

The Good, The Bad, and The Other
The Representation of Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Horror Film
from 1968 to 1979

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This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment for the BA (Hons) in Design for Stage and Screen. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted, and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed: 

Saoirse Carey

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Abstract:

This study concerns itself with the representation of mothers, pregnancy and childbirth in American horror film from 1968 to 1979. I explored three of these films; Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). The study queries the sudden increase in horror films which explore ideas of pregnancy and birth from this time. This study also sets out to evaluate the representations of the mother figures in these films to investigate the intent of these films. The research consisted of analysing the visual representations of mothers, pregnancy and childbirth from the 1960s. The vast majority of this information comes from the United States due to a transitional period in women's rights. Further understanding came from the analysis and deconstruction of the three chosen films. The results from this study concluded that there was vast representations of pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the representations of the mother. Although all three films were greatly inspired by similar sources, each film expressed very different understandings and ideas. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) explores many themes surrounding women's rights and idealises Rosemary, our protagonist as a good mother. *The Brood* (1979) explores the terrifying reproductive powers as women and portrays its protagonist as a horrifying maternal figure. *Alien* (1979) attempts to explore pregnancy and maternity as a more abstract idea and surpasses gender norms with its unfamiliar and lurking alien creature. The results show that social and historical context greatly influence film but it does not mean that each film influenced will be the same or sending the same message. However, it is clearly indicated that the horror genre uses childbirth and pregnancy as a device due to our continued lack of understanding surrounding women's bodies.

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Introduction:

“Horror film represents the mother as a site of both fascination and repulsion.” – Sarah Arnold¹

The 1970s were a transitional time in both cinema and society, leading to many changes in how the horror genre morphed and grew a fascination with the maternal. One reoccurring image is seen repeatedly: villainous mothers, inhuman children, monstrous pregnant bodies, and childbirth.

The 1960s brought many new visual and social ideas surrounding motherhood, the unborn, and the newly born. So much so, that there was a large influx of horror films that dealt with the maternal, and fascinated over the female body. I would like to investigate only three of these films; Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), David Cronenberg’s *The Brood* (1979) and Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979). Each film reflects, in different ways, the events happening in the world at that time, especially with that of women’s rights, birth control, and the growing visuality surrounding infants and the unborn. I have chosen these specific films, as each film has responded in a vast way of representing pregnancy, and in turn, mothers and motherhood.

This research is focused on how the mother’s body and reproduction could be seen as a place of repulsion and disgust. These three films explore the morbid curiosity with motherhood, pregnancy, birth, and their offspring in unusual and othered ways. I found a lot of the inspiration for the themes and imagery in these films were drawn from similar cultural or historical contexts, even though each film expresses very different ideas. *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) plays like a thriller, as we both anticipate, and dread, Rosemary’s birth throughout the film. The horror is psychological, and rarely shows visual horror or gore, rather allowing the audience to use their imagination. Rosemary is depicted as a good mother and a good woman. *The Brood* (1979) cannot be more different in approach. Nora’s pregnant body is used for body horror, with her offspring being equally as gruesome. Her maternity is seen as villainous and evil. She is shown as a bad mother and woman. Finally, *Alien* (1979) looks at the films before it and creates an entirely different narrative. The fear of motherhood is

¹ Arnold, Sarah. *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013

instead placed on the male counterparts through a monstrous mother alien. This film plays with the role of the mother with the seemingly unisex alien, and the male vessel.

To better understand the themes and social context in which these films sit, I will explore the visual representation surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, and fetuses, in the United States from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s. These include the late the representation of pregnancy and childbirth before 1956, the rise of Second-Wave Feminism, accessibility to birth control, foetal photography, and the Thalidomide Disaster.

There was a little-to-no representation of pregnancy in American media before December 1956, due to strict guidelines of what could be shown to the public.² In just over a decade, an explosion of horror-filled imagery concerning pregnancy emerged. I am going to explore the reasons why later in this document. What was the purpose of this imagery relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Perhaps it was a cautionary tale to women of the time. The idea of a cautionary tale was common in cinema at the time, with Slasher films. Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is credited with starting the trend of punishing women for having sex or being promiscuous. The "Final Girl" trope was born here, signifying the women who survived their films, were commonly quite innocent or were virgins. Women who were perceived as, or implied to be, impure or promiscuous, were killed.

The 1970s were a time of change in the United States, particularly surrounding the idea of women and their role in society. The 1970s sits in the middle of the sexual revolution, as well as the Second-Wave Feminist Movement. The feminist movement pushed for sexual freedom for women, both in body and mind. It also created a climate and space for women to feel freer and more comfortable in their sexuality.³

Accessibility to birth control increased in the 1960s, giving couples and individuals more options around having children. Sex was now no longer strictly a means for procreation, but something for people to enjoy. The pill was very popular, resulting in an increase of women going to, and graduating college. The first oral contraceptive, Enovid, was approved as a contraceptive in 1960. It was not until 1972 that The Supreme Court gave every citizen, regardless of marital status, the right to use birth control.⁴ There was a lot of controversy and

² Harrington, Erin. *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2017

³ Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center*. 2nd ed., PLUTO PRESS, 1984, p. 149.

⁴ Tone, Andrea. *Controlling Reproduction*. SR Books, 2008.

anxiety around these new ideas and laws. Women, previously only working before getting married, had more freedoms to explore further opportunities outside of the home.

Foetal photography became mainstream during the mid-1960s, first established in Life magazine. The photographer who was responsible was Lennart Nilsson. He published the book, *A Child is Born*, in 1965. The images featured are some of the earlier imagery of fetuses that were shown to a large worldwide audience. This new image of a foetus brought the attention away from the mother figure and to the foetus. The visual representation of the foetus quickly spread into

popular culture and horror film. Some interpretations began to form, such as the foetus being compared to an alien or monster floating in space.⁵ Nilsson was able to take these images with the help of a hospital in Stockholm, where he had a photography room set up. Nilsson composed the setting and the fetuses to give the illusion that they floating in a womb. Nilsson's photography has been used without permission in anti-abortion protests to this day, furthering his work into the public eye.⁶

The Thalidomide Tragedy was an epidemic that affected mostly Europe, but also Canada and the United States, in the early 1960s. It started as an over-the-counter drug in Germany. It was used as a sleeping pill, and to treat morning sickness in pregnant women. It had only hit



Figure 1 Lennart Nilsson, *A Child is Born*, 1965, Life Magazine, print.

⁵ Arnold, Sarah. *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama And Motherhood*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013, p. 156.

⁶ "See The First Photo That Let People See Life Before Birth". 100 Photographs | The Most Influential Images Of All Time, 2020, <http://100photos.time.com/photos/lennart-nilsson-fetus>. Accessed 22 June 2020.

