The Bio-Weapons Division: Power, Gender, Nature, and Technology in the *Alien* Films and *Dark Angel*

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Science fiction texts often comment on current debates or controversies about science and technology, adding dramatic tension and contemporary relevance. In this way science fiction helps to interpret how science impacts on our lives as well as engaging popular interest. Yet anyone familiar with science fiction knows that it rarely lets science/ technology go unchallenged. Many American science fiction films are almost technophobic in their presentation of robots run amok, or the latest scientific advances gone wrong. This may partly be because science fiction deals with issues previously marked out for religion and morality.[1] Genetic engineering in particular crystallises these engagements. From Dolly the sheep, to cloning for organ transplants, to designer babies, genetic engineering has rarely been out of the news for long in recent years. The science fiction texts I discuss here introduce another element by underlining the gendering of science and nature (as implicit in all three of the above quotations), showing female bodies exploited by male science/ scientists.

What I am calling the bio-weapons division here denotes a version of the science-nature opposition that underlies so much science fiction. Science and technology is often represented as rational, hegemonic, and masculinised while in contrast, nature is frequently represented as chaotic, Other, and feminised ("Mother Nature"). Given this binary opposition, the term bio-weapons could imply that nature/ biology itself can be a weapon, a threat to hegemonic, patriarchal power. Of course, not all science fiction maintains such strict binary oppositions and bio-weapon can also indicate a conjunction of nature and technology. All of these interpretations can be found in the *Alien* films[2] and in the television show *Dark Angel* (2000-2002).

I argue that Max, the protagonist of *Dark Angel*, and Ripley, the protagonist of four *Alien* films, have complex roles to play in the negotiation of the science/ nature opposition. Max is a bio-weapon herself, a transgenic super-soldier created by a secret military operation called Manticore (named after a mythical creature, a hybrid of other animals). The *Alien* films are concerned from the start with the potential of the alien species as a weapon, and the developing connection between Ripley and the aliens culminates in various alien-human hybrids in *Alien Resurrection* (1997). Both protagonists, therefore, become biological products of science and, as such, conjunctions of science and nature.

Science, nature, and bio-weapons each offer their own distinctive threats within the texts. In science fiction movies the trope of the mad scientist meddling with creation often means that science is presented as "bad" in religious/ moral terms; the over-reaching mad scientist usurps the divine function of creation. Furthermore, previous U.S. science fiction texts had presented science or technology as the major threat to human protagonists (as in *The Terminator*

1984). Yet recent science fictions have been more accommodating of technology, perhaps because the lives of those residing in rich Western countries now seem inescapably permeated by it. Contemporary elements derived from cyberpunk confuse a straightforward equation of science as "bad" with "good" use of technology, aligned with resistance to hierarchical structures and therefore with liberation – a popular big-screen example is the *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003). The "Streaming Freedom Video Bulletin" of Eyes Only, the hacker in *Dark Angel,* is "the only free voice left" in post-apocalyptic Seattle. Here science/ technology is double-edged: the technology that puts "hover drones" (flying surveillance cameras) on every street corner at the same time allows Eyes Only"s political message to be delivered to the masses. Yet how far can the hegemonic power that wields the products of technology, bio-weapons or otherwise, be subverted? The distinction is largely about who is controlling the technology, and to what end. Thus one of the questions about bio-weapons that I pursue in this paper is, who is in control of them and what are the effects of this?

In contrast, nature is threatening because it upsets or challenges rational or scientific control and it is often feminised as a way of conflating various types of oppositions (thus science/ nature maps onto mind/ body and masculine/ feminine). The bio-weapon combines all of these threats: Max and the Ripley clone in *Alien Resurrection* are creations of future mad scientists but their "natural" or "human" elements also enable, even encourage them to turn against their creators. As protagonists they are threatening because of their gender and several commentators identify Ripley as disturbing the status quo well before she becomes a bio-weapon like the aliens (and the aliens themselves display a mixture of "masculine" and "feminine" qualities). An established line of female/ feminist thought (see the work of Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, to name just a few) argues that the female body has been constructed as messy, abject, impure, or pathologised as a way of upholding clear distinctions and boundaries between categories like masculine/ feminine or mind/ body. The threat of the bio-weapon, therefore, is located in its transgression of boundaries; both Ripley and Max blur distinctions between nature/science, masculine/ feminine, mind/body. Max and Ripley are nevertheless presented as just warriors and as properly "human" despite their hybrid nature, and I suggest that their being female actually intensifies this presentation. Gender is used to emphasise their position as heroes precisely because of the binary oppositions in play, and while at times the science/nature division is subverted, the presentation of Ripley and Max often reinforces and maintains binary constructions of gender.

