ALIEN/ZOMBIE AS A REFLECTION OF HUMAN MIND: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

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Abstract: This study has been undertaken to analyze whether aliens/ zombies are netherworld beings or a reflection of human mind. For this, a few science fiction films are considered and a critical analysis has been done using the theories like Biopower and Biopolitics.

Index Terms- science fiction, aliens, zombies, biopower, biopolitics, monster.

INTRODUCTION

There exists a link between the real world and the transcendental world as explained by the science fiction genre of films, where the creative imagination works more than mere facts. Usually these imaginative and the real pictures are fused to form a new concept which seems like convincing to the open realm of viewers. But this fusion never happened in an overnight. It happened through myriad of years. A close observation on the science fiction genre of films about the concept of aliens presented over the period of years explains it intelligibly.

The beginning phase was a search for who the aliens are? What their nature is? The transition of science fiction films over years assumes the role to different entities to choose between which fits the term. Beginning with the first one *E.T, The Extra-Terrestrial* (often referred to simply as *E.T.*) is a 1982 American science fiction film co-produced and directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Melissa Mathison. It tells the story of Elliott (played by Thomas), a lonely boy who befriends an extraterrestrial, dubbed 'E.T', who is stranded on Earth**.** Elliott and his siblings help the extraterrestrial return home while attempting to keep it hidden from their mother and the government. The concept of *E.T.* has sprouted out in the mind of the director Steven Spielberg after his parents got divorced, creating a friendly being from outside planet that happen to share its time with the protagonist of the movie Elliott. This was after all what the director wished from his parents which he missed and which in turn is the spotlight for the future change in the concept of alien in coming phases in this paper i.e. the reflection of human mind (the dual reality). Critics acclaimed *E.T.* as a timeless story of friendship; this exactly was the first assumption about aliens, as some friendly beings which we could dream of visiting our planet and having a happy return. Eventhough this is the case, there was the underlying notion of the dual image which we failed to recognize but was marked unknowingly from the very first phase. For e.g. Elliott begins to experience a psychic connection with the alien, including exhibiting signs of intoxication due to the alien drinking beer, and he begins freeing all the frogs in a biology class. As the alien watches John Wayne kiss Maureen O'Hara in *The Quiet Man*, Elliott kisses a girl he likes. Moreover in the movie Elliott refers at a point as 'we' (Elliott + E.T.) and the very name E.T. from the first and last letters of the name Elliott, the director had in its mind that both the characters to share something common or more or less the dual reflection of the modern concept of alien. In the climax of the movie before entering the spaceship, E.T. tells Elliott "I'll be right here" (*E.T- The Extra Terrestrial*), pointing his glowing finger to Elliott's forehead. The modern concept of alien sprouts here i.e. reflection of human mind with only differing in the nature which was assumed to be a friendly one but not so friendly as we would find climbing up the ladder.

Dealing with the second one, *Small Soldiers* is a 1998 American action or a science fiction film directed by Joe Dante. The film revolves around two teenagers (played by Smith and Dunst), who get caught in the middle of a war between two factions of sentient action figures, the Gorgonites and the Commando Elite. As the title of the movie suggests the characters are small toys but shows how such small toys can be such devastating entities. This was the second assumption that non-living objects provided with artificial intelligence can act on their own creating troubles to human beings. This assumption was another step of progress in the changing role of alien, the only difference with the modern concept is that, here the toys act as the non living objects whereas the modern alien turns out to be the living but non-human being.

Signs is a 2002 American science fiction thriller film written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan. The story focuses on a former Episcopal priest named Graham Hess who discovers a series of crop circles in his cornfield. Hess slowly becomes convinced that the phenomena are a result of extraterrestrial life. *Signs* explores faith, kinship and extraterrestrials. This movie can be analysed in terms of the phase that was quite uncertain about the shape and nature of the alien concept instead providing different signs by the director leaving the imagination of the viewer to work on producing unique images. Only in the climax of the movie the head to foot snap of the alien is shown. The various signs used in the movie include: Graham discovers a crop circle in his field, reports of violent animal behavior has spread across town, and one of the Hess' dogs tries to attack Bo and Morgan, tall, dark figure from the roof of a barn and into the crops, where it disappears, spotting a green leg sticking out of the cornrows, lights have been spotted over Mexico City. In the movie a dialogue is "they don't like water" (*Signs*), actually this is a bit reflection of the modern concept i.e. what we find looking down the water body is our self image which reminds us of our human existence but the alien monster image hides behind which is ugly and does not likes to come out. Even this movie has the sparks to the modern concept.

