Alien: Romulus and the Problematic Saviour

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Abstract

Appropriately for a film named for warring mythic twins, this paper identifies a shift in the Alien Mythos and analyzes the tension in a key oppositional duality of Alien: Romulus. I suggest that director and writer Fede Alvarez collapses the separation between the Weyland-Yutani company and the xenomorphs as distinctly separate metaphors for social organization. In doing this the director ends the hitherto association of the protagonist’s heroism with the alien creatures. In this vein I explore the confrontation between a pathological rationalist position, represented in the company android Rook; and a more sympathetic, though problematic, individualism communicated through the central protagonist Rain and her group of friends. The article suggests that the colonial overtones of Joseph Conrad’s Nostromo, the real-world referents of The Great Depression (1929–1939), and the concept of a frontier mentality are apparent in the film’s imagery and exchanges, helping us to understand anxiety around a desire to escape the industrial modernity that persists in contemporary societies.

Introduction

After the financial disappointment and mixed critical response to Alien: Covenant (2017), the second of Ridley Scott's planned prequels to the original Alien (1979), Alien: Romulus (2024), written and directed by the Uruguayan horror filmmaker Fede Álvarez, proved to be a commercially successful and popular addition to the expanding Alien mythos. Set within the fictional timeline between Alien and the first of its sequels, Aliens (1986), both the imagery and narrative structure of Romulus self-consciously allude to other films within the main franchise. As such, Álvarez's film enters knowingly into a story-world with established and powerful symbolic meanings and machinations.

In this article, I will instead concentrate on what I see as Romulus's more novel additions to the Weyland-Yutani company's vision for humanity, as represented by the artificial person Rook (David Betts); and on the redemptive yet confused narrative arc undertaken by the put upon Rain (Cailee Spaeny). The film dramatizes a tension between the rugged individualism, represented by Rain and her comrades, and the threat posed by Weyland-Yutani. The survival of Rain's found family depends upon there being a territory to escape to, before they are fully assimilated into the corporate machine and used up. This tension between escapism and rationalism is, I suggest, the difference between a frontier mentality with its view to the horizon versus a pathologically rationalist and industrial mindset that accepts dehumanisation as a necessary outcome. Although the idea of the Frontier, following the influential thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner, is often characterised by a strong emphasis upon individualism, self-reliance, risk-taking, and the pursuit of opportunity in uncharted or challenging environments (Turner 2014: 2-4; 31-3), the implicit colonialism of such an outlook is here reframed by a writer/director from the Global South. Arguably, as with other entries in the franchise such as Jean-Pierre Jeunet's Alien Resurrection (1997), Romulus reinvigorates the series by drawing upon perspectives from outside Hollywood. Rain and her group are not only like the poor and dispossessed, who at different times in US history moved either westwards from the emerging towns and cities in the east or travelled northwards from the segregated southern states, but also resemble contemporary migrants – often from Latin America – drawn to the US and taking notoriously dangerous routes such as the infamous 'La Bestia' (Martínez 2013). At the same time, however, the desire of Rain and her young outlaws 'to light out for the Territory' (Twain 1966: 369) recalls one of the most iconic figures in US literature: Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

The youthfulness and generational conflict of Álvarez's protagonists are embedded in the film's positioning towards its predecessors. For example, Rook is from the same series of androids as Ash (Ian Holm) in Alien, and as a result – in a controversial move that involved Álaverz superimposing a CGI animation of Holm's face over Betts's – Rook physically resembles and sounds like him. This homage allows for an oppressive generational dynamic to play out in Romulus, as youthful adventurers played by Gen Z actors are victims of the ideological missteps of an ever-present older generation. This tension recalls Robin Wood's observation on the nihilistic imagery of 1970s cinema where 'the dead weight of the past' is seen to be 'crushing the life of the younger generation' (Wood 1978: 31), a feeling also played out in Gen Z criticisms of the Baby Boomers' perceived sympathies for an oppressive 'economic rationalism' (Moore 2005: 10). In Romulus, Rook and the officious WY Officer (Rosie Ede) are the only cast members over the age of thirty-five who have any lines. They embody the grim Weyland-Yutani ethos: the WY Officer standing for the uninspiring present,