The Female Action Hero

My exploration of the science/nature split begins with the role of the female action hero. We might expect the female action hero to use the technological weapons of science fiction or the hardware of action. Certainly one poster for *Aliens* (1986) featured Ripley with pulse rifle and flamethrower at the

ready, yet Max refuses to use guns despite her military training. The use of weapons by action heroes like Ripley in *Aliens* aroused some debate about gender representation and "masculinisation." In one sense this might be beside the point; in *Aliens*, as in all the films, despite the fetishised hardware wielded by soldiers of the Colonial Marine Corps, the most effective weapons are low-tech – fire, for instance. Discussing her role as the Ripley clone in *Alien Resurrection*, Sigourney Weaver commented, "I didn"t want to carry a gun. I mean, once you"ve died, it"s not a big deal to die again. I thought it was important for her not to need all that paraphernalia,"[3] a key aspect that distinguishes this version of Ripley from the one in *Aliens*. In the fourth film she *is* a weapon due to her nature as a hybrid.

Of course, the representation of female action heroes has changed over time. In the 1980s it was exhilarating to watch Ripley learn about and then use the "M-418 pulse rifle" to spectacular effect; twenty years later Max rejects military training and guns as part of the problem. Her refusal of guns is related to an incident in her personal history that is reinforced through repeated flashbacks starting in the pilot episode. Eva a young female X-5 (the Manticore transgenics have various designations, Max"s batch were X-5) is shot by Lydecker, Manticore project leader and "father" to this batch, after she takes a guard"s gun; in the flashbacks the gun and Eva"s body fall at young Max"s feet. This incident is thus tied up with Max"s resistance to Manticore and its values but her refusal of guns may also be an attempt to counter the argument that female action heroes simply act like men. Other characters in *Dark Angel* use guns but Max"s fight scenes tend to be up close, Hong-Kong style. Fellow transgenic Alec"s success and Max"s brief bout as an extreme fighter ("Fugheddaboutit" 2.15) demonstrate again that when the body itself is a weapon, hardware is dispensable. Indeed the title sequence of *Dark Angel*"s second season includes the words, "They designed her to be the perfect soldier, a human weapon," identifying Max (and the other transgenics) primarily as bio-weapons.

Close-range action also allows the camera to dwell on the physical spectacle of the hero"s body. Since any action hero inevitably comes under attack, his or her body is presented as simultaneously powerful and vulnerable, its boundaries or integrity constantly at risk.[4] The threat to Ripley in the first two films is of being ripped apart, penetrated by the aliens. In the third film, as Sherrie A. Inness points out, "Ripley"s vulnerability is emphasized" throughout[5] by everything from her shaved head to her being the only female in a colony of convicted male criminals. Yet as another iconic image indicates, the threat has now shifted: Ripley and the alien may come head to head but it will not kill her since she is carrying an alien, one that will soon break out of her body from the inside. This shift is developed in the next film when "Ripley" is herself part alien. From the beginning of *Dark Angel* threats against Max are always both external and internal: as a fugitive from Manticore she is constantly at risk of being hunted down and captured by external agents. Max"s genetic enhancements do not make her invulnerable, and she is shot in more than one episode ("…And Jesus

Brought a Casserole" 1.21, "Harbor Lights" 2.13), but she is also at risk from her own internal make-up, as demonstrated by her dependence on the food supplement Tryptophan (this seems to be a glitch in the genetic programming, see for example, "Flushed" 1.3). Conflating the two, hostile forces often want Max for her unique genetics,[6] so that evading capture is as much about evading penetrating scientific examination of her body (as detailed in Manticore flashbacks) as it is about evading blows or gunshots.

This fluctuation between external and internal threats has a mirror in the horror genre. Mark Jancovich suggests that horror films are often concerned with "the instability of identity" which may be mediated through physical transformation or, as in these science fiction examples, when the film depicts "the loss of any clear sense of an inside or an outside to the body."[7] Examples of this can be found in all four *Alien* films and Ximena Gallardo C. and C. Jason Smith repeatedly mention the "openness" of the body in these movies,[8] while the design of the alien itself seems to show some "inside" on the outside (elements of an exo-skeleton, wetness). The season two title sequence of *Dark Angel* presented a quick explanation of Max"s origins, voiced over images of a developing foetus and the mature Max, presenting internal (biological) and external factors (such as the Manticore barcode) as integral parts of Max"s identity and as key factors in obscuring/ uncovering her "destiny."

Gallardo C. and Smith suggest that *Alien*^{3} presents us with the "realization that the pristine body, on which we base so much of our individuality, never was."[9] I argue that the vulnerability of all action heroes is intensified in the *Alien* films and *Dark Angel* because of gender and that the insistence in these texts on specularisation, the opening up of bodies for examination, heightens the division or opposition between female/ nature and male/ science (since the bodies opened up are generally female or feminised, and those doing the opening are generally male). If, as Sara Buttsworth contests, male warrior hero identities are all about heterosexual masculinity, "an embodiment whose integrity depends upon the externalisation of the feminine"[10] then how does this work for action heroes who are female? Ripley, the aliens, and Max are all constructed at some point or another as "monsters" or "freaks," positioning them as outsiders (externalisation), as when Dillon comments in *Alien*^{3} that the prisoners on Fury 161 "view the presence of any outsider, especially a woman, as a violation of the harmony and a potential break in the spiritual unity." Here Ripley is a bio-weapon in the sense that she threatens male integrity just by being female. Gallardo C. has noted that by the third film, Ripley replaces the queen alien as the abject, "the foul female body whose products prove lethal to humans – and she is treated as such by the humans in the film."[11] In this way other characters attempt to externalise Max and Ripley as bio-weapons/ abject threats but for the viewer their liminality is valorised by their presentation as heroes.