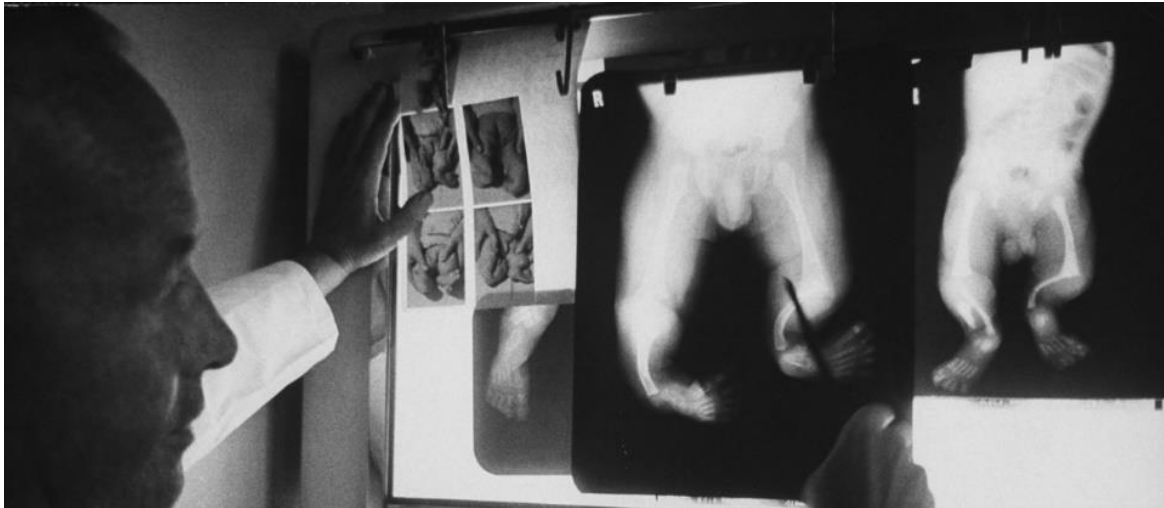


Figure 2 Stan Wayman, Dr. Oskar Hepp, the director of an orthopaedic hospital, looking at x-rays of deformed legs of thalidomide babies, 1962, The LIFE Picture Collection

the US through GP trials due to medical officer, Frances Oldham Kelsey, who pushed back the widespread release of the drug for further testing. Over 10,000 children were born with birth defects and abnormalities as a result of the drug. The effects of the drug in the United States weren't as severe, at only 17 children. The drug was withdrawn from use in March 1962. The abnormalities in the children included shortened limbs, defected eyes and ears, and organ defects. The drug also caused women to miscarry. Babies who did make it to birth had a high mortality rate.⁷ Interestingly, many of the monstrous children seen in 1970s horror film reflected the abnormalities that were seen in thalidomide victims. Films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Brood* (1979), *It's Alive* (1974) and *Demon Seed* (1977) dealt with deformed babies, very close and fresh to the actual tragedy happening and being very fresh in the public's mind.

With this understanding of the growing visual identity of the foetus, childbirth and pregnancy, I am now going to examine my three films of interest in three separate chapters, Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). Each chapter exploring how these films differ so greatly in their approach towards pregnancy, childbirth and offspring in horror film.

⁷ Bren, Linda. "Frances Oldham Kelsey: FDA Medical Reviewer Leaves Her Mark On History". *U.S. Food And Drug Administration FDA Consumer Magazine*, 2001, https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps1609/www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2001/201_kelsey.html. Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

Chapter 1: The Good Mother: Rosemary's Baby

This chapter will examine *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) as my first film. I will explore *Rosemary's Baby* through the scope of religion, a woman's place and the rise of feminism, the foetus as "othered" and the patriarchy.

Rosemary's Baby (1968) is a horror film directed by Roman Polanski. It is based on the novel *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) by Ira Levin. The film primarily follows Rosemary, our protagonist, who is set up to be the perfect mother, as she is married, and aspiring to be a mother. The film opens with her and her husband, Guy, moving into their new home. The couple befriends an elderly couple that lives in the same building as them. Rosemary finds them irritating, but Guy seems to enjoy their company. Minnie, the old woman of the elderly couple brings Guy and Rosemary chocolate mousse. Rosemary fails to finish the mouse as she states it has a "chalk-like"⁸ under-taste. Later, Rosemary believes she is raped by her husband while unconscious, implying she was drugged by the mousse. She goes into a dream-like state and watches as a dark presence rapes her. She then believes this presence that had raped and impregnated her, was the devil, which we find out later, is true. She is drowned in paranoia and attempts to uncover the truth about her strange neighbours. She is forced to drink strange medicine, isolated and forbade to even read books by her husband. Ultimately, she attempts to escape to protect herself and her unborn child, who she believed her neighbours want for ritualistic purposes. She is refused help by all she goes to, including her doctor. She is denied



Figure 3 Roman Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968, William Castle, Still from film

⁸ Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*. William Castle Enterprises, 1968. Film.

autonomy of her body, her child and her situation and there is real horror in that. The film feels like a feminist nightmare, a very literal metaphor for a woman's bodily autonomy.

The ending reveals that Guy had given her womb up to a satanic cult to further his acting career. Rosemary is forced back to her home to give birth and awakes later in a daze, finding her new-born son in a crib, surrounded by elderly people. Rosemary meets her child at the end of the film but does not recognize him. She states something is wrong with his eyes. The cult members state that he has his fathers' eyes, those of Satan. When implored to rock the cradle her baby is in, Rosemary asks "Are you trying to get me to be his mother?" She is met with "Aren't you his mother?".⁹ Rosemary decides ultimately to be the good mother, despite all being wrong around her. She is overcome with maternal instinct, staring at her child. Her maternal virtue in taking on the mother role to the spawn of Satan is striking in her lack of control over the situation. Rosemary stares into the crib that contains her son, she finally smiles at him with acceptance. Rosemary's maternal instinct is idealized. She is the perfect example of The Good Mother in a horror film of this time. The themes of religion and the occult, in part with Rosemary being a naturalistic good mother, can only make me reflect on the Madonna from Christianity.

Rosemary's experience of pregnancy mirrors that of Mary from the Bible. Rosemary is chosen to carry the only son of Satan, much like Mary was chosen to carry the only son of God. Guy serves as a step-parent, like Joseph. Her pregnancy is seen as a service to the cult's God and her reward is motherhood. However, the gift of motherhood is only directly related to her servitude and submission. Rosemary's only chance of having power is concerning her servitude to the patriarchy. Rosemary only gains status in being the mother to Satan's child. It leans on the idea that the only power a woman can achieve is through motherhood and reproduction, whereas Guy is allowed to rise beyond paternity. Through his servitude to Satan and the cult, he is given all he has ever wanted. In Christianity, women can look to the Madonna as a symbol of femininity and female power, which is linked to submission and motherhood. Men can look to Christ and God, or rather in this case, Satan. Julia Kristeva states that men feel comforted by this representation of women as the selfless mother. She states, "Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place."¹⁰ Rosemary has no control over her circumstances and will be seen as a bad mother if she does

⁹ Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*. William Castle Enterprises, 1968. Film.

¹⁰ Arnold, Sarah. *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama And Motherhood*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013 p. 16

not submit. From the religious context, being a bad mother is being a bad woman. It is interesting that religious boundaries and ideas set in place in this film, completely contrast the feminists of the time who wished for their freedoms. Rosemary accepting her child can be seen as a rejection of her liberty which could stand for the women's rights movement.