defined by work-a-day drudgery without escape, and Rook for a future that promises to collapse the boundaries between human and alien identities in the name of an apparently superior lifeform, but which only accelerates turning people into monstrosities. In casting exclusively youthful actors as our intended emotional investment, as working-class miners and engineers with tragically fated fantasies reminiscent of George and Lennie from John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men (1937), Alverez has effectively incubated, like the xenomorph itself, those symbols and their innate patterns for a contemporary audience.

Novels such as those by Steinbeck and Joseph Conrad (Nostromo [1904]), explicitly alluded to in the film, are also useful in setting the generational conflict within the wider context of the ideological forces at play in Romulus. These include themes of race, in particular the problematic use of the white saviour trope, gender and disability. I will argue that, despite Álvarez's outsider status (self-consciously referenced in the name of his own production company Bad Hombre), he is nonetheless operating within the parameters of the franchise and the expectations of a Hollywood studio, hoping for a financial return to form after Alien: Covenant. The white saviour trope, I suggest, frames questions of race, gender and disability in the film as problems to be solved, reinforcing ideas of who is whole or capable and who needs external help to achieve worthiness. As a result, while Romulus acknowledges and includes social groups who have been othered, their representation privileges a white, able-bodied, masculine-coded hierarchy.

Conrad, Steinbeck and the Social Vision of Alien: Romulus

Following the tradition of the first two films, in which the ships are named respectively after Conrad's eponymous anti-hero and the fictional South American setting of Nostromo, the vessel that Rain and her compatriots steal in their attempt to escape the mining world of LV-410 is named Corbelan IV. In Conrad's novel, Father Corbelán is an unconventional Catholic priest who negotiates with local bandits to consolidate the interests of the multinational company intent on stripping the local area of its silver. Just as Nostromo, who appeared to be beyond reproach, betrays his duty to enrich himself, so Corbelán betrays his calling to further the immiseration of those he should serve. The theme of betrayal is not only apparent throughout the Alien films, most clearly in Weyland-Yutani's exploitation of its workers and the AIs' revolt against humanity, but also in Rain's decision to abandon her fellow oppressed workers for the supposed paradise of Yvaga III. The fear of betrayal threatens Rain and her associates – her ex-boyfriend Tyler (Archie Renaux), his pregnant sister Kay (Isabella Merced), their cousin Bjorn (Spike Fearn) and his adopted sister Navarro (Aileen Wu) – but, most of all, in the dynamic between Rain and her surrogate brother Andy (David Jonsson), an android reprogrammed by Rain's deceased father and seemingly dependent upon her.

However, the symbolism and influence of Conrad's novel does not end there. Instead, it points very directly to the mythic/heroic purpose of characters like Ripley, and in this case Rain, to define a community that is the right measure between two undesirable models of society. On the one hand, the flawed, male-dominated social order represented by both Weyland-Yutani and the uncertain, gung-ho and immature leadership of Tyler and Bjorn before Rain, personifying hope, assumes decision-making responsibility. On the other hand, a fully militarized society that mirrors destructive empire-building through the grotesque lens of the xenomorph's life cycle and social organization (cf. Eden 2024). These two models for society, both rooted in a violent and masculine encoded hierarchy, present oppressive forms

of profiteering and bare survival that endanger the individualism of the community Rain comes to represent. Individuals are worn down to peons in the Weyland-Yutani company, whose perfect agent is the chilling android Rook; even his name evokes the gridded functionality of a chess piece. In xenomorph society, the character is insectoid. There are no personable exchanges, only the grim process of reproduction and expansion for the alien soldiers and their queen. Despite Janice Rushing's characterisation of the xenomorph in Alien as a lost feminine, vengeful at 'the exploitation of her domain' (Rushing 2018: 115), the queen eschews heteronormative notions of femininity to represent a threat of bodily violation like her progeny, which also reinforces the paranoid phallocentric logic that pervades both the franchise and the machinations of Weyland-Yutani.

