics Association Awards 2018 (winner; another nomination)

Best Use of Visual Effects

CinEuphoria Awards 2019 (winner; eight other nominations)

Best Visual Effects: Sara Bennett, Richard Clarke, Simon Hughes, Andrew Whitehurst

Best Art Direction - International Competition: Michelle Day, Mark Digby, Denis Schnegg

IGN Summer Movie Awards 2018 (winner)

Best Sci-Fi Movie

REASONS TO SEE *Annihilation*

- The all-female cast makes one question the conventional outlook of the film industry on gender and its representations.
- It is one of the few examples of psychological SF on the movie screen, and they did a great job!
- It reconnects SF cinema with the best current print SF (Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy).

- Horror movie fans will be very pleased, as well. Not only will it keep you on tenterhooks all along but also will make you jump out of your seats in some scenes.

PLOT SUMMARY (with spoilers)

An enigmatic area called 'The Shimmer' has been declared a quarantine zone by the US Government for its abnormal activities. It has been mysteriously isolated from the rest of the continent by an invisible but expanding border. In this territory, nature has erased the last traces of human civilisation through mutation. The Southern Reach, a governmental organization, has been sending people on research expedition to understand the anomalies. Yet, the majority have disappeared in The Shimmer, and the ones who have come back have no memory of what happened there. The 12th expedition, an all-female team which includes a biologist, a psychologist, a physicist, an anthropologist and a paramedic, enter the area without knowing what awaits them. Their purpose is to map the land, collect samples, and record their observations. Alongside the researchers' personal problems and secrets, the topographic anomalies, the new life forms, and the mutations in the new fauna will change everything for good...

GENDER ISSUES HIGHLIGHTS

David Ellison, the head of Skydance Productions, considered *Annihilation* (2018) "too intellectual" and "too complicated" for the audience. He demanded several changes in the plot, including making Portman's character more sympathetic and changing the ending. His requests were rejected by Scott Rudin, the film's main producer, who did accept director Alex Garland's final cut of the film. Paramount, however, the distributor signed a deal with Netflix to give the film a limited release in cinema before being streamed (see Kit 2017: online), a move that possibly ended up benefitting the film. It comes as no surprise, sadly, that *Annihilation* was no box-office success and that its all-female lead cast was blamed for that, as happened with *Ghostbusters* (2016).

Annihilation transgresses the stereotypical representation of women in SF movies as either villainesses or a damsels in distress. The women have their own backstories and economic independence; they are not depicted through the male characters. They do have chaotic lives and disturbed psychologies but, except from Lena (Natalie Portman), their problems are not related to men or to any gendered roles. This is why, apart from the movie's peculiar plot and its cool imagery, many critics have hailed *Annihilation* as a breakthrough in SF. "Though the images of these women, all toting guns and prepared to take out any mysterious alien creatures that may be waiting for them, are striking, the film does not try to linger on them deliberately", Josh Spiegel writes. There is, he adds, "in essence, no attempt in *Annihilation* to metaphorically nudge the audience to remember how this story is female-driven; it just *is* female-driven" (2018: online, original italics). The same can also be said about the representation of LGBTQ+ characters; their visibility is unquestionable, but the movie does not shout out how it is doing something unconventional for the film industry. Rather, it mirrors life, and represent all these people with all their colours, without getting stuck with the stereotypes.

SEE:

Kit, Borys. "Annihilation: Behind-the-Scenes of a Producer Clash and That Netflix Deal (Exclusive)". *The Hollywood Reporter* 7 December 2017.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/annihilation-how-a-clash-between-producers-led-a-netflix-deal-1065465>

Spiegel, Josh. "Annihilation". *Hollywood Reporter* 25 February 2018.
<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/topic/annihilation>

GENDER-RELATED SELECTED SCENE(S)

- Dr. Ventress briefs Lena on the mission
- Lena's husband Kane leaves for his mission
- Josie's choice to stay in the Shimmer
- **The alien humanoid mimicking Lena's shape**

At the end of the movie, Lena ends up in a lighthouse on the beach after following Dr. Ventress. Passing through a dark hole in the ground, she finds her mate, but completely altered. The doctor transforms into a colourful alien mass which absorbs Lena's blood. A fluid humanoid is created out of this entity. Lena tries to kill this faceless formation but cannot succeed. The humanoid starts mimicking Lena, including her actions and even physical features.