The plot centralizes around the cult members and Rosemary's husband attempting to control her. The novel in which the film was based off, written by Ira Levin was published in 1967. This time was socially dominated by the women's rights movement as women strived to obtain more control over their own lives. The anxieties around women's rights came from traditional values and religious values. I feel as though the film pushes religious characters to extremities to express that. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) changes the perspective of the audience



Figure 4 Roman Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968, William Castle, Still from film

by making Rosemary the protagonist and making the audience experience her torment and paranoia with her. This audience was made well aware of the horrors that the patriarchy caused as she loses all attempts of control over her life and her child. Consistently after she has fallen pregnant, all those around her try to control her actions and decisions. Tragically, Rosemary's doctor is not even part of the cult. He truly believes that Rosemary is hysterical, sending her back to her husband and the cult. He sympathizes with her and her struggle, despite Rosemary being set up to be the perfect mother and wife, but her situation is

compromised. It seems to her and the audience that she is trapped in this situation. A lot of the horror does not come from the satanic cult or the devil, but that a man gave up his wife's body for his gain. Rosemary does not know this, she thinks the cult members want her child for rituals. This film reflects a lot of the ideas happening at the time of release, especially women's fear that their freedom and liberties may be betrayed, not by the patriarchy or a

corrupt system, but those closest to them in their life. Early in the film, Rosemary believes she had been raped by her husband while she was sleeping. Marital rape was still legal and would not be made illegal in all of the United States until 1993.¹¹ Guy admits with ease that he had sex with Rosemary while she was unconscious, stating “It was fun, in a necrophile sort of way.”¹² With the fight for abortion rights going on at the time, the idea of men choosing what women do with their bodies, rather than the women who own these bodies, is mirrored in this film perfectly. Who does Rosemary’s womb belong to? Her husband, Satan or herself? Who do women’s wombs belong to? The men, the state or the women? During the 1960s, women who did not fit strict qualifications to receive an abortion often had to go to great lengths to obtain illegal abortions. Rosemary avoiding her husband and neighbours to try to get away reflects these lengths that women at the time had to go to, to gain their bodily autonomy.

The film portrays another anxiety of the 1960s, which is the changing structure of the family. Early in the film, we are set up to believe that Guy and Rosemary are going to be a traditional nuclear family, A stay-at-home wife and mother, a working husband and children. When Guy betrays Rosemary for his gain, this dynamic has changed to something very unfamiliar. Rosemary has had sex outside of marriage (or her kind) and is forced to almost share her child with the cult. She no longer has her private sphere in which she felt comfortable.

What makes Rosemary such a sympathetic character? Rosemary is the perfect example of the Good Mother. Like the Madonna, Rosemary is seen as all-loving and kind. The film sets her up as a good wife, willing to provide for her husband. She tends to the house and allows him to peruse his acting career. She is protective of her child in pregnancy. Upon finding out that her child is the spawn of Satan, she still takes on the motherly role to look after her son. Against all odds, she is maternal and nurturing. In contrast to Nora, the maternal figure in *The Brood* (1979), who is villainized for her maternal instinct and nature, who will be examined further in the next chapter as a direct contrast to Rosemary. To the cult, Rosemary may just be the womb for their cause but we see her as a good, caring person who is determined to do all she can to protect her child.

¹¹ Bennice, Jennifer A., and Patricia A. Resick. *Marital Rape: History, Research, And Practice Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. Sage, United States Of America, 2003.

¹² Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*. William Castle Enterprises, 1968. Film.

Most of the source of visual horror in the film is related to Rosemary's pregnant body, however, as she craves raw meat and chicken liver. The theme of disgust and horror surrounding a woman's body, sexuality and maternity is a common trend in these horror films. This theme is typically targeted at men as the workings of a woman is unknown and unusual to them. The portrayal of the pregnant body as a place of horror is noted by Barbara Creed, as she states, "in the horror film the ancient connection between women, womb and the monstrous is invoked."¹³ Rosemary's rape is another source of visual horror, further relating the idea of horror to be with the female body. The scene is filled with nausea-inducing movements and blurs as Rosemary is tied down to the bed and impregnated by Satan as her husband and cult members watch on. Aside from that, the film does not contain much visual horror and works more toward anticipation to build tension. Rosemary's pregnancy and impending birth adds enormous tension to the film. You grow more and more anxious for Rosemary knowing there is something unknown festering inside of her, and what may happen when she gives birth. Rosemary's body turns into a ticking time bomb and you wait in anticipation of when she is going to give birth. You anticipate who or what she is going to give birth to and what the cult is going to do to it. The fear of the unknown is a clever technique used in the film as the director does not give everything away to the audience, leading the audience to speculate on their fears. Nicholas Carlton notes that the fear



Figure 5 Roman Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968, William Castle, Still from film

of the unknown may be the fundamental fear we have as humans. Lovecraft said in 1927: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the

¹³ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print p.43

unknown.”¹⁴ This idea is followed through to the very end of the film when Rosemary’s child is born. He is not shown to us visually in the film, instead, we are shown Rosemary’s reaction and given hints about his appearance, through the dialogue of the other characters.

Rosemary’s Baby (1968) was one of the first films to explore the foetus as something “other.” The foetus gaining its own identity away from the mother figure. Later, many other films explored offspring as “other” such as *The Brood* (1979), *Demon Seed* (1977) and *It’s Alive* (1974). The portrayal of foetal photography to give visual identification to the unborn served as a beginning to the association of that to aliens or othered beings. The new visual image was something unknown yet familiar. This could be related to Freud’s discussion of the uncanny being something familiar but not quite. “The “uncanny” is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”¹⁵ There is fear around the unknown. The fear of children being born deformed was also a fear that had crept up during the 1960s, due to the thalidomide disaster and the thousands of children who were born with birth defects.¹⁶ *Rosemary’s Baby* also plays into that fear, as Rosemary fails to



Figure 6 Roman Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968, William Castle, Still from film

recognise her baby and states there is something wrong with “his eyes.”¹⁷ One of the many birth defects Thalidomide had on infants were abnormalities with the eyes.¹⁸ Many women were anxious during their pregnancies that their children may be born with some abnormalities. Much like during the film, as we never see her baby, we are

anxious about how he will look. Another similarity to the thalidomide disaster is the medicine

¹⁴ Carleton, R Nicholas. “Fear of the unknown: One fear to rule them all?.” *Journal of anxiety disorders* vol. 41 (2016): 5-21. doi:10.1016/j.janxdis.2016.03.011

¹⁵ Freud, Sigmund, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton. *The Uncanny*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. Print

¹⁶ Bren, Linda. “Frances Oldham Kelsey: FDA Medical Reviewer Leaves Her Mark On History”. *U.S. Food And Drug Administration FDA Consumer Magazine*, 2001, https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps1609/www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2001/201_kelsey.html. Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

¹⁷ Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*. William Castle Enterprises, 1968. Film.