Action heroes are inevitably physical. *Dark Angel*"s co-creator James Cameron notes "a real physicality" about Max.[12] Yet Ripley and Max are also

identified as female through their bodies. One character‟s perception of Max and her associate Logan in *Dark Angel* – “You‟re the brains, she‟s the brawn” (“I and I am a Camera” 1.18) – replicates the science/nature split as rationality/physicality. Yet there is more to female physicality than “brawn”, and strength is traditionally associated with the masculine. In terms of biological bodies, Ripley and Max are feminised by an emphasis on mothering/ reproduction.

Mothering is partly about providing an “acceptable” motive for the female action hero, presenting her as a just warrior or, as Gallardo C. and Smith point out, in “a socially authorized female role.”[13] It has often been noted that during the face-off between Ripley and the alien queen in *Aliens* “the desires and motives of both maternal figures are the same,”[14] that is, both are protecting children. The film constructs the relationship between Ripley and sole surviving colonist Newt as a mother-child bond and a frequently referred-to, deleted scene that appeared in the Director‟s Cut version of *Aliens* revealed that Ripley had a daughter who died while she was in hypersleep between the events of the first and second film.[15] Yet following the theme of reproduction (as distinct from mothering), Ripley discovers that Burke, the Company representative, deliberately exposed her and Newt to the alien facehugger specimens because he “figured he could get an alien back through quarantine if one of us was impregnated, whatever you call it, and then frozen for the trip home.” The potential victims are not just female this time (in the first film the facehugger‟s victim was male) but also the only outsiders (non-military females) and therefore available for reproductive exploitation. In the third film, Ripley discovers that she *has* become “impregnated”: a scan reports that she has “foreign tissue type” inside her body. While Ripley escapes the alien in this film by sacrificing herself and killing the newly born chestburster alien, in *Alien Resurrection* her clone declares that she is “the monster‟s mother.” While human *mothering* might be presented as “natural,” these latter instances present *reproduction* as disturbing or alien, biological but still unnatural or abject, “monstrous.” In my reading this abject status positions male science and technology as oppressive and intrusive.

A similar strategy is traceable in *Dark Angel*. Gallardo C. and Smith suggest that the *Alien* films demonstrate that “the patriarchy always desires what the woman has inside of her (her womb or her child) but never the woman herself” and read the conclusion of *Alien*[3] as Ripley telling “the patriarchy *this body and its products are mine, not yours* [emphasis in original].”[16] Dark *Angel* develops this equation of female reproduction and *production* (commodification by hegemonic power) into a full-blown breeding programme. Max and the other X-5s had “mothers” who carried the genetically engineered eggs or foetuses to term, providing a first generation of transgenics. There are many instances of pregnant female X-5s; some are pregnant by their own desire (control of their own reproductive systems being a sign of independence or freedom – another bio-weapon?) but after the DNA banks at Manticore are destroyed in the season one finale, the scientists continue the controlled breeding programme into a

second generation. Throughout both seasons Manticore is keen to examine any children born to transgenics, seeking information to advance the project. Thus Max tells Jace, the first pregnant X-5 to appear in the show, "They'll take the child away and you'll never see it again. Just like with our mothers" ("Female Trouble" 1.14). In *Alien Resurrection*, the *Auriga* scientists refer to Ripley-8 (as they call the clone) as "the host," highlighting her function as carrier rather than biological mother, just as the birth mothers of the original, genetically engineered X-5s were not the biological mothers of what they *carried*. The terminology is important here: Ripley-8 refers to herself, however ironically, as "the monster's mother," and Max talks about the "mothers" of the X-5s, both claiming a female-female relationship usually invested with emotion as well as biology.