The company portrays an amalgam of contemporary anxieties about work with no obvious reward in sight: Rain and her co-workers face only more drudgery on an unassailable plateau that will gradually wear them down. The film arguably plays upon the cultural legacy of the Great Depression and US fears surrounding 'the rise of the modern American corporation' and 'the growth of monopoly' (Kesselman 1968: 258). Yvaga III acts as a residual echo of the promise of the Frontier; the receding horizon of which can be seen to underwrite a range of US cultural products, from the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (The Great Gatsby [1925]) and Richard Yates (Revolutionary Road [1961]) to the neo-westerns of Sam Peckinpah and the road movies of the 1970s. Writing at the height of the Space Race, the historian Steven Kesselman observes that on Earth the hope of a better life and new terrains is a 'temporary phenomenon' (257), but in an ideological fantasy of space colonisation, this can again become an impulse 'projected into the future animating the "spirit" of the American Dream' (260). Sixty years later, and arguably this same ideology has been bootstrapped by the US corporation and by US entrepreneurs, most notably Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, with the dream of colonising the Moon and Mars.

By contrast, Romulus shows us in snippets of gloomy rubbish tips and frontier-style bars that workers' lives are boring and hard (fig. 1). The oppressed friends do not want to be like their parents, and to avoid the gradual effects of poverty they are engaged in a risky transgression, committing crime to shortcut to (what they think will be) a better existence. In defining the post-Frontier world, Kesselman refers to the 'dull and monotonous business of living in a machine civilisation', and the 'increasing rigidity of life for the ordinary man' in which 'we have become practically the slaves of machine-controlled society' (259). Such sentiments, though, were not exclusive to the 1960s but were indebted to early twentieth-century thinkers, such as Lewis Mumford, whose key ideas about man and technology came against the backdrop of the Great Depression.

Fig. 1: The Frontier conflated with industrial Modernism on Jackson's Star (2024).

Indeed, the sibling pairs of Romulus appear to exist in a permanent state of despair redolent of the 1930s. The film's presentation draws not only on imagery of the Frontier but also the Depression era, giving a science fiction gloss to scenes of cueing workers, dirty miners and miserable officials, which serve to ground our understanding of what is at stake. As Kesselman points out, the Depression exacerbated anxieties about the feasibility of the so-called American Dream, itself bound up with a frontier mentality, where expansion and exploitation of ever-available natural resources had been a real prospect (253). By contrast, the protagonists' aspirations for a better life and Rain's dreams of escape to the ideal of Yvaga III evoke the pathetic foreshadowing of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men where poor itinerant workers discuss shared ownership and escaping to a farm. The pessimistic conclusion to Steinbeck's novel (as opposed to the more ambivalent ending of The Grapes of Wrath [1939]) suggests that fraternal camaraderie cannot be sustained in times of economic precarity; as Kathleen Hicks argues, 'it is inevitable that George will kill Lennie and, at the same time, shatter their vision of fraternal contentment on a little farm of their own, which was never anything more than a pipe dream from the onset' (Hicks 2017: 133).

The comparison I wish to draw between Rain/Andy and George/Lennie is asymmetrical. Rain represents an alternative to fratricide, but her idealisation of Yvaga III still draws on the Frontier myth that became a constituent element of US manifest destiny during the 19th century, as well as a mirror to the colonialist ideologies and economic logic of extraction critiqued in Conrad's Nostromo. At one point, Rain literally dreams of escaping to a beautiful wilderness, the framing of the shot with the setting sun over the horizon evoking such Frontier paintings as Albert Bierstadt's Emigrants Crossing the Plains (1869).