¹⁸ Cullen, J. F. “OCULAR DEFECTS IN THALIDOMIDE BABIES”. *Brit. J. Ophthalmol*, 1964, <https://bjo.bmj.com/content/bjophthalmol/48/3/151.full.pdf>. Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

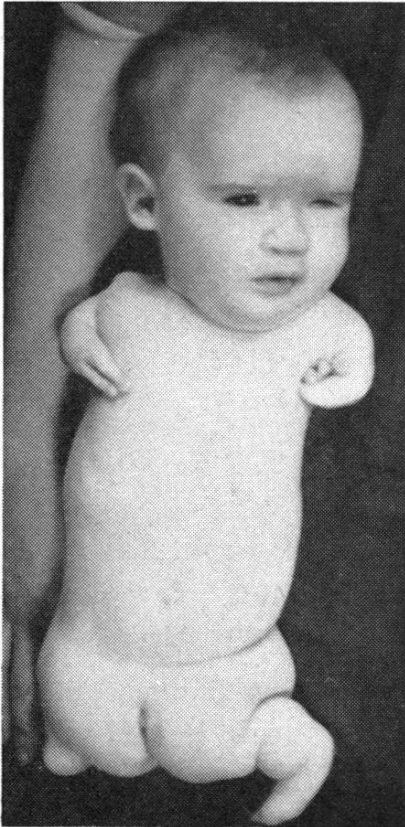


Figure 7 Cullen, James. (1964). Ocular defects in thalidomide babies. *The British journal of ophthalmology*

that Rosemary is being prescribed by her doctor throughout the film. She fears that her baby will die, as she is in so much pain.

Rosemary in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) is a true symbol of the good mother. Her struggle reflects the fears and struggles that women in her time faced, such as religious control, fear of the thalidomide disaster, and the breakdown of the nuclear family. The horror is pulled from Rosemary's experiences and her helplessness, not coming from the supernatural, but how society failed a young mother. The next film I am going to delve into is *The Brood* (1979) which reflects many of the themes and issues in *Rosemary's Baby*. Although both the main women in the films, *The Brood* portrays Nora as the complete opposite to Rosemary. Rosemary is seen as a good mother above all else, Nora is above all else, a bad mother.

Chapter 2: The Bad Mother: The Brood

The Brood (1979) is a body-horror film written and directed by David Cronenberg.

Cronenberg is known in cinema for his body-horror, grotesque imagery and practical effects. The chapter will explore divorce, child abuse, paternity vs maternity, children as othered, naturalistic or primal birth and censorship.

The film was written after the director's divorce. The film served as a remedy, as Cronenberg dealt with a divorce and the custody of their shared child.¹⁹ The divorce rate in Canada from 1970 to 1980 had risen by 200 per cent. *The Brood* (1979) explores insecurity around a society of divorce and family problems, issues that the director had experienced from a man's point of view. The film itself is teeming with estranged relationships.²⁰

The Brood (1979) explores these themes and portray how a woman's rage and emotion can manifest. Nola is the woman in question. She is mentally ill and receiving experimental therapy. This experimental therapy involved people manifesting their anxieties or anger physically onto their bodies. This is portrayed as boils or bleeding on some patients. Frank, Nora's husband, meets a man who was a patient and developed cancer as a result of the therapy. It is discovered Nola was abused as a child and has not dealt with her abuse. As a result, the emotion builds up in Nora, causing her to create a physical manifestation of her rage, a brood of villainous children. Nola is a victim of her mother, and her mother is presumably a victim of her mother; implying how a bad mother figure can ruin generations. Nola's father remained ignorant and passive to the abuse, furthering its effects. It is implied also in the film that the implications of Nola's actions throughout the film will have similarly devastating effects on her daughter, Candice. Through her childhood abuse, Nola's marriage never stood a chance. "You got involved with a woman who fell in love with you for your sanity and hoped it would rub off." Frank blames Nola for the downfall of their marriage and she was unable to cope with her past trauma. For this, Frank puts her into the care of Dr. Hal Raglan and refuses to see her until she leaves the facility. The reflection of Nola as a bad mother is in direct contrast to Rosemary who is deemed a good mother through her maternal instinct. Upon Candice seeing her grandmother being attacked, it is highly suggested by a

¹⁹ Cronenberg, David, and Chris Rodley. *Cronenberg On Cronenberg*. 1st ed., Faber And Faber, 1992, p. 84.

²⁰ Lennard, Dominic. *Bad Seeds And Holy Terrors: The Child Villains Of Horror Film (SUNY Series, Horizons Of Cinema)*. University At Albany (SUNY), 2014. P.76

doctor to her father, to get Candice to talk about her trauma so it does not manifest later in life. This theme of trauma and family troubles ruining generations is brought up throughout the film, as Frank worries that it is too late for his daughter and he has already “screwed her up.”²¹

The anxiety that lingers through the film is the power that women hold concerning children and reproduction. In the film, Frank is portrayed as the perfect, loving father as he tries to gain custody of his daughter. He is seen as the opposite of Nola’s cowardly father. Frank is a proactive, caring father throughout the film. He fears Nola had been physically abusing her due to bruising on her arms and back. Yet, Nola is still protected by the law as Candice’s mother. “The law believes in motherhood.” Frank does not go to the police or child protective services instantly as he feels they may side with Nora. This leads him to attempt to find more information on the therapy that Nola has been receiving from Dr. Raglan. The film explores the failures of two marriages, resulting in divorce or separation. Both the marriages of Nola and Frank and Nola’s parents caused great suffering for all involved. However, the film pays particular attention to how divorce can affect the children in the relationship. This greatly reflects David Cronenberg’s issue at the time, as he felt the custody of his child was best with him. Cronenberg has admitted that the character of Frank is a self-insert and Nola is heavily inspired by his ex-wife. In the film, he wanted to express the mental strain that the custody battle took on him and his daughter. He also states that the final scene, in which Frank kills his estranged wife, was “very satisfying.”²² Due to the personal relationship that the director has with the film, it has been heavily criticized for being misogynistic. The critic Robin Wood stated that *The Brood* irrationally showcased feminine power, in his book, *An Introduction to American Horror Film*.²³ Sarah Arnold also states that Nola is a clear representation of the Bad Mother, noting how it represents “The monstrous feminine” discussed in Barbara Creed’s analysis.²⁴

²¹ Cronenberg, David. *The Brood*. Canadian Film Development Corporation, 1979. Film.

²² Cronenberg, David, and Chris Rodley. *Cronenberg On Cronenberg*. 1st ed., Faber And Faber, 1992, p. 84.

²³ Britton, Andrew et al. *American Nightmare*. Festival Of Festivals, 1979.

²⁴ Arnold, Sarah. *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama And Motherhood*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013, p. 82

Nola literally and figuratively gives birth to a brood of small, dwarf-like children who attack whoever enrages Nola. The brood of children she gives birth to is the physical manifestation of her anger, provoked by her experimental therapy. Nola's brood of evil children attacks those who threaten her place of the mother, her family, the teacher that threatens to replace her, and the doctor who threatens to take Candice, her daughter, away. The dwarf-like children are inhuman, asexual, toothless and do not have a belly button. The film implies that without men, women only can manage to reproduce a mindless, murderous offspring. Her natural maternal instinct is deemed villainous and something to be destroyed. However, the film reflects anxieties of the raw material reproductive power women can hold without men. The disfigured villainous children are reminiscent of the traits found in children born from the Thalidomide disaster, which largely affected Canada in the 1960s. The children are small and dwarf-like which reflects the shortened limbs of survivors.²⁵ The brood of children also shows other traits of thalidomide, such as defected eyes. When the first brood child is brought in for autopsy, it is presumed by the police and medical personnel that the child was deformed and thus, hidden away by its mother. "...some crazy woman didn't want anyone to know she had a deformed child. She had this kid locked up in the attic for years, and never



Figure 8 David Cronenberg, *The Brood*, 1979, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Still from film

told anybody. Wouldn't be the first time!"²⁶ It is heavily implied that this investigator had heard, or had dealt with, cases of disabled children being hidden away. The lack of surprise from the medical examiner and the investigator at the inhuman child lying at the table before them is also noteworthy.