War of the Worlds is a 2005 American epic science fiction disaster film and a loose adaptation of H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Josh Friedman and David Koepp. The planet is attacked by aliens that come out of the ground (loosely based on H. G. Wells' Martians) driving Tripods and as Earth's armies are defeated, Ray tries to protect his children (Rachel and Robbie) and flee to Boston to rejoin his ex-wife. Spielberg declared that beside the work being a fantasy, the threat represented was real; they are a wake-up call to face our fears as we confront a force intent on destroying our way of life. This is a warning phase; the more intelligent beings watching on humans can be nothing but the dual reflection of human beings. But in this movie, the tripod from outer planets taking on earth is the final part of this earlier concept about alien.

The first phase ends here with the search for aliens and what actually they are? What their nature and characteristics are? That is, at the point where these science fiction movies had defined different roles to the concept of alien, searching for the best suited one. The first phase ends here and from this point begins the second phase.

In the second phase, defining and defining different roles to the concept of alien we reached a point where we started to look on ourselves, the embers from the ashes as we find in the movie *Signs* (where the aliens fear water i.e. we human beings looking down upon the water body sees our reflection in it but we often fail to accept the dark, ugly image that lurks behind it which is equated to aliens) rises the new avatars. The films taken for study in this second section include *Resident Evil* Series, *I Am Legend* (2007), *Quarantine 2: Terminal* (2011).

Going with *Resident Evil* series first, *Resident Evil* is a popular video game based film series based upon the Capcom video games of the same name. In 2001 Sony acquired distribution rights to the film and hired Paul W. S. Anderson as writer and director for *Resident Evil* (2002). He continued as writer and producer for *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004) and *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), and returned as director for a fourth installment, *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) and the fifth film *Resident Evil: Retribution* (2012), in 3D. A sixth installment is planned for a 2014 release date. The Umbrella Corporation, a bioengineering pharmaceutical company responsible for the zombie apocalypse as a result of creating the T-virus. Alice, the protagonist who was once a security operator working for Umbrella. She is now the ultimate enemy of the corporation. In her battle with Umbrella, she eventually meets with the main antagonist, Chairman Albert Wesker. The whole series of movie

explores the possibility of how the bio engineering processes can be risky, as in this movie the spread of T-virus eventually turning the human beings into some animated zombies, the alien of the modern age. Here man has to run away from their false steps instigating such devastating end results. This science fiction genre of film had at last found out the real aliens after a long search. The technology of any sort can be controlled to an extent but those technologies involving the biological concept is almost unpredictable and could create beings which could have never occurred in the imaginative creativity of any writers or directors. The movie highlights on two different zombies: the infected one and the programmed ones, both of them lacking the human nature. The uninfected left out human beings who suffer the most have to witness their twin reflection, which has been resided in their subconscious mind and finally the evil nature comes out.

I Am Legend is a 2007 American post-apocalyptic science fiction horror film directed by Francis Lawrence and starring Will Smith. Smith plays virologist Robert Neville, who is immune to a man-made virus originally created to cure cancer. He works to create a remedy while defending him against mutants created by the virus. Here in this movie the cure for cancer a variant of measles virus from animals mutates on the people who use it, this is the earlier said problem with technology and those involving the biological element in it. We are not sure or predictable of its results, these humanoids referred as darksiders equals the earlier concept of alien, which we feared as the beings from outer world wiping away the human race, here too the same happens. The only difference is that alien concept is the human reflection or the mirror reflection. For e.g.: the scene in which Will Smith explains to the alpha male; in that scene both the actor and the alpha male are separated between a glass shielding and Smith tries to explain looking at the glass. Why can't this be his mirror reflection to which he tries to explain the cure for himself, the dark side residing in him? The alternative ending also provides all sorts of hope in this movie within this regard, hope for a better life i.e. aiming for a better tomorrow wiping away the alien concept from the fears of mankind, by destroying the dark side in us.

Quarantine 2: Terminal is a 2011 American science fiction horror film and a sequel to the 2008 film, *Quarantine*. The movie revolves around a mutated rabies infection outbreak in a quarantined airport. This is a rare concept of alien explained in this movie. The world is confronting many problems such as over population, the domination of powerful nations. These issues and rivalry in turn results in some means to destroy i.e. to reduce human population, or to destroy the economic stability of a country targeting on the human resources, or in war. The very end of the movie can be interpreted in a possible way of wiping away the concept of alien or the dual reflection of human being: when George squeezes through the bars to escape out of the tunnel the savage infected Jenny is trapped inside setting a barrier between both**.** The next generation represented by George reminds us of the innocent child - the future, to whom we should gift all sorts of happiness wiping away the darker aspects regarding the alien concept which has been searching over the years by the science fiction genre of films.