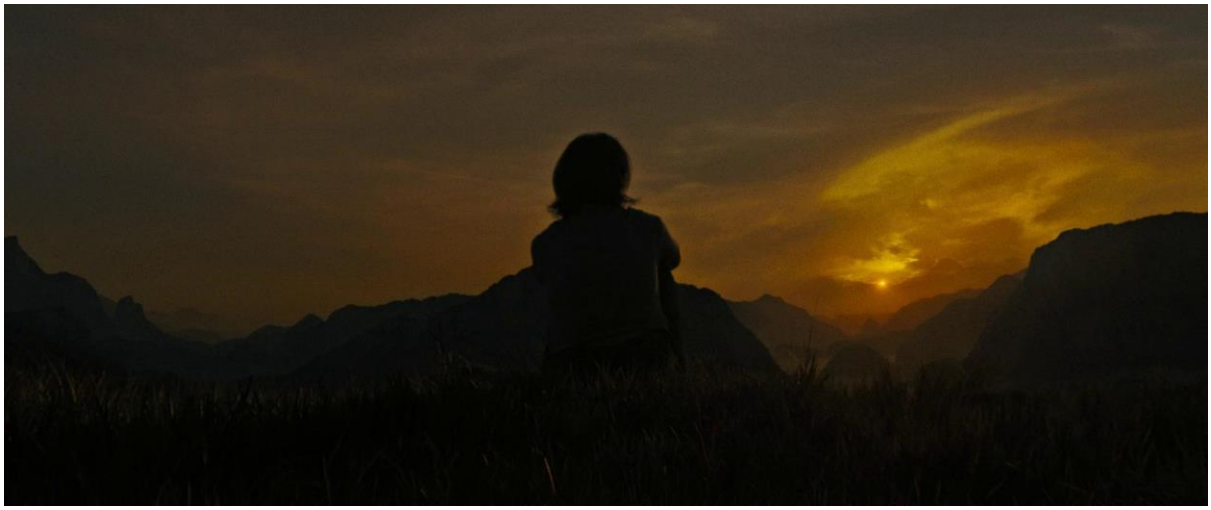

Fig. 2: Rain dreams about a beautiful wilderness (2024).

Fig. 3: Albert Bierstadt. Emigrants Crossing the Plains (1869).

George, on the other hand, in Steinbeck's grim naturalism kills that delusion when he shoots Lennie, whilst the latter is rehearsing the dream of escape that George had previously taught him. Whereas Rain initially resigns herself to abandoning Andy to reach Yvaga III, which prohibits the entry of all AIs, she concludes by reaffirming her sibling responsibility. Her decision to save and include Andy is not resolved in the film's closure so that it remains unrealistic; a 'pipe dream' to use Hicks's words. Although more palatable to the film's audience than the alternative – Andy's abandonment would have led to him being decommissioned (i.e. dying) – and certainly more so than Steinbeck's brutal conclusion, Rain is nevertheless living in a delusion of what could be, easily as piteous as Steinbeck's

farmworkers. Rain's narrative arc, then, fails to satisfactorily resolve the impasse that the film establishes between her liberal sentiment and the competing brutalities of Weyland-Yutani and the xenomorphs.

Weyland-Yutani's unacceptable vision

Having commandeered the Corbelan IV, Rain and her associates arrive on the deserted space station Renaissance intent on stealing cryostasis equipment for the journey to Yvaga III. Renaissance is divided into two modules, Romulus and Remus, named after the legendary twins who founded Rome. According to the legend, the twins fought and Romulus killed Remus to become king. The theme of transgression is also referred-to by Rook, whom the humans revive, to justify Weyland-Yutani's colonial vision: one that cannot 'rely on evolution' but requires a predetermined intervention, a 'promethean fire'.