²⁵ Bren, Linda. "Frances Oldham Kelsey: FDA Medical Reviewer Leaves Her Mark On History". *U.S. Food And Drug Administration FDA Consumer Magazine*, 2001, https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps1609/www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2001/201_kelsey.html. Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

²⁶ Cronenberg, David. *The Brood*. Canadian Film Development Corporation, 1979. Film.

Similarly, to *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Brood* explores un-naturalistic offspring. These children are deformed and murderous, lacking a belly button which implies an unnatural birth had taken place. They have no teeth, instead, they have beak-like gums. They are apparently colour blind and possess a yoke like life support on their backs for energy. The film shows a relation between Nola's mental state and the behaviour of her brood of children, their bond is deeper than biological as they are entangled mentally.



Figure 9 David Cronenberg, *The Brood*, 1979, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Still from film

Dissimilarly to *Rosemary's Baby*, the story is told through her ex-husband, perceiving her as something to be beaten or won against. The whole story is perceived through the masculine, investigating birth as something strange and unfamiliar. In the final scene, Frank attempts to lie to Nola, in an attempt to save Candice. Nola does not trust Frank and asked him if he is ready to love her. He agrees, he tells her that she is the only woman for him. Nola lifts her garment and reveals her reproductive organ, her arms splayed out like wings. Her pose is proud as she reveals what her new life has become and what new powers she possesses. Frank is disgusted as Nola reveals her reproductive organ, which has physically manifested outside of her body and gives birth in front of him. The birth is calm, no blood gets on her white dress and she calmly licks the infant clean. There is horror, but also affection in this scene, leading to a jarring juxtaposition. A clear opposite to birth that is portrayed in almost all media. She is upset at Frank's reaction of disdain, as he is unable to hide how he feels. "I

disgust you. I sicken you. You hate me.”²⁷ It is Frank that sees Nola’s birth as unnatural, fearing her maternal power. Kristeva states “Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power.”²⁸ The lack of understanding is the driving force of this scene as the audience feeds into the anxieties surrounding women’s bodies and reproductive organs. Rosemary is shown as an idealistic mother, whose instinct has won out above all. Nola’s natural maternal instinct is perceived as animalistic and grotesque to the male audience. Rosemary is embraced as the mother into the satanic cult, whereas Nola is seen as the villainous queen bee who must be destroyed.

Notably, Nola is represented as a hysterical woman. Hysteria was believed in ancient societies, such as in Egypt and Greece, to be a sex-selective disorder. It was believed that hysteria affected only people who possessed a uterus. In Ancient Greece, it was believed that hysteria caused a person’s womb to travel around their body which caused issues with other organs and the person’s health. The wandering womb theory was supported by Plato, the philosopher. Freud said of hysteria to be “characteristically feminine.” He believed that a woman’s deranged nature came from the lack of understanding of the loss of her penis. Only through marriage and sex, could she regain her penis. Hysteria seemed to be the explanation for what men could not understand in female bodies. Even today, Hysteria is a word still used to describe someone as over-emotional.²⁹ The link between hysteria and the wandering womb presents itself in *The Brood*. Due to Nora’s intense rage, her womb grows outside her body. It is unknown whether the movement of her womb has caused her mental suffering, or the other way around. Cronenberg may have been highlighting the lack of understanding of mental illness issues in women, perhaps using this imagery as satire to the origins of hysteria.

Barbara Creed explores Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject to better understand the character of Nola, in her book *The Monstrous Feminine*. Kristeva explores the relationship between mother and child through the gaze of abjection. The idea of turning into your mother is one met with horror. This idea is explored in Nola’s therapy session with Dr. Raglan, who roleplays with her as different people in her life. Nola believes that Frank fears her turning into her abusive mother. Nola fears this more than anything, stating that “mommies do not

²⁷ Cronenberg, David. *The Brood*. Canadian Film Development Corporation, 1979. Film.

²⁸ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers Of Horror, An Essay On Abjection*. Columbia University Press, 1982.

²⁹ McVean, Ada. "The History Of Hysteria". Office For Science And Society, 2017, <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/history-quackery/history-hysteria>.

hurt their babies.”³⁰ However, Nola moves past that through the manifestation of her anger and rage. Instead of pushing down her emotions and feelings, Nola becomes the monster. She feels her emotions and seeks out the emotional release through her new children. She even rejects her ideals of motherhood as she threatens to kill Candice if she is taken from her. Ultimately, Nola is destroyed by her husband. He cannot control her and her natural drive to reproduce out of rage and anger. Panicked, Frank strangles Nola to death. Without their



Figure 10 David Cronenberg, *The Brood*, 1979, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Still from film



Figure 11 David Cronenberg, *The Brood*, 1979, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Still from film



Figure 12 David Cronenberg, *The Brood*, 1979, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Still from film

mother, the brood die and the mental connection they have is severed. Frank takes Candice away but the trauma from the events has made its mark. The film implies that Candice will more than likely have the same problems as Nola later in life, and will likely hold the same power as her mother. The final shot is of Candice’s arm, which shows boils forming. Like how Nola was becoming like her own mother, Candice will certainly become like Nola.

Throughout the film, Candice and Nola are associated with the colour red. Candice wears the iconic scarlet red snowsuit, Nola’s hair is red, she also wears red throughout the film, and the colour is present around her in pillows. Red is associated with many meanings, one that is notable is its blood relation. Blood can also relate to menstrual blood and fertility. Cronenberg does not hold back from showing blood in the murders caused

³⁰ Cronenberg, David. *The Brood*. Canadian Film Development Corporation, 1979. Film.

by Nola's children. The colour red ties together Nola, her daughter Candice, the villainous children, and the imagery of bright running blood. Red is the colour of passion and intense emotion, although both characters of Nola and Candice rarely ever show intense emotions on screen, it suggests that great anger and emotion lies barely below the surface. The first brood child is also shown in the medical room under a bright red hue, furthering the visual connection between it and Nora.

Unlike *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Brood* is rich in visual horror. It was said by Cronenberg however that the foetus licking scene was cut down due to censors. The censorship issues only surrounded Nola, cleaning her newly born foetus with her tongue. However, the only real censorship before hitting box office centralized on the birth scene.³¹ Before the birth scene, there are four separate murder scenes at the hands of Nola's children. The film does not shy away from showing the small children attack with small hammers and their bare hands, leaving their victims in a bloody mess. It seemed the animalistic licking was the point in which audiences could not cope with the visual horror in a Cronenberg film.