Furthermore, in *Dark Angel*, Max and other X-5 escapees insist that their group, and Manticore transgenics as a whole, are a family. They frequently refer to each other as brothers and sisters and actor Jessica Alba, who played Max, identifies a "craving for some kind of family" as a driving force for the character.[17] The insistence on "family" relationships in *Dark Angel*, whether the restrictive "parental" control of Manticore or more egalitarian relationships between transgenic "brothers and sisters," presents Max as replacing hierarchical structures/ control with emotional bonds. Max and the original X-5 escapees have been "defending their freedom with their lives" ("Love in Vein" 2.14) but Max is also willing to risk her life for others, demonstrating her self-sacrifice, and she takes responsibility for her actions in freeing the Manticore transgenics. Similarly, Catherine Constable points out that the "relation of potentiality" that exists between the Ripley clone and the alien-human hybrids, as well as between the clone and other forms of life, "expands Ripley's responsibilities."[18] That is, as "the monster's mother" the clone is now responsible for its behaviour, and must ensure that it does not destroy the other humans, or Earth itself. Yet she is also "sister" to clones 1-7, found in a lab as she and the others try to leave the *Auriga*. This family relationship leads the clone to kill 7 at her request, removing her from scientific control and the supposedly "emotional[ly] autisti[c]" Ripley-8 sheds heartfelt tears in doing so. That female android Call assists Ripley-8 in "freeing" the other clones and that macho pirate Johner mutters, "Must be a chick thing" in bemusement underlines, in case we missed it, the alignment of emotion and family ties with the female. Gallardo C. and Smith point out that the clone then takes "personal" responsibility for her monstrous progeny, in contrast with the scientists[19] though they do not identify this explicitly as a feminised representation.

Peddling Flesh: Bodies as Commodities

It is not just female bodies that are seen as products in these texts however; all bodies are potentially commodities, and both series have many examples of hegemonic representatives or institutions doing what Max calls "peddling flesh" (*Dark Angel* "Cold Comfort" 1.7). The body and its control has

been the subject of many popular culture texts, perhaps most obviously in horror and science fiction. This is partly because, Jancovich observes, in contemporary, technological society the body becomes "an object of rational control"[20] by institutions, here the Company and the military. The *Alien* films and *Dark Angel* implicate medical technology in oppression and violence and in doing so play further on a gendered nature/ science division by presenting female "victims" of male scientific process. The female here operates as object *and* subject; women have traditionally been seen as powerless but both Ripley and Max become powerful (feminised) adversaries of the (masculinised) institutions they resist.

Jancovich goes on to suggest that in this kind of representation institutions "not only alienate and objectify the body, they make it increasingly difficult to distinguish the body from systems of control."[21] Taking the examples of Ripley and Max, their bodies are not only alienated (not strictly human) and objectified (commodified), they are *part of* the institutions that control them. Max was created to be a soldier, and Ripley worked for the Company, indeed in the first film she initially appears to be very much the company woman. Max and Ripley-8 are even branded (with a bar code and a tattooed number respectively) by the organisation that "made" them. While the texts may sometimes seem to celebrate the individual action hero who can make a difference, under closer examination they also both consistently demonstrate that power and control are factors beyond individuals who are themselves part of the process of oppression. Gender intensifies this scenario since the female/ feminised bio-weapons are to be wielded by masculinised power.

Judith Newton suggests that viewers of *Alien* relate to the way "everyone is forced to be a company man or company woman, somebody whose work is neither controlled nor understood by them, and somebody who is finally expendable in the name of profit."[22] The Company"s "special order 937" specifies that "all other considerations" are "secondary" to securing an alien specimen and states clearly: "crew expendable." This sets up an exploitative relationship between workers and corporation that follows through into the subsequent films. In *Aliens* Ripley compares the Company unfavourably with the aliens, telling Burke: "I don"t know which species is worse. You don"t see them fucking each other over for a goddamn percentage." Ripley is out of favour with the Company from the moment of her retrieval from hypersleep in this instalment because she "freely admit[s]" causing the destruction of the spaceship *Nostromo* (she set the self-destruct sequence in the finale of the previous film), valued at "42 million in adjusted dollars. That"s minus payload, of course." Ripley-8 in *Alien Resurrection* is simply a "meat by-product" of the cloning process; the alien queen is "the real pay-off" and while investigating the alien species might afford new avenues for "urban pacification, new alloys, vaccines," Wren implies that the scientists" main interest is in "the animal itself." Gallardo C. and Smith also note that both Call and Ripley are objectified and "traded" in this film.[23]

The commercial advantages of bio-weapons like transgenics is clear in *Dark Angel*: during one episode Max comes across an X-series who tells her he is "an IT concentrate, a battle processor. I'm basically a general, his staff, two database groups and five logistical support teams, all rolled into one stealth package" ("Brainiac" 2.10). Thus while Max is the focal character and offers a key subject position for the viewer, her identity for Manticore as commodity/ object rather than human/ subject is constantly underlined. Take the barcode. Max worries whether the barcode comes with an "expiration date" in "Cold Comfort," while those hunting escaped transgenics later accept barcodes (presumably removed after killing them) as "proof of purchase" ("Proof of Purchase" 2.3). At the end of the show the fact that X-series Jen's newborn daughter has no barcode is a key symbol of hope and liberation.