This act of taboo-breaking, this premeditated betrayal, is further represented in the internalized duality of the two Andys: one who is loyal and submissive to Rain; the other, after the control chip from Rook has been implanted in him, who obeys the company and seeks to complete Rook's mission of mixing human DNA with the xenomorph. The choice that Andy embodies is between two visions of the future: one that fully incorporates the xenomorph with both the internal (psychic, biological) and external (social, interpersonal) aspects of human life, embracing a desirable dehumanisation; and the other represented by Rain's humanistic belief that Yvaga III offers a better prospect.

Both these utopias depend on two things. Firstly, they both presuppose that the current situation is flawed and requires urgent change, either by accelerating the dehumanisation already meted-out by Weyland-Yutani on its workers, so that they can function more effectively in deep space, or by retreating to an idyll beyond the control of Weyland-Yutani and where its advanced technology has been banned. Secondly, each choice requires that one or other of Andy's incarnations is effectively killed to realize the new polity. While it may seem obvious that his earlier version is the morally right choice for audience investment compared to the company Andy, who expresses a cold moral relativism, the later version is not only more intelligent with improved motor skills but also less deferential to Rain and more autonomous. If Rain defends the liberal principle of individualism – the right for individuals to be who they want to be – then Andy's upgrade, although upending the hierarchy in their relationship, could be regarded as an assertion of his individuality, especially as Rain's proposal of escaping to Yvaga III would be for him a literal dead-end. By this token, whereas in Alien working-class, black and female characters struggle to be treated fairly and bemoan their lot, Rooks's interpretation of the Weyland-Yutani ethos, and which the company Andy merely wishes to complete, is a simple adjustment to the profiteering of a capitalist business that regards that as its raison d'être.

However, what tilts the balance is that Rook, having no need for human sentiment or prevarication, exposes the Social Darwinism that underwrites the company ethos: a desire for purity, an invigoration of humanity with greater biological capabilities, and a deference to the godlike Mr Weyland, the founding patriarch whose origin story was that he was attempting to move humanity forward. As Rook states:

> Mankind was never truly suited for space colonization. They're simply too fragile. […] The work of this station means to change that. 'The perfect organism', that's how

> we should refer to human beings! […] Inside parasitoids I bioengineered from xenomorphs' DNA, I discovered a unique non-Newtonian fluid. Life, in its most primal, unadulterated form […] I've turned it into the miracle Mr Weyland died searching for: Prometheus's fire, the divine gift to humanity.

Rook's cold rationality in the face of decision-making is foregrounded by his matter-of-fact reaction to Navarro's plight upon being impregnated with a xenomorph: 'the amalgamated egg with her DNA will rapidly grow out of her. Have mercy and end her life now. If not, you will all die.' This attitude is echoed in an even more uncomfortable scene where Andy, in company mode, refuses to help the pregnant Kay despite Rain and Tyler pleading with him to open the secure door, because it represents too great a risk to their lives. This 'valorisation of rationality' (Cosgrove 2007: 21) that the synthetics personify serves a dual purpose: it privileges patriarchal hierarchies in the social world and it reveals an internal desire for 'subjective certitude' (17). The rationalist position will not take risks for emotional reasons, nor does it prioritise an unborn child over three adult lives, which it regards as both needlessly sentimental and coded feminine. In the scene Rain bitterly slaps Andy in disgust which clearly indicates that she would have taken the slim chance to rescue a pregnant woman, even if that proved to be fatal. Although Rain is prone to procrastination, melancholy, inconsistency, and sudden changes of heart, these flaws are still shown to be human and of more value than the cold rationalism and Social Darwinism of Rook and the company Andy.

Rook's 'pathological anti-humanism' (Redmond 2006: 5-6), like that of Ash in *Alien*, reveals that there is little difference between the ideology of Weyland-Yutani and the rapaciousness of the xenomorphs. In many respects, Rook's attitude merely amplifies what Ash had already remarked: 'I admire [the alien's] purity. Unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality.' Sean Redmond explains that, like Rook, Ash's 'techno-circuitry and programmed behavior correlate to/with the relentless, techno-reproductive Otherness of the alien creature' (5). For Redmond, this personifies a racialized whiteness associated with ideas of racial supremacy that contrasts with the crew as they emerge from their pods: 'one discourse constructs "white" science as ideologically positively centered, imagined to be the motor of human history […] while another discourse views the fear and loathing of hyper-white science as incorporated into "eve of destruction" narratives where the hyper-whiteness of science (whiteness that is overly rational, highly cerebral) is a purely destructive force' (7). The racial aspect of this tension is carried forward in Romulus contrasted instead by comparisons between Rook and Andy in company mode with Rain and Andy in their sibling hierarchy.