Nola is a very different character to Rosemary. Although it is clear that both are tragic victims of their circumstances, Nola is never truly redeemed as a woman, or as a mother. The film treats her as the antagonist and something to be destroyed, for Frank to lead a life that resembles normality for his daughter. The film accurately reflects anxieties surrounding parenthood at the time, especially as the main issues were greatly inspired by Cronenberg's own experiences. The film also reflects how fears of deformed children had not yet resolved from the Thalidomide disaster. The film weaponizes men's lack of understanding of women's bodies and reproduction against them, creating one of the most iconic birth scenes in horror film history. In the next chapter, I am going to examine the final type of mother found in this genre of horror film. The Othered Mother is a figure I will analyse from the film, *Alien* (1979). The previous two films use two women as their vessels for pregnancy and childbirth and explore those films only through them. *Alien* explores pregnancy and childbirth in an incomparable way. The themes surrounding motherhood is explored not only through its male characters, the production design, story but also through a horrifying alien creature.

³¹Cronenberg, David, and Chris Rodley. Cronenberg On Cronenberg. 1st ed., Faber And Faber, 1992 pg. 80

Chapter 3: The Other Mother: Alien

Alien (1979) is a sci-fi horror film directed by Ridley Scott. This chapter is going to explore the male body as a vessel, gender and feminism, offspring as othered, metaphorical ideas of birth and sexuality.

The film follows a space crew who face an alien who has found its way on to their ship. Unlike *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Brood*, the pregnancy in this film is experienced through a male character, and a seemingly asexual, phallic-shaped alien.



Figure 13 Ridley Scott, *Alien*, 1979, 20th Century Fox, Still from film

The film starts with a space crew who are told to investigate a planet. The crew stumble on a myriad of alien eggs. Kane, a member of the ship, touches an egg. This results in an alien creature to attack him, attaching itself to Kane's face and neck. Unbeknownst to the rest of the crew, who bring Kane back to the ship, the alien has penetrated Kane's abdomen and implanted an alien fetus inside of him. Ripley, a female crew member, warns the rest of the crew about the dangers of not quarantining Kane and allowing the alien attached to him onboard. The crew ignore Ripley's pleas, as they fear Kane may die. Kane is brought to the infirmary, where the creature attached to his face eventually lets go and subsequently dies. Kane is seemingly alright and joins the crew for dinner, during which a small alien births itself from Kane's chest. He dies instantly and the alien escapes somewhere on the ship. The rest of the film plays like a cat and mouse game, as the remaining crew hunt the quickly

growing alien. The alien attacks, killing the rest of the crew, except for Ripley, who uses her cunning and wit to outsmart the creature.



Figure 14 Ridley Scott, *Alien*, 1979, 20th Century Fox, Still from film

This film differs greatly from the other two, mainly due to its setting. *Alien* (1979) is a science-fiction film, setting itself far into the future, surrounded by new technology, new gender norms and otherworldly creatures. With the film being so detached from everyday life, *Alien* (1979) has managed to explore its themes of birth and sexuality, in not only literal ways but also metaphorical ways. In *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Brood* (1979), both of our maternal figures give birth. *Alien* (1979) set to explore pregnancy and procreation in a very different way. Ximena Gallardo C. and C. Jason Smith compared many of the happenings in the film to portrayals of male rape and graphic birth. The large, intelligent, and terrifying alien creature is representative of the mother. It must reproduce and uses humans as its vessel or womb; regardless of age or gender. When Kane is attacked by the "facehugger", it attaches itself to his face, penetrating down his throat to plant its offspring into his stomach. In doing so, Kane also becomes the mother as he incubates the alien offspring. It is the man in the film, and not the woman, who is sexually assaulted. It is he who dies in pure pain as the alien births itself through his skin and chest. There is a lot of sexual imagery throughout the film, such as the Alien's vaginal mouth that is oozing goo, and its phallic head shape.³² The film is about the non-consensual, and its happening to a man. The screenwriter of the film, Dan O'Bannon, has stated that the "oral invasion" of one of the male crew members by the

³² Gallardo C, Ximena, and C. Jason Smith. *Alien Woman*. Continuum, 2004, pp. 13-61.

alien is payback for the attacks of many women in horror film. He also states how the films pull imagery from male fears, such as the lack of understanding of pregnancy and childbirth.³³ "One thing that people are all disturbed about is sex... I said 'That's how I'm going to attack the audience; I'm going to attack them sexually. And I'm not going to go after the women in the audience, I'm going to attack the men. I am going to put in every image I can think of to make the men in the audience cross their legs. Homosexual oral rape, birth. The thing lays its eggs down your throat, the whole number.'"³⁴ The film attempts to put men in the position that many women in horror film have been put in. Similarly, to *The Brood*, portraying pregnancy and birth through a male gaze evokes feelings of unease. *Alien* sets out to make men uncomfortable and think about the brutality of sexual violence. It forces men to reflect and understand the horrors of sexual violence. This film is in complete contrast to the previously mentioned films, *The Brood* (1979) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), which only focused on the female experience, as well as men's reaction to it. *Alien* (1979) takes these anxieties and makes them a horror for any audience, regardless of gender or sexuality.

The protagonist of the film is also a woman, Ripley, portrayed by Sigourney Weaver. She is ultimately the 'final girl' having outsmarted the monster. Ripley warns the crew of the implications of not quarantining the crew members who encountered the aliens. She also wants to kill any alien on the ship as she fears what could come of the crew. Her pleas are ignored. In the initial script, Ripley is not gendered as female or male; which is probably why her character does not follow the typical female stereotypes of the 70s.³⁵ There is a lack of gender throughout the film, reflecting the alien creature who is seemingly agender. Despite being a woman, she is strong-minded and resourceful, even slightly maternal and nurturing as she holds her cat, Jones in the final scene. She is portrayed as maternal but strong. At the end of the film, she is viewed as the hero; the only person who was cunning enough to outsmart the alien. The story is told through Ripley's perspective and we only learn new information throughout the film with her. This storytelling technique is similar to *Rosemary's Baby*, as we further sympathize with the characters. Ripley's character could be a response to, not only the trope of the "final girl", but also the new ideologies of the second-wave feminist movement.

³³ Kermode, Mark. "Scariest Moments In Film History". *The Guardian*, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2003/oct/19/features.review>.

³⁴ Cracked.com, Alien.: "Alien: A Film Franchise Based Entirely On Rape | Cracked.Com". *ScreenTalker.Org*, 2019, <http://www.screentalker.org/2011/01/alien-film-franchise-based-entirely-on.html>.

³⁵ Seymour, Tom. "Forty Years On, What Can Ridley Scott's Alien Teach The #MeToo Generation?". *Newstatesman.Com*, 2017, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/film/2019/03/forty-years-what-can-ridley-scott-s-alien-teach-metoo-generation>. Accessed 14 Oct 2019.

