

America, a Prophecy: when Blake meets *Blade Runner*

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Confronting the literary creator

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*¹ is widely viewed as a descendant of Frankenstein, read in turn as the rebellious progeny of *Paradise Lost*,² which is itself uncontroversially interpreted as a re-interpretation and elaboration of events set forth in the book of Genesis. Each text thematizes the myth of confronting one's creator and confronts its own textual progenitors in the process. Frankenstein's creature, for instance, is a seditious compound of Milton's Adam and Milton's Satan, and might have been a little less the rebel angel if only Frankenstein-cum-Prometheus-cum-Milton's-God had been a more responsible creator.³ As innumerable *Blade Runner* cult websites claim, Eldon Tyrell represents Roy Batty's Victor Frankenstein, who denies him, in place of a bride, more life. Cinematic adaptations of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, from James Whales's *Frankenstein* (1931) to Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990) and Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), have so popularised versions of Shelley's novella that it has become the primary intermediary between *Paradise Lost's* fundamental mythic narrative-creature confronting creator-and an audience generally more literate in film than in Milton.

While *Blade Runner* undoubtedly does share Miltonic themes with *Frankenstein*, the extent to which it shares them self-consciously is less obvious than filmnik essays would suggest. *Blade Runner* is far more calculating in its debt, and far more indebted, to William Blake's *America, A Prophecy* (1793) than it is to *Frankenstein*. Even leaving aside Blake's and *Blade Runner's* significant political and metaphysical allegiances, the film references *America* both in its deliberate misquotation (there is no quotation, mis- or otherwise, from *Frankenstein*) and in its depiction of Roy Batty, muscle-bound, blood-streaked and drenched in light, who is the Orc of

Blake's visionary illustrations well before he is another film incarnation of Frankenstein's creature. With the notable exception of Robin Wood,⁴ *Blade Runner's* critics have substantially ignored the film's allusions to Blake. David Desser's essay on *Blade Runner, Frankenstein and Paradise Lost* quotes the film's misquotation of Blake without mentioning his name and suppresses his contribution to the radical Romantic interpretations of Milton.⁵ *America* pivots between the cosmic deconstruction of good and evil and political polemic. The fact that the poem's influence on *Blade Runner* is generally ignored is a symptom of the way *Blade Runner* itself tends to be discussed either for its myth-making properties and its interest in metaphysical questions, or for its political critique and its pessimistic depiction of the futures of capitalism, scientism, and America.

Of course, *Blade Runner* is concerned with all these things, and it finds in *America*, where political meaning is also mythic meaning, an exemplary precedent for their mingling. But in the spirit of Blakean-Miltonic apostasy, *Blade Runner* also subverts Blake's account of a visionary trans-Atlantic revolution. Blake depicts the American Revolution as a revolt not only against imperialism, but against oppression itself, a revolt against the equivalent tyrannies of earth and heaven, one so successful that the liberation of America leads to revolution in England as well, which in turn sees 'France Spain & Italy/ In terror' and ultimately means an overthrow of the Heavens.⁶ The Revolution begins, Blake has it, when 'Fiery the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder roll'd/ Around their shores: indignant burning with the fires of Orc' (Plate 11). Roy Batty, *Blade Runner's* own apostate angel, reworks Blake's climax thus: 'Fiery the angels fell, deep thunder rolled around their shores, burning with the fires of Orc'. Roy's misquotation suggests a less fortunate fate than Blake does for Milton's rebel angel, 'Hurl'd head-long flaming from th' Ethereal Skie'.⁷ Milton's Satan is "[h]url'd", involuntarily banished from heaven, rather than actively rising away from divine tyranny as Blake's Angels do. Although the Satan of *Paradise Lost* protests that he 'Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n' (I, 255), his relegation to Hell, where he is condemned to 'Adamantine chains and penal fire' (I, 48), is not an entirely successful escape from oppression (not, certainly, if his rebellion is against all oppression, rather than just the localised tyranny of God in Heaven). Roy's invocation and subversion of Blake's revolutionary poem

describes the failure of the American Revolution. The fires of Orc are still burning—the film opens with a dark, polluted cityscape (that of the City of Angels) punctuated by sudden upward vomits of flame—but the Revolution, now two hundred years old, has not fulfilled Blake's prophecy, the revolutionary angels have fallen, and 'Adamantine chains and penal fire' are *de rigueur*.