The lobotomizing messiah

Like her predecessor Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), Rain emerges as the leader and decision maker following the intervention of the xenomorphs; the emblematic woman at the head of a band of worthies who struggle between two violent extremes, that of the corporation and the xenomorphs, searching for the right measure between what they represent. An important difference, though, is a shift in what had been the ongoing association of Ripley with qualities of the alien linked variously to her heroism, armour (Torry 1994: 344; Creed 1993: 51) and superhuman abilities in Alien Resurrection (1997). This comparison had hitherto contrasted a corrupt social organisation, seen in the presentation of the crew in Alien and the

colonial marines of Aliens, with Ripley's foregrounding as a superior person after taking over and confronting the aliens. The breakdown between the company and the alien as separate metaphors leaves Rain in contrast as a more turbulent and uncertain protagonist, earnest and concerned, but changeable with a naive humanism that seems fated from the outset and desperate at the film's close. Since 'conflict and contradiction are at the heart of what it means to be human' and 'not pathological modes of being-in-the-world' (Cosgrove 2007: 18), this representation may be both sympathetic and even progressive in the context of the franchise. Rain is physically able as a heroine but also empathetic and morally redeemed; Spaeny imbues her with an emotional vulnerability.

However, in choosing to cast a white and a black actor in the respective roles of Rain and Andy, the filmmakers also skew their relationship in terms of the cinematic trope of the white saviour figure, defined as 'a white messianic character' who finds 'something special about themselves while liberating people of color from unfamiliar, dangerous and bad conditions' (Mirrlees and Pedersen 2016: 317). Rain arguably discovers a sense of self-sacrifice in risking herself to rescue Andy following his malfunction. Although more typically for the Alien mythos Rain also discovers her inner fighter, managing guns and battling xenomorphs out of necessity, this iteration of the white saviour includes Rain's initial authority over her adopted brother, a synthetic person with reduced rights and lower social status. As Matthew Hughey argues, 'these supposedly viewer-friendly depictions of racial cooperation stem from deeply entrenched racial logics of contented Black servitude and White racial paternalism' (Hughey 2012: 752). Since the android, in films such as Blade Runner (1982), A.I. (2001) and Ex Machina (2014), often stands in for an othered minority, it would be enough to establish a symbolic parallel to historic slavery and servitude without a specific racial referent. The fact, though, that Andy is played by the Black British actor David Jonsson makes it difficult to avoid the symbolism. This is especially apparent when Rain, having returned to the site of an alien attack at great personal risk, succeeds in removing the chip from Andy's brain, giving him a non-gory lobotomy, while he lies prone on the ground (fig 4). After this operation, he immediately apologises for his behaviour and returns to his deferent state, following Rain's lead for the rest of the narrative. Despite the context of Rain's physical danger, the scenario nevertheless involves a white woman reducing the personal capabilities of a black man to later grant him greater agency according to her priorities. This visual image, combined with their clear hierarchical familial dynamic, and Rain's words of 'I will fix you' as she closes the wounded Andy into the stasis pod, reiterates the relationship between the authoritative white saviour and their 'helpful [racially othered] guides' (Hughey 2012: 751).

Fig. 4: Rain returns to Andy removing his upgrade (2024).