This control and abuse leads to identity crises for the protagonists, caught between subject/ object positioning.[24] It also emphasises their overt vulnerability (lack of stable identity/ body) in contrast to the ideal of physical and mental integrity (though as mentioned, the *apparent* integrity of the action hero's body is always at risk). By the second film the memories of her first encounter with the aliens have visible effects on Ripley. She has nightmares about her experience, and Burke mentions that he has seen her latest "psych evaluation," showing her stress but also revealing "his penetrating and authorized knowledge of her most intimate, subconscious thoughts," a clear sign of "his (and the Company's) desire to control her." The *Alien* films (Gallardo C. and Smith identify *Aliens* in particular) and *Dark Angel* play out versions of the "going back" plot, with protagonists suffering a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder. Cameron describes how the protagonist is forced to face the previous trauma, to "re-live it over and over."[25] *Dark Angel*'s use of flashbacks and Max's long struggle to come to terms with Manticore, even after she has destroyed its physical location and freed the transgenics, highlight the necessity of facing up to trauma in order to develop an integrated sense of identity. Arguably this is a preoccupation of many late twentieth-century texts, from the revisionist slave narrative *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987), to episodes of *The X-Files* (1993-2002) that focus on similar covert experimentation and seem to refer to the Holocaust and Nazi eugenics. I read this narrative device as clearly implicating hegemonic power in producing the trauma and affecting the protagonists' minds as well as their bodies. Their unstable identities are a product of male control, though this is eventually normalised through a "feminised" response and resistance, including developing emotional bonds.

Gallardo C. has explored the sense of *Alien Resurrection*'s Ripley clone's unstable identity in some detail, and she suggests that during the scene in which Ripley-8 meets versions 1-7 the clones "provide sister images for her self."[26] I have already suggested that *Dark Angel* focuses on "family" relationships. That Max is created from mixed DNA means that she is a product of science, though her investigation of her birth mother, and the complex scene where Manticore

leader Lydecker explains that he is *not* her father ("And Jesus Brought a Casserole…") indicates again the split between object of science (no real family) and human subject (with "proper" parental relationships). The positioning of Manticore personnel Lydecker and Renfro as wicked father and monstrous mother respectively shadows the computer designations Mother (*Alien*) and Father (*Alien Resurrection*), aligning institutional representatives with unnatural or corrupted parental roles. That Joshua, the first transgenic in *Dark Angel* and initially the only one without a barcode, also has a parental relationship with his creator Sandeman (he always refers to him as "Father") signifies a more "natural" parental relationship that rejects commodification and accepts at least some responsibility for the child/ creation.

Gallardo C. and Smith identify the question "Who are you?" as significant in *Alien Resurrection*. The film charts the clone‟s divided loyalties when she has to choose between saving the humans and Earth, or saving her "grandchild," the hybrid offspring of the alien queen. Ripley-8‟s conflicted identity is played up through visual aspects: the ribbing on her leather vest resembles the exoskeleton of the alien bodies and her "wet" hair reminds viewers of their moist skin, though the most telling alien characteristic is acid blood (now she is literally a bio-weapon). Ripley-8 does not initially integrate the alien aspects of her hybrid identity, as implied by her words to Call early on, "I can feel it, behind my eyes. I can hear it moving." In describing her role in the film, actor Weaver commented on the sense of the alien in the Ripley clone:

> Even she doesn‟t know what she‟s going to do… I felt Ripley should come back almost like a vampire. Her skin should be radiantly fresh, an element that makes her sexual and incredibly lustrous. She‟s almost too good to be true, and you don‟t know where she‟s getting it from. I wanted her to look "new and improved," strong, a little bit like a "creature."[27]

Weaver‟s suggestion that Ripley is "new and improved" by her hybridisation could be undermined by the sense that she is "a little bit like a creature" and that this is "almost too good to be true." However, both Gallardo C. and Constable conclude that Ripley‟s open identity is a positive step. Constable suggests that "this possibility of two emergent selves, interrelated yet different"[28] has "completely reconfigured" what was "the oppositional relation between the human and inhuman… to form a series of intersecting potentialities."[29] Cameron describes *Dark Angel*‟s Max in similarly positive terms when he explains that the character‟s name is "short for maximum" and comments that she is "a revved up version of us" showing "the nth degree of human potential."[30] The use of the word "potential" to describe both protagonists underscores their positive aspects as well as presenting them as a developmental step, a kind of post-human hybrid of science and nature.

Max too struggles to balance loyalties and identity. In explaining her "feline" sexuality (heritage of her mixed DNA) to prospective partner Logan, Max tells him: "It's just something Manticore tricked up inside of me that I can't control. It makes me feel like no matter what I do or how far I run, I can never get away from them" ("Meow" 1.20). In the finale of season one, this internal conflict is literalised when Max meets a younger version of herself in the woods around Manticore and is shot by her. In contrast to Ripley-8 tearfully killing her clone "self" in an act of freely willed mercy, here Max is all but killed by her coldly professional clone "self" acting under the orders of the institution she escaped and using weaponry Max rejects. In a season two episode we meet another Max clone,[31] originally on an industrial espionage deep cover mission, now living in San Francisco with a husband and son ("She Ain't Heavy" 2.19; the son is her husband's, not hers, but she is thus positioned as a mother). Yet the clones are not Max: Max only became "Max" when she escaped from Manticore, prior to that she was identified as X-5-452, her mature clone is X-5-453, and the younger version presumably has another designation. The so-called Ripley-8 never identifies herself as anything other than "the monster's mother" though she answers to both Ripley (as the surviving crew of the *Betty* call her) and Ripley-8. This is, of course, a classic dystopian science fiction tactic: the protagonist is dehumanised by a numerical designation and on escaping (pro)claims a new identity by choosing a name. That the Ripley clone never does this perhaps implies a continuing crisis of identity.