However, Ripley is still strongly gendered as a woman at the end of the film. In the final scene, Ripley removes her genderless crew uniform. The camera lingers on her, giving the scene a voyeuristic feeling. The Alien slowly reveals its phallic head to her, dripping and oozing with viscous liquid. The head of the Alien is very reminiscent of an erect penis. Ripley is now gendered as a sexually vulnerable woman. The film had treated Ripley as the opposite of many of the sexually vulnerable women found in horror film at the time, yet the mainstream male gaze eventually found its way into the film. Very suddenly after the apparent success of our hero, we are met with the impending doom of sexual violence. An article from Kristen Lopez suggests that in film, female actors often sacrifice their bodies to the camera. It is argued that excessive female nudity on screen is encouraged by Hollywood to cater to the audience and the constant consumption of female bodies. It is shown that this is clearly shown in statistics as per “A 2016 report from St. Mary’s University states actresses are three times likelier to be nude on-screen compared to their male counterparts and teenage girls are two times as likely in comparison to teen boys.”³⁶ *Alien*, a film which wished to slander the sexist ways of the films before it, still marketed and objectified its protagonist’s body. Barbara Creed notes “Ripley’s body is pleasurable and reassuring to look at. She signifies the ‘acceptable’ form and shape of woman.”³⁷ This film puts Ripley back into a



Figure 15 Ridley Scott, *Alien*, 1979, 20th Century Fox, Still from Film

³⁶ Lopez, Kristen. "A Matter Of Legitimacy: Female Nudity On-Screen | Features | Roger Ebert". Rogerebert.Com, 2018, <https://www.rogerebert.com/features/a-matter-of-legitimacy-female-nudity-on-screen>.

³⁷ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print

submissive, palatable version of a woman, in stark contrast to her portrayal previously in the film as she consistently outwits the alien.

The design of the Alien evokes ideas of sexuality, with its vaginal oozing mouth and its large phallic head. It was designed to disgust and invoke fear in the audience. However, the actual alien itself is rarely seen in the film. The absence of the alien in the shots of the film adds to the dread and tension. Similarly, to *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the film heavily plays on the fear of the unknown. Little is known about this monstrous alien, especially as it lurks in the dark corners of the screen. It crams itself into the pipes and small spaces within the ship, forcing the audience to scan the screen nervously to see if a glimpse can be caught. The birth of the alien creature reflects this waiting game and tension, as we suspect that only horror can



Figure 16 H.R Giger, Necronom IV, 1976, Art Print

come from this animalistic creature, who is mindlessly following its reproductive instinct. Although there is a lot of visual horror in the film, such as Kane's death, a lot of the tension and fear stems from not knowing where the creature lurks.

Contrasting to *The Brood*, the alien mother in this film is also producing villainous offspring at an exponential rate. The animalistic instinct to reproduce is reflected in both films, these murderous mothers cannot help the sadistic maternity that is natural to them. This production of offspring which is so natural to the mother is met with disgust and fear from all around it. Barbara Creed states that "When a woman is presented as monstrous, it is almost always concerning her mothering and reproductive functions."³⁸ With *Rosemary's Baby*, Rosemary was impregnated against her will by the Devil. There is a stark contrast with that of the crew members who were forcibly impregnated by the alien. Both forced to carry an othered baby. The crew members lives are compromised, however, as they will not survive the birth. There

³⁸ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print

is a horror to the male pregnancy as we instantly associate it with death. Barbara Creed notes that “Birth can exist only as the other face of death... the alien creature murderously gnaws its way through Kane’s belly, its birth leads to the male mother’s death... The scene in *Alien* where the alien creature gnaws its way out of the stomach of one of the astronauts is designed to command our attention while simultaneously punishing us for looking”³⁹ Rosemary fears for her child, not of it.

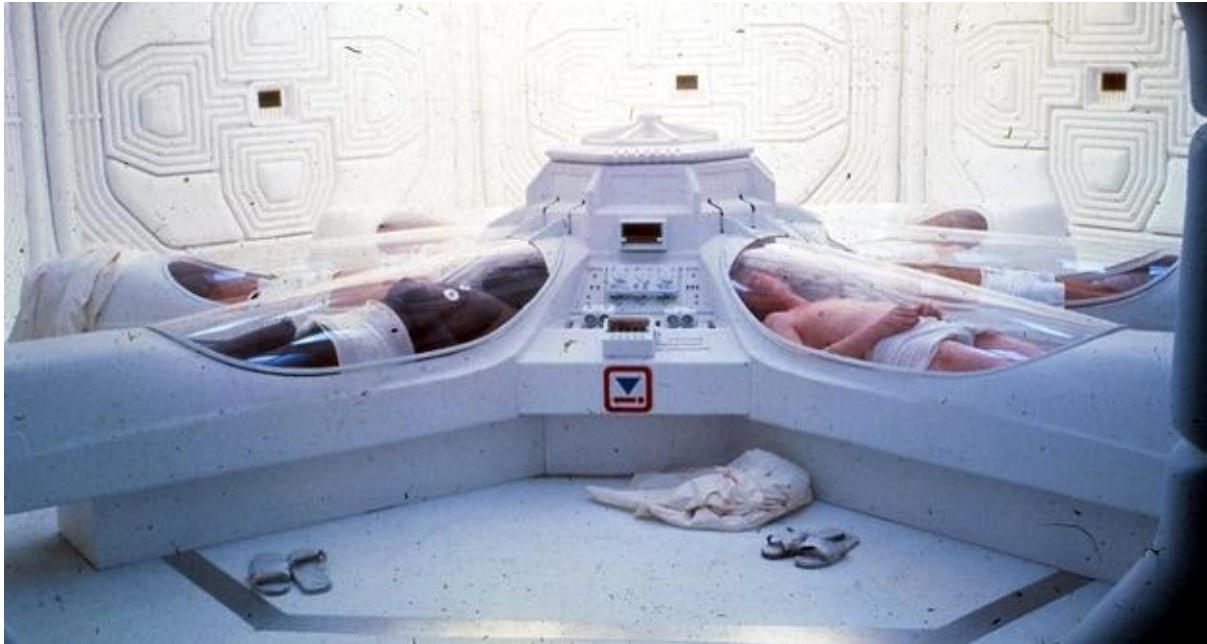


Figure 17 Ridley Scott, *Alien*, 1979, 20th Century Fox, Still from film

The visual imagery in the film is consistent with sexual imagery. Not only in the Alien’s design but throughout the film in its location and production design. The film looks at birth and sexuality as an idea and concept past childbirth and reproduction. The cave in which the crew finds the eggs resembles a vaginal opening. The crew climb in, entering the vulva to find the “womb” which is filled with eggs. The themes of invasion and penetration are explored more abstractly through this. The alien penetrating itself into the inner workings of the space ship also reflects anxieties of personal invasion, mimicking places in which someone should feel safe. The film opens with the crew members in a white room, they are in a deep sleep. The computer which controls the ship is called “Mother.” The white room in which the crew are asleep in resembles a womb. It could also be considered that the final birth of the film comes when Ripley escapes from a smaller spaceship out of the mothership.

³⁹ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print

The film also uses its unfamiliar location to bring in some current themes, although *Alien* can easily be read as a Freudian sexual nightmare. The film also explores capitalism and its workers. Although the film is set far into the future, labour exploitation and class is a clear issue within the ship. At the time, *Alien* was a rare film to represent working-class people in space. There is a clear hierarchy within the ship, with the mechanics, Brett and Parker, at the bottom as mechanics. Notably, Parker is the only person of colour on the ship and at the bottom of the ship's hierarchy. Despite there being a hierarchy within the ship, it is expected of all workers to obey the commands from the ship. The mission to the unknown planet is not part of the workers' given contract, yet it is still expected of them to partake, even if it is dangerous. In the eyes of the company, these labourers are expendable and easily replaced. This comes to its peak when it is discovered that a crewmate is an android, attempting to sabotage the remaining crew members for the company. "Mother" is representative of the company, becoming reminiscent of the monstrous mother which will terrorize or ruin her offspring.