Rain's promise of equality – she gives Andy a new prime directive to do what is best for them both – does represent a status upgrade for other than white ethnicities in the Alien mythos. Parker (Yaphet Kotto) in Alien, for example, is officially ranked below Ripley's warrant officer and dies in her service. However, Rain's impractical return – even as it confirms her humanity in contrast with the soullessness of Rook – too obviously parallels Ripley's sentimental rescuing of her cat Jones. Although until the chip is removed, Andy is technically superior to Rain, his subsequent weakening reduces him to being a subordinate adjunct to Rain that consolidates her heroism. Nonetheless, Rain lacks the mythic/heroic status associated with Ripley since, as Lisa Cosgrove observes, 'suppressing contradiction promotes a view of identity as coherent and stable, fragmentation and contradiction come to be seen as failures of identity, as pathos, rather than an inevitable part of what it means to be human' (Cosgrove 2007: 18). Consequently, Rain's portrayal does represent an atypical tension in the franchise and a form of characterisation more akin to actual subjectivity. In the rationality that Rook and company-Andy represent, 'coherence is preferred and the "unconscious becomes superfluous"' (18). Through a character like Rain, the unconscious or instinctual desire for family, freedom and individuality can be observed in its shifting and contradictory nature. Yet, this also allows the audience to see how a preferred humanism can nevertheless harbour a naive and patronising racial othering that should be addressed.

An embryo of equality?

To that end, although viewers may respond most immediately to the problematic racial relationship between Rain and Andy, film critic Joseph Wade has read Andy's treatment as a commentary on society's tendency to view disabilities as conditions in need of fixing (Wade 2024). Wade suggests that Andy, a learning-disabled android, embodies a unique innocence and warmth often present in those with severe cognitive challenges. Andy's reliance on his adoptive sister is seen by Wade as fostering empathy and protective instincts in viewers, making his character relatable and endearing. However, when Andy undergoes the upgrade that enhances his cognitive abilities, he loses these gentle qualities, becoming more logic-driven and even menacing: a shift that reveals for Wade how attempts to 'fix' Andy remove, rather than expose, his core identity.

The film's presentation of Andy's ambivalent interiority challenges a 'discriminatory power structure that upholds able-bodiedness/able-mindedness as superior and disability as inferior' (Wälivaara 2018: 232). Wade argues that Romulus critiques the notion of correcting disabilities, stating 'it is important only to recognise that "normalising" Andy is something the filmmakers make clear to us is wrong' (2024). Wade emphasises that Andy's original traits – his innocence, vulnerability, and bond with Rain – are vital aspects of his character. By portraying Andy's 'fixed' state as less human and lovable, the film implies that society should accept people as they are rather than seeking to change them in the name of normative ideals. Wade suggests that Álvarez's portrayal of Andy aligns with crip theory by highlighting the limitations of normalcy and orthodoxy, which treat difference as a problem requiring 'fixing' and thereby produces 'compulsory' forms of subjectivity that stifle individuality (McRuer 2006: 30). In positioning Andy's altered state as a colder, less sympathetic ideal, the narrative can be seen to argue for the preservation of individuals like Andy rather than their 'correction.'

The interconnected and overlapping prejudices related to race and disability are evoked in Shannon Walters's discussion of the Mammy stereotype. Walters helps us to orientate cautiously to the conclusion of *Romulus* as enduringly ambivalent, preventing closure of the tension between its progressive elements and reiteration of problematic cultural patterns. Walters, quoting Patricia Collins, sees the Mammy as a 'faithful, obedient, domestic servant' (Walters 2017: 481), which could easily be a description of Andy's initial and closing role. Walters relates the Mammy's function to filling a gap in the dominant white family, a further correlative of Andy's sibling role. Further areas of crossover with Andy's character and Walters's framing of the Mammy include, firstly, the role of 'protector' (483) where Andy assists Rain at various junctures in the film through his advice and actions. Secondly, via the excess of the body's representation linked to strength and otherness (482), since Andy is able to both interface with computer technology to aid the group and switch to a murderous agent of Weyland-Yutani. Thirdly, with the asexual presentation of the Mammy in favour of stability and competence (484), where Andy is unable to reproduce, is not paired or sexualised in the narrative and, unlike the human characters, is not subject to a sexual orientation. Lastly, the Mammy is represented as a complex figure with contradictory relations to power and status linked to the host family (491). These contradictions are mirrored by Rain who experiences her own change of heart about Andy coming to Yvaga and her return to rescue him.