America supplies *Blade Runner* with a glorifying reference point against which to contrast a nation's inglorious acts of enslavement, colonisation and environmental destruction. Perpetrated at various points between 1793 and the 1980s (and even while Blake was writing), these acts belie Blake's anti-imperialist prophecy. *Blade Runner* projects into the future the American slave-trade (having turned its attentions from Africans to Replicants), American imperialism (from Nicaragua and Vietnam to the Off-world colonies), and American-wrought environmental destruction (from its current disproportionate and unsustainable use of natural resources to complete environmental apocalypse). So while *Blade Runner* narrates the creature confronting his creator, it is also a film that obliges creators to confront their creation. For all that it is set in the future, that future is disconcertingly immediate—2019—and as the Coca-Cola advertisements, the neon lighting, the multi-national corporations that have become multi-planetary ones, and the implosion of a capitalist and technophile society suggest, if Los Angeles, 2019, is not exactly our present, it is a future born of our present. *Blade Runner's* British director, Ridley Scott, demands that the new imperial headquarters acknowledge what it is making, just as Blake, an anti-imperialist lodged in the heart of the emergent British empire, was concerned to show the Old World the New.

As Philip K. Dick (author of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, on which *Blade Runner* is based) has said of the film, its vision is “like everything we have now only worse.”⁸ The worst thing of all is the condition of the Replicants. The opening scroll describes the Replicant as 'a being virtually identical to a human', that is used 'Off-world as slave labor, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets'. The Off-world planets are to Los Angeles, 2019, as late eighteenth-century America itself was to Britain. Empire has not been abolished; it has simply shifted its centre from the palace of George III to the neo-Mayan ziggurat of corporate genius, Eldon

Tyrell. To make the point clearer, the colonies are extolled by Los Angeles' advertising broadcasts as 'the new world', 'a golden land of opportunity and adventure'-the very language that encouraged Blake, his contemporary Utopians, and the Puritans before them to consider America fertile ground for Paradise.

The Replicants stand, by turns, for angels, demons, and revolutionaries, but by rights they should also represent the victims of empire, the African-American slave population brought to the new world in that more terrestrial act of 'hazardous colonisation'. Referring to the blade runner's job, to hunt and kill-or 'retire'- Replicants, Rachael remarks, 'I'm not in the business. I *am* the business.' She points here to her own commodification, emphasised also in the euphemism of retirement', a word which substitutes for the fact of being killed a term often applied to leaving a state of commercial usefulness. But if this is as far as references to slavery go, the Replicants could represent slavery anywhere, without explicitly pointing to the history of African-American slavery. When Blake writes of slavery in *America*, it is not of the slavery perpetrated by Americans, but that of America to Albion, the 'heavy iron chain' (recalling Milton's 'Adamantine chains') that:

Descends link by link from Albions cliffs across the sea to bind
Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;
Heads deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands work-bruis'd,
Feet bleeding on the sultry sands and the furrows of the whip
Descend to generations that in future times forget. (Plate 3)

A slavery resulting in faces "pale and yellow" seems to preclude those black slaves ostentatiously ignored by the revolutionaries, as in the 'all men are created equal' professions of slave-owner, Thomas Jefferson. In the original cinematic release, Deckard muses, 'Skin jobs. That's what Bryant called Replicants. In history books he's the kind of cop who used to call black men niggers.' These words are excised with the Director's Cut, the 'black men' whom the Replicants might stand for are concealed. All that remains to suggest the Replicants' representation of America's slaves is Rachael's question to Deckard: 'What if I go north, disappear? Would you come after me, hunt me?' 'North' as a place of refuge recalls the sanctuary given to slaves by the

abolitionist northern states around the time of the American Civil War. It is an oblique reference, however, and the complete absence of African-American characters from a noticeably multi-racial *dramatis personae* seems a deliberate mimicry of Blake's white-washing celebration of the American Revolution.

