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I Am Mother

Abstract

This is a film review of *I Am Mother* (2019) directed by Grant Sputore.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



I Am Mother (2019), dir. Grant Sputore

I Am Mother is a twist on the regular post-apocalyptic sci-fi film. Rather than there being a ragtag group of humans suffering to eke out a meager existence on a destroyed planet, all that we see that remains in the world are a robot and a child. The robot is Mother (voice of Rose Byrne) and the child is Daughter (Clara Rugaard). Mother raises Daughter in complete isolation in a facility filled with human embryos, training her to be the best human possible. Daughter is kept inside the facility at all times as the outside world is considered contaminated and devoid of any existence. Mother raises Daughter, from infancy, to be caring, honest, trustful and ethical. Daughter is intelligent and curious. Her only form of human connection is through old recordings of television shows that she watches on her tablet. Yet as viewers, we see Mother as more human than robot, as it looks

slightly human and exhibits human qualities, nodding and rocking the infant Daughter, teaching her to walk, play, read and dance ballet. Mother raises Daughter to one day be a good Mother herself.

One day, a mouse enters the facility, making Daughter wonder how it has survived in a contaminated atmosphere. Then one day there is a voice outside, begging for help. Daughter has been raised to be moral and compassionate, so she lets in a woman who has been wounded (Hilary Swank). Without telling Mother, she helps the woman and is told that other robotic machines, droids, have shot her. This new element creates upheaval and distrust in Daughter, as she is forced to see Mother as a robot as well, not her Mother. Wounded woman won't let Mother near her as she claims that she is a droid like those outside who shot her, so Daughter saves her life by removing the bullet. Wounded woman draws on faith, praying to God to save her and holding a handmade cross in her hands. Wounded woman wants Daughter to leave the facility as she has been deceived by Mother; in response, Mother tells Daughter that she has never lied to her and that her prime directive has always been to help humanity. And she has always been a good Mother to Daughter.

Although Daughter has never suffered for anything in the facility, she desires to meet other humans and is lured by Wounded Woman to leave the facility in search of these humans, even though an embryo is growing into a human baby in the facility itself – a brother for Daughter. Wounded woman convinces Daughter that Mother is nothing more than a machine, and the only way to save her brother is by finding the humans living outside.

Once outside, we learn that Wounded Woman has lied to Daughter; there are no other humans out in the world. Daughter, asking Wounded Woman why she's betrayed

her, is told that “there is no sin in looking out for yourself.” The Wounded Woman tells Daughter that she is trustworthy. Inside her container home, she has an altar with crosses. But Daughter has learned that to be ethical is to help others and so she returns to the facility for her brother. Mother is happy that Daughter has returned “home,” where she belongs. Mother has raised Daughter to be superior in every way, to be smarter, to be more ethical. It is Mother who, using the ethical teachings of Kant, realized that in order to elevate her creators, she had to destroy them and tells Daughter that her entire existence has been to teach Daughter to see the bigger picture—humans must be taught to be better through ethics—so that Daughter has become superior to other humans and by returning to raise her brother, she has become the perfect Mother.

I Am Mother pits religious values against ethical values, and illustrates that in the end, religion is problematic as it allows humans to be selfish. Ethics allows humans to take care of others. Wounded Woman was raised with religion, and proved herself unworthy to be a good Mother. Daughter, on the other hand, proved herself by returning for her brother, because Mother taught her to be ethical and not religious. The question remains: how many children did Mother raise and kill in order to finally create what she considered to be a superior human, worthy of existence?