Ripley's interaction with the Company and Max's attempts to escape Manticore and its effects consistently underline how their fractured identities are a result of control by the military-industrial complex, institutions that see them not as subjects but as commodities. Gallardo C. points out that "the Auriga scientists… are… the ones who have forced [the Ripley clone] to become this new kind of Jekyllean or schizophrenic subject."[32] This dovetails neatly with my reading of Ripley and Max as powerful action heroes who are paradoxically powerless to control their own destinies.

While Ripley herself is not technically a soldier, David Thomson notes that Weaver "always tried to play her character „as a soldier" "[33] and Ripley is part of a hierarchical structure aboard the *Nostromo*. As company woman in the first film, Ripley sticks to the rules and castigates anyone who does not.

By the second instalment Ripley is firmly anti-Company and although Gallardo C. and Smith see her as "appeal[ing] to male authority by eliciting Hick's support as a member of the hierarchical military structure"[34] partway through, I read this scene somewhat differently. When Burke tries to take over command after the Colonial Marine Corps officers are killed, Ripley challenges his authority precisely by insisting on the "chain of command." Burke dismisses this, saying that Hicks is "just a grunt" not capable of making decisions about the "multi-million dollar installation." That Hicks' first order repeats Ripley's suggested course of action underlines that she, not he, is really taking charge and it also

aligns Ripley with the "grunts" rather than the Company. This instalment has been criticised for reducing the menacing alien of the first film to mere cannon fodder, yet the humans themselves are alien fodder, tools the Company uses to try and capture an alien. Indeed, Gallardo C. and Smith identify the alien in this film as "a minion-weapon: not the enemy per se, but a danger visited upon us by the enemy."[35] Their reading identifies the alien queen as the enemy (the opposition thus becomes alien/ human); I suggest that an alternative reading positions the Company as the real enemy here, since it puts the Marines in the line of fire to recover a specimen, seeing them as "expendable," just as the crew of the *Nostromo* were in the first film (an opposition of powerful/ powerless).

Throughout the earlier films there are indications of this equation. Ash‟s android identity is revealed towards the end of the first film, aligning the Company with the non-human and science/ technology (as well as presenting the Company‟s employees as tools rather than people). Parker rages, "That damn Company. What about our lives, you son of a bitch?" reminding viewers that Ash previously called the alien specimen a "tough little son of a bitch". That in the third instalment the Company representative is the "design[er]" of *Aliens*‟ "artificial person" Bishop merely adds to the impression that the Company is in the business of dehumanising its employees, and again associates them with science and technology, something lacking on Fury 161.

By *Alien Resurrection*, the Company has been replaced by the military-industrial complex, corrupt in its use of pirates, cloning, and weapons research. This instalment has the most clearly delineated mad scientists (a step up from Bishop‟s designer), a further indictment of science/ technology‟s control by hegemonic institutions since classic mad scientists were usually mavericks working alone. Gallardo C. and Smith state that the "effect of getting rid of the Company, then, is to diffuse evil among all humanity: humans are not minions of an uncaring corporation, but a monstrous species in its own terms,"[36] a reading that interprets the film as truly dystopian and one that plays down the significance of hegemonic power. In my view, the film‟s presentation is rather more complex.

The pirates from the *Betty*, while trading in illegal human subjects themselves, refuse to leave any of their number behind, demonstrating solidarity and co-operation. Since they operate outside the law, they could even be interpreted as marginalised non-hegemonic subjects. While captain Elgyn might fraternise with the commander of the *Auriga*, the others are soon more akin to the powerless grunts of *Aliens* (and a key member of the escape party is soldier Distephano). Certainly their presentation as outcasts is intensified by their variance from the traditional norm: Vriess‟s wheelchair and Christie‟s long dreadlocks function as visible signifiers of difference. Even the aliens in this scenario are presented as victims and furthermore as victims ready to strike back at hegemonic, masculinised, scientific power through teamwork and self-sacrifice (the aliens escape by tearing apart one of their number, whose acid blood burns away the floor of their containment cell).

While Wren assures Ripley-8 that she is now part of "United Systems Military, not some greedy corporation," the clone‟s assumption that nothing will be different is justified. In her explanation to the facehugger victim she chooses her words carefully when she tells him that the crew of the *Betty* "sold your cryotube to *this human* [my emphasis]," reiterating the previous comparison of hegemonic institutions and the aliens, as well as underscoring Ripley-8‟s distance from "humans." *Alien Resurrection* eventually reveals that Call is a "second gen" android, or "Auton" (from autonomous), a machine built by machines. The government ordered a recall," indicates that free will, making choices rather than following orders, is never popular within hegemonic structures.