Beyond good and evil

Not that Blake's silence in *America* on the revolutionaries' acts of oppression bespeaks either his ignorance or approval. 'The Little Black Boy' (in *Songs of Innocence* (1789)) eagerly anticipated racial equality, and Blake later produced the engravings for J. G. Stedman's *Narrative of a five years' expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796). His allegorical depiction of 'Europe Supported by Africa and America' shows a wilting white woman buttressed by a black and lighter brown one, each suggesting a generic racial identity-African, European, American. Both Africa and America wear gleaming gold bands around their upper arms, bands of slavery, which proclaim their mutual oppression. William Blake was an abolitionist, a fact that *America*, read simply as political tract, disguises.

But *America* is not just about a given political or historical moment. As John Howard explains, Blake could have depicted Washington and King George as recognisable figures:

But such likenesses would have limited our awareness to an earthly history. Rather, Blake wished to give a deeper view of human history, a prophetic look at the spiritual, mental, and physical implications of the American struggle for freedom that would stand as a vision of the forces working in England in 1793.⁹

Blake was very much concerned with England and its struggles, but he was equally concerned with more cosmic struggles, with history as a cyclic exchange between the oppressive tyranny of law, or religion, and the liberating cataclysm of revolution. Orc's rebellion against Urizen (where Orc is a descendant of Lucifer, and Urizen is God, or the demiurge) is an allegory for America's struggle with England, but so are America and

England allegorical figures for revolution and tyranny. Whereas Washington and King George are nebulous forces, Orc, 'Lover of wild rebellion and transgression of God's law' (Plate 7), is an eating, drinking, coupling, flaming, subjective individual. He is the incarnation of theomachy, which is the subject of *Blade Runner*, *America*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Frankenstein* all.

As Blake explains in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and
Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are
necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call
Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason.
Evil is the active springing from Energy.
Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.¹⁰

These sets of opposites all replicate one particular opposition: that of reason and religion against the creative energy of humanity. As Blake has it, humanity needs both the disorderly will and the ordering principles of reason. Each represses and perverts the other, but so long as they remain adversaries, there will be progress. In Blake's historical accounts, 'good' repression and 'evil' rebellion work together. *Blade Runner's* tyrant oppresses, its revolutionaries rebel, the tyrant is killed, the revolutionaries die, and this all confirms Blake's notion that neither repression nor rebellion is an enduring state. But whereas for Blake the clash of contraries works in a progression, *Blade Runner* is deeply pessimistic about the possibility any change more substantive than 'everything we have now only worse' model). Tyrell dies, Roy dies, but the infernal world seems unaltered.

As in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake reclaims hellfire as the accoutrement of genius and delight, *America* deconstructs the categories of Good and Evil. 'I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree' (Plate 8) are the words both of Satan, tempting Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and of Christ, hanging from his tree. To the orthodox Albion's Angel, Orc is evil, but he is also a force of apocalyptic purification. In any case, Urizen's own Priests are disclosed by the revolution 'in rustling scales', rushing 'into

reptile coverts, hiding from the fires of Orc' (Plate 15), just as serpentine as Satan and considerably more hypocritical. As the angels follow Orc into rebellion, 'Bostons Angel' cries aloud:

Why trembles honesty and like a murderer,
Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station!
Must the generous tremble & leave his joy, to the idle: to the
pestilence!
That mock him? who commanded this? what God? what Angel!
To keep the gen'rous from experience till the ungenerous
Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature;
Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science,
That men get rich by, & the sandy desert is giv'n to the strong
What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a
tempest
What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs
What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself
In fat of lambs? no more I follow, no more obedience pay. (Plate
11)

Urizen, the lawmaker, is on the side of chains, sceptres, plague, and materialism-wrapped in the fat of the very lamb sacrificed to him. Orc, the rebel and transgressor, is the redeemer. Boston is the first of the angels to recognise Orc as the true God, but in the Preludium, "the shadowy daughter", whose "panting struggling womb" he seizes, proclaims him "the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa" (Plate 2). He is a god of sexual activity, struggle, soaring spirits: none of these are values given much credence by the religious orthodoxy of Blake's day. This Blake, who so undermines orthodox pieties, whose hero announces of the Laws of Moses, "That stony law I stamp to dust" (Plate 8), seems unlikely to have much time for *any* "self-evident truth", let alone one espoused by slave-owning American revolutionaries.