This psychedelic encounter between the protagonist and her double is probably one of the most mind-blowing scenes ever filmed. In addition to the artistic portrayal, the humanoid, which actually resembles the alien form of Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013), deserves attention in terms of representing gender and sex. The alien form is sexless and genderless. Only after mimicking Lena, it demonstrates an anthropomorphic behaviour. Considering the subversion of stereotypical representation of gender in the movie, this scene might be self-reflectively pointing out to the fact that gender is a social construct, famously theorised as 'performativity' by Judith Butler. The humanoid becomes a 'human' in the end by imitating a set of behaviours that Lena performs such as fighting back or running away out of fear. In a way, it projects that one's sex or gender is never a determining mechanism of one's behaviour. Rather, it is a kind of role-play, because socially designated 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviours are not innate codes.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Mark Asch, "In *Annihilation*, the Future Isn't Female (Or Male)", *Nylon* 23 February 2018.
<https://nylon.com/articles/annihilation-movie-review>

Shortly before its release, *Annihilation* was the subject of a whitewashing controversy. In the second book of VanderMeer's trilogy, Portman's biologist character is described as Asian-American and Leigh's psychologist as part Native American. In mitigation, Garland has offered that he only worked off of the first book, in which VanderMeer offers no identifying characteristics for any of the characters on the expedition: They're known only by their roles, as "the biologist", "the psychologist", et cetera, and pointedly stripped of any identifying details, with the important exception of the biologist's own memories—she's the narrator.

Benjamin Lee, "*Annihilation* Review – Natalie Portman Thriller Leaves a Haunting Impression", *The Guardian* 21 February 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/22/annihilation-review-natalie-portman-thriller-leaves-a-haunting-impresion>

It's hugely refreshing, and remarkably uncommon, to watch a genre film that revolves around intelligent characters reacting intelligently to fantastical events. The team is made up of briskly efficient problem-solvers who remain practical and focused while dealing with otherworldly mayhem. Unlike with so many superficially similar films, as an audience we understand and empathize with the decision-making process, the script never sacrificing its smarts for suspense. It is tightly constructed and devoid of unnecessary exposition, yet the characters mostly feel like they are more than their various professions. This is also down to a

strong set of performers and while it's rare to see an all-female ensemble in a film of this ilk, Garland has little time for gender, imagining a future where such distinctions don't warrant recognition.

Richard Lawson, "Annihilation Review: Natalie Portman Commands a Dark and Rewarding Sci-Fi Story", *Vanity Fair* 21 February 2018.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/02/annihilation-review>

Unburdened by the typical clunky character tropes of largely male thrillers or sci-fi films, *Annihilation* finds new and compelling angles of inquiry. Its humanity is specific, nuanced, more fully realized. There's something quietly revolutionary about the way the film addresses gender both plainly and coyly, staging another upending of the supposedly natural order in a film that is already doing plenty of that.

LINKS

- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2798920/>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilation_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilation_(film))
- Metacritic (reviews): <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/annihilation/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/annihilation>

Film list (and factsheet author)

2001	<i>A.I.: Artificial Intelligence</i>	Merve Babal
2001	<i>Donnie Darko</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2002	<i>Minority Report</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2002	<i>28 Days Later...</i>	Shuyuan He
2002	<i>Signs</i>	Meghan Henderson
2004	<i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i>	Alvin Ng
2005	<i>War of the Worlds</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín
2006	<i>Children of Men</i>	Sara Martín Alegre
2006	<i>A Scanner Darkly</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2007	<i>I am Legend</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2007	<i>The Mist</i>	Shuyuan He
2007	<i>The Man from Earth</i>	Meghan Henderson
2008	<i>Wall-E</i>	Alvin Ng
2008	<i>Cloverfield</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín
2009	<i>Avatar</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2009	<i>District 9</i>	Merve Babal
2009	<i>Moon</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2009	<i>Star Trek</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2010	<i>Inception</i>	Shuyuan He
2010	<i>Monsters</i>	Meghan Henderson
2011	<i>Attack the Block</i>	Alvin Ng
2011	<i>Battle Los Angeles</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2011	<i>Super 8</i>	Merve Babal
2012	<i>Prometheus</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2012	<i>Wreck-it-Ralph</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2012	<i>Looper</i>	Shuyuan He
2013	<i>Robot and Frank</i>	Sara Martín Alegre
2013	<i>Elysium</i>	Meghan Henderson
2013	<i>World War Z</i>	Alvin Ng
2013	<i>Under the Skin</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín
2013	<i>Snowpiercer</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2013	<i>Ender's Game</i>	Merve Babal
2013	<i>Gravity</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2013	<i>Her</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2013	<i>Pacific Rim</i>	Shuyuan He
2014	<i>Edge of Tomorrow</i>	Alvin Ng
2014	<i>Ex-Machina</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín
2014	<i>Lucy</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2014	<i>Interstellar</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2014	<i>Dawn of the Planet of the Apes</i>	Alexandra Camp Martínez
2014	<i>Predestination</i>	Ainhoa Goicoechea Ortiz
2014	<i>Transcendence</i>	Shuyuan He
2015	<i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i>	Meghan Henderson
2015	<i>The Martian</i>	Alvin Ng
2016	<i>Arrival</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín

2016	<i>Rogue One</i>	Jiadong Zhang
2017	<i>Black Mirror: San Junipero</i>	Meghan Henderson
2017	<i>Blade Runner 2049</i>	Merve Babal
2017	<i>Marjorie Prime</i>	Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín
2018	<i>Annihilation</i>	Merve Babal

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