Similarly in *Dark Angel* institutional control is about suppressing individuality and emotion. After fellow-escapee Brin is captured and "reindoctrinated" by Manticore, Max asks, "What did they do to you?" but Brin merely responds, "They made me better" ("Hit a Sista Back"). The transgenics are finally re-presented in Max‟s climactic speech at the end of the show as veterans ignored by the country they fought for and the institution that created them.[37] "They made us. And they trained us to be soldiers, to defend this country. It‟s time for them to face us and take responsibility instead of trying to sweep us away like garbage. We were made in America and we‟re not going anywhere" ("Freak Nation" 2.21). Besieged by police and National Guard, the transgenics raise their flag in a reworking of the 1945 Iwo Jima moment immortalised by photograph and then in the U.S. Marine Corps war memorial. Logan‟s words to Max, the last line in the show, "Now look what you‟ve done" ("Freak Nation" 2.21) indicate that this is not just a declaration of the "Freak Nation" cited in the episode‟s title, but a larger declaration of freedom from the control that has dominated their lives, expressed in the symbolism of the flag that Joshua explains to Max. Its black lines (a bar code) represent the past, when Manticore and the government tried to keep the transgenics "in the dark," its red represents the present "where we are now because our blood is being spilled," while the white represents the future, "where we want to go… into the light." (And the language here invokes a physical/ bodily experience of these phases). The alliance of various human characters such as Logan and Original Cindy with the transgenics here points to the wider context of social control in *Dark Angel*‟s dystopian future and a wider resistance to that control.

Still Divided?

The struggles of Ripley and Max against hegemonic institutions make them just warriors, and, despite their conflicted identities, also prove them "human." Joss Whedon, screenplay writer for *Alien Resurrection*, has spoken of Ripley-8 "accepting her own kind of humanity, on her own terms even if she does not necessarily fit the description of „human‟."[38] "Human" in science fiction is, as here, often coded as emotional in opposition to rational technology. J. P. Telotte suggests that "an emphasis on feelings, emotions, and passion" counters the

genre‟s iconic use of "reason-technology-science," suggesting that this "helps to weigh our humanness against the scale of a thoroughly technologised environment.„[39] The dystopian protagonist traditionally struggles against the system, and if that system uses science or technology to maintain its hierarchy then this further contrasts the humanity of the protagonist. Ripley and Max both subvert and uphold the binary oppositions in play here by their nature as bio-weapons, combinations of both science and nature. Moreover, gender is mobilised in both the subversion and the preservation of these oppositions.

Max and Ripley make many choices in the course of their stories, and those choices revolve around issues of control and power. This could be related to the popular notion that all women have to do to become independent is to make individual choices – be autonomous, like Call the Auton. Yet, for some, external factors mitigate against making choices that can change their lives. Ripley and Max demonstrate how media representations have taken on some aspects of feminism in their presentations of female protagonists but also the ways that this popularized "feminism" can be problematic. Max and Ripley are at the same time alternatives to the female action hero who simply acts like a man, and women resisting gendered oppression with traditionally "feminine" strategies. In this case, therefore, human might further equate with female. The strategies Ripley and Max employ as resistant dystopian protagonists include acting on emotional responses; nurturing emotional bonds and "family" relationships (both discussed above); self-sacrifice; and co-operation (rather than individualism). Such strategies emphasise their "emotional" humanity and serve to contrast the cold, self-serving (masculinist) hegemony of science and the military.

While Gallardo C. and Smith assert that Ripley‟s "transformation from perennial victim of the Company and the Alien to eternal foe makes Ripley‟s death a victory, and propels her figure into legend,"[40] I suggest that this role also reiterates the female as a sacrifice and guardian of moral values. That Ripley is "propelled into legend" and Max is a kind of "messiah" at once presents them as the ultimate hero, the female Christ, but also reifies them as the ultimate sacrifice, giving themselves up, erasing themselves and their hard-won agency in order to civilise the (patriarchal) world.

The (re)construction of the action hero in these texts is also about cooperation with resistant or ex-centric groups rather than individual heroics. Gallardo C. and Smith note that in *Alien Resurrection* "Call has abandoned collective action of the feminist mode in favor of individual sacrifice and heroism of the patriarchal hero."[41] Ripley‟s cooperation, on the other hand, is extended to human and "non-human" alike, taking in many kinds of difference. Thus she allies herself with a black worker in the first film, with powerless "grunts" in the second, with criminals in the third (and despite Dillon‟s talk of disruption, he tells Ripley that they "tolerate anybody, even the intolerable"), and with pirates and the "terrorist" android Call in the fourth. Max is herself coded as an ex-centric subject (like many other female X-5s she appears to be non-white) and allies herself with

several resistant groups (the transgenics, the S1W) in her struggle against Manticore and the police state of post-apocalyptic Seattle, even including Logan Cale, a "bored, rich, liberal white guy" ("I and I am a Camera").[42]