While Blake and *Blade Runner* part ways in their analysis of America's Utopian future, they are similarly radical in their undermining of orthodox morality. Like Orc, who is both Christ and Lucifer, and Milton's Satan, who makes 'a heaven in hell, a hell in heaven', Replicant Roy Batty is Christ and

Satan-an embodiment of the principles of rebellion and redemption-whose name, 'Roy' (king) and 'batty' (mad), suggests an anarchic authority. When Roy finally confronts Tyrell, he calls him his 'maker' (aptly, since Roy's built-in self-destruct mechanism, courtesy of Tyrell, is what causes him prematurely to 'meet his maker) and 'the god of biomechanics', the technocratic demiurge who has embraced 'a science/ That men get rich by'. Tyrell is Blake's ungenerous God, who has built into his creatures a four-year life span, rejects his pet Replicant, Rachael, as soon as she loses the charm of believing herself to be human, smirks in bespectacled glee at outwitting Deckard, and explains, with scientific dispassion, that if 'we gift [Replicants] with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, and consequently we can control them better.' Roy tells Tyrell, 'I want more life, fucker!' The pronunciation of 'fucker', so as to resemble 'father', both bluntly reminds us that fatherhood is conditional on sexual activity and emphasises the similarity between Roy's demand and Jesus' prayer to his Father for more life, 'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me'.¹¹ Neither God the Father nor Tyrell are willing, and it is not surprising that the fiery angel, who outdoes Tyrell in intellect and even, we finally see, in compassion, should push his maker's eyes back into their sockets.¹²

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake disentangles Christ from the 'stony law' that *America's* Orc stamps to dust. A rhapsodic devil invites us to hear how Christ 'has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments':

did he not mock at the sabbath, and so mock the sabbaths God?
murder those who were murdered because of him? turn away the
law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to
support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a
defence before Pilate? covet when he pray'd for his disciples, and
when he bid them shake off the dust of their feet against such as
refused to lodge them? I tell you, no virtue can exist without
breaking these ten commandments. [Therefore] Jesus was all
virtue, and acted from impulse. not from rules.¹³

Blake's vision of a sinful, virtuous Christ offers a precedent for *Blade Runner's* depiction of Roy as anarchist messiah. Roy does 'questionable

things', 'extraordinary things', 'nothing the god of biomechanics wouldn't let you into heaven for'. He hijacks space shuttles, kills their crew and passengers, meets his maker, kills his father, kisses and grieves for his comrade, Pris, seeks more life, sees 'things you people wouldn't believe, deals in the sublime, and saves the life of the man who tries to kill him. Perhaps thanks to the insufficient socialisation afforded by a four year lifespan, he is an amoral character, beyond good and evil. The casting of Rutger Hauer, a muscle-clad Aryan prototype, underlines Roy's likeness to a Nietzschean superman. His character resists moral categorisation: he deals out sexual taunts (to Deckard, "You better get it up or I'm gonna have to kill you") only moments after he has smoothed the dead body of his lover and comrade, Pris; slips between prophetic eloquence and lewd playful banter; threatens and saves life. Roy the god-slayer works as a figure for Satan, but the film is strewn with signals that he is also Christ. Tyrell describes him as 'the Light', implicitly referencing descriptions of Christ as 'the light of the world' (in John 8:12 and elsewhere), and at the same time invoking Lucifer, Latin for 'bearer of light', and perhaps Orc himself, who is constantly described as 'fierce glowing', a renewer of 'fiery joy', swift as fire. Towards the film's end, as Roy feels his body seizing up, he pierces the palm of his hand with a long metal nail. It is an obvious allusion to the crucifixion, only exceeded in biblical redolence by Roy's death, his utterance, 'Time ... to die' (evoking Christ's *tetelestai* - 'it is finished'), and the white dove miraculously released from his hand.