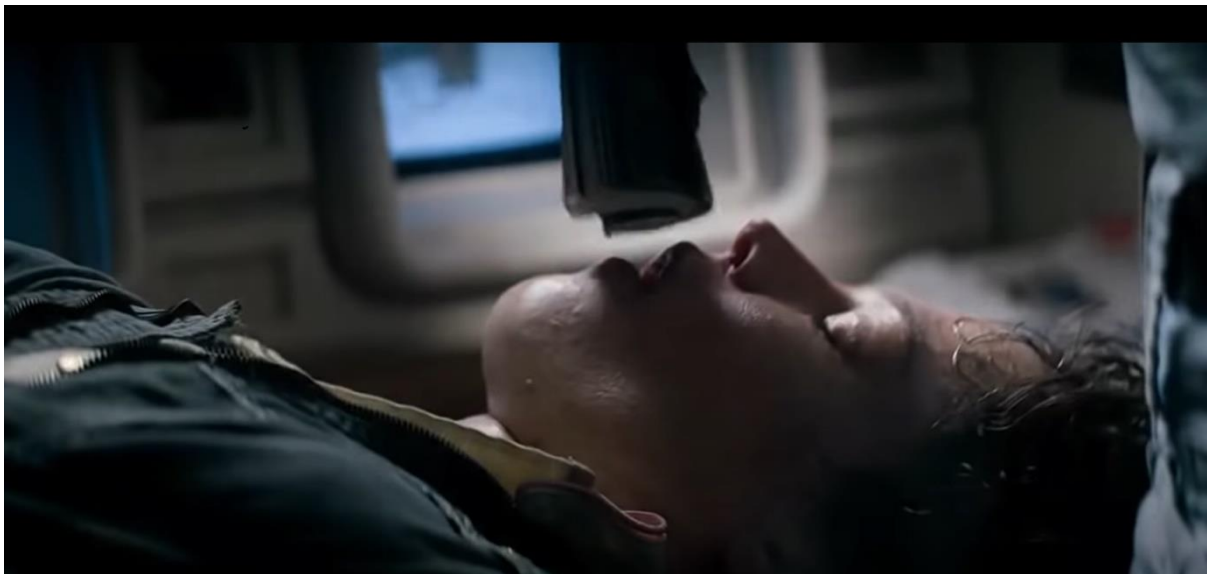


Figure 18 Ridley Scott, *Alien*, 1979, 20th Century Fox, Still from film

Ash, the robotized character also portrays traits of sexuality despite lacking any sexual function. Before he is revealed to be an android, Ash is queer coded through his actions. Gerard Loughlin states that the characters "prissy" acting as a method to bring an idea of "otherness" to the character. This femininity is more apparent in the film through deleted scenes, however.⁴⁰ There is a deleted scene in which Ripley and another female crew member discuss Ash, and if either of them has had intercourse with him. They are surprised to find

⁴⁰Loughlin, Gerard . *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology*. Challenges in contemporary theology. Wiley-Blackwell. 2004, print. p. 109.

either has not, further suggesting homosexuality onto Ash, however, it is later revealed that Ash is a robot. He attempts to kill Ripley with a pornographic magazine. It is to note that Ash attempted to kill Ripley in a way that mirrored the face-huggers earlier in the film, who Ash had so much admiration for. Ridley Scott notes that pornography is related to violence against women. It could be interpreted however that Ash is attempting to kill a human as he has observed from the aliens.⁴¹ There is also an uncanny aspect surrounding Ash, he has never been born. “A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden...”⁴² Haraway explores the cyborg as something that rejects rigid boundaries, such as the line between humans, animals, and machines. She also calls for the symbol of the cyborg to be representative of the possibilities outside traditional western gender and politics. As the cyborg is representative of stepping outside of the normal standards set for people, it can be seen as abject. In a film that conveys ideas of birth and death over and over, Ash is a stark contrast to that idea. He does not live and he certainly does not die in a way which we are familiar with. It is to note that the only character that is not born could be seen as a big antagonist to this film, as Ash represents the ideals of the company the crew are working for. If the company had not asked the crew to explore that planet, and later ask Ash to bring the alien back to its base, the crew would have survived.

Alien (1979) differs greatly from the other films of its time. It centred on ideas of birth from a male perspective, as well as using visual metaphors of birth and sexuality to drive the narrative. These techniques pushed the audience into further discomfort, as each segment of the film, including its production design, characters, and concept, oozes ideas of sex and sexuality. It played on men's lack of understanding of birth and female sexuality to create further horror and unease throughout. Although progressive for its time with one of the first female heroines, the film still fell victim to the male gaze and objectifying its lead actress.

⁴¹Thompson, Kristen. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique*. Harvard University Press. 1999 pp. 285, 293-300

⁴² Haraway, D., 1985. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. 1st ed. London: Macat International Limited, p.65.

Conclusion:

Through the research explored, it is clear that the representations of pregnancy and childbirth were vastly different within the horror film genre during the 1970s. Filmmakers were inspired by similar events happening in the world at the time, such as the Thalidomide Disaster, though despite that, films displayed a range of different narratives and perceptions. Although all three films analysed fit into the horror genre, they are also very distinctive from one another. *Rosemary's Baby* is a psychological thriller which entangles the audience, leaving them wondering what is the truth. *The Brood* is a classic Cronenberg film, full of visual horror and body horror, including brutal murder scenes and a lot of blood. *Alien* is a science fiction thriller action film which transports the audience deep into space. The portrayal of mothers is also extremely contrasting. Rosemary in *Rosemary's Baby* is the protagonist, we as an audience only seeing and knowing what she does. She is viewed as a good woman and through that, a good mother. The film is set up for the audience to root for her and wants the best for her. Nora in *The Brood* cannot be any more different. She is the antagonist which needs to be sought out and killed. She is a bad mother to Candice and thus she is a bad woman. *Alien* asks you to question who is the Mother? Is it Kane or the alien creature? In both ways, the mother is portrayed as something not traditionally feminine or female. However, one similarity in all three films explored is the offspring. Rosemary gives birth to the son of Satan who is said to look just like his father. Nora conceives villainous children who murder anyone who angers or upsets her. The alien produces more of its heinous kind. The horror comes from reproduction and the unknown of what will be produced. All three of these films show horror and fear of reproductive power. “...emphasizing that woman, because of her reproductive capabilities, is not far removed from the world of nature. Her generative functions position her on the side of the abject.”⁴³

As a woman and a design student, I found it greatly beneficial to explore these three different representations of the mother and birth in horror film from this time. In nearly all forms of media, the social context and background is absolutely crucial to form a comprehensive understanding. This research has allowed me to further understand how although informed and inspired from similar sources and a similar timeframe, the final product can be vastly different. As well as understanding the historical and social context, the intent of the director,

⁴³ Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print

writers and those involved in a piece of media also greatly impact what is being portrayed and represented. The representation of women in film is extremely vast, even across the three films explored in this research, although exploring similar themes in the horror genre. It is important to understand what this representation means, whether it is good representation or otherwise. As a designer, I know it is extremely important to be informed and recognise tropes or misleading representations. This is also true for designing and researching into different groups of people, such as ethnic groups or minorities.

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