Whether this reconstruction encompasses a new definition of gender is unclear. The texts" presentation of the female protagonists is complex and at times contradictory, sometimes upholding, sometimes subverting traditional notions of gender. The strong sense of masculinised science and feminised nature intensifies the struggle: *because* Max and Ripley are forces of nature, they resist scientific/ technological oppression. Their abject, outsider status also highlights the power relations in their respective worlds and genders these. Both Ripley and Max are definitely presented as heroes – whether we choose to view them as conservative models that rely on and valorise "feminine" characteristics like mothering, emotional responses, and self-sacrifice, or liberal models that engage us through collectivity, agency, and humanity is part of the polysemic nature of popular culture texts. This ambiguity continues to contest easy oppositions of any kind because such texts are hybrids themselves, hybrids of genre and of conflicting notions of power and gender.

End Notes

1. J. P. Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001: 2001, p. 10.
2 I will not be discussing *Alien versus Predator* (2004).
3 In David Thomson, *The Alien Quartet: Bloomsbury Film Guides No.4*, London: Bloomsbury, 1998, p. 152.
4. Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.151.
5. Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. 112.
6. Even among the transgenics, Max is unique, something revealed in the second season as integral to her role as a kind of messiah ("Love Among the Runes" 2.20). This was never fully explained since the show ended with the second season.
7. Mark Jancovich, *American Horror from 1951 to the Present*, Keele: Keele University Press, 1994, p. 26.
8. Ximena Gallardo C. and C. Jason Smith, *Alien Woman: The Making of Lt. Ellen Ripley*, New York: Continuum, 2004.
9. Ibid., p. 120. Gallardo C. and Smith also discuss the paradox of the penetrable "hard bodies" of the Marines in *Aliens* (p. 85)
10. Sara Buttsworth, „Bite Me": *Buffy* and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-Hero." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2002), p. 186.
11. Ximena Gallardo C., " „Who are You?": Alien/ Woman as Posthuman Subject in *Alien Resurrection*," *Reconstruction* 43.4 (Summer 2004), p. 16. 30 September 2004. <http://www.reconstruction.ws/043/gallardoc.htm>.
12. James Cameron, „Interview", *Dark Angel Season 1,* DVD, Twentieth-century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003.
13. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 10.
14. Catherine Constable, "Becoming the Monster"s Mother: Morphologies of Identity in the *Alien* Series," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn. London: Verso, 1999, p. 189.

15. See, for example, Martin Flanagan, "The *Alien* Series and Generic Hybridity," in *Alien Identities: Exploring Differences in Film and Fiction* ed*.* Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda. Whelehan, London: Pluto Press, 1999, pp 163 or Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 9.
16. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 153.
17. Jessica Alba, „Interview", *Dark Angel Season 1,* op. cit.
18. Constable, "Becoming the Monster"s Mother," p. 201.
19. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 193.
20. Jancovich, *American Horror from 1951 to the Present*, p. 27.
21. Ibid., p. 27.
22. Judith Newton, "Feminism and Anxiety in *Alien*," in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction,* ed. Annette Kuhn. London: Verso, 1990, p. 82.
23. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 171.
24. Gallardo C. and Smith note the similarity to superheroes in this respect (*Alien Woman*, p. 162). Certainly there is a tradition of "divided" identities for superheroes, many of whom are forced to lead double lives, keeping their "super" identity secret. Max in particular fits this model.
25. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 81.
26. Gallardo C., " „Who Are You?" " p. 27.
27. In David Thomson, *The Alien Quartet*, p. 152. Weaver"s reference to Ripley-8"s sexuality is interesting since I read her increasing sexualisation in the course of the four films as part of the insistence on her gender. In *Alien Resurrection* sex is presented as commerce, as when Ripley asks, "Who do I have to fuck to get off this boat?" or dehumanisation, as when Vriess quips to Johner, "Yeah, like you never fucked a robot."
28. Constable, "Becoming the Monster"s Mother," p. 192. 29.
Ibid., p. 197.
30. Cameron, „Interview", *Dark Angel Season 1,* op. cit.
31. This doubling is not restricted to Max: season two regular Alec is a clone of Ben, one of the X-5 escapees ("Pollo Loco" 1.17, "Hello, Goodbye" 2.17), while Joshua has a brother, Isaac, who is mistaken for him in "Two" (2.6).
32. Gallardo C., " „Who Are You?" " p. 24.
33. Thomson, *The Alien Quartet*, p. 30.
34. Gallardo C. and Smith, *Alien Woman*, p. 96. 35.
Ibid., p. 105.
36. Ibid., p. 168.
37. The finale brings us full circle in showing "grunts" as victims of the system that creates them: in the pilot episode Max"s friend Theo was a veteran of the "Balkan War"; in the final episode transgenic Mole talks about fighting Saddam.
38. Ibid., p. 163.
39. Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, p. 140.
40. Ibid., p. 11. 41. Ibid.,
41. Ibid., p. 188.
42. I have written elsewhere on racial and ethnic factors in *Dark Angel*