In the original cinematic release, Deckard is given rights to a sporadic *film noir* voice-over, mostly consisting of straight-talking hard-cop banalities, designed to clarify the narrative, but also, incidentally, cementing his place as the film's protagonist, signifying to audiences his right to their sympathy. These voice-overs are removed from the Director's Cut. Although the film's title still favours the blade runner, Deckard is decentred as hero, making way for Roy. We no longer sympathise with the cop, but with his quarry, who orchestrates a series of role reversals (and moral role reversals) in the final chase scene, obliging the blade runner by turns to pursue and himself to run away. Roy jeers at Deckard, 'Not very sporting to fire on an unarmed opponent. I thought you were supposed to be good. Aren't you the "good" man?' Roy's ironic rendering of 'good' calls into question its diffuse meanings:

Christlike and virtuous, promoting happiness, competent, sporting, legitimate. Deckard's violent (and disturbingly eroticized) execution of Zhora and Pris contradicts the first two; his physical inferiority to Roy, the third; and his now desperate scramble to dispatch Roy however he can, the fourth. The only sense in which Deckard could possibly be 'good' is in his legitimacy-his being legitimately human and so on the side of the law. The invalidity of the word, and of its application to Deckard, is made manifest when Deckard falls from the roof, and Roy-seconds away from his own death-gathers his strength and hauls him back to safety. Deckard, the 'good' man, is the fallen man, and Roy his redeemer.

It is one incident among many in the gradual confounding of the 'if you're not cop you're little people' binary mouthed by Captain Bryant-and of all those binaries that implicitly work alongside it: if you're not on the side of the law you're bad; if you're not fully human you're not capable of subjectivity. The dismantling of these prejudices focuses through Deckard. When he discovers that Rachael is a Replicant, he substitutes for her feminine pronoun the neuter. He asks Tyrell, 'How can it not know what it is?', simultaneously demanding of Rachael an intuitive self-awareness and implicitly denying her a self along with a gender. She becomes a worthy compatriot for Deckard when she saves his life by shooting another Replicant, allowing his supposition that she has repudiated her own Replicant identity. 'Shakes?', he asks her. 'Me too. I get 'em bad. It's part of the business'. Although this is an opportunity for her to remind him bitterly that she now knows herself to *be* the business, for him it is the beginning of a fellow-feeling, an acknowledgement that her emotions are genuine. At the same time, she has surrendered her lacquered black 1940s coiffure, shoulder pads, pencil skirt and high heels, the uniform of the femme fatale that at once made her look robotic and, within *film noir* convention, more sexually dangerous. That she should seem less robotic and dangerous as she becomes more aware of being a Replicant obviously troubles the claim Deckard makes in their first conference: 'Replicants are like any other machine-they're either a benefit or a hazard. If they're a benefit, it's not my problem.'

What clearly is Deckard's problem is that he himself is like a machine. The fact that he persists in treating Rachael as a robot into whom he must

program emotional algorithms, self-servingly instructing her in the phrases, 'Kiss me' and 'I want you', reflects *his* mechanistic emotion. When Roy and Pris kiss, they are playful, fond, mutually enthusiastic. Deckard's and Rachael's kiss is an aggressive mash of faces, calling into question the validity of her consent. It is he who seems robotic, able to rally nothing more emotionally subtle than physical force and a self-consciously formulaic erotic dialogue. The possibility that Deckard himself is a Replicant is canvassed in most discussions of the film. The origami unicorn Gaff leaves in Deckard's apartment fits too obviously with Deckard's daydream of a unicorn not to suggest that Gaff has access to Deckard's memories, just as Deckard has had to Rachael's. But while the film evidently encourages speculation along these lines-so that we are meant to ask along with Rachael, 'You know that Voight-Kampff test of yours? Did you ever take that test yourself?'-much of the evidence mustered in favour of Deckard as Replicant reinforces the same assumption of emotionally-inadequate, artificial Replicant (and thus the opposing assumption of emotionally adequate real human) that the film also tries to undermine.