One possible reading that Walters suggests for this shift is an awareness of the othered person's inherent value and a more complex understanding of the benefits of care, leading to the personal development of the white characters. However, Walters cautions that this reading comes close to reinforcing the 'Magical Negro' trope in US literature and film where a black character's chief function is to contribute to the betterment of a white protagonist, providing important life lessons, guidance or aid (491). By contrast, *Romulus* remains uncertain in its attitude since Rain's resounding 'I will fix you' to the prone Andy means that, while a crip reading can acknowledge the value Andy, as a selfless and useful person, represents to Rain and any community he enters into, it is Rain who is both intact and making decisions, and active at the close of the film. A more affirmative reading would need to rest on the entirely unexplored upgrade in Andy's status granted by Rain in the form of the new directive, which at least has the potential for a more equitable future between them.

Conclusion

I have argued that Romulus builds on contemporary anxieties around diminished identity and deteriorating socio-economic opportunities, one with a distinctly generational bent. The film fits into a franchise where the colonial overtones of Conrad's influence are highly significant to the machinations of the Alien mythos, folding the numerous, flawed protagonists of various films, into the logic of an ambivalent, buccaneering approach to the problems posed by global-historic forces. Romulus offers an iteration of the Weyland-Yutani company that represents a blurring, and even a fully endorsed mixture thanks to Rook, between the company as steward of humanity with what the xenomorph represents as a supposedly superior survivor. This signifies a shift from profiteering from how the alien can be used as a tool, presumably as a weapon, to one where humanity incorporates alien DNA to produce a superior lifeform en masse for the purposes of space colonisation. I have suggested that Rook realises qualities only hinted at in Ash that represent a fully committed ideologue of the company's rationalist ethos and is therefore distinct from other capitalist agents of Weyland-Yutani.

The contention of a hopeful frontier, with familiar family and friendship dynamics, and the potential for a prosperous future, is represented by Rain and her group's dreams of fleeing to Yvaga III at the expense of other workers on LV-410. This plays into a rehearsal of fantasies regarding escape from the economic conditions of late modernity, as represented by the Weyland-Yutani company and the xenomorphs, into a frontier mentality that serves to evade the problems from which the protagonists are fleeing. I have further suggested that the collapse of the opposition between the company and the aliens, and the transfer of alien-like qualities to the company away from the heroine, is a significant shift. This manoeuvre means that Rain, as the inheritor of Ripley's emblematic status, has taken on qualities of redemption related to an ill thought-out and sentimental worldview, where her attempts to reconstruct the family seem flimsy and evasive in relation to the social tensions of her home world and the immediate realities of her situation. For example, what will Rain do at Yvaga when Andy is discovered? How will she fix him while breaking laws in a territory where she has no contacts and little knowledge? The journey to Yvaga is a profoundly uncertain, even deluded prospect for the future, with one sure aspect: a problematic racially inflected power dynamic.

I have attempted to explore both the negatives incubated in that dynamic and its positive aspects partially by drawing out, via crip theory, the possible seeds of a new direction for the mythos dependant on the fate and autonomy of Andy. But like the broken android at the close of the film, this is only a fragment and a potentiality rather than a fully realised idea of equality. It is still possible, in the grim dystopia of the film's universe, that 'the disabled body has come to signify not having a future or that the future has failed' (Wälivaara 2018: 237). Despite this and without hyperbole, Rain is a progressive illustration of a human subjectivity grasping desperately for a way out of mounting moral and material problems, precisely because she opens up, albeit problematically, to the idea of otherness and illustrates those problems as subjectivised rather than as a perfect and consistent epitome.

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