Once we feared havoc from other planets, whereas, now we fear the self- destructive nature in ourselves. Fear is an innate factor in human beings from the inception of his existence. It is a controlling factor for the controlling and the controlled humans, that is, for the ruled and the ruling. During the past, this fear boiled the human mind to such a productive point that they imagined monsters from the netherworld in constant war for the world. With the movement of time and progress of science, the netherworld gives way to celestial bodies which are occupied by aliens who are mostly hostile towards humans. There were times when humans feared the alien attacks from outer world. But there occurred a recent shift in the nature of these constructed beings of the super heated human brain, i.e. the zombies are formed. Man winced to dispatch his own species for his selfish motives. This can be proved through Michel Foucault's 'Monster' concept and Roberto Esposito's 'Biopolitics'. The monster is a cultural construction, either completely fictitious or a designation made in relation to living flesh. The term 'Monster' is another name for hybridity or "otherness within sameness" (*Foucault's Monsters and the Challenge of Law* 212) and refers to a creature that is both, and simultaneously, human and non- human. Thus, monstrosity is a kind of irregularity that calls law into question and disables it. This concept parallels with Roberto Esposito's notion of 'Biopolitics'. 'Biopolitics' has a protagonist which is the dimension of Zoe. Zoe is often translated as bare life. Esposito feels that Zoe can only be defined with problems; the body is traversed by technology and life becomes other from itself.

With these two problems and one of the central ideas of Esposito's philosophy is that, "no other politics is conceivable other than a politics of life" (*Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* 33). Foucault believes that Biopolitics or biopower is the basic phenomena of the 19th century. Esposito writes using Foucault, "one might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life, or disallow it to the point of death" (*History of Sexuality* 136). Foucault through his genealogical work shows the effects of power on society. "Before this time power was situated in the body of the king, but now the biological itself has come under state control. The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy" (*History of Sexuality* 185).

Thus, from the above theories, it is vivid that the concept of alien is the mere portrayal or backscattering of thought ceased human minds. Such irregular shapes come as the aftermath of innate human fear for someone or something.

The second phase pin points towards the future growth of alien concepts. Up to where this concept can develop i.e. we have identified the human beings as the perfect suit for the replacement of alien. But, how far could the science fiction genre of films go? Else we should just stop here and create a future with hopes, a future to assure the humankind with the home as earth. The changing of roles has reached from aliens (past) to zombies (present). But the future depends on the creative imagination of each and every individual, as, to where can these aspects burst forth from present situation.

The imagination of the science fiction writers have reached the point where we realize the alien concept as a reflection of the darkness of human mind which we never often accept or reveal. But at times it comes out in the form of certain imagination or as technological concepts such as bio power for the stabilization of human population or as a weapon for war between the countries. Science fiction films are not based on exact scientific facts but the imagination and creativity of the writer always has some traces of the reality unknowingly hidden in each enterprise. The always questioned or debated phase is that whether the introduction of any new beings creates a utopia or dystopia. Most of the films state that it would create a dystopia. The aliens are actually extra terrestrial beings, in that sense one could point the finger toward the modern concept of alien, the reflection of human mind - mostly the darker side generated out of the bio power skipping i.e. the viruses infecting an entire human population, these viruses often created in the lab are aliens. The point at which this concept, that is the post modern concept of aliens has ceased and shows no further scope of development or we could think on it, as this modern zombies were once the savages of our past. The only difference is that they fed on animals raw for survival and the transformed zombies on the other hand almost has nothing to say as if humans just indulge in attacking the non infected ones. So we find that this modern concept once existed in the sub conscious mind of each and every being and currently it emerges out. The child image in most of the post apocalypse zombie films itself can be referred as the future. They are allowed to escape as we find in *Quarantine 2: Terminal*, *I am Legend* and *Resident Evil* series, why for? Just to make us inform that we should provide a future for them to dwell on the coming generation. This could be the next level of the alien concept in the approaching future.

The role varying in the alien concept has been a way to identify the underlying darkness within us and the science fiction genre of films has been successful in portraying it whether or not the science presented in the movies is factual or not. The more philosophical view that, as human beings each and everyone has the right to dwell on the planet and if we accept it we could avoid the intentional introduction of exotic viruses that could even create a world diseased with plague, wiping away the human race from the phase of the earth. The unintentional introductions often carried by some living beings like rats also have the same impact and for that, the only option is to be cautious. The advanced technological world also contributes to present zombie culture. Technology isn't inherently bad, but the fear some of us have of it is represented in certain zombie films. The more we use technology, the less we use our own human abilities. We become dependent on technology to do our human stuff - like talking, thinking etc. In this modern desultory world, phone and computer do most of our activities for us, and we have to admit that we have gone several days without talking to someone face to face, and once we finally venture out into the real world from the cyber world, we often feel like - a zombie.

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