When Deckard disguises himself as an officer from the Confidential Committee on Moral Abuses in order to infiltrate Zhora's dressing room, he adopts a phoney squeak to ask her, 'Have you ever felt yourself to be exploited in any way?' The question is painfully insensitive, given that she has been created for exploitation; equally so is his clarification, 'Well ... well, like to get this job. I mean, did ... did you do, or ... or were you asked to do anything lewd ... or unsavory, or ... or, otherwise repulsive to your... your person, huh?' *Blade Runner's* dialogue constantly reverts to themes of artificiality and reality. Deckard is shortly to ask Zhora if her snake is 'real'-to which she will snap, 'Of course it's not real'. So when Zhora replies to Deckard's question with, 'Are you for real?', the words encode the question, 'Are you real-or Replicant?' If we suspect the latter, as the film certainly permits, then we have reassociated Replicants with insensitivity, phoniness and artificiality.

Replicants are, as Tyrell describes them, 'More human than human': Nietzsche's supermen, Blake's fiery angels. Leon's volatile behaviour during his Voight-Kampff test suggests that Replicants fail the test for showing too

great an emotional response, not too little. Harrison Ford's stony delivery as Deckard and the heights of insensitivity his character achieves are more likely to rule out Deckard from being a Replicant than establish that he is one. The names given to the two categories demarcated by the Voight-Kampff test are 'Replicants' (or 'skinjobs', the 'artificial') and 'Humans' (or 'people', the 'real'). The categories that Blake, on the other hand, would polarize along an axis of emotional response are those of rebels and tyrants. The politics of sensibility work here in *Blade Runner* too: Tyrell, tyrant, cold and calculating; Roy, rebel, grieving, loving, hating, compassionating. Deckard, the enforcer of the law, Blake's 'stony book', is himself stony, and it is only when he starts acting from impulse, not from rules, that he seems to acquire emotions.

Disillusioned Romantic

Deckard's fall, which enables Roy both to save him and elevate him to a state of deeper emotion, is analogous to the *felix culpa* of *Paradise Lost*. But despite Deckard's personal salvation, none is offered for the world at large. Los Angeles is hell, and although individuals—a redeemed Deckard with his Rachael, for instance—might be able to make a personal heaven of it (riding off, in the original cinematic release, into a green, improbable Paradise), there is no reason to suppose that it will not remain hell.

Blake's prophecy for America was certainly apocalyptic, but in his cosmology, apocalypse was a necessary—even a desirable—part of the cyclic progression of history. His critique of the military-industrial machine just as it was getting into gear was brightened by his expectation of its inevitable sabotage. *Blade Runner*, on the other hand, is the work of a pessimistic Romantic, a Wordsworth grown disillusioned with revolution. Like the Romantics reacting against Enlightenment rationalism (Blake described Art as 'the tree of life' and Science as 'the tree of death'),¹⁴ Scott seems repulsed by the subordination of feeling to a technology tied up with profit and power. Unlike the Romantics, who could demonstrate their reaction by celebrating the primitive, *Blade Runner* can not even offer the consolations of nature. There are no trees, no sunlight, no stars; the most undomesticated animals are the rebel Replicants, and even their animal status is in question.

Los Angeles, 2019, is not only dystopic socially, but also environmentally. The film's vision of the technological sublime, a fire-breathing city canopied by pollution, is only relieved once, with Deckard's daydream of a unicorn careening through the forest. The dream of a mythical beast, and a dream possibly implanted artificially into the dreamer's mind, is very little consolation in the midst of the unrelenting urban grime.

C. Carter Colwell argues that Americans love both the primitive and the technological, and thus '*Blade Runner* [sees] both the primitive and the technological as both good and bad. Man once again stands in the middle, not only threatened from below and above, but simultaneously lured toward the values both embody.'¹⁵ On the contrary, while *Blade Runner* depicts both sets of values, its allegiances are clear: in its representation of 'everything we have now only worse', it is decidedly anti-technological. While our sympathy lies with the Replicants, it lies with them as the victims of technocracy, not as its mascots. What the film could have represented as achievements for technology-human habitation of other planets, the production of artificial animals-is instead deprecated on political and economic grounds. The scientific premises of the film are conspicuously flawed (the Replicants are depicted as entirely organic machines, for instance, but Roy's skin is unaffected by frozen carbon dioxide); indeed, they are so conspicuously flawed that it seems science is not the point. Unlike its cinematic contemporaries of the space opera genre, *Blade Runner* is an anti-science fiction.

Although it is not as overtly polemical as *America*, too disillusioned with the present to offer prophetic solutions, *Blade Runner* still critiques the political culture which has produced it. Scott's deployment of *film noir* convention creates an atmosphere of oppression, befitting the scenario of government by multiplanetary corporation, replete with complex systems of corporate surveillance, sirens that direct pedestrians to move on, objective physiological tests for emotional response, slavery and lynching. *Blade Runner's* values are anarchic, even in the way its de facto protagonist, Roy Batty, makes his way to centre stage, in spite of the detective-as-hero rules of the *film noir* genre. But whereas Blake's anarchists set the world aflame, *Blade Runner's* revolutionaries are all dead by the film's end; all killed, except for Roy, by Rachael or Deckard, who turn out to be among the

oppressed. When Roy misquotes *America*, he reflects on the moral fall of the American revolutionaries and the American Revolution, but he also foreshadows the imminent failure of his own angel cohort's rebellion. The world *Blade Runner* depicts is everything Blake would have abhorred, a Romantic dystopia, from which all the Romantic medicines-nature, feeling, poetry-are progressively removed.

NOTES

- 1 *Blade Runner* was first released in 1982, and then as a Director's Cut in 1992. Citations here are to *Blade Runner: the director's cut* (Scott, 1992), unless specified as Original Cinematic Release.
- 2 For *Frankenstein* as Romantic rewriting of *Paradise Lost*, see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).
- 3 The creature describes reading *Paradise Lost*: 'It moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting. I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from, beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.' (Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971), p. 129.)
- 4 Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), pp. 182-8.
- 5 David Desser, 'The New Eve: The Influence of *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* on *Blade Runner*', in *Retrofitting Blade Runner: issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. Judith B. Kerman (Ohio: Bowling Green State UP. 1991), pp. 53-65. Desser sums up Romantic revision of Milton as the work of Byron and the Shelleys.
- 6 William Blake, *America, A Prophecy* (1793; New York: United Book Guild,

- 1947), Plate 16. Further citations in parentheses.
- 7 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), in *The Oxford Authors: John Milton*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 1: 45. Further citations in parentheses.
 - 8 Philip K. Dick, quoted in Gregg Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: in his own words*, 2nd edn (Long Beach, CA: Fragments West/Valentine, 1988), p. 220.
 - 9 John Howard, *Infernal Poetics: poetic structures in Blake's Lambeth Prophecies* (London and Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 109.
 - 10 William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (1790; Oxford UP, 1975), Plate 3.
 - 11 Luke 22:42. According to the *Internet Movie Data Base*, Roy Batty's meld of 'father' and 'fucker' is deliberate. Hauer was instructed to pronounce the word ambiguously. (Available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083658/trivia> [accessed 26 May, 2005]).
 - 12 All the less surprising because movement of the pupils during the Voight-Kampff test is the primary signifier of human emotion; as far as the Tyrell technocratic machine is concerned, eyes really are windows onto souls.
 - 13 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 23.
 - 14 William Blake, 'The Laocoön' (1818), repr. in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
 - 15 C. Carter Colwell, "Primitivism in the Movies of Ridley Scott: *Alien and Blade Runner*", in Kerman, p. 125.

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